

## The Impact of Labor Migration on Job Concerns of the Jordanian Migrant Workers

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**Abstract:** The aim of this study is to examine how labor migration (as a process) can affect the job stability and concerns of the Jordanian migrant workers who worked in the Arab Oil Countries. Such an effect will include changes in income resources, investment, health insurance, new skills and job stability. A questionnaire was designed and given to a random sample of 180 migrant workers who worked in the Arab Oil Countries for more than three years before they came back to Jordan. The results indicated a sharp decrease in health insurance among returned migrants, a considerable decline in the ratio of employed workers against a similar increase in the ratio of workers working in trade or private owned shops, far from their original skill or profession. The highest investment among migrant workers, however, was in the areas of housing, trade and education, far from their original profession or area of interest.

**Key Words:** Labor Migration, Jordanian Migrant, Arab Oil Countries

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### Introduction

Labor migration is as old as the human history itself, where man used to move from one place to another looking for work and survival. Islam, as a religion, encouraged such migration in order to create a new status for man, family and society, in order to avoid slavery and injustice. Such migration used to take place on collective bases, where wife, children and sometimes relatives, will accompany the family-head in his migration. Such migration was largely influenced by Push-Pull factors, which determine the time and destination of such migration. Workers usually move from poor and unstable areas to modern and advanced areas. Above all, such migration used to be permanent where the worker and his family will settle in the new homeland or at least can do so. This can be clearly seen in the origins of many families or the last name of several families or tribes in the Arab and Muslim World which reflect the original area that they came from. Today, labor migration became largely different from what it used to be. Today's labor migration is temporary and limited in time according to the job contract. The family also is not allowed to accompany the family head (except for those who usually get high salaries). As a result, labor migration gained a considerable attention from several researchers in various fields such as sociology, economics, political science, and international law. The reason behind such attention is the fact that such migration causes severe changes that affecting not only the migrant worker himself, but also his family, his local community and his country as well. Also, similar changes take place in the host country in the economic, social, cultural and political levels. Some researchers view such migration as a flow of money between labor importing and labor exporting countries. Others view that as a brain drain from poor to rich countries. Others, however, view that as a new slavery by rich countries on poor countries within the modern new-world system. Yet, some researchers such as (Mangalam and Henry, 1970) reported a severe shortage in research in the social and cultural aspects of the labor migration, in comparison with the economical aspects which gained more attention. Furthermore, the research done on the social aspects of labor migration was mainly focused on family and local community and not the migrant worker

himself. This is a clear indication about the importance of this research.

**Problem Statement:** This research seeks to explore the impact of labor migration on the migrant worker himself, in terms of his original job, skills, profession, performance, job turnover, financial investment, savings and health insurance.

### Materials and Methods

Population for this study consists of the Jordanian migrant workers who worked in the Arab Oil countries for three years or more before they came back to Jordan. The reason for the selection of this period is to have enough time that enable the researcher to trace the changes in the life pattern of the migrant worker. The sample for this research was selected from the cities of Amman, Madaba and Zarqa, due to the fact that these cities are well known to have high ratios of migrant workers. And due to the absence of any official records about the number and the distribution of the Jordanian migrant workers abroad, the sample for this research was selected from coffee shops in the three cities. The researcher will ask about persons who worked in the Arab oil countries for three years or more. A random sample of 180 migrant worker will be adopted for this research. This sample size was adopted in similar researches carried out in Jordan and other countries (Ramzoun, 1997). The needed data will be collected through a questionnaire designed for this purpose. Each migrant worker will be asked to fill a questionnaire in the presence of the researcher himself. Collected data then will be classified in a special form in order to get the percentage for each question. Then, the results will be addressed in the form of tables of percentages.

**Historical Background:** Along the history, labor migration used to take place in a traditional manner. It used to be a random movement of people, where the family-head will settle with his family in the host family for good. This pattern of labor migration has changed in the second half of the twentieth century. The new form of labor migration became highly organized; mainly limited to the migrant worker only without his family; very limited in time as mentioned in the contract where the migrant worker has to go back to his home country regardless of the length of stay; and subjected to very restricted political laws.

