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POLICY BRIEF

The Role of the Network
of scholars on Mixed
Migration in North Africa

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1. Introduction

Migration patterns in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region are diverse. In addition to displacement and labour migration, the region, particularly in countries in North Africa, witness prevalence of mixed migration with key challenges. Recently, the governments in North Africa have been embarking on efforts towards reforming migration frameworks. Yet, capacities of relevant stakeholders continue to be challenged with the complex and dynamic migratory flows in North Africa. They are often confronted with lack of accurate and reliable data on the conditions and needs of migrants on the move, particularly vulnerable groups.

The commitment to GCM principles and the first Regional Review of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration (GCM) in the Arab region is evident through the first regional review since its endorsement. Countries such as Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia have submitted their first voluntary national reviews. Despite the interest of member states in the region in policy reforms working towards the objectives the GCM, the role of academia remains to be ambivalent in supporting national efforts towards addressing vulnerabilities associated with mixed migration and enhancing policy reforms. The GCM envisages the key role played by academia in enhancing knowledge on migration. This was evident in the role played by academia in the regional GCM consultations in the MENA region and the Continental Review for Africa. In this context, the Center for Migration and Refugee Studies (CMRS) at the American University in Cairo (AUC) is collaborating with the Mixed Migration Hub (MHub) hosted by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to initiate a network of scholars working on Mixed Migration in North Africa under the framework of the Africa Regional Migration Program (ARMP).

2. Scope of the Paper

The paper is a cross-cutting one analysing the key themes discussed in the four policy papers produced by the network of scholars on mixed migration in North Africa. It aims to examine the efforts and commitments of the abovementioned six countries. It looks critically on the research-policy nexus in the North Africa and the role the network can play in setting research agendas of national priorities and producing high quality outputs to support in knowledge-based policies in the region.

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3. Efforts towards Enhancement of knowledge on Migration

As earlier highlighted countries of this region have shown political will to work on policy reforms including enhancing data and knowledge on migration issues including national statistical surveys and studies. It is worth noting however that the countries of the region are each very unique in term of its national context, migration governance and data capacity.

Reflected in their voluntary national review on GCM, Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia and Sudan, have worked on the first objective related to producing accurate and disaggregated data.

Algeria²

A key initiative in Algeria is the Joint Ministerial Decree on the modalities of coordination between the national coast guards' authority. The Ministerial Decree aims at unifying coordination frameworks and information sharing between all governmental entities concerned with land and coastal border management, inspection and control.

Egypt³

Egypt has established the Migration Data Analysis Unit (MDAU) at Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS), in 2017 to identify knowledge gaps and support the government in evidence-based policies. The unit focuses on analyzing statistics collected by government apparatuses. In 2016, the first Household International Migration Survey (HIMS) for Egypt was published. In September 2019, CAPMAS specialists were trained on the technicalities and the methodologies of designing data for HIMS for Egypt, with the aim of overcoming data shortage problem on international migration nationally and regionally. In January 2020, Egypt hosted the second International Forum on Migration Statistics (IFMS), the largest global forum dedicated for migration statistics, which aimed to mobilize expertise from a wide range of disciplines such as statistics, economics, demography, sociology, geospatial science, and information technology. Moreover, in 2021, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Egypt, in collaboration with the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Cairo University to establish a Migration Research Unit (MRU) to provide a platform for communication among migration experts. Additionally, through its various concerned ministries and national councils, Egypt work on identifying push factors related to migration including key governorates of exit.

² Algeria Gazette, <https://www.joradp.dz/FTP/JO-ARABE/2019/A2019069.pdf> cited in UN-ESCWA Migration Policies in the Arab Region, Database. URL <https://migrationpolicy.unescwa.org/>

³ Egypt GCM Voluntary National Review (February 2021), URL https://migrationnetwork.un.org/sites/default/files/docs/egypt_report_-gcm_regional_review_final_6.pdf

Libya⁴

In Libya, the National Committee for Migration Strategies and Policies was recently formed, comprising technical experts with various backgrounds, as well as executive and legislative members from both the executive government branches and the Libyan House of Representatives in Tripoli. In addition to key priorities to be performed by the committee with regards to national strategies on migration and to address human smuggling and trafficking in persons, research constitute a key priority. Research and evaluations are planned to enhance an evidence-based policy when developing the national migration strategy. Through ongoing cooperation with IOM, relevant governmental entities are working towards developing migrants' data registration systems and data sharing systems.

Morocco⁵

Some priority objectives related to research have been implemented, including the establishment of the African Migration Observatory as the first mechanism of the African Union to which the task of developing, monitoring and exchanging information among African countries. Additionally, the National Migration Observatory aims at the collection of migration-related data at the national level. In this regard, the Higher Planning Commission has prepared several thematic studies on international migration including a census carried out between 1971 and 2014. The census has mainstreamed the dimensions of migration and migrants' access to basic services.

Sudan⁶

Sudan has also made significant efforts in combating human trafficking and migrant smuggling that have generated a global movement by establishing the Khartoum Regional Operations Center (ROCK) as a partnership between the European Union and the African Union to collect data on migration and combat this phenomenon.

