

# At the edge

## Trends and routes of North African clandestine migrants

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### Summary

In 2015, over 16 000 Algerians, Tunisians and Moroccans were caught while attempting to migrate to Europe covertly. Though North Africans are a relatively small portion of the masses of clandestine migrants, they are a critical group to understand. They are the innovators and early adopters of new methods and routes for migrant smuggling, such as their pioneering in the 1990s and 2000s of the routes across the Mediterranean that now fuel Europe's migration crisis. Understanding how and why North Africans migrate, the routes they use, and how these are changing, offers insights into how clandestine migration methods and routes in general may shift in the coming years. In shaping better responses to actual dynamics, it is important for countries to proactively address the chronic conditions that drive forced migration before they generate social instability.

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THE FAMILIES OF the dead marched through Ben Guerdane, Tunisia. Parents decried the 'desperation and indignation' that their children faced, the hopelessness that drove them to travel clandestinely to Europe.<sup>1</sup>

Five days before, 26 young Tunisians from Ben Guerdane had slipped across the border into Libya, boarded a smuggler's boat in Zuwara and sailed for the small Italian island of Lampedusa. Within hours, the boat had sunk and half of the passengers were dead.

Migrant deaths off the Libyan coast have become all too common: 383 deaths were recorded in June 2016 alone.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, the death of the young people from Ben Guerdane stood out – not for how many died, but from where they had come.

The vast majority of migrants who leave North Africa's shores headed for Europe come from outside of the region – primarily from sub-Saharan Africa. This flood of humanity obscures the continued clandestine migration of North Africans – Tunisians, Moroccans

and Algerians – both within the region and onwards towards Europe. The same week that the young people from Ben Guerdane died, Algerian authorities intercepted 138 clandestine migrants attempting to get to Sardinia, part of an effort that saw at least 311 migrants being apprehended along Algeria's beaches and at sea in June 2016.<sup>3</sup> European authorities intercepted over 2 000 North African migrants in Italy and Greece in the first half of 2016.<sup>4</sup>

Although the number of North African migrants to Europe is small compared to the overall number of clandestine migrants heading to Europe, it is an important one to study. Historically, North Africans have been innovators and early adopters when it comes to new methods and routes for migrant smuggling. Tunisian migrants pioneered the central Mediterranean route, while Algerians and Moroccans migrated in significant numbers along the Balkan migration corridor long before it became associated with Syrian, Iraqi and Afghan refugees. Understanding which methods and routes North African migrants are now using, and how these are changing, offers insights into how clandestine migration methods and routes in general may shift in the coming years.

### European concerns deeply influence how and why Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco approach the issues of the clandestine migration of their nationals

Additionally, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco lie on Europe's doorstep. Morocco and Spain are separated by just 15 km of sea, while Italy's Pelagic Islands are only 70 km from the Tunisian coast. Because of this proximity, events in North Africa can rapidly drive mass migration to Europe with little warning – as was the case in 2011, when migration from Tunisia to Italy increased by 4 192% compared to 2010, and over 14 000 Tunisians were apprehended in Italy's Pelagic Islands in March that year alone.<sup>5</sup> Understanding the drivers of North African migration and which factors restrain it are essential for predicting the circumstances that could spark a sharp increase in the number of clandestine migrants.

European concerns deeply influence how and why Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco approach the issues of the clandestine migration of their nationals. The increased immigration controls imposed by North African governments may have achieved operational success in intercepting migrants, but have done little to curb the underlying drivers of migration, raising the risk of unintended consequences of the increased securitisation of the region's borders.

This paper, which forms part of an Institute for Security Studies (ISS) special project, undertaken with the Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime and funded by the Hanns Seidel Foundation, seeks to update the evidence basis on the contemporary drivers and dynamics of African migration to Europe. It draws on over 40 interviews conducted with government officials, representatives from international organisations, journalists, researchers and migrant-rights organisations in Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco. The field research

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4 192%

THE INCREASE IN MIGRATION  
FROM TUNISIA TO ITALY IN  
2011 COMPARED TO 2010

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was complemented by a review of literature and media monitoring of key press sources in the three countries under analysis.

## **Clandestine migration from North Africa to Europe: A brief history**

North African migration to Europe is not a new phenomenon. Since the colonial period, substantial numbers of Tunisians, Algerians and Moroccans have migrated to Europe in search of economic opportunity, to reunify with their families or to start a new life. This emigration pattern continues, though the ways in which North Africans reach Europe have changed dramatically over the past two decades.

Before the 1980s and 1990s, North Africans rarely required visas to travel to Europe. Prospective migrants entered Europe legally, travelling by plane or boat, coming as tourists or under bilateral worker exchange programmes. Often, they stayed. The search for economic opportunity drove most of them. Despite their lack of legal status, migrants readily found work in the informal economy or, especially in southern Europe, by filling a labour vacuum in low-wage industries caused by the emigration of Italian and Spanish workers.<sup>6</sup>

Before the tightening of border controls, some North Africans engaged in circular migration – working in Europe for some of the year before returning to their home countries for the remaining months.<sup>7</sup> Regularisation programmes, whereby legal status was granted to undocumented workers (those without legal paperwork), created a pathway out of the informal economy for North Africans and buttressed the size of their diaspora communities. These programmes highlighted the scale of the undocumented North African migrant community in Europe. Between 1990 and 2005, Italy and Spain regularised over 297 000 undocumented Moroccans alone.<sup>8</sup>

The introduction by many European states of visa requirements for North Africans in the 1980s and 1990s changed this dynamic. Nevertheless, North African migrants continued to be drawn to Europe by the desire for better economic opportunities, as well as a belief – fed by the increasing availability of European media in North Africa – that Europe was a ‘paradise’.<sup>9</sup> But, with the legal avenues for migration to Europe increasingly limited by visa conditions, North African migrants and

enterprising smugglers began to develop clandestine routes to reach the continent.

The first high-traffic routes were between Morocco and Spain, and between Tunisia and Italy.<sup>10</sup> In Morocco much of the migration flowed either across the Strait of Gibraltar, or via the land border between Morocco and the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla, on the northern coast of Morocco. Throughout the 1990s, those encountered migrating along these routes were predominantly Moroccans, though Algerians also used them.

Most smuggling networks on these routes were composed of a small number of men who had access to boats or who had the capital to buy vessels. Sensing an opportunity, some contraband smuggling networks also diversified into migrant smuggling. Efforts on the part of both the Spanish and Moroccan authorities to control migration were minimal, and there was little in the way of bilateral coordination efforts between the states.

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In Tunisia the 1990s saw two migrant smuggling routes emerge. The first was from the northern Tunisian coast (specifically, the beaches close to Tunis and along the Cap Bon Peninsula) to Sicily.<sup>11</sup> The second route ran from the central and southern Tunisian coast to Italy’s Pelagic Islands.<sup>12</sup> These routes were predominantly used by Tunisian migrants, though the fact that Moroccan and Algerian migrants were intercepted along them indicated their broader popularity among other North Africans.

Tunisian fishermen and sailors were behind the first smuggling networks along these routes, engaging in intermittent migrant smuggling alongside their normal professional activities. The sophistication and reach of these semi-professional networks were limited yet they proved successful in moving significant numbers of clandestine migrants to Italy, thanks largely to the limited interest the Tunisian government showed in curtailing migrant smuggling. As a Tunisian migration expert explained, ‘Under [former president] Ben Ali, the main instruction for anyone intending to migrate clandestinely was that, if caught, the person should deny as [far] as

possible that they were Tunisian, throw away their identification, and change their dialect.<sup>13</sup>

During the 1990s the primary driver of clandestine migration for Tunisians and Moroccans continued to be the search for economic opportunity. Italy and Spain's accession to the Schengen Agreement, which abolished several of the European Union's (EU) internal border controls, increased the attractiveness of smuggling routes to those countries, as the agreement enabled undocumented migrants who had circumvented one set of border controls to travel throughout Europe with ease. Another reason for clandestine migration during the 1990s was the civil conflict in Algeria. During this period, Algerians – arriving either with short-term tourist visas or through clandestine smuggling routes – claimed asylum in large numbers in Europe.<sup>14</sup>

If the early to mid-1990s saw the rapid development of new clandestine pathways to Europe, the late 1990s and the 2000s saw strenuous attempts made by European states to close them down. In the late 1990s, Spain and Morocco began to reinforce their mutual border. Increased security-enforcement measures – examples being Spain's deployment in 2002 of an integrated surveillance system and the development by Morocco of law-enforcement units tasked with countering smuggling and trafficking – increased the risk of migrants and their smuggling networks being caught. New laws were passed targeting migrant smuggling networks.<sup>15</sup> The two countries began to develop stronger bilateral efforts, coordinating their operations and sharing information, to tackle clandestine migration.

### In 2004 Tunisia criminalised migrant smuggling and began to take decisive action against smuggling networks operating in its territory

In the central Mediterranean, Tunisia and Italy increased their cooperation, signing a number of bilateral treaties, including a readmission agreement, whereby third-country nationals can be deported. In 2004 Tunisia criminalised migrant smuggling and began to take decisive action against smuggling networks operating in its territory.<sup>16</sup> As this legal and cooperative framework developed, both nations deployed more security to counter smuggling operations, including joint maritime patrols.<sup>17</sup> These security efforts had an impact: Moroccan clandestine emigration across the Strait of Gibraltar fell in the mid-2000s, as did migration from Tunisia to Italy.

