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An estimated 60,000 or more Moroccan migrants crossed into the Spanish enclave of Ceuta in the last week of July, sparking a diplomatic and political crisis as Morocco approaches its September election. Royal Moroccan Football Federation president and budget minister, Fouzi Lekjaa, moves closer to possibly challenging to become the next prime minister in the 23 September elections after announcing on 25 July that he will join the Parti Authenticité et Modernité (PAM), the second-largest party in Morocco's 395 seat parliament and part of the ruling coalition. King Mohammed VI (1999-present) says his decision to name a \$1 billion highway that crosses into the disputed Western Sahara after United States (US) president Donald Trump is an expression of his "deep appreciation" of the US leader, highlighting the deepening strategic relationship between Morocco and the US.

Migrant crisis sparks diplomatic and political crisis ahead of elections

An estimated 60,000 or more **Moroccan** migrants crossed into the **Spanish** enclave of **Ceuta** in the last week of July, [sparking](#) a diplomatic and political crisis as Morocco approaches its September election. Spain's prime minister **Pedro Sánchez** (2018-present) called the crossing "*an attack, a violation of Spain's territorial integrity*", while **European Commission** president **Ursula von der Leyen**, described the crossings as "*unacceptable*" and **German** chancellor **Friedrich Merz** (2025-present) called for Morocco to "*take back the illegal migrants without delay*". **United States (US)** President **Donald Trump** (2017-2021; 2025-present) also described the situation as a "*catastrophe*" and an "*invasion of a country*". The attempted crossing reportedly killed at least 72 people.

Some commentators, including **International Crisis Group's North Africa** director **Riccardo Fabiani**, have [suggested](#) that Moroccan authorities might have deliberately facilitated the crossing to punish Spain for strengthening ties with **Algeria**, Morocco's longstanding regional rival. Speaking on the matter, Fabiani said that the evidence suggested "*some sort of Moroccan official role in this to send a message*" to Spain, whose prime minister had visited Algeria shortly before the crossing incident. However, Moroccan officials denied orchestrating the event and most of the 60,000 migrants have reportedly returned to Morocco.

What is evident is that Morocco is a country marked by significant contradictions. Morocco is one of Africa's emerging powers, with growing economic ambitions and a rising international profile. Notably, Morocco recently [surpassed South Africa](#) to become Africa's most industrialised economy, supported by its long-term industrial strategies, aggressive industrial upgrading, export diversification, major infrastructure investments and a rapidly expanding manufacturing hub that seeks to connect Africa, **Europe** and the **Middle East** (see *ARC Briefing Morocco Jun 2026*).

Morocco has also [positioned](#) itself a host of major international events and conferences. It hosted the prestigious **World Bank Group** and **International Monetary Fund (IMF) Annual Meetings** in October 2023 in **Marrakech**, marking their first return to Africa in 50 years. The **African Development Bank (AfDB)** and the founding partners of the **Africa Investment Forum (AIF)** hosted the 2025 **Market Days** in November 2025 in **Rabat**. Morocco also hosted the most recent editions of both the men's and women's **African Cup of Nations** football tournaments and will co-host the 2030 **Fifa World Cup** – with Spain and Portugal.

However, the Ceuta migrant crisis reveals a troubling reality for many Moroccans. Difficult economic conditions and limited opportunities at home were severe enough that thousands considered the dangerous crossing into Europe worth the risk. These challenging economic conditions also contributed to the country's [Gen Z protests](#) of 2025, which represented the most significant unrest in Morocco since the **Arab Spring** demonstration of 2011 (*see ARC Briefing Oct 2025*). The deaths of eight pregnant women at a public hospital in **Agadir** in August 2025 initially triggered the protests, which quickly developed into widespread anger over the state of public services and socioeconomic conditions across the country. Demonstrators, who called for prime minister **Aziz Akhannouch** (2021-present) to resign, were frustrated by several interconnected issues including, youth unemployment (at nearly 36%), perceptions of high world cup spending while public services remain underfunded, regional inequality among provinces, and corruption, among other issues.

The major contrast between Morocco's image as an emerging regional power and the economic desperation that prompted the migration crisis provides an important backdrop to the country's upcoming September election. Whether the next prime minister will be able to translate Morocco's growing economic strength and international influence into better living standards for Moroccans remains one of the central political and economic questions facing the country.

Moroccan football chief and budget minister front runner to become prime minister

Royal Moroccan Football Federation president and budget minister, **Fouzi Lekjaa**, has [moved](#) closer to possibly challenging to become the next prime minister in the 23 September elections after announcing on 25 July that he was joining the **Parti Authenticité et Modernité (PAM)**, the second-largest party in Morocco's 395 seat parliament and part of the ruling coalition. In the weeks leading up to his announcement, several political parties had pursued Lekjaa to join them.

