

# ► Employment Policy Brief

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## Migration and job creation in north/west africa

### Employment-intensive investment strategies in the gambia, mauritania, and tunisia

#### Introduction

**Migration** is a key enabler for a country's socio-economic development, and often a means for individuals to ensure human security. Most migrants self-select themselves to maximize their personal economic gains, except in cases where they are forced to flee from persecution. Migration driven by self-interest can also bring positive impacts for both sending and receiving countries, as long as the migratory flow is effectively managed and takes place through regular routes, in order to ensure the rights and dignity of people on the move. For instance, migration can complement a declining labour force in host countries to maintain a certain level of economic activities. On the other hand, countries of origin could also benefit from the transfer of resources and knowledge that migrants acquire in the host countries. Building a mutually beneficial relationship between sending and receiving countries is, therefore, key to maximizing the benefits of migration at both country and individual levels.

However, when the migratory flow takes place through irregular routes, it often leads to defective protection of migrant workers in the destination country, leading to a deterioration of working conditions, as well as socio-economic inequalities and disruption of social cohesion. Irregular migrants often name a lack of employment opportunities as a main reason for their decision to leave their countries.

**The ILO's Employment-Intensive Investment Programme (EIIP) supports countries to create jobs through public investments. As such, it helps to address the root causes of irregular migration.** The EIIP approach helps to promote decent working conditions for



Young participants in an EIIP project in The Gambia

all in the countries of origin. The EIIP mitigates the risks of irregular migration through immediate job creation and income generation for potential migrants. The approach indirectly disincentivizes irregular and perilous journeys with enhanced awareness on decent work conditions. The EIIP approach also assists social and economic reintegration of returnees through public investments. This can take place notably in infrastructure construction works where inexperienced and unskilled workers can be integrated.

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This note explains how the ILO supports its constituents, particularly the countries of the origin of migrants, in addressing migration issues through job creation with the EIIP approach, with concrete examples from the ILO's experiences in The Gambia, Mauritania, and Tunisia.

### The EIIP Overview

With its six thematic areas and five crosscutting themes, EIIP supports countries in the design, formulation, implementation and evaluation of policies and programmes aiming to address unemployment and under-employment through public investment, typically in infrastructure development and environmental works (e.g. road construction and maintenance, water and drainage, irrigation infrastructure, reforestation, and soil conservation etc.). 40 years of EIIP's experience allow it to offer a comprehensive and integrated package of

interventions with the provision of improved and climate-resilient infrastructure in the long term, and decent job creation in the short to mid-term. EIIP has long served as an entry point for improving sustainable livelihoods with immediate and tangible results.

### The Gambia

#### Decent Work for Returnees and Potential Migrants

The Gambia, the smallest country in mainland Africa with the population of 2.1 million, has one of the highest rate of irregular migration on the continent. Between 2014 and 2018, nearly 38,000 Gambian migrants were found to have entered the EU zone through irregular routes. Gambians call this irregular migration route to Europe "*backway*" – and many of the backway migrants who leave the country to set foot in Europe are detained in an appalling environment on their way to the North. In the worst case, these backway migrants lose their lives in the Mediterranean while trying to cross the sea.

The 2018 Labour Force Survey conducted by the Gambia Bureau of Statistics (GBoS) shows that out of 22,948 people who emigrated through irregular routes, 21,294, or approximately 93%, were reported to be unemployed at the time when they left the country.<sup>1</sup> This fact suggests that those migrants chose the *backway* due to the lack of employment opportunities in the country.

The same Labour Force Survey shows an alarming national unemployment rate of 35%, of which youth unemployment reaches as high as 42%.<sup>2</sup> These figures alone clearly call for an immediate action to create job opportunities and restore hope in the country, particularly for the youthful population. The democratic presidential election in early 2017 saw an overturn of the regime of 22-year rule. Against this backdrop, the country now faces a significant challenge of transforming its socio-economic vitality to build The New Gambia.

