

DIASPORA ENGAGEMENT



**MIDDLE
EAST**

**REGIONAL
SERIES**

The European Union Global Diaspora Facility (EUDiF) is the first European Union-funded project to take a global approach to diaspora engagement. Implemented by the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), the project seeks to build an informed, inclusive and impactful diaspora-development ecosystem through research, dialogue, and capacity development. EUDiF runs from June 2019 to December 2022.

This publication was written by Dr F. Tittel-Mosser for the European Union Global Diaspora Facility (EUDiF), with editorial support from Dr A. Sgro and C. Griffiths and design by Marc Rechdane. Views presented in the publication are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of EUDiF, ICMPD or the European Union. EUDiF thanks the ICMPD colleagues who produced the five Middle East fact sheets that made this regional overview possible.

Readers are encouraged to reproduce material for their own publications, as long as they are not being used commercially. EUDiF requests acknowledgement and to receive a copy of any publications. If publishing online, we ask that a link to the original publication on the EUDiF website be included.

Citation recommendation: Tittel-Mosser, F. (2021) Diaspora engagement: Middle East. Regional Series. EUDiF.

This publication includes links to sources and references that are accessible online. Readers are encouraged to use the digital version in order to access all related links.



EUDiF is the first EU-funded project to take a global approach to diaspora engagement. The project seeks to build an informed, inclusive and impactful diaspora-development ecosystem through research, dialogue, capacity development. EUDiF runs from June 2019 to December 2022.

Funded by
the European Union



Implemented by



CONTENTS

1. BACKGROUND	4
<hr/>	
2. POLICY AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORKS RELATED TO DIASPORA ENGAGEMENT	5
<hr/>	
At regional level	5
At national level	6
3. REGIONAL PIONEERS	8
<hr/>	
4. TERMINOLOGY	8
<hr/>	
5. KEY TRENDS AND PRACTICES	9
<hr/>	
Remittances and investments	9
Leveraging diaspora human capital and fighting brain drain	10
6. RECURRENT CHALLENGES	12
<hr/>	
7. RECOMMENDATIONS	13
<hr/>	



1. BACKGROUND

In 2020, EUDiF worked with a team of regional experts to conduct a global mapping of diaspora engagement across six regions. The aim of the global mapping is address the fragmentation of evidence on diaspora engagement policies, institutions and practices by collating the information in an open-access knowledge hub.

The global mapping has generated 107 individual country factsheets, which are available via an interactive map on the EUDiF website, where findings can also be compared between individual countries.

Through the research exercise, EUDiF has sought to identify the interests and challenges faced by countries of heritage when it comes to diaspora engagement. This publication is one in a six-part series reviewing the research results by partner region.

EUDiF regions:

- Africa
- Asia
- Eastern Europe & Central Asia
- Latin America & the Caribbean
- Middle East**
- Pacific

MIDDLE EAST

If you are interested in the specifics of the country selection methodology, email us at eu-diaspora@icmpd.org.

This document is a regional analysis of diaspora engagement in Asia. It draws on knowledge gathered during the mapping of five countries to study relevant policy and institutional frameworks, trends, good practices and recommendations at regional level. The resulting document offers a consolidated source of information to:

- ▶ Promote the contribution of diaspora to development;
- ▶ Guide action at regional level;
- ▶ Identify opportunities for peer exchange.



- Mapped by EUDiF
- Not mapped
- Not covered by project



2. POLICY AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORKS RELATED TO DIASPORA ENGAGEMENT

AT REGIONAL LEVEL

The Middle East is at the crossroads of several regional organisations and dialogues.

The countries covered by the Middle East mapping have comparable socio-economic contexts, including political instability, conflicts, and economic crisis. Moreover, in each country expatriates have complex and unique ways of engaging with the country of origin. This particular context explains why a publication in the EUDiF regional series is dedicated to this region. The decision to focus only on the Middle East and not on the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region as a whole can further be explained by the full integration of Northern African countries in the African Union's **Citizens and Diaspora Directorate (AU-CIDO)**, the regional framework covering Africa.

One of the main players in diaspora engagement at regional level is the League of Arab States (LAS)¹.

