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# Migration during Economic Crisis: The Case of Egypt

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**Migration during Economic Crisis: The Case of Egypt**

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**Abstract**
Egypt has experienced a major economic crisis since March 2022, which has had substantial impacts on food inflation and standards of living. This crisis was compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic, its global implications, and the Russian invasion of Ukraine. For many Egyptians, international temporary migration and remittances have been coping mechanisms, allowing them to diversify their income. This paper investigates the role played by international migration as a livelihood strategy during the recent economic crisis. It highlights the trends and patterns of current overseas migration, return migration, remittances and migration intentions for the period covering the COVID-19 pandemic and the economic crisis. The findings show that while the international emigration rate has increased, the return migration rate has substantially declined. In addition, the profile of migrants has changed as the share of low educated migrants increased, as well as the share of those holding precarious jobs prior to migrating. There results suggest that recent economic conditions in Egypt may be reshaping the patterns of Egyptian migration.

**Keywords:**
International migration, return migration, remittances, Egypt

**JEL codes:**
J61, J40

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**Résumé**

L'Égypte traverse une grave crise économique depuis mars 2022, avec des répercussions importantes sur l'inflation alimentaire et le niveau de vie. Cette crise a été aggravée par la pandémie de COVID-19, ses implications mondiales, ainsi que par l'invasion russe de l'Ukraine. Pour de nombreux Égyptiens, la migration temporaire à l'international et les envois de fonds ont constitué des mécanismes d'adaptation, leur permettant de diversifier leurs sources de revenus. Cet article examine le rôle joué par la migration internationale en tant que stratégie de subsistance durant la récente crise économique. Il met en lumière les tendances et les dynamiques de la migration internationale en cours, des retours, des transferts de fonds et des intentions migratoires pour la période couvrant la pandémie de COVID-19 et la crise économique. Les résultats montrent que si le taux d'émigration internationale a augmenté, le taux de retour a fortement diminué. De plus, le profil des migrants a évolué, avec une part croissante de migrants peu instruits ainsi que de personnes occupant des emplois précaires avant leur départ. Ces résultats suggèrent que les conditions économiques récentes en Égypte pourraient être en train de transformer les dynamiques migratoires égyptiennes.

**Mots-clés :**
Migration internationale, retour, envois de fonds, Égypte

# 1. Introduction

In the second half of March 2020, the world was brought to an almost standstill by the COVID-19 pandemic. Restrictions on mobility, internal or international, were at the core of government's responses to the pandemic and the consequences of these restrictions still shape migration today. In Egypt, the pandemic stopped the economic recovery that had started in 2016 (see for example Krafft et al., 2023). In the aftermath of the pandemic, global inflation, created by both interruptions in supply chains and the Russia-Ukraine war, gradually worsened the situation until Egypt experienced a major economic crisis starting in March 2022 (see Alazzawi and Hlasny, 2023 and Abay et al., 2022). As migration has traditionally been strongly linked to the country's economic growth strategy, either as a means to relieve pressure on the domestic labor market or a source of foreign currency through remittances (Abdel Fattah and Heggy, 2023), it is important to understand the recent changes in the patterns of the Egyptian international migration and reflect on how they impact livelihoods.

In this paper, we use the Egypt Labor Market Panel Survey (ELMPS) 2023 data in order to examine international migration, looking both at the evolution of the flows and characteristics of international migrants and at the profiles of returnees. The COVID-19 pandemic not only temporarily stopped and consequently slowed down the departures in overseas migration, but it also resulted in the unplanned return of substantial numbers of Egyptians from abroad. We analyze how the outflows of migration have picked up after the pandemic and, given the economic crisis in Egypt and increased vulnerability, how the profile of emigrants has changed. Regarding returnees, we also analyze the evolution in their profile, not only as a result of the pandemic-linked returns, but also as the demand for foreign workers in the Gulf countries has slowly decreased (Alsahi, 2020), which might be reflected in the choices of destination and the duration of migration. The data also allow us to better understand the role of remittances, which, in Egypt, is very substantial. According to the World Bank (2023), Egypt has been one of the top receivers of remittances worldwide. Finally, we also study the intentions to migrate, based on the expressed intent to migrate in the next 5 years, which will give us a glimpse of potential changes in patterns during the economic crisis.

While Egypt is still one of the major origin countries for international migration in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, the economic downturn is changing the country's migration profile. Our findings highlight the changing patterns of international migration post-COVID-19 and during the recent economic crisis in 2022, in particular, the increase in the current emigration rate, and the decline in the return migration rate. In addition, the profile of migrants has changed as the share of low educated migrants has increased, as well as the share of those with precarious jobs prior to migrating. Also, the results show an increase in the share of households receiving remittances, with these remittances being increasingly sent through informal means. Given the substantial role of international migration and remittances for the Egyptian economy, it is important to collect timely regular data on the numbers and characteristics of Egyptian migrants and returnees. The ELMPS is a good example of the data efforts that are needed and the next section briefly introduces the survey with a focus on the migration-related information that it provides.

## 2. Data

The ELMPS is a nationally representative panel survey carried out by the Economic Research Forum (ERF) in cooperation with Egypt's Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS).[1] The ELMPS is a wide-ranging panel survey that covers topics such as employment, unemployment, job dynamics and earnings and provides rich information on residential mobility, international and return migration experiences, education, and socio-economic characteristics.

The ELMPS has been administered to nationally representative samples since 1998. The ELMPS 2023 follows four survey waves that were conducted in 1998, 2006, 2012 and 2018. The 2023 round surveyed 70,636 individuals who belonged to 17,784 households. It tracks households and individuals that were previously interviewed in 2018, some of which were also interviewed in 2012, 2006 and 1998. Others belong to a refresher sample of households added in 2023. The ELMPS has rich data on current and return migrants. For current international migration, household members were asked if they had household members living or working overseas. Information on the characteristics of these current migrants and their migration experience was collected, including age, sex, education, year of migration, country of destination, labor market status, employment status, and sector of employment before migration. The return migration module surveyed individuals aged between 15 and 59 years old. It asked surveyed individuals whether they have worked abroad for more than six months and features return migrants' characteristics before, during, and after migration, frequency of migration, reasons for migration, reasons for return, year and country of first and final migration episode, year of final return, whether the individual travelled alone or with other family members, whether the individual planned on traveling temporarily or permanently, as well as other relevant information on remittances and savings behaviors abroad. The migration intentions module asks whether individuals are planning to migrate in the next five years. Individuals are asked to which country they want to migrate, what push factors in Egypt influence their intention to go abroad and what pull factors outside of Egypt attract them to go abroad.

[1] To access the ELMPS data go to: www.erfdataportal.com. For more information about ELMPS 2023, see Assaad and Krafft (2024).

In this paper, we examine the recent trends in international and return migration[2] focusing on individuals aged between 15 and 59 years old and highlighting the impact of COVID-19 and of the multifactor economic crisis.[3] For the analysis, we use three waves ELMPS 2023, 2018 and 2012 but mostly rely on the ELMPS 2018 and 2023, to compare the outcomes of interest before and after COVID-19.[4] First, we examine the share of international migrants and return migrants by year of migration. We also examine the distribution of international and return migrants across destination countries and we examine the migration rates by levels of education. We analyze the employment characteristics of international migrants before migration in terms of work and employment statuses. We compare the characteristics of current international migrants between 2018 and 2023 but also focus on those who migrated before COVID-19 (before 2020) and those who migrated after COVID-19 (after 2020). For return migrants we investigate the reasons for migration and the reasons for return. Relying on individual and household level data, we also compute international and return migration rates, as well as the incidence of any overseas migration (international and return) at the individual and household levels. We also examine the percentage of households receiving remittances in 2018 and 2023 and the characteristics of those households such as the sex, age, education and employment status of the household head, the household size and wealth quintile of the household, and also the channels through which the remittances are being sent. Finally, we examine trends in migration intentions between 2018 and 2023, the characteristics of those intending to migrate in the next 5 years, and the main push and pull factors for wanting to migrate.

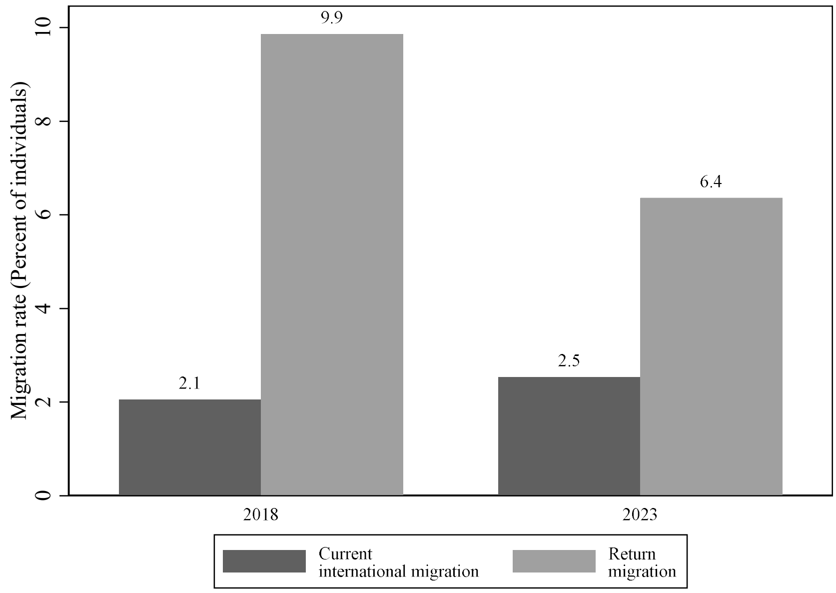
It is important to note though that while Egypt has always been a host country for refugees fleeing conflicts in region, their number considerably increased since 2011 and UN DESA estimates that between 2000 and 2019 the number of international forced migrants living in Egypt increased 18 times (UN DESA 2019). This number has further substantially increased in 2024 with the largescale arrival of Sudanese fleeing the protracted war. However, unfortunately, the ELPMS 2023 does not allow us to study the impact of refugees or transit migrants in Egypt due to their small sample size so we do not include in our analysis immigration-related dimensions.[5] In the rest of the paper, we focus on current Egyptian emigrants and Egyptian return migrants, and their households to examine the impact of the pandemic and national economic crisis that ensued afterward.

