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## Acknowledgements

The realization of this national country report would not have been possible without the invaluable guidance and support provided by Irene Ponzo, the WP4 leader and the Researcher at FIERI. Many thanks are due to Tesseltje de Lange, Professor of the Sociology of Law and Migration Law and the principal coordinator of the DignityFIRM project and her wonderful Radboud University team for the efficient scientific support they have provided all along the three years of the project. We would also like to acknowledge our appreciation to the administrative and financial support at the level of my institution. Our sincere gratitude is mainly addressed to the following individuals for providing the necessary facilities to ease the administrative procedures to get in touch with the national state and non-state stakeholders. We are particularly grateful to the Dean of the Faculty of Languages, Arts and Human



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The DignityFIRM project is a horizon Europe research project that is driven by the ambition to deepen the understanding of and to improve the policies related to irregular migrant work (IMW) in Farm to Fork (F2F) sectors. This report is part of WP4, which is aimed at understanding the governance arrangements underpinning the national policies addressing IMW in F2F sectors in five EU Member States (namely Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain and the Netherlands) and two Associated Countries (namely Morocco and Ukraine) in the period 2019-2024.

## Abstract

This report addresses the issue of undocumented migrant labor in Morocco's agricultural sector. It analyzes agricultural policies governing this sector and their impact on employment, highlighting the contribution of migrant workers, the feminization of the workforce, and the informal nature of the work. The report also examines the role of agricultural institutions, interprofessional associations, and local actors in regulating the sector and defending the rights of migrants, while emphasizing the absence of migrant workers from agricultural policies. Finally, it underscores the importance of a comprehensive, multi-stakeholder approach to coordinate policies, protect the rights of migrant workers, and meet the needs of the agricultural labor market.

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The report adopts a qualitative research methodology that is based on three main data sources. First, a mapping exercise was directed to the analysis of secondary data, i.e. as official documents, reports, media declarations of actors involved in the governance of irregular migration, population registers and surveys, as well as existing literature. Second, in-depth interviews were conducted with key general as well as sectoral representatives involved in the framing and implementation of the Green Generation policy in agriculture. Third, a focus groups discussion, organized in 10 February 2025, around the governance of IM

## 2. The agricultural policy and employment in Morocco

the national GDP, Morocco launched an ambitious policy in 2008 known as the Green Morocco Plan. This strategy aimed to modernize the sector, better harness its economic potential, and turn it into a lever for sustainable development. Afterwards, Morocco implemented the Generation Green policy (2020-2030).

The Green Morocco Plan aimed to boost the agricultural sector by focusing on several pillars. The first pillar of this strategy aims to develop modern, efficient agriculture that meets market requirements by promoting private investment and establishing an aggregation model aimed at enabling a maximum number of operators to benefit from this market-driven dynamic. The second pillar of the PVM intends to take into account the structure of the Moroccan agricultural sector by supporting small farmers (nearly 560,000 farms) to secure and improve their incomes with the aim of reducing rural poverty and consolidating the socio-economic fabric of the poorest territories.<sup>7</sup> The implementation of this policy was also accompanied by a significant institutional restructuring of the Moroccan Ministry in charge of agriculture<sup>8</sup>.

The main contributions of the Green Morocco Plan are reflected in concrete results across several areas. The widespread implementation of drip irrigation, which has enabled significant water savings, reflects a shift towards more efficient agriculture that takes into account the preservation of natural resources. Furthermore, the substantial investments made in the sector illustrate the commitment of public authorities as well as the confidence of economic stakeholders in the potential of Moroccan agriculture. On the social level, the creation of 1.5 million jobs represents a notable achievement, particularly in the fight against rural poverty. While significant progress has been made, one area remains open: integrating the human dimension into agricultural development.

The Green Morocco Plan was the subject of an evaluation that highlighted, on the one hand, the significant achievements of this policy, and on the other hand, certain shortcomings—particularly with regard to the human dimension. This evaluation represented a key step in the implementation of a new strategy based on two main pillars: consideration of the human element and the sustainability of agricultural development. Following the High Royal Guidelines of His Majesty King Mohammed VI in February 2020, the relevant stakeholders namely the agricultural sector, namely the Ministry of Agriculture and the organizations under its supervision, local and regional authorities, economic operators and their professional organizations launched the Generation Green Plan 2020-2030. The plan builds on the Green Morocco Plan but with more emphasis on human capital development, quality enhancement, and sustainability. It aims specifically to: (1) improve rural living

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.





