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Times of uncertainty in Europe: migration feedback loops in four Moroccan regions

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The current economic crisis in Europe is negatively affecting the working and living conditions of migrants and might change the lives and migration aspirations of non-migrants in regions of origin. In times of recession, previously involuntary non-migrants [Carling, J. 2002. “Migration in the Age of Involuntary Immobility: Theoretical Reflections and Cape Verdean Experiences.” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 28 (1): 5–42] may become voluntary non-migrants when they start considering immobility as a better alternative to migrating to Europe under uncertain working and living conditions. This paper investigates to what extent perceptions of the economic crisis and the changing opportunities for migrants in Europe might change migration aspirations of non-migrants in Morocco. It draws on the results of a survey of 2000 non-migrants and of 80 in-depth interviews collected in 2010 and 2011 in 4 Moroccan regions for the EUMAGINE project. This case study also provides an opportunity to analyse, from the perspective of the sending regions, how ideas and information about migration can have different direct and indirect effects in various regions depending on people’s micro- and macro-level circumstances – in other words, according to people’s living conditions and capabilities and the migration history and opportunities available to them locally and abroad. Beyond explaining the process of these migration feedback loops, the paper points out that besides migration-facilitating and migration-undermining effects, feedback mechanisms can also have a self-correcting effect on migration aspirations.

Keywords: aspirations; feedback loops; migration; Morocco

1. Introduction

Migration between two places can impact subsequent migration-related attitudes and behaviours. According to the theory of cumulative causation, migration has social and economic effects on communities, and this makes ‘additional migration likely’ (Massey 1990, 4–5). This theory suggests that ‘feedback mechanisms’ are at play in which past migration facilitates future migration (Lee 1966; Massey 1990). However, feedback mechanisms can also have the opposite effect and can weaken or reverse existing migration dynamics (de Haas 2010; Mabogunje 1970). Thus, when migration is perceived as successful in the sending communities, social networks generate ‘positive feedback loops’. However, if migration experiences are perceived negatively by the majority, this could defy the cumulative causation theory (Garip and Asad 2013).

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Research investigating the migration-undermining feedback mechanisms is scarce and the existing work mainly focuses on 'direct' feedback mechanisms, looking especially at the role of migrant networks in transmitting information about migration experiences and opportunities. Less is known about more 'indirect' processes through which migration affects future migration-related behaviour in the communities of origin, such as how changed ideas about migration can affect feelings of relative deprivation or perceived inequalities between particular places, which in turn have an effect on the value of migration in a community and on people's migration aspirations. In addition, it remains understudied how migration feedback processes work from the perspective of countries of origin and how they play out in different migration environments.

The global economic crisis since 2008 and its consequences for the conditions of migrants in Europe can provide an entry point to explore whether and how migration-undermining feedback mechanisms occur. Negative perceptions of the recession in the destination countries might change the lives and migration aspirations of non-migrants in origin countries. In times of crisis, 'involuntary non-migrants', that is, people who have the aspiration to migrate but do not have the ability to do it (Carling 2002), may become voluntary non-migrants when they start considering immobility as a better alternative than migrating to Europe under uncertain working and living conditions. This paper analyses to what extent perceptions of the economic crisis in Europe, as well as its perceived consequences for the opportunities and conditions for migrants, might change migration aspirations of non-migrants in different migration contexts in Morocco.

Beyond looking at the impact of the perceived changing European context on migration aspirations, this paper aims to provide more insights on how migration feedback processes work from the perspective of sending regions. The analysis focuses on the social and cultural dimensions of migration feedback processes. It shows how ideas and information on migration are processed by non-migrants and, through feedback loops, have indirect effects on non-migrants' feelings of relative deprivation and on their perceptions of inequality when they compare themselves to peers who migrated internationally. The changed relative deprivation affects migration aspirations and the value of migration at the individual and community levels. The analysis adopts a comparative perspective by looking at four different regions in Morocco with substantial differences regarding their migration history, their links to Europe and the local opportunities available to their inhabitants. This provides insights onto how feedback processes may result in different outcomes in particular contexts: for instance, people living in Tangier and the Todgha Valley, regions with strong links to Europe and that offer relatively more opportunities to their inhabitants, share similar negative views of migration to Europe in the current economic context of recession. In contrast, Europe tends to be perceived more positively in the remote and underdeveloped area of the Eastern High Atlas. However, migration is less valued in this area than in the Todgha Valley, where life and the economy are strongly related to its migrants.

After a quick overview of the evolution of Moroccan migration over time, the next section defines the components of the migration feedback loops analysed in this paper. Section 3 introduces the four settings under study and the empirical data of the EUMAGINE project. Section 4 describes how people in the four regions perceive migration, as well as the macro-structural environments in the region of residence, in the country of residence and in Europe. The subsequent sections analyse how perceptions and ideas about migration directly and indirectly affect migration attitudes and behaviour and how feedback processes develop in different migration environments. Beyond explaining the process of these migration feedback loops, the paper points out that besides migration-facilitating and migration-undermining effects, feedback mechanisms can also have a self-correcting effect on migration aspirations. This happens when people who previously aspired to migrate consider new destinations, discard particular types of

migration or postpone their migration desires to a more favourable period in the future, when they will perceive they have the capacity to migrate and achieve their projects. Also, the paper highlights the importance of personal circumstances and macro-structural settings in shaping people's perceptions of their opportunities and abilities to migrate, as well as their migration aspirations and the value they attribute to migration.

2. Migration feedback loops in changing migration environments: an empirical example

Over the past six decades, international migration has played a crucial role in the Moroccan political, economic, social and cultural landscape. Despite the unequal impact of migration at different geographic and social levels, migration has contributed to the development of Morocco through improving people's living conditions, stimulating the economy via a diversification of investments, raising the education level of migrants' children and enabling the upward mobility of disadvantaged social groups. International migration has also transformed many rural sending regions into urbanised centres with more opportunities for their inhabitants and internal migrants. These transformations have triggered debates about the emergence of new forms of inequality, but have also indirectly benefited non-migrant households (see de Haas 2007 for a literature review on existing empirical research about the effect of Moroccan migration in the regions of origin).