In this context, the ILO provided technical cooperation to the country to create employment opportunities for youth in the construction sector. A project entitled "*Employment Creation for Youth to Build Sustainable Peace in The Gambia*", financially supported by the Government of Japan, offered immediate employment creation for more than 300 youths and enhanced the employability of project participants. A particular focus was placed throughout the project cycle on inclusiveness in recruitment procedures and re-integration of returnees of irregular migration. As a result, the project recruited 32 returnees of backway migration, both women and men, skilled and unskilled, literate and illiterate, and with or without an educational background.

#### Employment Intensive Investment (EII) approach summary

# EIIP



Employment Intensive Investment Programme

#### Six key areas of EIIP interventions are:

- 1) Employment impact assessments
- 2) Public Employment Programmes (PEPs)
- 3) Public and Private Sector Development
- 4) Community and Local Resource-Based (LRB) approaches
- 5) Green Works
- 6) Emergency Employment

#### Crosscutting core values include:

- Gender equality
- Reaching vulnerable groups
- Working Conditions
- Environmental considerations and climate change adaptation
- Social dialogue

<sup>1</sup> Gambia Bureau of Statistics (2019). Gambia Labour Force Survey 2018. <https://www.gbosdata.org/downloads-file/the-gambia-labour-force-survey-glfs-2018>.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

### 1. Returnee's case

I decided to embark on the “backway” migration because of my family situation. I did not earn enough to support my family.

I was happy to learn this EIIP project opportunity when I returned to my country. It met my immediate needs.

► Voice from EIIP project participant in The Gambia

### 2. Potential migrant's case

If we receive support, we will stay here and work towards developing our own country and community. Collectively, we can make it here if we have the support. I am most satisfied within my own community.

The EIIP project allowed me not to go on a “backway” journey. It is too risky. My friends tell me horrible stories of what they have been through. These inhumane stories make me cry.

► Voice from EIIP project participant in The Gambia

### 3. Youth entrepreneur's case

The feeder road construction skills that were transferred from the ILO helped me launch my own business. I am no longer a job seeker. I am now a job creator.

► Voice from EIIP project participant in The Gambia



Gambian social partners were trained on OSH at construction sites

Migrant workers, especially those who enter into the labour market in a host country through irregular routes, have a considerable risk of not being subject to workers' protection and occupational safety and health (OSH). All the project participants, including the 32 returnees of irregular migration, received a training to raise their awareness of occupational hazards. Such **awareness on basic rights at the workplace helps the returnees of irregular migrants realize the deficit of decent work conditions they face when they engaged in surreptitious works** in host countries. Additionally, 55 staff of social partners were trained as trainers of labour inspection on OSH at construction sites. They are expected to disseminate the fundamental principles at the work place in the country and to raise awareness nation-wide.

Project participants, including the returnees of irregular migration, also received a series of skills training: local resource-based (LRB) road construction techniques that are at the core of the country's development plan, as well as business start-up and business administration trainings. As a result, some 250 young project participants, including the returnees, launched two business enterprises with the skills they obtained. Their motivation to continue to work on their own, even after the project ended, demonstrates the significance of the project. These efforts bore fruit and one of the newly established enterprises in Banjul (Community Road Development and Maintenance, or CODEM) successfully obtained its first contract outside the ILO project from the Kanifing Municipal Council, validating the EIIP's sustainable impacts. CODEM members internalized the EIIP method to take ownership of it, in order to scale up their construction techniques through on-the-job training with their first contract.





CODEM members working on a drainage system construction on the Kairaba Avenue after the ILO project

Job fairs were also organized during the project in collaboration with the Gambian Government and IOM in the regions where many returnees reside. More than 300 young women and men were matched with potential employers.

The project succeeded to contribute to developing entrepreneurship and enhancing employability at the same time for the returnees and the potential migrants alike.

## Mauritania

### *A Rural Just Transition and Migration*

Mauritania, a large-desert land with 4.1 million people, has faced a multitude of issues with border controls and migration management throughout its history, due to its geographically important location and its vast land area, as a migrant sending and receiving country as well as a transit destination.