[2] To identify return migrants we use those who answered the return migration module in the current or previous wave if they are tracked in the current wave. For 2023 we use 2018 and 2023 return migration modules, and for 2018 we use 2012 and 2018 return migration modules.
[3] See Anda et al. (2022) who examined the trends for international and internal migration using ELMPS 2018.
[4] We use ELMPS 2012 in Figures 1 and 2 to show the long-term trends in international migration.
[5] Note that ELMPS 2023 is representative of the national population but does not oversample immigrants and refugees in Egypt.

# 3. International Migration: Trends and Patterns

International migration remains high in Egypt and Figure 1 shows an increase in the number of current international migrants in 2023 representing 2.5 percent of all individuals[6] aged 15 to 59, while they only represented 2.1 percent in 2018. We also observe a decrease in the share of returnees, aged 15 to 59, from 9.9 percent in 2018 to 6.4 percent in 2023. This suggests that there has been a change in the pattern of migration with a higher emigration rate and lower return migration rate in 2023 compared to 2018.

**Figure 1: Return and current international migration rates (percentage of individuals) in 2018 and 2023 (ages 15-59)**
Source: Authors' calculations based on ELMPS 2018-2023.

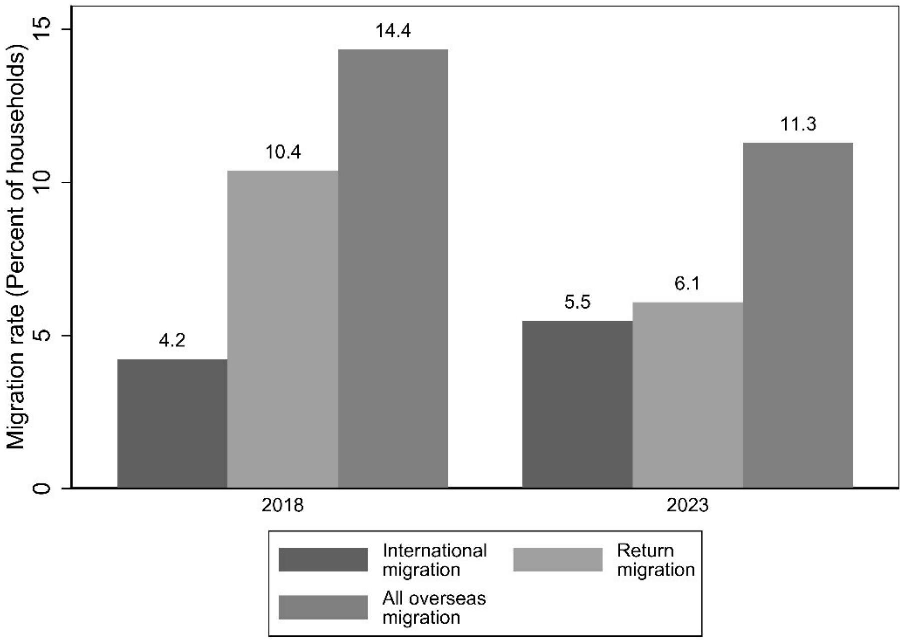



At the household level, 11 percent of all households were exposed to international migration in 2023, either because they had a current international migrant (5.5 percent) or because they had a return migrant (6.1 percent) (Figure 2). This reflects the importance of international migration in Egypt. Although the overall share of households exposed to international migration was lower than in 2018, at 11.3 percent compared to 14.4 percent, this was driven by lower return migration rates as the share of current international migration increased during that period. This pattern suggests that the recent economic crisis was pushing more Egyptians to emigrate and fewer Egyptians emigrants to return.

[6] All individuals here are current migrants plus the population of Egypt.

**Figure 2: Return and current international migration rates (percentage of households) in 2018 and 2023**

Source: Authors' calculations based on ELMPS 2018-2023.

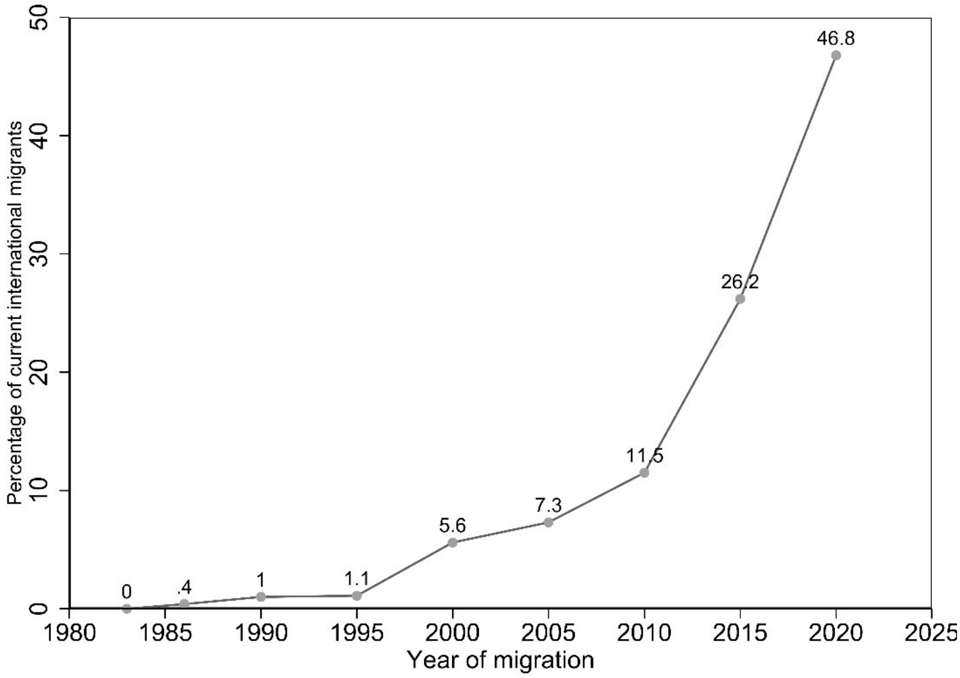



If we analyze the share of current international migration in 2023 by the year when they have migrated (Figure 3), we see more recent current migration, with almost half of current migrants (46.8 percent) having left since 2020, reflecting the temporary nature of Egyptian international migration.[7]

[7] This refers to migrants who left Egypt between 1980 and 2023.

**Figure 3: Current international migrants by year of migration (percentage), 1980-2023**

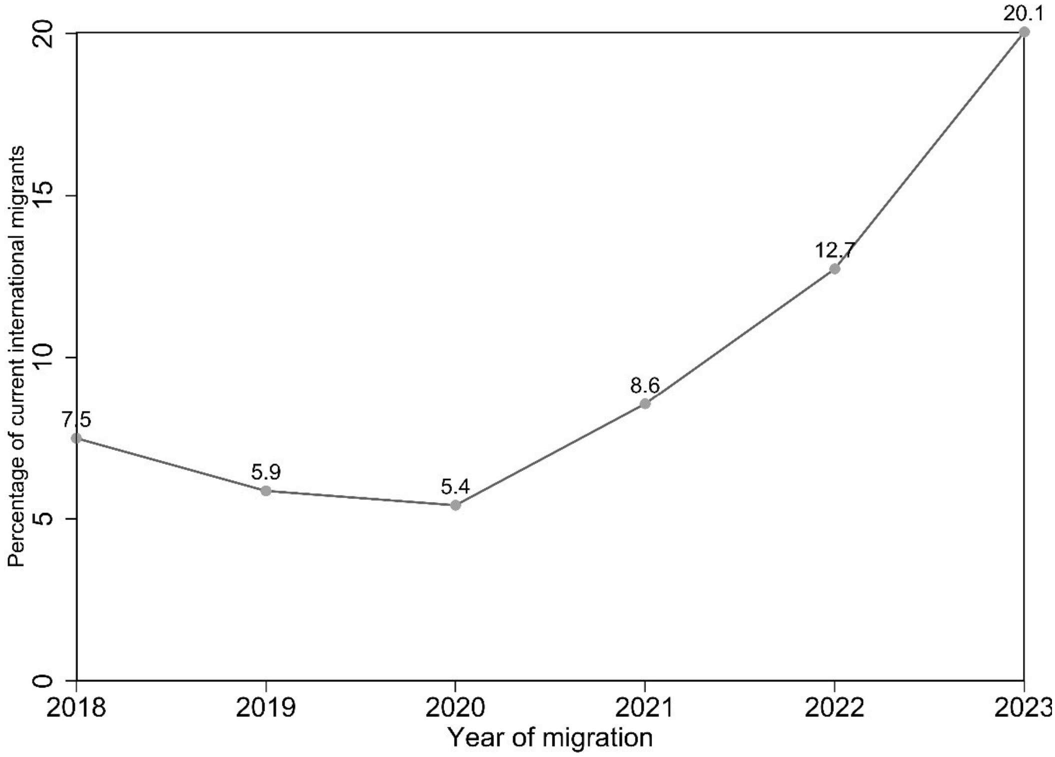
Source: Authors' calculations based on ELMPS 2023.




Notes: The data are categorized into five-year intervals. The 2020 data point is not a full 5 year interval as it corresponds to the period between 2020 and 2023.

Figure 4, focusing just on the period since 2018, shows the apparent slowdown in migration rates due to the COVID-19 pandemic that hit in 2020 and the subsequently sharp increase in current international migration afterward as global mobility resumed but also as Egypt faced economic challenges. About 7.5 percent of current migrants left in 2018, but only 5.4 percent left in 2020 due to COVID-19, though since COVID-19, the share of current migrants has increased to 12.7 percent in 2022 and 20.1 percent in 2023.

**Figure 4: Current international migrants by year of migration focus in 2018-2023, during COVID-19 and the economic crisis (percentage)**
Source: Authors' calculations based on ELMPS 2023.




Note: The percentages refer to share of current migrants out of all current migrants regardless of year.

In terms of destinations, we observe a slight diversification since 2018. Saudi Arabia continued to attract the highest share of Egyptian migrants (44.7 percent of current international migrants in 2023 compared to 40.7 percent in 2018). However, the share of current migrants in Kuwait decreased from 24.2 percent to 16.2 percent between 2018 and 2023. Also, around 10.0 percent of current migrants were in Jordan, down from 10.5 percent in 2018 and 9.4 percent were in UAE, up from 8.0 percent in 2018. Interestingly the share of current migrants in Libya increased from 3.3 percent in 2018 to 10.7 percent in 2023. As a result of conflict in Libya following the fall out of President Gaddafi in 2011, most immigrants had left, but since then immigration has been increasing despite the ongoing conflict. It should also be noted that Libya has become a transit country to Europe, which can explain the substantial increase in migration flows.[8] Moreover, destinations such as other non-OECD countries (2.5 percent in 2023 vs 1.7 percent in 2018) and the EU (2.7 percent in 2023 vs 2.6 percent in 2018) appear to have attracted higher shares of current migrants in 2023 compared to 2018, albeit still small in terms of magnitude relative to migration to the Gulf. However, these relatively small percentages might be due to the fact that migration to EU, OECD and non-Arab countries tends to involve whole households and therefore would not be well captured in our data.

