

DEMOCRACY



11.11.11

VECHT MEE TEGEN ONRECHT

REPORT
NIGER: BORDER PATROL
OF THE NEW EUROPEAN
MIGRATION POLICY

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Introduction

On the 13rd of June 2017, the European Commission presented its fourth progress report on its collaboration with African countries to reduce migration into Europe. The commission boasted of its accomplishments after only one year of collaboration. Although, according to the Commission, further steps still need to be taken to reduce the number of arrivals in Europe and to facilitate forced repatriation, they maintain that their policy is on the right track. Federica Mogherini, the European minister of Foreign Affairs, referred to Niger as emblematic of what can be achieved by means of increased collaboration. Development budgets were invested in increased border controls and people smuggling was tackled.

In March 2017, 11.11.11 visited Niger, and came to very different conclusions about the results of the Commission's efforts in the region. Migration had not diminished. On the contrary, migrants were taking much bigger risks, and following more dangerous routes than before. Moreover the development agenda is being hijacked more and more by European migration interests: projects financed by development aid funds are, both in terms of discourse and in their actual practice, increasingly focusing on the fight against migration. These results are counterproductive to the Commission's proposed goals and that is why, 11.11.11, calls for a urgent change of direction in European migration policy.

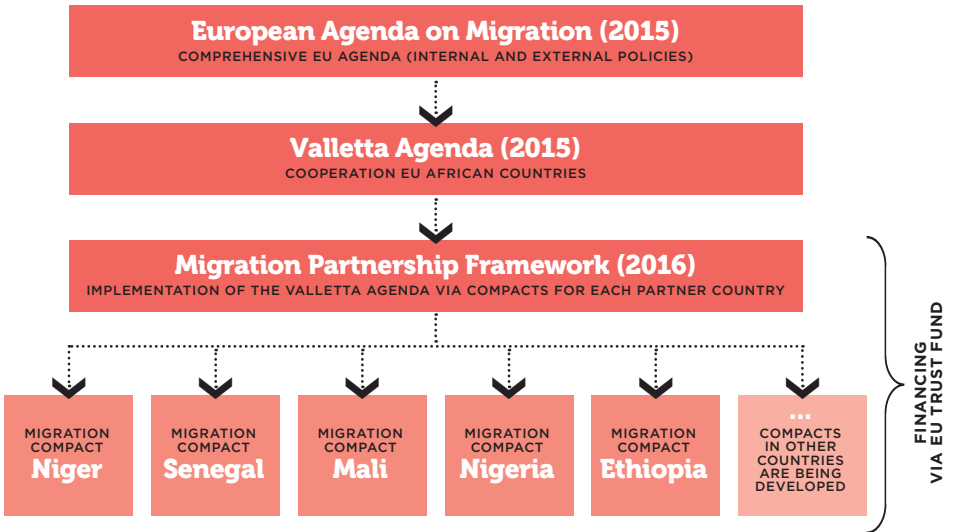
This report is the result of a visit to the terrain in Agadez and Niamey in March 2017. We have interviewed fifty migrants from six different ghettos in Agadez and in the International Organisation for Migration (IOM)'s return centre. We have talked to local authorities, the European and Belgian delegations in Niamey, the IOM, civil society organisations, human rights organisations and journalists.





From Fighting Poverty to Fighting Migration

European development policy in Africa is undergoing a shift in focus from fighting poverty to fighting migration. This is clear in terms of discourse, policy and financing. To the great dissatisfaction of many African nations, several core principals of development aid are under severe pressure.



1.1 New Migration Partnerships

In 2015, the greatly increased number of refugees arriving on European soil put migration high on the political agenda. The ‘Refugee Crisis’ became a European

top priority. Policy makers pleaded for ‘stricter measures’ in order to quickly reduce ‘irregular migration’ to Europe. In May 2015, the European Commission presented a new, over-arching ‘**European Agenda on Migration**’, consisting of four priorities.

1. Reduce the incentives for irregular migration
2. Increase border controls
3. Develop a common European migration policy
4. Increase legal migration

Together, these priorities were supposed to lead to a balanced and coherent approach to migration. However, the European response was formulated during a time – and with a mind-set – of crisis. European governments were in dire need of lower migration numbers as visible short-term results. Hence, its focus was first and foremost on the first two points of the migration agenda: border controls were increased, fences were built, and forced repatriations became more common. Steps towards a common European migration policy, on the other hand, were mostly absent. Furthermore, the European relocation programme, which

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MARK RUTTE
PRIME MINISTER OF THE NETHERLANDS

was supposed to relieve pressure from Italy and Greece by spreading refugees over the different member states, has been a complete failure. Nearly two years after its launch, only 20% of the reception locations that were originally promised have been created, and several member states refuse vehemently to participate.²

This lack of consensus on a humane way of dealing with the challenges of migration within Europe has had strong repercussions on the Union’s foreign policy. Policy makers were put under pressure by populist parties, and began looking for measures to quickly reduce migration numbers. Hence, the EU focused more and more on border control in countries outside the EU. As a result, a major part of the European development agenda was actually hijacked by domestic interests. European policy makers and secretaries of internal affairs were in the driver’s seat throughout the whole process. Despite having a rather unclear view on the complex relationship between migration and development, they heavily influenced foreign and development policy, thereby reducing the influence of the departments or ministries of development.³ The case of the Dutch prime minister Mark Rutte, illustrates this point: he was very clear about the goals of development, stating that “The most important thing is that the large number of refugees that

is currently flooding Europe is reduced to nothing, and that they (non EU countries) are prepared to stop migrants in exchange for money”.⁴

In order to close the Eastern Mediterranean route to Greece via Turkey, the EU made an agreement with the latter. Despite the fact that the ‘Turkey-deal’ has been strongly condemned by human rights organisations, the European Commission considers it a great success, as it has effectively reduced the number of arrivals in Greece.

Further steps were also taken to shut down the Central- and Western routes from Africa. Their focal point is the **Valletta Action Plan**, which the EU and the African leaders agreed to in November 2015 in the Maltese capital. The Valletta plan has five priorities:

1. Deal with the causes of irregular migration
2. Protect migrants and refugees by means of maritime operations
3. Deal with exploitation and human trafficking of migrants
4. Increase collaboration with respect to repatriation and readmission
5. Open legal migration channels



HOW MIGRANTS ENTER EUROPE, BY LAND AND SEA

In June 2016, the EU launched its new **Migration Partnership Framework** in order to implement the priorities of the Valletta agenda. The Partnership Framework creates custom-built ‘compacts’ per partner country, which are supposed to provide financial and logistic support for border controls, asylum procedures, anti-smuggling measures, and support for migrants returning to their home countries. Countries cooperating with the European migration agenda are entitled to a reward in the form of beneficial trade agreements and development agreements. The European Commission also proposes negative incentives for countries refusing to cooperate. If, for example, a country refuses to sign a readmission agreement, it might be punished by means of budget cuts in development programs. Niger, Nigeria, Mali, Senegal and Ethiopia have been assigned as crucial partner countries.⁵

Within this framework, the European safety agenda is starting to take precedence over investments in sustainable development, the creation of safe migration channels and the helping and protecting of people in need. The first progress reports show a clear focus on readmission, financial and logistic support of border controls, and the reduction of migration numbers.⁶ At present, there have not been any credible propositions for creating safe migration channels.

