Understanding African Migrations

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There are numerous causes for population displacement in Africa; none of these are new, whether they occur within countries, across the continent, or toward Europe. The term "migrations" covers a wide range of situations, which differ in their internal and international implications. It is important to closely examine the causes of these mobilities. The complexity of the problem cannot simply be approached through border control or externalization, as the European Union would apparently like.

politique étrangère

Since the 1990s, global migrations have become a central topic in international relations, both because of their importance in relationships between states (between Northern and Southern countries, and between departure, transit, and destination countries) and because of their new importance in global governance agendas. In 2015, 244 million people lived somewhere other than their country of nationality—a threefold increase in migrants compared to forty years ago. This increase has outstripped world population growth, even if it forms only a very small proportion of that population (around 3%, compared to 5% a century ago).

Such mobility has become a central issue in public and electoral debates in the North. Over the course of these debates, the image of migrants, and of immigration, has been profoundly distorted. The colonial histories of many of these European states mean that African migrations are particularly important to them. This is particularly true in France, where the figure of the immigrant worker is associated, in the public imagination, with Algerian or Malian workers, and migration with influxes from South to North. Africa is consequently seen as a vast and troublesome store of

migrants, in the face of which Europeans need new development and bor-der control policies.

If we reverse this perspective and consider migrations *from* Africa rather than *to* Europe, matters appear in a new and far more differentiated light. We come to understand that human movements on the continent are far more complex, both spatially and temporally, than a mere ascent toward Europe. Strikingly, we understand that Africa's position in international migration is relatively modest, especially if we distinguish between differ-ent types of migration flow. On a global scale, Africa repre-sents a stronger share of forced migration than of so-called "economic" migration.

Forced and economic migrations

The argument common to the articles in this special report is that the African migratory phenomenon is complex, and that this complexity fits poorly with the categories European migration policies attempt to frame it in. Rather than reduc-ing the phenomenon to a flow northward arising from demographic or economic asymmetries, we need a better understanding of the historical, cultural, and political aspects of modern migrations in Africa, one which situates African migrations more accurately within the global migration system.

Modern migrations occur within diverse, long-established mobilities

Africa was sparsely populated for a very long time. Over the centuries, it has witnessed human movements and mobilities on a grand scale, from the Bantu expansion to the modern-day labor migrations that form part of continental and global circulations—not to mention the (sometimes vast) displacements caused by conflict, slavery, and forced labor.[1]

Large-scale displacements—Bantu migrations in central and southern Africa, Arab ones in North Africa, and Nilotic ones in the east—lead in turn to processes of cultural syncretism, or else to new local mobilities as people try to escape military, political, cultural, or religious domination by the newcomers, whether they are settlers or invaders. For instance, some Berber populations in North Africa escaped the process of Arabization of

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1. The Bantu expansion involved a vast movement of people and culture over the course of more than a millennium. The current situation is the result of major migrations by the Bantu people, who come from a region located in the south of present-day Cameroon, toward the east and south of the continent. The term "Bantu" refers to populations from Cameroon to southern Kenya and the Comoros, from Kenya to South Africa, from Cameroon to Angola, and from the entire Democratic Republic of Congo. Experts estimate there to be between 450 and 600 Bantu languages.

the plains population. Similarly, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, King Moshoeshoe allowed the Basotho to maintain their independence in the face of Zulu aggression by gathering them in the mountainous territory of modern-day Lesotho. At the southern end of the continent, the Great Trek (1835-40) meant Boer populations could escape English domination for a time. From the fourteenth century, Dogon populations in West Africa, in the center of present-day Mali, escaped Mandé domination and, later, Islamization by taking refuge in the strongholds of the Bandiagara Escarpment and the Dogon Plateau.[2]

Slave raids have also had a significant impact on human mobility and settlements. Rabih az-Zubayr's slave trade had lasting consequences, not just for population levels in the areas he dominated militarily, but on the number of "northerners" or "Muslims" among the Christian populations of what is now the Central African Republic.[3] In East Africa, the slave trader Tippu Tip's expeditions from his base in Zanzibar had human consequences that stretched from the coast of present-day Tanzania to the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. In West Africa, the Atlantic slave trade also had effects on human settlements, whether slaves were captured directly by Europeans or through complicit African political structures, including the well-known slave kingdoms of the Gulf of Guinea, the Oyo Empire and the Kingdom of Dahomey.[4] The various slave trades led to massive displacements, as populations moved to more remote or easily defensible places in order to escape them; they also created distrust and animosity between communities, some of which continue to structure even modern nations. They involved tens of millions of human beings, and we can consider them (without, of course, forgetting the inter-African slave trade) as the first large-scale transcontinental movements of African populations.