[8] See IOM (2023) for the characteristics of Egyptian migrant workers in Libya, and their migration intentions to stay in Libya.

Furthermore, Figure 5 shows the first destinations of return migrants in 2023 compared to in 2018 which display similar patterns to those of current migrants. For instance, the majority of returnees migrated to Saudi Arabia in both 2018 and 2023 (28.7 percent vs. 33.2 percent). Interestingly, Libya is the second most popular destination from where migrants return, though this share has declined in 2023 compared to in 2018 (24.5 percent compared to 22.6 percent). Jordan was the third most likely destination of where return migrants had gone in 2023 with 14.4 percent. Overall, Figure 5 shows that, in 2023, Egyptian migration was still dominated by temporary migration to other Arab countries and in particular Saudi Arabia, which is attracting almost half of current migrants.

In terms of current migrants' characteristics (see Table 1, which includes t-tests for statistically significant differences over time), the main differences over time relate to education and labor market outcomes. In 2023, migrants appear to be much less educated, with the percentage of those having a university or above education falling by almost seven percentage points and those with below secondary education increasing by 4 percentage points compared to 2018. A significantly higher share of current migrants were unemployed before migration (41 percent in 2023 versus 30 percent in 2018) and only half of current migrants were working before migrating in 2023 (51.5 percent versus 65.5 percent in 2018) suggesting that a lack of (acceptable) jobs was a factor in pushing individuals to emigrate. Among those who were employed prior to migrating, those who were irregular waged workers continued to be the largest group amongst current migrants in 2023 (42.5 percent). The share of employers, prior to migrating, doubled albeit was still a small proportion at 3.7 percent versus 1.9 percent in 2018 and the share of the current migrants who were self-employed before migrating more than doubled in 2023 (8.2 percent) compared to 2018 (2.9 percent). Interestingly, when we compare the two recent waves of the survey, we see that there was no significant difference in the incidence of individuals with work contracts before migration, or in informality status of current migrants when measured as lack of access to social security over that period. We also notice an increase in current migrants from the first (poorest) and second wealth quintiles and a decrease in current migrants from the fifth (richest) wealth quintile. Overall, comparing current migrants in 2018 and in 2023 shows a change in the profile of current migrants: lower education and higher precariousness in the labor market.

If we take a closer look at the differences in the current migrant profiles of those who migrated before and after the COVID-19 pandemic (2018-2019 vs. 2020-2023) in Table 2, which includes t-tests for statistically significant differences over time, we see that the differences between the profiles of current migrants in 2023 compared to in 2018 are mostly driven by the profiles of those that have migrated after the pandemic. Table 2 also highlights that the share of those who were irregular wage workers pre-migration (among those who worked pre-migration) increased from 29 percent to 47 percent and that of regular wage workers decreased from 53 percent to 34 percent from before COVID-19 (2018-19) to post COVID-19 (2021-2023). Despite the smaller sample size of current migrants in 2018-2019, Table 2 suggests that after COVID-19, current migrants were younger and less likely to be married. This might be a pure time-related effect, with current migrant who left post COVID-19 being more recent than those who left before COVID-19 in 2018-2019. Overall, Tables 1 and 2 suggest that there was a change in the profile of current migrants in 2023 compared to in 2018, amplified by those who migrated post-COVID-19. Migrants in 2023 were more likely to be drawn from those not working and those with unstable jobs, perhaps reflecting the changing nature of the labor market but more importantly the impacts of the pandemic and the economic crisis. Overall, this reflects a deterioration in the economic/employment situation in Egypt and a change in the profile of current migrants.

**Figure 5: Destination countries of current international migrants and return migrants (percentages) in 2018 and 2023**

Source: Authors' calculations based on ELMPS 2018- 2023.

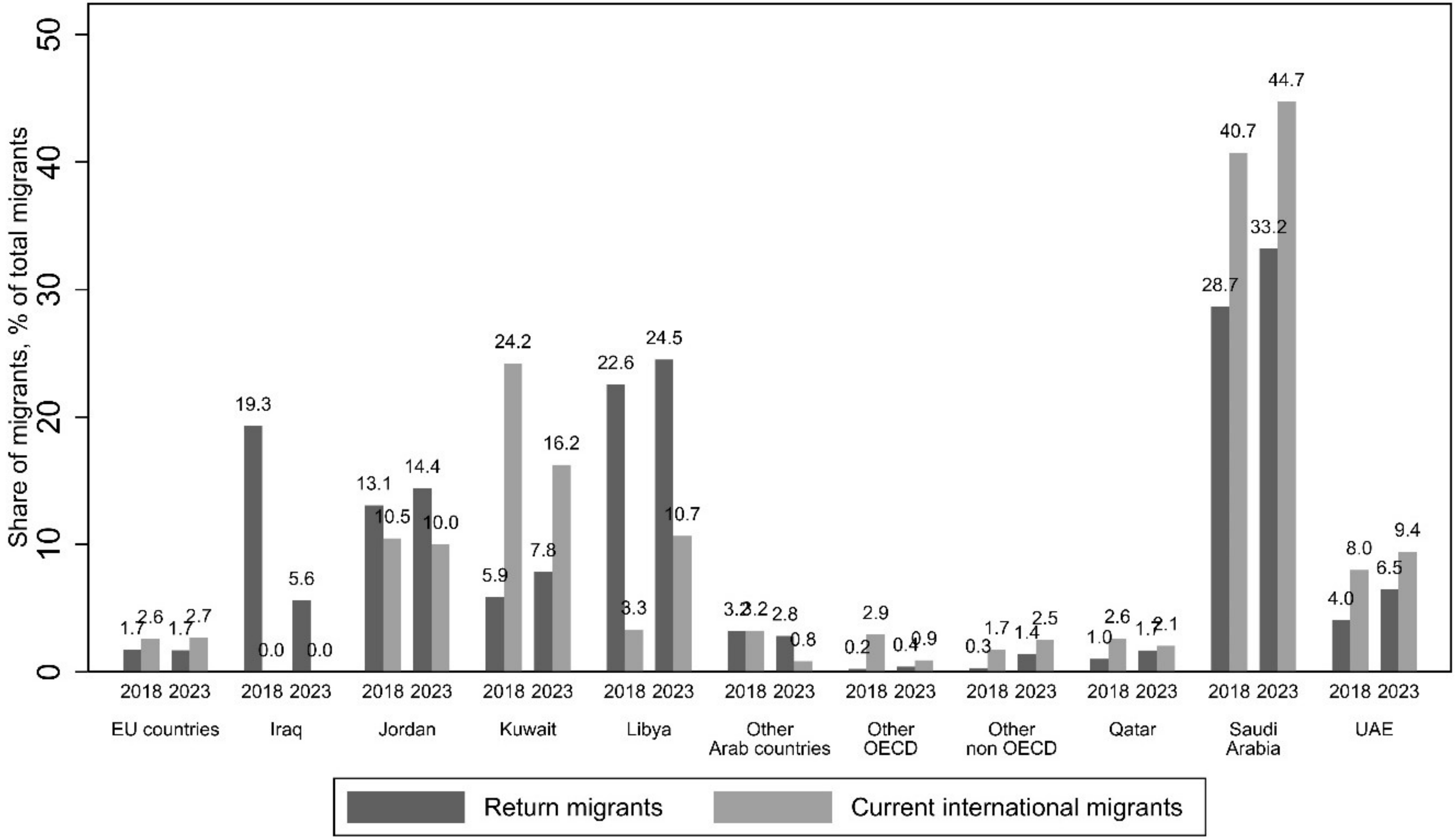


**Table 1: Characteristics of current international migrants in 2018 and 2023**

| | Current international migrants in 2018 | | Current international migrants in 2023 | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) |
| VARIABLES | N | mean | N | mean | Difference (4)-(2) |
| *Demographic characteristics* | 809 | | 1,210 | | |
| Male | | 0.975 | | 0.969 | -0.006 |
| Age | | 36.69 | | 35.99 | -0.700 |
| Married | | 0.798 | | 0.759 | -0.039 |
| *Educational level* | | | | | |
| Illiterate or read and write | | 0.115 | | 0.119 | 0.004 |
| Below secondary | | 0.077 | | 0.116 | 0.039** |
| Secondary & post sec. | | 0.514 | | 0.536 | 0.022 |
| University and above | | 0.294 | | 0.229 | -0.065* |
| *Relationship to the household head* | 809 | | 1,210 | | |
| Spouse | | 0.661 | | 0.642 | -0.019 |
| Son or daughter | | 0.305 | | 0.320 | 0.015 |
| Other | | 0.034 | | 0.038 | 0.004 |
| *Migration experience* | 805 | | 1,209 | | |
| Traveled alone | | 0.957 | | 0.955 | -0.002 |
| Traveled with other household members | | 0.043 | | 0.045 | 0.002 |
| *Labor market status before migration* | 776 | | 1,155 | | |
| Working | | 0.655 | | 0.515 | -0.140*** |
| Unemployed | | 0.299 | | 0.410 | 0.111*** |
| Not working and not seeking work | | 0.046 | | 0.075 | 0.029** |
| *Employment status before migration, among those employed before migration* | 486 | | 596 | | |
| Regular wage worker | | 0.365 | | 0.388 | 0.023 |
| Irregular wage worker | | 0.514 | | 0.425 | -0.089* |
| Employer | | 0.019 | | 0.037 | 0.019* |
| Self-employed | | 0.029 | | 0.082 | 0.053*** |
| Unpaid worker | | 0.074 | | 0.068 | -0.007 |
| *Sector of employment and job characteristics before migration* | 488 | | 612 | | |
| Public sector employment | | 0.073 | | 0.100 | 0.025 |
| Private sector employment | | 0.927 | | 0.878 | -0.049* |
| Incidence of work contract | | 0.239 | | 0.300 | 0.061 |
| Incidence of social insurance | | 0.120 | | 0.113 | -0.007 |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Household Geographical region* | 810 | | 1,210 | | |
| Greater Cairo | | 0.059 | | 0.021 | -0.038 |
| Alexandria and Canal Cities | | 0.033 | | 0.026 | -0.007 |
| Urban Lower Egypt | | 0.084 | | 0.078 | -0.006 |
| Urban Upper Egypt | | 0.068 | | 0.077 | 0.009 |
| Rural Lower Egypt | | 0.376 | | 0.372 | -0.004 |
| Rural Upper Egypt | | 0.380 | | 0.426 | 0.046 |
| | | | | | |
| *Household's Wealth Quintile* | 810 | | 1,210 | | |
| Wealth Quintile 1 | | 0.118 | | 0.153 | 0.035* |
| Wealth Quintile 2 | | 0.156 | | 0.207 | 0.051** |
| Wealth Quintile 3 | | 0.172 | | 0.208 | 0.036 |
| Wealth Quintile 4 | | 0.209 | | 0.198 | -0.011 |
| Wealth Quintile 5 | | 0.345 | | 0.234 | -0.111*** |

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

*Notes.* Column 5 is t-test for whether the difference in means between 2023 and 2018 is statistically significant.

