

The African Union's Migration Agenda

An Alternative to European Priorities in Africa?



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Abstract

While migration from Africa is the priority of European policies for the control of the European Union's external borders, African migration dynamics are above all regional.

Sub-Saharan migration is poorly connected to transcontinental flows: more than 70% remain in Africa. If we look at the continent as a whole, adding the Maghreb countries and South Africa (two regions better connected to transcontinental migration due to their level of development), the figure rises to nearly 53%, or more than one migrant in two. The proportion of African migrants hosted in Europe is 26%, or one in four. Finally, nearly one-third of the world's refugees are in sub-Saharan Africa.

Moreover, institutional logics of regional integration exist on the African continent and make freedom of movement an objective. At the continental level, several projects led by the African Union pursue this objective, while migration has been included by the United Nations as a dimension of the Sustainable Development Goals. However, these initiatives encounter various obstacles, in terms of the reluctance of some important countries (such as Nigeria or South Africa) and lack of resources.

Faced with this regional reality of African migration and the place that the issue occupies in the ongoing processes of regional integration in Africa, European policies impose an agenda that fails to take these specificities into account. Beyond the political sensitivity in Europe to the subject of migration (and particularly migration from Africa), this discrepancy can also be explained by two very different visions of the link between the regulation of migration flows and the development of African countries, and by a political asymmetry in the partnership between Europe and Africa.

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Introduction

In order to understand the specificity of the place of the African continent in the geopolitics of international migration, the following paradox needs to be highlighted: although migration from Africa is the main variable in the Europeans' assessment in terms of control of the European Union's (EU) external borders, the real dynamics of African migration are primarily regional. Between 70% and 80% of sub-Saharan African migration takes place in a country next to the country of origin and remains within Africa. For many reasons, African migrants are poorly connected to international migration routes running between continents.

Therefore, the issue can be assessed as follows: what the Europeans see as a major migration challenge – and which consequently structures their migration strategy in Africa – is in fact something that mainly affects Africans. The entire EU-African dialog on migration is permeated by this paradox and its institutional, political, social and economic consequences. Hence, when leaders of African and European countries meet to discuss migration, they are not talking about the same phenomenon.

In this paper, we will attempt to clarify and explain what the reality of migration phenomena in Africa encompasses, and to identify what an “African approach” to migration looks like, specifically by highlighting the institutional frameworks that manage the movement of people at different levels on the continent. In this way, we will also be able to take full stock of the disparity between this “African approach” and the European approach that still continues to set the tone for EU-African dialog on this subject.

African Migration Dynamics

Demographics is the key argument behind the thinking in Northern countries, that views Africa as a major source of current and future migration. The continent had 1.3 billion inhabitants in 2015. Projections indicate that it will experience the greatest population growth in the world. The African population is expected to double by 2050 according to the United Nations' projections. Hence the concern, which some people describe as a “demographic time-bomb”, that this will translate into a “migration time bomb” and a “rush to Europe” will take place.

The equation between high population growth and a sharp increase in migration to Europe, unfortunately fails to understand the specific dynamics of African migration. While it may seem counter-intuitive at first glance, demographics alone cannot explain migration as many other determinants must be taken into account – even though migration is a key factor in a country's demographics.

Intracontinental mobility

An initial key factor is the dynamic relationship between migration and development. All studies have empirically shown that it is not the poorest who emigrate. Medium-income countries tend to be among the top countries of origin, such as Mexico, Morocco and the Philippines. In Africa, international flows come from the north and south of the continent and not from the poorer sub-Saharan countries.

This is because not only economic, but also social and human capital is required to emigrate. Thus, the key hypothesis of the so-called “migration transition” theory should be borne in mind, whereby more development leads to more internal migration (rural flight) and more international migration. African migrants with limited material resources choose to travel short distances. The few, who have the necessary resources to undertake longer-distance migration, will be in a more advantageous position in countries of destination than other groups. This explains why sub-Saharan migrants to the United States are among the most highly educated.

