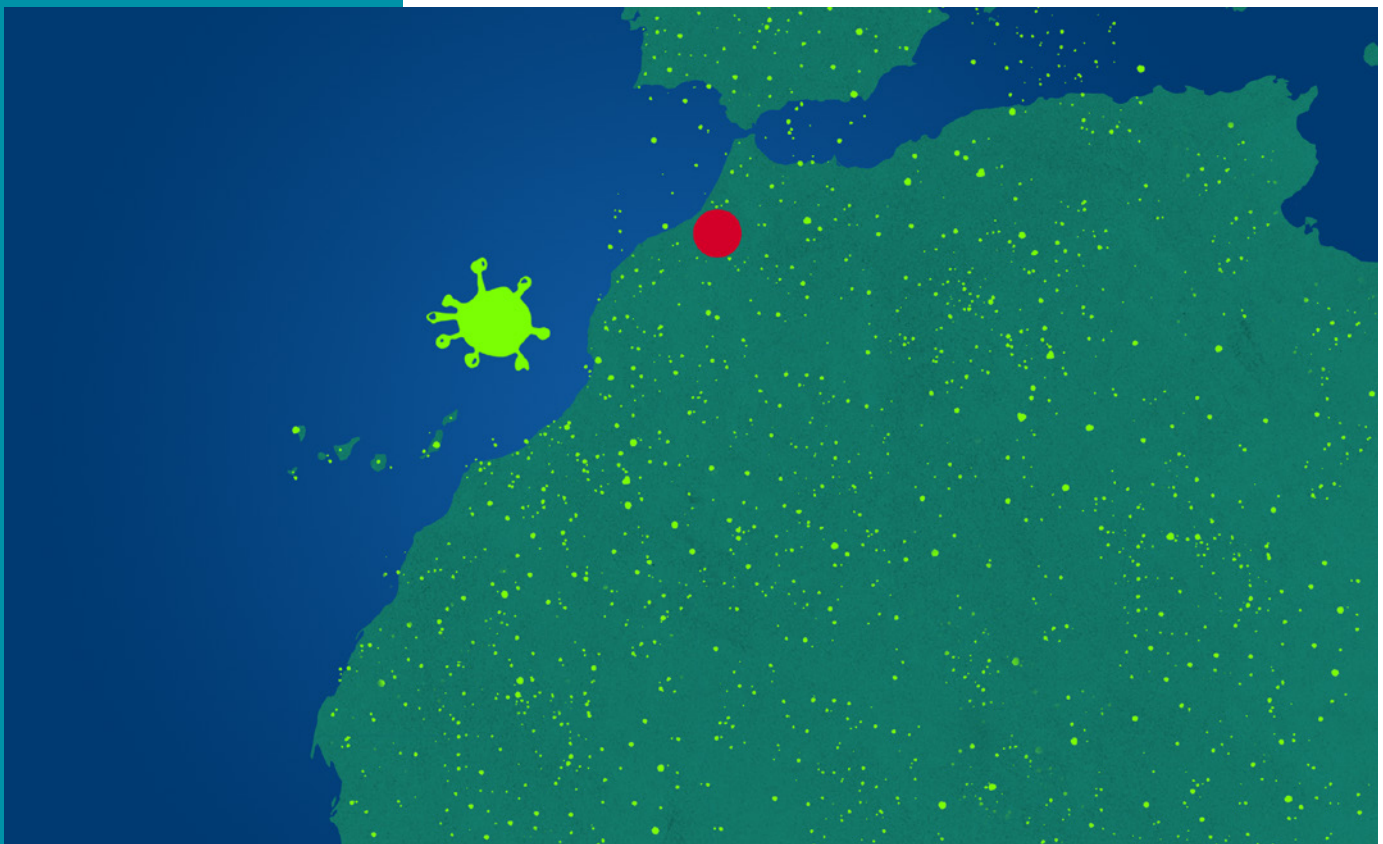


HEINRICH BÖLL STIFTUNG
WASHINGTON, DC

HEINRICH BÖLL STIFTUNG
BRUSSELS

COVID-19 PANDEMIC CASE STUDY: MOROCCO



BY REDA ZAIREG

Published by the Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung Washington, DC, and the
Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung European Union, Brussels, December 2020

AUTHOR

Reda Zaireg is a Moroccan freelance journalist. He started his career in 2013 as a journalist for TelQuel magazine. He then joined the newsroom of Medias24, then the Huffington Post Maroc. He has also collaborated with the Associated Press, Middle East Eye and Orient XXI.

