Migration Aspirations among Young People in Egypt: Who Desires to Migrate and Why?

Asmaa Elbadawy
Consultant
Population Council
Introduction

International migration has been a vital aspect of labor markets in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region following the reemergence of migration as a major phenomenon in the region in the 2000’s. In Egypt, according to recent estimates, more than 4 percent of the Egyptian population is currently living abroad. Also, Egypt has been ranked among the top ten countries receiving remittances worldwide. Recently, remittances flows amounted to over 9 billion US dollars, which constitutes more than 8 percent of Egypt’s GDP. This has motivated renewed research to investigate the trends of Egyptian actual international migration and the main characteristics of overseas migrants.

However, to the best of my knowledge, there has not been examination of youth intentions regarding international migration neither in Egypt nor in other countries in the MENA region. This paper attempts at filling this gap in the empirical literature, using a survey on adolescents and youth: the 2009 Survey of Young People in Egypt (SYPE). The primary objective of this paper is to examine the migration intentions of young people in Egypt. Intentions to migrate give an indication of future migration outflows. Preliminary analysis of SYPE shows that one in three young men in the age group 15-29 expressed willingness/intention to migrate. In contrast, only 5.9% of females expressed intention to migrate. The intention to migrate is highest among those in the age group 18-24 and decreases as young people get older. Young Egyptian males mainly aspire to migrate to the Gulf countries. Moreover, most of those who showed intention to migrate are primarily from richer households. This early analysis highlights the need for an in-depth analysis of the profile of youth with respect to their migration aspiration.

Data and methodology

The Cairo office of the Population Council has recently conducted a household survey on adolescents and youth in Egypt, the 2009 Survey of Young People in Egypt (SYPE). This survey is fielded on a nationally representative sample of 15,000 young people aged 10–29 years. It collected data on the five key areas of education, work, family formation, health and sexuality, and civic and political participation. This survey also provides information on young people’s intention to migrate abroad in addition to their actual migration experience. Furthermore, SYPE
data includes a rich set of questions on current and initial job market outcomes, family formation (marriage and fertility), networks and mobility constraints, skills acquisition and its relevance for the job market, decision making and attitudes in various aspects of work and education, and constraints faced in starting one’s own business.

The main objective of this paper is to understand why youth intend to migrate from Egypt and to identify the determinants of such aspiration. The regression analysis will provide a detailed background on youth migration experience and migration intentions, disaggregated by country of destination, age-group, gender, and demographic and socio-economic background.

The analysis will focus on youth opinion towards legal and illegal migration, reasons behind intentions to migrate, and the linkage between migration aspirations and the constraints facing the youth to find a job particularly in the private sector. The analysis will also investigate youth intentions towards temporary versus permanent migration. A particular focus in this study will be given to the choice of country of destination, source of information about this country, availability of migration networks (relatives, friends living abroad, etc.) which can provide help for the youth to migrate, and expectations about migration expenses and necessary documents needed to migrate.

It is planned to have a follow-up data to SYPE this year (SYPE 2013). If this data becomes available prior to the conference, it would be great natural experiment to see how youth migration aspirations changed after the Egyptian revolution took place.