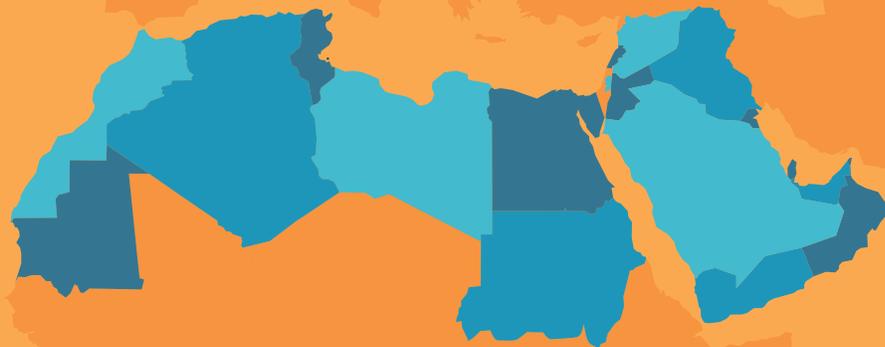




الباروميتر العربي  
ARAB BAROMETER

# Public Views of Migration in MENA

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## Executive Summary

Across the Middle East and North Africa, sizable proportions of citizens are considering leaving their home countries. Desire to emigrate is high across the region and has largely remained at the pre-COVID19 levels. In most countries surveyed, at least a fifth of the population reports considering emigrating. The percentage is highest in Jordan where nearly half (48 percent) say they want to leave the kingdom, and lowest in Egypt where only 13 percent share this desire.

Those who want to emigrate are more likely to be male, young, well-educated segments of the population, respectively. Youth across the region are significantly more likely to say they consider leaving their countries compared to their older counterparts. The gap between those ages 18-29 and those who are 30 years or older ranges from 32 points in Lebanon to six points in Mauritania. Similarly, those with college degrees or higher are more likely to want to emigrate compared to those with only a secondary education or less in all countries surveyed. The gap between the two groups is significant in several countries, especially in Sudan where it reaches the 26-point mark. Furthermore, men are more eager to leave than women in all countries except Lebanon, where both are equally interested in emigrating.

People across MENA name a number of reasons for wanting to emigrate. The most commonly cited reason is for economic issues. The majority of potential migrants in all countries surveyed mention economic factors as the primary reason why they want to leave. These levels range from virtually all potential migrants in Egypt (97 percent) and Jordan (93 percent) to more than half in Libya (53 percent). While other reasons, including security factors, political reasons, and educational opportunities, are mentioned by minorities across the region; these reasons seem to correlate with each country's political atmosphere, rather than being recurring themes across MENA.

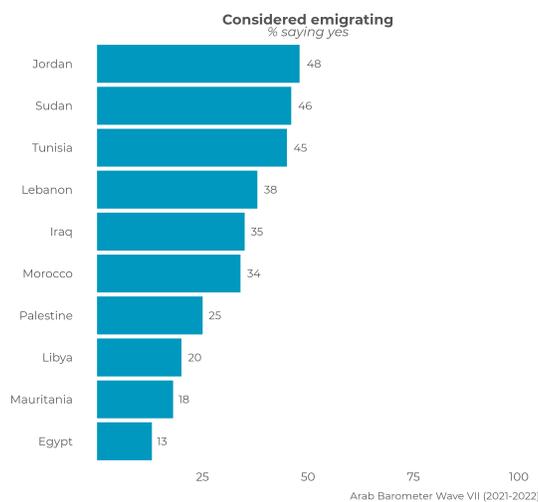
Potential migrants in MENA do not seem to agree on a destination. In no country is there a majority choosing one country as a preferred destination. Several factors contribute to people's preferences. These factors include historical trends of migration, language, proximity, and perceived opportunities. While Jordanians, Lebanese, and Mauritians prefer a move to North America, Egyptians and Sudanese prefer a Gulf country. North Africans tend to choose France or another European country as their preferred destinations.