However, although information sharing and cooperation between North African countries and those in Europe were heightened, the ability to effectively secure land borders in North African countries was still lacking. And while the authorities in Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco focused their efforts on deterring migrants from leaving directly from their shores, few attempts were made to address the root causes of migration or to deter efforts by their citizens to clandestinely get to Europe via other routes. Consequently,

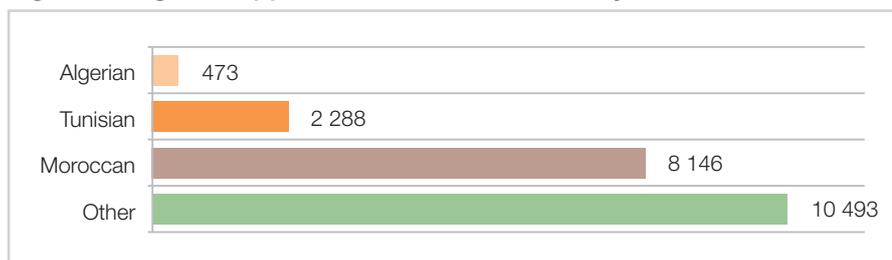


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increased law enforcement in the Mediterranean did not end clandestine migration – it simply displaced it to new routes and new countries.

The impact was most dramatic in Tunisia, where government control led Tunisian smugglers to shift most of their operations to Libya.<sup>18</sup> Smuggling networks that had been established in the 1970s and 1980s to help Tunisian migrant workers enter Libya now facilitated the movement of prospective migrants from Tunisia to Libya.<sup>19</sup> Other migrants took advantage of the lax visa regulations in the Maghreb region and flew to Tripoli.

**Figure 1: Migrants apprehended on arrival in Sicily, 2006**



Source: Salvatore Coluccello and Simon Massey, *Out of Africa: The human trade between Libya and Lampedusa*, *Trends in Organised Crime*, 10:4, 2007, 80.

In Morocco, as in Tunisia, migrants sought other routes. Some, deterred from crossing the straits to Spain, went from southern Morocco to Spain's Canary Islands. Libya also became a highly popular embarkation point for Moroccan clandestine migrants. Moroccan smuggling networks flew prospective migrants from Casablanca to Tripoli and contracted with Libyan and Tunisian smuggling networks to transport the migrants to either the Italian mainland or the Pelagic Islands.<sup>20</sup>

As a result, by 2006 Libya had become one of the main exit points for North African migrants heading to Europe. Libya's diplomatic estrangement from European countries, poor border-security capacity and position made it an ideal smuggling hub.<sup>21</sup> Half of the migrants apprehended in Sicily in 2006 were North Africans, and most had departed from Libya.<sup>22</sup> In that year, the number of Moroccans apprehended arriving in Sicily surpassed the number caught departing from Morocco for Spain.<sup>23</sup>

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Prices charged for transit to the Pelagic Islands ranged from €900 to €1 800, and in some cases up to €3 000 for a 'comprehensive immigration package'.<sup>24</sup> Initially composed of displaced smugglers and sailors from Tunisia, the smuggling networks in western Libya were slowly taken over by Libyans, who professionalised the operations. They recruited new clientele,

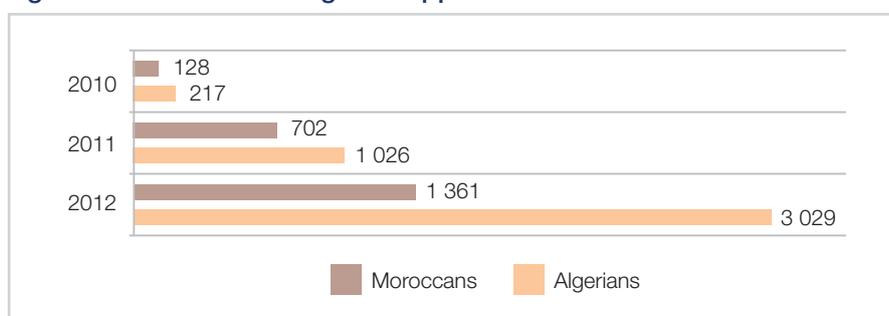
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OF THE MIGRANTS APPREHENDED IN SICILY IN 2006 WERE NORTH AFRICANS, AND MOST HAD DEPARTED FROM LIBYA

such as sub-Saharan migrants, and corrupted. As with the Tunisian–Libyan border, migrants crossing the border between Algeria and Morocco were facilitated by powerful smuggling networks that had sprung up with the border’s closure in 1994.

In 2010 North African migrants began to make use of the eastern Mediterranean and Balkan route. Predominantly from Algeria and Morocco, they took advantage of budget airlines and easily obtainable visas to get to Turkey, before crossing by land or sea into Greece or Bulgaria.<sup>25</sup> For a brief period, Algerians and Moroccans were among the five most detected nationalities along this route, and by 2012 the number of Algerians and Moroccans apprehended in the western Balkans exceeded the number apprehended in the central and western Mediterranean.<sup>26</sup>

**Figure 2: North African migrants apprehended in the western Balkans**



Source: FRONTEX, Western Balkans annual risk analysis 2012, April 2012, 41; FRONTEX, Western Balkans annual risk analysis 2013, May 2013, 13.

The so-called Arab Spring resistance of 2011 set the stage for the current migration situation in North Africa. In the months immediately after Tunisia’s Jasmine Revolution, a distracted and weakened law-enforcement apparatus paid less attention to operations against irregular migration, enabling large numbers of Tunisians to set sail for Italy. At least 27 982 Tunisian migrants were apprehended in 2011; an indeterminate number succeeded in reaching Italy.<sup>27</sup>

This surge in migration was temporary, however, as redoubled efforts by Tunisian security forces in 2012 led to a sharp decline in migration.<sup>28</sup> Yet the security operations revealed that in Tunisia, and across the Maghreb, declines in the level of clandestine migration during this period were due to increased effectiveness of the security services in cracking down on migration and the political will by governments to halt the flow. There had been no slackening in the desire of North Africans to migrate.

In Libya the revolt against the Gaddafi regime and subsequent civil war left behind an anarchic situation in which no one government party or militia group fully controlled the country’s shoreline. The barriers that had constrained the activities of Libyan smuggling networks disappeared as large numbers of migrants and refugees tried to get to Europe. While Libyan refugees sought shelter in Tunisia and Algeria, few attempted to smuggle themselves into Europe.



THE 2011 ARAB SPRING SET THE STAGE FOR THE CURRENT MIGRATION SITUATION IN NORTH AFRICA

Although Algeria and Morocco emerged from the Arab Spring relatively unscathed, the instability in the region led both nations to buttress their border security. Since 2011 both nations have made their maritime, air and land borders more secure, installing more physical barriers, deploying more security forces and improving their information-gathering systems. This has had limited impact, however, on the number of clandestine migrants leaving the two countries, but it has had a big impact on the routes that they follow to get to Europe and the nature of the risks they face.

### **Present-day migration: Patterns, routes and motives**

Despite robust efforts by North African and European governments to quell the phenomenon, the migration pattern one sees today from North Africa to Europe continues to mirror the past in terms of motives for migration, the routes migrants use and the impediments facing effective government responses to the crisis.

In 2015 border authorities in Spain, Italy and Greece apprehended over 16 000 migrants from Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco.<sup>29</sup> An even greater number are likely to have evaded apprehension, presented false documents or destroyed their original travel documents to avoid identification and repatriation.

Although Algeria and Morocco emerged from the Arab Spring relatively unscathed, the instability in the region led both nations to buttress their border security

But these figures pale in comparison to the number of North Africans who come to Europe on valid tourist, student or business visas and overstay.<sup>30</sup> It is clear that nearly two decades of intensified border security by Mediterranean states has not deterred the desire among North African youth to get to Europe, even if it has had a major influence on the methods and routes that they use.

The average North African clandestine migrant today is young, male and Moroccan. Most are between the ages of 18 and 30. One survey conducted in the Balkans identifies 26 as the average age of Algerian migrants and 25 for Moroccans.<sup>31</sup> Although some middle-aged migrants and minors are encountered, the numbers are fairly low. For example, in the central Mediterranean, Italian authorities apprehended only 118 minors in 2015.<sup>32</sup>

Males make up the vast majority of migrants, though the number of women making the journey is increasing. Commenting on this, one Algerian journalist noted the changing profile of prospective migrants and highlighted that in this 'new phenomenon even older people, the young and infants with their mother are trying to leave'.<sup>33</sup>

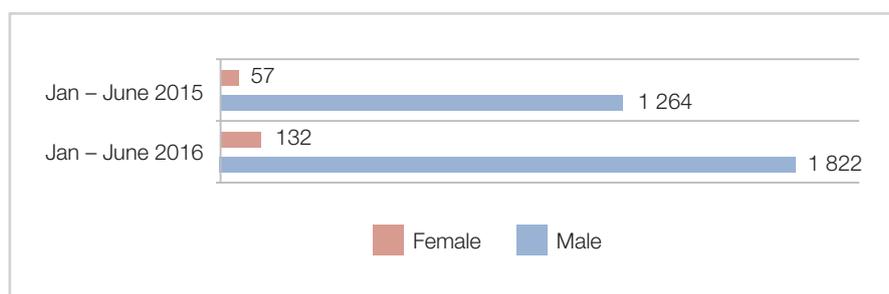
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> 16 000

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BORDER AUTHORITIES  
IN SPAIN, ITALY AND GREECE  
IN 2015

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**Figure 3: North African migrants apprehended in the central Mediterranean**



Source: International Organization for Migration (IOM), Summary of Arrivals to Europe 2015 Overview Dataset, <http://migration.iom.int/europe/>; IOM, Summary of Arrivals to Europe – 2016 Q2 Overview Dataset, 2016, <http://migration.iom.int/europe/>.

