
International Pendulum Migration to Morocco: Multi-Local Residential Strategies of Ageing Migrants

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Abstract

In Europe, labour migrants from the Mediterranean region who migrated to western Europe from the 1950s to 1970s constitute the most numerous older migrant population. This paper focuses on a subgroup of this population: ageing Moroccan migrants. It draws on the findings of ethnographic and survey fieldwork in one particular Moroccan area of out-migration. The paper examines the migration behaviour of ageing Moroccan migrants. Although they show a low propensity to return permanently to Morocco, there is a growing category of pendular migrants who, while officially residing abroad, and living on host-state social security benefits and pensions, tend to stay in Morocco for several months per year. The paper analyses the factors which explain this migration behaviour and the ensuing re-emergence of transnational, multi-local households while paying special attention to the role of host-state policies. Increasingly restrictive immigration policies as well as the partial non-exportability of pensions and social security benefits and, more generally, the volatility of policies and the lack of policy attention to return migrants' needs, are important considerations in the decision-making process of ageing labour migrants and their spouses and children. From the perspective of Moroccan migrants, a European residence permit or citizenship is a key asset, which must be fostered and passed on to following generations.

Introduction¹

Over the past four decades, Morocco has evolved into one of the world's leading emigration countries. Since the mid-1960s, and following the conclusion of agreements to recruit 'guest workers' with northwest European countries, Morocco has experienced large-scale emigration of mostly unskilled migrants. Moroccan migration was initially mainly oriented towards France, but also increasingly towards the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany and, since the mid-1980s, Spain and Italy.

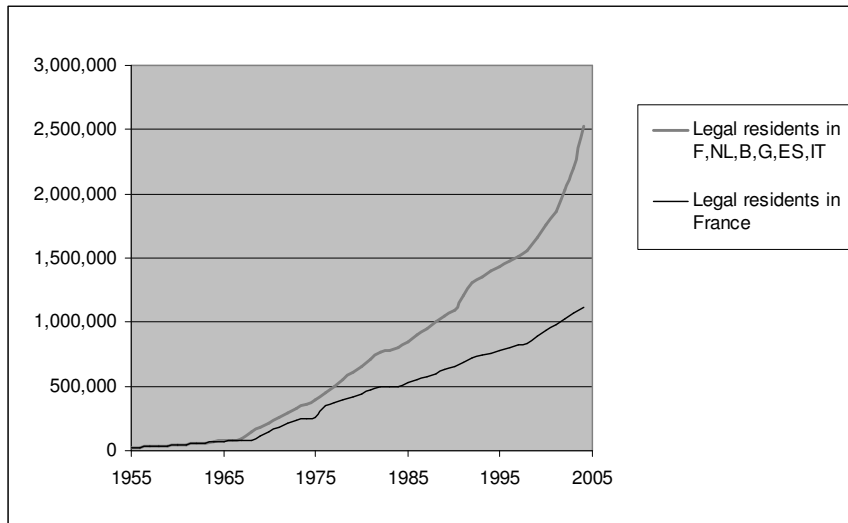
Contrary to expectations, following the economic recession and the tightening of immigration policies after the 1973 Oil Crisis, relatively few Moroccan migrants returned, and many ended up staying permanently, a process which was accompanied by large-scale family reunification. The combined effects of family reunification, family formation through new marriages, natural increase, undocumented migration, and new labour migration to Spain and Italy explain why the official number of people of Moroccans origin living in Europe has increased more than sevenfold from 300,000 in 1972, on the eve of the recruitment freeze, to an estimated number of 2.4 million people in 2004 (See figure 1).

Moroccans now form not only one of largest, but also one of the most dispersed migrant communities in Western Europe. France is home to the largest legally residing population of Moroccan descent (more than 1,100,000), followed by Spain (424,000), the Netherlands (300,000), Italy (299,000), Belgium (293,000), and Germany (102,000). Smaller but rapidly growing communities of higher-skilled

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migrants live in the United States (100,000) and Canada (78,000). Actual numbers may be substantially higher, due to substantial undocumented migration (De Haas 2006b).

Figure 1. Expansion of population of Moroccan descent in Europe, specified for France (1955-2004)



Source: National statistical services; De Haas 2006b; Fargues 2005.

The first generation of Moroccan migrants in Europe is now approaching the age of retirement, and the majority of them are not working anymore because of (pre) retirement, unemployment or incapacity to work. This evokes the question to what extent and how these ageing migrants are returning to Morocco, in a context where most, but not all, former guest workers have reunified their families in the European destination countries. In fact, there is a surprising lack of recent research literature on return migration of labour migrants from western Europe. Whereas in the 1970s and 1980s there was considerable debate on return migration (cf. Entzinger 1985), the permanent settlement of “guest worker” populations apparently also coincided with an academic shift towards integration studies.

This is somehow curious, because the fact that many migrants have settled at the destination does neither imply that *all* of them have settled at the time, nor does it exclude the possibility that ageing migrants will stay after the end of their active life. Moreover, the general image of low return migration and permanent settlement in Europe is likely to obscure complex forms of mobility that are ignored by gross migration statistics. The settler or returnee status primarily reflects legal categories, which often say little about people's actual behaviour. As this paper will show, a substantial category of ageing Moroccan migrants are developing a specific form pendular migratory behaviour. These pendulum migrants spend several months per year in Morocco while keeping official residence in Europe. In fact, such semi-returnees can be classified neither as 'settlers' nor as 'returnees'.

This paper will describe the migratory behaviour of ageing Moroccan migrants living in western Europe and analyse the structural legal, social and economic factors explaining their migratory behaviour. The paper will start with a brief macro-analysis of the post 1973 migratory behaviour of the first generation of Moroccan migrants. It will try to explain the general factors explaining why many Moroccan migrants eventually did not return to Morocco but reunified their families. The paper will subsequently focus on one case study. Drawing on empirical data collected by the author, the paper analyse the situation of return and pendulum migrants in one particular Moroccan area of out-migration, the Todra oasis valley, located in the province of Ouarzazate in southern Morocco.

Data collection by the author in this region took place between September 1998 and June 2000. A socio-economic household survey was conducted among 507

households containing 3,801 individuals, including 237 international (150 current and 87 returned) and 457 internal (292 current and 165 returned) migrants, in six villages. In addition to continuous participant observation, open interviews were conducted on migration, agricultural practices, investments and socio-cultural relations (see also De Haas 2006a). In 2003, additional interviews were conducted among prospective and return migrants.

