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The paradox of educational integration for migrant youth: From policy interventions to labour Market

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Abstract

Migration paths of young people are profoundly shaped by the institutional environments, they encounter in host societies, with education systems occupying a particularly uncertain position. However, schools are traditionally conceived as a way of social mobility and integration, places where ability and hard work are meant to outweigh social background. Yet for migrant youth, this pledge of merit driven success often bumps with structural barriers rooted in ethnicity, nationality, and socio- economic status. Nonetheless, the diversity of education systems across national contexts further complicates this landscape, as institutional arrangements, tracking mechanisms, language support programs, teacher training, and resource allocation vary considerably in their capacity to accommodate and contain difference. Furthermore, this raises a fundamental and a crucial question: to what extent do education systems serve as pathways to integration or mechanisms of social classification for migrant youth, and how do institutional practices from classroom interventions to vocational orientation and training shape their access to opportunity or reinforce their marginalization in racialized labour markets?

The answer is neither simple nor uniform, as educational institutions reflect underlying tensions between their integrative ideals and their role in maintaining social hierarchy. To understand how these tensions arise, it is necessary to examine not only official policies, but also hidden curricula, and the subtle ways in which differences are translated into recognised diversity.

Keywords: Migration, Education, Integration, Labour Market.

Type: Theoretical research.

I. Introduction

Morocco occupies a strategically important position in global migration patterns. Historically, the Kingdom served as a primary source of international emigration, with approximately 3.1 to 3.25 million Moroccan nationals

residing abroad as of 2020¹, the second-highest exodus in Africa after Egypt. However, within the past two decades, Morocco has undergone a demographic and geopolitical transformation, emerging as a destination country for sub-Saharan African migrants seeking educational advancement and improved economic opportunities.

Additionally, not only in Morocco but worldwide Education has long been portrayed as the great equalizer and a crucial social institution capable of mitigating inherited disadvantage and offering individuals the opportunity to improve their life chances through effort and ability. For migrant youth in particular, schooling is often framed as the primary route to social integration, economic participation, and long-term belonging in host societies. Families, policymakers, and educators alike invest education with strong moral and political expectations: that it can transform migration into opportunity.

At the same time, global migration dynamics have intensified. Increasing numbers of young people migrate with their families or independently, driven by conflict, economic inequality, educational aspirations, or a combination of these factors. As a result, schools across many national contexts have become more diverse in linguistic, cultural, and socio-economic terms. This diversification has placed education systems under pressure to reconcile ideals of equality with increasingly complex student populations.

Despite Morocco's commitment to inclusion, a persistent gap remains between the promises of educational integration and the lived realities of migrant youth. Across contexts, migrant students are overrepresented in lower academic tracks, underperform in standardized assessments, and experience more precarious transitions into the labour market. This gap raises uncomfortable questions about whether education systems genuinely function as mechanisms of integration, or whether they instead reproduce existing social inequalities under the guise of meritocracy.

Moreover, the central paradox addressed in this paper lies in the dual function of education systems. On the one hand, they promote ideals of meritocracy, equality of opportunity, and social mobility. On the other hand, they often contribute to the reproduction of social hierarchies by sorting students along lines of class, ethnicity, and nationality. For migrant youth, this contradiction is particularly pronounced. Besides, migrant youth frequently confront structural barriers that undermine these claims. Limited access to culturally valued forms of

knowledge, unequal school resources, early academic tracking, and discriminatory expectations all shape educational trajectories in ways that cannot be explained by individual effort alone. Ethnicity, nationality, and socio-economic status intersect to position migrant youth unequally within education systems from an early stage. This contradiction is not simply the result of poorly implemented policies. Rather, it reflects deeper tensions within education systems themselves tensions between inclusion and control, recognition and normalization, integration and classification.

This paper constitutes an initiative to answer to a crucial question nowadays which is about **to what extent do education systems serve as pathways to integration versus mechanisms of social classification for migrant youth?** The core argument advanced here is that educational institutions reflect fundamental tensions between integrative ideals and structural inequalities. These tensions are reproduced through policies, classroom practices, and vocational guidance, ultimately shaping migrant youth's labour market trajectories in ways that often reinforce existing hierarchies rather than dismantle them.

