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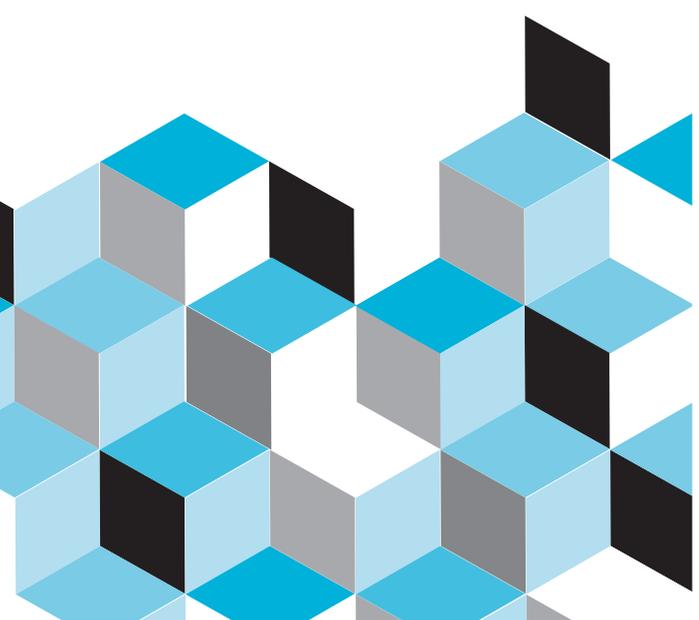
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MIGRATION DYNAMICS IN PLAY IN MOROCCO: TRAFFICKING AND POLITICAL RELATIONSHIPS AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS AT THE REGIONAL LEVEL

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Mehdi Lahlou¹

ABSTRACT

In 2018, Morocco became the first country of departure for migrants from Africa, as Spain became, simultaneously, the most important gateway to Europe during the same year. For Spain, this development revived fears generated by the events of autumn 2005, when hundreds of migrants breached, for the first time, the security fences between its cities in the North of Africa (Ceuta and Melilla) and the rest of Morocco. It also recalled the arrival of 32,000 migrants, primarily from Mauritania and Senegal, in the Canary Islands from May to September 2006. In that sense, the history of irregular migration between Africa and Europe seems to have been repeated since the beginning of the current century. Thus, the recent migration trends in the western Mediterranean indicate that, even if Morocco does everything it can and collaborates fully with European migration policy, as is the case today, these actions will not reduce irregular migration to the northern shores of the Mediterranean – and stop all the trafficking it induces – unless a new approach to security, economic and social conditions is adopted in the countries of departure. The management of migration from Africa needs to be conducted as part of a global, coherent and multilateral approach. Migration policies led by the European Union as well as the Maghreb countries must be implemented in close partnership with sub-Saharan countries of departure. Such cooperation must include not only the signing of readmission agreements with every African country from which the migrants depart, but also smart development plans to reduce the level of emigration. Moreover, in regard to migration via the southern coast of Spain, it seems clear that without effective Moroccan–Algerian cooperation, Morocco’s eastern border will continue to experience high migratory pressure, even if the two countries complete the “walls of protection” they started building years ago between their respective territories. And that pressure will necessarily be borne by Spain and the rest of Europe.

INTRODUCTION

Mobility between Morocco, as well as the rest of the Maghreb, and Europe has always been a feature of the shared history of Europe and North Africa. The colonial past, the geographic proximity and the economic and political realities in both areas have been major drivers of cross-border migration. This mobility of people has been paralleled since the late 1990s by a new current of mostly irregular migrants from sub-Saharan African countries crossing the Maghreb on their way to Europe – that is, Spain, France, Italy, Belgium and Germany, and more recently Scandinavia and the UK.

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Within this global framework, the regional migration dynamics have undergone many changes since 2000 linked to the deterioration of economic conditions in many African regions and the security upheavals caused in particular by the Arab uprisings. This has created an unpredictable flow of irregular migration along the western Mediterranean route, which initially was used mostly by migrants from sub-Saharan African countries and Algeria. Movement along this route increased steadily between 2000 and 2006, then tapered off over the next four years as migratory routes shifted from Morocco to Libya and the central Mediterranean.

