The Impact of Border Externalization and Militarization in Africa

Results from Phase 1 of the project

Border Externalization and Militarization: A Global Analysis

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Migration Flows and Issues

Migration is an integral part of Africa's history. People travel, leaving their countries of origin, to settle in neighboring countries and cross the continent's borders. The motivations and factors influencing migratory movements are multifactorial, with each individual case exhibiting a unique set of drivers and circumstances. However, the political, economic and social issues that coexist in the different regions of Africa result in diverse and similar pathways being adopted by people.

Africa, which is largely separated from Europe by the Mediterranean Sea, shares a long tradition of cultural, commercial and historical exchanges, with the mobility of people an integral part of these multiple interactions. Relations between the two geographical areas are also shaped by historical colonial and economic links, which strongly influence migratory trends. The Mediterranean "is one of the world's major demographic, political, economic, social and cultural fault lines, while remaining an important place of passage, exchange and dialogue, because migration flows through it"[1].

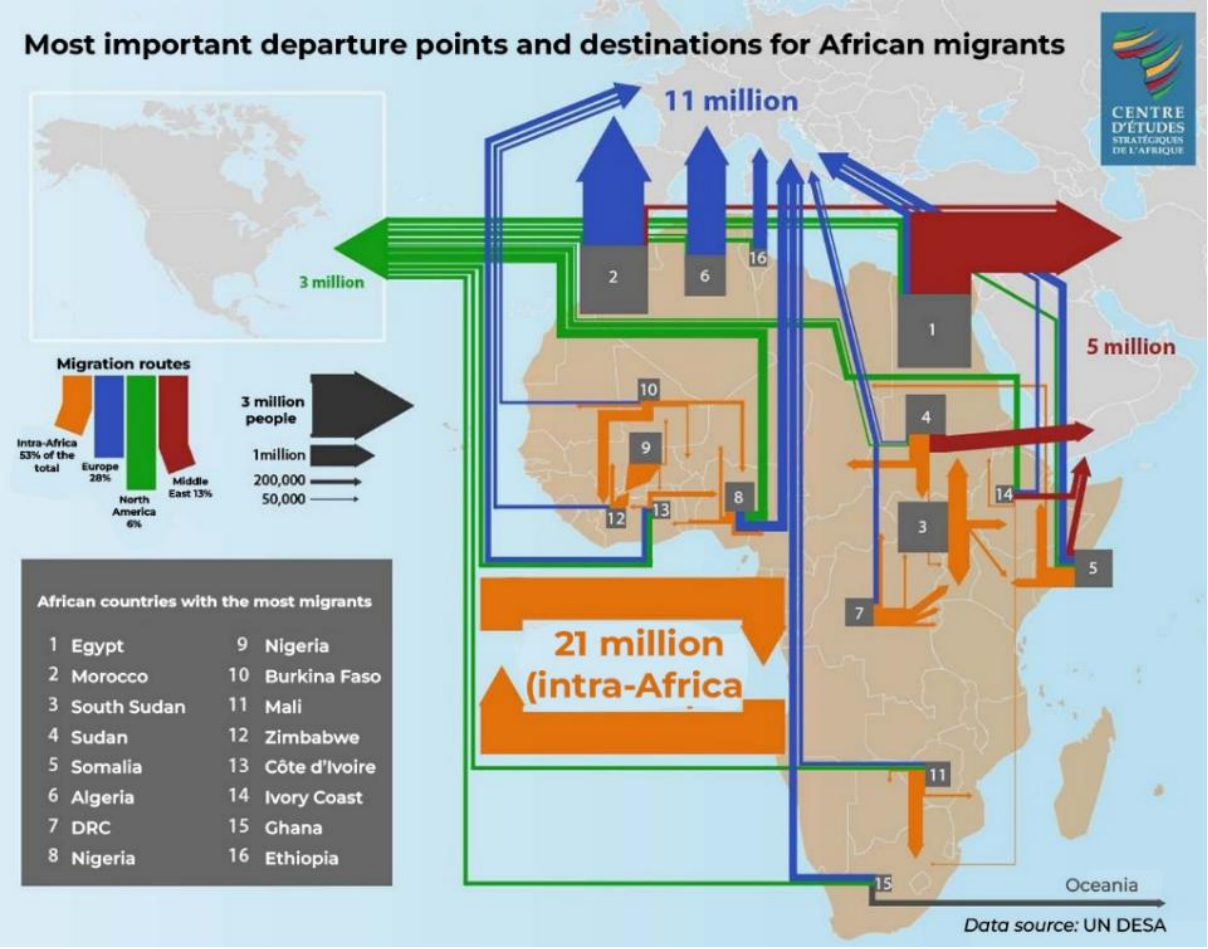
Following the entry into force of the Schengen Agreement in the 1990s, which established free movement and free trade in Europe, the fight against so-called irregular migration and the readmission of migrants became a central issue in EU-Africa relations. In an effort to ensure the security of its external borders, the European Union has constantly refined its migration policy, particularly through outsourcing this responsibility to third countries, notably those located in Africa. This approach has an impact on the rights of migrants and refugees.