The importance of the issue of diaspora engagement in the region has become clear over the past decade, as the **declarations of Arab summits** have frequently referred to Arab expatriates.² These references show the interest and importance of promoting the role of Arab expatriates in the development of their countries of heritage. Among LAS' most important efforts is the cultural programme for second and third generations of Arab expatriates to engage them with their home countries. In the implementation of these programmes, LAS has organised cultural trips, conducted studies and reports, organised conferences, meetings, seminars, workshops and field visits.

- 1 The LAS currently brings together 22 Member States – including Syria whose participation has been suspended since 2011 – with the purpose to strengthen political, economic, cultural and social cooperation.
- 2 See: **Tunis Declaration** in 2004 on the process of development and modernization in the Arab world; **Brasilia Declaration** issued by the Summit of Arab States and the countries of South America in May 2005; the **Khartoum declaration in 2006** and the **Doha Declaration** issued by the second Summit of Arab States and the countries of South America in March 2009.

The LAS also supports the dissemination of news on Arab communities around the world and supports celebrations, such as Arab Expatriates Days. In 2013, LAS consolidated migration and Arab Expatriates affairs into one department under the name **Migration and Arab Expatriates Department (MAED)**. The idea behind this consolidation was to ease the work in the field of migration and expatriates and help the LAS to coordinate its activities more effectively. The MAED also aimed to enhance regional integration. However, in 2021, it is not clear whether this institution is still active or not.

A notable advancement in terms of diaspora engagement is the development of closer ties between the LAS and the African Union's **Citizens and Diaspora Directorate (AU-CIDO)**.³ AU-CIDO provides leadership and coordination to AU member states in relation to the development and implementation of diaspora engagement frameworks, as well as practical guidance. In 2015, AU-CIDO and LAS conducted a working session in the framework of **CIDO's attempts** to engage African diaspora communities in the Middle East and Gulf regions to support the integration and development agenda of the AU. Such efforts are in line with the **Africa-Arab Partnership strategy**, which highlights four core areas of collaboration: political; economic, trade and financial; agriculture and food security; and socio-cultural. In order to move towards a more integrated collaboration on diaspora matters, the two **aimed at creating** a joint 'Diaspora for Development engagement framework', as well as to create a basis for collaboration between the civil society divisions of CIDO and LAS. However, even though the LAS showed interest towards such a cooperation, little has materialised so far.

Drawing on the increasing interest of countries in the Middle East to harness the potential of their diaspora,

- 3 Egypt, which is covered as part of this regional analysis on the Middle East, is a member of the African Union. Therefore, it is also included in the regional overview of Africa.

related issues have regularly been discussed in regional fora. When it comes to regional dialogues, diaspora engagement issues have been addressed on many occasions through thematic discussions and reports. Launched in 2015, the **Arab Regional Consultative Process on Migration Affairs (ARCP)** is an informal forum permanently chaired by the LAS that facilitate dialogue and cooperation between its 22 member states on migration issues.⁴ It focuses - among other things - on migration and development, brain drain and remittances.

Another well-known regional dialogue is the **Mediterranean Transit Migration (MTM) Dialogue**, an informal consultative platform between migration officials in countries of origin, transit, and destination along the migration routes in Africa, Europe, and the Middle East.⁵ It covers a comprehensive range of migration issues, including migration and development. One of MTM's flagship initiative was **Strengthening African and Middle Eastern Diaspora Policy through South-South Exchange (ADED-IP)**, a project whose overall objective was to enhance the institutional capacities of national authorities charged with migration and development to better harness the contributions of their diaspora communities. In particular, it aimed at supporting the creation - or further development - of comprehensive diaspora policies in focus Partner States and at enhancing the institutional and technical capacities of government agencies/local authorities involved in diaspora policy. The **main output** of this project was the development of Operational Guidelines for South-South and triangular cooperation that lay the basis for diaspora engagement in the South.

