



# **MIGRATION AND FOREIGN AID: DRIVERS, DESIRES AND DEVELOPMENT**

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## **ABSTRACT**

In the debate in Europe, conflict, lack of development, population growth, and climate change are often described as the 'root causes' of African migration. However, recent research-based literature on the links between migration and development stands in stark contrast to such simplified assumptions. This working paper explores the relationship between migration, development, and foreign aid. It builds on insights from both quantitative and qualitative studies focusing on Africa – especially West Africa – and is divided into three parts. It first examines the factors that underpin human mobility, then looks at contemporary African migration trajectories, and finally discusses how migration relates to foreign aid. The working paper argues that foreign aid initiatives often focus on externally defined root causes of migration and rarely attempt to understand locally determined drivers of migration. To better grasp how development policies and migration intersect, more in-depth research is needed.

## INTRODUCTION

In the past decades, sudden peaks in migrant arrivals to Europe's southern borders have often led to oversimplified assumptions about how conflicts and a lack of development drive migration to Europe. Irregular migrants are often made visible in the media as desperate people willing to risk everything to reach Europe. These images give the impression that a large exodus is about to take place from the African continent and that only drastic state-led measures will stop people from attempting migration in the future (cf. Carling & Collins 2018). However, the research-based literature on the links between migration and development stands in stark contrast to such simplified assumptions both when it comes to assessing the scope of future migration flows from Africa and when unpacking the relationship between migration and development. Instead of viewing migration as a response to the lack of development, the literature sees movement as part of a broader development process that increases both people's aspirations and their capabilities to move (De Haas 2019; Clemens & Postel 2018a; Carling & Talleraas 2016). In this working paper, the relationship between migration and foreign aid is explored in three parts: first, the paper looks at what underpins human mobility, then it examines migration trajectories and then it discusses how this relates to aid.

## PART ONE: UNDERSTANDING UNDERLYING MOBILITY PATTERNS

### Root causes and drivers of migration

On the level of policy, there has been an increased interest in getting a better understanding of the 'root causes' and drivers of migration. Root causes can be understood as 'the conditions of states, communities, and individuals that underlie a desire for change, which in turn produce migration aspirations' (Carling & Talleraas 2016: 6). These conditions can be social or political, and linked to conflict, poverty and insecurity. The concept of migration drivers often overlaps with root causes, but can also include the mechanisms that both produce and facilitate migration such as migration infrastructure<sup>1</sup> and social networks that inspire, fund and facilitate people's mobility (ibid.). Van Hear et al. suggest a 'push-pull plus' model to describe a complex of four drivers underlying and perpetuating migration behaviour: 1) *predisposing drivers* or the macro-level structural disparities between origin and destination; 2) *proximate drivers* or the actual economic, environmental or political manifestations that have a direct bearing on migration behaviour; 3) *precipitating drivers* or drivers that trigger migration, as for instance, critical events leading to individual or social decision-making; and 4) *mediating drivers* or the forces that 'facilitate, constrain, accelerate or consolidate migration, and may diminish migration too' (2018: 931-932).

<sup>1</sup> Migration infrastructure is 'the systematically interlinked technologies, institutions, and actors that facilitate and condition mobility' (Xiang & Lindquist 2014: S124).

Shifting the analytical focus from causes to drivers enables a more complex understanding of the often mixed and multiple dynamics that shape migration. This represents a move away from dominant understandings of economic rationality in migration theories and instead foregrounding the important role of subjective aspirations and desires, as Carling and Collins have emphasised:

It means recognizing that even economic narratives of movement are socially constructed and can only be read in relation to the subjectivities of migrants, their states of feeling and the circulation of affect within and across borders (2018: 913).

There is a growing policy interest in gaining more knowledge to address the root causes of migration, driven by the wish to better forecast future migration flows and design appropriate policy responses. There is a desire to stop unwanted irregular migration not only through increased border control measures, but also through targeted foreign development aid to improve living and working conditions in migrant sending countries. A good example of how development cooperation mixes with foreign policy and aid agendas is the European Union's Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF), which was launched with a five billion Euro grant in response to the migration and refugee crisis at the 2015 Valetta Summit. Its objective is to address '[t]he root causes of instability, forced displacement and irregular migration and to contribute to better migration management'.<sup>2</sup> Over the past five years, the EUTF has funded 254 migration and displacement related programs in 26 African countries. Yet, using development aid as a migration governance tool is not a new phenomenon.

### **Development as a migration governance tool**

In the 1980s, the idea that development aid could be used to govern migration was introduced in European policy in relation to conflict-driven displacement and it later gained popularity in the 1990s. By the new millennium, it had become an integral part of European migration and development policy thinking (Van Hear & Castles 2010; Carling & Talleraas 2016).<sup>3</sup> On the level of policy, the root cause approach has been used in relation to humanitarian interventions to deescalate conflict and violence and facilitate peace building. It has also been used to stem unwanted, mainly economically driven, migration by introducing poverty

<sup>2</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/trustfundforafrica/sites/default/files/factsheet\\_eutf-for-africa\\_january\\_2021\\_0.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/trustfundforafrica/sites/default/files/factsheet_eutf-for-africa_january_2021_0.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> The policy and research debates around migration and development are far from new as De Haas has emphasised (2012). Optimistic views in the post-war period shifted in the 1970s and 1980s to a more pessimistic outlook, especially concerning the damaging 'brain drain' effects of out-migration. Yet, by the new millennium and onwards the pendulum had swung back, and it was again mainly positive links between migration and development that dominated the debate and created a buzz around leading agenda-setting institutions like the World Bank, regional development banks, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the United Nations (UN) and the European Union (EU) (Vammen & Brönden 2012). It was especially the positive development effects of migrants' economic and social remittances, the important role of diaspora groups as drivers of development, 'brain circulation' and circular migration schemes that were put to the forefront of the policy debates (Carstel & Miller 2009). Like in previous decades, it seems that the mood is currently shifting to a more pessimistic view (Gamlen 2014).

alleviating initiatives and job creation to create viable alternatives to migration. Increasingly, these two agendas have come to overlap 'as governments and international agencies recognize the mixed nature of migration flows and migration motivations' (Carling & Talleraas 2016: 6).

Yet, when wanting to understand why some people migrate while others do not, and how development influences migration and vice versa, it is crucial to move beyond simplistic understandings and alarmist crisis scenarios. Instead, building on recent literature on migrant aspirations, desires and drivers, this paper aims to discuss some of the main ways the migration and migrant decision-making processes have been theorised. It also aims to give an overview of some of the tangible and less tangible drivers that influence African peoples' aspirations and decisions to stay or to migrate. Our study gives preference to insights from both quantitative and qualitative studies focusing on Africa – especially West Africa – but also includes other relevant comparative migration studies.

### **Development as driver for increased migration: the migration transition model**

One of the simplified assumptions about African migration is that it is mainly driven by poverty and underdevelopment and that increased development aid will help mitigate and stem unwanted migration flows. However, research on the nexus between migration and development has shown a different causal relationship. Since the 1970s, different theories about the relationship between increasing emigration and rising income levels have pointed out that emigration in low-income countries increases with growing local income levels and economic growth. Consequently, recent research suggests that rather than deterring migration, donors and development aid should be encouraged to shape migration for mutual benefit (Clemens & Postel 2018a, 2018b). Development, in other words, initially tends to increase both internal and international migration.