General migration patterns of first generation Moroccan migrants

Several general factors in Morocco and the destination countries explain why many Moroccan ‘guest-workers’, who migrated en masse to Western Europe in the 1964-1973 decade, did eventually not return. The 1973 Oil Crisis radically changed the political and economic context in which migration took place. Morocco suffered even more than the European countries from the high oil prices and the global economic downturn. The economic situation in Morocco deteriorated and, following two failed *coups d'état* against King Hassan II in 1971 and 1972, the country also entered into a period of increasing political instability and repression (De Haas 2007a).

The discontinuation of the ‘return option’ to Europe through the increasingly restrictive immigration policies, combined with the grim political and economic prospects in Morocco, explain why many migrants decided to stay on the safe side, that is, in Europe. Paradoxically, the recruitment freeze therefore stimulated permanent settlement rather of the reverse (Entzinger 1985; Fargues 2004; Obdeijn 1993). Although the social imagination of many Moroccan migrants has been long

haunted by the “myth” of an eventual return to their homeland (Boudoudou 1985), many have been unable to realize this dream. Simultaneously confronted with severe social, political, and economic constraints and uncertainties in Morocco, as well as the increasingly restrictive migration policies in Europe, most opted for family reunification, which heralded the shift from circular to more permanent migration.

Under these circumstances, the special return migration schemes implemented by countries such as the Netherlands, Germany and France – which often comprised return migration bonuses in exchange for relinquishing rights of residence – were a general failure and did not reverse the trend towards settlement. While family reunification was largely complete at the end of the 1980s, family formation gained significance as a major source of new migration from Morocco over the 1990s. Large proportions of the second generation Moroccan descendants prefer to marry a partner — preferably kin — from the region of origin (Lievens 1999; Reniers 2001). Besides the increasing reliance on family migration, a second consequence of the restrictive immigration policies was an increase of irregular labour migration to the classic destination countries in western Europe and, since the mid-1980, increasingly to the new destinations countries of Spain and Italy.

Although many labour migrants that arrived in western Europe during the 1960-70s labour migration boom ended up staying permanently, the late 1980s and early 1990s were characterized by a movement of return migration of relatively elderly, retired, or jobless Moroccans. Between 1985 and 1995, some 314,000 migrants returned to Morocco from France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, the UK, and Denmark. Since 1994, return migration has fallen to less than 20,000. However, return migration

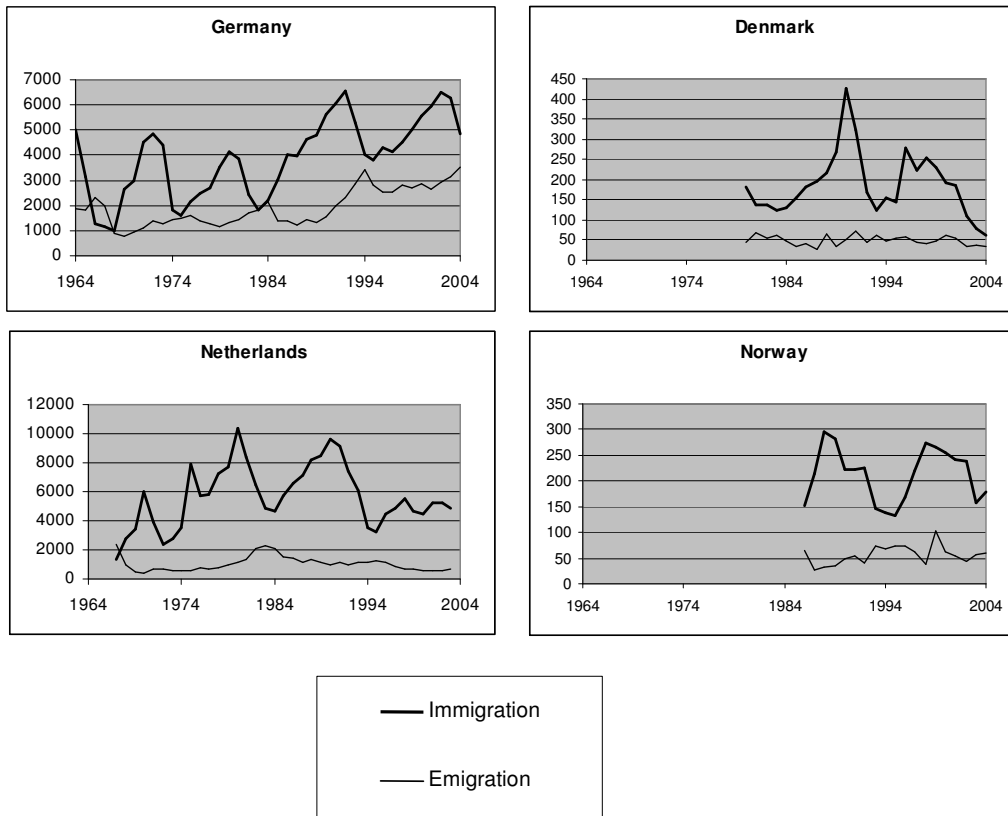
among first generation Moroccans has been low compared to other immigrant groups in Europe (Fadloullah *et al.* 2000:56). The predominantly permanent character of Moroccan migration is also testified by a high tendency towards naturalisation (Berrada 1990; Fadloullah *et al.* 2000:56; OECD 2004).

Figure 2 displays immigration and emigration trends for a number of destination countries for which relevant data was available². These country-level figures seem to suggest that return migration has been comparatively low³. It is however striking that out-migration from Germany has been considerably higher than from other countries. This might be related either to differences in migration measurement, or to the fact that a proportion of these migrants do in fact not return to Morocco, but resettle in another European country.

² France, the most important 'classical' destination country for Moroccan migrants, does not register yearly emigration.

³ It should be noted that out-migration does not automatically imply return migration to Morocco, since emigrants might also move to a third country. Nevertheless, it can be safely assumed that the majority indeed return to Morocco.

