



# PROGRESSIVE MIGRATION GROUP

## RECOMMENDATIONS TO EUROPEAN AND AFRICAN LAWMAKERS

*Updated November 2024*

The Progressive Migration Group (PMG), a network of African and European migration experts established by FEPS and the EU Office of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, examines the complex relations between the European Union and African countries of origin and transit with the aim of proposing innovative policy recommendations for progressive forces at EU and national level in the field of migration management and related policy areas.

According to the PMG, the EU's current migration policy and its relations with Africa in the field of migration are overly focused on reducing irregular migration. Reducing irregular migration and the associated risks for migrants is undoubtedly a legitimate and urgent goal of European and African policies, but it is neither effective nor sustainable, and it must go hand in hand with the creation of opportunities for legal migration.

The PMG believes that this approach, which also threatens to dominate the implementation of the European Pact on Migration and Asylum, is insufficient to address the complex challenges of African-European migration. The PMG proposes a broader approach that places migration cooperation within the broader political context of African-European relations, which are increasingly characterised by geopolitical power shifts. Development and human rights-oriented migration cooperation between Africa and Europe is more urgent than ever. The PMG therefore recommends that three components be strengthened in future cooperation: (1) greater awareness of the development benefits of migration, (2) a migrant-centred expansion of legal migration pathways, and (3) a human rights-based approach to the ongoing EU migration reform.

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## A DEVELOPMENT-ORIENTED APPROACH TO MIGRATION

Migration is a major driver of development and prosperity. According to the World Bank, international remittances to low- and middle-income countries worldwide reached \$656 billion in 2023 – more than direct foreign investment and far more than official development assistance to those countries. However, remittances are only one of the development benefits that migration brings. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development also recognises migration as a powerful driver of sustainable development because migration benefits not only migrants and host countries, but also their communities – through social, technological and skills transfers, as well as through investment and cultural diversity. The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration aligns with the 2030 Agenda by emphasising the multi-dimensional nature of migration and the need for a comprehensive approach to it that involves all policy areas. In practice, however, the development potential of migration is insufficiently exploited. This is also true of European migration policy, which focuses primarily on preventing irregular migration. The Progressive Migration Group finds no contradiction between managing migration and promoting development through migration, as they can be combined to meet the people's interests in both Europe and Africa. The Progressive Migration Group therefore calls for a development-oriented and rights-based approach to EU migration policy. This will foster sustainable development, reduce poverty and support families in countries of origin, recognising the crucial role migrants and diaspora communities play in the economic, cultural and social development of European societies by contributing to their diversity, resilience and prosperity.

## **1. INCORPORATE MIGRATION INTO DEVELOPMENT POLICIES AND VICE VERSA**

Migration must be considered a fundamental component of EU development policy because the economic, social and cultural contributions of the diaspora community (e.g. remittances, and the transfer of skills and knowledge) play a vital role in the development of their country of origin. The impact of migrants should therefore be consistently included in development programmes and debates, with the mutual benefits for host communities and countries of origin being highlighted. These benefits should also be promoted in migration policies (e.g. promoting skills development programmes in migration partnerships).

## **2. SHIFT THE NARRATIVE ON MIGRATION**

Efforts should be made to change the dominant narrative that portrays migration, particularly irregular migration and migrants, as a threat. A negative narrative is detrimental to migrants' rights. It also runs counter to the vital role that migrants play in helping meet the current and future economic and demographic needs of European societies. Furthermore, it risks undermining the EU's capacity to attract and maintain low-, medium- and high-skilled workers from third countries. A change in narrative can be brought about by fighting disinformation while disseminating accurate information about the benefits of well-managed migration (e.g. economic prosperity, cultural diversity, societal resilience and innovation). Such emphasis does not need to be one-sided, but it needs to stay factual, showing the broader picture, instead of focusing solely on the challenging aspects of migration. A viable approach would be to broaden the debate, or anti-rumour action, by working with local communities to support local initiatives that promote factual positive stories of migrants.

