

Forum: Special Political and Decolonization Committee (GA4)

Issue: The question of the Comorian island of Mayotte

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INTRODUCTION

The issue of the island of Mayotte is a dispute between the people of Mayotte and the government of France, and the government of the Comoros. Citing cultural, geographical and religious ties, Mayotte is generally closer to the Comoros, with the island country laying claims regarding Mayotte. Meanwhile the local population still chooses to remain under French rule following a number of referendums.

After the uncontrollable influx of migrants, mostly from Comoros, and the launch of Operation Wuambushu, aiming to expel migrants, the tensions in the region have risen, with the Comorian government clashing with the French in a diplomatic conflict regarding the return of the migrants. Combined with the religious leaders of Mayotte demanding separation from France, and Mayotte's native population now equating migrants, it is imminent that a solution is found to combat and clear the situation in the island.

As this is an ever-changing world, where factors like politics and technology re-define it every day, it is imperative that human rights are preserved and enforced, especially in regions like this one where slums and poverty prevail. Providing innovative solutions and devoting time to analyze this subject from every aspect, is a great way to habituate with ties between countries and their overseas territories, dating from the colonization period, and how they survive to this day.



Figure 1: Map of Mayotte¹

DEFINITION OF KEY-TERMS

Colonialism

The belief in and support for the system of one country controlling another². Comoros firmly believes that colonialism is applied to Mayotte by France.

Jus Sanguinis

A rule that a child's citizenship is determined by its parents' citizenship. France has tried to apply that policy to the residents of Mayotte³.

¹ "File:Mayotte Topographic Map-Fr.svg - Wikimedia Commons." *Wikimedia.org*, 24 Mar. 2009, commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mayotte_topographic_map-fr.svg.

² Cambridge Dictionary. "COLONIALISM | Meaning in the Cambridge English Dictionary." *Cambridge.org*, 27 Nov. 2019, dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/colonialism.

³ "Definition of JUS SANGUINIS." *Merriam-Webster.com*, 2020, www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/jus%20sanguinis.

Kwassa-Kwassa

A small fishing boat used in parts of Africa, used by Comorian migrants to flee to Mayotte⁴. These boats are extremely dangerous as they are wooden and narrow, making the rough journey between the two islands even more difficult and perilous.

Neocolonialism

The economic and political policies by which a great power indirectly maintains or extends its influence over other areas or people⁵. Comoros firmly believes that France's stronghold over Mayotte is a form of neocolonialism in the Indian Ocean.

Overseas Department

An overseas department can be defined as a territorial authority integrated into the French Republic in the same capacity as the departments and regions in Metropolitan France⁶.

Referendum

A vote in which all the people in a country or an area are asked to give their opinion about or decide an important political or social question. Through referenda, the Mahori citizens have shown their intentions to remain under French rule⁷.

Reintegration

Repeated or renewed integration. In the context of the topic, the Comorian government is denying the reintegration of the Comorian migrants in Mayotte.⁸

Sovereignty

The power of a country to control its own government, meaning the supreme authority that a certain institution has, over a state. The sovereignty of Mayotte has been a subject that has concerned the Comoros for decades⁹

⁴"Kwassa - Wiktionary, the Free Dictionary." *Wiktionary*, 2022, en.wiktionary.org/wiki/kwassa.

⁵ Merriam-Webster. "Definition of NEOCOLONIALISM." *Merriam-Webster.com*, 2019, www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/neocolonialism.

⁶ "Definition - Overseas Department / DOM / DOM | Insee." *Www.insee.fr*, www.insee.fr/en/metadonnees/definition/c2031.

⁷Cambridge Dictionary. "Referendum." @*CambridgeWords*, 14 Aug. 2024, dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/referendum?q=Referendum.

⁸"Merriam-Webster Dictionary." *Merriam-Webster.com*, 2025, www.merriam-webster.com/medical/reintegration.

⁹ Cambridge Dictionary. "Sovereignty." @*CambridgeWords*, 4 Dec. 2024, dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/sovereignty?q=Sovereignty+.

Statelessness

Lacking the status of a national¹⁰. In the case of the topic of the Comorian island of Mayotte, statelessness applies to the Comorian migrants that will not receive neither a Comorian nor a French citizenship.

