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EUROMED Migration V Study

How did media in the Southern Mediterranean countries cover migration in 2019-2020?

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Introduction

The topic of migration slipped under the radar for media in Arab countries bordering the Mediterranean during the 2019-2020 period after it had occupied much print, broadcast, online and social media space in prior years.

Pictures of Aylan Kurdi, the three-year-old Syrian boy of Kurdish background found face down on a beach in Turkey in September 2015, made worldwide headlines and featured prominently in television newscasts as well as online and on social media.¹

It also drew international attention to the plight of refugees fleeing conflict zones, drowning at sea, or migrants trying to escape harsh economic, climate and personal abuse conditions such as human trafficking.

Yet, there are other untold stories that garnered less attention in recent years but are seeing renewed media interest as the scourge of the coronavirus takes a heavy toll on those who have been displaced and are stuck in limbo in camps or houses with inadequate medical protection, financial inability to return to their countries if they so choose, or to find safer havens.

EUROMED Migration V, a programme steered by the Directorate General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR) and implemented by the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), has identified the need to conduct a study to identify and analyse the various factors that affect the media migration narrative and coverage both in the European Union and Middle East and Northern Africa.

This is to an extent a follow-up of a study EUROMED Migration IV programme carried out for the same sub-regions in 2015-2016. It takes a different approach but with the same goal of developing a better understanding of the reality and constraints of traditional and other media and how these elements affect their capacity to tell the “migration story”.

The two years selected for this study saw a decline in media interest in migration in the countries surveyed. The emergence, and spread, of the coronavirus in 2020 is an obvious reason and continues to be a news priority, as are the economic impact of the pandemic, the 10-year-old conflict in Syria, and flare-ups in Israel/Palestine that spill over into neighbouring Jordan, and, the strife in Libya and Algeria.

The pandemic has added a layer of misery for the media in the countries under review. They were already suffering from cutbacks, drops in circulation, vanishing advertising revenue, and competition from non-traditional platforms where journalists, activists and hate mongers jostled for the public sphere. Print media were particularly hard hit and several newspapers closed shop.

Working from home since the virus became a public health threat hobbled the news gathering operation for cash-strapped media. When reporters and correspondents ventured out for live or field coverage, their focus was on more pressing matters, so it was inevitable that migration take a back seat to other priorities.

However, the issue occasionally made the news when migrants, refugees and domestic workers were portrayed as potential coronavirus spreaders, or when questions arose about if, and how, to inoculate them against the pandemic. An angle that received little to no attention was what to do with refugees and migrants who contracted the virus

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/02/shocking-image-of-drowned-syrian-boy-shows-tragic-plight-of-refugees>

and needed hospitalization but could not afford treatment, could not compete with a country's natives for hospital space to be treated, and could not afford to pay for dwindling supplies of oxygen tanks.

A recurring story has been the endless loop of mis- and dis-information through chat apps and social media about vaccines and their effects along with migrants' and refugees' reluctance to be vaccinated when offered the opportunity based on the false narratives they readily consumed.

This segment of the study sheds light on the trials media faced in covering the topic during the 2019-2020 period, albeit keeping in mind the findings are more qualitative and notional, than quantitative and purely statistical, and may be somewhat asymmetrical in scope.

The information is based on a questionnaire sent to journalists, academics and NGO officials as well as research drawn from news articles and reports from various migration-related organizations. It is by no means conclusive but does present a panorama of views, at times contradictory in the same country, and poses a challenge to help clarify matters for the uninitiated (including in the media) by creating much-needed awareness of an issue that is unlikely to disappear any time soon.

The Arab countries covered in this segment are Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Lebanon and Jordan. Although the last one does not border the Mediterranean, it has a high concentration of refugees and migrants who arrived in waves over the decades, notably Palestinians, Iraqis and Syrians.

Lebanon, too, has a high refugee proportion of the population – a quarter of the known population by some estimates – that is Palestinian, Iraqi and mostly Syrian. Both Lebanon and Jordan have migrant workers from different parts of the world but their numbers in Lebanon began decreasing with the onset of financial difficulties and the pandemic in 2019 and 2020, respectively. Lebanon, long a land of emigrants, has seen an unprecedented sharp spike in departures of its own nationals since 2019 due to the country's economic woes compounded by the coronavirus and Beirut port explosion in August 2020.

Egypt, Libya, Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco have had waves of their own nationals attempting to cross the Mediterranean in search of greener pastures in Europe, and beyond, and have been transit countries for migrants and refugees from sub-Saharan Africa, or even conflict zones as far afield as Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan.

The common thread among them was the relative hiatus in migration media coverage and the discovery that journalists were often ill-informed about the situation in their own back yards, much less in other countries.



Chapter 1 – Polarisation in media

Migration was considered of secondary importance in Moroccan media compared to political, social, economic, sports, art and security topics. There was a stereotypical image of migration issues in most media and the subject was handled in a general, unilateral way. Awards given by international organizations had resulted in individual interest in some reports but migration was not an appealing topic to media.

“Migration usually ranks after official, economic and political news and there’s a difference between summer and other times of the year,” said the first Moroccan respondent interviewed for the study (Respondent 1), adding that there was a tendency to present a simplified image of migration as the issue is usually dealt with seasonally.

When Moroccan *émigrés* came home in summer, the media focused on them, notably print outlets that sometimes dedicated entire sections to migration. Conversely, media covered secret migration from Morocco to European countries, or the migration of sub-Saharan Africans to Morocco. Periodic radio and TV programs dedicated to migration were also produced. Their content depicted migrants with a mixture of simplification, bias and seriousness.

“The topic isn’t a priority on Morocco’s media agenda,” said a second Moroccan respondent (Respondent 2) interviewed. “In normal times, Morocco is an exporter of Moroccan migrants to Europe and North America, and is a host country for other migrants; the issue isn’t of importance.”

While there was good coverage in some instances, there was also reporting that stigmatised various migrant groups through the use of incorrect terms and unethical treatment.

“Sadly, although most migration is by plane, we always see stereotypical images tying migration in Morocco to ‘secret migration’ or to those of a different skin color, like (sub-Saharan) African migrants”, noted a third respondent from the country (Respondent 3).

Respondent 1 confirmed images included a preponderance of boats, corpses and tragedies that migrant children and old people faced, but also success stories of some migrants in host countries.

The presentations were twofold: pictures of violence that reflected the reality of migration policy between Morocco and the EU, as there are barricades between the two occupied cities of Ceuta and Melilla, with migrants attempting to climb the metal fence and the impact on them, and the other side of images that official Moroccan media tried to disseminate showing Morocco as a country that welcomed irregular migrants or that sought to regularise their status that began in 2014.

Additionally, there was the angle of Moroccans’ irregular migration and the absence of images about such people. Not because of censorship but because the topic of migration hasn’t been attractive for the past four years. Those who crossed from Morocco to Spain, Libya, or the Canary Islands (that are close to Morocco), were Moroccans. Some 10,000 Moroccans arrived in the Canary Islands at one point but there were few pictures of them to document their arrival and presence.

The Moroccan Network of Investigative Journalists (MIRAJ) is undertaking a massive effort to train media in investigative journalism, as did the Institute for Media Diversity. But this journalism genre is still in its infancy in Morocco due to financial considerations and issues of morale tied to journalists’ fears. MIRAJ conducts comprehensive training by introducing investigative journalism to universities and institutes with a key topic being migration and human trafficking between Morocco and Spain, and Morocco, Algeria and Libya.



There were a few investigative journalism attempts, but not enough to show the various aspects of migration.

According to Respondent 2, there's great difficulty in conducting investigative reports given the political context, directions, and situation of press freedom in Morocco that would enable investigative journalism, but there were excellent reports by Moroccan journalists that were recognized by the EU-funded Migration Media Award. However, a host of topics that haven't been tackled showed a great shortage of stories that presented danger, notably on human trafficking and the EU's policy on migration.

There were no respondents to the questionnaire from Algeria. Unrest in that North African country and strict surveillance of media and social media dampened the enthusiasm of journalists, academics, activists and others from even responding to the writer's emails. At least 190 activists and anti-government demonstrators were arrested, according to the Comité National pour la Libération des Détenus (CNLD)² Their fate is unknown. One journalist had agreed through an intermediary to reply but later said via Facebook message:

"Frankly, I can't answer her (this writer), even briefly, with information she can find on the Internet, and the information I have will add to my problems. I can't nominate anyone from Algeria to answer because I fear I may, unintentionally, cause him/her harm. Outside the box, the questions seem very normal. But according to you-know-who...we don't need hassles...I don't know how to answer her email because she won't understand our reality, particularly the years she specified in the questionnaire. I'm sorry I can't help her."

The intermediary, who is outside Algeria, said the country is in a very bad state, reminiscent of the former Soviet Union in its crackdown on dissidents and waves of arrests, adding that another colleague, a journalist and activist, had been jailed.

So information on migration in Algeria was selected from various online media and NGO reports to understand the landscape.

In a report entitled "New Spike in Mass Expulsion from Algeria to Niger" published in November 2020 by the European Council on Refugees and Exiles the authors said Algerian authorities had deported within the previous month thousands of people to Niger.³

They had included registered asylum seekers and children who were intercepted in raids across the country and handed over to Nigerien authorities in Agadez, or abandoned in the desert at the border. Those expelled stated they were subjected to severe abuse by Algerian forces.

As reported by the collective Alarme Phone Sahara, at least 6,747 people were expelled from Algeria to Niger between 30 September and 27 October. This marks a significant increase in deportations that occurs just after Algerian Interior Minister Kamel Beldjoud announced a national strategy on combatting 'illegal' migration in parliament on 30 September.

The "deportations," carried out through "unofficial convoys" to the border zone between the two countries, were based on a bilateral agreement from 2014 on repatriating undocumented Nigerien nationals from Algeria to Niger, the report said, adding that the deportees were apparently mistreated.

"Algeria is entitled to protect its borders, but not to arbitrarily detain and collectively expel migrants, including children and asylum seekers, without a trace of due process," the report quoted Lauren Seibert, refugee and migrant rights researcher at Human Rights Watch, as saying.

² <https://www.facebook.com/comitenationalpourelaliberationdesdetenusCNLD/>

³ European Council on Refugees and Exiles report "New Spike in Mass Expulsion from Algeria to Niger", 6 November 2020 <https://www.ecre.org/new-spike-in-mass-expulsion-from-algeria-to-niger/>

A month earlier, Human Rights Watch (HRW) had published "Algeria: Migrants, Asylum Seekers Forced Out Thousands, Including Children, Expelled to Niger, Without Due Process".⁴

While every country is entitled to regulate the entry of foreigners, Algeria's treatment of migrants violates its obligations as a party to the Migrant Workers Convention, which prohibits collective expulsions and requires examination of each case individually.

As a party to the UN and African Refugee Conventions and the Convention Against Torture, Algeria is also bound by the principle of non-refoulement, which prohibits the forced return of anyone to countries where they could face torture or threats to their lives or freedom. The Refugee Convention forbids expelling refugees lawfully in a contracting state's territory except on grounds of national security or public order.

The principle of *non-refoulement* is a core principle of international refugee law that prohibits states from expelling or returning (*refouler*) refugees to a place where their lives or freedoms are threatened on account of their race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or their political opinion. This principle is clearly expressed by Article 33 of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. Human rights norms provide additional protection from *refoulement* to that afforded by refugee law including with regard to situations where there is a substantial risk of torture or cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment. The principle of *non-refoulement* is widely recognized as a rule of customary international law and is therefore binding on all states, whether or not they are parties to the 1951 Convention or relevant international human rights instruments.

Like Morocco and Algeria, migration did not rank high on the Tunisian media's list of priorities. Economics, politics, sports and religion took precedence as it belonged to current events stories.

There were serious reports covering migration issues, migrants and refugees in Tunisia, as a sizeable number of them live in Tunisia, either by choice or temporarily until they have a chance to migrate to Europe. The Tunisian Commission to Combat Human Trafficking has found many cases of human trafficking of refugees from African coastal countries.

"I should point out that a serial on the Tunisian public TV channel during the past (2021) month of Ramadan dealt with issues of irregular migration from Tunisia to Italy and focused on very important social, economic and humanitarian matters in Tunisia and European holding centers," said the Tunisian respondent interviewed for the study.

One could divide images into three major categories: the pictures on social media that usually mentioned the social classes drawn to the idea of irregular migration (families, babies, women, teenage girls), traditional mainstream media coverage (print and online media), where there's an attraction to human interest stories like a cemetery in Jergees for migrants who died at sea, or the social and economic causes of migration, he added.

According the Libyan respondent interviewed, Libyan public opinion considered migration and its coverage of major importance. However, there were few reports on the issue in the 2019-2020 timeframe, and those that were disseminated were weak because of an absence of support groups and a shortage of investigative specialists in the field.

Egypt has traditionally taken center stage in the Middle East given its size, political weight, history, geographic location as an Arab and African nation, and because of its media presence. But the primacy of migration in the media seemed to draw contradictory reactions from journalists and experts.

⁴ Article by Human Rights Watch "Algeria: Migrants, Asylum Seekers Forced Out Thousands, Including Children, Expelled to Niger, Without Due Process", 9 October 2020 <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/10/09/algeria-migrants-asylum-seekers-forced-out>

For one of the respondents from Egypt interviewed for the study (Respondent 1), immigration, notably the “illegal” type, doesn’t attract enough attention in local Egyptian media, except for temporary campaigns at spread out intervals.

