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Returns at what cost

The challenges of placing readmissions at the heart of EU migration policies

Introduction¹

The introduction in 2016 of the comprehensive EU migration partnership strategy with the countries of the north and western Africa has already produced an uneven record – both in terms of policy effectiveness and in terms of impact on the credibility of other long-standing EU policy commitments. Created at a long series of summits and conferences in the past decade, the series of policy measures and financial incentives offered through various agreements and specifically designed funding envelopes has had as its main ambition to lower the number of migrants to the EU by a combination of four main sets of measures:

- security measures aimed at discouraging and preventing irregular arrivals (border controls, surveillance etc.)
- measures aimed at tackling the root causes of mass migration (such as job creation, development projects etc.)
- measures aimed at supporting refugee-hosting countries (such as humanitarian and structural development assistance)
- measures aimed at ensuring orderly returns of all irregular migrants or people

whose asylum request has been rejected to their countries of origin – or countries of residence prior to arrival

In the course of the past two years notable – if not always unequivocally seen as positive – advances have been made in terms of curbing arrivals and dispersing funding aimed at addressing root causes and supporting refugee-hosting countries. But the question of returns and readmissions has proven to be an extraordinarily difficult one to tackle, with most of the targeted countries of origin and transit showing clear reluctance to accept organized mass returns of their citizens from the EU.

This policy brief looks at the underlying challenges of implementing EU returns agenda from the point of view of both EU and individual member states – and from the point of view of the countries of origin/transit. It does so on the parallel example of two seemingly quite different cases – Senegal and Morocco. It is our contention that these cases despite their seeming differences, which would be elaborated in the brief, hold similar valuable lessons about the importance of understanding and taking into account the role of migration in the political economy of the target countries in order to design effective migration management policies – and also understanding the risks and limitations of making returns the symbolic and real spear point of EU migration agenda.

¹ Note: Some elements of this policy brief have already been published as a part of the essay “Their country’s global citizens: Political and economic agency of Senegalese diaspora”, published earlier this year in the Clingendael’s Spectator magazine (<https://spectator.clingendael.org/pub/2018/4/the-diaspora-influence/>)

The Shape of Migration

In order to better understand the importance of returns/readmissions agenda, we first look at the place and role of migration in the two countries' political economy. A cursory look at this question shows in both cases a deeply entrenched culture of migration and a significant role that migration plays in these countries' economic and political life.

According to the latest World Bank data, there are 643,640 Senegalese or 4% of the country's population officially registered as living abroad.² Considering many Senegalese are not officially registered, the real number is believed to be higher, but there are no reliable estimates as to just how much.

In comparison, over 3 million or almost 10% of Moroccan population live in Europe alone, making both countries significant contributors to the net migration to Europe, and specifically EU. That said, the arrivals from both countries have fallen in relative terms in the course of 2018 and none of them featured among the top-ten countries of migrant origin in the first 8 months of 2018.³

In both countries, migration has played an important social and economic role in defusing tensions related to economic underperformance, (youth) unemployment or even ethnic/demographic tensions. In fact, a case could be made that both in Senegal and in Morocco migration inhabits the grey area between individual choice and state-encouraged policy solution to structural economic and societal problems.

This case may be easier to make in case of Senegal, where migrants remittances contribute a significant share of state income. Last year remittances were estimated at USD 2,238 billion or almost 14% of the country's GDP - equaling the country's revenues from export of goods. In comparison, the Overseas Development Assistance to Senegal has been averaging USD 885 million since 2010 - barely 40% of the total remittances contribution. Arguably,

nowadays, "the true driver of Senegal's economy is migrants' income".⁴

Senegalese living abroad have also gone beyond providing direct remittances to their families, and have also been creating fund-pooling mechanisms to implement collective investments in their communities' infrastructure. This engagement is mainly done through some form of hometown associations (HTAs) or "*associations des ressortissants*" that fund collective projects aimed at improving the infrastructure and institutions in the community of origin - building, renovating, or supplying schools or medical centres, funding mosques or even improving basic infrastructure such as water, road, or electricity networks.⁵

With such a large economic footprint, the country's diaspora has been increasingly seen as a key development actor in the country, fulfilling at least three important government tasks:

- Providing access to hard currency and stabilizing the exchange rate
- Supporting domestic consumption, and thus economic growth
- Acting as a social safety net, thus reducing pressure on the government to provide these services

In view of this, with half of the Senegalese families having at least one member abroad, it could be said that the diaspora plays a role of an informal development agency and social security net wrapped in one, to which the state has outsourced a significant part of its responsibilities in terms of social protection.

