



International Migration Institute  
James Martin 21st Century School  
University of Oxford



## The myth of invasion

### Irregular migration from West Africa to the Maghreb and the European Union



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## Summary

Media and dominant policy discourses convey an apocalyptic image of an increasingly massive exodus of desperate Africans fleeing poverty and war at home trying to enter the elusive European ‘El Dorado’ crammed in long-worn ships barely staying afloat (Pastore et al 2006). The migrants themselves are commonly depicted as victims recruited by “merciless” and “unscrupulous” traffickers and smugglers. Hence, the perceived policy solutions – which invariably boil down to *curbing* migration – focus on “fighting” or “combating” illegal migration through intensifying border controls and cracking down on trafficking and smuggling related crime.

Although there has been an incontestable increase in regular and irregular West African migration to Europe over the past decade, available empirical evidence dispels most of these assumptions. First, trans-Saharan migration of West Africans to North Africa is not as new, massive and Europe-focused as is commonly suggested. While having much deeper historical roots in the trans-Saharan trade, migration of (former) nomads, traders and refugees to Mauritania, Algeria and Libya since the 1970s set the stage for contemporary trans-Saharan migration. Against the background of economic decline and warfare in West and Central Africa, Libya’s new ‘pan-African’ immigration policies are essential in understanding the major increase in trans-Saharan labour migration over the 1990s.

Since 2000, a major anti-immigrant backlash in Libya probably contributed to a diversification of trans-Saharan migration routes and the increasing presence of migrants in other Maghreb countries. Confronted with a persistent demand for irregular migrant labour in Europe, more and more sub-Saharan, mostly West Africans started to cross the Mediterranean. However, the public perception that irregular migration from Africa is massive and growing at an alarming rate is deceptive. Illegal crossings of the Mediterranean by North Africans have been a persistent phenomenon since Italy and Spain introduced visa requirements in the early 1990s. The major change has been that, in particular since 2000, sub-Saharan Africans have started to join and have now overtaken North Africans as the largest category of irregular boat migrants. Recent West African migrants are increasingly settling in Spain and Italy, where they enter flourishing underground economies. Even when apprehended, many migrants are eventually released. Many have acquired residency through recurrent regularisations.

It is a misconception that all or most migrants crossing the Sahara are “in transit” to Europe. In particular, Libya is an important destination country in its own right. There are probably more sub-Saharan Africans living in North Africa than in Europe. An estimated 65,000 to 120,000 sub-Saharan Africans enter the Maghreb yearly overland, of which only 20 to 38 percent are estimated to enter Europe. The total number of successful irregular crossings by sub-Saharan Africans should be counted in the order of several tens of thousands, according to our estimates 25,000 to 35,000 per year. The majority of migrants *enter* Europe legally and subsequently overstay their visas. The total annual increase since 2000 of the *registered* West African population in the EU has been around 100,000. This is still relatively modest compared to a total EU immigration of 2.6 million in 2004. There are an estimated 800,000 registered West African migrants in the main receiving countries compared to 2,600,000 North Africans.

Common push-pull models viewing poverty as the main cause of African *mass* migration are inconsistent with evidence that the migrants are not among the poorest and that West African countries still have comparatively low inter-continental emigration rates. Analyses focusing on ‘African misery’ pushing migrants out of the continent tend to obscure migrants’ agency and the vital demand side of this migration. Rather than a desperate response to destitution, migration is generally a conscious choice by relatively well-off individuals and households to

enhance their livelihoods. Likewise, the common portrayal of irregular African migrants as victims of traffickers and smugglers is inconsistent with evidence that the vast majority of migrants move on their own initiative. Trafficking is relatively rare, and smugglers are usually not part of international organised crime, but locally based  *passeurs*  operating alone or in small networks. Migrants typically travel in stages. Migrants often work in migration hubs to save enough money for their onward journey. Several end up settling along the way in Saharan boomtowns or major North African cities.

Since the 1990s, European states intensified border controls and have attempted to ‘externalise’ these policies by pressuring North African countries to clamp down on irregular migration and to sign readmission agreements in exchange for aid, financial support and work permits. While failing to curb immigration, these policies have had a series of unintended side effects in the form of increasing violations of migrants’ and refugees’ rights in North Africa and a diversification of trans-Saharan migration routes and attempted sea crossing points, which now cover large stretches of the African coastline from the Guinea to Libya. In practice, it seems almost impossible to seal off the long Saharan borders and coastlines, even if governments are genuinely willing to do so. What remains largely unspoken behind official discourses is that both European and African states have  *little genuine interest*  in stopping migration, because their economies have become dependent on migrant labour and remittances, respectively.

Several structural factors explain why it is likely that sub-Saharan migration to the EU and Libya will continue. First, trans-Saharan migration is less unwanted than it seems. The demand for cheap immigrant labour in Europe and Libya is likely to persist. Second, the firm establishment of migration routes and migrant networks, as well as improvements in communication and trans-Saharan transportation infrastructure are likely to facilitate future migration. Apart from Libya, other North African countries may also evolve into transit  *and*  destination countries. Migrants failing or not venturing to enter Europe often prefer to settle in North Africa as a ‘second best option’ than to return to their substantially poorer or unsafe origin countries. These trends might be reinforced by demographic change and the parallel segmentation of North African labour markets, which may increase the demand for immigrant labour.

For all these reasons, it is likely that migration from West Africa to North Africa and Europe will continue. There is a growing discrepancy between restrictive migration policies and the demand for cheap migrant labour in Libya and Europe. This explains why, rather than a decline in migration, increasing border controls have led to the swift diversion of migration routes, increasing “illegality” and reliance on smuggling as well as an increase in the risks, costs, and suffering of the migrants involved. As long as no more legal channels for immigration are created to match the real demand for labour, and as long as large informal economies will exist, it is likely that a substantial proportion of this migration will remain irregular.

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\* The cover photo by H el ene Neveu Kringelbach is a fragment from a painting hanging in a restaurant in Dakar. It depicts wooden boats (*pirogues*) used to migrate irregularly to the Canary Islands. One of the boats is named ‘Barsaa ou barsaqq’, which means ‘Barcelona or hell’.

# 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

## 1.1. Background and aims

Swelling masses of desperate Africans fleeing poverty and war at home are trying to enter Europe illegally. At least, this is the image conveyed by the media and popular discourses. The dramatic images of African migrants massively scaling the tall border fences separating the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla on Morocco's Mediterranean coast in the autumn of 2005, their more daily attempts to cross the Mediterranean by small fishing boats and the arrival of large numbers of African boat migrants on the shores of the Canary Islands in the summer of 2006 reinforce the perception of increasing African migration pressure on Europe's southwestern borders.

In recent years, irregular migration from sub-Saharan Africa to North Africa and Europe has received extensive media attention. Alarmed by these images, the issue has also been put high on the policy agenda of the EU and its member states, which have exerted pressure on North African countries to clamp down on irregular migration occurring over their territory through increasing border controls, toughening migration law, re-admitting irregular sub-Saharan migrants from Europe and deporting them from their own national territories.

Media, politicians and several scholars typically portray this migration as 'new', 'increasing' and 'massive'. Sensational media reportage and popular discourses give rise to an apocalyptic image of a 'wave' or 'exodus' of 'desperate' Africans fleeing poverty at home in search of the European 'El Dorado' crammed in long-worn ships barely staying afloat (Pastore et al 2006). Millions of sub-Saharan Africans are commonly believed to be waiting in North Africa to cross to Europe, which fuels the fear of a threatening invasion. These migrants are commonly seen as economic migrants although perhaps masquerading as refugees (Yassine 2006).

It seems as if the grim forecasts voiced in 1991 by the Club of Rome have come true: "At the extreme it is not difficult to imagine innumerable immigrants landing on the Northern shores of the Mediterranean and consisting of the hungry and the desperate" (King & Schneider 1991:62-63). In July 2006 French President Jacques Chirac warned that Africans "will flood the world" unless more is done to develop the continent's economy. Also in North Africa, similar fears and discourses are gaining ground. In September 2005, the headline of a Moroccan local newspaper ran "Black locusts' are taking over Morocco!" Although Moroccan authorities immediately banned the newspaper because of this racist language, politicians and the press on both sides of the Mediterranean continue to use terms like "massive invasion" and "plague" to describe this phenomenon (Goldschmidt 2006). Also Libyan leader Al-

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<sup>1</sup> The author would like to thank Margarida Marques, Petra Mezzetti, Ferruccio Pastore and Antía Pérez Caramés for their valuable help and advice in conducting this study. He would like to thank Rutvica Andrijasevic, Stephen Castles, Nora El Qadim, Georgia Jettinger, Emanuela Paoletti and Nick Van Hear, Ilse van Liempt for providing useful feedback on earlier versions of this manuscript. Responsibility for the views expressed remains with the author.

Qadhafi has employed the frightening “invasion” metaphor to portray African migration to North Africa and Europe in his dealings with the EU (Pliez 2004a:145).

The popular image is that “*war* and *poverty* are the root causes of *mass* migration across Africa”<sup>2</sup>. The migrants themselves are commonly depicted as victims of ‘merciless’ and ‘unscrupulous’ traffickers and criminal-run smuggling gangs, who recruit them through deceiving them about the opportunities in Europe and obscuring the perils of the journey through the Sahara and crossing the Mediterranean or the Atlantic. Or, as the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime recently stated, “The system of migrant smuggling ... has become nothing more than a mechanism for robbing and murdering some of the poorest people of the world” (UNODC 2006:20).

Irregular migration occurring from Western Africa to North Africa and Europe has increasingly been defined as a security problem (Lutterbeck 2006) associated with international crime (cf. UNODC 2006)<sup>3</sup> and, increasingly since the attacks of 11 March 2004 in Madrid and 7 July 2005 in London, terrorism (Cuttitta 2007; Goldschmidt 2006; Perrin 2005)<sup>4</sup>. Hence, the perceived ‘solutions’ to this phenomenon – which implicitly or explicitly almost always boil down to *stopping* migration – focus on “fighting” and “combating” illegal migration through cracking down on international trafficking and smuggling networks in combination with intensifying border controls (cf. UNODC 2006).

However, for several reasons, the popular idea that poverty has provoked mass migration of desperate Africans who have fallen victim to ruthless traffickers and smugglers is fundamentally flawed. The fundamental problem is that such perceptions are based on self-sustaining assumptions and impressions rather than on sound empirical evidence. The problem is twofold. On the one hand, there is still a lack of empirical research on this issue. On the other hand, the emergent and rich body of empirical literature that *has* become available in recent years, and which was pioneered by mainly Francophone researchers such as Pliez (2002), Escoffier and Lahlou (2002) and Bensaad (2003), is commonly ignored.

As a consequence, recent (Anglophone) studies on the issue typically rely on a mixture of media sources, policy literature, border guard apprehension records or interviews with police, embassy staff, and other officials (cf. UNODC 2006). Without sufficient empirical backing, unsubstantiated claims suggesting, for instance, that all sub-Saharan migrants in North Africa are ‘in transit’, that ‘millions’ of migrants are

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<sup>2</sup> Der Spiegel, 6 October 2005, emphasis by author.

<sup>3</sup> This security and crime focus is also evident in the composition of the participants in the Mediterranean Transit Migration (MTM) Dialogue, a partly European Commission funded project and managed by the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), which focuses on enhancing knowledge on and operational co-operation to “combat illegal migration” occurring in the Mediterranean. Besides officials from the Ministries of Interior, Intelligence and Security Services, Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Development Agencies of European and Mediterranean Arab states, the dialogue also involves, amongst others, EUROPOL, INTERPOL, FRONTEX, the DCAF (Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) (see [www.icmpd.org](http://www.icmpd.org)).

<sup>4</sup> For instance, the Italian minister of defence under the last Berlusconi government, Antonio Martino, stated that “illegal immigration is infiltrated by Al Qaeda”, and it is often managed “by terrorists in order to bring persons, weapons and drugs to Italy and Europe” (ANSA, 8 November 2004, cited in Cuttitta 2007).

waiting to cross from Libya to Europe<sup>5</sup>, that “240,000 Africans are smuggled into the EU annually”<sup>6</sup> or that thousands of Africans have drowned within a few months<sup>7</sup>, often take on a life of their own and are transformed into self-referring “facts” cited over and over again in the media, policy discourses, and several academic studies.

The main aim of this study is to achieve a more empirically founded understanding of the nature, scale, causes and evolution of irregular West African migration to North Africa and Europe within a changing African-European (migration) policy context<sup>8</sup>. This is pursued through a systematic analysis of the emergent empirical literature on this issue as well as policy reports, NGO publications and data available from official statistics. Besides analysing the shifting migration patterns from West Africa as well as migration policies by African and EU states, this study aims to explore the historical and structural causes of this migration.

Instead of studying irregular migration from West Africa as an isolated phenomenon, this study aims at embedding it into in the broader context of changing West African migration systems and their growing linkages with North African and Euro-Mediterranean migration systems through increasing trans-Saharan migration occurring after 1990. The study will start by analysing past migration trends in and from the region. This is a deliberate choice, based on the conviction that studying *continuities* between past and current migration patterns will help to identify areas of *discontinuity* and to comprehend the nature and structural causes of recent changes (cf. IMI 2006). As we will see, contemporary trans-Saharan migration has deeper historical roots. This is particularly evident in the existence of historical trans-Saharan links between West Africa and the Maghreb and, in the post-colonial context, early labour and refugee migration to southern Algeria and Libya.

While focusing on *irregular* migration, the study will not artificially dissociate irregular from regular migration, because both phenomena are known to be reciprocally interrelated; Regular migration facilitates irregular migration through the functioning of migrant networks, regular entry often precedes irregular stay, and many currently regular migrants have been irregular at some stage of their migration or residency. Therefore, regular and irregular migrants often tend to move to the same destinations (Allasino et al 2004; Schoorl et al 2000).

Based on an improved understanding of irregular migration from West African to North Africa and Europe as well as the experiences, motives, and migration strategies

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<sup>5</sup> For instance, it has been claimed by the Italian minister of the interior in June 2003 that 1.5 to 2 millions of Africans would be waiting in Libya to illegally cross to Europe (Boubakri 2006) Besides lacking sound empirical backing, such estimates ignore that Libya is a migration destination in its own right.

<sup>6</sup> Van Moppes (2006), referring to newspaper articles citing UNODC (2006).

<sup>7</sup> For instance, Franco Frattini, the EU commissioner for security, justice and freedom, claimed that around 3,000 people might have died in the summer of 2006 while attempting to reach Europe illegally by sea (Cuttitta 2007).

<sup>8</sup> This study will focus on migration between West Africa, the ‘greater’ Maghreb (Mauritania, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Libya) and West European countries, and only address migration occurring to and from Central Africa, Egypt, Sudan and the Horn of Africa as far it is relevant to understand migration processes in West and North Africa. The paper applies a broad definition of West Africa. Besides all ECOWAS members, Chad, Gabon and Cameroon are also included because of their relevance for West African migrations. Because of its geopolitical position and ethnic composition, Mauritania is difficult to classify as either Maghrebi or West African, and will be considered as both.

of individual migrants, this study will also try to assess how recent policies to curb this migration have changed opportunity structures for migrants, and, hence, the magnitude and nature of this migration. Based on this understanding, and besides identifying main empirical gaps, this study will conclude by developing future scenarios of West African migration to North Africa and Europe.

## ***1.2. Key definitions and concepts***

Much confusion in the current debate on irregular migration from West Africa to North Africa and Europe is related to the poor definition of central concepts. First of all, this applies to irregular migration. However, the boundaries between regular and irregular migration are not always clear. First, it is useful to make a distinction between irregular *entry* and irregular *stay*. For instance, most irregular migrants enter destination countries legally, but subsequently overstay their visas, or engage in prohibited work, through which their status becomes irregular. The other way around, migrants entering or residing in a country illegally can acquire legal residency through obtaining work, marriage or regularisation. In the case of overland migration from West Africa, migrants cross many countries, some of which do allow their entry, some of which not, so that a migrant moves in and out of formal regularity and irregularity.

The study will use the term ‘irregular migration’ because it is a broader and less normative term than ‘illegal migration’ (Jordan & Düvell 2002; Van Liempt 2007). ‘Illegal migration’ is primarily a legal term, which does not necessarily reflect the actual experiences of migrants. For instance, Van Liempt (2007:129) observed that smuggling can be ‘illegal’, but *licit*, or socially accepted, at the same time. Moreover, governments’ perception of ‘illegal’ migration vary greatly from one country to the other, reflecting differences in legislation and how it is applied in practice (Brennan 1984:409). For instance, citizens of member states of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS<sup>9</sup>) can nominally travel freely to other ECOWAS countries, although free movement is often obstructed *in practice* through failing implementation or corruption (Adepoju 2005). Moreover, notwithstanding public discourses stating exactly the contrary, European and African governments often tacitly tolerate the presence of irregular migrants, especially if they meet pressing labour demands.

Bearing these complexities in mind, we will define irregular migration in a broad sense as “international movement or residency in conflict with migration laws”. For the purpose of this study, we will employ a more narrow definition focusing on the actual process of migration: “crossing borders without proper authority, or violating conditions for entering another country” (Jordan & Düvell 2002: 15). This definition includes all journeys made by West Africans to North Africa and Europe where such illegal border crossing is involved. It is important to realise, though, that a substantial proportion of Europe’s legally residing migrant population were irregular migrants at some stage of their residency.

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<sup>9</sup> Current ECOWAS members are Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo.

Trafficking and smuggling are other central terms, which are often confused in policy and academic discourses. The term ‘trafficking in persons’ is restricted to situations in which people are deceived, threatened or coerced in situations of exploitation, including prostitution. ‘Human smuggling’ implies that a migrant voluntarily purchases services to circumvent immigration restrictions, without necessarily being the victim of deception or exploitation (Carling 2006). However, in practice it is often difficult to make a sharp distinction between what is voluntary and forced, as except in the case of slavery, migrant behaviour is simultaneously shaped by human agency and structural constraints to varying degrees.

In this study, the term ‘migrant’ includes both labour migrants and refugees, unless otherwise specified. In presenting migration data, migrants are defined according to country of birth. Second generations are not considered as they are less relevant for this study. Transit migration is another concept that is commonly used in the context of irregular migration from West Africa to North Africa, to such an extent that it is almost used interchangeably with irregular migration, erroneously so (see Düvell 2006 for several examples). There is no established definition of the term, and, as we will see, certainly not all West African migrants to North Africa can be classified as transit migrants. Moreover, intentions to move on (which is the basis of most definitions of transit migration) are not necessarily converted into actual movement. This is similar to the problems of distinguishing temporary from permanent migration – in which case (return) migration intentions do also often not match actual moves. Definitions of transit vs. ‘ordinary’ migration are therefore ambiguous. The term transit migrant seems therefore mainly useful as a post-hoc categorisation.

What complicates things further is that transit migration has, to a considerable degree, become a politicized and therefore value-laden term, which is used to brand migrants as ‘those who ought to move on’. Even labour migrants to Libya or *de facto* settlers who have been staying in North Africa for years or decades (cf. Roman 2006)<sup>10</sup> have recently been re-branded as ‘transit migrants’. This casts serious doubts on the added value, usefulness and desirability of using ‘transit’ as an analytical category. This study will therefore not employ the term transit to categorise *individual migrants*. The term transit seems to be more useful to describe a migratory phenomenon at the macro-level of societies and countries. *Transit migration* can then be defined as the movement of people entering a national territory, who might stay for several weeks or months to work to pay or to organise the next stage of their trip, but who leave the country to an onward destination within one year (cf. Düvell 2006).

This study will also draw on the concept of migration systems. Mabogunje (1970), the founder of migration systems theory, defined a migration system as a set of places linked by flows and counter flows of people, goods, services, and information, which tend to facilitate further exchange, including migration, between the places. While Mabogunje focused on rural-urban migration within Africa, Portes and Böröcz (1987) and Kritiz *et al.* (1992) extended this to international migration. International migration systems consist of countries—or rather places within different countries—that exchange relatively large numbers of migrants, and are also characterized by

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<sup>10</sup> For instance, Roman (2006) uses the term ‘transit migration’ for Sudanese and other migrants and refugees, who have often been living and working in Cairo for many years or decades.

feedback mechanisms that connect the movement of people to concomitant flows of goods, capital (remittances), ideas, ideals, representations and information (cf. Fawcett 1989; Gurak & Caces 1992)

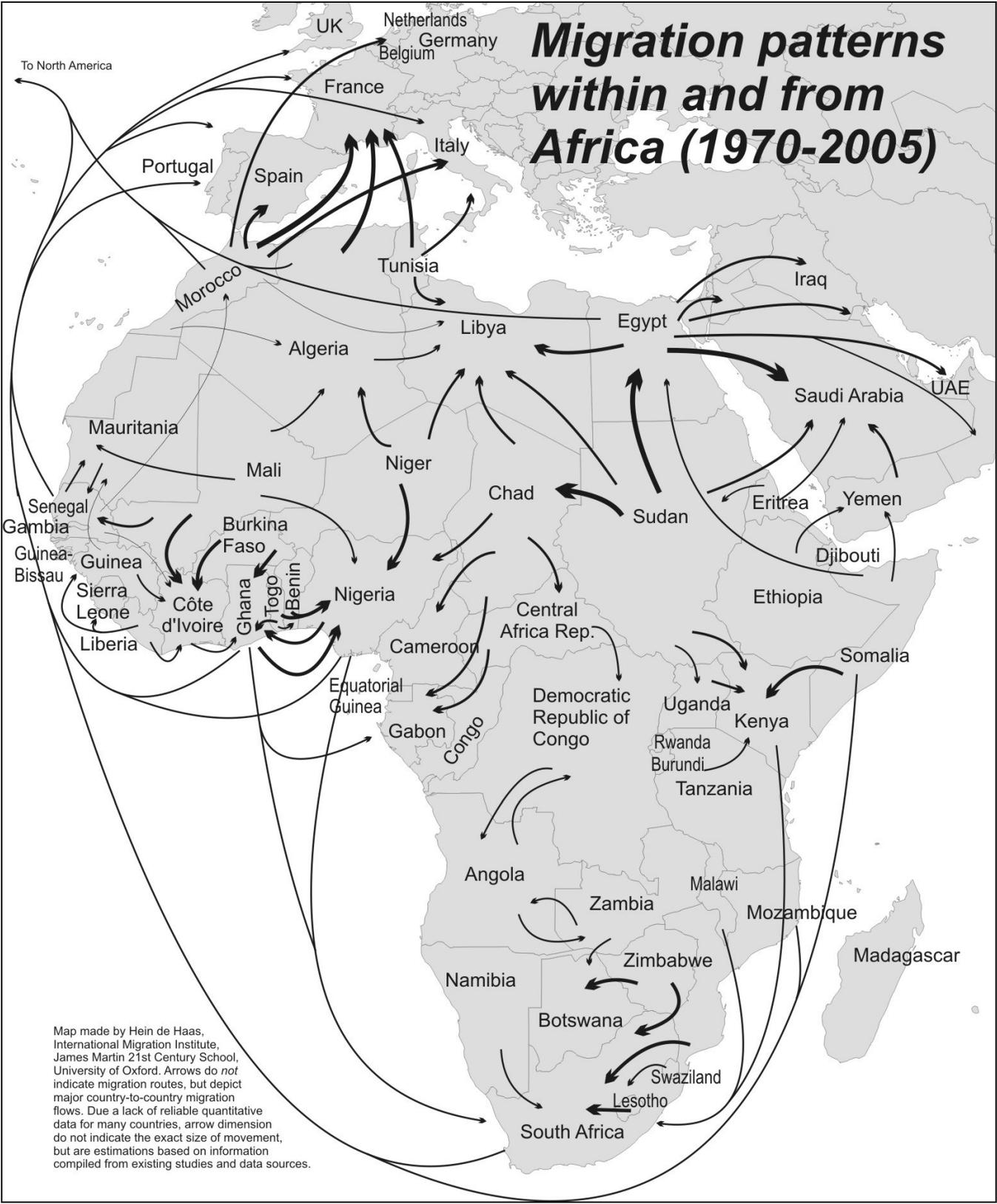
### ***1.3. Availability of sources and problems of measurement of irregular migration***

The largest problem in researching irregular migration is the irregular nature of the phenomenon, which explains why that many migrants do not register and tend to shun researchers. It is particularly difficult to make quantitative estimates. Statistics of apprehensions at the border are the most commonly used data. However, a substantial but unknown proportion of migrants enter Europe illegally without being apprehended. Furthermore, fluctuations in apprehensions partly reflect variations in the level of migration controls and, hence, policy priorities, and there is the possibility of double counting when the same migrants are apprehended two or several times in the same year.

Based on the assumption that regular and irregular flows correlate, also time series data on legally residing 'migrant stock' can function as an analytical tool to assess the general levels of migration from particular West African countries to particular North African and European countries. The regularisation schemes that have recently been implemented in Spain, Italy and other south European countries are other potential data sources. Such figures can serve as a retrospective tool to assess the magnitude of net irregular and regular immigration and the national background of migrants. Because of all these uncertainties, it is important to triangulate as many data sources as possible, and to avoid making definite claims on numbers.

While obtaining reliable migration statistics will remain a problem, a perhaps more promising, but commonly ignored source of information on the actual process of migration and the motivations and experiences of migrants is the emerging body of empirical studies carried out among (former or actual) irregular migrants, either in their countries of eventual settlement (cf. Hamood 2006; Van Liempt 2007) or in their assumed transit countries (cf. Alioua 2005; Bensaad 2003; Brachet 2005; Escoffier 2006; Lahlou & Escoffier 2002; Oumar Ba & Choplin 2005).

