



# Towards migration policy coherence

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## MIGNEX

MIGNEX (Aligning Migration Management and the Migration-Development Nexus) is a six-year research project (2018 – 2024) with the core ambition of creating new knowledge on migration, development and policy. It is carried out by a consortium of nine partners in Europe, Africa and Asia: the Peace Research Institute Oslo (coordinator), Danube University Krems, University of Ghana, Koç University, Lahore University of Management Sciences, Maastricht University, ODI, the University of Oxford and Samuel Hall.

See [www.mignex.org](http://www.mignex.org).



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## MIGNEX Reports

MIGNEX Reports are flagship publications written at the end of the project period to synthesise insights from across the more specific and technical analyses.

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‘Policy coherence’ has been used as an instrument in EU migration policies that place a heavy focus on stopping migration. Tools that focus on return and readmission aim to control migrant flows from non-EU countries, while development aid in countries of origin is oriented to prevent migration too. A new approach in the relationship between the EU and non-EU partners is crucial to open new opportunities for cooperation.

## **1 Migration policy interlinkages challenge the possibility of coherence**

A lack of understanding of migration policy interlinkages and of migration dynamics causes policy incoherence. Although challenging, embracing the complexity of migration policy interlinkages can help clarify policy dilemmas and trade-offs.

## **2 A critical approach to migration policy coherence should be adopted urgently**

A critical approach requires acknowledgement of the multiple meanings of policy coherence as a concept, and of the sources of incoherence. Policy coherence should be understood as relative to objectives and specific normative frameworks.

## **3 The EU’s external approach aims for coherence towards a restrictive migration agenda**

Although the EU external approach expresses an interest in fostering the development of origin countries, the main objective is to limit migration from non-EU countries. This unbalanced view of migration and development creates an important source of policy incoherence.

## **4 EU partnerships are varied but limited, with few tools**

EU partnerships are designed around conditionalities and compensations, in pursuit of coherence on the prevention and control of migration. Although ‘partnership’ may suggest equality, the relationships result from an unequal power dynamic that tends to benefit the EU.

## **5 The conditionality and compensation approach has uncertain impacts**

The rationale that underlies EU migration partnerships limits the policy tools available and has counterproductive effects. It makes it difficult for the EU to reach agreements with third countries and causes negative consequences for returnee migrants.

## **6 Focusing on the root causes of migration assumes migration can be prevented**

The EU’s preventive approach to migration rests on two assumptions, for which there is insufficient evidence: that there are root causes of migration, and that migration can be managed through policy that addresses these causes. Even if root causes of migration could be tackled, there are fundamental ethical and political dilemmas for policy-makers.

## **7 Countries of origin do not have an arsenal of effective policies to reduce emigration**

MIGNEX research shows that emigration aspirations are driven by factors linked to livelihoods, governance and corruption. Countries of origin could be encouraged to tackle these areas to decrease emigration pressures; however, they do not have an arsenal of effective policies to do so.



# Introduction

Over recent decades, European Union (EU) policy-makers have demonstrated a key interest in ‘policy coherence’ for a common framework for migration and asylum management. This is reflected in the New Pact on Migration and Asylum (hereafter, the New Pact) unveiled on 23 September 2020, which has the core ambition to develop a coherent strategy on migration:<sup>1</sup>

To be effective, border management, asylum and return policies must work well at the national level, and in the case of the integration of migrants at the local level. National policies therefore need to be coherent with the overall European approach. The new Asylum and Migration Management Regulation will seek to achieve this through closer European cooperation.<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, while the term ‘policy coherence’ appears often in EU migration policy documents, clear understanding of what this entails is still lacking. This report provides a comprehensive overview of the main insights from MIGNEX research on what policy coherence means as a concept, and how it has been used over time in EU migration policies.

We focus on the so-called EU external dimension, that is, the European approach to third-country cooperation on migration. This is built upon two main objectives: to control and to prevent migration from non-EU countries.<sup>3</sup> Traditional tools have been used predominantly to achieve the first objective, including strengthening border controls, tackling migrant smuggling and trafficking, and developing asylum systems. To prevent migration, the EU focuses on addressing the reasons why people move – the so-called ‘root causes’ of refugee and other migration flows.<sup>4</sup>

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1 Carrera S., 2021.

