



Rabat Process
Euro-African Dialogue on
Migration and Development

Rabat Process Senior Officials Meeting

**Outcome
document**

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Royaume du Maroc



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Introduction

Senior Officials Meeting (SOM)

- Co-chaired by the Kingdom of Morocco and Portugal.
- This marks the second Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) of the Rabat Process conducted within the framework of the Cadiz Action Plan 2023-2027. Since December 2022, Morocco has chaired the dialogue in close cooperation with the Steering Committee member countries and the support of the Rabat Process Secretariat, implemented by the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), and funded by the European Union, as part of the Dialogue for Migration and Mobility Support Project.
- The meeting attracted a varied audience of around 115 participants, including from 41 European and African countries.

Objectives of the meeting

- Presentation on the latest developments in the field of migration.
- Presentation of the results of the 2022 data collection cycle, Joint Valletta Action Plan (JVAP).
- Review of the implementation of the Cadiz Action Plan under the Moroccan Chairmanship.
- Handover of the Dialogue Chairmanship to Portugal, European member of the Steering Committee.
- Exchanges on the 2024 Programme of the Portuguese Chairmanship.

This document offers a summary of the **presentations and contributions** made across four thematic sessions, along with **recommendations** arising from the discussions.

1) High-level opening ceremony

The **high-level opening ceremony**, chaired by Mr. Fouad Kadmiri, Director of Consular and Social Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, African Cooperation and Moroccans Resident Abroad (MAECAMRE), was attended by Sedef Dearing, Director of Migration Dialogues and Cooperation, International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), Albert Siaw-Boateng, Director of Free Movement of Persons and Migration, ECOWAS Commission, Daniele Dotto, Deputy Head of Delegation of the European Union to Morocco, H.E. Isabel Almeida Rodrigues, Secretary of State for Equality and Migration, Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs, and Noureddine Benkhalil, Secretary General for the Ministry for Economic Inclusion, Small Business, Employment and Skills (MIEPEEC).

The **high-level representatives** emphasised the crucial role of **collaborative efforts, solidarity, and shared responsibility** in addressing the challenges and opportunities of migration, underlining the need to safeguarding fundamental rights and social protection measures.

The ongoing poly-crisis is affecting global migration trends and flows, particularly in West and Central Africa, which face major challenges such as desertification, food security, high population growth and protracted crises and conflicts. In that context, **multilateral cooperation** is crucial to foster effective synergies and close coordination among partner countries involved in the Rabat Process. Presently, numerous EU initiatives strive to enhance cooperation with African nations, facilitate legal migration, and combat irregular migration.

The **importance of regional Dialogues** like the **Rabat Process** in shaping migration policies was strongly emphasised, reaffirming its role as a key platform for dialogue and joint solutions, with acknowledgment of the European Union's financing support.

The high-level officials collectively acknowledged **Morocco's leadership within the Rabat Process** throughout the year, along with its achievements under the Cadiz Action Plan. In 2024, the Chairmanship of the Dialogue will be handed over to Portugal, with its newly established Agency for Integration, Migration and Asylum (AIMA). Portugal committed to continuing the valuable work of its predecessors and upholding the same dedication to strengthening and advancing the Dialogue.

2) Reflecting on the latest developments in the field of migration

This first session informed participants about the latest major developments in the field of migration, and particularly along the migratory routes linking Central, West and North Africa to Europe.

Recent developments in mixed movements relating to the Rabat Process - UNHCR

This presentation addressed the **humanitarian crisis and migratory flows in Africa**, particularly focusing on the Sahel region and the countries involved in the Rabat Process and underlined the need for collective and coordinated action to respond effectively to the crisis.

Points raised included the escalation of terrorist attacks and civilian displacement in Sahelian countries, leading to significant internal and cross-border movement as people seek safety.

A notable trend is the increase in refugees and asylum seekers in African countries participating in the Rabat Process, surpassing sea crossings to Europe. Most displacements occur within the region, emphasising the importance of regional responses. It was also observed that access to basic services, such as education, healthcare, and protection services for victims of violence against women, has deteriorated. This decline is attributed to insufficient funding and resources being concentrated in capital cities rather than along the routes frequented by migrants and refugees. In that manner, strengthening partnerships with local authorities, frequently present on the ground, is crucial, as they can offer emergency aid and effective referrals to available partners.

