



Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute

Internal Migration and Palestinian Returnees in West Bank and Gaza Strip

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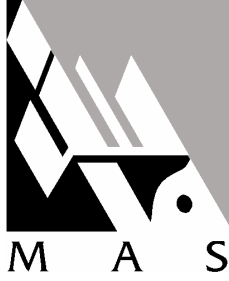
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3. The internal scientific committee supervises the work of the researcher or team of researchers through periodic progress reports.
4. The initial draft of the study is reviewed by the scientific committee for objective content-related amendments to be added to the second draft.
5. The second draft is then submitted for evaluation in accordance with the terms of reference to two or three external academic experts specializing in the subject. Provided that there is a positive evaluation by at least two experts, the researcher is asked to review the study taking into consideration the objective recommendations of these experts.
6. The study is presented for discussion at a public workshop attended by academics, researchers, and representatives from public and private sector institutions related to the subject of the research.
7. Comments and feedback from the workshop are incorporated into the study and the final draft is reviewed by the scientific committee to ensure that the necessary amendments have been made. The study is then edited.
8. Research papers written in English are translated into Arabic and published in both languages. An executive summary in English is attached to research papers written in Arabic.

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Summary

International indicators, particularly in Arab countries, show that the trend in internal migration is primarily on movement from rural to urban areas. Cities have become political and economic centers absorbing a high percentage of the labor and productive forces and also act as a base for various cultural, recreational, and service activities. As a result, cities have become attractive polarizing centers for migrants from rural areas. Demographic growth, poor land resources that are unable to sustain demand, undeveloped production forces, the seasonal nature of agricultural work, limited job opportunities, and inadequate public services in rural areas are now considered the most significant factors behind the movement of people from rural to urban areas.

A feature of internal migration in the West Bank and Gaza Strip (WBGS) is the fact that it has been taking place for some time yet no urban centers have developed for political reasons. Although urbanization has accelerated, it cannot truly be considered the outcome of migration from rural to urban areas but rather the result of the way in which urban areas are defined in statistical terms. It can also be attributed to the fact that several West Bank regions have turned into small urban centers. Clearly, the weak economic and social structure of cities in the WBGS did not attract the rural population. This has been reflected in the trends of internal migration.

The same trends in internal migration were identified in both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. No clear centers attracting or losing migrants were seen in either of the two areas. The study attributes this to the fact that marriage and accompanying one's spouse are two major motives for internal migration. The data on which the study was based also point to another trend, namely migration between population centers of the same type, i.e., between urban centers, rural centers and refugee camps, confirming the lack of clearly defined, attractive polarizing centers for migration.

It is possible to identify the following reasons for the low rate of migration from rural to urban areas in the WBGS:

1. As a result of Zionist occupation policies, no industrial centers or political and administrative capital characterized by urban development similar to those existing in neighboring countries, ever emerged in the West Bank. Consequently, medium-sized cities developed as commercial and service centers. Their development, which was slow and similar in nature, served neighboring villages and refugee camps but did not constitute attractive centers for the rural labor force. They were considered as attractive by rural consumers who visited the cities in the day but returned to their villages in the evening.
2. The rural labor force headed for Israeli labor markets and settlements close to their villages. The Israeli labor market provided job opportunities with high wages compared to the local WBGS labor markets. This restricted the number of workers migrating from rural areas to Palestinian cities.
3. The development of transportation systems, the geographical proximity of Palestinian centers in the relatively small area of the WBGS, and the tendency for workers to commute on a daily basis contributed to the low rate of internal migration.
4. These factors contributed to changing the concept of separate cities and villages that prevailed in the fifties and sixties. City and village lifestyles have drawn closer as a result of the constant interaction of city dwellers with those from the villages and visits by villagers to the major cities. The development of new urban patterns of consumption in rural areas, one of the results of the economic and cultural siege imposed by the occupation on cities, has clearly contributed to the growth of similar lifestyles in various Palestinian population centers and helped to restrict internal migration.
5. Following the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, the cost of real estate and property rental increased due to an increase in demand. This reduced the opportunity for young people in particular to migrate and settle in cities.

In this context, it is not possible to describe internal migration in the WBGS as a widespread phenomenon. The Ramallah district constitutes a somewhat exceptional case as it has attracted educated employees from other West Bank districts to work in service and educational institutions in the city of Ramallah. In addition, during the nineties, the city also hosted Jerusalem residents who were forced to move out of Jerusalem due to Israeli policies to rid the city of its Arab population. The Bethlehem district is the second most polarizing center for migration in the West Bank, mainly for migrants from the Jerusalem area for the same reasons as

mentioned above. Jerusalem itself can be considered the center in the West Bank from which the most migration takes place, despite the fact that its residents enjoy health services, social security benefits, and a high standard of living in comparison with the rest of the WBGS population. The reasons for the migration of Jerusalem residents are mainly related to political conditions and Israeli restrictions imposed on the city's Palestinian population. These restrictions include denial of construction licenses, arbitrary taxation, and similar policies designed to drive Palestinian residents to leave.

