

4 The political economy of migration governance in West Africa

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Despite the increasing attention on West African countries as a major region of origin for refugees and other migrants coming to Europe, there is little research that specifically considers the position, stakes, or interests of West African states. However, in order to understand the stakes of migration cooperation, the EU and its member states need to better understand how and in what ways African governments *prioritize* migration. This means considering migration policy interests in a more holistic way rather than reducing them to migration toward

Europe, as that would render analysis of an African view incomplete. Because different migration interests can be played off against each other, it is vital to look at where irregular migration to Europe stands in relation to other issues like diaspora remittances and displacement in the country.

For research on the “Political Economy of West African Migration Governance” (WAMiG)⁴² project, we employ such a holistic understanding, expanding on a point that has repeatedly arisen in previous studies for MEDAM (see box 1).

Box 1 A holistic understanding of the politics of migration

The WAMiG project assesses the *political relevance* of different types of migration journeys. In doing so, it acknowledges the overlapping nature of, for example, refugees and other migrants, as well as the agency, choice, and flexibility of individual journeys. In all the countries considered, it looks at the political role of the following aspects:

- irregular migration;
- diaspora migration;
- immigration;
- refugees and asylum seekers *from* the country; and
- refugees, asylum seekers, and displaced persons *in* the country.

The WAMiG project aims to analyze the political dimension of migration governance as well as the roles of multiple stakeholders, which reach far beyond government officials to civil society groups, international organizations, and journalists to name just a few. In short, the research examines how migration governance instruments and institutions are established, the interests and stakeholders involved (or excluded), and the societal discourse that influences these interests.

The qualitative research uses four countries as a starting point to better understand migration governance from an African perspective: Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, and the Gambia. All of them are of importance to the EU, the first three being priority countries under the EU Partnership Framework. Moreover, they represent a mix of countries of origin, transit, and destination, both small and large in size, as well as anglo- and francophone.

We conducted fieldwork in all four countries, interviewing a total of 133 policy makers, politicians, civil

society activists, and academic experts. The work was mostly undertaken in the countries’ capitals. In Nigeria, however, interviews of respondents were also held in Lagos and Benin City; in Senegal, interviews and/or participant observations also took place in Tambacounda and Saly. Noting the importance of discussing our research findings and analysis in the region, the research was participatory by design. The case studies were peer-reviewed, mostly by experts from the countries themselves. We presented our findings at dissemination events in Abuja, Banjul, Niamey, and Dakar between July and November 2019. Lastly, we discussed our findings with academics and civil society activists from all four countries at a stakeholder workshop in Accra. The following sections present the main findings. We conclude with recommendations on how more holistic cooperation on migration between West African countries and European partners can be achieved.

⁴² The WAMiG project involves independent research conducted by the Arnold Bergstraesser Institute, within the overall framework of the MEDAM project.

4.1 The politics of migration governance

Migration and mobility are generally not considered a threat or problem in the West African context. While concerns over dangers on the routes to Europe feature in official discourse and are mirrored in political actions, migration and mobility as such are considered a common part of everyday life. The most usual form of migration in West Africa is regional migration (see for instance, Awumbila, Teye, and Yaro 2017).⁴³ Regional migration is safeguarded through the free movement protocols of ECOWAS and the rules of the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU).⁴⁴ Furthermore, both Senegal and Nigeria safeguard the ‘right to migrate’ in their constitutions and relevant policy documents (Arhin-Sam 2019; Jegen forthcoming (b)).

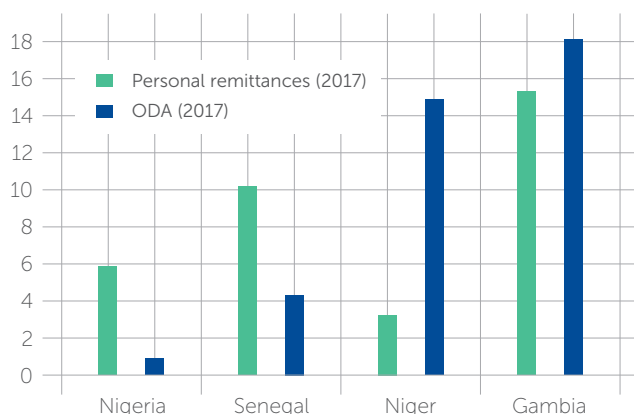
An important interest of West African states in relation to migration is linked to remittances. These come from within the region as well as beyond it. In Niger, regional migration plays a crucial role as a livelihood strategy of rural communities (Mounkaila, Amadou, and Boyer 2009), while the destination countries for migrants from the other three case study countries

