The security aspect of illegal migration policies in North Africa

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North African countries occupy a central position in the complex issue of migration across the Mediterranean, a region dubbed the "most deadly stretch of water for refugees and migrants" by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in 2011.[1] The challenges and dangers faced by those attempting this perilous journey, especially via the central Mediterranean route are escalating.[2] This route has become increasingly popular among smugglers due to its lower cost than land routes. Migrants are often crammed onto large fishing vessels holding at least 200-300 people or forced to utilize precarious dinghies, wooden or fiberglass boats, or even rudimentary iron vessels. These journeys are fraught with difficulty, as boats are frequently overloaded and inadequately equipped with fuel, significantly increasing the risk of shipwrecks.

Additionally, migrants often choose less patrolled routes to evade detection by coast guards. According to data from the International Organization for Migration (IOM), between 2021 and 2023, 627,329 individuals arrived in Europe via the Mediterranean, while tragically, 10,155 lost their lives or went missing during the attempt.[3] By the end of 2023, 286,292 migrants had reached Europe, with over 257,000 arriving by sea and nearly 29,000 by land.[4]

The North African nations serve as transit points and points of origin for migrants seeking European entry through legal and irregular channels. According to IOM, in 2022 alone, nearly 80,000 individuals attempted the Mediterranean crossing from Libya to Europe, with Egyptians constituting the largest group (36%), followed by Bangladeshis (28%) and Syrians (13%).[5]

This region's persistent political and economic instability fosters an environment conducive to human trafficking, document forgery, and other transnational crimes that heighten the security concerns associated with these migration flows.

This memo attempts to contribute to the discussion of SALAM forum on the "impacts of the militarization of foreign policy on approaches to migration and terrorism" by examining the security aspect of the illegal migration policies in three North African

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1   Saulo Loya, Militarized Borders, Mass Detentions: Mexico´s Migration Policy, Faculty of Law Blogs / University of Oxford, 28 June 2023: https://blogs.law.ox.ac.uk/border-criminologies-blog/blog-post/2023/06/militarized-borders-mass-detentions-mexicos-migration

2   The stretch of the Mediterranean Sea from Algeria, Egypt, Libya and Tunisia to Italy and Malta.

3   Global Data Institute Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM), Migration Flow to Europe -Arrivals, IOM, 12 Feb 2024: https://dtm.iom.int/europe/arrivals

4   Global Data Institute Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM), Op. Cit.

5   International Organization for Migration (IOM), Nov 28, 2023. DTM Migrant and refugee movements through the Central Mediterranean Sea - Joint Annual Overview 2022. IOM, Europe: https://dtm.iom.int/reports/migrant-and-refugee-movements-through-central-mediterranean-sea-joint-annual-overview-2022

countries: Tunisia, Egypt, and Morocco. The central argument here is that these countries have adopted a securitized approach towards illegal migration, perceiving the deterrence of irregular migrants toward Europe as a manifestation of sovereignty best upheld by their security and military capabilities. Concurrently, this perspective positions these countries as contributors to European security imperiled by illegal migration flows, thereby amplifying the European Union's response through its financial and military mechanisms as a reinforcement of their security-centric approach.

The memo is structured into three sections. Section one examines the security aspect of the policies adopted by North African countries to manage irregular migration, analyzing the key factors shaping these policies, including prevailing perceptions of irregular migrants and the countries' capabilities to monitor their borders and prevent sea crossings to Europe. Section two analyzes the level of cooperation between North African countries and the EU, exploring how the EU responds to the policies implemented by these nations. Section three concludes and outlines the potential repercussions of the current dynamics.

