START NETWORK

LEARNING REPORT

CASABLANCA'S SHIFTING URBAN CONTEXT FOR MIGRANTS

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Building trust with a hidden and dispersed population: trust is essential when working with migrant populations, who may be distrustful of outsiders. Trust takes time and capacity to build, and though it may be feasible in a more settled camp setting, it can be more difficult with people who are hidden, dispersed, or on the move. Agencies working with migrants should adapt implementation approaches to build trust, such as limiting putting them at risk through discrete distributions or hiring a team that reflects the diverse nationalities of the migrant populations.

• **Building partnerships with local and national actors:** including local and national actors and authorities are essential to ensuring the success of any project and long-term sustainability. This can be difficult in the context of migration, where actors may be more hesitant to get involved due to the irregular status of some migrant communities and possible existing discrimination or bias. It's important to find incentives that can lead to common goals being achieved for all stakeholders involved, including migrants. It's also important to engage multiple actors in various types of advocacy, so that the same agency that is implementing isn't also the sole agency leading on advocacy.

• **Ensuring flexible context analyses:** projects should avoid treating nationality-based communities as homogenous groups, as this misses the more complex relationships and tensions existing within one nationality group. Indeed, ethnic and political tensions in the countries of departure do not disappear along the migratory route. Conflict management training can be a good approach empower communities, and should not only include migrants, but also host communities (such as landlords or merchants) as well as implementing partners.

MERF ALERTS IN CASABLANCA, MOROCCO

MERF Alert Name	Awarded agency	Partner(s)	Amount (GBP)	Project dates	People reached
Alert 17 Morocco	Humanity & Inclusion (formerly Handicap International)	SAMU Social, Entraide Nationale	480,000	20 December 2018 - 20 March 2019	3,860
Alert 20 Morocco	Humanity & Inclusion (formerly Handicap International)	SAMU Social, Entraide Nationale, and the Association d'Art du Patrimoine Marocain	265,000	22 July 2019 – 5 November 2019	1,434

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CONTEXT

MIGRATION IN MOROCCO

Migratory flows in Morocco have evolved over the past years as the Western Mediterranean Route to Europe via Morocco has become increasingly used by migrants, particularly West Africans.[i] This is in part due to the increasing insecurity in Libya and Algeria and the risk associated with taking the Central Mediterranean Route. Though some migrants travel to Morocco for education or work opportunities, a large majority hope to continue their journey to Europe.[ii] The conditions migrants face along the route are difficult and often dangerous, involving smuggling networks, trafficking, slavery, and gender-based violence.

Meanwhile, the recent tightening of the management of the European Union's borders and the pressure exerted on North African countries to secure borders has resulted in a decrease of arrivals in Europe and an increase in the number of migrants trapped in Morocco. This has only been aggravated by the recent COVID-19 epidemic. Whereas IOM data indicated a spike of land and sea arrivals registered in Spain via the Western Mediterranean Route in 2018 (33,912 arrivals were registered between January and August 2018), 43 percent less were registered during the same period in 2019.[iii] As of May 2020, only 1,105 arrivals were registered along the Western Mediterranean Route during the first half of the year.[iv] Morocco has thus become an unintended country of destination for many migrants.

