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The Security-Migration-Development Nexus in the Sahel: A Reality Check

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ABSTRACT

Policymakers and experts have increasingly emphasized the nexus between migration, security and development in the Sahel, one of the world's poorest regions. Contrary to conventional wisdom, higher levels of economic and human development do not result automatically in a reduction of migratory flows – sometimes the opposite is the case. Similarly, it would be wise to nuance the view that armed conflicts automatically provoke huge migration flows. Policy frameworks sponsored and designed by foreign actors in the region, such as the European Union and the United States, seem to understand the need for a multi-layered approach but are sometimes stretched to meet inconsistent political demands. There is an urgent need for coherent, more evidence-based and less fear-based policy-making, along with local co-ownership in the implementation of policies, if further harmful effects of migration are to be avoided.

Migration | Mediterranean | Sahel | Africa | European Union

keywords

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Introduction

Migration is a hotly debated issue.¹ Policy discourses, and sometimes policies *tout court*, tend to rely on apparently trivial correlations which lack meaningful empirical substantiation. The reality is much less straightforward and requires a nuanced analysis to interpret it accurately. The emotions and attention stirred in the public debate in the EU and US by migration issues reveal in different ways an identity crisis and only widen the gap between potential evidence-based long-term policies and actual reactive short-term policies. With a view to fostering evidence-based policy-making, this policy brief departs from media sensationalism and presents the lessons learnt from the academic literature and past experiences about the complex relationships between migration, development and security in the Sahel region. While each of these concepts lends itself to plural interpretations, an effort of analytical clarity is needed to avoid any blurring of ideas. The Sahelian region provides a particularly relevant case study because it combines significant international migratory flows, new and traditional expressions of widespread insecurity, and major challenges in promoting development in a region lying at the very bottom of the Human Development Index.

¹ Migration and migrants are used here based on the definition of international migrants given in UN documents, i.e. "a person who is living in a country other than his or her country of birth". See United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), *International Migration Report 2015. Highlights (ST/ESA/SER.A/375)*, New York, United Nations, 2016, p. 4, <http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/publications/migrationreport/index.shtml>.

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1. Tsunami or mountain creeks? A reality check of migration in the Sahel

The modalities of migration within and from sub-Saharan Africa result from the complex interaction between geopolitical and economic dynamics, both at global and local levels. In the Sahel, a “semiarid region of western and north-central Africa extending from Senegal eastward to the Sudan”,² the nexus between migration and two other multifaceted policy areas, security and development, is as fundamental as it is difficult to grasp, let alone to govern. It cannot be addressed without providing in first place an empirically informed baseline of who migrates, where, for how long and why.

In spite of the prevailing alarmist rhetoric treating migration as a sudden emergency, migratory flows from Africa to Europe represent a long-standing phenomenon with deep historical roots and rapidly changing patterns. The volume of flows along these routes has varied considerably across time. For example, between 2010 and 2014 the most relevant route for flows from the Sahel towards Europe, the Central Mediterranean Route (CMR), has varied significantly, up to 80 percent from one year to the next, with sharp increases in 2011 and 2014, and a significant decline in 2012.³

While in the early 2000s migrants reached the EU by boat largely from the shores of Senegal and Mauritania heading towards the Canary Islands, or from Morocco to southern Spain, migratory flows along these routes are now considerably reduced. In 2016, 10,631 attempts of illegal border-crossing were detected between Spain and Morocco,⁴ while there were only 671 entries via the Atlantic route. Instead, figures of crossings along the CMR connecting North Africa to Italy have soared significantly in the last few years.⁵ This is also due to a shifting geopolitical landscape: before 2011, the entry into force of the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation between Italy and Libya in 2009 had allegedly reduced migratory flows of an estimated 75 percent along the CMR, although at high human and economic costs. While the treaty is sometimes presented as a successful blueprint, one should remember that the former regime consented to stem migratory flows on the condition that Italy bore

² So the Encyclopaedia Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Sahel>. It therefore forms a transitional zone between the arid Sahara (desert) to the north and the belt of humid savannas to the south, including countries such as Senegal, Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, northeast Nigeria, Niger, Chad, and Sudan.

³ Frontex website: *Central Mediterranean route*, <http://frontex.europa.eu/trends-and-routes/central-mediterranean-route>.

⁴ According to Frontex data, the so-called Atlantic Route used to be the busiest irregular entry point for the whole of Europe, peaking at 32,000 migrants arriving on the Canary Islands in 2006. The numbers dropped dramatically since 2007, following bilateral agreements between Spain and Senegal and Mauritians. However, available statistics suggest that figures are soaring again in 2017. Frontex website: *Western African route*, <http://frontex.europa.eu/trends-and-routes/western-african-route>.

