Asli Selin Okyay, Luca Barana and Coleen Boland (eds)

Moving Towards Europe
Diverse Trajectories and Multidimensional Drivers of Migration across the Mediterranean and the Atlantic
Chapter 13 Conclusions

Abstract: The conclusions provide comparative reflections with a particular focus on regional patterns regarding diverse origin contexts, as well as what happens en route or during consecutive, multiple journeys. Thus, it looks into how changing conditions in transit or alternative destination contexts inform migration processes and patterns as well as the timing and directions of movement, including from a gender and sexuality perspective. EU policies are assessed in relation to all these stages. Finally, the conclusions also discuss the initial impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and future prospects regarding all routes.

Keywords: regional patterns | diverse trajectories | multidimensional drivers | gender | European policies

A comprehensive look at the operation of drivers and shifting opportunity-constraint structures informing cross-border mobility dynamics across interlinking origin, transit, destination and host contexts in various spaces of mobility connecting the EU with South-Central and Western Asia, the Horn of Africa, West Africa and the Sahel, and Latin America and the Caribbean respectively, offer insights into comparative patterns when considering overall mixed migration patterns towards the EU in the past decade. These concluding observations highlight (changes in) key migration processes and trends emerging along the various identified routes, call for greater attention to the complex interplay between drivers operating across different contexts in which population movements unfold, and underline the ways in which EU policies and their ripple effects in relevant non-EU contexts as well as gender and sexuality dynamics play out along non-linear journeys. Given the time frame of analysis, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic necessarily enters this discussion, and contextualises some final thoughts on future prospects of mobility along each route.

13.1 Eastern Mediterranean Route

While of interest to the EU already since the late 1990s, mixed migration flows along the Eastern Mediterranean Route (EMR) originating in several regions of Asia have become a major policy concern in the last decade, particularly following the so-called ‘migration crisis’. Building on the policy repertoire that
was already in the making, the EU responded to the intensification of irregular crossings mainly of Syrians, Afghans and Iraqis by reinforcing the approach oriented at preventing spontaneous arrivals at its external borders. Besides hardening its own borders, externalising the management of cross-border mobility in origin and transit contexts has constituted one of the main policy lines. Partially delegating protection responsibilities has formed another increasingly important element targeting non-EU countries immediately subjected to large-scale displacement and sitting along the transit mobility trails towards Europe. With a view to stemming irregular flows arriving in the EU by minimising departures at the point of origin, addressing the drivers of migration and enforcing returns of those with no right to legal residence in the EU have become the main policy objectives vis-à-vis source countries.

The questions of who has the right to legal residence in the EU despite having arrived without authorisation (i.e., who is entitled to international protection), and who lacks such right and hence should be returned are inextricably linked to that of how drivers in origin contexts translate into individual motivations kicking off migration journeys. In relation to all these questions, a key assumption on which policies and policy categories are increasingly based relates to the distinction between ‘legitimate’ refugees versus ‘economic migrants’. The assumption is that what motivates migration should be neatly categorisable into either politically or economically motivated factors. A series of classification and hierarchisation exercises derive from this: countries that can be considered as ‘refugee-producing’ and nationalities that fit the legitimate refugee definition (increasingly equated with being directly targeted in situations of all-out war and active conflict), as well as gender-based and other social differences that include some and exclude others from qualifying as a person in need of protection (e.g., the case of single Afghan men in Turkey and the EU). This tendency has become increasingly visible in public and policy debates in Europe (Crawley and Skleparis 2018), while becoming more widespread also globally, with significant implications for migrants, asylum seekers and refugees.

The operation of drivers in the three EMR origin countries examined in this volume suggests a different account and calls for a nuanced approach. Conflict and violence, often heavily informed by foreign interventions and geopolitical rivalries, and their direct effects on physical safety play clear roles in informing migration within and from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan, in the latter two cases for more than a decade. However, it is also those effects of war and frustrated peace-building processes on livelihoods, infrastructure and access to basic services that inform the decisions of many who might not be directly affected by physical violence. As the conflict becomes protracted as in Afghanistan and Syria, or acquires
a cyclical nature as in Iraq, political and economic governance structures as well as rule of law erode and struggle to recover. This implies an almost permanent experience of insecurity for the populations in terms of livelihoods, fundamental rights or access to education, health and justice, affecting not only their daily lives, but also their ability to imagine and build a future. All three cases therefore confirm the point made by Crawley and Skleparis (2018: 53): to ‘fully appreciate the drivers of migration’ one needs to ‘examine the ways in which political and economic factors come together to shape the experiences of those living in times of war’, and ‘[t]he longer the conflict continues, the more complicated – and difficult to unpack – this relationship becomes’. This also underlines the importance of individual assessment of protection claims, and the flawed nature of making short-cuts between ‘legitimate’ claims and particular nationalities and/or gender groups.