Moroccan emigration started to increase in the 1960s. Migrants initially left from specific rural areas in the Souss and the Rif regions, and headed towards France. Emigration expanded progressively to other European countries such as Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany. The first migrants were mainly unskilled men who were often recruited through guest worker programmes. After the 1973 oil crisis, the demand for labour migrants decreased in many European countries, but Moroccan migration continued as migrants progressively settled in Europe and were joined by their families. Moroccan migrants gradually diversified in terms of gender, socio-professional background, regions of origin and countries of destination. In the late 1980s and in the 1990s, southern European countries experienced economic growth and became important destinations for Moroccan migration. Increased restrictions in European visa regulations and immigration policies in the early 1990s, on the one hand, and the weaker state intervention in Spain and Italy compared to other countries in western Europe, on the other, also fostered irregular movements and the overstay of migrants who could easily work in the informal economy (Massey et al. 1998; Solé 2004). Over time, many irregular migrants could get a legal residence and work permit through regularisation schemes.

With the outbreak of the global economic crisis, regularisations and the upward professional mobility of Moroccan migrants in Europe became more difficult. In recent years, unemployment severely hit Moroccan migrants, especially in Spain, where more than 55% of the active Moroccan population was unemployed in 2010 (Arslan et al. 2014). Those who did not lose their jobs in the wake of the economic crisis often experienced a worsening of their working conditions. At the same time, more and more Moroccans started to return to Morocco for more or less longer periods because of unemployment (Capote 2015; Cohen et al. 2011). This new economic context and the decreasing work opportunities in Europe might have challenged the positive value of migration to Europe among Moroccan non-migrants. In times of recession, previously involuntary non-migrants – those who would like to migrate but are not able to do so (Carling 2002) – may have become voluntary ones when they started considering immobility as a better alternative to migrating to Europe under uncertain working and living conditions.

Aspirations and decisions to migrate can indeed fluctuate with time according to circumstances and/or to people's changing perceptions of their opportunities in a specific place. Information on and ideas about migration and destinations can cause 'feedback processes' that either stimulate or discourage future migration (Mabogunje 1970, 11). de Haas differentiated between endogenous and contextual feedback mechanisms that operate both in the sending and the receiving contexts of migration. Endogenous feedback mechanisms designate the direct and intermediate structures and processes that originate in the process of migration. Besides the effects on migrant networks, endogenous feedback refers to the impacts on the migration industry that emerge from migration, the financial remittances, or the ideas and information on migration. In contrast, contextual feedback mechanisms designate broader social, cultural and economic impacts of migration that indirectly affect communities in origin and destination (de Haas 2010).

Endogenous and contextual migration feedback mechanisms are interconnected in migration feedback loops that can have positive or negative effects on subsequent migration (Garip and Asad 2013; de Haas 2010). In the context of sending regions, empirical research on migration-undermining feedback mechanisms tends to provide an incomplete analysis. The focus has been on direct effects, and especially on how information on migration and on the opportunities available in the sending and receiving countries affects the overall migration environment (Engbersen, Snel, and van Meeteren 2013; Mai 2004; Timmerman, Hemmerchts, and De Clerck 2014). Existing research, however, fails to explain how exactly this information leads to changes in migration aspirations and the value of migration.

This paper argues that information and ideas about migration do not necessarily affect migration aspirations directly, but rather impact non-migrants' feelings of relative deprivation that in turn can change migration aspirations and the value of migration. Examining indirect feedback mechanisms and their interconnectedness with direct feedback processes can provide further insights into how perceptions of migration can shape migration-related attitudes and behaviour. This paper takes the empirical example of Moroccan emigration to describe migration feedback loops by looking at their different mechanisms. Although the elements examined in this paper do not cover all the complex feedback processes that take place in reality, this paper provides evidence to better understand how similar feedback can lead to divergent effects in different migration environments (Figure 1).

This paper adopts the point of view of the inhabitants of the four Moroccan regions under study. They are referred to as 'non-migrants', independently of whether they migrated previously or not. The paper looks at their perceptions of the migration environments (Carling 2002), considering the opportunities and social rights in the place of residence as well as in Europe that may affect their ability and their aspirations to migrate or to stay. Figure 1 outlines how information and ideas about migration feeds directly and indirectly into the migration decision-making process (Box 5).

The first element of this feedback loop encompasses the information and ideas about migration that non-migrants in origin regions receive through social networks and through more impersonal channels (Box 1, Figure 1). This information can directly influence migration decisions (see direct feedback mechanisms between Boxes 1 and 5, Figure 1) when for instance a migrant decides to move to a rural area because he perceives that in times of crisis there are more job opportunities for him there than in an urban environment. However, information on changing migration environments can also indirectly influence migration decisions through the way in which people in origin regions change their perception of their own living situation in their place of residence. By comparing their situation to those who migrated internationally, non-migrants' feelings of relative deprivation can change (Box 2, Figure 1).

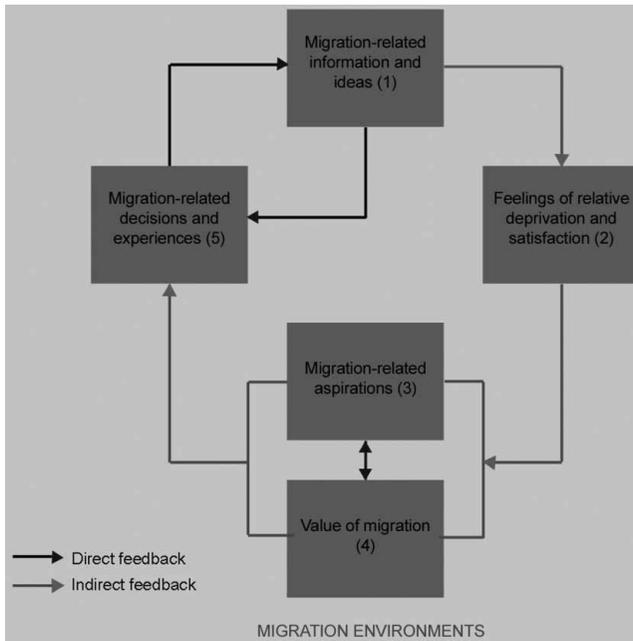


Figure 1. Migration feedback processes considered in this paper.

In migration studies, relative deprivation – that is, the feeling of having a lower standard of living or socio-economic status in comparison to a reference group – is mainly considered from an income perspective. Within the New Economics of Labour Migration theory, relative deprivation is considered a driver of migration when people compare the incomes of their household with those of a particular reference group and aspire to reduce the perceived inequality through migration (Stark 1984; Stark and Taylor 1989, 1991). However, the concept of relative deprivation can be considered beyond its economic dimension. Runciman described relative deprivation as the emotion experienced by someone who lacks something that other people have, be it at the economic, social or political level. Thus, a person can feel relative deprivation because of inequalities in the level of employment security or social security provisions, in the access to particular consumption styles or in the political and legal rights granted (Czaika and de Haas 2012; Runciman 1961, 1966; Stewart 2006). However, negative comparisons with the reference group can be counterbalanced with the ‘relative satisfaction’ (Yitzhaki 1979) felt when the comparison is made with those in the reference group who have less (Stewart 2006).