“In general, following the slowdown of the illegal immigration wave from Northern Egypt to Italy, and the State’s success in halting it, the media’s interest in the subject receded,” he said. “As for legal immigration, there isn’t much discussion of it in the media: instead, it may be discussed more on a personal level in social media.”

According to a second Egyptian respondent interviewed (Respondent 2), the thorny issue of irregular migration was in third place after politics and economics, but it tended to emerge strongly during a crisis: the arrest of irregular immigrants, or a disaster like a boat capsizing.

“Actually, I would say that migration was not a topic, or a hot topic, in Egyptian media at all during the 2019 to 2020 era,” said a third Egyptian respondent (Respondent 3). “I would say it ranks somewhere behind EU relationships, but maybe equally to the ignored topic of climate change.”

When depicted, it was either simplified accounts taken from international news or if there was local coverage, it focused on certain communities.

Syrian migrants who escaped the strife in their country and settled in Egypt were the subjects of various reports. Some stories covered their ability to start enterprises, particularly food businesses, and to become successful, but that only provided a narrow view of the community. Meanwhile, little was known about African migrants, their stories, and their aspirations.

“On occasion, I have seen a spread on migrant women but I always get the feeling it was funded by some organisation that is working with migrants in Egypt,” the Egyptian Respondent 3 added.

Depictions of migrants, immigrants and emigrants varied. While legal immigration wasn’t a topic of conversation in Egyptian media, a reverse trend emerged whereby Egyptian *emigrés* were covered and featured extensively through an initiative dubbed “Egypt Can”, spearheaded by the Ministry of Emigration, particularly if they were noted for special achievements.

Several conferences were organized to host them. The upshot was that Egyptian *emigrés* could return to benefit their country, but media did not mention the reasons for their emigration nor any conditions that facilitated their return.

Images have also been violent, the Egyptian Respondent 2 said, including the publishing of pictures showing people drowning, authorities arresting migrants, or weeping family members after losing loved ones, said the respondent.

But the Egyptian Respondent 3 disagreed, noting that the 2015 type of images had disappeared, and that it was more of a European story. The local story pictures focused on successful businesses and food outlets owned and run by foreign migrants in Egypt.

That could be due to migration stories being more common in print and online media than on TV, but images were negative, said a fourth Egyptian Respondent 4 who was contradicted by a fifth Egyptian Respondent, so it was hard to determine who was more accurate.

“There are no death boats in Egypt and there’s care taken in the use of photos,” Egyptian Respondent 5 insisted.

There were investigative reports on human trafficking but they were not limited to migration as they include girls hired as domestic workers.



However, Egyptian reporters struggled to conduct real investigative journalism with occasional stories more likely to appear in online publications like “Mada Masr”, Egyptian Respondent 3 said.

Respondent 1 from Lebanon was quite insightful in his analysis of Lebanon’s media landscape, noting three factors that made migration relatively conspicuous on a regular basis:

The presence of a large number of refugees in Lebanon; prevalent racism and xenophobia by influential and highly covered political parties and leaders, who often blamed refugees even when stories had nothing to do with the latter; and the increased emigration of Lebanese citizens due to the multi-faceted crises the country had experienced. But other topics, like health, economic and political crises, took precedence in the media’s coverage over the last couple of years.

“The media depiction of migration remained largely negative and biased,” he said. “Most serious and professional stories on migration have been published in new, independent, nascent online outlets rather than in the mainstream/legacy Lebanese media outlets.”

It’s difficult to separate the issue of migration from other topics in Lebanon’s daily news production as it’s tied to the economy, politics and security, according to Respondent 2 from Lebanon interviewed for the study. For the Lebanese, it was involuntary and triggered by hunger, poverty, instability and uncertainty, so a respondent preferred calling it displacement. Depictions of migration from Lebanon were connected to daily crises affecting all social classes.

Lebanese Respondent 2 acknowledged the production of serious journalistic topics, and analyses on the reasons for migration, with the largest number of stories focusing primarily on the economic and social implications. The reports featured mostly young emigrants and university graduates searching for job opportunities and stability abroad, leading to a “brain drain” and emptying the country of basic competencies in all sectors, notably Lebanon’s once distinctive medical and hospital domains.

“There’s also what the media call ‘secret migration’ on ‘death boats’ so there’s an abundance of topics and reports on the means of illegal migration and smuggling cases that are mostly the result of worsening despair by the Lebanese that end up in stories of death at sea or on land, that are reported in a dramatic fashion, focusing on the result without searching for the reason or providing any solution,” she said.

However, when topics turned to the migration of non-Lebanese (Syrian, Palestinian and Iraqi refugees), there was bias exemplified in the use of racist terms, a language of hate and anger at the presence of people considered a heavy burden on Lebanon, or an additional reason for the country’s crises, Lebanese Respondent 2 said.

Migration reporting is topical and connected to events like tragedies whereas the economy and politics are covered more extensively in Lebanon although all three are interconnected, as is their impact on the environment.

“Mainstream media discourse can be sensationalist, while independent media platforms move beyond the depiction of the migrant as a problem to be solved and into structural or root-cause(s) analysis,” explained a third respondent from Lebanon.

A fourth Respondent from Lebanon and gender said popular media always portrayed migration in a simplified manner because by its very nature it was not open to complexity, and often biased against refugees, with exceptions rooting for refugees, so it was almost never even-handed as that would have required a substantial investment in investigative journalism.

Sadly, tragedy imposed itself to make migration top news when there were tragic events, noted a fifth Lebanese Respondent. Stereotyping generally overwhelmed migration media coverage, notably on social media, where oversimplification was the norm.





There were contradictions in perceptions of migrants: either blind bias towards them for political and religious reasons, or racist views for political and religious reasons. Migrants and refugees were also blamed for the economic collapse in Lebanon based on racist views, not on any scientific, statistical or research data. On the other end of the spectrum, journalists and activists have produced serious objective and unbiased investigative reports, albeit few in number compared to the prevalent stereotypical perceptions.

Migration with all its permutations has been a sensitive and thorny topic for several years, with inadequate interest from officials in general and media in particular, explained a sixth Lebanese Respondent.

"So one can say that media have fallen short of dealing with this issue as a national cause that deserves treatment and wider attention," she said. "This is very clear in the media output where political subjects are top priority whereas coverage of such historical issues emerge through simplified classical reports that don't delve into the causes and consequences (of migration), negative or positive."

In practice, if there were illegal attempts to migrate from Lebanon that were thwarted on Lebanese shores, or the exposure of smugglers and details of their arrests, the topic was given priority in newscasts, like on LBCI TV. If the subject had no local angle, it was relegated to international news in the second or last segment of the newscast.

"At the channel where I work, the topic is, firstly, dealt with from a humanitarian standpoint, and secondly, from a news perspective far from politicization," the Lebanese Respondent 7 said, adding that the coverage included the extent of migration and its causes that were mostly humanitarian, economic or political.

Images of migrants reflected editorial policies with a tendency to overplay hardships such as the misery of refugees in overcrowded, unsanitary camps or common rooms where migrant workers lived in poor conditions.

"Most media on different platforms use a lot of violent pictures like corpses at sea and boats spread everywhere and bodies on shore, particularly those of children," lamented the Lebanese Respondent 2.

But there was also coverage of the plight of migrant domestic workers and nannies who were mistreated, who ended up mistreating children in their care, or who despaired after persistent abuse and took their own lives.

According to the Lebanese Respondent 5, when violent pictures are broadcast or published, recipients are warned, notably in broadcast media, but it's a free-for-all on social media.

The Lebanese Respondent 7 said some TV channels don't care and broadcast inhumane and unsuitable images, in clear violation of media ethics and good taste, while others like his station don't air pictures of corpses, cover children's faces, and produce reports on family reunifications and happy endings.

Investigative journalism has made some inroads in Lebanon but lacks sustained editorial support and guidance, financial resources and follow-up, all of which traditional Lebanese media haven't considered a priority as many of them have suffered from countless setbacks.

While traditional media outlets continued to spread a mostly negative discourse, migration stories have been picking up in internationally-funded independent outlets like Megaphone, Daraj, The Public Source, and Mashallah News, according to one the Lebanese Respondent 1.

"Al-Jadid TV does investigative journalism around organ trafficking, human trafficking and forced sex work," said an additional respondent from Lebanon of the local channel that invests time and resources into holding officials' feet to the fire and exposing corruption.

There has been sporadic coverage of sex workers from Eastern Europe – women hired under false pretenses as dancers or hostesses at bars and seedy hotels - who ended up forced to do more and whose stories got published or exposed on the air when authorities raided their places of work.

What investigative journalism exists in Lebanese media has not been based on scientific data and technical details, with few exceptions, in the Lebanese Respondent 8 view, adding that reports on migration were classical in nature and detached from the concept of modern investigative journalism.

Some investigative reports were quite skewed. Partisan stations broadcast stories on the need to bar the entry of refugees and migrants and to send those in the country home, while other channels produced more reasoned reports on human trafficking, the people behind it, and money paid for it.

The issues of migration, displacement and asylum occupied an important place on the list of news priorities in Jordan, in people's comments and in the general discourse in the country, according to the first Respondents from Jordan interviewed.

The reason: migration in the Jordanian case is often tied to the creation of the State in Jordan and its development across different eras. Jordan lived through the Nakba (creation of the State of Israel), the 1967 Six-Day Arab-Israeli War, the events of the 1975-90 Lebanese civil war, the second Gulf war (1990-91) and the displacement of Jordanians from Kuwait, the third Gulf war (U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003) and displacement of Iraqis to Jordan, the war in Syria (beginning in 2011) and the Syrian displacement.

The migrations were an important topic in the media but were linked to the timeframe in which they occurred and as soon as the wave of displacement ended and refugees settled down in Jordan, coverage dimmed.

At the beginning of displacement or population movement, media coverage tended to be sympathetic towards the displaced and the subject was presented from a humanitarian perspective but after refugees settled down and political attitudes related to displacement changed, the tone differed and voices were raised to inquire about the economic, political, security, environmental and social costs incurred by the refugees' presence. There were no fixed sections or topics about asylum and displacement in the Jordanian press, and the displaced, despite their large numbers, were not a group that was the subject of consistent and regular media coverage.

"There isn't a lot of journalism on the situation of migrants," said Respondent 2 from Jordan. "We are doing a radio show on Egyptian migrants and it has strong following from Egyptians (migrants in Jordan) and some related government officials."

Despite efforts by some journalists in limited independent media to publish stories related to the situation of migrants in Jordan, the legal framework that governs them or the legal rights context related to their exposure to violations, they were not a priority and not subject to daily news content. Depictions of migration-related topics were not clear for journalists or media in general.

"Even if they figure in substantive topics, they're not explained adequately, so the issue is simplified and they are depicted as violations, with a violator and a victim," said Respondent 3 from Jordan. "Even the victim is not represented professionally, plus some of the published content confuses concepts and links migration to the danger of demographic change or cultural change."

The ranking of migration in newspapers like the Jordan Times varied depending on the weight of events. It got top billing if there were large-scale migration waves like the Syrian influxes in 2015 and 'death boats' on the Mediterranean. But in general, migration usually trailed behind the economy, politics and other subjects.

Discussion of migrants occurred when politicians examined economic hardships the country faced with a blame game pointing to the presence of refugees who put substantial pressure on resources, leading Jordanians to ask

for help from donor countries worldwide. The term “refugees” was used when unemployment was debated or when a crime was committed involving refugees. Migrants in Jordan are usually workers or people who come on medical visas, such as Sudanese and Yemenis, and decide to stay. Jordanian journalists occasionally produce stories about them, but this happens more by visiting foreign reporters.

“Most of the migrants’ pictures were of irregular migration and large numbers of migrants in front of United Nations headquarters, of sit-ins, of boats and deaths, or of migrant children and women worn out by unstable lives,” said the Jordanian Respondent 3.

A forth Respondent from Jordan said the law prohibits publication of violent images, so the most frequently used pictures were when army personnel met refugees at the borders.

There was a seriousness in tackling the topic in Jordan through investigative reports but their scarcity was due to journalists’ poor capabilities to investigate such matters, the lack of media’s urgency to research and investigate, the absence of adequate finances to produce the stories, and the State’s obstruction of journalists’ access to information, which created a major hindrance, the Jordanian Respondent 3 explained.



Chapter 2 - The effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on media reports and coverage of migration-related issues

"The coronavirus has affected all facets of Moroccan life but has had a particularly serious impact on migrants given the locked borders and difficulty of movement", the Moroccan Respondent 3 said of the pandemic. It has caused a change of attitude toward migration as each country's focus turned to its own resources, local production and citizens.

"The COVID crisis sidelined the migration issue from the spotlight and coverage during the pandemic period was weak although a new form emerged, that of forced migrants, or stranded migrants and asylum seekers who got stuck in airports and at border checkpoints worldwide for many months under tragic and inhumane conditions," the Moroccan Respondent 1 said.

The Moroccan Respondent 2 agreed, saying migration receded from Moroccan media in light of the coronavirus and lockdowns, and quarantines were not given their due. The government ignored migrants as a result.