Veto

Vetoing a state's decision can be defined as an authoritative prohibition. This action is applied to the Security Council (SC) where the P5 countries can block any non-procedural resolution. Relating to the topic, France has vetoed the resolutions brought upon the Security Council by Comoros¹¹.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Historical Background

Mayotte, a small island in the northern part of the Mozambique Channel, is geographically a part of the Comorian archipelagos. Geopolitically though, the island has been subject to various powers, such as the Arabs, the Malagasy and the French, the latter retaining their authority over the island till today. Specifically, different chiefdoms, from Oman and Madagascar have been known to rule the island, usually due to trading routes, with France taking the reins later in history, by purchasing the island. The geographical location of the island, as well as its natural ports, have been the main reason the island has been so desired. Its history has been stigmatized by the relationships between colonial forces, Islam as well as the native inhabitants of the island.

Early Islamic influences and French colonization

Bantu-speaking populations inhabited Mayotte prior to European contact. The introduction of Islam came to be by Arab and Shirazi traders, who used this island as a stopover in the Indian Ocean. Islam is still the reigning religion in the area, with the island having the oldest mosque on French soil¹². From the 10th century, the island has been ruled by various Islamic sultanates, mainly from Oman, who had integrated the island into their broader trading network in the Indian Ocean. When the French sought to claim the island, it was ruled by the

¹⁰"Definition of STATELESS." *Www.merriam-Webster.com*, www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/stateless.

¹¹ "Definition of VETO." *Merriam-Webster.com*, 2019, www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/veto.

¹²AFP. "France's Oldest Mosque, in the Indian Ocean, Gets a Facelift." *Arab News*, Arabnews, 25 Sept. 2019, www.arabnews.com/node/1559826/world.

Malagasy king, Andriantsoly, who ceded it to them in 1841. France wished to have a safe naval base and commercial port in the Indian Ocean, following the loss of Mauritius and the Seychelles by the British, for strategic and economic reasons. France then started implementing measures and rules in order to align with its colonial policies, and progressively put an end to slavery on the island.

After the acquisition of Madagascar and the rest of the Comorian archipelago in 1885, Mayotte was the cornerstone of France's expansion in the Indian Ocean. Regardless of the protectorate status that the rest of the Comoros had, Mayotte maintained its administrative autonomy, being ruled either by Reunion or directly by metropolitan France.

Decolonisation period and Mayotte's autonomy

Following the aftermath of World War II, various French territories started experiencing a growing independence movement. As a result, France organized an independence referendum on the Comorian Islands. Even though a grand majority of votes in Grand Comore, Mohéli, and Anjouan, called for independence, Mayotte opted to remain under French authority. The Comoros did not agree with this choice. Meanwhile, UN General Assembly (UNGA) resolutions, which legally do not bind the participants, continued to criticize French rule over the islands. Despite the stricture from the U.N., the African Union and the newly formed Comorian government, this decision was vindicated for a second time in 1976. France has shown disagreement to the opinion of the Comoros, citing the right of self-determination for the Mahori people. As a result, it has vetoed a plethora of Security Council (SC) resolutions that supported Comorian claims. Hence, there has been a diplomatic deadlock for decades, regarding the status of Mayotte¹³.

Integration into France and the claims of the Comoros

Mayotte's relationship with France grew stronger over time, evidently after a third referendum in 2009, where 95% of Mahorans supported the idea of France forming an overseas department¹⁴. Officially, Mayotte became France's 101st on March 31st, 2011, while it received the status of a French overseas region in 2014, which is the highest degree of territorial subdivision in France. Notable administrative, economic and legal reforms happened following this shift, equating Mayotte's relations with the French national institutions.

Even though Comorian claims have died out in general, there is still vocal support regarding Comorian rule on the island, citing geographical, religious and cultural reasons as basis for this

¹³ "Bras de Fer Franco-Comorien Au Sujet de Mayotte." *Diploweb.com*, 2019, www.diploweb.com/Le-bras-de-fer-franco-comorien-au-sujet-de-Mayotte.html.

¹⁴ glhermine. "Mayotte Referendum 2009." *World Elections*, 30 Mar. 2009, welections.wordpress.com/2009/03/30/mayotte-referendum-2009/.

belief. However, Mayotte's inhabitants take pride in being French, showing no intention of changing their status.¹⁵

Current Situation in Mayotte

Mayotte is currently experiencing an escalating migration crisis that has placed phenomenal strain on its infrastructure, social services, as well as the native population. Comorian nationals, seeking a better future, sail to the island of Mayotte using small kwassa-kwassa boats, desiring the European Union's rights and privileges.

