

THE MYTH OF TRANSIT

SUB-SAHARAN MIGRATION
IN MOROCCO

REPORT

THERE ARE COUPLES WITH CHILDREN, CHILDREN LIVE IN THE SAME CONDITIONS, HUTS WITHOUT WATER, ELECTRICITY OR HYGIENE. IT IS TERRIBLE ... FOR THE WAGE FOR EXAMPLE, IF I AM OFFERED 50 DIRHAMS, I CANNOT REFUSE. I HAVE NO CHOICE, I HAVE TO ACCEPT IT. IF I REFUSE, SOMEONE WILL TAKE IT, SOMEONE WHO WILL ACCEPT THE PRICE BECAUSE THEY HAVE GONE TWO DAYS WITHOUT EATING ... EVERYTHING IS DIFFICULT. RENTING HOUSING HERE IS NOT EASY. YOU ARE EVEN ASSAULTED HERE – YOU GO TO THE POLICE AND THE FIRST THING THEY WILL ASK YOU IS FOR YOUR DOCUMENTS. IT FRUSTRATES ME SO MUCH, I AM NOT COMFORTABLE HERE; EVERYTHING IS DIFFICULT HERE. I MADE UP MY MIND AT THE LAST MINUTE TO LEAVE MOROCCO ... IF I HAD DOCUMENTS, I WOULD LIKE TO STAY. BUT IF I DID NOT ... IT DOES NOT ENCOURAGE ME. YOU CANNOT WORK, GET MARRIED, HAVE A FAMILY LIKE THIS, IN THIS SITUATION ... I THOUGHT ABOUT RETURNING TO MY COUNTRY. BUT HOW TO RETURN HOME? I HAVE SPENT MUCH OF MY LIFE HERE IN MOROCCO ... THIS COUNTRY IS A VICTIM OF ITS C

Myriam Cherti
and Peter Grant

June 2013
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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Myriam Cherti is an associate fellow at IPPR.

Peter Grant is a freelance researcher.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors wish to thank the many individuals who have contributed to this research.

Our IPPR colleagues: Sarah Mulley and Graeme Cook who contributed significantly to discussions about recommendations and earlier drafts of this report; Eliza Galos and Miklos Szilard for their support with some of the preliminary data and media analysis; Jenny Pennington for her useful feedback on drafts of the report. We are also grateful to Carolyn Smith for editing the final report.

We would also like to thank our project partners the CCME, particularly our colleagues Ouafae Benabdennebi and Ahlame Rahmi for their work coordinating the research in Morocco; we are especially grateful to Ouafae for her invaluable comments and contributions to the report. Thank you to Mike Collyer, Marta Grosso and Heather Harvey for their helpful comments on the report.

The fieldwork for this research could have never been completed without our dedicated field researchers in Morocco: Valentina Arno, Fabien Didier Yene and Ilham Moumen.

We would like to thank the project advisory board members and steering group members in Morocco who helped us to frame the research and review its findings.

Finally, we would like to thank all the sub-Saharan irregular migrants and key informants who shared their stories and considerable insight on this complex subject. The quotes on the front cover are from the migrant interviewees who took part in our research.

ABOUT IPPR

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IPPR
4th Floor
14 Buckingham Street
London WC2N 6DF
T: +44 (0)20 7470 6100
E: info@ippr.org
www.ippr.org

Registered charity no. 800065

This paper was first published in June 2013. © 2013

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ABOUT THE PROJECT

'Beyond irregularity' is a major international project led by IPPR which focuses on irregular and transit migration from sub-Saharan Africa through Morocco to the European Union. The project has five partners: Sussex Centre for Migration Research at Sussex University, UK; Eaves Housing for Women Ltd, UK; Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants (PICUM), Belgium; the Council of the Moroccan Community Abroad (CCME), Morocco; and the Development Research and Project Centre (DRPC) in Nigeria.

For more information, please visit <http://www.ippr.org/research-project/44/7143/beyond-irregularity-towards-a-sustainable-approach-to-dealing-with-irregular-migration-from-sub-saharan-africa-to-europe>

THIS PROJECT IS FUNDED BY THE EUROPEAN UNION



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Morocco – a changing picture of migration

Morocco, like many of its neighbours in the Maghreb, has long been a country of emigration. An estimated 4.5 million people currently live outside the country – a 10th of all Moroccans – with 85 per cent of these expatriates based in European countries. However, Morocco's status as a sending country has been complicated by another development: its transformation into a country of transit, and a destination in its own right for irregular migrants from the sub-Saharan region. This report explores the current policy response to this phenomenon and the opportunities for a more sustainable approach to migration management in the country.

The current scale of irregular migration through the Maghreb, with the majority aiming to reach Europe as their final destination, is new. The tightening of European border controls and the cost of migrating to other countries overland has meant that much of this transit migration has in practice taken on an extended, even semi-permanent character. Many of Morocco's 'transit' migrants, even those who regard their journey as incomplete, find themselves in the country for years.

Nevertheless, the notion of transit migration is pervasive in policy discussions and contributes to the absence of long-term, sustainable solutions to the challenge of managing Morocco's irregular migrant population. In terms of the Moroccan government's response, this discourse serves to underplay its own responsibility to respect the rights of a significant population within its territory. However, even many nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) working on behalf of Morocco's irregular migrants have tended to focus on immediate emergency assistance and short-term needs. It is unlikely that any lasting solution for irregular migration in Morocco will be found until its protracted character is recognised and acknowledged.

Morocco's policy in recent years has been characterised by an increasingly securitised approach to irregular migration. In particular, the 2003 Law 02-03 provided a legal basis for the detention and deportation of irregular migrants from Morocco. Although it also contained some protections for vulnerable groups – prohibiting, for example, the *refoulement*¹ of pregnant women and refugees – there is evidence that even these provisions have been violated.

European border concerns have been a major contributing factor to the policy shift within Morocco. Through a variety of mechanisms, from 'mobility partnerships' to targeted funding – in 2006, for instance, the European Union (EU) channelled €67 million to Morocco's border management through the MEDA² programme – European countries have effectively extended their migration policy beyond their borders into Morocco and its Maghreb neighbours. As a result, much of the EU's border control has effectively been outsourced to third countries like Morocco. Despite these trends, recently there have been encouraging signs of a change in Morocco's migration policy and a greater emphasis on the protection of its migrants. In particular, the 2011 national constitution strongly affirmed the central importance of human rights, including those of Morocco's irregular population. Although critics have argued that the legislation has yet to have any practical impact, it represents an important first step towards developing an immigration policy that is able

1 The sending, expulsion, return or transfer of a refugee to a country where their freedom would be threatened on account of ethnicity, religion, nationality, or membership of a particular social group. The contrary principle of *non-refoulement* is considered to apply in a human rights context to prohibit the forcible sending, return, or in any other way transfer of a person to a country where they may face torture.

2 The acronym MEDA derives from the French: *mesures d'accompagnement* (accompanying measures).

to manage migration better at all levels: border controls, access to basic needs, migrant protection from abuse and, if needed, facilitation of return.

Building on existing research and based on original new data, this report aims to move the debate forward and away from the fixed discussion on whether Morocco is still a transit country or not. Instead, it considers the consequences of these new forms of ‘transit’ and ‘permanent’ irregular migration in Morocco for policymakers, communities and individual migrants themselves. Our work will, we hope, spark a debate about the real policy challenges ahead for Morocco and the EU in dealing with sub-Saharan irregular migration, in terms of both transit and permanent migration.

Drivers of irregular migration in Morocco

As elsewhere, irregular migration to and through Morocco is driven by a complex range of ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors that are closely linked to the connections and inequalities between the sending region of sub-Saharan Africa and intended destination countries in Europe. The decision to migrate is often triggered by a complex mix of ‘proximate’ causes (such as the outbreak of violence, loss of livelihood or the death of a family member) and ‘root’ causes (such as political instability, economic uncertainty or prolonged unemployment). Our research shows that the journey may be initiated with a strong degree of personal autonomy, or in the context of strong familial pressure. Despite the diversity of experiences, it is evident that poverty, while an important driver of much irregular migration, is rarely sufficient by itself to explain the phenomenon. Other factors, from conflict to a ‘culture of migration’, also contribute to the process.

Factors in irregular migration

Push factors	
Violence and instability	The spread of conflict in countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Mali in recent years has been a primary driver of irregular migration through Morocco. Among our respondents, almost a quarter (22 per cent) had experienced conflict or political persecution in their country of origin. An additional 7 per cent fled due to domestic or community violence.
Limited opportunities	Among our respondents, these included the failure of a business, the lack of a viable livelihood, limited education prospects or climate change.
Mobility and the ‘culture of migration’	Families, friends, neighbours and the wider community can play a major role in perpetuating migration from key sending areas. In particular, as was the case for many of our respondents, the pressure to support parents and relatives can prove decisive.
Pull factors	
The influence of the diaspora	A crucial element in the facilitation and promotion of migration is the diaspora who, besides often providing advice or financial support, also present a visible ‘success story’ for prospective migrants. Returning migrants can play a similar role in communicating the apparent benefits of migration.
Media and social technologies	The television, internet and social media have led to an increasingly globalised outlook among young people in sending regions, together with an acute awareness of the inequalities between their own countries and developed countries in Europe.
Improved prospects	Migration is often driven by the pursuit of a better quality of life. While this frequently includes education or employment, it can also encompass political freedoms, security and other benefits unavailable in sending countries. A corollary of this is the idealisation of Europe. This positive outlook on Europe was surprisingly prevalent among our respondents, despite the global financial crisis and the EU’s increasingly assertive approach to border management.

The journey to Morocco

Sub-Saharan migrants reach Morocco through a diverse range of routes and methods. As evidenced in many of our respondents’ accounts, the journey can be protracted over

months or even years, with a strong element of improvisation. At the same time, despite detours and delays, the intended end destination – typically Europe – generally remains. Nevertheless, a significant proportion of migrants may migrate with Morocco as the intended destination, at least in the medium term. The difference between those with sufficient resources to undertake the journey in a single phase, even by air, and those who have to fund themselves incrementally is very considerable. For the latter group, dependent on poorly paid ‘odd jobs’, begging or even prostitution, the duration of the journey is likely to be much longer, as each stage must be saved for in advance.

Migrants also face many risks during their journey to Morocco: the inhospitable landscape, the depredations of criminal gangs and even violence from local security forces. Besides the danger of death through dehydration or starvation in the desert, many respondents reported violent incidents such as theft and sexual assault from criminal gangs and police, particularly near the Moroccan border.

Life in Morocco

The experiences of sub-Saharan migrants in Morocco vary considerably. Among our respondents, a number provided positive accounts of their stay and the welcoming attitude of Moroccans towards them. Nevertheless, the majority were more critical of their treatment. Several issues in particular defined their experiences while in the country.

Experiences in Morocco

Irregularity	The irregular status of most sub-Saharan migrants in Morocco is perhaps the central factor in their lives. Without legal documentation to work or reside in the country, irregular migrants or ‘ <i>sans papiers</i> ’ are effectively forced into a clandestine existence that exposes them to exploitative labour conditions, inflated rents and violence without recourse to police protection.
Discrimination and racism	Irregular migrants face stigmatisation from all levels of society, not only from ordinary Moroccans and the police but also at the level of policy and the media. This is based not only on race but also language and religious divisions, particularly for Christian or anglophone migrants, as well as their status as irregular residents in the country.
Underpaid and exploitative employment	Irregular migrants, even those with relatively high levels of education or training, often find themselves in the most dangerous or poorly remunerated areas of employment, frequently working at a wage far below the accepted rate for Moroccans and without basic protections. Many are unable to access even this level of employment and so are reliant on begging or remittances for their survival.
Lack of access to basic services	Migrants in Morocco struggle to access even basic services such as healthcare, education or legal assistance, especially outside the cities. The gap in government provision is filled to some extent by NGOs, support groups and (in the case of recognised refugees) UNHCR, but this provides only partial coverage. Particularly troubling is the ‘second generation’ of migrant children, born in Morocco or in transit, growing up without basic education or healthcare.
Social exclusion	Besides hostility from some Moroccans, sub-Saharan migrants also face divisions within their own communities based on nationality, language or religion. Furthermore, many find themselves increasingly alienated from contacts in their country of origin due to the incomprehension and unrealistic expectations of family and friends.
Poor living conditions	The combination of underpaid work or unemployment with inflated living costs for basic needs such as accommodation translates into acute poverty for many migrants. While in the cities this may mean exploitative and overcrowded lodgings, the situation is even worse in border areas such as Oujda, where many migrants are forced to hide in the forests and even clean water and electricity are unavailable to them.
Insecurity and the threat of deportation	Migrants are especially vulnerable to violence and crime, and may be reluctant to report incidents of robbery or assault to police out of a perception that no action would be taken or that the migrants themselves, lacking legal documentation, would be treated as criminals. In fact, deportation is a constant threat for migrants and often accompanied by human rights abuses, including <i>refoulement</i> .

For many sub-Saharan migrants, their lives in Morocco are structured around ‘making the attempt’: developing the necessary contacts and financial resources to cross, by land or sea, to Europe. With the growing securitisation of European border management, the risks to migrants are also increasing. Boat journeys, in particular, have become more dangerous and circuitous to avoid detection by security patrols. As a result, it is likely that more migrants are dying or disappearing at sea.

Future plans of migrants

Many migrants in Morocco find themselves in a limbo between return, onward movement or meaningful settlement. While the barriers to return are both psychological and material, as many migrants have invested substantial time and resources in their journey, at the same time the majority find themselves unable either to continue to Europe or remain as regular and integrated residents in Morocco. As a result, their future prospects are often uncertain and even contradictory.

The ongoing lure of Europe: Europe is still a preferred destination, with more than half of our respondents expressing a hope or intention to go there in the future. Even after extended periods in transit, many migrants still harbour hopes of entering Europe, though in practice a large proportion are likely to remain indefinitely in Morocco. This suggests that any resolution of Europe’s irregular migration pressure is closely bound up with the question of the status and treatment of migrants in Morocco.

Mixed attitudes to Morocco: Although most respondents wished to leave Morocco (mostly for Europe, though a substantial minority also wanted to return home), around a quarter wished to stay permanently. This implies that Morocco needs to develop responses both to short-term and transit migration, and to long-term and settlement migration.

The difficulty of return: Only a small number of respondents wished to return home immediately, but around a quarter expressed a desire to return home after temporary employment in Morocco or Europe. This highlights the importance of return options for migrants. Sponsored voluntary repatriation packages should be available for migrants wishing to return to their home country, and arrangements such as short-term work opportunities before return could also play an important role in increasing the numbers returning.

An uncertain future: Given the unpredictability of ‘the project’, many migrants are unsure about what to do with their future. The result, in many cases, is prolonged irregularity unless Europe, Morocco or sending countries are able to offer a positive choice, such as a temporary working visa, regularisation or a voluntary repatriation package.

Conclusions and recommendations

Our research shows that Morocco is undergoing a gradual shift from being a country of transit migration to one of longer-term immigration. Our interviews with irregular migrants illustrate that their sans papiers status is perhaps the single most defining aspect of their experience in Morocco, impacting on their employment, living conditions and access to basic services such as healthcare. While some gaps are filled by a range of dedicated NGOs and migrants’ rights groups, it is clear that these actors can never offer a complete solution; at some point, the state must step in. Important changes, such as the new constitution and the setting up of institutions such as the National Council for Human Rights, are positive foundations for the kind of policy and practice which Morocco must develop over time.

The challenge ahead for Morocco is to develop an immigration policy that is not just based on the need for security but includes pragmatic policies to deal with irregular

migration, both reflecting the legitimate need to manage immigration for the benefit of Morocco and recognising the rights of migrants. This challenge must also be faced by the wider Maghreb region: improved coordination and cooperation at a regional level could transform the experiences of migrants themselves and help all the countries in the region manage migration more effectively. Morocco and other countries of transit also need to transform their relationships with both source countries in sub-Saharan Africa and with the European Union. Irregular migration is, by definition, an international phenomenon, and it can only be tackled with transnational responses.

The findings of this research highlight the urgent need for a new policy framework operating at national, regional and international levels. We also make a number of recommendations that would help move towards such a framework.

National reforms in Morocco

- Advance the interdepartmental discussions between the ministries of interior, justice, employment, and foreign affairs, and the National Council for Human Rights, and expand these discussions with Moroccan civil society to begin to develop a comprehensive and pragmatic immigration policy that complements the current emigration policy.
- Strengthen bilateral cooperation with third countries and maximise the contribution of immigrants to Morocco through the introduction of visas and short-stay work permits with some of these third countries.
- Strike a better balance between border control and the protection of migrant rights through closer collaboration on migration between the Ministry of the Interior and the National Council for Human Rights, as well as civil society organisations.
- Deal more effectively with the current irregular migrant population by creating channels such as bridging visas that could provide legal status, at least temporarily, to provide for orderly return.
- Make voluntary return a viable option by cofunding the International Organization for Migration (IOM) Assisted Voluntary Return (AVR) schemes.

Regional and international reforms

(a) Closer cooperation – moving towards a regional approach with its Maghreb neighbours

- Reinstating the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) as an active platform for closer cooperation within the Maghreb on management of migration flows (including irregular migration) and for negotiation with the EU for it to move beyond individual bilateral partnership arrangements towards a collective regional approach.

(b) Improved communication and a closer collaboration with sub-Saharan African countries

- Develop bilateral agreements between Morocco and source countries to agree protocols for the return and reintegration of irregular migrants and bolster relevant consular services in Morocco to render them fit for this purpose.
- Strengthen consular services of sending countries in Morocco.

(c) An improved approach to collaboration with Europe

- The EU should develop a more equal partnership with Morocco in line with Morocco's advanced status and within the new framework of migration, mobility and security.
- Europe should support Morocco to adapt to being a country of settlement for sub-Saharan migrants, not just a country of transit, for instance by assisting with the development of a working visa regime, and supporting Morocco to develop a proactive and humane approach to voluntary return.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Contextualising the study

Irregular sub-Saharan migration in Morocco has risen up the policy agenda in recent years due to the attempts of many of these migrants to cross irregularly to Europe. While most of these individuals have traditionally been seen as transit migrants passing through Morocco, their options for continuing on to Europe have been severely reduced (DIIS 2011). Nevertheless, the route to Spain through Morocco – the ‘west Mediterranean’ route, as it is described by *Frontières extérieures* (FRONTEX) – still has the second highest number of interceptions out of the seven main migratory routes to Europe. Sub-Saharans are not considered the top irregular migrant group, as most migrants intercepted along this route are north African, but they still make up a considerable proportion of the total (FRONTEX 2012).

However, Morocco is referred to increasingly as a country of immigration (for example, see Khachani 2010; Clandestino 2009), in addition to being an acknowledged country of transit and emigration (De Haas 2005a). Descriptions of Morocco as a country of immigration in its own right started appearing in the Moroccan press around 2006, and the case of sub-Saharan migrants was given as a reason for this (La Gazette du Maroc 2006). Other recent research projects have also noted that Morocco is at the intersection of many migratory systems (Berriane and Aderghal 2008). This has significant implications for a variety of stakeholders, including Moroccan public institutions and civil society organisations.

Building on existing research and based on original new data, this report aims to move the debate forward and away from the fixed discussion on whether Morocco is still a transit country or not. Instead, it considers the impacts of these new forms of ‘transit’ and ‘permanent’ irregular migration in Morocco for policymakers, communities and individual migrants themselves. Our work will, we hope, spark a debate about the real policy challenges ahead for Morocco and the EU in dealing with sub-Saharan irregular migration in terms of both transit and permanent migration.