So while from the European point of view the economic development of Senegal is seen as a solution for reducing migration, in particular in its illegal form, Senegal sees migration as an actual tool of development and a much needed social security.

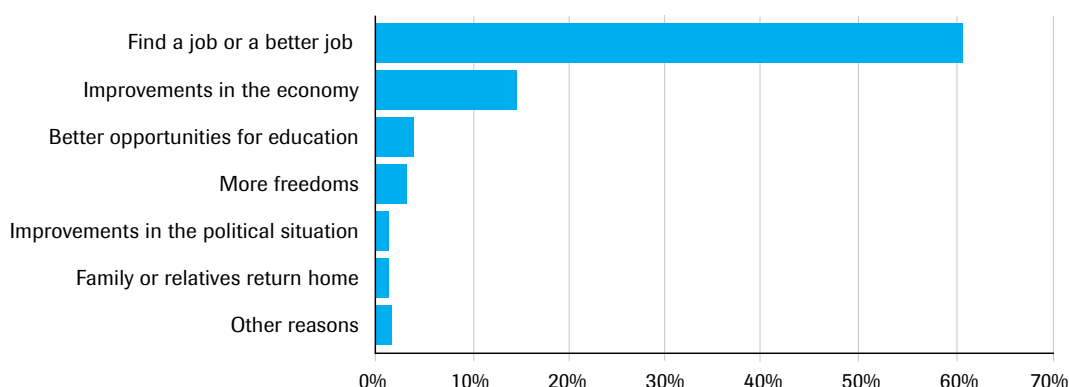
2 World Bank, 2018, Bilateral Migration Matrix 2018, Available at: <http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/migrationremittancesdiasporaissues/brief/migration-remittances-data>

3 <https://dtmodk.iom.int/docs/FlowsCompilationReportAugust2018.pdf>

4 World Bank 2017, Bilateral Remittances Matrix 2017, Available at: <http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/migrationremittancesdiasporaissues/brief/migration-remittances-data>

5 For a more detailed description of how these pooled funds work, see: Toma, S (2017) *Engaging with Its Diaspora: The Case of Senegal* in J. Mangala (ed.), *Africa and its Global Diaspora*, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham

Figure 1 Change needed in Morocco for potential emigrants to stay, 2010-2013



Source: OECD (2017) *Talent Abroad: A Review of Moroccan Emigrants*

Morocco has for decades been similar to Senegal – in the sense that it has been mainly the country of origin for a large population of migrants in Europe. In the early decades of the 1970s and 1980s, this migration has in fact been organized jointly by the Moroccan authorities and the governments of the host countries.⁶ Decades of such structural, state-sponsored migration have created one of the largest diasporas in the world – more than 3 million Moroccans currently live in EU countries such as France, Spain and Italy, with just above 5,5% of that total population residing in the Netherlands.⁷ Their economic contribution may not be as high in relative terms as that of the Senegalese diaspora – in 2017, the remittances have brought “only” 6,8% of the national GDP or USD 7,47 billion⁸ – but they tend to play a similarly important macroeconomic role.⁹

The reasons for this migration in recent decades have been similar to those driving the young Senegalese towards Europe: poor economic prospects, high youth unemployment, an impenetrable labour market ruled by patronage and influenced by networks and family connections. According to a recent OECD detailed report, over 60% of Moroccans considering migration would reconsider if the potential for finding a job or better job would improve.¹⁰ (see Figure 1). That said, both countries also feature strong sociocultural incentives for migration, which is being seen as “right of passage” or duty towards one’s family.¹¹

Despite rising political tensions, the percentage of Moroccan youth stating improvement to freedoms and improvement of political situation would prevent them from migrating is strikingly low. In the case of Morocco, however, lack of job prospects in cases of some demographic groups is seen as being caused or at least compounded by political reasons – such as economic neglect and disenfranchisement of its Berber population, which constitutes a vast majority of the Moroccan émigrés to some EU countries, including the Netherlands.

