MOROCCO AS A REFERENCE FOR NEW MIGRATION POLICIES IN FRANCOPHONE COUNTRIES

FROM THE NEED TO INTEGRATE IMMIGRANTS TO MOBILIZING TALENTS WORKING ABROAD AS A SOLUTION...

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Starting in late 2013, Moroccan migration policy has experienced a radical transformation, globally shifting from an inherently reactive and security-oriented perspective to an approach based on acceptance and integration. In this context, the competent Moroccan authorities helped migrants who were present on its national territory to get access to the training provided by the Office of Vocational Training and Employment Promotion (OFPPT) and to training programs offered by the National Mutual Aid Centers in addition to job search services provided by the National Agency for the Promotion of Employment and Competencies (ANAPEC).

In the same vein, a National Commission for the Integration and Regularization of Migrants has been established within the Ministry in charge of Moroccans Living Abroad and Migration Affairs. Also, since the beginning of the fall of 2013, this Ministry initiated developing a National Strategy on Migration and Asylum (SNIA), which was eventually promulgated by the end of 2014. One of the key objectives of this strategy was to integrate regular migrants, refugees, and Moroccans who have been repatriated for different reasons to Morocco.

The private sector has equally participated in this strategy. To this end, the General Confederation of Enterprises in Morocco (CGEM) published a practical manual in February 2018 on "Recruiting Foreign Employees in Morocco." This guide aimed at "Integrating Cultural Diversity into Business Practices" with the support of the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

However, despite the government's apparent political will, the integration problem remains relatively complicated for several immigrants and repatriates/returnees Moroccans.

There are many reasons for this, natably:

- The lack linguistic skills des immigrants (in particular in Moroccan dialect and classical Arabic) and the ignorance of their actual skills and qualifications and this also applies to Moroccan returnees, in particular those born outside Morocco;

- The apparent mismatch between the professional profiles of many returnees and immigrants with the local labour market needs;

- The legal and regulatory barriers, as well as the lack of knowledge by returnees/repatriated and immigrants of the country's relevant laws and regulations. Their lack of linguistic skills prevents them from obtaining their due rights for self-employment, business creation or any other income-generating activity.

MOROCCAN MIGRATION POLICY: FROM A SECURITY POSTULATE TO A DESIRE FOR INTEGRATION

Before taking note of the more or less significant presence of irregular migrants among its population and even before admitting that irregular migration through its territory was a serious political issue, Morocco had experienced a period of "non-political migration" between the early 1990s and 2002–2003.

During this period, it experienced a substantial rise in what has been called "transit migration" on its territory, mostly irregular or illegal, going to Spain and other European Union countries, to which the Moroccan government had until then shown relative indifference. This was partly because it considered this new form of migration of little concern for its security and, perhaps, after all, it was believed that it was unlikely to last long. It also assumed that Spain – its immediate European neighbour – benefited from the flow of migrants.

However, the increase in the number of migrants, year after year and the link that will be made after 2001 between migration and terrorism (in connection with the September 11 attacks on American soil) has caused Morocco to change its attitude after the European doctrine shift on this issue.

Within this global framework, the first significant step taken by Morocco at the beginning of the current century was in the legislative field. It was the unanimous adoption by the Moroccan parliament in 2003 of the law on "irregular emigration and immigration in Morocco," known as Law 02-03. In the wake of this law, Moroccan authorities adopted a set of institutional and operational measures that they believed would support their new approach to migration and best serve the interests of Morocco's "privileged partnership" with the EU and its special relationship with Spain.

At the institutional level, the "Directorate of Migration and Border Surveillance" and the "Migration Observatory" were created in November 2003. According to their architects, their purpose was to "rationalize working methods, refine analytical tools and optimize the deployment of operational units to monitor infiltration points of illegal immigrants, as well as to federate the thinking of all the parties concerned by the migration issue.