"Algeria: Reforming migration and asylum systems in a time of crisis" is a report by Chloe Teevan published in November 2020 by the European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM), a leading independent think tank based in the Netherlands and Belgium that partners with officials from ministries, institutions, international organizations, think tanks, academia and social and academic actors from Africa, Europe and beyond.⁵

It's a case study and part of a larger report on asylum, reception and migrant protection systems, as stated in the preface, that seeks to understand some of the dynamics driving or preventing reform of those systems while proposing initial entry points for international cooperation. Three other countries are included in the report: Morocco, Egypt and Tunisia. All four are countries of origin, transit and destination, each characterised by complex displacement and migration dynamics.

The common thread among the four countries is the coronavirus that "exacerbated many of the existing political and economic issues faced by these countries, including high unemployment and a deterioration of public services, posing renewed challenges for local and migrant populations alike."

Algeria is reportedly very protective of its sovereignty and rather unwilling to work directly with the EU and its member States on migration governance, the report's author wrote in the introduction. It also maintains strict control of its borders and prevents many departures to Europe.

⁵ Report by the European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM) "Algeria: Reforming migration and asylum systems in a time of crisis", 28 November 2020 <https://ecdpm.org/publications/algeria-reforming-migration-asylum-systems-time-crisis/>

The intense challenges faced by Algeria, now intensified by COVID-19, mean that asylum reform and improvements in the treatment of sub-Saharan African migrants and refugees are unlikely in the immediate future. Indeed, COVID-19 appears to have at once increased migratory pressures amongst young Algerians, while also leading to an intensification of government controls on those seeking to enter Algeria from sub-Saharan Africa.

Restrictions on movements due to the coronavirus added an extra layer of hardships on migrants seeking to enter Algeria from sub-Saharan Africa. Lockdowns and restrictive measures had a direct effect on natives and foreigners. In the case of media coverage, news and budgetary priorities in newsrooms changed from the usual coverage to the crisis at hand. More pressures were added on reporters and editors to produce content and to continue covering their usual topics, thereby stretching resources to the limit.

In Tunisia, Covid-19 inevitably affected attitudes to migrants and the way media reported on them as well as on related problems due to the pandemic.

A section in a report by the Tunisian Commission to Combat Human Trafficking mentioned a spike in human trafficking during the period covered and a deterioration of their cases because of the pandemic.

The coronavirus played into the Libyan equation. There were fears of employing migrants or dealing with them with the spread of the pandemic and other contagious diseases.

An unspecified number of Libyan journalists wrote about the government's delay in obtaining vaccines and the suspicion of corruption in combatting Covid-19 given how much money was spent on the medication. Moreover, media criticised most quarantine centres that reportedly lacked adequate facilities and equipment.

The coronavirus coupled with migration got Egyptians riled, with media reporting they resented how certain Arab Gulf countries treated the Egyptian communities in those States and considered them Covid-19 spreaders.

The overarching issue of migration in Egypt disappeared in the last two years given the lockdowns, in addition to fears of infections in countries of origin, transit countries and host countries, according to the Egyptian Respondent 2.

Covid-19 cast a long shadow on attitudes to migrants and how Lebanese media reported on them in relation to the pandemic.

"Early on, some discriminatory actions, under the pretext of COVID measures, were taken against refugees and migrants," said the Lebanese Respondent 1. "But the pandemic grew to such extents that such stories became kind of irrelevant later on."

Those discriminatory actions translated into anti-Syrian and anti-Palestinian statements with fears their refugee camps were the epicenter of the pandemic given the population density in them, high birthrates among the residents and poor sanitary conditions. The refugees and displaced were charged with taking what was rightfully Lebanese, particularly jobs, at a time when the economy began to tank, people could not access their bank accounts, and lockdown conditions meant severe financial losses.

"Right-wing politics has manifested in the mediatized vaccine discourse, particularly around who should receive the vaccine," said the Lebanese Respondent 8. "Some (people) called for denying the vaccine to refugees and migrants, while others advocated for forcing lockdowns in the camps to isolate these from the rest of the country."

The impact of the pandemic was closely linked to issues of the State's failure and collapse of the financial system, according to the Lebanese Respondent 4. They, in turn, led to coverage of the return of migrant domestic and blue-collar workers to Africa and Asia and an increase in xenophobic reporting claiming Syrians were responsible for unemployment in Lebanon.

Syrian labourers have worked in construction and other jobs in the country for decades. But the strife in Syria that began in 2011 has caused hundreds of thousands of other Syrians to seek refuge in neighboring Lebanon, to the dismay of many Lebanese.

When the pandemic first emerged, Lebanese media were busy tallying numbers of cases per district and governorate. When it got slightly out of hand, concern turned to how to mitigate it, how to protect oneself, how to contain the spread and how to keep migrants and refugees at bay given their precarious living conditions.

As news of vaccines made headlines worldwide, Lebanese media's focus turned to how to acquire the drugs and inoculate the population, until a controversy arose about whether migrants and refugees should be included in such campaigns. Media that had jumped on the awareness bandwagon stressed the importance of vaccinating refugees to control the spread.

"Of course there's an effect," asserted the Lebanese Respondent 7. "Lebanese feel refugees are not taking the necessary precautions to counter the coronavirus and some media have held them partly responsible for the spread of the pandemic but other media handled it strictly as a news story by reporting on the percentage of infected cases, how to trace them, and later how to vaccinate them."

As in other Arab countries, migrants in Jordan were badly hurt by the spread of the coronavirus, notably the large numbers who lost incomes from day jobs and their inability to travel and go home.

Coverage of migrants' problems was inadequate and below par and migrants faced hardships when Jordan imposed total curfews and lockdowns that adversely affected them as most were day labourers and the sectors that employed them were hobbled, according to the Jordanian Respondent 3.

"Migrants were badly hurt, many losing income if they had day jobs and the inability to travel was a big problem for them", said the Jordanian Respondent 2.





Chapter 3 – The economic and political aspects – what they mean and how they influence media reports on migration

On a positive note, migration transformed attitudes, leading to changes in Moroccan legislation, notably in the handling of reports by the National Council for Human Rights that took an active role in that area, along with several partisan and parliamentary bodies, the Moroccan Respondent 3 said.

But the Moroccan Respondent 1 was more circumspect, citing a disparity of attitudes, notably the discussion in Morocco about allowing migrants to vote in legislative elections. It triggered a debate in news articles that had a major impact on the government's position. Interest in the issue was measured by the existence of an official body, a quasi-ministry, tasked with migration affairs.

Migrants were missing on the Moroccan media front, just like minorities and marginalized groups, except for given peak times, or during crises, the case of tensions between Morocco and Spain in 2021 being a prime example.

The Moroccan Respondent 2 provided more details: media exerted influence on Morocco's public policy through coverage of authorities' violations against irregular migrants and the latter's precarious situations before 2013.

Independent and free media, not official outlets, covered the migration movement and the violations. "That created awareness among a segment of public opinion and human rights advocates."

The National Council on Human Rights issued an important report on migration and asylum policy that was then articulated in 2014. But in 2019, and during the administration of several governments, the topic was notably absent and lacked political interest.

"Migrants were included in the aid provided to fragile groups during the early period of the lockdown from March to June 2020. Otherwise there was no financial or medical support for migrants and official media stayed clear of the subject," the Moroccan Respondent 2 said.

Interestingly, the respondents did not agree on the number and exact names of ministries or bodies charged with migration and refugee affairs.

The Moroccan Respondent 3 referred to several official bodies working and cooperating on migration and asylum: the Ministry of Family and Solidarity, the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, African Cooperation and Moroccan Expatriates, the delegated Minister for Moroccan expats, and, the High Commissioner for planning, who's a reference for international organizations and the media since Morocco is not just a transit country but a host country, which leads to cooperation among them all to facilitate matters.

The Moroccan Respondent 1 said there was an official body responsible for migration issues - the Ministry of Moroccans Abroad and Migration Affairs - and a parliamentary committee that oversees these matters among its other responsibilities.

The Moroccan Respondent 2 named three main organizations: The Ministry of State for Migrant and Expatriate Affairs that managed the issue of migrants in Morocco, but that duty is no longer its purview. He also referred to the Ministry of Interior and the Directorate of Border Control and Migration. A newer body is a committee on human trafficking. A fourth institution, the National Council for Human Rights, monitors the extent of Morocco's adherence to human rights with regard to migrants, such as their detention.

"The problem is access to information and the Ministry of Interior isn't very accessible in that respect," he complained. "Another problem is contradictory information."

A question on international organizations and local/foreign NGOs managing migrants and refugees also produced mixed results.

The Moroccan Respondent 3 said there were "many" international organizations working on migration - the UNHCR, the IOM, the ILO, the EU, embassies and tens of European migration-related groups - that all cooperate and organise joint activities.

The Moroccan Respondent 1 mentioned dynamic cooperation with many international, Euro-Mediterranean, African and other organizations but provided no further details, noting there was some coordination and some competition between them; bits of official information from international organisations and NGOs that are credible but some data that remained fragmented, incomplete and inaccurate.

Morocco regularly convenes high-level international fora on migration in cooperation with major international organisations.

The Moroccan Respondent 2 identified the IOM, the UNHCR and UNICEF as key sources of information given the scarcity of official data.

"We try to cross-reference our information and statistics from different sources and international conferences to avoid relying on just one source," he explained. "Of course these organisations have their mission and strategy of conveying their messages to the public, so we always try to be cautious in dealing with statements, speeches and statistics from international conferences that also have their calculations."

Despite credible and professional coverage of migration issues, there was no real change of legislation in Tunisia to protect migrants. Tunisia still deals with migration based on a 2004 law despite calls by experts to amend and update it and have it meet with international legislative standards.

The Tunisian Commission to Combat Human Trafficking, a national public organization dealing with respect for human rights, combatting human trafficking and introducing and promoting this culture in Tunisia, produces comprehensive annual reports on these issues.

Tunisian audiovisual media were more involved in discussing the official cause and failure of economic and social policies regarding migration. The Inkyfada, Nouwaat, Al Katiba and Muhajir platforms tackled migration calmly and soberly in several investigative reports.

The Tunisian respondent who was interviewed for the study did not know how many international organizations and NGOs worked on migration in Tunisia but said the most active in producing reports, organizing gatherings and setting up workshops were the Tunis branches of the IOM, UNHCR and the Tunisian Forum for Social and Economic Rights.

"Most of their reports are credible and are used as references in media coverage", he said.

Migration as an issue in Libya was mixed with various political and security topics and required more specialized laws so there was no specific coverage and no indication it had shaped politics, legislation and public attitudes.

Departments related to migration, like shelters for the displaced, fall under the jurisdiction of the Interior Ministry, a Libyan respondent said. A department directly tied to internal migrants focuses on matters of national reconciliation between different regions and there's emphasis on this topic by the government whereby the internally displaced and refugees are considered one of the most significant issues facing Libyans, due to wars and internal conflict.

No information could be obtained on the number of international organizations managing migration in Libya. As with any number of subjects, journalists faced a shortage of data and no media laws to enable them to access information.

Egyptian media's coverage of migration has not shaped legislation or public attitudes, but some members of parliament were tasked with representing Egyptian émigrés abroad to maintain and solidify their ties to the homeland.

The issue goes beyond public and media guidance about migration and has included stories on providing employment opportunities for young people in villages and governorates noted for the irregular migration of their youth, as well as the need for training to establish entrepreneurial projects. Most young people seeking to emigrate rejected such initiatives, believing that travel abroad would yield quick riches, an Egyptian Respondent 2 said.

"Any policies or legislation comes top down," said an Egyptian Respondent 3. "No formation of new parties based on migration policies. Also, with the exception of the Syrian community, migrants in Egypt are viewed as transient, so public attitudes are not much felt. In the case of Syrians (love them or hate them) this is not the first time they come to Egypt as migrants and stay.

Similar to the wave that came in the late 18th century, they are expected to stay. They are able to better integrate in Egypt than other nationalities."

The question of who was in charge of migrants in Egypt, and under whose jurisdiction their affairs were managed, elicited different answers.


The Ministry of State for Emigration is the key government entity, while the Ministry of Foreign Affairs steps in on some issues with no apparent conflicts between them was one response.

The National Committee to Combat Illegal Migration and Human Trafficking under the auspices of the Cabinet, the Foreign Ministry, the Interior Ministry, the Ministry of Social Solidarity represented in the Small Medium Enterprises Initiatives body, and the National Council on Motherhood and Childhood was another.

A third vague reply was that the UNHCR is in charge of preparing Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with the various ministries to provide aid for refugees, particularly since Egypt is a transit, not an asylum, country.

Respondents were even unsure about the number and names of international organizations involved in migration issues. Two said they didn't know, one named the International Organization for Migration in Egypt, another said the UNHCR handled most matters in collaboration with the Egyptian government, adding that numbers were obviously exaggerated on occasion for political purposes. One person said he had never heard of such organizations, and if they existed, they did not receive media coverage.

Unlike Greece, where media coverage of migration helped shape politics and public attitudes, Lebanon's political discourse set the media tone on migration given the extreme politicisation of most media organisations and their direct connections to political parties and leaders, the Lebanese Respondent 1 said.



