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The EU Migration Partnership Framework: time for a rethink?

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Discussion Paper 28/2017

The EU Migration Partnership Framework

Time for a Rethink?

Clare Castillejo

The EU Migration Partnership Framework

Time for a rethink?

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Bonn 2017

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Abstract

The European Union's (EU) Migration Partnership Framework (MPF) was established in June 2016 and seeks to mobilise the instruments, resources and influence of both the EU and member states to establish cooperation with partner countries in order to "sustainably manage migration flows" (European Commission, 2017a, p. 2). Its strong focus on EU interests and positive and negative incentives mark a departure from previous EU migration initiatives and have generated significant controversy. This Discussion Paper examines the politics, implementation and impact of the MPF more than one year on from its establishment, asking what lessons it offers for the future direction of EU migration policy.

The paper begins by introducing the MPF and examining the different perspectives of EU actors on the framework. It finds that there is significant disagreement both among EU member states and within EU institutions over the MPF's approach and priorities. The paper explores the political and ethical controversies that the MPF has generated, including regarding its ambition to subordinate other areas of external action to migration goals; its use of incentives; and its undermining of EU development and human rights principles.

The paper assesses the implementation and impact of the MPF in its five priority countries – Ethiopia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria and Senegal. It argues that the concrete achievements of the migration partnerships have been limited; that the MPF has largely failed to incentivise the cooperation that the EU was seeking; and that the EU's migration programming in MPF partner countries has suffered from serious flaws. The paper takes an in-depth look at the Ethiopia partnership, which has been the most challenging. It describes how the interests and goals of the EU and Ethiopia have not aligned themselves, how the issue of returns has come to entirely overshadow engagement, and how the relationship between the partners has been soured.

The paper goes on to examine how the MPF relates to African interests and how it has affected EU-Africa relations, arguing that the MPF approach is seen by many African actors as imposing EU interests and undermining African unity and continental ambitions. Finally, it explores how the EU can develop engagement with Africa on migration issues that is more realistic, constructive, and sustainable, with the aim of fostering intra-African movement and economic opportunities; ensuring protection for refugees and vulnerable migrants; and allowing both continents to benefit from large-scale, safe and orderly African labour migration to Europe. However, it warns that any such shift will require a change in mindset by European leaders and populations.

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Abbreviations

AU	African Union
CAMM	Common Agenda on Migration and Mobility
CSDP	Common Security and Defence Policy
DG DEVCO	Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development (EC)
EC	European Commission
EDF	European Development Fund
EEAS	European External Action Service
EIP	European External Investment Plan
EU	European Union
EUR	euros
EUTF	EU Trust Fund for Africa
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
MPF	Migration Partnership Framework (EU)
NGO	non-governmental organisation
ODA	Overseas Development Assistance
UN	United Nations

Executive summary

The European Union's (EU) Migration Partnership Framework (MPF) was established in June 2016 as part of a range of initiatives aimed at curbing migration flows in response to the 2015 "migrant crisis". Its stated aim is to mobilise the instruments, resources and influence of both the EU and member states to establish cooperation with partner countries in order to "sustainably manage migration flows" (European Commission, 2017a, p. 2), and it has had substantial political backing from EU leadership. The MPF explicitly employs positive and negative incentives to encourage partner countries' cooperation and places a heavy emphasis on keeping migrants out and sending them back, characteristics that have generated significant controversy. So far, the MPF has been implemented in five priority countries – Ethiopia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria and Senegal. It is also increasingly being used to engage on migration with a range of other countries in a more ad hoc way.

This paper explores the politics, implementation and impact of the MPF more than one year on from its establishment. It examines the motivations and high expectations of those who support the MPF, the concerns and doubts of those who oppose it, and the experiences of those involved in implementing it. The paper asks to what extent initial expectations and concerns are proving valid and what, in fact, have been the operational and political impacts of this partnership framework.

The paper begins by introducing the MPF, outlining how it was developed in response to political pressure on European leaders generated by the "migrant crisis", and how it has been implemented and financed. It examines how the MPF fits into the broader EU migration policy framework, arguing that it is the most openly interest-driven of the EU's recent migration initiatives. As such it can be seen to epitomise a broader shift in the EU's approach, which seeks to promote short-term European migration and security goals through transactional engagement with African partners.

The paper goes on to examine the different perspectives of European actors on the MPF. It identifies the tensions and disagreements among EU member states in relation to the migration partnership approach, which are shaped by their conflicting interests on migration issues and their different relationships with African partners. It also identifies differences among EU institutions, with some strongly backing the MPF approach, while others question the heavy focus on returns and borders and express concern about the undermining of diplomatic relations. It also discusses the largely negative perspectives of civil society and migration experts on the MPF, as well as summarising the tensions that have emerged around funding for the MPF.

The MPF has a number of particularly controversial aspects, and the paper examines these, asking how they are perceived by different actors and how problematic they really are. These include the ambition to subordinate other areas of external action to migration goals; the use of positive and negative incentives to ensure partner cooperation on the EU's migration agenda; and the undermining of the EU's development and human rights principles. In particular, the paper argues that in making reduced migration a central goal of development assistance; targeting such assistance based on migration rather than poverty factors; and explicitly using development aid as both a carrot and stick to ensure partner cooperation on migration, the MPF is breaking with good development practice. It also

argues that in the drive to achieve the EU's migration goals, issues of protection and the human rights of migrants are being overlooked.

The paper then turns to look at the implementation and impact of the MPF at country level. It argues that the concrete achievements of the MPF migration partnerships have been limited and that the MPF has so far not managed to incentivise the type of cooperation that the EU was seeking. This is particularly striking in the area of returns, where there has been almost no progress in the five priority countries and where European expectations that modest financial incentives would purchase cooperation appears to have been misplaced. The paper also argues that, beyond the failure of incentives, there is a deeper flaw in the MPF logic. While a substantial amount of the EU's migration-focused development assistance in MPF countries is intended to address "root causes" of migration, there is no evidence that such types of development investments actually reduce migration. Examining the projects implemented through the EU Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF) in MPF partner countries, the paper finds that these have suffered from inadequate local ownership, weak alignment with local priorities and systems, untransparent selection procedures, slow implementation, and lack of sustainability. Moreover, many of these projects appear to be a repackaging of existing development programming in order to gain access to new EUTF funding.

Looking at implementation and impact across the priority countries, the paper recognises that the strongest results have been seen in Niger, where EU and local interests most closely converge, EU incentives have greater weight, and the sensitive issue of returns is not a factor. In Nigeria, Senegal and Mali progress has been more limited, with the EU expressing frustration that these countries are not cooperating on returns, and partner governments expressing frustration that they have so far seen little benefit from the MPF in terms of their interests, for example regarding investment in jobs or legal migration opportunities.

The paper takes an in-depth look at the Ethiopia migration partnership, which has been the most challenging for the EU. In this partnership the goals of the EU and Ethiopia have not been aligned, with the EU deeply frustrated that Ethiopia is not cooperating on the issue of returns, and Ethiopia disappointed that EU assistance through the EUTF has been slow, has failed to address key local needs and interests, and has resulted in a proliferation of unstrategic projects. The issue of returns is now entirely overshadowing the Ethiopia MPF and the EU is beginning to apply negative incentives to seek to force cooperation in this area. The paper argues that this partnership is a clear example of how the EU is losing perspective in its engagement with an important African partner that itself hosts almost one million refugees and that could be a positive partner in addressing the long-term challenge of migration.

The paper goes on to look more widely at how the MPF is perceived by African actors and what impact it is having on broader relations between the EU and Africa. It argues that the MPF approach does not acknowledge the different interests of European and African countries in relation to migration, but seeks to present EU interests as common interests. This means that dialogue with African partners is not based on a genuine recognition of each side's priorities and an attempt to seek compromise. It also finds that, in its bilateral and transactional approach and its focus on tightening borders, the MPF runs counter to African aspirations for inter-continental mobility and free movement, and to attempts to

develop a common African position in its engagement with the EU. The paper argues that the MPF – and the broader EU approach to migration that it represents – has undoubtedly soured European relations with some African countries, as can be seen in sensitivities over the issue of migration in the November EU-Africa summit.

Finally, the paper argues that the MPF demonstrates the limitations of the EU's current approach to migration and that a rethink is required. This must begin with recognition that migration cannot be halted and that, moreover, Europe will increasingly need African migration in years to come. From this starting point the EU should explore how Africa and Europe can work together to foster intra-African movement that supports Africa's economic growth; to ensure protection for refugees and vulnerable migrants; and to allow both continents to benefit from large-scale, safe and orderly African labour migration to Europe. It should also move from attempting to address "root causes" of migration with short-term development funds, to examining how the EU could really readjust its trade and investment policy in Africa to create more decent jobs and opportunities. Critically, the EU must also get its own house in order on asylum and migration, being honest about conflicting interests between member states and working towards effective common migration and asylum policies and systems. However, the paper argues that such a transformative shift in approach will require European leaders to have the courage to change the current political and public discourse around migration to a more constructive one.

1 Introduction

The European Union's (EU) Migration Partnership Framework (MPF) was established in June 2016, in response to the 2015 migration crisis, with the aim of establishing "a coherent and tailored engagement […] with third countries to better manage migration" (EC [European Commission], 2016a, p. 6). The partnership framework seeks to fully integrate migration into the EU's foreign policy by mobilising the instruments, tools, resources and influence of both EU and member states to establish cooperation with partner countries for "sustainably managing migration flows" (EC, 2017a, p. 2). It has a set of ambitious short-term and long-term goals. In the short term, it seeks to save lives in the Mediterranean; to increase returns to countries of origin and transit; and to enable migrants and refugees to stay close to home. In the longer term, it seeks to address the root causes of irregular migration and forced displacement and improve opportunities in countries of origin.

This paper examines the politics, implementation and impact of the MPF more than one year on from its establishment. Section 2 introduces the partnership framework, the way in which it was established, and how it works. Section 3 examines the different perspectives of EU actors on the MPF and finds that there is significant disagreement both among EU member states and within EU institutions over the MPF's approach and priorities. Section 4 explores the political and ethical controversies that the MPF has generated, including regarding its ambition to subordinate other areas of external action to migration goals; its use of positive and negative incentives; and its undermining of EU development and human rights principles. Section 5 examines the implementation and impact of the MPF in the pilot countries. It argues that the concrete achievements of the migration partnerships have been limited; that the MPF has largely failed to incentivise the cooperation that the EU was seeking, and that the EU's migration programming in MPF partner countries has suffered from serious flaws. Section 6 takes an in-depth look at the partnership with Ethiopia, which has been by far the most challenging. In this partnership, the interests and goals of the EU and Ethiopia have not aligned themselves, the issue of returns has come to entirely overshadow engagement, and the relationship between the partners has been significantly damaged. Section 7 examines how the MPF relates to African interests and how it has affected EU-Africa relations, arguing that the MPF approach is seen by many African actors as imposing EU interests and undermining African unity and continental ambitions. Finally, the concluding section explores how the EU can develop engagement with Africa on migration issues that is more realistic, constructive, and sustainable, with the aim of fostering intra-African movement and economic opportunities; ensuring protection for refugees and vulnerable migrants; and allowing both continents to benefit from large-scale, safe and orderly African labour migration to Europe. However, it argues that such a shift will require a change in mindset by European leaders and populations.

