



POLICY BRIEF

Algeria and Morocco

Developing inclusive strategies can prevent violent extremism

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Algeria and Morocco have been hosting thousands of sub-Saharan African migrants for a growing period of time. The migrants live in poor socio-economic conditions and face discrimination, providing fertile ground for radicalisation. Except for one Chadian who was arrested in Morocco in relation with a Daesh (also known as Islamic State, or IS) plot, sub-Saharan African migrants haven't been implicated in terrorism in either country. Before radicalisation manifests, Algeria and Morocco should develop migration policies that promote social and economic inclusion.

Key points

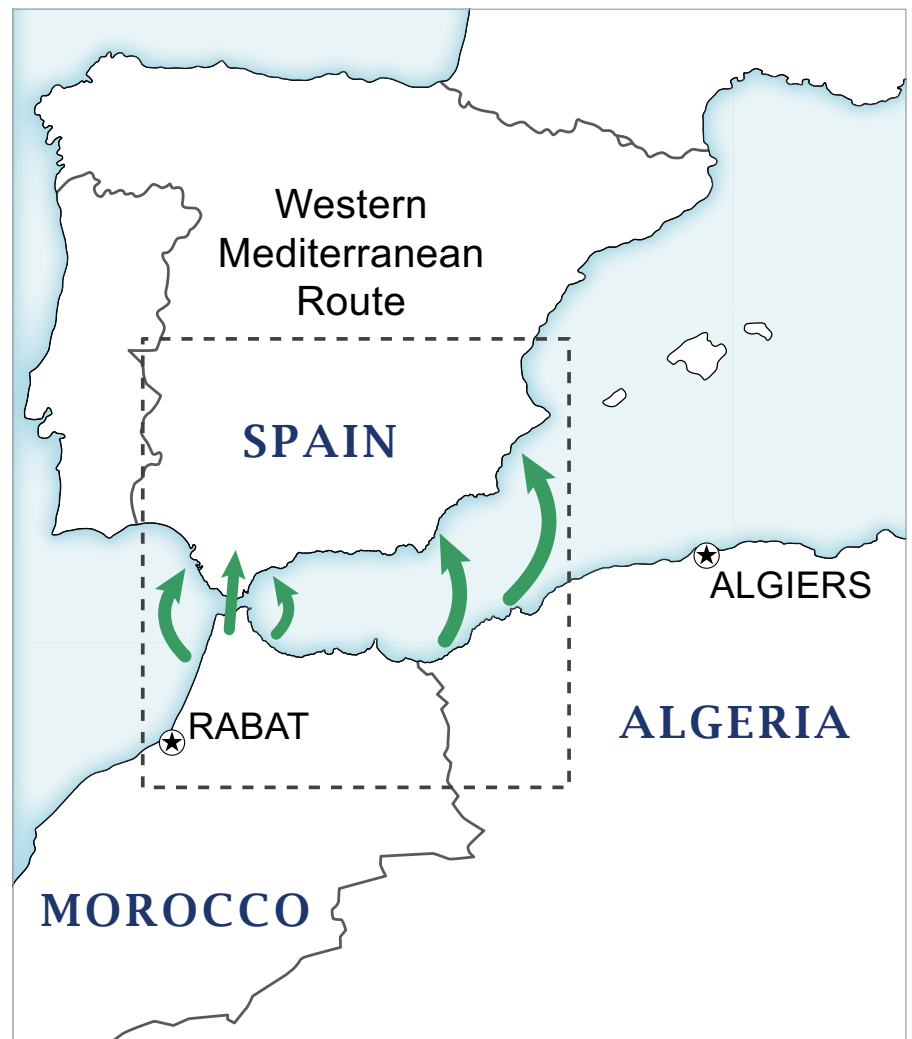
- ▶ No sub-Saharan African migrant has been implicated in violent extremism in Algeria or Morocco. This reinforces the fact that migrants' primary objective is searching for economic opportunities.
- ▶ The number of sub-Saharan African migrants heading to Algeria and Morocco might increase due to the geographic location of the two countries, located between sub-Saharan Africa and Europe; the ill treatment of migrants in Libya; and the inviting nature of the legalisation schemes.
- ▶ Growing racism and marginalisation of sub-Saharan African migrants, coupled with limited economic prospects, can build grievances among them, making the migrants susceptible to radicalisation. Therefore Algeria and Morocco should develop migrant-tailored strategies to prevent violent extremism.
- ▶ Algeria should start putting into operation its regularisation scheme by issuing residence and work permits to migrants. Morocco should also put into operation its second round of regularisation.