This is why African migration is poorly connected to intercontinental routes and migration mainly takes place within Africa. Between 1970 and 2017, Africa was overtaken by three continents (North America, Oceania and Asia) in terms of increased intercontinental migration flows. African nationals account for 14% of international migrants while 41% of these migrants are from Asia and 24% from Europe.¹ Thirty-four million Africans are international migrants, while 104 million Asians, 62 million Europeans and 37 million Latin Americans reside outside their native countries.² In 2019, 52.7% of African migrants were in Africa. Europe only hosts 26.3% of African migrants.³ Africa and Africans are less affected by international migration than other continents and population groups. This explains why African migrants only account for 10.4% of migrants in Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries, and almost half (46%) of these African migrants are from North Africa.⁴

In contrast, Africans are more widely represented in forced displacements with 6.35 million refugees under the United Nations' High Commissioner for Refugees' (UNHCR) protection in 2019.⁵ Nearly one-third of the world's refugees are in sub-Saharan Africa. Their numbers have tripled in a decade. Furthermore, in 2019, 41% of internally displaced people (IDPs) were in Africa.⁶ In 2020, emergency contexts include the Democratic Republic of Congo (with 880,000 refugees and asylum seekers and 5 million IDPs), Nigeria (respectively 294,230 and 2 million people) and the Central African Republic (623,400 and 684,000). There are 2.2 million South Sudanese refugees, mainly in Uganda and Sudan. Asylum, more than other types of international migration, primarily remains a regional phenomenon, as refugees often do not have the opportunity to mobilize the time and resources required to undertake a long-distance journey.

1. M. Achieng and A. El Fadil, "What Is Wrong with the Narrative on African Migration?", *Africa Migration Report, Challenging the Narrative*, International Organization for Migration, 2020.

2. The 2015 figures from the Population Division of the United Nations' Department of Economic and Social Affairs, available at: www.un.org.

3. J. Black, "The Data Question: The Challenge of Measuring Irregular Migration in Africa", *Africa Migration Report, Challenging the Narrative*, International Organization for Migration, 2020.

4. "Quelles évolutions des migrations africaines vers les pays de l'OCDE?", *Note d'information sur les données migratoires*, No. 5, Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development/French Development Agency, June 2019, available at: www.oecd.org.

5. *Global Trends – Forced Displacement in 2019*, United Nations' High Commissioner for Refugees, June 2020.

6. M. Adbiker and M. S. Cessouma, "Internal Displacement in Africa", *Africa Migration Report, Challenging the Narrative*, International Organization for Migration, 2020.

Differentiated regional logics

The continent is not a homogeneous area. It has differentiated dynamics depending on the regions involved, as well as the role played by African regional economic communities (REC) in managing human mobility.

In West Africa, 90% of human mobility is regional and only 10% of migrants leave the region for the Maghreb or Europe. This regional migration has a long history, and is made up of very different profiles (cross-border workers, women, refugees, etc.). The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has made regional integration possible where the movement of goods, capital and people has been formalized. Therefore, in principle, the free movement of people and the freedom of establishment and residence are enshrined in these documents, even though in practice, this remains subject to prevailing political and economic vagaries.

A major regional integration process has also taken place in East Africa. This integration – mainly economic – has again enshrined the free movement of people, along with freedom of residence for nationals of East African Community (EAC) member states. The protocol establishing the common market stipulates the harmonization of labor policies. Nonetheless, there are many obstacles to the free movement of people, starting with the complex and highly diversified nature of migration flows in the region. The many conflict zones in East Africa make it one of the main areas for people requiring international protection – 3.6 million people according to UNHCR in 2020, including more than 2 million in Tanzania, Uganda and Kenya, who are mostly from Somalia, South Sudan or the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The region is also torn by conflicts between its member countries. For instance, Somalia is seeking to join the EAC, but has a maritime dispute with Kenya, while the latter suspects some Somali refugees of being linked to terrorist groups based in Somalia. This has led to Somali refugees being used as leverage over Somalia on certain political and security issues in the region.

The Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa (CEMAC) finally promoted the principle of free movement of people in 2009, with implementation scheduled for 2014, when an integrated common area was established. However, this freedom of movement is hampered by security concerns that are also related to demographic considerations. Indeed, both Gabon and Equatorial Guinea are among the least populous countries in the region and implement expulsion policies due to concern about an imbalance between nationals of neighboring countries (such as Nigeria which is the most populous country in Africa) and their own nationals.

