

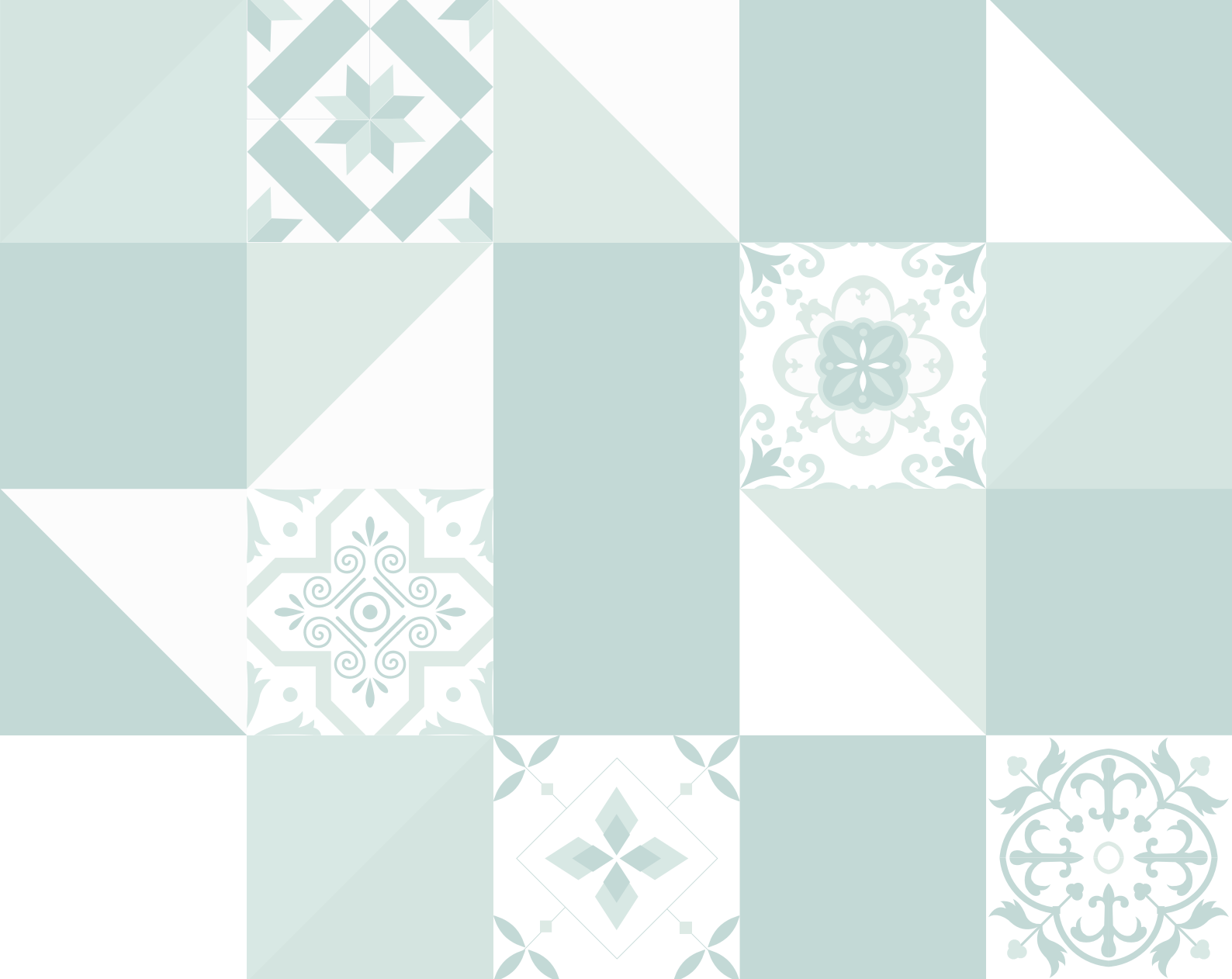
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# Diaspora Engagement Frameworks in the Middle East and North Africa: *A Review*





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# Introduction

Objective 19 of the 2018 Global Compact for Migration (GCM) calls on signatory states to “create conditions for migrants and diasporas to fully contribute to sustainable development in all countries”<sup>1</sup>. This objective underscores the increased attention, and responsibility, attributed to diasporas in the context of migration and development. Whilst migrants’ positive cross-border impact is in general well documented and subject to relative consensus, “transnational” governmental policies, and mechanisms dedicated to the engagement of the diaspora in migrant sending countries, are rarely broken down and analysed in a cross-country perspective.

Because of its interwoven migration history, the Mediterranean region encapsulates most of the challenges and opportunities commonly associated with diaspora (or expatriate) policymaking. Table 1 below shows the total emigrant population of six migrant-sending countries in the South Mediterranean. It also indicates each country’s proportion of emigrants relative to total (national) population.

	Algeria	Egypt	Jordan	Lebanon	Morocco	Tunisia	World
Total emigrant population	1,944,000	3,547,000	784,000	844,000	3,136,000	813,000	281,000,000
Proportion of emigrants in total population	4.3%	32%	7%	15.4%	8.4%	6.6%	3.6% <sup>2</sup>

Source: EUDiF<sup>3</sup>

Strikingly, and except for Egypt, the proportion of emigrants for each country exceeds the global average of 3.6 percent. Over three million Moroccans, and three million Egyptians, happen to reside outside of national borders. The tremendous significance of emigrant populations in the Mediterranean context attests to rich and diversified cross-border exchange flows. These flows span economic, cultural and social dimensions, and result in the emergence of “transnational” communities and processes as described in academic migration literature<sup>4</sup>. Importantly, it also suggests government activity tailored specifically to facilitate communication and provision of public services to these segments of society.

