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 turnaround 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...
Towards an EU-wide regularisation scheme

Alexandra Strang

The Council of Europe estimated in late 2007 that there are as many as 5.5 million irregular migrants residing in the EU. From both a human rights and a good governance perspective, this situation is crying out for change.

The EU immigration framework is presently based on the idea that there are two types of irregular migrants: persecuted refugees (legal) and economic immigrants (illegal). This presumption informs a policy that aggravates stigmatisation and criminalisation of refugees and migrants alike. In reality, both ‘types’ of migrant usually originate from countries characterised by chronic poverty, violent conflict, political instability and socio-economic deprivation which generate both refugee-producing conditions as well as other modes of (de facto) forced migration to places of greater political and economic stability.

In this way, the actual differences between the ‘push’ factors of persecution as anticipated by the 1951 Convention and the ‘push’ factors of the daily struggle with a life lacking in economic opportunity are often minor.

There are of course significant economic and demographic interests at stake for Europe in the immigration debate but what is needed, above all, is a human rights approach to policy reform. The security-oriented approach to countering irregular migration cannot and does not succeed in halting undocumented entry into the EU, because those who risk their life to travel to Europe do so not on a whim but in order to satisfy basic human needs such as physical security and the opportunity to secure a livelihood that will support themselves and their dependents. These are needs that will be pursued one way or another, regardless of obstacles, dangers and institutional discouragement.

The existing legal framework, however, proscribes the stay of migrants who are not considered – by domestic asylum procedures – to be in need of international protection. This will not deter the more determined migrants but will rather force them to the margins of society, giving rise to a range of human rights challenges linked with social exclusion.

**An argument for regularisation**

At present, rather than permitting the flow from migrant supply to employment demand, migration policies have tended towards greater restriction of migration movement. Undocumented migrants who are without work face considerable risk and difficulty in relocating to another area or country with greater employment prospects. These people often live in substandard and precarious circumstances but stay put if at all possible because this poses the least threat of arrest and expulsion.

Whereas in normal migration flows the worker would follow the work, the Dublin II Regulation1 and other EU rules operate precisely to limit this movement. There is much ongoing debate about easing the Dublin II provisions, largely in the context of how best to alleviate the pressures they place on states located on the eastern and southern frontiers of the EU. However, Dublin II rules prohibiting freedom of movement create social problems everywhere – not just in frontier states – because people are, to a considerable extent, ‘stuck’ wherever it is they first arrive, and end up doing anything they can to make ends meet. In such conditions, they become vulnerable to abuse and exploitation.

Policy improvements to administer labour migration while avoiding an outcome of internal EU immobility would benefit countries of first arrival, countries that require migrant labour and migrants themselves.

Without regularisation, there is no possibility for administrative controls or registration of social support needs; without an administrative ‘identity’ and social rights, there can