Most North African clandestine migrants hail from Morocco. In 2015 European authorities apprehended 12 843 Moroccans, 2 748 Algerians and 998 Tunisians along clandestine migration routes.<sup>34</sup> A similar trend was apparent in the first six months of 2016.<sup>35</sup>

### What motivates migrants?

Since the Arab Spring, North Africa has faced significant security challenges. Libya is wracked by a chaotic civil war, while terrorist groups continue to operate and intermittently clash with security forces in the rural areas of Tunisia and Algeria. However, most clandestine migrants apprehended are Moroccan, hailing from the one country in the region that has been spared internal conflict. This clearly highlights the reality that the overwhelmingly young and male migrants seeking to get to Europe by any means possible do so not to flee violence, but to find opportunity in the hope for ‘a job, a better future and a new life’.<sup>36</sup>

Though Morocco and Algeria have experienced economic growth over the last five years, those countries – along with Tunisia, which is struggling economically – continue to be challenged by young, growing populations and pervasive unemployment, especially among the youth. Many feel that their dreams are unattainable in their home countries. According to one migrant, in

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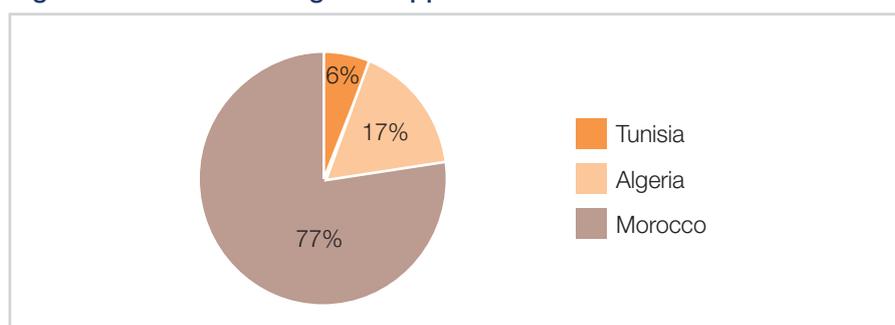
2 748

ALGERIANS AND

998

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**Figure 4: Clandestine migrants apprehended in 2015**



Sources: IOM, Summary of Arrivals to Europe 2015 Overview Dataset, <http://migration.iom.int/europe/>; FRONTEX, Annual risk analysis 2016, 2016, 17.

Morocco ‘there is no future for young people. There is no work and no hope.’<sup>137</sup>

Unemployment figures vary in the Maghreb. The unemployment rate is 15.4% in Tunisia; 11.2% in Algeria; and 9.7% in Morocco.<sup>38</sup> However, unemployment and underemployment rates are far higher among the youth, women and those from rural areas.<sup>39</sup> In Morocco the unemployment rate for urban youth is nearly 40%, while the youth unemployment rate in Algeria grew from 25.2% in 2014 to 29.9% in late 2015.<sup>40</sup>

For some, the vibrant informal economies of these three countries provide a livelihood, but such work offers little employment security and only limited opportunities for advancement. Although the region’s governments have sought to put in place programmes to spur economic development, there is little indication of their success. In Tunisia there is a pessimistic feeling that no efforts to curtail migration and ensure stability can be achieved ‘without offering job prospects to the youth, without giving them a hope that they can succeed and build a better future for themselves [and] their families’.<sup>41</sup>

But migrants in the Maghreb come from not only the economically destitute segments of society, but from all social strata. Many are ‘highly educated and skilled youth who either can’t find jobs that fit their ambition or aren’t satisfied with the salaries available’, according to a Tunisian journalist whom the author interviewed.<sup>42</sup> This highlights the fact that, in North Africa today, even university graduates face significant difficulties finding work.

Young and male migrants seeking to get to Europe do so not to flee violence, but to find opportunity

This problem is most acute in Tunisia, where 32% of university graduates are unemployed, but is evident across the entire region.<sup>43</sup> In North Africa there is a feeling of uncertainty among educated, professional young people about their opportunities. As one Tunisian journalist noted: ‘We have many young people who complete school and university diplomas, but can’t find jobs. These aren’t the poor and uneducated. These

are men and women who thought their lives would be [successful], that they’d do something great.’<sup>44</sup>

For these young people, migration to Europe acts as a desperate attempt to meet the expectations of success that they and their families have.<sup>45</sup> The number of educated young people seeking to emigrate seems to be growing within what has traditionally been a lower-middle-class phenomenon.<sup>46</sup>

An additional pull factor for North African migration to Europe is the large diaspora communities that live there

The search for economic opportunity forms the dominant push factor for migrants. But there are also pull factors. These include the search for adventure, the desire for a new type of life and a ‘fear of missing out’.<sup>47</sup> Internet access is common among North African youth, enabling them both to consume European media and engage directly with members of their communities’ diaspora in Europe.<sup>48</sup> This gives them a taste of the social opportunities that they perceive are available in Europe, heightens their social frustrations and whets their appetite to leave.<sup>49</sup> However, these drivers are much less significant than the search for economic opportunity. People now see migration as ‘buying their way out’, said an Algerian journalist. ‘It isn’t about adventure any more.’<sup>50</sup>

An additional pull factor for North African migration to Europe is the large diaspora communities that live there. ‘Everybody has a network, a family member or two abroad,’ explained a migration expert in Morocco.<sup>51</sup> These networks both help prospective migrants make the journey to Europe – by providing advice on routes and methods, and, in some cases, putting them in contact with smugglers – and help them find work and housing once they arrive in their destination country.

Despite the high expectations driving migrants to leave for new shores, in some cases aspirations are quickly deflated by the reality of living as a clandestine migrant in Europe. Economic opportunity is rarely as easily or rapidly attainable as expected. Even in the informal sector, North African migrants may face marginalisation,

either because they are not fluent in the language or because the informal economy is dominated by other ethnic and regional groups.<sup>52</sup> This can push North African migrants into riskier or more criminal activities to earn a living.<sup>53</sup>

Breaking out of the informal sector can also be difficult. The regularisation programmes that allowed many undocumented migrants to gain legal status in the 1990s and 2000s have diminished. Therefore, trapped between a limited scope of informal economic opportunities and a lack of legal avenues to acquire formal status, some migrants give up and go home.

However, for others, societal expectations for economic success preclude this. 'Migrating is seen as the way to success,' explained an Algerian security expert, 'and there is a lot of pressure to succeed. Because of this, there are some who are ashamed to come back if they do not succeed, if they're not meeting this ideal.'<sup>54</sup> As a result, some clandestine migrants, effectively living in economically precarious situations and acutely concerned about social perceptions if they do not succeed, may be at risk of recruitment by criminal gangs or radicalisation by terrorist organisations.

### Migration routes and methods

North African migrants use a mix of quasi-legal and clandestine methods to make the journey to Europe. The most popular strategy adopted by young Tunisians, Algerians and Moroccans is to travel legally (by acquiring a tourist or student visa), with the intention of overstaying when they arrive in Europe. For those who cannot obtain a visa, clandestine routes are the next best option.

In 2016 the central Mediterranean corridor was the route favoured by North African clandestine migrants attempting to get to Europe

