



The Africa-EU Partnership and migration: A bottom-up approach as an alternative to addressing irregular migration.

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This brief argues the AU and EU can only effectively manage intercontinental migration if they adopted migration instruments that are informed by migrants' actions, experiences and perceptions of migration and not state priorities. The brief proposes a bottom-up approach to developing effective migration management interventions..

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The African Union (AU) and European Union (EU) partnership on migration is an area of particular importance, especially when migration governance is a priority global issue. The AU-EU partnership is governed by multiple bilateral and multilateral agreements that cover a wide range of issues. On migration, for instance, agreements cover issues that range from *inter alia* border control, return and rehabilitation and visa processes.

The AU's approach to migration and priorities on migration governance are informed by, among others, 1969 Organisation of African Unity (OAU) Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa, the African Common Position on Migration and Development (ACPM), the Migration Policy Framework for Africa and Plan of Action (2018 – 2030) and the Protocol to the Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community (Abuja Treaty 1991) Relating to the Free Movement of Persons, Right of Residence and Right of Establishment. The instruments also underscore Africa and the AU's commitment to using and leveraging socioeconomic opportunities through migration management for Africa's development (African Union Commission, 2018).

Despite this, the migration agenda for various African countries seems to be externally determined, with the EU and international organizations seemingly playing the leading role (Maru, 2021). The migration strategies, policies, action plans and migration profiles of African states could, in this sense, be said to be developed according to the guidelines of the external actors. The drive to halt irregular migration and trafficking in human beings tops the agenda of externally drawn migration policies and action plans (Bird, 2020). While a lot of effort goes into developing these policies and strategies within the AU-EU partnership and according to particular environments of respective African states and the continent's regions, the migration instruments seem to still fail to consider migrants' expectations, experiences and perceptions of migration.

This brief argues the AU and EU can only effectively manage intercontinental migration if they adopted migration instruments that are informed by migrants' actions, experiences and perceptions of migration and not state priorities. The brief proposes a bottom-up approach to developing effective migration management interventions. Further, it calls for increased legal pathways that enable safe and regular migration based on designs that emphasize genuine accessibility and reflect unrestricted mobility. The brief is based on data gathered from experts and various stakeholders in the African integration project, and the contribution of the EU to that project. The interlocutors participated in two international workshops held in March 2022 and July 2022 organised under the auspices of the *African Union–EU relations, regional partnerships for actorness in effective global governance* (AURORA) project. The brief also benefited from the findings of desk research that analysed the Africa-EU partnership on trade in a regional and global context.

BACKGROUND

Movement between countries within the same economic zones happens frequently through both regular and irregular means. The fact that countries within economic regional communities (RECs) such as the Southern African Development Community (SADC) or the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) share common markets means that frequent movement of people between member states is inevitable.

People move for a variety of reasons, including but not limited to trade, employment, education and relational purposes. The common histories, cultures and markets that exist among member states of regions such as ECOWAS and SADC also make the movement of people between them necessary. This logic also applies broadly to Africa, and particularly, African regions and states that share common histories and ties with European states. These connections make movement between the two continents a common and persistent feature of international migration in the 21st century.

Mainstream imagery of the migration of Africans to Europe tend to be misconceived and inaccurate and contradict research, which also shows that intercontinental migration is generally lower than regional migration (Flaxhaux & De Haas, 2016; Trilling, 2019; International Organization for Migration, 2020b). For instance, more Africans migrate to other African countries than to countries in Europe. Even when they migrate to Europe, most Africans tend to use regular channels than irregular as portrayed in the media and by populists (International Organization for Migration, 2020a).

But, irregular migration between Africa and member states of the European Union (EU) presents a challenge for individual countries and the AU-EU partnership. This makes migration a priority in AU-EU partnership engagements and development cooperation as the parties seek to effectively manage it and promote mutual development. Sustainable solutions to issues that are common to and affect the AU and EU such as migration are imperative for the parties and the migrants, to promote safe, orderly and regular migration.

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KEY ISSUES

Migration cooperation within the framework of the AU-EU partnership is complex and faces many challenges. Reports of continuing migration and that thousands of Africans still attempt to reach Europe point to the minimal impact of the various bilateral and multilateral initiatives and processes by the two parties to stop irregular migration from Africa to Europe.

The persistent irregular migration suggests that a positive correlation exists between the increase in the number of people who use irregular channels and the increasing measures by the authorities to stop migration such as border patrols and the deployment of various border management and control technologies. Stricter border controls do not seem to serve the intended purpose of managing migration and reducing human mobility between states and regions (Hansen & Papademetriou, 2014). People are seemingly pushed to using irregular and unauthorized paths when formal avenues for their movement are restricted or closed.

Migration policy and the need for a bottom-up approach

The initiatives and processes that the AU-EU partnership

design to curb migration from Africa to Europe seem to lack a human focus. Rather, they seem to overwhelmingly focus on the migration process and implications for states and policy makers or politicians and not the migrant, their experiences and views. Migration agreements and state designed migration policies often dictate the nature of migration rather than tailor the policies and agreements to the needs of migrants (Piper and Rother, 2021). Consequently, a mismatch exists between policy, the migration agreements and their objectives and the outcomes of those measures, instruments and interventions.

This highlights the need for bottom-up approaches to managing migration, because the migration policies and initiatives designed through the AU-EU partnership do not address the everyday and grassroots concerns of the individual who faces the migration realities and life on the ground. The migrant's everyday concerns, expectations and aspirations in engaging in migration exceed the economic concerns about limited job opportunities and struggling local economies that politicians often cite as reasons for restricting

migration (Ruedin, 2021).

It is easy for individuals to disregard the migration interventions designed by policy makers and the parties in the AU-EU partnership if/when those measures ignore or fail to consider migrants' aspirations and expectations (Nshimbi, 2021). The continuation of irregular migration between

Africa and Europe in the face of efforts and measures to stop it should not be surprising.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The parties in the AU-EU partnership should prioritize people in developing interventions for managing migration. Migrants' aspirations, experiences and expectations should inform the policies and interventions. Besides establishing safe and secure migration avenues for migrants that are consistent with international standards, the measures should primarily seek better outcomes for the migrants. This is more likely to

encourage compliance and the cooperation of migrants, who would then be encouraged to opt out of irregular migration into the avenues that place them at the centre.

On their part, the parties in the AU-EU partnership need a working relationship where neither imposes its preferences for migration management and border control or assumes superiority over the other. Even so, the migrant should be at the centre of the measures they design and not the interests of politicians or the states involved.

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