In 2011–12, there was a new surge in movement along the western Mediterranean route as Syrian refugees sought to reach Europe via Gibraltar or the Spanish cities of Ceuta and Melilla, which are located in Moroccan territory. This flow peaked in 2015–16 with a “migratory explosion” off the Tunisian and Libyan coasts before levelling off in what could be called a “migratory peace” between Morocco and Spain.

Thus this structural evolution, due to ongoing social and economic crises and security chaos in a large part of the region, has produced many changes in migration patterns in the Mediterranean. This in turn has seriously altered the political and security response by European and North African countries and their willingness to manage the regular migratory flows, to reduce irregular migration and to fight against all trafficking linked to those flows.

The movement of people from North Africa to Europe – and more specifically to some important EU countries, such as France, Spain, Belgium, the Netherlands and Italy – was long considered a source of wealth and positive change (particularly between the 1960s and the 1990s), but is now perceived as an entirely negative phenomenon. At the beginning of the current century, mobility began to be conflated with the flows of irregular migration coming from the rest of Africa; in addition, since the 9/11 attacks on American soil, US and European discourse began to confuse migration with radical Islam and terrorism. As a result, perceptions of migration to, from and through the Maghreb came to be based less on economic and social considerations, and more on security.

Despite the considerable security measures that have been put in place, primarily by the European Union, (i) trans-Mediterranean migration, since mid-2016, has been almost entirely African; (ii) migration is now entirely unidirectional, from south to north, having been marked, between 2013 and 2016, by the displacement of a relatively small number of refugees (mainly Syrians) and migrants between the Middle East and the Maghreb; and (iii) as at the beginning of the actual century, Morocco is again ranked first in the number of irregular displacements of people, travelling through its territory, from south to north of the Mediterranean.

This article will focus on Morocco in particular for several reasons.

- From a geographical point of view, the country is situated at the Straits of Gibraltar and is only 14 kilometres from Spain, and therefore is the nearest African country to Europe.
- Two Spanish cities, Ceuta and Melilla, are situated on Moroccan territory. These cities, claimed by Morocco (a factor that further complicates relations between Spain and Morocco), are considered by many potential migrants as an easy gateway to Europe.

- Morocco, like Algeria, is seen as a country of relative prosperity in comparison with the African countries in the south of the Sahara. This perception has two important consequences: firstly, migrants think that on their way to Europe they can stop there for a while and earn some money to finance the rest of their journey; and secondly, in case they fail in their effort to migrate they hope to remain in Morocco, which would become their final destination “by default”.
- Having experienced relatively peaceful migration flows between 2008 and 2015, in autumn 2013 Morocco adopted a new policy to manage migration on its own territory. This policy took a humanitarian approach aimed at the implementation of a national strategy to integrate migrants into Moroccan society. This new policy was considered the most forward-looking approach among the countries of the Maghreb, and even of Africa.

Taking this evolution into account, and having analysed some of the most important developments that have affected human mobility in the western Mediterranean, mainly from and within Morocco, in recent years, this paper will address three specific issues: (1) the new Moroccan migration policy; (2) the problems of trafficking; and (3) relations between Morocco and Algeria in terms of the human mobility issue.

1. HUMAN MOBILITY IN THE WESTERN MEDITERRANEAN: RECENT MIGRATION DYNAMICS IN MOROCCO

The increasing number of migrants from sub-Saharan Africa passing through Morocco on their way to Europe during the first nine months of 2018 has again made it one of the most important migratory corridors in the Mediterranean. As of 30 September, nearly 37,000 people had emigrated in an irregular way between Africa and Europe via the western Mediterranean migration route in 2018. Thus Morocco became the first country of departure for migrants from Africa in 2018, while Spain became the most important gateway to Europe.

For Spain, this development revived fears generated by the events of autumn 2005, when hundreds of migrants breached, for the first time, the security fences between its cities in the North of Africa (Ceuta and Melilla) and the rest of Morocco (European Commission 2005). It also recalled the arrival of 32,000 migrants, primarily from Mauritania and Senegal, in the Canary Islands from May to September 2006.