⁵ See Frontex website: *Central Mediterranean route*, <http://frontex.europa.eu/trends-and-routes/central-mediterranean-route>.

the bulk of the costs – and control measures consistently failed to shield migrants from suffering significant human rights abuses).⁶ In addition, Italy agreed to a number of major investments, including a 5 billion euros worth highway across the whole of the country. Following the collapse of the Gaddafi regime, and the failure of the subsequent process of state-building, arrivals by sea in Italy displayed a sharp upward trend, amounting to about 43,000 in 2013, 170,000 in 2014, 153,000 in 2015 and 181,000 in 2016 (see Table 1). The prominence of Libya, and namely of the north-western towns of Sabratha, Zuwara and Zawiya, as a collecting and launching point for migrants is due to the large impunity enjoyed by smugglers, and to the unlikelihood of migrants being returned by EU authorities. This route draws deeply into sub-Saharan Africa and the Sahel: according to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), more than half the total number of migrants who reached Lampedusa in 2014 passed through the Nigerian town of Agadez.⁷ Migrants in transit here rose from an estimated 40–60,000 in the early 2010s to more than 250,000 in 2016.⁸ It is significant that within West and East Africa freedom of movement is underpinned by regional treaties,⁹ thereby facilitating regular migration to the north of Agadez. Further north, the Libyan borders are porous and controlled by local militias with vested interests in the business of migration. These aspects contribute to consolidating the prominence of this route for Sahelian nationals. Indeed, the top three countries of origin for migrants hitting the CMR in 2014 were Syria, Eritrea and Mali; in 2015 Eritrea, Nigeria and Somalia; and in 2016 Nigeria, Eritrea and Guinea (see Table 1).¹⁰

⁶ Mattia Toaldo, "Migrations Through and From Libya: A Mediterranean Challenge", in *IAI Working Papers*, No. 15|14 (May 2015), p. 6-7, <http://www.iai.it/en/node/4183>.

⁷ Peter Tinti and Tom Westcott, "The Niger-Libya Corridor. Smugglers' Perspectives", in *ISS Papers*, No. 299 (November 2016), p. 9, https://issafrica.org/uploads/paper299_2.pdf.

⁸ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), *The Role of Organized Crime in the Smuggling of Migrants from West Africa to the European Union*, New York, United Nations, 2011, <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/human-trafficking/migrant-smuggling/the-role-of-organized-crime-in-the-smuggling-of-migrants-from-west-africa-to-the-european-union.html>; Fransje Molenaar, "Irregular Migration and Human Smuggling Networks in Niger", in *Clingendael CRU Reports*, February 2017, <https://www.clingendael.org/publication/turning-tide-0>.

⁹ For instance, art. 59 of the ECOWAS treaty states the right of entry, residence, and establishment, and art. 104 of the Treaty for the Establishment of the East African Community.

¹⁰ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Italy Country Update - December 2016*, January 2017, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/53095>. It is worth stressing that different legal profiles add up in the figures mentioned above and coalesce in the general category of migrants: in many cases, for instance, Eritreans and Somalis qualify for refugee status (alongside with Syrians, obviously); this is less often the case for other nationalities, including Senegalese, Ivorians, and Guineans. Similarly, Nigerian and Malian migrants heading to Europe largely originate from regions which are relatively less affected by insecurity and civil war, such as the Edo State and the region of Kayes, respectively. While a specific pattern of human trafficking has been detected in the eastern leg of the trans-Saharan migrant route, connecting Eritrea to central and northern Europe (see Sahan Foundation and IGAD Security Sector Program (ISSP), *Human Trafficking and Smuggling on the Horn of Africa-Central Mediterranean Route*, Nairobi, Sahan Foundation, February 2016, http://www.sahan.eu/wp-content/uploads/HST_Report_FINAL_19ii2016.pdf), the facilitation of human mobility from West Africa relies more on flexible, non-hierarchical agreements, thus making it more difficult to disentangle cases of smuggling and of trafficking of human beings (see Arezo Malakooti, *Mixed Migration: Libya at the Crossroads. Mapping of Migration Routes from Africa to Europe and Drivers of Migration in Post-revolution Libya*, Altai Consulting for the UNHCR,

Table 1 | Nationalities of migrants arriving in Italy along the CMR

		2014		2015		2016
1°	Syria	42,000	Eritrea	39,000	Nigeria	37,000
2°	Eritrea	34,000	Nigeria	20,000	Eritrea	20,000
3°	Mali	10,000	Somalia	12,000	Guinea	13,000
4°	Nigeria	9,000	Sudan	9,000	Ivory Coast	12,000
5°	Gambia	8,000	Gambia	8,000	Gambia	11,000
Total		170,000		153,000		181,000

Sources: Italian Ministry of Interior and UNHCR, 2017.

Note: All figures approximate.

These figures have attracted considerable media attention, as well as uncountable policy speculations. It is true that in 2015 the number of international migrants worldwide was the highest ever recorded, reaching 244 million (up from 232 million in 2013). However, the share of the world population represented by international migration has remained relatively constant over the past few years, at around 3 percent.¹¹ In the year 2015, absolute migration figures were pushed up by the numbers of migrants originating from the Middle East, to the extent that arrivals across the Aegean Sea were five times higher than along the CMR. And yet fears that the entry into force of the EU–Turkey deal, in March 2016, would result in an increasing pressure along the CMR has failed to materialize so far, as the sheer figures and trajectories of migrants reaching Italian shores testify.¹² Moreover, the magnitude of south–north movements (towards OECD countries) pales when compared with the continued growth of south–south migration flows (across developing countries).¹³ Available statistics suggest that 84 percent of the migrant population originating from West Africa moves inside the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) area,¹⁴ while in East Africa 1.6 million South Sudanese have been displaced in neighbouring countries, and not to Europe, since

November 2013, <https://www.altaiconsulting.com/?p=5956>). The trafficking of Nigerian women destined to the prostitution market in Europe represents a notable exception.