are more varied. Nigeria is the largest net recipient of remittances in Sub-Saharan Africa. In 2017 for example, the country received US\$22 billion in official remittances, representing 5.9 percent of Nigeria’s GDP (World Bank 2019). Meanwhile, in the Gambia, remittances amounted to US\$228 million in 2017—nearly the same as official development assistance, which stood at US\$269 million (World Bank 2019; see also figure 3).

On the whole, migration and mobility in the West African context are widely considered a non-issue. This becomes most evident in the fact that all four case study countries only adopted (or in the Gambia’s case, are planning to adopt) a national migration policy following external funding for these schemes. Indeed, mobility in the region is normalized with many borders dividing ethnic groups that maintain close social, economic, and cultural cross-border ties. Two issues do stand out, however, that have raised concerns about migration for some West African governments. First, forced displacement within the region, which is not discussed at length in this report, is a critical issue, especially in both the Nigerien and Nigerian contexts. Second, are the governments’ concerns for the safety of their citizens—notably following the release of the CNN documentary in late 2017 on the human rights abuses, slavery, and torture of African migrants in Libya.

Figure 3 Contribution of remittances and official development assistance as a percentage of GDP, 2017

Different income sources as a % of GDP



Source: World Bank (2017).

Note: ODA = official development assistance.

European and West African interests in juxtaposition

In contrast to the typically low level of political interest in migration by West African states, for the EU and its member states, migration cooperation with West African countries has become increasingly important. Both the EU and its member states have contributed to setting up and strengthening institutions and policies dealing with migration governance in the region. This has also led to an increasing role for European (and European-funded) actors in the formulation of objectives for national migration policy, both directly and indirectly.

Broadly, European interest in migration governance centers on regulating migration flows from the region in general and stopping irregular migration to Europe

⁴³ This includes informal herder movements across country borders that hold important livelihood implications.

⁴⁴ Collectively, the 1979 Protocol (A/P.1/5/79) relating to Free Movement of Persons, Residence and Establishment, the 1985 Supplementary Protocol (A/SP.1/7/85), the 1986 Supplementary Protocol (A/SP.1/7/86), the 1989 Supplementary Protocol (A/SP.1/6/89), and the 1990 Supplementary Protocol (A/SP.2/5/90) are known as the ECOWAS free movement protocols. WAEMU (comprising the eight states that share the West African CFA franc currency) has its own rules.

in particular. This interest is pursued through institutional and legal capacity building on issues such as people smuggling, human trafficking, border control, and (forced) return cooperation. To further incentivize cooperation in these areas, projects that target the ‘root causes’ of migration have been adopted and wide reintegration programs have been set up. Owing to the significant impact on development funding (see also table 5), especially in countries like Niger or the Gambia, European interests have slowly gained in political relevance. This external push to adopt and implement measures targeting irregular migration has resulted in irregular migration becoming a top priority in Niger and the Gambia in comparison with other mobility-related policy issues, and a secondary priority in Nigeria and Senegal (see figure 4). Hence, some of these priorities are donor driven, while others correspond to more intrinsic policies.

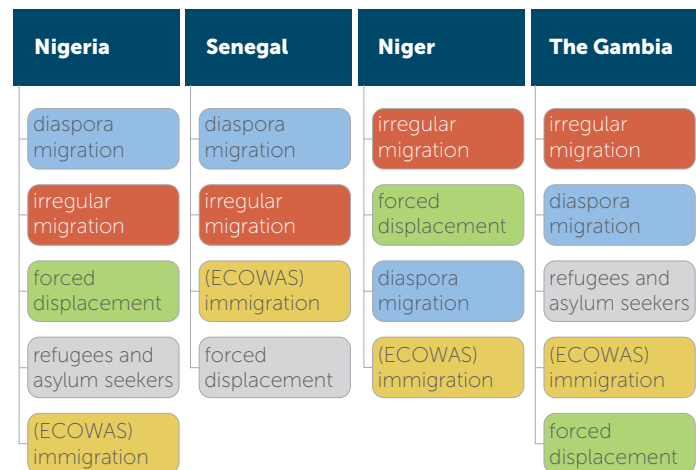
The fact that migration cooperation is often realized through capacity-building projects funded by development aid highlights that such aid for migration-related purposes makes it lucrative for governments to cooperate with the EU in this regard (see also Adamson and Tsourapas 2019). Aid includes institution building, training, technical support, and policy development.