2 Commission to the European Parliament, 2020: 6.

3 Boswell, 2003a.

4 Hagen-Zanker and Carling, 2023.

Despite variations in the EU external dimension over past decades, there has been a constant, and excessive, focus on stopping migration. This is reflected in the securitisation of the border and in a relationship with non-EU countries that is overly concentrated on preventing migration, rather than on how to create mutually beneficial relationships.<sup>5</sup> This skewed view of migration features heavily in recent EU policy instruments such as in the New Pact,<sup>6</sup> and in implementation of Mobility Partnerships (MPs).<sup>7</sup> In particular, Return and Readmission Agreements (RAs) are used as a key tool in MPs to control migration, setting out the bases, procedures and modalities to return non-nationals who do not or no longer fulfil the conditions for entry or stay.<sup>8</sup>

Preventing migration as an objective of the EU external dimension relies on development assistance, foreign direct investment and other tools of foreign policy. MIGNEX research shows how the preventive tools to contain migration have two important assumptions, namely: that migration has root causes,<sup>9</sup> and that these root causes can be tackled.<sup>10</sup> Policy incoherence then arises due to confusion or lack of public debate regarding the ethical dilemmas and tools associated with these assumptions.<sup>11</sup> The first assumption is discussed in detail in the MIGNEX report *New insights on the causes of migration*.<sup>12</sup> In the present report we delve into the second assumption, which manifests mostly through the role of development aid within recent EU policy and through MPs.

This report does not assess and measure levels of coherence or incoherence in EU migration policy. Rather, we critically analyse the EU external dimension of migration and how policy coherence has been sought. Key questions include: What does policy (in)coherence mean? What does the EU seek to achieve when invoking policy coherence? How does policy coherence relate to development efforts? What does policy coherence mean for third countries on the receiving end of the EU's external migration policies?

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5 Lebon-McGregor et al., 2022a

6 Boswell, 2003a; Lebon-McGregor et al., 2022a.

7 Ike et al., 2023; Lebon-McGregor et al., 2022a.

8 IOM, 2019.

9 Hagen-Zanker and Carling, 2023.

10 Vargas-Silva et al., 2023.

11 Erdal et al., 2022.

12 Carling et al., 2024.

Previous research emphasises that policy coherence, as a concept, has multiple definitions. These definitions have changed over time and they should be contextualised historically.<sup>13</sup> At its simplest, **policy coherence** refers to coherence in the outcomes of a policy or connections between its objectives. Incoherence can occur if there are unintended outcomes of a policy that contradict its primary objective, or if there are differences in objectives between multiple policy areas or jurisdictions within or between countries. This can occur because of internal inconsistencies in the policy logic, but it can also be introduced (*deliberately* or *inadvertently*) through the prioritisation of certain interests over others. In reality, scholars have identified various sources of incoherence, such as those between different policy areas (e.g., migration and development; or migration, development and trade) and between different actors.<sup>14</sup>

Critical approaches also emphasise how policy coherence can be instrumentalised to change policy priorities and to justify specific objectives.<sup>15</sup> More importantly, critical approaches state that all policies have sources of incoherence, thus arguing in its defence.<sup>16</sup> In this sense, rather than aiming for policy coherence per se, scholars suggest that fundamental efforts should be made to make policy objectives transparent and to identify the structural levels and actors that may be affected by them.<sup>17</sup>

Chapters 1 and 2 of this report outline the general framework that we use to analyse the EU's external dimension, laying the groundwork to justify a critical approach to analyse policy coherence. We describe the links or interconnections between migration management, development processes and migrant integration. Moreover, we provide the definitions and sources of policy incoherence across the EU migration policy framework.

From Chapter 3 onwards we disentangle the foundations of policy incoherence and the effectiveness of the EU external dimension on migration. We make explicit the EU migration policy objectives that are used as a benchmark to measure coherence.

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<sup>13</sup> Lebon-McGregor et al., 2022a.

<sup>14</sup> Koff, 2017.

<sup>15</sup> Den Hertog, 2018; Siitonen, 2021.

<sup>16</sup> Lebon-McGregor et al., 2022a.

<sup>17</sup> Erdal et al., 2022; Lebon-McGregor et al., 2022a.



Chapter 4 describes the EU approach to third-country cooperation on migration through its partnership infrastructure. Chapter 5 focuses on the rationale of conditionality and compensation that underlies EU migration partnerships. We describe its limited value and even counterproductive use, outlining the risks of informal ‘deals’ and the need for a reintegration policy.

Chapters 6 and 7 focus on the prevention approach of the EU external dimension. We look at the important assumptions and dilemmas when defining policies to prevent migration, and we depict core findings on the effectiveness of efforts to tackle the root causes of migration.