Additionally, the **Euromed Migration V** project (and previous phases) covering all countries in the Middle East except Iraq, facilitates North-South and South-South regional cooperation dialogue in the area of migration and international protection. It creates a space of learning and exchange on emerging diaspora matters by embedding the outcomes of capacity building or research activities, as well as country policies or expertise, within its dialogue platform. One of the main outputs of the successive Euromed phases is the development of the **i.map** platform that includes information on diaspora engagement and remittances.

4 The participation of Syria is currently suspended. All five Middle East countries covered by the mapping are part of this dialogue.

5 It covers 13 countries of origin, including Egypt and Lebanon in the Middle East.

Furthermore, Egypt is also part of the **Khartoum Process**, a platform for political cooperation focused on migration and mobility, and Iraq is part of the **Budapest Process** which is also involved in protecting migrant workers in the Silk Routes region. In 2019, the Khartoum Process held a **thematic meeting** on Migration for Development: Harnessing the Potential of Diaspora to discuss ways of engaging the diaspora in their host countries, providing an enabling environment in the country of origin and how to attract remittances and investments. The Silk Routes Partnership project, under the Budapest Process, supported Iraq in the development of its first diaspora engagement policy.

AT NATIONAL LEVEL

At national level, all five Middle East countries covered by the EUDiF mapping have taken concrete steps to advance diaspora engagement.

All countries have created an institution dedicated - at least in part - to diaspora engagement. Furthermore, they all allow dual citizenship and Egypt, Iraq and Lebanon allow the diaspora to vote in national elections. Granting these civic and political rights is usually considered as the basis of a robust enabling environment.

Nevertheless, **Iraq** is the only country mapped in the Middle East to have developed a diaspora engagement policy. The 2019-2022 Policy on Engagement with Iraqis Abroad, developed with the support of ICMPD, foresees facilitating the exchange of diaspora human capital, including in areas such as academic exchange and skills transfer. It includes pathways for economic development of Iraq, such as sharing information on regulations and requirements related to starting a business or investing in Iraq and proposes an online platform to facilitate contact between the Iraqi population abroad and Iraq. However, engaging Iraqis Abroad remains a relatively new policy discussion. The policy is a landmark first step in Iraq formalising relationships with the diaspora.

Although institutionalising diaspora engagement through a policy is a new departure in Iraq, diaspora engagement initiatives have been implemented informally for several decades.

In 2017, in **Egypt**, IOM started to work with the Ministry for Emigration and Egyptian Expatriate Affairs to devel-



op a national diaspora engagement policy and strategy. However, the strategy has not been adopted yet and no information on its advancement is currently available. The same year, the Government adopted the **Sustainable Development Strategy (SDS): Egypt Vision 2030**, which portrays diaspora engagement as a way to contribute to Egypt's development agenda, through encouraging diaspora remittances, investments, and skills transfer for the socio-economic development of the country. These changes reflect the Government's belief in the potential role of the diaspora in the development of the country.

The **EU-Jordan Mobility Partnership** concluded in 2014. A key feature of the Mobility Partnership is the focus on strengthening efforts to derive all the potential benefits from migration and to link them to development. It aims to strengthen the capacities of **Jordan** to more effectively reach and engage expatriate communities for the country's development. The Mobility Partnership includes measures taken to improve the information available to Jordanian citizens on employment, education and training opportunities available in the EU and the mutual recognition of professional and university qualifications. In 2019, the Government adopted a **Five Year Strategy and Action Plan for Expatriates**; it aims to collect information on Jordanian professionals working abroad in OECD and Arab Countries, to develop policies on return migration, and to encourage remittances and local investments.

In **Lebanon**, diaspora engagement mainly focuses on **economic activities** such as economic remittances; boosting

tourism from visits to the homeland; and creating business, trade and investment opportunities. The country is highly dependent on remittances and many families rely on them as "a safety net" in case of unforeseen events such as job loss, health issues or other economic hardship. When it comes to future priorities in terms of diaspora engagement, the Government's **Economic Vision Report** highlights that the adoption of an emigration policy remains a priority.

