Chapter 13

Africa–EU Migration: Between a Rock and a Hard Place?

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Introduction

Migration is as old as human history. Africa-Europe migration is intricately woven with the timeless thread of contention, asymmetrical relations, and unresolved questions. Dating back to the pre-colonial and colonial dispensations, the movement of people across the two regions occupies a decisive space in Africa-Europe relations. Its historical resonance not only evokes the enduring ties that have bound these regions, but also illuminates the contemporary picture, wherein shared challenges and opportunities assume paramount significance. Migration in contemporary Africa-Europe relations emerges not merely as a vestige of the past, but as a potent catalyst propelling the current and future trajectory of collaboration between Africa and Europe.

This phenomenon, characterised by the fluid movement of individuals, serves as a conduit through which the rich environment of cultural interactions, economic partnerships, and social integration flourishes. It transcends the rigid iron walls of state borders, providing a robust platform for the seamless exchange of knowledge, innovation, and skills. Both African and European stakeholders, cognisant of the inevitability of migration, agree on the imperative to manage this perpetual phenomenon and address any emerging challenges. During the so-called 2015 'migration crisis', over 1 million asylum applications were filed in the 28 European Union (EU) countries, constituting only 0.4% of

the EU population (Barysch 2016). However, the migration crisis has indelibly altered the contours of migration policies within the European Union (EU), instigating a paradigm shift towards the securitisation of migration and the weaponisation of development assistance by European actors.

Apart from causing "a rise in populist and racist discourses" in the EU (Kabata & Jacobs 2023:1223), the so-called crisis transformed migration policy and engendered differing perspectives on migration among policymakers on both sides of the Mediterranean. The diverging perspectives require delicate navigation in the ongoing discourse between Africa and its most important partner – the EU. While the EU actors see migration through the lenses of security and border control, African actors believe that migration is developmentally and mutually beneficial to Europe and Africa. Undoubtedly, the Africa-Europe migration discourse is being manipulated to justify the securitisation of migration. Despite the portrayal of a crisis, African migrants constitute only 12.9% of Europe's migrant population (Barysch 2016).

Over the past decades, Africa has been bedevilled with governance crises, economic woes, aggressive extraction of mineral resources, destructive effects of climate change, political instability and social disorder, violent conflict, and – more recently – terrorism. Undoubtedly, a profound connection exists between migration and climate change, with Africa bearing the brunt of the impacts of climate change. Climate change constitutes one of the push factors of both internal and international migration, as people at risk seek refuge in more stable and developed regions (IOM 2024). In 2019, data on forceful displacement revealed that the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) oversaw 6.35 million African refugees (Bertossi, El Ouassif & Tardis 2021:6). The increasing number of African migrants on European shores calls for a renewed partnership among the two blocs. Despite the consistent engagements between policymakers from both regions on migration, many questions are being generated on the nature, pattern, and reality of Africa-EU migration, including the status of migrants – regular and irregular – in Europe.

Africa-EU migration presents a very complex phenomenon, with a multifaceted range of viewpoints and approaches. These perspectives may differ depending on the individual, group, or country involved. While these standpoints are not mutually exclusive, there are ongoing debates and engagements within African and EU member countries, and between African Union (AU) leadership and EU actors, on how best to manage migration and address its various dimensions. For instance, the migration crisis in the EU in 2015 has elevated migration to a paramount concern for EU leaders. In contrast, African leaders have accorded priority to intra-African migration as a catalyst for continental integration, conceiving Africa-EU migration through the lens of innovation and development (AU 2015:3).

The shrinking regular pathways to the EU and border fortification have harmed African migrants, who are sometimes forced to use the dangerous irregular routes through the Mediterranean Sea and the Sahara Desert. Between January and June 2023, 289 children died while crossing the Mediterranean (Mbiyozo & Maunganidze 2023). African migrants who successfully reach Europe frequently encounter discrimination and are denied access to essential infrastructure in camps as they await processing through the asylum system. The urge for the securitisation of migration should not blur how migrants are being treated and their contribution to societies – both receiving and destination countries. The urgency to harmonise migration policies across the world and safeguard the wellbeing of migrants accounted for the adoption of the United Nations (UN) Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration (GCM) in 2018. The attainment of a global development framework (with sustainable development goals – SDGs) and Africa's development and peace blueprint (Agenda 2063), are dependent on the implementation of effective and humanistic international migration protocol, such as the GCM. The EU has persistently overlooked the stipulations of the GCM in its management of migration ties with Africans. This has underscored the imperative to bridge the gap between African and EU perspectives on migration, a crucial step in formalising movement between these two regions following the principles delineated in the GCM.

Notwithstanding the EU's acclaimed adherence to democratic principles, its approach to migration has been characterised as undemocratic. This assertion stems from the regional entity consistently framing migrants through a security-centric lens, emphasising the reinforcement of external borders and the implementation of proactive prevention measures, which encompass deportation and the instrumentalisation of migration. The increasing securitisation of migration in the EU has led to a rise in the exploitation and dehumanisation of migrants, who see their arrival in Europe as a 'do or die' affair. Many of them have fallen prey to human traffickers and other illegal migrant entrepreneurs, assisting them to cross the dangerous Mediterranean Sea, the Sahara, or any other irregular pathways. The categorisation of migration as a socio-economic threat is built on the alleged apprehension that immigration may infringe on public order, leading to a more fortified EU border and turning migrants into "securitised objects" (Zanker *et al* 2019:2). EU countries such as Hungary and Slovenia have generated a 'moral panic' and stereotyped irregular migrants as "criminals and a health risk", and former EU member state, the United Kingdom, has associated migrants with terrorism (Kabata & Jacobs 2023:1224). Africa-EU migration discourses are not driven by evidence-based research, but are informed by emotions, extreme nationalism, myths, and preconceived notions.

Thus, this chapter engages the reality of Africa-EU migration, examines the facts and debunks the myths of Africa-EU migration, and contextualises the Africa-EU migration relationship. It further highlights the divergent perspectives of African and EU actors towards migration and explores the securitisation of migration and weaponisation of Official Development Assistance (ODA). While identifying Africa-EU migration as a source of concern to the EU, the chapter concludes by providing effective suggestions for the promotion of mutually beneficial migration policies in both regions.

