



**Rabat Process**  
Euro-African Dialogue on Migration and Development



## Thematic meeting on Migrants in a crisis context

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# THE CONTRIBUTION OF DIASPORAS IN A CRISIS AND POST-CRISIS CONTEXT

**Dr. Hélène Simon-Lorière,**  
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The term "diaspora" is used with increasing frequency in the literature on migrations and by migrants themselves. It has taken on a positive connotation with regards to the significant transfers of funds sent to the countries of origin and its contribution to its development. According to the World Bank, these transfers of funds to developing countries represented 410 billion dollars in 2013. They increase every year and in several countries are higher than public development aid or foreign investments. This individual or community aid is a valuable support for the recipient families and also for the development projects to which they contribute and for the national economies in general.

A political, economic or environmental crisis on the scale of a region or an entire country can affect relations between the country of origin and the country of residence. It can also lead to new migrations, internal displacements and also flows of refugees into neighbouring countries and beyond. These migrations in times of crisis strengthen the numerical weight of the community resident abroad but also embody renewed potential for the role of the diaspora and its links with the country of origin.

The goal of this session is to discuss the role of diasporas in a crisis and post-crisis context. It involves identifying existing initiatives led by diasporas to respond to a crisis or to contribute to a reconstruction post-conflict process. This session will also allow to identify mechanisms of cooperation and coordination between these diasporas and their country of origin and of residence to facilitate their involvement in a crisis and post-crisis period.

### A broad definition of the word diaspora

It should first be noted that the term "diaspora" will be understood in the widest sense of the word, as it includes migrants of varied legal status: emigrants/immigrants who have retained their original nationality, emigrants/immigrants who have obtained the nationality of their country of residence, dual nationals, refugees, asylum seekers etc. Only some migrants maintain transnational relationships; their situation can therefore not be fully defined either in the country of residence or the country of origin but rather in the social field formed between the two. It is important to recall that not all migratory movements necessarily create a diaspora.

Two fundamental criteria that allow us to talk of a diaspora are of our interest:

- ▶ The population in question left its country of origin and is living in several places. These migrants retain and develop amongst themselves and with the original society multiple exchange relationships (of people, a variety of goods, information etc.) organised in the form of networks.

Innovatively, not only will members of African diasporas resident in Europe be called upon but also those members installed in all of the African Rabat Process member countries. Questions will be asked about possible dialogue between different diaspora centres with a view to taking action to help their country of origin in a crisis or post-crisis context.

- ▶ The population in question has settled into the host countries since several generations but maintains a strong sense of awareness with the home countries of their parents, maintained by family practices, community links and a lively community life.

The working groups are particularly focused on associations with a stake in the countries of origin, for example those that have received the designation of International Solidarity Organisations for Migration



(OSIM), in the French case. They will ask how the states concerned by this phenomenon can interact with these associations to focus and /or support their actions in a crisis and post-crisis context.

### Two key lines of discussion

Discussions by the working groups on the contribution of diasporas in a crisis situation and on the development of their country of origin in a post-crisis context could follow two key lines:

1. What are the existing initiatives in the Rabat Process countries, borne by the diasporas...
  - ▶ ... to respond to the needs of displaced persons and the communities of the country of origin in a crisis context?
  - ▶ ... to contribute to the development of their country in a post-crisis context?
2. What cooperation and coordination mechanisms between the countries concerned and diaspora organisations can contribute to more effective action by these civil society stakeholders resident abroad?

The following points are proposals to focus the reflection:

## **I. The role of the diaspora in a crisis and post-crisis context**

### 1.1 In a crisis situation

#### - In the country in crisis:

The diaspora can:

- ▶ save lives by facilitating migrations, the latter being a real adaptation strategy in response to the crisis (see below);
- ▶ contribute to humanitarian aid by making donations to international organisations that intervene in the country, by sending medicine, school supplies or money to enable daily life to go on in the areas protected by the fighting or in areas of refuge (reception centres for internally displaced persons during a conflict and also for the victims of natural disasters);
- ▶ draw the attention of the international community to the situation in the country of origin (demonstrations, press releases, petitions etc.);
- ▶ participate in initiatives to diffuse the conflict by promoting dialogue between the opposing parties (presence of diaspora representatives during peace negotiations).

