

Egyptian Expatriates' Engagement: Analysis of the Role of the State (2015-2023)

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Abstract

The question of expatriate engagement has been gaining momentous importance on the agenda of the Egyptian state since 2014. In an attempt to design a national strategy for engaging with its expatriates, the Egyptian government has been keen on developing specific policies and initiatives, starting with re-establishing the Egyptian Ministry of Emigration (Samra, 2018). This has been followed by several initiatives that aimed at providing public services to the expatriates, fostering their investment rates, and consolidating their national identity and sense of belonging (Samra, 2018). Hence, it would be interesting to analyze the national policies and initiatives for expatriate engagement further while addressing the following research question: "In light of A. Gamlen's typology of diaspora engagement policies, to what extent can the Egyptian emigrants' engagement policies and initiatives be considered comprehensive?"

To address the research question and prove the argument, the paper is divided into six sections, including a thorough conceptual framework, an analysis of the value the Egyptian emigrants represent to their homeland, and an examination of the mounting political will and interest in engaging the Egyptian expatriates. Based on this political will, the paper analyses the policies of capacity-building, and the initiatives that aim at extending rights and extracting obligations in terms of remittances, investments, and knowledge transfer.

Keywords: Egyptian expatriates, Gamlen's typology, Institution-building, symbolic nation-building, extension of rights.

Introduction

After a series of popular uprisings and socio-political instabilities between 2011 and 2013, the Egyptian state has witnessed an exponential rise in its immigration rate, which increased to 66.2% in only five years (2011-2015) (World Bank, n.d.). According to national reports, the number of national expatriates reached 12 million in 2022 (Taha, 2022). These immigrants represent a strategically important human capital that can contribute to the Egyptian national development, but they are also an important source of remittances which reached US\$ 32 billion in 2022 (Al-Aees, 2022)

Accordingly, in response to the potential positive contribution of migrants to the Egyptian national development, the government has shown an important interest and political will in strengthening the ties with the expatriates in order to benefit from their acquired knowledge and expertise, and to enhance their rates of investments in their homelands (Dawood, 2021; Samra, 2018). This political will is regularly emphasised upon by the government's political discourse, as well as the speeches of President Abdel-Fattah El-Sisi, along with high-ranking officials who all put the issue of expatriates' engagement among the top priorities of the state (State Information Service, 2022). This approach comes within a larger national strategy to construct a "New Republic" which would be based on an inclusive and sustainable development (State Information Service, 2022)

Hence, in an attempt to design a national strategy in engaging with the national expatriates, the Egyptian government has been keen on developing certain policies and initiatives since 2014, starting with the re-establishment of the Egyptian Ministry of Emigration (Samra, 2018). This includes several legal amendments, and initiatives that aimed at providing public services to the expatriates, fostering their investment rates, and consolidating their national identity and sense of belonging (Samra, 2018). In addition to these state-centred public initiatives, the government has also been cooperating with some non-state actors in order to expand its reach to the national expatriates, and to consolidate the national identity and sense of belonging of the young Egyptian expatriates while preventing the cycles of identity loss.

Hence, it would be interesting to further analyse the national policies and initiatives for expatriate engagement while addressing the following research question: "In light of A. Gamlen's typology of diaspora engagement policies, to what extent can the Egyptian emigrants' engagement policies and initiatives be considered comprehensive?".

This paper argues that due to the increasing potential value that the expatriates represent to their homeland in terms of financial and human capital, and based on Gamlen's typology of diaspora engagement policy, the Egyptian public approach to expatriate engagement can be considered comprehensive as it encompasses efforts for institution-building, and symbolic nation-building. It also directs attention to political integration, and social services while attempting to enhance the remittances' rates and expatriates' knowledge transfers though offering different sets of incentives.

Accordingly, the paper is divided into six sections: the first section is devoted to the conceptual framework in which the paper defines Gamlen's typology of diaspora engagement policies, and discusses the concepts of expatriates and diaspora while explaining the reason behind the use of the term "expatriate" rather than diaspora when addressing Egyptian emigrants. The second section elaborates on the value that the Egyptian emigrants can represent to their homeland; this value is derived from their financial and human capital contributions. The third section showcases the mounting political will and interest in engaging the Egyptian expatriates. Based on this political will, the fourth section analyses the state policies in terms of capacity-building while shedding the light on the institution-building and symbolic nation-building aspects. The fifth section elaborates on the extension of political rights, and social services to the expatriates. Finally, the last section focuses on the extraction of obligations in terms of remittances, investments, and knowledge transfer.

I- Conceptual Framework

a. Gamlen's typology of diaspora engagement policies

The concept of expatriate engagement (sometimes referred to as diaspora engagement) signifies the policies and strategies that aim to reach out to the expatriates, and re-integrate them economically, politically, and socially into their homelands (Gamlen, 2006, p.5). Accordingly, an extensive study has been undertaken by A. Gamlen (2006) who analysed the variety of expatriate engagement policies implemented in a large number of states across different continents and with different development levels and organised them into an interesting and comprehensive typology. This typology includes three main categories: capacity-building, extension of rights, and extraction of obligations.

Firstly, the capacity-building efforts are considered key elements in inducing expatriate engagement. According to Gamlen (2006, as cited in Jha,

2015, p. 380), they focus on the development of well-organised public institutions that work on establishing and managing a state-centred transnational society. The process of capacity-building includes two major aspects: institution-building and symbolic nation-building. The institution-building can take different forms from developing a unit to gather accurate data and needs assessments of the expatriates to establishing a ministerial-level entity to engage the expatriates (Gamlen, 2006, pp. 8–9). This entity, regardless of its scale, should be capable of setting objectives and exercising power to manage the affairs of the expatriates. Furthermore, the symbolic nation-building is defined as the use of symbols and inclusive rhetoric to create a transnational community united by a sense of belonging to the homeland (Dawood, 2021, p. 75). These symbols and rhetoric can be accompanied by initiatives to promote cultural ties, the initiation of expatriate-targeted media, acknowledgments and celebration of the expatriates' achievements, and the development of effective communication channels (Dawood, 2021, p. 75).

