



Looking towards ARDD's opportunities in the future:

## **Regional Responses regarding the Integration of Europe's Recently Arrived Arab Diaspora/Shataat**



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ARDD

النهضة العربية للديمقراطية والتنمية  
Arab Renaissance for Democracy & Development

Perspectives series – Part 1

Looking towards ARDD's opportunities in the future:

**Regional Responses regarding the Integration of  
Europe's Recently Arrived Arab Diaspora/Shataat**

## **“Looking towards ARDD’s opportunities in the future”**

### **Perspectives Series**

“Looking towards ARDD’s opportunities in the future” three-part Series, which Arab Renaissance for Democracy and Development launched based on the research findings of the “Women’s Access to Economic Justice Through Legal Empowerment” project supported by Ford Foundation, looks into perspectives going forward to address three themes that reflect some of the most important concerns of Jordanian youth, Syrian refugee women and recently arrived Arab diaspora/Shataat to Europe.

The Series reviews the importance of these themes and their implications for our Arab societies in the region and in the Shataat/ Diaspora and questions the solutions and prospects available to them in the current situations. It also highlights the perceptions of the current situation of youth and refugees’ choices in the light of the difficulties of economic empowerment, as demonstrated by Ford Foundation Project’s research on the obstacles to obtaining suitable work opportunities and the impact of poverty faced by large segments of our societies. In conclusion, the Series proposes studies’ directions with the goal to ultimately develop evidence-based policies that could contribute to solutions and alternatives towards more empowered, secure and coherent societies.

The first part of the series “Regional Responses regarding the Integration of Europe’s Recently Arrived Arab Diaspora/Shataat”. It examines the potential of civil society organizations in the MENA region to contribute positively to the ongoing European dialogue on the integration of the recent Arab Shataat/diaspora.

The second part “Jordanian youth and their decision-making processes regarding their futures” addresses the issue of out-migration of Jordanian youth, which has consistently been noteworthy. This paper addresses the factors that affect the decision-making processes of Jordanian youth regarding migration and all the relevant dimensions, it suggests further studies and analysis needed to bridge the gap between what young people want and lack.

The third part entitled “Gendering decision-making in mobility and insecurity; the necessity for including Syrian women and girls in discussions on potential return” highlights the importance of giving more attention to the inclusion of Syrian refugee women and girls in the ongoing dialogue on return.

### **Arab Renaissance for Democracy and Development (ARDD)**

Founded in 2008 in Amman-Jordan, Arab Renaissance for Democracy and Development (ARDD) is a Civil Society Organization seeking to foster transformative change towards an empowered, resilient and just society in Jordan and the Arab World. ARDD supports marginalized individuals and communities—including refugees and migrants—in acquiring and enjoying their social, political and economic rights, through legal aid, psychosocial support, media and grassroots mobilization, and research and advocacy to raise stakeholders’ awareness locally, regionally and internationally about the challenges that vulnerable persons face in Jordan and the Arab Region.

## Abstract

**In this paper we address the potential for civil society organizations (CSOs) from the MENA-region to positively contribute to discussions in Europe about the most recently arrived Arab diaspora, or shataat. We explore if, and how, lessons learned from this region with regard to hospitality and refugee hosting can be of use for governmental and institutional bodies and for civil society elsewhere. We particularly question how we can respond to problems related to the integration of recently arrived Arab migrants, taking the MENA region – which consists of sending and transitioning countries – as the point of departure. As such, it is our hope to contribute to dialogue that fosters the building of bridges towards inclusion within European countries, and that further counters exclusionary, racist and xenophobic tendencies.**

## Problem Statement

The most recent political and social upheavals in the Middle East have reinforced the need to fundamentally rethink and respond to the consequences of borders and boundaries. Outward migration from the MENA region in response to war is not a new phenomenon. Think, for instance, of the dispersal of the Palestinian shataat since the Nakba, or the movement of Lebanese nationals in response to the Lebanese civil war. Similarly, the 2003 invasion of Iraq and the ongoing conflicts in Syria and Yemen have disrupted the lives of millions who have fled their homes, and this has contributed to an unprecedented number of Arab refugees crossing and re-crossing borders and regional boundaries countless times as they seek asylum and refuge in Europe.

One result of this profound disruption has been the dynamic and complicated nature of the construction and reconstruction of identities, as individuals, families and groups find their sense of belonging is constantly unsettled. An important reason for responding from the MENA-region relates to the prolonged legal uncertainty that many Syrian and Iraqi refugees find themselves in in Europe. Keeping recognized refugees in legal uncertainty is in direct violation of the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, both of which all Western European countries are signatories. Although Jordan is not the ideal host country due to limited resources, it provides refugee protection despite not being a signatory of the Convention and the Protocol, and despite its own economic and structural difficulties. As such, holding European countries accountable for their commitments is a cen-

tral concern of a strong regional and international civil society.

In response to the EU economic crisis, there has been a decrease in funding for civil society organizations (European Economic and Social Committee, 2017), disproportionately affecting migrant organizations, organizations supporting migrants, and especially, organizations supporting minority women (Bassell and Emejulu, 2018). Specifically, advocacy organizations are still struggling with acquiring additional resources. This highlights the importance of, and opportunities for, collaboration between local and regional Civil Society Organizations based in the MENA region and in Europe in order to foster active and bridging roles. This is even more crucial considering the increasing popular support in Europe for xenophobic, anti-migrant and anti-Muslim media and politicians. In this paper and in ARDD's future work we further explore the possibilities for this type of cooperation, especially given that the cultural context and understanding from which these Arabs in diaspora come from is familiar to ARDD.