Undocumented migration is a possibility that sizable proportions of potential migrants are considering across MENA. This is especially true in Morocco where the majority of potential migrants say they would leave even if they lacked the required documents. Only in Lebanon (19 percent) and Egypt (13 percent) less than a fifth of potential migrants report considering emigrating without papers.

These are among the main findings of ten nationally representative public opinion surveys conducted across the Middle East and North Africa from 2021-22 as part of Arab Barometer Wave VII. The results include nearly 23,000 interviews across the region and have a margin of error of approximately 2 points in each country. Overall, these results make clear that, for people across MENA, migration remains an open option, especially for the younger, better educated generations, mainly to escape economic hardships.

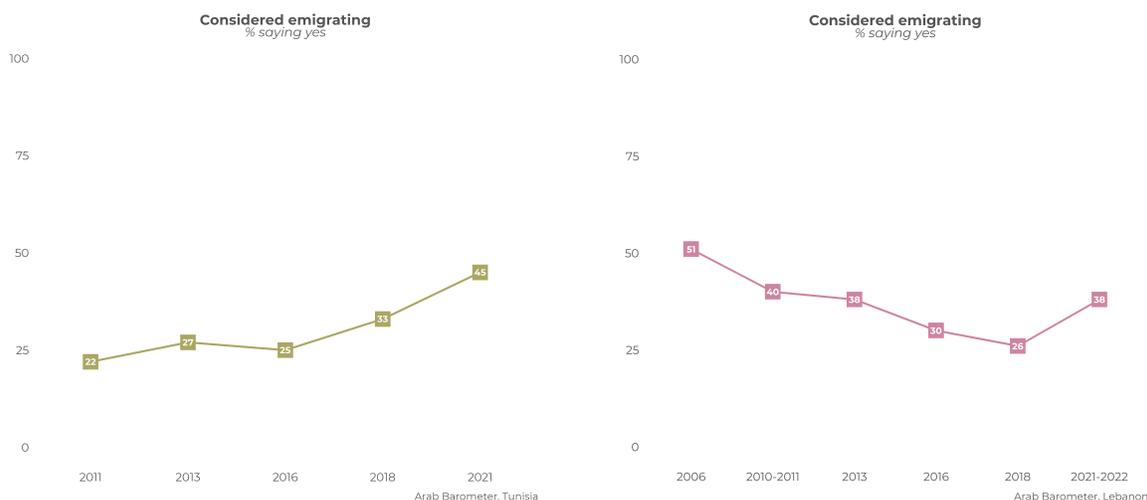
## Migration

Desire to emigrate is high across MENA. Levels are highest in Jordan, Sudan, and Tunisia, where nearly half of the population express their desire to leave their country. Around a third also say they consider emigrating in Lebanon (38 percent), Iraq (35 percent), and Morocco (34 percent). Furthermore, a quarter in Palestine and a fifth in Libya share the same sentiment. Notably, the only two countries where less than a fifth of the population say they consider emigrating are Mauritania (18 percent) and Egypt (13 percent).



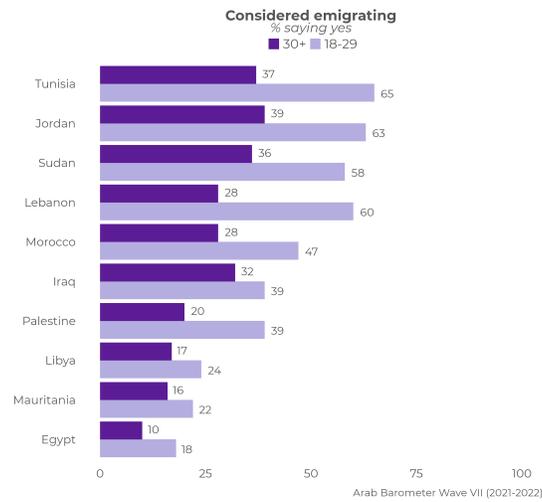
The number of MENA people who say they consider leaving their homelands has changed since 2018-19. While the number increased in some countries, it decreased in others. On the one hand, Lebanon and Tunisia have witnessed the biggest jumps as an additional 12 percent of people say they want to emigrate in each country. These jumps are likely linked with the increasing economic

challenges in each country. In Lebanon, the financial collapse in 2019 has resulted in many more citizens wanting to leave. In Tunisia, GDP per capita is now significantly lower than at the time of the 2011 Jasmine Revolution, which likely explains why many citizens hope to find a better future abroad.