While the case studies illustrate the need for nuancing the understanding of drivers so as to better account for the intertwinement between political, social and economic factors, they also call for a refinement of the still largely dominant idea that it is principally the conditions in countries of origin that drive mixed migration (somewhat directly) to the EU. The importance of secondary drivers in informing migration decisions and outcomes clearly emerges from these cases. Fragmented journeys or ‘serial migration of consecutive movements, separated by periods spent in one or more different locations’ (Crawley et al. 2016: 28) characterise Afghan mixed migration towards the EU in the last decade (in particular secondary movement from Iran). Conditions and experiences in Lebanon or Turkey, which were initially intended as destinations, also seem to have played a considerable role in Syrian refugees’ secondary movement towards Europe.1

Yet, while onward movement from countries like Iran, Pakistan, Turkey or Lebanon has been directed towards Europe, these countries have also continued to act as major destinations for both new arrivals from origin countries and secondary movement taking place within the region (e.g., movement of Afghans from Iran to Turkey). Secondary movement towards the EU, while requiring further attention, does not therefore imply that all or most migrants and refugees in these contexts leave their countries of origin intending to eventually move to Europe. In fact, according to a 2018 International Organisation for Migration

---

1 It should be noted however, that migration from Iraq during the 2015–16 peak seems to suggest a slightly different picture, with shorter and more direct journeys briefly transiting through Turkey possibly accounting for a larger share.
Asli Selin Okyay et al.

(IOM) Flow Monitoring survey, of the 3,173 migrants and refugees interviewed in Turkey between December 2017 and February 2018, 86 per cent of Syrians, 68 per cent of Iraqis and 64 per cent of Afghans indicated Turkey as their intended destination at the time of departure (IOM 2018).

However, as underlined by the notions of secondary drivers and fragmented journeys, decisions are readjusted as a response to altering conditions (e.g., the effects of the 2018 economic crisis in Iran on growing movement of Afghans towards Turkey) and to policy-informed constraints that migrants and refugees increasingly face in these contexts. As for the latter, the cases demonstrate that factors like legal uncertainty, persistent temporariness, irregularisation and risk of deportation have significant implications for access to formal employment, education or healthcare, reproducing insecure livelihoods and largely depriving people of future prospects. When considering such a restrictive turn, one should however also take into account that these countries – most of which already face mounting economic challenges – have been shouldering a disproportionately high share of protection responsibilities.

EU policies pay increasing attention to supporting refugee-hosting countries along major migration routes mainly through financial assistance. Such support typically finds its expression in the channelling of aid to these countries, where the objective is to build refugee and host community resilience through a shift from a humanitarian to a developmental approach. On the one hand, this policy can be seen as forming part of responsibility-sharing and following a global trend that attaches greater importance to investing in durable solutions for refugees and their host communities beyond emergency responses. On the other, the channelling of aid and the mainstreaming of migration into these countries’ development policies as part of this approach aim to address secondary drivers (particularly those that are related to livelihoods), so as to limit onward movement from these countries to the EU. Therefore, as the case studies showed (particularly in relation to the Syrian displacement), this policy approach is closely – if not mainly – linked to the objective of delegating protection responsibilities to third countries and minimising future arrivals in the EU through containing refugees and asylum seekers outside.

This approach therefore shifts responsibility to third countries, rather than sharing it more equitably – especially when one considers that EU financial assistance remains limited relative to the challenge faced by these countries and more importantly, that the EU largely lacks quantitatively and qualitatively meaningful resettlement and humanitarian admission schemes, i.e., responsibility-sharing mechanisms beyond financial assistance. Besides catalysing transactional approaches to protection and falling short of effectively remedying the precarity
faced by refugees in non-EU countries, this policy approach reproducing dynamics based on disproportionate distribution of responsibility becomes particularly questionable in terms of its sustainability. Considering that economic and socio-political capacities have already been increasingly overstretched in most refugee-hosting contexts, there is a necessity for the EU to move from the idea of ‘prevention through containment’ to ‘sustainable responsibility-sharing’, and from ‘developing others’ to a ‘multilevel partnership’.

In terms of (particular countries in) Europe as destination, the cases show that the main expectations informing this choice include being able to access physical safety, livelihoods, a secure legal status and basic services, in particular education. At the same time, whether one can reach the intended destination depends on how one can navigate opportunity-constraint structures encountered during the journey. The analyses suggest that changes in these structures particularly during and after the large-scale movement in 2015–16 played important roles in facilitating, impeding, affecting the timing or altering the pathways of cross-border mobility throughout the trails culminating at the south-eastern borders of the EU. In particular, the temporary opening up of a transit mobility corridor in 2015 enabling movement through to preferred destinations in Europe, which was arguably significantly informed by the sheer intensity of the Syrian refugee movement, seems to have shifted the opportunity-constraint structure, influencing decision-making (on whether/when to depart and where to move) by those considering embarking on the journey or moving onward.

The EU’s (gender-blind) policy response that, from early 2016 onwards, came in the form of enhanced mobility control at its borders and beyond; augmented political and financial investments in preventing departures from origin countries (most notably Afghanistan) and host and transit contexts (most notably Turkey); and intra-EU measures increasingly shrinking the protection space, has contributed to elevating the constraints. While varying in their timing, a shift from more open to restrictive policy frameworks aiming to limit new arrivals and encourage returns has been visible in all destination/host countries in the region, narrowing down and changing available destination alternatives. Increasing convergence towards restrictive policy frameworks in this broad space of mobility has implied growing insecurity and vulnerability for people on the move.