An IOM survey in 2019 shows that more and more migrants from West African countries (many from Senegal, Mali, and Guinea) have been seeking employment opportunities in the country's fast growing fishery and construction sectors.<sup>3</sup> This trend is combined with outward migration of Mauritians. The survey further shows that while most of the migrants in the country (94% of estimated 84,000 migrant residents) in

the capital area of Nouakchott have secured employment opportunities, less than 40% of them intended to stay in the country for a longer period of time.

This complicated dynamism of internal and external migratory flows can be interpreted as a continuum from the country's nomadic history. Mauritania faces a lack of natural resources for the basic human nutritional needs and to secure pastoral lands for nomadic herders. People often overcame these challenges through seasonal migration. In 1970's, increasing drought and desertification forced many rural Mauritians to settle in Nouakchott. The city then became overcrowded with an increasing informal economy.

Desertification exacerbates the situation in the country. Since much of its citizens rely on subsistence farming, recurring droughts result in a high level of poverty with the possibility of famine in extreme cases. In addition, conflicts and political instability in the Sahel region and subsequent immigration into Mauritania have pressured the domestic labour market, leading to the severe competition between Mauritians and migrants to secure scarce resources, pushing many into the informal economy in urban slums.

As such, the concentration of the population has taken place in urban areas around Nouakchott with an increasing rate of informal economy. Livelihood

<sup>3</sup> IOM (2019). New IOM Data Collection Reveals Latest Migratory Trends in Mauritania. Web, December 10 2019. <https://www.iom.int/news/new-iom-data-collection-reveals-latest-migratory-trends-mauritania>.





Participants of “Chantier École” project in Mauritania

opportunities in rural areas where still many vulnerable people reside are limited and people feel left behind. Rural-urban migration is anticipated to continue to increase, with the climate-induced push factors.

The *ILO Convention concerning promotion of rural employment for poverty reduction* (2008), noted, “decent work for all will not be achieved unless rural poverty is reduced”. **Tackling environmental challenges, severe desertification in the case of Mauritania and employment creation in rural areas can be achieved together.**

The EIIP supports job creation through eco-construction techniques in the Southeast rural region of the country where potential migrants reside. Through a series of such projects, the ILO operationalizes the International Labour Standards and reaches out to the vulnerable groups in rural areas at the same time as to achieve a just transition<sup>4</sup> to a greener economy.

The ILO’s intervention in Mauritania provided a package of on-site training through an EU-funded project “*Chantier école*”, where young women and men, many of whom are in rural areas, acquired hands-on skills highly in demand in the labour market. Participants of the training received a certificate of competence authorized by the national certification authority and improved their employability. This intervention has been scaled up with a new project

*PECOBAT*, financed by the EU and AFD, specifically targeting the vulnerable youth in rural areas where urban migration is taking place at a rapid speed. Young people were integrated into the fast growing building construction sector in order to provide their livelihood means. The ILO has also trained thousands of young Mauritians in the fishery sector under the *PROMOPECHE* project financed by the EU. The project incorporates value chain analysis as well as road construction activities around fish landing points to improve the conditions for the landing, storage and conservation of fish products as well as trade. Recall here that the construction and fishery sectors are witnessing a fast growth in the country, with the highest employment absorption potentials.

The techniques and materials used in the variety of EIIP projects in Mauritania are eco-friendly, with a maximum use of renewable energy and locally available resources. With this local resource-based (LRB) approach, these activities could be replicated by other national initiatives, promoting the country ownership for sustainable development and a just transition. The EIIP initiatives in the country are currently further expanding to target Malian refugees around refugee camps in rural locations to enhance social cohesion between host communities and refugee population through collaborative construction works. These new projects are financially supported by the United States, Japan, and UNHCR.

<sup>3</sup> For more details, please see ILO (2015). “Guidelines for a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all.”