¹¹ International Organization of Migration (IOM), *Global Migration Trends Factsheet 2015, 2016*, <https://publications.iom.int/node/1507>. It has been rightly observed that the size of the European population would have fallen in the absence of positive net migration. See UNDESA, *International Migration Report 2015. Highlights*, cit.

¹² Beyond Table 1 with CMR figures 2014–2016, also the data so far available for January–July 2017 show the majority of nationalities of migrants along that route as being very different from the ones mostly concerned by the Turkey deal: 93,935 undocumented entries, with three top nationalities being Nigeria, Bangladesh and Guinea. See Frontex website: *Migratory routes map*, <http://frontex.europa.eu/trends-and-routes/migratory-routes-map>.

¹³ IOM, *Global Migration Trends Factsheet 2015*, cit.

¹⁴ Tahar Benattia, Florence Armitano and Holly Robinson, *Irregular Migration between West Africa, North Africa and the Mediterranean*, Altai Consulting for IOM Nigeria, December 2015, <http://globalinitiative.net/?p=19362>.

the start of the conflict in December 2013.¹⁵ Hence, while it is by now clear that the CMR is the most dangerous for migrants' safety worldwide,¹⁶ the widespread rhetoric of a migrant flood, or of an "African tsunami" swamping European shores is largely misleading and needs to be reviewed. For if there is a sea of migrants, only a few creeks dribble out of Africa, with significant variations across time in intensity flow and routes.

2. The migration-development nexus

Public discourse, policy debates and even international policies addressing migratory flows are often premised on the common-sense idea that less development results in more migration and that income differentials alone amount to a key push factor. This idea posits without doubt that migration is linked to economic development, in as much as it represents a strategy of resilience for coping with the limited absorption capacity of local job markets. However, both the academic literature and the lessons learnt from past experiences in managing migratory flows challenge the validity of these assumptions. Economics literature has demonstrated that higher levels of economic and human development do not automatically result in a reduction of migratory flows; rather, they are associated with higher overall levels of migration. In other words, economic development has a "U-curve effect" on emigration, that starts decreasing only after a long period of sustained economic growth.¹⁷ This can be explained by the fact that people need resources (economic, social, intellectual) to migrate, thereby suggesting that opportunity, rather than income differentials alone, contributes to triggering the choice of migration. Interestingly, it is not the poorest countries in the region who account for the largest proportion of migrants arriving irregularly in Europe. Niger, Chad and Burkina Faso rank at the very bottom of UNDP's Human Development Index, and are located at the core of migration routes to Europe, and yet the majority of the migrants originate from more developed and more distant countries such as Nigeria, Senegal and Ivory Coast. Such findings invite one to reconsider the widespread assumption about the "prototypical" profile of the migrants heading to Europe: even though conclusive data are lacking, one could claim that in many cases the majority of long-range migrants are not the starving poorest, but the unemployed middle class. One could also argue that bad governance and patronage politics nurture migration more than sheer hunger, in as much as unequal opportunities, poor provision of public services and badly managed family planning policies constrain the youth's access to the job market.

¹⁵ Data provided by the Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat (RMMS), accessed in January 2017. See RMMS website: *Mixed Migration Monthly Maps*, <http://www.regionalmms.org/index.php/data-trends/monthly-maps>.

¹⁶ Tara Brian and Frank Laczko (eds.), *Fatal Journeys. Tracking Lives Lost during Migration*, Geneva, International Organization of Migration (IOM), 2014, <https://publications.iom.int/node/113>.

¹⁷ Hein de Haas, "Migration Transitions. A Theoretical and Empirical Inquiry into the Developmental Drivers of International Migration", in *IMI Working Papers*, No. 24 (2010), <https://www.imi.ox.ac.uk/publications/wp-24-10>.

This means that claims to curb migration by fostering economic development are utterly misleading, given that initially developmental policies and foreign direct investments are likely to result in more, not less, emigration, at least in the short to medium term. On the other hand, the longer-term effects of migratory flows can contribute to overturn the alleged correlation between migration and development: in many cases, migration can be seen not as the consequence of less development, but as the cause of more development.¹⁸ Migrants' remittances abroad contribute significantly to the sustenance of communities at home, and often sponsor schemes of local development and the provision of basic services. In Senegal, for instance, the remittances of the diaspora are said to amount to the first source of foreign currency in the country. In Nigeria, their estimated value surpasses 20 billion dollars per year, representing about 8 percent of the country's total gross domestic product (GDP).¹⁹

Admittedly, these figures could be much higher if the value of remittances through informal channels were also considered.²⁰ In other words, if properly managed the resources produced through migration have the potential to empower the countries of origin, fund the development of infrastructure to preserve their human capital, and even facilitate return migration. However, one should be cautious about the potentially ambivalent role of diasporas, as both a resource for development and peacebuilding, and as a spoiler of inclusive solutions.²¹ Long-distance involvement by exiled communities in conflicts of their homeland is by no means a new phenomenon, but in today's interconnected world the possibilities of transnational mobilization and political action have clearly increased, through multiple means including major financial operations. How this financial and social capital with international reach is then used by conflict-relevant actors on the ground can have a decisive impact. Specific co-development programmes can contribute to overseeing the use of these resources and maximizing their positive social impact, in order to foster community development, ensure gender equality and prevent brain drain.

