

# Europe-Africa cooperation in Mali

Louis Michel

## The EU is working with the Malian government to improve information provision about migration to Europe.

In 2008, Europe witnessed a significant increase in the number of migrants and refugees arriving on its Mediterranean shores, a turn-around from previously declining numbers. Some 30,000 people were reported to have reached Italy by the end of October 2008, compared to 19,900 during the whole of 2007. Figures from Malta also confirm this trend, with 2,600 arriving on the island in the first nine months of 2008 compared with 1,800 throughout 2007. These were the lucky ones. Countless men, women and children have lost their lives on this journey.

The reasons why people leave their home countries and embark on a long and dangerous journey towards the north are varied. Forced displacement due to armed conflicts and political instability, the prospect of better economic conditions as well as human-induced environmental change and natural disasters are the main causes of migratory movements. Increasingly we find there is a real 'migrant mix'. Refugees, migrant workers and asylum seekers, to each of whom different immigration policies apply, travel alongside each other using the same illegal routes to enter Europe.

Many illegal migration flows originate in countries of sub-Saharan Africa and lead through North Africa to the European Union. On their way to Europe many migrants may be stranded in transit countries, with no realistic prospect of return. While the trafficking and smuggling of human beings is a visible element of illegal migration, the flight of human capital ('brain drain') caused by recruitment policies of developed countries is an equally serious element of legal flows.

### Information centre in Mali

The EU decided to respond to this complex phenomenon by establishing a two-way dialogue

with the countries of origin or transit, exploring enhanced legal cooperation and offering better development assistance. As part of an increased focus on the links between external relations, development and migration, the EU opened a pilot 'centre for information and management of migration' – CIGEM – in Mali in October 2008.

Mali is the ideal location to launch such a pilot project. The sub-Saharan region is becoming increasingly aware of the potential benefits of migration for development such as the significant cash flowing to home countries from the diaspora. Mali is the second largest country in West Africa. Its central position and vast, permeable borders make it a country of origin, transit and destination of migratory flows. Out of a population of 12 million people, an estimated

4 million Malians are migrants. 3.5 million of these reside in West Africa and only 200,000 in Europe.

The aim of the centre in Mali is to provide potential migrants with a wide range of information and assistance. For example, it provides information on the dangers involved of using illegal migration routes controlled by unscrupulous profiteers; information on certain legal migration opportunities to Europe and elsewhere; and information on opportunities in Mali itself for vocational training and employment. The centre also helps the Malian authorities negotiate labour migration agreements with individual EU member states and other third countries.

In its first month, the centre received 302 visitors, of whom 261 (approximately 86%) were identified as potential migrants, 22 (7%) as voluntary returnees and 19 (6%) as



Mali's government adopted the UN Millennium Development Goal, set in 2000, to increase primary school enrolment for all and basic education for young adults by 2015 but there are not enough classrooms or secondary school teachers to accommodate the swelling enrolment.

involuntary returnees. 150 visitors (49%) had no formal education or only primary school education, 65 (21%) had secondary school education and higher, while the remaining 87 (28%) attended secondary school without having obtained a diploma. The majority of visitors expressed the wish to go abroad to find better job opportunities and economic stability, though they did not rule out the option of staying in the country if they could find interesting employment or vocational training.

This centre is a modest yet significant shift in Europe-Africa cooperation in dealing with this phenomenon in a positive way. It breaks the traditional mould of focusing exclusively on border control and return and offers a real alternative to a doctrine of repressive, security-led measures to tackle migration.

No coercive, repressive or security measures will ever manage to stop a human being taking his or her chances at achieving a better

life. Migration is not a criminal phenomenon. It has been with us since the dawn of time. Great civilisations have always been those that have embraced migration and ultimately benefited from the exchange of information and talent.

*Louis Michel is European Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid (<http://ec.europa.eu/echo/>). For more information, please email Marie-Pierre.JOUGLAIN@ec.europa.eu.*