## Hussein Farhan: The Impact of Labor Migration on Job Concerns of the Jordanian Migrant Workers

This fact might explain why the average living age for the migrant worker is about 49 years, while it is about 73 years for the American citizen. Such difference is due to the fact that labor unions in the host country support the rights of national workers only. And when migrant workers return to their home country, they would not benefit from local health insurance or social security due to the lack of the working years needed to apply for such services (Vitoz, 1978).

As they live in the host countries, migrant workers produce products that they cannot afford to buy, and, at the same time, they will be introduced to new patterns of spending that based on consumption of expensive foods and luxurious items, instead of saving and investment. Thus, social researchers concluded that labor migration spreads the fever of consumption among migrant workers as well as their families in the home country. In Turkey, for example, researchers founded that labor migration to Europe caused the spread of fever of consumption of luxury goods and appliances; a fact which led to a high inflation in local prices. Very few of them were able to invest the money they gained in small productive projects. Furthermore, when migrant workers returned to Turkey, they lived in the big cities away from their original villages. They even left their original jobs in agriculture and started to work in services and independent-small businesses (Rempel *et al.*, 1981).

Similar impact took place among Jordanian migrant workers in terms of consumption of luxury items, retreat in the agricultural sector and high level of inflation as a result of remittances from migrant workers abroad to their families at the home country. (Elsaket, 1983. The same thing happened in Yemen, where agriculture turned away from food stuff to cash crops as a result of the increasing demand among the families of the migrant workers (Shah, 1985).

In terms of the new skills that migrant workers acquired from host countries, researchers founded that such skills usually do not match the poor economy and the low level of technology in their home country. The reason for that is the poor infrastructure in such countries made them unable to absorb the high level of technology that was imported by the migrant workers. This fact would result in the loss of the skilled labor force in the long run, especially with the increasing level of awareness among migrant workers about job opportunities abroad through different announcements in the press and other media means (Alejandro, 1978). Yet, most of the research on labor migration was focused on economic and cultural aspects of such movement of people with little attention on the migrant worker himself. Both labor importing and exporting countries benefit from the movement of workers between them. Yet, such workers live in very undesirable conditions in the host countries. Such segregation became constitutional and legal. Migrant workers receive salaries less than national workers. Laws of minimum wages do not apply on foreign workers, as well as retirement and social security and other fringe benefits.

Therefore, more research is needed regarding the impact of labor migration on the migrant workers themselves.

In order to migrate to the Arab Oil Countries, migrant workers accept some job opportunities simply because of the higher salaries they will get.

As a result, their original skills and profession will be degraded or vanished in the long run. They usually seek high and quick earning opportunities regardless of the future of their professions or skills. Furthermore, the new skills that migrant workers might bring with them from host countries usually do not match the low level of technology in the home country, or such skills will be in the service sector and not in production that might benefit the nation as a whole. Gmelch, 1978.

The change in the original job simply means changing social and professional relations of the migrant worker (Manglam and Henry, 1970). He has to derive himself from the original field of specialty, including machines, tools, skills, as well as friends and local community in order to adapt himself to the new job's environment and relations that he is not familiar with. Therefore, he has to reorganize himself again, socially and economically. This means that the new change in the migrant's job simply means a considerable change in his relation with others. Such change includes working hours, living standards, consumption patterns, work experience and social interaction with the worker and staff.

The above discussion does not mean that the change in profession is an easy matter for the migrant worker. It depends on the level of technology in each profession, as well as governmental laws and regulations. This might explain the increasing number of returned migrant workers working in the service sector (against a decreasing number of workers working in production sectors) Gmelch, 1978. Other researchers claimed that this change in profession was due to the fact that migrant workers usually live in isolation in the host country for several years. When he returns to his home country, he will be less willing to work or to interact with others. He prefers to work alone in a small business or shop of his own (Alejandro, 1978).

Related to the above discussion is the impact of labor migration on the health of the migrant worker. Researchers concluded that the variation in temperature, humidity, altitude, wind speed and direction and other weather conditions between home countries and host countries, cause severe health problems for migrant workers in the long run, especially aspirator and breath problems (Ramzoun, 1997).

Based on the previous review of researches on labor migration, it can be concluded that there is a severe shortage in research regarding the impact of labor migration on the migrant worker himself. Thus the present research will focus on such impact on the professional conditions of the migrant worker.