The illegal migrants mainly descend from the island of Anjouan. Specifically, over a third of Mayotte's population is estimated to be undocumented¹⁶, many of whom live in vulnerable circumstances in overcrowded unofficial settlements, known as slums.

The government of France has made various efforts trying to eradicate the problem, with its most famous ones being the launch of Operation Wuambushu as well as a series of mass law enforcement campaigns to destroy illegal settlements, contain crime, and remove illegal migrants¹⁷. These operations have not accomplished long-term effects, while they have been deemed controversial both in France and internationally.

Natural disasters also played a role in worsening the crisis: intense storms and cyclones in late 2024 and early 2025 destroyed the majority of temporary shelters on the island, exacerbating the humanitarian crisis and unveiling the vulnerability of many migrants who felt hesitant or insecure to approach. Albeit the additional resources from French authorities to repair infrastructure and enhance control of immigration, including implementing the jus sanguinis citizenship legislative measure, the situation remains tenuous. Mayotte remains implicated between humanitarian imperative and long term development, while there are a variety of political and security interests of managing the uncontrollable migration in an extremely delicate geopolitical context.

The influx of migrants has also taken a toll on public services including healthcare, education, housing and sanitation, favouring the appropriate ground for frustration among local residents. Mahori people have been organizing protests and movements, calling for the protection of their homes. Consequently, there has been a continuous expression of resentment against immigrants. A major obstacle has been the decision of the Comorian government not to

¹⁵ 24, France. "Mayotte Votes for Full French Integration." *France 24*, FRANCE 24, 29 Mar. 2009, www.france24.com/en/20090329-mayotte-votes-full-french-integration-.

¹⁶ "Cyclone Damage in Mayotte Highlights Lack of Social Protections." *Human Rights Watch*, 28 Jan. 2025, www.hrw.org/news/2025/01/28/cyclone-damage-mayotte-highlights-lack-social-protections.

¹⁷ "Anti-Migration Operation on French African Island of Mayotte Stirs Tensions, Exposes Inequalities." *AP News*, 18 May 2023, apnews.com/article/france-migrants-africa-police-operation-mayotte-comoros-4e467c5c09cfb5ef82d9b82fe4c90d70

recognize the deported nationals, which led to the closure of its ports and a diplomatic conflict with France. As such, the stateless immigrants have no place where they can invoke their rights and seek any kind of asylum, further hindering their life, where they cannot have any commodity.

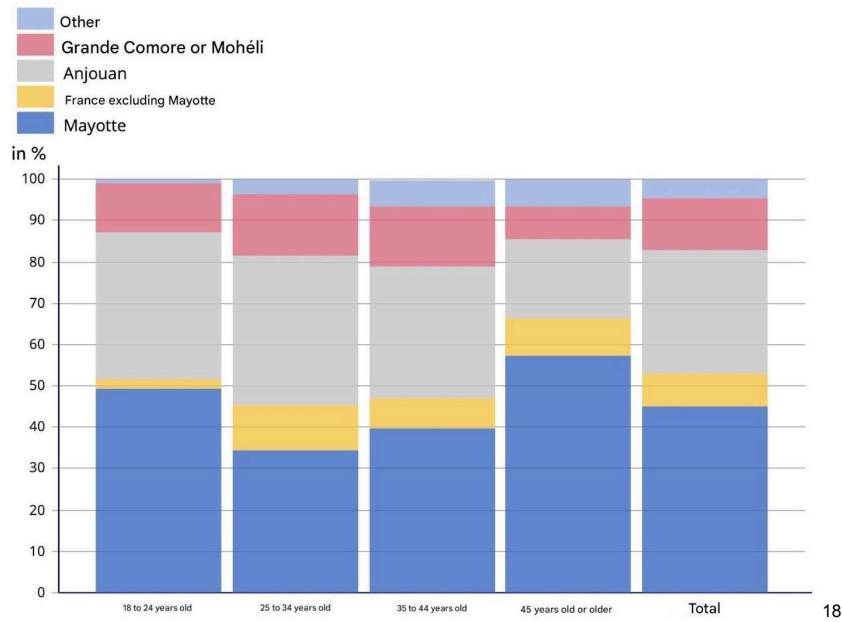


Figure 2: Percentage of Comorian migrants contrasting to Mayotte citizens¹⁹

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED

China

Even though China’s involvement is not direct in the Mayotte crisis, it still plays a vital and strategic role due to the economic and diplomatic relations it fosters with the Comoros. As part of its broader economic activity in Africa, China has funded infrastructure projects, while it has also provided development resources to the country, forming a stable position in the region. This relationship aids Comoros, as it shows that it has gained a really important, although indirect, international ally in this conflict. Nevertheless, China has retained good relations with both countries, aiding its neutrality, while it can make economic moves and be benefited by the process.²⁰

