

Morocco's Re-coded Approach towards Migration & Immigrants

It has been 70 years now since the creation of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), a body under the UN that regulates and facilitates migration, as well as investigates migration-related topics. Nevertheless, statistics on migration are shocking, with the number of migrants, emigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers rising exponentially, especially in the last two decades. The total number of migrants exceeds 280 million by mid-2021, which means 3.6% of the world population are living in other countries than their origins. To put it simply, one in every thirty people is a migrant.

The IOM defines a migrant as an “umbrella term reflecting the common lay understanding of a person who moves away from his or her place of usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons” (IOM, 2021). According to the UN's attached organization, there are 11 types of migration classification: mixed migration, urbanization and migration, environmental migration, family migration, forced migration or displacement, international students, irregular migration, labor migration, child and young migrants, older persons and migration, and return migration. Noting that every type has its own definition and current trends, this article will not discuss these differences, but rather shed light on the ways Morocco has dealt with and integrated its own policies towards migration and immigrants.

Migration Theory and Practice

Before looking at the Moroccan policies, let's recall the migration theory. Theories of migration fall into three main streams and major research on migration and development adopts at least one model to analyze migration patterns:

- ***Everett Lee's Theory of Migration:*** Lee's model of migration looks at push and pull factors plus intervening obstacles that would predict migration. Push factors induce people to leave a country or geographic area. Examples for push factors include few opportunities, discrimination, loss of wealth, war, and pandemic. Pull factors encourage people to move to a new country or area. Pull factors include job opportunities, better living conditions, attractive climate, and security. Both push and pull are economic, cultural, and environmental factors. As for intervening obstacles, they are factors that hold back or minimize migration. Obstacles may be cultural (such as language and racism) and environmental/physical (such as mountains and rivers). This theory works in the real world however it is not perfect as it does not consider human nature. Practically, this theory is still relevant at the current era.
- ***Duncan's Theory:*** O.D. Duncan (1899) in his seminal book 'The Theory and Consequences of Mobility of Farm Population' reasons why and how people migrate to seek farming and agricultural activities. He argued that there are microscopic and macroscopic active forces in the process of migration. These forces lie in: a) Economic and technical causes such as methods and structure of agricultural operations, changes occurring in the technique of agricultural production, and price situation; b) Social causes like policies regarding public land and production, development of transport and communication systems, and population growth; c) Personal causes, for instance, unsatisfied personal and family needs, views regarding neighbors, emotions of alienation; and d) Natural causes such as earthquake, droughts, floods, and an ongoing pandemic. Although this theory was developed in alignment with agriculture measure, is also valid for other measures.
- ***Guy Standing's Theory of Materialism:*** Standing (1981) built on the idea of Karl Marx's capitalism and examined migration and mobility from an economic lens. He asserted that migration is determined by the correlation of society's production, nature of wealth, and land ownership system. Before 1970s, migration took place in a collective way, such as a group of people that move to another country to work in farming or industrial sectors. For instance, Moroccan men migrated in large groups to work in mining in France in 1950s. Likewise, Turkish men migrated to Germany. However, with the ideas of modern capitalism, migration is large of individuals.

As far as this article is concerned, Lee's model of migration is not only projected but also recoded as the patterns of migration remain more or less the same but intervening obstacles have been sometimes mitigated, and most of the time some other obstacles emerge as politics and international security intervene in migration policies. Most recently, pandemic patterns have reshaped migration and migration

policies, things that called for recoding migration.

Key Numbers of Migration in Morocco

Fascinating is the geostrategic location of the Northern African kingdom as it connects Africa and Europe via the strait of Gibraltar. Morocco is the second African country with the most migrants after Egypt. Economically speaking, Morocco links almost two billion (23% of the world population) people which is a vast market that counts for \$2.6 trillion and \$17 trillion for Africa and Europe respectively. Furthermore, the economies of Africa and Europe together count for 18.4% of the world economy. These figures are vital for Morocco as a country where migration occurs three-fold: as a destination country for migrants coming from African countries, as a transit country whereby individuals cross to Europe or other destinations, and as a country that sends its citizens to other hosting countries mainly France, Spain, Italy, Netherlands, and Arab countries.

