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POLICY BRIEF

Africa and Europe: building consensus on migration

Otilia Anna Maunganidze

The management of migration requires cooperation between Africa and Europe, each for their own reasons. As a key element of the Africa-European Union strategic partnership, agreement on migration is central to developing a mutually beneficial strategy. Migration policies and approaches such as on labour, remittances, returns and readmissions, and effective international protection measures, should be based on evidence and the achievement of sustainable development.

Key findings

- ▶ Migration and mobility are key areas of concern for both Africa and Europe, although their respective priorities differ.
- ▶ Most African migrants move within Africa. Of those who leave the continent, most go to Europe and most follow safe and regular channels of migration.
- ▶ The majority of asylum seekers entering Europe are from the Middle East and Asia, not Africa.
- ▶ The African Union, the European Union and their respective member states do not always agree on policies and practices related to migration and mobility. For Africa, migration is primarily a development and demographic issue. Europe's stance increasingly follows a technical, security-centred response to immigration.
- ▶ Policies and practices on migration and mobility should be designed in a collaborative, comprehensive and consultative manner.
- ▶ Sustained migration cooperation between Africa and Europe should include joint efforts to achieve the following: address inequality and unemployment, regularise remittances, improve returns and readmission, uphold effective international protection mechanisms, create legal labour migration pathways, find durable solutions to irregular migration, encourage coherence on approaches to migration governance, combine humanitarian support to refugees and host communities with development plans.
- ▶ The connections between migration, regional integration and free trade should be leveraged to help stimulate development and economic growth in Africa.

Recommendations

The AU should:

- ▶ Advance migration as central to development and ensure that migrant communities are factored into development planning.
- ▶ Engage with member states to advance and regularise remittances to better leverage their benefits, including exploring avenues for reduced costs of remittances and formalising them as national revenue.

African states should:

- ▶ Ratify and implement the freedom of movement protocol and the agreement on the African Continental Free Trade Area. This will help align practice and policy objectives, and stimulate regional integration.

- ▶ Develop and strengthen public–private partnerships aimed at advancing legal labour migration pathways.
- ▶ Develop a national understanding of African common positions and mainstream efforts towards successful implementation of Agenda 2063.

The EU should:

- ▶ Consult more with African stakeholders on policies and strategies that impact directly on Africa, including those that may undermine efforts towards freedom of movement.
- ▶ End over-securitised approaches to migration management as these do not have the desired effect, and may have unintended longer-term consequences.

Introduction

Migration is a key aspect defining the relationship between Africa and Europe. Since 2014, however, concerns related to migration have grown increasingly divergent between and within the two continents. While the dynamics are complex and by no means homogeneous in the relationship between Africa and Europe, the issue of unregulated migration out of Africa to Europe is prominent in Europe's engagement.

For Africa, a mushrooming population, deepening socio-economic inequalities, poverty, limited economic and employment opportunities, food insecurity, and conflict continue to contribute towards people's reasons for moving, whether voluntarily or forced.¹ Most African migrants (accounting for 80% of all such migrants in 2020) move within Africa,² preferring neighbouring countries and regions over other continents. Of those that do leave the African continent, most go to Europe in search of better economic opportunities and relative stability. 26% of Africa's international migrants reside in Europe.³ However, despite this high proportion of Africa's international migrants choosing Europe, African migrants comprised only 12.9% of the total number of international migrants (10.6 million people) in Europe as at 2020.⁴

Connections between migration, regional integration and free trade must be leveraged to stimulate development and economic growth in Africa

Africa recognises migration as primarily a demographic and development issue. This is reflected in, among others, the African Common Position on Migration and Development,⁵ Agenda 2063,⁶ the Migration Policy Framework for Africa (MPFA)⁷ and the Joint Labour Migration Programme (JLMP).⁸ In addition, coupled with migration, trade is a key element of Africa's development and regional integration goals. The Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)⁹ and the Protocol to the Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community Relating to Free Movement of Persons, Right of Residence and Right of Establishment¹⁰ were both adopted in 2018 following concurrent and parallel negotiations.

Although Europe appreciates the connection between migration and development, since at least 2015, a security perspective has dominated the European Union's (EU) focus. This is reflected in its overwhelming focus on three areas. First, on oversimplified focus on poorly defined 'root causes' of migration that ignore push and pull factors and the realities on the ground. Second, on enhancing border controls to restrict migration, with a particular focus on smuggling and trafficking in persons. Third, on improving the return and readmission of migrants from Africa.