6 For a more detailed historical overview of Moroccan migration to EU, see: <http://focus-migration.hwwi.de/uploads/twilpubdb/CP16Morocco.pdf>

7 World Bank, 2018, Bilateral Migration Matrix 2018, Available at: <http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/migrationremittancesdiasporaissues/brief/migration-remittances-data>

8 World Bank 2017, Bilateral Remittances Matrix 2017, Available at: <http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/migrationremittancesdiasporaissues/brief/migration-remittances-data>

9 For a more detailed discussion on the macroeconomic impact of remittances in Morocco, see: Marzovilla, O. Mele, M. (2015) Remittances, Economic Growth, Exchange Rate Regime: The Case of Morocco, *European Journal of Economics, Finance and Administrative Sciences*, Issue 71

10 OECD (2017) *Talent Abroad: A Review of Moroccan Emigrants*

11 Wiardi Beckman Stichting, 2017, *Over de grens: De vluchtelingencrisis als reality test*; interviews in Dakar, March 2018

This particular social and ethnic group has been increasingly vocal since late 2016, when a security incident in the coastal city of Al-Hoceida prompted the emergence of the first organised protest movement in a decade, Hirak. The members of the movement have been demanding more equitable development and attention to the region, which they see as being deliberately neglected by the government. As a result, they have come under strong government pressure – including detention, and imprisonment that included torture.¹²

While there is no structural registration of migrants by their ethnicity, it is striking that the rise in the number of Moroccans seeking political asylum in the Netherlands since 2016 has coincided with the rising tensions in the Rif, where many of its Moroccan migrants come from. What little information is known, indicates that the migrants are mainly young single Moroccan males, who have often already tried and failed to get asylum in other EU countries, or have heard of the alleged Dutch leniency in granting asylum through their social networks.¹³

At the same time, Morocco has recently started becoming increasingly a country of transit for the migrants from sub-Saharan Africa. According to the Spanish Interior Ministry, over 17,000 migrants have arrived in Spain this year – twice as many as in 2017. In fact, Spain has overtaken Italy as the most popular entry point for migrants to travel to Europe.¹⁴ Since the majority of the migrants arriving in Spain are coming via Morocco, EU leaders believe Moroccan government needs to play a greater role in stemming the flow of people. For the past 15 years, the EU has been pushing hard for a deal that would see some of the migrants who came to continent

via Morocco returned there.¹⁵ This has introduced a new degree of complexity to the already tense migration diplomacy between Morocco and the EU and further raised the bar for the country's already questionable human rights and migrant protection record.

The Returns Conundrum

Although already a sticky subject before the 2015 Mediterranean crisis, returns and readmissions have since become a priority within the outward-looking elements of the EU migration agenda. Their importance has been stressed continuously since the enactment of the Returns Directive in 2010, as well as in a range of documents that have emerged since and that are specifically focused on returns, such as the EU Action Plan on Return, updated lastly in March 2017,¹⁶ and the numerous Council Conclusions focusing on return policies.

In this latest set of documents, the EU increasingly relies on the so-called “more-for-more principle” to obtain cooperation from third countries on the readmission of irregular migrants. This principle entails tying readmission demands to other areas of cooperation, and rewarding countries for their cooperation on readmission. In countries, like Senegal, where development agenda is economically relevant, the “rewards” often relate to EU development funding and activities. Senegal is, for instance, the single largest recipient of funds from the EU-supported emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF)¹⁷ – an instrument that has been established to serve as the main financing tool for addressing irregular migration from Africa. In Morocco, on the other hand, the more-for-more agenda has evolved around border cooperation and visa easing arrangement.