1.2 Methodology

This research has been carried out in Morocco by IPPR and the Council of the Moroccan Community Abroad (CCME). It captures information through intensive qualitative research, including in-depth interviews with 50 sub-Saharan migrants (38 men and 12 women). The interviews were completed in four locations: Rabat, Casablanca, Oujda and Nador. The countries of origin included: Cameroon, Senegal, Ghana, DRC, Nigeria, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Burkina Faso, Benin, Mali and Chad. The sample in this research does not claim to be representative of the sub-Saharan community living in Morocco; its purpose instead is to provide an overview of the experiences lived by these migrants that would help identify the main challenges faced by this group and how best to address them.

This study is also based on additional research that included:

- 19 interviews with stakeholders in Morocco (including representatives of state institutions, civil society organisations, international organisations and diplomatic missions)
- a literature review of existing research on sub-Saharan migration in Morocco
- mapping of existing initiatives, both from the statutory and voluntary sector, that respond to the needs of irregular migrants in Morocco
- brief media analysis of Moroccan newspapers to understand the media portrayal of the nature and scale of sub-Saharan migration
- two focus groups with irregular sub-Saharan migrants in Rabat
- two roundtable discussions with civil society organisations (national and international) and government representatives.

1.3 Report structure

The introduction and first and second chapters contextualise the research. These outline the aims of the study and provide a brief overview of sub-Saharan migration to Morocco and the Moroccan situation. Chapters three to six examine different stages of sub-Saharan migrants' journeys, starting with their initial motivation to leave their country, their journey to Morocco, their lived experiences in Morocco as an irregular migrant and ending with their future plans. Finally, the report discusses the main conclusions from this research and suggests ways forward towards a more comprehensive framework for migration management in the Maghreb. This final chapter puts forward recommendations for action at national, regional and international levels.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 Migration in the Maghreb – the regional context

Historically, the Maghreb – comprising Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya and Mauritania – has long been a region of emigration. Due to its geographical proximity and economic success, Europe has been the primary destination for most of the millions of emigrants who have left the region in the last few decades. From Morocco alone, there are an estimated 4.5 million people living outside the country – a tenth of all Moroccans – with 85 per cent of these expatriates based in European countries (IOM 2012). This large diaspora population continues to be a major source of income for the region, with remittances alone accounting for billions of dollars in revenue.

However, the Maghreb is now increasingly not only a region of origin but also a region of transit for many migrants, particularly from sub-Saharan Africa, or even a destination in its own right (IOM 2012). In itself, this is not a new phenomenon. Prior to the colonial era, there were high levels of population mobility between both sides of the Sahara as a result of trade, war, pilgrimage and religious education (De Haas 2006). These migration routes and patterns were interrupted with the imposition of arbitrary colonial borders, but since independence have revived and taken on new forms. Many of today's transit routes appear to follow these historic paths of trade and migration (Duvell 2008).

In the 1970s and 1980s, there were two main waves of trans-Saharan migration: former nomads and traders *en route* to the oil fields and construction sites of Algeria and Libya, and refugees from conflicts throughout the Sahel region who settled in urban areas in Libya, Algeria, Mauritania and Egypt (De Haas 2006). Trans-Saharan migration also increased significantly during the 1990s in the wake of the UN Security Council's arms embargo on Libya. Following this, the late Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi attempted to reposition himself as a figurehead within Africa by inviting sub-Saharans into the country, prompting the arrival of large numbers of migrants from west Africa and the Horn of Africa to work in the agricultural and construction sectors.

Migration routes and methods have subsequently diversified, and migrants have spread more broadly across the countries of north Africa (figure 2.1). Economic migrants and refugees from sub-Saharan Africa circulate through the Maghreb in search of employment opportunities and security. Importantly, much of this movement through the Maghreb is transitory, at least in intention, with migrants using north Africa as a prospective point of entry to Europe. One study has estimated that 100,000–120,000 irregular migrants cross the Mediterranean every year, including approximately 30,000 from sub-Saharan Africa (Simon 2006b). Yet in practice, the recent tightening of European border controls and the costliness of migrating to other countries by land has meant that much of this transit migration has taken on a protracted, even semi-permanent character, with migrants staying for long periods in countries of 'transit'.

Analysts have attempted to determine the numbers involved in these new migration patterns, but estimates vary considerably. A report for the International Labour Organization (ILO) in 2006 suggested that there were around 170,000 foreigners (excluding refugees) living in the Maghreb, although it was not able to identify the number of migrant workers or their distribution by gender and age (Musette et al 2006). However, a French press report around the same time suggested that there were at least 100,000 sub-Saharan migrants in Algeria and Mauritania, anywhere between one and 1.5 million in Libya, and several tens of thousands each in Morocco and Tunisia (Simon 2006a). More recently, the uprisings in adjacent states like Tunisia, Libya and Egypt, as well as ongoing conflict and natural disasters in sub-Saharan countries such as Mali, the Ivory Coast and DRC, have been a central element in the evolution and disruption of regional migration trends.

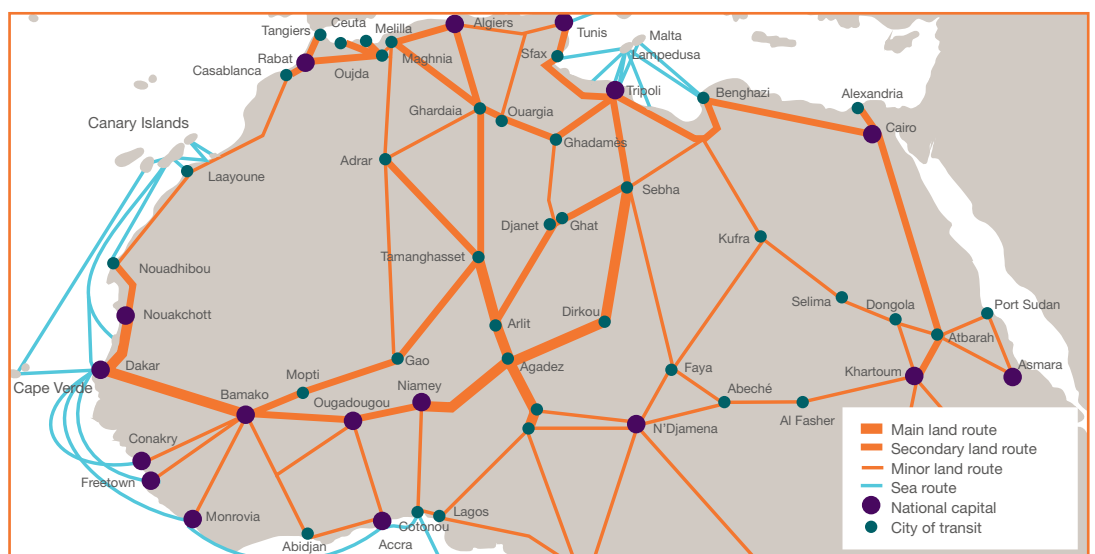
The scale of displacement from these events has been considerable. In Libya, for instance, following the outbreak of civil conflict, the IOM reported in May 2011 that 900,923 migrants – including 257,662 third country nationals, many of them sub-Saharan – had fled to Tunisia, Egypt, Niger, Algeria, Chad and Sudan. Thousands of others from neighbouring countries have also been forced to migrate. Some of this displaced population have ended up in Europe, in particular the Italian island of Lampedusa.³ Nevertheless, the volume of migrants moving from Libya to other African countries has been far greater than the number arriving in Europe. A Jesuit Refugee Service report from May 2011 estimated that, since the beginning of the political unrest in Libya, the EU had received only 2 per cent of the displaced population (JRS 2011). A significant portion of these migrants are likely to be sub-Saharanans fleeing persecution in Libya.

‘We are starting to see people who come from further afield because the revolution, the ‘Arab Spring’, has destabilized Libya, Egypt, and the road of many migrants who used to pass through the corridor to Israel, Israel has now built a wall. This means that perhaps, in the future, we will see more migrants coming ... More and more people go through Algeria and Morocco, which are the only passages which have remained somehow ‘stable’.’

Stakeholder 5

The effect of this destabilisation on the respect and recognition of migrants within north Africa, even those with internally recognised rights, has been disturbing. According to UNHCR (2013), ‘continuing unrest in the region has hurt the protection climate, increasing the risk of arrest and detention for refugees and asylumseekers, especially those from sub-Saharan Africa’.

Figure 2.1
Primary migration routes from sub-Saharan Africa



Source: Institut Thomas More 2010

3 Between January and the end of May in 2011, over 20,000 migrants from Tunisia arrived on the Italian island of Lampedusa. Around 14,500 migrants from Libya – including sub-Saharan Africans – also arrived on Lampedusa between the end of March and the end of May in the same year.

2.2 Migration in Morocco – from gateway to dead end

Morocco has a long history of emigration. In the last 50 years, it has sent millions of its residents to France, Germany and elsewhere in Europe to live, work and study. However, more recently, it has witnessed a new development, its increasing role as a country of transit, even a destination, for migrants from neighbouring states and in particular from sub-Saharan Africa (Bilgili and Weyel 2009). Since around 2000, in particular, the numbers of migrants from sub-Saharan Africa have grown dramatically in response to civil wars, political unrest and economic downturn.

Given the country's geographic location, on the threshold of Spain and Europe, its attraction as a place of transit for migrants heading towards Europe is unsurprising. Furthermore, while mainland Spain is only separated by a narrow stretch of the Mediterranean, the two Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla are also located on the territorial frontier of Morocco itself. These cities, surrounded by high wire fences, are the physical representations of the securitised divide between the EU and Africa (not only the Maghreb, but also much of the sub-Saharan region). Consequently, in the words of one Moroccan stakeholder, Morocco and its Maghreb neighbours 'face the same issues that Tijuana in Mexico [experiences] with San Diego'.

Precise figures on the volume of migrants attempting to enter Europe each year are not available. However, data on the number of interceptions on the crossing to Europe by Moroccan authorities each year provides some sense of general trends but does not give an indicative number for the irregular flow of migrants from Morocco to Europe. On one level, the number of these interceptions seems to be on the decrease. For example, while 9,469 sub-Saharans were intercepted in 2006, in 2007 this fell to 7,027 (AMERM 2008). But in practice, while the pull of Europe remains undiminished, the difficulty of permeating Europe's borders means that the migrant population are now based semi-permanently in Morocco, willingly or not, and this is where their impact is felt primarily. As one stakeholder put it, Morocco's position as 'an illusory door' has meant that it has effectively become a place of settlement, albeit unintended, for many migrants hoping to reach Spain or Italy.

'This country is a victim of its own history and geography ... in the sense that it finds itself, through the advancement of legislative texts and laws, as the ultimate border of Schengen ... It is as if the country, I would say, is an illusory door to cross the 15km separating us from the European territory.'

Stakeholder 3

Nevertheless, for a significant number of migrants, Morocco may also be seen as a destination in its own right. It has a number of benefits that may be absent in many countries of origin. These include relative stability and democratic politics, reinforced by the recent passing of the 2011 constitution, as well as the potential availability of educational opportunities. Morocco's economy, while dampened by the global financial crisis and struggling with endemic unemployment, is still growing. While these benefits remain out of the reach of many migrants, the context is often preferable to their home country, especially for those from volatile or violence-affected regions.

Intentionally or not, the result is that most of Morocco's irregular sub-Saharan population are now based in Morocco for at least the medium term. One of the weaknesses in the country's response lies in the reluctance of authorities to acknowledge this reality.

For Morocco, the ‘transit’ discourse reduces the country’s responsibility for its migrants and overlooks the fact that many irregular sub-Saharaners are now an established part of the population. In more subtle ways, it also informs the actions of many international and local NGOs, who prioritise the immediate humanitarian needs of irregular migrants while overlooking issues such as regularisation that define the experience of long-term migrants in Morocco.

Yet the ‘problem’ of Morocco’s irregular sub-Saharan population is not going to go away. Arguably the single most important distinction within Morocco’s diverse and heterogeneous migrant population is this issue of legal status. At present, while many foreign nationals reside legally in the country, these are predominantly from Europe or the Maghreb.⁴ Among sub-Saharaners, regular migrants constitute only a fraction of the total population: less than a quarter (24 per cent), according to one survey (AMERM 2008). As detailed in this report, this has devastating implications for the thousands of sub-Saharaners living without documentation in the country.

2.3 Europe and the securitisation of migration

A central element in Morocco’s current context is the role of Europe in shaping its migration policy. Over the past decade, the EU has sought to stem irregular migration flows into the region by extending the monitoring and exclusion of its borders to Morocco and other countries in the Maghreb, repositioning them as the ‘new frontier’ of Europe. In this framework, migration is seen as primarily a problem of security, particularly in terms of Europe’s immigration control. This increasing securitisation is apparent in policy instruments such as Law 02-03, the first legislation guiding Morocco’s migration framework. The priority of this new legislation is to manage migration at the border level by controlling entry and exit of migrants. The priority is very clearly on security issues, rather than human rights or regularisation. Although it also contains some protections for vulnerable groups – such as the *non-refoulement* of refugees and pregnant women – there is evidence that these have not always been respected (Amnesty International 2006).

These policies have also been criticised for extending Europe’s border controls even beyond Morocco, to the extent that even migration within Africa may be conceptualised in terms of immigration to Europe (DIIS 2011). Furthermore, while failing to reduce or alleviate migration, this approach leaves large numbers trapped in Morocco in a state of irregularity (GADEM 2010). ‘With all the measures that have been taken to control the borders with Europe,’ according to one Moroccan stakeholder, ‘Morocco has evolved from a transit country to a country of residence.’

In response, the framework of cooperation has now softened somewhat into ‘mobility partnerships’, officially signed in March 2013. However, Morocco’s migration policy continues to be informed to a large degree by Europe’s security concerns.

‘Morocco is considered as merely a servant of policies that are imposed from external actors. Through the measures implemented in Europe that either slightly or severely limit the freedom of movement of people, Morocco is almost regarded as the *gendarme* of Europe’s borders in the southern Mediterranean.’

Stakeholder 1

4 In 2008, Morocco was estimated to have more than 60,000 foreign nationals holding a valid residence permit, the majority from France (about 16,000) and Algeria (more than 12,000) (Di Bartolomeo et al 2009).

Through a combination of political pressure and financial assistance, the EU has effectively outsourced much of its border management to Morocco.⁵ Morocco has received substantial flows of European funding to support Europe's policy of containment. In 2006, for instance, it was awarded €67 million through the MEDA programme to strengthen its border control (Commission of the European Communities 2006). Nevertheless, the framework of cooperation between them has been developed in the context of one-sided and unequal negotiations. Europe has been able to transfer much of the burden of its border management to Morocco, an arrangement that even allows European countries to deport illegal sub-Saharan migrants to north Africa, rather than to their countries of origin. Most recently, an incident in September 2012 involving approximately 80 sub-Saharan migrants on the Spanish-owned Isla de Tierra ended with the majority forcibly transferred to Morocco before being sent on to Algeria. Only 10 of the most vulnerable migrants – mothers and children – were transferred to Melilla for medical treatment (BBC 2012a; El Pais 2012).

Like other north African countries, Morocco's collaboration with the EU has been largely determined through bilateral agreements. The clear imbalance of power – between Morocco on the one hand and a bloc of 27 member states on the other – has enabled the prioritisation of European interests at the expense of competing interests. In particular, it has served as a barrier to closer cooperation with other important stakeholders, both its Maghreb neighbours and sending countries in sub-Saharan Africa. This gap in engagement presents a significant barrier to the development of a sustainable and long-term solution to the country's migration challenges (Cherti et al 2012).

However, recently there have been positive developments in Morocco's response. Besides being a signatory to a range of international conventions, in 2011 Morocco passed a new constitution with a strong focus on rights and humanitarian concerns. As well as providing a broad context for the general protection of residents, it also contains a number of promising clauses relating to migration and reaffirms Morocco's commitment to human rights (ibid), although some commentators have questioned whether it has had a measurable impact on human rights in the country, including its treatment of irregular migrants (HRW 2013).

All these issues make Morocco an illuminating case study of migration in the 21st century. Pressured by the competing forces of globalisation and securitisation, it is a country caught between the political crises of the south and the economic crises of the north, between the 'push' of emigration abroad and the 'pull' of immigration from elsewhere.

5 One early sign of this new relationship occurred in 1992, when a bilateral agreement was signed with Spain that reportedly – its terms were never made public – allowed for migrants entering Spanish territory from north Africa to be deported directly to Morocco. Although the agreement was thought to have been annulled later by Morocco, there have been claims that it is still intermittently in force (Cherti et al 2012).

Box 2.1 Timeline of legislation

1951, Convention relating to the status of refugees: Morocco is a signatory.

1957, Law No 2-57-1256: Establishes procedures for protection of refugees in Morocco, including legalisation of residency in the country.

1967, Protocol relating to the status of refugees: Morocco is a signatory.

1969, OAU Convention on the Rights of Refugees: Morocco is a signatory.

1992, Readmission agreement between Spain and Morocco: Although its terms have never been made public, supposedly this allowed for the deportation of irregular migrants from Spain to Morocco. This agreement was only ratified by Morocco in 2012.

1993, International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families: Ratified by Morocco but none of the European countries.

2003, Migration Act: Penalises migration and establishes legal basis for arrest and deportation of foreign nationals from Morocco.

2005, Migration included in EU–Morocco bilateral agreements: Migration is mainstreamed into the Barcelona Process and the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). Within the ENP, around €40 million is disbursed to Morocco for border management during 2004–2006 (Global Detention Project 2011).

2011, New national constitution: An increasing focus on human rights, with positive implications for migrants as 60 of the 180 articles of this new constitution are defined by a human right perspective.

3. DETERMINANTS AND DRIVERS OF SUB-SAHARAN MIGRATION TO MOROCCO AND THE MAGHREB

3.1 Profile of migrants

Sub-Saharan Africa is probably the source of the majority of the Maghreb's irregular migrants. However, estimates of the numbers are very approximate, due in part to the inherent difficulties in quantifying a clandestine population, especially in a country where capacity and resources are limited. Yet this uncertainty also reflects a more general lack of political interest in the phenomenon (Musette et al 2006). Nevertheless, varying estimates by IOM and the Ministry of the Interior put the sub-Saharan irregular population in a range of 10,000 to 20,000 people (Khachani 2010). The limited size of the population, of course, does not mean that it can be ignored, though more often than not, this is what has happened in practice.

Data on the background profiles of sub-Saharan migrants is limited, due in part to the lack of regularisation programmes in many countries of transit (Musette et al 2006). However, what little is known about the backgrounds of west African irregular migrants in the Maghreb and elsewhere is somewhat counterintuitive.

Nationality: Migrants from a variety of both anglophone and francophone countries now migrate to Morocco, including Nigeria, Mali, Senegal, DRC, Ivory Coast, Guinea and Cameroon.⁶

Economic background: While irregular migrants are generally less wealthy and skilled than students and workers who emigrate via legal migration routes, they are not the poorest of the poor. Many come from urban areas in their countries of origin and have at least one parent with a moderate income (Lahlou 2003).

Education: Irregular migrants are often relatively well educated, with many holding the equivalent of an A-level and above; only a minority are illiterate (OECD 2006). Nevertheless, educational levels vary considerably.⁷

Gender: While young men still constitute the majority of west African irregular migrants, the numbers of women (who often work as domestic servants) and children have increased in recent years (Escoffier 2006).

Age: Research has shown that the majority of migrants are young men (Collyer 2007). In AMERM's (2008) research, the sampled migrants ranged between 15 and 47 years old, with an average age of 27.7 years. Over 95 per cent were under 36 years and only a tiny fraction (0.7 per cent) were minors (between 15 and 17 years old).

