



# **Eight myths on the migration–development nexus**

*that European and African  
policymakers need to reconsider*

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## **KEY MESSAGES**

- In the last years, the EU's migration agenda and its engagement with Africa on migration have shifted towards security and border control. As a consequence, the migration–development nexus has increasingly been framed in terms of security.
- Migration can contribute to development in both countries of origin and destination. However, it needs to be supported by holistic and long-term policies.
- EU investment and development aid won't curb migration. However, they can contribute to rendering it more beneficial. Development-aid allocation needs to be aligned with long-term national strategies and the needs of vulnerable people, and based on ownership.
- Africa–EU partnership agreements should be flexible enough to be adapted to national specificities.
- Migration as an adaptation strategy to environmental change needs to be supported.



## INTRODUCTION

Migration is a political priority for the European Union (EU), as evident in the Commission's proposal for the new Multiannual Financial Framework 2021–27. It is also a major focus of the EU's relations with Africa. The fact that the word migration is used 19 times in the 13-page Final Declaration of the 5th African Union (AU)–EU Summit shows that this focus is increasingly overwhelming. While currently on-trend, migration is not a new topic in Africa–EU political discussions. On the contrary, the EU's engagement with African countries on migration dates back to the early 2000s. At the beginning, both development and security-oriented approaches were adopted. However, in recent years a shift towards security and border control has occurred. This shift has also influenced the way the migration–development nexus has been framed. As a result, a security-inspired nexus has emerged. Based on this nexus, misconceptions on migration and development have gained relevance.

Addressing these misconceptions is crucial. African and European states are currently negotiating:

a) an agreement between the EU and the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) Group of States, and  
b) a new Africa–EU partnership. Migration is already an essential element in these negotiation processes; at the same time, diverging interests and domestic politics render negotiation of migration-related aspects very sensitive. This implies a risk. Each of the policy frameworks under negotiation will be essential both for international relations and for migration trends in the next decades. In order to be effective, they need to be based on research evidence. In this policy brief, we take one step back and look at eight myths on migration and development, providing insights on evidence for each of them. Then, we look at what this

means for current negotiations on the ACP–EU agreement and on the Africa–EU partnership. We target European and African policymakers.

## EIGHT MYTHS THAT AFRICAN AND EUROPEAN POLICYMAKERS SHOULD RECONSIDER

Migration is often framed based on the following myths:

### 1. International migration is caused by development failures.

Research evidence has proved that development actually tends to increase international migration, which is more expensive and more selective than internal migration. International migration outflows tend to augment with increasing development due to rising capabilities and aspirations to migrate, and start decreasing only after a long period of sustained economic growth. This tendency is known as the "migration hump".

### 2. Migration hinders development.

Migration has always constituted a strategy allowing households to strengthen their resilience. In addition, research shows that it can contribute to sustainable development in both countries of origin and destination, in particular through the circulation of labour, money and skills. However, this contribution is not automatic, but requires the adoption of innovative policies. One such example is "global skills partnerships" creating legal migration opportunities based on labour-market gaps in countries of destination and skills needs in countries of origin.<sup>7</sup> In the early 2000s, the European Commission recognized the potential of migration for European and African prosperity and suggested measures to support it.<sup>8</sup> By contrast, recent approaches framing

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1. AU and EU, "Joint Declaration", 5th African Union-European Union Summit, 30 November 2017.
  2. This engagement started after the Seville Council Summit Conclusions (2002) affirmed the need to cooperate with countries of origin and transit. In 2005, the Global Approach to Migration introduced an overarching framework for cooperation between countries of origin, transit and destination.
  3. M. A. Clemens, "Migration Is a Form of Development: The Need for Innovation to Regulate Migration for Mutual Benefits", UNDESA Technical Paper No. 8, 2017.
  4. M. Flahaux and H. de Haas, "African Migration: Trends, Patterns, Drivers", in *Comparative Migration Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (2016).
  5. C. Martin-Shields, B. Schraven and S. Angenendt, "More Development – More Migration? The 'Migration Hump' and Its Significance for Development Policy Co-Operation with Sub-Saharan Africa", DIE Briefing Paper No. 20, 2017.
  6. M. Foresti and J. Hagen-Zanker, "Migration and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development", Executive Summary, London, ODI, 2017.
  7. M. A. Clemens, "Migration Is a Form of Development: The Need for Innovation to Regulate Migration for Mutual Benefits", UNDESA Technical Paper No. 8, 2017.
  8. European Commission, "COM(2001)386: Proposal for a Council Directive on the Conditions of Entry and Residence of Third-Country Nationals for the Purpose of Paid Employment and Self-Employed Economic Activities", 2001.