Table of Contents

1. Bleak Prospects for the Economy	6
2. Health: Rising Infection Rate, Exhausted Medical Personnel	8
3. Politics: Minimal Democratic Improvement and Fears of Low Voter Turnout	10
4. Gender Impact: More Challenging than Expected	12
5. A Limited Multilateral Cooperation, but Support from Traditional Partners	14
6. Conclusion	17

Eleven months after the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, Morocco is facing a multiple crises. The coronavirus has inflicted heavy damage to the national economy and also has affected society. Disparities have increased, poverty has gained ground and, several months after the end of one of the world's longest lockdowns, an important part of activity is still at a standstill.

The crisis can act as a catalyst for change, and it has boosted some of the social programmes that have been planned for several years now, including the universalisation of social security. Nevertheless, the Moroccan state has to manage the situation with the means at hand: a reduced budget, lacklustre political institutions and a dirigiste approach which, while reflecting a strong resolve to get the country out of its rut, can hardly replace deliberative and consultative decision-making processes.

The prospect of holding elections in 2021 does not delight many people, and the fear of massive abstention looms over the political calendar.

Despite all this, Morocco is trying to cope with the situation, especially on the international level: the country is actively negotiating with its partners to boost investment and expects a relative rebound in 2021.

Overview

Covid-19 in Morocco

GDP per Capita

(in US Dollars)

3,204 \$



World Bank, 2019

<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD?locations=MA-UA-XK-BR-NG-PH>



36 million

Population



World Bank, 2019

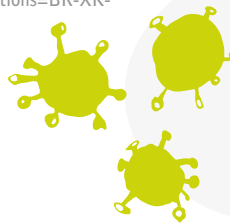
<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.P0P.TOTL?locations=BR-XK-UA-MA-NG-PH>

Covid-19 Cases

353803

WHO, November 30th, 2020

<https://covid19.who.int/region/afro/country/ng>



Covid-19 Cases

per 100 000

970,07



WHO, November 30th, 2020

<https://covid19.who.int/region/afro/country/ng>

Covid-19 Deaths

per 100 000

16,07



John Hopkins University, November 30th, 2020

<https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/data/mortality>

Fatality Rate

1,6%



John Hopkins University, November 30th, 2020

<https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/data/mortality>

ICU beds

per 100 000

4,5



Medias24, 2020

<https://www.medias24.com/covid-19-le-maroc-augmente-sa-capacite-a-3-000-lits-de-reanimation-equipes-8902.html>

1. Bleak Prospects for the Economy

With the slowdown in domestic economic activity, unemployment is likely to rise. It should exceed 13% by the end of the year according to the Department of Economy and Finance. The Moroccan economy lost nearly 600,000 jobs during the second quarter of 2020, which coincided with the implementation of strict confinement. When the confinement period came to an end, while hopes were rising for a steady recovery, the economy only slightly bounced back, primarily in agriculture and the secondary sector, and to a lesser extent in the tertiary sector. The expected number of corporate bankruptcies should hit close to 9,770 in 2020 - an increase of 16% compared to the previous year - but the overall picture of the scope and severity of the crisis will only become clearer in the first quarter of 2021, with a 25% increase in business failures, according to [an impact study conducted by Inforisk and the World Bank](#).

Besides the unemployment in formal sectors of the economy, a significant part of society is dependent on the informal economy, which accounts for more than 20% of the GDP and generates between 75 and 89% of the jobs in Morocco. Often non-contractual, earning irregular income and being excluded from the social security system, many informal sector workers face unemployment or short working hours and lower wages.