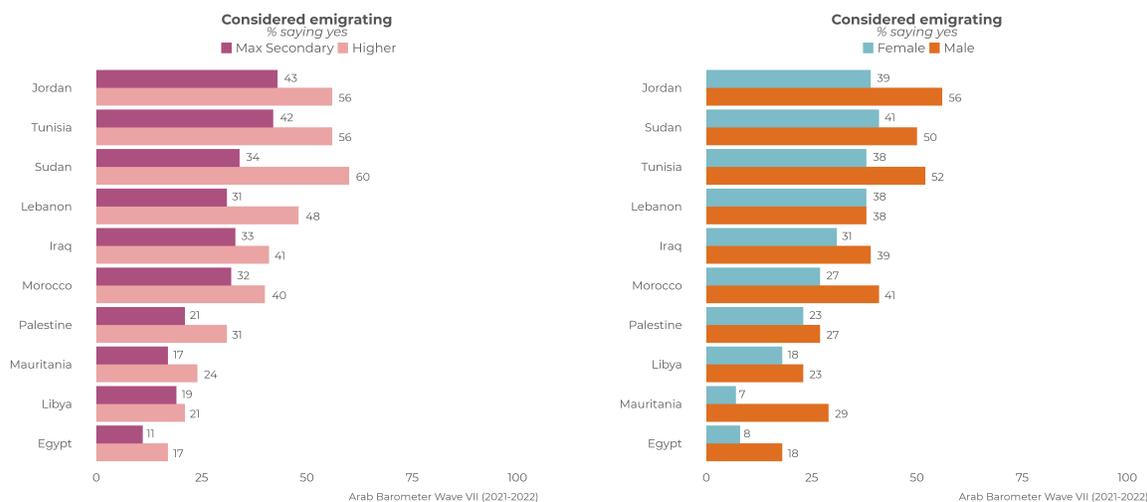


On the other hand, fewer people in Egypt (-15 points) and Morocco (-10 points) say they are considering emigrating in 2021-22 compared to 2018-19. In the remaining countries, however, levels have not changed significantly in either direction.

Turning to the types of people who are seeking to leave, the survey results make clear that youth in the region are significantly more interested in emigration than their older compatriots. In all surveyed countries, youth ages 18-29 have expressed they want to emigrate by a margin of at least six points compared to those 30 or older. In Tunisia and Jordan, nearly two thirds (65 percent and 63 percent, respectively) of youth say they are considering emigrating, compared to slightly more than a third of older Tunisians (37 percent) and older Jordanians (39 percent). Lebanese youth are twice as likely to want to emigrate compared to those 30 or older (60 percent vs. 28 percent); the same is true for Palestinians where 39 percent of those ages 18-29 want to leave the country compared to only a fifth of those 30 or older. The gap between the two age groups is also wide in Sudan (22 percent) and Morocco (19 percent). Though smaller, there remains a gap between those who are younger and the older in Egypt (eight percent), Iraq (seven percent), Libya (seven percent), and Mauritania (six percent).



There are significant differences by education levels when it comes to migration. Those with college degrees or higher are significantly more likely to consider emigrating, compared to those with lower levels of educational attainment. This reality poses a possible risk of brain drain in the region. Among the college educated, more than half in Sudan (60 percent), Jordan (56 percent), and Tunisia (56 percent) say they want to leave their countries, compared to lower proportions of their less-educated compatriots (34 percent, 43 percent, and 42 percent, respectively). In Lebanon, while a half (48 percent) of those with college degrees or above say they are considering emigrating, only a third (31 percent) of those with only a secondary degree or less say the same. The gap between the two groups is significant in most countries surveyed. This gap amounts to ten points in Palestine, eight points in both Iraq and Morocco, seven points in Mauritania, and six points in Egypt. Educational attainment does not appear to differ greatly for Libyans when it comes to their Intention to leave the war-torn country.