Marital status: Previous research suggests that sub-Saharan migrants are predominantly single.⁸ Most make the migration journey alone. Men who are married usually leave their wives at home. This does not appear to be a common occurrence for women. Married female migrants are more likely to be joining their husbands in destination countries (ibid).

6 AMERM's (2008) survey of 1,000 sub-Saharan migrants (both regular and irregular) in Morocco found that the largest group were from Nigeria (15.7 per cent), followed by Mali (13.1 per cent), Senegal (12.8 per cent), DRC (10.4 per cent), Ivory Coast (9.2 per cent), Guinea (7.3 per cent) and Cameroon (7.0 per cent). A smaller number were from the Gambia (4.6 per cent), Ghana (4.5 per cent), Liberia (3.8 per cent) and Sierra Leone (3.1 per cent).

7 For instance, in AMERM's (2008) survey, almost a third (31.7 per cent) of the migrants sampled lacked basic education, but the overall composition was relatively well educated, with 32.4 per cent having reached secondary level and another 16.1 per cent having continued to higher education.

8 In AMERM's (2008) sample, a clear majority (82.2 per cent) were single, with only 14.8 per cent married and another 3.0 per cent widowed or divorced.

Box 3.1 Profile of our respondents

Nationality: Among our respondents, the highest representation was from Cameroon (23 per cent), Senegal (13 per cent), Ghana (11 per cent) and Nigeria (11 per cent). There were also smaller numbers of respondents from Liberia (7 per cent), Ivory Coast (7 per cent), Guinea (7 per cent) and DRC (7 per cent). The remainder were from Mali (4 per cent), Burkina Faso (4 per cent), Chad (2 per cent), Congo (2 per cent) and Sierra Leone (2 per cent).

Gender: Seventy-three per cent of respondents were male and 27 per cent female.

Age: The average age of respondents was 31 years old, with the youngest being 18 and the oldest 55.

Education: Twenty-three per cent of respondents had minimal education or were illiterate, with another 18 per cent having received some level of primary school education. However, 43 per cent had attended high school at some level and 18 per cent had attended university, even if not all of them had completed their degree.

Marital status: Almost all of the respondents were not in relationships back home, though some of them had children back in their country of origin living with other family members or former partners. Some had subsequently developed relationships during their time in Morocco.

3.2 Drivers and motivations of migration

As elsewhere, sub-Saharan migration to Morocco can be framed in terms of ‘push factors’ from the country of origin, such as insecurity or poverty, and ‘pull’ factors like higher living standards and greater personal freedom in their intended destination. An explanatory framework that has been applied to transit migration through Morocco is the contribution of both ‘proximate’ causes (the outbreak of violence, loss of livelihood or the death of a family member) and ‘root’ causes (such as political instability, economic uncertainty or prolonged unemployment) of the decision to migrate (Van Hear 1998 in Collyer 2007).

However, migration is typically triggered by a complex range of forces and is not always easily reducible to a particular template. For instance, one of the most important distinctions employed in the policy arena is between economic migrants and refugees; in Europe this is often the balancing point between human rights obligations and immigration concerns. Yet this separation is far from clear cut. In reality, economic motivations (employment, life opportunities, education) and political drivers (weak governance, marginalisation, and violence) frequently overlap, with both contributing to the decision to migrate. Migrants may, for example, be forced to flee from a genuine existential threat and at the same time seek to improve their life prospects by accessing educational or employment opportunities elsewhere. Therefore, it can be problematic to separate drivers such as political conflict or climate change from the desire for better employment or higher living standards.

Whether through their own savings, family support or some other form of loan, prospective migrants must have the means to travel. Access to resources is then the crucial factor that determines if and how an individual migrates: many aspiring migrants lack the funds even to start the journey (Collyer 2010). In fact, while economic insecurity often plays a central part in the decision to migrate, poverty alone does not provide a sufficient explanation. In itself, it does not account for certain geographic concentrations

of ‘sending’ communities, or the relatively low levels of migration from other areas where poverty levels are high. In this regard, the existence of a socially validated ‘culture of migration’ within a community is often critical, as is the accompanying revenue flows that remittances can produce. Once this has become a recognised and visible part of the local landscape, migration can become self-sustaining.

Importantly, the drivers of migration themselves may change during the journey. At times a migrant’s journey may be largely improvised, even if the intended destination remains fixed. Of course, this is evident for the many long-term migrants in Morocco who, though still technically ‘in transit’, have had to adapt to a state of semi-permanent settlement in the country. Most migrants, once their journey begins, are constrained by limited opportunities and forces outside their control. Consequently, it is not surprising that motivations and destinations can change.

3.2.1 ‘Push’ factors

The range of possible ‘push’ factors in the decision to migrate are numerous, varying from a clear threat such as violence or political conflict to lack of opportunity and peer pressure from family or friends. Frequently these aspects are intermingled, meaning that migration can be both a choice and an obligation, driven by a strong sense of personal agency as well as a larger confluence of social, economic and political forces.

Violence and instability

One of the primary drivers of sub-Saharan migration to Morocco in the last 15 years has been the growing instability in countries such as DRC and Mali.⁹ Among our respondents, almost a quarter (22 per cent) had experienced conflict or political persecution in their country of origin, including in some cases the killing of their families, before beginning their migration. Some, persecuted for political or ethnic reasons, would appear to be legally classifiable as refugees.

‘I came for political reasons. My father was in total disagreement with the regime that was in place. And because my father was a member of a political party, the situation deteriorated to the extent that his life was threatened, and this is when he decided to take the whole family abroad.’

Malian migrant, male, 26

‘They began to go into people’s homes, to rape, to do anything ... And we could not remain anymore where we were, we were frowned upon and people knew our country of origin, despite the fact that my parents were born and raised in Congo.’

Congolese migrant, female, 23

‘My country was at war, violations everywhere, the rule of terror in most Ivorian towns ... My situation was catastrophic. I lost everything: my family, my father, my husband, my sisters, they were killed in attacks. I received threats, I risked death, my life was in danger. I experienced terrible times.’

Ivorian migrant, female, 35

9 One study, drawing on a sample of 95 irregular migrants spanning 13 different nationalities – of which nearly half came from DRC and Cameroon – found that just over half (54 per cent) had migrated because of political persecution (Wender 2004).

Civil war and violence are often the beginning of a protracted period of movement and dislocation for migrants, including many children, who often find themselves without social or geographic roots. One Liberian respondent, having lost his family in the civil war, moved through the Ivory Coast, Ghana, Nigeria, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau and Senegal in a state of continuous insecurity:

‘I stayed in Ivory Coast [moving] from one family to another, and from the beginning I couldn’t understand French so it was difficult for me, so I moved to Ghana, I went on [to] a refugee camp there ... Life was not easy for me there so I went over to Nigeria. I stayed in Nigeria, there was nothing again, then I came back to Liberia ... The war was very [severe] so I left and I went to Guinea and [experienced the] same problems, so I left Guinea. I went to Sierra Leone, stayed in Sierra Leone, another war broke out in Sierra Leone. I had to move from Sierra Leone to Guinea Bissau, I stayed in Guinea Bissau. Another war broke out in Guinea Bissau so I had to move to Senegal.’

Liberian migrant, male, 27

In fact, some migrants may be driven to leave their country by difficult or even threatening circumstances in the family or community. This can range from hostile relations with relatives or peers to a risk, in extreme cases, of violence or even death.

‘I was born into a large family. My father had three wives and I think there were about 14 of us, so he had problems with my brothers, with my half-brothers, so many reasons for me to leave. They did not come to an agreement with respect to our father, so to avoid other family responsibilities, the struggle for succession, for power, I left.’

Cameroonian migrant, male, 32

Besides political conflict, personal threats are also a factor for some migrants. An additional 7 per cent of respondents also initiated their migration in the wake of community or domestic violence.

Limited opportunities

At a personal level, migrants may begin their journey in search of better employment or educational opportunities. While this also involves the ‘pull’ of Europe and other developed areas, desperation and frustration also drive the decision to leave. Many respondents were in a state of profound and protracted economic insecurity when they left their country of origin, with little or no apparent access to regular or reliable employment.

‘What really influenced me is that the country had become very, very difficult. It prompted me to get out and to look for a better life on the other side.’

Cameroonian migrant, female, 39

‘What affected me the most in Cameroon, I had no means, even with a salary, things were not going well. I was sharing a flat, and I was earning maybe 2,000 francs per day. I had to buy nappies for the child, that I had to buy for the child ... I could not.’

Cameroonian migrant, male, 34

Others left because a particular venture had failed or their employment had been terminated.

‘[I was] with a company in the forestry sector, I worked for six years with this company. After the global crisis, the company was not doing well anymore, and I was left without an income, I did not know what to do in Cameroon. And the idea of leaving came into my head, to go and find out what’s going on elsewhere, the living conditions, where one could find a job.’

Cameroonian migrant, male, 32

‘My ambition when I was little was to be a tradesman. But when I started it was not working. So [I was forced to] adapt and find another way of life, walking through Africa.’

Burkina Faso migrant, male, 36

However, other respondents had some form of livelihood prior to migration but were spurred to leave by a sense of frustrated ambition and dissatisfaction with the options available in their home country.

‘[It was] not that I could not feed well, but apart from feeding well a human has challenges in life, and especially where you know the background of your family, and maybe you get to a certain stage where your family aren’t able to afford what you want for yourself, so you need to walk a little bit further to see what you can do to help your people or yourself. Then I left my country not because I just wanted to but I saw the situation of things [and] I decided to emigrate.’

Nigerian migrant, male, 28

‘I would like to be free, [but] [as a trader] there is no such thing as freedom.’

Burkina Faso migrant, male, 30

A related point, recurring among a number of respondents, was the issue of an interrupted or incomplete education. But the limitations of the local job market could even be a problem for the relatively affluent and well educated, who were still unable to find appropriate work opportunities in their country of origin.

‘You can be a graduate but not have work in Nigeria. There are many graduates in Nigeria that don’t have a work, I was one of them ... I applied for many jobs, I applied to the bank, I applied to local government.’

Nigerian migrant, male, 30

This could be particularly difficult if contemporaries had already achieved visible success. For some, the feeling of having fallen behind their peers provided the impetus to seek education or employment outside the country.

‘What really made me leave were my friends from high school. We studied together and they’ve all gone to work in public administration. We were at school together. They managed to enter the public administration.’

Burkina Faso migrant, male, 30

Mobility and the ‘culture of migration’

It is also important to appreciate the sometimes decisive role that ‘cultures of migration’ can play in countries of origin. The pressure to migrate to support one’s family can be considerable, particularly for the young, in contexts where migration is seen as an acceptable survival mechanism and a path to potential self-advancement. ‘It’s a country where everybody wants to go somewhere and bring something home,’ said one Ghanaian migrant of his homeland.

Within a ‘sending community’, migration is often an established and widely practised livelihood strategy (DIIS 2011). One respondent reported that he had been planning to migrate ‘from high school, I was 15 years old’. Another, who had also been planning to migrate since early adolescence, gave a vivid description of how widespread and normalised migration was among her peers:

‘We have a lot of friends who have travelled to Europe and to the United States. For us, before you have your family, you go to Europe, and you make your contribution ... They send money for the mother, for the father, for the sisters and brothers.’

Guinean migrant, male, 26

It is also important to recognise that many sub-Saharan migrants, before travelling to Morocco, have already lived and worked for an extended period in what one European stakeholder described as ‘transnational mobility’. Consequently, their journey should be located in the context of this fluid migration, facilitated by the minimal border controls and regulations between many countries in the sub-Saharan region, including the free movement of labour within the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

‘I think that we Africans, when it comes to borders, we are more tolerant, you see what I mean? In Africa, the barriers are not like those of Europe. There are no complications with this, I took the road and still take the road from time to time, it does not bother me.’

Cameroonian migrant, male, 34

There is also the category of so-called ‘adventurers’ who, while they are often pushed by the same political or economic insecurity as refugees or economic migrants, are also driven by a simple desire to expand their horizons. Several respondents appeared to fall into this category, having begun their journey not only out of desperation but also from a motivation to experience other countries.

‘I always had the desire to migrate to other countries, so there were no specific events that forced me to leave, in spite of my father’s death. [I also left] to help my family.’

Senegalese migrant, male, 33

‘It was for the money, but also for the experience, [to] meet and get to know honest people. In comparison, if you go to a country – such as Senegal – it is not for the money ... It is to discover, to grasp.’

Senegalese migrant, male, 31

When considering the dynamics of trans-Saharan migration to Morocco, it is also relevant to consider the indirect effects of the spread of conflict within sub-Saharan Africa and its impact on mobility within the subregion. Areas that were formerly receiving countries for neighbouring countries, such as Ivory Coast and Gabon, are now largely closed off or inhospitable to migrants, pushing them further north, to the Maghreb. This, in the words of one stakeholder, has led to ‘a reorientation of African migration toward new destinations. As Europe is closed, Morocco and the Maghreb in general are [some] of the new destinations of African migration.’

Family pressure and expectations

Migration can be an obligation as much as an opportunity due to the weight of social expectations, particularly for older children who may be regarded as breadwinners for the rest of the family.

‘As the eldest son of the family, I had a lot of things, a lot of responsibilities, really! And I did not want my brothers and sisters to say one day: “My brother did not do that, like the others”.’

Guinean migrant, male, 26

‘Working, I can take care of my younger brothers. My older brother, I help him. But my family is really poor. They need help. They rely on me.’

Cameroonian migrant, male, 28

However, this is by no means always the case. The decision to migrate can also be made in the face of strong opposition from relatives and peers, with the agency coming solely from the prospective migrants rather than his or her family.

‘It was difficult for my family to see a loved one leaving. The family did not want me to leave at all. My aunts, uncles, nobody wanted that; I already had a child too and I could not tell the father of my child that I was leaving. I went looking for a better future, hoping to change their standard of living.’

Cameroonian migrant, female, 39

3.2.2 ‘Pull’ factors in the country of destination

Diaspora

The pressure to migrate may also be exerted, directly or indirectly, through the examples of friends or family members already abroad. Social networks – both local and transnational – are often a central element in sustaining demand. Diaspora, especially extended family connections, can also play a crucial role in enabling the journey, both in terms of encouraging the prospective migrants and in making travel arrangements. More generally, they often provide potential migrants with a compelling vision of the opportunities and higher living standards available in Europe.

‘We see parents who come from there. They often say that, “in Africa you cannot enjoy your own life. We must get them out”. Here in Africa, it is not easy.’

Sierra Leonean migrant, male, 28

‘I have a cousin and others who live in France and they have good salaries, they have nice cars; and I didn’t have a stable job that could provide for my needs at home, so I said to myself why not try, I chose adventure.’

Senegalese migrant, male, 31

In this sense, irregular migration reflects broader trends of globalisation and transnational networks. In the words of one respondent, ‘the world is open’. Significantly, the positive aspects of the migration experience and the ‘success stories’ appeared to be the main image that prospective migrants had before beginning their journey. Despite the fact that violence, poverty and exploitation were common elements in their subsequent experience, there was almost no mention among respondents of being warned about these risks before they left. Even though they said that they would not encourage other potential migrants to undertake the route, they did not appear to have been cautioned themselves before beginning their journey.

Better life opportunities

While migrants are often compelled to leave their country due to a range of pressures, such as conflict and economic insecurity, the decision to migrate can also involve a considerable degree of personal agency and is often viewed positively as the first step towards a better life. Even for those fleeing violence, the journey may also be initiated in the hope of opportunities elsewhere, although these may be as simple as peace and a quiet life.

‘Everyone has a dream, and people differ in their willingness. I still have a dream to have a quiet life with a good salary, but the financial situation of my family has restricted me, in addition to the war, now I am only asking to live peacefully and healthily.’

Ivorian migrant, female, 44

‘To improve the quality of my life and to pursue my dreams, it is for those reasons that I considered the idea of leaving the Ivory Coast for a quiet country where peace reigns. We Ivorians, especially the poor, we were looking for peace and prosperity even in modest conditions.’

Ivorian migrant, male, 27

In the context of many countries of origin, where local education is frequently impaired by quality and resource constraints, academic or professional experience abroad may be seen as a prerequisite to success and status. This can even lead to situations where real opportunities within the country of origin are abandoned in favour of imagined employment or education elsewhere.

‘Every day I thought about pursuing my studies in Europe, because it is better. All the people who have good positions in government, when you look at their backgrounds, they went to university in the Sorbonne, universities of London, Oxford, in the United States. Well, I thought, if I [end] my studies in Guinea, I can have a place in society.’

Guinean migrant, male, 26

In practice, the search for better opportunities is often closely related to chronic poverty in the country of origin.

‘I had a tough childhood, I started working at the age of seven. I helped my father in agriculture because we lived in a small village far from the capital. I did not have the opportunity to go to school.’

Senegalese migrant, male, 31

Media and social technologies

The role of the media can also be significant in the decision of many prospective migrants to leave their country. Newspapers and television communicate vividly the higher living standards and opportunities elsewhere: as one respondent put it, ‘the mass media have shown us life in Europe’. In this sense, while global inequalities have existed for many decades, the media nowadays has the power to make the divide much more apparent. In the digital era, this can be compounded by social technologies such as email and Facebook that advertise the lifestyles of peers and relatives living abroad.

‘This is the effect of the internet. People see the photos: the others are in Europe. You share the pictures, you want the whole world to see how you live, how good you are, and the others are asking themselves: “Why not go to Europe?”’

Cameroonian migrant, male, 28

The idealisation of Europe

Finally, when considering sub-Saharan migration to Morocco, it is important to recognise the particular attraction that Europe exerts as a destination. This image is sustained among sub-Saharan migrants by their perceptions of visiting Europeans and also the apparent wealth of diaspora or returning expatriates. Even after the trauma and disillusionment of their journey to Morocco, most still subscribe to a positive view of Europe and continue to harbour dreams of eventually living and working there. Even the financial crisis did not appear to have dimmed this image for many respondents. Its appeal, while driven to a large extent by the desire for higher living standards and a good salary, was also informed by a strong urge for the rights and freedoms available on the continent.

‘Well, I am not aware of bad experiences for those who went to Europe. It is far, far away but it is a paradise. That’s it! Everywhere a man earns his living, feels good, is free. You need to live there.’

Guinean migrant, male, 28

‘In Europe, it is humanity. In Europe, there are human rights.’

Sierra Leonean migrant, male, 28

This has important implications for any long-term solution to sub-Saharan migration to Morocco and Europe. Besides economic underdevelopment, the lack of social and political liberty in much of sub-Saharan Africa will continue to drive the demand to migrate until these freedoms are introduced.

4. THE JOURNEY TO MOROCCO

4.1 Planning and organising a route

The journey from the country of origin to Morocco can involve a variety of experiences, depending on the migrant's financial resources, social networks and prior knowledge. The possible experiences vary considerably depending on the form of transportation, the funding of the journey *en route*, the use of professional smugglers, the degree of forward planning or improvisation, and the duration of the journey itself.

4.1.1 Routes

Migrants take a number of different routes connecting their countries of origin with north Africa, broadly falling into three passages: the coastal west African routes to Mauritania, the western Sahara and Morocco; the western Saharan routes to Algeria and Morocco; and the central Saharan routes to Libya and Tunisia (DIIS 2011). Recent increases in the numbers of migrants sailing directly from the Mauritanian, Cape Verdean, Senegalese, and other west African coasts to the Canary Islands have also turned them into new countries of transit migration.

In general, only migrants with the resources to cover the cost of the plane ticket and visa to Morocco, when it is necessary, are able to fly directly. This option is taken by only a small minority. For most migrants, the overland route is taken by bus and foot, meaning that migrants often pass through a succession of countries before reaching their destination.¹⁰ As a result, their journeys are frequently protracted, both in terms of time and distance. Among our respondents, migration took anything from a few weeks to a number of years.