Secondly, the extension of rights is also an interesting component of expatriate engagement policies. These include mainly two aspects: political incorporation, and social and civil rights and services. The political incorporation can include the extension of political and voting right to a wide range of expatriates, enhance their representation in their national political sphere and encourage their participation in elections and referendums (Gamlen, 2006, pp. 10–12). The social and civil right and services can include social support, welfare protection, services to enhance visits to the homelands (Gamlen, 2006, p. 12). This set of policies and initiatives aim to strengthen the connection between the expatriate and their state of origin (Dawood, 2012, p. 4).

Finally, the last category of policies aims to extract obligations from the expatriates. These obligations can have different natures according to the priorities and political agenda of the state. According to Gamlen's typology, these can include investment policies, emigration taxes, knowledge transfer initiatives, and/or lobbying in the receiving state (Gamlen, 2006, pp. 13–16). It is worth mentioning that the term obligation in this typology does not necessarily mean a requirement imposed by the state on its emigrants, but it can take a variety of forms including incentives, or participation in knowledge transfer programs (Dawood, 2012, p. 5).

Accordingly, this typology is used for the research analysis as it provides a thorough framework through which the Egyptian policies and initiatives can be comprehensively analysed.

b. Concepts of diaspora and expatriates

For precision purposes, it remains of significant importance to tackle the conceptual difference between the notion of “diaspora” and “expatriate” to determine which of these concepts is more applicable to the case study. This differentiation is also essential since a large portion of the literature studying Egyptians living abroad defines them as “Egyptian diaspora” rather than expatriates (Dawood, 2021; Kuşçu, 2012; Mehrez & Hamdy, 2010; Samra, 2018; Zohry & Debnath, 2010)

The term “diaspora” is derived from Greek roots and literally means “scattering of seeds” (Anthias, 1998 as cited in Grossman, 2019, p. 1264). Classically and until the late twentieth century, this concept has been used to designate specific populations that have been forcibly dispersed after an exile; hence, it has traditionally been used to refer to the Jewish population after their forced exile after the conquest of Babylon (Gamlen, 2008, p. 842; Grossman, 2019, p. 1264; Reis, 2004, p. 44). Some authors include also the Greeks and the Armenians as diasporas (Grossman, 2019, p. 1264). Theorists and scholars aligning with the classical conceptualisation of the notion argue that the migration of the diasporas is involuntary, so it is a forcible dispersion that is caused by a traumatic experience (Grossman, 2019, p. 1271). The diasporic identity is also distinct from other types of identity as it is based on shared sociocultural traits, shared memories of dispersion and/or forced migration, and nostalgia for an imagined or real homeland (Grossman, 2019, p. 1275). Diasporas also share the so-called “victim tradition” in their history and discourse; this tradition is based on the traumatic events that led to their forced dislocation (Cohen, 1996, p. 4). This classical conceptualisation of diaspora is still widely used by some scholars (Reis, 2004, p. 44).

However, by the end of the twentieth century, the term has been employed in a looser and more flexible manner (Parladir & Özkan, 2014, p. 106). Theorists enlarged the conceptualisation of the term to include migrants, refugees, guest workers, expatriates, and any other minority group living in a foreign land (Parladir & Özkan, 2014, p. 106). In other words, the term “diaspora” is sometimes used by some scholars to refer to any group of people who is voluntarily or involuntarily separated from their homeland and have some levels of affinity to their native communities (Al-Marebi et al., 2022, p. 386; Pradhan, 2021, p. 2). This enlargement of the concept is highly problematic as it has been charged for confusion, extreme fluidity and lack of boundaries for

the notion. Hence, it undermines the core meaning of the concept and leads to unprecise practical and empirical methodologies (Grossman, 2019, p. 1264).

Thus, to avoid any conceptual or methodological confusion, the research refers to Egyptians abroad as expatriates, as per the terminology used in the official and legal documents.

II- Importance of the Egyptian Expatriates' Contributions

a. Mapping of the Egyptian Expatriates: 1990s to 2020s

To understand the mounting importance of the engagement of Egyptian expatriates and their contributions to the state, it is important to start by tracing the Egyptian expatriation trends from the 1990s to the early 2020s. This analysis helps in paving the way to highlighting the potential value that the expatriates represent to their homeland.

Starting 1990s, there has been a rise in both permanent and temporary Egyptian migration. As per law No. 111 of 1983, permanent migrants are those who seek a dual nationality or permanent residence permit in a foreign state, this is predominantly the case for expatriates who aim at permanently living in Western or Latin American states (Müller-Funk, 2017, p. 55). On the other hand, temporary migrants are those who seek to temporarily work abroad, mainly in the neighbouring Arab states (Müller-Funk, 2017, p. 55). However, it is interesting to note that during the 1990s, the rate of temporary migrations exceeded the permanent ones as scholars state that “Egypt is now experiencing what is called the permanence of temporary migration” (Farrag, 1999, 55, as cited in Zohry, 2003, p. 5). In fact, this rise in temporary emigration is well-illustrated in the exponential increase of the number of contracts for Egyptians working in Arab states; these latter escalated from 589 contracts in 1991 to 100 839 in June 2005 (Zohry, 2007, p. 15). In 2001, the destination of half of these temporary emigrations was the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), succeeded by Libya (representing 17.4% of Egyptian emigrants), Jordan (11.9%), Kuwait (10%), and UAE (5%) (CAPMAS, 2001, as cited in Zohry, 2003, p. 4).

However, the early 2010s witnessed important regional political instabilities which affected the migration of Egyptians. The violent escalations in Libya, and Syria resulted in the return of a large number of Egyptian emigrants. These regional instabilities marked also an increase in the level of irregular migration within the region (Zohry, 2013, p. 52). Simultaneously, the political instabilities that took place in Egypt between 2011 and 2014 and the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood to power led a large number of Egyptians to

seek permanent migration in Western states (Zohry, 2013, p. 53). Accordingly, Egyptian emigration continued in its upward trend; however, it slightly changed in nature as the demand for uneducated workers decreased compared to the contracts provided to skilled and highly-educated Egyptians (David et al., 2019, p. 18). The emigration destinations maintained their status quo (apart from Libya) with the KSA being the main host of Egyptian labour, succeeded by Kuwait, and UAE (David et al., 2019, p. 21).

