

# Exploring the Future of Migration in North Africa

What we learn from uncertainty

International Migration Institute



UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

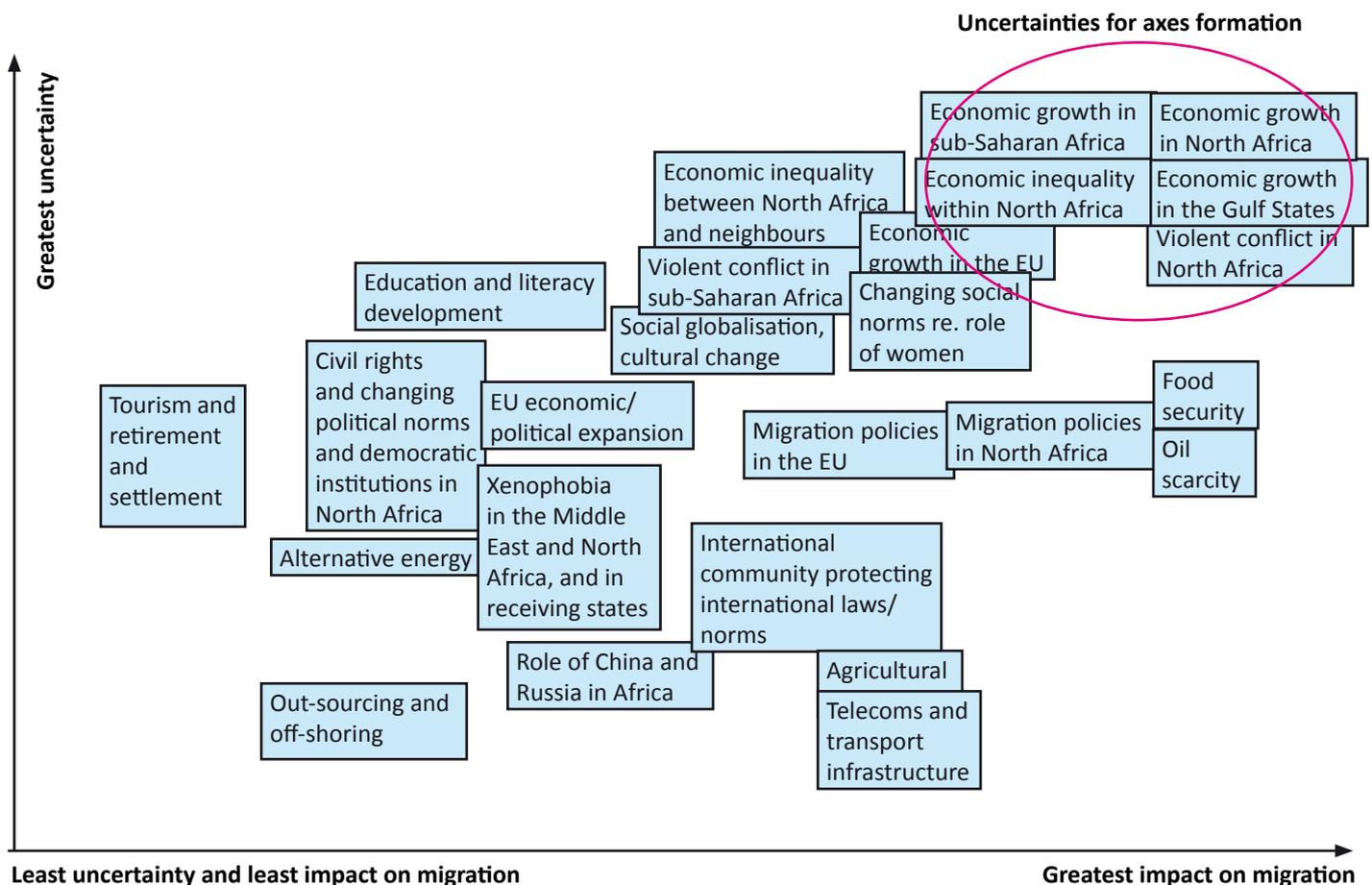
IMI Policy Briefing 7, May 2011

Which factors are **most uncertain** when thinking about North Africa in 2035? Which of these 'uncertainties' are likely to have the **greatest impact on migration**? Asking these questions is a fundamental step in using the scenario methodology to study future migration in North Africa. Because conventional futures studies tend to focus on relative 'certainties', they can ignore key migration drivers which are more difficult to predict. The purpose of the scenarios methodology is to expand our imagination about future developments by creating scenarios around key uncertainties. It helps us to identify which factors we should pay most attention to when exploring future migration patterns and trends and appropriate policy responses.

