

" MIGRATION NETWORKS THROUGH MOROCCO" MIGRANTS SURVEY IN MOROCCO

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1. Introduction

Since the beginning of the 1990's, significant migration flows have been developing from most of sub-Saharan African countries through the Maghreb - and more and more clearly through Morocco - to Europe. These flows are one of the human consequences of various developments sub-Saharan Africa has known during the last decade.

They have also, concerning the choice of Morocco as a transit or a final destination country, to be linked to the traditional relations Morocco has been maintaining with most of African countries, as well as the constant opinion of African population on Morocco, considered as an area of relative prosperity and welfare.

Finally, the European Union member countries requirement for visas concerning all African nationals had also a marked effect.

Official data on sub-Saharan African nationals movements, for all that they exist, should confirm this trend. In any case, the growing interest of the media, essentially of the press, and of several NGOs as charitable ones, as well as evidence collected from Moroccans in the cities and in various areas where a significant number of sub-Saharan African nationals live, can attest this trend.

Globally, the first researches in the field showed that, in its new form, the presence of sub-Saharan African migrants in Morocco - essentially to leave for Europe but more and more to stay in the country - was clearly perceived in the middle of the 1990's and has become stronger since three to four years, particularly since formal President Mobutu left the power in formal Zaire and the following events in Congo-Brazzaville and the area of the Great Lakes.

Other migrants from Sierra Leone and Nigeria has been added to these migration flows from formal Zaire and Congo-Brazzaville, related to the civil war running in Sierra Leone since 1991 and to growing troubles and the quasi civil war in Nigeria.

Moreover, the situation prevailing in Ivory Coast, notably since 1999, contributes to modify the migration deal in all West Africa. Not only Ivory Coast is less and less the traditional receiving country of migrants from Liberia, Burkina Faso or Guinea, but it has been becoming a sending country, for both political and economic reasons.

In fact, if a significant flow of migrants from Congo and former Zaire (today the Democratic Republic of Congo) takes place more or less logically within the relations developed between Morocco and these countries since the 1960's, the inflow of nationals from Nigeria or Sierra Leone - both categories originating from English-speaking countries, which the relations have never been very developed with - is very linked to new circumstances in Africa and the closing of European external borders.

The first interviews showed actually a very large variety of reasons for leaving, for transit through Morocco, to reach Europe or simply to stay in Morocco, at least for a while.

Migrants who have been interviewed usually put forward civil or interstate wars, as well as unemployment, poverty, individual or family destitution or drought. Nevertheless, the presence of migrants from Gambia, Gabon or Cameroon - which are relatively prosperous countries, with an internal political situation quite stable - shows that other reasons for leaving are related to the idea migrants have about Europe or Morocco, to the desire to discover new countries and new ways of life, and possibly to stay there.

All the same, it is obvious that most of migration movements in Morocco would not take place if it was possible for the migrants to leave directly for Europe, Canada or the United States.

2. Encountered difficulties

The difficulties encountered when interviewing the sub-Saharan migrants are related to their specific situation and to the nature of their movements, necessarily irregular and for most of them, made in an illegal situation.

The access to the migrants is *a priori* difficult, because of their social and legal precariousness. In particular, most of them are afraid of being arrested by police officers or other representatives of the authorities. It is much more difficult to approach migrant women, because, in addition to the reasons mentioned above, they very little get out from home.

Moreover, many migrants do not speak Arabic, nor French or English. Then interviews are to be held with them thanks to another migrant who has to translate. In this case, some of the answers may be biased by the wish to hide some information, including to the translator himself.

Furthermore, answers given to certain questions - or sometimes to all the questions - may be biased, or marked by the wish to turn the discussion as to obtain any help. It can be the case, in particular, concerning answers about the native country of the migrant. In some situations, a Nigerian should present himself as a native from Sierra-Leone, to be favourably considered relating to the nature of civil war in Sierra Leone. The same could happen regarding relations with the concerned diplomatic representations in Rabat or with Moroccan authorities, the police in particular.

In Tangier, contacts with migrants are much more sensitive because of a certain state of "excitement" due to the closeness of the time of leaving, the stronger and more noticeable presence of police officers, the largest concentration and visibility of migrants, and the scattering of smuggling networks.

In the same idea, holding interviews in Mohammed V airport in Casablanca, which is the main legal entry point into Morocco, is extremely difficult. As it is almost impossible to get contacts with migrants in illegal crossing points from Algeria to Morocco, or from Morocco to Spain.

The reception of migrants in more quiet places, as in an NGO premises, does not give the guarantee of greatest reliability, as far as some of the answers may be determined by the very purpose of the visit. It can be the case, for example, of visits to charitable NGOs.

3. Descriptive of the migrants survey

The study is first based on a survey and a research in the field, which purpose is to collect from a group of migrants considered as the “reference group”, various information about :

- Identification of the migrant (age, gender, activity, nationality, level of education...);
- Native countries of the migrants;
- Motives and context of the decision to migrate;
- Migration networks that was used;
- How long, how expensive and how difficult the trip was;
- Living conditions in Morocco;
- Final destination country and expectations of the migrants.

Answers to these different topics have been collected on the basis of a preliminarily established interview guide, the reference to having possibly changed according to the context and the way the discussion was running on with each interviewed migrant.

The lack of quantifiable and verifiable information, whatever their nature may be, did not allow to choose first a sample of countries or migrants.

Moreover, data collected, necessarily subjective and linked to the present circumstances, cannot give rise to any extrapolation or generalisation to largest populations.

These data may only be considered as qualitative references showing trends, or as answering items, which estimation may only be of a general nature. A largest study of scientific research, including, if need be, researchers from various countries of Maghreb and sub-Saharan Africa, should be conducted in order to reach a best knowledge and a greatest intelligibility of the phenomenon being the subject of the present study.

Place of the survey: Rabat, Tangier, Casablanca

Period: October/November 2000

Number of migrants interviewed: about sixty.