



IRREGULAR MIGRATION IN MOROCCO CLANDESTINO



Counting the Uncountable: Data and Trends across Europe

December 2008

Research Brief

KEY POINTS

Main facts and figures

- According to the CLANDESTINO report, about 10-12,000 undocumented migrants were present in Morocco by the end of 2007. Although this is not a very significant number it constitutes a substantial decrease from the estimates between 2002/2005 pointing up to 20,000 irregular migrants waiting to cross from Morocco into Europe.

Quality assessment of estimates found in literature

- All estimates of the irregular migrants are based on approximations. The reliability of these estimates depends primarily on the character and influence of the NGO present on the ground. Also, the information furnished by NGOs who have been present for a long time in Morocco seem more reliable than those which come from NGOs more recently installed in the country.
- The migrants in a state of irregularity are by nature very mobile. Thus, their number varies frequently. Many among them may leave and return within the same year, if, for example, their attempt to migrate has failed. Among the migrants declared as apprehended at the borders by the police force, several tens of them may be counted many times the same year. This devalues the data published by the police.

Main paths of irregularity

- The majority of irregular migrants who enter Morocco use the country as a stepping stone in order to enter Europe. Those who live in the country under irregular conditions are in this situation either because they could not leave for Spain, or because, after having failed to emigrate, they no longer wish or cannot return to their countries of origin.
- Due to the intensification of control at the borders, as much by the Moroccan forces as by the Spanish, the average duration of stay of the irregular migrants in Morocco has lengthened to about 4/5 years.
- Some of the migrants who have diplomas (which may have been obtained in Morocco) work in the country as journalists, or in the service sector. Others work informally. (in construction, hairdressing, shoe repair, and small businesses). However, the great majority is unemployed and survives with the support of NGO's, Moroccan as well as foreign.

Relevant policies

- Until 2002, Morocco followed a rather liberal migratory policy with respect to the countries of sub-Saharan Africa. This was in part due to the will to preserve its political interests in the African continent, and in particular to profit from African support in the conflict of the Sahara. This position was all the more easy to hold whilst Europe had little concern for the migration from sub-Saharan Africa.
- After 2002, and especially since the summer 2005, the migratory policy adopted by Morocco began to be aligned gradually with that of Europe and the authorities tightened the controls at the borders both in terms of entering and exiting the country. This period also saw the adoption of increasingly restrictive laws regarding irregular migration (with respect to Moroccan migrants as well as those from sub-Saharan Africa).

Main policy implications

- The intensifying of the controls at the Moroccan borders resulted in the migratory highway relocating, as of the end of 2005, more to the south, towards Mauritania then towards Senegal.
- These controls also caused large numbers of irregular migrants to reside in Morocco for longer periods of time.
- This situation also led to the emergence of racist sentiments among the local population who portrayed migrants as invaders.



CLANDESTINO

<http://www.eliamep.gr/en/category/migration/>

THE RESEARCH

Estimates and guesstimates of irregular migration in Europe 'travel' freely and uncritically among experts, journalists and policy makers without it being clear who produced them first and how. Their source may not be clear, their direction, however, definitely is: these numbers are routinely used as a means of arousing public anxiety about migration and exercising pressure for policy responses.

This study critically explores the sources of data and estimates of irregular migration and, in particular, the validity and reliability of the methods used in their production. In doing so, it shows why and how migrants become irregular and whether and how they can achieve legal status. We also critically assess the policies aimed at tackling the phenomenon of irregular migration.

Background of Migration Situation in Morocco

The irregular migration flows to Morocco, in their current form, began during the years 1989/1990. It was gradually reinforced by the constitution of the EU of Schengen space (after 1992). Its ascending flow was also affected by the aggravation of the political crises that Africa underwent during the 1990s (Civil wars in Zaire– Democratic Republic of Congo, in Liberia, in Nigeria); major political crises in Ivory Coast, Cameroon,) and the deepening of the economic and social crises that various areas of sub-Saharan Africa experienced during that period. It is estimated that more than 90% of the migrants with irregular status reach Morocco from its border with Algeria. Among these migrants one finds more than 30 nationalities; the most represented countries among them are Democratic Republic of Congo, Senegal, Ivory Cost, Nigeria, Senegal, Mali, Niger, Gambia, and Liberia. Until 2001/2002, the passages of migrants wishing to enter Europe, and in particular Spain, were more straightforward; especially through the administrative borders between Morocco and the towns of Sebta and Mélilia (Ceuta and Melila). The installation by Spain - after 2002 - of a powerful control system of the Andalusian coasts called SIVE (Integrated system of external vigilance) and the intensifying of the control at the borders by the Moroccan authorities will change migratory paths and will make Morocco a country of stay rather than a country of transit.