In that sense, the history of irregular migration between Africa and Europe seems to have been repeated since the beginning of the current century. Following the humanitarian crisis and security chaos in Syria that began in 2011, and the resulting refugee crisis, which lasted until mid-2016, African migratory corridors between Libya and Italy again took the lead during 2016 and 2017, shifting to the route between Morocco and Spain in 2018. Thus the situation in the Mediterranean has reverted to its previous state as recorded between 2000 and 2005, with the majority of migration originating in Africa, mainly around the Straits of Gibraltar.

1.1 RECENT MIGRATION TRENDS TO AND FROM MOROCCO

The spread of the Arab uprisings through North Africa and the Middle East provoked numerous and deep changes in security policy, producing, *inter alia*, waves of refugees at the borders of countries

such as Tunisia, Egypt and, especially hard hit, Libya and Syria. This led to a mass exodus of sub-Saharan (and Tunisian) migrants, initially from Libya and Tunisia, followed by a wave of hundreds of thousands of Syrians fleeing civil war, with a peak in 2015, as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1 | Irregular movement via major land–sea migratory routes to the EU, 2008–2018

	All Mediterranean routes	Western Mediterranean route	Share of Western Mediterranean route (%)
2008	151,135	6,500	4.3
2010	104,120	5,000	4.8
2012	73,160	6,400	7.75
2013	101,800	6,800	6.68
2014	283,175	7,840	2.75
2015	1,822,337	7,164	0.39
2016	374,638	10,231	2.73
2017	184,410	23,143	12.55
2018 (9 months)	82,100	36,654	44.7

Source: Author’s compilation based on Frontex online data (<https://frontex.europa.eu/along-eu-borders/migratory-routes/western-mediterranean-route>), Frontex (2016, 2018) and IOM (2018b) data for 2018.

Between 2012 and 2015, two trends were evident in the Mediterranean space. Firstly, a spectacular increase occurred in the total number of migrants and refugees arriving in Europe from the east and south of the Mediterranean. Secondly, despite a slight increase in the number of irregular migrants using the western Mediterranean route since 2012, this route’s share of migration became almost marginal, accounting for only 0.39 per cent in 2015, against 7.75 per cent four years earlier.

At the beginning of 2016, however, the migratory route between Turkey and Greece was closed after an agreement was signed between the EU and Turkey on 18 March 2016.² This recalled the events of 2006, when a similar agreement was made with Senegal regarding the Canary Islands.

As a direct result of the agreement between the EU and Turkey, according to a report by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the total number of migrants and refugees arriving in Europe via the Mediterranean Sea in 2016 was 363,348, split almost evenly between Italy and Greece, with much smaller numbers arriving in Malta, Cyprus and Spain. The number of arrivals that year to Greece totalled 173,561 migrants and refugees – only 20 per cent as many as in 2015, when the number reached 853,650 (IOM 2017). The same trend is confirmed by data published by the IOM for the period between 2014 and 2018.

² “On 18 March 2016 the European Union and Turkey reached an agreement aimed at solving the issue of the high numbers of migrants crossing the Mediterranean Sea from Turkey to Greece. This agreement intended to close the people-smuggling routes and reduce the number of migrants entering the EU. It focused principally on the following issues: returning to Turkey any migrant entering Greece from Turkey irregularly; and resettling, for every migrant readmitted by Turkey, another Syrian from Turkey.” See Fernández Arribas (2016: 1097).

Table 2 | Total sea arrivals in Italy, Greece and Spain, 2014–2018

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018 (9 months)
Italy	170,100	153,842	181,436	119,369	21,041
Greece	34,442	853,650	173,614	29,595	23,240
Spain	N/A	5,309	8,162	22,108	36,654

Source: IOM (2018a, 2018b).

The migration data from the first ten months of 2018 follow the same trend: the IOM reported that as of 10 October, 88,049 migrants and refugees had entered Europe by sea in 2018, compared with 142,301 on the same date in 2017 (IOM 2018c).

These important changes in the pattern of migrant and refugee arrivals in Europe between 2015 and 2016 due to the shift of migratory routes to the west of the Mediterranean led to increasing flows of migration towards Spain, via Morocco, particularly from 2016 to 2018. As indicated in Table 1, the share of migrants utilising the western Mediterranean route increased from 0.39 per cent to about 45 per cent in just three years. One of every two migrants crossing the Mediterranean in the direction of Europe takes the sea route between Morocco and Spain, strongly indicating that all border control systems set up between the two countries in recent years have failed.

