

Position paper<sup>1</sup>

# Migration Governance and the Rabat Process: The case of Morocco

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## Executive summary

It is evident from the data presented in this position paper<sup>2</sup> that, following the March 2016 EU-Turkey agreement regarding refugees and migrants,<sup>3</sup> the movements of migrants (including those leaving the Libyan coast) were greatly reduced between 2016 and 2018. However, a consequence of this has been the reopening of the migration route between Morocco and Spain, the main passage for African migrants to Europe between 2003 and 2005. In reality, this was inevitable, for the simple reason that, while the civil war in Syria – at the root of the 2015 refugee crisis – could not last indefinitely, the fundamental causes of migration from Africa are deeper and more structural. In this configuration, Morocco clearly constitutes a key country in terms of collaboration with Europe, not only with respect to reducing irregular migration from its territory and sub-Saharan Africa but also to helping Africans achieve a better quality of life in their home countries.

Any such partnership, however, should be holistic, in the sense that it must tackle not only security issues but, firstly, economic, and human development. Based on the global African demographic and economic framework introduced in this paper, it is evident that controlling all African borders<sup>4</sup> would be ineffective, especially for Europe, if the African continent continues to experience the same forms of economic and political governance currently in place as well as the same commercial and financial international relations, with the European continent in particular. At the same time as Europe's role should be to contribute to the development of the African continent, the international community should seriously take its responsibilities for achieving the same objective. In this sense, an interesting step was taken with the adoption of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) in 2018.<sup>5</sup>

Some of the international commitments outlined in the GCM, aimed at protecting and improving the living conditions of migrants, appear to set out potential solutions, including:

- Minimizing the adverse drivers and structural factors that compel people to leave their country of origin;
- Enhancing availability and flexibility of pathways for regular migration;
- Facilitating fair and ethical recruitment and safeguard conditions that ensure decent work
- Addressing and reducing vulnerabilities in migration;
- Saving lives and establish coordinated international efforts on missing migrants;
- Strengthening the transnational response to the smuggling of migrants;
- Preventing, combating, and eradicating trafficking of persons in the context of international migration;
- Empowering migrants and societies to realize full inclusion and social cohesion;
- Eliminating all forms of discrimination and promoting evidence-based public discourse to shape perceptions of migration;

<sup>2</sup> In particular, see Table 3, p11.

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/gte\\_wp\\_16.pdf](https://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/gte_wp_16.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> That is to say, in our case, those through which irregular migrants pass on their way to Europe.

<sup>5</sup> 'Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration'. Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 19 December 2018. United Nations, General Assembly.  
[https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/73/195](https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/73/195).

- Investing in skills development and facilitating mutual recognition of skills, qualifications, and competencies;
- Creating conditions for migrants and diasporas to fully contribute to sustainable development in all countries;
- Cooperating in facilitating safe and dignified return and readmission, as well as sustainable reintegration;
- Strengthening international cooperation and global partnerships for safe, orderly, and regular migration.

The elements detailed above constitute part of the 23 objectives set out by the GCM and represent developments that follow the logic instituted by the Rabat Process (started in July 2006).<sup>6</sup> In fact, the Rabat Process provides a framework for consultation and coordination founded on four strategic pillars:

1. Organize mobility and legal migration;
2. Improve border management and prevent and fight against irregular migration;
3. Strengthen synergies between migration and development;
4. Promote international protection.

In line with this study, the kingdom of Morocco was one of the first countries to adopt the GCM.<sup>7</sup> It thus becomes clear that the Moroccan approach to migration could conform to this general framework as well as to the foundations of the Rabat Process, from which the GCM seems to originate. Specifically, what has been called the 'New Migration Policy', followed by Morocco since late 2013, and which will be discussed in this paper, aligns with the Rabat Process.

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<sup>6</sup> The Euro-African Dialogue on Migration and Development (Rabat Process) brings together countries from Europe and Central, North, and West Africa, as well as the European Commission and the Economic Community of West Africa (ECOWAS), to address the issues raised by migration. The Rabat Process provides a framework for consultation and coordination, helps address the challenges of migration, and promotes opportunities for exchange and development.  
<https://www.iom.int/fr/node/103011>.

<sup>7</sup> The other country is Germany.

## Introduction

This is a position paper by the Knowledge Platform (KP) for Migration Governance in Africa<sup>8</sup> coordinated by the African Diaspora Policy Centre (ADPC). The platform is devoted to strengthening the interface between research, policy, and practice in the area of migration governance at continental, regional, national, and local levels. It operates as a forum through which government policymakers, migration policy experts, and practitioners in Africa can learn from each other and share good practices in the field (both policies and programmes) regularly in the form of a South-South exchange. The motto of the platform is: Organizing a knowledge network for better migration governance in Africa. It contributes to the migration and mobility dialogue from the perspective of Africa. Additionally, the platform is committed to contributing to a better migration governance system that works for the benefit of all.

The position paper aims to contribute to the ongoing policy discussions on governing migration and human mobility from the perspective of civil society. It provides a bottom-up point of view and conveys a message to policymakers of the added value of civil society's input into the discussion about improving the migration governance system in Africa at different levels. The position paper also narrates a perspective informed by a lived reality and a first-hand observation of the social, environmental, political, and economic dynamics on the ground impacting migration in all of its multi-facets. To this end, the position paper articulates a less familiar narrative of the topic. This is because the analysis in the position paper is closely informed by insider inquiry, local inspection, specific country experience, and a deeper understanding of the complexity and challenges of the migration and mobility dynamics on the continent, which currently receive little policy attention.