OVERVIEW OF AFRICAN MIGRATION

In 2023, the African continent accounted for 14% of the total number of people on the move[2], equivalent to 40.4 million people. Meanwhile, the Asian continent accounted for 41%, and the European continent for 24%. As of June 2024, the global population of refugees and asylum seekers is estimated to be approximately 43.4 million people[3]. "A substantial number of these people are in Africa: 5,430,153 in the East Africa and Great Lakes region, with Sudan alone accounting for nearly 2 million; 3,324,428 in West and Central Africa; and 10,056,557 in Southern Africa"[4].

The majority of African migration takes place within the continent. Indeed, 80% of migration is intra- African[5], whether for refugees seeking refuge as close as possible to their own country or for migrants moving to neighbouring economic centres. The facilitation of regional mobility is achieved through two primary mechanisms: geographical proximity and establishment of regional agreements. Examples of such agreements include the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the East African Community (EAC).

According to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), by the year 2020, approximately 11 million of the African migrants who have departed their continent[6], will be residing in Europe, nearly 5 million in the Middle East, and over 3 million in North America. Of the migrants residing in Europe, the three primary countries of origin are Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia, constituting 5 million of the 11 million individuals present in Europe[7]. This underscores the significance of geographical proximity, existing diaspora communities and economic opportunities as determining factors in the migration decision-making process.

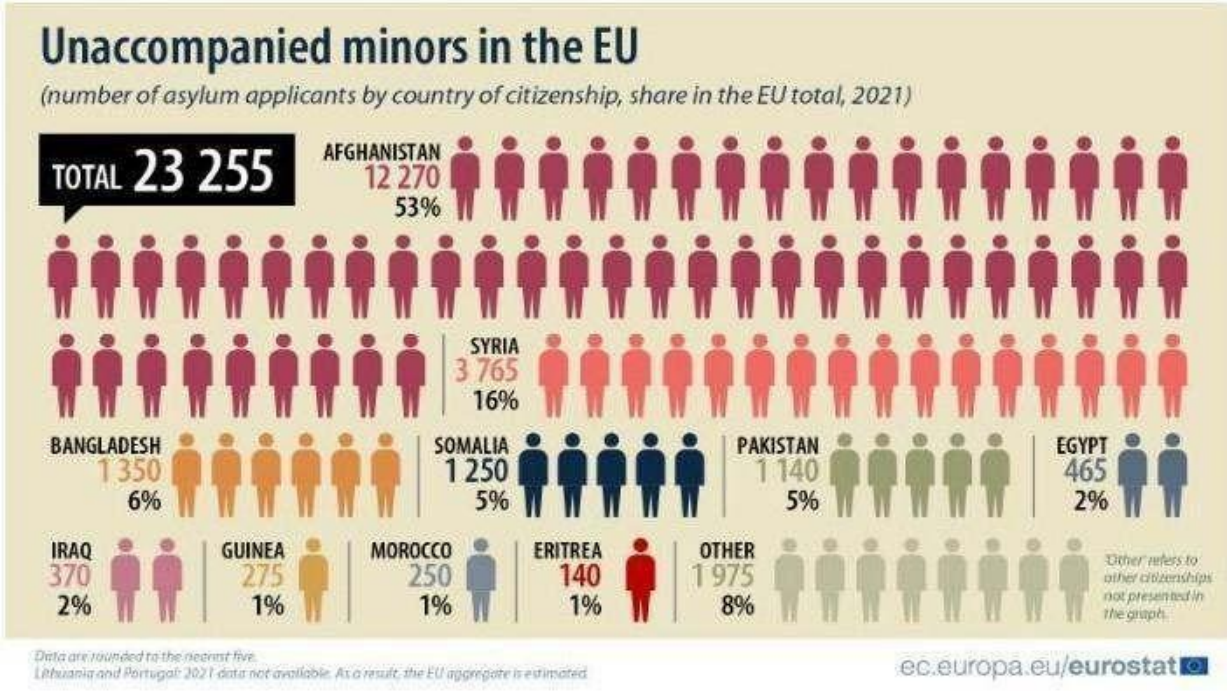


Source: UN DESA

A plethora of migrant profiles exists, each with its own unique history. The present study will attempt here to identify the main trends, without claiming to be exhaustive, by highlighting those migrants who are invisible. In 2020, women accounted for 48.1% of all migrants[8] and 47.1% of migrants in Africa[9]. According to the IOM report "A Region on the Move 2021", women and girls represent the majority of migrants in East Africa and the Horn of Africa (50.4%)[10] compared to men and boys. This phenomenon can be attributed to the fact that many migrants in this region are displaced persons and refugees, and that they are

predominantly women, with men seeking refuge or economic opportunities in other regions. In 2020, women accounted for 47.1%[11] of all migrants in West Africa.

