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# Morocco: Setting the Stage for Becoming a Migration Transition Country?

**MARCH 19, 2014** PROFILE | By Hein de Haas

## Version française

Over the second half of the 20th century, Morocco has evolved into one of the world's leading emigration countries, with the global Moroccan diaspora estimated at around 4 million. Moroccans form one of the largest and most dispersed migrant communities in Europe. Morocco's current population is about 33 million; more than 3 million people of Moroccan descent currently live in Western and Southern Europe. Recently, a smaller but growing number of Moroccan migrants have settled in Canada and the United States.

Over the past decade, changing migration patterns have set the stage for potentially far-reaching changes to the economy, demographics, and legal system of this North African country. Although Morocco remains primarily a country of emigration, it is also becoming a destination for migrants and refugees from sub-Saharan Africa and, to some extent, from crisis-hit European countries. The growing presence of immigrants confronts Moroccan society with an entirely new set of social and legal issues typical for immigration countries, which do not yet resonate with Morocco's self-image as an emigration country.

While Moroccan migration remained relatively untouched by the Arab Spring upheaval, migration has been one of the most defining and thorny issues in relations between Morocco and the European Union. While the latter has attempted to engage Morocco in efforts to reduce irregular emigration and transit migration, Morocco has an interest in facilitating mobility for its own citizens.

Recently, Morocco seems to be coming to terms with its growing role as a country of immigration. In 2013 King Mohammed VI announced a new, more liberal immigration policy that includes avenues for regularization of unauthorized African and European immigrants. Although it is too early to tell how the new policy will be implemented, the move signified a first-time acknowledgment on the part of the Moroccan government of the reality that Morocco is also

becoming a country of settlement.

Drawing on unique new data from the DEMIG project, this article provides an overview of the evolution of historical and more recent migration patterns from and towards Morocco, and how evolutions in migration can be explained from broader processes of social, economic, and political change occurring in Morocco and Europe. It will also analyze the unintended role that increasing European immigration restrictions have played in reinforcing the permanent character of Moroccan migration, as well as recent policy developments.

## Colonial Migration

Arab-Islamic conquests beginning in the seventh century brought mostly Arabic-speaking populations to present-day Morocco, later joined by large numbers of Muslims and Jews from Spain after the centuries-long *reconquista* of the Iberian Peninsula ended in 1492. Forced migration in the form of slave trade—both within and to Morocco—lasted well into the colonial era.

French colonization of neighboring Algeria in 1830 heralded the beginning of a period of economic and political restructuring, which created new migration patterns from Morocco. This led to increasing seasonal and circular labor migration to Algeria for work on farms owned by French *colons* (settlers) and to the expanding Algerian coastal cities. In the late 1930s, the number of Moroccan migrants to Algeria was estimated at about 85,000 per year.

In 1912, the Franco-Spanish colonial “protectorate” over Morocco was formally established. While France gained control over the heartland of Morocco, the Spanish protectorate was limited to the southwestern Sahara and the northern Rif mountain zone. Road construction, other infrastructure projects, and the rapid growth of cities along the Atlantic coast boosted rural-to-urban migration within Morocco.

The colonial era (1912-56) also marked the beginning of migration to France. During World War I and II an urgent lack of manpower in France led to the active recruitment of tens of thousands of Moroccan men for factories, mines, and the French army—40,000 for the French army during the first world war and 126,000 during the second world war. Most of these migrants returned to Morocco after both wars ended.

Although 40,000 Moroccans from the northern Rif area found employment in Spanish dictator Francisco Franco's army during the Spanish civil war in Spanish Morocco, labor migration from Morocco to Spain remained limited. Until the 1960s, Spain itself remained a source of labor migrants to northern Europe and even to Algeria.

When France stopped recruiting Algerian workers during the Algerian war of independence (1954-62), recruitment and migration of factory and mine workers from Morocco was boosted. Between 1949 and 1962, the Moroccan population in France increased from about 20,000 to 53,000. Much of this migration took place via Algeria, which remained a French colony until 1962. Moroccan laborers often followed their *colon* employers, who massively departed to

France after Algerian independence.

### Post-Independence: Moroccan Emigration Increases, Destinations Multiply

Yet post-colonial migration was only modest compared with the 1962-72 decade, when strong economic growth in Western Europe resulted in high demand for low-skilled labor. This would dramatically expand the magnitude and geographical scope of Moroccan emigration. Between 1965 and 1972, the estimated number of registered Moroccans living in the main European destination countries increased tenfold, from 30,000 to 300,000, further increasing to 700,000 in 1982, 1.6 million in 1998, and 3.1 million in 2012 (see Table 1 and Figure 1).

In a context of growing demand for workers in Western Europe, labor recruitment agreements with the former West Germany (1963), France (1963), Belgium (1964), and the Netherlands (1969) led to a diversification of Moroccan emigration beyond France.

