

New Evidence on
Yemeni Return Migrants
from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

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New Evidence on Yemeni Return Migrants from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

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DEVELOPING CAPACITIES IN MIGRATION MANAGEMENT

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INTRODUCTION

In March 2013, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia approved the Nitaqat programme, which aimed to increase job opportunities for Saudi citizens and ruled that irregular workers would no longer be tolerated and would be deported. As a consequence, hundreds of thousands of irregular migrants have been forcibly repatriated since then. Neighbouring Yemen has been the country most affected. According to IOM, by the end of 2014 almost 600,000 Yemenis had already crossed the border back into Yemen, mainly through the border crossing point of Al-Tuwal.

The economic situation of Yemen, one of the poorest countries in the world, was already progressively deteriorating, as its economic system faced the considerable challenge of creating sufficient jobs to match the growth in labour supply brought about by the demographic transition.¹ It was therefore evident that the repatriation from Saudi Arabia of such a high number of migrants would have a significant impact on the economic situation of the country, which relied heavily on remittances.

Within this context, in 2014 the International Labour Organization (ILO) decided to carry out a Yemen Return Migrants Survey (YRMS) aiming to collect the information necessary to devise and implement evidence-based relief policies.² A questionnaire, composed of a cover page and six sections, was administered to 2,414 households in areas with high rates of returnees. The survey intended to reveal the profiles of the return migrants, capture the demographic and economic profile of the members of their households, describe their migration experience, and gain information on the employment and economic situation of the returned migrants. Section six of this questionnaire was prepared by IOM with the specific aim of better understanding the reasons behind the initial irregular migration to Saudi Arabia; the frequency of remittances sent back to Yemen from Saudi Arabia; the method of such transfers; the nature of relationships with other migrants in Saudi Arabia; the willingness to migrate to other countries following the forced return to Yemen; and the economic and social difficulties encountered by return migrants and their families.

When the process of political transition turned “into a full scale war that generated major casualties, internal displacement, destruction of infrastructure and disruption of service delivery across all major sectors exacerbating the pre-existing humanitarian crisis”, a Damage and Needs Assessment Survey (DNAS) was carried on by the Republic of Yemen and the ILO.³ The goal was to evaluate the impact of the crisis on employment and labour markets in Sana’a, Aden and Al-Hodeidah, with a focus on youth and the most vulnerable household members.⁴

OBJECTIVES AND STRUCTURE OF THE PAPER

The main aim of this paper is to present the findings of the sixth section of the YRMS (Yemeni Return Migrants Survey) questionnaire, which have not yet been published. This is an important step, since this section of the questionnaire provides information very relevant to better understanding the situation of return migrants during their stay in Saudi Arabia and the problems they had to face when they returned to Yemen. However, in order to provide a correct understanding of these findings, we will first present some baseline information on Yemen, followed by a summary of the main findings of the first five sections of the YRMS. The paper is therefore structured into four parts. The first sets the general background for the analysis, providing updated information on the main demographic aspects and trends in Yemen, and then summarizing the main characteristics of its labour market, as well as providing some indications on the impact of the war. In the second section, we will summarize the main findings of the first five sections of the YRMS questionnaire. The third part is devoted to a detailed analysis of the results from the sixth section. The final part will provide suggestions for long- and short-term policy measures and some indications for future research activities.

1 Bruni, Salvini and Uhlenhaut, 2014.

2 Bruni and Khan, 2015.

3 Republic of Yemen and the International Labour Organization (ILO), 2016.

4 The Damage and Needs Assessment Survey (DNAS), which used a sample extracted from the 2013–2014 Labour Force Survey, was conducted at the request of the Government and in collaboration with the Yemen Central Statistical Organization (CSO) in Sana’a City, Al-Hodeidah and Aden, which together account for around 22 percent of the population of Yemen aged 15 and above. The three Governorates were affected by the conflict in different ways: at the time of the rapid needs assessment in Sana’a and Al-Hodeidah bombing was still going on, while in Aden fighting had stopped in July and some relief had been brought in. The interruption of the conflict in Aden mattered in terms of labour market outcomes; for this reason, data analysis has been conducted separately for the three Governorates wherever possible.

BASELINE INFORMATION

Demographic trends

In the last 65 years, Yemen’s population has witnessed an almost sixfold increase, from 4.7 million in 1950 to 26.9 million as of 2015 (Table 1). The trends in fertility and mortality underpin this long-term tendency of population increase (Table 2).

Table 1: Population of Yemen by main age groups: absolute values (millions) and percentage composition, 1950–2050

	0–14	15–64	65+	Total	0–14	15–64	65+
1950	1.9	2.4	0.2	4.4	42.3	5.6	3.1
1990	6.3	5.5	0.3	12.1	51.9	10.6	2.8
2015	10.9	15.2	0.8	26.9	40.6	37.5	2.0
2030	12.7	23.4	1.3	37.4	34.0	68.9	1.8
2050	12.6	34.0	2.9	49.5	25.5	133.2	2.2

Source: Elaboration of data from UN DESA, 2017

In the 1950s, one child out of four died during the first year of life and life expectancy at birth (LEB) was only 35 years. The total fertility rate (TFR) was still in an ascending phase and reached a maximum of 8.8 children per woman at the beginning of the 1980s. By now, the TFR is down to 4.4 children per woman and the infant mortality rate (IMR)⁵ to 47 per thousand, while LEB has increased to 64 years (Table 2). The rate of total population growth reached its maximum in the 1990s and then progressively declined to the present value of 2.9 per cent. However, the total population is still increasing by around 680,000 people per year, as the difference between 850,000 births and 170,000 deaths (Table 2). In a zero-migration scenario, total population is expected to exceed 37 million in 2030 and to reach almost 50 million by 2050. Yemen’s rapid population growth has been paralleled by significant changes in the age structure. Due to the impact of the demographic transition, the share of the first main age group (0–14) reached a maximum of 51.9 per cent in 1990; by now, its weight is down to 40.6 per cent. While the share of the working age population has increased, its value remains very low at 56.6 per cent. Only 2.8 per cent of the population is 65 or older.

Table 2: Total fertility rate (TFR), infant mortality rate (IMR) and life expectancy at birth (LEB); births, deaths and natural population growth (average yearly values in thousands), 1950–1955, 1985–1990 and 2010–2015(%)

	TFR	IMR	LEB	Births	Deaths	Natural growth
1950–1955	7.4	251	35	222	139	83
1985–1990	8.8	95	57	586	134	452
2010–2015	4.4	47	64	849	172	677

Source: UN DESA, 2017.

The demographic trends we have just outlined have generated two major and interlinked challenges: one for the education system, the other for the labour market.

Education⁶

As a consequence of the upsurge in the number of births, the number of children of compulsory education age has increased in the last 40 years from around 1.4 million in the 1980s to more than 5.6 million as of 2015, while those of secondary education age increased by more than five times, from 315,000 to 1,720,000, over the same period. According to official estimates (Republic of Yemen and World Bank, 2010) in 2010, only around three quarters of boys and girls were enrolled in basic education, while only one third were enrolled in secondary education. In both cases, the gender differential was quite large and girls represented 60 per cent of out-of-school children. Moreover, dropout rates were high, especially for girls and in the countryside. As a consequence, only 50 per cent of those who entered grade 1 reached the last grade of basic education and only 38 per cent reached the last grade of secondary education, with boys performing better than girls. School attendance was hindered by the fact that Yemen’s population is scattered over difficult rural terrain limiting access to schools, with children sometimes having to walk up to an hour or more to reach the nearest school. Girls typically face additional obstacles closely interlinked with early marriage and household labour needs, as well as the lack of female teachers in rural areas.

⁵ Calculated as the number of deaths of infants under one year old per 1,000 live births.

⁶ This and the following paragraph are based mainly on Bruni, Salvini and Uhlenhaut, 2014.

Labour market and labour market indicators

Starting in the second half of the 1970s, Yemen's working age population (WAP) has increased at a massive rate, climbing from 3.5 million to 13.2 million. Between 2010 and 2015, the WAP increased by an average of 460,000 per year (3.5%). In this context, Yemen's formal labour market presents two striking characteristics. The first is that the rate of activity is lower than the rate of inactivity: only 40.8 per cent of the WAP (15–64) is in fact active in the labour market. Moreover, only 30 per cent of the young (15–24) participate in the labour market, the percentage being 49.1 per cent for men and 10 per cent for women. The second is that women represent only 13 per cent of the labour force, their rate of activity being as low as 10.5 per cent. However, the most dramatic signal of the dismal situation of Yemen's labour market comes from the employment data. Only 33.5 per cent of the population aged 15 to 64 have a job, the percentage being an acceptable 62.1 per cent for men, but an incredibly low 4.7 per cent for women. Moreover, if we consider the 15–24 age group, only one out of five is employed (one out of three for boys and one out of 40 for girls).

