Exploring narratives on the Migration– Development nexus

How can the future Africa-EU partnership maximise the development impact of migration and mobility?

Report on the virtual roundtable discussion organised on 9 November 2021 by ACT Alliance EU, in collaboration with Caritas Africa and Caritas Europa









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- **Anna Knoll**, Head of Migration Programme at ECDPM;
- Siga Fatima Jagne, Commissioner of Social Affairs and Gender, ECOWAS Commission;
- Badara Ndiaye, Director of the Association Diaspora Development Education Migration (DIADEM) and West African Platform of the Civil Society Organisation MIGRAFRIQUE;
- Hans Stausboll, Head of Unit for Regional and Multi-Country Programs for Africa at the Directorate-General for International Partnership of the European Commission (DG INTPA);
- Bob van Dillen, Senior Migration Adviser for Cordaid, the Netherlands;

- Carine Nsoudou, Executive Director of Africa-Europe Diaspora International Platform (ADEPT);
- Andreas Grünewald, Policy advisor for migration at Brot für die Welt, Germany.

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Acronyms and abbreviations

- **AU** Africa Union
- **COVID** Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19)
- **CSO** Civil Society Organisations
- **ECDPM** European Center for Development Policy Management
- **ECOWAS** Economic Community of West African States
- **EU** European Union
- **ICMPD** International Centre for Migration Policy Development
- **IGAD** Intergovernmental Authority on Development
- **NDICI** Neighborhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument
- **ODA** Official Development Assistance
- **TVET** Technical and Vocational Education and Training

Executive summary

The virtual dialogue held on 9 November 2021 on the migration-development nexus in the future Africa-EU partnership highlighted the need to bridge the gap between promises and progress on commitments towards building an inclusive, coherent and holistic partnership on migration and mobility. African aspirations and priorities are about freedom of movement for skills, labour, social capital and economic development. The current Africa-EU Partnership is still dominated by the key priorities of the EU, which include returns and readmissions, border management and controls and root causes of irregular migration. In order to shift towards a partnership that builds on common interests and priorities of both parties, the EU should move away from the overfocus on restricting migration and instead prioritise building on the potential of migration as a development force in line with African aspirations.

The session noted the great need for the future Africa-EU Partnership to engage with civil society and Diaspora, tapping proactively and meaningfully into their knowledge, experience and expertise. This could be best improved with the creation of policy frameworks, open platforms, and fora for north-south CSOs sharing and exchange and consistent facilitation with funding.

Overall, the key takeaways from the debate centred around five priority areas:

- Build a balanced partnership for both parties
- Ensure policy coherence and respect for human rights
- Enhance meaningful engagement with CSOs and Diaspora
- Invest in intra-African mobility for sustainable development
- Invest in legal pathways for migration and mobility and in addressing the root causes of forced displacement

It was also recommended that more investment in rural areas for improved access to services, for livelihoods and well-being with a focus on youth could help reduce the reasons people have to migrate seeking better opportunities. A renewed Africa-EU partnership should aim at creating a comprehensive and balanced partnership.

The ECOWAS Commissioner representative

highlighted the main challenges and opportunities for the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) region in implementing of the Protocol on the Free Movement of People. The discussion focused on the EU migration policies, the EU-ECOWAS policy dialogue and cooperation on migration, the impact on migration policies and the free movement of people and migrant's rights in the ECOWAS region and between West Africa and Europe. This contributed to the clarification of how ECOWAS and AU institutions discuss migration and mobility issues with civil society and to what extent this dialogue informs decision-making on these issues.

The African civil society's representative

highlighted the main priorities and challenges civil society encounters in relation to the ECOWAS and EU's Agenda on migration and mobility in the region. That furthered identified what is needed to ensure harmonisation and coherence of regional and EU policies on migration across different sectors with regards to employment and jobs creation, youth and women empowerment, trade agreements. The speaker identified areas of cooperation and engagement on migration and migrants' rights between the ECOWAS, the AU, and civil society. It suggested how the EU can be supportive of that, especially in the lead-up to the next AU-EU summit.