Main Factors shaping the policies

Security and sovereignty concerns

The influx of illegal migrants is framed in North African countries as a factor weakening state sovereignty at their borders and presenting many challenges to national security. Political discussions frequently highlight migration's social, economic, and political difficulties, framing it as a security concern. For instance, President El-Sisi expressed concerns about Israel's plans during Gaza War that started in October 2023, viewing it as a potential threat to Egypt's national security due to the risk of displaced Palestinians crossing the borders.[6]

In Tunisia, laws conflate illegal migration with human trafficking, which is criminalized by a 2016 law. The influx of Libyan refugees fleeing conflict since 2011 has presented economic challenges for Tunisian society,[7] as they now constitute a significant portion of the population. Illegal migration is also deemed a serious problem in Morocco, where the government views it as a threat to national security. Illegal migrants in Morocco are subject to fines and imprisonment,[8] and the national immigration and asylum strategy identifies human trafficking and trafficking networks as the main enablers of illegal migration.[9]

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6   See video recording of the president El Sisi statement, 18 October 2023: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5q1puYwjvCc. The reader may also want to refer to Yara Ahmed's and Jaida Aboulfotouh's SALAM essay, unpacking the Egyptian government's rationale and narrative supporting its current response to the Gaza War.

7   By 2015 they represented 10% of the society. Libyan Refugees in Tunisia (in Arabic), DW, October 10, 2015: https://www.dw.com/ar/%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%82%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%82%D8%A9-%D8%A8%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%B2%D8%AD%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%A8%D9%8A%D9%8A%D9%86-%D9%88%D9%85%D8%B6%D9%8A%D9%81%D8%AA%D9%87%D9%85-%D8%AA%D9%88%D9%86%D8%B3/a-18774012

8   This applies also to Moroccans leaving the country via illegal means. See law number 02-03 of the year 2003.

9   Moroccan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, National Immigration and Asylum Strategy: https://marocainsdumonde.gov.ma/en/national-immigration-and-asylum-strategy/

Coupling illegal migrants with threats to national security, including terrorism and transnational organized crimes, is not a new development in this region., This perspective can be traced back to the previous decade. A 2010 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) report highlighted that sub-Saharan migrants reaching Morocco relied on smuggling networks, and all irregular migrants from Africa at that time used sea routes serviced by smugglers to reach Europe.[10]

There are examples from the region demonstrating the ongoing presence of criminals and terrorists potentially exploiting migration routes. Data on terrorist incidents in Egypt following the toppling of the Muslim Brotherhood regime in 2013 shows a revival of terrorism in the country. Egypt's rank on the Global Terrorism Index jumped from 27 during the period 2002-2011 to 13 in 2013 and 2014.[11] During this period, the country's borders witnessed the crossing of foreign migrants who joined the government-designated terrorist groups active in Northern Sinai. A 2015 statement by the Egyptian Ministry of Defense spokesperson revealed that among the "250 killed terrorists," individuals holding Turkish, Palestinian, and Syrian passports were identified.[12] The Soufan Group estimated in 2017 that "between 500 and 1,000 foreign fighters left Syria and Iraq to join terrorist groups in Northern Sinai". [13]

The connection between terrorism and crime in Northern Sinai was underscored during the "Sinai 2018 Counter-terrorism Operation". Official statements revealed "the arrest of hundreds of individuals, including foreign nationals, suspected of criminal activity and terrorism".[14]

Viewing migrants through a security lens often leads to policy shifts that prioritize strengthening border control and implementing stricter security measures. These policies typically involve increased surveillance, detention, and restrictive immigration policies. In recent years, North African countries have increasingly relied on coast guards and military forces to manage their borders. In some countries, coast guard forces are affiliated with the Ministry of Interior, as in the case of Morocco, while in others, such as Egypt and Tunisia, they are part of the armed forces and National Guard forces, respectively. In both cases, governments focus on militarized border security and sea interception operations to curb and control any crossing of the borders by migrants.

In the end, this securitized approach reinforces the linkage between illegal migrants and criminal networks, especially those involved in human smuggling, as discussed in detail in the last section of this memo.

