

INTRODUCTION¹

Philippe Fargues

In the years 2014–2016, when arrivals of undocumented migrants and refugees arriving by sea to Europe surged to unprecedented numbers, a map of the north-west quarter of Africa made an appearance in European media. The map showed several lines, or arrows, spanning the Gulf of Guinea to the Mediterranean Sea some 4,000 km to the north. It sketched the land routes travelled by migrants and refugees from all corners of Africa to reach the Mediterranean Sea, from where they would embark to Europe. Two main routes were distinguished according to destination in Europe: the “Western Mediterranean Route” (WMR) for Spain and the “Central Mediterranean Route” (CMR) for Italy or Malta.

The map is a schematic representation of a small part of a multifaceted reality, however. It should not be misinterpreted. The lines string together separate segments used since time immemorial by traders, shepherds or clerks travelling back and forth in Africa. Many migrants nowadays use these same roads to move between African countries, from south to north in search of employment in oil-rich Libya or Algeria, or from north to south to work in the coastal plantations of Côte d’Ivoire or Ghana. Those who go all the way to the Mediterranean Sea awaiting passage to Europe are a minority. On the other side, the steady rise in African migration to Europe in recent years, which is an established reality, has little to do with the migratory flows by land across West and North Africa. Just as with most long-distance migrants in the world, it is by air and with a visa that the majority of African migrants to Europe reach their destination.

The magnitude of population movements along the CMR, the high prevalence of irregular migrant status on this route, the role of criminal networks and the tragic fate of many migrants travelling one of the world’s deadliest migratory routes have drawn much attention from governments, international organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the media. Indeed, linking sub-Saharan Africa to North Africa and Europe, the CMR connects one of the poorest parts of the world to one of the wealthiest, a fact that makes it a potentially very busy migratory road. The vast, empty and almost control-free areas it crosses in the desert and at sea favour irregular movement and smugglers’ activities, which can put migrants’ lives at risk. Political chaos and the failures of the rule of law in several sections of the journey leave free rein to traffickers subjecting migrants to extortion, exploitation and even death.

Against this backdrop, lumping together smugglers who challenge security and undocumented migrants who breach administrative rules, governments often present combating the former and stopping the latter as one and the same objective, in Africa as well as in Europe. All States are concerned about disorderly border crossing and

¹ Terminology used in the whole volume reflects the IOM “Glossary on migration” (IOM 2019) except as otherwise stated.

irregular migration challenging their sovereignty. When Algeria sends back tens of thousands of migrants with an irregular status to its border with the Niger, it does it for the same reasons that European Union member States every year return 150,000–200,000 third country nationals following orders to leave. The difference lies in the way migrants in irregular situation are sent back – returned by plane after an agreement is found with their countries of origin or left stranded in the desert – more than in States' affirmation of their sovereignty.

There is an important asymmetry regarding governments' strategies on migration, however. All North and West African States are anxious about the European Union half-shutting the door to their own migrants. At the negotiating table, the European Union puts the prospect of pathways for regular migration and development aid as bargaining chips in exchange for tightened border control in Africa – more precisely, preventing the exit of migrants with no visas (in contradiction with the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 13(2): “Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own”) – and the readmission by African States of returnees caught in irregular situation in Europe. However, measures taken by States to stiffen controls along land and sea migratory routes are believed to have ambivalent effects on irregular migration – to reduce the number of migrants but at the same time increase the risks migrants are exposed to as they take more dangerous roads to bypass obstacles.

This volume focuses on West and North Africa, and mostly covers the period 2018–2019. Its four sections deal with four of the most salient features of migration along the CMR. Section I – Key migration trends – tackles its highly volatile nature. Migration routes, trends and flows change very quickly in response to contextual and political factors in Africa and Europe. In an effort to compensate for the scarcity of official statistics, IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) and the Mixed Migration Centre's Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism initiative (4Mi) have put in place instruments to monitor migratory movements. Section II – Migration and risks – addresses situations of vulnerability migrants face in countries on the CMR and the various threats, from environment to conflict, that prompt them to move. Section III – Migration and development – explores the generally positive contribution of migrants to development and resilience in their countries of origin, and the particular situation of migrants in transit with irregular status. Section IV – Migration governance, and policy and programming responses – examines migration policies in West and North Africa, how they are influenced by national and international processes, and by changing public perceptions of migration and emerging evidence; and discusses some of their effects.