## **3. ENHANCE DIALOGUE AND PARTNERSHIP**

Dialogue and diplomacy are, therefore, essential tools for the co-development of migration policies with African partner countries, reflecting shared responsibilities and benefits. However, governments often have a narrow perspective and understanding of the challenges and needs of local communities and refugee populations. Furthermore, governments often have limited comprehension of their socio-cultural dynamics, especially in countries with weak state institutions. Dialogue should therefore also extend to migration experts from civil society, academia or organisations for refugee rights. This would broaden the picture, enable a better understanding of local dynamics, and aid the development of effective

needs-based policies and programmes. Additionally, support should be given to strengthening national institutions. More resources should be allocated to initiatives that foster dialogue at different levels, using these discussions as a centrepiece in the development of migration and development policies.

## **4. ADDRESS CLIMATE CHANGE AND MIGRATION**

A discussion on development – first and foremost with countries along migration routes – that is driven by the objectives of the EU's migration governance will not lead to sustainable long-term solutions. Instead, it can undermine the progress and goals (stability, development and regional prosperity) of the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) in Africa and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). Furthermore, the discussion often leaves aside pressing regional issues that have an impact on migration dynamics (e.g. the increase in extreme weather phenomena, desertification and salinisation of coastal areas). EU policymakers should therefore invest in more evidence-based policies and research to actually understand what kind of implications climate change has on migration; develop disaster preparedness and resilience-building strategies with partner countries regarding climate-induced migration; engage in international cooperation to address the short- and long-term implications of climate change on migration and development.

## **5. RETHINK FINANCIAL TRANSFERS TO FRAGILE STATES**

Providing substantial development aid to fragile states in return for commitments on readmission, border security and controlling regional mobility is likely to have adverse long-term effects, especially in countries with weak institutions. These countries may lack the capacity to implement development projects effectively, and such funds could exacerbate the root causes of migration that they aim to address. A more holistic approach to development assistance is needed – one that extends beyond financial aid to tackle the political and social issues underlying insecurity, instability and displacement.

## A MIGRANT-CENTRED PERSPECTIVE ON LEGAL CHANNELS AND LABOUR MIGRATION

One of the main features of European migration policies is their obsessive and, at times, symbolic focus on border control, while policies aimed at strengthening legal pathways are lagging behind – despite the EU member states' demographic trends and need for labour migration. Furthermore, EU migration policies have an increasingly negative impact on migrants' rights. The Progressive Migration Group calls for a migrant-centred approach to legal pathways and labour migration, prioritising policies that focus on the rights and needs of migrants. The EU must therefore move from a conditional and instrumental approach to migration to one that fosters mutual respect and understanding between Europe and Africa on the one hand, and that upholds inclusiveness and equal social protections for newcomers, on the other.

### 1. ADDRESS CONDITIONALITY IN MIGRATION AGREEMENTS

Migration agreements must prioritise respect for human rights over strict conditionality related to border control. This involves negotiating balanced agreements that consider the needs and contributions of both sending and receiving countries, thus promoting mutual benefits, safety and stability. Establishing mechanisms for regular monitoring and evaluation of these agreements will help maintain their fairness and effectiveness. Addressing and overcoming political and institutional barriers that oppose progressive migration policies is crucial.

### 2. DEVELOP INCLUSIVE MIGRATION POLICIES

Migration policies must be inclusive and respect the human rights of all migrants. They must also ensure access to basic services such as healthcare, education and legal protection. Engaging civil society organisations, local communities and migrants in the policymaking process is essential to ensure that policies respond to the needs of all stakeholders. This inclusive approach will help build more cohesive and supportive communities across the EU.

### 3. ENHANCE LEGAL MIGRATION PATHWAYS

EU decision-makers should develop and promote legal migration pathways to reduce reliance on dangerous and irregular routes. By simplifying and expediting legal migration processes (e.g. making visa processes more accessible and less time-consuming for potential migrants), EU decision-makers can make these pathways more accessible. Providing safe and legal channels for migration and asylum will reduce the risks associated with irregular migration, help meet labour market needs and support the integration of migrants in host countries. As migration is a phenomenon that affects the receiving country's society and economy

as a whole, the private sector should be substantially engaged in the promotion and implementation of legal pathways (e.g. finding ways to share costs like those of visa processing).