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10 UNODC, Smuggling of migrants into, through and from North Africa :A thematic review and annotated bibliography of recent publications, 2010, p. 5: https://www.unodc.org/documents/human-trafficking/Migrant_smuggling_in_North_Africa_June_2010_ebook_E_09-87293.pdf

11 See: Institute for Economics and Peace , Global Terrorism Index, 2012; Global Terrorism Index Report, 2014; Global Terrorism Index Report, 2015); and Eman Ragab, Counter-Terrorism Policies in Egypt: Effectiveness and Challenges, Euromesco Series, 30 Papers IEMed, October 16, 2016: https://www.iemed.org/publication/counter-terrorism-policies-in-egypt-effectiveness-and-challenges/#section-who-are-the-terrorists-a-transforming-landscape-mxSht

12 Eman Ragab, "The Middle East & Foreign Fighters in Syria: Cases of Egypt and the GCC Countries", in: Kacper Rekawek(ed.), Not Only Syria? The Phenomenon of Foreign Fighters in a Comparative Perspective, NATO Science for Peace and Security Series - E: Human and Societal Dynamics, 2017.

13 Richard Barrett, "Beyond the Caliphate: Foreign Fighters and the Threat of Returnees", The Soufan Center, October 2017, p. 12.

14 Eman Ragab, "Counterterrorism policies in Egypt: effectiveness and challenges" (in Arabic), Strategic Files, Feb 2019, p. 15.

Priority of short-term policies: increased border control

Despite the economic challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ukraine war, and instability in Libya, military spending in North African countries remains relatively high compared to other regions. According to SIPRI data, overall African military spending decreased by 5.3% in 2022, marking the first decline since 2018.[15] Despite the decrease, Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, and Egypt still allocate a significant portion of their GDP to military spending. In 2022, these countries spent 4.78%, 3.90%, 2.48%, and 1.06% of their GDP on defense, respectively, with slightly higher figures in 2021.[16]

While exact figures on how much is spent on coast guard forces are not readily available, these forces play a leading role in defending the borders across the region. This leads to militarized border security and sea interception operations, adding another angle to the securitization of migrants crossing borders by land or sea. This is particularly pertinent given the sudden flow of migrants from neighboring countries torn by conflicts and crises.

In such situations, governments often resort to criminalizing irregular migration, which can increase migrants' vulnerability, pushing them towards dangerous routes and exposing them to exploitation and abuse. Stricter border controls, including visa restrictions, increased surveillance, and detention, are common practices in these situations. For instance, following the April 2023 conflict in Sudan, Egypt faced a significant influx of people seeking refuge. The Egyptian government initially implemented temporary measures to manage this influx at the two main border entry points, Qustul and Argeen, allowing only women, children under 15, and men over 66 to enter without visas. This resulted in approximately 280,000 Sudanese individuals arriving in Egypt by July 2023.[17]

Several factors contributed to these temporary measures, including the limited capacity of the two commercial border entry points to handle a large influx of people efficiently, and security concerns about individuals with potentially harmful intentions attempting to cross the border, particularly following reports of escaped prisoners from al Huda prison in Sudan.

Additionally, according to the Egyptian government, issues like fraudulent visas, human trafficking, and financial crimes were present in the region.[18] Sudan was also ranked highly for transnational organized crime, particularly human trafficking and arms trafficking,[19] while Egypt faced challenges in combating financial crimes and human smuggling.[20]

15 SIPRI, Military expenditure and arms production, SIPRI Yearbook 2023: https://www.sipri.org/yearbook/2023/05

16 Financial factsheet of Africa's defence spending, Military Africa Magazine, June 8, 2023: https://www.military.africa/2023/06/financial-factsheet-of-africas-defence-spending/#:~:text=Overall%2C%20North%20Africa%20was%20the,29%25%20higher%20than%20in%202012.

17 Relief Web, Sudan Regional Refugee Response - July 2023 progress report, Egypt, 22 Aug 2023, p. 3: https://reliefweb.int/report/egypt/sudan-regional-refugee-response-july-2023-progress-report-egypt

18 Egypt requires all Sudanese to obtain a visa to enter the country (in Arabic), Aljazeera, June 10, 2023: https://www.aljazeera.net/news/2023/6/10/%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%B1-%D8%AA%D8%B7%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8-%D8%AC%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%B5%D9%88%D9%84-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89

19 Africa Organized Crime Index of 2023: https://africa.ocindex.net/

20 Africa Organized Crime Index of 2023, ISS, Interpol, and Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, p. 46: https://africa.ocindex.net/assets/downloads/english/enact_report_2023.pdf