# Migration patterns within and from Africa (1970-2005)



Map made by Hein de Haas, International Migration Institute, James Martin 21st Century School, University of Oxford. Arrows do not indicate migration routes, but depict major country-to-country migration flows. Due a lack of reliable quantitative data for many countries, arrow dimension do not indicate the exact size of movement, but are estimations based on information compiled from existing studies and data sources.

## 2. Past and current trends in West African migrations

### 2.1. Introduction

Contemporary West Africa has recently often been described as the most mobile part of Africa. At first sight, this seems to be true for intra-regional mobility. Census based estimates by the United Nations Population Division suggest that West Africa has the largest absolute international immigrant stock (based on place of birth data) in Africa. It is also the only part of sub-Saharan Africa where migration stocks relative to the total population have been increasing over the past few decades, where other parts of Africa have actually shown a relative and sometimes even *absolute* decline (Zlotnik 2004). This largely reflects intense intra-regional migration characterising West Africa, but fails to capture migration from West African countries to other parts of Africa and trans-continental migration, mainly to Europe, North America and the Gulf. In addition, trans-continental emigration *out of* Africa seems to be more intense in West Africa than elsewhere on the continent with the clear exception of North Africa. In order to understand the recent increase in irregular migration to North Africa and Europe, this section will start by analysing the colonial and postcolonial migration history of West Africa.

### 2.2. Evolution of West African migration patterns

As in other parts of Africa, there is evidence of a considerable degree of pre-colonial mobility in West Africa, which is exemplified by the dispersion of Fulani speaking people through parts of the Sahel zone and the seasonal wanderings of transhumant herders (cf. Arthur 1991). Religious education and the *hadj* to Mecca were associated with major mobility and sometimes settlement of West Africans all across West, North and East Africa.

The trans-Saharan trade connected North and West Africa economically, politically, religiously and socially (Lydon 2000; Marfaing & Wippel 2004; OECD 2006b). Until the twentieth century, the slave trade constituted an important form of forced migration across the Sahara. In particular oases were commercial and migratory junctions and constituted a “global place in the pre-modern era” (Lightfoot & Miller 1996:78). The extremely diverse ethnic composition of Maghrebi oases — with their blend of sub-Saharan, Berber, Arab and Jewish influences — testifies to this long history of intensive population mobility (De Haas 2003)<sup>11</sup>.

From the sixteenth century onwards, European mercantilist expansion would fundamentally change most of these patterns. Growing European mercantilist trade and the establishment of forts along the West African coast negatively affected trans-Saharan trade and was associated with the slave trade, which led to the forced

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<sup>11</sup> The sharp distinction commonly made between North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa is historically incorrect by neglecting the fact that the Sahara *itself* has been a huge transition zone between these two sub-continental constructs, as testified by trans-Saharan trade and, currently, migration. This makes it difficult to classify countries such as Mauritania and Sudan to either belonging to north or sub-Saharan Africa.

displacement of millions of people from Africa to Europe, North America, and the Caribbean between the mid sixteenth and early nineteenth century (Nayyar 2000:2).

In the late nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century, the colonisation of North and West Africa by mainly the French and the English led to radical changes in intra-regional migration patterns. Besides the decline of trans-Saharan trade, pre-modern migration within West Africa increasingly gained the character of wage labour migration. The development of cacao, palmoil and groundnut farms (generally in more coastal zones of West-Africa, such as southern Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana, Senegal and The Gambia), mines, road construction and other infrastructure works as well as the growth of cities such as Accra, Lagos, Kano, Ibadan, Abidjan, Lomé, Dakar and Cotonou triggered major rural-rural migration of farm workers and rural-urban migration of skilled and unskilled workers, traders and students. Besides increasing labour demand on smallholders' farms (Hill 1957), in infrastructural works and in colonial urban centres, the introduction of taxes (Arthur 1991) and organised labour recruitment (Bump 2006) have been mentioned as other factors that stimulated migration from non-wage, rural subsistence economies to the urban and rural wage sectors. The expropriation of agricultural land for plantations has also been frequently mentioned (Amin 1974). However, the scale of expropriation has been fairly limited and most rural-rural labour migration was directed at smallholders' farms rather than large plantation (Van Hear 1998)

Since colonisation, intra-regional mobility in West Africa has been generally dominated by a predominantly North-South movement from landlocked countries of Sahel West Africa (Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and Chad) to the more prosperous plantations, mines and cities of coastal West Africa (predominantly Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal and The Gambia) (Arthur 1991; Findley 2004; Kress 2006). There was also considerable transversal migration *within* the coastal zone of mostly seasonal workers to the relatively wealthy economies of Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana (before the 1970s) and Nigeria (since the 1970s). Due to the relatively small size of most West African countries and the fact that arbitrary colonial borders often separated members of the same ethnic groups, such migration often acquired an international dimension<sup>12</sup>.

These coast-bound international migration patterns have often been reproduced inside countries, with people often moving from the relatively arid and underdeveloped inland zones to the often more humid and more prosperous agricultural as well as urbanised zones, generally located in the south and, in the case of Senegal and Mauritania, west of countries. Some more northern located cities such as Kano in Nigeria or the new, centrally located capitals of Yamoussoukro (Côte d'Ivoire) and Abuja (Nigeria) have also become migration destinations in their own right. A distinct *immigrant* group were the Lebanese, a group of traders and entrepreneurs who established themselves throughout West Africa (cf. Leichtman 2005).

These colonial migration patterns largely persisted in the late 1950s and 1960s. In particular the relatively prosperous economies of the Ghana-Côte d'Ivoire migration pole attracted large numbers of internal labour migrants as well as international

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<sup>12</sup> Amongst other factors, the relatively small size of many West African countries might partly explain why international migrants stocks are relatively high in this part of Africa. This exemplifies the often blurred distinction between internal and international migration.

migrants from countries such as Togo and Nigeria (mainly to Ghana), Guinea (mainly to Côte d'Ivoire) and Burkina Faso, Niger and Mali (to both). In a strong anti-colonial spirit of pan-Africanism, the presidents of Ghana and particularly Côte d'Ivoire welcomed immigrants to work and stay (Anarfi & Kwankye 2003). A smaller migration system centred around Senegal because of trade and groundnuts, with most migrants coming from neighbouring countries and the Gulf of Benin (OECD 2006b).

A turnaround in the West African migration order occurred with the mass immigrant expulsions from Ghana in 1969 and from Nigeria in 1983 and 1985, which reflected "pendulum-like shifts in the relative fortunes of Ghana and Nigeria as poles of attraction for migrants" (Van Hear 1998:78). In Ghana, increasing repression following the 1966 coup, a deteriorating economy and rising unemployment marked the country's transition from a net emigration to a net immigration country (Peil 1995; Van Hear 1998). The immigrant community in Ghana became a scapegoat for this crisis and in 1969 the Ghanaian government enacted the Aliens Compliance Order, leading to a mass expulsion of an estimated 155,000 to 213,000 migrants, mainly from Nigeria, Togo, Burkina Faso and Niger (Van Hear 1998:73-74).

Despite substantial emigration of Ghanaian traders, fishermen and others to other parts of West Africa, including Nigeria, Liberia and Sierra Leone, Ghana remained principally an immigration country until the late 1960s. However, sustained economic decline in the 1970s encouraged more and more Ghanaians to emigrate. An estimated two million Ghanaian workers left Ghana between 1974 and 1981; their primary destinations being Côte d'Ivoire and the burgeoning oil economy of Nigeria (Van Hear 1998:74). Smaller but significant numbers of skilled Ghanaian workers such as teachers, doctors and administrators migrated to countries such as Nigeria, Uganda, Botswana, and Zambia (Anarfi & Kwankye 2003; Peil 1995; Van Hear 1998).

While migration to Côte d'Ivoire continued, Nigeria took over Ghana's place as West Africa's second migration pole in the 1970s. Parallel to Libya and the Gulf countries, the 1973 Oil Crisis made oil-rich Nigeria, which had recovered from the 1967-1970 Nigerian Civil War in Biafra, into a major migration destination. Rising incomes of the urban middle class, mass public investments and rapid industrialisation attracted substantial number of West African labour migrants (Van Hear 1998). However, misguided economic policies, endemic corruption and a major decline in oil production and the post 1981 decrease in oil prices would herald a long period of economic downturn alongside sustained political repression and violence (Arthur 1991; Van Hear 1998).

As earlier in Ghana, the ruling regime started to blame immigrants in an attempt to divert popular attention from acute economic and political difficulties (Van Hear 1998:79). In 1983 and 1985, Nigeria followed the Ghanaian example, and expelled an estimated two million low skilled west-African migrants. Although the latter figure is perhaps exaggerated, the majority of expelled migrants, between 700,000 and 1.2 million, were Ghanaians (Peil 1995; Van Hear 1998). As Ghana before, Nigeria has witnessed a 'reverse migration transition', transforming itself from a net immigration to a net emigration country (Black et al 2004:11). Nigerians have increasingly emigrated to countries such as Ghana, Cameroon, and particularly the wealthy economies of Gabon, Botswana and South Africa (cf. Adepaju 2000). Since 1994, South Africa has developed as a major destination for migrants from various African

countries, among which numerous Nigerians. In particular the skilled have found the booming economy of South Africa to be a convenient alternative to Europe, the US and the Gulf States (Adepoju 2004).

Although many migrants (in particular Beninois and Ghanaians) seem to have remained in or returned to Nigeria (De Haas 2006a; Van Hear 1998), the expulsions have played a fundamental role in the creation of a substantial Ghanaian diaspora in Africa, Europe and North America. Although the mass return of Ghanaian workers has probably assisted the country's economic recovery in the second half of the 1980s, the expulsion has accelerated the "Diasporisation" of Ghanaians in the longer term (Van Hear 1998:168-9, 204). By partially cutting off a principal destination for Ghanaian migrants, the expulsions and the concomitant economic decline in Nigeria encouraged Ghanaians to explore opportunities further afield (Van Hear 1998:204). Although most Ghanaian migrants continued to live within the West African region, principally in Côte d'Ivoire, in the late 1980s more and more Ghanaian migrants started to explore new destinations, not only within Africa (ranging from South Africa to Libya) but increasingly to European countries such as Germany, the UK, the Netherlands and Italy, often by the asylum route (Van Hear 1998:204-209). As we will see in the next section, the crisis affecting Côte d'Ivoire over the 1990s, in combination with a turnaround in Libyan foreign and immigration policies, would have similar effects, in further stimulating West Africans to migrate to North Africa and, from there, increasingly to Europe.

### ***2.3. Trans-Saharan migration to Libya and North Africa***

Since Nigeria's decline in the 1980s, Côte d'Ivoire remained West Africa's only major migration pole with a quarter of its population consisting of immigrants and their descendants. However, after 1993, political and economic turmoil tempted politicians to play the nationalistic (Ivorian) card. Especially after the military coups of 1999 and 2002 and the outbreak of the civil war in 2002, increasing xenophobia prompted hundreds of thousands of migrants, predominantly Burkinabè, to flee the country (Black et al 2004; Drumtra 2006; Kress 2006). Although many would stay and others returned, the former appeal of Côte d'Ivoire as West Africa's migration pole had gone. This trend towards regional economic decline, increased xenophobia and increasing insecurity had also been reinforced by civil wars in Sierra Leone (1991-2001), Liberia (1989-1996 and 1999-2003), spilling over in Guinea (1999-2000). Warfare led to the loss of up to a quarter-million lives and at least 1.1 million people living as refugees or internally displaced persons (Drumtra 2006).

Under general circumstances of increased violence and economic decline in West Africa, the decline of Côte d'Ivoire was not compensated for by the rise of new labour migration poles within the region. Although Ghana and Senegal – currently among the region's most stable countries – seem to have increased their appeal as transit and immigration countries (cf. Black et al 2004), they have not taken in Côte d'Ivoire's former position. This has apparently provoked a series of shifts in the West African migration landscape. Partly prompted by a lack of alternative migration destinations in West Africa, West Africans have started to expand their geographical view. Although most migrate still within the region, increasing numbers of migrants started to explore new migration destinations in Europe, North America as well as at the

southern and northern extremes of the African continent. This coincided with the emergence of two new migration poles at the northern and southern extremes of the continent over the 1990s: Post apartheid South Africa and 'pan-African' Libya. South Africa has developed into destination for higher and lower skilled migrants from various West African countries, among which numerous Nigerians (Adepoju 2004; Morris 1998). To a lesser extent, also Gabon and Botswana have emerged as new destinations (Adepoju 2000).

More relevant for this study is the surge in trans-Saharan migration to Libya and other North African countries occurring over the 1990s. This migration is far less known than migration to South Africa but numerically more important. This recent increase was preceded by a longer period of limited migration from Sahelian to North African countries including Mauritania. Since the 1970s and 1980s, forced and voluntary settlement of nomads, violent conflicts and wars in the Sahel and Sahara<sup>13</sup>, and, perhaps, droughts provoked two types of mobility. First, impoverished (former) nomads and traders, such as the Touareg, started migrating to work at construction sites and the oil fields of southern Algeria and Libya. Second, with recurrent warfare in the Sahel and Sahara, thousands of refugees have settled in camps, towns and cities in Libya, Algeria and Mauritania since the 1970s (Bredeloup & Pliez 2005).

Libya and, to a limited extent, Algeria, witnessed increasing immigration of labourers from their southern neighbours Mali, Niger and Chad to their sweltering Saharan hinterlands, where oil wells, mines and new farms were located but where nationals often refuse to work (Spiga 2005). Libya rapidly developed into North Africa's major migration pole (Pliez 2004a). Although most immigrants were Egyptians and Tunisians, Sudanese and smaller number of West Africans (mainly from its neighbouring countries Niger and Chad) were also allowed to enter and work.

This immigration was generally tolerated or even tacitly welcomed. In Algeria, for instance, settlement of migrants from northern Mali and Niger in southern towns such as Tamanrasset filled local labour shortages and fitted into national policies to revitalise the underpopulated south through infrastructure development and population policies (Spiga 2005). Since the 1960s, thinly populated Mauritania has also allowed significant numbers of Senegalese, Malian, Guinean and Gambian migrants to work as fishermen (work which indigenous Mauritians tend to shun), in the iron mining industry or in local services in its capital Nouakchott and its main trading port Nouadhibou. Some highly educated immigrants work as teachers at private schools, whereas women sometimes work in or own small restaurants. Other migrants became involved in trade activities, such as the Senegalese and Nigerians who are involved in exporting (dried) fish to their origin countries (Oumar Ba & Choplin 2005).

This earlier migration to Libya, Algeria and Mauritania also set the stage for more large-scale trans-Saharan migration occurring after 1990. Maintaining strong trans-Saharan family and kinship ties, and capitalising on their trade networks and knowledge of the desert, numerous ex-nomads found new livelihoods through starting

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<sup>13</sup> Such as the Libyan-Chadian conflict between 1978 and 1987, the Moroccan "Green March" into the Western Sahara in 1975 until the cease-fire agreement between Morocco and Polisario in 1991, the Chadian crisis from 1982 to 1990, and the Touareg rebellions in Mali and Niger from 1990 to 1997 (OECD 2006b; Pliez 2004a).

to work as transporters of goods and people, often using ancient caravan trading routes. These ex-migrants and ex-nomadic entrepreneurs started to help transiting other migrants on board lorries and pick-ups. In this way, the Touareg of Mali and Niger, the Toubous in Chad and the Zaghawa of Sudan have become key actors in the commercial and migratory systems that connect north-Africa with sub-Saharan Africa (Bredeloup & Pliez 2005).

Whereas Mauritania, Algeria and Libya witnessed significant overland immigration and settlement of West Africans, until the mid 1990s the presence of sub-Saharan migrants in Morocco and Tunisia remained largely limited to relatively smaller numbers of students, traders, professional workers, sportspersons and some refugees, mainly from francophone West African countries as well as Gabon and the Democratic Republic of Congo (former Zaire) (Boubakri 2006; Goldschmidt 2003). Overland migration to these countries was relatively rare.

This picture would drastically change in the 1990s under partial influence of a major shift in Libyan foreign policy. Against the background of the deteriorating economic and political situation in West Africa, a radical change in Libya's foreign policy provoked a major surge in trans-Saharan migration to Libya. The air and arms embargo imposed on Libya by the UN Security Council between 1992 and 2000 played an unintended but decisive role in this unprecedented increase in trans-Saharan migration and the subsequent consolidation of trans-Saharan migration routes and networks. Disappointed by the perceived lack of support from fellow Arab countries during the embargo, Libyan leader Muammar Al-Qadhafi embarked upon a radical reorientation of Libyan foreign policy, in which he positioned himself as an African leader (Pliez 2005). To counteract the effects of the air embargo and the subsequent international isolation, Libya facilitated entry by land (Hamood 2006: 17-18). As part of his new pan-African policy, Al-Qadhafi started to particularly welcome sub-Saharan Africans to work in Libya in the spirit of pan-African solidarity (Boubakri 2004; Pliez 2002; Pliez 2004a).

Traditionally a destination for North African (mainly Egyptian and Tunisian) migrants, Libya subsequently became a major destination for sub-Saharan migrants (Boubakri 2004; Hamood 2006; HRW 2006). In the early 1990s, most migrants came from Libya's neighbours Sudan, Chad and Niger, which subsequently developed into transit countries for migrants from a much wider array of sub-Saharan countries (Bredeloup & Pliez 2005). Although most migrants lacked any formal rights, and although there were regular expulsions, their presence was generally tolerated. In 1998 Libya played a key role in creating the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD), which currently links 23 African countries<sup>14</sup>, whose aim is to create a unified regional bloc, promoting the free movement of persons, capital, and goods (Hamood 2006). Besides Libya's pan-African politics, increasing sub-Saharan immigration was also part of a more general trend due to a restructuration and segmentation of the Libyan labour market. Similar to developments in the Gulf States, the economic downturn through falling oil prices and the sanctions led to calls to 'indigenise' the Libyan workforce as of the early 1980s. However, the Libyan

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<sup>14</sup> According to the CEN-SAD website (<http://www.cen-sad.org/index.htm>) accessed on 19 March 2006, its member states were Benin; Burkina Faso; the Central African Republic; Chad; Côte d'Ivoire; Djibouti; Egypt; Eritrea; Gambia; Ghana Guinea Bissau; Liberia; Libya; Mali; Morocco; Niger; Nigeria; Senegal; Sierra Leone, Somalia; Sudan; Togo; and Tunisia.

economy and public service had already become heavily dependent on migrant labour. While Egyptians predominate in agriculture and teaching jobs (Pliez 2004a), in particular manual and unskilled jobs have increasingly been filled by sub-Saharan African migrants.

This also seems related to a decreased willingness among North African migrants, who have better access to the more attractive labour markets of the Gulf and European countries, to take up such jobs. Moreover, the unprecedented growth of the small-scale informal private sector over the 1990s has further increased the demand for abundant and cheap African migrant labour (Pliez 2005). This has led to an increasing segmentation of Libyan labour markets. For instance, while the owner of the growing number of private agricultural enterprises is typically Libyan, the foremen tend to be Egyptian (farmers) and the labourers from sub Sahara Africa (Pliez 2004a).

Mounting labour migration to pan-African Libya also coincided with increasing migration to other North African countries, although to a lesser extent. In Morocco, for instance, the first significant numbers of arrivals of sub-Saharan migrants who had often travelled *overland* were observed in the mid 1990s. This movement only gained real momentum after 1997-1998 (Barros et al 2002). Besides Senegalese, Nigerians, Malians and Ghanaians, several of these earlier migrants were refugees, for instance those fleeing the political turmoil and military conflicts in the Great Lake district in particular after the fall of president Mobutu<sup>15</sup> in the Democratic Republic of Congo in May 1997 and the civil war in Congo Brazzaville (1997-1999). Congolese and a limited number of refugees from West African countries such as Liberia and Sierra Leone (Lindstrom 2002) considered Morocco as a *relatively* safe haven (Barros et al 2002).

#### ***2.4. From trans-Saharan to trans-Mediterranean migration***

Until the 1980s, only limited numbers of West African students and mainly highly skilled workers migrated to Europe and also North America, mainly following Francophone-Anglophone colonial-linguistic divides. This emigration was very limited in comparison to large-scale labour migration of unskilled workers from the Maghreb countries to Europe. Only workers from Cape Verde (mainly to Portugal and the Netherlands) (Carling 2001) and pockets in the Senegal river basin in northern Senegal and the Kayes region of western Mali (mainly to France) (Findley 2004; Martin et al 2002) joined the northbound movement of low skilled north-African labour migrants to West Europe in the 1960s and 1970s (De Haas 2006b).

Since 1990, however, there has been a striking increase in migration to Europe and North America, principally from Nigeria, Ghana and Senegal, as well as a geographical diversification of migration destinations beyond the former colonisers France, the UK and Portugal (Black et al 2004; Van Hear 1998). This migration both comprised regular, skilled migration, for instance of health workers to the UK, the US and the Gulf, and relatively low skilled, often irregular, migration, which was increasingly oriented towards Spain and Italy. Whereas most West Africans used to

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<sup>15</sup> Former president Mobutu himself was granted asylum by Morocco, were he died and was buried in 1997.

enter Europe by airplane, a shift in migration patterns took place towards the turn of the century. Tightening of European visa policies and the intensification of migration controls at airports and other official ports of entry, prompted an increasing number of West African migrants to avoid official air and maritime links and to cross the Mediterranean illegally from North Africa after crossing the Sahara overland.

Until recently, most West Africans made the trans-Saharan crossing in order to work in Libya. Since the late 1990s, however a fundamental shift occurred when sub-Saharan migrants started to join the flow of Maghrebis who had already started crossing the Mediterranean illegally by *pateras* (fisher boats) since Italy and Spain introduced visa requirements for North African workers in the early 1990s. This increase was so strong that since 2000 sub-Saharan Africans have taken over from North Africans as the largest group intercepted by European border guards. In this way, sub-Saharan migrants forged a vital connection between the resurgent trans-Saharan and the established Euro-Mediterranean migration systems.

The increasing presence of West Africans in Libya and elsewhere North Africa, the persistent demand for migrant labour in (southern) Europe, where salaries and living conditions are much better than in Libya, and the already well-established networks of smugglers helping Maghrebi to cross the Mediterranean, were necessary conditions for this vital shift in the African-European migration landscape. However, the major anti-immigrant backlash in Libya following violent anti-immigrant riots in 2000 seems to be essential in understanding why this year was in many respects a major turning point in West African migration to North Africa and Europe, characterised by (1) a further diversification of trans-Saharan migration routes, (2) an remarkable increase in West Africans moving to Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia, not only from Libya, but increasingly directly, and (3) a sudden increase in the number of West Africans crossing the Mediterranean<sup>16</sup>.

In September 2000, violent clashes between Libyans and African workers led to the deaths of 130 sub-Saharan migrants, although Libyan officials claim only six died (Pliez 2004a). The Libyan authorities, in an apparent attempt to respond to growing popular resentment against immigrants, who were blamed for rising crime, disease (HIV/AIDS) and social tensions, instituted a number of repressive measures. These include more restrictive immigration regulation, lengthy and arbitrary detention of immigrants in poor conditions in prisons and camps, physical abuse, and the voluntary and forced repatriation of tens of thousands of immigrants including asylum seekers, most of them to Niger, Chad, Sudan, Nigeria and Ghana (Hamood 2006; Pliez 2004a; Schuster 2005). Expulsion would continue in subsequent years. Between 2003 and 2005, the Libyan government would have deported approximately 145,000 irregular migrants, mostly to sub-Saharan countries (HRW 2006).

It is important to emphasise that Libyan migration policies have generally been highly erratic, with mass expulsions of migrant workers occurring regularly. Such (threats of) expulsions often reflected the vicissitudes of Libya's diplomatic relations (Beauge & Burgat 1986; Labib 1979; Pliez 2004a)<sup>17</sup>. By contrast, this crackdown had a

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<sup>16</sup> Between 1999 and 2000, the percentage of non-Moroccans (mainly sub-Saharan) migrants apprehended at the Canary Island went up from 11.8 to 63.2 percent (Coslovi 2007).

<sup>17</sup> For instance, between 1966 and 1985, there were no less than eight expulsions of Tunisian workers from Libya as well as three border re-openings (Pliez 2004a). In 1985, 80,000 Tunisian and Egyptian

particularly strong racist dimension and seemed primarily a reaction of public authorities to strong public resentment against the presence of Black African workers, whereas former expulsions primarily served Libyan foreign policy goals. However, the Libyan state would soon instrumentalize this crackdown for foreign policy goals by presenting it as Libya's contribution to the "fight against illegal migration" vis-à-vis European countries as part of Libya's general efforts to become reintegrated into the international community.

However, migration from sub-Saharan Africa continued because of the persistent need for cheap immigrant labour in Libya, although this migration became increasingly irregular<sup>18</sup>. Nevertheless, it is likely that increasing repression in Libya has contributed to a partial diversion of the by then already firmly established trans-Saharan migration movements from Agadez in Niger, away from Libya in the direction of Algeria and from there onwards to Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia. It does not seem to be coincidental that it was since 2000 that these countries witnessed a striking increase in migration from an increasingly diverse array of origin countries. Besides refugee migration from countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sierra Leone, and Liberia, new origin countries of predominantly labour migrants included Nigeria, Senegal, the Gambia, Liberia, Mali, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Niger, Sudan, the Central African Republic, and Cameroon.