Intra-African Migration and the Complicity of African Leaders

Discussions on intra-regional migration and migration within the broader Africa-EU migration narratives consistently highlight the prevalence of migration controls and institutional measures aimed at combatting human trafficking and smuggling (Zanker 2019). Consequently, the leadership of the AU and EU, along with the national elites of both regions, are implicated in what is perceived as an attempt to arbitrarily regulate human movement. This is antithetical to the attainment of the AU's Agenda 2063, which recognises the importance of the free movement of persons within the continent and highlights the link between migration and development. The resources and efforts dedicated to border policies and migration controls could yield more substantial benefits if redirected towards harnessing the opportunities presented by migrants and integrating them into the socio-economic fabric of both sending and receiving countries, including their respective labour forces.

Since the inception of the AU, African regional actors have developed many protocols on migration, including the 2006 Migration Policy Framework for Africa (MPFA), which aimed to strengthen the capacity of national governments and regional organisations on the following migration-related themes: labour mobility, internal migration, irregular migration, forced displacement, the migration–development nexus, inter-state co-operation, human rights issues, migration data management, and co-operation in border management.

The AU adopted the 2006 MPFA in Banjul, in The Gambia. Realising the changes in migration patterns and the emergence of contemporary issues on migration, the AU decided to review the MPFA and include a plan of action. This led to the adoption of the 'Migration Policy Framework for Africa and Plan of Action (2018-2030)' in 2018. It aims to improve migration governance within Africa through eight major themes: migration governance, labour migration and education, diaspora engagement, border governance, irregular migration, forced displacement, internal migration, and migration and trade (AU 2018). In comparison to

the EU migration policy, the AU's MPFA is inward-looking, but the EU's policy is predominantly outward-looking. The EU has been able to ensure the free movement of citizens of its member states within the bloc, but the AU and its member states have now shown the required commitment to the implementation of its free movement protocol.

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Intergovernmental Agency for Development (IGAD) have the most developed common migration policy among the regional economic commissions (RECs). ECOWAS adopted a protocol relating to the free movement of persons, residence and establishment in 1979, while IGAD prides itself on the establishment of an effective regional migration policy framework (RMPF). In 2008 and 2010, IGAD's regional consultative processes (RCPs) on migration held two meetings that served as the foundation for the implementation of the IGAD-RMPF (IGAD 2012:5). The migration policies of both IGAD and ECOWAS are enforceable, but the AU protocol and policy on migration and mobility are not legally binding. This accounts for its inability to ensure member states' compliance with AU initiatives on migration.

Since 2020, seven African countries – Gabon, Niger, Burkina Faso, Sudan, Guinea, Chad, and Mali – have experienced military coups (see Akinola and Makombe 2022). This has heightened insecurity and engendered human rights abuses, fuelling irregular migration to Europe. In South Africa, the resurgence of xenophobic violence against foreigners of African descent over the past decade has claimed lives. The securitisation of migration and institutionalisation of anti-migration sentiments have driven a significant percentage of foreign nationals out of the country. The xenophobic attack in 2008 resulted in over 60 reported deaths and the displacement of about 100 000 people (OHCHR 2022). Institutionalised anti-migration measures, the rise of the anti-migration vigilante group Operation Dudula, and the politicisation and securitisation of migration have rendered the country inhospitable for migrants, especially irregular migrants. Consequently, South Africa – once considered migrant-friendly – is no longer a viable option for many African migrants, both

regular and irregular, prompting them to seek refuge in Europe and other continents.

Xenophobia and racialised anti-migration have also manifested in North Africa. From January to August 2024, Algeria repatriated over 20 000 migrants of various nationalities to its border with Niger (Human Rights Watch 2024:465). The migrants found themselves in Assamakka town, as thousands of them were stranded, lacking access to shelter, healthcare, protection, and basic amenities. The situation was exacerbated by military coups and the closure of borders, further deteriorating the humanitarian conditions for the migrants. Tunisia's president Kais Saied instructed the interior minister to combat irregular migration and save the country from the deliberate attempt by irregular migrants to distort Tunisian identity. He blurted out, "Hordes of illegal immigrants from Sub-Saharan Africa are still arriving, with all the violence, crime and unacceptable practices" (Mhaka 2023). The AU must be credited for condemning the anti-migration, anti-Pan-African, and "shocking statement", which appears unusual given that, at the time, the estimated count of Black African migrants in the country, including those lacking proper documentation, stood at just 21 000, within a population of 12 million people (Mhaka 2023).

Though African migrants of Black descent have been experiencing human rights abuse and discrimination in Tunisia over the years, the country's security forces headed the clarion call of President Saied by arresting over 850 Black African foreigners in February 2023, including both regular and irregular migrants as well as students (Human Rights Watch 2024:627). In a similar fashion to the deportation of migrants in Algeria, Tunisia further deported about 2 000 people to its border with Libya and Algeria. The stranded migrants included asylum seekers, pregnant women, and children (Human Rights Watch 2024:627). Hostility against African migrants in some African countries, particularly those who continue to see their countries and leaders as the beacons of Pan-Africanism, is a mockery of African unity and solidarity. It becomes contradictory to expect the leaders of many African countries that have ignored the AU's migration policy and

implemented stern anti-migration laws to demand improved migration governance from the EU and its member states.

Africa-EU Migration: Factualising the False Narratives

Migration has attracted diverse definitions and conceptualisations due to its politicisation and securitisation. Many studies and policymakers have also tried to categorise migration into different forms, including regular and irregular, legal and illegal, voluntary and forced, which makes the concept very problematic, particularly from the standpoint of migrants, whose voices have usually been blurred. In the context of this chapter, it is thus more appropriate to see migration from the global context, as a "movement of a person either across an international border (international migration), or within a state (internal migration) for more than one year irrespective of the causes, voluntary or involuntary, and the means, regular or irregular, used to migrate" (EC n.d.). The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) also defines it as a "movement of a person or a group of persons, either across an international border (international migration) or within a state (internal migration), encompassing any kind of movement of people, whatever its length, composition and causes" (EC n.d.).