Indeed, the Valetta summit in 2015—bringing together European and African heads of state for the first summit solely dedicated to the topic of migration—saw the launch of the EUTF, mostly funded through the EU’s development budget. Niger has been the largest benefactor of the four case study countries, with 12 projects to the tune €253 million, making up a high 3 percent of GDP (see table 5). If we account for population size, the EUTF is especially significant in the Gambia, amounting to €16.82 per inhabitant compared with €0.66 per inhabitant in Nigeria.

Another incentive to cooperate on migration-related projects has been security concerns. Especially in Niger and Senegal, which face a volatile, regional security context, border capacity building is often perceived as fostering state capabilities in anti-terror measures. The link between migration and security considerations has not only been forged by external powers, but has also been evoked, for instance, by the Nigerien government to gain much needed military support, in addition to state capacity building and development assistance.

Despite these benefits, migration cooperation bears a number of consequences, of which four are discussed below.

Figure 4 Migration policy priorities in Nigeria, Senegal, Niger, and the Gambia



Source: Own research (see also Arhin-Sam 2019; Altrogge and Zanker 2019; and Jegen forthcoming (a, b)).

Table 5 Overview of EUTF projects, September 2019

	Nigeria	Senegal	Niger	The Gambia
Total value of EUTF projects (€)	128,523,633	107,803,200	253,000,000	37,900,000
Number of EUTF projects	8	10	12	3
EUTF as a share of GDP (%)	0.04	0.49	3.00	2.55
Volume of EUTF funding per person (€)	0.66	6.80	11.27	16.82

Source: Figures for the EUTF are from the European Commission and include all EUTF spending up to September 2019 (<https://ec.europa.eu/trustfundforafrica/region/sahel-lake-chad>); GDP and population size stem from the World Bank (2018).
 Note: EUTF = EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa.

4.2 Obstacles to migration cooperation in West Africa

The challenges that arise from European interests in cooperation can be distinguished into four categories, which affect the case study countries to varying degrees. First are the adverse effects on local ownership; second is increasing conflict over institutional mandates; third are domestic legitimacy problems; and fourth are concerns over a trade-off between migratory rent⁴⁵ and reduced remittances. The first two speak of migration governance more broadly, and the latter two are especially tied to the question of migrant returns. Each consequence is discussed using the example of a case study country.

Niger: Adverse effects on local ownership

The European focus on irregular migration governance derives from the ‘fight against smuggling’ becoming a short- and long-term policy priority in Europe’s migration cooperation with non-EU states. It is therefore not surprising that even though emigration

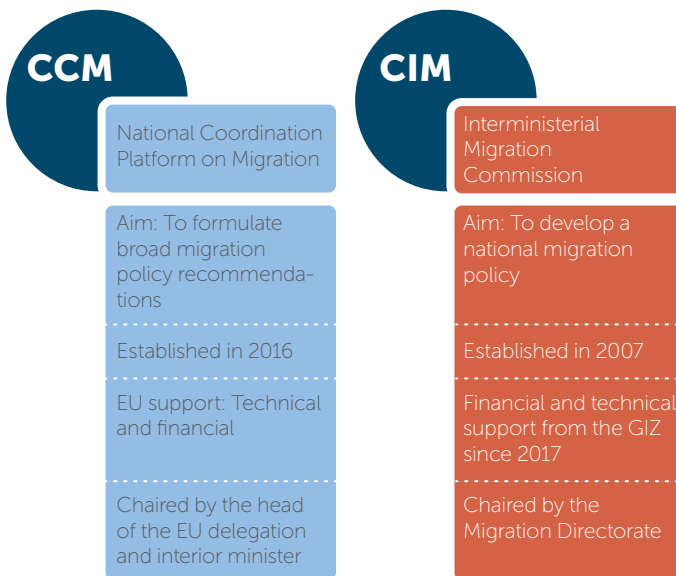
from Niger toward Europe is negligible, the country has become a key partner of the EU (member states) due to its role as a ‘transit country.’

