



International Migration Institute  
James Martin 21st Century School  
University of Oxford



## Working Papers

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Year 2010

Paper 22

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# Migration and development Lessons from the Mexico-US and Morocco-EU experiences

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## Abstract

This paper aims to improve the understanding of migration-development links by comparing the evaluation of Mexico-US and Morocco-EU migration over the twentieth century. Despite significant differences, Mexico and Morocco share a common geopolitical location on the global South-North migration frontier as well as their position as prime source countries of predominantly low-skilled migrants into the US and EU. The analysis highlights the large extent to which Mexican and Moroccan migration is determined by political-economic transformations in the US and EU. Persistent economic gaps and migrant networks partly explain why, instead of decreasing migration, the recruitment freezes in Mexico (1964) and Morocco (1973) have contributed to increased reliance on family and irregular migration and a diversification of migration origins and destinations. Simultaneously, policy-driven changes in labour market structure caused an increased demand for casual and informal labour in the service sector, agriculture and construction. In light of this evidence, it would be naïve to expect the 2008 financial crisis to cause a *fundamental* shift in migration trends because political-economic conditions fuelling migration have remained unaltered. Similarly, in spite of the considerable contributions of Mexican and Moroccan remittances to the improvement of income and living standards in origin areas, it is unrealistic to assume that migration and remittances alone can overcome generically unfavourable development conditions. Therefore, improving *general* development conditions through structural political and economic reform seem the most viable policy to increase the development potential of migration. If such reform does occur, Morocco and, particularly, Mexico may transform into immigration countries in the medium to long term.

**Key words:** International migration, development, transformation, Mexico, Morocco, US, EU, policy

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# 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The issue of migration and development has attracted increasing attention in academia and policy over the last decade. Although the *potential* of migration to contribute to development in origin societies has been widely recognised, it is much less clear what factors explain why in some societies migration seems to have rather positive effects on economic and human development, while in others the role of migration in development has apparently been less positive or indeed rather negative (Agunias 2006; de Haas 2009b; Taylor et al 1996). Another problem is that migration is often treated as a more or less exogenous variable ‘impacting upon’ development, whereas migration itself is an intrinsic part of broader development processes. In other words, it is a two-way relationship.

This paper aims to improve the understanding of the reciprocal migration-development links by comparing the cases of Mexico and Morocco. Notwithstanding significant historical, economic and cultural differences, these two countries share a similar position on the global South-North migration frontier. Whereas Mexico has been the main source country of predominantly lower-skilled migrants to the US, Morocco, together with Turkey, has been the main non-EU source of migrant labour to the EU over the past decades. A second similarity is that Mexico and Morocco have been engaged in a process of trade liberalisation with their northern neighbours in the form of NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) and the European Union Association Agreements, respectively.

A third similarity is that both countries have been confronted by increasingly restrictive immigration policies by the US and the EU in spite of sustained demand for foreign labour. Partly linked to the latter point, Mexico and Morocco have recently experienced increased transit migration and immigration from countries located further south in Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa respectively. The US and EU member states have put the Mexican and Moroccan governments under pressure to increase border controls and internal policing in an effort to curb ‘transit’ migration from countries located further to the south. This is likely to have contributed to the increasingly irregular character of migration.

Despite these similarities in their migratory and geopolitical position, Mexico and Morocco provide different social, economic and policy contexts. This implies that a comparison of both migration systems can give valuable insights into the way in which structural conditions, including policies, shape migration–development interactions. For instance, how can divergences in migration trends be explained by differences in the general structure of the political economy and specific migration policies? And are there differences in the ways in which migration and remittances affect development in Mexico and Morocco, and how can such differences be explained?

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<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this paper was prepared as part of the project ‘Transatlantic dialogue on migration and development issues: Lessons from the Mexico-US and Morocco-EU experiences’ (2009), which was funded by the German Marshall Fund of the United States. We would like to thank Oliver Bakewell, Raúl Delgado-Wise, Richard Jones and Pier de Vries for useful feedback on earlier drafts of this paper.

Before starting the comparison between Mexico and Morocco, the first section of this paper will briefly elaborate the two central theoretical concepts guiding the analysis: migration systems and migration transitions. In order to contextualise the analysis of migration trends, the second section of this paper will compare macro-level development characteristics and trends in Mexico and Morocco, which are likely to have an effect on migration. The third section of this paper describes and compares migration trends from Mexico and Morocco over the twentieth century, and explores how such trends can be explained from more general processes of political and economic change. The fourth section will analyse how half a century of mass migration has affected the political economy of destination and, in particular, origin countries. The paper will conclude by assessing the extent to which differences in migration-development links between Morocco and Mexico can be explained by from differences in contextual factors and policies.

## **2. Concepts: Migration systems and migration transitions**

The assumption underlying the analysis in this paper is that migration is an *intrinsic* part of broader development or transformation processes (Castles & Miller 2009; de Haas 2009b; Skeldon 1997). Migration patterns and trends are commonly explained by referring to *migration policies*. However, any attempt to analyse migration in isolation or by looking at migration policies alone would miss out the drivers of migration processes rooted in the broader political economy of sending and receiving countries. After all, factors such as macro-economic policies, labour market structure, trade policies and economic inequalities between sending and receiving countries fundamentally impinge upon migration processes.

In order to ground our analysis more within general migration theory, it is useful to relate the Moroccan and Mexican migration experiences to one spatial and one intertemporal concept used in migration theory: namely migration systems and migration transitions. Both concepts help us to conceptualise migration patterns and migration trends as part of broader systems of exchange and broader development processes.

Mabogunje (1970) defined a *migration system* as a set of places linked by flows and counterflows of people, goods, services, and information, which tend to facilitate further exchange, including migration, between the places. While originally developed to explain rural-urban migration in Africa, this theory has also been applied to international migration (Fawcett 1989; Portes & Böröcz 1987). It is not difficult to identify the Mexico-US and Morocco-EU corridors as quintessential examples of migration systems, in which exchanges of goods, people and capital have reinforced each other. Within such systems, migration tends to gain its own momentum through the cost and risk-decreasing effects of migrant networks. Migration system theory also teaches us that labour, capital, trade and information flows tend to be complements rather than substitutes, as the various exchanges tend to reinforce each other.

The concept of *migration transitions* helps us to explain the changing migratory functions of regions and countries over time along with more general processes of development. This is the notion that societies and countries in parallel with economic restructuring and concomitant social change and demographic transitions tend to go through a sequence of initially *increasing* emigration, the coexistence of significant but diminishing emigration and increasing immigration to eventually become net immigration countries (Skeldon 1997; Zelinsky 1971). Increasing incomes, the development of transport and communication infrastructure, and education typically increase people's capabilities *and* aspirations to migrate (de Haas 2010b)

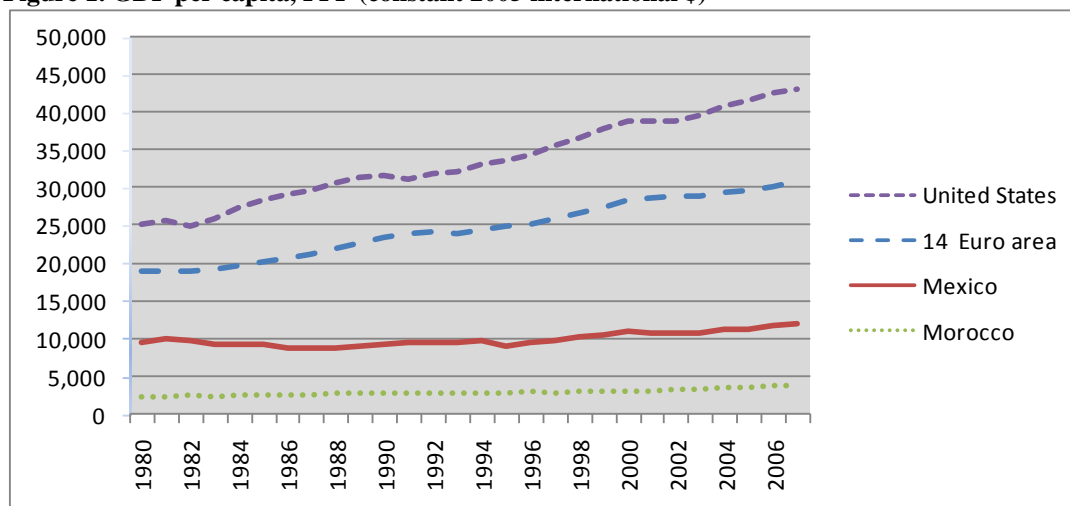
This also explains why the world's leading emigration countries are typically not among the least developed. Again, Morocco and Mexico are particular cases in point. Migration transition theory predicts that, in the longer term, economic growth and decreasing opportunity gaps with destination countries leads to the transformation of emigration into immigration countries. The challenging question here is whether countries as Morocco and Mexico will also go through similar migration transitions in the near future, and whether increasing transit migration and immigration from poorer countries located further south may herald their future transitions into immigration countries.

### **3. General development characteristics and trends: transatlantic and North-South comparisons**

Although their migratory function is remarkably similar, Mexico and Morocco are strikingly different in terms of overall levels of human development and the relative development gap with destination countries. Figure 1 reveals significant differences in GDP per capita for Mexico and Morocco, with Mexico clearly being the economically more advanced country, although Morocco has made relatively more progress. Between 1980 and 2007 Moroccan GDP per capita has increased by 63 percent against only 27 percent for Mexico. Between 1980 and 2006, GDP per capita has grown steadily in the EU and the US by 62 and 70 percent, respectively.