Based on the statistics released by CAPMAS, the number of Egyptian expatriates reached around 10.2 million Egyptians in 2017 (Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS), 2019, p. 69). The majority of the expatriates, around 7 million, reside in neighbouring Arab states and the rest is globally dispersed: 1.3 million in Europe, 33 595 in Asia, 1.8 million in the American continent, and 45 000 in Africa (Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS), 2019, p. 69; El-Ebedy, 2022, p. 86). These numbers further increased as, according to the former Minister of Emigration and Egyptian Expatriates' Affairs, Ms Soha El-Gendy, the number of Egyptians living abroad reached 12 million in 2022 (Taha, 2022). The KSA maintains its status as a top destination for Egyptian emigrants with 2.2 Egyptian migrants while Kuwait and UAE host around 600 000 Egyptian expatriates (Taha, 2022).

However, it is important to note that these numbers are only estimates as according to the former Egyptian Minister of Emigration, Ms Nabila Makram, some Egyptian families choose not to officially register their information in the Egyptian embassies and consulates (El-Ebedy, 2022, p. 85). Additionally, some emigrants no longer have their Egyptian passports as their host states do not authorise dual-citizenships, this is for example the case for Austria (El-Ebedy, 2022, p. 85).

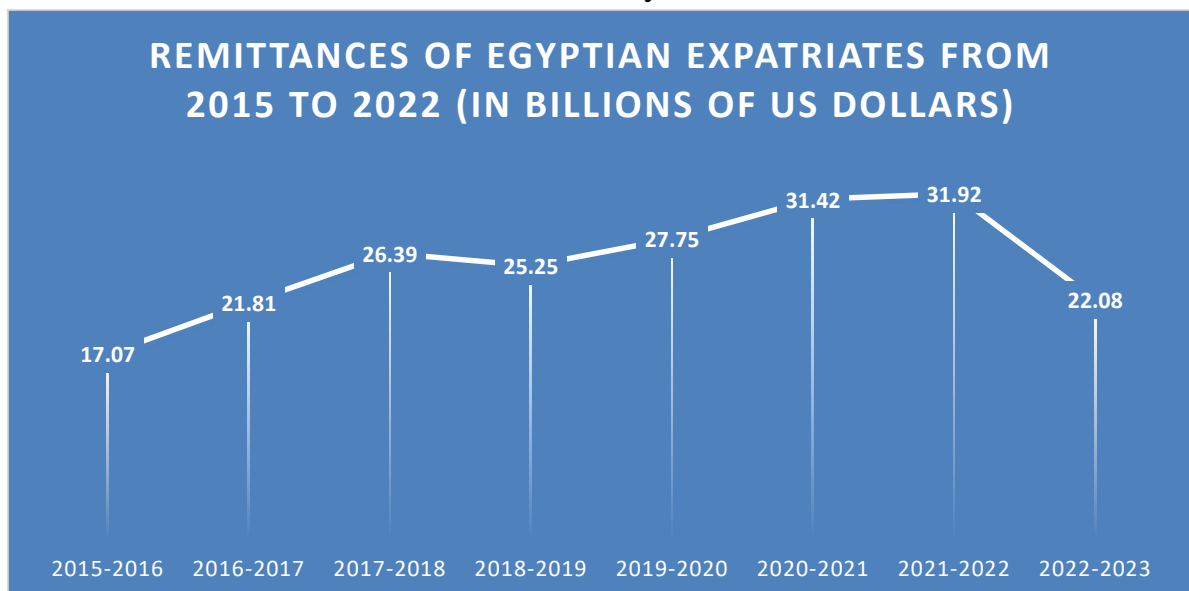
Thus, this brief analysis shows that Egyptian expatriation rates maintained an upward trend since the early 1990s which led the phenomenon to become predominant in the social and political discourse. In fact, the national expatriates became a key asset with the potential to highly contribute to the development of their homeland. These contributions can be categorised into financial capital contributions and human capital contributions.

b. Financial Capital contributions

The literature shows that the financial capital contributions of the migrants, including remittances and investments, can potentially foster the

development of their state of origin. Some scholars explain that remittances have the potential to improve the standards of living of the migrants' families which can help during times of crisis while it can also stimulate local consumption and demand, boost the cycles of production, and eventually revive the local economy (Østergaard-Nielsen, 2003, p. 16; Stahl & Arnold, 1986, p. 899). Furthermore, according to the Global Knowledge Partnership on Migration and Development, the remittances inflows constitute a greater source of financial support to the LMIC (low-and middle-income countries) compared to foreign direct investment and external development aid (Global Knowledge Partnership on Migration and Development (KNOMAD), 2023, p. 1). They also are considered key for vulnerable economies suffering from a national public deficit and shortage of foreign currency (Itzigsohn, 2000, p. 1143).

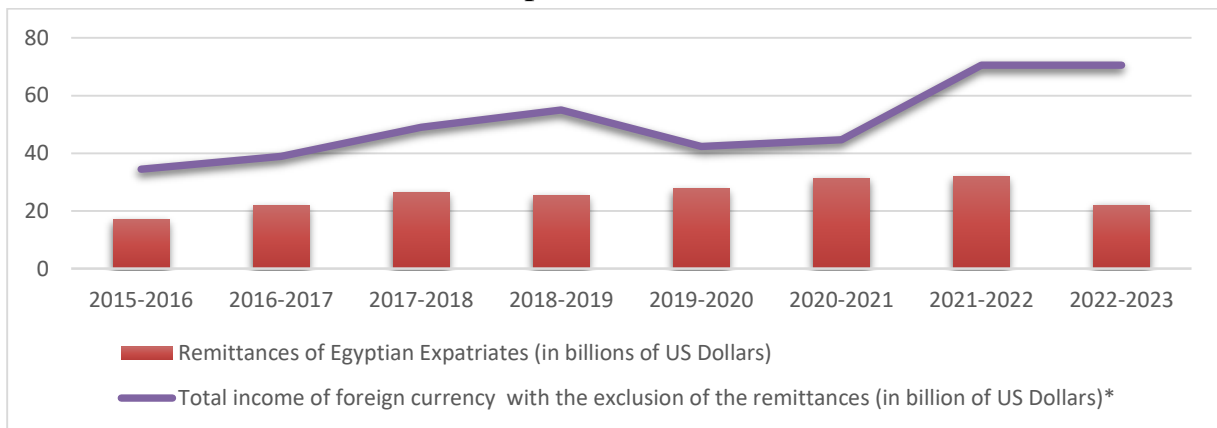
By assessing the value of remittances to the Egyptian state, it is possible to claim that remittances are one of the most important sources of foreign currency. According to the below graph (graph 1), remittances reached \$17.07 billion in 2015-2016, and this number continued to increase at a steady pace until it reached \$26.39 billion in 2017-2018. Despite a slight drop in the following year, they continued in their upward trend while reaching \$31.92 billion in 2021-2022 (Ali et al., 2024, p. 20). Accordingly, these changes show an increase of almost 190% in seven fiscal years.



