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TIME TO GOVERN MIGRATION TOGETHER AN OPPORTUNITY FOR EUROPE AND AFRICA

FEPS GLOBAL MIGRATION GROUP



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INTRODUCTION

We are all living in a fast-changing global order. The traditional international points of reference of the European Union (and its member states) are shifting and the rise of new assertive international actors is testing Europe's capability to adjust and act as a single global player. Indeed, the EU is often defensive and reacts feebly to perceived threats and actual challenges, rather than positively shaping the transformations that are well under way within the region and at global level.

The EU's incapacity to find a bold common policy that goes beyond scant agreements based on the lowest common denominator amongst its member states, or to resist the temptation to become inward-looking and to close in on itself, is particularly evident in its approach to migration. This – especially in the wake of the so-called 'refugee and migration crisis' – has, in fact, been approached with a securitarian and resistant attitude, resulting in a migration policy that is unbalanced towards the main goal of curtailing arrivals and of increasing returns, that is over-zealous in strengthening border controls, and that is committed to the sacrosanct fight against smugglers and traffickers, and to the attempts to tackle the so-called root causes of migration. These efforts largely outweigh the pursuit of the safe and orderly management of people's transnational mobility.

This short-sighted political approach, coupled with growing extremist and xenophobic trends across Europe, has also exacerbated the propensity for the dehumanisation and/or criminalisation of migrants who try to cross European borders without a proper document, and it often turns them into the scapegoats of current social and economic problems. Whatever the migrants' origin, personal history and reasons for leaving their countries, they are mostly seen as mere numbers by a somewhat hostile European public and its governments; in addition, when migrants are not seen as threats to security, they are often portrayed as invaders of lands, cultures and identities. What is all too often overlooked is the fact that migrants are mostly

vulnerable human beings in legitimate search of a decent and safe life, who could actively contribute to Europe's prosperity if they were welcomed and integrated.

A significant, but not overwhelming,¹ number of people arriving in Europe come from Africa.² However, the figures are often perceived as higher than they actually are.³ We must be honest in saying that these arrivals may be 'more noticeable' because of the misconceptions and prejudices that all too often accompany the 'foreigner'. It is a fact, however, that migration from Africa is expected to increase in the coming years, for two essential reasons: Africa is today the poorest continent in the world, and at the same time has the highest rate of population growth (these two facts are strictly interdependent).

Demographic projections in Europe and Africa for the coming decades are indeed to a certain extent specular. On one continent there is a steady decline and ageing of the (working) population and, on the other, there is a dramatic increase in the youngest population. These data simply put could lead to the simplistic assumption that – as in a system of communicating vessels – what we have to expect for the future is a massive economic, humanitarian and migratory challenge that will stream from Africa to Europe and that might easily turn into a security issue. Misinterpretation of the numbers and a lack of contextualisation of the data can easily be exploited to raise uncontrolled and unfounded fears of an 'invasion'. Indeed, this misinterpretation is already feeding myths, such as the so-called 'replacement theory'. On the other hand, the lack of appropriate policies based on a comprehensive approach and on cooperation at regional (continental) and global level could indeed turn a manageable reality and the potential rise of

1 The number of migrants leaving Asia is almost three times higher than that of those leaving Africa. More specifically, the number of Asian migrants reaching Europe is twice as high as the number of African migrants reaching Europe (www.migrationdataportal.org).

2 According to the IOM's *World Migration Report 2020* in 2019, 10.6 million African-born migrants resided in Europe (out of over 82 million international migrants, and out of 38 million non-European migrants). Note that these data refer to the European continent as a whole and not just to the EU (<https://publications.iom.int/books/world-migration-report-2020>).

3 In general, European citizens tend to overestimate "the percentage of immigrants as a proportion of the population, in several cases by a significant margin". On average, in 2017, the proportion of immigrants in the EU28 population estimated by EU citizens was 16.7%, while according to Eurostat the actual proportion was 7.2%. It must be underlined that "there are significant differences in the extent to which this figure is overestimated" between the EU member states. Special Eurobarometer 469. Integration of Migrants in the European Union (https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/news/results-special-eurobarometer-integration-immigrants-european-union_en).



African international migration into another series of humanitarian, social and political predicaments.

Meanwhile, arrivals of irregular migrants in Europe have returned to their lowest level since 2013⁴ – a weak trend that could (and will) be reversed at any moment, given the persistent instability in Libya, renewed tensions in the Middle East, and other ‘ungovernable’ factors, such as climate change-driven environmental disasters. Yet, **the sense of urgency that has characterised the last few years is now fading**. Some might interpret this as a positive development, because it allows migration to be seen less as an emergency and more as an enduring phenomenon. On the other hand, it could mistakenly lead to a waning interest from European and national policymakers to introduce and implement broad, common, long-term and effective management of migration. Reaching an agreement on such a divisive topic will be extremely difficult and many policymakers may be inclined to sidestep or wait for more favourable conditions. The result could be the indefinite postponement (in spite of the new European Commission’s good intentions) of badly needed initiatives to relaunch the reform of the asylum system and the development of a truly European migration policy.

