

# Morocco

Since the 1960s, Morocco has evolved into one of the prime source countries of labour migrants to Europe. Increasing immigration restrictions in Europe did little to stop migration, and have led instead to the increasingly irregular character of migration and to the exploration of new destinations beyond the traditional ones of France and the Benelux countries. Since 1990, low-skilled Moroccan emigrants have increasingly headed to Italy and Spain, while the higher-skilled increasingly migrate to the US and Canada. Over three million people of Moroccan descent (out of a total population of over 31 million) are currently believed to be living abroad. Receiving an estimated US\$ 5.6 billion in remittances (money transfers from migrants abroad) in 2006, Morocco was the largest remittance receiver in Africa.

Since 1995, Morocco has also evolved into a transit country for migrants and refugees from sub-Saharan Africa. Although many of them attempt to cross to Europe, those failing or not venturing to enter Europe prefer to stay in Morocco as a second-best option rather than returning to their more unstable, unsafe, and substantially poorer home countries. Their presence confronts Moroccan society with an entirely new set of social and legal issues typical for immigration countries, issues that do not yet resonate with Morocco's self-image as an emigration country. Persistent demand for migrant labour in



Europe, along with demographic factors and increasing aspirations due to improved education and intensive media exposure, suggest that the propensity to migrate over formally closed borders is likely to remain high in the near future. However, in the longer term, out-migration might decrease and Morocco could increasingly develop into a destination for migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa, a transition process that might have already been set in motion.

## Background information

**Capital:** Rabat

**Language:** Arabic (official), Berber languages, French

**Area:** 710,850 km<sup>2</sup>

**Population (2007):** 31,224,000

**Population density (2007):** 44 persons per km<sup>2</sup>

**Population growth (1996-2007):** 1.2%

**Foreign nationals  
as percentage of population (2008 est.):** 0.3%

**Labor force participation rate (2007):** 56.1%

**Unemployment rate:** 9.8%

**Religions:** Muslim 98.7%, Christian 1.1%, Jewish 0.2%

## Historical and Recent Trends in Immigration and Emigration

### Pre-colonial migration

Morocco's pre-colonial history exemplifies the idea that pre-modern societies can be highly dynamic and mobile. The population history of Morocco is characterized by continually shifting patterns of human settlement over large distances, which has produced the highly diverse society and culture of present-day Morocco.<sup>1</sup>

Nomadic or semi-nomadic (transhumant) groups traveled large distances with their herds between summer and winter pastures. While some nomadic tribes settled, other sedentary groups became nomadic or settled elsewhere. Following the Arab-Islamic conquests beginning in the seventh century, Arab tribal groups migrated to and settled in present-day Morocco, where they deeply influenced traditional Berber society. At the

same time, many Arabs who had settled assimilated into local Berber culture and society.

Monotheistic religion has been another factor in stimulating mobility. Besides the *hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca), the numerous marabutic pilgrimages (*mussems*) prevailing within the entire Maghreb and West African cultural area, mobility related to the religious schooling of pupils and students at *medersas* and Islamic universities, as well as the peregrination of religious teachers has put people into contact over large distances.

Also, Moroccan Jews have been highly mobile both within Morocco and internationally. Their extended networks enabled them to travel and to settle elsewhere, and Jews played a vital role as intermediaries and merchants in the trans-Saharan trade as well as in establishing contacts and trade relationships between Moroccan sultanates and European countries from the sixteenth century onwards. Following the *reconquista* of the Iberian Peninsula, large numbers of "Andalusian" Muslims and Megorashim Jews fled to Morocco and settled in northern cities.

Ever since the eighth century AD, the urban-based sultanate dynasties and the upper classes associated with the sultan's power — the *makhzen* — have attempted to gain control over the autonomous Berber and Arab ethnic groups living in mountainous areas and deserts of Morocco's hinterland. The establishment and growth of imperial cities in western and northern Morocco (mainly Rabat, Marrakech, Fes and Meknes) attracted merchants and migrants from rural Morocco. The *makhzen's* strategic economic interests in the Trans-Saharan caravan trade required them to establish military strongholds and trading posts in the interior. In regions south of the Atlas Mountains, oases were commercial and migratory junctions. The diverse ethnic composition in oases — with their blend of Sub-Saharan, Berber, Arab and Jewish influences — testifies to a long history of intensive population mobility.<sup>2</sup>

Centuries-old seasonal and circular rural-to-rural migration patterns existed between certain rural areas — such as the Rif Mountains and the southern oases — and the relatively humid regions and the imperial towns in western and northern Morocco. The Trans-Saharan caravan trade engendered significant population mobility and migration between sub-Saharan Africa and North Africa. Far into the twentieth century, the slave trade constituted an important form of forced migration within and towards Morocco.

### Migration in the colonial era

The French colonisation of Algeria in 1830 marked the beginning of a period of economic and political restructuring, which was to create entirely new migration patterns within the Maghreb region. The increasing demand for wage labour on the farms of French colonists and in the northern cities attracted a rising number of seasonal and circular migrants from rural areas in Morocco.<sup>3</sup>

In 1912, the French-Spanish protectorate over Morocco was formally established. While France gained control over the heartland of Morocco, the Spanish protectorate was mainly limited to the Western Sahara and the northern Rif mountain zone. Integration of the largely autonomous tribes of Morocco's hinterland into the modern state, the expansion of the capital-

ist economy, road construction, other infrastructure works and the rapid growth of cities along the Atlantic coast shaped new markets for rural-to-urban migration.

During the First World War, an urgent need for manpower in France led to the active recruitment of tens of thousands of Moroccan men for the army, industry and mines. Although most migrants returned after the end of war, international migration to France resumed after 1920, because of the flourishing French economy. In the Second World War, labour demand again led to the recruitment of Moroccan men in Morocco. About 126,000 Moroccan men served in the French army during the Second World War and in the subsequent wars in Korea and French Indochina (Vietnam).<sup>4</sup>

### The Moroccan migration boom

Morocco became independent from France in 1956. Circular migration to Algeria came to a definitive halt in 1962 following closure of the Moroccan-Algerian border as a result of tensions between the two countries after Algerian independence from France. From then on, international migration from Morocco would become more and more focused on Europe.

