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EFFECTS OF
EXTERNALISATION - EFFEXT

EU Migration Management in Africa and the Middle East

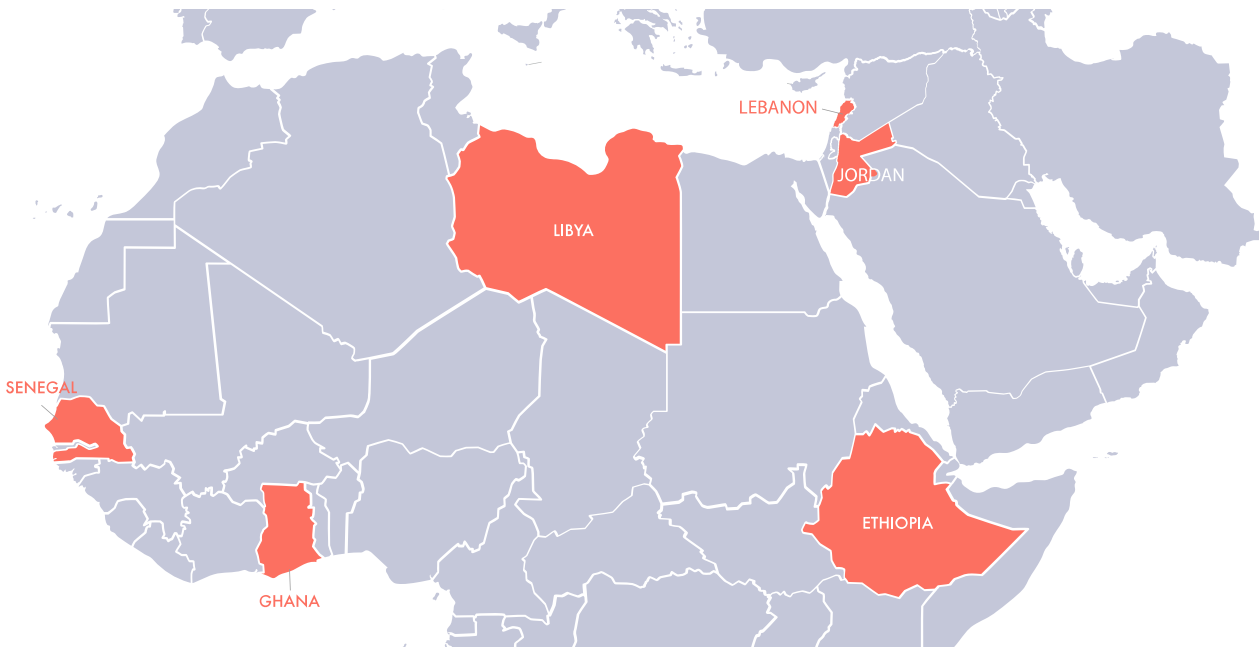
Introduction to the project

Migration is key for development in Africa and the Middle East. Yet, a number of states in these vast regions cooperate with European stakeholders on interventions to curb irregular migration and increase returns. While international collaboration has become essential in migration governance, the incentives, implementation and broader impact of international and European migration measures in African and Middle Eastern partner countries has received minimal attention.

The EFFEXT research project has explored these issues by zooming in on six countries: Jordan, Ghana, Lebanon, Libya, Senegal, and Ethiopia. These countries represent origin, transit and destination countries for mixed migration flows, and differ in terms of governance practices and capacities, colonial histories and international policy collaboration, as well as socio-economic developments and migration dynamics.

How do key stakeholders in Africa and the Middle East navigate competing global and national priorities regarding migration management in an EU-centric policy context?

This has been the driving question of our research, and to answer it, the project team has collected data in all six case countries, interviewing governance stakeholders, local practitioners, border controllers, and migrants to understand how the needs and demands of different groups are met, or not. The research methodology included elite interviews with bureaucrats, decision makers, and actors involved in policy implementation, as well as ethnographic fieldwork in select migration localities. Additionally, a survey with a discrete choice experiment was conducted in Ghana.