As the FEPS Global Migration Group wrote in its 2018 paper “Prioritising people: A progressive narrative for migration”, if migration is to be understood “as a structural and ordinary feature of our contemporary world (...) even though it may be reaching unprecedented levels in the present global context for a variety of enduring reasons”, and not “as an emergency calling simply for short-term measures”, then “(...) temporary, simplistic, short-term and narrow policy responses, not only will not ‘solve the problem’, but will likely make the consequences of mismanagement more severe”.⁵ Moving from this premiss and from the general reflections on a progressive approach to the management of migration, as proposed in its previous essay, and against the backdrop of a fast-changing world order that calls for more assertive and resolute European actions to strengthen the external as well

4 Frontex (2020), *Irregular migration into EU at lowest level since 2013*, 20 January (<https://frontex.europa.eu/media-centre/news-release/flash-report-irregular-migration-into-eu-at-lowest-level-since-2013-n5pHiA>).

5 FEPS Global Migration Group (2018), *Prioritising people: A progressive narrative for migration*, Brussels (<https://www.feps-europe.eu/component/attachments/attachments.html?task=attachment&id=139>).

as internal projection of the EU, the FEPS Global Migration Group now advocates a few concrete policies aimed at: **increasing and strengthening orderly regular migration routes; better framing relations with both African countries and African regional organisations** in the field of migration management as well as development; and **converging fair and non-discriminatory standards and procedures in EU labour markets** which put people centre stage. All these proposals would also be in line with the principles and guidelines of the Global Compact for Migration, which the FEPS Global Migration Group endorsed and supported in its previous paper and in the conference “UNited for a different migration”, held in New York in September 2018. The goal is to formulate more concrete policy proposals for Europe in its dealing with the continuous, unstoppable and ‘physiological’ movements of people across countries and continents, and above all between Africa and Europe. The proposals aim at the respect and protection of these people’s human rights and human dignity. At the same time, such policies would contribute to the development of African countries and would strengthen the European integration process. Our aim is not to be praised for the invention of new and original policies. Instead, we aim at promoting the adoption and enforcement of badly needed policies that still await the courageous political leadership to convince our societies of this need.



1. THE CONTEXT

To better regulate relations between countries of origin, transit and destination, it is necessary to recognise the economic and social framework within which such relations currently exist. Africa and Europe are close neighbours, and circumstances and events in the former necessarily affect the latter, and vice versa. The European Union cannot consider itself distant from developments of all natures that unfold on the African continent. Nor can it truly believe that – as some European leaders advocate loudly – closing borders and ports to prevent immigration is (besides any moral judgement on such measures) a serious and feasible option in the face of mutually changing demographics and social and economic conditions. Rather, the EU should, above all, seriously acknowledge the considerable opportunities that well-managed migration offers to both sending and receiving countries.

The demographic factor

Population growth projections indicate that the population of Africa will grow substantially by 2050.⁶ However, doubts are being raised by authoritative sources as to whether such data should be treated cautiously. Africa is, from a demographic point of view, not a homogenous continent.⁷ Fertility rates vary substantially from region to region (from the extremely high levels of the Sahel to the levels of some

6 Predictions place the continent's population between 1.9 and 2.4 billion in 2050. According to the United Nations forecast: "More than half of global population growth between now and 2050 is expected to occur in Africa (...) Regardless of the uncertainty surrounding future trends in fertility in Africa, the large number of young people currently on the continent, who will reach adulthood in the coming years and have children of their own, ensures that the region will play a central role in shaping the size and distribution of world's population over the coming decades." (<https://www.un.org/en/sections/issues-depth/population/index.html>).

7 "It is important to note that the largest proportional changes from 2009 to 2019 occurred in countries with relatively smaller populations (...). Africa's most populous countries – Nigeria, Ethiopia and Egypt – are not among the top 20. However, all three countries also experienced increases in their population". Also, population growth at national level is influenced by international migration within Africa. IOM, *World Migration Report 2020*.

North African countries,⁸ which resemble instead the rates reached by Europe in the 1950s). Moreover, there are reasons to believe that the demographic transition – the shift from high birth rates and high infant death rates to low birth rates that occurs with improved access to education and with technological and economic development – may indeed take place much more rapidly in some African countries,⁹ as a consequence of urbanisation and women’s education, than has happened in Europe, where the decline in fertility occurred over a very long period of time.¹⁰ Yet, **the control of the demographic variable depends on the reduction of poverty and increased access to education**, which are conditioned by other social and economic policies, and by relations between Europe and Africa.

As for poverty, in the presence of high population growth, economic growth must create sufficient decent jobs to absorb the growing labour supply. Here it is noteworthy that the percentage of poor people in Africa out of the total population decreased from 45% to 35% between 1990 and 2013. Yet at the same time, the absolute number of poor increased from 280 to 395 million people.¹¹

Intra-African mobility

Another crucial element to be considered is that intra-African migration represents the largest bulk of transnational mobility on the continent. More than half of African international migrants live in another African country, and international migration

8 The current fertility rate is 2.37 in Morocco, 2.16 in Tunisia, and 2.19 in Libya. It is higher in Algeria (2.94) and Egypt (3.25).

9 For example, between 1975 and 2019, Kenya’s fertility rate plunged from 8 to 3.5 births per woman.

10 A sensibly different theory is proposed, for example, in D. Bricker and J. Ibbitson (2019), *Empty Planet. The shock of Global Population Decline*, Penguin Random House; or by the International Institute for Applied System Analysis, according to which, “achieving the SDGs would lead to population growth below even the lower bound of recent UN probabilistic population projections” (<https://www.iiasa.ac.at/web/home/about/news/161129-sdg-pnas.html>).