Indeed, conversations around Africa-EU migration do not reflect reality but are constructed in a way to justify the securitisation of migration through political rhetoric and media agenda-setting. Fifty-three percent of African migration is intra-continental and African migrants constitute only 12.9% of the migrant population in Europe. During the so-called migration crisis in 2015, about 1 million applications for asylum were filed in the 28 EU countries, which represented an increase from the 2014 estimate of 600 000 (Barysch 2016). However, applications around this period constituted only 0.4% of the EU population (Barysch 2016). The data on Africa-EU migration have been dominated by EU institutions due to the weakness of African civil society organisations, and the lackadaisical posture of African governments and other global actors, the majority of whom have allegedly been accused of favouring the EU's approach to

migration issues. This has led to an imbalance in perspectives, with EU-centric viewpoints prevailing.

The rhetoric from EU actors often creates the impression that the entire EU is inundated by migrants from developing countries, especially irregular migrants from Africa. Contrary to this, Africa hosts 25% of the global refugee population, with only 7.2% of African migrants in the EU being refugees. In 2019, out of the 28.7 million global refugee population, Africa hosted 7.3 million refugees and asylum seekers, which constituted 25% of the global population of refugees (IOM/AUC 2020:15). As contained in this IOM/AUC report, Afrobarometer survey conducted in 2018 shows that only 20% of respondents indicated their willingness to migrate from Africa to Europe. Intra-regional migration within Sub-Saharan Africa is estimated at over 70%, and the inclusion of the Maghreb countries and South Africa makes it 53%, while the African migrants in the EU constitute 26% of Africans on the move (Bertossi, El Ouassif & Tardis 2021:2).

Contrary to the conventional narratives that migrants are poor people, many people do not have the resources to travel through either regular or irregular pathways. As revealed by a 2019 UNDP report *Scaling Fences: Voices of Irregular African Migrants to Europe*, 50% of the 1 000 migrants that were interviewed in the study relocated abroad despite having a job and making a living in their home countries. Indeed, "it is not the poorest who emigrate... more development leads to more internal migration (rural flight) and more international migration. African migrants with limited material resources choose to travel short distances" (Bertossi, El Ouassif & Tardis 2021:7). Though this is more applicable to regular migration, studies have also shown that irregular migration from Africa to the EU – via the Sahara or Mediterranean – is quite expensive. As far back as 2005, migrants have had to pay about US$1 250 from Senegal to the Canary Islands in Europe in a traditional small wooden fishing boat (Kohnert 2007:12).

As of 2021, about 34 million Africans were international migrants, while 104 million Asians, 62 million Europeans and 37 million Latin Americans were living outside their home countries (Bertossi, El Ouassif & Tardis 2021:6). In the West

African sub-region, 90% of human movement is regional and only 10% of migrants move from the region to the Maghreb or Europe. (Bertossi, El Ouassif & Tardis 2021:7). In 2020, only 3% of the African population resided outside their home country, compared to 8.5% of the European population (Mo Ibrahim/Africa Foundation 2022). Africa hosts 82% of African international migrants, and Europe accommodates only 12.7%. Of the total African migrants in the EU, just 7.2% are refugees. In 2022, the EU received 3 million migrant workers through legal pathways, compared to 300 000 arriving through irregular channels (Liboreiro 2023).

Africa-EU Migration: Dangerous Route, High Casualties

The EU's migration control policy – particularly the sealing off and policing of its southern borders and the coastal line between Morocco and Mauritania against irregular migrants – has led to a shift in migration routes to Europe (Kohnert 2007:12). During the first four months of 2022, the restriction of legal routes enforced migration from the East and Horn of Africa, and intensified border security near the eastern Mediterranean Sea (adjacent to the Saudi-Yemen border) resulted in the tragic loss of over 430 lives and injuries to approximately 650 migrants (Frouws & Horwood 2023). These incidents were reportedly attributed to gunfire from Saudi security forces. In a parallel timeframe in 2023, a distressing toll continued, with at least 75 migrants losing their lives due to actions by Saudi officials at the border, and 226 sustaining injuries. In their bid to cross to the EU through irregular routes, migrants have been caught in the crossfire of the Yemen conflicts. "Girls as young as 13 years old have reportedly been raped by Saudi security forces and pushed back across the border into Yemen without their clothes", while in North Yemen, close to the Saudi border, 10 000 bodies of migrants were found in a cemetery (Frouws & Horwood 2023).

African irregular migrants continue to endure perilous journeys, facing harsh conditions as they attempt to reach the EU through hazardous Mediterranean Sea routes and the Sahara

Desert. Data between 2000 and 2005 recorded that between 65 000 and 80 000 migrants used the Sahara route to reach the EU. During this period, the EU supported Morocco to strengthen its capacity to police its border around the Spanish enclaves of Melilla and Ceuta, and along the Atlantic coast (Kohnert 2007:8). From 2015 to 2022, 13 out of 19 of the EU-funded projects in Niger were directed towards border controls and law enforcement (Grillmeier, Fallon & Haiges 2023). During this time frame, Germany allocated more than €166 million (£142 million) to fund 14 projects related to migration (Grillmeier, Fallon & Haiges 2023). While the Nigerien government responded by ostensibly criminalising irregular migration traversing its territory, the broader investment in border control has not proven efficacious in completely stemming the tide of irregular migration to the EU. This is attributed to the adaptive strategies employed by 'migration entrepreneurs', who have ingeniously identified alternative routes, particularly across seas and deserts, thus circumventing the purported deterrent measures.

Between 2014 and 2018, over 6 600 Africans died, mostly from starvation, dehydration, physical abuse, ill health, and lack of access to medical facilities, as they attempted to cross the Sahara Desert toward Europe (Schlein 2018). The Sahara Desert includes the 400 000 square km that incorporates the Ténéré desert, extending from northeastern Niger into western Chad (Grillmeier, Fallon & Haiges 2023). This vast expanse poses significant challenges to search and rescue missions due to its complexity, compounded by the presence of threats from armed bandits, kidnapping networks, and terrorist organisations operating in the Sahel region. Tragically, thousands have lost their lives, with many disappearing in the Mediterranean Sea.

