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REPORT

WELCOME BACK EVERYONE

THE RETURN AND REINTEGRATION OF IRREGULAR MIGRANTS FROM MOROCCO

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IDEAS to CHANGE LIVES

ABOUT THE PROJECT

'Beyond irregularity' is a major international project led by IPPR which focuses on irregular and transit migration from sub-Saharan Africa through Morocco to the European Union. The project has five partners: Sussex Centre for Migration Research at Sussex University, UK; Eaves Housing for Women Ltd, UK; Platform for Inter national Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants (PICUM), Belgium; the Council of the Moroccan Community Abroad (CCME), Morocco; and the Development Research and Project Centre (DRPC) in Nigeria.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

While Morocco is fast becoming a country of immigration, it has a long history of emigration. There are millions of Moroccans abroad, most living in Europe. In 2011, it was estimated that 4.5 million Moroccans were living overseas legally, which is roughly 12 per cent of the Moroccan population. Of these Moroccans, around 85 per cent are in European countries (Bladi 2011).

Data on the number of irregular Moroccan migrants is by definition more difficult to ascertain. However, data from across the EU showing the number of forced removals, regularisations and assisted voluntary returns can help to build a broad picture.

The statistical office of the European Union (EU), Eurostat, produces annual data on third-country nationals who have left the EU following an order to leave. After a significant increase from 2002 to 2006, the figures for Moroccans have remained largely stable over the last four years (2008–2011). In 2008, the number of Moroccans who left the EU following a deportation order was 16,020 (7 per cent of the 243,110 people from all nationalities leaving the EU); in 2011 this figure held steady at 7 per cent, or 14,160 out of 194,050 people (Eurostat 2012). The number of returns to Morocco via assisted voluntary return and reintegration packages (AVRR) remained comparatively low. Only 821 Moroccan citizens took up such packages between 2000 and 2011.

This report looks at how countries of origin and destination can improve the way they tackle irregular migration with a more effective return and reintegration strategy. Drawing on in-depth qualitative research carried out with returned migrants and stakeholders in Morocco, the report presents new data on what drives return and describes the actions required to ensure that return and reintegration policy is effective, efficient, humane and, most importantly, sustainable.

This research was carried out in Morocco by IPPR and the Council for the Moroccan Community Abroad (CCME). It utilises information gained from intensive qualitative research: in-depth interviews with 50 men who migrated irregularly from Morocco to the EU, but subsequently returned to Morocco. Of these 50 men, 15 chose to return home on their own, 13 felt compelled to return although they did so 'voluntarily', and a further 22 were deported. Although the research intended to interview returnees who benefited from assisted voluntary return (AVR), the research team struggled to reach them even with the help of the International Office for Migration (IOM). An additional nine interviews were conducted with stakeholders in Morocco who facilitate return or respond to the needs of returnees as they attempt to reintegrate. These stakeholders represent a range of government agencies, service-providing nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) and international agencies.

The current approach to the return of irregular migrants from Europe to Morocco is characterised by an unwillingness to take responsibility on both sides. Current policy in both European countries and in Morocco is expensive, ineffective and harmful to returnees. While forced removal continues to be the key European policy response to irregular migration, it remains an ineffective means of preventing remigration in the long term. Therefore, there is a clear need for a new policy approach to irregular migration that serves better the interests of European countries, Morocco, and migrants themselves.

Our research findings show that the nature and experience of return is important to an understanding of the later success or failure of reintegration. It demonstrates that in many cases, with the right 'end-to-end' support, irregular migrants would be willing to leave Europe and resettle back in Morocco in a way that was positive for both themselves and their communities. The relationship between forced return, poor reintegration and an increased likelihood of future irregular migration should be recognised by all sides in the debate.

Our research, and a wide range of other evidence, demonstrates that migrants can be encouraged to return voluntarily if they are offered support that meets their needs and addresses their fears.

Interviewees in our sample were worried about the return experience itself; for example, some were concerned they would be detained on arrival and have their possessions confiscated. Other important barriers to return were related to their reintegration. Many interviewees did not want to return home with nothing to show for their time away; some were fearful that they would arrive back in Morocco destitute and unable to access housing or other basic services. Incentivising take-up of voluntary return will require European governments to design packages that are more attractive to migrants, and for Morocco to move away from a security-led approach to irregular migration that penalises returnees.

Reintegration is a crucial step towards achieving sustainable return. In particular, it is important to address the factors that led migrants to leave Morocco in the first place, to prevent further irregular migration. Skills and access to a regular source of income are critical to people's ability to support themselves independently, but support also needs to reflect the importance of social reintegration: solid social support structures are essential for effective reintegration and provide a safety net beyond work. Return policies and reintegration support should seek to strengthen these social networks, as well as migrants' ability to participate in the labour market. Policymakers also need to recognise the importance of ensuring that returnees are prepared mentally for the challenge of building a new life back in Morocco.

Reintegration packages need to engage local actors who can assist returnees who struggle after the initial receipt of financial support, and help to meet their continuing needs, including their emotional and psychological needs. By increasing the capacity of local communities to respond to return, the Moroccan government can also address some of the 'push' factors that drive irregular migration in the first place.

Summary of recommendations

Recommendations for Morocco

- Morocco should review the 02-03 legislation to ensure that returnees, who left irregularly, are not penalised. It is particularly important to review the application of this legislation to unaccompanied minors to include specific provisions for the protection of children, in line with the Children's Rights Act of 1989.
- Morocco should ensure that the return of irregular migrants is in line with its ratification of the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families.
- The Ministry for Moroccan Residents Abroad should amend the current policy towards the return and reintegration of members of the Moroccan population living abroad to include irregular migrants as many of them have fallen into irregularity following the economic crisis in Europe and particularly Spain.
- Moroccan embassies and associations in Europe should promote AVR schemes among the Moroccan population living abroad.
- Morocco should invest in the provision of reintegration schemes that involve local actors more effectively. For example, it should foster links between IOM and *Agence nationale pour la promotion de l'emploi et des competences* (ANAPEC).

- Lead civil society organisations in each local area should encourage social reintegration and the prevention of social isolation of returnees by developing a network of returned irregular migrants. Where possible, previous returnees who have successfully reintegrated should be trained to mentor new returnees as they settle into their new life back in Morocco.

Recommendations for European member states and international organisations

- European governments should work together to standardise AVRR schemes across Europe and increase their availability. Schemes should be open to all irregular migrants.
- AVR schemes should include local associations with outreach officers who have good links to particular communities which are thought to have sizeable irregular migrant populations. These outreach workers should deliver training and produce publicity materials to be distributed in common spaces, such as internet cafés and destitution support centres.
- All AVRR packages should include three basic elements: pre-departure assistance (such as family tracing on request); basic post-arrival assistance (such as airport pick-up, transportation to final place of destination, emergency housing); support in vocational training and education, access to the labour market, or assistance in setting up a business.
- Half of the money that is allocated to each country from the European Returns Fund should be ringfenced for funding AVR schemes. This should be a pot of 'use-it-or-lose-it' funding that must be used to develop and maintain AVR schemes.
- European funding for reintegration schemes should be conditional upon the involvement of local civil society organisations in Morocco.
- Ensure that bilateral readmission agreements are transparent allowing independent monitoring of their implementation.
- Organise voluntary returns through existing mechanisms for return, reintegration and rehabilitation in collaboration with Moroccan NGOs.
- The monitoring and evaluation of AVR programmes should become a priority and be funded appropriately.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

This report looks at how countries of origin and destination can improve the way they tackle irregular migration with a more effective return and reintegration strategy. Drawing on in-depth qualitative research carried out with returned migrants and stakeholders in Morocco, the report presents new data on what drives return and describes the actions required to ensure that return and reintegration policy is effective, efficient, humane and, most importantly, sustainable.

Addressing irregular migration is both a genuine policy challenge and a significant political and public concern. The latest Transatlantic Trends immigration survey (German Marshall Fund of the United States 2011), shows the level of concern that irregular migration elicits among the population in Europe. When asked whether they were worried about irregular immigration, the majority of respondents in all countries reported concerns; the highest rates were recorded in Italy (80 per cent), followed by Spain (74 per cent) and the United Kingdom (71 per cent). While some of these concerns may be based on misinformation, it is clear that irregular immigration is an issue that people across Europe feel their governments do not have under control.

Governments can and should set policies to manage migration. This must involve imposing restrictions on who can and cannot enter and stay in the country. Migration policy should have the protection of human rights at its centre; but it should also uphold democratic norms, which means that while political elites must not shy away from debating and challenging misinformed views on immigration, they must also be responsive to the public's concerns. While most irregular immigrants are working, often pay taxes and have no access to welfare benefits, they do impose economic and social costs by putting unplanned-for pressures on services and infrastructure. Many irregular immigrants find themselves in situations of vulnerability and psychological uncertainty, and can be prone to exploitation. More broadly, irregular immigration damages severely the integrity and credibility of the immigration system itself, which must function well in order to maintain public support for the migrant flows that Europe needs.

European countries have been stepping up their efforts to encourage irregular migrants to return to their countries of origin, through both policies designed to act as a 'stick' (such as increasingly restricted access to the labour market and public services), and policies designed to act as a 'carrot' (such as packages of support offered to migrants who agree to return home). Although such measures have undoubtedly impacted on people's desire to stay and the likelihood of their returning home, previous research has identified major shortfalls in this policy response (Finch and Cherti 2011), and rates of spontaneous return and take-up of AVR packages by irregular migrants remain too low (Cherti and Szilard 2013).

Alongside policies to encourage irregular migrants to return, European states also deport irregular migrants, a practice that raises its own issues and problems. For example, legal and human rights concerns have been raised over the use of indefinite detention and methods of forcible removal (ILPA 2012).

Previous research (see, for example, Black et al 2011) shows that unless return is followed by reintegration, large numbers of returnees – typically between half and two-thirds – think about leaving again. Moreover, given the extent to which those in countries of origin are in touch with expatriates in destination countries, if returnees have poor experiences this information will filter back to irregular migrants, and reinforce their resistance to return. If European policy in this area is to have success in the medium and long term it must put as much emphasis on reintegration as on return.

1.2 Irregular migration from Morocco to Europe

Morocco has a long history as a country of emigration. Millions of Moroccans have moved abroad, particularly to Europe, over the past few decades. The minister responsible for Moroccans living abroad estimated in 2011 that 4.5 million Moroccans were officially registered as legal migrants living abroad (approximately 12 per cent of the Moroccan population), with 85 per cent of them settled in European countries (Bladi 2011).

Data on the number of irregular Moroccan migrants currently residing in Europe is by definition more difficult to ascertain. However, data from across the EU showing the number of forced removals, regularisations and assisted voluntary returns can help to build a broad picture.

The population of irregular Moroccan migrants in the EU is concentrated in southern European countries. The number of irregular Moroccan migrants deported from Spain comprised almost two-thirds (65 per cent) of irregular Moroccan migrants expelled from the EU 27 member states in 2010. The next highest deporting countries in 2010 were France and Italy. The UK was the ninth highest deporting country (MIREM 2012, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies 2012). Over 297,000 irregular Moroccan migrants benefited from regularisation campaigns that took place in Spain and Italy between 1990 and 2005 (Mghari 2006). While this shows that a considerable number of Moroccans have regularised their status, it also demonstrates the size of the irregular population, both in the past and, in all likelihood in the present.