The EU's New Pact on Migration and Asylum,¹¹ which now informs its strategic engagement on migration, retains a securitised approach and

10.6 million

AFRICAN MIGRANTS RESIDE
IN EUROPE AS AT 2020

covers the technical aspects of Europe's policies on migration, including responsibility-sharing in respect of hosting refugees and processing asylum seekers. This is not always consistent with Africa's efforts towards freedom of movement, regional integration and development.¹² It also does not align with the EU's policy coherence for development.

Instead, under the EU's Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF),¹³ for example, Europe has used development cooperation funding for migration controls or as leverage with African countries.¹⁴ Already in 2018, this approach was criticised for its impact on regional economic growth and free movement of people in West Africa.¹⁵

For example, countries in the central Sahel, like Mali and Niger¹⁶ that border North Africa, have suffered unintended consequences of this securitised approach, including growing insecurity and instability, increased smuggling of persons, and a weakened relationship between the state and the population. This challenge is not restricted to West Africa, as similar measures and policy pushes have impacted regional integration efforts in Central, East, southern and North Africa.

Globally, in low-income and middle-income countries, remittances account for more than 10% of GDP

Any negotiated strategy between Africa and Europe must thus reflect common understanding on migration, mobility and development. This consultative collaboration would be between the African Union (AU) and the EU, and could form part of the longer-term strategy between the two blocs. In addition, Europe and Africa also engage under the auspices of the partnership between the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS) and the EU.

In April 2021, the OACPS and the EU agreed on a new framework informing their partnership. Migration and mobility are extensively covered in this, with a view to a comprehensive and balanced approach to address migration.¹⁷ However, lingering differences on

migration, which remains a contentious and politically sensitive issue, have delayed the signing of a new agreement between the parties.

The challenge remains on how Africa and Europe can reconcile their divergent positions and agree without one party imposing its position on the other. This Policy Brief identifies areas in which a strategic partnership on migration can be formed, and how.

Strategic partnership on migration

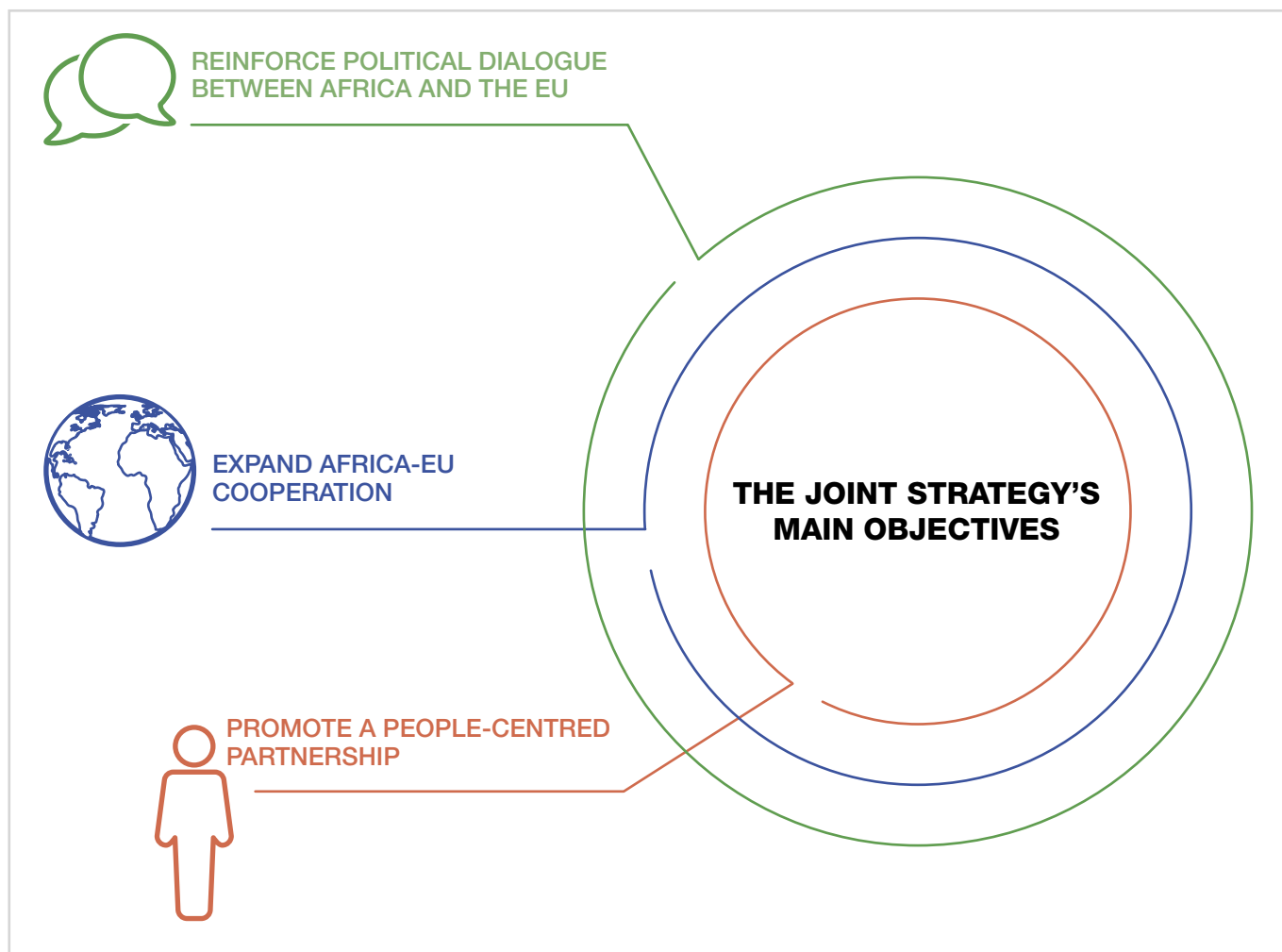
The formal channel for the EU to work together with the AU is the Africa-EU Partnership established in 2000.¹⁸ The relationship between Africa and the EU on migration is framed within the Joint Africa-EU Strategy adopted in December 2007.¹⁹ Migration has featured as a priority since then and, since 2018, as one of four joint priorities of the AU and the EU.²⁰

