

From Emigration Country to Africa's Migration Passage to Europe

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Profile

By Hein de Haas

Over the second half of the 20th century, Morocco has evolved into one of the world's leading emigration countries. Moroccans form one of the largest and most dispersed non-Western migrant communities in Western Europe.

Morocco's current population is about 30 million; over two million people of Moroccan descent currently live in Western Europe. More recently, a growing number of Moroccan migrants have settled in Canada and the U.S..

Receiving \$3.6 billion in official remittances in 2003, Morocco was the fourth largest remittance receiver in the developing world. In the meantime, Morocco seems to be evolving into a transit and immigration country for migrants from sub-Saharan Africa.

Migration History

The precolonial population history of Morocco has been characterized by continually shifting patterns of human settlement and uprooting of sedentary and (semi-) nomadic groups. Centuries-old seasonal and circular rural-to-rural migration patterns existed between marginal rural areas and relatively prosperous regions and towns in western Morocco.

Following the Arab-Islamic conquests beginning in the seventh century, mostly Arabic-speaking population groups migrated to present-day Morocco. Large numbers of Muslims and Jews migrated from Spain to Morocco after the *reconquista* of the Iberian Peninsula. Far into the 20th century, the slave trade constituted an important form of forced migration within and towards Morocco.

The French colonization of Algeria in 1830 heralded the beginning of a period of economic and political restructuring, which created entirely new migration patterns from Morocco. The demand for laborers on the farms of French *colons* (settlers) and in the expanding Algerian coastal cities attracted a rising number of seasonal and circular migrants. In the late 1930s, the number of Moroccan migrants to Algeria was estimated at about 85,000 per year.

In 1912, the Franco-Spanish protectorate over Morocco was formally established. While France gained control over the heartland of Morocco, the Spanish protectorate was limited to the southern Western Sahara and the northern Rif mountain zone. Road construction, other infrastructure projects, and the rapid growth of cities along the Atlantic coast shaped new markets for rural-to-urban migration.

The colonial era (1912 to 1956) also marked the beginning of migration to France. During World War

I and World War II, an urgent lack of manpower in France led to the active recruitment of tens of thousands of Moroccan men for factories, mines, and the French army. Most of these migrants returned to Morocco. During World War I, 40,000 were recruited, and 126,000 were recruited during World War II for the French army.

Although 40,000 Moroccans from the Rif (known as Riffians) found employment in Franco's army during the Spanish civil war in Spanish Morocco, labor migration from Morocco to Spain was extremely limited. Until the 1960s, Spain itself remained a source of labor migrants to northern Europe and even to Algeria.

When France stopped recruiting Algerian workers during the Algerian war of independence (1954-1962), migration of factory and mine workers from Morocco was boosted. Between 1949 and 1962, the Moroccan population in France increased from about 20,000 to 53,000. Much of this migration took place via Algeria, which remained a French colony until 1962. Moroccan laborers followed their *colon* employers, who massively departed to France after Algerian independence.

Yet this post-colonial migration was only modest compared with the 1962-1972 decade, when the magnitude and geographical scope of Moroccan emigration dramatically expanded. The strong economic growth in Western Europe in the 1960s resulted in great demand for low-skilled labor. Morocco signed labor recruitment agreements with the former West Germany (1963), France (1963), Belgium (1964), and the Netherlands (1969). This was the onset of a spatial diversification of Moroccan emigration, which had been mainly directed towards France.

Moroccan Jews followed a distinct pattern, massively emigrating to France, Israel, and Canada (Québec) after the creation of the state of Israel in 1948 and the Six Day War of 1967. Morocco's Jewish population dwindled from an approximate 250,000 to the current number of about 5,000.

Between 1965 and 1972, the estimated number of registered Moroccans living in Europe increased tenfold, from 30,000 to 300,000, to around 400,000 by 1975 (see Table 1).