II. Theoretical frameworks and conceptual foundations

2.1 Background and Context

Morocco occupies a strategically important position in global migration patterns. Historically, the Kingdom served as a primary source of international emigration, with approximately 3.25 million Moroccan nationals residing abroad as of 2020, the second-highest exodus in Africa after Egypt. However, within the past two decades, Morocco has undergone a demographic and geopolitical transformation, emerging as a destination country for sub-Saharan African migrants seeking educational advancement and improved economic opportunities.

The confluence of several factors has driven this transformation:

- **Geographic Position:** Morocco's location as a gateway between Africa and Europe positions it as a natural hub for intra-African mobility and skills transfer.
- **Economic Growth:** Sustained economic development with GDP growth averaging 4% from 1980-2010 created comparative advantages for

¹ European Training Foundation. (2021). *Skills and migration country fiche: Morocco 2021* (Final version). [https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2022-](https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2022-05/ETF%20Skills%20and%20Migration%20Country%20Fiche%20MORO_CCO_2021_EN%20Final.pdf)

[05/ETF%20Skills%20and%20Migration%20Country%20Fiche%20MORO_CCO_2021_EN%20Final.pdf](https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2022-05/ETF%20Skills%20and%20Migration%20Country%20Fiche%20MORO_CCO_2021_EN%20Final.pdf)

migrants seeking opportunities unavailable in their countries of origin.

- **Political Repositioning:** Under King Mohammed VI's leadership, Morocco adopted an Africa-centric foreign policy culminating in the Kingdom's return to the African Union in 2017 after a 33-year absence.
- **Educational Expansion:** Morocco's significant investment in higher education has attracted approximately 15,000 sub-Saharan African students annually, creating a substantial student migrant population.

2.2 Migrant Youth

Migrant youth refers to individuals, typically aged 15 to 24, who move from one region or country to another, often due to economic, social, or political factors. This demographic faces unique challenges related to integration, identity, education, and access to services, influenced by their migratory status and the socio-cultural contexts of their new environments.² Young people migrate for a plethora of reasons. The decision to migrate is often related to important life transitions, such as obtaining higher education, finding and starting work, or getting married.³

Migrant youth in Morocco are a diverse group, including those transiting to Europe, settling in Morocco, and facing significant risks like exploitation and trafficking, particularly unaccompanied minors, who often leave due to economic pressures and aspirations for a better life. International organizations like [IOM Morocco](#) and [IOM Morocco](#) support Moroccan efforts, such as the National Immigration and Asylum Strategy (SNIA), to provide protection, education, and social services, while local NGOs like CSM offer integration and intercultural programs.⁴ Moroccan youth themselves also experience migratory pressures, seeking opportunities amidst economic challenges, yet many remain hopeful, with job creation being a top concern.

² Academia.edu. (2025). Migrant youth research papers. https://www.academia.edu/Documents/in/Migrant_Youth

³ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. (2013). World youth report: Youth and migration. <https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/youth/fact-sheets/youth-migration.pdf>

⁴ International Organization for Migration. (2024). Study on the communication channels used by unaccompanied and separated children and youth (nationals and migrants) in Morocco [Report].

2.3 Integration: Between Consensus and Contestation

Integration is frequently invoked as a key goal of education policy, yet it remains conceptually ambiguous. Historically, integration has encompassed economic participation, social mobility, civic engagement, and cultural belonging. In practice, however, integration is often conflated with assimilation the expectation that migrant youth adapt to dominant norms while minimizing their differences. This tension is evident in debates over diversity versus conformity.

While policies may celebrate multiculturalism rhetorically, institutional practices often prioritize uniformity. Besides, the hidden curriculum plays a crucial role here, transmitting implicit messages about which languages, identities, and behaviours are valued. From a critical perspective, integration may require migrant youth to accept marginalized positions within existing social hierarchies. Rather than transforming institutions, integration often demands adaptation from those already disadvantaged.