The EU Official Representative clarified how the EU will be supporting human mobility within Africa and explained with examples of how the EU envisages maximising the migration-development nexus through the new Global Europe instrument. The speaker provided information about the EU's plans on ensuring legal pathways for migration, expanding opportunities for labour, education and family reunification from Africa to Europe. He shared briefly how the EU institutions intend to consult civil society on migration and mobility

issues in the context of the 6th Africa-EU Summit and beyond.

The European civil society's representatives

discussed the main proposals on regular migration, protection of migrants' rights and progress on remittances and diaspora issues applicable to the Africa-EU cooperation, such as the Kigali joint communication, the recent EU-OACPs agreement and the new Pact on Migration and Asylum. They pointed to some needed actions towards maximising a development-migration nexus in the new Africa-EU Partnership Framework and migration policies and how the EU can improve engagement with civil society during and beyond the AU-EU summit.

The first section of this summary report provides the background to the roundtable discussion. The second section provides highlights of the dialogue. The third section provides the key takeaways with conclusions in section four.

1. Background

In the lead-up to the 6th Africa-EU summit taking place in 2022, ACT Alliance EU, Caritas Africa and Caritas Europa convened a virtual roundtable discussion on 9th November 2021 which focused on how to maximise the development impact of migration and mobility in the future Africa-EU partnership. This event built on the main recommendations of the previous roundtable discussion (April 2021) which placed emphasis on African priorities and aspirations for migration and mobility while recognising the need for the renewed Africa-EU partnership to take a balanced and sustainable approach to migration.

Migration is one of the key thematic priorities of the future Africa-EU partnership, replacing the previous 2007 Joint Africa-EU Strategy on the occasion of the 6th AU-EU summit. Migration is also one of the most sensitive and controversial areas of interest for both parties. After years of debates and negotiations differences persist in how the issue of migration is perceived in Europe and Africa: from a mostly development-driven approach on the African side to one still rooted in security-driven concerns in the EU.

While there is acknowledgement from the EU side of the need to promote a positive narrative on migration, to focus more on safe and regular pathways for migration and mobility within Africa and to Europe and to protect migrant's rights, challenges persist in implementation. In different frameworks applicable to the Africa-EU cooperation, such as the Post Cotonou Agreement and the proposed EU Migration and Asylum Pact, little attention is paid to priorities of African countries. There is not sufficient emphasis on protecting migrants' rights or empowering Diaspora groups, while commitments on regular migration remain vague and weak. Moreover, the 10% target and the "incentive approach" on migration endorsed in the new NDICI - Global Europe financial instrument risk further undermining the focus on poverty reduction and development in the EU cooperation with African countries on migration.

In the view of the co-organisers, to successfully shift the narrative on migration and reshape AU-EU relations, the new partnership should promote a rights-based, human-centric, long-term approach to migration, focusing on harnessing its positive aspects, reflecting African countries' priorities and focusing on actions centered on reducing poverty and inequalities.

For this reason, this second virtual roundtable discussion offered the opportunity to explore existing and potential links between migration and sustainable development and to identify how the AU and EU can cooperate more on priorities that are mutually beneficial for the two continents. The dialogue was enriched by discussing priorities and challenges in the context of the ECOWAS agenda on regional mobility, migration and integration and the development potential of migration in countries of origin and destination.

ACT Alliance EU, Caritas Africa and Caritas Europa are hopeful that the discussions from the virtual event will help shape the new Africa-EU Partnership Framework on migration and raise the importance of meaningfully engaging civil society in the discussion.

2. Summary of the event

The session covered four key themes: the Migration Context and State of Play of the Africa-EU Partnership; the Migration-Development Nexus; Comprehensive Approaches on Migration and Policy Coherence; and the CSOs and Diaspora Engagement.

2.1 Migration context and state of play of the Africa-EU Partnership

The migration context within Africa is defined by cross-border and inter-country human mobility. In the EU migration is problematised and seen as a challenge, whereas in African countries it is seen as part and parcel of daily life and an important element of economic and social development. In ECOWAS countries, for instance, facilitating human mobility for labour and improving migrants' rights within the region are at the core of policies and approaches addressed to achieve the sustainable development of the region. As observed by Badara Ndiaye, African CSO's representative:

"African governments aspire to promote a policy environment with free movement of labour, that drives to and harnesses the potential of migration for development. African migrants overwhelmingly move within African countries and only a small proportion move to Europe. This points to the importance of intra-regional and continental migration governance, to make such movement work for development and to improve the rights of migrants".