In Gabon, such concerns are reflected by policies to recruit foreign workers from West Africa (or even Pakistan) rather than the region.

The southern African migration sub-system is based around South Africa that is at heart of it. This country is also the most opposed to the principle of free movement of people within the South African Development Community (SADC). Regional integration within the SADC covers very heterogeneous economic circumstances. South Africa has promoted selective immigration policies designed to fill low- and high-skilled jobs. Generally, economic integration in southern Africa is much less separate from a commitment to the national sovereignty of States than elsewhere on the continent.

Finally, integration in the Maghreb is insufficient to provide a framework for the free movement of people. The region shares some characteristics with southern Africa that merit comparison. Firstly, they are the two main regions of origin for migrants leaving the continent, for reasons already given with respect to the economic, social and human capital required to embark on migration beyond Africa.

Secondly, they are also major immigration regions. However, “migration transition” theorists have demonstrated the complex correlation between migration and development, and its influence on the evolution of medium-income countries’ migration policies according to their economic, social and human development. Indeed, the link between the level of development, net migration and type of migration policy makes it possible to forecast migration policy trends in these countries. According to this model, medium-income countries have negative net migration (they have more emigrants than immigrants) and therefore focus their policies on managing their diaspora. Conversely, the most developed countries have positive net migration (they have more immigrants than emigrants) and they focus their policies on controlling and selecting these immigrants.

It is therefore possible to model transitions in migration policies as a result of the effects of development: more development results in a change in net migration that in turn leads to a change in the objectives of the countries’ migration policies. This explains how countries, such as Brazil, China, Malaysia or Turkey, have gradually introduced immigration policies that have borrowed many aspects from developed countries. While this development does not apply to sub-Saharan Africa, it nevertheless becomes a factor in analyzing the situation in northern and southern African countries, starting with Morocco and South Africa.

The African strategy on migration

The African Union (AU) has developed its own Migration Policy Framework. In some instances, this has resulted in major innovations. At continental level, the AU has taken into account the challenge of internal displacement, adopting a Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa in 2009, known as the “Kampala Convention”. This treaty, which has no equivalent in the rest of the world, is groundbreaking over and above its binding legal force, since it aims to cover all IDP situations. With this treaty, Africa is again assuming the leading role that it had in 1969 with the adoption of the AU Convention Governing Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa. This treaty extends the definition of refugee by paving the way for prima facie recognition in the event of a massive influx of people fleeing conflicts or generalized violence.⁷ Africa was followed by Latin America⁸ while the issue is still a matter of debate in Europe.⁹

More broadly, a Migration Policy Framework for Africa was adopted by the AU Assembly in 2006. The document covers the various challenges of the migration phenomenon, its root causes, its relationship to development, the brain drain problem and the situation of migrants on the continent. It provides a non-binding legal framework, calling on member states to link their migration policies to development needs and the protection of migrants' rights.

It requires States to commit to good governance practices. At national level, this is achieved by the implementation of appropriate migration policies, improved border control, as well as other more comprehensive measures, for instance in youth employment, education and quality of public services. This also involves supranational, continent-wide level cooperation where States are required to engage in peace and security efforts. This document provides a framework to support member states and regional economic communities in developing migration policies.

7. G. Okoth-Obbo, “Thirty Years On: A Legal Review of the 1969 Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa”, *Refugee Survey Quarterly* [sic: Quarterly], Vol. 20, No. 1, 2001.

8. Cartagena Declaration of 1984.

9. The European Union did not wish to extend the definition of refugee as it appears in the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees of July 28, 1951. In 2001, it created the temporary protection status granted collectively in the event of a major influx of displaced people. However, this protection has never been applied, including in 2015 when the Union faced an unprecedented influx of people fleeing their countries since the Second World War.

Nine specific topics are addressed, including labor mobility, irregular migration, forced displacement, internal migration, the migration–development nexus, inter-state cooperation, migration data management, human rights issues and cooperation in border management.

