

Working Paper 9/2026

**Migration Skill Corridor
Report
MOROCCO - NETHERLANDS**

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<http://link4skills.eu>



The Link4Skills project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon research and innovation programme under grant agreement number 101132476

Echoes on the Highway

The Moroccan–Dutch corridor’s untapped potential for skilled migration

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Abstract

This working paper explores the current state of the Moroccan-Dutch migration skill corridor based on 27 interviews conducted with stakeholders in Morocco and the Netherlands as part of the Link4Skills project. It provides an overview of legal, political and institutional relations underlying the corridor, and summarises origins, trends and drivers of migration within the corridor. The corridor can be categorized as the post ‘guest worker’ type. It is a well-established corridor rooted in the labour movements of the 1960s and 1970s, which gave rise to stable communities and enduring relations between both countries. Today, labour migration, including skilled migration, has become marginal, which is why the corridor can hardly be called a migration ‘skill’ corridor. Although an agreement between the two countries is in place, it is dominated by return narratives and the corridor appears politically sensitive. In practice, mobility is largely shaped by migrant networks and community dynamics rather than by structured recruitment initiatives governed by the public or private sector. Current networks do not necessarily facilitate new migration; instead, negative feedback contributes to the corridor’s apparent phasing out, as Moroccans increasingly favour other destinations, and second-generation Moroccans in the Netherlands choose to return. Overall, the corridor represents a missed opportunity: renewed political attention, a more holistic approach, and positive narratives are needed to tap into the corridor’s potential for skilled migration and increase opportunities for skills development and private-sector involvement.

Introduction

This working paper examines the Morocco–Netherlands migration skill corridor and the legal, political and institutional context in which it operates. In the Link4Skills¹ framework, “migration skill corridors” refer to cross-border mobility pathways between two countries that can, in principle, foster skills exchange and thereby help address labour-market mismatches.^{2 3 4} Analytically, the corridor perspective is useful because it brings together different levels of explanation: it links broader policy choices and labour-market dynamics (i.e., macro-level) to the institutional actors that mediate mobility (i.e., meso-level, and to the decisions and expectations of individuals (i.e., micro-level).⁵ Corridors also differ substantially in their origins and governance, which is why five different – but potentially overlapping - types can be distinguished: post-colonial corridors, post–guest worker corridors, highly skilled corridors, medium-skilled or sector-based corridors, and humanitarian corridors. They vary in terms of formality, establishment, and governance.⁶

The Morocco-Netherlands corridor is a particularly instructive case because it combines a long history with comparatively limited present-day mobility. The relationship is anchored in the recruitment of Moroccan workers in the 1960s and 1970s to address labour shortages in the Netherlands. Over time, these movements resulted in established communities and durable social and economic connections between both countries. Yet contemporary migration along the corridor is relatively modest. New arrivals are largely linked to ad hoc family formation, labour migration has become marginal, and skilled mobility remains limited—raising the question to what extent the corridor currently functions as a “skill corridor” at all.

Empirically, the paper draws on 27 semi-structured interviews with stakeholders in Morocco and the Netherlands conducted within the Link4Skills project, complemented by desk research on relevant policies, documents, statistics, research, and secondary literature. Interviewees include policy actors, practitioners and experts, allowing the analysis to capture how the corridor is perceived and governed from both sides. This tandem approach avoids the common destination country bias in migration research. All interviews were transcribed, coded and analysed using an issue-focused approach. An overview of the interview sample is provided in the Appendix.

Building on this evidence, the paper classifies the Morocco-Netherlands corridor as a post–guest worker corridor. It is an established corridor, which seems to be phasing out. While a bilateral agreement exists, cooperation is widely described as politically sensitive and strongly shaped by return priorities, with initiatives to facilitate regular (skilled) mobility remaining. In practice, mobility is less driven by state programmes or employer recruitment than by migrant networks

¹ <https://link4skills.eu>

² Engbersen, G. & Reinold, J. (forthcoming). Chapter 1. Migration Skill Corridors. In I. Grabowska and M. B. Setrana (Eds.), *Fair Skilled Mobility. A Manifesto*. Routledge, Abingdon/New York.