Table 1: Evolution of Migrant Stocks in Selected Countries in Western Europe (Registered Population, Regardless of Nationality, Including Second and Third Generations)

Year	France	Netherlands	Belgium	Germany	Spain	Italy	Total
1968	84,000	13,000	21,000	18,000	1,000	NA	137,000
1972	218,000	28,000	25,000	15,000	5,000	NA	291,000
1975	260,000	33,000	66,000	26,000	9,000	NA	394,000
1982	431,000	93,000	110,000	43,000	26,000	1,000	704,000
1990	653,000	184,000	138,000	62,000	59,000	78,000	1,174,000
1998	728,000	242,000	155,000	98,000	200,000	195,000	1,618,000
	1,025,000		214,000	72,000		253,000	

2005	1,023,000 (2002)	316,000	214,000 (2002)	13,000 (2004)	397,000	233,000 (2004)	2,278,000
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Sources: El Mansouri 1996 (F, NL, B, G 1968 - 1990); Basfao & Taarji 1994 (IT 1982, 1990); National Statistical Services (B and F 1998; N, G, ES, IT 1998 and 2005); López García 1999 (ES 1968-1990); IOM and Fondation Hassan II 2003 (B and F 2002). **From Guest Workers to Permanent Settlers**

The 1973 oil crisis heralded a period of economic stagnation and restructuring, resulting in rising unemployment and a lower demand for unskilled laborers in Western Europe. Consequently, the destination countries closed their frontiers for new labor immigrants and introduced visa requirements for Moroccan visitors.

Although the Moroccan government, most host societies, and the so-called "guest workers" themselves insisted that this migration was temporary, most migrants did not return after 1973. The economic situation in Morocco deteriorated and, following two failed coups d'état in 1971 and 1972, the country entered a period of political instability and repression. Consequently, many migrants decided to stay in Europe.

Paradoxically, the increasingly restrictive immigration policies pursued by receiving states interrupted the traditional, circular character of Moroccan migration. Migrants feared not being able to go back to the receiving country if their return home was not successful.

The discontinuation of the "return option" explains why many migrants decided to stay in Europe. Massive family reunification in the 1970s and 1980s foreshadowed this shift to more permanent migration. It was mainly through family reunification that the total population of people of Moroccan descent in France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Germany increased from 400,000 in 1975 to over one million in 1992.

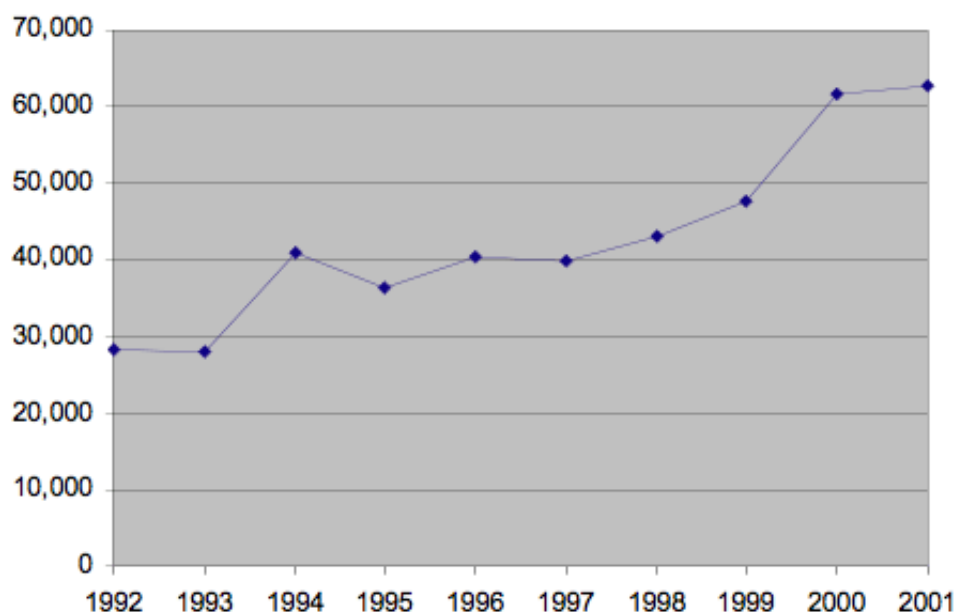
Although the majority of labor migrants ended up staying permanently, the late 1980s and early 1990s saw waves of return migration. Between 1985 and 1995, some 314,000 migrants returned to Morocco from France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, the UK, and Denmark. Return migration peaked in 1991 at 40,000 returnees. Since 1994, return migration has fallen to less than 20,000 per year. Return migration rates among Moroccans have been among the lowest of all immigrant groups in Europe.

