

AFRICA RISK CONSULTING

Morocco Monthly Briefing September 2024

Morocco Summary 24 September 2024

Prime minister Aziz Akhannouch (2021-present) arrives in China on 4 September to attend the ninth Forum of China Africa Cooperation (FOCAC). Office National des Hydrocarbures et des Mines (ONHYM) (national office of hydrocarbons and Mines) director general Amina Benkhadra says on 30 August that the \$25 billion Nigeria-Morocco Gas Pipeline's (NMGP) is progressing "extremely favourably" thanks to the commitment of all the countries involved. Finance ministry announces on 1 September that Morocco received a record ten million tourists between January and July. Morocco will conduct its seventh national census between 1 and 30 September to collect comprehensive information on the demographics, economic conditions and social trends.

Akhannouch attends FOCAC in China...

Prime minister **Aziz Akhannouch** (2021-present) arrived in **Beijing (China)** to attend the 9th **Forum of China Africa Cooperation (FOCAC)** between 4 and 6 September as King **Mohammed VI's** (1999-present) representative.¹ Akhannouch was accompanied by foreign affairs minister, **Nasser Bourita**, minister-delegate for investment, **Mohcine Jazouli**, and a delegation of businessmen who took part in the 8th **China-Africa Business Leaders Conference** held on the sidelines of FOCAC.² Bourita also took part in the FOCAC ministerial meeting on 3 September that approved the **Beijing Declaration and Action Plan**, which will guide Africa-China relations from 2025 to 2027.³

While addressing Chinese President **Xi Jinping** (2013-present) and fellow **African** leaders on 6 September, Akhannouch reaffirmed his government's steadfast commitment to advancing and strengthening further partnerships between Africa and China for shared prosperity and inclusive growth that will unleash Africa's full potential.⁴ Akhannouch also said that thanks to its strategic position and resources, Morocco will remain a strong partner for China and Africa in developing the continent's agriculture, infrastructure, and renewable energies.

He further emphasised the importance of enhancing Africa-China collaboration to address several global challenges generated by the geopolitical changes taking place in a multipolar world.⁵ Akhannouch also said that Morocco is committed to supporting FOCAC, whose objectives are similar to those of various local initiatives for African regional integration, stability, peace and sustainable development.

Morocco will also benefit from China's commitment at FOCAC to further open up its market to African exports, a key request of African countries which have sought to rebalance their economic ties with China. China's trade surplus with the continent increased to a record \$64 billion in 2023 - with exports reaching a record \$173 billion.⁶ While no major agreements or deals were signed between Morocco and China, FOCAC allowed the two countries to bolster their relations further. Equally significant is the move by China not to invite the **Algeria**-backed **Polisario Front** movement which has continuously demanded a sovereign state for the **Western Sahara**.⁷ Moroccan media celebrated

¹ CGTN, 4 Sep 2024

² Morocco World News, 4 Sep 2024

³ Morocco World News, 4 Sep 2024; North Africa Post, 4 Sep 2024

⁴ North Africa Post, 6 Sep 2024

⁵ North Africa Post, 6 Sep 2024

⁶ Bloomberg, 9 Sep 2024

⁷ Atalayar, 5 Sep 2024

that development and the non-invite of the Polisario Front as an important endorsement of Morocco's territorial integrity and a rejection of the secessionist movement in Western Sahara.⁸

Morocco-Nigeria pipeline project advances...

Office National des Hydrocarbures et des Mines (ONHYM) (national office of hydrocarbons and mines) director general **Amina Benkhadra** said on 30 August that the \$25 billion **Nigeria-Morocco Gas Pipeline's (NMGP)**, also known as the **African Atlantic Pipeline** project, is progressing "extremely favourably" thanks to the commitment of all the countries involved.⁹ The pipeline has been in the works since 2016 but the ONHYM and the **Nigerian National Petroleum Company Limited (NNPC)** signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on 15 September 2022 to officially kickstart the project.