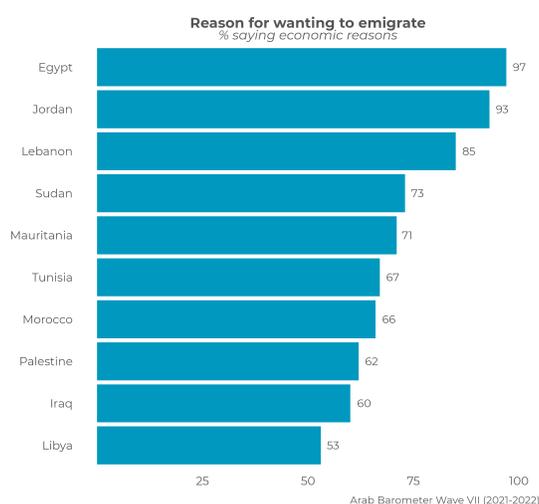
Additionally, men across the region are significantly more likely to want to emigrate compared to women. At least half of men in Jordan (56 percent), Tunisia (52 percent), and Sudan (50 percent) say they want to leave their countries. The gender gap in this regard is greatest in Mauritania where almost three-in-ten (29 percent) men want to emigrate, compared to only seven percent of women. Though smaller, the gap remains wide in Jordan (17 percent), Tunisia (14 percent), Morocco (14 percent), and Egypt (10 percent). In Libya, Sudan, Iraq, and Palestine, the gender gap is less than ten percent. Meanwhile, there is no gap in Lebanon where men and women equally want to leave the country.

## Reasons for Emigrating

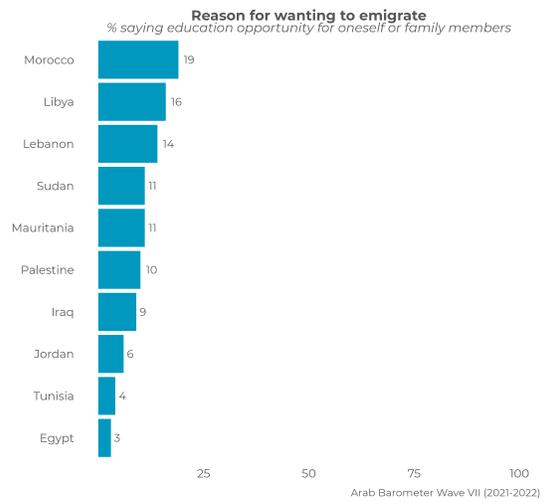
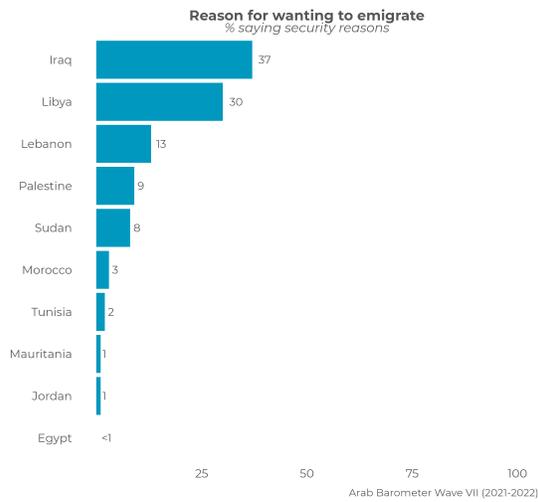
The fact that the majority of people in all countries surveyed see the economic situation in their countries as bad or very bad is reflected in discussions of migration. Across the region, people wanting to emigrate mainly cite economic reasons as their motivation for migration. Security issues, education opportunities, corruption, and political reasons follow, but are far less important compared to economic factors.