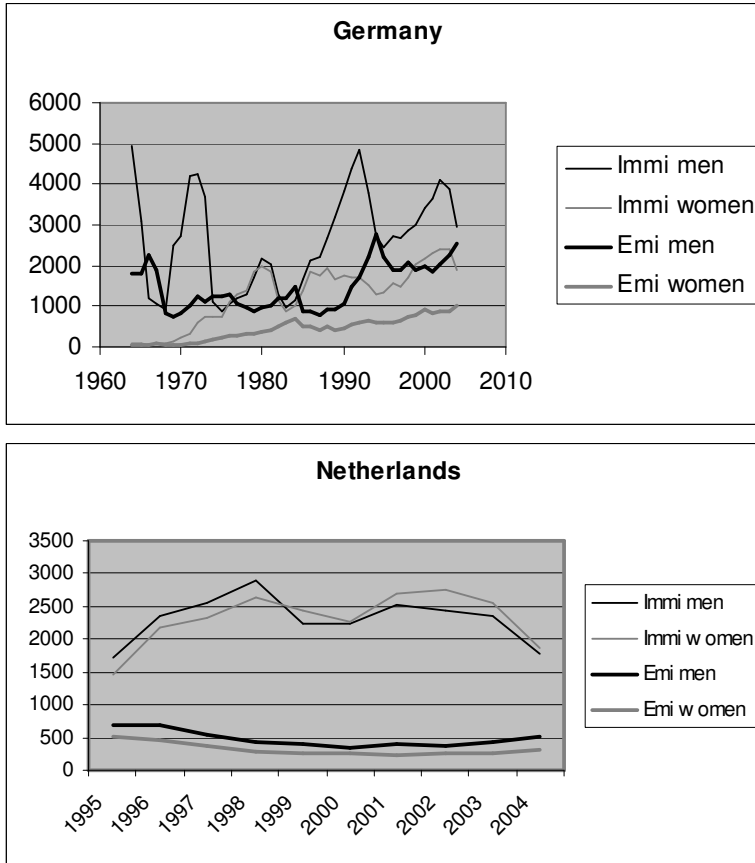
Figure 2. Emigration and immigration of Moroccan nationals



Sources: National statistical services

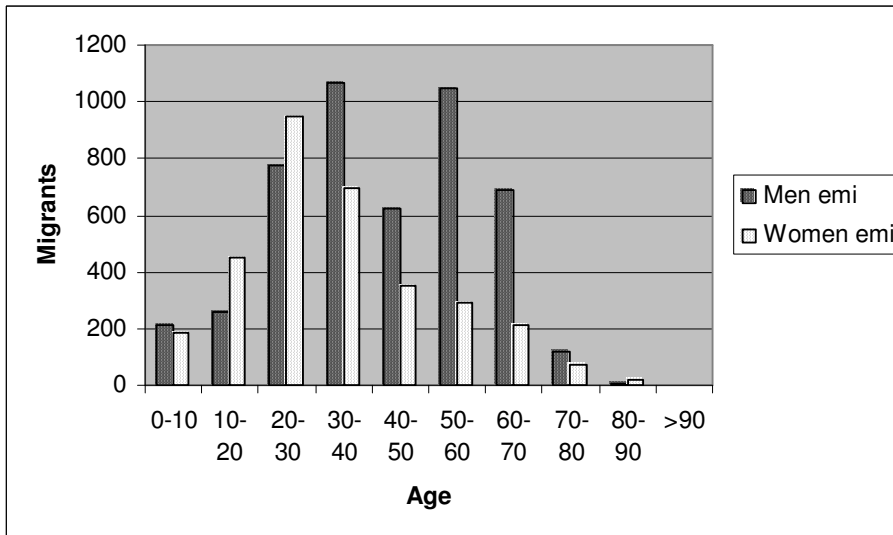
Available data for Germany and the Netherlands presented in figure 3 suggest that return migration tends to be higher among men than among women, which may partly reflect the fact that men are more numerous, in particular among the first cohort of migrants. Contrary what some might expect, data from the Netherlands presented in figure 4 suggest that the majority of return migrants do not belong to the elderly. For instance, 61 and 81 percent of all Moroccan male and female migrants, who emigrated between 1995 and 2004 from the Netherlands to Morocco was younger than 50 years.

Figure 3. Moroccan migration from and to Germany and the Netherlands, by sex



Sources: National statistical services

Figure 4. Return migration from the Netherlands to Morocco 1995-2004, by age and sex



Source: CBS Netherlands

Shifting migration strategies from the Todra valley

Although the macro-data presented seem to confirm the relatively low inclination among Moroccan migrants to return permanently, these data say little about individual migration patterns. Through using micro-data from the Moroccan Todra valley, we will now attempt to uncover the complexity of mobility patterns obscured by macro-data on migration flows as well as the motivations of individual migrants to develop their specific migratory behaviour. Before analysing the role of migration in livelihoods and the multi-local residential strategies of migrants, we will outline the evolution of migration from the Todra and how migration strategies have been shifting.

The Todra is a small river oasis located on the southern slopes of the High Atlas Mountains in Morocco. In 2000 the valley housed approximately 70 000 inhabitants living in 64 villages and the rapidly expanding town of Tinghir (25 000 inhabitants). Like most of rural Morocco, the Todra valley remained largely free of the central state power based in the cities west and north of the High Atlas until the 20th century. The installation of the French protectorate over Morocco (1912-1956) marked the beginning of an era of tumultuous change.

On the one hand, following the conquest of the Todgha valley in 1931 by colonial powers, the incorporation of this formerly stateless society of Berbers (*Imazighen*) into the colonial state and – after independence – Moroccan-Arabic state, meant the loss of tribal autonomy and the decline of regional and trans-Saharan (caravan) trade

networks. On the other hand, the transformation of the valley's political and economic macro-context through the incorporation of the Todra into the modern state and the capitalist economy, created entirely new livelihood opportunities through wage labour outside traditional subsistence oasis agriculture both within and, in particular, outside the valley. These processes have culminated in the increasing importance of labour migration from the Todra.

From the second half of the nineteenth century, Todrawi went to work in the cities and on the farms of French *colons* in Algeria. However, French occupation of Morocco and the concomitant urbanisation created unprecedented opportunities for internal migration, mainly to coastal cities like Rabat and Casablanca. The combined effect of Algerian independence (1962) and the economic boom in Europe caused a reorientation of international migration flows, which shifted towards France and, to a lesser extent, Belgium and the Netherlands. The late 1960s and early 1970s were the "golden age" of labour migration, when male workers were directly recruited, the costs and risks of migration were relatively low and a large number of relatively poor Todrawi were able to migrate to Europe.

Although formal labour recruitment came to an end after the mid-1970s, the Todrawi managed to adopt alternative strategies to migrate abroad. Several factors seem to explain the persistence of international labour migration. First, some migrants applied a migration strategy which has been referred to in the literature as "relay migration" (cf. Arizpe 1981). In this case, the migrant does not decide to reunify his entire household (i.e., his wife and children) at the destination, but to let only one or two

unmarried sons come over before their age of legal adulthood⁴ in what can be called ‘partial family reunification’. These sons then take over their father’s function as the migrant breadwinner after his remigration. In this way, the household maintains its stake in international migration. By passing the baton (i.e., the right to residency and work in Europe) from father to son, a new generation of (labour) migrants can thus be created via legal ways.