Cutting across origin, transit and host contexts is the role played by gender and sexuality: the case studies show that it is important to see the complex decision-making processes that women and individuals of diverse sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) go through at different phases of their journeys from an intersectional perspective. Whilst both women and LGBTQI+ individuals decide to leave in a context of discrimination, one needs to take into account
how this discrimination intersects with the outbreak of conflict, economic rights and needs of the self/family, considerations on security during the journey, as well as (beliefs about) the opportunity-constraint structures in origin, host, transit and destination countries. The interlinkages between these factors are complex. For example, once conflict erupted or intensified, discrimination has accelerated for both women and LGBTQI+ individuals in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria. At the same time, the revolution in Syria has also empowered women in their agency, while the opportunity-constraint structures also changed once they became sole breadwinners of the family. Once en route, women and mothers are at heightened risk of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in host, transit and destination contexts (i.e., also in Europe), while gender-blind migration and asylum policies in all these contexts exacerbate such risks. Furthermore, the case study on Iraq also highlights how Western-defined categories such as LGBTQI+/SOGI and the necessity to perform them visibly in order to be granted asylum can be highly problematic.

While research suggests that ‘[v]ictims of trafficking constitute a particularly gendered group, which increasingly includes minor girls’ (Boland and Tschaler 2021: 14), existing data and analyses on trafficking along the EMR and in Europe are unfortunately insufficient to reach sound conclusions on the representation of women/men/boys/girls among victims of trafficking. However, as the case studies demonstrate, migrant women/girls from the three countries face greater risks and are particularly subjected to SGBV and other forms of violence and exploitation during the journeys. Yet the case studies also suggest that unequal power relations between undocumented (and hence unprotected) people moving under precarious conditions and the smugglers, authorities, bandits or militias they relate to while en route, subject all – women, men, boys and girls – to experience some form of violence and abuse.

Finally, the analyses show that the Covid-19 pandemic had significant implications for both migration drivers and the opportunity-constraint structures shaping cross-border mobility along the EMR. The socioeconomic fallout deriving from the pandemic has deepened existing fragilities in origin contexts, for example in Afghanistan, by leading to rising urban poverty, inflation and food insecurity and further straining already limited capacities to absorb the pandemic-induced returns. In host countries, the pandemic, intersecting with other crises (e.g., economic downturn in Jordan/Turkey, multiple crises in Lebanon) has further impacted precarious livelihoods of refugees and migrants. The pandemic has also augmented the constraints for cross-border mobility and access to asylum through generalised border closures and mobility restrictions, as well as particular policy choices partially justified by public health concerns.
such as Greece’s temporary suspension of its asylum system in early 2020 and the increasing use and normalisation of pushbacks at the Greek borders in the post-pandemic context (Grandi 2022).

13.2 Central Mediterranean Route

The ‘migration crisis’ of 2014–17 has been a game-changer for European policy-making targeting the Central Mediterranean Route (CMR). A securitised approach aimed at deterring irregular migration from Africa and mainly based on externalisation and border controls has been established, without relevant modifications materialising in the following period despite shifting trends in irregular arrivals. As the analysis of the case studies in this volume has shown, such measures are often based on biased assumptions about the drivers of irregular migration from countries of origin and transit in Africa and beyond, and on a simplistic perspective on the functioning of the route, often framed as a linear trajectory from sending countries to Europe.

In fact, the assumption that migration trajectories along the CMR are easily conceived as linear journeys is challenged by the difficulties of defining the CMR itself as a ‘route’. The CMR is better understood as a fragmented ensemble of mobility and migratory trails originating in different regions in Africa – and even outside the continent – and converging on the Mediterranean coasts of Libya and Tunisia, before heading to Europe across the Mediterranean Sea.

Such complexity is also reflected in the divergence of drivers at play in the regions where movements on the CMR originate, namely the Horn of Africa, the Sahel and West Africa. These areas have presented stark differences in terms of political arrangements, economic trends and conflict dynamics during the last decade. Key institutional elements stand out, starting from the different circulation arrangements characterising these regions. Migrants from Mali and Nigeria are able to reach the borders of Libya and Algeria exploiting the opportunities posed by the free circulation regime of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and, concurrently, by consolidated regional mobility patterns and infrastructures, not limited to smuggling operations. Tellingly, not all movements from these countries have turned into irregular migration to Europe, even when conflict erupted in north-eastern Nigeria in 2009 and in northern Mali in 2012. The picture changes in the Horn of Africa, where the absence of a free circulation regime affects migratory attitudes in a completely different way, concurrently with the role played by the authoritarian political system in Eritrea. While the porosity of borders should always be taken into account as an important factor, it has been underlined how in Eastern Africa
migration poses mortal risks due to the dangerous crossing of borders, especially the militarised frontier of Eritrea. Such obstacles enhance also the appeal of smugglers operating on the first trails of travel out of the country (McMahon and Sigona 2016).

These different institutional environments faced by potential migrants in Eritrea, Mali and Nigeria also shed some light on the difficulty of drawing a deterministic link between the emergence of conflict, waves of political violence or economic downturns and irregular arrivals in Italy, bearing in mind that, with some fluctuations, the flows from these countries have all mainly followed the general pattern of the route, peaking in 2016. In this sense, the peculiarity of the Eritrean case as a country of origin emerges due to the persistence of structural political drivers that have not changed during the last decade, despite major geopolitical developments in the region.