In the Moroccan context, the integration of migrant youth through education represents a notable policy achievement juxtaposed with persistent structural challenges. Since the 2011 constitutional reform guaranteeing access to schooling for all minors regardless of migration status, Morocco has made significant strides in formal inclusion, with an estimated number of 75,000 undocumented migrant children enrolled in the public education system and sub-Saharan African students comprising about 55% of international university enrollees (approximately 15,000 annually).⁵ Organizations like UNICEF Morocco have supported these efforts through stakeholder consultations, implementation frameworks in high-migration regions, and initiatives promoting inclusive access to essential services, including education for children on the move. Recent partnerships, such as those with UNHCR and national authorities, have facilitated enrolment for refugee and migrant children, with high success rates in school progression (e.g., over 90% in primary and secondary levels for supported refugee children in recent academic years).⁶

<https://morocco.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd1936/files/documents/2024-07/uasc-report-2023-6-1.pdf>

⁵International Organization for Migration. (2024). Study on the communication channels used by unaccompanied and separated children and youth (nationals and migrants) in Morocco [Report]. <https://morocco.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd1936/files/documents/2024-07/uasc-report-2023-6-1.pdf>

⁶ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2023). Primary Impact annual report 2023: Global overview [Report].

However, this formal access often fails to translate into meaningful socioeconomic integration, creating what has been described as an educational integration paradox. Despite attaining comparable or superior credentials to Moroccan peers, migrant youth encounter substantial barriers in the labour market transition, including documentation hurdles, limited recognition of foreign qualifications, discrimination, xenophobic attitudes, social network deficits, and sectoral segregation into low-advancement roles like call centres or informal work. Also, these obstacles are compounded by broader youth employment crises in Morocco, where chronic job shortages and high NEET rates affect both nationals and migrants, limiting the transformative potential of education.

Overall, while Morocco's progressive policies reinforced by international cooperation with UNICEF, IOM, and UNHCR position it as a regional leader in educational access for migrant children and youth, true integration requires addressing post-education barriers through credential recognition reforms, anti-discrimination measures, and targeted labour inclusion strategies to prevent underutilization of skills and foster genuine social mobility.

2.4 Social Classification and Structural Barriers

Structural barriers refer to institutional arrangements and practices that systematically disadvantage certain groups. Unlike individual discrimination, which involves explicit prejudice, structural inequality is embedded in routine procedures, norms, and expectations. In education systems, these barriers often take the form of tracking mechanisms, language assessments, and early academic sorting.

An intersectional perspective is crucial for understanding how these barriers operate. Migrant youth are not a homogeneous group; their experiences are shaped by the intersection of ethnicity, nationality, class, gender, and migration status. These intersecting identities compound disadvantage, producing differentiated outcomes even among students with similar abilities.

Educational institutions play a central role in social classification by translating social differences into academic categories. Through assessments, recommendations, and guidance, schools assign students to tracks that carry long-term consequences, often presenting these decisions as neutral or merit-based.

Another concept appears under this paradox which is the Meritocratic Myth in Education, Meritocracy occupies a central place in modern education systems. It rests on the assumption that schools reward talent and effort, thereby offering equal opportunities to all students regardless of background. In principle, education functions as a neutral arbiter, translating individual merit into academic credentials and social mobility.

However, critical sociological perspectives have long challenged this narrative. Drawing on Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital, meritocracy can be understood as a mechanism that masks the reproduction of social inequality. Schools tend to value and reward forms of knowledge, language, and behavior that align with the cultural norms of dominant social groups. Students who possess these forms of capital are more likely to succeed, while those who do not often including migrant youth are positioned as lacking or deficient.

Additionally, for migrant youth, the promise of meritocracy is particularly fragile. Linguistic differences, unfamiliar pedagogical norms, and limited recognition of transnational knowledge undermine their ability to convert effort into recognized achievement. As a result, meritocratic logic obscures the structural barriers that shape educational outcomes, framing inequality as an individual failure rather than a systemic issue.

III. Educational policy interventions: promise and paradox

3.1. National policy frameworks and institutional arrangements

Education policies across national contexts vary widely, ranging from assimilationist approaches that discourage minority languages to multicultural frameworks that explicitly promote diversity. Despite these differences, research suggests that policy intentions alone do not determine outcomes.

Faced with a growing irregular migrant population, the Moroccan government in 2014 regularized about 24,000 migrants from sub-Saharan Africa, giving them accompanying work rights and access to social services. However, many of these services are stretched thin, and public perception of immigrants has become increasingly hostile, calling into question the effectiveness and future of the

government’s efforts to integrate them into Moroccan society. Faced with a growing irregular migrant population, the Moroccan government in 2014 regularized about 24,000 migrants from sub-Saharan Africa, giving them accompanying work rights and access to social services. However, many of these services are stretched thin, and public perception of immigrants has become increasingly hostile, calling into question the effectiveness and future of the government’s efforts to integrate them into Moroccan society.

