Illegal immigration from Africa to Europe

Last September, the Spanish enclaves Ceuta and Melilla witnessed a mass influx of illegal migrants from Africa, and the stream of desperate people from the continent bound for Europe has not ceased. Nonetheless, the stories of overcrowded boats arriving, or more often capsizing, at the southern European shores, often do not make front-page news.

Illegal migration is not a new phenomenon for European Mediterranean countries. During the summer months, Spain, Italy, Malta and Turkey are confronted with the arrival of thousands of illegal immigrants. However, the figures for 2006 show a sharp increase in irregular migration movements. Compared to 2005, the numbers have doubled. So far this year, over 17,000 African migrants have arrived in Spain. More than 12,000 Africans have attempted to cross the ocean to the Italian island of Sicily . Europe now matches North America in its significance as a region of immigration.

1.1   Migration routes from Africa to Europe

The events in Ceuta and Melilla revealed that North African countries have become gateways to Europe. Migrants from sub-Saharan Africa, in particular, use these gateways as transit routes. The main arrival areas for maritime migration are located where a comparably short distance separates Europe and Africa. Previously, the main route from West Africa to Europe was through Mauritania to Morocco, where Africans attempted either to enter Ceuta and Melilla, or cross the Straits of Gibraltar. In recent years, however, immigrants have increasingly been heading for Senegal and Mauritania, where they board boats for the Canary Islands, in most cases Fuerteventura. This shift can be attributed to the effective Spanish controls in the Mediterranean. Alternatively, would-be immigrants from sub-Saharan Africa or the Horn of Africa attempt to land on the Italian island of Lampedusa from Algeria and Libya via the North and East African routes.

1.2   EU migration policy

In the mid-1980s the EU adopted harsh immigration policies, creating "Fortress Europe." The policies aimed at securing its borders and keeping would-be immigrants out. A decade later, the union introduced another approach to migration control, aimed at signing readmission agreements with third countries. The 1998 Vienna Action Plan envisaged the creation of buffer zones and camps for illegal economic migrants in North Africa.

The events in the Spanish enclaves last year made the European community realize that the problem of illegal immigration can only be tackled by a comprehensive strategy. Several agreements have

been signed between the EU, Spain and Italy, respectively, and African states. In May 2006, Spain agreed to provide new aid packages to Morocco in exchange for the latter applying more stringent border control. Three months later, Spain reached an accord with Senegal on joint patrols in Senegalese territorial waters. Moreover, the EU started its first joint border control, Hera II, recently in the Canary Islands. It is tasked with reinforcing control of waters off western Africa and diverting ships heading for Europe.

The wider dimensions of the problem made the EU recognize that addressing the root causes of illegal migration is essential to successfully manage the issue. The two main triggers are poverty, which is closely connected with unemployment, and conflict.

Given that access to visas is extremely restricted for Africans, illegal migration often remains the only option for a better life. In certain African countries, even well-educated people have difficulties finding jobs. With unemployment rates also high in transit countries, migrants continue to Europe, where laws provide for temporary housing, food, medical care and legal aid as well as - potentially - a residence permit. Yet, as a consequence of the high percentage of migrants failing to enter Europe, many return and remain in the Maghreb countries, undeterred by the European efforts to reduce illegal trafficking and migration.

The EU has given top priority to cooperating with countries in the transit regions and regions of origin. At the Rabat conference in July 2006, European and African states developed a common strategy to tackle the problem of illegal immigration flow into Europe. It combines a tougher approach to policing and border security and actions against human traffickers with poverty-reduction incentives for African countries. Yet, enactment might be difficult as the plan is non-binding, vague and funding for it has not been secured.

1.3   Doubtful commitment of African governments

The commitment of African states to combat illegal migration is often challenged. In African countries, migrants' remittances dwarf official development aid. Given that most of the migrants are unemployed and poor, and hence potentially troublesome, their emigration signifies leverage to their governments. The African states are opposed to a European proposal for an agreement, which only admits well-educated Africans to Europe. In their opinion, such an accord would speed up brain drain and leave the task of training and education to Africa while Europe reaps the benefits. The benefit of today's situation and the anticipated negative impact of an immigration accord make African governments reluctant to sign any readmission agreement with Europe.