The first section of the volume reviews the evidence in countries along the CMR. What do we know about migration and the profile and situation of migrants? From what sources? With what gaps? And how do we improve our understanding of processes at play? These are critical questions for policymaking on migration, as well as for academic research and media reporting on the topic. Statistical data are expected to possess a few basic qualities. First, they must be collected and made available to the public. Being linked to extremely sensitive social, economic and political issues, migration is a matter of bitter controversies and often prejudices, so empirical evidence is critical to set the record straight. Data must be reliable and accurately reflect the complexity of a phenomenon that changes fast over time and varies greatly from place to place. Moreover, information must be delivered in real time, at the moment events occur, if it is meant to be useful for guiding and monitoring action.

The most elementary question is about the size of the migrant population. The global migration data set of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) provides estimates of international migrant stocks at several dates up until 2019 for all countries of the world. Aggregating the West and North African countries which are the main focus of this volume shows a region of 633.2 million inhabitants (mid-2019) with 10.4 million immigrants and 21.8 million emigrants. The bottom line is that North and West Africa is not the huge pool of emigration that European politicians and media often describe. Indeed, narrowing the scope reveals a contrast between North Africa, a mostly migrant-sending region polarized by Europe, and West Africa, characterized by the predominantly intraregional circulation of migrants. Looking at individual countries, Libya and Côte d'Ivoire emerge as two net migrant receivers, and Morocco, Tunisia, Mali and Burkina Faso as major senders.

Looking for information about migrants' individual characteristics, origins and destinations, and their reasons for moving, one has to search national data sets. In most countries along the CMR, national statistical offices have achieved significant progress in collecting and publishing data on migration. National population censuses, often completed by post-census household surveys, are the main sources of data about born-abroad and/or foreign-born residents (immigrant stock) and former members of the household currently living abroad (emigrant stock). The most recent round of population censuses (early 2010s) has produced a wealth of information about migratory

levels (which may at times significantly differ from UN DESA estimates), trends and patterns. Yet, useful as it may be, such information is not fully adapted to policymaking requirements. Population censuses reflect the situation at the time they are conducted, which is usually once every 10 years. Census data can help identifying structural issues but not monitoring policy responses.

In countries with highly developed statistical systems, the continuous flow of data collected and processed by a variety of public services provides the information necessary for monitoring and evaluating policies. Until now, however, none of the countries along the CMR have built a web of administrative sources capable of responding to all the needs of informed policymaking on migration and related issues. Big data generated by cell phones and social media – which African citizens increasingly use – are another untapped but promising source, though they still present some methodological issues to extract what relates to migration in the mass of information they contain, and pose privacy and ethical issues.

In brief, none of the existing sources – United Nations global migration data sets and national population censuses – provide a full picture of the migratory flows between countries along the CMR, and most temporary as well as irregular migration escapes these sources. Counting people on the move, whatever their status and final destination, in order to understand their situation and address their needs, is the challenge that IOM and the Mixed Migration Centre (MMC) have taken up. IOM's DTM operates in difficult contexts, such as conflict-torn Libya or trans-Saharan roads, in which the usual tools of statistical observation are inefficient. It collects data on stocks and flows of internally displaced persons (IDPs), returned IDPs, international inward and outward migrants, and return migrants. In addition to quantifying stocks and flows of migrants and mobile populations, including IDPs, DTM carries out ad hoc surveys on specific mobility-related issues. Being a mechanism of continuous record, DTM is primarily based on interviews or focus group discussions with key informants, and it also includes interviews of migrants in person.