Rapid post-war economic growth in northwest Europe created increasing unskilled labour shortages in sectors such as industry, mining, housing construction and agriculture from the 1950s. Until the early 1960s, most were recruited in south European countries. When this migration stagnated, attention shifted towards south Mediterranean countries. Agreements on the recruitment of "guest workers" were signed between Morocco and the former West Germany (1963), France (1963), Belgium (1964) and the Netherlands (1969). This was the onset of a spatial diversification of Moroccan migration to Europe, which was previously mainly directed towards France.

Formal recruitment by specialised agencies in the host countries was important only in the initial years of labour migration. Spontaneous settlement, network migration and informal recruitment by companies was far more important numerically than formal recruitment, even in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>5</sup> Administrative obstacles, long waiting lists and the accompanying bribery necessary to acquire travel documents encouraged people to migrate as "tourists" and stay on as labour migrants. Migrants were often assisted by relatives or friends who had already migrated, and who then acted as intermediaries between employers and potential migrants. In the 1960s, most emigrants traveled to France, the Netherlands, Belgium and elsewhere without a prearranged work permit in order to find work and were regularized at a later point in time. These spontaneous settlers did not initially experience too many problems in finding work and accommodation. Although the attitudes of the host societies towards migration became negative from the 1970s, many migrants succeeded in obtaining permanent residence papers through a series of legalization campaigns in the Netherlands (1975), Belgium (1975) and in France (1981-1982).<sup>6</sup>

Moroccan Jews, who started to migrate in relatively small numbers to Gibraltar, London, Manchester and Marseilles in the second half of the nineteenth century, began emigrating from Morocco in large numbers following the creation of the state of Israel in 1948. On the eve of this migration, Morocco's Jewish population numbered over 250,000.<sup>7</sup> Between 1948 and

1956, 90,000 Jews emigrated. After the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, most remaining Jews decided to leave the country.

Between 1948 and 2003, a total of 270,188 Moroccan Jews migrated to Israel. In 2003, the Israeli population included 161,000 people born in Morocco, plus 335,000 born in Israel with a Moroccan-born father. Including Israeli-born with a Moroccan-born mother and the third generation, it is estimated that at least 700,000 people of Moroccan ancestry live in Israel. Presently, about 5,000 Jews remain in Morocco.<sup>8</sup>

### Diversification of migration in response to restrictive policies

The Moroccan state, European receiving countries as well as most migrants themselves expected that this migration would only be temporary. Standing in an ancient tradition of circular migration, most migrants themselves intended to return after a certain amount of money had been saved to buy some land, construct a house, or start their own enterprise. The 1973 Oil Crisis heralded a period of economic stagnation and restructuring, resulting in rising unemployment and lower demand for unskilled workers. Consequently, northwest European countries closed their borders to new labor migrants. However, most migrants did not return, but ended up staying in Europe permanently. The Oil Crisis radically changed the political and economic context in which migration took place, both in Europe and in Morocco. Morocco suffered even more than the European countries from the high oil prices and the global economic downturn. In addition, following two failed *coups d'état* against King Hassan II in 1971 and 1972, the country also entered into a period of increasing political instability and repression.

This combination of factors explains why many migrants decided to stay on the safe side, that is, in Europe. Paradoxically, the recruitment freeze stimulated permanent settlement instead of the reverse. Large-scale family reunification heralded this shift from circular to more permanent migration. It was mainly through family reunification that the total population of Moroccans in France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany continued to increase. Return migration has been low among Moroccans compared to other immigrant groups in Europe.

While family reunification was largely complete at the end of the 1980s, family formation gained significance as a major source of new migration from Morocco over the 1990s. For many Moroccans, marrying a partner in Europe has become the only option to enter the classic destination countries (France, Belgium, Netherlands, Germany) legally. Significant proportions of the second-generation Moroccan descendants marry partners from the region of origin.<sup>9</sup>

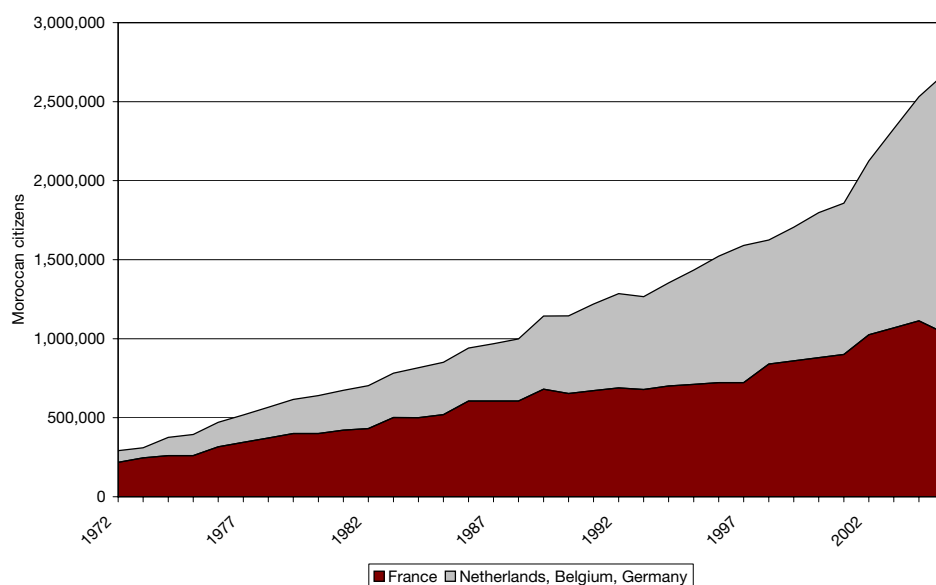
Besides the increasing reliance on family migration, a second conse-

quence of the implementation of restrictive immigration policies was an increase in undocumented migration to Europe. Especially during high economic growth in the 1990s, undocumented migrants were attracted by the increasing demand for cheap labour in agriculture, construction and the service sector. This went along with a diversification of migration destinations and the rather sudden rise of Spain and Italy as prime destination countries for new Moroccan labour migrants. Themselves former labour exporters, Spain and Italy have emerged as the main destination countries for new Moroccan labour migrants since the mid-1980s.<sup>10</sup> Over the last decade, there has also been a notable increase of migration to Canada and the United States. These migrants tend to be highly skilled, and their migration is influenced by the high unemployment among high educated in Morocco.