Looking instead at other countries of origin on the CMR, changing conflict dynamics and evolving political drivers alone are not sufficient to determine the trends of unauthorised border crossings along the Mediterranean Sea. While political conditions in Eritrea are structural, key modifications have occurred both in Mali and Nigeria in different moments of the period under analysis. However, such evolutions did not unmistakably translate into shifts of the migratory flow at the concluding end of the CMR.

In fact, despite the divergence of political, economic and social drivers in countries of origin as diverse as Eritrea, Mali or Nigeria, movements from these countries have shown a comparable outcome in terms of irregular arrivals in Italy: they peaked in 2015–16 and, broadly speaking, during the migration crisis of 2014–17. These trends suggest that, in order to gain a better grasp of the drivers on the CMR, the analysis should look more carefully at conditions in countries of transit and how these areas have acted as amplifiers or bottlenecks for irregular migration at different moments in time. The case of emigration from Tunisia constitutes a partial exception among our case studies because of the country’s peculiar geographic proximity with Italy, which diminishes the significance of other contexts of transit, and the different pattern followed by irregular arrivals of Tunisians in comparison to the other nationalities included in this volume. However, it has been highlighted how the first wave of Tunisian migration in 2011 might have been also precipitated by the ‘simple’ opportunity posed by the momentary absence of border controls due the confusion and disorganisation of the police forces during the upheaval (Fargues 2017).

To move to the role of drivers and policies in countries of transit, elements such as the arrival of Syrian migrants in Libya in 2014 and the development of an operational smuggling infrastructure there and in the Sahel, especially in Niger,
have interacted with the growing instability in Mali and Nigeria, the downturn of the Nigerian economy in 2016 and the persistence of political repression in Eritrea in shaping the increase of irregular arrivals in Italy culminating in 2016. Also, the decreasing trend spotted in unauthorised border crossings in 2017–20 seems to have been largely affected by shifting conditions in areas of transit, such as the implementation of the EU-sponsored Anti-Trafficking Law in Niger and the multifaceted disrupting effects of the various phases of the Libyan conflict on smuggling business and irregular migration. Overall, it could be safely assumed that the flow of Sub-Saharan migrants on the CMR has been profoundly influenced by the changes occurring in the ‘alternative destination’\(^2\) of Libya since 2011: while these evolutions have not been unidirectional in incentivizing departures from the country, they have profoundly affected the context in which migratory decisions of potential migrants have been taken, one way or the other. For instance, the violence engulfing the western coast of Libya in the more recent years of the conflict has posed new obstacles to the activities of smugglers and has potentially enhanced neighbouring Tunisia’s role as an area of transit, as the increase in departures from the country since 2017 seems to suggest. However, this increasing trend in departures from Tunisia is not only connected to the crossing of Libya becoming even more dangerous, time-consuming and expensive over the years, due to the conflict and the lack of rule of law in the country, but it has been also facilitated by the change of EU policies in terms of externalisation and securitisation of borders.

As a reaction to the ‘migration crisis’, regions of origin for the CMR – the Horn of Africa, the Sahel and West Africa – have been the explicit targets of actions funded under the European Union Emergency for Africa Trust Fund since 2015. The EU intervened at all levels of the route – in countries of origin (Eritrea, Mali, Nigeria and Tunisia), of transit (Mali, Niger and Libya) and at the European border on the Mediterranean, deepening its collaboration on migration management with governmental authorities, for instance in Niger, and local actors in Libya. Member states like Italy have also been active in securing their borders since 2017.

It is complex to assess how these European and Italian policy actions aimed at enhancing cooperation on border management with countries like Niger and Libya have impacted on irregular movements, also depending on the benchmarks assumed to measure policy success (the reduction of irregular arrivals or

\(^{2}\) The role of Libya as an ‘alternative destination’ is a rather Eurocentric concept, but it is useful in explaining the attraction that the country has produced for foreign workers.
rather the humanitarian costs and level of protection guaranteed to migrants). Nonetheless, even if only in a partial fashion, the disruption of smugglers’ business model in Niger, accompanied by a deeper cooperation between the EU, Italy and Libyan authorities inaugurated in 2016–17, was followed by a dramatic decrease in the arrivals recorded by Frontex in Italy from July 2017. While conditions were shifting along the route, European policies seemed to be working, at least temporarily. However, without any significant change in the framework of European actions, 2020 saw the start of a new increase in the number of irregular arrivals on the CMR, while governments of countries on the route were seemingly adopting a more relaxed stance, for instance in Niger.

A final point about the importance of incorporating into the analysis the role of secondary drivers unfolding in countries of transit pertains to the wide-ranging consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic in the different geographical contexts crossed by the CMR, which predisposed EU-bound flows in unexpected ways in 2020. For instance, free circulation within ECOWAS and more broadly in the Sahel slowed during the first half of that year, due to border closures and containment measures put in place by several governments. Not only was circulation hindered, but thousands of people remained stranded at borders during those months, a new reason for them to stop in an already fragmented migratory trajectory. The pandemic highlights also a gendered dimension at play on the CMR. For instance, women – mostly of Sub-Saharan origin – transiting through Tunisia in 2020–21 have been more frequently affected than men by the socio-economic consequences of Covid-19: women more often experience a loss of income, reduced access to basic goods and services or increased racism and xenophobia, while migrant women with children have experienced an even more pronounced level of Covid-induced stress and anxiety than those traveling alone (Mixed Migration Centre 2021).

