How the EU and third countries can manage migration

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★ The sharp rise in the number of migrants crossing the Mediterranean from Turkey to Greece in 2015 threw the EU into disarray. By closing the Balkan route and striking a deal with Turkey, the EU reduced the number of arrivals in Greece. But until the summer of 2017 the EU found it much harder to reduce the numbers crossing from Libya to Italy. And it has struggled to share the administrative and political costs of migration between its member-states, largely leaving Greece and Italy to cope on their own.

★ The EU's initial ad hoc response to the migration crisis is slowly being formalised into a strategy to curb migration by using foreign policy to prevent migrants from crossing the Mediterranean. The EU's recent dealings with Libya, which have been led by Italy, illuminate the compromises that the EU must make with third countries to curb migration. While the EU has been successful in reducing flows, by providing money to Libya and training the country's coastguards, this deal is fragile and has come at the cost of migrants' human rights.

★ This paper evaluates the policy instruments the EU has at its disposal in its dealings with countries of origin and transit: return agreements with countries of origin; development aid; and screening centres in third countries to determine eligibility for asylum.

★ The EU's attempts to strike readmission agreements with countries of origin have had limited success. Countries of origin are often unwilling to strike such deals, as this may reduce the flow of remittances which are a significant source of national income for many. If the EU could open up legal channels for migration through visa programmes, scholarships and work permits, there would be less need for readmission agreements, which will in any case only be struck if the EU provides additional development funding to source countries. EU aid could be paid in instalments and returns could be limited to future arrivals only, so that states would not have to worry about a sudden spike in returns as people already in Europe are sent back to their country of origin.

★ Attempts to enlist the co-operation of third countries will continue to come at the expense of human rights unless the EU improves conditions in detention centres in third countries, and provides other forms of aid to migrants stranded by the closure of the EU's borders as well as those of third countries. In the short term, the EU should improve conditions in Libyan reception centres and push harder for peace in Libya.

★ The EU also needs a long-term strategy to reduce incentives to migrate. In the long run, migration can only be reduced by ensuring security and economic opportunities in countries of origin. But the number of people attempting to reach Europe will continue to increase until income differences between sub-Saharan Africa and EU member-states fall substantially. And a 'more for more' approach – more aid in exchange for more co-operation on migration – will require the EU to loosen its purse strings considerably: the EU's migration policy should not have a distorting effect on development aid, whose main objective should continue to be poverty reduction. European aid often makes up a small proportion of the GDP of countries of origin and transit.

★ Calls to process asylum applications outside the EU, as Australia does, are unrealistic. Centres run by international organisations are unsuitable for 'mixed' migration flows, with refugees and economic migrants travelling together, because these organisations cannot detain people. And the EU itself cannot process asylum claims in third countries, since it would not have the authority to distribute refugees to member-states, who all have their own asylum laws. Progress towards a common European asylum system is slow, with member-states unwilling to share sovereignty.

The sharp rise in the number of migrants crossing the Mediterranean from Turkey to Greece in 2015 threw the EU into disarray. In August 2015, German Chancellor Angela Merkel announced that Germany would process the asylum claims of people who had already transited through other EU countries, opting out, albeit temporarily, of the 'Dublin regulation', which mandates that asylum-seekers must claim asylum in the first EU country they enter. But Hungary erected a razor-wire fence along parts of its borders with Serbia and Croatia to stop migrants entering its territory, and the border-free Schengen agreement was suspended, as border controls were reintroduced between Austria, Hungary, Germany, Denmark and Sweden (and elsewhere). Pressure from Austria and other EU states then led to other border closures along the western Balkans route. And in March 2016, the EU, led by Germany, negotiated a deal with Turkey to stop migrants crossing to Greece. In exchange, the EU offered to take in some refugees from camps in Turkey, gave Turkey aid and promised visa liberalisation and to speed up the country's accession negotiations. Thus Merkel's policy to open Germany to refugees has been reversed. The EU has sought to close its borders, especially stopping migrants from taking the treacherous sea routes across the Mediterranean in unseaworthy boats supplied by people-smugglers.

The number of migrants who have crossed the Mediterranean – estimated at 1.7 million between 2014 and 2017[1] – is not unmanageable, given the EU's population of 510 million. But the EU has found it politically difficult to share the burden. The Union has sought to ease the pressures on Italy and Greece, which as frontline states must process most asylum claims, thanks to the Dublin rule. The EU has made increasing use of the European Asylum Support Office (EASO), which has worked with the Greek and Italian authorities to set up 'hotspots' – processing centres for new arrivals. It has also created a 'relocation mechanism' to move asylum-seekers from Greece and Italy to other member-states, agreed by qualified majority in September 2015. This mechanism was passed despite opposition from Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Finland and the Czech Republic, and the number of asylum-seekers relocated under the scheme has been far lower than originally envisaged. By October 2017, only 29,700 of the 98,000 foreseen by the plan had been relocated from Italy and Greece to other member-states.[2] Support for anti-immigrant parties has risen in many member-states, and Poland and Hungary's increasingly authoritarian governments have vehemently opposed the relocation of asylum-seekers, stoking anti-EU sentiment to serve their broader political agendas.