The primary focus is on managing migration flows, Africa–Europe cooperation and addressing the 'root causes' of irregular migration. Supporting this are several policies and plans on migration and mobility that the AU and the EU have agreed on, including the Tripoli Declaration on Migration and Development,²¹ the Ouagadougou Action Plan to Combat Trafficking,²² and the Ouagadougou Declaration and Plan of Action on Employment, Poverty Eradication and Inclusive Development in Africa.²³ There are also other layers of cooperation between the AU and the EU and between individual member states on both sides.

It is against this backdrop of existing cooperation that a critical reflection is possible on entry-points for improving and strengthening the partnership on migration and mobility between Africa and Europe. Based on current instruments, policies and practices, there are four areas in which this can be done:

- Remittances
- Legal labour migration pathways
- International protection
- Legal and voluntary returns, readmissions and reintegration.

Chart 1: Africa-EU joint strategy objectives



Source: <https://africa-eu-partnership.org/en/partnership-and-joint-africa-eu-strategy>

Remittances

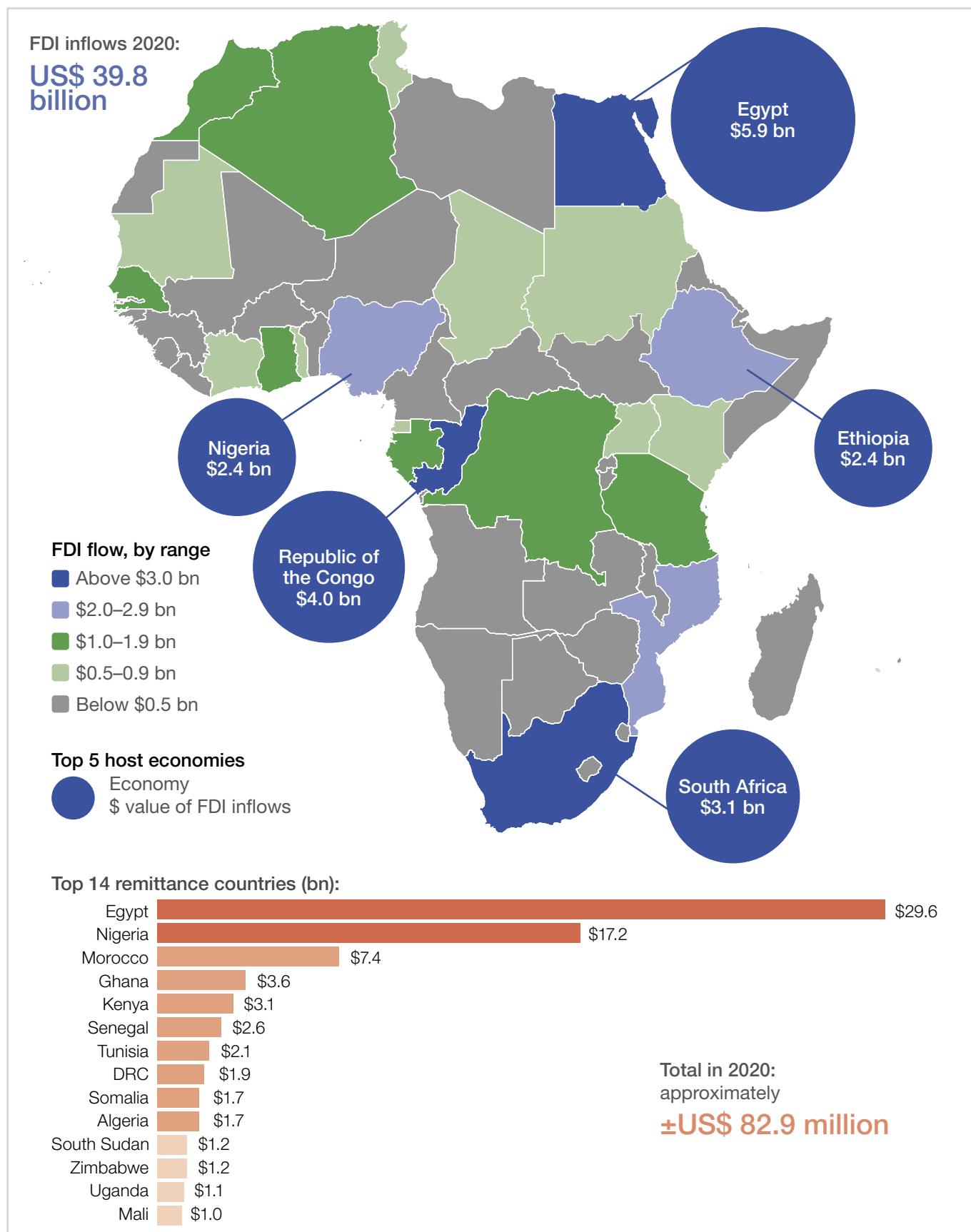
Remittances are covered extensively in the AU's MPFA as connecting migration and economic development in Africa. Agenda 2063 couples remittances with the role that migration can play in enhancing Africa's integration agenda.²⁴ Significantly, remittances are a major and dependable source of foreign income on the continent.

Globally, in low-income and middle-income countries, remittances account for more than 10% of gross domestic product. For Africa, this translates into remittances contributing billions in revenue annually.²⁵ In 2020, despite predictions of massive decline due to the COVID-19 pandemic, remittances still amounted to US\$540 billion globally, with Africa accounting for 15.37% of global remittance inflows.²⁶ Most African countries recorded an increase in remittances in 2020 compared