Finally, the literature on relative deprivation in international migration explains mobility from the perspective of the migrants who compare their individual situation with a particular group in the origin community (Stark 1984). This perspective ignores, however, that relative deprivation or satisfaction can also explain immobility from the perspective of the non-migrants when they compare themselves to a particular group of peers who migrated. For the analysis in this paper, I consider the level of relative deprivation experienced by non-migrants, taking as a reference group other members of the community who migrated to Europe. I also look at the relative satisfaction of non-migrants compared to their peers who migrated, by analysing their remarks on what they lack compared to migrants, and what they have and perceive that migrants do not

enjoy. Finally, I keep to a broad definition of relative deprivation by taking into account other types of inequality beyond the economic dimension, namely access to social rights and job security.

The information and ideas non-migrants receive about the changing migration environment can therefore impact their feelings of relative deprivation and satisfaction. Changing feelings of relative deprivation and satisfaction can in turn change the meaning of migration at an individual level and therefore aspirations to migrate or to stay (Box 3, Figure 1). This paper conceptualises migration aspirations as a continuum between two extremes (Timmerman et al. 2010), with the preference of staying in the country of residence at one end, and the preference to migrate internationally at the opposite extreme (Carling 2014).

Transformations in feelings of relative deprivation can also lead to changes in the general value attributed to migration at the community level (Box 4, Figure 1). Drawing on existing literature we can hypothesise that over time, migration progressively gained a positive value in Morocco. In the context of his research conducted in the Souss-Massa-Draa region, Aït Hamza observed that before the 1960s, migration was mainly negatively perceived. It was related to those who needed to escape their village to avoid being held accountable for their debts or their crimes. According to him, it was only during the mid-1960s that perceptions of internal and international migration changed. Migration became more attractive when the traditional local environment changed due to several factors such as the monetisation of the economy, an increase of the population in a context of scarce economic resources and a decrease in livestock due to a worsening of the drought (Aït Hamza 1997). Migration also gained more positive value because it allowed people to improve their working conditions, to gain working rights and to improve their social status (Aït Hamza 2002).

With changed ideas and information on migration environments, existing feelings of relative deprivation and satisfaction can change in regions of origin. These can in turn affect migration aspirations at the individual level, as well as the value of migration at the community level, and thereby influence non-migrants' migration decisions (Box 5, Figure 1). Decisions to migrate or to stay will then in turn produce new information and ideas on migration.

3. Research setting and methods

This paper draws on data gathered in 2010 and 2011 for the EUMAGINE project in four regions of Morocco. The EUMAGINE project studies the impact of perceptions of human rights and democracy on international migration aspirations and decisions in Morocco, Senegal, Turkey and Ukraine. The project collected in-depth interviews and surveys, using a random sample of the population aged between 18 and 39 in four regions in each country. The research areas were selected according to their migration history or a specific human rights situation. In Morocco, Tangier was selected because of its strong immigration background and its historical connections with Europe; the Todgha Valley was chosen because of its high emigration rate; the Central Plateau, in contrast, was selected for its more recent and lower emigration history; and finally, the Eastern High Atlas for its characteristics as a geographically remote, and economically isolated and underdeveloped area. The main characteristics of the four areas under study are summarised in Table 1.

The analysis presented in this paper mainly draws on the 80 in-depth interviews carried out in Morocco with men and women with diverse profiles in terms of age, occupational status, migration experience and migration aspirations. These provide insights into longitudinal changes in migration-related perceptions and aspirations of non-migrants. The findings of the non-quantitative data are complemented by survey data from 2000 questionnaires collected in Morocco.¹ Using inferential analyses with weighted data (Ersanilli 2012) and controlling for

Table 1. Description of the four research areas (Berriane et al. 2011).

Research area	Economic context	Migration context	Geography
Todgha Valley	Economy strongly dependent on migrants' remittances and visits	Main region of origin for internal and international emigration (after Souss and Eastern Rif) International emigration started in the 1950s to Algeria and reached its peak during 1960–74 (to France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany)	Oases region
Central Plateau	Economy dominated by (seasonal) work in agriculture and extraction of natural resources	Initially a destination area for internal migrants Emigration started at the end of the 1980s and was mainly directed towards Spain and Italy during the 1990s	Cut off from the economic centres
Tangier	Morocco's second economic hub	Increasing attraction for internal migrants from rural areas, who come either for job opportunities or because they aspire to international migration (often irregular migration) Emigration started in the 1960s. It is one of the main origin areas of emigration to Spain	Strategic geographical location
Eastern High Atlas	Marginal and underdeveloped	Widespread internal migration to Tangier or Agadir for construction (men) and agriculture (women) International emigration remained moderate up to the 1980s	Remote and poorly connected

regional fixed effects, I performed four logistic regressions to evaluate the effect of socio-economic factors at individual and household levels on perceptions of the migration environments (Table A1, Appendix). The dependent variables measure the positive perceptions of life of men and women in Morocco and in Europe.² A fifth logistic model looks at their effect on people's migration aspirations. Taking into account that the ability to migrate could have an effect on the aspiration to migrate, the dependent variable assumes that migration is possible as far as the required documentation is concerned.³

The next section describes the current Moroccan and European contexts in which migration takes place, as perceived by non-migrants in the four areas under study.

4. Ideas and perceptions of migration environments in four Moroccan regions

4.1. *Insufficient changes at the local level*

Over the last decade, people living in the four Moroccan regions under study perceived considerable improvements in the existing public services and infrastructures. However, positive changes were considered insufficient. Informants in all four areas shared similar negative

perceptions of their poor access to public services, high living costs, low incomes and lack of professional fulfilment. The latter was explained by a shortage of employment opportunities and the absence of basic rights and employment stability. Even in Tangier, where people perceived better employment opportunities than in other regions of Morocco, informants spoke about the high incidence of informal labour, job instability, low wages and competition for available jobs between the local inhabitants and the – less demanding – workforce that migrated from other areas of Morocco. For instance, the account of a 38-year-old male taxi driver in Tangier who returned to his home town after 10 years in France reflects this overall dissatisfaction: ‘There are no changes perceived in important things. Only the conditions of the roads are changing. They renovate the roads, they build up properties, but some aspects of life like health, education or salaries remain the same.’