The EU's ad hoc response to the migration crisis is slowly being formalised into a strategy to curb migration by dealing directly with countries outside the EU. Since the EU has found it difficult to distribute the administrative and political costs of migration among its member-states, policy-makers are increasingly focusing on foreign policy to try to prevent migrants crossing the Mediterranean in the first place. The idea is to stop people attempting to cross the Mediterranean at all. This paper's purpose is to evaluate the policy instruments the EU has at its disposal in its dealings with countries of origin and transit.

The most immediate problem facing Italy in particular, and the EU in general, is the continuing people-smuggling operation from Libya. The numbers are falling at the time of writing, thanks to controversial Italian and EU policies in Libya and in the Mediterranean. The paper starts with an examination of Europe's dealings with Libya, which illuminates the compromises that the EU must make with third countries to curb migration. The Libya case also highlights why the behaviour of 'countries of transit' is difficult for the EU to control. Sections follow on specific areas of policy that Europe's politicians and policy-makers have proposed to curb migration from countries of origin and transit. These are:

★ readmission agreements, which allow the EU to deport migrants whose asylum claims fail – or who have no other legitimate reason to stay in Europe – back to their country of origin;

1: 'Operation portal: Refugee situations, Mediterranean', United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Data as of October 2017.

2: 'Member-states' support to emergency relocation mechanism', European Commission, October 4th 2017.

★ using the EU's aid budget to reduce migration from third countries, by training border and coastguards for example – but also through development projects and more general investment and budget support to raise living standards;

★ screening centres in source and transit countries, which some EU politicians hope could be used to process asylum claims, with successful applicants then resettled in EU member-states or elsewhere.

These policies have varying degrees of potential, and all face practical, legal and political hurdles in both third countries and in the EU. This paper is the first in a series for a new CER/OSEPI commission on EU justice and home affairs policy, which is being led by former Italian prime minister Giuliano Amato. Its purpose is not to argue for particular policies, which the commissioners will do themselves in their final report, but rather to provide an overview of the state of the debate, and evidence for the commissioners to consider in their deliberations.

The strategic lessons of Libya

Since the Turkey deal, the EU's efforts have continued to focus on the political imperative of reducing the number of migrants reaching the EU. Following the closure of the Balkan route and the March 2016 EU-Turkey deal, the flow of arrivals in Greece from Turkey fell significantly. In the summer of 2016, the EU's attention then turned to the central Mediterranean route, where the number of arrivals in Italy, almost entirely embarking from Libya, was increasing.

Libya is not under the authority of a single government, but has three competing centres of power: the UN-backed Government of National Accord, the House of Representatives backed by General Khalifa Haftar, and the Government of National Salvation. In turn, each of these actors is fragmented and does not have complete control over its own forces. These divisions mean that Libya does not have a single coastguard administered by the state, but a set of armed groups with different allegiances.

The EU has let Italy take the lead on negotiations with Libyan actors, following the template of the Turkey deal, for which Germany's agreements were endorsed by the EU. In January 2017, Italy agreed to help the Government of National Accord police its own waters and train and equip its coastguards. On February 3rd 2017, the EU endorsed the deal. In April, the EU allocated €90 million to Libya to be spent on improving conditions in detention centres and fostering economic development.

Over the summer, the Government of National Accord reportedly struck a deal with the Anas al-Dabbashi

brigade, which controls the key smuggling hub on the western Libyan coast, and which is seeking government jobs and political legitimacy in return for intercepting migrants' boats and taking them back to Libya.[3] Some NGOs involved in search and rescue in the Mediterranean stopped operating in Libyan waters after Italy negotiated a new 'code of conduct' in July 2017, which mandated that they refrain from transferring rescued people to other vessels, among other things.[4] Other NGOs which refused to sign, such as Médicins Sans Frontières, have stopped operating in Libyan waters after they reported being threatened, and in some cases shot at, by Libya's coastguard. This, as well as stepped-up EU and Italian support for the Libyan coast guard, has meant that more migrants attempting the crossing are being intercepted by Libyan boats and taken back to Libya, rather than landing in Italy.

At the same time, the EU has sought to co-operate with countries of transit and origin in Africa and Asia to reduce the number of migrants reaching Libya. While efforts to negotiate readmission agreements with origin countries have been very slow, the deals with Libya and other countries along the route appear to have reduced the numbers, at least at the time of writing. In the first half of 2017, the number of sea arrivals in Italy largely tracked the average in previous years, rising to around 24,000 per month during the summer, when the sea is calmer and the crossing less dangerous (see Chart 1). However, arrivals in July and August were sharply lower than a year earlier.