While the poorest countries produce internally displaced people, they do not produce large migration flows nor is it the poorest segments of the population that can mobilise the resources needed to travel internationally. Successful migration demands both social, cultural and economic resources to connect to other people who can help facilitate the knowledge and resources needed to initiate and pay for the journey and settlement upon arrival (De Haas 2019). In short, in low-income countries, development and improvement in income levels, infrastructure and education will typically lead to more internal and international migration because people are more capable of realising migration plans and increasingly aspire to migrate (*ibid.*). Evidence suggests that greater youth employment may deter migration in the short term if a country stays poor, but that it is unlikely to reduce migration when the economy grows and diversifies (Clemens & Postel 2018a, 2018b). For low-income countries today, it will take several decades before they reach past middle income where migration rates are expected to slow down and reverse (approximately 8,000 to 10,000 US dollars in income per capita), and migration from middle-income countries is typically much higher than that from poor countries (*ibid.*). Yet, at the point where low-income countries transition and become middle-income countries, out-migration from there on reaches a plateau

and starts to decrease (De Haas 2019; Clemens 2014). This inverted-U relation is often referred to as the migration hump or the migration or mobility transition model. The migration transition model underlines how development in low-income countries generally leads to increasing levels of migration. Migration, in this process, is 'a vital resource' rather than a sign of a desperate response to poverty (De Haas 2019: 14). Migration is in other words embedded in broader development processes and rarely sparked by a single issue that drives people to migrate, but rather by a combination of multiple structural forces as well as individual factors. Therefore, the policy debate on root causes and the assumption that poverty drives migration is misleading, although people feel that they are compelled to move because of poor opportunities in the short and medium term (Carling 2017).

### **African migration trends and links to development processes**

Going beyond the representation of African migration as driven by poverty, underdevelopment, climate change and violence, African migration in the post-colonial period in fact seems to be driven by development processes and social transformations that have expanded people's ability and aspirations to migrate (Flahaux & De Haas 2016). African migration is not mainly directed towards European countries. In fact, the vast majority of African migrants move within their own subregions or within the continent. That said, since the 1980s, African migration out of the continent has accelerated and people have started to move, often beyond colonial ties, to Europe, North America, the Gulf, Asia and Latin America, a process that seems partly driven by Europe's increasingly strict migration governance and visa requirements (ibid.; Vammen 2019).

African migration to Europe and elsewhere has been relatively stable for the past 60 years when taking account of the overall population growth (Bjarnesen 2020; Flahaux & De Haas 2016). As a result, the share of Africans living abroad from 1960 to 2017 compared to the total African population remains between 2.6% and 3.2% (European Commission 2018b: 9). People from West Africa mostly move as temporary workers or long-term labour migrants to neighbouring countries. West African migrants are predominantly shaped by the region's colonial past and the historical role of labour recruitment in Francophone countries like Senegal and Mali, but the United States has also become an important destination for extra-continental migration from the region (Flahaux & De Haas 2016: 15).

Until 2012, most African migrants entered Europe as regular migrants with visas and residence permits granted before arrival. Yet the number of African immigrants settling legally in Europe per year has dropped significantly from 442,000 in 2008 to 270,000 in 2012 and has remained more or less stable since then (European Commission 2018b: 5). The majority of those entering Europe legally came from more developed North African countries (57%), while the rest (42%) came from sub-Saharan countries, mainly Nigeria, Senegal and South Africa (ibid.). When looking at irregular arrivals to Europe via the Mediterranean routes, the number of irregular crossings by sub-Saharan African nationals has also been relatively stable over the past decade, even though major oscillations happen on individual routes (Bjarnesen 2020; Andersson 2014). Furthermore, there has been a 70% reduction (from 83,000

in 2008 to 26,000 in 2016) in the so-called first residence permits awarded to African workers entering Europe for work reasons (European Commission 2018b: 15). The increased restrictions on legal pathways and visas may affect the many aspiring labour migrants as well as people forced to move, as irregular migration becomes the only accessible option if they want to move to Europe (Bjarnesen 2020). Another effect of limited regular migration channels, as well as EU border externalisation efforts, is a booming smuggling industry facilitating the increasingly long and dangerous journeys (see, for example, Andersson & Keen 2019; MMC 2019b).

### **Unpacking migration aspirations and migrations abilities**

Understanding migration aspirations and people's capability to act on them are key when wanting to unpack migration dynamics beyond simplified push-pull models. Moving away from theories based on principles of rational choice, utility maximisation and wage differentials, recent migration scholarship sees migration decision-making as a dynamic process that is:

Influenced and shaped by complex interactions between macro, meso and micro level factors including historical and geographical ties between country of origin and destination countries and economic, political and social resources that refugees and other migrants are able to mobilize (Crawley & Hagen-Zanker 2018: 21).

One of the ways the migration decision-making process has been explored theoretically is by looking at the mental thresholds that people must overcome before embarking on a migration trajectory. Naerssen and van der Veld (2015) have turned the attention away from why migrants move to why people choose to stay. After all, the vast majority of people do not migrate even though they might be dissatisfied and face difficult living conditions where they live. Although family and social networks facilitate migration, it is ultimately an individual decision whether to stay or go. Naerssen and van der Veld argue that the decision-making involves three thresholds that need to be crossed before a person decides to leave. First there is *the mental threshold*, where the migrant starts to think about what will be gained from moving versus staying. This is not just an economic cost-benefit analysis but enmeshed with feelings and sentiments of belonging. Second is *the location threshold*, which concerns the choice of destination. This is not only based on where the migrant might find work but also where they can find familiarity like common language or religious affiliation. It is also based on where it would be possible to connect to social and family networks that can facilitate the process of migration and then integration upon arrival. The final threshold is concerned with *the journey* itself. Here, migration governance comes into question: what would it take to cross the border? What would the cost and risk be? Would one need an intermediary (travel or recruitment agent or smuggler) to facilitate the journey? Would it be possible to travel to the destination through regular migration channels or would it also involve irregular migration? Would circular migration be possible? Depending on how these questions are assessed, the person can either choose to stay or pass the threshold to instate migration. In short, it is a model that incorporates both the importance of knowledge, finances, and social networks but

also feelings of belonging and risk/opportunity persecutions including doubt and self-confidence in the decision-making process prior to migration (Naerssen & van der Veld 2015). Passing from one threshold to another is not a linear process. Instead, it should be seen as recurring deliberations where decisions are re-examined and changed, for example when new knowledge is accrued or when network connections and resources are either gained or lost. Recent studies on African migration support this view by demonstrating how people's migration plans – both regarding the choice of destination and how to get there – change as they embark on the migration journey (Schapendonk et al. 2018; Hagen-Zanker & Mallett 2016; Mainwaring & Brigden 2016).

