



**Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
Secretariat**

EF.DEL/46/07
22 May 2007

ENGLISH only

Conference Services

**Fifteenth OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum - Part 2:
“Key challenges to ensure environmental security and sustainable development in the
OSCE area: Land degradation, soil contamination and water management”
Prague, 21 - 23 May 2007**

**Session IV
Challenges to the management of water resources and to countering desertification in
the Mediterranean region**

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DESERTIFICATION AND MIGRATION: ANALYSIS AND PERSPECTIVES IN NORTH AFRICA

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1. INTRODUCTION

Both climatic and socio-economic situations in North Africa are marginal. In fact, more than 90 % of the North African countries are under arid conditions and desertification is a very active process reducing land productivity and food production for a growing population. It is well established that over population, poverty, insufficient education, unemployment and inadequate policies are the most important driving forces leading to a very high pressure on the limited natural resources, especially water, soil, pastures and forests. It is also important to notice that cultivated land surface exceeds by more than 20 % the arable land of the region.

Around the Sahara desert, rainfall is erratic; this is particularly the case of the south Mediterranean countries. For example, 30 % reduction in rainfall between 1980 and 2005, especially along the Mediterranean coast of Morocco, is observed. Thus, water scarcity is a major issue in North Africa.

Conservation of natural resources, such as water, soil and forest is a vital objective in North Africa in order to prevent land degradation. Deforestation, cultivation of marginal land such as steep slopes and pastures induce soil quality loss. The pressure on the land is very high and the regeneration capacity of the vegetation is very low. This situation leads to a severe reduction of the soil productivity which induces migration of the population to more productive land.

2. THE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT ISSUE

In addition to climatic conditions, there is a big difference in human development between North and South of the Mediterranean, and also between north and south of the Sahara desert. Several indicators illustrate this fact.

- Compared to North Mediterranean countries such as Spain, France and Italy where more than 98 % of the population is educated, in most of the West African countries the alphabetization rate is less than 50 %. The situation is somewhat better in North Africa where this rate ranges between 43 % in Mauritania and 76 % in Tunisia.

- Poverty is a major issue. There is a large gap between the African and the European countries with respect to poverty rate. The gross domestic product per capita varies from less than 500 \$US in most of the sub Saharan countries to more than 20 000 \$US in Spain, France and Italy. The situation in the Maghreb is variable, but better than in West Africa.
- The unemployment rate, which is lower than 10 % in the European countries, is between 10 and 27 % in North Africa and exceeds 30 % in the African countries south of the Sahara.
- The population growth rate, less than 0.4 % in the north Mediterranean countries, ranges from 1 and 1.6 % in the North African countries and exceeds 2 % in the sub Saharan countries.

The above mentioned indicators show clearly that there is a gradient in human development between the sub Saharan, the south Mediterranean and the north Mediterranean countries. Poverty in the African countries leads to more pressure on the land which loses its productive capacity with time. Land degradation (desertification) forces the population to emigrate looking for better living conditions either in country (rural exodus) or in other countries (international exodus). It is estimated that because of poverty and land degradation in the African countries, more than 60 million persons will be forced to emigrate northward.

3. THE MIGRATION ISSUE

Migration between North Africa and South Europe through the Gibraltar route always existed. From historical view point it can be considered a natural phenomenon. In fact, during the colonial period (especially the first half of the 20th. century), North Africans had the possibility to migrate legally to the colonising countries (mostly France, Spain and Italy). The establishment of a visa of entry to most of the European countries for the Maghrebians opened the door for the illegal migration and pushed the emigrants to explore all possible ways and means.

Migration to Europe is boosted by poverty, desertification, difficult access to the European market, and more recently, the political persecution and wars have increased the pressure to emigrate. There in fact, a complex Relationships between poverty, desertification, inadequate governance and migration.

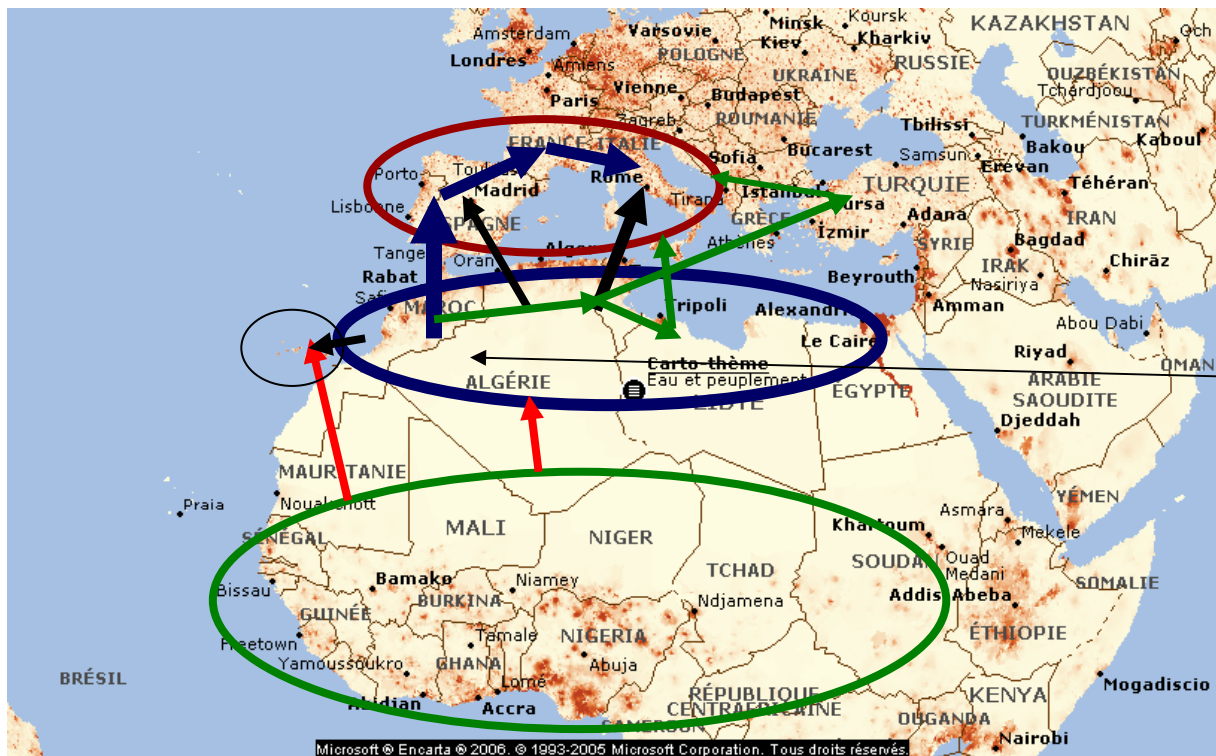
In the European Union, Spain is the most affected country by migration. According to Eurostat, Spain is the first receiver of immigrants since 1997 and in 2005 Spain recorded a positive migration balance of 652.300 persons. This record represents 38.5% of the total increasing rate (1.691.500) in the 25 EU countries in 2005. During the period 2001-2005, the immigrant number in Spain has increased by 2.977.300 persons.