“THE EUROPEAN SAFETY AGENDA IS STARTING TO TAKE PRECEDENCE OVER INVESTMENTS IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, THE CREATION OF SAFE MIGRATION CHANNELS AND THE HELPING AND PROTECTING OF PEOPLE IN NEED”

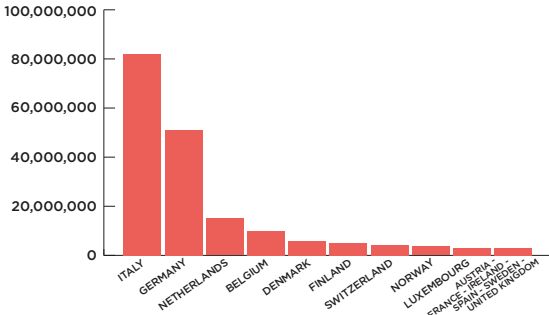
1.2 The EU Emergency Trust Fund

The *Emergency Trust Fund for stability and addressing root causes of irregular migration and displaced persons in Africa* is steadily becoming the primary mechanism by which this European migration policy is rolled out and *Migration Compacts* projects are financed. This agency was created by the European Commission in 2015 to foster stability in countries in the Sahel, the Horn of Africa and North Africa, and deal with the root causes of irregular migration. The Trust Fund presented itself as a welcome instrument for dealing with these countries' challenges in terms of extreme poverty, food insecurity, health care, environmental problems and institutional weakness.

After more than a year and a half, it seems that there have been very few new investments. Of the agency's 2.87 billion euro, 2.42 originated from other development funds such as the *European Development Fund* (EDF) and funds for humanitarian aid (ECHO) and food insecurity (DCI FOOD). EU member states only committed a mere 202 million euro. Hence, over 80% of the fund's financial means is coming directly from already existing European development budgets. Belgium is one of the few countries that have invested

“A major part of the European development agenda was actually hijacked by domestic interests”





CONTRIBUTIONS MEMBER STATES TO THE EU TRUST FUND

Only extra pledges of the members states are presented. Indirect funding via f.e. EDF is not included.⁹

a substantial amount of money. Belgium has provided 10 million euro over a three-year period.⁷ However, Belgium investment in the Trust Fund is much higher, since Belgian money also reaches the fund through the EDF.⁸

From the start 11.11.11 and a whole array of foreign NGO’s feared that the panic that gave rise to the creation of the fund would heavily influence its projects. There was a serious risk that a European agenda preoccupied by hardly realistic short-term objectives would emerge. More than a year later, this indeed seems to be have been the case. Despite the strategic documents’ focus on development, what happens in the field is mostly determined by the goal of reducing irregular migration and strengthening border control. Many projects heavily emphasise security, for example in the form of anti-smuggling measures or border surveillance.¹⁰ Furthermore, every project is expected to be framed in terms of the fight against migration.

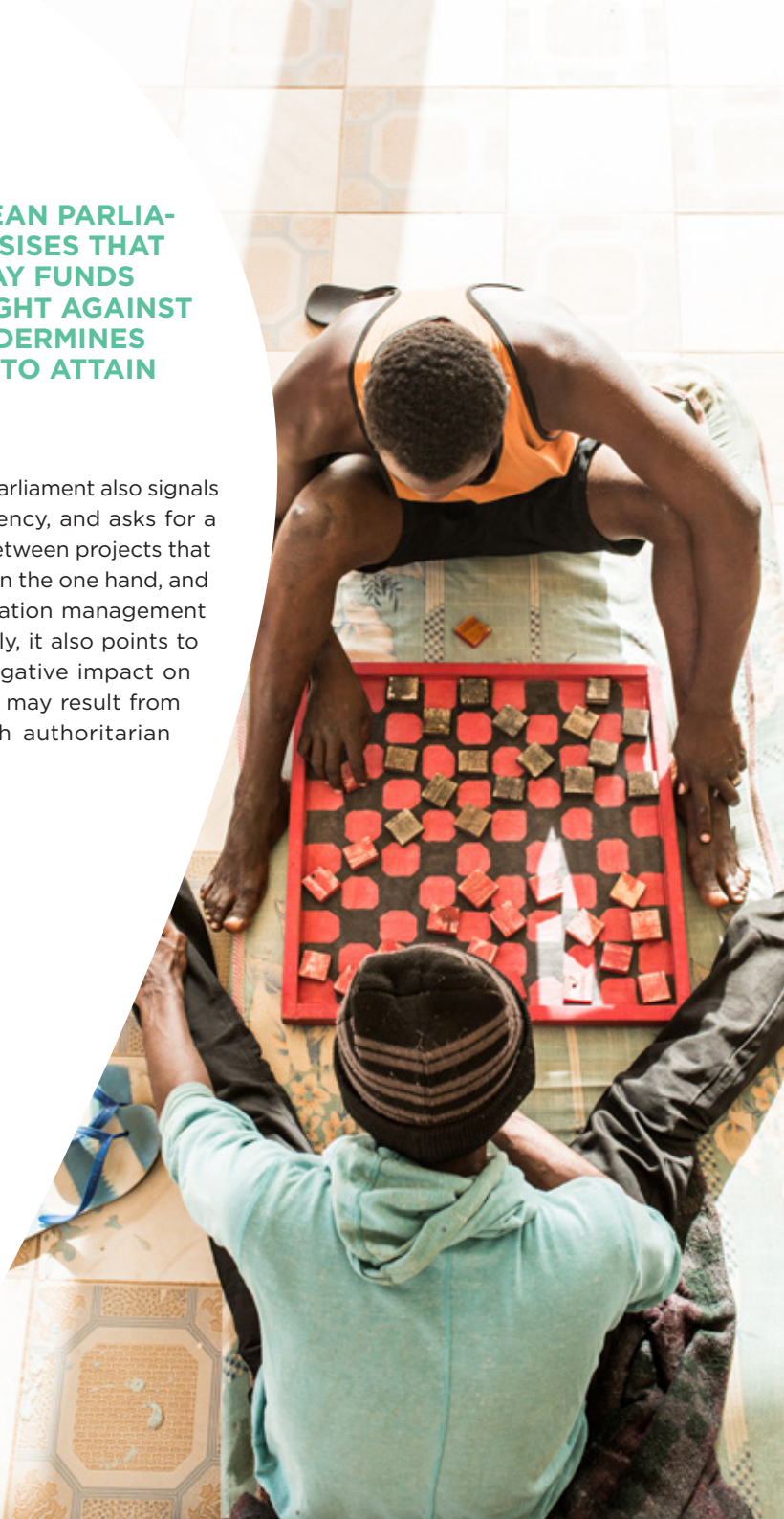
Projects have the obligation to mention how they will ‘have an impact on migration streams’.¹¹ Funds that were originally intended for development are being redirected to the fight against migration. This is very worrisome, and in direct contradiction with the EU’s development goals, and against article 208 of the Lis-

bon Treaty, which states that the fight against poverty should be the central aim of development aid. The new Europeans Consensus reaffirms the centrality of this aim, but at the same time opens the door for the use of development aid as a means of border control and as an instrument of a broader EU migration policy.¹²

In September 2016, the European Parliament issued a resolution against using financial means from the EF and other development funds for migration management. It emphasises that pulling away funds from the fight against poverty undermines our ability to attain the *Sustainable Development Goals* (SDG’s). The parliament is also concerned that this shift might lead to a situation in which the least developed countries receive fewer means. It argues for more ‘ownership’ by local partners in the way development takes shape, as well as for more accountability. These are two core principles of effective development aid.

“THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT EMPHASISES THAT PULLING AWAY FUNDS FROM THE FIGHT AGAINST POVERTY UNDERMINES OUR ABILITY TO ATTAIN THE SDG’S”

Furthermore, the parliament also signals a lack of transparency, and asks for a clear distinction between projects that focus on poverty on the one hand, and those aim at migration management on the other. Finally, it also points to the potentially negative impact on human rights that may result from collaboration with authoritarian regimes.¹³



1.3 Dissatisfaction of African Countries

The continuous and ever-increasing shift towards a safety agenda does not only present a threat to a number of core principles of development aid, it also creates more insecurity in African countries. The concerns voiced by the African Union in the aftermath of the Valletta conference are still valid today. The 'Two unions, one Vision'-baseline of Valletta has not been upheld. Migration has always been important for the development of many African countries, and imposing limits on it is seen as a hindrance to their development. At the Valletta conference, Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, put it in the following way: *Migration in search of safety or a better life is as old as humanity. There is no part of the world that can be a fortress. We should be open to legal migration.*¹⁴

There are several elements that have made collaboration more difficult. African countries strongly object to the conditionality of development aid and trade agreements. Readmission of migrants is another sore spot. This became painfully obvious in December 2016, when Malian Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdoulaye Diop publicly contradicted Dutch minister Koenders on a supposed agreement on the readmission of migrants. A few



days after Koenders' visit, the Malian minister formally denied that such an agreement had ever existed.¹⁵ Other problematic elements are the creation of 'processing centres' for migrants in African countries, and the fact that, when projects are actually executed, the majority of funds flow back to European organisations, bypassing African institutions. Furthermore, it is telling that the creation of legal migration routes to the EU is one of the few Valletta-priorities in which no progress whatsoever has been made, despite the fact that this was one of Africa's most important demands.

A study by the *European Centre for Development Policy Management*, based



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PRESIDENT AFRICAN UNION

on interviews with African policy makers, shows that the latter do not trust EU Trust Fund projects. Much of these, so they say, are short-sighted and do not take into account the complexity of migration, its challenges and its opportunities. To give but one example: Senegal

receives a yearly donation of 20 million euro as part of the Valletta Agenda, but this amount pales in comparison to the 1.6 billion euro it receives on a yearly basis from Senegalese migrants abroad. Hence, reducing migration is not at all in the interest of countries such as Senegal. On the contrary, they have much to gain from easier access to Europe.¹⁶ Hence, a more sensible and positive approach would be to satisfy the African demand for legal access routes. However, the European side is definitely not prepared to consider this as a serious option.

The continuously growing emphasis on migration in the relations between the

EU and Africa also constitutes risks. First of all, the EU renders itself vulnerable to blackmail. Turkish president Erdogan has already repeatedly threatened to cancel the Turkey agreement as a result of Europe's critical attitude with respect to human rights in his country. Comparable threats have been issued by the Sudanese regime as well. Something similar also happened in Morocco, after a trade conflict with the European Union in December 2017.¹⁷

Meanwhile, the EU is also losing its credibility as an international promotor of human rights. A report by the UN Special rapporteur on the human rights of migrants shows that the fact that the EU has moved its migration policy to countries outside the EU makes it impossible to guarantee the safeguarding of human rights, since these countries hardly have any access to EU human rights mechanisms. The EU's international position is weakened as a result.¹⁸





“The EU is losing its credibility as an international promotor of human rights”



Niger: Outpost of the European border policy

Niger became one of the most important strategic partners of the EU's development policy in the region. It is also one of the poorest countries in the world, and is right at the bottom of the UN's *Human Development Index*. The country has the very lowest score on public health, education and standard of living. The average life expectancy is 55.5 years, the average number of children per woman is around seven, and the literacy rate is less than 30%.¹⁹ In short, there are reasons enough for investments in development aid. Yet, this alone does not explain Europe's sudden and increasing interest.

2.1 An age-old crossroad of migration

Since ancient times, Niger has been at the crossroads of trade routes, and has always been a regional melting pot of civilisations. Today more than ever, it is a transit country of the migration routes that go from West and Central Africa through Libya to Europe. The vast majority of migrants who travel from Libya to Europe have passed through Niger.²⁰ Since Libya is still in a state of chaos – it harbours three governments and hundreds of militias entangled in a blood-soaked struggle for power – Niger is moving more and more to the forefront of the European policy of fighting migration in its early stages.

The Nigerien government is willingly collaborating with the European migration agenda. Its own population migrates mainly within the region itself, to the neighbouring countries Algeria, Libya and Nigeria. Very few Nigeriens venture to Europe. Hence, it is not a problem for Niger to serve as Europe's border police. This stands in contrast to countries such as Senegal, which have seen a substantial migration to Europe, and depend on the money flowing back to their economy from the diaspora through money transfers. This, however, is not the only reason why Niger is on board with Europe's migration policy. There are a number of domestic challenges that effectively force the country to align with international tendencies.

Agadez, smuggling capital of Africa

Agadez, a desert city in the middle of Niger, is the most important axis of both the regional migration routes and those destined to Europe. Libya is the next stop. In order to get there, migrants have to traverse over 600 miles of Sahara desert. The journey is organised by hundreds of smugglers.

Using off-road vehicles, they bring the migrants to the Libyan border, a journey which can take up to four days. Twenty-five to thirty people are packed together in the cargo container of a truck, together with three large fuel containers. The passengers are able to take only one bottle of water and a small backpack. In the truck itself, they hold on to wooden sticks stuck the frame of the truck in order to avoid falling off. Many migrants wait for weeks, sometimes even months, in one of the dozens of ghettos at the outskirts of Agadez until they have scraped together enough money to be able to continue their itinerary.