But some investigative reports have succeeded in affecting public positions thanks to civil society groups by rallying support on the issue of human trafficking and probes into conditions of foreign migrant workers in Lebanon.

"In general terms, Lebanon is not immune from the turn toward the right, something that state-affiliated mainstream media also propagates," said the Lebanese Respondent 8. "Migrants are demonised by various political figures who have media platforms, which in turn translates into a generalised racist, anti-refugee attitude that is not divorced from older histories of perceived enmity in the context of the civil war."

"In Lebanon, media's coverage of migration has not affected politics or legislation and public postures," said the Lebanese Respondent 5. "A million people taking to the street to demonstrate against the collapsing economy had no impact; the state here is unaffected."

It could also be that discussion of legislation on the matter was confused and lacked clarity. Media tended to convey points of view and statements without digging into the legal aspects, causes and consequences of migration, and their ramifications. Migration was sometimes discussed in parliament and cabinet meetings as well as some partisan meetings, but nothing more.

Confusion spilled over into the government sphere where the interests and priorities of ministries differed, based on the political and sectarian agendas of the parties that controlled them.

The Lebanese Respondent 1 said the Ministry of Social Affairs (which has integrated the short-lived Office of the Minister of State for Refugee Affairs), the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities, the Ministry of Education, and UN agencies such as UNHCR, UNRWA and the International Organisation for Migration managed migration in a half-hearted coordinated way.

The Lebanese Respondent 2, who worked closely on the issue, named the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Justice Ministry, the Labour Ministry, the Directorate General of Internal Security, the Directorate General of General Security, the Directorate General of State Security, the public prosecution office, the judiciary and security centres as stakeholders.

"But coordination among them was mostly lacking, which reflected negatively on any accurate and balanced media coverage about refugees, migrants and human trafficking," she said. "So there are conflicting data about the numbers of migrants and cover-ups on the identities of traffickers as well as their partisan and sectarian affiliations. The outcome in the media was settling for stories on the missing and deaths because of the difficulty in investigating the causes."

The Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Defence, particularly as it relates to Palestinian refugee camps, were also part of the jurisdictional equation.

"There's no coordination among them for the most part and political, personal and sectarian elements overlap in how the issue is handled," said a Lebanese Respondent 7, which explains problems that arise over distribution of foreign assistance to those in need.

The Lebanese Respondent 1 praised the "relatively high credibility for numbers" issued by the UNHCR and academic institutions such as the American University of Beirut's Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs on these matters.

Most UN organisations and international NGOs dealing with migration and human trafficking have offices in Lebanon: the UNHCR, IOM, UNODC, the United National Conference on Trade and Development, UNDP, Organisation of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, United Nations Population Fund, the World Bank, and the ILO.



"There's regular coordination among these international organisations since most of them are UN-related so media depend on their statistics," said the Lebanese Respondent 2. "As for data from the government, it's mostly conflicting leading to confusion at best, and bad information at worst, which is reflected in media reports."

Various international bodies including those of the UN and different countries primarily in the EU and North America deal with the plight of migrant domestic workers and the integration of Syrian refugees into the workforce. The reliability of statistics issued by the government depends on whether they're being monitored by international organisations and domestic civil society organisations.

"My impression is that because most statistics are being monitored, official (Lebanese) statistics are relatively reliable," opined the Lebanese Respondent 4. "However, many media outlets pick and choose the data they prefer in order to serve their agenda."

The Lebanese Respondent 5 believed government statistics had no credibility and that the figures of local and international NGOs were beholden to their respective funders, meaning they may have lacked transparency. So journalists had to seek multiple sources and cross-reference them.

"To date, the impact of migrations and displacement has been limited to some practices at the level of the national discourse or some scientific and academic discussions, and some workshops or conferences have been held tackling the issue of media coverage that violates the human rights of marginalized or weak groups like refugees, but these discussions have not developed into national legislation and have not become political or partisan constructs," said the Jordanian Respondent 1.

Media's coverage of migrants in Jordan has not shaped politics and laws but has had an impact on public opinion whereby the tone on refugees in Jordan's media mirrored that of the street.

Asked which ministries in Jordan managed the affairs of migrants and refugees, the respondents gave different answers: the Ministry of Interior that's involved with asylum and refugees, the Ministry of Social Development, the Department of Refugee Affairs of the Directorate General of General Security that focuses entirely on Syrian refugees, and the Department of Migrant Labour Affairs at the Ministry of Labour. There are different security and organisational specialty areas regulating the labour market.

U.N. and international organizations dealing with migrants' rights in Jordan include the IOM, UNHCR, and the Norwegian Refugee Council, among others. Journalists were skeptical of government data because of their inaccuracy and inflated numbers to attract the international community's assistance, according to one source who said disparities between official statistics and those issued by UN agencies created a dilemma as UN organisations depended on government figures on the presence of migrants and refugees.



Chapter 4 – The importance and effects of social media in the overall reporting on migration in the region

The Moroccan Network of Investigative Journalists relies on migration experts, notably academicians, who have conducted field research on the topic for the last four decades.

It becomes more complicated in trying to determine if anyone monitored social media for levels of abuse in 2019 and 2020 because of what that would have required in terms of time and available resources.

The Moroccan Respondent 3 said the High Commission for Planning prepares accounts, as does the National Council for Human Rights. They're official bodies that monitor media, produce annual reports about violations and set up daily trends on the topic along with security apparatuses that have cells working on the issue.

The Moroccan Respondent 1 did not know about social media monitoring, and the Moroccan Respondent 2 said there was nothing official, although there were initiatives by NGOs and researchers.

The fact that migration was absent from official and professional Moroccan media coverage was connected to social media, so NGOs provided their input, as did perpetrators of hate and racist speech, particularly toward black migrants in Morocco from sub-Saharan Africa (and the results were seen on social platforms).

The Tunisian Respondent did not know, and did not think, there were any individuals or groups monitoring social media in Tunisia to keep track of hate speech. The independent High Commission for Audiovisual Communication that overseas broadcast media has strict rules about hate speech.

The Libyan Respondent said some Libyan civil society organizations followed social media violations but journalists were scared to handle these topics in a bold and independent way.

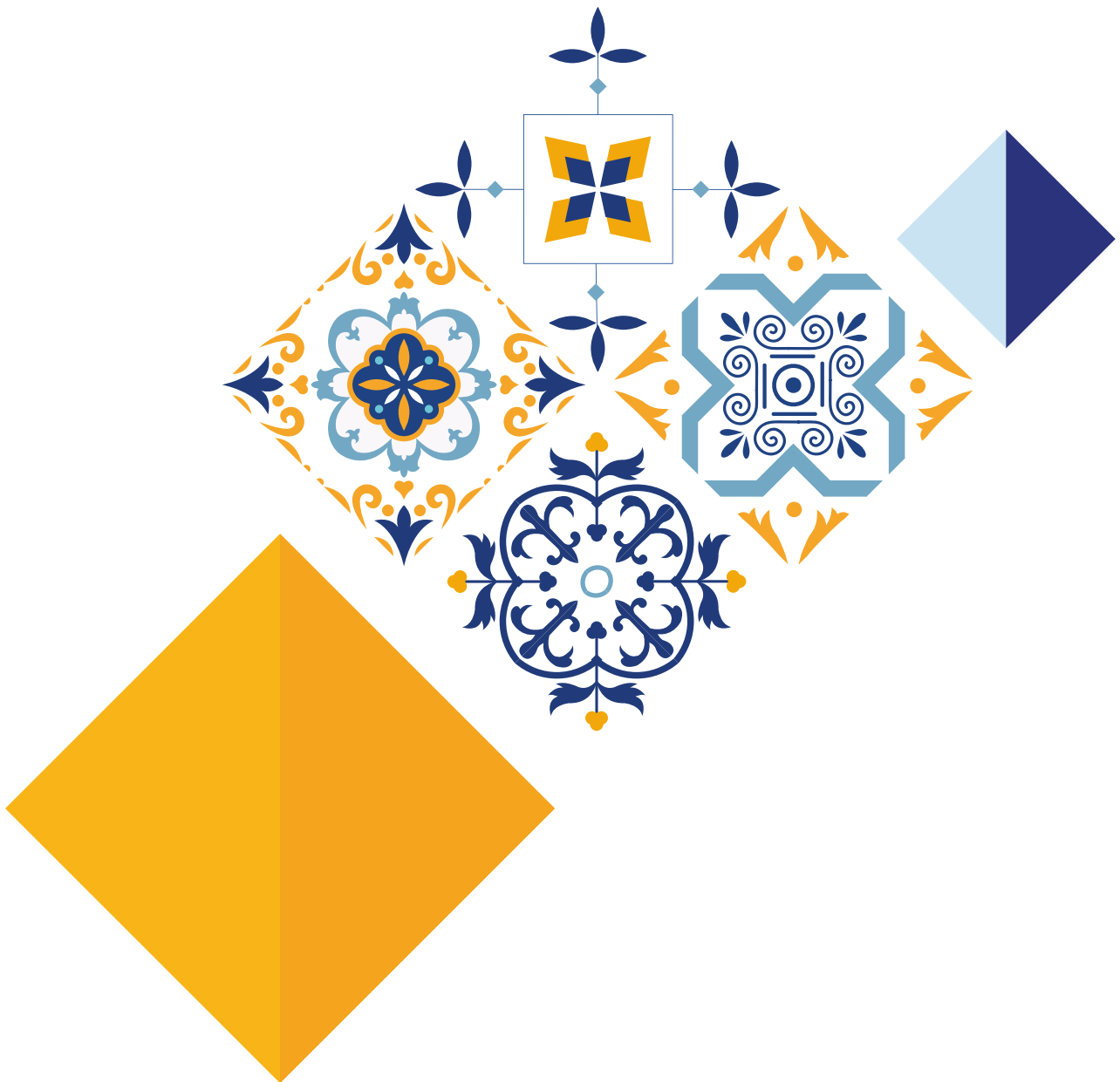
Given tight controls on media and social media in Egypt, it was difficult to determine if any entity or person took on the task of monitoring social platforms for abuses and hate speech against migrants and refugees. Most respondents did not know if such efforts were undertaken but two said individual initiatives probably existed by academics or at think tanks.

There's been sporadic monitoring in Lebanon of social media for levels of abuse but that has depended on funding for specific projects and they were not particularly focused on migration. The Samir Kassir Foundation (SKF) has been involved in an in-depth social media monitoring initiative of hate speech and of politically oriented and/or state-sponsored disinformation. The Maharat Foundation conducted an anti-migration social media monitoring survey but not during the period covered in this study and there has been no monitoring from the government sector.

Although the SKF did not monitor migration coverage in Lebanese media in 2019-2020, several key trends emerged in its findings: blaming refugees for the many woes the country had gone through was ever present in the political discourse and largely relayed in the media without much fact-checking, the Lebanese Respondent 1 said.

There are no specialised supervisory Jordanian organisations to monitor abuses related to refugees per se but some cases of abuse were recorded by occasional examination and government platforms such as "Haqqaq Ta'arif" (It's

Your Right to Know) that track what's published in traditional media or on social media. There's also the "Akeed" (For Sure) monitoring mechanism at the Jordan Media Institute that follows violations in professional and social media as well as a specialised unit in Jordan's General Security apparatus that monitors, registers and follows up on online crimes.



Chapter 5 – The media's attitude towards migrants and migration, migration in media before and now

The media's attitude to migrants and the language used to describe them was another point of disagreement among Moroccan respondents.

The Moroccan Respondent 3 described a major flaw in the media discourse on migration that sometimes tilted toward racism, with terms in colloquial Moroccan Arabic like "azi" (derogatory word similar to nigger). On the flip side, there were exemplary articles thanks to the Moroccan Network of Migration Journalists that has trained reporters and succeeded in changing their outlook about migration.

As for types of stories, hard news was the prevalent format. Individual diligence came through thanks to efforts in cooperation with the Moroccan Network of Investigative Journalists or the Maghrebien Center for Media and Democracy that is involved in training journalists on migration in the North Africa region, or, the Moroccan Network of Migration and Asylum Journalists.

A sharp contrast came from the Moroccan Respondent 1, who credited more advanced coverage today than in the past and more interest in using objective language, but admitted there were some slipups.

"Most news stories are translated: comments and features are published and broadcast but are fewer than hard news stories," he said. "There's also independent commentary, but there's stagnation in partisan coverage of migration issues and it remains seasonal and weak compared to the required volume."

Moroccan media were not obliged to take a positive or negative attitude about the topic, according to the Moroccan Respondent 2, who found the question difficult to answer and requiring quantitative and qualitative research. He said media dealt with migration, but not as sharply, or with the type of polarity that existed in Middle Eastern Arab countries – as opposed to those in North Africa – with regard to Syrian refugees.

It boiled down to positive, professional or humane coverage of sub-Saharan migrants in Morocco, or an anti-migrant/immigrant stance. There was no editorial policy on how to handle the issue and it was not raised in newsrooms. Journalists waited for a migration crisis to happen then determined terminology they would use.

Given the difficult state of affairs, it was rare to find news organisations dedicating correspondents or teams to cover migration. The Moroccan Respondent 3 said most news operations, except one or two, did not have specialized migration reporters. Those that did were the "Alaan.ma" website and "Al Sabah" newspaper.