This framework was reviewed ten years after its adoption, specifically with regard to the inclusion of migration on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) list by the United Nations (UN). The review concluded that the framework is still relevant and that some aspects need adapting, particularly in view of the AU's priorities. Therefore, a revision was undertaken to improve the continent-wide movement of labor, facilitate remittances, harmonize national policies and strengthen cross-border cooperation. Everything is based on an action plan for the 2018-2030 period.

Finally, the increasing importance of migration-related issues in the AU's priorities has made it a cross-sectoral factor in various initiatives. This is the case, for instance, for Agenda 2063 that specifically aims to introduce a common passport for nationals of AU member states along with a generalized visa exemption. The initial deadline of 2018 to achieve this goal could not be met. This is also the case for the establishment of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), that came into effect in May 2019 and aims to achieve the free movement of African citizens. However, there is reluctance, particularly on Nigeria's part, that is one of the continent's leading economies.

The African Agenda on Migration should also be mentioned, whose development was entrusted to Morocco at the 28th AU summit in 2017. Ambitious in its objectives, this Agenda intends to make migration in Africa a choice and not a necessity; to free itself from preconceived ideas and to fight against stereotypes associated with migrants; and to build a “comprehensive, integrated and holistic approach to migration”. It should be noted that the coordinators of this new Agenda are determined to establish a pragmatic and effective framework helping member states to improve their responses to migration challenges and to take advantage of the development potential offered by human mobility on the African continent. In addition to this, there is the objective of producing reliable data and expertise on the migration phenomenon in Africa, as a result of which the African Migration Observatory was established in Rabat in December 2020.

From documents to practice: A difficult implementation

Since the 2000s, we can see what can be described as the emergence of an “African approach” to migration, dealing with this phenomenon at continent level. This approach is based on the objective of free movement on the continent to make optimum use of migrants in terms of economic development. But this approach does not overlook aspects related to States’ security and the protection of migrants.

However, there are many obstacles and still a long way to go from principle to practice. Some of the most influential countries in Africa, such as Nigeria and South Africa, have been reluctant to develop free movement of people. The treaty establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area has been signed by the 35 AU member states apart from Eritrea. Twenty-nine countries had ratified it as of December 2019. However, its supplementary protocol on the free movement of people has only been ratified by four member states¹⁰.

Furthermore, the specific migration framework developed by the AU is essentially non-binding. The agreements on forced displacement are the exception, but their implementation is limited in practice. In reality, there is a disconnect between the AU’s policies and member states’ practice. The implementation of the AU’s Migration Policy Framework depends on regional economic communities (REC) and the member states. But there is still little ownership of the framework’s objectives at sub-regional and national levels.¹¹

However, the situation is improving because of national governments’ greater awareness of migration issues. The ECOWAS member states have undoubtedly made the most progress, by including migration in their national development strategies apart from Benin and the Republic of Guinea.¹² This means a cross-sectoral approach to migration that includes both education, labor market and health policies.

10. A. Akena and R. Nyirinkindi Katungye, “Pan-africanism, Regional Integration and Migration”, *Africa Migration Report, Challenging the Narrative*, International Organization for Migration, 2020.

11. M. Achieng and A. El Fadil, “What Is Wrong with the Narrative on African Migration?”, *op.cit.*

12. C. Le Coz and A. Pietropolli, *Africa Deepens Its Approach to Migration Governance But Are Politics Translating to Action*, Migration Policy Institute, April 2020.

Consequently, implementing these strategies requires commitment by the different stakeholders both horizontally – at the level of different ministries – and vertically – at the level of central government, local government, civil society organization, research institute, etc.

Yet, African states lack the resources and capacity to give the African migration strategy the scope it seeks. The 2006 policy framework review emphasized the lack of institutional knowledge in governments due to frequent staff transfers. There is also a lack of close cooperation and information sharing about migration between governments.¹³ The mechanisms for assessing and monitoring how the AU framework is implemented are non-existent, and the AU's Commission cannot monitor the implementation of its strategy more accurately. In 2016, only three people were working on migration in the AU's Social Affairs Department.

In addition to these limitations, an “African approach” to migration can be viewed more accurately, if it is contrasted with a migration policy agenda dictated by European countries. Indeed, although the objectives announced by the institutional stakeholders on both continents seem to converge – specifically on the migration-development nexus – this convergence conceals very different rationales that we will now focus on.