13.3 The Western Mediterranean Route and the Western African Route

In considering the Western Mediterranean Route (WMR) and Western African Route (WAR) case studies from a broader standpoint, it indeed seems evident that emerging, merging and shifting regional migration patterns on the route through Morocco or West Africa to Spain reflect the conflation of different factors, which may produce aggregate effects in acting concurrently across various stages and contexts of migrant journeys and decision-making. What follows includes the most relevant findings informing the past decade’s trajectories, with particular emphasis on the potential but not exclusive influence of: livelihood
strategies in origin contexts as affected by local and global drivers; informal networks as recourse vis-à-vis inconsistent national, intergovernmental and trans-governmental migration and asylum policy regimes (or lack of implementation and streamlining of these); both Mali and Morocco’s increasing role as transit (in addition to origin) countries as pertains to a wider geopolitical negotiation; and prioritisation of EU and member state securitisation interests over a more holistic, long-term view of migration governance and integrity of asylum systems, particularly resulting in gendered effects on flows along these routes.

To begin, structural drivers at the point of origin appear increasingly global in nature, from international security and development interventions to climate effects. In the case of Mali, for example, it may be that intensifying violent conflict throughout the country (and particularly in the north) could partially result from destabilising effects of international peacekeeping interventions over the past decade. This forms part of a greater international security and development nexus that could engender further violence and forced displacement, not exclusive to the Malian case, but also impacting Sub-Saharan African flows and transit through Mali overall (Boutellis and Zahar 2017; Di Razza 2018). Moreover, global climate change and its implications for food security, socioeconomic stability and overall livelihoods has increasingly emerged as a significant factor at play in Mali and the wider Sub-Saharan context, and climate cycle changes have affected migration patterns in Morocco as well (Hegazi et al. 2021; Van Praag 2021). Even the Covid-19 pandemic and its consequences for origin country economies and resulting societal well-being could be understood as part of the global effect on the local. This is not to dismiss local factors like the Tuareg uprising through 2009, the social and political response to Mali’s 2018 election, various increasing conflicts over access to land and resources in Mali, or Morocco’s 2016 Rif struggle (ACAPS 2018; Haïdara and Isbell 2018; Zaïreg 2018). Nor should observations on globalisation’s effects detract from migrant agency as to livelihood strategies, as exemplified by the Malian history and culture of gendered mobility, or long-established Moroccan diaspora networks (Bolay 2021; Berriane 2018).

In turning towards those drivers mediating migration and mobility in contexts of transit, the degree of capacity or willingness of state and regional actors to craft and implement migration governance, or the disparity between purported potential for authorised mobility versus the reality on the ground, should be considered in combination with disjointed legal avenues and administrative processes between states and regions. The Free Movement Protocols of ECOWAS allow for a national to move from one Member State to another for up to ninety days with valid documentation, thus facilitating regular migration flows within the region. Upon leaving the ECOWAS region and proceeding on
to North Africa and entering Morocco, movements may become irregular, as the ECOWAS free movement measures no longer apply, and migrants find limited options for regular pathways with even further limitations when opting for crossing from Morocco or West Africa into Spain and the EU.

Such fragmented migration regimes in turn relate to smuggling or informal networks that exercise significant influence on the manner and direction of migratory movements. Given the absence of recourse to the state or legal systems, it is argued that in the majority of cases, individuals who form part of the mixed migration flows from Africa along the WMR and WAR routes choose smuggling entities in order to facilitate their travel (Magallanes-Gonzalez 2020). The informal and precarious nature of these networks can then expose migrants not only to more dangerous and clandestine journeys, but also to trafficking and abuse with heavily gendered dimensions.

Forming part of these previous considerations about transit is the greater geopolitical context, consisting of competing interests, diverging diplomatic overtures versus discretionary practices, and corresponding inconsistent implementation of migration strategies, all of which have important repercussions for migrants. In particular, Morocco has become an increasingly crucial player over the past few decades and even more so in recent years, beyond its geographical location positioning at the crux of the WMR. Not only does it receive significant funds from the EU (the second largest recipient among EU neighbours), it also exercises its weight with Sub-Saharan African neighbours and in contesting the Western Sahara with Algeria. In combination, there is a lack of true opportunity for socioeconomic integration in the face of these unfulfilled or non-implemented migration commitments and policies (as well as the current Moroccan economic context) (Baida 2020).

Finally, in arriving at the destination stage within the overall route context, it is again evident that the observation and implementation of migration and asylum policies both in transit countries and in the reception and handling of asylum requests at the European border work in a mutually constitutive nature with migrants’ initiative or response in light of this management, affecting flows.

In this context, frequently documented discretionary and at times illegal procedures take place at the Spanish southern border of Ceuta and Melilla. These are visible in the news and civil society advocacy throughout the timespan under study, an example including the pushbacks and returns of unaccompanied minors in August of 2021 (De Vega 2021). As with similar critiques on the WMR, in terms of the WAR, advocacy organisations have condemned migration management policies in the Canaries as intentionally dissuasive mechanisms, isolating migrants and ultimately seeking their deportation, including via pushbacks.
Finally, reception conditions have been criticised as particularly lacking during 2020 with Covid-19 consequences and heightened arrivals (Monreal Gainza and Paredes 2021).