The Nigerien authorities estimate that, in 2016, somewhere between 120,000 and 150,000 West African migrants have passed through the region of Agadez on their way to Libya and Algeria. According to IOM, more than half of the migrants who arrive in Italy have passed through Agadez, which is why Agadez is being referred to as the smuggling capital of Africa.²¹



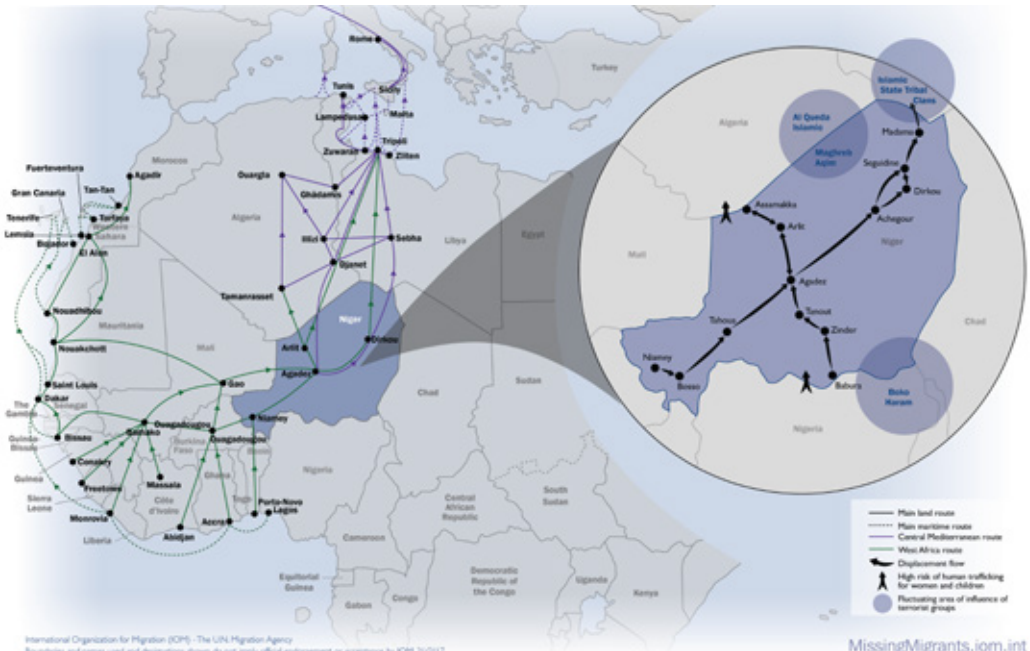
“THE NIGERIEN AUTHORITIES ESTIMATE THAT, IN 2016, SOMEWHERE BETWEEN 120,000 AND 150,000 WEST AFRICAN MIGRANTS HAVE PASSED THROUGH THE REGION OF AGADEZ ON THEIR WAY TO LIBYA AND ALGERIA”

2.2 An unsteady government

The Nigerien government has little legitimacy in the eyes of its citizens. The population has shown a great deal of resistance against the government's corruption and nepotism, despite the fact that (true) opposition parties do not have a lot of freedom. In 2015, the army attempted a coup against the sitting president, Mahamadou Issoufou. At present, Niger is being confronted

with dropping prices of oil and uranium, two of the country's most important export products. The Southern region of Diffa is in an unprecedented safety crisis. Over 100,000 people who have fled the violence committed by Boko Haram are living there in a state of severe food insecurity.²³ In March 2017, thousands took to the streets in protest against the government and for better living conditions and for the release of political prisoners.²⁴ In April of the same year, another demonstration took place, this time by thousands of students. The

MIGRATION ROUTES NIGER²²



International Organization for Migration (IOM) - The UN Migration Agency
Boundaries and names used and designations shown do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by IOM 21/2017

violent repression of this protest led to the wounding of several people, and the death of one.²⁵ The Nigerien government is trying to compensate its unstable internal status by being a loyal ally at the international level, since it is dependent on French and American support to remain in the saddle. Hence, European delegations are received with a great deal of willingness.

2.3 Political Pressure from Europe

The EU sees Niger as an essential strategic partner, and as a model country in the region. This is illustrated by the sheer

“THE EU SEES NIGER AS AN ESSENTIAL STRATEGIC PARTNER, AND AS A MODEL COUNTRY IN THE REGION”

number of European delegates that have visited the country. Among others European Minister of Foreign Affairs Federica Mogherini, the French Ministers of International Development, Defence and Interior Affairs, and the Dutch and Italian Ministers of Foreign Affairs have visited Niger during the course of the last year.²⁶ In 2016, Belgian Minister

of Development Alexander De Croo also paid the country a visit. In that same year Angela Merkel also visited Niger, the first time ever for a German chancellor. She promised the Nigerien government 77 million euro to help fight migration in the Agadez region. Nigerien president Issouffo welcomed this support, but also stated that a lot more European help is needed to help reduce migration.²⁷

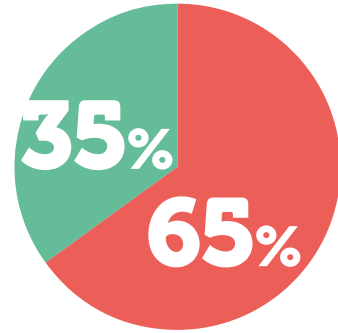
In May 2015, encouraged by the EU, Niger passed a new law²⁸ as a means to increase their efforts in the fight against smugglers. The law imposes heavy fines and prison sentences up to thirty years for smuggling. It was voted in 2015, but was initially not really applied on the terrain, where people mostly turned a blind eye. It was only in 2016, after additional pressure from Europe, that the Nigerien government started to act more repressively in the region of Agadez. The EU did not just exert political pressure, but also offered technical support to uphold the new law. In February 2017, a *European Migration Liaison Officer*





was stationed in the capital city, Niamey. In the nearby future, there will also be a representative of the European Border Agency Frontex to help control migration in the region.²⁹

In addition to these measures the EU is also financing an array of projects, by means of the *Emergency Trust Fund*, to help fight migration on the terrain in Niger. At present, Niger is receiving 140.9 million euro, which makes it the third largest recipient of the Trust Fund. Currently, there are fourteen projects, eleven of which (which together account for 91.8 million euro) fall under the priority of *Improving migration management/governance*. This amounts to 65% of the investments of the Trust Fund in Niger. These projects were mostly initiated by Spain, France and Germany. One example is a project aimed at strengthening borders in collaboration with the French CIVI-POL, and at the creation of an *Equipe Conjointe d'Investigation* (ECI) to fight people smuggling and criminal networks linked to irregular migration. Only one single project falls under *strengthening*



DISTINCTION PROJECTS NIGER



resilience. Two projects are part of the priority of creating economic opportunities.³⁰

Aside from this, there are also some projects in the Sahel region that transcend national boundaries. For example, there is a 41.6 million euro Spanish project, collaborating with Italy, Portugal and France, which is aimed at strengthening the border control capacity in the various countries in the Sahel by means of the creation of *Groupes d'Action Rapide – Surveillance Intervention*.³¹

In short, it is quite clear that fighting migration and increasing border control are the most important aims of Trust Fund investments in Niger.

Horse-trading in the board of the Trust Fund

The *Emergency Trust Fund* is run by a strategic board (chaired by the European Commission) and three regional 'operational committees'. The actual assignment of Trust Fund projects happens in the operational committees. Every member state that has invested at least three million euros in the Fund has a vote within these committees. Aside from Belgium, there are twelve other members who are entitled to vote.

Despite the fact that, during the past few months, there has been some progress in involving both the European delegations in the partner countries and the countries themselves, the majority of these projects is still very much initiated and controlled by Brussels and the various EU member states. In some cases, lobbying even happens directly by the police services of the different member states. Not coincidentally, the EU Foreign Minister Mogherini has received the joint heads of the police departments of a number of EU member states within the context of project proposal on the Sahel region.