Many young people are also affected by migration. Young minors known as "unaccompanied minors" take to the road to reach Europe. According to Eurostat, more than 23,000 unaccompanied minors (UAMs)[12] obtained protection status from a European Union Member State between 2020 and 2021. The majority of them are boys, and several African countries are represented among those seeking asylum, including Somalia (5%), Egypt (2%), Guinea (1%), Morocco (1%) and Eritrea (1%), according to statistics from 2021.



Source: Eurostat

CAUSES OF MIGRATION

Travelling or migrating to another country requires financial resources, especially as the routes taken are dangerous and long. Consequently, migrants do not necessarily come from the poorest sections of society, as they may receive financial support from their families or members of the diaspora living abroad to fund their departure. To better understand who emigrates, we will explore some of the reasons that lead people to leave their country.

There are many reasons why people leave their country of "origin", and these affect the type of migration category:

Wars, conflicts and political instability

Conflicts in countries such as Sudan, Somalia, Nigeria and Burkina Faso, among others force entire populations to leave their region of origin. First, they move within the same country, as Internally Displaced People, and then to other countries in the region as asylum seekers or refugees.

Economic crises and challenges

The economic situation in many countries on the continent is unstable. The resulting difficulties in providing for themselves and their families (e.g., the search for work, rising unemployment and difficulties in accessing healthcare and decent housing, etc.) are driving people to leave their countries for economic hubs such as South Africa or Nigeria, or to seek opportunities outside the continent in Europe or the Gulf States.

Discrimination

Gender-based discrimination (sexual and gender-based violence, genital mutilation, forced marriage, limited work and study opportunities, etc.) is one of the reasons that push women to leave their families and countries, as well as parents with their young daughters. Additionally, some migrants in Africa want to come to Europe because they are persecuted in their own countries because of their sexual orientation. Finally, discrimination on the basis of ethnicity and language is also a reason for travelling, as minority ethnic groups in some countries do not have access to the same opportunities.

Climate change

The lack of water and food resources, due to drought, flooding and other natural disasters linked to climate change, are forcing entire populations to leave their region of origin. People who make a living from agriculture are also being forced to leave their land and find resources in the cities. By the end of 2021, the West and Central Africa region will have 265,400 Internally Displaced Persons[13] due to disasters (floods, storms or landslides). Migration is therefore a coping strategy for those affected.

The hope of a better future and the search for adventure

Individual and personal reasons must also be considered when examining the causes of migration. Many young people consider that they have no future in their own country and decide to move to Europe in the hope of building a better life for themselves. Some leave because their loved ones have died, while others, particularly women, leave to join their families.

Finally, there are the adventurers, who leave their countries to discover other places, often travelling with other young people from his region. These profiles of people and their reasons for leaving are mixed in the routes taken to reach North Africa, Europe or other economic centers.

MIGRATION ROUTES

We will then examine the routes used for irregular migration, paying particular attention to those from West and North Africa to Europe.

The main migration routes for Africans outside the continent are as follows:

- To Europe: The West African Atlantic route (to the Canary Islands, Spain), the Western Mediterranean route (to Spain), the Central Mediterranean route (to Italy and Malta), the Eastern Mediterranean route (to Greece and Cyprus), and to a lesser extent but just as dangerous, from the Comoros to Mayotte (France).
- To North America, in particular via the countries of South America on the way to the United States.
- To the Middle East and the Gulf countries, especially for Egyptians or migrants from the Horn of Africa.

The Western Mediterranean route

The Western Mediterranean route involves people leaving Morocco for Spain either by crossing the Mediterranean in boats, or by crossing the land borders to Ceuta and Melilla, either by jumping over the barriers of the Spanish enclaves or by hiding in cars crossing the Moroccan-Spanish border. According to the IOM's Missing Migrant Project, 3,735 people have gone missing[14] on the western Mediterranean route since 2014. In 2023, 458 people died or went missing, including 17 women, 65 men and the others could not be identified. These numbers are still well below the real figures. In 2023, this was the busiest route. Of the 225,154 people who attempted the crossing, 2% disappeared or died, and 98% arrived in Europe irregularly. These figures come from the IOM's "Missing Migrant" project and are not exhaustive, as many disappearances on migratory routes are not documented.