## The Moroccan Emigrant Population

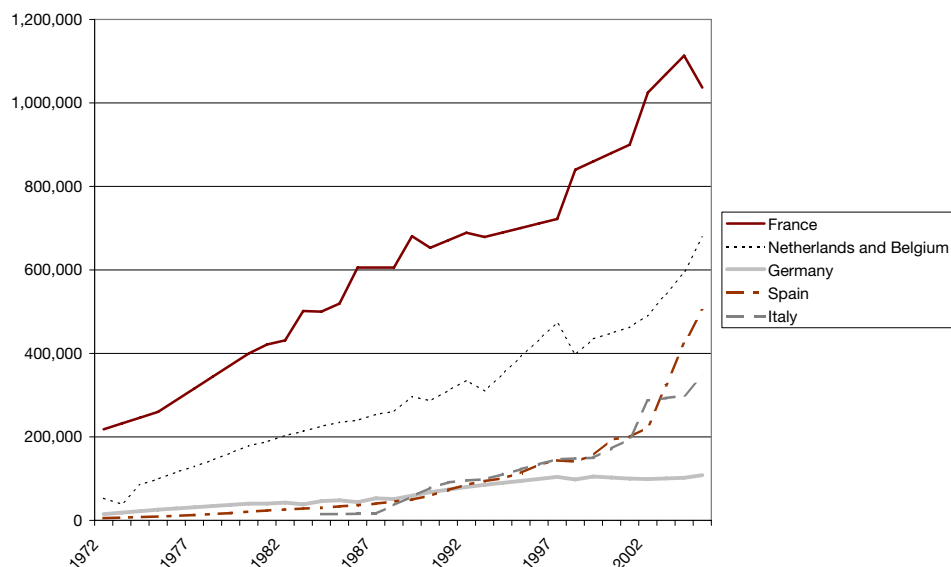
Figure 1 illustrates the remarkably steady increase of the Moroccan population living abroad in defiance of the increasingly restrictive immigration policies of the former recruiting countries in Europe. It also shows a decreasing spatial focus on France. The combined effects of family reunification, family formation, natural increase, undocumented migration and new labour migration to southern Europe and North America explain why the number of Moroccans living in the main European destination countries steadily increased from 300,000 in 1972, on the eve of the recruitment freeze, to at least 2.7 million in 2005. This ninefold increase represents an average annual increase of about 73,000. This does not include irregular migrants and smaller immigrant populations living in the United Kingdom and Scandinavia, which are estimated at a level of at least 100,000 persons.<sup>11</sup>

**Figure 1: Number of Moroccan citizens living in Europe, specified for France, 1972-2005**



Source: Moroccan Consular Services

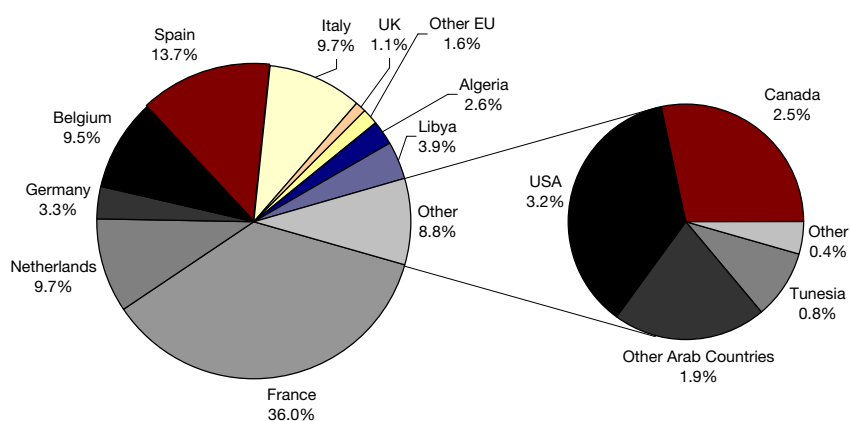
**Figure 2: Evolution of population with Moroccan citizenship in main European destination countries, 1972-2005**



Source: Moroccan Consular Services

Figure 3 shows that 85% of Moroccans living abroad live in European countries. In 2005, France was still home to the largest legally residing population of Moroccan descent (about 1,000,000), followed by Spain (500,000), Italy (350,000), Belgium (350,000), the Netherlands (325,000), and Germany (108,000). Smaller but rapidly growing communities of higher-skilled migrants live in the United States (at least 100,000) and Canada (at least 78,000). An estimated 300,000 Moroccans live in other Maghreb and Middle Eastern countries.

**Figure 3: Distribution of Moroccan population living abroad, 2004**



Source: Moroccan Consular Services

Moroccans are the largest and most dispersed African immigrant population living in Europe, where they alone outnumber *all* West African migrants living in Europe. Moroccans form the second most sizeable non-EU immigrant population living in Europe after Turks. While the Turkish migration to the EU is stagnating, Morocco has been among the top source countries of immigrants to the EU and is expected to overtake Turkey as the main source of non-EU immigrants in the coming decade.

It should be noted that these data give an inflated image of actual net migration, because they are based on Moroccan consular records, which include all people possessing Moroccan citizenship, including migrants and the second generation holding double citizenship. For instance, around 2003 about 1.5 million Morocco-born migrants were living in France, Italy, Spain, Portugal, the UK and the Netherlands,<sup>12</sup> while about 2.3 million Moroccan *citizens* were living in those countries.

