



Migration in the Middle East and North Africa

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Executive summary

Migration has been a major issue affected the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region has for decades. Many citizens across the region have sought to leave their homelands in search of life in foreign countries. Arab Barometer has been monitoring attitudes toward migration in the region since 2006. The newest Wave VIII surveys between 2023 and 2024 reveal that sizable percentages of people across the region want to leave their countries in pursuit of better living conditions elsewhere. Levels of desire to emigrate, however, vary based on domestic conditions and whether it is actually possible to emigrate. For example, while nearly half of Tunisians want to leave their country, fewer than a fifth of Kuwaitis share this wish. These levels have remained largely stable in recent years for the countries surveyed.

Potential migrants tend to be young and with a college education. Youth generally are more likely to express their desire to leave their countries and embark on a life elsewhere. The same is true for those with better education; in part, the college-educated may be more likely to expect to be able to find better jobs and opportunities than those with no more than a secondary education. At the same time, gender plays a lesser role in most countries surveyed.

While household income is not a major determinant of whether an individual wants to emigrate, views and outlooks on domestic economic conditions do. In all but one country surveyed, potential migrants tend to view their current economy more negatively than their compatriots. Furthermore, in a majority countries, those who want to leave are likely to be less optimistic regarding the future of their country's economic situation than those who do not want to leave their homeland.

Thus, it is no surprise that potential migrants name economic reasons as the main motive behind their decision. This is the case for most countries surveyed where majorities of potential migrants say they want to emigrate due to economic motives. Security and political reasons follow, especially in Lebanon where rising tensions that could result in war coming to Lebanon are a factor. Pursuit of better educational opportunities drives some, including a majority in Kuwait, toward emigration.

As for preferred destinations, North American countries, namely the United States and Canada, are the most commonly cited, followed by Western European countries and the Gulf. Preferences differ across the region based on linguistic and cultural factors. For example, countries with previous ties to former colonial powers tend to prefer to emigrate to these places where communities of diaspora already exist and are thriving.

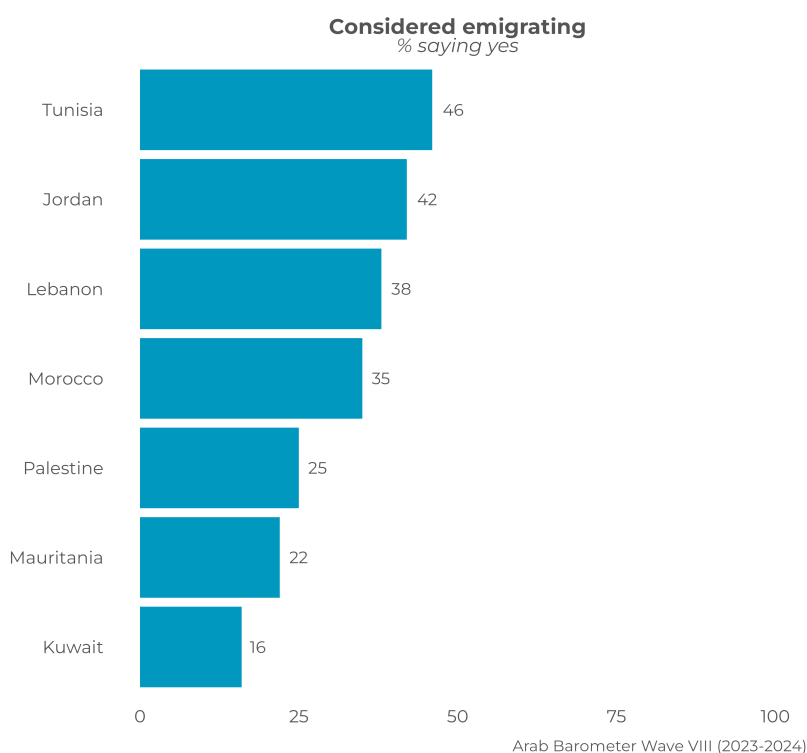
In most countries, the majority of potential migrants say they would only depart if they had the necessary papers. However, significant proportions of potential migrants express their willingness to consider emigrating even if they do not. While in most countries these levels have remained constant in the past two years, Mauritania presents itself as an exception where a major increase of people wanting to emigrate even without the required papers. Undocumented migration is more likely among the less-fortunate. People with at most a high school degree tend to be more willing to consider this option compared with their better educated compatriots. The same is true for income, as those struggling to make ends meet are more likely to express their willingness to leave without documents than the better-off people among potential migrants.

These are among the main findings of seven nationally representative public opinion surveys conducted across the Middle East and North Africa from 2023-24 as part of Arab Barometer Wave VIII. The results have a margin of error of between ± 2 and ± 3 percentage points in each country. Overall, these results make clear that, for people across MENA, migration remains an option, especially for the younger, better-educated generations, mainly to pursue a better life elsewhere. Additional information about the surveys can be found at www.arabbarometer.org.