The EU statistical office, Eurostat, produces annual data on third country nationals who have left the EU following an order to leave. After a significant increase from 2002 to 2006, the figures for Moroccans have remained largely stable over the last four years (2008–2011). In 2008, the number of Moroccans who left the EU following a deportation order was 16,020 (7 per cent of the 243,110 people from all nationalities leaving the EU); in 2011 this figure held steady at 7 per cent, or 14,160 out of 194,050 people (Eurostat 2012). The number of returns to Morocco via AVRR packages remained comparatively low: the number of Moroccan beneficiaries over the period of 2000–2011 was only 821.

Despite the fact that deportations remain the first resort for most EU member states to deal with irregular populations, there seems to be a general agreement that AVR, whether 'compelled' or 'chosen', is far preferable option, both for European member states and for returning migrants. It is more dignified and more humane for the migrant, more cost effective for the member states, more sustainable than forced return and it does not require the same cooperation between states that forced return does. Although exact figures are difficult to establish, the cost of forced returns is generally thought to be around 10 times greater than AVR (Black et al 2011). Policymakers also need to give more consideration to the question of how spontaneous return (with no involvement from the authorities) of irregular migrants can be encouraged and supported.

While the Moroccan government's response to return migration, for regular Moroccan migrants, has been focused on entrepreneurial or administrative support, very little assistance has been put in place for the return and the reintegration of irregular migrants. In fact, their return can lead in some cases to detention or imprisonment. This often makes the return of these irregular migrants unsustainable and increases their likelihood of remigrating.

At the present time, there is very little data available on the experiences of returnee irregular migrants to Morocco. New data and new policy thinking is particularly important as the Moroccan government look to develop a policy on the reintegration of returnees. It

is essential that this new strategy includes irregular migrants as they are in need of most support, particularly those who have been forced to return, who are often completely unprepared as a result.

This study draws on detailed qualitative work with an under-researched target group in order to gain understanding of the impact of different policy approaches. Our research examines the full circle of a migrant's journey, starting from their travel to Europe; we then focus on their return to their country of origin, and go on to explore their subsequent experience of reintegration. We also examine current policy responses from both a European and Moroccan perspective. In doing so, we are able to highlight opportunities for countries of origin, transit and destination to address irregular migration in a way that is effective, sustainable and beneficial to all parties.

1.3 Understanding return and reintegration

The academic literature is replete with discussions of how we should understand the different types of return and what is meant by sustainable reintegration, yet these definitions do not always correspond with how the terms are used in policy or in practice. For example, a binary distinction is usually drawn between 'voluntary' and 'forced' return (Toms and Thorpe 2012). 'Voluntary' generally refers to situations in which the migrant returns under his or her free will, whereas 'forced' refers to the migrant being removed (deported) from the host country. However, the distinction that is often made between 'forced' and 'voluntary' return is overly simplistic, and meaningless in many cases. Just because irregular migrants who have returned home were not removed forcibly does not necessarily mean that their return was voluntary in a meaningful way. 'Voluntary' return can also be compelled in various ways. Particularly when it comes to ease of reintegration, it matters most whether return was chosen or compelled; rather than whether a migrant was deported, returned voluntarily with intervention from the authorities (for example via an AVR programme), or did so spontaneously without any official involvement.

'Reintegration' is also a contested term. The IOM measures the sustainability of return using indicators of remigration (such as whether migrants have remained in the country to which they have returned for at least one year) and labour market integration (whether they are involved in generating financial income to support themselves).

The Development Research Centre (2009), among others, has questioned whether evaluations of sustainability should be limited simply to the wellbeing of individual returnees, or if they should be extended to assess the wider social impact of return . For example, evaluations could monitor emerging tensions between individual returnees and those who stayed, or investigate whether local areas were becoming increasingly reliant on external assistance in order to support returnees. Sustainability could also be monitored to assess whether the assistance migrants are given to reintegrate, such as skills training or funding to start up a business, has implications for the community at large in terms of development.

1.4 Methodology

This research was carried out in Morocco by IPPR and the Council for the Moroccan Community Abroad (CCME). It utilises information gained from intensive qualitative research which comprised in-depth interviews with 50 men[1] who migrated irregularly from Morocco to the EU, but subsequently returned to Morocco.

1 Initially, the research team attempted to ensure a gender balance of interviewees; however, it proved impossible to secure any female respondents.

Of these 50 men, 15 chose to return home on their own, 13 felt compelled to return although they did so 'voluntarily', and a further 22 were removed forcibly. Although the research intended to interview returnees who have benefited from AVR, the research team struggled to reach them even with the help of IOM. An additional nine interviews were conducted with stakeholders in Morocco who facilitate return or respond to the needs of returnees as they attempt to reintegrate. These stakeholders represented a range of government agencies, service-providing NGOs and international agencies.

This study aims to explore the short- and medium-term effects of return and reintegration on returnee migrants and their communities. For this reason, the returnees were interviewed *two years* after their return to Morocco. This allowed us to consider the progress returnees had made following receipt of any support, and gave us an initial indicator of the sustainability of the return.

The in-depth qualitative interviews we conducted with returnees in the course of this study provided opportunities to identify gaps in support and nuances in reintegration needs. Drawing on this methodology, we offer new insights for policymakers into opportunities for implementing effective return and reintegration policies at all stages of the migration journey, in countries of origin, transit and destination. Our analysis draws out lessons for policymakers on how agencies can encourage the return of irregular migrants, and how they can ensure that this return is sustainable both for the individuals themselves and countries of destination and origin.

Responses from the returnees and Moroccan stakeholders interviewed for this study are woven into the narrative of this report. Basic details are included for each returnee including their age and their means of return. The latter is denoted in two ways: as 'removed forcibly' if they were deported, and 'spontaneous' if they left of their own accord without the involvement of a mediating agency. Of the 50 interviewees in our research sample, not a single migrant was actually aware that enrolling in an AVR programme was a possibility and some were even dubious that such support existed. This may in part account for the extremely low take-up of AVR programmes in the EU over the course of the past decade.

1.5 The structure of the report

The structure of the report reflects the different phases of migration. We start by contextualising interviewees' return experiences, detailing their lives in Morocco, their motivations for migrating, how they became irregular, and their experiences in their countries of destination. We then turn our focus to return: what triggers it, what the process is like and how the journey home unfolds. The third and fourth chapters of the report focus respectively on current European policy responses to encouraging return and reintegration, and how the Moroccan government and civil society have reacted to the return of their citizens who migrated irregularly to the EU. To identify lessons for policy, these two final sections examine barriers to return as well as factors influencing migrants' reintegration. We end by presenting our conclusions and recommendations.

2. IRREGULAR MIGRANTS – HERE, THERE AND BACK AGAIN

2.1 Moving abroad

2.1.1 Motivations for migration

Initial motivations for migration can indicate whether return and reintegration are likely in the future. Many migrants in our sample explained that the allure of moving abroad to Europe was related to adventure, and the opportunities for financial and material success that eluded them in Morocco. The impression that the 'grass is greener' in Europe appears to be strong in Morocco, reinforced by the media and migrants who are already abroad and purport to have 'made it'. Moroccans in our sample who migrated mainly because of 'pull' factors, such as a change in lifestyle or higher living standards, usually intended to move only temporarily and return once they had realised their economic ambitions.

While many Moroccans struggle with poor socio-economic conditions, not all those in our sample felt pressure to leave because of poverty or lack of prospects. There were many who were simply intrigued by the idea of living a different lifestyle elsewhere or earning more to improve their circumstances in relation to their friends, family and neighbours. The stories told by friends, family and acquaintances that had migrated abroad were powerful inspirations. Returnees explained that these stories had in fact been half-truths, revealed as such upon their own journeys to Europe; however, others had been convinced, not by words, but by the signs of wealth they had witnessed with their own eyes. Some had come to understand that such 'wealth' was earned by working in exploitative conditions or obtained over long periods of time rather than immediately, but many were young when first exposed to such symbols and felt driven enough to take the risk.

> **'I emigrated at the age of 15. I left school because I knew many people who had already migrated. Some young people when they returned, sometimes only aged 18, they came with nice cars – they were better than me – then I decided that that I did not want to live in Morocco.'**
> Male, 24, removed forcibly

There are also 'push' factors encouraging Moroccans to migrate. These are usually linked to economic uncertainty or political instability, both of which concerned migrants in our sample to varying degrees. Most of the migrants in our sample migrated when young and single, and had low levels of education, which usually meant that their job prospects in Morocco were poor. As a consequence, they found it difficult to secure steady employment, especially in decent work with decent pay. Poverty, or the threat of poverty, was a persistent worry among this group. However, some who were older said that they had been motivated to leave after years of enduring social repression and curtailed freedoms. Safety and security were felt to be genuine concerns by some, but seeking asylum in Europe was not understood to be an option in any of the cases in our sample where this was raised as an issue. It is unlikely that these migrants would have qualified for asylum in any case, but nevertheless, Europe was viewed as a haven from the hardships experienced in Morocco.

> **'We saw Europe as a refuge, a kind of inn, of security where we could have a prosperous life.'**
> Male, 66, spontaneous return (chosen)

The desire to provide for and protect family was also an important driver of irregular migration. While the majority of our sample chose to leave Morocco at a young age and had no pressing familial responsibilities (for example, no partners or children) they felt a duty to care for parents or plan ahead for a family in the future. The interviewees in our

sample had been frustrated by the lack of support available to them and their families, and in lieu of trust in Moroccan authorities they turned to Europe to transform their situation. Many of the reasons for migration cited in our sample were actually similar to those of the sub-Saharan migrants who cross irregularly into Morocco in transit to Europe (Cherti and Grant 2013).

> **'What drove me to leave is the situation of my family and my responsibility as the oldest son. I had no clear objective beyond helping my family.'**
> Male, 33, removed forcibly

The economic crisis of 2008 did not deter many migrants from moving abroad to Europe, although it may have caused more people to return to Morocco as job prospects dried up and hostility towards migrants, both legal and irregular, reached new depths. In fact, the perception of demand for labour, particularly cheap labour in a time of austerity, motivated migrants to make the journey to Europe. While there was no guarantee of a job, employment felt almost certain, especially when compared to living in Morocco with little or no qualifications or work experience. The Moroccan stakeholders interviewed for this case study doubted that European businesses had the same fervour for prevention of irregular migration as their governments or the general public. These stakeholders believed that irregular migrants from Morocco would continue to supply the demand for an inexpensive, flexible source of labour in Europe, evading controls at the border and the authorities in order to do so.

> **'Many companies in Spain want to keep irregular migration as it is. They benefit from it, especially in the agricultural sector.'**
> Moroccan stakeholder

While employers in Europe may have a demand for labour at a low cost, their governments rarely issue visas for low-skilled labour, although there are exceptions in certain sectors, such as seasonal or agricultural work. There are few legal routes into Europe for low-skilled Moroccans looking to take up employment, which is why many feel they can only enter by irregular means. This brings us to our next section, in which we discuss how migrants in our sample found themselves in situations of irregularity.