As a final consideration, when taking into account the gendered effects of inconsistent or irregular migration governance and how this relates to real or perceived constraint and opportunity structures regarding asylum processes, research to date on family strategies in accessing Spain via Morocco is notable. For example, it seems possible that whether or not a pregnancy was deliberate (i.e., often possibly a result of rape), both the mother herself or a smuggler or partner might consider this a strategy to avoid deportation and obtain family reunification rights upon arrival in Spain (Dubow and Kuschminder 2021; Tyszler 2019). It is also theorised that children can be a part of these gendered family mobility strategies: for example, Moroccan families may send their sons in an attempt to clear the fences of Ceuta and Melilla with the hopes of avoiding pushbacks as minors are entitled to international protection (Queirolo Palmas 2019).

Finally, regarding the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, despite the intermittent Spanish border closures related to the pandemic and crisis, arrivals continue on the WMR and WAR, with flows even shifting from other routes, given the pandemic’s effects on movement restrictions and migration decision-making. As a result, despite and due to Covid-19 mobility complications, arrivals on the WMR and WAR continue, and in some cases are overwhelming reception systems. The socioeconomic consequences of the pandemic for origin and transit countries along the WMR and WAR also point to future migration trends. The impact of the pandemic has slowed efforts towards development goals among African countries, and there has been an estimated 3 per cent contraction of Sub-Saharan Africa’s economy in 2020 (Nwuke 2021).

13.4 Atlantic Route

Recent trends on the Atlantic Route illustrate how the volume, direction, gender composition and forms of migration are shaped by varying combinations of macro- and meso-level factors that produce aggregate effects on non-linear migration and asylum trajectories. The Atlantic Route demonstrates many context-specific characteristics, but in particular manifests the ways in which configurations of drivers in the transit context are inextricably linked and operate in parallel with the contexts of origin and destination.

In light of this, what follows are the most relevant observations as to key drivers, trajectories and policies informing the Atlantic Route in the period under study, namely: (1) local to global precipitating and predisposing drivers,
including deteriorating social protections and humanitarian crisis within the region, in combination with US interventions and policies, all of which inform both origin and transit contexts and trajectories; (2) the air route as a former limitation on mobility and as a socioeconomic constraint on demographic profiles, as contrasted with a shift in demographic profiles in light of cheaper air travel combined with volumes of human movement; (3) the ancestral and historical ties between Spain and LAC states affecting both the nature of migration patterns and interrelated policies; (4) in both the LAC and EU contexts, diverging and evolving definitions and policies as to who and what merits international protection directly affecting the way migration and asylum systems accommodate human mobility; relatedly, a lack of consistency in asylum system procedures or real practices at member state and EU levels that has important ramifications for irregular migration; and finally, (5) gendered dimensions of LAC nationals’ migration not only reflected in global care chains, but also in the increasingly endemic structural violence against women in the origin and transit contexts, linked to historic or current interventions and policies in destination countries.

To begin, in looking at the case studies, a very general and simplistic understanding could point to proximate drivers of persistent and gradually deteriorating economic, political, security and environmental conditions, with predisposing factors including political instability as well as lack of security in the context of weak states and government corruption, alongside deepening inequalities brought about by interconnected economic instability.

In combination with this and as referenced in the case studies, social protections can be limited or entirely lacking in several LAC states. What social protections are put in place can often be short-term, partisan policies without universal coverage and long-term impacts, especially for vulnerable populations. As a result, migration dynamics reflect more transit and unstable migration, as traditional labour migration has been replaced with survival migration and forced migration, or in the case of Europe, migration for social reproduction. This migration is non-linear as the case of Europe illustrates; for example, Venezuelans may transit through and stay for long periods of time in countries within the LAC region before moving on to Spain.

However, closer inspection reveals that conditions in the origin countries cannot simply be considered outside of the migration, security and development nexus, particularly in light of US intervention, and later restrictive and fluctuating migration policies. To begin, the advent of neoliberal globalisation from the 1980s forward, led by the US among other actors, was based in implementing structural adjustment programmes in regions including that of the LAC states, arguably leading to unequal development, deteriorating regional conditions and
forced migration (Delgado-Wise 2014). At the same time, migration policies in receiving countries like the US have not always accommodated consequent, or even initially invited, migration. Moreover, significant US foreign policy intervention is witnessed in the case studies. A first instance is US involvement in the Honduran economy in the 1980s, alongside US military presence and support for allegedly corrupt political leaders through to the present (Nevins 2016). Meanwhile, Venezuela’s so-called failed state and collapsed economy can be attributed to multiple factors, although US trade sanctions undoubtedly play a role, and could be contributing to exacerbating the humanitarian crisis and displacement (Weisbrot and Sachs 2019). Colombia similarly has received controversial US military and securitisation aid from the 1980s forward articulated in terms of a drug war, marked by a shift in this framing and bilateral cooperation in a post-9/11 context (Crandall 2002).