#### - In the neighbouring countries of countries in crisis:

The members of the diaspora and the populations of the host countries that speak the same vernaculars can take part in welcoming refugee populations. This phenomenon can, amongst other things:

- ▶ avoid or make less general the classic policy of refugee "encampment", the camps and humanitarian aid thus being directed towards refugees who have no links to the local population;



- ▶ reduce dependence on humanitarian aid;
- ▶ facilitate the integration of refugees, particularly through work;
- ▶ enable both refugees and the host population to benefit from international aid;
- ▶ facilitate and accelerate the possibility of a return.

- In more distant countries, especially in Europe:

The reception of a very small percentage of people fleeing the crisis in these countries (migration as a response to the crisis) is facilitated by the existence of a diaspora:

- ▶ through family reunification;
- ▶ by the assistance the diaspora brings to administrative procedures to obtain legal protection (asylum, subsidiary protection etc.) ;
- ▶ through work opportunities in "ethnic" niche markets.

Diasporas encourage the maintenance of contact with the country of origin and can then facilitate the return to the country of origin and the reintegration of those who choose to return by:

- ▶ providing support in the initial stages of the return by funds transfers;
- ▶ participating in efforts to achieve peace and reconciliation in the country of origin;
- ▶ investments in small businesses in the country of origin given to trustworthy people remaining in or returning to the country.

## 1.2 In a post-crisis situation

The diaspora is a stakeholder on which states can rely on for crisis recovery and for restoration and reconstruction. The actions of diaspora members are long term and can contribute to development in a variety of ways.

When diaspora members remain abroad:

- ▶ by getting involved in post-crisis politics and in supporting plurality:
- ▶ by participating in the process of social reconstruction ("truth and reconciliation" processes) and by promoting "peace education" (investing in building schools or assistance in running them, sponsoring children, supporting NGOs and civil society);
- ▶ by becoming economic investors in their country of origin (construction of houses, support for small start-ups);
- ▶ by fostering social action or business investment among stakeholders without family links with the country of origin.

When some diaspora members decide to return to the country, regardless of their status (refugee, emigrant who has acquired a new nationality or dual nationality, emigrant who has retained his or her original nationality) and the length of time spent abroad (from a few months to several decades):



- ▶ by becoming active in public life (political, community and economic involvement etc.);
- ▶ by using and adding value to personal and professional experiences gained abroad that can become assets for the country of origin ("brain gain").

## II. Towards a dialogue between the countries concerned and diasporas?

Diasporas act selectively: neither their transfers of funds, equipment and ideas nor their emotional support ever involves the entire population of a country. The diaspora's actions can contribute to crisis recovery and the dynamics of development but only if it is actively supported by the states concerned. Collaborations between state stakeholders and individual and collective stakeholders, who are members of diasporas, are to be encouraged in a concerted, multilateral approach.

The actions of diasporas could be supported by the governments of their countries of residence and their countries of origin. The associations coming from the diasporas would be able to be closely linked to initiatives for peace and development in their country of origin at meetings on a national or international scale and in strategy development. Links can be facilitated by inviting members of diaspora associations to take part in formal dialogues with the State during international or domestic meetings. States would thus be better able to identify profiles and expertise. Diaspora members who have returned to their countries of origin can, indeed, become stakeholders in government services or even advisers to the government in their respective countries. Local involvement by diaspora members, despite being resident abroad, can be a force for development based on beneficiary populations.

The associations coming from diasporas represent technical skills and capture socio-cultural knowledge that can be exploited and add value. States and international organisations must facilitate the action of the associations. In particular, it seems to be important to separate investment for crisis recovery from the development of the country of origin. Spaces for dialogue like the Rabat Process have a role to play in creating the conditions for dialogue to take place between countries of origin, countries of residence and diasporas, without security issues overriding development concerns. These spaces where dialogue can take place play a part in implementing a concerted, multilateral and balanced approach to the effects of migration.



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