This situation has resulted in European funding prioritizing the implementation of the 2015 Nigerien anti-smuggling law (no. 2015–36), which was drafted in close cooperation with the UN Office on Drugs and Crime. The law entrenches the criminalization of the transport of travelers without possession of valid identification documents. Support has sought first to strengthen the judicial capacities of the Nigerien state in order to prosecute ‘smugglers.’ Further projects have worked to build the capabilities of security actors. For example, the Directorate for Border Surveillance has profited from extensive support, which covers the construction of border posts and installation of data management systems as well as training.

An increasing number of ‘humanitarian’ projects have also been set up to care for and ‘voluntarily’ return stranded travelers. For instance, since 2016 an EU-funded project implemented by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) provides food, water, shelter, medical and psychological support, alongside assistance with travel documents for migrants in six so-called transit centers. However, assistance at the centers is based on individuals’ willingness to voluntarily return to their countries of origin, making the humanitarian assistance conditional (see also Morales 2019). There are also search and rescue operations for migrants stranded in the desert; as of June 2019, nearly 20,000 people had been rescued since April 2016, and taken to the transit centers. Finally, development projects have been launched to offset the negative consequences of the 2015 law on local economies, through initiatives in the transit region Agadez.

Beyond supporting the implementation of laws, European support has had an impact on policy. In 2007, Niger launched its Interministerial Commission on Migration (Commission Interministerielle de Migration, CIM) to develop a national migration policy. For numerous reasons, mainly financial but also due to a lack of strong leadership, this process was put on hold in 2014. In the meantime, the EU funded the development of the National Strategy to Counter Irregular Migration, which spells out how to put the 2015 law into effect. In record time of under a year, the International Centre for Migration Policy Development drafted the

Figure 5 Overview of the main migration frameworks in Niger



Notes: The CIM predates the CCM but was inactive for a number of years, partly due to funding issues. Today, both frameworks receive substantive external funding and technical assistance raising doubts over local ownership.
GIZ = Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit.

⁴⁵ Harouna Mounkaila used this term to describe the financial incentives that go in hand with donor-induced national migration projects at the WAMiG dissemination event in Niamey, Niger in October 2019.

strategy. This stands in strong contrast to the national migration policy. A civil society actor commenting on the adoption of the strategy on irregular migration told us: “On a fait les filles avant la mere, ce n’est pas logique.”⁴⁶

In fact, the EU has secured a permanent role in the formulation of migration policy recommendations in Niger through financing the setup of the National Coordination Platform on Migration (Cadre Concertation de Migration, CCM). This is a biannual meeting of national and international stakeholders that work to define such recommendations. Formed in 2016, the platform is chaired by the head of the EU delegation along with the Nigerien interior minister (see figure 5).

The national migration policy process was re-launched in 2017 with financial and technical support from the German development agency, GIZ (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit; see figure 5). The formulation of the national migration policy bears the potential of being more owned by Nigeriens. Two civil society groups are closely involved in the process as well as the national human rights council.⁴⁷ Yet, some interlocutors decried the political nature of inclusion in the consultation framework. Moreover, Nigerien civil society organizations as well as academics stressed that a more locally owned national migration strategy will only be possible if the policy is able to curtail the security-focused approach to migration governance taken in the post-2015 context.

Senegal: Increasing conflicts over institutional mandates

Competition for leadership is a feature of migration governance in Senegal. There was wide agreement among respondents that competition extends to actors at the political level, in government institutions, and in civil society. One civil society activist put it thus: “Mais le problème est que comme vous venez de le souligner, quand les bailleurs arrivent, il y a cette compétition-là qui est créé.”⁴⁸ The most notable conflicts over mandates have occurred in the formulation of the national migration policy, the modernization of the civil registries, and the setting up of reintegration programs under the EU-IOM initiative.