At a regional level, seasonal patterns of rural flight and of regional migration (most notably towards North Africa) represent a key strategy to cope with the dry season in places like Mali and Niger, and therefore amount to a significant component of families' livelihoods.²² It is hardly surprising, then, that both migration and

¹⁸ Kathleen Newland, "What We Know About Migration and Development", in *MPI Policy Briefs*, No. 9 (September 2013), <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/node/4013>.

¹⁹ Alexandre Devillard, Alessia Bacchi and Marion Noack, *A Survey on Migration Policies in West Africa*, Vienna-Dakar, ICMPD and IOM, March 2015, p. 259, <https://publications.iom.int/node/44>.

²⁰ Given its reliance on official statistics, the World Bank Remittances database does not provide figures for countries like Eritrea or Somalia, although they are likely to be very significant. See World Bank website: *Migration and Remittances Data*, <https://goo.gl/caKG5x>.

²¹ See examples in Liisa Laakso and Petri Hautaniemi (eds.), *Diasporas, Development and Peacemaking in the Horn of Africa*, London, Zed Books, 2014, <http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:nai:diva-1874>.

²² Fransje Molenaar, "Irregular Migration and Human Smuggling Networks in Niger", cit.

smuggling are widely seen locally as an opportunity, rather than as a threat.²³ In this sense, since 2000 ECOWAS and IOM inaugurated the Migration Dialogue for West Africa (MIDWA), a forum explicitly aimed at discussing ways to unleash the potential of regular migration within ECOWAS, and in 2008 ECOWAS initiated a Common Approach on Migration Process, reaffirming its commitments to remove obstacles to the free movement of persons, the benefits of migration for ECOWAS, and the defence of the rights of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees. In the same vein, the 2006 Africa Union's (AU) Migration Policy Framework for Africa sets out to promote intra-continental mobility.²⁴

However, the assumptions of the policy frameworks that outside actors – such as the EU and the US – have sponsored and designed to address migration in the Sahel fail to consider this evidence adequately. As a key stakeholder in the region, the EU has tried over the past three decades to consider the need for a comprehensive approach on the external dimension of its migration policy in relation to development. In practice, however, political pressures and concrete constraints in implementation have put the EU in the uncomfortable position of trying to keep together a multidimensional understanding of migration governance with the common-sense view of a direct and proportional correlation between “better economic opportunities at home” and a decrease in migration flows.²⁵

The view set out in the 2011 Global Approach to Migration and Mobility (GAMM),²⁶ and further developed in the 2015 Agenda for Migration and its subsequent implementing documents,²⁷ recognizes that migration is a symptom of poverty as well as of conflict and weak governance, but also an opportunity for improving livelihoods and development, observing that “regional labour mobility schemes encouraging South-South mobility can bring an important contribution to local development”.²⁸ This understanding is also enshrined in the subsequent frameworks of cooperation between the EU and the regional bodies dealing with migration in the Sahelian area: with the AU, the EU signed a Joint Declaration on Migration and Development in 2006,²⁹ followed by specific summits and action plans; with

²³ Peter Tinti and Tom Westcott, “The Niger-Libya Corridor”, cit.

²⁴ African Union, *The Migration Policy Framework for Africa* (EX.CL/276 (IX)), Executive Council 9th Ordinary Session, Banjul, 25-29 June 2006, [http://archive.au.int/collect/oaucounc/import/English/EX.CL.276.\(IX\).E.PDF](http://archive.au.int/collect/oaucounc/import/English/EX.CL.276.(IX).E.PDF).

²⁵ European Commission, *A European Agenda on Migration* (COM/2015/240), 13 May 2015, p. 16, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=celex:52015DC0240>.

²⁶ European Commission, *The Global Approach to Migration and Mobility* (COM/2011/743), 18 November 2011, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=celex:52011DC0743>.

²⁷ European Commission, *A European Agenda on Migration*, cit.; and European Commission, *On establishing a new Partnership Framework with third countries under the European Agenda on Migration* (COM/2016/385), 7 June 2016, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=celex:52016DC0385>.

²⁸ European Commission, *A European Agenda on Migration*, cit., p. 16.

²⁹ African Union and European Union, *Joint Africa-EU Declaration on Migration and Development*, Tripoli, 22-23 November 2006, http://ec.europa.eu/development/body/tmp_docs/2006/Joint_declaration_22110_AU-EU.pdf.

Western and Central African countries, the EU initiated a process of cooperation in 2006 (called the Rabat Process), and with countries in the Horn of Africa in 2014 (the Khartoum Process), aimed at clamping down on irregular migration while fostering opportunities for local development. Building on these frameworks, the Valletta Political Declaration and Action Plan of November 2015, while recognizing that “a comprehensive approach is necessary for boosting sustainable economic, social and environmental development”, aspire to “address the root causes of irregular migration”, including by “reducing poverty” and “supporting inclusive economic growth through investment opportunities and the creation of decent jobs”.³⁰ To this end, the Valletta Summit has launched a EU Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF) of 2.8 billion euros streamlining European aid to tackle the root causes of migration, including, most notably, the lack of development and job opportunities, thereby corroborating the idea that more development aid leads to less migration.