to 2019. However, according to the World Bank, Nigeria (which alone accounts for 20.75% of Africa's remittance flows) had a 27.7% decline.²⁷ Countries like Zambia and Mozambique, however, recorded massive increases of 37% and 16% respectively.²⁸

For several countries on the continent, such as Egypt, Ghana, Kenya, Morocco, Senegal and Zimbabwe, remittances far exceed official development assistance (ODA) and foreign direct investment (FDI) combined.²⁹ To put this into context, according to the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), total FDI to Africa in 2020 amounted to approximately US\$39.8 billion.³⁰ This is less than half of the total remittances Africa received in 2020.³¹ It is thus no surprise that the World Bank regards remittances as the most important source of external financing in low- and middle-income countries.

Chart 2: FDI flows and remittances to Africa



Sources: UNCTAD 2021 & Knomad 2021

The AU recognises this critical contribution and sees remittances as having the potential to reduce poverty and lessen inequality on the continent. This is possible if remittances are invested in sectors such as education and health, and in income-generating activities.³² The African Institute of Remittances established in 2015 by the AU to support African countries to harness the development benefit of remittances forms part of the continent's long-term strategy.³³

Governments, the AU and the EU must support remittance infrastructures. This would include regularising remittance channels currently dominated by the private sector through reducing the cost of sending remittances, incentivising methods of money transfer such as through mobile and other digital channels, and improving access to banking services. As of 2021, the average global cost of sending remittances is high, at 6.5% commission charged per transaction.