The position paper aims to amplify voices from civil society in the policy discussions in the field taking place at different policy levels both within Africa, Europe, and between the two. Actively involving civil society in the ongoing political dialogue and policy discussions regarding migration and human mobility is crucial. It is in line with the commitment enshrined in the Joint Africa-EU Strategic Partnership<sup>9</sup> and Action Plan adopted in Lisbon in 2007. The strategy, which is often referred to as a 'people-centred partnership', urged Africa and the EU to pursue and implement policies and programmes that facilitate the active participation of civil society in policy deliberations in the different areas of the partnership. This is because civil society contributes valuable observations that can enrich policy discussions from an angle not often presented. This paper will also serve as a background document for a side event that ADPC will organize during the upcoming AU-EU Summit, to be held in Brussels in February 2022.

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<sup>8</sup> A project assisted by the German government via the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH. The content reflects the author's views and the GIZ is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information in this document.

<sup>9</sup> For the full text of the Joint Africa-EU Strategic Partnership, see [www.europafrika.org](http://www.europafrika.org).

The key focus of the Summit is the issue of migration and mobility in the Africa-EU Partnership. The side event is also intended to increase the profile, voices, and visibility of the network of African migration policy experts in Africa among migration policy and development community circles, both in Africa and in Europe.

Reflecting on “Migration Governance and the Rabat Process: The Case of Morocco”, this paper revisits the Euro-African Dialogue on Migration and Development created in 2006, also known as the Rabat Process. The information gathered in the position paper consists of a mix of quantitative and qualitative data as well as a closer observation of the dynamics on the ground. The position paper presents an African perspective on how the targeted governments in the Maghreb region translated the political dialogue into policy and practice in the field of migration governance, the challenges encountered, and possible solutions that will allow a way forward. The position paper argues that the root causes of migration within the Maghreb region and beyond cannot be resolved by controlling the movements of human mobility. The problem is much deeper and more complex and requires a holistic approach. The ongoing dialogue processes are important, but they are like a band-aid solution. They only help to reduce the flows of migrants by temporarily closing one migration route while at the same time opening another. The position paper recommends a review of the limitations of the dialogue processes. This is in terms of addressing migration issues at their root and with respect to a lack of development and sufficient economic growth, which leads to poverty, unemployment, and desperation, which, in turn, forces people to migrate. In addition, addressing the root causes of migration also requires the development of a long-term policy since short-term and limited interventions are not working effectively.

## A) The specific context of migration from Africa

While the number of African migrants in the world is not as high today as is presented to the European public<sup>10</sup> – about six out of ten African migrants stay on the African continent<sup>11</sup> – the risk of this number increasing in the future is high. This is because of the demographic and economic factors at work today as well as the way the general political and climatic situation on the continent is evolving.

Before delving into the major underlying causes of current and future migration from Africa, we must question policy and public discourses based on the notion of an “African invasion” or that frame African migration as a potential threat to the “European way of life”.<sup>12</sup> The concept of invasion, which appears here almost as a myth, suggesting that Africa is *the* continent that sends a disproportionate number of migrants to other parts of the world, including Europe, is simply incorrect. Data on migration on a global scale shows that the number of migrants from Africa is almost equal to that of migrants from Latin America, and these two continents only

<sup>10</sup> See, ‘The Myth of Invasion: The inconvenient realities of African migration to Europe’. Hein de Haas. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01436590802386435?journalCode=ctwg20>.

<sup>11</sup> International migrations 2020. <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/migrations-internationales-2020-principaux-r-sultats>.

<sup>12</sup> ‘African Migration to Europe Is a Lifeline, not a Threat’, *World Politics Review*, 9 June 2021. <https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/29716/on-african-migration-europe-s-reaction-is-the-problem>.

supersede Oceania and North America (Table 1). In addition, among the top 20 countries of origin of migrants in 2019, only one African country, namely, Morocco, ranks 18th. Thus, today’s discourse framing African migration as a threat to European security and/or identity, for example, has much more to do with looking at migration through the lenses of race, ethnicity, and religion<sup>13</sup> than it does with empirical evidence.

Table 1: Number of international migrants in mid-2020 around the world, by region (in millions)<sup>14</sup>

Regions	<u>Where migrants are living</u>	<u>Where migrants come from</u>
Asia	85.6	115
Europe	86.7	63.3
North America	58.7	4.3
Africa	25.4	40.57
Latina America & Caribbean	14.8	42.9
Oceania	9.4	1.97
Total	280.698	

Along the same lines, and as shown in the table above, the number of migrants leaving Asia is almost three times higher than that of migrants from Africa, and almost twice as high as that of migrants from Europe. By country, and according to the most recent data published by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the top five countries of origin of new immigrants to OECD countries in 2017 were the People’s Republic of China, Romania, India, Poland, and Vietnam. The leading African country is Morocco, which ranks 18th, with 99,000 migrants and 1.4 per cent of total OECD countries inflows in 2017. Nigeria is ranked 31st, Algeria 46th, and Egypt 48th.

<sup>13</sup> Because African migrants are more visible, either because they are black, because they are Arab, because they are Muslim, or because they are all three simultaneously.

<sup>14</sup> United Nations - DESA. International Migration – 2020.