In **Palestine**, the ongoing occupation and limited progress in state-building has **impeded the state's capacity** to articulate meaningful engagement strategies and frameworks, despite the existence of active community based networks. An **inter-institutional committee**, the Migration Technical Team (MTT), has been set up to seek to identify current shortcomings in diaspora policy and examine ways to both increase engagement and to better respond to expatriates' needs. The MTT, placed under the leadership of the Ministry of Interior, leads a multi-agency, transversal effort on engaging the diaspora. With support from the international community, the MTT is currently holding consultations that bring together governmental and civil society organisations based in Palestine with a view to increasing synergies among initiatives and laying the groundwork for a national diaspora strategy. The MTT is also collecting data on expatriate communities in order to best integrate their needs and motivations in future policy-making. The MTT is supported in this endeavour by the EU-funded **EUROMED Migration V** programme.

3. REGIONAL PIONEERS

EUDiF's Regional pioneers are countries that have shown significant interest and progress in the field of diaspora engagement over time. Countries are usually identified as regional pioneers because:

- The national institutional framework and enabling environment has been developed explicitly recognising the key role of migrants and/or the diaspora in the development of the country of origin, and highlighting the importance of optimising diaspora development contributions.
- And/or, the country has implemented notable diaspora-relevant initiatives in a given development sector.

There is no ranking of pioneers. More detail on each of the regional pioneers is available in the country factsheet.

Lebanon: Generally, the Lebanese government adopted a “policy of concord” vis-à-vis the diaspora. The “policy of concord” means that the Lebanese government encourages pacific links among different Lebanese confessional groups residing abroad and encourages them to establish unions and associations.⁶

Although proper legislative support and adequate institutionalisation of diaspora engagement is still lacking, the concord approach can be observed in the Government's support to diasporic networks and organisations as a way to sustain links with the Lebanese diaspora. The “policy of concord” is a unique approach in the region rooted in and reflective of Lebanon's heterogeneity. The Government encourages the transfer of remittances, facilitates returns, promotes dialogue with international organisations dealing with emigrants' issues (such as UNDP), and motivates its expatriates to exercise their democratic rights. The adoption of the **Voting for Lebanese Diaspora** law, as part of the Lebanese electoral law and the **Lebanese Citizenship Reacquisition Law**, remain two of the Government's main achievements.

⁶ Anna DI Bartolomeo, Tamirace Fakhoury and Delphine Perrin, CARIM -Migration profile: Lebanon (2010) 6.

Egypt: Like Iraq, in Egypt, diaspora engagement is not a new phenomenon. Since the 1970s, Egypt has implemented various initiatives to engage with its diaspora including the adoption in 1983 of **Law 111** on Emigration and Sponsoring Egyptians Abroad. The law incentivised Egyptians abroad to be engaged in the development of Egypt. In 2015, the reestablishment of the **Ministry of State for Emigration and Egyptian Expatriate Affairs** demonstrated the revival of the Government's will to engage the diaspora and strengthened its capacity to do so. In 2017, Egypt started to develop a national diaspora engagement policy and strategy. However, the status of the instruments is still unclear. **Egypt Vision 2030**, Egypt's strategic objectives vis-à-vis emigration and Egyptian citizens abroad include strengthening the links of Egyptians abroad and their children with the homeland (especially the second and third generation) demonstrating a long-term approach to diaspora engagement.

4. TERMINOLOGY

The term diaspora is not used in the region

due to the fact that historically, the word diaspora was used to refer to the traumatic dispersal from a given homeland, and in particular the dispersion of Jews. Usually, the preferred terms are ‘expats’ or ‘expatriates’, used interchangeably with ‘emigrants’ or ‘émigré’.

In Egypt, the term ‘Egyptian citizens abroad’ is used and Iraq uses the term ‘persons of Iraqi origin residing abroad’.

Lebanon refers specifically to its diaspora as ‘the Lebanese Expansion’ (Arabic, الإنتشار اللبناني al-intishar al-lubnani; also الجالية اللبنانية al-jāliyyah al-lubnaniyyah).

5. KEY TRENDS AND PRACTICES

The EUDiF global mapping on diaspora engagement showed that some trends are global (e.g. increasing remittances, attracting investment, creating links with the diaspora through events and network building networks). Nevertheless, each region also has its own specific trends and distinct practices.