From Morocco and Tunisia, increasing numbers of these sub-Saharan migrants and refugees have joined Maghrebis in their attempts to enter the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla or to cross the Strait of Gibraltar to Spain or from Tunisia to Italy (Lampedusa, Pantalleria or Sicily) (Barros et al 2002; Boubakri 2004). In addition, sub-Saharan migrants in Libya have increasingly tried to cross to Italy and Malta directly from the Libyan coast, transforming Libya from a destination country into a destination *and* transit country.

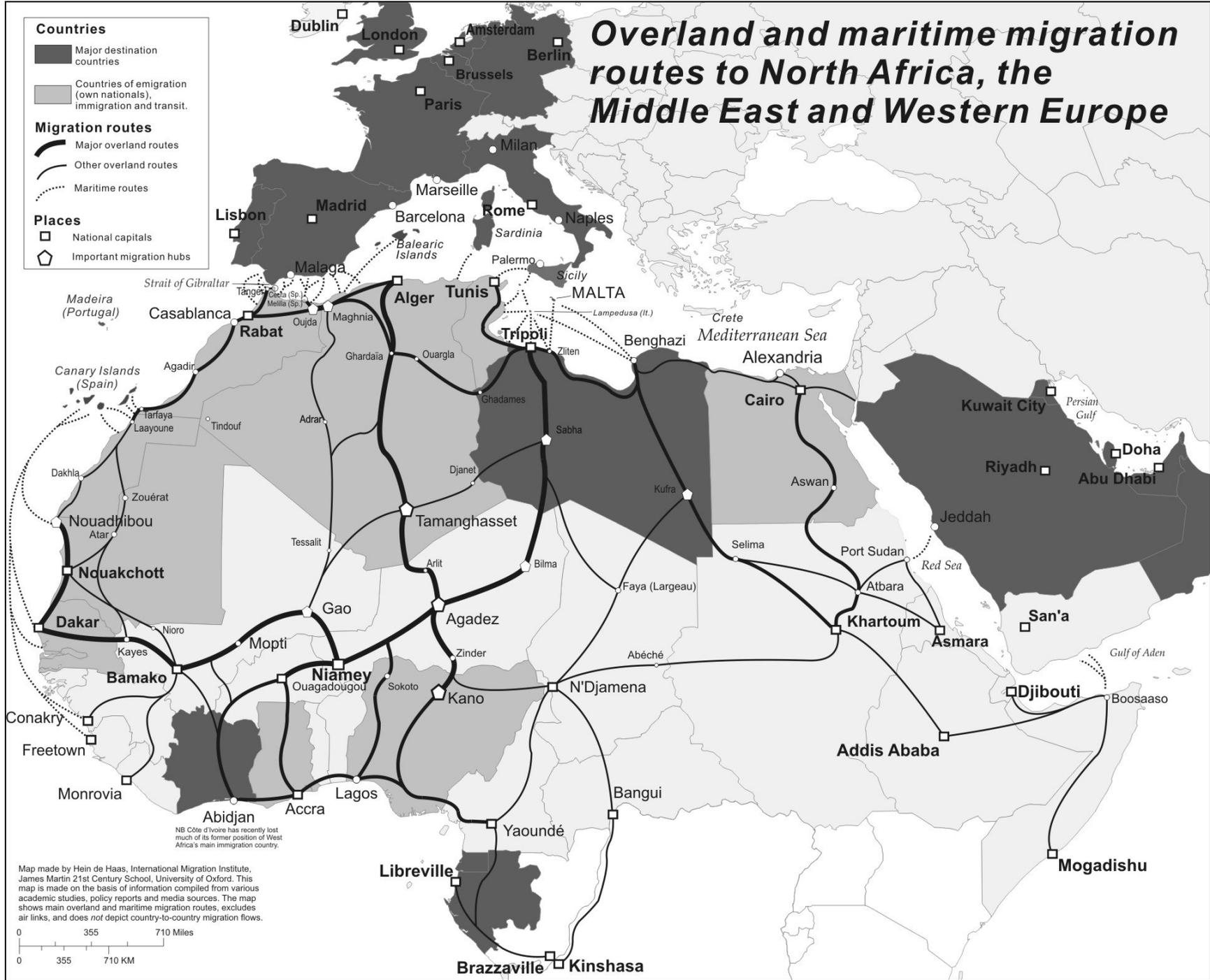
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workers were expelled in a general context where Libya criticized Tunisia and Egypt of being pro-American. In 1995, Libya announced that it planned to fly home 500,000 Sudanese, 300,000 Chadians, 250,000 Malians and migrants from other sub-Saharan countries, in an alleged attempt to gain the support of these countries to support Libya's request to lift or soften the UN sanctions (Migration News, September 1995). Eventually, 335,000 migrants would have left the country, of which 200,000 would have been expelled. Also Palestinians and Mauritians were expelled, officially because of the signature of the Oslo accords and the diplomatic ties that Mauritania established with Israel. Subsequent labour shortages led to the active recruitment of Iraqi workers (Pliez 2004a)

<sup>18</sup> It should be noted that the distinction between regular and irregular migrants in Libya has always been arbitrary. Even in the 1990s most sub-Saharan migrants did not register with Libyan authorities.

# Overland and maritime migration routes to North Africa, the Middle East and Western Europe

- Countries**
- Major destination countries
  - Countries of emigration (own nationals), immigration and transit.
- Migration routes**
- Major overland routes
  - Other overland routes
  - Maritime routes
- Places**
- National capitals
  - Important migration hubs



### **3. The migration process: routes, methods and motivations**

#### ***3.1. Trans-Saharan and maritime migration routes***

Migrants use numerous land, sea and air routes to reach their desired destinations in North Africa and Europe. Restrictive immigration policies and intensified migration controls have led to a growing reliance on overland routes, although migrants who can afford it make at least part of the journey to North Africa by airplane. An emerging body of empirical studies strongly suggests that the trans-Saharan journey is generally made in several stages and may take anything between one month and several years. On their way, migrants and refugees often settle temporarily in towns located on migration hubs to work and save enough money for their onward journey, usually in trucks or pick-ups (Barros et al 2002; Brachet 2005; Collyer 2005; Escoffier 2006). Cameroon, Nigeria, Mauritania, Algeria and Libya seem to be the favourite countries for stop-overs, where it is relatively easy to find work such as bricklayers, security guards, merchants, shoemakers, tailors, cleaners, and domestic worker. Some migrants end up settling in such towns as workers, entrepreneurs or smugglers (Escoffier and Lahlou 2002:24).

Although a multitude of trans-Saharan routes exists, at least until recently the majority of overland migrants entered the Maghreb from Agadez in Niger. Agadez is located on a historical crossroads of migration itineraries, which often follow revived sections of older trans-Saharan and Sahelian (caravan) trade routes and which have now extended all over the Sahel zone and deep into western and central tropical Africa. There are two major itineraries leading to Agadez. Migrants from West Africa such as Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Togo or Benin usually travel via Niger's capital Niamey. Migrants from Nigeria, Congo, Congo-Brazzaville, and other central African countries directly pass from Nigeria, usually after regrouping in the cities of Sokoto and Kano in northern Nigeria (Barros et al 2002).

From Agadez, migration routes bifurcate to the Sebha oasis in Libya (via the Dirkou oasis) in north-eastern direction and to Tamanrasset in southern Algeria in north-western direction. From Sebha in southern Libya, migrants move to Tripoli and other coastal cities or to Tunisia; from the coast, migrants travel by boat to either Malta or the Italian islands of Lampedusa, Pantalleria, and Sicily. Other migration routes connect Sudan with the Kufra oasis in south-eastern Libya, which are mainly used by migrants from Sudan (principally from the Darfur region), Ethiopia and Eritrea. Other routes connect Chad with Libya and are used by Nigerian, Cameroones, Congolese and Sudanese migrants. Most Egyptians enter Libya directly at the Mediterranean coast. Libya's pan-African policies have also played a key role in linking the Nile valley – East African and the Euro-Mediterranean migration systems. Not only a growing number of Egyptians – who traditionally migrated to Libya to work – make the crossing to Italy via Libya, but also migrants and refugees from Sudan, Somalia, Eritrea and Ethiopia. Their main (provisional) destination is still Cairo, but they now increasingly attempt to migrate to Europe through Libya from Sudan, Chad or Egypt (Drozd & Pliez 2005:71; Hamood 2006).

From Tamanrasset in Algeria, migrants move to the northern cities or enter Morocco via the border between Maghnia and the area East and West of Oujda in Morocco. Although the land border between Algeria and Morocco has been closed since 1994, it is relatively simple to cross the border accompanied by a Moroccan or Algerian smuggler through a “no man’s land” of 14 km during night (Barros et al 2002). From Oujda in Morocco, migrants either try to enter the EU by crossing the sea from the north coast or entering the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta or Melilla or move to Rabat and Casablanca, where they settle down at least temporarily. Since 1999, tougher policing at the Strait of Gibraltar has led to a general diversification in attempted crossing points. A growing number of boats started to leave from the north-western Atlantic and eastern Mediterranean coast and even from Algeria. After 2001, a rapidly increasing number of migrants in Morocco have moved southward to the Western Sahara in order to get to the Canary Islands, a Spanish territory in the Atlantic Ocean. Intensified border patrolling at the Tunisian coast also led to a diversification of attempted crossing points and an increasing number of migrants directly departing from the western Libyan coast, and, most recently, the eastern Algerian coast to Sardinia.

On the western edge of the continent, and in a likely response to increased border controls and repression in the Maghreb, there has been a sharp increase in migrants avoiding the trans-Saharan crossing to the Maghreb altogether by directly sailing from the Mauritanian, Cape Verdean, Senegalese, and other West African coasts to the Canary Islands on traditional wooden fishing canoes (*pirogues*). This has transformed these countries into new countries of transit migration. For instance, the boomtown of Nouadhibou in northern Mauritania – a traditional destination of West African migrants – has recently evolved into a major migration crossroads, from where many West Africans (Senegalese, Guineans, Ghanaians, and so on) attempt to sail to the Canary Islands in pirogues or through hiding in cargo ships. Some attempt to travel overland from Mauritania to Morocco via the Western Sahara (Oumar Ba & Choplin 2005).

In 2006 there was a major surge in boat migration to the Canary Islands. While in 2007 the number of arrivals on the Canary Islands seem to have gone down to pre-2006 levels – possibly as a result of increasing sea patrolling – there has been an increase in boats leaving the Algerian coast and arriving on the Italian island of Sardinia (LaRepubblica 2007). While *piroque* migration to the Canary Islands is a new phenomenon, irregular immigration by larger vessels is a more established practice. An unknown but probably substantial number of West African migrants embark illegally on larger (usually cargo) ships directly heading to the Canary Islands or the European mainland (Oumar Ba & Choplin 2005; Pastore et al 2006; Van Liempt 2007)<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup> For instance, Van Liempt (2007) argued that Dutch harbours are used for smuggling migrants in and out. She cites a report by the Dutch Immigration and Naturalisation Service stating that 91 percent of Guinean asylum seekers claim to have entered the Netherlands by boat. This would apply for 35 and 34 percent among asylum seekers from Liberia and Sierra Leone, respectively. Pastore et al (2006) cites an example of a boat that departed from the Guinean coast and travelled to the Italian coast via the Strait of Gibraltar. Carling (2007b) mentions the role of Cape Verde as a transit country to the Canary Islands.

In recent years, migrants from China, India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh have started migrated to the Maghreb via Saharan routes. They mostly fly from Asia to West-African capitals, sometimes via the Gulf States. From there, they follow the common Saharan trail via Niger and Algeria to Morocco. Others enter north-Africa through Egypt to Libya and Tunisia, from where they cross to Italy and Malta (Simon 2006:39). In 2007, increasing numbers of Asians have joined Africans crossing from the West African coast to the Canary Islands. This phenomenon has been linked to the effective closure of the Red Sea - Suez canal route for Asian irregular migrants after 2002 (Cuttitta 2005). Boubakri (2004:3) also mentions the presence of Kurds, Iraqis, and Palestinians among these migrants.

This exemplifies the increasing complexity and global connectivity of West African migration, a process in which West African, trans-Saharan, Euro-Mediterranean migration and globalised migration systems have become increasingly interconnected.

### ***3.2. Factors encouraging settlement or transit***

The commonly used term ‘transit migrants’ may be misleading in three senses. First, the journey to North Africa may take months and even years and is generally made in stages, complying with step-wise migration patterns typical for many African countries. On their way, migrants and refugees often settle temporarily in towns to work and save enough money for their onward journey (Barros et al 2002; Bredeloup & Pliez 2005; Collyer 2006). Substantial numbers of migrants end up settling in such towns and cities.

Second, at least temporary settlement in North Africa has been the rule rather than the exception. Libya and, to a lesser extent, Algeria and Mauritania have been destinations for labour migrants in their own right. For limited numbers sub-Saharan students, professionals and sportspersons, also Tunisia and Morocco have been destinations (Barros et al 2002; Bredeloup & Pliez 2005).

Third, a considerable proportion of migrants failing or not venturing to enter Europe prefer to settle in North Africa on a more long-term basis as a ‘second best’ option rather than return to their generally more unstable, unsafe and substantially poorer origin countries. Increased repression in Libya and other North African countries has prompted an increasing number of labour migrants and refugees to migrate to Europe. However, several studies suggest that the vast majority of migrants who are ‘stuck’ in North Africa do not want to go back. After investing considerable personal and family resources in reaching North Africa, and often having connections to those migrants who already succeeded in entering Europe, migrants do generally not want to abandon their migration project at the fringes of Europe. Therefore, migrants who are expelled from North African countries commonly migrate back (cf. Barros et al 2002; CIMADE 2004; Escoffier 2006; Goldschmidt 2006).

Increasing repression in North Africa and particularly Libya is also likely to have played an important role in the decision to migrate onward (Barros et al 2002), that is, to convert into ‘transit’ migrants. For instance, Escoffier and Lahlou (2002:23) mention the case of migrants from Nigeria, Chad and Sudan who fled Libya to

Morocco after the violent riots against sub-Saharan workers in 2000. However, a considerable number of migrants and refugees who intend to migrate to Europe are “stuck” in countries such as Morocco because of a lack of means to cross to Europe and tend to stay for increasingly longer periods (Collyer 2006; Lahlou & Escoffier 2002). This exemplifies the difficulty of using the term transit migrant as an identifier, because, depending on their experiences, migrants’ (mixed) motivations and aspirations often change over the journey. Intended transit countries can become countries of destination, and the other way around.

In contrast to common perceptions of North Africa as zone of transit or a ‘waiting room’ for migrants waiting to cross to Europe, there are probably more sub-Saharan Africans living in North Africa than in Europe. Increasing trans-Saharan migration and settlement of migrants has played a key role in revitalising ancient trans-Saharan (caravan) trade routes and desert (oasis) towns in Mali (Gao), Niger (Agadez), Chad (Abéché), Libya (Sebha and Kufra), Algeria (Tamanrasset and Adrar) and Mauritania (Nouadhibou) through increasing migration, settlement, and concomitant trade with which this migration is strongly intertwined (Bensaad 2003; Boubakri 2004; Bredeloup & Pliez 2005; Spiga 2005). Such towns now house significant resident sub-Saharan populations. For instance, the population of the Saharan boomtown of Tamanrasset in southern Algeria has increased from 3,000 persons in 1966 to 65,000 persons in 1998. Over half of its current population (49,000) is estimated to be of sub-Saharan origin (Spiga 2005).

Besides the revitalised desert and oasis towns of Mali, Niger, Chad, Mauritania, Algeria and Libya located on trans-Saharan migration routes, also most major North African cities, such as Rabat, Oran, Algiers, Tunis, Tripoli, Benghazi, and Cairo, harbour sizeable communities of sub-Saharan migrants as a result of their voluntary and less voluntary settlement (Boubakri 2004:4; Bredeloup & Pliez 2005:11-12). Immigrants often concentrate in specific neighbourhoods (Alioua 2005; Oumar Ba & Choplin 2005). Although they generally lack legal status and are vulnerable to exploitation, sub-Saharan migrants, including those living outside Libya, find jobs in specific niches of the informal service sector (such as cleaning, dishwashing, domestic work and baby-sitting), construction, petty trade, manufacturing (shoemakers, tailors), agriculture, mechanics, fishery (in Mauritania), tourism, ‘Afro’ hairdressing and football clubs (Alioua 2005; Boubakri 2004). It often concerns arduous jobs that some Maghrebis shun (cf. Bredeloup & Pliez 2005:12). Others try to pursue studies in Morocco and Tunisia, sometimes also as a means to gain residency status that simultaneously gives them a foothold in local labour markets (Alioua 2005; Boubakri 2004).

The recent increase in migrant raids and xenophobia in North Africa have made migrants more vulnerable to discrimination. Migrants who got stuck in Saharan migration hubs (like Kufra in Libya) due to border closures are vulnerable to worsening living and work conditions (Drozd and Pliez 2005:78). Migrants are often denied access to legal assistance, public health care and schooling. Their irregular status and the increase in policing and raids have made migrants vulnerable to extortion by officials and severe exploitation on the housing and labour market. In Morocco, migrants live in highly degrading circumstances in overcrowded houses or, sometimes, in improvised camps (Alioua 2005; CIMADE 2004; Collyer 2006; Escoffier 2006).

Collyer (2006) found that Moroccans rent apartments to irregular migrants for double or triple the price that Moroccans would pay. Furthermore, sub-Saharan migrants in Morocco working at markets or in shoerepairing were not paid but were given some of the left over vegetables at the end of the day, or a meal. Only migrants that had particular skills that they could employ under their own terms, such as repairing electronics or teaching, succeeded in making money for themselves. Many relied on remittances received from family and friends in Europe and even their countries of origin (Collyer 2006).

### ***3.3. Background of migrants and personal motives to migrate***

The scattered evidence on the socio-economic profile of irregular West African migrants exemplifies their highly diverse background (Escoffier 2006). It appears that they are generally less wealthy and less skilled compared to the post-colonial and current legal migration of West African students and workers to France, the UK and the US (cf. Hernandez-Coss et al 2007). Nevertheless, despite the common portrayal of migrants desperately fleeing poverty, migrants are rarely from the most destitute families. Migrants tend to be from moderate socio-economic backgrounds and are often from urban areas in their countries of origin. A substantial proportion has followed secondary or higher education (Escoffier 2006; OECD 2006b; Schoorl et al 2000). Although the large majority of migrants are young men, women (often working as domestic servants) and children are increasingly present (Escoffier 2006). This can hugely vary across immigrant groups. In Italy, for instance, 85 percent of Cape Verdean immigrants are women, mostly working as domestic workers, whereas 96 of the Senegalese are men, mostly working as street vendors (various sources cited in Van Liempt 2007).

The relatively high costs of migration partly explain why West African migrants do generally not belong to the poorest milieus in origin countries (Bensaad 2005; OECD 2006b). Rather than fleeing poverty, migrants tend to move either because of a general lack of perspectives for self-realization in their origin countries and the concomitant inability to meet their personal aspirations, or because of fear of persecution or violence in origin countries, and sometimes a combination of both (Collyer 2006; Escoffier 2006). Also evidence from regularisations in Europe suggests that irregular migrants are generally well-educated (Levinson 2005). This complies with general evidence that a certain increase in income and education generally lead to higher *capabilities* and *aspirations* to migrate. Therefore, relative rather than absolute poverty in combination with improved access to financial and social resources seem to be the main drivers of South-North migration (De Haas 2006d).

### ***3.4. Regular vs. irregular entry to Europe***

It is commonly assumed in the media, policy and academic literature that most West Africans enter Europe by crossing the sea in wooden and unseaworthy *pateras* (from

Morocco to Spain) or *pirogues* (from West Africa to the Canary Islands) (cf. Lutterbeck 2006: 61). However, extensive media coverage of this assumed ‘African exodus’ and the *visibility* of this type of migration obscures the fact that the majority of irregular immigrants in the EU have entered legally, on some sort of a visa, and then overstayed (Düvell 2005). If possible, North *and* West Africans avoid entering Europe by perilous crossings on fisher boats. For instance, in 2002 only ten per cent of the irregular migrants’ population in Italy entered the country illegally by sea (Cuttitta 2007).

What is even less well known is that there are many other ways of entering Europe illegally. Migrants with sufficient financial means or networks either secure a tourist visa or residency permits through (real or fake) marriage or arranged work contracts, travel with forged documents or documents of family look-alikes, or travel by air using so-called *via/via* systems. Some scale the fences surrounding the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla in northern Morocco or attempt to swim around them. Other migrants embark on larger and safer passenger or cargo ships sailing from North and West Africa to Europe. This can be done either clandestinely or by bribing the ship’s crew or the drivers of the cars, vans or trucks in which they often hide (De Haas 2003; Hammouda 2005; Oumar Ba & Choplin 2005; Simon 2006; Van Liempt 2007; van Moppes 2006).

Nevertheless, the relative importance of entry by *patera* or *pirogue* seems to be comparatively high for West Africans because of the recentness of their settlement in Europe. More established immigrant groups, such as North Africans, can more often rely on their extended family networks to enter Europe on visas, forged documents or by hiding in others migrants’ cars and vans (De Haas 2003). In 2003, the population of legal Moroccan residents grew with almost five persons to every intercepted Moroccan boat migrant, whereas among Malians the ratio was the reverse (Carling 2007).

Survey data collected by NIDI and Eurostat in the 1990s among migrants and their households in Italy, Spain, Ghana, Senegal, Morocco and Egypt provide additional insights into the relative importance of different entry methods (Schoorl et al 2000). Although the survey was not representative, the results suggest that most migrants entered Europe legally, and that among the irregular migrants most have overstayed their visas. Among the surveyed Senegalese in Spain and Ghanaians in Italy, 34 and 60 percent, respectively, reported to have complied with immigration rules, 15 and 7 percent to have entered illegally, and 36 and 15 percent to have overstayed their visas, while 14 and 18 percent did not respond to the question. Among those who report illegal entry or overstay, the percentage reporting to have been successful is two thirds or high (Schoorl et al 2000). However, these results are likely to be biased towards the more successful cases. Based on data released by the Italian ministry of the Interior, it has been estimated that in 2005 no less than 61 percent of irregular migrants were overstayers (down from 75 percent in 2002-3), 27 percent entered the country by (document) fraud (up from 15 percent in 2002-3) and 12 percent entered the country clandestinely (up from 10 percent in 2002-3) (Coslovi 2007; UNODC 2006).

Once in Europe, many irregular migrants manage to stay and settle. A substantial but unknown proportion of sub-Saharan migrants attempting illegal entry are apprehended by European border guards and police. Only a minority of those

apprehended by Spanish and Italian border guards are eventually expelled. In 2002 and 2003, only about a quarter of detained irregular migrants in Spain were effectively expelled, more than 66,000 were released (Carling 2007). Besides the limited expulsion capacity, this is related to difficulties with identifying migrants. Many migrants destroy their papers to avoid expulsion to their origin countries, while asylum seekers, minors, and pregnant women often have the right to (at least temporary) residence on humanitarian grounds (cf. Kastner 2007). Furthermore, sub-Saharan African countries are often reluctant to collaborate with the *forced* readmission of large numbers of irregular migrants. Because of these factors, many apprehended migrants are eventually released after the maximum detention period (40 days in Spain) with an expulsion order. This order is generally ignored, after which migrants either go underground in the informal sector or migrate onwards to other European countries.

In Europe, colonial links, shared language and the overseas presence of migrated kin and friends play an important role in the choice for the destination. The colonial Francophone-Anglophone language divide still plays an important role in migration patterns, although this role is decreasing (cf. Nwajiuba 2005). More and more migrants stay in Spain and Italy, which have developed into Europe's main migration destinations since 1990. In these countries, it is relatively easy to find irregular jobs in the large and thriving (formal and informal) agricultural, construction and service sectors. Other migrants, such as many Senegalese and Ghanaians, are often self-employed and involved in trade. Over the past decade, a substantial number of migrants have obtained residency papers through successive regularization campaigns in Italy, Spain and other European countries or through other channels, such as marriage or securing a labour contract.

Working and living conditions of irregular migrants in Europe have become increasingly precarious. According to coverage in the press and some empirical studies, irregular migrants regularly face discrimination and are vulnerable to severe exploitation by employers and house letters (Allasino et al 2004; Gatti 2006; Laganà 2006; Van Liempt 2007). In southern European countries, the widespread hidden economy not only attracts irregular immigration, but also discourages the stabilization of immigrants who are regularized through amnesties (Reyneri 2001). This explains why regularized migrants keep working in irregular jobs or sometimes revert to an irregular residency situation (Allasino et al 2004; Levinson 2005; Reyneri 2001). The relative rarity of immigrant regularisations is a particular problem for irregular migrants living in northern Europe (Mazzucato 2005). Mazzucato (2005) found that Ghanaian migrants in the Netherlands spent approximately 10 years acquiring legal status, during which time they often worked two cleaning jobs per day, and after which they had often too many physical ailments to continue working and ended up receiving welfare payments from the Dutch state.

### ***3.5. Intermediaries: smugglers and family networks***

Media, politicians as well as many scholars depict West African “transit” migrants as victims of unscrupulous traffickers and merciless criminal-run smuggling networks. However, the available empirical evidence based on research among the migrants

concerned strongly suggests that trafficking is rare and that the vast majority migrate on their own initiative (Alioua 2005; Barros et al 2002; Brachet 2005; Collyer 2006; Escoffier 2006). Smugglers are usually not part of international organised crime or centralised, hierarchical mafia-like structures, but tend to be locally based and operate alone or in relatively small networks. Smugglers are often former nomads, migrants or ex-migrants who cooperate with local corrupt police and border officials (Brachet 2005).