At least half of people wanting to emigrate across the region say they want to leave their country because of the economic conditions. The percentage is highest in Egypt (97 percent) and Jordan (93 percent) where virtually all potential migrants say it is for economic reasons. Libya is the only country where only about half (53 percent) say their reason for wanting to leave is the economic situation. Libya is also the only country where economic factors seem to motivate

women (55 percent) more than men (51 percent). In all other countries, men are more likely to cite economic reasons than women. This is especially true for Mauritania where the gender gap in this regard amounts to 23 percentage points. While it is unsurprising that those with lower incomes are more likely to say economic reasons are their motivation for migration, the gap is significant in several countries. In Libya, there is a 26-point gap in citing economic factors between those with lower incomes and those with higher incomes. The gap amounts to 20 points in Morocco, 19 points in Palestine, and 15 points in Lebanon.



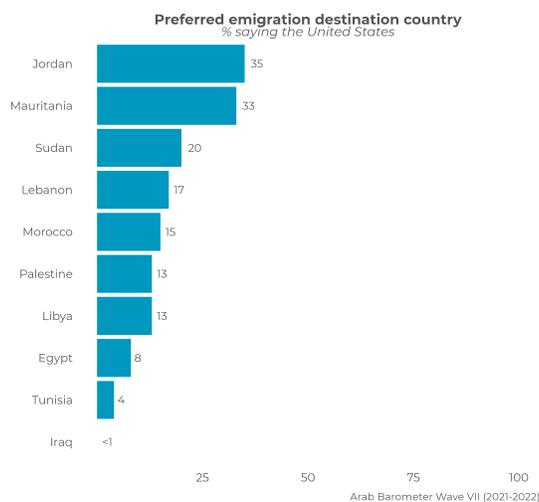
Other factors cited by those who want to emigrate vary greatly by country, reflecting - if partially - the specific issues facing each country. For example, while more than a third in Iraq (37 percent) and three-in-ten in Libya cite security reasons, less than ten percent say the same in Palestine, Jordan, Sudan, and other North African countries. Additionally, while nearly a fifth (19 percent) of potential migrants in Morocco say they want to do so for educational opportunities, only four percent in Tunisia and three percent in Egypt say the same. Political reasons are also more likely to be a motivation for those in less-stable countries like Lebanon, Palestine, Libya, and Iraq than it is for those in Egypt or Mauritania. Finally, while a fifth of Libyans wanting to emigrate point to corruption as their motivation for migration, only one percent of potential Tunisian migrants say the same.



## Destinations

For people wanting to emigrate from the region, North America is the most preferred destination, followed by Europe and the Gulf countries. The destination preferences, however, vary greatly by country.

While a third of Jordanians (35 percent) and Mauritians (33 percent) wanting to leave their country choose the United States as their preferred destination, less than ten percent share this preference among potential migrants in Egypt (eight percent), Tunisia (four percent), and Iraq where virtually no one wants to emigrate to the US.



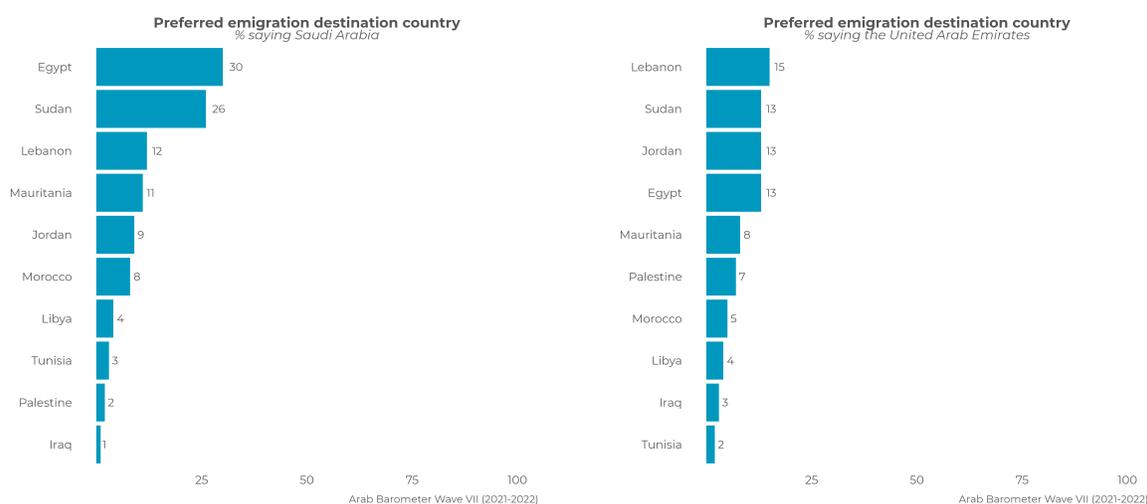
Canada is the preferred destination for roughly three-in-ten potential migrants in Jordan (30 percent) and Lebanon (29 percent), and a fifth in Morocco (21 percent) and Libya (20 percent).