At the same time, the proportion of the local working-age populations is decreasing because of structural demographic transition and social transformations. The demographic transition impacts the labour market, particularly because of the decline of the active population in certain economic sectors because of the general decline in fertility rates in Morocco, but also because of the migration of a greater part of Moroccan agricultural workers to other European countries either in circular migration programs to Spain, France, or Germany or as irregular migrants. As for the social transformation, Moroccan agricultural workers and because of the seasonality of the their jobs have become increasingly demanding in terms of work with preferences of self-employment or entrepreneurship<sup>15</sup>. As a result, irregular migrant workers have become increasingly essential in Morocco's agriculture as they fill labour shortages and maintain productivity, especially in regions with extensive agricultural products destined to exportation, i.e. Souss Massa Region.

At the national level, the collective regularizations of migrant workers carried out in 2013 and 2017 represented a major step forward, motivated by humanitarian and inclusive considerations, without directly targeting a particular sector such as agriculture. However, interviews with various national and local stakeholders highlight a growing focus on the contribution of migrant workers in several strategic sectors, including agriculture. Thus, a local dynamic is developing, supported by employers, civil society organizations, trade unions and migrant networks, highlighting the importance of continuing and amplifying regularization efforts in order to meet the needs of the agricultural labor market. Despite local dynamics and regularization efforts, individuals and groups advocating for the rights of migrant workers in this sector operate primarily on a local scale. They are usually associations, unions, sometimes not officially structured and authorized migrant community

<sup>15</sup> HCP (2024, p. 8).



This situation has also led to debate on the informal nature of employment in the agricultural sector and in many other sectors, and has recently occupied a central place in the political debate sparked by the adoption of the new law on the right to strike. In an interview with the Minister of Economic Inclusion, Small Business, Employment and Skills, Younes Sekkouri stated that the government is working on upholding the labour law. A fine of 5,000 to 50,000 dirhams is imposed on employers who fail to register within the regulatory time limits (1 month days) with the management body to which they belong, with an order to register their employees within a period not exceeding one month.

In addition, the Minister of Employment observed also that the government has been working for seven months on the employment plan, especially in the rural areas hit with 7 years of drought, causing a rise in unemployment rate. To face the situation, the government created a social conditionality program and mobilized financial incentives directed towards employers, businesses and small farmers to encourage the recruitment of agricultural workers. The categories targeted by these measures include Moroccan workers who have no education or degree.

In this context, it is essential to highlight that the formalization of employment, particularly in the fight against informal labour including in the agricultural sector, relies on the implementation of Law No. 09-21 on social protection. This royal initiative, launched in 2021, aims to extend social protection to all professional categories (artisans, merchants, farmers, fishers, transporters, etc.). The law aims to: (1) Extend mandatory health insurance (AMO) to an additional 22 million beneficiaries by the end of 2022; (2) Extend family allowances to seven million school-age children by 2024; (3) Expand retirement coverage to five million active workers by 2025; and (4) Generalize unemployment benefits (IPE) by 2025<sup>19</sup>. The generalization of social protection in Morocco is based on two main financing mechanisms: a contributory system for salaried and self-employed individuals who are able to contribute (AMO CHAMIL), and a solidarity-based system financed by the State for those who cannot contribute (Tadamon)<sup>20</sup>. Therefore, this law on social protection plays a key role in expanding social coverage, formalizing, and organizing employment, especially in sectors characterized by seasonal work, such as agriculture.

However, this law does not apply to irregular migrants. It is limited to regular migrant workers who are eligible to benefit from social protection through either contributions or the solidarity mechanism, noting that there is no clear article specifically addressing this issue.

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<sup>19</sup> Social government (n.d.).

<sup>20</sup> Hamza Saoudi (n.d.).

## 5. Explanations of non-policy in the agricultural sector

Except for the MPV and the Green Generation, there is no clear and coherent agricultural employment policy for recruiting IMWs and granting them residence permits that would enable them to have access to social and labour rights afterwards. The agricultural policy remains short sighted as it concentrates on boosting production without consideration of the social transformations at stake. The changing mentalities of national workers and the demographic transition represent significant changes that influence the agricultural sector. Furthermore, the sectoral structuring of agricultural policy highlights the need to adapt its orientations to the different realities and needs of actors on the ground.

