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# EU-Africa Relations on Migration: Development, Human Rights & Social Justice in the Mediterranean Route


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# 1. – Introduction

The relationship between the European Union (EU) and Africa has long been shaped by the complex dynamics of migration, a phenomenon that is deeply intertwined with historical, economic, and political forces. Migration between these two continents is not merely a contemporary issue but a reflection of centuries of interconnectedness, exploitation, and inequality. This dissertation seeks to explore the multifaceted dimensions of EU-Africa relations on migration, focusing on the structural drivers of migration, the EU's border management and foreign policy, and the critique of remittances as a development tool. By examining these themes, the dissertation aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how migration is shaped by global inequalities, imperial legacies, and neoliberal policies, as well as how these forces are perpetuated through contemporary migration management practices.

The dissertation is structured into three main chapters, each addressing a critical aspect of EU-Africa migration relations. The first chapter delves into the historical and structural drivers of migration, focusing on the trends of Africa-EU migration, the role of inequality and underdevelopment, and the impact of imperialism and neoliberalism. It argues that modern migration cannot be understood in isolation from the historical exploitation of African resources and labor by European powers, nor from the ongoing economic policies that perpetuate global inequalities. By examining the structural roots of migration, this chapter sets the stage for understanding why migration flows persist and how they are shaped by broader global systems.

The second chapter shifts the focus to the EU's border management and foreign policy towards Africa. It provides a critical analysis of the EU's external border policies, particularly the post-Schengen era, and their impact on migratory flows. This chapter also explores the historical context of Italy-Libya relations, which have played a pivotal role in shaping the EU's approach to border management in the Mediterranean. Additionally, it evaluates the viability and effects of Mobility Partnership projects, which are often touted as a cooperative solution to migration management but have been criticized for reinforcing unequal power dynamics between the EU and African states. Through this analysis, the chapter highlights the contradictions and consequences of the EU's border policies, which often prioritize security and control over human rights and development.

The third chapter critiques the widely promoted argument that remittances—money sent home by migrants—can serve as a tool for development. Drawing on Immanuel Ness's work *Migration as Economic Imperialism* and Hannah Cross's article *Imperialism and Labour*, this chapter challenges the neoliberal narrative that remittances can offset the negative effects of migration and underdevelopment. It argues that the reliance on remittances as a development strategy reflects a broader trend of shifting responsibility for development onto individuals rather than addressing systemic inequalities. By deconstructing this argument, the chapter underscores the need for a more equitable and structural approach to development that goes beyond the individual actions of migrants.

To contextualize these discussions, it is essential to define key concepts related to EU foreign border policy and migration management. Migration management refers to the policies and practices employed by states and international organizations to regulate and control migratory flows. This includes measures such as border security, visa regimes, and bilateral agreements. The EU external border policy encompasses the strategies and mechanisms used by the EU to manage its borders, particularly in the post-Schengen era, which has seen an increasing emphasis on externalizing border controls to non-EU countries. Mobility Partnerships are bilateral agreements between the EU and third countries aimed at managing migration through cooperation on issues such as border control, readmission, and legal migration pathways. While these partnerships are framed as mutually beneficial, they often reflect power asymmetries and prioritize the interests of the EU over those of partner countries.

Another critical concept is remittances, which are financial transfers made by migrants to their families or communities in their countries of origin. While remittances are often celebrated for their potential to alleviate poverty and stimulate development, this dissertation critiques the overreliance on remittances as a development strategy, arguing that it obscures the structural inequalities that drive migration in the first place. Finally, the concept of imperialism is central to this dissertation, referring to the historical and ongoing domination of African economies and societies by European powers, often through economic and political means. Neoliberalism, as an extension of imperialism, refers to the global economic policies that prioritize market liberalization, privatization, and deregulation, often at the expense of social welfare and equitable development.

In conclusion, this dissertation seeks to provide a critical and comprehensive analysis of EU-Africa relations on migration, highlighting the structural inequalities, historical legacies, and contemporary policies that shape these dynamics. By examining the drivers of migration, the EU’s border management strategies, and the critique of remittances as development, it aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the complexities and contradictions inherent in EU-Africa migration relations. Ultimately, this dissertation calls for a rethinking of migration policies and development strategies that prioritize equity, justice, and human rights over security and control.

# 2. - Explaining Africa-EU migratory flows

## 2.1 - Introduction

This chapter of the study aims to provide a comprehensive description and explanation of the phenomenon of regular (and “irregular”) emigration of people coming from the African continent and into EU-member states through the Mediterranean route. To this end, it develops its analysis through an attentive review of the available literature on the matter. Moreover, the scope of the argument is built upon a Marxist approach: it analyzes the macro-economic (structural) variables and drivers of the phenomenon of labor migration inscribed in modern international capitalism and in the history of international relations between sending and host countries, focusing on the role of structural inequality and underdevelopment between them as primary collective motor of emigration; as well as the conditions that migrants experience during their permanence in destination states.

## 2.2 - Africa-EU Immigration Trends

Immigration, as a topic, especially African immigration, has become a stable presence in European political discourse, as diverse political forces have made the phenomenon either a question of border security, a danger for national identity and economic stability or a humanitarian problem that civilized nations should take responsibility for, when not directly an economic resource to directly catalyze and exploit. In order to better grasp the magnitude of African migration towards European borders, it would be useful to compare some pertinent data: the IOM (the International Organization for Migration) in its latest report accounts that in 2020 there were globally 281 million international migrants, equal to 3.6% of the world’s population, of these, 169 were detected in 2019 to be labor migrants. The document also reports that, in 2022, the total number of displaced persons, which accounts for refugees, asylum-seekers and people in need of international protection, was 117 million. The number of migrants from African states in all EU states, at least the most recently reported number, is 40.6 million people. African migrants represent a mere 14.5% of the global migrant population, a share inferior to both Asia (41%) and Europe itself (22.5%), moreover, less than one third of that population (27.2%) lives in Europe (AEF Summit on African Migration).

It’s surely true, as most European medias highlight, that Africa-Eu migration has risen in absolute value in the last 15 years, but as it has increased by 26% since 2010, intra-Africa migration had by 46.3%. The latest ETTG (European Think Tanks Group) Policy Brief on Migration points out to the increasing significance of migration to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, as employment opportunities in sectors like construction, manufacturing, hospitality and retail have attracted many mainly from East and North Africa. The brief also confirms that most of African migration is intra-Africa, as 82.4 % of the population migrates inside the continent, only 12.7% chooses European states as destinations (UNDESA). The origin of this effect on internal migration can be traced to the development of continent-wide free movement protocols between states and regional councils, aimed at economic cooperation and mutual development. Nonetheless, the whole internal migrant population is not completely represented by the category of economic migrants, as still today, Africa, much like other regions in the world, is deeply affected by conflicts and hosts millions of displaced people within or from regions like the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia and recently, Sudan, from which 1.8 million people left, seeking asylum in neighboring countries to escape the horrors of the civil war. They are very rarely detected in sea arrivals in Europe. Indeed, it is estimated that only 7.2% of African migrants in European states are refugees, as reports point out that in 2020 Syrian refugees' number (1 million) was higher than the number of African refugees (700 thousand) (AEF). Most of African migration in Europe, 80% for the AEF Summit, is economically driven, meaning it is mainly composed by a population, a very young one among other things, of individuals looking for better economic prospects.

The most pressing concern in the European political analysis and action towards African immigration relates to irregular migration. Irregular border crossings happen mainly by sea, through the Mediterranean. FRONTEX, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, identifies four established routes to Europe:

- The Central Mediterranean Route, with crossing of migrants mostly coming from Sub-Saharan Africa and North Africa, transiting via Tunisia and Libya, targeting the coasts of southern Italy and Malta. Up to November 2024, the number of arrivals amounted to 62000, following what Frontex defines a sharp downward trend.
- The Eastern Mediterranean Route, which doesn't concern Africa much as Syrian asylum seekers, targeting Greece, Cyprus and Bulgaria. It has seen a steady rise in 2024, with 64000 crossings recorded.
- The Western Mediterranean Route, with migrants coming predominantly from Algeria, Morocco and Sub-Saharan Africa, mainly targeting the *enclaves* of Ceuta and Melilla in Spain. 41800 crossings were recorded in the first eleven months of 2024, which results to be the highest number since 2009, possibly due to deteriorating security and humanitarian situation in Western Africa.
- The West African Route, which regards the irregular arrivals to the Canarie Islands, with migrants transiting through Morocco, Western Sahara, Mauritania, Senegal and Gambia.