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

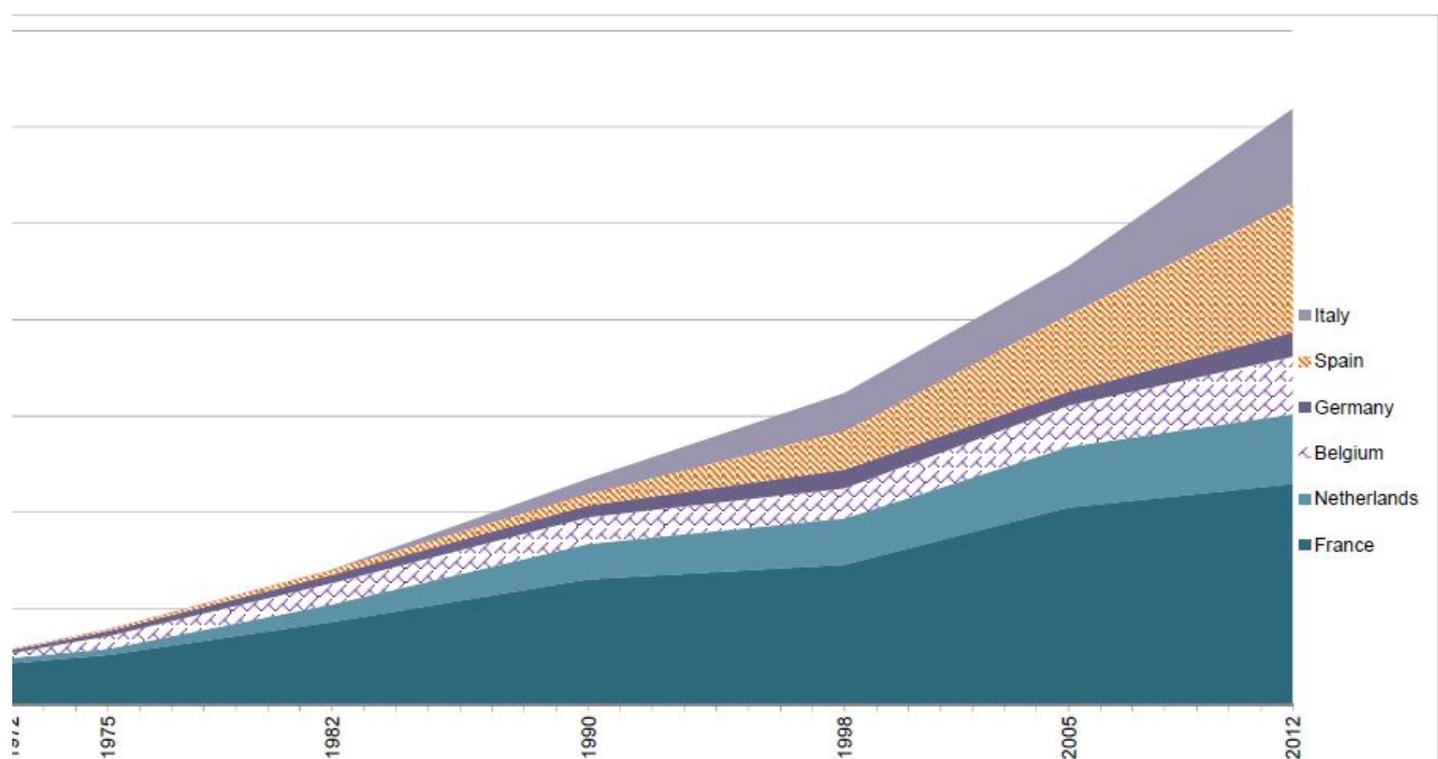
**1: Evolution of Moroccan-Origin Populations in Main European Destination Countries (Registered population, possessing Moroccan citizenship, including second and third generations), 1968-2012**

France	Netherlands	Belgium	Germany	Spain	Italy	Total
84,000	13,000	21,000	18,000	1,000	NA	137,000
218,000	28,000	25,000	15,000	5,000	NA	291,000
260,000	33,000	66,000	26,000	9,000	NA	394,000
431,000	93,000	110,000	43,000	26,000	1,000	704,000
653,000	184,000	138,000	62,000	59,000	78,000	1,174,000
728,000	242,000	155,000	98,000	200,000	195,000	1,618,000
1,025,000 <sup>a</sup>	316,000	214,000 <sup>a</sup>	73,000 <sup>b</sup>	397,000	253,000 <sup>b</sup>	2,278,000
1,147,000	363,000	298,000	127,000	672,000	487,000	3,094,000

Years appearing in this table were chosen due to data limitations.

Mansouri 1996 (FR, NL, BE, DE 1968 - 1990); Basfao and Taarji 1994 (IT 1982, 1990); National Statistical Institute of France 1998; NL, DE, ES, IT 1998; NL 2012); López García 1999 (ES 1968-1990); International Organization for Migration (IOM) and Fondation Hassan II 2003 (BE and FR 2002). a Data for 2002; b data for 2004; Foreign Affairs, Morocco (FR, BE, DE, ES, IT 2012).

**Figure 1. Evolution of Moroccan-Origin Population by Country of Settlement, 1968 to 2012**



appearing in this table were chosen due to data limitations.

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### From Guest Workers to Permanent Settlers (1973-89)

Although Moroccan and receiving-country governments insisted that this migration was temporary, many migrants did not return and ended up settling in Europe. Paradoxically, increasing settlement was stimulated by increasing immigration restrictions.

The 1973 oil crisis heralded a period of economic stagnation and industrial restructuring, resulting in rising unemployment and a lower demand for low-skilled laborers in Western Europe, and labor migration slowed considerably in the years that followed. With many destination countries closing their borders to new labor immigrants and introducing visa requirements for Moroccan visitors, circular migration was no longer an option. Rather than reducing migration, this pushed more and more former “guestworkers” into permanent settlement.

