

Euro-Mediterranean Migration Dynamics: The Role of the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean Countries

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The Mediterranean is one of the regions most affected by migration issues due to its specificities as a border region separating two sides of an area characterized by strong asymmetries in levels of development.

The severity of migration issues for the countries of the Mediterranean Basin, especially those on the southern and eastern shores (southern and eastern Mediterranean countries or SEMCs) has taken on an unprecedented scale, especially since the events of the “Arab Spring.” The uncontrolled dynamics of the illegal migration flows hoping to make it to Europe has placed the stability of the entire region in danger, especially in 2015.

The diverse policies pursued by the SEMCs, whether deliberately or as a result of mechanisms agreed with the European Union, is an encouraging step. But these policies are far from effective for reasons having to do with both the SEMCs themselves and their largest partner, the European Union. Nevertheless, it would be unfair to disparage all the policies implemented by certain southern Mediterranean countries. Some have been successful in terms of absorbing the migration shock and transforming the challenges it poses into a development dividend for the sake of stability and regional prosperity. This would be the case of the prospects of Morocco’s new immigration and asylum policy.

In any event, the transition to a new approach to migration governance that integrates the national, re-

gional and international levels is the only option to provide substantive responses to the problem of illegal immigration, which raises issues with a strong impact on stability and the Euro-Mediterranean area.

The Mediterranean: A Region Strongly Affected by Migration

At present, the international debate on migration is highly controversial, pitting those who continue to defend the virtues of mobility as a source of growth and cultural enrichment against those who focus instead on the economic, social and security risks that mobility entails.

The Mediterranean, considered one of the main international migration corridors, is particularly concerned by these issues. Whilst European countries’ migration policies were once marked by their openness and incentivizing nature, they have gradually hardened and today seem to prioritize selective or chosen immigration aimed at meeting skilled labour needs.

This reversal in the trend is due to several cyclical and structural factors. The challenging economic situation in some host countries and the uncontrollable scale of illegal immigration to Europe have further rekindled xenophobic tensions and led several countries on the northern shore to make security considerations the main determinant of their migration policies, both within and outside their borders.

The sociopolitical transformations that some MENA countries have experienced, as well as the persistence of areas of tension in Africa, largely explain this situation. In addition to these factors, the migration dynamics are also due to the environmental crisis affecting many countries throughout the Mediterranean and sub-Saharan Africa.

Recent data on irregular migration flows in the Mediterranean¹ show a clear decline, especially with regard to the eastern route, which, in 2015, reached alarming proportions (more than 800,000 irregular arrivals) before returning to very moderate levels of around 23,000 arrivals in 2018. The flows along the central route remain dynamic, albeit with a downward trend, averaging 150,000 arrivals a year between 2015 and 2018.

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Whilst the activity along these two routes seems to be gradually declining, activity along the western route has increased somewhat, as evidenced by the rise in the number of arrivals, which grew from nearly 7,000 in 2015 to 23,143 in 2017 and 56,644 in 2018.

A Complex Migration Problem Due to the Multidimensional Nature of the Issues Involved

Due to their multidimensional nature, migratory phenomena in the Mediterranean pose complex questions for both countries of origin and transit and host countries. The main issues can be summarized as follows:

- *At the legal and regulatory level:* national and international regulations on migration are not fully aligned. Several host countries continue to put national considerations at the centre of their migration policy even as the bilateral agreements concluded remain marked by strong asymmetries that do not take into account the priorities of the countries of origin and transit, some of which have become host countries as well.

- *At the economic level:* Migrants' contribution to host countries' economic growth is widely recognized. Amongst other things, it makes it possible to fill the host countries' labour shortages due to their aging populations. For the countries of origin, migrants' remittances play an important role in the external financial balances and contribute to the dynamics of domestic demand. This virtuous circle is today constrained by several factors related, especially, to the difficulties of integrating migrants into the host countries due to the rise in xenophobia and the costs borne by the countries of origin in terms of brain drain.
- *At the security level:* The strong interconnection between terrorist groups and trafficking networks involved in illegal immigration and human trafficking is a serious threat. Certain critical areas, such as the Sahel, have become fertile ground for illegal migration activities that are highly profitable for the terrorist groups operating in the region. At the same time, they offer them opportunities to recruit new candidates for illegal immigration, who generally have few prospects and, therefore, are vulnerable to indoctrination.
- *At the environmental level:* The forced displacement of populations due to the impact of climate change is an emerging form of migration which could grow more intense in the future, especially in countries with a severely limited ability to adapt. This situation poses major legal challenges, not only in terms of recognition by the international community of the status of climate refugee, but also in terms of cooperation policy aimed at developing the resilience of countries vulnerable to climate change.