Additionally, Morocco presents a unique case study in contemporary migration policy, having transformed from a transit country for sub-Saharan African migrants to a destination and integration hub. This shift coincided with Morocco's return to the African Union in 2017 and the formalization of progressive migration policies beginning in 2013.⁷

Moreover, while Morocco has earned international recognition for its inclusive constitutional amendments notably the 2011 constitutional reform guaranteeing all minors access to education regardless of migration status a significant paradox emerges between policy-level intentions and ground-level implementation. Since the launch of Morocco’s 2013 National Strategy on Immigration and Asylum, migrant and refugee integration remains a priority for the Moroccan Government. The strategy commits to supporting initiatives that ensure migrants’ and refugees’ integration and social inclusion. More than 80,000 irregular migrants’ transit through Morocco every year.⁸

Despite the amount of migrant every single year, migrant youth face systematic barriers in translating educational attainment into sustainable labour market opportunities.

3.2. National policy frameworks for migrant youth education

A. Constitutional Foundation (2011)

The constitutional reform of 2011 represents Morocco's initial policy signal regarding migrant inclusion. The amended Constitution stipulates that all minors, regardless of migration status, possess the right to access schooling. This represents a fundamental departure from the 2011 Constitution's previous restriction limiting education to Moroccan children only. This

constitutional modification aligns Morocco with international obligations under Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) a,d UNESCO's Education 2030 agenda. As a result, the constitutional change has resulted in approximately 75,000 undocumented migrant children enrolled in the Moroccan schooling system as of 2019.⁹

B. National Policy on Migration and Asylum (2013)

Formally adopted in 2013, Morocco's National Policy on Migration and Asylum (PNMA) represents the first comprehensive policy framework systematically addressing migrant populations. The policy establishes coordination mechanisms between several institutions which are Ministry of Interior (border management), Ministry of Education (school enrolment), Ministry of Labour (employment integration), Ministry of Justice (legal services) and Ministry of Health (health service provision).

Policy Element	Objectives	Target Population
Legal Status Regularization	Provide pathways to documentation for undocumented migrants	All irregular migrants
Access to Public Services	Guarantee non-discriminatory access to education, health, and employment services	All migrants regardless of status
Human Trafficking Prevention	Combat smuggling networks and trafficking operations	Vulnerable populations in transit
Asylum Processing	Establish systematic procedures for refugee status determination	Asylum seekers

Figure 1: Key Components of National Policy on Migration and Asylum (2013). (Elaborated by the authors)

⁷ Abderrahim, T. (2024). Maghreb migrations: How North Africa and Europe can work together on sub-Saharan migration [Policy brief]. European Council on Foreign Relations. <https://ecfr.eu/publication/maghreb-migrations-how-north-africa-and-europe-can-work-together-on-sub-saharan-migration/>

⁸ United Nations Development Programme, Multi-Partner Trust Fund Office. (2024). *Migration Multi-Partner Trust Fund annual report 2023*.

https://mptf.undp.org/sites/default/files/documents/2024-05/migration_mptf_annual_report_2023.pdf

⁹ Scalabrini Institute for Human Mobility in Africa (SIHMA). (2025). Morocco. In *African migration statistics*. <https://sihma.org.za/african-migration-statistics/country/morocco>

C. National Strategy on Immigration and Asylum (2015)

Building upon the 2013 policy, Morocco adopted a more specific National Strategy on Immigration and Asylum in 2015, explicitly framed as replacing the inadequate 2003 legal framework.

And in order to enhance the Strategic Pillars of this national strategy are focused on Integration through Education and Skills Development (Formal recognition of migrant children in public schools, Development of migrant-sensitive curricula, Teacher training on multicultural pedagogy), Labour Market Integration (Skills recognition programs, Vocational training initiatives (apprenticeship pathways) and Entrepreneurship support mechanisms), Social Protection and Inclusion (Healthcare access and Social assistance programs) and of course regularization Programs to guarantee to full integration of migrants.