'To arrive in Bamako was not easy. You must arrive in Togo. I stayed there a little (the month of August). In September, I travelled to Bamako, and I arrived almost in October. You cannot get there easily. [The journey] was night and day. I was ill in Burkina Faso ... Afterwards, I went to Bamako. So it's a lot of trouble. In Dakar, I spent three months. October, November, early December. I even spent the festive season out there. And after the holidays I left for Mauritania. There I spent a week. And then [on to] Morocco.'

Cameroonian migrant, male, 34

'Well, there is no way to get a visa, I crossed [several] countries: Congo (Brazzaville), then Cameroon, Nigeria, Benin, Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, and Morocco.'

Congolese migrant, male, 43

4.1.2 Planning and information

The available support and guidance on the route varied considerably among respondents. Some migrants had networks or social contacts in other sub-Saharan countries *en route*, in Europe or Morocco itself. Others had no contacts to speak of outside their country of origin. Many migrants drew on the services of smugglers for at least part of their journey (box 4.1). According to one stakeholder, tribal networks are also playing an increasingly important role: 'It is no longer smugglers but tribal leaders who organise themselves into networks to make people come to Morocco.' In some cases, the level of improvisation was striking. 'My destination?' said one Cameroonian migrant, 'I did not have a destination.'

10 AMERM's (2008) sample found that 83.7 per cent of surveyed migrants had travelled through multiple countries, with more than a fifth (21.1 per cent) passing through four to six countries before reaching Morocco.

In practice, even when Morocco or Europe are the intended destinations from the outset, the migrant journey is improvised and punctuated by extended periods of settlement in other areas before continuing. Some respondents stayed years in countries such as Algeria before finally entering Morocco. In some cases, Morocco seems to have been just one of a number of possible destinations in the Maghreb, meaning that at times it is perhaps only with hindsight that a clear 'route' appears. Even when 'Europe' was the intended destination from the outset, as was often the case, respondents did not always have a particular country in mind.

Nevertheless, many received advice from friends or acquaintances who had already made the journey that strongly informed their subsequent decision to migrate, demonstrating the important role that pre-existing networks can play in migration.

'That one friend who had made the journey in 2005, he gave me the route. I had an itinerary with me.'

Cameroonian migrant, male, 34

Some respondents received information and financial support from friends or family members based in transit countries or Europe to navigate their journey. Others were able to tap into social networks among fellow nationals in countries of transit. These could play a significant role in their journey. For instance, one Guinean migrant stayed for four years in Senegal working as a hairdresser, gathering information and contacts on the next step of her route, before moving on to Morocco.

'I saved some money ... Before I left, I built relationships with a few people, I began to speak their language, and I asked for information, others advised me, [for when] I requested a visa in Europe.'

Guinean migrant, male, 26

Notwithstanding an element of improvisation, many respondents were well informed about the pros and cons of different routes in terms of security, cost and convenience, including the outbreak of conflict in Libya. One respondent, having spent some time there in the early 2000s, emphasised the attraction of Libya as a destination then due to the availability of employment and its geographic proximity to Europe. 'From Libya we had many places to go to Europe,' he said. 'At that time the work was good.' 'I left for Libya in 2006,' another migrant from Liberia reported. 'It was easy to get there because the regime of President Gaddafi made it easy for us.'¹¹ However, in the wake of the conflict migrants appear, understandably, to be avoiding this location.

'There are also people that go to Libya ... In Nigeria, I met other adventurers who were going to Europe. They passed through Libya. I did not. At this point, there was the war in Libya, so I decided to travel through Morocco.'

Cameroonian migrant, male, 28

11 One Nigerian respondent, also migrating during 2001–2002, had heard different reports about the Gaddafi regime. 'I decided not to go to Libya because what I was hearing about, Libya was very bad. I was hearing different kinds of news. You know one time they threw someone in the desert? So I was scared. I am not motivated [to travel] if I am frightened. They told me the president – Gaddafi – is very bad. They told me the way the soldiers treat blacks is very bad, they throw you in the sea. I could have gone to Libya because you can work. But they told me about killings so it scared me.'

Box 4.1 The use of smugglers

Smugglers were accessed frequently by respondents at various stages of the journey, sometimes through contacts or friends but often also from a position of anonymity. Services extend from relatively small commissions, such as a border crossing or a short trip, to a more comprehensive package. One respondent, for instance, suggested that migrants could buy a direct service from Senegal for a large sum: 'People in Senegal, it is the Mafia out there, you can get a passport like that, to go to the north, afterwards you buy the ticket, you go. But there, he asks you for 6,000 euros.'

Most of our respondents appeared to have taken shorter and cheaper services. For instance, one respondent described paying €600 to be smuggled through the desert from Mali to Algeria with around 20 other people. Another migrant paid €650 to travel from Cameroon to Morocco. Others, having managed to reach Algeria, employed smugglers for the final border crossing into Morocco. 'All sub-Saharan crossing the border, who go to Oujda, they cross during the night because some of them are already familiar with the border, and they know where they can cross,' one respondent reported. 'We must pay 300–500.'

The services of these operators were often unreliable and could place the lives of migrants at risk. One migrant from Cameroon described the breakdown of his transport *en route* to Algeria:

'We arrived in the desert one day, our car broke down. We were among 47 people packed like sardines in a can. The gentleman asks us all [to get out]. There was not enough food for everyone. You know, to travel, all we had for food were some cookies and some milk. It was not easy, even the locals could not help because there was not enough for them. We waited a day, the man who led us called the next car behind us, it came almost 12 hours after, and [we were told] that it could do nothing for us and it was overloaded, and he said that if he spent too much time here, he could lose lives.'

Cameroonian migrant, male, 27

The potential for smugglers to cheat their clients is considerable, particularly when conscripted locally, with migrants either tricked out of their money completely or provided with a substandard service. One respondent, having paid thousands of euros to be smuggled out of Morocco to Spain, found that his trusted contact point had suddenly disappeared:

'I constantly called to ask about the situation. He told me another week. I called again, the phone did not work. I called my friend, the one who had sent me there. He told me to trust him, I did not know him.'

Cameroonian migrant, male, 34

Another migrant from Burkina Faso paid €600 to enter Spain from Mauritania, only to find that the trip had been cancelled, and without a refund. He subsequently had to return to Senegal to work another year before being able to continue his migration again. Others were only taken part of the way.

Another, a Malian, paid 5,000 dirhams to be taken to Spain from Algeria but was abandoned in Morocco. A Senegalese migrant, having paid 4,000 dirhams in return for a job and accommodation in Morocco, was also scammed:

‘The man who helped us to emigrate was a Senegalese married to a Moroccan from Marrakech, he was accompanied by a Frenchman; it was he who had the van in which we [travelled]. We gave him 4,000 dirhams each to ensure that we travelled with a contract of employment and occupations, and for food and accommodation too, but we found nothing of what he had promised. We travelled with the van holding a Senegalese passport; we paid 50 euros each at the border of Mauritania and 50 euros at the Moroccan border. We spent four days of a tiring journey with financial difficulties, and when I arrived in Morocco I had only 100 dirhams left.’

Senegalese migrant, male, 33

4.1.3 Funding and financial support

The journey to Morocco is typically very costly for migrants, who spend hundreds or thousands of euros on bribes, smugglers, transportation and daily necessities.¹² Some migrants, having run out of money during their journey, rely on support from their families in their home country. The minority with relatives in Europe may also receive remittances from them (Collyer 2007). Those migrants able to fund themselves for the duration of their migration, either from their own savings or from the support of family and friends, enjoy a relatively short period of transit.

However, many migrants lack the resources to support themselves for the entirety of the trip, meaning that trans-Saharan journeys are often punctuated by multiple stays in other countries *en route*, primarily in urban areas, working until they can save enough money to fund the next step of their journey. This can lead to them being grounded *en route*, for months or years, engaging in informal and insecure work until they are able to move on elsewhere (Musette et al 2006). During these protracted stays, migrants typically undertake odd jobs such as gardening or construction until they are able to finance the next stage of their journey.

‘I went to different countries. I did some work, construction, gardening, all what was needed. I did all kind of jobs. Anything we find, we do.’

Guinean migrant, male, 26

Given the temporary and poorly paid nature of this employment, for many migrants covering the daily living costs can be a struggle, let alone saving. A number of respondents highlighted the extreme precariousness of their situation during the journey.

‘To go through sub-Saharan countries, where there are no jobs. We must stay there for some time, friends, brothers, they will try to help ... There is no funding for the trip. We live like parasites, we depend on other people ... Sometimes the girls sell themselves.’

Congolese migrant, male, 43

¹² AMERM (2008) estimates that journeys typically cost an average of €1,000–2,000, but may reach as much as €3,000.

‘After reaching Algeria there was the need to get money to continue the journey so I started work on a building site in construction building houses, where I have a contract of months ... It’s not really a city, it’s in the middle of nowhere in the desert. Even to buy bread you have to work hard ... So like everybody I was working hard trying to get money to take the journey to Tamaraset where work is better paid. So I went there and started hustling again, I mean working doing painting, cleaning people’s houses too, just to be able to gather money and continue the journey.’

Ghanaian migrant, male, 36

Others, unable to find even this kind of work, may have to resort to prostitution, begging or handouts from home for survival.

‘I solicit charity outside the mosques. Muslims always take pity of me. So it’s thanks to them that I can eat.’

Ivorian migrant, female, 35

Nevertheless, a number of respondents reported positive experiences in transit countries and even settled for extended periods, developing friendships and engaging in productive employment. For instance, one migrant from Burkina Faso, having arrived in Senegal, stayed there for two years working legally as a driver and became well integrated in the local community:

‘For me, Senegal was very good. In Senegal, six months after my arrival, I began to master the language. In Senegal, even if you understand French well, you must know the local language. You must speak their language. You must know it to appreciate the good life fully. With that I had friends, we had fun.’

Guinean migrant, male, 26

Nevertheless, the extent to which migrants remained fundamentally committed to the journey is remarkable, particularly considering their economic insecurity once their initial funds are exhausted. Despite his positive experience in Senegal, the respondent from Burkina Faso still remained committed to Europe as a final destination. He subsequently left for Morocco because, in his own words: ‘It’s the plan: the destination is Europe.’

Box 4.2 Intended route and destination

The majority of respondents (82 per cent) travelled by land, entering Morocco primarily from Algeria (58 per cent) but also Mauritania (24 per cent). The number of transit countries between their home country and Morocco depended on the location of their home country, the level of improvisation in their journey and also detours as a result of border controls or insecurity. Some respondents, based nearby in Senegal or Mali, only had to pass through a single country to reach Morocco. Most, however, had to make multiple border crossings to get there, involving as many as seven countries of transit.

Only a minority (18 per cent) reached Morocco by air. The costs for plane tickets and the general fear of being removed at arrival are often a deterrent.

Almost half of respondents initiated their journey with the aim of reaching Europe, but a third left with Morocco as their intended destination. Given the improvised, uncertain and ambiguous plans of many migration journeys, as well as their tendency to develop in transit, it is problematic to pinpoint exact destinations for migrants, particularly as the ‘transit’ before even reaching Morocco may have lasted years, with prolonged settlement in one or more other countries.

Nevertheless, while among respondents there was a clear desire to head to Europe from the outset, it is striking how many appeared to have considered Morocco as a destination rather than just a country of transit en route to Spain, Italy or other EU countries. Though around 50 per cent of migrants left their country of origin with Europe as their original destination, suggesting its attraction for migrants remains strong despite the ongoing financial crisis, a little over 30 per cent also headed for Morocco, a sign that it is increasingly regarded as a destination in its own right. Smaller numbers also initiated their migration with Algeria, Libya or another sub-Saharan country in mind.

It is not, of course, always possible to separate completely even these decisions from the obvious proximity of Europe to Morocco and the role this may also have played in some migrants’ decision-making. As one migrant put it: ‘Almost all [migrants] want to come to Morocco because it is close to Spain.’ Nevertheless, it was also clear that Morocco had attracted some respondents for its relative peace, environment and employment opportunities, even if it did not always meet these expectations.

‘I was made aware through a colleague from Mali. He told me that Morocco was the best refuge, even more so as we were sure to go through the Maghreb borders.’

Ivorian migrant, female, 35

‘I had friends and acquaintances that lived in Morocco, they encouraged me to come here due to the favourable climate, stability and the possibility of finding a job.’

Ivorian migrant, female, 44

‘Myself, I came to Morocco for a better job, but here there is no work ... I thought perhaps Morocco is better. Everything has changed very quickly. But when I got here, I quickly realised that it’s even harder.’

Cameroonian migrant, male, 28

‘I thought I could find a better life here in Morocco, but unfortunately there is no way, so we are trying to go to Europe.’

Cameroonian migrant, female, 39

4.2 Dangers and the threat of violence

Migrants face many dangers during their journey to Morocco: the inhospitable landscape, the depredations of criminal gangs, and the presence of sometimes violent security forces. First, the inherent difficulties of traversing an often hostile natural environment, particularly the desert, for days at a time, could be potentially life-threatening.

Respondents described vividly the thirst, hunger and fatigue of their journeys through the Sahara.

‘I spent days and nights in the desert. In the desert, when you enter the desert, you should have your bottle of water, some cookies and some cakes in a bag. When they are finished, they are finished. And you have three to four days after that to cross the desert.’

Cameroonian migrant, male, 28

‘At the edge of the Sahara, the car did not want to start, we had no choice but to go on foot into the desert with only a few millilitres of water, and after hours of walking, we found help but we were very tired and very hungry.’

Malian migrant, female, 28

These dangers were compounded by the risk of direct violence.¹³ A large number of armed gangs, composed not only of locals but also other migrants, are able to exploit the vulnerability and isolation of the migrant population with little apparent intervention by local police.

‘These are people who are familiar with foreigners and locals. When you have just arrived, they take you and leave you somewhere. It is a form of kidnapping, they make you call your country and ask your family for money. They are the ones who organise the trips. It is a form of well-structured organisation ... They force you to call your family for funds.’

Cameroonian migrant, female, 39

One respondent was warned as he entered the country by another sub-Saharan migrant about the threat of Moroccan and Nigerian ‘mafia’ who kidnapped migrants and then blackmailed their families in their home country for ransoms. Not long afterwards, as part of a mass deportation from Morocco, he found himself in a cell with hundreds of other migrants and a fight broke out among them. However, having been released by a policeman, he subsequently started back towards the Moroccan border but was then ambushed and almost killed by one of the gangs:

‘Where I went to, that was where the ambush was. I ran into a group of Nigerian guys who held me up, they put a knife to my neck, they put me on the ground like you want to slaughter a cow. A foot [was] on my head, they put a knife [to me] and they were searching my bag. If I was a francophone they would have killed me ... They were searching, they were speaking French with me and I said I am not a francophone. They took my driver’s license, they took my Ghanaian passport and that is what saved me, when they saw I was a Ghanaian.’

Ghanaian migrant, male, 36

Besides the depredations of these criminal groups, another problem for migrants is the constant harassment of local security forces. Both Moroccan and Algerian forces appear to be particularly aggressive near the border between the two countries (GADEM 2010).

¹³ Violence against migrants is widespread during the journey. For instance, of the 4,035 consultations performed by Médecins Sans Frontières in 2008 at Rabat, Casablanca and Oudjah, 753 (18 per cent) involved violence (MSF 2009).

Besides the duress of raids and detention during their journey, some respondents reported that security forces at times themselves perpetrated violent assaults on migrants.

‘The Moroccan army beat us ferociously, they hit us and because of that I spent 15 days in hospital in the city of Nador.’

Liberian migrant, female, 27

‘When the police move, you are free to move [and] you can cross an iron bridge. If you cross the border they might shoot you. Algerians might shoot you, I knew that when I crossed the borders at night.’

Nigerian migrant, male, 30

Sexual and reproductive health problems are common among female migrants arriving in Morocco due to the widespread reliance of female migrants on prostitution as a survival mechanism (MSF 2009) as well as the prevalence of sexual assault. It has been estimated that as many as 36 per cent of women and 5 per cent of men have suffered rape during their journey to Morocco (Migeurope 2010). As reported by some respondents, women were vulnerable to sexual abuse and exploitation from criminals, fellow migrants and even police.

‘I can say what I saw with my eyes. Ninety-five per cent of females don’t like [how they are treated], what they are used to in this country on this road, this journey. But circumstances [produce] victims, circumstances make them.’

Nigerian migrant, male, 30

‘When you are moving, and your luck runs out, the Algerian authorities will see you and arrest you too. And if there are women, they would get raped. I have seen it with my own eyes. They would rape the women by force. If you have valuables with you, they would confiscate them. But the most difficult part is the rape, which is very bad.’

Ghanaian migrant, female, 25

According to one Moroccan stakeholder, many female migrants become pregnant during their journey as a result of rape, meaning they have to take on the added responsibility of a child.

‘They were raped on the road to get here, they are pregnant. So they have these children, they became pregnant perhaps in Algeria or in Senegal, and they may have given birth at the borders, they are in Morocco now with the children.’

Stakeholder 12

Besides the vulnerability of these individuals to abuse and exploitation from other migrants, there is also the risk of rights violations by border control officials (Collyer 2006). By the time they arrive in Morocco, after months of deprivation and uncertainty, migrants are frequently in a state of physical and psychological crisis.

5. LIFE IN MOROCCO

5.1 Overview

Thousands of sub-Saharan migrants are based in Morocco, estimated between 10,000 and 15,000 (AMERM 2008). They are based primarily in key towns and cities across the country such as Rabat, Casablanca, Oujda, Tangiers and Laayoune, and constitute a visible part of the urban demographic. While the majority of these migrants may still consider Europe as their ultimate destination, in practical terms their residency has become semi-permanent due to financial constraints and the impermeability of the border between Morocco and the EU (Khachani 2010).

It is important to recognise that their experiences are very mixed, ranging from a legally settled professional class to the clandestine population of irregular migrants, many of whom live in a state of chronic poverty and exclusion. Living standards, in the words of one stakeholder, can be described ‘as the glass half empty or half full’, while relations with the native Moroccan population are characterised by ‘a lot of exchange but also a lot of racism’. Similarly, even though typically they face considerable difficulties in every area of their lives, irregular migrants may still have positive views of their stay in Morocco, particularly when they have fled civil conflict and violence.

‘I love Morocco, the climate suits me, there is a lot of food, I’m comfortable here despite a few problems ... I do not want to go anywhere else and I do not have the means to go anywhere else, especially not to Europe.’

Ivorian migrant, female, 44

‘Moroccans help me, they give me something, they give me money, they give me clothes, my baby has clothes, we have things.’

Ghanian migrant, male, 39

Yet for the majority of migrants, their stay is spent in a state of protracted precariousness, and social and economic marginalisation. As border controls have tightened and as hostility towards immigrants has risen in both transit and destination countries, irregular migrants stuck indefinitely in Saharan migration hubs have experienced increasingly difficult living and working conditions (Drozd and Pliez 2005).

‘At my age, I don’t have kids: it’s not a life. I don’t have kids, I don’t have a wife, it’s not a life. I look at myself as a person who is frustrated. That’s why I put all my life in God’s hands. How long can I beg? My years are going. I don’t have money, I don’t have anything. What do you expect.’

Nigerian migrant, male, 35

5.2 Irregularity – the impacts of being *sans papiers*

Perhaps the most defining issue for Morocco’s sub-Saharan migrants is their status as undocumented *sans papiers*. The *carte de séjour*, which is a residency permit required from all foreigners living in Morocco, serves as the basis of regularisation for employment, residency and access to services such as healthcare: without it, a migrant is marginalised in virtually every aspect of their daily lives. This results in acute invisibility and vulnerability for the majority of sub-Saharan migrants.