Table 3: Main labour market indicators* by sex and main age groups, 2010 (%)

	Male	Female	Both sexes	Male	Female	Both sexes
	15–24			15–64		
RoA	49.1	10.0	30.3	70.9	10.5	40.8
RoE	36.4	2.6	20.1	62.1	4.7	33.5
RoU	26.0	74.0	33.7	12.4	54.9	17.9
RoI	50.9	90	69.7	29.1	89.5	59.2
	25–64			15+		
RoA	86.3	10.8	47.9	68.4	10.1	39.5
RoE	80.2	6.1	42.5	59.9	4.6	32.5
RoU	7.0	43.5	11.2	12.4	54.6	17.8
RoI	13.7	89.2	52.1	31.6	89.9	60.5

Note: * RoA: rate of activity; RoE: rate of employment; RoU: rate of unemployment; RoI: rate of inactivity.

Source: Bruni, Salvini and Uhlenhaut, 2014.

The consequence of the situation we have just described is that almost 18 per cent of the people in the labour force are unemployed. The situation of the young (15–24) is particularly distressing, as shown by the fact that their unemployment rate is three times higher than that of those aged 25–64.

Let us finally underline that almost half of Yemen's labour force has not completed compulsory education; people with at least secondary education represent less than 30 per cent, while only around half of the employed were in salaried employment.

The Damage and Needs Assessment Survey

The 2016 DNAS provided some indications of the war's impact on the labour market. The survey showed that:

- Three quarters of total population lived in rural areas;
- The service sector was the predominant employer, accounting for 55.6 per cent of jobs, followed by agriculture, which accounted for 29.2 per cent (with a high incidence of own-account workers) and industry with only 14.5 per cent.
- Almost three quarters of the employed worked in informal economic firms and more than 80 per cent were in informal employment;
- Only around half of the employed were in salaried employment, while 42.4 per cent were either own-account or contributing family workers.

The survey also indicated that:

- There was already a high incidence of displacement, mainly women of working age and children;
- With respect to the 2013–2014 labour force survey (Republic of Yemen, 2015), there was a dramatic reduction in the level of employment, especially in Sana'a and Al-Hodeidah, where bombing was still going on at the time of the assessment;
- The sectors most affected were those that employed the greatest number of people, namely services and agriculture;
- Women and young people were the most affected.

A synthetic measure of the impact of the crisis was provided by the economic indicator of dependency (Bruni, 2017). In 2014, 1,000 employed supported 3,869 dependants beside themselves; by November 2015, the number of dependants had increased to 4,374 (up 13.1%). The situation had worsened in all three Governorates, but especially in Aden (from 3,846 to 4,670) and Sana'a (from 3,878 to 4,636); less so in Al-Hodeidah, in spite of the fact that employment had been hit very hard in this Governorate. This showed that the crisis had generated a displacement of dependants proportionally greater than that of the employed.

Migration history

Historically, Yemen has always been a country of emigration, immigration and transit, with Yemeni migrants scattered throughout the world, in the Gulf, Asia, Africa, United States of America and Europe. Migration out of Yemen has dwindled in the past two decades, as oil-producing countries such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have become largely closed to Yemenis. Yemen's proximity to the Horn of Africa has also given rise to an influx of refugees and economic migrants arriving on Yemen's shores, mainly from Ethiopia and Somalia, some of them aiming to reach the Gulf countries.⁷ Added to this is the large-scale internal displacement that has increased since 2000, a result of the Saad'a war in the north (2004), the southern insurrection since 2007, and the 2011 uprisings and the war raging since 2015.⁸

THE QUESTIONNAIRE

The YRMS questionnaire was composed of a cover page and six sections; the first five were prepared by the ILO, the sixth by IOM.⁹ The results of the first five sections have already been presented (Bruni and Khan, 2015). Before analysing the information gathered in the sixth section led by IOM, we will briefly present the structure of the questionnaire and summarize the main results of the first five sections.

The questions on the cover page, to be answered directly by the interviewers,¹⁰ concern the interviewing process and provide the data necessary to know the number and characteristics of families interviewed – including the total number of household members, geographical distribution by district, and location in urban or rural areas – as well the number of return migrants eligible for the other six sections of the survey.

The first five sections were devoted to the following topics:

1. The composition and demographic characteristics of the household interviewed (10 questions);
2. The demographic characteristics of the return migrants and their migration history (18 questions);
3. The work experience in Saudi Arabia (17 questions);
4. Income, remuneration and benefits entitlements (10 questions);
5. Working conditions in Saudi Arabia (5 questions).

The sixth section prepared by IOM contained 17 questions related mainly to the return to Yemen.

THE MAIN FINDINGS OF THE FIRST FIVE SECTIONS

The questionnaire was administered to 2,414 households located in the four Governorates (split as follows: Taiz around 25%; Hajjah, 25%; Al-Hodeidah, 33%; and Al-Mhweit, 17%) to which the majority of migrants had returned. The large majority of the households interviewed (81.9%) lived in rural areas.

Household composition and structure and socioeconomic characteristics of the members

The 2,414 households that comprised the sample were distributed in the four Governorates most affected by the repatriation process: Taiz, Hajjah, Al-Hodeidah and Al-Mhweit.

The household members numbered 17,211, 54.4 per cent of whom were men, while 3,064 were return migrants. The typical household was an extended family composed, on average, of seven members spanning three generations, with a large number of siblings of the household head living in the same dwelling.

⁷ See Thiollet, 2014.

⁸ The Government of Yemen gives the figure of 545,318, while UNOCHA gives 430,000 and UNHCR 310,000. According to the most recent figures, internally displaced persons amount to around 2 million, as reported by Task Force on Population Movement, available at: <http://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/yemen-task-force-population-movement-tfpm-14th-report-may-2017-enar>

⁹ The questionnaire is provided in Bruni and Khan, 2015.

¹⁰ The interviewers were instructed to compile the cover page directly, to put the questions in Section 1A to the most knowledgeable member of household and the questions in the other sections to the returned migrants. In 2,044 cases, the migrants themselves were interviewed, while in the other 361 cases the respondent was another member of the family. Since in more than one quarter of the families there was more than one migrant, the interviewers were instructed to choose the one who had been in Saudi Arabia for a longer period.

A little more than one quarter of the household members were represented by household heads and their spouses. The largest component is that of “son and daughter”¹¹ (54.1%) followed by “brother and sister”. The average age of the household members (both men and women) is 23 years, with almost three quarters of household members under the age of 30 and only 7 per cent above the age of 55.

Almost 40 per cent of the household members are illiterate, while 33.5 per cent have only a basic reading and writing capacity acquired outside the education system. Only 27.4 per cent have some schooling; specifically, 14.0 per cent have completed primary education, 10.9 per cent secondary education and just 2.5 per cent have attained some higher educational level.

The educational attainment is inversely related to age and is lower for women than for men: for instance, 68 per cent of the household heads did not complete primary education, compared with 88 per cent of their spouses and with 57 per cent for their sons and daughters; more than half of the women are totally illiterate, versus less than one quarter of the men; and 38.4 per cent of men have more than primary education versus 21.9 per cent of women.

If we consider the household members 15 years or older, only 58.6 per cent are or have been married.¹² The explanation for this quite low value is that the age at marriage is quite high: in fact, only one third of those between 15 and 29 are married. Even in the following age group, the share of singles is still 12.3 per cent. However, data do also suggest that over a lifetime, almost everybody gets married. We can also observe that women account for 73.5 per cent of divorcees in the sample and 85 per cent of those widowed.

Only around one in five (19.7%) of the household members aged 15 years and above are employed and 1 per cent are self-employed. Notably, the rate of employment of men is around 35 per cent, while women are almost completely absent from the formal labour market. These findings are in line with the results of the labour force survey we presented previously.

For men, the rate of employment is directly related to educational attainment: employment increases from 25 per cent for those who know how to read and write, but have no formal schooling, to 60 per cent for those with more than high school, passing through values of 41 per cent for those with primary school and 44 per cent for those with secondary or vocational school. The totally illiterate register a value of 34 per cent. The number of observations for women is very low, but suggests an even more extreme situation, showing that only women with high educational level are present in the labour market. Information on the wage earned the week before migrating to Saudi Arabia was provided by 1,656 household members (representing 56% of the household members that were employed). The average wage of the respondents amounts to USD 150, with approximately one third earning less than USD 100, one third between USD 100 and USD 150, and 30 per cent earning more. The wage level is positively related to educational attainment.

