

VALLETTA 2015 TO ABIDJAN 2017: RECENT TRENDS IN AU–EU MIGRATION RELATIONS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Ahead of the fifth AU–EU Summit in November 2017, this policy brief identifies changing trends in Africa–EU migration relations under the 2007 Joint Africa–EU Strategy (JAES), the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF) and the outcomes from the 2015 Valletta Summit on Migration. It also examines bilateral Africa–EU relations against the broader backdrop of the UN Global Compact for Migration (GCM) and the ongoing international discussions on a global framework for migration management that seek to normalise and regularise migration to Europe through policy interventions across the continent. The brief concludes with recommendations that reflect key policy issues for the upcoming AU–EU Summit.

INTRODUCTION

On 28–29 November 2017, the fifth AU–EU Summit (called the Africa–EU Summit prior to Morocco’s re-joining the AU) will take place in Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire. Held triennially as a heads of state meeting since 2000 in Cairo, the summits facilitate dialogue between EU and AU member

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations reflect key policy issues for the upcoming AU–EU Summit.

- 1 Legitimate pathways for migration to Europe should be established based on employment and education opportunities, with an action plan with detailed timeframes for implementation over the next five years. Progress here could foster greater trust levels.
- 2 Both parties should engage in frank discussions on finding sustainable, long-term solutions for semi-skilled migrants through vocational training programmes, circular migration schemes and similar initiatives. Increased securitisation of Europe’s borders will not necessarily mean fewer migrants, and the EU’s Blue Card Scheme (an approved EU-wide work permit) is limited to skilled professionals.
- 3 Long-term infrastructure development to enable greater levels of employment and improved access to opportunities for youth should be prioritised.
- 4 African countries should undertake research to identify gaps in their labour markets so that joint skills-sharing exercises with Europe can occur. Facilitating future circular labour programmes based on skills shortages in African and EU members respectively is also recommended.
- 5 AU members should mitigate against increased militarised interventions by EU members, by finding ways to reduce conditionality linked to development aid. Diversifying income and adopting and implementing a continental-wide framework on migration will help reduce impacts of EU security efforts in Africa.

states on a range of topics spanning job creation, youth employment, peace and security, and migration. The last topic, intrinsically tied to this year's summit theme, 'Harnessing the Demographic Dividend through Investments in the Youth', is responsible for changing dynamics in Africa–EU relations.

Establishing bilateral consensus to work on future plans for circular migration (the temporary or long-term movement of people between countries), employment opportunities and educational prospects will be essential for taking Africa–EU migration relations forward. With 200 million people aged 15–24, Africa has the highest youth population in the world.² More than half of global population growth to 2050 will happen in Africa – an increase of 1.3 billion African people.³ Ensuring these people have sufficient educational and employment opportunities requires investment from governments and long-term strategies. This increases pressure on African governments to provide adequate jobs, quality education and opportunities for young people.

However, the mismatch in priorities between the continents is stark. The EU prioritises stemming irregular migration, tackling smugglers and traffickers' business models and re-admission, whereas African countries focus on building resilience and employment in sending countries, addressing development concerns, and harnessing remittances. Many African countries perceive migration as inevitable and natural, whereas recent EU policies seek to control, limit and prevent certain kinds of movement by African nationals to Europe. These different priorities have strained continental discussions on migration in recent years, and questions remain whether any meaningful progress will be made in Abidjan.

THE JAES AND CHANGING AFRICA–EU MIGRATION RELATIONS

Since the initial [2005 EU Strategy for Africa](#) – which was criticised for the lack of African participation in its preparation – the EU has made greater attempts to forge a more equitable relationship with its African counterparts. The resultant 2007 JAES underpins the vision of a long-term relationship between the two continents, covering peace and security, migration, governance and democracy, and economic issues. Its effectiveness as an equal partnership remains questionable owing to challenges over dedicated funding, cumbersome implementation structures and political buy-in from both continents.⁴ It has, however, established a cooperation framework that

has improved Africa–EU relations, particularly on peace and security.⁵

Political instability in Libya, the Horn of Africa and the Sahel has led to increased migration flows to Europe. According to the International Organization for Migration, all except one of the 10 migrant-sending countries to Italy, by sea, for [January–July 2017 were African](#): Nigeria, Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, The Gambia, Senegal, Eritrea, Sudan and Morocco.⁶ This threatens to undermine gains made on economic cooperation, trade and development issues. It has also taken greater prominence in recent discussions on AU–EU relations. A separate declaration on migration was agreed to at the [2014 AU–EU Summit](#), followed by the [EU's Agenda on Migration in May 2015](#) and the Valletta Summit in November 2015.

Similarly, the [EU's 2016 Migration Partnership Framework](#) targets 'better managed migration flows' with a focus on African origin and sending countries. The fifth progress report⁷ notes that formal cooperation with partner countries regarding readmission of migrants to their countries of origin and their sustainable reintegration into these communities remains stalled. The EU has identified the need for better financial and technical capacity-building incentive mechanisms to facilitate such discussions. Despite limited progress (good relations with Nigerian authorities and Senegal's preparation of a national migration policy), discussions with Mali, Ethiopia and Nigeria on readmission agreements have been difficult.