Poverty is also expected to rise rather alarmingly. According to [a strategy note issued in July by the Office of the High for Planning, the United Nations, and the World Bank](#), although Morocco has succeeded in reducing income poverty over the past 20 years from 15.3% in 2001 to about 4.8% in 2014, the trend is likely to be reversed. It is expected that this rate will rise to 6.6% in the current year. The percentage of people at risk of poverty or those already poor will increase from 17.1% of the population in 2019 to 19.87% during 2020, which means that an additional 1.05 million people will be affected by monetary poverty.

Against this background, the Moroccan state implemented several incentives, subsidies and aids, targeted at specific economic sectors and population groups. In March 2020, King Mohammed VI announced the creation of a special fund dedicated to the upgrade of medical infrastructure, the support of the national economy, the preservation of jobs and the mitigation of the social impact of the pandemic. This fund collected more than 2.7 billion euros from public and private contributors. Financial subsidies ranging from \$80 to \$120 (ca. 68 to 102 euros) per month were provided to 4.3 million households earning income from the informal sector, but this aid alone proved insufficient to alleviate the economic impact of the coronavirus crisis on these populations. Businesses, on the other hand, are benefiting from stimulus packages, tax rebates and are expected to take advantage of a two-year tax exemption for youth recruitment in 2021.

In August, Mohammed VI introduced an economic stimulus package of over 11 billion euros (11% of GDP) to support the productive sectors and SMEs, industrial restructuring, emerging and high-value sectors, infrastructure, agriculture and tourism. This support will be provided through a strategic investment fund as well as a system of loans guaranteed by the state, from which 20,000 companies have already benefited, for an amount of nearly 2.5 billion euros. Then, in October, the King announced a plan to expand the scope of social security coverage, with the aim of extending medical coverage by the end of 2022, followed by the generalisation of family allowances, compensation for job loss and retirement pensions.

With all these measures, the Moroccan state's social expenditures are expected to significantly increase, to the extent that [2021's budget bill](#) provides for more than 3 billion euros of additional spending, for 1.8 to 2.3 billion euros less in tax revenue. For the current year alone, the budget deficit reached nearly 4 billion euros, or 7.6% of GDP, versus 2.6 billion euros for the same period in 2019. To meet its needs, Morocco would have to resort to international borrowing, at the risk of increasing its debt ratio. Since the outbreak of the crisis, Morocco has heavily relied on aid and international loans. The country has lent more than 2.2 billion euros and has drawn 3 billion dollars on the International Monetary Fund (IMF) precautionary and liquidity line. Consequently, the overall public debt is forecast to rise from 80.5% of GDP to 91.7% in 2020, before experiencing an expected slight decline in 2021, to 91.1% of GDP, according to Bank Al-Maghrib.

2. Health: Rising Infection Rate, Exhausted Medical Personnel

[In recent weeks, the infection rate has been steadily rising.](#) While the infection level had remained at a fairly low level during the confinement, which lasted from March to July, Morocco crossed the 1,000 cases per day mark at the end of July, and infections increased by 157% in August, compared to the first five months of the pandemic. Throughout September, the number of active cases fluctuated around the 20,000 range, with an average of 2,035 cases per day, before rising to 25,000 active cases in October, with an average of 3100 cases per day. But these rather low figures should be tempered because, with 160,000 tests per week, Morocco's diagnosis and tracing capabilities do not match the actual contamination levels. Only those who develop a sufficiently evidential pattern of symptoms, as well as those who have been in close contact with them, are tested. Otherwise they are simply encouraged to self-isolate. A tracking application has been developed by the Health Department, but it is little used and so has only an irrelevant or marginal usefulness.