Irregular border crossings remain a feature of the migration flow between the continents, despite playing a minor role in it – the latest estimate published by the IOM that about 80% of all migrants arriving from Northern and Western Africa between 2011 and 2016, a period of general enlargement of the number of irregular arrival, migrated to Europe through regular channels- , casting a spotlight on itself over the years due to the outrageous number of incidents that involved the Mediterranean Routes. Improper and overloaded vessels travel unsafely through the sea smuggling men, women and often children to the coasts of Malta, Lampedusa, Cutro, and other destinations, waiting to be accepted by the border authorities, when the weather don't make them sink or die during the trip. The ETTG Brief Summit on Migration asserts that the central Mediterranean crossing is now the world's most deadly migration route, with 24502 people dead or gone missing during the travel during the period between 2014 and 2024, off the total of 31272 that includes the other two main Mediterranean Routes (FRONTEX), with the major cause of death being drowning. European foreign policy projects have tried to answer the phenomenon focalizing action at the "roots" of irregular migration, meaning by addressing the role of human smugglers and criminal networks in sending countries, increasing policing and border control both in the sending and the receiving countries, so to prevent illegal departures directly. Despite this, as these security measures were implemented, little to no action went into facilitating and promoting regular migration, instead, an analysis of Schengen applications reveals high rejection rates especially among Africans that require short visas for business and tourism compared to other nationalities. Although a decrease in Schengen visa applications in Africa has been recorded between 2014 and 2022, the rejection rate over the same period increased from 18% to 30%.

The next chapter will investigate the European Union extra-Schengen foreign policy, while the next paragraph will focus specifically on migrant labor in the Eu states, first looking at the international economic infrastructure that encourages labor migration from regions of the Global South (the so called "productive periphery"), such as African countries, towards regions of the Global North, such as European countries.

## 2.3 - Economic Drivers of Migration: a Brief History of Global Inequality and Underdevelopment

To have a truly comprehensive view specifically of African migration towards EU states, it's first necessary to understand it as a global phenomenon dependent on complex factors that often overfly the sphere of interpretations and approaches solely focused on the desire for better conditions, on individual agency and freedom to decide another place to live (clearly, this concept seems immediate considering refugees as subjects, but given the demonstrated centrality of labor migration in the whole migratory phenomenon, this dissertation focuses especially on the latter) that might move a person to leave their homeland, the right to "mobility", as the UN Human Development Report of 2009 on Human Mobility and Development puts it. Indeed, while the individual dimension of migration drivers can and is considered valid, it alone does not describe the global structure around the phenomenon of labor migration, made up of both geopolitical and economic interests, historical variables and regional as well as international regulations. Moreover, it is necessary to center the framework on the dimensions of equality, development, human and labor rights, without these dimensions the picture would remain unclear, if not partial and biased. This paragraph is then dedicated to the reconstruction and of this structure, analyzing the history of inequality in trade relations between the developed destination states of the Global North and the underdeveloped origin countries of the Global South as a fundamental element to explain modern migration between Africa and EU countries; it also provides an accurate description, through the review of authoritative sources, of the evolution of the institutional background regarding migration programs and, finally, addresses the conditions and role of migrant labor in destination states.

Economic development, with all the nuances that its definition imposes, and migration, both internal and international, are deeply interconnected phenomena. Surely, one could assume the presence of affordable and functioning healthcare, access to services and infrastructures and to a stable and diversified job market are all variables that could dictate the possibilities and choices that a person has available during their life in a specific territory, thus also influencing their choices towards changing city, region, country to work or to live in -the latter option being really inflated especially for migrants coming from the global south into European borders, as many member states impose severe limitations to settlement and citizenship options for migrant workers coming from outside the Schengen zone, as we'll explore later-, but that interconnection is not limited to influencing migration as an individual choice. Rather it's levels of inequalities in economic development between zones of the world and how that inequality is being maintained that directly build the conditions and infrastructure that, in turn, builds the structural drivers for modern migration. At the same time, migration itself corroborates the process of extraction of resources from developing countries by developed countries, for the international market, consolidating it not only to become a permanent feature of international capitalism, but also to expand over the years to the point we are now and being recognized, by development scholars and international institutions, as itself a mean to foster development in poorer countries. Indeed, from the 2000s onwards, labor migration has been directly regarded by some development scholars and international organizations as a possible direct source of development for underdeveloped regions in the world, promoting the role of remittances to origin countries as a source of credit useful for national economic progress.

To understand the role of development inequality between the global south and north in labor migration it's beneficial to introduce the argument with a brief recap of the modern history of relations (both economic and political) between states of the global North and the global South.

## 2.4 - Unequal Exchange: Imperialism and Inequality as Structural Drivers of Migration

Historian L.S. Stravianos, in his work *Global Rift: The Third World Comes of Age*, describes the "Third World" as a category of regions of the planet that became underdeveloped because of commercial, financial and industrial capitalism, firstly exercised by western European mercantilist economic powers in the sixteenth century and continued throughout history until essentially the second half of the twentieth. It was represented by countries which were almost completely subordinate and economically dependent on the colonial control of the metropolitan and imperialist states, that Stravianos calls the First World. These two categories most often overlap with the definitions of Global South and Global North, coined by political activist Carl Oglesby in 1969, to describe the relation of military and economic dominance that northern capitalist countries with a colonial history had with their former dominions, even after the decolonization processes started in the mid nineteenth century.

At the end of the eighteenth century, regions such as Eastern Europe, Latin America, the Middle East, India, China, Southeast Asia, and most of all the African continent, had been incorporated as fundamental outposts for Western industrial capitalism. They were forced into unequal trade relations, as these countries on the periphery, not having direct control of their resources, exchanged raw materials and agricultural products for industrial commodities, the latter being realized through the materials extracted from the Third World, enabling the First World to affirm itself as the global center for manufacturing, finance and commerce. In the aftermath of the second world war, with communist parties waging anti-colonial struggles in Asia, Africa, Latin America and Eastern Europe, and colonialist countries like France, Netherlands, UK and Portugal being compelled to concede freedom to their former dominions, most of Third World regions succeeded in gaining formal independence. However, the colonial powers of the First World maintained and expanded economic control over their resources through economic imperialism. As Marxist migration scholar Immanuel Ness puts it, in his work *Immigration as economic imperialism*

*"The imperial control exercised through enforcing structural economic inequality over two centuries has been and remains the most significant obstacle to the development of the Global South." (Ness, 2021)*

Indeed, in most instances, the decolonization process started in the aftermath of the second world war, that left the European powers heavily weakened and allowed the United States to rise to become a global hegemonic power (at the time rivaled only by the USSR), left the newly independent countries with insufficient capital to fund essential development project, and reduced taxation capacity to provide basic public services in favor of the poor rural population, due to independent governments not being able to re-extract the necessary wealth from the national elites that directly communicated with the colonizers. Only countries where urban workers and rural peasants were able to engage in protest and rebellion managed to achieve some form of redistribution. Moreover, while European countries relied on the funds of the Marshall Plan, the retreat of colonial authorities was accompanied by the withdrawal of financing aimed at essential human needs, leaving that responsibility to the newly independent and unprepared governments, provoking outbreaks of poverty and famine that persevered in the post-independence era.

Furthermore, decolonization in many countries did not come along with a process of restructuring economic control of resources, only new countries deemed strategically and economically valuable received financial support by the US and its allies, even when these countries lacked social programs or their government displaying authoritarian features. In this sense, the role of colonialism, even after its formal defeat, built and maintained the structure of global inequality that we recognize today.

A fundamental source of global wealth inequality, which started receiving attention from social scientists during the 70s, is the perpetual unequal exchange that made Western powers able to maintain their economic dominance. Political economist Arghiri Emmanuel, in his oeuvre *Unequal Exchange: A Study of the Imperialism of Trade,* argues that unequal exchange in trade is nothing more than the extension of colonial plunder: capitalism enriched core imperialist countries through the impoverishment of peripheral economies of the Global South. He also points out, recovering Marx's notion of class struggle, that while the emergence of class society in core countries moved workers to organize in unions and demand their governments for statal intervention and redistribution, with forms of welfare for the marginalized and the mass of displaced people from the countryside caused by the expansion of industrialization and market economy, instead, workers on the periphery did not have the same opportunity.

The focus of their struggles and associationism was posited on freeing themselves of colonial control. Emmanuel's model is based on the observation of the history of commercial exchange between the "center" and the "periphery", recognizing the role of the systematic plunder conducted by metropolitan core countries of Europe, together with settler-colonial countries, at the expenses of peripheral countries and native communities, in the modern extraction of economic benefits from the peripheral countries that achieved political independence but are still deeply economically subordinated in the international capitalist structure. This theory is directly opposed to classical economists' analysis of wealth inequality, as they consider the mobility of capital the main factor in the determination of prices and profits, without considering the (at the time more relevant) relative immobility of labor and that the consistently lower wage rates in the Global South prevented the wage equalization that David Ricardo hoped for. In fact, capitalist profits to this day are realized through imperialist investment in poor countries, exploiting the lower wage rates. In turn, developed countries have ensured sufficiently great differentials in wage rates to maintain their comparative advantage in labor price, especially low-skilled labor.