³ Snel, E., Engbersen, G., & Reinold, J. (2024). *The complexity of migration decisions within migration corridors: Applying insights from EUMAGINE and THEMIS studies to the Link4Skills project*. Link4Skills Working Paper 3/2024. Available at: <https://link4skills.eu/index.php/2025/01/31/l4s-migration-decisions-report/>

⁴ Triandafyllidou, A., Shirazi, H., & Engbersen, G. (2024). *Concept paper on migration skill corridors*. Link4Skills Working Paper 2/2024. Available at: <https://link4skills.eu/index.php/2025/01/22/migration-skill-corridors/>

⁵ Carling, J., & Jolivet, D. (2016). Exploring 12 migration corridors: Rationale, methodology and overview. In O. Bakewell, G. Engbersen, M. L. Fonseca, & C. Horst (Eds.), *Beyond networks: Feedback in international migration* (pp. 18–46). Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137539212>

⁶ Engbersen, G. & Reinold, J. (forthcoming). Chapter 1. Migration Skill Corridors. In I. Grabowska and M. B. Setrana (Eds.), *Fair Skilled Mobility. A Manifesto*. Routledge, Abingdon/New York.

and community dynamics. Strikingly, these dynamics do not necessarily encourage new migration, but negative feedback can also deter prospective movers. This contributes to the corridor's apparent phasing out as other destinations become more attractive (e.g., for cultural and language reasons). Against this backdrop, the paper explores what would be required to move from a legacy corridor towards a more future-oriented partnership fostering skilled migration.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. First, it outlines the legal, political and institutional arrangements relevant to the Moroccan-Dutch corridor. It then summarises, the origins, key trends and drivers of migration between both countries. The paper concludes with reflections and policy-relevant considerations on how a more coordinated approach could strengthen the corridor, including from a skills perspective.

Legal, political, and institutional frameworks and relations

The relationship between the Netherlands and Morocco was tense in the 2010s. The main reasons were concerns about the Moroccan government's influence on Moroccan citizens in the Netherlands,⁷ lack of cooperation on the return of rejected asylum seekers to Morocco,⁸ and specific incidents resulting in diplomatic frictions.⁹ Since the early 2020s, relations between the two countries have significantly improved. The Netherlands and Morocco seem to have a "good relationship, also due to historic and societal ties. [...] The dialogue is broad and constructive" (L4S_NL_pol_24). Having a good partnership is perceived as "crucial, both for migration cooperation and broader development and security goals" (L4S_NL_pol_24).

The Netherlands is one of nine EU Member States that signed the Joint Declaration establishing the Mobility Partnership between the Kingdom of Morocco and the EU and its Member States (Doc. 6139/13, 3 June 2013).¹⁰ This Declaration sets shared objectives on 1) mobility, legal migration, and integration; 2) border management and preventing and combating irregular migration and human smuggling; 3) migration and development; 4) international protection; and 5) horizontal initiatives. In the context of skilled migration, it is especially interesting that the Declaration acknowledges that the mutual recognition of vocational and academic qualifications needs to be facilitated (point 6). Furthermore, the Declaration lays out that "to improve coherence between [...] other areas of sectoral cooperation (trade, education, research, culture) to make it easier for Moroccan vocational trainees, students, academics, researchers and businessmen and women to enter and stay in the EU Member States" (point 7). Aspects of social security as defined by the EU-Morocco Euro-Mediterranean Association Agreement should also be preserved and strengthened (point 10). The Joint Declaration mentions skills specifically in relation to migration and development, making sure that skills acquired in the EU can be used for the economic development of Morocco upon return (points 23 & 24). In the same context of migration and development, the Declaration also states that signatories endeavor to "implement policies to prevent and deal with the 'brain drain', including by promoting circular migration and the mobilization of skills" (point 27). The Annex of this Declaration lists concrete cooperation projects and initiatives to be implemented by EU institutions, agencies, and participating Member States. Interestingly, the Netherlands is mostly mentioned as an official partner with regard to projects related to dealing with irregular migration, return

⁷ Sunier, T., van der Linden, H., & van de Bovenkamp, E. (2016). The long arm of the state? Transnationalism, Islam, and nation-building: The case of Turkey and Morocco. *Contemporary Islam*, 10(3), 401–420. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11562-016-0353-7>

⁸ Leerkes, A., Maliepaard, M., & Van der Meer, M. (2022). *Intergovernmental relations and return - Part 2: From paper to practice?* (Memorandum 2022-2). WODC repository: <https://repository.wodc.nl/handle/20.500.12832/3210>

⁹ For instance, the contested extradition of a Dutch-Moroccan national to Morocco. https://www.france24.com/en/20170629-wanted-dutch-moroccan-held-extradition-row-report?utm_source=chatgpt.com

¹⁰ [eu-council-eu-morocco-mobility-partnership-6139-add1-rev3-13.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/eu-morocco-mobility-partnership-6139-add1-rev3-13.pdf)

(including of unaccompanied Moroccan minors), readmission, security of documents, and monitoring movements/ migration management. Projects on skilled migration (e.g., Moroccan students, graduates, and researchers, and to a limited extent other labour migrants) are mostly the responsibility of the EU, France, and Germany. Encouraging labour migration to meet labour market needs in the EU are not explicitly mentioned. While the Netherlands is one of nine EU Member States participating in this partnership and also responsible for explicit projects, it seems to be taking more of an observer role in practice.