3: Reuters, 'Armed group seeks legitimacy with Tripoli migrant deal, source says', September 21st 2017.

4: Euronews, 'Italy's code of conduct for NGOs involved in migrant rescue: text', August 3rd 2017.
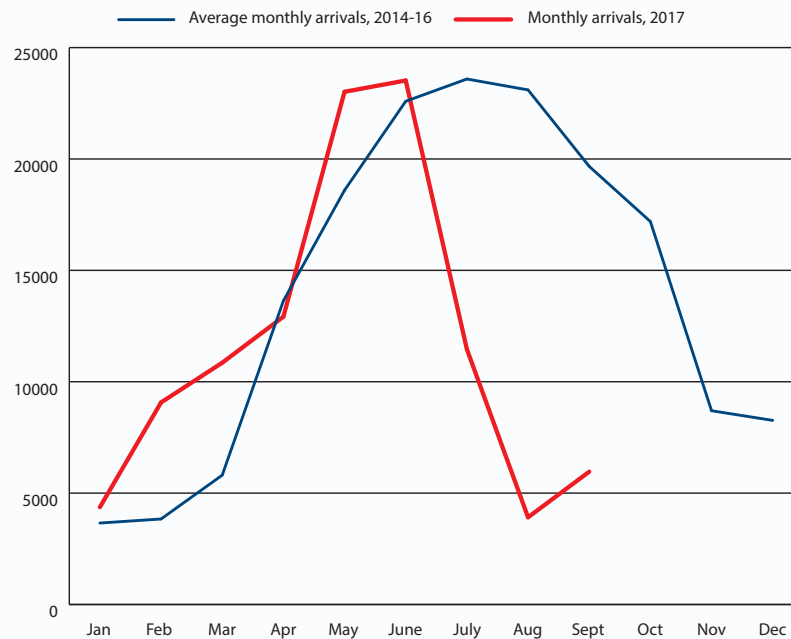
EU officials say that it is not only the deal with Libya that has reduced the number of boats. They point out that potential migrants are starting to appreciate how difficult the route has become, although this cannot be proved. EU support to countries such as Niger has succeeded in getting the local authorities to crack down on people-smuggling. But it is not clear whether the numbers entering Libya have slowed as migrants might be taking unmonitored, more dangerous routes across the desert. Officials also point out that 7,000 migrants have voluntarily left Libyan detention centres and returned to their country of origin since the start of 2017, thanks to a repatriation programme conducted by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM).[5] The EU also wants to set up screening systems for migrants in countries to Libya's south, such as Mali and Niger. The EU, in conjunction with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), would set up processing centres in these countries to stop migrants from travelling onwards. The centres would also deal with migrants transferred from Libya, and the UN agency would identify those qualifying for asylum. But, so far, this plan remains embryonic.

It is likely that the EU's and Italy's deals with Libya are most responsible for the decline in the numbers: they fell soon after Italy stepped up its support for the Libyan coastguard in the summer of 2017. Bu the deals also trample on the human rights of migrants being returned to Libya. The militias that patrol the coast have been involved in people-smuggling themselves. Many migrants have suffered horrific abuse, including forced labour, torture, and sexual violence at the hands of smugglers. The various Libyan authorities are unable to deal with migrants humanely and effectively. By the EU's own admission, "conditions in the centres where migrants are held are unacceptable and fall short of international human rights standards".[6] Unless conditions in Libyan detention centres are improved, the EU's current approach will continue to put people's safety at risk. The EU has no presence on the ground in Libya, and is leaving the work on improving the centres to the UNHCR and IOM. Both say that poor security in Libya prevents them from sending international staff to Libya on a permanent basis: the centres are currently only managed by Libyan staff.

At the time of writing, it is too soon to tell whether the Libyan deal will hold. Arrivals in Italy ticked up again in September 2017 following fighting between rival militias in Sabratha. But the Libya case demonstrates the difficulties that the EU faces in its attempts to externalise its migration policy by signing agreements with countries of origin and transit outside Europe. These difficulties largely arise out of the fact that countries of origin and transit are often weak states, which do not have enough border staff or infrastructure to control movements of people. Many officials in countries of transit are bribed by people-smuggler gangs which in some towns hold more power than state officials. Moreover, governments and voters in these countries do not necessarily want to reduce migration flows. Remittances from migrants living in richer countries are a big source of revenue for many poorer countries. Governments in Africa and Asia resent Europe's attempts to keep out and deport irregular migrants, pointing out the xenophobic attitudes that often underpin European countries' migration policies.

5: International Organisation for Migration, '132 Guinean migrants return home from Libya with UN migration help', August 9th 2017.