MMC's 4Mi collects data through individual interviews conducted at urban migration hubs and border crossing points with migrants and, whenever possible, with smugglers. Interviews with migrants focus on the reasons for migration, migratory routes, protection risks and the economics of the journey. Interviews with smugglers focus on their links to other State and non-State actors and the way they operate. For lack of sampling frames, both DTM and 4Mi are based on non-random selections of periods and places where interviews are conducted, and respondents or monitors who provide information on migrant flows. DTM and 4Mi's methodologies are not bias-free, but they have the invaluable merit of providing a continuous flow of detailed information that no other mechanism produces. A large part of this volume is based on DTM and 4Mi's original findings, and several chapters are written by staff in the field.

Before the launching of DTM and 4Mi, there was a sense that migration along the CMR was highly volatile. While structural economic factors in origin and destination countries explain mid- and long-term migration trends, it is widely agreed that contextual and political factors in North and West Africa, as well as further away in Europe, can cause sudden and radical changes in the routes and the composition of migrant flows. However, it was not until DTM and 4Mi implemented mechanisms of large-scale data collection at borders and nodal crossroads within each country that a detailed picture of mobility emerged.

Recording mobile and settled migrants inside Libya, DTM data reveal that, despite the civil war that started in 2014, the country remains a destination for hundreds of thousands of migrant workers, in much larger numbers than migrants in transit, waiting for passage to Europe. Data on migrants' living and working conditions, capacity to remit, access to health care and other services, as well as exposure to risks, show a clear divide between the relative safety of long-term settled migrants and the critical precariousness of short-term transit migrants.

Other sources of data – including records by the Italian Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre and the European Border and Coast Guard (Frontex), and IOM's Missing Migrants project and surveys among migrants who arrived by sea in Italy – provide information about migratory movements across the Mediterranean Sea. They show that places of embarkation, routes and the timing of journeys constantly adapt to bypassing obstacles that would bring the migrants back to the Libyan shore.

A recurrent finding of the many surveys carried out in both West and North Africa is that current migrants are mostly moving for reasons of employment, family or study, but rarely for fleeing conflict, political insecurity and persecution. The exact opposite picture emerges from interviews among migrants irregularly arrived in Europe by

sea, the majority of whom declare that they moved in order to flee life-threatening circumstances in their homelands or in transit countries, particularly Libya. This discrepancy epitomizes the complexity of cross-Mediterranean migration and the limitations of the distinction between “forced” and “economic” migrants: for lack of humanitarian visas, persons in need of international protection who want to lodge asylum claims in Europe have no choice but to embark on dangerous sea crossings to reach their destinations; at the same time, migrants who may have originally left their countries primarily to seek employment elsewhere may suffer human rights violations in transit or first destination countries which may compel them to cross the Mediterranean to seek protection.

Being able to anticipate, if not forecast, migration would be a breakthrough in the management of the phenomenon. Global polls that now cover large parts of Africa provide information on how many individuals desire to emigrate from their countries, how many have concrete plans to do so and what their preferred destinations would be. However, a comparison with flows shows us that only a minority of them end up actually migrating to Europe. Policies, socioeconomics characteristics and changing opportunities have an impact on the realization of migration plans. Aspiring migrants from Africa are still less likely than others to migrate to their preferred international migration destinations. This also shows that polls about aspirations to migrate cannot serve to anticipate or forecast migration. Regarding refugee movements, several databases on the state of governance in countries of origin, media reports on conflict and other sources of displacement, and asylum statistics can be combined in a “push factor” index that may help anticipate large movements of population.

The second section of the volume is on risks attached to migration. Moving across borders to settle far from home is always a risky endeavour. At the same time, it is often a response to insecurity and risks at home, whether these are of an economic or political nature. One salient feature of the CMR seems to be a combination of negative factors, with many migrants leaving behind high risks of destitution in origin countries and facing high risks of aggravated vulnerability at different steps of the journey, including at destination. Traveling is risky, in and of itself. Travellers stuck in places of transit for lack of documents to continue their journeys have to make a livelihood or find themselves moneyless, far from solidarity networks. Many fall prey to criminal networks subjecting them to various forms of exploitation, from forced labour to enrolment in the sex business, from robbery to extorting money from their families at home, and from physical mistreatment to ultimately disappearance and death. Moreover, staying with no permit of residence and working with no work permit, many migrants are exposed to severe sanctions by the authorities, including arrest with no access to justice, arbitrary detention and deportation.