[https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/sites/www.un.org.development.desa.pd/files/undesa\\_pd\\_2020\\_international\\_migration\\_highlights.pdf](https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/sites/www.un.org.development.desa.pd/files/undesa_pd_2020_international_migration_highlights.pdf)

Nonetheless, migration from Africa is expected to increase in the coming years, for the following two essential reasons:

1. Africa is the poorest continent in the world today.
2. Africa has the highest rate of population growth in the world.<sup>15</sup>

### A.1) Migration from Africa, extreme poverty, and high demographic growth rate

Extreme poverty and high demographic growth appear to be linked in Africa – as elsewhere – and are largely implied in the strong migratory pressure noted in the continent during the last decades. As shown in Table 2 below, African nations account for 22 of the 25 poorest countries in the world. Today, about 750 million people are living in extreme poverty, surviving on less than US\$1.90 a day and more than half of the world’s extreme poor (i.e. 420 million people) lives in sub-Saharan Africa.

Table 2: World’s poorest countries (top 25), 2019<sup>16</sup>

Country	Population (millions)	Demographic growth rate %	GDP per capita (in US\$)	International rank
Liberia	4.9	2.4	710	1
Central African Republic	5.8	2.14	730	2
Burundi	12	3.3	770	3
Congo Democratic Republic	95.8	3.3	870	4
Niger	23.3	3.87	990	5
Malawi	18.6	2.68	1,180	6
Mozambique	30.5	2.95	1,200	7
Sierra Leone	7.8	2.13	1,480	8
Madagascar	27	2.69	1,510	9
Comoros	0.8	2.23	1,570	10
Togo	8.12	2.45	1,620	11
Gambia	2.36	2.97	1,700	12
Guinea-Bissau	1.9	2.49	1,700	13
Burkina Faso	20.44	2.89	1,810	14
Uganda	44.5	3.61	1,820	15
Haiti	11.3	1.26	1,830	16
Zimbabwe	14.7	1.43	1,850	17
Ethiopia	112.1	2.61	1,890	18
Chad	16	3.3	1,920	19
Rwanda	12.7	2.64	1,990	20

<sup>15</sup> *World Population Review*, ‘Poorest Countries In The World 2019’. <http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/poorest-countries-in-the-world/> and *World Population Review* <http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries>.

<sup>16</sup> *Idem*.

Afghanistan	38.23	2.34	2,000	21
Mali	19.8	3.04	2,160	22
Guinea	12.8	2.88	2,180	23
Benin	11.8	2.75	2,260	23
Solomon Islands	0.673	2.6	2,270	25

When it comes to population, Table 2 shows that the countries presented as the poorest in the world also have very high rates of demographic growth.<sup>17</sup> Globally, such rates are higher in Africa than in any other continent, and this trend is likely to remain so for a long time, particularly due to persistent poverty on the continent.

At this level, and according to the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations (UNDESA), the world’s population continues to increase, but growth rates vary greatly across regions and are at their highest in Africa.<sup>18</sup> Thus, the world’s population is projected to grow from 7.7 billion in 2019 to 8.5 billion in 2030 (10 per cent increase), and further to 9.7 billion in 2050 (26 per cent increase) and 10.9 billion in 2100 (42 per cent increase). The population of sub-Saharan Africa is projected to double by 2050. More precisely, Africa’s demographic growth today may be alarming, with predictions placing the continent’s population between 1.9 and 2.4 billion by 2050. By 2100, three-quarters of the world’s growth is expected to come from Africa, reaching 4.1 billion people, and thus claiming over one-third of the global population, while today it is only 14 per cent. Most countries (like Ethiopia, Egypt, Nigeria, and Uganda) will at least triple in population size as the region has very high fertility rates.

Nations in many parts of the world have experienced for centuries (in Europe) and decades (in Asia, Latin America, and North Africa) what demographers call the “Demographic Transition”. The African population – mainly in sub-Saharan countries – is still in the explosive phase of its growth, because of poverty, lack of education (among women in particular), and the failure of social systems in most parts of Africa. Clearly, if this problematic trend continues, it is hard to imagine all its repercussions by, say, 2050 or 2100.<sup>19</sup> We would not just be confronted with a massive economic, humanitarian, and migratory challenge, but also a truly global security issue. Extreme poverty, unemployment, and income inequality are being exacerbated by bad economic and social policies, by an unbalanced international economic order, and by climate change, all of which are important drivers of social instability and insecurity at the regional and continental scales.

What is certain, however, is that in addition to the problems of security, terrorism, and climate change – whose effects on intra and extra-continental migration are profound and pose major political problems – poverty and the strong growth of the African population are today the main drivers of migration. Moreover, they will continue to be the main drivers; more intensely and more strongly in the years to come.

<sup>17</sup> *World Population Review*, ‘Poorest Countries in the World 2019’. <http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/poorest-countries-in-the-world/> and *World Population Review* <http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries>.

<sup>18</sup> UN-DESA. *World Population Prospects 2019 Highlights*. [https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/WPP2019\\_Highlights.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/WPP2019_Highlights.pdf).

<sup>19</sup> *Idem*.

## B) Morocco in the African and Mediterranean migration context

Morocco, which borders the Strait of Gibraltar and is only 14 km away from Europe, where two Spanish cities, Ceuta/Sebta and Méliila/Melilla<sup>20</sup> are located, is at the forefront<sup>21</sup> of testing the effects of socio-economic, demographic conditions, and climate change on the mobility of people from Africa. As a consequence of its geographic situation, Morocco was the main route for irregular migrants between Africa and Europe at the beginning of the current century, in particular between 2002 and 2005, and it has experienced a new increase in transit migration through its territory in recent years.<sup>22</sup> Thus, while Morocco remains a significant emigration area, especially if we consider the number of Moroccans living abroad (about 4 million people from a population of 36.4 million).<sup>23</sup> It also remains a transit country and, since the economic and financial crisis of 2008, it has become a final destination for Africans, Syrians, Libyans, etc. (in most cases, when migrants cannot find a way to Europe) and a host country for many Europeans in search of job opportunities – even if this is not yet clearly reflected in official figures.