A seroprevalence study conducted by the Health Ministry between March and August 2020 revealed a prevalence rate of 700 per 100,000 inhabitants, whereas the incidence rate identified over the same period through standard diagnosis was only 172 per 100,000 inhabitants. However, this high seroprevalence rate can be explained by sampling bias (blood donors are healthy urban adults, and are not representative of the general population), [as highlighted by the Moroccan news website Medias24.](#)

Nevertheless, at this stage, Morocco is managing the pandemic risk to some extent. To make up for the lack of hospital bed capacity, several field hospitals have been set up in different cities. Despite this, the health system is periodically overwhelmed in some towns and districts, leading to the enactment of partial and temporary confinement measures, along with a change in the care protocol (home-based monitoring and treatment for the mildest cases), with the aim of easing the strain on hospitals. But fears of a surge in contaminations persist, in particular due to a waning of the public's vigilance and a slackening in the implementation of preventive measures.

The advent of winter flu could make the situation worse. As World Health Organization (WHO) Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus warned in June, 'the co-circulation of Covid-19 and influenza may worsen the impact on already overburdened health-care systems', and cause 'a combination of problems, including the reassignment of staff and supplies and overloading of laboratories'. Winter influenza could not only overwhelm the diagnosis capacity of laboratories and hospitals due to the overlapping symptoms of the two diseases, but it could also contribute to the spread of SARS-CoV-2. [A study by the Max Planck Institute in Berlin and the Pasteur Institute in Paris](#) estimates that

winter flu may increase coronavirus transmission by a factor of 2 to 2.5 when the two diseases co-circulate. To reduce this risk, Morocco is launching a large flu vaccination campaign at the end of October, free of charge for the poorest populations.

With 0.7 doctors and 1.3 nurses per 1,000 inhabitants, Morocco can hardly afford an upsurge in cases. Already overworked and exhausted by a several months-long campaign to control the coronavirus, doctors and nurses are mending the failures of the health-care system. They have been mobilised since February and often lack the appropriate resources, both for diagnosis and treatment, and for protection (masks, gloves, sanitizer, etc.), and are subject to a heavy workload and a high risk of contamination. They are calling for an improvement in their working conditions and an increase in wages, which have not been raised in 14 years: a public hospital doctor begins his career as a resident with a pay of 280 euros per month, rising to 740 to 800 euros once he is a certified doctor. The maximum salary ranges from 1,500 to 1,700 euros per month. Failing to secure an increase in salaries and improvements in work conditions, [the Independent Union of Public Sector Doctors is now threatening to resort to protest actions.](#)

3. Politics: Minimal Democratic Improvement and Fears of Low Voter Turnout

On a broader level, the risk of social unrest should not be minimised under the present circumstances. [The coronavirus crisis has amplified economic and social disparities](#). In some localities, the impact and constraints linked to the pandemic (restrictions on mobility, reduced working hours, shutdown of certain activities, etc.) combine with already existing structural problems (poverty, unemployment, difficulties in access to healthcare, supplies, etc.).

In addition to cyclical and 'routine' protests, conducted for several years now by organised groups whose use of public space has become trivialised (unemployed university graduates, trade unions, associations, etc.), new categories are now hitting the streets, especially in peripheral areas, but also in large cities: shopkeepers, street vendors and farmers in Kelaat Seraghna; families who have not benefited from state aid in Ezzhiliga; caterers, waiters, orchestra musicians and sports hall managers demanding the resumption of their activities in Tangier. Some demonstrations are banned by the authorities, while others, unplanned or more spontaneous, are monitored once they happen. Overall, the demands primarily relate to state aid and to regulations restricting or even prohibiting specific occupational activities during the pandemic. These demands are regularly addressed in negotiations between local authorities and protest groups.