Benkhadra made the statement on the sidelines of a key regional workshop aimed at reviewing the **Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA)** and **Host Government Agreement (HGA)**, which are essential to the implementation of the pipeline project.¹⁰ The event took place in **Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)** from 27 to 30 August and brought together experts from the 13 **Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)** countries participating in the project which could also supply gas to **Europe**.¹¹ The pipeline will span 5,600km and benefit over 400 million people living in West Africa while improving energy infrastructure in the region. Morocco will house 1,672km of the pipeline.¹²

Benkhadra said that the NGMP, which "represents the essence of South-South cooperation", aims to boost energy access in the **West African** region, where some countries have an electrification rate below 40%. He believes the NGMP will drive necessary economic and social development, mainly in the mining sector given the mineral resources in the participating countries.¹³

The **Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) Fund for International Development** and the **Saudi Arabia-based Islamic Development Bank (IDB)** pledged nearly \$60m to fund feasibility and engineering studies for the pipeline.¹⁴ Once completed, the NMGP will be the second longest pipeline in the world after **China's West-East Gas Pipeline**.¹⁵ If the pipeline progresses, it will take 25 years to complete and could be a primary gas source for West Africa. **Casablanca-based ETAFAT** on 10 May commenced the onshore topographic surveys for the NMGP northern region, which includes Morocco, **Mauritania** and **Senegal**, marking a key milestone in the project's development.¹⁶ ETAFAT and its joint venture partner, **French** construction company **Fondasol**, are overseeing the NMGP.

Gas from the pipeline will also be a much cheaper and more accessible alternative for Morocco – in October 2021, political tensions with Algeria over Western Sahara resulted in Algeria closing the **Maghreb-Europe** gas pipeline (see *ARC Briefing Algeria Nov 2021*). This pipeline was a key source of energy for both Morocco and **Spain**. Besides its investments in gas, Morocco also aims to increase the share of renewables in its energy mix.

The government plans to raise the share of renewable sources to more than 52% of the national electricity mix by 2030.¹⁷ Energy minister **Leila Benali** said on 16 May that the country plans to boost its renewable energy capacity to 11 gigawatts (GW) by adding 6.5GW over the next four years, as it also invests in gas and green hydrogen.¹⁸ Renewable energy sources represent approximately 40% of

⁸ Atalayar, 5 Sep 2024

⁹ MAP News, 30 Aug 2024

¹⁰ Morocco World News, Aug 30 2024; North Africa Post, 29 Aug 2024

¹¹ Morocco World News, Aug 30 2024

¹² Morocco World News, 6 Dec 2022

¹³ MAP News, 30 Aug 2024; Morocco World News, Aug 30 2024

¹⁴ Bloomberg, 15 Sep 2022

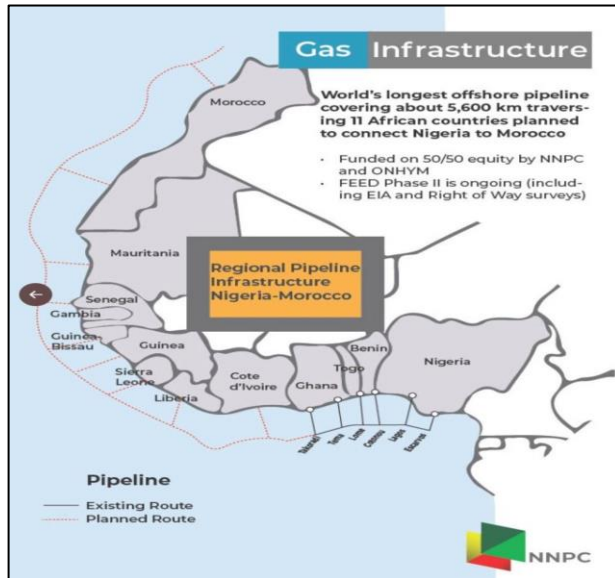
¹⁵ Morocco World News, 28 Nov 2023

¹⁶ Morocco World News, 11 May 2024

¹⁷ Energy & Utilities, 22 Feb 2023

¹⁸ North Africa Post, 17 May 2024

Morocco's energy mix but the country plans to bolster that share to 52% before 2030.¹⁹ Morocco's plans to develop its energy mix is a notable development that should be praised, particularly in light of the **European Bank for Reconstruction and Development's (EBRD)** report published on 16 May that warned that high dependence on energy imports and seasonal agricultural production makes its economy vulnerable to climate risks.²⁰