This shift was to a certain extent unforeseeable. It is evidence, in particular, of the fact that there are multiple links and relations between the choice of migratory route and the reasons for the displacement of people, especially when in relation to human mobility from south to north.

1.2 CAN MOROCCO BE CONSIDERED A COUNTRY OF RECEPTION FOR MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES?³

Despite the changing and relatively low rate of arrivals, Morocco, and the Maghreb as a whole, cannot be considered an area where migrants and refugees want to remain. This is confirmed by the most recent available data, which indicate that their total number in Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia represented only 0.15 per cent of all migrants and refugees worldwide in 2017, decreasing from 0.19 per cent in 2000.

The number of migrants worldwide grew from 173 million in 2000 to 220 million in 2010, and reached about 258 million in 2017, equivalent to 3.4 per cent of the world's population (UNDESA 2017: 4). According to UN data from 2017, fewer than 100,000 international migrants (96,000) were living in Morocco, representing 0.3 per cent of the total population of Morocco (UNDESA 2017: 26).

However, the true situation on the ground may be somewhat different than the statistics indicate, especially when in respect of irregular migrants. According to the Office of the High Commissioner for Planning, Morocco's official statistical agency, the number of foreigners legally residing in the country in September 2014 was "exactly" 86,206 out of a total population of 33.8 million. Thus, foreigners represented 0.25 per cent of the population of Morocco. This means that in absolute

3 This section draws heavily on Lahlou (2018: 249–50).

numbers, Morocco, like Algeria (with 403,000 migrants in 2017) and Tunisia (with 58,000 migrants in the same year), is not a significant host country. However, in late April 2015, according to the Ministry of Interior (reported in an unofficial document), 114,029 foreigners from 120 countries were living in Morocco.

These figures are largely consistent with data from the Moroccan government's 2014 Exceptional Regularization Process for Irregular Migrants. The process validated 17,916 out of 27,332 requests for regularization – a 65 per cent rate of approval, and just over one-third of the 45,000 regularizations announced as the target for this process (Lahlou 2015: 113). In late 2013, immediately prior to the start of the Exceptional Regularization Process, Moroccan authorities estimated that there were more than 45,000 irregular immigrants living in Morocco at the time, almost twice the number indicated earlier. If this estimate is accurate, then the number of irregular immigrants in Morocco after the 2014 regularization process would be around 28,000 – that is, the difference between the number of regular immigrants published after the last general census in September 2014 and the data released by the Ministry of Interior in spring 2015. It is not clear, however, whether these figures include some 4,553 individuals considered by the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR 2015) as “persons of concern” (including 782 refugees and 3,771 asylum seekers).

2. MIGRATION DEVELOPMENTS AND HUMAN SECURITY ISSUES IN MOROCCO

2.1 THE NEW MOROCCAN MIGRATION POLICY⁴

On 10 September 2013, Morocco's King Mohamed VI held a meeting with his Minister of Home Affairs and a number of human rights representatives (among them the National Council of Human Rights, CNDH) to initiate a new “migration and asylum policy” for foreign residents of the kingdom, especially aimed at illegal migrants.⁵ This announcement was considered a turning point in Morocco's human rights approach to irregular immigrants, mainly sub-Saharan Africans from countries such as Mali, Senegal, Niger, Nigeria, Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea, but also refugees from Libya and Syria.

The new migration policy comprises three main elements: (1) an exceptional regularization process for immigrants, carried out in 2014 (this operation benefited nearly 45,000 migrants); (2) extended power for the UNHCR to grant the right of asylum to a greater number of asylum seekers in Morocco; (3) new laws allowing for better integration of migrants and asylum-seekers into Moroccan society, as well as increased emphasis on the fight against human trafficking and traffickers.

By the end of 2014 – the final date of the first exceptional regularization operation – the number of validated requests for regularization reached 17,916 out of a total of 27,332 requests, as noted above. A second operation followed between 2016 and 2017, involving around 24,000 irregular

4 This section draws heavily on Lahlou (2015: 112–4).

5 Although official spokesmen and the public media associated this initiative with a report on the issue of irregular migration published by the CNDH, some observers linked it to a BBC documentary broadcast in early September 2013 in which some illegal immigrants in Morocco made allegations of abuse by the police. See Mason (2013).

migrants. In terms of asylum, however, the UNHCR has recognized relatively few refugees in Morocco. There were 853 UNHCR-recognized refugees, with 2,178 asylum seekers' cases pending as of September 2013 (HRW 2014: 48).