Concerns have also been raised about practices in this region affecting sea migrants, including potential delays in search and rescue operations and the risk of increasing fatalities at sea. This is compounded by reports of migrants facing allegations of mistreatment upon reaching certain shores.[21] For instance, Human Rights Watch (HRW) documented cases in Tunisia where over 100 African migrants were allegedly expelled to the Algerian border in September 2023 after being intercepted at sea. [22] In July 2023, HRW reported on alleged abuses against African migrants by Tunisian authorities, including the police, military, and coast guard. These allegations included "use of excessive force, cases of torture, arbitrary arrests and detention, collective expulsions, dangerous actions at sea, forced evictions, and theft of money and belongings".[23]

Recently, it has been observed that North African countries are increasingly adopting technological solutions to expand their military capacity to control land and sea borders. These technologies include artificial intelligence, and unmanned vehicles like drones and automated search and rescue vessels, and big data analysis tools to enhance surveillance.[24] Additionally, digitized public services initiatives like smart ID cards aim to connect data points like employment, finances, and demographics to facilitate transnational immigration control, fraud detection, and counter-terrorism and financial crime efforts.[25] Data and money spent on the specific use of these technologies by North African coast guards is limited. However, one commonly known technology in the region is the use of biometric data collection systems at airports, often supported by major companies like IBM, Amazon, and Google.[26]

This trend aligns with the projected global growth of the border security market. Recent market research reports expect annual growth of this market between 7.2% and 8.6%, to reach a total of 65-68 billion dollars in 2025.[27]

In summary, the securitization of illegal migration policies in the three North African countries under examination occurs on two distinct levels. Firstly, at the level of perceptions, the influx of illegal migration is construed as a challenge that undermines state sovereignty, often intertwined with perceived threats to national security such as terrorism and transnational organized crime. Secondly, at the level of enacted policies, there is a growing dependence on coast guard forces, which are increasingly equipped with advanced technologies to enhance their military capabilities in monitoring and controlling both land and sea borders.

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21 "Why do so many migrant boats sink in the Mediterranean?" (in Arabic), BBC Arabic news portal, August 13,2023: https://www.bbc.com/arabic/articles/cndkdl6yz530

22 https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/10/10/tunisia-african-migrants-intercepted-sea-expelled

23 "Tunisia: No Safe Haven for Black African Migrants, Refugees", Relief web, July 19, 2023: https://reliefweb.int/report/tunisia/tunisia-no-safe-haven-black-african-migrants-refugees-enar

24 Dhakshayini Sooriyakumaran, and Brami Jegan, "Race, technology and the necropolitics of border militarism Corporate actors profiting from refugee and migrant abuse", Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, 15 May 2020, OHCHR-UN Human Rights: https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Racism/SR/RaceBordersDigitalTechnologies/Sooriyakumaran_and_Jegan.pdf

25 Ibid.

26 OHCHR-UN Human Rights, "Report on Race, Borders, and Digital Technologies", Issued by the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, 15 May 2020: https://www.ohchr.org/en/calls-for-input/report-race-borders-and-digital-technologies

27 Dhakshayini Sooriyakumaran, and Brami Jegan, Op. Cit.

EU's policy of outsourcing border management

The European Union (EU) has increasingly relied on cooperation with North African countries to manage migration flows and to prevent irregular entry into its borders. This approach, often referred to as "externalization" or "outsourcing" of border management, involves collaborating with transit and origin countries to control migration at their borders.

In line with this policy, the European agency Frontex has expanded its activities beyond EU borders to manage migration flows. This includes initiatives like Operation Themis, launched in February 2018 in the Central Mediterranean Sea.[28] It aims to support Italy in controlling migration by monitoring migration flows via tracking movements from countries like Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Turkey, and Albania. Additionally, the operation focuses on detecting cross-border crimes, maritime criminal activities, the presence of foreign fighters, and potential terrorist threats to EU security.