Graph 1: Remittances of Egyptian Expatriates From 2015 To 2023 (In Billions Of US Dollars). Graph designed by the author based on data gathered from Ali, Abu Alftouh, and Hamza (2024, p. 17).

Furthermore, while the remittances are significant in their net values

across the years, it remains important to compare them to other sources of revenue in hard currency. The below graph (graph 2) shows that, from 2015 to 2020, the remittances constituted 45% to 70% of the total Egyptian revenues in foreign currencies (Ali et al., 2024, p. 14). Focusing on 2021-2022, one can note that the remittances constitute almost 6.7% of Egypt's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Ali et al., 2024, p. 23). During the same fiscal year, the remittances' value was greater than the sum of the revenues that resulted from the Suez Canal fees (US \$7 billion), tourism (US \$10.7 billion), and foreign direct investments (US \$8.9 billion) (Ali et al., 2024, p. 20).



Graph 2: Remittances of Egyptian Expatriates from 2015 to 2022 Compared to Other Sources of Income (In Billions of US Dollars). Graph designed by the author based on data gathered from Ali, Abu Alftouh, and Hamza (2024, p. 17).

Thus, the financial capital contributions of the Egyptian emigrants are of irrefutable value to the state as they constitute a key pillar of the economy and a fundamental source of foreign currency.

c- **The Human Capital Contributions**

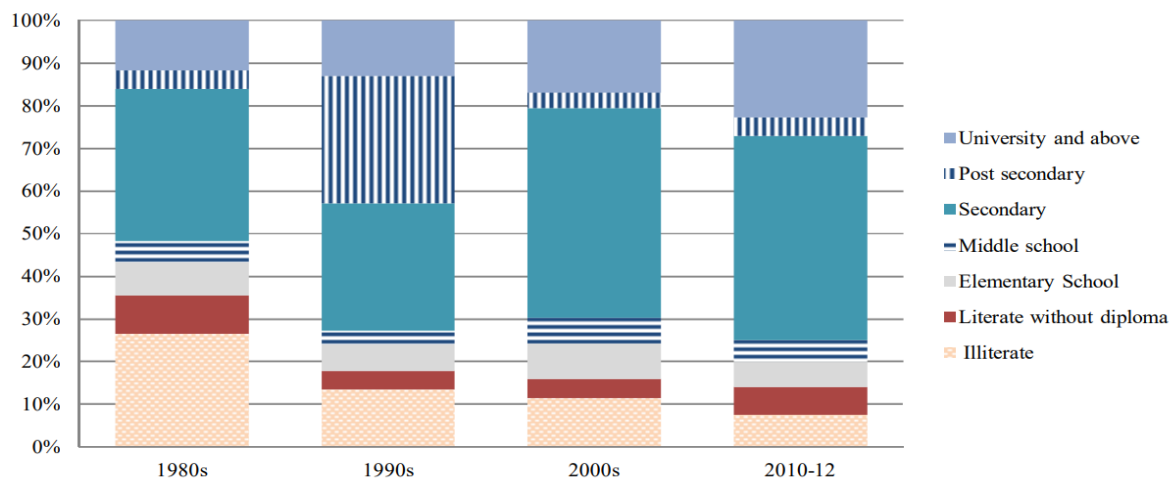
The value of the Egyptian expatriates does not only reside in their financial input but also in their potential human capital contributions.

Although some scholars warn about the risks of “brain drain” as it can highly benefit the receiving states at the expense of the emigrants’ homeland and deepen the cycles of dependency of the poorer sending states (Docquier & Rapoport, 2007; Lien & Wang, 2005), the literature increasingly focuses on the potential benefits of “brain circulation” (Mehrez & Hamdy, 2010, p. 252). This concept addresses the possible movement of the highly skilled labour across different states making them capable of travelling back and forth between the states of origin and of residence.

It is worth noting that the Egyptian nation possesses a significant portion of highly skilled expatriates, mainly those who permanently migrate to Western

states. Based on a survey conducted by the Migration Policy Institute (2015, p. 12), between the years 2009 and 2013, 38% of Egyptian expatriates living in the United States of America (USA) had a bachelor's degree (compared to only 20% of the total American population), and 26% of the Egyptian expatriates held a post-graduate degree, compared to only 11% of the American general public. These significant percentages of highly educated migrants are also relevant in other Western states. In fact, in 2008, 65% of Egyptians in Canada, 59% in Ireland, 51% in Switzerland, and more than 40% in Belgium, France, Sweden, and the United Kingdom (UK) had completed tertiary education or advanced research programs (Dawood, 2012, p. 8).

Furthermore, it is worth noting that these numbers are witnessing a persistent rise which adds to the importance of the Egyptian human capital. In fact, according to the below graph (graph 3) designed by Wahba (2014, p. 12), the proportion of highly educated emigrants is incrementally growing compared to the sum of the illiterate emigrants and those who are literate but without any diplomas. Hence, while the latter group composed 35% of the Egyptian migrants in the 1980s, they only represented approximately 17% in the 1990s and 14% in the early 2010s. In contrast, the expatriates who obtained a bachelor's degree represented only 12% in the 1980s; however, this percentage reached almost 22% in 2010-2012.