Due to the persistence of wage inequality between the center and the periphery, workers in poor countries are pushed into internal and international, temporary low-wage migration just to survive (Ricci 2021). While capital has the capacity for international mobility, because of the temporary nature of modern migration programs (on which we'll expand later), labor is unable to fully relocate from poor to rich countries to increase wages. Labor migration from underdeveloped countries to developed countries in the '60s and the '70s was more limited than in the 2020s, the exceptions being high skilled workers and migration routes directly connected to colonial legacies (Pakistan-Britain, Algeria-France, Caribbean-United States and others), and so initially Immanuel somewhat hoped that if a sufficiently high level of labor mobility could have resulted in a gradual equalization of wage rates among underdeveloped and developed countries, but he ultimately discarded it as "unrealistic and frivolous" (Emmanuel 1972:60). Instead, he ended up advocating for the establishment of a system of wealth and income redistribution which encompassed both the national and the international sphere, but this solution as well remains highly improbable in today's neoliberal capitalism.

Nonetheless, Immanuel's theory of unequal exchange has been recovered by contemporary Marxist scholars, especially Neo-Gramscian thinkers, such as Zak Cope. He contends that unequal exchange is a constant attribute of the world political economy which, through the modern instruments of oligopoly capital, establishes the division among rich and poor countries. Additionally, this global divide creates new dimensions of class struggle on an international scale, considering that it solidifies a separation between the interests of workers of rich countries, that want to maintain their relative privilege, and those of poor ones that would benefit from an equalization process.

It is possible to even observe this same phenomenon reflected in "micro-scale" in the history of economic development of nation-states which are today defined as fully developed, such as most western European countries. For example, a study from the IMISCOE Regional Reader conducted by migration scholar Rodriguez-Pena on the continuity of migration drivers gives an historical perspective of Spanish migration history through a social transformation approach, analyzing how changes at the economic, political and cultural level impact timing, volume and direction of immigration, and in particular trying to discover the mechanisms that allow for transition from trends of net emigration to net immigration.

The author distinguishes four historical phases of Spanish migration trends: from the 1880s to mid-1930s, from mid-1930s to late 1950s, from 1960s to mid-1970s and finally from mid-1970s to present times. The first phase was characterized by incipient and asymmetric industrialization, urbanization processes, state expansion as well as the emergence of the first social security nets, and triggered mutations in the territorial migration trends: as southern Spain featured already a huge, short-distance rural-rural migration trend of agricultural workers towards latifundiums, northern Spain featured long-distance seasonal outward migration in search of better economic opportunities.

In the early twentieth century in-migration rates in the North-eastern and eastern regions doubled as traditional destinations in southern and central Spain (except for the capital Madrid) lost importance, as advancements in the railway system aided the internationalization process of Spanish economy it also consolidated regional infrastructural inequalities, shaping regional economic differences, shifting in the orientation of rural migratory trends towards the flourishing cities of the north-eastern and eastern coasts. Also, the state expansion benefited the middle class that found stable jobs in the administration, and centralization processes started in the 1800s introduced new taxes and impediments to accessing communal lands, boosting emigration rates for day laborers and small agricultural producers of northwestern regions. The mid-1920s also saw the introduction of migrant labor laws, introducing restricting conditions for emigrating towards Morocco, and the early-1930s saw a law restricting the use of internal migrant labor in favor of local unemployed workers, decreasing migration trends both inwards and outwards.

With the coming of the Francoist dictatorship, living and working standards precipitated, and with them the migration capabilities and most of the rights of Spanish citizens. Emigration was moreover de-facto outlawed, but the ban was lifted in the mid-40s for an although restrictive infrastructure for state-assisted migration (introduction of travel documents, work visas, probation officers targeting regime opposers) redirecting international flows towards closer European states. Another characteristic of this period was the increase of urban-rural migration, as unemployment and insecurity drove people out of urban centers, and the food quotas system encouraged pendular migration between rural and urban zones, until even these movements were suppressed by other security measures.

The third phase, going from the 1950s to the 1970s, was characterized by three socio-economic shifts: the transition to an industrialized and service economy, technological innovation, and shifts in migratory policy. The economic recovery, helped by American aid and liberalization policies, made both internal and international migration trends (now regulated by the Spanish Emigration Institute) spike once more, further exacerbating the dynamism of Northeastern, eastern cities, European states and also new mediterranean destinations, at the expense of southern landholdings.

Finally, the fourth phase features Spain's democratic transition in 1975 and a spectacular economic growth during the mid-1990s, especially for the construction and service sectors. This growth was accompanied by an increase in internal migration trends and a slight decrease in regional inequalities. Also, in 1988 immigration officially surpassed emigration rates, even the accession to the EU in 1986 didn't spark mass emigration, given the reduction in wage rate differentials between other European states. Despite this, the 2008 crisis heavily disrupted Spanish financial and labor market, causing massive job destruction and growth in informal jobs, encouraging immigrants and skilled youth emigration and leading to the consolidation of Southern and Central Spain depopulation trend. The experience of Spain, which other scholars demonstrate* to be closely superimposable to other European countries' experiences, (given eventual historical differences), like Italy and France, highlight the role of state stabilization and expansion, the international wage rate and development differentials in influencing migratory trends of a country, as well as demonstrating that international inequality reflects national inequality.

## 2.5 - Western Response to Global Inequality: Neoliberalism, Labor Mobility and Development

Global inequality to this day doesn't seem to decrease, instead the World Inequality Report of 2022 conducted by the Paris School of Economics, supervised by economists Lucas Chancel, Thomas Piketty, Emmauel Saez and Gabriel Zucman, detects a sensible increase in the gap between rich and poor starting from 1980. This trend started stabilizing during the same period, the latter being characterized by a trend of growth in wealth for rich countries and instead by stagnating when not negative trends for poor and middle-income economies in Asia, Africa and Latin America, without even considering the dramatic expanse in the number of millionaires and billionaires over this forty-year period.

Since the post-independence era, Western powers have devised and funded tools against poverty and underdevelopment, in the form of three main types of foreign revenue: foreign aid, foreign investment, and, most recently, labor-migration remittances. The first two types of foreign revenue comprise development programs mostly funded or devised by the United States and Western European countries: the IMF (International Monetary Funds), the World Bank, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), all of these institutions funneled capital to governments of Global South countries to finance developmental programs. However, they were exchanged for high-interest loans, which often led to default, debt restructuring on the part of the IMF, collateralization with mineral and agricultural resources, essentially benefiting the donors more than the receivers. Considering the value of foreign aid compared to that of the natural resources extracted first by colonial governments and then by western corporations, the results in terms of development were underwhelming in most recipient countries, only governments that enacted land reform programs and expropriated key resources, such as Taiwan, managed to see their poverty level reduced (Lin 1981).

Since the Cold War, the western world, headed by the United States, needed a political instrument to draw intellectual support in the Global South away from USSR's and China existing model of Marxist, state-centered development in favor of a theory of capitalist development. One of these examples, as Immanuel Ness notes, was classical political economist W.W. Rostow's theory of modernization, exposed in 1960 in his book *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto*, in which Rostow expressed his distaste for communism and the Soviet Union, instead advocating for a mechanistic theory of capitalist development that was never replicated in a nation-state (Rostow 1960, Ness 2022: 55). His approach favored foreign assistance towards governments that embraced the western, free market-based paradigm for development.

Rostow was also appointed national security adviser during Lyndon Johnson presidency, and he encouraged and organized military intervention to suppress popular leftist organizations and socialist movements in the Global South, and in the following years the US Agency for International Development continued to oppose development projects that involved land and resource redistribution in favor of market-centered approaches. Rostow's model ignored the fact that Northern economies had developed through state intervention and regulated markets. Nonetheless, despite the unsuccess of free market policies in fostering development, western countries continued to demand the removal of tariffs and barriers to trade in order to be recognized in the international market. Moreover, political economist Ha Joon Chang, in his book *Bad Samaritans* explains that the imposition of deregulated capitalism has negatively affected the development and economic growth of previously planned economies of the developing world (Chang 2009).

Alongside financial aid, foreign direct investments (FDI) emerged during the 80s and 90s as useful tools for developmental assistance. They consist of funding coming from investors, often multinational enterprises from highly developed countries, to allow governments to establish development projects in developing countries. They take advantage of tax incentives and lower labor costs and establish key links in global supply chains. Globalization and the expansion of the international market facilitated the spread of foreign direct investments in the global south, overcoming direct financial aid since the 90s.

Developing countries have devised instruments to insert themselves in the global value chain and attract investments by foreign corporations, an example of these strategies are the creation of Special Economic Zones, specific areas with low tariff and taxation levels that multinational corporations use to create horizontal and vertical linkages for the development of economies of scale of industrial commodities and services. The popularity of these zones has greatly expanded over the years, with 5400 SEZs detected in 2019 (UNCTAD), and in 2021 there were 203 just in Africa (UNCTAD, 2021). The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, in a report of 2019, describe the boom of the SEZ phenomenon as a "response to increasing competition for internationally mobile investment", but also observes that many zones are underperforming, and they don't necessarily increase the amount of foreign investments flowing in the country, nor does it guarantee a stable incorporation into the global value chain. The same report sheds doubt on their ability to have the desired positive effect on development, as "too many zones operate as enclaves with limited impact beyond their confines" (UN 2019b: 13).