12 <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/09/05/morocco-king-brushes-evidence-police-abuse>

13 <https://www.volkskrant.nl/nieuws-achtergrond/waarom-verloopt-het-uitzetten-van-uitgeprocedeerden-zo-stroef-~bb2f5ff6/> and informal conversations with the staff of various Asylum centres (COA) in the Netherlands

14 <https://www.dw.com/en/morocco-a-risky-migration-partner-for-the-eu/a-44898635>

15 *Ibid.*

16 <https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/20170302amoreeffectivereturnpolicyintheeuropeanunion-arenewedactionplanen.pdf>

17 <https://ec.europa.eu/trustfundforafrica/region/sahel-lake-chad/senegal>

In none of these two countries, however, has the more-for-more principle been successfully implemented. The latest Progress Reports on the implementation of the EU partnership agreements published thus far and the more overarching progress reports of the implementation of the EU Migration agenda suggest that readmission has in fact remained by far the least successful of all already challenging aspects of cooperation.¹⁸

Under Article 13 of the Cotonou Agreement,¹⁹ Senegal is obliged to re-admit its nationals that are being returned from the EU countries on the grounds of being irregular migrants. Senegal also has bilateral readmission agreements with Spain, Italy and France, and has actively cooperated on border management with the EU – though, much like Morocco, it has not yet signed or agreed to an EU Readmission Agreement (EURA). Its record of accepting its returned citizens is dismal, with only 9% return ratio.²⁰ The main technical obstacles for slow returns, in the eyes of the EU officials is refusal of the Senegalese governments to cooperate – by for instance issue temporary travel documents to the Senegalese citizens who claim to have no IDs, an issues that comes up time and again in every EU progress report in 2017 and was repeatedly stressed by both the EU and the Senegalese interviewed as a part of this research.

Morocco has signed bilateral readmission agreements (of nationals only) with Spain, France, Germany, Italy and Portugal. Returns under bilateral agreements have been progressing slowly – even in cases, like for instance Germany, where there is a stated full commitment to cooperation by the

Moroccan government.²¹ The identification of Moroccans without documents features prominently as one of the main obstacles to effective deportations, but also the logistical and security challenges of executing forced deportations by planes²² and the simple challenge of identifying irregular migrants. In the case of the Netherlands, which still does not have a bilateral returns agreement with Morocco, these obstacles prove harder still. Many Moroccans who arrive on their own file an asylum request, but also leave the special centres on the eve of what they already suspect would be a negative decision, making it hard to trace them down.²³ The governments' attempts to discourage such "misuse" of asylum procedure by for instance cutting off the modest return assistance or systematically raising the issue with the government has not borne fruit.²⁴

The Dutch-Moroccan difficulties are somewhat out of sync with the wider European trend, which is somewhat more positive – in 2017 there were 34,000 Moroccan citizens who were issued an order to leave the territory of the EU, and just over 10,000 were returned, making Morocco one of the only two countries accepting such high number of returnees.²⁵

Morocco has however structurally avoided committing to EURA that would include third country nationals. The negotiations around the EURA have been going on for over a decade now, without any real progress, while the pressure of illegal migration has

18 <https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/20180516progress-report-european-agenda-migrationen.pdf>

19 [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:22000A1215\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:22000A1215(01))

20 "Return ratio" is defined as the ratio between return decisions and effective return of country's citizens. For specific figures on Senegal, see: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2018/570490/EXPO_IDA\(2018\)570490_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2018/570490/EXPO_IDA(2018)570490_EN.pdf)

21 This increased cooperation followed on the 2015 attack on the Christmas market in Cologne, see: <https://www.dw.com/en/the-difficulty-with-deportations-to-morocco/a-19339006>

22 For instance, any flight out of the Netherlands can take only up to two deportees, see: <https://www.dienstterugkeerenvertrek.nl/Landeninformatie/marokko/020Voorbereidenfeitelijkvertrek/>

23 Informal conversations with the staff of various Asylum centres (COA) in the Netherlands

24 See, for instance, <https://www.volkskrant.nl/nieuws-achtergrond/waarom-verloopt-het-uitzetten-van-uitgeprocedeerden-zo-stroef-~bb2f5ff6/>

25 https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Statistics_on_enforcement_of_immigration_legislation#Latest_trends_in_enforcement_statistics

gradually moved the negotiation of an EURA with Morocco to the centre of its relations with the EU.