Together, this fieldwork enabled the team to map the trajectory of migration governance measures from policy-making and agreements to local-level impact. By tracing policy implementation across different levels and stages, EFFEXT has explored the influences on migration policy outcomes in this political and multi-actor policy field, generating a comprehensive understanding of the links between the European externalisation efforts, and cross-level responses in Africa and the Middle East.

Cross-cutting themes

Through the analysis of data collected in all case countries, important cross-cutting insights have emerged, specifically concerning how various externalisation policies operate, how they are responded to, and what types of implications they produce. While these cross-case insights will be further explored comparatively, some preliminary findings have emerged:

African and Middle Eastern navigation of externally imposed migration policies

Through analyses of recent and previous research, it has become clear that African and Middle Eastern states navigate what can be seen as externally imposed policies in more ways than either simply accepting or refusing to collaborate. Rather, responses may take place on a scale from adoption or adaptation to resistance or subversion.¹ How different states respond to external migration policy instruments has significant consequences for the development of migration governance, not only within the country, but also for international or global migration governance frameworks. Responses may lead to the cementation of certain migration narratives and norms and may exacerbate existing power asymmetries within national and regional stakeholders, and between the Global North and South.

Rippling effects of European externalisation

While many European-funded initiatives focus on reducing the incentive to travel to Europe, they also have wide-reaching consequences beyond local and regional migration dynamics, as they affect social dynamics and policy priorities in Africa. These implications may be seen as rippling effects of European policy initiatives on migration and are experienced on the ground in African and Middle Eastern states.² Such effects may be intended or unintended results of externally-implemented migration policies. For instance, in Ghana, the research highlighted that the Ghanaian border agency have been modernised, expanded, and professionalised. However, it also revealed more subtle, yet consequential implications, including increased reliance on external funding, shifts in local border dynamics, and the criminalisation of legal emigration.³ Taking heed of these rippling effects enables a better understanding of the wider consequences of externalisation, and how these policies may lead to a backlash against European influence and migration governance.⁴

Risks of merging development aid and migration control

Increasing amounts of development and humanitarian aid target concerns related to migration control and security. Yet, while their impact on migration flows can vary, migration control-oriented development aid often is at odds with locally grounded and prioritised needs and may have aversive influence on development processes. This includes so-called “root causes” approaches in aid funded migration governance initiatives. As such, a tension exists between upholding human rights, sound governance and locally grounded development in African and Middle Eastern countries, and ensuring perceived security among receiving countries in Europe.⁵

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Libya

Hans Lucht

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Survivors of Misrata Experts of the European Commission's Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection department (ECHO) were on hand at the arrival of the latest ship carrying migrant workers and critically injured people from Misrata, Libya. Photo credit: EU Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid, Flickr

Located on the land route connecting sub-Saharan Africa with North Africa, Libya has long been a central destination for African labour migration, as well as a transit point for sea journeys to Southern Europe. Libya is a key country in the EU's externalisation efforts and is a major recipient of both development aid and migration management assistance. Yet, little is known about how EU interventions play into the conflict-ridden country's internal divisions between north and south. Libya, especially the South, is a vastly understudied country, especially considering the importance it holds in trans-Saharan migration. As such, the project has highlighted new ethnographic data from the hard-to-reach border areas of the country.

The primary actors involved in migration management in Libya are the two rival governments within the country and their associated militias and institutions. Additionally, tribal and ethnic groups control the borders in Southern Libya. Apart from an apparent normalisation of brutalisation of migrants in recent EU externalisation, the research findings indicate that little to no EU support goes to Southern Libya, thereby exacerbating existing divisions in the country. This emphasises the stark economic, political, and security disparities between the two regions, and how they have been deepened by international interventions.⁶

Senegal

Ida Marie Savio Vammen

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Street art with the slogan “Leave or stay?” painted during one of the European-funded campaigns in Dakar. Photo credit: Ida Marie Savio Vammen