13. M. Achieng and A. El Fadil, “What Is Wrong with the Narrative on African Migration?”, *op. cit.*

EU-African Misconceptions About Migration

In spring 2020, the European Commission published a communication that established a “comprehensive” strategy for EU-Africa relations.¹⁴ It was intended to be a basis for negotiations on renewing agreements with the Africa-Caribbean-Pacific (ACP) Group of States. A summit with the AU was scheduled for the fall of the same year. The Covid-19 health situation forced both regional organizations to postpone the event to the following year.

In the renewed relations between the EU and Africa, you cannot fail to be struck by the emphasis on migration. It is one of the five priority areas identified at the heart of the 2015 “migration crisis” at the Valletta summit, that brought together European and African leaders on this subject.¹⁵ Although this EU-African cooperation on migration and legal mobility seemed to be an obvious common objective, the gulf between the partners has widened.

On the one hand, the Europeans are concerned that African states’ efforts are not more proactive in the areas of combating irregular migration and the readmission of their nationals with irregular status in Europe. On the other hand, the Africans emphasize the Eurocentric nature of the objectives that are supposed to be shared between both continents, that seem to prioritize European interests to the detriment of sustainable development and peace in Africa.

Visas vs. readmissions: A major point of contention

The issue that probably crystallizes conflict in the EU-African partnership the most is readmissions.

14. European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, *Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council – Towards a comprehensive Strategy with Africa*, JOIN (2020) 4 final, Brussels, March 9, 2020.

15. The other priority areas in the Valletta Declaration are: addressing the root causes of irregular migration and forced population displacements; strengthening protection for migrants and asylum seekers; and preventing and fighting against irregular migration, migrant-smuggling and human trafficking.

After the 2015 episode when the EU experienced the arrival of more than a million people mainly on the Greek coast in relation to the Syrian crisis, and then with the agreement signed with Turkey to make it more difficult to cross the border, the Europeans' focus has turned to other migration routes in the Mediterranean. The objective of developing "global partnerships" (or compacts) with third countries to "better manage migration", has in fact concentrated on the issue of return and readmission of irregular migrants in Europe to countries of origin and transit – in addition to reducing irregular arrivals to Europe. Five African countries were identified as priorities for this objective: Ethiopia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria and Senegal.

It is clear that the EU has not made any significant breakthrough in this area with its African partners since 2015. For 2016, the return rates were only 26.4% for Nigeria, 9.8% for Ethiopia, 9% for Senegal and 4.8% for Mali.¹⁶ Despite an increase in the number of return decisions involving sub-Saharan nationals, the actual return rate is still consistently below 10%.¹⁷

On the other hand, the Europeans have hardly given any pledges to their African partners, because of the extreme sensitivity of national public opinion to immigration. Consequently, the debate on regularizing irregular migrants in Europe has never been initiated. With regard to the prospect of new legal immigration channels, European commitments on the subject have always been vague, and mostly limited to students. In fact, the number of visas issued to African nationals for work purposes even fell by 80% between 2010 and 2016.¹⁸

This underlines how the visa-return "deal" fails to provide an effective and operational framework for EU-African dialog on migration. This is actually because readmissions to Africa and visas to Europe is a zero-sum game. There are many reasons for this. The politicization of migration on both continents makes any compromise difficult to justify to populations that are particularly sensitive to the subject. The rise of populism based on new identitarian and nativist discourses in Europe further distorts the dialog between the Europeans and Africans on migration. But the issue is also increasingly sensitive in Africa, particularly with regard to the treatment of nationals subject to removal orders by the authorities of European countries.

16. There are average rates across the entire EU. See European Commission, *Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council and the Council – Fourth Progress Report on the Partnership Framework with third countries under the European Agenda on Migration*, COM(2017)350 final, Strasbourg, June 13, 2017.

17. A. N. Mbiyozo, "Returning Migrants: Europe's Focus, But at What Cost?", *Policy Brief*, Institute for Security Studies, April 2019.