This report is based on desk research, in-person interviews conducted in Brussels and Addis Ababa, and telephone interviews with relevant actors in other locations. In total, 38 individuals were interviewed during the period September to October 2017. These included officials from the European Commission and European External Action Service; European Parliamentarians; diplomats and development officials from European member states; government officials and diplomats from MPF partner countries; UN officials; migration experts; and representatives of civil society organisations. Interviewees spoke on condition of anonymity and hence are not named in the paper.

2 Introducing the Migration Partnership Framework (MPF)

2.1 The MPF within the EU's migration policy framework

The MPF was developed as a response to the 2015 "migrant crisis" and the resulting public and political pressure on European politicians to take action in response to large numbers of highly visible arrivals, particularly in light of the conspicuous failure of the European refugee redistribution agreement. As such, it is part of a wider package of recent EU migration initiatives focused on Africa and prompted by the "migrant crisis". These include the 2015 European Agenda on Migration, the Valletta summit and Valletta Action Plan, the EU Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF), and the Common Agenda on Migration and Mobility (CAMM) documents signed with countries such as Ethiopia and Nigeria. The MPF must be also understood in the context of pre-existing EU engagement with Africa on migration, including the EU-Africa Migration and Mobility Dialogue (MMD) and the regional Rabat and Khartoum processes.

While the MPF has similar stated objectives as the Valletta Action Plan,[1] it is very different in tone from Valletta or from previous EU initiatives and agreements on migration. These differences include the MPF's focus on a transactional relationship[2] and emphasis on using both positive and negative incentives to achieve EU interests. As Lehne points out, in the communication establishing the MPF the "The EU's interests are laid out in brutally clear terms [and] the approach focuses almost exclusively on keeping people out and sending them back" (Lehne, 2016). Meanwhile, the interests of African countries are mentioned only in the most general terms. Indeed, this communication, as well as the five quarterly progress reports on the MPF that have been issued so far, repeatedly stress the importance of returns and readmission and the need for "rewards" and "consequences" to ensure partner's compliance in this area. The European Council has reportedly played a major role in promoting this tough approach, a stance that can be seen in its 2016 conclusions on the MPF that stated "Cooperation on readmission and return will be a key test of the partnership between the EU and these partners [and] all relevant instruments and sources of funding should be mobilised in a coherent manner in support of the approach" (European Council, 2016, p. 2). According to those involved in designing the MPF, this emphasis on returns is based both on a need to deliver quick, visible results and an assumption that returns act as a deterrent to potential migrants – an assumption that migration experts say is not supported by evidence. Overall, the MPF is the most openly interest-driven of the EU's migration initiatives, and indeed the one that appears furthest removed from the principles of genuine partnership.

1 The Valletta Action plan is built around five priority domains: development benefits of migration and addressing root causes of irregular migration and forced displacement; legal migration and mobility; protection and asylum; prevention of and fight against irregular migration, migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings; and return, readmission and reintegration.

2 In which deals are done to achieve short-term goals and interests, as opposed to building a longer-term relationship of collaboration.

2.2 How migration partnerships work

The partnerships were initially envisaged as "compacts" – documents that established clear commitments from each partner – around which all EU policy areas could be mobilised to deliver on migration goals. However, this idea of a set of established commitments was dropped as impractical and the MPF is now described as a

> political framework for continued and operational cooperation, pulling together the different work strands in order to develop a comprehensive partnership with third countries, combining the instruments, tools and leverages available to the EU and Member States to deliver clear targets and joint commitments. (EC, 2016b, p. 3)[3]

In essence, these partnerships involve a mix of political, aid and security engagement by the EU and member states, adapted to each country context, and with a focus that shifts over time in response to changes in context or in the quality of cooperation. The partnerships do not involve any dedicated political dialogue processes or programming instruments, but are more a general "scaling up" of political engagement and development investments on migration through pre-existing channels. While EU officials report that they welcome the flexibility of the partnerships in their current form, some argue that the absence of any formal commitments creates a lack of clarity on what each side should do and expect, reducing the potential to exercise leverage and achieve impact.

So far, the MPF has been implemented in five priority countries – Ethiopia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria and Senegal. These countries were identified at the outset because they are priorities in terms of origin or transit and – critically – because they were seen as open to such a partnership. Indeed, one EU official pointed out that it was thought these countries would demonstrate the quick results that Europe's political leaders desperately needed, but that they have not done so and that in hindsight some were a "bad choice". However, it seems the MPF is now moving away from this original model of priority countries and instead will be used to engage with a variety of countries in a more ad hoc, fluid and lower profile manner. In this way cooperation has recently been stepped up under the MPF with countries in West and North Africa. Cooperation has also begun under the MPF with some Asian countries, including engagement on the issue of returns with Bangladesh and Pakistan, cooperation with Afghanistan on a number of issues including root causes of migration, and a migration management project for silk-route countries).[4] This shift is partly a response to the limited results in the pilot countries, and the desire to avoid creating further unrealistic expectations. It is also because member states are unlikely to agree on priority countries, with each keen to prioritise the regions from which they receive most migrants.

Activities in the five priority countries have included high-level political dialogue by both the EU and member states; placement of dedicated European migration liaison officers within EU delegations; substantial funding and programming on migration by the EU and member states; increased security support through existing Common Security and Defence

3 According to EU officials, the initial compact idea was abandoned both because it was recognised as being difficult to negotiate and inflexible, but also because different elements of the EU institutions (e.g. DG DEVCO, DG Trade and others) were reluctant to put their policies at the disposal of migration goals, or to allow the EEAS to coordinate their respective policy areas.

4 However, it is important to note that the specifics of this more recent cooperation are beyond the scope of this report, which focuses primarily on MPF implementation in the five priority countries.

Policy (CSDP) missions and operations; strengthened EU agency involvement in partner countries (such as the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, EUROPOL, and so on); and the development of innovative IT (information technology) solutions for migration management.

In terms of financial assistance in support of the MPF, so far, the bulk of this has come from the EUTF. EUR 500 million were channelled through the EUTF specifically for the five MPF countries. Projects undertaken with this money are identified and implemented in the same way as other EUTF projects. Meanwhile, MPF priority countries also benefit from wider EUTF programming, as well as migration-related assistance from member states. In the future, partner countries may also receive significant investments through the recently launched European External Investment Plan (EIP), which is intended to mobilise EUR 44 billion in private investment for Africa and the European neighbourhood by 2020. Such funding is likely to come in particular through the European Fund for Sustainable Development (EFSD), which is one of the EIP's three pillars and which, as well as working towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), "should contribute towards addressing migratory pressures" (European Parliament & European Council, 2017, p. 3).

While financial investment is supposed to be the main incentive for cooperation within the MPF, in reality, the amount of new aid being offered is not hugely attractive especially for the larger MPF countries. It is also very uncertain whether the EIP will be able to mobilise the investment it seeks. Therefore, as Lehne points out, "The financial incentives suggested are hardly generous or credible enough to have the desired impact" (Lehne, 2016).

3 The differing perspectives of European actors on the MPF

3.1 Conflicting member state interests

The MPF is supposed to harness the political engagement, finances and activities of the EU and member states in a coordinated way to achieve migration goals. It does seem that enhanced coordination among European countries is taking place to some extent, as can be seen, for example, in a series of sequenced high-level visits to Niger. However, there are also tensions between member states over the MPF, the extent to which they support its implementation, and how it relates to their own bilateral relations and interests in Africa.

The presentation that there is one common EU interest in relation to migration from Africa and that the MPF is a commonly shared EU endeavour is a fiction. In fact, different member states have different – and in some cases conflicting – interests on migration from Africa, shaped in large part by their historical ties and bilateral relations with African countries and the extent to which they host diaspora populations. Some also have their own sources of influence and do not see much value in a collective EU approach to migration. As Lehne points out,

> [w]hen it comes to African partner countries, member states have sources of influence and targeted leverage not available to the EU. They can operate more rapidly, with greater flexibility and less visibility […] From the perspectives of individual European capitals, EU initiatives might easily get in the way of national efforts. (Lehne, 2016)

These conflicting member state interests and agendas shape their approach to the MPF. Some countries particularly affected by migration, such as Italy, are keen on the transactional approach and use of positive and negative incentives. Others such as Spain (which has experience of more mutual interest-based migration collaboration in West Africa) or Ireland (which is more concerned about the undermining of EU values and principles) are apparently more sceptical. Likewise, some member states' officials interviewed stressed that returns should be central to the partnership framework, while others reported that they wanted to see a greater balance in focus across the different goals framework. However, it is important to note that difference of opinion about the MPF also exists *within* individual member state governments. For example, a number of member state diplomats reported that home ministries, justice ministries, and prime ministers' offices are keen on the strong emphasis on borders, returns and conditionalities, while foreign ministry and development officials are more doubtful.

It is clear that the bilateral relationships that European countries have with MPF countries shape their approach. Some member states want to avoid pressure or negative incentives being applied to countries where they have strong bilateral relations or strategic interests. Other member states express frustration that particular European countries are not putting their privileged bilateral relationships at the service of migration partnerships. Likewise, some member states have bilateral returns arrangements with specific MPF countries that work well and may not want an EU-wide agreement to jeopardise these. Indeed, in the area of returns, member states' interests can come into direct conflict, as a working bilateral return agreement in one member state can encourage unwanted irregular migrants to move to other member states from where they cannot be returned. In addition, some member states are resistant to some elements of the MPF agenda as they have important diaspora populations that they do not want to alienate, or a greater need for informal labour from Africa.

According to both external commentators and some EU officials, this lack of common interests, coordination and solidarity on migration issues within Europe has in fact been a driver of the MPF approach. The numbers of arrivals over recent years would have been manageable if shared between EU countries, but resistance to redistribution meant that some countries were left with a large burden and resulting political pressures. Unable to establish effective internal EU systems because of the conflicting interests of member states, the EU externalised its response to migration through instruments such as the MPF. According to Dassù, this externalisation

> indicates that any EU migration policy is harder to pursue in its internal dimension – where migration has become an explosive political divide across the continent – than as a foreign policy compact. Externalizing the burden, however, will be neither easy nor sufficient […] A change of perspective is needed: the key condition to address past failures is on the internal side [so that] a working EU migration policy could then start to emerge. (Dassù, 2017)

Hence a priority for the EU must be to strengthen its own asylum and migration systems to be better equipped to manage fluctuating migration flows and integrate incoming people. EU officials are aware that Europe needs to do this, and it has also been stressed recently by the European Council. However, the rise of right-wing movements in many member states limits opportunities to do so. As Lehne points out, "As governments become more nationalistic and solidarity among member states diminishes, collective action on the EU

level – an essential component of successful migration management – has become more difficult" (Lehne, 2017).