Graph 3: Egyptian Emigrants Distribution Based on The Education Level (Wahba, 2014, p. 12)

These high levels of education are complemented by the acquisition of advanced skills, expertise, and high-ranking positions in the hosting states. According to the research conducted by Zohry and Debnath (2010, p. 45), 97.5% of Egyptian expatriates living in Western states and 44.3% of those residing in Arab states believe that they acquired new skills from their state of

residence. Furthermore, a significant proportion of Egyptian migrants, particularly permanent expatriates, are likely to hold high-ranking positions. For instance, based on a study conducted by the Migration Policy Institute (2015, p. 7), almost half of the Egyptian expatriates in the USA work in professional or managerial positions; a percentage that is significantly higher than the one of the general American public (only 31%).

Thus, based on the aforementioned data, it is observable that Egypt possesses rich human capital with a significant potential to contribute to national development. According to the literature, by enhancing “brain circulation”, highly skilled expatriates can provide their homeland with international knowledge and expertise while forming knowledge networks (Lowell & Findlay, 2002). They are also considered “reputation intermediaries” as they provide a certain prestigious representation of their state of origin (Mehrez & Hamdy, 2010, p. 252). Additionally, skilled migrants can also stimulate social, and cultural exchanges while enhancing the richness of the sending state’s socio-cultural fabric (Lowell & Findlay, 2002). Finally, skilled expatriates can also improve modernisation efforts in their homelands by providing scientific consultancy, facilitating technology transfers, and investing in developmental and entrepreneurial projects (Lowell & Findlay, 2002; Mehrez & Hamdy, 2010, p. 252).

III-Egyptian Expatriate Engagement: Remarkable Political Will

A closer look at the Egyptian political agenda shows that there is a growing interest and political will in expatriate engagement. This is highlighted in Article (88) of the amended 2014 Egyptian Constitution which states the following:

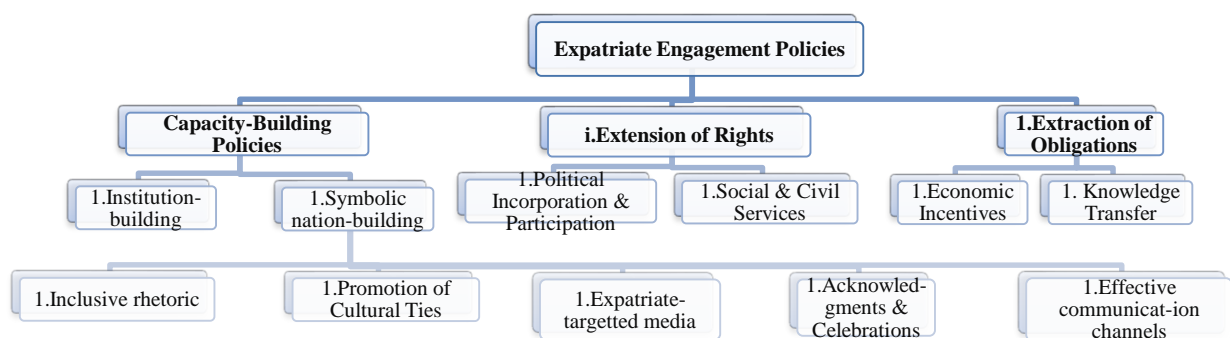
The State shall safeguard the interests of Egyptians living abroad, protect them and protect their rights and freedoms, enable them to perform their public duties towards the State and society and encourage their contribution to the development of the nation. (Constitution of the Arab Republic of Egypt, 2014)

The Egyptian political will in integrating and engaging the Egyptian expatriates is also well-documented in the 2030 vision of Egypt as it includes the following goals as part of a more sustainable strategy for national development:

- The establishment of policies and initiatives to enhance international financial flows with a special focus on remittances which should be directed to the national development (Ministry of Planning and Economic Development, 2023, p. 23)
- The enhancement of the transfer of skills and knowledge from Egyptian experts and scholars residing abroad while strengthening their connection with their homeland (Ministry of Planning and Economic Development, 2023, p. 26)
- The maintenance of the Egyptian identity among young expatriates (Ministry of Planning and Economic Development, 2023, p. 39)

Accordingly, the state has undertaken numerous public policies and initiatives attempting to implement the aforementioned national goals. These public policies and initiatives can be classified as follows:

Capacity-Building Policies



a. Institution-building

The Egyptian efforts in engaging the expatriates crystallised by the 2015 Presidential decree No. 379 which aimed at re-establishing the Ministry of State for Emigration and Egyptian Expatriates' Affairs (MOE) (Ministry of Emigration and Egyptian Expatriates' Affairs, n.d.-b). This ministry is a core

state institution with the relevant capacity and authority to manage all issues regarding emigration flows, illegal migration, and the affairs of Egyptians living abroad (Ministry of Emigration and Egyptian Expatriate's Affairs, n.d.). Since 2016, the ministry has undertaken important measures to develop organisational structures to ensure a successful management of the migration flows, and an impactful engagement of Egyptian expatriates (Ministry of Emigration and Egyptian Expatriates' Affairs, n.d.-b). Thus, from 2015 to 2023, the ministry has been active in initiating policies and programs for expatriate engagement under the leadership of two ministers: Ambassador Nabila Makram (2015-2022), and Ambassador Soha El-Gendy (2022-2024) (Ministry of Emigration and Egyptian Expatriates' Affairs, n.d.-a).

According to the published ministry's strategy (Ministry of Emigration and Egyptian Expatriates' Affairs, n.d.) and a report published by the State Information Service (2023c), the ministry aims at:

- Formulating a national and inclusive public opinion
- Benefitting from the expatriates' knowledge and experience
- Strengthening the national, political, economic, and social ties among the expatriates and between them and their homeland
- Developing a comprehensive policy for Egyptian migration
- Formulating policies and initiatives to combat illegal migration.

It would be interesting to note that these goals mirror those mentioned in the Egyptian 2030 Vision. Hence, the establishment of a ministerial-level entity to target the engagement of expatriates is a significant building bloc upon which the state ensures proper capacity-building.

b. Symbolic nation-building

When focusing on the Egyptian efforts in engaging the expatriates, it is possible to highlight important attempts of symbolic nation-building. Firstly, these attempts are well-illustrated in the lexicon used in the official documents that address emigrants-related matters. In fact, law no. 111 of the year 1983 refers to the emigrants as "*Al-Masryin Bl Kharig*" which translates into "Egyptians living abroad" (as used in Articles 2 (b), and 3), or in some instances, they are named "*Mohageryn*" which means "migrants" (as in Article 2 (a)) (Law No. 111/1983, 1983). The Egyptian constitution utilises also the same inclusive terminology as it refers to the emigrants as "Egyptians living abroad" (Article 88) (*Constitution of the Arab Republic of Egypt*, 2014). Hence, these terms are used to reiterate an existing connection to the homeland. Furthermore,

any expressions that might have a negative connotation or indicate complete separation or permanent dispersion, such as the terms “diaspora” or dispersion”, have constantly been completely avoided in the official political discourse (Müller-Funk, 2017, p. 56).