Meanwhile, regional migration is characterised by complex, diverse and non-linear migration, rather than by the transborder patterns that characterised the region in the past. Both regionally and within states, in addition to the vacuum in protections outlined, infrastructure projects resulting from interventions described above, as well as environmental crisis, contribute to internal displacement. Any destabilisation in the region, and how it affects mixed migratory movements in particular, has been influenced by transit and destination countries that implement a discretionary use of any refugee protection norms (i.e., those included in the 1950 Convention or Cartagena Declaration instruments). In addition, there have been policies increasing penalisation for border crossings, border removals and deportation under the Clinton, Bush and Obama administrations (Chishti et al. 2017). In the period under study, Obama and Trump inherited the comparatively most robust migration enforcement regime both legally and in terms of resources (ibid.). Most recently, however, migration policies under the Trump administration—both restrictive, preventative and punitive—in combination with strong anti-immigration rhetoric towards Central American migrant caravans, inform an increase in Central American migration to Spain and Europe as diverted from the US from 2016 onwards (Ojea 2018).

Secondly, all of this has implications for migration to Europe, both in influencing origin contexts as well as in possibly presenting Europe as an alternative destination to the US. Here, it is important to highlight potential mitigating effects of air travel, more or less necessary in accessing Europe. For example, before the ten-year period under study and in the previous century, migration patterns were either less voluminous as in the case of Colombia or Honduras, or composed of more elite populations as in the case of Venezuela (Dekocker 2018).
However, increasingly reduced costs and a greater variety of available routes in recent decades could go towards explaining the past decade’s increased migration from LAC countries to Europe (Palma 2015). This may also have gendered effects in terms of family migration patterns, as instead of prioritising women migrants reaching Europe as a livelihood strategy, families may perceive it as possible to bring additional family members, thus affecting the feminisation of migration to Europe.

Thirdly, this in turn relates to the historical and ongoing relationship between Spain and LAC countries that demonstrates how configurations of drivers, at the route and international level, can alternate back and forth between origin, transit and destination. By way of illustration, it seems to be the case that Spain proves a preferred destination country among the member states, much of which could be traced to historical context, but no doubt primarily to Spanish emigration in the twentieth century and current ancestral ties with the LAC region. Integration of LAC-origin migrants may be improved thanks to family ties and diaspora networks, common language, greater acceptance of certain migrant ethnicities by Spanish society, and accepted international care regimes, among other factors (Hierro 2016). Apart from labour market and migrant integration policies and programmes, part of this relationship is also built into Spanish nationalisation policies. In addition, the Spanish provision for expedited nationality by residence after two years (versus ten) for those from Ibero-American countries may allow for the regularisation of irregular migrants, depending on the ease and duration of the process, and if migrants perceive that this is a viable option. In this sense, despite whatever historical groundwork lies behind them, it is the current and developing EU and Spanish migration policies that undoubtably shape decision-making.

Fourthly, a primary issue in considering asylum-seeker and mixed migration from LAC regions to Europe and Spain is the context in which LAC nationals seek international protection, and their ultimately limited protection in this sense. Precarious social protection systems in the LAC region have been put under further stress with the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic (Vera Espinoza et al. 2021). Most notably, life-threatening security and crime conditions in their origin countries, which their respective governments are unable to protect them from, may not be considered sufficient for individuals to meet international protection requirements in Spain and in Europe. For example, in the case of migration from Honduras to Spain, even as the Spanish justice system ruled in 2017 that victims of the maras could meet requirements for international protection, in 2019 only 226 of 6,780 Honduran asylum applications to Spain received favourable outcomes (CEAR 2020). The Colombian case is also striking, as in
2019 only 0.91 per cent of those Colombian nationals whose cases were resolved received a favourable determination in receiving international protection (*ibid*). These low acceptance rates may influence whether those LAC nationals who entered via a tourist visa weigh the opportunity cost of attempting the asylum process at all, versus remaining in an unauthorised capacity. Moreover, asylum procedures consist of long wait times. By way of example, even in order to register for applying for asylum, 2019 appointment waiting times in Spain could reach up to a year, with an average of six months’ wait time (*AIDA* 2020). The length and consistency of asylum procedures can thus serve as a deterrent in practice, even if not consciously written into policy.

These limitations in administrative procedures or real practices are not exclusive to the Spanish and EU context, again demonstrating how consideration of these patterns requires a non-linear understanding of the connections between origin, transit and destination. International human rights frameworks and intergovernmental or transgovernmental agreements still do not sufficiently fulfil legal obligations. In terms of interregional cooperation, the LAC region has some notable mechanisms in place, including the migrant rights provided under Mercosur (*Lavenex* 2019). At the same time, the Venezuelan example can demonstrate how nationals simply do not have access to documentation that they are legally entitled to, thus leading to their mobility taking on an irregular nature in crossing any international border, regional or not (*John* 2019). Moreover, met with overwhelming demand resulting from humanitarian crisis, some countries within the region have tightened their reception and regularisation provisions for Venezuelans, with originally human rights–oriented asylum regimes implementing more restrictive policies (*Wallace and Mortley* 2021). In this sense, and in light of recent policy changes in several countries, progressive legislation and regional agreements largely are not applicable to these new patterns of increasing migration, which are managed with presidential decrees and ad hoc policies like temporary permits that relegate migrants to a secondary juridical status (*Acosta and Brumat* 2020). This demonstrates the variable and sometimes conflicting effects of migration and asylum policies, as restrictions within the region can either: affect whether arrivals to Europe become irregular (due to policies in transit countries); lead to consideration of Europe as an asylum destination if it had not been before; or preclude ever reaching Europe.