This report sets out to clarify how sending countries’ public apparatus are involved in the establishment and consolidation of links with the diaspora. It aims to provide an overview of governmental policies, including legislation, institutions, programmes and other “soft” laws which participate to shape and determine the relationship emigrants may or may not cultivate with their home country. By bringing light on some of these aspects, the report hopes to familiarise readers with current governmental practices and, constructively indicate ways forward for implementation of the GCM’s objective 19.

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1 (Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, 2018)

2 Total migrant population relative to world population

3 (European Global Diaspora Facility)

4 (Cassarino, 2004)

This report arises in a context of increased expectations vis-à-vis diaspora policies. Post-covid economic turmoil and a degraded geopolitical environment resulting from wars in Ukraine and Gaza are exacerbating pressure on many migrant sending countries' welfare. Noting the influence these events exert on domestic policy development, the report will analyse diaspora engagement policies in light of the turbulent outlook the Mediterranean region is facing in 2024.

## 1.1 Defining the diaspora

Reflecting the intricacy of worldwide migration flows, the definition given to diaspora is not settled and its interpretation varies from one context to another. The IOM's Glossary on migration refers to the diaspora as *"migrants or descendants of migrants, whose identity and sense of belonging have been shaped by their migration experience and background"*<sup>5</sup>. Others argue that diaspora may be used interchangeably with "emigrants" or "expatriates"<sup>6</sup>.

Whether the diaspora label applies to "disengaged" emigrant communities, or people with no links to their countries of origin, is still a matter of contention. It is sometimes argued that the maintenance of "some links" is essential to making an emigrant part of the diaspora. Without prejudice to this debate, the report will adopt the view that all emigrants from a given country may be considered part of this country's diaspora without restrictions, thereby adopting a rather inclusive perspective on the diaspora, in addition to aligning on colloquial uses of the term.

The importance of including *"descendants of migrants"* in conceptions of the diaspora cannot be overstated. As described further down, sending countries' policy beneficiaries may include second- or third-generation migrants. This is because descendants might not always possess their parents' citizenship, often due to restrictions in countries of residence. In practice this does not conflict with the maintenance of some kind of affective or emotional links.

For example, the Irish government views its diaspora as composed of *"individuals of every background from communities in every part of the world. It includes Irish citizens living overseas (...) as well as the heritage diaspora, those many millions of people of Irish descent around the world (...) as well as the affinity diaspora who hold a deep appreciation for our people, place and culture"*<sup>7</sup>.

In most countries in the (south) Mediterranean region, the term "expatriate" is preferred and considered more contextually accurate. For this reason, the analysis employs both expatriate and diaspora interchangeably, thereby prioritising the demographic dimension of emigration over social, cultural or political interpretations.

## 1.2 Approaching diaspora engagement policies

These conceptual considerations have important implications for the study of diaspora engagement policies across geographical contexts. Governments and public entities tend to develop different appreciations of their diasporas, based mostly on historically produced framing mechanisms. This leads to starkly heterogeneous outcomes in terms of policy instruments and beneficiaries. Additionally, it is important to remind that diasporas' interaction with home communities remains predominantly within the private or semi-private sphere, leaving little space for the articulation of broad-based diaspora policies.

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5 (International Organisation for Migration, n.d.)

6 (IMISCOE, n.d.)

7 (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2015)

Furthermore, Gamlen remarks that diaspora engagement policies should not necessarily “be seen as part of a unitary, coordinated, state strategy. Rather, they form a constellation of institutional and legislative arrangement and programmes that come into being at different times, for different reasons, and operate across different timescales at different levels”<sup>8</sup>.

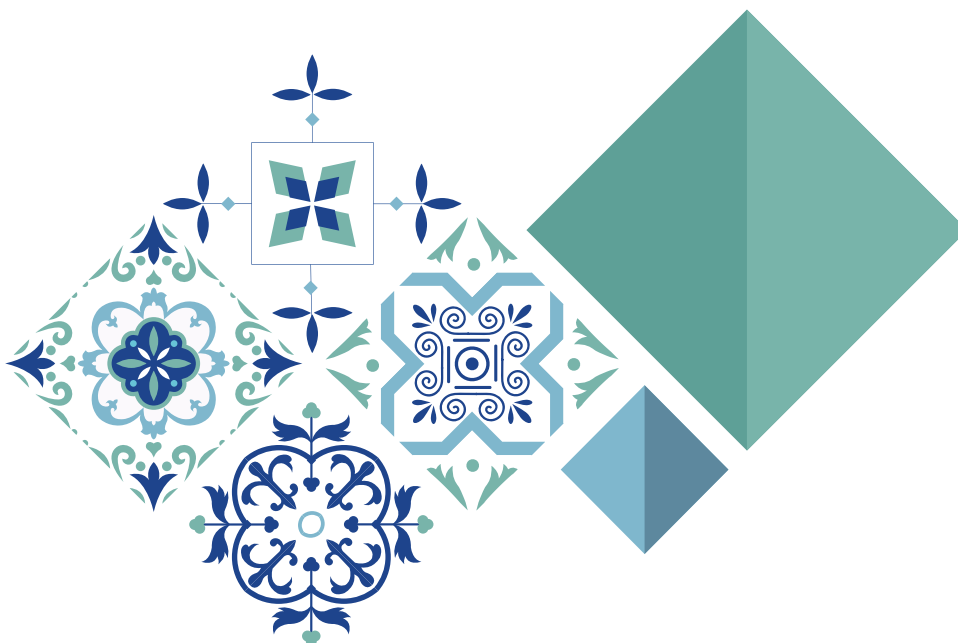
In response to the analytical obstacles raised above, he proposes a typology featuring three broad types of diaspora engagement policies:

- ◆ Capacity-building policies
- ◆ Policies related to extending rights to the diaspora
- ◆ Policies related to extracting obligations from the diaspora

The report analyses and discusses diaspora engagement policies in a few key countries of the south Mediterranean. To do so, it roughly follows Gamlen’s typology of diaspora engagement policies. This framework offers the advantage of being flexible to accommodate a plurality of state approaches to the diaspora while allowing for comparative perspectives.