Moreover, beyond the legal documents, this inclusive rhetoric is also clear in the official statements of the Ministry of Emigration, and the public speeches of high-ranking officials. For instance, in the ministry’s mission statement on the official website, it is documented that the state puts emphasis on supporting and caring for the affairs and interests of the “sons and daughters of Egypt living abroad” (Ministry of Emigration and Egyptian Expatriate’s Affairs, n.d.). Hence, this type of official statement is emotionally loading as it evokes strong paternalistic feelings. It is also interesting to note that these terminologies are used in public speeches. For instance, in a speech in 2018, the then-minister of emigration states that Egyptians abroad are “the first line of defence for their homeland” (Kassab, 2018). These types of expressions are charged with sentiments as they create a sense of belonging to a community and a protective attitude towards the state of origin.

It is also worth noting that the ministry also established expatriate-targeted media embodied in the monthly newsletter named “Masr Ma’ak” which translates into “Egypt stands with you” (Ministry of Emigration and Expatriates’ Affairs, n.d.; State Information Service, 2020). This newsletter aims to inform the expatriates with the latest updates regarding the ministry’s activities, policies and initiatives (Ministry of Emigration and Expatriates’ Affairs, n.d.). Until 2023, the total number of issues reached 36 with the first one released in January 2019, and the latest in January 2022 (Ministry of Emigration and Expatriates’ Affairs, n.d.).

Furthermore, the inclusive rhetoric and media are accompanied by some interesting attempts to promote the cultural ties between the emigrants and their homeland. These efforts, embedded in articles 2, 3, and 4 of Law No. 111 (1983), include the launch of several initiatives, and campaigns to promote the national identity, history, and culture of the motherland. These comprise linguistic campaigns such as “*etkalm bl Arabi*” which translates into “speak in Arabic”, an initiative that is implemented under the auspices of President Abdel-Fattah El-Sisi (State Information Service, 2022c). It aims to educate the expatriates’ children about the Arabic language, enhancing their reading capabilities, and their oral and written communication skills. It also focuses on amplifying their knowledge about Egyptian customs, traditions, social values,

and national events (State Information Service, 2022c).

Additionally, the Egyptian symbolic nation-building efforts include acknowledgements and celebrations of the expatriates' achievements. These acknowledgements are highlighted in several issues of the ministry's monthly newsletter including, among others, issues 26 (Ministry of Emigration and Egyptian Expatriates' Affairs, 2021a, p. 5), 32 (Ministry of Emigration and Egyptian Expatriates' Affairs, 2021b, p. 5), and 36 (Ministry of Emigration and Egyptian Expatriates' Affairs, 2022, p. 7) which all narrate the success stories of several expatriates specialised in different fields. The ministry also occasionally congratulates the outstanding accomplishments of Egyptian expatriates while showing that their achievements are well recognised by the Egyptian state. For instance, in 2021, the then-minister of emigration, Nabila Makram, recognised the achievement of a student named Bayan Galal who became the first Arab President of the Student Union at Yale University, one of the most prestigious American universities (Ragheb, 2021). This has also been the case for an actor named Rami Malek who has been congratulated by the then-minister Nabila Makram, and by the official X (previously called Tweeter) page of the Egyptian embassy in the USA for becoming the first Egyptian American actor to win the Oscars (Ragheb, 2019a).

The Egyptian symbolic nation-building efforts encompass also the creation of effective communication channels with the Egyptians abroad. In fact, these channels are an essential building bloc through which the social integration of expatriates can be achieved. Accordingly, in 2018, the MOE initiated the first forum, under the name of "On your vacation, we see and hear you" to directly communicate with the expatriates visiting Egypt, listen to their concerns, and take note of their insights and contributions (Abu-Ghanima, 2018). According to Nabila Makram, the forum, which included officials and representatives from different public institutions, aimed at creating a stronger connection with the second and third generations of emigrants while strengthening their national culture and identity (Ragheb, 2018a; Shawki, 2018). To further ease the communication with the expatriates, this forum was followed by several campaigns including for instance an initiative called "An Hour with the Minister". This latter consists of conducting regular virtual meetings with expatriates residing in different states in order to listen to their concerns and orient them with any procedures, policies or new initiatives (Ali et al., 2024, p. 36).

The attempts to deepen the expatriates' integration into the Egyptian

social fabric crystallised in the launch of the Ministry of Emigration Dialogue Centre for Egyptian Youth Abroad (MEDCE). This latter is an important and interactive platform that encourages bonding among young Egyptian expatriates while encouraging them to share their ideas and suggestions for bolstering the national socio-economic development, (The Egyptian Cabinet, 2023).

Moreover, until 2023, seven forums were organised to target young Egyptians who are studying abroad. These forums were intended to ensure and maintain a strong connection with these students, to create networking opportunities among them, and to offer them help in overcoming any obstacles (Ayman, 2021; Ministry of Emigration and Egyptian Expatriates Affairs, 2021; State Information Service, 2022b).

Thus, through the use of inclusive and sometimes even paternalistic terminologies, the launch of cultural campaigns, and the initiation of public acknowledgements of expatriates' success, the Egyptian state showed tremendous interest in initiating a sense of pride and belonging to an Egyptian transnational community (Dawood, 2021, p. 48).

IV- Extension of Rights

1- Political Incorporation Policies

According to the literature, initiatives and policies that aim at boosting the levels of political integration and participation of the expatriates are of special importance as they enhance the feeling of belonging of the emigrants to their homeland, create a relationship of trust and enable a regular flow of remittances and investments (Gamlen, 2006; Itzigsohn, 2000). Hence, since 2015, the Egyptian state has shown a growing interest in creating a robust connection between the emigrants and their homeland which is reflected in its efforts to enhance their political incorporation and participation (Ali et al., 2024, p. 25).