¹⁸ Entre Semnoz et Chéran. “Mayotte 4, Peuplement et Organisation Sociale.” *Le Blog Entre-Semnoz-Et-Chéran*, 2 Mar. 2024, entre-semnoz-et-cheran.over-blog.com/2020/12/mayotte-4-peuplement-et-organisation-sociale.html.

¹⁹ Entre Semnoz et Chéran. “Mayotte 4, Peuplement et Organisation Sociale.” *Le Blog Entre-Semnoz-Et-Chéran*, 2 Mar. 2024, entre-semnoz-et-cheran.over-blog.com/2020/12/mayotte-4-peuplement-et-organisation-sociale.html.

²⁰ “Xi Jinping Meets with Comorian President Azali Assoumani_Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China.” *Fmprc.gov.cn*, 2024, www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xw/zyxw/202409/t20240902_11483570.html.

Comoros

Comoros is one of the two countries alongside France that are more involved in this conflict ever since it gained independence from France in 1975. Since the referendum regarding the status of Mayotte, the Comoros have continuously expressed opposition to this choice and has brought the issue before the UN, specifically in the UNGA and the SC, the African Union and other international organisations. Comoros views France's stronghold as an attempt to maintain some form of colonial power in the continent and a violation of the concept of territorial integrity. The Comorian constitution includes Mayotte as part of Comoros' territory and various governments have rejected the different referendums that have been drafted regarding the status of the island. This situation shows Comoros' stance against the French regime on the island.

The conflict has also impacted regional migration dynamics. The stark economic disparities between Comoros and Mayotte, which is a part of the European Union as well, have led a plethora of Comorian people, especially from the island of Anjouan, to attempt the perilous journey from their country to Mayotte, using small and narrow kwassa-kwassa boats. This has burdened a further strain on the diplomatic relations between the two countries, as both states will not grant citizenship to these populations. Despite the limited bilateral discussion, Comoros is not willing to give up their claim to sovereignty over Mayotte and continues to seek international support for it.²¹

France

The other important country that should be taken into consideration, except for the Comoros, is France, as the conflict is happening on its soil. Mahori residents have been enjoying French citizenship and rights since the 1970s and have voted repeatedly to remain under French rule, rejecting Comorian claims. France has also dedicated large investments to assimilate Mayotte into its national system, especially in the sector of infrastructure, healthcare, education and public services, showing that it aspires to raise the island's standards to those of the French mainland.

Unfortunately, Mayotte still faces various and serious problems such as high unemployment rates, overcrowding in house areas, now categorized as slums, as well as one of the highest poverty rates in the European Union. The migrant influx has only worsened the situation, as Comorian citizens have a great impact on the situation there.

Alas, the French government has addressed these problems continuously, having launched the infamous Operations Wuambushu and Wuambushu 2, in 2023 and 2024 respectively, which aim to dismantle informal settlements and deport undocumented migrants. These actions received criticism for their abuse of human rights and harsh treatments, while

²¹Mayotte under de Facto Sovereignty vs de Jure Sovereignty: The Franco-Comorian Territorial Dispute on Mayotte

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their effectiveness was deemed unsuccessful. To sum up, France does not seem willing to cede power, but international organizations are asking for a correct confrontation of this matter.²²

African Union (AU)

As Mayotte is an essential part of the Comorian archipelago, the African Union has endlessly supported the claim of the Comorian government to the island. The AU considers France’s ongoing rule over the island as a remnant of colonialism and a breach of Comoros’ territorial integrity. Multiple resolutions have been voted and drafted leaning on the side of Comoros and urging diplomatic talks regarding the island. This reaction reflects a larger philosophy of Pan-Africanism and the AU’s position regarding complete autonomy from foreign powers in Africa.²³

European Union (EU)