In the same period, the economic situation in Morocco deteriorated and, following two failed *coups d'état* in 1971 and 1972, the country entered a period of political instability and repression. In a context of increasing immigration restrictions, this situation made many labor migrants decide to stay on the safe side of the Mediterranean and reunify their families.

Helped by the liberal family reunification policies that European destination countries adopted, Moroccan migration shifted during the 1970s and '80s from primarily circular and labor based to more permanent and family based. It was family migration that mainly explains the fourfold increase in the number of people of Moroccans living in West Europe, from 291,000 in 1972 at the eve of the oil crisis to nearly 1.2 million in 1992.

Family reunification took two forms: “Primary” family reunification consisted of Moroccan women and children joining the predominantly male migrant workers. “Secondary” family reunification happened when the children of Moroccan migrants in Europe married people living in origin regions. While primary family reunification was largely completed by the end of the 1980s, during the 1990s secondary family reunification became an important channel for continued migration from Morocco. By 1998, the number of people of Moroccan descent in the main European destination countries had risen to 1.6 million.

Return migration has remained relatively limited compared to other immigrant groups in Europe. Analysis of available migration data from Northern and Western European destination countries suggests that about one-quarter of Moroccans who migrated between 1981 and 2009 returned to Morocco, although that proportion fluctuates with the business cycle in Europe. This low tendency towards return coincides with a high tendency towards naturalization. From 1992 to 2001, about 430,000 Moroccans living in Belgium, Denmark, France, Italy, the Netherlands, and Norway were granted the nationality of an EU Member State.

### **Migrations to Southern Europe and Beyond**

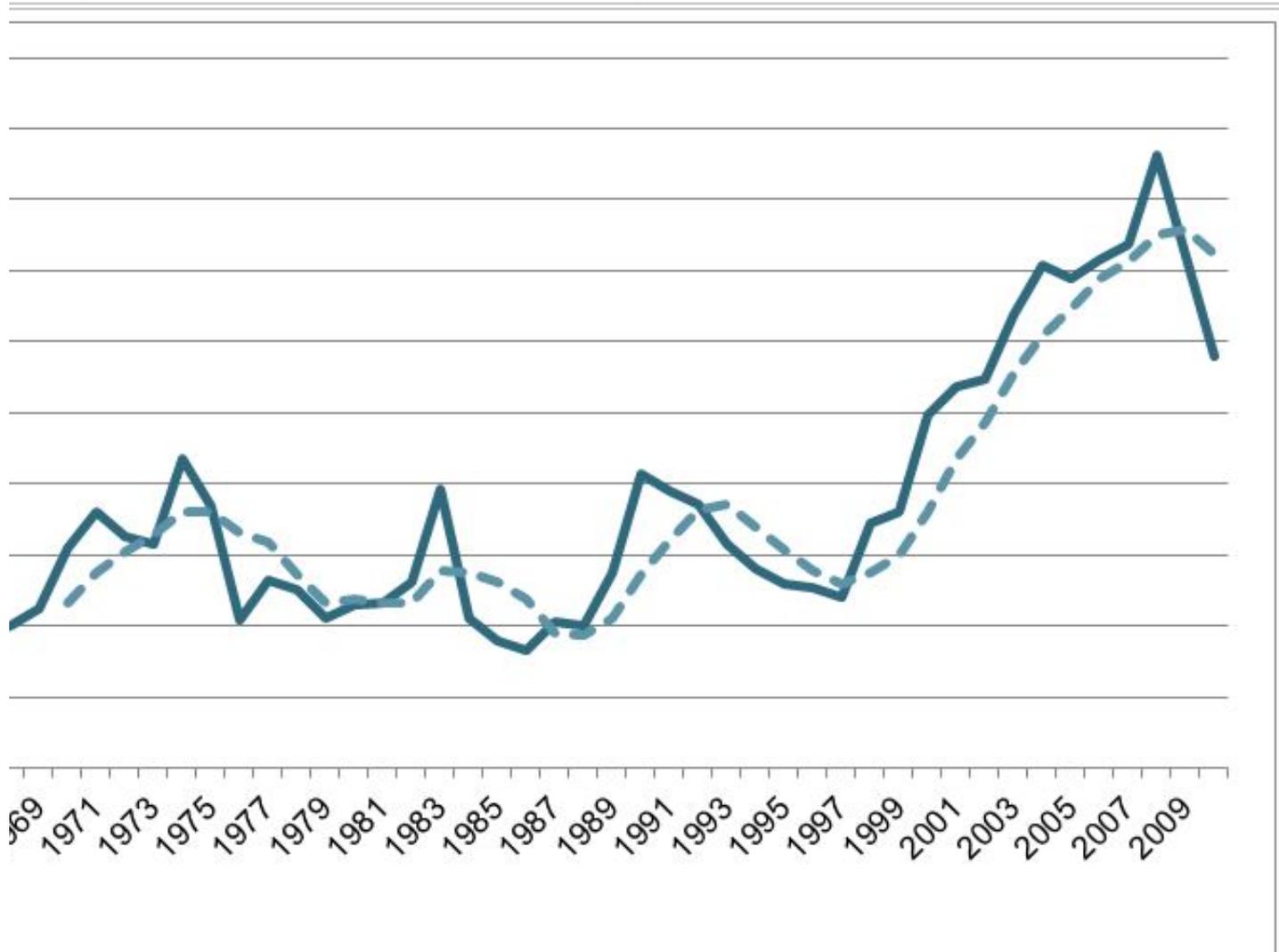
While family reunification largely explains the continuation of migration to traditional destination countries in Northern and Western Europe, from the mid-1980s Spain and Italy emerged as new destination for Moroccan migrants mainly as a consequence of rapidly rising demand for (often irregular) migrant labor in agriculture, construction, and other low-skilled services. Initially, Moroccan migration to Southern Europe had a predominantly circular character as Moroccans could travel freely back and forth.