Forcibly returned migrants

A little more than 3,000 members of the 2,414 families interviewed were return migrants. Nearly half (47.8%) of all male household members aged 15 and older were return migrants.¹³ Almost half of return migrants are the heads of their households, while 37 per cent are sons of the household head. A little more than half of the return migrants do not have formal schooling, but in spite of this, 29.7 per cent can read and write; around one quarter have completed primary education, 21 per cent secondary education and 2.5 per cent have some higher level of schooling. Migration appears largely to be a personal decision, although in around one quarter of the cases, the family played a critical role in the decision; as to be expected, the percentage is higher for migrants of younger age.

The decision to migrate was taken by the migrants themselves in three quarters of the cases and the main motivations behind the decision were lack of job opportunities and limited working skills, while a good understanding of the migration process acquired through previous migration experiences represented an incentive.

The week before departure from Yemen to Saudi Arabia, almost 55 per cent of the return migrants were unemployed and 20.2 per cent were underemployed. Only one quarter had a full-time job and more than half worked in the agricultural sector. Only 6 per cent of the migrants had some technical qualification, mostly acquired on the job and mainly in the construction sector. Finally, more than 75 per cent of the repatriated migrants had previous migration experiences (more than 30% had migrated at least six times).

¹¹ “Sons or daughters” of the head of the household or of siblings of the head of the household.

¹² The survey also found a small number of household members already married in the 0–14 age group.

¹³ Data by age permit us to conclude that more than half of Yemeni men migrate during their lifetime.

In conclusion, the return migrants illustrate well the large, mainly low-skilled supply of labour ready to leave Yemen, a country characterized by lack of job opportunities, to respond to the labour demand in the Saudi Arabia labour market, taking advantage of personal and family knowledge of the migration process.

The migration process

The majority of return migrants had migrated irregularly, with only marginal use of other channels, the Internet and social media being used almost exclusively by the young to get some information. Less than 4 per cent of the return migrants had the documents required to enter Saudi Arabia and even fewer had a regular contract signed prior to leaving Yemen, while only a little more than half of these contracts were then honoured in the destination country. Finally, only a very small percentage of migrants signed a contract in Saudi Arabia.¹⁴

The working experience in Saudi Arabia

Not only were all migrants interviewed successful in their quest for a job once reaching Saudi Arabia, but more than 30 per cent found more than one. In 45 per cent of cases the jobs were full-time; in more than 30 per cent, jobs were part-time, while in around 20 per cent of the cases migrants had to rely on daily paid jobs. In more than 60 per cent of cases, the job implied some overtime, generally requested by the employer, and in 70 per cent of cases the working day lasted more than eight hours.

The wages reported by the respondents present a very high variance, but with an average of almost USD 500 per month, with 5 per cent earning above USD 1,000 a month; 87 per cent of respondents reported considering the wage differential between Saudi Arabia and Yemen as very large or significantly large. However, one third of the respondents considered the remuneration in Saudi Arabia less than satisfactory or not very satisfactory. Payments, mostly on a monthly or a daily basis, were made regularly in more than 90 per cent of the cases. A little more than 20 per cent of the interviewed received forms of remuneration complementary to their wage, mainly in the form of food and accommodation.

A positive aspect of the migration process is that one quarter of the migrants reported acquiring some technical skills, the majority of them through on-the-job training. Almost two thirds of those who reported returning with additional skills had worked in the construction sector, whereas an additional 20 per cent had acquired skills relevant for occupations in the service sector.

In spite of all this, when asked for a general evaluation of the working conditions in Saudi Arabia, only around 6 per cent of respondents considered them good and around 20 per cent considered them very poor; more than 40 per cent judged them as poor, but bearable.

Remittances

Almost all migrants sent remittances home to Yemen while they were in Saudi Arabia. In more than two thirds of cases, the amount was in excess of half of the wage; in 70 per cent of cases, the amount remitted accounted for more than 50 per cent of the family's income.

Back in Yemen

According to the migrants themselves, 96.6 per cent were forcibly repatriated and in 95.3 per cent of cases, Saudi Arabia authorities justified the forced repatriation by the lack of proper documents. Back in Yemen, the returned migrants were confronted with serious difficulties in finding a job. Only a minority succeeded, and, at the time of the interview, only around 46 per cent were working, mainly in the construction sector and in agriculture. Two thirds of respondents stated that it had been extremely difficult or quite difficult to find a job; the reported level of difficulty seemed to increase with the age of the returned migrant. However, in spite of the shortage of employment opportunities, 6.2 per cent of the returnees who had found some form of employment reported having two or more jobs.

The jobs performed were mostly poorly paid and insecure. Only 30 per cent received a wage greater than USD 50 per month. The majority were short-term jobs, generally paid on a daily basis. Only one quarter of employed returnees expected their job to last more than one year. Around one third reported working less than eight hours, while in 30 per cent of cases, the employer required overtime work.

In this situation, it is not surprising that more than 90 per cent of returnees interviewed affirmed that, given the opportunity, they would go back to Saudi Arabia, with almost half indicating that they would be willing to use irregular channels to do so.

¹⁴ We can safely conclude that in the great majority of cases, migration led to a job in the informal economy of Saudi Arabia, either in unregistered economic units, or in registered economic units, but with serious deficits in terms of decent work.

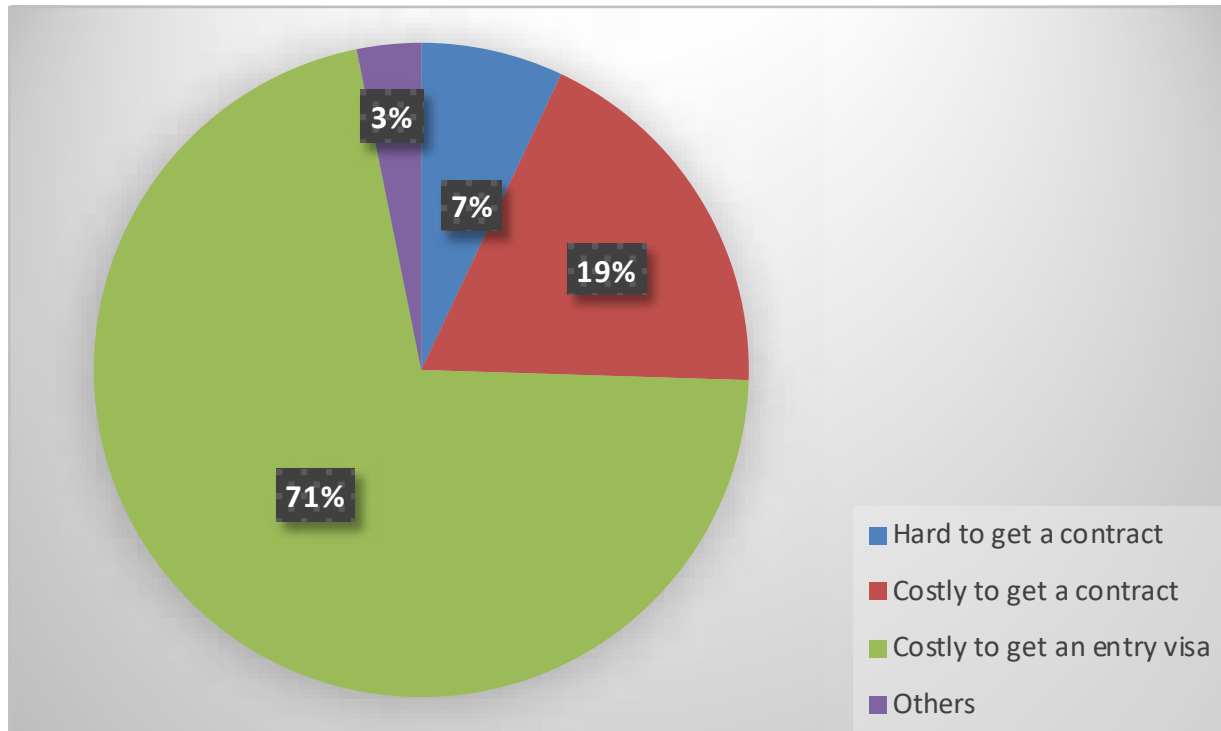
THE MAIN FINDINGS OF THE SIXTH SECTION

To complete the information collected by the first five sections of the questionnaire, IOM prepared a sixth section aimed at providing a better understanding of the reasons behind the choice of irregular migration, the frequency of remittances and method of transfer, the relationship between migrants in Saudi Arabia, the willingness of returnees to migrate to other countries, and the economic and social difficulties encountered by migrants after returning to Yemen. The sixth section of the questionnaire was administered together with the initial five sections.