The West African Atlantic route

This route involves departing by sea from Morocco, Mauritania or Senegal to reach Spain via the Canary Islands. Migrants spend several days at sea in dugout canoes to reach Spanish soil. In 2021, a total of 22,316 migrants arrived illegally in the Canary Islands, compared with 23,271 in 2020. According to Caminando Fronteras, a Spanish NGO, that receives emergency calls from migrants or their families in distress at sea, more than 7,800 migrants lost their lives[15] between 2018 and 2022 while attempting to reach the archipelago from the African coast. In 2023, more than 6,000 people went missing[16] while trying to reach Spain. The vast majority of these disappearances occurred on the particularly perilous journey from the coast of north-west Africa to the Spanish archipelago of the Canaries, in the Atlantic Ocean.

The Central Mediterranean route

The Central Mediterranean route links the shores of North Africa to Italy (and Malta) by sea. People seeking to reach Europe by this route leave by boat from Libya or Tunisia. In recent years, Tunisia has seen an increase in departures, particularly around the town of Sfax towards the Italian island of Lampedusa. In 2023, Frontex recorded 158,000 irregular[17]

entries to the European Union via the central Mediterranean Sea route. 2,476 people died or went missing, including 60 women, 158 men and others who could not be identified. According to the IOM's "Missing Migrant" project, 23,032 migrants have disappeared along this route since 2014. Of the 994,407 people who attempted the crossing, 2% disappeared or died, 27% were intercepted and 72% arrived in Europe illegally.

The Eastern Mediterranean route

The Eastern Mediterranean route involves migration from Turkey to Greece (Bulgaria and Cyprus). It is mainly used by people from the Middle East and South Asia who are fleeing conflict and instability in the region, such as Syrians, Iraqis, Afghans, Palestinians, etc. Since 2014, 2,447 migrants have disappeared[18] along this route. Of the 723,321 people who have attempted the crossing, 1,454 have disappeared or died, and 42% have been intercepted at sea. In 2023, 171 people died or went missing, including 27 women, 26 men and others who could not be identified.

These routes are also used by migrants from West Africa and the countries of North Africa, etc. People from West Africa have already faced many challenges in reaching the countries of North Africa, such as crossing the borders of African countries, travelling through the Sahara Desert, living conditions in the Maghreb countries, etc. Those undertaking the journey to Europe via these routes encounter numerous difficulties as soon as they leave their countries of origin, during their migratory journeys and upon arrival in Europe.

Perspective from the States

In the 1990s, the Schengen agreements were introduced in Europe, creating an area of free movement of goods and people within the European Union, while tightening controls on its external borders. The opening up of the Schengen area brought migration issues to the forefront of relations between European and African states. Since then, European states have sought to restrict the arrival of migrants by externalizing and militarizing their borders, in order to prevent so-called irregular migration to Europe. They have also stepped up the return of irregular migrants through readmission agreements with African countries.

These externalization policies "are external policies negotiated with non-EU countries, ranging from the readmission of people in a so-called irregular situation to facilitating the issuance of visas or development projects aimed at keeping people in their countries of origin"[19]. The literature

on externalization is vast and has been analyzed by many researchers. Its definition encompasses a wide variety of areas, prompting specialists to examine specific fields in order to identify its particularities.

EURO-AFRICAN COOPERATION ON MIGRATION

Dialogues or agreements between the EU and African countries have intensified through several key initiatives such as the Barcelona Process in 1995, the Cotonou Agreement in 2000 and the Rabat Process in 2006, among others. Alongside these forums for dialogue, Frontex was established in 2004 to control the EU's external borders. Meanwhile, various political strategies were implemented by the EU to externalize its migration policy, such as the European Pact on Migration and Asylum and bilateral agreements. In 2024, the EU adopted the European Pact on Migration[20] to support European states in controlling their European borders and accelerating the return of migrants deemed "undesirable" to "third countries". Furthermore, the growing number of agreements between the EU or its Member States and African countries in recent years is part of this trend towards externalizing the EU's borders to countries such as Mauritania, Tunisia, Egypt and others.

The year 2015 marked a major turning point in the EU's externalization policies. The arrival in Europe of more than a million people from war-torn Syria, as well as Afghans, Iraqis, etc., was described as a "migration crisis". The European Union is stepping up its cooperation with third countries by signing more and more agreements. The Valletta Summit, which brought together the EU's 28 Member States and 34 African states in 2015, resulted in an action plan whereby the EU would increase its development aid by setting up a €5 billion "Emergency Trust Fund for Africa" in exchange for migration governance is being delegated to African countries. The EU's strategy is to intensify diplomatic negotiations and cooperation on migration and development.