Family reunification was largely completed by the end of the 1980s. During the 1990s, however, migration to Europe from Morocco continued as the children of guest workers married people from their parents' home regions. This process of family formation largely explains the striking persistence of Moroccan migration to the classic European destination countries.

By 1998, the number of people of Moroccan descent in these countries had risen to 1.6 million. From 1992 to 2001, about 430,000 Moroccans living in Belgium, Denmark, France, Italy, the Netherlands, and Norway were granted the nationality of an EU Member State (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Number of Naturalizations of Moroccan Migrants in Belgium, Denmark, France, Italy,

Netherlands, Norway, and Spain, 1992-2001



Source: OECD 2004; Moroccan Ministry of Foreign Affairs. **New Moroccan Migrations**

Besides the increasing reliance on family migration, a second consequence of restrictive immigration policies in Europe was an increase in the number of undocumented labor migrants, particularly in Spain and Italy. Themselves former labor exporters, Spain, Italy, and even Portugal have emerged as new destination countries since the mid 1980s.

Until Italy and Spain introduced visa requirements in 1990 and 1991, respectively, Moroccans were able to enter as tourists and overstay their visas. On several occasions since the late 1980s, Italian and Spanish governments were compelled to grant legal status to Moroccans and other migrants through successive regularization campaigns.

Between 1980 and 2004, the combined Moroccan population officially residing in Spain and Italy increased from about 20,000 to 650,000. Italy and in particular Spain have replaced France as the primary destination for new Moroccan labor migrants. An increasing proportion of independent labor migrants to Southern Europe are women who work as domestic workers, nannies, cleaners, or in agriculture and small industries.

Since the oil crisis, a relatively small number of Moroccans have migrated to Libya (120,000) and the oil-rich gulf countries (several tens of thousands) to work on temporary contracts. More recently, the United States and the French-speaking Canadian province of Quebec have attracted increasing numbers of generally well-educated Moroccans.

The combined effects of family-related migration, undocumented migration, and labor migration to Spain and Italy explain why Moroccan emigration has persisted in spite of increasingly restrictive immigration policies. The Moroccan migrant stock in Europe and North America has increased almost sevenfold from 300,000 in 1972, on the eve of the recruitment freeze, to at least 2.3 million around 2000. This figure excludes undocumented Moroccan migrants, who are likely to number at least several hundreds of thousands of people.

France is home to the largest legally residing population of people of Moroccan descent (more than 1,025,000), followed by Spain (397,000), the Netherlands (315,000), Italy (287,000), Belgium (215,000), and Germany (99,000). Smaller communities live in the Scandinavian countries (17,000), the United Kingdom (50,000), the United States (85,000), and the Canadian province of Quebec (70,000).

Including migrants in Arab countries and Moroccan Jews living in Israel, at least three million people of Moroccan descent live outside the country (see Table 2).

Table 2: Estimates of Moroccan Migrant Stocks Worldwide

Country	Population registered in Moroccan consulates (2002)	Destination country statistics	Year	Source
France	1,024,766	506,000	1999	IOM 2003:217 (French census; only Moroccan nationals)
Netherlands	276,655	315,821	2005	Statistics Netherlands
Belgium	214,859	204,000	2000	IOM 2003:101
Germany	99,000	80,266	2000	IOM 2003:33
Spain	222,948	396,668	2005	Ministry for Employment and Social Affairs, Spain
Italy	287,000	253,362	2004	Istituto Nazionale di Statistica
UK	30,000	50,000	2000	Collyer 2004
Scandinavia	17,000	-	-	-
Other	13,593	-	-	-
<i>Europe</i>	<i>2,185,821</i>	<i>1,806,117</i>	<i>1,806,117</i>	<i>1,806,117</i>
U.S.	85,000	21,035	2000	U.S. Census Bureau (only Moroccan nationals)
Canada	70,000	-	-	-

<i>North America</i>	155,000	-	-	-
Libya	120,000	-	-	-
Algeria	63,000	-	-	-
Tunisia	16,414	-	-	-
Saudi Arabia	11,973	-	-	-
UAE	8,359	-	-	-
Other Arab	12,216	-	-	-
<i>Arab countries</i>	231,962	-	-	-
Israel	-	270,188	2005	Total immigration 1948-2003 (CBS Israel)
Sub-Saharan Africa	5,355	-	-	-
Other countries	3,959	-	-	-

Trans-Saharan Migration

Each year, several tens of thousand of sub-Saharan Africans are believed to migrate to Spain through Europe. Since the mid 1990s, Morocco has developed into a transit migration country for these migrants, a mixed group of asylum seekers and, increasingly, labor migrants. They generally enter Morocco at the border east of Oujda from Algeria after they have crossed the Sahara overland, usually through Niger.