This progressive evolution, starting in 1992, the year when the Schengen area began to be effectively implemented, has induced a parallel change in Moroccan migration policy, especially regarding transit migration and the situation of immigrants. Before it accepted the fact that irregular migration through and in its territory was a serious political issue, Morocco experienced a period of “non-policy” concerning foreign migration, between the early 1990s and 2002/2003. This period was marked by the rise of transit migration, mostly irregular, towards Spain and other European Union countries. Initially, the Moroccan government appeared indifferent to the issue, partly because it considered that this new form of migration was of little concern to Moroccans and was unlikely to last.<sup>24</sup>

With this in mind, one can nevertheless outline four distinct periods with their respective and complementary migration approaches. The first period ran from 2002/2003 to 2005/2006. This brief period included the adoption of Morocco’s first law<sup>25</sup> on migration, in November 2003, with the main objective to reduce irregular migration from the country and to reinforce the fight against human trafficking between North and West Africa and Spain. This period was especially marked by the dramatic events recorded at the borders of the cities of Ceuta and Melilla during the summer of 2005.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>20</sup> The names of the two cities are written in this paper in both Moroccan and Spanish.

<sup>21</sup> And whose Atlantic coast is less than 80 km from the Island of Fuerteventura, one of the seven islands of the Canary Islands archipelago.

<sup>22</sup> See Table 3.

<sup>23</sup> [https://www.hcp.ma/Demographie-population\\_r142.html](https://www.hcp.ma/Demographie-population_r142.html) (5 September 2021).

<sup>24</sup> Lahlou, Mehdi; Barros, Lucile; Escoffier, Claire; Pumares, Pablo, and Paolo Ruspini, ‘L’immigration irrégulière subsaharienne à travers et vers le Maroc’, Geneva: ILO, 2002.

<sup>25</sup> This law, which deals officially with the “Entry and stay of foreigners into the Kingdom of Morocco, irregular emigration and immigration” was adopted unanimously on 22 May 2003 by the Moroccan Parliament, a few days after the first terrorist attacks in Casablanca on 16 May, which killed 45 people. See *Law 02-03* (Morocco Official Bulletin No. 5162 of 20 November 2003), <http://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b4ed5c.html>.

<sup>26</sup> European Commission, ‘Visit to Ceuta and Melilla – Mission Report’. [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_MEMO-05-380\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-05-380_en.htm).

The second period ran from mid-2006 to the end of 2010. It began after the Euro-African intergovernmental meeting on migration held in Rabat in July 2006,<sup>27</sup> which marked the beginning of the Rabat Process. It should be noted that Algeria's commitment to the Rabat Process was absent at this time. Moreover, the process, whose main objectives are presented above, was disrupted at the regional level by the "Arab Spring", in 2011, before being resumed in the more general framework of the Global Compact on Migration. During these years, the number of irregular migrants passing through Morocco decreased to its lowest level since 1990 (see Table 3), largely due to the security approach adopted within Law 02/03 and because of the opening of the migratory route between Libya and Sicily.<sup>28</sup>

The third period started in late 2010, with the beginning of the "Arab Spring" and the great transformations in terms of regional security that this event caused in the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean, from Tunisia to Turkey. Having strongly decreased until the end of 2010, the migratory movements started to increase again (mainly from Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt). Initially, between 2011 and 2012, this number rose slowly, then, from 2013, there was a marked increase and a great influx of Syrian refugees. Since this time, the flows of irregular migrants from Morocco have remained stable with a significant number of Syrian refugees arriving in the country from 2008.<sup>29</sup> The fourth period started in 2016 and continues to this day, with a peak of migrants recorded in 2018, and the reappearance of the Canary Islands as an important destination for irregular migrants from Morocco.

The following section summarizes the main data from the last two phases, which were marked by the effects of the 2008/2012 financial crisis, the "Arab Spring", the so-called 2015 refugee crisis and, finally, the COVID-19 crisis.<sup>30</sup>

### B.1) Morocco: Transit country

Since the mid-1990s, Morocco has become a transit country for sub-Saharan migrants seeking to enter Europe illegally and the irregular departures of citizens for whom normal migration opportunities have dried up. A key factor in this regard has been the agreements established in the Schengen Area, which made entry into Europe for most people coming from Africa impossible without obtaining a visa. Thus, according to estimates made by a Spanish migrant rights NGO, APDHA,<sup>31</sup> nearly 220,000 irregular migrants arrived in Spain from Morocco between 2000 and 2008, including 86,840 Moroccans and 132,550 Algerian citizens and various other nationalities from sub-Saharan Africa (i.e. an annual average of 9,650 Moroccans

<sup>27</sup> The first Euro-African ministerial conference on Migration and Development was held in Rabat on 10-11 July 2006. For more information see the Rabat Process website: <http://www.processusderabat.net>.

<sup>28</sup> [https://elpais.com/politica/2014/03/08/actualidad/1394302005\\_693909.html](https://elpais.com/politica/2014/03/08/actualidad/1394302005_693909.html).

<sup>29</sup> Their number was estimated at about 2,700 in 2014. See Lahlou, Mehdi, 'Regional Migration Dynamics and Implications for Innovation and Development in North Africa', in *Handbook of Migration and Globalisation* (Chapter 15), edited by Anna Triandafyllidou. Collection: Social and Political Science. February 2018. <https://www.elgaronline.com/view/edcoll/9781785367502/9781785367502.00022.xml>.