Migration restrictions and border controls would interrupt this circular migration. After Italy and Spain introduced visa requirements in 1990 and 1991 respectively, more and more Moroccans migrated illegally across the Strait of Gibraltar, overstayed their visas, and were pushed into permanent settlement. Despite the introduction and expansion of border restrictions, irregular migration continued primarily because of ongoing labor demand in Southern Europe.

On several occasions since the late 1980s, Italian and Spanish governments granted legal status to large numbers of Moroccans and other migrants through successive regularization campaigns. In this way, hundreds of thousands of unauthorized migrants were able to gain legal status and, subsequently, reunify their families in Southern Europe.

These factors explain that, in spite of increasing restrictions, the combined Moroccan population officially residing in Spain and Italy increased from about 20,000 in 1980 to an estimated 1.2 million in 2010. While in the past most Moroccan labor migrants were men, an increasing proportion of independent labor migrants to Southern Europe are women who work as domestic workers, nannies, cleaners, or in agriculture and small industries.

Since the 1970s, a relatively small number of Moroccans have migrated to Libya (approximately 120,000) and the oil-rich Gulf countries (several tens of thousands) to work on temporary contracts. More recently, the United States and the French-speaking Canadian province of Québec have attracted increasing numbers of generally highly educated Moroccans.

**Figure 2. Total Estimated Annual Moroccan Migration to Europe, 1967-2009**

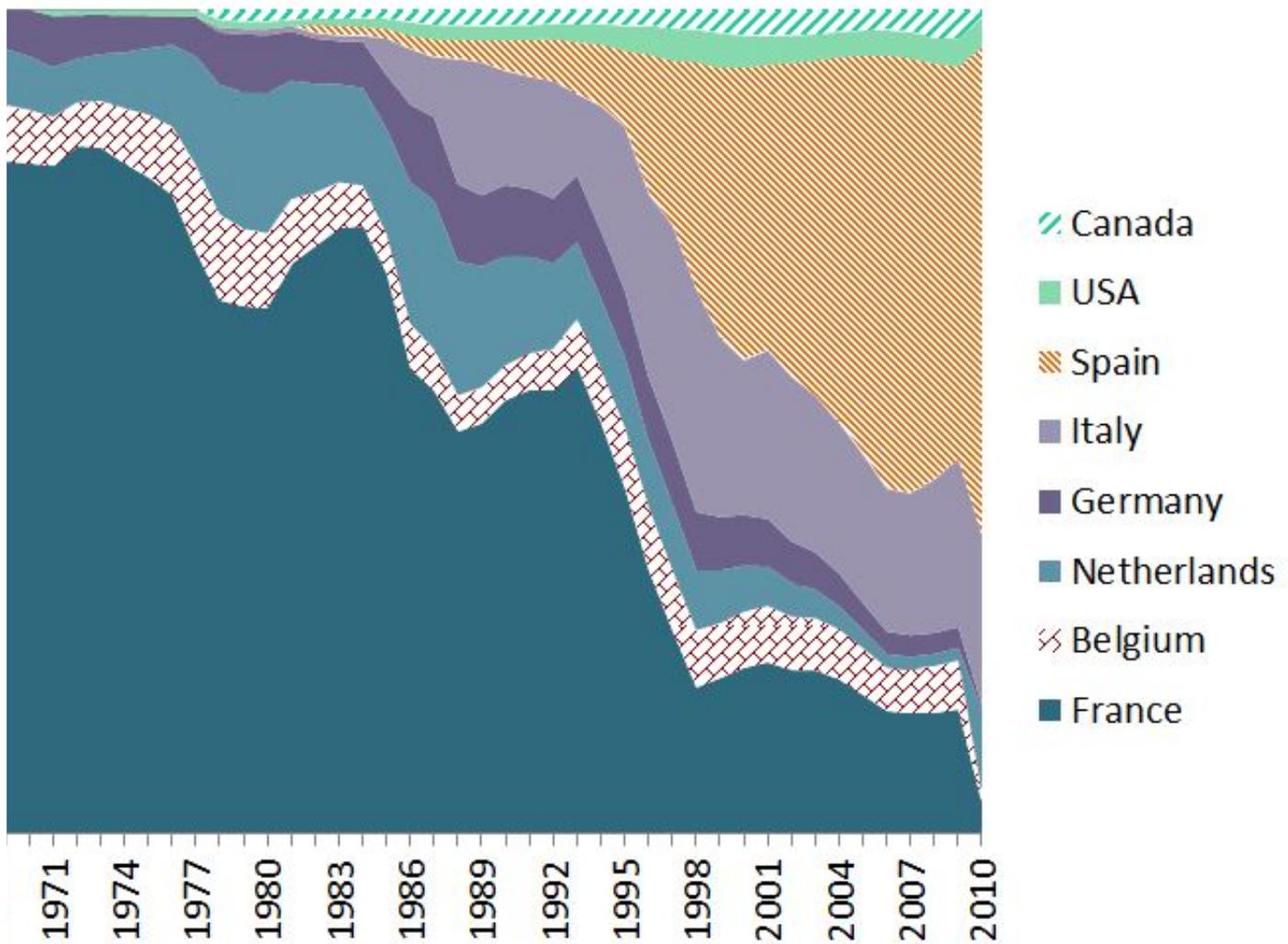
ie is a trend line based on a moving four-year average.

al Migration Institute, University of Oxford, DEMIG C2C database, [www.imi.ox.ac.uk](http://www.imi.ox.ac.uk).