Once in Morocco, they often attempt to enter the Spanish cities of Ceuta and Melilla by scaling the tall border fences separating these enclaves from Morocco. Because Spain has few repatriation agreements with sub-Saharan countries and because of identification problems, many migrants who manage to get in are eventually released. In September 2005, at least five people died and more than 40 were injured in such a massive border-crossing attempt in Ceuta.

Initially, this flow from sub-Saharan Africa seemed to be a reaction to political turmoil and civil war affecting countries like the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Republic of the Congo, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Côte d'Ivoire. Since 2000, however, migrants tend to come from an increasingly diverse array of origin countries. New origin countries of such transit migrants include Nigeria, Senegal, the Gambia, Liberia, Mali, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Niger, Sudan, the Central African Republic, and Cameroon.

Recently, even migrants from Asian countries, such as India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, have

transited through Morocco via the Saharan route. They are mostly flown in from Asia to West-African capitals. From there, they follow the common Saharan trail via Niger and Algeria to Morocco.

Although most migrants consider Morocco a country of transit, an increasing number of migrants who fail to enter Europe prefer to settle in Morocco on a more long-term basis rather than return to their more unstable and substantially poorer home countries. Probably several tens of thousands have settled in cities like Tangiers, Casablanca, and Rabat on a semi-permanent basis, where they sometimes find jobs in the informal service sector, petty trade, and construction. Others try to pursue studies in Morocco.

Yet sub-Saharan migrants face substantial xenophobia and aggressive Moroccan and particularly Spanish border authorities. Since most of them have no legal status, they are vulnerable to social and economic marginalization.

In September 2005, a Moroccan newspaper compared sub-Saharan African migrants to "black locusts" invading northern Morocco. Frequent round-ups have occurred in immigrant neighborhoods and in improvised ad-hoc camps close to the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla and larger cities, and unauthorized migrants are regularly deported to the Algerian border.

There is evidence that a substantial minority of immigrants to Morocco have migrated for reasons that fall under the 1951 Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. However, the Moroccan government assumes that virtually all sub-Saharan immigrants in Morocco are "economic migrants" on their way to Europe.

This means asylum seekers are rejected at the border or deported as "illegal economic immigrants" even though Morocco is party to the 1951 Geneva Convention, has a formal system for adjudicating asylum applications, and has an Office of Refugees and Stateless Persons (Bureau des Réfugiés et Apatrides - BRA) to assist and protect refugees.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) office in Morocco has recognized about 2,100 people in Morocco today as refugees, but the BRA generally does not grant them status. Therefore, they lack rights to employment, education, and health care.

Policies on Emigration, Remittances, and Integration Abroad

Ever since the 1960s, the Moroccan government has encouraged emigration on political and economic grounds. It stimulated labor recruitment from relatively marginal Berber-speaking areas of the southwestern Sous valley, the oases of southeastern Morocco, and the northern Rif Mountains, a region notorious for its rebellious attitude to central authority. In particular, remittances were expected to make a contribution to prosperity and thus dampen the rebellious tendency.

Formal recruitment by specialized agencies was important only in the initial years of labor migration. Even in the 1960s, spontaneous settlement and informal recruitment by companies was more important numerically. "Spontaneous" migrants were assisted by relatives or friends already abroad, who also acted as intermediaries with employers. Most migrants succeeded in obtaining permanent residence through a series of legalization campaigns in the Netherlands (1975), Belgium (1975), and

in France (1981-1982).

In terms of remittances, the total amount of money and goods increased steadily up until the early 1990s. Between 1968 and 1992, the officially registered remittances rose from \$23 million to \$2.1 billion per year.

However, over the 1990s an ominous stagnation in remittances, at around \$2 billion per year, generated the fear of a future decline. This prospect prompted the Moroccan authorities to change their attitude toward migrants.