<sup>30</sup> See Lahlou, Mehdi, <https://www.iai.it/en/publicazioni/eu-africa-partnership-migration-and-mobility-light-covid-19-perspectives-north-africa>.

<sup>31</sup> Asociación Pro Derechos Humanos de Andalucía (APDHA), *Human Rights on the Southern Frontier 2009*, Sevilla, APDHA, June 2010, p. 28, [http://www.apdha.org/webanterior/media/InformeFS2009\\_eng.pdf](http://www.apdha.org/webanterior/media/InformeFS2009_eng.pdf).

and 14,728 non-Moroccans). Since 2008, more global data<sup>32</sup>, which include irregular migration to Europe, make it possible to categorize similar human movements from both Algeria and Morocco under the designation of the “Western-Mediterranean Maritime Route”.<sup>33</sup> According to Frontex, as shown in Table 3 below, this Western Mediterranean route remained marginal in Mediterranean migration until 2016, the year in which the agreement between the EU and Turkey on the control of migratory flows was signed.

After the slowing of departures from Turkey, followed by a strengthening of the Italian Navy’s controls on the Italian coast, a double evolution was noted between 2016 and 2017. On the one hand, a sharp decline in the number of irregular migrants in the Mediterranean occurred, after the historic peak of 1.822 million recorded in 2015 (a peak that was then qualified as a “migration crisis”). On the other hand, a shift of migratory routes to the west, with again another peak of 56,245 in 2018 (more than a third of the total irregular migrants recorded that year in the Mediterranean).

Table 3: Irregular movements of migrants on the western Mediterranean route in relation to all similar migrations in the Mediterranean, 2008-2020<sup>34</sup>

Years	Total Migrants (all routes) 1	West-Mediterranean route 2	2/1
2008	151,135	6,500	4.3 %
<b>2010</b>	<b>104,120</b>	<b>5,000</b>	<b>4.8 %</b>
2012	73,160	6,400	7.75 %
2013	101,800	6,800	6.68 %
2014	283,175	7,840	2.75 %
<b>2015</b>	<b>1,822,337</b>	<b>7,164</b>	<b>0.39 %</b>
2016	374,638	10,231	2.73 %
2017	184,410	23,143	12.55%
2018	149,117	56,245	37,71%
2019	141,846	23,969	16,89%
2020	125,226	17,228	13,75%

Another element deserves to be highlighted in this regard. Returning to the table above, of the 56,245 migrants reported in 2018<sup>35</sup> as irregular, en route between Morocco, Algeria, and Spain,

<sup>32</sup> Provided by the Frontex, the European agency for the protection of Europe’s external borders.  
<sup>33</sup> This route includes crossings between northern Morocco and southern Spain, as well as the cities of Ceuta and Melilla, as well as the sea routes between western Algeria and the cities of Almeria or Alicante, also in Spain.  
<sup>34</sup> Compiled by Mehdi, Lahlou. From <http://frontex.europa.eu/trends-and-routes/migratory-routes-map/> 2016 and ‘Risk Analysis’ for 2016 & 2018. March 2016 and February 2018. + Risk Analysis 2020. [https://frontex.europa.eu/assets/Publications/Risk\\_Analysis/Risk\\_Analysis/Annual\\_Risk\\_Analysis\\_2020.pdf](https://frontex.europa.eu/assets/Publications/Risk_Analysis/Risk_Analysis/Annual_Risk_Analysis_2020.pdf) & [https://frontex.europa.eu/assets/Publications/Risk\\_Analysis/Risk\\_Analysis/Risk\\_Analysis\\_2021.pdf](https://frontex.europa.eu/assets/Publications/Risk_Analysis/Risk_Analysis/Risk_Analysis_2021.pdf)  
<sup>35</sup> Frontex, ‘Risk Analysis’ for 2016 & 2018. March 2016 and February 2018. <http://frontex.europa.eu/trends-and-routes/migratory-routes-map/> and

24,390 were Syrian (making up more than 57 per cent of the total) and 8,020 were Moroccan. During the following year, of the nearly 24,000 irregular crossings recorded on the same route, 6,336 were Moroccan and 4,014 Algerians, or 43.2 per cent of all relevant flows.

There are two reasons why migrants from sub-Saharan Africa have become a minority. Firstly, these migrants tend to migrate through Tunisia or Libya, or via the Atlantic corridors, towards the Canary Islands. This is probably due to the tightening of controls in maritime areas in the Strait of Gibraltar and at the city limits of Ceuta and Melilla, as well as the shift of South-North African migration routes to the central Mediterranean. This was confirmed in 2020, the year that saw the number of migrants using the West African<sup>36</sup> route explode again, due to the COVID-19 crisis with irregular migration flows that the pandemic induced between Tunisia and Italy and between Morocco and the Canary Islands – from 2,718 in 2019 to 23,029 in 2020, consisting of 11,759 Moroccans and 10,910 sub-Saharan nationals.

The second reason is the measures taken to integrate migrants – in line with the objectives of the Rabat Process – as agreed in the New Migration Policy pursued by the Moroccan authorities since early 2014. This policy, which acknowledges the fact that Morocco has also become a host country, has changed Morocco’s approach to managing migration within its territory. In response to the quantitative developments recorded from 2010 (indicated on page 11 above) and also with the aim of changing the image of the country among young Africans, Moroccan authorities announced a New Migration Policy in September 2013 concerning the crucial question of conditions for receiving migrants. It should be noted that this was at a time when Morocco was preparing its return to the African Union. The introduction of this policy began a process of “exceptional regularization” of almost 55,000 migrants by the end of 2014 and the adoption of a series of associated laws.