Concerning the other objectives of the new initiative, the Ministry in Charge of the Moroccans Residing Abroad and Migration Affairs worked out a National Strategy of Immigration and Asylum. This strategy, adopted by a Government Council held in December 2014, aims at ensuring better social integration of immigrants and better management of the migration flow within the framework of a "coherent, overall, humanistic and responsible policy" (MRE 2014: 8).

This strategic vision is founded on three main objectives: (i) to facilitate the integration of the new regularized immigrants; (ii) to establish an adapted institutional and regulation framework; and (iii) to manage migration flows in a way that maintains respect for human rights.

This new policy was aimed first of all at protecting migrants from the various forms of trafficking to which they can fall victim. However, although many migrants whom we met in the course of our research expressed satisfaction with the implementation of this policy, the reality on the ground does not seem to have changed for many of them.

2.2 MIGRATION AND TRAFFICKERS OF MIGRANTS

Most people in charge of associations of migrants whom we met in the course of our field research – in Rabat and in Dakhla, in the far south of Morocco – reported that since 2014 internal movement within Morocco has been relatively easy. When it comes to migration of foreign migrants from the northern part of Morocco, these migrants operate within their national communities, in particular when they conduct "massive attacks" on the security fences around Ceuta and Melilla, as happened again in the summer of 2018.

Moroccans willing to migrate as foreign migrants can also be "helped" by traffickers in other situations, in particular to migrate to Libya and beyond. Some traffickers are only Moroccans, acting independently, while others may belong to criminal organizations comprised of Moroccans, Nigerians or migrants from Côte d'Ivoire. Our field research was not able to confirm this information, but a Moroccan government spokesman reported on 6 September that "security services in Morocco put more than 54,000 attempts at clandestine immigration in failure in 2018, dismantled 74 criminal networks active in the field of human trafficking and illegal immigration and seized 1,900 boats" (MAP 2018).

Further, the Moroccan Royal Gendarmerie reported in December 2017 that it had "dismantled a five-people organized criminal group involved in illegal emigration to Europe through Libya, and in other serious crimes, including kidnapping and money laundering" (Kasraoui 2017). The authorities declared also that they had been "after these gang since September 2017, following the arrest of two masterminds of illegal emigration in Beni Mellal, a city located in center Morocco [one of the most important regions of departure to Italy]. The two criminals were apprehended for their involvement in a large network that operates at both the national and international levels" (Kasraoui 2017).

The investigations “led to the arrest of five individuals, one of whom [had] acted as an intermediary between the main organizers and the potential illegal immigrants”. The enquiry also uncovered “the gang’s involvement in a network of illicit financial transactions that collected funds from candidates [for irregular migration] and transferred them to Libya, to then be smuggled to Italy”. The public press agency, Maghreb Arab Press (MAP), which reported the news, indicated that a total of 3,000 such financial transactions were conducted between 2015 and September 2017 (Kasraoui 2017).

2.3 MIGRATION AND TRAFFICKING: ABUSE OF WOMEN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

A January 2017 report by the European Commission stated that

a worrying trend is that the number of vulnerable migrants, especially women and minors, is increasing. Among the 181,000 migrants who disembarked in Italy, around 24,000 were women (13%, almost half of whom from Nigeria), and around 28,000 were minors (15%), of which the vast majority (91%) were unaccompanied. This represents an increased share from 2015 (10%), with a growing proportion of unaccompanied minors (75% in 2015). The top five nationalities of unaccompanied minors are: Eritrean (15%), Gambian (13%), Nigerian (12%), Egyptian (10%), and Guinean (10%). (European Commission 2017: 4)

The statistics regarding the gender make-up of migrants who arrived in Italy in 2016 also document the occurrence of diverse forms of violence against women and very young people in the course of migration, as much in the countries of transit as in the host societies, mainly in the south. Women are among the most vulnerable migrants, as they are constantly targeted by sexual violence. But an increasingly young migrant population, comprising children migrating independently of their families, are also frequently victims of violence.