Whilst the related public discourse reproduces the (misleading) link “more development aid, less migration”, the manifest gap between rhetorical claims and implementation further complicates the picture of the effectiveness of EU migration policies in the Sahel,³¹ and most notably of the EU Trust Fund for Africa. On the one hand, the real aid flow differentials seem to be largely allocated in favour of enhanced border controls and other security measures, including capacity building and equipment for law-enforcement agencies, thereby targeting more immediate consequences rather than the root causes of migration.³² On the other hand, the imperative to curb migration at all costs risks distorting even the genuine developmental ambitions of foreign policies in the Sahel. In a number of cases the sourcing of additional finances by the EU and its Member States in order to address the refugee crisis has come at the cost of ongoing and planned development activities. In other cases, it has decreased the flexibility and the availability of aid funding for development cooperation. The EUTF sponsoring scheme, too, has partly relied on the existing aid delivering processes and funds, thereby limiting itself in some cases to “relabel” and “repackage” previously allocated resources. While streamlining migration and its alleged root causes, the principles of local ownership and necessity have often been overlooked. The urge to strengthen development and political cooperation with countries that are strategically relevant from a migration perspective has led to neglecting others who could be more or equally in need of support.³³

³⁰ Council of the European Union, *Political Declaration - Valletta Summit*, 11-12 November 2015, p. 2, <http://europa.eu/ldG66Dd>.

³¹ Interestingly, this also seemed to be the case with the 2011 EU Strategy for Security and Development in the Sahel, which crucially addressed migratory flows as well. See Tuesday Reitano and Mark Shaw, “People’s Perspectives of Organised Crime in West Africa and the Sahel”, in *ISS Papers*, No. 254 (April 2014), <https://issafrica.org/uploads/Paper254E.pdf>.

³² Jair van der Lijn, “For the Long Run. A Mapping of Migration-Related Activities in the Wider Sahel Region”, in *Clingendael Reports*, January 2017, <http://reliefweb.int/node/1897474>. However, a EU officer posted in Nairobi, interviewed for this research in March 2017, disputed this view, suggesting that, in practice, the concrete implementation of the projects funded by the EUTF is smoothed in more human-rights oriented interventions.

³³ Anna Knoll and Andrew Sheriff, “Making Waves: Implications of the Irregular Migration and

Moreover, security imperatives risk overriding the development concerns. External actors in the Sahel, including the US, the EU and EU Member States, put a growing emphasis on hardened border control, pushing state and non-state actors in the Sahel to reduce the margins for unconstrained cross-border mobility (for instance in view of larger funding prospects), irrespective of the final destination of the flows and of their socio-economic significance for the survival of local communities.³⁴ Yet the neglect of the broader political economy of migration has already proved detrimental to the effectiveness of these strategies. In several Sahelian countries, cross border informal economies and workforce mobility, admittedly including smuggling, represents in fact one of the few available economic opportunities especially in the remote peripheral regions where natural resources are scarce.³⁵

3. The migration-security nexus

The links between migration and security are manifold, not least due to the polysemy of the concept of security. Security perceptions around migration vary sharply across the continents, and involve diverging concepts of security: for instance, while European (and increasingly American) public opinion often associates migratory flows with a threat to their security and identity, Africans tend to see migration as an opportunity for humanitarian protection and economic security.³⁶ Instead of arbitrarily focusing on a unilateral understanding of security (state security, human security, food security, etc.), it can be worth asking in each case what the direction of the stated correlation between migration and (in-) security is, and whose security the nexus is about.

Long before it became such a controversial political issue, migration was widely seen – especially in the Sahel – as a key strategy for local communities to cope with food and environmental insecurities, in a region characterized by patterns of severe climate change, unpredictable agricultural output and famine. Legal insecurity and human insecurity are also important issues: the refugee protection framework is not an exception to the uncertainty of law implementation in large areas of the Sahel, and provides a significant incentive for refugees to seek a more protective framework in Europe. Even beyond the search for greater security at individual and community level, migration can contribute to states' security – which is less often recognized. As institutional weaknesses and unpredictable

Refugee Situation on Official Development Assistance Spending and Practices in Europe", in *EBA-reports*, No. 2017:01 (February 2017), <http://eba.se/en/?p=5239>. See also the investigative reports of Diverted Aid: <https://innovation.journalismgrants.org/projects/diverted-aid>.

³⁴ Fransje Molenaar, "Irregular Migration and Human Smuggling Networks in Niger", cit.

³⁵ Ibid.; Mattia Toaldo, "Migrations Through and From Libya", cit.

³⁶ For a good overview on these narratives see Anna Knoll and Frauke de Weijer, "Understanding African and European Perspectives on Migration. Towards a Better Partnership for Regional Migration Governance?", in *ECDPM Discussion Papers*, No. 203 (November 2016), <http://ecdpm.org/?p=25035>.

access to natural resources have the potential to represent major drivers of conflict and civil war, migration can be said to represent a safety valve to absorb the demand of employment of a quickly expanding youth often trained in little but fighting. Taking the road (of migration) thus represents an alternative to taking up arms, and can significantly contribute to regional stability and global security.