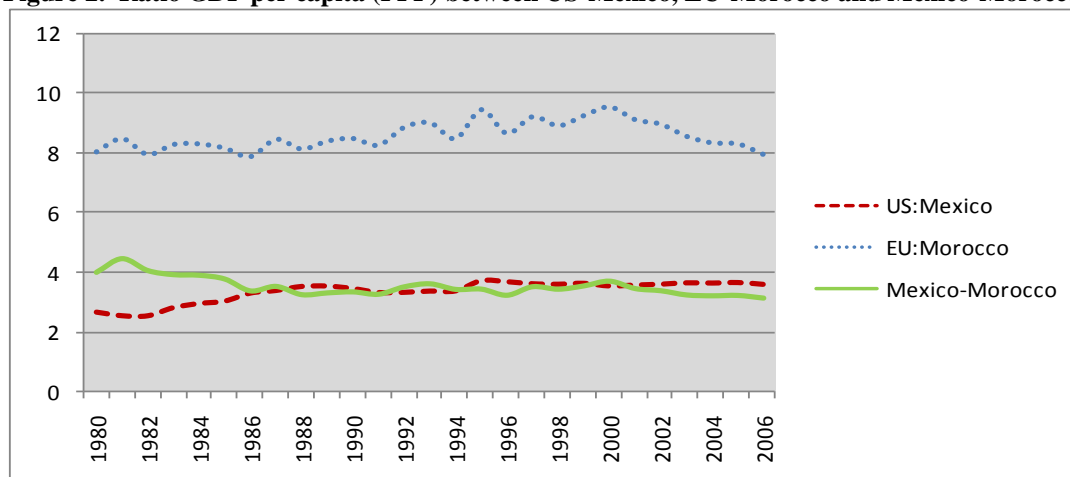
Figure 2 shows that the relative income gap between Morocco and the EU is more than twice the gap between Mexico and the US. Interestingly, the gap between Mexico and Morocco is more or less equal to the US-Mexico gap. In 2006, the gap in GDP per capita (PPP constant 2005 international \$) between the EU and Morocco was 7.9:1, continuing a downward trend that started in 2001. For Mexico, the gap with the United States is narrower, but it has been on a small upward trend since 1982 and constant at 3.6:1 since 2002.

**Figure 1. GDP per capita, PPP (constant 2005 international \$)<sup>2</sup>**



Source: World Bank, World Development Indicators, December 2008

**Figure 2. Ratio GDP per capita (PPP) between US-Mexico, EU-Morocco and Mexico-Morocco**



Source: World Bank, World Development Indicators, December 2008

Between 1980 and 2007, the ratio between Mexican and Morocco GDP per capita has decreased from 4.0 to 3.1. This is a consequence of the much lower average rates of economic growth in Mexico as compared to Morocco. In this period, average GDP per capita growth has been 1.91 percent for Morocco, compared to 1.17 percent for Mexico. For the 14 Euro countries and US average annual growth rates were 1.80 and 1.88 percent, respectively.

Another indicator of the structural weakness of the Mexican and Moroccan economies is the high volatility of economic growth. Economic growth has been highly volatile in Mexico and Morocco, with GDP per capita rates regularly falling well below 0, while in the US and EU peaks and dips are much less marked. Table 1 shows that volatility of 1980-2007 GDP per capita growth (measured by the coefficient of variation) is the lowest for the EU and the United States (65 percent and 96 percent respectively), while growth volatility in Mexico amounted to a staggering 301 percent compared to 252 percent for Morocco. In comparison to the 1961-1979, income

<sup>2</sup> Note: The 14 Euro area includes the following countries - Austria; Belgium; Cyprus; Finland; France; Germany; Greece; Ireland; Italy; Luxembourg; Malta; Netherlands; Portugal; Slovenia; Spain.

growth volatility has increased in all countries, but the growth has been particularly dramatic in Mexico. So, while Mexico has still much higher GDP per capita levels than Morocco, Mexican growth has clearly been lagging behind Morocco and its economy shows a higher level of instability.

**Table 1. Volatility of GDP per capita growth, 1961-2007**

Period	14 Euro area	Mexico	Morocco	United States
1961-1979				
Standard deviation	1.62	2.32	3.93	2.05
Average	4.06	3.40	2.52	2.58
Coefficient of variance (%)	39.99	68.14	155.86	79.48
1980-2007				
Standard deviation	1.16	3.52	4.81	1.80
Average	1.80	1.17	1.91	1.88
Coefficient of variance (%)	64.66	301.33	252.49	95.65

Source: World Bank, World Development Indicators, December 2008.

Income inequality and relative poverty are often considered as important drivers of migration. The 2007 values of the GINI coefficient clearly show a positive South/North gradient in income inequality. Mexico's GINI coefficient is 46.1 compared to 40.8 in the US, while income inequality in Morocco (39.5) is significantly higher than EU countries such as France (32.7), Spain (34.7) and the Netherlands (30.9). At the same time, these figures show that income inequality in Mexico is much higher than in Morocco, a factor which might explain the relatively high migration rates from Mexico despite comparatively high *aggregate* levels of economic development. Since the 1980s, however, there has been a decline in inequality in Mexico, which is approaching US income inequality, and which in turn is roughly at Moroccan levels<sup>3</sup>.

The limited official data suggest that the share of the population living under the national poverty line in Mexico and Morocco is roughly comparable. Despite a much higher GDP per capita, the relatively high poverty rate in Mexico might be explained by its much higher income inequality. The percentage of the Mexican population living below the national poverty line has declined from 21 percent in 2000 to 18 percent in 2004 (OECD 2008a; World Bank April 2008). For Morocco, data are available only for 1991 and 1999. Between those two dates, the percentage of the population living below the poverty line increased from 13.1 percent to 19 percent. It is unclear to what extent this reflects a real increase or differences in measurement. However, the Human Poverty Index, which proxies the level of deprivation by including values on illiteracy, access to water and longevity, suggests that less than 7 percent of the Mexican population and more than 33 percent of the Moroccan population would be living in conditions of poverty.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Source: World Bank, World Development Indicators, December 2008; Human Development Report 2001, 2006, 2007/2008.

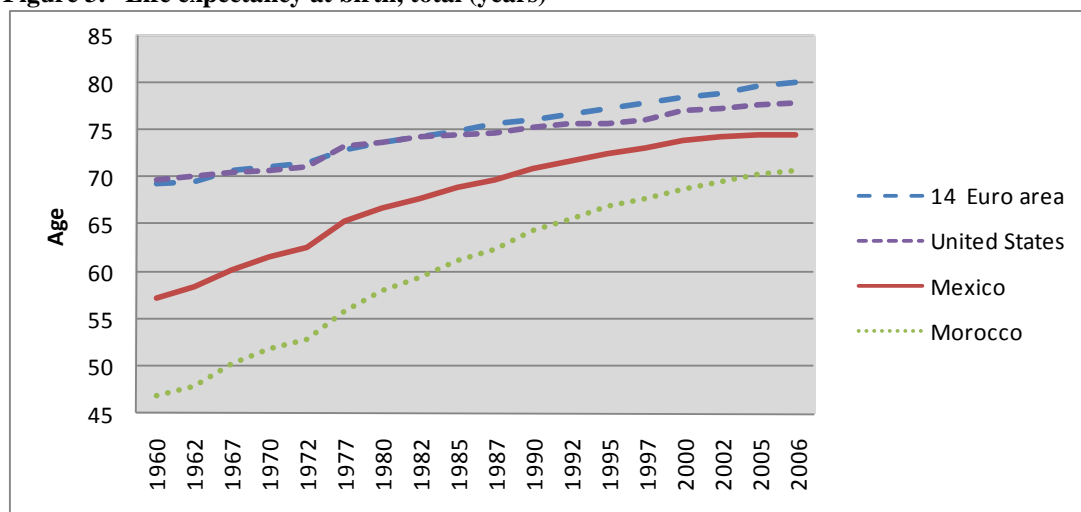
<sup>4</sup> UNDP, 2007/2008 Human Development Report, data available at <http://hdrstats.undp.org/indicators/18.html>, accessed on 6 February 2009.



Conventional measurements of development that focus on income indicators have often been criticized. Sen (1999) in particular argued that development should be seen as the process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy to live the life they have reason to value. Although income growth tends to expand people’s freedoms, this is not necessarily the case. Such freedoms also depend on other factors, such as “social and economic arrangements (for example, facilities for education and health care) as well as political and civil rights (for example, the liberty to participate in public discussion and scrutiny)” (Sen 1999:3). This is relevant for understanding migration, as such human capabilities are likely to affect the capabilities and aspirations to migrate (de Haas 2009b).

Interestingly, while income-related development gaps across the Rio Grande and the Strait of Gibraltar have remained largely constant, non-income related indicators rather suggest there has been a process of steady convergence. For instance, life expectancy is usually considered as a key proxy for levels of human development and quality of life. Figure 3 shows that life expectancy in Morocco and Mexico at birth has increased remarkably since the 1960s and that the gap with destination countries has steadily decreased. The same picture of strong convergence exists for literacy. While adult literacy rates for most developed countries are close to 100 percent, Morocco’s literacy rate has increased from 30.3 to 55.6 percent between 1980 and 2007. Literacy rates in Mexico have been much higher, and have further increased over the same period from 83.0 to 92.8 percent.

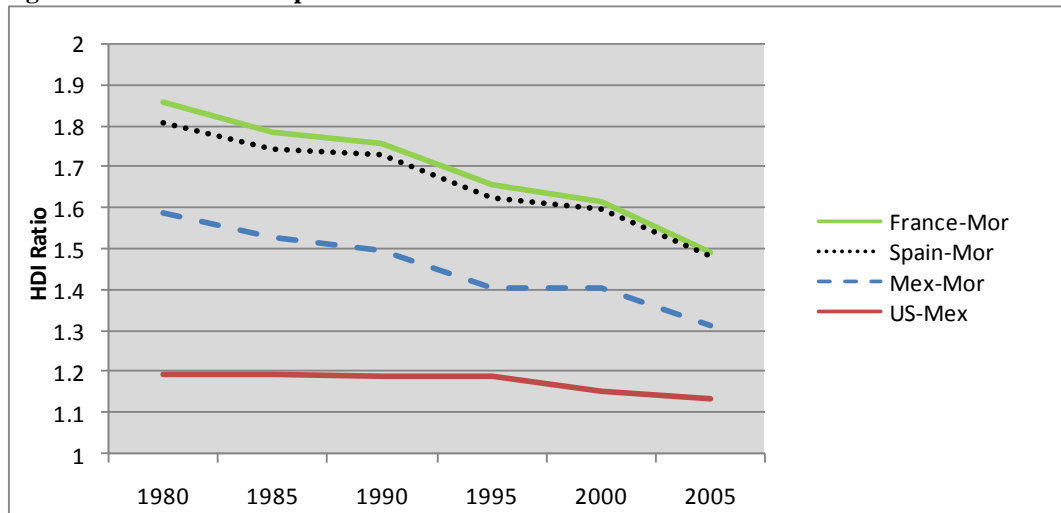
**Figure 3. Life expectancy at birth, total (years)**



Source: World Bank, World Development Indicators, December 2008

Similar trends of South-North convergence emerge if we look at the Human Development Index (HDI), which incorporates measures of GDP per capita, literacy, life expectancy and educational attainment. Although HDI values since 1980 have increased steadily for all countries in question, Mexico and, particularly, Morocco have been catching up. As figure 4 shows, the North-South HDI gaps have been steadily decreasing. The remarkable improvements in literacy and life expectancy explain the particularly fast improvement of Morocco’s HDI values. This can have potentially significant positive long-term impacts on economic growth and further poverty reduction in the future.

