

Morocco overview

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Morocco is included in the African and Euro-Mediterranean mobility space. There has been internal and international migration for generations. Migration trajectories are complex and have varied during different phases of the country's history. Traditional migrations have been movements of mainly internal pastoral populations and commercial exchanges and pilgrimages. More recent migrations are driven by the search for work and better living conditions. Emigration for work from the countryside to the cities and abroad is a result of integrating the country's economy

into global market chains initiated at the end of the 19th century by colonial companies exploiting agricultural land, forests, and mineral resources. Independence in 1956 was followed by an extension of the labor market, an increase in the intensity of migration from the countryside to and between the cities, and a widening of access by rural and urban households to modern consumer goods. International emigration from Morocco was stimulated in the 1960s by the European demand for labor and was a factor in policies for economic growth.



Investment in irrigated agriculture (water storage tank, motor pump and drip irrigation system) by returning migrants in Tadla, Morocco (photo: L.Amzil).



Over the past three decades, the intensity of internal and international migration has increased in a global context marked by climatic, economic, and socio-cultural disruptions of all kinds. The number of Moroccans residing abroad is now estimated to be over 10% of the population. This increase is part of a new migratory cycle marked by a transition that makes Morocco a country of departure and a country of reception and transit for migrants from sub-Saharan African countries and elsewhere. International and internal migration is present in the material life of households, contributes to macroeconomic balances, and is a driving factor in social change and the spread of modernity in cities and in the countryside. Morocco is a middle-income country with an emerging economy. Between 2000 and 2017, the average annual gross domestic product (GDP) growth in Morocco was 4.4%, while GDP per capita increased annually by 3.1%, with a reduction in poverty and an amplification of inequalities (Figure 1).

Our research aimed to unpack these complexities, including ongoing migration types and governance

interventions and how various actors use migration to stimulate sustainable and gender-equitable growth in the agriculture sector while reducing associated hardships. A team of AGRUMIG project researchers from the Mohammed V University of Rabat in Morocco conducted interviews and consultation workshops with stakeholders at regional and national levels. The analysis looked at the presence of migration internally and internationally and via households and public spaces. Migration policies in Morocco have followed those of the European Union (EU) and other international organizations and are hindered by inconsistencies between national mandates and those of external organizations. The research was conducted at three locations (Table 1).

The research focused on the drivers of socio-demographic and production structures in places of origin that potentially led to the decision to migrate, either internally or internationally. We then examined the effect of migrant returnees on local resources, both material and immaterial, and more broadly on rural development processes.