Women from sub-Saharan Africa are considered by human trafficking networks as a valuable commodity to be exploited through prostitution.⁶ Since the beginning of this century, these women often have not paid for their journey or for “protection” but rather have fallen into the clutches of migrants, mostly from their own communities, who have proclaimed themselves leaders and claimed full rights over them. These women usually travel in groups, under the protection of “their” men, who keep them in secret and not easily accessible places. In exchange for such “protection”, the women must provide sexual services to anyone introduced to them, mainly the inhabitants of the cities of transit or other migrants.

The international non-governmental organization (NGO) Médecins sans Frontières (MSF) and many other human rights organizations have been particularly responsive to this issue, as their teams have dealt with numerous cases of abortions that have caused bleeding, usually as the result of the use of abortion drugs. This phenomenon is evidence of a large number of unwanted pregnancies and, therefore, high levels of sexual exploitation of women, mainly within irregular migrant communities.

⁶ Very often young Nigerian, Togolese or Ghanaian girls.

Between 2010 and 2012, MSF treated 697 survivors of sexual violence in Morocco, including 122 in Oujda and 575 in Rabat. Among the survivors who were willing to provide information, “almost three quarters had experienced more than one incident of sexual violence and half said they had experienced multiple incidents involving different attackers” (MSF 2013: 22). Moreover, according to MSF’s analysis, approximately 35 per cent (about 240 persons) of the survivors of sexual violence assisted by MSF between 2010 and 2012 were victims of human trafficking networks (MSF 2013: 23). “These patients are particularly vulnerable as they have little or no control over their sexual and reproductive health, have limited freedom of movement and are often kept captive and subjected to continuous exploitation and sexual, physical and psychological violence” (MSF 2013: 23).

That being said, women sometimes use pregnancy as a means of protection against harassment. Similarly, there is the perception that pregnancy ensures safe conduct once a woman reaches Europe.

A number of factors, such as high rates of dependency on irregular migration networks and lack of protection against human traffickers (and the perpetrators of sexual violence), increase the vulnerability of women, who are often forced to live in unhealthy conditions and to be sexually promiscuous, and are subjected to prostitution and forced labour. Inevitably, exposure to HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, as well as tuberculosis, is very high.

NGOs have collected testimonies indicating that when migrant women get sick, they often lose the support of their protector and are abandoned, and in some cases even disappear. It is now common in the streets of Rabat, Tangiers, Fez, Marrakech and Casablanca to see women carrying young babies begging on the street or at the doors of mosques and cemeteries. In many cases, those who initially brought them to Morocco have abandoned them, and the women find themselves unable either to continue their journey, or to return to the places they left.

Another phenomenon that seemed to have emerged by the middle of the last decade in Rabat and many other Moroccan cities, and which remains a persistent problem, is prostitution of very young migrant girls (from twelve to fourteen years old) who left their countries alone with “protectors”, who turned into human traffickers in Morocco.

Compounding these issues is the blatantly xenophobic and racist attitude of many social groups in the transit countries, including the middle class. The precarious conditions and poverty in which the migrant population lives no longer evoke pity or compassion, but only rejection.

2.4 DOMESTIC WORKERS

According to representatives of some civil society organizations we met in Rabat, foreign domestic workers, mainly from Senegal and the Philippines, have been brought to Morocco illegally in recent years. Many of them seem to have been smuggled in and forced into domestic labour.

A Senegalese we met in Dakar, who has resided in Morocco between Rabat and Agadir since 2002, told us that he participated for many years in operations to bring Senegalese women to Morocco to be servants. He carried out between five and seven operations a year until 2017, but after the

scandal over the sale of migrants in Libya erupted in late 2017 and early 2018, he no longer trafficked persons between Senegal and Morocco. He is paid a commission for each “operation”, and he thinks the women for whom he “facilitates” the journey to Morocco are well treated. However, their passports are sometimes taken away by their employers. Some of them are allowed to visit their families in Senegal, once every two years at most, and their wages in most cases are directly and almost entirely transferred to their parents.

2.5 MIGRATION AND DRUG TRAFFICKING

Morocco is regarded as one of the most important exporting countries of drugs in the world. Drugs are generally transported from the ports located north of Morocco (Tanger-Med, in particular) or in zodiacs or other motorboats, generally from the Moroccan Mediterranean coast. However, these places, and the same means of transportation, are generally used by illegal migrants as well as Moroccans leaving without identity papers or visas for Spain.