The report closes with policy implications and concluding remarks.

## This is one of three concluding reports



# Research design

## The foundations for our insights

The research has been designed according to strategic choices that laid a path towards new knowledge on the meaning and use of coherence in EU migration policy. The following non-technical elements of the research design provide important background for the core chapters of this report.

**The multi-level determination of migration processes**  
*MIGNEX Background Paper*  
[mignex.org/d061](https://mignex.org/d061)



This report is built upon four MIGNEX Background Papers<sup>18</sup> written using diverse methods and data in the context of MIGNEX Work Package 9 (WP9). Therefore, readers should refer to these papers for further methodological details. We signpost these documents where relevant in this report. Given the focus on policies of WP9, methods and data also draw on WP5 (i.e., Policies),<sup>19</sup> as explained in the Methodology section.

Our analytical framework relies on a critical approach to policy coherence (Figure 1). This means we consider the complexity of migration dynamics and the interrelationships within migration-relevant policies, including integration policies, development policies and migration policies, among others. Drawing on previous MIGNEX research, we acknowledge the complexity underlying the determination of migration processes, reflected, for instance, in the fact that migration is shaped by many factors, all at once, and that each migration driver can work in contrary ways.<sup>20</sup>

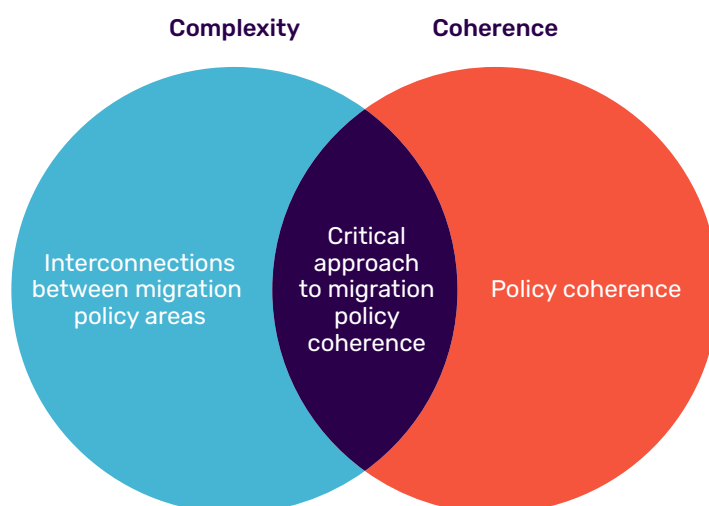
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18 Erdal et al., 2022; Ike et al., 2023; Lebon-McGregor et al., 2022a; Lebon-McGregor et al., 2022b.

19 See [www.mignex.org/work-packages/wp5-policy](https://www.mignex.org/work-packages/wp5-policy).

20 Carling et al., 2024.

**Figure 1. A critical approach to analyse EU migration policy coherence**



Source: The authors.

The multi-level determination of migration processes implies that the links between migration policy areas are complex. They are multidirectional, time-variant and scale dependant, among various other properties.<sup>21</sup> In MIGNEX we use the concept of **migration-relevant policy**, which refers to all policies that might affect migration dynamics, even if a policy is not presented under a migration heading. The effects on migration could be unintentional and indirect. For instance, trade policies could affect livelihoods in countries of origin, and the resulting changes could affect migration flows. In this context, the concept of migration-relevant policy is valuable for a comprehensive assessment of policy coherence.<sup>22</sup>

Approaching policy coherence from a critical approach also means understanding the polysemic nature of policy coherence and how the concept can be instrumentalised to change policy priorities. Policy coherence not only changes its meaning over time, but also in relation to different underlying policy objectives and normative frameworks.

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21 Erdal et al., 2022.

22 Carling, 2019.

## Scope

Unlike other aspects of the MIGNEX project that focus on specific communities or *research areas*,<sup>23</sup> this report focuses on countries as a whole (see Figure 2 for MIGNEX countries and the research areas). Moreover, while we focus on both MIGNEX origin and transit countries, references to other non-EU countries are made when relevant.

**Figure 2. MIGNEX countries and research areas**



Source: Carling et al., 2024.

The main object of study in this report is the **EU external approach to migration**. To study this, we analyse EU policies with a specific focus on those describing the EU's international cooperation with third countries. Note that in this report, EU countries are interchangeably named as Member States. We also refer to non-EU countries as third countries or developing countries, which are denominations frequently used in EU policies.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Carling, 2019.

<sup>24</sup> Commission to the European Parliament, 2020.