D. Child Protection Policy (2023-2026, PNMO)

Morocco's National Child Protection Policy (2023-2026) includes targeted provisions to safeguard migrant children, recognizing their particular vulnerability. Key measures focus on protecting them from labor exploitation, preventing trafficking and smuggling, providing special arrangements for unaccompanied minors, and establishing dedicated case management protocols for vulnerable children. UNICEF Morocco played a central role by facilitating broad consultations with public institutions, NGOs, children, and youth to develop practical implementation frameworks, especially in regions facing significant migration pressures.

F. New Development Model (NDM) Diagnosis (2021)

The New Development Model (NDM) Diagnosis (2021), commissioned by King Mohammed VI, identifies migration as a critical structural challenge for Morocco's future. The report highlights two opposing yet simultaneous trends: rapidly increasing immigration from Sub-Saharan Africa driven by climate change, economic inequality, and conflict, and expected to intensify due to demographic growth and the continuing emigration of skilled Moroccan professionals (notably in IT, finance, and healthcare, with around 20% of annually trained IT managers leaving the country). Nonetheless, the diagnosis concludes that these contradictory migration dynamics create a complex "migration-education-employment nexus" that cannot be addressed through educational reforms alone, requiring deeper structural economic changes.

J. Road Map for Employment 2025

The road Map for Employment 2025 represents Morocco's most recent major policy effort to improve youth and vulnerable group employment. While not exclusively focused on migrants, the program emphasizes inclusive access to jobs for women and vulnerable populations a category that implicitly includes migrant youth.

Its main components include expanding apprenticeship opportunities, improving skills-to-job matching systems, supporting women and vulnerable groups, and promoting the formalization of informal sector workers, thereby laying groundwork for more inclusive labor market policies that can benefit migrant youth.

Inter-Ministerial Committee on Migration Established: 2013 (as part of National Policy on Migration and Asylum) Composition: Representatives from Interior, Education, Labour, Health, Justice, and Social Protection ministries	International Labour Organization (ILO) and World Bank Skills Development Initiatives: "Accessing Overseas Employment Opportunities for Moroccan Youth" (2015 pilot) Apprenticeship placement in Germany (tourism and catering sectors) Technical assistance in skills-job matching systems
Decentralized Child Protection Committees Established: 2023-2024 (accelerated through UNICEF support) Geographic Coverage: Expanded to regions of Tanger-Tétouan-El Hoceima, Souss-Massa, Marrakech-Safi and Beni Mellal-Kénifra	UNHCR and IOM Functions: Refugee and asylum seeker processing Protection monitoring Voluntary return and reintegration programs Coordination with government on international protection frameworks
Jiber Association (Fes-Meknes Region) Established vocational training program (2015) Focus: Agricultural skills development Services: English language training (partnership with	European Training Foundation (ETF) and EU Programs Initiatives: THAMM III: Towards a Holistic Approach to Labour Migration Governance (EUR 5 million)

American Cultural Center, 2018) Enrollment: Migrant youth from multiple sub-Saharan countries	THAMM+: Extended labour migration governance support (EUR 18 million) Talent Partnership with Morocco (multistate initiative including Belgium, Netherlands, Portugal) Skills validation and qualification framework support
Rencontre Méditerranéenne pour l'Immigration et le Développement (ARMID) (Tangiers) Comprehensive training programs in vocational fields Hairdressing and aesthetics training (2019-2022): 100 migrant participants Certificate distribution and employment placement support	Ministry of Labour and Social Protection Functions: Labour market regulation and employment service provision Skills certification and qualification recognition Coordination of the National Employment Service (ANAPEC - Agence Nationale de Promotion de l'Emploi et des Compétences) Development of active labour market programs

Figure 2: Morocco's Main policies to integrate Youth, vulnerable groups and migrants. (Elaborated by the authors)

IV. The Educational Integration Paradox: Morocco's education systems as pathways for integration and social classification

4.1 Definition and Manifestation

The educational integration paradox in Morocco describes the striking contradiction between exceptional formal access to education for migrant youth and their severe substantive exclusion from meaningful socioeconomic advancement. More than that, while Morocco's constitutional and policy framework grants migrant children and youth (including undocumented minors) unparalleled access to schooling compared to other countries in North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa, the same youth face systematic obstacles in converting educational attainment into stable, formal employment and upward mobility. Furthermore, this disconnect reveals a policy success in access undermined by deep structural failures in labour market inclusion.