The Moroccan Respondent 1 concurred while the Moroccan Respondent 2 said the Moroccan Network of Migration Journalists grouped 20 specialised members in a field that includes 2,500 journalists. There were no specialised journalists in all the newsrooms or official (government) and foreign agencies but a few specialists who were mostly members of the network.

"That's why we work on training and specialising journalists and with students in journalism schools to ensure they become specialised in migration," the Moroccan Respondent 2 said. "The reason for the lack of specialisation worldwide is a lack of material and financial resources, lack of human resources, and the weakness in newsrooms."

Journalists' attitudes to migrants and migration varied. Those trained by the High Institute for Journalists, the Network of Migration and Asylum Journalists and the Maghrebien Centre for Media and Democracy were quite qualified to deal with migrants as most of the training was in collaboration with official and UN bodies that provided learners with key resources to help them comprehend the topic. The Network of Migration and Asylum Journalists and MIRAJ offered prizes.

More awareness and understanding about migration issues than in the past, initiatives by some journalists to specialise in the subject and media training are commendable, but they fall short of what is required.

As for awards, the Moroccan Ministry of Communications hands out the National Journalism Prize but it's not specific to migration.

The network launched scholarships on migration coverage for journalists and journalism students and organised a competition. Five teams grouping professional journalists and students were selected for financial assistance to produce reports and surveys on migration.

Tunisian attitudes toward migrants and the language used depend on the types of media in question and their content. Hard news seemed a non-starter while broadcast talk shows with discussions and in-studio debates were more widespread.

Coverage was more focused on the economic, social and political details of migration, meaning mainstream media stayed clear of straight news and human interest feature stories. What has attracted larger audiences is the political infighting on the performance of successive governments since the 2011 revolution.

Like other countries with limited resources, there were no dedicated journalistic migration teams but media sent correspondents to cover stories when the need arose.

Despite the scarcity of coverage, the National Union of Tunisian Journalists has provided a document on migration and migrant issues in a bid to self-correct. There are no specific prizes for the coverage of migration and refugees.

"Most media use the term illegal migration," said the Libyan Respondent. "Depending on the topic and its importance on some TV channels, it's covered as essential news, and there are articles written about it, but because of the shortage of print newspapers in Libya, the topic is disseminated on social media."

There is a shortage of correspondents specialized in topics such as migration and a dearth of resources and equipment as well as no support and encouragement for journalists.

Libya lacks active media organizations to guide journalists to produce migration reports or to follow up on them and no specialized awards for coverage of migration. There's also an absence of media syndicates and no consensus on forming them to act as watchdogs in the country. Existing legislation is no panacea as the print media law dates back to 1972.

"In light of the circumstances Libya is going through as a transit country, Libyans consider the increase in the number of irregular migrants as the cause of many problems, like the spread of diseases and the sharing of subsidized materials such as fuel and groceries, as well as contributing to crimes like smuggling, etc.," he said.

Understanding the Egyptian media's attitude to migrants and the language used to describe them depended on one's perspective on who the migrants were. For some Egyptians it was their own country's *emigrés*, who since the constitution granted them the right to vote abroad for elections at home, had become the darlings of local media. So they acquired star status in recent years, particularly if they were recognized luminaries or experts in certain fields.



But for the Egyptian Respondent 2, who has covered the plight of migrants, it's terms like "escapees from death" that best described Egyptians who may have survived the tortuous sea ventures to reach Europe. He believed positive coverage of the issue had an effect as many families tried to bar their children from irregular migration after watching the news of what fate befell others.

The Egyptian Respondent 3 felt language had become neutral following reports that included slurs against members of migrant communities in the past. "Good coverage can be a two-way tool: In the case of Syrians who have been a focus of success stories, (Syrians) are not loved by the public as they feel they took their jobs and opportunities away."

Coverage of migration had been negative and media attacked brokers who facilitated it while Egyptian migrants were seen as victims in search of a better life away from their country.

Official statements from Egyptian government bodies or those dealing with refugees and migrants used neutral language in describing the issue, an Egyptian Respondent 5 said.

Since Egypt does not have a partisan press in the traditional sense, coverage has been seasonal and dependent on domestic events featuring the participation of its own émigrés. The Ministry of Emigration launched a campaign dubbed "I speak Arabic" to draw third generation Egyptian expats to their homeland, according to the Egyptian Respondent 1.

The Egyptian Respondent 2 said some media blamed the government for causing young people to migrate "illegally", and the Egyptian Respondent 4 said coverage in most cases concentrated more on the human side of migration. The discrepancy in replies could reflect a lack of distinction between reporting hard news and editorializing on the state of affairs.

Since migration was of passing consequence, there were no dedicated correspondents to report on it. Investigative journalists covered such issues with the exception of Al Masry Al Youm newspaper, where an editor specialized in migration and asylum news, the Egyptian Respondent 5 said.

Journalists had no specific attitude toward the issue. Many sympathized with migrants but rejected young people's unwillingness to find jobs that would keep them from escaping their plight by migrating and dying en route. The Egyptian Press Syndicate has conducted seminars and gatherings to define the dangers associated with irregular migration but has no special awards for migration.

"Migration coverage seems to follow international trends, so 2015 was a peak for Europe and that story was communicated in Egypt," the Egyptian Respondent 3 said. "Otherwise, migrants, other than Syrians, are invisible people who live in Egypt and are known to hold menial jobs until they can move to the developed world."

She doubted journalists viewed migrants as a community that could contribute to the economy or add cultural diversity. She saw a great need for guidance from journalists' unions or related NGOs.

"Media has the potential to play a very important role to help form more favorable attitudes," she said. "Little is really known about members of the community and they are often bullied and harassed."

That also translated into no role for media in the perception of migrants in transit and host countries since migration wasn't an Egyptian priority from the outset.

The Egyptian Respondent 5 is one of the few journalists who delved into the issue by writing human interest stories.

Most Lebanese media differentiate between emigrants, the displaced, asylum seekers and refugees, according to the Lebanese Respondent 2, who explained the various classifications.





Lebanon has always been a country of émigrés — trade, wars, famines and financial stress. Many Lebanese are dual nationals and hold passports from North and South America, Australia, and, various African and European countries. Lebanon has also known several waves of migrations from neighboring countries and further afield.

She explained that emigrants are Lebanese who've emigrated in search of a better life and future. The displaced are the Lebanese who were forcibly ousted from their towns and homes because of the Israeli occupation in 1982, the 1975-90 civil war, or partisan clashes. Asylum seekers are Syrians who moved to Lebanon because of the war in their country and may return to it at the end of the conflict. Refugees are the Palestinians whose homeland was seized by the Israelis who occupied it, expelled them from their villages, destroyed them and their homes in 1948 and they may not return, and the fear is they will settle in Lebanon forever. There are several generations of them who have lived in camps since the creation of the state of Israel.

"Everyone knows that the issues of the Syrians and Palestinians are divisive and contentious among the Lebanese and are reflected in words, pictures, caricatures and voices in various Lebanese print and broadcast media," she said. "What predominates is the Lebanese 'I' the victim and the 'other,' 'the stranger' the cause of all the deterioration in the situation whatever its nature."

The topics of Syrian displacement and Palestinian asylum were often presented from the perspective of their negative social, security and political impact on Lebanon and the Lebanese, and their reverberations were manifested in the political and media discourse that reached the level of hate speech, racism and playing to the tunes of Lebanese identity, the threat to stability, national security and one's livelihood.

In the first weeks of the COVID pandemic, several Lebanese municipalities decided to impose curfews after 6:00 p.m. on the mobility of Syrian refugees. Some political leaders blamed much of the economic crisis on the refugees rather than on their own mismanagement of economic governance, on corruption, and on wrong policy decisions, said the Lebanese Respondent 1.

The discourse was in line with Lebanon's political divisions. In December 2020, camps of refugees in Northern Lebanon were torched. Earlier, after a shooting in the mountain town of Besharri, Syrian refugees and workers were expelled and mainstream media did not dig further into these developments to verify facts and provide a full picture, with the limited exceptions of nuanced stories provided by outlets like Megaphone and Daraj.

Most of the news and reports about Palestinian refugees and Syrian migrants focused on crimes, violence, drugs, undermining security and security raids, so they reinforced the images of this presence as a threatening and destabilizing element. News reports about Syrian and Palestinian labour also promoted the notion that they competed with the Lebanese workforce, adding to the burden of asylum and displacement.

"So the preponderance of negative coverage mostly overshadows any impact of, or attempts at, modest positive reporting about the Palestinian and Syrian presence such as their contribution to cultural and economic diversity, and it undermines any coverage aimed at attracting support and understanding and realization about the needs of refugees and asylum seekers for human rights and the importance of dealing with their poor social, economic and living conditions in camps lacking the very basics of dignified life," said the Lebanese Respondent 2.

Mainstream discourse identified migrants as "refugees" or "exiled" and because the mainstream media landscape was an extension of the political classes, migrants often became scapegoats to deflect responsibility for the state's failures, the Lebanese Respondent 3 said.

Lebanese media regularly cross the line between hard news and opinion, which can confuse readers, listeners, viewers and browsers about the sources of information and intentions of their producers, thereby muddying already murky waters.

The Lebanese Respondent 5, who has covered refugees and migrants extensively, said there used to be sympathy from non-partisan media in Lebanon toward the displaced Syrians whose displacement was a humanitarian, not a political, issue, and because Western public opinion sympathized with them against the Syrian regime.

"This appeared in the language used with terms like 'displaced who lost their security, livelihoods, homes and loved ones, the hardships they're experiencing, bad living conditions in camps,' etc.," she said. "This coverage had some positive aspects that translated later into aid and initiatives with the media shedding light on problems of the displaced."

The Lebanese Respondent 6 criticized feature stories, and televised pieces in particular, on migrants and refugees for not using the appropriate terminology that reflected the broader meaning of migration. The failure was due to the choice of people in the reports and some journalists' lack of historical background knowledge that would have enabled them to deal with the subject differently, far from clientelism, superficiality, and narrow political and sectarian considerations.

Partisan news coverage, for its part, emphasized the party's politics at the expense of the news story and feature. For example, it was reported in non-partisan media that displaced Syrians were forced to participate in pro-regime presidential elections organized by the Syrian embassy in Lebanon, whereas pro-Syrian partisan Lebanese media reported that Syrian refugees supported the regime. Lebanese media not beholden to the Syrian regime reported that the displaced faced mortal dangers if they returned to Syria, as opposed to assurances of their safety in pro-regime news outlets.

Lebanon's media are in dire straits and have a hard enough time covering what they consider key issues, so migration takes a back seat to other topics, unless it's directly related to the country's political, economic and social security. Therefore, having journalists dedicated to migration is not on the table unless international grants that serve specific purposes, and are limited in time, fund special projects.

The Samir Kassir Foundation used one of its international grants to sub-award the Thomson Reuters Foundation and part of the sub-award was used to recruit a local reporter to cover disenfranchised and marginalized groups, including refugees.

Palestinian and Syrian news organizations with correspondents in Lebanon follow the news of refugees and asylum seekers. But there are no specialized teams, according to the Lebanese Respondent 2. However, there have been investigations that succeeded in highlighting migration as it relates to human trafficking.

"At the beginning of the Syrian crisis, Lebanese news media assigned correspondents to cover and go on photo/video shooting tours in areas where asylum seekers were located, but there were no specialised teams to cover the issue," said the Lebanese Respondent 5. "Some international organisations trained journalists but as events developed and the matter of the displaced receded from the forefront, correspondents covered what was topical."

The Lebanese Respondent 7 said his TV station has two correspondents versed in the subject who cover it locally. But if the topic is outside Lebanon, any reporter or editor can follow the news and produce a report on it.

Journalists' attitudes to migration and migrants depend on their biases, political and/or partisan inclinations, religious sectarian outlooks, and their media organisations' priorities. National journalists' syndicates have no role in Lebanon, be it on this issue or any other matter. They're a microcosm of the country's dysfunctional institutions. The State doesn't offer any journalistic awards. Some organizations offer modest prizes but migration isn't part of that context.

"The term migration in its wider meaning is unclear for most people, as well as for some media that are not well versed in the topic," said the Lebanese Respondent 6. "For the most part media ignore or avoid distinguishing between permanent and temporary migrants and their percentage in relation to a country's population and the social category to which they belong."

She argued the media's role would be more positive if every journalist involved became well informed through the framework of international migration law and by obtaining real and accurate data in a bid to provide rich content based on ethical facts far from political agendas, according to one expert.

In Jordan, at the beginning of every asylum movement media used positive and empathetic terms toward refugees. They were described as brothers, victims, persecuted, tormented. With time the terminology changed, particularly if the refugees stayed for long stretches and foreign assistance to them or the government decreased. That's when descriptions like the burden of asylum, the danger refugees present, the threat, and competitors in the labour market, appeared.

"We have refugees from different countries and migrant workers from different countries, (who) are called foreign labour," said a Jordanian Respondent 2. "Or they are called by their country of origin, like Filipino workers, or Sri Lankan domestic workers, etc."

He said language was the least problem, as journalists tend to parrot the police's narrative, so if authorities say a Sri Lankan worker died by suicide, media never know if that was the case or if the worker was murdered. Journalists regularly reflect the government's point of view.