After the recognition of Mayotte as a French overseas department in 2011, the EU considers it as one of its outermost regions, dating since 2014. Through that acknowledgement, the European Union also accepts France’s rule over the island. Hence, Mayotte can use and take advantage of the EU development funds and the aid for infrastructure, leading to Mahori citizens enjoying more privileges than Comorian ones. Thus, this situation has led to the migrant waves that have been tormenting the island. Though it does directly intervene in the conflict and does not provide substantial help, the European Union still stands by France.²⁴

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

DATE	DESCRIPTION OF EVENT
1841	France purchases Mayotte from Madagascar
1855	In the Berlin Conference, France gains control of the whole Comoros Archipelago

²² Nikolas. “Solidarity with Mayotte: “Three Months after the Disaster, the Situation Remains Critical” - Fondation de France.” *Fondation de France*, Apr. 2025, www.fondationdefrance.org/en/blog-emergencies/solidarity-with-mayotte-three-months-after-the-disaster-the-situation-remains-critical.

²³ AHG/Res.226 (XXIX) Page 1 RESOLUTION on the QUESTION of COMORIAN ISLAND of MAYOTTE

²⁴“Mayotte’s Status with Regard to the European Union - EU Monitor.” *Eumonitor.eu*, 2016,

www.eumonitor.eu/9353000/1/j9vvik7m1c3gyxp/vj6ipo0ft6y7.

22 December 1974	Mayotte votes to remain in France, following a referendum regarding the status of the Comoros
6 February 1976	France vetoes Comoros' draft resolution, supported by 11 out of 15 members, demanding Mayotte to be ceded to Comoros
8 February 1976	Mayotte votes for a second time to remain in France, with a clear majority
29 March 2009	Mayotte votes for a third time to remain in France, with an overwhelming majority
31 March 2011	Mayotte becomes the 5th overseas department of France, and its 101st overall
2018	Protests happen across the island against the illegal migration from the Comoros
24 April 2023	Operation Wuambushu is launched
11 September 2023	Operation Wuambushu ends
16 April 2023	Operation Wuambushu 2 starts

RELEVANT UN RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness

The Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness calls for the granting rights to stateless people and how we can prevent this problem. It was adopted on August 30, 1961 and entered into force on December 13, 1975. Statelessness is a problem that Comorian migrants' children face in Mayotte, as the state of France has a jus sanguinis policy, while Comoros is not accepting back migrant families, giving these people no chance to register themselves in any country.

Importance of the universal realization of the right of peoples to self-determination and of the speedy granting of independence to colonial countries and peoples for the effective guarantee and observance of human rights

Convention 37/43, which was adopted on March 12, 1982 recognizes the right of previously recognized territories to determine their national integrity and geopolitical status. Mayotte is a territory that has continuously opted to remain under French rule and this choice is not being understood or respected by the Comorian government.

New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants

The New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, which was adopted on September 19, 2016, enforces the compliance of member states to grant every human right to refugees and migrants and for them to have an equal standing as human beings in society. Racism and xenophobia are problems that Comorian migrants face in Mayotte, while the state of France has not granted adequate resources for their survival on the island.

Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees

The Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, which was adopted on July 29, 1951 and entered in force on April 22, 1954, outlines the definition of a refugee, the rights of those granted asylum, and the obligations of the countries that grant asylum. This treaty was extended to Mayotte, regarding the rights of the refugees as well as the handling of them, especially after the great influx of Comorian citizens in Mayotte, where they do not receive help from the government of France

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

2009 Mahoran status referendum

A significant event in this conflict was the 2009 Mahoran status referendum, where the inhabitants of the island overwhelmingly (95.2%)²⁵ supported remaining under French rule, by creating a complete French overseas department that was declared in 2011. Beforehand, Mayotte had a unique status as a “departmental collectivity” and was only partially incorporated into the French institutions and law that were being followed in mainland France.

The results of the referendum brought a significant change, as Mayotte gained an even firmer position in the French constitution, being given the same administrative and political standing the mainland departments had.

Consequently, the island joined the European Union in 2014 as its westernmost area. Internationally, this political move caused outrage especially in the Comoros, the United Nations and the African Union, who named this move as a form of neocolonialism²⁶.

Operation Wuambushu

Operation Wuambushu was a police and military operation that was instigated by France and launched in April 2023 on the island of Mayotte. The operation aimed to eradicate illegal immigration, dissolve informal settlements, known as slums, and expel undocumented

²⁵ glhermine. “Mayotte Referendum 2009.” *World Elections*, 30 Mar. 2009, welections.wordpress.com/2009/03/30/mayotte-referendum-2009/.