**Table 2 Characteristics of current international migrants before and after COVID-19 (migrated in 2018-2019 vs. 2021-2023)**

| | Migrated before COVID (2018-2019) | | Migrated after COVID (2021-2023) | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) |
| VARIABLES | N | mean | N | mean | Difference (4)-(2) |
| *Demographic characteristics* | 156 | | 518 | | |
| Male | | 0.979 | | 0.961 | -0.018 |
| Age | | 33.70 | | 31.90 | -1.800** |
| Married | | 0.771 | | 0.587 | -0.184*** |
| | | | | | |
| *Educational level* | | | | | |
| Illiterate or read and write | | 0.110 | | 0.108 | -0.002 |
| Below secondary | | 0.089 | | 0.134 | 0.045 |
| Secondary and post-secondary | | 0.514 | | 0.537 | 0.023 |
| University and above | | 0.287 | | 0.221 | -0.066 |
| | | | | | |
| *Relationship to the household head* | 156 | | 518 | | |
| Spouse | | 0.624 | | 0.486 | -0.138** |
| Son or daughter | | 0.347 | | 0.481 | 0.134** |
| Other | | 0.029 | | 0.033 | 0.004 |
| | | | | | |
| *Migration experience* | 156 | | 518 | | |
| Traveled alone | | 0.962 | | 0.938 | -0.023 |
| Traveled with other household members | | 0.039 | | 0.060 | 0.022 |
| | | | | | |
| *Labor market before migration* | 155 | | 478 | | |
| Working | | 0.523 | | 0.518 | -0.005 |
| Unemployed | | 0.409 | | 0.403 | -0.006 |
| Not working and not seeking work | | 0.068 | | 0.079 | 0.011 |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Employment status before migration, among those employed before migration* | 74 | | 266 | | |
| Regular wage worker | | 0.526 | | 0.336 | -0.190** |
| Irregular wage worker | | 0.285 | | 0.471 | 0.186** |
| Employer | | 0.009 | | 0.040 | 0.031* |
| Self-employed | | 0.071 | | 0.079 | 0.007 |
| Unpaid worker | | 0.109 | | 0.075 | -0.034 |
| | | | | | |
| *Sector of employment and job characteristics before migration* | 73 | | 274 | | |
| Public sector employment | | 0.144 | | 0.082 | -0.061 |
| Private sector employment | | 0.856 | | 0.875 | 0.019 |
| Incidence of work contract | | 0.435 | | 0.280 | -0.155 |
| Incidence of social insurance | | 0.127 | | 0.082 | -0.045 |
| | | | | | |
| *Household Geographical region* | 156 | | 518 | | |
| Greater Cairo | | 0 | | 0.018 | 0.018* |
| Alexandria and Canal Cities | | 0.034 | | 0.015 | -0.019 |
| Urban Lower Egypt | | 0.125 | | 0.084 | -0.041 |
| Urban Upper Egypt | | 0.071 | | 0.059 | -0.012 |
| Rural Lower Egypt | | 0.319 | | 0.427 | 0.108 |
| Rural Upper Egypt | | 0.451 | | 0.396 | -0.055 |
| | | | | | |
| *Household's Wealth Quintile* | 156 | | 518 | | |
| Wealth Quintile 1 | | 0.133 | | 0.190 | 0.057 |
| Wealth Quintile 2 | | 0.177 | | 0.253 | 0.076 |
| Wealth Quintile 3 | | 0.216 | | 0.198 | -0.018 |
| Wealth Quintile 4 | | 0.172 | | 0.189 | 0.017 |
| Wealth Quintile 5 | | 0.301 | | 0.170 | -0.131** |

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

*Notes.* Column 5 is t-test for whether the difference in means between 2018 and 2023 is statistically significant.

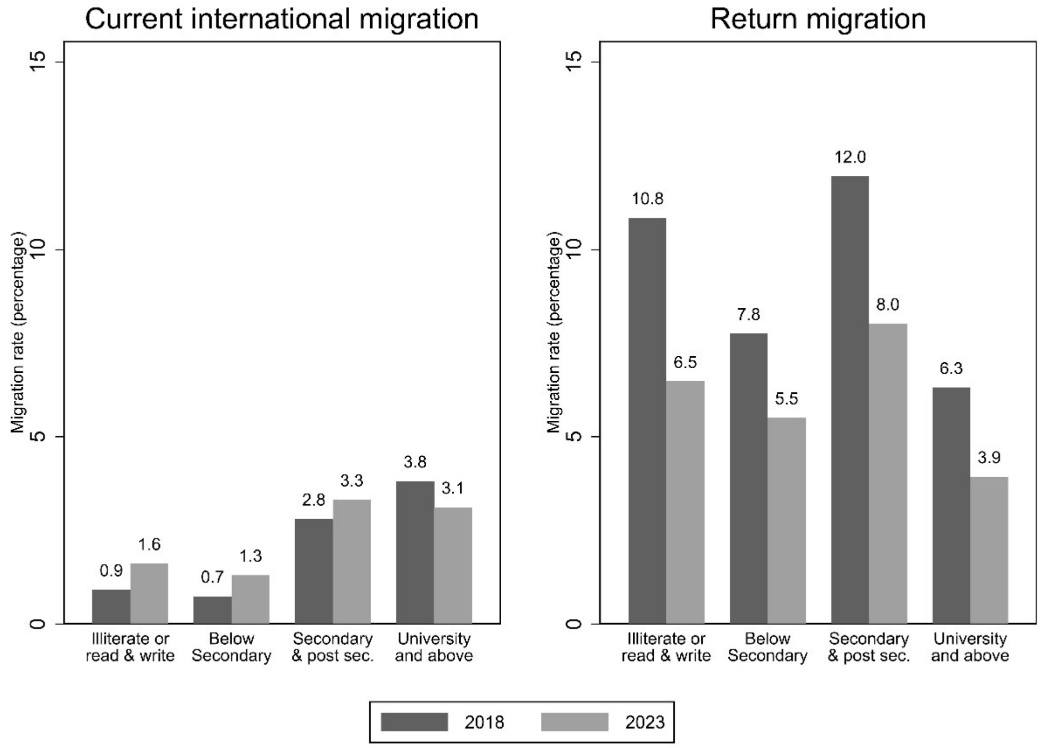
It is also useful not only to examine the characteristics of current migrants but also the patterns and trends of emigration by educational level. Figure 6 presents the migration rates by education for both international migration rates (emigration rates based on current migrants) and return migration in 2018 and 2023. All educational groups except the university educated experienced an increase in emigration rate between 2018 and 2023. The emigration rates of those illiterate or can read or write increased between 2018 and 2023 from 0.9 percent to 1.9 percent and those with below secondary degrees from 0.7 percent to 1.3 percent over 2018 to 2023. Interestingly the emigration rate of secondary and above increased to 3.3 percent and was similar to the emigration rate of university degree holder (3.1 percent) in 2023.[9] Also, the rate of return migration declined for all educational groups, but the return migration rate was much higher than the current migration rate for all

[9] Note that in 2023, the emigration rate of secondary and post-secondary (3.3 percent) wasn't statistically different from the emigration rate of university and above (3.1 percent).

educational groups, which is consistent with previous patterns and with the temporary nature of migration in Egypt (Figure 6). However, those with university degrees had the lowest return migration rate despite having a high emigration rate.

**Figure 6: Migration rates by education (ages 15-59) and type of migration in 2018 and 2023 (percentage)**

Source: Authors' calculations based on ELMPS 2018 - 2023.

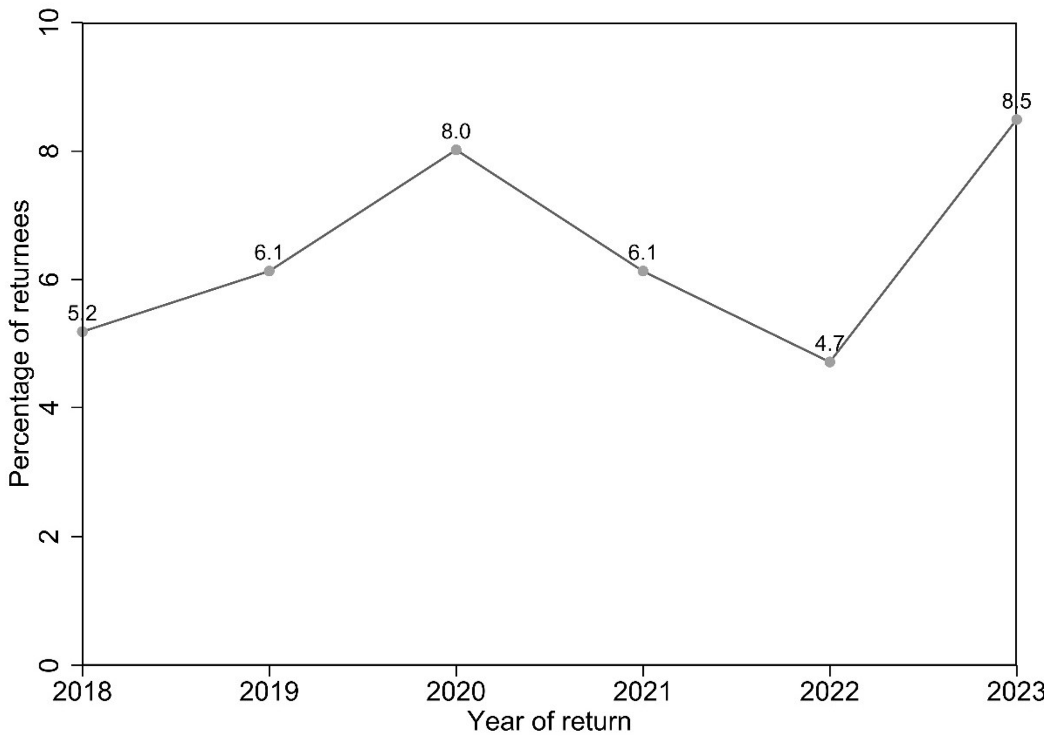



# 4. Return Migration

When looking at the share of return migrants by year of return (Figure 7), we observe the effects of COVID-19, with an increase in the share of returnees (8.0 percent) in 2020, followed by a slowdown in 2021 (6.1 percent) and 2022 (4.7 percent). But as the global recession due to COVID-19 and the Russia-Ukraine war deepened, the share of returnees increased to 8.5 percent in 2023. However, it is important to note that this trend in return migration is complex to interpret as it is potentially affected by both host countries' labor market and lower demand for labor as a result of the global recession as well as the economic conditions in Egypt.