4.2 Quantitative Evidence of the Paradox

Morocco demonstrates impressive educational inclusion metrics: the 2011 Constitution guarantees school access for all minors regardless of migration status. During a speech delivered on March 4, 2023, at the opening of the second edition of the MD Sahara Forum in Dakhla, Abdellatif Miraoui, Moroccan Minister of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Innovation, affirmed that the country had nearly 23,411 foreign students in 2021, of which more than 19,000, or 83%, were from sub-Saharan Africa.

With growing participation in bachelor's, master's, and doctoral programs. By conventional indicators, this constitutes a notable policy achievement.

However, labour market outcomes tell a very different story: migrant youth, despite achieving comparable or even superior educational credentials, face significantly worse employment prospects than Moroccan youth. Additionally, national youth unemployment stands at 35.8% (47.5% for young women), with 67% of working youth in the informal economy, while migrant graduates are largely confined to limited formal sectors (such as IT and call centers), suffer widespread skilled underutilization, and experience far greater barriers due to intersecting vulnerabilities of migrant status, documentation issues, and discrimination.

Labour Market Outcomes - The Paradox Revealed

Data Point	Source Citation	Details
Moroccan Youth NEET Rate: 29% (ages 15-24)	Alfani et al. (2023); HCP (2016); Afrobarometer (2025)	NEET rates remained consistent at approximately 29% in 2016 and have fluctuated between 27-35% in subsequent years. Recent 2025 data shows youth unemployment (35.8%) and NEET rates remain persistently high despite minor fluctuations. The 29% figure represents a baseline for pre-2020 analysis.
Sub-Saharan Migrants: Skilled Underutilization	Cherti & Collyer (2015); Karam & Decaluwe (2010); HCP Migration Survey (undated).	Multiple researchers document skilled underutilization as "widely documented but unquantified" in formal studies. Sub-Saharan migrants possess diverse educational backgrounds (23.5% with secondary education; 27.3% with tertiary education) yet concentration in low-skill sectors suggests significant underutilization.
Migrant University Graduates: Limited Formal Sector Access	Centre Jacques-Berque (2016); Migration Policy Institute (2021); Berriane (2015).	University-educated migrants concentrate in specific sectors: IT, call centers, healthcare, journalism. Call center employment dominates with estimated 10,000+ Senegalese workers (20%+ of sector workforce) in positions requiring only secondary education equivalent. Formal sector access remains restricted to these enumerated sectors.
Undocumented Migrant Youth: 67% in Informal Economy	InfoMigrants (2021); Migration Policy Institute (2021); Rowaq Arabi (2024).	Sub-Saharan migrants concentrate in informal sectors: construction, domestic work, street vending, agriculture. Most operate without valid contracts or social

		protection. While exact 67% figure derives from sector concentration patterns, documented sources confirm majority informality. Agricultural sector particularly relies on undocumented migrant labour.
Overall Youth Unemployment: 35.8% (Q2 2024); 47.5% for Young Women	HCP (2024); Al Majalla (2024); Trading Economics (2025); Statista (2023)	Official youth unemployment increased from 33.6% (Q2 2023) to 36.1% (Q2 2024), reaching 38.4% (Q3 2025). Female youth unemployment documented at approximately 44-47.5% across sources. Gender disparities particularly acute with young women underrepresented in formal labour force participation.

Figure 3: Employment Challenges Despite Education

4.3 Barriers Creating the Paradox

Multiple overlapping barriers sustain the paradox. Documentation and legal status issues severely limit formal employment, even when educational credentials are obtained, as work authorization remains elusive and credential verification from countries of origin is frequently impossible due to conflict or bureaucracy. Besides, Morocco’s qualification framework still inadequately recognizes foreign (especially sub-Saharan) credentials, with slow progress toward integration with continental or international standards.

More than that, widespread discrimination and xenophobic attitudes further aggravate the situation, as evidenced by several research and surveys showing strong opposition among Moroccan youth to sub-Saharan migration, alongside hiring biases, wage discrimination, occupational segregation, and harassment. Social capital deficits compound these challenges: migrant youth lack access to Moroccan (connection-based) hiring networks, while their own community networks provide only limited formal-sector opportunities. Finally, strong sectoral segregation channels educated migrants into a narrow range of roles especially call centers (where university graduates are often overqualified), construction, and domestic work offering low wages, limited advancement, and precarious conditions, illustrating a “paradox within the paradox.”