The impact of colonialism

The colonization of Africa had numerous consequences for human mobility. Wars of conquest reshaped human settlements—as, for instance, the war between French colonizers and Samory Touré, the founder of the

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2. Or the Mali Empire.
3. As shown by Andreas Ceriana Mayneri, an anthropologist and researcher affiliated to IMAF-Aix, during a conference on the Central African crisis at Ifri, June 1, 2015. Rabih as-Zubayr, in full Rabih az-Zubayr Ibn Fadl Allah, was a Sudanese warlord and slave trader who ravaged areas of what is now southern Chad and the northern Central African Republic.
4. The Oyo Empire was located in the southwest of present-day Nigeria and the southeast of Benin. The Kingdom of Dahomey, also known as the Fon Kingdom, was located in the south of present-day Benin.

Wassoulou Empire (1880-98), reshaped a territory within the borders of what is now Mali, Guinea, and Côte d'Ivoire.

Colonialism's effects on human mobility also include forced displacements, whether to European firms' plantations and mines, or for the construction of transport infrastructure in areas where a large workforce was not available. As Jacques Barou remarks, the construction of the Congo-Ocean Railway between 1921 and 1934, running around 500 kilometers from Brazzaville to Pointe-Noire, involved the forced recruitment of nearly 130,000 workers from French Equatorial Africa.[5] Such labor, in an area where tropical diseases were particularly prominent, and in conditions of near-slavery, led to a very high death rate: there were nearly 18,000 deaths on the site, which equates to thirty-six for each existing kilometer of track.[6] Barou also shows that the development of Belgian mining in the Congolese regions of Kasai and Katanga caused significant displacements from other areas of the colony.[7] At independence, more than a quarter of residents lived somewhere other than the place they were born. As early as the 1920s, French colonizers in West Africa requisitioned labor from French Sudan (present-day Mali) to work on plantations in Côte d'Ivoire, which was very sparsely populated at the time. This laid the foundations for post-independence migrations, during which many Malians left (freely, this time) to work in Côte d'Ivoire.

Of course, not all migrations in the colonial period were the result of force. The emergence of transport infrastructure and of cities, where new economic opportunities were developing in increasingly monetarized environments, generated major population displacements.[8] Villages moved toward new communication routes. In Mauritania, some populations settled in cities in order to escape slavery. On the eve of independence, economic structures and changes in the various colonies did not resemble the pre-colonial period at all: willingly or not, African populations had adjusted to the new territorial situation. Mobilities and migration flows developed at every scale. Seasonal migrations for the harvest in the Senegalese peanut basin involved populations from other parts of Senegal and from other countries, including French Sudan, the Gambia, and Guinea (the famous *navétanes*).[9] Some Sahelian trading populations spread through French West Africa and French Equatorial Africa. Malian

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5. Jacques Barou, "Migrations et travaux forcés en Afrique subsaharienne à l'époque coloniale," *Hommes et migrations* 1228 (November-December 2000), 51-61.
6. Not counting the numerous deaths during transit between the place of "requisition" and the work site.
7. Barou, "Migrations et travaux forcés," 56.
8. Taxes had proved more effective than forced labor for integrating populations into the colonial economy.
9. Philippe David, *Les navétanes: histoire des migrants saisonniers de l'arachide en Sénégambie des origines à nos jours* (Dakar: Les nouvelles éditions africaines, 1980).

traders could be found as far away as Gabon or the Congo. Until the 1990s, one of the main expatriate Mauritanian communities was in Côte d'Ivoire, where it was heavily involved in retail. Migrations sometimes occurred on the scale of an entire colonial empire—demonstrated by the presence from the early twentieth century of Syrian-Lebanese populations in West Africa. Similarly, under the British Empire, Indian populations settled in Africa, and some African populations, including Nigerians, spread through the Empire and, today, the Commonwealth. During French colonization, temporary or permanent migrations by Sahelians to countries in the Gulf of Guinea—Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Benin, and so on—occurred gradually, and remained structurally important after independence. Such migrations represent far more than Africans simply moving to the mainlands of their former colonizers.