18. F. Zanker, "Managing or Restricting Movement? Diverging Approaches of African and European Migration Governance", *Comparative Migration Studies*, Vol. 7, 2019.

Development and migration: Two difficult visions to reconcile

The migration/development issue has informed thinking and debate about the effectiveness of migration policies in developed countries for a long time. In fact, it is a major issue. Remittances sent by international migrants have exceeded official development assistance since the end of the 1990s, and are now on the way to reaching the level of direct foreign investment in low- and medium-income countries. In 2018, these remittances were estimated at \$528 billion, of which \$81 billion went to Africa (mainly to Nigeria and Egypt, followed by Morocco, Senegal and Ghana). According to the World Bank, remittances accounted for nearly 5% of African GDP in 2016.¹⁹

Nevertheless, conflict exists between the two terms “migration” and “development” depending on the preferred approach. This conflict traditionally shuts down the debate. On the one hand, a fairly broad consensus has emerged globally that obstacles to the international movement of people are curbs to development. On the other hand, development is seen as a vector likely to reduce “migration pressure” at the borders of Northern countries, by enabling Southern populations to find an alternative to emigration, starting with economic opportunities and a labor market capable of absorbing them locally.

The literature on the migration-development nexus emphasizes the difficulty in settling *a priori* the debate on the cost of migration for the development of countries of origin (brain drain) or, conversely, its development potential (brain gain). Everything depends at what level the analysis is carried out. From a broad perspective, remittances neither create a brain drain nor a brain gain: these sums generally fail to be converted into long-term development in contexts marked by structural obstacles to development (corruption, nepotism, institutional failure, etc.). From this point of view, migration does not appear to be a panacea either. The results of the research of the impact of migration on the level of poverty in the countries of origin are in fact contradictory.²⁰

19. C. Natali and L. Isaacs, “Remittances to and from Africa”, *Africa Migration Report, Challenging the Narrative*, International Organization for Migration, 2020.

20. I. Palmary, “Migration and Inequality: An Interdisciplinary Overview”, in T. Bastia and R. Skeldon (dir.), *Routledge Handbook of Migration and Development*, Abingdon, Routledge, 2020, p. 95-102.

The differential effects have been identified in some cases where migrant remittances can contribute to increasing land prices and place non-migrant populations in a state of greater inequality compared to families and communities that include emigrants. In other instances, domestic remittances help to reduce income inequalities while those of international migrants help to increase them.

Nevertheless, the role played by remittances – which are not only financial, but also include social and cultural transfers – from transnational diasporas to local communities is crucial. By being included in the UN's SDGs, migration has emerged as an intrinsic factor in the broader development process in low-income countries. This is a complete change in the view that in the early 2000s still considered migration as a consequence of the poorest countries' failure to develop.

Despite this fundamental change in the terms of the debate, the issue remains ambivalent. Admittedly, both Europeans and Africans seem to agree on the fact that development is strongly linked to proper regulation of migration flows.²¹ This objective is also reflected in the AU's 2018-2030 action plan as has already been discussed. The same idea has permeated documents produced by EU institutions since the early 2000s, starting with the 2005 Global Approach to Migration. The global-level convergence on this topic was formalized in December 2018 at Rabat in Morocco with the adoption of the Global Compact for Migration.

However, as we have seen, while there is consensus on both sides of the Mediterranean about the need for “proper regulation” of migration to support the development processes of Southern countries, this consensus covers very different views – which are difficult to reconcile at present – about the very nature of the migration-development nexus. While Europeans see it as an alternative to migration, Africans see it as a major potential for development.

Controlling or restricting migration flows?

This difference in approaches stems from the fact that Europeans and Africans are not interested in the same phenomenon. The EU and its member states are focused on African migration to Europe, whereas the priority issue for African countries is regional mobility.

21. F. Zanker, “Managing or Restricting Movement? Diverging Approaches of African and European Migration Governance”, *op. cit.*

This has an impact on public policies that can be implemented to maximize this migration–development nexus. From the African perspective, facilitating the mobility of African nationals on the continent is a development factor that justifies the objective of free movement referred to previously. However, this free movement does not mean either altering the borders – including those inherited from the colonial period – or the end of border controls – unlike the Schengen area model. For instance, the practice of requesting a visa upon arrival is spreading to many African countries.