African MPF partners are well aware of the divisions among member states, the weakness of a common EU approach, and the resulting limitations of engaging at EU level. Both Nigerian and Ethiopian officials were clear that they prefer bilateral agreements and cooperation on migration with individual member states over cooperation with EU institutions, because they see this as more rapid, efficient and tailored to their countries' specific context. This is particularly the case on returns, with some member states offering more attractive reintegration packages than others. As Collett argues,

> [s]tate-to-state diplomacy on migration has typically been more effective than the EU's multilateral approach. Individual European governments can draw on longstanding relationships and a broader range of mutual interests; they can offer more, and often more discreetly. For many partner countries, the EU remains simply a (strong) source of funding, while the real politics lie elsewhere. (Collett, 2017)

3.2 Differences among EU institutions

There are also differences among the EU institutions on the MPF. In particular, the prioritisation of returns is strongly promoted by the Council Secretariat and DG Home. This is unsurprising, as Faure et al. point out: "DG HOME's outlook on migration tends to be short-term and focused on security threats inside the EU. This means that its actions aim, primarily, to restrict human mobility and stem irregular immigration" (Faure, Gavas, & Knoll, 2015, p. 16). However, it seems that other parts of the EU machinery, including the European External Action Service (EEAS) and DG DEVCO, are somewhat frustrated by this agenda. A number of EU officials stressed that the tough approach to returns has been misplaced and threatens to undermine diplomatic engagement and the wider range of interests that Europe has with MPF countries. They stress that discussions over the return of very small numbers of people have soured relations with African partners; absorbed an excessive amount of the EU institutions' time and political capital; and distracted from a deeper exploration with African partners on how to work cooperatively on migration. A number of European parliamentarians are also vocal in their criticism of the MPF as undermining EU values.

Some within the EEAS also questioned the strong emphasis on borders within the MPF, with one official arguing that this "responds to a false public perception of illegal migrants flooding in by boat, that is based on dramatic TV images and a hypocritical presentation of the problem by European politicians". In reality the majority of irregular migrants enter Europe legally and overstay their visas. Moreover, Europe's political leaders are well aware that irregular migration is fundamental to the success of certain European industries, such as agriculture. This suggests that the focus of EU efforts should be fixing the internal European system and regularising the labour that Europe gets from Africa, and not focusing on preventing Africans from moving. However, at the moment there does not appear to be political space within Europe to have a more honest discussion of the problem. While legal migration has not figured in any significant way in the MPF so far, the latest announcements from the European Commission (EC) suggest some shift on this, with the EC proposing pilot projects for legal migration with those third countries that have "shown political engagement in finding joint

solutions to tackle irregular migration and readmission of irregular migrants" (EC, 2017e). However, EU officials caution that there is still little appetite among member states for such action.

3.3 Perspectives of external observers

Many Brussels-based observers express serious concerns about the approach of the MPF, with many seeing this as unhelpful or counterproductive. For example, Vimont suggests that

> an approach focused too much on returns and readmissions risks being unable to convince Europe's partners to initiate true collaboration for lack of mutual trust […] The difficulty with this type of approach lies in its built-in contradiction: if a genuine spirit of cooperation must inspire the two sides' mutual engagement in such partnerships, how can such commitments ever stick if one of the parties – the EU – intends to impose its conception based on an inward-looking policy of pushing back the waves of migrants? (Vimont, 2016, p. 28)

Migration experts from international civil society and the United Nations who were interviewed were also unanimously critical of the MPF focus. They recognise that an effective system for returns is important for a credible migration system and for creating public acceptance of those who do have a right to stay. However, they stress that this issue should not be mixed up with addressing the longer-term drivers of migration or tied to aid, in the way that the MPF has so explicitly done. As one senior UN official commented,

> the EU should stop mixing returns with aid to address the drivers of migration. They are not doing good migration projects and also not getting people sent back. They are not achieving anything. What we need is an honest conversation on why Africans move and what migration means for the EU and its economy.

Migration experts also argue that the MPF, as well as other recent EU migration initiatives such as the Valletta Action plan and the EUTF, have set unrealistic goals and expectations, particularly around addressing drivers of migration. They argue that complex issues such as youth unemployment or the erosion of rural livelihoods cannot be addressed over such as short timeframe and with such modest funding as these initiatives provide.

3.4 Disagreement over funding of migration partnerships

From the beginning there has been significant disagreement among European actors regarding the funding of the migration partnerships. Some member states were frustrated when the EC announced that funding for the MPF would be channelled through the EUTF without any prior discussion with the trust fund's strategic board. Likewise, some were opposed to the initial allocation of EUR 500 million from the European Development Fund (EDF) reserve for the MPF, arguing that this allocation should be deferred until there had been some analysis of the results of the EUTF and discussion on its strategic direction. However other member states – including those for whom addressing migration is a national priority and who were strong supporters of the MPF – were keen to allocate this money. After some wrangling, the EURO 500 million extra for MPF countries was agreed in December 2016.

Member states are currently in disagreement about further financing of the EUTF. The EUTF has been replenished from the EDF and now stands at approximately EUR 2.9 billion, while the EC is calling strongly for member states to also contribute more. The EC's most recent progress report on the MPF states that

> [t]he scale of funding that can be mobilised in support of EU policy objectives remains a key factor for success. It will be essential that additional resources are made available by Member States for projects under the EU Trust Fund for Africa. (EC, 2017c, p. 15)

Some member states are in agreement, arguing that the fund is working well and that more money needs to be put in now to be ready for upcoming challenges. Others are very reluctant to put any more money into the fund arguing that the EUTF has yet to demonstrate its value, that it is a purely political tool, and that there is no evidence that this type of migration funding will have the desired impact. They also suggest that the call for replenishments are an artificial exercise, as the EC is filling the pipeline with projects that have not yet been implemented and then asking for more money.

There is also controversy surrounding who receives funding from the EUTF to implement projects in the MPF countries. The majority of implementation is being undertaken by member states implementing agencies, who see this new migration money as "as an alternative source of funding for their implementing agencies and existing programmes" (Castillejo, 2016, p. 21). There are tensions among member states, with some complaining that only a few member states' implementing agencies are getting access to the migration funding. Meanwhile others complain that some member states that only made a minimum contribution to the EUTF are now seeking to get significant money from it for project implementation. Whatever the rights and wrongs of these arguments, it is disturbing that money that has come from development funds such as the EDF is now being mostly channelled to member states agencies who are competing over it in this way.

4 Controversial aspects of the MPF

4.1 Subordination of EU external interests to migration

The communication establishing the MPF was very clear that all areas of external action should be used as leverage to gain cooperation from African partners, stating that

> neighbourhood, development and trade are not the only policies that are relevant to support the compacts. No policy areas should be exempted from this approach. All EU policies including education, research, climate change, energy, environment, agriculture, should in principle be part of a package, bringing maximum leverage to the discussion. (EC, 2016a)

This has led to serious concerns, including among some EU and member state officials involved in foreign and development policy, that other external interests will be subordinated to the EU's migration agenda.

While so far it seems that such subordination is not happening to any great extent, there does appear to be some moves in this direction within the most challenging partnerships – Nigeria and Ethiopia – neither of which are cooperating on the EU's returns agenda. In

Ethiopia, both development and trade initiatives appear to be delayed because of lack of progress on returns; in Nigeria, some development initiatives appear to be on hold. Meanwhile, MPF progress reports suggest that further investments in other partners may also be contingent on improved cooperation on returns. While it seems that the use of other policy areas as leverage will be limited and intended to send a signal rather than substantially alter the substance of EU-partner country engagement, it inevitably damages relations. Given that the EU has a wide range of interests in relation to these African countries – from climate change to poverty reduction to regional security – any move to make cooperation in these areas dependent, even in the slightest way, on progress on a limited migration agenda would seem to go against the EU's long-term interests. It would also inevitably be counterproductive, as weakened trade, development or security relationships would obviously not help provide opportunities for local populations or persuade them not to migrate. Interestingly, EU officials reported that in Mali, given the precarious security situation, the migration agenda will not be given precedence over other EU interests in the country, no matter how limited Mali's cooperation may be.

4.2 The use of conditionalities

MPF is explicitly founded on a conditional approach. It promises benefits from the EU across a whole range of areas – primarily development cooperation, but also research, trade, education and other areas in return for cooperation on the EU's migration goals, as well as threatening negative incentives in response to non-cooperation. Funding from the EUTF has so far been the main bargaining chip of the MPF, with those close to the EUTF decision-making process reporting that judgements about whether a country cooperates sufficiently are important in allocating additional money and that some agreed projects have been delayed in response to weak cooperation on returns. It is reported that such delays of EUTF projects are never explicitly linked to lack of cooperation on returns, but that African partners – and indeed member state officials – are left to infer this. This lack of transparency is highly problematic as it does not allow for a frank and clear dialogue on what commitments and expectations are on each side.

While the use of negative conditionalities has been very marginal so far, there is now a strong push from some member states and some EU institutions to apply some harder negative incentives to countries that do not cooperate on returns. As one member state official stated: "It's simple: if countries don't cooperate then we just move the money to where there is more cooperation". This approach is reflected in the hardening of the tone of MPF progress reports over the last year. For example, the fourth progress report states that

> formal cooperation on readmission and return with some of the priority countries has continued to stall. This points to the need to identify and use appropriate incentives to bring to bear in the negotiations on readmission agreements, including through visa policy. (EC, 2017c, p. 2)

The negative incentives currently under consideration apparently include reducing the ease with which diplomatic visas are granted, while still operating within existing rules. EU officials suggest that a greater application of negative incentives should be expected after the November EU-African Union (AU) summit.

The issue of trade incentives is a particularly contentious one. The communication establishing the MPF explicitly states that trade policy should be used as leverage for obtaining cooperation on migration, "notably where the EU gives preferential treatment to its partners: migration cooperation should be a consideration in the forthcoming evaluation of trade preferences under GSP+" (EC, 2016a, p. 9). However, such ideas so far appear to have limited traction and DG Trade is reportedly reluctant to put trade relations at the service of migration goals. It is, however, important that the EU looks more broadly at how its trade policy impacts migration, not in terms of a self-defeating "less-for-less" approach, but by examining how fairer trade relations could generate more opportunities and decent employment in Africa. For example, some commentators suggest that the EU's external trade policies – in particular European Partnership Agreements (EPAs) – may be partly responsible for fuelling the migration that Europe is so concerned about, by damaging economic productivity and economic opportunities in Africa.

The use of both positive and negative conditions to get cooperation from African partners on migration is problematic on a number of levels. Firstly, as discussed, it ties other important policy areas to cooperation on migration in ways that may undermine the EU's other policy goals or commitments. Moreover, as the MPF does not involve any explicit agreement between partners, conditions are therefore being used in a context where there is no clarity on what commitments have been made or are being broken and no honest dialogue between the two sides about how incentives are being applied. But, more importantly, this approach is simply unlikely to work as the incentives available – whether aid or visa processes – are just not enough to incentivise some African countries, especially when compared to the huge amounts they receive from remittances and the political sensitivity of taking back returnees.