2.1.2 Routes into irregularity

Given that there are few options open to low-skilled Moroccans interested in migrating to Europe legally, it should come as little surprise that the majority of our sample crossed the border irregularly. While migrants can fall into irregularity once they have entered a country on legal terms, for example by exceeding the agreed period of residence or breaching the terms of their visa (Gordon et al 2009), most migrants in our sample were unable or found it difficult to obtain legitimate authorisation to enter. Those who did enter legally often did so under the pretence of tourism, but rather than overstay or settle illegally in the country for which they were given initial entrance clearance, they would use the opportunity to migrate irregularly elsewhere within Europe. One interviewee recalled using his own passport to enter Turkey on valid grounds before migrating illegally to Greece. From there, he continued his chain of irregular migration, moving through Macedonia, Serbia, Romania, Hungary, Austria and Germany within a year.

The number of security precautions taken at borders, particularly in airports, make irregular entry to the EU difficult. However, research by *Frontières extérieures* (FRONTEX 2012) finds that Moroccans are among the five nationalities most likely to evade controls

by presenting false papers. Furthermore, Moroccans appear increasingly to prefer crossing by irregular sea routes rather than by air to bypass the strict security measures in place. Travelling by sea does, however, entail greater risks. FRONTEX has evidence that migrants have taken to using unseaworthy vessels to attempt the crossing from Morocco to the Spanish mainland and the cities of Melilla and Ceuta (ibid). There have been many reports of small inflatable crafts being used for illegal border crossings between Morocco and Gibraltar in particular. Once irregular migrants have made it safely into Europe, they turn to other unconventional means for moving within the continent. Long and arduous walks or stowing away in vehicles were common among the interviewees in our sample.

> **'I lived in Melilla and then Almeria for a short time, and then I went to France on foot and then to Germany.'**
> Male, 36, spontaneous return (chosen)

In part, the ability of migrants to move irregularly in these ways is due to the close proximity of the countries they entered. Nearly all of the migrants in our sample who entered the EU via irregular means, specifically by smuggling in, did so through Spain, Italy or France. Similarly, nearly all had lived in one or more of these countries at some point in their journey, even if only for a short period of time while in transit to another destination. This is in line with data from FRONTEX, particularly in regards to Spain: the land and sea border between Spain and Morocco is one of the busiest border sections, totalling more than 10 million annual entries (FRONTEX 2012).

2.1.3 Life in the country of destination

Experiences of living irregularly in Europe varied between migrants in our sample, depending on factors such as length and country of stay, social networks and their previous circumstances in Morocco. The average length of stay within our sample was quite long, falling just shy of nine years; however, this ranged between five months to an exceptional case of 47 years.

In many cases where irregular migrants were only able to stay in Europe for a short period of time (often followed by forcible removal) the experiences of life were grim. These migrants were often ensnared in situations where the likelihood of detection and arrest were high; for example, in drug trafficking, exploitative jobs or in worklessness, which had provoked some to turn to criminality in order to survive. There was a high level of risk associated with their activities – to remain in the shadows was, for some, emotionally taxing; for others, impossible to sustain.

> **'I did not find any work. I had no papers. I was really suffocating. Sometimes I had to steal from the supermarket to eat.'**
> Male, 37, spontaneous return (compelled)

Conversely, irregular migrants who were able to stay in one country for a significant period of time had a more positive experience. Longer stays do not necessarily afford more positive experiences, but when migrants had a more positive experience, this motivated and enabled them to stay longer. During their stay, these irregular migrants were able to secure steady employment, establish a routine, and tap into social networks. They learned the language and began to integrate, blending into local communities and minimising their risk of detection. The difference between feeling fully integrated and living life on the margins was considerable.

> **'Over time, we began to learn the language and to know the right people, and we began to find work, mostly in construction.'**
> Male, 42, removed forcibly

Existing social networks also played an important role in helping the irregular migrants in our sample to integrate into their host society after they had arrived. Many of the migrants in our sample had family, friends or acquaintances already living in Europe that they had followed or hoped to meet with once they reached their destination. Social networks were integral in supporting irregular migrants to land on their feet, helping them to find work and a place to live as well as providing a boost to morale when needed. They spared migrants from the isolation typically experienced by those who had left their loved ones behind in order to start again elsewhere. These networks did not necessarily mean that migrants would not be exploited by employers, or were exempt from violence or forced criminality, but often networks enabled an easier adjustment to the new country. However, some migrants recalled being disappointed with their social contacts upon arriving in Europe: those they had expected would greet them with open arms and who would welcome them to prosperity reacted with indifference and shame instead. Unprepared for such alienation, many migrants were at a loss as to how to manage on their own.

> **'It was full of bitterness; I've seen a lot of difficult things. Here, in our city, young migrants when they return, they promise us many things: they leave us their addresses and phone numbers and make promises to host us in Europe until we can take care of ourselves. However, in the first three months I was there, they all abandoned me, turned off their phones and saw me as a burden to be avoided. When they visit they describe their lives as ideal, but when you go over there yourself you discover their real lives.'**
> Male, 30, removed forcibly

Alternatively, social networks could take a dark turn in some cases. The contacts that irregular migrants were expecting to care for them would on occasion exploit the precariousness of their positions instead. Lack of status left these migrants vulnerable to abuse. Not only were they denied access to services, such as healthcare, but they were also unable to turn to the authorities for fear of deportation. Migrants from Morocco who enjoyed legal status were able to use this to their advantage: offering help, but only for a price, knowing that irregular migrants had few options.

> **'It was the regular Moroccan migrants who rented flats to the irregular Moroccans for 50 dirhams per bed. They exploited the need for refuge and we were three or four immigrants per room; the regular migrants were renting from the Italians and they were renting to us the bed per night.'**
> Male, 39, spontaneous return (compelled)

In spite of the betrayal and other hardships suffered (for example, working long hours in menial jobs for less than the minimum wage and without rest, or staying in cramped quarters without proper facilities), many of the migrants in our sample were convinced that they were better off living in poor conditions in Europe rather than Morocco. While some denounced their lives as irregular migrants in Europe as deplorable, others were genuinely content with their situation, feeling that it was enough to meet their basic needs.

This may be explained by migrants' relative levels of satisfaction with their standard of living in Morocco. If the migrants had been 'pulled' by the possibility of greater wealth ('getting rich quick', so to speak) more than if they had been driven by feelings of scarcity, then their expectations for Europe were likely to fall short. In contrast, migrants who had very little to begin with in Morocco were happy to continue living in Europe even in difficult circumstances.

> **'I worked in laundries, cleaning services and construction sites. All of this without papers. It was common. It was much better than my situation in Morocco. I paid my rent, I ate well, I sent money home and I could also save. I was very well there.'**
> Male, 37, spontaneous return (chosen)

In the next section, we look at what prompts some irregular migrants to return while others are hesitant to do so. We explore the journey back to Morocco in depth, including how return is triggered, what the barriers are to returning voluntarily, and the return process itself.

2.2 Moving home

2.2.1 Triggers

Not much is understood about what prompts irregular migrants to return to their country of origin. There are competing migration theories, the first being premised on the assumption that return migration is a result of a 'failure' to find a job or improve their lives in the receiving country (De Haas et al 2009). The second theory takes the opposite view: it argues that irregular migrants will return if they are able to secure work and meet their financial goals abroad, as this enables them to sustain a better life in their country of origin (ibid).

Our research found that neither theory could necessarily be proven; factors triggering migration are much more nuanced than either theory assumes. For example, spontaneous return was also affected by the degree of social integration in the receiving country, as well as family ties in Morocco. There was also the constant threat of deportation, and imprisonment for crimes committed.

While nearly half of the interviewees in our sample were forced to return following arrest and detention, the remainder returned spontaneously, either because they chose to or felt compelled to. The triggers for those who returned spontaneously ranged from family reasons to an inability to find work in the receiving country.

Table 2.1
Triggers for return, by type of return

Triggers for return	Number of irregular migrants who cited trigger as primary
Chose spontaneous return for family reasons (to start a family or to reunite with loved ones)	12
Chose spontaneous return to start anew or seek opportunities (for example, to reap benefits of investments)	3
Compelled spontaneous return to avoid detention or imprisonment	2
Compelled spontaneous return because of poor health	5
Compelled spontaneous return because of instability (such as problems securing work) in receiving country	6
Forced return following arrest and detention	22

For those who chose to return spontaneously, family was the main draw to Morocco. There were many irregular migrants within our sample who had left their spouses and children behind in Morocco to fulfil what they saw as their responsibility to be the 'primary breadwinner'. They maintained strong connections to both immediate and extended family. This was often coupled with feelings of nostalgia for their homeland, as well as for their way of life there. Most of the interviewees were inspired to return because they felt they were missed and needed, often prompted by a major life event, such as the birth of a child or the death of a relative. In five cases, interviewees returned because a parent had passed away or required care; in the other cases, the decision was tied to wives and children.

> **'First and foremost, I missed my family. I left my son and my wife behind me. They lived with my family, but I was not there for them. They lacked nothing but my presence. But at some point, I told myself that my place was with them.'**
> Male, 37, spontaneous return (chosen)

Other returnees decided to head home because they wanted to start a family of their own. They felt that it was not possible to pursue such goals in Europe, sometimes citing differences in 'way of life' or a lack of stability as an explanation. For those who had yet to settle down, family was an aspiration strong enough to propel them home.

> **'I wanted to be stable, have my own work, I wanted to get married, have my own children … things that I could not do there [in the host country] because I did not have the means.'**
> Male, 40, spontaneous return (chosen)

Similarly, some irregular migrants in our sample felt much more connected to Morocco than Europe, and for reasons of finance or opportunity rather than family, were more likely to return by choice. Some of the irregular migrants in our sample had benefited from enough economic stability while in Europe to set aside savings and invest in Morocco. The possibility of being able to make financial investments in Morocco persuaded some interviewees in our sample that returning was their best option. Others felt that they had a stronger social network in Morocco to help them start again now that they were in a better position to compete in the labour market, or had severed their close ties in Europe (for example, one interviewee returned on the heels of a divorce), freeing them to pursue opportunities back at home. In particular, those who were in a comfortable financial position and could afford to invest in Morocco were more confident in their decision to return because they felt cushioned by their wealth and could reintegrate with ease.

> **'I'm fine; I have nine houses in this country, earned through my work. I could not have done that staying in Morocco. What do you think?'**
> Male, 63, spontaneous return (chosen)

While spontaneous return was more often a choice than compelled, in a fraction of the cases where interviewees felt they had no alternative to return, the threat of detention or imprisonment loomed. In all three of the cases in which this trigger was cited, drug trafficking was the cause. In a sense, these three were the lucky ones: they had evaded detection for drug trafficking, but four others in our sample had been caught and removed forcibly for perpetrating the same offence. All of the interviewees who reported being involved in drug trafficking said that they had been driven to do so by the insecurity of their status, the dearth of opportunities, and the poverty that this had led to.