Additional root causes of population displacement include rising food prices, the socio-economic impact of climate change and armed conflict. The presentation provided illustrative examples of increased movements from various countries and routes, both overland and by sea, with implications for countries along migration routes.

Future projections suggest ongoing displacement, especially for Malian, Burkinabe, and Sudanese populations, potentially causing destabilisation in countries participating in the Rabat Process.

The following key solutions were presented to address this crisis:

- Cooperation among countries of origin, transit, and destination of migrants and refugees is paramount.
- Strengthening humanised border management, encompassing sea, airport, and land borders, is crucial to facilitate identification, referrals, and access to services, including facilitating return when necessary.
- It is also essential to support the commitments made by States at international fora, such as the [World Refugee Forum](#) in December 2023, by integrating them into a comprehensive approach to managing population displacement. For instance, Mauritania and Gambia have made notable commitments to address humanitarian needs and enhance more inclusive migration management, considering the specific needs of affected communities.
- The Rabat Process was underscored for its role as a valuable platform to addressing migration challenges in a coordinated manner.

Mixed migration flows: Land and sea routes along the Mediterranean, the Western African Atlantic and the Western Balkan routes. IOM's Analysis and Approach

Recent trends in migration routes into the EU reveal three major developments. First, there is a resurgence of the West African Atlantic route, with significant growth in arrivals in the Canary Islands. Secondly, a new route from West and Central Africa to Latin America and the United States has emerged, leading to concerns about human rights and exploitation. Thirdly, there is a notable increase in migration flows through Niger to North Africa, particularly towards Libya, with smugglers using bypass routes to evade controls.

IOM emphasised the importance of addressing migration challenges comprehensively, including collaboration between countries of origin and destination, ensuring access to legal documents for migrants, and providing protection against risks such as violence and disappearance. It also discussed reasons for migration, such as socio-economic factors, governance issues, conflict, and climate change, and highlights the need for targeted programs and gender-responsive approaches.

Significant risks faced by migrants were also highlighted, including violence, kidnapping and death during perilous crossings. Despite efforts, protection services remain insufficient, and there are challenges in data collection, indicating the necessity for strengthened collaboration between governments, the UN, civil society, and other stakeholders to address these issues effectively.

Overall, IOM advocated for a comprehensive approach to migration management, encompassing various stakeholders and addressing the root causes of migration, in line with the [Global Compact for Migration](#) and [Global Compact on Refugees](#).

Overview of the main migratory routes into EU - FRONTEX

The [European Border and Coast Guard Agency](#) (FRONTEX) plays a vital role in the migration flow into Europe. With a centralised position, FRONTEX maintains real-time awareness of external border activities and is equipped with the latest technologies to monitor and respond to challenges at the external borders, in close collaboration with Member States. FRONTEX is also committed to exchanging information with non-EU countries, leveraging existing partnerships and cooperation agreements.

FRONTEX's operations cover various regions. A significant deployment has been established in the region bordering Ukraine to ensure an efficient response to the thousands of people who are still fleeing the war. Currently, 2,500 EU officers are involved in managing migratory flows and combating cross-border crime, such as migrant smuggling. The contributions of partners such as Morocco in combating human smuggling networks and promoting comprehensive migration strategies were recognized.

The humanitarian dimensions of migration were emphasized, underlining that real people lie behind the statistics. In 2023, the number of irregular crossings of the EU's external borders reached around 380,000, an increase of 17% on the previous year. The Central Mediterranean route was the busiest, followed by the Western Balkans and the Eastern Mediterranean. Syrians constituted the largest group of irregular crossings, with notable increases in crossings from Africa.

Smugglers are adapting their tactics, operating across multiple countries and using vessels with high passenger capacity, notably fishing vessels departing from Libya. This has contributed to increased migratory pressure and risks for migrants, including unaccompanied minors. Overall, the presentation underscored the need for coordinated efforts to address migration challenges while respecting the rights and dignity of migrants.