The number of migrants has increased in the last two decades everywhere around the globe. However, Europe remains as the top receiving region. Migrants to Europe increased from 49.6 million (1990) to 86.7 million (2020) which is almost two-fold. The shortcut to reach Southern Europe is through Morocco, hence many migrants going to Europe pick Morocco as a country of transit. The total number of people that had crossed the Mediterranean corridor via Morocco in 2019 alone surpassed 2.2 million. In mid-2020, the total number of international migrants to Morocco reached 102.4 thousand which counts for 0.3% of the total population. The annual change of migration stock is modest (2%) compared to other countries (i.e., Turkey: 6.6%, Egypt: 8.6%, Sudan: 16%). The number of Moroccan emigrants, however, is almost 3.7 million in 2020 which has doubled since 1990 to 1.3 million.

This big number explains the huge share of total remittances (US\$ 7.4 billion) sent by Moroccans abroad which contributes to 6.5% of GDP. Furthermore, Gallup (2016) reported that 3.7% of young Moroccans had a plan to move to another country in the next 12 months. Forced migration to Morocco also witnesses a remarkable increase between 2011 and 2021 where the number of refugees and asylum seekers counts for 736 and 8.2 thousand respectively ([Morocco Data Portal](#), 2021; [HCP](#), 2021).

Migration Policies

Since the African Union adopted new approaches to facilitate the movement of people within the continent, Morocco aligns with full responsibility and proactivity with these approaches. In 2006, the Euro-African Dialogue on Migration and Development was held in Morocco's capital Rabat. This dialogue later was named the [Rabat Process](#) and gathered 28 African states, 29 European states, 2 partner observers, and more than 10 additional observers. The Rabat Process offers frameworks for collaboration, and consultancy, bringing together countries of origin, transit, and destination of the migration routes linking Central, West, and Northern Africa with the European continent. The aim is to give answers to technical and political aspects related to migration and development for different authorities and other stakeholders.

A few years later, Morocco hosted the Marrakesh Political Declaration and Action Plan under this process on May 2, 2018. This action plan contained many policies in migration management. These policies were categorized into 5 domains with 10 objectives using 23 actions. Domains that member states pledged to voluntary commit are: 1) Development benefits of migration/Root causes of irregular migration & forced displacement, 2) Legal migration and mobility, 3) Protection and asylum, 4) Irregular migration, migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings, 5) Return, readmission and reintegration.

Morocco and the EU signed a Mobility Partnership in 2013 to combat networks involved in the trafficking and smuggling of human beings. Policies that were implemented by Moroccan authorities come up with considerable fruits such as maximizing the positive impact of regular migration for the development, protection of those who have been smuggled, and of victims of human trafficking. The 2018-2020 Multi-annual cooperation program is another means of cooperation that was adopted in the Marrakesh Action Plan. This plan encouraged facilitating remittances, and visa facilitation, and promoted the integration of refugees and forcibly displaced (settlement). Authorities also have strengthened the protection of refugees and the forcibly displaced people with an increasing number of refugees and asylum seekers (+8200 persons). From another angle, regular migration and mobility of young people and women are promoted as well as the facilitation of visa issuing procedures. The latest version of the Rabat

Process articulated the [2030](#) Agenda for Sustainable Development aims to “Facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies”.

Furthermore, Morocco co-chaired with Germany the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration in Marrakesh on December 19 2018 which later became the International Refugee Day. The Marrakesh Pact is essentially a practical framework to manage international tensions over migration. It is in accordance with international standards for human rights, and the welfare of migrants regardless of their migration status. Morocco is very committed to fulfilling its contribution to multilateralism through the Marrakesh Pact as the officials urge member states to broaden awareness on immigration and reflect emerging issues surrounding migration realities. The outcomes of this initiation can be summarized as a catalyst to facilitate migration and boost the benefits that migration has on sustainable development.

In December 2020, Minister of Foreign Affairs, African Cooperation and Moroccan Expatriates Nasser Bourita, and the Commissioner for Social Affairs of the African Union Amira El Fadil inaugurated the [African Migration Observatory](#) in Rabat on December 18, 2020. The main objectives of this observatory are to provide the Continent with centralized data on migration, improve migration governance through formulating unified policies, advancing the knowledge base of the African Continent on migration and mobility.