A country's contribution can be earmarked per region, but not per project. This means that Belgium cannot choose which projects are to benefit from its investments in the fund. The money is gathered in one central account, and then divided over all kinds of projects. This is why it is important that Belgium uses its vote to block projects that are at odds with its own development aims. However, successfully stopping a project requires a majority, and therefore an alliance with at least six other countries.

Several sources close to the decision-making process have confirmed to us that it is impossible to take a critical attitude within these committees. Despite the fact that some proposals are very questionable (employing a very repressive approach for example), negative advice is extremely rare. There is a lot of high-level political pressure behind the scenes not to oppose such projects. Projects are being approved at a frantic pace and without critical reflection, out of fear that one's own future projects might not be approved as well. In fact, up until now, there never even seems to have been an official vote.

A photograph of two men in a tunnel. The man on the left is standing, wearing a yellow and black striped beanie, a white t-shirt with yellow text, and blue jeans. The man on the right is sitting on the ground, wearing a grey beanie and a dark grey hoodie with a red and black graphic. The tunnel walls are made of rough, textured earth. The text "Only 20-35% of migrants intend to go to Europe" is overlaid in white on the right side of the image.

“Only 20-35% of migrants intend to go to Europe”

2.4 Regional free movement under pressure

In principle, the majority of West-African migration, in Niger and in the transit town of Agadez, is perfectly legal. Most West African countries are part of the *Economic Community of West African States* (ECOWAS), which allows free movement of persons, comparable to the European Schengen Area. Most migrants entering Niger are doing so through commercial bus companies, and often have all the necessary documents. Their migration only becomes irregular when they cross the Libyan border. The bus companies only go as far as Agadez. From there, migrants use smugglers to continue their journey.

“SMUGGLERS AND OPERATORS OF MIGRANT GHETTOS WERE IMPRISONED WITHOUT ANY FORM OF TRIAL OR CONVICTION”

Because the Libyan border is hard to patrol, the police has increased repressive measures in the region of Agadez. Since the new smuggling law was passed, 47 people have been arrested. However, local authorities do not have

the ability to deal with the arrests in a legal way. Hardly any awareness for the new law was raised before it went into effect. Smugglers and operators of migrant ghettos were imprisoned without any form of trial or conviction. This is a clear violation of human rights and of the principles of the constitutional state.³² Local human rights organisations are protesting against these practices, and strongly doubt the existence of a juridical ground for these convictions. They experience this kind of repression as something that is imposed by Europe, and in blatant contradiction with the free movement of persons in the ECOWAS zone.³³

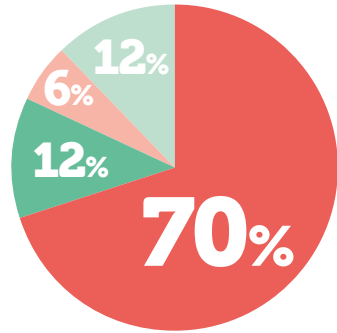
European policy is aimed at fighting irregular migration in the region and according to the media, all migrants in the North African region are supposedly on their way to Europe. In reality, however, things are much more complicated. The majority of people migrating along the Sahara route are not bound for Europe. Only 20-35% of migrants intend to go to Europe. The largest part of migration in this area is circular: people try to find temporary jobs in other countries, for example during harsh agricultural seasons. Traditionally, Libya has always been one of the countries these people go to. This kind of regional migration is of vital importance as a survival strategy for hundreds of thousands of people, and it will be even more so in

the future, due to climate change and rising population numbers. A large-scale repressive approach runs the risk of obstructing this kind of migration.

2.5 Migration from Africa, economic migration?

One important argument in the discourse accompanying the policy that aims to put a stop to Central Mediterranean migration is that we are not dealing with refugees, but with economic migrants. According to Belgian State Secretary Theo Francken, “a great deal of migrants are coming to Europe via Niger, but only very few of those are real refugees”. “Hence, it would be a good thing to tell them at that location that is useless to continue their journey, and that it would be better to return, since they have no chance whatsoever of obtaining a residence permit”.³⁴

It is true that many migrants are motivated by a lack of economic opportunities in their countries of origin. Nevertheless, figures from the UN refugee agency dispute the idea that we are dealing with a purely economic phenomenon. In 2016, 30% of migrants coming from Sub-Saharan Africa were able to get protected status in Europe. These people have used the same route via Niger as economic



BREAKDOWN PER TYPE OF STATUS MIGRANTS SUB SAHARA AFRICA 2016

- REJECTED ASYLUM APPLICATIONS
- REFUGEE STATUS GRANTED
- SUBSIDIARY PROTECTION STATUS GRANTED
- HUMANITARIAN STATUS GRANTED

migrants do. In short, the reality is that migrant streams are becoming more and more mixed.³⁵ Hence, by blocking this migration route, Europe is making it impossible for people in need to receive protection. Furthermore, aside from economic incentives, climate is playing an increasingly large role in forced migration in the region. For these people, there is no protective status in Europe as of yet.³⁶

Aboucar, on the run from a changing climate

Aboucar is 22 years old, and was born and raised in a family of farmers in Frankouda, a small village in Senegal. Their living conditions are dire. “The soil is getting dryer and dryer, and there is a great lack of water. As a result, it’s getting harder and harder to actually get a return from the land”, he says. “The whole family depends on cultivation. When you see them suffer, you decide to leave, even if it is hard to do so.” He would like to try his luck in Europe. He knows people who live there and who sometimes return to the village during holidays. “They can provide for their family. I want that too”. He has been in Agadez for three months already, and is waiting for money from one of his older brothers to be able to continue his journey to Libya and, eventually, Italy.

Land degradation has always been a problem in Senegal, and climate change has made things even worse. Rainfall has diminished significantly in the last decades, and land degradation has become more common. Key economic sectors such as agriculture, fishing and animal husbandry are under great pressure. According to IFAD, 70% of the Senegalese are employed in one of these economic sectors.³⁷ Both internal and external migration are important adaptation strategies to deal with the toughest effects of climate change.



About Karim, on the run for the repression in Gambia

On September 22, Abou Karim's life changed completely. One moment he was walking on the street in Jarasoma, Gambia, taking a picture, and then suddenly, he was arrested. A police officer happened to pass by, and accused him of espionage. Despite the fact that there nothing incriminating could be found on his mobile phone, he was imprisoned for two days without food or water.

Eventually, he was released, but only in anticipation of his trial. After talking to his parents, Abou decided to flee. He left shortly thereafter, with nothing more than a backpack, and one hundred euro in his pocket. Through Senegal and Niger, he eventually ended up in Agadez. Together with his family, he is now weighing his options.

At any rate, Europe is not part of his plans. "I came here to save my life, not to risk it", he says. "Libya is even worse than Gambia, so, I won't be going there in any case". Recently, a new president has come to power in Gambia, and things seem to be changing for the better. "Things are looking good, and everyone is hoping for improvements, but we must be careful. In any case, I won't be returning anytime soon. The juridical system will not change over-

night. The same police officers who were after me are still there. But who knows, perhaps, one day, I might return to Gambia."