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A Mauritanian woman on “Chantier École” project learning the topography techniques on the job

### Tunisia

#### Decent Work for Potential Migrants

The year 2010 and 2011 saw a historic overturn of the country's 23-year political regime, eventually leading to the democratization of the country. The Jasmine Revolution, named after its national flower, was caused by the people's frustration in political freedoms, poor living conditions, and finally yet importantly, a high unemployment rate, which peaked during these years. The remnants of people's frustration started to expand to the other countries in the region, shaping the movement of Arab Spring. An underlying key issue of this political movement has been a lack of employment opportunities. After the revolution, the country is now facing the challenge for socio-economic transformation, under a difficult situation with stagnating employment prospects.

Despite the drastic change in the political environment, an increasing number of young Tunisians still choose to go to the North through irregular routes. The Tunisian Government is tasked to monitor the unauthorized use of the country's ports for irregular entrance into the EU.

However, given the nature of irregular migration, effective border control poses a significant challenge, while migrants' illegal status in the host countries also makes it difficult for tracking reliable data and understanding the whole picture. Without reliable information on the irregular migration, many policy measures face difficulties reaching to the people most in need.

Under this difficult circumstance following the revolution and subsequent socio-economic instability, the ILO launched in 2012 a project entitled “Support Programme

*for the Development of Under-privileged Areas.”* The project has targeted five most disadvantaged and isolated governorates of the interior part of the country; namely Siliana, Kef, Kasserine, Sidi Bouzid, and Gafsa, where potential migrants often feel there is no other means to secure their livelihoods but through irregular migration.

This participatory ILO project in vulnerable areas promoted the engagement of all local actors to tackle the unemployment issues collectively. The project created more than 152,000 workdays in infrastructure construction works with the use of local materials and the training of more than 200 youths. 50 Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) developed their businesses through the project, including 10 SMEs which were newly created due to the opportunity generated through this ILO project. 10 cooperatives now employ 200 women in rural areas who have also been trained and certified in processing agricultural products.

These livelihood opportunities in the processing of agricultural products resulted from the economic diversification that has taken place due to the infrastructure development by the project, as the benefits of irrigation infrastructure construction had spillover effects from the local farmers of the fruit and vegetables to those who process the products, namely the women in rural areas.

As is evident from this example, a simple **infrastructure development with an employment-intensive approach has local multiplier effects that benefit the rural population, spreading its seeds to create new employment opportunities elsewhere.** As such, the



Cobblestone paving with marble wastes in Sidi Bouzid, Tunisia

outcome of EIIP interventions go beyond the initially intended immediate income security and employment creation. It reaches to the potential migrants who are in search of jobs.

## Recommendations

### ✓ Create decent job opportunities in countries of origin to reduce irregular migration

In order to mitigate the risk of irregular migration, the EIIP intervention creates decent work opportunities in the countries of origin, particularly for young people in rural areas who are prone to embark on perilous journeys. The EIIP approach not only creates immediate employment opportunities and generates income most notably in the construction sector, but also enhances the employability of the participants through a series of training schemes. Where applicable, the EIIP also offers entrepreneurship and business development support for long-term sustainable outcomes. The EIIP approach lifts up the marketable life-long skills of individuals in the countries of origin, while serving as an immediate means of social protection.

The newly constructed infrastructure through EIIP contributes in turn to local economic development. The EIIP promotes the use of locally available resources and materials with the due consideration of local knowledge, experiences and technologies. At the project design stage, potential local multiplier effects induced by the purchase of local materials are assessed, with the view to stimulating the local market along the value-chain. This has a long-term impact on not only the commodity markets but also the labour market and employment prospects, much needed in the countries of origin.

### ✓ Promote reintegration of returnees to restore their hopes and a sense of belonging in their countries of origin

The EIIP assists the reintegration of returnees of irregular migration by specifically targeting the beneficiaries with the view to creating contacts between people from different backgrounds. This includes interactions among recent returnees of irregular migration, people from host communities, refugees, women and men, with or without educational and/or professional backgrounds.

A sense of belonging in the community space restores the hopes of returnees of irregular migration, who

often feel frustrated with their given situations. Collaborative works increase the unity within their own communities towards achieving development objectives collectively.