In the wake of creating these institutions, Europe will fully consent to decisions that align with its objectives, indicating that it is particularly attentive to everything that happens on the Moroccan side regarding migration.

At the same time, on the operational level, the new "Moroccan strategy to tackle illegal migration" will prioritize a "community-based and preventive approach" through intelligence work, in particular, to dismantle human trafficking networks. This approach has been strengthened by the significant deployment of personnel and equipment and the establishment of a general and permanent mechanism composed of more than 7,000 members, 4,000 of whom will be primarily dedicated to coastline surveillance.

The combination of this mechanism, the largest ever put in place to control the Atlantic and Mediterranean coasts of Morocco (over a distance of nearly 3,500 km), and the Spanish "integrated system of external vigilance" established in 2002 in the south of Spain and then off the Canary Islands, as well as the intervention of the European Agency for the Protection of External Borders (FRONTEX), has made the crossing of territorial waters between the two countries, extremely complicated.

More recently, since late 2013, and at a time when Morocco began to have some "migration peace," within 2015, less than 0.40 percent of trans-Mediterranean migration transiting through its territory and maritime space (and that of Algeria), the country was going to adopt a "New Migration Policy," described as "more humane" and based on the regularization of specific categories of migrants and a National Strategy for the Integration of Migrants and Refugees.

Thus, in 2014, the first operation of regularization of migrants allowed 18,000 people in an irregular situation to obtain a residence permit to stay legally on Moroccan territory. In 2017, the number of regularized migrants reached nearly 21,000, involving 113 nationalities, most of whom were of sub-Saharan origin. In 2018, this number reached 50,000.

MOROCCO'S NEW MIGRATION POLICY: KEY HIGHLIGHTS

King Mohamed VI held a meeting on September 10, 2013, with his Minister of Interior and some human rights representatives (among others, the staff of the National Council for Human Rights – CNDH) to launch a new "migration and asylum policy" for foreign residents living in the Kingdom, especially illegal migrants. This announcement was a turning point in the Moroccan human rights approach towards irregular immigrants from the sub-Saharan States of Mali, Senegal, Niger, Nigeria, Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea, and refugees from Libya or Syria.

The "new migration policy" includes three main elements:

- A special operation to regularize immigrants was carried out in 2014, benefiting nearly 45,000 migrants.
- Expand the authority of the UNHCR to grant asylum to more asylum seekers in Morocco.
- Adopt new legislations to better integrate migrants and asylum seekers into Moroccan society;
- Engage powerful campaigns against human trafficking and traffickers.

The end of 2014 was the date limit for the first exceptional regularization operation. The number of approved regularization applications reached 17916 out of a total of 27332 applications, i.e., with a satisfaction rate of 65%, representing a little more than one-third of the 45000 regularizations announced as the objective of this operation.

A second regularization campaign was conducted between 2016 and 2017, which benefited another 21,000 irregular migrants, involving 113 nationalities, most of whom were of sub-Saharan origin. During the same period, however, the number of migrants transiting through Morocco increased by 130% compared to 2016. This increased to 55,700 by December 2018.

Regarding the other objectives of the "new approach," the Ministry in charge of Moroccans Residing Abroad and Migration Affairs (MCMREAM) has developed a ''National Strategy for Immigration and Asylum – SNIA." The latter strategy, which was adopted following a Government Council held in December 2014, aimed to ensure better integration of immigrants and better management of migration flows within the ''framework of a coherent, comprehensive, humanistic and responsible policy''.

This comprehensive approach was to be based on three main pillars:

- Facilitate the integration of new regularized immigrants;
- Establish and develop an appropriate institutional and regulatory framework;
- Manage migration flows in a way that respects human rights.

The first pillar of this triptych represents the foundation of a new public approach in Morocco, which will acknowledge that the arrival of foreign migrants in the country should be considered a demographic advantage. As such, they will not only allow the local labour market to respond to part of its shortage in terms of talented human resources but also help fill job offers in the "less attractive" sector for the Moroccan labour force.