While the local authorities, who fall under the umbrella of the Ministry of the Interior, play a key part in managing the crisis, elected local officials only fulfil a limited role. The Covid-19 crisis has been met with a centralised approach, to the detriment of local administrations (regions and communes). In 2015, Morocco implemented new laws designed to grant more powers to communes and regions, as part of a new policy of advanced regionalisation. With the dominance of the central authorities in managing the crisis, Morocco's regions are losing momentum. Even though 2020 was once envisioned as the year when further progress in regionalisation was to be made, some politicians complain today about the 'marginalisation' of the elected councils and call for the process to be put back on track. In this regard, [the Moroccan Association of Presidents of Communal Councils \(AMPCC\) calls for a reform of the law](#), in order to enhance the financial, managerial and political autonomy of the elected councils. They also call for a more specific definition of the scope of action of elected officials and local authorities, as well as a clearer division of powers and responsibilities between the two authorities. [The Interior Ministry later pledged to bolster its support for advanced regionalisation](#), primarily through budget transfers and support for local programs, as part of the contractualisation process between the State and regions.

The same applies to the political sphere. The Moroccan executive is characterised by a dichotomy between a prevailing monarchy and an elected government made up of a coalition of six political parties and technocrats directly appointed by the king. In both the elected institutions (parliament, etc.) and the government, political parties find themselves downgraded in the management of the crisis in favour of ministerial departments and public institutions and administrations headed by appointees of the king (Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Economy, police, etc.), thus strengthening the idea that the political sphere is not the decision-making arena, which could lead to a high abstention rate in the 2021 elections. In turn, political parties have very little substantive expertise on public governance issues, and have often succumbed to a form of 'voluntary or involuntary divestment' of major public issues in favour of the monarchy and the technocrats appointed by the king, leading to strong 'institutional disenchantment' amongst the citizens, as institutions appear to be of little overall utility in the conduct of public affairs.

Regarding the human rights situation, NGOs point to restrictions on civil liberties, noting that despite laws guaranteeing them, many civil liberties are constrained in practice. The decree-law on the state of health emergency punishes contraveners with one to three months in prison and/or a fine of 30 to 130 euros. During the lockdown period, 81,489 people were arrested for infringements of the state of health emergency, according to an April assessment by the Directorate General of National Security (DGSN). Of these, 42,967 were brought before the public prosecutor's office. 95% of them were tried while not in custody, while 4.83% were placed in detention. According to official data, those who were held in custody were detained primarily because they committed other crimes (theft, drug trafficking, or violence against law enforcement officials) in addition to violating the state of health emergency. Those arrests typically occurred in popular, often overcrowded neighbourhoods where large families share a single house, making it difficult for family members who were accustomed to occupying the premises at different times of the day, to coexist with each other.

By the beginning of May, 80 individuals accused of spreading false information about the coronavirus were prosecuted. One of them, 'Mi Naima', a well-known Moroccan YouTuber, was handed a one-year prison sentence for a video in which she claimed that the coronavirus did not exist. Her sentence was later reduced to three months in prison, and she has since been released. Activists and citizen journalists were also arrested for violating the provisions of the state of health emergency.

4. Gender Impact: More Challenging than Expected

Since the onset of the coronavirus crisis, NGOs have expressed concern about the rise in domestic and family violence. The domestic environment is a prime site of abuse, with nearly 6.1 million women affected, according to the 2019 national survey on violence against women by the Office of the High Commissioner for Planning (HCP).

'In households with domestic violence issues, when isolation or quarantine strategies are deployed, the risk of such violence tends to increase, as does the risk of sexual exploitation. Covid-19 is likely to be responsible for similar trends, as the experience of the Ebola and Zika epidemics has demonstrated by revealing increased rates of domestic violence', [UN Women said in a note on the impact of the epidemic on women and girls in Morocco](#). The UN agency cites early data from China that 'suggest that the Covid-19 epidemic has had a significant impact on rates of domestic violence, tripling the number of cases reported to local police in February 2020 compared to the same period the previous year'.

Due to the reported increase in violence against women during the state of emergency, the Public Prosecutor's Office issued a memo urging prosecutors to give priority to addressing complaints from women victims of violence. NGOs established helplines and hotlines for abused women, some of which provide legal support.