It is not possible to discuss the external dimension of EU migration policy without due consideration to the evolution of the overall policy framework on migration and asylum in the EU – hereafter, the **internal approach**. Readers should refer to MIGNEX Background Paper D8.2 where a detailed description of the internal approach is provided.<sup>25</sup>

An examination of the legislative framework and policy instruments in the EU migration and asylum law  
*MIGNEX Background Paper*  
[mignex.org/d082](https://mignex.org/d082)



## Types of data

Data was not collected specifically for this report; however, the MIGNEX Background Papers and previous research that this report draws on collected data in two ways: (1) desk reviews and (2) key informant interviews. See the Methodology section for details of data collection and analyses.

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<sup>25</sup> Gunay and Schneider, 2024.

# Methodology

## Techniques for data collection and analysis

Table 1 describes the data upon which this report builds, namely: academic articles, policy documents (EU and for MIGNEX countries), MIGNEX policy reports and interviews. Academic articles, policy documents and MIGNEX policy reports were collected through desk reviews. The data differs in four ways: 1) the form of data collection, 2) the target population or policy documents of interest (i.e., focus), 3) the geographic scope and 4) the extent of the data.

**Table 1. Data sources**

Form of data collection	Focus	Geographic scope	Extent of data
Review of academic literature	Academic literature	Global	Articles in academic journals discussing the empirical links between migration management, development and integration
Desk review	EU policy documents	EU level	EU policy documents, namely: 1. Documents associated with the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) <sup>26</sup> 2. Documents associated with the Mobility Partnership Facility (MPF) <sup>27</sup> 3. Documents associated with the New Pact <sup>28</sup> 4. Documents associated with the Action Plan for Integration and Inclusion <sup>29</sup> 5. Documents associated with the Global Approach to Migration and Mobility (GAMM) <sup>30</sup>
Desk review	Country policy reports from MIGNEX	MIGNEX countries	10 country policy reports: Afghanistan, Cabo Verde, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, Nigeria, Pakistan, Somalia, Tunisia and Turkey

<sup>26</sup> Erdal et al., 2022.

<sup>27</sup> Erdal et al., 2022.

<sup>28</sup> Lebon-McGregor et al., 2022a.

<sup>29</sup> European Commission, 2020.

<sup>30</sup> Lebon-McGregor et al., 2022a.



Form of data collection	Focus	Geographic scope	Extent of data
Desk review	MP EU–Turkey; EU–Nigeria	EU, Turkey and Nigeria	In-depth literature and policy document review
Key informant interviews	Migration and policy experts	MIGNEX countries	15 exploratory interviews with key stakeholders working in the field of migration in MIGNEX countries 14 interviews with key stakeholders working in migration in Turkey (6) and Nigeria (8)

## Desk reviews

Four types of desk reviews were conducted.

First, a comprehensive literature review was conducted of academic articles on the links between migration management, development and integration.

Second, a desk review was conducted on the EU’s comprehensive policy frameworks associated with the EU external approach (see Table 1). These documents were selected on the basis that they consider different forms of migration to the EU and the related challenges posed to all Member States. Moreover, we put a special focus on policy created over recent years to tackle emerging migration-related questions in Europe from the so-called migration/refugee ‘crisis’ of 2015, because the added political tension over migration across the EU geography.<sup>31</sup>

Third, a review was conducted of MIGNEX policy reports to examine EU policy from the partner country perspective. This is largely captured through interview data collected during WP5 of the MIGNEX project when key informants in each of the 10 countries were asked to reflect on how (in)coherent they found EU migration policies. These represent reviews of policies in the 10 countries of origin and transit covered by the project. MIGNEX adopts a broad perspective and regards policy

**Country-level policy review**  
*MIGNEX Handbook Chapter 9*  
[mignex.org/publications/9-country-level-policy-review](https://mignex.org/publications/9-country-level-policy-review)



<sup>31</sup> Erdal et al., 2022.

to include the existence and effectiveness of particular laws, common practices, development initiatives, policy interventions and the wider policy environment or framework.

### **Box 1. Questions in the interview guide for WP5 policy reviews**

1. Has development cooperation money been used for migration, asylum or border management? What incentives were given to the government when negotiating with the EU on border- or migration-related issues?
2. How coherent are the EU (or EU Member State) approaches to migration in your country? Can you provide some examples?

Source: Godin and Vargas-Silva (2020: 14).

