



Council of the European Union
General Secretariat

Brussels, 13 February 2024

**DOCUMENT PARTIALLY
ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
(22.04.2024)**

WK 2411/2024 INIT

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NOTE

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Delegations
Subject:	EU-Morocco cooperation on migration

In view of the Moadem Roundtable on 16 February 2024, delegations will find attached in the ANNEX the "Background document on EU-Morocco cooperation on migration".

BACKGROUND DOCUMENT ON EU-MOROCCO COOPERATION ON MIGRATION

Context: The Migratory Situation

Morocco is a major partner in the Southern Neighbourhood with which the EU has solid and long-standing cooperation, which should be maintained in a true partnership through dialogue, responsibility sharing, mutual trust and respect. The EU-Morocco Joint Declaration of June 2019 aims to deepen the relationship between the EU and Morocco across a number of areas, with the EU continuing to support Morocco on a wide array of issues including on migration and mobility, fostering green and climate action, digital agenda, investment, development, social cohesion, governance, fundamental rights, trade relations, and youth mobility. Cooperation is well developed in all areas of migration management and includes consistent financing of Moroccan capacities by the EU. The EU is committed to further supporting Morocco according to jointly agreed priorities, through EU funding in the 2021-2027 period. However, the Addendum to the 2019 Political Declaration (equivalent to the Partnership Priorities) has not been adopted yet.

Morocco is a country of origin, transit and destination for migrants, with which it is important to maintain the success and credibility of past cooperation on migration.

Morocco is a significant country of origin, with a large diaspora representing roughly 10% of their population and remittances at roughly USD 12 billion, representing roughly 8.3% of their GDP in 2023. In 2022, 149 692 first time residence permits were issued by EUMS for the purpose of family reunification (84 241), work (43 662) and education (21 789). In 2023, there were 16 015 irregular border crossings by Moroccan nationals into the EU, representing some 4% of all irregular arrivals on the EU's external border. The large majority (14 288) arrived via the Western Mediterranean and the Atlantic Routes, representing respectively 48% and 22% of all arrivals on these routes.

In 2023, Morocco was the main country of departure on the Western Mediterranean Route (accounting for 48% of all departures) and the second main country of departure on the Atlantic Route (accounting for 22% of all departures), after Senegal. For the Western Mediterranean Route, there is no breakdown of nationalities by country of departure. The large majority are Moroccans and Algerians. In addition to these nationalities, smaller numbers of Syrians, Malians, and Guineans were recorded. On the Atlantic Route, around 15% of the irregular arrivals were of Moroccan nationality, while 44% were Senegalese, 11% Gambians, and 7% Malians (and 10% are of unspecified sub-Saharan nationality). Morocco hosts a large number of migrants and refugees in transit, with around 19 000 migrants and refugees registered with UNHCR.

The EU considers Morocco as a key partner in migration. This comprehensive migration partnership that broadly includes protection, legal migration and mobility, addressing root causes of migration and displacement, tackling irregular migration, migration governance, countering migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings thereby saving lives, border management and return and reintegration. Progress on the implementation of the relevant strategic and legislative agenda remains key.

Morocco is part of a Team Europe Initiative for a Comprehensive Migration Approach in the Maghreb, Sahel and West African Countries (the Atlantic/Western Mediterranean Route), whose aim is to ensure that mobility and migration takes place in a safe, orderly and regular manner. The five pillars of this Team Europe Initiative (TEI) are: (1) Legal migration and mobility; (2) Protection and asylum; (3) Prevention of irregular migration, countering migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings; (4) Return, readmission and reintegration and (5) Migration and development.

Prevention of irregular migration by combatting smuggling of migrants and trafficking in human beings

In 2016, Morocco criminalized human trafficking through the enactment of Law No. 27-14. Various procedures have been progressively put into effect to this end, notably the establishment of the National Commission tasked with coordinating anti-trafficking measures in July 2018, the adoption of 2023-2030 National Plan to Combat and Prevent Human Trafficking in March 2023 and the adoption of the National Referral Mechanism for Victims of Human Trafficking.

The EU launched an Anti-smuggling Operational Partnership (ASOP) with Morocco during the visit of the Commissioner for Home Affairs in July 2022, to tackle criminal networks, address irregular migration and save lives. This partnership is currently being under implementation. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]. This programme will follow up on the EUTF funded programme “Dismantling the criminal networks operating in North Africa and involved in migrant smuggling and human trafficking programme”, which concluded its activities in Morocco in 2023.