‘An undocumented person has nothing in Morocco, he can do nothing. Before anything and for everything here, they start by asking you for your documents. If you want to work, they ask you your documents.’

Ivorian migrant, female, 35

‘An undocumented is a person who has no value. He really is “a nothing”. So if you do not have documents, you are not paid, you are injured. So it is horrible. This is our life as undocumented.’

Congolese migrant, male, 43

One consequence of their clandestine status is that migrants have no recourse to police protection or official channels of complaint. This puts them at constant risk of abuse and exploitation from the local Moroccan population. Most obviously, it creates the perfect conditions for an underpaid and readily exploitable labour force. From accommodation to physical security, their lack of documentation creates immediate obstacles in every aspect of their lives.

‘The houses we rent, if the Moroccan knows that you do not have documents you will suffer, if you take home 600 dirhams, he knows that you do not have documents and you’ll pay 600 dirhams and sometimes every week you will give him another 50 dirhams. He will disrupt you, he will bother you, he will ridicule you. They know that we are black and we come, we leave the forest, there are no houses.’

Cameroonian migrant, male, 27

‘The Moroccans here, they attack us every time. When they want, they take your money. You cannot do anything; [such as] go to the police, because you do not have your documents. You cannot do anything.’

Sierra Leonean migrant, male, 28

Having entered legally, many migrants subsequently lapse into irregularity and become *sans papiers*.

Students, for example, may remain after their studies are completed and then be unable to access formal employment, pushing them into illegal working.¹⁴ The way out of irregularity, however, is far more elusive. Migrants can spend many years in the country and still be no closer to regularisation. One of the central issues is the absence of a clear and comprehensible framework for migrants to achieve legal residency. Even refugees are not provided with the full residency card, meaning that in practice their situation is often not much better than that of irregular migrants (Cherti et al 2012).

Another corollary of their irregular status is the limited freedom of movement of many migrants. As *sans papiers*, lacking legal documentation, they are prohibited from travelling through the country as there are internal security checks, for example at coach and train stations, which forces these migrants to spend prolonged periods in one city, relocating elsewhere only with difficulty. This can impair their long-term prospects and also force them into insecure or threatening situations.

14 IPPR focus group discussions, 15 May 2012, CCME.

‘We cannot walk without documents. Even for the ticket, they ask for your passports, residence permits, all that, you do not move ... For example in Nador, Oujda. It [is] a problem if they ask for my passport, my documents.’

Cameroonian migrant, male, 34

‘You need documents to take the bus. But as you are undocumented, what do you do? It’s like that. I was forced to go into the desert, into the forests.’

Cameroonian migrant, male, 28

The majority of respondents were in no doubt about what the first step to improving their situation should be: ending the limbo of their lives as *sans papiers* through formal regularisation (box 5.1). This, more than anything else, would have a transformative effect on every aspect of their lives by providing them with the basis to live safe, productive and dignified lives in Morocco without the stigma of illegality.

Box 5.1 Regularisation for Morocco’s *sans papiers* – in their own words

‘In my opinion, first the Moroccan government needs to explore how they will regularise the situation of the sub-Saharan who have already been in the area for a long time and who are not in a regular situation. There are sub-Saharan who have been here for three to four years, there are those who have children with Moroccan women. I really appeal to the government to first regularise these people. If the government could only hear us.’

Cameroonian migrant, male, 27

‘The priority is regularisation. We say that for development we need peace. I think that for peace, there must be good governance. So access to rights, to health – regularisation – needs to happen ... The main demand is the regularisation of all undocumented.’

Guinean migrant, male, 28

‘If the Moroccan state regularises the situation, we will be able to work legally and have rights.’

Congolese migrant, male, 43

5.3 Discrimination and racism

Perhaps the single most common element in the respondent accounts was the issue of discrimination. The picture presented by the large majority was of a continuous and deep-rooted racism that permeated almost every aspect of their lives, from renting accommodation and securing work to receiving healthcare and engaging with the police. Many described local attitudes to sub-Saharan migrants in the strongest possible terms. ‘Moroccans humiliate the black race,’ said one. ‘They have prejudices against us.’ According to another respondent, migrants were treated ‘like monkeys; they say that we are dirty’.

This segregation of sub-Saharan migrants is informed by deep-rooted prejudice and stigma. In some contexts, this may have intensified as the growing number of settled migrants has brought the Moroccan and sub-Saharan populations into closer proximity. Particularly damaging is the association sometimes made between migrants and a plethora of social problems, including terrorism, AIDS, criminality, trafficking and prostitution. As one Moroccan stakeholder admitted: 'In some cases, the basic image that the average Moroccan has about sub-Saharans is of dirt, AIDS, prostitution, and theft.'

'It is not my fault if I am in Morocco undocumented. What people say – "All undocumented are traffickers" – this is not true!'

Cameroonian migrant, male, 34

'We have to survive; we are human beings, even if some people regard us as animals. We are seen by others as parasites that threaten the peace of the citizens.'

Liberian migrant, female, 27

'Moroccans are racist. They say that we men are thieves and that the girls are whores – I say that there are exceptions – they say that they are found everywhere, in the suburbs and in the centre.'

Congolese migrant, female, 29

Religious difference may also compound this. Some Christian respondents emphasized the divisions between them and the largely Muslim Moroccan population, with one even adopting a Muslim name in response to the pressure he felt from locals about his religious identity. ('They ask you directly if you are Muslim,' he reported. 'So, if you say that you are not Muslim, well ... you must say that you are Muslim.') However, other respondents believed that religion was not the central issue, and that even Muslim migrants would not be accepted by the local population. 'In Morocco,' said another respondent, 'even if you say that you are Muslim, it does not make any difference, they will not accept you ... Us, the black people in Morocco, they don't believe you when you say that you are Muslim.'

Language barriers, for non-native French speakers, can be another cause of exclusion. With the recent wave of migration, the countries of origin have expanded beyond the francophone states that were the original sending regions to include countries such as Nigeria and Ghana. This means that, for English-speaking migrants, language may be an additional barrier. 'In Morocco in general, as an English-speaking person, it is difficult to find work,' one Ghanaian respondent reported. 'They give work to the francophones, particularly the Senegalese who can work in the call centres and other things.'

The exclusion of sub-Saharan migrants in Morocco is also rooted in their status as second-class citizens. In this sense, the discrimination they experience is to a certain extent opportunistic: a predictable outcome of their extreme vulnerability as irregular *sans papiers*. Significantly, these practices are aided by official attitudes to sub-Saharan migrants. The irregular status of most migrants places them beyond the support and protection of police and service providers, making them especially vulnerable to abuse and exploitation from officials and citizens alike. This point was powerfully articulated by one Moroccan stakeholder, who emphasised the vested interests that exist at all levels of society in the continued marginalisation of the country's migrants.

‘The poor in Morocco have benefited from the situation of irregularity, the irregularity of these people, and I would even say that some institutions have benefited much more from this situation of irregularity than they would a process of regularisation.’

Stakeholder 14

Box 5.2 Popular stereotypes and the role of the media

The media plays an influential role – for good or ill – in the popular representation of irregular migrants in Morocco. Its potential as a means to sensitise Moroccans to the plight of sub-Saharan migrants is considerable and there have been instances where television, newspapers and other outlets have made a positive contribution. Nevertheless, the media can also perpetuate misinformed and stigmatising perceptions of irregular migration. For instance, Goldschmidt (2006) has observed that the press in north Africa as well as Europe used terms like ‘massive invasion’ and ‘plague’ to describe the attempts made by sub-Saharan migrants to reach the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla in 2005. Collyer et al (2011) suggest that the use of this kind of language, as well as phrases such as ‘potential migration’ and ‘migration pressure’, have helped to create the impression that there are vast numbers of irregular or transit migrants pressing up against the metaphorical gates of Europe.

Part of the problem, as one stakeholder argued, is that sub-Saharans in normalised or regular contexts are virtually absent from the media:

‘This black population is ... a component of the Moroccan population ... but this component we don’t see it anywhere ... I’ve never seen a black TV presenter ... and yet black [people] are part of the Moroccan population. Why? Because ... in the collective imagination, conscious or unconscious, the black person is a citizen of secondary class.’

Furthermore, despite legal prohibitions against racism, programmes and articles often help perpetuate stigmatising images of sub-Saharans, particularly irregular migrants.

‘I think that the broadcasting media have a very important role to play ... Of course racism is forbidden, you cannot have racist remarks on television and radio ... But I do not think that this provision is complied with, when I think of how many times in the theatre and in films produced in Morocco, racial abuses are directed at black Moroccans ... I think that black people are often the subject of racist remarks even in broadcasting media.’

Stakeholder 14

To gauge the typical representations of sub-Saharans and irregular migrants in the media, IPPR undertook a media review of 20 articles from seven different national and international newspapers. Encouragingly, most took a neutral tone that avoided criminalisation, and a discourse of protection was equally represented alongside that of security. Nevertheless, associations with illegality were frequently made, with a strong focus on irregularity, security and border crossing.

A number of trends were identified:

The overwhelming majority of accounts presented sub-Saharan migrants as irregular: Only two (10 per cent) of the articles presented migrants in a regular situation, while the majority (12) showed them in various situations of irregularity. The remaining six articles did not make any reference to their status.

Transit and irregularity are still seen as the defining characteristics of sub-Saharan migrants: Although many articles did not assume that migrants were living temporarily in Morocco, half (10) of them explicitly saw migrants as in transit compared to just three articles (15 per cent) that did recognise or envisage their permanent settlement. The remainder did not make a reference to their status or the duration of their stay in Morocco. However, as most articles depict irregular border crossings, migrants may be seen as temporary even when this is not explicitly stated.

There are negative associations between irregular migration, border security and sub-Saharan migrants in Morocco: Eight (40 per cent) of the articles reported on irregular border crossing or smuggling. The association of migrants with illicit activities is reinforced by their frequent description as ‘illegal immigrants’ rather than ‘sub-Saharan’, ‘immigrants’ or ‘migrants’. The article titles also frequently concentrated on numbers (‘230 sub-Saharan migrants uncovered’), the clandestine nature of their status or activity (‘Arrest of 35 irregular sub-Saharan migrants’) or on both (‘More than 5,800 crimes have been solved’). Six (30 per cent) of the articles presented migrants exclusively in association with very negative issues compared to just one (5 per cent) that described migrants in positive terms. However, it was promising that the majority (13) of the articles used a largely neutral and balanced content.

Some articles also drew attention to discrimination and abuse of irregular migrants: Seven articles (35 per cent) referenced human rights, anti-racism or exploitation issues in relation to irregular migrants. It is an encouraging sign that some media content is highlighting the challenges that migrants face. Nevertheless, in cases where migrants are victimised, there is almost no reference to possible factors in the Moroccan response. Instead, the root causes are either the personal agency of migrants themselves, the myth of migration, European policy or the actions of other states (either Algeria or other countries in the sub-Saharan region).

5.4 Employment and working conditions

Previous research has highlighted the extreme economic insecurity of many migrants, rooted in a lack of sustainable or salaried opportunities.¹⁵ This exploitation is reinforced indirectly by Morocco’s current policies on regularisation. As one respondent put it: ‘We are forced to do hard labour, and then when they do not want us anymore, they deport us to Oujda.’ Many migrants are forced to work in the informal sector as a result, often undertaking the most dangerous or poorly paid work in agriculture or construction.

¹⁵ In AMERM’s (2008) study, for example, 59.4 per cent of sampled migrants claimed to have no income whatsoever, while a further 18.8 per cent survived through begging and another 7.9 per cent depended on charitable or family support. Only 13.8 per cent were actually employed, the majority (11.5 per cent) through odd jobs, with only a small minority (2.3 per cent) enjoying regular employment. Most troublingly, there appeared to be little difference among long-term residents in terms of the proportion with no income, suggesting that many migrants find themselves in this situation for protracted periods.

The illicit nature of this work facilitates a highly inequitable and exploitative shadow market of clandestine labour, as testified by some respondents.

‘Most sub-Saharan people in Morocco do not have documents. The work we do here is hard physical work. Moroccans do not call you for an easy job. It is hard work and the pay is really low, because they know that you have nothing, you’re undocumented. And you must do [it].’

Cameroonian migrant, male, 28

‘Even though you have the job, if you let the Moroccan know you have no documents, you could work for him for a whole month without even getting paid. And there isn’t anything you can do.’

Ghanaian migrant, female, 25

Given their desperation and relative position of weakness, employers are able to pay sub-Saharan migrants well below the minimum wage.

‘For the wages, me for example, if I am offered 50 dirhams, or 100 dirhams, I cannot refuse. I have no choice. I have to accept it. When I refuse, someone else will take it who will accept the price because they have gone two days without eating.’

Cameroonian migrant, male, 34

‘My friends, they are never paid well. The Moroccan is paid 100 dirhams and the migrant 50, for the same work. And you are forced to do so. If you do not work, you do not eat.’

Cameroonian migrant, male, 34

Typically, this work occurs outside the normal rights and protections of formal employment. In the event of an accident, as *sans papiers*, migrants are neither able to claim support or compensation from their employers, nor access health services as legal residents.

‘I have seen cases of undocumented migrants who have had accidents in factories, marble manufactories, who remain [trapped] without any aid in hospital beds here because they not only had no residence permit, but also could not sue their employers.’

Cameroonian migrant, male, 35

‘Undeclared work is without insurance. A brother, he was working without insurance, and something fell on his leg, and almost cut it. [It was] undeclared work, he could not use social assistance. He had to look for help everywhere in order to return home.’

Congolese migrant, male, 43

The marginalisation of sub-Saharan migrants also represents a great loss of potential as irregular migrants cannot contribute their skills through formal employment. As a result, even highly trained workers are often unable to leverage their abilities.

‘Even if you’re qualified, you cannot start at a company and work for decent wages. So I think that Morocco still has an archaic policy, the role of migrants, experts, technicians ... They want to take advantage of us.’

Congolese migrant, male, 43

Many migrants, having left their country in search of productive employment, end up forced to subsist by begging. Besides the humiliation and hardship this imposes on them, it also represents a loss to the Moroccan economy as valuable human capital is left to waste.

‘Some have to subsist on begging: an unfulfilled opportunity ... If this country’s a good country, I can start a business. I have the brains for business, because I learnt business studies in secondary school. I don’t like begging. I cannot continue to be begging from year to year, it’s a disgrace. There’s no respect.’

Nigerian migrant, male, 30

Box 5.3 Falling between the cracks – irregular migrants and the protection gap

The hardening of Morocco’s migrant policy, with European support, has meant that migration is framed as a security rather than protection issue. Despite some positive developments, the majority of irregular migrants still have little or no access to public services such as health or education. They are also generally reluctant to seek police support because, as *sans papiers*, they run the risk of being treated as criminals themselves.

By contrast, international agencies and NGOs play a central role in presenting the ‘problem’ of migration in humanitarian terms. Nevertheless, without close government support, their outreach remains limited. Though it has had an office in the country since 2005, based in Rabat, UNHCR’s mandate only extends to recognised refugees. By its own admission, UNHCR has only been able to reach a limited number of persons of concern (UNHCR 2010). However, a large number of international NGOs are now operating in Morocco, such as Médecins Sans Frontières and Caritas, who fill some of the service gaps. Without them, many irregular migrants would be without access to healthcare. Nevertheless, these services cannot serve as a substitute for public services.

Support for migrants has been growing among Moroccan NGOs, connected in part to the broader resurgence of human rights and social welfare in the country. While these organisations mostly operate within a general framework such as labour law or public health, many also assist irregular migrants. However, only a limited number have this as a specific focus, meaning their objectives are typically focused on essential services and short-term support. This can lead to non-humanitarian concerns being overlooked, including longer-term questions of immigration status. Nevertheless, advocacy and legal support to vulnerable migrants has been increasing (Cherti et al 2012). Migrant associations, although not officially recognised, are also beginning to play a more prominent role. Nevertheless, these efforts are hampered by divisions within the migrant population and their uncertain legal status.

Coordination between these different stakeholders is an ongoing challenge. The Moroccan government has limited outreach with civil society or migrant associations, a legacy of the country’s history of authoritarian rule, particularly between 1960 and 1980 (Cherti et al 2012).

This means that the state and NGOs are often operating against each other, with competing security and humanitarian concerns. For the latter, without government support, the scope to transform the lives of migrants is limited: in the words of one Moroccan stakeholder, ‘We write, we denounce, we do some lobbying, some forcing but we do not have the power of the UNHCR, not the power of the Ministry, not the power of the government and surely not the power of the political elite in this country.’

This lack of cooperation between government, NGOs and migrant associations can lead to fragmented services and tensions that undermine the possibility of a more collaborative response. ‘As for the work of public officials,’ another Moroccan stakeholder reported, ‘we feel that there is a kind of suspicion on both sides, and there is no clear and direct cooperation.’

5.5 Access to basic services

Irregular migrants are typically barred from essential public services such as healthcare, schooling and legal assistance. Given their poverty, marginalisation and fear of removal, many migrants are unable to afford even emergency healthcare, let alone the longer-term investment of education and other basic needs. Civil society organisations therefore play a crucial role in filling the service gap for migrants. Without them, many would find themselves with little or no access to essential services such as medical care.

‘Before it was hard for immigrants to go to the hospital. But now, we have many international organisations. Immigrants can now go and complain to them ... The international organisations will help the sick.’

Ghanaian migrant, female, 25

‘If you’re sick, Caritas is there to provide you with medication. If Caritas was not there, it would be death. If MSF was not there it would be death.’

Congolese migrant, male, 43

Nevertheless, while many respondents had positive reports of the support provided by NGOs, other highlighted important shortfalls in the quality and availability of these services.

‘There are numerous NGOs, but they talk too much and do nothing. Moreover, there are many, many Africans in the Oujda region, we are everywhere: in the forest, in the middle of highly populated areas, even in the forest of Berkan and Saidia. However the associations cannot meet our needs.’

Malian migrant, female, 28

There was even a perception, from one respondent, that accessing the services of some of the NGOs would lead to him being repatriated as a result:

‘If you are going to Caritas, you must sign up, and they make you go home. And how to return home? But for us, we don’t want to return home: your family is miserable, your father ... there is nobody to help you.’

Malian migrant, male, 26

However, the shortcomings of the nongovernmental sector are in part a reflection of its limited resources and mandate. A fragmented group of organisations with divergent remits can only be of imperfect assistance without the oversight of an official national platform. They cannot serve as an effective substitute for a coherent governmental system of care. As one stakeholder put it: ‘An NGO is not supposed to change things in a country ... [Change] has to come from the ground, not be imposed by political force or economic power.’ Furthermore, without a clear and formalised framework, there is a danger that services will be delivered in an ad hoc and uneven fashion, with much depending on the disposition of individual staff.

‘But collaboration is closely linked to the person who works in the structure at the time. They have made a lot of progress, but there are not really instructions emanating from above to the various health centres or schools, I think it’s really related to the willingness of the person that deals with you, and that’s what makes you get results or not, always with the danger that when these people leave, everything can change overnight.’

Stakeholder 2

The absence of basic services is particularly acute for migrants based outside the cities, such as those marooned in the hostile borderlands between Morocco and Algeria. Here, the absence of electricity, water or sanitation, combined with poverty and insecurity, make living conditions unbearable.

‘In a cave here in Oujda near the forest, there are many of us; there are even those who are with their children. In the forest each of us seeks shelter; living conditions are unbearable, especially when it’s cold. We sleep on the ground, on old mattresses that Moroccan benefactors have given us. No water, electricity, toilet or anything.’

Liberian migrant, female, 27

‘In the forest like animals, we are couples, there are couples with children, and children live in the same conditions, huts without water, electricity [or] hygiene: it is terrible.’