Despite all these measures, lawsuits were unusually low during the confinement, so much so that the volume of complaints filed by abused women between March 20 and April 20, at the peak of the lockdown, was ten times lower than the monthly average. The Public Prosecutor's Office attributed this decline to 'the stability of the Moroccan family, its harmony and its natural commitment to peaceful coexistence, despite the challenging circumstances that the Kingdom is currently experiencing'.

The reality proved to be different. According to data collected by the Union of Feminist Action (UAF), a feminist organisation that runs several support centres in Morocco, domestic abuse has indeed risen, but only 35.05% of the victims assisted by the NGO have filed complaints against their partners for acts of violence. 7.21% of them filed for divorce, and 4.12% fled the marital home to seek refuge with their families or neighbours.

The impact of the pandemic on women cannot be solely limited to the increase in domestic abuse. It takes different forms and is manifested in diverse aspects. [In recent studies](#), the Office of the High Commissioner for Planning (HCP) has highlighted some of the gender-related implications of the coronavirus crisis.

The congestion of the public healthcare system has significantly reduced women's access to sexual and reproductive health services. Regarding access to general medical treatments, women have been more disadvantaged than men: out of all female-headed households with one or more members suffering from common diseases, nearly 47.5% did not have access to health services, compared to 37.9% for households headed by men.

Women and men are also differently affected by the psychological effects of the Covid-19. [According to an HCP survey](#), women are more affected by sleep disorders than men (26% versus 23%), anxiety (51% versus 49%) and depression (9% versus 6%).

The over-representation of women in jobs related to health and care services overexposes them to the coronavirus and substantially increases their risk of infection, according to the HCP: women represent 58% of the medical staff and 67% of the paramedical staff (nurses and technicians).

A survey conducted by UN Women and the HCP shows that only 10% of women who lost their jobs or suffered a loss of income benefited from state or employer financial support, whereas 35% of men did. The public aid compensated 39% of men's income, compared to only 20% for women.

Domestic burdens increased during the confinement period, weighing more and more on women, who spent an average of 4 hours and 27 minutes a day on them, versus 45 minutes for men.

With the exception of a few HCP and UN Women surveys, the specific gender impact of the coronavirus has yet to be fully investigated. A key issue is the lack of gender-specific indicators in national statistics.

5. A Limited Multilateral Cooperation, but Support from Traditional Partners

Since the outbreak of the pandemic, Morocco has broadened its portfolio of partnerships to tackle the coronavirus. Early on, Morocco sought China's expertise and secured a partnership for vaccine development, to ensure that it would be one of the first countries to benefit from it in adequate quantities.

The European Union, Morocco's main trading partner, has provided the most substantial assistance during the pandemic. Morocco benefits from an advanced status among the EU's neighbouring countries, and as such enjoys a high level of cooperation.

Various aid packages geared towards mitigating the economic, health and social impact of the outbreak have been delivered or promised by the European Union in favour of the country, for a cumulative total of 450 million euros. The European Investment Bank has, for its part, approved a 200-million-euro loan to Morocco. This significant funding, allocated to Morocco's national pandemic response plan, helped the kingdom cushion the effects of the Covid-19 crisis.

On December 2, Germany granted a € 1 billion aid package to Morocco, aimed at "mitigating the social and economic consequences of the Covid-19 crisis". This financing "should provide a prompt and significant contribution to the management of the Covid-19 crisis in Morocco, to the sustainable transformation of the Moroccan economy and to the further development of green energy," according to [a statement by the German Federal Embassy in Morocco](#).

Now Morocco has its focus on the economic rebound of the European continent and seeks to benefit from the opportunities that it can offer. In early October, a videoconference between European Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Olivér Várhelyi and several Moroccan ministers provided an occasion for both sides to discuss possible synergies in their respective economic recovery plans. Representatives of the Moroccan government made suggestions regarding a partnership for a 'shared competitiveness' between Morocco and the European Union in several high-priority areas.

Morocco's aim seems to strengthen cooperation with the European Union in order to benefit from the economic recovery of the continent, without this recovery being at the country's expense through a relocation process of some industries. The prospect of a forthcoming overhaul of the European Neighbourhood Policy, which is on the political agenda of the European Union, may motivate Morocco to renegotiate its place and role with the EU.