Latest UNODC research findings on migrant smuggling through West, Central and Northern Africa and to Europe, and UNODC's response

Over a three-year period, the UNODC conducted research on migrant smuggling in Central and West Africa, with a particular focus on routes leading to North African countries, across the Mediterranean, and to the Canaries. This research involved surveys and interviews with refugees, migrants, and smugglers, as well as key informants from various sectors, which were then triangulated with existing data and reports.

Key findings include¹:

- Different scenarios of migrant smuggling exist, contingent upon the specific region and route. For instance, in areas with free movement routes and easier crossings, smuggling tends to be less prevalent and less organised. While regions experiencing conflict and challenging sea crossings often host more sophisticated actors, leading to potentially higher profits.
- Various actors are involved, ranging from highly organised groups to individual perpetrators at a low level. Investigations and prosecutions have primarily targeted low-level actors, raising questions about identifying true perpetrators.
- Non-state armed groups are not directly involved in perpetrating migrants smuggling, but indirectly profit from smuggling by extorting fees in territories under their control.
- Financial transactions for smuggling fees are predominantly in cash, making it difficult to trace.
- Corruption in West and North Africa is a significant driver of demand for smuggling, particularly at security checkpoints and border crossings.
- Contrary to common perception, migrants and refugees often initiate contact with smugglers themselves. The interviews uncovered that this accounted for 86% of the cases, where individuals, their family members, or friends directly approached smugglers either by phone or in person, and in fewer cases, via social media.
- Motivations for migration (ranging from seeking a better future for oneself and their family, facing serious cases of persecution, the need for international protection, and being displaced by conflict, among other factors), combined with a lack of legal alternatives and corruption, contribute to the demand for smuggling services.

Although the ECOWAS region guarantees the right to free movement, obstacles remain, including difficulties in accessing essential documents and citizens' limited awareness of their rights, which is exacerbated by corruption.

The presentation also highlighted an increase in smuggling incidents in 2023 along sea routes from Africa to Europe, affecting at least 293,000 people. Efforts to address this are being made through initiatives like the [PROMIS Project](#) - aiming to protect the rights of irregular migrants and combat human rights violations in West and Central Africa, and the [Liaison Magistrate initiative](#), in place to improve coordination between source and destination countries to enhance investigations and prosecutions.

Priority areas for UNODC intervention in 2024 include addressing connections between human trafficking/smuggling and other illicit activities, conflicts, and climate-induced mobility.

¹ Additional information regarding this survey can be found in the following link: [Observatory on Smuggling of Migrants](#)

3) Presenting the results of the 2022 JVAP Data Collection Cycle

Established in 2015, the [Joint Valletta Action Plan](#) (JVAP) serves as the regional framework to address migration policy. It aims to enhance cooperation between African and European States on migration, built around five domains and encompassing 105 priority areas.

This presentation outlined the results derived from the 2022 Data Collection Cycle of the JVAP, shedding light on the forthcoming direction of the JVAP Follow-up process. Special emphasis was placed on using data-driven insights to inform policymaking on migration.

Key results of the 2022 JVAP Data Collection Cycle

- The 2022 data collection cycle for the JVAP saw significant success, with a high volume of initiatives and funding reported by partners. Notably, ECHO participated for the first time, contributing 500 initiatives. The cycle saw the publication of 1,370 new initiatives totalling €8.8 billion in funding, with a focus on projects and policies across various work processes and regions.
- Leading countries in terms of initiatives implemented and funding allocated during the cycle were Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Nigeria. Cumulative data since 2016 shows consistent increase in reported initiatives and funding, indicating strong partner commitment, particularly in the Rabat Process region.
- There is a trend towards implementing initiatives under Area 3, as revealed by funding distribution analysis across project years and areas.
- Looking ahead to 2024, the JVAP aims to evaluate its activities and enhance effectiveness. Planned activities include engaging in participative evaluation of methodologies and overhauling technical infrastructure for better tracking and reporting.