Accordingly, the report starts by highlighting institutions and strategies directly related diaspora engagement in the six migrant sending countries observed (“capacity-building policies”). Second, the analysis shifts to the economic dimension of engagement or “diaspora finance”, shedding light on the state’s involvement in transfers of a financial nature. Finally, and reflecting new trends in diaspora engagement, the argumentation centres on policies accompanying non-financial contributions from the diaspora. These last two sections may be considered as both simultaneously corresponding to the typology’s “extending rights” and “extending obligations” components. The report closes with a few concluding remarks synthetising main findings.

The analysis focuses on Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia on account of a) the prominence of emigrant populations within each national context and b) recent policy activity linked to diaspora engagement, including new legislation, programming and/or institution-building.



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8 (Gamlen, 2006)

## 2. Institutions and strategies

A first observation pertains to the diversity and heterogeneity of diaspora institutions in place in the countries of the region. Whilst some countries have embraced national strategies and institutional bodies explicitly dedicated to engaging and maintaining links with constituencies abroad, others have adopted a low-profile approach, nesting responsibilities for expatriate outreach within the fold of external affairs' ministries.

This diversity in approaches to the diaspora is primarily a reflection of countries' migration outlook, governance traditions and domestic priorities. Countries with high and sustained levels of emigration, or where remittances account for a large share of the GDP, are more inclined to devote resources and high-level attention to expatriates. This attention may manifest itself in the creation of ministry-level diaspora entities or "whole-of-government" strategies bridging economic, social and cultural interventions. On the other end of the spectrum, the fragmentation of diaspora-related responsibilities and their assignment to lower-level administrative echelons is usually associated with countries with less salient migration features.

To a certain extent, policy proactiveness is often found to be embedded in a perception, within the leadership, of the diaspora as a "resource" to be maximised in the context of state-led development planning<sup>9</sup>. In contrast, the absence of this perception results in a relative neglect of diaspora issues, at least nominally. In other terms, collective social expectations and framings associated with the diaspora in the country of origin provide a credible lens to explain variations in prominence given to diaspora affairs at the institutional level.

The purpose of this section is to map the profiles of the main governmental entities involved in diaspora engagement and provide a comparative perspective on their respective prerogatives/scope of action.

### 2.1 Institutionalisation of diaspora engagement

Established in September 2015, the Egyptian Ministry of Emigration and Egyptian Expatriate Affairs (MoSEEA) is the lead agency for the management of the affairs of Egyptians residing abroad. It works in coordination and cooperation with other ministries and bodies concerned with migration policy, including the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The MoSSEA specifically frames its strategies and activities in relation to helping deliver Egypt's 2030 Vision and the SDGs in order to "*promote economic and human development by stimulating the contribution of Egyptians abroad in creating an innovative and knowledge-based society*"<sup>10</sup>.


In view to strengthen links with expatriates, Morocco established in 1990 the Ministry for Moroccans residing abroad<sup>11</sup>. Delegated since 2013 to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, African Cooperation and Moroccans Abroad, the Ministry prepares and implements government policy concerning Moroccans residing abroad, in coordination with relevant ministries and institutions inside and outside Morocco, including the Hassan II Foundation for Moroccans Living Abroad.

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<sup>9</sup> (Belguendouz, 2010)

<sup>10</sup> (European Global Diaspora Facility, 2022)

<sup>11</sup> (European Global Diaspora Facility, 2022)



These institutions exert significant influence on sending countries' relations with expatriates in their respective contexts. Despite its fairly recent existence, the Egyptian Ministry of Emigration has already concluded several cooperation agreements with migrant hosting countries, focusing notably on the cross-border recognition of skills and access of returning migrants to the labour market and entrepreneurship in Egypt<sup>12</sup>.

Reflecting the country's track record in diaspora engagement, the Moroccan Ministry for Moroccans abroad is responsible for several innovative initiatives and programmes tapping in the diaspora's expertise, resources, and networks. This is the case of the *MDM Invest Fund* which facilitates entrepreneurship projects in Morocco for Moroccans residing abroad. The agency's mandate extends to ensuring expatriates' access to public services and support structures. For this reason, the "Guide for Moroccans Living Abroad" as well as studies on the living conditions of Moroccans abroad were released.

Beyond these two examples, progress on institutionalisation of diaspora policy is limited. Lebanon's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants and specifically the General Directorate of Emigrants (GDoE) are responsible for diaspora outreach. Institutional expatriate engagement is restricted to providing essential consular services (civil status, nationality, property) and organising elections for overseas voters. The Investment Development Authority of Lebanon (IDAL) is specifically responsible for measures and cooperation projects relating to investment promotion.

In Jordan, most prerogatives related to diaspora affairs are concentrated within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates although other governmental actors including the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of Higher Education and the Jordan Investment Board have a direct stake, as well as experience, in the regulation of expatriates' affairs<sup>13</sup>.

The Tunisian Office for Tunisians Abroad (*Office des Tunisiens à l'étranger* - OTE), within the Ministry of Social Affairs, plays a pivotal role in building relations with communities abroad. Due to Tunisia's long history of emigration, the agency is involved in different domains of diaspora engagement, including investment promotion and knowledge transfer, data collection on expatriates via the *Observatoire Nationale de la Migration* (ONM) and the provision of social and cultural services to the diaspora.