6: European Commission and High Representative, 'Migration on the central Mediterranean route: Managing flows, saving lives', January 25th 2017.

Countries of transit also do not want migrants from other countries to get stuck in their country – and would prefer to wave them through rather than help the EU.

Given that countries of origin are often reluctant to curb migration, the EU must use incentives to persuade them to do so. This does not come easily to the EU, since it is a group of member-states with no federal government empowered to provide, say, work visas for comparatively low-skilled immigrants to the EU, in exchange for tighter border controls in countries of origin. But the EU's strategy is coalescing around three policy areas: agreements on returns with countries of origin in return for at least the possibility of more legal migration routes, aid, and screening centres in third countries to determine who qualifies for asylum in the EU.

1) Readmission agreements

Returns policy is a key element of EU efforts to reduce flows of economic migrants. The EU has tried to strike readmission agreements with countries of origin but has only had limited success. In 2016, 493,785 non-EU citizens were ordered to leave the EU. Of these, only 226,150 (46 per cent) were returned. Around 90,000 people who were returned were from Albania, Ukraine, Kosovo and Serbia, but there were only 3,000 returns to Nigeria, which accounted for 21 per cent of all arrivals though the central Mediterranean route. And returns of Guineans, Ivorians and Gambians, other significant origin countries, were negligible.[7]

Readmission policy is in the first instance an issue for member-states, not the EU; most migration policy is not set at the EU level. But most member-states' migration and asylum systems are under-resourced, and many migrants simply go to ground if their asylum application is unsuccessful and they are issued with an expulsion order. Enforcement of such orders is patchy, and the Commission recommends more use of detention to prevent people from absconding.[8] The EU itself could help member-states in setting up asylum systems that are able to make decisions quickly through the European Asylum Support Office (EASO), as it has done – not without

controversy – in Greece. Specifically, EASO could be given more money and trained personnel by member-states, so that it could in turn provide more aid to Italy and Greece to help process applications and to manage the return of failed asylum-seekers. But Italy is resisting a greater role for the agency on national sovereignty grounds. The European Border and Coast Guard (EBCG) could also step up its assistance to member-states trying to return failed applicants. But to do so, it would need to be better resourced both in terms of budget and personnel. Some member-states also refrain from seeking assistance from the EBCG as the human rights safeguards for their return flights are seen to be overly cumbersome.

The EU is prioritising readmission agreements with those countries that account for large numbers of applicants but few successful asylum applications. Nigerians accounted for 21 per cent of all arrivals in Italy in 2016, while Ivorians and Guineans accounted for 7 per cent each.[9] The EU does not have readmission agreements with any of these three countries, even though the rates of successful asylum application from them are low: 78 per cent of Nigerian asylum applications are rejected, as are 70 per cent of those filed by Côte d'Ivoire nationals and 71 per cent of Guinean nationals.[10] To strike readmission agreements the EU needs to provide incentives for countries to take back their citizens. Third countries are often unwilling to strike deals, as this may reduce the flow of remittances from its nationals working in the EU.

Chart 2 shows that these remittances are a significant source of national income for many countries of origin. Remittances from the EU alone made up 1.6 per cent of Nigeria's gross national income in 2014. EU remittances make up a much larger proportion of GNI for some countries, such as Morocco and Gambia; and for Bangladesh, Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire, rather lower. The EU will have to provide much stronger incentives if it is to persuade countries to tighten borders and co-operate on readmissions, given the scale of the potential national income that would be foregone if they did so.

7: Eurostat, 'Statistics on enforcement of immigration legislation', May 2017.
8: European Commission, 'Commission Recommendation of 7.3.2017 on making returns more effective when implementing the Directive 2008/115/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council'.
9: European Commission and High Representative, 'Migration on the central Mediterranean route: Managing flows, saving lives', January 25th 2017.
10: Eurostat, 'Asylum quarterly report'.
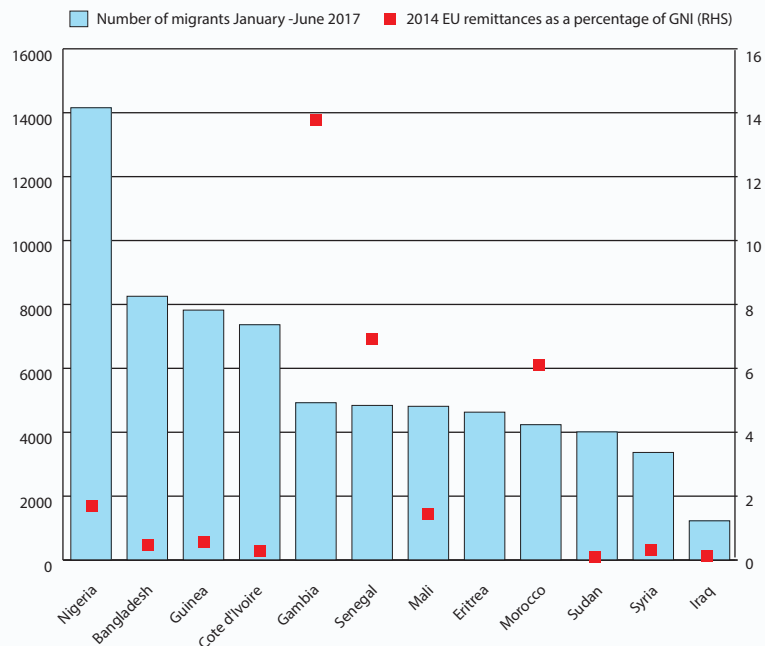
Champions of readmission agreements should note that countries of origin also face domestic political pressures. Families' incomes are boosted by relatives sending money home from Europe. Political tensions between European and non-European countries which share a colonial past are also a factor to consider. Negotiations on readmission between EU member-states, the European Commission and the governments of the countries of origin are secretive, to reduce the domestic criticism that the latter face. And the process of readmission can also be politically sensitive – planes with returned migrants are often scheduled to land at night-time, so that the press is less likely to be there to document their arrival.