Morocco also launched a strategy to manage immigration under the umbrella of the National Strategy on Immigration and Asylum ([NSIA](#)) in 2013. This strategy comes with many objectives and action programs. NSIA's vital programs include education and culture, health, youth and leisure, housing, and employment.

In terms of education and culture, many objectives are already met including the integration of migrants and refugees into formal and non-formal schooling system, and teaching Moroccan languages and culture to migrants and refugees. Concerning health, the actions involved ensuring health care access for migrants and refugees under the same conditions as Moroccans and coordinating actions in health institutions. As for youth and leisure, actions were implemented to integrate legal migrants and refugees in sports and recreation programs intended for youth and children. Furthermore, promoting a housing system for migrants and refugees is an essential need. That is why the Moroccan authorities act to promote the housing rights of legal immigrants and refugees under the same conditions as Moroccans. It is important to note that some media outlets would use the housing umbrella to rupture government efforts in terms of migration. Occasionally, we may see in some residential complexes 'For Rent to Moroccan Only' signs, which may indicate unnecessary racism message. However, in many cases in Casablanca, those exclusions are oftentimes meant for illegal African immigrants who were refused to rent houses in some specific quarters. In contrast, legal African immigrants, just like any other immigrants, benefit from their rights. Last but not least, employment-related actions were implemented in facilitating access to employment opportunities and promotion of business creation (like startups) by legal immigrants.

There is also the signing of a partnership agreement -in October 7 2021 in Rabat- between the High Commission for Planning (HCP) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to reinforce collaboration between the two bodies in terms of investigating comprehensive empirical research and common projects to spotlights on refugees and asylum seekers. The partnership aims to provide concrete data and necessary information to concerned governments, institutions, and civil organizations to enable the facilitation of processes in integrating this vulnerable population and to provide them with assistance and medical care to ease the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. One early fruit of this partnership is a joint study on forced migration, made in the form of a survey, soon to be available at www.hcp.ma.

Recently, the U.S. Department of State encouraged Morocco's effort in combating human trafficking in the 2021 Trafficking in Persons Report. The [report](#) classified Morocco in Tier 2, like Turkey and Brazil, in managing migration and human trafficking. The Government of Morocco is making significant efforts to eliminate human trafficking even at the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic as it took care of 441 victims and established support units to assist female victims of crime and sexual exploitation. In fact, the National Security reported that the number of investigations and prosecutions involved in human trafficking and smuggling decreased compared to previous years with 69 prosecuted cases in 2020.

When it comes to politicizing migration patterns, any country would use migrants and emigrants to achieve what it wants by reacting in unwanted behaviors or putting pressure on its neighboring country. The case

of Turkey against Greece is a good example of where Turkish authorities let thousands of emigrants cross its borders to Europe. The same thing is true in Morocco as it let individuals mainly young people traverse borders at the Ceuta enclave. Migration issues could also be an instrument to distract citizens away from internal problems such as in the case of Algeria. Terrible socio-economic [crises](#) among Algerians are addressed by the government by blaming Morocco as the source of its domestic problems.

Push & Pull Factors

Lee's theory of migration in particular presents the factors which encourage prospective emigrants to leave their home country and settle abroad. Push factors that Moroccans consider before intending to migrate do not differ, at least in common factors, from factors that push Turkish or any other citizen of developing countries. As soon as a Moroccan observes that his or her country cannot offer a better environment to live in with dignity and prosperity, migration to Europe comes to mind. We often hear the 'I feel a foreigner in Morocco' comment, especially among the youth who are willing to leave their comfort zone to experience a new life in a new country. Educated people also suffer after graduation as long as they could not integrate into the Moroccan workplace for several and indefinite reasons. Educated and skilled persons find it easy to migrate to pursue higher education or find a work permit, especially for those who master two more foreign languages. Individuals with average linguistic skills find obstacles at the begging of their migration journey and many of them proact to learn their destination-country's official language. Many receiving countries now require language mastery before issuing visas to inflow emigrants. Well-experienced individuals do migrate too if they find themselves stuck in Morocco. The simple reason is that they utterly want to contribute to Morocco's development, however, the unnecessary bureaucracy practices and unfriendly treatment hold them back to continue investing in Morocco. For this group of people, investing in neighboring countries, either in Africa or Europe, is much easier.