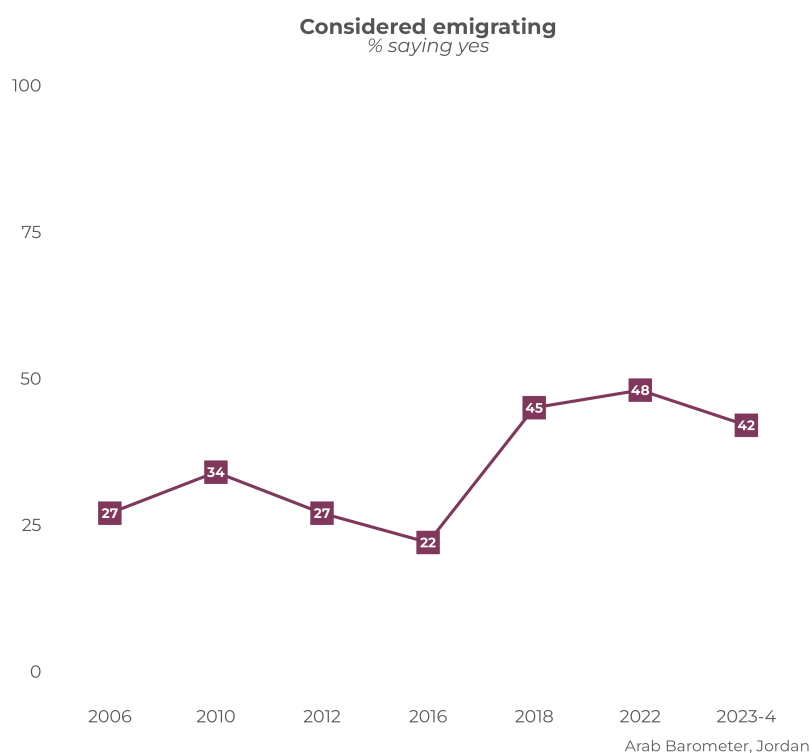
Note: Data from Palestine were collected between September 28 and October 6, before the October 7 Hamas attack on Israel, which may affect current views.

Desire to emigrate

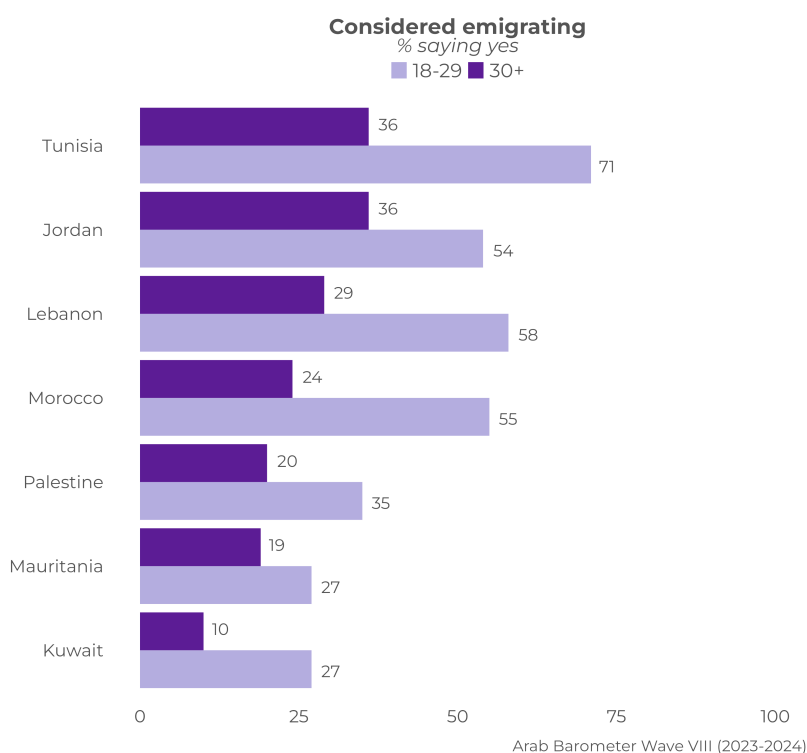
Across MENA, sizable portions of the population have always expressed a desire to emigrate in search of a better life. In 2024, levels of desire to emigrate in the region vary greatly, reinforcing historical trends. Tunisia tops the list with 46 percent of its people saying they have considered leaving the country, followed by Jordan (42 percent) and Lebanon (38 percent). In Morocco, about a third says the same (35 percent) compared to only a quarter of Palestinians and slightly fewer Mauritaniens (22 percent). Kuwait, being one of most economically stable and prosperous countries included in the survey, has the lowest percentage of potential migrants at only 16 percent.



The percentage of citizens who have considered emigrating has remained largely unchanged in the past two years in most countries surveyed in the last two waves of Arab Barometer. This is especially true for Tunisia, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, and Kuwait. In Mauritania, an increase of four percentage points is observed, though it remains close to the survey's margin of error. The only clear exception is Jordan where a drop of six percentage points has taken place (from 48 percent in 2022 to 42 percent in 2024). This drop takes the percentage of Jordanians wanting to leave closer to the level observed just before the COVID-19 pandemic, though it remains far higher than any percentage recorded before 2018. For Morocco and Lebanon, this wave's levels roughly match those of Arab Barometer's Wave III in 2012 (32 percent and 38 percent, respectively). Notably, the percentage of those wanting to emigrate from Tunisia, while effectively unchanged from 2022, is the highest ever recorded in the country by Arab Barometer. In 2011, only about a fifth (22 percent) of Tunisians said they considered leaving their country. This percentage has been increasing ever since, reaching nearly half (46 percent) during this wave. For other countries, including Kuwait and Palestine, levels have remained largely unchanged over the past 12 years.



