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Policy Brief

Relations between immigration and labour policies in Morocco.

What prospects ahead?

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In Farm to Fork sectors (F2F), **the increasing dependence of employers on informal migrant work calls for the governments' intervention.**

Morocco has been experiencing rapid changes in its farm to fork labour market for several years. Declining population growth, urbanization, and changing lifestyles are limiting the availability of local labour, particularly for seasonal work in the agricultural and fisheries sector. Migrants, particularly those from sub-Saharan Africa, are playing a growing role in these sectors, while their integration continues to be affected by precarious legal and social conditions.

In light of the group discussions the DignityFIRM Moroccan research team had on the 10th of February 2025, this Policy Brief we explore **the actual regulations available for employing migrant workers, including the**

legal pathways open for migrants in irregular status. We also recommend to the Moroccan government some of the prospects towards more inclusive schemes of seasonal labour migration that would strike the balance between the country's strategic economic needs, and the migrants' labour and welfare rights.

Labour market transformations

Morocco is experiencing a **rapid demographic transition** marked by a progressive aging of the population. This phenomenon is reflected mainly through the demographic indicators of mortality and fertility. It leads to a transformation of the age pyramid which reveals a trend towards inversion: "on the one hand, a decrease in the proportion of young people under 15, from 28.2% in 2014 to 26.5% in 2024, as well as a decline in the working-age population (15 to

59 years), from 62.4% in 2014 to 59.7% in 2024; and on the other hand, an increase in the proportion of people aged 60 and over, from 9.4% in 2014 to 13.8% in 2024"¹. This demographic transition is also accompanied by an **increase in the rate of urbanization**, "the weight of the urban population reaching 62.8% in 2024 against 60.4% in 2014"².

Another socio-cultural change concerns the **increasing orientation, particularly among young people, toward sectors perceived as more attractive, such as call centers or certain urban jobs, and the tendency to undervalue manual labour**. Other Moroccan workers tend to favour employment without being registered in the National Social Security Fund (CNSS) so as to be liable for the direct social assistance provided by the State.

On the social level, this evolution results in a **lack of recognition and valorisation of agricultural work**. It constitutes one of the explanatory factors for the disinterest of the younger generations in seasonal work, which accentuates the dependence on foreign labour, particularly in the agricultural and seafood processing sectors. These two economic sectors are characterized by a high demand for unskilled, and seasonal labour, particularly during peak periods (harvests, fishing campaigns).

¹ High Commission for Planning (HCP). Note on the main results: Demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of the population, General Population and Housing Census. December 2024, p.8.

² Ibid., p.7.

The governance of irregular migrant work in Morocco

As the number of irregular migrants spiked resulting from the evolving migration dynamics in Morocco over the past decades, considerable attention was directed to the governance of migration dynamics in the country. On 18 December 2014, the government adopted the National Strategy for Migration and Asylum (SNIA), making Morocco the first country in the Middle East and North Africa region to draft a strategic plan on migration and asylum. The new migration policy reflects a renewed focus on managing the migration issue that aligns with the country's commitments to the international conventions, including the 2011 Constitution, ILO conventions and the Convention on the Protection of Migrant Workers, which guarantees equal treatment and non-discrimination among all residents to labour and welfare rights.

Systemic gaps and institutional limitations

Restrictions on the formal employment of foreigners

Some aspects of the recruitment mechanism of foreign workers in Morocco present challenges to consider. First, **the procedure must be initiated by employers for migrant workers who are still in their home country**, which means that irregular migrant workers on Moroccan soil cannot benefit from this

formal employment procedure. Second, **the number of work permit applications per employer and per job profile is capped**, which limits the flexibility of the mechanism. Third, **the costs associated with publishing advertisements and obtaining the activity certificate can represent a significant investment for employers**. Finally, this system is particularly **suited to highly skilled foreign workers**, which suggests that adjustments could be considered to meet the needs of a greater diversity of profiles.

Renewal challenges for regularized migrants

The exceptional regularizations, which granted 50,000 irregular migrants residence permits in the two collective campaigns of 2013 and 2017, allowed for the **removal of the administrative opposability for irregular migrants to work formally**. Their access to the formal labour market has been enhanced by **simplifying the process** of applying for work visas from the labour authority. Employers could employ regularized migrants formally without providing and paying for the activity certificate, which proves the lack of national competencies to fill the job.