11 M. Zupi (2019), “Sviluppo sostenibile, democrazia e migrazioni in Africa”, in P. Mazzetti and S. Ceschi (eds.), *Ripartire dall’Africa. Esperienze e iniziative di migrazione e di co-sviluppo*, Rome: Donzelli Editore.



within the region has increased significantly since 2000.¹² Poor peasants driven from their farms by civil wars, famines or other ‘push-factors’ do not go further than the next border: from Darfur to Eastern Chad, from Somalia to Kenya. This dynamic should be more widely broadcast to reassure concerned European citizens and to challenge xenophobic narratives. Indeed, it should always be taken into consideration when devising agreements that contain migration clauses with any African country – as will later be discussed at length.

Socio-economic imbalances

Economic and commercial imbalances between the ‘North’ and the ‘Global South’ are among the most important sources of the crisis in the countries of the South. Europe has strong economic, trade and political relations with these countries and is connected to them by numerous kinds of agreements, as well as cultural and historical ties.

Migration is not merely the product of individual or family decisions, but is also driven by wider economic and social factors. It is a phenomenon embedded in a set of socio-economic networks and transnational relations. In fact, **massive scale migrations are fundamentally determined by the contradictory and disorderly dynamics of uneven development across the planet**, between North and South, between Europe and Africa.

Against this backdrop, migration can also be seen as a ‘compulsive displacement’. Contemporary migration patterns are the result of a highly unbalanced socio-economic order in which **domination and wealth concentration strategies contribute to the deprivation of the production and support means from large segments of the population, forcing massive contingents of people to sell their labour**

12 “(...) in 2019, over 21 million Africans were living in another African country, a significant increase from 2015, when around 18.5 million Africans were estimated to be living within the region. The number of Africans living in different regions also grew during the same period, from around 17 million in 2015 to nearly 19 million in 2019”. IOM, *World Migration Report 2020*.

power both nationally and internationally. It follows that growing restrictions on the mobility of the migrant workforce determine its depreciation, and increase its vulnerability, precariousness and exploitation.

In this context, **migrants often become cheap labour merchandise**, a disposable population that unwillingly contributes to preserving the existing dynamics of accumulation. The more vulnerable migrants become, the more their employers benefit. Increasing social exclusion leads to increased profits and fiscal gains for both employers and host governments. In social terms the outcome demeans migrants, and further jeopardises their social, political and human rights.

The development/migration nexus

Reducing the above-mentioned imbalances is therefore to be considered a primary goal, firstly in itself and secondly as a way to govern migration better. Yet the question of the nexus between migration and development needs still to be more closely investigated in its wider complexity and multidimensionality. The little space offered by these pages is not enough to do justice to an issue that deserves a much broader and deeper analysis. Nor is it enough to understand better how the two processes entwine and mutually affect each other. Here we simply wish to underline some key elements of this relationship, and in particular the assumption that migration contributes to development in places and nations of origin. Very often remittances sent by international migrants are believed to have a positive effect on the development of the countries and regions they have left. In fact, “migrants’ remittances exceed the value of all overseas development aid combined”, even if their real net contribution to growth is difficult to evaluate.¹³ However, other forms of contribution by the diasporas to the communities of origin, such as so-called ideational and social remittances deserve more atten-

13 G. Giovannetti and M. Lanati (2016), “Migration and development. A focus on Africa” in A. Triandafyllidou (ed.), *Routledge handbook of immigration and refugee studies*, New York: Routledge, p. 236 and 238.



tion. Moreover, the link between migration and development is predominantly understood as a one-way scheme in which remittances play a role, while other social concerns associated with development are overlooked or even ignored. It is generally assumed that a 'free' global market – which enables an outrageous concentration and centralisation of capital in a handful of multinational corporations that control and regulate the global market – will operate as an exhaustible source of economic growth.

This implausible line of thought rigidly ignores other aspects of the relationship between migration and development, such as the harsh living and working conditions experienced by migrants in transit and receiving societies, as well as the high socio-economic costs that migration imposes on sending countries. It also fails to appreciate the contribution that newcomers make to hosting societies. Furthermore, it places the burden on migrants, expecting that “some of the most exploited workers in the world can make up for the failure of mainstream development policies”¹⁴

This one-sided approach is reflected in the contrasting perception of migrants in the countries of origin and those of destination. In the former, they are portrayed as national heroes (partly with the opportunistic intent of ensuring the flow of remittances). While migrants must meet the excessive expectations of their communities of origin, in the countries of destination they are depicted as a burden and, at times, as a negative and ‘polluting’ influence on culture and identity. One – more or less intentional – consequence of this stigmatisation is to perpetuate social exclusion, which leads to vulnerability and the exploitation by employers of a cheap and disposable labour supply.

These observations of the links between migration and the socio-economic imbalances that exist between North and South underline how **contemporary migration is linked to development-related problems intrinsic to the neoliberal global order**. Only a deeper understanding of the fundamental flaws of the neoliberal

14 S. Castle and R. Delgado-Wise (2008), *Migration and development. Perspectives from the South*, IOM, Geneva.

system, and the nature of the imbalances between North and South, as well as the impact of these imbalances on migration intentions and dynamics, combined with a deep analysis of how the existing range of mechanisms and policies affect migration flows, can help produce sustainable and progressive governance policies for humane, effective and sustainable transcontinental human mobility between Africa and Europe.

The demographic factor in Europe

Before looking at the mechanisms in place in the relations between Africa and Europe with regard to migration, it is useful to understand Europe's future demographic projections to see how current migration contributes to these forecasts and what impact it will have in the future. Data on Europe's ageing population, on the decline of its workforce, on its economic 'need' for migrants, and on the sustainability of European welfare and pension systems do not have any real positive effect on the European public's attitude towards migrants and migration. In reality, the opposite is more palpable, as the fear of cultural shifts due to an increased foreign share in the European population often outweigh any consideration of social and economic benefits.