### Results and Discussion

Table 1: Distribution of the Sample According to the Age

Age/ year	Percentage
20-29	8%
30-39	32%
40-49	36%
40-more	24%

Table (1) shows that 36% of the sample size were in the age of 40-49 year, then 32% were in the age of 30-39 year, then 24% were in the age of 50 year or more and 8% were in the age of 20-29 years old.

# Hussein Farhan: The Impact of Labor Migration on Job Concerns of the Jordanian Migrant Workers

Table 2: Distribution of the Sample According to the Marital Status

Marital status	Percentage
Single	24%
Married	76 %
Others	00%

Table (2) indicates that 76% of the sample were married, and 24% percent were single.

Table 3: Distribution of the Sample According to their Sex

Sex	Percentage
Male	92%
Female	8%

Table (3) indicates that 92% of the sample were male, and 8% were female.

Table 4: Distribution of the Sample According to Level of Education

Level of education	Percentage
Secondary school or less	18%
Collage Diploma	38%
University	44%

Table (4) indicates that 44% of the sample hold a university degree, while 38% hold a collage diploma, and 18% hold secondary school certificate or less.

Table 5: Distribution of the Sample According to the Number of Years as Migrant Worker

Number of years	Percentage
3-9	52%
10-19	28%
20 or more	20%

Table (5) shows that 52% spend three to nine years abroad, and 28% spend ten to nineteen years, while 20% spend twenty years or more.

Table 6: Distribution of the Sample According to their Occupation

Occupation	Percentage
Teaching	20%
Technicians	38%
Employees	22%
Trade	8%
Others	12%

Table (6) shows that 38% of the sample worked as technicians in the host country, while 22% worked as employees, about 20% worked as teachers and 8% worked in trade. The remaining 12% worked in several other occupations.

Table 7: Distribution of the Sample According to the Present Source of Income

Source of income	Percentage
Monthly salary	76%
Retirement	9%
Small shop	7%
Unemployed	8%

Table (7) indicates that 76% of the sample depend on monthly salaries, about 9% depend on retirement and 7% depend on trade, while 8% were unemployed.

Table 8: Distribution of the Sample According to (If they Change their Occupation in the Host Country)

Change in occupation	Percentage
Yes	47%
No	53%

Table (8) indicates that 47% did change their occupation in the host country, while 53% did not.

Table 9: Distribution of the Sample According to (If they Change their Occupation after they Returned to Jordan)

Change in occupation	Percentage
Yes	32%
No	56%
Unemployed	12%

Table (9) shows that 32% of the sample did change their occupation after they returned to Jordan, and 56% did not, while 12% became unemployed.

Table 10: Distribution of the Sample According to the New Sources of Income in Jordan

Source of income	Percentage
Monthly salary	38%
Shops and trade	34%
Rent	12%
Stocks and land	8%
Others	8%

Table (10) shows that 38 % of the sample depend on monthly salaries, and 34% depend on trade, while 12% depend on rent, and 8% depend on land and financial investment in stocks, while 8% depend on investments in other areas.

Table 11: Distribution of the Sample According to (If they have health insurance)

Health insurance\ Period	% of Yes	% of NO
Before migration	66%	34%
During migration	82%	18%
After migration	38%	62%

Table (11) indicates that 62% of the sample enjoyed the health insurance in Jordan before they migrated out, while 38% did not. In the host country, 82% enjoyed the health insurance while 18% did not. After returning back to Jordan, only 38% enjoyed health insurance while 62% became without such insurance.

# Hussein Farhan: The Impact of Labor Migration on Job Concerns of the Jordanian Migrant Workers

Table 12: Distribution of the Sample According (If they have monthly saving services)

Monthly Saving services\ Period	% of Yes	% of No
Before migration	22%	88%
During migration	28%	72%
After migration	38%	62%

Table (12) Indicates that 22% enjoyed the monthly saving services before migration while 88% did not. But, in the host country about 28% enjoyed such services while 72% did not. When they returned to Jordan, about 38% enjoyed such services while 62% did not.