This competition is at least partially linked to external financial incentives. One individual involved in implementation commented: “Mais ils veulent, cha-

cun veut piloter cette fois. Pourquoi ils veulent piloter ? C’est très simple : c’est les ressources. Ce n’est pas autre chose, la gestion des ressources,” noting that the donors had introduced such a system.⁴⁹ More generally, there is a fragmented institutional landscape in which actors operate with partially overlapping and unclear mandates. This in itself may make the determination of the best project partner for external donors difficult and has in part contributed to project failure (see also Vives 2017).

Relatedly, decisions are often at a technocratic ministerial level—without explicit consent from politically relevant stakeholders. This is best illustrated when considering the development process of the national migration policy. Its formulation started in 2015 and was concluded with the technical validation of the document in March 2018. Political validation was still outstanding at the time of writing. The drafting of the document took place in the framework of an interministerial committee, which was coordinated by the Ministry of Economy, Planning, and Cooperation and financed by the IOM. According to respondents, the initiative to develop the policy did not come from a high political level but from civil servants. They started the development process without initial permission from a higher ministerial level, which was only granted once the funding had been secured. This raises questions on the exact (political) ownership of the policy elaborated given that the initiative to launch the drafting process may not have derived from a political priority but rather a funding possibility. This may also explain why the policy’s political adoption has been slow. Even making EU budgetary support conditional upon adoption has so far proven unsuccessful. Beyond this Senegalese civil society groups have raised concern about the agenda-setting ability of external donors in relation to the policy.

Furthermore, the coordination role has been contested by other ministries—especially the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its Diaspora Unit (Direction General de l’Appui de Sénégalaise de l’Exterieur), which at the beginning saw its mandate on migration curtailed in the elaboration process. Competition for leadership between the participating actors has also led to delays in the EUTF-funded modernization of civil registries, where both of the government agencies involved claim leadership over the process. Similarly, the delayed launch of the reintegration program as part of the EU-IOM joint initiative funded by the EUTF can

⁴⁶ Translation: “We created the daughters before the mother. This is not logic.” Comment by a Nigerien working for an international NGO (Interview, Niamey, March 2019).

⁴⁷ The groups are Jeunesse-Enfance-Migration-Développement (JMED) and Groupe de Réflexion et d’Action pour le Soutien au Phénomène de l’Immigration (GRASPI), though there were some complaints that these civil society groups are uncritical of the irregular migration agenda.

⁴⁸ “But there is this problem, as you highlighted, when the donors arrive, there is this competition” (Interview of a civil society activist, Dakar, July 2019).

⁴⁹ “But they want, everyone wants, to lead this time. Why do they all want to lead? That is very simple: it is resources. There is nothing else, it is the management of resources” (Interview of an individual from an implementing organization, Dakar, July 2019).

be understood as a result of initial competition over funding and ambiguity in the mandates of Senegalese and international actors.

Lastly, the influx of migration-related development aid (or migratory rent) results in sustainability problems. Interlocutors highlighted that the end of project funding often ends the initiative. While this is indicative of the limited financial resources available, it must also be understood in the context of competition for migratory rent—where financial incentives may override political priorities.

The Gambia: Domestic legitimacy problems

In the Gambia, cooperation with European actors became ever more important after the opposition leader Adama Barrow won the presidential election in December 2016, ending the country’s long-term authoritarian rule by Yahya Jammeh in January 2017. Development assistance to the country more than doubled in 2017. Merely a year before, development assistance only made up 6 percent of GDP, compared with over 18 percent in 2017 (see figure 3).

With the idea of the Gambia being a good example to showcase successful cooperation on return, the country has been pushed into the limelight of European migration cooperation interests. Much like the other countries (with the exception of Niger, where return does not play a role due to the low emigration rate), the number of forced returns is low, especially as shown in the ratio of those returned to how many received an order to leave (see figure 6). For example, in 2018 only 7.4 percent of all Gambians with an or-

der to leave were returned to their country of origin. Many policy makers attribute the low number of returns primarily to a lack of willingness to cooperate by the country of origin.