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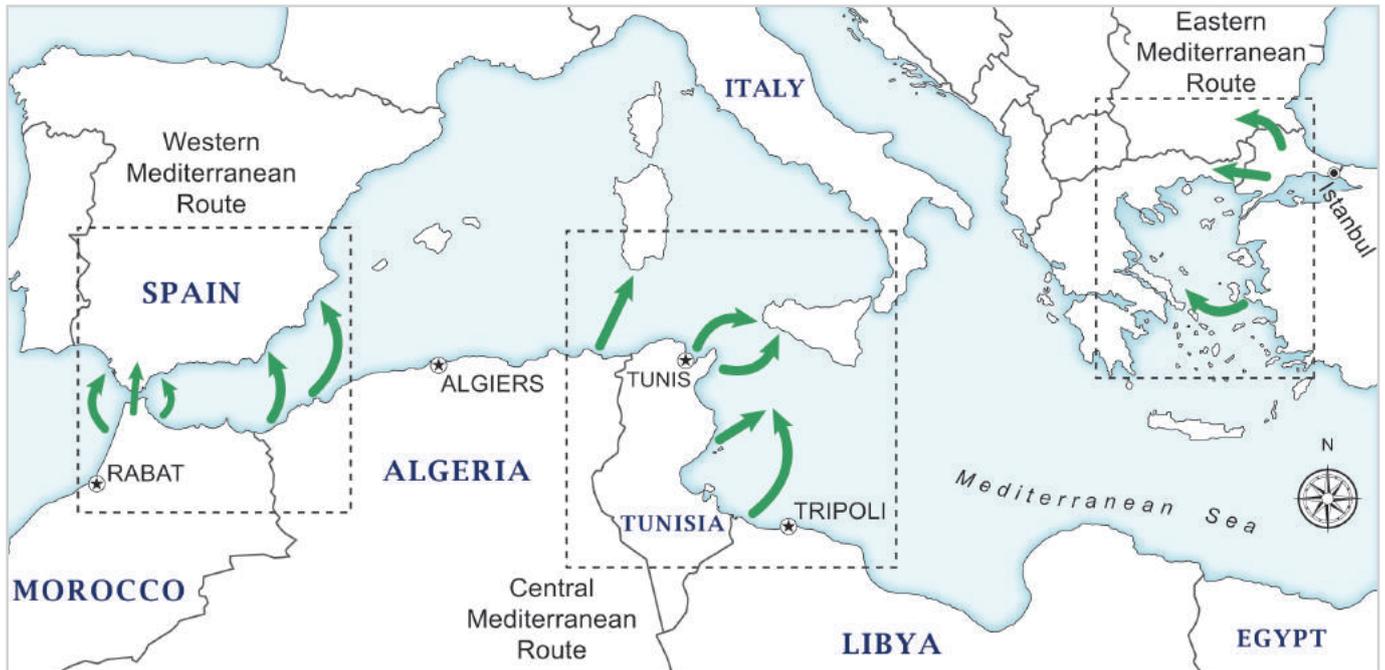
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The clandestine routes used today mirror those used in the past. Although migrants embark from numerous points along the North African coast, generally three main corridors are used. The central Mediterranean corridor, the most popular route during the first half of 2016, has departure points in Libya, Tunisia and north-eastern Algeria. The eastern Mediterranean corridor, the most commonly travelled clandestine route for North Africans in 2015, starts with a sea crossing to Greece from the Turkish coast, followed by overland transit through the Balkans. The western Mediterranean corridor involves maritime departure points in north-western Algeria and northern Morocco, and a land route between Morocco and the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla.

The precise routes used within these main corridors, and their popularity, shift rapidly in response to changing levels of security enforcement, and changing social, political and economic conditions in the countries of transit and embarkation. The main routes are discussed in the sections that follow.

Figure 5: The three routes used by North Africans to reach Europe



Source: Author's own map, S Ballard – cartographer.

**The central Mediterranean corridor**

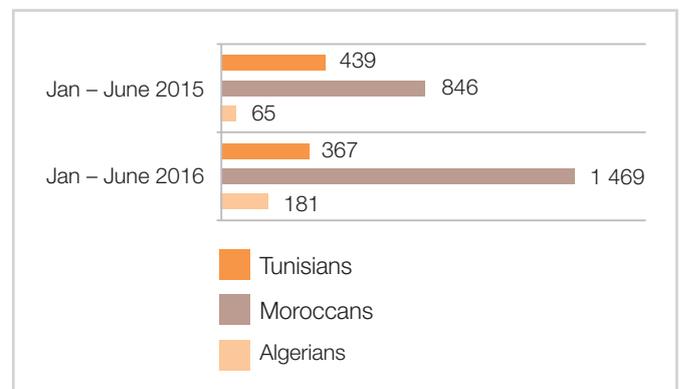
In 2016 the central Mediterranean corridor was the route favoured by North African clandestine migrants attempting to get to Europe. Out of a total of 70 222 migrants apprehended using this route by Italian authorities in the first six months of 2016, 2 017 were Tunisian, Algerian or Moroccan – one-third more than during the same time period in 2015.<sup>55</sup> Algerian and Tunisian authorities detained hundreds of others as they attempted to make the crossing to Italy.

The increasing popularity of this route is primarily due to shifting migration patterns among Moroccan and, to a lesser degree, Algerian migrants. For Moroccans, the preference for this route is in all likelihood the result of a steep increase in law-enforcement efforts along the eastern Mediterranean corridor, which have made that route more challenging. The number of Algerians who are apprehended in the central Mediterranean is increasing, as numbers apprehended in the eastern Mediterranean stay fairly steady, suggesting a slight increase in the number of clandestine migrants.

The central Mediterranean corridor has embarkation points in north-eastern Algeria, Tunisia and Libya. Its popularity among North African migrants, and more

generally among migrants from the Middle East and sub-Saharan Africa, has grown substantially since 2011. For some North African migrants, the benefits of this corridor are its accessibility, minimal cost and proximity to Europe. The route's accessibility is linked to the collapse of government enforcement efforts, and the government more generally, in Libya. One migration official noted: 'The Libya situation is a game changer. It is seen by migrants as lawless territory and the simplest way to get to Europe.'<sup>56</sup>

Figure 6: North African migrants apprehended in the central Mediterranean



Source: IOM, Summary of Arrivals to Europe 2015 Overview Dataset, <http://migration.iom.int/europe/>; IOM, Summary of Arrivals to Europe – 2016 Q2 Overview Dataset, 2016, <http://migration.iom.int/europe/>.

Within this corridor, there are three distinct routes. The most commonly used route involves embarkation points in western Libya. Most of these are clustered between Tripoli and the Tunisian border, including beaches at Zawiya, Sabratah and Zuwarah, though launch points to the east of Tripoli are also used.<sup>57</sup>

Smugglers use wooden fishing boats and inflatable craft. These vessels, often only minimally seaworthy, are overfilled with prospective migrants to maximise the profits of the smuggling rings.<sup>58</sup> Between 2015 and 2016 the number of seaworthy vessels available to the smuggling networks has reportedly dropped, leading them to become more reckless with the vessels they use.<sup>59</sup> The cost of passage depends on the type of service that the migrant pays for. A position on the deck and access to lifejackets, for example, cost more than a place inside the hull.<sup>60</sup>

On this route, the destination of the smugglers is, at least nominally, Italy's Pelagic Islands, a journey of roughly 300 km. However, an increase in the number of drownings in 2013 led Italy to deploy a search-and-rescue mission into international waters off Libya. This mission, later superseded by one run by the EU, changed the smugglers' game. Now, instead of sailing to the Pelagic Islands, most smuggling networks aim to navigate the migrants just far enough into international waters – around 12 nautical miles (22.2 km) – so that they can be picked up by private or government rescue craft operating off the Libyan coast.<sup>61</sup>

This tactic has led smugglers to use less seaworthy craft, increasing the likelihood that the vessels will capsize or sink. At least 2 606 migrants drowned off the Libyan shore between January and July 2016.<sup>62</sup> During the same period, by comparison, 428 migrants drowned along all other smuggling corridors across the Mediterranean.<sup>63</sup> As an Algerian journalist put it, 'These networks aren't safe, these boats aren't safe. We see that these networks bring immigrants into the open arms of death.'<sup>64</sup>

The smugglers, comprising Libyan, Tunisian and Egyptian nationals, are highly organised and have a reputation for brutality, at times violently forcing migrants into the boats and robbing them.<sup>65</sup> There is a perception in North Africa that such violence is largely directed at sub-Saharan migrants and that North African migrants are able to access networks where they are treated better and which

are safer. 'For the Maghrebis,' continued the journalist, 'for those people who can afford €2 000 for the crossing, there are quite old networks, which are safe.'<sup>66</sup> These safer networks provide boats that are smaller and more seaworthy than those available to sub-Saharan Africans.<sup>67</sup> Nevertheless, as evidenced by the migrants from Ben Guerdane who perished, the dangers are not necessarily fully eliminated from the voyage.

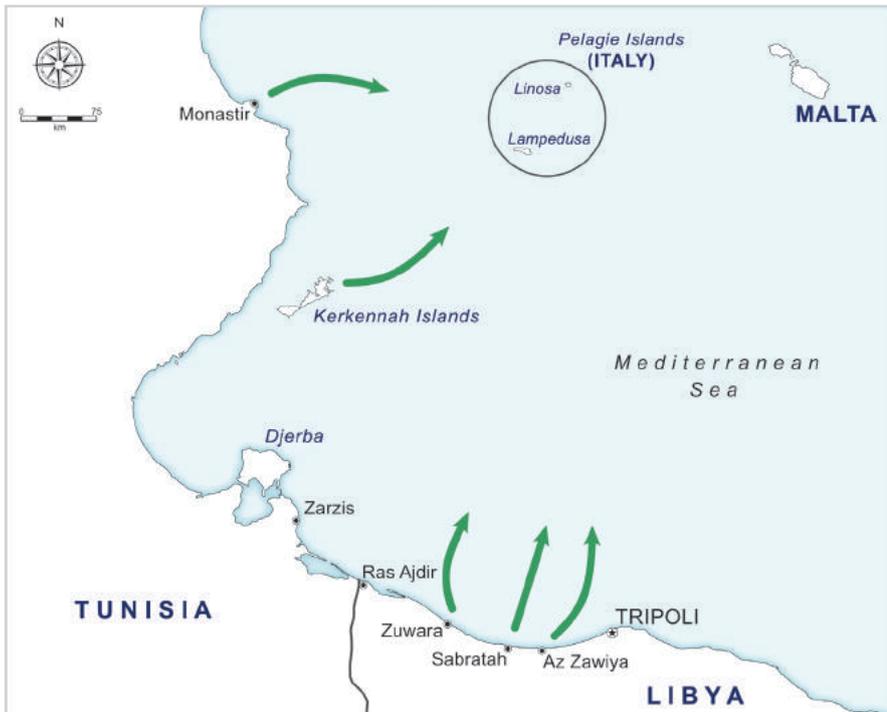
Smuggling networks in Libya have a reputation for making more use of social media than networks in other parts of North Africa – and they use the technology in different ways. There is widespread penetration of Internet-enabled phones in North Africa, and social media allow networks to convey information more rapidly and over a larger area than by word of mouth. Applications such as Facebook, Twitter, Telegram and Skype are used frequently by prospective migrants and smuggling networks in North Africa to provide information on routes, methods and conditions; to advertise services; to provide information on embarkation times; and to update migrants' families on their successful arrival in Europe.