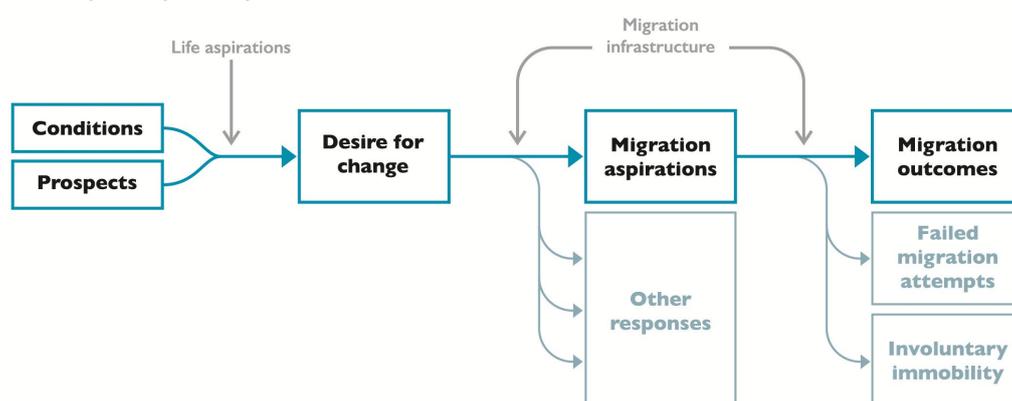
### **Migrant decision-making and triggers**

Including some of the same points as the threshold framework, Hagen-Zanker and Hennessey (2021) identify four main categories that influence migrants' decision-making in their literature review of 182 studies on subjective and intangible factors. The first is *imagination*: on a more existential level, people start to imagine migration as a catalyst for a different lifestyle, possibilities and alternative identities more attuned with globalisation and cosmopolitanism. As already mentioned, imagination also shapes the idea of possible ways to migrate and potential destinations. Their second category is *personality traits and attitudes to risk* as well as psychological dispositions. For example, there seems to be a strong link between general curiosity and openness to new experiences and adventure and people's inclination to move (ibid.: 38). Some studies also emphasise that especially extraverted and sociable people are more likely to migrate while other studies link certain mental attitudes such as being patient, persistent, optimistic and good at adapting to new situations with higher intentions to migrate. The willingness to tolerate and take risks also seems to be a key factor. The third category is *emotions and feelings*. Frustration, alienation, a sense of being marginalised, relatively deprived and stuck, as well as jealousy can trigger migration (see below), but so can hope, love and intimate connections to family and friends. Finally, *beliefs and values* also play a role in the individual decision-making process. For example, religious belief in predestination or control by a higher power seems to nurture high-risk migration and the attempt to migrate through irregular routes. Faith can also help migrants interpret and cope with difficult circumstances. But strong religious beliefs and a sense of purpose can also make people *less* likely to migrate. Furthermore, gender norms frame migration decision-making as there might be different expectations to men and women's (im)mobility. Like more tangible factors such as income difference and access to services, these subjective and intangible factors often overlap and constantly evolve through feedback loops shaping if, how and where the migrant should go (ibid.: 35-36). Additionally, the local socio-cultural context shapes migrants' decision-making, for example societal expectations towards young people can differ from place to place. In some places, migration – particularly high-risk migration – is associated with shame, in others it is seen as an acceptable alternative to staying put. None of these factors are static but evolve and are influenced by other more tangible factors, the socio-cultural context, and new personal experiences with migration.

## The migration (cap)ability model

Another theoretical approach combines both mental and physiological factors with socio-economic factors in an aspiration/ability model, also sometimes referred to as the aspiration (cap)ability framework (Carling & Schewel 2018; Carling 2002; De Haas 2021, 2019). As described, development typically leads to increasing levels of migration because people both become more capable of moving but also aspire more to do so (De Haas 2019). The model refers to a two-step approach that analytically differentiates between people's aspirations to migrate, or their lack thereof, on the one hand, and their actual ability to realise migration projects on the other.<sup>4</sup> It recognises that many people's desires to migrate stay unfulfilled. Building on his research in Cape Verde where many people wish to migrate but do not have the ability to do so, Carling (2002) describes the prevalence of *involuntary immobility*, a state that has consequences not only for the individual but also for the local community. It can also be a result of wartime migration when people become trapped in places they would prefer to leave (Lubkemann 2008). The model additionally considers that life aspirations and the desire for change do not automatically lead people to migrate. People act in many other ways not related to migration aspirations and concrete migration outcomes, for example when they could move but simply prefer to stay (see figure below). Building on the two-step aspiration-ability approach and as an attempt to nuance the discussion of root causes, Carling and Talleraas (2016) and Carling (2017) have illustrated the different mechanisms that produce migration in a model that can be applied for migrants, including refugees.

**Figure 1. Carling and Talleraas' model of the migration decision-making process and the mechanisms that produce migration (2016: 7).**



The three-step model first represents the *formation of a desire for change* based on how people evaluate their current conditions and future prospects, weighed up against their life aspirations. Since the desire for change does not necessarily lead to migration aspirations, the model's second step is linked to when the *channelling of a desire for change transforms into migration aspirations*. Through long-term fieldwork in

<sup>4</sup> For a discussion on the theoretical difference between the models see Carling & Schewel (2018) and De Haas (2021).

Morocco, in an area where the general life conditions had improved. Hein de Haas, for example, has observed how people's general life aspirations increased rapidly and were a catalyst for growing migration aspirations. Improved education, access to media and the regular return of successful migrants and their relative wealth all contributed to increasing materialistic as well as social aspirations. These aspirations, together with growing capabilities to migrate, made people leave despite the general improvement in living conditions (De Haas 2021: 17).

Finally, the third step of the model is the *outcomes of migration aspirations* that can lead to actual migration projects if the person has the capability, opportunity, knowledge and resources to do so. But the model illustrates that aspiration can also lead to failed migration attempts or a state of involuntary immobility where the person, despite the desire to move, is unable to do so. Such outcomes are often invisible yet can have an impact on local development processes. When people aspire to go but cannot, they might be less likely to invest in local livelihoods and seek to acquire relevant skills to improve their situation (Carling 2017).

The model also includes migration infrastructure that facilitates and conditions mobility. This element shapes the way people perceive the possibility of migration and helps to generate migration aspirations, and then in turn affects whether these aspirations are realised. Current EU migration management measures to curb irregular migration and crack down on human smuggling can in this context be seen as a way to further limit the migration infrastructure, but with the effect of producing involuntary immobility for large groups of the African population.

The model underscores that migration is just one of many things that people aspire to in life. In regard to the prospect of improvement that lies behind migration aspiration, Ghassan Hage (2005, 2009) makes a useful distinction between physical and 'existential mobility'. Following Bourdieu, Hage uses the term existential mobility to describe the benefit of having a sense of motion and direction in life (2009: 470). Based on research on the Lebanese diaspora, he concludes that, like everyone else, migrants need to have a feeling that their life is 'going places'. Most people can see opportunities in their familiar context. However, when they feel that they are either moving too slowly or are stuck, they start to contemplate migration:

We do not engage in existential mobility in order to experience physical mobility. The contrary is true: we engage in the kind of physical mobility that defines us as migrants because we feel another geographical space is a better launching pad for our existential selves. We move physically so we can feel that we are existentially on the move again or at least moving better (Hage 2005: 470).