Many of the EU's existing readmission deals with countries in the Western Balkans or Eastern Europe were struck thanks to leverage provided by the prospect of accession. The EU will have to use a wider toolkit to strike deals with African countries such as Nigeria, where accession is not an option.

Using positive incentives may be the most effective way: opening up legal channels for migration through visa programmes, scholarships and work permits can be a quid pro quo for signing a readmission agreement. But third countries may be worried that by striking readmission agreements, they would be opening themselves up to the returns of large numbers of their own nationals. One possibility that could be explored would be to limit returns to future arrivals only, so that states would not have to worry about a sudden spike in returns. To ensure that countries do not stop co-operating with readmissions over time, any EU aid that

is provided as an incentive to enforce borders could be paid in instalments. (The EU insisted that payments should be dependent on Turkey's actions in the March 2016 agreement.)

Ideally, readmission agreements would be negotiated by the EU. However, this may not prove easy, not least because many member-states will be unwilling to open up legal migration routes and the Commission lacks the legal power to force them through. Officials in the EU's institutions point out that member-states can agree measures that close the EU's external border faster than those that open it, so using the expansion of legal routes as an incentive will be tricky. Because of this, in the short term, the EU could make more use of its financial leverage to support individual member-states or 'coalitions of the willing' in striking readmission agreements with third countries. Alternatively, it could strike more informal readmission deals such as the ones agreed with Afghanistan last year and, more recently, with Bangladesh. These deals are not legally binding, according to the Commission, but both sides make commitments to 'co-operate' on readmission.[11] However, critics point out that the looser arrangements circumvent the European Parliament, with its power to oversee and monitor legal agreements made by the Commission, and to ensure that human rights safeguards are in place.

2) Aid and foreign policy
The EU can take short-term measures to discourage onward movement of migrants to Europe from countries where they are currently hosted, and long-term measures to remove incentives to migrate.

11: European External Action Service, 'Joint way forward on migration issues between Afghanistan and the EU', October 4th 2016.

In Libya, the EU can take steps to improve conditions and help bring peace to the country. Around half of migrants arriving in Libya hope to find work there, but the lack of security and widespread abuse make onward migration to Europe more likely.[12] In the immediate term, the EU should improve conditions in Libyan reception centres. Institutions and member-states can do more to support UNHCR and IOM in their efforts to monitor and improve these conditions. At the moment the EU has only pledged €90 million to provide assistance to migrants and improve Libya's economy and governance of its coastal communities. The EU and member-states should also press all Libyan actors, from rival governments to the municipalities that host migrants and people-smugglers, to improve conditions in reception centres, including by pressuring the Libyan authorities to grant unfettered access by humanitarian organisations to the facilities they control; to sign the UN refugee convention; and to scrap the country's policy of blanket detention of all undocumented migrants. EU funds can be made contingent on reform, with well-managed centres receiving additional funding.

The EU and member-states should push harder for peace in Libya, which will require a deal between General Haftar, whose forces control eastern Libya and the militias of Misrata, the main backers of the Government of National Accord based in Tripoli.[13] But EU member-states have often backed different actors in the Libyan conflict. Member-states should find consensus on a strategy and then work with the United Nations Special Envoy, the United States and Russia to secure a stable outcome, ideally in the form of a power-sharing agreement leading to a new constitution and presidential elections. Peace would also enable the EU to help Libya strengthen border controls, especially in the south of the country.