According to the World Bank, sub-Saharan Africa is the most expensive region to send money to, with an average commission of 8.2%.³⁴ The highest cost is recorded in eastern and southern Africa: sending money from Tanzania to Uganda costs 24%; from Angola to Namibia 22%; and from South Africa to neighbouring Botswana 19.6%, to Angola 19%, to Malawi 16% and to Zimbabwe 14%.³⁵

Sustainable Development Goal 10 aims to reduce transaction costs of remittances to below 3%.³⁶ It also aims to eliminate remittance corridors with costs higher than 5%.³⁷ Initiatives such as the Intergovernmental Table on Remittances established by the Italian presidency of the G20 in 2021, within the framework of the G20's Global Partnership for Financial Inclusion, may help.³⁸

Legal labour migration pathways

Africa and Europe agree that legal pathways connected to labour migration are the preferred avenue for migration. However, this avenue is not always open to most migrants given the limitations related to cost and sometimes restrictive application requirements. This has resulted in more people opting for irregular means to access the labour market in other countries. Expanding cooperation on the facilitation of legal migration within Africa and from Africa to Europe is thus key. This speaks directly to the developmental benefits of migration in

Africa and provides a structured avenue for regulating and monitoring migration.

The JLMP is the AU's primary policy process aimed at encouraging improved labour migration governance.³⁹ In June 2020, the JLMP partners – the AU, the International Labour Organisation, the International Organisation for Migration and the UN Economic Commission for Africa – adopted a 2020–2030 Strategic Framework.⁴⁰ The EU was one of the partners involved in the process of developing this new framework. Among other aspects, the framework underscores the economic contribution of African migrant workers and develops an implementation plan that centres this aspect.

Through the Global Skill Partnership, both continents have also begun to strengthen efforts towards promoting legal labour migration pathways that respond to the needs within labour markets, while enhancing skills for people in less developed countries. The Global Skill Partnership is a migration model developed by the Center for Global Development and launched on the margins of the 2018 Intergovernmental Conference on a Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.⁴¹ It aims to ensure that mobility contributes to development through bilateral and multilateral programmes to exchange and advance skills and meet labour needs.

Sub-Saharan Africa is the most expensive region to send money to, with an average commission of 8.2%

The EU, for example, has adopted an approach where the destination country technically and financially supports the training of potential migrants. This approach has benefited African countries as the training is provided there and is not limited to migrants. Examples include the partnership between Morocco and Belgium,⁴² and between Nigeria and the EU,⁴³ to develop their respective information and communications technology sectors. Morocco also benefits from a multisectoral initiative for Moroccan youth.⁴⁴ Likewise, Nigeria has bilateral partnerships under this initiative with Germany, in construction,⁴⁵ and with the United Kingdom, in nursing.⁴⁶

Other participating countries are connected to the European Commission's 2018 legal migration pilot project, which aims to expand legal labour pathways for African migrants through cooperation with the private sector in the EU. In addition to Morocco and Nigeria, Egypt and Tunisia⁴⁷ are part of this pilot project with five EU countries (Belgium, France, Germany, Lithuania and Spain).⁴⁸ Consistent with these initiatives, in the New Pact, the EU proposes enhancing 'talent partnerships'. If well coordinated, this would ensure the coherence of the many ongoing bilateral arrangements.

Beyond the bilateral and multilateral transcontinental arrangements, increasing intra-labour and skills mobility on the continent requires intra-African regional cooperation and the harmonisation of labour migration policies. This would be the next key step for Africa to advance legal pathways in a more coherent and consistent manner. To do this, member states must be on board, as they determine national policies and frameworks on, among other issues, migration and mobility.

International protection

While efforts to ensure more voluntary migration are important, there are still many people whose migration journeys are perilous because irregular means of migration are their only option. As migrants continue to travel on dangerous and risky routes, the need for international protection increases. Some migrants, for example those held in detention facilities in Libya,⁴⁹ have limited legal recourse. There has to be a long-term plan to facilitate an inclusive protection approach supported by both Africa and Europe.

Migration is key in fostering AU–EU partnerships – hence policies must mutually benefit the two continents

Finding durable solutions to irregular migration, including refugee management, will be key for the partnership between Europe and Africa. For its part, the EU proposes sweeping changes to the asylum-processing and refugee processes in its New Pact. However, this still does not recognise that the majority of asylum seekers entering Europe are not from

Africa. Further, it does not immediately recognise the role that Africa is playing in comprehensive refugee response. There is, however, mutual recognition that African countries host almost a third of the world's refugees and that they do so with limited resources.⁵⁰ Thus, for African states that already host large numbers of refugees, technical and financial support is critical.