The sector started to witness shortages and constant instability and transformations of the agricultural labour force, which was constituted primarily of national migrant workers, then female national migrant workers, and lastly international irregular migrant workers. The agricultural policy is fixated on boosting agricultural production by paying attention more to the natural, environmental and human dimensions. The social dimensions of Generation Green focus primarily on the human aspect, aiming to support the development of a new generation of rural middle class through improving incomes and strengthening the protection of farmers<sup>21</sup>. In this context, a member of parliament stressed the need to have a labour migration strategy that looks into the future needs of the agricultural sector in terms of labour. *“In addition, it is crucial to think about the future, as the number of migrants will increase and the country’s need for labour, whether skilled or not, will grow. Morocco is undergoing rapid development, both in the agricultural sector and in the automotive industry, which demonstrates strong economic dynamics”*. [MOR\_WP4\_12]

Migrant workers are not explicitly targeted in these policies. This absence can be explained by several reasons. First, even though Morocco is a transit and host country for migrants, the number of immigrants remains relatively low compared to other countries. “In 2020, Morocco had approximately 103,000 international migrants, including irregular migrants, regular migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers”<sup>22</sup>. The number of IMWs remains statistically insignificant, according to a labour migration expert. That’s why the government has other national agricultural policy issues in its agenda. This situation could explain why policymakers have not included migrant workers as a target population for agricultural policies, particularly due to the lack of precise data on their numbers and aspirations. According to the representative of the Ministry of Agriculture, the availability of additional data could

<sup>21</sup> Agence pour le Development Agricole (n.d.).

<sup>22</sup> IOM (n.d).

contribute to a better understanding of their contribution to the sector and inform future policy directions.

Second, agriculture in Morocco often operates seasonally, with high demand for labour during planting or harvesting. In this context, some agricultural workers, including IMs, are often hired informally. Although the Labour Code provides some limitations on seasonal work by encouraging employers to hire permanent workers who have worked for them for two years, the regulations remain poorly enforced. Although migrant workers are increasingly present and contribute significantly to the agricultural sector, they are not yet a population explicitly targeted by agricultural policy. This situation is partly explained by the need for stronger coordination between the various stakeholders involved. The National Immigration and Asylum Strategy (SNIA) provides a general framework conducive to the integration of migrants into Moroccan society and the consideration of migration in all sectoral policies. Better alignment between the SNIA and the Green Generation strategy would help promote the progressive and balanced inclusion of migrant workers in the agricultural sector, contributing to both ensuring decent and fair working conditions and addressing structural challenges such as the demographic transition, the changing aspirations of local workers towards agricultural occupations, and the gradual transformation of labour dynamics.

## 6. Conclusion

The absence of a sectoral policy in agriculture concerning migrant workers can be explained by two key factors. The first is related to the relatively low number of migrants in Morocco, particularly in the agricultural sector. This relatively limited number might justify the lack of a specific sectoral policy for this category. It is also worth noting that the existing sectoral policy does not take into account employment and labour related-issues, as it is primarily focused on promoting productivity, and encouraging employers to create job opportunities in the agricultural sector. Secondly, it is necessary to put in place a comprehensive migration policy, targeting economic sectors attractive to migrant workers, such as agriculture, in order to facilitate their socio-economic integration, the protection of their fundamental rights and their access to health and education.

The social protection law, as explained, constitutes an important tool in the formalization of labour in agriculture. It allows workers to access social coverage, whether they are national or migrant workers, salaried, self-employed, non-salaried, or even individuals engaged in freelance activities. This law plays a crucial role in regulating certain informal, atypical or seasonal activities by providing a legal and social framework to gradually include these workers in the social protection system.

The governance of agricultural IMWs necessitates a multi-dimensional reality that cannot be addressed by the agricultural policies implemented by Morocco since 2009 alone. A whole of multi-stakeholder government approach is needed to ensure horizontal and vertical policy coherence across the various levels of government. Labour, employment, migration status of agricultural workers, analysis of the labour market dynamics and the measurement of needs in terms of international labour force, projecting on the economic needs in reference to social transformations and demographics, analyzing the short term and long term implications of the inclusive labour migration policies are all mechanisms for good governance of the issue of IMW.









## Deliverable information

Schedule Information	
Title and number	<b>The governance of irregular migrant work in the National agricultural policies in Morocco</b>
Work Package, Task and Deliverable	WP4, Task 4.2, Part of D3.2 (DignityFIRM Working paper series)
Publication date	6.02.2026
Doi reference	10.5281/zenodo.18430168
Authors	Hanane Darhour, Hajar Bouzid
Dissemination level	PU
Deliverable type	Working Paper

Working paper WP4

# **The governance of irregular migrant work in the National agricultural policies in Morocco**

## **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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This project has been funded by the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 101094652