Size and Demographic Features of Irregular Migration

The official statistical data, coming from the Office of the Statistics (Direction de la Statistique – Rabat), does not make any reference to the irregular migrant population. The only estimates available on this subject come from the services of the Ministry for the Interior (Directorate of the Migration and the Borders) and also from the work undertaken by various governmental organizations - of research or assistance to immigrants. These data from internal sources are also supplemented with data coming from the relevant services of the EU or the Spanish police authorities (Gardia Civil). Furthermore, in connection with the serious events witnessed in the north of Morocco during autumn 2005 (nearly 15 migrants were killed while trying to force barriers installed at the borders between Morocco and Spain) many field studies were undertaken to ascertain the number of migrants coming from Morocco and their living conditions. According to the study published by the ILO in 2002 - the first to be conducted on the subject in Morocco and the Maghreb - the number of migrants in transit ranged between 15,000 and 20,000 in 2000 / 2002. In September 2005, on the sidelines of the meeting between the prime ministers of Spain and Morocco in Seville, the King of Morocco said that in Morocco there were "several hundred thousand undocumented migrants." In October 2005 the European Commission put forward a figure of 10,000 prospective migrants staying in Morocco and 20,000 living in Maghnia, in Algeria, waiting to emigrate irregularly to Europe. This shows a marked decrease with respect to the estimate of 2002 made by the EC, which ranged between 40-45,000 people seeking to enter Europe irregularly from Morocco. The latest estimates of the number of migrants in transit and/or residing in Morocco hover around a figure of between 10-15,000 people. This has been concluded in part by a study carried out in 2007 by UNAIDS (MENA region - Cairo) and the Moroccan Ministry of Health on "Mobility and HIV / AIDS" and on "Migrants access to health care in Morocco". According to the NGO "Médecins sans frontières"-MSF-Rabat, the number of irregular migrants in 2007, was estimated to be about 10,000, mainly split between Rabat, Oujda, Tangier and Casablanca,. "Medecins du Monde" (MdM), estimates that there are around 15-30,000 illegal migrants in Rabat only. However on their website, they publish an estimate of 5-7,000 people for the same city.

Regarding age, the majority of irregular migrants belong to the younger age groups (20 to 25 years). As concerns gender distribution, today women represent nearly 30% of irregular migrants, while in 2001 they represented between 15 and 20% of the total irregular migrant population.

Main Paths into and out of Irregularity

Since Morocco entered into an advanced statute of partnership with the EU, it seems politically decided to fulfil its obligation to enforce control of its borders and to readmit irregular migrants that entered Europe via Moroccan territory.

An important consequence of the new Moroccan migration reality (both factual and political) lies in the fact that Morocco has recently witnessed a significant mobilisation of associations defending the interests and rights of migrants – both associations which intend to support sub-Saharan migrants and those initially created for Moroccan migrants now also operating in favour of foreign irregular migrants. This trend emerged strongly after the events which occurred in northern Morocco in September / October 2005.

These associations have gathered strength from regroupings and other collective actions implemented by foreign migrants themselves. Overall, 3 reasons underlie this phenomenon:

- 1 . The extreme politicization and huge media coverage of the migration issue on both sides of the Mediterranean in recent years.
2. The desire expressed among young Moroccans to react to the violations of rights suffered by migrants on national level, in relation to Europe, or to other Maghreb countries, including Libya, in particular.
3. The availability of finance from public funds, as well as European associations, which associations based in Morocco may use to finance actions in support of migrants; such as, raising awareness about the risks related to migration and assisting both migrants whose migration project has failed and returnees.

Policy Recommendations

One of the principal findings of this project is that the estimates on irregular migrants are either insufficiently founded or, sometimes even contradictory to the sources. However, in order to formulate a successful migration policy one needs to have a thorough knowledge of the field and the capacity both to determine and to follow-up the effects of various measures adopted by public authorities.

Within this framework, it seems necessary to:

- Widen research with other destination, transit and departure countries. That would comprise countries such as Spain and Italy as countries of destination, Senegal, Niger, Mali, Albania or Moldavia, as countries of departure, and the Ukraine or Turkey as countries of transit and departure. This research should be carried out according to the same methodology and use a uniform data operating system. It should also facilitate gaining a deeper understanding of the living and working conditions of the irregular migrants in the countries where they reside.
- Create networks between various research centres in EU countries, in some pertinent Eastern European countries and in Africa (North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa) on the migration (and demographic) questions.
- Examine the studies (on sub-Saharan countries, in particular) on the relation between poverty, underdevelopment, deterioration of natural resources, political governance and the increase of the irregular migration phenomenon. Such studies should also demonstrate in which conditions migration may be (or not) a real instrument of development.

In addition, the launch of a migration policy with a strictly security based perspective as has been implemented so far in Morocco, shows that the pathways of irregular migra-

tion will only move elsewhere; for example, to the south, as in the North African case. This indicates that another approach must be tried out - one that would make current buffer zones not barriers vis-a-vis the migrants, but spaces of development, cooperation and freedom of movement.

Within this framework and utilising the European policy of vicinity, Morocco (and the whole of the Maghreb) should become an immigration country (region) and a relay of development for Africa in the South of the Sahara.

For more information

The full report on Morocco, by Mehdi Lahlou, is available at <http://www.eliamep.gr/en/category/migration/>.

Read the research briefs and full reports of the other 14 countries included in the CLANDESTINO project at <http://www.eliamep.gr/en/category/migration/>

For more clarifications on the Morocco report contact:
Prof. Mehdi Lahlou, Institut National de Statistique, et d'Economie Appliquee (INSEA), Rabat, Morocco



CLANDESTINO

Tel: 00 212 61 55 65 02

email: melahlou@hotmail.com