In general, the Netherlands are hesitant to commit to EU Talent Partnerships:

“I recall when the European Commission proposed talent partnerships, an umbrella approach to bundle efforts and bring in workers from countries like Tunisia, Morocco, and Egypt. The House adopted an almost chamber-wide motion opposing this plan. The reasoning was that labour migrants would come to fill shortages here, but many MPs did not see it that way” (L4S_NL_pol_15).

In addition, there is a direct agreement between the Netherlands and Morocco. In July 2021, the two countries signed a Bilateral Action Plan,¹¹ defining “Cooperation in the field of migration” among other things.¹² This cooperation includes the following:¹³

- “To increase cooperation and coordination in the field of migration, a joint committee on cooperation in migration matters will be established. The frequency of meetings will be decided by the committee’s members.
- Preparation of regular exchange visits by the Ministers of Migration of both countries.
- To improve cooperation on returns and readmissions and operational coordination in the field of migration, and to exchange experiences and strengthen capacities, an exchange of experts between the competent authorities (DT&V and Ministry of the Interior/DGSN) will be programmed by mutual agreement.
- The two countries intend to continue their cooperation to support the implementation of Morocco’s National Asylum and Immigration Strategy.
- Establishing the right conditions for cooperation on legal migration” (Plan d’action Pays-Bas et Maroc)

As in the case of other corridors, agreements on social security are also crucial for Moroccan-Dutch migration. The Action Plan also covers this aspect, specifically the renewal of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) concerning the application of the Administrative Arrangement on Social Security, initially concluded in 1972 and revised several times since then.¹⁴ The Action Plan is the only bilateral migration-related agreement in the case of the Netherlands.¹⁵

An interesting observation is also that in the EU agreements, legal migration is mentioned first, while in the Moroccan-Dutch Action Plan, it comes last. Assuming that the structure of the agreements to a certain extent mirrors government priorities, it seems clear that return and readmission are the main concerns of the Netherlands. This is also confirmed by interviews (L4S_NL_exp_06; L4S_NL_pol_15):

“We have a very different kind of interest in Morocco, because we have a large Moroccan population here in the Netherlands. So, also with young people who, at some point, just have

¹¹ https://www.tweedekamer.nl/kamerstukken/brieven_regering/detail?id=2022Z23492&did=2022D50616

¹² Beyond migration aspects, the Action Plan includes paragraphs on political cooperation in general; cooperation in the field of security, justice and police; social security; trade, investments and climate; and cultural affairs.

¹³ These points were translated and copied from the French agreement.

¹⁴ <https://verdragenbank.overheid.nl/en/Treaty/Details/001001>

¹⁵ Also confirmed by the recent IBO Arbeidsmigratie: <https://open.overheid.nl/documenten/25c8f9ef-c50d-478d-8a7e-2e42c327f3f2/file#page6>

to go back. So, what we are constantly weighing is: what should we do in a European context, and what can we do much better bilaterally? That balance is not always clear. We are also looking at this in Brussels, together with our partners there. Do we really need to act through Europe? Or should we sometimes do much more bilaterally, in smaller ways, to secure some solid ground? Because we really do have very different interests with certain countries” (L4S_NL_pol_15).

“Current partnerships often start from a negative premise – return first, and maybe you get some migration benefits in return. That’s not a proactive labour market strategy. It becomes a political package deal, not a skills-based match” (L4S_NL_pol_15).

“Often, regular or labour migration only comes up because the partner country demands it, not because we ourselves put it on the table. Then we look at: what is our political space? What steps can we take?” (L4S_NL_pol_15).

From these and other quotes, it is clear that the Netherlands made progress with Morocco and not with other countries, “because there is a kind of win-win. We want (irregular) people to return - that’s the blunt version - and Morocco also wants something in return. But it takes a very long time, so you can’t expect results overnight” (L4S_NL_pol_15).

For the Netherlands, “Morocco represents a traditional migration relationship, but today the political space is very limited” (L4S_NL_pol_15). The corridor is thus somewhat state-led, unlike other migration (skill) corridors to the Netherlands that are mostly shaped by the private sector (L4S_NL_prac_02), such as the Indian-Dutch migration corridor.

We identified a limited number of initiatives that facilitate skilled migration; however, as one interviewee highlighted, they are “only symbolic” (L4S_NL_exp_06). “Setting up even small [state-led] pilots is slow. For example, an exchange of 50 high potentials on each side took ages to arrange. It feels too limited” (L4S_NL_pol_15). Given these constraints, it is sometimes argued that the private sector is better prepared for facilitating skilled migration to the Netherlands; however, the private sector also depends on the government setting the framework to do so (L4S_NL_prac_09).