The Moroccan migrant population in Europe has increased almost sevenfold, from 300,000 in 1972, on the eve of the recruitment freeze, to at least 2.5 million in 2010. This estimate excludes unauthorized Moroccan migrants, who might run in the several hundreds of thousands. Figure 2 shows that emigration *rates* also have *increased* fast since the late 1990s in defiance of immigration restrictions and border controls.

Including migrants in Arab countries and Moroccan Jews living in Israel, about 4 million people of Moroccan descent live abroad (various years, see Table 2). Figure 3 reveals the extraordinary diversification of Moroccan emigration in terms of destinations, away from the former colonizer France.

**Figure 3. Moroccan Emigration by Main Destination, 1965-2010**



based on five years moving averages.

International Migration Institute, University of Oxford, DEMIG C2C database, [www.imi.ox.ac.uk](http://www.imi.ox.ac.uk).

France is still home to the largest legally residing population of people of Moroccan descent (more than 1.1 million) in 2010, followed by Spain (766,000), Italy (486,000), the Netherlands (362,000), Belgium (297,000), and Germany (126,000). Smaller communities live in the Canadian province of Québec (53,000), the United States (33,000), the United Kingdom (26,000), and Scandinavian countries (see Table 2).

**Table 2: Estimates of Moroccan Migrants Worldwide**

Country	Moroccan Citizens Living Abroad 2012	Moroccan Emigrants Born in Morocco Around 2010
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,058,429</b>	<b>2,419,000</b>
France	1,146,682	871,000
Spain	671,669	766,000
Italy	486,538	356,000
Belgium	297,919	179,000
Netherlands	264,909 (362,954 <sup>a</sup> )	168,000
Germany	126,954	63,000 <sup>c</sup>
United Kingdom	26,191	16,000
Israel	38,567	
United States	33,047	34,680
Canada	53,707	n/a
<b>Countries</b>	<b>214,451</b>	
Japan	69,276	n/a
India	45,451	n/a
Indonesia	30,635	n/a
Saudi Arabia	35,724	n/a
United Arab Emirates	15,935	n/a
Other	17,430	n/a
	700,000 <sup>b</sup>	153,000
Saharan Africa	9,396	-
	2,509	-
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4,060,634</b>	

For Moroccan citizens living abroad: Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Direction des Affaires Consulaires et (Citoyens marocains à l'étranger); for Moroccan emigrants (1st generation): Organization for Economic and Development (2012); *International Migration Outlook*: France (for 2008), Netherlands (for Belgium (for 2009), Spain (for 2010), Italy (for 2009), Israel (for 2010); Annual Population Survey (UK for 2008); U.S. Census Bureau (U.S. estimate for 2000).

Includes 2nd and 3rd generations (CBS Netherlands); <sup>b</sup> 2007 estimate (de Haas 2007a: Population marocaine en Israël); <sup>c</sup> Moroccan citizens; Statistisches Bundesamt (Germany 2009).

## Morocco as a Destination and Transit Country

Since the mid-1990s Morocco has evolved into a destination country for migrants from sub-Saharan Africa and Europe. Although this immigration is still very modest compared to the large-scale nature of Moroccan emigration, this is a significant shift from the past.

An increasing number of migrants from West Africa, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and other African countries travel to Morocco on visas to pursue studies and embark upon professional careers. West African and, more recently, some Filipina women migrate to Morocco as domestic servants and nannies for wealthier Moroccan households, and there is also a modest, but growing presence of Chinese traders in Moroccan cities. In addition, an increasing number of Europeans have settled in Morocco as workers, entrepreneurs, or retirees. The number of European labor immigrants, particularly from Spain, has increased since the onset of the global economic crisis in 2008.

While the number of students and workers from African countries such as Senegal and Mali (who enjoy visa-free travel to Morocco) has been increasing, the African immigrant population in Morocco also includes asylum seekers and refugees fleeing conflict and oppression in their origin countries. Some African migrants use Morocco as a staging ground before attempting to enter Europe. These migrants often enter Morocco from Algeria, at the border east of Oujda, after crossing the Saharan overland from Niger. Once in Morocco, they sometimes attempt to enter one of two permanently inhabited Spanish port cities located on the north coast of Africa, Ceuta and Melilla, which share borders with Morocco. Because Spain has few repatriation agreements with sub-Saharan countries and because of identification problems, many migrants who manage to enter are eventually released.

An increasing number of migrants failing or not venturing to enter Europe prefer to settle in Morocco as a second-best option rather than return to their more unstable and substantially poorer origin countries. Tens of thousands have settled in cities like Casablanca, Rabat, and Fes on a semi-permanent basis, where they find jobs in the informal service sector, domestic service, petty trade, and construction. The increasing presence of immigrants from sub-Saharan Africa has also increased religious diversity and has, to a certain extent, revitalized Christian life in some cities of this predominantly Muslim country.