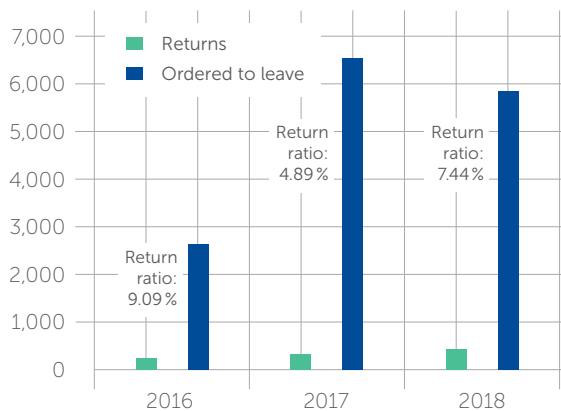
The new Gambian government tentatively began to cooperate with the EU on return matters. For example, it sent regular missions to Europe to issue nationals with identification documents to facilitate their return.⁵⁰ To enhance cooperation on forced returns, the EU and the Gambia concluded a non-binding ‘good practice’ agreement on preferable conditions of forced returns from EU member states in May 2018, with implementation starting in November that year. This approach is illustrative of a general turn toward informal readmission politics between the EU and Sub-Saharan African states (see Slagter 2019). In the Gambian context, considering also the increasingly volatile political situation of the country, cooperation on forced returns has gained ever more potential to become an explosive issue for domestic politics.

Tensions regarding implementation of the good practice agreement arose when European governments started increasing returns and, according to Gambian officials, did not sufficiently adapt their operations in line with the standards agreed. This cumulated in a return flight operation in February 2019 from Germany, about which the Gambian authorities were allegedly insufficiently informed and which was therefore initially refused entry. The confusion over this flight purportedly caused violent outbreaks between Gambian security authorities and the returning migrants. Around the same time, in response to numerous such flight-related incidents and a public outcry, the Gambian government declared a temporary moratorium against further forced returns from the EU from March onwards.

Months of tense negotiations followed, with the moratorium lifted in October, though the matter has by no means yet been adequately resolved. The good practice agreement indicates that the Gambia’s reception capacities should not be overstretched by the number of returns. For the Gambian government, this means a reduction in chartered operations and lower overall return numbers. Most importantly, it calls for more time to pave the way for a ‘return with dignity,’ by setting up better reintegration opportunities also for forced returnees.

Although the moratorium has been lifted, the number of returns from Europe has remained very low and limited to individuals on scheduled commercial flights. That is because the transition government needs to collaborate with EU partner countries, but the issue of return also has the potential to weaken its

Figure 6 Returns from the EU to the Gambia, 2016–18



Source: Eurostat.

⁵⁰ The United States has also been scaling up its cooperation. The new government agreed to accept forced returns from the United States, which in turn revoked a travel ban for Gambian government officials that had been in place since October 2016. The number of forced returns from the United States then slightly increased from 56 in 2017 to 111 in 2018 and to 124 in 2019. See ‘ICE Details How Border Crisis Impacted Immigration Enforcement in FY 2019’, US Department of Homeland Security, February 24, 2020, <https://www.ice.gov/features/ERO-2019> and Altrogge and Zanker (2019).

legitimacy at home. The Gambian press, and especially social media, regularly comment on this highly emotional issue. A communication imbalance has emerged in which social media is taking the lead. Activists on social media are protesting against deportations. And they have their particular narrative, as explained by one civil servant.⁵¹ At the same time, the government is frequently suspected of playing an active role in returns and is accused of withholding information about its dealings with the EU and member states like Germany. Allowing more deportations from the EU would be perceived as betrayal by many migrants and their families. The moratorium and continued delay in accepting a higher number of returns therefore fulfills a symbolic function of (seemingly) defending Gambian against foreign national interests.

The Gambian government is currently facing increasing domestic turmoil, with President Barrow extending his three-year transition period to five years, which—while constitutionally legitimate—contradicts what he originally agreed. Opposition to this has been growing, which in turn faced repressive crackdowns in January 2020. That makes potential cooperation on returns even riskier. The domestic environment also includes the diaspora abroad, and return cooperation can undermine political support from diaspora communities and possibly undercut remittances, including from people who have returned (unwillingly). Indeed, remittances not only come from the high-skilled immigrants abroad, but also from irregular migrants. This brings us to a related challenge, namely the role of remittances.