Introduction

For the past decade, Algeria and Morocco have been important transit and stopover countries for migrants moving from sub-Saharan Africa to Europe. While the Western Mediterranean route, which covers both countries, was largely replaced by the Eastern and Central Mediterranean routes in recent years, it never disappeared. It is now back in the spotlight, with the number of irregular migrants using this route almost tripling, from 5 003 in 2010¹ to 13 364 in 2017.²

The Western Mediterranean route begins with Algeria's southern borders with Mali and Niger. It stretches from the border to Tamanrasset in Algeria, on to the central city of Ghardaïa, and then up to Algeria's large coastal cities.³ Migrants also travel from Niger through Algeria, or through Mauritania into Morocco. Those transiting Algeria cross the Moroccan-Algerian frontier near the city of Tlemcen before their final bid to cross to Spain – either via land crossing into the Spanish enclaves of Melilla and Ceuta, or across the Strait of Gibraltar or Alboran Sea to mainland Spain.⁴

Figure 1: The Western Mediterranean Map⁵



Source: M Herbert. Cartographer – S Ballard

Many migrants from the Sahel region head to Algeria and Morocco with the primary objective of crossing to Europe. However, initiatives to strengthen border security by Algeria, Morocco and the EU have made this transit more difficult and costly. Facing these challenges, the duration of stay of transit migrants has increased. Rather than staying only briefly in Morocco or Algeria, an increasing number of migrants now stay for years.⁶

The exact number of irregular migrants in Morocco and Algeria is unknown. It is estimated that between 25 000 and 100 000 sub-Saharan African irregular migrants, mainly coming from Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, live in Algeria.⁷ In 2014, 50 000 sub-Saharan migrants lived in Morocco.⁸ Between January and September 2017, 8 532 sub-Saharan African migrants mainly hailing from Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea and Gambia crossed to Spain via Morocco.⁹

As many of the migrants do not have the money to pay for their journey all the way to Europe, they usually stop over in these two countries and seek informal work. Algeria's US\$548.3 billion hydrocarbon economy and Morocco's US\$257.3 billion diversified economy, ranging from agriculture and machinery to transport equipment production, provide numerous employment opportunities for these migrant workers.

Algeria and Morocco also attract thousands of regular migrants. In 2012, Algeria issued more than 50 000¹⁰ work permits for nationals of China, Egypt, Turkey, the UK, Italy, France, Syria and Morocco. Similarly, 77 798¹¹ foreign nationals, mainly from France and Algeria, held residence permits in Morocco in 2012.

Legalising sub-Saharan African migrants

In July 2017, Algeria announced plans to grant residency rights and work permits to irregular sub-Saharan African migrants, intended to address a shortage of manpower in the agriculture and construction sectors.¹² However, the Algerian Ministry of the Interior has yet to decide how many irregular migrants will benefit from this arrangement.

The decision mirrors Morocco's 2013 regularisation policy, under which 25 000 migrants were given a one-year residence permit. People from 116 countries benefited from this policy, including those from Senegal and Nigeria.¹³ Morocco announced its second-round regularisation campaign in 2016, but it is not clear how many were regularised in this latest initiative.

In 2008, Algeria adopted a law that directs foreign nationals' conditions of entry, stay and circulation,¹⁴ and Morocco is drafting migration and asylum laws.¹⁵ This indicates a growing trend of receptiveness to foreigners.

More and more, Algeria and Morocco have become the second-best choices of sub-Saharan African migrants due to increasingly securitised borders in the region, which forces many migrants to stay much longer than they want in the two countries. This reality coupled with the favourable legalisation schemes offer many of the sub-Saharan African migrants a good reason to work and live in Algeria and Morocco.