Between 2015 and 2016 the number of seaworthy vessels available to smugglers has reportedly dropped

Libyan smuggling rings make use of social media for all of the functions mentioned above, but they have arguably been more innovative in the use of technology. Some enable prospective migrants to book their passage over the Internet.<sup>68</sup> But the use of social media also has a dark side, as smugglers use apps to coerce family members of migrants into paying ransoms.<sup>69</sup>

Most North African migrants departing from Libya are Moroccans, followed by Tunisians. Nationals from both countries have a long tradition of working in Libya, and large diaspora communities remain in the country despite the civil war. Of the Moroccan and Tunisian workers who have left Libya since the start of the war, most are believed to have returned to their country of origin, rather than heading for Europe. The Tunisian and Moroccan migrants who depart for Europe from Libya are believed to travel to Libya explicitly for the migration opportunities the country affords, as opposed to going there for economic opportunities and then migrating if these fail to materialise.

Figure 7: Departure points from Libya and Tunisia



Source: Author's own map, S Ballard – cartographer.

For Tunisians, getting to the smuggling areas on the Libyan coast has been straightforward in the past, although it is becoming increasingly difficult. The key authorised border post for entering Libya from Tunisia is at Ras Ajdir. This border post is busy, as it is a key transit point for both legal and illicit commerce. A recent increase in terrorist attacks in Tunisia, including the 2015 Sousse and Bardo attacks, and the 2016 attack on the border town of Ben Guerdane, has led Tunisian authorities to heighten security controls along the Libyan border. A 200-km trench-and-berm system has been constructed, and border crossings have become more rigorously controlled.<sup>70</sup>

Despite these measures, however, smuggling continues along the border, and it is still fairly easy for people to cross back and forth, either by evading border patrols or by bribing security officers. However, the slight increase in reported migration attempts from the Tunisian coast in 2016 might be an indication that it is becoming more difficult for Tunisians to cross into Libya for migration purposes.

The journey to Libya for Moroccans is more complex. They have the option of two routes. Those who can afford it, fly from Casablanca to Algiers. From Algiers, clandestine migrants then travel south-east to El Oued.<sup>71</sup> From there, they continue south through Ouargla and cross into Libya near the small town of Debdeb, near the Libyan border town of Ghadamis. (A February 2016 encounter between the Tunisian military and a smuggling vehicle full of Moroccans in the far south of Tunisia suggests that there may now be another route, running to the north of the Tunisian town of Borj El-Khadra.<sup>72</sup>

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AT LEAST  
**2 606**  
MIGRANTS DROWNED OFF  
THE LIBYAN SHORE  
BETWEEN JANUARY AND  
JULY 2016

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Figure 8: Overland routes across North Africa



Source: Author's own map, S Ballard – cartographer.

This route is largely the same as that used by Syrian refugees in 2014 and 2015, though it is unclear if the same smuggling networks are involved.)

The second main route runs overland from Morocco to the Algerian border. This is more popular, as it is cheaper than flying.<sup>73</sup> Although the border between the two countries has officially been closed since 1994, there is a great deal of illegal cross-border movement. Much of this involves robust, though local smuggling networks that trade in subsidised Algerian commercial goods, such as petrol, medicine and tobacco, or more nefarious products, such as drugs and arms.<sup>74</sup> Much of the smuggling happens along the northern third of the border. It is here that most Moroccan migrants heading to Libya cross the border, close to the Moroccan city of Oujda, though some travel as far south as Figuig.<sup>75</sup>

Sub-Saharan migrants heading into Morocco – and Moroccan labourers alike heading to Algeria to find work – frequently use clandestine border-crossing routes around Oujda, and a number of human-smuggling networks, including several former petrol-smuggling rings, have emerged to facilitate their transit. The cost for this is between €10 and €20.<sup>76</sup> Once in Algeria, the Algerian smuggling networks then move the migrants on towards Algiers. The standard price charged from Tlemcen to Algiers is between €250 and €400.<sup>77</sup> From Algiers, the migrants follow the previously described route south towards the Libyan border. There are signs that a southern route also exists between the Moroccan border and the Libyan frontier, possibly via Ghardaïa and Ouargla.<sup>78</sup>

Although the civil war in Libya has arguably opened up the operational space that enables industrial-scale migrant smuggling to flourish, the ensuing chaos in the country has simultaneously made the route less attractive to migrants. Algerians are believed to largely avoid the route, viewing it, for now, as too risky. Recent reports of North African migrants being detained by militias in



THERE IS A GREAT DEAL OF ILLEGAL CROSS-BORDER MOVEMENT BETWEEN MOROCCO AND ALGERIA, DESPITE THE BORDER BEING CLOSED SINCE 1994

Libya on suspicion that they support Islamic State are also likely to make the route less appealing to migrants from Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia who have access to other clandestine routes to Europe.<sup>79</sup>

The second route in the central Mediterranean corridor starts from the Tunisian coast. Although the Tunisian route was very popular in 2011 and 2012, a step-up in security activities by Tunisian authorities has limited the numbers migrating along this route. Nonetheless, the authorities report with some regularity on thwarted migration attempts, suggesting that the heightened security efforts have not completely deterred people from attempting to use the route.

The civil war in Libya has arguably opened up the operational space that enables industrial-scale migrant smuggling to flourish

In the north of the country, most of the migrants leave from the Cap Bon Peninsula, or from north of Tunis. Along the central coast of Tunisia, beaches to the north and south of Monastir and the Kerkennah Islands have proven popular in recent months as departure points. Most reported departures involve between 10 and 35 migrants,<sup>80</sup> most of them young men between the ages of 15 and 30. In at least one case, contraband tobacco was uncovered alongside the migrants, suggesting that poly-product trafficking networks may be active along this route.

Not all migrants leave the country using clandestine smuggling routes starting from remote parts of the coast, however. For those who are able to pay their way, it is reportedly possible to book a passage on cargo vessels and private

**Figure 9: Central Mediterranean route from eastern Algeria and northern Tunisia**



Source: Author's own map, S Ballard – cartographer.

THE STANDARD PRICE  
CHARGED FROM TLEMCCEN  
TO ALGIERS IS BETWEEN

€250

AND

€400

yachts.<sup>81</sup> And a similar option is available in Algeria. It is an expensive journey, costing €4 000 and upwards, and the boats go to only a limited number of destinations,<sup>82</sup> including ports in southern Italy, Spain, France and even distant Belgium.<sup>83</sup> As an Algerian journalist explained, 'Migrants go through Antwerp because it is seen as safer, even if it is a longer journey.'<sup>84</sup>

The final route in the central Mediterranean runs from the eastern Algerian coast to Sardinia. This is one of the preferred routes for Algerians seeking to get to Europe, who view it as quick (the passage takes 12 hours in optimal conditions) and far safer than the routes via Libya.<sup>85</sup>

Key embarkation points are clustered in the provinces of Annaba and El Taref, and include Sidi Achir, Ras El Hamra, Oued Boukrat, Sidi Salem and El Kala.<sup>86</sup> The smuggling networks that operate here tend to be small and localised. Both the smugglers and the migrants tend to be from the provinces of either Annaba or El Taref, and there is no indication that non-Algerians have sought to use this route. Migrant departures tend to involve two to three vessels leaving simultaneously from the same beach, with 10 to 15 migrants per vessel.<sup>87</sup> Mostly, the boats leave late at night or in the early hours of the morning, to reduce the chances of their being apprehended by the authorities. The cost of passage ranges from €2 000 to €3 000.<sup>88</sup>

### Smuggling routes to Europe across the eastern Mediterranean, from Turkey and via the western Balkans, continue to be popular among North African migrants

The smuggling networks in eastern Algeria are loosely organised, and based on family ties and trusted friendships.<sup>89</sup> Vessels are procured cheaply, either bought from local fishermen or built by carpenters.<sup>90</sup> To avoid being caught, smugglers work through trusted intermediaries when recruiting migrants for the voyages.<sup>91</sup> Migrants seeking passage gather information on who to contact by various means. 'Contact is made through an acquaintance, a close friend, or someone from the neighbourhood,' explained a journalist in the Algerian city of Annaba. 'Information is passed by word of mouth and then by Skype or the social media.'<sup>92</sup>

However, there is also active recruitment of migrants by intermediaries, who solicit prospective clients. As one observer noted, 'In poor districts, in the cities and on the coast, people know people, and it is easy for smugglers to target those who might be interested.'<sup>93</sup> In order to limit the impact of arrests and law enforcement intelligence gathering information is strictly compartmentalised in the networks. Few apart from the network leaders aware of all elements. This secrecy extends to also to interactions with the migrants, who are typically informed of the date and time of their departure at 'the last possible moment'.<sup>94</sup>

IN 2015 THE GREEK  
COASTGUARD APPREHENDED

8 839

NORTH AFRICAN MIGRANTS,

83%

WERE MOROCCAN

## The eastern Mediterranean corridor

Smuggling routes to Europe across the eastern Mediterranean, from Turkey and via the western Balkans, continue to be very popular among North African migrants. However, the closure of this, the most popular route for clandestine migrants in 2015 as a result of an agreement between the EU and Turkey in March 2016 has resulted in a partial shift of migrants to the central Mediterranean corridor.<sup>95</sup>

In 2015 the Greek coastguard apprehended 8 839 North African migrants, 83% of whom were Moroccan.<sup>96</sup> In the first half of 2016, the number of North Africans apprehended was far lower: 426 Algerians, 352 Moroccans and 34 Tunisians.<sup>97</sup> This is the result of an increase in law enforcement in the region, which has markedly curtailed the volume of Moroccan migration through the eastern Mediterranean, with numbers declining to one-twentieth of their former levels. Tunisian and Algerian migration along this route has declined by roughly a third. However, more Algerians continue to be captured along the route than in the central Mediterranean, and this route remains, noted one Algerian journalist, ‘the number one destination for Algerians aiming to migrate clandestinely’.<sup>98</sup> This sentiment was echoed in Morocco and in Tunisia, suggesting that if law-enforcement efforts were to slacken along the corridor it would once again become the dominant route to Europe for North African migrants.