In 2023, Frontex expanded its use of technology and resources for border surveillance and migration management. This included increased reliance on drones, data management systems, and airborne capabilities for monitoring maritime and land borders.[29] During the first half of 2023, Frontex implemented 21 joint operations across 296 locations. Within this period, the Central Mediterranean Route, a critical migration pathway, saw the arrival of approximately 100,000 individuals. Most originated from Ivory Coast and Guinea, followed by Egypt, Tunisia, and Bangladesh.[30] According to State Watch,[31] Frontex "earmarked €40 million exclusively for the acquisition of chartered aircraft to facilitate forced returns from 2023 to 2027."[32]

It is important to note that Frontex's activities and their effectiveness in addressing migration challenges are subject to ongoing discussions and scrutiny by organizations such as Statewatch in the UK, as well as Stop Wapenhandel and the Transnational Institute in Germany .[33] These discussions often involve various perspectives on the appropriate balance between security concerns and humanitarian considerations, the long-term effectiveness of border control measures in addressing the root causes of migration, and the ethical implications of using specific technologies for surveillance and migration management.

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28 https://www.frontex.europa.eu/media-centre/news/news-release/frontex-launching-new-operation-in-central-med-yKqSc7

29 https://www.statewatch.org/media/3857/eu-frontex-mb-decision-procurement-plan-2023.pdf

30 Frontex external border management activities in the first half of 2023, Statewatch, Sep 6, 2023: https://www.statewatch.org/media/4059/eu-council-frontex-operational-activities-report-first-half-2023-12561-23.pdf

31 StateWatch is a UK registered charity since 1991. It produces and promotes critical research, policy analysis and investigative journalism to inform debates, movements and campaigns on civil liberties, human rights and democratic standards. See: https://www.statewatch.org/about/

32 Frontex: deportations at record high in first half of 2023, Statewatch, 05 October 2023: https://www.statewatch.org/news/2023/october/frontex-deportations-at-record-high-in-first-half-of-2023/

33 See" Transnational Institute, The deadly consequences of Europe's border militarization, 23 January 2017:   https://www.tni.org/en/article/the-deadly-consequences-of-europes-border-militarization StateWatch, "Telling the Story Of Eu Border Militarization", August 2023: https://www.statewatch.org/media/4000/eu-border-militarisation-narrative-guide.pdf

Besides, the EU plays a significant role in shaping migration management policies in North Africa, acting as a source of external legitimacy. EU support can lend international validation to the policies adopted by North African countries. It also provides technical and financial assistance and expertise to support these countries in their border control efforts. For example, on July 16, 2023, the EU and Tunisia signed a new Memorandum of Understanding on a strategic partnership worth 1 billion euros.[34] This agreement includes various components, explicitly allocating 105 million euros to bolster Tunisia's border management capabilities, including search and rescue operations, anti-smuggling efforts, and migrant return procedures.[35]

The agreement also supplies the Tunisian coast guards with radars and other equipment to enhance border surveillance and control.[36] This agreement was signed as migrants departing from Tunisian shores to Europe was on the rise. In 2023, over 45,000 individuals left from Tunisia attempting to reach Europe. While Tunisian Coast Guards intercepted and returned more than 14,000 individuals, tragically, around 600 people were reported dead or missing at sea.[37]

The EU signed a similar agreement with Egypt in October 2022, allocating 80 million euros to support the country's coast and border guards in reducing irregular migration and human trafficking. Per the agreement, the EU provides equipment like search and rescue vessels, thermal cameras, and satellite positioning systems to enhance border surveillance and control.[38] However, the ongoing conflict in Gaza since October 2023 has raised concerns about the potential for a forced influx of Palestinians. This has prompted discussions regarding a possible review of the EU agreement with Egypt, considering President El-Sisi's public refusal of any Israeli policy aiming to displace Palestinians towards Egypt's borders and the potential onward migration to the EU. If Palestinians are displaced to Egypt, there are concerns they might attempt further migration towards European borders.[39]

The EU has adopted a similar approach in responding to repeated incidents where the Moroccan coast guards do not react to illegal migrants' attempts to cross the sea to EU borders. One notable example occurred in May 2021, when over 6,000 individuals crossed into Ceuta, a Spanish enclave in North Africa. The EU's response to these incidents combines increasing funding and expanding technical cooperation. In August 2022, the EU allocated 500 million euros to Morocco to strengthen collaboration on managing

34 "Tunisia: No Safe Haven for Black African Migrants, Refugees", ReliefWeb, 19 Jul 2023: https://reliefweb.int/report/tunisia/tunisia-no-safe-haven-black-african-migrants-refugees-enar

35 European Commission, Press statement by President von der Leyen with Italian Prime Minister Meloni, Dutch Prime Minister Rutte and Tunisian President Saied, June 11, 2023: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/STATEMENT_23_3201

36 "The IRC: The EU's migration agreement with Tunisia "risks driving migrants and refugees onto even more dangerous routes", Op. Cit.