Therefore, Europeans and Africans agreed on the objective of orderly and controlled migration as shown by adoption of the Global Compact for Migration in December 2018, albeit much more enthusiastically on the African side. However, this adherence to the principle of managing migration flows is also based on different visions. From the African perspective, controlling migration flows pursues an objective of protecting migrants' human rights given the dangers of exploitation and trafficking for their natives. From the European perspective, controlling immigration means above all restricting migration flows.

The Dominance of the European Approach over the African One

To what extent can the facade of consensus that we have just highlighted in the link between better regulation of migration and the development of Southern countries, evolve into a genuine and meaningful, if not operational, agreement between European and African partners?

Since 2015, it has been difficult to see a rebalancing in the terms of the partnerships that the EU has offered its African partners. The EU member states' political priorities continue to set the pace, including going even further in outsourcing control of the EU's external borders, sometimes at the expense of respect for the democratic framework and migrants' fundamental rights. For instance, informal readmission agreements that escape scrutiny by parliaments and the judiciary have increased.²²

European funds as a tool to influence the African agenda

Therefore, the EU intends to use a lot of money to get African countries to comply with its migration objectives. Indeed, it is international donors, particularly the EU, that support African governments in implementing their migration strategies. This casts doubt on the sustainability and ownership of migration policies by African governments. European funding is a godsend for African states, but they must be committed to continuing these strategies once the projects financed by foreign funding come to an end.²³ Furthermore, funding the implementation of African immigration strategies allows the EU to transpose its priorities – controlling South-North flows – into national policies.

22. This type of informal agreement has been entered into with the Republic of Guinea, Ethiopia, Gambia and Côte d'Ivoire. See J. Slagter, *An 'Informal' Turn in the European Union's Migrant Return Policy towards Sub-Saharan Africa*, Migration Policy Institute, January 2019.

23. C. Le Coz and A. Pietropolli, *Africa Deepens Its Approach to Migration Governance...*, *op. cit.*

For instance, the EU representative in Niger sits at the same level as the Nigerien Minister of the Interior in the national consultation framework on migration and can influence national policy guidelines.²⁴

The Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF for Africa), launched in 2015 after the Valletta summit, has quickly established itself as the most visible instrument of the European Partnership for Migration. The EUTF covers a broader range of issues than just the fight against irregular migration. It aims to combat the “root causes of irregular migration and the phenomenon of displaced people in Africa”.

Therefore, the EUTF is primarily an official development assistance instrument – 90% of the funding comes from the EU budget, mainly from the European Development Fund reserve. The EUTF also reflects an even greater synergy between migration, security and development policies.²⁵

However, the EUTF differs from official development assistance by its intervention logic and mode of governance. It favors project support rather than budget support for states. To avoid the usual slowness of development policies, the funding is channeled almost entirely to intergovernmental organizations, major international NGOs and European cooperation agencies.

The projects are examined and approved by an operational committee in Brussels chaired by the European Commission and made up of donor countries that have paid an “entry ticket” of at least €3 million. Beneficiary countries are only observers without voting rights, unless they pay the required amount. Therefore, the African states are not theoretically involved in selecting the projects to be undertaken in their country, although in practice, the consent of the ambassador of the relevant country must be sought and, in the field, dialog between European delegations and the host country is inevitable.

As of November 2020, 256 projects had been approved by the operational committee worth a total amount of €4.8 billion.²⁶ Since it was founded, the Fund's Strategic Board, made up of representatives from the European Commission and donor states, has decided to limit its list of priorities to issues of return, migration governance, the EU-Africa Dialog on Migration, the global response to the refugee situation, and security and

24. Mercator Dialogue on Asylum and Migration (MEDAM), “European and African Perspectives on Asylum and Migration Policy: Seeking Common Ground”, *2020 MEDAM Assessment Report*, 2020.

25. N. Krotov-Sand, “Le Fonds fiduciaire d’urgence et son volet Sahel : l’immigration comme nouvel enjeu de sécurité et de développement”, *Note d’analyse du GRIP*, Brussels, Group for Research and Information on Peace and Security, April 2017.