The 2015 Valletta Summit is yet another EU-led initiative to tackle migration-related issues. It spawned the [Valletta Action Plan \(VAP\)](#), building on existing mechanisms in the [Rabat Process](#), [Khartoum Process](#) and the JAES. The VAP targets the highest sending regions: Northern Africa boasts 254 initiatives addressing the VAP's five focal areas,⁸ Western Africa 355 and Eastern Africa 343.⁹ Valletta established the EUTF, a new financing instrument with current pledges of EUR¹⁰ 3.1 billion (approximately \$3.6 billion),¹¹ focused on addressing root causes of irregular migration from Africa and facilitating increased EU–Africa security cooperation.¹² Addressing the root causes of irregular migration and forced displacement consumes 60% of the VAP's overall funding, and 50% of all initiatives.¹³

The EU has been criticised for insufficient responsibility sharing and paying for the 'problem' to be kept away from its borders. EU leaders, at an informal meeting in Malta in February 2017, discussed stemming the flow of irregular

migrants, and agreed to provide training and support to the Libyan national coast guard, step up voluntary return activities, collaborate with countries of origin and transit on projects that enhance their border-management capacity, and improve external border control. This raises questions about the EU's willingness to work with politically unstable regimes with poor human rights records to stem migration flows to its borders. Its actions could also exacerbate fragile political conditions in countries such as Libya, Niger and Somalia, ironically increasing North-bound migration trends. This also points to EU member states' driving a security discourse and normalising enhanced border controls within Africa for their own agendas.

USING AID CONDITIONALITY TO ADDRESS MIGRATION

The EUTF finances 106 programmes across three regions, totalling EUR 1,589 million (approximately \$1,844 million). Of this amount, EUR 918.5 million (approximately \$1,066.2 million) is allocated for the Sahel and Lake Chad Basin, EUR 606 million (approximately \$703.5 million) for the Horn of Africa, and EUR 64.5 million (approximately \$74.9 million) for North Africa.¹⁴ Most of the funding goes towards combatting irregular migration, migrant smuggling and trafficking, and few resources exist for enhancing legal migration and mobility. This has reinforced doubts about the EU's commitment to addressing legal mobility and labour migration, which are vitally important issues for African countries.

Since inception, the EUTF has been mired in controversy because of its incoherent financing vis-à-vis priorities and policies such as the EU's Agenda on Migration.¹⁵ The EUTF skews aid allocations towards countries based on their migration profile, thereby undermining EU principles on aid effectiveness and stretching the definition of development assistance.¹⁶ Consequently, many African partners perceive the EUTF as an EU-imposed migration agenda over which they have little sense of ownership.¹⁷

The increasing use of EU development assistance to tackle migration issues, with the EU using greater conditionality to secure third-country commitments on readmission and border control, has been criticised.¹⁸ The focus has been on donor policy outcomes rather than on Africa's development needs. Despite its lip service to democratic values and good governance, the EU draws opprobrium for this realpolitik approach when security and economic interests are at stake.¹⁹

CAN UN PROCESSES ENHANCE DIALOGUE ON MIGRATION?

The GCM seeks to establish commitments and agreed-upon principles among UN members to establish an international framework to facilitate safe, orderly and regular migration. Efforts to establish a common African position on migration within GCM discussions have not succeeded, owing to competing and conflicting regional and national interests. Consequently, the third [Pan-African Forum on Migration](#), held in Uganda in May 2017, failed to provide concrete results. This lack of African consensus hampers efforts to engage successfully in international migration discussions and bilaterally with EU partners. AU members collectively share responsibility for their inability to establish a coherent continent-wide approach, especially since some countries have a vested interest in outward migration because of the extensive remittances received. Intra-African migration remains contentious, with power struggles between sending and receiving countries. For example, South Africa and Kenya support stricter border controls that reduce the number of economic migrants in their countries.²⁰

The plethora of bilateral agreements between EU and AU member states is equally concerning. In recent years the EU has entered into immigration agreements (known as mobility partnerships) with Morocco and Tunisia to reinforce their border-management capacities and improve readmission of irregular migrants. The EU is also actively pursuing border-management programmes in Eritrea, Mali, Niger, Nigeria and Sudan to stem Europe-bound irregular migrant flows. Complicated historical colonial relations have fostered aid dependency among some African countries, and AU members have limited leverage in dealing with their development partners. How can African countries possibly engage in equitable, forward-looking continental migration policies through seemingly transparent meetings such as the JAES Summit, when they bind themselves bilaterally to unfavourable conditions with their development partners?

Consequently, such practices have enforced a bifurcated approach towards migration for African countries, with bilateral commitments to their EU partners compromising efforts to improve domestic and regional initiatives. These practices run contrary to the AU's progressive principles in the [2006 Common Position on Migration and Development](#) and the [2006 Migration Policy Framework for Africa](#), which remain non-binding and lack mechanisms for monitoring compliance. In the absence

of true leadership to bring AU members together, the willingness to domesticate and implement these protocols and find common ground remains questionable.²¹

While the EU and its members have the prerogative of pursuing equitable, partnership-based policies that do not reinforce a 'Fortress Europe' that turns away migrants, AU members bear the responsibility of pursuing agreements that work towards ensuring greater, widespread benefits for Africans. There is equal need for African governments to militate against bilateral agreements undermining AU initiatives on migration, with their colonial ties and desire for short-term development assistance undermining long-term progress on migration issues. African governments that weaken continental efforts share, in equal measure, responsibility for the stultified progress on implementable migration policies within Africa. AU and national leadership is essential for formulating positions that will safeguard the successful prospects of their citizens, and should provide inputs to global and bilateral migration management frameworks that can contribute to the long-term, sustainable development of Africa's people.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Asmita Parshotam is an international trade and development expert. She previously worked at the WTO and the European Centre for Development Policy Management. She is currently a Researcher in the Economic Diplomacy Programme at SAIIA.
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