In this configuration, the interests of the drug traffickers and migrants (and their traffickers) are potentially contradictory. This seems to be true, however, only in the case of sub-Saharan migrants. Drug traffickers frequently make use of migrants of Moroccan origin, who are recruited through social networks controlled by the same traffickers and agree to transport small quantities of drugs in exchange for exemption from the payment for their trip to the Spanish coast.

At a meeting of members of Moroccan NGOs in the north of the country, in the town of Tetouan – one of the principal areas for drug trafficking between Morocco, Spain and the rest of Europe – we were informed that the Moroccan security forces’ efforts to control migration have created a problem for drug traffickers, who face “increasing risks” in transporting their products to Spain. In addition, the police operations that are launched whenever migrants try to breach the safety fences around the cities of Ceuta and Melilla in large numbers constitute a factor of “disorder and unpredictability”, blocking the activities of the producers and the conveyors of drugs.

As a consequence, the migrants coming from the south of the Sahara are regarded as an obstacle, are hated and are sometimes violently attacked by the drug traffickers, who can even be used – according to some associative activists we met – to helping the security forces to move them away, far from the northern coasts of the country.

3. POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF MIGRATION AT THE REGIONAL LEVEL

According to many high-level political officials we met in Rabat, police measures alone cannot solve the immense problem of illegal migration. Instead, a comprehensive approach and a genuine partnership involving the countries of origin, the European countries of destination and, of course, the countries of transit must be implemented. At the same time, it is of course necessary to facilitate voluntary returns and, above all, to effectively combat human trafficking. But the populations involved and the problems they face, both now and in the years to come, are such that there is a need for a multilateral framework for dialogue and cooperation between the European Union, the Maghreb countries and the main countries of departure of illegal migrants from sub-Saharan Africa.

From the civil society perspective, many Moroccan NGO leaders insist that Morocco must have a strategy of respect for its own national sovereignty and autonomy in its political decision-making. It must not yield to European pressure or “Euro-Spanish dictates”, which would serve to cast doubt on Morocco’s policy in Africa, which has been built over many decades with the aim of protecting its African interests, especially in the case of the Sahara.

According to one of the high-level officials we spoke with in Rabat in June 2018,

it’s necessary to start from a fundamental observation: Morocco is not a space of wealth which is able to receive a foreign population in important proportions. There is no question of creating a kind of call to migrate (*un appel d’air*) for illegal immigration of residence that will eventually be impossible to maintain on its territory. This problem of sub-Saharan migration is not a problem of Morocco alone, it is without any doubt a Euro-African problematic [...]. It cannot be solved by the police (or even the military) alone. Only the social and economic development of the poorest and unsafe countries in Africa is able to reduce the propensity for migrant departure.

At the same time, it must be said that Algeria is a strategic country in the management of irregular migratory flows: “it is the Algerian border that determines the Moroccan one to the east and to the south. If Algeria does not close its borders, we will continue to have an endless stream of young migrants who want to move to Europe, transiting necessarily by Moroccan territory.”

Another Moroccan official noted that “Algeria does nothing from this point of view, it implements, in one way or another, its strong capacity of nuisance on Morocco and all that can, according to the official, interfere only with what is good for Algerian interests.”

Thus, the question of the management of illegal migrants has an effect on Morocco’s relations with other African countries. Algiers seizes on any reports of poor treatment of African migrants by Morocco, because Algeria is doing everything it can to sever the ties between Morocco and Africa. If at the same time it can show that Morocco is at the service of Europe, it will be able to tarnish Rabat’s image even further and isolate it, particularly on the issue of what was previously Spanish Sahara.

According to many NGO leaders, Europe needs to be “realistic”. Europeans are increasingly aware that the problem is serious, but they want it to be resolved by others. Europe wants first and foremost to protect its own population’s standard of living, well-being and security. However, it must be said that all of this comes “with a price” and requires a more balanced distribution of wealth in an increasingly globalized economy.

Europe has a vested interest in Morocco developing and becoming a regional power, acting as a development relay/officer with/to Africa, which will also allow it to retain many migrants, who may settle and work in a situation of legality or come, as it is already the case for years, to study in its different cities.