Policy frameworks sponsored by external actors in the Sahel tend to see things the other way around: migration is not the cause of greater security, but the consequence of greater insecurity. While this intuitive link is at first sight indisputable, a plethora of counterexamples urge us to nuance such a view and to reject a purely mechanical understanding of push and pull factors, as often resorted to in policy discourses. Significant patterns of migration from Somalia are clearly influenced by widespread insecurity there, but a similar dynamic of insecurity and state collapse in Central African Republic have not resulted in the same migratory trends. While an authoritarian regime contributes to pushing Eritreans to migrate in search for a greater personal security, the same does not occur in other authoritarian and ruthless regimes in the Sahel, such as Chad. Migratory flows from countries experiencing internal conflicts and terrorism, such as Mali and Nigeria, do not originate from the hardest-hit regions, such as Kidal or Borno State respectively, but from relatively less violent ones, such as Kayes and Edo State. And most migrants along the CMR (over 63 percent) come from countries where there is currently no war. Senegal, Ghana, Guinea, Nigeria, Gambia, Cameroon and Sierra Leone accounted for the strongest relative increases in 2016 compared with 2015.³⁷ Hence, while insecurity is a contributing factor, its impact on migration from and through the Sahel is overwhelmingly mediated by other aspects, including economic and cultural issues.

Policy discourses and the practices of foreign actors in the Sahel, including the EU and some of its Member States, convey the idea that the enhancement of local security forces and border controls can contribute to reducing irregular migration by inhibiting opportunities for smuggling. In a similar vein, US policies in the region tend to assume that the “ungoverned” borderlands in the region represent a fertile ground for major global security threats, such as terrorism and organized crime (which are sometimes conflated, in spite of the lack of adequate evidence). Hence, programmes such as the Pan-Sahelian Initiative and the Trans-Saharan Counter Terrorism Partnership have undertaken to enhance border controls and strengthen local security apparatuses in the region.³⁸ This approach risks to

³⁷ Bram Frouws, “The Italian Connection: Getting the Analysis Right Using Data Not Myths”, in *RMMS Feature Articles*, 17 January 2017, <http://regionalmms.org/index.php/research-publications/feature-articles/item/60-the-italian-connection-getting-the-analysis-right-using>.

³⁸ The Pan-Sahelian Initiative (PSI) and the Trans-Saharan Counter Terrorism Partnership (TSCTP) refer to the US-sponsored programmes aimed at fostering security in the Sahel. The PSI was a relatively small programme, lasting from 2002 to 2004 to assist the border enforcement efforts of Mauritania, Mali, Niger and Chad. Since 2005 it expanded into the TSCTP: intervening in Algeria, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, and Tunisia, it was endowed with a 500 million dollar budget and mandated to assist local efforts to counter

present as support to development and the rule of law many actions which are in their essence counter-insurgency operations. However, it is worth noticing that tougher border security risks discouraging regional patterns of informal mobility and short-term economic migration to neighbouring countries, which are not only alternatives to long-haul migration but also favour regional development without carrying significant security risks. Moreover, such policies challenge local ownership as they sharply contrast with, for instance, the ECOWAS Common Approach on Migration; yet, in order to be effective, such measures need to be part of a comprehensive regional framework, as tougher border controls in one country risk displacing the problem rather than tackling it head-on. Unilateral initiatives by individual states through bilateral actions with transit countries can thus create challenges for neighbouring states. Italy's and Germany's deals with Sudan and Niger are examples of this short-sighted approach. The EU itself acknowledges that, as a result of the anti-smuggling activities carried out by Niger, Mali is increasingly likely to be used as an alternative transit country.³⁹ In the US, similar views have been recently put forward.⁴⁰

Furthermore, foreign support to security forces and border controls in the countries of origin and transit is based on the idea that Sahelian states lack the capacity, but not the willingness, to fight irregular migration. In many cases, however, this assumption does not stand empirical scrutiny. Local state authorities are in fact well aware that migration leads to employment and that remittances represent a key driver of resilience for local communities and development for the whole country. Hence, they might resort to foot-dragging, and turn a blind-eye on irregular migration to resist foreign pressures. This trend is not new: already in 2014, IOM recognized that "the *quartiers* or *les ghettos* in the towns where migrants accumulate, and the involvement of police, soldiers and border officials appear to be [...] 'normalized' and accepted [...]. Much of this can be attributed to the fact that many of the local economies are now highly dependent on smuggling, encouraging authorities to turn a blind eye".⁴¹ Even beyond that, an increasing amount of evidence is pointing at the pervasive collusions between migrants' smugglers and state authorities, including within the security apparatuses and the political establishments. Irregular migration can thus approximate the dynamics of a state-sponsored racket. Niger, Eritrea, Sudan and Libya exemplify these dynamics, and contribute to explaining the resilience and impunity of smuggling

terrorism in a multi-dimensional fashion, linking development, security and rule of law.

