

Policy Brief

Relations between immigration and labour policies in Morocco. Employers' legal responsibilities with irregular migrant workers.

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As confirmed by our findings in the framework of the DignityFIRM project, a significant number of irregular migrants work temporarily in less regulated sectors and fill gaps in the Moroccan labour market, namely in the agricultural and sea food industry sectors, which are characterized by seasonal peaks of production.

The informal employment of migrant (and some native) workers in these sectors as day workers exposes them to precarious labour and welfare conditions, such as: lack of labour contracts and absence of social protection. Their precarity is exacerbated due to their legal insecurity, linked to the confluence of their irregular residence status, their informal

labour status along with other socio-economic and identity factors that push them at first hand to tolerate low quality working conditions that does not guarantee their dignity.

This Policy Brief draws on two workshops with stakeholders as well as on findings from interviews we had with various national and local stakeholders within the framework of the DignityFIRM project.

This Policy Brief focuses on employers' legal responsibilities for hiring irregular migrant workers and some of the challenges that drive employers' non-compliance with the labour regulations in this respect. A particular focus is directed here to the agricultural and seafood

industry sectors which have become increasingly dependent on irregular migrant workers, as well as migrants passed through the regularization campaigns of 2013 and 2016. Migrant workers play an essential role in the economic stability of these sectors which contribute to the country's food security and national economy.

Particularly, the following policy recommendations can be addressed to the Moroccan government for a more balanced approach that guarantees both flexibility and protection.

New migration dynamics

In the recent decades, Morocco turned to be a country of transit and reception of many migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. According to the 2024 General Population and Housing Census (RGPH), Morocco counts 14,8152 foreigners on its territory. There is no official estimate of the number of irregular migrants in Morocco, but African Union reports that more than 87,000 irregular migrants have settled in Morocco in the last past five years in addition to over 12,000 asylum applications processed in 2023 which makes the country the second most popular destination for irregular migrants in Africa¹. This population has specific socio-demographic characteristics: they are mainly young people, often with no

professional qualifications and in an irregular administrative situation. They therefore constitute a workforce that employers can easily mobilize in the agricultural and seafood industry sectors which do not require specialized skills.

New migration policy

The Kingdom of Morocco has adopted in 2013 the National Immigration and Asylum Strategy (SNIA), namely a new migration policy aimed at promoting the integration of migrants into the Moroccan society through their socio-economic inclusion, encouraging training and employment, and involving several state institutions and civil society organizations in this process. This policy was reinforced in the same year by an exceptional campaign to regularize migrants in an irregular administrative situation, which, according to government figures, involved around 23,000 foreigners. A second exceptional regularization campaign was then organized in 2016, regularizing 26,000 individuals.

For employers, the SNIA launched in 2013 along with the two regularizations provided a general framework that encourages the economic integration of irregular migrants and addresses labour market inefficiencies.

While Morocco's migration policy is evolving to include a human rights perspective, the integration of migrants is pending on a regulatory framework that allows for legal pathways for regularization and integration constellations for irregular migrants.

¹ African Union. (2025, June). African Integration Report 2025: Strengthening the implementation of Regional Frameworks to fully leverage continental achievements. https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/45243-doc-2025-0722_African_Integration_Report_main_report_EN_1_1.pdf

the *caporal* system, which needs to be changed.

Policy recommendations

Establish an appropriate legal framework for the employment of migrants

Insights from the group discussions emphasize the need to establish a simplified system for irregular migrant workers to access formal employment in sectors under pressure, particularly agriculture and fisheries. Such an approach would help address pressing labor market needs while ensuring better social and legal protection for migrant workers from labour abuse and exploitation on the basis of their irregularity.

Strengthen compliance inspections

Strengthen the enforcement of the Labor Code to protect workers' rights and combat informal practices. This involves implementing regular inspections to ensure compliance with the legislation, creating accessible firewalls and complaint mechanisms, aimed at ensuring the protection of irregular migrant workers.

Strengthen social protection

Although migrants in an irregular administrative situation can access health care, it remains essential to put in place mechanisms allowing them to regularize their legal status. This regularization would facilitate their integration into national social and health protection programs (CNSS and AMO), thus ensuring the protection of their fundamental rights.

Improve living and working conditions through corporate social responsibility

Incentivizing corporate social responsibility, by implementing ethical recruitment practices would improve the living and working conditions of seasonal migrant workers. This includes providing suitable housing, ensuring safe means of transport, particularly for female agricultural workers, and strengthening workplace safety and social inspections to ensure that rights are respected and occupational risks are prevented.

Encourage cooperation and social dialogue

It is essential to officially recognize migrant community representatives as legitimate interlocutors in social dialogue. This recognition should be accompanied by a strengthening of tripartite consultation between employers, trade unions, and NGOs, in order to ensure that the needs of migrant workers are better taken into account.

Furthermore, it is recommended to develop South-South partnerships, particularly with migrants' countries of origin, to promote concerted and sustainable solutions to labor migration.

Conclusion

The contribution of migrant workers in the agricultural and fisheries sectors today constitutes an essential lever for the development of Morocco's strategic sectors. However, the persistence of informality not only limits the full recognition of their rights, but also hinders the optimization of these vital

sectors. The adoption of a clear, flexible, and inclusive framework represents a strategic opportunity. It would ensure better security for migratory routes, respond to the real needs of the labor market, and consolidate national competitiveness. By doing so, Morocco would

confirm its commitment to protecting the rights of migrants while continuing to implement its migration policy.

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About DignityFIRM

Towards becoming sustainable and resilient societies we must address the structural contradictions between our societies' exclusion of migrant workers and their substantive role in producing our food.

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