The Arab Spring had little effect on Moroccan migration, mainly because relatively few Moroccans live in the countries where violent conflict broke out, and also because Morocco is geographically far away from these countries.

### *Refugees, Unauthorized Migrants, and Public Opinion*

While both African and European immigrants in Morocco often lack legal status, migrants and refugees from sub-Saharan Africa are the regular target of violent racist attacks and discrimination in Morocco. Over the past years, police round-ups have frequently occurred in

immigrant neighborhoods in big cities and in improvised ad hoc camps close to Ceuta and Melilla. Some migrants have been randomly deported via the Algerian border without checking their right to protection, which is a violation of the principle of *nonrefoulement*.

In November 2012, the cover of a Moroccan weekly (*Maroc Hebdo*) represented sub-Saharan migrants as “the Black Danger” suggesting that they increase drug trafficking, prostitution, and pose a human and security problem. Moroccan politicians have also alleged that sub-Saharan migration increases unemployment.

In reaction to scapegoating and institutionalized racism, a vibrant civil-society sector has emerged in Morocco, consisting of human-rights organizations and associations of Moroccan emigrants abroad, as well as sub-Saharan migrants, religious organizations, lawyers, and local migrant-support groups such as ABCDS and GADEM. These groups play a vital role in giving practical assistance and advocating for migrants’ and refugees’ access to residency rights and public services.

A significant minority of immigrants in Morocco have migrated for reasons that fall under the 1951 Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. Until recently, the Moroccan government assumed that virtually all sub-Saharan immigrants in Morocco were “economic migrants” on their way to Europe. However, in 2007, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) signed an *accord de siège* with the Moroccan government, resulting in some limited improvements in the situation of refugees and asylum seekers.

Since then, those holding UNHCR registration cards have less frequently been subject to harassment and deportation. Their access to public health care and education has in some instances improved as well, although many problems persist and the Moroccan government generally refuses to issue resident permits to refugees and asylum seekers. As of mid-2013, the UNHCR office in Morocco had registered 874 refugees and 3,706 asylum seekers.

### **Policies on Emigration, Remittances, and Integration Abroad**

Since the 1960s, the Moroccan government has encouraged emigration on political and economic grounds. It stimulated labor recruitment from relatively marginal Berber-speaking areas of the southwestern Sous valley, the oases of southeastern Morocco, and the northern Rif Mountains, a region notorious for its rebellious attitude to central authority. In particular, remittances were expected to reduce poverty, unemployment, and discontent, and thus function as a political safety valve.

Until the 1990s, the Moroccan government attempted to maintain tight control of Moroccans living in Europe by actively discouraging their integration into receiving societies, including naturalization—to the dismay of some EU governments adopting policies to the contrary. The Moroccan government sent Moroccan teachers and imams abroad and provided education to

migrants' children in the Arabic language to remind them of their roots and to prevent integration and assimilation, which was also perceived as endangering vital remittance transfers.

Through Moroccan embassies, consulates, mosques, and state-created organizations for migrants, such as the "Amicales," Moroccan migrants were also actively discouraged from establishing independent organizations and joining trade unions or political parties.

In this way, the Moroccan government wanted to prevent migrants from organizing themselves politically and, as such, from forming an opposition force from abroad. During the 1970s and 1980s, it was not unusual for political troublemakers who lived in Europe to be harassed while visiting family and friends in Morocco. However, there was a growing consciousness that Morocco's policies alienated the migrant population from state institutions rather than binding them closer to their origin country.

The Moroccan state therefore changed course in the early 1990s. Active repression was largely replaced by the courting of the expanding Moroccan diaspora. Along with the dismantling of the control apparatus in Europe, this translated to a more positive attitude towards naturalization and dual citizenship. Also factoring into Moroccan authorities' change in attitude was an ominous stagnation in remittances, at around \$2 billion per year during the 1990s, which generated the fear of a future decline.

These changes were in line with a certain liberalization of Moroccan society during this time period. Increasing civil liberties meant more freedom among migrants to establish organizations such as Berber, hometown, and aid associations.

A ministry for Moroccans residing abroad was created in 1990. In the same year, the Moroccan government established the *Fondation Hassan II pour les Marocains Résidant à l'étranger*, which aims to foster links between migrants and Morocco. This foundation aims to help migrants in various ways, both in Europe and during their summer holidays in Morocco, and seeks to inform and guide migrants on investment opportunities. In 2007, King Mohammed VI established the Council for the Moroccan Community Abroad (CCME). This is an advisory council consisting of emigrants, which aims to advise the Moroccan government how to best defend the interests of Moroccan emigrants and how to enhance the development potential of migration. The migrant members of this consultative council are appointed by the king.