The first set of policies that target the enhancement of political incorporation and participation reside in the parliamentary representation and the extension of voting rights to a wide range of expatriates. In fact, eight seats in the parliament are reserved for representatives of Egyptian expatriates (Embassy of Egypt in Washington DC, 2015). When compared to other states in the region such as Tunisia which allocates 18 seats for its emigrants (Ensari et al., 2023, p. 12), the number of parliamentary seats for Egyptian Expatriates is limited, but it is still considered to be an important step that can have a positive role in maintaining the expatriates' inclusion in the political arena. It is also worth mentioning that a wide range of Egyptian expatriates enjoy their voting

rights without limitations. Accordingly, any citizen who holds an Egyptian passport, even if he/she possesses a dual nationality, has the right to participate in elections (Rabea, 2018; State Information Service, 2015). The voting process is also made easier by allowing embassy voting (Al-Noubi, 2015).

Additionally, it is interesting to note that the political incorporation and participation policies go beyond the extension of voting rights to include extensive awareness campaigns about the importance of electoral participation. For instance, during the Parliamentary elections of 2015, the then-minister Nabila Makram made several tours worldwide including a visit to Kuwait, Jordan, and Australia to highlight the importance of participation in elections and to explain the voting procedures (El-Saeidy, 2015; Makram, 2022, p. 56). These efforts were complementary to a large electronic campaign, under the name of “*Barlamani*” (which translates into My Parliament), to reach all Egyptians living abroad and guide them through the electoral districts, the candidates’ list, and the voting procedures in their area of residence (El-Saeidy, 2015; Makram, 2022, p. 56).

Furthermore, in 2018, it was a priority for the MOE to further enhance the connection of the expatriates to their homeland by enabling them to easily participate in the presidential elections. Hence, in addition to tour visits by Nabila Makram, an operation room has been established by the MOE to ease communication with the emigrants, answer all their inquiries, and solve promptly any challenges they might face during the voting days (Kheir Allah, 2018; Makram, 2022, p. 56). Moreover, several awareness campaigns have been developed and shared through all official social media platforms to explain to the public the procedures and required documents for voting (Gouda, 2018). According to Nabila Makram, these awareness campaigns have reached around one million viewers (Gouda, 2018).

These efforts also persisted during the 2019 elections for the constitutional amendments, and the 2020 parliamentary elections. Hence, a campaign named “I know ... Participate, even if abroad” has been launched. This latter aimed at addressing the importance of the expatriates’ participation in the referendum while responding to any inquiries regarding the voting process (Ragheb, 2019b; State Information Service, 2023c). Additionally, during the senate’s elections in 2020, the MOE worked on creating rapid and effective communication channels, including the use of emails and phone messages, to respond to all expatriates’ questions (Hosny, 2020). Finally, it is interesting to note that the terminologies used for the email address dedicated to responding to

voting inquiries were carefully chosen to highlight the importance of the expatriates' insights and participation: Egyexpicare2020@gmail.com.

2- Extension of Civil and Social Services

Besides political participation, the state initiates some efforts to extend some social services for the expatriates.

These social services include attractive offers. For instance, in 2022 the MOE, in cooperation with the Ministry of Civil Aviation, presented special discount offers on EgyptAir flights for the families of expatriates. These deals are offered to the expatriates to facilitate and increase their number of visits to their homeland (El-Sayed, 2022; Ragheb, 2023).

Additionally, the social services covered the psychological health and safety of young expatriates. For instance, in 2022, the Ministry of Emigration announced the initiation of a campaign named “*Etkalm .. Matkhafsh .. Masr Ma'ak*” which translates into “Speak up .. Don't be Scared .. Egypt Stands by You” (Ragheb, 2022; State Information Service, 2022d). This campaign, implemented in cooperation with an online psychotherapy centre named Shezlong, targeted all expatriates suffering from any stress, anxiety, culture choc, loneliness, depression, bullying, and inability to cope with different cultures, in addition to any other challenges they might be facing (Ayman, 2022).

However, it is worth mentioning that although there are some attempts to extend social and civil services to Egyptian emigrants including for example the issuing of life insurance certificates for all Egyptians working abroad (Ministry of Emigration and Egyptian Expatriates' Affairs, 2022; State Information Service, 2021), these attempts remain minor as the initiatives are limited in scale and number and they are, in some cases, implemented temporarily.

V- Extraction of Obligations: Incentive-Based Initiatives

It is important to note that the extraction of obligations can take different forms. Some states, to ensure a high level of expatriate contributions to the economy and national development, choose to impose restrictions and obligations. This can take the form of a “brain drain tax” that is applied in some states such as the USA or Switzerland (Gamlen, 2006, p. 13). This policy imposes certain taxes on nationals who reside or work abroad (Gamlen, 2006, p. 13). However, when it comes to the Egyptian case, the state applies an incentive-based approach to this matter. This approach includes economic incentives to enhance remittance rates and investments, as well as initiatives to

boost knowledge transfer.

a. Economic Incentives

As part of its strategy to boost the financial contributions of Egyptian expatriates, the state offers attractive incentives and services to increase transactions in hard currency. For instance, in 2022, the state announced the launching of a new initiative which allows custom-reduced car imports for all Egyptian expatriates, aged 15 years or above, in exchange for a five-year deposit in hard currency (Egypt Today, 2023; State Information Service, 2024). This initiative not only helps in enhancing financial flow in hard currency, but it also helps in facilitating the re-integration of the expatriates into their homeland by easily importing their cars. The following year, the Egyptian Banks, specifically the National Bank of Egypt (NBE) and Banque Misr, issued dollar savings certificates with attractive interest rates (7% and 9% interest rates) (Mounir, 2023; State Information Service, 2023d). This initiative has been adopted as a result of the cooperation between the MOE, the Central Bank of Egypt, and the Egyptian local banks; and it aims, according to Ambassador Noha El-Gendy, at enhancing the financial transactions in hard currency, supporting the national economic development and providing additional income for the Egyptian expatriates through the attractive interests (Hany, 2023).