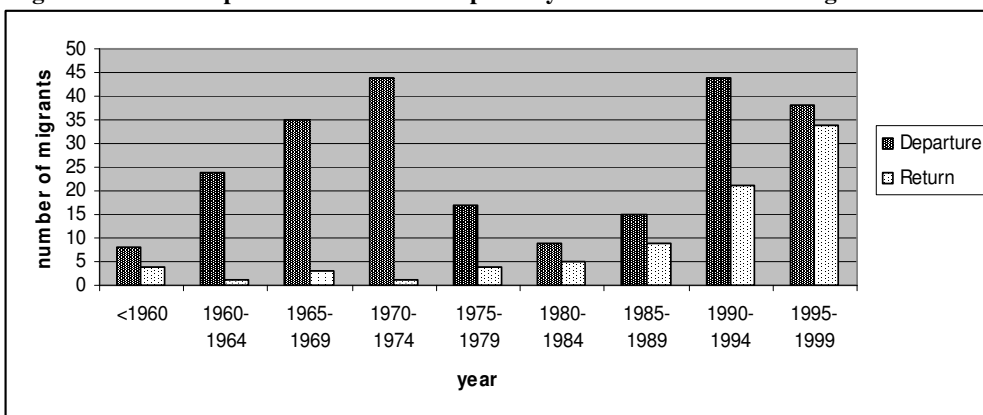
Family migration through new marriages with sons and daughters of the first generation of migrants has become virtually the only other way to enter north-west European countries (i.e., France, Netherlands, Belgium, and Germany) legally. Access to legal residency and thus to relatively well-remunerated work has increasingly become the prerogative of migrants’ children. This has coincided with a considerable rise in bride-prices. Although this practice seems to be declining now, many migrants wish to give their daughters to nonmigrants living in regions of origin in marriage. Although migrants’ sons are generally freer in choosing their spouse, many end up marrying a girl from their village of origin too, under strong social pressure from their family and communities of origin.

The temporary drop in labour migration in the 1980s reflects a period of economic stagnation and economic restructuring in Europe and exactly coincided with the period when family migration peaked. Through family reunification, migrants families departed definitively from the valley. Most migrants who did not reunify their families and returned, did so in the 1990s, when the first generation of former ‘guestworkers’ started to approach retirement age.

⁴ Adult children generally do not have the right to immigrate to European countries on the legal basis of family reunification.

Besides the increasing reliance on family migration, another consequence of restrictive immigration policies was a significant increase in undocumented migration. There also occurred a geographical diversification of migration flows after 1990, when Italy and, particularly, Spain emerged as new destination countries for legal and undocumented labour migrants. After a lapse between 1975 and 1990 – when family migration dominated – a surge in new “primary” labour migration to southern Europe has occurred (see figure 5).

Figure 5. Year of departure and return of ‘primary’ international labour migrants⁵



Source: Household survey

Although France remains the main focus for international migrants (accounting for 61 percent of all surveyed international migrants) with significant migrant communities in Montpellier, Nice and Paris, destinations like the Netherlands (8 percent), the Arab

⁵ ‘Primary’ labor migrants are migrants who obtained their residence permit on the legal basis of their work. Although people who migrate through networks claim residence permits on the legal basis of family reunification or formation often end up working. It is therefore important not to artificially distinguish labor and family migrants. Such labor migrants ‘in disguise’ can therefore be labeled as ‘secondary’ labor migrants. However, family reunification normally implies the total disappearance of the household from the Todra, which means that such households cannot be interviewed. Furthermore, the distinction between primary and secondary migration is useful in the sense that primary labor migrants are more likely to settle in new destinations and to be the creators of new migrant communities abroad, whereas secondary migrants tend to follow the beaten track. Thus, in a way, the occurrence of primary migration is an indication of the degree to which new future potentials for network migration are created.

oil countries (6 percent), Spain (13 percent) and Italy (4 percent) have grown in relative importance.

Economic significance of migration

Migration has become an all-pervasive phenomenon in the Todra valley. Half of the surveyed active male population (16-65 years) has been, or is involved in internal (22.0 percent current and 11.0 percent returned) or international migration (11.4 percent current and 3.6 percent returned). 20.1 percent of all surveyed households contained international migrants, 12.8 percent only contained international return migrant households. 7.5 percent of all surveyed households do not contain current or return migrants, but do regularly receive remittances from abroad. Taken together, 40.4 percent of all households are international migrant households of some sort. 25.0 percent of all household contain internal migrants but no international migrants, while only 34.5 percent of all households are non-migrant.

International migration and remittances have significantly contributed to economic development, improved standards of living and enabled the partial emancipation of subaltern ethnic groups. International migrant households have a relatively high propensity to invest in housing, agriculture and other enterprises. However, several structural constraints such as corruption, complex administrative procedures, lack of legal security, economic uncertainty, and a generally perceived unreliability of the Moroccan state explain why many migrants decide not to return permanently or

hesitate to invest, and, hence, prevent the high development potential of migration from being fully realised (cf. De Haas 2006a).

As in emigration regions across the world, labour migrants from the Todra give a high priority to housing investments. Simultaneously with processes of out-migration and high population growth, the Todra valley has witnessed the massive movement of people out of the traditional, fortified adobe villages to new, more spacious, detached and generally more luxurious houses. Although the construction of new houses is a general process in the oasis, international migrant households have been at the forefront of this development. Almost three-quarters (74.0 percent) of all real estate investments are made by international migrant households and constructing a house is typically the first investment migrants make.

The importance attached to housing should primarily be explained by a quest for space, safety, privacy, fewer conflicts and better health. Interviews also revealed that women gain significantly in personal liberty through the establishment of new independent houses for their nuclear family – away from the authority of their parents-in-law. Secondly, housing is also a secure capital investment through which households are able to generate additional income through various lease arrangements. Furthermore, house ownership also provides household “life insurance”. In the event of the death of the breadwinner or another significant loss of income, family members are guaranteed shelter and can gain rental income. This is particularly important in a society where most households do not have access to social security systems. 57.6 percent of the international migrant households have constructed second or third homes outside their native village. 24.8 percent of all

houses are built outside the native village, in three quarter of the cases in Tinghir, the region's sprawling urban centre, where some migrants relocate their families or settle after they return (cf. De Haas 2006a).