³⁹ European Commission and High Representative of the Union, *Annual Report on the Sahel Regional Action Plan* (SWD/2016/482), 23 December 2016, <http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-5009-2017-INIT/en/pdf>.

⁴⁰ US State Department, *Framework for Border Security and Management Programs: A Compilation of Lessons Learned and Best Practices*, Washington, 2017 (Unclassified electronic copy obtained by the authors via the National Democratic Institute).

⁴¹ Tara Brian and Frank Laczko (eds.), *Fatal Journeys*, cit., p. 112. In the framework of an interview conducted in Bamako in 2014, a senior Malian officer plainly admitted that "migrant smugglers are perfectly known by Malian authorities. We could put them all in jail in less than 24 hours. But remittances bring many more riches to the country than anything else, so no one has a real interest to disrupt the business chain".

networks in spite of international efforts.⁴² The effectiveness, let alone the legitimacy, of pouring resources into the hands of these actors to stop migration is highly questionable. Moreover, the implicit support to corrupt regimes, bad governance and state-sponsored rackets risks to represent a greater challenge to regional – and European – security in the long run.

However, one should stress that even an enhanced border enforcement carried out in a comprehensive, transparent, accountable and effective manner would not be completely secure and risk-averse. Both the available academic literature and the lessons learnt from past experiences underscore that, in many cases, the obstruction of legal avenues for regular migration does not lead to a significant reduction of departures, but to a greater resort to professional smugglers and traffickers capable of circumventing the new barriers. Illustrative of this trend are the routes carved out by Senegalese migrants through Libya, or by Eritrean migrants across the Sinai, when a renewed border enforcement shut down the “traditional” routes across Mauritania and Sudan, respectively.⁴³ And the professionalization of smuggling networks, as a result of greater border enforcement and sanctions, can end up reinforcing organized crime, corruption and bad governance.⁴⁴ There is little doubt that the shrinking of legal avenues for regular migration and the rise of criminal organizations as alternative providers of mobility increases the vulnerability of migrants and severely undermines their human security.⁴⁵

A number of externally sponsored policies dealing with migration and security emphasize that irregular migration provides a major source of income for non-state actors such as organized crime and terrorism. The dismantling of the business model of migrants’ traffickers is thus presented as contributing to international peace and security.⁴⁶ However, that migration breeds organized crime and/or terrorism (and that organized crime and terrorism can be easily conflated) is not as straightforward as these policies seem to assume. Undoubtedly, major migratory flows from Eritrea have provided a fertile ground for the development of transnational organized crime – yet one needs to underscore that the latter is

⁴² Sahan Foundation and ISSP, *Human Trafficking and Smuggling on the Horn of Africa-Central Mediterranean Route*, cit.; Peter Tinti and Tom Westcott, “The Niger-Libya Corridor”, cit.; Floor El Kamouni-Janssen, “Only God Can Stop the Smugglers’. Understanding Human Smuggling Networks in Libya”, in *Clingendael CRU Reports*, February 2017, <http://globalinitiative.net/?p=18965>; Fransje Molenaar, “Irregular Migration and Human Smuggling Networks in Niger”, cit.

⁴³ Tara Brian and Frank Laczko (eds.), *Fatal Journeys*, cit.; Tahar Benattia, Florence Armitano and Holly Robinson, *Irregular Migration between West Africa, North Africa and the Mediterranean*, cit.; Sahan Foundation and ISSP, *Human Trafficking and Smuggling on the Horn of Africa-Central Mediterranean Route*, cit.

⁴⁴ UNODC, *The Role of Organized Crime in the Smuggling of Migrants from West Africa to the European Union*, cit.; UNODC, *Corruption and the Smuggling of Migrants*, January 2013, <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/human-trafficking/2013/unodc-launches-paper-on-corruption-and-the-smuggling-of-migrants.html>.

⁴⁵ Tara Brian and Frank Laczko (eds.), *Fatal Journeys*, cit.; Sahan Foundation and ISSP, *Human Trafficking and Smuggling on the Horn of Africa-Central Mediterranean Route*, cit.

⁴⁶ See European Union Foreign Affairs Council, 20 April 2015, <http://europa.eu/HQ67mQ>.

reportedly linked to state actors.⁴⁷ In Nigeria, human smuggling and trafficking are largely performed by criminal-tribal networks, while there is no evidence of the involvement of terrorist organizations such as Boko Haram. In Mali, the presence of feared terrorists in the north is reportedly an incentive to look for alternative routes, and has contributed to fostering the role of Niger's Agadez as a regional hub. In the case of Libya, despite the lack of conclusive evidence, controversial reports have contributed to inflating media anxiety about Daesh's alleged racket of migrant smuggling and plans to attack Italy via migrant boats,⁴⁸ and the possible linkages between smuggling and terrorism is increasingly called into question by EU officials.⁴⁹ And plentiful observations suggest that, as a general rule, human smuggling across West Africa resorts to the services provided by "homespun" networks through flexible arrangements, rather than to organized criminal cartels.⁵⁰ In the past, it was recognized that "the assistance provided to sub-Saharan African migrants had been small-scale, focused on a single border or short leg of the journey which had to be paid for separately".⁵¹ The prevalence of horizontal and porous dynamics of coordination among "service providers", especially in the Sahel, demonstrates that organized crime and terrorist groups are far from being the main enablers of migratory flows, and that the latter do not necessarily reinforce the former. It is rather the shrinking of legal avenues for migration that contributes to empowering criminal syndicates, leading one to conclude that the criminal professionalization of human smuggling is often the outcome, not the cause, of that securitization of migration which, ironically, is purported to fight terrorism and organized crime.