Patricia Moser
ISN Editor

1.4   International law

United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime
The Palermo Convention was adopted in 2000 by the United Nations to address the problem of

human trafficking. The Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, adopted in 2000, and the Protocol Against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, adopted 2004, supplement the convention. Ratifying states agree to prevent and combat trafficking in persons, protect and assist victims of trafficking and further international cooperation to meet the protocol's objectives.

Council of Europe Convention on Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings
This convention was adopted in May 2005. The aim is to prevent and combat human trafficking. As of the end of June 2006, 30 of the 46 members of the council have signed the convention. Moldova ratified the convention and eight more countries must do the same in order for it to enter into force.

1.5   International organizations

Dakar Conference
On 5 -6 June 2006 the UN Capital Development Fund and the UN Development Program held the Dakar Conference. The meeting was aimed at improving the delivery of financial services as an approach to poverty reduction in Africa. The focus was on the issues and challenges involved in building inclusive financial sectors in Africa. The conference united for the first time a broad representation of public and private sector and concluded with adopting the Dakar Declaration.

Organized Illegal Immigration into the EU, by Europol, The Hague, The Netherlands
This report provides an overview of illegal immigration to Europe. It explains migration desire in the context of the push- and pull-factors. The involvement of organized crime in irregular migration is discussed, as are the migration routes and falsified documentation as the most popular method of entry.

Immigration, by the European Commission, Brussels, Belgium
This website offers information on EU immigration policy. It gives a general view of the accomplishments and covers the latest developments in all relevant fields. The section on illegal immigration lists the main achievements in the six areas in which the European Commission is actively taking measures against illegal immigration.

Migration and Development: Opportunities and Challenges for Policymakers, by the International Organization for Migration, Geneva, Switzerland
This paper guides policymakers through challenges posed by migration and development. It gives an overview of the policy implications discussed in the literature on migration and development. The paper's primary aim is to further the process of mapping out policy options in this area, especially across the spectrum of channels that form the migration-development nexus.

Global Commission on International Migration (GCIM), Geneva, Switzerland
The mandate of GCIM is to provide the framework for the formulation of a coherent, comprehensive and global response to international migration. The website offers information on its policy analysis projects and research programs. Its thematic and regional studies, which focus on topics related to the commission's mandate, also analyze irregular migration. Reports provide further insight into migration in Europe, the Middle East and the Mediterranean and West Africa.

Dialogue on Mediterranean Transit Migration (MTM), by the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), Vienna, Austria
This website includes information on informal inter-governmental dialogue on transit migration over the Mediterranean. The European Commission funds this forum. It aims at enhancing operational cooperation to combat illegal migration and concentrates on medium and long-term policy responses focusing also the migration-development nexus. The first MTM newsletter explains the transit routes from Africa and the Mediterranean to Europe.

1.6   Government

Proyectos para el control de la inmigración irregular, by the Spanish Interior Ministry, Madrid
This document by the Spanish government provides information on projects to control illegal immigration to Spain. In particular, it offers details on the European project "Sea Horse," which seeks to control immigration to the Canaries in collaboration with Mauritania. The Sea Horse project includes joint patrols of the Spanish civil guard and the Mauritanian police as well as the database Sea Horse Network, which aims to track illegal immigration in real time.

Euro-Africa Conference on Migration and Development, by the Moroccan Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, Rabat.
The Rabat Ministerial Conference held in July 2006 united ministers from the EU and West, Central and North Africa and focused on the West and Central African migration route. The aim was to find joint responses to migration. This was one of the priority actions as spelled out in the European Council's "Global Approach to Migration: Priority actions focusing on Africa and the Mediterranean." A final declaration and an action plan were adopted. The objective of the two documents is to strengthen control methods. However, they do not address the root causes of migration.

1.7   Research and academia

European Migration Information Network (EMIN), London, UK
The European Migration Information Network (EMIN) is based in the Migration Research Unit (MRU) at the University College London (UCL). The network is being funded by the European Union's Odysseus Program in order to provide a hub for relevant information resources on international migration, particularly migration in Europe. The site includes access to a directory of organizations, individuals and projects, a list of migration-related networks, and a glossary of migration-related terms.