While the desperation of destitution may have compelled some to take up drug trafficking, the desperation to avoid imprisonment as a consequence was what, ultimately, inspired their return.

> **'I returned voluntarily. I wanted to avoid jail this time because I had several complaints against me. And I wanted to escape and not be trapped again in Italy.'**
> Male, 32, spontaneous return (compelled)

Others in our sample felt compelled to return because of ailing health, whether mental or physical. Some interviewees had also been in accidents while in Europe limiting their ability to find work. One of the interviewees explained that without work, it was impossible to carry on living in Europe, as irregular migrants are not entitled to access social assistance from the state. While it was worklessness which drove his return, the underlying cause was his partial paralysis.

> **'I had a car accident. My legs are not like before. I cannot move one of them. I regret the fact of returning to Morocco; however, I had no choice. I was unable to work. And in the west, an undocumented migrant who doesn't work cannot live. I had to go back against my will.'**
> Male, 37, spontaneous return (compelled)

Worklessness and general insecurity of employment in Europe were raised as issues that compelled some in our sample to return to Morocco. Some found it difficult to find work if they did not have a pre-existing network to turn to once in Europe, while others struggled to find work following the economic crisis of 2008–09. Given that financial prosperity had been one of the leading incentives for Moroccans to risk migrating irregularly to Europe, the absence of work left some feeling unfulfilled and wondering if they would be better off back in Morocco where they could at least be with their loved ones and enjoy a sense of familiarity. One of our returnees told us that the precariousness of his situation was difficult to swallow; he needed more certainty with age than a life in Europe could provide.

> **'My situation was not stable, and as I am in my 30s, I was asking myself questions about my future. I said to myself that I could not stay in England without knowing my fate at that age.'**
> Male, 40, spontaneous return (compelled)

Our Moroccan stakeholders echoed the explanations of interviewees who identified the economic crisis as their 'push' to return home. However, the stakeholders noted that most of the returnees they had spoken with actually had regular status at a point during their time in Europe (in contrast to our interviewees who had migrated entirely irregularly); these returnees fell into irregularity over the course of their stay. They were forced to return upon losing their jobs in the wake of the crisis, even if they had spent a significant stretch of time abroad, because they had been given few options to extend their stay legally. As irregular migrants they were denied access to social protection from the state and felt they had no choice but to cut their losses and return.

> **'Crisis has a huge impact on return, especially in Italy and Spain. Crisis has been present constantly in discussions with returnees since 2008–2009, and could be considered as one of the main reasons for people to return. The people who return from Italy with IOM are migrants who had a regular situation, a job and a residence permit, but who were unable to renew the latter as they lost their jobs due to the economic crisis, falling consequently into irregular situations. In Italy, there is no automatic renewal of the resident permit and, therefore, no security for migrants. In some cases, people have lived in Italy for over 10 years in a regular situation, suddenly becoming irregular when they lose their employment and [then] choose to return home.'**
> Moroccan stakeholder

Interviewees who had significant experience of being an irregular migrant (for example, those who had migrated several times) were more likely to return voluntarily. It has been suggested that this is a reflection of the 'less-settled nature of their life histories' (De Haas et al 2009). From our interviewees, there was a sense that migration felt 'natural' to some of them, and thus they had confidence in their ability to move fluidly within Europe and between Europe and Morocco. One of the interviewees described his irregular migration as an 'adventure', but one which would ultimately culminate in Morocco.

> **'My situation was not bad at all. At least I was satisfied because I was working; I had my financial independence and I was happy, but I wanted to live another adventure.'**
> Male, 40, spontaneous return (chosen)

Those with at least some level of education were more likely to return voluntarily than those without any qualifications. The latter believed they would be better off in work in Europe (albeit in labour-intensive, low-paid work) as opposed to remaining unemployed in Morocco.

2.2.2 Barriers to voluntary return

Our research has provided some insights into the barriers that prevent irregular migrants from returning spontaneously by choice or participating in an AVR programme.

In our sample, a primary barrier to spontaneous return was a lack of financial means. Many of the migrants in our sample were still working towards achieving their initial monetary goals, unable to save as much as they had hoped to because of poor wages, high cost of living and remittances. Others were thwarted by the need to repay debts to smugglers, or 'agents', who had enabled their entry into Europe. Some were unable, therefore, to afford the return journey and felt they were trapped in their country of destination until they could pay for their travel home or were removed forcibly by the authorities.

> **'I regret leaving [for Europe]. If the crossing was free I would have preferred returning earlier, but since I spent a lot of money I could not return.'**
> Male, 48, removed forcibly

It is worth acknowledging that some of these interviewees would not have returned spontaneously even if they were able to cover the cost of their ticket or pay a smuggler to help them cross back into Morocco. Some were still working towards their savings target and had no intention of returning until they had met it. These savings would help

them realise their aspirations for building a house, setting up a business or paying for their children's education once they returned to Morocco. They felt that if they were to return with little or nothing to show for their time abroad, they would be disappointing their families and alienated by their communities. There was pressure to succeed as expected, and this curbed the desire of irregular migrants to return prematurely.

> **'People whisper, they say that this guy has not been successful in Italy and that he had to return to Morocco because he cannot do anything.'**
> Male, 48, removed forcibly

The economic uncertainty of a future in Morocco deterred some of our interviewees from returning. Interviewees felt that opportunities in Morocco were scarce, wages did not reflect the cost of living, and infrastructure was lacking. There was also no support on offer from the state to tide them over during difficult times, which meant that some would struggle to meet basic needs and to gain a foothold in the labour market upon arrival. Initial drivers of migration, such as economic inequality and poverty, continued to sway migrants in favour of living in Europe.

If migrants are unable to return entirely on their own, AVR programmes offer irregular migrants a package of support to help them return home, and often, to reintegrate. Irregular migrants without legal status, papers or a valid visa (a situation that was characteristic of all of the interviewees in our sample) are eligible for some AVR programmes, but they tend to be given less financial assistance than other participants in the programme including failed asylum-seekers, victims of trafficking or irregular migrants with dependants. The degree of support on offer varies between countries, as does the amount of the incentive, but all pay for a ticket home and some facilitate reintegration by financing education, training or entrepreneurial activities, depending on migrants' eligibility.

None of the irregular migrants in our sample returned home through an AVR programme, or were even given the option to do so. Some interviewees said that they would have chosen to return voluntarily through an AVR programme if they were offered one, especially if assurances of reintegration support were made, although many were dubious that such support existed.

> **'Nobody will give you any financial assistance; it is the first time I've heard this kind of question. At the time of my return there was nothing. If it was there, I would have used those services, and even today, there is nothing of this kind. No such help exists.'**
> Male, 47, spontaneous return (chosen)

2.2.3 Journey back to Morocco

For many of the interviewees in our sample, the return journey was described to be as harrowing as their initial crossing into Europe. Nearly half (22) of the interviewees were removed forcibly following detection, arrest and a period of detention in the host country. Interviewees who were deported also often faced a brief stint of detention (usually one to two days) and interrogation by Moroccan authorities (generally the police) before their release. Irregular migrants who are deported are not entitled to any support from the Moroccan government, and thus can be ill-equipped for the transition, particularly because they were unprepared to leave in the first place.

Returning voluntarily was not always easier than being removed forcibly, especially if the migrant felt compelled to return home. Of the remaining 28 interviewees who returned

voluntarily, 15 returned by choice and 13 felt compelled to come home to Morocco. Only one of these interviewees benefited from the help of the local Moroccan embassy (albeit only after making a false claim about losing his passport), and another received a contribution from a local faith association in Italy to help finance his travel home. The rest of our interviewees relied on their families for support to return home, believing the state or other organisations would not respond to their needs.

> **'Of course I did not receive any help or assistance for my return to Morocco … the only aid and assistance came from my family. They are the only people who helped me meet my needs.'**
> Male, 34, spontaneous return (compelled)

While there were AVR programmes operating in Europe that could have helped these irregular migrants return home – by covering the cost of their journey, for instance – none of the interviewees in our sample participated in such a scheme. When considering returning voluntarily, these irregular migrants had no knowledge of AVR programmes in spite of the fact that many of them belonged to a social network of other Moroccan migrants, often also irregular, and shared information about migration freely. AVR programmes were simply not on the radar of most irregular migrants from Morocco who lived in Europe.

There were interviewees in our sample who had been interested in going back to Morocco, but they were eventually deported before they could find the means to return on their own. However, none of these interviewees were attempting consciously to attract the attention of the authorities in order to achieve forced removal. Most of the interviewees actually recounted being arrested initially because of misfortune, or 'being in the wrong place, at the wrong time'. One of these men explained how he had been tracked by the police because he would keep the company of a friend who sold cannabis occasionally near his home. He was presented with a choice between imprisonment or return and felt he had been bullied into 'voluntarily' returning.

> **'We were asked to choose between imprisonment and return to Morocco; I chose to go back.'**
> Male, 29, removed forcibly

Not only were these interviewees criminalised while in the host country, but they were then subjected to the same treatment upon arriving back in Morocco if there was evidence that they had left Morocco irregularly. It is the Moroccan government's policy to hold irregular migrants who have been deported back to the country in detention for up to a 48-hour period. These returnees are then released without a stipend to meet immediate basic needs or support to secure accommodation. Returnees must find their own way to friends and relatives who bear the brunt of helping them to reintegrate in their communities.

In the next section, we focus on the reintegration process, what life is like for irregular migrants once they return to Morocco, what support is on offer to help them reintegrate, and whether return can be considered sustainable.

2.3 Reintegrating in Morocco

2.3.1 Life upon return

Successful reintegration is a central tenet of sustainable return. Our interviewees had mixed experiences of reintegration following their return to Morocco, but more than three-quarters reported encountering obstacles.

The most common challenge for returnees was economic integration. While our interviewees may have gained experience and skills while working abroad, they felt that their employability was still low or that their wages were an inadequate reflection of their abilities, especially if they encountered difficulties finding or securing work once they returned. Some had migrated irregularly as a solution to their unemployment, but they returned only to find themselves facing the same predicament. There were still concerns about poverty, worklessness, and the lack of a safety net for those who had fallen on hard times. In circumstances where the state was unwilling to intervene, family continued to play an important role in supporting returnees.

> **'Life is tough. I do not have any money; my brothers and my family support me. Since I returned, I have been unemployed.'**
> Male, 27, removed forcibly

Social and economic inequalities were felt sharply by those who returned without savings to cushion them or were disadvantaged in the labour market (for example, because of a criminal record). Our interviewees described living in Morocco as 'expensive', explaining that it did not appear that wages (for example, in the construction sector) had risen to meet price inflation. Some said only the rich could live comfortably in Morocco, whereas everyone else struggled to get by. The gap between rich and poor was thought to be wide, and one of our interviewees warned that Moroccans would turn to criminality in order to close it. Not all Moroccans would 'play by the rules' if fairness in the system was perceived as lacking.