While in the 1960s and early 1970s the large majority of workers migrating to Europe were single or married men, the proportion of women and children among Moroccan emigrant populations has steadily risen with increasing family reunification but also an increased participation of women in labour migration to Europe. In the early 2000s, 45% of all registered Moroccan migrants in France were women. These proportions were 48% Belgium, 42% in Germany and 49% in the Netherlands. In Spain and Italy, 33% and 40% of all registered Moroccan immigrants were women, which probably reflects the more recent nature of Moroccan migration in those countries.<sup>13</sup>

## Immigration and Transit Migration

While Morocco is generally known as a typical emigration country, since the mid 1990s it has also developed into a destination and transit zone of migrants coming from sub-Saharan, mainly West African, countries. While Morocco has received limited numbers of student migrants and highly-skilled workers from sub-Saharan countries such as Senegal, Mali and Zaire, immigration remained very limited in the post-independence era.

This changed after the mid 1990s, when more and more trans-Saharan migrants started to migrate to Morocco, often in an attempt to cross the Mediterranean from the Moroccan coastline. Initially, this flow from sub-Saharan Africa seemed to be a reaction to political turmoil and civil war affecting several West African countries and the concomitant economic decline in

regional destination countries such as Côte d'Ivoire. In particular the anti-immigrant backlash occurring in Libya since 2000 has encouraged more and more sub-Saharan migrants working there to join the flow of Moroccans and other Maghrebis who already started migrating illegally to southern Europe from the early 1990s.

However, it is a misunderstanding that all sub-Saharan migrants migrate to Morocco to cross to Europe. An increas-

ing number of sub-Saharan migrants work or pursue studies in Morocco, sometimes as a means to gain residency status. In 2005, 25,000 African migrants were *legally* residing in Morocco, and their numbers seem to be increasing.<sup>14</sup> Another 28,000 Europeans were officially residing in Morocco in 2005, including an increasing number of French retirement migrants settling in cities such as Marrakech. Because this only reflects the number of official African and European residents, the real number of people living on Morocco soil is likely to be substantially higher and, by all accounts, growing.

## Irregular Migration

Until Italy and Spain introduced visa requirements in 1990 and 1991, respectively, Moroccans could enter easily as tourists, after which many of them overstayed and became *de facto* undocumented migrants. As in northwest Europe, the establishment of visa requirements has led to an increasing reliance on undocumented migration. The long coastlines of Spain and Italy make it relatively easy to enter those countries illegally. There is a persistent demand for unskilled labour in Europe, especially in the relatively large informal sectors of southern European countries and of Italy, in particular.

On several occasions since the late 1980s, Italian and Spanish governments were compelled to grant legal status to almost two hundred thousand undocumented Moroccan migrants, through successive legalisation campaigns.<sup>15</sup> Italy and particularly Spain have now taken over the position of France as the primary destinations for new Moroccan labour migrants. Between 1980 and 2004, the combined Moroccan population officially residing in Spain and Italy skyrocketed from about 20,000 to 550,000.

While large numbers of Moroccans have migrated irregularly to Europe over the past decades, regular and irregular migration of migrants from sub-Saharan Africa to and through Morocco has been increasing since the late 1990s. Most irregular migrants enter Morocco from Algeria, at the border east of Oujda, after they have crossed the Sahara overland, usually through Niger. Once in Morocco, they attempt to cross to Europe by sea or try to enter the Spanish cities of Ceuta and Melilla on the northern Moroccan coast by scaling the tall border fences separating these enclaves from Morocco. In September 2005, at least five people died and more than 40 were injured in just such a massive border-crossing attempt in Ceuta. A substantial proportion of migrants failing or not trying to enter Europe prefer to settle in Morocco on a more long-term basis, rather than returning to their more unstable and substantially poorer home countries. Although lacking residency status and, therefore, vulnerable to exploitation, they sometimes manage to find jobs in specific niches in the informal service sector, tourism, petty trade, construction and agriculture.

Although this is a new phenomenon, it is important to counter images of a huge flood of African immigrants threatening to swamp the Maghreb and Europe. The number of sub-Saharan migrants is still relatively limited compared to the sizeable Moroccan emigrant population. Each year, not more than some tens of thousands of sub-Saharan migrants are believed to

attempt to migrate to Europe illegally, while the number of sub-Saharan irregular migrants and refugees living in Morocco is currently estimated to be much higher.<sup>16</sup> Sub-Saharan irregular migrants face substantial xenophobia and aggressive Moroccan and Spanish police and border authorities. Since most of them have no legal status, they are vulnerable to social and economic marginalization.

Since the 1990s, Morocco has been put under increasing pressure by EU countries to introduce more restrictive immigration policies and to increase border controls. In 2003, Morocco passed new immigration laws that institute severe punishments for participation in or assisting irregular immigration and human smuggling. According to critics, these new laws, which criminalize irregular migration, show that Morocco and Tunisia are bowing to pressure from the EU to play the role of Europe's "police".<sup>17</sup> Although the new Moroccan law makes reference to relevant international conventions and seems to be a nominal improvement, migrants' and refugees' rights are often ignored in practice. Morocco is also under pressure to institute tougher immigration and visa rules for sub-Saharan Africans. Moroccan police forces have regularly conducted raids in migrant neighbourhoods and brought irregular migrants to the Algerian borders where they are left to their fate.

To reduce immigration flows from Morocco, the EU is also seeking to boost Morocco's development. In 1996, Morocco signed the European Mediterranean Association Agreement (EMAA) with the EU, Morocco's most important trading partner. This should lead to the establishment of a free trade area in 2010. The EU's support for Morocco's economic transition is mainly implemented through the MEDA (*Mesures d'Accompagnement* or Accompanying Measures) program, which aims to increase competitiveness by developing the private sector and promoting good governance. Significant funds from the MEDA program target the stated goal of immigration reduction. The EU is putting increasing emphasis on collaboration with Maghreb states on border control and readmission.

However, all of these policies have done little to decrease migration. Instead of reducing migration, intensified border controls have led to a rise in irregular migration, diverted migration routes, and increased the risks, costs, and suffering on the part of the migrants involved. In brief, policies to "fight illegal migration" seem bound to fail because they are among the very causes of the phenomenon they presume to combat.