People who smuggle migrants in *pateras* and *pirogues* are often (former) fishermen, whose livelihoods are said to have been marginalised partly because of large-scale fishing by European vessels close to the (Senegalese and Moroccan) coasts allowed under the Fisheries Agreements with the EU (cf. Hoebink 2005). Migrants typically pay smugglers for one difficult leg of the journey, usually involving a border crossing, at a time (Brachet 2005; Collyer 2006). Besides the sea crossings, the most difficult parts of the trans-Saharan journeys are the desert and border crossings from Niger to Libya or Algeria. Shorter border passages, such as between Algeria and Morocco – where there is very intensive cross-border smuggling – are relatively cheap (Barros et al 2002).

Rather than smugglers, corrupt and abusive policemen, soldiers and border officials who exact high bribes and may strip migrants of money and essential assets such as mobile phones, are the largest dangers migrants face while making the trans-Saharan journey and while staying in the Maghreb (Barros et al 2002; Goldschmidt 2006). In his study on the Agadez-Sebha route between Niger and Libya, Brachet (2005) reported wide-scale corruption among police and border officials who charged high ‘tolls’ to migrants and smugglers.

Migrants often use the services of smugglers to protect themselves from such abuse, which seems to have worsened with the recent increase in repression in North Africa. Although abuse, deceit and violence by smugglers do commonly occur (Oumar Ba & Choplin 2005; Pastore et al 2006), migrants cannot be depicted as their passive victims who are recruited and have little to say. In essence, smuggling is a service, and there is an often a high level of interdependence between migrants and smugglers.

Based on a detailed study of Italian court files, Pastore *et al.* (2006) debunked the received wisdom that takes the popular image of thousands of migrants crossing the Mediterranean in ships as evidence of the existence of hierarchically integrated, centralized, sophisticated, worldwide active, criminal cartels. Their study showed that smuggling organisations are no highly structured transnational entities or mafias but rather complex, loose networks linking largely independent small to medium sized clusters of practical competencies.

This corroborates empirical evidence and more general critique on popular views focusing on the association of migration with organised international crime which largely rule out migrants’ agency, and portray smuggling as a main *cause* of migration (Neske 2006; Salt 2000; Thuno & Pieke 2005; Van Liempt 2007). As clients, smuggled migrants do have agency and pursue risk-reduction strategies, which render human smuggling structurally distinct from other criminal activities such as trafficking in human beings or the smuggling of illicit goods (Bilger et al 2006). In fact, many smugglers were migrants themselves, and experienced migrants also fulfil

smuggling roles. Therefore, smuggling should certainly not be seen as the *cause* of irregular migration, which is however the rationale underlying policies to “combat illegal migration”. On the contrary, the growing importance of smuggling is rather a *response* to increasing migration restrictions and repression (cf. van Liempt & Doornik 2006).

Although irregular migration from West Africa is commonly associated with trafficking, there is in fact very little evidence of migrants being trafficked from West Africa into Europe. The only well-documented exception to this rule is the trafficking of Nigerian female sex workers to European countries such as Italy and perhaps also the Gulf (Carling 2006; Okonofua et al 2004). This trafficking evolved over the 1990s, when increasing immigration restrictions made female migrants dependent on large loans in order to migrate. This provided an opportunity for traffickers, who coerced them into prostitution to repay their migration debt (Carling 2006). Although most women know that they will work as prostitutes, they are often unaware of the arduous work condition and the actual size of the debt. However, after repaying their migration debt in one to three years, they are free and can eventually become a ‘madam’ of other prostitutes. The reciprocity between prostitutes and (equally female) traffickers and the prospect of upward mobility in the trafficking organization are strong incentives to adhere to the pact (Carling 2006). Therefore, even in the case of trafficking, migrants do often exert a certain degree of agency.

However, the vast majority of migrants seem to use smugglers but migrate largely on their own initiative. Migration to Europe is becoming increasingly costly due to increased border controls, and prices of smuggling seem to have equally increased. The trans-Saharan crossing can easily cost hundreds of dollars spent on bribes, smugglers, transportation and cost of living. In 2003, the illegal crossing by boat from Morocco to Spain cost from \$200 for minors, to between \$500 and \$800 for Moroccans and up to between \$800 and \$1,200 for sub-Saharan Africans (Lahlou 2003). Prices for the Libya-Italy crossing seem to be roughly similar. UNODC (2006) cited press reports mentioning prices of US\$ 880 for the Morocco-Canary Islands crossing, US\$ 385-1260 for Nouadhibou-Canary Islands crossing, and US\$ 480-1930 for Senegal-Canary Island crossing. A more secure crossing from Mauritania to the Canary Islands aboard of a cargo ship would cost as much as €2500 to €3000 to be paid to local smugglers and the ship’s crew. Embarking clandestinely on such a ship would cost around €500 (Oumar Ba & Choplin 2005). Collyer (2006) reported that Bangladeshis paid a single price of €6,000 and €8,000 to travel by plane from Dhaka to Dubai, then to Bamako, overland to Morocco, and then by sea (apparently by jet-ski) to Ceuta

Although prices vary, they represent considerable sums taking into account the low average incomes in West Africa. Collyer (2006: 26) found that migrants and refugees in Morocco reported having spent anything from several months to several years average salary of their origin countries. Yet Pastore et al. (2006) pointed to the fact that prices for smuggling are always lower than what migrants should expect to pay for safer migration options such as a legal tourist visa, forged documents or having a fake marriage organised. Therefore, the price of smuggling can not increase beyond a certain threshold (Pastore et al 2006). In addition, smugglers make significant costs and often have to bribe officials. This tempers the received wisdom that smuggling is a very lucrative business.

The common focus on smuggling and trafficking as “causes” of migration also obscures the fact that networks of family, friends and acquaintances play a preponderant role in facilitating migration and their presence abroad tends to determine migration destinations. Among the Senegalese and Ghanaian migrants surveyed by Schoorl *et al.* (2000), family and, to a lesser extent, friends were the main source of information on the countries of destination. Before migration, migrants tended to be better informed about work opportunities and wages than admission regulations for migrants *per se*. Based on interviews with Moroccan and Senegalese migrants in Spain and Egyptian and Ghanaian migrants in Italy, Herman (2006) emphasised the paramount significance for most migrants of existing networks of friends, relatives, and acquaintances when undertaking their journey.

Available empirical evidence suggests that migration is often a family investment rather than a desperate move. Migration within (Hampshire 2002) and from (Wouterse 2006) West Africa to Europe is generally a deliberate choice and an investment by reasonably prosperous households and families to enhance their livelihoods. Household savings are often mobilised and assets such as land sold to be able to pay for the migration of one family member. Also at the destination, settled migrants facilitate the passage of other family members and friends through providing information and access to housing. They also play an important role in facilitating migration, either through securing visas or residence permits, or through paying for their passage to North Africa and Europe (Alioua 2005; Goldschmidt 2006; Mazzucato 2005). Many trans-Saharan migrants receive financial support assistance from family and friends in origin countries, in North Africa or in Europe, with which they are in close contact through the now ubiquitous mobile phone (Alioua 2005; Collyer 2006; Escoffier 2006).

## 4. Quantifying migration patterns from West Africa

### 4.1. Main origin countries

It is impossible to give precise figures about the number of West Africans leaving their country each year in search of other destinations within and outside the region. However, by triangulating as many data sources as possible, this section aims to assess the general migration trends in West African migration to North Africa and Europe that occurred over the last decade. Table 1 presents bilateral country-to-country estimates of migrant stocks based on the matrix recently developed by the University of Sussex and the World Bank (cf. Parsons *et al* 2005; Ratha & Shaw 2007)<sup>20</sup>. It is important to emphasise that the presented figures should be interpreted

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<sup>20</sup> These bilateral migration data are derived by the World Bank from an augmented and updated bilateral migration matrix originally created by the University of Sussex (see Parsons CR, Skeldon R, Walmsley TL, Winters LA. 2005. *Quantifying the International Bilateral Movements of Migrants*, Development Research Centre on Migration, University of Sussex). This database uses national censuses, population registers, national statistical bureaus and a number of secondary sources (OECD, ILO, MPI, DFID, UNPD) to compile bilateral migrant stocks for 162 countries. In an expanded version used for modeling, this database also estimated bilateral information for 64 additional countries for which the censuses had no information on sources of migrants. The World Bank updated the

with the greatest caution, because they rely on data of varying quality and for some countries figures have been obtained through estimation.

At first sight, the data seem to exemplify the varied migration patterns in West Africa, with several countries (Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal) having a higher estimated emigrant than immigrant stock and some countries (Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, Ghana, the Gambia) a higher estimated immigrant than emigrant populations. The immigrant and emigrant populations of other countries (Cameroon, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Togo) appear to be roughly in balance.

**Table 1. Estimates of emigrant and immigrant populations in West Africa and North Africa**

	<i>Population (2000)</i>	<i>Emigrant stock</i>	<i>% population</i>	<i>Immigrant stock</i>	<i>% population</i>	<i>Emigrant- immigrant stock</i>	<i>% net migrant stock</i>
Benin	7,197,000	508,640	7.07	174,726	2.43	-333,914	-4.64
Burkina Faso	11,292,000	1,121,758	9.93	772,817	6.84	-348,941	-3.09
Cameroon	14,856,000	231,169	1.56	136,909	0.92	-94,260	-0.63
Cape Verde	451,000	181,193	40.18	11,183	2.48	-170,010	-37.70
Chad	8,216,000	181,442	2.21	437,049	5.32	255,607	3.11
Cote d'Ivoire	16,735,000	151,755	0.91	2,371,277	14.17	2,219,522	13.26
Gabon	1,272,000	27,330	2.15	244,550	19.23	217,221	17.08
Gambia, the	1,316,000	56,762	4.31	231,739	17.61	174,977	13.30
Ghana	19,867,000	906,698	4.56	1,669,267	8.40	762,569	3.84
Guinea	8,434,000	520,835	6.18	405,772	4.81	-115,063	-1.36
Guinea-Bissau	1,366,000	116,124	8.50	19,171	1.40	-96,953	-7.10
Liberia	3,065,000	89,075	2.91	50,172	1.64	-38,903	-1.27
Mali	11,647,000	1,213,042	10.42	46,318	0.40	-1,166,724	-10.02
Mauritania	2,645,000	105,315	3.98	65,889	2.49	-39,426	-1.49
Niger	11,782,000	437,844	3.72	123,687	1.05	-314,157	-2.67
Nigeria	117,608,000	836,832	0.71	971,450	0.83	134,618	0.11
Senegal	10,343,000	463,403	4.48	325,940	3.15	-137,463	-1.33
Sierra Leone	4,509,000	78,516	1.74	119,162	2.64	40,646	0.90
Togo	5,364,000	222,008	4.14	183,304	3.42	-38,704	-0.72
<b>Total</b>	<b>257,965,000</b>	<b>7,449,740</b>	<b>2.89</b>	<b>8,360,382</b>	<b>3.24</b>	<b>910,642</b>	<b>0.35</b>
<i>North Africa</i>							
Algeria	30,463,000	1,783,476	5.85	242,446	0.80	-1,541,030	-5.06
Egypt	67,285,000	2,399,251	3.57	166,047	0.25	-2,233,204	-3.32
Libya	5,306,000	90,138	1.70	617,536	11.64	527,398	9.94
Morocco	29,231,000	2,718,665	9.30	131,654	0.45	-2,587,012	-8.85
Tunisia	9,563,000	623,221	6.52	37,858	0.40	-585,363	-6.12
<b>Total</b>	<b>141,848,000</b>	<b>7,614,751</b>	<b>5.37</b>	<b>1,195,541</b>	<b>0.84</b>	<b>-6,419,211</b>	<b>-4.53</b>

Source: Calculations based 2000 population data (UNPD) and bilateral migration estimates compiled by University of Sussex and World Bank and adapted by World Bank. Bilateral migration matrix (updated 7 December 2006) downloaded on 15 January 2007 from [www.worldbank.org/prospects/migrationandremittances](http://www.worldbank.org/prospects/migrationandremittances).

information on bilateral migrant stocks for 56 countries using the most recent census data Ratha D, Shaw W. 2007. *South-South Migration and Remittances*. Washington: World Bank, Development Prospects Group.

Some unexpected results seem to be the result of the significant movement of refugees and asylum seekers within the region and the underestimation of emigration to Libya and other North African countries. For instance, Chad might seem an unlikely immigration country, but is in fact a major country of asylum hosting at least 224,000 refugees and asylum seekers, mainly from Sudan (see tables 6 and 7 in annex). On the other hand, this database seriously underestimates the number of Chadians, but also Nigeriens and other West Africans living in North Africa (Libya) (see also table 2). Liberian emigration is also likely to be much higher than the estimated 89,000, which does apparently not include the at least 237,000 Liberian refugees and asylum seekers living abroad, primarily in other West African countries. Their inclusion would drastically increase the actual emigrant population (see tables 6 and 7 in annex).

Looking at emigrant population as percentage of the total population, emigrant populations seem comparatively low, with the notable exception of Cape Verde (38 percent of the total population) and, to a lesser extent, Mali (10 percent), Benin (5 percent) and Burkina Faso (3 percent). All West African countries taken together, immigrant and emigrant populations seem roughly in balance. This stands in contrast with North Africa, where these data suggest strongly negative migration rates for all countries with the unsurprising exception of Libya. Whereas emigrant populations of Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia seem fairly accurate, the *actual* immigrant population in Libya is likely to be several times higher than the 620,000 mentioned in this database (see section 4.2).

Table 2 exemplifies the overwhelmingly regional orientation of West African international migration. In Benin, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Togo, over two thirds of emigrants are believed to live within West and Central Africa. According to the same estimates, only from Cape Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, Gabon, Sierra Leone, Senegal and The Gambia over half of emigrants are living in North America or Europe. For the region as a whole, 61.7 percent of emigrants would live in the region, 8.2 percent in Central Africa, 0.3 percent in the Gulf, 14.8 percent in North, West and Southern Europe and 6.0 percent in North America.

Thus, despite the recent diversification of West African migration, it is important to emphasise that intra-regional migration remains far more important than migration from West Africa to the rest of the world. Given the fact that data problems are more severe in African countries than in most Western countries due to undercounting of irregular migrants and missing data on migrants in censuses (Parsons et al 2005), it is likely that the actual level of intra-regional migration is considerably higher, according to some estimates up to seven times more than the volume of migration from West Africa to the rest of the world (OECD 2006b).

**Table 2. Estimates of destinations of emigrant populations from West and North Africa (%)**

	West Africa	Middle Africa	North Africa	Gulf	North West and South Europe	North America	Other
<i>West Africa</i>							
Benin	79.1	8.6	0.0	0.0	3.5	0.3	8.5
Burkina Faso	90.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.3	0.1	8.5
Cameroon	9.7	42.7	0.0	0.0	31.8	7.0	8.7
Cape Verde	10.2	1.1	0.0	0.0	53.0	16.7	18.9
Chad	13.5	41.7	26.5	5.7	3.4	0.6	8.6
Cote d'Ivoire	35.9	0.1	0.0	0.0	48.4	6.9	8.7
Gabon	24.1	14.6	0.0	0.0	48.9	3.7	8.7
Gambia, the	27.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	51.5	12.2	8.7
Ghana	66.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	14.3	10.2	9.1
Guinea	84.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	5.2	1.4	8.6
Guinea-Bissau	56.3	0.1	0.0	0.0	34.6	0.5	8.6
Liberia	24.9	0.0	0.0	0.0	14.2	51.7	9.1
Mali	82.7	3.8	0.1	0.0	4.5	0.3	8.6
Mauritania	65.6	2.4	0.1	0.2	20.6	2.5	8.6
Niger	79.0	10.2	0.1	0.0	1.8	0.3	8.5
Nigeria	14.1	26.9	3.5	1.7	24.6	19.9	9.3
Senegal	39.3	6.7	0.0	0.0	42.1	3.0	8.8
Sierra Leone	13.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	45.7	31.5	9.2
Togo	65.9	7.4	0.0	0.0	16.3	1.9	8.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>61.2</b>	<b>8.1</b>	<b>0.9</b>	<b>0.3</b>	<b>14.7</b>	<b>6.0</b>	<b>8.8</b>
<i>North Africa</i>							
Algeria	0.1	0.0	0.8	0.1	85.5	2.0	11.5
Egypt	0.4	0.0	15.4	53.0	8.2	7.1	16.0
Libya	0.3	13.9	2.3	0.4	25.6	13.7	43.7
Morocco	0.2	0.0	0.3	0.8	79.2	2.7	16.8
Tunisia	0.0	0.0	12.3	2.0	71.7	2.2	11.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>0.2</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>6.3</b>	<b>17.2</b>	<b>57.1</b>	<b>3.8</b>	<b>15.4</b>

Source: see table 1.

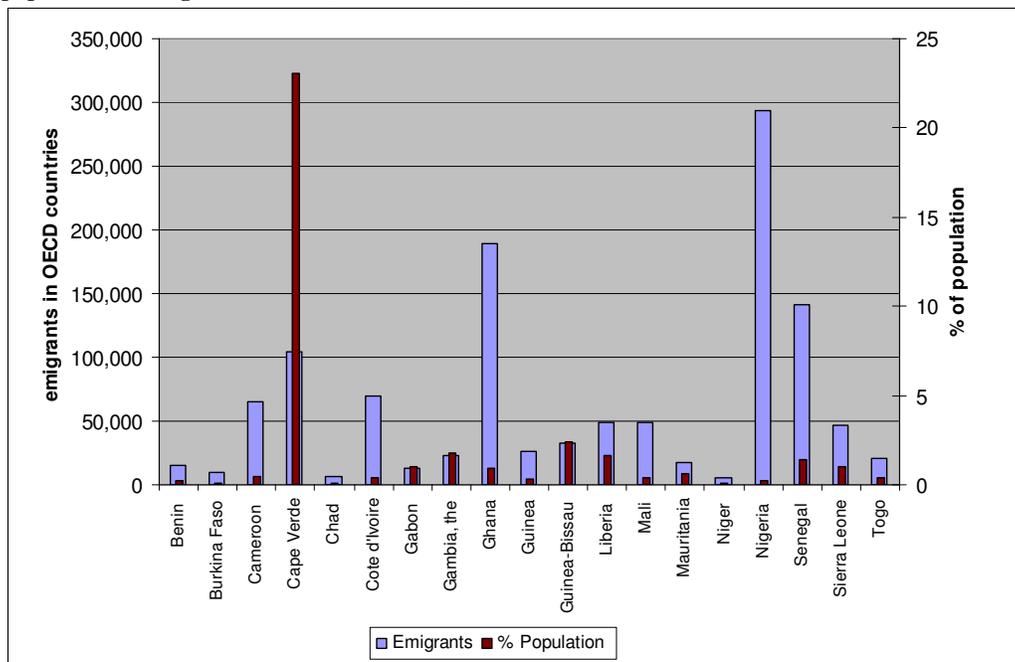
Recent data on legal immigrant stocks in OECD countries presented in figure 1 give new insights in the relative share of West African countries in intercontinental migration to Europe and North America. These data are likely to underestimate the true size of the migrant population as they do not include irregular migrants, and because not all receiving countries register relatively unimportant countries of origin separately. They are furthermore based on country of birth information and do therefore not include the second generation.

In absolute numbers, Nigeria, Ghana and Senegal predominate in migration to Europe and North America. They would represent 25.5, 16.4 and 12.2 percent of all West African migrants living in OECD countries, respectively. Cape Verde, Côte d'Ivoire and Cameroon have also more than 50,000 registered migrants living in OECD countries. If we calculate the emigrant population as percentage of the total population, which indicates the relative importance of emigration, the picture changes quite radically. For instance, registered Nigerian migrants in OECD countries only

represent 0.2 percent of its estimated total population of 118 million in 2000. Generally, migration to OECD countries is at relatively low levels, and only Guinea-Bissau (2.4 percent), the Gambia (1.8 percent), Liberia (1.6 percent), Senegal (1.4 percent), Sierra Leone, Gabon and Ghana (all 1 percent) having emigrant stocks of at least 1 percent. The notable exception to this rule is Cape Verde, with an estimated 23.1 percent of its population living in OECD countries.

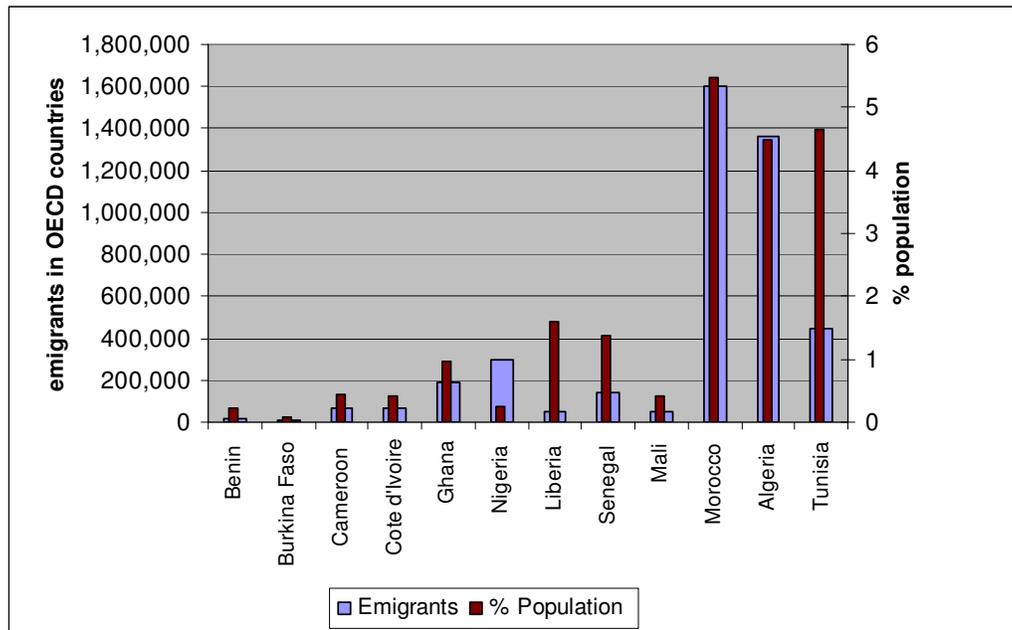
These data confirm that West African migration to Europe is relatively modest, certainly in comparison with North Africa. This is exemplified by figure 2, which compares the absolute and relative importance of migration from a selected number of North and West African countries. Registered Moroccan migrants (1.6 million out of a population of 29 million) alone already outnumber *all* registered West Africans (1.2 million out of a population of 258 million) living in OECD countries.

**Figure 1. West African immigrants in OECD countries, absolute number and percentage of total population of origin countries (around 2000).**



Source: Own calculations based on OECD Database on immigrants and expatriates (update November 2005); downloaded 15 January 2007 from [www.oecd.org](http://www.oecd.org). Data sources are population censuses or population registers, mostly dating back to 2000-2001.

**Figure 2. Immigrants in OECD countries from selected sub-Saharan and North African countries absolute number and percentage of total population (around 2000).**



Source: Own calculations based on OECD Database on immigrants and expatriates (update November 2005); downloaded 15 January 2007 from [www.oecd.org](http://www.oecd.org)

#### **4.2. North African destination and transit countries**

Available estimates suggest that more sub-Saharan Africans live in North Africa than in Europe. Because of the irregular or unregistered character of most migration, official North African data sources show unrealistically low estimates of West African immigrant populations in the region. Libyan local authorities estimate the number of legal foreign workers at 600,000, while irregular immigrants are estimated to number between 750,000 and 1.2 million (Bredeloup & Pliez 2005: 6; EC 2004a). Another source claims that Libya hosts 2 to 2.5 million immigrants (including 200,000 Moroccans, 60,000 Tunisians and 20,000 to 30,000 Algerians and 1 to 1.5 million sub-Saharan Africans), representing 25 to 30 percent of its total population (Boubakri 2004: 2). Pliez (2004a) estimated the number of sub-Saharan Africans in Libya at 1.5 million. This population would be dominated by 500,000 Chadians and an even higher number of Sudanese (Drozd & Pliez 2005: 64).

According to official estimates, 100,000, predominantly Senegalese and, to a lesser extent, Malians would live in Mauritania (Oumar Ba & Choplin 2005:28), also commonly but misleadingly referred to as a transit country. Real figures are likely to be higher. Based on data on the migration-propelled growth of cities in Saharan Algeria (Spiga 2005), the number of resident sub-Saharan migrants in Algeria is at least 60,000, although the real number is likely to be significantly higher. While there is much uncertainty, Morocco and Tunisia probably house smaller but apparently growing sub-Saharan immigrant communities of about one to several tens of thousands (Alioua 2005; Boubakri 2004; Collyer 2006; Goldschmidt 2006).

**Table 3. Main OECD destination countries of West Africa born migrants (around 2000)<sup>21</sup>**

<i>Destination</i>	<i>Number of migrants</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
US	351,025	29.8
France	298,302	25.3
UK	176,223	15.0
Italy	82,018	7.0
Portugal	68,000	5.8
Spain	51,174	4.3
Canada	41,450	3.5
Netherlands	35,978	3.1
Belgium	14,691	1.2
Switzerland	12,147	1.0
Ireland	10,559	0.9
Other	35,834	3.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,177,401</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Own calculations based on OECD Database on immigrants and expatriates (update November 2005); downloaded 15 January 2007 from [www.oecd.org](http://www.oecd.org).