National efforts in the Middle East mainly revolve around attracting remittances and investments, as well as - to a lesser extent - leveraging the human capital of diaspora and fighting brain drain.

REMITTANCES AND INVESTMENTS

Remittances remain an important source of income in the region. In 2018, they represented 17.7% of the GDP in Palestine, 12.7% in Lebanon, 11.6% in Egypt and 10.4% in Jordan. Remittances in terms of GDP to Iraq are anecdotal. The same year, the **growth rate of remittances** to the Middle East and North Africa was 9.1%, led by Egypt, which saw an increase of 17% in its remittances that year. Other countries in the region have seen a more moderate increase, such as Lebanon with 1.8%, or even a decrease, such as Jordan, -1.4%. Remittances to the Middle East and North Africa region **are projected** to drop by 19.6% in 2020 due to the global slowdown linked to the Covid-19 crisis, as well as the impact of lower oil prices in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. The price to send remittances varies a lot in the region, with Lebanon one of the most expensive countries. The Middle East region is also one of the least economically integrated⁷ regions in the world and attracts less foreign direct investment than other regions.

Countries in the Middle East with large diaspora populations are **progressively** taking steps to support remittance flows and tie their diaspora with national development. Specific institutions have been established by each country with a mandate to encourage economic links with the diaspora. Since its early days, diaspora engagement in Egypt was focusing on labour migration and increasing contributions of migrant remittances to the coun-

try's economy. Attracting their investment later became a strategic objective too. The ministry of Emigration and Affairs of Egyptians Aboard developed an **e-portal** providing digital services to Egyptians abroad. These include guides on investment opportunities in Egypt (especially in the housing and infrastructure sectors, but also in IT) and remittance service registration with the Central Bank of Egypt. Only approximately 10% of remittances to Egypt are sent formally and enter the Egyptian banking system. In order to promote greater remittance inflows and to strengthen hard currency reserves, Egypt offers Egyptians abroad the opportunity of ten-year tax relief on remittance transfers if they register with the National Bank of Egypt. The National Bank of Egypt also provides e-banking and mobile banking services, and Egypt has launched debt certificates denominated in dollars and euros to ease hard currency shortages. In 2012, the **General Authority for Investment (GAFI)**, which regulates and facilitates investments, created a special division of Egyptian expatriates' affairs, to reach the diaspora and assist contribution to the country's development.

In Palestine, collaboration with the private sector has resulted in the establishment of various channels aiming to stimulate expatriates' appetite for investment in the country. The Palestinian Investment Promotion Agency's (PIPA) is the lead agency working on bringing foreign investment and driving expatriate entrepreneurship to Palestine. It has participated in the **MedGeneration** project, a regional endeavour to tap into diaspora potential by connecting qualified professionals in Europe with Palestinian businesses. Other initiatives including diaspora bonds or seed funding have materialised via an active banking sector and the willingness of many expatriates to invest locally. The **Palestinian Market Development Programme (PMDP)** was designed to support job creation and sustainable economic development in Palestine. It provides Palestinian SMEs with technical and financial support in the form of grants to scale up local businesses and drive their integration into global value chains. As part of its activities, PMDP has organised various diaspora working-groups to explore trade and investment linkages and facilitated connections between expatriate investors and local businesses.

Similarly, the Government of Jordan's diaspora engagement priority is to establish links with diaspora commu-

⁷ Economic integration is the unification of economic policies between different countries for example through the abolition of trade barriers or the uniformity of fiscal policies.



nities and encourage remittances and local investments, particularly via trade and tourism. In this regard, the **Med-Generation** project thought to map and mobilise Jordanian expatriate “talents” in order to support the country’s economic and human development. Over 300 diaspora “talents” were identified and 230 diaspora members were mobilized over a period of 30 months. Additionally, 14 diaspora entrepreneurs were supported by the project to implement various initiatives.