Multi-local residential strategies of migrants

The fact that the majority of investments are being done by migrants who are currently living abroad exemplifies the strong transnational nature of their orientations, in which they try to maintain a simultaneous foothold in two countries. Investments in housing and businesses are also part of a strategy to prepare for the desired "return" to the native region after retirement. As we will see, this return is not necessarily a permanent, all-year-round return, but increasingly takes the form of a semi-return, pendulum behaviour, in which several months per year are spent in Morocco.

Over 70 percent of the international return migrants stayed more than 7 years abroad, and the average stay abroad lasts 18 years (see table 1). Those who return earlier are generally migrants to Arab oil countries and undocumented migrants to southern Europe who were either expelled or did not find satisfactory employment. However, other migrants consciously return at a relatively young with the intention to invest their money in their own enterprises.

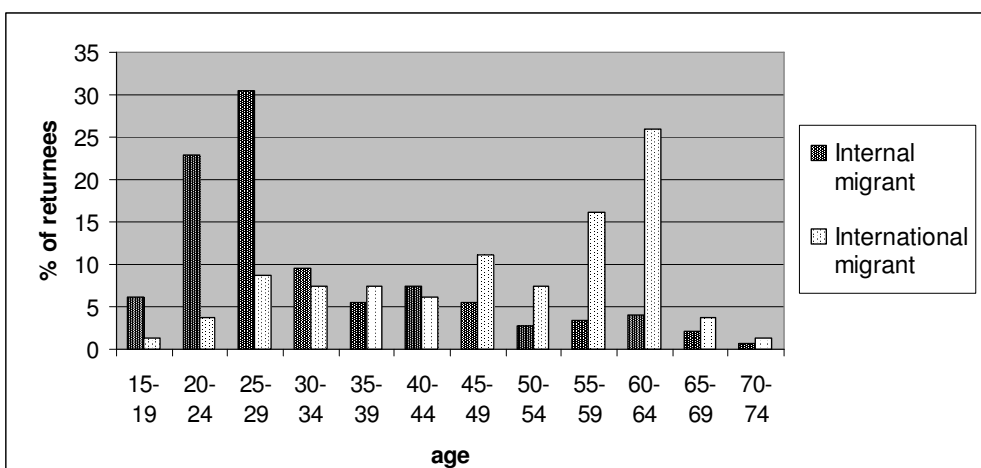
Table 1. Total migration duration of internal and international migrants

Migrant type	Total length of stay (%)				Total	Mean	<i>n</i>
	0-3	4-6	7-18	≥19			
Current internal migrant	37.5	17.9	36.5	8.1	100.0	7.5	285
Current international migrant	17.4	17.4	22.8	42.3	100.0	15.7	149
Returned internal migrant	24.7	32.0	30.7	12.7	100.0	8.2	150
Returned international migrant	13.4	14.6	19.5	52.4	100.0	17.7	82
Total	27.2	20.6	30.0	22.2	100.0	10.8	666

Source: Household survey

The average age of international return migrants is 48 years in the year of return.

However, if we take the mode as measure of central tendency, we come out at the 60-64 age category as the typical age on return (see figure 6). Whereas the majority of international migrants in Europe have eventually reunified their families at the destination, a smaller proportion of international migrants has left their nuclear family in Morocco and has eventually returned. They make up 3.6 percent of the total active male population, against 11.4 percent for current international migrants.

Figure 6. Age on return of internal and international return migrants

Source: Household survey

Two thirds of the current returnees returned in the 1990s. This corresponds with the aging of the first generation migrants who left to Europe during the migration boom of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Three decades after the Oil Crisis, the first

generation of European migrants is approaching the age of (pre-) retirement. Those who reunified their families in Europe do seldomly return permanently, not in the least because their children (who were mostly raised and educated in Europe) and spouses (who generally enjoy more legal rights and social freedoms abroad) generally oppose the idea of returning.

The limited social and economic opportunities in Morocco and the integration⁶ of migrants' children in Western European society explain why the expectation of return *en famille* has turned into a myth for most migrants who reunified their households in Europe. However, the minority who did not decide to transfer their families during the family reunification wave in the late 1970s and 1980s, returned in the late 1980s and 1990s. Early return migrants generally came from Algeria, and ten percent of recent returnees have worked in Libya and, to a lesser extent, Saudi-Arabia. Migrants to Arab oil countries generally work on temporary contracts and do generally not stay permanently.

However, a substantial and growing group of the majority of elderly “non-permanent returnees” seem to develop mobility patterns of semi-return or transnational commuting, which blur the classical, primarily juridical distinction between settlers abroad and return migrants. 12.2 percent of all households participating in international migration were ‘empty’ in the sense that all household members had their official residence in Europe, while at the time of the survey one of the, usually older, ‘commuting’ household members was in fact present. Although they were not

⁶ Despite the fact that the integration of Moroccans is perceived as problematic by many Europeans, it should not be ignored that, in Moroccan eyes, migrants' children have become westernised to a large degree. The overwhelming majority of the second generation youth, who generally speak better French

considered to be part of the survey population, this is in fact an arbitrary choice taking into account the *de facto* transnational character of such households.

Table 2 shows the number of months the different categories migrants stayed abroad during the 12 months prior to the survey (for current migrants) or during the last year of their migration (for return migrants). It reveals that among international migrants, the average number of months they stay abroad annually is somewhat inferior to 10. This figure is lower than expected, as summer holidays generally last between 4 and 6 weeks, and not all migrants return each year. 24 percent of current international migrants stayed in Morocco for 3 months or longer, whereas also 28 percent of officially returned international migrants stayed 3 months or longer in Morocco in the last year of their stay abroad.