Examples in the region:

Libya

On 2 February 2017, with the support of the European Union, Italy signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Libya to combat so-called irregular migration. The agreement establishes the basis for long-term cooperation, delegating patrols in the central Mediterranean to the Libyan coastguard and providing them with boats, a maritime coordination center, and training. Most of the people intercepted at sea while trying to flee Libya are forcibly returned by the Libyan coastguard, with the material and financial support of the European Union, and often end up in detention centers. In 2023, the NGO Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) published a report entitled “You will die here”[21], based on the testimonies of migrants who were victims of violence and torture in Libyan detention centers. Despite these violations of migrants' rights, on 20 March 2023, the European Council extended its financial and logistical support to the Libyan authorities for a further two years, until 31 March 2025.

Tunisia

The Memorandum of Understanding[22] between Tunisia and the EU, signed on 16 July 2023, includes €900 million in aid for various areas, such as trade, digital technology and energy transition. However, €105 million are allocated as part of the partnership to combat irregular migration. This agreement aims to step up financial and technical support to Tunisia to counter irregular migration to Europe. The agreement aims to increase the repatriation of Tunisians expelled from Europe, and potentially facilitate the return of migrants of other nationalities transiting through the country. On 21 February 2023, a presidential statement[23], referring to "hordes of sub-Saharan migrants" and highlighting a threat to the country's "demographic composition" was released. This statement provoked violent attacks against black people, as well as arbitrary arrests, house evictions and sudden dismissals.

Morocco

In 2024, the European Union is expected to conclude a new migration agreement with Morocco. While the two partners have not signed a specific migration pact, the European Union has been providing financial aid to Morocco under cooperation programs since 2014, with funding continuing until 2027. The European Union has been cooperating with Morocco on migration for a long time, specifically since 2004. According to a join[24] investigation carried out in May 2024 by the French newspaper "Le Monde", the non-profit media organization "Lighthouse Reports", and seven other international media outlets including "Enass Media", migrants travelling to Europe are being apprehended in large numbers and expelled to desert areas in Morocco, Tunisia and Mauritania. These actions are accompanied by human rights violations and are supported by European resources.

Rwanda

In September 2021, Rwanda concluded a controversial agreement with the United Kingdom aimed at facilitating the expulsion of migrants or asylum seekers from the UK to Rwanda. The agreement was strongly criticized by the UN and a number of NGOs for breaching of the

International Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. However, on 6 July 2024, before the agreement could come into force, the new Prime Minister, Keir Starmer, announced that the project to deport asylum seekers and irregular migrants arriving in the UK to Rwanda would be abandoned[25]

Niger

In 2015, Niger passed a law aimed at cracking down on 'migrant smuggling', with the support of the EU. The intention was to reduce the attractiveness of its territory as a transit point for migrants seeking to reach Europe via Libya. However, this raised concerns about freedom of movement within ECOWAS. In 2023, Niger's military junta annulled the law amid heightened tensions with European states.

CONSEQUENCES OF THE EXTERNALIZATION AND MILITARIZATION OF BORDERS ON RELATIONS BETWEEN AFRICAN STATES

The externalization and militarization of borders has consequences for relations between African states. In addition to violating the rights of migrants, the refoulement of migrants to the borders of neighbouring countries causes tension between states. In August 2023, for example, 300 migrants were stranded in the desert between the Tunisian and Libyan borders after being turned back by the Tunisian police[26]. Neither Tunisia nor Libya wanted to take them in. Tensions between Algeria and Morocco are also regularly rekindled when migrants are turned back at the border. Refoulements also occur between the Maghreb countries and the countries of the Sahel, particularly from Algeria to Niger. Diplomatic, strategic and economic relations between the Maghreb countries and the countries of West Africa and the Sahel are damaged when the nationals of these countries travelling to Europe are mistreated in the countries of North Africa. Jeanne Bureau explains that "by shamelessly mistreating their nationals, Algeria is sending a very bad signal to the countries of sub-Saharan Africa[27]". Finally, freedom of movement within the ECOWAS zone is jeopardized by the militarization of borders and the criminalization of people on the move. According to the Atlas of Migrants in Europe[28], freedom of movement within the ECOWAS area is the cornerstone of the desire for regional integration. However, the introduction of border controls and refoulements contradict this desire for free movement.

IMPACTS ON INDIVIDUALS AND COMMUNITIES

The externalization and militarization of European migration policies have a significant impact on individuals and communities in Africa. Migrants are put at risk, their rights are violated throughout their journey, and violence is rife.

Some examples:

Forced immobilization, especially for women

The European Union's externalization and militarization policies aim to restrict the movement of people deemed "undesirable" on European soil. These policies thus undermine freedom of movement. "Women's freedom of movement is generally more restricted than men's for a variety of reasons, including economic inequality, gender-specific childcare responsibilities, and the risks of gender-based violence during migration"[29]. Externalization policies reinforce this gendered division.