Table 13: Distribution of the Sample According to the Type of Investment After they Returned to Jordan

Type of investment	Percentage
Houses\ Apartments	28%
Stocks	9%
Trade	24%
Taxi	6%
Education	14%
Others	9%

Table (13) indicates that 28% of the sample invested in purchasing houses or apartments, about 24% invested in trade, about 14% invested in education for themselves or for their children, while 9% invested in other areas of investment.

Table 14: Distribution of the Sample According to the Desire to Change Occupation

Type of answer	Percentage
Yes	82%
No	18%

Table (14) indicates that 82% of the sample had the desire to change their original occupation, while 18 % had the desire to stay in the same occupation.

Table 15: Distribution of the Sample According to the Desire for Higher Salaries

Type of answer	Percentage
Yes	90%
No	10%

Table (15) indicates that 90% of the sample are willing to work in jobs that pay better salaries, while 10% were satisfy with their income.

Table 16: Distribution of the Sample According to the Desire to Change the Field of Occupation

Type of answer	Percentage
Yes	62%
No	38%

Table (16) indicates that 62% of the sample are willing to change the field of their occupation after they returned to Jordan, while 38% were satisfy with their jobs.

Table (1) shows that about two thirds of the sample were in the age of 30-49 years old. They represent the economically productive group as well as the new generation of workers who seek to establish their professional career and future in a short period of time through migration abroad. On the other side, employers usually seek such age group because they usually have better health and stronger bodies and less diseases; a fact which means less financial expenditures. The second largest group (24%) was the age group of fifty years or more. Such a group became old and came back to Jordan. They spent most of their life abroad because they were then youth and productive, and when they started to get old, they were asked to leave to their home countries. Capitalist employers seek the muscles of the worker and not the worker as a person. And when such muscles become weak, a process of replacement will take place where the migrant worker will be asked to go back to his country as soon as possible and a new young migrant worker will take over in order to go through this process again (Vitoz and Stan, 1978). The final age group (20-29) was about (8%). This small percentage can be attributed to the fact that they still in the process of building the skills and experience. Above all, the sample for this research constituted of those who spent three years or more in the Arab Oil Countries. This might explain why such an age group is very small.

In terms of social status, Table (2) shows that 76% of the sample were married while only 24% were single. This also might be partially explained by the fact that the sample was formed from those who spent three years or more. Researchers also founded that the first investment migrant workers usually do is to get married (Ramzoun and Hussein, 1997). This will give them psychological stability as they live in Arab conservative societies. Above all, people are usually married at this age.

As shown in Table (3), about 92% of the sample were male and only 8% were female (all of them were married). This is very normal in the Arab region where man is the family head and then responsible for the substance of his family. In fact, this could be the reason for his migration abroad, in order to afford a better standards of living. Yet, although the percentage of migrated women is very small (8%), it can be considered as a very important sign for the increasing role of woman in the Arab World, especially in Jordan in particular. Women as migrant workers usually work as teachers in female schools as well as in other economic sectors that belong to girls or women in the Arab Oil Countries. Woman now became as a productive element economically and socially. At the same time, the migration of woman alone is not possible, according to local laws in the conservative Arab societies, as mentioned earlier. Such local laws in the Arab Oil Countries do not allow women to travel alone abroad unless accompanied by one of her immediate relatives according to the teachings of Islam.

In terms of the level of education, Table (4) shows that 44% of the sample hold university degrees. This means that the demand for migrant workers in the Arab Oil Countries is mainly focused on the highly educated workforce, and the Jordanian workforce is capable of meeting such demand. In fact, Jordan is considered the third country in the world in terms of the number of university graduate to the total population, after the United States and Sweden (Ministry of Higher Education, 1997).

Table (4) also shows that 38% of the sample hold collage diploma, and 18% hold secondary school certificate. This simply means that such labor migration is highly selective from the young and highly educated workforce in Jordan. Such skilled and educated workforce is easily available in Jordan. At the same time, this workforce is badly needed in the Arab Oil Countries due to the increasing number of development pr objects their, especially in education and construction.