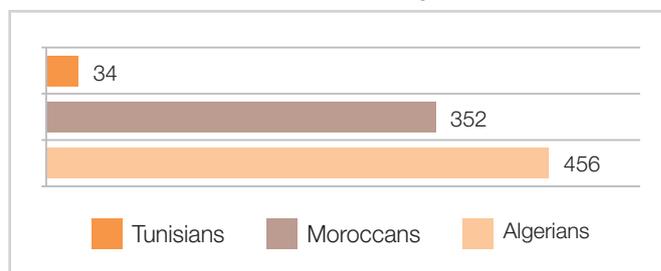
The first step for North African migrants who use the eastern Mediterranean corridor is to travel from their home countries to embarkation points in Turkey.<sup>99</sup> To do this, they fly from Tunis, Algiers or Casablanca to Istanbul on one of the region’s numerous low-cost airlines. Some migrants travel through secondary countries in North Africa or via sub-Saharan Africa to obfuscate their ultimate destination and reduce the likelihood that authorities in their home country will prevent their departure.<sup>100</sup>

Tunisians, Algerians and Moroccans benefit from visa-free travel to Turkey – though Turkey has begun to take a harder line on suspicious North African travellers arriving in Istanbul.<sup>101</sup> Several groups of Moroccans were deported from Turkey in 2015 and 2016, accused of planning to infiltrate Europe on behalf of Islamic State, though subsequent investigations suggested

that these groups were ordinary migrants, with no terrorist connections.<sup>102</sup> As a result, according to an international migration researcher, ‘migrants are buying and presenting fake work contracts to the authorities to justify their trip’.<sup>103</sup>

During 2015 and early 2016, until the de facto closure of the route following the EU–Turkey deal, North African migrants would head to the Aegean coast from Istanbul, and join the flow of Syrian, Iraqi and Afghan migrants seeking clandestine sea transport to Greece. The stage from North Africa to Istanbul, and then onwards from Istanbul to Izmir, on the Aegean coast, is often done without the services of a smuggler. Migrants rely instead on information and advice from friends or relatives who have migrated along the route in the past. Until this route was effectively shut down in March 2016, migrants would make contact with maritime smugglers either in Istanbul or Izmir – often through North African intermediaries working for the networks – and then depart on the leg of the journey to mainland Europe.<sup>104</sup>

**Figure 10: Numbers apprehended in the eastern Mediterranean, January–June 2016**



Source: IOM, Summary of Arrivals to Europe – 2016 Q2 Overview Dataset, 2016, <http://migration.iom.int/europe/>.

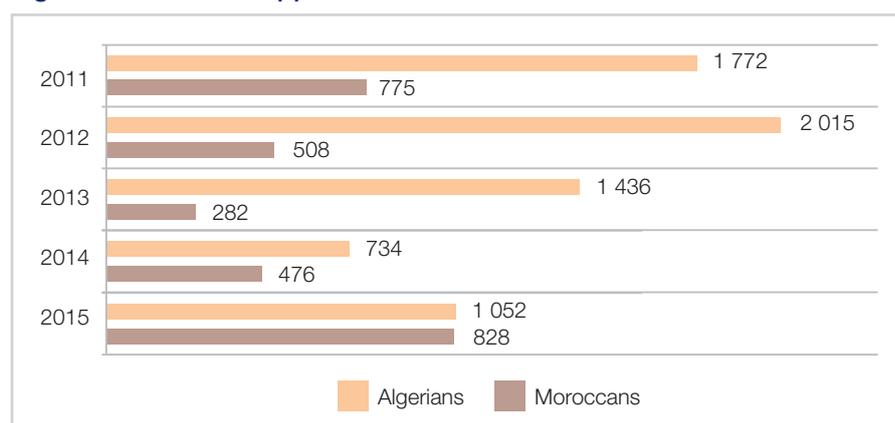
A distinct pattern has emerged among North African migrants using the eastern Mediterranean route, namely their efforts to claim Syrian nationality. As mentioned, on other routes it is common for North Africans to destroy their identity cards in an attempt to avoid being identified and deported. In the eastern Mediterranean, however, a significant percentage of North African migrants claim Syrian nationality in their bid to be granted asylum in Europe. According to Frontex, the EU border agency, in 2015 to 2016 almost 40% of migrants who were screened, and who were assumed to be Moroccan, claimed Syrian nationality.<sup>105</sup> Corroborating these claims, falsified Syrian identity documents are sold in Turkey.<sup>106</sup>

## The western Mediterranean corridor

Historically, one of the major migration routes between North Africa and Europe was the western Mediterranean corridor. However, compared to the situation in the early 2000s, when the annual number of Moroccan clandestine migrants alone often numbered above 10 000, heightened Spanish and Moroccan security-enforcement efforts along this route have led to a sharp decline in North African migrants using the route today.

Nonetheless, according to a specialist on Moroccan migration, it is inaccurate to say that the 'Moroccan door is closed'.<sup>107</sup> Frontex reports that 1 052 Algerian clandestine migrants and 828 Moroccan immigrants were caught on this route in 2015, while interviews in Morocco confirmed that migrants continue to attempt crossings, and occasionally perish, along this corridor.<sup>108</sup> It is clear, however, that the western Mediterranean route is no longer the favoured clandestine corridor either for Moroccans or Algerians: it has been supplanted by the central and eastern Mediterranean corridors.

**Figure 11: Numbers apprehended in the western Mediterranean**



Source: Frontex, Annual risk analysis 2016, 2016, 17.

1 052

ALGERIAN CLANDESTINE  
MIGRANTS AND

828

MOROCCAN IMMIGRANTS  
WERE CAUGHT ON THE  
WESTERN MEDITERRANEAN  
ROUTE IN 2015

The western Mediterranean migration corridor comprises two maritime routes and a land route. The most popular maritime route involves embarkation points on the Strait of Gibraltar, usually between the Moroccan city of Tangier and the Spanish enclave of Ceuta.<sup>109</sup> Small fishing boats, along with inflatable dinghies, jet skis and other craft, are used to shuttle migrants across the straits to the Spanish coast.<sup>110</sup> The average number of migrants per vessel is smaller than that typically encountered in the central and western Mediterranean routes, with an average of between eight and 12, but larger vessels are also used on the route.<sup>111</sup>

Algerians and Moroccans were the second and third most apprehended of all nationalities on the corridor in 2015. However, the majority of migrants using this route are sub-Saharan Africans.<sup>112</sup> Smugglers active along the route tend to be well organised and there are networks previously active in smuggling narcotics (primarily cannabis resin) across the straits.<sup>113</sup> The price for the crossing is reportedly between €1 400 and €3 000, depending on the smuggling method.<sup>114</sup>

Figure 12: Main routes in the western Mediterranean corridor



Source: Author's own map, S Ballard – cartographer.

Despite the relatively short distance across the straits, the route is still dangerous: 'Just last month [in April 2016], two boats of 40 [migrants] and one boat of 60 disappeared,' said a Moroccan migrant-rights activist.<sup>115</sup> Deaths and disappearances are so common that Facebook pages have been developed specifically to convey information on those who manage to safely reach Spain to other migrants and family members.<sup>116</sup>

Facebook pages have been developed to convey information on those who manage to safely reach Spain

The second maritime route starts on the coast of western Algeria, whence migrants aim to reach the Spanish provinces of Almería and Murcia, and, less commonly, the Balearic Islands. The most commonly reported embarkation point in 2016 was Bou Hadjar, though migrants also start the crossing in Tlemcen, Oran and Mostaganem.<sup>117</sup> The vessels used are either small fishing boats or lightweight inflatable boats. The smuggling networks involved are thought to be concentrated between Mostaganem, Oran and Chlef.<sup>118</sup> The numbers of migrants transiting along this route are believed to

be small, both compared to other routes in the western Mediterranean and to the far more popular smuggling route between eastern Algeria and Italy. The migrants using this route are overwhelmingly Algerian, though a small number of sub-Saharan Africans have also been arrested.<sup>119</sup>

The land route for clandestine migration in the western Mediterranean involves the tiny autonomous Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla. These territories, the EU's only land border with Africa, have provided a clandestine access point to mainland Europe for North African and sub-Saharan migrants for over a decade. Since 2005 the enclaves, especially Melilla, have regularly seen dramatic entry attempts by predominantly sub-Saharan migrants, including regular efforts to climb the enclaves' walls, swim in from the sea or use small boats to enter. Such attempts to physically enter the Spanish enclaves are uncommon among Moroccan and Algerian migrants. Rather, these national groups tend to attempt to gain entrance to the Spanish territories by using false documents, including authentic documents that they present as imposters, or by concealing themselves in vehicles or suitcases.<sup>120</sup>

Algerian migrants departing from Morocco enter the country via similar routes to those used by Moroccan migrants heading to Libya. From the Algerian city of Tlemcen, the migrants go to border crossing points to the

north and south of the border town of Maghnia. Guided by Moroccan or Algerian smugglers, small groups cross the border late at night or in the early hours of the morning.<sup>121</sup> From there, they travel unassisted towards Nador or Tangier, where false documents are procured for efforts to enter Ceuta or Melilla, or smugglers are contracted to facilitate the sea crossing to Spain.