DTM and 4Mi surveys show that not all migrants are equally vulnerable. Male respondents report being exposed to risks such as unpaid or forced work more often than women, while women appear more exposed to risks of threats of sexual violence and being obliged to an arranged marriage; children are on average more exposed than adults to the specific types of risks covered by these surveys, and illiterate migrants more than educated ones. The duration of the journeys and means of transportation are other critical factors of risk. Above all, falling in the wrong smugglers’ hands is a major cause of tragic outcomes, though equating smuggling with organized crime is oversimplifying a phenomenon that is also related to the state of a society. If some local, ordinary people in transit countries earn livelihoods out of smuggling migrants, it is in part because the context in which they live favours this kind of trade. Indeed – due to political unrest, the lack of rule of law and the weakening of State control – entire territories spanning the Sahel and Libya have left aside the benefits of human and economic development.

The third section of the volume is on development. How do outward and inward migration contribute to economic and human development and strengthen resilience to economic and environmental hazards in countries of origin and destination? Reciprocally, how does development in these countries impact migratory flows at entry and exit? These general questions are of specific relevance in countries along the CMR.

What applies to regular migration does not necessarily work the same way in the case of migrants in irregular situation, a common category in North Africa. In particular, to what extent do transit migrants contribute to development in the countries where they are temporarily living (through their work) and in their countries of origin (through remittances)? These migrants often live on the margins of society, hiding from State administration and working in informal, unrecorded and underpaid jobs. In some cases, they complement local workers by taking low-skilled, low-paid occupations that natives no longer accept. In other cases, they compete with them by doing the same jobs for lower wages. Such factors can hinder their ability to earn a sufficient income to remit money to their families left behind.

Nevertheless, case studies in Senegal demonstrate that migration – regardless of the status – is an important strategy to diversify revenues and support households and communities of origin. This can also be true in the case of migrants returning to their communities of origin. In the Niger, a country that has witnessed the arrival of tens of thousands of migrants forcibly returned from Algeria, training programmes have been established with the support of IOM to teach transit migrants how to develop a microbusiness once they return to their communities of origin. The challenge is turning a “failed” migration experience into a successful reintegration back home.

An additional salient feature of the West and North African regions is their extreme exposure to hazards linked to climate change. Heat, drought and desertification are looming threats in these regions. Large territories are fated to sooner or later become uninhabitable. Multilateral initiatives such as the Sustainability, Stability and Security (3S) programme, bringing together 14 African countries, address this by sharing resources for tackling the causes and consequences of land degradation. Yet, there might come a point beyond which adaptation and resilience will become increasingly hard and may affect migration flows. At present, international refugee law does not recognize environmental threats as reasons for seeking international protection – although other instruments exist, such as human rights or environmental law. Getting prepared for incoming changes due to global warming calls for rethinking the category of refugee and extending international protection to entire groups of population forced to cross borders just to survive.

Recently, countries of destination have mainstreamed migration-related objectives in their allocation of development aid to countries of origin and transit. The “European Union Emergency Trust Fund for stability and addressing root causes of irregular migration and displaced persons in Africa” (EUTF for Africa) sets four objectives: creating employment opportunities, strengthening resilience of communities, improving migration management, and improving governance and conflict prevention. EUTF’s objectives are all commendable, but addressing irregular migration needs to be accompanied by opening pathways for regular migration. Indeed, migration brings origin countries money, knowledge and business networks that are necessary ingredients for development. Therefore, containing migration amounts to putting up obstacles to development.