In other words, it is the discrepancy between what people aspire for in life and how they perceive their likelihood of achieving it that often makes them more likely to explore migration as a way out of this unsatisfactory state of existential immobility. Along similar lines, Bakewell has argued that 'People do not aspire to migrate; they aspire to something, which migration might help them achieve' (cited in Carling & Collins 2018: 917). The ethnographic qualitative literature on West African migration highlights the fact that young people often find themselves stuck because

they do not have the resources to transition from being a child to being a respectable married adult who is able to provide for their family (see, for example, Vigh 2009; Honwana 2012; Hernandez-Carretero & Carling 2012). This can also be the case for students who, despite their educational accomplishments, largely feel abandoned by their government because they in comparison to earlier generations have not been able to access jobs in the public sector (Cruise O'Brien 1996; Black et al. 2021). To make this transition, some choose to migrate to find a place that can serve as a catalyst for social becoming (Vigh 2009).

From this perspective, migration is a means to an end and it is therefore becomes relevant to study not only the links between a subject and migration possibilities but the more complex relationship between the migrant themselves and the personal transformation that they envision through migration (Carling & Collins 2018). These more qualitative reflections follow in line with more large-scale quantitative studies of migration aspirations and planning. A European Commission report from 2018, for example, concludes that it would be more accurate to see the potential to migrate as a proxy for life dissatisfaction rather than the actual potential migration (European Commission 2018a). The findings suggest that being dissatisfied with life conditions and having a more pessimistic view about the future standards of living and the local economy are, not surprisingly, associated with a higher desire to move to another country (ibid.).

In summary, the aspiration and ability to migrate are decisive factors for whether migration occurs. Aspirations are shaped by both a macro-level emigration environment 'encompassing the social, economic and political context in which particular social constructions of migration exists but also individual characteristics that shape who wants to leave and who wants to stay in a given location' (Carling & Schewel 2018: 946). The capability is also shaped by the macro-level context and the given opportunities and obstacles for migration, and can depend on individual factors such as socio-economic background, class and level of education. When, for example, legal migration channels are curbed, migration aspirations might result in involuntary immobility or attempts to migrate through irregular migration channels by the available migration infrastructure.

## **PART TWO: REALISING THE MIGRATION TRAJECTORY**

### **Many wish to migrate, but only few move**

One of the key questions raised in both research and policy debates on migration aspirations and (cap)ability to migrate is whether the intention to migrate translates into concrete actions to move or not. Several recent quantitative survey studies come to the same overall conclusion, namely that many African citizens aspire to migrate yet only few of them make concrete plans to do so (van Dalen et al. 2005). These different surveys use different questions to capture people's aspirations or desires to migrate, whether they plan to move within a certain time period, and, finally, if they have made concrete plans to go (Carling & Schewel 2018). The setting

and wording of survey questions can have a large impact on the way people answer migration related questions, and in general, the more abstract the questions concerning the wish to migrate, the more likely people are to report a desire to migrate (Tjaden et al. 2019; Carling 2019). Another obstacle for quantitative analysis is the lack of accurate data that can measure not only outflows of migrants but also its directionality, especially to non-European countries, such as internal migration within African subregions or on the African continent (Schöfberger et al. 2020).

Survey data from the Gallup World Poll (GWP)<sup>5</sup> from 2010 to 2015 show that in Africa close to one third of the population (27%) would like to move abroad yet only 1.5% have made actual preparations to do so. Furthermore, GWP data from 2017 show that 43% of the surveyed West Africans would like to migrate given the opportunity, but only 4.4% of the respondents said they were making concrete plans to do so within the next 12 months. Among those, only one in three said they wanted to go to Europe (Schöfberger et al. 2020). In other words, migration aspirations should not be confused with actual migration plans as the pool of so-called 'potential migrants' would be greatly overestimated. Instead, policy makers should focus on the 'actual potential migrants' – in the case of Africa – the 1.5% that have prepared to leave (European Commission 2018a).

Much in line with this, yet trying to break the links between intention, preparation and actual migration further down, Tjaden et al. (2019) come to a similar conclusion by comparing GWP data with official migration flow data. Their study shows that the link between intention and actual migration flow varies considerably across world regions and is in general much weaker for potential migrants in developing countries. As such, it is not surprising that in Africa, the migration intentions are much higher than elsewhere, but the link with actual migration flows is weaker. The authors speculate that this might be due to the lack of resources to move, and restrictive migration policies, among other things (Tjaden et al. 2019: 42).

Data from the Afrobarometer survey (2019a) conducted between 2016 and 2018 with 45,823 respondents in 34 African countries similarly points to high migration aspirations within the continent. Using a scale to measure the degree to which the respondents had considered moving to another country to live, their data indicated that 63% did not consider migrating while more than one third (37%) of the Africans interviewed had considered it, including 18% who indicated that they had considered it 'a lot'. One in ten of the respondents, stating that they were considering migration, said that they currently were preparing to go. When looking at West African countries alone, the numbers were higher, though the majority

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<sup>5</sup> The GWP is a public opinion survey that includes questions on migration desires and plans. The survey covered 160 countries over the period 2010-2017. It is currently the largest source of data on migration desires and plans and is often used in quantitative studies. There are three survey questions on migration desires and plans: 1) 'Ideally, if you had the opportunity, would you like to move permanently to another country, or would you prefer to continue living in this country?'; 2) 'Are you planning to move permanently to another country in the next 12 months, or not?' (this question was only asked if the person had expressed a desire to migrate); and 3) 'Have you done any preparation for this move?'

(59%) did not consider moving to another country, 41% had considered migrating, and out of them, 21% had considered it 'a lot'. That said, the desire to migrate varies a lot between countries. For example, 57% of respondents in Cabo Verde had considered migration, while most respondents in Mali (80%) said they did not consider migration to another country.

Among the respondents interviewed, one third would be most likely to move to another country within their region (29%) if they had to move, or elsewhere in Africa (7%), to Europe (27%), North America (13%), or some other country/region (13%). Yet, again there are large differences between countries. Looking only at the West African countries included in the study, 19% altogether stated that they would be most likely to move to another country in the region or elsewhere in Africa (6%), whereas 72% would choose to go outside the continent – to Europe (31%), North America (30%), or some other country/region (11%). GWP data from 2017 show a slightly different picture regarding destinations. In this data set, North America was the most preferred region of destination for West Africans who aspired to migrate (16%), while 10% selected Europe and 4% would like to move to another African country (Schöfberger et al. 2020).

On a smaller scale, Carling et al.'s (2013) survey on migration aspirations in Senegal, a country with a long tradition of regional and international migration, shows similar high migration aspirations. Across four different sites: a religious town and its rural hinterlands, an agricultural area in the Peanut Basin, a middle-class suburb of Dakar, and a remote rural area on the border to Mauritania, the majority (between 64% and 82%) of the young adults aged 18-39 wished to migrate within the next five years if they had the opportunity. Europe was their preferred destination, and the preference for where to go in Europe varied greatly between the areas. Yet, when exploring how many had taken actual steps towards migration, such as seeking information about employment opportunities abroad or applying for a visa or admission to a university, the study showed, like the other studies, a large gap between aspirations and preparations, as the large majority who aspired to migrate had not taken any steps towards preparing for it, nor did they have a passport.