The rise of neoliberalism made underdeveloped countries move further away from providing essential development for the popular masses both in rural and urban localities, instead concentrating funds on production networks (agricultural and industrial commodities) strategic for exports to foreign markets. Another crucial characteristic of Special Economic Zones, especially in the manufacturing sector, is that they are heavily reliant on the availability of low-skilled migrant labor, both to set them up and to maintain production, which makes them very vulnerable to externalities and shocks in the supply of cheap labor, such as during the Covid-19 pandemic. Furthermore, to achieve a constant labor supply they often rely on temporary hiring programs devised by private recruitment agencies, which in turn are in contact private contractors in sending countries. The private market of migrant labor is a direct consequence of the lack of a global migration regime (Ness 2022) and contributes to increasing the costs of migration for temporary laborers, as they are obligated to pay recruitment costs.

This leads us to the third source of foreign revenue, which is remittances. They are direct transfers of foreign currencies that migrant laborers send back to their original countries, usually directed towards the migrant family unit, to fund essential services and cover daily costs. Remittances have become a stable source of foreign earnings for many states of the Global South. The World Bank reports that remittances to lower and middle-income countries detected were estimated to be around 685 billion of US dollars in 2024, a whopping 5.8% increase compared to 2023, with African sending countries totalizing 114 billion in total (World Bank). To this day, remittances outpace every other form of foreign aid. It must be observed, however, that the countries which receive most remittances are usually already integrated in the global production network and serve an important role in commodity supply chains, differently from the poorest countries which most frequently do not feature a level of development necessary to supply a stable number of migrant laborers to other countries, as they cannot manage to educate or train them (De Haas 2020). Migrant remittances started being considered valuable instrument in fostering development by theorists since the release of the United Nations Development Programme's *Human Development Report 2009: Overcoming Barriers: Human Mobility and Development* (UNDP 2009). The document frames migration as a human freedom:

*"…By referring to the capability to decide where to live as well as the act of movement itself, we recognize the importance of the conditions under which people are, or are not, able to choose their place of residence. …Our concern, however, is not only with movement but also with the freedom that people must decide whether to move. Mobility is a freedom – movement is the exercise of that freedom." (UNDP 2009: 15)*

At the same time, the UNDP Report warns about the unsafe conditions, the costs, the insecurity and the hostile environments related to the migratory experience:

*"Human movement can be associated with trade-offs – people may gain in some and lose in other dimensions of freedom. … workers in the GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) states accept severe limitations to their rights as a condition for permission to work. They earn*

*higher pay than at home, but cannot be with their families, obtain permanent residence or change employers. ...People living and working with irregular status are often denied a whole host of basic entitlements and services and lead their lives in constant fear of arrest or deportation." (UNDP 2009: 17)*

The United Nation report's approach to migration appears somewhat controversial: it praises it as a path towards higher wages and better living conditions but doesn't directly propose solutions to the problems that migrants encounter in the travel, such as the access and costs to labor visas, informality and xenophobia in labor relations once in destination states, and the constant threat of irregularity and deportation that follows the expiration of their visas. However, it did correctly predict that as global labor demand increases, nations will continue to negotiate agreements on globally recognized rights of migrant laborers.

To encourage states to reduce barriers to migration, in 2009, the UN organized the Global Forum on Migration conference. In this occasion the UN also took a more moderate stance on the role of remittances in fostering development, conceding that national and human development required a more comprehensive deployment of resources by appropriate public institutions, for which remittances alone are insufficient, but still recognizing them as a potential tool for economic growth (UNDP 2009: 108). Despite this, since funds travel directly from the migrant in the destination state to their family account in the origin state, national governments are essentially bypassed, and except for states that established projects for remittance services (see the recent EU-Africa partnership PRIME Africa on remittance-fueled development), they are unable to control how money is spent. One could assume that individuals may be able to rightfully decide how to spend their money for their interest, but as low-wage workers' remittances could cover sanitary and education costs, they alone are not able to finance and staff public schools nor build hospitals (Ness 2022: 63). In 2018 UN member nations signed the *Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration* in Morocco. It advanced on paper the rights of migrant laborers, but not being a treaty, it didn't feature any enforcement mechanism for states, nor for recruitment agencies and individuals, but instead relied on compliance to the UN Charter's Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Only a few regions in the world apply consistent regulations for migrants, such as the Schengen Zone.

## 2.6 - Conclusions

Clearly, labor migration from the Global South did not spur out of a preconceived development scheme funded by migrant remittances, it's rather a natural response to the ever-growing demand of cheap labor in high and middle-income economies. Poor peripheral countries suffered the implementation of neoliberal policies, as they reduced well-paid full-time jobs in favor of low-wage positions for specific production and service needs. Also, Marcel van der Linden noted that while industrialized countries of the Global North experienced Fordism, with the proliferation of social welfare state and manufacturers employing unionized labor, Global South countries didn't experience a similar phase. In fact, in the 80s and 90s, as production moved from the Global North to the Global South, unionization was eschewed by national governments to maintain wages low to attract investments (van der Linden 2021). Moreover, neoliberalism in southern economies makes workers redundant after they reach 25-30 years old. In this sense, international low-wage migration is driven by destabilized job markets in sending countries and better employment opportunities in Northern economies characterized by labor shortages in key sectors (manufacturing, agriculture, domestic services) (Sassen 2002). Despite the ever-growing economic importance of labor migration, there is no major global treaty regulating it, instead the main legal framework behind international migration remains bilateral agreements between states. Even inside the European Union Schengen Zone, where internal borders are abolished for the short-term free movement of people, migrant labor is admitted to crossing the border only through established bilateral agreements among singular states. This creates a patchy and inconsistent legal system for migration, shaped and influenced by political and economic vicissitudes between states. And, in this uneven system, private recruitment agencies insert themselves as brokers between migrant laborers in sending states and employers in receiving ones. In turn, acting as intermediaries, they charge high fees to migrants for their services (recruitment, migration processing, travel) and usually the costs are even higher in the case of low skilled migrants (Migration Data Portal 2021), further restricting the accessibility of migration. Under the guidelines provided by the Global Compact for Migration, migrants should pay no recruitment costs, but as available data show, most often recruiters, governments and employers impose a range of costs on migrants to work in destination states: document costs, passports, visas, residency permits, medical check-ups, training and language tests, transport costs, and, again, recruitment agencies.

To achieve a clearer picture of the European extra-Schengen migration legislative architecture, the next chapter is dedicated to the analysis of the history of EU's border policies and agreements with sending states, providing a focus on the evolution of EU's approach to border security and migration.

# 3. - European Border Management and Foreign Policy towards Africa

## 3.1 - Introduction

The relationship between Europe and Africa has long been shaped by migration, with historical, economic, and geopolitical ties influencing the movement of people across the Mediterranean. In recent decades, however, migration from Africa to Europe has become a focal point of political and public discourse, driven by factors such as conflict, economic inequality, climate change and demographic shifts. European foreign border and migration policies, particularly those targeting African migration, reflect a complex interplay between security concerns, humanitarian obligations and strategic interests. This chapter explores the evolution, implementation, and consequences of European policies aimed at managing migration from Africa, examining their implications for both regions. Furthermore, it argues that European foreign border and migration policies toward Africa are characterized by a tension between securitization and cooperation, which ultimately impedes migrants from ameliorating their situation. It examines how these policies affect migration dynamics, regional stability and the rights of migrants, while also considering the broader geopolitical and economic context of EU-Africa relations. By analyzing key policy frameworks, case studies, and the perspectives of stakeholders, this research seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities in managing migration between Europe and Africa.

## 3.2 - The Impact of Borders on Labor Mobility in EU-Africa Relations

Immanuel Ness, in his seminal work Migration as Economic Imperialism, argues that migration policies often serve as tools of economic imperialism, reinforcing global inequalities and exploiting labor from poorer regions. This chapter explores the detrimental effects of border regimes on labor mobility between the EU and Africa, drawing on Ness's framework to analyze how restrictive migration policies perpetuate economic dependency and hinder development in African nations. By examining the structural barriers imposed by borders, this chapter highlights the ways in which these policies undermine the potential benefits of labor mobility for both regions.

Borders, as physical and legal constructs, play a central role in regulating the movement of people. In the context of EU-Africa relations, border policies have increasingly become mechanisms for controlling and restricting labor mobility. Ness (2022) argues that these policies are not merely about security or sovereignty but are deeply embedded in the logic of economic imperialism. By limiting the movement of African workers, EU border regimes ensure a steady supply of cheap labor for European industries while preventing African economies from benefiting from the skills and remittances of their migrant workers. The Schengen Agreement, for instance, has created a fortress Europe that is largely inaccessible to African migrants. Visa requirements, biometric controls, and externalized border management (such as the EU's cooperation with North African countries to intercept migrants) have made it increasingly difficult for African workers to enter Europe legally. These barriers force many migrants into irregular channels, exposing them to exploitation and human rights abuses. Ness (2022) contends that such policies are designed to maintain a global hierarchy of labor, where African workers are relegated to precarious and low-wage jobs, both within and outside their home countries.