In Lebanon, governmental efforts to strengthen relationships with the diaspora have been mainly focused on attracting foreign investments, namely through the Investment Development Authority of Lebanon (IDAL). A **plan developed in 2006** foresaw the establishment of “special economic zones, tax-free and specialised in high potential sectors like medical tourism, media, high-tech and food processing”. While these special economic zones exist, they do not focus on attracting diaspora investments, and have not been very successful at attracting investment in general. A **MIEUX initiative** to support IDAL aimed “to maximise the impact of Lebanese diaspora investment and activity in the socio-economic development of Lebanon.” Although promising in its early stages, the action lacked sustained commitment from Lebanese counterparts and did not lead to the development of a diaspora investment strategy as initially planned.

In 2006, the Government of Iraq passed **Investment Law No. 137** (last amended in 2015), laying the foundations for attracting foreign investment. The law set out several strategic initiatives including tax incentives, investor guarantees and obligations. However, there was no specific scheme targeting the diaspora. The Policy on Engagement with Iraqis Abroad shows a shift in Iraq’s approach in this regard as it specifically targets diaspora direct investment and job creation. In Iraq, even more than financial remittances, **social remittances** - such as networks - are considered key for the development of civil society and human rights as well as democratisation.

LEVERAGING DIASPORA HUMAN CAPITAL AND FIGHTING BRAIN DRAIN

Brain drain is an issue for the whole region. This is mostly due to political instability and lack of economic opportunities, resulting in one of the highest levels of youth unemployment in the world.

A 2018 **study** by the Arab League’s Department of Population and Migration Policies showed that high unemployment rates in the Middle East were responsible for 70% of university graduates looking for employment abroad. Palestine, Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon suffer most from brain drain. The massive migration of highly skilled citizens has led to a decline in the provision of some key social services, such as the health and education sectors. Not all countries in the region have started implemented initiatives in this direction. However, there are few effective practices in mobilising diaspora to minimise brain drain.

Iraq recognises the potential of Iraqis Abroad and is enthusiastic to work with them. It encourages nationals abroad to return home and support the development of the country, with a strong emphasis on attracting highly qualified and skilled Iraqis. As mentioned, the Policy on Engagement with Iraqis Abroad is a first step in this direction as it foresees the exchange of the diaspora human capital, including in areas such as academia and skills transfer. Iraq has benefitted from several skills transfer projects in recent decades. The **Iraqis Rebuilding Iraq** programme aimed to fill gaps in Iraqi ministries with expatriate expertise, encouraging diaspora members to return to their home country to develop local experience. and It created a roster of potential experts willing to return to their home country. Additionally, since 2005, hundreds of Iraqi scientists, medical doctors and company leaders have gained expertise through qualification programmes arranged by the **German-Iraqi Management Training Academy** (AGI). The **Temporary Return of Qualified Nationals** programme has facilitated 48 assignments in Iraq in the areas of education, health, engineering and humanitarian assistance. Through the ongoing second phase of the project, members of the Iraqi diaspora in the Netherlands contribute to the development of Iraq with their expertise, knowledge and entrepreneurship by participating in the IOM’s **Connecting Diaspora for Development** (CD4D) project. Through temporary assignments, professional diaspora members are linked with selected institutions in Iraq to share knowledge and expertise. For example, statisticians were deployed to the Central Statistics Office.

In the past few years, a certain number of **initiatives** have brought skilled diaspora members to Palestine for short-term assignments. In collaboration with international agencies, Palestinian ministries have established channels of mobility devoted to supporting specific sectors of the economy, most often by harnessing the diaspora’s



qualifications and “know how”. In particular, the academic, medical and “high-tech” sectors have benefited from this type of expatriate involvement. For example, the Palestine ICT Incubator (PICTI) in partnership with the Palestine Investment Promotion Agency participated in **Med-Generation**, a regional diaspora engagement effort that was funded by the European Union. Since 1994, Palestine has received support from expatriates via the **TOKTEN project**, primarily in the fields of education, health and IT.

Since the 1970s Egypt has aimed to encourage its highly skilled diaspora to return in order to stem brain drain. However, these efforts have fluctuated over time. A new start was signalled in 2015 with the reestablishment of the Ministry of State for Emigration and Egyptian Expatriate Affairs and the recognition in **the Sustainable Development Strategy** of the importance of skills trans-

fer for the socio-economic development of the country. As a result, a Science Hub for skills and knowledge collaboration and exchange has been launched on the new **e-portal** of the Ministry of Emigration and Affairs of Egyptians Abroad.