The said pilot project, according to interviewees, involves up to 50 young professionals from both the Netherlands and Morocco who temporarily work in each other’s countries. Designed as a circular migration scheme, participants gain experience in the Netherlands before returning to Morocco, with stays of up to 11 months and two weeks under the trainee scheme to avoid pension obligations. The project is implemented by the Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO), which recruits companies and matches them with Moroccan youth, and is coordinated with the Ministries of Foreign Affairs (BZ), Justice and Security (JenV), and Social Affairs and Employment (SZW). The pilot involves young people with a degree and a job contract, ranging from vocational qualifications (i.e., MBO level) to tertiary degrees from universities of applied science (i.e., HBO level) and research universities (i.e., WO level), thus going beyond the target population of the Dutch knowledge migrant scheme (*Kennismigrantenregeling*). It aims to foster mutual “brain gain” and strengthen broader migration partnerships with Morocco, despite facing political opposition in the Netherlands (L4S_NL_pol_15; L4S_NL_pol_24).

Interestingly, this pilot was negotiated under former Minister Marjolijn Faber (PVV), who served in the first Dutch right-wing cabinet, and was in office when interviews were conducted. In parliamentary debates she highlighted that “of course, the PVV should not be bringing in more Moroccans; [but that she] needs something to deal with Morocco, so [she]’ll need to give visa out for skilled migrants, or students or something like that” (L4S_NL_exp_17). She also clarified that the pilot project is explicitly designed to

provide skills and prospects in Morocco, with safeguards for return, and that the pilot would be discontinued if participants failed to return.¹⁶

In October 2023, an MoU was signed aimed at improving academic exchange: supporting Moroccan PhD students to benefit from scholarship programmes in the Netherlands; joint supervision; improving research, innovation, and youth employability.¹⁷ Related to that, there is also the MENA Scholarship Programme (MSP) that “offers Moroccan professional impact makers up to (and including) 45 years training opportunities at education institutions in the Netherlands. This scholarship is offered by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs as part of the Shiraka programme and is managed by Nuffic, the Dutch organisation for internationalisation in education.”^{18 19}

Furthermore, there is the Skilled Driver Mobility for Europe project implemented by the International Road Transport Union, in which the Netherlands and Morocco have been involved since 2024 (L4S_NL_prac_01).²⁰

There are also other strategic opportunities between Morocco and the Netherlands, including in agriculture and the energy transition (L4S_NL_exp_11; L4S_NL_pol_15).

“When we were in Morocco, I found it interesting that the ambassador there pointed out to ‘orange companies’ who see opportunities in Morocco for certain parts of our economic activities” (L4S_NL_pol_15).

In June 2023, Morocco and the Netherlands signed an MoU on cooperation in the field of renewable energy,²¹ followed by an Action Plan detailing implementation for 2024-2025.²² While these agreements do not cover migration aspects explicitly, they could have indirect implications, through academic, professional, specialist, and expert exchange, cooperation, and training, which may lead to more permanent stays, depending on opportunities. Also, cooperation between companies is encouraged, which could lead to Dutch companies setting up offices in Morocco and vice versa.

Moroccan migration to the Netherlands: origins, trends and drivers

With a total of 420,000 Moroccans living in the Netherlands, of whom 174,000 are first-generation migrants who often migrated many years ago (L4S_NL_prac_02), Moroccans account for the second-largest migrant group in the Netherlands.²³ Moroccans came as guest workers, especially in the 1960s and 1970s (see Figure 1). A main instrument that brought Moroccans to the Netherlands was a bilateral agreement that entered into effect in 1969.²⁴ Official recruitment was terminated already in 1973; however, Moroccans continued to arrive in the Netherlands independently. Of earlier cohorts of Moroccans, around 30 per cent remained in the Netherlands, and of those who migrated later,

¹⁶ https://www.eerstekamer.nl/toezegging/pilot_circulaire_migratie_marokko#p1

¹⁷ Ministère de l'Enseignement Supérieur, de la Recherche Scientifique et de l'Innovation. (2023, 10 octobre). *Signature d'un mémorandum d'entente dans le domaine de l'enseignement supérieur*. Gouvernement du Maroc. <https://www.enssup.gov.ma/fr/actualites/signature-dun-memorandum-dentente-dans-le-domaine-de-lenseignement-superieur>; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken. (z.j.). *Bijlage: Rapportage economische missies 2023* (p. 9, sectie “Marokko, 9–13 oktober 2023”). Open.overheid.nl. <https://open.overheid.nl/documenten/b9897023-be3a-457a-8287-226485cd5b47/file>

¹⁸ <https://www.studyinnl.org/finances/mena-scholarship-programme-msp/msp-morocco>

¹⁹ <https://www.nuffic.nl/en>

²⁰ <https://www.migrationpartnershipfacility.eu/mpf-projects/64-skilled-driver-mobility-for-europe-sdm4eu/preview>

²¹ <https://www.government.nl/documents/diplomatic-statements/2023/06/21/memorandum-of-understanding-between-the-governments-of-morocco-and-the-netherlands-on-cooperation-in-the-field-of-hydrogen>