### ***4.3. European destination countries***

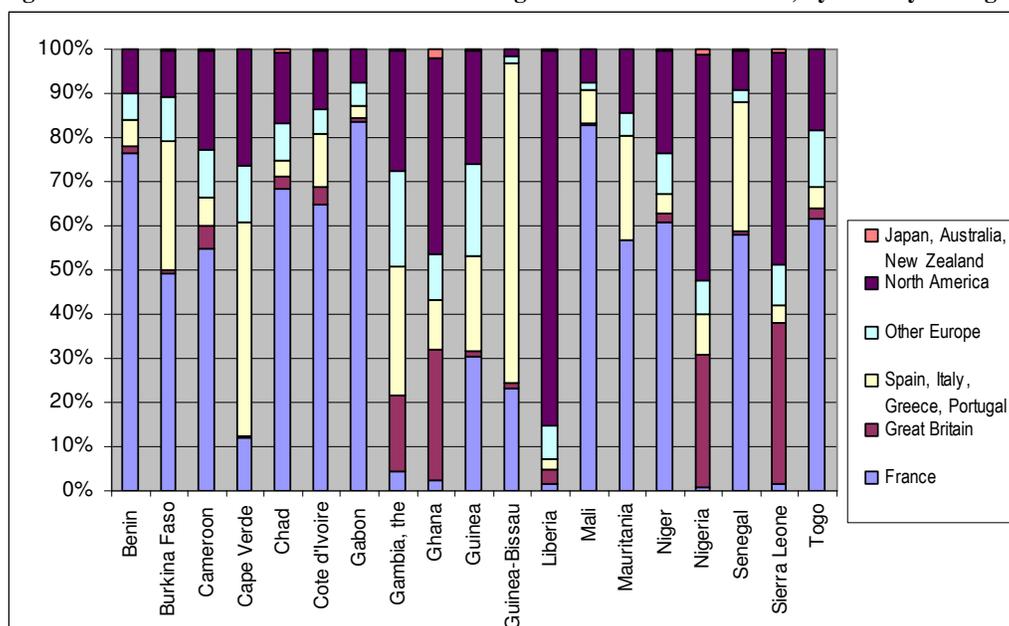
Data from OECD countries presented in table 3 show that France, the UK, Italy, Portugal, Spain and the Netherlands are the most important European destination countries for West African migrants. However, these figures obscure recent dynamics, in which Italy and Spain have emerged as the most important destinations for new migrants to Europe. Figure 3 gives some additional insights in the dominant migration destinations within the OECD for each West African country. It shows that emigration from several countries still largely follows colonial patterns. For instance, two thirds to three quarters of migrants from Benin, Chad, Gabon, and Mali live in France.

Likewise, migration from Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and, to a lesser extent, The Gambia, is predominantly oriented towards the UK and the US. Due to their specific histories of colonialism and foreign dominance, migrants from Cape Verde and Guinea Bissau are predominantly living in Portugal and Liberians in the US. Figure 3 suggests that recent migration to Spain and Italy has been relatively important for Senegal, The Gambia, Mauritania, Guinea and Burkina Faso.

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<sup>21</sup> Including Gabon, Chad, Cameroon and Mauritania.

**Figure 3. Destinations of West Africa born immigrants in OECD countries, by country of origin**



**Source:** Own calculations based on OECD Database on immigrants and expatriates (update November 2005); downloaded 15 January 2007 from [www.oecd.org](http://www.oecd.org) (see table 8 in appendix for absolute figures).

In absolute numbers, the most important origin countries of migrants in southern Europe are Cape Verde (51,000; mainly in Portugal), Senegal (41,000), Nigeria (26,000), Guinea-Bissau (24,000; mainly in Portugal) and Ghana (21,000). Benin, Chad, Gabon, Niger and Togo have particularly small registered expatriate populations living in southern Europe (less than 1,000) (for further details, see table 8 in the appendix).

Table 4 displays the most recently available data on registered West African born migrant populations in the six main European receiving countries. For Portugal and the UK, we had to rely on census-based OECD data from 2001. The French figures are based on the 1999 census data, which means that current numbers are likely to be substantially higher due to recent immigration. The data reveal that, although France still hosts the largest estimated number of legal West African immigrants, the recent Spanish and Italian figures are much higher than the OECD figures suggest. Genuine figures are believed to be substantially higher because of the irregular status of many migrants (cf. Mazzucato 2005). Although West Africa is the most important origin region of *sub-Saharan* migrants in Europe, the data confirm that West African migration is comparatively modest compared with North African migration and, recently, migration from Eastern Europe (for West Europe as a whole) and Latin America (mainly to Portugal and Spain).

**Table 4. Registered foreign born migrant populations in main European receiving countries**

Origin country	Spain (padrón data 1/1/2006)	Italy (official foreign residents) 31/12/2005	France (foreign born population , 1999 census)	UK (foreign born) 2001 census	Portugal (foreign born) 2001 census	Netherlands (foreign born) 2007 estimates	Total
Benin	NA	1,762	8,375	239	26	219	10,621
Burkina Faso	NA	7,949	2,796	99	2	288	11,134
Cameroon	3,326	5,529	26,890	3,233	58	1,559	40,595
Cape Verde	2,508	3,955	11,938	328	44,964	11,453	75,146
Chad	NA	115	1,864	183	18	76	2,256
Cote d'Ivoire	1,446	14,378	29,879	2,794	92	797	49,386
Gabon	NA	156	5,794	135	72	453	6,610
Gambia, The	12,663	650	970	3,924	25	75	18,307
Ghana	12,068	34,499	4,069	56,112	54	12,196	118,998
Guinea	7,525	1,813	5,704	265	297	2,191	17,795
Guinea-Bissau	4,797	258	5,882	381	21,435	217	32,970
Liberia	758	1,165	586	1,583	31	1,996	6,119
Mali	13,834	702	35,978	121	44	137	50,816
Mauritania	8,410	568	8,237	28	31	349	17,623
Niger	NA	714	1,247	96	NA	263	2,320
Nigeria	26,501	34,310	1,978	88,378	146	4,754	156,067
Senegal	31,507	57,101	53,859	723	631	816	144,637
Sierra Leone	1,165	964	520	17,048	44	4,810	24,551
Togo	NA	2,109	10,598	553	30	1,136	14,426
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>126,508</b>	<b>168,697</b>	<b>217,164</b>	<b>176,223</b>	<b>68,000</b>	<b>43,785</b>	<b>800,377</b>
<i>North Africa</i>							
Algeria	43,719	20,202	575,740	10,670	189	3,801	654,321
Egypt	2,588	58,879	16,386	24,700	102	11,147	113,802
Libya	NA	1,523	988	9141	11	533	12,196
Morocco	487,942	319,537	521,059	12,348	1354	168,099	1,510,339
Tunisia	1,656	83,564	201,700	3,070	53	4,119	294,162
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>535,905</b>	<b>483,705</b>	<b>1,315,873</b>	<b>59,929</b>	<b>1,709</b>	<b>187,699</b>	<b>2,584,820</b>
<i>Other Africa</i>							
Other Africa	23,906	42,586	159,073	NA	NA	56,824	282,389
Europe	1,593,675	1,261,964	1,934,758	NA	NA	620,400	5,410,797
North America	41,887	16,779	46,038	NA	NA	25,906	130,610
Latin America	1,367,989	238,882	81,306	NA	NA	308,665	1,996,842
Asia	192,323	454,793	550,166	NA	NA	354,016	1,551,298
Oceania	2,380	2,486	4,149	NA	NA	7,004	16,019
Apatride	NA	622	NA	NA	NA	NA	622
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3,884,573</b>	<b>2,670,514</b>	<b>4,308,527</b>	<b>4,865,563</b>	<b>651,472</b>	<b>1,604,299</b>	<b>17,984,948</b>

Source: [www.ine.es](http://www.ine.es) (Spain), [www.istat.it](http://www.istat.it) (Italy), [www.ined.fr](http://www.ined.fr) (France), OECD (United Kingdom and Portugal), [www.cbs.nl](http://www.cbs.nl) (Netherlands)

These data also exemplify that some West African countries participate disproportionately in migration to Europe. Ghana and, in particular, Senegal stand out as a countries which have broken away from colonial migration patterns and from where a substantial increase and diversification in migration to southern Europe (and the US) has taken place. Senegalese born are increasingly present in Spain and, particularly, Italy. The Senegalese form an immigrant group almost as big as the Nigerian born population abroad, although Nigeria's population is eleven times higher than Senegal's population. The Ghanaian community has particularly grown in Italy, and, to a lesser extent, Spain and the Netherlands<sup>22</sup>.

Other West African countries that have experienced an increase and diversification in migration to Europe are The Gambia (to Spain), Nigeria (to Spain and Italy), Côte d'Ivoire (to France and Italy), Mali (to Spain and France), and Burkina Faso (to Italy). European bound migration from other West African countries, and in particular Niger, Chad, Benin, Guinea and Togo, has remained extremely limited. In particular, migrants from Chad and Niger almost exclusively migrate within West Africa or to Libya, and hardly migrate to Europe at least until very recently.

#### ***4.4. Trans-Saharan and trans-Mediterranean migration flows***

##### *General estimates*

It is important to make a distinction between trans-Saharan and trans-Mediterranean migration flows. Largely because of their irregular character, we can only make tentative estimations on gross trans-Saharan flows of West African migrants to North Africa. Empirical field studies seem to generate more reliable data than official statistics. One empirical case study estimated that the yearly number of Africans migrating over the main trans-Saharan migration route between Agadez in Niger to Sebha in Libya amounted to "some tens of thousands", of which one to two thirds had the *intention* to migrate to Europe (Brachet 2005). Simon (2006) estimated that about 60,000 to 80,000 migrants would take this route every year, although the source of this estimate is not clear. According to Libyan authorities, each year between 75,000 and 100,000 foreign nationals would enter the country (EC 2004b). It has also been claimed that between 65,000 and 120,000 sub-Saharanans would enter the entire Maghreb yearly, of which 70-80 percent would go to Libya and 20-30 percent to Algeria (Simon 2006).

With regards to Mediterranean sea crossings, UNHCR (2005) estimated that in 2004 120,000 irregular migrants attempted to cross the *entire* Mediterranean, including 35,000 persons of sub-Saharan origin, although this number would be higher if we include Atlantic crossings to the Canary Islands. ICMPD estimated that about 100,000 migrants cross the Mediterranean (irregularly) each year, an estimated 30,000 of which would be of sub-Saharan origin, and 45,000 of which would be from the north Africa or the eastern Mediterranean (Simon 2006). Nevertheless, the empirical basis of such estimates is not always entirely clear. In the remainder of this section, we will

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<sup>22</sup> There is also a substantial Ghanaian community living in Germany (Van Hear 1998).

use data on apprehensions, regularisations and migration statistics to assess the magnitude and recent evolution of irregular migration from West Africa to North Africa to Europe.

### *Apprehension data*

Data on apprehensions of migrants along the border by either North African or European law enforcement agencies are the most commonly used data source to estimate irregular migration flows. However, apprehension figures are sensitive to control levels, the effectiveness with which smugglers operate, problems of counting the same migrants several times and the risk of manipulation by authorities. Due to a lack of transparency, the empirical basis of figures provided by North African states on immigration, apprehensions and the dismantling of supposed smuggling and trafficking networks are not verifiable. States might be tempted to manipulate such figures in the interest of foreign policy, for instance to boast their efforts in 'combating illegal migration' and to obscure failures. Moreover, apprehension figures only say something about irregular entries, and nothing about the larger group entering Europe legally. Finally, apprehension figures say little about irregular entry by other means than *pateras* and *pirogues*, which are the typical subject of apprehensions. Therefore, such data should be used with great caution.

Libyan authorities claim that in 2005 they apprehended some 40,000 people seeking to enter Italy, in comparison to 43,000 in 2003 and 54,000 in 2004. According to ICMPD (cited in EC 2004b), 50 percent of migrants transiting through Agadez in Niger would be from Nigeria, 15 percent from Niger, 30 percent from Ghana and 5 percent from other countries. In the same year, Algerian authorities would have arrested over 3000 migrants, possibly mainly from Niger and Mali, while Tunisian authorities claim to have apprehended an average number of 8,000 irregular migrants annually between 1998 and 2003 (UNODC 2006). The Moroccan authorities claim to have apprehended 30,000 irregular migrants in 2005 (source: Ministère de l'Intérieur). This would mean that Maghrebi authorities together apprehend approximately 80,000 migrants each year.

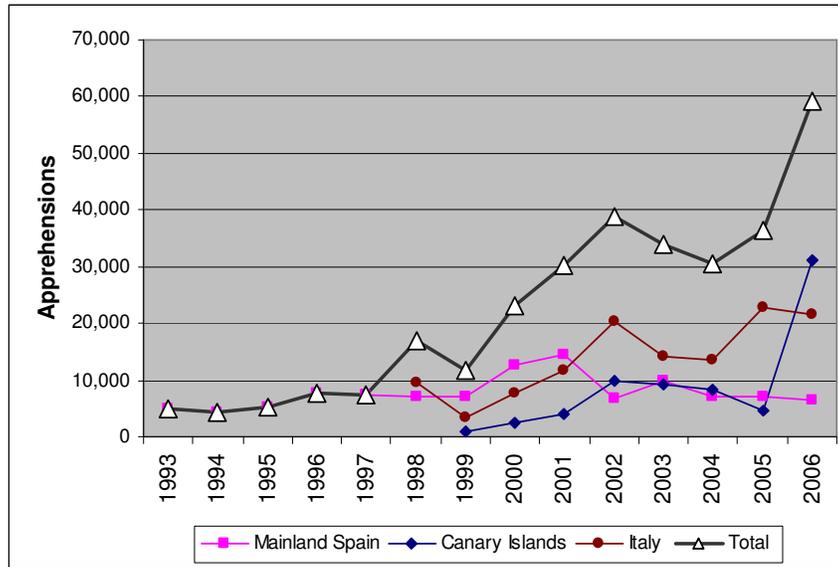
Over half of the 27,000 migrants apprehended by Moroccan police in 2004 would be of West African origin, with most migrants coming from Mali, Senegal, Ghana, and the Gambia, respectively<sup>23</sup>. Other important groups are Algerians, Congolese and Asians. About two thirds of the 20,000 irregular migrants apprehended by Libyan authorities between 2000 and 2003 would also be of West African origin, with a dominance of migrants from Chad, Niger, Mali and Ghana, respectively. Other migrants are mainly from Sudan. Over 90 percent of migrants apprehended by Algerian authorities between 2002 and 2003 were reported to be of West African origin, with most migrants originating from Niger, Mali and Guinea (Simon 2006). All Maghreb countries taken together, the most important nationality of apprehended migrants seems to be Mali, followed, in order of importance, by Niger, Guinea, Chad, Ghana, Senegal and Liberia.

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<sup>23</sup> Source: CARIM online database, [www.carim.org](http://www.carim.org). Accessed 4 April 2007.

Since the instauration of visa requirements for Maghrebi by Italy and Spain in 1990 and 1991, respectively, and the subsequent end of free seasonal and circular labour migration to these countries, migrants started to migrate illegally to the European continent<sup>24</sup>. Figure 4 reveals an increasing trend in the number of apprehensions since 1999. The increase in apprehensions might partly or mainly reflect intensified border patrolling. It is therefore less clear to what extent this indicates a real increase in irregular boat migration, although Carling (2007) hypothesised that the increase in apprehensions rather reflects the post 2000 increase in migration than more effective controls.

**Figure 4. Apprehension figures of irregular migrants in southern Europe 1993-2006**



Sources: See table 9 in annex.

However, apprehension data do reveal two other, more certain trends: the diversification of crossing points and the increasing sub-Saharan character of this migration. Intensified border controls at the Strait of Gibraltar have led to increasing migration to Italy, the Canary Islands and, to a lesser extent, Malta. The decrease in apprehensions after 2002, in particular at the Canary Islands, was presented as a success of increasing border controls. However, a steep increase in Italy in 2005 and a particularly sharp increase in apprehensions at the Canary Islands seem to have reversed this trend.

All apprehension figures show an increase in the proportion of mainly sub-Saharan migrants since 2000, who have now overtaken Maghrebis as the largest group crossing to Europe. Whereas in 1996 the 142 sub-Saharan Africans crossing to mainland Spain represented a mere 1.8 percent of all migrants, this share jumped from

<sup>24</sup> It is a common misconception that all or most North African and Turkish ‘guest workers’ migrated legally. For instance, among Moroccans spontaneous settlement and recruitment by companies has been more important than formal labour recruitment by agencies ever since the late 1960s. Most entered Europe as tourist, and subsequently overstayed their visas (cf. de Haas 2003). It was only since Spain and Italy introduced visa requirements, that irregular *entry* into Europe started to become a major policy issue.

2.0 to 20.3 percent between 1999 and 2000 (Lahlou 2005). This share further increased to 41.7 percent in 2002, 38 percent in 2003 and 50.6 percent in 2004 (Source: El Pais, 6 October 2002 and Simon 2006). 9.1 percent of the migrants apprehended on the Canary Islands in 2004 declared to be Moroccan and 86.8 percent from other, predominantly West African countries. This percentage went up from 11.8 percent in 1999 to 63.2 percent in 2000 (Coslovi 2007). Similar trends can be observed in Italy, where sub-Saharan migrants represented 30 percent of all migrants apprehended in 2002, although the shares of East African (in particular from Eritrea and Somalia), Middle Eastern and Asian migrants are higher than in Spain (Coslovi 2007; Simon 2006).

This does not necessarily mean that sub-Saharans are now the largest group of trans-Mediterranean irregular migrants. Moroccan and other Maghrebi migrants can often migrate through other means (hiding in vans, trucks, forged documents, tourist visas) through their family networks. This explains that sub-Saharan Africans are more likely to be apprehended. This certainly applies for apprehension data from North African authorities, who are more likely to arrest West Africans than their own nationals.

What can we conclude from apprehension figures on total irregular migration movements from West Africa to North Africa and Europe? In a recent report, UNODC (2006) added up the apprehension figures from North African and European authorities (over 100,000 per year), multiplied this by two (assuming that one third of illegal entries are detected), and concluded on this basis that “at least 200,000 to 300,000 Africans enter Europe yearly illegally, while another 100,000 try and are intercepted and countless others lose their way or their lives” (UNODC 2006:5).

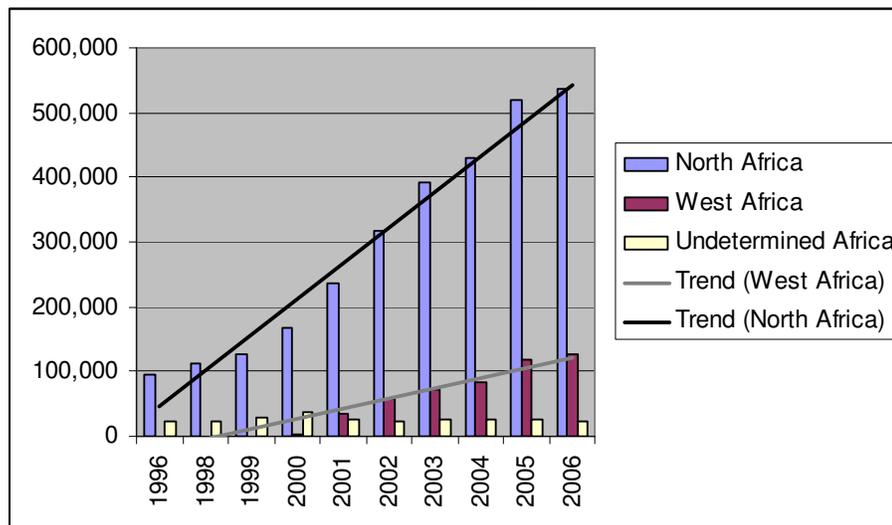
Although these estimates immediately started circulating in the press as “facts”, this is in fact a highly inaccurate estimate. The cited UNODC study entirely ignores reliability issues, the fact that migrants may be apprehended several times, and the fact that North Africa is a migration destination in its own right, which should preclude adding up North African and European apprehension figures. The following analysis of European immigration and regularisation data will cast further doubt on inflated estimates that hundreds of thousands Africans would enter Europe illegally annually.

#### *Evolution of regular and irregular migration stocks in Spain*

A second, indirect but probably more accurate method to estimate regular and irregular migration flows is to study the evolution of the numbers of regular West African migrants in the main European destination countries over the past decade. This is a useful exercise, because irregular and regular migration are likely to be correlated (Allasino et al 2004), and because increases in regular migrant stocks largely reflect regularisation of formerly irregular migrants. The fact that most irregular migrants can and do register with Spanish municipal registers (*padrón*), provides a unique opportunity to assess the magnitude of irregular migration through comparison of such municipal data with data on migrants possessing a residence permit (Sandell 2006). Triangulating these two data sources with data from the recent

regularisations allows an assessment of the number of irregular migrants per origin country and the net yearly irregular immigration.

**Figure 5. Number of North and West Africans registered in Spanish municipalities (*padrón*)**



Source: Own calculations from INE (data accessed 20 February 2006 at [www.ine.es](http://www.ine.es))

Figure 5 shows the increase in West and North African populations registered in Spanish municipal registers (*padrón*) between 1996 and 2006. Although North Africans are in the majority, the number of West Africans has increased over the past decade, but as the trend lines shows, at a less steep rate. Nevertheless, the absolute increase in recent years has been rather spectacular, from 3,200 in 2000 to 127,000 in 2006, or 20,500 per year. These data confirm the hypothesis formulated above that 2000 has indeed been a turning point in irregular West African migration to Europe.

Through careful comparison of the municipal registers with residence permit data it is possible to estimate how many migrants are without legal status, although the difference between the two registers should not be interpreted as an *exact* measure of the share of irregular migrants due to different kind of possible measurement errors (for an elaborate discussion see Sandell 2006). Table 5 displays the relevant data for West African and, for comparative purposes, North African migrants in Spain. These data suggest that 41 percent of West Africans against 20 percent of North Africans had irregular status at the eve of the regularisation of 2005. The analysis strongly suggests that a more recent migration history to Spain is related to a higher proportion of irregular migrants.

The last two columns of table 5 assess the effects of the last regularisation, which started in 2005. Between 2004 and 2006, the number of legal immigrants from registered West African countries increased from 69,000 to 107,000, which is an increase of 32 percent compared to the 118,000 estimated legal and irregular residents on 1 January 2005. Of the 3,022,000 foreigners possessing a Spanish residence permit on 31 December 2006, 709,000 were of African origin. An approximate number of 107,000 migrants were West African, or 4.6 percent of all non-EU immigrants living in Spain, whereas north-Africans account for 24.9 of the total non-EU population. West Africans have also not figured very prominently in earlier Spanish

regularisations. In 1985-1986, 1991, 1996, and 2000 Moroccans were the dominant group, with Ecuadorians taking over this positions in the 2001 and 2005 regularisations (OECD 2006a).

**Table 5. Foreigners registered in Spain**

Origin country	Registered residence permit 31/12/2004	Municipal registers 01/01/2005	Difference as % of total registered at municipalities	Registered residence permits 31/12/2006	Difference residence permit 2006-2004 as % of 2005 municipal data
Benin	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Burkina Faso	NA	NA	NA	522	
Cameroon	1,532	3,254	52.9	2,612	33.2
Cape Verde	2,143	2,765	22.5	2,350	7.5
Chad	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Cote d'Ivoire	552	1,340	58.8	1,042	36.6
Gabon	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Gambia, The	12,834	11,601	-10.6	16,177	28.8
Ghana	4,633	10,165	54.4	8,989	42.9
Guinea	3,151	7,049	55.3	5,238	29.6
Guinea-Bissau	2,424	4,513	46.3	3,228	17.8
Liberia	315	1,099	71.3	301	-1.3
Mali	4,465	11,794	62.1	11,187	57.0
Mauritania	5,723	8,909	35.8	7,843	23.8
Niger	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Nigeria	11,248	25,611	56.1	19,074	30.6
Senegal	19,343	27,880	30.6	28,560	33.1
Sierra Leone	575	1,707	66.3	600	1.5
Togo	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
<b>Total</b>	<b>68,938</b>	<b>117,687</b>	<b>41.4</b>	<b>107,201</b>	<b>32.5</b>
<i>North Africa</i>					
Algeria	27,532	46,232	40.4	39,433	25.7
Egypt	1,683	2,610	35.5	2,249	21.7
Libya	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Morocco	386,958	468,797	17.5	543,721	33.4
Tunisia	1,013	1,693	40.2	1,327	18.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>417,186</b>	<b>519,332</b>	<b>19.7</b>	<b>586,730</b>	<b>32.6</b>

Source: Own calculations based on INE and Secretaría de Estado de Inmigración y Emigración (data accessed 20 February 2006 at [www.ine.es](http://www.ine.es) and [extranjeros.mtas.es/](http://extranjeros.mtas.es/)).

Using the same data, Sandell (2006) assessed that Africans account for 12 percent (91,000) of Spain's irregular migrant stock of about 765,000, of which half were Moroccans. He estimated that yearly immigration to Spain has been remarkably stable over the 2001-2006 period at a level of 650,000 per year, that there has been no major 'pull effect' of the recent regularisation, and that total irregular migration has been around 447,000 in 2005.

Taking into consideration that African migrants account for 12 percent of the total number of estimated irregular migrants, and assuming that this reflects their share in current migration flows, it can be estimated that the total number of Africans successfully entering Spain in an illegal way hover around 54,640 ( $447,000 * 0.12$ ) per year. During the 2005 legalisation campaign, West Africans only accounted for 28 percent of the total African population. If we apply this to the above estimates, this would correspond with an annual net irregular immigration from West Africa of 15,000 each year, suggesting that three quarters of the 20,500 yearly increase of West Africans is through irregular migration. Because this figure also includes overstayers, the actual number of irregular *entries* into Spain should be lower.