While migration out of Senegal has mostly consisted of male migrants, the survey interestingly showed that women aspire to migrate almost at the same level as men, but when exploring who had taken actual steps towards migration, men were three times more likely to have done so than women, except in the less conservative suburb of Dakar. Finally, the study shows that migrants are not driven by a glorified and overtly positive image of Europe. Instead, they hold a more balanced view where economic opportunities in Europe are recognised, but so are other aspects of life in Senegal. This point is confirmed in other studies, for example by Beber and Scacco (2020), who emphasise that the people interviewed in Benin City in Nigeria knew that 'Europe would be tough' and overall underestimated the European monthly per capita income, while those considering migrating irregularly to Europe would have a more positive perception in general.

### **Characteristics of would-be migrants and those on the move**

Data from GWP and the Afrobarometer indicate that especially young adults and educated African citizens contemplate migration. Half of the people in those groups said they had contemplated it at least ‘a little bit’ (Afrobarometer 2019a; European Commission 2018b). When looking at who aspires to migrate within or out of Africa, GWP data shows that people are on average in their twenties. Those who take concrete steps towards migration tend to be better educated and are in an economically better position compared to those who do not consider migrating or those who only aspire to move. More than half of those who prepared to leave had completed secondary or tertiary education and more than half had a job (European Commission 2018b). The Afrobarometer data indicate that people’s experience of poverty does not seem to have a large impact on the interest in migrating, yet it does affect their reasons for wanting to migrate as they are more likely to see migration as a way out of hardship. On the other hand, the wealthier migrants in the survey mentioned education, adventure and business opportunities as reasons for migrating. It is especially men (40%, compared to 33% women) and urban residents (44%, compared to 32% from rural populations) who aspire to move. Furthermore, studies building on WGP data show that the likelihood of moving increases with personal income for those individuals coming from low-income countries and the poorest regions including sub-Saharan Africa (Dustmann & Okatenko 2014; European Commission 2018b). Such findings fit well with the above-mentioned aspiration and (cap)ability framework that emphasises that though poor people also migrate, they tend to do so less often and over shorter distances, while wealthier and more skilled migrants have the resources needed to move over larger distances. This is partly related to the high levels of educational and occupational specialisation and to the overall organisational complexity of modern societies, which require people to move within and across borders to fulfil the desire to match qualifications and personal preferences with labour markets and social opportunities (Flahaux & De Haas 2016).

In a large-scale UNDP survey focusing on African migrants traveling through irregular channels to Europe, data show that out of 1,970 respondents from six West African countries (Côte d’Ivoire, The Gambia, Guinea, Mali, Nigeria and Senegal), most of the migrants came from areas with relatively low levels of deprivation compared to other parts of the countries, which was shown using Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) scores (UNDP 2019: 28). The great majority of respondents were young, male and single. Their mobility seemed linked to rapid urbanisation processes as they largely came from urban areas such as towns and cities (85%). This is twice as many as the general African population where 45% live in urban areas. The study also shows that 43% had a family member who migrated and lived in Africa or Europe and that these family members contributed substantially through remittances to household spending and, although to a lesser extent, to financing the journey to Europe (UNDP 2019: 30). The migrants came from households with an average of ten members, leading the study to suggest that population pressure and strained household economies in a development context may be a significant feature influencing migration decision-making.

A recent survey by the Mixed Migration Centre (MMC) carried out in 2021 among 2,083 mostly West African but also Central African migrants traveling in West and North Africa through Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Libya, Tunisia, and Sudan also highlights the large influence that close social connections can have on migration decision-making. A significant majority (65%) of the respondents said that they had been influenced by others or their social context (such as social media or mainstream media, films and books), while 34% stated that their decision to migrate had not been influenced. As with other research stressing the important role of migration networks, the MMC study shows that close social connections are especially important in the decision-making process. Parents, spouses, friends and family in their country of departure were mentioned as especially influential but so were friends and family in another country (54%) (MMC 2021b). In West Africa, returnees were also mentioned (17%) as an influence. Yet, smugglers, in spite of the growing policy attention and popular outrage, were only mentioned by 15% of the respondents as having an influence on the decision to go (see also MMC 2019b). That does not mean that smugglers or migration brokers are not important in facilitating West African migration, however. Smugglers offer those with migration aspirations a way to access mobility. For example, another MMC study shows that 73% of surveyed migrants moving from West Africa to North Africa used a smuggler (though the term is disputed and not locally used), since, currently, irregular migration is the only means of aligning the aspiration to migrate and the capability to do so (MMC 2019a).

### **Seeking better economic opportunities**

For the vast majority, economic motivations play a central role in West African migrants' decision to move. Yet, as already emphasised, this motivation cannot stand alone in explaining migration trends, and it is helpful to embed analysis of such decision-making in the local social, economic and political context. The literature often mentions a prevalence of remittances in local communities as being one of the drivers of migration. Remittances in West Africa exceed international development assistance and are a crucial lifeline for many families that use the money not only to pay for basic everyday needs but also education, healthcare and housing. However, while economic reasons do play a crucial role in migration decision-making, they are often not the sole reason for migrating. When looking at people who aspire to migrate to another country, the most cited reasons are to look for work (44%) and to escape poverty and economic hardships (29%) (Afrobarometer 2019b). Though the African continent has experienced considerable macroeconomic growth, it has not led to sustainable economic opportunities nor boosted employment rates (*ibid.*). The Afrobarometer data shows that Africans consistently rank unemployment at the top of their 'most important problems' and give African governments some of their poorest performance ratings when it comes to job creation (Afrobarometer 2019b: 8).

When looking at people who have actualised their migration aspirations, the UNDP survey of West African migrants shows that 81% of the respondents selected 'work/send money home' as either the most important reason (60%) or as an additional reason for migrating to Europe (21%), and only 1% selected it as the only

reason for traveling (UNDP 2019: 41). It is important to note that out of the migrants interviewed, 49% were earning money before departure and in most cases (63%), more than the average wage level in their country. Still, 50% felt that they did not earn enough, and only 12% earned enough to save money. In other words, many of the migrants might, in economic terms, be perceived as relatively successful in their local national context, but they still do not feel that staying could fulfil their life aspirations. Furthermore, two thirds stated that earning an income or the prospect of earning an income at home was not a factor that would change their decision to migrate (UNDP 2019: 36). Despite having better education and, for some, relatively well-paid jobs, they were still excluded from regular migration channels and therefore set out on irregular migrations journeys to fulfil their migration aspirations. Since the migrants in the survey were relatively better off than their peers, the data imply that irregular migration is also an indication of the overall development process in Africa. Yet from a migrant's perspective, this development does not go 'fast enough, and with gains that are uneven and limiting' (ibid.).

MMC data similarly shows the importance of economic factors for West and Central Africans on the move. The vast majority (83%) cited economic factors as a reason for leaving and when asked to elaborate, 60% mentioned that they did not earn enough in the job they had, indicating that they were economically active yet not satisfied with their job, whereas 34% selected 'difficult doing business'. Unemployment was more often cited as a reason to migrate by the women in the survey (33%) (MMC 2021a: 11). A separate MMC study focusing on young West African transit migrants, between 15 and 29 years old, largely confirms this picture, as 79% cited economic reasons in response to why they left their country (MMC 2021b).