**Figure 7: Percentage of return migrants, by year of final (most recent) return, focus on 2018 and 2023**

Source: Authors' calculations based on ELMPS 2023.




Note: Percentages of returnees as share of all returnees regardless of year of return. Numbers in figure do not add to 100%. Data does not include the additional returnees from the 2018 wave.

In Table 3 (testing for significant changes from 2018 to 2023) we analyze the evolution from 2018 to 2023 in the characteristics of return migrants and again we observe a slight change in the pattern of migration, with returnees in the recent survey wave being less likely to be uneducated (illiterate or read and write) and more likely to be secondary or post-secondary educated. Interestingly, the share of returnees who wanted to travel abroad permanently increased significantly. Also, recent return migrants were less likely to have migrated in the first place because they were not employed, unlike for the most recent current migrants in 2023 in Table 1. In 2023, they were more likely to migrate for higher wages. In addition, returnees in 2023 were more likely to be employed and less likely to be out of the labor force, which was more common for earlier cohorts of return migrants in 2018 and 2012 (see David, Elmallakh and Wahba, 2022).

**Table 3: Characteristics of return migrants in 2018 and 2023**

| | Return migrants in 2018 | | Return migrants in 2023 | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) |
| VARIABLES | N | mean | N | mean | Difference (4)-(2) |
| *Demographic characteristics* | 1,759 | | 1,276 | | |
| Male | | 0.989 | | 0.994 | 0.005 |
| Age | | 44.26 | | 44.67 | 0.410 |
| Married | | 0.917 | | 0.916 | -0.001 |
| | | | | | |
| *Educational Level* | | | | | |
| Illiterate or read and write | | 0.263 | | 0.181 | -0.082*** |
| Below secondary | | 0.122 | | 0.132 | 0.010 |
| Secondary and post secondary | | 0.481 | | 0.537 | 0.056** |
| University and above | | 0.133 | | 0.150 | 0.017 |
| | | | | | |
| *Migration spells and experience* | 1,750 | | 1,274 | | |
| Traveled once for work | | 0.801 | | 0.752 | -0.049** |
| Traveled twice for work | | 0.135 | | 0.147 | 0.012 |
| Traveled more than twice for work | | 0.065 | | 0.101 | 0.037*** |
| Traveled alone | | 0.970 | | 0.976 | 0.006 |
| Traveled with other household members | | 0.030 | | 0.024 | -0.006 |
| Planned to travel temporarily | | 0.866 | | 0.831 | -0.035** |
| Planned to travel permanently | | 0.117 | | 0.169 | 0.052*** |
| | | | | | |
| *Reasons for migration* | 1,752 | | 1,273 | | |
| Unemployed and seeking work | | 0.225 | | 0.221 | -0.004 |
| Found a better job | | 0.546 | | 0.467 | -0.079*** |
| Higher wages | | 0.098 | | 0.145 | 0.047*** |
| To help the family financially | | 0.051 | | 0.060 | 0.010 |
| Other reasons | | 0.081 | | 0.106 | 0.025 |
| | | | | | |
| *Current work status* | 1,749 | | 1,268 | | |
| Employed | | 0.947 | | 0.966 | 0.019* |
| Unemployed | | 0.015 | | 0.016 | 0.001 |
| Out of labor force | | 0.039 | | 0.018 | -0.020*** |
| | | | | | |
| *Geographical region* | 1,759 | | 1,276 | | |
| Greater Cairo | | 0.072 | | 0.057 | -0.015 |
| Alexandria and Canal Cities | | 0.048 | | 0.028 | -0.020 |
| Urban Lower Egypt | | 0.101 | | 0.108 | 0.007 |
| Urban Upper Egypt | | 0.052 | | 0.061 | 0.009 |
| Rural Lower Egypt | | 0.415 | | 0.382 | -0.033 |
| Rural Upper Egypt | | 0.311 | | 0.363 | 0.052** |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Wealth Quintile* | 1,749 | | 1,276 | | |
| Wealth Quintile 1 | | 0.188 | | 0.185 | -0.003 |
| Wealth Quintile 2 | | 0.205 | | 0.240 | 0.035* |
| Wealth Quintile 3 | | 0.236 | | 0.180 | -0.056*** |
| Wealth Quintile 4 | | 0.195 | | 0.235 | 0.04* |
| Wealth Quintile 5 | | 0.176 | | 0.159 | -0.017 |

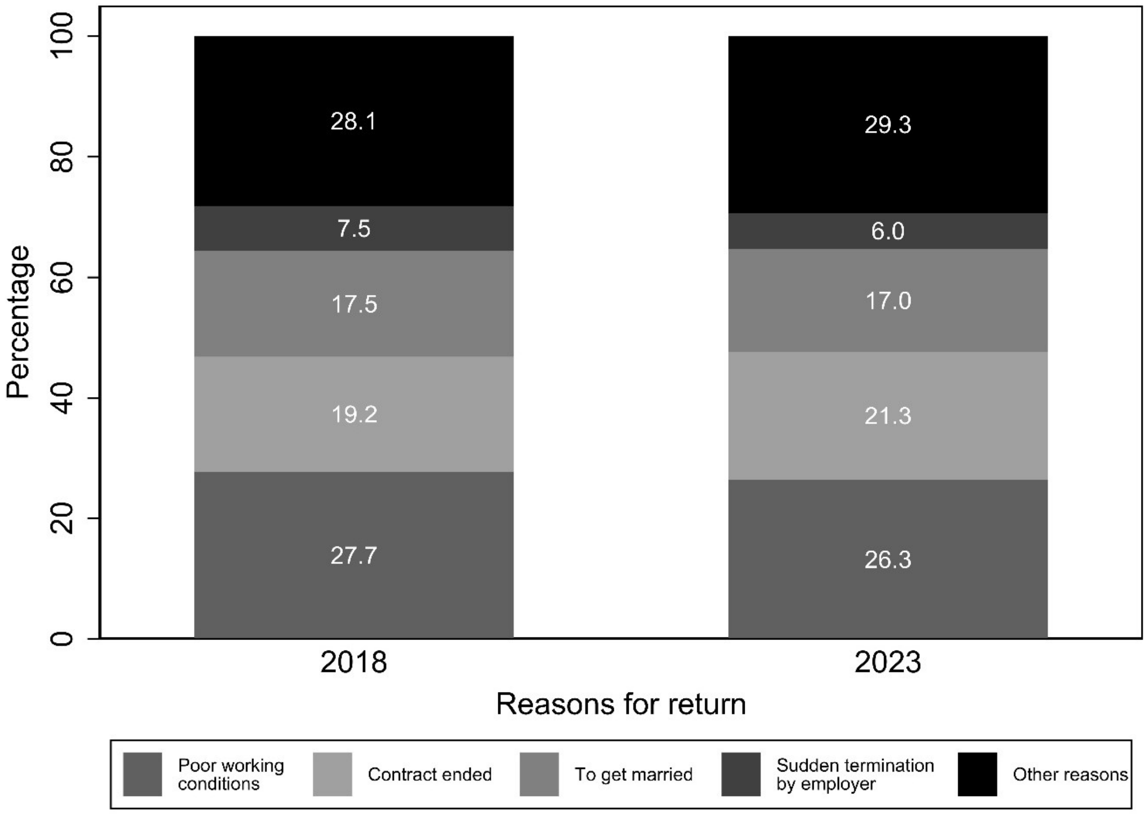
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

*Notes.* Column 5 is t-test for whether the difference in means between 2018 and 2023 is statistically significant. Return migration refers to final (most recent) migration.

The reasons for return (Figure 8) show only small changes in the profile of return migrants between 2018 and 2023 – the return being due to poor working conditions abroad becomes slightly less frequent in 2023 (27.7 percent of return migrants had indicated poor working conditions as the reason for return in 2018 and this percentage fell to 26.3 percent in 2023), as did the return to get married (from 17.5 percent to 17.0 percent), while the return at the end of the contract increased by 2 percentage points (from 19.2 percent in 2018 to 21.3 percent in 2023).

**Figure 8: Main reason for return migration from final (most recent) migration in 2018 and 2023 (percentage)**

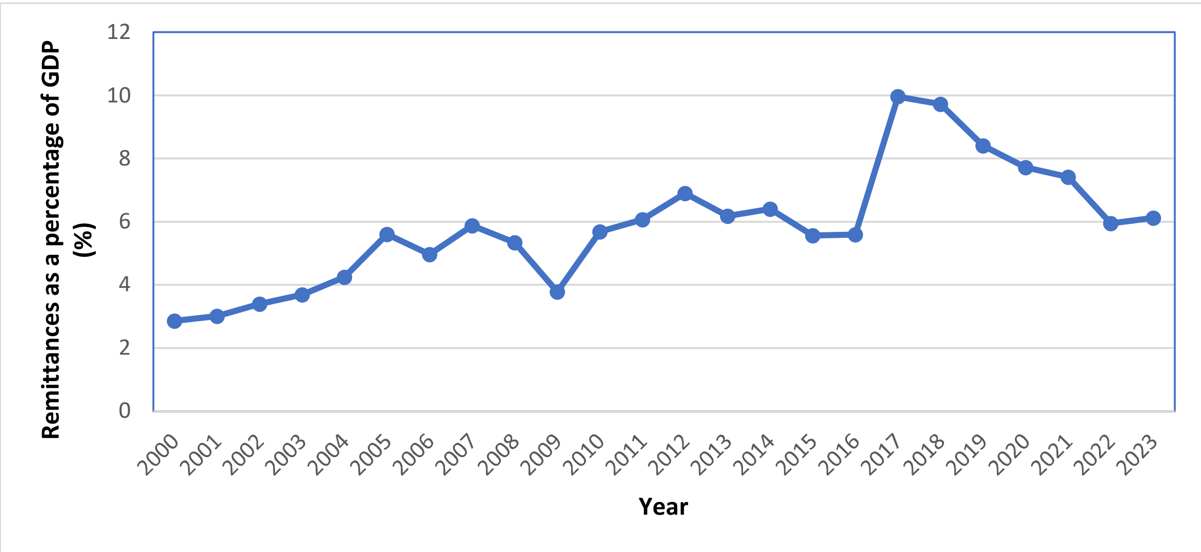
Source: Authors' calculations based on ELMPS 2018-2023.