Malian migrant, female, 28

In the long term, the lack of healthcare and education also exacts a critical toll on migrants, particularly children. The protracted exclusion of young migrants from even the most rudimentary schooling has a lasting impact on their future prospects. Troublingly, a new generation of children born in transit or in Morocco itself now face an even bleaker future than that of their parents (box 5.4).

Box 5.4 A lost generation? The uncertain future of children growing up in irregularity

Morocco now has an emerging second generation of sub-Saharan Moroccans with urgent human development needs. These are the children of migrants, born *en route* or in Morocco, who are now effectively ‘between borders’ in terms of their nationality. For them, Morocco is effectively their ‘country of origin’ and most are likely to stay on, having no home to return to. Yet as *sans papiers*, the majority are unable to access even a basic education.

‘From the standpoint of pure territory, territorial belonging and nationality, they perhaps do not belong to any country. They were born in, I would say, between borders, and then when these children are in Morocco we found that there are many problems because they cannot attend school because of the Moroccan system’s registration requirement.’

Stakeholder 12

The situation of this group is arguably even more acute than that of their parents. However, lacking alternatives and even a home country to return to, this marginalised population will nevertheless be a part of Morocco’s future. In this regard, the importance of Morocco acknowledging and resolving their predicament is not only humanitarian – a question of respecting their rights, in line with its international obligations – but also pragmatic. In the long term, the value of investing in their social and economic potential is evident. This is particularly the case with education, as many young migrants are now growing up with no access to even a basic level of instruction. With some now entering their teens, Morocco runs the risk of creating a new generation of permanently disenfranchised sub-Saharan Moroccans.

5.6 Exploitation and poverty

As a largely irregular minority, sub-Saharan migrants are readily exploitable not only as workers, but potentially in every area of their lives, from housing to shopping. While this may be rooted to an extent in racism, it is also a predictable consequence of their vulnerability. The effect of this everyday discrimination, in addition to the humiliation and resentment it inspires, is to burden migrants with inflated living costs for essentials such as accommodation that makes their situation even more precarious.

‘Moroccans with the undocumented, they are all abusers. They abuse and exploit undocumented migrants, sub-Saharans, whether it is for work or for the homes where they live, because when the Moroccan knows that an undocumented person lives in his flat, they abuse him tremendously. They give you hours that you have to be out of your own home, they cut off water and electricity whenever they want. They choose the visitors. They even give you the hours during which you must cook. It becomes a nightmare. They come in without giving you any notice, ask you questions and check your room as if you were in prison.’

Cameroonian migrant, male, 35

Without official documentation, dependent on work for their immediate survival, sub-Saharan migrants are largely dependent on the goodwill of their employers. In the words of one migrant, working for 80 dirhams a day: ‘There are others that pay 110 dirhams, or 120 dirhams, and some who pay less, it is really hard. You must accept and support your family.’ This typically results in salaries that, besides being well below the market rate, are barely enough for migrants to meet their essential needs.

‘One Arab man employed me in construction. But he paid me 40 dirhams, and that can’t take me anywhere. A day job like building is supposed to be 100 or 150, but he treated me like that because I am black ... I can’t work for 40 dirhams. I pay 50 euros for rent.’

Nigerian migrant, male, 30

‘The daily work, nine hours and 30 minutes per day ... 60 dirhams...You want, you stay. You do not want; they do not ask you to come ... Taking the bus trip every day costs me 15 dirhams. So, I have 45 dirhams each day. There is no alternative.’

Guinean migrant, male, 26

‘It is very difficult. You work for 50 dirhams from seven in the morning until eight in the evening without breaks. Transportation to work already costs you 10 dirhams.’

Cameroonian migrant, male, 27

Among respondents, the daily incomes ranged between 50 and 100 dirhams, though others reported even lower amounts – for example, a street vendor earning 20 to 40 dirhams a day – while a significant number stated that they had no revenue at all and were dependent on street begging or support from friends. Furthermore, many faced the added exploitation of high rents in crowded and sometimes inhospitable housing. From respondent accounts, the rental sector for migrants was a predatory market where, as *sans papiers*, they had virtually no room to negotiate reasonable prices or even basic rights.

‘The woman owner of the house in which I live, for her I am only an immigrant who has no documents. I have to be at home by 9 pm, I live in her home as a prisoner, I’m not allowed to invite any of my friends, switch the light on in the bedroom or to increase the volume of the TV. I have no right to do anything, not even use much water for the shower. She holds me by the throat and at the end of the month I pay 450 dirhams with water and electricity, I do not use electricity or water as I spend the day outside.’

Senegalese migrant, male, 33

‘It’s too hard. Currently, we have a small room, 800 dirhams a month ... We are paying an expensive rent because they know that we are undocumented. In addition, I know, I’ve seen ... I have already contacted several Moroccans and they have no rooms.’

Cameroonian migrant, male, 34

Underpaid by their employers and overcharged by their landlords, migrants may struggle to even meet the basic costs of living.

‘I am a poor man who earns about 20 dirhams per day, I pay 450 dirhams a month for housing and I eat for 20 dirhams a day, 10 dirhams a week for gas, and 20 dirhams a week for charging the phone to call my mother.’

Senegalese migrant, male, 33

‘Sometimes I borrow money from friends to pay the rent (my part) I earn roughly 1,000 dirhams to 1,200 dirhams a month, I pay 200 dirhams for the rent, for food 500 to 700 dirhams a month, for health 100 dirhams. It is not enough. Life is difficult in Morocco.’

Senegalese migrant, male, 31

As a result, migrants can live in a constant state of insecurity, even struggling to achieve a minimal level of subsistence. ‘I end some days without having eaten’, said one Cameroonian migrant. Others, working towards their next meal or rental payment, have to survive on bare necessities only while essentials such as clothing or healthcare remain out of reach. As one woman from the Ivory Coast put it: ‘We can’t afford to be ill or to consider additional needs.’

‘It’s not easy. In addition, it is not easy to find work. One room at 800 dirhams. How to pay? And Moroccans throw you out if you don’t pay. And here there is no work. Nothing. And with the odd jobs, you can only eat. No clothes. It is really very hard.’

Cameroonian migrant, male, 34

5.7 Social networks and support

5.7.1 Social life in Morocco

One of the ongoing challenges to the integration of sub-Saharan migrants is the limited social interaction between them and Moroccans on a social basis. For many of our respondents, their most direct contact was primarily negative, with (for instance) exploitative landlords or aggressive street gangs. Nevertheless, a number had managed to establish meaningful friendships with Moroccans or at least reported positively on the treatment they had received from local people. Several respondents had received sustained assistance from Moroccans. One Senegalese respondent reported: ‘Many of my Moroccan friends support me by providing me with clothes and food.’ Another respondent, originally from Guinea, described her Moroccan friend as ‘like a parent, like a mother’.

Nevertheless, the majority of our respondents rarely socialised with Moroccans. Some attributed this to the attitudes of the locals towards them. ‘We really would like to be friends,’ one Cameroonian woman said, ‘but for them we are nobodies, and how to stay friends with them? It’s not easy.’ Even when contact occurs – in a mosque, for instance – barriers remain. ‘The Arabs, they are Muslim too, but only when they pray,’ according to a Malian respondent. ‘They don’t accept us.’ This also reflects the segregation of sub-Saharanans and the clandestine nature of their lives in Morocco. Migrants may, depending on their employment, come into contact with Moroccans in the workplace and interact with them on a regular basis in a public context such as the local market. Yet in their private lives, the level of contact was much more limited.

Almost all of our respondents were sharing accommodation with other sub-Saharanans rather than Moroccans, though the properties themselves were owned and managed by locals. The majority also appeared to socialise primarily with other migrants, particularly of their own nationality, although some had also developed strong connections with groups from other countries where they had been based *en route* to Morocco. Even in informal social settings, the migrant population is typically divided into national, religious or linguistic groupings.

This segregation is also evident in more formal settings, including migrant associations. There has been a recent increase in the number of these organisations, providing migrants with the opportunity to mobilise on a range of issues. Although their objectives vary, one of their central functions is as an informal welfare system of support.

‘We have a Senegalese organisation of social support in the city centre. We help compatriots who have financial problems or [who need] to receive social services, sometimes we contribute to pay for surgery.’

Senegalese migrant, male, 31

‘We have an association, we meet up ... it’s small, but it’s about brotherhood, friendship, all these values. In fact, the Association of Cameroonians is there to help our brothers, if they are sick.’

Cameroonian migrant, male, 32

Some also extend beyond this to public advocacy, serving as platforms for marginalised groups to rally support from their own community and even from Moroccan nationals. In particular, migrant associations have been able to champion the issue of regularisation.

‘We also campaign for the rights of refugees to be recognised. Because normally, a refugee is not considered to be a refugee. The authorities do not accept them!’

Guinean migrant, male, 28

‘The main objective is the recognition of migrants’ rights, it is for regularisation. The unconditional regularisation of all sub-Saharan migrants in Morocco.’

Congolese migrant, male, 43

However, their influence is often weakened by linguistic, religious or national divides (Cherti et al 2012). One European stakeholder highlighted the need for ‘de-ethnisation’ and ‘to build an alliance of associations that could take community action’. In practice, many migrants prefer to confine themselves to informal platforms rather than these more organised structures. Also, most of these migrant associations are constrained by their lack of legal status; besides the fact that the majority of their membership is irregular, they are also not officially sanctioned, as required by law. As a result, their public role may even be sidelined by NGOs acting on their behalf.

‘That is to say to the Moroccan associations to give a space of expression for sub-Saharan migrants, not to talk on their behalf ... Often the first reaction is to say they are undocumented. It is easier for us, if they are undocumented. They must be given the means to meet and to organise.’

Stakeholder 16

Besides nationality, language and religion, there are also barriers of status among sub-Saharan migrants in Morocco; in particular, between the regular and irregular population, the professional classes and the *sans papiers*.

‘There are some very poor sub-Saharans, living in very precarious conditions of great economic fragility, [and] social [precarity], including in terms of fragility of rights, but it is clear that there are also ambassadors, [and] a sub-Saharan middle class ... There is the possibility of community mobilisation and even more so as [the sub-Saharan middle class] lives in Morocco legally. So there is a problem of community mobilisation.’

Stakeholder 9

A number of other stakeholders also highlighted the need for ambassadors of the countries of origin to lend greater support to migrant associations and engage more actively in the work of their constituency in Morocco.

‘Very rare are the embassies of sub-Saharan countries that intervene when there is a problem ... We really need to hustle them, except for some embassies ... that have a link with migrants.’

Stakeholder 16

Nevertheless, not all migrant associations play a benign role. One example is the communes near the Moroccan border, headed by a ‘president’ or ‘chairman’, who exacts a levy from arriving migrants to stay in the forest. Even among *sans papiers*, hierarchies of power exist.

‘There is no democracy out there. The democracy is the dictatorship. If you want to go to Oujda, you [need to] pay 250 euros.’

Burkino Fasan migrant, male, 36

‘A leader there, he is responsible for the community, and the new arrivals, they have a right of ‘ghetto’ ... The right of ghetto ... you’ll give 200 dirhams as right of ghetto. That will allow you to ...’

Guinean migrant, male, 28

5.7.2 Contact with country of origin

Irregular migrants typically have an uncertain connection with their countries of origin. Many, like a number of our respondents, have lost their families to conflict and have little or no connection with their country of origin. Even those who do have family and maintain some degree of contact with them may not have seen their family since beginning their migration, a period often amounting to several years or more. Nevertheless, some migrants are still able to access some form of support, financial or emotional, from relatives while they are in Morocco, including small remittances to sustain them.

The spread of the internet and telecommunications has made it easier for migrants to contact their country of origin. Yet even now, there may only be sporadic contact between migrants and their families back home, in part because one or both may not have access to these technologies. One respondent from Burkina Faso, for example, reported that he regularly communicated with his family but only by telephone ‘because where they are, they have no access to the internet’. Others may lack even this mode of communication. ‘I do not call them; I do not have a mobile, and my mother does not have a phone,’ said one Sierra Leonian respondent. ‘Last time when I talked to them was before I left.’

Migrants also may face unrealistic expectations from relatives in their country of origin. Their situation is often compounded by the failure of family members to appreciate the gap between their circumstances and the imagined affluence of the ‘successful’ migrant. Their incomprehension and even recrimination can act as a barrier to regular communication.

‘It’s not easy when you call the family and they ask you how you are and the second thing they ask you is to send money. I called the family, but not that often.’

Cameroonian migrant, female, 39

‘I do not keep relations with the people of my country because ... when a person leaves the country, people think you’re gone, and that you have become rich. And often, when you call people, they think you want to give your financial support, emotional support. When you call, they’ll say, “I need money, can you send that?” And if you do not send any, they think that you refuse to help them.’

Congolese migrant, male, 43

5.8 Threats and insecurity

5.8.1 Crime and violence

Due to their vulnerability and the significant racial discrimination against them, migrants are at an especially high risk of violence. ‘Inequality and discrimination are experienced daily by Moroccan people,’ said one respondent. ‘We live in marginality and violence.’ This can range from low-level hostility and intimidation to physical injury, sexual assault and even murder. While much of this aggression comes directly from the Moroccan population, the broader institutional context facilitates this violence in important ways. Most migrants, as *sans papiers*, are clandestine and therefore unable to seek protection from the authorities. For instance, irregular female migrants are exposed to the threat of sexual violence as their status means they are unable to access official protection facilities and are fearful of reporting crimes to the authorities (Planes-Bouissac et al 2010).

Though not official policy, a logical consequence of the securitisation of the migrant presence in Morocco is that police may often view migrants as a problem to be dealt with, rather than a vulnerable population to be protected. Consequently, migrants may not engage with them out of fear of arrest or deportation, even following a violent assault.

‘I was assaulted by 15 youths; they attacked me, in Takkadoum. And I went to the police. The first question was if I had a resident permit. “Who [was it?],” they asked me. And then they asked me if I knew their addresses and I said “No.” The situation is like this: regularisation is necessary.’

Cameroonian migrant, male, 32

‘A person came to me, asked me to give him my phone. I asked him why, he took a knife, and the telephone. He gave me a punch with the knife on the head. They took 20 dirhams and the telephone. And Moroccans looked at him, in the middle of the day, and did not do anything. And I cannot complain, because I have no documents. If you complain, you will be asked for your documents. If we call the police, they will send us to Oujda. That has happened to me once.’

Cameroonian migrant, male, 34

5.8.2 The threat of deportation

Deportation is a genuine threat for sub-Saharan migrants, particularly close to the border between Morocco and Algeria, around the towns of Ceuta and Melilla and anywhere near the Mediterranean or north Atlantic coasts, creating a daily backdrop of uncertainty and intimidation for migrants. This results in an ‘infernal situation’ for migrants, as one European stakeholder described it. ‘Every day at 4am or 5am, and in the evening when returning home there is another raid, they need to escape again. It is a daily struggle that disrupts people, in addition to the cold, lack of housing, lack of food.’ Some respondents had themselves been deported, sometimes more than once, before re-entering Morocco. The constant menace of arrest and violence from the authorities seriously undermines the basic wellbeing of migrants.

‘Migrants are arrested most often like rats. One must see how the controls are carried out, with extreme violence, even if the person does not have documents, we believe they have dignity.’

Cameroonian migrant, male, 35

The arrest and subsequent expulsion of migrants frequently occurs outside of any procedural framework, without any form of legal advocacy or support, despite the fact that Law 02-03 states that upon notification of the decision of deportation, ‘the alien is authorised to immediately notify a lawyer, the consulate of the country or a person of his choice’ (Article 24). As there are no official detention centres, irregular migrants may be packed into cells prior to being deported (UNHCR 2010), sometimes with convicted criminals in contravention of international norms. Another troubling aspect of this process is the reported presence of refugees and asylumseekers among the deported, though according to UNHCR this practice has reduced considerably (UNHCR 2010). Some respondents believed the practice was still commonplace. ‘All the migrants [have] documents, but they are deported back to Oujda anyway,’ one Guinean woman said.

These ‘forced returns’ frequently involve high levels of violence and severe rights abuses, with migrants simply dumped in the desert near the Algerian border. Besides subjecting them to hunger and thirst, this also places them at risk of assault, rape and injury at the hands of organised gangs (GADEM 2010). These *refoulements* also place migrants in a limbo between the security forces of the two countries: there are claims that police are sometimes perpetrating the violence themselves. Some respondents had disturbing accounts of their encounters with security forces on the border.

‘They stop you, they attack you, and they beat you up when they arrest you. People who are deported have injuries. When I was in Oujda, Médecins Sans Frontières, they helped me with broken arms.’

Cameroonian migrant, male, 34

‘When you are there, they will take you to the sea. They hit you ... many people, and they [have to stay] out there with the police who made the repatriation, until the next day ... Arriving at the border, [the police will] say “Out there is Algeria, Morocco is here.” And they remain at the border.’

Ghanaian migrant, female, 25

5.9 ‘Making the attempt’ – moving on to Europe

A central paradox of the migrant experience for sub-Saharan in Morocco is that, while many are residing in the country on a semi-permanent basis, the journey for many of them is still incomplete. For a large number, Europe will have been their intended destination since the beginning of their journey. Despite the trauma and hardship of the route to Morocco, or sometimes because of it, this assumption often remains unchanged. At the same time, for some migrants the challenging living conditions of being a *sans papiers* in Morocco – ‘a frustration of these people who have been here for 10 or 15 years, undocumented, without a job or a fixed place to live’, in the words of one stakeholder – may also be a contributing factor. Europe, under the circumstances, appears to offer a better chance of a dignified existence. Besides immediate survival, the attempt to enter Europe may be the central concern of many migrants, perhaps even the only structuring element in their lives.

There are two main routes for migrants to enter Europe from Morocco. As one respondent put it: ‘You have two choices in front of you, either the fence or the boat.’ By land, migrants can attempt to cross the fortified barrier separating Morocco from the Spanish cities of Melilla and Ceuta, located on the Moroccan mainland. By water, small boats can also travel the 15km stretch of the Mediterranean between Morocco and the Spanish mainland.

While interceptions of migrants by security forces have dropped since 2006 (AMERM 2008), a decrease attributed in some quarters to the progressive intensification of surveillance and deterrence at the border, it also may be that the nature of the attempts has changed. Sea crossings, as opposed to the land barrier, have become more popular since 2005 and much of this clandestine traffic may be going undetected; even when these attempts are unsuccessful, capsized vessels and their passengers can disappear without trace. With migrants now taking more difficult and dangerous routes to avoid detection, it may be that a larger number are now dying or disappearing.

‘Ten years ago, on a daily basis, *pateras*¹⁶ were intercepted, there were dramas, but now we hear fewer stories around. Does this mean that *pateras* are no longer used or is it that the people disappear, what I call the ‘anonymous death’. That is to say that these people engage in the same adventure and eventually disappear into the sea, but [other] candidates still exist.’

Stakeholder 8

Land crossings between Spain and the Spanish cities of Melilla and Ceuta have been subjected to increasingly militarised border control in recent years, as demonstrated in 2005 when at least 11 migrants were killed between August and October (Davies 2010). In many cases the physical dangers arise from the direct violence of the Moroccan and Spanish border forces.¹⁷ However, the fear of interception and the subsequent reprisals may also have an indirect effect by encouraging migrants to take greater risks to avoid detection. In particular, as the presence of maritime security has expanded, sea crossing routes have become more circuitous and dangerous. As a result, of the thousands who attempt to make the journey every year, an unknown number die or disappear.

¹⁶ *Pateras* are small boats used by irregular migrants.