37 "The IRC: The EU's migration agreement with Tunisia "risks driving migrants and refugees onto even more dangerous routes", Reliefweb, 19 Jul 2023 : https://reliefweb.int/report/tunisia/irc-eus-migration-agreement-tunisia-risks-driving-migrants-and-refugees-even-more-dangerous-routes

38 EU funds border control deal in Egypt with migration via Libya on rise, Reuters, October 21, 2022: https://www.reuters.com/world/eu-funds-border-control-deal-egypt-with-migration-via-libya-rise-2022-10-30/

39 EU accelerates Egypt aid package as it fears fresh wave of refugees, the Financial Times, https://www.ft.com/content/100bcbe1-8cd8-4864-b726-691feabdff4e

irregular migration.[40] Additionally, EU agencies like Frontex and EASO have collaborated with Morocco to improve the training of border personnel and reception practices at the border.[41]

It is worth noting that there have been observations by the author and experts in the field of a potential correlation between stricter migration control measures adopted by North African countries and increased financial support from the EU. Some argue that North African countries might strategically manage migration flows to exert pressure on the EU for increased financial support. This is exemplified by instances where North African countries do not actively prevent irregular migration towards the EU, which have been followed by increased EU funding. For example, on September 13, 2023, around 6,800 migrants arrived in just over 24 hours on a tiny island in Italy; having departed from Tunisia without being intercepted by Tunisian forces.[42] However, these observations require serious consideration without ignoring the factors influencing EU funding decisions, including long-term partnerships, strategic interests, and regional stability concerns.

Conclusion: Repercussions and consequences

While the current immigration policies in the North African region achieve short-term progress in controlling the flow of migrants via established routes of concern to the EU, they create unintended consequences. One of these consequences is the emergence of new routes where border control measures are absent or weak. Illegal migrants, including those receiving smuggling services, tend to seek new routes to cross borders, evading interception by coast guard forces or unmanned equipment used in established migration routes. This often involves taking more dangerous routes, exposing them to risks of trafficking and death due to the hazardous nature of these alternative routes. Factors contributing to this development include social media and communication technologies, GPS, low-cost flights, and maritime vessels.

One of the new routes is the Atlantic route. Migrants use this route to travel to West Africa and then to the Spanish Canary Islands. This pathway has become popular among irregular migrants, with an increase from under 2,700 in 2019 to more than 21,400 in 2020.[43] Additionally, the Black Sea route is gaining importance, with migrants leaving their countries to reach Turkey, then proceeding to Georgia, Bulgaria, and Romania. Alternatively, migrants may be smuggled from Turkey to Bulgaria or Romania aboard small boats. Georgian networks also smuggle migrants from Georgia to Romania using land routes through Armenia and Azerbaijan.[44]

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40 A year after EU's €500m Morocco package, what has changed? Euobserver, August 4, 2023: https://euobserver.com/migration/157332

41 IOM, Migration Governance Profile: Kingdom of Morocco, October 2017: https://www.migrationdataportal.org/sites/g/files/tmzbdl251/files/2021-03/MGI%20Morocco%20EN.pdf

42 A flotilla of migrant boats from Tunisia overwhelms an Italian island and tests Meloni's policy, Los Angeles Times, September 13, 2023: https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2023-09-13/the-italian-island-of-lampedusa-sees-5-000-migrants-arriving-in-100-plus-boats-in-a-single-day

43 Migration Policy Practice, Special issue on Global mobility, Vol. XI, Number 1, January–February 2021: https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/mpp-44.pdf

44 UNODC - Global Study on Smuggling of Migrants: https://reliefweb.int/report/world/unodc-global-study-smuggling-migrants-2018