Finally, a fourth desk review was conducted to gain in-depth knowledge of the EU partnerships with Turkey and Nigeria. The analysis looked at bilateral agreements and preparatory documents falling under the framework of MPs between the EU and the respective partner country.

## **Interviews**

In the four MIGNEX Background Papers of WP9, researchers conducted 29 interviews with key stakeholders working in the field of migration within the partner countries. These interviews focused on issues around refugee rights such as access to legal aid and status determination procedures.<sup>32</sup>

First, 15 interviews of an exploratory nature were conducted with stakeholders working on the migration and development nexus to capture more precisely the ‘voices’ of partner countries. Experts from think tanks, academia, civil society including diaspora communities, and international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) and international organisations were selected from MIGNEX institutional contacts.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Ike et al., 2023.

<sup>33</sup> Lebon-McGregor et al., 2022b.

A second set of interviews were conducted with migration and policy experts to gain in-depth knowledge for the case studies of Turkey and Nigeria. An initial list of interviewees was created from the desk review, which was later complemented with snowball sampling and from MIGNEX institutional contacts. Fourteen interviews were conducted: six in Turkey and eight in Nigeria.

Although not specifically for WP9, interviews were also conducted in the context of the migration-relevant policy reports of WP5. These interviews supported the preparation of country policy reports. Methodological details can be found in the respective country reports.

**Migration-relevant  
policies in Afghanistan**  
*MIGNEX Background  
Paper*  
[mignex.org/afg](http://mignex.org/afg)



## Analyses

We relied on narrative policy and content analysis.<sup>34</sup>

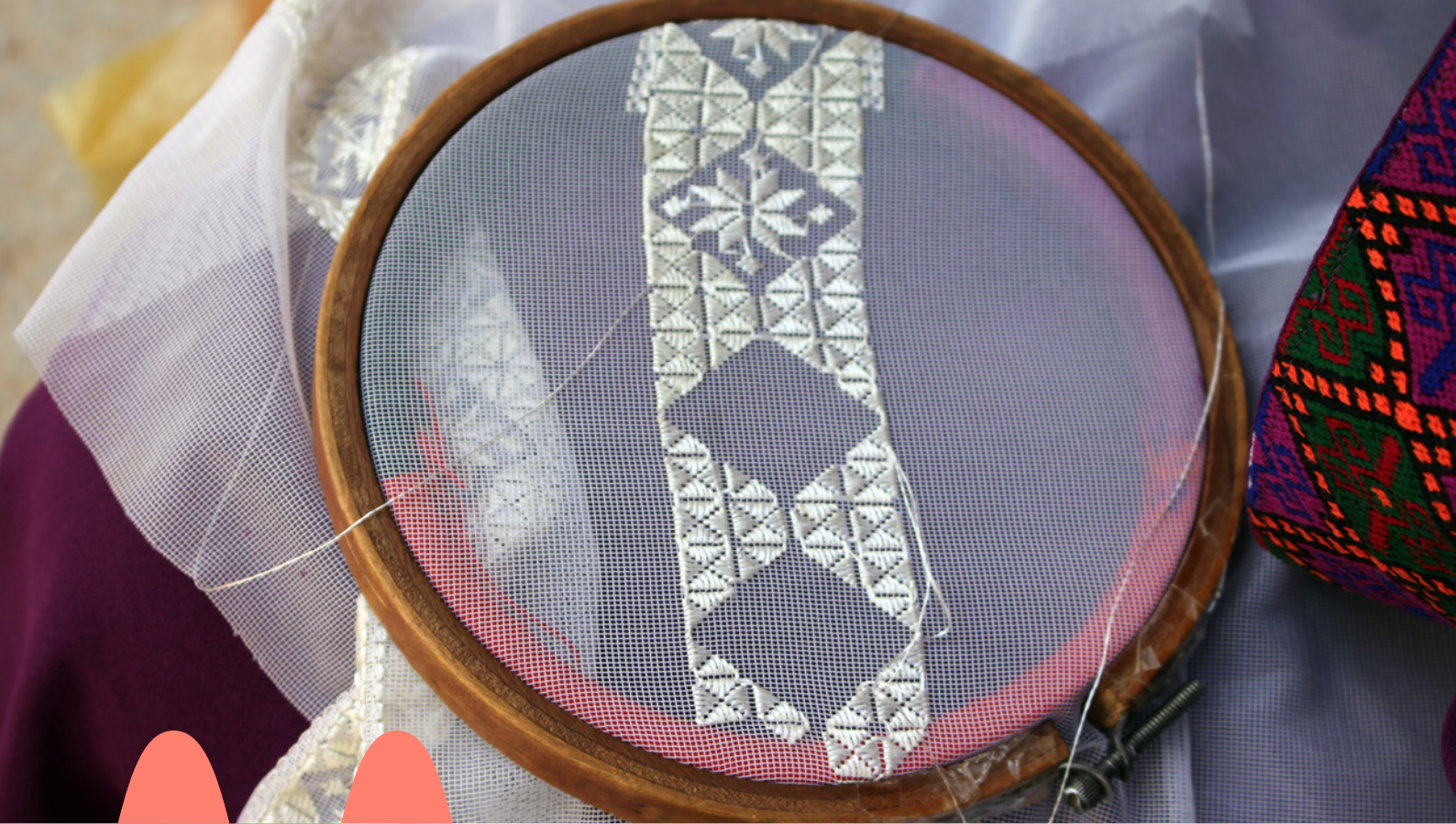
Policy narratives provide simplified and programmatic tales of cause and effect. They include a diagnosis of a problem and its possible solutions. This approach stresses that simplifications inevitably and necessarily come with omissions. In the case of migration policy particularly, consensus on a divisive issue can only be achieved through the omission of points of contention.<sup>35</sup> For the analysis of policy narratives, the main task is therefore to identify the contradictions and dilemmas within the text, and through that reveal internal incoherence.