Furthermore, to elevate the investment rates, the MOE initiated, in 2023, an awareness campaign titled “Egyptian Investors Abroad Answer: Why We Invest in Egypt?” (State Information Service, 2023b). This initiative intends to foster emigrant’s investments by guiding them through the Egyptian market, highlighting investment opportunities, and orienting them to minimise any possible obstacles they might face (State Information Service, 2023b). The initiative consists of testimonial videos done by experts who explain and provide insights about their investment experiences in Egypt. Thus, it helps in creating a sense of trust and inclusion in Egyptian society and among domestic investors (Zain, 2024). These initiatives have been accompanied by some efforts conducted by the MOE to encourage Egyptians living abroad to invest in the Egyptian economy by initiating the “Egyptians Abroad Investment Corporation” (General Authority for Investment and Free Zones, 2023), and the organisation of several exhibitions to enhance expatriates’ real estate investments (Massad, 2023).

Accordingly, the state’s initiatives addressing remittances and investments are diverse in nature as they take the form of offers, attractive interest rates,

customs legal reforms, awareness campaigns, and the initiation of an investment corporation. However, despite the comprehensive nature of these initiatives, the remittances witnessed a drop in 2022-2023 (as shown in the aforementioned Graph 1). Hence, the initiatives' scale of implementation needs to be widened while reaching a larger number of Egyptian expatriates and their immediate outputs need to be evaluated.

b. Knowledge Transfer Initiatives

To complement the economic incentives, and since the portion of educated emigrants is incrementally rising, the state aimed to target the highly skilled emigrants while attempting to benefit from the concept of "brain circulation".

Firstly, a series of conferences titled "Egypt Can" has been launched under the auspices of President Abdel-Fattah El-Sisi. The first edition took place in Hurghada in 2016. It targeted Egyptian scientists, experts, and scholars to benefit from their knowledge and expertise and enhance their contributions to national development (Ministry of Emigration and Egyptian Expatriates' Affairs, 2018). The following year, the second edition aimed at celebrating the achievements of Egyptian women living abroad while highlighting the importance of their contribution to national development (Ministry of Emigration and Egyptian Expatriates' Affairs, 2018; National Council for Women, 2017). This second edition was the fruit of cooperation between the MOE and the National Council for Women (Ragheb, 2017).

Thereafter, the third edition of the conference took place in Luxor, a choice symbolising the extensive pharaonic history, under the name of "Egypt Can with the Sons of the Nile" (Ragheb, 2018b; State Information Service, 2018c, 2018a). This conference aimed to benefit from the expatriates' expertise in issues of agriculture, irrigation, and water resource management (Ragheb, 2018b; State Information Service, 2018c, 2018a). During the following years, more editions took places including the 2018 conference titled "Egypt Can with Education" (Egyptian Information Portal, 2018; State Information Service, 2018b), the 2019 edition which came under the name of "Egypt Can with Investment and Development" (Ministry of Emigration and Egyptian Expatriates' Affairs, 2019a; Ragheb & Hamada, 2019), and the 2022 "Egypt Can with Industry" (State Information Service, 2022a).

Additionally, a series of conferences were held targeting mainly the younger generations, to enhance the effective circulation of ideas, ensure proper

communication, and fortify their social integration into the Egyptian state. Starting in 2019 and until 2023, the MOE has launched four editions of the “Egyptian Entities Living Abroad Conference” (Ministry of Emigration and Egyptian Expatriates’ Affairs, 2019b). This conference provides an opportunity for Egyptian expatriates to have direct and personal interactions with some policymakers, express their needs and demands, present their ideas and suggestions regarding national pressing issues, and get better informed about Egyptian policies (Ministry of Emigration and Egyptian Expatriates’ Affairs, 2019b). One of the main objectives of this conference was the enhancement of the national identity of the young ones as they constitute, according to the statement of Gendy, a significant component of the Egyptian soft power (State Information Service, 2023e). It is worth noting that the conference has been growing in scale while reaching 1000 registered participants in 2023 (State Information Service, 2023a).

Although conferences are important for knowledge circulation and transfer, it remains important to analyse their end product. In fact, many vital topics have been brought to the table in the aforementioned conferences including the pressing issues of water management, industry, and education. It is also worth noting that a recommendation for creating an investment corporation for Egyptian expatriates was submitted during the 2022 edition of the Conference of Egyptian Entities Living Abroad. In 2023, this company was founded by ten of the most prominent Egyptian businessmen living abroad (General Authority for Investment and Free Zones, 2023). Furthermore, the 2022 “Egypt Can with Industry” led to interesting partnerships including the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Suez Canal Economic Zone and the German firm H2 (Adel, 2022). This latter aims to enhance the cooperation between the two entities to establish a waste-to-hydrogen plant in Port Said (Adel, 2022).

Thus, based on the aforementioned analysis, the idea of knowledge transfer is an integral part of the Egyptian strategy for expatriate engagement. It is not done based on imposition of obligations on the expatriates, but rather it is incentive-based through the organisation of a series of conferences targeting scholars, women, and youth. However, although these conferences are interesting, their long-term outcomes need further evaluation.

In conclusion, this research aimed at analysing the state-centric policies and initiatives addressing expatriates in light of A. Gamlen’s diaspora engagement typology. The paper diligently analysed the importance that the

Egyptian expatriates represent to the state while highlighting the value of their potential financial and human capital contributions. Thereafter, the paper introduced the mounting political will and interest in engaging the expatriates; this latter is reflected in the constitution and the Egypt 2030 agenda. Based on this political will, the paper utilised Gamlen's diaspora engagement typology to analyse the state-centric policies and initiatives. Accordingly, the analysis revealed that the public initiatives encompass a wide variety of aspects including institutional reforms, the re-establishment of the MOE, a rich symbolic nation-building approach, in addition to initiatives to extend political rights and social, and civil services. They include as well some interesting attempts to boost flows of remittances, investments, and knowledge transfer. Thus, while it is possible to conclude that the initiatives meet the different categories of Gamlen's diaspora engagement policies, some aspects of the Egyptian expatriate engagement policies need more development such as the extension of social and civil services, and the economic incentives to boost remittances and investments. Finally, it would be interesting, for future research, to go beyond the state-centric approach while exploring the role of Egyptian non-state actors in the file of expatriate engagement.

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