



Webinar: Migration Governance and the Rabat process: the case of Morocco

Minutes of the Webinar

Participants (7 men and 2 women):

- 1) Dr. Mehdi Lahlou (Morocco)
- 2) Mr. Badara Ndiaye (Senegal)
- 3) Mr. Jide Olatuyi (Nigeria)
- 4) Mr. Oluwafemi Moses Abe (Nigeria)
- 5) Mr. Frank Nkomba (Cameroun)
- 6) Ms. Aya Kasasa (Belgium)
- 7) Ms. Karima Belhaj (Morocco)
- 8) Dr. Yéra Dembele (Senegal)
- 9) Mr. Eyachew Tefera (Ethiopia)

Introduction

The Euro-African Dialogue on Migration and Development, also called Rabat Process, was created in 2006. Since then, the Rabat Process brings together countries of origin, transit and destination of the migration routes linking Central, West and Northern Africa with Europe as well as the European Commission (EC) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), to tackle questions arising from migration issues. The Rabat Process provides a framework for consultation and coordination; contributes to meeting the challenges posed by migration; and encourages opportunities for exchange and development.

Morocco plays a central role in the Rabat Process as the place where ongoing dialogues between Africa and Europe are facilitated. Likewise, the government of Morocco, in response to the issue of migration management, had in the first instance instituted a harsh migration regime for a while. This has resulted in an outcry from civil society, human rights organisations and others in the country which urged the government to treat migrants humanely and respect their rights at all means. Eventually, the mounting pressure from civil society organisations in the country forced the government to develop a new migration policy strategy in 2014. This new policy strategy emphasizes a humanitarian rather than a security approach to migration, which defined earlier actions undertaken by the government. One of the novel aspects of the new

policy is the granting of permission to citizens from West African countries, including Senegal, to enter Morocco without visas. The aim is to foster more cooperation between Morocco and sub-Saharan African countries, namely Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, and Guinea, so that the security and dignity of migrants trying to reach Europe or returning home are fully respected. The action of the Government of Morocco is also in line with the implementation of the 2018 Marrakesh Pact on migration, which opened opportunities for employment and citizenship in Maghreb countries.

The webinar reflected on the ways that the Rabat Process is contributing to the effort of strengthening migration governance in the countries and regions involved in the process since its inception. It will present an African perspective on how governments translated the political dialogue into policy and practice in the field of migration governance, challenges encountered and possible solutions on the way forward¹.

The Rabat Process in the current context

Since the 2006 inception of the Euro-African Dialogue on Migration and Development, also known as the Rabat Process, different global events have challenged its efficiency in the field. In the 2010s, the Arab Spring and the refugee crisis in the Caribbean ushered in new migration processes such as the European policy adopted in 2016. COVID-19 also exacerbated migration issues that have not been given enough policy attention, such as the increase of flows from Tunisia to Italy and Morocco to Spain, which include migrants from sub-Saharan Africa. With Morocco as a focus hosting the main pathway to Europe in the western part of the Mediterranean, the case of Ceuta and Melilla, which are Spanish cities on the African continent, demonstrate the manifestation of the political tensions experienced with regards to migration. Morocco has fought to protect Tetouan and Nador from also being overtaken as migration management sites and, in combination with defending the two European cities, there has been a heavy weight on the Moroccan economy.

The pathways that make up migration routes between Africa to Europe need to be approached as points of junction rather than points of transition only. The COVID crisis shows how the social and economic difficulties in Africa are important and affecting migration. Solutions may be found in the Global Compact for Migration (GCM), new political approaches and new negotiations between Europe and Africa, involving more countries. The Rabat Process is very geo-strategic, not just technical, or political. The question of borders appeared as flexible borders in terms of policy, not administration, which brings about new types of relationships among states and raises several issues for Diaspora, civil society, research, and academia. Migration governance

¹ The Platform is very grateful to Dr. Mehdi Lahlou for his presentation on his work analyzing the Rabat Process and its impact. Mr. Lahlou is a Doctor of State in Economic Sciences, University Paris-I, Panthéon-Sorbonne. He received his Bachelor of Economics at Mohamed V University, Rabat where he is now a professor and associate researcher.

is a combination of several frameworks of dialogues, not only the Rabat Process but also in terms of approaches in which irregular migration plays a very important role. It is a way of building new regulation from a top-down approach which will then trickle down to be adopted at intermediate levels from Regional Economic Communities (RECs) to the national level. With the Rabat Process, however, there has been an issue of domestication by all partners. Cameroun for instance has 23 objectives and actions that have yet to be enacted by different departments of the ministry, not only foreign relations. Throughout the years, the same issues are brought up, such as migration and development mobility, borders, migration management, etc. There then needs to be more focus on local domestication of the Process and other agreements, especially in terms of the action plan, for there to be effective governance.

With time, these texts have not been focused on and the actors have changed, such as in Libya (Tripoli meeting in 2006) and France where the presidency changed, and the focus shifted to a military/security approach rather than on social and economic development. Since 2015, migration and refugees could not be managed by the Process, leading to the creation of other agreements. However, the experts agree that it is now time to give more attention to the derivatives of and new ideas beyond the Rabat Process. For example, after 2018, the Malta Process fuses and condenses the action plans of La Valette and Rabat in terms of objectives. Still, the main preoccupation about migration governance is the implication of AU in these dialogues, what it proposes and its ability to mobilize different actors. These concerns come from a lack of transparency as to the framework of political migration strategy at the AU level that is not well known.

Proposals for the way forward

As the different challenges from the Rabat Process and beyond were laid out, the Platform experts brainstormed on a few possible paths to find solutions. When there are important migratory events such as those in the summers of 2018 and 2021 showing the failure of the Rabat Process (similar to 2006 with insecurity in Libya, Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, but worse), more needs to be known about the position of the AU and awareness of the reality on the ground. To this end, the experts propose that the Platform should communicate with the AUC directly, get clarity on what the AU can do with this situation and to explore opportunities to negotiate another approach with the EU. There will be a meeting between the EU and AU in February 2022 in Brussels (EU-Africa Summit) which also presents an opportunity to express ideas of migration governance reforms and improvements as the new framework of cooperation 2021-2027 is developed. During the last three years, many conversations were had leading up to this and three processes have been imbedded in the Malta process as previously stated. It is also important to keep in mind that the EU has allotted 10% of its budget to migration and 90% to development.

On the other hand, some experts suggest that the creation of institutions is not the most important thing - it is the adoption of a global framework. The new framework of cooperation will have a lot of influence due to COVID and the lack of financial resources. The experts suggest

organizing a Panafrican double action with AU and ECOWAS (Senegal is hosting the presidency in 2022). While the AU could be a political partner, having a direct dialogue with RECs seems to be a new way of changing the approach to governance and have it anchored in subregional dynamics. Also, the Knowledge Platform can potentially be an observatory on the degree of implementation and difficulties of the actions enacted by the AU as it is reforming.

All in all, the next few months will be a turning point in migration governance as a new process is ushered in. The decisions and actions made will have simultaneous effects in the Diaspora and mobility in Africa. The focus of the Platform would be to contribute to improving migration governance in Africa by proposing new ways forward and exploring its different aspects and challenges, since not much has changed since 2006 as socio-economic challenges worsen. The AU and RECs challenges in terms of translating ideas into action from an African lens will benefit from discussions at a level beyond management and towards development.