Border Management

Under Morocco’s 2013 National Strategy on Immigration and Asylum (SNIA), Morocco’s Ministry of the Interior regulates migration flows across borders, with a focus on outgoing flows and Sub-Saharan smuggling networks, [REDACTED]. Frontex and Morocco outlined in December 2023 the next steps for closer cooperation in the Frontex-Morocco Comité Mixte, which meets every year to agree on a roadmap for joint activities on border management. [REDACTED]

The EU has provided Morocco with a budget support programme of EUR 152 million focusing on border management in respect of international human rights standards, the institutional governance of migration and asylum and the integration of migration and refugees. EU contribution to Moroccan border management efforts also include support provided through the Border Management Programme for the Maghreb region (BMP-Maghreb, EUR 24.5 million out of EUR 70 million regional programme) and through the programme “Soutien à la gestion intégrée des frontières et de la migration au Maroc” (EUR 44 million).

Return, readmission and reintegration

Over the past years Morocco continued to be one of the top nationalities as regards the number of return decisions issued in the EU to its citizens. In 2022 alone, 30 745 return decisions were issued to Moroccan citizens. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

As far as concerns reintegration support is concerned, Moroccan citizens returning from the EU can benefit from the Joint Reintegration Services (JRS). Morocco is among top 10 third countries according to the caseload where such services are provided. The EU has an ongoing programme supporting the sustainable reintegration of Moroccan returnees with GIZ (EUR 6 million).

The EU has been supporting returns from Morocco to relevant countries of origin, first through the EU-IOM Joint Initiative and then with the Migrants Return and Reintegration Programme (MRRP North of Africa). In 2023, over 1 000 people benefitted from assisted voluntary return from Morocco to their country of origin in the framework of the MPRR. Facilitating the voluntary return of individuals from African countries of origin via IOM remains the key approach for the Ministry of the Interior in Morocco since the implementation of the National Programme for Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) in the Kingdom of Morocco in 2005.

Asylum and legal pathways for international protection

The absence of asylum legislation has resulted in the continuation of an ad-hoc system jointly managed by UNHCR within the inter-ministerial commission housed in the “Bureau des Réfugiés et Apatrides (BRA)” under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This commission's role is to decide on the regularization of refugees registered with UNHCR. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

In the framework of the Regional Development and Protection Programme (RDPP) for North Africa funded by AMIF, the EUAA equally implement the Regional Pilot Project, where Morocco is actively participating.

¹ The ratio between those ordered to leave and those effectively returned to a third country.
² Annual data for 2023 is not yet available.

The EU is also supporting the protection of refugees, migrants and individuals seeking protection in Morocco through a number of programmes implemented with UNHCR, IOM and civil society organisations, funded both under the EUTF for Africa and NDICI-Global Europe Instrument.

Labour migration and partnerships

Overseen by the Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs, Morocco seeks to address unemployment, particularly among its youth, which currently stands at 30% and is on the rise, while also endeavouring to prevent brain drain by retaining its best and most educated citizens.

Simultaneously, Morocco prioritizes the interests and expectations of its sizable diaspora. In 2013, Morocco introduced a National Strategy aimed at supporting Moroccans worldwide (Marocains résidant à l'Étranger – MRE), preserving their identity, rights, and interests, and enhancing their financial contribution to the development of their homeland and its global influence. In August 2022, King Mohammed VI initiated the development of a new strategic vision on this matter.

Morocco is one of the five countries, with which a Talent Partnership with the EU and interested Member States was launched. During the round table event launching the initiative on 26 April 2023 and the technical meeting on 28 November 2023, the political dialogue contributed to, and facilitated the discussions on legal migration. Currently six Member States (France, Italy, Spain, Sweden and Portugal) participate in the Talent Partnership with Morocco, and two Member States (The Netherlands and Belgium) hold a status as observer. A first discussion on the Talent Partnership Roadmap was held at the technical meeting in November 2023.

Regional programmes involving Morocco focusing on supporting labour migration governance, labour mobility, legal migration and skills partnerships are being implemented under NDICI-Global Europe for a total amount of EUR 23 million (EUR 5 million for THAMM III and EUR 18 million for THAMM+). Several pilot projects on legal migration and mobility are also currently being implemented through the Migration Partnership Facility (MPF).

Questions for discussion

At the Moadem Round Table on 16 February 2024, the Presidency invites delegations to share their views on the following questions:

- 1) What is the state of play in your bilateral cooperation with Morocco on migration?
- 2) Which areas do you believe would benefit from further bilateral and possibly EU support in the short to medium term?