Increasingly dangerous migration routes

The militarization of borders and the criminalization of migrants is not stopping people from taking the road to North Africa and Europe but is making the journey increasingly dangerous. Crossing borders is becoming more and more difficult, as migrants have to use dangerous methods and hide in order to cross borders that are becoming increasingly inaccessible due to military presence, surveillance cameras and barbed wire, etc.

In addition, migratory routes change and are diverted as agreements between European and African countries on border controls are reached between European and African countries. For instance, since the Moroccan government tightened controls in the Strait of Gibraltar and along the Mediterranean coast, some of the West African migration routes have shifted towards the Atlantic coast, from Senegal or Mauritania to the Canary Islands[30].

Human rights violations: exploitation, detention, refoulement, human trafficking, torture and slavery

Throughout their migratory journey, people leaving their countries in an attempt to reach Europe face numerous human rights violations. Although these violations are widely documented, they persist due to the power given to States by the externalization of European migration policies. Despite denunciations, refoulements to countries that violate the human rights of migrants continue. "The European Union and its Member States derogate from the prohibition of non- refoulement, when push-back policies are carried out in the Mediterranean Sea through Frontex, forcing asylum seekers are forced to return to Libya"[31].

Preventing access to the asylum application

By externalizing its migration policies, the EU is delegating its asylum responsibilities to so-called ‘third’ countries where there is no legislative framework for asylum, or even to countries that have not ratified the Geneva Convention. According to Claire Rodier, "the European Union is shirking its responsibilities under the international commitments to which

it is a signatory"[32]. Furthermore, by preventing migrants from accessing access to European territory through externalization, the EU is preventing exiles from applying for asylum. All migrants, regardless of their situation, are subject to the externalization and militarization of borders, which prevents them from reaching Europe, even if they could obtain refugee status.

Consequences for the health and mental health of exiles

Violence, multiple human rights abuses and difficulties in accessing healthcare have a major impact on the health and mental health of migrants. In its report "Death, despair and destitution: the human costs of the EU's migration policies", Médecins sans Frontières describes the human impact of the EU's migration policies and documents some of the consequences.

Racism

One of the consequences of the externalization of migration policies is the rise of racism and its institutionalization in the Maghreb countries. In Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco, migrants sent back to the border are targeted on the basis of their skin color. Migrants are blamed for the insecurity and economic difficulties in these countries. They are singled out as scapegoats. This discourse is legitimized by the governments themselves: in Algeria, for example, "in the summer of 2017, Ahmed Ouyahia, who was then Secretary General of the Rassemblement National Démocratique at the time, declared in the summer of 2017 that migrants were 'a source of crime, drugs and several other scourges"[33]. In February 2023, Tunisian President Kais Saied gave a speech in which he spoke of "hordes of illegal migrants" arriving in Tunisia to "change the demographic composition of Tunisia". This was followed by an outpouring of hatred towards migrants from sub-Saharan Africa, including violence in the streets, rape and eviction from homes, and so on.

Gender-based violence at borders and on the migration route

The closure of borders, the externalization of migration policies and the militarization of these policies are exacerbating the existing power dynamics between men and women. The experience of migration differs between men and women. "The externalization of EU border control to Africa thus exacerbates violence against women, as it creates and maintains a continuum of spaces along the migratory route where black women must confront relations of power and domination based on gender, 'race' and class to cross secure borders"[34]. Women are at greater risk of sexual violence and rape, and more likely to use sex work as a financial resource. When crossing the sea from Morocco to Spain, boats carrying pregnant women are the boat is more likely to be rescued by the Spanish authorities if there are pregnant women on board. Conversely, menstruating women are not allowed on the boats, for fear of attracting sharks. Crossing the land barriers at Ceuta and Melilla is predominantly a male endeavour with few women participating. Many migrant women become pregnant during their journey, often as a result of rape. They have no access to sexual health care and "due to inadequate medical care and difficult birthing conditions, some women have died in childbirth"[35]. Finally, women may "find it difficult to find childcare or to send their children to school"[36].

Families searching for their loved ones and/or in mourning

Because many migrants disappear during their journey, their families are searching for them and live in anguish with no news of them. The dead at borders, at sea and in the desert are often not identified, leaving families in a state of uncertainty as they do not know whether their loved ones have died. The absence of information and bodies makes it difficult for relatives who have stayed behind, are on the road or have reached Europe to mourn.

