

*Rural-to-Urban Labor  
Migration: A Study of Upper  
Egyptian Laborers in Cairo*



*Ayman G. Zohry*



**University of Sussex at Brighton  
Centre for the Comparative Study of Culture, Development  
and the Environment (CDE)**

**Rural-to-Urban Labor Migration: A Study of Upper Egyptian  
Laborers in Cairo**

by

**Ayman Gaafar Zohry**

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I hereby declare that this thesis has not been submitted, either in the same or different form, to this or any other university for a degree.

Signature:

*Ayman G. Zohry*

## **Abstract**

This thesis is about rural–urban migration in Egypt. Its key aim is to analyze the rural–urban mobility strategy chosen by young men from villages in Upper Egypt (the southern part of the country) who move to Cairo. The empirical base of the study is made up of 242 questionnaire-based interviews with Upper Egyptian labor migrants in Cairo, supplemented by 20 more detailed interviews of such migrants and a period of fieldwork in selected villages of origin. Widespread use is also made of Egyptian census data to derive the quantitative estimates of the phenomenon; however the usefulness of this exercise is only partial given that not all rural–urban movement is actually recorded by the census.

The phenomenon of rural–urban mobility is examined within a broader set of macro-scale issues which are of concern to the Egyptian government as well as to social researchers. These issues include: the rapid but uneven nature of Egyptian modernization and urbanization given the socio-economic disparities between Lower and Upper Egypt; the hyper-growth of Greater Cairo with its 24 million inhabitants; the nature of Egyptian employment trends and the informal economy; and the long-term demographic trends of a country whose distribution of population remains uniquely spatially concentrated, and whose annual rate of population growth (2.1 percent), though falling, is still high.

The results of the study show that the motives for migrating are overwhelmingly economic and linked to the support and survival of the family base in the village. Key migration factors are unemployment, very low incomes, lack of rural job opportunities, landlessness and bad living conditions in rural Upper Egypt. Cairo offers higher wages, more regular work, a more exciting life (for some) and, most important of all, the chance to remit cash in order to support family members at home in the village. Migration thus improves the material quality of life for rural families and contributes to poverty alleviation, at least in part. For many rural laborers working in Cairo, migration is a waiting game until they can find permanent and more secure job opportunities in their villages, especially in the public sector. However, for many, such hopes are illusory and hence to-and-fro migration will continue. Meanwhile the construction sector in Cairo is crucially dependent on Upper Egyptian laborers who provide a cheap and flexible source of labor for this burgeoning activity.

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To each Upper Egyptian migrant laborer in Cairo. To those who sacrifice their own expediency to help their families in the village and to ensure a decent life for them.

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## **List of Acronyms and Appreviations**

<b>CAPMAS</b>	Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics, Egypt
<b>CPR</b>	Contaceptive Prevalence Rate
<b>EDHS</b>	Egypt Demographic and Health Survey
<b>GCR</b>	Greater Cairo Region
<b>GDP</b>	Gross Domestic Product
<b>ILO</b>	International Labor Organization
<b>INP</b>	Institute of National Planning, Egypt
<b>IOM</b>	International Organization of Migration
<b>KSA</b>	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
<b>LDCs</b>	Less Developed Countries
<b>LE</b>	Egyptian Pound (Livre egyptiane)
<b>NGOs</b>	Non-Governmental Organizations
<b>SIS</b>	State Information Services
<b>TFR</b>	Total Fertility Rate
<b>UAE</b>	United Arab Emirates