Policies Implemented by SEMCs, Whose Effectiveness Is Far from Satisfactory

To address the multiple challenges caused by the growing migratory pressures they face, SEMCs have resorted to several mechanisms. They are essentially

¹ Council of the European Union, "EU migration policy." Retrieved on 15 May 2019. www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/migratory-pressures/.

the product of cooperation agreements² concluded on a bilateral basis with the European Union to counter illegal immigration flows, whether involving their own nationals or those from neighbouring regions. These agreements include, amongst other things, measures to strengthen border control and for the systematic exchange of information, as well as the implementation of certain humanitarian actions.

The policies pursued by the SEMCs to combat irregular migration are constrained by the inherent limits of their development model

An assessment of the effectiveness and efficiency of the mechanisms put into place by the SEMCs suggests that the outcomes achieved to date fall far short of the expected goals. Several factors corroborate this assertion:

- The continuous influx of irregular migrants is itself proof of the ineffectiveness of the measures taken to address it. In addition to the poor economic performance and growing social exclusion of certain age groups, particularly young people, the lack of negotiating power of the countries of origin hardly helps create the right conditions to tackle this phenomenon according to a holistic and integrated vision.
- The situation of pervasive instability in some SEMCs complicates the phenomenon of irregular migration by creating alternative pathways that are almost impossible to control. The limited capabilities of sending countries or transit countries such as Libya, plagued by an acute internal crisis, hinder the process of combatting the illegal immigration networks that take advantage of failed and vulnerable states.

- Most policies are not part of a comprehensive framework. The Sahel region is a major source of migrants and fertile ground for several criminal organizations. With the exception of Morocco, which has embarked on a renewed migration policy that takes this problem into account, the other countries still have a long way to go to develop policies to integrate the sub-Saharan context as a key parameter for reabsorption in the migration equation.
- The policies pursued by the SEMCs to combat irregular migration are constrained by the inherent limits of their development model, which suffers from several imbalances:
 - Growth rates remain insufficient and subject to the vagaries of the international situation. This is in addition to weaknesses in terms of job creation, especially for young people, who are the main candidates to emigrate.
 - Social inequalities are exacerbated by the decline in government support for basic social sectors as a result of pressure from international financial institutions, which impose socially demanding reforms in exchange for their financial support for SEMCs facing economic difficulties.
 - The risks raised by the aggravation of environmental and water imbalances (recurring droughts, water scarcity, alteration of agricultural ecosystems, etc.) push populations located in fragile zones into forced mobility, first to major cities and, then, to Europe, on makeshift boats.

Morocco's Experience with Migration Governance: Strengths and Weaknesses

Due to its geographical position at the gateway to Europe, Morocco is strongly affected by migration issues. Once a country of origin of illegal immigration and a transit point for sub-Saharan immigration to

² The EU has chosen to conclude cooperation agreements with the refugees' countries of transit and/or origin. The readmission agreements in force with "third" states are not a new approach in the history of European migration policies. The case of the EU and Turkey is the most illustrative. An agreement was concluded on 18 March 2016 with Turkey to halt migration flows in the Aegean Sea in exchange for financial support amounting to 3 billion euros and greater facilities for the granting of visas to Turks. That said, in the particular case of Syrians, this so-called bartering mechanism follows a one-for-one rule: for every Syrian returned to Turkey, another Syrian who has already obtained refugee status from the UNHCR will be resettled in Europe. This agreement has significantly contributed to the decline in migration flows along the eastern route.

Europe, it has increasingly become a host country for migrants. The hardening of Europe's migration policy and the country's own opening towards Africa, consecrated in January 2017 by the Kingdom's return to its institutional family, are the two factors that explain this situation.