For over twenty years, President Yahya Jammeh ruled Gambia with an iron fist. His regime was one of brutal repression and large-scale violations of human rights. Tens of thousands of people fled. In December 2016, Jammeh was beaten in the elections by his rival Adama Barrow. Under severe pressure from the international community, Jammeh was forced to resign after several weeks. With Jammeh's departure, there is again hope of a free and democratic Gambia. However, this will inevitably be a long-term effort. Many political dissidents are still locked up, and torture has not stopped being common practice in prisons.



Joseph wants to escape poverty in Cameroon

“I tried everything” Joseph, 22, says. “I am smart, and I have a technical degree, but I cannot use it because of the circumstances. I saw my life slip through my fingers, and I knew that things were not going to get better. What is the use of staying home and waiting to starve?”. So, two months ago, he left Cameroon. His aim is to travel through Algeria and Morocco, and eventually try ‘to make a living’ in Spain.

For the moment, however, he is stuck in Agadez. Together with another Cameroonian, he is responsible for the management of the ghetto. He has money at his disposal, but for the moment, his sick father is the first

priority. Every week, he talks with his family over the phone. “They give me the support I need to go on. I want to help them as well”, he says.

Although he was morally prepared for his journey, there has been much hardship. Hunger and stress are beginning to take their toll. He realises that, even if he gets to Europe, he will have to continue to fight. His older brother, who lives in Germany now, is a sans-papier, and in a difficult situation. Chances are high that he will have to face the same fate. “I don’t understand why Europe is closing its borders for us”, he says, “while all we want to do is contribute and help our families.”







3

Impact of the European policy

The repressive European approach to migration in the Sahel region does not result in lower migration figures. On the contrary, the number of arrivals from Africa is still increasing. However, the policy does have an impact in a different way: migrants are resorting to even more dangerous routes. The consequences of this on the ground are detrimental.

3.1 Dubious figures and new routes

Since 2016, the International Organisation for Migration has been registering figures on Nigerien migration routes. Their monitoring points are located on two famous migration routes in the northern region of Agadez: Séguédine and Arit. But these show only a fragment of the migratory movement in the region. IOM itself explicitly says that it cannot guarantee the representativeness of its figures.³⁸ However, that has not stopped them from becoming a cornerstone of the development of European policy in the region, and of the communication on the progress of *Migration Compacts*.

In December 2016, the OIM reported that, in November 2015, only 1,500 people had been registered at the monitoring points. This number seemed exceptionally low, since in October 2015,

there were still 12,600 people that were registered at the very same monitoring points. It quickly became clear that the exceptionally low number in November was merely the result of a technical difficulty, and IOM instantly issued a correction: in reality, 11,500 people had passed through the monitoring points. Hence, there was no significant drop compared to the previous month. However, a couple of days later, the erroneous figure was integrated in the European Commission's progress report.³⁹ According to an accompanying press release, the figure proved that *Migration Compacts* in priority countries were starting to show results, with a first significant drop in migration numbers.⁴⁰ In 2017 as well, the European Commission sent a communication to the European Parliament and the European Council that still mentioned the erroneous figure as a success.

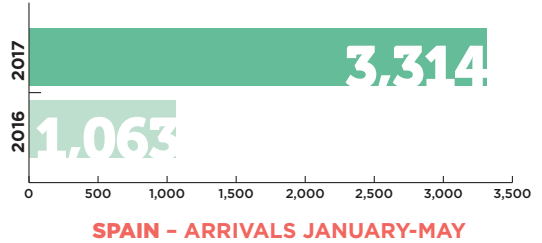
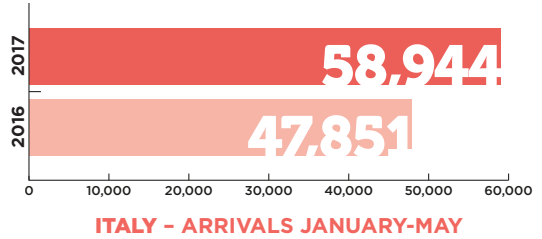
"The number of persons leaving Niger to attempt the dangerous crossing of the Sahara has fallen from over 70,000 in

May 2016 to around 1,500 in November. This successful model, which has been proven to reduce numbers, should be replicated with other regional partners, notably Mali, Chad, Egypt, Algeria and Sudan.”⁴¹

However, IOM recognizes that these figures do not represent the whole picture, since migrants simply change their routes in light of possible obstacles or hindrances. Now that border controls have become stricter, they started using different routes to circumvent them.⁴² The IOM-estimates of the number of migrants in Sebha, the first large town in Libya, are still very high: between January and March 2017, 44,000 people were registered.⁴³ Furthermore, local IOM-employees confirm that registrations only happen during daytime, while smugglers are become more and more active at night.⁴⁴

Knowing that smugglers are successfully setting up new routes, it is much more correct to measure the impact of the *Migration Compact* approach by looking

“IN THE FIRST HALF OF 2017, THERE HAS BEEN AN INCREASE OF 23% ON THE CENTRAL MEDITERRANEAN ROUTE FROM LIBYA TO ITALY”



at arrival numbers in Europe for the African routes. These show no decrease at all. In fact, they even show an increase. In the first half of 2017, there has been an increase of 23% on the Central Mediterranean route from Libya to Italy.⁴⁵ In the same period, the number of arrivals in Spain through the Western Mediterranean route has tripled in comparison to 2016.⁴⁶ In short, the EU fails to attain its own goals.

3.2 Adverse effects

At least for now, the *Migration Compact* approach does not seem to result in lower migration numbers. However, the policy did have some other, problematic consequences on the ground: alternative and more dangerous routes, higher smuggling prices, destabilising effects on the region, ...

3.2.1 ALTERNATIVE, DEADLY ROUTES

In 2016, over 5,000 people died trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea in order to get into the EU. However, we have no idea of the number of migrants that have perished on the route through the desert before reaching the sea in the first place. According to various sources, the number could be at least as high. A test based on a small sample (211 migrants) by the *North Africa Mixed Migration Hub* showed that only 15% of deaths occurred at sea, compared to 44% in Libya and 38% in the Sahara desert.⁴⁷ Due to a lack of registration, the large majority of deceased migrants has died an anonymous death.

Ever since the anti-smuggling law has been upheld more strictly, new routes have come into existence in the North of Niger, Algeria, and through the North of Mali. According to the IOM, strictly monitored places such as Séguédine are being avoided by using alternative, more dangerous routes.⁴⁸ Smugglers are well-organised, equipped with gps-devices, and easily adapt to inspections. They know the time schedules and radius of the security services. The new routes are situated along more savage areas with less infrastructure and a higher chance of car trouble and accidents. There is also a lot less security, due to the presence of armed groups. Local

IOM-employees have noticed that smugglers are also avoiding watering holes in the desert, and prefer to travel at night instead of during the day, which makes the journey even more hazardous.⁴⁹ Furthermore, ever since the new restrictions are in force, there have been more reports on deaths in the desert.⁵⁰ At the end of May, forty migrants, among them several children, died of thirst on their way to Libya. Earlier that same month,

“EVER SINCE THE ANTI-SMUGGLING LAW HAS BEEN UPHELD MORE STRICTLY, NEW ROUTES HAVE COME INTO EXISTENCE IN THE NORTH OF NIGER, ALGERIA, AND THROUGH THE NORTH OF MALI”

eight people bound for Algeria died as well.⁵¹ Aside from this, the fear of getting caught also causes panicky reactions by the drivers, and smugglers are prone to leave migrants behind on their own in the middle of the desert. The latter phenomenon is well-known to the IOM.