The EUMAGINE survey confirms this overall feeling of frustration, revealing that only a minority in the four regions considered that life for men and women in Morocco was good or very good. Gender differences are only observed in the Todgha Valley, where the proportion of women with positive perceptions of life of men and women in Morocco was about 10% higher than the proportion of men with the same perceptions. The proportions range from 7.5% in the Eastern High Atlas to 19.1% in Tangier, and differences seem to be partly explained by wealth inequalities. Indeed, the inferential statistics (cf. models 1 and 2 in Table A1, Appendix) show that more wealth in the household and more education significantly increased the likelihood of finding that life in Morocco is good or very good for women, whereas wealth is the only variable showing a significant and positive effect on the perceptions of life in Morocco for men.

Taking into account non-migrants’ migration links with Europe, the four regions can be grouped in two categories with regard to people’s perceptions of locally available opportunities. On the one hand, Tangier and the Todgha Valley are regions with strong links with Europe, mainly fostered through migration and the back-and-forth movements of migrants who return to Morocco especially during their summer holidays. On the other hand, the Central Plateau and the Eastern High Atlas are more isolated areas, where migration started more recently and is less prevalent among households (Figure 2).

The proportion of people who were in touch with family members living abroad illustrates these regional differences regarding the links with Europe and elsewhere. The EUMAGINE survey asked respondents if they had been in contact with at least one family member living in another country in the last 12 months. Whereas about half of the respondents in Tangier and the Todgha Valley were in touch with at least one family member, in the Central Plateau the proportion was less than 30% and in the Eastern High Atlas less than 10% (Figure 3).

At the same time, evidence gathered by the in-depth interviews suggests that, compared to the other two regions, Tangier and the Todgha Valley offered more opportunities to their inhabitants, particularly regarding employment possibilities. Indeed, despite the availability of natural resources in the Central Plateau and the Eastern High Atlas, people complained about the lack of opportunities in these two regions. According to interviewees, the available resources – mainly forested areas in the Eastern High Atlas, and water and agricultural land in the Central Plateau – were owned and/or managed by a few. Thus, the forestry resources in the Eastern High Atlas were only profitable for a small and privileged group of people. In the Central Plateau, job opportunities were considered to be more accessible for migrant workers from other regions, who were more flexible in terms of working and salary conditions, than for the local population.

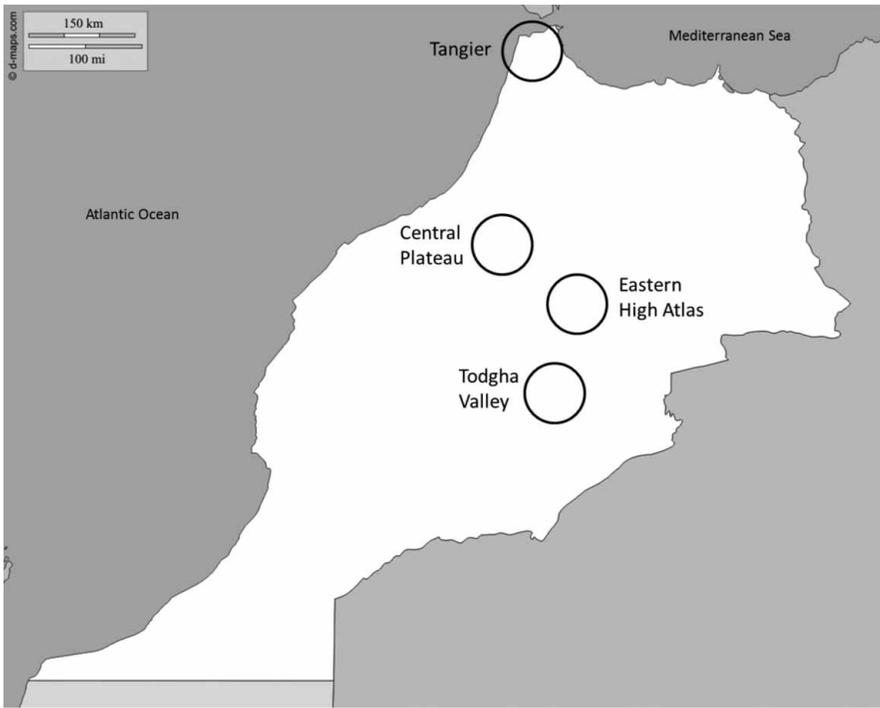


Figure 2. The four regions under study.

Source: Dmaps.com [http://www.d-maps.com/carte.php?num_car=1132&lang=en]

4.2. Mixed perceptions of Europe

The overall negative views about life in Morocco contrast with the widespread positive views of life in Europe – from 58.6% of Moroccans surveyed in Tangier to 76.6% in the Eastern High

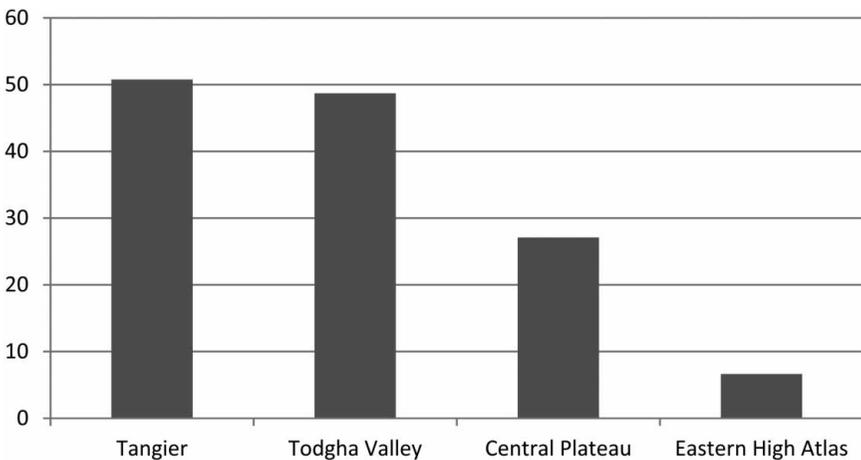


Figure 3. Percentage of respondents with at least one family member living abroad and who contacted them at least once over the last 12 months.

Atlas. However, not all European countries were perceived the same way. Two types of European destination regions can be distinguished according to their macro-economic characteristics – informants spoke about *weak* and *strong* countries. Germany, the Netherlands and France tended to be considered as strong countries, whereas the southern Mediterranean countries (Portugal, Spain, Italy and Greece) were seen as more vulnerable primarily due to their recent economic recession. Informants also distinguished countries according to the level of salaries or the perceived degree of social justice and equality in the surveys there. The negative views of the Mediterranean countries may have reduced their desirability as destination countries even when family members are living there. Indeed, the surveys revealed that the weak countries are less frequently mentioned by those who aspire to migrate when they are asked about their desired destinations, rather than about the country of residence of their family members living abroad.