Source: NNPC

Morocco receives 10 million tourists in first six months...

The finance ministry announced on 1 September that Morocco had received a record ten million tourists between January and July this year, an increase of 15% compared to the same period in 2023.²¹ In July alone, 2.6 million tourists visited Morocco, up 20% compared to the same period last year.²² The developments have created optimism within the ministry that Morocco will achieve its 2024 target of 17.5 million tourists, compared to 2023's record-breaking 14.5 million.

Moroccan officials plan to boost the number of tourists by at least one million annually through 2030, ahead of the 2030 **FIFA World Cup**, which Morocco will co-host with **Portugal** and Spain. That year 26 million tourists are expected to visit Morocco.²³ To achieve this objective, Morocco in 2023 began doubling the number of foreign flights arriving in the country and reached an agreement with **Irish** low-cost airline, **Ryanair**, which is estimated to double the number of tourists that the company flies to Morocco by 2027 to 10 million.²⁴ The government also plans for 150,000 additional hotel beds to be ready before 2030, either through greenfield projects or the upgrading of existing facilities. Authorities are also working on the development of 14 large-scale projects to add options for tourists, including natural park resorts, amusement parks and hot-air balloon sites.²⁵

While the government's plans are ambitious, it has demonstrated that it has the political will and commitment to meet them. With constantly increasing tourist numbers, additional capital infusion and a growing fleet owned by state carrier **Royal Air Maroc (RAM)**, Morocco seems poised to accelerate its growth trajectory and realise its ambitious vision for the tourism sector.

¹⁹ North Africa Post, 17 May 2024

²⁰ European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, 16 May 2024

²¹ Ministry of Finance, 1 Sep 2024; North Africa Post, 1 Sep 2024

²² North Africa Post, 1 Sep 2024

²³ North Africa Post, 15 Jul 2024

²⁴ Bloomberg, 27 Feb 2024

²⁵ Bloomberg, 27 Feb 2024

Morocco begins its seventh national census...

Haut Commissariat au Plan (HCP) (higher commission of planning) head **Ahmed Lahlimi** announced on 30 August that Morocco will conduct its seventh national census between 1 to 30 September to collect comprehensive information on the country's demographics, economic conditions, living conditions and social trends.²⁶ The census is being conducted per King Mohammed's instructions and **United Nations Statistical Commission (UNSC)** recommendations.²⁷ Lahlimi said that the census will use significant human resources of about 55,000 participants, including researchers and supervisors, who will ask Moroccans questions on demographic conditions, as well as their access to health centres, schools, electricity, water, employment and social safety nets.²⁸ The operation will cost \$147m, of which 67% is allocated for participant remuneration, 20% for material and logistical resources, and 13% for technological resources.²⁹

The census is particularly important because it will provide an accurate picture of Morocco's population and its economic situation. The governments will use collected data to plan for future growth and development, making sure decisions are based on real population needs. It will particularly play a crucial role in allocating resources and delivering services across the country. By providing accurate data on population size, distribution, and demographics, it will help the government direct funding to where it is needed most. **Marrakech** and its surrounding areas will most likely require additional funding for infrastructure and housing following last September's deadly earthquake, which caused approximately \$12 billion in damage.