According to the Population Division of the UN, nine of the EU member states are facing a demographic decline. Interestingly, they are all countries located on Europe's southern or eastern border.¹⁵ Fifteen are experiencing a stationary or moderately positive demographic trend,¹⁶ while two of the remaining countries

15 In descending order of demographic decline: Italy, Poland, Hungary, Portugal, Greece, Romania, Bulgaria, Latvia and Lithuania. The last two of these countries are experiencing a population reduction level greater than 1%.

16 In descending order: Austria, Sweden, the United Kingdom, Belgium, Germany, Malta, Denmark, France, the Netherlands, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Slovakia, Slovenia and Spain. In those with a "moderately positive" demographic trend (Austria, Sweden and the UK), population growth could mainly be attributed to gains from international migration.



(Ireland and Luxembourg) have an average annual growth rate above 1%.¹⁷ In general, fertility rates are higher in northern and western Europe and low, or very low, in southern and eastern Europe.

In Europe the demographic trend is characterised by very slow population growth that is expected to decline in the next decade. The age structure will also change substantially, with the share of people aged 65 years or older increasing from 19% to 30% by 2050.¹⁸

Migration has also become a key structural component of these demographic dynamics, i.e. migrants are replacing a percentage of natural population growth. Nevertheless, this replacement will not be sufficient to reverse Europe's declining population trends, nor to help Europe maintain its demographic weight in the world (which is expected to drop from the current 7% to 4.8% in 2050). In this critical demographic transition, the EU cannot ignore the relevant contribution that can be made by migration to its population trends.¹⁹

Yet, migration is to some extent already compensating for the shrinking domestic workforce in European countries and indeed seems to offer, at least in some measure, a response to the ageing of Europe's population. Projections have shown that in the case of a no-migration scenario (with neither immigration nor emigration from 2015 to 2030), the "younger working age population would decline in *all* member states, with no exceptions".²⁰

17 Ireland and Luxembourg are small countries. In both cases, the continued increase is due to inward migration, including in Ireland (which has only very recently experienced a drop in the average 2.1 children per woman, which is the replacement rate).

18 The decline in the employment rate caused by ageing will be counterbalanced by the entry of women into the workforce, but only in countries where there is a low female participation rate, such as Greece and Italy.

19 The hope for the effectiveness of policies aimed to boost fertility is indeed vain. Most of the studies on the effect of family policy on fertility conclude that, in the short and medium term, there are transient effects or no effect at all. Moreover, in most cases countries that put hopes in family policies to increase fertility rates also advocate that women retreat from the labour market to bring up their children, thus shrinking that market even further, when it is instead badly in need of women's participation.

20 P. Fargues (2018), "Maintaining Europe's place in the world" in R. Marchetti (ed.), *Debating migration to Europe*, Abingdon: Routledge, p. 20

The state of play: regular migration routes and irregular migration to Europe

Legal avenues to reach Europe exist and are quite substantial. In fact, over 3 million people reach the EU annually and obtain residence permits to work, reunite with their families, study, or visit Europe for business.²¹ Recent data show that between 2009 and 2018, the number of first work permits (including for seasonal work) issued annually by the EU member states generally increased or remained constant, with the notable exceptions of Spain, Greece, the United Kingdom and, especially Italy, where the sharpest decline in the issue of work permits was recorded.²²

How can this be reconciled with the large increase in irregular arrivals recorded during the so-called migration crisis? Are existing regular pathways sufficient and, above all, efficient to manage Europe's need and to allow safe journeys and humane and fair treatment of people on the move? Or are we experiencing a short circuit that creates obstacles and bottlenecks²³ which hinder the journeys of migrants and refugees to Europe, forcing them along dangerous and irregular routes?

21 According to Eurostat, "in 2018, about 3.2 million first residence permits were issued in the European Union to non-EU citizens (...). Family reasons accounted for almost 28% of all first residence permits issued in the EU in 2018, employment reasons for 27%, education reasons for 20%, while other reasons, including international protection, accounted for 24%". Eurostat newsrelease 164/2019, 25 October 2019 (<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/10189082/3-25102019-AP-EN.pdf/95e08bc8-476d-1f7d-a519-300bdec438cb>).

22 The difference between the number of first work permits issued by Italy in 2008 and in 2019 is of -222,089 units, while in Spain it is -44,303, in Greece -13,522 and in the UK -8,518. Interestingly, the country that recorded the largest increase is Poland with +585,893. Poland is also the country that issued the largest number of work permits in 2018 (596,916), followed by the UK (108,150) and Germany (68,343). Notably, in Italy in 2018 only 5.8% of the permits were issued for working reasons (13,877). Fondazione Leone Moressa (2019), *Frontiere chiuse, ma non per tutti. I paesi europei che attraggono lavoratori immigrati*.

23 For a clear and interesting account of the dynamics that determined the large inflows of irregular migrants and asylum seekers from 2013 onwards, see P. Fargues, op. cit., pp. 14-18.



While regular avenues do exist, they are still largely handled at national level, with Europe continuing to play only a minor regulatory role.²⁴ This is a reality that does not match either with a true single market or with the global nature of the phenomenon and the need to establish packages and partnerships on migration that can deliver results at the continental level. What is still largely lagging behind is the establishment of credible and coordinated legal avenues for migrants to reach Europe in a safe and orderly manner.

A slight exception would be resettlement schemes. In this very specific area, the EU has acquired a more significant coordinating role in the past few years thanks to the mobilisation of significant financial resources, even if the number of beneficiaries is not yet sufficient to proclaim its full success.