RECENT TRENDS IN THE MOROCCAN LABOUR MARKET

The Moroccan labour market continues to be marked by two main characteristics.

- Although Morocco – like many other developing countries in francophone Africa – has a young population (46% under 25 years of age) and a rapid growth in school enrollment in recent years, its overall level of education remains low. For example, about 74% of the adult population (15 years and older) has only received primary education or less, and only 5% of the workforce completed higher education in 2015. As a direct result, the skill level of the working-age population and the labour force is limited.
- Labor force participation is low and has declined. The national labour force participation rate dropped from about 55% in 1999 to 47% in 2016. The latter rate affects men and women differently. Indeed, it is more than three times higher for men (70.8%) than for women (23.6%). The latter rate even reached less than 20% in 2019.

These two characteristics, which can be described as structural, have significant consequences.

The first characteristic leads to low *quality of available jobs* and, *consequently*, low *productivity*. This concurrently led to the predominance of the informal economy and, consequently, to high demand for skilled labour and highly qualified workers for the formal and non-agricultural sectors.

Concerning the second marker, even though the statistical decrease in the activity rate of women is mainly used to technically reduce the unemployment rate affecting them, and therefore the general unemployment rate, it resulted in the same consequence, which is a great need for more qualified and highly qualified labour. This is essential for promoting new manufacturing activities that will, in turn, boost innovation and increase added value.

This was confirmed by a survey conducted by the CGEM in 2017 on the theme "Challenges of leaders in the transformation of their enterprises."

According to this survey, the issue of human resources was considered by 44% of respondents as the second most critical

threat they were facing for the future development of their companies.

More precisely, limited human resources have been identified as a significant challenge by 56% of entrepreneurs in the banking, finance and insurance sectors and 45% of entrepreneurs in the information technology sector.

However, the fact is that, despite this general statement of a lack of human resources, there are no precise figures by activity/sector concerning the qualifications or the number of skilled individuals required. Therefore, higher education institutions and vocational training services seem to better respond to the State's policy in supporting industrial and sectoral development strategies. In doing so, they seem less concerned with the demands of the private sector.

This is especially true since social dialogue – between trade unions, entrepreneurs and the State – in Morocco is more often focused on wages and social security coverage than human resource qualification.

THE NEED FOR A QUALIFIED WORKFORCE AND ACTIONS TO ADDRESS IT: THE WORK OF FOREIGNERS AND MOROCCAN RETURNEES AS A SOLUTION

The Moroccan authorities have implemented a range of sectoral projects/programs from 2008–2011 in response to the consequences of the 2008 global economic and financial crisis and the so-called "Arab Spring." These include a plan known as the "industrial acceleration" scheme.

The peculiarity of this plan is its focus on establishing industrial ecosystems. This critical element of the new industrial strategy seeks to reduce the sector's fragmentation by promoting the development of targeted and mutually beneficial strategic partnerships between industry leaders and tiny, small and medium-sized enterprises. More specifically, it involves uniting groups of companies around structures that drive ecosystem projects. These drivers can be national industry leaders, professional groups or foreign investors.

This effort has led to the launch of 7 ecosystems in the automotive industry, textiles, aeronautics, trucks and industrial bodywork, 6 in the construction materials industries, in mechanical and metallurgical industries, the chemical industry, the leather sector, offshoring, the pharmaceutical industry, in the agri-food sector and an ecosystem Cherifian Office for Phosphates (OCP).

The new industrial strategy adopted in 2014 set the following general objectives for the sector until 2020:

- The creation of half a million jobs, half of which come from foreign direct investment and the other half from a modernized national industrial base
- A growth of nine points in the share of industry in the gross domestic product (GDP), from 14% to 23% by 2020.