Africa's relatively modest role in international migration

In Africa, as elsewhere, migration is primarily regional.[10] In 2015, 52% of African migrants went to other African countries, and only 27% to Europe. Africa is less involved in international migration than other continents. It is home to only 8.5% of the world's 244 million migrants, far behind Europe (31.15%), Asia (30.75%), and North America (22.1%). Thirty-four million Africans have migrated internationally, while 104 million Asians, 62 million Europeans, and 37 million Latin Americans live outside their country of origin.[11]

In contrast, Africans make up a greater proportion of forced displacements. One third of refugees under the mandate of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) were nationals of an African country at the end of 2014—some 4.62 million people.[12] The Somalis and the Sudanese, in particular, are among the largest refugee populations in the world (1.1 million and 665,000, respectively). More than any other type of international migration, asylum-seeking is a predominantly regional phenomenon, since refugees typically cannot mobilize the time and resources needed for a lengthy journey.

Africa is the second largest destination for refugees after Asia. Similarly, according to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Center (IDMC),

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10. With the exception of Latin America, the Caribbean, and North America.
11. 2015 figures from the Population Division of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, available at www.un.org.
12. 14.4 million refugees were under UNHCR protection at the end of 2014, excluding Palestinian refugees in the Middle East, who come under UNRWA's mandate. See the UNHCR's statistics, available at www.unhcr.org.

one-third of the 38 million people internally displaced in 2014 were living in Africa. With the African Union's adoption of the 2009 Kampala Convention, the continent has faced the challenge posed by internal displacement.[13] This treaty has no equivalent elsewhere, aiming to cover every internal displacement situation. Africa has reclaimed the pioneering role it played in 1969 with the adoption of the OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa, a text that expanded the definition of refugees and paved the way for *prima facie* recognition in cases of mass influxes of people fleeing conflict or widespread violence.[14] Latin America followed Africa in this, while the issue remains under debate in Europe.[15]

International law only imperfectly captures the gray areas many migrants occupy. Vikram Kolmannskog has shown the cumulative effects of war, drought, and flooding on internal and international Somali displacement, as well as the pragmatism shown by UNHCR officers in Kenya who included Somalis within their mandate.[16] Similarly, Africa as a whole is faced with a phenomenon where states find themselves in hybrid migration situations. For refugees, Sudan is both a source, a transit, and a host country, with more than 3 million displaced persons within its borders.[17] Such situations are complex and surpass a simply African frame, demanding international governance.

The ravages of "ivority"

Labor migration and xenophobic tensions

As elsewhere, mobility—particularly labor migration—can cause tensions with indigenous populations, ones sometimes expressed in political discourse.

The presence of a foreign workforce in Côte d'Ivoire dates from the colonial period, when it was exploited by many plantations. With independence, President Félix Houphouët-Boigny appealed to foreigners to settle

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13. See the article in this issue by Alexandra Bilak.
14. George Okoth-Obbo, "Thirty Years On: A Legal Review of the 1969 Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa," *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 20, no. 1 (2001).
15. Cartagena Declaration, 1984. The European Union was unwilling to broaden the definition of "refugee" given in the Refugee Convention adopted on July 28, 1951. In 2001, it introduced the idea of temporary protection, which could be granted collectively in the event of a massive influx of displaced persons. This has never been applied—even in 2015, when the Union was confronted with a wave of refugees unprecedented since the Second World War.
16. Vikram Kolmannskog, "Climate Change, Disaster, Displacement and Migration: Initial Evidence from Africa," *New Issues in Refugee Research*, research paper 180, UNHCR, December 2009, 5-10.
17. For mixed migration flows in Africa, see North Africa Mixed Task Force, "Conditions and Risks of Mixed Migration in North East Africa," November 2015. http://www.mixedmigrationhub.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Conditions-and-Risks-in-Mixed-Migration-in-North-East-Africa.pdf.