> **'Life is very hard for those who return here. Morocco is like a big supermarket: those who have money can live, and the less fortunate people suffer. We must have equality for all. There should be work for everyone, especially for those who have been in prison, even more so as a large number of prisoners are imprisoned illegally. And life is expensive in Morocco, and wages do not follow … it is a policy that pushes the Moroccans to move towards trafficking and illegal business.'**
> Male, 33, spontaneous return (compelled)

For those who returned with little to show for their time abroad or who failed to impress the communities they had left behind, there was shame. The disappointment of others could be a bitter pill to swallow, particularly if the returnees felt they had done everything in their power to succeed or had been deported before they could accomplish their goals. Although immediate families could usually be counted on for support, it was still a source of indignity for returnees who felt they had failed to provide for their loved ones and dependants.

> **'Social pressure and gossips are real weapons that must be challenged. This makes things difficult for those who return.'**
> Male, 33, removed forcibly

In most cases, the interviewees in our sample reconnected with their families upon return; their families formed the basis of support in the absence of government or civil society organisations. However, a few of our interviewees reported that they did not have a healthy relationship with their family, which had impacted adversely on their reintegration. This appeared to be true particularly among those who had forged strong friendships and better integrated socially in Europe, possibly because they made more of an effort to develop a support system while abroad to compensate for an absence of one at home.

> **'It's a hard life since I returned. I have bad relationships with my parents and with my brothers. In Italy at least I had my dignity, not here; I became a person of no importance.'**
> Male, 27, removed forcibly

Social and economic difficulties can compound each other, taking their toll psychologically for some returnees. There were some within our sample who said that they felt they were worse off following their return to Morocco than they had been prior to their initial migration. In a few cases, this was because of a history of mental ill health which had gone untreated, but that was now exacerbated by the troubling situation at hand. For others, the fluctuations in wellbeing that they had experienced throughout their migration, and especially upon return, were the cause of their mental fragility. These returnees were plagued by mental health issues, such as anxiety and depression, which had the potential to end in extreme distress.

> **'My life has become hell. I even tried to kill myself by swallowing rat poison. I woke up in the hospital. Allah has given me a second chance to live. But for what life? A life of misery.'**
> Male, 46, removed forcibly

Only a small minority (about a fifth) of our interviewees expressed some satisfaction with their experience of reintegration. While fewer than five of these interviewees managed to integrate into the labour market or boasted of economic success (for instance, based on investments in property), these interviewees were more content with their current situation at home than they had been in Europe and had plans to remain in Morocco in the future. A common thread among these interviewees was the voluntary nature of their return. These interviewees had returned spontaneously by choice, as opposed to feeling compelled to return on their own or being removed forcibly by European authorities. They felt more prepared to return than the other irregular migrants in our sample and were thus more likely to find it a relief to be back in Morocco. They were able to make more of an effort to re-establish their lives by actively pursuing long-term business or employment opportunities and reconnecting with their local networks and family structures.

> **'I started another life and another career. After starting a career in Italy, I shifted to working as a real estate developer. With the money I earned, I bought land and fields. When I decided to stay in Morocco, I started other projects. I run my business here in Morocco, and I take care of my family and my children, especially the older ones who are now teenagers.'**
> Male, 39, spontaneous return (chosen)

Satisfied returnees were also more likely to have spent a longer period abroad than those who were having a difficult time resettling. Particularly in the handful of cases where returnees were able to find sure footing financially upon return, the length of stay in Europe had been a minimum of five to 10 years, but was upwards of 20 to 30 years in the exceptional cases where returnees had enjoyed wealth in Morocco. Those who felt as if they had time to accomplish their goals were not as resistant to reintegrating or eager to go back to Europe as those who had felt their time was cut short and that they were forced to return before their ambitions of prosperity, for example, could be realised.

2.3.2 Support on offer

There is very little support on offer to returnees, particularly in Morocco, although none of our interviewees received any assistance or preparation for return while in Europe either. The IOM is the agency most commonly responsible for delivering AVR programmes across Europe, but it could be that the demographic represented by our sample has been difficult for the IOM and other AVR providers to reach. Women and children, particularly victims of trafficking, tend to be targeted by AVR providers during outreach (for instance, in areas where prostitution is high), so male Moroccans who have migrated irregularly on their own instigation, may fall low down on the list of priority groups. Our interviewees were also accustomed to limited government intervention in Morocco, which may have influenced their expectations about receiving support to return and reintegrate. Family was felt to be the only dependable rock our interviewees could cling to as they transitioned from living irregularly in Europe to once again taking up residence in Morocco. None of our interviewees received any assistance from the state or NGOs in order to reintegrate. This may be a missed opportunity for both Europe and Morocco to realise wider development goals through a mechanism which also supports individual returnees.

> **'Help? From where? From associations or governmental organisations? No. There was the help of my family in the beginning. They helped me overcome the failure of my migration and the sorry state in which I was, both financially and morally. Money and clothes: they gave me everything that I needed.'**
> Male, 30, removed forcibly

According to our sample, for returnees to be able to reintegrate the basics must be addressed first: food, shelter and clothing were the most immediate needs, especially among those who were deported with few belongings. Often, family came to the rescue, especially to cover material costs, but they had difficulty providing emotional support to migrants who had endured a difficult return process. There were some migrants who were in need of professional counselling, while others would have simply settled for someone else who could share and identify with their experience. It could be isolating for returnees to be in a situation in which they felt they no longer had much in common with friends and family who had stayed behind, or for those who were feeling judged for perceived failure.

> **'It is difficult for those who cannot find help. Moral support would be something. Migrants cannot find space here to discuss and share their experience. There is no association that will give them a hand.'**
> Male, 32, spontaneous return (compelled)

> **'Funding is important, but it is not everything. I needed counselling. In Morocco, we do not find it.'**
> Male, 46, removed forcibly

The inadequacy of response from the Moroccan government in part reflects a lack of adaptation to changing immigration laws in Europe. Regularisations were more common in the 1990s than they are at present. Some of our returnees and stakeholders noted that prior to the 1990s many Moroccans were able to migrate easily to Europe on tourist visas, particularly to the southern member states. It was possible for these irregular migrants to spend summers in Spain, Italy and France, working in markets and selling to tourists in beach resorts without encountering any opposition. They were often in a state of transit migration, as they did not intend to remain in Europe, but instead planned to migrate

elsewhere (usually back to Morocco) as soon as opportunities to make money began dwindling, although some would overstay their visas in the process. As regularisation campaigns first succeeded, irregular Moroccan migrants were able to remain abroad permanently, later facilitating family migration and establishing their lives in Europe. One stakeholder referred to Italy as an example of a European country whose history of regularisations affected the nature of migration from Morocco.

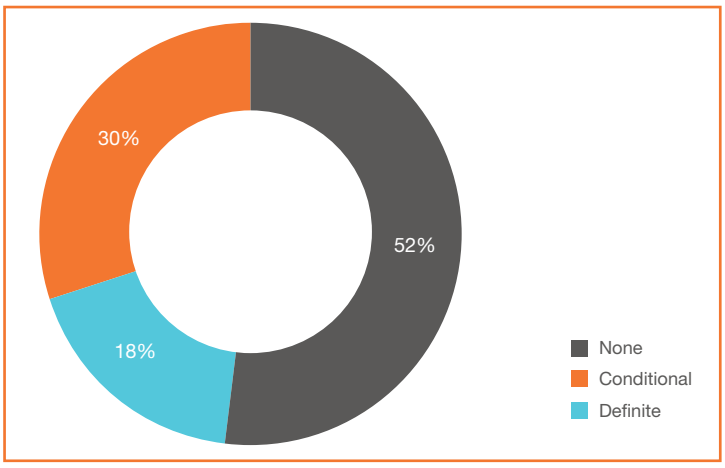
> **'The first immigration law, the Martelli Law, was established in Italy, regularising irregular immigrants residing in Italy by the end of the year in 1990. It provided irregular immigrants with a residence permit and a work permit and this is how the migration from the south to the north of Italy started. Migrants were able to establish themselves in Italy. Many irregular Moroccan migrants who were in France, Belgium, and Holland moved to Italy once the law was put into place. That is how Moroccans started to live in Italy. And then the family migration started, and more regularisations took place in 1996, 1998, and 2002.'**
> Moroccan stakeholder

Later, regularisations became rare, and forced returns to Morocco became more prevalent. Yet, the Moroccan government has been slow to act in terms of helping their citizens who want to return voluntarily to do so safely and with support. The 'culture of migration' is seemingly reinforced by government; as one stakeholder put it: 'Every time the immigration minister makes a speech, he speaks of the economy and investment.' The stakeholder went on to hypothesise that there was no return policy because in the view of the Moroccan government, Moroccans abroad should integrate in their host countries so they could send remittances home.

2.3.3 Sustainability of return

Successful reintegration is usually understood as return which is sustainable: for example, as defined by the IOM, sustainable return is achieved when an irregular migrant remains in the country of return for at least one year following their arrival and is considered to be financially independent (Black et al 2011). While the IOM's measurement of 'success' is a good start, it must be broadened.

Figure 2.1
Interviewees' intention to remigrate following return



All of the interviewees in our sample have remained in Morocco for at least two years following their return, yet nearly half (24) are still open to re-emigrating again or have even planned to do so. Nine interviewees revealed that they intended definitely to remigrate to Europe and a further 15 interviewees would remigrate conditionally. Only slightly more than half of the interviewees (26) planned to remain in Morocco. Some of these returnees would have remigrated sooner (that is, within their first two years of return) had they possessed the means to do so. The IOM definition of 'sustainable' is limiting because it focuses on short-term reintegration as opposed to the medium- and long-term sustainability of return.

Of the interviewees who were set firmly on remigrating to Europe, most were concerned about the lack of jobs, poor infrastructure and absence of a safety net, such as welfare or social services in their home country. While their motivations for re-emigration were based primarily on financial considerations, some also cited 'pull' factors of a social nature. They had become accustomed to an alternative way of life that had appealed to them personally and found it difficult to readjust to living in Morocco, particularly without any support. They felt that Morocco had changed somehow or that they had different expectations for what home would or should be like. Social and economic inequalities were felt sharply by those who wished to remigrate. This was the case especially among interviewees who had been deported and had lived abroad for less than five years.

