REPORT – SCENARIO-BUILDING WORKSHOP 1
Understanding the Rate of Change in Mixed Migration: The role of technology within migration dynamics

BACKGROUND

On June 16, 2021, the Rabat Process convened the first of four migration scenario-building exercises run by the Mixed Migration Centre (MMC), which, over the course of 2020, will introduce Rabat Process members to a strategic foresight tool that can be used in their migration planning and policy-making and facilitate members' development of scenarios for migration in the countries of the Rabat Process in 2030. The June workshop had three objectives:

1) Provide a briefing on the various types of futures analyses, ranging from forecasting to scenario-building, as well as the relative benefits of a scenario approach. This briefing included an overview of the key concepts of scenario-building methodologies, including certainties, uncertainties and "collective intelligence".

2) Present and analyse data from MMC's 4Mi project on the role of technology in mixed migration dynamics in West and North Africa. In particular, the MMC team examined the extent to which refugee and migrant respondents had smart phones in their possession, how they used their smartphones (e.g., in contacting smugglers or obtaining information about the journey), and the influence of social media and mainstream media on their decision to migrate.

3) Facilitate a PESTEL exercise among participants. This exercise asked participants to reflect upon past migration drivers/events/trends related to technology that shaped the migration patterns we see today in 2021. It also highlighted how much change can occur in the field of migration within a given timeframe.

FINDINGS FROM PESTEL EXERCISE DISCUSSIONS

Technological drivers of migration were framed at the outset of the exercise in broad terms, including border management technologies, information and communication technologies (ICT), social media and other online platforms, mobile money and money transfer systems, and transportation technologies. Participants then zoomed in to discuss what they perceived as key technological factors specific to their country and regional contexts. Figure 1 shows the specific factors that participants from countries in West Africa and Europe identified during discussions, which were recorded in real-time by MMC facilitators. These include:

- **Money transfer services**, particularly Orange in West and North Africa, which enable youth to remit funds to their parents in Niger
- The advancement of **educational technologies** including massive open online courses (MOOCs) across West African countries, which afford internally displaced persons (IDPs), refugees and migrants improved access to education in situ. The advancement of educational technologies was also cited as improving the quality of vocational training, enabling remote learning and affording improved access to labour markets upon completion. In the short-term, 'edu-tech' and remote learning alleviates the need for movement; in the long-term, education increases people's capabilities and aspirations to migrate, especially when their skill levels are not absorbed by local labour markets.
- **Social media** enables refugees and migrants to share information about the journey and get in contact with smugglers, but it can also be a source of misinformation and, in more extreme cases, used by human traffickers to reach potential victims.
- **Apps that facilitate the migration process**, such as real-time translation services, encrypted communication services, or messaging services that can work across SIM cards and telephone networks. We can think of these technologies as reducing the costs of migration and in some instances, helping to reduce risk by enhancing information-sharing and information-use.
- **Advances in medical research**, which improve processes of age determination to ensure the protection of the rights of migrating and displaced children and youth.
- **Improved data-sharing and coordination** on migration among countries, which was highlighted as a factor for migration management, as well as the **monitoring of entry and exit** at air, land and sea borders with support from institutions like the International Organization for Migration (IOM). In discussing improved coordination, participants from European countries cited the 2022 rollout of the European Union's new "Entry/Exit System (EES)". According to the EU, "EES is a system that will register entry and exit data and refusal of entry data of third-country nationals crossing the external borders of the Member States and determining the conditions for access to the EES for law enforcement purposes."