Consequences for travel communities

The criminalization of migrants and the "smugglers" who make a living from the travel economy has led to economic hardship in some regions. The case of the Agadez region in Niger is an example of the impact of externalization policies on local communities. Historically, this region made its living from the travel economy, but with the enactment of the 2015 law, hoteliers and transporters had to cease their activities and lost their income[37].

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IMPACT ON MIGRANT RIGHTS NGO/ASSOCIATIONS AND ACTIVISTS

The externalization and militarization of migration policies are leading to the criminalization of people on the move, but also of the actors and organizations that support the rights of migrants and rescue these travellers in mortal danger. Amnesty International explains that "the criminalization of rescues at sea[38] has reached such proportions that today, no boat is operating off the coast of Libya to rescue migrants". For example, the Italian coastguard detains NGO boats for several days so that they cannot set out to sea to rescue people in distress. The crews have been accused of facilitating the illegal entry of migrants into Europe and of encouraging further dangerous crossings.

In the context of escalating security measures and authoritarianism in several Maghreb countries, activists and campaigners championing the rights of migrants, whether Tunisian or from other African countries, are facing harassment from law enforcement. The situation in Tunisia has deteriorated in recent years, with activists being arrested by the police and are threatened with deportation, in the case of foreigners, due to their activism.

The Key Role of Non-State Actors

In Africa, non-state actors, particularly international organizations and UN agencies, play a significant role in the migration landscape due to the region's complex political, social, and economic environments. States often call on their technical expertise for a variety of specific mandates. For instance, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) is called upon or provides technical support in developing states' migration policies, and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) mainly offers humanitarian support to asylum seekers and refugees, particularly in countries without national legislation on asylum. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) can support States in enhancing their border management systems whilst ensuring the protection of the human rights of migrants within border areas.

Other non-state actors, such as NGOs, play a pivotal role in emergency operations, including the rescue of migrants during their journey, providing social and legal protection, and launching initiatives to promote respect for human rights. For example, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) provides medical aid to individuals facing threat to their lives or health. Organizations such as Oxfam organize citizen mobilization campaigns to exert pressure on political decision-makers, while entities like Sea- Watch rescue migrants in distress at sea.

Intergovernmental and UN organizations, including the IOM, the UNHCR and the ICMPD, are responsible for the provision of technical and political support to governments on issues related to migration. These organizations also act as defenders of the rights of migrants and refugees and provide support to migrants "in need", particularly in the form of humanitarian aid. This situation tends to make the claims of migrants and refugees invisible.

For the European Union (EU) and its Member States, "the International Organization for Migration (IOM) is a key cooperation partner, a reliable and trustworthy service provider, and one that is capable of establishing and maintaining stable relations with the States in which projects are to be implemented"[39]The organization is a key partner for European states in the governance of migration in "third countries". It is involved in capacity-building for government officials, journalists and NGOs, and in the development of migration policies in "third countries". The promotion of migration management aims to ensure the effective state control of "irregular" migration on a global scale, with a preference for outcomes that minimize societal unrest, criticism and mortality. Organizations such as Frontex and the ICMPD work to monitor external borders and strengthen measures to combat so-called irregular migration.

Community Organization and Mobilization

In a context characterized by the criminalization of migrants and the shrinking of civil society's civic space in North and West Africa and the Sahel, it is becoming increasingly difficult for migrants and refugees themselves to articulate their concerns. Human rights associations, organizations and activists working on migration also face state threats to their migration-related activities. These different geographical areas are considered as places of "origin" or "transit" on the way to Europe. The European Union and its member states are exerting pressure to tighten border controls and restrict the movement of people. This policy leads to government practices that aim to restrict the actions of civil society and the voice of irregular migrants.

The adoption of various legislative measures against illegal entry and exit, under European influence, has resulted in the criminalization of all forms of assistance to illegal immigrants. Over the last twenty years, the region (comprising North Africa, West Africa and the Sahel) has witnessed two major series of legislative reforms in the area of migration. "The first series, which focused on entry, residence and exit procedures for foreign nationals, mainly affected North African countries during the 2000s. The second wave of legislation, which began in the early 2000s and intensified in the following decade, extended to Sahelian and West Africa. It focused on the fight against human trafficking and migrant smuggling. A series of potential offences now hangs over nationals and foreigners, either in their mobility or in their mobility-related activities"[40]. The fight against trafficking and smuggling has thus become, often as a pretext, a means of criminalizing activities associated with mobility, resulting in legal action against anyone who receives, harbours or transports a person in an irregular situation.

CHALLENGES RELATING TO COMMUNITY SELF-ORGANIZATION

A significant number of individuals and groups of migrants are endeavouring to articulate their experiences, raise awareness of their plight and demand their rights. However, the informal nature of these initiatives (in the form of associations or groups that are not recognized by the State) poses significant challenges in terms of gaining recognition and acknowledgement for their circumstances. Indeed, when initiatives, whether associative or collective, do not obtain official recognition from the State, this places them in an in-between position, both legal and social, which diminishes their legitimacy and their ability to act effectively.

