



**Rabat Process**  
Euro-African Dialogue on  
Migration and Development

# Rabat Process Senior Officials' Meeting

## Conclusions

**Malabo, Equatorial Guinea**  
**17<sup>th</sup> -18<sup>th</sup> November 2021**

**Conclusions**



Under the Chairmanship of Equatorial Guinea

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## About the labelling system

A labelling system - for initiatives led and/or funded by Rabat Process partners at national level, which directly contribute to implementation of the Marrakesh Action Plan - was launched at the Ouagadougou SOM in February 2019. The labelling system is one of the pillars of the Dialogue's engagement mechanism, through which Rabat Process partners can commit, on a voluntary basis, to support the implementation of one or more of the 23 actions of the Marrakesh Action Plan. Bilateral, multilateral or regional projects as well as meetings/events can be labelled as "Rabat Process "projects.

### **"Pursue the use of tools to boost the Dialogue: labelling and the laboratory of ideas"**

(Recommendation from "[Stocktaking of progress on the implementation of the Marrakesh Action Plan \(2018-2020\) and future prospects](#)".)

- The Dialogue partners agreed that the labelling system has been successful with the labelling of two meetings, one of which focused on coordination between the national and local level on migration. The partners recalled the importance of cooperating with local authorities (e.g. local governments) but also with local communities. Their key role in accompanying the reintegration of return migrants was underlined as well as their involvement in the formulation of public policy. It was also recalled that the regionalisation of national migration policies is already underway in several countries.

## On strengthening the Dialogue's interaction with cities and local authorities

### **"Strengthen the interaction of the Dialogue with cities and local authorities"**

(Recommendation from "[Stocktaking of progress on the implementation of the Marrakesh Action Plan \(2018-2020\) and future prospects](#)".)

In the Marrakesh Political Declaration (2018-2020), the Rabat Process partners adopted an "inclusive and multi-stakeholder approach" to migration management. In order to give concrete form to this commitment, the French Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs and the French Ministry of the Interior led a thematic meeting on 14th and 15th September on "National authorities, local authorities and migration". This was the first meeting of the Rabat Process on this topic and brought together local and national authorities. It mobilised a total of 95 participants (face-to-face and virtual participation); 22 Dialogue partner countries were represented, including 7 from local authorities in Africa and Europe. 48 organisations were also represented including United Cities and Local Governments, the Mayors Migration Council, the GFMD Mayors' Mechanism, ICMPD, OECD, IOM and the EU.

Participants discussed the different definitions and forms of multi-level migration governance. Some countries shared their policy or strategic frameworks on migration, involving local authorities. For example, Morocco seeks to implement their National Immigration and Asylum Strategy using a regionalisation approach involving municipal, regional and national authorities. In France, the "*Territoires d'intégration*" scheme seeks to strengthen cooperation between the state and local authorities for the integration of foreigners, in conjunction with the communes and other actors.

Through the discussions, partners gained a better understanding of the challenges of multi-level governance in the field of migration, and were able to exchange good practices designed to foster and optimise coordination between the local and national levels.

The term "local authorities" can be interpreted in different ways depending on the context, but a consistent definition, which was taken into account in Paris, is the following:

*The term «Local Authorities» refers to public institutions with legal personality, component of the State structure, below the level of central government and accountable to citizens. Local Authorities are usually composed of a deliberative or policy-making body (council or assembly) and an executive body (the Mayor or other executive officer), directly or indirectly elected or selected at local level...<sup>1</sup>*

One of the expected results of this meeting was that it would feed the partners' reflection on the place of local authorities in the Dialogue and the possibility of involving them more closely in the implementation of the Marrakesh Action Plan (AP). The contribution of cities and local authorities could enrich the Dialogue by bringing a different perspective, allowing partners to better understand the realities and needs of local authorities in the field of migration.

Moreover, opening the dialogue to local authorities would contribute to the achievement of a number of objectives of the Marrakesh AP for example

- Creating an enabling environment for the diaspora to contribute fully to sustainable development - in line with objective 1 of the Marrakech AP.
- Raising awareness and sharing information with migrants at all stages of the migration process (risks associated with irregular migration etc.) - in line with objective 8
- Matching migrants' training to labour market needs - linked to objective 3

As highlighted in the Paris thematic meeting, local authorities also have the capacity to

- Promote the socio-economic inclusion of migrants, and their access to basic services - in relation to objective 6
- Foster social cohesion and combat xenophobia, racism and discrimination at local level - linked to cross-cutting priority 3 of the Marrakesh AP

A dialogue with local authorities would also promote policy coherence between the local and national levels on migration, avoiding contradictions and ensuring that policies are aligned.