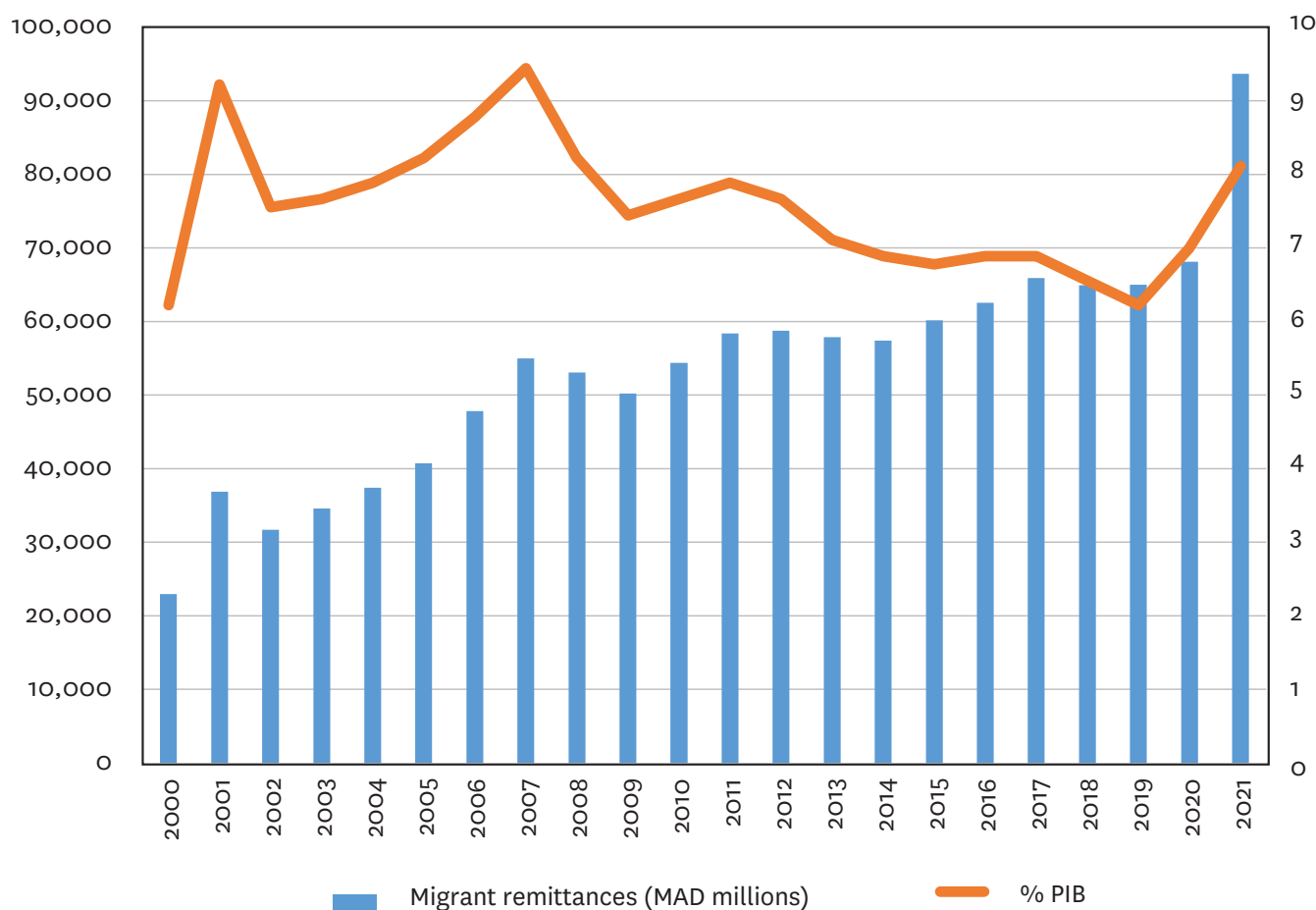


Figure 1. Evolution of migrant remittances (in MAD millions) and percentage share in GDP between 2000 and 2021.

Source: Currency exchange (Royaume du Maroc-Haut-Commissariat au Plan 2022).

Notes: PIB: Personal Internet Banking; MAD: Moroccan Dirham.

Table 1. Study site and migration context.

Site	Features of the agricultural economy	Seasonal migrants (% households)	Destination	Long-term migrants (% households)	Destination	Returnees (% households)	Men and women migrants
Moulouya High Atlas	<p>A region open to commercial exploitation of mineral and forestry resources, first by colonial then by Moroccan companies.</p> <p>Arboriculture and market gardening are crops that mark the landscape and bear witness to major agrarian transformations, affecting both land and water resources. High-value agricultural production serves urban centers.</p> <p>A region where international emigration, despite old flows to France, has increased over the last two decades.</p>	78%	<p>Internal: Midelt, Khénifra, Béni Mellal, Casablanca, Tanger, Agadir, Nador, Rabat, Kénitra, Laayoun, Dakhla</p> <p>International: France, Spain</p>	24%	France, Spain	0% in villages but some returns to local urban centers or regional towns	85% men 15% women
Tadla Plain and marginal zone (Piemont)	<p>An economically attractive region.</p> <p>The hydro-agricultural development of the Tadla Plain is the basis of agricultural development in a region bordering a phosphate plateau. The economic system created around these two economic poles has not prevented the region from becoming a major pole for the emission of internal and international migrants.</p>	22%	<p>Internal: Nador, Casablanca, Agadir</p> <p>International: Italy, Spain, France</p>	77%	Spain, Italy, France, Portugal, Germany	26.5%	90% men 10% women

Findings

The three regions showed strong similarities in their migratory profile, i.e., migrants are mostly young men but an increasing number of women, both with some formal education. Many migrants did not name Western European countries as their main destination. Differences among the three regions related to history, the intensity of migration, the frequency of returnees to their area of origin, and their willingness to invest in agriculture there.

Policies that consider the link between migration and development do not show the same results in the three regions. On the one hand, all the mechanisms linked to migration governance implemented by the government or by international cooperation organizations have as host regions Tadla and the Figuig Oasis which belong to two regions, Béni Mellal-Khénifra and Oriental. In these regions, migration is considered a social and territorial matter of great importance. If the Tadla is at the center, then

the Figuig Oasis occupies a marginal position. La Haute Moulouya-Haut Atlas Oriental is not recognized as relevant to hosting these same actions. However, migration is not a determining factor in sectoral economic development policies, particularly agricultural and rural development. The Green Morocco Plan (2008–2020), which aims to attract investment to rural areas, does not recognize migrants as a specific category with a wealth of capital and skills or with specific expectations.