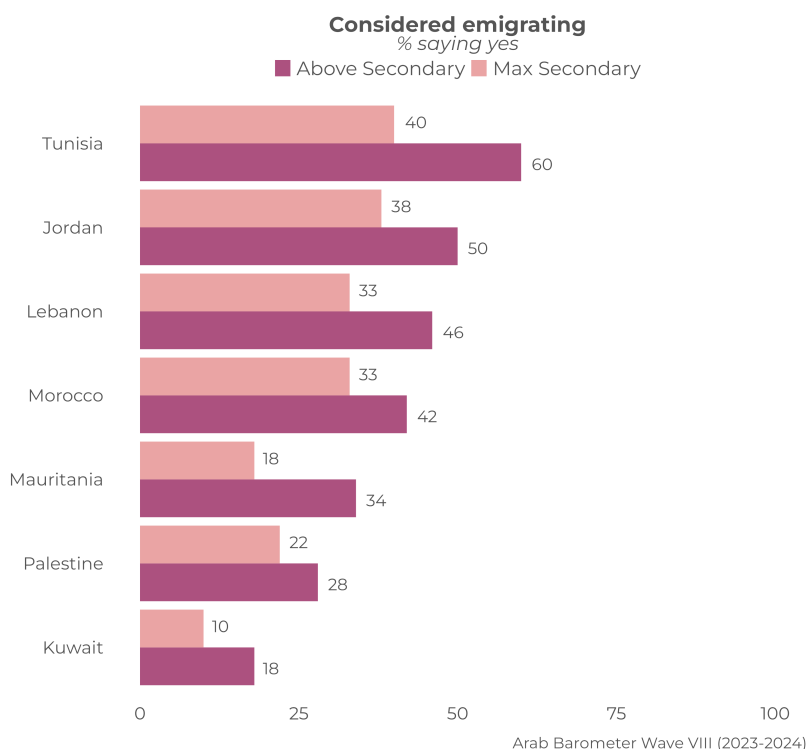
The region's youth are more likely to express a desire to emigrate than their older compatriots. In Tunisia, seven-out-of-ten (71 percent) of youth ages 18-29 say they want to leave the country. Additionally, more than half of their counterparts in Lebanon (58 percent), Morocco (55 percent), and Jordan (54 percent) share this sentiment. About a third of youth in Palestine (35 percent) and roughly a quarter in each of Mauritania and Kuwait (27 percent for each) also say the same.



In comparison, no more than 36 percent of those 30 or older in all countries surveyed want to emigrate. In Kuwait, only one-in-ten citizens ages 30 or older want to leave the Gulf state. The age gap when it comes to people's desire to emigrate is large in most countries surveyed. In some countries, youth are twice as likely as those 30 or older to say they want to leave. This is the case in Tunisia (71 percent for youth vs. 36 percent for older Tunisians), Lebanon (58 percent vs. 29 percent), and Morocco (55 percent vs. 24 percent). The gap is also wide in Jordan (18 points), Kuwait (17 points), and Palestine (15 points). Only in Mauritania is the difference between those ages 18-29 and older people relatively small at eight percentage points (27 percent vs. 19 percent).

People with higher levels of educational attainment are generally more inclined to emigrate than their less-educated compatriots across the region. Yet, the differences in levels of desire to emigrate based on education are not as wide as the age differences. Six-of-ten Tunisians with a college degree or above want to leave their country compared to only 40 percent of those with at most a secondary education. Similarly, half of Jordanians with a higher education want to emigrate while only 38 percent of those with lower levels of education share the sentiment. The gap also exists in Lebanon (46 percent vs. 33 percent), Mauritania (34 percent vs. 18 percent), Morocco (42 percent vs. 33 percent), and