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migration as security challenge and development failure have led to weakening the economic potential of migration. This implies a cost: it has been found that even modest reductions in current migration barriers would make it possible to increase global economic productivity by several trillions.<sup>9</sup> Considering that it is predicted that by 2030 the vast majority of the world's poor will be living in sub-Saharan Africa,<sup>10</sup> this represents a missed opportunity.

### 3. Migration can be curbed through development aid.

Policies based on a root causes rhetoric tend to be ineffective for three main reasons. Firstly, as mentioned above, development tends to increase international migration, rather than curb it. Secondly, development aid has a limited capacity to actually implement development improvements, such as employment and economic growth. Thirdly, donors tend to distribute migration-relevant aid also to countries that are not countries of origin for migrants.<sup>11</sup>

### 4. Most migration from Africa to Europe takes place irregularly.

In the last years, EU policymakers have mainly focused on irregular migration. Even if irregular migration is increasing, however, available data show that most African migrants still enter Europe through regular means.<sup>12</sup> Family migration remains the main legal migration pathway. In addition, approximately 9 million regular migrants from Africa are currently living in the EU,<sup>13</sup> as well as many European citizens who are of African descent and/or also African citizens.

### 5. Most African migrants head towards Europe.

Most African migration takes place within Africa, and not between Africa and the EU. In many African countries, mobility is a long-standing phenomenon with deep historical roots and rapidly changing patterns. Since the 1980s, migration out of the continent has increased; however, it is not only directed towards Europe, but also towards the Gulf region, Asia and the Americas.<sup>14</sup> The percentage of Africans living abroad has not increased in recent years.<sup>15</sup>

### 6. A securitized migration agenda is the best option.

During the first decade of Africa-EU cooperation on migration, development and security-oriented approaches coexisted. However, in recent years EU priorities have shifted towards security and control of the external border. This shift has been strengthened by public pressure and by divisions between member states with regard to internal responsibility sharing. In 2015, the EU increased its efforts towards effective cooperation with African states, by taking into greater consideration their interests in terms of development and investment. However, it also put a conditionality on cooperation against irregular migration and border controls. This approach risks weakening the

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9. M. A. Clemens, "Migration Is a Form of Development: The Need for Innovation to Regulate Migration for Mutual Benefits", UNDESA Technical Paper No. 8, 2017.

10. H. Kharas and A. Rogerson, "Horizon 2020. Creative Destruction in the Aid Industry", London, ODI, 2012.

11. M. A. Clemens and H. M. Postel, "Deterring Emigration with Foreign Aid: An Overview of Evidence from Low-Income Countries", GCD Policy Paper No. 119, 2018.

12. Joint Research Centre, "Many More to Come? Migration from and within Africa", 2018.

13. UNDESA, "The International Migrant Stock: The 2017 Revision", 2017.

14. M. Flahaux and H. de Haas, "African Migration: Trends, Patterns, Drivers", in *Comparative Migration Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 2016.

15. Joint Research Centre, "Many More to Come? Migration from and within Africa", 2018.

potential of migration for development as described above. It also risks increasing human rights violations along migration routes.<sup>16</sup> In addition, public opinion within Africa tends to be against the participation of their governments in migration management approaches involving return agreements. Therefore, rendering this participation a *sine qua non* condition for cooperation in other policy domains risks backfiring.

**7. Most African migrants are escaping from wars.** Most

African migrants are citizens of countries with no ongoing war. However, poor governance and insecurity in the country of origin (e.g., in the form of ramified corruption, violence and arbitrary arrests) can contribute to migration decisions. In contexts of insecurity, migration can be an alternative for youth to taking up arms or engaging in terrorist groups, and can contribute to regional and global security and peace.<sup>17</sup> At the same time, regional instability and arms trade need to be addressed by the EU, through strengthened efforts in terms of mediation and peacebuilding.