Migration: a piece of the political-economic puzzle

We argue that Senegal and Morocco, while having different economic and political contexts, share one significant similarity: in both countries migration and migrants play an important role in the national-level political economy. As the more detailed analysis below will argue, these roles differ, but have several things in common:

1. Migration preserves a degree of economic resilience among the population and impacts the macroeconomic and societal stability of the country.
2. Migration and migration-created diasporas can play important direct political roles in the countries of origin – by the presence or by absence – further increasing their impact on stability.
3. The combined economic and political influence of migration creates challenges for the political establishments in both countries when it comes to visible mass returns of its irregular migrants from the EU countries – such returns could be highly problematic or even in some case challenge their claim to power.

In Senegal, the country's establishment – in an apparent effort to harness the growing financial flows coming from the diaspora – adopted the discourse at the turn of the century linking migration and development, and started setting up institutions aimed at extracting the financial and human capital from the European and later also US-based Senegalese diaspora. This approach consisted of three key lines of intervention: promoting private economic investments of Senegalese living abroad in Senegal, supporting migrant pooled fund mechanisms abroad and their development projects in home communities, and leveraging the resources and expertise of the highly skilled diaspora for the benefit of Senegal.

More importantly, with time, Senegalese diaspora has become interested in the

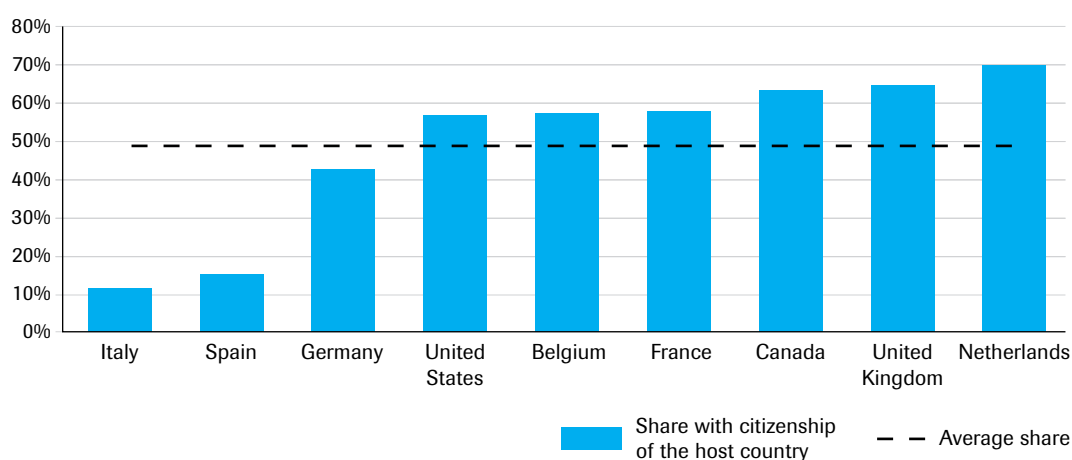
state, and has gradually managed to assert its own channels of political influence on the country's governing structures, by translating some of the dispersed economic power it wields through individual migrants' remittances into a formal place at the political decision-making table. Senegalese citizens living abroad can vote in country's elections, and many observers have argued that they also tend to have an important weight in determining the outcome through their votes as well as through their influence on relatives back home. In fact, since 2000, all the major electoral campaigns were organised not only in Senegal but also in major migrants' countries of settlement, notably the United States and France – with Paris and New York being considered as “the main battlegrounds” for presidential elections. With over 400 voting places opened in countries that count even less than 200 registered residents, Senegal seems to hold the record for the largest number of diaspora polling stations.

And although the number of electors registered on voting lists abroad is low (about 3.4 % of the total), diaspora's voice is expected to reverberate and impact voters' choices back in Senegal. Diaspora vote is thus expected to have a symbolic value and a multiplier effect beyond its actual weight. International migration has thus become not only a central feature of Senegalese identity and the standard model of social advancement, but also a tangible element of its daily political life, fully represented in country's discourse and at all levels of policy-making. The same people that some European policy-makers view as law-breakers and a potential economic and societal threat, are viewed by their country of origin as valued citizens, future development agents and voters with formal parliamentary representation.