In Jordan, the focus is less on the fight against brain drain and more on supporting the population in finding solutions to high unemployment rates, including in looking for opportunities abroad. Since 2016, the **Ministry of Labor** has been supporting and regulating the emigration of Jordanians by providing an online portal that allows Jordanians to search for employment opportunities in Jordan and abroad. In addition, due to rising unemployment rates, the Ministry promotes emigration by tracking job opportunities in Gulf countries and supervising the activities of private recruitment agencies.



6. RECURRENT CHALLENGES

The following recurrent challenges were identified through the EUDiF mapping on diaspora engagement across several of the five countries mapped in the Middle East. These are challenges faced by governments in their attempt to engage their diaspora. In many cases, the same challenges are faced by diaspora organisations and individuals as they impede their involvement in the development of their country of origin due to a weak enabling environment. There is no specific ranking of the challenges listed below and most can also be observed in other regions.

Lack of unity and political polarisation: In several countries, the political landscape has been shaped by sectarianism. This segmentation is mirrored in the diaspora and can lead to tensions between different diaspora communities. This polarisation has led to trust issues towards governments as well as between different diaspora groups. It remains a challenge for disparate groups to come together when addressing governments.

Lack of data: In several countries, statistical data on the diaspora is scarce and can be difficult to collect. In-depth

information on the characteristics and structures of the communities abroad is limited. When efforts have been made to collect such data, use by the authorities has been limited. The highly segmented nature and the varying legal statuses that characterises the diaspora in some countries (such as Palestine) make it increasingly difficult to identify and systematically engage them.

Bureaucracy and limited institutional coordination: There are often issues with coordination between ministerial institutions dealing with diaspora. Cumbersome bureaucratic processes make it difficult to access said institutions and benefit from their services. This affects policy development and implementation. The pressure exerted by different actors are often not coordinated which results in an inability to link policies, strategies and priorities. This has also hampered attracting investment.

Remittances channels: Lack of access to bank accounts, trust in financial institutions and high costs of sending remittances are still issues faced in several countries in the region.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations to strengthen diaspora engagement in the Middle East include the following:

To countries of origin:

- **Develop more targeted strategies to tap into the full potential of the diaspora:** Diaspora engagement remains unequal in the region, with varying levels of success. Countries of origin should aim at better showcasing investment opportunities for their diaspora. They should also take advantage of the skills and networks of the diaspora that could be valuable to drive entrepreneurship in the region and strengthen the capacity of national institutions.
- **Know your diaspora:** Building adequate diaspora engagement strategies and policies requires solid and detailed knowledge of the diaspora. Data collection exercises, such as diaspora mapping and profiling of the diaspora in host countries, are a key first step in this regards. The capacity to collect and analyse the data of national institutions in the Middle East needs strengthening. However, when such exercises are implemented, countries of origin must take advantage and be willing to integrate the data into their strategic planning.
- **Build trust:** Due to the instability in the region, several countries in the Middle East need to build trust with their diaspora. Steps to be taken to build trust and further involve the diaspora in national affairs include providing better consular services and

showing interest in the diaspora's potential, beyond merely the financial contributions.

- **Remove barriers to attract financial capital:** Adequate financial regulations should be developed in the Middle East to match the diaspora with investment opportunities in key sectors. In parallel, there should be work done to ease and reduce transaction costs for remittances flows and improving access to the banking systems.

To diaspora organisations:

- **Build trust:** Due to the conflict history in the region, the diaspora is often polarised and distrustful of other groups. Being able to coordinate and communicate collectively would give more weight when engaging with the country of origin and more power when lobbying the government to have access to rights and opportunities in the country of origin.

To donors and implementing agencies:

- **Tailor capacity development:** The diversity of the Middle East requires donors to grasp local realities and build on existing efforts in order to respond to the specific needs of each individual country. The divergent local realities, diaspora diversity, and (often) historic mistrust mean that neutral support could accompany states and diaspora organisations to co-develop the most appropriate tools and technical skills needed over time.