

# : Global Governance Spotlight

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## The Valletta Dilemma. Why migration governance in Africa should take centre stage

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**In view of the current migration crisis, the European Union (EU) has called a summit on migration in Valletta, Malta from 11-12 November 2015. African representatives have been invited to participate in this meeting. Ahead of the summit, both the EU and the African Union (AU) have put forward separate position papers reflecting their priorities and approaches in addressing migration and its positive and negative consequences. Whatever decisions are taken in Valletta, from an African perspective, European migration policy is not more of an imperative than African migration. In fact, migration governance in Africa remains the most critical challenge and requires thorough deliberations and reform. This brief piece therefore attempts, first of all, to explain the current crisis related to migration in Africa. Second, it identifies a number of gaps in African migration governance and in the implementation of existing policies. And finally, it describes how the Valletta Summit can transform the migration crisis into an opportunity and makes recommendations as to how the Valletta Summit can contribute to effective migration governance and boost the Africa-EU Partnership's trade and development agenda.**

Migration in Africa takes two broad forms: displacement (forced migration) and mobility (voluntary migration). Causes of forced migration include conflicts, natural and man-made disasters and evictions. In addition, there are spontaneous migrations of rural communities as a result of droughts and famine as well as seasonal traditional migration of agro-pastoralist communities in search of water and

grazing lands. Such factors cause, accelerate and trigger displacement. Better opportunities, improvements in transport and communications infrastructures and kin community influences also pull people to be more mobile. While displacement needs to be reduced and, where possible, eradicated, mobility provides an integrative opportunity which should be facilitated. However, for mobility to be a positive force for integration and prosperity, it has to be legal, safe and orderly.

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### Migration – an uneven debate

The current discourse disproportionately emphasises migration to Europe and neglects migration within the African sub-region (intra-regional migration). Consequently, the importance of migration as part of the African continent's broader regional development agenda has not received the attention it deserves. There are several reasons for this neglect. First of all, there is the sheer pressure of numbers. Further, communities in the EU regard migration as more than a socio-economic issue, seeing it as a problem that could threaten their cultural survival. Intense political and social pressure from host communities in the destination and transit countries puts the issue in the public spotlight. The topic receives additional attention when once again a boat has capsized on the Mediterranean route. Elsewhere, migrants travelling via Southern Africa or the Yemen route face exactly the same or an even worse situation, however, their fate tends to go un-

noticed. They face death in containers, murder at the hands of criminals and in congested prisons and the increasing possibility of xenophobic attacks. All this accounts for the difference in responses by the governments concerned, the media and the international community.

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### Conflicting Interests of AU Member States

The AU, like the EU, faces a divergence in the policy priorities of member states and home, transit and destination countries. The preferences of these countries vary and often conflict. As popular destination countries, for example, South Africa and South Sudan have more shared concerns with Europe than with neighbouring African countries on migration issues. Major concerns for destination countries include threats related to transnational security and international crime, socio-economic and cultural issues that are related to demographic threats and protection of local labour markets. For countries of origin, the human rights and safety of their nationals and the contributions, mainly through remittances from migrants take pride of place. Transit countries share concerns and face challenges similar to those affecting the destination countries, albeit to a very limited degree due to migrants' temporary stay within their jurisdiction. Consequently, even if the states concerned have adopted an AU-wide policy on migration, they rarely share a common vision or agreed end state on migration. Incompatibilities of end state goals thus exist within the migration agenda and are reflected in the degree of urgency with which such issues are addressed.

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### “Anywhere but Africa”

Migration in Africa has to be seen against the background of its political history and hence displacement, which may be conflict- or development-induced or result from man-made or natural disasters. But more importantly, misunderstandings about the destination countries and misinformation about the gravity of the risks arising along migration routes significantly contribute to the crisis in migration governance in Africa. This collective social psychology in many African communities, especially among Africa's youth, is encapsulated in the term “anywhere but Africa”. Pressures from host communities and direct family members as well as enticement from families, peers and ethnic ties in the diaspora are accelerating factors in inducing young Africans to decide to take dangerous migration routes.

### African migration routes

Every year, around 100,000 mixed migrants from the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) region travel along routes that expose them to the highest possible risks, including death, injury, slavery and torture.

The main routes are:

- The Southern Route from Kenya, crossing borders into Tanzania, Zambia and Malawi to South Africa;
- The Gulf of Aden Route from Djibouti, Somalia to Yemen across the Red Sea;
- The East Africa Route from Sudan, Chad and Libya to the Mediterranean Sea;
- The Mediterranean Sea Route from the shores of Libya and Egypt to Malta, Italy, Cyprus and Greece; and
- The Red Sea Route across the sea and the Suez Canal to Italy and Malta or Israel through the Sinai desert.

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### Policy-Implementation Gap

Both the AU and the EU have long been committed to a normative framework. While progress on norm-setting has been relatively swift, it is regrettably very slow on implementation. The policies put forward in the advanced AU-EU policy documents require coherent, consistent and comprehensive implementation. Moreover, African states still lack the will, determination and resources needed for effective migration governance. Under-resourcing, poor governance and institutional weaknesses mean that the challenges will continue for the foreseeable future unless partners allocate substantial resources to deal with the above-mentioned gaps and implement the recommendations presented in AU-EU policy documents.