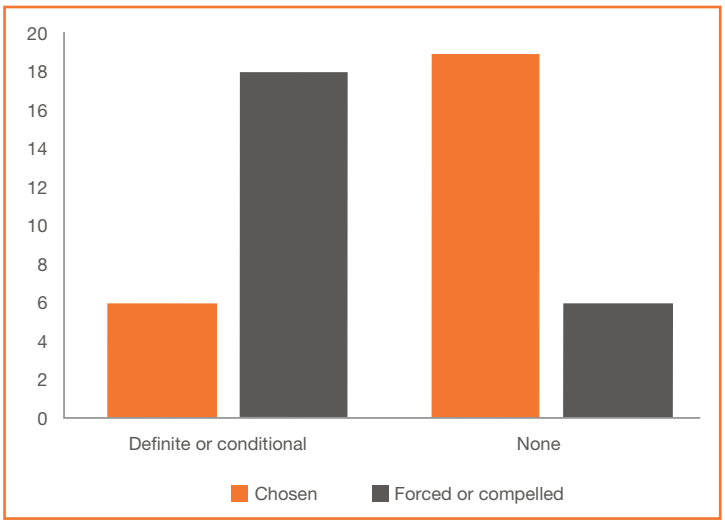
> **'Life in Morocco is harder and more expensive than before. After [four] years of living in France, I found several differences: people have become materialistic and superficial. The rich live better. To understand the plight of life in Morocco, observe the people who live there, the hospitals and the rest. I am still at odds with Morocco.'**
> Male, 46, removed forcibly

Some interviewees stressed they would only remigrate under certain conditions; for example, based on whether they were given legal status or if there were definitely more, or specific, job opportunities in Europe. Some did not mind remaining in Morocco as long as they could maintain a livelihood, but they would be prepared to leave if their circumstances changed. The availability of employment guided decisions to migrate. Once again, this was particularly true among those who had been compelled to go back, most likely because they had fewer savings to cushion their return. The intention to remigrate, whether definitely or conditionally, was much higher among those who had been forced or compelled to return than it was among those who had chosen to return spontaneously (see figure 2.2, over).

There is good reason to believe that the sustainability of return could be influenced by the degree of support offered to help irregular migrants reintegrate in their communities. Reconnecting with family and friends and acclimatising socially was a much more fluid process for these returnees than assimilating economically. However, once again financial problems outweighed the social benefits of home for many in our sample and accounted for returnees' dissatisfaction with being home.

> **'It [success of reintegration] is case by case. There are migrants who returned to a mode of normality. If the migrant is from a wealthy family, he can go and set up a project and reintegrate. There are other immigrants who return empty-handed, the doors are closed before him. What should he do? How? The level of education is also crucial.'**
> Male, 30, spontaneous return (chosen)

Figure 2.2
Interviewees' intention to remigrate, by type of return



Considering that almost half of our sample intended to or were considering migrating to Europe again, clearly there is scope for the sustainability of return among returnees to be improved. Our research confirms that there is a lack of provision in terms of training and education to help returnees secure work, as well as few options for them to achieve financial independence. Reintegration support, whether offered through AVR programmes, by government, or local organisations, has the potential to increase the sustainability of return.

3. THE EUROPEAN POLICY RESPONSE

3.1 European policy context

European countries with significant numbers of irregular migrants are confronted with three options: tolerate the presence of irregular migrants, regularise their status, or return them to their countries of origin. While some European countries, particularly southern ones, have attempted to address the issue through a series of regularisations, most have relied on deportations to reduce the number of irregular migrants. The return of these migrants may be more politically palatable for European countries than regularisation or tolerance, but forced return is very challenging from a diplomatic and policy point of view. Increasingly, European governments are exploring opportunities to actively engage with irregular migrants and encourage them to return voluntarily (EMN 2011).

The need for more concerted action from Europe to address the return of irregular migrants was evident from the stories of interviewees in our sample, many of whom lived in Europe as irregular migrants for a significant period of time. The majority did not want to return home when they did, even if they found their experience abroad to be challenging. Although the general intention to return home was widespread, most did not return until they felt prepared to do so on their own terms, or until they were compelled to do so, one way or another.

Differences in return and reintegration outcomes may be explained in part by conflicting and incomplete policy responses across Europe. Attempts to create a coordinated returns strategy are still at an early stage of development. The European Returns Fund has been established to support the efforts made by member states to improve the management of return. For the years 2008–2013, its budget was €676 million. The European Commission has tried to harmonise EU member states' responses to the return of irregular migrants, most notably by introducing the Directive on Common Standards and Procedures in Member States for Returning Illegally Staying Third Country Nationals (also known as the Returns Directive) in 2008. The directive introduces EU-wide rules and procedures about both forced and voluntary return of migrants. The directive covers a range of issues, including the use of detention and re-entry bans for returned migrants (European Parliament 2008). Member states that ratify the directive are prohibited from applying harsher rules than those set out in it, but can be more generous if they choose.

The success of this drive for harmonisation is limited so far. On the face of it, the Returns Directive does seem to promote cooperation between EU member states to manage the return of irregular migrants by promoting a consistent response. However, the UK and Ireland have opted out of signing the directive altogether, while eight other states have not notified the Commission of any measures taken on a national level to implement it (ECRE 2011).

To reduce immigration flows from Morocco in particular, the EU has also focused on boosting Morocco's development. In 1996, Morocco signed the European Mediterranean Association Agreement (EMAA) with the EU, which led to the establishment of a free trade area in 2010 (De Haas 2005). Support for Morocco's economic transition is also implemented through the Mesures d'Accompagnement programme (MEDA), through which the private sector is developed and good governance is promoted as well as the efficient management of migration flows. Thus the project Support to the Free Movement of People has benefited from the assistance of ANAPEC for the promotion of international jobs and legal employment opportunities.

The MEDA programme's funds also include support for prevention and control of irregular immigration, and rural development programmes specifically targeted at the northern provinces where poverty levels are high, and where human smuggling and irregular migration take place (De Haas 2005). Morocco has an active role in distributing the funds; however, there are also serious doubts about the credibility and effectiveness of these policies: they are not adequate to target the root causes of migration; nor are they sufficiently developed to counter professionalised smuggling and rapidly adapting migration strategies.

More recently, in October 2012, a Europe dialogue with Morocco on migration, mobility and security was launched following the Arab Spring and the civil unrest, revolution and war that followed during the course of 2011 in the southern Mediterranean. The new logic of the EU is to respond to migration issues by supporting security, including the establishment of readmission agreements. This new partnership is part of a global approach focused largely on the fight against irregular immigration and human trafficking, readmission of migrants and better border management. It also provides for mobility, legal immigration and integration, migration and development. Its implementation may be an opportunity to put in place effective policies for the return of migrants in irregular situations.

3.2 Border control and management of forced return

Given Morocco's geographical proximity to Europe, immigration issues between Morocco and Europe have been dominated by concerns about border control, security, and irregular migration in the last few decades (De Haas 2007). Usually, Europe has viewed Morocco as a transit migration country with responsibility for preventing irregular migrants from entering Europe (Sadiqi 2004), and there is continuing tension on this issue between the two sides. Moroccan authorities have often been perceived by neighbouring countries to give in to the European policy 'of outsourcing the management of migration flows' (Lahlou 2008). In line with this, as above, the EU has focused on boosting Morocco's development, including through the MEDA programme. Overall, Morocco has actively contributed to the further expansion of the European migration control regime (also see Düvell and Jordan 2003) via its diplomatic engagement in the Maghreb region. For instance, Algeria was prevailed upon to help securitise Moroccan borders, and from December 2005 Moroccan authorities began deporting sub-Saharan migrants to neighbouring countries, as well as to their countries of origin.

Moroccan nationals deported by EU countries are readmitted by Moroccan authorities under a framework of bilateral agreements. So far, Morocco has signed readmission agreements with five EU member states: Germany (1998), France (1993, 2001), Portugal (1999), Italy (1998, 1999) and Spain (1992, 2003). The EU has also tried to convince Morocco to sign a readmission agreement allowing the return of any 'irregular' migrant who has transited via Morocco (including third country nationals). Official negotiations on a Morocco–EU readmission agreement opened in 2003 and continue still.

3.3 Return and the protection of vulnerable groups

Return migration may provide a solution to the problems associated with irregular migration that is beneficial to all concerned. However, as the EU Returns Directive and other national policies recognise, not all irregular migrants should be returned, or can be returned immediately.

Morocco's most vulnerable irregular migrants are unaccompanied children. Fifty-five per cent of the arrivals (from 1 January to 31 July 2009) from Morocco in the Canary Islands and 41 per cent on Andalusian shores claimed to be unaccompanied minors (FRONTEX 2010). Young Moroccans are also present in other countries at Europe's southern frontier, namely in Italy (16 per cent of the identified minors in 2010 [Carlier et al 2010]) and in France, particularly in Marseille and in Lille, which is home to a significant Moroccan population.

There are no official bilateral readmission agreements between Morocco and European countries for the repatriation of unaccompanied minors; however, Morocco has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Spain for their return. This memorandum states that Spain can repatriate unaccompanied minors following their formal identification and the tracking of their families. Unaccompanied minors are handed over to the Moroccan authorities, which are then responsible for placing them either back with their families under the supervision of social services or in an orphanage. The agreement includes general references to international legal obligations and the child's best interests, but fails to specify safeguards and guarantees to this effect before, during, and after a child's repatriation (see box 3.1).

Box 3.1 The removal of unaccompanied Moroccan minors from Spain

As part of Spain's efforts to return children more quickly, the Spanish government is financing the construction of residential centres for unaccompanied children returned to Morocco. The construction of two residential centres and several flats in Morocco was financed by the autonomous communities of Madrid and Catalonia. Human Rights Watch (2008) also suggest that additional facilities for repatriated children are planned by the Andalusia autonomous community.

However, valid concerns remain that centres will be used to speed up children's removal from Spain to a country without a functioning child protection system to receive them. Although it is permissible under international standards to return a child to the country of origin if advance arrangements of care and custodial responsibilities are made, it is unclear to what extent the return of children to such centres will serve their best interests. The Committee on the Rights of the Child has stated clearly that 'non-rights-based arguments, such as those relating to general migration control, cannot override best interest considerations' (Human Rights Watch 2008). Furthermore, if services in these centres are only accessible for repatriated children, one could argue that such programmes create incentives to migrate for children who otherwise would not have access to such services.

The case of unaccompanied Moroccan minors raises a number of key limitations regarding forced removals and the level of cooperation between Morocco and European member states such as Spain. Even if Moroccan consulates issue guarantees or give assurances to take care of the child, this does not remove the obligation on Spain to assess carefully the risks for a child of being subject to inhumane or degrading treatment, neglect, or exploitation upon return, before making a repatriation decision. The European Court of Human Rights has made clear that the mere fact that a receiving country has ratified human rights treaties is not sufficient to satisfy a sending country's duty to protect a person from ill-treatment (Human Rights Watch 2008).

3.4 Encouraging voluntary return

The EU Returns Directive is clear that return undertaken voluntarily is preferable to return that is forced, something confirmed by our research. This preference for voluntary return over forced return has also been a key message from international organisations engaged in managing migration, such as the IOM and the Global Migration Forum. Voluntary return also has the potential to be much cheaper than forced removal.

European governments have developed a number of approaches to encourage migrants to return voluntarily to their countries of origin. These have ranged from measures to encourage irregular migrants to leave spontaneously (for example, through creating a 'hostile' environment) to approaches which try to make the process of returning to countries of origin more attractive, such as offering packages of support.

The most common example of this latter approach is the use of AVR or AVRR programmes. The programmes vary. All of them pay for the return journey, but some also provide returnees with some degree of support both before return is carried out and upon arrival in the country of origin. Many AVR programmes offer payment 'in-kind' only: rather than paying returnees directly in cash, funds are put towards a range of goods or services including vocational training, help to start a small business and the purchase of tools and equipment. While the support available differs across countries, it is often quite limited. The level of support also varies in relation to migrant's personal circumstances. Such programmes are available in most European states, although to varying degrees: some countries provide support only to refused asylum-seekers, others only to migrants from certain countries (EMN 2011).