Other results concern the autonomy of gender in the family and local contexts where emigration is present. According to the results, it turns out that the wives of migrants have little contact with their husbands when they continue to live with the family in Morocco. Communications go through a male family member. Similarly, the funds sent by the migrant are received and managed by a male family member. In the three regions, the wives of migrants represent barely 8% of the recipients of remittances. The increased autonomy and gender emancipation that migrant women acquire during the migration process are not necessarily replicated in reintegration back into the community, where they often face unchanged gender norms. For this reason, many migrant women prefer to settle in cities on their return rather than in their rural areas of origin.

We were also interested in the associative actions carried out by migrants. The diaspora associations are often not well perceived by local associations. When development issues arise at the local level, discrepancies may occur. The contradictory views of the two categories of associative actors can contribute to project failure. This was the case, for example, of the two projects related to the rehabilitation of the Figuig Oasis, which experienced a coordination problem that prevented success. At first sight, we considered the factor of the cleavage between the actors claiming Figuig as identity and reference, grouped in local associations, on the one hand, and the associations of the diaspora in France, on the other hand. However, the interviews revealed that the ethnic factor was a catalyst for tensions and cleavage. In the majority of cases, these local or diasporic associations are ethnically based and bring together family members belonging to the same *ksar* (village community), and there are as many associations as *ksars* in the oasis. The results suggest these identity differences have had a negative impact on development projects linked to emigration in the Figuig Oasis.

Diaspora associations are active in two study sites, the plain of Tadla and the Figuig Oasis. For their actions to be effective, they need an institutional framework at the local level that allows their integration and provides them with



Farmers in discussion about a family farm supported by migration income in Tadla, Morocco (photo: L. Amzil).

the necessary support. The study revealed the role played by certain associations in providing medical support and health care for people in need.

In Figuig, for example, an association of women, some of whom are retired, takes on this task. Remittances from migrants partly cover the costs, and a group of doctors from the diaspora accompanies them and organizes medical campaigns to benefit the elderly and other vulnerable people. In the rural commune of Oulad Youssef (Tadla), a hemodialysis center has been created, partly financed by migrants. The success of this project was also due to a contribution from the municipal council, which was chaired by a returning migrant.

The study highlights the paradox relating to the representation of emigration among the young generation of boys and girls. On the one hand, emigration offers economic opportunities and allows them to escape the social and moral pressure that weighs on them and prevents them from expressing themselves and leading an independent life. On the other hand, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and certain repatriated people disseminate a negative discourse on emigration about the difficulties encountered by migrants. There is an ambivalence in the appreciation of emigration which does not dampen the aspirations of young people to emigrate.



Plan Maroc Vert, a young farmers' cooperative growing apples, in Ait Ayach valley, Haute Moulouya-Haut Atlas Oriental, Midelt province, Morocco (photo: M. Aderghal).



A rural tourist reception structure built using funds provided by returning migrants in Outat valley, Haute Moulouya-Haut Atlas Oriental, Midelt province, Morocco (photo: F. Boukrich).

The study showed that difficulties linked to agrarian systems limit investments in agriculture by migrants. First, there is the pressure on irrigation water. Growing water stress has pushed many farmers to use groundwater, which has been boosted by financial support for drip irrigation under the Green Morocco Plan but is contributing to groundwater depletion. Large-scale farmers who can afford the investment can adapt by moving to areas where groundwater has not yet been tapped, while other farmers face higher irrigation costs without significant improvements in productivity.

Then there are land constraints. Sharing inherited land leads to reduced plot size. Smaller and smaller plots eventually become unsuitable for cultivation. In Figuig, as in the plain of Tadla, there are micro-plots that are no longer cultivable and have been abandoned. Some are now being used for building houses. In recent years, and given the interest in family land, arrangements have been made between some migrants and local farmers, often small landowners or landless farm workers. The former give up their land to the latter who take them on as sharecroppers and exploit them in exchange for a quarter of the harvest. Sharecroppers' access to land offers them the possibility of saving money and, through the links they forge with the migrant landowner, emigration for them may become possible.

Finally, the difficulties encountered by migrants in successfully integrating into the territories of return through investment are related to their ability to mobilize savings

to make productive investments. Even if there are some success stories among return migrants (Spitzer 2016), the results of the survey highlight the limit of annual savings made by most migrants. Only 13% of households declared annual income from emigration above MAD 30,000 (about USD 3,100), and only 12% of remittances from migrants to households in the three regions would have been directed to productive investments.

In all three regions, irrigation is at the heart of agricultural intensification, but the remittances that support these investments are not always sufficient. In the plain of Tadla, those who succeed are return migrants who have become entrepreneurial farmers but whose investments do not come from salaried employment in the country of emigration. In the Figuig Oasis, some returnees have bought old rangelands outside the oasis and converted them for cultivation with irrigation. However, the investment is significant. In both cases, the size of the agricultural estates and the technical and commercial systems adopted show that the investment required large amounts of capital.