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However, many of the migrants do not consider these as their destination countries. This is primarily because few migrants see sustainable futures in Algeria and Morocco, as the economies of these countries have not provided enough job opportunities even for their own citizens. The unemployment rate is 30%¹⁶ in Algeria. Though the general unemployment rate is 10.6% in Morocco, its youth unemployment rate is 29.3%.¹⁷ A 2016 study on five North African countries, including Algeria and Morocco, also shows that almost half of the respondents considered unemployment the most pressing problem.¹⁸

The limited livelihood prospects have prompted growing tensions against irregular migrants in these countries. Algeria's regularisation announcement followed the launch of an anti-migrant online campaign – 'No to Africans in Algeria'¹⁹ – which accuses African migrants of taking jobs and spreading HIV/AIDS. Similarly, Morocco's 2013 regularisation followed strong criticism from international and domestic human rights groups against the government's violation of migrant rights.

Claims of racial discrimination in Algeria can be summarised by the experiences of Grewinio, a migrant from Benin; and Karim, a Senegalese. Grewinio stated that he never felt safe walking in the streets of Algiers. He said people often called him 'Ebola'. As a result, he decided to use the name 'Ebola' as his Facebook name.²⁰ Karim said he had the same experience in Morocco, with people calling him 'Ebola' at the market.²¹

Different reports also show that racism has increased after the regularisation initiative in both countries. Following Algeria's announcement of the regularisation campaign, former prime minister Ahmed Ouyahia (later reappointed prime minister) openly spoke against sub-Saharan African migrants in that country.²² In Morocco, there is no report that a political leader has openly spoken against migrants – but Eric, a migrant from Cameroon, reported that talk of integration via the media seemed to have resulted in renewed anti-black sentiments.²³

Of course, all is not gloom. Despite their limited impact, there are a few positive initiatives aimed at embracing the sub-Saharan African migrants into the two countries' populations. In Algeria, for example, there is a Facebook page dedicated to migrants' news – *Bienvenue chez moi (Welcome to my place)* – promoting the positive contributions of migrants to that country's economy. In addition, since 2015, Algeria has offered the enrolment of a limited number of migrant children in public schools. Furthermore, religious leaders have taken some action meant to enhance public awareness on supporting migrants. In Morocco, there is an anti-racism group called Support and Defense of Immigrants (Gadem).²⁴

Political and economic benefits

Legalising migrants brings political and economic benefits to Algeria and Morocco. It improves their relations with Sub-Saharan African countries. This is especially relevant for Morocco, which is striving to improve its relations with sub-Saharan African countries. Morocco took significant steps following its announcement that Africa was the 'top priority' of its foreign policy in 2014. After being absent for 33 years, it was readmitted to the African Union (AU) in January 2017. In the same year it asked to join the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), as the first North African member. ECOWAS has accepted the request in principle.

Further, legalising migrants will enhance Algeria and Morocco's negotiation power with European partners as the regularisation scheme is in line with the European Union (EU) goal of containing irregular migration. In 2016, Algeria and Morocco were among the 16 'priority'²⁵ countries identified by the European Commission to work towards achieving its goal of migrant reduction in return for various 'incentives' like development aid and trade.

The crossing of 1 100²⁶ sub-Saharan African migrants to Spain within three days in February 2017, following an EU Court of Justice ruling to suspend agricultural trade with Morocco, demonstrates the leverage of Morocco in curtailing the flow of migrants to Europe – particularly to Spain.

The regularisation schemes could also help grow the economies of Algeria and Morocco

The regularisation schemes could also help grow the economies of Algeria and Morocco. In the case of Algeria, migrants can contribute a lot as it strives to steer²⁷ its economy away from overreliance on oil and gas production. Despite high unemployment rates, Algeria faces a chronic shortage of construction workers as Algerians migrate in search of better salaries – including to Europe. Sub-Saharan African migrants' contribution towards the economy of Morocco is also increasing.²⁸

Are migrants exposed to radicalisation in Algeria and Morocco?

Hosting tens of thousands of sub-Saharan African migrants for longer periods of time is a new experience for Algeria and Morocco.²⁹ They are more familiar with transit, short-term migrants. In fact, Algeria and Morocco are countries of emigration. In 2012, 961 850³⁰ Algerians and 3.4 million³¹ Moroccans lived abroad.