In all cases, a sure and stable Morocco is far preferable to a country mired in security chaos, such as Libya.

CONCLUSION

Based on our analysis of migration trends and the global situation, in particular at the human security level, it is evident that controlling the coastline, including the borders in the Maghreb from Morocco to Libya, will prove ineffective if the African continent continues to be characterized by the same forms of economic and political governance that are in place today.

It is also clear, given the actual level of wealth in Morocco and the means at its disposal, and given the security situation in Libya in particular, that the Maghreb as a whole will not serve as a strong buffer to protect Europe's Mediterranean coasts and borders for the foreseeable future. Thus, even if Morocco, operating at the edges of the EU, does everything it can and collaborates fully with European migration policy, as has been the case primarily since 2014, this will not be enough to stem irregular migration to the north shore of the Mediterranean without the adoption of a new approach to security, economic and social conditions in the countries of departure and transit.

The management of migration from Africa needs to be conducted as part of a coherent and multilateral approach. In this context, migration policies in the Maghreb – similar to that adopted by Morocco in 2013 – must be implemented in partnership with sub-Saharan countries of departure. Such cooperation must include the signing of readmission agreements with every African country from which the migrants depart. Moreover, in the absence of effective cooperation between Morocco and Algeria, Morocco's eastern border will continue to experience high migratory pressure, even if the two countries complete the "walls of protection" that they started building years ago between their respective territories.

Irregular migration has also been recognized as a particular problem for Africa. In an effort to address the issue, the African Union created a Special Commission for migration and development at the 29th session of its Assembly of Heads of State and Government. On that occasion, in an address to the Assembly in July 2017, King Mohamed VI of Morocco declared that

Africa is at a crossroads. It is up to us to choose the right path for its emergence. Right now, our African continent is facing a host of challenges, including the proliferation of non-state actors – a fact which creates many grey areas – the threat of transnational terrorism and violent extremism, and the impacts of global warming.⁷

He added

Africa is losing its youths to legal and illegal migration. There is no way such a loss can be justified. Should our young people's fate be at the bottom of the Mediterranean? Should their mobility become a hemorrhage? Certainly not! I think it is up to us to deal with this

7 Full Text of HM the King's Speech to 29th AU Heads of State and Government Summit, Addis Ababa, 3 July 2017, <http://www.maroc.ma/en/royal-speeches/full-text-hm-kings-speech-29th-au-heads-state-and-government-summit>.

issue properly in order to make it an asset. Thousands of young Africans try clandestinely to reach the northern shore of the Mediterranean in search of a better life, with all the risks involved. They are precious men and women and are part of our continent's human resources.⁸

We can only hope that this sentiment is shared by all the African heads of state and that they will work, with the support of Europe, to bring about political, organizational and socioeconomic improvements.

8 Ibid.

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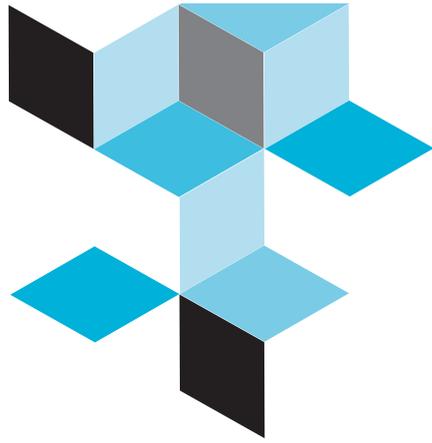
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Middle East and North Africa Regional Architecture: Mapping geopolitical shifts, regional order and domestic transformations (MENARA) is a research project that aims to shed light on domestic dynamics and bottom-up perspectives in the Middle East and North Africa amid increasingly volatile and uncertain times.

MENARA maps the driving variables and forces behind these dynamics and poses a single all-encompassing research question: Will the geopolitical future of the region be marked by either centrifugal or centripetal dynamics or a combination of both? In answering this question, the project is articulated around three levels of analysis (domestic, regional and global) and outlines future scenarios for 2025 and 2050. Its final objective is to provide EU Member States policy makers with valuable insights.

MENARA is carried out by a consortium of leading research institutions in the field of international relations, identity and religion politics, history, political sociology, demography, energy, economy, military and environmental studies.



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