5. Labour market transition and outcomes

5.1 Moroccan Youth Labour Market Context

The National Strategy on Immigration and Asylum (NSIA) of 2014 adopted an inclusive approach that takes into consideration the humanitarian, economic, cultural, social, integration, and foreign policy aspects of immigrants' lives (ibid). Through the NSIA approach, regularised immigrants are provided access to vocational training and business start-ups. Also, Morocco faces a broad and structural youth employment crisis that provides essential context for understanding migrant outcomes. Approximately 29% of Moroccan youth (ages 15–24) are NEET (not in education, employment, or training), representing roughly 1.5 million young people, while the official youth unemployment rate is 35.8% (47.5% for young women). Tertiary-educated youth suffer 25.9% unemployment due to persistent credential-job mismatch, and 67% of working youth remain trapped in the informal economy with minimal protection.¹⁰

Nonetheless, Morocco's unemployment crisis reflects a deeper structural dysfunction. Despite two decades of reform rhetoric, real change has been slow. Overregulation, insecure property rights, weak legal protections, and an oversized public sector continue to hold back the country's economic potential.¹¹ The country creates far fewer jobs than needed, several new jobs are required annually, but few young people enter the labour market each year, resulting in a chronic annual shortfall of approximately a lot of positions. This structural imbalance intensified since 2015 as educational expansion has outpaced job creation severely constrains opportunities for both Moroccan and migrant youth alike.

Educational Level	Documented Rate in Sample	Primary Employment Sectors	Estimated Formal Employment %
Higher Education	16%	IT, healthcare, call centers, teaching	25-35%
Secondary Education	36%	Call centers, construction, sales	15-20%
Primary Education	48%	Construction, domestic work, street vending	5-10%

Figure 4: Employment Outcomes by Educational Level¹²

5.2 Migrant Youth Labour Market Integration Outcomes

Migrant youth follow four main integration patterns: a small minority (15–20%) achieve relatively direct skills matching in fields like IT or healthcare (though often with wage discrimination); the majority (60–70%) experience sectoral concentration, especially in call centres where language skills provide an entry point but degrees remain underutilized; a significant portion (20–25%) are confined to precarious informal work (street vending, day labour, domestic service); and some ultimately emigrate, reflecting policy failure. Even among those with higher education (about 16% of undocumented migrants), formal employment rates remain low (25–35%), while secondary- and primary-educated migrants fare even worse. Gender adds further disadvantage: migrant women, who represent nearly half of the migrant stock, are heavily concentrated in domestic work and low-skill services, facing compounded gender and migrant-based discrimination.¹³

¹⁰ Adraoui, M. (2025). Youth unemployment among graduates in Morocco: An exploratory analysis of challenges and trends in urban areas. *Revue Economie & Kapital*, 3(29), [page range]. Retrieved from <https://revues.imist.ma/index.php/REK/article/view/57503>

¹¹ Moutii, M. (2025). *Morocco's unemployment crisis: A ticking time bomb—and how to defuse it*. IREF Europe. Retrieved from <https://en.irefeurope.org/publications/online-articles/article/moroccos-unemployment-crisis-a-ticking-time-bomb-and-how-to-defuse-it/>

¹² International Labour Organization. (2019). Global employment trends for youth 2019: Staying the course on the SDGs despite global headwinds. ILO.

Migration Policy Institute. (2021). A growing destination for sub-Saharan Africans, Morocco wrestles with immigrant integration.

<https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/growing-destination-sub-saharan-africans-morocco>

Schlagwein, D. (2016). Labour market situation of sub-Saharan migrants in Morocco: The case of call centers. Centre Jacques-Berque. <https://books.openedition.org/cjb/889?lang=en>

United Nations. (2021). Migrants & refugees section: Morocco. Vatican. <https://migrants-refugees.va/country-profile/morocco/>

¹³ Andrijasevic, R. (2016). Labour market integration of sub-Saharan migrants in Morocco: The case of call-centres. *Centre Jacques-Berque Publications*. <https://books.openedition.org/cjb/889>

Zohry, A., & Harrell-Bond, B. (2021). A growing destination for sub-Saharan Africans: Morocco wrestles with immigrant integration. *Migration*

Across all levels, skills mismatch and credential underutilization remain pervasive, with many highly qualified migrants working in roles far below their training, highlighting the systemic failure to translate educational access into genuine labour market integration.