## Immigration and Integration Policy

Since independence, Morocco has generally facilitated the immigration of students and professionals as well as spouses and children of Moroccan citizens. Until the mid-1990s the presence of sub-Saharan migrants in Morocco and Tunisia remained largely limited to relatively small numbers of students, traders, professional workers, athletes and some refugees, mainly from francophone West African countries as well as Gabon and the Democratic Republic of Congo (former Zaire). Morocco has an active policy of inviting a quota of students from befriended African nations to study at Moroccan universities. Several African countries are exempted from visa programmes. Morocco



has no active integration policy, and most forms of immigration are officially seen as temporary.

## Emigration policy

Throughout the post-independence period, the Moroccan state has considered migration not only as a “safety valve” to prevent political tensions in Berber areas, but also as a tool for national economic development. From the onset of migration, the Moroccan state has attempted to maintain tight control of migrant communities in Europe by explicitly addressing migrants as its subjects and, until the early 1990s, actively discouraging their integration into the receiving countries, including by naturalisation. The government sent Moroccan teachers and imams abroad and provided education on the Arabic language and Moroccan culture to migrants’ children, to prevent integration and alienation, which was also perceived as endangering vital remittance transfers (see following section).

Through a control apparatus consisting of Moroccan embassies, consulates, mosques and state-created offices for migrants such as the “Amicales”, Moroccan migrants were discouraged from establishing independent organisations, joining trade unions or political parties in the countries that the Moroccan state considered merely as their temporary place of residence. This policy served two purposes. First, the state wanted to prevent Moroccan migrants from organising themselves politically and thereby becoming a potential factor of opposition “from outside”. Second, as it was perceived as endangering the vital remittance transfers, integration was to be avoided.

These policies were increasingly criticised, not only by the governments of destination countries, which saw them running against their integration policies, but also in Morocco as awareness rose that these policies alienated migrant population from state institutions rather than binding them. The failure of these “remote control” policies and an ominous stagnation in remittances prompted the Moroccan state to change course over the 1990s by adopting a more positive attitude. Along with the

partial dismantling of the control apparatus in Europe, this has meant an increasingly favourable attitude towards naturalization, dual citizenship and voting rights for migrants abroad.

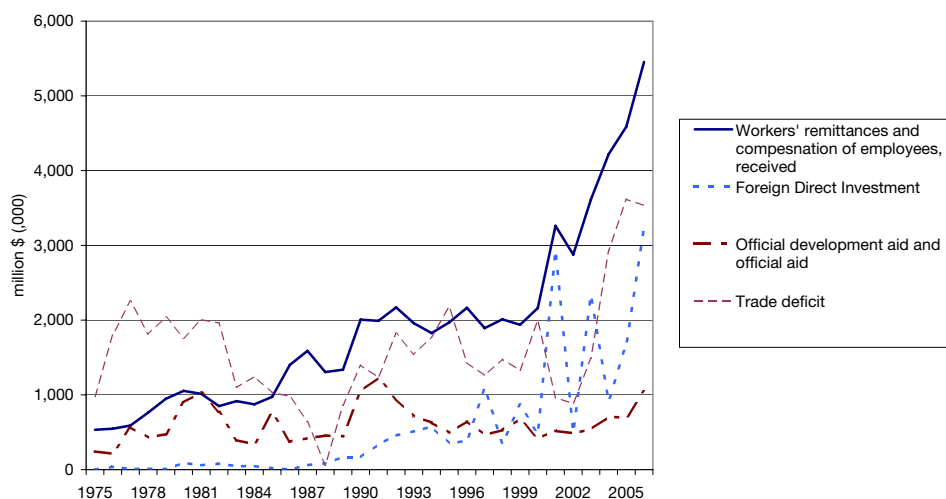
Superficially, past repression has been replaced by the active courting of the rapidly-expanding Moroccan Diaspora. Along with policies to facilitate holiday returns, remittances and the co-opting of former exiles by inviting them to take up official positions, the state adopted a positive attitude towards migrants acquiring double citizenship and their integration into receiving societies. This has apparently contributed to spectacular increases in remittances and holiday visits. However, these targeted policies could only be successful because of continuing emigration and because they were an integral part of a more general political liberalisation process, which has changed the attitude of the state towards Moroccan citizens in general. At the same time, this reform has been only partial and the Moroccan state has not given up a number of instruments to control emigrants. This is most evident in its systematic opposition to emigrants relinquishing Moroccan citizenship.

In 1990, a ministry for Moroccans residing abroad was created and the Moroccan government established the *Fondation Hassan II pour les Marocains Résidant à l'Étranger*. The aim of this foundation is to foster and reinforce the links between Moroccan migrants and Morocco through assisting them in various ways, both while in Europe and during their summer holidays in Morocco, and to inform and guide migrants on investment opportunities. These coincided with a more general liberalization of Moroccan society through the 1990s. Increasing civil liberties also meant more freedom among migrants to establish organizations such as Berber, “home town,” and aid associations.<sup>18</sup>

Recently, the Moroccan state has put effort into creating the *Conseil Supérieur de la Communauté Marocaine à l'Étranger* (CSCME), the High-Level Council for the Moroccan Community living Abroad. The *Conseil Consultatif des Droits de l'Homme* (CCDH), a consultative council created in 1994 to advise the King on human rights issues, plays an increasingly important role in this process. In 2003 a special commission on the human

rights of emigrants was created, comprising (appointed) representatives from emigrant communities.<sup>19</sup> In November 2006, extensive consultations were initiated in preparation for the creation of the CSCME. The 37 members of the council were formally appointed by King Mohammed VI in 2008.