This reality has been overshadowed, in the past few years, by a political environment that has rendered any discussion on legal pathways for migrants a politically toxic topic to handle. The overall focus has been on the need to decrease irregular migration and enhance returns, and to restore a sense of trust and control over the increased migratory flows that Europe faced in the 2015-2016 period.

As irregular migratory flows have abated, there now seems to be a political space to restart a more open and frank discussion on the issue of regular pathways, not only for refugees, but also for job-seeking migrants. Initiatives in these fields might find fertile ground to grow and allow the establishment of a more coordinated approach to legal migration that could enhance the EU's capability to operate as a global player.

²⁴ Existing European directives in the field of legal migration include the Family Reunification Directive 2003/86/EC, the Long-Term Resident Directive 2003/109/EC, the Students and Research Directive 2016/801, the Blue Card Directive 2009/50/EC, the Single Permit Directive 2011/98/EU, and the Seasonal Workers Directive 2014/36/EU. Migrants' rights are also covered by the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, which grants rights to everyone, irrespective of nationality. Additionally, the Race Equality Directive 2000/43/EC also protects third-country nationals (TNCs). For an assessment of the current legislative situation, see K. Groenendijk (2019), "Legal Migration" in P. De Bruycker, M. De Somer and J.-L. De Brouwer, *From Tampere 20 to Tampere 2.0: Towards a new European consensus on migration*, European Policy Centre.

2. WHAT HAS TO BE DONE

Rethinking African-European relations

A necessary component of a renewed approach to the efficient management of migration is that of **fair and equal cooperation with countries of origin and transit**. In 2018, the FEPS Global Migration Group wrote in its paper “Prioritising people” that “fair and equitable mobility pacts that give due consideration to the interests and needs of the countries of origin and offer them both practical and beneficial outcomes” is a necessary precondition for the establishment of channels for regular migration.

Looking at partnership from the point of view of Europe...

Achieving fair and comprehensive partnerships in the field of migration with the countries of origin and of transit is not an innovative goal per se. Since the establishment of the Global Approach to Migration and Mobility (GAMM) and the Mobility Partnerships, the key ingredients of a fair partnership have been clear to both the EU and partner countries. But while the ingredients are understood and agreed by all, the absence of an agreed and unbiased ‘chef’ who can mix them into tailored recipes that are ‘digestible’ by all parts involved is still a fundamental limit of EU engagement in this field. **The system remains too fragmented** with no clear reporting line or overall coordination.

In addition, one key lesson learned over the past years is that **agreements on migration need to be flexible and to adapt constantly** in order to respond to the changing realities of migratory flows. The old European approach grounded on rather bulky and inflexible international agreements, with procedural approval and implementation burdens, does not fit the reality of migration. The much more flexible concept of partnerships, grounded on the informal understanding of evolving patterns and circumstances and reciprocal trust, seems much more appropriate for responding to operational realities. However, this requires structures and the



ability to take swift decisions. It also requires finely corresponding instruments – all things largely lacking in the Brussels bureaucratic and diplomatic system.

It is clear, however, that **de-bureaucratisation and flexibility should by no means come at the expense of consultation and transparency**. Moving forward beyond the crisis mode of the last few years will entail the ability to **be more open and inclusive in the decision-making process with regard to other institutions, first and foremost the European Parliament, as well with civil society**. This represents an important opportunity, as the latter in particular possesses invaluable knowledge of the operational realities on the ground and can contribute to better management of migration itself. On the other hand, civil society organisations will need to adapt their approach, moving partly away from the ‘advocacy only’ attitude and developing the ability to better integrate their ideas and viewpoints with political realities.

... and from the point of view of Africa

Through such partnerships and other agreements, the European Union has played a critical role in the development of migration policies within Africa. Since 2000, the African Union and the EU have adopted various frameworks on migration, the scopes of which have ranged from focusing on the root causes of migration to strengthening synergies between migration and development; from improving border management and combatting irregular migration to promoting international protection; from addressing sex tourism and other forms of sexual exploitation and the abuse of women and children to combatting xenophobia and racism; from creating job opportunities in African countries to devising poverty reduction strategies. Such initiatives include the Cairo Plan of Action signed in 2000; the Rabat Process; the Joint Africa-EU Declaration on Migration; the Tripoli Process; the Khartoum Process; the 2015 Valletta Summit Action Plan and the establishment of the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (ETUF); and, last but not least, the EU Partnership Framework for Migration, which enhances the role of the European External Action Service in this field, under the auspices of the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.

As migration is increasingly viewed through the lenses of ‘pressure’ and ‘insecurity’, prompted by the sharp increase in the flow of refugees, asylum seekers and irregular migrants into Europe, the policy response is inevitably based on control and border management, if not outright militarisation. As a consequence, new and existing agreements and partnerships are increasingly centred on securitising migration and are being negotiated bilaterally without the consent of other countries in the region. This is a fact that is far from being of secondary importance.

Proposals and actions to step up military and security cooperation and assistance, including the provision of equipment and new border control technologies, the enhancement of information and intelligence sharing, and support to military deployment with the aim of deterring migration, are increasingly part of the relations between the EU member states and their African partners.

This securitised approach has an impact on intra-African migration. As has already been stated, the majority of African international migration occurs on the African continent itself, but the provision of restrictions introduced at the request of the European Union or its member states hinders intra-African mobility and presumes unjust jurisdictional interference. For example, since 2014-2015, North African countries have stopped recognising the African Union’s *laissez passer*. Furthermore, the European Union, by means of different policies, has been pushing for border controls among the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), despite the fact that ECOWAS had achieved the free movement of people among its member states.

