



policy

BRIEF

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To Jump or to Sail? Analyzing the Flows of Undocumented Migration into the European Union through the Southern Spanish Border.

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SUMMARY:

Only nine miles at its narrowest point, the geographical separation between Spain and Morocco is a natural entrance to the southwestern flank of the European Union (EU), and is the world's greatest development gap between two bordering nations. The "borderless Europe" policy of the Schengen Agreement has made stringent enforcement of border control policies a necessity for the Spanish government. Such policies have been unsuccessful and do not address the fundamental problems at the root of the migratory flow into Spain. Instead, the result has been greater profits for traffickers seeking to smuggle undocumented migrants from Morocco to Spain, and a segmentation among potential illegal immigrants. Moreno-Fuentes argues that the EU should focus on the linkages between immigration, integration and development policies in an adequate manner, rather than simply manning geographic borders.

According to the 2005 UN Human Development Report, the border between Spain and Morocco constitutes the highest development gap in the world (Spain occupies the 21st position of that Index, Morocco the 124th). In terms of strict economic differential (measured in gross domestic product per capita, purchasing power parity US\$), the wealth gap between Spain (\$22,391) and Morocco (\$4,004) is 25 percent larger than the one existing between the United States (\$37,562) and Mexico (\$9,168).

In October 2005, the images of hundreds of potential migrants from sub-Saharan Africa trying to jump over the fences that separate the Spanish North African enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla from the Moroccan territory made headlines around the world. Beyond the temporary media attention granted to those people seeking a life on the margins of western European societies, those dramatic images drew attention to the pressures felt by Spain along its land and sea borders with Morocco. Although the fences held and the flows have been reduced, Spain has implemented tough European Union border control policies for several years that fail to address the fundamental problem, raising questions about their relevance.

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A series of interrelated factors account for those migratory pressures. Paramount is the extreme development differentials existing between both shores of the Mediterranean. According to the 2005 UN Human Development Report, the border between Spain and Morocco constitutes the highest development gap in the world (Spain occupies the 21st position of that Index, Morocco the 124th). In terms of strict economic differential (measured in gross domestic product per capita, purchasing power parity US\$), the wealth gap between Spain (\$22,391) and Morocco (\$4,004) is 25 percent larger than the one existing between the United States (\$37,562) and Mexico (\$9,168). The gap between Spain and other African countries that were the source of those migrants who scaled the fences is much larger (*i.e.* Mali \$994; Ivory Coast \$1,492; Gambia \$1,859; or Ghana \$2,238). Complementing these disparities is the strong demand for unskilled workers in the Spanish labor market (mainly for the underground economy) which constitutes the pull factor that complements the push effect of the stagnant (and often receding) economies of the countries of origin of those migration flows. Certainly, Spain's geographical proximity to Morocco (separated by only nine miles at its narrowest point) makes it the natural entrance to the EU's southwestern flank.

Furthermore, the historical colonialist connections between the two continents, and the existence of settled African communities in many western European countries (who provide the information, finance, support and solidarity networks that encourage migration) both contribute to explaining the growing migratory pressures. To the explanatory factors of the migratory flows channelled through the Gibraltar Straits, we can add the widespread political instability in many African countries, environmental adversities (droughts, plagues, desertification), as well as demographic factors (extreme differentials in age structures, fertility rates, etc.). All, collectively, create an overwhelming incentive to make the arduous trek north and to face the associated risks of life as a new immigrant.

In halting this migration, the Spanish government was responding to the policy prescriptions agreed upon in Brussels. Since the early 1980s, the development of a common European market, with the dilution of internal boundaries and the creation of a common external border, forced EU member states to gradually harmonize their border control policies. The 1997 Amsterdam Treaty aimed at the creation of an area of freedom, security and justice in the EU through the transfer of responsibilities for asylum, admission and residence of third-country nationals to EU institutions. Following the implementation of the Amsterdam Treaty, the Schengen Agreement (hitherto an intergovernmental scheme aimed at eliminating internal border controls between the adherent countries) was incorporated into the EU regulatory framework (with only the United Kingdom and Ireland opting out). This implied the establishment of a common visa policy, and the creation of the "Schengen Information System," both schemes aimed at unifying the procedures for gaining access to EU territory. The unintentional consequence of those measures is that once in the territory of a member country, an undocumented migrant can easily move around "Schengenland."