in the country and contribute to what would be called the "Ivorian economic miracle."[18] In the 1998 census, Côte d'Ivoire was home to more than 4 million foreigners, or one in four of the population—a number that included 2.2 million Burkinabe and 800,000 Malians.[19] Tensions between Ivorians and foreigners were common. Nationalism first emerged as early as the 1930s, with the creation of the Association de Défense des Intérêts des Autochtones de Côte d'Ivoire (Association for the Defense of the Indigenous Peoples of Côte d'Ivoire, ADIACI), which campaigned for jobs in the colonial administration to be reserved for nationals.[20]

In the late 1950s, a nationalist organization led an ultimately successful campaign to expel Dahomean (Beninese) immigrants.[21] For a variety of reasons, xenophobia and community tensions developed from the 1990s onwards. The country's economic situation had deteriorated significantly; Houphouët-Boigny, the "father of the nation," had died in 1993; and the democratic turn led to a proliferation of political parties and newspapers, and a broadening of public expression. Communitarian tensions were common topics in the media, exploited by groups that, struggling to set themselves apart with their political programs, resorted instead to identity politics.[22] For instance, Houphouët-Boigny's successor, Henri Konan Bédié, used nationalist rhetoric shamelessly to try to maintain his eroding electoral base.[23] He passed laws to this effect, including one that aimed to give nationals priority in land ownership.[24] The succession of crises in Côte d'Ivoire that lasted until 2011 were partly the result of long-term migration, which was appropriated for identitarian and xenophobic ends in times of economic hardship.

A similar pattern emerged in South Africa in 2008 and 2015, with xenophobic riots claiming the lives of dozens of foreign residents. The images of this violence created shock both nationally and internationally, and cast the moral authority of South Africa—often idealized as a symbol of freedom and reconciliation—into question. While South Africa's economy

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18. The first two decades of independence have been a period of strong economic growth for Côte d'Ivoire.
19. Christian Bouquet, "Le poids des étrangers en Côte d'Ivoire, *Annales de Géographie* 112, no. 630 (2003), 115-45.
20. Sylvie Bredeloup, "La Côte d'Ivoire ou l'étrange destin de l'étranger," *Revue européenne des migrations internationales* 19, no. 2 (2003), 85-113.
21. Fabrice Hervieu-Wane, "Comment est née 'l'ivoirité'," *Jeune Afrique*, April 11, 2004.
22. Our use of the term "communitarian" here comes from the fact that tensions with foreigners are amplified by tensions between Ivorians from the south and north of the country; the latter, who belong to ethnic groups also present in Burkina Faso and Mali, for instance, are sometimes viewed in the south as foreigners. This contributes greatly to a bitter sense of being second-class citizens.
23. Bédié completed Houphouët-Boigny's term after his death, and was elected in 1995.
24. Alfred Babo, "Conflits fonciers, ivoirité et crise sociopolitique en Côte d'Ivoire," Note de l'Ifri (Paris: Ifri, 2009).

has always attracted large numbers of foreign workers, the country is still characterized by considerable inequalities and a very high unemployment rate.[25] Many are still excluded from the economy more than twenty years after the fall of apartheid. Some of the poorest South Africans have decided that foreign populations—their real numbers sometimes fantastically inflated, but often highly visible because many run local businesses—are the guilty party. The historical roots of this violence, combined with more recent resentments with economic underpinnings, have led to acts of xenophobia that could easily recur tomorrow if the entire population's plight does not improve significantly. So far, the country's political parties and leaders have refrained from fueling xenophobic discourse. But if the economic situation deteriorated or the ANC faced a serious electoral challenge, we might observe a new shift from a political rhetoric still largely imbued with racial questions, to a rhetoric stigmatizing foreign migrants.