It is arguable whether these policy interventions have met Africa’s needs when it is apparent the real goal is to reduce migration flows from Africa to Europe. Security priorities in Africa and Europe differ substantially. **Prioritising European over African concerns fosters the perception that donor aid only pursues the donor’s interests.**

Moreover, key actors dealing with border security issues may well end up enjoying a privileged gatekeeper role, allowing them ready access to donor support, to the detriment of more pressing needs. Furthermore, and importantly, the European Union’s approach to countering migration has led to an emphasis on achieving



short-term operational success, rather than on devising the longer-term (and slower) migration management policies that are required to address mobility and security. Other implications of the European approach to mobility in Africa also need to be taken into account. First, making it harder for people to move freely within Africa will only increase the use of irregular routes, making migrants more vulnerable to criminal networks, discrimination and exploitation. Second, the securitisation of migration impacts the economies of African countries. While Africa works to advance a continental free trade area, hindering the free movement of people and making borders more contained harms the potential of intra-African trade and African development. This will lead to more and more Africans wanting to leave their home countries in order to seek a better life elsewhere. Third, the securitised approach to migration risks strengthening local autocratic governments, exacerbating political tensions and blocking further democratic developments. Fourth – and perhaps most importantly – the EU’s frequent recourse to development aid to pursue the goal of containing migration flows not only risks being counterproductive (more development may in fact foster more emigration) but is ethically questionable. **Aid for development is and must remain an objective of its own.**

A new generation of mobility pacts

European and African priorities and interests can be conflicting, particularly if the emphasis is placed on short-term security goals, rather than the long-term promotion of sustainable and equitable development. While EU countries are interested in seeking better cooperation with African partners on issues such as the return of irregular migrants, border control and refugee protections, African countries would like to explore opportunities for legal migration channels to the EU – not least because African migration involves economic dynamics through remittances, as previously noted.

Developing a new generation of constructive and sustainable, fair and comprehensive, partnerships between the EU and Africa is key to the construction of common ground for cooperation between the two shores of the Mediterranean. Such partnerships could open a whole new range of opportunities for Africa as

well as for Europe. By contrast, the externalisation of migration control is perceived by the South as an attempt to compensate for mismanagement and institutional incompetence in the North. The EU is also perceived as foolishly and stubbornly clinging to a unilateralist approach to migration realities – which instead requires collaboration. A good faith approach from the EU must factor in these concerns if future efforts are not to repeat the failure of the past.

Below are a few proposals to help shape a new generation of agreements.

- ◆ The European Union will need to step up significantly its ability to leverage **coordinated legal pathways** as a crucial ingredient for fair and stable partnerships with its neighbours. The agenda for visa liberalisation and facilitation will also need to be reopened in order to engage with key partners. The point of reference should be the Global Compact for Migration.

- ◆ **Partnerships with Africa should not focus disproportionately on security issues.** Priority must be given to economic and social development, by creating or improving development prospects in departure and transit countries. The European Union needs to **revise some of its common policies**, including trade policies and the common agricultural policy, which contribute to the perpetuation or the worsening of the socio-economic imbalances between North and South previously noted. Moreover, in recognition of the climate crisis that our planet is facing – which is increasingly causing people’s displacement – any agreement with Africa should promote **greater respect for the environment** and prevent the further deterioration of natural and scarce resources, such as water on the African continent. In this context, the need to amend international refugee law to integrate cross-border mobility caused by environmental shocks should be seriously addressed.

- ◆ **The perspective and interests of the relevant African countries should be included in the decision-making process.** Current trends show that African countries are excluded from these processes even when projects are planned that involve these countries directly. In the case of ETUF projects, for example, it is a board in Brussels that reviews and adopts them. Beneficiary countries are only observers without voting rights, unless they contribute financially.



This reality, coupled with the securitised approach adopted in the relations between the two continents, is undermining relations between African governments and their citizens.

- ◆ **Old agreements should be renegotiated to take stock of the new developments and agreements that have been negotiated to regulate the African countries' mutual relationship, such as protocols aimed at enhancing the intra-African movement of people and intra-African trade.** The European Union should, for example, support implementation of the African Union (AU) Free Movement Protocol, adopted in 2018, and of the Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).²⁵ This will help Africa pursue sustainable development through the enhancement of intra-continental trade and human mobility.
- ◆ As for **returns and readmission**, it must be underlined that there is no basis in international law for the EU to pretend that states are in some way responsible for re-admitting non-nationals who may have passed through their territory *en route* to Europe, but who have otherwise no connection with the country. Transit countries, such as Morocco, Algeria or Tunisia, have to readmit their own citizens living in irregular situations abroad, but it is not productive to oblige any African country to readmit foreign migrants on its territory. Linking the acceptance of these measures to visa facilitation is arguable, and will likely precipitate more irregular migration. By the same logic, the externalisation of migration management (and search and rescue operations) to third countries, with questionable democratic and human right standards, should be radically revised.
- ◆ **Civil society and research organisations should be enhanced.** These organisations have the competences to remind governments that pursuing the longer-term perspective, rather than short-term and short-sighted policies which suckle transient priorities and interests, will better address the root-causes of migration.

²⁵ The Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area entered into force on 30 May 2019, while the operational phase of the AfCFTA was launched the following July. Trading under the Agreement is due to start on 1 July 2020.