The restriction of labor mobility has profound economic consequences for African nations. Ness (2022) emphasizes that migration is a vital livelihood strategy for many Africans, providing opportunities for employment, skill acquisition, and income generation. However, border policies that limit these opportunities exacerbate poverty and underdevelopment in Africa. By preventing African workers from accessing higher-wage markets in Europe, these policies effectively trap them in economies with limited job prospects and low wages. Moreover, the EU's reliance on African labor for sectors such as agriculture, construction, and care work highlights the hypocrisy of its border policies. While European economies benefit from the labor of African migrants, often through irregular or temporary channels, African countries are denied the opportunity to harness the full potential of their labor force. Ness (2021) argues that this dynamic reflects a form of economic imperialism, where the Global North extracts labor and resources from the Global South while denying it the benefits of free movement.

The human cost of restrictive border policies is immense. African migrants who attempt to cross into Europe often face perilous journeys, with many losing their lives in the Mediterranean Sea or the Sahara Desert. Those who survive frequently encounter detention, deportation, and exploitation in transit countries. Ness (2021) highlights how these experiences are not accidental but are the direct result of policies designed to deter migration at any cost. The psychological and social impacts of these policies are equally devastating. Families are separated, communities are disrupted, and migrants are subjected to dehumanizing treatment. The criminalization of irregular migration further marginalizes African workers, pushing them into the shadows of society where they are vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. The scholar argues that these outcomes are consistent with the logic of economic imperialism, which prioritizes the interests of capital over the rights and dignity of workers. Given the damaging effects of current border regimes, it is essential to explore alternatives that promote fair and equitable labor mobility. Ness (2021) suggests that a more just approach to migration would involve recognizing the rights of workers to move freely and access decent work. This could be achieved through bilateral agreements that facilitate legal migration channels, protect the rights of migrant workers, and ensure that both sending and receiving countries benefit from labor mobility. For example, the EU could establish mobility partnerships with African countries that include provisions for skill development, fair wages, and social protection. Such agreements would not only address labor shortages in Europe but also contribute to the development of African economies through remittances and knowledge transfer. Additionally, the EU could invest in creating job opportunities in Africa, reducing the economic pressures that drive migration in the first place.

## 3.3 - Migration through the Central Mediterranean route: Italo-Libyan relations and the emergence of the post-Schengen EU external border policy

Cross-Mediterranean migration into the European Union was for many years a matter destined to not be addressed through a common political and legislative approach across member states, being instead left to be dealt with by the southern member states. This approach met its end with the outbreak of the migratory crisis of 2015, which forced the other European powers to become aware and engaged into adopting provisions, often extremely strict, to regulate external border crossing and migration. It must be observed as well that Mediterranean crossings were rather modest during the 90s, when the European Union had just emerged as an economic alliance, with the ratification of the Treaty of Maastricht and the launch of the European Common Market in 1993, and then with the establishment of the Schengen Agreement in 1995. Despite this, the elimination of internal borders between member states prompted a precautionary interest in exercising control over the external borders of the Union and the maritime routes connected to them. In this scheme of things, the particular history of Italy and its relationship with Libya appears central to understand a fundamental part of modern African migration trends towards Europe and how maritime crossings, especially over the Central Mediterranean Route, have been regulated since the 90s to this day. At the same time, it is possible to observe how migratory trends coming from outside Europe through southern states somewhat influenced the establishment of the Schengen zone in the first place.

Indeed, in the 1980s Italy, Spain and other countries like Greece on the periphery of the EEC (European Economic Community) were kept out of the initial talks for the creation of a borderless area that allowed for the crossing of both people and commodities. Initially, the area stipulated in the original Saarbrucken Accord (announced by France's president Francois Mitterrand and West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl in 1984) was meant to comprehend France, West Germany and the Benelux countries, but that project was later projected inside the EEC policy field and transformed into the foundations of Schengen (Comte, 2015). When the Accord was announced, Italian foreign minister Giulio Andreotti manifested a national interest in negotiating a similar agreement with France, which was quickly declined by his French counterpart. In fact, Italy was only admitted into the Schengen deliberations after having accommodated the extensive list of French demands on immigration policies: broad border policing cooperation, the adoption of a more conservative approach to immigration policy, a process of harmonization of visa requirements (which included demanding visas from countries across the Mediterranean), and the sign of a bilateral readmission agreement governing migrants caught illegally or rejected at the French border (Paoli, 2015). Eventually, Italy became a qualified member of the Schengen acquis, after harmonizing its immigration policy to more stricter regulations adopted by the other parties, and signed both the Saarbrucken Accord and the Schengen Agreement in 1990. After just one year after the implementation of the treaties, 10 out of 12 countries of the EEC had introduced visa requirements for all Arab states. This change alone had immediate consequences for migratory flows: the new legislative regime complicated the legal access of long-time employed seasonal agricultural workers in Sicily, Southern France and Corsica (Alba & Silberman, 2002; Fromentin, 2022), and for Pastore et al. (2006) the restriction of visa requirements in themselves created the incentives for illegal immigration, developing the Central Mediterranean route across the Sicilian channel.

In the same year as Italy's entry into the Schengen zone, specifically in February 1990, there were the first post-war Italian attempts to properly regulate migration, with the Martelli Law. The provision sought to regulate the arrival, registration, integration as well as a path to citizenship for migrants, but it would later reveal itself as ineffective and poorly enforceable, as the receptive facilities meant to house migrants weren't ready and the related personnel was poorly trained and insufficiently prepared to match the procedures described by the new legal framework (Tjønn et Jumbert, 2024). In fact, in 1991, when an Italian ship named Vlora carrying almost 20000 asylum seekers escaping post-communist Albania docked in the southern Italian port city of Bari, the Italian government initially housed the migrants in the city soccer stadium and brought food and water via helicopter drops. In a few days any attempt to process the migrants through the procedures set up by the Martelli law were discarded, as the Italian government, for its first time in its history, forcibly returned all arriving migrants back to Albania, violating the Refugee Convention. This event had a particular influence in Italian domestic politics in the 90s, as the public showed concern towards the possibility of increasing migration of "foreign" and "destitute" people and was confronted with the failure of the European integration approach that the Martelli Law had demonstrated, it built the basis for an "Euro-realist" political paradigm that privileged the pursue "national interest" over European integration in foreign policy and viewed *refoulement* as an acceptable practice, a paradigm later brought to electoral success by the *Forza Italia* party, headed by Silvio Berlusconi, in the 1994 elections. Again, as Tjønn and Jumbert state, in the mid-90s it's possible to observe the shift of the attitude of Italian public institutions towards immigration policy, becoming considerably restrictive, more prone to rely on bilateral agreements and forcible return, and in the later years, characterized by externalized border control across the Mediterranean and into Libya.

Indeed, Italy's new foreign policy priorities became the strengthening of economic ties and at the same time of border policy cooperation with countries along the Southern Coasts of the Mediterranean. In this political framework, Libya became a key country for Italy to engage with. After 1969, with the golpe orchestrated by colonel Mu'ammar Gaddafi, Libya spent much of the 1980s and 90s being considered as an international pariah because of the new regime's antagonistic relationship with the US and other countries in the region, due to its support of international terrorism, and sought to recreate a dialogue with European countries. Furthermore, the sanctions and the embargo imposed on the north-African country, summed to the government's expenses to finance warfare and the low oil prices throughout the 1980s, had a terrible effect on Libyan economy; to counter the effect of international sanctions, Gaddafi's regime sought to expand oil and gas extraction in 70s and 80s and, inspired by pan-Africanist and pan-Arabist ideals, looked to stimulate labor migration and political support from neighboring countries. Indeed, by 2008, between 1 and 1.5 million migrants resided in Libya (De Haas, 2006; Paoletti, 2011), bringing both the much-needed labor in the country's economy but at the same time creating tensions in Libyan society. Italy remained one of the only western countries to maintain a mostly cordial diplomatic relation with Gaddafi's regime, gradually expanding its economic involvement with its former colony, mainly through the Italian multinational oil and gas giant ENI's (Ente Nazionale Idrocarburi) exploration and production projects. Alongside this economic reconnection, the first steps of political rapprochement were made in the first half of the 90s, as part of the "Good Neighborhood Policy" ("*Politica del buon vicinato"* in Italian), which lead to the signing of a Joint Communiqué between the two countries' foreign ministers in 1998, the first Italo-Lybian agreement that mentioned simultaneously colonial history, economic cooperation and migration control in a single text. This document marked the beginning of a new form of bilateral relation and cooperation between Italy and Lybia, characterized by an ever-closer economic involvement of Italian companies in its territory, particularly ENI, in exchange for the political recognition of the Libyan regime. The agreement also meant to present migration management between the countries a common interest to collaborate on (initially meant as a joint effort to contrast visa forgery, not yet patrols and interceptions) (Coralluzzo, 2008; Labanca, 2015; Lombardi, 2011; Italian & Libyan Governments, 1998a), as well as a tool to start a process of political rapprochement between the former colony and the former colonizer, framing the collaboration as a "mutual desire to leave the negative colonial heritage behind" (Italian & Libyan Governments, 1998a, b; Tjønn et Jumbert, 2024) and promote a future of collaboration. Despite the potentiality and the ambition of the agreement, it had little effect on migrant crossings: between 1998 and 2005 the number of registered arrivals went from 5500 to 23000, with 1641 deaths at sea during the same period. Since the mid-1990s, Gaddafi sustained the claim that Libya was a transit country rather than a destination state itself, and the increase in crossings further confirmed this thesis, which brought Gaddafi to strategically use migratory flows as a resource for negotiations with European countries, demanding the lifting of sanctions on the regime and the readmission in the international community.

