

MirreM Data Collection – Country Context

MOROCCO and TUNISIA

Name and email address of rapporteur:

Abdeslam Badre abdeslambadre@yahoo.com

Date: 05/09/2023

Instructions:

Reflecting on your deskwork and fieldwork, please provide a brief snapshot (1 – 3 pages in total) of the overall picture of irregular migration data in your country. For each question, please address stocks, flows and indicators (or indicate N/A).

Questions:

1. What is your overall assessment of the quality of irregular migration data in your country?

As always, collecting data on irregular migration, especially in Morocco and Tunisia, remains a complex and sensitive endeavour that poses various challenges to me as a researcher. Irregular migrants tend to operate beyond government authorities' reach, often driven by socioeconomic, political, or security factors, and the irregular nature of their movements is exacerbated by the absence of official records. Additionally, strict adherence to ethical guidelines, obtaining informed consent, and implementing data anonymization measures become paramount due to the vulnerable nature of the migrant population. Furthermore, underreporting and data bias appeared to be significant concerns in the two countries, potentially distorting the accuracy of the collected information.

Furthermore, the dynamic and rapidly changing nature of irregular migration patterns further complicates the task of obtaining comprehensive and systematic data. Finally, the often-opaque practices and limited transparency exhibited by official authorities responsible for collecting data about irregular migration in both Morocco and Tunisia (wherein the Directorates of national security within the Ministry of Interior are the entities responsible for this type of data collection) hinder public access to this critical information. In short, the difficulties associated with accessing the already scarce and unsystematic existing data render the overall quality of the data concerning irregular migration in Morocco and Tunisia a subject of significant concern for me as researcher.

2. How is irregular migration data generally used in policy making?

Generally, irregular migration data serves as a referential foundation for policy making in both Morocco and Tunisia. Firstly, they play a fundamental role in shaping immigration and border control policies. By understanding the scale and trends of irregular migration, including the origins and destinations of migrants, which helps the governments of the two countries to develop strategies to manage the migration flows. Secondly, data helps

measuring and allocating the required resources to border security and law enforcement agencies, migration patterns and identifying hotspots, and this was also confirmed to be by one of the interviewees who works at the High Commission of Refugees' office in Rabat. Third, and finally, it helps international humanitarian organizations such as IOM, HCR local offices and the Red-Cross so to identify and allocate the nature and volume of assistance required (shelter, healthcare, and social services) for the different segments of irregular migrants, such as refugees and asylum seekers, women, and children. Fourth, these data are instrumentalized in diplomatic negotiations and international cooperation agreements by Morocco and Tunisia with their EU counterparts and the governments of the migrant-exporting African countries.

Notably, the manipulation of irregular migration data remains a concern. Although, there is no concrete information or proof about data manipulation in the focal countries, data manipulation is often by certain local media outlet as well as by certain political discourses (as was the case with the resent anti-migration slogans by the current president of Tunisia who publicly claimed that there were over one million irregular sub-Sharan migrants in Tunisia and who represented a threat to the demographic structure of the country; while other local NGOs said that the number of irregular migration did not exceed 40,000 at best) to overplay/downplay the scale of irregular migration, especially if it is a sensitive political or diplomatic issue. In other cases, the Governments may alter data to comply with international agreements or to align with specific political goals and narratives under domestic and international political pressure, which may also explain why accessing data estimate about this demography is surrounded with too many challenges and secrecy.

3. How did you go about the data collection process?

Based on the research highlighted objectives, I first started by reviewing existing data sources, including Government reports, international organizations, and academic studie. My assessment of these sources helped me to a limited extent to identify some subsequent data sources. Then, I started contacting (by phone, emails and in person within Morocco) some of these governmental and non-governmental entities in an attempt to get hold of the data. Simultaneously, I started engaging with my fellow researchers and experts locally who also happen to have contacts and networks with local NGOs, given these entities possess on-the-ground knowledge and expertise, and they may have access to critical data and insights that can inform your research. After realizing that obtaining data estimates proved to be elusive, I started looking at proxy indicators as alternative, which included data on asylum, refugees applications, and remittances.

4. Were there any specific difficulties you experienced during this process? How did you address them?

Indeed, the ccollect of data estimates about the stocks and flows of irregular migrants in Morocco and Tunisia turned out to be more challenging than the fieldwork interview data collection for the two countries. This challenge emanates partially from some of the reasons I laid out in the previous section. As I have explained in my previous emails to the project

coordinator (see email dated on 08 August), I have found a number of official reports, ministerial press-releases and also the periodic reports of the IOM regional office all which mention updated statistics (total sums & developmental trends compared to previous years) about irregularity in the two countries but with no further details about the data itself or the way to access it, except the mention of the references in the bibliography sections. When I check those sources, I end up in dead-end trying to identify the data source or the methodology used in collecting it. So, I went twice in person to the Headquarter of Directorate of National Territory (DNT) within the Ministry of Interior in Morocco in order to ask access to the data. The first time they told me that they only communicated that sort of data with national official entities under a formal request; but they suggested I should go to the Higher Commission of Planning (HCP), since it is the national office of publishing regular national reports about all aspect demographic, economic, political, and environmental trends of the country. Again, at HCP, they provided me with their latest report but not with the data itself. The report highlights statics and figures in its analysis but not a detailed data as we are looking for our project. So, I decided to go the DNT for the second time. There, I confronted another challenge. First, they kept asking many a series of questions about the project itself and who was currying it and why and how and when; then they asked me if I had the research ethical approval to even collect this data. Seeing that my attempt was backfiring on me, I decided to back up, and inform our project coordinator (Albert) about the situation, and he suggested I contact some colleagues at Ibn Zohr University who are leading a similar project under EU fund, which I did as I know two colleagues in this project, but they told me that they still have not started the data collection process yet.