As Florianne Charrière and Marion Frésia observe in the case of West Africa—an insight that extends to the rest of the continent—some countries may decide on radical approaches to regulating migration, like the mass expulsions that took place in Ghana in 1969, Nigeria in 1983, Mauritania and Senegal in 1989, and Libya in the late 1980s.[26] At the end of 2014, Angola carried out a series of raids in the capital, expelling some 3,000 illegal aliens.[27] Such brutal approaches may be undifferentiated, or may target particular communities. To understand them, we must situate them within the bilateral relations with the country of origin of those expelled: for instance, that is how we should approach the *Mbata ya Bakolo* operation in Brazzaville in early 2014, where 100,000 nationals of the neighboring Democratic Republic of Congo whose papers were not in order were deported.[28]

Migration as a collective strategy

The diverse causes of modern mobility

Independent states' economic strategies (opening up new agricultural fronts, developing mining and fishing) and international institutions' structural adjustment policies generate national and international mobilities.

The impact of climate crises is another underlying cause of these mobilities: droughts in the 1970s and 1980s led the Senegalese government to

25. See the article in this special report by Zaheera Jinnah.
26. Florianne Charrière and Marion Frésia, "West Africa as a Migration and Protection Area," November 2008, UNHCR, available at http://www.refworld.org/docid/4a277db82.html.
27. RFI, "Angola: rafle de plus de 3,000 étrangers à Luanda," December 22, 2014.
28. Kinshasa and Brazzaville are neighbors, separated by the Congo River.

make it easier for those from the north and center of the country to settle in the southernmost region, the Casamance, which had been least affected by the drought. This was one cause of the Casamance conflict.

Far from being a problem for African countries of departure, governments sometimes view large-scale migration as an asset. In many countries, like Cape Verde, money sent back by migrants surpasses official development assistance as the primary financial resource. The diaspora provides foreign exchange and helps development, supporting business projects in Cape Verde. Some countries try to situate these initiatives within what we could call labor force export strategies.

Migration projects can be individual, but family support is often needed in order to save enough to make travel across borders possible. Migration is often part of a family risk reduction strategy. In some rural societies, families who are aware of the danger of focusing on agriculture (the results of which may vary from year to year) invest locally in other activities like transport or crafts, or send family members to other economic areas, nationally and/or internationally. Jacques Barou shows how Soninke villages in northwestern Mali have, for decades, used migration to ensure their communities survive, making sure men who have gone to France can marry women from their home villages, and "choosing children who were born in France but raised traditionally, with access to a good level of education, who can carry on the migratory system while allowing the previous generation to return."[29]

Migration is not just a matter of flight by "the wretched of the earth"; it also involves groups investing in individuals whose academic background or entrepreneurial spirit shows promise. Migration often promises social ascent and serves as a mark of success. In his novel *Le ventre de l'Atlantique*, the Senegalese writer Fatou Diome shows that, whatever the migrant's material and psychological situation, once they have reached their destination they become objects of envy and fantasy for the community they left—privileged people with an infinite debt toward those who helped them leave, which makes it almost impossible for them to admit to problems or failures.[30] If they do not visit, or send home gifts or money, migrants are viewed as having broken with the group, and become "people you can't count on any more."

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29. Jacques Barou, "La famille à distance. Nouvelles stratégies familiales chez les immigrés d'Afrique sahélienne," *Hommes et Migrations* 1232 (July-August 2001), 16-25.
30. Fatou Diome, *Le ventre de l'Atlantique* (Paris: Anne Carrière, 2003).

Migrations are themselves a factor in reproducing these flows of people. The presence of an immigrant group within a country enables preparations for the arrival of new immigrants. Transnational relationships of solidarity are woven across the world, feeding on a "migratory imagination" and the cultural value of the experience of migration.

Europe's obsession with migration, and Africa's silence

These diverse causes of African migration cohere poorly with destination countries' migration policies. This is particularly true for European nations, whose internal objectives are subsequently exported to Africa. The external dimension of asylum and immigration policies became a priority for the European Union at the November 2004 European Council in The Hague.[31] The EU supported efforts by third countries "better to manage migration and to provide adequate protection for refugees," leaving little room for dialogue about legal migration opportunities for Africans. The Global Approach to Migration and Mobility (GAMM) that the European Union adopted after the Arab Spring better reflects the migration aspirations of third countries, but suffers from the obscurity of its partnership frameworks and lack of commitment by member states, who are primarily concerned with controlling immigration.[32]