AVR schemes draw on the support of agencies from both the countries of origin and destination, but typically are facilitated by international agencies such as the IOM, which oversees these programmes in most of Europe. The IOM oversees the return of Moroccan irregular migrants from countries such as Switzerland, Ireland, Austria, Norway, Malta, Belgium, the Netherlands and Italy.

Although AVR programmes were first established in the late 1970s, the policy shift towards voluntary returns set out in the Returns Directive has yet to be reflected in practice. EU member states are still deporting many more people than they are returning through AVR schemes. Forced returns in 2009 still accounted for almost three quarters of all returns from the EU 27 plus Switzerland, Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein. Forced returns increased 42 per cent from 128,346 in 2008 to 182,222 in 2009, while during the same period voluntary returns rose by just 12 per cent from 59,875 to 67,064 (Matrix Insight 2011). The use of forced return over voluntary return is reflected among Moroccan returnees: there were only 821 AVR users in the 10 years between 2001 and 2011 (IOM 2011), compared to a total of 14,160 returnees in 2011 alone (Eurostat 2012).

Table 3.1
Moroccan AVR users, 2000–2011

2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	Total
11	11	18	19	43	45	59	90	100	179	111	135	821

All of the irregular migrants who participated in our research intended to stay in Europe only temporarily. Most made the journey with the explicit purpose of making money and then returning to their family and community in Morocco. This meant that for all interviewees, return was always a possibility; or at least it was when their journey first began. Yet even when migrants were highly dissatisfied with their experiences in Europe, or when they were attracted to returning home by opportunities available in Morocco, a number of barriers prevented them from returning.

Policy (including the design of AVR programmes) needs to be more mindful of issues that are important to returnees in practice. We found that fear was by far the most powerful barrier to return. This included uncertainty about accommodation or employment, limited opportunities for education, career progression, and general wellbeing. These dynamics are also well documented in other research studies (such as Thiel and Gillan 2010).

Alongside fears of a lack of material support and lack of safety were other, more social, concerns. Most migrants had left Morocco in order to improve their standard of living and their status within their community. The feeling of 'failure', and of coming back to an area where they had no contacts and no social status, was particularly unattractive. Beyond basic economic concerns, people were concerned about the stigma attached to the appearance of having failed. This stigma affected migrants' willingness to return to their families or communities. The isolation that results from this stigma means that building social networks is critical both to migrants' wellbeing and to their ability to access further assistance. Help to build social networks and form new communities is important for returnees, but we found few examples of support in this area.

It is clear that too little support for voluntary return is available to Moroccans in Europe, and that the support which is available often fails to address the key barriers to return. Our research also shows that migrants' awareness of the return and reintegration support that *is* available remains low. Many of our interviewees reflected that had they known about the available assistance for return they would have considered leaving sooner. None of our interviewees benefited from any form of support for their return.

3.5 Supporting reintegration

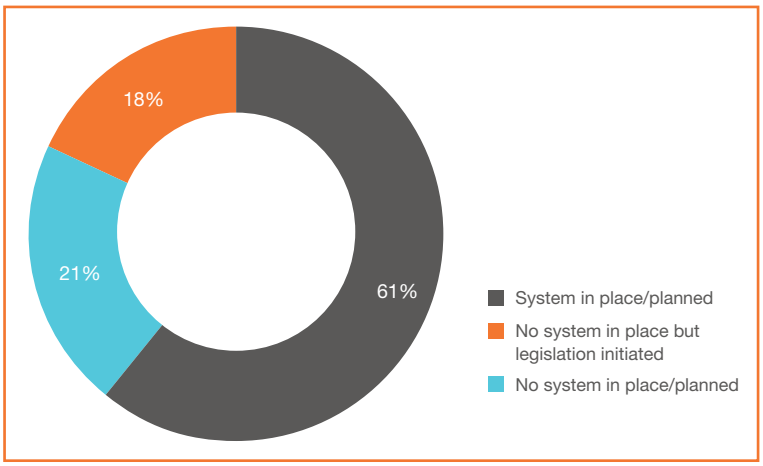
As outlined above, policy that facilitates return has been developed mainly at a bilateral level between individual European states and Morocco. Bilateral agreements that concern the return and reintegration of unaccompanied minors, in the case of Spain, have some provision for reintegration support alongside return. However, agreements concerning other irregular migrants mostly address only the readmission of the migrant, and make limited provisions for reception and reintegration support.

Forced returns are not always monitored to find out whether the migrant has reintegrated in the country of destination. Research by Matrix Insight found that EU states had a number of monitoring systems for following up on forced returns either in place or being planned (see figure 3.2, over). However, in over a third of cases no monitoring was either in place or planned at all.

Although readmission agreements governing forced returns rarely provide for reintegration support, there are some one-off projects financed jointly by the EU and member states to support the reintegration of irregular migrants who have been either removed forcibly or returned voluntarily. For example, the European Reintegration Instrument (ERI)[2] is an 18-month project supporting the reintegration of Moroccans, Nigerians and Pakistanis returned from Belgium, France, Sweden and Germany. The ERI project offers individual reintegration assistance starting on arrival to provide support in accessing basic services (such as housing and medical care) and basic training to help isecure a job. Voluntary returnees receive more assistance than those who have been removed (see box 3.2, over).

2 http://www.bamf.de/SharedDocs/Anlagen/EN/Downloads/Infothek/Rueckkehrfoerderung/eri-infoblatt.pdf?__blob=publicationFile

Figure 3.2
Monitoring systems in place or planned in 28 EU countries, March 2011



Source: Matrix Insight Ltd 2011

Box 3.2 Assistance provided by the European Reintegration Instrument
Reintegration assistance is granted in the shape of benefits in kind.

Maximum amount per person:-

Voluntary returnees: up to **€1,250** or up to **€2,000** to start up a business
Persons who have been removed: up to **€750**
Voluntary returnees as a family:

a. Spouse up to **€1,250**
b. Additional amount per minor child up to **€500.**

The ERI initiative is, however, a one-off project. Such projects need to be implemented in a more sustained and consistent way, and by more member states. They should be part of a continuing policy approach funded by the European Return Fund and member states, and implemented by local partners in Morocco.

Generally, migrants who return voluntarily through an AVR programme are provided with more support to reintegrate than forced returnees. However, little is known about the extent to which these AVR recipients benefit from the reintegration support they have received as often there is still a lack of proper monitoring in place for these programmes.

Although none of our interviewees took part in an AVR programme, a number of these schemes do exist. Twenty-nine reintegration projects were set up in 2011 for Moroccan nationals who returned voluntarily from Europe (mainly from Belgium, Italy and Switzerland), mostly aimed at helping returnees set up businesses (IOM 2011).

However, entrepreneurship is not easy. Financial acumen, market knowledge and significant amounts of capital are all essential, and rates of failure are high. Currently, AVR programmes offer support to start up a business as a way of helping returnees gain financial independence but, given the high rate of risk involved in entrepreneurship, this has mixed results. Evaluations of start-up support have revealed cases in which migrants would not have made the same decision to return had they known how likely it would be

that their enterprise would fail (Vranken 2010). In our view, support to start up a business should be given in installments to allow AVR providers to monitor progress better and intervene where necessary.

Our research also shows that returning migrants, particularly those who have been removed forcibly, not only encounter immediate financial constraints but also continuing social, psychological and economic difficulties. AVR schemes should work collaboratively with local NGOs to support returnees in rebuilding their social networks. These local NGOs could assist returnees who struggle after the initial receipt of financial support, and help to meet their continuing needs – including their emotional and psychological needs – in a way that IOM cannot.

As in the case of forced returns, better monitoring and evaluation of reintegration support is needed to gauge the effectiveness of different strategies for helping returnees to become self-sufficient.

4. THE MOROCCAN POLICY RESPONSE

4.1 Preventing irregular migration

In Morocco, four events contributed to the emergence of new policies to tackle irregular migration to Europe: (a) large-scale clandestine entries by irregular migrants arriving by boat first in southern Spain from the late 1990s and then on the Canary Islands around the mid-2000s; (b) EU demands to tackle irregular border crossings; (c) the Casablanca terrorist attacks in May 2003; and (d) migrants storming the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla in 2005.

In response to these events the Moroccan enforcement agencies were restructured; as part of this process the Directorate of Migration and Border Surveillance (DMBS) was created, a subagency in the Ministry of the Interior. These changes were intended specifically to combat irregular migration flows and especially irregular exits from Morocco across its sea borders. The reinforcement of border control has led to significant changes in the number of irregular migrants (both Moroccan and sub-Saharan) attempting to cross to Europe (see table 4.1).

The decrease in the number of irregular migrants (both Moroccan and sub-Saharan) from 2003 onwards has had two main contributing factors. First, the 2003 bill related to border control and discussed in more detail below; second, the 2005 incidents in Ceuta and Melilla that saw thousands of sub-Saharan migrants storm the three-metre-high barbed wire fences that separate the Spanish enclaves from Morocco. Shots were apparently fired by border guards leading to six deaths at the border to Melilla, while five migrants were killed trying to get into Ceuta.

Table 4.1
Number of arrests of irregular migrants in Morocco (Moroccan nationals and foreigners)

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Moroccans	9,850	13,002	16,100	12,400	9,353	7,914	7,091	6,619
Foreigners	15,056	13,100	15,363	23,851	17,252	21,140	9,469	6,954
Total	**24,906**	**26,102**	**31,463**	**36,251**	**26,605**	**29,054**	**16,560**	**13,573**

Source: Moroccan Ministry of Interior, DMBS

The 2003 bill (known as Law 02-03) on emigration and illegal immigration in Morocco was unanimously adopted by the Moroccan parliament in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks in Casablanca on 16 May of the same year. This law marked a turning point in the management of migration, especially irregular migration.

The law provides for fines of 3,000 to 10,000 dirhams (€250–900) or imprisonment of between one month and six months for any person who leaves Morocco illegally by land, sea or air borders. Although the law does not explicitly refer to the treatment of returnee irregular migrants, the penalisation of irregular departure indirectly punishes return. Law 02-03 does not have any exclusionary clauses regarding the treatment of unaccompanied minors, thus they are subject to the same penalties.

As discussed above, interviewees in our sample who were deported from Europe often faced a brief stint of detention (usually one to two days) and interrogation by Moroccan authorities on their return.

4.2 Supporting return

Over the years, Morocco has become dependent on its migrants' remittances. According to data from the World Bank, the amount sent by remittance has increased from US$1.32 billion in 2000 to over US$5 billion in 2011. Transfers have tripled in 10 years, and as a result, Morocco has become more interested in the regularisation and integration of its citizens abroad than in their permanent return (Lahlou 2006).

Reliant on remittances, and aware of the costs associated with effective voluntary return programmes, the Moroccan government has in the past two decades prioritised the improvement of migrants' working and living conditions overseas over permanent returns. The government holds that Moroccans should have the right to work and live abroad if this is to help their families in Morocco and, if their families join them abroad, they should have the right to invest back in Morocco without compromising their legal status in their countries of residence.