Table 2. Number of months of absence during last year (last year of migration for return migrants)

Migrant type	Absence in months during last year of migration (%)				Total	Mean	n
	0-3	4-6	7-9	10-12			
Internal migrant	10.6	19.2	38.4	31.8	100.0	7.8	292
International migrant	3.3	6.0	14.7	76.0	100.0	9.8	150
Returned internal migrant	9.1	15.2	33.9	41.8	100.0	8.0	165
Returned international migrant	3.4	8.0	17.2	71.3	100.0	9.6	87
Total	7.8	14.0	29.5	48.7	100.0	8.5	694

Source: Household survey

The tendency towards prolonged stays in Morocco becomes even clearer if we examine the relation between the age of migrants and the numbers of months spent in Morocco during the last year. Whereas among migrants between 15 and 29 years only 7 percent spent at least 3 months in Morocco, this proportion neatly increases with age, and amounts to 19.6 percent among the 30-44 years old and 33.3 percent among the 45-59 years old. Among migrants over 60 years old, 55.6 percent spends at least 3

or Dutch than Berber or Arabic, feel so alienated from everyday Moroccan society that they cannot imagine living in Morocco.

months per year in Morocco. Among male migrants this proportion is even 62.5 percent. 22.2 percent of elderly migrants spent at least 6 months per year in Morocco. It is almost exclusively male migrants who spend at least 3 months per year in Morocco.

The high average stay in Morocco can be explained by the long period spent in Morocco by a category of relatively aged international migrants who officially reside abroad, but who no longer work. This group of unemployed, retired or (partially) incapacitated migrants generally lives on social security benefits, and some of them tend to commute between Europe and Morocco, where they stay for longer periods. While social, nostalgic and perceived health benefits (such as the warmer climate in the case of rheumatism, which is often cited by migrants) play an important role, some of these truly ‘transnational commuters’ are active in trade activities in which they bring consumer goods or cars from Europe, and take back from the Todra local products such as olive oil. Other migrants give people rides back to Europe or smuggle undocumented migrants across the Gibraltar Strait in their small vans, locally known as *transits*.

Although numerous international migrants gain an additional income by trading goods and transporting people (including irregular migrants) during the yearly summer holiday, during which migrants massively visit the Todra valley, this has become a veritable way of life for some—generally older—migrants. Several *transits* commute between the Todra and Montpellier, the main migration destination in France, on a weekly basis. Such commuters seem to be primarily migrants living in southern France and, increasingly, Spain. The relatively short distance from Morocco to

Mediterranean cities such as Montpellier and Nice as well as Barcelona and Malaga facilitates this behaviour. It is only one day's travel from Gibraltar to southern France compared to at least two days to northern France, Belgium, and the Netherlands.

Long-term international migrants who have not reunified their families and who have not cut ties with the household of origin typically return towards the end of their working age, in their fifties or early sixties. Subsequently, their children may start the cycle again, either through 'relay migration' or by marrying kin abroad. Most of the international migrants who left in the late 1960s and early 1970s migration boom had either reunified their families or returned home at the turn of the century. However, classic distinctions between permanent and return migration are becoming increasingly blurred, and we are now witnessing the emergence of transnational Todra communities that maintain intensive contacts with either side of the Mediterranean.

The majority of these commuters are men, who typically leave their spouses and children behind in Europe for shorter or longer trips. Interestingly, we are witnessing a remarkable reversal of residential strategies over time. Whereas in the 1960s and 1970s the male "guestworkers" who left their families behind in Morocco, we now witness the re-emergence of transnational households after a phase after reunification in Europe, in which the ageing migrant workers leave their spouses and children behind in Europe for part of the year. In each of these cases, it is the migrants' spouse who bears the main responsibility for the persistence of the household in general and child rearing in particular. Patriarchal values valuing such typical women's roles explain the relative immobility of female 'family migrants' compared to male 'labour migrants'. However, ageing migrant women whose children have grown up seem to

increasingly join their spouses for extended 'holiday' stays which might last several months.

Pendulum migration is not the prerogative of migrants who reunified their families in Europe. The other way around, many ageing migrants who did not reunify their families and have acquired the permanent right of residence or citizenship of the destination country, also commute between their families left behind in Europe and Europe. Their stays in Europe can serve to visit family and friends in Europe or to do business, but are often a legal requirement to secure residency rights in Europe.

The rationale of pendulum migration

The permanent return to Morocco is generally conceived as too risky, and there are in fact very few households that have reunified in Europe that return to Morocco as a whole. The main explanation for this phenomenon is the reluctance of migrants' spouses and, in particular, children to return. Most male migrants themselves realise that return of their children is no viable in view of the superior educational and job opportunities in Europe.

This perception is being reinforced by the relative failure of the strategy pursued by first generation migrants who preferred to leave their children in Morocco and did not decide to reunite their families in order to offer their children a higher education and a professional career in Morocco. Besides fears that their children offspring would become 'spoiled', 'westernized' or 'drunkards' in Europe, and having themselves

experienced the often problematic position of migrants in Europe⁷, several migrants reasoned it would be better not to expose their children to potentially humiliating positions. Many international migrants from the Todra who decided not to reunify their families in the 1970s and 1980s did so because they assumed it would be a better strategy to invest in the higher education of their children (and particularly of their sons) in Morocco, which would enable them to live secure and comfortable lives as civil servants in Morocco.

Table 3. Unemployment rates by educational level, by household migration status

Household migration status	Unemployment rate by educational level (>15 yrs) (%)					Total
	No	Primary	Lower sec.	Higher sec.	Higher	
Nonmigrant	2.2	3.7	1.4	3.2	0.0	2.6
Internal	1.0	1.7	6.9	0.0	15.0	3.1
Indirect international	1.2	1.9	0.0	6.7	27.8	4.4
Current international	2.8	3.3	7.3	3.9	25.0	4.8
Returned international	3.9	2.8	10.4	5.3	18.2	5.4
Total	2.1	2.8	6.0	3.4	18.3	3.8

Source: Household survey

However, this strategy has often failed since, in the meantime, it has become increasingly difficult for Moroccan university graduates (*licenciés*) to find a job due to severe budget cuts in the public domain, the general economic downturn, misguided educational policies, and the general surge of the number of young people holding higher education degrees. Within the household survey sample, unemployment rates⁸ among higher educated people in international migrant households vary between 18 and 25 percent (see table 3)⁹.

⁷ Possibly, international migrants who have not reunified their households also tend to have more negative experiences living and working in Europe.

⁸ It is useful to note that in the Moroccan context, unemployment is a concept with a limited significance. In fact, many people are underemployed in the sense that they only work from time to time, depending on the availability of—mostly temporary—employment.

⁹ This reflects the general Moroccan pattern of high unemployment among the young and higher educated. The two basic reasons for their inactivity are the lack of proper employment opportunities as well as the financially secure position of their households, a situation which allows them to refuse semi- or unskilled work. More generally, the mediocre quality of higher education, the gap between the type and level of education and labour market needs, government budget cuts, and relatively low economic growth have all negatively affected the access of young, higher educated Moroccans to the labour market.