## 5. Remittances

Egypt has been one of the top ten countries in terms of remittances received over the few years prior to COVID-19.[10] In 2019, Egypt was the fifth highest recipient of remittances in the world, reaching $26.8 billion (World Bank, 2020). Indeed, remittances have become an important source of foreign currency contributing to 10 percent of GDP in 2017 and 2018, per Figure 9. However, with onset of COVID-19, despite the continuing important role of remittances as seen in Figure 9, remittances slowed down during and after COVID-19. This trend may be in part due to the fact that Gulf countries experienced slower economic growth, see for instance Ratha et al. (2024). However, this downward trend was compounded by the large divergence between official and parallel foreign exchange rates in Egypt in 2022 and 2023 (Ratha et al., 2024), leading to a sharp decline in remittance flows sent through official channels, which were likely to have been diverted to unofficial channels (Ratha et al., 2024).

**Figure 9: Remittances transfers into Egypt (percentage of GDP), 2000-2023**
Source: The World Bank, World Development Indicators. Personal remittances received (% of GDP).




Examining the share of households receiving remittances in 2018 (2.3 percent) and 2023 (2.9 percent), Figure 10 shows an increase, reflecting the importance of remittances as a source of income during the recent period of economic crisis in Egypt. This suggests that more households received remittances in 2023 compared to 2018 but, as seen in Table 4, there was a significant decline in the funds sent through banks and official channels (52 percent in 2023 vs. 68 percent in 2018) and a higher share of funds sent informally through friends and family (28 percent in 2023 vs. 7 percent in 2018). Thus, although the recorded remittances sent through official channels declined (Figure 9), more remittances flows were

[10] See World Bank (2020).

sent through unofficial channels, and more households received remittances in 2023 compared to in 2018. This highlights the pivotal role played by the macroeconomy and exchange rate in channeling remittances through the banking system.

**Figure 10: Households receiving remittances in 2018 and 2023 (percentages)**

Source: Authors' calculations based on ELMPS 2018 and 2023.

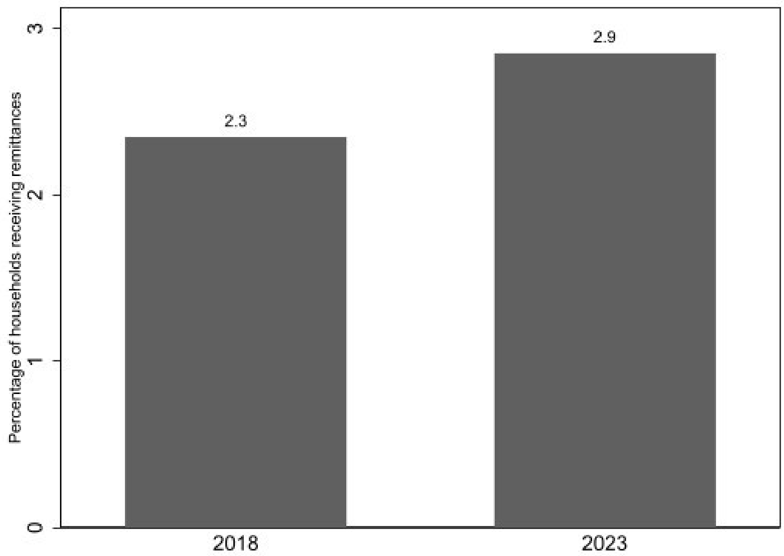



Table 4, which includes t-tests for statistically significant differences over time, also shows the characteristics of households receiving remittances in 2018 and 2023. Recipient households were equally likely to be female headed households in both years (85 percent in 2018 and 87 percent in 2023), consistent with migration being male dominated in Egypt as seen in Tables 1 and 3. The heads of recipient household were more likely to have below secondary education (18 percent vs. 11 percent) in 2023 compared to in 2018. In terms of labor market outcomes, the heads of recipient households were less likely to be unemployed (2 percent in 2023 compared to 8 percent in 2018). Moreover, when examining the wealth distribution of recipient households and, with the caveat that though remittances might be an important source of the household wealth, Table 4 shows that the share of recipient households among the top quintile decreased. In other words, recipient households were less likely to be among the richest in 2023 compared to 2018, although still more likely than other quintiles (e.g. 26 percent of the richest versus 12.6 percent of the poorest households), supporting the earlier findings about international migration increasingly being used as a coping mechanism during hard economic times.

**Table 4: Characteristics of households receiving remittances in 2018 and 2023**

| | | Households in 2018 | | Households in 2023 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) |
| VARIABLES | N | mean | N | mean | Difference (4)-(2) |
| *Household head characteristics* | | | | | |
| Female | | 0.851 | | 0.868 | 0.017 |
| Age | | 35.64 | | 36.48 | 0.840 |
| | | | | | |
| *Educational level of household head* | | | | | |
| Illiterate or read and write | | 0.264 | | 0.229 | -0.035 |
| Below secondary | | 0.107 | | 0.177 | 0.070** |
| Secondary and post-secondary | | 0.355 | | 0.391 | 0.036 |
| University and above | | 0.274 | | 0.203 | -0.071 |
| | | | | | |
| *Labor market status of household head* | | | | | |
| Employed | | 0.187 | | 0.208 | 0.021 |
| Unemployed | | 0.080 | | 0.019 | -0.061*** |
| Out of labor force | | 0.734 | | 0.773 | 0.039 |
| | | | | | |
| *Household characteristics* | | | | | |
| Household size | | 3.405 | | 3.537 | 0.132 |
| | | | | | |
| Wealth quintile 1 | | 0.093 | | 0.126 | 0.033 |
| Wealth quintile 2 | | 0.147 | | 0.191 | 0.044 |
| Wealth quintile 3 | | 0.165 | | 0.207 | 0.042 |
| Wealth quintile 4 | | 0.239 | | 0.216 | -0.023 |
| Wealth quintile 5 | | 0.357 | | 0.260 | -0.097* |
| *Geographical region* | | | | | |
| Greater Cairo | | 0.066 | | 0.005 | -0.061 |
| Alexandria and Canal Cities | | 0.006 | | 0.013 | 0.007 |
| Urban Lower Egypt | | 0.095 | | 0.086 | -0.009 |
| Urban Upper Egypt | | 0.058 | | 0.041 | -0.017 |
| Rural Lower Egypt | | 0.336 | | 0.412 | 0.076 |
| Rural Upper Egypt | | 0.439 | | 0.443 | 0.004 |
| | | | | | |
| *Means of sending money* | | | | | |
| Bank or transfer office | | 0.681 | | 0.523 | -0.158*** |
| In person | | 0.134 | | 0.125 | -0.009 |
| Friend or relative | | 0.071 | | 0.280 | 0.210*** |
| Mail | | 0.140 | | 0.085 | -0.055 |

*** $p<0.01$, ** $p<0.05$, * $p<0.1$

*Notes.* Column 5: is t-test for whether the difference in means between 2018 and 2023 is statistically significant.
N=398 for 2018, 568 for 2023.

# 6. Migration Intentions

Finally, we examine migration intentions in 2023 compared to 2018, five years earlier before COVID-19. First, it is important to note that individuals were asked about their intentions to migrate in the next 5 years as opposed to migration aspirations in general. We also restrict our focus to those aged 15-45 years, the age group with the highest migration propensity. Interestingly, we observe a decrease in migration intentions of individuals aged 15-45 years of age between 2018 and 2023. Figure 11 shows that 4.0 percent of men declared intending to migrate within the next 5 years in 2023 (versus 6.4 percent in 2018), while this share was only 0.7 percent for women in 2023 (versus 1.2 percent in 2018), emphasizing that emigration in Egypt continued to be dominated by men. Analyzing the distribution across age groups, and not restricting age, we find a decrease in intention rates among all age groups between 2018 and 2023 in Figure 12, and a similar pattern when we only restrict the sample to men in Figure 13.

**Figure 11: Migration intentions in the next 5 years (percentage) by sex, 2018 and 2023 (ages 15-45)**
Source: Authors' calculations based on ELMPS 2018 and 2023.

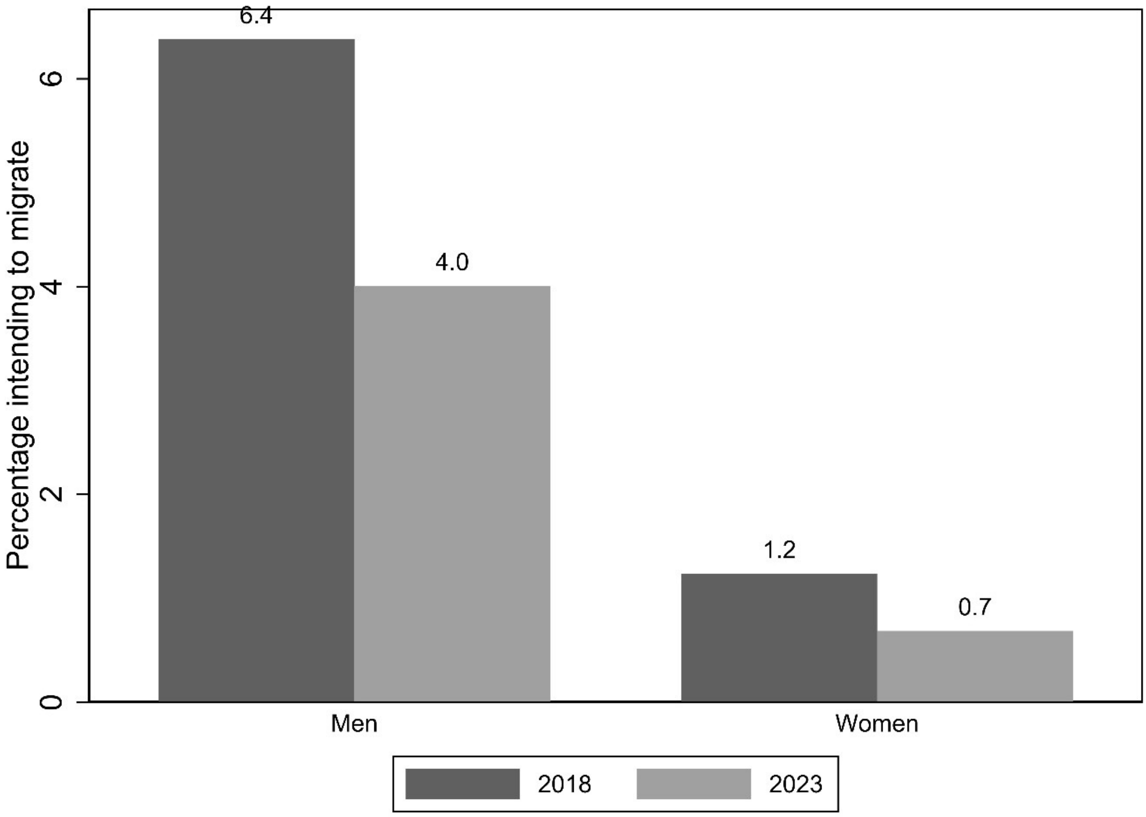


**Figure 12: Migration intentions in the next 5 years (percentage) by age group, 2018 and 2023 (ages 15-64)**
Source: Authors' calculations based on ELMPS 2018 and 2023.