Ten years after the Joint Communiqué, in 2008, a second bilateral agreement on migration management was setup between Italy and Libya, the so-called *Treaty of Friendship*, signed into being with Berlusconi's visit to Gaddafi in Benghazi. Once again, the treaty contained a formal apology for the colonial past and an offer of reparations by Italy to Libya in form of financial aid, ENI's expansion in the Libyan petroleum sector, and Italy's desire for Libyan collaboration in their national migration management agenda. In this sense, it marked the first step forward for the externalization of Italy's migration regime to Libya, allowing joint Italo-Libyan coast guard patrols for organized pushbacks of migrants looking to reach European coasts, creating a framework of large-scale refoulement to Libya. Moreover, the treaty traded an increase in Libyan border control and a further suppression of illegal immigration in exchange for more financial aid and investment. The effects of the agreement of irregular crossings were quickly noticeable, as between 2008 and 2010 the number decreased from 37000 to only 405. Historian and Africanist Alessandro Triulzi (2013) described the process as a "systematic refoulement" of all northbound migrant boats across the Mediterranean, and the then serving Italian Minister of Interior Roberto Maroni praised these extremely repressive measures as a "model for the whole of Europe". This agreement also allowed Libya to grow out of international isolation, ending the long-standing international embargo and the sanctions regime established by NATO allies against the country, with a historic visit to Tripoli of the then US Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice (Morone, 2013; Triulzi, 2013).

Nonetheless, during the period between 2010 and 2012 many countries in Northern Africa and Arabic Peninsula underwent a process that journalists at the time described as the "Arab Spring", with series of political demonstrations, agitations, and in diverse cases, outright civil war, challenging long-standing autocracies. Gaddafi's regime was not spared by these uprisings, as the armed opposition, supported by French airplanes and American drones, eventually unseated him after a gruesome struggle, in October 2011. This series of events inevitably threw both regional politics and migration policy cooperation in a tumultuous stage. In 2012 the European Court of Human Rights condemned the Italo-Libyan cooperation in the *Hirsi Jamaa and others v. Italy* case, where 24 Eritrean and Somali nationals appealed to the ECHR for having been forcibly returned to Tripoli after being intercepted by the Italian coastguard in 2009, despite the negative ruling Italy still attempted to revive the clauses of the Friendship Treaty through new agreements with the National Transitional Council (NTC), the interim government in power after Gaddafi's fall, but without results. The demise of the military regime created a power vacuum in the region, which attracted external actors both from the region and internationally, to the point that Libya was split up between two opposing governments: the one in Tripoli, recognized by the UN and supported by Italy, Turkey and Qatar, and the self-declared government of Khalifa Haftar, backed by Russia, Egypt, UAE, Saudi Arabia and France.

Further border management projects date to the period between 2013 and 2015, which in Europe has been often referred to as the "refugee crisis" (even if, as Tjønn et Jumbert note, it would be better to define it as a "reception crisis"). The crisis-rhetoric mixed with the actual difficulties related to the reception of the increased migratory flows and the public unrest generated by the former two, made the EU reconsider its approach, choosing to take on a more central role and impose further limits to entry for migrants coming from Mediterranean routes. One of the initiatives devised to respond to the numerous wreckages and deaths was the naval-humanitarian Search and Rescue operation Mare Nostrum, announced in October 2013 after a large and overloaded vessel caught fire right outside the coast of Lampedusa. Mare Nostrum was then substituted by Triton, an operation this time directly led by FRONTEX, the European Union border management agency, just a year later. It will be renovated and enlarged in April 2015, during another spike in irregular crossings. In June, the EU launched Operation Sophia, an actual military operation to combat migrant smuggling and trafficking, with a mandate to "identify, capture and dispose of vessels" and "contribute to wider EU efforts to disrupt the business model of human smuggling" (Operation Sophia, 2019a). It's relevant to note that the scope of the operation would have been expanded twice: the first expansion, in June 2016, included the duty to train the Libyan Coast Guard and Navy and contribute to the implementation of the UN arms embargo off the cost of Libya, the second included the task of reporting on the efficiency of the training of the Libyan Coastguard and Navy and to gather information on illegal trafficking of oil exports from Libya.

Finally, in 2017, Italy and Libya signed the Valletta Memorandum of Understanding, for the first time establishing the use of "temporary detention centers" for migrants, as well as European-paid patrols against "fuel smuggling" (Italian and Libyan Governments, 2017). The accord was negotiated by the ex-member of Italian secret services and then Interior Minister Marco Minniti with the Awlad Suleiman, Tubu, and the Tuareg (ethnic groups which were not affiliated with the Tripoli government and were involved in the organization of migrant treks from Southern Libya to the Mediterranean coast), which were paid to stop directing migrants northwards; at the same time, the Italian government issued a package of financial aid to the Tripoli government to persuade it into endorsing the initiative (Morone, 2018; Trew & Kington, 2017). The effect of the Memorandum on the trends of crossings in the Central Mediterranean was as quick as it was noticeable, as the media reported a 85% drop in August of the same year compared to two years before. Thanks to its success, and a gradual process of stabilization and pacification between the competing forces in the region (mostly obtained through the UN-backed and Libya led *Libyan Political Dialogue Forum*), the Valletta Memorandum was renewed for three additional years in February 2020, and in that year alone 12000 migrants were refouled back to Libya by the EU-trained Libyan Coast Guard (InfoMigrants, 2021). The agreement was harshly criticized by scholars and human rights activists, as the migrants residing in the "temporary detention centers" in Libya were often kept in squalid conditions in an unclear network of camps managed by different, and often non-governmental actors (city militias, ethnic groups, as well as NGOs and IGOs from the international community). Furthermore, the practices of the LCG were often a matter of condemnation, featuring histories of torture of migrants, as well as reports of Libyan coast guard associates collaborating when not partaking to human smuggling (Pietz, 2019; Tondo, 2019). Libya to this day suffers from political destabilization, and both of its governments often seem to not be possibly considered responsible and accountable partners in migration management.

Looking ahead, the future of Italy-Libya relations on migration management will likely be influenced by the stability of the Libyan political landscape, the evolving role of international organizations, and the growing scrutiny from human rights advocates. For Italy, balancing its national interests with its commitments to international humanitarian law remains a critical challenge. A more sustainable and ethical approach to migration management would require greater investment in addressing the root causes of migration, fostering regional cooperation, and ensuring that migration policies prioritize the dignity and rights of individuals. In conclusion, while Italy-Libya cooperation on migration management, as well as the successive involvement of the European Union, have achieved short-term objectives in reducing irregular migration, their long-term implications demand a reevaluation of strategies to align with both security imperatives and humanitarian principles. Only through a holistic and rights-based approach can the two nations navigate the complexities of migration in a manner that upholds their shared responsibilities to the international community and the vulnerable populations caught in the crossfire of geopolitical realities.

## 3.4 - Mobility Partnerships as a Framework for Migration Governance in EU-Northern Africa Relations

The European Union's (EU) engagement with Northern African countries has long been shaped by intertwined priorities of migration management, security, and economic development. Among the most significant instruments in this relationship are Mobility Partnerships (MPs), bilateral or multilateral agreements designed to balance the EU's security-driven migration policies with development-oriented cooperation. This paragraph examines the role of MPs in EU-Northern Africa relations, analyzing their objectives, implementation, and socio-political implications. By situating MPs within broader debates on migration governance, it explores how these partnerships reflect asymmetrical power dynamics, contested policy priorities, and the tension between mobility facilitation and border externalization.

Mobility Partnerships, formalized under the EU's Global Approach to Migration and Mobility (GAMM) in 2008, are non-binding agreements that seek to:

- Facilitate legal migration pathways (e.g., labor mobility, student exchanges),
- Combat irregular migration through enhanced border controls and readmission agreements,
- Promote migration-development linkages (e.g., diaspora engagement, remittance management),
- Strengthen human rights protections for migrants.

These initiatives typically include visa facilitation agreements for students and professionals, readmission agreements for irregular migrants, capacity-building programs (e.g., training border guards), as well as development aid conditional on migration cooperation (e.g., EU Trust Fund for Africa). Rooted in the EU's "comprehensive approach" to migration, MPs aim to reconcile competing interests: Northern African states seek economic opportunities and technical assistance, while the EU prioritizes curbing irregular migration and securing borders. In this sense, MPs exemplify "externalization"—the EU's strategy of outsourcing migration management to third countries. Scholars like Lavenex (2006) frame this as "remote control" migration governance, where Northern African states act as "gatekeepers" to Europe. Furthermore, critics argue MPs reflect neo-colonial dynamics, prioritizing EU security over African development.