This, arguably, makes it harder for Senegalese politicians to agree with and implement policies that would undermine the size, financial reach or political power of its current or future diaspora – and accepting the forced returns of irregular migrants from high-earning countries ranks high on that list.²⁶

26 *Ibid.*, interviews with Senegalese state officials and western diplomats, March 2018, Dakar and Europe.

Figure 2 Moroccan emigrants' citizenship of main destination countries, 2010/11



Source: OECD (2017) *Talent Abroad: A Review of Moroccan Emigrants*

Morocco is facing another kind of challenge when it comes to the place of migration in national political economy. With 5,8% of GDP coming from remittances,²⁷ Morocco's dependence on this source of income, while high, is lesser than that of Senegal. But the security valve that the labour migration has represented in the past and still continues to represent is highly important for maintaining an extraordinary level of stability in the troubled region. This may be even more the case in the Rif area, which has a worse than average record both on economic development and on political freedoms, and where a significant part of Moroccan diaspora in Europe – and certainly the Moroccan diaspora in the Netherlands – comes from.

In fact, the Moroccan government has actively encouraged emigration for political and economic reasons – as witnessed by organized state involvement in the 1970s and 1980s with formal recruitment agencies scouting for low-educated manual labour for emptying western European factories.²⁸

Moroccan state specifically stimulated labour recruitment from relatively marginal Berber-speaking areas, including the northern Rif, a region with a history of protracted tensions with the government. It has been argued that the remittances were most likely expected to diffuse some of the existing economic and political tensions in this part of the country.²⁹ Until the 1990s, the Moroccan government had attempted to maintain tight control of Moroccans living in Europe by actively discouraging their integration into the receiving societies, including naturalization. The legacy of this policy is still strong: Moroccan migrants in Europe, including the second generation, are not too quick to take the citizenship of the host country – on average only half of them hold the host-country citizenship, with the Netherlands at 70% being a notable exception. The number of Moroccan migrants with local citizenship is especially low in Spain and Italy, where less than 20% of Moroccans aged 15 and above hold host country citizenship (see Figure 2).

Unlike Senegalese, the Moroccan migrants were also actively discouraged from

27 <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/bx.trf.pwkr.dt.gd.zs?yearhighdesc=false>

28 For a history of Moroccan migration in this period see also de Haas, H (2016) Moroccan migration trends and development potentials, pg.11-14, GIZ, Available at: <https://www.giz.de/fachexpertise/downloads/giz2016-en-moroccan-migration-trends.pdf>

29 For a detailed discussion on this topic see: De Haas, H. (2005) Morocco: From Emigration Country to Africa's Migration Passage to Europe, Migration Policy Institute, available at: <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/moroccoemigration-country-africas-migration-passage-europe/>

organizing themselves politically – fearing that this may form an opposition force from abroad.³⁰

The Moroccan state changed course in the early 1990s, when a sharp drop in remittances and a strong pushback on lack of integration of Moroccans created a push for the liberalisation of nationalization practices, and acceptance of dual nationality – as well as renewed push to overcome the perceived alienation of Moroccan diaspora from their country.³¹ A ministry for Moroccans residing abroad was created in 1990, as well as “Fondation Hassan II pour les Marocains Résidant à l'étranger,” which aims to foster links between Moroccan migrants and Morocco. Through this and other institutions, these days Morocco runs extensive programmes aimed at ensuring a sense of closeness to its diaspora – exchanges, projects that leverage the skills of Moroccan émigrés and nurturing the social and economic impact of migrants – as long as it aligns with the vision set out by the country's ruling family and its political establishment.³²

In terms of returns and readmissions, this complex social, economic and political situation leaves Moroccan government with limited internal manoeuvring space. Internally, the level of dependency on remittances may be lower than that of Senegal, but still high enough for their loss to create significant economic impact. It may also affect the political cushion they have provided over the decades – and potentially bring back to the country its dissatisfied youth, a prospect that is increasingly concerning in the face of the protest in the Rif picking up momentum and the state being increasingly criticized for the hard-handed approach to the brewing dissatisfaction of the Berber community. For those invested in the current political settlement in Morocco, accepting returns carries significant risks – without offering any structural benefits that could offset them.