In advocating a comprehensive and integrated approach that takes both human and security considerations into account, Morocco has chosen a migration policy with a human face. This is evidenced by its adoption, in 2013, of a new immigration and asylum strategy³ that resulted in the regularization of the situation of nearly 23,096 immigrants in late 2014.⁴ More recently, a second regularization operation was launched on 15 December 2016, according to more flexible criteria than the first wave.⁵ As a result of this operation, 20,000 applications (out of a total of 28,400), representing 113 nationalities⁶ were granted through late October 2018, 48% of which corresponded to women.

The overweighting of security considerations to curb the risks and threats of migration has revealed its limits

These regularization operations were transmitted through measures promoting access by migrants to the health and education systems under the same conditions as Moroccan citizens. Likewise, Morocco has opened the doors of its Office of Vocational Training and Employment Promotion (OFPPT from the French) to migrants whose status has been regularized to allow them to receive qualifying training and boost their chances of finding decent work. With regard to access to housing, the 2015 Finance Act provided for the possibility for regular migrants to

take advantage of state-subsidized housing under the same conditions as nationals.

Notwithstanding the positive nature of Morocco's approach to adopting a flexible migration policy for African nationals, it is certainly not devoid of risk, for the following main reasons:

- The efforts to integrate sub-Saharan migrants face cultural and socioeconomic constraints, albeit tacit and sporadic ones, that could grow should xenophobic behaviour take root.
- The succession of regularization operations could be a pull factor for other potential migrants, overwhelming the country's absorption capacity and posing significant socioeconomic and security challenges.
- The stabilizing effect of the policy of regularizing sub-Saharan migrants could be a temporary fix rather than a perfect substitute for the initial plan to migrate to Europe. That risk would jeopardize the strength of Morocco's regional and international commitments in this area, forcing it to adopt less flexible positions on migration management.

Towards Efficient Migration Governance that Better Addresses the Mutual Interests of Both Shores of the Mediterranean

Given the severity of the migration issues and the associated multifaceted threats, the use of new approaches to the regulation and governance of migration between the two shores of the Mediterranean is inevitable.

These new approaches are justified by several considerations that reflect both the inefficiency of security measures alone to guarantee a lasting solution to the phenomenon of irregular immigration and the inability of the countries of origin, some of which have

³ This strategy is a logical continuation of the report prepared by the National Human Rights Council entitled "Étrangers et droits de l'Homme au Maroc: Pour une politique d'asile et d'immigration radicalement nouvelle" (Foreigners and Human Rights in Morocco: For a Dramatically New Asylum and Immigration Policy). It is broken down into four strategic objectives: facilitate the integration of regular immigrants, update the regulatory framework, put an appropriate institutional framework into place, and manage the migratory flows whilst respecting human rights.

⁴ Politique nationale d'immigration et d'asile. Rapport 2018- MDCMREAM: Ministère délégué chargé des Marocains résidant à l'étranger et des affaires de la migration.

⁵ See: Discours Royal du 20 août 2016 à l'occasion de la Fête de la Révolution du Roi et du Peuple.

⁶ Communiqué du CNDH. www.cndh.org.ma/fr/communiqués/la-commission-nationale-de-recours-de-la-deuxieme-operation-de-regularisation-assouplit.

also become host countries, to implement appropriate policies to eradicate this scourge and substantially limit its human and security costs.

The Imperative to Promote a Common and Shared Perception of Migration Issues Far Removed from Political One-Upmanship

It is widely accepted today that the overweighting of security considerations to curb the risks and threats of migration has revealed its limits. The proliferation of maritime patrols, the sophistication of the means of technical control, the creation of immigrant identification and detention centres and even the conclusion of agreements with the countries of origin of the migration have helped to secure, to some extent, the EU's external borders. Nevertheless, the persistence of the phenomenon offers irrefutable proof that the efforts made attack the symptoms, rather than the root, of the problem. To overcome this constraint, knowledge of migratory phenomena in the Mediterranean must be strengthened in order to better understand and grasp the underlying causes. To this end, the implementation of a regional monitoring centre specialized in the study of all aspects of migration in the Mediterranean would be a strategic move. Endowed with the right human and material resources, such a structure could play a unifying role, coordinating the research efforts of research centres in the partner countries. The priority areas to be considered would include cross-disciplinary and prospective studies to strengthen proactive capabilities and propose innovative solutions to the identified problems based on international best practices in migration governance.