Nigeria: Concerns over a trade-off between migratory rent and potentially reduced remittances

A key stake in European migration cooperation is the prospect of reduced remittances, which make up an important economic contribution in all the selected countries (see figure 3). Remittances to Nigeria currently exceed official development assistance and foreign direct investment. As noted earlier, Nigeria is the largest recipient of remittances in Sub-Saharan Africa. By 2018, the country received more than US\$24.3 billion in official remittances (an increase of \$2 billion from 2017, see figure 3), representing 6.1 percent of Nigeria's GDP (World Bank 2019).

Considering the huge effect of remittances, it is unsurprising that the Nigerian government's implicit priority clearly lies with diaspora migration policies (see also figure 4). On the whole, Nigeria has been active in migration policy development since 2014, includ-

ing through a national migration policy, strategies on labor migration and diaspora matters, and a coordinating framework to reform migration governance. Nevertheless, many of these initiatives are lacking in implementation.

The most advanced policies concern the diaspora, which are far-reaching and include an office assisting the president on diaspora affairs, a diaspora policy, a diaspora commission, a senate committee on diaspora matters, and strong support for the Nigerians in Diaspora Organization. In collaboration with Nigerian diaspora organizations, the government has been arranging global Nigerian diaspora conferences. Still, for the most part, government activities have focused on economic benefits. In June 2017 the Nigerian government floated its first diaspora bonds. Furthermore, there are ongoing plans to set up a government-owned money transfer system for Nigerians abroad. Government action does not go as far as to address the government's inability to retain highly skilled people, with critics arguing that remittances amount to quick pay-offs rather than dealing with the longer-term problems related to the loss of skilled people (see also Clemens 2016).

This attention on the diaspora stands in sharp contrast to the European interests in migration cooperation with the country. A substantial portion of funding for governing irregular migration in Nigeria comes from development partners and particularly the EU. Though it is not easy to actually obtain an overview of migration projects in the country, investigative reporters recently counted 50 migration projects in Nigeria funded by 11 individual European countries, and 32 migration projects funded through the EU, amounting to more than €770 million (Vermeulen et al. 2019; see also Vermeulen, Amzat, and Zandonini 2019). Migration-related projects funded by the EU and its member states in Nigeria have centered for the most part on irregular migration, trafficking, return, and reintegration. Governance initiatives in this area are dominated by international and nongovernmental actors. The low interest of the Nigerian government to work on this issue is mirrored by the funds provided. For example, the government reduced the annual funding of the primary agency for combating human trafficking and smuggling (NAPTIP) from 2.5 billion naira (€6.2 million) in 2015 to 1.7 billion naira in 2016 (€4.2 million).⁵²

These diverging migration priorities have left the Nigerian government in a dilemma. While they are interested in capitalizing on migration-related development aid, it may de facto lead to the curbing of migration from the country (although this is highly

⁵¹ Interviewed in Banjul (May 7, 2019).

⁵² US Department of State, "2017 Trafficking in Persons Report—Nigeria," Washington, DC (2017), <https://www.refworld.org/country,.../NGA,,5959ec72c,0.html>.

contested), but more concretely a higher number of returns to Nigeria. Returns have been both implicitly and explicitly tied to migration projects (Zanker et al. 2019; see also chapter 3). Cooperation on returns can be costly and further challenge domestic legitimacy, like in the Gambia. Considering that many Nigerians blame their government for the high level of corruption, lack of good governance, unemployment, inability to retain skilled professionals, and many other

problems, any return agreement threatens to further discredit the government.

For the time being, Nigeria still errs on the side of prioritizing diaspora policy. Notably, EUTF funds make up 0.04 percent of GDP (see table 5) and remittances 5.9 percent (see figure 3). This helps to explain the tendency toward a proactive interest in diaspora migration yet a much more reactive approach toward irregular migration and trafficking.

4.3 Outlook

From a West African perspective, there are, of course, benefits to the rise in European interest in cooperating on migration. The increase of external funding and migration-related development projects has surely been welcomed in many countries and by many vulnerable people in need of protection and support. Nonetheless, the drive to improve migration cooperation is not without effects that complicate the relationship between West African and European nations and the role of migration therein. In terms of designing frameworks for migration governance, our research has found adverse effects on local ownership and increasing conflicts over institutional mandates. The most contentious issue—return and readmission—is entangled in domestic legitimacy problems and concerns related to potentially reduced remittances. Migration cooperation between the EU and many West African countries is tense, with scholars, activists, and others repeatedly criticizing the current approach. So, where does that take us?