The ensuing discussion addressed the challenges in data collection, and centred on improving collection practices, sharing knowledge on implementation, and the importance of collaboration between partners in the reporting process to ensure data accuracy.

Suggestions were made for enriching the PACV database by integrating more detailed data and extending its access beyond partner country focal points, including to academics, journalists and other stakeholders for greater inclusivity and usefulness. The question of extending access to non-governmental partners was raised for consideration and will be followed up.

During this session, ICMPD took the opportunity to briefly introduce its new Grant component.

Enhancing inclusivity in migration dialogues

The new Grant component aims at enhancing the involvement of civil society organizations (CSOs), diaspora organisations, and local authorities in migration-related initiatives. This mechanism is part of the [MMD programme](#), co-implemented with the European Union, and aims to make migration dialogues more inclusive by connecting funded initiatives to policy discussions and thematic recommendations.

The Grants facility, a key component of the MMD programme, aims to translate policy decisions into concrete actions and facilitate their implementation. It covers various domains such as migration and development, legal migration, international protection, prevention of irregular migration and human trafficking, and return and reintegration. Cross-cutting issues like gender equality and human rights are also addressed.

The structure of the Grants component aligns with the five areas of the JVAP and addresses migration challenges at continental, regional, and multi-country levels. Consortium applications are encouraged. The application process will involve the submission of a concept note, and support will be provided for the preparation of a comprehensive project document. Applications can be submitted in English or French, and the evaluation process will be transparent, with the participation of European Commission observers in the Evaluation Committee. The call for proposals is currently being prepared and will be announced shortly. Approximately 9 million euros will be allocated to selected projects.

4) Taking stock on activities and results of the Moroccan chairmanship

During this third session, the Rabat Process Secretariat reflected on the highlights of 2023, emphasising the Moroccan Chairmanship's commitment to advancing the Cadiz Action Plan across all five areas, achieving significant progress by addressing 5 out of the 10 objectives and 11 out of the 20 actions of the plan.

The year saw a diverse range of themes addressed, from voluntary return and reintegration to climate change and the questions of youth, development and migration, with innovative approaches such as the first-ever organized meeting on family separation and missing persons in the context of migration. These meetings resulted in fruitful discussions and numerous valuable recommendations for partner countries.

Successful engagement with the Khartoum Process led to positive outcomes and collaborative efforts, to be further pursued. The inclusive involvement of all partner countries in the Dialogue was highlighted as crucial for success, emphasizing the importance of diverse perspectives in addressing migration challenges. The Rabat Process Secretariat's significant communication efforts led to a notable increase in followers on social media platforms, expanding the Dialogue's impact beyond its usual reach.

Looking ahead to the Portuguese Chairmanship, the Rabat Process Secretariat expressed confidence and eagerness to continue collaborative efforts to achieve shared objectives, building on the momentum from the Moroccan Chairmanship.

Overview of actions under the Cadiz Action Plan, under the Moroccan Chairmanship

In this session, the co-chairing countries presented the main outcomes of the thematic meetings in 2023.

Area 1: Development benefits of migration and addressing the root causes of irregular migration and forced displacement.

Thematic Meeting on Migration, Youth and Development

Under the joint chairmanship of **the Netherlands** and **Nigeria**, this thematic meeting highlighted the pivotal role of fostering innovation and economic growth, particularly among youth. It demonstrated how young entrepreneurs are driving transformative change in the migration landscape, reframing migration as a narrative of hope, energy, and opportunity.

The objectives of this thematic meeting included establishing a diverse and inclusive multi-stakeholder platform focused on youth engagement, empowerment, education, employment, representation, and participation, while also analysing frameworks and processes through a youth-centric perspective to generate actionable recommendations. The co-chairs emphasised youth as architects rather than mere recipients of migration policies and underscored the active participation and indispensable contribution of women, promoting gender inclusivity in collective efforts.

A key recommendation (among many others) arising from the discussions is to create an environment conducive to youth entrepreneurship, aligning with the objectives of the Rabat Process and setting a precedent for international engagement. In that manner, they stressed the importance of involving youth directly in decision-making processes, because “nothing about youth can be done without youth themselves”.