- There was consensus on the Steering Committee's proposal to invite, on a regular basis and when relevant, the appropriate local authorities (or networks of associations representing local authorities) to Rabat Process thematic or technical meetings. This option would enrich the Dialogue while opening channels of communication between the national and local levels on migration governance at the same time. The experience and practice of local authorities would be shared and taken into account by partners. This would help influence the development and adoption, by partners, of migration policies and strategies adapted to the needs and realities of local authorities. It would lead to a sharing of experiences without detracting from the intergovernmental nature of the Dialogue.

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<sup>1</sup>[COM\(2013\) 280 "Empowering Local Authorities in partner countries for enhanced governance and more effective development outcomes"](#)

## About the role of reference countries

### Introduction of the reference country system

- Ouagadougou SOM, 2019.

### Objective

- Ensure better monitoring of the implementation of each domain of the Marrakesh Action Plan.

### Functioning

- The "Reference countries" contribute to the overall coordination of activities related to their respective areas, share lessons learned and best practices with Rabat Process partners, facilitate expertise and information for future Dialogue activities, encourage the identification of actions where needs are expressed and ensure that priorities that have not yet been addressed are adequately addressed.

### Consultations

- The "Reference countries" regularly exchange with the governance of the Rabat Process, i.e. the Steering Committee, the Dialogue Chair and the Secretariat. This "reference countries" system strengthens the intergovernmental nature of the Dialogue.

### Results

- The "Reference Countries" develop and present an initial roadmap and a final report.
- Under Domain 3 on protection and asylum, the Dialogue partners agreed with Switzerland and Chad's proposal to focus activities in 2021 on 3 themes:
  1. Unaccompanied minors, the risks they run along migration routes, their protection on migration routes, their reception (including the processing of their asylum applications) and their care ;
  2. Family separation and missing migrants;
  3. Local integration as a durable solution.
- In the framework of Domain 5 on Return and Reintegration, the Dialogue partners identified success factors of voluntary return and reintegration programmes such as the multi-stakeholder approach and coordination between host and origin countries or the development of local communities hosting returnees. Success factors were discussed during the Voluntary Return and Reintegration activity organised by Cameroon (reference country), in collaboration with France.

## On the follow up of the Joint Valetta Action Plan (JVAP)

The text of the Joint Valletta Plan of Action (JVAP) has been technically updated, in line with the mandate given to the Steering Committees of the two Processes (Khartoum and Rabat) by JVAP partners at the 2018 Senior Officials' Meeting in Addis Ababa. In order to ensure full participation in the exercise, members of the Khartoum and Rabat Processes were invited to submit their inputs and recommendations on policy developments and priority actions, focusing specifically on the introductory paragraph and the five areas with their respective priority actions and priority areas.

Following the individual meetings of the respective Steering Committees, the two processes met in a Joint JVAP Steering Committee, held on 15th December 2020 virtually, chaired by the Netherlands as Khartoum Process Chair, and under the French and Equatorial Guinean chair for the Rabat Process.

In accordance with its mandate, the Joint Steering Committee agreed to retain technical comments. Comments beyond the mandate of the update were duly recorded and will be forwarded, along with the updated draft JVAP text, to the next Joint Valletta Senior Officials' Meeting for deliberation.

The text in its current form was approved *ad referendum* through a silent procedure by both the Khartoum and Rabat Process Steering Committees in early 2021, and circulated to JVAP partners in February 2021.

- With regard to JVAP follow up, the Dialogue partners drew two conclusions:
  1. The Rabat Process will continue to implement its priorities even though the JVAP update has not yet been formally approved;
  2. The two steering committees (Khartoum Process/Rabat Process) could agree to hold a joint steering committee before the EU/AU summit in February 2022, to contribute to the discussions.
- The Dialogue partners reiterated their commitment to the JVAP database. They will participate in the new data collection in 2022 to update the JVAP Database.