Center for International and European Law on Immigration and Asylum, Konstanz, Germany
This website offers an overview of latest European developments in the field of asylum and immigration. In addition, it provides access to the most important treaties and documents on migration law as well as to graphics and statistics.

TRANSREDE Research Project: Transnational Migration, Return and Development in West Africa, by the Sussex Centre for Migration Research, London, UK

This research project is a collaboration between the Sussex Centre for Migration Research, the Ivory Coast's Ecôle Nationale Supérieure de Statistique et d'Economie Appliqué and Ghana's Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research. It examines the advantages of emigration for citizens of Ghana and Ivory Coast and the relationship between international migration, return and development. The website includes working papers and workshop reports.

From "Fortress Europe" to "Welcome to Europe," by Oxford Council on Good Governance (OCGG), UK
This paper by Simon Dalferth gives recommendations to the governments of European Union member states on the development of EU immigration and asylum policies. The study identifies immigration as a general challenge for Europe and calls on the member states to develop a comprehensive common approach. The author details how European responses to immigration have mainly focused on security issues and explains how the governments also need to see immigration as an opportunity and not as a threat.

Mediterranean Migration: 2005 Report, by the Euro-Mediterranean Consortium for Applied Research on International Migration (CARIM), San Domenico di Fiesole, Italy
This report offers a comprehensive survey on migration to, from, and in transit through the Mediterranean countries of the Middle East and North Africa (Med-MENA). It aims to provide a perspective from the south looking north, rather than the other way around. The report contains a regional overview as well as a section for each of the ten Med-MENA countries. Each section includes chapters on the demographic, economic, legal and political dimensions of migration.

Outsourcing Migration Management, by the Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS), Copenhagen
This paper by Thomas Graae Gammeltoft-Hansen explores the links between the European Union's migration priorities and its foreign policy agenda. The author explains why the EU has increased its efforts to regulate migration flows beyond its borders and given priority to cooperation with third countries. The paper also examines how EU foreign policy has developed vis-à-vis these third countries, and what objectives these policies serve to effect.

Non-governmental organizations

Information Concerning Immigration and Asylum Law in the EU Member States, by the Odysseus Network, Brussels, Belgium
This website offers information on immigration and asylum laws of 16 European states. For each country, it provides access to legislation, a bibliography, publications, relevant websites and the national bodies assigned to analyze the evolution of immigration and asylum policies.

Development Gateway, Washington, DC, USA
The Development Gateway is as an interactive portal for information and knowledge sharing on sustainable development and poverty reduction. The website offers content on various development issues, which can be searched by topic or country. Information is also available in Spanish and French.

Migration Policy Group (MPG), Brussels, Belgium
This organization focuses on policy development in three core areas, namely integration, migration and anti-discrimination. It issues a European monthly covering all major European developments in the fields of immigration and asylum policies, asylum-seekers, controlled migration, irregular and illegal immigration, racism and xenophobia, and issues arising out of the process of integrating ethnic minorities. The website further provides publications and country reports on immigration management and anti-discrimination law and policy in 18 European states.

The Boundaries of Belonging: Reflections on Migration Policies into the 21st Century, by Inter Pares, Ottawa, Canada
This paper by Alison Crosby examines the politics of categorization that defines people who move, as well as the migration containment policies that set and maintain the boundaries of these categories. The paper suggests that "the problem" is not migration per se, but rather the way the powerful seek to control and contain the movement of people. It argues that migration policies are a form of population control.

Media

Les migrations transsahariennes, une mondialisation par la marge, by El Watan, Algiers, Algeria
This article by Ali Bensaad examines trafficking in human beings on one of the most popular African transit route from the Sub-Saharan region to North Africa. The focus is on the trans-Sahara route from Niger to Libya.

In Depth: Africa – After the Promises, by BBC, London, UK
This special report assesses the status in Africa one year after the G8 summit, at which the participating leaders pledged to boost aid and cut debt in Africa. The case studies, reports and background analyzes examine whether the promises are meeting the expectations.

Spanish Study Points to Benefits of Immigration, by Financial Times, London, UK
This article by Victoria Burnett refers to a study by the Catalan State Savings Bank and the Autonomous University of Barcelona. The study concludes that the growth of the per capita GDP of Spain and other European countries during the last ten years can be traced back to the mass influx of immigrants.