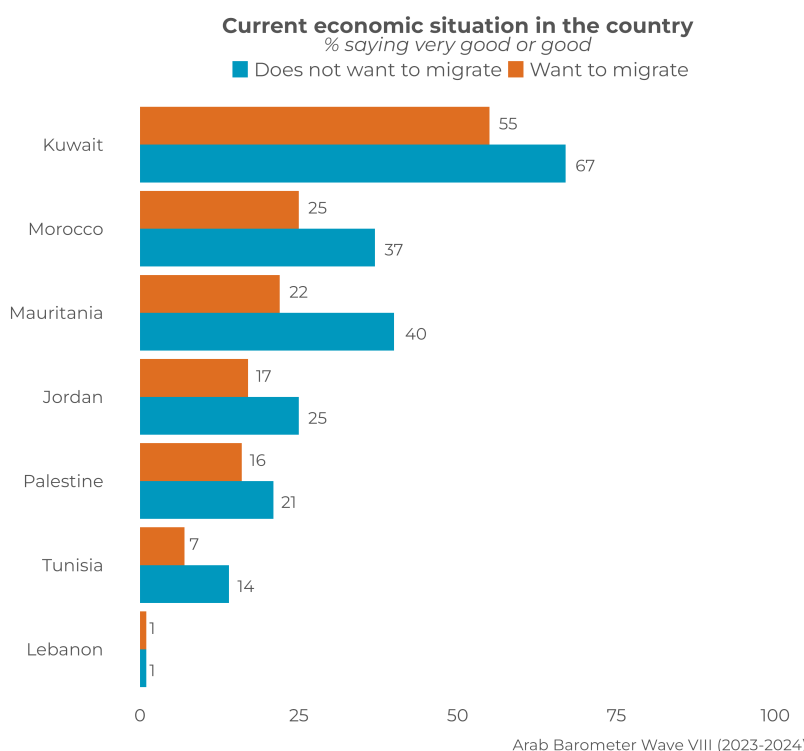
Kuwait (18 vs. 10 percent). It is smallest in Palestine as the better educated are only six percentage points more likely to express their desire to leave than their less educated compatriots (28 percent vs. 22 percent).



Other demographic factors are less consistent predictors of the desire to emigrate. Gender for example is a major factor in Mauritania where 37 percent of men say they want to leave their country compared to only eight percent of women. That also applies to Morocco where the gender difference is 20 points (45 percent for men vs. 25 percent for women) and Jordan when the gap is 16 points (50 percent vs. 34 percent). Other countries, however, see differences of less than ten points between men and women in their desires to emigrate. Additionally, only in Morocco does household income play a large role. Four-in-ten of those who cannot cover their expenses say they want to emigrate as compared to only 29 percent of their better-off compatriots. Elsewhere, the gap is less than ten points.

In all countries surveyed except Lebanon (where virtually no one rates the economy positively), potential migrants tend to view their economy less positively than their compatriots. Even in Kuwait where the majority says the economy

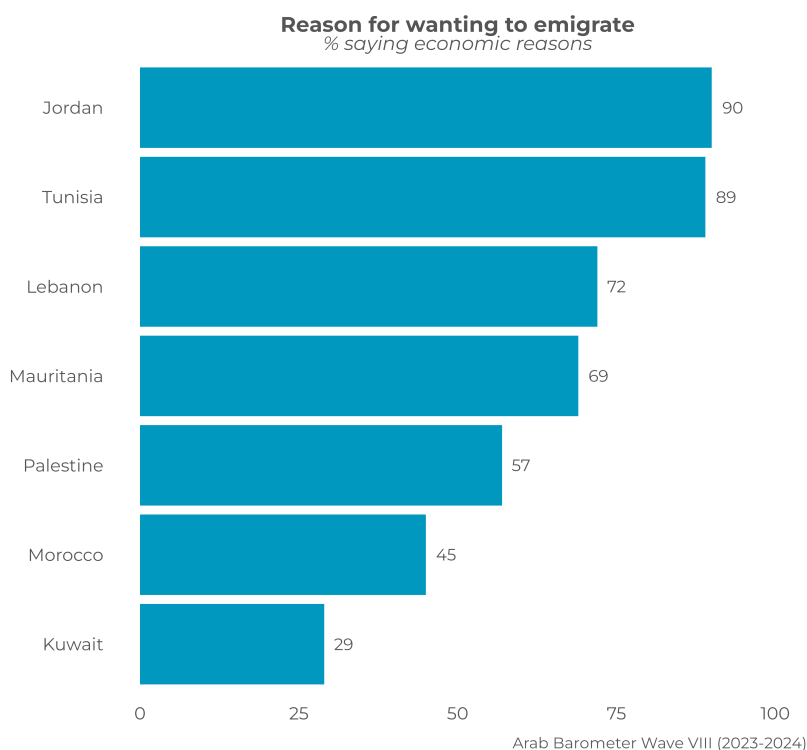
is very good or good, a gap exists between those who want to emigrate and those who do not. Potential Kuwaiti migrants are 12 points less likely to rate the economy as good than others. A similar gap exists in Morocco (25 percent vs. 37 percent), while a greater difference is seen in Mauritania where about a fifth (22 percent) of potential migrants say the economy is good compared to four-in-ten of those who do not wish to leave their country. In other countries where only minorities say the economy is good like Jordan, Tunisia, and Palestine, potential migrants hold more negative outlook than their compatriots. Additionally, in a majority of countries, those who want to leave are less optimistic about their country's economic future. For example, while only 37 percent of potential Tunisian migrants say the economy will be better in the upcoming years, more than half (56 percent) of those who do not want to emigrate hold this view. Similar patterns exist in Mauritania and Jordan where the gap is 14 points and 12 points, respectively.



Reasons for wanting to emigrate

Therefore, it is no surprise that in most countries surveyed, economic motives top the list of reasons why potential migrants across the region want to leave

their homeland. This is especially true in Jordan (90 percent) and Tunisia (89 percent) where the overwhelming majorities cite economic reasons. It is also true in Lebanon and Mauritania where roughly seven-in-ten say the same (72 percent and 69 percent, respectively). Additionally, more than half (57 percent) of those considering emigrating in Palestine say economic factors are what drives their desire to leave. Only in Morocco and Kuwait do less than half of potential migrants name economic motives (45 percent and 29 percent, respectively).