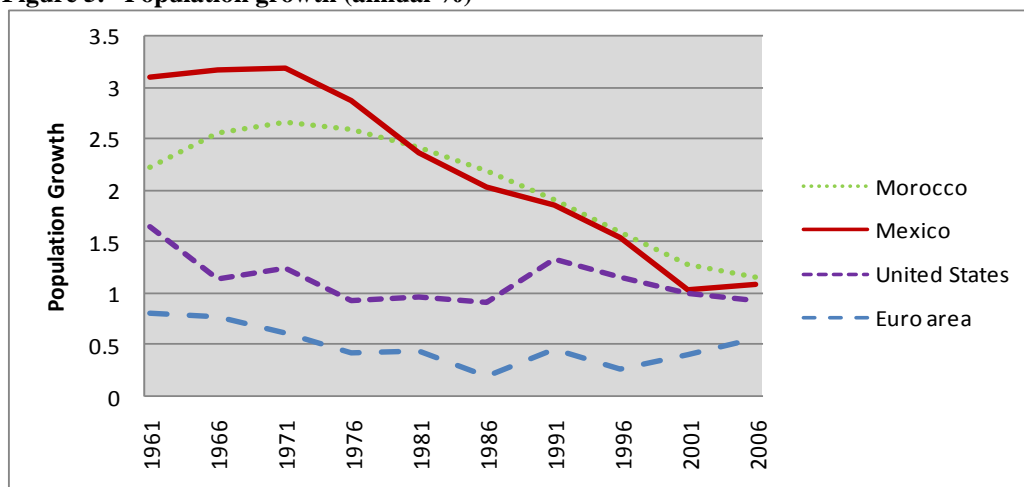
**Figure 4. Human Development Index Ratios**



Source: UNDP, Human Development Report, Indicator Tables HDI 2008

Besides relative levels of human and economic development, demographic factors such as fertility and population growth are ascribed a major role as drivers of migration. In comparison to economic variables, demographic variables reveal a clear trend of South-North convergence over the past few decades. Figure 5 exemplifies the dramatic decline in population growth witnessed in Mexico and Mexico since the 1970s. This is the lagged result of drastic reductions of fertility rates, which have in both countries decreased from approximately 7 births per woman in the 1960s to 2.2 and 2.4 births per woman for Mexico and Morocco, respectively, in 2006. The rapid decrease in fertility rates will begin to have an effect on the growth of the Moroccan working-age population in the decades after 2010 (de Haas 2005). Estimates show that the increase of the Mexican working-age population will significantly slow down after 2015 (Partida-Bush 2005; UNPD 2004). However, the extent to which this will lead to a decreasing emigration potential as predicted from migration transition theory, will depend on crucial macro-contextual factors such as future economic growth and political stability.

**Figure 5. Population growth (annual %)**



Source: World Bank, World Development Indicators, December 2008

Finally, the level of political and civic freedoms is also considered as a factor affecting migration propensities. Also here, both Morocco and Mexico have made progress in the form of increasing civil liberties, although this process has been much more thorough in Mexico than in Morocco. Morocco is an Islamic monarchy represented by a king, who is the head of state with supreme authority over civil and religious matters. The king appoints all important officials, including the prime minister. Constitutional reforms introduced by King Hassan II in 1992 and 1996 have redistributed some legislative powers. Some further reforms introduced by the new King Mohammed VI after 1999 have increased civil liberties including the freedom of political expression and the right to establish associations. Executive power remains still firmly concentrated in the hands of the king. Political competition is not fully democratic and cases of incarceration of individuals who criticize authorities still occur (Polity IV Project 2007b).

For over 70 years Mexico was ruled by one party, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). The PRI's dominance permitted the executive branch to overshadow the legislative power, with the president having extensive patronage powers. Overall, Mexican politics were marked by fraudulent practices. In 1997, the PRI lost its firm hold on the country in the legislative elections, at a time when two main opposition parties were introduced – the National Action Party (PAN) and the Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD). The 2000 presidential elections further diminished the PRI's dominance with the victory of President Vicente Fox Quesada from the National Action Party. Since the introduction of opposition parties, the power of the executive branch has been constrained, although it can still influence the judiciary. Although overall political freedom has increased, southern states (Chiapas, Guerrero and Oaxaca) are still characterised by politically motivated tension and occasional violence (Polity IV Project 2007a).

The above analysis showed that the economic gap between Mexico and Morocco and their northern neighbours has remained persistently high. However the *relative* gap has remained relatively constant. This somehow defies common assumptions of a *growing* North-South gap. Secondly, there is no indication of systematic impoverishment and increasing underdevelopment. Notwithstanding rather constant relative economic development gaps, Mexico and, particularly, Morocco, has achieved economic growth over the past decades. Thirdly, all *non-economic* indicators of human development suggest that there has been a process of South-North convergence rather than divergence. Mexico and, particularly, Morocco has experienced significant improvements in advancing human development. Also in the political domain, Mexico and, to a much more limited extent, Morocco, has introduced gradual reforms creating more civil liberties and, in the case of Mexico, democratization.

This exemplifies the ambiguous nature of measuring development, and that the evaluation of South-North inequalities crucially depends on the relative weight attached to economic factors as opposed to quality-of-life indicators. Despite these positive changes, domestic inequality between urban-based elites and rural populations in Mexico and Morocco remain large, political reform has remained limited particularly in the case of Morocco, and in both countries there is still a lack of economic stability. In addition, it should not be assumed that improvements in economic and human development will automatically lead to a reduction in migration.

Not only can absolute economic growth enable more people to migrate as long as income gaps remain high, the huge improvements in education and overall access to information may also have further increased the aspirations and capabilities of Mexicans and Moroccans to migrate. At the same time, *relative* economic gaps with destination countries have remained persistently high. Assuming that migration requires a certain threshold of economic wealth and that migrants are commonly motivated by *relative deprivation*, this can explain why migration from these Mexico and Morocco has remained remarkably high over the past few decades, despite – or rather thanks to – substantial improvements in absolute levels of human and economic development in both countries.

## 4. Mexican and Moroccan migration in the 20<sup>th</sup> century

### 4.1 Migration as part of general transformations

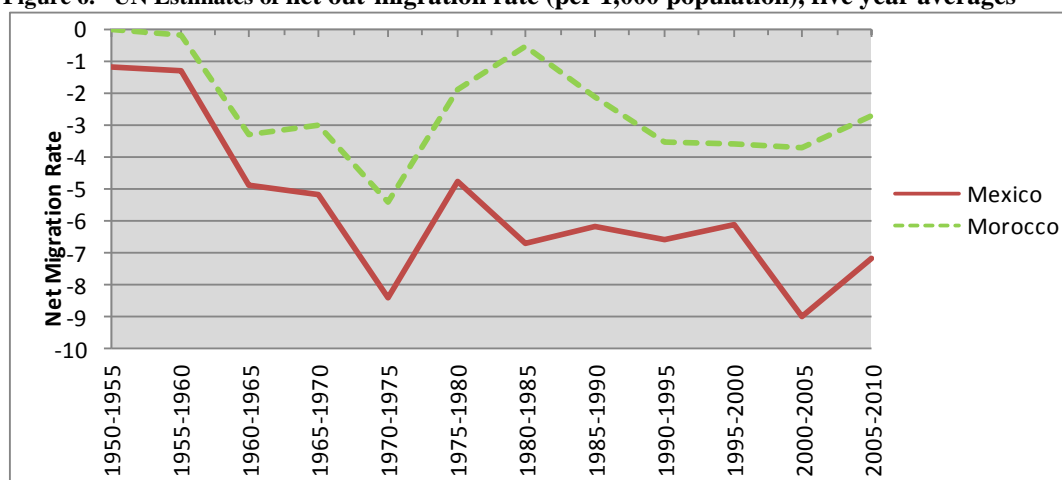
Over the second half of the twentieth century, the majority of low-skilled migrants in the US and EU have not come from the poorest countries, but from Mexico, Morocco and Turkey, which are not coincidentally middle-income countries located in their relative proximity. While Turkey seems to have entered a migration transition and has become a major destination country in its own right, Mexico and Morocco are quintessential examples of a category which Skeldon (1997) has aptly characterised as ‘labour frontier’ countries. The previous section has shown how a certain level of migration-facilitating and migration-aspiring development, combined with a relative South-North development gap which has remained at high enough levels to fuel migration aspirations, has created the ideal preconditions for the occurrence of sustained large-scale migration.

However, it would be reductionist to perceive migration from Mexico and Morocco as simply a function of their aggregate development levels and opportunity gaps with the US and the EU. It would be impossible to understand the particularly large-scale nature of migration along these two main global migration corridors without taking into account their geographical position and the historically grown hegemonic relations with their northern neighbours, which have turned Mexico and Morocco into prime reservoirs of cheap, often irregular, migrant labour. In addition, periodic fluctuations and the changing nature of migration along these two migration corridors can only be explained if we take account of more general regional and international trends in migration and non-migration policy, economic growth and economic restructuring and liberalization.