The western Mediterranean migration corridor is the least used route among North African clandestine migrants seeking to get to Europe. Strong bilateral relations and information sharing between Spanish and Moroccan law-enforcement agencies, and, to a lesser degree, between Algeria and Spain, coupled with the high level of surveillance and interdiction systems in place around the Strait of Gibraltar, lessen the likelihood that the corridor will witness the large, sustained migrant surges that define the central and eastern Mediterranean corridors today – or which defined the western corridor in the mid-2000s. The numbers of migrants using this corridor are likely to increase only if the political will for controlling migration were to diminish in Morocco or Algeria, or if either were to be gripped by social or economic instability.

### Visa overstays

In the popular imagination, North African migrants arrive in Europe by small boat, delivered by smugglers in the night. The reality, however, is rather different.

Many, if not most, North African migrants arrive in Europe with legal documents, having obtained a Schengen visa for business, to study or to visit as a tourist, and then simply overstay beyond the terms of their visas.<sup>122</sup> ‘Youth nowadays,’ explained an Algerian journalist, ‘don’t want to take the risk of being blacklisted [by being caught migrating illegally]. Youth who want to go to Europe illicitly are desperate; this is the last resort for them.’<sup>123</sup>

The increased accessibility of Schengen visas has driven this predilection for overstaying the visa terms among North African migrants. Between 2011 and 2015,<sup>124</sup> the number of Schengen visas issued in North Africa nearly doubled, reaching over 1.1 million in 2015. This growth is driven both by a steep increase in applications together with a largely static rate of visa applications that are turned down.<sup>125</sup> The increased availability of

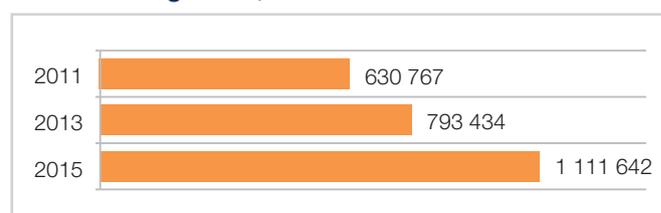
Schengen visas has meant that, in North Africa today, pursuing legal avenues for entry is a common first attempt for prospective migrants when it comes to making their way to Europe.<sup>126</sup> Only if their application is denied do they turn to clandestine methods.

### Many, if not most, North African migrants arrive in Europe with legal documents

Identifying the exact number of North African clandestine migrants who abuse the legal visa process is difficult. Data from Italian regularisation campaigns in the mid-2000s indicates that 61% to 75% of applicants had arrived on legal visas and then overstayed, while only 10% to 12% arrived via clandestine routes.<sup>127</sup> Frontex data shows that far more Algerians and Moroccans are detected for illegally overstaying each year – nearly 30 000 on average – than for attempting to illegally cross into the EU. This would suggest that prospective migrants continue to use legal entry methods to gain access to Europe.<sup>128</sup>

It is important to note that although visa fraud enables prospective migrants a safer, if more expensive, form of travel to Europe, they still face similar challenges to other undocumented workers while there. Either in their attempts to procure false work or residence permits, or as a means of income generation, visa overstayers often intersect at certain points with criminal or informal economic groups.

**Figure 13: Number of Schengen visas issued to Algerians, Moroccans and Tunisians**



Source: European Commission, Visa statistics for consulates, 2015, [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/borders-and-visas/visa-policy/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/borders-and-visas/visa-policy/index_en.htm); European Commission, Visa statistics for consulates, 2013, [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/borders-and-visas/visa-policy/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/borders-and-visas/visa-policy/index_en.htm); European Commission, Visa statistics for consulates, 2011, [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/borders-and-visas/visa-policy/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/borders-and-visas/visa-policy/index_en.htm).

## False documents

Fraudulent documents are used by some to travel both within North Africa, and between North Africa and Europe. Frontex records show that the number of false documents that were detected among migrants travelling to Europe fell in 2015, after nearly doubling between 2011 and 2013.

Moroccans use false documents more than other national groups in their attempts at migration.<sup>129</sup> Most of these are detected at the land border between Morocco and the Spanish enclaves or at airports in Italy and Belgium.<sup>130</sup> Algerian migrants also use false Moroccan travel documents to enter the Spanish enclaves, though this strategy has become less common, as Algerian migrants have gravitated towards other migration corridors.<sup>131</sup>

In North Africa security-force officials emphasise that flights between Morocco and Libya, and between Morocco and Turkey frequently have passengers using false documentation.<sup>132</sup> There is concern among security officials in North Africa that in the chaos of the Libyan revolution, a large number of authentic Libyan passports and other identity documents were stolen from the state by unknown parties. Regional officials fear that these documents may be employed by terrorists or migrants to mask their identities and to facilitate travel.

## Government responses to migration

North African governments are aware of the level of outbound migration from the region to Europe, and have taken a number of steps to address it.

Since 2011 Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco have strengthened their efforts to ensure greater security along their land and maritime borders. In addition, they have stepped up operational cooperation and information sharing on migration and other forms of organised crime with European states. Security officials in North Africa view these efforts as generally successful, while acknowledging deficiencies and gaps that allow migrant smuggling to continue.

North African states are looking to change their image from origin nations for migration, to transit and destination countries. Interviewees in all three countries noted that media reporting on North African migrants has declined significantly in recent years. Media reports now tend to

focus on sub-Saharan or Syrian migration through the region. This is in part a reflection of reality: the number of sub-Saharan and Syrian migrants passing through North Africa is far greater than the number of Tunisians, Algerians and Moroccans who migrate clandestinely to Europe. Significant numbers of sub-Saharan Africans break their journey in Algeria or Morocco, working either clandestinely or quasi-legally for long periods of time to fund their onward journey to Europe.

Meanwhile, the fact there is increasingly less discussion of migration by North Africans in Algerian, Tunisian and Moroccan media may accordingly be limiting the amount of information available to prospective migrants on the true risk they face, especially on the maritime routes. In turn, the lack of information and media reporting on the risks involved may be driving an increased interest in migration by North Africans.

North African governments are aware of migration from the region to Europe, and have taken steps to address it

Of the three states, Morocco has engaged the most forcefully in efforts to curtail migration from its territory to Europe. Moroccan security officials view migration, primarily among sub-Saharan Africans, as one of the top challenges they face along their borders.

The Moroccan Ministry of Interior and the armed forces are jointly responsible for border security and countering clandestine migration.<sup>133</sup> The Moroccan government has taken active steps to strengthen border security along its maritime frontier, building new roads and security infrastructure in the coastal areas, which have traditionally been difficult to access and patrol, and deploying a far larger number of security personnel in the northern coastal regions.<sup>134</sup>

According to a Moroccan security official, there are 11 000 security-force members 'stationed from the northern coast through to Kenitra [just north of Rabat], along the beaches'.<sup>135</sup> The government has also deployed a large number of security personnel around Ceuta and Melilla, to try to limit efforts by migrants to storm the barriers that surround the enclaves.

Bilateral cooperation with Spain – and, to a lesser degree, Italy – has been stepped up, leading to rapid information sharing, joint patrolling and the exchange of liaison officers. Morocco has received significant aid from the EU to enhance border security and counter migratory flows.

These efforts, and others along Morocco's northern land and maritime borders, are driven by the desire to strengthen the country's bilateral relationship with Spain and other EU member states, rather than by the government's perception that migrants represent a threat. This *realpolitik* means that the issue of migration – both of North Africans and sub-Saharan Africans – is a point of leverage for Morocco in its relationship with Europe.

And, occasionally, Morocco has chosen to relax its security efforts, motivated by either domestic political concerns or international relations with European nations. When this happens, large numbers of migrants attempt to cross the straits in short order, posing a significant challenge to the Spanish authorities and underlining the importance of Morocco as a partner in the migration issue. 'Whether or not the route between Morocco and Spain is active is really more of a political question,' noted one international observer, 'and is dependent on whether or not Morocco wants to make a political point [on an issue].'<sup>136</sup>

Morocco is not alone in looking at south–north migration issues primarily through the prism of bilateral relations with Europe. While both Tunisia and Algeria have made significant efforts to combat the smuggling of migrants to Europe from their territories, neither government views the issue of migration – let alone the migration of their citizens – as a significant national security challenge. North African states are far more concerned with regional terrorism and the movement of so-called foreign fighters (those who join militant groups overseas) transiting to Syria and Libya. As with Morocco, changes in bilateral relations with Europe, or a shift in domestic security priorities could lead to less emphasis being placed on the issue, potentially driving an increase in the flow of migrants from North Africa.