30 *Ibid.*

31 *Ibid.*

32 OECD (2017) *Talent Abroad: A Review of Moroccan Emigrants*

The inclusion of third-country citizens in the readmission negotiations has made this already difficult situation additionally complex. The EUAR foresees that Morocco also readmits those third-country nationals, as well as its own citizens. According to migration experts, an agreement that would include Morocco accepting the third country migrants is “unrealistic”.³³ This despite an increasing number of migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa – especially from Chad, Cameroon, and Nigeria – that have made Morocco their home, offering respite from economic and political troubles in their own countries. Morocco's own high unemployment rate has fuelled concern over foreign migrants in the labour market and a general anti-migrant sentiment among the public. Much like in neighbouring Algeria, there is increased racism against these migrants in Morocco, fuelled by a combustible mixture of “fear, competition and poverty.”³⁴ According to reports published by humanitarian and rights organisations, the majority of surveyed sub-Saharan migrants has experienced deliberate physical violence, most commonly committed by Moroccan security forces.³⁵

In response to this challenge, in December 2017 the EU Trust Fund adopted a new programme (EUR 4.58 million) aiming to strengthen the protection and resilience of migrants and refugees, displaced persons and host communities in Morocco – reflecting the policies already used in the framework of EU compacts, the main policy tool used in the EU response to mass protracted displacement in the Middle East. This programme – which is in line with Morocco's own National Strategy on Migration – is aimed to “help civil society actors ensure awareness of migrants' rights and access to legal counselling” and the EU policymakers hope it will “promote the integration of migrants into Moroccan society”.

33 Lalous, M. (2014) *Morocco's Experience of Migration as a Sending, Transit and Receiving Country*, IAI, Italy, interviews in Europe

34 Lalous, M. (2014) *Morocco's Experience of Migration as a Sending, Transit and Receiving Country*, IAI, Italy

35 https://www.msf.org/sites/msf.org/files/migrants_in_morocco_report.pdf

Under the current political and social circumstances, however, it seems unlikely that this or other similar programming would bring about either an immediate improvement in the living conditions of sub-Saharan migrants in Morocco or the country's readiness to accept returns of third-country nationals in any short-term timeframe.

The other path of influencing seems to be equally unsuccessful. In early 2018, EU offered Morocco also an additional assistance package to strengthen border management capacity, building on the funding already provided to support Morocco's migration policies (EUR 35 million assigned in December 2017). During the migration talks in November, Morocco has, in theory, agreed to re-launch negotiations of the Readmission Agreement. By May this year, "technical contacts /.../ with a view to designing an assistance package to strengthen border management capacity and re-launching negotiations on Visa Facilitation and Readmission Agreements" have been rekindled. In August this year, EU Commission reiterated its readiness for a further financial commitment to Morocco.³⁶ The negotiations around the readmission agreement, however, haven't started yet.

Conclusions

The cases described herein show that in order for any migration management to be successful, it needs to begin by understanding the role of migration in the political and economic settlements in place in those countries, and find a way to reconcile the different roles that the same people play in the respective societies through which they move – their countries of origin, transit and host countries. With its main focus on stemming the flow of migration from sub-Saharan and North Africa, without fully incorporating in the policy making the internal dynamics that determine these flows, the current EU

agenda may be poorly adjusted to this purpose.

It may also be internally contradictory. The assumption behind the current set of EU migration management policies is that border management, addressing the root causes of migration and enacting returns and readmissions are not just mutually compatible but also mutually strengthening objectives. As the cases of Morocco and Senegal show, this assumption may require a closer look and potentially some re-examining.

In many countries of North and West Africa, migration is a phenomenon deeply embedded in the political, economic and even social fibre of these countries. It plays a significant role in the national-level political economy – through the multi-pronged economic impact of remittances or by serving as social security or political valve, and sometimes also through its feedback-impact on the national-level policymaking. Migration may be planned, encouraged or condoned by the government, and informally incorporated in the national-level economic and political model. And due to the urgency of EU's and its member states' need to appear to be managing it, it may have also become an unexpected tool for leveraging various forms of related assistance and incorporating it in this model.