Current trends suggest there is a high likelihood that the number of sub-Saharan African migrants heading to Algeria and Morocco will increase due to the following:

1. Harsh economic realities and growing unemployment rates in their countries of origin.
2. Regularisation announcements are expected to encourage many more to go to these countries.
3. Neither expulsion nor expanded border security will significantly impact on the movement of migrants due to simple geographic reality – Algeria and Morocco lie directly between sub-Saharan Africa and Europe.
4. Any migrant who wishes to go to Europe and avoid the danger and cost associated with transiting through Libya, will transit through Algeria and Morocco. The shocking ill treatment of migrants in

Libya is explained by the recent report of migrants being auctioned as slaves for \$400 per head.³²

5. This is only going to become more acute as the EU attempts to close Libya's Southern border.³³

As more and more sub-Saharan migrants spend increasingly longer periods in the two countries, it is important to note that many live in socially and economically precarious situations and face considerable discrimination. If this is not addressed properly, it might lead to a heightened risk of radicalisation.

Algeria and Morocco are not new to violent extremist attacks. They have been targeted since the 1990s. Violent extremism threats in these countries primarily stem from the groups affiliated with al-Qaeda and Daesh. Particularly, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) is active in the two countries. Terrorist incidents in Algeria include the In Salah Gas plant in 2016³⁴ and the 2013 attack on an oil facility in Tiguertourine, near In Amenas, that caused the death of 11 Algerians and 37 foreigners.³⁵ In the case of Morocco, three tourists were attacked by knife in 2015.³⁶ In 2011, Marrakech, a popular tourist destination, was attacked – resulting in the death of dozens of tourists.³⁷ Al-Qaeda-affiliated groups were involved in the incidents.

These attacks hit Algeria's oil industry and Morocco's tourism industry hard. It is estimated that the In Amenas attack deprived Algeria of more than \$40 million in oil revenue in a four-day stand-off.³⁸ Morocco's tourism industry – which contributes 12% of the GDP – has also been hit hard due to the resurgence of violence in the surrounding region since the emergence of Daesh in 2014.³⁹ In the following year, a 15% decrease in the flow of tourists from France was recorded. France had provided almost 1.8 million visitors in 2014.⁴⁰

Violent extremism threats in Algeria and Morocco primarily stem from the groups affiliated with al-Qaeda and Daesh

The foreign fighters' phenomenon is the other peace and security challenge facing Algeria⁴¹ and Morocco. To date, around 1 500 Moroccans and 200 Algerians have joined Daesh.⁴² Regional officials have voiced concern that North African fighters are returning home from the collapsing Daesh caliphate in Syria, raising the terrorism risk.⁴³ This means the two countries also need to work strongly towards the deradicalisation of the returnees.

Algeria and Morocco have maintained strong counter-terrorism approaches that depend heavily on intelligence and military operations. Since 2013, Algeria has become Africa's largest importer of weapons – spending more than \$10 billion on its military per year. Morocco's military budget too has shown significant growth but is still three times smaller than Algeria's.⁴⁴ At different times, both countries reported the dismantling of cells linked to AQIM and Daesh in their respective countries.



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Apart from their military responses, Algeria and Morocco have implemented preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) strategies. Both countries closely monitor their religious institutions. Since the civil war of the 1990s, imams and religious institutions have been under government control in Algeria and radical preachers banned from mosques. In 2013, a national union of the country's imams was formed with the objective of safeguarding the religious space from imported religious ideas.⁴⁵

Morocco started its 'Islamic Reform' in 2003, which includes overseeing its mosques and its media, following the Casablanca suicide bombings.⁴⁶ Morocco's strategy focuses on promoting moderate Islam through 'qualifying mosques, developing curricula for imams... and engaging the youth in religious and social issues'.⁴⁷

In 2016, Morocco also launched an electronic platform, *Ra'ed*, which focuses on disengaging people from extreme forms of Islam. Further, it published a series of books – *Islam and Contemporary Context*⁴⁸ – that focuses on deconstructing extremist perspectives.