This section shows that twentieth century migration from Mexico and Morocco towards the US and the EU, respectively, has been part and parcel of more general political and economic transformation in these regions. Examples include the active recruitment of Mexican labour through the U.S. Bracero Programme (1942-1964) and the recruitment of Moroccan workers by European states and industries in the late 1960s; the 1973 ‘Oil Crisis’ and the ensuing economic recession; the liberalisation of trade substantiated by NAFTA and the EU Association Agreements; and the global recession starting in 2008. This section will show how such *forces majeures* in the international political economy explain most trends and shifts in emigration from

Mexico and Morocco to the United States and Europe, respectively, over the second half of the twentieth century.

**Figure 6. UN Estimates of net out-migration rate (per 1,000 population), five year averages**



Source: Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, World Population Prospects: The 2008 Revision, <http://esa.un.org/unpp>, 5 August 2009

Figure 6 displays UN estimates of five-year averages of annual net-migration rates from Morocco and Mexico. Although these estimates need to be taken with significant caution, it is not difficult to relate some of the fluctuation to major events, such as large-scale recruitment in Morocco in the late 1960s and early 1970s during times when European economies boomed, decreasing outmigration and increasing return migration in the 1970s in times of world recession and an unanticipated resurgence of migration in the 1980s and 1990s, which seems to reflect economic recovery and labour market restructuring (including deregularization and casualization of labour) in the US and EU. This section will further explore migratory trends in Mexico and Morocco and how they have been an intrinsic part of broader trends of social, economic and political transformation on either side of the North-South border.

## 4.2 Mexican migration to the United States

Mexico and the United States share a land border that stretches for 3000 km, which has historically provided easy passage over territories that were once part of the same geopolitical entity. As for Morocco (see below), the border area Mexico shares with its northern neighbour is characterised by hegemonic power relations embedded in a history of colonialism and subordination. In the case of Mexico, the expansion of the United States meant the subjugation of Mexican interests and, despite Mexican resistance, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 implied the movement of borders and the seizing of more than half of Mexican land by the US. US expansionism directly transformed large numbers of Mexican citizens into involuntary migrants to the United States. The impact of this historical event is still felt today, as the annexation of the former Mexican land is sometimes used to provide justification for the right of movement of Mexican citizens to the southwest United States, where the influence of Mexican culture and the Spanish language continues to dominate the landscape (Escobar Latapí & Janssen 2006; García 1996).

Since the late 1800s, we can distinguish five major periods in Mexican migration to the United States. The first phase consisted of labour migration of Mexican workers for infrastructure works in the United States, in particular to work on the construction of railway systems. This period of labour migration lasted until 1929-1930, when the Great Depression led to the mass deportation of Mexican workers and the closure of legal channels of immigration into the United States. This period coincided with Mexico's redistribution of agricultural lands and domestic job creation, which encouraged the return of Mexican workers (Delgado Wise & Marquez Covarrubias 2008).

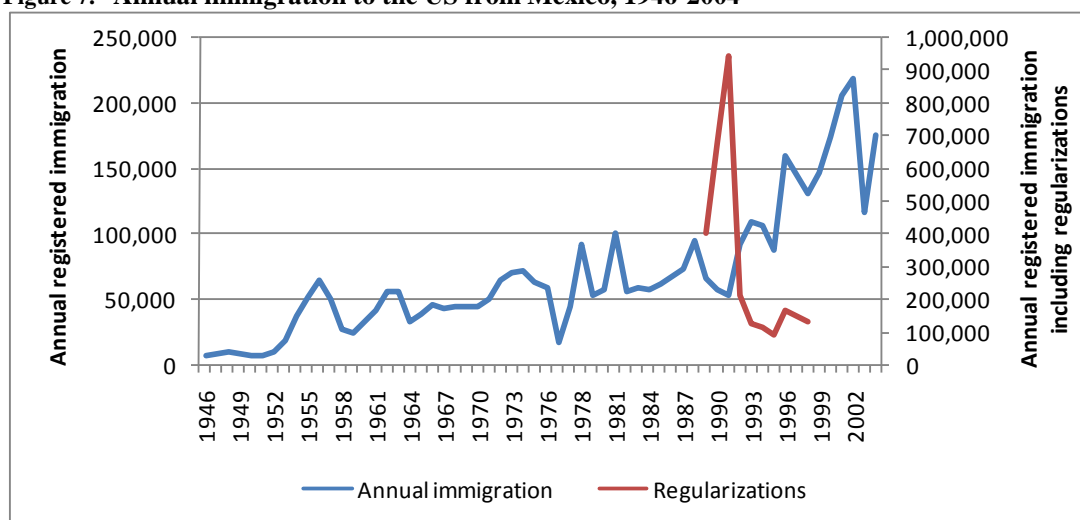
By 1942 the US economy had regained strength and the demand for labour made the US government look at Mexico as the best-suited supplier of labour force. The introduction of the *Bracero* temporary workers programme guaranteed a regular supply of workers to meet the increasing demand for labour. Although the Mexican economy was growing during this period, the Mexican countryside still generated a substantial surplus of labour force willing to work in the US. This phase marks two important changes in US-Mexico migration history. First, this was the first time that the US and the Mexican governments entered into bilateral negotiations to regulate migration, which served both governments' interests. The Mexican government has historically been in favour of using migration as a way to reduce unemployment and poverty. It has also been suggested that migration has been a political 'safety valve', as it effectively allowed the Mexican government to avoid economic reforms necessary for the development of impoverished rural regions (CEPED et al 2007). Secondly, it was during this phase that migrant networks started to solidify (Delgado Wise & Marquez Covarrubias 2008). Since migrant networks reduced the social and economic costs and risks of migration, this laid the basis for future flows. This also rendered the phenomenon increasingly difficult for governments to control.

By 1960-1964 the *Bracero* Programme was being phased out, signalling a new phase which lasted roughly from 1965 to the mid-1980s, and which was characterised by the emergence of the first significant flows of undocumented migration (Durand et al 2001). This is largely explained by the incongruence between increasing demand for low-skilled labour in the US and the absence of sufficient legal channels for immigration. It is at this time that the growing ranks of (often undocumented) migrants began to be viewed negatively despite the fact that their labour had become a structural part of the US economy.

After the discovery of significant oil reserves in Mexico in 1978, the country experienced a boom in government spending and a reduction of out-migration. However, declining petrol prices in combination with the high wages that were paid in the US for agricultural work led once again to increasing labour migration to the US (Martin 2009). Since the mid-1980s, Mexico-US migration has been characterised by an increase in more or less permanent settlement of regular and irregular migrants in combination with a remarkable diversification of communities of origin and destination (cf. Leach & Bean 2008). This has been accompanied by an intensification of family reunification. Paradoxically, increasing migration controls have prevented migrants from following the historical circular migratory patterns and has therefore encouraged more permanent settlement and family reunification. A recent analysis showed a striking correlation between the growth of the number of US border patrol

agents since 1982 and the increase in the average duration of migration for Mexican migrants in the US (Ratha et al 2009)

**Figure 7. Annual immigration to the US from Mexico, 1946-2004**



Source: United Nations Population Division, International Migration Flows to and from Selected Countries: The 2005 Revision.

Over the past five decades, there has also been an intensification of migration flows which have left no Mexican region untouched by migration (CEPED et al 2007). In general, from the 1920s to the 1990s an average of fifty to sixty percent of Mexican migrants have originated from Western Mexico (named by Cornelius (1992) as the Historic region), primarily from the three states of Jalisco, Michoacán, Guanajuato, but also from Durango, San Luis Potosí and Zacatecas (Durand et al 2001). Similarly to the spatial diversification of origin areas in Morocco, over the years new sending areas have emerged in the north (e.g. Baja California), the south (e.g. Oaxaca) and the central regions of the country (e.g. the Federal District) (Durand et al 2001).

The effect of NAFTA on economic development and migration from Mexico is hotly contested. It has been argued that the implementation of NAFTA in 1994 has fuelled an informalisation of labour markets and increased labour market exploitation, leading to an increase in migration to the US (CEPED et al 2007; Delgado Wise & Guarnizo 2007; Delgado Wise & Marquez Covarrubias 2008). This seems to be supported by the immigration flow data in Figure 7. Since the implementation of NAFTA, there has been growth of *maquiladoras* and *maquilas*, assembly plants and more complex manufacturing sites on the Mexican side of the border. While these can be seen as foreign investment boosting Mexican productivity, others have argued that these industries have low levels of integration in the national economy, rely heavily on the import of parts and cheap labour of low-skilled Mexican workers, and would therefore constitute a “disembodied export of the Mexican workforce” (Delgado Wise & Guarnizo 2007).

However, it is difficult to empirically prove a direct causal relationship with NAFTA because other *forces majeures* are also likely to have affected migration dynamics. For instance, the increase in Mexico-US migration might also be explained by high economic growth in the US and the increased demand for ‘flexible’ labour on informal labour markets (Escobar Latapí & Janssen 2006). In addition, the agricultural reform pursued by the Mexican government in 1990-1992 led to subsidy

reductions and reduced price guarantees for crops, which seem to have negatively affected the income of the middle and lower segments of the Mexican peasantry.

In the 2000s, there has been increasing immigration of Central American nationals into Mexico who often intend to 'transit' to the US. According to some estimates, 2 million individuals per year would transit from Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador and Nicaragua through Mexico to reach the United States (CEPED et al 2007; OECD 2008b), but estimates vary hugely and there is great uncertainty around data reliability. According to official figures migration from Central America is relatively low. There is an estimated annual inflow of about 40,000 individuals, mainly Guatemalans, coming to Mexico for agricultural work (OECD 2008b). It is unknown how many undocumented migrants migrate to and live in Mexico. It is important to emphasise that the migration of Central American nationals to Mexico dates back to the 1970s and 1980s when several countries in the region went through a period of political turmoil and civil warfare, although there has possibly been an increase in immigration and transit migration.