Reasons for irregular migration

More than two thirds of respondents (71.3%) said that the last time they entered Saudi Arabia, they did so without proper documentation because of the cost of getting a visa, while 18 per cent explained that it was too costly to get a contract and 7 per cent said they migrated irregularly due to the difficulty of getting a contract (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Reasons for migrating irregularly



While the first dominant explanation (cost of visa) does not present any strong correlation with demographic variables, both the cost of getting a contract and the difficulty of getting it appear to be related to educational attainment and age. More specifically, the difficulty of getting a contract is inversely related to educational attainment, while the cost of getting a contract is positively related to the same variable (Figure 2). The opposite correlations emerge with age, since age and education are inversely related (Figure 3).

Figure 2: Reasons for migrating irregularly by level of education of respondent (%)

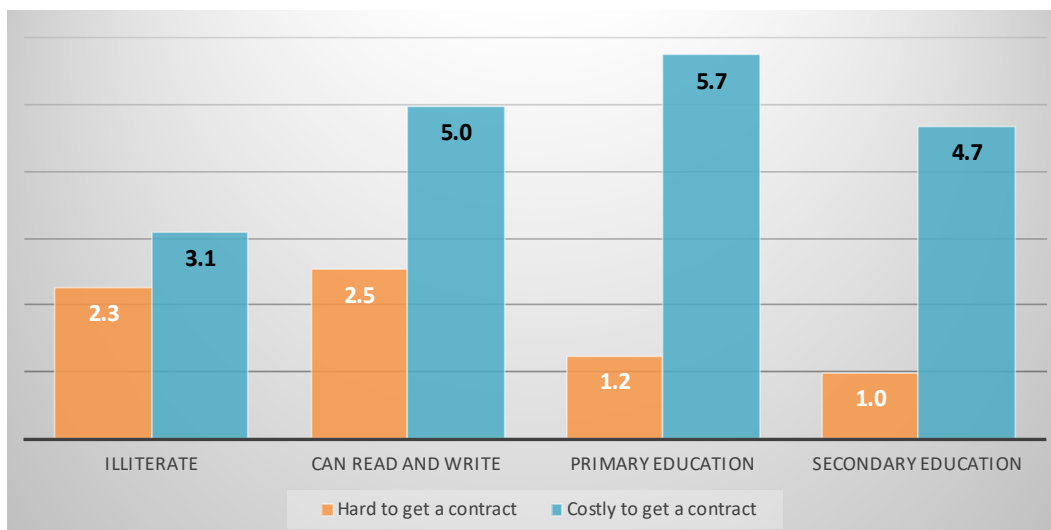
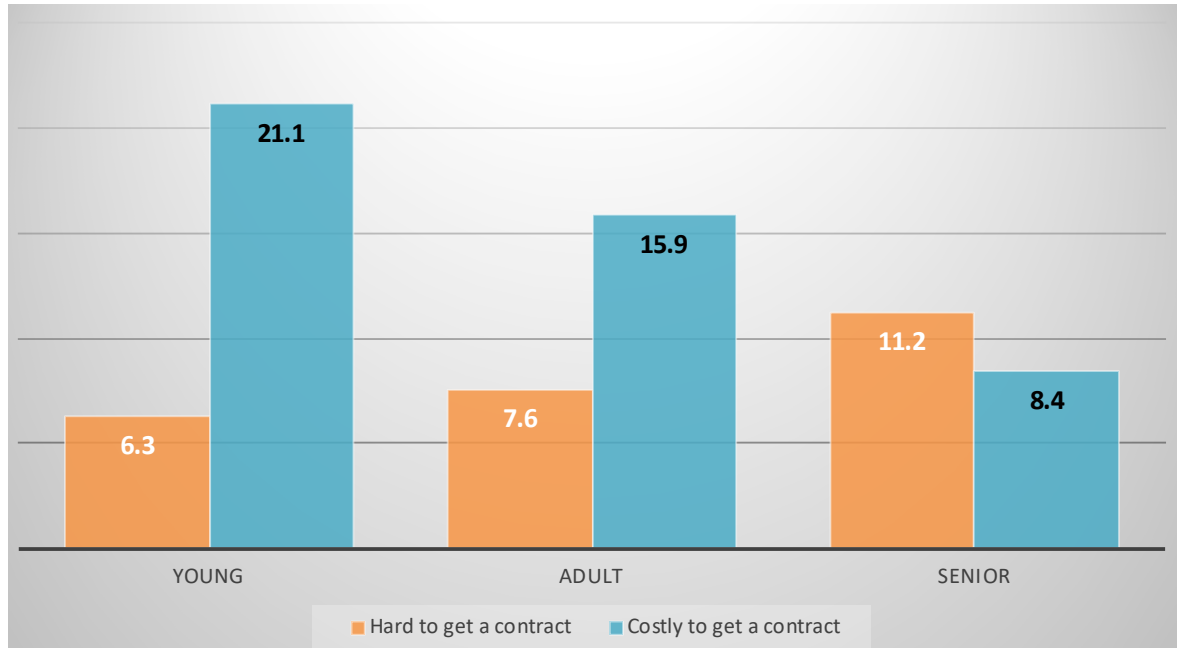


Figure 3: Reasons for migrating irregularly, by age group (%)



Note: “Young” consists of respondents who are 15–29 years old; “adult” consists of respondents aged 30–49 years; and “senior” includes respondents who are 50 years old and above.

Remittances

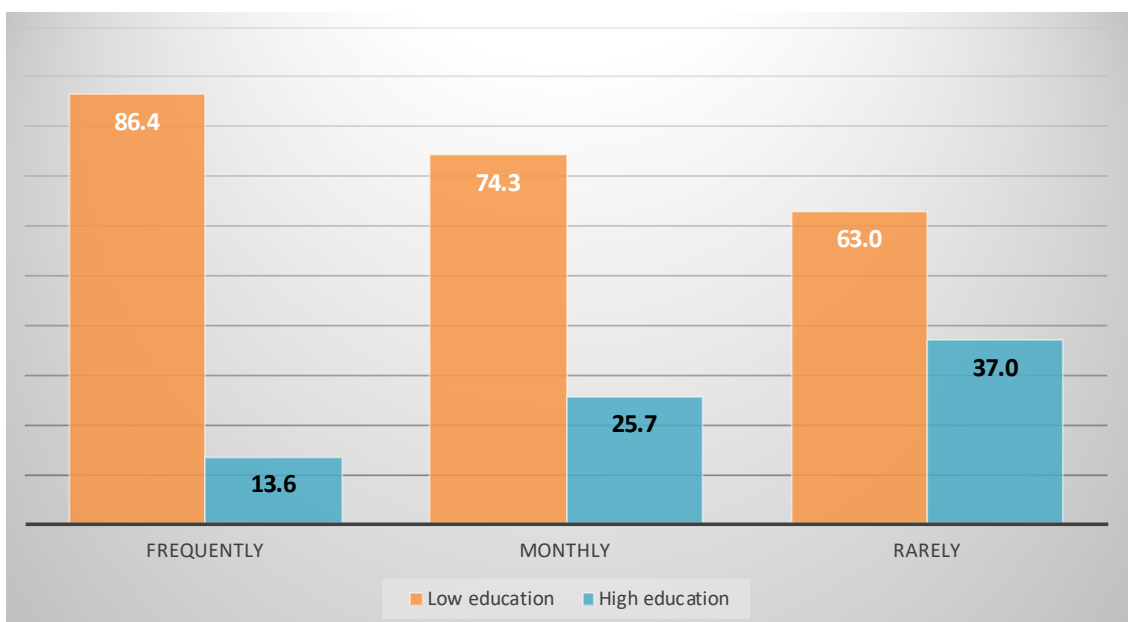
A series of questions explores the important issue of remittances, and more specifically how frequently they were transferred, the method and cost of sending them, and the tendency for migrants to assist others in transferring remittances.

Frequency of sending remittances

Respondents reported sending remittances very frequently: 20 per cent more than once per month, 75 per cent once a month, and only 5 per cent less often. The frequency of sending remittances is highly correlated with the frequency of salary payments, with 85 per cent of those sending remittances more than once per month being paid mainly on a daily or weekly basis.

Overall, the frequency in sending remittances does not appear to be related to education (and therefore age). However, when we analyse the behaviour of the previous three groups, the frequency with which remittances were sent home is inversely related to the level of education (Figure 4).¹⁵ Data also show that among those who sent remittances frequently, 87 per cent work in the information and communication sector, while 80 per cent are single.

Figure 4: Frequency of sending remittances by educational attainment (%)



¹⁵ People with higher education are those that have at least a secondary education degree.

The two main correlations we have underlined (regarding frequency of payments and education) are coherent with each other, since the jobs that are paid more frequently are those requiring less skill and therefore are those performed by migrants with lower educational attainment.

Method

Remittances were sent mainly through relatives and friends (88%); only 9 per cent of respondents used money transfer companies and only 2 per cent used banks. Surprisingly, higher income migrants seem to use relatives and friends above average, while lower income migrants are the more likely group to prefer banks and money transfer agencies.