Area 2: Regular migration and mobility

Special event on [Circular migration](#)

Morocco and **Portugal** jointly led a special event focusing on circular migration. Emphasising collaborative migration management, the two co-chairs underlined the potential of circular migration for maximising benefits across countries of origin, destination, and for migrants themselves. They stressed its role in addressing labour shortages in destination countries, consequently leading to increased economic production. Furthermore, they highlighted the positive impact on migrants, including higher incomes and skills’ development, ultimately benefiting their countries of origin.

During the first panel, initiatives like PEM WECCO in Belgium and Senegal, as well as Skills Partnership Mobility in Germany, Ghana, and Senegal within the construction sector, were showcased. Participants engaged in discussions regarding significant challenges and brainstormed innovative strategies to overcome them. The resulting recommendations were categorised into three groups: operational, focusing on scaling up efforts, fostering partnerships between European and African companies, and facilitating the return and contribution of skilled migrants to their home countries; strategic, aiming to align migration and human capital development strategies; and related to tool development, including anticipating skill needs and recognising informally acquired skills.

The second panel presented successful experiences in Morocco, Spain, Lithuania, and Nigeria, highlighting the critical importance of cooperation in addressing illegal migration and advancing migration and development. It was stressed that circular migration reinforces regular migration channels. Consequently, adopting a triple-win approach is paramount, to ensure the well-being and protection of migrants’ rights while safeguarding the interests of all parties involved. This approach entails vertical integration, encompassing elements such as fast recruitment procedures, language learning, cultural and legal guidance, employment integration, accommodation, overseas training, return management, and ensuring social security rights. Moreover, the significance of implementing integrated mobility partnerships and maintaining continuous dialogue between authorities of departure and destination countries was underscored as indispensable components.

Area 3: Protection and asylum

Thematic Meeting on [Family Separation and Missing Persons in the context of migration](#)

Addressing the thematic on missing migrants stands as a paramount concern for **Switzerland**. It was therefore natural to co-organise its first meeting within the framework of the Rabat Process. The thematic focus is also of great importance for **The Gambia**, as many Gambians embark on irregular migration journeys with the aim of reaching Europe, yet the dangerous routes often result in tragic loss of lives, highlighting the relevance of addressing these issues to bring relief or closure to affected families, communities, and societies.

The meeting focused on key themes including the prevention of migrants from going missing and family separation in the context of migration, the search and identification of missing migrants, providing support and information to families of missing migrants, and addressing the needs of unaccompanied and separated migrant children. Several good practices were identified, notably in The Gambia, including the establishment of a Taskforce for missing migrants, a National Focal Point on the issue of missing migrants, the identification of migration focal points in diplomatic missions, close collaboration between the government and Gambian diaspora communities to identify missing migrants, and collaboration with the ICRC on DNA testing and analysis of families of missing migrants.

The most important recommendation arising from this meeting is the setting up of a network of focal points in the partner countries of the Rabat Process responsible for issues relating to missing migrants and the separation of families. The latter were encouraged to identify their respective focal points.

ICRC will cooperate with Switzerland and Gambia to support this network and streamline communication among these focal points on missing migrants. This collaboration will also facilitate actions, establish objectives and working modalities, and ultimately build the necessary capacities to address these concerns. Two key priorities are seen for this role: serving as a primary contact for inquiries from authorities of other countries on these matters and representing the authorities in multilateral discussions regarding cooperation and policy questions related to missing migration issues.

The Gambia and Switzerland are firmly committed to maintaining dialogue and exchanges on missing migrants. The Gambia has specifically offered to organise a follow-up meeting in 2025, in line with the respective presidencies.

Area 4: Prevention and effective reduction of irregular migration, fight against migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings.