The above analysis exemplified that US-Mexico migration has largely been a function of economic fluctuations and policy trends in the United States. This is indicative of the huge regional power asymmetries. The Mexican government has almost always responded to US migration policies, and has been unable or unwilling to develop its own comprehensive migration policy and to negotiate a common migration policy with the US. In an effort to shift this paradigm, President Fox encouraged talks on US-Mexico migration in 2000, but the terrorist attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 largely halted this dialogue. Since then, several attempts to formulate an agreement that would address the status of an estimated 6.5-7 million undocumented Mexican migrants in the US (Hoefer et al 2007), provide legal channels for migration and family reunification schemas, and improve the protection of rights of regular and irregular migrants in the US, have largely failed. At the same time, the US debate has rather focused on toughening border controls including the construction of border fences.

Since the onset of the economic crisis in 2008, the flow of Mexican migrants to the United States has declined, although it has affected irregular migration much more than regular migration. This slowdown explains why the Mexican migrant population in the US has remained largely unchanged at around 12 million rather than experiencing further growth following recent trends, which would have put the Mexican population at about 13 million in 2009. In spite of high unemployment rates among Mexican migrants, no significant increase in return migration was recorded, highlighting migrants' general preference to stay put, certainly when economic conditions in origin countries are not more favourable (Fix et al 2009) and when restrictive migration policies and border controls make re-migration more costly and risky.

### **4.3 Moroccan migration to the European Union**

For centuries population movements in Morocco mostly took the form of seasonal and circular migration patterns from rural areas to other rural areas, but also to more prosperous regions of north-western Morocco and the imperial cities of Meknes, Fes,



Rabat and Marrakech. However, more long-distance migration is not a new phenomenon in Morocco. For instance, in the seventh century Morocco saw the immigration of Arabic-speaking populations, and late fifteenth-century Morocco saw the mass arrival of Jews and Muslims expelled from Spain after completion of the *reconquista*. Slavery within and into Morocco was also a form of population movement that affected the country (de Haas 2005).

While the sea borders between Morocco and Europe appear to mark a physical separation between societies and cultures that seem very distinct today, throughout known history both sides of the Mediterranean have been in intensive contact. Under Arab rule, large parts of current Morocco and the Iberian peninsula were under the same political and cultural sphere. The current separation between Arabo-Berber and Muslim Morocco and Catholic Spain was established after the completion of the *reconquista* of the Iberian peninsula in the late fifteenth century.

Modern migration flows from Morocco to Europe go back to the beginning of the twentieth century and are closely tied to the colonization of the Maghreb region and the Franco-Spanish protectorate that was formally established over Morocco from 1912 to 1956. While France gained control over the heartland of Morocco, the Spanish influence remained limited to the southern Western Sahara and the northern Rif mountain zone (de Haas 2005). As we will see, Morocco's subordinated position to France, accompanied with the reduction of the language barrier through the introduction of the French language for administrative affairs and in education, facilitated the rapid transformation of Morocco into a supplier of low-skilled workers to fill France's labour demands, first in Algeria and then in France's growing industry and army.

We can distinguish five major phases in modern Moroccan emigration, with the first phase starting in the 1830s with France's colonisation of Algeria. The establishment of farms by French *colons* and the expansion of the Algerian coastal cities created an increasing demand for manual labour, to which Moroccans responded by migrating to Algeria, mostly following seasonally or circular migration patterns (de Haas 2005).

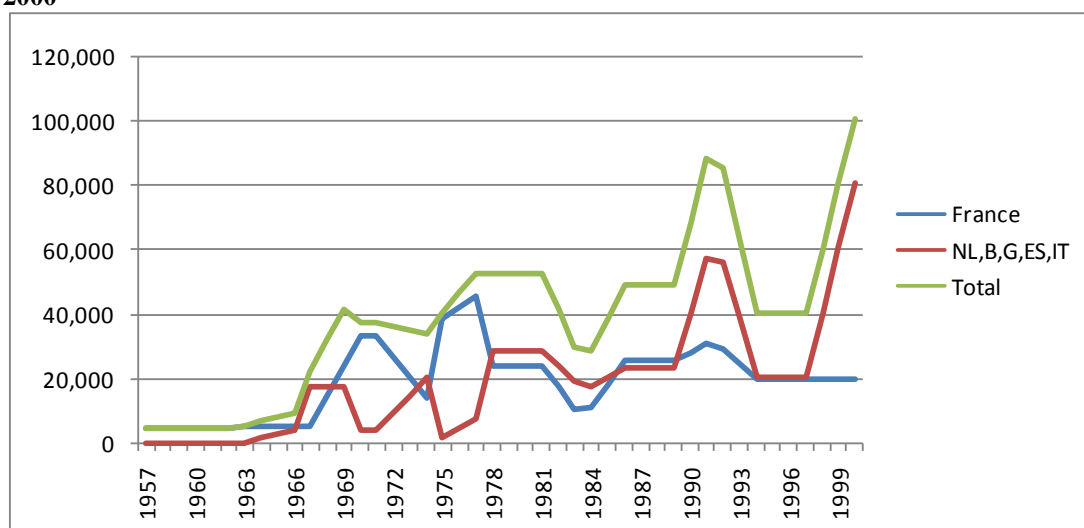
The establishment of the Franco-Spanish protectorate in 1912 signalled the beginning of the second phase characterised by limited migration of workers to France including that of soldiers serving in the French army. In the same period, internal rural-urban migration took off promoted by the urban growth and infrastructural development initiated by the French. The labour recruitment phase continued with the Franco-Algerian war from 1954 to 1962, when France interrupted the recruitment of Algerian workers and became even more dependent on Moroccan workers. In addition, the mass migration of *pieds noirs* (French settlers and their descendents) to France after Algeria's independence in 1962, prompted the migration of Moroccan migrants who had been working for French colonisers in Algeria and who decided to follow their employer to France.

The third phase lasted from the mid 1960s to the 1973 Oil Crisis. This was the great age of labour recruitment, fuelled by high demand for low-skilled, mostly industrial labour in the booming European economies. This also led to a diversification of destinations beyond France. Work was guaranteed and new migration flows were formalised through bilateral recruitment agreements, which were signed with West

Germany and France in 1963, Belgium in 1964 and the Netherlands in 1967. By 1975 it is estimated that there were around 400,000 Moroccans living in Europe (de Haas 2005).

The 1973 Oil Crisis and the subsequent economic recession heralded a fourth phase of Moroccan migration, marked by increasingly restrictive immigration policies. Paradoxically, this led not to mass return but rather to the interruption of circular migration and an increase in permanent settlement, family reunification and family formation (through transnational marriages between migrants and spouses living in Morocco) as a strategy to gain a socio-economic and legal foothold in Europe (De Mas 1990; Heinemeijer et al 1977). As in Mexico, increasing migration restrictions have not led to an end of migration, but have paradoxically pushed more migrants into permanent settlement and have made new migrants more dependent on irregular and family migration.

**Figure 8. Annual estimated net migration from Morocco to major European destinations, 1957-2000**



Source: Own calculations based on migrant stock data obtained from diverse national statistical services cited in De Haas 2003; Moroccan consular data, in Fargues et al. (2005)<sup>5</sup>.

A fifth phase started in the mid-1980s, when Moroccan migration patterns started to show important changes such as the growing diversification of migration destinations as well as in the migrant population, with a new wave of labour migration occurring to Spain and Italy, an increasing share of migrant women (for instance, to be employed in domestic work in southern Europe) and increasing migration of high-skilled Moroccans, not only to Europe but also to the United States and the French-speaking Canadian province of Quebec. Figure 8 shows Moroccan migration has grown and diversified, particularly since 1980. During this phase there has also been an increase in the numbers of undocumented migrant workers in response to the ever more restrictive immigration policies pursued by the European Union while demand for (informal) migrant labour has increased (de Haas 2005).

<sup>5</sup> Net migration estimates were obtained by calculating annual changes in Moroccan migrant stocks, applying a three year moving average. This can only be a rough estimate, and total immigration is likely to be higher as stock figures include emigration and mortality. The volatile movements in the 1990s partly reflect regularisation campaigns in Spain and Italy.

Over the second half of the twentieth century, there has been a remarkable diversification of origin regions of international migration (de Haas 2007). In Morocco, the Sous valley in the southwest and the Rif mountains in the northeast and some Saharan oases have traditionally dominated international migration from Morocco. However, already in the 1960s and 1970s a diffusion process occurred outside these regions, through which the entire northern and south-western regions became involved in international migration. Since the 1980s, increasing migration to Spain and Italy has coincided with the rise of several new source regions in central Morocco (e.g., the Tadla plain and Khouribga) as new sources of international migration. Today, most Moroccan regions are affected by migration, although its relative importance varies from region to region (Berriane & Aderghal 2008).

As with Mexico, Morocco has also been witnessing increasing immigration and transit migration since the mid-1990s (de Haas 2008; Lahlou & Escoffier 2002). Alarmed by the sensationalist media portrayal and public concern of this relatively limited phenomenon, the EU has been putting public pressure on the Moroccan government to increase border controls. In 2003 Morocco passed a new law regulating the entry and residence of foreigners, which however has not stopped the limited but increasing presence of sub-Saharan and, to a lesser extent, European settlers on Moroccan territory (Berriane & Aderghal 2008).

As is the case for US-Mexico migration, Morocco-EU migration has largely been a function of economic fluctuations and policy trends in EU member states, which again is indicative of the huge regional power asymmetries. Officially, the position of EU country governments towards migration has shifted from a welcoming attitude to an official policy of restrictionism. Instead, the Moroccan government has been keen to promote migration as a tool to reduce poverty, promote entrepreneurship and, possibly, to reduce political opposition and regionalism in Berber-speaking areas (cf. De Mas 1978).

Since the start of the economic crisis in 2008, EU member countries have experienced a significant reduction in labour demand. In some countries, this has been accompanied by toughened border controls and measures to encourage the return of migrants. However, in a striking parallel with the 1973 Oil Crisis, this did not lead to a massive return. In Spain, for instance, in spite of a severe economic downturn and very high unemployment rates, most regular and irregular migrants have opted to stay. Some Moroccans with legal residence have returned, but in small numbers. Also the 'pay-to-go' scheme which offered regular migrants a lump-sum payment in exchange for renouncing their resident permit did not encourage many Moroccan workers to return. Some Moroccan families have adopted a 'partial return migration' strategy in which some family members (i.e., wives and children) returned while others remained in order to retain residency rights. Some migrants have moved to other EU countries where they might be able to rely on the support of family networks. (Fix et al 2009).