On December 1st, during a visit to Morocco by Oliver Varhelyi, [Morocco's Minister of Economy and Finance Mohamed Benchaâboun](#) officially called for the European Union's support to the [Mohammed VI Investment Fund](#), a fund that was created to oversee the kingdom's economic recovery. Mohamed Benchaâboun suggested that the European investment would help the diversification of Europe's supply sources, as part of a redesign of global value chains due to the Covid-19 crisis. Varhelyi pledged support, and promised a new "detailed economic plan for bilateral partnership" by next spring.

Besides the pursuit of many ongoing programmes and projects with the EU, Morocco appears to be eager to expand its partnership range. [The Green Deal envisioned by the European Union to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050](#) seems to appeal to Morocco, which would like to increase its investment in green energy and generate a payoff in the process.

Morocco's economic and policy agenda with the United States is different. Relations between Morocco and the United States, while stable, especially in their security and military aspects, are intertwined with diplomatic and political agendas that are heavily dependent on shifts in the US administration.

US support for Morocco during the pandemic was relatively modest. By March, the US government raised \$670,000 from the US Agency for International Development's (USAID) to support efforts to contain the spread of Covid-19 in Morocco. In April, the US Defense Threat Reduction Agency donated protective equipment to frontline Moroccan healthcare workers.

Cooperation between the two countries appears to be more focused on security and military aspects, and to a lesser extent investment promotion. Many US officials, including Secretary of Defense Mark Esper, have visited Morocco in recent months to help modernize the Moroccan military capacity, enhancing Moroccan military capacity, and supporting Morocco's role in maintaining regional stability. US officials also called for a new roadmap for defence cooperation between the United States and Morocco.

Faced with significant economic challenges during the economic recovery phase, Morocco is likely to be in demand for US investment. In October, a US government delegation, led by US International Development Finance Corporation (DFC) Chief Executive Officer Adam Bohler, visited Morocco to expand US investments in Morocco and to promote resiliency following the Covid-19 pandemic.

Being an active player in several international organisations, Morocco appears to be disappointed by the very low contribution of multilateral bodies in the management of the pandemic.

The coronavirus raised significant challenges that many countries faced on their own. This situation led to some disillusionment towards multilateralism in the eyes of the Moroccan diplomacy. 'Multilateral bodies such as the UN must today be strengthened, be more effective and get rid of the rhetorical and political anaphora', [Morocco's ambassador to the UN Omar Hilale](#) told the newspaper [Maroc Diplomatique](#). 'There was obviously a

lack of dialogue between States when dealing with the multidimensional effects of the pandemic. This is a huge shortfall for multilateralism during the Covid-19 crisis', he remarked.

The Moroccan ambassador to the UN is also concerned about the rise of nationalism and isolationism in several countries. 'Within the UN, many countries have taken unilateral decisions throughout this crisis, at a time when policy choices should be conducted in a more concerted and unified approach by international actors.' For the ambassador, these issues, symptomatic of a multilateralism crisis would be better resolved in order to rebuild multilateralism on a more pragmatic, supportive and sustainable ground.

According to Hilale, the pandemic has the potential to provide an opportunity for international relations. 'International solidarity was given a new impetus during the pandemic, and was boosted by Covid-oriented financing and calls for donations, mainly to help treat patients and prevent new contaminations.' In the mid-term, the ambassador hopes that this international experience will be 'a driving force for strengthening not only health systems and medical cooperation, but also international solidarity in the face of global tragedies linked to migration, climate change, famine, extreme poverty and violations of human rights'. In short, lessons learned from managing the Covid-19 should provide guidance on how to balance international cooperation against other equally compelling global issues.

As chairman of the humanitarian affairs segment of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), in June [Morocco launched a call for action](#) that received support from 171 countries and two regional organisations, the European Union (EU) and the African Union (AU). This call urges increased cooperation to control and contain the pandemic through effective measures and prompt and flexible funding, without such funding replacing or diverting resources allocated to other humanitarian needs unrelated to Covid-19.