Existing policy frameworks addressing migration in the Sahel demonstrate the limited attention paid to the lessons offered by the struggle of the international community against other illicit flows, such as drugs: an exclusive focus on the supply side is likely to result in increasing human rights abuses, uncontrollably soaring costs and limited effectiveness.⁵² Hence, just as in the case with the war on drugs, the "war on irregular migration" is likely to generate its own monsters, and even greater insecurity.

⁴⁷ "Eritrean human smugglers have penetrated their country's political establishment". Sahan Foundation and ISSP, *Human Trafficking and Smuggling on the Horn of Africa-Central Mediterranean Route*, cit., p. 30.

⁴⁸ Mattia Toaldo, "Migrations Through and From Libya", cit.

⁴⁹ Kateryna Ivashchenko-Stadnik et al., "How the EU is Facing Crises in its Neighbourhood. Evidence from Libya and Ukraine", in *EUNPACK Papers*, 31 March 2017, <http://www.eunpack.eu/node/77>.

⁵⁰ Tara Brian and Frank Laczko (eds.), *Fatal Journeys*, cit.; Tahar Benattia, Florence Armitano and Holly Robinson, *Irregular Migration between West Africa, North Africa and the Mediterranean*, cit.

⁵¹ UNODC, *The Role of Organized Crime in the Smuggling of Migrants from West Africa to the European Union*, cit., p. 35.

⁵² Frank G. Madsen, *Transnational Organized Crime*, London and New York, Routledge, 2009.

4. Options to improve the EU and US contributions to the governance of the security-migration-development nexus in the Sahel

The international actors, chiefly the EU and the US, intervening in the Sahel on the policy triangle migration/security/development share responsibility to avoid harmful impacts and to improve the governance of these policy areas, a governance intertwined with the wider level of governance in the region. Consequently, our main recommendations are:

- To avoid misgivings and miscommunications linking migration policies with development cooperation. There is no evidence of immediate links between the contexts and the beneficiaries of the two policies.⁵³ The risk of misplacing taxpayers' money and expectations is very serious, both in terms of internal and external (unintended?) political impacts.
- Development efforts would have a greater impact on the governance of migration if some key preconditions were systematically ensured, including a more direct involvement and ownership of local authorities and civil society organizations, taking into account the diaspora-generated actual or potential development dynamics, and a more realistic approach to market analysis in the preparatory steps of development programmes.⁵⁴ Moreover, no development effort will be successful without ensuring that funds are properly funnelled through the empowerment of good governance and rule of law.
- Criminal smuggling networks are as strong as the migrants are disempowered. Policies premised on interdictions have proven to be counterproductive on the long run, and bear significant human, economic and reputational costs, and should be limited. Provision of services and legal protection beyond and notwithstanding the legal status of migrants in a specific territory would go a long way to providing migrants with incentives for avoiding criminal networks. Moreover, a growing amount of evidence shows that the promotion of regular avenues to human mobility and remote application for refugee status (such as the "humanitarian corridors") represent more viable and sustainable solutions.
- In this vein, too repressive a governance of migration should be avoided, as it multiplies the shortcomings of the weak rule of law systems in the region, including the lack of an enabling environment for civil society and the high frequency of human rights violations. From this perspective, the promotion of good governance, the rule of law, accountability and transparency can contribute to reducing the scope of smuggling, putting an end to the impunity of criminal organizations, foster development and inhibit migratory flows. Blind support to security agencies and controversial deals with authoritarian regimes – for example in Sudan, Ethiopia, Chad and Egypt – should be discontinued.

⁵³ See also Steffen Angenendt, Anne Koch and Amrei Meier, "Development Cooperation and Addressing 'Root Causes'", in *Forced Migration Review*, No. 52 (May 2016), p. 29-30, <http://www.fmreview.org/solutions/angenendt-koch-meier.html>.

⁵⁴ See examples in "Thinking Ahead: Displacement, Transition, Solutions", in *Forced Migration Review*, No. 52 (May 2016), <http://www.fmreview.org/solutions.html>.

- At the level of international agreements, while it is understandable that bilateral agreements (such as the EU “Compacts”) with single countries along migration routes are seen as more quickly implementable than support for the complex AU policy architecture, the latter still deserves attention and support in certain initiatives, especially where relevant to improve the continental mobility framework and thus probably reduce incentives for extra-continental migration.
- Last but not least, public authorities should highlight the positive contribution that mobility has made to the well-being and the peaceful progress of the involved continents, both towards general audiences and specific ones, namely in schools. Conversely, inflammatory rhetoric drawing on controversial “nexuses” – such as those between migration, terrorism and criminality – should be avoided in order to prevent misunderstandings and undue anxiety. The manifold benefits that migration can bring about – in terms of global development and security – should contribute to calling into question policies whose implicit aim seems to be, *de facto*, only to reduce migration flows.

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