## **B.2) The new Moroccan Migration Policy**

On 10 September 2013, King Mohamed VI held a meeting with his Minister of Home Affairs and some human rights representatives (inter alia the staff of the National Council of Human Rights, CNDH)<sup>37</sup> to initiate a new “migration and asylum policy” for foreign residents living in the kingdom, with a specific focus on irregular migrants. This announcement was considered a turning point in Morocco’s human rights approach toward irregular immigrants, who mainly arrived from sub-Saharan countries, including Mali, Senegal, Niger, Nigeria, Côte d’Ivoire, and Guinea, but also refugees from Libya and Syria.

The New Migration Policy features three main elements:

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[https://frontex.europa.eu/assets/Publications/Risk\\_Analysis/Risk\\_Analysis/Annual\\_Risk\\_Analysis\\_2020.pdf](https://frontex.europa.eu/assets/Publications/Risk_Analysis/Risk_Analysis/Annual_Risk_Analysis_2020.pdf).

<sup>36</sup> Which corresponds to the maritime corridors between the Moroccan Atlantic Saharan coasts, from Tarfaya to Dakhla, and the Islands of Fuerteventura, Las Palmas, and Tenerife.

<sup>37</sup> While official spokesmen and the media linked this initiative to a report on the issue of irregular migration published by the CNDH, some observers believed the catalyst was a BBC documentary, broadcast in early September 2013, in which a number of illegal immigrants in Morocco alleged that they had been abused by the police. <http://www.bbc.com/news/business-23964923>. 4 September 2013.

1. An exceptional regularization operation for immigrants. This initiative benefited nearly 55,000 migrants between 2014 and 2017.
2. An extension of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' (UNHCR) power to grant the right of asylum to a more significant number of asylum seekers in Morocco.
3. The adoption of new laws that facilitate better integration of migrants and asylum seekers into social life in Morocco, and combat human trafficking/traffickers.

By the time the first exceptional regularization operation had been completed in late 2014, the number of validated requests for regularization had reached 17,916, out of a total of 27,332 requests. That is to say, there was a 65 per cent approval rate and over a third of the government target of 45,000 regularizations had been achieved. A second regularization campaign between 2016 and 2017 benefited another 21,000 irregular migrants, involving 113 nationalities, most of whom were of sub-Saharan origin. In 2017, however, the number of migrants transiting through Morocco increased by 130 per cent compared to 2016, before rising to over 55,700 at the end of 2018.

Concerning the other objectives of the new approach, the Ministry in Charge of Moroccans Residing Abroad and Migration Affairs worked out a National Strategy of Immigration and Asylum, which was adopted by a Government Council held in December 2014. This strategy aimed at ensuring better integration of immigrants and better management of the migration influx within the “framework of a coherent, overall, humanistic and responsible policy”.<sup>38</sup>

This strategy was founded on three main pillars:

1. To facilitate the integration of the new, regularized immigrants.
2. To establish an adapted institutional and regulatory framework.
3. To apply a human rights-based approach to migration.

If the last two pillars constitute important components of the new Moroccan approach to migration – parts still under construction, incidentally – the first pillar, in the absence of which there can be no integration of migrants, has already started to be implemented. The commitments contained in this strategy, and presented under the general title "Integration Issues", relate to the following key objectives:

- The facilitation of access to the public health system;
- The facilitation of access to education and training in both the public and private sectors;
- The facilitation of access to housing;
- The facilitation of access to professional training and employment.

Nevertheless, it is necessary to point out here that the available data on the number of migrants who have benefited from these projects indicate that, to date, their effect on the ground is not

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<sup>38</sup> 'La nouvelle Politique Migratoire Marocaine'. Konrad Adenauer Foundation, Rabat. 2017  
[https://www.kas.de/c/document\\_library/get\\_file?uuid=fd3118d2-365a-113b-06c6-973a65a509c8&groupId=252038](https://www.kas.de/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=fd3118d2-365a-113b-06c6-973a65a509c8&groupId=252038).

very significant. Indeed, it appears that the initiative has been more symbolic than factual, especially since most migrants, even those who have been regularized, are always searching for a route out of Morocco to go to Europe. In this sense, and according to the nature of the irregular migration phenomenon, there are no precise statistics on the number of migrants, particularly from sub-Saharan countries, currently living in Moroccan territory. Estimates put the figure at between 100,000 and 150,000 people, almost 75 per cent of whom are thought to be irregular immigrants and slightly more than 70 per cent who intend to pursue their migration projects towards Europe.<sup>39</sup> This latter figure means that Morocco remains primarily a transit country for foreign migrants living on its territory and that Europe remains the main objective of migrants, whatever their origin or the reasons for their trip.

In recent months, several events have complicated the political and migratory situation in Morocco and in the region as a whole, which must be taken into account in any migration policy aimed at managing migration in the Mediterranean area. These include:

- The COVID-19 health crisis, whose economic and social effects on the countries of the region, particularly Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco, have serious consequences on Gross Domestic Product and employment, and therefore strengthen the propensity to migrate.<sup>40</sup>
- Political and diplomatic problems occurring since the end of 2020 between Germany and Morocco and, after May 2021, between Morocco and Spain. In the latter case, the dispute reached its climax when Morocco reduced its control over its administrative border with Ceuta/Sebta on 18 May 2021.<sup>41</sup>
- The fall of Kabul during August 2021 and the expected shockwave that this will induce in the near future as a result of an increase in the number of Afghan refugees in the Mediterranean area. There will also be an effect on migrations of sub-Saharan origin due to the likely consequences of the Taliban's "victory" in Islamic terrorist movements operating in Sahelian Africa.<sup>42</sup>

All this implies a new European approach, centred on the migration issue, but which must recognize that such an approach can only be a component of a more global policy, one which integrates the political, diplomatic, economic, and social factors currently in play in the south of the Mediterranean.