For foreigners wishing to migrate to Morocco, there are several encouraging pull factors. The premises concluded in all international agreements and partnerships such as the National Strategy on Immigration and Asylum, Marrakesh Pact, and Rabat Process, motivate largely migration towards Morocco. Starting from visa issuing procedures, passing through integration, short-term resident permits, to long stays in Moroccan territory, these are considerable pull factors. Any emigrant who is legally integrated can benefit from all public services like any Moroccan including access to education, health care system, and marketplace. It is not an overnight decision for the AU to inaugurate the African Migration Observatory in Rabat, but figures, statistics, pull factors in alignment with national policies, and commitments towards migration have brought such achievement.

From Transit to Destination Country

Since the 1950s, Morocco is considered to be a major landing place of migrants. The major destination was and still is the European continent followed by North America and Arab countries. However, Morocco's considerable achievements in the past two decades are to be confessed since it has now become a destination country. In his public address in 2013, King Mohamed VI emphasized on the Moroccan commitment to migration. He called on the government to "elaborate a new comprehensive policy on immigration and asylum issues, pursuant to a humanitarian approach in conformity with our country's international commitments and respectful of immigrants' rights". He also reported that Morocco has transformed from being a country of transit to a country of destination. The king also urged the international community to "become strongly involved in dealing with this [migration] phenomenon, so as to prevent the humanitarian disasters it causes". Soon after, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs opened a department to observe migration trends in collaboration with relevant authorities. Furthermore, Morocco initiated the African Alliance for Migration and Development to deal with this phenomenon.

Second Best Option

Following the global financial crisis in 2008, the rule of the game had changed drastically. Prior to 2008, the outflow of Moroccans to Europe had been increasing exponentially. However, a noticeable drop occurred right after the crisis which had a horrific impact on the European continent as a whole. By 2013, the flow to Morocco started to rise slightly for several years until it reached its peak in 2017, when almost 40.000 people opted for Morocco as a better option and optimal country to settle.

As we mentioned in the 'Pull Factors' section, several incentives are given to investors from other parts of

the world to ease their business expansions. Those incentives are not only in favor of the investors themselves but also for nationals of second or third countries wishing to work in Morocco. The labor force, though, is generated by such incentives which are considered to be important pull factors to migrate to Morocco. It is worth mentioning that Morocco, through its National Agency to Promote Employment and Skills ([ANAPEC](#)) has attracted thousands of skilled people from African countries besides modest numbers from Europe and other countries for the sake of fulfilling job opportunities in the Moroccan large market while assuring diversity in the workplace.

An interesting number of born-global startups take place in the Northern African kingdom. Investors and entrepreneurs together use the opportunities (incentives www.morocconow.com) that Morocco offers for new business entries to run new activities or extend existing activities of the country of origin. Examples for mega projects that attracted international investors are the Anfa Financial City, Dakhla Port, Fez Nearshore Park, Casablanca Teknopark, Tangier Med, and Technopolis, among others. These mega projects offered thousands of jobs not only to Moroccans but also to skilled immigrants from different countries who have been living in Morocco for at least three years. Based on the NSIA and considering the unemployment rate of 9.6% among the Moroccan population, skilled and educated legal immigrants have been fully or partially integrated into the marketplace.

Recapitulation

To outline, migration patterns in Morocco have changed and migration patterns have been re-coded in the recent decade. Migration has become an instrument to put pressure on neighboring countries in order to erode their antagonistic behaviors. Countries that once sent mass migration have become receiving countries. Not only that, but these countries have even transformed and become second or even first best options to live, run business, study, and seek refuge or asylum. Return migration is also noticeable as many governments provide incentives for their citizens abroad to reconnect with their homeland. Perhaps this will be one indicator for future economic development in developing countries like Morocco. This could surely be achieved in the near future, as long as Morocco commits to its national strategies for migration and immigration.

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