At first sight, these estimates seem at odds with the more than 35,000 apprehensions of predominantly sub-Saharan migrants in Spain over 2006, up from 11,781 in 2005. This seems to corroborate the hypothesis that there has indeed been a recent increase in irregular entries, in particular through the increasing popularity of the direct West Africa – Canary Islands route. Furthermore, if we take into account that many migrants migrate onwards from Spain to other destinations in Europe, the gross irregular immigration movement into Spain is likely to be substantially higher than net irregular immigration. It is therefore important to look also at the evolution of West African populations in other important destination countries.

### *Italy*

Unfortunately, there is no data similar to Spain from Italy, the other main port of entry to Europe. Also in Italy, sub-Saharan citizens form a relatively small, but rapidly expanding population. On the basis of regularisation data, it has been estimated that the total irregular migrant population is 700,000 (OECD 2006a). Moroccans dominated the 1987-1988, 1990 and 1999 regularisations, but this position was taken over by Albanians and Romanians in 1998 and 2002, respectively. The only West-African country appearing relatively predominantly in the Italian regularisations is Senegal, which is the biggest immigrant group from the region. This also tends to be the dominant West African origin country in regularisations in Spain and Portugal (OECD 2006a). In Italy there has been an increase in the number of regular west-African citizens from 141,000 in 2003 to 211,000 in 2006, an increase of 23,000 per year (source: [www.istat.it](http://www.istat.it)). Although this only includes the legally residing population, the total West African immigrant population in Italy is significantly higher than in Spain.

### *Portugal*

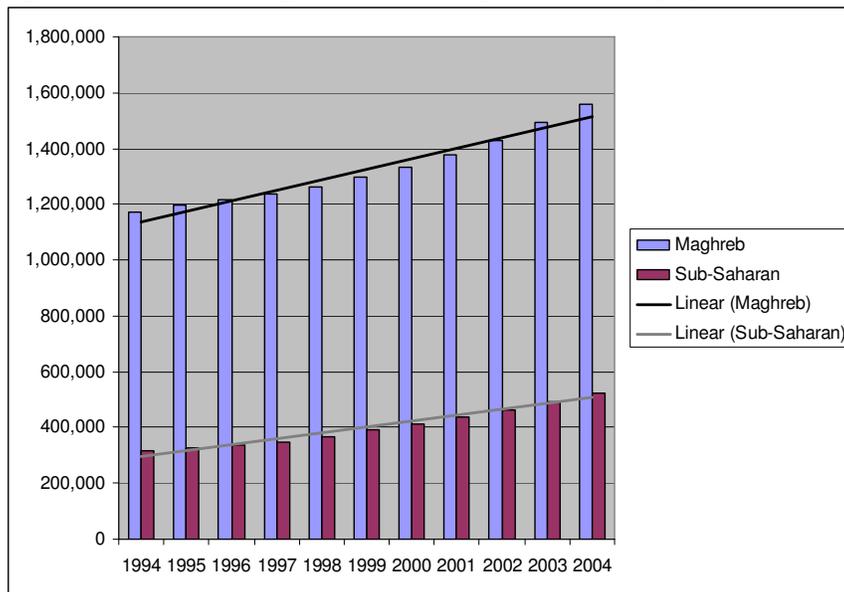
On the basis of regularisation data, the total irregular migrant population living in Portugal has been estimated at 185,000 (OECD 2006a). The population holding African nationalities are predominantly from the former Portuguese colonies Cape Verde (56,000) Angola (28,000), Guinea-Bissau (21,000) in 2006. The combined population of nationals from these countries has increased from 83,450 in 2000 to 105,388 in 2006, or an average increase of 3,660 per year (data for 2006 from Serviço de Estrangeiros e Fronteiras). In the Portuguese regularisations of 1992-1993 and 1996, Angolans and Cape Verdians belonged to main beneficiaries, but this position

was taken over by Ukrainians and Brazilians in the 2001 regularisation, mirroring increasing migration from Latin America and Eastern Europe in Spain (OECD 2006a).

*France*

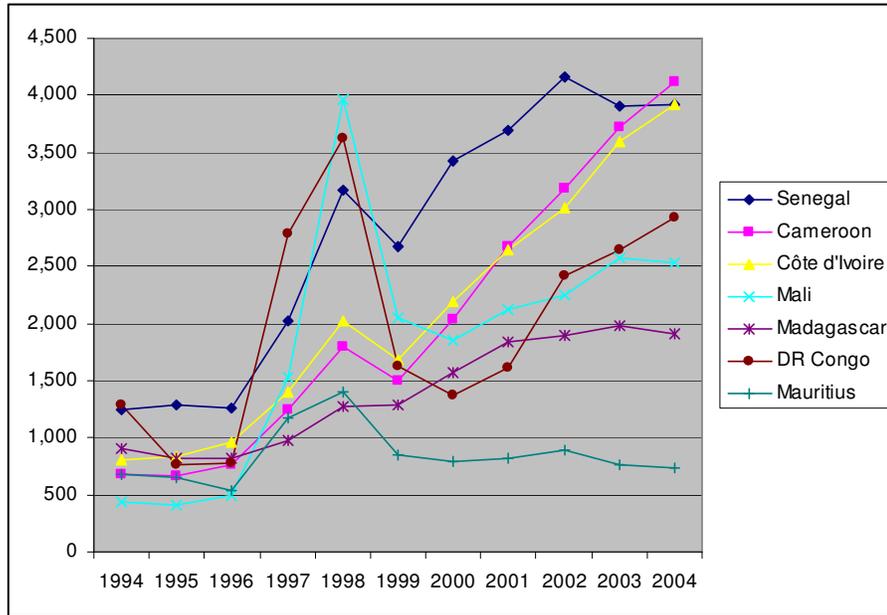
In France, the number of sub-Saharan migrants has increased from 376,000 in 1999 to 570,000 in mid 2004, or an increase of 35,000 per year, seven out of ten who come from former French colonies (Borrel 2006). Figure 6 shows that, as in Spain, the growth in absolute number of the sub-Saharan population between 1994 and 2004 has been slower (21,000 per year on average) than the growth of the Maghrebi population (37,000 per year). Figure 7 shows that sub-Saharan immigration has remarkably increased since 1996, with the sharpest increases from Côte d’Ivoire, Cameroon and Senegal.

**Figure 6. Estimates of the growth of the foreign born African population in France**



Source: Own estimates on basis of data of [www.ined.fr](http://www.ined.fr) and [www.insee.fr](http://www.insee.fr)

**Figure 7. Immigration rates of selected sub-Saharan countries to France, 1994-2004**

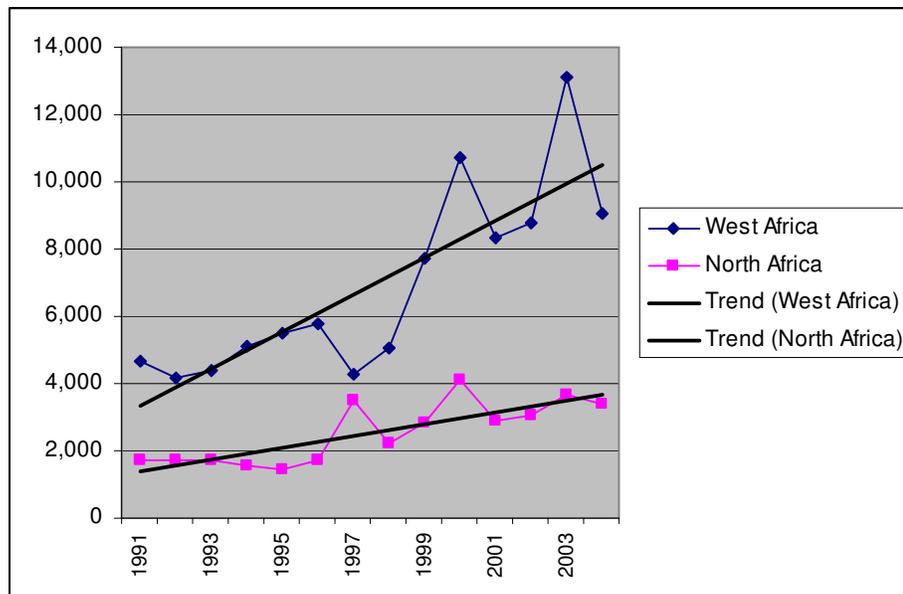


Source: [www.ined.fr](http://www.ined.fr)

### United Kingdom

In line with evidence from other countries, recent data from the UK equally show an increased trend in West African immigration over the past 15 years. These figures only include migration from the main origin countries Ghana (30,495 immigrants between 1991 and 2004), Nigeria (55,835) and Sierra Leone (10,365). In recent years total immigration from these counties has been around 10,000 annually (see figure 8).

**Figure 8. Immigration rates from West and North Africa to the UK, 1991-2004, by nationality**

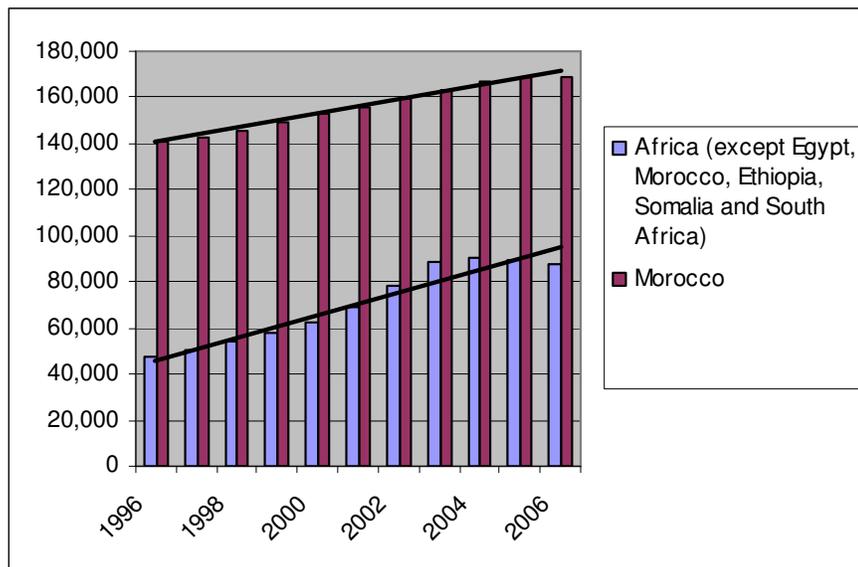


Source: Migration Information Source, Global Data Center [www.migrationinformation.org](http://www.migrationinformation.org); 'West Africa' comprises Nigeria, Ghana and Sierra Leone.

## Netherlands

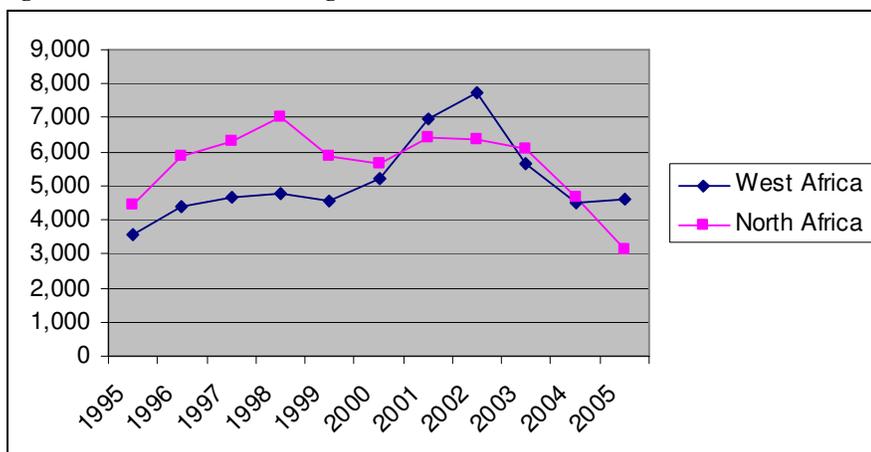
Data from the Netherlands presented in figures 9 and 10 suggest a substantial yearly increase in the number of West Africans born immigrants since 1996. In fact, averaging 5,000 per year, this increase is faster than, for instance, the increase of the Moroccan born. It is quite remarkable that immigration of West Africans has been roughly equal to that of Moroccans, a striking change compared to previous migration, where the latter group clearly dominated. Corroborating earlier evidence, there was an increase in West African immigration after 1999. However, after 2002, there has been a remarkable *decrease* in legal immigration. After 2004, the sub Saharan population has even decreased in absolute size. This seems to reflect nationwide trends of decreasing immigration and increasing emigration in the Netherlands, where hardened policies towards immigration and immigrants have incited immigrant groups such as Ghanaians (and Somalis) to migrate to other European countries (Mazzucato 2005; Van Liempt 2007).

**Figure 9. Growth of African foreign born populations in the Netherlands**



Source: [www.cbs.nl](http://www.cbs.nl)

Figure 10. Gross African immigration to the Netherlands



Source: [www.cbs.nl](http://www.cbs.nl)

#### 4.5. The myth of invasion: Estimates of irregular migration flows

Since 2000, the combined registered immigrant population born in West Africa living in Spain, Italy, France, Portugal and the Netherlands has increased with approximately 73,000 per year. Taking into account that about one quarter of registered West Africans is living in the UK, and considering smaller communities in other countries, the total increase is likely to be around 100,000 per year. Because this represents the *net* increase, the actual annual number of entries is higher. On the other hand, part of this increase does not reflect new entries, but the conversion from irregularity into regularity.

We have estimated net irregular migration from West Africa to Spain at 15,000 each year. Spain's estimated yearly increase of West African migrant populations (20,500) accounts for about 20 percent of the estimated total yearly increase in Europe. This leads to a maximum estimate of 75,000 ( $15,000 / 0.2$ ) irregular immigrants per year. If we apply the above-mentioned survey data by Eurostat/NIDI (Schoorl et al 2000) estimating that about one third of irregular Senegalese and Ghanaian immigrants in Spain and Italy, respectively, have entered the country illegally (compared to two thirds of overstayers), we reach a provisional estimate of 25,000 successful irregular entries of West Africans each year.

Assuming that the importance of irregular entry for West Africans has increased since the Eurostat/NIDI research was completed in the 1990s, the actual number of illegal entries is possibly higher. On the other hand, this estimate is based on Spanish data, while irregular entry is probably less important in the UK and France where West African immigrant populations are already more established. This would lead to lower overall estimates. Although these estimates should be interpreted with extreme prudence because of such uncertainties, our estimate of 25,000 successful illegal entries comes rather close to earlier estimates that 30,000 to 35,000 sub-Saharan Africans (predominantly from West Africa) would successfully cross the Mediterranean irregularly each year (Simon 2006; UNHCR 2005). Assuming that 65,000 and 120,000 sub-Saharaners enter the entire Maghreb yearly (Simon 2006), this

leads us to estimate that between 20 (25,000/120,000) and 38 (25,000/120,000) percent of trans-Saharan migrants eventually cross to Europe. This clearly counters common views that reduce North Africa to a transit zone.

What does this say about apprehension rates? Between 2002 and 2005, European apprehension figures fluctuated between 30,000 and 40,000. Assuming that half of these migrants are from sub-Saharan Africa, this leads to an annual interception rate of 15,000 to 20,000. From this, it appears that between one half and two thirds of irregular entries go undetected. However, the estimated 25,000 successful irregular entries also include the many West Africans migrants who are apprehended but eventually released. Being detected is not equal to being unsuccessful. So, the actual rate of undetected entries seems to lie lower.

It is important to stress that the underlying assumptions (in particular about the proportion of migrants attempting illegal entry versus other methods) of these estimates are fundamentally uncertain. However, it does seem rather certain that the total number of successful irregular entries of West Africans into the European Union should be counted in the order of several tens of thousands rather than hundreds of thousands. According to current estimates, these irregular entries would represent approximately one third of total West African (regular and irregular) immigration of around 100,000. Although irregular immigration has apparently accelerated in 2006 with increasing boat migration from West Africa to the Canary Islands, this clearly dispels any idea of an African exodus.

## **5. Factors driving migration: questioning push-pull approaches**

It is common to portray regular and irregular migration from West Africa to Europe as massive and to attribute this “African exodus” to circumstances of extreme poverty, high unemployment and (civil) war (Adepoju 2002; Fall 2003; Lahlou 2005). Drought, environmental degradation and, increasingly, climate change are frequently mentioned as factors driving African migration (Carr 2005; Henry et al 2004a). This complies with stereotypical representations of Africa as a continent plagued by widespread misery of various kinds. As Diatta and Mbow (1999:243) argued: “Continuing desertification, globalization of the economy and accelerated pauperization have intensified the human exodus”.

The common thread of such analyses is to interpret migration implicitly or explicitly as development failure (see for example Cross et al 2006). Migrants themselves are commonly portrayed as passive victims who are desperately pushed out of the African continent by external forces, and who fall easily prey to unscrupulous traffickers and smugglers. On the conceptual level, the common focus is on ‘root causes’ such as poverty, which are presented as exogenous factors which ‘cause’ migration. Such interpretations reflect equilibrium push-pull models of migration, which see migration as a linear function of spatial differentials in development levels between the origin and destination areas, generally seen in dichotomous terms. Most analyses, though, put remarkably more emphasis on push than pull factors.

Although they make intuitive sense, such analyses are highly problematic for theoretical and empirical reasons. Although the truism holds that people generally move in search of better livelihood opportunities, it is doubtful whether the push-pull framework is of much analytical use to explain specific forms of migration and migrant behaviour. First, push-pull models tend to have the character of rather ambiguous, ad-hoc lists of factors that are likely to play a role in explaining migration, but which often confuse indirect and direct causes of migration as well as macro and micro levels of analysis. Moreover, they do generally neither specify nor allow for empirical tests concerning the specific weight of various factors explaining migration. Because push and pull factors are generally mirrored in each other, they also tend to be two sides of the same coin. Because together they provide the perception of difference between “here” and “there”, they have limited heuristic value (cf. McDowell & de Haan 1997).

Analyses suggesting that theoretical concepts or macro-level factors such as “population pressure”, “globalization”, environmental degradation or structural adjustment programmes “cause” migration are deterministic in ignoring many other factors influencing people’s choices and the indirect rather than direct ways in which such macro-phenomena can be related to migration. Otherwise, it would for instance not be possible to explain why many people move from sparsely populated and non-degraded areas to densely populated and highly degraded areas. They also tend to commit a classical “ecological fallacy” of making inferences about individual migrants based on macro-level correlations. Macro-structural factors do not necessarily “explain” individual migration decision making. It is rather the actual possibility to build up a satisfactory livelihood and aspiration levels that determine an individuals’ propensity to migrate.

Besides these conceptual problems, push-pull models are also inconsistent with empirical evidence. The idea that extreme *poverty* and *underdevelopment* has provoked *mass* migration from West Africa to Europe is fundamentally flawed. First, despite recent increases, West African emigration to Europe has not been massive by any standards, and is modest compared to migration movements from other parts of the world. One can also cast fundamental empirical doubt on the assumed nature of the macro-level trends that are commonly thought to “produce” migration. For instance, the general idea that the Sahel zone is suffering under desertification is challenged by recent evidence of increasing greenness in at least some areas in the Sahel (Olsson et al 2005). It is also unlikely that relatively short-term changes in migration patterns can be attributed to long-term patterns of climate change, the nature and impact of which are still unclear.

Second, there is reason to question the assumed relationship between development and migration. If poverty and underdevelopment were the main causes of migration, how can it then be explained that West Africa, despite its (extremely) poor and often unstable status, has *much* lower rates of out-migration to Europe and North America than considerably wealthier countries in, for instance, North Africa, Latin America or Asia? Push-pull models assume an inversely proportional linear relationship between differences in human and economic development and the rate of out-migration. This is conflicting with mounting evidence that social and economic development

increases people's capabilities, and therefore tend to coincide initially with *increasing*, not decreasing propensities to migrate (De Haas 2005a).

Push pull models also tend to ignore people's aspirations, which are assumed constant, whereas in reality social and economic development and general processes of globalisation typically tend to raise people's aspirations. Increases in school attendance, media exposure and improved awareness about better opportunities for personal development in Europe are likely to be among the factors that have also increased aspirations of young West Africans to migrate.

In particular, South-North migration requires substantial *capabilities* and *aspirations* to assume the costs and risks of migrating. This explains why international migrants are generally not among the poorest and why the globe's most important emigration countries (e.g., Mexico, Morocco, Turkey, Philippines) do not typically belong to the least developed countries. Development seems inevitably accompanied by increasing mobility and migration. Only in the longer run, after several decades of sustained growth and progressive convergence of income and opportunity gaps with destination countries, does net emigration tend to decrease and immigration to increase, after which countries tend to transform from net emigration to net immigration countries (De Haas 2005a)<sup>25</sup>. Hence, the relation between migration and development is neither linear nor inversely proportional. Growth, development and decreasing differentials with destination countries tend rather to have an inverted J-curve or U-curve effect on emigration, steeply increasing in the initial phases of development and only later gradually decreasing. This phenomenon has been described in the literature as the 'migration hump' (Martin & Taylor 1996).

In this light, and besides factors such as geographical distance, the relatively underdeveloped status of West Africa might paradoxically explain its comparatively *low* migration rates to Europe. If West Africans were slightly wealthier, better educated and have better access to trans-continental migrant networks, migration would possibly have been more massive.

Is it really a coincidence that the West-African countries with the highest rates of Europe-bound labour migration (Cape Verde, Ghana and Senegal<sup>26</sup>) do *not* belong to the most deprived, isolated and unstable West African countries experiencing the highest population growth? Van Hear (1998:210) pointed at the paradoxical fact that the acceleration of Ghanaian emigration in the later 1980s occurred when Ghana's economy was picking up and when democratic reforms started to be implemented. Despite its relative prosperity in comparison to other countries in the region, emigration continued, a phenomenon which is difficult to explain by using a push-pull framework.

Likewise, the empirical evidence on the influence of environmental factors such as drought on migration is mixed (cf. Findlay 1994; Henry et al 2003; Henry et al

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<sup>25</sup> This is what has happened in the past few decades with southern European countries such as Spain, Italy, Greece and Portugal and also with Ireland, as well as with several southeast Asian countries such as Malaysia, Taiwan and South Korea. Countries such as Turkey, Tunisia and Mexico might be on the threshold of such a transformation.

<sup>26</sup> In absolute terms, Nigerian South-North migration is substantial, but in proportion to its total population, Nigerian emigration is rather low.

2004b), but does not seem to sustain the idea of *mass* migration provoked by environmental degradation. Similarly, there is evidence that most components of rural development either have no effect on migration or rather tend to encourage internal migration (Beauchemin & Schoumaker 2005), casting fundamental doubt on the assumption that migrants can be kept “down on the farm” by development projects (Rhoda 1983). Although the cited studies focus on internal migration, the idea that development stimulates migration seems to apply even more for international migration, because it generally requires more resources and capabilities.

Besides failing to understand the fundamental non-linear character of the development – migration relationship, push-pull approaches focusing on macro-level ‘root causes’ tend to ignore the agency of migrants by portraying them as passive pawns being pushed out of Africa by macro-level crises. Such representation conflicts with empirical evidence that, rather than a desperate response to destitution, migration within and from West Africa to Europe is generally a deliberate choice and an investment by reasonably prosperous household and families to enhance their livelihoods (Hampshire 2002; Wouterse 2006).

Through their focus on ‘African misery’ allegedly pushing desperate migrants out of the continent, dominant public and academic discourses also tend to obscure the vital demand side of this migration. Instead of desperately leaving the continent, most migrants are consciously migrating to countries such as Libya, Spain and Italy, where there is a high demand for cheap migrant labour. Irregular migrants enter well-rooted and flourishing local underground economies, the existence of which often predates irregular immigration (cf. Reyneri 2001). Although armed conflict and economic decline in West Africa have certainly decreased livelihood opportunities in the region, this migration is difficult to explain without taking into account the sustained demand for cheap migrant labour in Libya and Europe.

Politicians, the media and scholars commonly claim that migrants have exaggerated dreams about the good life in the European “El Dorado”. This is also the rationale behind awareness campaigns aiming to discourage Africans from migrating. However, even if impressions of Europe as some kind of paradise were too rosy, the image that there are more opportunities overseas does reflect reality at least to some extent. Salaries are many times higher even in the informal sector and regularization is a realistic prospect. Notwithstanding all the problems migrants may face, and although distorted views might prevail, the perception that international migration is the most secure way towards more social and economic opportunities is more than a mirage.

A final shortcoming of push-pull approaches is their a-historic nature. Migration in and from West Africa is anything but a random process. People tend to migrate from specific places in West Africa to specific places in North Africa and Europe in a spatially clustered, concentrated, and non-random fashion. While the functioning of migrant networks largely explains why migration movements are structured and tend to gain their own momentum, the initial creation of migration ‘corridors’ can generally be traced back to political economic processes or shocks of a more general nature.

In the West African case, we have seen that political economic *forces majeures*, such as colonisation, the Oil Crisis and its aftermath, regional warfare and economic decline in West Africa's migration poles, the UN embargo prompting Libya to embark upon its pan-African policies, and the segmentation of labour markets in Libya and Europe, have exerted a high influence in shaping contemporary migration patterns. Such political-economic shifts have generally been more important in determining migration than migration policies *per se*. Rather than standing alone, migration policies are often a function of more general political-economic processes, which is particularly evident in the case of Libya's migration policies (Pliez 2004a). If migration policies do not match economic realities, the result is irregular migration.