In the case of Morocco, the fact that two Spanish cities are located on its territory – and, indeed, are also considered European by the European Parliament<sup>43</sup> – certainly constitutes an attractive pull factor for migrants (not only from the rest of Africa but also from other Moroccan

<sup>39</sup> <https://www.bladi.net/maroc-immigration-subsaharienne.html>.

<sup>40</sup> Lahlou, Mehdi, 'EU-Africa Partnership on Migration and Mobility in Light of COVID-19: Perspectives from North Africa'. <https://www.iai.it/en/persona/mehdi-lahlou>.

<sup>41</sup> [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/RC-9-2021-0349\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/RC-9-2021-0349_EN.html).

<sup>42</sup> *Le Monde*, 'L'échec des Etats-Unis en Afghanistan résonne au Sahel'. 18 August 2021. [https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2021/08/18/la-victoire-des-talibans-resonne-au-sahel\\_6091695\\_3212.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2021/08/18/la-victoire-des-talibans-resonne-au-sahel_6091695_3212.html).

<sup>43</sup> European Parliament resolution on the breach of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child and the use of minors by the Moroccan authorities in the migratory crisis in Ceuta. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/B-9-2021-0349\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/B-9-2021-0349_EN.html).

areas) to this region of North Africa.<sup>44</sup> In this regard, it is of utmost importance to reduce the economic and social gap that exists between these two cities – which Morocco considers as occupied – and their immediate neighbourhood, represented by the Moroccan cities of Nador, near Melilla/Mélilia and Tetouan, Fnideq and Mdiq, near Ceuta/Sebta. It is not a question of simply establishing migratory corridors, but also of ensuring that these areas and populations, strongly affected by the closure of the borders that surround them, can benefit from resources enabling them to develop. This means providing meaningful support to improve people’s daily lives and encouraging them to work in their cities of origin rather than seek salvation through migration to Europe.

Clearly, the current closure of the border between Nador (one of the most populous cities in northern Morocco) and Melilla/Mélilia not only costs the Moroccan State in terms of public spending – ultimately to protect a city that the European Union considers as a European territory – but deprives Nador of much greater economic and financial resources. If the city were not closed to its Spanish neighbour and if potential investors, both national and foreign, were not put off from establishing businesses in the area by the actual and/or potential disturbances induced by the management of the border, there would be more opportunities to receive support.

The same thing can be said about the Spanish enclave of Ceuta/Sebta, in the vicinity of Tetouan. The development of these two regions on the Moroccan side, and the creation of activities that would generate more jobs and wealth, would make Spain (and Europe as a whole) less attractive for the young people who live there. Therefore, when the EU argues that it strongly financially supports Morocco in the management of migratory flows from its territory, it should also include these elements in its assessments. It should also take into consideration the significant financial costs of the current situation for the Moroccan state, part of which include direct spending on border protection, and another part of which is financing efforts to integrate migrants into Moroccan society.

### **C) How to reduce irregular migration and better associate human movements with development?**

Within the global African demographic and economic framework introduced in this paper, it is clear that controlling all of Africa’s borders from within Africa – as part of a security approach – is not possible if the African continent continues to experience the same forms of economic and political governance that are currently in place, as well as the same international relations, in particular with Europe and China. Our purpose here is to present a series of interventions and priorities aimed at creating (or improving) development prospects and enhancing synergies between migration and development, both in source regions and in host countries. Essentially, these proposals seek to reduce illegal migration as much as possible, as it is unwelcome and constitutes a source of conflict and a motive for political radicalization. Confronting this global problem from distinct and complementary levels requires a multi-dimensional, multi-scale approach as well as long-term development policies.

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<sup>44</sup> See photos in the Annex.

In terms of policy, European countries must recognize that Africa’s future is a matter of major concern today, and not just because of irregular migratory flows originating from the continent. In this context, an international programme (an “Africa Plan”<sup>45</sup>) including significant economic, social, and climatic components must be initiated. Europe is on Africa’s doorstep, and it is inconceivable that it will escape the various problems experienced and expected in Africa – including those linked to climate change – which will only worsen every year if nothing significant is done to remedy the situation.

From this perspective, it is useful to translate, not only in discourses but also in European public policies, the main objectives of the Barcelona Process, which was adopted in 1995.<sup>46</sup> This was a unique and ambitious initiative that laid the foundations for a new regional relationship and could represent a turning point in Euro-Mediterranean relations. With the Barcelona Declaration, the Euro-Mediterranean partners established three main objectives of a global partnership that would be beneficial to all:

1. Definition of a common area of peace and stability through the reinforcement of political and security dialogue (Political and Security Basket);
2. Construction of a zone of shared prosperity through an economic and financial partnership and the gradual establishment of a free-trade area (Economic and Financial Basket);
3. Reconciliation between people through a social, cultural, and human partnership aimed at encouraging understanding between cultures and exchanges between civil societies (Social, Cultural, and Human Basket).

This process, which, to date, has lacked the political and financial means for its implementation, should be updated and could be extended and usefully attached to the recommendations of the Rabat Process and the Global Compact for Migration.