While in Morocco, migrants, and particularly irregular migrants, can be quite vulnerable. Though Morocco adopted a national asylum and immigration strategy based on a human rights approach in 2013, various initiatives to date, including socio-economic integration, have only focused on regular migration. Without a clear legal status or fixed address, any irregular migrant is unable to access jobs or skills training that could help them integrate into the Moroccan community. Discrimination is increasingly common.[v] Durable solutions for them are also scarce-- access to economic opportunities is highly uncertain, meaning that often their most basic food, shelter, and medical needs are not met.
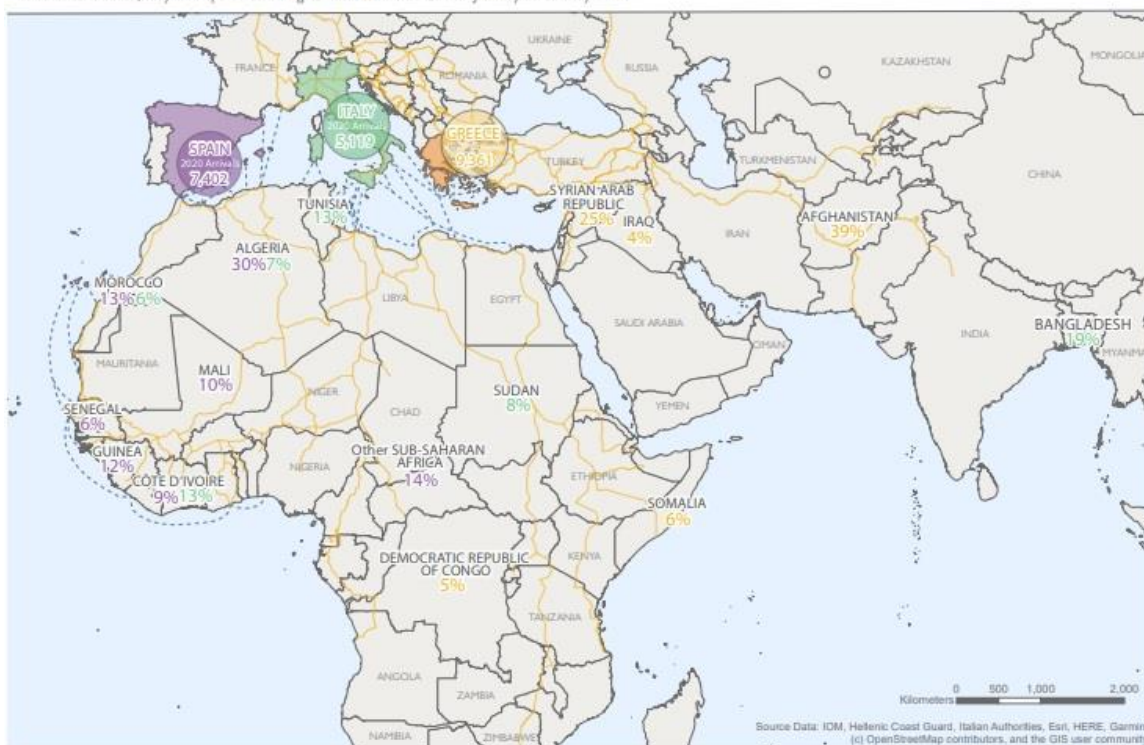
Main countries of origin reported at arrival. IOM Mixed Migration Flows in the Mediterranean. May 2020

INFORMAL CAMPS IN CASABLANCA

Most migrants in Morocco live either in overcrowded housing in working-class neighbourhoods, in the forests near the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla, or until recently in informal urban camps.

Casablanca, Morocco's economic capital, has become an emerging choice of settlement for people on the move for a variety of reasons ranging from historical ties to access. Firstly, the city has long established connections with West African communities and companies that enables greater opportunities for informal work and linkages into community networks. Secondly, Casablanca's is also the first point of entry for those traveling by air making it accessible for everyone. Finally, it is also much easier for migrants to blend in and spread out throughout Casablanca's five governorates, rather than smaller towns, which makes them less likely to get stopped by authorities.

Until June 2019, Casablanca hosted one of the last informal camps near the Ouled Ziane bus station, first set up in December 2016. It was from there migrants that would often travel by bus in the direction of Melilla or Ceuta. After the closure of the camp in Oujda town near the Algerian border in 2015, followed by those in the cities of Fez and Rabat in 2017, the Ouled Ziane camp grew in size. By 2019, with the increased border clampdown, the situation reached breaking point with an influx of refoulés from the border returning to Casablanca. On any given day, between 800 and 1,800 migrants, primarily sub-Saharan African adult males including a noticeable proportion of unaccompanied minors, took shelter in the increasingly overcrowded and unsanitary camp based on a 400m^2 basketball court. When a large fire completely destroyed the camp in June 2019, authorities seized the moment to evict all its inhabitants, leading them to spread out throughout the streets of the city.[vi]

MERF RESPONSES IN CASABLANCA

Informal camp near Ouled Ziane station in Casablanca, Morocco before its destruction in 2019 (Credit: Humanity & Inclusion)

Due to the uncertain legal status of many migrants in Morocco and the reduced services and facilities available to support them, a significant gap in needs emerged. **Between August 2018 and October 2019, the Migration Emergency Response Fund (MERF) vii funded three three-month long projects in Morocco.** The MERF is a rapid response contingency fund available to over 20 international NGOs to respond to new or unforeseen changes in humanitarian needs along the Central and Western Mediterranean Routes. Though available in 11 countries, the MERF contingency fund has been primarily used in Morocco, in part due to the described spikes in needs starting in 2018 and lack of other sources of funding.

