

Migration driven by relative poverty: a challenge without real solutions

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The EU asylum system has failed. The Dublin Convention stipulates that the first EU country to receive an asylum seeker processes the application. As the irregular flow of migrants to the EU has the northern countries as its main migration destination, but the southern countries as its first point of arrival, the system can only function, if there is, subsequently, a solidaric redistribution of received migrants between the individual EU countries. The EU countries cannot agree on such a redistribution.

The situation at Ceuta , the Spanish EU enclave of in Morocco, highlights the absurdity of the system. In its surroundings, hundreds of young people, mostly men from African countries, live in miserable conditions without access to proper sanitation, legal assistance or medical care, and lurk for a chance to escape inside. They are prevented by two parallel 6-meter-high barbed wire fences that shield the city's 76,000 inhabitants from Morocco, and by a police force of more than 1,200 people who beat or shoot rubber bullets at migrants without visas who seek to break through. As long as a migration-seeker is one meter outside the fence, he / she can shout the three magic words "I request asylum" to police officers in Ceuta without result. If the three words are pronounced one meter inside the fence, on EU soil, they trigger a range of legal rights under several international conventions - the Refugee Convention, the Human Rights Convention, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, etc .. With one stroke, there gain access to legal aid, social benefits and security for several years of residence in Europe, even for migrants who do not meet the conditions for granting asylum - their application must be processed and that, including appeals, takes time. The few meters that determine the effect of the three words create an extreme tension, and not all migrants are equally delicate. In 2017, 2018 and 2019, there were several raids by groups of several hundred people armed with sticks that hurled acid and excrement at the police in their attempt to force access.¹

The formal observance of rules laid down by International conventions, is, for good reason, sacrosanct in Western countries: an intertwined world calls for respect of human rights of all world citizens no matter where they come from and requires international rules of law

¹ Source: : [Ceuta border fence - Wikipedia](#)

to function efficiently. But the real-life respect of Western states for obligations imposed by the conventions is undermined in the field of migration by two factors.

One is the exploitation by illegal migrants² of rules defined by international conventions for situations other than theirs. The Refugee Convention's legal right for entry in a country and for the processing of applications for asylum respecting all due procedures was designed for refugees fleeing from political persecution or from war; illegal migrants exploit these to secure residence by applying for asylum as soon as they have succeeded in crossing the border of the target country. Asylum seekers over the age of 18 lie younger to gain access to the extended right of residence provided by the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Convention on the Law of the Sea obliges ships to assist people in distress at sea and to transport them to the closest safe harbor; this motivates migrants to deliberately bring themselves into distress by sailing a few kilometers out into the Mediterranean in overcrowded rubber boats. Destruction of identification documents before arrival (70% of asylum seekers in the EU) makes it difficult to repatriate rejected asylum seekers. Home authorities have no motivation to help with the provision of required documentation and passports so rejected asylum seekers can be returned: The World Bank estimates the diaspora's annual financial transfers to low- and middle-income countries at \$ 528 billion in 2018, of which sub-Saharan Africa received \$ 40 billion.³ Very few rejected asylum seekers are sent home. Even if all documents and agreements are in place, the principle of non-refoulement and the human rights convention's rules on the right to family life can prevent deportation, even of terrorists and of dangerous convicted criminals.

In national law, smart exploitation of rules for purposes other than those envisaged by the legislature - for example, loopholes for tax payment - lead to subsequent revision of the law. A tightening of humanitarian rules in international conventions is virtually impossible; the required majority among the co-signatories cannot be obtained. Individual states have the option of withdrawing from an international convention and then re-entering with specified reservations. But such a resort undermines the purpose of international conventions: to create rules that are the same for everyone. Instead, EU countries resort to the de facto bending and circumvention of rules on the reception of refugees. In 2021, the media revealed that the 'Ceuta formula' of beating and pushing back asylum seekers

² Defined as migrants without visas fleeing relative poverty - the large income per capita differences between their country and EU average - the poorest people in their country cannot afford the investment in getting to EU-shores.

³ Source: World Bank's Migration and Development Brief, December 2018

was used by FRONTEX at the Greek borders with Turkey and by Croatian police officers at the border with Bosnia.

The second factor, which undermines real-life compliance with formal rules by both side – by migrants and by recipient countries - is **the potential size of uncontrolled migration**. The UN expects the population of North Africa to increase from 246 million in 2020 to 372 million in 2050; Sub-Saharan Africa's to 2.1 billion (from 180 million in 1950); Pakistan's to 400 million (from 40 million in 1950); while Europe's population remains at 700 million (EU plus UK = 500 million).⁴ The African working age population will be six times the size of its European counterpart. The struggle for meaningful work and the division of scarce resources will be brutal; consequences from climate change will exacerbate the resource problem. Per capita income will be a fraction of the European; so the pull factor for migration will be unimpaired.

The migratory pressure faced by Europe In the next 30 years will be substantially stronger than during the last 20 years. Somalia illustrates the magnitude of the challenge. From 1990 to 2015, Somalia's population increased by 71% to 10.8 million, its diaspora almost twice as much by 136% to 2 million; corresponding to 19% of the population remaining in the country.⁵ 19% of 2.5 billion people give a potential migration pressure of 400 million people from Africa or an average of 13 million per year; in addition, migrants will come from Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, etc.

What can EU countries do to reduce annual irregular immigration to a level higher than in the last 20 years, but manageable politically, economically and socially?

One avenue is to **regulate the size of the annual influx of migrants**.