Aside from Libya, the EU should focus on Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan. These three countries currently host millions of Syrian refugees. If conditions for refugees in these countries deteriorate, they may seek to emigrate to the EU. Developments in Turkey are of pivotal importance. If Turkey cracks down further on the Kurdish minority, this will lead to the flight of both Turkish Kurds and Syrian Kurdish refugees currently living in Turkey. To avoid this outcome, the EU should seek to improve conditions for refugees in Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan by providing funds for international organisations helping them. And the EU should persuade host countries to allow refugees to work, which has obvious benefits for refugees themselves and potentially for these countries as a whole. It would also lead to more integration with host societies, and reduce the numbers who seek to move to Europe.

Further afield, the EU can collaborate with countries of transit and origin. While there will be a temptation to focus on short-term fixes such as training for coastguards and border guards in order to reduce migration flows, the EU also needs to have a long-term agenda. In the long run, irregular migration can only be reduced by ensuring security and economic opportunities in countries of origin.

African and European leaders agreed to co-ordinate development and migration policies at the Valletta Summit in November 2015. The EU pressed for a 'more for more' approach to aid and migration, with African countries accepting readmission agreements and stronger border enforcement in exchange for more development grants and finance. For their part, African leaders demanded more legal routes for their citizens to migrate to Europe.[14] The Valetta Summit's 'action plan' was the start of a process – it did not commit participating states to big shifts in policy – but it outlined a nascent strategy to tackle irregular migration. The EU would try to help African economies grow, and offer more legal routes for African migrants to live and work in Europe, in exchange for stronger border control and readmission of irregular migrants by African countries.

On the face of it, this strategy makes sense. But there are three potential pitfalls, which arise out of the opposed incentives for African and European countries, and the relationship between development and migration.

First, the challenge of creating job opportunities is huge: the IMF estimates that the working-age population of sub-Saharan Africa will increase from 480 million in 2013 to 1.3 billion in 2050.[15] Even if the EU succeeds, the number of people attempting to reach Europe will continue to increase – and in fact, accelerate – until income differences between sub-Saharan Africa and EU member-states fall substantially.[16] Emigration from poorer countries rises as they develop, reaching a peak at a national income per capita of $7-8,000.[17] Migration is both risky and costly, since air travel – or paying people-smugglers – is still expensive for people living in poor countries, and legal migration routes are limited. Migrants from poor countries tend to be richer than the average in their country of origin. And the correlation between emigration and higher living standards has strengthened in recent decades, thanks to the falling price of air travel and growing migrant groups in developed countries providing information, money and support for their compatriots who also want to move.

The second issue is political resistance in Europe to providing more legal routes for migrants from poorer

12: UNHCR, 'Insecurity, economic crisis, abuse and exploitation in Libya push refugees and migrants to Europe, new study reveals', July 3rd 2017.
13: Luigi Scazzieri, 'The EU and Libya: Realism or irrelevance', CER Insight, February 3rd 2017.
14: 'Action plan', Valletta Summit on Migration, November 2015.

15: International Monetary Fund, 'Regional economic outlook: Sub-Saharan Africa', April 2015.
16: International Labour Organisation, 'World Employment Social Outlook: Trends 2017'.
17: Michael Clemens, 'Does development reduce migration?', Center for Global Development, March 2014.

countries. At the summit the EU agreed to consider offering more visas for African tourists, business people, students and researchers, and to recognise more professional qualifications for people from countries outside Europe in general. But at present, the EU's member-states offer very few visas to the countries that are the origin of most migrants who cross the Mediterranean to Italy (see Chart 3). Of the top 12 sending countries, only Moroccans currently receive more work and education visas from EU member-states than the OECD average. The rest are far lower. Partly this discrepancy is down to the difference in education and skill levels between poor and rich countries. And more European visas to work and study are given to people from developed countries, because member-states worry less that people from these countries will overstay. It will be difficult for the EU's member-states, which have very different visa regimes, to agree to co-ordinate reforms in order to substantially increase the number of legal migration routes.

Chart 3:
Work and education visas issued to the top 12 source countries for sea arrivals to Europe, 2016