Thematic meeting on [Humanised border management](#)

Co-chaired by **Morocco** and **Spain**, this thematic meeting was notable for its alignment with the main principle of the Rabat Process, which is fostering collaborative efforts to address shared challenges, and its location in Marrakech, where the adoption of the [Global Compact on Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration](#) highlighted the pivotal role of human-centric approaches in migration governance. Additionally, it coincided with the recent endorsement of the declaration and the [Cadiz Action Plan](#), which emphasises enhancing the capacities of public institutions in integrated border management.

During the meeting, recommended principles and guidelines on human rights at international borders were shared, focusing on non-discrimination, special needs, and the protection of asylum seekers. Emphasis was placed on the significance of fostering multi-stakeholder partnerships, including collaboration with international organisations, NGOs, and civil society, as part of a comprehensive and coherent approach.

Key insights from the discussions included praise for law enforcement agencies' efforts in safeguarding the human rights of vulnerable migrants, particularly through search and rescue operations at sea, combatting human trafficking, and ensuring mechanisms for reporting abuses. The importance of reinforcing international cooperation between States, including non-state entities, to prevent abuses and adapt to changing migration dynamics was emphasised. Additionally, the concept of countries transitioning from origin or transit to destination countries was highlighted as a significant development in migration patterns.

The co-chairs stressed the importance of ensuring continuity in initiatives during the next chairmanship to enhance border management tools, which are essential for effective migration governance.

Area 5: Return, readmission, and reintegration

Thematic meeting on [Voluntary return and reintegration](#)

Organised jointly by **Cameroon** and **Belgium**, this thematic meeting continued the discussions initiated during the webinar on key factors for the success of voluntary return and reintegration programs held in January 2021.

The objectives of this meeting were to discuss new perspectives on return and reintegration within the framework of the EU strategy, to identify a common corpus of best practices between European and African countries, to raise awareness about the importance of strengthening synergies between reintegration and development, and to inform about the need to consolidate the protection of migrants at all stages of the process.

The various initiatives presented during the panels emphasised the importance of strengthening links between reintegration programs and socio-economic development in countries of return to ensure sustainable and local reintegration. According to IOM, it is necessary to incorporate reintegration into national sectoral plans to comprehensively address the vulnerabilities of returning migrants.

The key recommendations formulated during this thematic meeting aim to improve the policies and strategies of voluntary return and reintegration of migrants, focusing on the need for a coordinated and inclusive approach, as well as addressing the specific needs of returning migrants and host communities.

5) Handing over of the Chairmanship and presenting Portugal Program for 2024

In the concluding session, the Kingdom of Morocco, represented by H.E. Younes Sekkouri, Minister of Economic Inclusion, Small Business, Employment and Skills, formally handed over the Chairmanship of the Dialogue to Portugal, represented by H.E. Isabel Almeida Rodrigues, Secretary of State for Equality and Migration, Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs, who introduced its priorities for 2024 and provisional calendar of activities foreseen during its tenure.

Portugal highlighted their primary goal will be to move forward with the implementation of the Cadiz Action Plan 2023-2027 and foster dialogue through a geographical and thematically balanced approach, considering the interests and specificities of the Dialogue partner countries. In this sense, Portugal will seek to develop initiatives both in Europe and in Africa, covering all areas of the Rabat Process' strategic framework.

Within the Dialogue thematic programme, the key priorities that Portugal will be focusing on during their chairmanship programme will fall under Area 1 "development benefits of migration and addressing the root causes of irregular migration and forced displacement", Area 2 "regular migration and mobility" and Area 3 "protection and asylum". These areas are closely aligned with established priorities in Portugal's migration policy. In addition, Portugal will strive to develop and implement actions not previously covered in all five areas of the Cadiz Action Plan.

As a first step, Portugal will organise a Steering Committee Meeting (CoPiL) in Brussels on 15th of March to formally launch the programme of activities for 2024. A second CoPiL will be organised at the end of the Portuguese chairmanship together with a Senior Officials' Meeting (SOM) to hand over to Nigeria, as upcoming African Chair of the Rabat Process.

To conclude, Portugal encouraged Rabat Process partner countries to work together with the new Portuguese chairmanship and provide inputs and proposals that will be carefully reviewed in close collaboration with the Secretariat of the Process.