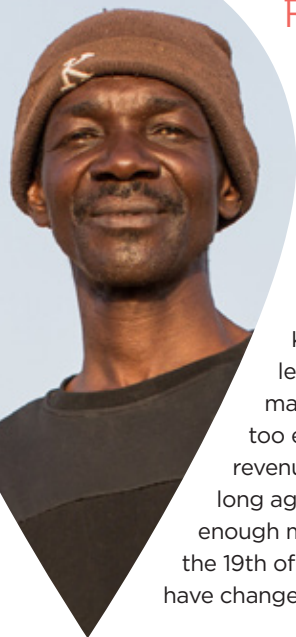
Jeroury from Guinee Conakry

Jeroury has travelled a long way to arrive in Agadez. His itinerary started in Guinee Conakry, where he tried to find a job as a blacksmith. His search was unsuccessful, and he decided to try his luck in Europe. He embarked on a long, costly and arduous journey through Mauretania, Mali and Burkina Faso, and eventually ended up in Agadez. On a Thursday in February 2017, he finally scraped together enough money to continue his journey to Libya. The first driver brought him, together with twenty other passengers, to a meeting point in the middle of the desert. At one o' clock at night, a second driver came to pick them up. Here again, they had to pay. Jeroury, however, didn't have any money left. He gave his phone instead, and was able to leave anyway. Not long after this, the driver noticed a vehicle in the distance, which he thought belonged to the Nigerien army. "The driver dropped us in the

middle of the desert, and drove off in the distance. He still had my papers. We were lost in the desert, I didn't even have any water. We had to walk for three days before we could find some soldiers, who took us to a military camp. They told me: 'You guys are crazy, don't you know this is prohibited?' But I didn't have a clue. I don't have any kind of information about the route. We stayed in the camp for two days. We didn't get anything to eat. From there, I was able to go to the IOM transit centre in Agadez". Today, Jeroury wants to go back to his family in Guinee. "I am out of money, and I've been through enough."



Antonio from the Democratic Republic of Congo



“For me, the adventure is over”, Antonio tells us. He is 46 years old, and the only Congolese in the return centre. He is a sculptor from Kinshasa, which he left because his raw material was getting too expensive and his revenue too insecure. Not long ago, he was still making enough money, but since the 19th of September, things have changed. “The president is

refusing to resign, and since then, the situation is highly unstable.” he says. “I am not involved in politics myself, but it’s taking away my livelihood anyway”. He heard that, in Algeria, it was possible to earn enough to making a living. At the end of December, he left, trying to get there via Cameroon. Between Agadez and Algeria, he and his fellow travelers were suddenly noticed by the police, who chased them in the middle of the desert. Some people fell out of their car and were left behind. Eventually, they were arrested, and Antonio was brought to the return centre. He is now planning to go back to the DRC, to his wife and children.

Kone from Ivory Coast

Kone is from Abijan, Ivory Coast, and has been on the road since August. He is 29 years old, and although he has already worked for several small companies, he cannot find a stable job. “I want to move forward in life”, he says. He was bound for Italy, but in Libya all his money was taken away from him. So there was nothing left to do aside from returning to his home country. On 2 January, the car he shared with fifteen other migrants in the North East of Niger was fired upon. Of all the passengers, Kone suffered the gravest injuries, and due to a lack of medical attention he lost his foot. At this very moment,

the IOM return centre is providing him with the necessary medical care. In the meantime, his wife in Abijan has given birth to a son. He is hoping to be able to go home quickly, but he still hasn’t found the courage to tell his wife of his accident.



“Wherever mobility is limited, smuggling thrives”

3.2.2 HIGHER SMUGGLING FEES

Research shows that smuggling networks can very easily adapt to restrictions by using new routes and techniques. These often result in high fees for the migrant. Wherever mobility is limited, smuggling thrives.⁵² One of the consequences of the increased strictness of the controls in Niger is that smugglers are taking higher risks. They are also using other, stronger vehicles, and are armed more often. These extra costs are charged to the migrants. According to IOM, costs today are two or three times higher than a year ago.⁵³ One of the consequences of this is that migrants are staying longer in transit cities. In earlier times, there used to be a smooth transit through Agadez. Local humanitarian organisations which are active in the ghettos are noticing that, at present, migrants are staying in Agadez much longer. A lot of migrants are saying that the costs are problematically high. They often have to wait for weeks to get money from their family in their country of origin. Some try to do odd jobs in Agadez itself. Very often, migrants are saving money on food to be able to continue their journey.⁵⁴



3.2.3 ECONOMIC REGRESS

The local economy of Agadez is mostly running on migration. Hence, Agadez has known tremendous economic progress in the past couple of years. Besides smugglers and transport companies, local restaurants, hotels and traders are getting their share as well. Furthermore, the presence of migrants also creates a large reservoir of cheap, temporary labour. During the last five years, the population of Agadez has grown from 100,000 to 500,000, supposedly as a consequence of an increased economic attractiveness of the region.⁵⁵ All local actors indicate that Agadez has benefited a lot from migration. According to Ibrahim Diallo, an independent journalist who is specializing in migration, every family in Agadez has at least someone who is directly or indirectly dependent

“EVERY FAMILY IN AGADEZ HAS AT LEAST SOMEONE WHO IS DIRECTLY OR INDIRECTLY DEPENDENT ON THE MIGRATION BUSINESS”

on the migration business.⁵⁶ The Nigerien government also admits that both the police force and the military are profiting, by making use of illegal taxes.⁵⁷

“AGADEZ HAS ALWAYS BEEN A TRADE CITY, AND IT IS NOT EASY TO TURN MERCHANTS INTO FARMERS OVERNIGHT”

Even the European border and coast guard agency Frontex has issued a warning that draining the migration industry might result in local protests. This has already happened in Algeria. Some sources even state that the migration industry is the only factor preventing a new tribal uprising in the North of the country.⁵⁸

The EU delegation in Niger also acknowledges that migration is important for the economy of Agadez. This is why, it states, it is crucial to develop alternative economic activities in the region. So-called *rapid impact projects* are supposed to create alternative sources of income for local communities which are currently dependent on the smuggling industry.⁵⁹ However, people on the terrain and other experts are questioning the feasibility of the EU's plans. According to Sophia Wolpers (University of Amsterdam), the revenue from the migration industry is several times higher than what people might earn in other sectors. In the past, the EU has done a lot of investments in agriculture around Agadez. Today, however, desertification has made any profitable form of agriculture near to impossible. Furthermore,

Agadez has always been a trade city, and it is not easy to turn merchants into farmers overnight.⁶⁰

3.2.4 HEALTH PROBLEMS

Despite the increased repression, there are still thousands of migrants in and around Agadez. Today, they are leading a more hidden life than in the past. According to local NGO's this entails great risks. Doctors of the World is one of the few organisations involved in health care for migrants in the region. In Agadez, there are facing the same challenges as before, since there is still a large inflow of migrants. But the circumstances in which they are forced to work are becoming increasingly difficult. Migrants are ill more often than they use to be. A lot of health problems, such as stomach or lung diseases, are direct consequences of inadequate hygiene and a lack of clean water in the ghettos. Psychological problems and traumas are common as well.