**Figure 4: Remittances, foreign direct investment and aid to Morocco, 1975-2006**



Source: World Development Indicators

## Remittances

For Moroccans, surging remittances from family and friends abroad have been a vital tool for poverty alleviation and a potential source of investment capital. Through the development of an efficient banking system, as well as macro-economic stability, Morocco has been relatively successful in directing

remittances through official channels. Notwithstanding some slumps, remittances surged from 200 million dirham (US\$ 23 million) in 1968 to over 18.5 billion dirham (US\$ 2.1 billion) in 1992. After an ominous stagnation throughout the 1990s at levels of around US\$ 2.3 billion, remittances surged after 2001 (with a minor slump in 2002), reaching the unprecedented level of US\$ 4.2 billion in 2004 and an estimated US\$ 5.6 billion in 2006.<sup>20</sup>

Although part of the upswing is likely the effect of the devaluation of the US dollar combined with better registration of activities, there is little doubt that there has also been a real increase in remittances. Between 2001 and 2006, official remittances only represented 7.4% of the gross national product (GNP) and their value was equal to a large share of Morocco's trade deficit. Officially registered private remittances significantly exceed the value of direct foreign investments, which are also much more unstable. Until 2005, they also exceeded the receipts from tourism. Remittance revenues dwarf those of phosphates, Morocco's primary export commodity.<sup>21</sup>

The increase in remittances is partly linked to the enormous increase in the number of Moroccans returning during the summer holidays, which testifies to the strong social links between emigrants and their families in Morocco. According to a recent survey, three quarters of the international migrants have visited Morocco at least once in the past two years. Moroccan government sources claim that over 2.2 million migrants and 580,000 cars crossed the Strait of Gibraltar between 15 June and 15 September 2003. In 2006, the total number of holiday visits by migrants and their descendants had increased to about three million.<sup>22</sup>

Over the past two decades, remittances have proved to be a substantially higher and less volatile source of foreign exchange than either official development assistance (ODA) or foreign direct investment (FDI), and have become a vital element in sustaining Morocco's balance of payments (see figure 3). Although there is disappointment at the low propensity among migrants to start enterprises, remittance expenditure and numerous investments in housing and small businesses by migrants have actually substantially improved living conditions, contributed to poverty reduction and boosted economic activities in several migrant-sending areas.<sup>23</sup>

Available empirical studies suggest that migration and remittances have considerably improved living conditions, income, education and spurred economic activity through agricultural, real estate and business investment, from which non-migrants indirectly profit. This has led to the rapid growth of migrant boomtowns and has transformed migrant-sending regions such as the Rif, Sous and several southern oases into relatively prosperous areas that now attract internal migrants from other, poorer areas.<sup>24</sup>

However, the developmental potential of migration has not been fully realized due to several investment constraints such as uncertainty concerning property rights, corruption, bureaucracy, market failure and an overall lack of faith in the Moroccan state. Migration and remittances may enable people to retreat from, as much as to invest in, local economic activities, depending on the specific investment environment. Positive development impacts of remittances are more prevalent in relatively

central, relatively prosperous regions and towns where most migrants allocate their investments or return to, whereas more marginal rural areas might be confronted with de-investment or even depopulation. Paradoxically, therefore, a certain level of development in migrant-sending regions seems to be a prerequisite for return and investment rather than a consequence of migration.

## Citizenship

Moroccan citizenship law is based on *jus sanguinis*, or descent. In principle, Moroccan citizenship is automatically acquired by birth from at least one Moroccan parent. With the introduction of a new family law in the early 2000s, Moroccan *women* are now also able to pass on their citizenship to their children. For foreign nationals, it is generally very difficult to acquire Moroccan citizenship. Moroccan citizenship law gives some groups the right to acquire Moroccan citizenship, such as children born in Morocco to foreign parents or female spouses of Moroccans and persons who have rendered "exceptional services" to Morocco.

Because Moroccan citizenship is practically inalienable, it is almost impossible for emigrants to relinquish citizenship, and Moroccan citizenship is automatically passed on to the second and even third generations. This means that Moroccans obtaining citizenship of their country of settlement cannot relinquish their Moroccan nationality, so that they automatically acquire dual citizenship.

The Moroccan state tries to strike a delicate balance between courting and controlling the expanding Moroccan Diaspora. The fundamental idea remains that Moroccan citizens abroad and their descendants are ultimately subjects of the Moroccan King. The authoritarian relationship between the Moroccan state and Moroccan migrants is also revealed by the paradoxical fact that the more positive, less repressive attitudes of the Moroccan state vis-à-vis its emigrants were only made possible through general policy reforms unilaterally decided upon by the King, the fact that the idea of extending voting rights for Moroccan citizens abroad has apparently been discarded without debate in parliament, and the fact that the future *Conseil Supérieur de la Communauté marocaine à l'étranger* (CSCME) contains non-elected members nominated by the King,

The main shift since 1990 has been a growing awareness within the Moroccan state apparatus that migrants' social and economic integration into destination countries does not have to undermine their contribution to Morocco's development. It has realised that efforts to counter migrants' integration abroad are rather counter productive. There has been an interesting reversal of perspectives and policy analysis. Economic and political integration is now considered to be a desirable development, because correctly-positioned migrants can play a key role in attracting investment and stimulating trade. More prosperous and integrated migrants are also in a better position to send larger sums of money to family and friends in Morocco. This reflects a shift in thinking in which the development contribution of migrants is not forcibly linked to return migration,

as it has become increasingly clear that transnationally oriented and integrated migrants are perfectly able to engage with their countries of origin without necessarily returning.