Senegal is a compelling case study for exploring the effect of externalisation. Migration and remittances play a vital socioeconomic and cultural role in the country, which has a long tradition of cross-border mobility, both within the region and internationally. For close to two decades, the Senegalese government has simultaneously accommodated and resisted EU externalisation interventions. At the governmental level, key actors include the Ministry of the Interior, responsible for the police, including border control, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, alongside some other government departments. Internationally, the EU, Spain and France and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) have had strong inputs and influences. In this context, the government has had to navigate donor interest that comes with access to large sums of development funding and funding to build the national security apparatus and bureaucracy as well as sensitive issues such as forced return, which remains politically sensitive nationally, and their interest in strengthening diaspora contributions.

The ethnographic research in Senegal highlighted the multifaceted ripple effects of the EU and European actors' externalisation initiatives and discourses. In the Senegalese context, civil society organisations (CSOs) often become key intermediaries in the migration industry, implementing EU-funded projects as they struggle for financial support. At the same time, other CSOs engage in anti-externalisation measures seeking to challenge and subvert the European border regime and the Eurocentric narratives around migration.

One of the most intriguing aspects found during research in Senegal is the contestation from below against European externalisation efforts. For instance, while the EU has heavily invested in campaigns to deter irregular migration from Senegal, activist-led campaigns in Dakar have emerged to inform the population and challenge Eurocentric migration policies and the associated border violence. Other CSOs have tried to push the government to adopt a more Senegal-centred national migration policy. However, their room for influence is limited. It remains uncertain if the new government under President Bassirou Diomaye Faye and Prime Minister Ousmane Sonko will be more willing to listen to CSO actor's critical voices when seeking to promote their political agenda to enhance Senegal's sovereignty and reduce foreign dependencies and debt.⁷

Border check-point at the Ghana-Togo border, 2022. Photo credit: Cathrine Talleraas



Ghana

Cathrine Talleraas Project Leader/Senior Researcher, Chr. Michelsen Institute
Leander Kandilge Ass. Professor Centre for Migration Studies, Uni of Ghana

The Ghanaian migration governance landscape reflects the complex interplay between local needs and international priorities and is thus a key reference point for understanding the effects of European externalisation. Despite government institutions such as the Ministry of the Interior and the Ghana Immigration Service (GIS), remaining central, the policy landscape has been significantly shaped by external influences. Policies like the National Migration Policy (NMP) have emerged through collaborative efforts involving government ministries, academic institutions, and NGOs. However, challenges in aligning policy implementation with local realities persist, especially when external state and non-state actors, along with Ghanaian stakeholders, seek to influence migration governance priorities in terms of both policy design and implementation.⁸ While migration policies, like the NMP and more specific policy instruments, may be drafted through inclusive processes, the implementation often sidelines local actors' perspectives. This exclusion has resulted in tensions, as locally grounded insights and needs can be overlooked when externally funded projects are launched. The power dynamics between international funders and local stakeholders reinforce hierarchies that affect the relevance and sustainability of migration governance.

Recent efforts in border control strengthening have had both positive and negative implications for local border governance and social dynamics. As international stakeholders, including European governments, have invested in modernising the GIS, border management capabilities have improved. However, this has come with increased reliance on external resources, and shifting narratives around migration could be seen as affecting Ghana's border autonomy and sovereignty. Moreover, stricter control measures have led to the criminalisation of certain legal migration practices, affecting local mobility and fostering a complex interplay between traditional authority structures and new governance arrangements. These dynamics emphasise how external priorities influence not just governance but also reshape everyday experiences and relationships in border areas.⁹

Research from a field experiment conducted in a transit community in Ghana found that videos emphasising local opportunities or the dangers of irregular migration had limited impact on changing overall attitudes toward migrants. However, campaigns highlighting local opportunities did reduce migration intentions, which in turn improved attitudes toward other migrants.¹⁰ This study also explored the differences between state-led and CSO-led information campaigns, finding that locally driven, CSO-led initiatives tended to resonate more effectively with communities, as they were perceived as more trustworthy and relevant. These findings underscore the importance of considering both the content, delivery method and relevance of migration information provision.¹¹