## About the presentations on current migration issues

**The European Union** gave an overview of the migration situation - which has been significantly affected by COVID-19 - and presented the latest policy developments, including the launch of talent partnerships on legal migration, as well as the adoption of an EU strategy on voluntary return and reintegration and a renewed EU action plan against migrant trafficking.

The Economic Community of West African States (**ECOWAS**) stressed the importance of strengthening synergies between the Rabat Process and the ECOWAS consultative process, the Migration Dialogue for West Africa (**MIDWA**).

**The International Organization for Migration (IOM)** reiterated its commitment to the Rabat Process. With regard to current migration issues, IOM referred to the situation in West Africa, a key region for migration governance and the birthplace of free movement in Africa. As such, one of the oldest inter-state consultation mechanisms on migration in Africa - the Migration Dialogue for West Africa (MIDWA) - was established in the West and Central African region, where there are approximately 9.8 million migrants, mostly intra-regional. It is expected that the continental free trade area and the African Union's free movement protocol will create new opportunities for West and Central Africans, who have a strong culture of mobility, and could be a powerful vehicle for intra-African integration. IOM later mentioned the worsening humanitarian situation in the central Sahel and Lake Chad basin. Urgent regional priorities include direct humanitarian response, community stabilisation, peace-building interventions and support for the long-term restoration of socio-economic viability of conflict-affected areas. IOM also recalled the impact of COVID-19 on mobility in the region and elements of response such as improving access to health services for migrant and host populations.

IOM, as a UN agency and in its capacity as Coordinator and Secretariat of the UN Migration Network, referred to the interstate mechanism of the International Migration Review Forum (IMRF) to be held from 10<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> May 2022 in New York. The Review Forum will assess progress in the implementation of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) and provide an opportunity to identify persistent and emerging challenges. The Forum – through a negotiated statement on progress, among other things - will provide guidance on how to better address emerging challenges - whether it be lessons learned from the COVID-19 experience or the links between climate and mobility. IOM recalled that in the GCM, Member States call on regional consultative processes, including the Rabat Process, to contribute to the Review Forum by providing relevant evidence, best practices, innovative approaches and recommendations. The Rabat Process as well as regional organisations, such as ECOWAS and its consultative process – MIDWA - are very well placed to bring regional and interregional perspectives to this global consultation, to facilitate a common approach to addressing key migration challenges.

The **United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)** discussed the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 and the new realities faced by victims of trafficking and smuggling as well as possible responses. UNHCR recalled that Dialogues such as the Rabat Process must adapt to these realities and allow partners to exchange practices and lessons learned, such as working with local communities in the fight against trafficking and smuggling of migrants. UNHCR also supported Switzerland's proposal to encourage action or reflection on the issue of

missing migrants within the Rabat Process. UNHCR underlined the importance of engaging on this issue. UNHCR also encouraged the Rabat Process partners to pay more attention to intra-regional movements (within the ECOWAS region, among others). Finally, UNHCR recalled the importance of working more on the collection of accurate data in order to be able to design appropriate responses, in particular by working with emerging entities such as the Observatory for Migration in Rabat.

## **About the proposals to prioritise the Marrakesh Action Plan and make it ever-more operational**

### **Domain 1: Development benefits of migration and addressing root causes of irregular migration and the phenomenon of displaced persons.**

Dialogue partners highlighted the impact of environmental factors and climate change on migration processes and suggested that the Rabat Process focus on these issues in the future (*see description in box below*).

#### **Action to combat climate change**

"...the partners reiterate the commitments made in the Valletta framework ... **to address environmental and climate change issues** ..."

*Preamble to Domain 1 of the Marrakesh Action Plan*

Although in the Marrakech Action Plan climate change is only mentioned in the preamble of Domain 1, it is an area of major interest for African and European partners. In early 2019, a request was made by Burkina Faso to take into account the issue of climate change by organising a thematic meeting on migration and climate change. Burkina Faso has also separately requested support from the Rabat Process Secretariat to implement its national strategy for the development of eco-villages in areas with high migration flows caused by climate hazards.