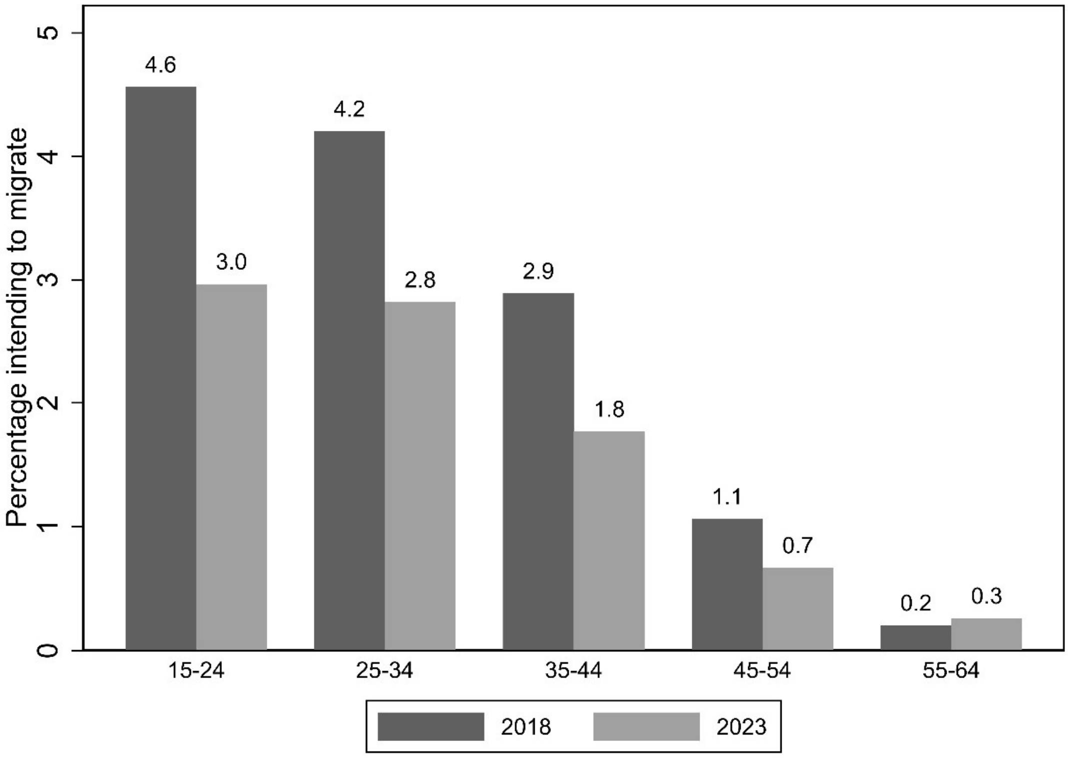
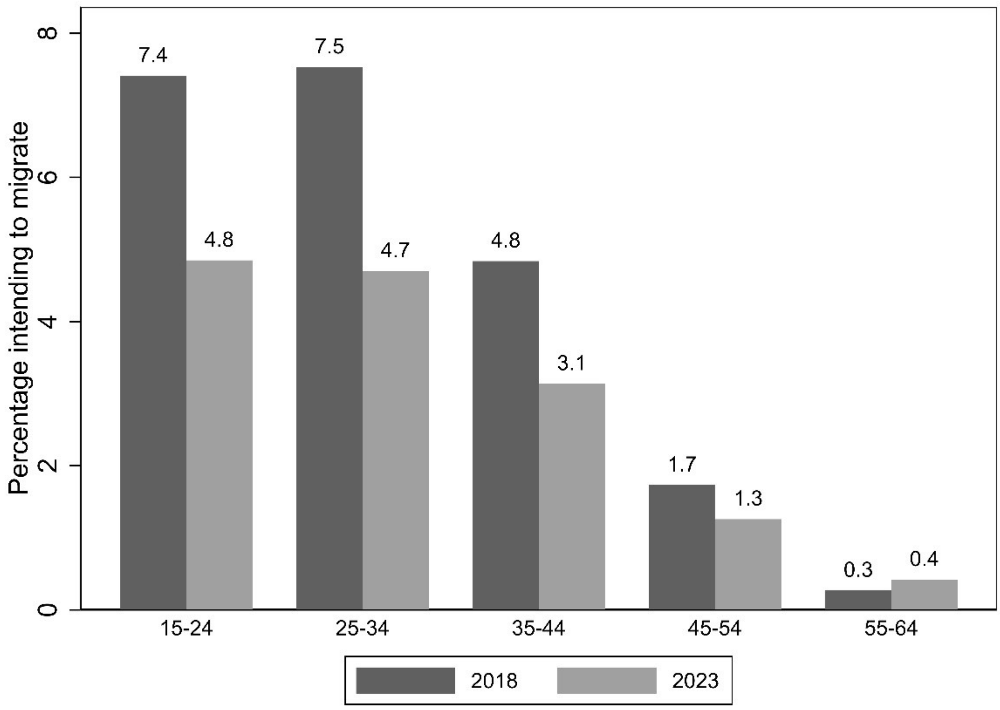


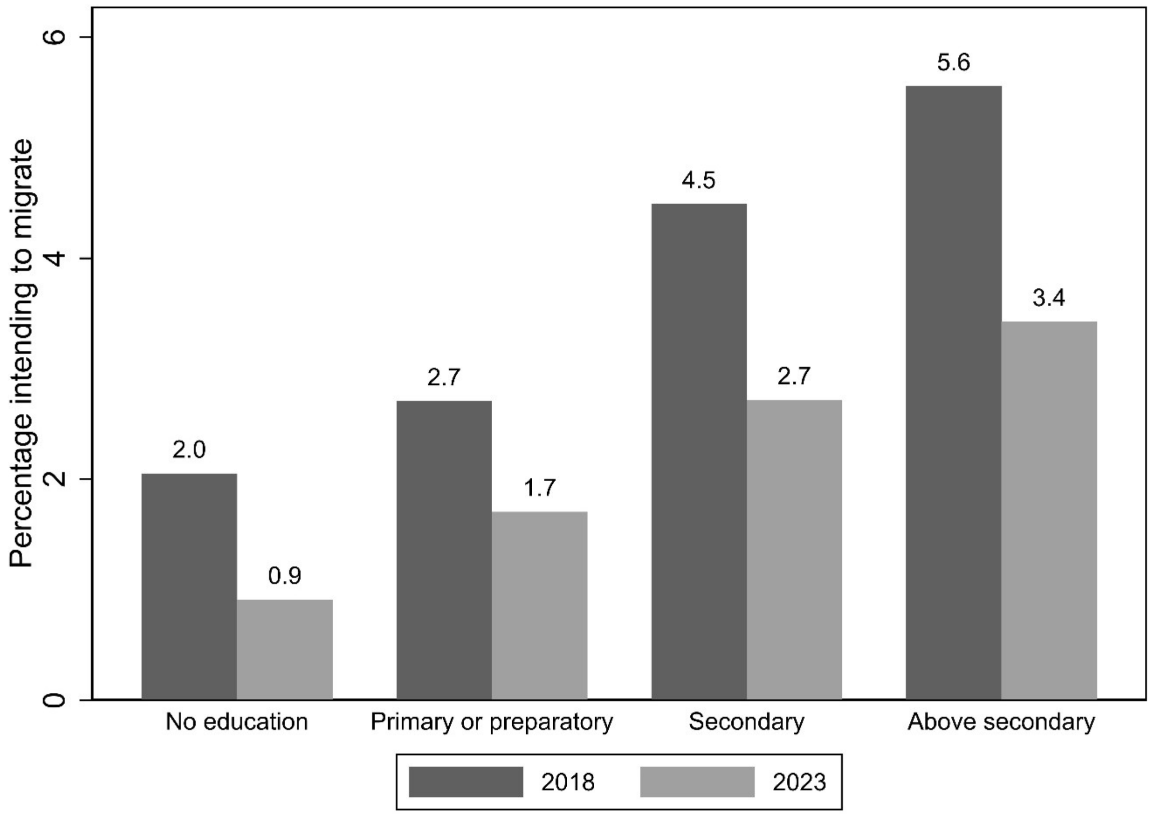

**Figure 13: Migration intentions of men in the next 5 years (percentage) by age group, 2018 and 2023 (ages 15-64)**
Source: Authors' calculations based on ELMPS 2018 and 2023.



The magnitude of this decrease in intention was similar across education levels (Figure 14). In 2023, individuals having an educational level above secondary had the highest migration intentions, 3.4 percent (versus 5.6 percent in 2018). Interestingly this decrease is in line with the findings of Abdel Wahed et al. (2020) who compare migration aspirations among young people, aged 18 -29 years of age, before and after the Arab Spring and find that these intentions significantly decreased after the Arab Spring and only 14 percent of young men and 3 percent of young women declared intending to migrate in 2019. Though it is important to note that our measure is time-restricted for the following 5 years and not open ended as so is more about intentions rather than aspirations.