## 2.2 Strategies of diaspora engagement

Diaspora engagement is often associated to the migration and development nexus in migration literature. Migrants are indeed perceived to contribute positively to the welfare of communities in origin countries through the transfer of income and social remittances, involvement in cross-border business and investment projects and, more generally, through their role as informal ambassadors and "place influencers".

Because of these positive and well-documented knock-on effects, governments of migrant sending countries are inclined to structure their approach to diaspora engagement, often with the support of international agencies. In the MENA region, strategy-making around diaspora has primarily revolved around mobilising the diaspora's social and economic potential, partly in response to the region's development deficits. Measures have notably focused on leveraging inward investment, seizing on the diaspora's position as a bridgehead in transnational spaces, to plug into infrastructure development projects in the country of origin and create socio-economic opportunities for the MENA's young and expanding population.

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<sup>12</sup> (European Global Diaspora Facility, 2022)

<sup>13</sup> (Nimeh, Koch, & Ragab, 2018)





Implementation of these measures is nevertheless often affected by the absence of a unifying governmental vision, bureaucratic competition amongst implementers, and incompatibility with other governmental priorities. For example, the opaque and burdensome regulation environment pertaining to FDI in some contexts is found to negatively influence objectives related to expatriates' investment.

These shortcomings are best addressed through the development of national "whole of government" approaches on migration. Advocates argue these approaches participate to create a more coherent and predictable policy environment, increasing incentives for the diaspora to engage. In this domain, MENA countries' track record is mixed. Despite numerous reforms over the last decade, most countries' legislative frameworks are yet to be strengthened or operationalised to meet expectations often associated with diaspora engagement.

Because of the volatile context and migration pressures in the region, conditions for strategic policy-making on migration are lacking. However, incremental steps in the last decade show a certain consensus is emerging on the pertinence of broad-based thinking on the diaspora. For example, applied to expatriates, Lebanon's policy of "national concord" contrasts with the country's sectarian politics. This policy commits institutions abroad to safeguard the Lebanese's civic and political rights, regardless of confession<sup>14</sup>. The concord approach materialised in the adoption of the 2017 Electoral Law which granted expatriates the right to register and vote in national elections. This right first came into effect during the 2018 elections.

Egypt's Sustainable Development Strategy (Egypt Vision 2030) refers to the diaspora as an important component of the country's development pathway. In 2021, it was even announced the Ministry of Emigration and Egyptian Expatriate Affairs had begun working on a "National Strategy on Expatriates' Engagement" in cooperation with the International Organisation for Migration (IOM). Unfortunately, additional information has not been released and it is unknown if the project has gained any traction.

In 2014, The Jordanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs took the decision to reboot its approach to expatriates' engagement. Developed in consultation with international actors and expatriates' groups, the 2014-2018 "Action Plan for Expatriates" featured four strategic dimensions<sup>15</sup>: 1. Defend the rights and interests of Jordan's expatriates 2. Establish and deepen outreach and communications activity between Jordanian expats and the country; 3. Increase consular services offered by Jordanian missions; 4. Encourage expat contributions and participation in overall development activity in the Kingdom.

Updated and subsequently prolonged in 2019, this Plan reflects high-level commitment in favour of diaspora engagement. It has also had results on the ground, leading to the increase of the capacities of consular staff and laying foundations for important initiatives (Arabic classes for second and third generation emigrants, new electronic services, and information portals for emigrants, etc). However, deficient internal coordination and communication about the plan's scope and responsibilities have reportedly blunted the plan's impact.<sup>16</sup>

Yet to be adopted, the Tunisian National Migration Strategy has the potential to re-shape the country's approach to migration and development, including by setting new terms of engagement, and clarifying expectations surrounding Tunisia's highly diverse diaspora<sup>17</sup>. Consultations leading to the draft Strategy have notably highlighted expatriates' lack of trust in state institutions, a legacy from pre-revolution political structures in Tunisia. To foster a better climate, the draft strategy includes provisions to reform and establish new diaspora institutions in line with the 2011 revolution's democratic aspirations. The tense migration context and shifting political priorities are currently unfavourable to the draft strategy's adoption.

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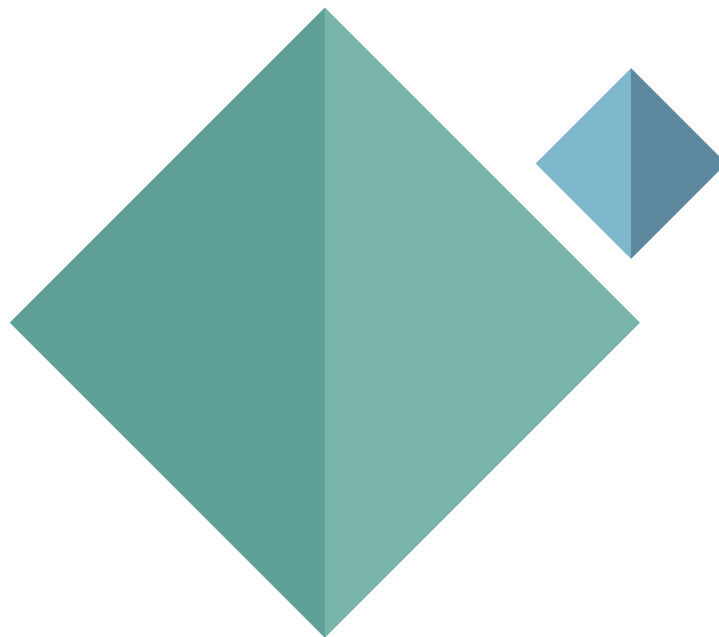
<sup>14</sup> (European Global Diaspora Facility, 2022)