Concerning the period that the migrant worker spent in the host country, Table (5) shows that 52% of the sample spent three to nine years in the host countries, about 28% spent ten to nineteen years, while 20% spent more than twenty years. This reflects the satisfaction of employers in the Arab oil countries. This also reflects the long period that migrant workers usually spend in host countries. Such period is taken from the migrant worker's most productive years of his life. Migrant workers usually seek to work abroad in order to get richer in short time. Yet some of them get stuck in the host country and cannot afford to go back to Jordan by his well because he accustomed himself to the standard of living in the host country. Twenty years or more abroad simply means that he got old enough to be productive again when he returns to his home country. It is really brain draining where the receiving country will benefit from the young and skilled workforce free of cost and with relatively low wages. And when the migrant worker gets old with poor health, he will be asked to leave back to his home country as soon as possible.

In terms of occupation in the host country, Table (6) shows that 38% of the sample used to work as professionals and technicians, about 22% worked in administrative positions, about 20% worked as teachers, 8% worked in trade, while the remaining 12% worked in several other occupations. This means that 80% of the sample worked in highly skilled and educated professions and occupations. At the same time, such occupations usually means fixed monthly salaries, in addition to health insurance and other fringe benefits.

Migrant workers cannot afford to open shops or businesses in the host country. Unskilled workforce is not demanded in the Arab Oil Countries because it is very easy to afford locally. Only highly skilled and educated workforce is in demand for the development plans and projects. This explains why some social scientists considered labor migration as brain drain from poor to rich countries (Rempel *et al.*, 1981).

Table (7) shows that 76% of the sample used to depend on monthly salaries as the source of income before they migrate to the Arab Oil Countries, and 9% depended on retirement, and 7% depended on trade, while the remaining 8% were unemployed. Again, this reflects the desire of the migrant worker to receive stable monthly income. This also means that 76% of the migrant workers used to have jobs and monthly salaries before they left Jordan. They were bot very rich, but at least they were socially stable. They migrated in order to have higher income and better standard of living in a shorter period. This could be the main driving force for labor migration everywhere and not only in Jordan. The higher wages in the receiving countries attract migrant workers who seek to build wealth in short time.

Concerning the change in occupation in the host country, Table (8) shows that 53% of the sample worked in jobs which are different from their original

skills, simply because they will get higher salaries. In fact, money is the driving force and not how to be creative in a given profession. In the long run, this shift will demolish the original skills of the migrant worker, especially the traditional-hand skills. For country such as Jordan, with very limited resources, hand skill and hand made product represent the only source of employment and income in several rural areas. This might support previous researches which concluded that migrant workers when they return to their home countries, they usually tend to leave their villages and farms and live in big cities (Ramzoun and Hussein, 1997). Thus, labor migration might lead the migrant worker to abandon his original skills that took him decades to develop.

Related to the above discussion is the change in the source of income after the migration. Table (9) shows that 38% of the sample still depend on monthly salaries as main source of income. This means that nothing much has changed in this regard. Employment opportunities remain to be the main source of income for them, before and after migration. Table (9) also shows that 34% of the sample became to rely on trade and small shops as new source of income. They brought back with them enough money to open small shops and trade projects in Jordan. Their dream was to establish their own independent shops or businesses. Thus they invest the wealth they collected in such small projects and shops, and then started to earn their income from such projects or shops.

The third new source of income according to Table (9) was the investment in buildings for rent, where 12% of the sample reported that they started to rely on the monthly rent they receive after they returned to Jordan. Migrant workers founded that the investment in housing for rental purposes proved to be a good source of income due to the high demand in Jordan. Thus, migrant workers started to rely on the monthly rent of the buildings they built or bought for this purpose, because rent is very expensive in Jordan.

The final new sources of income were equally divided between stocks\ land and taxi and buses, about 8% each. Taxi or stocks also good sources of income for many families in Jordan, and some migrant workers invested the money they collected from abroad in such areas because they give good monthly return, sometimes better than employment opportunities.

What the migrant worker usually seeks is a secured source of income that enables him to avoid working for others for minimal wages. The above new sources of income for Jordanian migrant workers are well known in their good monthly return for the rest of the Jordanian society. Therefore, migrant workers invested their money in such economic sectors.