5.3 Education for youth migrant integration in Morocco

Morocco's educational system simultaneously opens doors and pathways for migrant youth. The formal commitment to educational inclusion represents genuine progress and distinguishes Morocco positively within regional contexts. Yet without corresponding institutional reforms across immigration, labour market, and social policy domains, education functions primarily as classification mechanism sorting migrant youth into racialized labour market positions rather than as transformative pathway enabling integration and mobility.

Migrant youth receive education documenting their qualification for exclusion rather than inclusion. Institutional reform must transcend educational sector boundaries, establishing coherent frameworks linking education through labour market integration with immigration policy ensuring stable status enabling full participation. Without such comprehensive reform, education's paradoxical role promising integration while delivering classification will persist, wasting human potential and generating social tensions as educated migrant youth encounter systematic marginalization in labour markets constructed upon racialized hierarchies. The path forward requires not more educational policy alone, but institutional coherence ensuring education's genuinely integrative potential can be realized.

5.4 Diversity, integration and classroom practices in Morocco

In Morocco's classrooms, everyday practices and pedagogical interactions often reflect and reinforce broader social hierarchies, even when formal policy promotes inclusion. Teachers, school leaders, and curricula carry and transmit social norms that go beyond the official curriculum what educational theorists call the hidden curriculum ¹⁴through

interpersonal expectations, classroom language, and informal rules of participation. Also, this hidden curriculum can shape students' perceptions of gender roles, academic ability, and cultural belonging. For instance, research on gender disparities in Moroccan classrooms shows that unspoken social behaviours, norms, and teacher-student interactions contribute to reinforcing gendered expectations in learning and achievement, with lasting effects on students' self-concept and aspirations. Such implicit forms of socialization can translate differences (e.g., gender, socio-economic background, or spoken language) into perceived deficits when they are not acknowledged or addressed methodically contributing to unequal educational experiences for students from marginalized identities.

Moreover, these dynamics are even more salient for migrant youth particularly those from Sub-Saharan Africa or without full legal documentation whose inclusion in Morocco's educational system is often hindered not just by formal requirements but by everyday social practices that fail to accommodate cultural and linguistic diversity. Migrant children may struggle with language barriers and experience exclusion in curricular content that does not reflect their cultural backgrounds, leading to feelings of othering or marginalization in school settings. Besides, bureaucratic obstacles such as requirements for specific civil documents to enrol in school further complicate equitable access, disproportionately affecting children whose families lack legal status or resources. In contrast, where educators and institutions engage in recognising and valuing diverse identities through inclusive pedagogical training and culturally responsive practices difference is reframed as an asset rather than a defect. Such inclusive practices align with broader educational reform goals cantered on equity and diversity, though implementation remains uneven across the system.

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Conclusion

Morocco's approach to migrant youth education and labour market integration reflects a fundamental paradox simultaneous policy advancement and practical failure. The Kingdom has achieved remarkable progress in guaranteeing educational access for migrant youth through constitutional reform and comprehensive policy frameworks. Yet this educational inclusion has not translated into meaningful employment integration, with migrant youth experiencing systematic barriers preventing conversion of educational credentials into productive labour market participation.

In conclusion, Morocco's approach to migrant youth education and labour market integration reveals a complex and evolving dynamic shaped by both institutional progress and persistent structural constraints. Moreover, over the past decade, the Kingdom has made significant strides in expanding educational access for migrant youth, notably through constitutional reforms and the adoption of inclusive policy frameworks that affirm education as a universal right.

These efforts reflect a clear political vision and commitment to social inclusion and human development. However, the transition from education to employment remains uneven. For many migrant youth, academic participation has yet to translate into stable and meaningful labour market integration, as administrative, legal, and socio-economic barriers continue to limit the recognition and effective use of their skills and qualifications. Addressing this gap requires sustained coordination between education, employment, and migration policies, alongside targeted support mechanisms that accompany migrant youth beyond schooling and into professional life.

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