

Thematic Meeting on the Root causes of irregular migration

Context: strategic importance of the theme of the root causes

The Valletta Summit made addressing the root causes of irregular migration and forced displacement a priority topic in the cooperation between African and European countries in matters of migration. The creation of the Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF) represents a new financial mechanism dedicated explicitly to addressing the root causes of the irregular migration and forced displacement of persons in Africa. In light of the mandate given to the Rabat Process to monitor the effective implementation of the Joint Valletta Action Plan (JVAP), the new Rabat Process strategic framework, **the Marrakesh Action Plan 2018-2020**, is closely aligned with the JVAP, so as to ensure coherence in political undertakings.

As such, the Marrakesh Action Plan aims to “Achieve a common understanding of the root causes of irregular migration and forced displacement in the Rabat Process region” through two specific actions as follows:

- **Action 4:** Analyse the root causes and make practical recommendations (particularly through the organisation of thematic meetings on this subject) with a view to improving the incorporation of these issues into policy development.
- **Action 5:** Promote a more systematic inclusion of issues related to the root causes of irregular migration and forced displacement into socio-economic development strategies and programmes at national level, and into development cooperation programmes, whilst also promoting ownership of existing regional normative frameworks.

The Marrakesh Action plan also pays particular attention to the fight against xenophobia, racism and discrimination, though, notably, the promotion of a “*balanced narrative on migration and diasporas*” based on factual data, whilst highlighting the positive contribution of migration for development.

Given the complexity of the theme of the root causes of irregular migration and its importance, a Thematic Meeting on Root Causes will be organised by the Rabat Process in Paris on 23rd and 24th October 2018. The organisation of this meeting was approved by the Steering Committee (the strategic governing body of the Rabat Process). The latter also decided in favour of conducting an in-depth study on the root causes in order to gather conclusive and specific data which will guide discussions during the thematic meeting.

Gaining a better understanding on the concept of root causes

In order to fight against the “root causes of irregular migration”, it is first necessary to identify them. As recognised by the Rabat Process partners in the Marrakesh Action Plan, there are multiple root causes of irregular migration and forced displacements. It is a complex and difficult theme to define, and there is a certain amount of confusion regarding the means to be used to respond to this phenomenon, especially regarding the issue of. For instance, studies have shown that development does not restrict migration, and that the social and economic developmental process is, on the contrary, associated with generally higher levels of mobility and greater levels of migration, at least in the short and medium term.



The study and thematic meeting will help to “unpack” the question of root causes and to show that migrations are not the outcome of a single determinant; they will try to provide more detailed elements to explain the motivations which underlie the decision to migrate.

Although the majority of migratory flows in Africa and Europe are observable at the intra-continental levels, the media coverage of migration in the Rabat Process region remains focused on South-North irregular migration rather than South-South migration. In addition, this media coverage tends to present migration as being a “problem” to “resolve” and not an opportunity. The study and thematic meeting will help to put into perspective the “problematic” character of irregular migration coming from the African continent towards Europe, and will contribute to reframing the debate on root causes. In addition, root causes are presented as being factors which are only present in countries of origin. Yet, root causes require *causes must be addressed through a large range of responses at the political and operational level and require* a shared and coordinated response including countries of origin, transit and destination.

A migrant-centred approach

The study and thematic meeting will try to go beyond the approach which consists in explaining the choice to migrate solely as the result of external factors (economic, environmental and political factors) and will suggest an alternative. The study invites us, in particular, to « consider migrations *from the inside* (Ma Mung, 2009: p.25) and to put ourselves in the place of the main actor – i.e. potential migrants, persons who have the experience of migration – the importance was to direct ourselves towards a fine and complex understanding of the causes of migration, in line with reality”¹. The study on root causes will promote a migrant-centred approach; interviews will be carried out with candidates for migration, those who have already left and /or already arrived as well as those within the migrant’s entourage.

A new decision-making tool for the Rabat Process: an in-depth study on root causes

Through the study and the thematic meeting, the partners of the Rabat Process will analyse the root causes of irregular migration in order to grasp the complexity of the question and the diversity of the migratory dynamics within Western Africa. The partners will gain enhanced understanding of the factors which influence the choice to migrate and of the aspects which determine different types of migratory movements (irregular migration, regular migration, regional migration or migration to Europe).