*Sources:
Eurostat, 'Resident permits statistics', World Bank, 'Total population statistics'.*
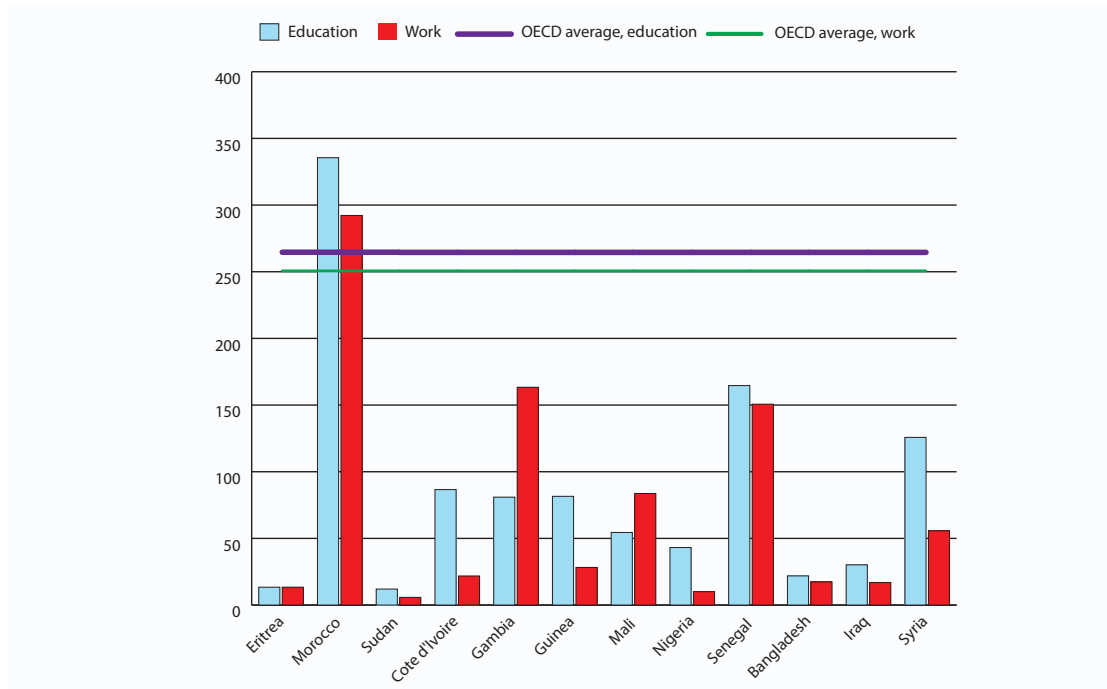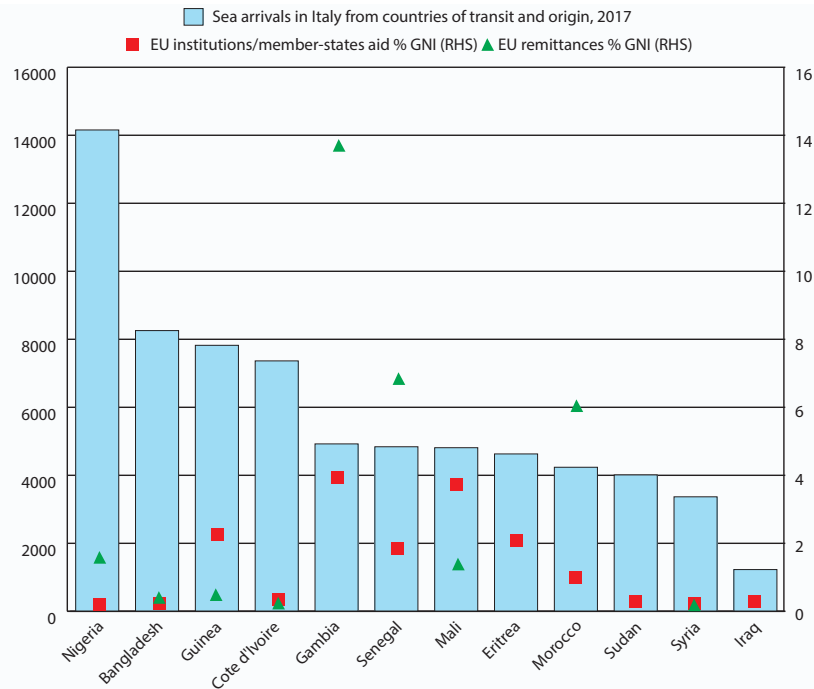

Third, the EU's development expenditure and loans cannot – and should not – be strictly linked to the migration policies that poor countries pursue. The first aim of development aid, according to the EU's Treaty of Lisbon, is to reduce poverty, and the EU and its member-states have reassured African and Asian countries that they will not withhold money if they do not curb emigration or accept readmission agreements. But even the EU's 'more for more' approach – more aid in exchange for more co-operation on migration – will be difficult to enact. Chart 4 plots European development aid and remittances as a proportion of national income against the number of sea arrivals in Italy in 2017, for the main countries of origin and transit. Nigeria, for example, is a middle-income country thanks to its oil and gas reserves. European aid therefore makes up a small proportion (0.13 per cent) of its national income. Moreover, the value of remittances of Nigerians already in Europe is ten times larger than the value of EU aid to Abuja – the country's population has much to gain from more migration to Europe, not less. The EU would have to offer substantially more aid and finance to Nigeria to give the government reason to close the estimated 1,500 illegal crossing points into and out of the country.

18: International Organisation for Migration, 'Migration in Nigeria: A country profile', 2014.