Although economic motivations are the primary driving factor, there are some notable differences across demographic groups. For example, those who are less well off economically are, unsurprisingly, more likely to name economic factors. There are, however, a few notable differences when it comes to other demographic variables. For example, older Palestinians and older Kuwaitis are more driven by economic calculations than their young compatriots (65 percent vs. 48 percent and 36 percent vs. 24 percent, respectively). Moreover, Moroccans and Kuwaitis with at most a high school education tend to look for better economic opportunities abroad than the college-educated (50 percent vs. 34 percent and 48 percent vs. 25 percent, respectively). Differences in views

by income are not identical across the region. The gap is widest in Morocco where people struggling to make ends meet are twice as likely as their better-off compatriots to cite economic reasons for wanting to leave the kingdom (56 percent vs. 28 percent). A large gap by relative income also exists in Lebanon (20 points), Mauritania (16 points), Palestine (13 points), and Kuwait (13 points).

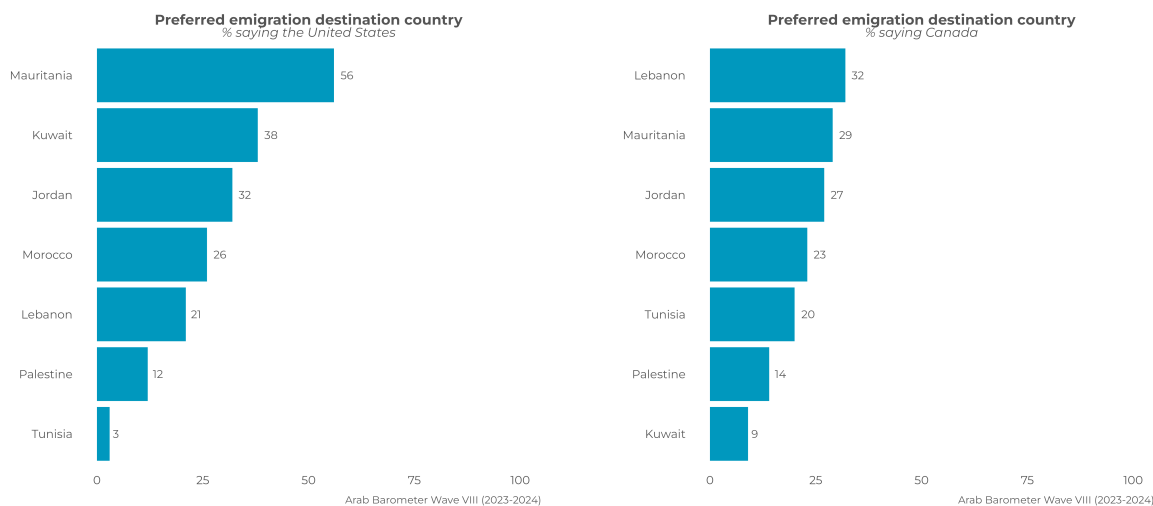
Unlike the economic reasons cited either by a majority or a plurality in most countries surveyed, other motives driving people's desire to leave their homeland are often confined by the specific domestic challenges facing each country. For example, roughly a quarter of potential migrants in Lebanon say they want to leave for political reasons (23 percent) or corruption (24 percent). No more than one-in-six in all other countries surveyed say the same. It is no surprise that the ongoing political and economic crises in Lebanon have pushed segments of the population to the brink, forcing them to seek better life abroad. Adding insult to injury are the recent and growing tensions between Hezbollah and Israel on Lebanon southern borders. Thus, it is understandable that 27 percent of potential migrants in Lebanon would cite concerns for their own security as a motive for wanting to leave the country. In contrast, Kuwaitis, two-thirds (65 percent) of whom rate their economy as very good or good, are driven toward migration by other motives. More than half (56 percent) of those wanting to leave Kuwait say they want to do so in search of a better educational opportunities abroad. No more than about a fifth in all other countries included in the survey cite the same motive. In Mauritania and Lebanon, 21 percent say they want to leave their country to pursue education, while 18 percent in Morocco and 17 percent in Palestine say the same. Fewer than one-in-ten Jordanians (eight percent) and Tunisians (six percent) list education as the main motivation to leave their countries.