It is evident that the reasons for migration, and the conditions of it, are relevant to the rights which people in these situations are entitled to. Yet, an overarching consequence of any kind

of migration – be it for economic reasons, because of war, or to be closer to dispersed family members - is that it requires people to find a balance between belonging in and to different places. Rather than adhering to one singular identity defined by citizenship or a nation-state, migrants tend to inhabit complex, “in-between” circumstances of existence. Global developments in technologies have made this balancing act between different cultural and regional situations more apparent. It is ARDD's conviction that in the context of migration, preserving an identity that simultaneously does justice to one's host country as well as the Arab homeland is possible.

### **Integration (Al-Indimaj) over Assimilation (Al-Insihar)**

*Al-Insihar* refers to the idea that being in a European country requires foregoing your Arab cultural identity in order to be accepted. In being assimilated into a new non-Arab society, the migrant would have to choose where his or her loyalty lies – between one or the other nation-state and culture. Policies in western countries regarding what is called ‘multiculturalism’ have rightfully been critiqued by western scholars for their exclusionary tendencies. The ways in which policies around ‘multi-

culturalism' were implemented further contributed to the idea that non-white migrants (including people born and raised there) were 'others' – not like 'us' – whose rights were conditional and who constantly needed to prove their loyalty (Lentin and Titley, 2012; Yuval-Davis, 2012).

In contrast, *al-Indimaj*, a more flexible approach to integration into host societies - leaves space for preserving one's diasporic Arab identity while feeling received as an equal citizen in one's new society. This can contribute to positive changes in that new community. It is hard work that requires substantial support – from policies, institutions and civil society – but is a necessary process towards social cohesion and societal harmony.

Migrants have to work hard to become part of their new home. Integration, in contrast to assimilation, is a two-way street: the successful settlement and well-being of the recently arrived migrant into a new society becomes extremely difficult when the receiving population puts up barriers towards integration. Often, the receiving population is not aware of these social, economic, legal, cultural, and language-related barriers within their societies that make integration of the newcomers difficult.

## Identifying structural barriers and understanding potential opportunities

This is where the role and importance of collaborating between different civil society organizations – with different geographical and cultural backgrounds – comes into play. It is to further contribute to identifying the social, cultural and psychological barriers that Western civil society organizations – as well as governmental institutions and private companies – might not be aware of. These often potentially hinder the ability of some migrants to successfully integrate into one's new home country. For instance, much xenophobic and anti-Muslim backlash in Europe targets in particular refugee women. Here, ARDD's work on recognizing and targeting the structural barriers that vulnerable refugee Muslim women face might provide helpful entry points for interventions elsewhere.

Support in western countries for xenophobic and anti-immigration politicians are most often explained through the feelings of fear and lack of job-opportunities among the white working class. Critical social scientists have explained this fear, in relation to the decline of the social welfare state and economic crises – as two develop-

ments that do not relate to the arrival of newcomers (see for instance Hage, 2003). As has been the case in Jordan, concerns of the host population need to be taken seriously and need to be fully addressed in order to foster societal harmony for all.

Further developing inter- and intra-cultural dialogue and awareness-raising of both sides – the migrant and host populations – is crucial in order to *improve* and *maintain* a better human condition for all. Dialogue and cooperation enables people to overcome seeing the ‘other’ as a threat and instead move towards recognizing each other as a fellow human being.

With the aim of building these bridges, ARDD stewarded a project called *Antaga*, supporting Syrian and Iraqi refugees in Sweden. The project highlighted their positive participation within the Swedish context through cultural activities in their country of asylum – while preserving their cultural identity to prevent further fragmentation of their families and distance from one’s history. The project uses different media platforms, including community dialogue events and workshops aimed at women’s participation and also addressed differences in childrearing. Moving forward, it will also consist of the production of a short documentary film covering the challenges that recently-arrived Arab migrants face in

their attempts to integrate into Swedish culture.

Recently arrived migrants in Europe often have their own rich cultural and life experiences that they can draw upon, if provided the space to do so. Often certificates, diplomas, and work experiences are disregarded in European countries and newcomers have to start from scratch. Another important contribution for CSOs based in the MENA-region can potentially be mitigating these challenges, for instance in terms of accrediting academic or professional experiences or sharing their lessons in regard to working with the private sector. From our experience, separation from family – nuclear but also extended family – has severe impact on the lives of recently arrived migrants. In Jordan, 36.5 % of all registered Syrian refugees, are separated from a nuclear family member (Columbia Global Centers, 2018). Regional CSOs can step in when issues relating to lack of documentation, procedural costs, and language barriers make family re-unification procedures more difficult. Moreover, issues around the consequences of divorce and the well-being of children whose parents are divided by borders require innovative thinking, not only from the receiving society, but also the sending countries and their leadership.

## Conclusion

ARDD's Arab Migration and Arab Diaspora initiative is designed to generate results-driven solutions to these challenges, relying precisely on what is one of ARDD's skills: listening to the concerns from refugee communities themselves and advocating on behalf of them for their rights. Transformative change comes when working *with, by, about*, and ultimately *for* those concerned. We hope that the *Antaga* project and other upcoming projects will enable us to further learn how to practically respond to the issues affecting and concerning Arab migrants in Europe. ARDD seeks to support those within the Arab diaspora in ways that would make them independent and depend on themselves to manage, survive, and thrive.

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