Twenty-five stakeholders from academia, civil society, governments, the private sector, and international organisations identified the initial list of uncertainties during the Global Migration Futures (GMF) project workshop in June 2010 in The Hague. After the workshop, the GMF research team further explored these uncertainties and introduced some new ones. The

stakeholders and the GMF team plotted the uncertainties (see Figure 1), illustrating the relative impact on of these factors on future migration in the region as well as their relative degree of uncertainty. This policy briefing outlines the top five uncertainties that may significantly affect migration.

Figure 1: Uncertainties and their impact on migration



## Economic growth in North Africa

Over recent decades, significant but limited economic growth and improvements in human development have coincided with growing unemployment and inequality. It is difficult to predict future economic growth in the region, as this depends on a combination of factors, such as political stability, investments in state and regional infrastructure, improvement in access to quality education, technological advancements and the creation of new industries, as well as the future of oil reserves. What we do know is the strong, non-linear link that exists between economic growth in North Africa and migration. Rising income per capita releases individuals from resource constraints that prevent migration. This is one reason why middle-income countries have the highest out-migration rates. Under conditions of high economic growth, this might mean a reduction of out-migration (to Europe and elsewhere) from North Africa – in similar ways as is happening in Turkey. On the other hand, economic growth and growing complexity of labour markets can increase intra-regional migration to obtain work.

## Violent conflict in North Africa

Recent events in North Africa have demonstrated that the occurrence and outcomes of violent conflict are highly uncertain. If revolutions eventually lead to more democracy, this could mean a more stable future for North African states. If this coincides with economic growth, this may make North African societies increasingly attractive migration destinations. However, how long will democratic transition take? Initially, transitions imply heightened instability and conflict, as various political groups emerge and take part in elections. As we saw in Kenya in December 2007, elections in states with newly established democratic institutions and norms can often be fraught with conflict. Conversely, if the revolutions lead to continued or strengthened authoritarian rule, there is a possibility for protracted conflict, or ‘imposed peace’, provided that rulers improve employment opportunities and become more effective at repressing public contestation. What we know for certain is that violent conflict tends to have a significant impact on migration. According to UNHCR, at the end of 2009 there were 27.1 million conflict-generated internally displaced persons and 15.2 million refugees, the majority of whom were displaced by conflict.

## Economic growth in the Gulf

At present, the oil, construction, and domestic work economies remain high on the list of factors that attract North African migrants to Gulf states – and, within the region, to Libya. However, in 2035, countries in the Gulf may have shifted to become ‘knowledge societies’ with more diverse economies. The status of oil reserves, foreign direct investment, new industries, as well as relations with the West and economically influential states in 2035 are factors that contribute to the high level of uncertainty concerning future economic growth in this region. What

is certain is that economic growth causing an increasing wage gap between the Gulf and North Africa as well as increasing employment opportunities will contribute to increasing North African, particularly Egyptian, migration to the region. A decline in growth would contribute to the opposite effect.

## Economic growth in sub-Saharan Africa

In sub-Saharan Africa, foreign direct investment, improvements in infrastructure and educational access and quality, agricultural innovation, and advancements in technology are just some of the factors that create the high level of uncertainty about future economic growth. What is known is that there are two primary implications for migration. First, if none of the above advancements take place, low economic growth contributes to continued migration to North Africa and Europe in moderate numbers, i.e. the status quo. Second, if some or all of the above take place, we can paradoxically expect increased migration from sub-Saharan Africa because more people will be able to migrate while significant opportunity gaps persist. Economic growth can also prompt skilled North Africans to migrate to sub-Saharan Africa for employment in new industries, contributing to increased trans-Saharan economic integration.

## Changing social norms regarding the role of women

In 2035, if North African states are democratic societies, it is possible that women will have become increasingly incorporated into political life, achieved greater access to quality education, and improved their employment opportunities and income. On the other hand, depending on the political party in power, a more democratic society can coincide with a contraction in the rights of women. It is also possible that economic growth in the region will enable more women to become educated; however, economic growth could also lead to increasing inequality between men and women if women do not receive the fruits of economic progress. It is highly uncertain how cultural values and rights of women in North Africa will evolve in the future. For reasons similar to economic growth, an increase in the skill level and income of women would contribute to their migration. Moreover, women who previously managed their households might employ other women to carry out the domestic work of their homes, contributing to increased migration of female domestic workers.

## Looking ahead

The GMF team will re-examine the list of uncertainties for migration in Europe in 2035. As with North Africa, it will refine each uncertainty and reassess its relative impact on migration and level of uncertainty, using its expertise on the determinants of migration and migration systems. This process not only ensures the rigour of the project’s scenario methodology, but also makes certain that the team identifies and realises the implications of the findings it encounters at each step of the process.



Ministry of Foreign Affairs



The Hague Process  
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