¹⁷ Evidence of abuse by security officials in both countries has been documented in previous research. For example, out of 9,350 consultations by MSF with migrants in Tangiers, Nador and Oujda between March 2003 and May 2005, 23.3 per cent of all assistance provided was for injuries resulting from violence; of these injuries, 60 per cent were reportedly caused by Spanish or Moroccan forces (MSF 2005).

In a recent incident, involving a boat with more than 70 sub-Saharanans travelling to Spain from Morocco, at least 14 people were drowned. Seventeen others were recovered alive, but at the time of reporting the remainder had not been found (BBC 2012b).

While these dangers may deter some migrants, it is striking that most sub-Saharan migrants are still willing to risk the journey, a reflection of their determination but also their desperation. Their willingness to undertake the journey, despite the risks and expense, should be understood in light of their alternative prospects. Unable to make a meaningful life for themselves in Morocco or return to their home country as ‘failures’, for many the attempt to leave Morocco is an attempt to break a deadlock that may have lasted months or even years.

Box 5.5 Making the attempt – the experience of our respondents

Despite the securitization of its borders, attempts to enter Europe illegally are still common:

Approximately 35 per cent of our respondents had attempted to cross by land or sea into Europe, with half of these having done so on multiple occasions. One respondent reported that he had made eight separate attempts. In addition, a significant number of other respondents reported that they intended to do so in the future if legal routes were not available.

Smugglers are frequently used for illegal sea crossings: Respondents reported payments of between €500 and €700 for a crossing in a *pirogue* or Zodiac.¹⁸ ‘It depends, if you don’t have much money,’ said one migrant. However, crossing by boat or car could cost up to €3,000.

The dangers of these attempts are considerable, including the threat of violence from border police: A significant number of respondents reported being injured while trying to leave Morocco, with some directly assaulted by security forces.

‘When we try to enter the water to cross, the authorities arrest you. By the feet. They are there; they are even working with the Moroccan authorities. Sometimes at night; they always attack you.’

Cameroonian migrant, male, 28

These attempts can be lethal, but many migrants are still willing to take the risk: Some respondents, having heard of the risks, were disinclined to make an attempt themselves.

‘I knew about the 50 to 60 people; ... I used to eat at the [same] house [in] Nigeria. They all went by boat to Spain and they drowned in the sea with some babies. [It was] so many people that I knew, I decided to not take the journey by boat and risk my life.’

Liberian migrant, male, 16

¹⁸ Accounting for inflation, this is somewhat lower than some previous estimates. For instance, one study estimated that the cost of a boat crossing from Morocco to Spain was between US\$500 and \$800 for Moroccans and even higher – between US\$800 and \$1,200 – for sub-Saharan Africans (Lahlou 2003).

‘There are people who drown. When you try to pass through the barrier, they’ll break your feet. There are others who have tried to cross. I spoke to several people. I lost two friends. They died. They were in the water.’

Sierra Leonian migrant, male, 28

Nevertheless, as demonstrated by the fact that half of those who had attempted to cross the border had done so more than once, many migrants were still willing to take the risk.

‘Many risks, many deaths. Many deaths, many deaths. According to me, as I cannot remain here, I’d rather take the risk. This is my destiny, and I accept that. I have met people who have [subsequently] drowned, people who have been kicked, who were injured. Well it [demonstrates] that the police are very violent.’

Cameroonian migrant, male, 34

6. FUTURE PLANS

In contrast to the discourse of the ‘transit migrant’, many sub-Saharan migrants in Morocco have been based in the country for years (AMERM 2008). Nevertheless, although the transit label overlooks the social and political reality of long-term settlement, it does contain an element of truth: the common belief among migrants, even those who have lived for protracted periods in the country, that their journey is still ongoing, with Europe typically the intended destination.¹⁹

Irregular migrants in Morocco often have a keen sense of disillusionment about their experiences. ‘I regret, regret, regret,’ said one respondent, summing up his last four years as a migrant. ‘Overcoming all those obstacles, I don’t see the point.’ The frustration, poverty, insecurity and humiliation typical of many migrant experiences provide a striking contrast to the positive images that may have encouraged migrants initially to leave their country of origin. There also seemed to be a general consensus that they would not advise anyone else to initiate the journey, at least as irregularly as they had done. As another respondent put it: ‘Don’t try it. I will never allow my enemy to make the same journey.’

As a result, hardship, homesickness or a general sense of hopelessness about their future may push some migrants to consider return as an option. ‘Most have tried but have always failed. They understand that they cannot stay in Morocco because they do not have access to many things, such as healthcare,’ according to one stakeholder. ‘They think that if the conditions in Morocco and in the country of origin are the same, at least they will be regular at home and then there is the support of the family.’ Yet in fact many migrants, despite deplorable personal circumstances, remain in the limbo of permanent transit for many years without returning. This suggests that restrictive European border policies and oppressive living conditions within Morocco are not sufficient in themselves to encourage the majority of migrants to return to their home country. Even with the considerable dangers involved, as well as the economic difficulties in Europe, the desire to continue to Europe remains strong.

6.1 The continued lure of Europe

Notwithstanding their experiences, direct or indirect, of its restrictive border controls, the EU was still seen by many as a place where social and political liberty were respected. ‘Stay in a country with human rights,’ said one respondent. ‘It’s the best country for me.’ This view of Europe as the next step in their migration sometimes remained even after prolonged periods of ‘transit’ in Morocco. One respondent, despite having been in Morocco for nine years, still said that ‘my dream is to live in Europe’.

‘Europe’, depending on the respondent, sometimes meant a specific country such as Spain, Germany, Italy or the UK. In these cases, advice or the existence of friends and associates could play a determining role. Others, however, did not appear to have a particular country in mind and seemed willing to improvise, depending on the available opportunities. Surprisingly, given the role that the media can play in encouraging migrants to leave their country, Europe’s troubles in the wake of the financial crisis did not seem to have impacted significantly on the decision-making of most migrants, although there were exceptions. ‘There’s nothing in Europe,’ said one respondent. ‘Europe right now is on fire.’

19 This is reflected in the findings of AMERM’s (2008) extensive survey of migrants, where almost three-quarters (72.6 per cent) of respondents hoped to continue their journey while only one in 10 (10.6 per cent) wanted to return home. Perhaps the most striking finding of the research was how few (2.3 per cent) wished to remain in Morocco.

But in general, Europe still remained the primary destination of choice, despite its ongoing troubles.²⁰ This can be explained partially by the fact that, beyond the EU, the crisis has also further weakened the already poor performance of many sub-Saharan economies, as well as Morocco's. As a result, the 'milk and honey' image of Europe remains strong for many migrants.

'The only dream I have is to go to Europe, and I have to make it. Despite the fact that mass media talk about financial crisis, I'll find a job, I have friends that will help me to find it.'

Senegalese migrant, male, 31

Box 6.1 Crossing to Europe – findings from our respondents

Europe was still a preferred destination, with 57 per cent of respondents expressing a hope or intention to go there in the future.

However, this included a significant proportion (18 per cent) of respondents – almost a third of those who wished to go to Europe – who either considered Morocco a viable alternative if their situation improved (9 per cent), or only wished to stay in Europe temporarily before returning to their country (9 per cent).

This shows that, even after extended periods in transit, border security measures do not stop many migrants from harbouring hopes of entering Europe in the future. In practice, many are likely to remain indefinitely in Morocco, without achieving a meaningful existence, or returning to their country of origin.

This suggests that a significant proportion of Europe's migration pressure could be alleviated through regularisation of migrants in Morocco or the provision of short-term working and study visas in Europe. Such visas or residency permits would allow this latter group to enjoy a period of employment, education or training in Europe before returning to their home country.

While their experience of irregularity in Morocco and other countries of transit may encourage some migrants to pursue legal routes into Europe, if available, for the majority this option remains inaccessible. In practice, then, many will still consider illicit methods of entry; this is a reminder that, even with restrictive border controls, demand is sufficiently strong to ensure that many will continue to attempt to enter clandestinely. 'If they give me a visa, all well,' as one respondent put it. 'Otherwise I will migrate illegally.'

20 However, one European stakeholder suggested that the crisis had made Europe less appealing for sub-Saharan migrants, socially as well as economically, resulting in some returning voluntarily to Morocco. 'With Tanger Med, there are more engineers who come from the Ivory Coast with contracts. It's now a destination where they prefer to come to work. They do not want to go to Spain or Italy because of the economic crisis. There are interesting stories about people who have left, who managed to get to the other side, and then have returned to Morocco. They often describe their experience as hell because of racism, lack of jobs, and the expense. Here they have networks.'

6.2 The challenges of remaining in Morocco

Box 6.2 Staying in Morocco – findings from our respondents

Sixteen per cent of respondents wished to stay in Morocco permanently, with another 9 per cent expressing a desire to stay if regularisation was an option.

This included a large proportion of migrants who had fled violent conflict or abuse in their country of origin. This suggests that Morocco is becoming a chosen destination for some migrants, including many who would be classified as refugees.

Another 16 per cent of respondents wished to stay in Morocco in the short term before returning to their country of origin, although most needed to save some money or gain some experience first.

This implies that a significant proportion of migrants, if offered the opportunity of a short-term working visa, could then return to their country of origin without becoming a permanent presence.

Many respondents had no desire to remain in Morocco. This was in part because of their deep-rooted desire to continue to Europe, but also because of their disenchantment with the treatment they had received in Morocco and the limited options available to them.

‘There are no opportunities here. It is not for the future. Honestly. Work like that, and wages like that, they are miserable! This is miserable!’

Malian migrant, male, 26

‘Everything is difficult. Renting housing here is not easy. You are even assaulted here, you go to the police, the first thing they will ask you are for your documents. It frustrates me so much, I’m not comfortable here, everything is difficult here. I made up my mind at the last minute to leave Morocco.’

Ivorian migrant, female, 35

However, others were more ambiguous in their attitude to Morocco. Some stated that they would remain in Morocco if regularisation was an option, but that without integration life would be intolerable.

‘If I had documents, I would like to stay. But if I did not ... it does not encourage me ... You cannot work, get married, have a family like that, in this situation.’

Cameroonian migrant, male, 32

Some migrants, who had spent years in the country or who had fled violent conflict in their country of origin, had more positive attitudes. After spending a significant part of their lives in the country, notwithstanding their many difficulties, Morocco may come to be seen as a home of sorts.

‘I thought about returning to my country. But how to return home, because I have spent much of my life here in Morocco?’

Guinean migrant, male, 28

‘Since I am far away from the war, I live in peace and I feel good. It is true that the situation is not as we had hoped for, but it is comfortable.’

Ghanaian migrant, male, 27

Nevertheless, the intended plans of migrants do not generally reflect their likely prospects, at least in the short term. Though a large portion of Morocco’s migrant population may wish to leave, in practice this is where most are likely to remain for the foreseeable future. The result is that many migrants are effectively settled in Morocco, but without the ability to support themselves through productive employment in the formal economy.

6.3 The difficulties of return

Box 6.3 Returning to the country of origin – findings from our respondents

Although only 5 per cent of respondents wished to return home immediately, a total of 30 per cent expressed a desire to return home after temporary employment in Morocco (16 per cent) or Europe (9 per cent).

This highlights the importance of a range of return options for migrants. While sponsored voluntary repatriation packages should be available for migrants wishing to return to their home country, alternative arrangements such as short-term work opportunities before return could also play an important role.

Many migrants, when they initiate their journey, do so with no intention of return. Some may have lost their families in violent conflict and experienced protracted displacement in a number of countries, meaning that ‘home’ no longer exists in their country of origin. Others, frustrated by the limited opportunities or social freedoms in their country, leave with the objective of settling permanently elsewhere. In these cases, return is the worst case scenario and rarely voluntary. As one Malian respondent put it: ‘I would rather die.’

Nevertheless, for others the attitude towards return is more ambiguous. Among our respondents, a significant number expressed a desire eventually to go back. However, only a small portion of these wished to do so immediately. This minority were either saving up for their return or hoping to be repatriated by an international agency. For most of those intending to go back, however, return was a medium- to long-term option, and contingent on having first made a success of themselves. Migrants typically have invested heavily in their project, both financially and psychologically. Besides the loss of face, many have been funded by their families, meaning failure is unaffordable not only for the migrant but also the entire household. Importantly, this means that the marginalisation of irregular migrants from the labour market and other restrictive policies may in some cases prolong, rather than shorten, their stay as they struggle to make the savings necessary for their return.

‘For now, I cannot return, I cannot think about that. Because I cannot return without anything. I cannot help my family. So for me, for the moment, I cannot think of a return.’

Cameroonian migrant, male, 32

Furthermore, for many migrants the conditions in their home country that drove them to migrate in the first place – for instance, unemployment or political conflict – are still

in place. Return to the home country is therefore dependent on these root issues being resolved. Even in the face of considerable hardship, migrants are unlikely to return to their home countries voluntarily without positive incentives and opportunities.

‘I do not know how to get a job. I know how things work in my country ... it is difficult to find a job. So to return, I should have a job. If someone said to me “Return, there is a job!” I would go.’

Cameroonian migrant, male, 28

‘I am told that in our country there are no jobs. You understand me, no jobs, no work and everything is very expensive ... Here when you go to market and you want to buy something, it’s very cheap.’

Ghanaian migrant, male, 39

Box 6.4 Uncertain plans – findings from our respondents

Seven per cent of migrants did not have a clear preference for their next destination. As one migrant put it, discussing the variety of choices he faced: ‘At night, I always think about what to do next, with the time already spent here: return home, go and cross the fences or wait for my situation to be regularised. I ask myself those three questions every day.’

Given the unpredictability of ‘the project’, many migrants are disoriented about what to do with their future. The result, in many cases, is prolonged irregularity unless Europe, Morocco or sending countries are able to offer a positive choice, such as a temporary working visa, regularisation or a voluntary repatriation package with benefits such as education or training.

7. WAYS FORWARD – TOWARDS A COMPREHENSIVE FRAMEWORK FOR MIGRATION MANAGEMENT IN THE MAGHREB

‘We cannot do anything at the national policy level. It must be a multidimensional and multiregional approach. We cannot speak of an initiative to reduce the curse of migration without talking of a policy among Europeans and another among sub-Saharan, it is all nested. The country of origin, the poverty, misery, the transit country itself is a country of departure for the west, and then the host country. It would take a Euro-Mediterranean institutional mechanism, which has representations in the three blocks, with a charter or an agreement between the three.’

Stakeholder 15

Morocco, like other Maghreb countries, has been, is and will remain a migratory route towards Europe. As it has become a threshold that is more and more difficult to cross, an increasing number of sub-Saharan migrants have become stranded in Morocco, gradually changing the country’s status from one of transit migration to one of permanent migration. This places sub-Saharan migrants in a limbo, between transit, undocumented or unsafe residency and the fear of being deported.

The findings of this research identify the shortcomings of the current migration framework, for Morocco, the Maghreb, Europe and sub-Saharan migrants. They also highlight the urgent need for a new policy framework operating at national, regional and international levels. This section outlines an alternative strategy, with four key components.

(a) National reforms

- **Reform of Moroccan migration policy:** In particular, developing an immigration policy that is not just based on the need for security but includes pragmatic policies to deal with irregular migration that both reflect the legitimate need to manage immigration for the benefit of Morocco, and recognise the rights of migrants.

(b) Regional and international reforms

- **Greater cooperation among Maghreb states:** A shared commitment from Morocco and its neighbours to develop a framework for migration in the region.
- **Collaboration with sub-Saharan states:** A commitment to more substantive dialogue and collaboration with sending countries.
- **Equality in Morocco’s relationship with Europe:** A movement towards a more consultative and mutually beneficial partnership with the EU.

Each of these elements is explored in more detail in this section.

7.1 National reforms in Morocco

7.1.1 Immigration reform

Improvement in the current response to irregular migration in Morocco needs to take place at several levels. These include: developing a comprehensive and pragmatic immigration policy that complements the current emigration policy; creating the right balance between border controls and the protection of migrants’ rights; dealing with the current irregular migrant population, including identifying channels that could provide some legal status to this population (even if only as a route to orderly return); facilitating and promoting voluntary return; and finally developing an immigration system that provides legal routes of entry that meets the socio-economic needs of the country.

(a) *Lack of a coherent immigration policy*

- **Advance interdepartmental discussion between the ministries of interior, justice, employment, and foreign affairs, and the National Council for Human Rights, and expand these discussions with Moroccan civil society to begin to develop a comprehensive and pragmatic immigration policy that complements the current emigration policy.**

Migration to Morocco will continue despite the current security framework, legally or otherwise. Even with the onset of the financial crisis, Europe will continue to attract large numbers of migrants. Many of these, including many in ‘transit’, will settle in Morocco. If the recent militarisation of Europe’s borders and the increasingly stringent internal policies of countries like Morocco have demonstrated anything, it is that migration will continue regardless, at least until the underlying dynamics are addressed. Ongoing instability in sub-Saharan Africa and the growing reality of related drivers such as climate change may precipitate a greater number of migrants, particularly women and children, who end up settling permanently in Morocco.

‘I think this is the challenge facing Morocco [now] and [one] that it will face in the future. The phenomenon is expected to grow, especially with the instability in certain countries in Africa, political and ethnic struggles, then an economic situation that forces this immigration of diverse groups of people, and there are new profiles that arrive (youth, women, and children).’

Stakeholder 1

Although many irregular migrants stay in Morocco ‘by accident’ due to EU border controls, this does not necessarily mean that they stay for shorter periods as a result. The discourse of transit employed by Moroccan authorities can imply that the situation of irregular sub-Saharan migrants in Morocco is temporary in nature. Yet this research, and other work in this field, has highlighted that in practice migrants exist in a protracted state of irregularity, living for years without legal rights or access to basic services (AMERM 2008). The majority of ‘transit’ migrants, in short, are settled semi-permanently in Morocco. What this means is that the ‘problem’ of migration cannot be regarded as a transient phenomenon or eliminated through reactive measures such as arrest and deportation. What is required instead is a long-term solution that recognises that even self-described ‘transit’ migrants may need a context where they can live safely in Morocco, at least in the short to medium term.

Morocco must therefore develop a strategy that engages positively with immigration. A more open and responsive immigration policy could tap into the considerable potential of migrants as a legally recognised and managed labour force. Many migrants have desirable educational or professional skills that remain unutilised in their context as *sans papiers*. By recognising and realising the untapped possibilities of its migrants, Morocco – like the many European countries with a sizeable population of Moroccan emigrants – could create a more productive and effectively engaged labour force. This would be of far more benefit to the country than a hidden population subsisting unsustainably on the margins of its economy.

‘The state can help those who have no resources to meet their needs by engaging them in projects in construction, on the basis of the Spanish example, which thanks to the foreign labour workforce could transform vast deserted lands into successful agricultural fields.’

Malian migrant, female, 28

Similarly, a more open and accessible border regime, with opportunities for sub-Saharanans to enter Morocco legally on short-term or temporary working visas, would also allow the government to play a more direct role in the management of its migration. It is unlikely that Morocco can halt migration at present – at least until the fundamental drivers of conflict, poverty and lack of opportunity in the sending countries are resolved – but it can determine to some extent the nature and form it takes. Short-term entry visas, for example, could give migrants (including refugees and asylumseekers) the opportunity to enter the country through official channels, affording the Moroccan authorities better control over the management of migration within their country's borders.

'The advantage of introducing (for example) a one-week visa, besides the fact that migrants could enter the country legally, is that we could control the number of people who enter and exit and also give them the opportunity to claim asylum legally, giving them a reasonable period of time.'