Content analysis relies on word frequency and qualitative analysis to code the associated meaning with the concepts of interests – such as type of coherence within policy instruments. For instance, we compared the use of the term ‘coherence’ in the Global Approach to Migration (GAMM) and the New Pact to show how the GAMM’s focus on coherence of migration and development policies may differ to the New Pact.

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<sup>34</sup> Roe, 1994; Faustini-Torres, 2020; Pécoud, 2021.

<sup>35</sup> Pécoud, 2021.



# 1 Migration policy interlinkages challenge the possibility of coherence

A lack of understanding of migration policy interlinkages and of migration dynamics causes policy incoherence. Although challenging, embracing the complexity of migration policy interlinkages can help clarify policy dilemmas and trade-offs.

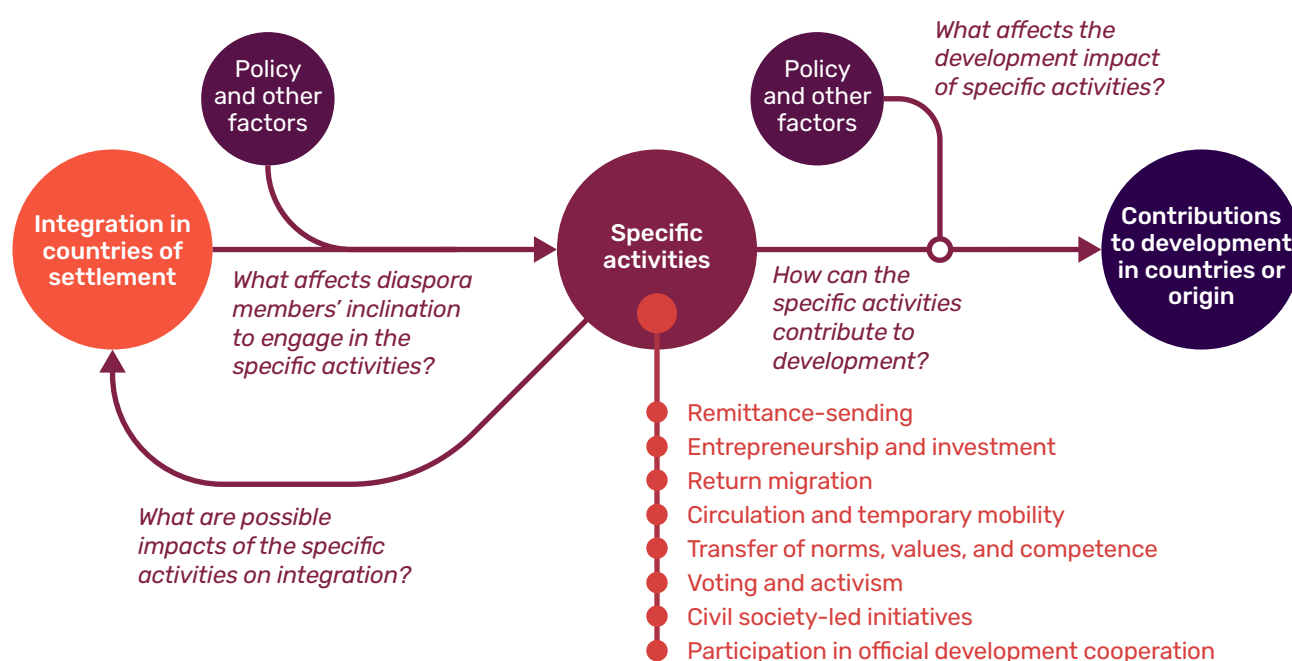


## Migration policy is complex

Limited understanding of the interrelationships between migration, migration management, integration and development remains a challenge for policy coherence.<sup>36</sup> Seemingly, there is no consensus in the literature on how development and migrant integration relate. It is often argued that this lack of understanding is a key reason why incoherence can (unintentionally) occur.<sup>37</sup>

Better understanding matters because, if ignored, the links or interconnections between migration management, development and integration can contribute to unintended effects of policy interventions. For instance, migration management policies can affect migrant integration or development in migrants' countries of origin. And the effects might not be intended or desired. However, at times they might also unintentionally contribute to desired outcomes from one or more policy perspectives.<sup>38</sup> At the same time, interrelationships that remain out of sight can represent a missed opportunity because they could offer potential to boost the positive effects of migration.

**Figure 3. Connections between integration in countries of destination and development in countries of origin**



Source: Erdal (2020).

36 Erdal et al., 2022.

37 Picciotto, 2005.

38 Erdal, 2020.