Regular supervision of inmates is carried out by authorities from the Ministry of Islamic Affairs and members of regional and local religious councils

Morocco has also implemented a prison-based deradicalisation programme. Regular supervision of inmates is carried out by authorities from the Ministry of Islamic Affairs and members of regional and local religious councils. In 2013 alone, officials visited approximately 5 000 inmates. The example of the former radical Salafist figure Mohamed Fizazi, who led Friday prayers in front of the King after completing the deradicalisation process, is powerful.⁴⁹ Fizazi was imprisoned for preaching violence against foreigners and in connection to the 2003 Casablanca bombings.⁵⁰

Migration policies to help prevent extremism

Migrant flow to Algeria and Morocco is neither temporary nor unusual. The two countries continue to host migrants, either as destinations or in longer transits. Of the tens of thousands of sub-Saharan African migrants Algeria and Morocco are hosting, most come from the Sahel region and West Africa, where AQIM, Daesh and Boko Haram are active. AQIM especially is expanding its membership to citizens of Mali, Mauritania, Senegal and Niger. In 2016, Malians constituted the majority of the AQIM fighters.⁵¹

To date, no sub-Saharan migrant has been implicated in violent extremism attacks in either Algeria or Morocco, except for one incident in 2016 where a Chadian national was arrested in connection with a Daesh terrorist plot.⁵² This is a very strong indicator that migrants are heading to these countries in search of better opportunities and not with the sinister motive of getting involved in terrorist activities. As experiences in Europe and elsewhere indicate, however, migrant communities are not immune from radicalisation.



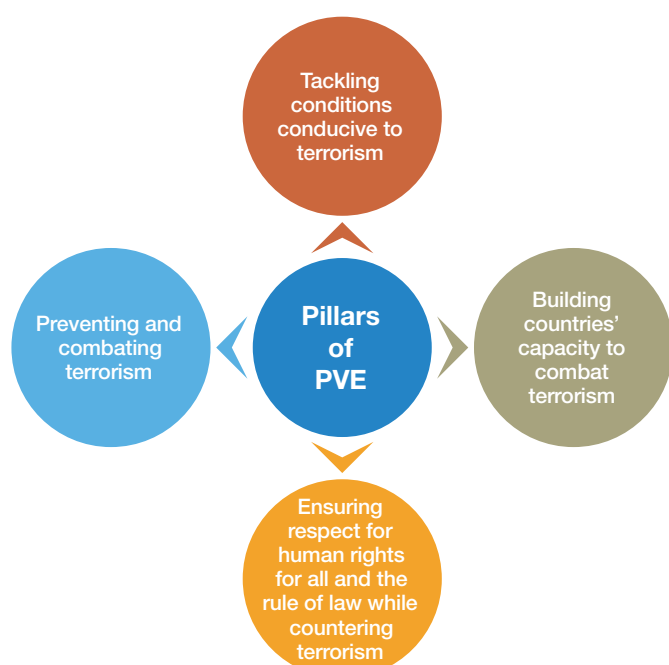
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In some cases, they can even be susceptible. Therefore this is the right time for the two countries to develop strategies to prevent violent extremism – targeting migrant communities before any major radicalisation occurs. So far, the C/PVE strategies of these countries are focused on their own nationals.

Preventing violent extremism (PVE) refers to ‘an approach which aims to address the root causes of violent extremism through non-coercive approaches’.⁵³ The 2015 United Nations (UN) Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism also stressed the importance of paying closer attention to root causes and drivers of violent extremism instead of military-centred approaches.⁵⁴

Strategies of PVE are multi-layered and include provision of education, health and job opportunities; respect for human rights; and empowering the youth and marginalised communities. Tailoring strategic communications through the mainstream and social media is part of this strategy. In terms of developing PVE strategies, the UN Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism suggests the four key pillars (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Four key pillars of the UN Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism



Source: The 2015 UN Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism⁵⁵

Algeria and Morocco’s PVE strategies for migrant communities should consider three of the pillars: (i) tackling conditions conducive to terrorism, (ii) preventing and combating terrorism, and (iii) ensuring

respect for human rights for all and the rule of law while countering terrorism. These pillars provide the basis for respecting the rights of migrants, facilitating economic opportunities, enabling migrants’ access to education and healthcare, and tackling social discrimination. Working on these aspects will help Algeria and Morocco to minimise the chances of radicalisation among migrant communities. Lessons learnt indicate that the exclusion of migrant communities is the major driver for radicalisation.⁵⁶