Between January and March 2021, an estimated 4 159 migrants had been intercepted in the Mediterranean Sea by the Libyan coastguard and returned to the neighbouring Maghrebi countries.[1] From January to September 2023, approximately 186 000 people arrived by sea in Italy, Greece, Spain, Cyprus, and

1 See https://ipatc.joburg/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/ipatc-policy-brief-9-centering-the-voices-of-afri9can-migrants-in-africa-eu-migration.pdf.

Malta. Within this period, more than 2 500 migrants lost their lives or went missing while attempting the perilous crossing of the Mediterranean Sea (Bowman 2023). Those unable to reach Europe often choose to stay in Northern African countries such as Libya, Egypt, Morocco, and Tunisia (Aslan 2022). Some stay voluntarily, others are trapped, and a portion of the migrant community faces slavery, sexual abuse, and unpaid labour.

Since 2014, the Central Mediterranean Sea route, primarily utilised by Africans, witnessed the highest number of dead or missing persons, estimated at 22 746 individuals (Missing Migrants Project 2024). This was followed by the Western Sea path, with 3 712 and the Eastern Mediterranean Sea route, where approximately 2 349 migrants were dead or missing. The table below shows the causes and number of deaths through irregular routes.

Table 13.1: Cause and Number of Deaths Since 2014

	Deaths	**Cause of Death**
1.	311	vehicle accident/death linked to hazardous transport
2.	263	harsh environmental conditions/lack of adequate shelter, food, water
3.	73	violence
4.	51	accidental death
5.	29	sickness/lack of access to adequate healthcare
6.	26 867	drowning
7.	1 213	mixed or unknown

Source: Missing Migrants Project (2024)

As indicated in the table, most deaths were recorded through drowning, followed by those that were unaccounted for and thereby declared missing. The image below shows the number of dead and missing persons per year. Tragedies unfolding in the vast expanse of the Mediterranean Sea have regrettably become a familiar narrative, permeating an unsettling sense

of normalcy. Embracing a humanistic paradigm in addressing migration challenges, entailing the augmentation of legal avenues for prospective migrants and fortification of rescue endeavours, possesses the potential to significantly mitigate the toll of these regrettable casualties.

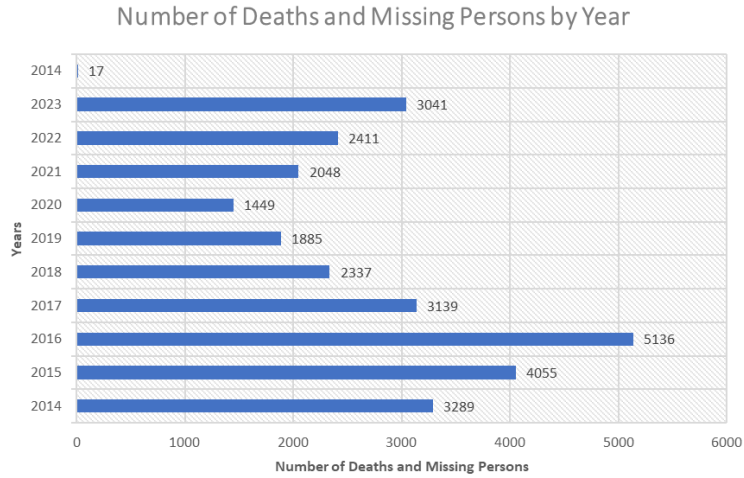

Figure 13.1: Number of Deaths and Missing Persons by Year

Source: Missing Migrants Project 2024

The EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF) and the inception of the Team Europe Initiatives (TEI) in 2021 were geared towards the provision of financial support to sending and transit countries, with the specific aim of combating irregular migration. Nevertheless, the efficacy of these endeavours is potentially compromised by the absence of a cohesive funding strategy, which is indispensable for addressing the multifaceted challenges necessitating strategic, long-term planning (Bisong 2023). Bisong further maintains that the expeditious *modus operandi* evident in both the EUTF and the extant TEIs has attracted criticism, as it is perceived as predisposed to inadequacy, given that a sustained resolution to the underlying drivers of migration mandates a protracted, integrated, and sustainable approach.

Such intervention remains conspicuously absent from the present initiatives.

The quest to argue for the protection of irregular migrants should not be mistaken for supporting irregular channels, human trafficking, and human smuggling from Africa to the EU. The dire socio-economic reality, political tensions, reckless governance, violent conflict and insecurity, and climate change have displaced people from their homes. In addition to conflict, climate-induced[2] migration has been one of the major reasons for human displacement and push factors of Africa-EU migration. As noted in the IOM Strategic Plan (2024-2028), "conflict, climate change, environmental degradation and uneven development are driving more displacement and irregular migration, yet we lack the frameworks and resources to adequately protect the many people who have little choice but to migrate to find safety and a livelihood" (IOM 2024:5).

In Northern Nigeria, the escalation of temperatures and unpredictable rainfall has heightened the competition for resources between farmers and herders, precipitating a transformative shift in conventional migratory routes and escalating the tensions underlying intercommunal conflicts. Other African countries also experienced climate-induced displacements. For example, in December 2023, Somalia experienced about 86 000 new internal displacements: 3 000 were caused by conflict or insecurity, 4 000 were because of drought, 77 000 were displaced due to floods, and 2 000 were because of other factors (UNHCR 2024).

The prolonged conflicts in various African countries have triggered extensive human displacements, contributing significantly to the increase in the number of African migrants in the EU. Conflict emerges as a direct root cause of forced displacement, exemplified by the ongoing violent conflict that broke out on 15 April 2023 in Sudan's capital (Khartoum) between the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and Sudan Armed Forces (SAF),

2 Based on an IOM report, "Climate-induced migration occurs when individuals or communities leave their homes due to the adverse impacts of climate change, such as prolonged drought, flooding or the loss of arable land".

after an unresolved disagreement between General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan (SAF leader) and the leader of the RSF, Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo. The devastating conflict soon spread across the country. Since the conflict broke out, both factions have consistently employed both small light weapons (SLW) and powerful explosive weapons in densely populated regions, leading to numerous civilian casualties and substantial damage to civilian property and critical infrastructure.