4.3 Undermining development principles?

The MPF is unequivocal in making reduced migration a central goal of development aid and in using development aid as both a carrot and stick to ensure cooperation. As the EC states,

> [i]ncreasing coherence between migration and development policy is important to ensure that development assistance helps partner countries manage migration more effectively, and also incentivises them to effectively cooperate on readmission of irregular migrants. Positive and negative incentives should be integrated in the EU's development policy, rewarding those countries that fulfil their international obligation to readmit their own nationals, and those that cooperate in managing the flows of irregular migrants from third countries, as well as those taking action to adequately host persons fleeing conflict and persecution. Equally, there must be consequences for those who do not cooperate on readmission and return. (EC, 2016a, p. 9)

This approach presents a profound break with the EU's established development principles that focus aid on lower income and least developed countries with the aim of reducing poverty. While the funds that are being used as incentives for MPF countries may have been channelled through the EUTF – a migration-focused instrument – they were originally

drawn from development funds, primarily the EDF.[5] Hence the MPF in effect involves providing or withholding Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) to countries that are not necessarily the most in need in order to ensure that they comply with a specific European political priority and home affairs agenda on returns. Moreover, the EUTF-funded projects in the MPF countries, in their design, governance and execution, appear to flout many core development principles, as discussed in detail below. Indeed, a representative of a civil society organisation working on migration in the Sahel reported that the MPF and the funding that accompanies it is seen by local African development actors as "a cynical attempt to bribe African countries with aid", which rolls back the progress that the EU has made in its development practice over the last decade. Moreover, even from the perspective of those who believe that development aid can and should be used to curb migration, reducing aid as a sanction for lack of cooperation appears self-defeating as it would, by this logic, actually increase poverty, reduce opportunities and potentially exacerbate migration.

There are profound divisions among European actors over such an explicit use of development aid to achieve migration goals, including divisions between member states. Central and Eastern member states and those facing high levels of migrant arrivals are generally supportive of a shift towards using development aid as a tool of external action in the field of migration and security. On the other hand, some of the more well-established European bilateral donors are pushing back against a trend that they see as skewing development priorities and stretching the definition of ODA. As one official from a member state that is strongly supportive of the MPF stated "there is a divide among member states between those with traditional development thinking and those of us that see development as more in line with the comprehensive approach and the global strategy". There are also divides within member state governments and EU institutions, with development officials particularly concerned about this approach. One development official from a member state that is supportive of the MPF stated that

> as a development person this has been a game changer of what you use ODA for and what you think development aid is. As a civil servant you accept and try to live with new reality, but we see it as a poisoning of our discourse and narrative.

Some EU parliamentarians expressed concern about the impact of the MPF approach on long-term aid levels, arguing that if aid is used to achieve migration goals, but is unsuccessful in this, this could become an excuse to cut aid in some member states.

4.4 Undermining human rights principles?

There are also concerns that the MPF approach to migration is undermining the EU's human rights principles in a number of ways. Indeed, the MPF was described by Oxfam as "an attempt to outsource the EU's obligation to respect human rights" (Oxfam International, 2016).

Firstly, the strong focus on tightening borders and preventing people from moving inevitably means some with genuine claims for protection cannot reach safety. As one EU

5 For a detailed discussion of the EUTF and how it represents a fundamental shift in the EU's approach to aid, see Castillejo (2016).

official closely involved with the implementation of the MPF in the Horn of Africa admitted:

> If you reach Europe you can have a hearing, if you don't then you don't get hearing. How can you ensure that the people being blocked are not refugees? How would they get a hearing if they can't get through? These are valid human rights concerns for the migration partnership framework.

There are also broader concerns regarding the EU's willingness to overlook partners' poor human rights records in their concern to achieve their migration goals, and the chance this offers for abusive governments to whitewash their record, present themselves as cooperative and strengthen their engagement with Europe. This concern was repeatedly highlighted in relation to Sudan, which sees migration cooperation as a way to come out of the cold, for example through its engagement in the Khartoum process and as one of the beneficiaries of the EUTF and the German-funded Better Migration Management (BMM) programme – a programme cited in MPF progress reports. Sudan has reportedly taken measures to limit the flow of migrants, which is presented by the EU as a success. But experts report that this has often taken the form of *refoulment* or blocking people on their way to Libya and Egypt in ways that are not compliant with basic human rights standards. Some MPF partners, such as Ethiopia and Nigeria, also have troubling human rights records, including in dealing with people on the move. This raises questions for the EU of whether these are the kind of partners it wants or this is the type of cooperation on migration it is seeking to buy. As Willermain argues, the partnership framework

> presents states plagued by corruption and with poor governance and human rights records with a powerful bargaining chip to leverage maximum political capital […][thereby risking] perpetuating a cycle of abuse and repression that causes people to flee, and fails to effectively tackle the economic logic of human traffickers, since state actors in several African states that the EU seeks to partner with have proven economic stakes in this very trade. (Willermain, 2016)

Human rights experts argue that

> the protection and promotion of migrants' rights in partner countries should have been more comprehensively integrated [in]to the MPF. This would have been more consonant with the EU commitment to the protection of human rights worldwide […] and the human-rights based approach to migration governance commended by the United Nations. (Bauloz, 2017)

Indeed, the need for a systematic human rights assessment when cooperating with third countries in the field of migration was reaffirmed by a recent decision of the European Ombudsman, which rejected the EC's argument that, due to its political nature, the EU Turkey agreement would be exempt from the need of a thorough human rights assessment (European Ombudsman, 2017).

5 Implementation and impact of the MPF

5.1 Impact on migration trends

Since the establishment of the MPF, the EC has issued quarterly reports charting its progress. The demand for such reports and their generally positive tone demonstrates the strong political pressure for the MPF to show results. The most recent reports highlight progress in terms of reduced arrivals on the central Mediterranean, although acknowledge that arrivals on the Western Mediterranean route have increased (EC, 2017c). However, experts and some EC officials comment that the work with the MPF pilot countries has played a minimal role in shaping these trends, which are due to a range of factors including European cooperation with the Libyan authorities,[6] the EU-Turkey deal, and the fact that less migrants are on the move from the Horn of Africa.

In fact, the concrete achievements of the migration partnerships so far seem modest, especially in light of their strong political backing and high levels of expectations. The activities in the MPF countries that appear to have demonstrated the most tangible results are those focused on tackling smuggling and trafficking networks, and supporting Assisted Voluntary Returns of migrants stranded along the route to Europe. While the roll out of EU migration personnel in MFP countries – European Migration Liaison Officers, and in some countries European Border and Coast Guard Agency liaison officers – is also presented as an important step forward, there is little detail on what impact this has had in terms of results. However, as some interviewees noted, some elements of the partnership may involve behind-the-scenes political dialogue and results in terms of internal policy shifts in-country that are sensitive and hence not publicised.

European actors have different perspectives on the impact of the MPF, although most appear to assess this somewhat negatively. The majority of EC and EEAS officials interviewed for this research assessed the MPF as so far having had little impact on curbing migration. One commented that the MPF had not added any specific value, that the EU engaged in similar ways in countries that are not MPF partners, and that it is "more politics than substance". The assessment of member states appears more polarised. While officials from a couple of member states that have consistently backed the MPF were very positive about its potential to deliver results, most of those interviewed felt that it was a political exercise that would not have any concrete impact. There appears to be widespread recognition by most European actors that the positive incentives offered by the MPF are simply not attractive enough to leverage the cooperation that the EU seeks, particularly with big partner countries such as Ethiopia or Nigeria.

6 This engagement in Libya has been highly criticised from a human rights perspective.

Table 1:	**Key progress on migration by national authorities in MPF countries, as reported by the EU in June 2017**
Ethiopia	• First sectoral dialogue on governance and human rights under the EU-Ethiopia Strategic Engagement, April 2017 • Ethiopia chair of Khartoum process
Mali	• Adoption of National Border Strategy and related Action Plan. • Efforts to facilitate the voluntary return of Malian citizens stranded in Niger and in Libya • Reinforcement of government actions to improve monitoring of migration flows along key border areas • Development of a regional approach to address smuggling and human trafficking
Niger	• National Migration Strategy and Action Plan finalised • Joint Investigation Team operational since March 2017 • The Cadre de Concertation agreed specific recommendations and the appointment of the Permanent Secretary • Specific regional Cadre de Concertation on migration launched, involving local and central authorities • Action against smuggling and trafficking, with 18 operations by mid-2017 • Joint information platform on alternative routes launched
Nigeria	• Launch of Cooperation Platform on Migrant Smuggling, involving EU agencies and member states • Cooperation on readmission relatively positive, though negotiations for the readmission agreement with the EU is slow (at the time of writing these negotiations were effectively stalled) • Growing cooperation on criminal trafficking of women and girls • Cooperation with the International Organisation for Migration to facilitate assisted voluntary returns from Niger and Libya • Nigerian liaison officers have been deployed in Italy
Senegal	• Reorganisation of border police service and improvement of availability of migration data • Action plan of the national migration strategy • Bilateral cooperation with Italy, Belgium and Germany expanded • Extension of central fingerprints database • Embassy opened in Niger to assist migrants wishing to return to Senegal • Negotiations finalised with the European Border and Coast Guard Agency on improved working arrangements • Focal Points for identification identified in relevant ministries.
Source: Adapted from EU [European Union], 2017a, 2017b, 2017c, 2017d, 2017e	

Beyond the inability of the MPF's to incentivise the particular cooperation the EU seeks, there appears to be a deeper flaw in the MPF logic (and the logic that lies behind the EU's broader response to migration through the Valletta Action Plan, EUTF, etc.), which was repeatedly highlighted in interviews with foreign affairs and development officials and migration experts. While a substantial amount of the EU's migration-focused assistance in MPF countries is intended to address "root causes" of migration, there is no evidence that these types of development investments will actually reduce migration. As one donor official in Ethiopia put it "We need to test assumptions that, if we give Eritreans better lives, they will not move on. Is this based on anything? What research is there to back this up?" Although conflict and instability may fuel migration, there is little evidence that lack of development does so, an assumption that underlies the MPF and broader EU approach.

Indeed, a recent study on migration to Europe found that in fact "emigration is likely to increase as a country's economy grows, as more people have the financial resources and the information they need to make the journey" (Cummings, Pacitto, Lauro, & Foresti, 2015, p. 3). Likewise, François Crépeau, the UN's special rapporteur on the human rights of migrants has commented that "more development means more migration. Because all those people that have for a long time been wanting to leave, but could not afford to do so, can now leave their country," (quoted in Barbière, 2016). Indeed, many of the investments made in the MPF countries are similar to the kind of investments that have long been made under traditional development instruments – with far greater finance and scale – and yet have not appeared to reduce migration.[7]

This apparently widespread recognition that the MPF is unlikely to achieve its goals is troubling for a number of reasons. Firstly, because it suggests that the EU's understanding of the politics and dynamics of migration in Africa, and how it can work with these, is flawed or at least highly skewed by political pressure. Likewise, because this means that the negative side-effects of the MPF approach – the diversion of development aid from poverty reduction goals, the cooperation with abusive regimes, the souring of political relations over contentious issues such as returns – is being undertaken for no significant gain, even within the EU's own limited and transactional conception of what those gains should be. Also, because the fact that the EU continues to implement and give high-level support to a mechanism that seems so widely regarded as unable to deliver results, raises questions about how well its decision-making processes are working.