### 4. ADDRESS BRAIN DRAIN AND BRAIN WASTE

While migrants are recognised as development agents for the countries of origin, brain drain and brain waste represent unwanted consequences of poorly managed migration. These could be addressed by promoting transnational skills partnerships that focus on training and upskilling workers in their home countries before migration. This approach ensures that migrants are well-prepared and that their skills are aligned with the needs of the country of origin and the potential host country's labour market. Additionally, it is crucial to ensure not only the newcomers' equal rights to social protection, but also the portability of rights, allowing migrants to transfer their social security and pension rights between countries seamlessly. Supporting migrants who want to return to their home countries by providing opportunities for employment and business creation can contribute to the local economy and reduce the negative impacts of brain drain.

### 5. ENHANCE MIGRANT PROTECTION AND WORKING CONDITIONS

Migrants' social protection, decent working conditions and decent jobs can be fostered through a 'social contract' to ensure fair wages, safe working conditions and access to social services. Quality certification systems for recruitment agencies could be implemented to prevent exploitation and ensure ethical practices. Additionally, job matching mechanisms and skills recognition tools for recruiters can prevent exploitation and underemployment. Migrant workers should receive support services, including legal aid, healthcare and educational opportunities. These measures would create a fair and supportive environment for migrants within the EU.



# A HUMAN RIGHTS-BASED IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EU MIGRATION AND ASYLUM REFORM

In 2024, the European institutions and EU member states reached a political agreement on a comprehensive reform of the EU asylum system. The New Pact for Migration and Asylum entered into force on 11 June 2024 and the following day the European Commission adopted a Common Implementation Plan. The EU member states must concretely implement the reform by mid-2026. Hence, it remains to be seen whether the new legal framework will manage to ensure the protection of migrants' rights as well as greater and fairer cooperation between the EU and migrants' countries of origin and transit. Despite the EU's focus on externalisation, the Pact itself does not take into account the perspectives of partner countries. A paradigm shift in EU migration and asylum policies is urgently needed to ensure increased transparency, robust monitoring and accountability for EU policies and programmes on the one hand, and a unified African response to the externalisation practices carried out by the EU, on the other.

## 1. STRENGTHEN HUMAN RIGHTS PROTECTION BY UPHOLDING INTERNATIONAL OBLIGATIONS AND BY INCLUDING ROBUST PROTECTIONS IN AGREEMENTS WITH THIRD COUNTRIES

All the EU's externalisation-oriented policies and migration agreements should uphold the European Union's existing human rights obligations under international law, including the European Convention on Human Rights and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. EU decision-makers should integrate explicit human rights safeguards into all migration-related agreements and policies, rejecting proposals that might compromise these standards, and ensuring that third-country agreements include robust protections for migrants in order to maintain the EU's compliance with international legal norms. Any indications, complaints or reports that EU member states are in breach of EU or international rules should be carefully investigated. When the European Commission deems that a member state has failed to fulfil an obligation under EU law, the Commission should initiate an infringement procedure.

## 2. EU SHOULD JOIN THE EUROPEAN CONVENTION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

The EU accession process to the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) should be taken forward. This would lead to greater coherence in human rights protection, enhanced legal accountability, and closer judicial cooperation between EU institutions and the Council of Europe. This accession would reinforce the EU's commitment to human rights, although it may also present challenges in harmonising diverse legal and political landscapes within its member states.