The success of a new generation of agreements, partnerships or mobility pacts will depend not only on what they offer but on what they will be able to deliver. Furthermore, they need to be proposed within a framework of equality and equity, not duress. For many 'sending countries', people are the most valuable 'natural resource', who need to be nurtured, developed and appreciated. Their skills and their labour have values at both ends of the equation, whether through remittances or the acquisition of translatable skills.

Such proposals apply to the relations between states or regional organisations, but they concern people whose rights, dignity and interests are too often overlooked, if not completely denied. Their work is degraded, their skills and competences neglected, their aspirations nullified. Agreements, policies and mechanisms not only affect countries' mutual relations, but directly impact on people's lives, choices and opportunities, even survival. This must always be the guiding light of the EU and its member states' actions, in order to operate in accordance with its principles and fundamental values.

More and more women migrate

The number of women on the move, including women travelling alone and independently – for work, study or as heads of households migrating to meet their families' economic needs – is constantly increasing. But migration, and African migration in particular, is typically considered through male lenses. As noted, the rights, dignity and interests of migrants are too often overlooked, and migrants' work is too often degraded. This is even more true for women.

The increase of migrant women is linked to their growing roles as economic stakeholders. In spite of this reality, women are less able than men to pursue their own interests. They usually migrate as a result of a family decision and, to a larger extent than men, choose their destination on the basis of the perceived economic opportunities and/or the presence of social networks.

In addition to the risks and challenges that male migrants face when on the move



and in the countries of destination, **migrant women must confront more specific threats and problems**. They are subject to **violence** at all stages of the migration process, be it gender-based or conflict-related (or both at the same time). Such risks are higher if the woman is not accompanied by a man. Women are also more at risk of **abuse** and **exploitation, forced labour** and **trafficking** at all stages of their journey. And they have more limited access to information and to more regular migration options.

When in the countries of destination, many migrant women are employed in the informal sectors and, in the absence of working rights, they are more subject to abuses. Women are disproportionately employed in unskilled jobs, particularly in the domestic, care and agricultural sectors, which are traditionally undervalued and unprotected. On top of this, access to services, from healthcare and education to justice and banking, is more difficult for women than it is for men.

Women who migrate for economic reasons suffer either an even larger burden of family care or separation from their offspring and families. Yet, despite all these obstacles and difficulties, evidence shows that women send roughly the same amount of remittances (corresponding to a larger proportion of their incomes) as male migrants, but they do it more regularly and over longer periods.

These observations show that **a gender-based approach to migration policies** is needed, as most migration policies tend to be gender-neutral or geared towards men. Moreover, it is very important to note that restrictive migration measures have a disproportionate impact on migrant women and on children. This is an element that needs to be taken into consideration when discussing the opportunity of opening new regular and safer migration pathways to Europe.

Towards a European labour market convergence

As noted previously, European migration legislation plays a limited regulatory role. It has been extremely difficult to overcome the many *perceived* different interests and priorities that the EU member states have when it comes to regulating access

to their territory and labour markets. Competences are jealously protected under the pretence of preserving sovereignty (a topic which is even more vehement in these times of revamped nationalism or, as it has come to be called, sovereigntism). Such differences also depend on factors like the destination country's economic situation, geographic location or language, as well as its historical (and colonial) links with the countries of transit and origin. The need for increasing convergence in a single market regime in order to preserve the Schengen area's free movement of people is nevertheless evident.

It has been well documented²⁶ to what extent global workforces, including in the EU, will rely on migrants to compensate for population-ageing and the consequent shrinking of EU member state workforces. And even if unpalatable for many European governments and for a significant part of Europe's public opinion, new common avenues for the regular entry of migrants into the European Union and its labour markets will have to be explored: from job-seeking visas to pathways for international students in transition to employment; and to vocational training and circular migration systems, etc. **The widespread and false belief that migrants 'steal' jobs from the native must be flatly rejected.** In fact, the correlation between unemployment and migration would suggest that "the dominant pattern is one by which more migration is coupled with less unemployment" rather than the opposite.²⁷

As the situation stands, national admission schemes for migrant labour compete against (the few) existing European schemes, with national actors (employers, workers and national authorities) tending to prefer the flexibility offered by the former to the complexity of the latter – thus perpetuating labour market differences from member state to member state.²⁸ **However, it will be necessary to work towards less divided and less divisive labour markets.**

26 See for example: P. Taran (2018), *Migration, development, integration and human rights. Global challenges in the 21st Century*, Global Migration Policy Brief for the Global Parliamentary Consultation on International Migration and the Global Compact on Migration, Rabat, 6-7 December (<https://www.ipu.org/download/6193>).

27 Fargue, op. cit., pp. 25-26.

28 Groenendijk, op. cit., p. 69.



Public institutions dealing with labour issues, alongside employers and trade unions, should be empowered to design new job opportunities based on the real needs of their countries.²⁹ While it is not easy to predict the needs of labour markets, trends must be identified. This information should be collected and processed at the local level (due to differences not only between states but also between regions), although plans should be shared at the national and European levels, in order to **build a bottom-up multilevel governance of labour markets** and to better orient the intra-European free movement of people and a common strategy towards migration.

With the aim of fighting irregularity and the exploitation of irregular migrants, it would also be useful to ensure legal labour market entry status for migrant workers who are already settled in the European Union but who lack a clear status of employability because of their 'legal limbo'.

Effective credential recognition systems and a shared commitment to equity and non-discrimination

Introducing fair credential recognition systems for migrant skills, and improving migrant access to clear information governing occupational requirements, would lead to predictability in terms of employment rules, and would better define the procedures and processes necessary to work in different fields.

