

Illegal Migration from Morocco to Europe

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Illegal migration is not a new phenomenon in North Africa; it goes back to the 1960s and the 1970s, when many North Africans and Moroccans particularly took advantage of the open borders with Europe and stayed in Europe illegally without the consent of the authorities. This phenomenon was then tolerated because the need for labor was high.

Illegal migration expresses the will of the individual to move to a new land, settle down and work in the host country in order to improve one's living standard and socio-economic conditions. Illegal migration is badly viewed by people and officials alike. It is considered a negative move that should be combated.

Every year, the European Union receives dozens of thousands of illegal migrants. They come from Africa, South America and South-East Asia.

Who are the illegal migrants from Morocco? The majority of them are young people who have a low or average level of education (primary to high school certificate) and come from a modest social background. They dream of an El Dorado that their imagination magnifies and that satellite television reinforces.

Vigorous, dynamic and ambitious though they are, they leave their country for adventure. What are the reasons behind this behavior? There are six major good reasons for this:

i-their country does not offer them jobs, career development, nor entertainment.

ii-there is absence of a social strategy, and young people are left on their own. As a consequence, the young are disappointed and hopeless.

iii-the European continent is attractive and fascinating to them.

iv-the fascinating image of Western Europe that is vehicled by legal migrants who come to Morocco during the summer holidays seduces many young people. The luxurious cars they drive and the great amount of money they spend attract the illegal migrants.

v-remuneration is low in Morocco, and the young think that even if they find a job in Morocco, the pay will not be interesting.

vi-the authority of the father has weakened so much that they young feel relatively free and look for adventure as a result.

At times, the illegal migrant's families go into debts, sell their property to be able to pay between 1000 and 3000 Euros for the traffickers. The question is: do these young people actually reject their country, they culture, and their way of living? An investigation among migrants and their families showed that these migrants love their country and their families. They emigrate to Europe mainly for economic reasons; most of them are either unemployed or under-employed, and wish simply to earn decent revenues and to improve their standards of living. What they hate about their country is the lack of opportunities, poverty, unemployment and the bureaucracy of the administration. They think that the host country will offer them a better life and a better future.

This phenomenon of illegal migration is not specific to North or Black Africans. East Europeans, Latinos, Chinese people, Pakistanis, Lebanese, Kurdish, Iraqis all these indulge in illegal migration.

Morocco has recently become a popular gateway to Europe for illegal migrants from sub-Saharan Africa. The coastal cities of Tangier, Nador, Asilah, Larach, Martil in the north; Agadir, Sidi Ifni, Tarfaya, Dakhla, and Laayoune in the south are cities which sub-Saharan Africans, Algerians and Moroccans target as their meeting points before embarking on their adventurous trips to Europe. Lybia, Tunisia and Algeria have also their own city ports used by illegal migrants.

Every trip by boat is marked by victims (**47 died in October 2003**, ...), or they are captured and detained in European police stations, or deported by Spanish and Italians authorities. According to the Department of Statistics (2003), more than 4000 Moroccan illegal migrants are detained in Spain, Italy, and France. By contrast, young

Moroccans who remain in their country have their feet in Morocco and their heads in Europe.

The sea is their favorite route to Europe. They also use other means of access to Europe, namely air transportation; there are also illegal migrants arriving by land. Once they are in Europe (mainly France, Spain, Italy, Belgium and Holland), they form groups, helped by their predecessors and do small and odd jobs like selling phone cards, cigarettes, washing cars, etc. They do not give a good image of their fellow Moroccans or Africans. At times, they are aggressive because this is the way they express their feelings in a society that is hostile to them.

These illegal migrants generally stem from semi-rural or urban areas; they do not integrate easily in the host country which accepts them only for economic reasons. These immigrants accept to do any jobs in any sector. They generally work in appalling conditions. Thus, they do jobs which natives cannot or do not wish to do. In this way, they fulfill a function in the host country.

Illegal migrants have a good ability to adapt but not to integrate: they rapidly learn the language, know all the places in the city and acquire useful information, as they are usually realistic and pragmatic.

The interesting question to ask is: is it possible to fight against this problem of illegal migration? To do this, we have to take into account the following arguments:

- Illegal migrants have been pushed by poverty and rejected by their states because they are unskilled and have not succeeded or succeeded enough in their home countries.
- They are attracted by the freedom of expression and democracy in Europe, as well as by the wealth and prosperity of Europe which encourages equality of opportunities and rapid social promotion.
- They are also rejected by the host country because they are poor, semi-educated, do not speak the target language at all or do not master it well, and because they come from a developing and culturally different country.

- Illegal migrants are also motivated by the protection of human rights in Europe, which allow the free movement of people according to their needs and interests, and by the laws encouraging the integration of migrants.

However, the host country generally allows the free circulation of goods and products but controls foreign residents and restricts the movement of migrants for socio-economic and security reasons. The problem of migrants could be resolved by finding a reconciliation between the needs of migrants and those of the host country.

However, it is difficult to reconcile the strong desire of the migrant to live in Europe on the one hand, and his rejection by the host country by the other hand, hence the difficulty of finding an adequate solution to this serious problem.

Although the governments of sending countries try hard to stop the movement of illegal migrants, they cannot eradicate it. Similarly, the governments of host countries cannot stop illegal migration, but can control it by establishing quotas of the number of migrants to be allowed in according to their economic needs and priorities.

At any rate this phenomenon is difficult to resolve. Attempts are being by both sides of the Mediterranean to reduce illegal migration by a) delocalizing certain industries to the south of the Mediterranean, b) increasing investments in sending countries, and c) training of potential migrants before being allowed to migrate to Europe.

It is noticeable that after the illegal migrant's situation is legalized in the host country, he or she submits to the norms and way of life of the country, works hard and tries to save up money to send to his family back home or to invest in the country of origin. Thus, these migrants have their feet in Europe and their heads in the home country. Altogether there are over 1,5 million of Moroccan immigrants in Europe, about one million of whom go back to Morocco each summer for vacation with their families. Nonetheless, those who come back for good to their home countries represent only 10%

To conclude, illegal migration is a real problem particularly for the receiving countries, namely Spain, France and Italy. Migration is a lucrative phenomenon to the sending countries. For example, 2 to 3 billion Euros are sent to Morocco each year. Thus, they are an economic advantage for the country, which on the other hand provides

them with a psychological and cultural support. However, illegal migrants are ill-treated and under-paid by the employers in the host country because they are not authorized migrants. Both sending and receiving countries should negotiate strategies and ways of reducing illegal migration, which can poison or damage bilateral relations if it goes out of proportion.