Competition around water is fierce and investment in agriculture is becoming more expensive with no economic success guaranteed.

Policy issues

Morocco is at the center of major international migration policy processes. The government included migration in the 2011 constitution and instituted its own migration law in 2013. It then hosted a summit in Marrakech during which the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration was adopted in December 2018. The headquarters of the African Observatory on Migrations is also located in Rabat. Overall, migration as a component of government policy is managed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs through the Department of Moroccans Residing Abroad. Whether they are returning migrants or still living in the host country, migrants, as Moroccan citizens, can benefit from the development policies carried out by the government. This includes, for example, the subsidies allocated to agricultural investors by the Green Morocco Plan and, more recently, by the Green Generation Strategy 2020–2030. The Moroccan government has also multiplied the number of bodies promoting the role of migrants in development. This is the case of the Hassan II Foundation for Moroccans Residing Abroad in terms of investment and support for projects, and the Council of the Moroccan Community Abroad, whose mission, in addition to defending the rights of migrants, is to further involve the Moroccan diaspora in the socio-economic development of the country.



New agricultural land developed by migrants, and second home extension outside the Oasis of Figuig, Morocco (photo: M.Aderghal).



Survival of oasis agriculture in the face of challenges posed by climate change and abandonment of family land in Figuiq, Morocco (photo: L. Amzil).

Moroccan migration governance bodies, through the National Strategy for Immigration and Asylum and the National Strategy for Moroccans Living Abroad promote initiatives in partnership with international organizations and with adaptations to the Moroccan national and regional context. Implementing programs for migrants is done within the framework of partnerships between Moroccan national and regional authorities and development agencies such as the French Development Agency (AFD), Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), Belgian Development Agency (ENABEL), as well as Italian and Spanish cooperation, which also involves international and local NGOs.

The study of programs and mechanisms of governance and development of migration in the regions studied by the AGRUMIG project reveals the tendency of international organizations, in particular the European Union, to prioritize the orientations of European and national migration policies of each country of destination for Moroccan migrants. The degree of coordination and collaboration between the actions of these external bodies and those of the Moroccan government remains questionable.

Migration policies are hampered by the inconsistency between the national priorities of Morocco and those of the countries receiving migrants. In addition, there is no integration between programs relating to migration

carried out by international cooperation bodies, which can operate in parallel in the same region, leaving few initiatives to regional and local actors. For example, in the Béni Mellal-Khénifra region, the coexistence of the program Deployment of Migration Policies at the Regional Level, financed by the EU and implemented by the Belgian Cooperation Agency (ENABEL), and the Program Strengthening Moroccan Territorial Communities in Improving Reception Structures for Migrants are supported by the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ). This co-presence of programs with similar objectives is also observed in the Oriental region. The Deployment of Migration Policies at Regional Level Program (DEPOMI) is carried out there in parallel with the Regional Program for Migration Policies and Initiatives (PRIM4), financed by the French Development Agency (AFD) and implemented by Expertise France. This program also aims to support the regionalization of migration policy in Morocco in the Orientale and Souss-Massa regions.

Even if these mechanisms are put in place to enhance the institutional region in line with the process of advanced regionalization, the fact remains that governance practices remain subject to the constraints imposed by the mode of government of Morocco and that of international organizations, marked by a high degree of centralization and bureaucratic heaviness.



Stakeholders at a national workshop on migration governance held on October 25, 2022, in Rabat, Morocco (photo: L. Amzil).

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AGRUMIG Policy Brief Series

This policy brief is one in a series of briefs produced as part of the AGRUMIG project.

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AGRUMIG Project

The project titled **AGRUMIG 'Leaving something behind' - Migration governance and agricultural & rural change in 'home' communities: Comparative experience from Europe, Asia and Africa** proposes an integrated approach to migration governance to address the two-way relationship between labor mobility and changes in agriculture and the rural sector. Migration creates challenges for rural 'sending' communities in low- and middle-income countries, yet it can also be transformative. The project engages in a comparative analysis of seven countries (China, Ethiopia, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Morocco, Nepal and Thailand) to identify the economic, institutional, cultural and agroecological factors which shape these relationships. It will identify the range of governance interventions that can harness migration to stimulate sustainable, gender equitable growth in agriculture, and reduce the distress associated with migration.

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(Call: Towards forward-looking migration governance: Addressing the challenges, assessing capacities and designing future strategies)

Project website: <http://agrumig.iwmi.org>

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This project is part of the MARIS (Migration, Agriculture and Resilience: Initiative for Sustainability) network (<http://maris.iwmi.org>)