Colonialism had a huge impact in creating new internal-coastal migration patterns that have persisted to the present day. Until 1990, (post) colonial bonds also shaped most migration of students and skilled West Africans to France and the UK. This changed when Libya embarked upon its pan-African policies, leading to a surge in trans-Saharan migration. Increasing presence of West Africans in North Africa in combination with the persistent demand for cheap migrant labour in Europe eventually led to an increase in trans-Mediterranean migration to Europe since 2000, through which a connection between trans-Saharan and Euro-Mediterranean migration systems was established.

Initial migration patterns tend to be reproduced through the functioning of networks, giving rise to migration systems that link places and countries of origin and destination through relatively stable exchanges of people, goods, capital (remittances), ideas, and information. In particular migrant networks tend to facilitate continuing labour, family and undocumented migration over formally closed borders (cf. Massey et al 1998). The evolution of trans-Saharan and trans-Mediterranean migration systems exemplify that, once migration systems are established, migration movements gain their own momentum, largely independent from their immediate causes.

Through migrant networks, remittances, and social and economic change in migrant sending communities, migration tends to create the social and economic dynamics, to sustain the process. Because of these self-reinforcing dynamics, migration tends to follow historical migration patterns. Thus, *current* migration patterns from West Africa cannot be explained without taking into account regional and global political-economic *forces majeures* of the past, which still leave their 'footprint' on actual migration patterns through the functioning of migrant networks. This partly explains why the colonial Francophone/Anglophone divides still matter in current migrant patterns, although decreasingly so, and why regions and countries that have got involved in the migration process to Europe at a relatively early stage, such as Senegal and Ghana, still dominate West African migration to Europe.

## 6. Policy approaches towards irregular migration in Europe, North and West Africa

### 6.1. Increasing border controls and ‘externalisation’

Since the 1990s, European states have mainly responded to persistent irregular immigration by intensifying border controls. This has involved the deployment of semi-military and military forces and hardware in the prevention of migration by sea (Lutterbeck 2006). When groups of immigrants started to push their way into Ceuta and Melilla, fences were erected by 2000 (Goldschmidt 2006). Over the past decade, Spain has attempted to seal off its maritime borders. The government installed an early-warning radar system (SIVE or Integrated System of External Vigilance) at the Strait of Gibraltar, a system that has recently been extended to the Canary Islands (Lahlou 2005).

EU countries have also reacted by attempting to ‘externalize’ border controls towards the Maghreb countries by transforming them into a “buffer zone” to reduce migratory pressures at Europe’s southern border (Goldschmidt 2006; Lutterbeck 2006; Perrin 2005; Schuster 2005). They have done so by pressuring North African countries to clamp down on irregular migration and to readmit irregular migrants in exchange for development aid, financial support for border controls, military equipment, and, particularly in Italy, limited numbers of temporary work permits for immigrants (Chaloff 2005; Cuttitta 2005). To reduce immigration, the EU is also seeking to boost cooperation on migration issues in the context of the European Mediterranean Association Agreements (EMAA) all North African countries except Libya signed with the EU (De Haas 2005b; Hoebink 2005). Facing the recent changes in migration patterns, in particular Italy and Spain have recently concluded similar agreements with sub-Saharan countries.

In addition to toughening border controls, a second policy “solution” recently advocated by African states and humanitarian NGOs is to spur development through aid and trade or even a “Marshall plan for Africa”<sup>27</sup> which is believed would remove the need to migrate (De Haas 2006d). A third “solution” advocated by governments and NGOs in Europe and Africa is the launch of information campaigns aiming to discourage migration through raising awareness among would-be migrants on the perils of the journey and the difficult life in Europe or to encourage migrants to return (see for instance Diatta & Mbow 1999). In practice, though, the emphasis of policies has been on increasing border controls, and development-instead-of-migration policies are often mainly mentioned *en passant*.

Since 2003, Spain and Morocco, as well as Italy and Libya, have started to collaborate in joint naval patrols and readmission agreements in return for aid. In 2006, Spain received limited support from Frontex, the new EU external border control agency, to patrol the routes between Senegal, Mauritania, Cape Verde, and the Canary Islands by airplane, helicopter, and patrol boat. Frontex also intends to coordinate patrols

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<sup>27</sup> Der Spiegel, 6 October 2005.

involving Italy, Greece, and Malta to monitor the area between Malta, the Italian island of Lampedusa, and the Tunisian and Libyan coast.

In 2003-2004, Morocco and Tunisia passed new immigration laws that institute severe punishments for (collaboration with) irregular immigration and human smuggling. According to critics, these new laws which criminalise irregular migration show that Morocco and Tunisia are bowing to pressure from the EU to play the role of Europe's "policemen" (Belguendouz 2005; Boubakri 2006). Although the new Moroccan law makes reference to relevant international conventions, and seems to be a nominal improvement, migrants' and refugees' rights are often ignored in practice (Collyer 2006; Schuster 2005). Morocco and Tunisia are under pressure to institute tougher immigration and visa rules for sub-Saharan Africans (Boubakri 2006). For instance, Senegalese, who used to circulate in Morocco without too many problems (Goldschmidt 2006) and who can still travel visa-free, now face major harassment when arriving at airports (Pian 2005). Tunisia has built several detention centres for irregular migrants (Cuttitta 2005). Both Morocco and Tunisia have regularly brought irregular migrants to their borders where they are left to their fate (Cuttitta 2005; Goldschmidt 2006).

To reduce immigration, the EU is also seeking to boost cooperation on migration issues in the context of the European Mediterranean Association Agreements (EMAA) all North African countries except Libya signed with the EU, which should lead to the establishment of free trade areas in the next decade. EU support for economic transition of North African countries is mainly implemented through the MEDA (*Mesures d'Accompagnement*) program. Significant funds from the MEDA program target the stated goal of immigration reduction. For instance, of the total MEDA aid budget of 426 million euros for 2000-2006 allocated to Morocco, 115 million euros (27 percent) are being spent to "break out of the circle of weak growth, unemployment, poverty, and migration" through support for the control of irregular immigration and rural development programs (De Haas 2005b; Hoebink 2005).

The EU is putting increasing emphasis on collaboration with Maghreb states on border control and readmission. Following up the communication issued by the European Commission in 2002 on "Integrating migration issues into the EU's external relations", the EU adopted a regulation establishing a programme for financial and technical assistance to third countries in the area of migration and asylum (AENEAS) in March 2004. Its programme for 2004-2008 has an overall expenditure of 250 million euros. Among its aims are "to address the root causes of migratory movements", to forge "a partnership on migration stemming", and "specific and concrete initiatives to help these countries to increase their capacity in the area of migration management". The programme allocates funds to actions on the development of legal migration, drafting of legislation and development of national practices as regards international protection and asylum, stemming "illegal" migration and readmission and reintegration of returnees (EC 2003).

Although Libya has not signed an association agreement with the EU, Libya has collaborated more closely with EU countries, and Italy in particular, than any other North African country in terms of border controls and the establishment of detention camps for irregular migrants (Andrijasevic 2006; Hamood 2006; HRW 2006; Pliez 2005; Schuster 2003). Although initially mainly a response to a strong anti-immigrant

sentiment within Libya, this policy shift also became part of a broader geopolitical move, and should be seen in the broader context of Al-Qadhafi's successful efforts to regain international respectability, to lift the embargo, and to attract foreign direct investments.

A cooperation treaty was signed in December 2000 between Libya and Italy related to combating drugs, terrorism, organised crime and undocumented migration. In 2004, Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi and the Libyan leader Al-Qadhafi made a pact to stop irregular migration to Italy, with Libya allegedly agreeing to deport unauthorized sub-Saharan migrants over Libyan territory to their origin countries and to seal off its southern frontiers. Two months after the Libyan-Italian agreement, the EU agreed to lift its 18-year arms embargo on Libya. Only few days later Libya accepted for the first time to readmit illegal migrants from Italy in October 2004 (Cuttitta 2005). Although many other factors played a role, Italy had lobbied hard to lift the ban so that Libya could import equipment to better control its borders.

Italy financed the construction of three detention camps for undocumented immigrants in Libya. Libya has also been collaborating closely with Italy in concerted expulsions of undocumented migrants from Italy via Libya to their alleged origin countries. Between August 2003 and December 2004 alone, the Italian government financially contributed to 50 charter flights from Libya that returned 5,688 people to their alleged origin countries, including Bangladesh, Egypt, Eritrea, Ghana, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Pakistan, Sudan, and Syria (Hamood 2006; HRW 2006). In addition to the concerted expulsions Italy has provided equipments and organised numerous training programmes to train Libyan police officers (EC 2004b).

One of these training programmes, *Across Sahara* (1.9 M€), is funded by Italy and the EC and managed by IOM and involves the training of police officers from Libya and from Niger and aims at creating a network with 14 police bases to patrol the border between Niger and Libya. The Programme for the Enhancement of Transit and Irregular Migration Management in Libya (TRIM, 2.7 M€), which is equally funded by Italy and the EC, aims to support capacity building of Libyan authorities in migration management and provide reintegration assistance to stranded migrants in Libya in collaboration with sending countries. The US embassy in Tripoli has allocated 60,000 US\$ to support counter-trafficking (CT) activities.

## ***6.2. Effects of policies on migration patterns***

The collaboration of countries such as Morocco in migration controls and internal policing has recently been described as 'effective' (UNODC 2006). Although collaboration might have been rather effective in a strictly technical sense, efforts to prevent migrants from entering Europe have had a series of unintended, often counterproductive effects. First, increasing repression in North Africa has led some migrants who intended to stay there to reconsider their plans and to move to Europe. Second, the use of more diverse and longer land and maritime migration routes has led to an unintended increase in the area that EU countries have to monitor to "combat" irregular migration. Third, smuggling methods have become more professional, with smugglers using larger and faster custom-made boats and zodiacs

instead of fishing boats. Smugglers also adopt new landing techniques such as arriving in groups of boats and fanning out when approaching the coast, which makes it difficult to intercept all boats (Carling 2007). There has also been an increase in the number of minors and pregnant women attempting to cross, who are generally more difficult to expel (De Haas 2006c; Kastner 2007). Fourth, these policies and the anti-immigrant discourses that accompany them have prompted and legitimised a notable increase in institutionalised racism and the violation the rights of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees in North Africa (Collyer 2006; Hamood 2006; Schuster 2005).

Rather than curbing immigration, the evidence presented so far suggests that increasing surveillance in the Strait of Gibraltar and elsewhere has led to professionalisation of smuggling methods and a general diversification in attempted crossing points since 1999 (Barros et al 2002; Boubakri 2004:5; De Haas 2005b; Fadloullah et al 2000:113-115). Migrants now cross the sea from more eastern places on the Moroccan coast to mainland Spain; from the Tunisian coast to the Italian islands; from Libya to Italy and Malta; from the Western Sahara to the Canary Islands; from Algeria to Spain. In recent years, more and more West Africans avoid crossing the Sahara and North Africa altogether by sailing directly from Mauritania, Senegal, and other West African countries to the Canary Islands. The surge in arrivals at the Canary Islands in 2006 suggests that there has even been a real increase in the total number of Africans entering Europe illegally. There has equally been a diversification in overland, trans-Saharan routes in response to increased border controls.

Migrants and smugglers have continuously adapted their strategies to the changes in immigration controls. While the media focuses on ‘boat people’, many (North and sub-Saharan) African migrants use other methods – tourist visas, false documents, hiding in vessels with or without the consent of the crew or scaling the fences surrounding the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla or attempting to swim around them. In response to increased restrictions in North Africa, border and police officials tend to charge higher bribes, and migrants increasingly use secondary, often more dangerous routes through the desert (Brachet 2005).

The capacity to prevent migrants travelling across the Sahara over the Mediterranean and the Atlantic is limited. The huge length of land and maritime borders and widespread corruption among police and border guards make it virtually impossible to prevent people from crossing the Sahara, the Atlantic and the Mediterranean. According to International Maritime Law, boats which are intercepted in international or European waters by European vessels cannot be sent back to Africa<sup>28</sup>, and coast guards have the duty to save migrants from drowning. Some analysts believe that increasing sea patrolling has actually increased the chance of surviving the trip and might therefore even encourage migrants, especially those sub-Saharans who know it will be difficult to expel them (Carling 2007). Moreover, the efficacy of border control systems such as the Spanish SIVE has been severely hampered by administrative and human factors, such as the high absence of staff due to work-related illness or depression (Carling 2007).

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<sup>28</sup> Panapress, 1 September 2006.

Many West African boat migrants who are apprehended by European coast guards are eventually released because they cannot be sent back. Although EU countries have signed re-admission agreements with a growing number of African countries, forced expulsions are difficult to enforce in practice. The agreements are often not or partially implemented, expulsions are expensive and have a limited deterrent effect because migrants who are expelled from Europe to Africa, from Morocco to Algeria or from Libya and Algeria to Mali, Niger and Chad tend to migrate again (Barros et al 2002; CIMADE 2004; Collyer 2006; Escoffier 2006). Not only European countries, but also North African countries such as Morocco, Algeria and Libya cooperate with West African states on re-admission. Although repatriations do take place, the numbers returned are generally fairly small (De Haas 2006a).

Each year, significant numbers die or get seriously injured while trying to enter the EU. It has been claimed by a Spanish Human rights organization that at least 368 people died while crossing to Spain in 2005, although the actual number might be two or three times higher because many bodies are never found (APDHA 2006). Human rights organizations estimate that 3,285 dead bodies were found on the shores of the Straits of Gibraltar alone between 1997 and 2001 (Schuster 2005). However, the actual number of drownings is significantly higher because an unknown percentage of corpses are never found. The risks of crossing the Sahara are believed to be at least as high as the more widely mediated hazards of an undocumented crossing of the Mediterranean or the Atlantic (Collyer 2006), although there is no empirical evidence to sustain such claims.

Notwithstanding these facts, sensational media coverage, policy makers and humanitarian organisations tend to exaggerate the risk of dying. For instance, in July 2006 the Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) stated that “For every person who reaches Europe, several others have never made it. Europe will never see the untold numbers who die in the Sahara, who are left penniless in transit countries far from home, who drown when their dilapidated boats capsize, or who waste their lives in North African prisons”<sup>29</sup>.

It is commonly believed that the death tolls have been rising as a direct consequence of enhanced maritime patrol activities and the subsequent diversion of migration flows towards further and more dangerous routes across the Sahara and Mediterranean (Lutterbeck 2006). However, Carling (2007) argues that the actual risk of dying while crossing the sea to Spain has remained constant at around one percent or has even slightly fallen over the past years. He suggests that increases in the death toll should be mainly attributed to an increase in the number of people trying to cross, rather than to increased border surveillance.

### ***6.3. Human rights issues and the refugee dimension***

Pressure by EU states and mounting domestic xenophobia have prompted North African states to reinforce internal policing on migrants. Consequently, immigrants,

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<sup>29</sup> UNODC press release “UNODC Proposes Pact to Stop Smuggling of Migrants from Africa”. 10 July 2006.

including asylum applicants, who often risk being arbitrarily arrested, detained, and deported or stripped of their assets, have had their rights violated. After years of relative tolerance, North African states regularly conduct migrant raids in immigrant neighbourhoods, after which immigrants are detained or deported to land borders. Because of increasing migration controls, sub-Saharan migrants in North Africa and Europe have also become more vulnerable to severe exploitation in the labour market.

In Libya in particular, xenophobia is expressed in blanket accusations of criminality, verbal and physical attacks, harassment, extortion, arbitrary detention, forced return and possibly torture (Hamood 2006). After introduction of the new immigration law, Morocco started deporting Nigerians and other West Africans by organising direct flights. When hundreds of Africans attempted to enter Ceuta and Melilla in October 2005, at least 13 sub-Saharan Africans died, some of them allegedly killed by border guards. After these events, the Moroccan authorities turned to nationwide raids and arrests of immigrants in cities and makeshift camps in the forests around Ceuta and Melilla. The Moroccan authorities subsequently attempted to remove as many as 2,000 migrants to a remote desert border with Algeria (Collyer 2006).

An unknown but significant proportion of sub-Saharan migrants have escaped persecution or life-threatening circumstances (Barros et al 2002; Collyer 2006; Escoffier 2006; Lindstrom 2002; Schuster 2005). According to a recent empirical study by Collyer (2006), the percentage of migrants in Morocco that would require humanitarian protection would vary between 10-20 percent under the strict application of the 1951 refugee Convention definition, to 70-80 percent under more generous humanitarian measures – although it should be mentioned that his sample was not designed to be representative and is likely to be biased towards refugees and asylum seekers. It is sometimes difficult to make a sharp distinction between political and economic migrants, because individual motivations are often complex, mixed and may change over time. Some migrants who set out with primarily economic motivations may become less voluntary migrants along the way when exploited by employers, arbitrarily imprisoned, maltreated, and stripped of their remaining assets by North African police or border guards.

Until recently, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) kept a low profile in the Maghreb states and protection was not thought to be available (Hamood 2006; Lindstrom 2002). UNHCR is currently seeking to expand its operations in the Maghreb. However, state authorities often do not cooperate, continue to deport asylum seekers, and generally refuse to grant residency and other rights to refugees recognized by UNHCR (Collyer 2006; Lindstrom 2002). Consequently, Europe's policy to externalise border controls towards countries with a poor human rights record and inadequate refugee protection, may jeopardize the rights and security of the would-be immigrants, including asylum seekers and refugees (Lutterbeck 2006). However, in 2007 the Moroccan government signed an *accord de siege* with UNHCR giving them full-fledged representation in Morocco.

Human rights organisations have argued that Spain and Italy risk seriously compromising the principle of *non-refoulement* by swiftly deporting African migrants and asylum seekers to Morocco and Libya where their protection is not guaranteed (AI 2006; HRW 2006). Italy has been accused of collectively expelling groups of migrants in a hasty and indiscriminate manner without properly investigating their

rights to asylum, medical care, or other forms of assistance and protection (AI 2006; HRW 2006). Since the Prodi government came to power in 2006, such practices have apparently stopped. The Libyan government, which has not signed the 1951 Geneva Convention but is party to the African Refugee Convention, has randomly deported migrants expelled from Italy to their alleged origin countries, which include Sudan and Eritrea, regardless of whether they fear torture or persecution (Hamood 2006; HRW 2006).

As Hamood (2006:77) argued, Libya's integration into the international community and its cooperation with the EU on matters of migration presents a *potential* for positive change, because it "could mean a higher degree of international scrutiny on Libya's human rights record, be it related to its treatment of foreigners or its own nationals". However, whether this will happen critically depends on the emphasis the EU places in reality on human rights principles in light of its priority to restrict entry into its territory: "Although framed in the human rights discourse, it is hard to see concretely how the EU is actively pushing forward an agenda for reform within Libya to ensure refugee protection beyond mere rhetoric" (Hamood 2006:78). In principle, the same ambiguities hold for the effect of cooperation with other African countries on the protection of the rights of migrants and refugees.

#### ***6.4. Double agendas and conflicting interests***

Irregular immigration from sub-Saharan Africa has created considerable tension between the EU, North African, and sub-Saharan African states. On the surface, North African states have apparently largely conceded to European pressure and have adopted dominant European public discourses on 'combating illegal migration'. On the other hand, North African states do tacitly or openly oppose several elements of externalization policies, partly because such policies are seen as reinforcing their new position as destinations. For instance, with the exception of Libya, North African states have been rather reluctant to readmit large numbers of irregular migrants from third (sub-Saharan) countries on a regular basis. Attempts to negotiate and implement multi-lateral (EU-sending/transit country) agreements on the re-admission of third nationals have systematically failed. When such agreements exist on a bilateral level, sending and transit states often obstruct or delay implementation in direct or indirect ways (cf. El Qadim 2007).

Proposals by some EU Member States to establish offshore 'processing centres' for immigrants and asylum claimants in North Africa, or to send naval ships to patrol African coasts, are also often opposed because they are seen as threatening national sovereignty while migrant processing centres and UNHCR offices are seen as attraction points<sup>30</sup>. North African states perceive that such measures would encourage more immigration and settlement on their territory. Combined with mounting domestic xenophobia, this creates tremendous resistance against recognising the *de facto* presence of sub-Saharan immigrants in North Africa. More in general, North African states and societies have difficulties in coming to terms with their new

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<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, in 2007 Morocco signed an agreement with Spain to establish two centres for the repatriation of minors.

migratory status, which confronts them with an entirely new set of legal and social issues typical for immigration countries, issues that do not (yet) resonate with their engrained self-image as emigration countries. Neither do they resonate with the constant denunciations by North African states of European racism towards them and their own migrants abroad.

On the other hand, there remains a certain reluctance to deport large numbers of sub-Saharan immigrants. This is not only related to the high costs of such expulsions. For instance, recent raids and collective expulsions have caused major international embarrassment for Morocco. These events, which are at odds with Morocco's attempts to improve its own human rights record (cf. Collyer 2006), also face vocal protests from Moroccan human rights organisations and migrants' and refugees' own organisations. Libya deals with the specific problem that it tries to maintain the image of full compliance with policies to 'combat illegal migration' by regularly deporting sub-Saharan immigrants while its economy is in fact heavily dependent on these workers (Pliez 2004a). Therefore, expulsions might primarily serve to create the *impression* of full compliance. Libya's new immigration policies also seem at odds with its official aim of promoting free movement of people among CEN-SAD countries.

Another factor explaining a certain reluctance to fully comply with EU policies is the strategic geopolitical and economic interests North African states have in maintaining good relations with sub-Saharan states (cf. Kreienbrink 2005). Not only 'pan-African' Libya, but also other Maghreb states have pursued their specific 'African policies' aiming at extending their geopolitical sphere of influence in the continent through diplomacy, aid, investments and exchange of students (Boubakri 2006; Goldschmidt 2006; Marfaing & Wippel 2004; Pliez 2004b). Such relations can be potentially harmed by mass expulsions, the maltreatment of immigrants, or the EU-pressured introduction of visa requirements for sub-Saharan Africans.

Over the past three decades, Morocco and Algeria have been competing over the support of sub-Saharan states in their opposed positions on the issue of the Western Sahara. Morocco has heavily invested in its relations with sub-Saharan countries, and many African countries have effectively withdrawn their support for Algeria-backed Polisario, a rebel movement working for the separation of Western Sahara from Morocco. The migration issue is systematically brought up in relations between the two countries. Moroccan authorities and media routinely accuse Algeria and Polisario of tacitly allowing sub-Saharans to migrate over its territory to Morocco and the Western Sahara in order to discredit Morocco's international position. In its turn, Algeria refused to attend the African-European migration summit of Rabat in July 2006.

Recent pressure by EU states on West African countries like Senegal, the Gambia, and Guinea to crack down on irregular migration is also potentially at odds with the freedom of movement enshrined in the 1971 protocol of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) on the Free Movement of Persons, the Right of Residence and Establishment. Citizens of ECOWAS states at least nominally have the right to settle, work, and do business in other ECOWAS states. Although the implementation of the protocol on free movement leaves much to be desired (Adepoju 2005; De Haas 2006a), West African states have few legal means to 'combat illegal

migration' as long as migrants' presence on their territories is basically legal. Also on a practical level, it seems virtually impossible to impede people from moving.

In 1999 Mauritania withdrew from the ECOWAS community, which implies that most ECOWAS citizens now need a visa to enter the country (Oumar Ba & Choplin 2005). It is not clear to what extent this is related to its increasing collaboration with EU countries on migration issues. The recent increase in crossings to the Canary Islands is probably not as unwelcome as it seems, because it has given the Mauritanian government leverage to negotiate migration agreements with European countries in exchange for financial support. Yet the Mauritanian government is more or less caught between two fires: the significant contribution that cheap immigrant workers and smuggling make to its economy and its interest in maintaining good relationships with its African neighbours on the one hand, and the pressure it feels from European countries to 'combat' undocumented migration on the other (Oumar Ba & Choplin 2005).

Considering the difficulty of reconciling conflicting interests and the practical inability to stop migrants from crossing vast land and maritime borders, there is a clear sense of deadlock around the issue. Recent African-European migration summits, such as the Rabat summit of July 2006 and the Tripoli summit of November 2006, have not moved beyond declarations of good intent and general agreements of increasing Euro-African cooperation in "Extending support for building institutional capacity and developing projects in countries of origin and transit to combat illegal migration, migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings" in combination with "addressing the root causes of migration and notably the lack of employment through better targeted development policies" (AU/EU 2006). The *de facto* emphasis of these summits is on migration control. Although these agreements include a paragraph listing "pious wishes" (Boubakri 2006) to promote development and trade, to eradicate poverty and to prevent conflicts, no concrete plans are made and hardly any resources are actually mobilised to achieve such goals<sup>31</sup>.

The issue of irregular immigration from African countries has also created considerable tensions within the European Union. For instance, previous proposals by some EU countries to make aid conditional on collaboration in migration controls and re-admission have been rejected by other states (Schuster 2005). In 2006, Spain, Italy, and Malta complained about the limited support for border patrolling from less directly concerned northern countries. Some northern European governments (such as France, Austria, and the Netherlands) responded by blaming Spain and Italy for their recent mass regularizations, which they believe pulls in even more irregular migrants (Le Nouvel Observateur, 21 September 2006). Such tensions and a general unwillingness to give up national sovereignty in migration policies explain why most issues are still dealt with on the bilateral level.