However, for renewal of their residence permits, regularized migrants face significant challenges, including strict documentation requirements, such as the ability to have a valid work contract, or the ability to apply for the status of an entrepreneur by creating a start-up.

As for migrants who fall back into irregularity after the expiration of their residence permits, they have virtually no access to formal employment and are forced into informal employment.

Some responses, initiatives and strategies

The actors involved in the discussion agreed that the National Immigration and Asylum Strategy (SNIA) provides a general framework conducive to the integration of migrants in all sectors. To promote the progressive and balanced formal inclusion of migrant workers in Farm to Fork sectors, alignment between the migration policy and these sector's policies is crucial. The **economic resilience and social sustainability of these sectors can only be guaranteed through the legal security of migrant workers**, who have become an essential part of the labour force. Legal security ensures decent and fair working conditions for all.

Several employers are already **implementing measures to address the gradual transformation of labour dynamics, improve the attractiveness and retention of their workforce**, both native and non-native. This includes providing compensation (bonuses, benefits, and allowances), as well as building day-care centers within or near production sites. Some are investing in offering transportation and housing solutions for their workers. These initiatives help reduce job insecurity, stabilize the workforce, and boost productivity.

The ANAPEC implements a range of support and professional integration measures. The agency offers training and specific support programs to facilitate migrant worker's socio-professional integration. Besides, the Ministry of Economic Inclusion, Small Business, Employment and Skills also manages job offers intended for highly qualified foreign workers, notably through the *Taechir* platform.

Local initiatives, led by civil society in partnership with migrant communities, have emerged to address specific needs. These include the creation of community day-care centers that enable migrant women to balance family and professional life. Furthermore, migrant groups with representatives promote greater participation in decision-making and the defence of their rights at the local level.

On the government side, several strategic directions are already underway. These include the bilateral agreements Morocco has signed with Senegal, Tunisia, and Algeria. Nationals of these three states do not need to apply for a work permit and can directly apply for a residence permit based on an employment contract.

Policy recommendations

To respond to the rapid transformations of the Farm to Fork labour market and ensuring both migrants' rights as well as the sectors' economic resilience, the following policy

recommendations and suggestions are outlined to the Moroccan government.

Establishing a national scheme for seasonal labour migration

Establish a national scheme for seasonal labour migration by establishing a specific status for seasonal workers for foreign nationals and allowing employers to hire foreign workers for seasonal jobs when domestic labour is unavailable.

Improving the working and living conditions

Improve the working and living conditions of seasonal workers in an irregular situation through regularization of their administrative status and the **formalization of their employment relationship through specific regulations for seasonal migrant workers** that set labour and welfare standards for employers, including accommodation, ensuring fair wages, and guaranteeing work hours.

Strengthening the enforcement of labour laws

Strengthen the enforcement of labour laws by reinforcing the role of labour and social inspections to prevent informal employment and exploitation of seasonal workers' rights in general and migrant workers in particular.

Strengthening social protection

Strengthen social protection for the benefit of seasonal migrant workers, by adapting

social protection systems to their needs and facilitating the portability of rights through bilateral agreements.

Encouraging the attractiveness of seasonal jobs

Encourage the attractiveness of seasonal jobs by establishing incentives for local workers, such as bonuses, training, and professional recognition. At the same time, promote the image of a "*socially responsible company*" among employers.

Promoting dialogue and inclusive governance

Promoting local partnerships through dialogue and inclusive governance between actors, i.e. municipalities, employers and migrant associations.

Conclusion

Our fieldwork indicates that **Morocco is currently at a strategic juncture**. On the one hand, it faces a growing demand for seasonal and low-skilled labour; on the other, socio-cultural and demographic developments are reducing the availability of local labour. In this context, the growing pool of irregular migrants present in the Moroccan soil plays a key role in filling this gap.

The way forward is to develop general labour regulations that set the standards for decent seasonal labour for all as well as **specific regulations that allow employers to hire migrants**, including irregular migrants stuck in the Moroccan soil for both economic and human rights considerations.

The governance of irregular migrant workers necessitates a multi-dimensional and multi-level governance model which ensures coherence across the various horizontal and vertical levels of government competencies.

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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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