Contrary to the perception that the EU's overfocus on fighting irregular migration might give, the majority of migration occurs within the African continent. Less than 20 percent of migrants from the ECOWAS region migrate to Europe. As a result, the priority of "enforcing border controls by Europe" is detrimental to the local regional policy arrangements, limits opportunities for the mobility

of labour, skills and infringes the rights to freedom of movement.

Migration is one of the key priorities discussed in the EU-AU partnership framework and one of the most controversial issues. In the past, the EU has responded to migration unilaterally rather than starting a conversation and joint long-term planning. This has limited the possibility for a longer-term strategic vision on migration and human mobility between the two continents. **The interests of Europe in protecting its borders and in increasing returns, border controls in Africa, readmissions and reintegration still dominate the migration agenda.**

Recently the EU started to shift away from a Eurocentric driven approach towards focusing more on priorities of African countries and being balanced and coherent. However, the <u>Kigali Joint Communique</u> (October 2021) again places more emphasis on tackling irregular migration and smuggling, readmission, return and reintegration, than on other aspects. Legal pathways for migration, remittances, Diaspora engagement, investment and migrants' rights are only mentioned in passing and non-concrete terms. Hence the need to explore more in-depth how those issues can be leveraged in the renewed partnership.

The discussion explored the interests of African countries such as developing skills for the creation of local jobs and incomes, as well as migrants' rights. The dialogue focused on the need to develop Africa's rural areas. This highlighted the importance of developing quality service

delivery, and infrastructure for effective delivery of services and market linkages to commerce and trade. Hence the need to promote mechanisms and investments that increase incomes among rural communities.

In this regard, Hans Stausboll, Head of Unit for Regional and Multi-Country Programs for Africa at DG INTPA, highlighted in his intervention that the EU intends to step up its efforts to conclude bilateral labour migration agreements, scale up the Erasmus+ programme, facilitate the sustainable integration of migrants in destination countries and create other legal pathways for migration. All these proposals, he continued, are reflecting the EU's intention and willingness to rebuild a partnership with African countries based on mutual interests and underpinned by balanced and comprehensive tailor-made actions.

2.2 Migration-development Nexus

The link between migration and development has remained uncharted in the current Africa-EU partnership, while in African countries it is well emphasised. This is particularly relevant in the ECOWAS region where migration is understood as being a catalyst for the development of regional economy. Indeed, this region has policies promoting Free Movement and rights for people to settle and work in any of the ECOWAS countries. The freedom of movement facilitates legal pathways for migration contributing to farming, pastoral and trade activities. As emphasised by the ECOWAS Commissioner Dr. Jagne, the development of rural areas is a key priority for ECOWAS countries. Investing in and developing rural areas would contribute towards curbing human trafficking, increasing incomes and providing access to quality basic services such as schools and health for better rural livelihoods and well-being as well as increasing opportunities for youth.

Since 2018 the AU has developed a framework on free movement. The Pan African Open market - the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) - is expected to enhance this arrangement. This state of play is essential for development in Africa as it promotes opportunities for employment and contributes to the development of skills and competencies. Another issue which arose from the discussion is that migration is contributing to Africa's brain drain, but positively contributing to brain gain in the European Continent. For instance, the health sectors in Europe and the US have gained many health personnel from Africa. Economically the poor balance of trade contributes to migration

as well. In this space investing in value-added mechanisms for Africa's raw goods is another opportunity to address migration. Value addition and proper pricing of African exports will support local industries which in turn would create more jobs for the youth, semi-skilled and skilled persons. This, in turn, would also address the brain drain factor.

According to Hans Staubsoll, the EU has contributed and intended to do more to the development of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), which is envisaged to facilitate the free movement of people and goods. This would contribute to the AU-TVET Strategy, and the AU Agenda 2063, the Africa We Want, and overall, to the Agenda 2030 for sustainable development to which the EU is firmly committed. On this matter, the right to move in the region to look for better conditions of life, or research, study, and training would foster regional integration, and this must be promoted and protected.