Concerning the change in health insurance, which is very important for element in job stability, Table (10) shows that before migration, about two thirds or 66% of the sample used to have health insurance as part of the fringe benefit of work. Health insurance is compulsory for large firms, according to the Jordanian related laws. However, when migrant workers left to the Arab Oil Countries to work there, they resigned and, as a result, lost their health insurance. When they returned back to Jordan after years of work abroad, they could not afford to buy health insurance. They started to work at their own small shops, or they became too old to apply for such insurance, because insurance companies usually do not accept insuring people over sixty years old, except for very large firms. Table (10) shows that the percentage of insured

## Hussein Farhan: The Impact of Labor Migration on Job Concerns of the Jordanian Migrant Workers

workers in the sample dropped from 66% before migration to only 32%. This means that two thirds of the sample suffer now from the lack of health insurance which is very necessary for any worker in order to feel secured at his work. This also means that labor migration resulted in doubling the percentage of uninsured workers among Jordanian migrant workers. Related to the health insurance is the saving account at work or in a bank. Table (11) shows that 22% of the sample used to have such service before migration. This percentage increased to 28% during their work in the host countries and to 38% after they returned back to Jordan. This means that migrant workers became more capable to locate part of their income as savings a side from daily expenditures. Such savings, however, reflect the fact that they feel unsecured and unstable since they have no retirement or health insurance, as the rest of the workers. Above all, this also means that migrant workers feel isolated and different from the rest of the workforce in Jordan since they cannot benefit from certain services, or the feeling of lack of belonging to the local workforce. They lived in isolation in the host country as foreign workers, yet they still suffer from such feeling in their own country, but to a less degree.

The above fact can be better understood by examining the new areas of investment among migrant workers after they returned back to Jordan. Table (12) shows that the largest portion of investment (28%). In the traditions of the Jordanian society, the sign of one's success is the ownership of a house or an apartment after marriage. He wants to avoid paying rent and feel that his children are secured after him. Some build the new house or apartment in the same house of his parents, while others prefer to build alone or of his own. He wants to avoid his children future problems or complications with his relatives concerning family relations or house ownership.

The second largest investment (24%) was in trade and small shops. Migrant workers seek to work for their own businesses. Therefore, they invest the money they collected small shops such as grocery, boutique, mechanic, or other businesses. They prefer not to be dependent on limited monthly salary. Workers usually be more sincere and creative when they work for their own. This explains this trend among migrant workers to invest in small businesses.

The most surprising finding in this research could be the third largest investment (14%) which was in education. Migrant workers became to appreciate education since it means higher salaries and higher social status for themselves as well as for their children. The questionnaire for this research did not have (education) as independent investment, but the migrant workers reported that under (other investments). This support similar findings by that migrant Jordanian migrant workers are highly skilled and educated, because their salaries in the host country are heavily dependent on their level of education and years of experience. Thus, they want the best for themselves and their children.

The remaining areas of investment were distributed between stocks (9%), public taxi (6%), and several areas of investment (9%). This reflects the variation in the level of education and awareness among migrant workers. Highly educated workers tend to invest in stocks, while professionals and laborers choose to invest in more quick and guaranteed business, such as public taxi.

Concerning stability of the migrant worker in his profession, Table (15) shows that 90% of the sample were willing to work in certain jobs that are from their original skills if they paid higher salaries. This simply means that money became the driving force for many migrant workers who started to have less loyalty towards their professions or skills. This attitude was among them before they left to work in the host country in several other professions, sometimes out of their original skills. Such attitude was enhanced after migration, when they became rich enough to do so.

### Conclusion

This research was an attempt to examine the impact of labor migration on the professional life of the migrant worker himself, since he is the pillar of such migration. The results indicated that the Jordanian migrant workers were highly educated and experienced. They mainly work as teachers, technicians, and administrators.

Labor migration, as a process, seems to influence the future status of the migrant workers. In terms of income, migrant workers started to rely on trade and small businesses more than on monthly paid jobs. Based on that, they started to work in small businesses and trade after they returned back to Jordan. However, they lost their health insurance in return for the higher income they earned from the host country. As a result, migrant workers tend to have more savings and more investment, because they became financially more capable to do so, as well as more insecure in their work after they returned back to Jordan. This fact can be easily seen in the new attitude of the majority of the migrant workers who became unsatisfied with their present jobs or salaries; they always seek new jobs, any jobs with higher salaries, even if they are far from their own professions. Money became the driving force for most of the migrant workers, a fact which means the destruction of the professional life and security of the migrant worker in the long run.

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