In 2018, the Rabat Process produced an infographic aimed at "untangling" the root causes of forced displacement in the Lake Chad region<sup>2</sup>. The infographic analysed how the combination of several long-term structural root causes and rapid triggers such as conflict had led to severe humanitarian consequences in the region, with 2.3 million people displaced. The main structural causes included climate change and environmental degradation, leading to an increase in global temperature, changing rainfall patterns, deforestation, competition for resources, land degradation, desertification and, ultimately, the shrinking of Lake Chad by 90 % due to overuse of resources.

As this infographic illustrates, climate change is reshaping the map of the world's habitable areas and more people are displaced by 'natural' disasters than by conflicts and civil wars<sup>3</sup>.

In terms of factors in the decision to migrate, a recent study produced by the Mixed Migration Centre (MMC) in partnership with the Rabat Process Secretariat<sup>4</sup> clearly demonstrated that environmental factors play an important role in migration decisions - not so much as an isolated factor, but rather as a factor interacting primarily with and intensifying others. Furthermore, in order to facilitate the development of appropriate

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.rabat-process.org/en/activities/publications/infographic-root-causes-forced-displacement-lake-chad>

<sup>3</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/default/files/10\\_trends\\_shaping\\_migration.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/default/files/10_trends_shaping_migration.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.rabat-process.org/en/activities/publications/briefing-drivers> .

evidence-based policies, a workshop on the future of mixed migration focusing on the impact of climate change on migration was organised in collaboration with the MMC in October<sup>5</sup>.

### **Future suggestions**

The Rabat Process could continue to work on this topic in order to analyse and better understand the complex interactions between climate change-induced migration, conflict and crisis. In the Sahel context, the Rabat Process could serve as a platform for the exchange of practices between national administrations, international donors and rural communities. African practices, which have ensured and still ensure the production and reproduction of natural resources, could be explored. Further study on how women and children are disproportionately affected by migration and climate change could also be conducted.

The policy paper and scenario-building exercise on environmental change being conducted by the MMC in cooperation with the Secretariat will provide food for thought on how this topic can be explored with the Dialogue.

## **Domain 2 – Legal migration and mobility**

The Dialogue partners thanked the Reference Countries, Portugal and Cabo Verde for their plan to hold a thematic meeting on legal migration on 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> December in Lisbon, with a particular focus on labour migration. Furthermore, during the discussions on Domain 2, the question of the portability of workers' social rights was raised.

## **Domaine 3 – Protection and asylum.**

The Dialogue partners thanked the Reference Countries, Switzerland and Chad for their suggestion to work on the three-abovementioned themes, namely: unaccompanied minors on migration routes; family separation and missing migrants; and local integration as a durable solution.

The partners took good note of the proposal by Switzerland and Chad to organise two activities in 2022-2023 in close collaboration with UNHCR and under the presidencies of Spain and Morocco:

1. A roundtable and study visit in Chad, to explore local integration as a durable solution;
2. A thematic workshop on the issue of missing migrants. The workshop could be organised in a hybrid format, in order to facilitate the participation of technical experts with specific knowledge on missing migrants.

The partners welcomed the implementation of a bilateral "twinning" project, to make the Swiss-Chad reference country partnership operational. This project, which would be "labelled" as a Rabat Process project, will focus on knowledge exchange and capacity building in the field of asylum and protection in Chad. The project will be supported by UNHCR and could inspire other partners and reference countries.

## **Domain 4: Prevention of and fight against irregular migration, migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings**

- The Dialogue partners committed to working with Niger, one of the reference countries for Domain 4. Niger requested support from the Rabat Process to better respond to objective 7 of the Marrakesh Action Plan, i.e. capacity building for legal and penal authorities through two training sessions. The results of these training sessions will be presented during Dialogue events (*see description in the box below*).
- Burkina Faso, for its part, recalled its wish to collaborate as reference country on the issues of combating trafficking in persons.

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<sup>5</sup>The workshop participants were given an overview of the latest research on the effects of climate change on migration. They were introduced to priority areas for future migration policy development and planning, derived from the MMC conceptual framework.