The EU is planning to scale up support for mobility between Europe and Africa, and within Africa. It has a programme fund of about 570 million Euros for the *Erasmus Plus* addressed to Sub-Saharan Africa regions. It intends to also increase support to the *Intra African Mobility Scheme* targeting higher education. Under this scheme the EU plans to support labour and circular migration to improve capacities by training and equipping government authorities and its partners. The EU expects that support through civil society will ensure that labour migrants' rights in the informal sectors are

protected. Additionally, facilitating sustainable integration of migrants in destination countries and promoting the portability of acquired rights through social benefits are other measures the EU intends to deliver.

Whereas the EU is committed to these objectives, there seems to be little attention on root causes of forced displacement. This state of play occurs in the context where Africa has close to 70% of the world's 82 million people in forced displacement. Interventions on root causes should assess and review how structural causes of forced displacement and the negative impacts of climate change can be best addressed. The discussions highlighted the need for combined funding — in the Global Europe instrument — towards the migration-development nexus approach for both the short and long-term. Such a funding commitment must also benefit host communities.

In the view of Bob van Dillen, Senior Policy Adviser on migration for Cordaid, the root causes of forced displacement should be at the heart of development policy and be conspicuously articulated in the development objectives of the European Union.

The Kigali Joint Communique reaffirms the need for protection and support for refugees and forcibly displaced populations. They must be able to rely on humanitarian assistance and protection, especially women and girls. Many of today's crises are protracted and this requires longer-term approaches towards local integration. There seems to have been a view that protection and support for refugees and forcibly displaced populations are purely humanitarian, but this should change to embrace the long-term perspective given the experiences in the Eastern Africa Region.

2.3 Comprehensive Approach on Migration and Policy Coherence for the EU

The Africa-EU as a people-centred partnership should prioritise response to local needs as defined by local authorities and informed by civil society. The partnership should have the inclusive engagement of governments, CSO, and the Diaspora. Within this it should also create policy frameworks that encourage the cooperation between the civil society and Diaspora in the same way as the EU engages with other stakeholders.

Migration is discussed in other parallel frameworks and initiatives, which should reflect a coherent and comprehensive approach. For instance, the new EU pact on migration and asylum has in it the talent partnership supporting legal migration and mobility with the key partner countries. However, the pact seems to have as its priorities border control, return and readmission at the expense of pathways for legal migration and skills mobility. The talent partnership seems to be limited to skilled migrant workers but as observed by Carine Ndousou, Executive Director

of Africa-Europe Diaspora International Platform (ADEPT), the parameters should be broader, to include also low-skilled migrants and diversified geographic coverage.

The EU has drawn up Action Plans for several priority countries of origin and transit amongst which are Niger, Tunisia, Libya and Morocco in the northern Africa Region. In the Sub-Sahara region, the arrangements are slightly different with a focus on returns. In addition, Team Europe Initiatives will also launch the Central Mediterranean route (France/Italy initiative) and the Western Mediterranean route (Spain). There is a need to draw out from these plans whether the launched initiatives will take a more balanced approach than has been the case with the EU Trust Fund for Africa or the implementation of the Joint Valetta Action Plan.

As emphasised by Anna Knoll, Head of Migration Programme at ECDPM, it will be important that these new initiatives pay as much attention to protecting migrants' rights, facilitating regular migration, and empowering Diaspora communities to contribute to development as they do to preventing irregular migration, returns, and border controls. Moreover, in light of the 10% spending target for migration in the new Global Europe financial instrument, the EU and Member States should ensure full respect of the policy coherence's binding commitment and desist from instrumentalised aid for security purposes.

It was noticed that under the Africa-EU partnership framework, the concept of "potential migrant" which is part of the EU's border controls narrative, should be removed as it conflicts with pre-existing African regional arrangements and frameworks, for instance, with the ECOWAS Regions' free movement policy. In this region, every citizen has the right to move and stay in another ECOWAS country to look for better conditions of life, labour and study. If the "potential migrant" status is enforced through a negative lens, as Badara Ndiaye warned, it will undermine all concepts of good intent in exploring the migration-development nexus in this region and the priorities of African states.