Roughly similar to US-Mexico economic relations, EU-Morocco economic relations have been characterized by increasing openness. The European Union has concluded a free trade agreement with Morocco that is projected to come into force in 2010. On the one hand, one may argue that free trade has the potential to expand Morocco's market for its exports and benefit from reduced prices of its EU imports. The

agreement may lead, at least in the medium term, to a shift in production toward increased specialization in labour-intensive products (with a focus on textile and agricultural production), much like in the case of Mexico (Achy & Milgram 2001). On the other hand, the free trade agreement is also seen as threatening the economic viability of domestic industry (Hoebink 2005). Although not on the scale of the Mexican *maquiladoras* and *maquilas*, Morocco has also increasingly attracted outsourcing of economic activities such as seafood processing and call-centres.

Morocco also receives some EU funding for programmes that promote the development of the private sector and good governance (i.e. the MEDA program - *Mésures d'Accompagnement*). Officially, both free trade and aid programmes envisage that development will reduce migration from Morocco. However, besides the questionable assumption that development will necessarily lead to less migration, MEDA and other aid programmes are limited in scope and therefore unlikely to have any meaningful impact (Hoebink 2005). At the same time, well-established migrant networks that connect Morocco and an increasing range of EU countries are likely to continue to facilitate future migration.

#### **4.4 Comparison of Moroccan and Mexican migration trends**

Mexico and Morocco's location on the South-North frontier and their proximity to some of the globe's wealthiest nations has undoubtedly played a major role in boosting migration. Both countries also share the feature that their migration flows have been dominated by relatively low-skilled workers. The proximity of both countries to the 'North' and the relatively low costs of migration are likely to explain why international migration from Mexico and Morocco has been relatively accessible for low-skilled workers and their families, whereas for more distant countries it is often the relatively high-skilled and the relatively wealthy who migrate most.

Historically, these regions have been characterised by the relative ease of movement and significant cultural exchange. Colonialism (in the case of Morocco) and territorial expansionism (in the case of Mexico) framed the historical relations between 'North' and 'South' and set the stage for current hegemonic relations. The ensuing economic and political inequalities led to the rise of migration flows that were at times deliberately promoted and in more recent times officially unwelcome but inevitable and mostly tacitly tolerated.

Despite these similarities, these two border regions also present physical differences. Morocco and the EU are separated by sea (with the exception of Ceuta and Melilla), while the US-Mexico border is longer and is entirely on land, stretching over urban centres and large sections of desert terrain that is very porous and difficult to patrol (Alba 2004; Coleman 2007; Krissman 2005). Despite intensified border patrols which have increased the risks associated with border crossings, the border is a relatively minor obstacle to mobility compared to the Mediterranean Sea or even the Strait of Gibraltar. This may make the border crossing relatively easier for Mexican migrants. In addition, one may argue that the cultural and religious differences between Mexico and major destination states in the US like California and New Mexico, with their significant Latino migrant communities, are less marked than between Morocco and EU member states. This relative geographical and cultural proximity may explain why

Mexican migration has continued at high rates despite higher levels of development and a significantly lower North-South development gap compared to the Moroccan case.

The proximity of Morocco and Mexico to the EU and the US, respectively, has been a key factor in turning these countries into labour reserves. Along both migration corridors, the active labour recruitment of temporary workers initially played an important role in boosting migration. The ease of passage, paired with the establishment of migrant networks, was instrumental in maintaining the flows of migrants in spite of the suspension of formal recruitment programmes in 1964 in Mexico and in 1973 in Morocco. In both countries, the sudden halt of recruitment programmes interrupted established patterns of circular migration and paradoxically led to permanent settlement and family reunification rather than large-scale return migration. Restrictive immigration policies and increased border controls combined with a sustained demand for cheap migrant labour in the US and the EU have led to a growing reliance on irregular migration for the recruitment of new migrants.

Mexico and Morocco's role as North-South 'labour frontiers' has been reinforced by liberal ideologies and the pressure of international agencies such as the IMF and World Bank. This led both countries to gradually abandon the protectionist economic policies they had followed until the 1980s, as the 'Washington Consensus' saw free trade and free markets as essential requirements for achieving economic growth. The adoption and implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the free trade agreement between the EU and Morocco should be seen in this more general light.

It is crucial to observe that in the case of Morocco *and* Mexico, increasing trade and international economic integration have not coincided with take-off economic growth or declining GDP per capita differentials. Why this has not been the case and whether and how this can be related to decreasing trade restrictions is a contested issue. While Marxist interpretations see free trade agreements and economic integration as a factor reinforcing the economic dependency and undermining the productive capacity of the Moroccan and Mexican economies, others question this assumption and argue that free trade and economic liberalization can only benefit development if they coincide with structural domestic economic and political reform. Regardless of the interpretation, the economic liberalization and internationalisation seems to be related to similar migration trends for Mexico and Morocco, which are both characterized by the resumption, acceleration and diversification of migration since the mid-1980s.

Notwithstanding restrictive immigration policies adopted since the 1970s, both Mexican and Moroccan migration has persisted through family-reunification and family formation and irregular migration. Family-reunification and permanent settlement were the responses of Mexican and Moroccan migrants when the destination governments decided to end the recruitment of foreign workers. This unexpected outcome was similarly unforeseen by US and EU policy-makers, but was a logical response from the migrants' perspective, who were either aware of the continuous demand for migrant labour, or simply decided to stay on the 'safe side' of the border, particularly because of the dismal political and economic conditions in Mexico and Morocco, which suffered much more from the post Oil Crisis global recession than most destination countries. Also the recent global economic crisis

seems to have had largely similar effects for Mexican and Moroccan migration. Although there has been slowdown of new migration, no mass return has occurred, and the fundamental trends have remained unaffected.

The Moroccan and Mexican migration systems have also shown a remarkably similar tendency towards diversification of origin and destination areas of migrants. This diversification seems to be related to a spatial and social diffusion of the migration experience in origin countries, which has slowly integrated even the most remote rural areas into these migration systems. It is as yet unclear to what extent such diffusion and diversification in migration patterns is linked to policy changes.

Both Mexican and Moroccan studies reveal an increase in emigration from urban areas, a shift away from the traditionally rural character of international migration from these countries (Berriane & Aderghal 2009; de Haas 2007; Durand et al 2001; Hamilton & Villareal 2008). This 'urbanisation' of international migration is strongly associated with general urbanisation processes in both countries. The more diverse geographical origin of migrants is accompanied by a broader range of destinations of such migrants. The diversification seems to be partly linked to the rise of new economic core regions within the US and EU. In the EU, for instance, economic growth in Spain and Italy and increasing demand for workers in agriculture, construction, and the informal service sector jobs (domestic work, restaurants, cleaners, etc) (cf. Allasino et al 2004; Ambrosini 2001; de Haas 2008; Lageder 2006; Ortega Pérez 2003; Reyneri 2001) partly explains why more Moroccans have migrated to southern Europe. Similarly, Mexican workers are increasingly migrating outside of the classic destination areas of California, Texas, the southwestern US and Illinois into areas in the South and the Central US (i.e. Georgia, Florida, Colorado and North Carolina)<sup>6</sup> and the Midwest states of Iowa, Nebraska and Kansas, where there has been a growing demand for cheap labour in the food processing industry and in construction.

The growing role of Mexico and Morocco as transit countries has produced a gradual effort in the global North, and in particular in the EU, to transform border countries in the South, and in this case Morocco and other Maghreb countries, into a buffer zone that would 'entrap' South-North migrants, preventing them from making their way to the North. However, increasing immigration restrictions and heightened patrol missions have proved unsuccessful in blocking access to the Mediterranean coast and to the Canary Islands in the Atlantic Ocean as well as to the United States (Carling 2007; de Haas 2008).

The overall trends of persistent migration and settlement over the past half century have led to the formation of Mexican and Moroccan communities abroad that have reached between 10 and 12 percent of the entire population living in the origin country: figures indicate that there are about 10.2 million Mexican-born residents in the US and there are more than 3 million Moroccan citizens living abroad world-wide, an estimated 2.1 million of which are in the EU (de Haas 2005; Delgado Wise &

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<sup>6</sup> The 2000 U.S. Census revealed that 33 percent of Georgia's total foreign-born population of 577,273 were from Mexico (Migration Policy Institute, Data Hub available at <http://www.migrationinformation.org/DataHub/whosresults.cfm>), accessed on 2 February 2009.

Guarnizo 2007).<sup>7</sup> The presence of no less than 6.5 million undocumented Mexican workers in the United States is very significant, and such groups have great potential for mobilisation, as witnessed in the demonstration that happened across the country in 2006 (Castles & Miller 2009; OECD 2008b).

## 5. The political-economic impacts of migration and remittances

### 5.1 Migration as a structural feature of the regional political economy

The above analysis has shown that the persistent demand for cheap migrant labour in the US and EU and the migration-facilitating function of established migrant network provide powerful explanations for the remarkable persistence of Mexican and Moroccan migration. While the preceding analysis has focused on how migration should be seen as an intrinsic part of broader North-South hegemonic relations and general political and economic transformation processes, half a century of mass migration has also had an impact on these relations and processes in its own right.

In other words, migration has become a *structural* feature of the political economy of the Mexico and Morocco, where remittances have started to play an increasingly crucial role. In addition, the large Mexican and Moroccan migrant communities abroad have been ascribed an increasingly important role as entrepreneurs and development actors. Also for the US and EU, mass immigration from Mexico and Morocco has had irreversible effects. In particular, the *de facto* settlement of large migrant populations has compelled European and US governments to implement erratically-occurring regularisation schemes (such as IRCA in the US and the large-scale regularisation in Spain and Italy in the 2000s), which formalised and accelerated the already existing process of permanent settlement of migrant communities.

There is a remarkable gap between official discourses which tirelessly reiterate the official aim to reduce, control or stop (particularly irregular) migration, and the political-economic interest in continuing migration on either side of the Rio Grande or Strait of Gibraltar. This might explain why governments often turn a blind eye in tolerating irregular migration and undocumented residence. Dominant government discourses obscure the fact that Mexican and Moroccan migration to the US and EU is partly fuelled by a structural demand for cheap migrant labour in formal and informal sectors.