Additionally, census data supports economic planning, policy development, and the creation of targeted social services. The census is also essential for ensuring fair political representation through the drawing of voting districts. Businesses also rely on it to understand markets and workforce trends. The last census was conducted in 2014 and found that Morocco had a population of 33.8 million.

Planner

1 – 30 Sep 2024 (**Morocco**) National census
2026 (**Morocco**) General election

Chronology

22 Sep 2024 **Rabat (Morocco)** *North Africa Post*. **Japan** grants Morocco a \$180m loan to support a development policy programme aimed at achieving universal health coverage;

19 Sep 2024 **Rabat (Morocco)** *Middle East Monitor*. Morocco is set to try an **Israeli** soldier on charges of war crimes committed during military operations in **Gaza (Palestine)**;

18 Sep 2024 **Rabat (Morocco)** *APA News*. Morocco and **Gabon** sign a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to strengthen judicial cooperation;

16 Sep 2024 **Rabat (Morocco)** *Africanews*. Increased numbers of security personnel deploy to **Fnideq**, a town which borders the **Spanish** exclave of **Ceuta**, following a rapid rise in the number of migrants attempting to cross the border into **Europe**;

12 Sep 2024 **Rabat (Morocco)** *Ministry of health*. Health ministry announces that Morocco's first case of monkeypox case has been confirmed in **Marrakech**;

9 Sep 2024 **Rabat (Morocco)** *Morocco World News*. Floods kill at least 11 people with nine still missing in **Tata**, **Tiznit** and **Errachidia** provinces;

²⁶ Haut Commissariat au Plan, 30 Aug 2024

²⁷ North Africa Post, 30 Aug 2024

²⁸ Haut Commissariat au Plan, 30 Aug 2024

²⁹ Morocco World News, 1 Sep 2024; Middle East Monitor, 3 Sep 2024

4 Sep 2024 **Rabat (Morocco)** *Morocco World News*. The **United States (US)**-based **Washington Institute for Near East Policy** says that the US-Morocco **Free Trade Agreement (FTA)** signed in 2004 has more than quadrupled bilateral trade over the past two decades but has not delivered the expected economic benefits;

3 Sep 2024 **Rabat (Morocco)** *Morocco World News*. Justice minister **Abdellatif Ouahbi** announces his intention to introduce strict penalties in the penal code to address misconduct on social media platforms such as **TikTok** and **YouTube**;

2 Sep 2024 **Rabat (Morocco)** *Middle East Monitor*. Morocco launches its new population survey census, which will run until 30 September;

1 Sep 2024 **Rabat (Morocco)** *North Africa Post*. Finance ministry reports Morocco received ten million tourists up to July this year, a 15% increase compared to the same period last year;

31 Aug 2024 **Rabat (Morocco)** *Morocco World News*. The Moroccan coast guard intercepts a makeshift boat carrying 168 Sub-Saharan migrants off the coast of **Dakhla**;

29 Aug 2024 **Rabat (Morocco)** *Atalayar*. Equipment and water ministry data indicates the total volume of commercial traffic handled by Moroccan ports reached 116.4 million tonnes in the first half of 2024, a 15.3% increase compared to last year;

27 Aug 2024 **Rabat (Morocco)** *Middle East Monitor*. Morocco and **Saudi Arabia** sign a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to strengthen cooperation in the health sector and pandemic preparedness;

27 Aug 2024 **Rabat (Morocco)** *AP*. **Spanish** authorities confirm that thousands of migrants have attempted to cross the border from Morocco to the Spanish enclave of **Ceuta** in the last few days;

24 Aug 2024 **Rabat (Morocco)** *Arab News*. Moroccan and **Algerian** diplomats engage in a fistfight at the preparatory meeting of the **Tokyo International Summit on Development in Africa (TICAD)** in **Tokyo (Japan)** over the **Polisario Front**'s alleged participation at the event;

22 Aug 2024 **Rabat (Morocco)** *APA News*. Health ministry confirms it has tightened border measures to prevent a mpox outbreak.

About Africa Risk Consulting:

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