

GENDER & SOLIDARITY NETWORKS AMONG TRANSIT MIGRANTS TO THE EUROPEAN UNION

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SUB-SAHARAN AFRICAN (SSA) MIGRATION

- 700,000 SSAs currently reside in Morocco, primarily from West and Central Africa
- Nearly 70 percent report intentions to stay and live in Morocco rather than continuing on to Europe, a significant shift from prior years
- In spite of integration programs, SSAs continue to live in precarious conditions and face everyday racism, violent attacks, infringement of rights, dire poverty, and a lack of work opportunities
- **What are the implications for European Union migration policies?**



SUB-SAHARAN MIGRANT POPULATION IN MOROCCO BY COUNTRY AND MIGRANT ROUTES



Source: Migration Policy Institute 2021

RISE OF FORCED IMMOBILITY IN MOROCCO

- In the 1990s, Morocco emerged as main transit country for those traveling to Europe
- A series of bilateral agreements between Morocco and Spain have ensured joint securitization since 1990s
- European Union has increasingly pressured Morocco to secure its borders and limit maritime passages as the “border guard” of Europe



In May 2021, 8,000 Moroccan migrants entered the Spanish territory of Ceuta

POLICY CONTEXT IN MOROCCO AND THE EUROPEAN UNION

- Morocco has become a major actor in regional discussions of a new “Africa-centered” approach to migration management, especially since the 2006 **Euro-African Dialogue on Migration and Development**.
- Morocco regularized the status of 18,000 migrants during 2014 & 2017
- In 2018 Morocco hosted 160 countries as they approved the **United Nations Global Compact on Migration**, signaling the country’s central role on the world stage.
- Morocco’s National Migration Policy (NMP) as progressive example of integration program



Rabat Process
Euro-African Dialogue
on Migration and Development



STUDY FRAMEWORK

This project draws on concepts from four key areas of social theory:

1. Transit migration and forced immobility
2. Status insecurity and rightlessness
3. Women migrants and social support
4. Race and racialization

WOMEN'S MIGRATION

- At least one third of sub-Saharan migrants are now women but research has focused on men
- Gendered geographies of power: women's agency as constrained by time, space, and various layers of power inequalities.
- **Key questions:**
 - What factors motivate women to migrate?
 - What networks of support emerge in response to women's settlement related to family formation and separation (e.g., pregnancy, childcare, intermarriage and relationships with Moroccans)?
 - What forms of discrimination and violence do women encounter and how do they seek support or justice?



RACIAL AND RELIGIOUS DYNAMICS

- Racialized slavery existed in Morocco from the 16th to 20th centuries; lasting impacts on race relations and distinctions between Blacks and other Moroccans
- Perceptions of the migrant "problem" in Morocco have led to increased policing and assaults against migrants by citizens and law enforcement authorities and growing xenophobia



Postcard image of slave market in Marrakesh

METHODS

- Participant observation and interviews with snowball sample of male and female sub-Saharan migrants in Morocco during summer 2021 (n=25)
- Key informant interviews with migrant organizations and stakeholders from Moroccan government, social service agencies, and NGOs (n=8)



SUMMER 2021 RESULTS

- Graffiti in the park (Rabat) 2019
- In 2021, the pandemic has affected desire to travel to Europe, combined with cost and danger
- Research continuing in Spain



SUMMER 2021 RESULTS

- Making community in Morocco: primarily Senegalese have remained, due to special relationship between the two countries
- Easy terms of entry for them
- Religious ties between the two countries
- Senegal has consistently supported Morocco in their claim to Western Sahara, alongside other Arab and African nations



SUMMER 2021 RESULTS

- Prominence of women migrants from Senegal, especially in market activities
- Impact on gender norms, roles, expectations?



SUMMER 2021 RESULTS

- Women migrants (especially from Senegal) now occupy a unique niche in Moroccan economy
- What will be the future shifts in migration patterns, especially as borders reopen (or close again)?
- Ongoing research to understand impacts for European Union migration policy and EU bordering practices



CONCLUSIONS

- The study provides insights into the formation of migrant networks of exchange and support in transit sites within a context shaped by postcolonialism, complex racial dynamics, and novel regional political demands
- By focusing on transit countries and shifts in settlement populations, this research contributes to the growing literature on transit spaces, immobility, and migrant agency.
- Centering on Black migrant experiences and women's social support systems offers a migrant-centered approach to this space allowing for close understanding of how migrants create new forms of home, kinship, and social life