This development is accompanied by a complex interplay between migration, organized crime, and corruption, leading to the flourishing of transnational criminal networks involving smugglers, corrupt officers, facilitators, and criminal organizations. For instance, smugglers use routes from Niger and Mali through Algeria, connecting Morocco and Mauritania to Spain's Canary Islands[45]. Another manifestation of this challenge concerns individuals who use fraudulent documents to enter transit countries and then use illegal means to reach the EU. This can occur due to weaknesses in document verification processes that allow individuals with forged documents to enter transit countries. Insufficient resources or expertise in detecting fraudulent documents can also create vulnerabilities. This has led some transit countries to implement stricter visa requirements, tightening controls on issuing visas, work permits, and family reunion visas, which in turn reinforces the development of alternative dangerous routes.

Another significant challenge in managing migration in North Africa is the weak governance structures surrounding migration policies. This stems from several critical factors, including:

-Limited resources: North African countries often face resource constraints, leading them to prioritize short-term solutions like border security measures. While these may offer temporary relief, they often neglect long-term sustainability and fail to address the root causes of migration.

-Exclusion of critical stakeholders: Current approaches often overlook the potential contributions of other stakeholders, such as civil society organizations and the private sector. These entities can play crucial roles in addressing the root causes of migration and fostering sustainable solutions like job creation and economic development initiatives.

-Lack of regional cooperation and insufficient coordination between North African countries, countries of origin, and destination countries due to differing national interests hinders progress. This limited cooperation restricts the development of comprehensive and sustainable solutions, including the creation of legal pathways for migration, such as work permits and refugee resettlement programs. The absence of such pathways can push individuals towards irregular and often dangerous migration routes.

Mainstreaming technologies in the work of coast guard forces contributes to the governance challenge. As aforementioned, the coast guard forces in the three countries examined in this paper tend to use drones, unmanned vehicles, Big Data, and AI systems to strengthen their border control capabilities. However, the opaque nature of these systems can hinder public scrutiny and oversight. It is crucial to approach technology in border control with caution and ensure safeguards are in place to mitigate any risks. This includes prioritizing transparency, upholding human rights, and ensuring responsible development and deployment of such technologies.

Therefore, shifting towards a more comprehensive approach to migration management is necessary. This requires North African countries to first acknowledge the complex factors influencing border security policies. This includes limited resources and infrastructure to manage large-scale migration effectively through regular channels and the presence of criminal networks or individuals fleeing conflict zones that can raise legitimate security anxieties. Second, it requires finding a balance between addressing security concerns and

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45 Africa Organized Crime Index of 2023, Op. Cit., p. 27: https://africa.ocindex.net/assets/downloads/english/enact_report_2023.pdf

upholding the human rights of migrants. This needs to move beyond security-focused solutions and expand the role of other stakeholders, including civil society organizations, the private sector, and communities, in developing and implementing comprehensive migration and border management policies.

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PRISME Initiative

PRISME aims to redefine the conception of "security" in the Middle East and North Africa, as the starting point for strategic relations between MENA countries and their European and North American partners. It does so in pursuit of effective, collaborative approaches to ensuring a more peaceful and stable future. To this end, PRISME sponsors dialogue and debate between foreign policy professionals across diverse backgrounds and perspectives. These include individuals in governments, thinktanks and academic institutions located in the MENA region, Europe and North America, with a specific focus on engaging young and emerging thinkers and practitioners. Its goal is to re-define security in the Middle East, broadening the definitions of what it looks like, for whom, how it can be achieved, and how outside actors can contribute to it.

SALAM Project

SALAM (Sustaining Alternative Links beyond Arms and the Military) proposes to rethink the centrality of the arms trade in international relations with and among Middle East & North Africa (MENA) countries.

It fosters and amplifies ideas from a network of scholars and practitioners working in and with the Middle East. Issues they will address include the arms trade's advertised role in cementing bilateral and multilateral ties between North America, Europe and the MENA region; the opportunity costs of over- or sole reliance on weaponry as security; and alternative modes of engagement that might redefine a shared strategic agenda.