Northern Africa's role as a migration corridor stems from colonial labor systems and post-independence economic dependencies. Since the launch of the Barcelona Process in 1995, the necessity to manage migratory flows has been coupled, in the context of European collaboration with southern neighboring countries, with the interest in promoting democracy and good governance. The Mobility Partnership approach was firstly framed under the ENP (European Neighborhood Policy) launched in 2004, with the aim of achieving stability in the border regions of the Union though the promotion of "European values", projects for economy modernization, as well as adherence to the rule of law and to human rights. It is nonetheless relevant to note that the ENP underwent major revisions over the years, first in 2011, in retaliation to the "Arab Spring", and then in 2015, during the migration and refugee crisis -both periods of rising migratory trends towards Europe-, as scholars such as Panebianco and Cannata (2024) describe a policy shift towards short-term stability objectives and issue-specific collaborations. Indeed, as migration gained prominence in the post-9/11 period, the EU started to address the phenomenon mainly under the scope of security (e.g., the 2005 EU Strategy for Africa). The 2011 Arab Spring destabilized regimes in Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt, triggering further displacement and irregular migration. The EU responded by devising and expanding tools to stabilize partner states, divided between market tools, financial aid and mobility partnerships. Indeed, these projects have been implemented in several Northern African countries, including Morocco, Tunisia, and Egypt. However, despite their potential benefits, ENP-related projects have faced several challenges and criticisms in their implementation. An example of these hardships can be found in the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements (DCFTAs), a series of accords aimed at further liberalization of trade in services as well as harmonization of trade-related legislation with partner countries, introduced for Morocco, Egypt and Tunisia in the aftermath of 2011 events. (Hockman, 2016). Since then, negotiations in Morocco were interrupted in 2014, while in Tunisia they are still stalling. Langan and Price (2020) highlighted a fundamental hypocrisy in the approach the EU has used in the negotiation process: the trade cooperation was based on the exchange of an increase in export quotas to European markets for a liberalization process for key sectors in partner countries. At the same time, as liberalization of trade in services required reforms in the area of movement of people, allowing cross-border movement of service suppliers and workers, the drafts lack specific sectoral proposals and provisions related to the needed process of visa and work permit harmonization between member states, since decisions on the approval or dismissal of such processes fall under the direct competence of member states, meaning that the liberalization of the service market exceed the competence of Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements.

The most recent focus in the European Neighborhood policy regards mobility, but once again, UE cooperation mostly relates to the control of irregular crossings rather than regular migration, as the latter fall under the competence of member states, in a fragmented net of national migration regimes. In front of this uneven field, Mobility Partnerships have been proposed as flexible soft-law instruments able to provide adaptive solutions against the pitfalls in the EU external migration policy. The ductility of these projects allows the European Union to match in a single framework the management of both regular and irregular migration, offering visa facilitation schemes, labor migration projects in exchange for concrete achievements in terms of border control, readmission and return (Seeberg & Zardo, 2022). However, it must be noted that the implementation of these projects is object to continuous negotiations, as the talks for the EURA (EU Readmission Agreements), a crucial part of the agreement, have been repeatedly interrupted or decelerated, such as in the case of Morocco, which halted negotiations between 2015 and 2019, and Tunisia, where the bargaining stalled when more contentious issues were at stake (Panebianco & Cannata, 2024). Regarding their effects on cooperation, outside formal agreements, none of the partner countries reported noticeable improvements in legal migration opportunities. Compared to the expectations related to the MPs, data show rather modest increases in terms of permit issuance and looking at reports for short-term visas (which allow a stay up to 90 days for family, business or tourism reasons) they show little to no progress. Moreover, Eurostat data (2021) show that the cooperation on returns, which was a central part of the agreements, had little to no effect, as the gap between the number of "orders to leave" issued and that of "effective returns" remains consistent, when not widening.

In conclusion, as Panebianco & Cannata state in their study *(Im-)Mobility Partnerships: Limits to Democracy Promotion through Mobility in the Mediterranean,*

*"No substantial improvements in terms of either legal mobility, visa facilitation or returns have been achieved to date, so that it would be rather more appropriate to speak of MPs in terms of immobility." (Panebianco & Cannata, 2024:85)*

Looking ahead, the future of Mobility Partnerships will depend on the ability of the EU and Northern African countries to address these challenges and to develop a more balanced and comprehensive approach to migration management. This will require greater emphasis on development cooperation, stronger engagement with civil society and migrant communities, and a more equitable distribution of responsibilities between the EU and its African partners. By addressing these issues, Mobility Partnerships can play a key role in shaping a more sustainable and mutually beneficial approach to migration in EU-Northern Africa relations.

## 3.5 - Conclusions

The current border regimes governing EU-Africa relations are deeply damaging to labor mobility and perpetuate a system of economic imperialism. By restricting the movement of African workers, these policies reinforce global inequalities, hinder development in Africa, and expose migrants to significant risks. Immanuel Ness's Migration as Economic Imperialism provides a critical lens for understanding these dynamics, highlighting the need for a more just and equitable approach to migration. As this chapter has shown, addressing the damage caused by borders requires a fundamental rethinking of migration policies, one that prioritizes the rights and dignity of workers over the interests of capital. Only by embracing such an approach can the EU and Africa build a relationship that is truly mutually beneficial. The asymmetrical nature of EU-Northern Africa relations has led critics to argue that mobility partnerships prioritize the EU's security and border control interests over the development needs of African partners. This has led to concerns about the externalization of EU migration policies, with Northern African countries bearing the burden of managing migration flows and implementing restrictive border controls. Another challenge is the limited impact of MPs on addressing the root causes of migration, such as poverty, unemployment, and political instability. While MPs include provisions for development cooperation, their focus on migration management often overshadows broader development objectives. Additionally, the implementation of MPs has been hindered by capacity constraints, political instability, and differing priorities between the EU and Northern African countries.

# 4. – The Migration-Development Nexus: A Structural Critique of Migrant Remittances in the Global South

## 4.1 - Introduction

The prevailing narrative in international development discourse posits migrant remittances as a powerful tool for fostering economic growth and reducing poverty in the Global South. Institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have lauded remittances for their ability to stabilize economies, improve household incomes, and contribute to national development. However, this chapter challenges this optimistic narrative by drawing on *Immanuel Ness' Migration as Economic Imperialism* and Hannah Cross' *Imperialism and Labour*. It argues that remittances are not a sustainable or equitable solution to development challenges but rather a symptom of deeper structural inequalities rooted in global capitalism and economic imperialism. By situating remittances within the broader framework of labor exploitation and systemic underdevelopment, this chapter reveals how they perpetuate dependency and mask the exploitative nature of the global economic system. The critique presented here underscores the need to move beyond the neoliberal celebration of remittances and address the structural forces that drive migration and underdevelopment in the Global South.

Immanuel Ness' work provides a critical lens through which to understand the structural drivers of migration from the Global South. He argues that migration is not a voluntary choice but a consequence of entrenched economic imperialism, which has systematically undermined the economies of the Global South through neoliberal policies such as Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs). These policies, imposed by international financial institutions, have dismantled public services, privatized industries, and eroded local livelihoods, creating conditions of chronic unemployment, poverty, and inequality. In countries like the Philippines and Mexico, the export of labor has become a national strategy to cope with economic crises induced by neoliberal reforms. Remittances, in this context, are not a sign of development but a reflection of systemic dispossession and the failure of states to provide for their citizens. Ness emphasizes that the reliance on remittances reflects a form of "economic imperialism," where the Global South is integrated into the global economy as a supplier of cheap labor rather than as an equal partner. This system benefits capitalist economies in the Global North by providing a steady supply of low-cost labor while undermining the development prospects of the Global South. For example, the Philippines' labor export policy has created a "remittance economy" that relies on the exploitation of its overseas workers, rather than addressing the structural issues that drive migration. Hannah Cross further elaborates on this dynamic by highlighting how migration is deeply embedded in the global capitalist system, which relies on the exploitation of cheap labor from the Global South. Migrant workers often fill low-wage, precarious jobs in sectors such as construction, domestic work, and agriculture in the Global North or wealthier regions. This labor exploitation generates remittances that sustain families and communities in the Global South, but it does so at great human cost. Cross argues that this system externalizes the social and economic costs of reproduction onto migrant workers and their families, while the benefits accrue to capitalist economies in the Global North. The structural roots of migration, therefore, lie in the unequal power relations of global capitalism, which perpetuate the underdevelopment of the Global South and the exploitation of its labor force.