In November 2006, EU Justice Commissioner Franco Frattini called for new job centres in Africa to help match supply with demand in an attempt to "fight illegal immigration and trafficking" (BBC online, 30 November 2006). These centres would inform people about job and education opportunities in Europe and about the risks of

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<sup>31</sup> The Dutch minister for development cooperation characterised the (incoherent) action plan of the Rabat conference as a "grab bag". Source: Wereldomroep 11 July 2006. [http://www.wereldomroep.nl/actua/europa/act20060711\\_migartie](http://www.wereldomroep.nl/actua/europa/act20060711_migartie)

irregular migration. The idea is that member states transfer part of their immigration quotas to these centres, which recruit low skilled personnel for temporary jobs in sectors such as agriculture and tourism. This echoes earlier (failed) proposals by Italy in 2002 to transpose the Italian system of legal immigration agreements in exchange for readmission agreements to the EU level (Cuttitta 2005). Again, the success of such proposals depends on the willingness of EU member states to give up part of their national sovereignty in migration issues by allocating immigrant quota to such centres, and the willingness of African states to readmit irregular migrants. The latter is a condition for establishing job centres, which might fuel suspicions that these plans camouflage a hidden agenda of returning irregular immigrants. It is also unclear how the intended temporariness of migration will be enforced in practice, apart from the fact that many employers prefer to employ irregular migrants who are already in Europe and are therefore likely to circumvent formal recruitment.

### ***6.5. Vested interests in continuing migration***

What remains largely unspoken behind official discourses on “combating illegal immigration” is that European and African states have *little genuine interest* in stopping migration, because the economies of receiving and sending countries have become increasingly dependent on migrant labour and remittances, respectively. First, there is a fundamental discrepancy between the official aim to curb immigration and the sustained demand for cheap (often irregular) migrant labour in Europe and Libya.

The large informal and formal labour markets in Spain, Italy but also Libya for agricultural labour, construction, and other service jobs have become increasingly dependent on the influx of cheap, often irregular migration labour (cf. Pliez 2004a; Reyneri 2001; Sandell 2006). There has also been a remarkable growth in demand for informal care and domestic labour. In the ‘southern European welfare regime’, the combination of patriarchal family structures, low levels of state-provided social security and child care and low birth rates, female migrants working as domestic or care workers gradually replace the low-paid or unpaid caretaking activities of native women (Lageder 2006). The informal economy feeds on both the strong demand for domestic and personal care services and a wealth of small businesses where irregular migrants can easily find work (Allasino et al 2004).

European and Libyan governments are under pressure from employers to allow more legal immigration or to tacitly allow irregular migration (Chaloff 2005; Pliez 2004a). There is a discrepancy between a general public rhetoric hostile to (regular and irregular) immigration (cf. Curran 2004) in attempted responses to public xenophobia, and public action, which has largely tolerated irregular immigration (Ambrosini 2001) and has introduced mass regularisations (Zincone 2006). This discrepancy exemplifies that states are not homogeneous units, but comprise diverse, often conflicting political and economic interests.

In a context of extraordinarily low fertility (1.3 children per woman), the immigration of more than 200,000 migrants per year to Italy is a fundamental resource for economic development (Dalla Zuanna 2006) and is particularly essential to sustain the large informal economy (Quassoli 1999). At the same time, Italian policies on

immigration and acquisition of nationality are among the most restrictive in Western Europe (Pastore 2004). There is no explicit immigration policy regulated by employers' needs despite the demand for migrant labour in the formal as well as large informal sector (Ambrosini 2001).

Similar dynamics of economic growth, labour market segmentation and demographic change explain the largely unregulated labour migration boom to Spain (Ortega Pérez 2003), although in comparison to Italy there is perhaps more recognition of the need for immigrants in the political arena. It has been argued that there is a tacit alliance between trade unions and employers in favour of moderately open immigration policies. Over the past decade, Spain has pursued several migration policy reforms creating more possibilities for migrants to obtain legal residency (Ortega Pérez 2003). New immigration and labour laws have also increased penalties for employers who hire irregular workers, but, as in Italy, this is still often tolerated in practice. In fact, the ambivalent migration policies of European states but also Libya reinforce precarious working and living conditions of migrants. Also from northern Europe there is empirical evidence that the level of controls on employment of irregular workers is adjusted to labour shortages. Current immigration policies thus often come down to tolerating an informal labour market operating below the standards of the formal labour market (Zorlu 2000). Also here, the discrepancy between official policies to 'combat illegal migration' and labour market needs is also apparent in the lax enforcement of laws forbidding illegal labour<sup>32</sup>

Both Spain and Italy have quota systems that are formally based on labour-market needs. The fact that the yearly quotas never match real demand (Chaloff 2005; Ortega Pérez 2003; Sandell 2006; Serra 2005) partly explains the persistence of irregular migration, which is often tolerated as long as migrants find work. However, because many employers prefer migrants who already reside (illegally) in Europe (cf. Cuttitta 2007), it is unlikely that increased quotas will lead to a standstill of irregular migration. To prevent the presence of large groups of undocumented migrants, Spain, Italy and other southern European countries have regularly reverted to mass amnesties. Allasino *et al.* (2004) argued that the frequency of amnesties may contribute to the perception that unauthorized entry by the back door is more effective than via the front door of programmed flows and quotas (cf. Serra 2005).

In order to create public support, amnesties are generally sold with the argument that they will stem further irregular migration, and are often accompanied by a concomitant tightening of immigration policies and a vow that no more amnesties will follow (Levinson 2005). However, as long as demand for migrant labour persists, occasional regularisation programmes do generally not prevent further irregular arrivals (Papadopoulou 2005). Although there is no evidence of a 'pull effect' of regularisations (Sandell 2006). All in all, irregular migration seems to be predominantly driven by labour market demand (Reyneri 2001).

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<sup>32</sup> For instance, in July 2007 the Dutch government objected to proposals of EC's vice-president and justice commissioner Frattini to increase sanctions - including criminal prosecution - against companies that break illegal labour laws. Currently, only 1.5 percent of all Dutch companies are controlled annually. According to the Dutch government, increasing this to the 10 percent proposed by Frattini would entail high costs and create a high administrative burden (NRC, 10 July 2007).

North African and sub-Saharan African countries also have little genuine interest in curbing emigration. From an African perspective, migration constitutes a potential development resource (cf. Hoebink 2005). Continuing emigration serves vital political and economic interests in relieving pressure on internal labour markets and generating substantial remittances. This is evident for most north African countries, where overt or tacit policies to stimulate migration have been an integral part of their national development strategies for at least three decades (De Haas 2006b; Heinemeijer 1977). In recent years, several governments of sub-Saharan African countries such as Senegal, Burkina Faso, Ghana and Nigeria seem to have become increasingly aware of the development potentials of migration and remittances. West African governments are also trying to look into strategies to foster links with their emigrant communities and to enhance their contribution to national development (De Haas 2006a; Ndione & Broekhuis 2006).

In this context, many African states seem to adopt a strategy of formally complying with the EU's 'fight against illegal immigration' to varying degrees while using the migration issue as a bargaining chip in negotiating aid, economic relations, immigrant quota (De Haas 2006a; El Qadim 2007), or, in the case of Libya, international reputation rehabilitation (Hamood 2006; Pliez 2004a). Although they might pay lip service to the "fight against illegal migration", African governments are neither able nor have little genuine interest in stemming emigration while Libyan and European employers are in need of migrant labour. At the same time, countries in the Maghreb have little genuine interest in stopping migrants from transiting to Europe.

Libyan leader Al-Qadhafi has explicitly voiced this ambivalence on several occasions. At the European Council meeting in Sevilla in June 2002, he publicly stated that the EU had to increase development aid in order to slow down the "invasion of Europe by illegal migrants", warning that "not one single North African state is willing to guard the doors of Europe for free, because the region itself is invaded by sub-Saharan migrants" (Pliez 2004a:145). At the Tripoli summit of November 2006, he voiced considerable scepticism when he characterized the EU's intentions to complement tighter border controls through development projects in African states as little more than propaganda. In addition, he told the more than 50 African and European government ministers that they must accept high levels of cross-border migration and that resisting migration "is like rowing against the stream" (BBC online, 23 November 2006).

In fact, while positioning themselves as 'victims' of illegal immigration, Maghreb countries and, recently, Mauritania and Senegal, have successfully capitalised on their new status as transit countries in negotiations with EU countries. As El Qadim (2007) observed for Morocco, conditions are not unilaterally imposed by European countries. In fact, she argued that Morocco has largely benefited from the increase in irregular migration over its territory. By consciously positioning itself as Europe's leading partner in the "fight against illegal migration", Morocco has considerably strengthened its position in negotiations with the EU and its member states on issues like financial support, economic integration, quotas for Moroccan immigrants and improvements of the position of Moroccan emigrants in Europe. Morocco has increasingly linked its collaboration in intensifying border controls and policing sub-Saharan migrants on its territory to the improvement of the position of its own (regular) emigrants in Europe (El Qadim 2007).

## 7. Conclusion

Over the last 15 years, there has been an incontestable increase in regular and irregular migration of West Africans to North Africa and Europe. Nevertheless, this study has also shown that trans-Saharan migration of West Africans to North Africa is not as new and massive as is commonly suggested. While having much deeper historical roots in the trans-Saharan trade, migration of (former) nomads, traders and refugees to Mauritania, Algeria and Libya in the 1970s and 1980s set the stage and established the networks for more large-scale contemporary trans-Saharan migration. Against the general background of economic decline and civil war in West and Central Africa, Libya's 'pan-African' migration policies are essential in understanding the major increase in trans-Saharan migration over the 1990s.

In particular since 2000, a major anti-immigrant backlash and increasing repression in Libya coincided with and probably contributed to a diversification of trans-Saharan migration routes and the increasing presence of sub-Saharan Africans in other Maghreb countries. Confronted with a persistent demand for cheap migrant labour in nearby southern Europe, more and more sub-Saharan Africans started to cross the Mediterranean. The year 2000 was an important turning point in West African migration to Europe, marked by a sharp increase in the share of West Africans joining Maghrebi in their irregular sea crossings to Spain and Italy. In doing so, they forged a vital connection between the trans-Saharan and Euro-Mediterranean migration systems. Whereas West African migration has traditionally focused on the UK and France, many recent irregular migrants travelling overland settle in Spain and Italy, which have evolved into important destination countries over the 1990s. West African communities in Europe are increasing. Many irregular migrants in southern Europe have acquired residency status through recent legalisations.

This study showed that apocalyptic representations of a massive exodus of desperate Africans who are pushed out of the continent by poverty, war and drought are fundamentally flawed. The popular perception that irregular migration from Africa is growing at an alarming rate is deceptive. Since the introduction of visa requirements for North African countries by Italy and Spain in the early 1990s, illegal crossings of the Mediterranean Sea have been a persistent phenomenon. Rather than an increase *per se*, the major change has been that, after 2000, sub-Saharan Africans started to join and have now overtaken North Africans as the largest category of irregular boat migrants. Although almost all West African countries are represented in these flows, most migrants tend to come from a relatively small number of countries, in particular Senegal, Mali, Ghana and Nigeria.

It is a myth that all West African migrants crossing the Sahara to North Africa are 'in transit' to Europe. There are probably still more sub-Saharan Africans living in North Africa than in Europe. Libya in particular is an important destination country in its own right, in particular for Chadians, Nigeriens and Sudanese. Other North African countries house smaller but growing West and Central African communities. An estimated number of between 65,000 and 120,000 sub-Saharan Africans enter the entire Maghreb yearly overland. Between 20 and 38 percent of trans-Saharan migrants

are believed to cross eventually to Europe. This clearly counters common views that reduce North Africa to a transit zone or “waiting room”.

This study estimated the number of successful irregular crossings by West Africans into Europe at around 25,000 per year, compared to other estimates of 30,000 to 35,000 per year. There has probably been an increase in 2006 through the growing popularity of the West Africa-Canary Islands crossing. Although this is an estimate, which should not be interpreted as an empirical “fact”, it is probably safe to say that the total number of successful irregular entries of West Africans into the European Union should be counted in the order of several tens of thousands rather than hundreds of thousands.

The majority of irregular West African migrants have entered Europe legally and subsequently overstayed their visas. Most migrants find work and many have recently obtained residency papers through recurrent amnesties. The total increase of the *registered* West African population in Europe is estimated at levels of about 100,000. This represents a fraction of total immigration to the EU — a total of about 2.6 million people in 2004 among the EU-15 (except Greece) (De Haas 2006c).

Notwithstanding the recent increase, West African emigration is still relatively modest in comparison with, for instance, North African immigration to Europe. It is estimated too that migration within West Africa is up to seven times higher than the volume of migration from West Africa to the rest of the world. There are an estimated 800,000 registered West African migrants living in the six main receiving countries in Europe (Spain, Italy, Portugal, France, UK, the Netherlands) compared to 2,600,000 North Africans. Regular West African migrants represent about 6.4 percent of the total registered non-European immigrant populations in the main European destination countries.

The common portrayal of irregular African migrants as “desperate” and impoverished victims of “unscrupulous” traffickers and “merciless” criminal-run smuggling networks is inconsistent with empirical evidence that the vast majority of migrants move on their own initiative. Migration is generally a *conscious* choice and often a family investment rather than a desperate move. Migrants are generally *not* among the poorest and least educated of their origin communities. Smugglers are usually not part of international organised crime, but tend to be locally based and operate alone or in relatively small, flexible networks. Migrants travel in stages and typically pay smugglers for one difficult leg of the journey.

Efforts by European countries to increase border controls and ‘externalise’ these policies to North and West African countries have had a series of unintended side effects, the most notable of which have been a diversification of overland and maritime migration routes and violations of migrants’ rights in North Africa. It is questionable whether controls have actually reduced the total numbers of crossings. In 2006, there was even a striking increase in the number of migrants directly crossing from the West African coast to the Canary Islands. It seems practically impossible to seal off the long Saharan borders and Mediterranean coastlines, even if governments would genuinely be willing to do so

Ironically, restrictive migration policies aiming at “combating” irregular migration are a fundamental *cause* of irregular migration themselves. Similarly, while smuggling is commonly represented as one of the main “causes” of irregular migration, it is rather the *result* of increasingly restrictive migration policies. Policy making on this issue seems to be caught in a vicious circle: Rather than “solving” irregular migration, increasingly restrictive immigration policies and border controls have produced more “illegality”, which adds pressure to adopt even more restrictive policies (see also Van Liempt 2007). More generally, migration policies have failed to meet their stated objectives, because they fail to see that migration is an integral part of structural transformation processes rather than a problem that can be “solved” through addressing its alleged root causes.

Several structural factors explain why it is likely that sub-Saharan migration to the EU and Libya will continue and why even other North African countries may further evolve into transit *and* destination countries. First, trans-Saharan migration is less unwanted than it seems. The demand for cheap, irregular immigrant labour in Europe and post-embargo Libya is likely to persist or even increase, a demand to which a new generation of educated and ambitious sub-Saharan Africans are likely to respond. This irregular migration has generally been beneficial for economies in transit and destination countries because of the cheap labour it generates and the migration-related trade and business activities of smugglers, entrepreneurs and state officials (cf. Brachet 2005).

Second, the firm establishment of migration routes and migrant networks, improvements in trans-Saharan and trans-Mediterranean communication and transportation infrastructure are likely to facilitate future migration. With the consolidation of migrant communities in new countries of settlement, in particular in Italy and Spain, this migration has passed its pioneer stage. It is therefore likely that the new West African immigrant communities established in countries such as Spain and Italy will follow the pattern of North Africans, with an increasing importance of family migration as a source of (legal) migration. The consolidation of migrant networks will also facilitate the acquisition of visas and other documents enabling migrants to *enter* Europe legally or on larger vessels, avoiding the dangerous sea crossings in *pateras* and *pirogues*.

The paving of the trans-Saharan *piste* between Tamanrasset in Algeria and the border with Niger and the recent completion of the last stretch of the paved road from Dakar in Senegal to Nouakchott all the way to Tanger in Morocco are likely to further stimulate trans-Saharan mobility (Oumar Ba & Choplin 2005; Pian 2005). In the same way, increasing trade between North African countries and Europe partly boosted by free trade agreements, the growth of the North African tourism industry are likely to further increase cross border traffic. This is also likely to enhance opportunities for migrants to cross borders legally or illegally. In general, processes of economic integration between Europe and African countries are also likely to coincide with a parallel intensification of human mobility.

Third, besides Libya other North African countries might also further evolve into destination and settlement countries. Substantial differentials in economic development and political stability between North African and most sub-Saharan countries explain why migrants failing or unwilling to enter Europe often prefer to

settle temporarily as a 'second best option' than to return to their politically more unstable, poorer or unsafe origin countries (cf. Barros et al 2002; Escoffier 2006). Although many migrants *aim* at crossing to Europe, it is difficult to predict whether this will actually happen. Previous migration experiences have taught that at least a certain proportion of 'temporary' migrants may end up settling, and there is no *a priori* reason why this would not apply in this case.

The specific segmentation of European and North African labour markets may increase the future scope for immigration. West African migrants in Libya and Europe tend to do work that natives shun, even if the latter are unemployed (cf. Pliez 2004a). Even in poorer Maghreb countries there is structural unemployment among the higher educated who at the same time shun unskilled or semi-skilled jobs. They instead prefer staying unemployed or migrating to Europe (cf. Schoorl et al 2000). This can explain the simultaneous occurrence of out-migration from North African and immigration from sub-Saharan Africa.

These labour-market trends might be reinforced by demographic transitions. In Europe, rapid ageing in combination with economic growth is likely to sustain the demand for migrant labour, in particular in the service sectors. Also in North Africa, demographic change may reinforce trans-Saharan migration. In contrast to sub-Saharan Africa, most north African countries have almost reached the point where the dramatic reductions in fertility since the 1970s will result in the reduction of the number of people attaining working age beginning in 2010 to reach full momentum in the period 2015-2020 (Fargues 2004). Assuming future political stability and at least moderate economic growth, this decreasing demographic burden might also decrease the North African potential for emigration and increase the potential for immigration (from sub-Saharan Africa) in the medium to longer term.

This might provoke a changing position of north-African countries in the African-European migration landscape. Over the past two decades, the rapid development of south European countries has provoked the southward shift of the Euro-Mediterranean 'labour frontier' – the imaginary line separating immigration from emigration countries (cf. Skeldon 1997). This shift offered new labour migration opportunities for Maghrebi workers, who used to migrate to northwest Europe but increasingly started migrating to Italy and Spain after 1990. Future demographic trends and economic growth in countries such as Tunisia and Morocco might consolidate their position as a migration destination. Increasing sub-Saharan immigration is therefore perhaps heralding the future southward shift of the Euro-Mediterranean labour frontier *across* the Mediterranean further into North Africa. Whether this will happen is far from certain, but under circumstances of at least modest economic growth and political stability, this is a realistic scenario.

Faced with the failure of past policies, African and European politicians and scholars have often argued that migration can only be curbed through promoting African development, for instance by increasing aid or liberalising trade. However, even if such policies would be effective, development is an unlikely short-cut 'solution' to migration, because economic and human development tends to coincide with an increase rather than a decrease in migration (cf. De Haas 2006d). It is more likely to *spur* migration in the short to medium term, as development will increase people's *capabilities* and *aspirations* to migrate while it will probably take many decades to

substantially decrease development gaps with European *and* North African countries even in the most optimistic scenarios. This casts fundamental doubt on the assumption that a “Marshall plan for Africa” would help to curb migration.

For all these structural reasons, and unless exceptional circumstances arise, it is likely that migration from West Africa to North Africa and Europe will continue. There is a growing discrepancy between restrictive migration policies and the demand for cheap migrant labour in Libya and Europe. This explains why increasing border controls have rather led to the increasing importance of irregular migration and the swift diversion of migration routes and an increase in the risks, costs, and suffering of the migrants involved rather than a decline in migration. As long as no more legal channels for immigration are created to match the real demand for labour, and as long as large informal economies in North Africa and Europe will exist, it is likely that a substantial proportion of this migration will remain irregular. In brief, policies to “fight illegal migration” are bound to fail because they are among the very causes of the phenomenon they pretend to combat.

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## Appendix

**Table 6. Refugees and asylum-seekers, by country of asylum and origin, end-2005**

Country of asylum / origin	Refugees and asylum seekers in the country	Refugees and asylum seekers from country abroad	Refugee/asylum seekers immigrants minus emigrants	As percentage of total population
Benin	31,989	683	31,306	0.4
Burkina Faso	1,295	818	477	0.0
Cameroon	58,808	13,876	44,932	0.3
Cape Verde	NA	19	NA	NA
Chad	275,480	51,513	223,967	2.7
Côte d'Ivoire	44,070	24,659	19,411	0.1
Gabon	13,388	138	13,250	1.0
Gambia	7,932	2,340	5,592	0.4
Ghana	59,033	20,783	38,250	0.2
Guinea	67,333	9,097	58,236	0.7
Guinea-Bissau	7,782	1,300	6,482	0.5
Liberia	10,197	237,114	-226,917	-7.4
Mali	13,066	873	12,193	0.1
Mauritania	724	33,955	-33,231	-1.3
Niger	349	1,246	-897	0.0
Nigeria	9,439	36,137	-26,698	0.0
Senegal	23,341	10,521	12,820	0.1
Sierra Leone	60,142	46,397	13,745	0.3
Togo	9,707	58,586	-48,879	-0.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>694,075</b> (32,319 asylum seekers)	<b>550,055</b> (59,989 asylum seekers)	<b>144,020</b>	0.1

Source: Own calculations of data in UNHCR 2005 Global Refugee Trends and UNDP 2000 population data.

**Table 7. Estimated refugee populations within West Africa (larger than 10,000), 2005**

Country of origin	Country of asylum	
Liberia	Côte d'Ivoire	39,919
Liberia	Ghana	38,684
Liberia	Guinea	54,810
Liberia	Sierra Leone	59,952
Mauritania	Senegal	19,712
Togo	Benin	26,632
Togo	Ghana	14,136
Sudan	Chad	202,266
Central African Rep.	Chad	41,246
Chad	Cameroon	39,303

Source: UNHCR 2005 Global Refugee Trends

**Table 8. Estimated of foreign born population in OECD countries, by country of birth**

	France	Great Britain	Spain, Italy, Greece, Portugal	Other Europe	North America	Japan, Australia, New Zealand	Number of Emigrants	% Population (2000 UNPD)	% all West Africans migrants living in OECD countries	Emigration higher educated / all higher educated
Benin	11,986	239	952	908	1,555	31	15,671	0.2	1.3	9.6
Burkina Faso	4,674	99	2,777	938	1,007	25	9,520	0.1	0.8	14.3
Cameroon	36,020	3,233	4,332	7,036	14,749	132	65,502	0.4	5.6	19.9
Cape Verde	12,404	328	50,543	13,272	27,411	28	103,986	23.1	8.8	NA
Chad	4,421	183	212	552	1,041	41	6,450	0.1	0.5	NA
Cote d'Ivoire	45,231	2,794	8,104	3,894	9,464	143	69,630	0.4	5.9	9.8
Gabon	10,639	135	353	656	932	22	12,737	1.0	1.1	25.2
Gambia, the	1,026	3,924	6,706	5,026	6,284	66	23,032	1.8	2.0	42.4
Ghana	4,376	56,112	21,121	19,954	84,274	3,605	189,442	1.0	16.1	45.7
Guinea	7,836	265	5,627	5,326	6,542	150	25,746	0.3	2.2	NA
Guinea-Bissau	7,596	381	23,904	529	511	11	32,932	2.4	2.8	70.4
Liberia	737	1,583	1,305	3,660	41,620	181	49,086	1.6	4.2	24.4
Mali	40,222	121	3,622	784	3,680	79	48,508	0.4	4.1	19.7
Mauritania	9,591	28	3,993	884	2,400	21	16,917	0.6	1.4	NA
Niger	3,391	96	258	504	1,290	21	5,560	0.0	0.5	10.5
Nigeria	2,563	88,378	26,435	22,361	150,917	3,190	293,844	0.2	25.0	8.4
Senegal	82,116	723	41,476	3,781	12,739	299	141,134	1.4	12.0	28.6
Sierra Leone	686	17,048	1,985	4,341	22,381	442	46,883	1.0	4.0	33.5
Togo	12,787	553	971	2,708	3,777	25	20,821	0.4	1.8	11.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>297,276</b>	<b>172,299</b>	<b>197,970</b>	<b>92,088</b>	<b>386,290</b>	<b>8,446</b>	<b>1,154,369</b>	<b>0.5</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

Source: Own calculations based on OECD Database on immigrants and expatriates (update November 2005); downloaded 15 January 2007 from [www.oecd.org](http://www.oecd.org).

Data sources are population censuses or population registers, mostly dating back to 2000-2001.

**Table 9. Apprehensions of unauthorised migrants in Spain, Italy and Malta (1993-2006)**

	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Mainland Spain	4,952	4,189	5,287	7,741	7,348	7,031	7,178	12,789	14,405	6,795	9,788	7,245	7,066	6,494*
Canary Islands	0	0	0	0	0	0	875	2,410	4,112	9,875	9,388	8,426	4,715	31,000**
Sicily / Lampedusa	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	8,828	1,973	2,782	5,504	18,225	14,017	13,594	22,824	21,400
Calabria	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	873	1,545	5,045	6,093	2,122	177	23	88	282
Malta	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	166	219	24	57	1,686	502	1,388	1,822	NA
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,952</b>	<b>4,189</b>	<b>5,287</b>	<b>7,741</b>	<b>7,348</b>	<b>16,898</b>	<b>11,790</b>	<b>23,046</b>	<b>30,171</b>	<b>38,703</b>	<b>33,872</b>	<b>30,676</b>	<b>36,515</b>	<b>59,176</b>

Sources: Lahlou 2005 (mainland Spain until 1999), Coslovi 2007 (mainland Spain and Canary Islands since 2000, Sicily/Lampedusa, Calabria, Malta since 2002); Simon 2006 (Malta until 2001). \* Extrapolated estimate based on 4329 apprehensions until 29 August 2006; \*\* Estimate for 2006 (El País, 27 December 2006).