

The EU Trust Fund for Africa and the Perils of a Securitized Migration Policy

by Luca Barana

Sub-Saharan Africa has become the focal point of the EU's external migration policy, particularly since the closing of the so-called Balkan Route in 2016 following the EU-Turkey deal. That year, 181,000 migrants reached Italian shores from North Africa, leading the national government to call on the EU to orchestrate a comprehensive response to the phenomenon. Such efforts had already begun in 2015 with the adoption of a European Agenda on Migration in May¹ and the Valletta Summit in November,² which, among other initiatives, launched the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF).

The EUTF is envisioned as a means to eradicate the root causes of migration, targeting origin and transit countries in five priority areas: 1) creating employment opportunities; 2) supporting resilience and basic services for local populations, in particular the most vulnerable, notably refugees and displaced people; 3) improving migration management; 4) enhancing stability and governance, by promoting conflict prevention, combatting forced displacement and enforcing the rule of law; 5) improving policy by exchanging best practices and filling knowledge gaps.³ The Fund defines three geographical areas of intervention: the Sahel and Lake Chad Region, the Horn of Africa and North Africa.

¹ European Commission, *A European Agenda on Migration* (COM/2015/240), 13 May 2015, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=celex:52015DC0240>.

² For further information, see: Council of the European Union, *Valletta Summit on Migration*, 11-12 November 2015, <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/international-summit/2015/11/11-12>.

³ European Commission, *The European Union Emergency Trust Fund for Stability and Addressing Root Causes of Irregular Migration and Displaced Persons in Africa. Strategic Orientation Document*, 15 February 2016, p. 11-14, <http://europa.eu/!bn43Gq>.

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As of 15 December 2017, 3.3 billion euro has been allocated to the Fund. Just 375.1 million come from EU member states and other partners: Italy, with 102 million euro, has provided 27.2 percent of this funding.⁴ However, the great majority of resources originate from the European Development Fund (EDF) and other European instruments previously aimed at development projects. The EUTF also seeks to attract funds from non-EU sources, with some examples being Norway and Switzerland whose combined contribution stands at 13 million euro. As of 4 December 2017, more than 100 projects ranging from development initiatives to efforts to reduce irregular flows have been approved under the EUTF over the past two years, for a total of 1.9 billion euro.⁵

The EUTF is meant to be a more flexible instrument compared to the EU's existing development tools, with simplified approval and contractual procedures. This reflects the original idea and mandate of the Fund, an initiative that is expected to deliver concrete results quickly. Nevertheless, implementation times are taking longer than expected, leading some to question the Fund's ability to deliver.

Overall, EU migration policy is struggling to overcome an inherent

contradiction: on the one side, there is a clear acknowledgement that migration is a structural phenomenon with long-term implications, driven by deep developmental and governance shortcomings. On the other, the EU's reaction is for the most part tailored towards the short-term. Such a contradiction is explained by the "crisis mode" displayed by EU institutions and member states in tackling the migration question, particularly in light of the growing anxiety of European electorates.

Another danger is the increased tendency to divert funds formerly allocated to European development cooperation to the task of migration management and border security, thereby weakening EU action in the realm of poverty reduction and good governance.

The short-term orientation of European migration policy has achieved some concrete results, yet structural challenges remain largely unaddressed. The EUTF has approved projects in Niger and Libya in 2017 and supported bilateral Migration Partnerships with selected countries (Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Mali and Ethiopia) to facilitate assisted returns of migrants and combat human trafficking. As a result, migrant arrivals through the Central Mediterranean Route – passing from Sub-Saharan Africa up to North Africa and finally Europe – dropped during the summer, falling by 30 percent compared to 2016 as of November 2017.⁶

⁴ European Commission, *EU MS and Other Donors Contributions (Pledges and Received Contributions)*, last updated 15 December 2017, https://ec.europa.eu/trustfundforafrica/content/trust-fund-financials_en.

⁵ European Commission, *Contribution to the EU Leaders' Thematic Debate on a Way Forward on the External and the Internal Dimension of Migration Policy* (COM/2017/820), 7 December 2017, p. 14, <https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regdoc/rep/1/2017/EN/COM-2017-820-F1-EN-MAIN-PART-1.PDF>.