**8. Environmental factors are secondary.** Through its effects

on the environment, accelerated climate change is likely to have an impact on migration trends. The ten largest displacement events in 2016 were climate-related.<sup>18</sup> At the same time, migration is an important adaptation strategy to environmental change and can prevent future displacement, as recognized by the UNFCCC Cancun Adaptation Framework in 2010. Environmental change can occur through sudden catastrophes such as floods or through slow-onset processes, such as land degradation. In this last form, it constitutes a serious challenge for many African farmers. The migration of single household members can allow them to diversify sources of income. However, vulnerable farmers who are the most exposed to environmental degradation are also the ones who



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experience the most difficult access to international migration.<sup>19</sup> Even if climate change is a transnational challenge affecting both Africa and Europe, it is still not considered a priority for Africa–EU cooperation.

## THE NEW AGREEMENT WITH THE ACP POST-2020 AND THE REFORM OF THE JAES

The two main legal frameworks for Africa-EU cooperation are now under negotiations: the Cotonou Partnership Agreement (CPA) between the EU and the ACP, and the Joint Africa-EU Strategy (JAES).

The CPA was concluded in 2000 for a 20-year period (2000-2020). It has been the framework for the EU's relations with 79 countries from Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific (ACP). Formal negotiations for the future of ACP–EU relations should start in August 2018. How will migration fit into the new framework, given the current political climate?<sup>20</sup> Article 13 of the CPA is dedicated to migration. In its 2000 version, it addressed conditions in countries of origin and transit,

16. CONCORD (European NGO Confederation for Relief and Development) and CINI (Coordinamento Italiano NGO Internazionali), "Partnership or Conditionality? Monitoring the Migration Compacts and EU Trust Fund for Africa", 2018.

17. K. Long, E. Mosler Vidal, A. Kuch and J. Hagen-Zanker, "Citizenship, Migration and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development", ODI Briefing, 2017.

18. S. O. Stapleton, R. Nadin, C. Watson, and J. Kellett, "Climate Change, Migration and Displacement", ODI, 2017.

19. I. Schöffberger, "Environmental Change and Translocal Vulnerability in Senegal", in *Migration, Environment and Climate Change Policy Brief Series*, IOM, Vol. 3, No. 4, 2018.

20. T. Voituriez, J. Vaillé, H. Vanvolsem and J. Bossuyt, "Relations between the EU and the African, Caribbean and Pacific States (ACP) after 2020", in *IDDRI Issue Briefs*, No. 3, 2018.

legal migration and return of irregular immigrants. Despite this ambitious endeavour, however, the parties have failed to come up with a common and comprehensive agenda on migration. In 2010 an attempt was made to revise this article, yet the conditions did not allow for a breakthrough. This has weakened the role of the CPA as an effective policy framework for partnership on migration.

The weakness of the CPA is also reflected in the fact that in this decade, the EU has reacted to increasing migration pressure through regional approaches and migration Dialogues, such as the Khartoum and Rabat Processes. Such regional partnerships are of strategic interests for EU and African policymakers, because they provide a more direct entry-point. Therefore a regionalised future ACP-EU partnership appears to be favoured by all parties. The EU has proposed to do this in the form of regional compacts standing on an all-ACP foundation, with tailored regional priorities as well as specific governance structures.<sup>21</sup>



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For Africa, the regional protocol could be regarded as upgrading and replacing the Joint Africa-EU Strategy. The JAES was adopted in 2007 to provide an overarching framework for cooperation between EU member states and 54 African states. Migration was one of the identified common priorities. However, once again divergent interests have hindered joint actions. In this

sense, the renegotiation of the ACP-EU partnership can be an opportunity to reform Africa-EU cooperation. For this to happen, however, politically sensitive aspects need to be addressed. Given their role in migration management, the full participation of European and African states and of regional organisations such as the EU, the AU, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in the post-Cotonou negotiations is essential.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, following the African Union's 31st Summit decision on post-Cotonou, the negotiation process and dynamic could evolve more considerably.<sup>23</sup>

## MIGRATION-RELATED PRIORITIES FOR THE AFRICA-EU PARTNERSHIP

The Africa-EU partnership agreements currently under negotiation will establish a long-term policy framework for cooperation. As such, they need to be aligned with African and European long-term priorities and strategies, and based on a comprehensive approach. The following migration-related priorities need to be taken into consideration.