### **Individual and family reasons for migrating**

Migration aspirations in West Africa are embedded in the larger social context, and family and close social connections play a crucial role in influencing the decision-making process and facilitating and financing migration. When exploring the reasons why West African migrants move, it is therefore not surprising that individual and family reasons play an important role. In the MMC 2021 study, personal and family reasons is the second most quoted reason for migrating. Yet there are significant gender differences as 37% of the women and only 19% of the men mentioned family as a reason. Using a different vocabulary, the UNDP (2019) survey points to the critical role of family and relatives and 'personal issues/freedoms'. Here, 40% cited 'family/friends' as the most important or as an additional reason contributing to the decision to migrate to Europe. Again, there are important gender differences as 27% of the women and 15% of the men stated 'family/friends' as the most important reason for going to Europe. Relatively fewer (7%) of both male and female respondents expressed that 'personal issues/freedom' was the most important issue (2019: 41-42).

The two studies point to various explanations for the gender difference, including that women have more family responsibilities, and that women more often state that they migrate to join or reunite with family members or friends. There are also

additional reasons why women may want to escape their current situation, including moving away from abusive family relations, traditional gender norms, forced marriage, female genital mutilation and other forms of sexual abuse and violence. Furthermore, ethnographic studies have shown how young men choose to migrate because they are unable to fulfil family and societal expectations. Migration thus becomes a way for them to renegotiate social obligations by distancing themselves from family expectations, fixed gender and generational roles and every day economic demands (Hernández-Carretero 2015; Melly 2011). In sum, the surveys and qualitative studies point to a strong link between individual and family reasons and economic drivers of migration.

### **Insecurity, violence and poor governance**

The MMC 2021 study shows that 13% of West African migrants stated 'violence, insecurity and conflict' as a reason for migrating, whereas 8% responded 'rights and freedoms' and 7% 'access to services/corruption' as reasons for migrating. Breaking the numbers down and comparing two countries with high levels of insecurity, Mali and Burkina Faso, migrants from Mali more often selected violence and insecurity as reasons for migrating (33%) than Burkinabe migrants (13%). This discrepancy suggests that conflict affected populations in Burkina Faso might not have the needed resources to move despite their aspirations to do so (MMC 2021a). Qualitative research supports these findings by pointing towards the fact that historical and ongoing processes of decline and violence fuel collective desires for migration (Vigh 2009; Piot 2010).

The impact of poor governance and little or no access to social service and the accompanying sense of alienation also seem to shape migration. The UNDP survey highlights that 26% of the respondents selected the 'governance/security context' as an additional reason for migrating to Europe. Of these, 62% said they had been unfairly treated by the government, and 77% felt they had no influence on their government. Furthermore, the survey shows low levels of confidence in national government, the police and army, and dissatisfaction and disappointment with service provision regarding the government's ability to secure jobs and access to health and education. It is worth noticing that education also played an important role in the survey, as 24% stated education as 'other reason for coming to Europe' while 8% cited education as the most important reason (UNDP 2019: 41). Other studies have shown that reliable public healthcare and education are signs of political and economic stability that connects to the populations' overall wellbeing, which further reduces migration aspirations (Aslany et al. 2020: 40). Along these lines the UNDP survey points to how, in an African context – because of the generational gap between those sitting in power and those governed – large portions of the young population feel dissatisfied and excluded from influence on politics. This situation not only shapes their sense of lack of opportunities and future prospects in their country of origin but also their ambition to pursue their dreams and aspirations elsewhere (UNDP 2019).

### **Environmental reasons and the lack of food security**

Environmental factors may not play a central role in migrants' decisions to move, but they are nevertheless an important consideration. MMC data show that only 2% of West African and 6% of Central African respondents selected natural disaster or environmental factors as one of the reasons for why they left their country, and none cited it as the sole cause. Yet, when asked separate questions about whether environmental issues were a factor in their decision to leave, a much larger percentage indicated that it did play a role (West Africa, 47% and Central Africa, 53%). Though this might appear as a contradiction, it corresponds with other studies that highlight that, unless they are sudden environmental disasters that force people to move, environmental factors are usually further back in people's mind when stating reasons for their mobility (MMC 2021a: 12). Instead, environmental factors combine with, and sometimes intensify, other factors, and often serve as a stress multiplier that exacerbates other already existing local challenges.

Unfavourable environmental conditions are one of the multiple interlinked causes of food insecurity which in turn affects migration. Migration is widely known for having a positive impact on food security and migrant's remittances play a crucial role for many families in times of crisis. Using GWP data from 2014 Sadiddin et al. (2019) have explored how food insecurity affects migrant aspirations and actual preparations to leave in sub-Saharan Africa. Their study indicates that food insecurity is an important determinant of both the desire and decision to migrate internationally. Experiencing food insecurity raises the probability of desiring to migrate to another country and the probability of the desire increases in conjunction with the severity of food insecurity. Yet deciding to migrate to another country at the same time decreases as food insecurity worsens, a finding that corresponds with the above-mentioned literature that highlight that poor people – although they have migration aspirations – face tremendous constraints in realising them. The authors therefore recommend that reducing barriers to migration would benefit poor populations facing food insecurity. In Ghana, studies have shown that migration, especial seasonal migration, is a way for fishermen and many rural households to cope with climate related adverse weather conditions such as droughts and floods that threaten their agricultural production (Warner & Afifi 2014; Rademacher-Schulz et al. 2014; Lucht 2012). In sum, having the capability to migrate is important for poorer segments of the population when adapting to climate change.

## **PART THREE: ARE MIGRATION PATTERNS SENSITIVE TO FOREIGN AID?**

It is sometimes argued that foreign aid may help to reduce migration because it provides new opportunities to people who would otherwise consider migration as an option for getting access to resources and choices that they do not currently have. It is stated in the recent Danish strategy for development cooperation: 'Fighting poverty and creating new opportunities for people in regions of origin and in fragile

countries helps to prevent irregular migration towards Europe' (Danida 2021a: 19). Similarly, the New European Consensus on Development argues: 'Through development policy, the EU and its Member States will address the root causes of irregular migration and will, inter alia, contribute to the sustainable integration of migrants in host countries and host communities and help ensure the successful socioeconomic integration of returning migrants in their countries of origin or transit' (EU 2017: 18). The assumption underlying these statements is that reducing the socio-economic gap between low- and high-income countries will lead to less migration. While this is a rational and reasonable expectation, it is, as documented above, only the case when countries reach higher middle-income status. Foreign aid may, in fact, enable people living in poverty to migrate, as many scholars have indicated (see for instance Clemens & Postel 2018b). It is furthermore argued that bilateral aid strengthens the connections between development practitioners and certain people in recipient countries, developing knowledge that the latter can make use of to migrate (Berthélemy et al. 2009).

This part looks at three different ways of assessing the relationship between development cooperation and migration. First, we examine the literature seeking to relate foreign aid and migrants in cross-country analyses. The second section looks at the potential of foreign aid in relation to the drivers of migration and seeks to answer the question of whether optimally organised foreign aid is likely to influence migration. In the third section, we review recent studies seeking to link specific development projects to the aspirations and abilities of potential migrants. Two general conclusions in this part are that there are few indications that aid may inhibit migration and that research on specific aid-supported development activities seeking to stem migration is very limited. Thus, there is need for more studies before a more rigorous conclusion as to the relationship between certain forms of development cooperation and migration can be established.