The fourth section of the volume is on governance and programming. Countries along the CMR are senders and receivers of international migrants in almost equal numbers. They all have policies on emigration and diaspora, and policies on immigration and inclusion. These policies have a common purpose of determining who belongs, and at what level, to the framework of rights and duties that defines citizenship and how to engage with citizens abroad. How does one keep inside citizens who left, and how does one include non-citizens who entered? How do areas of free movement of persons redefine the sense of belonging beyond the community of citizens? What role do public opinion and perceptions play in the way governments address these sensitive issues?

Diaspora policies, which first appeared in the Maghreb countries, then in Member States of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), follow a common pattern. They all started from a will to foster the contribution of expatriate nationals and possibly second-generation migrants to the development of their countries of origin. States established institutions, sometimes at ministry level, to strengthen the link between diasporas and their homelands. A first policy line consisted of taking fiscal and monetary measures to attract remittances through official banking channels, and favour direct investment by expatriates. Cultural policies aiming to revive the sense of belonging to their, or their parents’, homeland followed. Lastly, most countries implemented mechanisms to allow expatriates political participation from abroad, in particular through external voting facilities. The recognition of emigrants as members of their countries of origin is a general trend in countries along the CMR.

Immigration and inclusion policies are characterized by a discrepancy between States’ marked commitment to international tools on migrants’ rights and the limited level of migrants’ inclusion in national frameworks of rights and duties. On one side, all but two African States considered in this volume (Côte d’Ivoire and Tunisia) have ratified the 1990 International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (1990), and all but two (Algeria and Libya) in 2018 adopted the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. On the other side, in sharp contrast with the adherence to international tools of migrants’ inclusion, all North and West African States have nationality laws that place blood bonds above territorial bonds, and none of them have policies for the full inclusion of immigrants. Societies can be more inclusive than States, however. In Africa, like everywhere in the world, public opinion, prejudices and discriminatory attitudes towards immigrants

coexist with tolerance and openness. In particular, successful immigrants who create employment for nationals are regarded with more sympathy than migrants in irregular situations.

Irregular migration has become a ubiquitous issue in African policies on migration. Sanctioning migrants with irregular status by arrest, detention and deportation is the rule; amnesty and regularization are exceptions. African and European Governments now share a common vision of irregular migration as a crime, and they effectively cooperate to contain undocumented migrants and deport those apprehended in irregular situation. A spiral is triggered by which smugglers' strategies to get around States' controls put the safety of migrants at increasing risk. Aiming to break the vicious circle of tightened controls and increased risks, civil associations and international organizations carry out awareness-raising campaigns to alert would-be migrants to the dangers of irregular migration. Moreover, data collected by IOM and MMC convey to the world's leaders and opinion makers evidence about the risks on the roads of migration from Africa to Europe.

At the time of completing this volume (July 2020), it has become obvious that the COVID-19 pandemic will have considerable repercussions on international migration and migrant individuals globally. What these could specifically be in African countries along the CMR is unknown. One after the other, States are closing their borders and putting strict restrictions on the mobility of people. As migration flows are put to a halt, many migrants risk falling into irregular situation in the foreign countries where they found themselves stuck when borders shut. Their situation as non-citizens may rapidly deteriorate. As regards health in the first instance, while the pandemic has not yet reached a large scale in countries along the CMR, it may soon do so, and migrants will suffer from poorer-than-average access to health care. Moreover, the global economic disaster triggered by the pandemic has already destroyed many tens of millions of jobs, and joblessness spreads everywhere. On top of this, the collapse of oil prices could well sound the end of the oil-and-gas-dependent wealth that attracted migrant workers in Libya and Algeria. Finally, the recession of the world's economy may hit non-citizens even harder than citizens, and annihilate migrants' capacities to earn an income and remit money to their communities at home. COVID-19 may halt movements, at least for a while, on the CMR, with devastating consequences at all steps.

— REFERENCES

- International Organization for Migration (IOM)
2019 Glossary on migration. Geneva. Available at https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/iml_34_glossary.pdf.