Recognising that European countries also host refugees, mostly from Asia (in particular the Middle East), responsibility-sharing with Africa would require the EU to provide greater international protection and offer refuge through international resettlement. At present, protections are being eroded by some EU member states, with people being turned back at sea and at the border,⁵¹ and with asylum processes not always considering the specific facts of each application.

For both Africa and Europe, supporting refugee host communities in Africa would go a long way towards advancing international protection.⁵² In this respect, drawing on the Global Compact for Refugees, efforts to combine humanitarian support to refugees and host communities with development plans can help.⁵³ In addition, understanding that most host communities in Africa are themselves confronted with socio-economic challenges, the approach would need to go beyond providing international support to facilitating better access to services for both refugees and host communities.⁵⁴

Return, readmission and reintegration

Return, readmission and reintegration is another focus of the EU in its relationship with Africa. Though the proportion of African migrants is small, Europe's emphasis on returns is driven by the increasing number of undocumented migrants, which rose from about 1.4 million in 2011 to an estimated 6 million in 2018.⁵⁵ During this period, just under half a million of the migrants were from Africa.⁵⁶ The rise was largely attributable to those that travelled to Europe from the Middle East seeking asylum and had their applications rejected.⁵⁷

Despite this, stemming from the EU's 2016 Partnership Framework in line with the European Agenda on Migration, returns and readmissions have featured strongly in the EU's approach to African migration.⁵⁸

Though there has been a steady decline in numbers of African migrants to Europe since 2018, the EU's New Pact still focuses on returns and calls for greater cooperation to enhance voluntary returns and improve cooperation in cases of deportation and forced returns. This includes conditionalities linking cooperation on returns to visa processes. However, this does not align with what was agreed by the AU and EU following their joint summit in 2017. There, voluntary returns and commitment to the protection of fundamental rights were underscored and preferred.⁵⁹

Overall, returns are contested and politically sensitive in Africa. Most African governments have resisted the EU's returns policies. With the exception of Cabo Verde, the EU's efforts to conclude formal return and readmission agreements with African countries have failed.⁶⁰ Instead, some countries like Ethiopia, Guinea, The Gambia and Côte d'Ivoire have entered into informal agreements with EU member states.⁶¹

Further, in line with the New Pact, some European countries like France have adopted punitive measures for African countries that are not cooperating on returns and readmissions. In September 2021, France cut its visa quotas for Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco, dubbing them 'uncooperative transit nations' in a row over irregular migration.⁶² This approach is not sustainable. Instead, there should be consideration for advancing a mutually beneficial returns and readmission policy that is underpinned by returns being voluntary, safe, dignified and in line with international human rights and humanitarian norms.⁶³

Conclusion

Migration is a key element of the relationship between Africa and Europe. Since the two do not always agree on how best to frame policies and practices related to migration, consultation is key. The two continents, through the AU and the EU, should design their policies and practices on migration and mobility in a collaborative, comprehensive, consultative and mutually beneficial manner.

While Africa continues to regard migration as a demographic and development issue, Europe's stance since 2014 has increasingly followed a politicised, yet technical, security-centred response to immigration. For both, though, migration cooperation is unavoidable. In order to get this right, several issues must be factored in and a common understanding reached. These issues include addressing growing inequality, reducing unemployment or precarious employment, mainstreaming remittances, improving returns and readmission, and upholding effective protection mechanisms. Ultimately, Africa and Europe should develop consistent and coherent migration governance approaches.

Recognising that migration can and will continue, the task is to develop policies and approaches that align better with efforts towards sustainable development, limit the risks and contribute to economic recovery and growth. In particular, through leveraging its connection with regional integration and free trade, migration could stimulate development and economic growth. Enhancing legal pathways for labour migration, improving remittance systems and focusing more on migration *governance over securitisation* will strengthen the partnership between Africa and Europe.

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About the author

Ottilia Anna Maunganidze is the Head of Special Projects at the Institute for Security Studies in Pretoria. This policy brief draws on research conducted in 2020 with Tsion Tadesse Abebe (ISS senior researcher at the time) for two reports as part of an Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) project: 'A new European consensus on asylum and migration'.

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