The combined issue of development/migration or migration/development in Africa needs to be addressed in the short- and medium-term, not only through development aid but also through concerted management of migratory flows, in a combined European-African approach. But, above all, it should be addressed through a long-term approach that establishes structural, social, and economic development policies at the national and regional levels.

Such an approach requires concerted, multi-dimensional, and global action, starting with an effective Euro-Maghreb partnership to develop the North African region (beginning with Morocco) as a channel of cooperation rather than create a security barrier between Sahel countries and Europe. In this regard, it would be interesting to reflect on the establishment of an international “task force” for Africa that has the institutional capacity and financial resources to put this region of the world on the human and economic development track. An important step has been taken by the international community with the adoption of the GCM, whose main objectives we have presented in the introduction to this paper.

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<sup>45</sup> See the “Marshall Plan with Africa” initiative by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) as an example <https://www.bmz.de/en/countries/marshall-plan-with-africa>

<sup>46</sup> See Barcelona Declaration : [https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/euromed/docs/bd\\_en.pdf](https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/euromed/docs/bd_en.pdf).

Nevertheless, as previously mentioned, Algeria is among the states that have refused to join the GCM, stating that such a pact would induce a “transfer of sovereignty to international institutions on issues whose stakes are national security”, that it is “a very controversial declaration that is not unanimous at the international level” and that “it is up to the State to define the legal concepts of regular migration and work”.<sup>47</sup> Although such a position is not far removed from those of countries such as the United States (at a time when the American administration was disengaging from all international conventions and agreements), Brazil, Austria, Italy (of the former far-right president of the Italian Council), or Israel, it shows that despite Morocco and Tunisia giving their support to this pact, cooperation between the Maghreb countries remains limited.

Inevitably, the Maghreb must assume responsibilities vis-à-vis its sub-Saharan neighbours, specifically concerning phenomena that affect the region, including desertification, impoverishment, malnutrition, and general insecurity. In this context, there are benefits to bringing the policies of various Maghreb governments closer together. In this regard, we note the convergence of migration policies since 2003/2004 between Morocco and Tunisia and take into account Algeria's long-term interest in opening up to the rest of the Maghreb, but also to its European neighbours. In response to the problems posed by migration, this kind of collaboration, for example, in terms of mobilizing national skills at home and in the diaspora, can increase the chances of success. Experience tells us that initiatives have little effect when conducted within a unilateral framework.

In addition, the European Union must become more involved at the political level, to ensure that the Maghreb stops being a space of conflicts and truly becomes a framework for cooperation. This is in the interest of its people and will create a real bridge of mutual aid for the development of the entire Sahelian zone, one of the poorest regions in Africa and a departure point for a large number of migrants.

Analysing further, it emerges that the Global Compact currently ignores, and consequently does not address, the deep and very diverse reasons for forced or involuntary migration. This means that the migration issue has not yet been fully considered by international agendas. And yet, an opportunity still exists to reverse the global tendencies by considering that the migratory pressure expressed in the countries of the Global South are the consequence of an unbalanced international economic and social order that must be transformed urgently, and of which the world economic crisis of 2008 was a symptom.

To this end, political parties must play a leading role, based on the principles of openness, humanism, balance in international relations and sustainable human development. European NGOs, whose actions are not determined by electoral issues, also have a fundamental function as information providers within European societies, raising awareness about the real stakes of migration, its causes, and its diverse consequences. In addition, and as territorial communities are increasingly impacted by migration issues –because it is they who receive migrants – they should play a greater role in the necessary change, in both the host countries and the countries of origin, by facilitating human exchanges, education and partnership actions, and the transfer

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<sup>47</sup> SPUTNIK France, (17 December 2018). ‘Alger énumère les points qu’il refuse dans le pacte de Marrakech sur les migrations’. <https://fr.sputniknews.com/20181217/alger-reserves-pacte-migrations-ONU-marrakech-1039334563.html>.

of knowledge and information on the best practices for local development. There must also be a reorientation of public policies – within the European Union and in the various Maghreb countries – in order to promote solutions directed towards the future founded on a concerted, global economic- and social-based approach, rather than interventions purely of a police and security nature. At this level, the approach must be based on the principle of co-responsibility between Europe, all countries of North Africa (where Algeria and Morocco are decisive links), and the countries of sub-Saharan Africa, obviously with a strong focus on the negative effects such as brain drain.

Finally, specific political and technical measures, such as readmission, must be approached from a bilateral perspective. Certainly, transit countries like Morocco, Algeria, or Tunisia must readmit their citizens living in irregular situations abroad, children in particular. But each country of departure must also do so. Thus, readmission agreements must be discussed between the EU and the African Union, in a global approach and as part of a comprehensive strategy that combines migration and development, as well as human rights and democracy issues. This should be followed by enacting a specific readmission agreement between Europe and every concerned country of departure as long as its citizens are subject to being transferred out of Europe. Thus, it is not productive or useful to oblige any African country to readmit foreign migrants on its territory who have been expelled from any EU country. If necessary, the acceptance of this measure by African countries could be linked to relevant political conditions, with the exception of visa facilitation. It is clear that any further limitations on regular access routes to Europe would undoubtedly result in increased irregular migration.

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## Annex



Above: the border between Melilla and Nador, Northern Morocco, on 13 May 2021.  
Photograph courtesy of Lahlou, Mehdi.



Above: the border and the area between Melilla and Nador on 13 May 2021. Photograph courtesy of Lahlou, Mehdi.

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