The cost of sending remittances

Forty-four per cent of respondents judged the cost of sending remittances as average, while 26 per cent thought it was low and 25 per cent thought it was high. The perceptions expressed by the respondents do not seem to be related to the method of sending money. This seems to suggest that other reasons, such as security, and the accessibility of banks and offices of money transfer agencies in Yemen, probably play a major role in the choice of remittance method.

Helping other migrants to transfer money

Only one quarter of respondents helped other migrants to send money. This seems to be directly, although weakly, related to education, income and permanence of duration in Saudi Arabia. We verified that it is also correlated with higher sociability, a behaviour that will be described later.

Conclusions

In conclusion, migrants tend to send remittances frequently or very frequently, depending on the frequency with which they are paid; friends and relatives are the method largely preferred and only around one quarter judged the cost of the transfer to be high, with this share remaining constant regardless of the method of transfer.

Helping other migrants

More than 50 per cent of respondents provided some assistance to other migrants while in Saudi Arabia. Of them, more than half provided shelter, while around 10 per cent helped in finding a job and 5 per cent in entering Saudi Arabia (Table 4). The tendency to help other migrants is greater among adult (25–49) migrants and is positively related to the intensity of the interaction with the other members of the community, while educational level, type of occupation and the urban/ rural divide do not seem to be relevant in explaining this behaviour. Notably, almost two thirds of senior migrants provided assistance in terms of shelter.

Table 4: Percentage of migrants who provided help to other migrants, by type of help provided (%)

	Young	Adult	Senior	Total
Did not help	50.9	45.0	51.7	48.6
Have helped	49.1	55.0	48.3	51.4
Entry to Saudi Arabia	9.6	8.2	7.0	8.9
Finding a job	39.0	39.3	29.8	38.7
Sheltering	51.4	52.5	63.2	52.4

Willingness to migrate to other countries

More than 70 per cent of respondents declared that they intended to migrate to other countries than Saudi Arabia. The willingness to migrate is directly and strongly associated with education and indirectly to age (Figures 5 and 6).

Figure 5: Willingness to migrate, by educational attainment (%)

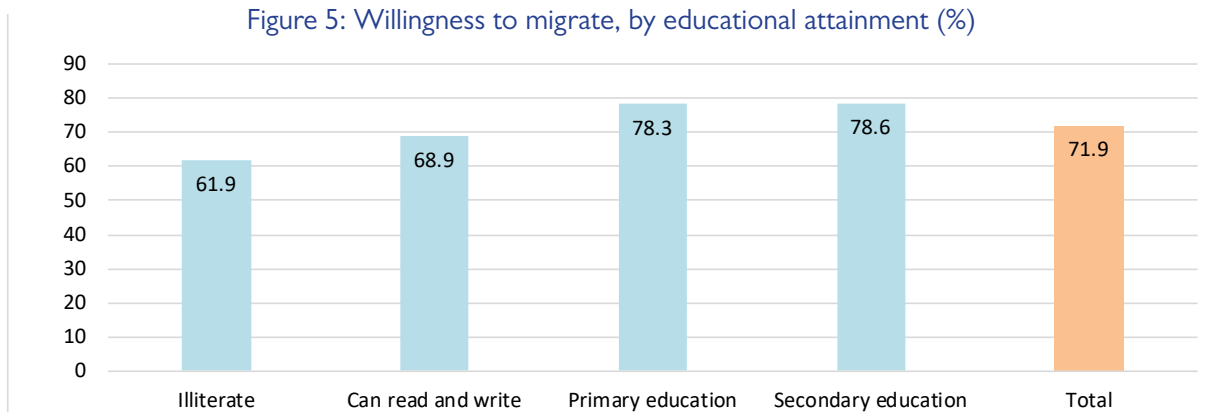
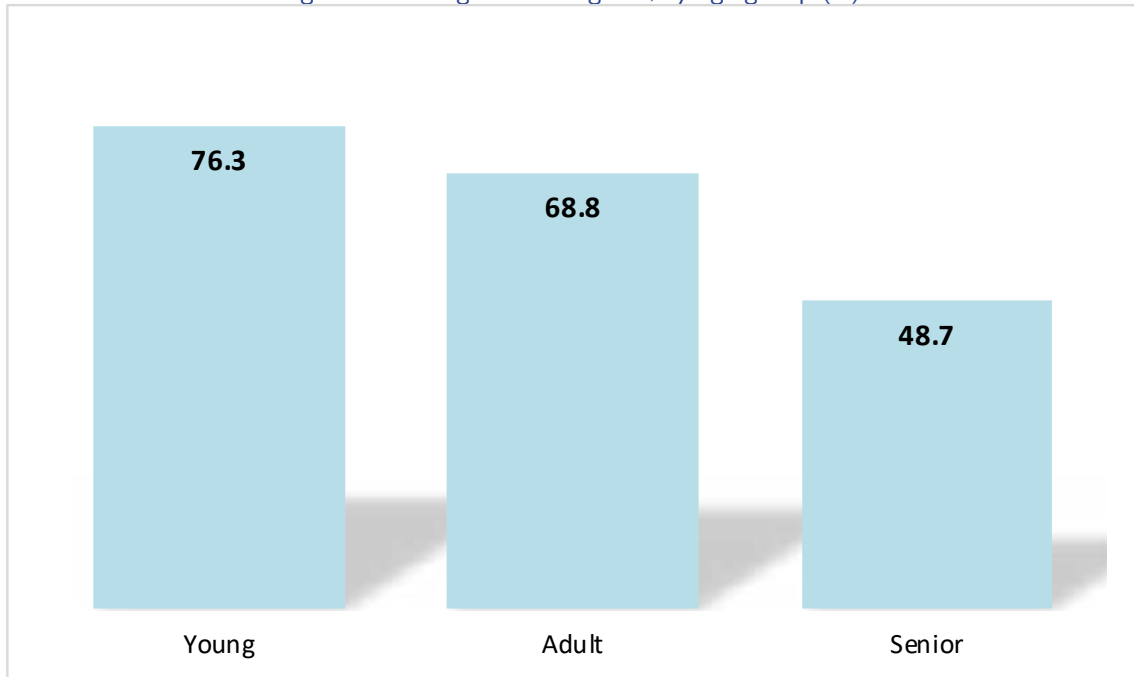


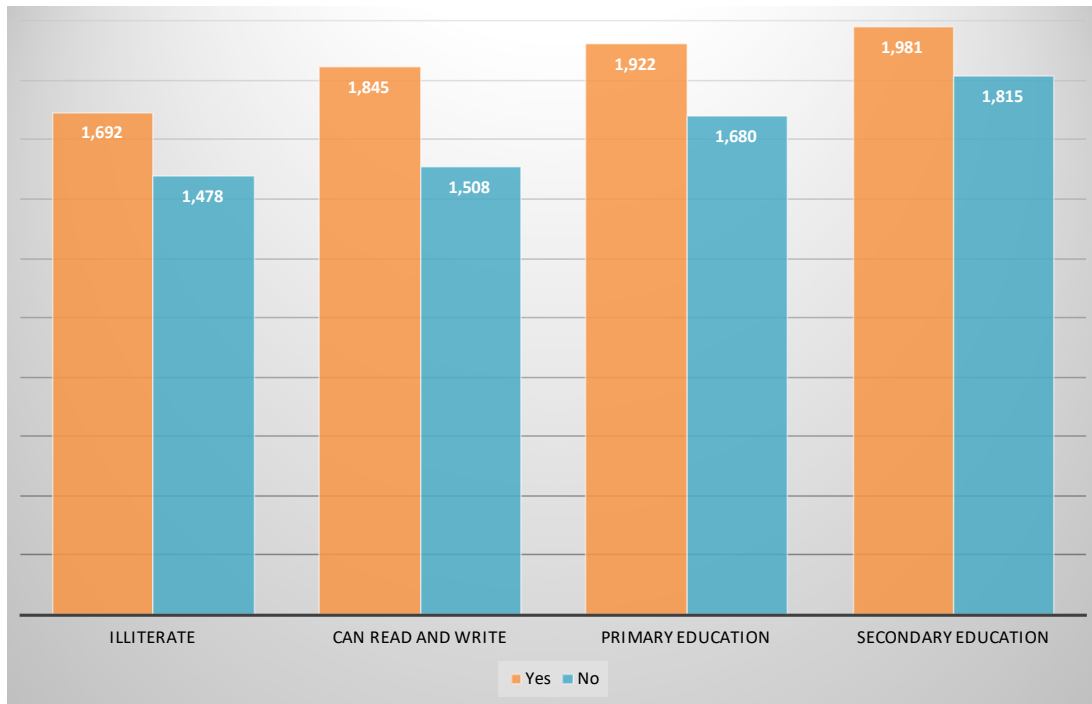
Figure 6: Willingness to migrate, by age group (%)



Note: “Young” consists of respondents who are 15–29 years old; “adult” consists of respondents aged 30–49 years; and “senior” includes respondents who are 50 years old and above.