### ✓ Raise awareness of decent work conditions, often in deficit in host countries when migration is irregular

The ILO, in its project interventions, promotes the implementation of International Labour Standards and decent work practices. These standards include the basic rights of workers. These rights are often taken for granted, yet are often in deficit when a migrant engages in economic activities with irregular means in host countries. The EIIP interventions operationalize the fundamental Conventions to protect the rights of workers, in addition to OSH, social dialogue, social security, and other sector-specific standards. Awareness of these rights and decent working conditions reduces the risks of potential migrants engaging in forms of employment where these basic rights of workers are not protected.

## Scale-up

This note explores different types of migration-related challenges and potential interventions with three country examples. In The Gambia, the re-integration of irregular migrants into the labour market of the home country poses a challenge. Mauritania faces the intensification of climate-induced rural-urban migration and the needs to rejuvenate local economies. Tunisia seeks to abate the potential migrants embarking on perilous journeys putting their lives in danger.

In all the three country cases, **the common root cause of this increasingly pressing issue of migration is the lack of employment and livelihood opportunities.** The EIIP proposes an intervention modality to provide an immediate means to tackle these challenges, with the long-term objectives of personal skills and infrastructure development for the people to restore their hopes in the countries of origin. In most cases, potential migrants and returnees of irregular migration are seeking opportunities to improve their livelihood and enhance their employment prospects in their own countries. Once they have the opportunity, they are able to – and willing to – build the future of their countries.



A project participant in Mauritania. With the skills he obtained through the EIIP project, he is now set to cultivate his future and build his own country.

### Key ILO / EIIP resources

1. EIIP Programme Document – Creating Jobs through Public Investment. ILO 2018  
[https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/employment-intensive-investment/publications/WCMS\\_619821/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/employment-intensive-investment/publications/WCMS_619821/lang--en/index.htm)
2. Promoting Decent Work for Indigenous and Tribal People through Employment and Investment Programs. ILO 2018  
[https://www.ilo.org/employment/Whatwedo/Publications/policy-briefs/WCMS\\_638360/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/employment/Whatwedo/Publications/policy-briefs/WCMS_638360/lang--en/index.htm)
3. Building A Gender-Equitable Future through Employment Intensive Investment Programmes. ILO 2018  
[https://www.ilo.org/employment/Whatwedo/Publications/policy-briefs/WCMS\\_638360/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/employment/Whatwedo/Publications/policy-briefs/WCMS_638360/lang--en/index.htm)
4. Job Creation for Syrian Refugees and Host Communities: Employment Intensive Investment Strategies in Jordan and Lebanon. ILO 2018  
[https://www.ilo.org/employment/Whatwedo/Publications/policy-briefs/WCMS\\_648055/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/employment/Whatwedo/Publications/policy-briefs/WCMS_648055/lang--en/index.htm)
5. Tunisia: Empowering Women through the Induced Effects of Investments for Economic Diversification. ILO 2019  
[https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/employment-intensive-investment/publications/WCMS\\_675196/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/employment-intensive-investment/publications/WCMS_675196/lang--en/index.htm)
6. Local investment for climate change adaptation: Green jobs through green works. ILO 2011  
[https://www.ilo.org/asia/publications/WCMS\\_172716/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/asia/publications/WCMS_172716/lang--en/index.htm)
7. Tunisia: Empowering Women through the Induced Effects of Investments for Economic Diversification. ILO 2019  
[https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/employment-intensive-investment/publications/WCMS\\_675196/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/employment-intensive-investment/publications/WCMS_675196/lang--en/index.htm)
8. ILO Future of Work High-Level Dialogue Report. ILO 2019  
[https://www.ilo.org/skills/info/public/pr/WCMS\\_724751/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/skills/info/public/pr/WCMS_724751/lang--en/index.htm)

### Contact:

Employment Policy Department  
Development and Investment Branch  
Job Creation through Public Investment Unit

International Labour Office  
4, route des Morillons  
CH-1211 Geneva 22, Switzerland

For more information on links between infrastructure investment and employment creation, visit the website of the Employment Intensive Investment Programme:

<http://www.ilo.org/global/topics/employment-intensive-investment/lang--en/index.htm>