Lessons learnt indicate that the exclusion of migrant communities is the major driver for radicalisation

A vital outcome of the migrant-tailored PVE strategies is that through winning their hearts and minds, migrants are inclined neither towards recruitment nor involvement in violent extremism. Effective prevention, therefore, makes any underground recruitment attempt by the terrorist groups less appealing to migrants. Another important aspect of PVE strategies is their being less expensive than military-centred counter-terrorism approaches. Further, such strategies have long-term impact such as establishing a multi-national society, which contributes towards the overall development of these countries similar to the United States of America (USA). In addition, the development of anti-extremism will be very high as they will consider these countries home.

Conclusion

Growing trends of racism in some cases and increased efforts at tolerance and inclusion of migrants in others make migration central to the societal debate in Algeria and Morocco. These debates and the actual contexts – such as the high unemployment rate – should inform the draft migration/asylum policies of these countries. The governments need to work hard to raise public awareness of the good things that come with migrants, and the need to accept them.

So far, only one sub-Saharan African – from Chad – has been implicated in violent terrorist attacks in Morocco. Considering the fact that these countries are becoming new hosts of tens of thousands of sub-Saharan African migrants for a longer period of time, however, it is important to note that there is a growing racism and

marginalisation against these migrants. This can build grievances among migrants and make them susceptible to radicalisation. These countries, therefore, should consider developing migrant-tailored PVE strategies. This could help them prevent any future radicalisation among migrants – and may even increase migrants' cooperation with the intelligence services.

Recommendations

The first step Algeria and Morocco should take is to put into operation the regularisation schemes. Algeria should start issuing residence and work permits to migrants as per its announcement. Morocco should also operationalise its second round regularisation. This would give the basis for the development of the migrant-tailored PVE strategies.

Algeria and Morocco should also strengthen their bilateral cooperation to effectively implement their

respective legalisation schemes and share experiences for future improvements.

Further, the two countries should strengthen cooperation with neighbouring countries – especially Mali, Chad, Niger and to some extent Mauritania – and other countries of migrant origin. The purpose of such cooperation should be to encourage legal migration and improve border security.

Algeria should stop the deportation of migrants as this sends mixed messages regarding the country's stand on sub-Saharan African migrants. In October 2017, the Algerian government expelled more than 2 000 sub-Saharan African migrants from countries including Niger and Mali. In September 2017, 1 000 people from Niger were also deported. The danger of expulsion includes driving migrants towards radicalisation – terrorist groups can use the expulsion as a recipe for recruitment.

Notes

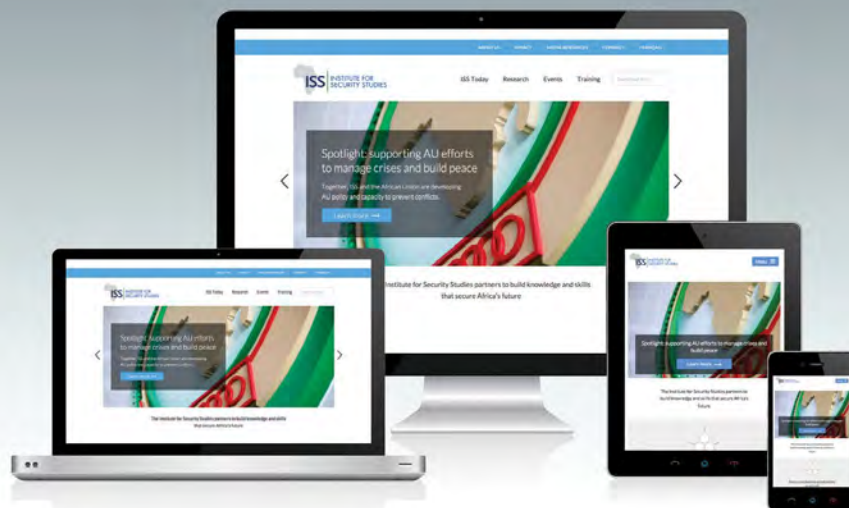
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