In the interviews, the positive references to Europe were often linked to the lack of opportunities and social justice perceived in Morocco. On the one hand, informants described Europe as the ‘promised land’; a place of opportunities, employment and fortune, where salaries were high and proportional to the living costs – even if some differences were pointed out between countries. Europe was often associated with well-being, wealth and material prosperity, and seen as offering a motivating environment where people could live a better life, improve their situation, make their own choices and fulfil their aspirations. In addition, the high levels of social justice and democracy were extensively mentioned. In Europe, people were perceived as having access to their basic rights because good-quality education was considered available even for the poor and well-trained doctors provided accessible health services. Europe also tended to be associated with equality between men and women and people’s equality before the law. In addition, some interviewees mentioned freedom of belief, thought and speech, as well as the right to political participation and the election of politicians representing the people’s will.

Similarly, respect for workers’ rights and social protection provisions were mentioned several times. In contrast to what people experienced in Morocco, workers in Europe were considered protected by unemployment benefits if they lose their jobs; agreed working hours were seen as respected by employers, and overtime fairly remunerated. Formal work was considered as prevailing, giving access to social security and pension schemes, and the regular payment of salaries seemed guaranteed each month. Finally, those with fewer chances were perceived as able to get along thanks to income redistribution and to the social services available.

On the other hand, overly positive perceptions of Europe were counterbalanced by views of Europe as a racist and hostile environment in which Moroccans are discriminated against. According to informants, in Europe, people lacked solidarity with fellow citizens and family members. Also, some respondents mentioned the high housing costs and the cold climate in northern Europe as deterring factors. Usually, however, these negative ideas about life in Europe were specifically linked to negative experiences experienced by Moroccan migrants. In other words, Europe could be a place of opportunities, but its positive characteristics were not always seen as accessible to Moroccan migrants, especially in times of economic recession.

At the individual level, empirical evidence collected by the EUMAGINE survey data indicates that those who had previous international migration experience were more likely to have more negative perceptions of life in Europe (Table A1, Appendix). At the regional level, taking Tangier as the reference category, people living in the Eastern High Atlas are more likely to have positive views about life of men in Europe. The particularly harsh local context in this underdeveloped region could explain this trend. A 38-year-old woman native of this region, who

worked in informal jobs and had been an agricultural seasonal worker in Spain, summarised the living conditions in the area saying that:

Life is very difficult in our region, job opportunities are non-existent, and there are no lucrative economic activities. During the winter, we suffer from the freezing cold, and prices for firewood are expensive compared to the low wages; we work the whole day for a 60 Dirham wage (about €5.6), whereas the expenses are many and burdensome. Those who own agricultural land work in farming, whereas those who do not have land look for employment in the region or in other parts of Morocco.

4.3. *Changes in the perceived ability to migrate*

With information on migration experiences circulating between destination and origin, non-migrants in the four regions do have an idea of the problems faced by Moroccan migrants in Europe. Non-migrants attributed these difficulties to three factors: the different cultural and religious values that migrants encounter in Europe, the lack of opportunities that they face because of the segmented labour markets, and the difficulties in getting a residence and work permit. Some of these negative perceptions are not new and were observed in Morocco before the outbreak of the economic crisis in Europe (de Haas 2003). In the past, these drawbacks were, however, counterbalanced by the opportunities of self-improvement, as migrants could find a job in Europe no matter whether they had a legal residence and work permit or not. Perceptions of opportunities for self-improvement changed with the global economic crisis: employment for Moroccan migrants was considered scarcer in the main destination countries, as native-born workers were seen as preferred – even in jobs where they were hard to find before the crisis.

Interviews conveyed the general idea that in the post-2008 economic context, the European migration environment had changed. If family reunification, marriage and studies were still viewed as possible ways of migrating, the chance to obtain a job contract in southern Europe in order to migrate legally was considered increasingly small. Moreover, intermediaries who claimed to be able to provide a job contract in Europe asked for higher prices even if no positive outcome was guaranteed. This is illustrated by the comment of a 26-year-old male with secondary education, who was working in the Central Plateau city of Oulmes in the carpentry sector:

Recently some people came back trying to sell contracts for Italy for [the equivalent of €5.500] but nobody wanted to buy them. A contract for 6 million and you are not even sure if you will be able to renew it after 6 months. Nobody dares to buy them. In the past, a rumour of somebody having contracts for sale was enough and everybody would rush to him.

The only remaining option available to those who could not migrate as family member, student or legal worker was irregular migration. Interviews revealed that although irregular migration was still considered feasible, in most cases informants preferred immobility to this type of migration. The perceived degree of uncertainty of migrating irregularly has increased since the economic recession and irregular migration is thus much less attractive than in the past. An interview with a 36-year-old law graduate who managed his own drugstore in Tounfite in the Eastern High Atlas reflects this changing trend:

In the past, potential migrants would leave without even knowing where they would end up. Let's say that you leave, but that you don't know if you will get your documents and when that will happen. Moreover, what kind of job are you going to find there? In the past, candidates tried to leave Morocco whatever the result would be, hoping to get a residence permit, but currently things have changed.

Since the economic crisis started in 2008, ideas and information circulating in Morocco about Europe and migration opportunities there have changed. This has affected the way in which non-migrants in Morocco perceive their own living situation compared to their peers who live in Europe in times of recession. This, in turn, has triggered changes in their feelings of relative deprivation and satisfaction, as the next section will show.

5. Shifting feelings of relative deprivation

The interviews suggest that the changed perceptions of migration to Europe reduced the feelings of relative deprivation of non-migrants in Morocco. The increased relative satisfaction felt by non-migrants goes well beyond the economic aspect and is intrinsically related to notions of uncertainty and security. The statement of a self-employed 36-year-old male hairdresser in the Drissia area of Tangier reflects these feelings, which appeared more frequent in this region with more economic opportunities:

With the new industrial areas here and with the crisis in Europe, people make their living in Morocco. People are now convinced that there is nothing left in Europe. If going to Europe means to start from scratch, and if here in Morocco they have 5 to 10% of guaranteed chances to succeed, people tend to think that it is useless to go to Europe and start from nothing without knowing what is going to happen.

However, it is sometimes difficult to assess whether there is an actual shift in the feelings of relative satisfaction, or if the economic crisis and high unemployment perceived in Europe were used by some involuntary non-migrants as an excuse, as a consolation for their incapacity to migrate. This may be the case for a 24-year-old male informant in Tangier who was looking for a job when he was interviewed. He wanted to study in Europe but never did because his family could not afford the costs. At the time of the interview, when he heard the comments of some of his migrant family members on the difficult situation in Europe, he felt relieved to be in Morocco. The fact that involuntary non-migrants particularly stress the negative aspects of migration had already been observed before the outbreak of the economic crisis (e.g. de Haas, 2003).