These short-term projects have allowed insight through key informant interviews into the scale and complexity of challenges relating to the needs of migrants in an urban context. Two of these projects specifically concentrated in Casablanca (see table on Page 1). One project led by MERF partner Handicap International/Humanity & Inclusion (HI) between December 2018 and March 2019 focused on providing assistance to migrants in the aforementioned Ouled Ziane camp over the cold winter months. A follow-up HI project between July 2019 and October 2019 responded to the new situation and needs when the Ouled Ziane camp was destroyed by a fire and closed by authorities.

The learning from this report reflects on some of the lessons learned when implementing a migration humanitarian response in an urban context, both in an informal urban camp and in a setting that has a more geographic spread.

LESSONS LEARNED

BUILDING TRUST WITH A HIDDEN AND DISPERSED POPULATION

Following the fire in Casablanca's Ouled Ziane informal camp in June 2019, between 800 and 1,000 migrants moved to nearby streets and the Medina neighbourhood. When it became clear that they would not be able to access the former camp again, the situation significantly deteriorated, with migrants dispersed further into the city and forced to stay in small groups in the streets.

The destruction of the urban formal camp structure in Casablanca and throughout Morocco has meant that humanitarian responses must adapt to a more dispersed and hidden migrant population, where trust building becomes a key component: whereas the first MERF alert (Alert 17) was more focused on building trust and gaining access to the camp, the second project (Alert 20) had to prioritise a more mobile approach to reach the most vulnerable migrants. To do this, HI built on the relationship of trust it had established with migrants during the first alerts. Hiring a diverse team that reflected the sub-Saharan nationalities of the migrants helped in this report. As such, most migrants were comfortable sharing their location with the organisations.

Given the fact that many irregular migrants prefer to remain hidden, discretion was a key tactic when distributing kits, voucher or other forms of assistance. Large distributions in an urban context can lead to large crowds, theft, increase risk of authorities arresting individuals, and a sense of perceived preferential treatment between migrants and host communities (who are often also vulnerable). This puts both implementing agencies and migrants at risk and can damage trust. To overcome this, HI adopted various approaches:

- Having more frequent but smaller distributions with subsections of the camp or neighbourhoods, ensuring that most activities also included vulnerable Moroccan communities.
- Sometimes kits were hidden and distributed in black trash bags to seem less valuable. Whenever possible, vouchers were preferred over bulkier items (such as mattresses) or cash.
- Often these distributions were held late at night to avoid drawing large crowds. However, this latter approach can put some of the most vulnerable groups at risk, such as women and girls who may not want to walk in the streets at night. It is also exhausting for teams in the long term if they have to regularly work late into the night.

Going forward, trust is essential when working with migrant populations, who may be distrustful of outsiders. Trust takes time and capacity to build, and though it may be feasible in a more settled camp setting, it can be more difficult with people who are hidden, dispersed, or on the move. Agencies working with migrants should adapt implementation approaches to build trust, such as limiting putting them at risk through discrete distributions or hiring a team that reflects the diverse nationalities of the migrant populations.

BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS WITH LOCAL AND NATIONAL ACTORS

In order to ensure long-term sustainability of any project, coordination with civil society and authorities is essential. Both projects in Casablanca focused on involving authorities at all levels, from the governor to local authorities, and adopting a 'win-win' approach. Though there may be prejudices against migrants, most authorities and civil societies were receptive to implementing social cohesion activities and health campaigns as these activities were seen as benefitting both migrants and host communities. For example, HI and its partners organised dance, music, and sports activities in local community centres, or *maisons de jeunes*, for youths of all nationalities, which brought new life and energy to these centres. They also organised cleaning campaigns to improve hygiene in the camp and neighbouring area.

Cleaning campaign near the Ouled Ziane camp in Casablanca, Morocco before its destruction in 2019 (Credit: Humanity & Inclusion)

The biggest challenge for all stakeholders was the short three-month timeframe of the MERF projects. Humanitarian interventions are not as common in Morocco, a traditionally development-focused country, and actors are not set-up for rapid humanitarian responses. This took some adjustment and capacity building. Turnover of government authorities is also challenging, and often migration is not always considered a priority. Additionally, access is typically gained through individual relationship-building, which can quickly change when a new governor or local authority starts with a new agenda or bias.