## Box 2. Three key areas of EU migration policy: migration management, development processes and migrant integration

**Migration management** is an instrument in an overarching policy that seeks to influence and shape migration in a way that is desirable for a given state. Migration management involves the actions (laws, policies and policy implementation) undertaken by states to govern the ways in which migrants may enter the state's territory and achieve a legal residence there, and the ways they are able to extend (or not) their legal residence in the country of destination up to a permanent status.<sup>39</sup>

**Development** is a complex process of social change with multiple definitions,<sup>40</sup> but it broadly refers to the improvement of living standards in a particular country. EU policy organisations have a key objective to foster development for countries outside the EU, including in the countries of Africa and Asia involved in the MIGNEX project. The relationships between migration and development are complex.<sup>41</sup> This means that, under certain conditions, increased development in origin countries can increase migration aspirations; but under other conditions development may prevent migration aspirations by making available a wider range of opportunities.<sup>42</sup>

**Integration** relates to the processes of adaptation with which migrants engage in their new homes.<sup>43</sup> It entails a relationship between migrants and other members of their new communities, and between states and migrants. Integration involves multiple aspects, from the labour market, to education and health, to social aspects related to cohesion and participation in communal activities. Successful migrant integration across all of these areas is a policy priority of EU states.

Source: Adapted from Erdal et al. (2022).

International migration evades distinctions between policy fields. For example, policy matters that relate to both migration management and integration are often linked; and questions of development in migrants' countries of origin are strongly connected with migrants through remittances and investments, return migration and skills transfers. Thus, development concerns intersect with questions of migration, both internally and internationally, and increasingly with migration management considerations.

39 Boswell, 2007; Adamson and Tsourapas, 2020; Pécoud, 2021.

40 Andersson and Siegel, 2020; UNDP, 2020.

41 Carling et al., 2024; De Haas, 2010.

42 Carling et al., 2024.

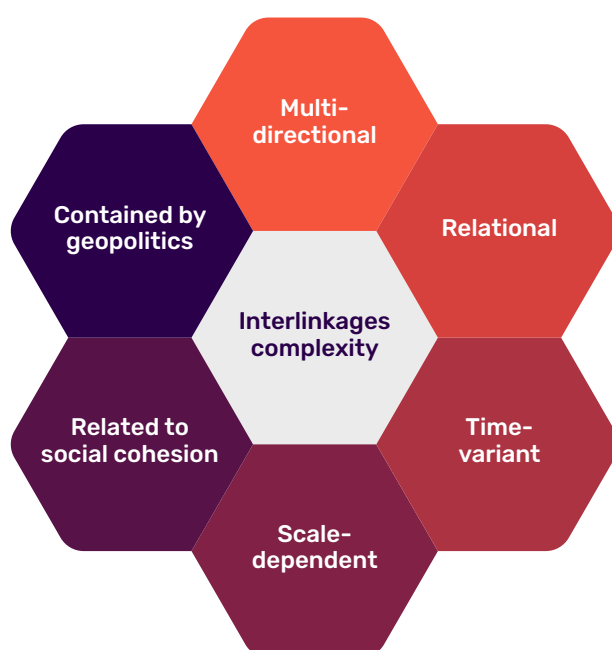
43 Kivisto, 2003; Erdal, 2013.