<sup>15</sup> (Tittel-Mosser, *Diaspora Engagement, Regional Series: Middle East*, 2021)

<sup>16</sup> (Tittel-Mosser, *Diaspora Engagement, Regional Series: Middle East*, 2021)

<sup>17</sup> (Boubakri, Ben Achour, Ben Sassi, & Labidi)

In 2014, Morocco unveiled its draft National Strategy for Moroccans Living Abroad. To date it remains the only national strategy dedicated to expatriates in the South Mediterranean. This institutional specificity reflects how expatriates are viewed in the domestic debate in Morocco. This perception is carried at the highest level with Mohamed VI emphasising expatriates' "attachment to the country (...) and constructive role in the development of their homeland". The strategy includes three priorities: Preserving the identity of Moroccans living abroad, protecting their rights and interests, and encouraging their contributions to the development of Morocco<sup>18</sup>



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<sup>18</sup> (Ministère chargé des Marocains Résidant à l'Étranger et des Affaires de la Migration)

# 3. Remittances, investment and entrepreneurship

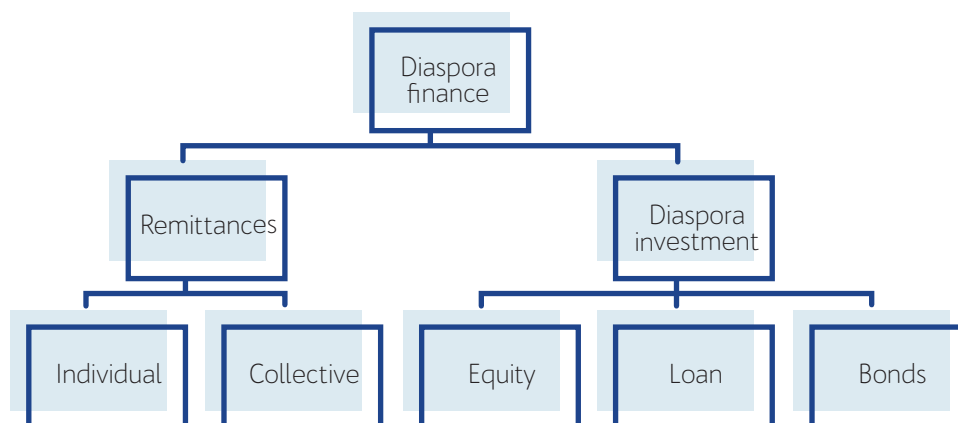
All six migrant sending countries from this study belong to the World Bank’s “middle income” category. Throughout the region, underlying macro-level weaknesses in job creation and private investment are compounded by the reverberating effects of the Covid-19 crisis, high food prices and the war in Gaza. These factors keep weighing heavily on these countries’ social cohesion, threatening to set back development gains notably for the most vulnerable<sup>19</sup>. Against this backdrop, strengthening economic resilience is a key policymaking objective.

The multiplication of diaspora instruments in the economic and financial sphere, and the attention granted to “diaspora finance” in general, needs to be assessed in this context. As discussed above, financial contributions remain a central pillar of diaspora-related policy thinking around the world. In all the countries studied, there is dedicated legislation or government-led programmes in place, most prevalently in the form of investment vehicles, financial incentives, or in-kind support to entrepreneurs.

This aligns on objective 19) e) of the GCM which calls for states to “develop targeted support programmes and financial products that facilitate migrant and diaspora investments and entrepreneurship”<sup>20</sup>. The following section will describe steps taken towards raising economic contributions from the diaspora and how these are calibrated to meet domestic development goals.

The economic dimension of diaspora engagement, or “diaspora finance”<sup>21</sup>, as sometimes referred to, covers widely disparate interventions in terms of both operational structure and goals. They pertain to (both formal and informal) money transfers, also known as remittances, but also to finance mechanisms, which most often come in the form of equity, loans or bonds. Chart 1 offers a simplified classification of diaspora finance.

Chart 1: Simplified classification of diaspora finance channels (compiled from Gelb et al. (2021))



19 (International Monetary Fund, 2023)

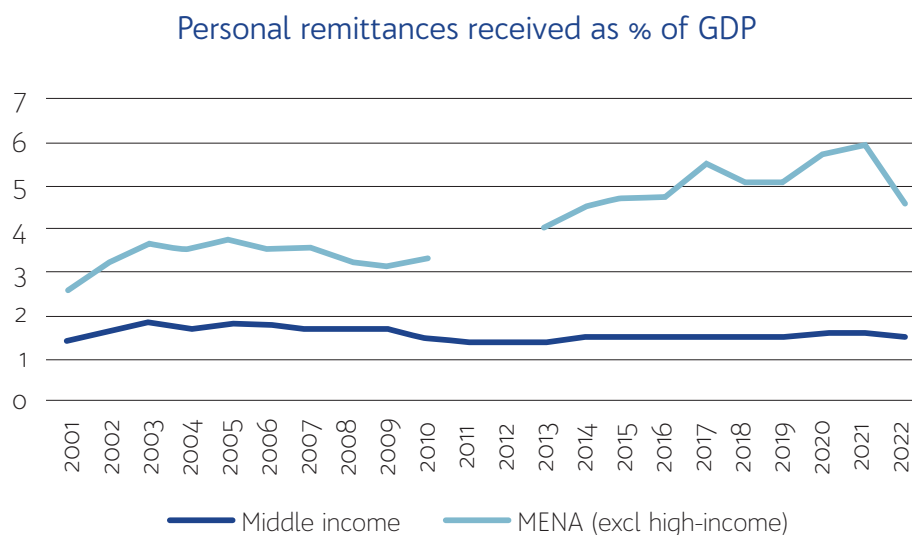
20 (Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, 2018)

21 (Gelb, Kalantaryan, McMahon, & Perez-Fernandez, 2021)

Remittances consist in one-way payments from households in hosting countries towards communities in the country of origin. Remittances are known as either *individual* or *collective* depending on whether payments are made by one or several households. Despite the considerable literature and statistical base pertaining to remittances, intersections with origin countries' policies remain an underexplored area of analysis. It is generally understood that public organisations may influence the direction and volume of transfers either by pooling and advising individual contributions or by topping up collective ones when aimed towards public infrastructure.