The upcoming elections will be the first since last year's Gen Z elections. By recruiting Lekjaa, PAM hopes to benefit from his [popularity](#) as a "*working-class hero*" with major support among the youth, in a country where football enjoys overwhelmingly popular. Morocco, which reached the semi-finals of the 2022 World Cup finals and the quarter finals of this year's edition, will co-host the 2030 edition with Portugal and Spain.

PAM and three other parties, the nationalist **Istiqlal Party** and the **Parti de la justice et du développement (PJD)** and Akhannouch's **Rassemblement National des Indépendants (RNI)** are generally considered the main challengers in next month's polls. The country's constitution mandates King **Mohammed VI** (1999-present) to appoint a prime minister from the party which secures the most parliamentary seats in the elections. Several analysts, including Moroccan law professor **Mustapha Sehim**, are convinced that Lekjaa is undoubtedly the [frontrunner](#) to be the next prime minister and lead the next "*World Cup government*" as it is popularly referred to locally, forecasting that it will be a landslide.

Morocco names Western Sahara highway after Trump in show of gratitude

King Mohammed VI has said that his decision to name a \$1 billion highway that crosses into the disputed **Western Sahara** after Trump is an expression of his "*deep appreciation*" for the US leader, highlighting the deepening strategic relationship between Morocco and the US.

State media **Maghreb Arabe Presse (MAP)** [announced](#) on 1 August that in a letter dated 2 July, King Mohammed informed Trump that the 1,055km expressway between **Tiznit** and the city of **Dakhla** in the Western Saharan will be named the **Donald J. Trump Highway** as a "*mark of friendship and peace, and as a personal expression of my deep appreciation...*".

King Mohammed was particularly [thanking](#) Trump for his recognition of Morocco's autonomy over the Western Sahara in 2020, as part of a deal that saw the country re-establish ties with US-ally, **Israel**. The monarch referred to Trump's decision as a "*historic recognition*" that "*forever be etched in the memory of Moroccans*" and provided "*unprecedented momentum*" to relations between their countries. Trump had publicly acknowledged the recognition a few days earlier on 26 July, [stating](#) that it was "*such a great honour*".

Notably, the **US Trade and Development Agency (USTDA)** on 28 July said it was [backing](#) the **ORNX** international consortium planning to produce green ammonia in the Western Sahara, representing the first US federal funding of its kind for a project in the disputed territory. While the USTDA's \$5.7m financial backing is only a fraction of the estimated \$4.5 billion cost of the facility in **Laayoune** (Western Sahara), ORNX [said](#) that for Morocco "*the grant also carries strong symbolic significance in its relationship with the US*".

Trump's recognition of Moroccan sovereignty helped spur investment in Western Sahara, a resource-rich territory about the size of the **United Kingdom (UK)**, with countries such as the UK, **France** and Spain later adopting similar positions. The US, UK and France are permanent members of the **United Nations Security Council (UNSC)**, giving Morocco an unprecedented diplomatic advantage as it consolidates international support for its position. This alignment among major powers not only strengthens Morocco's leverage but also reshapes the geopolitical landscape around the dispute, with an increasing number of **European** governments changing their policies in the same direction.

Planner

23 Sep 2026 (**Morocco**) Parliamentary election
 2026 (**Morocco**) King **Mohammed VI** expected to make a state visit to **France**;
 2026 **Nador (Morocco)** **Nador West Med** port expected to open

Chronology

22 Aug 2026 **Rabat (Morocco)** *Morocco World News*. Justice minister **Abdellatif Ouahbi** renews Morocco's call for dialogue with **Spain** over the islands of **Ceuta** and **Melilla**, saying the two cities will remain on the agenda between the two countries;

20 Aug 2026 **Rabat (Morocco)** *Morocco World News*. The **European Union (UN)** is preparing to increase funding for Morocco's migration and border-management efforts following the **Ceuta** crisis, while also seeking to finalise a broader strategic partnership with Morocco by the end of 2026;

19 Aug 2026 **Rabat (Morocco)** *Morocco World News*. Direct flights between Morocco and **Israel** resume after a three-year suspension, with **Israeli** airline **Arkia** operating twice-weekly flights between **Tel Aviv** and **Marrakech**;

18 Aug 2026 **Rabat (Morocco)** *Morocco World News*. The **United States (US)** awards US-headquartered global security, defence and aerospace contractor **Lockheed Martin** a new \$31.3m engineering and technical support contract, running through June 2029, covering Morocco and nine other countries under the Foreign Military Sales programme;

15 Aug 2026 **Rabat (Morocco)** *Morocco World News*. Police arrest at least 111 people as they try to enter **Ceuta**, a **Spanish** enclave, amid tightened security on both sides of the border after social media posts called for another mass migrant crossing;