The fears of Europeans were exacerbated by the events of 2015. In March, the managing director of Frontex warned that between 500,000 and 1 million people were ready to sail from the Libyan coast.[33] The first migrants, however, set out from Turkey. Few were from Africa. The most heavily represented African nationality in 2015 were Eritreans, who accounted for 4% of the million people who arrived on European shores.[34] But Africans are likely to bear the brunt of what, as the Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte made clear when he took over the presidency of the European Union in the first half of 2016, has become the Europeans' sole objective: a significant reduction in migration.[35] It is true that, in November 2015, the European and African states who met at the Valletta Summit on Migration committed to promoting regular migration and mobility channels for Africans.[36] It

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31. European Council, *The Hague Programme: Strengthening Freedom, Security, and Justice in the European Union*, Brussels, November 4-5, 2004.
32. European Commission, "The Global Approach to Migration and Mobility," COM (2011) 743 final, Brussels, November 18, 2011. On the external dimension of the EU asylum policy, see: Matthieu Tardis, "Le droit d'asile, histoire d'un échec européen," *Les études de l'Ifri* (Paris: Ifri, August 2015), 26-30.
33. For more, see www.lejdd.fr.
34. For more, see data.unhcr.org.
35. For more, see www.politico.eu.
36. See the action plan adopted at the summit, available on www.consilium.europa.eu.

is common to hear such goals pronounced, but they remain secondary to those of return migration and fighting irregular immigration.

Jean-Pierre Cassarino examines the apparently central place occupied by the question of readmission in Euro-African relations.[37] A public culture of migration control has apparently imposed itself in discussions on both sides of the Mediterranean. The agendas that have slowly developed over the last two decades, which draw a connection between border control and development, are now dominant. Formalized by the International Agenda for Migration Management (IAMM), this approach has now become accepted and reproduced, and a "managerial" lexicon has developed to describe the reality of migration: "good governance," "security," "mixed flows," "economic migrants," "fake asylum seekers," "balanced approaches." Readmission clauses are becoming more common in Euro-African relations through various types of readmission agreement. Twelve such agreements existed between the EU and African states in 1994, a number that had risen by 2014 to 72. Cassarino identifies the many ambiguities behind this rapid expansion, ones distinctive to relations between partner countries in the North and South. Something that appears central to their relationship is in fact just "one means among others to consolidate a bilateral partnership framework that includes other, more strategic—in some cases even crucial—issues than the fight against irregular immigration."

Once again, the distance between destination countries' goals of controlling their borders and the dynamics of migration is wide. Research has clearly shown that, if European countries' border policies were less restrictive, allowing for free circular movement between South and North, a majority of migrants would return to their home countries. But since the 1990s a correlation has been observed between the decline in return migration and the securitization of migration policies in the North, which contributes to migrants' decision to remain in Europe. We should also note that "forced returns," organized through agreements between countries of origin and destination, occur in very limited numbers compared to spontaneous returns carried out by migrants.[38]

At the Valletta Summit in 2015, the Europeans announced the creation of a €3.6 billion fund to promote stability and combat the root causes of irregular migration and internal displacement in Africa. To date, the

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37. See in this special report the article by Jean-Pierre Cassarino.
38. Marie-Laurence Flahaux, Cris Beauchemin, and Bruno Schoumaker, "From Europe to Africa: Return Migration to Senegal and the DRC," *Population and Societies* 515 (October 2014), 2; see also Cris Beauchemin et al. (eds.), *Migrations africaines: Le codéveloppement en question* (Paris: Armand Colin/Ined, 2013).

European Commission has contributed €1.8 billion, and member states have contributed €31.4 million.[39] Supporting development and good governance in African countries in order to reduce the risk of migration in the short term is an error. As the United Nations has noted, the majority of migrants come from middle-income countries where more people have access to the resources needed to undertake a migration.[40]

Europe's interlocutors are silent. African states do not have the shared vision or proposals to make the terms of the Europe-Africa migration relationship more equitable. But this silence is being denounced with increasing force by African civil society which, as migrant tragedies only grow in number, is challenging its leaders to meet their responsibilities.[41]

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39. See the current state of contributions, as of January 27, 2016, on http://ec.europa.eu.
40. 157 million, according to Population Division of the United Nations (ibid., note 13).
41. For more, see www.madenetwork.org.