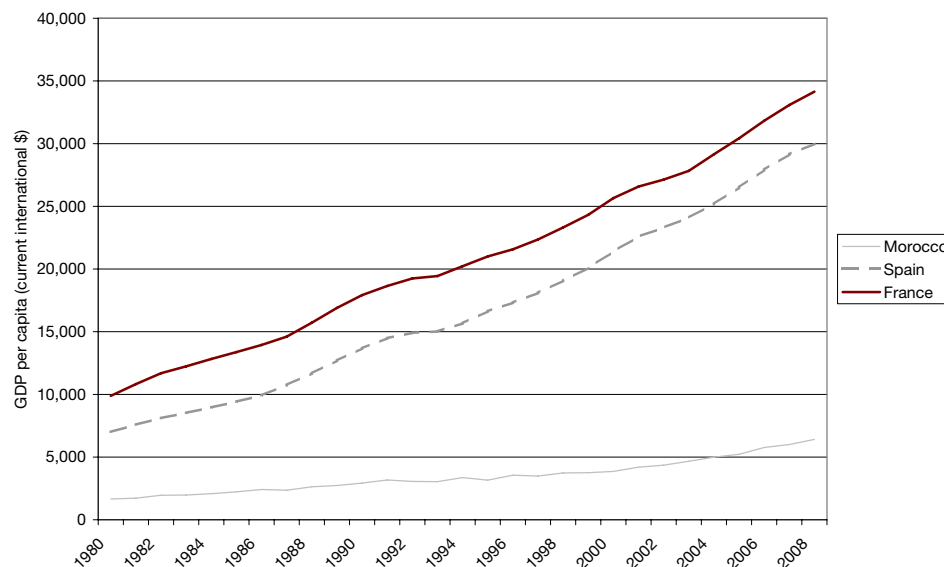
Furthermore, political participation of Moroccan descendants in the destination countries is now encouraged instead of discouraged, because they can contribute to a more positive image of Moroccans abroad and is seen as potentially furthering Morocco's international interests. This shows that politically mobilised emigrants are increasingly considered a potential political instrument rather than a threat.

On several occasions, attempts by the Moroccan state to export its sovereignty and national ideology in order to foster links with migrant communities have created conflicts with politicians and governments of European receiving countries. For instance, sending Moroccan teachers abroad for classes in Arabic language and Moroccan culture has been seen by certain European politicians as an obstacle to integration, and remains controversial. Moreover, Morocco's opposition to the relinquishing of Moroccan citizenship by migrants and their descendants is seen by some European politicians and governments as running counter to their integration policies.

Tensions on such issues have been particularly high with the Dutch government, for example. Besides refusing to incorporate Moroccan-paid teachers into its national education system, it refused to institutionalise its relations with the Moroccan religious authorities by allowing Imams sent and paid by the Moroccan government into the country. In 2004, the Dutch government decided to abolish 'own language and culture' classes. In the same year, the Dutch Minister for Integration and Immigration requested the Moroccan ambassador in the Netherlands to stop the practice of automatically granting Moroccan citizenship to Moroccan descendants. This was part of her efforts to abolish dual citizenship as a means to further migrants' integration. The Moroccan authorities refused this request, which they perceived as unwanted interference in Morocco's internal affairs. In 2005, the Dutch government officially requested the Moroccan state to enable Moroccans to renounce their citizenship as of the third generation, a request which was also refused.<sup>25</sup>

In 2006, right-wing Members of Parliament (MPs) publicly questioned the national loyalty of Khadija Arib, a Dutch Labour Party MP who is also one of the two Dutch-Moroccan members of the migration working-group of the CCDH. They argued that membership of this working-group, which advises the Moroccan King, is incompatible with her membership in the Dutch parliament because of conflicting loyalties and that she therefore had to choose. In Belgium, Fatiha Saidi, an MP for the Socialist Party declined an invitation to become member of the CCDH migration working-group because she did not want to

**Figure 5: GDP per capita, PPP (current international \$), 1980-2008, Morocco, France, Spain**



Source: World Development Indicators (World Bank)

work for institutions belonging to two different states.

While revealing a growing gap between official policies and the de facto transnational nature of the life and activities of many migrants, such examples also indicate the potentially conflicting sovereignty claims made by the Moroccan and European states.

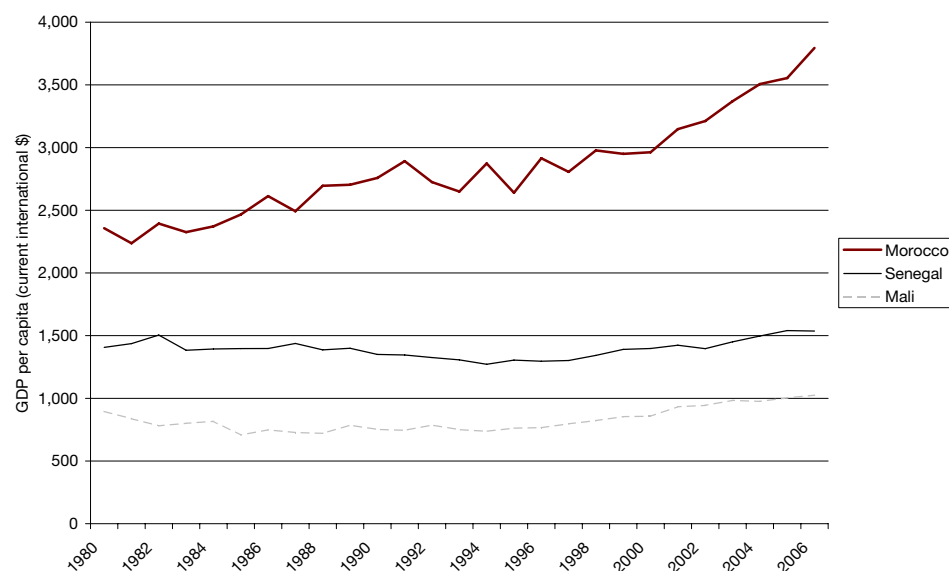
## Refuge and Asylum

An unknown proportion of sub-Saharan migrants in Morocco have escaped persecution or life-threatening circumstances. According to a recent empirical study, the percentage of migrants in Morocco that would require humanitarian protection varies from 10-20% under the strict application of the 1951 refugee Convention definition, to 70-80% under more generous humanitarian measures.<sup>26</sup> It is sometimes difficult to make a sharp distinction between political and economic migrants, because individual motivations are often complex, mixed and may change over time. Some migrants who set out with primarily economic motivations may become less voluntary migrants along the way when exploited by employers, arbitrarily imprisoned, maltreated, and stripped of their remaining assets by North African police or border guards.