Remittances contribute substantially to the MENA's economic development. As shown in the chart below, remittances account for a growing share of the region's GDP, almost 6 percent in 2021. Remittances account for an average of 1.5 percent in the rest of the middle-income world. Despite this, tailored policy development is yet to gain real traction. To ease the inflow of remittances, and remedy to the current currency crisis, Egyptian state-owned banks have launched US-denominated bank accounts<sup>22</sup>. In addition, the National Bank of Egypt offers a ten-year tax relief on transfers from abroad for registered operations<sup>23</sup>. By most accounts, these efforts are nevertheless undermined by expatriates' low confidence in national institutions and the banking system.

Chart 2: Evolution of personal remittances received relative to GDP (compiled from World Bank Data Portal)



Equity-based mechanisms, or diaspora direct investment (DDI), are viewed favourably in sending countries' development and planning policies. These mechanisms revolve around individuals, or households, from the diaspora injecting funds in the development of the country of origin, either towards business development or social organisations. Most often, public agencies provide investment-related information to the diaspora for example by highlighting opportunities and/or regulations applicable to these transactions. In other words, "DDI are intermediaries matching suppliers and beneficiaries of funds separated by distance and information barriers". Tunisia and Egypt, for instance, have published various investment guide to the attention of expatriates, reducing the information gap which characterises certain diaspora communities<sup>24</sup>.

Practice shows that state agencies sometimes reach beyond their intermediary function. Algeria and Morocco both stimulate capital injection in the economy by making available seed funding to their respective diaspora. The MDM

22 (Mansour, 2023)

23 (European Global Diaspora Facility, 2022)

24 (European Global Diaspora Facility, 2022)

*Invest* mechanism is run by Tamwilcom, a Moroccan public financial institution which specialises in guarantees for small- and medium-enterprises. Eligible projects from the diaspora may receive up to 5 Million Dirhams (approx. EUR 460,000) on top of technical /entrepreneurial support<sup>25</sup>. Adopting a similar approach, the Algerian National Youth Employment Agency grants expatriate entrepreneurs start-up credit as well as tax exemptions for starting projects in Algeria. In both cases, investments in innovative areas are given extra consideration<sup>26</sup>. Due to a lack of reporting information, the impact of these programmes on expatriates' decisions-making is yet to be fully understood.

Importantly, country of residence policies' also happen to exert influence on diaspora finance flows. For example, the German WIDU.africa initiative supports members of African diasporas in Germany to invest in businesses in their home country. If eligible, the investment is covered up to 50 percent by the German government. Despite obvious needs in this domain, no equivalent initiative seems to exist in the Euro-Mediterranean region.

In addition to the above, central banks and financial institutions in countries of origin may also set up specific loan-based instruments for expatriates. "Diaspora bank accounts" represent an important source of credit for the development of the private sector in the migrant sending country while giving account holders' (the diaspora) access to origin country financial services, including loans, bypassing traditional residency requirements in the process. Governments are key in setting adequate banking regulations and lifting potential restrictions linked to residence. Algeria and Tunisia are reported to have established a flexible environment for their diaspora's banking operations<sup>27</sup>.

Diaspora bonds represent the third type of diaspora finance instrument. Described as 'government debt security marketed to nationals living abroad'<sup>28</sup>, diaspora bonds have been in the spotlight ever since a string of successful raising campaigns in India in the 1990s<sup>29</sup>. Geared specifically to tap in expatriates' savings, they appeal to financial institutions because of expatriates' acceptance of below-market remuneration rates. Several times in the past decade, the Egyptian government has resorted to diaspora bonds in the context of large investment projects albeit with mixed financial results<sup>30</sup>. The country has also started issuing bonds labelled in foreign currency in view to alleviate the country's currency shortage.

In Jordan, diaspora bonds represent an 'innovative source of funding' alongside other blended finance instruments, notably in the context of the implementation of the country's Human Resources Development (HRD) Strategy (2016-2025). Similarly to Egypt, the Jordanian diaspora bonds are mobilised in a context of stretched public resources and 'rationalisation' of funding programmes. They directly respond to the government's priorities, in this case provision of welfare, transportation and employment<sup>31</sup>.

As described above, beneficiaries of diaspora investment vary according to the type of instrument considered. Assessments of global diaspora investment flows seem to indicate that a disproportionate amount of transactions occur from households in hosting countries towards the private sector (or households) in origin countries. In contrast, public agencies feature only marginally amongst beneficiaries. However, this should not overlook the fact that most public engagement is informal in nature, for example as an intermediary in the development of private-to-private transactions (equity mechanisms). The impact of state interventions in these types of operations needs more thorough appraisal. In addition, the renewed popularity of initiatives like diaspora bonds or seed funding in the region suggests more assertive programming linked to diaspora investment is to be expected in the future.

