

LERC presents paper at the CMRS Research Conference on Migration and Refugees in the Region

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Reported by Basma Abdel Khalek, LERC Project Manager

The Lebanese Emigration Research Center (LERC) at Notre Dame University in Lebanon participated in the Center of Migration and Refugee Studies (CMRS) research conference on Migration and Refugee in the Middle East region that was held at the American University in Cairo, Egypt, on May 8th and 9th 2010.

Ms. Basma Abdel Khalek, Project Manager and Research Assistant at LERC, presented a paper entitled *The Global Financial Crisis: Impact on the Lebanese Expatriates in the Gulf*, authored by Ms. Guita Hourani, Director of LERC. Ms. Suzanne Menhem, a PhD candidate at Université de Poitiers, who had assisted Ms. Hourani along with Ms. Abdel Khalek in this study, was also present at the conference.

The Research Conference was attended by various researchers and scholars from Egypt, Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, Turkey, Sudan, and Ethiopia, who also presented the findings of their research from their respective countries on topics such as migration trends and patterns, migrant workers, refugees, international migration and remittances, human rights, economic migration, and displacement.

The conference opened with the speech by Dr. Ray Jureidini, Director of the CMRS, who welcomed the speakers and participants at AUC, and briefly presented the main activities of the Center, mainly the organization of weekly seminars and meetings and the active participation with a training center in Cairo to deal with refugees. Following Dr. Jureidini's speech, Dr. Nabil Fahmy, Dean of the School of Global Affairs and Public Policy at AUC, addressed the audience to brief them about the School, which contributes to collaborative efforts dealing with issues of human rights, law, poverty, advocacy and refugees in the Middle East and Africa, as well as in the world.



Dr. Ray Jureidini delivering his welcome speech at AUC (May 2010).

Ms. Basma Abdel Khalek was among the speakers in the session on the Middle East, where she presented the findings of her study on the impact of the global financial crisis on the Lebanese working in the Gulf countries. In her presentation, Ms. Abdel Khalek started by thanking the CMRS for inviting LERC to take part in the conference.



Ms. Basma Abdel Khalek presenting the study *The Global Financial Crisis: Impact on the Lebanese Expatriates in the Gulf* at AUC (May 2010).

She began her presentation with a historical overview on Lebanese migration, which started around the end of the 19th century and which continues to the present day. She also discussed the push factors behind Lebanese migration, mainly the political insecurity and the socio-economic turbulence in the country, which have affected the decision of Lebanese to migrate, seeking more opportunities abroad. Ms. Abdel Khalek also exposed some facts about the Lebanese presence in the Gulf which started in the 1950s and was boosted in the 1980s and the 1990s due to the unstable situation in war-time Lebanon and to the geographical proximity of these countries to Lebanon.

Following the introductory part of her presentation, Ms. Abdel Khalek considered the impact of the global financial crisis on the economies of the Gulf countries to talk about the decline of the financial markets in these countries and the drop-off of new job opportunities, in the UAE principally.



Some participants at the CMRS Research Conference (May 2010).

As for the impact of the crisis on the Lebanese working in the Gulf, Ms. Abdel Khalek detailed the methodology of research conducted by the author to study this phenomenon. The methodology was based on a survey that was sent out to Lebanese expatriates in the Gulf asking them to answer some questions, and on expert interviews with banking, economics and policy experts in Lebanon and the UAE, as well as on media monitoring, literature review and information

extracted from reports of Lebanese embassies in the Gulf countries.

Before closing her presentation, Ms. Abdel Khalek shared with the audience the results and findings of the research. She highlighted the impact of the global financial crisis on the Lebanese expatriates in the Gulf, which was not as critical and calamitous as pictured in several media outlets at the beginning of the crisis. The study showed that Lebanese working in the Gulf countries, and especially those residing in the UAE, felt a fear of losing their jobs, as well as suffering a decline in bonuses and fringe benefits. Most of those who answered the questionnaire expressed their willingness to accept reduction in promotions and live through the difficult conditions in order to avoid losing their jobs. The impact of the crisis on remittance transfers to Lebanon was considerable but not disastrous, because Lebanon has continued to receive transfers from expatriates working in the Gulf during crisis time with a slight reduction of amounts due to the delicate working conditions of the senders.

The paper also illustrated the survival strategies of the Lebanese expatriates in response to the crisis. Almost all respondents chose to avoid risky investments, to reduce the frequency of travelling and to increase their savings. Ms. Abdel Khalek also highlighted the fact that some Lebanese in the Gulf may move to other countries in Africa, Europe or the USA searching for opportunities or may return to Lebanon to start a new business or work as freelancers. The decision to return to Lebanon remains correlated with the measures that the Lebanese government should take to reduce unemployment, boost economic activity and ensure political stability.

To conclude, Ms. Abdel Khalek emphasized the importance of developing further research on contemporary issues related to migration, using instruments to collect quantitative data in addition to qualitative data collection strategies. At the end of her presentation, Ms. Abdel Khalek took part in the discussion answering questions addressed by participants.



LERC represented by Ms. Abdel Khalek (right) and Ms. Menhem (May 2010).



Dr. Jureidini and Ms. Abdel Khalek pictured at the conference (May 2010).