Fifthly, the systemic nature of human trafficking growing within the region has amplified migrant vulnerability. In that sense, in considering a wholistic view of these patterns, it is important to stress the gendered characteristics of Atlantic Route migration and how this speaks to the overall arch of globalised processes, transactions and mobilities that configure such mobility. Again, this of course
relates to the gendered nature of movement in terms of feminised global care chains and family livelihood strategies characterising LAC country migration to Europe. The Global North, including the EU, benefits from this transnational labour system, which can often take place outside of formal arrangements and can subject labourers to compounded vulnerabilities, including involvement in smuggling and trafficking networks (Sassen 1998). Such phenomena are interrelated with the case study observations of increasing structural violence against women in origin and transit contexts. In particular, in the Central American case, violence against women and other minority groups is observed to be worsening, as those committing the violence operate with impunity, continuing these practices alongside the state's inaction or lack of protection (Menjívar and Walsh 2017).

Given the transnational nature of these processes and human mobilities, this amplified violence against women and other minority groups in the LAC region should not be decoupled from the policies and interventions of destination countries that may have played a role in shaping this systemic violence. This is a trend that can be witnessed throughout any observations made as to shifts and patterns in the direction, composition and volume of migration along the Atlantic Route in the ten-year period under examination. In particular, the irregular nature of mobilities seems to be inextricably linked to fragmented or inconsistent migration and asylum governance, with not only the US implicated in the origin and transit contexts, but the integrity of systems in Spain and the EU factoring significantly into shaping migration to Europe. Ultimately, of course, all of these observations as to the Atlantic Route must be understood within a more nuanced picture of complex migrant decision-making processes couched within fluctuating real and perceived constraint and opportunity structures.

Finally, the repercussions of the Covid-19 pandemic surface as one of the most obvious ongoing developments. Of course, the pandemic has had profound public and population health as well as socioeconomic impacts. The LAC region accounts for a disproportionately high number of confirmed cases of Covid-19 and deaths worldwide, representing over 30 per cent of deaths globally, although it only makes up 8.4 per cent of the world’s population (ECLAC and PAHO 2021). There continue to be significant gaps in health access and vaccine coverage. This evidently augments earlier described inequalities in the region. Indeed, the continued repercussions in the LAC region, including economic impacts, certainly precipitate future migration. LAC experienced the worst economic performance of all developing regions, with its most serious economic contraction in 120 years in the year 2020, and it is not expected to bounce back to 2019 figures in 2021. It is estimated that 22 million more people fell into poverty in 2020
Vulnerable populations were hit hardest, which can include women, children, indigenous people, persons of African descent, LGBTQI+ persons, rural populations, persons with disabilities, and crucially, migrants, who can intersect with several of these categories.

In that respect, migrants likely faced further loss or breach of human rights. The pandemic witnessed authoritarian regimes become emboldened or further bolstered in the region, with human rights violations multiplied or manifested in new ways (Voces del Sur 2021). Migrants’ human rights were further compromised in that those already in precarious situations were subject to further exposure, with authorities in transit and destination countries relegating migrants to situations of overcrowding and not acting in compliance with Covid-19 protocols. Critically, many migrant groups have been left stranded by border closures (Manetto 2021). This underlines the continued prioritisation of securitisation and the reluctance to craft long-term, sustainable migration policy, both within the region and further abroad.

References


Chishti, Muzaffar, Sarah Pierce and Jessica Bolter (2017), ‘The Obama Record on Deportations: Deporter in Chief or Not?’, in Migration Information Source, 26 January, https://www.migrationpolicy.org/node/15819

Crandall, Russell (2002), Driven by Drugs. U.S. Policy toward Colombia, Boulder/London, Lynne Rienner

Crawley, Heaven et al. (2016), Destination Europe? Understanding the Dynamics and Drivers of Mediterranean Migration in 2015, MEDMIG Final Report, November, https://www.compas.ox.ac.uk/?p=8982


De Vega, Luis (2021), ‘Las listas de las últimas devoluciones de menores a Marruecos’, in El País, 19 August


Conclusions


Manetto, Francesco (2021), ‘Una nueva caravana con cientos de migrantes marcha de la frontera sur a Ciudad de México’, in El País, 24 ss


Palma, Mauricio (2015), ‘¿Pais de emigracion, inmigracion, tránsito y retorno? La formación de un sistema de migración colombiano’, in *Oasis*, No. 21, pp. 7–28, https://doi.org/10.18601/16577558.n21.02


Vera Espinoza, Marcia et al. (2021), ‘Towards a Typology of Social Protection for Migrants and Refugees in Latin America during the COVID-19 Pandemic’, in
Conclusions

Comparative Migration Studies, Vol. 9, Article 52, https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-021-00265-x


Zaireg, Reda (2018), ‘King Mohammed VI’s Speech: How the Street Became Morocco’s Main Political Player’, in Middle East Eye, 6 August, https://www.middleeasteye.net/node/72294