People in French-speaking North African countries and Lebanon are, understandably, more likely to prefer emigrating to France. Among potential migrants, roughly three-in-ten Tunisians (32 percent) and Mauritians (30 percent), a quarter of Lebanese (26 percent), and a fifth of Moroccans (22 percent) say France is their preferred destination. In all other countries, one-in-ten or less say the same.

Recently, Germany has become a preferred destination for seeking jobs, education, or just a better life in general. This reality is reflected in Arab Barometer survey where Germany stands out as one of the most preferred destinations in most countries. In Libya, for example, Germany tops the list of destinations, surpassing Italy and Canada, with roughly a quarter (23 percent) of potential migrants saying they want to emigrate to Germany. Around a fifth in Morocco (19 percent), Lebanon (18 percent), and Tunisia (17 percent) say the same. The percentage is 14 percent in Jordan and 13 percent in Palestine.

The Gulf countries are also a top destination for a significant number of potential migrants across the region, especially in countries that already have large communities of expats in the Gulf. For example, two thirds of Egyptians considering emigrating say they prefer moving to Saudi Arabia (30 percent), Kuwait (19 percent), the United Arab Emirates (13 percent), or Qatar (four percent). Even larger proportion of potential Sudanese migrants prefer the Gulf, though Sudanese are more likely to be equally interested in all Gulf countries. Around

a quarter (26 percent) say they want to leave Sudan for Saudi Arabia, while 18 percent say Qatar, 13 percent say the UAE, and seven percent say Kuwait. Additionally, the UAE is the preferred destination for 15 percent of potential migrants in Lebanon and 13 percent in Jordan; while 16 percent in Lebanon, 14 percent in Mauritania, and one-in-ten in Jordan prefer Qatar.

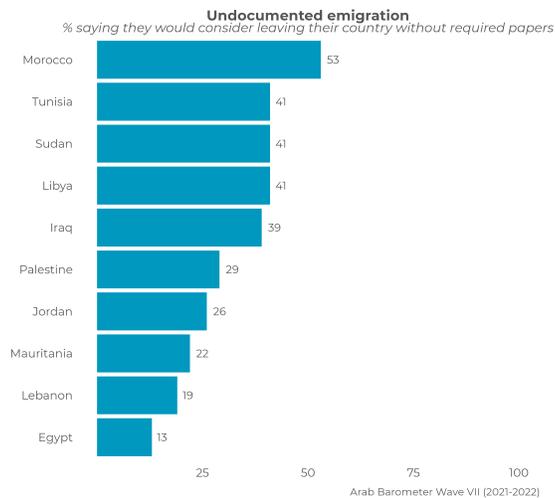


Turkey is another country that has been attracting people from the region. It is noteworthy that Turkey tops the preferred destination list for potential migrants in Palestine where roughly a quarter (23 percent) say they would like to emigrate to this country. It is also a favorite destination for 14 percent in Jordan and 11 percent in Libya.