13 Aug 2026 **Rabat (Morocco)** *Morocco World News*. **Spain's** interior minister **Fernando Grande-Marlaska** announces that an estimated 5,000 migrants, including nearly 1,900 minors, remain in Ceuta following a mass border crossing in late July;

12 Aug 2026 **Rabat (Morocco)** *Morocco World News*. Morocco says it is seeking a more balanced partnership with **Spain** to manage migration and protect unaccompanied minors, emphasising shared responsibility, adherence to international law and the best interests of children, following the recent arrival of 1,527 Moroccan minors in **Ceuta**, with Spain reviewing Morocco's proposed returns on a case-by-case basis;

11 Aug 2026 **Rabat (Morocco)** *Morocco World News*. Morocco is strengthening security around its borders with **Spanish** enclaves **Ceuta** and **Melilla** ahead of a social-media-driven campaign

calling for a mass crossing on 15 August, while Spain reinforces its border and suspends military leave in Ceuta;

8 Aug 2026 **Rabat (Morocco)** *Morocco World News*. Morocco's ports handled 148.6 million tonnes of traffic in the first half of 2026, up 14.4% year-on-year, driven mainly by a 28.6% surge in transshipment to 82.6 million tonnes;

6 Aug 2026 **Rabat (Morocco)** *Al Jazeera*. **Ceuta's** head of local government, **Juan Jesús Vivas**, says at least 100 migrants died during last week's mass crossings from Morocco into the **Spanish** enclave, while between 3,000 and 5,000 migrants remain there after around 72,000 people entered in one of the largest migration surges into **European Union (EU)** territory in recent years;

6 Aug 2026 **Rabat (Morocco)** *Reuters*. State news agency **MAP** reports that Morocco is ready to cooperate with **Spain** and other **European** partners on the return of unaccompanied minors who were among tens of thousands of migrants who crossed into the **Spanish** enclave of **Ceuta**;

5 Aug 2026 **Rabat (Morocco)** *Morocco World News*. **Spanish** embassy in Morocco states that a recent supreme court ruling on migrant returns does not change Spain's immigration laws or grant the right to remain in Spain for those entering irregularly through **Ceuta** and **Melilla**;

4 Aug 2026 **Casablanca (Morocco)** *Reuters*. A consortium led by **Swiss-Japanese** firm **Kanadevia Inova** says it plans to start building a \$1.5 billion waste-to-energy plant by the end of the year, with full operations expected by mid-2030;

3 Aug 2026 **Rabat (Morocco)** *Reuters*. **European Commission** president **Ursula von der Leyen** proposes that the **European Union (EU)** further strengthen its borders and increase support for Morocco to help prevent a repeat of the chaotic influx of 50,000 migrants into the **Spanish** enclave of **Ceuta** last week;

2 Aug 2026 **Rabat (Morocco)** *Bloomberg*. King **Mohammed VI** says his decision to give **United States (US)** President **Donald Trump's** name to a \$1 billion highway that crosses into the disputed **Western Sahara** expresses his "deep appreciation" of the US leader;

2 Aug 2026 **Rabat (Morocco)** *Morocco World News*. Interior ministry says that social media information, human traffickers and the misinterpreted **Spanish** court decision were driving forces in 60,000 Moroccans attempting to swim to **Ceuta**, a Spanish enclave;

31 Jul 2026 **Rabat (Morocco)** *Reuters*. Two industrial sources say that **Russia** has imported a seaborne cargo of about 30,000 metric tonnes of AI-92 gasoline from Morocco;

30 Jul 2026 **Rabat (Morocco)** *Morocco World News*. **Spain** praises Morocco's security services for helping curb irregular migration attempts into the Spanish enclave of **Ceuta**, with both countries agreeing to strengthen cooperation and facilitate the return of migrants who entered illegally;

28 Jul 2026 **Rabat (Morocco)** *Bloomberg*. The **United States (US)** is backing an international consortium seeking to produce green ammonia in the Western Sahara, the first federal funding of its kind for a project in the disputed Moroccan-controlled territory;

28 Jul 2026 **Laayoune (Morocco)** *Morocco World News*. **United States (US)** ambassador **Duke Buchan** visits Laayoune to meet local officials and explore opportunities to expand US-Morocco economic cooperation, with discussions focusing on investment in renewable energy, fisheries, logistics, tourism and infrastructure;

27 Jul 2026 **Rabat (Morocco)** *Bloomberg*. The **United States (US)** President **Donald Trump** says Morocco is naming a 1,055km highway in the **Western Sahara** after him, seemingly reflecting his landmark recognition of the kingdom's rule of the disputed territory in 2020 that helped spur an investment boom.

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