As of September 2023, the United Nations (UN) indicated that the conflict had resulted in at least 9 000 reported fatalities – an estimate likely lower than the actual toll – and forced 5.4 million people to flee, with 4.1 million displaced internally and over 1 million seeking refuge in neighbouring countries (Human Rights Watch 2024:591). Based on the report, over 70% of health facilities in the conflict-affected zones were not functioning, and about 20 million Sudanese required food assistance. The warring factions threatened the lives of political activists and detained many, and about 300 000 fled to Chad, which is one of the transit countries to the EU (Human Rights Watch 2024:591-592). Approximately 5 million people have been displaced from their homes. Of these, 4.4 million are internally displaced, with over 1.1 million seeking refuge outside Sudan (UNHCR 2024), and some opting for irregular routes to Europe. Expectedly, many of the internally displaced persons (IDPs) may later make their way into the EU, as regular or irregular migrants.

The AU recognised that "many who migrate in an irregular manner do so because their countries are affected by armed conflict, political instability and economic decline" (AU 2016:5). Mere recognition does not save lives; concerted commitments by all the migration actors are required to achieve humane, safe, and orderly Africa-EU migration.

Africa-EU Migration Relationship: Motion without Movement

To foster a closer Africa-European partnership, European actors facilitated the Cotonou Agreement that defined the operational modalities of the Africa-European relationship, under the

platform of the African, Caribbean, and Pacific (ACP) countries. The pact, which replaced the 1975 Lomé Convention, was signed by the European Commission and its member states, and the ACP and its member states, including AU member states. The Cotonou Agreement was constructed upon three foundations: development co-operation, economic and trade co-operation, and political dimension. Article 13(5) the 2000 Cotonou Agreement stipulates the obligations of all the states to "accept the return of and readmission of any of its nationals who are illegally present on the territory of an ACP State, at that State's request and without further formalities" (EUR-LEX 2000:13).

African and EU actors have consistently reiterated their intentions to engage in migration and mobility within the framework of the Joint Africa-EU Strategy, such as the 4th Africa-EU Summit in Brussels in April 2014. The 2015 Valletta Summit was the first time African and EU political leadership would meet on the vexed migration phenomenon. The meeting attracted about 60 leaders from both parties (Zanker 2019). The EU-Africa Summit in 2014 gave more impetus to migration, as it adopted an action plan (2014-2017) and prioritised six important issues on migration: trafficking in human beings, remittances, diaspora, mobility and labour migration (including intra-African mobility), international protection (including internally displaced persons), and irregular migration (EC 2015).

Due to the so-called 2015 migration crisis, African and EU leaders held the Valletta Summit on migration between 11 and 12 November 2015. The summit aimed at six major migration issues – addressing the root causes of irregular migration and forced displacement; enhancing co-operation on legal migration and mobility; reinforcing the protection of migrants and asylum seekers; preventing and fighting irregular migration; migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings; and working more closely to improve co-operation on return, readmission and reintegration.[3]

3 For more information on the Valletta Summit, see https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/international-summit/2015/11/11-12/.

Europe continues to establish migration relationships with Africa on three different levels: continental through the AU, regional via the regional economic communities (such as ECOWAS), and bilateral through direct engagements with specific African countries. These are characterised by financial and logistical support. The EU has been able to enhance its working relationships through different pacts and "policy dialogues with countries along the western migratory route (Rabat Process[4]) and the eastern migratory route (Khartoum Process[5])" (EC 2015). The AU is actively involved in these processes, which have been characterised by asymmetric relationships.

Between 17 and 18 February 2022, the EU and AU leaders met in Brussels to renew their partnership. The co-operation involved an Africa-Europe investment package of €150 billion, the provision of 450 million vaccine doses to Africa by mid-2022, enhanced peace and security co-operation, an enhanced migration and mobility partnership, and a commitment to multilateralism. The meeting included the following agreement on migration: a) preventing irregular migration, b) enhancing co-operation against smuggling and trafficking in human beings, c) supporting strengthened border management and achieving effective improvements on return, readmission and reintegration, and d) enhancing migration dialogues between the two continents. The sixth EU-AU summit produced a joint statement which reinforced the decision of both organisations and their members to "work in a spirit of joint responsibility and commitment, in full respect of international law and fundamental human rights" (EU 2022). Despite these promises, Africa-EU migration continues to be characterised by human rights abuse, asymmetry of relationships and EU's hegemony, dehumanisation of migrants and the silencing of their voices, as well as a subtle rejection of the provisions of the GCM.

4 It involves engagements between European countries and African countries from North, West, and Central Africa, including a close partnership with ECOWAS. It facilitated partnerships between Spain, Portugal, Senegal, Mauritania, Cape Verde, Morocco, The Gambia, and Guinea Bissau.

5 It involves partnerships with five African countries: Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, South Sudan, and Sudan.

On 15 November 2023, the European Union and the Organisation of Africa, Caribbean, and Pacific States (OACPS) – formerly the ACP – signed the Samoa Agreement, which effectively replaced the Cotonou Pact, with a specific focus on migration. The Samoa Agreement has the following six pillars:

1. democracy and human rights;
2. sustainable economic growth and development;
3. climate change;
4. human and social development;
5. peace and security; and
6. migration and mobility.

This agreement is operative at the regional level; nevertheless, the EU and its member countries have also facilitated partnership with individual African states that are key to the externalisation of migration policy. For instance, the Italian prime minister, Giorgia Meloni, invited the leadership of many African and EU countries for a sensitive meeting on how to govern the vexed migration issues (Mbiyozo & Maunganidze 2023). African countries – Egypt, Ethiopia, Libya, Mauritania, Niger, and Tunisia – attended the meeting.