### **Cross-country studies**

A limited number of studies have tried to clarify the relationship between foreign aid and migration both in general and when disaggregating both parameters. They do so by adopting cross-country statistical measures, which should raise some concern given the probability of the two parameters interacting. It is not evident that there is a causal relationship from aid to migration, or the other way around, and this weakens the approach. Moreover, many macro and micro parameters may influence migration, making it difficult to isolate the impact of foreign aid, and 'overcontrolling' these parameters seems to be another problem (Clements & Postel 2018b: 13). Therefore, the conclusions of this literature should be assessed with caution.

Some studies indicate an increase of immigrants in OECD countries because of increasing total and/or bilateral aid (Berthélemy et al. 2009; Menard and Gary 2017; Restelli 2021) whereas another study (Lanati & Thiele 2018) finds that an increase of total aid is associated with a reduction of flows of regular migrants to donor countries even from poor countries. A study focusing on refugees (Dreher et al. 2019) finds that aid does not inhibit refugee flows in the short run, only in the long

run, whereas another study of bilateral aid (Murat 2020) seems to identify a slight reduction of the number of asylum-seekers because of increased bilateral aid.

Some of these studies use the stock of migrants as the dependent variable while others focus on flows of regular migrants or asylum-seekers, and two concentrate on irregular migrants arriving in Greece, Italy and Spain (Clist & Restelli 2020; Restelli 2021). The last category of migrants is typically the one that European politicians are mostly concerned about, and the conclusion here is that total aid does not influence the number of irregular migrants, whereas bilateral aid has a small attraction effect. It is also concluded that budget constraints have no influence on the flow of irregular migrants to Europe, as 'the lower the income at origin the greater the irregular flow to Europe' (Restelli 2021: 31). However, this conclusion is at odds with the majority of studies, and it is well documented that irregular migration often requires significant resources. Other studies suggest a correlation between aid and regular migration and all studies emphasise the importance of networks. A further twist to this is seen when aid is decomposed sector-wise. Lanati and Thiele suggest that aid supporting social services, partly in response to the Millennium Development Goals, rather than aid aimed at increasing income through better economic infrastructure or productive sectors, lowers migration rates (2018: 66-67). The reason given is that potential migrants can only benefit from these improved social services by staying home.

It is no surprise that different studies come to partly differing conclusions, given that foreign aid is such a broad category. Migration can be analysed in terms of stocks or flows of migrants and in terms of regular or irregular migrants not to mention asylum-seekers. However, it seems reasonable to make the overall observation that there is limited evidence of foreign aid in general reducing migration. It is also noteworthy that the only two studies focussing on irregular migration to Europe conclude that total aid has no bearing on the number of irregular migrants.

### **The potential of foreign aid in relation to migration**

As indicated above it may be less useful to analyse aid in general than to look at particular forms of aid and their potential for affecting drivers of migration. This can be done using the extensive literature on aid effectiveness, which examines the impact of development cooperation on various development problems. One study focuses on four such development issues: economic growth, job creation for youth, conflict resolution, and human rights (Clemens & Postel 2018b: 5-8). The lack of one or more of these factors is often mentioned by politicians and in official strategies for development cooperation as the root causes of migration. Indeed, a recent Danish partnership programme with four Arab countries is precisely directed towards creating jobs for youth and improving the human rights situation in order to address migration (Danida 2021b). Thus, the potential of foreign aid in relation to migration could reside in the ability of development cooperation to address these four issues.

Foreign aid's impact on economic growth is disputed (Doucouliagos & Paldam 2011; Mekasha and Tarp 2019), but rarely assessed to be the cause of significant

growth rates. Market opportunities, a conducive institutional environment and political stability are needed as well to create growth (Tang & Bundhoo 2017). Given the literature on the migration transition, discussed above, low-income countries would have to experience levels of growth equivalent to those in China for an extended period before they will see reduced emigration numbers. Thus, for a variety of reasons, it is unrealistic to expect that migration, including irregular migration, now or in the coming years, can be influenced by aid's effects on economic growth.

Every year, 12 million young people enter the workforce in Africa, but only three million new jobs are being created (MFA 2020). Although this represents a gigantic challenge, it can be met by sustained levels of economic growth and change: 'The youth employment policy agenda in sub-Saharan Africa is, first and foremost, an economic transformation agenda, including raising within-sector productivity in lower productivity sectors such as agriculture and expanding output and employment in higher productivity sectors' (Fox & Gandhi 2021: 1). However, while foreign aid may very well support such a process, it will not materialise without strong political leadership, increased access to global markets, and hitherto unseen foreign direct investments. Thus, the potential of foreign aid alone reducing migration through the creation of millions of jobs is limited.

Social and violent conflicts are likely to stimulate mobility, whether as irregular or regular migrants or as refugees. In a systematic review of the academic literature on the ability of development cooperation to influence conflicts, Zürcher concludes that, 'aid in conflict zones is more likely to exacerbate violence than to dampen violence' (2017: 506). This idea is supported by evaluations of development programmes in conflict-ridden areas (Engberg-Pedersen & Fejerskov 2010). Thus, aid resources may very easily fuel an existing conflict or, for that matter, turn a latent conflict into violent struggle which is likely to incite mobility.

Lack of human rights and democracy is also associated by some with increased emigration (Clemens & Postel 2018b: 5-8). The potential of foreign aid in this area is probably more mixed than in relation to the above-mentioned issues because it is easier to target activities to have an immediate effect on certain dimensions of human rights, democracy and governance. One study, however, finds no evidence of a general effect of development cooperation on democracy: 'Using two different democracy indexes and two different measures of aid intensity, no evidence is found that aid promotes democracy' (Knack 2004: 251). This conclusion is said to hold for the post-Cold War period, too. Contradicting this, a more recent study concludes that, 'the aggregate effect of aid on democracy has become more positive after the Cold War, and the effect of aid on government capacity and on reducing corruption has also improved over time' (Dijkstra 2018: 225). In line with the widespread scepticism as to the effectiveness of conditionality and donor influence on policy reform in countries where the government does not support this, another study suggests that highly aid-dependent countries may be more inclined to accept human rights commitments than other countries (Donno & Neureiter 2018). It is also argued that donor influence on policy reform is more likely in countries with well-established democracies as governments in these countries need resources to

satisfy their constituencies (Montinola 2010). Overall, it seems that foreign aid may hold some potential to influence human rights and democracy although the recent authoritarian tendencies in OECD countries to some extent delegitimise donors' possible ambitions in this field.

One thing is the potential of foreign aid to limit migration, another is whether aid is channelled to realise this potential. One study comparing aid to 'migration-relevant' issues across countries concludes that aid to countries with disproportionately large emigration is not biased more towards these issues (Clemens & Postel 2018b). This may have changed in recent years, but it is still important to keep in mind that development cooperation historically has been influenced by numerous different purposes (geopolitical interests, commercial concerns, colonial ties, security issues, global norms, etc.) making a very sharp focus on migration less likely.