Stakeholder 6

(b) Absence of clear legal routes for temporary migration

- **Strengthen bilateral cooperation with third countries and maximize the contribution of immigrants to Morocco through the introduction of visas and short-stay work permits with some of these countries.**

'We must stop thinking that migration is a problem. Migration is an economic actor of prosperity, so if there are sub-Saharan migrants in Morocco today, it means that the Moroccan economy is a prosperous economy and if the migration phenomenon continues it means that the economy is booming and that it goes well ... If the Moroccan economy is caught in the maelstrom of the European crisis ... migration will decrease, and therefore sub-Saharanans will find new migration routes, to Dubai, probably to the Gulf.'

Stakeholder 9

Despite the currently high levels of unemployment in Morocco, the country is likely to become increasingly dependent on foreign labour in the medium term as its own workers move to Europe to plug the gaps left by Europe's own ageing population. The limited numbers of migrants in the country at present offer an opportunity for Morocco to develop a functioning immigration system on a relatively small scale.

'In the medium term, our labour market will need this workforce and so we are forced to become a country of immigration and the only remaining exporter of this workforce is sub-Saharan Africa, but I think it is starting to settle down ... For us, in sectors such as agriculture and construction, the shortage of workers is starting to be felt in quite a few areas ... At the end of the day we will need a workforce, because the economy cannot function without a workforce.'

Stakeholder 8

'Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco and Mauritania, the region itself will need sub-Saharan migrants if it intends to develop economic [activities] such as building roads and the entire infrastructure needed to support the region.'

Stakeholder 3

In the meantime, Morocco would benefit from considering its current capacity to absorb legal migration, and begin to adjust its policies accordingly. One stakeholder, while emphasising that Morocco did not need to be ‘angelic’ by taking on disproportionate responsibilities, nevertheless argued for the benefits of the country clearly assessing its needs and capacities. This could then inform an immigration policy that, within manageable limits, allowed migrants a greater range of rights and opportunities.

7.1.2 Dealing more effectively with the current irregular migrant population

(a) Achieving a better balance between border controls and the protection of migrant rights

- **Strike a better balance between border control and the protection of migrant rights through closer collaboration on migration between the Ministry of the Interior, the National Council for Human Rights, and civil society organisations.**

Recognising migrant rights is an essential part of Morocco’s general movement towards a rights-based framework for government, as well as its prominent role in international platforms on migration. With the passing of its new constitution in 2011, Morocco has set itself on a path towards a stronger rights-based framework in its domestic governance. The constitution has 60 articles on human rights. Therefore, the constitution must be enforced to ensure a greater guarantee of the protection of migrant rights. Furthermore, with its prominent involvement in various platforms for migrant rights – such as its hosting of the first Euro-African Ministerial Conference on Migration and Development in 2006 – as well as its ongoing advocacy for the millions of Moroccan citizens abroad, particularly in Europe, it is also extending its position as an important international player in the field of migrant rights.

Nevertheless, these achievements risk being undermined unless it manages to achieve a more progressive approach to its own migrant population, as has been the case recently following the publication of Médecins Sans Frontières report (2013) that referred to several cases of human right abuses. While some of the criticism has been refuted by the government, the negative publicity that the report has generated was certainly damaging. The departure of MSF has now created a real gap in support to the most vulnerable migrants. Filling this void by building the capacity of civil society organisations is essential here.

Morocco has shown itself willing to move beyond this policy of exclusion and removals, yet its practical actions still lag some distance behind. Large numbers of migrants – including even recognised refugees (UNHCR 2010) – are currently with little or no access to essential services such as healthcare, education or adequate shelter. As migration is projected to continue, given ongoing instability in the region, developing an effective system of humanitarian support is critical to ensure the arrivals of vulnerable persons, including many women and children, are provided with essential support.

‘The arrival of women and children imposes a number of obligations on the state because of its international commitments. For example, a child has certain rights regardless of his legal status, access to health and education in particular, while at the legal level in Morocco there is nothing that facilitates this except through some diverted measures via associations and organisations that support migrants. At the legal level, there is nothing.’

Stakeholder 1

‘Some people that have been living (for example) in the camps for some years, some for more than six years, who have attempted to go to Europe, who were expelled and then they returned to the camp in order to make another attempt. So every day people are trying to cross. According to their stories, above all, there is an emergency, the Moroccan authorities must deal with the humanitarian situation, because these people are humans.’

Stakeholder 4

As the conditions of Morocco’s constitution begin to be put into practice, the protection of migrants should not be seen as a secondary priority to be considered once the rights of Moroccan citizens have first been assured. Rather, the treatment of its migrants – among the most vulnerable and marginalised in the country – is inseparable from Morocco’s wider rights-based reform.

‘The most complicated [approach] is to reflect on poverty and insecurity in general in Morocco, in which the issue of migration is subsidiary in relation to the broader issues (of poverty, human rights and insecurity in Morocco).’

Stakeholder 9

Commendably, Morocco plays an active role in advocating on behalf of its citizens abroad, particularly in Europe. However, the increasingly apparent disjuncture between the rights it demands for Moroccan migrants abroad with those it provides to its own migrant population threatens to undermine its credibility in this important area. Furthermore, the situation of many *sans papiers* in Morocco also provides a troubling counterpoint to the country’s positive engagement with migration issues at an international level and its status as a signatory to a range of conventions on human rights.

‘The most basic rights must be respected ... because I say this within and outside Morocco ... If I say that to the Moroccans in the world, in France or elsewhere, I cannot have a different discourse for migrants in Morocco, a society is judged by the way it welcomes its foreign people.’

Stakeholder 3

By taking action to eliminate these contradictions through a more considered migration policy, Morocco would consolidate its position internationally while also strengthening its moral authority at home, particularly in the area of human rights. With the right political will, Morocco would be well qualified to play a leading role in coordinating such a regional framework. Furthermore, a collective resolution to the challenges of migration would also represent a significant step towards a calmer and more cooperative relationship in general between Morocco and its Maghreb neighbours.

(b) Absence of channels that could provide a legal status for these irregular migrants

- **Deal more effectively with the current irregular migrant population by creating channels such as bridging visas that could provide legal status, at least temporarily, to provide for orderly return.**

The ‘problem’ of the existing irregular migrant population cannot be ignored, it needs to be dealt with more effectively. The current government response is characterised by apparent indifference or hostility, depending in part on their location: in some areas of the

country, authorities may choose to ignore the presence of migrants (together with their basic needs and protection), while elsewhere migrants may be continuously deported to the borders, although many re-enter the country shortly afterwards. It is also important to recognise that sub-Saharan migrants are only one group of irregular migrants. Several groups of European immigrants for example reside and work in the country illegally, though they are less prone to removal as they fairly well established.

A more durable solution would be to open up paths for some of these migrants to legalise their status, at least temporarily, if not permanently. This could provide the basis for a more controlled and orderly process of returning people to their home countries, and also offer some the possibility to play a productive role in Morocco's development.

'There is a huge problem; the Moroccan authorities need to have a strategy, a clear view on what are the criteria for a residence permit. A person who enters the territory, who wants to settle for one year, three years, and four years, what are the requirements for this person to receive a residence permit? If he wants to settle permanently for 10 years, and so on? We need to develop some criteria.'

Stakeholder 13

It is important to recognise that such a form of regularisation of sub-Saharan *sans papiers*, in particular, would not be without challenges or controversy. As in other countries, migration issues have the potential to be politically and socially divisive, and there are also valid practical concerns. Nevertheless, given the strength of its underlying drivers, the fundamental issue of irregular migration is not going to be resolved by ignoring or pathologising the phenomenon. Legally or illegally, the reality of Morocco's irregular migrant population must be recognised. Some form of regularisation, however limited, offers the possibility of the Moroccan government regaining a greater level of control over the process.

7.1.3 Return and enforcement

- **Make voluntary return a viable option by cofunding IOM's assisted voluntary return schemes.**

Encouraging migrants to return is not necessarily working against the grain of migration patterns. Migration is often circular: people set out assuming that they will one day return. As discussed above, our research documented many cases in which irregular migrants were willing to leave Morocco and resettle in their country of origin in a way that was positive for them and their community.

As well as encouraging irregular migrants to return when they can, it is important that any return policy helps migrants to reintegrate in their countries of origin. Support needs to ensure that people do not return to genuine hardship and destitution, and to encourage returnees to rebuild their lives, in order to prevent irregular remigration.

Assisted voluntary return packages that can include reintegration support are often provided, worldwide, by the IOM. However, there is a low take-up from migrants and there is reduced availability of these packages in Morocco itself. In fact less than a year ago IOM Morocco published a call²¹ to raise US\$800,000 to help 1,000 migrants return and reintegrate in their home countries.

21 <http://www.iom.int/cms/en/sites/iom/home/news-and-views/press-briefing-notes/pbn-2012/pbn-listing/iom-morocco-appeals-for-usd-8000.html>

A recently published article²² showed that despite IOM's efforts to raise funds, they have only managed to help 12 per cent (180) irregular migrants of the 1,500 who desire to return voluntarily. While most of the funding for these voluntary return packages is from Europe, almost no contributions are made from Morocco. This only highlights a clear gap for Morocco to fill in order to manage the return of irregular migrants better, in a cost-effective, humane and sustainable manner.

Of course, assisted voluntary return is not the only form of orderly return. By providing routes to short-term legal status for irregular migrants in Morocco, as proposed above, opportunities could be created for them to return to their countries of origin voluntarily, without IOM assistance.

7.2 Regional and international reforms

7.2.1 Closer cooperation – moving towards a regional approach with its Maghreb neighbours

- **Reinstating the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) as an active platform for closer cooperation within the Maghreb on management of migration flows (including irregular migration) and for negotiation with the EU for it to move beyond individual bilateral partnership arrangements towards a collective regional approach.**

Morocco's migration policy has long been dominated by its relationship with Europe at the expense of its regional partnerships, especially within north Africa. While Maghreb states have developed some degree of cooperation through a series of bilateral agreements on the free circulation of migrants and workers, the conditions between different countries vary considerably and have not been widely implemented (Musette et al 2006). In practice, although irregular transit migration is a problem shared to a greater or lesser extent by all Maghreb states, there is no strong regional framework capable of addressing the issue in a coordinated way.

The most relevant formal platform for regional cooperation is the AMU, comprising Algeria, Libya, Mauritania and Tunisia as well as Morocco, but in practice the AMU is barely operational: 'perhaps the least active regional consultative process in the world' (Cherti et al 2012). Since its foundation in 1989, there has been just one meeting between the heads of its member states. While there is more interaction between these countries at other meetings, under the aegis of the African Union (AU) or the EU, even here involvement has been fragmented.²³ Yet the AMU offers the best possibility of a responsive regional approach. It offers the strongest chance of north African states moving beyond the bilateral focus of individual EU 'partnership' agreements and negotiating collectively for a framework that serves their shared interests better.

The shortcomings of the current approach to migration, with a focus on national rather than regional solutions, have created a situation where irregular migrants are often shunted from country to country in a process that is damaging for both the migrants themselves and the region as a whole. Sub-Saharan migrants entering Morocco irregularly from Algeria are frequently arrested by Moroccan police and sent back to Algeria, only to

²² <http://www.ccme.org.ma/fr/presse-et-migration/item/30843-rapatriement-volontaire-de-180-migrants-clandestins>

²³ For example, in 2006 the Rabat process was initiated as an arena for discussion between Europe, Maghreb and sub-Saharan countries on migration challenges, but was boycotted by Algeria on the grounds that it was accused of serving European security and economic interests. Before that, in 1984, Morocco withdrew from the Organization of African Unity, the AU's previous incarnation, following its majority approval of the creation of the Sahrawi Democratic Arab Republic (SADR) in the contested areas of the western Sahara.

be chased out again by Algerian forces. By adopting a more collaborative perspective, both countries could move away from the current ‘zero sum’ approach towards a more humane and sustainable migration strategy. This could be resolved through a meaningful regional agreement.

‘We have in this country around 3,000km of borders which means, I would say, that we are relatively permeable to migration flows, which it seems to me, highlight the contradictions and even conflicts between the Maghreb countries. I think the issue of sub-Saharan migration cannot be resolved by one country alone, it can only be effectively resolved at the Maghreb level itself. Because, beyond the fact that we play the ‘ping-pong game’ between Algeria and Morocco, there are routes through Tunisia and Libya, and so on ... So it is at the regional level that we can solve this problem.’

Stakeholder 3

Stronger cooperation within the Maghreb could allow for a better-managed intake of sub-Saharan migrants, resulting in a more coordinated allocation of migrant labour to the particular needs of each country.

‘There are going to be many migrants to north Africa in general, and Morocco would face many difficulties in the management of this migration ... It is for this reason that we must address this issue at the regional level, with our neighbours to the south east and north for a comprehensive and global understanding of the question because Morocco cannot cope alone and above all, Morocco is not the only country to be concerned.’

Stakeholder 7

The adoption of regionally agreed responsibilities would also facilitate more progressive and rights-based approaches to migration, such as the elaboration of commonly agreed protections for migrants across the Maghreb and the development of a specially trained border force to reduce rights violations. Data sharing, research and improved cooperation could help all countries to manage migratory flows better within their borders as an alternative to securitised border control (Adepoju 2006). By assuring certain rights and protections together, there would be room for these countries to develop a more strategic approach to managing migration.

7.2.2 Improved communication and a closer collaboration with sub-Saharan African countries

- **Develop bilateral agreements between Morocco and source countries to agree protocols for the return and reintegration of irregular migrants and bolster relevant consular services in Morocco to render them fit for this purpose.**
- **Strengthen consular services of sending countries in Morocco.**

Morocco has managed to achieve significant progress with some countries in sub-Saharan Africa in certain areas of collaboration, such as educational exchange programmes or trade agreements. In terms of migration, on the other hand, neither Morocco nor the countries of origin have made sufficient efforts to develop closer ties. Most of these countries offer very limited consular services and support or advice in the case of judicial procedures or expulsion, and there is no evidence that they advocate

for the welfare of resident nationals in their relations with the Moroccan government. Clearly, many of these countries face very real questions of resources and capacity to engage with countries like Morocco in this way, but these same countries have developed effective representation for migrants in Europe, so this appears to be at least in part a question of priorities.

There is evidence that Morocco's relationship with the EU has helped weaken potential cooperation with sending countries. For example, there are claims that the EU pressurised Morocco to implement visa requirements for sub-Saharan migrants (De Haas 2005b).

Nevertheless, by discussing the concerns and opportunities that migration presents both for sending and receiving countries, progress could be made towards a framework where flows are managed better for their mutual benefit. One stakeholder put forward a bold recommendation for the elaboration of a Schengen-like agreement that, as within the EU, would liberalise the labour market in west and north Africa, facilitating greater movement across the region of regular migrants. There are already some regional platforms established within west Africa that could serve as foundations for such an arrangement, such as ECOWAS. Although other agreements in the region have been less successful, they do suggest a possible blueprint for broader future integration with the Maghreb. Improved cooperation between the regions could also open up an alternative dialogue to the current bilateral framework with Europe that dominates discussions.

'We may have some cooperation with the southern Maghreb and sub-Saharan Africa ... I am convinced that if (for example) in the field of migration, we make Algeria, Morocco and all here do a little more work, we might create a committee of partners that will be very important for sub-Saharan Africa, no need to go to Europe.'

Stakeholder 7

7.2.3 An improved and balanced collaborative approach with Europe

- **The EU should develop a more equal partnership with Morocco in line with Morocco's advanced status and within the new framework of migration, mobility and security.**

In contrast to its relations with its Maghreb neighbours, Morocco has developed a close cooperative framework with the EU on migration issues. In this case, however, it is the nature of the partnership itself that is problematic. EU-Moroccan cooperation has long been defined by clear power imbalances, as reflected in previous mobility 'partnerships' where European border control has been prioritised (Cherti et al 2012). This has often not served Morocco's own interests. By containing rather than resolving migration pressures, Morocco has been transformed from a place of transit *en route* to Europe to a 'reluctant host' of a grounded migrant population (Meliani and El Chigeur 2009).

For the past 10 years Morocco has refused to sign a readmission agreement relating to third country nationals who have entered an EU member state illegally via Morocco. In August 2012, Moroccan foreign minister Saâdeddine El Othmani stated that Morocco would not be the '*gendarme* of the European Union'.

Despite the Moroccan authorities' opposition to 'pay[ing] for the permissiveness of neighbouring countries',²⁴ it remains unclear whether a readmission agreement will be

24 Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs, afternoon session, 21 February 2013

signed. Nevertheless, given the Commission's insistence that the signature of a mobility partnership²⁵ is conditional upon the signature of such a readmission agreement, it seems likely that it will.²⁶ Signing such an agreement would be a major shift as it would make Morocco the first African country to conclude a readmission agreement with the EU. The implications of this would be a dramatic increase in the burden borne by Morocco in terms of responsibility for returning sub-Saharan irregular migrants currently in Europe who have travelled via Morocco. Morocco's capacity to discharge such responsibility effectively is questionable: the EU should drop this demand and instead negotiate the new mobility partnership on a more collaborative basis.

- **Europe should support Morocco to adapt to being a country of settlement, not just one of transit, for sub-Saharan migrants, for instance by assisting with the development of a working visa regime, and supporting Morocco to develop a proactive and humane approach to voluntary return.**

If Morocco is to implement a new approach to irregular migration successfully, then Europe must also be willing to adjust its current position of engagement, including its overwhelming focus on border security, to help redirect Maghreb policies towards an emphasis on migrant rights (Planes-Bouissac et al 2010), and the interests of Morocco and other Maghreb countries.

'There is a migration from Europe to the north African countries, such as Morocco for example, these people are still here, somehow a new form of colonisation, they are still exploiting the workforce here, the wealth here ... All the pensioners in European countries, which can really sustain themselves with very little here, a little money. For example 2,000 euros in Morocco, it allows them to live very well, while it does not even allow them to spend a fortnight in a European country.'

Stakeholder 12

The EU at present invests substantial funds in security-focused measures that aim to contain rather than resolve irregular migration. However, as the current situation in Morocco shows, these measures have only a very limited effect without addressing the fundamental drivers in sending countries. The result is that the pressure of migration is either outsourced to intermediary countries such as Morocco or rechannelled into more dangerous and clandestine forms of entry into Europe. EU funds could be spent more strategically in source and transit countries to lessen the problems caused by irregular migration as well as support the process of return and resettlement.

7.3 Conclusions

Our research shows that Morocco is undergoing a gradual shift from 'transit' migration to longer-term immigration. Our interviews with irregular migrants illustrate that their *sans papiers* status is perhaps the single most defining aspect of their experience in Morocco, impacting on their employment, living conditions and access to basic services such as healthcare.

25 Mobility partnerships provide a framework for discussion of a range of more detailed issues. Such partnerships are based on the expectation that, in return for greater engagement by Morocco in EU priority migration control practices, the EU will offer significant access to visa facilitation regimes for Moroccan nationals.

26 European Commission, *Communication on migration*, COM(2011) 248, 4 May 2011

While some gaps are filled by a range of dedicated NGOs and migrants' rights groups, it is clear that these actors can never offer a complete solution; at some point, the state must step in. Important changes, such as the new constitution and the setting up of institutions such as the National Council of Human Rights, are positive foundations for the kind of policy and practice which Morocco must develop over time.

The challenge ahead for Morocco is to develop an immigration policy that is not just based on security but includes pragmatic policies to deal with irregular migration that both reflect the legitimate need to manage immigration for the benefit of Morocco and recognise the rights of migrants. This challenge must also be faced by the wider Maghreb region: improved coordination and cooperation at a regional level could transform the experiences of migrants themselves and help all the countries in the region manage migration more effectively. Morocco and other countries of 'transit' also need to transform their relationships with both source countries in sub-Saharan Africa and with the EU. Irregular migration is, by definition, an international phenomenon, and it can only be tackled with transnational responses.

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