Africa-EU Migration Discourse: Divergent Standpoints

Broadly speaking, African perspectives regard migration as a natural and developmental phenomenon that is mutually beneficial to both sending and receiving countries, but EU partners tend to view it through the lens of securitisation and border control. The pivotal moment that elevated migration policy to the forefront of European politics and policymaking was the Syrian refugee crisis in 2015, leading to the securitisation of migration. However, it is essential to recognise that migration from Africa was not the most decisive primary catalyst for the 2015 migration problem and the EU's border control policy. Certainly, in the year 2015, 17% of registered asylum seekers in the EU originated from European nations external to the EU bloc, Norway, and Switzerland. This encompassed a total of 68 000 asylum seekers from Kosovo, 67 000 from Albania, and 21 000

from Ukraine (Pew Research Centre 2016). Notably, these nations had previously contributed migrants during their tenure as part of the former Yugoslavia and the United States of the Soviet Republic – USSR (Pew Research Centre 2016).

Both African and EU policymakers agree on the interlink between migration and development, particularly the need to ensure proper regulation of migration; however, "Europeans see it [development] as an alternative to migration, Africans see it as a major potential for development" (Bertossi, El Ouassif & Tardis 2021:16). Since remittances have been surpassing ODA for the past years, it seems logical to have prioritised the flow of remittances from Africa to the EU, which could have reduced the pressures on the EU for development assistance. However, African leaders seem to have preferred development assistance. Beyond direct financial benefits, development assistance – which encompasses institution building, training, technical support, and policy development for migration-related purposes – creates an incentive for African governments to collaborate with the EU (Zanker *et al* 2019:11). However, a slight divergence exists between African policymakers and their citizens regarding the impact of development assistance on African citizens (see Zanker *et al* 2019:13). While many within the political class may prefer development assistance, a significant portion of which is being siphoned off from public accounts into private pockets through well-organised networks of political corruption, the citizens often derive more tangible benefits from remittances.

Both regional policymakers agreed on the need to foster more partnerships on Africa-EU migration governance, but the parties' perceptions of migration governance remain at odds. Africans are advocating for the desecuritisation of migration and improvement in the human conditions of migrants in the EU, but the EU actors are keener on controlling or managing migration outside of the borders of the EU member states. African leaders are very enthusiastic about the 2018 Global Compact for Migration, but their European counterparts are not committed to the implementation of the compact. Africans are keener on beneficial migration policies; the EU are very enthusiastic about beneficial trade policies.

Furthermore, the AU actors are more interested in the protection of the human rights of all migrants (irrespective of their status and categorisation) in both transit and destination countries, but the EU leaders are more interested in stopping the boats from reaching the EU. The EU actors are keenly disposed to the deportation and return of irregular migrants, while deportation is unfavourable and unpopular within the African migration discourse. Apart from reducing the number of irregular migrants in the region, European actors see deportation as a potent deterrent to prospective irregular migrants from Africa. From the African standpoint, deportation reduces remittances and puts pressure on the dwindling employment opportunities in the origin countries.

Across Africa, there is also a perception that Europe was partly responsible for Africa's socio-political and economic woes, through the centuries of slavery and decades of colonialism and imperialism. Furthermore, the "EU contributed to Africa's economic misery due to its selfish external trade policy" (Kohnert 2007:8). The EU and its allies are also to be blamed for the imposition of Western-style neoliberal political and economic templates by the Bretton Woods Institutions (International Monetary Fund and World Bank) and other Western donor organisations (Akinola 2021). While internal problems have contributed to Africa's struggles, externally imposed ideologies – such as the structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) – have destabilised African economies and generated immense contradictions that deepened structural violence and engendered armed conflicts (see Akinola 2021).

Thus, a cross-section of Africans sees Africa-EU migration as well justified and legitimate, thereby constituting Europe's 'pay-back cheque' or reparations for the sins of slavery, imperialism, and colonialism. Despite the appealing narrative this holds, African regional actors and national political elites (the external actors) have the responsibility to ensure the safety, security, and development of Africa. Africa has the required resources (both human and material) for the economic and political development of African countries and improvement in the livelihoods and human conditions of its population; however,

there has been a lack of political will to transform these into human capacity development, improvement in the livelihood of poor Africans, and sustainable national economic development.

The importance of migration and the African diaspora community to the AU is reflected in its decision to make them the 'sixth region' of the AU Commission. The African diaspora has shown their willingness to give back to the continent through social and financial capital. Africa received over $42 billion in remittances in 2020, making up the largest source of net international inflows after foreign direct investment, thereby surpassing ODA. Nigeria stands as the foremost net recipient of remittances in Sub-Saharan Africa. In 2017, the country garnered a substantial sum of US$22 billion in official remittances, constituting 5.9% of Nigeria's GDP (Zanker *et al* 2019:9).

The AU notes that the contributions of diaspora and migrant communities (i.e. through remittances), both within Africa and beyond its borders, play a crucial role in the development of the continent (AU 2016:6; Akinola 2022). IOM Director General Amy Pope conceived migration as a powerful instrument for development, prosperity, and progress (IOM 2024). Over the past centuries, migration has been "a cornerstone of development, prosperity and progress for many" (IOM 2024:5). The AU acknowledges the significance of remittances as a tool to bolster individuals' resilience against shocks and contribute to poverty eradication (AU 2018). The imperative is underscored by the need to enhance the efficiency of remittance transfer mechanisms and reduce the associated costs. Yet, the AU lacks a comprehensive continental diaspora engagement policy that seamlessly incorporates the diaspora community into national and regional development initiatives. Such a policy should also strive to transform remittances from merely contributing to family wellbeing into powerful instruments for both national and continental development.

There is also a differing perspective on the extension of legal pathways as one of the instruments for reducing irregular migrants in the EU. Initially, the EU leaders considered measures to implement migration-friendly policies, including the

enhancement of legal migration pathways; however, migration issues soon became securitised and instrumentalised by the EU and many of its member states (Mbiyozo & Maunganidze 2023). Though the African stakeholders on migration continue to favour the expansion of legal pathways to the EU, this has been subtly resisted by European policymakers. Between 2010 and 2016, the number of visas issued to African nationals for labour purposes was reduced to 80% (Bertossi, El Ouassif & Tardis 2021).