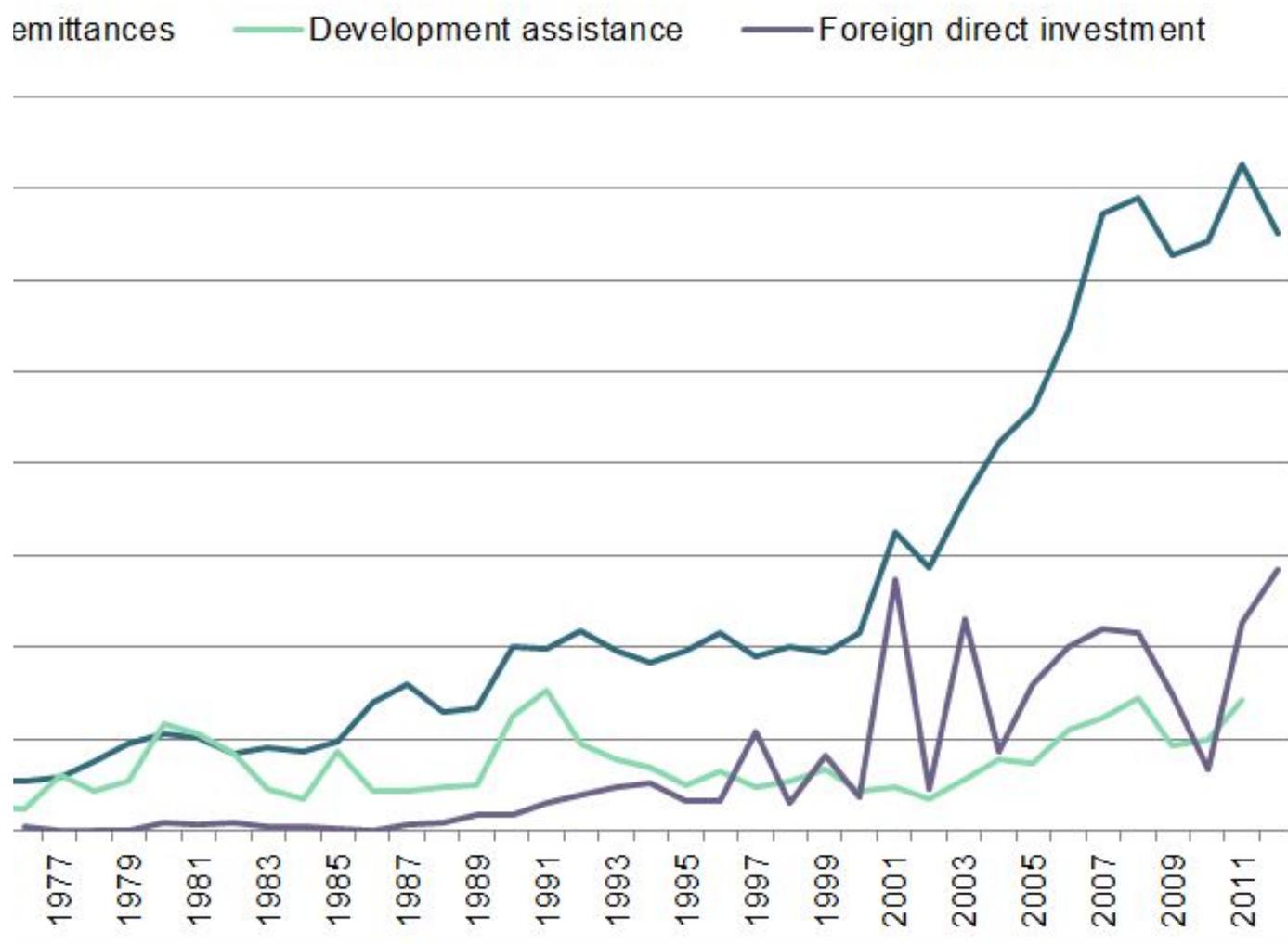
## **Surging Remittances**

Morocco has been relatively successful in channelling remittances through official channels such as banks and money transfer companies. Since the 1990s, it has become easier, cheaper, and more attractive for Moroccans to remit money because of a government-encouraged expansion of Moroccan bank branches in Europe, the lifting of restrictions on foreign exchange, fiscal measures that favor migrants, and devaluations that increase the value of foreign currency.

At first glance, these policies seem to have reversed the stagnation in remittances. Since 2000, there has been a spectacular increase in official remittances, which stood at \$6.9 billion in 2012. However, an even more important factor explaining the surge in remittances has been the rise in

migration to Spain, Italy, and other new destinations. The global economic crisis caused only a relatively minor decrease in remittances in 2009, after which they increased again and stabilized.

Figure 4. Official Remittances to Morocco, 1975-2012



; World Development Indicators

: [bank.worldbank.org/data/views/variableSelection/selectvariables.aspx?source=world-development-](http://bank.worldbank.org/data/views/variableSelection/selectvariables.aspx?source=world-development-)

Remittances are a crucial and relatively stable source of foreign exchange and have become vital in sustaining Morocco's balance of payments. In 2012, official remittances represented about 7 percent of the gross national product (GNP). Over the 2000s, remittances have been roughly six times the amount of official development aid paid to Morocco on average, and three times the value of direct foreign investments, which are also much more unstable (see Figure 4).

The real amount of remittances is estimated to be higher because money is also sent through informal channels or in the form of goods taken to Morocco.

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

However, there is little evidence that these initiatives have been very successful, as issues of corruption and a general lack of trust in government institutions, including the judiciary, continue to put off potential investors. Some argue that the “migration culture” and dependency on remittances provokes passive attitudes, lessens the entrepreneurial spirit, and undermines the pressure for genuine political and economic reform.

### **Morocco, Migration, and Regional Diplomacy**

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

Spain is located about nine miles from the Moroccan coast at the Strait of Gibraltar's narrowest point, and the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla on the northern Moroccan coast literally represent "Europe in Africa." Despite intensified border controls, thousands of Moroccans and other Africans manage to enter an internally borderless Europe each year. Although it should be emphasized that the majority of Moroccan migrants cross borders legally, growing restrictions have increased irregular crossings.