The results of the study and the meeting will serve as a basis for developing appropriate and targeted political instruments that aim at improving migration management. It should be noted that root causes will be analysed by the partners of the Rabat Process, not with the aim of preventing or stopping migration. Rather, they will be analysed in order to address the structural factors of irregular migration which force people to migrate out of desperation, whilst gaining greater awareness of the advantages of safe, orderly and regular migration. Partial results of the study will be presented during the meeting, and will help to raise awareness and to contribute to a more balanced communication on migration.

¹State of the art: The root causes of irregular migration in the region of the Rabat Process (Lucie Bacon and Nelly Robin, Study conducted for the ICMPD, May 2018)



Objectives of the thematic meeting

General objective of the meeting

To gain a shared understanding of the root causes of irregular migration in the Rabat Process region, in order to facilitate the development of appropriate policies which are capable of responding to the identified structural factors.

Specific objectives of the meeting

- To carry out a joint analysis of the concept of root causes in all its forms and to “unpack” these root causes (*is there a hierarchy between the root causes? are there overlaps?*)
- To deconstruct and reframe the debate on the root causes, by focusing particularly on the results and new ways of reflecting on the question, with new ideas generated by the meeting and study.
- To develop recommendations for different stakeholders - including political decision-makers, project and programme managers - on how to address root causes.
- To strengthen the link between operational research and evidence-based policy development.

Expected results

- A series of (non-binding) recommendations, designed to facilitate the development of appropriate policies which are capable of responding to the identified root causes, in conformity with national development programmes.
- A series of (non-binding) recommendations, designed to ensure that questions related to root causes are systematically taken into account during the development of policies and national development programmes and strategies.
- A series of (non-binding) recommendations, designed to guide project managers in the implementation of actions to address root causes.
- An analysis which would contribute to regional-level discussions related to the Valletta framework (noting that one of the sub-objectives of domain 1 of the JVAP consists in “*carrying out a joint EU-Africa analysis of the root causes of irregular migration and the phenomenon of displaced persons...*”) and to continental-level discussions, as part of the Africa-EU Partnership.

Organisation and methodology of the meeting

The thematic meeting will be held on 23rd and 24th October 2018 in Paris. It will be chaired by France and co-chaired by Senegal. The participation of external experts (namely representatives of civil society organisations and international organisations, researchers, members of the diaspora and representatives of the private sector) will be at the discretion of France.

In order to ensure that the study and the thematic meeting result in relevant recommendations and are of added value for the dialogue partners, they must be guided by precise goals. The debates during the thematic meeting must be coherent, fruitful and well-facilitated. Although it is possible to provide a long list of the root causes of irregular migration, it is necessary – for the purposes of the study and the thematic meeting – to focus discussions and debates on precise and predefined categories of root causes.



Taking into account the specific mandate of the Rabat Process, it was decided to exclude short-term or cyclical root causes (often referred to as “triggers”) which are the source of forced displacement, from the scope of the study and the meeting. Indeed, if we consider the fact these “triggers” include insecurity, repression, ethnic conflicts, civil wars and inter-State conflicts, it is clear that the Rabat Process has limited capacity to act on these factors. The Rabat Process is above all a space for dialogue and political undertaking, the purpose of which is to improve its partners’ understanding of migratory challenges. It is not a stabilisation instrument and does not have the means to carry out concrete actions in the face of crises or conflicts. Thus, conflict zones or crisis zones will not be considered in the scope of the study meeting.

The detailed agenda for the thematic meeting will be prepared by the Secretariat of the Rabat Process in consultation with France, and will include the following points:

- An introductory presentation on the concept of the root causes of irregular migrations and its importance for the Rabat Process
- A session designed to place the issue of root causes within its regional context (including the sharing of the result of the Khartoum Process Thematic Meeting on Root Causes, held in 2017)
- An explanation of the methodology developed for the study on root causes by the researchers and presentation of partial results of the study achieved to date
- An analysis of the existing responses designed to address root causes, in order to conduct a joint reflection on the ways to strengthen and improve these
- Thematic panels on the key questions, including: the urbanisation of migration and the role of cities; the root causes of rural-urban migration.
- Working groups: in these groups, the partners will jointly explore potential responses to the root causes presented and will formulate recommendations that will later be distributed and discussed in a plenary session with all the participants.

Significant time will be allocated to questions and answers after every plenary session. All the sessions will be moderated and presentations of experts will supplement the respective debates.