5.2 Impact on EU internal systems

One of the main achievements singled out in a review of the first year of MPF (EC, 2017b) is the high-level of cooperation between EU and member states in the partnership countries. This includes the coordinated use of EU and member state's development instruments, increased information-sharing, and coordination of high-level and technical missions. For example, in the Sahel, there has been collaboration in dialogue and in projects that has included member states such as France, Germany, Spain, Italy and the Netherlands. Such increased coordination is positive because it reduces mixed messages, duplication, and makes engaging with donors easier for countries in which government capacity is quite limited.

However, the progress reports also recognise that only a handful of member states are actively engaged in the MPF, and that in some cases member states with privileged bilateral relations in partner countries are not using these to further the MPF agenda. This supports the impression that the MPF is an initiative that is strongly backed by a few member states, most of which receive substantial funding for programme implementation from the EUTF, but that others are somewhat sceptical of and detached from the MPF agenda.

In terms of the impact that the MPF has had within the EU's own structures, some observers say this has been positive in pushing different EU institutions to cooperate on migration, and improving policy coherence in this area. Interestingly, some EU officials, while recognising the limited impact of the MPF on the ground, suggest its greatest achievement has been to firmly embed migration in EU foreign relations, which in the long run will be

7 For more on this, see Martin-Shields, Schraven, & Angenendt (2017).

critical, as migration is an issue that cannot be dealt with effectively by individual member states. In this sense, they argue the most positive impact of the MPF – an externally focused framework – has actually been on the EU's own internal organisation.

However, in terms of the impact of the MPF on the EU's policy framework, some actors express concern that the migration partnerships are part of a recent multiplication of migration initiatives that have had the effect of increasing confusion over this framework. Indeed, a number of member states' officials and African officials interviewed stressed that they did not know how the MPF was specifically supposed to add value, nor understand exactly how it related to other initiatives such as the Valletta Action Plan and the CAMM, which also involved incentive-based bilateral engagement with African partners. One member state official working on migration in Ethiopia commented "We do not have clarity between these bilateral processes. It is not useful to have all these different names for what is essentially the same thing".

5.3 Implementation and impact of EUTF projects

The EUTF is the main vehicle through which the EU provides migration-related aid in MPF countries, and the implementation and impact of the MPF is therefore intrinsically tied up with the effectiveness of the EUTF. The EC states that "The EU Trust Fund for Africa has allowed accelerated and flexible decision-making on projects targeting migration policy and management, and on addressing the root causes of migration" (EC, 2017b, p. 15) and reports that as of 4 September 2017, 169 contracts had been signed for a total amount of over EUR 1.2 billion across the three EUTF regions – Sahel and Lake Chad; Horn of Africa; and North Africa (EC, 2017c). However, while the EUTF has been quick to commit money, implementation has been much slower. Indeed, reflecting on the first year of the MPF the EU admits that

> [w]hile the Trust Fund has demonstrated that it is able to quickly prepare actions of common interest to the EU and its Member States as well as to partner countries, such speed has not always been maintained in subsequent steps of the process. A number of implementing partners (including development agencies of EU Member States) were not ready to quickly deploy and start activities on the ground. (EC, 2017b, p. 15).

Government officials from the MPF partner countries express frustration at these delays. They also raise other concerns about EUTF-funded projects, including that these are not in line with local priorities and needs; that they are not sufficiently aligned with government plans, systems or priorities; and that the funds do not go to local implementers. While experiences vary between countries and projects, there is no doubt that African ownership within the EUTF is weaker than within traditional European cooperation instruments and hence risks alienating African partners and overlooking local priorities, knowledge and capacities. Moreover, the selection of EUTF projects and partners has been criticised as ad hoc and untransparent, with member states' implementing agencies playing the largest role in implementation, and some clearly seeing the fund as a source of finance for their regular programming.[8] One civil society organisation working on migration in the Sahel described how EUTF projects in that region were focused on communities that migrated rather than

8 For more discussion of the weaknesses of the EUTF, see Castillejo (2016).

communities most in need; aimed to provide quick fixes rather than addressing the long-term needs of the country; were designed and implemented by Europeans with minimal consultation with local actors; and skipped important procedures such as impact assessments or human rights assessments for the sake of speed.

According to international agencies working on migration, many of the EUTF projects in the MPF countries were the same type of development projects that European actors were already implementing, but relabelled as addressing migration. They stress that these projects offered nothing new or transformational, and as one UN official stated "it is delusional to think that these projects are going to address root causes of migration". International agencies describe how the political pressure from Brussels and European capitals to work on migration and the availability of comparatively large amounts of development funds for migration under the EUTF has created a "feeding frenzy" in MPF countries, with implementing agencies and non-governmental organisation (NGOs) that have no experience of migration entering the migration field. This has resulted in a proliferation of inexpert players, and typical development projects being repackaged (in some cases at the request of European donors) as addressing migration in order to align them with political priorities and access the new migration funding. They argue that this is particularly problematic because it is done in an uncoordinated, unstrategic and inefficient way. As another UN official pointed out "Now everyone has to do their own research on root causes of migration".

Preventing such an unstrategic proliferation of ineffective migration programming requires robust monitoring of EUTF-funded projects in MPF countries, with substantive benchmarks for progress against the broad range of goals the projects seek to address, rather than simply monitoring inputs/outputs as the EU has sometimes done in the past.[9]

5.4 Impact on returns and readmissions

In the area of returns and readmissions, which has such high priority within MPF, the EU has not been able to advance its goals or obtain any significant cooperation from partner countries. Indeed, it seems that in this area the EU seriously miscalculated the extent of its leverage and underestimated the political sensitivity and resistance to returns in partner countries. As recent analysis by the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) finds,

> money does not always buy the expected immediate results in the area of return. As the return statistics on Senegal, Nigeria and Mali suggest, despite last year's progress in cooperation with those countries, the launched partnership did not immediately translate into an increase in returns, which was one of the main short-term goals of the compacts. (Mananashvili, 2017)

In Nigeria, negotiations on a readmission agreement were begun but at the time of writing had stalled. The search for more informal cooperation, such as standard operating procedures, with the other MPF countries has also had little traction. Meanwhile, with Ethiopia the issue of returns has reached a complete impasse and has become a source of political tension and

9 For example, Collett (2016) points out that in countries such as Serbia, EU assistance to asylum and protection systems has been assessed in terms of quantitative outputs (e.g. officials trained, etc.) rather than whether outcomes have actually improved for those seeking asylum.

barrier to continued collaboration. There is now increasing momentum to apply stronger negative incentives to force partners to cooperate on this issue, as is discussed above. Having made returns a centrepiece of the MPF and having invested significant high-level political interest and engagement in it, the EU has so far nothing to show.

5.5 MPF implementation in Niger

Niger is frequently lauded as the most successful of the migration partnerships, both in terms of what has been achieved with the Nigerien government and the way in which European actors have coordinated in the country. The EC states that

> [c]ooperation with Niger is emblematic of what can be achieved with a transit country through the Partnership Framework. From the outset, the Government of Niger has been a proactive and constructive partner. The EU and Member States have closely coordinated their action, with a clear division of labour and mutually reinforcing support to help Niger meet its objectives. (EC, 2017b, p. 3)

The partnership with Niger has involved a lot of high-level political engagement by the EU and member states. Meanwhile, cooperation initiatives have focused on strengthened border management, combatting smuggling, assistance to and voluntary return of stranded migrants, creation of alternative economic opportunities for communities on transit routes, support for the protection and reintegration of returnees, support to national migration strategies and plans, and security support, including to the G5 Sahel Joint Force (EU, 2017a).

Niger certainly appears to be the country in which the MPF has faced the least challenges and in which there has been substantial activity at political and operational level. This success is due to a number of factors. Firstly, as a country of transit Niger does not face the same political sensitivities over returns faced by countries of origin, which have proved such a sticking point with other partners. Secondly, as an extremely poor country with limited options for inward investment, the extra resources for migration projects that have been mobilised through the EUTF and by EU member states provide a stronger incentive in Niger than in some other MPF partners that have stronger economies and more investment options. Thirdly, much of the EU assistance has been security-focused and has therefore been quite well aligned to Niger's own security interests, in particular in addressing the security threats Niger faces along both its northern and southern borders. In Niger the "more-for-more" approach appears to be working, with one EU official remarking "we clearly have an interest in rewarding a country like Niger with more aid".

Nigerien officials interviewed expressed satisfaction with the partnership, its overall focus, and the activities being carried out. However, they repeatedly stressed that it is important to integrate the EU's migration-focused security support with efforts to address wider security concerns in the country, notably terrorism and arms smuggling. For example, where EU-supported activities disrupt trafficking networks, support for alternative livelihoods for communities that benefited from trafficking is urgently needed, otherwise these communities becoming more vulnerable to recruitment by terrorist groups or involvement in smuggling. Likewise, Nigerien officials stressed that short-term security actions must be complemented by accelerated and reinforced development efforts addressing root causes of migration. These concerns demonstrate the challenge for the EU in balancing different short-term and longer-term security and migration interests in its engagement with MPF

countries. As Knoll argues, in Niger the EU's efforts in cracking down on smuggling and migration routes into Libya risk upsetting a security equilibrium based on income generated from these illicit movements. While the EU seeks to provide alternative economic opportunities "whether this will help to create sufficient economic alternatives for former combatants, security forces, and jobless young people that may lose out from recent efforts to halt flows remains to be seen" (Knoll, 2017).

5.6 MPF implementation in Mali

The EU's overall engagement with Mali has a strong focus on security, with two EU Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions in place to support stabilisation efforts in Mali. In this context, it is unsurprising that much of its migration cooperation has also been security-focused. This includes reinforcement of the migration dimension of the CSDP mission, projects to support the redeployment of Malian internal security forces and to reinforce border control in central Mali, and 9 EUTF projects with an emphasis on security and job creation. In June EUR 50 million from the African Peace Facility was announced for the G5 Sahel Joint Force to help increase security and boost cross-border cooperation in the region (EU, 2017b).

Mali is a significant country of origin for migration to the EU and hence returns have been an important element of the partnership. The return rate for irregular Malian migrants in the EU remains very low and the Malian government generally does not provide papers and take people back. Mali has been resistant to the EU's push for cooperation on return and reintegration and this has become a highly sensitive political issue in the country. Indeed, the Malian government backtracked from plans for a readmission agreement with the EU in response to hostile public opinion at home and among the Malian diaspora and criticism from the opposition. EU officials recognise that this situation will not change until after next year's elections as this issue is too politically sensitive. Mali provides an example of a country where the EU has tried to force the returns agenda, but this has backfired making the issue even more sensitive and difficult to address, a fact that the EU has acknowledged and responded to by reducing the pressure on returns.

EU officials report that cooperation with Mali under the MPF has become more challenging over time and some suggest that a rethink is needed on how to engage with Mali on migration. This should include a recognition of the complexity of Mali's situation, and that migration goals cannot be pursued in isolation, but must take into account the broader security situation and EU commitment to peace and security in the country. Apparently, such a change in approach is beginning to take place, with migration being increasingly treated as one element of a holistic security response. As EU officials point out, Europe's security concerns protect Mali from the imposition of significant negative incentives and provide an example of how other external interests – rather than being subordinated – can be prioritised over migration in MPF partner countries. As one official remarked "The EU is unlikely to ever sanction Mali in terms of aid as it would not want to risk counterproductive consequences on [the] security side".