There is an underlying assumption that the majority of returning irregular migrants have few skills and therefore do not have much to offer their country of origin. However, with an average stay in Europe of nine years, the interviewees in our sample all managed to develop their skills while they were away. The fact that they were able to send regular remittances to their families back in Morocco suggests that they had jobs that allowed them to do so, making them no different from other regular Moroccan migrants. The latter benefit from an 'enhanced migrant status' back in Morocco that gives them easy access to bank loans and even government matchfunding to set up a business.

The global economic crisis of 2008–2009 has spurred some action from the Moroccan government on the issue of forced returns from Europe. The migration ministry's priorities have begun to shift from an exclusive focus on how to engage migrants abroad in contributing to the development of Morocco (for example, through encouraging remittances or skills development). Supporting the sustainable return of irregular migrants is now of increasing importance. Reintegration, particularly of children, is in the spotlight, but efforts are also needed to address the return process itself. This is critical given that some irregular migrants are resorting to risky crossings in order to re-enter Morocco, which for them is preferable to being detained and expelled by Europe and criminalised on return.

However, aside from the security-focused measures outlined above, to date, there has been no explicit policy response to the return of irregular Moroccan migrants. As well as a number of policy responses to encourage legal Moroccan emigrants to maintain connections to Morocco by providing them with special administrative support to help them invest back in their country of origin, for several decades, legal Moroccan migrants have also benefited from special support for their annual summer holiday return. The yearly *Opération Transit,* also known as the *Opération Marhaba* ('welcome' in Arabic) enables the annual summer vacation trip for over three million Moroccans to run as smoothly as possible.

4.3 Supporting reintegration

The number of Moroccans returning to Morocco on a permanent basis is increasing gradually, because of the economic downturn in Europe, and combined with the increasing number of irregular migrants being deported back to Morocco, pressure is building on the government to act on the question of reintegration. Although plans are still at an early stage, the IOM has been in consultation with the government to create a unit within the ministry to support the social and economic reintegration of irregular migrants, as well as the educational integration of their children.

> **'To face the issue, we have created a structure within the ministry, called Help and Support for Reintegration of Moroccans. At the same time, we are developing a strategy, with the support of the IOM. This strategy is based on three main pillars: support for social integration, for the people, particularly children, who have lived abroad and face some cultural and social challenges returning to Morocco; [support for]**

economic integration; and the third pillar is [support for] the educational integration of children. For the children who come back from France, it is not really an issue, but the problem is with the children returning from Italy and Spain. The kids face serious integration challenges with the Moroccan national education system.'

Moroccan stakeholder

In March 2013, the Ministry for Moroccan Residents Abroad, in collaboration with IOM, published a call for tenders for support in developing a reintegration strategy for returnees. Although they are not explicitly referring to irregular returnees, the call seems to be inclusive of this group. This new strategy is being developed in response to the economic and financial downturn in Europe and its potential impact on Moroccan society. The ministry identified the urgency of developing a comprehensive strategy for return and reintegration that will support Moroccan migrants who are in situations of extreme vulnerability and whose number is unknown. This new strategy for the reintegration of returnees has two main broad objectives: the development and implementation of a strategy for the economic reintegration of returnees and the development and implementation of a strategy for social and educational reintegration. The ministry remains wary of local tensions that this could create between former migrants and those that did not leave.

'In the strategy we will see if we can create partnerships with other institutions, for instance for economic integration, would it be possible to have a state guarantee for microcredit available for reintegration. But we don't want to create a preference for Moroccans residing abroad versus Moroccans living in Morocco. We have already a structure for Moroccans living abroad who want to invest more than one million dirhams in Morocco, the state subsidies 10 per cent, with some conditions. The finance minister decided that it could not go on as it was discriminatory. We had to argue that it was not discriminatory. But then people complain. These are some of the challenges we face.'

Moroccan stakeholder

The successful implementation of AVRR programmes is hugely dependent on the role that local Moroccan partners play in collaboration with IOM or other European AVR scheme providers. While it is essential to provide financial packages and support before and after arrival, it is equally important for the returnee migrants to receive sustained help at the local level. The provision of reintegration support to returnee irregular migrants is challenging because of the scarcity of civil society organisations providing this kind of assistance. IOM Morocco tried to complete a mapping of these organisations in order to ensure continuity of support for beneficiaries of AVRR, but they found only a tiny number of organisations that provided any form of support.

The government has also developed public policies that specifically encourage the return of skilled migrants such as FINCOME and more recently the Maghribcom initiative.[3] The latter is in the form of an internet platform targeting mainly qualified Moroccan expatriates. This is done through the provision of information on national plans and programmes implemented in Morocco, business and investment opportunities, and programmes for the mobilisation of skills. These initiatives are implemented by the Ministry for Moroccan Residents Abroad in partnership with the various national actors, host countries and a network of skilled migrants.

3 http://www.maghribcom.gov.ma

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The current approach to the return of irregular migrants from Europe to Morocco is characterised by an unwillingness to take responsibility on both sides. Current policy in both European countries and in Morocco is expensive, ineffective and harmful to returnees. While forced removal continues to be the key European policy response to irregular migration, it remains an ineffective means of preventing remigration in the long term. There is a clear need for the development of a new policy approach to irregular migration that serves better the interests of European countries, Morocco, and migrants themselves.

5.1 Increasing rates of voluntary return

Our research findings show that the nature and experience of return is important to understanding the later success or failure of reintegration. This research shows that in many cases, with the right 'end-to-end' support, irregular migrants would be willing to leave Europe and resettle back in Morocco in a way that was positive for them and their communities. The relationship between forced return, poor reintegration and an increased likelihood of future irregular migration should be recognised by all sides in the debate.

Although none of our respondents benefited from an AVR programme, wider evidence suggests that programmes that encourage migrants to return voluntarily are less expensive, less harmful and achieve better outcomes than forced return. Our research shows that support to return is not offered consistently across Europe, and even where it is available, migrants tend not to be aware of its existence.

Returns policy is more costly when it aims to reintegrate migrants since successful reintegration requires systematic post-return assistance. However, we believe that the evidence is compelling that investment in AVRR schemes could both reduce costs elsewhere (for example, by reducing the number of costly forced removals) and improve outcomes.

- Half of the money that is allocated to each country from the European Returns Fund should be ringfenced for funding AVR schemes. This should be a pot of 'use-it-or-lose-it' funding that must be used to develop and maintain AVR schemes.
- European governments should work together to standardise AVRR schemes across Europe and increase their availability. Schemes should be open to all irregular migrants.
- AVR schemes should include local associations with outreach officers who have good links to particular communities which are thought to have sizeable irregular migrant populations. These outreach workers should deliver training and produce publicity materials to be distributed in common spaces, such as internet cafés and destitution support centres.
- Moroccan embassies and associations in Europe should promote AVR schemes among the Moroccan community living abroad.

5.2 Designing effective return and reintegration policies to overcome barriers to return

Our research, and a wide range of other evidence, demonstrates that migrants can be encouraged to return voluntarily if they are offered support that meets their needs and addresses their fears.

Interviewees in our sample were worried about the return experience itself: for example, some were concerned they would be detained on arrival and have their possessions confiscated. Other important barriers to return were related to their reintegration. Many interviewees did not want to return home with nothing to show for their time away; some were fearful that they would arrive back destitute and unable to access housing or other

basic services. Incentivising take-up of voluntary return will require European governments to design packages that are more attractive to migrants, and for Morocco to move away from a security-led approach to irregular migration that penalises returnees.

Reintegration is a crucial step towards achieving sustainable return. It is particularly important to address the factors that led migrants to leave Morocco in the first place, in order to prevent further irregular migration. Skills and access to a regular source of income are critical to people's ability to support themselves independently, but reintegration support also needs to reflect the importance of social reintegration: solid social support structures are essential for effective reintegration and provide a safety net beyond work. Return policies and reintegration support should seek to strengthen these social networks, as well as migrants' ability to participate in the labour market. Policymakers also need to recognise the importance of ensuring that returnees are prepared mentally for the challenge of building a new life in back in Morocco.

Significant capital has been committed to developing and running AVR programmes in Europe by the European Commission and individual member states. Yet we know very little about the extent to which they encourage sustainable return and reintegration. Greater monitoring of reintegration needs to be put in place to assess the impact of support, and to determine what more needs to be done for reintegration to be successful. To develop effective policy in this area, the monitoring and evaluation of AVR programmes should become a greater priority and be funded appropriately.

- Morocco should review the 02-03 legislation to ensure that returnees who have left irregularly are not penalised. It is particularly important to review the application of this legislation to unaccompanied minors to include specific provisions for the protection of children, in line with the Children's Rights Act of 1989.
- Morocco should ensure that the return of irregular migrants is in line with its ratification of the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families.
- Ensure that bilateral readmission agreements are transparent, allowing independent monitoring of their implementation.
- All AVRR packages should include three basic elements: pre-departure assistance (such as family tracing on request); basic post-arrival assistance (such as airport pick-up, transportation to final place of destination, emergency housing); support in vocational training or education, access to the labour market, or assistance in setting up a business.
- Organise voluntary returns through existing mechanisms for return, reintegration and rehabilitation in collaboration with Moroccan NGOs.
- The monitoring and evaluation of AVR programmes should become a priority and be funded appropriately.

Similarly, Morocco needs to acknowledge that its citizens will be returned from European countries if they are found to have irregular immigration status, and that the return of these citizens may have consequences for Morocco. The Moroccan government should be more proactive and assume a greater role in overseeing the return of irregular migrants from the EU to Morocco.

Reintegration packages need to be supported by local actors who can assist returnees who struggle after the initial receipt of financial support, and help to meet their continuing needs, including their emotional and psychological needs. By increasing the capacity of

local communities to respond to return, the Moroccan government can also address some of the 'push' factors that drive irregular migration in the first instance.

- The Ministry for Moroccan Residents Abroad should review the current policy towards the return and reintegration of members of the Moroccan community living abroad to include irregular migrants as many of them have fallen into irregularity following the economic crisis in Europe and particularly Spain.
- Morocco should invest in the provision of reintegration schemes that involve local actors more effectively. For example, create links between IOM and ANAPEC.
- Lead civil society organisations in each local area should encourage social reintegration and prevention of returnees' social isolation by developing a network of returned irregular migrants. Where possible, previous returnees who have successfully reintegrated should be trained to mentor new returnees as they settle into their new life in Morocco.
- European funding for reintegration schemes should be conditional upon the involvement of local civil society organisations in Morocco.

Finally, it is important to note that even the most generous AVRR packages cannot always help returnees to overcome systemic challenges such as there being few jobs in their local area, a limited market for their start-up business, or prohibitively high school fees to educate their children. It is important that policy developed jointly between Morocco and Europe to reintegrate returnees goes beyond support for individual migrants or individual civil society organisations. To produce long-term change, migration must be seen as a cross-cutting issue: wider issues including access to education and training opportunities for young people must be included in the debate.

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