2.4 CSO and Diaspora Engagement

Engagement with civil society in both Africa and Europe is not emphasised in the current AU-EU partnership framework. But civil society has a wealth of information, knowledge, experience and expertise in dealing with migration. For instance, within Africa, civil society is dealing with forced displacement, internal displacement of populations and other aspects of migration continually. State governments often call upon civil society to engage with displaced communities and stateless individuals.

The roundtable discussion observed that the current status of the Africa-EU Partnership has limited spaces, funding and fora for CSO and Diaspora engagement. There is a need to remedy this by creating investment in funding specifically focused on CSO and Diaspora engagement. The investment should be long-term to provide CSO and Diaspora the spaces to identify and engage with relevant opportunities using their knowledge, expertise and experience to inform and intervene appropriately on migration issues.

CSOs feel that neither European nor African governments have a real proactive interest in having an open dialogue and including civil societies. At the state government level, during negotiation meetings and other fora of the Africa-EU Partnerships and on migration issues, civil society

has not been included. This leads to the perception that **political discussions on migration issues have not been very democratic**, as many decisions on cooperation in the field of migration were taken behind closed doors and bypassing both civil societies and Parliaments.

Andreas Grünewald, Policy advisor for migration at Brot für die Welt, pointed out in his final remarks that civil society organisations in the North and South of the Mediterranean must join forces to democratize the discourse and to make their voices and knowledge heard. Channels of discussions and cooperation for exchanging and making proposals at country and ECOWAS level are of extreme importance. CSO-Diaspora engagement should include the creation of policy frameworks that encourage the cooperation between the Diaspora on the one hand, and the civil society on the other. In the ECOWAS Region, there is an aspiration to have a Pan African and West African CSO engagement policy similar to the policy ECOWAS has for the Diaspora. This Policy should also include Diaspora remittances and the reduction of remittance transfer costs.

The EU sees civil society as essential for better managing migration and mobility as highlighted in the comprehensive strategy with Africa (2020). Under this, the EU is committed to providing

dedicated funding facilities towards its engagement with civil society, youth and women and civil society.

Diaspora Engagement

The EU is also committed to continue supporting the role of Diaspora communities in promoting development in countries of origin. The EU believes that with the right conditions in place, the Diaspora can play a very crucial role in boosting investments and development. For instance, there has been increased support for Diaspora organisations such as the Africa-Europe Diaspora International Platform. This notwithstanding, the new Africa-EU Partnership has to be extremely ambitious when it comes to Diaspora engagement and must be in line with the migration-development nexus. Diaspora engagement should not be limited to Diaspora engagement should not be limited

Diaspora engagement should not be limited to Diaspora's economic contribution only, but rather it should be larger and include Diaspora social and human capital, for example, through knowledge exchange. As pointed out by Carine Nsoudou:

"CSO civil society organisations in general and Diaspora organisation in particular, given our position as bridges between Europe and Africa, should be fully and systematically included in the Africa-EU Partnership process, when it comes to the design phase, the implementation phase, but also in the evaluation phase, this is extremely important."

Diaspora communities, she continued, have skills, competencies and are resourceful in the migration agenda, hence the need to provide more concrete opportunities for them in the future AU-EU Partnership Framework.

3. Key takeaways / Recommendations

On the basis of the discussion, these are the key takeaways and recommendations that can be extrapolated.

Holistic and balanced partnership embracing interests and priorities of both parties

The openness of the EU to engage with the priorities from the Africa perspective was acknowledged but more concrete measures are needed. Key elements include the need for the partnership to:

- Prioritise the Africa in-country and in-region needs and priorities as informed by the context;
- Respond to local needs as identified by local authorities and informed by civil society.

Ensuring policy coherence and respect for human rights

The partnership was inaugurated when there were already measures, frameworks and policies in play in Africa, such as the ECOWAS human mobility frameworks and other regional mobility and residency arrangements. The Africa-EU framework was created also when new inter-country and intraregional mechanisms were being designed such as the Africa Free Trade Area Framework. The Africa-EU Partnership should endeavour to:

- Promote evidence-based policies for intraregional and continental migration governance in full respect of policy coherence from both continents:
- Commit to open and transparent approaches grounded in the principles of solidarity, balanced partnership, trusted ownership, shared responsibility, accountability and full respect for human rights;
- Promote the protection, reception, rights, and a just treatment/engagement of refugees and IDPs with adequate long-term funding.