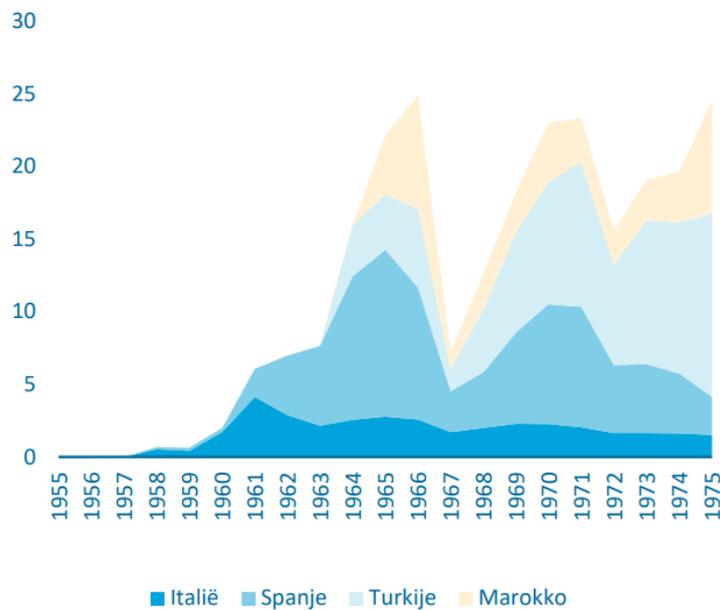
²² <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/convenanten/2024/05/14/gezamenlijk-actieplan-marokko-en-nederland-voor-hernieuwbare-energie-waaronder-waterstof>

²³ Engbersen, G. & Reinold, J. (2024). Country Profile the Netherlands. Migration and Skill Corridors. Available at: https://link4skills.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/L4S_countryreport_NL_tm.pdf

²⁴ <https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%20686/volume-686-I-9781-English.pdf>

approximately 50 per cent stayed.²⁵ Over time, what started as temporary labour migration had thus been transformed into permanent settlement, followed by the migration of relatives and community members of the initial migrants. Overall, we can therefore categorise the corridor as the post-guest worker programme type.

Figure 1: Development of labour migration between 1955-1975 (source: CPB, 2024)



Source: IBO Arbeidsmigratie²⁶

In recent years, labour migration from Morocco to the Netherlands has been negligible. The corridor is rather driven by family migration, especially family formation, but also family reunification and to a lesser extent family members accompanying labour and asylum migrants or international students (see Table 1). While family migrants can of course also bring valuable skills and contribute to the economy of the destination country, the Moroccan-Dutch corridor does not seem to be a “migration skill corridor” in the classic sense, despite its potential. Family migration from Morocco to the Netherlands is characterized primarily by the arrival of low-skilled and lower-educated family members and partners.²⁷ Our re-analysis of the EUMAGINE and THEMIS data suggests that Moroccans in the Netherlands are often lower educated.²⁸ Nevertheless, one interviewee highlighted that “what [they] see now is that people from Morocco [coming to Eindhoven], for example, don’t have the same profile anymore as back in the 60s or 70s, so to say. So, they are also educated, also in tech” (L4S_NL_prac_01) – even though according to statistics and other interviews, these highly educated Moroccans likely do not form a majority.

This trend seems to be the same for all other forms of migration. In this regard, we learned that the consular services of the Dutch embassy in Rabat had only granted one work visa for qualified people per month since 2013. The country was presented to us as a “small country”, already sufficiently populated by migrants from non-EU countries (L4S_MA-NL_pol_05).