5.7 MPF implementation in Senegal

The MPF with Senegal was intended to build on what was already a strong relationship of cooperation between Senegal and Europe. Senegal is a major country of origin, and therefore the EU has strongly emphasised returns in its engagement under the MPF. In terms of aid, there have been significant funds from the EUTF, with 9 projects for a total of more than EUR 181 million adopted (EU, 2017c). However, these incentives have only produced limited results in terms of the EU's core agenda of returns and readmissions, and the number of positive responses from the Senegalese authorities to requests for the consular travel documents required to return Senegalese nationals remains low. In a recent report on the Senegal migration partnership, the EU makes clear that further cooperation on border management and other areas will be "on the basis of results achieved" (EU, 2017c, p. 3), indicating the EU's frustration at the lack of progress on returns and willingness to withhold funding to achieve cooperation in this area. Some member states' officials express significant frustration with Senegal and say they want the EU to push harder. It is important to note that Senegal already had a more mutual interest-based collaboration with Spain on migration, which appears to have been a more effective approach than the MPF.

Civil society organisations working in Senegal report serious concerns with the EU migration projects in the country, which reflect some of the broader concerns about EUTF programming discussed above. They report that projects are designed in Brussels, implemented by EU implementing agencies with minimal consultation with local actors, and focused on the regions where most migrants come from rather than those regions with the greatest developmental needs. Disturbingly they also report that officials responsible for migration issues within the EU delegation, and therefore with oversight of migration projects, have law-enforcement rather than development backgrounds. Overall, they stress that the way in which migration projects are being rolled out in Senegal represents a huge step backwards in terms of development practice.

5.8 MPF implementation in Nigeria

The EU has regular high-level engagement with Nigeria and in 2015 signed a Common Agenda on Migration and Mobility with the country. The EC reports that dialogue and political engagement with Nigeria on migration was stepped up significantly since the launch of the MPF. The Nigeria partnership lays a strong focus on combatting trafficking, while the EUTF provides funding for projects to address resilience, return, reintegration and anti-radicalisation, as well as humanitarian support (EU, 2017d). However, this EU money is inevitably "small fry" for Nigeria and unlikely to provide any significant leverage in areas where Nigerian and European interests do not align themselves.

Nigeria is among the most important countries of origin for migration to Europe and the EU has a strong interest in strengthening cooperation on returns. Negotiations were launched on a readmission agreement in 2016, but quickly stalled. However, the EU continues to stress that this should form a central part of its strategic engagement with the country:

> Nigeria is a strategic partner in Africa for investment and security as well as for migration, and the conclusion of an effective readmission agreement would represent a clear sign of commitment to this broad and strategic partnership. (EC, 2017b, p. 6)

While Nigeria's official position is that they have no problem with readmission, they do appear to be delaying progress on the readmission agreement. Nigerian officials stress that there is no point sending people back when they have no opportunities and will just travel abroad again.

It seems that, in Nigeria, the EU's ambitions to obtain cooperation on returns through positive development incentives were misplaced. While the EU continues to stress return in its engagement with Nigeria, officials privately recognise that they will not get anywhere on this. Remittances are very important for Nigeria, while development aid is not. EU officials know that more effective leverage would be through trade or research cooperation but, as discussed above, it has so far been impossible to harness these policy areas for migration goals.

While some within the EU institutions are now pushing for negative incentives, for example in relation to visas, this is unlikely to happen as some powerful member states have significant strategic interests in the country and would not want to risk seriously damaging relations. This again demonstrates that EU ambitions to use the MPF as a framework to put other areas of external action at the service of migration goals is both flawed and unrealistic.

For their part, Nigerian officials' assessment of the MPF is generally negative, stressing that the country has not yet seen much benefit from it. They report that they were hoping to see innovative solutions to address irregular migration, unemployment and lack of opportunities, and to reduce the dangers that migrants face during their journey, but that they have so far been disappointed. Critically, Nigeria is keen to see more legal migration opportunities into Europe and is frustrated that this has not been part of MPF agenda.

6 The Ethiopia migration partnership

6.1 Migration and refugee challenges in Ethiopia

Ethiopia is an important destination and transit country for migrants and refugees, as well as to a lesser extent a country of origin for labour migration (although there are not major numbers migrating to the EU). Ethiopia hosts over 850,000 refugees from neighbouring countries, mainly from Eritrea, Somalia and South Sudan. This population has grown rapidly in recent years due to the crisis in South Sudan and the government sees it as a potential threat to stability. Ethiopia also has an estimated one million internally displaced people. Large numbers of Ethiopians undertake irregular labour migration, the vast majority heading east to the Gulf, the next largest cohort heading south towards South Africa, and a relatively small number heading north towards Europe. While all three of these migration routes are dangerous, experts report that by far the most dangerous is the route through Yemen to the Gulf.

Ethiopia's policy framework on migration and refugee issues is currently in a state of flux. Out-migration from Ethiopia was banned in 2013 following the forced return of many Ethiopian migrants from the Gulf. While there has been some legislative progress in this

area,[10] this ban still remains in place. As a result, migrants are forced to take irregular routes, thereby increasing their vulnerability. Although this irregular flow is tolerated by the authorities because of the importance of remittances, the government is reluctant to openly acknowledge this continued out-migration. In terms of refugee policy, Ethiopia is becoming more progressive and is a pilot country for the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF).[11] The government is in the process of changing the legal framework to move away from a strict "encampment" policy to allow a small percentage of refugees to move out of camps and integrate into communities. Both migration and refugee issues remain highly sensitive for the Ethiopian government.

The population of Ethiopia is currently around 100 million and expected to double to 200 million by 2050. Ethiopian officials stress that the main challenge for the country is to create jobs for its rapidly growing youth population, many of whom currently seek to migrate in search of opportunities. The government is particularly interested in creating industrial jobs, in line with a push to industrialise its economy. It is in the context of these multiple and significant migration challenges that the EU's migration partnership with Ethiopia must be understood.

6.2 EU-Ethiopia political engagement

The MPF is one of a number of engagement frameworks between the EU and Ethiopia. On migration, there is already the 2015 CAMM.[12] In 2016, the EU and Ethiopia adopted a Strategic Engagement document that is intended to expand dialogue across six pillars, one of which is migration. Dialogue under this strategic engagement was put on hold during the country's ten-month state of emergency that ended in August, but is set to be restarted.

Ethiopia was chosen as a pilot country for the MPF in large part because it is one of the few stable and viable partners in the Horn of Africa, with which the EU can engage on migration. EU officials report that there were expectations that it would be relatively easy to achieve results with Ethiopia on the EU's migration goals. For its part, Ethiopia was apparently attracted by the idea of support for job creation, in particular through access to the EIP.

These expectations of easy results under the Ethiopia MPF have proved unfounded. Ethiopia has been a helpful partner for the EU on migration at regional level, acting as a constructive player in the Khartoum process and at the Valletta summit, including by championing certain issues and bringing other African partners on board. However, in terms of the goals of the MPF, the interests of the EU and Ethiopia have not aligned. From the Ethiopian side, officials repeatedly stress that they had expected stronger support in the areas of job creation, addressing root causes and legal migration, and that EU collaboration in these areas

10 The government's ambition is that in future out-migration should happen within the framework of Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) and bilateral relations, in order to better manage flows and protect migrants.

11 For more on this UN initiative, see http://www.unhcr.org/comprehensive-refugee-response-framework-crrf.html.

12 The CAMM commits the EU and Ethiopia to cooperate on issues of international protection and refugees' needs, legal migration and mobility, irregular migration, smuggling and trafficking in human beings and development policy. It is funded through the EUTF.

has been slow and less than expected – or in the case of legal migration, non-existent. Meanwhile there is deep frustration among EU institutions and member states that Ethiopia has not delivered on returns. Indeed, the issue of returns has come to entirely overshadow the Ethiopia MPF and is now a barrier to further collaboration.

Some observers and EU officials point out that the choice of Ethiopia to participate in a framework that explicitly uses aid as "more-for-more" leverage to achieve European goals was a miscalculation. While Ethiopia would like more investment from the EU, the money on offer is simply not a strong enough incentive. Ethiopia has other sources of finance, notably China, and also does not want to be seen to be dictated to by the EU or to risk relations with its diaspora. Moreover, migration to Europe is simply not a major concern for Ethiopia, as it is far more concerned about the large numbers of Ethiopians migrating in risky circumstances to the Gulf. The government also has far more serious national security and stability challenges than migration.

While the EC continues to whitewash the situation with overly positive progress reports, in reality it seems this partnership has reached an impasse with no obvious way forward. The EU is now moving to negative incentives (although this is not formally acknowledged), including delaying planned development and trade cooperation initiatives, and considering leveraging other policy areas, as discussed below. However, Ethiopia is strongly opposed to such conditionalities and their imposition seems only likely to harden positions and further reduce collaboration. Ethiopian officials stress that they have many important things to discuss with the EU – from counter terrorism to climate change. They do not want migration to continue to dominate political engagement with the EU, as it currently does, and say this would be better treated as a technical issue under broader development engagement. From the European perspective, it is important to note that Ethiopia is an authoritarian country with a poor human rights record, and the EU's current focus on its migration and return goals in its engagement with Ethiopia is likely to reduce the space for the EU to pressure Ethiopia on governance reforms. Overall, it is clear that the EU and Ethiopia clearly have very different visions of the priority migration should have within their relationship and the focus that migration cooperation should take.

6.3 European coordination on migration in Ethiopia

The MPF is supposed to mobilise and coordinate all the tools of the EU and its member states to achieve migration goals. There are 21 European member states present in Ethiopia, some – such as the United Kingdom – with extremely large bilateral programmes. While this large number inevitably poses coordination challenges, most EU and member states' officials in the country report that coordination on migration issues is strong.

At political level, it appears that European actors are largely delivering a common message on migration in their dialogue with the government, including through high-level missions by member states and the HR-VP (High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission). This includes common messaging on the importance of returns and readmissions. However, in terms of how to practically respond to the lack of progress on returns, member states are not in agreement, with some pushing for tough negative incentives, and others suggesting that this issue should not be allowed to dominate the agenda.

In terms of practical coordination, there is an EU+ migration coordination group, while migration is also regularly discussed in monthly HOMs meetings. The EUTF seems to have been an important catalyst for improved collaboration on migration. EU officials report that the fact that member states contributed to the EUTF with their own money, that they have access to this money, and that some of them lead on EUTF project implementation, has increased both coordination and interest in migration, including at Ambassadorial level.

6.4 Returns and readmission

The issue of return and readmission has come to dominate the Ethiopia MPF, blocking progress on cooperation and acting as a profound irritant to the broader relationship between the EU and Ethiopia. This situation seems quite surreal given the very small numbers of Ethiopian citizens eligible to be returned, as well as the wider picture that Ethiopia is not one of the main countries of origin for irregular migration to Europe, as well as the fact that Ethiopia itself is hosting almost 1 million refugees. It is arguably a sign of the EU's loss of perspective and desperation for short-term migration "wins" that this situation has developed.