If the *methods currently applied by EU countries to reduce the size of the migrant inflow* continue to be applied, but in enhanced form, it will not look pretty. *One category of measures aims to reduce the pull factor. Reception camps* are made as unpleasant and *social benefits* as modest as possible without the human rights court putting a brake on it. *The rules for granting asylum* are tightened. A current imaginative example is the bill from the Danish Ministry for Foreigners and Integration, presented in February 2021, which intends to move the processing of asylum applications and the accommodation of asylum seekers away from Denmark by paying one or more countries outside EU to take over responsibility for them. The accompanying hypocritical political spin is concern about that,

⁴ Source: UNDES, World Population Prospects 2019

⁵ Pew Research Centre: "5 facts about the global Somali diaspora", June 2016

on average, three people drowned every day on their way across the Mediterranean towards Europe in 2020; and that the procedure will remove the need for that route. *Another category of measures strengthens the defense of the EU's borders against entry*, meaning. use of 'Ceuta methods' to block access to the EU: *indirectly* by continuing to bribe neighboring countries around the Mediterranean to keep potential migrants away from EU borders; *directly* by more harsh rejection of migrants at European borders and ports.

A more humane and economically the most sensible avenue for all stakeholders is the 'Canadian model' for the regulation of migration: that *the EU agrees annual migration quotas with African countries*, in return for their active resistance with the repatriation of rejected asylum applicants from their country. The Canadian point system for the selection of immigrants is the model which enables the largest annual immigration flow. By selecting immigrants with qualifications which seem to be relevant for the needs of the national labor market, Canada annually manages to receive and integrate migrants from non-Western countries, in far larger numbers relative to the national population, than the migrant flow which created panic in the EU in 2015. But Canada has the geographical advantage of being surrounded by polar ice to the north, by the United States to the south, by the Pacific Ocean to the west and the Atlantic Ocean to the east. Few irregular migrants arrive at the Canadian border; most refugees come to Canada as quota refugees from the UN.

A complementary approach **is to address the "push factor": the causes of migration** in the countries of origin. German Chancellor Angela Merkel recommends a 'Marshall-Plan' for Africa.

In the article "The EU's focus on migration control will not solve either Tunisia's or the EU's problems", migration researcher Hi Ahlam Chemlali states that 38% of the migrants who arrived in Italy by boat in 2020 were Tunisian nationals. Driven by youth unemployment of up to 40%, they saw no future in Tunisia. Chemlali criticizes: "The EU's narrow focus on migration and border controls overlooks the real threat, namely the economic situation and the lack of security reforms. It is the reasons why young people are on the streets, what makes people leave the country. To avoid this development, requires the EU not only to provide financial support for coastguards and border controls, but to shift focus to the underlying and structural challenges facing Tunisia. "

The observation of the real threat is correct, the proposed solution expresses wishful thinking. Outsiders, apart from the diaspora of a country, have extremely limited

opportunities to influence the underlying and structural challenges of a country. Thorough structural reforms must be driven by forces from within the country, being backed by the power elite and strong popular consensus. In Tunisia and in Africa in general, these conditions are not present. Structural conditions that block national consensus include: corrupt lifetime presidents, the high "economic rents" which can be extracted from mineral and oil / gas resources, ethnic tribal antagonisms, the attitude that an election victory means the winning party's exclusive right to decide without consulting the opposition and population growth which intensifies competition for a limited economic resources.

It should be obvious that good advice and finance from abroad cannot create real change in a country unless the local structures and power relations allow it. Europeans do not have to look outside the EU: for more than 100 years, Italy has used internal transfers to reduce the economic and productive distance between the north and the south of the country – without success.

Yet, since the 1960s, Western countries have provided development aid to developing countries in the belief that they could. The development in per capita income in sub-Saharan Africa gives reason to dampen such optimism. Income per capita varies greatly from year to year not due to fluctuations in the size of development aid, but due to the development in international raw material prices. According to World Bank estimates, per capita income expressed in constant year 2010 US-dollar in sub-Saharan Africa was \$1,256 in 1967, \$1,221 in 2000 and \$1,657 in 2019.⁶ The increase from 2010 to 2019 is mainly due to the China effect, which triggered a sharp increase in an international demand for raw materials, as well as economic liberalization. 'Assistance to democracy and good governance' received a modest but growing share of development funds over the last 20 years; yet, the International Democracy Index in 2020 showed the lowest level since 2006.⁷

Europeans must be more humble with regard to the impact which EU assistance can achieve realistically. In 1960, the challenge of effectively assisting progress in Africa seemed manageable: Europe's population was more than twice the African.⁸ That ratio has been reversed, and the difference in technical knowledge has shrunk. The number of university graduates has expanded vastly, and the world-wide-web equalizes access to new technical information and innovative finance-, regulatory and governance concepts.

⁶ Source: : <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.KD?locations=ZG>

⁷ Source: Democracy Index 2020 report, Economist

⁸ Source: UNDES, World Population Prospects 2019

Western countries can provide useful punctual assistance in highly specialized areas when local authorities so wish. For example, how to effectively design and manage a green energy system where energy production fluctuates up and down in step with solar and wind intensity. It can make the general technological development within a supported sector more flexible. But the belief that aid can lead to structural changes in society is an expression of inappropriate Western arrogance.

Conclusion: there are no easy solutions. Also in the future, migration policy will be fraught with muddy and contradictory compromises, accompanied by lots of hypocrisy.