Efficiently administered pathways for regular migration enhance global value chains and contribute to development financing through remittances and diaspora capital (IOM 2024). The AU is very passionate about the migration-development nexus and agrees on the need to devise proactive strategies, implement sustainable policies, and create the required "environment frameworks that foster Diaspora participation in the development of the continent and their countries of origin" (AU 2018:5).

From Securitisation of Migration to the Weaponisation of ODA

The EU has closely partnered with African RECs to enhance the migration policy of Africa and the EU. For instance, ECOWAS was allocated €24 million from the European Development Fund (EDF) to enhance the effective implementation of the ECOWAS Free Movement of Persons' Protocol and its Common Approach on Migration (EC 2015). Furthermore, about €5 million was allocated under the Development Co-operation Instrument (DCI)-Migration and Asylum Programme to protect and assist Somali refugees in the Horn of Africa, mainly in Kenya and Djibouti. These forms of assistance were mutually beneficial and positively received in Africa, thereby supporting the assertion that not all financial assistance from the EU to Africa is directed at border control.

While originally the EU's migration issues were "limited to internal policy, the external aspect of European migration policy is now becoming a central pillar. It has led to the practice of externalisation, that is, a process through which the European

Union outsources a share of the control of its borders beyond its own territory" (D'Humières 2018:1). The European Council confirmed the main objectives of the EU's migration policy in September 2016 were to "reduce flows of illegal migration and increase return rates" (Tardis 2018). For instance, the EUTF was established in 2015 on the assumption that development assistance can prevent or control migration. The EU has thus popularised the weaponisation of aid and instrumentalisation of migration as a potent instrument of foreign policy and diplomacy, which has endangered Africa's survival. The AU, most African governments, and RECs are disturbingly attached to the EU for development co-operation and regional security. Several African political elites conceive Africa's development through the lens of European assistance (Mitzen 2006). Receiving external support is not the main problem; the decisive challenge is the dependence of many African leaders on this foreign assistance, including their acceptance of the negative conditionality attached to such foreign interventions.

For the EU, ODA has become a new conditional aid, premised upon adherence to the EU migration policy and its securitisation initiatives. Connecting the EUTF with weaponisation and the EU's asymmetric migration relations with Africa, Bertossi, El Ouassif & Tardis (2021:19) maintain that,

> The EUTF differs from official development assistance by its intervention logic and mode of governance. It favours project support rather than budget support for states... Since it was founded, the Fund's Strategic Board, made up of representatives from the European Commission and donor states, has decided to limit its list of priorities to issues of return, migration governance, the EU-Africa Dialogue on Migration, the global response to the refugee situation, and security and stabilisation.

As noted by Zanker *et al* (2019), "the securitised vision of migration" dates back to the 1980s. It was reinforced after the so-called migration crisis in the EU, when over 1 million migrants entered Europe, and further heightened in the last few years, with the devastating effects of COVID-19 and the growing popularity of

right-wing political parties in the region. After the establishment of the EUTF, by September 2016, the EU explicitly outlined the primary goals of its migration policy, emphasising the intent to "reduce flows of illegal migration and increase return rates" (Tardis 2018). Consequently, the EU has been promoting the strategic use of migration as a powerful instrument in foreign policy and diplomacy, characterised by its instrumentalisation of migration and the weaponisation of development assistance. As noted by Mbiyozo and Maunganidze (2023), "leveraging development funding in exchange for migration co-operation has had dire outcomes for Africa. These include supporting Libyan militia and obliterating local economies in Niger without providing alternatives". The dire economic implication of instrumentalisation in Niger tends to push more people out of the country in search of greener pastures, which will nullify the objectives of the EU's migration containment policy.

The EU maintains that "migration and mobility have the potential to act as powerful enablers for economic, social and environmental development in low- and middle-income countries of origin and destination" (European Commission 2015). Yet, there are diverse institutional and policy measures to curtail the opportunities that migration presents to Africa and its people through its securitisation of migration and weaponisation of development assistance. Furthermore, European policies on returns, institutional barriers against money transfer, and restrictions in the legal migration channels and labour regulations are antithetical to the development of African economies and their people.

Since the AU and its member states have also presented migration as an important mechanism for economic development (AU 2015), it becomes illogical that African leaders and many countries continue to co-operate with the EU on the implementation of its policies on containment and forceful returns. Undoubtedly, "the EU intends to use a lot of money to get African countries to comply with its migration objectives. Indeed, it is international donors, particularly the EU, that support African governments in implementing their migration strategies. This casts doubt on the sustainability and ownership of migration

policies by African governments" (Bertossi, El Ouassif &Tardis 2021:18). The instrumentalisation of migration and weaponisation of ODA has played an important role in 'convincing' African states to support the EU's securitisation regime.

The EU was less concerned about Saed's human rights records and compelling cases of poor governance. Indeed, the securitisation of migration engenders "severe costs to democracy, safety and lives" (Mbiyozo & Maunganidze 2023). Both the EU leaders and the UK government have shown no reservations in dealing with African governments like Rwanda and Tunisia, that have been accused of autocracy. Therefore, "to stop migration flows, the EU and its Member States have engaged in bilateral relations with countries whose dominant political values are not aligned with the EU's proclaimed values of democracy, human rights, freedom, inclusion and participation" (Bisong 2023:45).

The rigid stance of the EU actors on migration and the dehumanisation of its migration policy may harm the consistent relationship between Africa and the EU bloc. The EU is still Africa's biggest partner. For example, in February 2020, the initiation of the EU-APSA[6] IV unfolded with a substantial financial pledge of €40.5 million spanning a four-year horizon – 2020-2024 (ECOSOCC 2023). This financial commitment was specifically directed towards enhancing the capacity and co-ordination of APSA components, equipping them to adeptly respond to evolving security challenges in Africa. However, the intensified 'romance' between Africa and non-Western actors, such as China, Russia, and Saudi Arabia may work against the hegemony of the West in Africa. The recent hostility between France and West African francophone countries, leading to the gradual exit of France from the Sahel, should be a major concern. Furthermore, the low publicity that surrounded the signing of the Samoa Agreement between the EU and OACPS must have jolted the European community.