⁶ European Commission, *Progress Report on the European Agenda on Migration* (COM/2017/669), 15 November 2017, p. 2, <https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regdoc/rep/1/2017/>

The main beneficiaries of the Fund are Niger (189.9 million euro, including 50 million from Italy's Africa Fund⁷), Senegal (161.8 million), Libya (158.2 million), Ethiopia (157.5 million) and Mali (156.5 million). Four out of five top recipients are countries identified as priority areas, particularly through the EU's new Migration Partnership Framework.

Nonetheless, the case of Libya is emblematic of how the present focus on short-term fixes largely ignores deeper, structural challenges. Despite the chaotic political situation on the ground, the EU has invested heavily in border and migration management in Libya, thanks in part to strong political efforts by Italy and new funding from the EUTF in 2017.

According to EU data, all EUTF contributions to North Africa, and particularly Libya, have so far been devoted to the issue of migration management and control (priority number 3 of the EUTF).⁸ This trend is highlighted by the approval of a 46 million project, in cooperation with the Italian Ministry of the Interior, encompassing activities ranging from the training of the Libyan Coast Guard to increased cooperation in migration management at the Southern border of

the country.⁹

Numerous EUTF projects approved during 2016 addressed development and protection priorities, but new initiatives in 2017 reinforce the gradual turn towards an increased focus on the short-term security implications of migration, prominent examples being actions in North Africa or Italy's contribution to Niger. The securitization of migration is not a new phenomenon, but it accrued new relevance in Europe in light of the political and media framing of the "migrant crises" since 2014-15. The risk that securitization will overshadow what at its core is a developmental issue is also highlighted by the fact that a majority of the EUTF's funding originates from the European Development Fund.

The European Parliament's Committee on Development (DEVE) has been extremely critical of this trend, condemning "any use of EDF and ODA [Official Development Assistance] funds for migration management and control of any other actions without development objectives".¹⁰ The securitization of development and migration policy goes hand in hand with concerns about the respect for human rights in countries targeted by the EUTF. Examples include migrant

EN/COM-2017-669-F1-EN-MAIN-PART-1.PDF.

⁷ These resources are part of Italy's overall contribution to the EUTF.

⁸ European Commission, *Annex 1 to the Progress Report on the European Agenda on Migration* (COM/2017/669), 15 November 2017, p. 2, <https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regdoc/rep/1/2017/EN/COM-2017-669-F1-EN-ANNEX-1-PART-1.PDF>. For further information on the use of funding in North Africa, see https://ec.europa.eu/trustfundforafrica/region/north-africa_en.

⁹ European Union, *Support to Integrated Border and Migration Management in Libya - First phase (Action Fiche)*, 2 October 2017, <https://ec.europa.eu/trustfundforafrica/node/494>.

¹⁰ European Parliament-Committee on Development, *Report on the EU Trust Fund for Africa: The Implications for Development and Humanitarian Aid* (2015/2341(INI)), 29 June 2016, p. 7, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=REPORT&reference=A8-2016-0221&language=EN>.

detention centres in Libya, which have received ample international coverage recently, or the opaque relationship between European donors and authoritarian regimes. A certain consternation has been generated by the direct budgetary support provided by Italy to Niger's government for instance.¹¹

Migration is a complex and long-term issue that cannot be managed through a securitized closure of borders. The European Union and its member states should balance legitimate requests for protection and development with the growing use of developmental tools in the security field. Looking to the future the Fund should not be burdened by short-term urgency or the scarcity of financial resources, but rather address the security-migration-development nexus in a more comprehensive and long-term fashion, including by expanding legal migration opportunities.

For this reason, European political leaders should stop framing the current migratory environment either as a "crisis", or as a risk to the security and welfare of European citizens. This framing generates anxiety and fear in the European electorate, strengthening populist parties in many European countries and pushing the EU to prioritize migration management (priority 3) or conflict prevention

and enforcement of the rule of law (priority 4) over the more long-term developmental and socio-economic drivers of migration. Fighting the root causes of migration is a structural challenge: reducing the number of arrivals to appease voters will not lead to sustainable migration management.

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¹¹ Andrea Stocchiero, Francesca Minniti and Giulia De Ponte, *Partenariato o condizionalità dell'aiuto? Rapporto di monitoraggio sul Fondo fiduciario d'emergenza per l'Africa e i Migration Compact dell'Unione europea*, Roma, CINI and CONCORD Italia, November 2017, p. 33-34, <http://wp.me/p5Dyrf-1y3>.

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