

Summary: “State of the art – The root causes of irregular migration in the region of the Rabat Process” - a study conducted by Lucie Bacon (Migrinter) and Nelly Robin (Institut de recherche pour le développement-CEPED) for ICPMD, May 2018

At the request of the Secretariat of the Rabat Process implemented by the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), in May 2018 Lucie Bacon and Nelly Robin carried out a study entitled *State of the art – The root causes of irregular migration in the region of the Rabat Process*. This review of existing work on the subject of “root causes” of “irregular migration” suggests a need to rethink the concepts underpinning the current global approach taken by the Rabat Process on migration issue, which consider irregular migration as a problem whose causes can be identified and which we can tackle through development aid.

Two components make up the current approach: the first concerns the adoption of security measures, notably the externalisation or “outsourcing” of border control of the European Union (EU); the second, more long-term, aims to tackle the factors which are put forward to explain migrants’ departures. These factors can be economic (poverty, economic crisis, the burden of foreign debt), demographic (population growth, urban growth), environmental (drought, pressure on natural resources) or even political (*Coup d’état*). In order to discourage the populations of countries of origin from undertaking their migratory projects, specific instruments or development aid are mobilised.

However, despite these two components, irregular migrations persist. Faced with this *impasse*, scientific works propose an alternative approach. This requires, first, that we highlight the partial nature of the concept which considers migration as a South-North phenomenon and which, as such, fails to give due consideration to intra-African migration. The latter is, however, significant between countries of the Rabat Process, where a system of free movement, specific to the functioning of the ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) and the ECCAS (Economic Community of Central African States) applies. This system of free movement continues to apply to movement towards the Maghreb countries, due to the existence of bilateral agreements between the Member States of the ECOWAS and the ECCAS on the one hand, and the States of the Maghreb on the other.

It is essential to take into account intra-African movements as well as the benefits derived from free movement. Indeed, it has been proven that migration tends to increase the development of the countries of origin, especially via remittances, fund transfers and the creation of jobs by the migrants. According to the latest report of the World Bank, in 2017, remittances towards low and medium-income countries amounted to 466 billion dollars, a significantly higher amount than that provided by public development aid.

In addition, the notion of “root causes of irregular migration” is potentially problematic as it fails to differentiate between regular and irregular migration. However, this does not correspond to reality: there are no root causes of regular migration completely distinct from root causes of irregular migration. At the start, there is a decision to leave and a plan to migrate, and it is only during the migratory journey itself that it may become, irregular.

In addition, there is a deterministic logic which underpins the concept of the fight against “root causes”, which does not portray the complexity of the decision to migrate. Such explanations lead us to consider migrants either as “ballistic objects propelled by differences in the standards of living between the sending countries and the receiving countries”, i.e. as “a set of agents that have no control over their actions”; or as “unfeeling calculators aiming to maximise their gains [...with] advanced knowledge of the effects of their actions.”¹

On the contrary, this study invites us to **consider the migrant as an autonomous individual, driven by a complex set of factors which go beyond a simplistic desire to escape from poverty**. The notion of “the project to migrate” (migration project) which is constantly being re-evaluated and reconfigured whilst the migration is carried out, enables us to better understand migrants’ journeys. The study takes into consideration the changes which often take place during the migratory journey itself, and the role played by the members of the groups to which the migrant-actor belongs in the different decision-making processes which guide their journey.

The review carried out by Lucie Bacon and Nelly Robin for the ICMPD proposes, therefore, an innovative approach to migratory movement within the countries of the Rabat Process. According to this approach one of the solutions lies in maintaining free movement in order to promote economic development and political stability in these regions.

¹ Ma Mung Emmanuel, 2009, « Le point de vue de l'autonomie dans l'étude des migrations internationales : « penser de l'intérieur » les phénomènes de mobilité », in Françoise Dureau; Marie-Antoinette Hily. *Les mondes de la mobilité*, Presses de l'Université de Rennes, pp. 25-38