There was a disparity in the attitude of media vis-à-vis migrants, depending on the news organisations covering them. If the media were official or semi-official, they typically published news related to the government's efforts to organise and legalise migrants' presence in Jordan. Coverage was also negative and demonised migrants by referring to cultural changes in areas where they congregated, values that were inconsistent with Jordanian culture, and their lack of abiding by regulations.

"The language used is insensitive towards migrants, their rights, cultures and needs," said another Jordanian Respondent 3. "They're usually described as hordes of such a nationality who do not abide by the law, or a stray group that is undisciplined in its country, let alone in another country, or ignoramuses by describing them as uneducated and know-nothings, or thieves dispersed in regions where non-observance of instructions are prevalent."

The terminology was varied: ignorant; worshippers of idols and cows; female migrants became degenerate prostitutes or willing to go out with any man; blacks to describe people of color; and highway robbers. The most offensive coverage was in opinion pieces whereas features and in-depth reports described the reality by giving voice to the victims, the hardships they lived through, and clarified migrants' legal framework, the migration crisis, and its causes.

The Jordanian Respondent 4 sees it somewhat differently. The language used to describe migrants is neutral but turns sentimental when there is undeniable suffering and tragedy involved like the story of the three-year-old Syrian refugee Aylan Kurdi.

"In our coverage, there is zero tolerance for using 'negative words' to describe refugees but we quote people as saying that refugees are harming the economy by accepting low wages that Jordanians can't afford to accept," he said.

Coverage was more news oriented when waves of displacement occurred, then morphed into analyses when discussion turned to the economic, social, political and security costs associated with the waves of asylum seekers and displacement, explained the Respondent 1 from Jordan.

There are no journalists specialised in migration in Jordanian media. A journalist covering international organisations may include reporting on migration and migrant affairs. In general, there are no specialised journalists in most subjects, except for economic news, where some TV channels and newspapers hire economics and financial affairs graduates to cover such matters.

Journalists' attitudes to migration were relative. Those who conducted research and participated in training workshops had a positive attitude but for most, it was not a topic of interest and tended to be viewed negatively. Journalists with negative attitudes towards migrants, especially Syrians, accused them of stealing the Jordanian media workers' jobs.

The journalist's union had no role in guiding reporters as it was preoccupied with general matters and had no track record of trying to improve the standard of migration coverage. The Jordanian Press Syndicate minimized the importance of migration journalism and migrants since they had not become a specialised field. Likewise, there were no awards for migration coverage.

Elsewhere, the "Markaz Tamkeen Lil Da'am Wal Musanada" (The Enabling and Support Center) helped migrants and non-Jordanian workers and organised an annual journalism prize for the best coverage of stories on migrants and non-Jordanian workers.





References



Country 1 – Morocco

Three respondents.

Samples of Moroccan media's coverage of migration:

- 1) A brief straightforward item by Morocco's official news agency MAP on 5 February 2020 is an example of neutral reporting on the sea rescue of some 40 irregular migrants including women and children off the Tunisian coast en route to the Italian island of Lampedusa after their boat's engine failed.⁶
- 2) Al Ghad newspaper of Jordan published a hard news item headlined **"Migrants Cling to Dream of Reaching Europe Despite Corona"**⁷ from AFP on Moroccan migrants on 15 March 2020. The daily used a news agency story with a Tangiers dateline to report on Moroccan migrants using any means to escape their country while totally unfazed by the pandemic. It profiled and quoted a number of migrants.
- 3) Al 'Omq (The Moroccan Depth, or Interior) published a report by Mariam Al Taiydi in Rabat on 22 November 2020. Entitled **"Confrontation with a Broom: An African Migrant in Morocco"**⁸, it included a Soundcloud segment and a YouTube video about a migrant from Cameroon. It detailed financial and other hardships he faced during a complete lockdown in Morocco that prevented him from paying his rent and securing the basics for his family. His wife gave him a broom to sweep streets in different neighbourhoods, for which passersby rewarded him with money. The positive twist to the story was the broom that saved him from starvation and eviction during the lockdown and emergency public health conditions in the country. The article referred to a study by the Moroccan Institute for Political Analysis that showed the number of irregular Moroccan migrants to Europe had decreased due to the pandemic while the movement of irregular migrants from sub-Saharan Africa had not diminished despite restrictions in, and between, cities.⁹

Country 2 – Algeria

There were no respondents to the questionnaire. Unrest in Algeria and strict surveillance of media and social media dampened the enthusiasm of journalists, academics, activists and others from even responding to the writer's emails. At least 190 activists and anti-government demonstrators were arrested. Their fate is unknown. One journalist had agreed through an intermediary to reply but later said via Facebook message:

"Frankly, I can't answer her (this writer), even briefly, with information she can find on the Internet, and the information I have will add to my problems. I can't nominate anyone from Algeria to answer because I fear I may, unintentionally, cause him/her harm. Outside the box, the questions seem very normal. But according to you-know-who...we don't need hassles...I don't know how to answer her email because she won't understand our reality, particularly the years she specified in the questionnaire. I'm sorry I can't help her."

The intermediary, who is outside Algeria, said the country is in a very bad state, reminiscent of the former Soviet Union in its crackdown on dissidents and waves of arrests, adding that another colleague, a journalist and activist, had been jailed.

6 <http://www.mapexpress.ma/actualite/grand-maghreb/parution-dun-ouvrage-collectif-paradigme-maghreb-europe-migration-genre-dialogue-culturel/>

7 <https://bit.ly/3ucEMAW>

8 https://al3omk.com/601884.html?utm_source=dlvrit&utm_medium=facebook

9 <https://mipainstitute/8128?fbclid=IwAR3IJHKYmFG612Ytj5gg2Pq1TudsBPV3TRgNVn2KgqoqawcPSyaXTasJY-->

Samples of Algerian media's coverage of migration:

1) A report by the state-run news agency "Algérie Presse Service" on 2 October 2020 was headlined **"Repatriation of secret migrants with strict respect for international treaties"**¹⁰. The news item was neutral and relayed what Algerian Interior Minister Kamel Beldjoud had announced about the repatriation of secret migrants of different nationalities, but mostly from Niger, while adhering to international treaties. He added that Algeria dealt with "clandestine migration" from 44 African countries but respected international conventions, notably those on human rights and migrants' dignity. He attributed the large influx of migrants in various parts of the country to persistent crises and conflicts in the Sahel region.

2) The independent online daily newspaper "El Watan" wrote, **"More than 400 Algerians reached Spain in less than 24 hours"**. In a report¹¹ published on 28 July 2020, Ali Ait Mouhoub said secret migration had accelerated during the good season and quoted government sources as saying 418 people aboard 31 vessels had reached the coast of Murcia, the Balearic Islands and Alicante. He added the figures were worrisome from a humanitarian and sanitary standpoint. All migrants had undergone coronavirus PCR tests and at least seven had tested positive. Other than reporting on the numbers, El Watan said the migrants' detention conditions in Spain were precarious and unsanitary. It reported on the arrest of two Algerians involved in human trafficking between Algeria and Spain. The coverage was neutral.

3) The "Algerie Eco" news site reported on 19 December 2020 on the incarceration of some 5,343 clandestine Algerian migrants in 2020 on the Spanish coast, according to EU figures.¹² But the Algerian League for the Defense of Human Rights (LADHD) said the stated number for "clandestine immigration" only covered the period of January to September 16, 2020. The report quoted European Union figures of Algerians entitled to residency in the EU, cited how many had been arrested and how many had disappeared at sea that year.

All these media reports quoted official sources and statistics. There was no enterprise reporting of any kind, no interviewing of migrants, refugees, displaced people, or members of NGOs, academic experts, or other references.

Country 3 – Tunisia

One sole Tunisian respondent.

Samples of Tunisian media's coverage of migration:

1) La Presse published a scathing and well-researched report, **"As of today mass expulsion of Tunisian migrants: Why did Tunis turn a blind eye to an Italian smear?"**¹³, by Chokri Ben Nessir on 10 August 2020 about the expulsion of irregular Tunisian migrants from the Italian Mediterranean island of Lampedusa with the Tunisian government's complicity. That was despite an agreement between the Tunisian and Italian governments to offer the migrants temporary humanitarian residence permits. The reporter detailed the agreement's reversal and provided ample legal and other background information on why Italy backed down, fearing the Schengen regime would lose its raison d'être if it (Italy) alone were left assuming responsibility for sheltering the asylum seekers, so Rome opted to maintain the union's solidarity.

¹⁰ <https://www.aps.dz/algerie/110448-rapatriement-de-migrants-clandestins-dans-le-strict-respect-des-traites-internationaux>

¹¹ <https://www.elwatan.com/edition/actualite/plus-de-400-algeriens-rejoignent-lespagne-en-moins-de-24-heures-28-07-2020>

¹² <https://www.algerie-eco.com/2020/12/19/immigration-clandestine-5-343-algeriens-arretes-sur-les-cotes-espagnoles-en-2020/>

¹³ <https://lapresse.tn/70242/a-partir-daujourd'hui-expulsion-massive-de-migrants-tunisiens-pourquoi-tunis-ferme-t-il-les-yeux-sur-une-bavure-italienne/>

2) The activist news site Inkyfada published a deep dive, **“How Does Europe Control its Borders in Tunisia?”**¹⁴, by Haifa Mzalout on 20 March 2020 into the mechanics of European countries and the EU equipping Tunisia with financial and material resources to fortify the North African country's borders and curtail migration into Europe under the guise of mutual cooperation. The report noted that Tunisia was both a transit and a departure country so it was in the interest of several European Union States to bolster its capabilities in controlling the influx of migrants to Europe. A disclaimer at the end of the piece reads: “The production of this article has received funding from the Migration Media Award, funded by the EU. The information and views set out in this article are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of the European Union. Neither the European Union institutions and bodies nor any person acting on their behalf may be held responsible for the use, which may be made of the information contained therein.” The tone is also critical of the EU and ICMPD, which it characterized as “technicians of border management. They provide training workshops to States thanks to a network of experts with a keyword ‘political and ideological neutrality and technical assistance.’”

3) The website **“Realité”** published a news article¹⁵ on August 10, 2020 relying on a report from AFP. Several other Tunisian news websites used the same wire service copy to report on the expulsion of irregular Tunisian migrants from Italy. Sites like **“Jeune Afrique”**¹⁶ referred to a visit by Italian Interior Minister Luciana Lamorgese to reactivate an agreement between Italy and Tunisia on the repatriation of Tunisian migrants. It quoted the president of an NGO representing the families of Tunisians who disappeared at sea as saying such news appeared in Italian media but wasn't published in Tunisia, notably since decisions on refoulement (repatriation) violate humanitarian rights.

4) The **“Inkyfada”** news site, in a detailed article by Arianna Poletti¹⁷ published 26 November 2020, criticized both the Tunisian and Italian governments for an August 2020 renegotiation of a bilateral agreement enabling Rome to repatriate Tunisian migrants without informing them of their rights or allowing them to apply for asylum. According to the article chronicling a journey in return and headlined **“In Italy, the Obscure Deportation Process of Tunisian Migrants”**, civil society groups denounced the move. The Tunisian platform reported the story from the Italian island of Lampedusa.

5) **“Tunisia, Destination of Choice for Sub-Saharan Africans”** by Hamza Marzouk and published on 21 December 2019 in *L'Economiste Maghrébin*¹⁸ is based on a quantitative study by the Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights that breaks down figures of a survey sampling African migrants who had settled in the cities of Tunis, Sfax, Sousse and Medenine. It found that 75% had entered Tunisia legally while 23% were irregular and others had arrived after being promised job contracts that turned out to be forged. Other statistics referred to hardships the migrants faced, including mistreatment, racism, physical violence, fraud and blackmail. While not overly empathetic, the article did point to exploitation and the fact that few migrants benefited from social security.

6) An editorial in *La Presse* dated 1 October 2019 asked in a headline, **“Irregular Migration: Are Tunisian Ports Safe?”**¹⁹. The piece by Abderrahmane Hedhili, president of the Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights, criticized a meeting at the United Nations General Assembly between the Tunisian and Italian foreign ministers, as quoted in Italian media. The meeting's aim was reportedly to classify Tunisian ports as safe for migrants rescued at sea and for the “forced repatriation” of Tunisians who had landed in Italy. Hedhili argued that rescued migrants or those who landed in EU States were the responsibility of the EU. He also listed his forum's support for the official Tunisian position of 2018 that rejected the establishment of a port base in Tunisia for migrants, and that Tunisian

¹⁴ <https://inkyfada.com/fr/2020/03/20/financements-ue-tunisie-migration/>

¹⁵ <https://www.realites.com.tn/2020/08/des-ce-lundi-litalie-va-expulser-les-migrants-tunisiens-clandestins/>

¹⁶ <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/1030221/societe/en-italie-les-migrants-tunisiens-menaces-dexpulsion/>

¹⁷ <https://inkyfada.com/en/2020/11/26/deportation-italy-tunisia/>

¹⁸ <https://www.leconomistemaghrabin.com/2019/12/21/tunisie-premiere-destination-migrants-subsahariens/>

¹⁹ <https://lapresse.tn/27106/migration-irreguliere-les-ports-tunisiens-sont-ils-surs-pour-les-migrants/>

ports were unsafe for migrants or refugees since the country's laws did not protect them. He called on the next government to cancel all bilateral agreements on collective repatriation with Italy and slammed the "policies of extortion and conditional aid" imposed by European States.