Preferred destinations

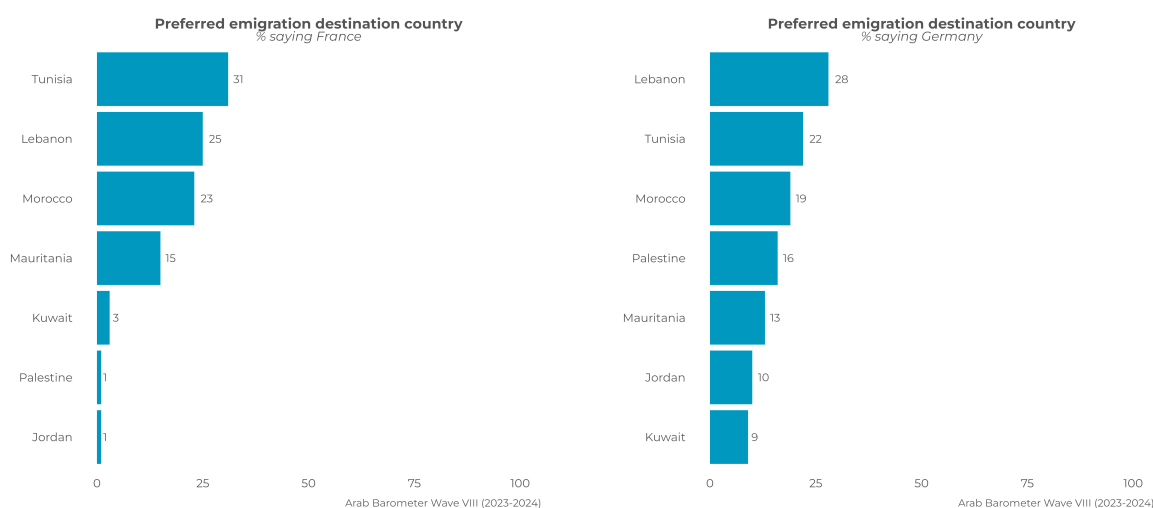
Potential migrants from the region differ in their preferred destinations. Generally, North America tops the list, followed by Western European countries and the Arab Gulf. The United States is the favorite destination for more than half of those want to leave Mauritania (56 percent). A third or more of potential migrants in Kuwait (38 percent) and Jordan (32 percent) say the same along with a quarter in Morocco (26 percent). Two-in-ten (21 percent) in Lebanon and about one-in-ten Palestinians (12 percent) agree. Only three percent of people wanting to leave Tunisia name the U.S. as their preferred target. About three-in-ten potential migrants in Lebanon (32 percent) and Mauritania (29 percent) say they would like to migrate to Canada while roughly a quarter in Jordan (27 percent) and Morocco (23 percent) and a fifth in Tunisia hold a similar wish.

Arab Barometer – Wave VIII

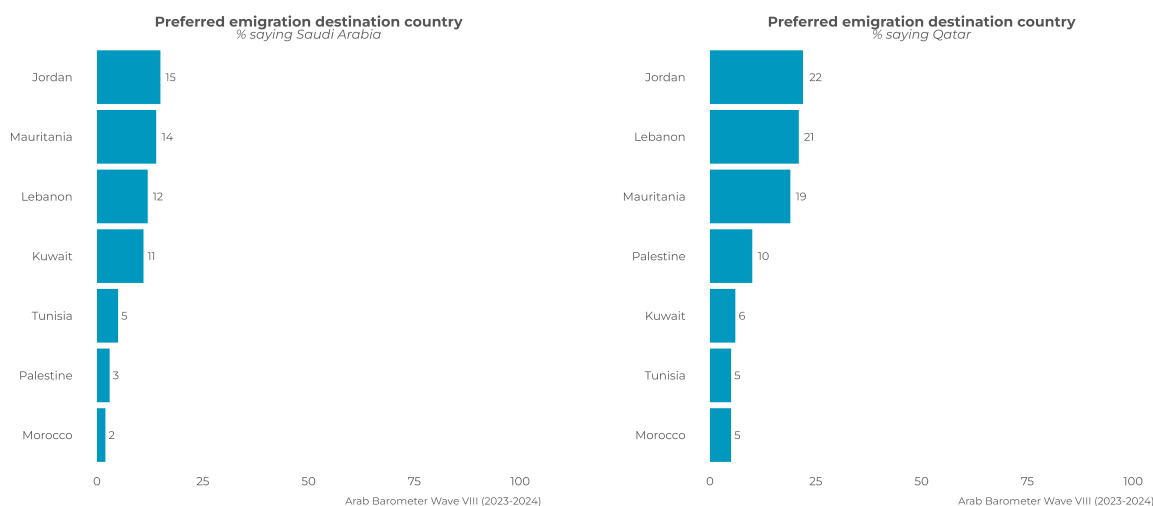
Migration Report



France is the preferred destination for many potential migrants from its former colonies. Three-in-ten (31 percent) in Tunisia, a quarter in Lebanon (25 percent) and Morocco (23 percent), and 15 percent in Mauritania name France as their intended destination. No more than three percent in Kuwait, Palestine, or Jordan say the same. Preferences of Germany are slightly more uniform, ranging from 28 percent in Lebanon to one-in-ten in Jordan (ten percent) and Kuwait (nine percent). Meanwhile, Moroccans are the most likely to favor Spain and Italy (22 percent for each). Additionally, Italy is one of the most preferred countries for Tunisians (20 percent).