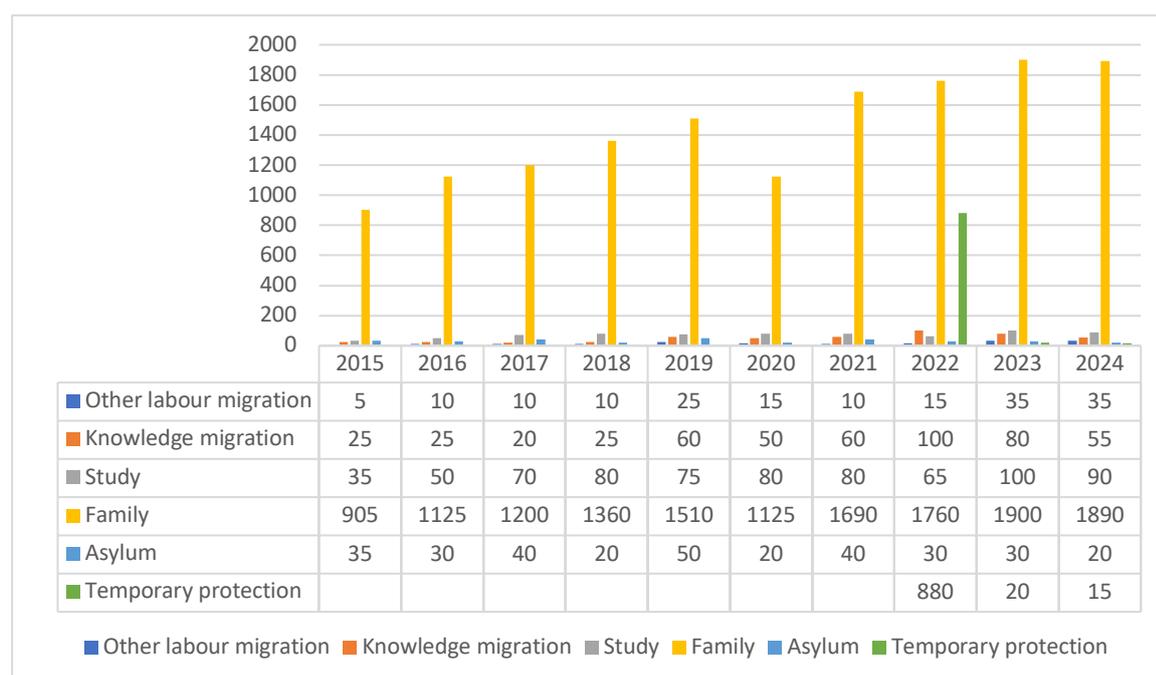
²⁵ <https://open.overheid.nl/documenten/25c8f9ef-c50d-478d-8a7e-2e42c327f3f2/file#page6>

²⁶ <https://open.overheid.nl/documenten/25c8f9ef-c50d-478d-8a7e-2e42c327f3f2/file#page6>

²⁷ Jennissen, R., Bovens, M., Engbersen, G., & Bokhorst, M. (2023). *Migration, Diversity and Social Cohesion: Reassessing the Dutch Policy Agenda*. Springer (Open Access). Link via Springer: <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-031-14224-6>

²⁸ Snel, E., Engbersen, G. & Reinold, J. (2024). *The Complexity of Migration Decisions within Migration Corridors*. Link4Skills Report. Warsaw: Kozminski University.

Table 1: Moroccan Migration to the Netherlands



Source: CBS²⁹

Box 1: Insights from the Link4Skills Migrant Survey

To illustrate our findings, we use insights from the Link4Skills Migrant Survey.³⁰ It was very difficult to recruit skilled Moroccans for the survey, even though we had specifically hired a Moroccan student assistant who supported this task. In total, only seven skilled Moroccans completed the survey, one man and 5 women (for one respondent the gender is unknown). They were on average rather young (23.7 years old), and had come to the Netherlands for studying, or working (in research and data engineering). Their average duration of stay in the Netherlands was five years, so fairly recent (compared to THEMIS participants who were in the Netherlands for more than 20 years on average). Their most important reasons for migration were opportunities for professional development, education, economic and labour market conditions. None of them had followed pre-arrival training in terms of aspects related to language, culture or the labour market. Overall, most perceived the migration process as “mostly smooth”. Their most important challenges in the Netherlands are related to finding housing and finances. Three of the respondents would like to stay in the Netherlands permanently, two would like to stay temporarily (2-5 years), and two would like to move onwards. Reasons for these preferences are similar to the reasons why they left Morocco and came to the Netherlands in the first place.

Labour migration to the Netherlands is demand driven and thus depends on the willingness and capacity of companies in the Netherlands to recruit internationally. The low numbers of Moroccans arriving for work purposes explicitly suggest that “Moroccans and Tunisians are not looking at the Netherlands” (L4S_NL_prac_02),³¹ and at the same time, “there are very few Moroccan companies present. And we see very few people coming in directly for companies” (L4S_NL_prac_02). This is an important difference compared to other corridors like the Indian-Dutch one, which are mostly shaped by the private sector and company locations. A private recruitment agency we interviewed confirmed that “[They]’ve simply never

²⁹ <https://opendata.cbs.nl/#/CBS/nl/dataset/84809NED/table?dl=C6A33>

³⁰ Reinold, J., Engbersen, G., Grabowska, I., Chrol, E., Kyliushyk, I., Schwenken, H., Ullmann, J., Hendow, M., Huss, D., Triandafyllidou, A. & Shirazi, H. (2025). *Link4Skills Migrant Survey Restricted Access Variant. V1*. [Data set] DANS Data Station Social Sciences and Humanities, <https://doi.org/10.17026/SS/1IKONT>

³¹ See also: Engbersen, G., Snel, E., & Esteves, A. (2016). Migration mechanisms of the middle range: On the concept of reverse cumulative causation. In O. Bakewell, G. Engbersen, M. L. Fonseca, & C. Horst (Eds.), *Beyond networks: Feedback in international migration* (pp. 205–230). Palgrave Macmillan

received a request from [their] partner healthcare institutions asking, ‘Why aren’t you working in Morocco?’” (L4S_NL_prac_13).