A major ongoing research programme (2019-2023) on the relationship between migration and development financed by the EU Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation programme sets out from the following points regarding foreign aid:

1. In its current form development aid does not seem to be big enough to create the underlying changes that effect migration decisions
2. In cases where we do see a deterrent effect of aid on migration, a noticeable impact would require an unrealistic increase in aid
3. For poor countries, aid is often expected to increase migration
4. The deterrent effect of aid only seems to be the case when higher levels of income are achieved or with very specific types of aid in specific contexts
5. More systematic research is needed breaking down different types of aid more at the macro level and looking at specific interventions and specific types of interventions at the micro-level
6. There is little information on the effects of development (aid) on different types of migrations (i.e. regular vs. irregular) (Siegel 2019)

These points summarise well that the potential of aid appears to be limited, that its immediate impact in low-income countries is to stimulate migration rather than the opposite, and that there is little evidence of how specific aid interventions influence mobility.

### **Concrete aid-supported activities and their impact on migration**

Carefully organised development support may influence migration patterns and offer potential migrants fewer reasons to migrate. A recent multi-university research project, MigChoice, addresses the intersection of migration and foreign aid from the perspective of potential migrants, and observes that '[w]e know surprisingly little about how people negotiate the fields of knowledge, social relations and public structures that allow them to come to decisions on how best to make their life meaningful, and how mobility specifically features in their life projects' (MigChoice 2021: 5). The research concentrates on The Gambia, Guinea and Senegal, and a central idea is that many different drivers of migration are at play, as mentioned above. Interestingly, the research notes that, '[d]evelopment

interventions are “big business” in contemporary West Africa, involving significant spending of public money, and touching most or all of the sites and regions that are the focus of our research’ (MigChoice 2021: 11). This is not least due to the significant resources that the EU’s Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF) has spent on different development activities with the explicit purpose to limit migration. However, the general sentiment among potential migrants interviewed is that these activities are inaccessible. Many of the projects focus on vocational training in relation to jobs in the formal sector, but what is the effect if the youth only can find jobs in the informal sector? Other development interventions seek to stimulate entrepreneurship, and while most of the interviewed young people believe that they have the personal capabilities to become successful business owners, an even larger majority believe that they do not have adequate support and that events outside their control will prevent them from succeeding (MigChoice 2021: 17-18). This prevents them from pursuing an entrepreneurial path.

In addition, the EUTF interventions are criticised by the MigChoice project for following a blue-print approach across countries rather than adapting to local contexts, for favouring short-term projects over longer-term programmes based on national policies, and for re-framing existing development interventions rather than developing innovative activities (MigChoice 2021: 15-16). All this prevents the EUTF from addressing what young people experience as their key challenge, namely the fundamental inequalities regarding access to opportunities and resources. Geographically, socio-politically and intergenerationally, young people feel largely marginalised, and these are challenges that are difficult to address in the short term.

Thus, the MigChoice project corroborates the diversity of drivers of migration as well as the interaction of aspiration and ability to migrate. This suggests that aid interventions seeking to limit migration need to address many different issues in areas characterised by outmigration. The study does not find examples of such successful interventions, but these cannot be ruled out. Particularly in situations where potential migrants do not possess the ability to realise their aspirations, aid-supported activities may mitigate the urge to move. However, it seems helpful to think in terms of a comprehensive package of activities to address the many different drivers. Adapted to local conditions, this package could include, for example, the strengthening of social security through cash transfers to help during sudden family tragedies such as the death of breadwinners, the loss of productive assets, natural disasters, etc. It could also include social change that reduces gender and intergenerational inequalities, and the development of local opportunities that respond to the imagination of potential migrants for a different future.

This ambitious comprehensive package would, of course, require national and local political support. The MigChoice project talks about ‘the need for a whole-of-government or indeed whole-of-society approach, rather than specific initiatives whether focused at individual “potential migrants”, returnees or communities’ (2021: 22). Given the size of this task, it may also be worth considering how aid can support intra-regional African migration where this can benefit societies, economies, and migrants. Given that intra-regional mobility already constitutes by

far the largest part of African migration, directing potential migrants to African destinations looking for labour may be easier than stemming migration altogether. Again, this would only be possible if governments and other authorities in these countries can support it. In any case, it seems that aid-supported activities should be adapted carefully to local conditions and aspirations. The often-reached conclusion of avoiding blueprint approaches is as relevant here as elsewhere.

## **CONCLUSION**

This working paper has pointed to the importance of nuancing simplistic assumptions of ‘root causes’ and seeing beyond poverty and conflict as the main drivers of migration. Shifting the analytical focus from causes to drivers enables a more complex understanding of the often mixed and multiple dynamics that shape migration today. Moving away from dominant understandings of economic rationality in migration theories enables a foregrounding of the role of subjective aspirations and desires, social networks, and the migration infrastructure, all of which both facilitate and block migration. Building on recent studies, the paper has emphasised that African migration in the post-colonial period is largely driven by development processes and social transformations that have expanded people’s ability and aspirations to migrate. The lack of regular migration alternatives for West Africans leads not only to states of involuntary immobility but also irregular migration, when migrants in their own way try to bridge the vast inequality in wealth and security between West Africa and Europe through migration.

When it comes to the relationship between migration and foreign aid, this study argues that foreign aid rarely takes a point of departure in an understanding of locally determined drivers of migration. Rather, it focuses on externally defined root causes of migration which may or may not coincide with those drivers of migration. Moreover, it is premised on a rationality characterised by individualism which contradicts the often collective effort to access resources through migration or aid activities. A much more promising approach would be to carefully address the locally determined concerns of potential migrants making concrete plans to leave. If such development programmes exist, they should be analysed in detail to establish their potential.

In addition, the study documents the following points:

- Aspiration and ability to migrate are decisive factors for migration. Aspirations are shaped by a macro-level emigration environment including social, economic and political formations, and also individual characteristics.
- Migration aspirations should not be confused with actual migration plans or migration abilities. Several recent quantitative survey studies come to the same conclusion, namely that many African citizens aspire to migrate, yet only few make concrete plans to do so.

- Looking at who aspires to migrate within or out of Africa, and who takes concrete steps towards migration, data show that people are on average in their twenties, are better educated and are in an economically better position compared to those who do not consider migrating or those who only aspire to move.
- For the majority of migrants from West Africa, economic concerns play a central role in their decision to leave. Yet, the data suggest that this motivation cannot stand alone when explaining current migration trends.
- There is little evidence that foreign aid deters migration in general. Indications rather suggest the opposite. While this may have changed recently, aid is not particularly focussed on 'migration-relevant' sectors. Moreover, if it were, evidence indicates that it would not be able to create substantial change. And if it did, it may rather spur emigration than the opposite.
- A crisis mode of reaction and governance as the central approach of European migration policy has been in place since 2015 and it seems self-perpetuating. This is not helpful in terms of understanding and addressing human mobility.
- Given the foreseeable demographic development, it is unrealistic to pursue a strategy of avoiding human mobility altogether. Mobility is a deeply ingrained part of the practices of communities characterised by migration, and it is only likely to be supported by general economic and social development in low-income societies. Thus, it seems much more promising to pursue a twofold strategy of addressing locally determined drivers of migration as well as supporting regional migration already being by far the largest part of the migration in sub-Saharan Africa.

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