Addressing root causes of mass migration would most likely require an adaption of the current political-economy model of these countries – a structural change that goes beyond the current mandate, policy reach or funding capacity of the EU Trust Fund or any other migration management instrument at EU's disposal. Such changes also take time, motivation and determination on the side of the reforming authorities to actually see them through – none of which is being foreseen, discussed or accounted for in the current migration management toolbox.

Mass returns of these countries' citizens present therefore a serious challenge to the political-economy model endorsed by these countries, either by choice, necessity or a combination thereof. Successful returns would require visible and viable political

³⁶ <https://euobserver.com/migration/142511>

and economic alternatives to offset or cushion the anticipated loss of income and economic and political pressures that would be the inevitable consequences of any serious curbing of Senegalese or Moroccan migration to Europe – in support of the long-term structural shifts away from the migration-based political-economic model of these countries. The EU policymakers often stress the incentives on offer – development programmes, capacity building in border management, maybe even occasionally some visa liberalization. But while these forms of compensation may be welcomed by the local establishment, they simply do not weigh up to the complex web of economic and political benefits of migration that these countries are deriving – nor resolve the deep-seated governance and political issues that drive it in the first place.

It is not reasonable to expect that migration will cease to be part of the economic and societal model for many countries of origin – certainly not in short, but probably also not in the mid to long term. There, where countries rely heavily on remittances, and where migration is part of the social fabric, every government – regardless of the level of its democratic accountability – is likely to be judged by its capacity to deliver to its own citizens engaged in, or dependent on, migration as the main source of financial stability. Some, like Morocco, may also be deeply reluctant to serve as second-choice hosts for rejected EU-bound migrants from third countries.

It is also questionable whether a dramatic shift away from a migration-based model is desirable from the point of view of these countries' economic interests, or even possible in the increasingly globalised world economy, premised on increased ease of movement of goods, services and also people – also between these countries, many of which belong to the Economic Community of West-African States (ECOWAS). Migration management and adaptation, therefore, seem to better respond to the actual needs of northern and western African societies than straight-out curbing and “stemming”, envisioned by the EU policy documents.

Recommendations

Based on the analysis above, we would like to propose the following broad-line recommendations for improving cooperation on readmission not just with Senegal or Morocco but also with a broader set of countries in west and north Africa.

1. Readmission as a stand-alone policy objective is not necessarily complementary or mutually reinforcing with other key EU-wide migration policy objectives, such as border control or addressing the root causes of mass irregular migration. Understanding internal political-economic settlement in individual partner countries and the role migration plays in it is crucial for tailoring the return dialogue, embedding it in the correct sequence and supporting with effective policy measures. Policymakers should, therefore, conduct an individual political-economy analysis of each partner country, focused on understanding the role that migration plays in their political and economic settlement and its mutual relation with other migration-related objectives as a basis for tailoring migration dialogue with those countries.
2. Return agenda that is (perceived as) undermining the existing national-level political settlement and the underlying economic model is unlikely to be effective, as its impact may be (perceived as) destabilising for the country's economy and its political status quo. Return should, therefore, be approached as a part of a comprehensive set of measures designed to allow the countries of origin to replace some of the economic roles of migration with realistic alternatives within a reasonable length of time. This means, for every country, a tailored combination of measures such as migration quotas, controlled circular migration, economic and governance reforms.
3. As the cases of Morocco and Senegal show, the countries with higher stakes or higher leverage over the EU partners will be in a stronger position to negotiate readmission agreements that do not tackle the root causes of mass migration (economic or political shortcomings in

the county). This means that the price for successful returns and readmissions may, in fact, be condoning or not tackling some of the very issues that cause migration in the first place: poor governance and/or rights violations. The EU's unenviable choice may be between tackling root causes or negotiating readmission agreements, and it's the one EU countries should be cognizant of.

4. Finally, as the Morocco example shows, under the EU cooperation that aims to 'stem' the flow of asylum-seekers,




the capacity of third countries to offer reception and protection to asylum seekers is crucial. Requesting such readmissions without a functional protection framework in place would further undermine both the international normative framework on migration and EU's normative reputation. Any readmissions programmes must, therefore, go hand in hand with tailored programmes aimed at improving human rights and protection records of hosting countries.

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