## 4.2 - Remittances and the Illusion of Development

While remittances provide short-term relief for households in the Global South, they fail to address the root causes of underdevelopment. Ness and Cross argue that remittances are often used for consumption rather than productive investment, perpetuating a cycle of dependency. For instance, in countries like Honduras and El Salvador, remittances constitute a significant portion of GDP, yet these nations remain mired in poverty and underdevelopment. This reliance on remittances discourages governments from pursuing structural reforms or investing in local industries, as they become dependent on the outflow of labor and the inflow of remittances. The focus on remittances as a development tool obscures the broader structural inequalities that drive migration. Cross highlights that remittances are a form of "private welfare" that compensates for the lack of public services and social safety nets in the Global South. This privatized approach to development shifts the burden of poverty alleviation onto individual migrants and their families, rather than addressing the systemic issues that perpetuate poverty and inequality. In this sense, remittances are not a solution to underdevelopment but a symptom of a deeply unequal global economic system. Moreover, the mainstream discourse on remittances often portrays migrants as "heroes" of development, celebrating their contributions to poverty reduction and economic stability. However, Ness and Cross argue that this narrative serves to obscure the structural inequalities and exploitative dynamics that underpin migration. By framing remittances as a market-driven solution to development, this discourse shifts the responsibility for poverty alleviation onto individual migrants and their families, rather than addressing the systemic issues that perpetuate poverty and inequality. Cross highlights that this neoliberal narrative also serves to legitimize the status quo by presenting migration and remittances as a "win-win" solution for both the Global North and the Global South. In reality, this system benefits capitalist economies in the Global North by providing a steady supply of cheap labor, while the Global South remains trapped in a cycle of dependency and underdevelopment. Ness further argues that this discourse reflects a form of "economic imperialism," where the Global South is integrated into the global economy on unequal terms, perpetuating its subordinate position.

The exploitation of migrant labor is central to the functioning of global capitalism. Cross argues that migrant workers are often subjected to precarious working conditions, low wages, and limited labor rights, particularly in sectors such as construction in the Gulf states or domestic work in Europe and North America. These exploitative conditions generate remittances that sustain families and communities in the Global South, but they also reinforce the imperialist structures that underpin the global economy. Ness further contends that the reliance on remittances reflects a form of "economic imperialism," where the Global South is integrated into the global economy as a supplier of cheap labor rather than as an equal partner. This system benefits capitalist economies in the Global North by providing a steady supply of low-cost labor while undermining the development prospects of the Global South. For example, the Philippines' labor export policy has created a "remittance economy" that relies on the exploitation of its overseas workers, rather than addressing the structural issues that drive migration. The labor exploitation inherent in this system is not limited to economic terms but also extends to social and psychological dimensions. Migrant workers often face family separation, cultural alienation, and the erosion of social ties, which have long-term consequences for their well-being and that of their communities. Cross emphasizes that the social costs of migration are disproportionately borne by women, who often take on caregiving roles in the absence of migrant family members. This gendered dimension of labor exploitation further underscores the unequal power relations that underpin the global economic system. The reliance on remittances, therefore, is not merely an economic phenomenon but a reflection of the broader structures of exploitation and inequality that characterize global capitalism.

## 4.3 - Counterarguments and Rebuttals

Proponents of the remittance-development nexus often point to the positive impact of remittances on household incomes and poverty reduction. For example, studies have shown that remittances have helped to reduce poverty in countries like Mexico and India. However, Ness and Cross argue that these benefits are short-term and unevenly distributed. Without addressing the structural issues that drive migration, remittances merely provide a temporary reprieve rather than a sustainable solution to underdevelopment. Moreover, the focus on remittances as a development tool ignores the broader social and economic costs of migration, such as family separation, brain drain, and the erosion of local economies. Cross highlights that the reliance on remittances often discourages governments from pursuing structural reforms or investing in local industries, perpetuating a cycle of dependency and underdevelopment. In this sense, remittances are not a solution to underdevelopment but a symptom of a deeply unequal global economic system. The critique articulated by Ness and Cross calls for a fundamental rethinking of the role of remittances in development. Rather than celebrating remittances as a market-driven solution to poverty, this chapter argues for addressing the structural inequalities and exploitative dynamics that underpin migration. This includes challenging the neoliberal policies that drive migration, promoting fair labor standards for migrant workers, and pursuing alternative development strategies that prioritize sovereignty and equity over extraction and exploitation.

The critique presented in this chapter underscores the need to move beyond the neoliberal celebration of remittances and address the structural forces that drive migration and underdevelopment in the Global South. Immanuel Ness and Hannah Cross provide a powerful framework for understanding the exploitative dynamics of labor migration and the systemic underdevelopment of the Global South. By situating remittances within the broader context of economic imperialism and labor exploitation, this chapter reveals how they perpetuate dependency and mask the exploitative nature of the global economic system. The reliance on remittances as a development tool reflects the failure of the global economic system to address the root causes of poverty and inequality. By dismantling the structures of economic imperialism and promoting a more equitable global economic order, it is possible to create conditions where migration is a choice rather than a necessity, and development is a collective right rather than an individual burden. This requires a fundamental shift in development paradigms, from market-driven solutions to structural reforms that prioritize sovereignty, equity, and justice. Only by addressing the root causes of underdevelopment and labor exploitation can we move toward a more just and equitable global economic system.

This chapter synthesizes the critical perspectives of Ness and Cross to challenge the dominant narrative on remittances and development, offering a structural analysis of the exploitative dynamics that underpin migration and the global economy. By situating remittances within the broader framework of economic imperialism and labor exploitation, it reveals the limitations of remittances as a development tool and calls for transformative alternatives that address the root causes of inequality and underdevelopment.

## 5. - Conclusions and future perspectives

The exploration of EU-Africa relations on migration in this dissertation has revealed a complex interplay of historical legacies, structural inequalities, and contemporary policies that shape the movement of people between these two continents. By examining the structural drivers of migration, the EU's border management strategies, and the critique of remittances as a development tool, this dissertation has sought to provide a comprehensive understanding of the forces that perpetuate unequal migration dynamics. The findings underscore the need for a fundamental rethinking of migration policies and development strategies, one that prioritizes equity, justice, and human rights over security and control.

The first chapter of this dissertation highlighted the structural drivers of migration, emphasizing the role of inequality, underdevelopment, and the legacies of imperialism and neoliberalism. It demonstrated that modern migration flows cannot be understood in isolation from the historical exploitation of African resources and labor by European powers. The enduring effects of colonialism, coupled with neoliberal economic policies that prioritize market liberalization and privatization, have created conditions of poverty and instability that compel many Africans to migrate. This chapter argued that addressing the root causes of migration requires tackling these structural inequalities, rather than merely managing their symptoms through restrictive border policies.

The second chapter critically analyzed the EU's border management and foreign policy towards Africa, particularly in the post-Schengen era. It revealed how the EU's external border policies, including the externalization of border controls and the establishment of Mobility Partnerships, often prioritize security and control over human rights and development. The case of Italy-Libya relations illustrated how these policies can lead to human rights abuses and exacerbate the vulnerabilities of migrants. Furthermore, the chapter questioned the viability of Mobility Partnership projects, arguing that they often reinforce unequal power dynamics between the EU and African states. This critique calls into question the EU's commitment to genuine cooperation and highlights the need for more equitable and humane approaches to migration management.

The third chapter deconstructed the argument that remittances can serve as a tool for development, drawing on the works of Immanuel Ness and Hannah Cross. It challenged the neoliberal narrative that remittances can offset the negative effects of migration and underdevelopment, arguing that this perspective shifts responsibility for development onto individuals rather than addressing systemic inequalities. The chapter emphasized that while remittances may provide temporary relief for some families, they cannot substitute for comprehensive development strategies that address the root causes of poverty and inequality. This critique underscores the need for policies that prioritize structural transformation over individualistic solutions.

Throughout this dissertation, several key themes have emerged. First, migration between Africa and the EU is deeply rooted in historical and structural inequalities that cannot be addressed through migration management alone. Second, the EU's border policies, while framed as solutions to migration challenges, often exacerbate the vulnerabilities of migrants and reinforce unequal power dynamics. Third, the reliance on remittances as a development strategy reflects a broader trend of neoliberal policies that prioritize market-based solutions over systemic change. These themes highlight the need for a paradigm shift in how migration and development are approached, both in policy and in practice. Moving forward, this dissertation calls for a reimagining of EU-Africa relations on migration that centers on justice, equity, and human rights. This requires addressing the structural drivers of migration through policies that promote equitable development, reduce inequality, and challenge the legacies of imperialism and neoliberalism. It also necessitates a reevaluation of border management strategies to ensure that they prioritize the protection of migrants' rights and dignity. Finally, it calls for a move away from reliance on remittances as a development tool, towards comprehensive strategies that address the root causes of poverty and inequality.

In conclusion, this dissertation has sought to shed light on the complexities and contradictions inherent in EU-Africa relations on migration. By critically examining the structural drivers of migration, the EU's border policies, and the critique of remittances, it has highlighted the need for a more just and equitable approach to migration and development. The challenges are significant, but they are not insurmountable. With a commitment to justice and human rights, it is possible to build a future where migration is not driven by necessity but by choice, and where the relationship between the EU and Africa is defined by cooperation and mutual respect rather than exploitation and inequality.

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