From Metema, the border area between Ethiopia and Sudan, 2018.
Photo credit:
Kiya Gezahegne

Ethiopia

Kiya Gezahegne Lecturer, Addis Ababa University/GDI, University of Manchester
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EU policies and financial support play a central role in influencing Ethiopia's migration framework. The EU provides financial assistance, technical support, and strategic guidance for border control, human trafficking prevention, and migrant protection. Through agreements such as the EU-Ethiopia Common Agenda on Migration and Mobility, the EU funds projects intended to enhance Ethiopia's migration management capabilities, particularly for controlling 'irregular' migration and supporting the reintegration of returnees. However, this funding often comes with strings attached, requiring Ethiopia to align its policies with the EU's migration control objectives. For instance, EU-backed initiatives focus on strengthening Ethiopia's border control and immigration enforcement, objectives that serve European interests by reducing migration flows from Africa to Europe. This financial dependency makes it more challenging for Ethiopia to prioritise its own migration-related needs, such as creating employment opportunities or improving the economic stability of returnees.

Through the Khartoum Process and other regional migration dialogues, the EU works closely with Ethiopia and neighbouring countries to tackle issues like human trafficking and 'irregular' migration. This collaboration has led to Ethiopia establishing frameworks for managing migrant flows, including the National Anti-Trafficking Task Force, which was influenced heavily by EU funding and policy guidance. However, the implementation of these policies reveals gaps. Ethiopian agencies tasked with enforcing these policies, such as the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Labor and Skills, often struggle with limited resources and interagency coordination. These challenges weaken the effectiveness of EU-driven policies, especially in reaching rural or marginalised communities where migration drivers like poverty and lack of employment are prevalent. Consequently, the EU's externalisation policy, while well-funded, fall short in addressing root causes of migration in Ethiopia.

As a result, the EU's externalisation efforts are seen by some Ethiopian stakeholders as "exporting Europe's migration problem" to Africa. While the EU's support has led to important developments in Ethiopia's migration management, local actors sometimes view these policies as serving EU interests more than Ethiopian ones. This perspective is influenced by the perception that EU-funded projects emphasise short-term security goals, such as reducing migration flows to Europe, over long-term support for Ethiopia's socio-economic development. While the EU's externalisation policy has provided Ethiopia with crucial resources and strategic support for migration management, it has also created dependencies and tensions. The prioritisation of EU concerns related to migration control have clashed with Ethiopia's national interests, such as addressing unemployment or the economic integration of returnees. For example, Ethiopia has been pushed to tighten its border security in order to comply with EU priorities, creating tension between external control and internal development goals.¹²

Jordan

Zoë Jordan

Senior Lecturer, Centre for Development and Emergency Practice, Oxford Brookes



Workers travelling to agricultural work, Photo credit: Jordan International Labor Organization (ILO), Flickr

Jordan hosts a migrant population numbering an estimated 2-3 million people originating from across the region – most notably, Palestinian, Syrian, and Iraqi refugees. While Jordan is one of the largest refugee hosting countries in the world, with an estimated 1 in 10 people being a refugee, Jordan considers itself a transit country. This means that Jordan has adopted a policy of allowing people into the country but encouraging them to move on. Additionally, Jordan does not recognise asylum seekers and restricts who can access residency in the country. Jordan's interests centre on preserving political stability in the country. Other priorities include security, ensuring the continuation of external funds, and protecting Jordan's regional role and political and economic allegiances.

The Jordan Compact (2016) represents one of the key moments in the relationship between EU and Jordan. The Compact can be seen as part of the externalisation of asylum and follows the agreement between the EU and Jordan on a Mobility Partnership (2014) which contained four main objectives: effective management of mobility for short periods, legal, and labour migration; strengthening cooperation on migration and development; combatting irregular migration, trafficking, and smuggling and promoting an effective return and readmission policy; and strengthening the capacity to manage refugees in line with international standards.¹³ The Compact builds on this to consider trade as migration policy and must be understood as an instrument for refugee employment. Such moves towards access to work fit with the EU's 'resilience' building approach, however, frustrations are growing among Jordanians and refugees alike due to worsening economic conditions and unemployment.