²⁶ “Radware Bot Manager Captcha.” *Lagazettedescommunes.com*, 2025, www.lagazettedescommunes.com/actualite/32077/decentralisation/outre_mer_departmentalisation_mayotte_debut_campagne_explication.htm.

immigrants, who originated from the Comorian islands of Anjouan and Grand Comore. The operation included security deployments, home demolitions and heightened border security. It sparked criticism from human rights organisations for its strict measures and outraged the Comorian government, who refused to accept the Comorian immigrants back.

The operation was an indication of the social inequality that is prevalent on the island of Mayotte as well as the challenges that have been created in the island, like poverty, overcrowding and strained public services.²⁷

Operation Wuambushu 2

Operation Wuambushu 2 was the second phase of France’s security initiative in Mayotte, launched on 16 April 2024 by Overseas Minister Marie Guevenoux. Like the first phase in 2023, this operation aimed to dismantle unsanitary shantytowns known as “bangas”, combat illegal immigration and target criminal gangs, but with even more ambitious targets—specifically, the arrest of around 60 gang leaders and the destruction of approximately 1,300 informal housing units, double the number removed in the previous year²⁸. This intensified deployment drew renewed scrutiny from human rights groups and further strained diplomatic relations with Comoros.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Heightening marine security and patrol to ensure the safety of marine borders between France and the Comoros

To control irregular migration, combat human trafficking, and stop smuggling, the French government could increase and boost naval patrolling services and surveillance in the waters surrounding Mayotte. The main goal of these initiatives is to limit the number of the kwassa-kwassa boats, used by Comorian migrants to flee to Mayotte.

In the midst of ongoing diplomatic problems with Comoros, an increased maritime presence also aims to bolster France’s border security and establish its authority over Mayotte. Although border control may benefit from these actions, humanitarian concerns about the dangers migrants encounter at sea may also be raised.

²⁷ “Mayotte : Une Opération d’Expulsions Fait Polémique.” *Franceinfo*, 13 Apr. 2023, www.franceinfo.fr/france/mayotte/mayotte-une-operation-d-expulsions-fait-polemique_5768486.html.

²⁸ Monde, Le. “A Mayotte, Le Gouvernement Lance Une Deuxième Opération “Wuambushu” Contre La Délinquance et l’Immigration Irrégulière.” *Le Monde.fr*, Le Monde, 16 Apr. 2024, www.lemonde.fr/outr-mer/article/2024/04/16/a-mayotte-le-gouvernement-lance-une-deuxieme-operation-pour-lutter-contre-l-immigration-irreguliere-et-l-habitat-illegal_6228099_1840826.htm

Promoting the improvement of living conditions in the Comoros, to prevent the continuous migrant influx

To gain access to more resources regarding healthcare, education and economic possibilities that are unavailable in their home country is a factor that led Comorians to migrate to Mayotte. Supporting sustainable development initiatives in the country, by funding infrastructure projects, creating workplaces, enhancing healthcare and education, is essential to confronting the underlying causes of the masses that migrate. The improvement of the islands' economic opportunities and services can positively impact and, consequently, lessen the incentive for illegal migration. Additionally, these actions can help equate the living positions of Mayotte with those in France.

Implementing non-military initiatives for the situation, to promote peace and de-escalate civil unrests

Campaigns for community engagement and discussions to mediate the disputes between the local residents and the officials are a few examples of these projects. The fuss that leads to people protesting and tensions rising, can be reduced by enforcing local administration, promoting lack of secrecy and including a society free of civil annoyances. Furthermore, dedicating financial resources in job training, education and youth involvement can provide the society with some sustainable alternatives to social instability and endless violence. Strategies that lack a military aspect, can change the trajectory to de-escalation and social viscosity in the area putting emphasis on development and communication where everyone is included.

Establishing regularization and legal alternatives

Managing and defining the status of the undocumented migrants in Mayotte has posed one of the greatest challenges in this crisis. They are facing legal problems regarding their nationality, having difficulty acquiring neither a Comorian nor a French citizenship. This solution promotes the creation of clear, humane and transparent legal mechanisms to confront this situation. By implementing regularization policies, the French government can provide legal residency to the migrants who meet specific criteria, such as family ties, employment and year of residence, rendering them eligible to remain in Mayotte. Simultaneously, there could be fair and efficient asylum procedures for those fleeing persecution, like temporary work visas or family reunification program, to assure that sea crossing will be reduced.

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