The national monitoring mechanism aims to prepare a detailed and comprehensive report on the progress of the goals of the Global Compact by the ministries and relevant authorities during April 2021, as well as expand the circle of dialogue with national and international partners in the field of migration to attract support and enhance contributions to the implementation of the Global Compact.

⁴ Libya GCM Voluntary National Review (February 2021), URL https://migrationnetwork.un.org/sites/default/files/docs/libya-_gcm_report_eng.pdf

⁵ Morocco GCM Voluntary National Review (February, 2021), URL https://www.unescwa.org/sites/default/files/event/materials/gcm_voluntary_national_report-_morocco-_en.pdf

⁶ Sudan GCM Voluntary National Review (February, 2021), URL https://migrationnetwork.un.org/sites/default/files/docs/sudan_gcm_national_review_report_english_version1.pdf

Tunisia⁷

In Tunisia, several efforts have been embarked on with regards to research on migration. In its first submission of the voluntary national review of GCM in 2021, the government of Tunisia focused among other objectives on objectives related to data production and migration management.

The following achievements have been highlighted concerning data on Migration:

- Inclusion of migration in the 2016-2020 development strategy and data collection.
- Establishment of the national observatory of migration according to decree 1930 of the year 2014 to handle analyses on migration and data collection.
- Launch of national survey “Tunisia Hims” on migration.
- Engagement in the network of scholars on migration in North Africa NAMAN
- Enhancing capacity of staff and data tools including the digitalization of migrants’ documents.

4. Research Agendas on Mixed Migration by Interlocutors of Knowledge

Examining the production of knowledge on mixed migration in the North Africa region, one tends to notice that it has been primarily driven by global interest and debates on mixed migration from the perspective of EU destination countries⁸. To begin with, there are various contestations that could be argued against the usage of the term “mixed migration”⁹ in addition to other terms suggesting the movement of people through North Africa rather than being hosted in the region. Such terms include “people/children on the move and countries of the region portrayed as” “transit.”¹⁰ The fact of loosely using such terms is barely based on evidence and makes the impression that migrants are crossing through North Africa rather than hosted in such countries. It also assumed a one-size-fits-all modality, which negate the different needs different groups of migrants may have. With the outbreak of COVID-19 Pandemic¹¹, the movement has certainly been further impacted, which raises the applicability of treating migrants in the region as temporary.


⁷ Tunisia GCM Voluntary National Review (February, 2021), URL https://migrationnetwork.un.org/sites/default/files/docs/gcm_voluntary_national_report_-_tunisia-_ar.pdf

⁸ For further discussion on the impact of EU externalization policy on the region, please see Policy Paper # 4 produced by the scholars of the network as part of the same series.

⁹ For further discussion on the impact of the conceptualization of “Mixed Migration” in the region, please see Policy Paper # 3 produced by the scholars of the network as part of the same series.

¹⁰ Collyer, M. & de Hass, H. (2012), “Developing Dynamic Categorisations of Transit Migration,” *Population, Space and Place*, Vol. 18: 468-481.

¹¹ For further discussion on the impact of impact of COVID-19 on the region, please see Policy Paper # 1 produced by the scholars of the network as part of the same series.



Such framings of migration process in the region are linked to the interlocutors of knowledge in the region. A review of publications concerned with mixed migration in the last decade reflect a diversity and separation between research produced by policy-makers, practitioners and academics. As earlier noted, several countries of the region have been working towards enhancing their national information system either by mainstreaming migration or by conducting national studies on migration. This is a recent development ensuring ownership of members states to research. In general, research produced on the national level has tended to be more descriptive with less in depth of the migration framework on the ground. It would further benefit from the engagement of academics and experts to ensure outreach to the most vulnerable groups and a critical evaluation to national contexts and policies. Despite such recent efforts, the impact on and interlinkages with policy decisions remain unclear.


In addition to government-owned data on migration, the landscape of actors producing research and data on mixed migration is predominately implemented by international agencies in line with global agendas concerning mixed migration due to funding influence. This approach has led to an overwhelming production of knowledge only concerned with “counting migrants on the borders” or “on the move.” Notwithstanding the importance of statistical research on mixed migration, implementing donor-driven agendas often lead to further limitations put by national actors on the production of research, being perceived as an issue of “national security”. The securitization of research on mixed migration is partially due to conflicting agendas and lack of cooperation between practitioners conducting and producing such knowledge, in many cases in a hidden manner, which further jeopardized the production of knowledge. Furthermore, several research projects are not built on methodologically sound tools to ensure they adequately reflect the profiles and needs of migrants in the region. They do not provide an-depth analysis of the legal and socio-economic vulnerabilities as they tend to focus on numbers and routes taken either from countries of origin and towards countries of destination. In some cases, academics are commissioned by such actors to conduct research that feeds into the agenda of monitoring movements of migrants.

Apart from such collaboration, academics produce research on mixed migration, but is likely to be at risk of not being published in the case of not receiving approval by the national actors.¹²

Research produced by academics and practitioners have often been regarded by policy-makers as being deprived of evidence and not fitting the national priorities or agendas due to being dependent on sample groups accessible by scholars or caseloads of practitioners.