Many jobless graduates are forced to return from the cities where they studied to the Todra to stay with their families. This is generally perceived as an extremely frustrating if not humiliating experience. The graduates find it dishonourable to remain dependent on their parents and to be unable to marry. Boredom and bitterness characterize their existence. These unemployed young men now form Todra's share of Morocco's "detached middle" (cf. Cohen 2001)¹⁰. The unemployed sons (and daughters) of international migrants tend to be full of resentment vis-à-vis their fathers who did not allow them to join them in Europe. The international migrants themselves, confronted with the broken ambitions of their children, tend to regret their choice not to reunify their families in Europe. For them, their educational investment strategy has apparently failed.

Confronted with the lack of perspectives in Morocco for their children, several migrants who initially did not reunify their families decide so on the last moment when this is legally possible, that is, just before their children attain adulthood. Through this 'now or never migration', families are sometimes torn apart. Jamal, 20 years old, for instance, was left alone in Morocco.

"My father works in Nice since 1969. He never wanted to take his family to France. He was afraid that we would become *Nsara* [Christians] until he suddenly changed his mind when he realised there was no future in Morocco

¹⁰ Mass unemployment and frustration among a new generation of relatively well-educated youngsters is a general problem in Middle Eastern and North African countries, and this might be one of the major explanations for the growing (religious and ethnic) radicalism in the region. In this context, Richards (2003:6-7) argued that "Government policies have not only reduced the rate of growth of demand for labor, but have also fostered inflexible labor markets. Decades of government job guarantees for graduates have induced students to seek any degree, regardless of its utility in the production, since a

for us. But I was already too old. My mother, brothers and sisters left me here alone. I do not what to do. I see no solution.”

Jamal now lives alone in the large family house. He put all his hopes on obtaining a scholarship at a French university, which would allow him to join his family.

When migrants’ children living in the Todra had already reached adulthood, and cannot legally go to Europe through family reunification or family formation, they frequently try to migrate on their own steam. In fact, many young men (and, increasingly, women) that now migrate to Spain and Italy are children of relatively well-off, ageing international return migrants that decided not to reunify their families.

For instance, consider the case of Idir, who in June 1970 in the Dutch town of Alkmaar after having worked in the coalmines of Pas-de-Calais in northern France for 8 months, work for which he was directly recruited in the Todra. The work in the mine was extremely heavy, and through friends he eventually arranged a work contract for a local cheese factory in Alkmaar where other members of his tribe (Ait ‘Atta) were already working. He invested the money he earned in a building a large, two-storey house suited for his future extended family – his sons, their spouses and their children – and the purchase of agricultural land in the oasis. He decided not to reunify his family in the Netherlands, but he now regrets this choice, because his children could not find work in Morocco: “I have made a mistake, but when I realised this it was already too late”.

degree, by itself, has long been a guarantee of a government job. Governments cannot now provide the necessary jobs, but statist policies impede private sector job creation.”

In 1995 he decided to return permanently. However, his three sons (who are between 18 and 28 years old) did not find work in Morocco, and now all had illegally migrated to southern Europe, two in Spain, and one in Italy, where they work in the construction industry. Thanks to recent legalisation campaigns, they have obtained residency permits. Two of his three daughter are married, one with a villager who is illegally working in Spain since 18 months. Two of his three sons will marry when they return during the summer holiday. According to Ahmed,

“their spouses and children will follow them quickly, as soon as possible. That is better. That is the big mistake I made. It is better for them. If you return home after a day working, and talking Dutch to your mates, it is so nice to have girl at home. She can also cook, and clean the house. After passing the threshold you are “returned” in Morocco, which is a real pleasure. It is also better for the children”

Although Ahmed regrets his own choice not to reunify his family, he obviously enjoyed the fact that his own children “do well”. During the ride [I gave Ahmed a lift in my car] Ahmed was called two times on his mobile phone [most Moroccans possess a mobile phone nowadays] by one of his sons in Spain and his daughter’s migrated husband.

Despite the fact that he had not been in the Netherlands during the past decade he wished to return during the next summer. Ahmed told that return migrants from the Netherlands can benefit from a special visa scheme, but that there is a yearly quota.

He was on the waiting list for several years, but he thought it would now be his turn. On this occasion, he not only wanted to visit his four co-villagers who settled in Alkmaar, but he also planned to visit family and friends living in Spain, Portugal, Italy, France, Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands.

Disappointing experiences by returned migrants such as Idir seem to deter ageing migrants who still live abroad from returning permanently. Declining reliance on return migration a realistic option also appears to be a partial explanation for the fact that new labour migrants increasingly decide to reunify their families at the destination as soon as possible. Ageing migrants subsequently prefer to develop multi-local residential strategies, in which they spend several months per year in Morocco and Europe, while keeping their legal residence in Europe.

The significance of these multi-local residential strategies of pendulum migrants is further reinforced by the experiences of permanent return migrants who tend to regret this choice. Mohammed, for instance, migrated in 1968 to Montpellier in France. His wife and children followed him in 1976. He is jobless since 1990, and will officially retire within a few years. All his daughters are married now, two of his three sons are still studying at university. He originally planned to start a large agricultural enterprise upon return. He even bought the land and installed a water pump. But the fact that his children were married, working and studying in France made him realise that it was impossible to return permanently. He now spends half of the year in Morocco to run his agricultural enterprise. During the months of absence, his brother ensures the management of his small farm, where he produces almonds and wheat. While he returns to France, he takes a local produce (mainly almonds and olive oil) to

France. On his way back, he takes electronics and car parts to sell at the local market. He only lives in one part of his two-storey house in his native village. The vacant rooms are inhabited by his brother and his family. During the summer holidays his wife and children visit his native village, but his single sons generally remain only for a couple of weeks, after which they travel around in Morocco as ‘tourists’ before returning to France.

The role of European migration policies

Return migrants in the Todra generally perceive that their ‘guaranteed’ rights on state pensions, child benefits, other forms of social security, the right to re-emigrate and access to visa – whether granted in the context of return migration schemes or not – have been severely curtailed since they returned to Morocco. Still abroad migrants are generally reluctant to give up their established rights in Europe while taking significant social and economic risks implied in return migration. Negative experiences by earlier return migrants and the concomitant perceived unreliability of European states play an important role in explaining this reluctance.

The progressively restrictive European immigration policies governments have made it increasingly difficult to pay family visits, mostly because of costly and lengthy visa application procedures. Moreover, changes in social security regulations and increasing limitations on the exportability of social security and pension benefits often have, sometimes unforeseen, negative repercussions for return migrants.