This explains why restrictive immigration policies have invariably failed to stop migration and have had perverse effects, particularly leading to increased irregular migration and growing vulnerability of migrants. The public quest for more control has coincided with a massive increase in investments in land and maritime border patrolling and the related infrastructure. In turn, these control measures have given

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<sup>7</sup> Such figures are not unique to developing countries. For instance, the United Kingdom registered between 5.5 and 6 million of its citizens residing abroad out of a population of approximately 60 million.

rise to a variety of smuggling services serving the needs of undocumented migrants (CEPED et al 2007). So, in many ways the policies designed to ‘combat’ irregular migration seem bound to fail because they are an intrinsic part of the phenomenon which they officially proclaim to ‘combat’.

In recent years, both Mexico and Morocco have experienced increasing transit migration and settlement of migrants coming from Central-South America and sub-Saharan Africa respectively. This has strained relationships with the US and the EU, which have put pressure on their southern neighbours to increase border controls. On the other hand, as significant players in the political economy of Latin America and Africa, respectively, Mexico and Morocco have a vested interest in maintaining good relations and building coalitions with their southern neighbours. Therefore, there is reason to question the level of *genuine* interest that governments of these countries have to stop migrants from further afield transiting through their territories. What we see in practice is that both Mexico and Morocco seem to have used the issue of ‘transit migration’ as a bargaining tool in wider negotiations with the US and EU on economic integration, aid or the improvements of the position of their own emigrant populations.

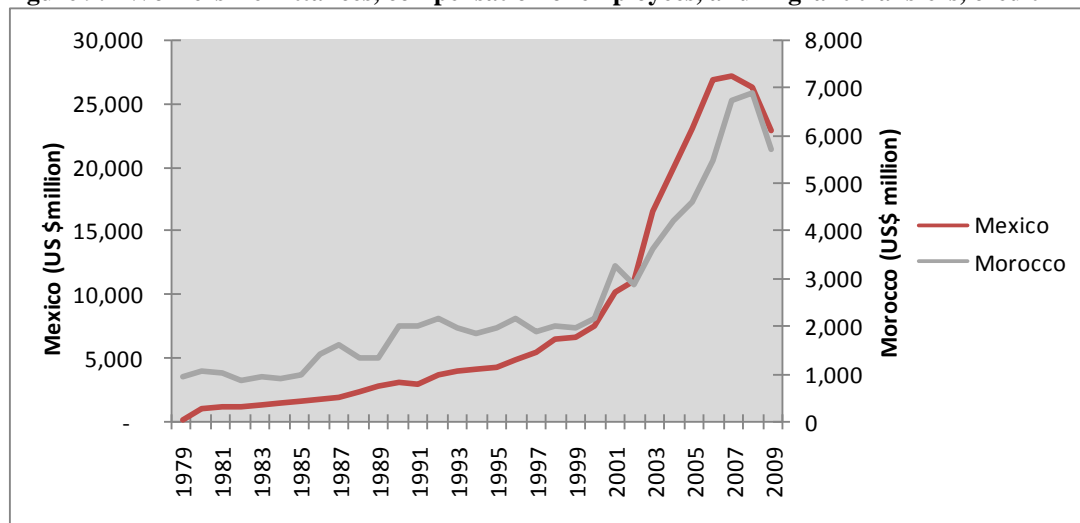
## 5.2 Remittances

Remittances are the most powerful symbol of the strategic place occupied by migration in the political economy of Mexico and Morocco. The crucial role of remittances as a strategic source of hard currency and their role in improving livelihoods, reducing poverty and maintaining the political status quo is another reason why Mexican and Moroccan governments in sending countries have a strong *de facto* interest in the continuation of migration despite the lip service paid to official policies to reduce regular migration and to ‘combat’ (irregular) migration.

Figure 9 exemplifies that, notwithstanding periodic fluctuations, remittances to Mexico and Morocco have shown a steady growth over the past decades. Particularly striking is the growth in remittance volumes since the late 1990s. In the 10 years between 1997 and 2007, remittances to Mexico multiplied fourfold from US\$ 5,546 to 25,037 million. Remittances to Morocco have also shown a dramatic increase since 2000, when remittances were estimated at US\$ 2,161 million, and 2007, when remittances reached US\$ 6,730 million. Despite the much higher absolute volume of remittances to Mexico, the relative macro-economic importance of remittances is much higher in Morocco. In 2007, remittances represented about 9 percent of Moroccan GDP compared to just below 3 percent of Mexican GDP.



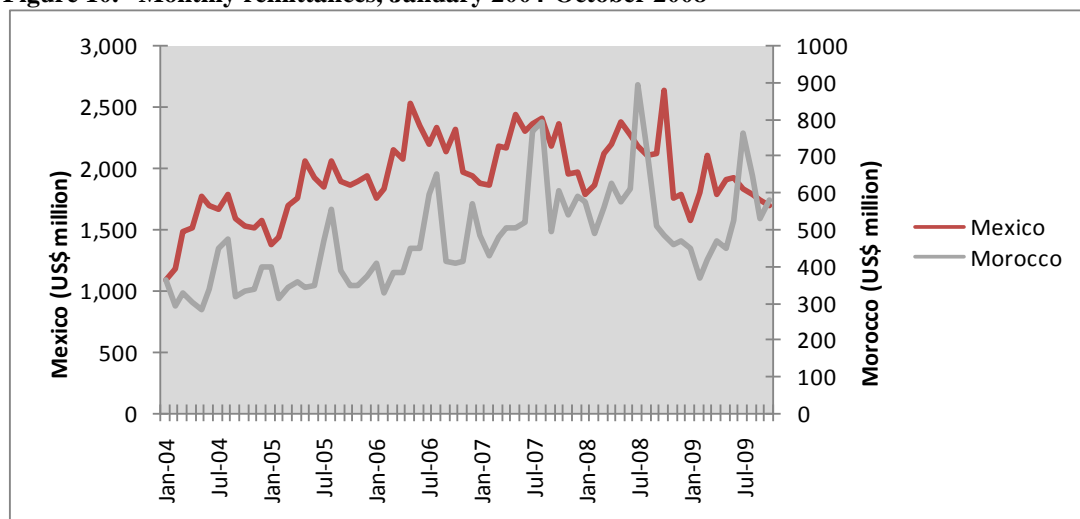
**Figure 9. Workers' remittances, compensation of employees, and migrant transfers, credit**



Source: World Bank, Remittance Data 2009

Figure 9 also shows that the global economic crisis of 2008 has coincided with a significant, albeit not *massive*, decrease of remittances, and that this decrease has been equally strong in relative terms for Morocco and Mexico. While many emigration countries experienced a remittances decline in 2009, in Mexico and Morocco the decrease already started in 2008 and has been comparatively strong. This is likely to reflect the concentration of Mexican and Moroccan migrants in a limited number of countries which were particularly negatively affected by the crisis (Fix et al 2009). For instance, the collapse of the construction sectors in the US and Spain has led to a massive increase in unemployment in the wake of the crisis. The decrease in formal remittances may also partly reflect the increasing use of alternative methods of remitting money, which are not recorded by central banks. Figure 10 shows trends and fluctuations in monthly remittances to Mexico and Morocco. This seems to indicate that since reaching a low in January 2009, Moroccan remittances seem to be recovering. Mexican remittances seem to be stagnating at a lower level, but there seems to be no indication of a massive further decrease (Ratha et al 2009).

**Figure 10. Monthly remittances, January 2004-October 2008**



Source: World Bank, Remittance Data 2009

### 5.3 Development impacts of migration

While Mexico and Morocco are major recipients of remittances, there is fundamental disagreement about the impact of migration on development. This reflects more general paradigmatic and ideological oppositions in the literature between those perceiving migration mainly as a factor undermining or, at best, postponing development and those perceiving migration as a crucial factor boosting modernisation, entrepreneurship and investment (cf. de Haas 2010a).

In order to bring more clarity into the discussion, it is useful to distinguish between the direct and relatively uncontested contribution of remittances to the improvement of the livelihoods and living standard of migrants' families and communities on the one hand, and the more contested question of whether migration can set in motion more structural change and trigger national take-off development on the other. Evidence from both Morocco and Mexico seems to confirm that migration often makes a vital contribution to improving livelihoods and wellbeing of migrants and communities involved and at the same time also confirms the idea that migration alone cannot lead to take-off development and remove more general development obstacles.

#### *Mexico*

There is no agreement on the development impact of migration and remittance in Mexico. Prior studies tended to see migration as a development-undermining process which drained origin communities of their valuable labour sources (cf. Reichert 1981; Rubenstein 1992). Yet other, more recent studies are generally more upbeat. A study by Escobar Latapí and Janssen (2006) concluded that remittances are extremely important for poorer recipient households as they lead to significantly improved incomes and living standards in origin areas.

Various empirical studies analysing pertinent survey data have indicated that remittance expenditure on investments and consumption also stimulate economic activity and employment directly and (via multiplier effects) indirectly (Adelman et al 1988; Durand et al 1996a; Durand et al 1996b). Another study found that three out of four municipalities that had high migration rates reduced their marginality levels through remittances in comparison with municipalities with lower emigration rates (Escobar Latapí & Janssen 2006). There is also evidence that remittances have a positive influence on infant health and decrease infant mortality (Frank & Hummer 2002; Kanaiaupuni & Donato 1999). The evidence on schooling of children is more mixed (Hanson & Woodruff 2002; McKenzie 2006).

The effects of remittance on income inequality are initially often negative (cf. Mishra 2007), but this effect may be reversed over time as the migration experience diffuses across communities and migration becomes less selective (Jones 1998). The socioeconomic background of migrants affects their ability to invest remittances in income-generating activities in the origin communities. Recent evidence shows that migrant workers from the poorest communities across Mexico found it very difficult to set up enterprises, while non-poor return migrants from one particular origin area

had set up 50 percent of their businesses after returning from the United States (Escobar Latapí & Janssen 2006).

