

Aid conditionality on migration control is immoral

Dr Awil Mohamoud • 23 March 2021

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On 25 March 2021, the European Parliament votes on the “Report for a new Africa-EU Strategy”, which will contribute to the revised Africa-EU Strategy to be adopted at the upcoming AU-EU Summit. Amidst resurgent debates about migration conditionalities towards Africa and a possible inclusion of such provisions in the report, Dr Awil Mohamoud, Director of the African Diaspora Policy Centre in The Hague, argues that imposing migration conditionalities fundamentally contradicts the EU’s objective of a deepened partnership with Africa.

Development cooperation should not be used as a carrot-and-stick instrument for managing migration. Initially, development aid was instituted to reduce poverty, tackle inequality and address social and economic underdevelopment in the Global South. It was not at all designed to advance a restricted migration management policy. In fact, there is a growing body of evidence indicating that the tendency of people to migrate cannot be reduced by development cooperation. It is simply not the right instrument.

The proposition of tying development cooperation to migration management in Africa is inhumane and should be resisted by all means. It is a cheap and punitive political manoeuvre to harm the poor in Africa, who are disadvantaged when development aid is used to prevent migration rather than supporting better livelihoods. It is also a poison bill aimed at watering down the value and quality of the new “Report on the

EU-Africa Strategy – a partnership for sustainable and inclusive development” that the Development Committee of the European Parliament has been working on since January 2020. This despicable tactic only serves to frustrate and undermine the progress made in the Africa-EU political dialogues since the [Joint Africa-EU Strategy \(JAES\)](#) was adopted in Lisbon in 2007. It raises questions on the EU’s commitment for a fair and genuine partnership with Africa based on mutual respect and cooperation beneficial to the people of both continents. It is also a matter of trust and good faith in the negotiations with regards to the ongoing Africa-EU migration and mobility political dialogues.

Decoupling migration from development

Migration has become a sticking point in advancing the cooperation and partnership between Africa and Europe in several critical areas such as the creation of legal and regular pathways for labour migration. But migration policy should not be misused to undermine an elevated cooperation between Africa and Europe in the fight against poverty, injustice, human rights violations, lawlessness, insecurity, and political and social instability. Thus, it is perhaps time for migration policy to be addressed outside development cooperation to avoid such recurring irritations. It is time to decouple both policies because they are not compatible. We should demand it adamantly through increased civil society pressure at national and EU level.

Delinking development policy from migration policy now demands a call for action. We need a serious discussion during the upcoming AU-EU Summit focusing on the issue of migration and mobility in the Africa-EU Partnership. We should be bold and demand a drastic EU policy change on this toxic issue. VENRO, CONCORD and other broad civil society networks, including the diaspora, can take the lead on a campaign on this matter.

Contesting the narrative

It is also time to contest the prevailing narrative on migration that is largely false and based on the skewed premise of the “African invasion in Europe” propagated by quite a number of mostly right-wing European politicians and media. This is nothing more than an exaggeration. In fact, according to African migration researchers, today there are more Europeans in Africa than Africans in Europe.

The false “invasion narrative” is driving the prevailing policy perception in European countries that migration is a threat and a problem that must be managed and controlled at all costs. This neglects the obvious development benefits of migration to Europe, which were again clearly highlighted during the Covid-19 pandemic. The contributions of migrant essential workers to healthcare and to the day-to-day running of essential services in many countries in Europe in this time of crisis are perfect examples. Unfortunately, many essential migrant workers have lost their lives in this courageous service for European societies.

Developing a counter narrative on migration and highlighting the development benefits of migration is critical – not only for Africa, but also for Europe. It is generally

conceived that the history of migration is the history of human struggles to survive, to prosper, to escape insecurity and poverty, and to move in response to opportunity. In short, migration is the oldest action against poverty. From the perspective of Africa, migration in the form of labour mobility within the continent and beyond is both a force for poverty reduction as well as a force for development. The remittances transferred by the migrants in Africa and abroad are testimony to this observation.

No abuse of development means for migration control

In summary, I am totally against using development funds to advance the EU migration management objectives. Nonetheless, development aid can be targeted to improve the lives and well-being of migrants and refugees in many African countries surviving in abject conditions. This is what the EU committed to do with its Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF) created during the Valletta Summit on Migration in November 2015. However, most of the fund was eventually diverted to migration management; namely, combating human trafficking and smuggling as well as regulating and facilitating the repatriation and re-admission of nationals of a contracting state with irregular residence status to another contracting state.

Another area that development aid can be targeted to is the creation of social safety net programmes for refugees and migrants in Africa that were hit hardest by the Covid-19 pandemic, which re-exposed their vulnerability. On this point, the lesson from the pandemic is the urgent need to have social safety net schemes for migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons in Africa both in times of crisis and in times of relative stability. Doing this will be in line with the commitment made by many European countries to realise the goals of the Global Compact for Migration (GCM) as related to the Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), expected to be achieved by 2030. In a nutshell, it is time to use development aid for what it was originally intended: fighting against poverty and inequality rather than to be used as an instrument to advance a toxic and divisive migration management policy.

Dr. Awil Mohamoud is the Director of the African Diaspora Policy Centre (ADPC), a diaspora think tank based in The Hague (Netherlands).