## Capacity building on migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings

"Objective 7: Build the capacities of public institutions with competency in the areas of integrated border management, and the prevention and fight against migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings"

The training of justice-police personnel is one of the key needs in this field, and a request for support from the Rabat Process to this effect was recently made by Niger, one of the reference countries for Domain 4. This is to support the national project "Awareness raising and information for women and children victims of trafficking and object of trafficking", which essentially includes awareness raising activities and training (the latter targeting - in particular - magistrates and judicial police officers on prosecution procedures). This project corresponds to our Action Plan and would respond to the recommendations of the assessment entitled "Anti-Trafficking Gaps, Needs and Transferrable Practices in the ECOWAS Member States and Mauritania", produced by ICMPD for the Rabat Process partners in 2020<sup>6</sup>.

It is envisaged to support the project by funding 2 training sessions: in Dosso near the border (training of prosecutors, police, gendarmerie and national guard officers, National Agency for the Fight against Trafficking in Persons) and in Zinder (training of different types of judges).

Indeed, despite a comprehensive legal framework (the most compliant in the West African region with the International Protocols), few cases of trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants are investigated and prosecuted in Niger, mainly due to the lack of capacity of law enforcement agencies to build a solid case against traffickers. The proposed training would help to fill this gap.

## Domain 5 - Return, Readmission and Reintegration.

- The Dialogue partners took note of the proposal by Cameroon and Togo as reference countries, to organise a meeting under the future Moroccan Presidency in 2023.
- During the exchanges, the partners recalled the importance of taking into account the following: the question of communication on the mechanisms for assisting voluntary return in host countries; the need to ensure a better correlation between these mechanisms and those existing in the migrants' countries of origin; the importance of advocating for policies that provide for reintegration at national level. Furthermore, the importance of dignified voluntary return in full respect of fundamental human rights was recalled.
- IOM presented its return and reintegration policy. The policy is based on a comprehensive organisational approach that takes into account all aspects of return, readmission and reintegration. IOM highlighted its changing position moving from an intervention-oriented actor to an advisor to governments and stakeholders on return migration in general, based on comprehensive protection and a human rights approach that links reintegration more closely to development and stabilisation programmes.

## On the governance of the Dialogue

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1) The Senior Officials' Meeting officially marked the handover of the Chairmanship of the Dialogue to Spain, a member country of the Steering Committee.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.rabat-process.org/en/activities/publications/anti-trafficking-assessment>

- The Office for Migration Affairs – a separate unit of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs reporting directly to the Cabinet - will officially be responsible for the Chairmanship. An inter-ministerial coordination group has been established for this purpose. Spain's Chairmanship will be carried out as a team at national level.
- The Chairmanship will take place in a spirit of openness. A collective and participatory approach will be at its heart, taking into account all Dialogue partners' interests.
- Spain then presented its future programme as Chair. It confirmed that successful experiences will be taken into account, such as labelling, the organisation of meetings in hybrid format and the role of the Reference Countries.
- Spain would like to organise among others, three high-level face to face thematic meetings on: Domain 1 (migration and development, root causes); Domain 2 (legal migration and mobility, in particular on the issue of matching the structural challenge of qualifications in African-European labour migration) and Domain 4 (lessons learnt during covid times in irregular migration, and fighting human trafficking and smuggling). Spain would like this programme to be coherent with partners' priorities and to build on the proposals made by the UN Agencies. Belgium, having just elaborated a National Migration and Development Strategy, would be particularly interested in contributing to future activities organised on Domain 1 (the issue of remittances, for example, was mentioned). Identification of activities and themes on Domains 3 and 5 will be defined with the Reference Countries.
- The Rabat Process partners agreed to hold a Ministerial Conference Chaired by Spain. This Conference could serve as a bridge with the future African Chair of the Dialogue - Morocco. Spain will maintain a pragmatic approach to the preparation of the Conference.
- Finally, regarding the Global Compact on Migration (GCM), Spain stressed the importance of contextualising the activities of the Rabat Process. The Rabat process partners agreed on the Spanish proposal for the Secretariat to prepare a document on actions undertaken in line with the GCM objectives –especially since December 2018- within the Rabat Process as a contribution to the first GCM's International Migration Review Forum (IMRF) and a to organise a seminar afterwards to exchange views on its results and possible future activities at the light of IMFR's main conclusions.

**2) Gambia recalled its expression of interest to Chair the Rabat Process in the future.**

**3) The Rabat Process partners acknowledged and thanked Morocco for its intention to hold the next African Chairmanship of the Rabat Process in 2023**