It appears that in the absence of a readmission agreement the EU wanted to pilot some returns and identified 58 Ethiopians eligible for return. The Ethiopian government dragged its feet in verifying these peoples' identity, but finally the two sides agreed on 32 people who could be returned. Ethiopia was then supposed to issue travel documents, but delayed doing so; meanwhile some of the identified people absconded. According to EU sources, at the time of writing there were less than 20 of this original group who could be returned. However, Ethiopia has still not issued travel documents for them, citing legal and technical challenges and repeatedly saying that the issue will soon be resolved, while blaming the EU for having lost the people who absconded.

EU officials stress that the return of this very small group of people is important because it is a pilot project and can pave the way for more returns. They point out that, although numbers of irregular Ethiopian migrants to Europe are comparatively low, Ethiopia has one of the worst records on readmission. Ethiopia on the other hand has made promises at political level to take these people back, but says that the returns must be voluntary not forced, and specifically that Ethiopian embassies cannot issue travel documents unless the returnee is willing to sign these. It seems that Ethiopia is stalling on this issue because it does not want to alienate its diaspora, because of the importance of remittances, because of the political sensitivity of and public hostility to forced returns, and because it does not want to be dictated to by the EU. Ethiopia is also apparently seeking greater funding from the EU for the reintegration of returnees.

There is now debate within the EU institutions of the extent to which negative incentives should be applied to Ethiopia to force progress on returns. There have already been delays to one EUTF project and to a planned EU-Ethiopia trade event, in part because of lack of progress on returns. EU officials say that, while it has not been made explicit that these delays are linked to returns, Ethiopian officials are aware of the connection. The impasse over returns is also affecting cooperation in other ways. It is apparently damaging European cooperation on refugee issues with the Ethiopian Administration for Refugee & Returnee Affairs (ARRA), the entity that is responsible for returns as well as refugees. The returns

issue is also seemingly affecting the relationship between the EU and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD),[13] with Addis Ababa complaining that the EU keeps raising the returns issue at informal ministerial meetings.

Further and more explicit negative incentives are currently being considered, including on the processing of diplomatic visas. Meanwhile, those responsible for the EUTF have been asked to slow down the initiation of new programmes in Ethiopia. One EU official involved in EUTF implementation reported that while 130 million of the 500 million put into the EUTF for MPF countries was reserved for Ethiopia, much of this is not being used because of the impasse, and that the EUTF funds for Ethiopia will now remain effectively blocked until there is some progress on returns. Another official pointed out that while Ethiopia was going to be a priority for European Fund for Sustainable Development, it is now unlikely to be, both because of poor governance and because of lack of cooperation on returns.

Different positions exist among EU institutions and member states over how the impasse over returns should be handled. There is pressure on the EU institutions to get tough and apply negative incentives from a number of member states governments that themselves face public pressure on migration issues at home. These member states say that the EU has fulfilled its obligations, that Ethiopia has benefited a lot from EUTF, and that they must now reciprocate with returns. However, other member states stress that a range of strategic and security interests with Ethiopia could be damaged by the application of significant negative incentives. Likewise, within the EU institutions, there is some division, with pressure for a tougher approach to Ethiopia coming from the Council Secretariat and DG Home, which is being resisted by DG DEVCO and some parts of the EEAS. Ethiopia is well aware of this increasing pressure for negative incentives and is unlikely to be swayed by it. Ethiopian officials make the powerful counterargument that the EU is talking about tens of people due for return, while Ethiopia is already hosting so many refugees. Indeed, Ethiopia has its own implicit threats, as one Ethiopian official commented "We are hosting nearly one million refugees in the region. This is very important for the EU. If we close our refugee camps, this would pose a problem for the EU: people would come to Europe".

Ethiopian officials express deep frustration that this issue has dominated dialogue with the EU and has taken up so much political space at highest level. As one official put it "This [the returns] has been blocking all other discussions for last two years […] We don't want to downsize all discussions on migration to issues of return". While Ethiopia is clearly being obstructive, they have a point. Indeed, many outside observers agree that the overwhelming emphasis on returns by the EU is unreasonable and counterproductive. Some EU officials privately agree, pointing out the amount of EU staff time, money and political capital dedicated to pursuing the returns issue is completely out of proportion with the small numbers involved, especially in light of Ethiopia's overall positive approach to migration and its generous hosting of so many refugees. The Ethiopian case certainly suggests that the issue of returns trumps all other elements of the MPF, including commitments to supporting countries that host refugees. In this regard it is important to note that the communication establishing the MPF not only suggests that negative incentives should be used where countries do not cooperate on returns, but also that it "will reward […] those taking action to adequately host persons fleeing conflict and persecution" (EC, 2016a, p. 9). Overall this situation seems to be a striking example of how the EU – desperate to be seen to act tough

13 The IGAD is a regional grouping of eight East African countries including Ethiopia.

on migration – is losing its way in its engagement with a powerful, and largely constructive, African country that should be a positive partner in addressing the long-term challenge of migration.

6.5 Migration programming

The last couple of years have seen a huge growth in EU spending on migration in Ethiopia, primarily from the EUTF, from which Ethiopia has received more than any other country. Prior to the Valletta summit there were just a few small migration projects, while as of mid-2017 the EU and member states together were providing just over EUR 490 million in migration-funding (EU Delegation to Ethiopia, n.d.). The vast majority of this was going to just two of the five themes from the Valletta Action Plan, with 47 per cent of funds going to Theme 1: Development benefits of migration and addressing root causes of irregular migration and forced displacement, and 46 per cent going to Theme 3: Protection and asylum.[14] This hugely increased spending demonstrates the importance given to migration within European development assistance to Ethiopia. However, a number of development and migration actors in Ethiopia have raised some serious concerns about how these funds are being spent and with what impact.

As with the EUTF more broadly, in Ethiopia it appears that the increased priority and funding for migration may be skewing development agendas. Observers argue that this has resulted in a proliferation of players in the migration field, many of whom are development NGOs (non-governmental organisations) that are repackaging or refocusing their work as "prevention of migration". Indeed, one member state official admitted that their country's existing development programming is being repackaged with a migration narrative and that they are encouraging their NGOS partners to do likewise. This seems problematic, as it suggests that some development programmes that were – hopefully – initially focused on identified development needs are being refocused towards a European-driven prioritisation of migration, in effect a skewing of development priorities. This proliferation of migration activities also results in duplication and lack of coordination.

Some humanitarian experts are also concerned that the EU's current migration focus is skewing humanitarian aid and undermining humanitarian principles in Ethiopia. In particular that the large amount of money going to mixed migration[15] is coming at the cost of meeting the humanitarian needs of refugees. They also point out that South Sudanese refugees, who make up almost half of the country's refugee caseload, are chronically underfunded and that the lack of priority given to this population is because South Sudanese do not onwardly migrate. Meanwhile, the Eritrean refugee caseload has a higher and more consistent level of support from donors because Eritreans in Ethiopia are much more likely to migrate on to Europe. Humanitarian experts stress that the starting point must be to support the most vulnerable migrants and refugees, regardless of if they are onward movers.

14 It is important to note that not all of this is new money. For example, there was pre-existing support for refugees that is now counted as coming under Valletta Theme 3 of the Valletta Action Plan. There are also reports that existing development programming has been repackaged to focus on migration.

15 For instance, focusing on the mobility patterns and routes common to different types of migrants, including forced and voluntary, as well as migrants along the continuum between these two categories.

In terms of how the new migration programmes are being implemented, local and international actors in Ethiopia express a range of concerns about their timeliness, choice of implementer, and focus, which reflect broader concerns about the EUTF as an instrument. For example, despite the fact that the EUTF was established to provide a quicker response than traditional development instruments, it seems that implementation of EUTF projects in Ethiopia has been slow. One example is the Italian managed EUR 20 million SINCE programme, which is intended to create employment for vulnerable populations. This programme was adopting in December 2015 and is still in the process of contracting local implementation partners with implementation due to begin in earnest at the end of 2017. Likewise, local and intentional actors expressed concern that the EUR 46 million BMM project, implemented by GIZ, has been extremely slow to get moving. The Ethiopian government is very unhappy about these types of delays, with one official commenting "Valletta was two years ago, but so far this fund has not created a single job".

There are also concerns that the EUTF projects in Ethiopia are implemented primarily by European implementing agencies and NGOs. While EU officials stress that the choice of implementer is made based on knowledge and track record in the country, there is a strong perception among observers that the EUTF money is being carved up among European actors. As one UN official put it:

> There is a pretence that the EUTF money goes to Africa, but it does not, it goes to the European agencies. The EU agencies are fighting over who gets most; they don't really care that none of this money actually stays in Ethiopia. They have lost sight of the objective.

There is also disappointment among local and international migration experts in Ethiopia at the focus of the EU's migration programming, which does not add value or offer a genuinely transformative approach to working on migration. As one migration expert stated "It is tragic to see how the EUTF projects are unfolding. Very few are helpful; they are just about being seen to be doing something".

There are questions about the extent to which EU migration projects work with local actors or address local priorities. For example, international agencies working with IGAD suggested that some of the EUTF support to IGAD in the form of research studies was neither in line with IGAD's interests nor helpful to IGADs work, but was a priority that was promoted by Brussels. The issue of embedding programmes in local structures was also raised vocally in relation to the SINCE programme, which is intended to create employment, but will be implemented by NGOs. UN experts suggested that such an approach cannot be sustainable or scalable given that it largely bypasses existing government structures responsible for employment, notably the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Industry, and that it works at local level without addressing national fiscal and employment policy frameworks. While some involved with the project have apparently pushed for a more systemic approach, they report that there is resistance both from the Italian implementers and from Brussels who want quick and visible projects focused on measurable short-term outputs, rather than longer-term institutional and policy change.

Concerns were also repeatedly raised, including by a number of EU member states officials, about the fact that some EU migration programmes were disperse and lacked focus. In this regard, the BMM project was criticised as having too many partner countries and too many disparate elements. Some argued that, instead of spreading themselves so widely, such

programmes should be looking at what change they wanted to effect and consolidating their efforts in support of this. These and the other concerns discussed above raise important questions about the extent to which EU migration programming in Ethiopia is in line with development best practices.

7 The MPF and EU-Africa relations

7.1 EU-Africa engagement on migration

Given that the MPF is so clearly focused on promoting Europe's interests in its engagement with African partners, an important question is how this framework is perceived by African actors and what impact it is having on broader relations between the EU and Africa.

African governments recognise that migration is a central concern for Europe and understand the political pressures that European leaders are facing in this regard. However, African officials from a number of MPF countries stressed that the EU places too much emphasis on migration in its political engagement with them. They argued that while migration needs to be discussed, it is currently dominating dialogue with Europe in a way that threatens to eclipse other important issues. Moreover, these officials recognise that the EU's goals on migration are unrealistic, that migration cannot be stopped, and that the measures that the MPF is prescribing are unlikely to have their desired impact. Some suggest that, until the EU accepts this reality, it will be difficult to have an honest and useful discussion on migration.