The call also encourages member states to closely cooperate with the United Nations, facilitate the flow of humanitarian assistance and presses for compliance with the UN Secretary General António Guterres' appeal for a global ceasefire.

It is rather unusual for a Moroccan diplomat to speak publicly on such an issue. This reflects Morocco's high hopes for international actors to help address the global pandemic crisis. A country highly dependent on its international environment, both in terms of aid and loans as well as investments, Morocco sees the current lack of cooperation as a missed opportunity that would have helped it and other developing countries to share the cost of the crisis.

6. Conclusion

Provided that Morocco succeeds in maintaining the infection rate within manageable levels, the main challenge ahead is economic recovery: getting the economy back on track, regenerating jobs and attracting investment are at the top of the country's priorities.

During the current economic recovery phase, [Morocco seems to seek greater integration in the game of global trade](#). The pandemic has exhausted the state budget and, given the country's plans for heavy spending in 2021, may seek to raise resources from international funds in the coming year. Taking into account the quite volatile social climate and its associated risks, the new social policy that the country plans to implement appears to be a priority and will require substantial funding.

Assuming that Morocco hopes to bind itself to Europe's economic recovery, the country is likely to be impacted by the recession of its main trade partner. But as long as manufacturing relocation remains 'pure advertising', the economic impact is not likely to be severe, says Selin Özyurt, senior economist at Euler Hermes-Allianz, in [an interview with the news website Le360.ma](#). The economist believes that the present context offers medium and long-term opportunities for Morocco, particularly with regard to Europe's ecological transition, as Germany has already begun investigating opportunities for green hydrogen production in Africa.

[In the eyes of Ahmed Azirar, research director at the Institut Marocain d'Intelligence Stratégique \(IMIS\) think-tank](#), the reconfiguration of value chains in Europe, if it does not entail manufacturing relocation, could provide an opportunity for Morocco, as European manufacturers may wish to reduce their exposure to Southeast Asia by investing in a nearby geographic hub.

On the political level, the minor involvement of institutions and elected bodies in the handling of the Covid-19 crisis could lead to a high abstention rate in the upcoming elections. The weak citizen adherence to politics has negative effects: widespread distrust in representative institutions, disaffection for institutional politics and, ultimately, a proliferation of social movements. The idea that conventional politics are definitely deadlocked and unlikely to spark change is being strongly asserted in Morocco. The political sphere being one of the main mediating spaces between the state and society, its paralysis makes the street one of the only available platforms of expression for groups wishing to voice their demands.

Over the past three years, Morocco had the chance to assess the shortcomings of its development policy, as well as the implementation constraints affecting various social programs. The country's new social agenda, if it does not necessarily translate into an

improvement in the living conditions of millions of Moroccan families, should at least provide them with social safety nets.

Morocco's efforts on gender issues remain very limited and need to overcome many obstacles, notably due to an under-diagnosis of the true extent of the problem, as the scarcity of gender-disaggregated data illustrates. The mobilisation of feminist NGOs which, thanks to their activism, have managed to put this issue on the public agenda, should receive more institutional support.

Finally, the health system is facing structural problems (such as a lack of financing and equipment) that only a thorough and far-reaching reform can resolve.

Imprint

Editor:

Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung Washington, DC, 1432 K St NW, Washington, DC 20005, USA

Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung European Union, Brussels, Rue du Luxembourg 47-51, 1050 Brussels, Belgium

Contact:

Christin Schweisgut, Programme Director, Infrastructure and Development, christin.schweisgut@us.boell.org

Anna Schwarz, Head of Global Transformation Programme, anna.schwarz@eu.boell.org

Place of publication:

<https://us.boell.org>, <http://eu.boell.org>

Release date:

December 2020

License:

Creative Commons (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0), <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0>

The opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung Washington, DC and Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung European Union, Brussels.