Devising instruments to better and more quickly recognise the real skills and credentials of newcomers can also help prevent employment abuses, ensure fair treatment and fight xenophobia. The ability and resolve to collect information on migrant profiles and capacities are in fact uneven across the European Union. When people disembark at the EU's borders very little or nothing is known regard-

²⁹ For example, there is evidence that shifting to a green economy has a dual benefit. Such policies create more jobs in renewable energy, the public transport infrastructure, and energy conservation/efficiency technologies for the residential, commercial and industrial sectors, while addressing the global climate crisis. Canada's Green Energy Network has shown how a 5% federal budget allocation can create 1 million jobs within five years, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions by up to 35% (<https://greeneconomy.net.ca/one-million-climate-jobs-challenge/>).

ing their qualifications or know-how, despite the fact that this would help to channel their capacities for the benefit of both the person and the context in which they arrive. Filling this information gap is also key to enabling their legal transition into the formal labour market.

To this end, it would thus be useful to **harmonise and streamline policies at the national and European levels** concerning the process of recognising international credentials and qualifications, as well as previous working experience, also making this process more transparent and accessible.

Many immigrants face enormous difficulties when dealing with a process that is often lengthy, costly, and sometimes ‘mysterious’ and therefore frustrating. An assessment of the qualifications of potential migrants, together with the availability of a wide range of information (by means of dedicated portals, online counselling, and pre-departure support) that is even provided before arrival in the country of destination, would add predictability for migrants and employers. Such procedures would raise newcomers’ awareness of their options and chances in the labour market of the country of destination, and help them prepare for job interviews and for the improvement of their language skills – thus creating better integration opportunities.

Objective assessment methodologies (provided by trained stakeholders) for the credentials, skills and experience of migrants would help alleviate unconscious bias or discrimination, and challenge systemic xenophobia and racism – all of which are endured by migrants when they search for a job.

Another useful tool, in use in Canada for example, is the so-called mentoring programme, which matches internationally-trained professionals with the same relevant professionals based in the receiving countries. Mentors typically introduce immigrants to their professional networks, help identify potential employers and advise on culturally specific realities, speeding up newcomers’ integration into the labour market.

Measures aimed at easing newcomers’ access to the labour market should be accompanied by policies targeting the socio-economic imbalances that exist in



the host countries and communities, for example by creating job opportunities. The goal should be for migrants to complement native workers rather than substitute them, in order to avoid a strong segmentation of the labour market and the exacerbation of social divides.

Challenging xenophobia and racism, averting abuse, and promoting the integration of migrants into labour markets, while preventing social dumping, can be helped by re-orienting language. There is currently a widespread use of terms such as 'high-skilled' and 'low-skilled' (and political discourse and legislation at both European and national level reflect this distinction). However, such terms often neglect the real competences of migrants – who are frequently employed in jobs that do not reflect their skills, know-how and education. These terms subtly disguise a xenophobic, or even racist, gendered and elitist attitude. Moreover, **they tend to underestimate or even deny the actual skills inherent in certain occupations. A more apt descriptor could be 'low-wage' and 'precarious jobs'**. Childcare or care of the elderly, jobs in which mostly women are employed, for example, are considered low-skilled, yet this kind of work requires a wide range of social skills, such as patience, insight, empathy. Expressions such as 'low-wage' and 'high-wage' better express the reality of the jobs to which they refer, without stigmatising the holder or diminishing their personal history.

3. CONCLUSION

The 2019 European elections and the inauguration of a new European Commission, with a significant progressive component, offer the opportunity to steer the EU and its member states in the direction of more inclusive migration policies internally and to pursue more equitable cooperation with the countries of origin and of transit externally.

In order to achieve the new policies and promote the measures we suggest, the Union should fully exercise the responsibilities and competences it has received from the Lisbon Treaty. We are well aware that the Treaty preserves and guarantees “the right of member states to determine volumes of admission of third-country nationals coming from third countries to their territory in order to seek work” (art.79 par.5). But it also gives the European Parliament and the Council, acting in accordance with the ordinary legislative procedure, the ability to adopt measures on the conditions of entry and residence and on the definition of the rights of third-country nationals residing legally in a member state (art.79, par.2). This competence has been exercised in past years, but much more can be done within its limits, if the vision, the courage and the political will to do so are championed.

It is crucial for Europe to move away from its euro-centric vision and *perceived* European interests, and instead to address migration according to the logic of a global issue that requires global vision and measures. To persistently disregard the deep imbalances that are at the root of migration, to ignore the perspectives of the countries of origin, and to try to impose a European agenda based on fear, may reduce the number of people reaching Europe in the short-term, but it will also aggravate the socio-economic and environmental conditions that induce people to migrate in the first place.

Rethinking Europe’s migration policy requires strong political will and courage. It will encounter firm resistance from a significant number of actors, who are either tenaciously opposed to migration for ideological or utilitarian reasons, or are afraid of taking a turn that may be unpopular with voters. In the latter case, juggling between inconsistent positions will likely result in the dissatisfaction of one or other part of the electorate and eventually backfire.



Against this backdrop taking the risk of changing European citizens' perspective and narrative on migration is warranted and worthy. Migrants are people with full rights and aspirations, and changing the policy plot line represents a progressive opportunity for Europe. Instead of retreating behind increasingly hard borders, the European Union must choose to act as a fair global player. The reshaping of its relations with the countries of origin and transit, and with African countries in particular, around the need to support their sustainable development and to better govern migration together, is quite simply long overdue.

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