The aforementioned factors generated a number of higher-level insights. First, technological factors impact each stage of the migration journey, from planning to execution, and overlap with other major economic, political and social drivers of migration. We see from the first factor in the list on money transfer services how strong social norms around supporting families in home countries are supported by money transfer technology or how educational technologies can help overcome local gaps in secondary and tertiary education sectors. In this way, technological drivers rarely occur in a vacuum and are instead embedded within and have an enhancing effect on larger processes of structural change. Second, technological drivers do not appear to significantly determine whether people move, with the exception of when they reduce the costs of migration and/or increase people's

capabilities (assuming they have the aspirations). Instead, such drivers more often shape how people move, i.e., the modes of transport, interactions with smugglers, access to information that can ease or further complicate the journey. Third, and finally, Figure 1 underscores the extent of change that can occur in 10-20 years' time. We must take this understanding forward in building our scenarios for 2030, which represents a time horizon of just under 10 years. What will be the next "big thing" which dramatically change, improves or disrupts the way we undertake international movements?

Figure 1: PESTEL Chart completed by participants during the workshop
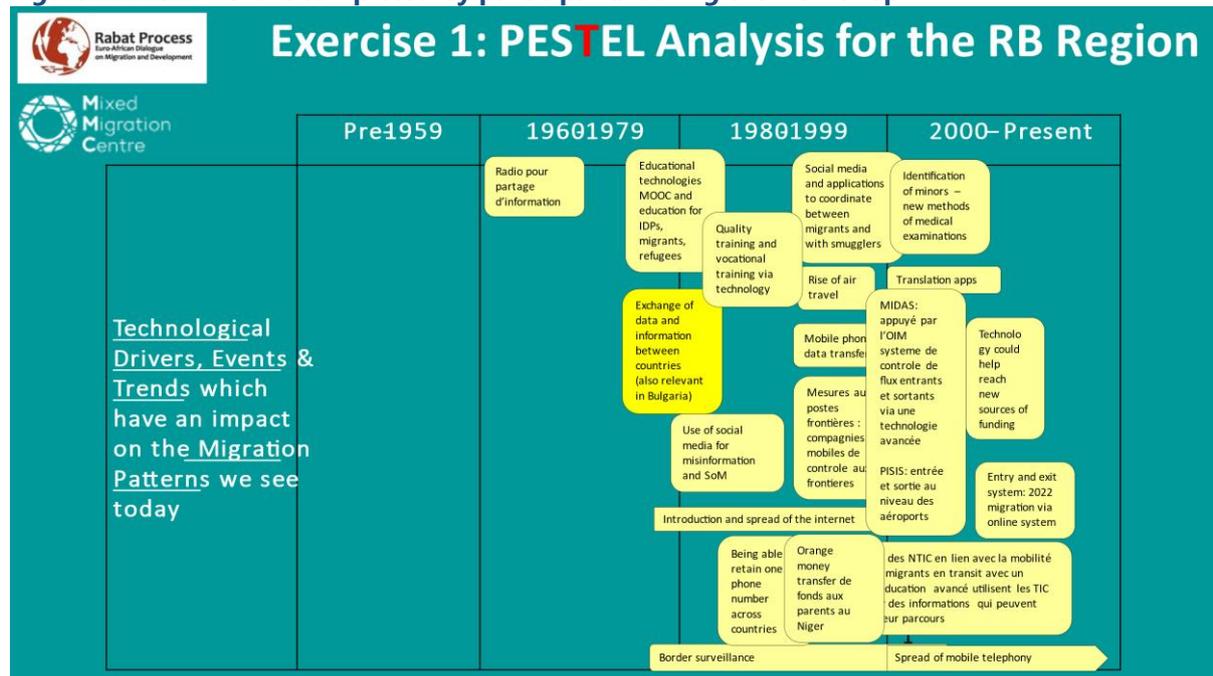
FURTHER READING

MMC (2020) Artificial intelligence and radical technical innovation: the impact of the Fourth Industrial Revolution on mixed migration.
GMFUS (2020) AI, Digital Identities, Biometrics, Blockchain: A Primer on the Use of Technology in Migration Management.
MMC (2019) Hype or hope? Evidence on use of smartphones & social media in mixed migration.
MMC (2016) Getting to Europe the WhatsApp Way: The use of ICT in contemporary mixed migration flows to Europe.