Willingness to migrate is also directly related to earnings in Saudi Arabia (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Willingness to migrate (yes or no), by educational attainment and average earnings in Saudi Arabia (Riyals)



Back to Yemen

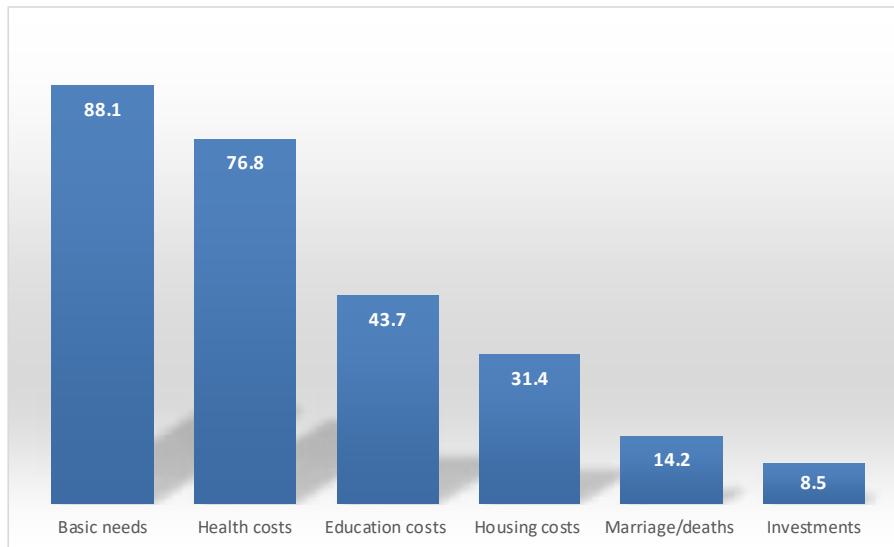
An initial series of questions aims to find out the most serious economic problems that confronted the migrants once they returned back home, while a second series of questions addresses the psychological impact of the return.

Economic impacts

After returning to Yemen, the great majority of respondents reported facing serious problems in satisfying basic everyday needs (88.1%) and meeting the costs of health care (77%). A relevant percentage also reported problems related to education (44%) and housing costs (31%).

The first two items affect the great majority of the returnees, while the other more specific difficulties are concentrated within specific subgroups. For instance, in the case of education, data show that this problem affects mainly those returnees who are heads of family, those who are unemployed and those with low education.

Figure 8: Percentage of respondents who reported facing serious problems in covering specific costs



Relationship with the community

A series of questions exposes some challenges faced by migrants in terms of acceptance by the community of origin after returning home. In general, the problems were not very serious, but looking carefully, some interesting aspects emerge.

Frequency of social contacts

The level of social interaction among migrants and home community members was quite pronounced: 89 per cent of respondents met other members of their community at least once a week and even every day; only a small minority (11%) socialized less than twice per month or even less. Regression analysis suggests that, in general and with everything else equal, the frequency of social contacts appears to be directly related to education, being unemployed and residing in a rural area; and inversely related to age and income level. Therefore, the migrants acting more socially are mainly young, with an educational attainment above average, unemployed or with low income, and living in rural settings.

Interaction with the community

The analysis reveals that:

- 90 per cent of respondents declared that the other members of the community recognized them as valued members of the community;
- 85 per cent felt welcomed by the community;
- 73 per cent found it easy to integrate into everyday community life;
- 70 per cent felt that they did not represent any burden for the community of origin;
- 64 per cent were happy to be back; and
- 62 per cent declared that they had daily contacts with the community and 16 per cent once a week.

After merging the five possible answers in just two categories “I agree” and “I don’t agree or I am indifferent” it became evident that almost all those interviewed felt that they were welcomed by their community (see Table 5). However, the percentage of positive answers becomes notably lower when the question relates not to the reaction of the community, but to the psychological impact of the return on the interviewees. In fact, only 74 per cent felt integrated again in the community, 70 per cent felt they were not a burden and only 64 per cent declared themselves to be happy to be back.

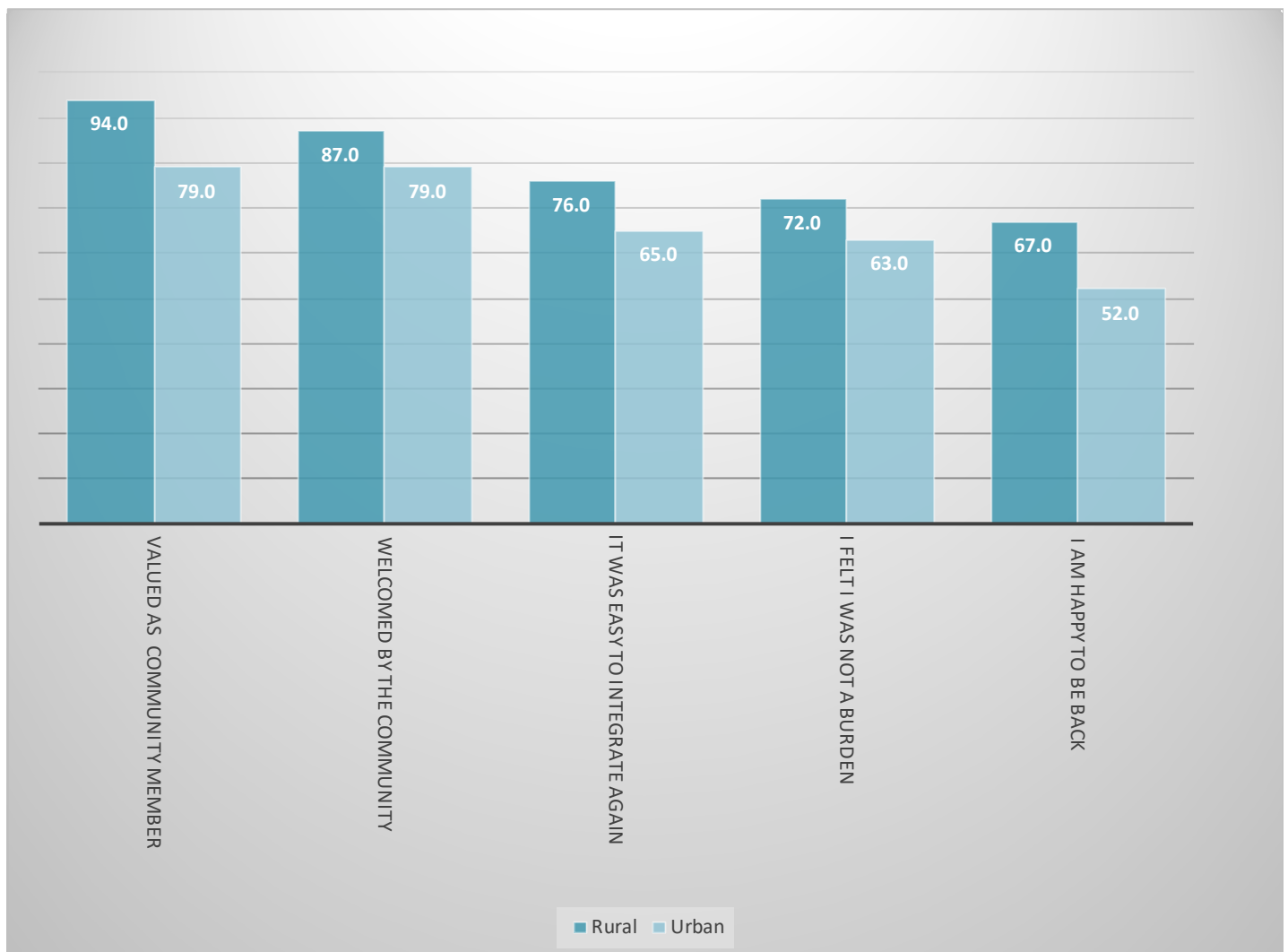
Table 5: Percentage of respondents who answered positively to the five questions related to their feelings after returning home

	% of positive answers
My community values me as a member	91.1
I was welcomed by the community	85.1
It was easy to integrate into the community	73.8
Since returning I am not a burden to my community	70.5
I am happy to be back into the community	64.5

The first two questions aim to verify the reaction of the community toward the returned migrants, while the others try to capture their personal feelings. The answers indicate that the communities are felt to be very understanding toward the migrants who were forcibly returned, while they themselves were not necessarily very happy to be back. This conclusion is also sustained by the fact that a large majority of the returnees are willing, as we have previously seen, to leave Yemen again for some other country.