Sea arrivals in Italy from countries of transit and origin, 2017
■ EU institutions/member-states aid % GNI (RHS) ▲ EU remittances % GNI (RHS)

European aid is also a small proportion of the national income of Bangladesh and Côte d'Ivoire, because they are not among the world's very poorest countries. To have an effect on these countries' policies on border control and readmission, the EU would either have to reorient spending from the poorest countries or raise aid budgets, possibly substantially. Other countries which receive less European aid – or receive substantial remittances from their diasporas in Europe – include Sudan, Morocco, Gambia and Senegal.

3) Offshore processing
At a summit of European and African leaders on August 28th 2017, French President Emmanuel Macron pressed for asylum processing centres to be set up in African countries on the route to the Mediterranean. The previous month, Macron had suggested that such 'hotspots' could be set up in Libya, with migrants' asylum requests processed offshore. Such a policy has been pursued by Australia, which has camps on Manus and Nauru, two remote islands in the Oceania archipelago; migrants' boats are intercepted by the Australian coast guard, and their passengers taken to these camps for processing. If their asylum applications are successful, they are transferred to Australia. If they fail, they are returned to their host country, often after long periods of detention. Conditions in these camps are poor, and NGOs and the UN have reported that detainees have suffered from abuse and violence, and many have poor mental health.

There are two avenues that the EU or its member-states, working independently of the Union, could pursue to set up offshore camps, neither of which seem likely to be successful.

The first is to set up new centres that would be run by the UNHCR and IOM in countries of transit. European countries – helped by UNHCR – could process asylum-seekers' claims, resettle successful refugees in their own territory, and return failed applicants to their original countries. The UNHCR runs 'open' reception centres, where no one is detained, in Chad and other countries for people displaced by conflict. Some refugees have been resettled to Europe and the US from these centres, but the numbers are small. The difficulty with such open centres is that they are unsuitable for 'mixed' migration flows, with refugees and economic migrants travelling together. Economic migrants have little incentive to go to the centres, because they would be unlikely to win a claim for asylum. To work, such centres would have to detain people caught in the host country's territory and then process their claims. But the UNHCR will not detain people, so European countries would have to partner with the country of transit's government, which may not respect the human rights of detainees.

The second option is even more problematic: that the EU itself runs processing centres, resettling successful refugees to the EU, in the same manner as Australia. However, the EU has no common asylum system: asylum law is still in the hands of the member-states. It is unclear who would be responsible for decisions on asylum applications, and whose courts would handle appeals. Progress towards a common European asylum system is difficult, with member- states unable to agree to a reform of the Dublin regulation. The EU is still far from having even common standards on asylum. It has tried to decide on a common list of safe countries of origin. But external processing carried out by the EU would require the wholesale harmonisation of asylum legislation across the EU.

Even if the EU developed a common set of criteria for asylum or a common system to make decisions on asylum, it is unclear how refugees would then be resettled. Which member-states would take in refugees and according to what criteria? Would there be a compulsory distribution mechanism? The EU has found it difficult to implement a scheme distributing asylum-seekers from Italy and Greece among member-states. This was due not only to the reticence of countries such as Poland, Hungary and Slovakia, but also to other member-states: Germany had only taken 30 per cent of its overall allocation, France, 22 per cent and Spain, 13 per cent.[19]

Finally, the co-operation of third countries is by no means guaranteed. It is unclear why third countries would agree to hosting processing centres on their territory unless they were sure that they would not become a magnet for more migration and that people would not simply be stuck there. And, before going ahead with external processing, the EU or individual member-states would need to secure sufficient safeguards that asylum-seekers will be housed in decent conditions and that their human rights will be fully respected.

It is possible that coalitions of willing member-states could carry out external processing by themselves. However, a fully-fledged EU-wide system of external processing presupposes the collaboration of safe third countries where applications can be processed, as well as a functional EU system to handle applications and appeals, to resettle migrants amongst member-states and to return those whose applications have been rejected to their countries of origin.

Conclusion

This paper has set out the EU's current approach and examined the possible ways in which it can address the foreign policy dimension of migration. Some avenues seem more promising than others. For instance, it is clear that the EU cannot move towards external processing of asylum applications until member-states take major steps towards a common EU system to handle applications and appeals, to resettle migrants amongst member-states and to return those whose applications have been rejected to their countries of origin.

But there is more scope for the EU to use its leverage to sign readmission agreements with countries of origin, or to support member-states in brokering readmission agreements. The EU can deploy a wide range of incentives in securing readmission agreements, from visa policy to aid. And the Union's vast financial resources remain an untapped asset in fostering economic development. The EU can do more to make use of them. While economic development in the short-run raises emigration from poorer countries, legal routes for migrants from Africa and Asia will bring in economically beneficial workers. But ultimately, the only way to curb the numbers attempting the dangerous route overland and sea to Europe is to provide more security and higher living standards at home.

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19: European Commission, 'State of play: Relocation mechanism', October 2017.