The impact of migrant remittances on small business development has been found to be substantial. Estimates indicate that almost 20 percent of the capital invested in microenterprises in urban Mexico comes from remittances. In the ten Mexican states with the highest emigration rates to the US, almost a third of the capital invested is associated with US migration. Remittances affect more than the household unit and area beyond the rural communities where migrants often originate, as microenterprises are often set up in urban centres, where migrants know that their business has greater chances of succeeding due to better economic conditions (Woodruff & Zenteno 2001).

Besides money remitted to family and friends by individuals, remittances can also be sent collectively. For instance, many Mexican migrants are organised in Hometown Associations (HTAs) which send money and other resources to support philanthropic projects such as the construction of schools, clinics, roads and agricultural infrastructure. Some of these initiatives are supported by the government's *tres por uno* programme, a matching scheme in which three levels of government triple the contribution made by migrants' organisations. Notwithstanding the wellbeing-enhancing effects of several of such collective projects, migrants' initiatives do not necessarily meet the most urgent needs in the communities while the benefits of these matching programs generally are limited to the communities with enough migrants able to form an association (Taylor 2006). This raises the question of whether these projects are indeed the best way to invest public funds. In addition, given the relatively low volume of 'collective' remittances, it is unlikely that such initiatives can have a major impact on development processes.

### ***Morocco***

Since the late 1960s, remittances have been a vital contribution to Morocco's balance of payment. In 1968, the officially registered remittances sent by Moroccan migrants were US\$23 million. By 1992, they had increased to US\$2.1 billion per year. A stagnation in remittances over the 1990s prompted the Moroccan government to 'court' emigrant populations to secure future remittances. In the early 2000s, a sudden increase occurred and by 2003 annual remittances stood at US\$3.6 billion and US\$6.7 billion in 2007 (de Haas 2005; World Bank April 2008). Over the past two decades the value of remittances has proved to be substantially higher and less volatile than other international resource flows such as official development assistance (ODA) and foreign direct investment (FDI) (De Haas & Plug 2006; Giubilaro 1997). Since the late 1980s, the Moroccan government continued its policies to facilitate remittances through a network of post offices and banks and by implementing new monetary policies that lifted restrictions on exchange and on the repatriation of money (Giubilaro 1997).

In comparison to the voluminous literature on Mexico, empirical evidence on the impact of migration and remittance on development in Morocco is much more limited. Notwithstanding significant empirical gaps, available evidence (for general reviews of the literature see Berriane & Aderghal 2009; de Haas 2009a) suggests that migration and remittances have considerably improved living conditions, income,

education and spurred economic activity in migrant sending communities and regions through agricultural, housing and business investment, from which also non-migrants have indirectly benefited. There is also some macro-economic evidence that the inflow of remittances substantially contributes to income growth.

It has been claimed that since the 1990s there has been a certain increase in entrepreneurial activities among Moroccan migrants, although there is still a lack of pertinent data to substantiate this claim. Khachani (1998) argued that there has been a diversification in the economic activities of Moroccan migrants. This could be the combined effect of the economic integration of Moroccan emigrant populations in Europe as well as the relative improvement of political and economic conditions in several regions of origin. These would have encouraged migrants to purchase agricultural land and modern agricultural equipment or to establish non-agricultural enterprises, such as those in the tourist sector, construction, transport, food-processing (Bencherifa & Popp 1990; 2000; Berriane & Aderghal 2009; Nyberg-Sorensen 2004). Migrants are also said to have played a significant role in activating the stock exchange in Casablanca and are managing parts of the privatized transportation system, such as bus services (Nyberg-Sorensen 2004).

Moroccan migrant associations have also been recognized for promoting creative initiatives and channelling resources in times of need (i.e. the 2004 earthquake in northeastern Morocco) and many initiatives have taken place in rural areas where the government has lagged behind in promoting development (Lacroix 2005). Migrants have benefited from the technical support of development NGOs to design and implement development project. However, as in the case of Mexican migrant organisations, the overall economic impact of these projects is often very limited due to their relatively small size.

There is ample reason to believe that the development potential of international migration for Moroccan sending communities is far from fully realized. The fact that Moroccans have one of the lowest tendencies to return of all immigrant groups in Europe (Fadloulah et al 2000) suggests that Morocco is still not a very attractive environment in which to invest.

## **6. Conclusion**

Migration has become a dominant feature in the political and macro-economic landscapes of Mexico and Morocco. Despite the significant cultural and economic differences between both countries, they share the geo-political feature of their location on the 'frontier' between the 'developed' and 'underdeveloped' world. It is therefore no surprise that Mexico and Morocco have evolved into the prime source countries of immigrants into the US and EU, respectively. Persistent South-North development gaps, a continued demand for migrant labour in specific economic sectors and the migration-facilitating function of migrant networks help to explain why formal border closure to new labour migration after labour recruitment was abolished in 1964 for Mexico and in 1973 for Morocco migration – has not led to a decrease in migration

Rather, increasing migration restrictions have led to increasing reliance on family and irregular migration and seem to have contributed to, rather than prevented, the permanent settlement of Mexican and Moroccan migrant communities at the destination. There has also been a remarkable diversification of migration origins and destinations for both Morocco-EU and Mexico-US migration. It is not entirely clear to what extent this diversification is explained by a spatial diversification of migrant labour demand, increasing migration restrictions, diffusion of the migration experience across networks or other factors.

The fact that increasing trade, capital and tourism flows across North-South borders have not coincided with decreasing migration exemplifies the usefulness of migration system theory, which hypothesizes that labour, capital, trade and information flows tend to be complements rather than substitutes because the various exchanges tend to reinforce each other. Cutting of legal channels for labour migration has therefore mainly led to a diversion towards other channels for migration including an increase in irregular forms of migration or residence

This paper has also shown that short-term fluctuations and long-term trends in Mexican and Moroccan migration are strongly linked to economic cycles and broader political economic transformations in the US and EU, respectively. Since the mid 1970s, structural change in labour market structures led to a partial shift in the specific nature of (migrant) labour demand, characterized by a relative decline in heavy industry and the remarkable growth of the service sector. At the same time, the general political trend towards deregularization and flexibilization of labour markets along with declining population growth, increasing overall skill levels and increased female labour participation has fuelled the structural demand for regular and irregular migrant labour in the service sector, agriculture and construction.

In light of past experiences, it would therefore be naïve to expect that the 2008 economic crisis would lead to fundamental shift in Moroccan-EU and Mexican-US migration trends and patterns because the structural conditions fuelling migration have remained unaltered. Although a slowdown of new migration has occurred and return migration has increased, these resemble short-term fluctuations normal during any economic recession rather than a *fundamental* shift, let alone a reversal in migration trends. Just as the impact of the 1973 Oil Crisis on Moroccan migration taught us, it is unlikely to expect a massive return of migrant workers in the wake of the crisis, who rather tend to stay put.

In recent years, both Mexico and Morocco have experienced increasing transit migration and settlement of migrants coming from Central-South America and sub-Saharan Africa, respectively. An important question is whether this heralds a gradual transition of Mexico and Morocco into countries of immigration. This is predicted by migration transition theory and this scenario should certainly not be ruled out in the medium to long run. However, for the time being, Mexico and Morocco remain emigration countries *par excellence*. While rapid demographic transitions in both countries as well as declining gaps in Human Development with the US and EU would suggest so, income gaps have remained persistently high. However, if political conditions remain stable and economic growth continues at least at moderate rates, this might lead to increasing immigration and the decreasing emigration on the longer term, particularly in the case of Mexico, where income gaps with the US are *relatively*

low compared with the Morocco-EU development gaps. However, *whether* this will happen will fundamentally depend on future economic growth, political stability and liberalisation in Mexico and Morocco.

While Morocco and Mexico received sizable amounts of remittances, they are much more important in relative (to GDP) terms in the Moroccan case. The impact of migration and remittances on development in origin countries is a hotly contested issue, which has traditionally opposed neo-Marxist migration pessimists and 'developmentalist' migration optimists (de Haas 2010a). However, if we look at the pertinent empirical studies, a more nuanced and positive picture arises. While migration and remittances have generally had considerable benefits for living standards and material wellbeing of the migrants, their families and their communities involved, it has also become increasingly clear that it would be unrealistic to expect that migration alone can create 'take-off' development as long as political and investment conditions remain unfavourable. This makes migrants risk-averse and generally reluctant to return and to invest in business ventures.

For all their good intentions and actions, the positive contributions of individual migrants to local and regional development can *also* be interpreted as a response to states' *failure* to develop a proper institutional framework to redistribute wealth and power, provide basic services such as sewage, adequate health care and schooling and to combat corruption. In the same vein, people who migrate to earn money to invest in an enterprise in the origin country may do so because they cannot get a loan with a Moroccan or Mexican bank. Also this points at systematic institutional failure, which also decreases the development potential of migration. Hence, migration cannot 'fix' structural development failure. Although this might not match official discourse, neither the Mexican nor the Moroccan governments have much genuine interest in stopping migration of their own citizens, because emigration has become a vital political-economic safety valve that generates billions of dollars of remittances in foreign exchange, which have also become essential in sustaining the livelihoods of millions of their citizens. However, in some ways the safety-valve function of migration and remittances may also effectively reduce domestic pressure on origin country governments to implement structural political and economic reforms needed to create more favourable development conditions.

At the same time, the often marginal position of Moroccan and Mexican migrants in the EU and the US, particularly of those with irregular status, discrimination and exploitation on labour markets as well as increased border controls has led to more human suffering and has pushed migrants into permanent settlement. This has hampered their potential to contribute to development processes in Morocco and Mexico.

So, it is not realistic to expect a large-scale return on investments for as long as states fail to create an attractive environment to invest in and as long as migrants' socio-economic position in destination countries and their ability to return for shorter or longer periods is hampered by illegal status and discrimination. The lesson for sending country governments seems that the best policy to increase the developmental potential of migration and remittances is to improve *general* development conditions through pursuing structural political and economic reform. The lesson for receiving country governments seems that, instead of ineffectively trying to stop inevitable

migration, immigration policies opening the borders to demand-driven labour migration, while preventing discrimination and guaranteeing migrants' rights, will enhance the developmental potential of migration for sending and receiving societies alike.

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