The interviews also suggest that feelings of relative satisfaction were more common among people who enjoyed more individual opportunities, that is, those with a higher level of education, who were employed or who owned a small business. This is the case of a talented 25-year-old man in Oulmes (Central Plateau) who was working as a manager in a civil engineering company, studying at the university and collaborating in a local association. He initially wanted to migrate, but his aspirations changed and at the time of the interview he preferred immobility because of the economic crisis in Europe. He did not discard the option of migrating in the future if his life aspirations in Morocco were not fulfilled and the situation in Europe improved. His narrative shows how non-migrants, when considering their feelings of relative deprivation or satisfaction, do consider other aspects than the economic ones, such as access to social rights, job security and professional fulfilment:

(...) I live a quiet life here, I have a regular income, so what would I do there [in Europe]? I would live in misery and without a job. There, job opportunities are in the agriculture and building sectors. These jobs are physically very demanding. If I migrate to Europe it would be to look for a permanent job with a [regular] salary in a company or to be employed in a sector corresponding to my profile; in a consulting company, for instance. Now, with the economic crisis in Europe, I wouldn't be able to find it. (...) Morocco is dynamic; I am close to the family. Moreover, I am settled in Morocco, and I earn enough money working. When I calculate the annual balance of my income I realise that I probably earn more here than what I would do in Europe. I am not certain, so I prefer to stay in Morocco.

The EUMAGINE survey allows measuring non-migrants' perceptions of economic and non-economic aspects of migrants' life in Europe.⁴ The results show that non-economic aspects of migration were more negatively valued than the economic ones in the four research areas, without significant differences between the regions under study (Figure 4). There are, however, significant differences between Tangier and the other three regions if we consider perceptions of the economic aspect of migrants' life in Europe. Indeed, interviewees in Tangier are more pessimistic about migrants' economic success in Europe. This could be explained by a combination of factors, including a more positive perception of the local economic environment and the dominant perception among non-migrants of Spain as a country where the economic crisis has hit especially hard, coupled with the fact that Spain is one of the main destinations for migrants from this region.

At the individual level, shifts in feelings of relative deprivation and satisfaction had an effect on migration-related aspirations. At the community level, it had an impact on the value of migration. These changes, which potentially influence people's migration behaviour, are discussed in the following sections.

6. Migration aspirations in times of uncertainty in Europe

The interviews show that changed perceptions of migration environments can undermine migration aspirations. In times of crisis, finding work in Europe was seen as more difficult than in the past and this reduced the perceived opportunities to migrate legally. Furthermore, migrating to Europe without a contract and a residence permit was associated with increasingly uncertain living and working conditions. These perceptions had a negative effect on migration aspirations, as in the case of a 27-year-old male internal migrant living in Tangier who unsuccessfully tried to reach Europe some years ago in a Zodiac. During the EUMAGINE fieldwork, he did not think about trying to migrate to Europe again unless he was offered a good employment opportunity, as he did not see any chances in Europe for low-skilled migrants like him:

If there was employment in Europe, it would be nice whatever the nature of the job is, because I think that life can be better there; but nowadays I don't think about Europe. (...) The sub-Saharan think

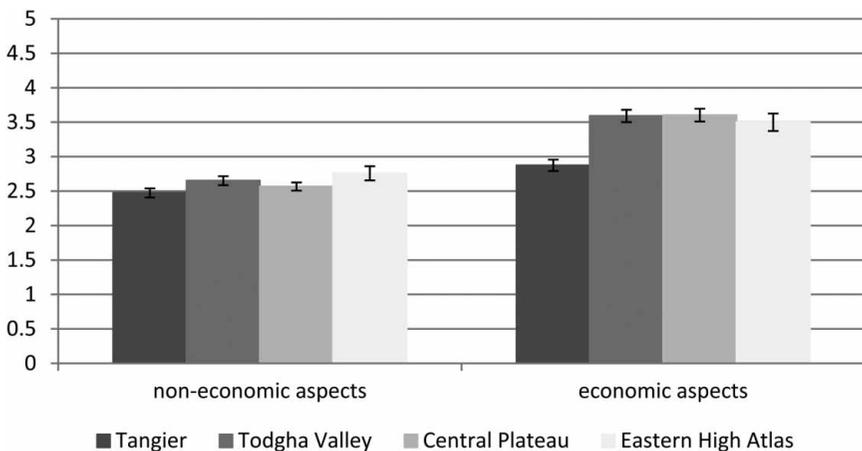


Figure 4. Regional mean score of the positive perception of migrants' life in Europe.

about migrating, but only a few Moroccans do. Right now, [if offered the possibility to migrate in the next 5 years] I would refuse; I don't want to go there because I do not have any diplomas that could help me to find a secure job (...).

In this case, negative perceptions of Europe directly affected the respondent's desire to migrate. However, negative ideas and perceptions can also undermine migration aspirations more indirectly, when negative ideas about migration affect non-migrants' feelings of relative deprivation when they compare their personal situation with that of their migrant peers. Here, it is the effect of information on relative deprivation that, as explained in the previous section, indirectly shapes migration aspirations.

In addition, people's migration aspirations appear to be closely linked to their concrete opportunities in their country of origin and abroad. In other words, their capacity to migrate also affects their aspiration to migrate (Appadurai 2004). What is more, people might not have the aspiration to migrate but would leave if they had the opportunity. This was the case of a 38-year-old woman in Tounfite (Eastern High Atlas), who migrated to Spain and admitted that 'honestly, I never thought about migrating to Spain to work, I wanted to stay in Morocco despite the hard living conditions – until I had the opportunity to leave'.

However, migration to Europe remains attractive for many because of European living standards. Despite the changed European context, interviews reveal that sizeable sections of the population still perceived opportunities in migration. This was particularly the case for those who saw migration as a way of improving their precarious living conditions, as well as those who still considered having the capacity to migrate, such as students and those with close family members abroad.