Moreover, the joint declaration after the 2022 EU-AU summit reflected the aim of the 2000 Cotonou agreement,

6 African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) is the African Union's framework for peace and security on the continent.

particularly concerning returns. The United Kingdom struck a deal with Rwandan president Paul Kagame in Prime Minister Sunak's promise to "stop the boats" bringing irregular migrants to the country across the English Channel from France, where over 29 000 migrants made the dangerous journey in 2023 (Lawless 2024). When compared with the 42 000 migrants that used the same route in 2022, the UK's border control regime is becoming very effective. Though no migrants have been relocated to Rwanda, the country has received a substantial sum of up to £240 million ($305 million) through the agreement (Lawless 2024).

President Paul Kagame's asylum arrangement with the UK government, involving the permanent relocation of asylum seekers from Britain to Rwanda, has faced significant criticism in Africa and the UK. Kagame believed he was sincerely attempting to implement both the 2000 Cotonou Agreement and the pact between African leaders and the EU during their meetings, including the 2022 summit. While donor organisations and the West are free to include conditionality in loans and financial assistance to developing countries, it is unthinkable to turn irregular migrants and asylum seekers into 'objects' of conditionality and weaponisation.

However, President Kagame has been one of the few political leaders who have shown concern about the plights of irregular migrants in the transit countries and across the dangerous routes to the EU. He has forged partnerships with the AU, the EU, and other international actors on migration since 2017. Specifically, Rwanda's Kagame has partnered with the AU and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to establish an Emergency Transit Mechanism (ETM) for evacuating or rescuing refugees and asylum seekers out of Libya (AU 2024). For whatever reason, including the weaponisation of developmental assistance and instrumentalisation of migration, Kagame has therefore filled the vacuum created by the regional and continental body and their complacency in effectively responding to the plights of Africa-EU migrants.

Conclusion: Towards Improved Africa-EU Migration Relations

The chapter has attempted to respond to Africa-EU migration relations through the lenses of history and current trajectory and to reinforce the strategic importance of migration to Africa-EU relations. The emerging nexus between migration and sustainable development resonates within the overarching frameworks delineated in global and continental developmental blueprints. Thus, the attainment of both Agenda 2063 and SDGs are dependent on the effective management of international migration, particularly their recognition of the imperativeness of creating the enabling environment to ensure the safety of migrants and exploring the opportunities that migration presents to both sending and receiving countries.

Currently, migration remains the most contentious discourse between African and EU policymakers. As noted in this chapter, migration partnerships between the two regions involve both the regional institutions and their member states. For instance, France and Italy have made concerted efforts to curb irregular migration through collaboration with African nations like Tunisia. However, addressing the issue requires expanding legal pathways to Europe and eliminating institutional barriers to visa processing and entry. Furthermore, a policy intervention, supported by the EU, to mitigate the impact of climate change, such as flooding and drought, would be more impactful in reducing migration than the EU's efforts at securitisation and border controls. Thus, apart from requesting aid to assist those displaced by climate change, the AU should seek the support of the EU in reviving the moribund early warning system to detect and prevent some of the risks posed by climate change. For instance, relocating people from a community prone to flooding is more proactive than supporting them after flooding. The EU could also strengthen the AU's Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings and other initiatives to eradicate human smuggling.

The path to improved Africa-EU migration relations requires the following specific recommendations:

1. There must be a shared priority between African and EU actors, backed by transparency and strong political will and commitments.
2. Desecuritisation of migration and deweaponisation of financial and development assistance from the EU to Africa should be a priority. Similarly, African actors should impress on their EU counterparts to abolish the social, national, and religious profiling of migrants at the border posts.
3. The historical asymmetric relation between Africa and the EU must be addressed; this is an important corollary of mutually beneficial migration governance.
4. Africa-EU narratives must be rewritten and its myths debunked through research. Migration policy should be based on research and not emotions or nationalistic extremism.
5. We must resolve the moral dilemma for African actors due to rising anti-migration feelings in Africa. The West has always 'lived by example' through the exportation of political and economic systems (capitalism and democracy), including a push for the liberalisation of African borders for free trade; thus, they should also take the lead in migration humanism.
6. There must be a rethinking of the root causes of the problem, and developmental assistance. ODA is not a well-targeted intervention. An increase in migration-related ODA, like strengthening border security of sending or transit countries, does not necessarily reduce migration. It may lead to a shift to irregular routes, raise in the cost of travels, and encourage the emergence of new networks of human traffickers and smugglers.
7. African elites should be proactive in transferring 'brain drains' to 'brain gains' by leveraging the knowledge, innovation, and resources of African migrants in the EU for the development of Africa. Many should be integrated into the workings and programmes of the AU.
8. All would benefit from the enhancement of the capacity of African civil society organisations, think anks, and researchers to generate accurate data for migration policy intervention.
9. The voices of African migrants must be integrated into Africa-EU migration relations. The sending, receiving, and

transit countries are all guilty of seeing migrants as 'objects', rather than as human beings with families, identities, and aspirations. They are part of the global community, and their fundamental human rights must be protected.

10. Saving the lives of migrants and protecting their fundamental human rights should be the priority of African and EU actors. African actors should also make concerted efforts to sensitise Africans to the perils and dangers associated with using illegal routes to Europe. Agitating for the protection of lives, including those using illegal routes, should not be misinterpreted as condoning and legitimatising illegality.

At the root of the migration conversation are governance and security issues. African leaders have failed to direct Africa to the path of sustainable development, peace, and security. Many of them are so comfortable with the dependency syndrome. Temporary funding from the EU, which appears as a quick fix, is not the most effective intervention for the development of Africa. Rather, combatting structural violence (more effective than peacekeeping missions), institutional building, and investment in human capacity are more sustainable in reducing irregular migration. The optimal strategy for enhancing African security and development lies in an approach that emanates 'from below'. This entails a commitment to investing in research initiatives and fostering multifaceted platforms for dialogue that encompass states and non-state actors, including the invaluable contributions from think-tank communities and civil society organisations. The discourse surrounding Africa-EU migration ought to be framed as a matter of choice rather than an existential imperative, alleviating the prevailing narrative of migration as a dire and life-threatening necessity for many fleeing Africans.

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