Conversely, the prevailing socio-economic and political instability in numerous countries is a salient factor that must be considered. The geographical location of these migrants introduces an additional layer of complexity. The present study will examine the economic crises

affecting these geographical areas, often coupled with political instability, tend to overshadow the migrants' demands. Instead of being seen as social actors with rights and stories to share, migrants find themselves marginalized or even stigmatized, transformed into scapegoats onto which the frustrations and failures of internal policies are projected. This situation creates a vicious circle in which migrants' histories, rights and demands are not only ignored, but their very presence becomes a subject of contention and polarization. In some countries in West Africa and the Sahel, recent military coups have generally had the effect of suppressing any dissent that challenges the authority in place. In Mali and Burkina Faso, for example, freedom of association is under threat and the suppression of association is a systemic trend. This makes the activities of associations and activists increasingly fragile, sometimes even rendering them invisible.

COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION: CHALLENGING SILANCE, BOUNDARIES, PRACTICES AND NARRATIVES

Notwithstanding the challenges faced, migrant communities, associations and activists are organizing themselves to articulate their concerns and to take action to defend the human rights of migrants and refugees.

Referring to the "tragic event in Melilla"[41], where at least 23 migrants lost their lives, many refugees and migrants gathered to demonstrate in front of the Moroccan Parliament[42] and the offices of UN organizations[43], demanding justice and recognition of their rights.

In other situations, migrants organize themselves to find solutions to the problems they encounter. For example, to find accommodation[44] in Morocco, migrant women sometimes organize themselves into communities in certain districts, buildings and flats. A system of sharing has been set up: women who work and live with their employer during the week offer to sublet their rooms to other women while they are away. Furthermore, they seek to position themselves under the aegis of women who have been established for a greater duration, thereby affording them the opportunity to establish a network of mutual support and acquaintances.

Several organizations are working to highlight human rights violations, while at the same time lobbying the European Union, African states and UN organizations. The objective of this initiative is to exert influence over institutions such as the EU, which provides financial and technical support for the migration policies of "origin" and "transit" countries. The ambition is for this support to be conditional on respect for the human rights of the people concerned, rather than being contingent on security imperatives. A number of civil society organizations are involved in addressing issues relating to access to healthcare, justice, the protection of minors, the rights of LGBTQI+ people, women's rights and, more broadly, human rights.

Campaigning organizations such as AlarmPhone Watch the Med and AlarmPhone Sahara are escalating their efforts to rescue migrants at sea or in the desert, and publishing reports on the situation of migrants. Other organizations such as MSF - Médecins Sans Frontières, working

in the medical field, play a crucial role in drawing attention to the situation of migrants and demonstrating the impact of EU support. As demonstrated by this report, entitled "You are going to die here"[45], which is based on testimonies collected in migrant detention centres in Libya. The latest report " Death, Despair and Destitution: the Human Costs of the EU's Migration Policies "[46] details the disastrous consequences of the political crisis facing Europe at its borders and beyond. Networks of civil society organizations including organizations, activists and researchers from various European and African countries, such as EuroMed Rights, the Réseau Syndical Migrations Méditerranéennes-Subsahariennes, Migreurop, Collectif Loujna- Tounkaranké and NGOs such as Oxfam, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch are working to influence decision-makers in African countries and in Brussels at European level. Their aim is to encourage bilateral and multilateral cooperation to protect the rights of migrants and refugees, while at the same time criticizing externalization policies in the region. They frequently take positions through political declarations favoring human mobility and freedom of movement, and opposing security policies. The organizations, activists and campaigners maintain links of exchange and sharing on the situation and the progress achieved in the area of human rights. With this in mind, regional meetings are organized, both face-to-face and online. These include the Maghreb Social Forum and CommemorAction, which commemorates people who have died, disappeared or been forcibly disappeared along migratory routes. These are therefore spaces for collectively denouncing the political responsibility for this violence and building a network of solidarity with the families for truth and justice.

All these civil society initiatives help to give a voice to migrants and members of their families and to provide a space for political involvement for these different profiles. Their demands are many and varied, some of which are key:

Freedom of movement between countries and the opening up of "legal" migration channels.

- The compulsory rescue of people in distress in the desert, the Mediterranean Sea or the
- Atlantic Ocean.
- An end to the criminalization of migrants and solidarity with migrants
- Guaranteeing respect for the dignity of the disappeared and the deceased.
- Condemnation of EU externalization policies
- Prioritizing respect for migrants' human rights in the context of Africa-Europe relations on migration

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