The EUMAGINE survey shows that while a large majority of respondents aspire to migrate in the Central Plateau (over 70%) and in the Todgha Valley (68%), migration aspirations were lower in Tangier (close to 48%) and in the Eastern High Atlas (53%). In Tangier, people perceived more local opportunities and had less positive views of life in Europe than in the other regions – thus, fewer people aspired to migrate even if they were given the necessary papers. However, we would have expected a higher proportion of those with migration aspirations in the Eastern High Atlas due to the harder living conditions there and the more positive perceptions of migration towards Europe. Similarly, we would have expected lower proportions of people with migration aspirations in the Todgha Valley than in the Eastern High Atlas because in the former, negative perceptions of migration in the changed European context were much stronger than in the latter. The surprising results indicate that the emigration context only partially explains migration aspirations.

Furthermore, besides positive or negative effects, feedback mechanisms can have self-correcting effects on migration. For instance, migration aspirations can be postponed or can reappear when the migration context changes and the capacity to migrate increases. The narrative of a 22-year-old woman in the Eastern High Atlas illustrates this. She stopped thinking about emigration due to the lack of opportunities in the uncertain European context, but she would still like to emigrate in the future if a good opportunity arose: 'I haven't stopped for good [thinking about emigration] despite the new conditions in Europe, if I find a good chance to migrate with a good salary and a convenient work, I will leave without hesitating.'

7. Questioning the value of migration

At the community level, migration is still seen as a way to achieve a better life in terms of material improvement, well-being and personal fulfilment. This is particularly the case for those who are

unemployed or who want to improve their working conditions – not only regarding their salaries, but also their access to social rights or employment stability. Particularly interesting is the case of students. Unlike in the past (de Haas 2003), this group perceives more opportunities in Morocco than in Europe, where they think that they would not be able to reach an employment level corresponding to their qualifications. At the same time, they tend to consider that opportunities in Morocco are more accessible for those who previously migrated internationally because of the experience and knowledge acquired.

Although migration is still positively valued by students, the value attributed to migration has shifted towards more scepticism, especially in regions with a longer migration history, as people considered the life of migrants to be difficult and full of constraints. This confirms a trend already observed in the early 2000s in the Todgha Valley (de Haas 2003). In all four regions, informants spoke about the cultural differences that migrants have to deal with in Europe and about the hard work in the segmented labour markets that they have access to. Furthermore, while migration was still considered positively, immobility was seen as a better bet than undocumented migration in a context of crisis in Europe, and close family networks at the destination more important than in past migration projects. Indeed, Moroccans' ability to migrate to traditional destinations in Europe was strongly associated with close family ties abroad. Their assistance was seen as a key for a successful migration project in times of uncertainty in Europe.

Many informants also mentioned their interest in alternative migration destinations. Besides the vision of Germany as a country with no economic recession, the USA was often mentioned, especially by students, and Russia was perceived as a place with new employment opportunities. Migrating to these new destinations was sometimes considered more worthwhile than migration to traditional destination countries such as France or Spain.

Especially in the Todgha Valley, local discourses differentiated between the successful former migrant and the failed recent migrant. The former migrants were portrayed as *winner*s, good workers who invested in the community of origin by building houses and opening shops, by bringing presents or giving loans to members of the sending community. The recent migrants were viewed as *loser*s, selfish, often unemployed or even homeless in Europe, and with reduced positive outcomes of their migration in terms of incomes and quality of life.

Figure 5 shows that people living in the Todgha Valley or in the Central Plateau region give migration a higher value than those living in Tangier or in the Eastern High Atlas.⁵ This is in agreement with the fact that in these two regions people are more likely to aspire to migration than in Tangier – with rates up to 70%, that is, about 20% higher than in Tangier. Overall, however, the mean scores are below 2.5 in all regions, indicating that migration is not highly valued. This is surprising given the high proportion of people with migration aspirations in the Todgha Valley and in the Central Plateau. Individual survey data also show that some respondents did not value migration positively in any of the dimensions studied, and at the same time aspired to migrate. This is the case of 15% of those who aspired to migrate in Tangier and 11.4% in the Eastern High Atlas. This group tends to be younger, less wealthy and to have a more negative perception of Morocco than those who aspire to migrate and value migration positively – at least in one of the studied dimensions – and those who do not value migration but do not aspire to migrate. We could hypothesise that those in the former group have fewer opportunities in Morocco than the other two groups and therefore aspire to leave Morocco despite their lack of knowledge of advantages to migration in times of uncertainty in Europe. This also suggests that even if migration is considered better than staying, other alternatives – such as an improvement in living and working conditions at home – would be preferred by those individuals.

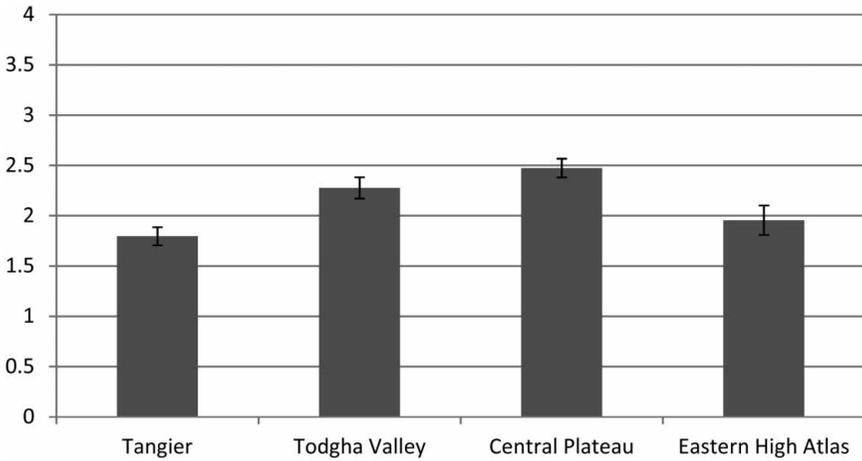


Figure 5. Regional score on the positive value of migration.

8. Conclusion

Changing perceptions of migration to Europe are shaping migration aspirations of Moroccans. In the context of the European economic crisis, involuntary non-migrants in Morocco tend to become voluntary non-migrants, as the lack of opportunities to migrate negatively affects people's aspiration to migrate.

The analysis presented in this paper shows how ideas and information on migration are processed by non-migrants and trigger direct and indirect feedback loops from the perspective of the sending regions. Indeed, Moroccan migrants' experiences in Europe shape non-migrants' perceptions and aspirations to migrate. Through direct feedback loops, migrants' experiences can impact future migration decisions – for instance, when changed perceptions lead migrants to choose alternative migration destinations. Through indirect feedback loops, changed perceptions of migration can influence feelings of relative deprivation and satisfaction when non-migrants compare their situation to that of their migrant peers in Europe. This in turn impacts their migration and life aspirations at the individual level, as well as the value attributed to migration at the community level.