An interesting result is that the percentage of positive answers to all five questions, and therefore both the positive reaction of the community as felt by the return migrants and their feelings of happiness, were notably higher for rural residents.

Figure 9: Percentage of respondents who answered positively to the questions about returning home, by urban/rural residence



We tried to investigate further the results we have just presented, by concentrating our attention on the two questions most representative of the returned migrants’ perceptions of community reactions and of their own feelings about return, namely, the question related to the acceptance of the community and the question about feelings of happiness.

In order to do so, we regressed the two chosen variables with age, wage in Saudi Arabia, education, marital status, residence in urban/rural area, frequency of social interactions, desire to migrate out of Yemen and success in finding a job when back in Yemen.

The results of this analysis indicate that the feeling of being welcomed back by the community of origin is directly related to whether the return migrant had found a job back in Yemen, as well as the frequency and ease of socializing; and is inversely related to education, in that those with higher education were less likely to feel welcomed back. Returnees’ happiness about being back in Yemen is linked in the same way to the same variables, but it is also positively related to the time spent in Saudi Arabia, with those who spent more time in Saudi Arabia more likely to report being happy to be back in Yemen.

Time spent in Saudi Arabia

On average, respondents had spent 61 months, or more than five years, in Saudi Arabia before being forcibly returned. The range is very large, with 10.7 per cent reporting they had been in Saudi Arabia for less than six months and, at the other extreme, 11.7 per cent stating that they had been in Saudi Arabia for more than 10 years. It is therefore evident that the irregular flow of Yemeni citizens to Saudi Arabia has been a long-term phenomenon.

Obviously, long duration of stay is positively related to age, but people with shorter durations, and who were therefore also younger, had higher wages (Figure 11), which is explained by the inverse relation between age and education.

Figure 10: Percentage distribution of respondents, by duration of stay in Saudi Arabia

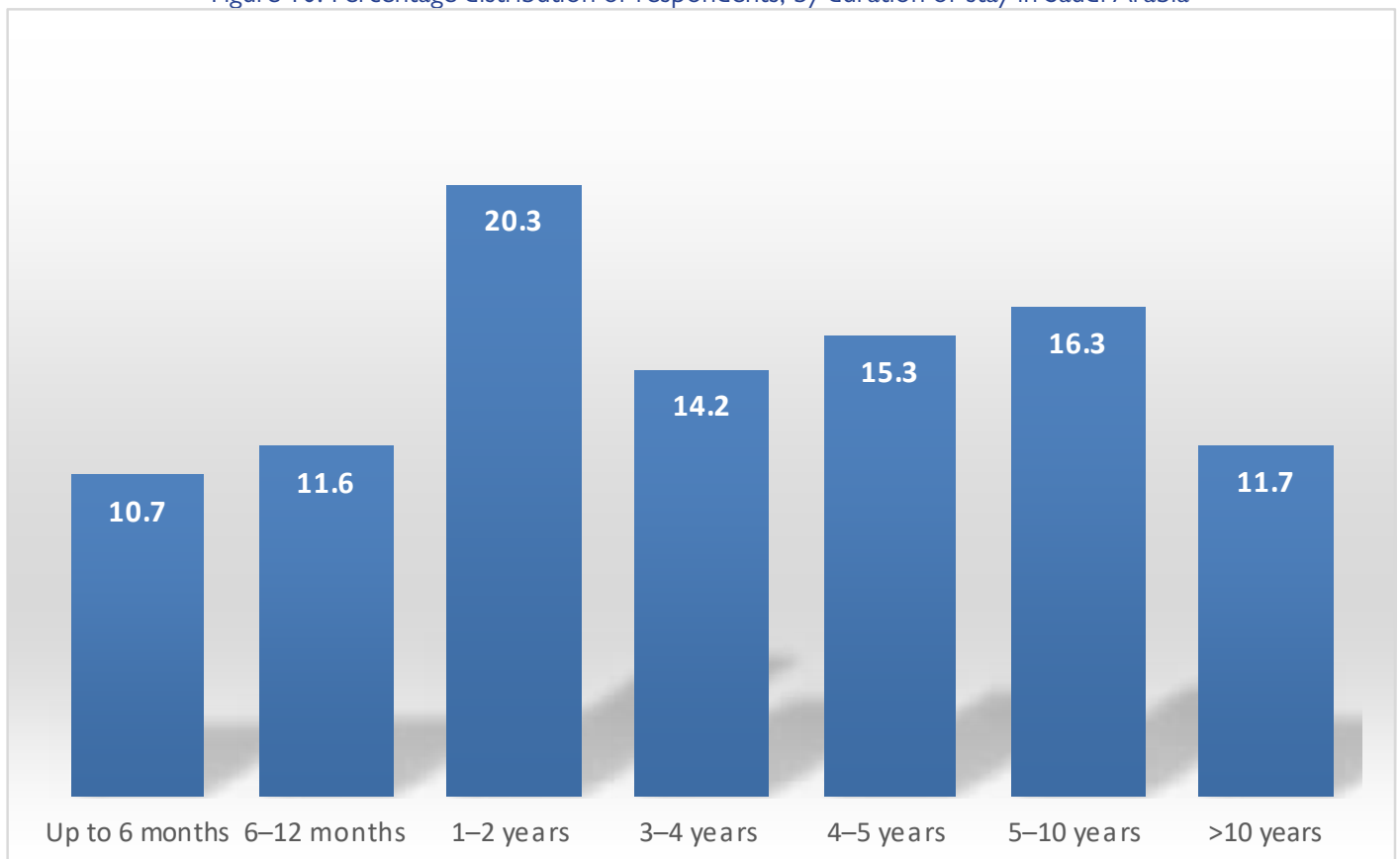
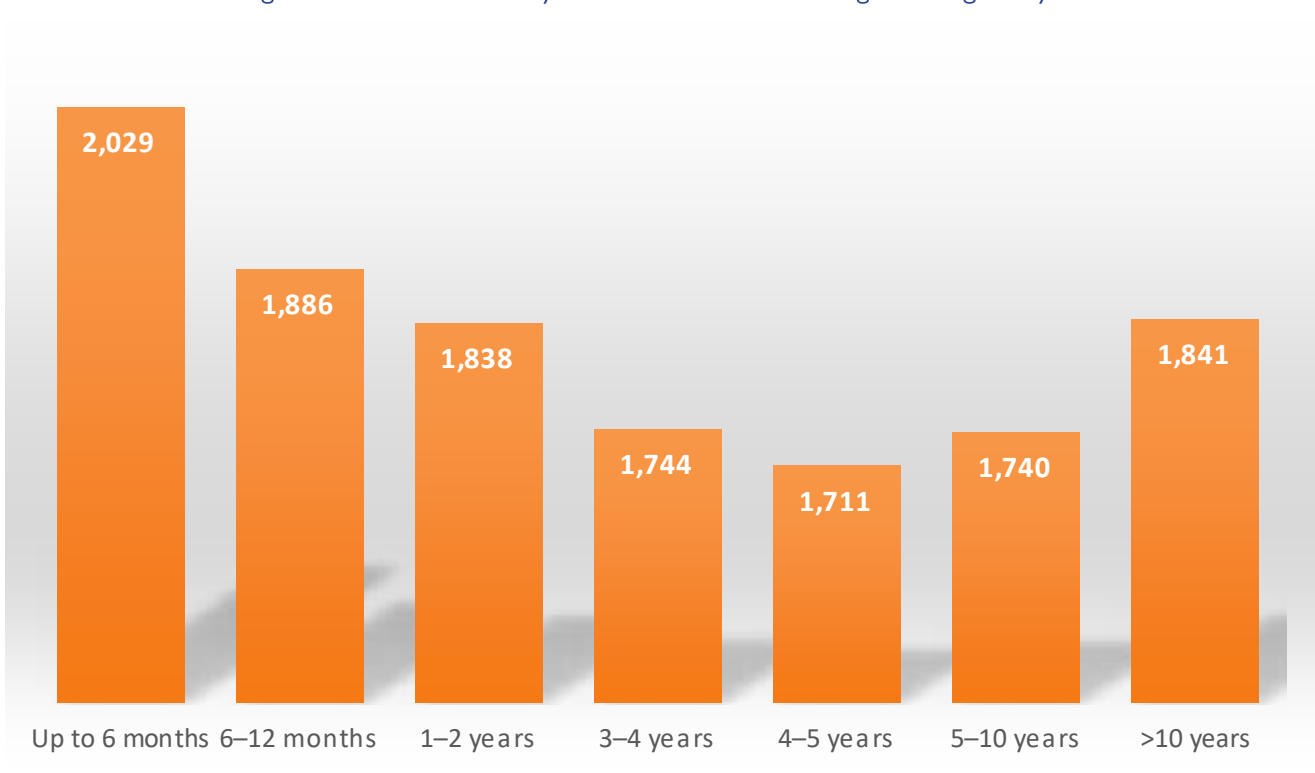


Figure 11: Duration of stay in Saudi Arabia and average earnings in riyals



Frequency of return

The last question of the questionnaire has to do with the frequency with which migrants came back to Yemen. The average number of returns was quite high (5.5), which implies on average one trip back home per year. The number of visits is positively related to the time spent in Saudi Arabia, while it is inversely related to age, education and wage level.