Migration policy in Jordan often appears reactive, constituted within an emergency response framing despite the protracted time frame of displacement for all refugee populations in the country. Despite a flagship refugee policy focused on access to the labour market for Syrian refugees, the policy remains divided with little connection between labour migration and refugee protection. Further, within the refugee response, there is a stark distinction between the protections and services available to different nationalities of refugees.

Lebanon

Are John Knudsen

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Dilapidated building rented to Syrian refugees in Hamra, Beirut Photo credit: Karine Pierre, reproduced with permission

Lebanon has a long history of being a host to refugees from neighbouring countries. Despite being a small country, it hosts the world's largest per capita refugee population (approximately one million Syrians and 200 000 Palestinians, although these numbers are uncertain). However, there is no refugee law, and the country has resisted setting up refugee camps, meaning most Syrian refugees are 'self-settled' across the country and many live in urban areas.

Lebanon has not complied with EU directives to ease the economic burden for Syrian refugees, yet still been able to reap large amount of EU funding to stabilise the country reeling under and economic and political crisis. Poor Syrians and Palestinians as well as desperate Lebanese have left the country by boat, often with disastrous results. The EU recently awarded Lebanon EUR 1 billion, to improve border control, counter the growing smuggling industry, and break the smugglers' "business model." However, Lebanon is wary of the EU's policy of strengthening "resilience", interpreted as becoming a permanent host to Syrian refugees. EU funding and influence have aimed to bolster Lebanon's capacity to host refugees, particularly Syrians, while containing onward migration to Europe. There is strong resentment with EU policy dictates and the union failing to live up to its own humanist ideals, selectively applying this to Middle East "buffer states" burdened with large refugee populations. Rather than being a "norm provider" or "normative power" the EU has instrumentalised the migration issue and used MENA states, such as Lebanon, as hosting solutions.

Due to government deadlocks, the country is run by a caretaker government (PM Najib Mikati), and unable to elect a new President. Legislation has been moved out of formal political institutions to CSOs filling in for the government's lack of policy institutionalisation and controlled by elites benefitting from foreign and EU funding. Additionally, the country is still reeling from the fifteen year long civil war (1975-90), and the murder of former PM Rafik Hariri (2005), with massive debt and internal divisions between political parties and religious groups. Lebanon is currently amid a new war with Israel (IDF) targeting Shia-majority villages in South Lebanon and Hizbollah bases in Beirut. The conflict has displaced 1,2 million people and around 2-300,000 have crossed the border into Syria, thus adding another layer to the country's deep economic and political crises.¹⁴

Snapshots from our fieldwork



EU funded technical and vocational training in Ghana, targeted at potential migrants and returnees, 2022. Photo credit: Cathrine Talleraas



Traditional fishing canoes along the beach in a community North of Dakar, Senegal where European-funded campaigns have tried to convince the youth not to embark on dangerous migration journeys. Photo credit: Ida Marie Savio Vammen



Female activist at the Push Back Frontex campaign that aimed to inform the local population about the European Border and Coast Guard Agency and the brutality of externalisation in Senegal and North Africa. Photo credit: Ida Marie Savio Vammen



Ghana immigration service building. Photo credit: Cathrine Talleraas



Practicing interviews in Ghana. Photo credit: Cathrine Talleraas



Mid-project meeting in Beirut, Lebanon in December 2022. Co-hosted between CMI and the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs at the American University Beirut. Policy-makers and academics met to discuss the implementation of EU policies in the Levant, and the challenges faced by the EU and Levant countries alike. Photo credit: EFFEXT Project