Unauthorized Moroccan and other African migrants usually enter either carrying false papers, hiding in trucks or migrants' vans or by riding in *pateras* (small fishing boats chartered by smugglers) or speedboats, or even swimming around the border fences in Ceuta and Mellillia. Since the mid-1990s, intensified border patrolling in the Strait of Gibraltar has not stopped migration but rather prompted migrants to cross from more eastern places on the Mediterranean coast and to explore new crossing points to Europe, such as the Canary Islands. Each year, several hundred migrants are believed to die during such crossings.

In 1996, Morocco signed the European Mediterranean Association Agreement (EMAA) with the European Union, Morocco's most important trading partner, with the aim to establish a free trade zone. Since 2000, this has led to tariff-free trade for many products, to be further extended in the future.

In 2003, Morocco passed a new law regulating the entry and residence of foreigners. The law included heavy sanctions against irregular immigration and human smuggling but largely ignored migrants' rights. According to critics, in passing the new law Morocco bowed to pressure from the European Union, which wishes Morocco to play the role of Europe's "policeman" in North Africa.

In June 2013, Morocco and nine EU Member States signed a mobility partnership, which establishes political objectives for a more efficient “management” of migration. However, rather than a concrete policy plan, it is rather a mutual declaration of intent to enter into negotiations in which the issuance of visas for Moroccan students and high-skilled migrants will become easier in exchange for Moroccan collaboration in the readmission of unauthorized migrants. It remains to be seen how much will be concretely implemented, and for domestic and diplomatic reasons it is likely that the Moroccan government will continue to oppose the wholesale readmission of non-Moroccan nationals.

Morocco's increasingly independent policy course became evident in the major immigration policy reform that was announced in 2013 under influence of growing criticism by national and international NGOs on the escalation of violence against migrants. In August 2013, together with other associations, the GADEM association compiled a highly critical report that detailed significant abuse of migrants, embarrassing the Moroccan government on the international stage. In September 2013, the National Council of Human Rights (CNDH) released an official report that criticized Morocco's migration policy for being too security-oriented and ignoring migrant rights. The report included a number of policy recommendations, including the right to asylum and the regularization of unauthorized migrants from Africa and Europe. The report was quickly endorsed by the royal Cabinet, setting in motion a potentially far-reaching immigration reform.

With the official endorsement of King Mohammed VI, things have moved quickly. For instance, Morocco has reopened its Bureau de Protection des Réfugiés et Apatrides (Protection Office for Refugees and the Stateless), given migrants' children access to public education, and announced an "exceptional" regularization to be executed in 2014. While it remains to be seen how these policies will be implemented, they seem a significant break with the past. They can also be seen as an assertion of independence and refusal to obey the wishes of the European Union. The reforms may also be beneficial in strengthening Morocco's strategic relations with sub-Saharan countries and improving its leverage and credibility in negotiations with the European Union, for instance on readmission.

Although the Moroccan government is formally complying with the European Union's fight against irregular immigration, serious doubts remain about the credibility and effectiveness of these policies. There is a reluctance to massively readmit and expel sub-Saharan unauthorized migrants, particularly because this may harm strategic political relations with sub-Saharan countries. This partly explains why nationals from Senegal, an important regional ally, enjoy visa-free travel to Morocco.

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

From the Moroccan perspective, migration constitutes a vital development resource that alleviates poverty and unemployment, increases political stability, and generates remittances. In the context of the Arab Spring and increasing domestic pressure for reform, emigration is believed to have an important stabilizing function.

### **Moroccan Migration Looking Forward**

High youth unemployment, low wages, and limited domestic opportunities suggest that Morocco's emigration potential will remain high in the coming one to two decades. In addition, increasing education and media exposure have increased aspirations, and for many young low-skilled and, increasingly, high-skilled Moroccans, migration continues to represent a promising path to success.

The economic crisis in Spain and other in European destination countries has led to a slowdown in emigration and increasing returns and even some limited immigration from Europe. The key question is whether this is a temporary response to a decline in labor demand, or whether this heralds a more structural migration transition characterized by a long-term decline in emigration. The extent to which Moroccan emigration will pick up again vitally depends on whether and how fast European destination countries will recover from the current economic crisis.

However, it is unlikely that Moroccan emigration will cease. Even if countries like France, Italy, and Spain continue to face economic hardship, some demand for Moroccan migrant labor in the agricultural, construction, and service sectors, as well as domestic work, is likely to persist. Furthermore, as has happened in the past, limited opportunities in the established destination countries may also lead to the emergence of new Moroccan migration destinations in and beyond Europe.

However, in the medium to long term, emigration might decrease following the substantial decline of Moroccans attaining working age in the coming decades, although this obviously depends on future economic growth and political stability. Under conditions of future growth and stability, Morocco *may* evolve into a "migration transition" country, characterized by the coexistence of declining emigration and increasingly immigration. This process may already have been set in motion with increasing immigration from sub-Saharan countries and elsewhere.

Although Moroccan policymakers and the media have stressed the temporary, transitory character of sub-Saharan immigration, an increasing proportion of these migrants are becoming long-term or permanent settlers. Their presence confronts Moroccan society with an entirely new set of social and legal issues typical for immigration countries—issues that do not yet resonate with Morocco's self-image as an emigration country. The recently announced new immigration policy reform, which includes provisions for regularization of unauthorized migrants, may signal that Moroccan society is gradually coming to terms with these new migration realities.

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