Engagement with CSOs and Diaspora

Civil society and Diaspora have information, knowledge, experience and expertise relating to migration and development. In addition, they also have human and social capital that can contribute to the migration-development nexus. The Africa-EU Partnership should, therefore:

- be supportive of CSOs and Diaspora engagement, giving value to their knowledge base, expertise, experience, human and social capital;
- involve the participation of CSOs and Diaspora in monitoring and evaluation of the future Africa-EU strategy;
- provide open opportunities for CSOs platforms and fora from both Africa and Europe for sharing, exchange, and action;
- open, inclusive transparent, and accountable in all its processes;

Investing in intra-African mobility for sustainable development and economic integration

The ECOWAS region demonstrated the value of intra-Africa mobility and integration in labour, social and human capital for sustainable development and protection of migrants' rights. The value of strengthening the existing frameworks in the context of local priorities needs to be emphasised as it responds to root causes of poverty, inequalities and forced displacement. The Africa-EU Partnership should thus:

Facilitate freedom of movement within Africa for labour, education, human capital, including low-level skilled people on the move, trade and travel documents e.g. 10 year visa, and/or identity cards;

- Embrace a youth focus to create spaces for inclusion of the youth who constitute the majority of the migrants but who are excluded from the debates on migration policy, approaches and interventions;
- Strengthen options that contribute earmarked resources and roles linked to investment plans in rural Africa.

Investing in legal pathways for migration and mobility and in addressing the root causes of forced displacement

Apart from trade, labour, regional economic development and livelihood needs, mobility in Africa has strong linkages to forced displacement and migration. Internally displaced persons and refugees continue to present challenges within Africa. The Africa-EU Partnership should, therefore:

- Comprehensively address the root causes of forced displacement, including climate-related and structural causes, which vary by region in Africa;
- Invest in the facilitation of legal pathways for migration and mobility, including by significantly upscaling circular migration schemes that benefit migrants, but also the countries of origin and destination;
- Invest in the facilitation of reduced transfer costs on remittances.

4. Conclusions

The Virtual Roundtable discussion explored and noted that there are wide gaps between the aspirations as expressed in joint declarations and what is happening in practice on both continents. This indicates the need for raising the level of ambition in implementing existing commitments and continuing further discussion on common areas of cooperation between the AU and the EU on migration and mobility so as to truly build a mutual beneficial partnership based on real common priorities.

There was common agreement that migration is in itself positive as a development strategy for both continents. Examples drawn from the ECOWAS region showed the importance of investing in intra-African mobility for labour, skills and education, developing basic quality social and health services and infrastructures in rural areas, promoting youth inclusion, improving migrants' rights and addressing Africa's brain drain. Legal protection of displaced people and host communities in the situation of forced displacement including communities affected by the adverse effects of climate change and environmental degradation is also another pressing issue for African countries.

While there is acknowledgement from the EU of these partners' priorities, more ambitious and concrete commitments need to be reflected in the renewed partnership framework and resulting implementation. The EU must make progress on maximising the migration-development nexus in the future partnership and its policies and practices as it benefits the two continents. For instance, this could be done by supporting intra-African mobility policy and arrangements on free movement of people and goods, facilitating legal pathways to Europe for education, labour and economic opportunities with a youth focus and strengthening legal protection of migrant's rights and displaced people. Respecting countries' ownership and policy coherence and ensuring transparency and accountability in future joint actions are foundational to the EU's goal of building a 'true partnership of equals' with Africa.

Building on that, a crucial component that must remain in focus ahead of the AU-EU summit and beyond is the **importance of strengthening mechanisms and efforts that engage civil society and the Diaspora in addressing migration and development as they are key allies in the achievement of the SDGs.** Providing dedicated space, different fora and channels of discussion for CSOs and diaspora from Africa and Europe as well as adequate funding are concrete proposals that should be incorporated in the future AU-EU partnership framework.

The co-organisers, ACT Alliance EU, Caritas Africa and Caritas Europa will continue engaging with African and EU-based civil societies and policy makers in the lead-up to the 6th AU-EU Summit in order to ensure the partnership on migration and mobility takes a balanced, comprehensive and peoplecentred approach.