The political environment also seems to play a role: “Apparently, the Netherlands has become less attractive. Political statements, such as ‘fewer Moroccans’, may also play a role” (L4S_NL_exp_19). This is confirmed by existing research on drivers of Moroccan migration to the Netherlands and their experiences living in the Netherlands. An established migration corridor like the Moroccan-Dutch one may also decline based on the concept of diminutive causation.³² They identified three factors that led to declining Moroccan migration to the Netherlands, namely 1) less motivation of settled Moroccan migrants to support potential new arrivals due to progressively tightening immigration rules from the 1980s onwards, fewer economic opportunities and a hostile social environment, which leads to 2) the provision of negative feedback to potential migrants affecting their aspirations to move to the Netherlands, and 3) resulting changes in migration cultures in Morocco (e.g., home preference, preference for other destinations like Canada for skilled migrants).

Moroccan migrants in the Netherlands often intend to stay,³³ which is possibly because mobility decreases with duration of stay in the destination countries and because lower education is generally associated with less mobility. The Dutch government, however, would like to see Moroccans return more often, which is also the focus of the agreement between the Netherlands and Morocco: “We are relatively successful in encouraging return migration, mainly of young men” (L4S_NL_pol_15).

Conversely, forms of transnational living are also observed, most notably among retired Moroccans who reside part of the year in Morocco, motivated by climatic conditions, family ties, and a sense of home.³⁴ Increased possibilities to work remotely lead to return migration as they allow Dutch Moroccans to keep their Dutch jobs and escape experiences of exclusion, discrimination, and racism.³⁵

The second and third generations of Moroccans in the Netherlands are firmly established, though challenges in education, employment, and social inclusion remain important issues. These challenges, paired with other factors, increasingly lead to the return migration of second or third generations, so-called Moroccan Dutch nationals.³⁶ They show a relatively high propensity to leave the Netherlands³⁷ because of experience with exclusion, hostility, discrimination, and intolerance in the Netherlands.³⁸ Employment opportunities in Morocco are another important driver of this return migration. For example, some work for Dutch telecom companies that moved to Morocco to reduce labour costs, although salaries for their Dutch-speaking employees are above-average for Moroccan standards.³⁹ Other returnees keep their Dutch jobs and work remotely from Morocco or start their own businesses in Morocco, for example, providing services to Moroccan Dutch people in Morocco (e.g., in gastronomy, hospitality, tourism, etc.).

³² Engbersen, G., Snel, E., & Esteves, A. (2016). Migration mechanisms of the middle range: On the concept of reverse cumulative causation. In O. Bakewell, G. Engbersen, M. L. Fonseca, & C. Horst (Eds.), *Beyond networks: Feedback in international migration* (pp. 205–230). Palgrave Macmillan

³³ Snel, E., Engbersen, G. & Reinold, J. (2024). *The Complexity of Migration Decisions within Migration Corridors*. Link4Skills Report. Warsaw: Kozminski University.

³⁴ Engbersen, G., & Snel, E. (2020). The emotion management of transnational living. *Population, Space and Place*, 27(5), Article e2414. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/psp.2414>

³⁵ Belabas, W., & de Jong, P. (2024). The unique nature of second-generation migration experiences: a case study of the Moroccan Dutch. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 50(18), 4501–4521. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2024.2333868>

³⁶ Ramos, M., Thijssen, L., & Coenders, M. (2019). Labour market discrimination against Moroccan minorities in the Netherlands and Spain: a cross-national and cross-regional comparison. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 47(6), 1261–1284. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2019.1622824>

³⁷ De Jong, P., Wachter, G. & Dieleman, D. (2020). Emigratie van de tweede generatie. Retrieved September 2025 from <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/longread/statistische-trends/2020/emigratie-van-de-tweede-generatie?onpage=true#c-3--Resultaten>

³⁸ Belabas, W., & de Jong, P. (2024). The unique nature of second-generation migration experiences: a case study of the Moroccan Dutch. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 50(18), 4501–4521. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2024.2333868>

³⁹ Belabas, W., & de Jong, P. (2024). The unique nature of second-generation migration experiences: a case study of the Moroccan Dutch. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 50(18), 4501–4521. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2024.2333868>

Being a second-generation Moroccan migrant in the Netherlands can feel like growing up between two cultures, resulting on the one hand in experiences of exclusion that motivate emigration, while at the same time equipping individuals with skills and opportunities that facilitate emigration.⁴⁰

Ethnic mixing between Dutch people and Moroccans generally remains limited.⁴¹ Higher-educated, employed, and higher-status Turkish and Moroccan immigrants and their descendants are more likely to form close ties with Dutch natives due to greater Dutch language proficiency, weaker religious participation, and reduced ethnic identification, which enhances cultural similarity (ibid.). Given the large population of Moroccans in the Netherlands, there are also plenty of opportunities to practice and maintain the Moroccan culture, which “has less to do with Morocco, it has more to do with it that people are from a Moroccan heritage, so you can go into every city neighbourhood to find an iftar at the moment. But those have nothing to do with the skilled migration anymore” (L4S_NL_prac_02).