The regional director of the public health care of Agadez is strongly opposed to the increasing repression. "Migrants are afraid to register for medical assistance because they are afraid to get caught. This is obviously a threat to their personal health, but it is also a danger for the public health of the entire city. There is a risk of epidemics. It is vitally important that migrants gain access to the regular



health care system. One of the essential factors in this, is a relationship of trust.⁶¹

3.2.5 A THREAT TO REGIONAL STABILITY

The smuggling industry of Agadez is part of a broad societal context. Its importance goes beyond the criminal networks which are organising the actual smuggling itself. Whole communities, and even local authorities and safety services, depend on it.

Human smuggling is a complex problem that requires a thorough and comprehensive approach. The current EU policy regards smuggling networks too much as isolated networks. Its reply is a one-sided safety centred approach reminiscent of the 'wars' on drugs and terror. If the latter have taught us anything, it



is that the focus of such approaches is too limited, and often leads to an inefficient game of cat-and-mouse. Several research institutions, such as *Clingendael*, the *Institute for Security Studies*

“THE CURRENT EU POLICY REGARDS SMUGGLING NETWORKS TOO MUCH AS ISOLATED NETWORKS”

and the *Global Initiative Against Organized Crime*, have issued strong warnings that a one-sided repressive approach to the smuggling industry might heighten ethnic tensions and result in real danger for the stability of the region.

Control over migration routes in the North of Niger is held by two communities:

the Tuareg and the Toubou. For the economically disadvantaged Toubou in particular, smuggling is one of the only feasible sources of income. There is a strong rivalry both between these groups and among them. Research shows that a brutal repression of the smuggling industry without offering viable alternatives will further instigate these conflicts. These risks are very real. In arrests during the past months, 67 vehicles have been confiscated, and only the Toubou community was targeted. This is striking, but not surprising, since the police force in Agadez is part of the Tuareg elite. Immediately after their confiscation, the vehicles needed to be transferred to a military compound because the local Toubou community threatened to attack the police station. Furthermore, Islamist and other rebel groups are actively looking for young



recruits in the region. Unemployed smugglers (many among whom are ex-soldiers) could very well form an easy target for them.

Migrant smuggling is one of the very few things that keeps the North of Niger together. A brutal intrusion might overthrow this balance of power and annihilate past development efforts. According to Clingendael and the Institute for Security Studies, there is a great risk that such a situation might undermine the fragile balance of a country in the middle of a highly unstable region. This could in turn, very well lead to new migration crises in the region.

“MIGRANTS ARE AFRAID TO REGISTER FOR MEDICAL ASSISTANCE BECAUSE THEY ARE AFRAID TO GET CAUGHT. THERE IS A RISK OF EPIDEMICS”

Conclusion and Recommendations

The European repressive approach to migration in the Sahel region is not delivering the goods in terms of lower migration numbers, and is therefore unsuccessful in achieving its own goals. Aside from this, this approach also has a lot of detrimental consequences. The current policy is pushing refugees and other migrants to take even more dangerous routes. Migration, which in many cases is a perfectly sensible adaptation strategy to deal with the consequences of climate change and economic shocks, is being pushed underground. The right to protection of people on the run is at risk. Development aid is being hijacked more and more by a European internal agenda. Because of this, resources are being taken away from their primary target: fighting poverty. Furthermore, there is a threat that finances will be reallocated away from the poorest countries.

There is an urgent need for a change of course in European policy. Border control and migration management are legitimate goals, but they should not come at the expense of respect for human rights, development aid and the freedom of people to migrate. Both economic and political migration can be perfectly legitimate reasons to migrate. Migration management is impossible without the existence of legal channels for migration.

The growing European attention to migration can be an opportunity, provided it is used to start a genuine dialogue with African countries. We are welcoming the efforts done to come to a coherent policy with respect to migration and development. Such a policy should be aimed at removing the long-term root causes of migration, opening legal migration channels, and offering protection for people on the run.





11.11.11 suggests the following two recommendations:

1. DEAL WITH ROOT CAUSES INSTEAD OF SYMPTOMS

The European focus on its own short-term interests needs to make way for a long-term collaboration with African countries on the topic of migration. Collaboration is vital to counter the fundamental causes of forced migration, to open legal migration channels and end the thousands of deaths by drowning in the Mediterranean. Fighting poverty and inequality should be central in this approach. As an important donor in the Trust Fund, Belgium can play a crucial role in this respect.

In general:

- Discuss the recent shift from fighting poverty to controlling borders at the highest level of the EU.
- Issue a clear condemnation of any form of conditionality of development aid and trade agreements in the context of take-back agreements.



In the management of the Trust Fund:

- Show a critical attitude within the strategic board and the operational committees of the Fund. Find allies and block projects that are not in line with our development goals.
- Advocate, in line with Resolution 2015/2341 of the European Parliament, a clear and transparent distinction between means for development on the one hand, and means for migration management on the other.
- Make a plea for more *ownership* by African partners, and a more prominent role of civil society and delegations on the ground in the shaping of projects.
- Demand a more transparent functioning of the Fund, among other things, with respect to the European Parliament.
- Formulate clear red lines for Belgian investments in the Fund. If there is no improvement with respect to the strategic targets of the fund, subsequent payments should be put on hold.
- Belgium's own projects in the Fund should be perfectly in line with its own development goals.

2. SAFE AND LEGAL MIGRATION ROUTES

Both Belgium and the European Union should, in accordance with the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development (goal 10.7. *Facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility*), urgently look into the creation of legal access routes for people on the run and other migrants. It is impossible to make further progress in collaborating with African countries without taking into account their concerns on legal migration channels to Europe. This doesn't mean that Europe should open its borders. Legal migration channels make sure that migration happens in a structured and controllable way. Creating legal alternatives is the best way of cutting the ground from under the smuggler's feet.

In Belgium, this entails the following:

- Look into the creation of a broader model for labour migration that makes migration possible for high, medium- and low-skilled workers. (Regional competency)
- Drastically raise the number of resettlements from refugee camps in the region (Federal competency)
- Implement a more lenient application of family reunion and humanitarian visas for people on the run. (Federal competency)
- On an intra-European level, promote solidarity and obligations for a fair spread of asylum seekers coming from Greece and Italy. A well-functioning asylum system within Europe might create leverage for an international plea for an increase of solidarity with refugees. (Federal competency)



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