As a final note on coordination with national actors, HI noted that any agency seeking to respond to the needs of migrants cannot at the same time lead on advocacy initiatives to improve the conditions of migrants in Morocco. This can jeopardise their access to the most vulnerable groups. It is important for other organisations to take on this role to ensure long-term solutions while allowing others to respond to the most urgent and immediate needs of migrants.

Going forward, including local and national actors and authorities are essential to ensuring the success of any project and long-term sustainability. This can be difficult in the context of migration, where actors may be more hesitant to get involved due to the irregular status of some migrant communities and possible existing discrimination or bias. **It's important to find incentives that can lead to common goals being achieved for all stakeholders involved, including migrants**. It's also important to engage multiple actors in various types of advocacy, so that the same agency that is implementing isn't also the sole agency leading on advocacy.

ENSURING FLEXIBLE CONTEXT ANALYSES

Before its destruction, the Ouled Ziane camp had a complex internal governance structure to ensure that order was maintained within the informal camp. Each nationality of migrants had at least one community leader (with around 23 leaders in total) who would be in charge of resolving conflicts, sharing information, and organising his or her community. In terms of project implementation, these leaders also played a key role in facilitating access into the camps and assisted with distributions.

As more and more people moved to the camp, this placed more stress on this governance system, particularly as some communities grew in size more than others (such as the Guinean, Cameroonian, and Malian communities). When some new arrivals began blaming leaders for lacking motivation to organise more border movements and focusing instead on illicit activities such as prostitution and drugs, the situation quickly became explosive, leading to the death of one migrant and the final fire in June 2019.

Following the destruction of the camp, the governance structure entirely dissolved. Though some migrants stayed with other members of their community, many prioritised individual relationships they had created in the camp when looking for housing or shelter. For many, there was a sense of regaining autonomy and independence. The first HI project in the Ouled Ziane camp relied heavily on this informal governance system to gain access to the camp, undertake activities. HI focused much more on relieving inter-community tensions, particularly between migrants in the camp and neighbouring Moroccan communities, though social cohesion activities.

With the second project and the disintegration of the camp governance structure, HI and its partners focused more on providing conflict management training to individuals who could more easily transmit messages (due to their education or the languages spoken) and demonstrated leadership qualities-- not necessarily based on nationality. They noticed that even within one nationality group, significant tensions existed. Conflict management training also included members of HI and civil society partners, as it had been noted that there can sometimes also be misunderstandings between migrants and agencies.

Needs also changed between the initial project in the informal camp setting and the second more dispersed context. While the first project focused on improving the sanitation infrastructure and providing warm clothes for the Ouled Ziane camp, finding shelter for a now displaced 1,000 former Ouled Ziane residents and strengthening social cohesion were prioritised in the second project. Whenever possible, migrants were encouraged to find their own rooms or apartments that fulfilled pre-agreed criteria in terms of safety and cost to encourage more autonomy of decision-making and integration into the community.

Building on their learning around trust, HI worked with local community associations and provided training on community building (such as between landlord and tenant) to ensure that migrants were welcomed appropriately.

Going forward, projects should avoid treating nationality-based communities as homogenous groups, as this misses the more complex relationships and tensions existing within one nationality group. Indeed, ethnic and political tensions in the countries of departure do not disappear along the migratory route. Conflict management training can be a good approach empower communities, and should not only include migrants, but also host communities (such as landlords or merchants) as well as implementing partners.

i http://www.mixedmigration.org/articles/shift-to-the-western-mediterranean-migration-route/
ii http://intersections.ma/MAP/site/index.html#GT3
iii ttps://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Flows%20Compilation%20Report_Aug_2019_fin.pdf
iv https://reliefweb.int/report/world/mixed-migration-flows-mediterranean-compilation-available-data-and-information-may-2020
v https://observers.france24.com/fr/20191101-maroc-interdiction-vente-billets-africains-situation-irreguliere-ctm
vi http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/north-africa/2019/06/30/Many-injured-in-Morocco-migrant-camp-blaze-sources.html