According to the Spanish National Institute of Statistics, the clandestine immigrants in Spain are originated from Morocco (511.294) followed by Ecuadorians (497.799), Rumanians (317.366), Colombians (271.239), Argentineans (152.975), Bolivians (97.947) and Peruvians (85.029).

Clandestine sub-Saharan immigration is a global problem affecting both the North and the South Mediterranean countries. Mauritania, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Libya are increasingly faced with clandestine migrants coming from sub-Saharan Africa in

perspective to reach the European continent. These countries, used to be a source of emigrants, are presently transformed to transit countries. Some of the sub Saharan immigrants will stay in North Africa. The maximum flow is directed naturally towards the northern provinces of Morocco and Tunisia. The events which occurred in Seuta and Melilia during september 2005 demonstrate the gravity and the complexity of the problem, Morocco and Spain faced.

Traditionally the most important migration flows passed through the Gibraltar strain between Spain and Morocco or through Tunisia and Libya. Because of more security cooperation between Morocco and Spain, clandestine migrants where forced to use other routes such as Turkey or the Canary Islands. This last route is becoming more and more frequent, specially for the sub Saharan emigrants.



Schematic migration flows between the sub Saharan countries, north Africa and Europe.

Emigration is one of the responses to poverty and desertification. It improves the income of the family in the source country because of the money transfer and also reduces the pressure on the land.

Reduction of emigration without in site investment will lead to more desertification. For a long time, the European Union and its member states treated the migration as a pure security problem. Europe is asking the south Mediterranean countries, especially Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya to stop the illegal emigration and readmit the emigrants who transited through them. The establishment of “readmission centers” in North African countries was proposed but it would not solve the problem. It will only be a transfer of responsibility.

Migration should be treated through in a human development view point. The European countries need strong North African and sub Saharan partners for evident economic reasons. Regularisation programs, targeting undocumented immigrant workers and implemented by

many European countries, solve partially the labour shortage problem. However, some European employers continue to engage clandestine immigrants, which prevent them from paying their social security contribution.

Selective immigration is a new French idea. It will probably solve part of the European problems but not the root causes of migration. It should not be reduced to select the well minded young African scientists and qualified workers.

4. SOLIDARITY FOR DEVELOPMENT IS THE KEY ISSUE

If the same trends of land degradation and poverty continue in the south and if the capacity for development of the African countries is not promoted, their will always be migration northward. The international community should be proactive to help in i) developing production capacities, ii) creating new opportunities for jobs through productive investments, iii) increasing income at the local level for all stakeholders and iv) alleviating poverty. **This is the best way to improve human development which will certainly allow the potential emigrants to stay home.**

Developing countries in north and sub Saharan Africa have the responsibility for the establishment of better governance, which will allow economic growth and would encourage former emigrants to return back home and participate to the development of their countries through positive investment partnerships.

Recent development in bilateral (ex: Spain – Morocco, France-Morocco) and multilateral (ex: EU, UNDP, WB-GEF, MCA) cooperation programs are promising, especially those projects dealing with capacity building through education, institutional organisation, rural development, and financial support. Decentralised cooperation and south to south cooperation, being developed, are good initiatives (capitalise on successes and prevent errors) in direct partnership with the local communities.

The obligations of the UNCCD require more inputs from the developed European countries to reduce the desertification rate (moving northward) by promoting sustainable participatory land management and poverty alleviation in less developed parties. This is the best way to control, positively, south to north migration and to assure environmental security in the Mediterranean region. Thus, **more cooperation and collaboration between Annexes 1 (Africa) and 4 (South Mediterranean countries) of the UNCCD is required.**

5. CONCLUSIONS

Migration control is not a pure security problem. **Solidarity for human development in Africa is the best way to control positively migration flows.** Sustainable development through improved governance, better knowledge of natural resources and their productive capacity, and access to market constitute important elements for more equity in cooperation.

Migration is a real challenge for both policy makers and human development international institutions. Young scientists are encouraged to invest in this area to better understand the complex relationships between poverty-migration-desertification.