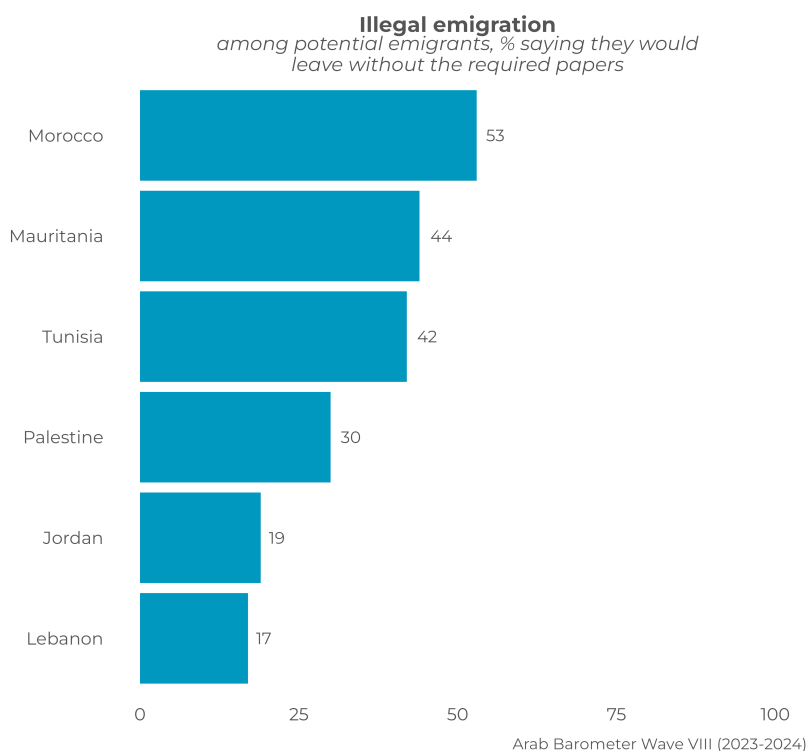


On the other side of Europe, Turkey is favored by about a fifth of potential migrants from Palestine (22 percent). Though no more than one-in-ten in all other countries surveyed say the same. In the Gulf, Qatar is the most preferred country. A fifth in Jordan (22 percent), Lebanon (21 percent), and Mauritania (19 percent) want to migrate there. One-in-ten Palestinians with a desire to leave their country also name Qatar as their preferred endpoint. Fewer say the same in Kuwait, Tunisia, and Morocco. For both the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, no more than a fifth in all countries surveyed name either one as a favorite destination.