## 3. REFORM MONITORING AND ACCOUNTABILITY MECHANISMS

All new migration and asylum agreements should be provided with robust and transparent monitoring

systems to ensure compliance with the above-mentioned international human rights standards. These mechanisms must include regular and public reporting to enhance transparency and accountability. To address the current issue of underutilised or ignored monitoring mechanisms, monitoring reports should be publicly accessible and not classified, thereby building trust in EU-funded projects. Impact assessment tools should be adapted and applied to the specific context to better evaluate the risks of cooperation and, where necessary, to put in place effective and realistic mitigation measures. The possibility of curtailing cooperation to avoid causing serious harm should be included. The EU needs to show the willingness not only to delay but also to terminate programmes where the risk of human rights violations or other harm is high and cannot be effectively mitigated. All EU-funded programmes must include accessible complaints procedures for external stakeholders and people affected by the programme. This will enhance the potential of such programmes to mitigate the human rights risks associated with extra-territorial assistance. Ideally, it will also contribute to strengthening human rights protection in recipient countries. Improved human rights due diligence policies can also help avoid allegations of complicity in human rights abuses by ensuring that cooperation partners are fully aware of the risks, thereby avoiding situations of wilful blindness.

## 4. ENSURE SUSTAINABLE AND REALISTIC APPROACHES TO MIGRATION AND ASYLUM MANAGEMENT IN THE EU

The EU's increasingly transactional and securitised approach to migration increases its reliance on unpredictable third-country cooperation. It also increases its exposure to side effects of political turmoil and conflict, and risks undermining the trust of partner countries in the EU, as well as the trust between EU member states,



and the trust of European citizens. To mitigate these risks, the EU should introduce targeted support for member states handling new responsibilities (e.g. border procedures) and enhance the predictability of solidarity measures. Additionally, the EU should recalibrate its engagement with third countries to reduce dependency on them for managing irregular arrivals and returns.

Instead, it should pursue more structural partnerships and avoid outsourcing asylum responsibilities. Policy-makers should present the expected outcomes of the New Pact and external agreements realistically, avoiding promises of sudden reductions in migratory numbers. This would foster a trustworthy democratic system and, in turn, a more transparent migration and asylum system.

## THE PROGRESSIVE MIGRATION GROUP (PMG)

Giramchew Adugna  
 Lukmon Akintola  
 Steffen Angenendt  
 Luca Barana  
 Sara Bojarczuk  
 Felix Braunsdorf  
 Jean-Louis de Brouwer  
 Angeliki Dimitriadi  
 Roberto Forin  
 Mamadou Goita  
 Ibrahim Kasso Hussein  
 Anna Knoll  
 Ottilia Maunganidze  
 Awil Mohamoud  
 Yaye Helene Ndiaye  
 Felicity Okoth  
 Ferruccio Pastore  
 Fatma Raach  
 Paddy Siyanga Knudsen  
 Jamie Slater  
 Anna Terron Cusi

### EDITORS:

Tin Kampl, Tobias Beylat, Hedwig Giusto

### PROJECT COORDINATORS:

Tobias Beylat, Alexander Geiger, Hedwig Giusto, Bruck Negash Teame, Julia Wild

*The views expressed in this document do not necessarily represent the views of the respective organisations to which the members of the Progressive Migration Group are affiliated.*



## ABOUT THE FOUNDATION FOR EUROPEAN PROGRESSIVE STUDIES (FEPS)

The Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS) is the think tank of the progressive political family at EU level. Its mission is to develop innovative research, policy advice, training and debates to inspire and inform progressive politics and policies across Europe. FEPS works in close partnership with its 77 members and other partners – including renowned universities, scholars, policymakers and activists – forging connections among stakeholders from the world of politics, academia and civil society at local, regional, national, European and global levels.

**FEPS**  
FOUNDATION FOR EUROPEAN  
PROGRESSIVE STUDIES



Avenue des Arts 46, B-1000 Brussels, Belgium  
+32 2 234 69 00  
[info@feps-europe.eu](mailto:info@feps-europe.eu)  
[www.feps-europe.eu](http://www.feps-europe.eu)  
[@FEPS\\_Europe](https://www.instagram.com/FEPS_Europe)

## ABOUT THE FRIEDRICH-EBERT-STIFTUNG EU OFFICE

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Rue du Taciturne 38, 1000 Brussels, Belgium  
[www.brussels.fes.de](http://www.brussels.fes.de)  
[@FES\\_Europa](https://www.instagram.com/FES_Europa)

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