Conclusion

In summary, the Moroccan–Dutch migration corridor is a well-established one, rooted in the labour movements of the 1960s and 1970s, when Moroccan workers were recruited to fill labour shortages in the Netherlands. Accordingly, we can categorise the corridor as the post-guest worker programme type. Over time, this initial wave gave rise to stable migrant communities, forming the basis for enduring social and economic ties between the two countries. Today, new arrivals are relatively limited and mainly consist of ad hoc family formation cases, while labour migration has become marginal and skilled migration is very limited. Since there is an agreement between the Netherlands and Morocco, one can argue that the corridor is somewhat state-led. The priority of the Dutch government is rather to encourage the return of (irregular) Moroccan migrants residing in the Netherlands. Initiatives to facilitate regular (skilled) migration are thus far limited and setting them up has been described as time-consuming. Expanding regular channels is rather seen as a necessity by the Dutch government to accommodate the wishes of the Moroccan state in their cooperation.

Despite an agreement being in place, the corridor now operates largely beyond direct public or private intervention. In practice, mobility between Morocco and the Netherlands is mainly driven by migrant networks, social capital, and community ties rather than by structured recruitment schemes or government programmes. This shift illustrates a broader trend: mature migration corridors often become self-sustaining through family and community dynamics, even when formal migration channels are restricted. However, current migration networks are not characterized by facilitating the arrival of compatriots, but rather by rejecting it. The critical attitude within these migrant networks has contributed significantly to the decline of migration from Morocco to the Netherlands.⁴² Besides, private-sector involvement in this corridor remains limited compared with other origin countries, such as India. Dutch companies rarely recruit directly from Morocco. It would be interesting to study why companies do not actively recruit from Morocco but seem to value workers from other origin countries more (i.e., mismatch between supply and demand, perceptions about language skills, etc.). This underlines the need for targeted initiatives to strengthen mutual understanding, align skills, improve recognition of qualifications, and create pilot programmes for youth mobility or circular migration, while keeping in mind the limitations of the latter. Strengthening partnerships in vocational training and professional mobility could reinvigorate this long-standing corridor, making it more responsive to current economic and demographic needs in both countries. By linking migration management with skills development and private-sector cooperation,

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ van Tubergen, F. (2014). Ethnic Boundaries in Core Discussion Networks: A Multilevel Social Network Study of Turks and Moroccans in the Netherlands. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 41(1), 101–116. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2014.886955>

⁴² Engbersen, G., Snel, E., & Esteves, A. (2016). Migration mechanisms of the middle range: On the concept of reverse cumulative causation. In O. Bakewell, G. Engbersen, M. L. Fonseca, & C. Horst (Eds.), *Beyond networks: Feedback in international migration* (pp. 205–230). Palgrave Macmillan

both countries could transform a legacy of past labour migration into a forward-looking framework for mobility and partnership. A holistic approach bringing together different Ministries and policy areas is needed to actually make the corridor a migration *skill* corridor:

“The trick will be to create some kind of trade-off. But that means some departments that usually try to stay in the background - saying, “don’t call us”- will really have to be involved. And some are already saying: yes, come on in. Also, with Morocco, there are opportunities: in agriculture, in the energy transition. If you play it smartly, also bilaterally, you can make real progress. That’s why I say: this is the small playing field for now. But if you want to broaden it, this is essentially the route we’re trying to take.” (L4S_NL_pol_15).

For good practices, it is advisable to look at other corridors such as the Moroccan-German or the Moroccan-French one.

Appendix-List of interviews

General interviews	Corridor specific interviews
L4S_NL_prac_01 L4S_NL_prac_02 L4S_NL_prac_03 L4S_NL_prac_04 L4S_NL_exp_05 L4S_NL_exp_06 L4S_NL_prac_07 L4S_NL_pol_08 L4S_NL_prac_09 L4S_NL_exp_11 L4S_NL_prac_13 L4S_NL_prac_14 L4S_NL_pol_15 L4S_NL_exp_17 L4S_NL_prac_18 L4S_NL-exp_19 L4S_NL_exp_20 L4S_NL_exp_21 L4S_NL_pol_24 L4S_MA_prac_01 L4S_MA_prac_02 L4S_MA_prac_03 L4S_MA_pol_04 L4S_MA-DE_prac_06 L4S_MA_exp_07 L4S_MA_exp_08	L4S_MA-NL_pol_05

Note: We only provide a clean list here to protect interviewees' anonymity. Unfortunately, we did not succeed in conducting corridor-specific interviews.