The combined effect of EU legislation and pressure from other member states resulted in an agreement to police the Union's external border strictly--thus ensuring that Spanish authorities felt a strong responsibility to control Spain's southern borders. Since 1991, Spanish authorities have invested considerable material and human resources in trying to build an effective system of border control. While new visa requirements for North Africans were introduced, increasing attention was also paid to policing the seashores. The SIVE system (an integrated system of radars, infrared cameras, planes, helicopters and boats) was gradually deployed in an effort to prevent the influx of "*pateras*" (rafts) loaded with undocumented migrants on the Andalucian coast and the Canary Islands. The control of access to the cities of Ceuta and Melilla was also strengthened by building a road around the perimeter of those enclaves, the installation of a double barbed-wired fence 3.2 and 6 meters high, ditches, turrets, thermal sensors, and infra-red cameras supporting the patrolling of the "*Guardia Civil*" (Civil Guard). The army was also deployed along

the border at times of particular pressure. The idea of fulfilling a European mission was clearly reflected in the allocation of EU funds for the deployment of those complex and expensive schemes of border control.

Contrary to the images of unrestrained mayhem created by the recent events at Ceuta and Melilla, the policies implemented in the southern EU border have been relatively effective in controlling unwanted migration. Table 1 lists immigrants living in Spain according to their region of origin based on data drawn from official figures regarding legal residents in contrast to census data. It demonstrates the existence of a far greater stock of undocumented migrants from Latin America and eastern Europe (arriving legally and overstaying their permits) than African migrants (those most directly affected by the strengthened control of the southern borders). The latter group represents roughly 25 percent of the total foreigners legally living in Spain in 2005, but they currently constitute only about 10 percent of the stock of undocumented migrants.

Table 1. Foreign residents in Spain

YEAR	TOTAL	EU	REST OF EUROPE	NORTH AMERICA	LATIN AMERICA	AFRICA	ASIA
2003	1,647,011	406,199	154,001	16,163	514,484	432,662	121,455
2005	2,054,453	523,367	177,863	17,021	676,220	511,196	146,503
2003*	2,664,168	587,949	348,585	25,963	1,047,564	522,682	128,952
2005*	3,691,547	817,302	557,643	23,957	1,455,323	658,097	176,818

* Data from the Census (including all those registered, regardless of their legal status).
 Source: *Ministerio del Interior* and *INE*.

Measuring the success of a policy is notoriously difficult. But slowing the growth in the volume of African immigrants is strongly correlated with the evolution of the complex relationships between Spain and Morocco. Although both countries signed an agreement in 1992 for the readmission of all illegal immigrants crossing into Spain from Moroccan territory, its implementation with regard to Moroccan nationals has depended on the state of affairs of an extensive bilateral agenda (which also includes the final status of the western Sahara, sovereignty over the Spanish enclaves in North Africa, illicit trade--drugs and tobacco from Morocco to Spain, consumer goods from Ceuta and Melilla to Morocco, and the access of Spanish boats to Moroccan fisheries).

The strengthening of border control measures has resulted in a significant increase in the volume and profits made from smuggling undocumented migrants. So a complex, specialized network of organizations has been created extending from groups traditionally involved in drug trafficking by boat or truck, to fishermen affected by the dismantling of the Spanish fleet that formerly operated in Moroccan waters.

A curious segmentation of potential illegal migrants has also taken place. One distinction is based on nationality: if caught, Moroccans are returned to their country of origin, but that is not the case with other nationalities. Minors are not returned because of Spanish child protection regulations, while pregnant women and mothers of very young children are also allowed to stay in Spain for humanitarian reasons. Inevitably, those with more money have a greater chance of entering Spain using falsified papers or by paying to board a raft departing from the western Sahara bound for the Canary Islands--where the SIVE system has not yet been fully deployed. In contrast, those with less money pay to try to reach the Andalusian coasts, and finally, those without sufficient monetary resources try to jump the fences of Ceuta or Melilla.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Francisco Javier Moreno-Fuentes is a researcher at the Research Unit in Public Policy and Politics of the Spanish National Research Council in Madrid. He holds a Master in Social Sciences from the Juan March Institute in Madrid, a Master of Science in Social Policy and Planning from the London School of Economics and Political Science and a PhD in Political Science from the Universidad Autónoma of Madrid. He has published a book, several chapters in edited volumes, and journal articles. His main areas of interest include immigration policies in western Europe, welfare regimes and their reform, and urban policies.



The situation at the border of Ceuta and Melilla must therefore be understood as more than simply poor people from the global South storming the barricades. It is part of a complex system of migration. While the flow of migrants may have been temporarily reduced at this one locus of entry, the broader context is one that has stimulated illicit activity, and the flow of migrants has often simply been diverted to other locations. The fundamental problems that stimulate the northward flow of immigrants, however, have not been addressed. The global dimension of the issue has thus remained unresolved. Migratory pressures at the southern EU border are unlikely to decrease in the foreseeable future and long-term measures that go beyond transforming migration transition countries like Morocco into buffer areas to prevent migratory flows from reaching Europe will have to be implemented. Current EU policies fail to link immigration, integration and development policies in an adequate manner. They focus largely on manning geographic barriers rather than providing long term solutions. It may be time to rethink the efficacy of this approach.