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25 (Tamwilcom, 2024)

26 (European Global Diaspora Facility, 2022)

27 (Tittel-Mosser, *Diaspora Engagement, Regional Series: Africa*, 2021)

28 (Gevorkyan, 2021)

29 (Ragab & Diker, 2021)

30 (Schuettler & Rostom, 2014)

31 (National Committee for Human Resource Development, 2015)

## 4. Human capital and skills transfer

The previous section has described how new policy instrument related diaspora engagement are emerging in the context of domestic financial constraints. However, change in sending countries' governmental priorities also reflect shifts in migration patterns and dynamics, particularly within the Mediterranean region. The following section will delve into the specifics of human capital transfers.

Most sending countries in the Mediterranean region have undergone significant change in their migration profile over the past two decades. The most remarkable evolution pertains to the skills category of emigrants: traditionally low-skilled and primarily employed in host countries' industrial sectors, emigrants tend to now be evenly represented across skills and qualification levels. Although inequalities persist, surveys in hosting states show migrants progressively closing the qualification gap with the non-migrant population, a trend which is even more pronounced amongst second generation migrant<sup>32</sup>. Throughout the region, qualification levels amongst emigrants are consistently higher than among their non-migrant co-nationals – a phenomenon explained by the 'selectivity' of migration processes<sup>33</sup>.

From the perspective of countries of origin, emigrants' upwards social trajectories have led to a gradual shift in home countries' discursive environment, which translates into new, 'softer' engagement strategies centred on human capital. Rather than adopting an outright focus on currency transfers, narratives on the diaspora stress emigrants' know-how, expertise and networks acquired as part of their migration experience, inviting them to accelerate home countries' integration in the globalised and digitalised world economy.

Morocco is a good example of this mutation. The profile of Moroccan expatriates has evolved sensibly since the 2000s. Moroccan emigrants are now mainly employed in hosting countries' service sectors, primarily in Western Europe, and their cohorts include significant numbers of academic, technological, and medical professions<sup>3435</sup>. Taking the lead on this matter, King Mohammed VI, regularly uses his podium to compliment Moroccans abroad (referred to as "talents" (*compétence*)) for their achievements while multiplying welcoming signals towards the community<sup>36</sup>.

In terms of policy, the approach has been re-calibrated to fit the context and requirements of the "knowledge" economy which emphasises sustainable, inclusive, and long-term growth. Accordingly, efforts have gone towards mobilising specialised professional or youth groups from the diaspora and foster infusion with Morocco-based research or technical entities.

For example, Morocco was a very early partner in the UNDP-implemented TOKTEN initiative which, from the 1990s onwards, set the tone for international cooperation related to diaspora skills mobilisation. TOKTEN was instrumental in laying the groundwork for FINCOME (*Forum International Compétences Marocaines à l'étranger*), a mechanism piloted by the Ministry for Moroccan Emigrants aiming to streamline short-term mission by professionals from the diaspora among private and public institutions in Morocco. Based on the assumption that knowledge transfer is essential for Morocco's long term development, the Ministry supports the establishment of professional networks

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32 (Pascual, 2023)

33 (De Bel-Air, 2016)

34 (Lahlou, Bouiyouf, Arab, & El Mhamdi)

35 (Haut Commissariat au Plan, 2020)

36 (Maroc Hebdo, 2022)



on a geographic basis (3 in France, 1 in Germany and 1 in Canada) or along thematic lines, in accordance with the country's strategic priorities (agriculture and environment)<sup>37</sup>. Similar schemes exist in partnership with the SMEs, primarily revolving around mentorship and the transfer of business skills.

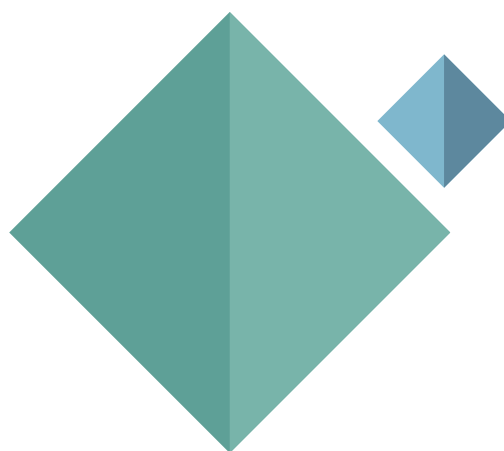
Egypt's diaspora approach is also getting in tune with the potential of its emigrants' human capital. The Ministry of Emigration and Egyptian Expatriates has established a 'Science Hub' dedicated to the exchange of skills and knowledge under its e-service portal for expatriates. Additionally, the Ministry is also behind the organisation of the "Conference of Egyptian Entities Abroad" which pitches for the diaspora's involvement in national infrastructure projects, including civil services, education, and insurance. This represents an opportunity for skilled Egyptian migrants to be consulted on various projects in the absence of formal knowledge exchange structures.

Both Jordan and Lebanon have a long history of drawing benefits from their diasporas' expertise and entrepreneurial mindset. Skills and knowledge exchange have happened informally, drawing on their diasporas' prosperity and successful integration in countries of residence. To stimulate exchange, governments have predominantly relied on consolidating network-based organisations in countries of residence and providing material support when available.

Launched in 2014, the Lebanese Diaspora Energy (LDE) Conference was conceived to "*promote Lebanese heritage and celebrate the diaspora's success*."<sup>38</sup> The conference has taken place yearly until 2020, hosting several high-profile figures from the business and cultural scene across continents. Although economic turmoil in Lebanon has brought the event to a close, the diaspora remains instrumental in providing relief to many communities in the country.

In a similar vein, the Jordanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Jordan has convened large-scale expatriate conferences in Jordan involving personalities from different backgrounds. Mostly centred on investment opportunities in Jordan, and the promotion of a safe and conducive environment for business and FDI, the conferences have also been reported to discuss service provision to Jordanians in their respective countries of residence<sup>39</sup>.