Endnotes

- 1 See Bakewell and Talleraas, manuscript in preparation.
- 2 See Talleraas and Vammen, manuscript in preparation.
- 3 See Talleraas 2024a.
- 4 See Vammen 2024.
- 5 See Jordan, Talleraas and Vammen; Talleraas and Kandilige, and Vammen, manuscripts in preparation.
- 6 See Lucht and Lndi, manuscript in preparation.
- 7 See Vammen 2024 and Vammen, manuscript in preparation.
- 8 See Kandilige, Gopsill, Talleraas and Teye, 2023.
- 9 See Talleraas 2024a and Talleraas 2024b.
- 10 See Wiig, Kolstad, Kandilige and Talleraas, manuscript in preparation.
- 11 See Kandilige and Talleraas, manuscript in preparation.
- 12 See Gezahegne and Bakewell 2022, and Gezahegne and Bakewell, manuscript in preparation.
- 13 See Jordan, Brun, Sadler and Obeidat 2023.
- 14 See Forster and Knudsen 2023, and Knudsen, manuscript in preparation.

Project publications

- Forster, R. and A.J. Knudsen (2023). National and International Migration Policy in Lebanon. EFFEXT Background Papers. Bergen: Chr. Michelsen Institute.
- Gezahegne, K. and O. Bakewell. (2022). National and International Migration Policy in Ethiopia. EFFEXT Background Papers. Bergen: Chr. Michelsen Institute.
- Jordan, Z., C. Brun, I. Sadler, and D. Obeidat (2023). National and International Migration Policy in Jordan. EFFEXT Background Papers. Bergen: Chr. Michelsen Institute.
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- Kandilige, L. and T. Yeboah (2024). West African Migration Regimes and the Externalization of EU Migration Management Policies in in G. Heck, E. Sevinin, E. Habersky, C. Sandoval-Garcia (eds): Making Routes: Mobility and the Politics of Migration in the Global South. Cairo, New York: American University Cairo Press.
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- Talleraas, C. (2024a). Externally Driven Border Control in West Africa: Local Impact and Broader Ramifications. *International Migration Review*, 0(0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/01979183241292318>
- Talleraas, C. (2024b) The politics of migration policy implementation in Ghana. *Governance*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gove.12848>
- Vammen, I. (2024). The Struggle over Mobility Narratives: How Senegalese Activists use Alternative Information Campaigns to Contest EU Externalisation. *International Migration Review*. 0(0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/01979183241286746>

Upcoming EFFEXT outputs (manuscripts in preparation):

- Bakewell, O. and Talleraas, C. Shifting sands: the evolution of African migration governance amidst global agendas and foreign interventions.*
- Gezahegne, K. and Bakewell, O. Creating Space for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration: The Understanding of (II) legality in Ethiopia.*
- Jordan, Z. Local perspectives on migration policy processes: Nationals and refugees’ understandings of EU-Jordan externalisation policies in the context of the humanitarian-development nexus in Jordan.*
- Kandilige, L, C. Talleraas, A. Wiig and I. Kolstad. Continuities in externally-driven state-led versus home-grown migration information campaigns.*
- Knudsen, A.J. EU Migration Governance Beyond its Borders: Policy Informalisation in Lebanon’s Syrian Refugee Response 2012–22.*
- Lucht, H., and Lndi, A. Everything Goes to Tripoli and for the South, There’s Nothing: Views on EU externalization from Southern Libya.*
- Talleraas, C. and L. Kandilige. The Arbitrary Logic of Development Aid as Migration Governance.*
- Talleraas, C. and Vammen, I. Unpacking the rippling effects of European migration governance in Africa.*
- Vammen, I.M.S. and M. Dimé. Pushing to Go Beyond an EU-driven Migration Agenda: The Role of Civil Society in Senegal’s Migration Policymaking.*
- Wiig, A., C. Talleraas, L. Kandilige, and I. Kolstad. Effects of information about irregular migration on transit community attitudes towards migrants.*

* = work-in-progress papers, titles may change

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Collaboration partners



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