26. See the list of projects on the European Commission’s dedicated website: <https://ec.europa.eu>.

stabilization. The objective of developing economic opportunities for African countries has taken a back seat to the EU's domestic policy priorities.²⁷

Conditionality as a means of pressure on African countries

Disappointed by the lack of readmission results, the EU and its member states intend to make their official development assistance more conditional upon good migration cooperation by African countries. The conditionality of development aid is not a new concept, but it was previously linked to respect for human rights and the rule of law. Yet, conditionality regarding migration issues can contradict the requirement to respect fundamental rights, as demonstrated by cooperation with the Sudanese and Libyan authorities on border control.

We can see that the EU is equipping itself with the tools to control its relations with Africa. The European Commissioner for International Partnerships' mission statement emphasizes the importance European institutions give to migration issues, by asking Jutta Urpilainen to prepare "to adapt bilateral funding to achieve our immigration management objectives".²⁸ Similarly, the revised Schengen Code, which came into force in February 2020, now allows for visa facilitations, but also for visa restrictions depending on third countries' cooperation regarding readmission.

The EU wants to show its power to its African partners with this policy and has changed its focus from "give more to get more" to a principle of "give less to those who do the least". However, the EU suffers from a credibility problem with its African partners. To date, the EU and, especially its member states, have neither pledged enough nor kept their promises. This is particularly true with regard to legal immigration routes for African nationals. Furthermore, the Europeans are losing influence in Africa in face of the emergence of Russia, China and Middle Eastern countries.²⁹

27. "The EU Trust Fund for Africa – Trapped Between Aid Policy and Migration Politics", *Oxfam Briefing Paper*, Oxfam, January 2020.

28. Our translation. See the Mission Statement: <https://ec.europa.eu>.

29. Mercator Dialogue on Asylum and Migration (MEDAM), *op. cit.*

Finally, this strategy could simultaneously prove to be counter-productive for the Europeans by worsening the quality of the dialog with African governments that could turn to other international partners. It is also a risk for the continent's stability, by channeling European aid to countries of origin and transit with migratory relevance for Europe to the detriment of the poorest countries or those with the most pressing humanitarian needs.³⁰

³⁰. *Ibid.*

Conclusion

It seems difficult to separate what may be an “African approach” to migration from the dominance of the Northern countries, first and foremost European countries, when defining migration policy objectives.

The lack of political support from the Northern countries for the December 2018 Global Compact on Migration, both from the Europeans and the United States, shows the divide between the North and South in terms of what is expected from global migration governance. In the North, expectations are framed in terms of increased control over the movement of people from the South in a complex mix of security and identitarian concerns. In the South, expectations are for better management of human mobility capable of contributing directly or indirectly to the development of countries of origin and transit.

Two factors, in particular, lock migration into a dialog of the deaf between Africa and Europe. The first one relates to the distortion of a very complex and differentiated migration geography in Africa through the lens of issues affecting Europe. The main destination for African migrants is Africa. Despite the “narrative” that portrays Europe as the main destination for these migrants, it hosts half as many migrants as African countries. The disconnect between the image of African immigration to Europe and the regional reality of African migration is a sticking point for any progress in EU-African dialog on the subject.

The second sticking point relates to the ambivalence of global consensus on the relationship between migration and development. While the Europeans continue to view development as an alternative to migration, both their migration and development policies will fail to achieve their objectives. The relationship between migration and development is much more complex than a simple zero-sum game. It is known that obstacles to the movement of people are also obstacles to the virtuous effects of migration on the development of the poorest countries.

To put it another way, although national governments can influence the levels and forms of migration to some extent, they do not have the power to change the underlying trends. Inadequate border policies are an obstacle to the possible positive effects of migration on development.

A further final aspect must be emphasized here: no migration and development policy can succeed without taking migrants' views into account, as they are key stakeholders in international relations between States and markets. Yet, the review undertaken of policies implemented in different regions of the world, emphasizes the discrepancy between the rationale of these policies and the practices of migrants and their families. This is probably a medium- and long-term undertaking, so that an African approach to migration can be rolled out, capable of making a difference and fully contributing to the continent's development.