The Importance of Favouring Structural Approaches to Provide Substantive Responses to Migration Phenomena

Policies to combat illegal immigration in particular should be part of any human development approach to ensure conditions of economic and social stability in sending countries. To this end, priority should be given to changing the development models currently in place in these countries and to public and related policies to turn them into genuine levers for creating wealth and reducing all aspects of inequality. This effort to transform the development model will require major internal reforms. However, it will also

require substantial external support from European countries. This support should be centred on strengthening institutional capabilities and supporting economic and social development projects in the sending countries. Large-scale promotion of revenue-generating activities in disadvantaged areas is one of the actions needed to provide substantive responses to this thorny issue.

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The Opportunity to Promote Enhanced Subregional, Regional and Intercontinental Cooperation

The transition to a constructive migration policy would entail, above all, substantially strengthening the cooperation between the countries of the southern Mediterranean basin. These countries have an interest in setting aside their political differences to better address their common challenges. The countries of North Africa, one of the main outlets of irregular migration to Europe, should pool their resources and coordinate their efforts to enhance the effectiveness of their actions to dismantle human trafficking networks and to relentlessly combat terrorist organizations and transnational crime, whose connections with illegal immigration networks hardly need proving.

The bilateral approach pursued to date by the European Union in the fight against illegal immigration should be replaced by multilateral agreements bringing together all the envisaged measures under a coherent and unified mechanism. The simultaneous relaxation of procedures to promote regular and orderly migration that meets the needs of both shores of the Mediterranean would also be a very suitable policy. Of course, migration is not an exclusively Mediterranean phenomenon. It is fuelled by the dynamics of

the flows from sub-Saharan African countries. Today these flows are an additional pressure on North African countries in particular and heavily condition their ability to work towards better regulation of migration flows. To stabilize these flows and keep them at acceptable levels, it is crucial to focus efforts on supporting the political stability of the countries sending migrants and to encourage the implementation of revenue-generating socioeconomic projects.

Priority should likewise be given to support for climate change adaptation, which will ultimately be the main cause of forced displacements of African populations to North Africa and, from there, to Europe. Improving local populations' access to basic resources such as water and energy is an absolute priority, and rightly so.

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The Need to Involve Non-governmental Actors in the Design and Implementation of Policies to Combat Illegal Immigration

The fight against illegal immigration requires solidarity and collective ownership of the issues involved by all stakeholders. Consequently, the role of the media and of civil-society players is essential to support efforts to raise awareness, especially amongst people, with regard to the risks and dangers of illegal immigration. Civil-society associations that work with migration both in host countries and in countries of origin should be strongly supported. Citizen initiatives pursued under

the auspices of NGOs, through support for the creation of microenterprises and cooperatives, would not only highlight the value of local know-how and create revenue and jobs, but also give hope to the vulnerable segments of the population who view migration as the only way out.

Given their proximity to migrants, these associations could thus be an important channel for awareness raising, support and protection of migrants' fundamental rights, including migrants in irregular situations. They could also play a vital role in mitigating the impact of the increase in smuggling activities and in illegal organizations involved in human trafficking.

Conclusion

A key point on the cooperation agenda at the Mediterranean level, migration is of critical importance, drawing its substance from the interconnected issues associated with it. Its reduction to a mere security issue has, based on the evidence, been inconclusive and often counterproductive.

The big challenge is to transform the migration risk into a development opportunity. Achieving this goal requires a true paradigm shift that will turn the Mediterranean into an area of shared prosperity able to resolve the multiple divides separating the two shores. Taking the depth of Africa into account is also a priority to address the roots of the problem.

Whilst this new cooperation paradigm, which has yet to be built, fundamentally involves states, its efficient implementation will not be possible without the assistance of non-governmental organizations, which are clearly the enduring channels for "win-win" regional cooperation. Migration could be, in many ways, a powerful lever, enabling the Mediterranean to regain its leadership and attractiveness in the new geo-strategic balances that lie on the horizon.