According to the study, migrants move from the Gaza Strip to the West Bank, albeit on a limited scale. It is likely that the rate of migration will increase if Israeli restrictions preventing people from Gaza from entering the West Bank are removed. Within the Gaza Strip itself, the northern district is the sole attractive center for migration. This can be attributed to the establishment of new population and housing centers in this area by the Palestinian Authority with the aim of reducing the high population density in other districts.

The study shows that migrants have characteristics that distinguish them from other WBGS Palestinians. The general census of 1997 showed that internal migration in the WBGS consisted mainly of females. There was a high percentage of refugees amongst migrants due to the fact that the refugees rarely possess land or real estate and are therefore more willing to move to new population centers. The study also shows that migrants are better educated in comparison to the overall population and a high percentage of migrants possess university degrees and college diplomas.

The majority of migrants are young adults and most of the migrants over 12 years of age, particularly females, are married. This is of particular interest as single persons who have never married constitute the highest percentage of the total Palestinian population.

There is a high percentage of family breadwinners among migrants compared to the general population but the percentage of sons and daughters acting as breadwinners is much lower. This is clearly due to the age structure of migrants, which is mainly that of young adults, rather than the younger age structure predominant in the general population. Migrant families are relatively small in comparison to the average WBGS family.

Although the study indicates that migrant participation in the labor market is less than among the general population, this conclusion is considered to be misleading. The reason is that the participation rate in the labor market according to gender was higher among migrants when both sexes were considered individually than among the general population. Therefore, economic factors have an impact on migration in the WBGS, although this impact is limited, particularly on women. The gap between male participation in the labor market by migrants and that among the total WBGS male population is clearly growing. Unemployment among migrants is lower than in the total population and only confirms the impact of economic factors on internal migration. In addition, the dependency ratio among migrants is low in comparison with the rest of population. To conclude, migrants are characterized by a high rate of participation in the labor market, low unemployment and a low dependency ratio in comparison with the rest of the WBGS population.

A large number of migrant workers are over ten years of age and are employed in professions that require a high level of education. The number of migrant workers in professions that do not require a high level of education is low compared to the same age groups in the general population. This is applicable to both sexes although, according to the study, it applies more to the West Bank than to the Gaza Strip where no clear trend was observed. This implies that the impact of economic factors in the West Bank is greater than in the Gaza Strip. This is not surprising bearing in mind the fact that the economic situation in Gaza is deteriorating at a faster pace than in the West Bank, especially with regard to job opportunities. It should also be remembered that the West Bank is larger than the Gaza Strip. Individuals living in the Gaza Strip do not need to move to new population centers to improve their job opportunities because it is easy for them to commute on a daily basis. In the West Bank, on the other hand, population centers are a considerable distance from each other, particularly in the urban areas, so individuals often have no choice but to move to new population centers where job opportunities are more abundant.

Returnee migrants display several characteristics that distinguish them from other WBGS individuals. The general census of 1997 showed that there were more males than females returning to the WBGS. There is a low percentage of refugees among returnees and they tend to be highly educated in comparison to the general WBGS population.

A large number of the individuals returning from abroad are young adults. This can be attributed to the high percentage of individuals in the young adult age group and the low percentage of those less than 15 years of age. In this respect, returnees differ from the general population of the WBSG where the majority are under the age of 15. This may explain another trait of returnees which is that a high percentage over 12 years of age are married while only a small percentage have never been married. In comparison, individuals who have never been married constitute the majority within this age group within the total Palestinian population.

There are a large number of family breadwinners amongst returnees, including both wives and husbands, compared to the general population. However, the percentage of sons/daughters serving as breadwinners is lower. This is no doubt related to the age structure of returnees, which is primarily that of young adults compared to the high percentage of children found in WBSG society. The high percentage of breadwinners indicates the small size of returnee families compared to family sizes amongst the WBSG population where there are relatively few breadwinners.

The percentage of individuals over the age of ten who participate in the labor market is high amongst returnees. This applies to both males and females, highlighting the significant impact of economic factors on the return of migrants to the WBSG. The return of many individuals is often linked to the establishment of the Palestinian National Authority and employment in various PNA bodies. In most cases, these people previously worked for the PLO abroad.

There is a low rate of unemployment amongst returnees compared to the WBSG population as a whole. However, this is restricted to males while female unemployment amongst returnees is higher than among WBSG females. This may be attributed to a higher rate of labor force participation by female returnees. It may also be linked to the return of females accompanying males, especially those coming from the Gulf countries. Returnees display a lower dependency ratio than the rest of the population.

Amongst returnees over ten years of age, many work in professions that require a relatively high level of education compared to statistics per profession for this age group in the total population. This applies to both males and females and is often linked to the high level of education of returnees compared to that of the population as a whole.

The study indicates that political factors constitute the main motivation for the return of a large number of Palestinians to the WBGS from abroad. Primarily, the establishment of the Palestinian Authority was accompanied by the return of a number of Palestinians, including those who worked for the various PLO departments and bodies. On a regional level, the Gulf War was followed by the expulsion of a large number of Palestinians from some Gulf countries, particularly Kuwait, and consequently their return to the WBGS. The study also links social factors to the return of some Palestinians, particularly marriage. The effect of economic factors on the return of Palestinians from abroad appears to be very limited. This is not surprising considering the poor economic conditions and limited job opportunities available in the Palestinian economy.