In addition to this industrial plan, it is possible to cite the National Strategy for the Development of Logistics Competitiveness or the Renewable Energy Plan. On this last point, Morocco, which imports nearly 95% of its energy needs, launched a "National Renewable Energy and Efficiency Plan" in February 2008 to develop alternative energies to meet 52% of its domestic markets by 2030 and to increase the use of energy-saving methods. The plan is expected to stimulate more than €4.5 billion in investments and create more than 40,000 jobs by 2020.

These sectors/plans, as well as agriculture, fisheries, higher education or scientific research, require a lot of human resources. But more than these, as it has just been generally mentioned, is needed for the multiple requirements of the country.

Consequently, would competent authorities opt for different methods to cover the demand of the Moroccan economy for qualified and highly qualified human resources?

These methods/means included initial training in national institutions of higher education and vocational training, facilitating access to employment for foreign migrants living in Morocco, and in-service training in production units or through internships abroad. At the same time, they were calls made to benefit from the potential contribution of qualified Moroccan human resources established abroad. These calls have become increasingly urgent in connection with the significant economic and social difficulties arising from the Covid 19 pandemic that the country has been experiencing (along with the rest of the world) since the beginning of 2020.

And these experts – living and working mainly in OECD countries, especially in France but also in Belgium and the French-speaking Canadian province of Quebec, would significantly support Morocco. Their contribution would bring added value to its various sectors of production of goods and services (including agriculture, fishing, renewable energies, etc...). In addition to that, they would also reinforce, both by being present in-person and by possibilities of remote working thanks to ICT means, its national health systems and training/research systems thanks to:

- Their enhanced and updated scientific and technical expertise due to greater global exposure to competition;
- Their long exposure to norms, codes and values established in an organizational framework

(scientific, technical and ethical) that is conducive to greater efficiency and a constant quest for innovation;

- Their way of doing business abroad, according to the best international practices;
- Their understanding of the overall processes of global companies;
- Their presence in various foreign direct investment and innovative technology markets;
- Their qualifications and inside/outside companies' networks, and in manufacturing plants and/or research centers where they work;
- Their capacity to adapt to innovation, openness and flexibility, acquired both during their training and by being exposed to the economic, social and human realities of the environments where they operate and/or live.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION:

The demographic structure of the Moroccan population is in a progressive decline in terms of its youth component. By contrast, the older population is increasing. This implies that the labour market will be similar to that of many developed countries over the next few decades.

Considering the aforementioned point, Morocco will probably need a more active workforce, as it lacks qualified human resources. It will have to approach its overseas diaspora to meet this double challenge. It will also have to organize at its best the hosting of a more significant number and a more qualified foreign population/labour force. Therefore, taking some of the following initiatives seems to be of the utmost relevance both to approach its citizens living abroad and to foreigners residing on its territory:

- Involve national institutions, local communities and potential employers from various economic and social sectors in assessing their human resource needs, especially from a qualitative perspective.
- Identify and promote local employment opportunities and strengthen the attractiveness factors of all Moroccan territories and regions.

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- Improve the attractiveness of the territories for all actors, including migrants, nationals and foreigners. Skilled Moroccan migrants, in particular, should feel that their rights and assets, when available, are well protected despite their periodic absence.
- Anticipate specific incentives in public policies to integrate the skills of migrants, both Moroccan and foreigners.
- Pursuing and diversifying the efforts in collecting statistical data on experts among the diaspora to mirror changes in current migration flows and migrants' expectations.
- Reinforce the support of NGO development initiatives at the local and diaspora levels and support the development of migrants' social networks, including professional migrants.
- Engage more directly with employers, both public and private, to better identify the nature of required skills.
- Restructure training programs and develop integration/reintegration programs based on these needs.
- Develop networking activities, which today represent the best way to mobilize talented human resources inside and outside the country. It is also one of the most effective instruments to promote local and national initiatives, express needs and try to find the best means to satisfy them, including the transfer and exchange of the most innovative practices.