For instance, the new Dutch medical insurance law, which was introduced in January 2006, obliges any person receiving Dutch state pensions or other social security benefits to participate in the new national obligatory medical insurance scheme. This also applied to Moroccan return migrants permanently living in Morocco, which had to pay the high monthly contributions – which are based on Dutch health care standards and costs – while they have no access to Dutch health care facilities. Moroccan public health care facilities are much more limited and also considerably cheaper. As a consequence of the new law, many migrants living on small (partial) state pensions or disability benefits would lose a large part or even their entire income.

The fact that the Dutch government informed the return migrants on the new law by sending them Dutch-language letters seems characteristic for the Dutch government's apparent inability to comprehend the concrete situation in which Moroccan return migrants live. Many return migrants are illiterate or do not sufficiently understand Dutch to understand the complex new regulations. Moreover, application forms for the new insurance scheme were not sent with the letter, but had to be requested through a website¹¹. Although the law has later been amended and migrants now have

¹¹ Other attempts to curtail the rights of return migrants on social security and other rights include recent, more stringent medical re-examinations of claimants of Dutch social disability benefits, often

o pay much lower contributions adapted to average medical costs in the country of residence, such negative experiences deter still-abroad migrants. The general trends is clearly towards further curtailing the exportability of social benefits and other migrants' rights. This creates a permanent feeling of unrest and structural distrust vis-à-vis European governments, which are seen as maximising their efforts to curtail migrants' social and economic rights. Subsequently, migrants prefer to develop a pendular migration behaviour instead of returning permanently while often securing residency rights through acquiring citizenship.

In addition, many migrants have built up only partial claims to social security, on which they hardly survive alone. For instance, migrants tend to have only partial access to European state pensions because they only spend a part of their active life in Europe. Most Moroccan migrants, and women in particular, have saved little or no money in private pension schemes. In many cases this implies that they would fall back to poverty if they would rely on social security only. Therefore, elderly migrants increasingly rely on and count on support by their children. Last but not least, for both ageing migrant men and women, the better quality and general accessibility of public health care systems are a major reason of not giving up residency rights in Europe. Further ageing and deteriorating health of the first generation will probably restrict the extent to which they will be physically able to commute in the future and this might eventually force them to remain in Europe. This all explains why migrants have a vested interest in maintaining a firm legal and social foothold in Europe.

resulting in a reduction of disability benefits because when claimants are declared partly fit to work, whereas they are denied the right to return to the Netherlands to actually work. Related to this regulation is the gradual abolishment of the Bonus on Disability Payments for claimants living abroad which covered the gap between the (often low) disability payments and the official poverty line. Furthermore, return migrants face enormous difficulties obtaining visas to visit family in Europe. The

Although ageing male migrants often cling to their wish to return permanently, this desire is generally obstructed by low incomes and the reluctance of children and spouses to return. Especially for nonworking Moroccan women, their children tend to represent their major form of social security since they generally have limited claims to social security and pensions. Consequently, many ageing migrant men develop a pendular migratory behaviour. Women only tend to join them in this type of mobility once all their children are independent.

For women, migration to Europe not only implies an important improvement in their economic situation, but also in their legal and social position. This may be an additional reason why migrant women tend to be less willing to return to Morocco than men. It can therefore be hypothesized that (legal and social) gender inequality in Morocco decreases the propensity to return among migrants and increases the tendency towards family reunification.

Besides a generalised distrust towards the Moroccan State apparatus (the so-called *makhzen*), there is a general lack of trust among international migrants in the institutions of the destination countries. Paradoxically, confronted with a political discourse that has become progressively hostile towards immigration and with increasingly restrictive immigration policies and laws, ageing migrants fear that by resettling in Morocco they will give up their acquired rights in Europe. This fear of not having the option to return to Europe in case of failure in social (adaptation) or economic terms seems to decrease their propensity to return.

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Conclusion

Macro-data confirming the general image of low return migration and permanent settlement in of Moroccan migrants in Europe obscure the fact that a growing category of ageing or pendulum migrants who can neither be classified neither as ‘settlers’ nor as ‘returnees’. Although officially residing abroad in order to ensure their rights and maintain access to social benefits and health care, and generally living on social security benefits and state pensions, they tend to stay in Morocco for several months per year while they leave their children and often spouses behind in Europe. While some truly “transnational commuters” are active in commercial activities in Morocco, other ageing migrant couples spend extended “holiday” visits to Morocco. In migrant sending areas, they tend to live in second houses in their native regions which they have massively built with the money they earned in Europe.

Pendulum migration by ageing Moroccan migrants and the ensuing re-emergence of transnational, multi-local households can be interpreted as a strategy trying to reconcile the reluctance of children and, to a lesser extent, spouses, to return and the interest in maintaining social and economic ties with Morocco, while holding a firm legal, social (security) and economic foothold in Europe in the interest of escaping from social exclusion and avoiding falling back to poverty. Besides their reliance on their children, the partial non-exportability of social security and pension benefits impedes permanent return and hinders people from returning and circulating freely.

The volatile (i.e., unreliable) and increasingly restrictive European immigration policies have probably also played a role in decreasing the tendency among migrants to return. Increasingly restrictive immigration policies have had the perverse effect of interrupting circular migration patterns and actually decreased migrants' tendency to return. They have also added to the fear that immigration policies might become even more restrictive in the future, and that today's guarantees on return—for example concerning the right to temporary visas or to migrate again or the level of social security benefits—will only have limited and temporary value. This lack of trust partly explains why many migrants cling to their acquired European residency rights.

From the perspective of Moroccan migrants, a European residence permit and, increasingly, citizenship is a key asset, giving access to the European labour market, social security systems and public health care. This asset is therefore fostered and preferably passed on to following generations. For female migrants, an additional reason not to return is that they enjoy better rights in Europe. For migrants' children, it gives them access to European education systems and labour markets.

In general, Moroccan migrants are operating in institutional environments that they perceive as untrustworthy or even hostile on either side of the Mediterranean. This makes them extremely risk-averse and prudent about giving up their hard-won rights in Europe. Safeguarding access to social security and parents' concerns about their children's future education and employment seem to be key factors in explaining this pendulum migration behaviour. While many ageing migrants do in fact have the wish to return, political, economic and social uncertainties do withhold them from doing

so. Therefore, guarantees on the right to migrate again as well as improved and guaranteed exportability of social security benefits, especially in the field of health care, are indispensable if governments wish to offer migrants a genuine choice to return.

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