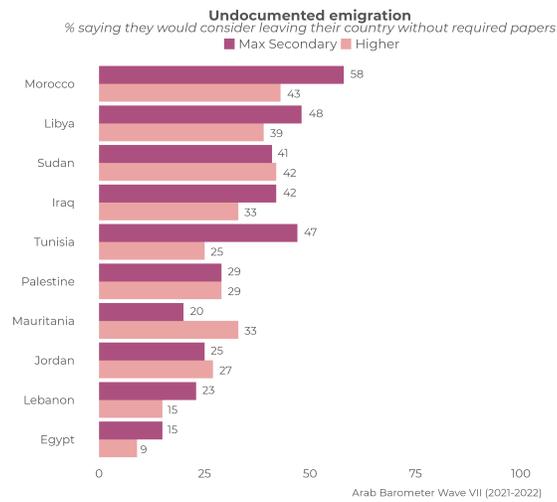
## Undocumented Migration

Significant proportions of potential migrants across the region say they would consider emigrating even if they lacked the required legal documents. Morocco, however, is the only country where more than half (53 percent) of those wanting to leave would consider doing so without the necessary papers. This is an increase from 2018 when only 38 percent of potential Moroccan migrants said they would consider leaving their country without the required documentation. Around four-in-ten of those wanting to emigrate in Tunisia (41 percent), Sudan (41 percent), Libya (41 percent), and Iraq (39 percent) say they would do the same. The proportions are smaller in Palestine (29 percent), Jordan (26 percent), and Mauritania (22 percent). Less than a fifth of potential Lebanese

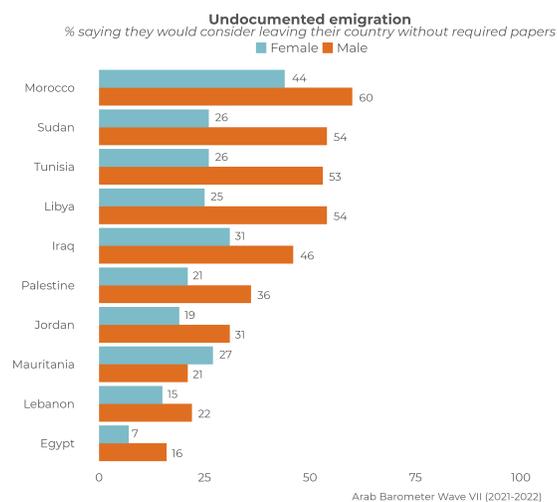
(19 percent) and Egyptian (13 percent) migrants say they would consider migrating without the required documents.



The possibility of leaving the country illegally seems to be shared roughly equally between youth and those ages 30 or older in most countries. Notably, however, Sudanese youth are significantly more likely to consider emigrating without papers compared to their older counterparts by a margin of 15 points. Educational attainment offers greater distinction when it comes to undocumented migration considerations. Those with only a secondary degree or less are more likely to think about leaving their country without papers in Tunisia (+22 points) and Morocco (+15 points). The opposite is true for Mauritania, however, as a third of potential migrants with higher education consider leaving illegally compared to only a fifth of their counterparts with secondary education or less. As for income, one country stands out for the striking variation between higher-income potential migrants and their lower-income counterparts, that is Morocco. Two thirds (68 percent) of potential migrants with lower incomes say they would consider leaving Morocco without papers, compared to only three-in-ten of potential migrants with higher incomes. For the other countries, differences across income levels are nowhere near as wide as they are in Morocco.



Gender is by far the most distinguishing factor between potential migrants considering emigrating without required documents. In most countries, men are significantly more likely to consider doing so than women. The gap is greatest in Libya (+29 points), Sudan (+28 points), Tunisia (+27 points). It also amounts to 16 points in Morocco, 15 points in Iraq and Palestine, and 12 points in Jordan. Only in Mauritania, women are slightly more likely to say they would leave the country without documents than men, among potential migrants (27 percent vs. 21 percent).





## About Arab Barometer

The Arab Barometer is a nonpartisan research network that provides insights into the social, political, and economic attitudes and values of ordinary citizens across the Arab world.

We have been conducting rigorous and nationally representative public opinion surveys on probability samples of the adult populations across the Arab world since 2006. The margin of error is  $\pm 2$  percent.

The Arab Barometer is the largest repository of publicly available data on the views of men and women in the MENA region. Our findings give a voice to the needs and concerns of Arab publics.



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