- **Surpass the generic story of “root causes” and reframe the migration–development nexus.** In the last years, the migration–development nexus has been framed following a root causes rhetoric. It is essential to reframe the nexus to include the potential of migration for development. This is a priority both for Africa–EU policy frameworks, and for the two continents’ engagement in the Global Compact on Migration. Innovative initiatives such as the “Global Skills Partnership” are needed, in order to establish regular migration channels based on an assessment of European and African interests. Further measures supporting the mobility of researchers and students are necessary. Such initiatives need to address existing inequalities with regard to access to international migration, e.g. through a facilitated access to education for vulnerable persons. In addition, policies supporting the diaspora’s contribution for development are needed; these could include measures in support of circular mobility and allowing the decrease of remittances costs.

21. A. Medinilla and J. Bossuyt, Charting the Course to 2020, ECDPM, 2018.

22. N. Keijzer and A. Medinilla, “Can the EU Prioritise Both the African Union and the Africa, Caribbean and Pacific group?”, ETTG, 2017.

23. [https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/34370-doc-draft\\_assembly\\_xxxi\\_e.pdf](https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/34370-doc-draft_assembly_xxxi_e.pdf)



- **Ensure ownership of development aid by vulnerable people.** Recent focus on migration has justified a change of approach with regard to development aid. Aid negotiations are increasingly about finding a balance between the interests of European and African states, and of third actors such as the private sector. In this context, the interests of the most vulnerable people risk being neglected. These people are often badly represented in domestic politics and have scant access to international migration. Development programmes need to include mechanisms ensuring that their interests are represented.
- **Adapt general frameworks to national specificities.** In the last years, the EU has tried to identify general models and frameworks for its cooperation with African countries on migration. It has put a focus on regional migration dialogues and erratic forms of intercontinental cooperation forms such as the Valletta Process. However, this approach does not take into adequate consideration the fact that states located in the same region may have diverging interests with regard to migration. For instance, EU Southern and Northern countries have different interests in terms of border control and labour-market needs. Similarly, African countries of origin and transit of migrants have different interests, e.g. with regard to return. The Africa–EU partnership framework needs to be flexible enough to allow adaptation to national specificities.
- **Make environmental change and environmental migration a priority for Africa–EU cooperation.** This cooperation would need to be based on an assessment of the influence of environmental degradation on development, and of the potential of migration as an adaptation strategy to environmental change. It would also need to address inequalities in the access to migration.
- **Base policies on empirical evidence and on long-term goals.** Migration is increasingly framed in terms of security, based on short-term political pressures and neglecting empirical evidence. This trend is strengthened by negative public attitudes with regard to migration. However, this approach has long-term consequences both for migration policy and for development in countries of origin and destination of migrants. In order to reframe migration in a more holistic manner, it is essential to assess factors contributing to public concerns and to address them, e.g. through information campaigns.
- **Strengthen cooperation inside the EU.** The EU aims at cooperating with African states as a whole. However, it is increasingly clear that European cohesion on migration is hindered by the fact that member states have divergent interests. These diverging interests can be found with regard to the internal dimension (e.g., related to refugees' distribution and labour-market needs), and with regard to the external dimension (e.g., related to trade relations). In order to be able to speak internationally with one single voice, the EU needs to engage in an open assessment of these interests and of possible compromise solutions (e.g., on the reform of the Dublin System).



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- **Ensure full respect of international human rights and protection standards.** The EU and its member states increasingly aim at sharing their responsibility on asylum with African countries of transit. In this context, it must be ensured that related bilateral and multilateral EU-Africa agreements are in line with existing international conventions on human rights and asylum, such as the 1951 Geneva Convention. In addition, the option of allowing asylum applications to be presented also in EU Delegations needs to be explored, as a way to prevent asylum seekers to engage in dangerous migration routes.<sup>24</sup> ■



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24. N. Pirozzi, N. Sartori and B. Venturi, "The Joint Africa–EU Strategy", European Parliament, 2017.

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