Until then, the Moroccan government had attempted to maintain tight control of Moroccans living in Europe by actively discouraging their integration into the receiving societies, including naturalization. The government sent Moroccan teachers and imams abroad and provided education to migrants' children in the Arabic language and Moroccan culture to prevent integration and alienation, which was also perceived as endangering vital remittance transfers.

Through Moroccan embassies, consulates, mosques, and state-created offices for migrants, such as the "Amicales," Moroccan migrants were actively discouraged from establishing independent organizations and joining trade unions or political parties. The Moroccan government also prevented migrants from organizing themselves politically and, as such, from forming an opposition force from abroad. During the 1970s and 1980s, it was not unusual for political troublemakers who lived in Europe to be harassed while visiting family and friends in Morocco.

However, European governments criticized the integration-discouraging policies that ran counter to their own integration policies. Moreover, there was a growing consciousness that Morocco's policies alienated the migrant population from state institutions rather than binding them closer to their home country.

The Moroccan state changed course in the early 1990s. Past repression was largely replaced by the active courting of the expanding Moroccan diaspora. Along with the dismantling of the control apparatus in Europe, this has meant a more positive attitude towards naturalization and dual citizenship.

A ministry for Moroccans residing abroad was created in 1990. In the same year, the Moroccan government established the "Fondation Hassan II pour les Marocains Résidant à l'étranger," which aims to foster links between Moroccan migrants and Morocco. This foundation helps them in various ways, both in Europe and during their summer holidays in Morocco, and seeks to inform and guide migrants on investment opportunities.

These changes were in line with the liberalization of Moroccan society over the 1990s. Increasing civil liberties meant more freedom among migrants to establish organizations such as Berber, "home town," and aid associations.

Customs procedures work more smoothly and are less corrupt than in the past. Advertisements on the radio and television target Moroccans visiting from abroad, and the Moroccan motorways even

have service centers catering to them. Migrants who criticize the government are rarely bothered now when visiting.

Surging Remittances

In recent years, it has become easier, cheaper, and more attractive for Moroccans to remit money because of a government-encouraged expansion of Moroccan bank branches in Europe, the lifting of restrictions on foreign exchange, fiscal measures that favor migrants, and devaluations that increase the value of foreign currency. These measures are in line with the "positive attitude" adopted in the early 1990s.

At first glance, these policies seem to have reversed the stagnation in remittances. Since 2000, there has been a spectacular increase in official remittances, which stood at \$3.6 billion in 2003. New labor migration flows to Spain and Italy and those countries' large-scale legalization programs in recent years also help explain the increase.

Morocco has been relatively successful in channeling remittances through official channels. Remittances are a crucial and relatively stable source of foreign exchange and have become vital in sustaining Morocco's balance of payments. In 2002, official remittances represented 6.4 percent of the gross national product (GNP), 22 percent of the total value of imports, and six times the total development aid paid to Morocco. They also exceed the value of direct foreign investments, which are also much more unstable.

The actual amount of remittances is estimated to be at least one-quarter to one-third higher — or about \$1 billion — because money is also sent through informal channels or in the form of goods taken to Morocco.

Despite the level of remittances, few migrants seem inclined to start enterprises in Morocco. The Moroccan government, therefore, has tried to attract migrants' investments by offering fiscal incentives, reducing corruption, and removing bureaucratic obstacles to investment, such as easing administrative procedures for obtaining business permits.

Migration and EU-Morocco Relations

Spain is located only 14 kilometers from the Moroccan coast, and the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla on the northern Moroccan coast literally represent "Europe in Africa." In many respects, the Strait of Gibraltar is the European Union's equivalent of the Rio Grande between the U.S. and Mexico. Despite intensified border controls, tens of thousands of Moroccans and, increasingly, other Africans manage to enter Europe each year. This makes Spain the main entrance to an internally borderless Europe for African immigrants.

Undocumented migrants usually enter either by riding in *pateras* (small fishing boats chartered by smugglers) or speedboats, hiding in trucks or migrants' vans, or carrying false papers. Since the mid 1990s, intensified border patrolling in the Strait of Gibraltar has prompted migrants to cross from more eastern places on the Mediterranean coast and to explore new crossing points to Europe, such as the Canary Islands.