Like their Arab peers, Algerian emigrants are well-represented within high-skilled professions in their countries of residence, unlocking knowledge flows in all areas of the economy in addition to making material contributions. In contrast to the above, state-level programming in Algeria doesn't seem to include provisions for short-term professional mobility. Interestingly, Algeria's efforts in engagement seem to consist rather in permanent talent attraction programmes, notably by offering financial and administrative incentives to Algerians abroad as part of a return "package". In this respect, the package has been reported to be taken up by growing numbers among second- or even third generation emigrants<sup>40</sup>.



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37 (Gaillard & Gaillard, 2017)

38 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d.)

39 (Nimeh, Koch, & Ragab, 2018)

40 (Khettab, 2016)



## 5. Conclusions

This report set out to unpack dynamics and characteristics of diaspora engagement policies in the MENA region, drawing on an in-depth review of six countries' framework and Gamlen's typology of diaspora engagement policies.

Acknowledging the prominence of private (or non-state-led) transactions in transnational dynamics, the research shows that states in the MENA play a decisive role in fostering, consolidating, and extending linkages between sending countries and expatriate communities.

On the one hand, this role may be characterised by pro-active interventions such as central banking institutions providing financial support to entrepreneurs residing abroad or in the context of "diaspora" bonds issuance. Because reporting mechanisms are often lacking, the effectiveness of these interventions, and their impact on developments goals, remains a critical unknown.

On the other, the review carried out in this report shows that state activities predominantly revolve around intermediary functions. This is notably the case for sending countries' initiatives promoting short-term professional mobility or relating to investment counselling. These practices notably underscore the relevance of domestic development agendas which seem to set the tone for diaspora engagement reforms and initiatives.

Despite national variations, the report has also highlighted that diaspora engagement policies have taken root in all six countries analysed, resulting in an ongoing process of institutionalisation of diaspora engagement. Further research on policy implementation is required to understand to which extent the fragmentation of responsibilities and absence of "whole-of-government" strategies is affecting policy results.

The argumentation has also touched upon the contemporary geopolitical, economic, and political drivers of diaspora policymaking. Notably, it has shed light on the effects of evolving migrant profile and integration processes on the structures of diaspora engagement in sending countries. Most sending countries have shifted from a remittance-based approach to strategies facilitating human capital circulation. To some extent, this adjustment reflects the demands imposed by the "knowledge" economy and the critical role played by innovation in generating growth aligned on sustainability goals. Geopolitical instability in the region and the associated economic headwinds, strengthen the case for prioritising instruments related to non-financial contributions.

In line with the above, migrant sending countries are well-advised to keep investing in monitoring and understanding the demographic, social and economic trends pertaining to their diaspora. Increasing rates of student and high-skilled labour mobility in the region suggest a process of diversification and sophistication of cross-border exchange flows. In this regard, providing flexible instruments for circular mobility, as well as mainstreaming support to civil society groups in country of residence, would represent key steps to maximise migration's benefits for origin countries.





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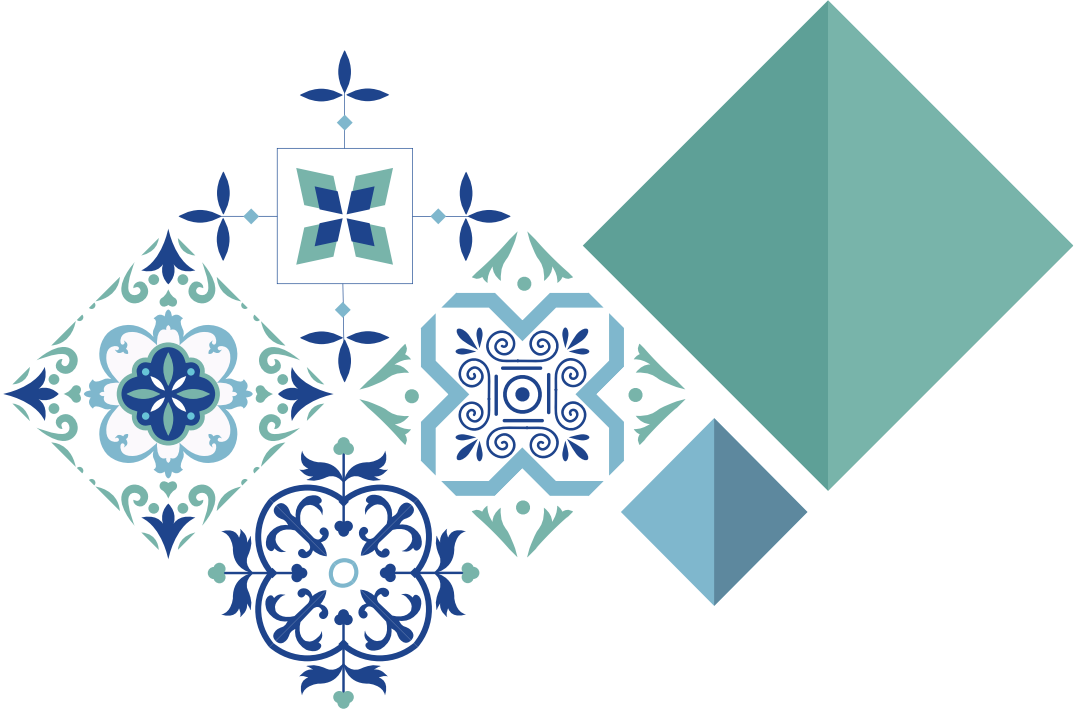
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