7) An empathetic article in Nawaat, an alternative news website, dated 23 April 2020 covered the hardships sub-Saharan Africans faced due to coronavirus regulations. **"Lockdown: The Distress of sub-Saharan Africans in Tunisia"**²⁰ read the headline. The feature with photos of Africans on a beach referred to 4,200 asylum seekers and 7,000 students, many of who were in a rather precarious situation. Their plight was shared on social media in a bid to shed light on their vulnerability, their inability to pay rent and to seek help for their basic needs as several had lost their jobs and meager pay. The article mentioned a social media fundraising campaign to help the migrants, to which Tunisians were responsive, and a campaign appeal to reinforce the protection of migrants.

8) The report **"COVID-19 fallout drives Tunisians to Italy despite deportations"**²¹ published 1 September 2020 by NGO The New Humanitarian and packaged as a news story, is well documented with statistics, context, background information, and interviews with Tunisians who attempted to migrate to Italy and failed, or who had migrated in the past but had found it difficult after the Italian government began sending home irregular migrants.

Country 4 – Libya

One respondent was the only respondent.

Samples of Libyan media's coverage of migration:

1) The "Africagate News" website published a good and jarring investigative report **"In the time of Corona, the Tawergha camps in Benghazi have become obsolete"**²² on the Tawergha migrant and refugee camps in Benghazi where health and sanitary conditions were non-existent. Reporter Ibtissam Aghfir who documented her article with very good photos on 20 December 2020 had been advised not to reveal she was a journalist. She observed the over-crowding in concrete structures housing asylum seekers and noted that if just one person contracted the coronavirus nobody would be spared. Conditions were exacerbated by a lack of clean drinking water and pollution from wastewater surrounding the camps that were not disposed of properly. The facilities were relics left by foreign companies that had abandoned them when the Libyan revolution erupted and had become refugee camps unconnected to the city's urban infrastructure.

2) The Tunisia-based activist Inkyfada news platform produced a very good, well-researched investigative report **"Investigation: At the Heart of Human Trafficking Networks in Libya"**²³ on 1 December 2020 about irregular migration and human trafficking including interviews with migrants, refugees, survivors of trafficking and smugglers. It was bylined MOAMA.

²⁰ <https://nawaat.org/2020/04/23/confinement-la-detresse-des-migrants-subsahariens-en-tunisie/>

²¹ <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news-feature/2020/09/01/Italy-Tunisia-migration-deportations-coronavirus>

²² <https://www.afrigatenews.net/article/%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%B2%D9%85%D9%86-%D9%83%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%88%D9%86%D8%A7-%D9%85%D8%AE%D9%8A%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%BA%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%A8%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%BA%D8%A7%D8%B2%D9%8A-%D8%B3%D9%82%D8%B7%D8%AA-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%AF%D9%85/>

²³ <https://inkyfada.com/en/2020/12/01/human-trafficking-libya/>



Country 5 – Egypt

Five respondents.

Samples of Egyptian media's coverage of migration:

1) Ayaat Habbal wrote an empathetic report **“Qa'dat Qahwa” (coffee gathering)... a way for refugee and migrant women to find a “bond”**²⁴ in Al Masry Al Youm daily on 29 December 2020 about refugee and migrant women from Sudan, Eritrea and Syria who gathered once a month for coffee and home-made sweets from their respective countries as a form of support in their time of need. Some were their family's sole breadwinners, or dependent on husbands, but found themselves in dire straights because of the coronavirus and subsequent lockdowns in Egypt. The report was supported by a very well-produced video.

2) The Beirut-based “Daraj” news platform published a detailed investigative report **“Egypt: Sexual Violence against Women Refugees on the Rise”**²⁵ by Shahat Al-Sayed and Sahr Al-Hamdani on 17 December 2020. The writers explained that due to the coronavirus, women refugees in Egypt often had no choice than to seek employment as domestic workers to make a living. As a result, sexual violence had sharply increased. The article focused on the accounts of three migrant women who endured sexual assaults and the indignities of being ignored by authorities as well as leading international organisations and NGOs concerned with migrant and refugee matters. It provided substantive contextual legal information. The report was produced with support from the Washington-based International Center for Journalists and the Facebook Journalism Project.

3) The previous year the “Daraj” news website produced a scathing report by Syrian journalist Rawad Ali on the hardships Syrian refugees faced in Egypt. **“The Impossible Plight of Syrian Refugees in Egypt: Threats, Harassment, and Illegal Deportations”**²⁶ published 31 October 2019 shed light on how Egyptian authorities mistreated Syrian refugees, including women, children and elderly people, at Cairo International Airport, although the Syrians had valid residency and refugee cards, issued by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Among the detainees were businessmen who had invested millions in projects in Egypt. Even a British citizen of Syrian origin who had gone to Egypt for a sightseeing tour was suddenly arrested at the airport, humiliated, called names because of his origins, and threatened with deportation to Syria. Not even his mother was spared insults, it said. The investigative report was produced over six months and documented the deportation of six Syrian refugees to Syria, and six others to neighboring countries. The intervention of international refugee and immigrant organisations did nothing to halt the deportations, signaling Egypt's infringement of international treaties of which it is a signatory, according to the authors. Egypt imposes restrictions on refugees who had at some point engaged in activities against Syrian President, Bashar Al Assad. The report said Egypt's practices violated the 1984 Convention against Torture, which stipulates “No State Party shall expel, return (“refouler”) or extradite a person to another state where there are substantial grounds for believing that he would be in danger of being subjected to torture.” It quoted the head of the Free Syrian Lawyers Association (FSLA) Ghazwan Qurunful who said Egypt also violated the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol thereof, which asserts that “refugees should not be returned to a country where they face serious threats to their life or freedom.” Egypt signed both conventions, according to the UNHCR website, pursuant to Presidential Decree article 154 issued April 6, 1986 and published in the Official Gazette No. 1, on January 7, 1988.

**All names were changed in the report.*

²⁴ <https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/2201340>

²⁵ <https://daraj.com/en/64439/>

²⁶ <https://daraj.com/en/34201/>



Country 6 – Lebanon

Eight respondents.

Samples of Lebanese media's coverage of migration:

1) "Beirut Today", an independent, community-based news platform in Lebanon, published an empathetic, activist article on Syrian refugees. **"Beirut blast leaves Syrian refugees at heightened vulnerability"**²⁷ The 26 August 2020 report by Tatiana Rouhana focused on the apocalyptic Beirut port explosion on August 4 that left 300,000 homeless, 6,000 wounded, and more than 200 declared dead or missing. Beirut Today, quoting the UNHCR, reported that at least 34 refugees died, 7 refugees were missing and 124 refugees were hurt.

The blast heavily impacted areas like Gemmayzeh, Karantina, Mar Mikhael, Jetaoui, Marfaa Karm El Zeitouni, Downtown and Bourj Hammoud –areas with plenty of old structures weakened by the lack of maintenance. The explosion knocked down these structures, leaving many Syrian refugee families homeless and at a higher risk of vulnerability.

Rouhana wrote that "the heinous explosion" must not be utilized by the Lebanese government as yet another tactic to send Syrian refugees back home, as such action would be considered an infringement of the non-refoulement principle, of Lebanon's obligations under international law, and that the refugees had long suffered from discriminatory practices by the Lebanese state and its institutions.

2) In another empathetic article **"Aid distribution processes discriminate against Syrian refugees"**²⁸ in "Beirut Today" by Lynn Sheikh Moussa published 1 September 2020, the writer said aid distribution processes following the Beirut blast had proven discriminatory, with Syrian refugees increasingly reporting being refused aid on the basis of nationality. By the time the piece was published an estimated 43 Syrian refugees had died, many of who worked at the Beirut port. She said the modest population of refugees living in the Karantina area near the port that had sustained heavy damage suffered from the aftermath. The neglected neighborhood's poor infrastructure and timeworn buildings crumbled, leaving many injured, homeless, and vulnerable.

3) The Public Source produced a detailed report with an activist bent on the rights of labourers in Lebanon, notably the lack of migrant workers' rights. In **"Did Someone Say Workers? (Part 1 of 2) Dispatches from the October Revolution: Labor and Organizing"**²⁹ published on 29 January 2020, Lea Bou Khater, a researcher at the Consultation and Research Institute and lecturer at the Lebanese American University, raised the issue of the country's ineffective trade unions and organized labour that were absent from the start of protests in October 2019 as the reality of Lebanon's financial meltdown sank in. She said the General Confederation of Workers in Lebanon (GCWL) had not called for any strikes or demonstrations, and had waited 19 days after the onset of the protests to issue a brief statement.

This is relevant since the majority of enterprises are micro-sized (employing fewer than five workers), which adversely affects labour organizing, given the limited capacity for workers' association in small enterprises. Additionally, migrant workers and those in informal employment, who make up almost 40 percent of the total workforce, are excluded from labour organising. The laws fall short of protecting Lebanese citizens, leaving little recourse for migrant workers or refugees.

²⁷ <https://beirut-today.com/2020/08/26/beirut-blast-syrian-refugees-heightened-vulnerability/>

²⁸ <https://beirut-today.com/2020/09/01/aid-distribution-processes-discriminate-against-syrian-refugees/>

²⁹ <https://thepublicsource.org/did-someone-say-workers>

In addition to restrictive labor market features, legal shackles tame the labor movement. Lebanon never ratified the International Labor Organization Convention No. 87 of 1948 on Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize, which eliminates any requirement that union formation be preauthorized. Moreover, the 1946 Lebanese Labor Code significantly limits freedom of association: According to Article 86, no trade unions may be established without prior authorization from the Ministry of Labor; according to Article 50, the only union members protected from dismissal are those elected as union board members.

4) The Public Source also published a substantive article, **“Kafala Reform a Liberal Veneer: Migrant Workers and the Struggle for Liberation,”**³⁰ by Sintia Issa on 7 September 2020 on the need to reform the “kafala” (sponsorship) system in Lebanon that binds foreign migrant workers to employers who may be abusive, deprive them of wages, bar them from leaving their jobs, and prevent them from demanding their rights. Kafala is commonly interpreted in English as ‘sponsorship,’ although in classical Arabic the meaning is closer to connotations of ‘guarantee’ (daman) and to ‘take care of (kafl). Kafala is described in the Arab States as having stemmed from a Bedouin tradition of hospitality, where strangers were considered guests of a local who took legal and economic responsibility for their welfare, as well as for the consequences of their actions. However, today kafala sponsorship is used instead as a means to regulate migrant labour in certain Arab countries. Under kafala, a migrant worker’s immigration and legal residency status is tied to an individual sponsor (kafeel) throughout his or her contract period in such a way that the worker cannot typically enter the country, resign from a job, transfer employment, or leave the country without first obtaining explicit permission from his or her employer. Kafala has been criticised as creating situations akin to forced labour.

The article featured the hardships and abuses South Asian migrants faced at RAMCO, a private company subcontracted for waste management by the Lebanese government, when one of the workers was reportedly imprisoned, tortured and almost killed by the company’s security employees. The Bangladeshi worker had apparently experienced symptoms of mental illness. The company, using the pretext of the financial crisis in Lebanon, had failed to pay him and his colleagues for months in U.S. dollars as was customary. It had also laid off dozens of “garbage collectors,” thereby increasing the workload on the remaining men and leading to strike action by the workers. The company eventually relented to avoid a repeat of the 2015 garbage crisis, when rubbish nation-wide, but particularly in Beirut, was dumped haphazardly and stayed uncollected, creating a public health emergency.

The writer said the RAMCO incident reflected a culture of racialised violence that she had witnessed in the United States and which she attributed to “the imperial political economy since the founding of the U.S. settler colony.”

Throughout the twentieth century, for instance, the US state and white militias enacted violence and forms of legal exclusions to discipline and govern migrant Latinx, Chinese, and Filipino/a migrant farming and construction workers on whom the state of California has depended for its accelerated growth. During slavery, racial violence was an everyday practice that was also assigned to slave patrols, predecessors of the police. They emerged in the late seventeenth century, armed with whips and guns, to discipline, capture, and punish fleeing slaves.

5) An earlier article **“Between Kafala and Governmental Neglect: How Domestic Workers Are Left to Starve During a Global Pandemic”**³¹ published by the “Public Source” 8 May 8 2020 with good context and interviews on the kafala system reported on how foreign domestic workers were being abandoned by their employers and left to starve during the pandemic. Many employers stopped paying their workers, packed them up and dropped them off at the entrances of their respective embassies.

The article drew a grim picture of conditions domestic workers faced in Lebanon as scores were laid off or forced into unpaid labour since the start of the economic crisis and outbreak of the coronavirus. The author ascribed the

³⁰ <https://thepublicsource.org/kafala-reform-liberal-veneer-migrant-workers>

³¹ <https://thepublicsource.org/between-kafala-governmental-neglect>



root cause to the “kafala” (sponsorship) system that “literally puts a domestic worker’s legal status in the hands of an often unpredictable, violent, and abusive employer, while excluding her (usually a female) from the limited protections of the labor law.” She added that kafala also gave the employer carte blanche to inflict untold horrors on the worker, including confiscating her passport and enslaving her. The nationwide lockdown exacerbated matters for domestic workers who were at the complete mercy of employers also forced to stay at home. The slightest hint of illness, even innocent coughs and sneezes unrelated to the virus, threw employers into a panic fearing the domestic workers had contracted Covid-19.