Over the last six decades, Moroccan emigration has increased despite economic and policy changes in the European immigration environment. The uncertain European economic context has, however, reduced opportunities for Moroccan migrants, and interviews revealed that although irregular migration is still considered feasible, in most cases informants preferred immobility to this type of migration. Also, empirical evidence collected by the EUMAGINE survey indicates that those respondents who had previous international migration experience were more likely to have more negative perceptions of life in Europe.

Nonetheless, migration is still considered by many Moroccan non-migrants as the way to get a better life in terms of economic improvement, well-being and personal fulfilment. This paper showed that these continued emigration aspirations are partly explained by the lack of sufficient changes in Morocco and in the regions of residence. Furthermore, even for those who perceive more opportunities in Morocco than in Europe, such as students, migration is still positively valued as a means of increasing their chances in their country of residence upon

return. However, even if migration is considered a better alternative to staying put, this does not necessarily imply that migration is seen as the best option if other alternatives were available.

The paper also points out that besides positive or undermining effects, feedback mechanisms can also have self-correcting effects on migration aspirations. In particular temporal and geographical migration environments, migration aspirations and decisions can be postponed, new destinations considered and particular types of migration preferred or discarded as a result of new information and ideas on migration.

Despite the generalised view that the availability of opportunities in Europe has decreased, there are regional differences: in areas where local opportunities are scarce, perceptions of Europe and migration remain positive, while scepticism is higher in regions where some positive changes have occurred locally. This suggests that the same information on migration can lead to distinct outcomes in different settings according to a region's particular migration history, traditional migration destinations and the opportunities available locally. It also shows the role played by micro-level personal circumstances in migration feedback processes.

Finally, there are three types of uncertainties that emerge throughout the analysis: job insecurity, the lack of social protection and the lack of clear perspectives that some people experience about their life aspirations. These aspects of uncertainty appear linked to people's perceptions of their capabilities and opportunities both in their place of residence and in Europe. These uncertainties go beyond the notions of risk or lack of knowledge of migration outcomes, which are the most common types of uncertainty considered in migration studies. Looking beyond known and unknown risks of migration, paying more attention to other types of uncertainties and to how these influence people's (im)mobility aspirations according to their capabilities and their socio-economic conditions would allow a better understanding of how inequality and uncertainty affect migration and immobility.

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Notes

1. The data set used for this analysis is the *EUMAGINE Individual questionnaire* with reference 'STUM 20120628 – incl hh and mgcount'.
2. The dependent variables are dummies coded 1 if the respondent considered that life is good or very good, and 0 if they considered that life is bad, very bad or neither good nor bad. The use of logistic regressions instead of OLS is

based on the observation of significant non-linear relationships between dependent and independent variables in some research areas.

3. The dependent dummy variable accounts for a survey question asking for migration aspirations 'if somebody gave [the respondent] the necessary papers for going to live or work in Europe', coded 1 if the respondents answered 'go to Europe'.
4. The survey question asking to what extent respondents agreed with the statement 'People from Morocco who live in Europe are treated badly' can be used to measure the perceived non-economic outcomes of Moroccan migrants in Europe. Similarly, respondents' opinions on the statement 'Most people from Morocco who go to live or work in Europe become rich' can be used to measure their perceptions of the economic outcomes of migration. In both questions, respondents were asked on a scale from 1 to 5 whether they strongly agreed, agreed, neither agreed nor disagreed, disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statements. For the analysis in this paper, the scale measuring the economic outcomes was reversed. Therefore, for economic and non-economic outcomes, the higher the score, the more positive the view of migrants' life in Europe.
5. To measure the positive value of migration beyond its economic aspects, I created four dummies based on survey questions asking how strongly respondents agreed with the ideas that going to live or work in Europe can be a good experience for women and for men, that most Moroccan people become rich there and that they gain valuable skills. A Cronbach's alpha test provides evidence that the items measure an underlying construct with a scale reliability coefficient of 0.66. The dummies are coded 1 when the respondent agreed or strongly agreed with the statements. I subsequently created a new variable coded from 0 to 4 according to the sum of scores of the four dummies.

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Appendix

Table A1. Logistic regressions on perceptions of life for women and men in Morocco and on migration aspirations if given the necessary papers (odds ratios).

	Life for women in Morocco is good or very good (1)	Life for men in Morocco is good or very good (2)	Life for women in Europe is good or very good (3)	Life for men in Europe is good or very good (4)	Would go to Europe if given the necessary papers (5)
Wealth	1.21** (2.81)	1.23** (3.26)	0.93 (-1.71)	0.90* (-2.32)	0.84*** (-4.17)
Woman	1.19 (1.18)	1.18 (1.04)	0.83 (-1.59)	0.75* (-2.49)	0.60*** (-4.22)
Age	1.00 (-0.29)	1.01 (0.55)	1.01 (0.74)	1.00 (-0.15)	0.98 (-1.93)
Education level	1.05* (2.48)	1.03 (1.32)	0.99 (-0.70)	0.98 (-1.41)	0.99 (-0.95)
Partner	0.80 (-0.99)	0.67 (-1.55)	0.73 (-1.80)	0.81 (-1.20)	0.48*** (-3.68)
Children	1.45 (1.43)	1.28 (0.82)	0.83 (-0.96)	0.99 (-0.05)	0.74 (-1.48)
International migration experience	0.98 (-0.04)	0.92 (-0.12)	0.27* (-2.35)	0.31* (-2.58)	0.82 (-0.35)
Internal migration experience	1.41 (1.81)	1.31 (1.46)	0.98 (-0.11)	0.90 (-0.67)	1.01 (0.04)
Family members living in another country	0.76 (-1.77)	0.74 (-1.85)	1.06 (0.42)	1.10 (0.74)	1.23 (1.57)
<i>Research areas:</i>					
Tangier	1 (.)	1 (.)	1 (.)	1 (.)	1 (.)
Todgha Valley	0.80 (-0.98)	0.78 (-1.14)	1.21 (0.79)	1.22 (0.87)	2.67*** (5.18)
Central Plateau	0.93 (-0.35)	0.83 (-0.84)	1.25 (0.89)	1.17 (0.68)	2.59*** (4.71)
Eastern High Atlas	0.66 (-1.23)	0.53* (-2.00)	1.89* (2.29)	1.63 (1.76)	1.11 (0.48)
<i>N</i>	1999	1999	1991	1993	1999

Notes: Z-statistics in parentheses. Models 1–4 measure the likelihood of perceiving that life for men or women in Morocco or in Europe is good or very good. Model 5 measures the likelihood of aspiring to migrate if provided with the necessary papers for going to live or work in Europe.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

*** $p < .001$.