The separation outlined above has acted as one factor contributing to the lack of interlinkages between policy and research in the countries of the region. The constant usage of “evidence-

¹² For further discussion on the limitation of conducting research in the region, please consult Policy Paper # 2 produced by the scholars of the network as part of the same series.



based” approach in national reports reflecting policy reforms on migration suggests that policymakers have utilized evidence from research when designing or implementing policies or in the decision-making process. They indicate that policies were formulated based on solid consultations with experts and academics. Despite few reports indicating the participation of experts in consultation meetings, it is overrated to indicate that policies were research-driven. The concept of evidence-based, despite its frequent usage, is quite abstract and does not provide enough evidence of the tools used in the policy-making process, reflecting a rather symbolic approach.


It is important to note that in the migration scene, we tend to talk about policy and research as interdependent but the reality particularly in this region is that research has been affected by policy more than the other way round. It is worth noting that this is also the case in industrialized countries of destination whereby policies are not necessarily evidence-based. They rather respond to narratives that ignore evidence.

This includes not only national policy settings but equally and more importantly policies on migration on the global level. Research-policy relations might have influenced knowledge production in migration research in this region. This has made it quite challenging for knowledge producers to find a balance and create synergies between global, regional and national priorities. Without adequate coordination with apparatuses concerned with national research in the region, researchers find themselves in a difficult position to justify priority areas, often not seen as priorities by states in this region but regarded as key priorities by donors. The priorities of researchers and those of states in the region might be different than those of donors who finance research. Relying on donors’ funding makes it difficult for researchers and research institutions to have their own research agendas.

5. The Role of the Network of Scholars on Mixed Migration in North Africa

Despite shared challenges among countries of the region, what was quite interesting to observe is the lack of regional or bilateral cooperation between countries in the region on migration data.

Within the research setting outlined above, the Mixed Migration Academic network acts as a multi-disciplinary in nature encompassing scholars from different disciplines including but not limited to Political Science, Sociology, Law, Demography and Economics. In its first phase taking place between its launch in June 2021 until September 2021, the network has included academics from the region of North Africa. In its next anticipated phase in 2022, the network is to be extended to other academics working on mixed migration in North Africa to ensure an exchange of ideas and expertise. The main aim of the network is to advance research on mixed migration and push forward academic debates on the issues of mixed migration and provide advice to policymakers. The regional network acts as a platform of knowledge on mixed migration which aims at contributing to enhancing national migration policies and frameworks in a sustainable and humane manner along the North African Migration Route in six key countries Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Sudan and Tunisia.



Composed of national academics covering the six countries with multi-disciplinary backgrounds, the network utilized the solid expertise and knowledge of scholars. Members of the network also serve on national, regional and international committees and networks concerned with migration in the region. They have actively engaged in partnerships with UN agencies and other organizations on research projects and participated in policy advice to national stakeholders. As such the network has a vital role to play acting as an interlocutor of knowledge and creating the interlinkages between academia and practice. During its first phase, the network has identified areas of priorities to be discussed in policy outputs.

The network's policy outputs are to be disseminated in public for a webinar attended by multiple stakeholders representing the North Africa region. This will support in initiating an open dialogue on issues of sensitivity that are critical pertaining to mixed migration debates such as:

- The conceptualization of mixed migration, its manifestations and legal impact on North Africa
- The Impact of Covid-19 pandemic on migrants in North African countries
- The EU Border Externalization Policies in North Africa and Beyond: Impacts on the Region
- The Role of Academia in knowledge production on Mixed Migration: Challenges and Opportunities
- Mixed Migration Data Collection and Dissemination in North Africa

As an autonomous voice from the region, the network can act as a very useful vehicle of knowledge transformation on mixed migration. It can provide technical support to national and international stakeholders alike and rather bridge the gap between the two.

In its upcoming phase and through regular policy outputs and seminars on the identified priorities related to mixed migration in the region, the network can act as a critical voice through:

- Producing sub-regional (North-Africa) research;
- Producing policy papers for North Africa and for specific countries in the sub-region;
- Constituting a forum for discussing mixed flows and migration generally in North Africa. In carrying out these function.



Having a critical voice in promoting knowledge on migration in the region would serve in:

1. Initiating and continuing policy dialogues with national stakeholders to ensure keeping them up to date of key trends and protection needs not only along the routes but equally among existing migrant groups hosted by countries in the region
2. Identifying risk factors to allow foresight and perceptiveness to support migrant groups.
3. Ensuring dissemination and joint-ownership of knowledge on irregular migration to facilitate the work of policymakers, practitioners and researchers alike.
4. Discussing national limitations to ensure that research funded by international entities feeds into national priorities and policies and is mindful of local context.
5. Conducting evaluations on recent policy developments to ensure assessing the effectiveness of reformed or changed policies particularly with regards to the needs of vulnerable populations identified at the borders or prone to smuggling and/or trafficking which will enhance the quality of regulatory frameworks.
6. Conducting evaluation of policies through cooperation and consultation with researchers and other stakeholders to support governments in their national efforts to protect migrants and address hazards of irregular migration.