However, the Moroccan state tends to consider virtually all sub-Saharan immigrants in Morocco as "economic migrants" on their way to Europe. This means asylum-seekers are commonly rejected at the border or deported as "illegal economic immigrants" even though Morocco is party to the 1951 Geneva Convention and has a formal system for adjudicating asylum applications, which is, however, barely functional. Until recently, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) kept a low profile in Morocco and protection was not thought to be available among refugees and asylum seekers.<sup>27</sup>



**Figure 6: GDP per capita, PPP (current international \$), 1980-2008, Morocco, Senegal, Mali**



Source: World Development Indicators (World Bank)

Under the influence of increasing immigration, UNHCR has recently been seeking to expand its operations in Morocco. However, state authorities often do not cooperate, continue to deport asylum seekers, and generally refuse to grant residency and other rights to refugees recognized by UNHCR. Human rights organisations have therefore argued that European states such as Spain and Italy risk seriously compromising the principle of *non-refoulement* by swiftly deporting African migrants and asylum-seekers to Morocco (and Libya) where their protection is not guaranteed.<sup>28</sup>

It has therefore been argued that Europe's policy to externalise border controls towards countries with poor human rights records and inadequate refugee protection may potentially jeopardize the rights and security of the migrants, including asylum-seekers and refugees.<sup>29</sup>

However, in 2007 the Moroccan government signed an *accord de siège* with UNHCR giving them full-fledged representation in Morocco.<sup>30</sup> This might signify a gradual improvement of the situation of asylum-seekers and refugees in Morocco. By the end of 2007, 786 refugees recognised by UNHCR were living in Morocco and 671 asylum seekers had their cases pending with UNHCR. However, even refugees recognised as such are generally not granted residency status by the Moroccan authorities. Therefore, they also lack rights to employment, education, and health care.

## Future Challenges

Morocco's medium-term migration potential fundamentally depends on future economic growth and the extent to which recent increases in civic liberties are sustained and real democratization occurs. Income gaps between Morocco and European destination countries have actually increased over the past decades (see figure 5), and such sustained opportu-

nity differentials are likely to fuel future migration. However, a combination of demographic and economic factors could potentially decrease the emigration potential of Morocco in the longer run.

After years of high population growth, future demographic developments will see some changes. The popular perception that a country like Morocco region will remain an almost infinite pool of young, unemployed migrants ready to move to Europe as soon as they are presented with the opportunity ignores the fact that Morocco has achieved spectacular reductions in fertility, which plummeted from around 7.1 in 1965 (at the onset of guestworker migration to Europe) to 2.5 by 2000.

If the current trend continues, and the Moroccan economy keeps on growing, the unique demographic

"window of opportunity" offered to the next generations entering the labour market bearing an exceptionally light demographic burden may well result in a rapidly decreasing emigration potential over the coming decades. This may also make Morocco more attractive as a migration destination, which is likely to coincide with increasing immigration and settlement from sub-Saharan Africa. It seems that, in Morocco, this latter process has already been set in motion with mounting trans-Saharan (overland) immigration from Sub-Saharan countries.

However, if current reforms and economic growth are not sustained, Morocco's migration hump may be extended or transformed into a semi-permanent situation of sustained out-migration. Although this primarily depends on domestic political factors, the implementation and effects of Morocco's association and free trade agreements with the EU will play a fundamental role too.

At the same time, it would be naive to expect that the presence and settlement of sub-Saharan migrants in Morocco is a temporary phenomenon. Rather, it is likely that these communities will grow in large Moroccan cities, facilitated by reduced travel costs, the attraction of Moroccan private and public universities and vocational schools, and increased demand for low and high-skilled migrant labour. This phenomenon also exemplifies the importance of *relative* deprivation in explaining migration: while Moroccans themselves still wish to migrate to Europe, Morocco can be a comparatively stable and wealthy country for sub-Saharan migrants. For instance, in 2006 per capita GDP in Morocco (corrected for purchasing power parity) was 2.5 times higher than in Senegal and 3.7 times higher than in Mali (see figure 6). Large gaps between Morocco and sub-Saharan countries also exist with regard to fertility.

This might herald an era of increasing African migration to, and settlement in, Morocco, and the coexistence of immigration and emigration typical of 'transitional' countries. Interestingly, this migration transition might well restore Morocco's historical

function as a bridge between sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa and Europe.

#### Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> See de Haas (2005).
- <sup>2</sup> See de Haas (2003) as well as Lightfoot and Miller (1996).
- <sup>3</sup> See Büchner (1986) as well as Fadlullah, Berrada and Khachani (2000).
- <sup>4</sup> See Bidwell (1973).
- <sup>5</sup> See Collyer (2004) and Shadid (1979).
- <sup>6</sup> See Muus (1995).
- <sup>7</sup> See Kenbib (1999).
- <sup>8</sup> See de Haas (2007b).
- <sup>9</sup> See Lievens (1999) and Reniers (2001).
- <sup>10</sup> See Huntoon (1998).
- <sup>11</sup> See Fargues (2005).
- <sup>12</sup> See de Haas (2007d).
- <sup>13</sup> See Fargues (2005).
- <sup>14</sup> See Fargues (2005) and Berriane (2007).
- <sup>15</sup> See Sandell (2006).
- <sup>16</sup> See Alioua (2005).
- <sup>17</sup> See Belguendouz (2005).
- <sup>18</sup> See de Haas (2007a).
- <sup>19</sup> See Belguendouz (2006).
- <sup>20</sup> Source: World Development Indicators database (World Bank).
- <sup>21</sup> See de Haas and Plug (2006).
- <sup>22</sup> See de Haas (2007a).
- <sup>23</sup> See Berriane (1996) and Teto (2001).
- <sup>24</sup> See de Haas (2007c).
- <sup>25</sup> See Belguendouz (2006).
- <sup>26</sup> See Collier (2006). It should be mentioned that his sample was not designed to be representative and is likely to be biased towards refugees and asylum-seekers.
- <sup>27</sup> See Lindstrom (2002).
- <sup>28</sup> See de Haas (2007d).
- <sup>29</sup> Lutterbeck (2006).
- <sup>30</sup> See de Haas (2007d).

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