Summary conclusions

The questionnaire illustrates that virtually all forcibly returned migrants in the sample were irregular migrants. Asked to explain the reason for this choice, almost all of them referred to the higher costs of migrating regularly. If this is certainly true from a subjective point of view, the question remains whether it would have been at all possible for them to obtain a regular visa and a work contract, especially for those less equipped in terms of education and experience.

To provide economically for the family represents the main motivation to migrate, and all Yemeni migrants sent remittances home while they were abroad. In more than three quarters of cases, remittances exceeded 50 per cent of what the migrant earned. The frequency of sending remittances is related to the frequency of migrants' salary payments: generally, it was found that migrants send money home as soon as they get it, mainly through relatives and friends. Since frequent payments are inversely related to the skill level of the jobs, the less educated migrants are those who send remittances more frequently. Only one quarter of the migrants felt that the cost of sending remittance was high, but we did not find any correlation between the perceived cost and the method used, which suggests that the method was chosen on the basis of other factors, including security and the accessibility of banks and money transfer agencies in the area of residency both in Saudi Arabia and Yemen. As to be expected, some of the more educated and experienced migrants helped other migrants in Saudi Arabia to send remittances home.

The general willingness to provide support and help to other migrants, especially through offering shelter and helping others to find a job, is quite widespread, with more than 50 per cent of respondents supporting others in these ways. This is particularly pronounced among older migrants.

On the average, respondents had spent more than five years in Saudi Arabia. The distribution by length of stay is quite regular, showing that the flow of Yemeni irregular migrants to Saudi Arabia has been a long and regular phenomenon and has not been accompanied by regularization possibilities in Saudi Arabia, despite the significant contribution of Yemeni migrants to local economies there.

Given the political and economic situation that returnees found upon return to Yemen, it does not come as a surprise that more than 70 per cent expressed their willingness to migrate again to other countries, and that the willingness increased with education and the wage earned in Saudi Arabia.

The desire to leave again for a different country appears to be coherent with the economic challenges the returnees had to face at home; more specifically, the great majority of respondents declared that they faced serious problems in satisfying basic everyday needs (88.1%) and the costs of health care (77%), while more specific needs affected specific subgroups. For instance, in the case of education costs, data show that the worries were expressed mainly by heads of family, the unemployed and respondents with low education.

The great majority of respondents felt that their communities of origin were very understanding, welcoming them warmly; in their turn, the returnees seem to have been able to fit again inside their original environment, showing a very high level of social communication, an attitude more pronounced for the young, the more educated, the unemployed, and those living in rural areas.

However, the percentage of respondents who felt that the community was acting positively toward them was notably higher than the percentage who declared they were happy to be back. Both percentages were higher in rural than in urban settings and were directly related to the present situation (having found a job in Yemen) and personal characteristics (the tendency to socialize and having lower levels of education). However, the percentage of those happy to be back is also positively related to their time spent in Saudi Arabia, which suggests that migrants missed their community while in Saudi Arabia. The frequency of return visits to Yemen while migrants were in Saudi Arabia was quite high, on average once a year.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The long run

The first dominant trait of Yemen's labour market is its high demographic pressure. It should be underlined that while the rate of increase of the working age population will progressively decline from a present yearly value of 3.3 per cent to 2.6 per cent by the 2030–2035 period, the absolute yearly increase will reach a maximum of almost 600,000 at that time. It is therefore evident that for a long time to come, it will be impossible for the Yemeni economy to create the number of additional jobs necessary to face the growth in potential labour supply of demographic origin. In this situation, emigration remains a priority for Yemen, and the Government should strive to reach agreements with some of the numerous countries that are already facing structural shortages of labour. The goal would be to find a way to manage both predefined and well-organized migration flows that will respond to the needs of the destination country, while diminishing the excess of labour supply in Yemen and providing extremely needed remittances (Bruni, 2017).

As we have seen, the educational level of the young Yemeni labour force has been improving, but remains extremely low, while the professional skills necessary to successfully enter the labour market, especially those of more advanced countries, are almost completely lacking. Special efforts should therefore be made to increase the educational level of the children that will constitute the labour force of tomorrow.

At the same time, Yemen should immediately adopt measures aimed to lower fertility. For the next 15–20 years, the young people that will enter the labour market have already been born, but such measures could at least reduce the demographic pressure that will affect the labour market after 2035.

THE SHORT RUN

Wars inevitably affect the labour market and Yemen is not an exception, as was already made clear in 2015 by the DNAS run by the Republic of Yemen and the ILO.

In this situation of emergency, precedence should be given to relief measures, especially those directed at displaced people, with displacement having affected 10 per cent of the country's population, including 2 million people currently displaced and an additional 1 million formerly displaced persons who have returned home. However, these measures should focus as much as possible on the activation of the labour market, given that the majority of displaced persons are of working age.

At the same time, it is of extreme importance to draft a recovery plan to be implemented as soon as the conflict ends. To be effective, such a plan should be based on information that is as accurate as possible. For this reason, collecting updated information on the education and vocational training system, as well as on production activities, should be a priority. Moreover, a new labour force survey should be launched as soon as possible. The survey should include a section devoted to assessing the special needs created by the war and its different impacts on various areas of the country. To provide an accurate assessment of the changes brought about by the war, the sample of families to be viewed should include families that were also interviewed in the previous prewar survey.

In the very short run, as soon as the bombing stops, local employment plans should engage residents and displaced persons in infrastructure recovery activities (roads, schools, hospitals) through employment-intensive investment programmes that could generate spillovers at the household level, as well as long-term effects on production activities.

It is extremely important that public works programmes be seen as an opportunity to improve competencies and be designed with a skill development component capable of aligning the skill demand with the skill supply. Moreover, these programmes should be complemented by structural interventions in the vocational training system. More generally, radical reforms and investment in the education and vocational training system are crucial, including investments in female teachers for rural areas and in the updating of school curricula.

In the medium term, economic growth and social development will depend on the Yemeni Government's engagement in reigniting economic growth, generating decent employment, providing a social protection floor for all, and addressing equality in employment.

A special focus should be on women's economic empowerment. The DNAS showed that the recovery registered in Aden had led to unprecedented levels of employment of women. It therefore rightly suggested that these important gains "should be sustained by paying particular attention to monitoring the informality of employment and by promoting not employment per se, but quality employment and decent work".¹⁶ It also proposed that: "A system of quotas should be established in recovery activities to ensure that related jobs are not taken up entirely by young males coming back from the conflict."

The war is also having a relevant impact on school dropout rates as a consequence of child labour and the recruitment of children by armed groups. This suggests that school attendance conditions should be applied to the design of social assistance recovery programmes. More generally, the problem of child labour will need measures aimed at: i) the reactivation of identification and referral systems; ii) return-to-school programmes; and iii) the reintegration of former child soldiers (Republic of Yemen and ILO, 2016).

In a longer perspective, Yemen needs to start a transition from a situation characterized by lack of job opportunities and informality to a situation that will offer, if not full employment, at least decent work to a majority of the people of working age. This will require a transformation of socioeconomic thinking, policies and institutions.

In substance, Yemen needs to find a new development paradigm leading the country toward a sustainable development path that will overcome poverty, inequality and insecurity. Economic growth is the result of a process of technological upgrading, of diversification, and of structural change driven by the accumulation of capabilities on the one hand and the transformation of production structures on the other. It is the knowledge base of a country that defines and limits the technologies that a country can adopt, the production structure that evolves, and therefore the possible paths to economic growth and social development. More specifically, speeding up economic growth and triggering successful "catching-up processes" does require shifting production from low-technology activities into high-technology activities and jumping into new knowledge clusters. To do so, a country needs to drive its knowledge structure toward higher diversity and complexity, in other words to endow its incoming labour force with the expertise and competences that will be required by the economic development triggered by industrial policies (Bruni, Salvini and Uhlenhaut, 2014).

It is hoped that this process, which in the present situation probably looks like a utopian dream, will have the possibility to become a working plan in the not-too-distant future.

¹⁶ Republic of Yemen and ILO, 2016.

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