Nonetheless, both Tunisia and Algeria have built up their operational capacity to prevent migrants from using the maritime routes to Europe. In Tunisia the ministries of interior and defence are involved in efforts to counter clandestine migration.<sup>137</sup> The Ministry of Interior has

reorganised its coastal security architecture, increased the National Guard's footprint along the country's coasts, and acquired a number of new patrol craft, including some donated by Italy.<sup>138</sup>

Similarly, Tunisia's Ministry of Defence has upped its maritime patrol capabilities. These efforts have largely succeeded in preventing migrants from embarking from Tunisia's shores and deterring interest in the route. 'It's riskier for those migrants hoping to leave through Tunisia,' explained an Algerian journalist, 'because the government has now implemented much [more restricted] access to the beaches to the north.'<sup>139</sup>

### Tunisian security forces are preoccupied with addressing the growing terrorism threat in the country

Along the country's historically porous borders with Algeria and Libya, Tunisia's ministries of defence and the interior have sought to tighten their control by acquiring and deploying more equipment and personnel, and through the construction of physical barriers, notably the berm and ditch along the Tunisian–Libya frontier. However, although smuggling has been curtailed in some places, there remains a perception that smuggling in people, goods and weapons persists along both these borders, facilitated both by operational gaps and corruption among security-force members.<sup>140</sup> Additionally, Tunisian security forces are preoccupied with addressing the growing terrorism threat in the country, which has distracted their focus from the movement of clandestine migrants along some land borders.

Algeria, too, has worked to build its border-security capacity and to deter the movement of some clandestine migrants. These efforts are most evident in the deep south of the country, where large numbers of personnel have been deployed, many of whom are concentrated along the long frontier with Libya. The focus of the deployment is to intercept the movement of terrorists and weapons traffickers attempting to breach the frontier. This can also have an impact on the movement of clandestine migrants because, as one journalist noted, 'The authorities find it very difficult to distinguish between who is a migrant and who is a terrorist when they cross the

border. They want to ensure that no mistakes are made, and no terrorists can enter the country.<sup>141</sup> Nonetheless, the frontier is not completely sealed, and is regularly crossed by clandestine migrants from North Africa and from sub-Saharan Africa.

Along Algeria's long shoreline, the security forces attempt to exert strict control over migrant smuggling, both on land and at sea. In 2015 Algeria's Gendarmerie and police reported some 1 500 arrests of Algerians for migration offences in coastal areas and at sea.<sup>142</sup> And the number arrested in Algeria dwarfs the number encountered by Italian authorities, suggesting that the relatively high numbers of Algerians still migrating along the eastern route may do because of law-enforcement pressures encountered in Algeria. Nonetheless, the rate of migration attempts from Algeria's shores suggests that although Algeria's security efforts are preventing migration attempts towards Europe, they are not significantly deterring them.

If efforts to build more robust border security on south–north transit corridors are directly linked to North African states' interests in building relations with Europe, their efforts to do the same on east–west corridors is far more intimately linked to the security of North African states themselves – be it the movement of foreign fighters heading overseas or fears of destabilisation introduced from abroad.

Between 2012 and 2016, at least 8 750 Tunisians, Algerians and Moroccans are believed to have travelled to Syria to fight with Islamic State, while another 2 500 reportedly went to Libya.<sup>143</sup> The vast majority are Tunisian. The three governments have committed substantial resources to limiting the ability of potential foreign fighters to leave for Syria and Libya, and, likewise, to restrict their ability to return. Unintentionally, these efforts have had an impact on the movement of North African migrants. In part, this is due to government policies restricting movement, as is the case with Tunisia's border closures and the decision to limit the travel of those under 35 to Algeria, Morocco, Libya and Turkey without their fathers' written approval.<sup>144</sup> Given Tunisia's efforts to restrict clandestine migration from its own shores, migration from Tunisia has become extremely difficult without travelling to one of these four countries. Additionally, given that the demographic profile of potential migrants is similar in many ways to that of prospective foreign

fighters, governmental surveillance has led to the arrest of economic migrants in transit suspected of being foreign fighters. In perhaps the most well-publicised incident of this phenomenon in North Africa, 270 Moroccans were arrested at Algiers Airport in January 2016 over concerns about their intent.<sup>145</sup>

Finally, some prospective migrants are less inclined to travel because of the greater suspicion they now face. 'Potential migrants are afraid to go to Libya or Tunisia,' one Moroccan noted. 'They are worried that they could be accused of wanting to join ISIS or some other radical group.'<sup>146</sup>

In the Maghreb a key gap, both in addressing migration and the movement of foreign fighters, is the lack of institutionalised cooperation and coordination between the security forces of the nations in the region. Compared to levels of cooperation and coordination that have developed between North African countries and the EU, within the Maghreb cooperation is either nascent or non-existent, depending on the countries involved.

### North African and European efforts to prevent migration have not addressed the concerns that drive the phenomenon

Although Algeria and Tunisia have increased their engagement over the last five years, frequently sharing information and devolving communication from commanders down to the operational level, the relationship still needs to be refined. As for Morocco and Algeria, cooperation in the security forces is virtually non-existent, and information sharing between security forces rarely occurs. This opens gaps in the border-security architecture of both nations, which can then be exploited by smuggling and trafficking organisations, impeding efforts to limit clandestine migration between Morocco and Algeria. In the absence of effective east–west cooperation on border security, efforts to counter south–north migration and security threats can succeed only to a degree.

North African and European enforcement efforts to prevent and deter migration have not successfully addressed the deep social and economic concerns that drive the phenomenon. Large numbers of North

Africans continue to attempt an increasingly dangerous clandestine journey to Europe or try to acquire a coveted Schengen visa, while larger groups of the population are clearly interested in migrating.<sup>147</sup>

Increased enforcement operations have removed a social and economic 'safety valve' for North African states – one that allowed the region's youth to find work and success overseas, before returning to their home countries with new-found status and economic credibility. Restricting this opportunity raises the risk of increased social and economic tensions in North Africa, as well as the risk of radicalisation as youth seek out other routes for status and social credibility.

There seems to be a quiet recognition among North African states that this migration safety valve is of use, as long as it doesn't interfere with their relations with Europe. North African governments focus their efforts on curtailing migration most acutely at those departing from their shorelines, be they citizens or transit migrants. There is less interest and concern paid to the movement of their citizens to other countries with the intention of migrating from abroad. Migrants continue to head to Europe, but fewer and fewer leave from their home countries.

## Conclusion

North African migration routes are in a state of flux. In 2015 the pattern was that most North Africans, especially Moroccans, attempted to migrate clandestinely through the eastern Mediterranean/Balkan corridor.

The surge of Moroccan migrants in early 2016 along the central Mediterranean route and continued reporting in Algeria of Moroccan migrants captured in transit suggest that the increasing violence and instability in Libya is not a deterrent to migrants. It is likely that Moroccans will continue to migrate in large numbers via Libya, and they are likely to be joined by Tunisian youth from areas bordering Libya.

Algerians are likely to continue transiting from the Algerian coast to Italy and Spain. It remains to be seen whether the small number of non-Algerian migrants who have been apprehended on these routes is an indication of heightened interest by North African and sub-Saharan migrants to depart from there.

The continued movement of North Africans through the eastern Mediterranean, albeit in reduced numbers, suggests that this route too could re-emerge rapidly as a high-volume corridor if Turkey's political will for law enforcement lessens. This may well be the case as the apparently mutually exclusive demands of controlling migration, on the one hand, and responding to terrorism and political instability, on the other, increasingly conflict.<sup>148</sup>

European nations should work with North African states to address the lack of economic opportunity driving migration

Efforts by North African governments have achieved some success in limiting migration attempts from their shores. However, the region's porous land borders enable the east-west movement of migrants, as well as smugglers of commodities, weapons and narcotics. Although efforts are being made to increase security along the region's land borders, the uneven level of cooperation between states in the region severely hampers their efforts at increasing border security. In turn, porous borders enable the displacement of migration flows from points and countries within North Africa that have significantly cracked down on clandestine migration to areas where enforcement capabilities and will are very limited.

Although government efforts to limit migration by North Africans through border control have achieved some success, efforts to recognise and respond to the drivers of migration have not. There continues to be a significant gap between the economic aspirations and desires of many North Africans, and the opportunities available to them. As the 'safety valve' of clandestine migration becomes increasingly elusive for the region's frustrated young people, social tensions may mount, leading to increased instability in the Maghreb.

Rather than supporting the securitised approach currently in vogue in the Mediterranean, European nations should work with North African states to address the lack of economic opportunity that drives migration. The goal should be both to help build economically successful partner nations and to proactively address the chronic conditions that drive migration before they become critical generators of social instability.

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Matthew Herbert is a research fellow with the Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime and leads border-security capacity-building programmes at the Strategic Capacity Group. He has designed and implemented community-sensitive border-management projects in North and West Africa. He is co-author of a 2015 US Institute of Peace study on border security in the Maghreb. He is currently finishing his PhD at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University.

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