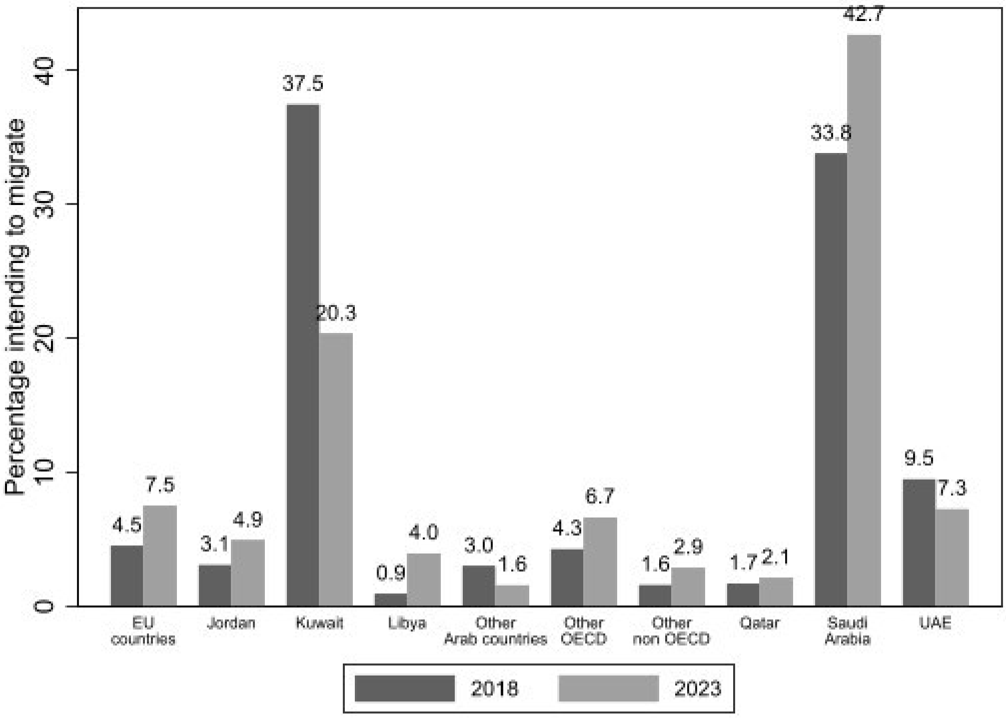
**Figure 14: Migration intentions in the next 5 years (percentage) by educational level, 2018 and 2023 (ages 15-45)**

Source: Authors' calculations based on ELMPS 2018 and 2023.




With regards to destinations for a potential future migration, we observe a switch from an interest in going to Kuwait to going to Saudi Arabia, where almost half of the individuals wanted to migrate in 2023 (Figure 15). Interestingly, intentions to migrate to EU (7.5 percent in 2023) and other OECD countries (6.7 percent in 2023) also increased. The increase was slight but was much higher than in the case of actual migration. Interestingly, among those intending to migrate, 8 percent would still intend to migrate within the next five years even if the only way to immigrate is undocumented.

**Figure 15: Destination of those intending to migrate in the next 5 years (percentage), 2018 and 2023 (ages 15-45)**
Source: Authors' calculations based on ELMPS 2018 and 2023.




In terms of reasons for intending to migrate (Figure 16 for pull factors, Figure 17 for push factors), seeking higher income remained the main pull factor for wanting to migrate, with more than half of those intending to migrate in both periods referring to that as the main reason. Interestingly there was a decline in the share of those intending to migrate who blamed lack of jobs as the main push factor (from 43.4 percent to 30.7 percent) though there was an increase (by 10 percentage points, to 28.1 percent) in the share of those attributing their intention to bad living conditions in 2023 compared to in 2018. Hence, despite the low intention rates, the patterns show poor economic conditions back home as the main driver for migration intention.

**Figure 16: Main pull factors for intending to migrate in the next 5 years (percentage), 2018 and 2023 (ages 15-45)**
Source: Authors' calculations based on ELMPS 2018 and 2023.

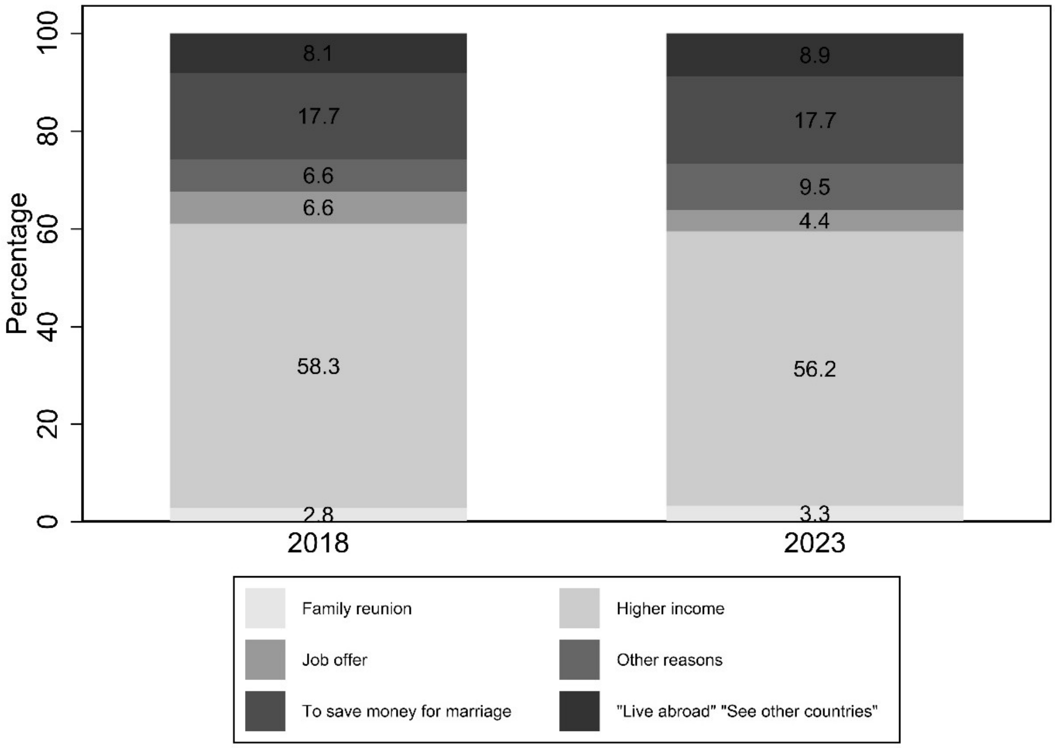
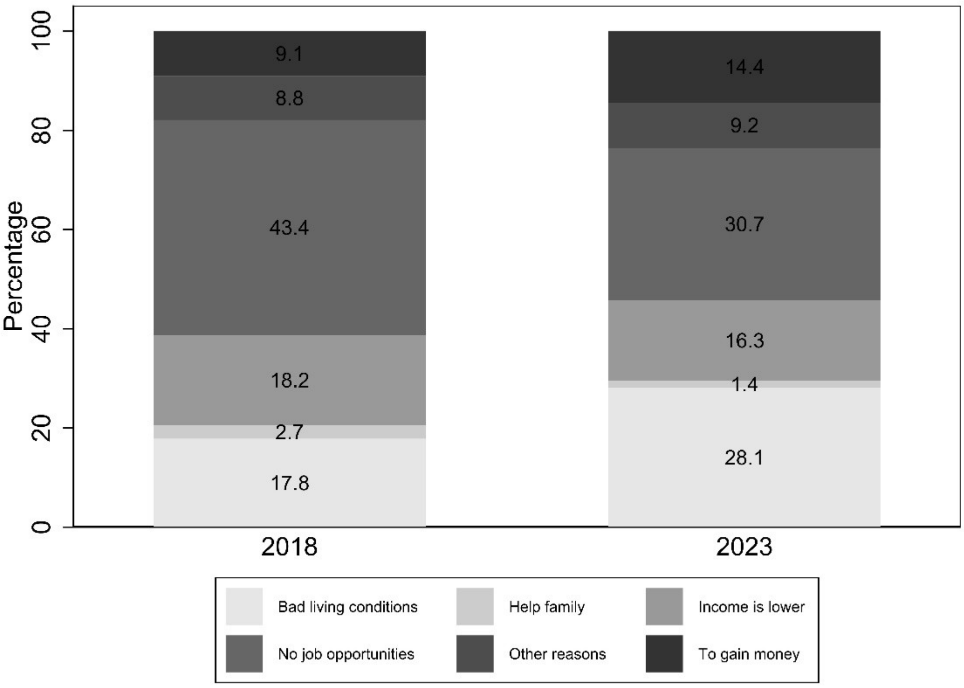



**Figure 17: Main push factors for intending to migrate in the next 5 years (percentage), 2018 and 2023 (ages 15-45)**
Source: Authors' calculations based on ELMPS 2018 and 2023.



# 7. Conclusion

International migration has been a defining feature of the Egyptian economy in recent decades. Egypt has been a labor sending country since the 1970s with large flows of Egyptian workers migrating temporarily for work to other Arab countries. This temporary migration has provided a safety valve in times when domestic job creation was lagging behind the increase in labor supply, but more importantly resulted in substantial remittances flows making Egypt the fifth highest recipient of remittances over the last ten years and contributing to 10 percent of GDP at its peak in 2017-2018 (World Bank, 2024). In addition, with almost 10 percent of Egyptian households experiencing international migration and large return migration due to the temporary nature of migration, this situation has led to Egyptian migrants returning with higher skills levels and savings that have contributed to economic development. Given the centrality of migration in the economic and social landscape in Egypt, this paper investigates the role it played as a livelihood strategy during the economic crisis. Indeed, Egypt has experienced a major economic crisis since March 2022, which has had substantial impacts on food inflation and standards of living. This crisis compounded the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and its global implications, which were further worsened by the Russia-Ukraine war and the international instability in brought.

Comparing 2018 and 2023, the findings suggest that current international migration rate has increased, and that the return migration rate has declined. In addition, the profile of migrants has changed as the share of migrants with no and low education has increased, as has the share of those with precarious labor market status (unemployed and not working prior to migration). Indeed, in 2023, the emigration rate of those with a secondary degree increased compared to 2018 and became similar to the emigration rate of those with a university degree. However, those with university degrees had the lowest return migration rates despite their high emigration rate. In addition, the share of households in the top wealth quintile receiving remittances fell, suggesting the use of international migration as a coping mechanism across the wealth distribution as a means to diversify income during the economic crisis. However, this growth in remittances was muted by the macroeconomic conditions in Egypt. Overall, the results suggest that the recent economic conditions in Egypt might be changing the nature of Egyptian migration.

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