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### Collaboration Gap

In order to tap the positive and desirable impacts well-managed and coordinated migration or human mobility has on economies, it requires more. The cross-cutting nature of migration demands, first and foremost, an effective framework for collaboration among the national and regional authorities responsible for relevant policy areas. These include foreign affairs, justice and home affairs, national security, policing, border control, social affairs and labour, tourism, immigration, and gender equality. Second, a lack of coordination amongst countries and regions exacerbates migratory challenges for home and destination countries

alike, so these countries would be well-advised to combine their efforts in order to respond more effectively to the problems caused by irregular migration. In short, the idea of “African Solutions to African Problems” in migration governance cannot be achieved without the involvement of the regional economic communities (RECs).

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## Conclusions for the Valletta Summit

Migration poses the most dramatic, tragic and complex challenge of our time. At the same time, it offers opportunities that could transform the lives of many individuals and countries. Nevertheless, it is the exploitation of migrants and the negative impacts of migration, not the positive benefits, which are the focus of public discourse and media coverage. Given that the Valletta Summit will take place under the shadow of the current crisis, it raises more concerns and dilemmas than hope. The first concern is that in response to the crisis mood, the Valletta Summit could launch new initiatives and parallel processes that undermine and siphon off resources from existing projects. The second dilemma is that the Valletta Summit could shift the focus away from long-term sustainable solutions to a short-term reactive response. Political declarations and new action plans may offer false hope, replacing effective long-term projects with actions that simply perpetuate the problems. The short-term approach already adopted by the EU in the form of migration containment policy and the use of military force in response to smuggling are indicative of this problem.

From these observations, the following conclusions can be drawn for the Valletta Summit on Migration.

1. Migration should not be treated as a new and negative phenomenon. It has always been part of human history. Mobility that is orderly and legal should be seen as a positive force in the world. Migration should be viewed from a long-term developmental perspective. It is important to note that there is no easy panacea for migration-related challenges, and so foresight and long-term strategic engagement are required. Unless the fundamentals of migration governance are put in place, strategic engagement will be based on false premises. The priority of the Valletta Summit, then, should be to build a migration governance architecture in Africa, comprising a normative, institutional and collaborative framework involving states and non-state organs that can facilitate voluntary, safe, orderly and legal mobility and curb forced or illegal migration by Africans. Building an African migration architecture should start with national consultative conferences (NCCs) on existing AU normative frameworks on migration. African nations and regions need

to develop comprehensive stand-alone policies on migration that provide strategic thinking and clarity about the drawbacks and benefits of migration. Without a clear policy direction, current legislative reforms in Africa and even in the EU and other countries of destination countries will be counterproductive.

2. Africa needs a sustained civic dialogue and engagement to address erroneous pervasive perceptions and images of “dreamland” destinations of migration. Africa has to change communities’ prevalent thinking, which has evolved for decades and has now formed a collective psychology of “anywhere except the home country”. Changing this public perception will require long-term pro-youth economic development, good governance and public engagement. But it also requires short- and medium-term measures to create awareness of the risks of illegal migration along unsafe routes and the real situation in destination countries. This awareness-raising also needs to target the African diaspora in destination countries.
3. Migration is an individual action based on local situations with global implications. There is therefore a need for long-term global-local collaboration to address the root causes of displacement and illegal mobility. As part of the implementation of the principle of subsidiarity, all actors at international, regional and sub-regional levels should support the national efforts, and the national authorities should serve as backups to local authorities and communities. While the AU has already developed the normative frameworks necessary for effective migration governance, some RECs have moved to regionalise the same policies in the regions and have mobilised support for their implementation at the national level. In order to further diffuse the norms set by the AU, the importance of conducting national consultative conferences in countries selected by the AU and the RECs is vital. The largest home, transit and destination countries should be selected for the first round of such NCCs. Africa needs to collaborate with regional, continental and international actors to enhance the role of community-led local engagement and global cooperation. Here, the AU can serve as a platform to forge common pan-African positions and speak with one African voice.

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## Policy Recommendations for the EU

1. The main challenge for the EU is the need to see migration as a development issue. As long as extreme poverty, conflicts and major constraints on decent livelihoods exist in Africa, Europe will continue to experience migration stress. The

EU needs to shift its focus away from an ad hoc interventionist approach based on “fire-fighting” towards a long-term development partnership. The EU should further seize the opportunity afforded by the Valletta Summit to advance a sustainable mechanism for migration governance through development and trade. With significant investment in high-impact pro-poor economic projects such as promoting labour-intensive small and medium enterprises, the EU can help African countries address the development issues associated with migration. Successful projects of this type already exist in many African countries and only require scaling up and expansion. Intervention in such areas would also help address potential violence that may spur more displacement due to the expected growth in youth unemployment and the lack of a voice in political processes. This way, migration could easily bridge development in Africa and Europe, and the Valletta Summit on Migration could provide a shot in the arm for the Africa-EU Partnership’s trade and development agenda.

2. Voluntary, legal and orderly migration governance means building an inclusive and effective institutional and collaborative framework. Well-resourced migration-related initiatives deliver effectively when states show the political determination to deal with the matter. Given that migration is a low priority on many African countries’ national agendas, it is unlikely that African governments will allocate significant budget resources to this policy area. The EU therefore needs to make the necessary financial resources available to reflect the urgency of migration issues on the national public agendas.
3. Given that Europe will need more human and financial resources for its economy, mobility to Europe needs to be improved significantly by changing its prohibitive visa regime for Africans wishing to enter the EU legally.
4. Containment of migrants and migration within home or transit countries should not be regarded as an effective EU strategy on migration. Containment is unlikely to work as migrants will

always change their routes depending on the challenges they face.

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