A renewed push toward increased and strengthened migration conditionality can be seen at the EU level, as shown in chapter 3. First, the recently adopted Visa Code provides for using the restriction or issuance of visas as a form of leverage toward non-EU countries to cooperate on issues such as forced returns. Second, the ongoing discussions on the adoption of the new Multiannual Financial Framework show a strong move toward further development aid conditionality. Under the proposed MFF, the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument will provide EU actors increased leverage over non-EU countries in migration matters. The instrument, of which at least 92 percent must be financed by official development assistance, will allow for an annual assessment of the non-EU country's performance in line with the donor's migration control ob-

jectives—including readmission. Depending on the outcome of the assessment, funding allocation will be adaptable.

Our research has highlighted that the continued social and political importance of remittances is unlikely to be balanced by development aid. Current trends indicate that migration cooperation induced by development aid will not lead to a more-for-more but rather a less-for-less principle. This is only likely to worsen the difficulties West African states are facing, as outlined above. Development projects in the field of migration currently run the risk of responding more to European priorities than those of West African stakeholders, as critics have continued to point out. This further raises the possibility of project-related rent-seeking on the side of receiving states, which in the long term can undermine project implementation as well as project sustainability. To counteract these problems, moving away from the renewed and strengthened focus on migration conditionality and bringing local ownership back to the center of development assistance is the way forward.

Moreover, the lack of transparency surrounding increasingly informal migration cooperation (see also chapter 3), has heightened the mistrust of populations and governments, and has negatively impacted democratic accountability. In some countries, such as the Gambia, this runs a high risk of further contributing to growing political instability.

At the moment, the EU, its member states, and their African partners are often talking past each other. Migration is continuously framed as a problem, as something to be curtailed. This stands in strong contrast to different (and multiple) understandings of migration and mobility as something normal and an important livelihood strategy. While the significance of irregular migration can be understood from a European

perspective, putting it at the center of discussions and summits as well as development aid approaches highlights that African interests are not being valued.

That is not to say that a clear and joint definition of migration exists in West Africa, let alone how it should be governed. For example, we find that for the time being the *lack of implementation* of free movement protocols in ECOWAS, due to lax or missing border controls, seems to actually uphold mobility in the region. ECOWAS as an institution as well as its member states need to independently re-establish norms for free movement in the region and develop plans on how to best achieve them. This includes finding a balance between the informality needed in the region to enable cross-border mobility as well as joint interests in strengthening borders for security reasons, for instance. In the meantime, and while allowing room for such a process, summits and meetings like the forthcoming EU-African Union summit in Brussels in 2020 should put free movement on center stage, which is of interest not only to ECOWAS but also to the African continent as a whole.

Finally, and most importantly, an emphasis should be placed on creating more and actually feasible legal pathways to migration. As already iterated in chapter 3, a recent report highlights that less than 1.5 percent of the EUTF goes toward funding regular migration schemes among African countries or between Africa and the EU (Raty and Shilhav 2020).

Migration is a long-standing, important, and legitimate development strategy in the region, and only

through offering legal options for it will fewer people feel the need to embark on the dangerous irregular journeys that continue to be used. Such opportunities must be more than mere rhetoric in policy documents, but accessible, visible, and credible:

- Accessible means addressing practical problems, like not being able to apply for a Schengen Visa in all countries, and having to travel at high cost to endure a lengthy process that often stands little chance of success.
- Visible means that people can see positive examples of others actually being able to migrate in safe and orderly manners. It also implies being more transparent in development projects that give advice on the European job market, when knowing full well that in reality it is nearly impossible to access. Otherwise, such initiatives only lead to more frustration and suspicion.
- Credible means that not just a handful benefit from such programs—like the 84 Nigerians who received scholarships from Erasmus+ during 2014–18, a minuscule fraction of a population of over 200 million.

Only when such legal pathways are in place will African governments be in a better position to cooperate on return and readmission. The current trend of moving toward negative conditionalities will do nothing to improve an already tense relationship.