6) The Beirut Today website published an empathetic, pro-refugee article **“More than 100 tents set on fire in Miniyeh refugee camp”**³² by Marwan Issa on 28 December 2020 on how a quarrel between a number of Syrians and Lebanese in the Northern town of Miniyeh led to a literal conflagration when Lebanese set an entire Syrian refugee camp on fire “using gas flasks in Nazi pogrom fashion.” The fire burned more than 100 tents, over 370 camp residents fled and at least four were injured.

The writer pointed to collective punishment measures against the wrongdoings of individuals by recalling another incident in which a personal dispute led to the death of a Lebanese citizen in the northern town of Becharré and triggered an onslaught against Syrian refugees in their homes and camps, displacing hundreds of them. The report said the so-called “retaliations” were racially-motivated fascism and were a symptom of Lebanese society generalising, blaming, and attacking an entire group of people from a certain sect or nationality for individual incidents and personal disputes.

Incidents like the one in Miniyeh and Bcharre reflect the systematic discrimination that Syrian refugees face on a daily basis concomitantly with campaigns produced by the ruling class to vilify them, distort their image and classify them as enemies.

With the total absence of government intervention, the incidents also reflect the lack of legal and security measures to protect the rights of refugees –particularly in sensitive times like these.

7) Janoubia (The Southerner), a magazine that covers news from Lebanon’s southern regions ran an unsigned news article on 13 October 2020 about a seminar on the controversy of asylum and immigration. Ironically, the Umam (Nations) Association for Documentation and Research organised the event. Its founder was publisher, writer, activist and noted Hezbollah critic Loqman Slim, was shot dead on 4 February 2021. In **“Omam” (Nations) Seminar on “the asylum and immigration” controversy in Lebanon: Palestinians and Syrians between the obsessions of danger and victimhood**³³ Janoubia reported on associations concerned with Palestinian refugees and displaced Syrians that met to discuss frequently raised issues about how the country’s demography may be disrupted if Palestinian refugees were settled in Lebanon. This is a particularly sensitive matter in a country shared by 18 recognised and often squabbling religious sects that have fought hard battles against each other at different times. Earlier in the last century Lebanon’s population was reportedly equally divided between Christians and Muslims. But Muslims have by far surpassed Christians and if Palestinian and/or Syrian refugees were to be permanently settled in the country, the Christians would become a tiny minority and lose all political power. Lebanon’s president is a Maronite Christian, its parliamentary speaker (the second highest political authority) is a Shiite Muslim and the prime minister (the third highest authority) is a Sunni Muslim.

The article quoted participants at the seminar pointing out how the pace of Lebanese emigration had accelerated, mostly among Christians, and that the vast majority of Lebanese wished to leave, but securing visas, work



³² <https://beirut-today.com/2020/12/28/more-than-100-tents-set-on-fire-in-miniyeh-refugee-camp/#:-text=Following%20a%20dispute%20that%20took%20in%20Nazi%20pogrom%20of%20fashion>

³³ <https://janoubia.com/2020/10/13/%D9%86%D8%AF%D9%88%D8%A9-%D8%A3%D9%85%D9%85-%D8%B9%D9%86-%D8%AC%D8%AF%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%88%D8%A1-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%87%D8%AC%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D9%84/>



opportunities abroad and having adequate finances were main stumbling blocks. Loqman Slim mentioned the government's reluctance to raise the refugee issue for fear of ruffling feathers.

8) Beirut Today, ever on the activist bandwagon, delved into the matter of sex and human trafficking using nightclubs as lures for customers with a report by Hadi Afif on 23 September 2019 **"No Demand No Supply: Bringing the sex buyer into the narrative"**³⁴ on a documentary theatre performance recalling raids on nightspots in 2016 that led to freeing 75 Syrian women, some of who had been there for over two years.

The operation's sex traffickers had apparently been running the ring for over 10 years at the time of the raids. The news was splashed in mainstream media then disappeared from view, which prompted a university professor to work on her theater production with NGO KAFA (Enough) by drawing attention to what lacked in the media's initial coverage: the sex buyer.

The performance used a 2014 KAFA study entitled "Exploring the Demand for Prostitution: What Male Buyers Say About Their Motives, Practices, and Perceptions"³⁵ as a blueprint for retelling the horror story. The study investigated a small sample of 55 men to explore the attitudes by which buyers of sexual acts viewed prostitution.

9) Elsewhere, Zahra Hankir, a Lebanese journalist and the editor of the best-selling, award-winning anthology "Our Women on the Ground: Essays by Arab Women Reporting from the Arab World"³⁶, and Lynn Chaya, a Beirut-based Lebanese-Canadian photojournalist and activist, produced a deep dive for The Public Source on the aftermath of the notorious Beirut port blast on August 4, 2020, and its implications for migrant domestic workers. **"Surviving Karantina: The Long Way Home,"**³⁷ published 16 September 2020 and updated 22 September 2020 was the culmination of their efforts. The author and editors had to revise and rectify the text when a reader pointed to an interviewee's oral testimony after the explosion and discussion of the kafala system, saying it "was not entirely representative of her experience." The interviewee managed to return to her home in Ghana over a month after the blast. Hankir and Chaya had been documenting the blast's impact on residents living in the nearby Karantina neighborhood in a series of articles loaded with visual elements.

The low-income, slum-like area east of Beirut port derives its name from the French "la quarantaine" (the quarantine), where in the past travelers arriving by sea were isolated in a hospital to check for, and control, the spread of any infectious diseases they may have contracted. Over the years, thousands of Palestinian refugees, Armenians, Kurds, migrant workers of different nationalities and Lebanese have lived in the Karantina district.

10) The Daraj news platform published an empathetic piece **"Syrian refugees in Lebanon... Corona and Dreaming of Returning"**³⁸ by Loujein Haj Yousef and Fatima Othman on 30 December 2020 in cooperation with Radio Rozana, an independent Syria-focused news organisation, on the precarious situation of Syrian refugees stranded in Lebanon following the outbreak of the coronavirus that infected many of them.

The writers shed light on refugees who wished to return to their country but were unable to due to the closure of the Lebanon-Syria border after the pandemic became a public health problem, as well as due to the financial crisis in the host country and because male refugees feared being drafted into the army to fight in the ongoing strife gripping Syria.

34 <https://beirut-today.com/2019/09/23/no-demand-no-supply-bringing-sex-buyer-narrative/>

35 <https://kafa.org.lb/en/node/140>

36 <https://www.amazon.com/Our-Women-Ground-Essays-Reporting/dp/0143133411>

37 <https://thepublicsource.org/surviving-karantina-long-way-home>

38 <https://daraj.com/en/63389/>

11) Human Rights Watch published a useful report, **“Discrimination Risks Harming Syrians, Lebanese Alike”**³⁹ in April 2020 stating Syrian refugees in Lebanon deprived of Covid-19 vaccines would not only endanger them, but also the Lebanese population at large. It cited at least 21 Lebanese municipalities that had introduced discriminatory restrictions on Syrian refugees as part of their efforts to combat the pandemic.

Since early March 2020, at least eight municipalities, citing Covid-19 concerns, implemented curfews that restrict the movement of Syrian refugees to certain times. The municipalities introduced these measures before the government called for a nationwide curfew, and the restrictions on Syrians exceed those that the government has imposed on the general population.

“There is no evidence that extra curfews for Syrian refugees will help limit the spread of Covid-19,” said Nadia Hardman, refugee rights researcher and advocate at Human Rights Watch. “The coronavirus does not discriminate, and limiting the spread and impact of Covid-19 in Lebanon requires ensuring that everyone is able to access testing and treatment centers.”

12) In December 2020, the Samir Kassir Foundation (SKEyes) published findings of a media monitoring project **“Hate Speech in the Lebanese Media”**⁴⁰ that tracked such discourse, including against migrants and refugees. The report was part of a larger project entitled **“Inclusive Media, Cohesive Society”**, aimed at tracing and combatting hate speech while ensuring increased representation of marginalised groups in social media and traditional outlets.

Researchers examined Facebook, Twitter, and national television. The study on Facebook focused primarily on hateful speech directed at refugees. It said the anti-refugee sentiment reached a crescendo in previous years as the war raged in Syria and attributed the vile rhetoric targeting Syrian and Palestinian refugees to conservative Christian-majority parties.

Country 7 – Jordan

Four respondents.

Samples of Jordanian media’s coverage of migration:

1) The **7iber** (Hiber, ink in Arabic) news platform published an excellent deep dive covering Egyptian and Syrian day labourers and Sri Lankan domestic workers who freelance by cleaning several homes in Jordan and who were shambled by the lockdown and unable to fend for themselves. They were already living off meager wages they could no longer earn any money or send home remittances to their families. The piece, **“Escape to a Debt Notebook at the Grocery Store: Migrant Day Laborers in the Age of Corona”**⁴¹ by Mahmoud Al Shara’an published 9 April 2020, covered how the migrants were also unable to go home for lack of money. Although some landlords waived their rents, the migrants resorted to begging from neighborhood grocers to let them buy food on credit. The report touched on their financial distress as well as the psychological pressures they endured given their unemployment, boredom and confinement. The migrants were ineligible for assistance from various ministries and social service organizations that helped mainly Jordanian nationals. The report detailed how employers took advantage of the migrants by paying low wages.

³⁹ <https://www.hrw.org/node/340118/printable/print>

⁴⁰ <https://www.skeyesmedia.org/en/News/Reports/09-02-2021/9124>

⁴¹ <https://bit.ly/3fCApKl>

2) The ILO published a useful policy brief on 18 December 2020 entitled **“THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 on Migrants and Refugees in the Arab Region”**⁴² in which it said migrants and refugees were among the social groups most affected by the impact of the COVID-19 crisis, and were suffering disproportionately from its social and economic consequences.

They are at the forefront of the pandemic, providing essential services including health, cleaning, domestic work, agriculture and food production, and ensuring the continuity of supply chains across the Arab region. The pandemic has exacerbated the vulnerability of refugees and asylum seekers in urban, rural and camp contexts, while negatively impacting humanitarian assistance.

It called on countries to take immediate steps to protect and empower migrants and refugees, and enable them to overcome the direct and longer-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, to ensure nobody is left behind. “Countries are also called upon to recognize the contribution of migrants and refugees to the societies and economies of the region and to their countries of origin, and are urged to fight xenophobia and discrimination towards them,” it said.

3) In another helpful publication, **“Promoting balanced media reporting on migrant workers in the Arab States,”**⁴³ the ILO examined how Arabic-language media covered migrant workers in Jordan and Kuwait based on monitoring research in 2019. It found: The use of a positive tone when reporting on migration was rare; op-eds over-emphasized the negative representation of migrant workers; social media conversations echoed traditional media; migrant workers’ voices were missing; proper terminology was commonly used; and common stereotypes about migrant workers prevailed.

Moreover, the stereotypes perpetuated the following ideas: Migrant workers had a negative impact on the economy; migrant workers were to blame for insecurity; and migrant workers were responsible for spreading disease.

42 https://www.ilo.org/beirut/information-resources/factsheets/WCMS_764761/lang-en/index.htm

43 https://www.ilo.org/beirut/projects/fairway/WCMS_776372/lang-en/index.htm

Conclusions



1. Polarisation in media reports has always been present but it appears that the gap between positive and empathetic on one side and negative and aggressive on the other is expanding.
2. Migration fatigue has been at its highest peak in the last several years, resulting in media's ad hoc and reactive reporting.
3. Lack of coordination of international organisations addressing migration-related issues and their affiliates and local/foreign NGOs also hinders the media's effort to handle such matters.
4. Use of migration for local political and economic goals is on the rise. Traditional media influenced by local politics and backed by alternative media lack detailed reporting on the context and complexities of migration, or reflection on wider social and political issues affecting both sides of the Mediterranean.
5. The significance and influence of social media and "alternative news" become increasingly important in shaping public opinion.
6. Lack of regulations or control over dis- and mis-information adds to the problem of complexity of media's migration coverage.
7. In many countries surveyed in this study, experts detected a growing trend of using social media as a tool against migrants, spreading xenophobia and picturing migrants as a potential threat, especially in the transition and host countries.
8. Social media and other online sources' dissemination of rumour, speculation and alarmist information only contributes to the fear and ignorance among the public at large.
9. The Covid-19 pandemic grabbed the media's attention throughout the Mediterranean and the rest of the world while pushing back migration from a list of important topics to cover, becoming the main reason for the decline of interest in addressing this complex issue.
10. The pandemic not only affected the number of stories, but, to a great extent, the nature and tone of those that appeared.
11. The spread of Covid-19 was used as an anti-migrant tool in some cases in several countries.
12. There is no local or global strategy on how to tackle this complex task. Fueled by the lack (or scarcity) of official information, statistics and general access to data, migration coverage seems to be at its lowest and weakest point.
13. There is an urgent need for new strategies and initiatives, including new forms of public funding and support, to help traditional and alternative media better explain the process of migration, its role in human history and its contribution to national and regional development.

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