5. What were the main gaps in the evidence base (i.e., unmet user needs) that emerged during your data collection process?

Indeed, there remain several gaps in the available data about irregular migration in the two countries. First, there is a lack of data itself; the available data set is not compatible, and sometimes different sources (governmental vs. non-governmental vs academic) present different estimates. Second, there are stark chronological gaps in the data in the sense that there is no periodically regular collect of data: In Tunisia for instance, we hear the president of the country speak about 1 million sub-Saharan migrants who are in a state of Irregularity while the local NGOs speak about only 40,000 but none of these speakers provide the sources of their data. Third, there is an absence of aggregated data in terms of the migrants age, sex, country of origins, duration of stay in both countries, expect data about refugees and asylum seekers because their data is usually recorded by the HCR in the two countries.

6. Were there any meetings with producers or users of irregular migration estimates and indicators that you were unable to secure, but sense that endeavouring to do so in future may be worthwhile? If so, please provide contact information for this person/entity and explain why you think such detail would be helpful.

Yes. Please see my answer to question 4.

7. Please point to an example . Why did you select this example?

As far as this project is concerned, the only “good practice” estimating irregular migration and/or making use of estimates of irregular migration in policy-making that you came across in the context of both Morocco and Tunisia was the one from the United Nations Database as well as the UNHCR, which I have already shared with you. The reason for selecting these sources is that they provide systematically comparable data, across the duration of 10 years. Also, their data is aggregated in terms of gender and country of origin. Most importantly, they also provide a clear statement of the methodology used for the data collected.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Data on Irregular migration in Morocco

- In July 2019, the Migration Policy Institute (MPI) reported that an estimated 700,000 sub-Saharan African migrants reside in Morocco¹.
- In 2021, the Moroccan High Commission for Planning carried out a national survey² on forced migration and published by the UN-Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families in November 2022, reported that of all migrants in Morocco, 36.6% are in an irregular situation (37.7% of women and 35.9% of men), in particular young persons aged between 15 and 29 (42.9%). This means implies that there are estimated 256,000 migrants in state of Irregularity in the country.
- The survey also showed that around a quarter of migrants in Morocco (25.9%) have regular status, 24% benefit from refugee status and 12.3% are asylum-seekers.
- In June 2023, the Moroccan Ministry of the Interior³ confirmed that “about 366,000 attempts at illegal immigration to Europe have been aborted” over the past five years, stating that this number reached 70,781 attempts that were thwarted in 2022. As for the end of May 2023, 25,519 attempts had been thwarted for irregular immigration. According to the same data, about 90,000 migrants have been involved in rescue operations at sea during the past five years; while the number during 2022 reached a total of 12,478 immigrants, compared to 3,150 at the end of last May.

Data on Irregular migration in Tunisia

- A 2021 official data by the Tunisian National Observatory for Migration⁴, Tunisia Statistics and International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) reported that the number of irregular immigrants from non-Maghreb countries in Tunisia is 21,000.

¹ Driss El Ghazouani (July, 2019). A Growing Destination for Sub-Saharan Africans, Morocco Wrestles with Immigrant Integration. Migration Policy Institute. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/growing-destination-sub-saharan-africans-morocco>

² UN (28 Novembre 2022). Second periodic report submitted by Morocco under article 73 of the Convention pursuant to the simplified reporting procedure. Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4003768>

³ Hespress (26 June 2023). The outcome of the fight against irregular migration questions the policy of European support to Morocco. <https://www.hespress.com/تليصح-تخفاكم-الهجرة-نظامية-ناست-1192754>

⁴ Tunisia HIMS (2021). Enquête Nationale sur la Migration Internationale. International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD). <https://www.ins.tn/sites/default/files/publication/pdf/Rapport%20de%20l%27enquête%20nationale%20sur%20la%20migration%20internationale%20Tunisia-HIMS.pdf>

- But local NGOs in Tunisia report that that number fluctuate between 30000 and 50000.
- Whereas in February 2023, the president of the Tunisia, Kais Saïed, claimed that the number of sub-Saharan irregular migrant hits 1,2 million, describing Tunisia as facing a threat of “hordes of irregular immigrants from sub-Saharan Africa” who are changing “the demographic composition of Tunisia.”
- According to Tunisian authorities, over 37,000 sub-Saharan Africa irregular migrants were arrested in 2022 amid attempts to cross into Europe⁵.

⁵ TRT Africa (July 2023). Dozens of irregular immigrants arrested in Tunisia. <https://www.trtafrika.com/africa/dozens-of-irregularimmigrants-arrested-in-tunisia-13914599>