Not only does Europe put more emphasis on migration in its engagement with Africa, African and European actors also have profoundly different priorities regarding migration. As Vimont points out, there is

> a fundamental difference of narratives on migration between Europe and Africa. Europeans perceive immigration essentially as a threat to their jobs, to their national integrity, and, more and more today, to their security. Africans see migration as a natural component of their societal tradition, a significant source of their economic prosperity through the financial remittances sent back home, and, in recent years, an alternative to the double threat they face at home of unemployment and political radicalization, which lead to insecurity and destabilization. (Vimont, 2016, p. 21)[16]

These differing interests can be seen in the different elements of the MPF and the Valletta agenda that each party highlights. While the EU is focused on returns and borders, African partners of the MPF are united in stressing that they want the MPF – and indeed the broader range of initiatives emerging from Valletta – to deliver jobs, economic opportunities, and legal migration routes.

Problematically, the EU does not openly acknowledge these different interests, meaning that dialogue with African partners is not based on a genuine recognition of each side's priorities and an attempt to seek compromise. Instead it is based on an agenda that prioritises

16 Although it is important to recognise that, while many African countries see out-migration as an important economic opportunity, some are also concerned that the do not want too many refugees and migrants coming into their countries from other African states.

EU interests, pretends these are also African interests, and seeks to foist this pretence on African actors through a range of so-called positive and negative "incentives". As one EU official summed it up:

> We can pretend that we have a joint interest on migration management with Africa, but actually we don't. The EU is interested in return and readmission. Africa is interested in root causes, free movement, legal routes and remittances. We don't mention that our interests are actually not aligned.

Observers and migration experts interviewed repeatedly stated that the EU did not listen to or take on board African perspectives. One staff member of a European civil society organisation described an AU delegation trip to Brussels and Berlin in 2016, where AU representatives tried to persuade Europeans that their intense focus on migration prevention was misguided: "Everyone in Brussels and Berlin listened politely but went along with their prevention programmes".

The EU's shift away from multilateral engagement with Africa on migration through the AU, and towards the kind of bilateral, transactional relations epitomised by the MPF, is causing deep frustration among some African actors. This shift began with the Valletta Summit, to which only some countries were invited. Countries in Southern Africa felt excluded, with South Africa particularly frustrated as it faces significant migration challenges but was left out of the dialogue. The EU then further singled out just a few countries from the Valletta process to be the focus of the MPF[17] and made the tone of these relationships less diplomatic and more transactional – a further move away from positive engagement with Africa. African partners have had different responses to the bilateral and transactional approach of the MPF. Some reject this as an imposition of EU interests that undermines a common African position, while others are more pragmatic and want to see what they can gain from it.

Overall there appears to be widespread recognition, not least within some EU institutions, that Valletta, the EUTF, and the MPF have soured relations between the EU and Africa, by undermining African unity and by imposing EU interests. It is important that the problematic nature of this approach is acknowledged and addressed head on by the EU, as it will not go away by simply pretending this is a genuine partnership.

7.2 African interests and priorities on migration

African countries have a range of interests in relation to migration that threaten to be undermined by the current prevention and return focus of EU migration policy in general and the MPF in particular. Fundamentally, African countries do not have a strong interest in stopping migration to the EU, which is Africa's first source of remittances (36 per cent) (EC, 2017d). African interests are more focused on addressing intra-African migration issues, reflecting the fact that the majority of migration takes place within Africa and not from Africa to Europe.

17 This limited focus on five priority countries is now expanding as more countries come to be addressed under the MPF, albeit in a more fluid and informal way.

Central among these is the African interest in intra-continental mobility and free movement. The AU is promoting the adoption of a continental-free movement protocol, which it is hoped will unleash economic growth and development. The MPF, with its discourse that presents open borders and migrants as a threat and its pressure for African countries to securitise borders in the name of "migration management" appears to run counter to these interests. Critically, it fails to take sufficient account of the fact that intra-continental migration is an important means to generate growth and to provide a safety valve when populations are under pressure, or that porous Africa borders serve many positive social and economic functions. As one UN official pointed out: "While Africa is trying to reduce barriers to free movement, the EU is giving African countries money to securitise and reinforce borders, including to repressive countries like Sudan". However, it is important to note that on the African side there is a significant gap between continental-level discourse around the desirability of free movement and the actual approach of many African governments and regional organisations which do not support free movement in practice.

Some commentators suggest that the MPF approach particularly risks undermining the progress on freedom of movement made by some Regional Economic Communities (RECs), notably the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). For example, EU engagement with Niger is focused on tightening borders, but other ECOWAS countries are concerned that this must not jeopardise the region's free movement protocols. While migration experts point out that over the last decade there has been growing interest among African governments in developing national migration strategies and effective border management, this needs to be done in a way that reflects African realities and aspirations, not EU interests. Moreover, given that some member states have been actively supporting the AU's attempts to develop a continental free-trade area, there appear to be serious contradictions between European approaches to migration and broader Africa-wide political and economic ambitions.

Another African interest is in developing a common position on migration, which would strengthen African positions when negotiating with the EU. Indeed, with the new AU Chair and Commission in place, there is now greater aspiration for a common AU position on migration. Moreover, the AU and some powerful African countries like South Africa are reportedly keen to revitalise the continental-level Migration and Mobility Dialogue with the EU to rebalance the current focus on bilateral engagement. However, there is resistance to this from some countries that benefit from the bilateral, incentive-driven approach of the EUTF.

While both the EU and African sides are responsible for the failure of the MMD to take off, such a continental-level and politically focused approach is much needed to take a broader and more long-term look at how the EU and Africa can jointly address migration. This would require the EU to move away from its current bilateral, transactional approach and engage meaningfully at multiple levels – bilateral, regional and continental – giving sufficient weight to all three.

7.3 Migration at the EU-AU summit

There has been disagreement among both EU and African actors about the extent to which migration issues should feature in the 2017 EU-Africa summit. Recent EC reports stress that not only migration, but the MPF itself, should be discussed at the summit:

> The upcoming EU-Africa Summit will constitute an opportunity to take stock of progress made within the context of the Partnership Framework with African countries and to add new dynamics to the ongoing effort to build together a well-functioning and mutually benefiting mobility and migration partnership." (EC, 2017c, p. 15)

Some member states, notably those for whom migration has become a central element of foreign and development policy and who are supportive of a tough EU approach, also pushed for migration to be a central topic at the summit.

However other member states, notably those that are more sceptical about the EU approach to migration, as well as some officials in the EU institutions, were concerned that the issue could overtake the summit, poison discussions, and prevent progress on other issues, given the hostility of the AU and some African countries to the EU's current approach, as well as the potentially unhelpful tone of some European actors on this issue. One official commented: "If we want to have a positive summit we need to be prudent and not pressure on migration demands". This group suggested migration should be discussed as and where appropriate in relation to the issues of youth and jobs, but not be given too much prominence.

On the African side, there were also disagreements. Some MPF partner country governments suggested migration should be a major issue at the summit, as it is impossible to talk about youth and jobs without talking about migration. Other MPF partners wanted migration to have some limited place, but not to be allowed to overshadow the summit. They argue that issues such as development, trade and investment, peace and security and post-Cotonou are the critical issues to be addressed, although acknowledge that these issues do have migration elements. Still others view migration as a limited and divisive agenda that should not be discussed at the summit at all.

8 The way forward

The Migration Partnership Framework – as it has been implemented in the five priority countries – is the clearest example yet of the EU's shift towards a transactional, short-term and incentives-based approach to migration in response to the "migration crisis". It has also clearly demonstrated the limits of such an approach. The MPF may have achieved some impacts in specific areas such as enhanced cooperation on trafficking, border security, or improved intra-European coordination at country level. However, overall it has not incentivised the kind of cooperation from partner countries that it was seeking; has not significantly enhanced the way that the EU works on migration at country level; and, in some cases, has even soured relations with partner countries. Despite the continued political demand for results from the MPF, and the regular positively worded progress reports, in effect the MPF experience suggests that the EU needs to rethink on migration.

Firstly, the EU needs to accept not only that migration cannot be stopped and that Africans will continue to make the journey to Europe in search of opportunities, but – crucially – that Europe needs African migrants and that this need will grow in coming decades. As Vimont makes clear:

> [E]conomic migrant inflows, notably from Africa, will inevitably rise in the future: Europe is growing older while Africa is getting younger; a natural process of transfers and substitutions will slowly emerge to satisfy labor market needs in European countries. Current demographic research leaves little doubt on this point. (Vimont, 2016, p. 14)

With this recognition as a starting point, short-term and unsustainable approaches focused on punishing countries if they do not accept back a few hundred people, or working with individual countries to tighten their borders, do not make much sense. Instead the EU needs to focus on building genuine partnerships, not just with a few cherry-picked "partner" countries, but at national, regional and continental level. It should use these partnerships to explore how Africa and Europe can work together to foster intra-African movement that supports Africa's economic growth; to ensure protection for refugees and vulnerable migrants; and to allow both continents to benefit from large-scale, safe and orderly African labour migration to Europe. This inevitably throws up huge challenges, such as matching African skills to European markets. However, an emphasis on creating different types of opportunities for Africans in Europe (such as long-term migration, circular migration, research and educational opportunities), and hence strengthening remittances and skills-transfer to Africa, would refocus engagement in a way that serves both African and European interests, and may even help unblock the issue of returns that the EU is currently so focused on. Likewise, moving from an attempt to address "root causes" of migration with short-term development funds, to instead examining how the EU could *really* readjust its trade and investment policy in Africa to create more decent jobs and opportunities, would be a more sustainable approach.

The EU-Africa summit – while it would be wise to shy away from more divisive debates on issues such as return – could perhaps be an opportunity to explore some of these broader and longer-term issues at continental level. There are also global processes underway that can help the EU to think more creatively and honestly about its future migration policy. For example, the establishment of the new Global Compacts on Migration and on Refugees "provides openings for strategic reflections that can help redirect European policies towards a longer-term vision on migration and mobility and its role for global development in order to complement the immediate short-term responses and overcome the 'crisis mode'" (Knoll, 2017).

The most recent EC communication on the delivery of the EU migration agenda (EC, 2017f) suggests that there might be some modest appetite for such a re-balancing away from the current focus on prevention to take on board African interests, although it is not clear that member states share this appetite. The communication contains some positive elements such as the resettlement of 50,000 refugees over the next five years, pressure for member states to crack down on illegal and exploitative employment of irregular migrants, and plans for piloting legal migration. However, disappointingly, legal migration is still presented through the prism of incentivising cooperation on returns. While a functioning migration system of course requires the return of those who are not eligible to stay, making this issue so central to cooperation, given the small numbers involved and the much bigger

weaknesses in Europe's internal migration systems, is out of proportion and unhelpful, as many EU officials seem to recognise.

As well as rethinking its external engagement with Africa on migration, the EU needs to get its own house in order on asylum and migration. This requires being honest about conflicting interests between member states and working towards effective common migration and asylum policies and systems, as difficult as this may be. Perhaps even more critically, European leaders must seek to shift the current political and public discourse around migration. They must make the case that Europe needs migration from Africa; must actively challenge negative and xenophobic presentations of migrants in politics, the media and wider society; and must seek to build public acceptance of migrants and migration. Given the pressure that mainstream European political parties are currently facing from the rise of right-wing political movements, this will require significant courage. However, a change in the European mindset is crucial if Europe is to build a more constructive and realistic engagement with Africa on migration in the future.

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