Moroccan authorities claim that, in 2004, they prevented more than 26,000 irregular attempts to emigrate, of which 17,000 concerned sub-Saharan immigrants. In 2004, 15,675 undocumented boat migrants were intercepted by the Spanish authorities during their attempts to cross to the Iberian coast (46 percent of all cases) or the Canary Islands (54 percent of all cases). About 55 percent are estimated to be Moroccan and 43 percent sub-Saharan African, compared to 81 and two percent in 1999, respectively.

There has been roughly one fatality per 100 interceptions since the late 1990s, mostly due to drowning. According to official numbers, 1,035 migrants died between 1999 and 2003 while migrating to Spain. Migrants rights' organizations claim the real figure is higher.

Immigration control ranks high on the European Union's (EU) agenda, and, as a result, the EU's relationship with Morocco has endured considerable stress. In particular, the issue of Morocco readmitting undocumented migrants is a pressing but yet unresolved issue in negotiations with the EU.

Yet there is already a high level of bilateral cooperation with the some EU Member States, chiefly with Spain. Since 2004, Morocco and Spain have collaborated in joint naval patrols and readmission of Moroccan and non-Moroccan nationals in return for \$390 million in aid.

In recent years — especially after the terrorist attacks in Madrid in March 2004, in which several Moroccans were involved — immigration is increasingly linked to security issues. There is also increasing concern about Morocco's role as a transit country for migrants from sub-Saharan Africa.

In 2003, Morocco passed a new law regulating the entry and residence of foreigners. The law includes heavy sanctions against undocumented immigration and human smuggling but largely ignores migrants' rights. According to critics, in passing the new law Morocco is bowing to pressure from the EU, which wishes Morocco to play the role of Europe's "policeman" in North Africa.

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 (Mésures 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. Of the total MEDA aid budget of 426 million euros for 2000-2006, 115 million euros (27 percent) are being spent to "break out of the circle of weak growth, unemployment, poverty, and migration" through support for the control of illegal immigration and rural development programs. In particular, the funds target the northern provinces, which are seen as a source of poverty, drugs, human smuggling, and illegal migration.

Although the Moroccan government is formally complying with MEDA's and the EU's fight against illegal immigration, serious doubts remain about the credibility and effectiveness of these policies.

First, on a yearly basis, MEDA aid is equal to only two percent of remittances. Second, besides a certain reluctance to play the role of Europe's policeman and massively expel sub-Saharan immigrants, which might also harm strategic political relations with sub-Saharan countries, Moroccan policymakers claim it is impossible to stop migration as long as the economic and political root causes persist.

Although the number of interceptions have dramatically increased in recent years, it is estimated that the majority of migrants reach Spain due to the professionalization of smuggling techniques and a diversification and expansion of migration strategies. Also, sub-Saharan immigrants who are deported to Algeria tend to return within a few days.

In the eyes of the Moroccan government, the EU's intention to create a "common Euro-Mediterranean space" is perceived as lacking credibility for a number of reasons. First, Europeans have almost unrestricted access to Morocco although Moroccans face restrictive policies. Second, protectionist policies prevent Morocco from exporting agricultural products to the EU, while many undocumented Moroccan migrant workers help harvest produce in EU countries.

From the Moroccan perspective, migration constitutes a vital development resource that alleviates poverty and unemployment, increases political stability, and generates remittances. In fact, the Moroccan government has little interest in stemming emigration while European employers are in need of labor.

Future Prospects

Persistent demand for migrant labor in Western Europe in agricultural, construction, and service sectors, along with high youth unemployment and low wages, suggest that emigration is likely to continue at high levels in the near future.

However, in the longer term, emigration might decrease following the substantial decline of people attaining working age in the decades after 2010, although this obviously depends on future economic growth.

Over the longer term, the decline in the working-age population may result in a decreased potential for emigration; the decline could also affect the progressive development of Morocco into a "transitional" country, characterized by the coexistence of emigration, transit migration, and immigration. This process has apparently already been set in motion with mounting overland immigration from sub-Saharan countries.

Although Moroccan policymakers and the media stress the temporary, transitory character of sub-Saharan migration, an increasing proportion of these officially "temporary" migrants might become permanent settlers. These African migrants to Morocco face substantial xenophobia and social and economic marginalization. At the same time, 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.

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Data Sources:

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