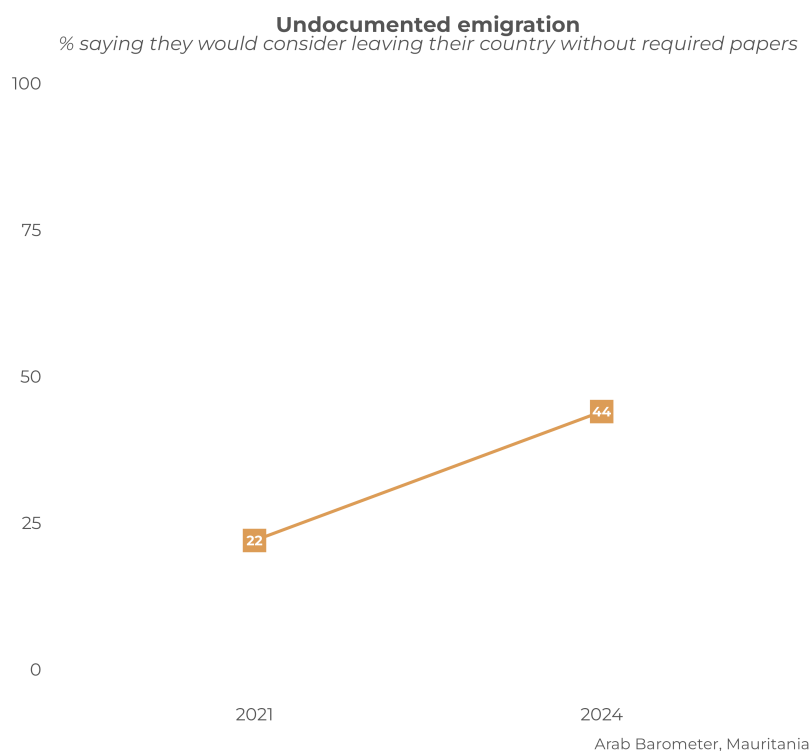


Undocumented migration

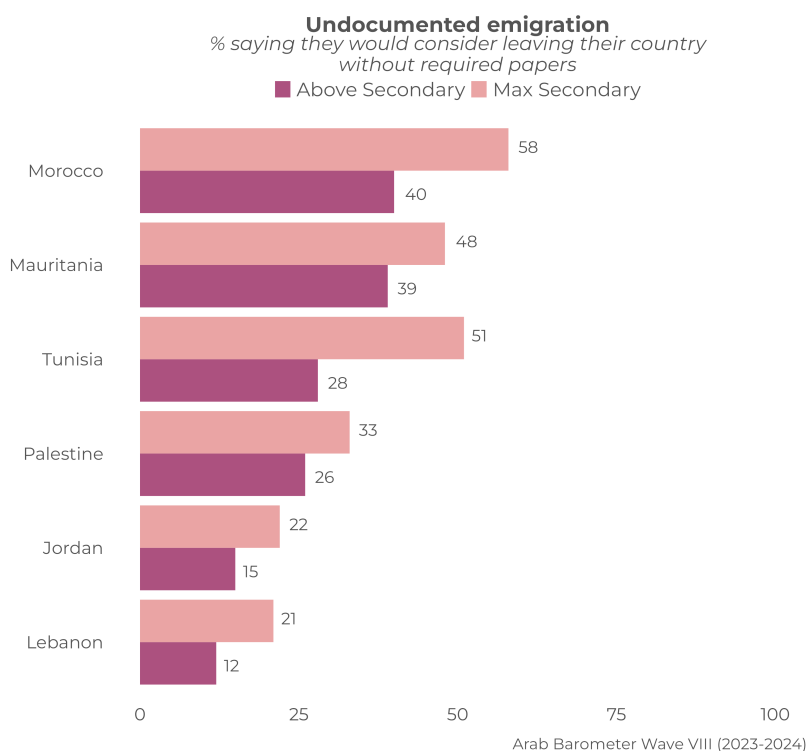
Significant numbers across the region want to leave their countries in any way possible, thus considering undocumented migration among other options. This is especially the case in Morocco where more than half (53 percent) of potential migrants say they would consider leaving the kingdom even if they lacked the required papers to do so. At least four-in-ten in Mauritania (44 percent) and Tunisia (42 percent) say the same. In Palestine, three-in-ten potential migrants express their willingness to leave their homeland without the required documents. No more than a fifth in Jordan (19 percent) and Lebanon (17 percent) hold the same thought.



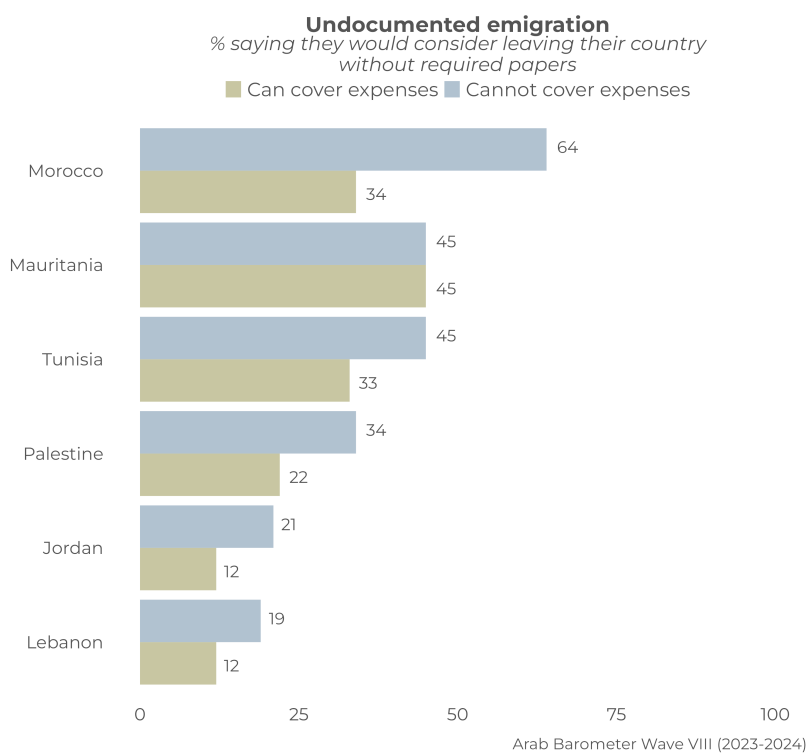
It is noteworthy that Mauritania has witnessed a major shift since 2022. During Arab Barometer's previous survey two years ago, only 22 percent of potential Mauritanian migrants said they would consider leaving their country even if they lacked the necessary papers. This percentage has since doubled. This increase could signal the struggle many Mauritians are undergoing inside their country and the difficulties they face in obtaining the documents required for a proper and legal emigration process. This is reinforced by the fact that youth are more likely to want to leave even without documents than their older compatriots in Mauritania by a margin of ten percentage points (51 percent vs. 41 percent).



Among potential migrants, those with a secondary education or less tend to think of emigrating without documents more than the college-educated. The gap between the two groups is widest in Tunisia (23 points) and Morocco (18 points). In Mauritania and Lebanon, the less-educated are nine points more likely to hold this view than those with college degrees while in Palestine and Jordan the gap is seven points.



Additionally, nearly two-thirds (64 percent) of potential Moroccan migrants who struggle to cover their expenses say they would leave without papers compared to only a third (34 percent) of their better-off counterparts. A similar trend, though with smaller gaps, exists in Tunisia (45 percent vs. 33 percent), Palestine (34 percent vs. 22 percent), Jordan (21 percent vs. 12 percent), and Lebanon (19 percent vs. 12 percent). In terms of gender, men are generally more willing to leave without documents than women in all countries surveyed.





ABOUT ARAB BAROMETER

Arab Barometer is a nonpartisan research network that provides insight 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 across 15 countries.

We are the longest-standing and 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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