## Migration policy links have various properties

Population movements are recognised in the context of urbanisation processes and patterns of mobility, but such movements often remain a challenge for governance efforts. In particular, the interrelationships between migration policy areas means that the connections and effects between migration management, development and integration policy tools are multidirectional, relational, and time- and scale-dependant<sup>44</sup> (see Figure 4).

**Figure 4. The complex interrelationship between migration policy areas**



Source: The authors, based on Erdal et al. (2022).

Migration management, development and integration can influence each other in multiple ways. For instance, integration affects migrants' engagement with the labour market in destination countries. This affects their income which, in turn, affects migrants' capacities to remit money home or make other investments in their countries of origin. These investments have important implications for development in countries of origin by increasing access to education and food security of households, for instance.<sup>45</sup>

**Links between migration management, development and integration**  
*MIGNEX Background Paper*  
[mignex.org/d091](https://mignex.org/d091)



44 Erdal et al., 2022.

45 World Bank, 2008.

Policies that limit integration can thus have an (unintended) effect on development in countries of origin, while restrictive migration policies can affect integration outcomes. For example, limiting family reunification based on financial thresholds can push migrants towards precarious types of employment in search of immediate earnings.<sup>46</sup>

Interrelationships between migration management, development and integration occur at micro, meso or macro levels. The micro level refers to individuals, families and households; the meso level refers to communities; and the macro level refers to the national and aggregate population level.<sup>47</sup> It is at the micro level where the links between migration management, development and integration become visible in the most concrete ways.

And the interrelationships between migration policy areas vary across time too. Consequently, the timeframe selected under a particular policy framework, years for example, matters because it defines the interrelationships that are allowed to be seen and those that remain out of sight. For instance, integration issues become more pressing if explicit temporary migration becomes long-term or permanent settlement. Equally, a longer perspective requires consideration of pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial eras, because the conceptualisations of migration and the relationships with nation states change over time.<sup>48</sup>

## Social cohesion and geopolitics span migration policy

Social cohesion and geopolitics can be seen as overarching policy considerations of nation states that mediate the interrelations between migration management, integration in destination countries and development in countries of origin (see Figure 5).

Ultimately, questions around the regulation of migration according to labour market needs and how to respond to the international obligation of protection and humanitarian needs relate to social cohesion. Similarly, geopolitics also comes into play, encompassing policies related to migrant populations and their

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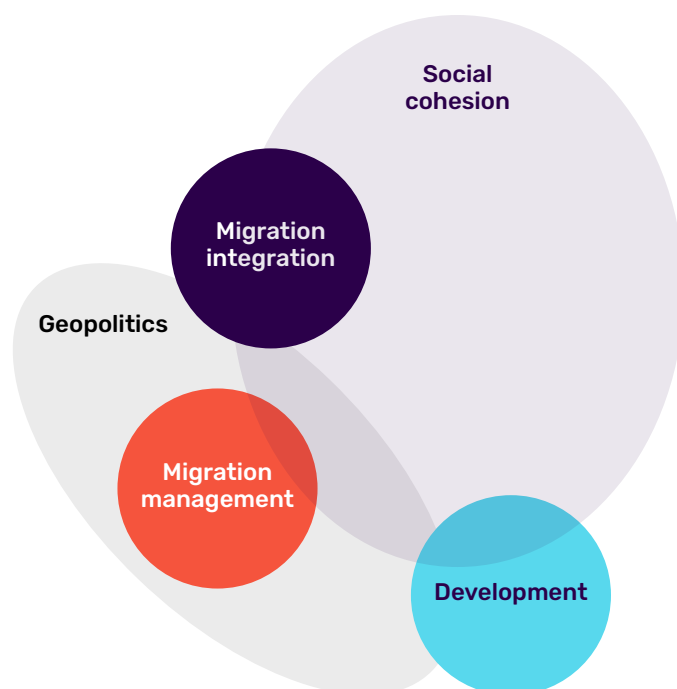
<sup>46</sup> Scott, 2017.

<sup>47</sup> Erdal et al., 2022.

<sup>48</sup> Erdal et al., 2022.

diasporas, and also a country's broader economic, political, security and other interests, both regionally and globally. The New Pact, for instance, emphasises successful integration and inclusion as an essential part of a well-managed and effective migration and asylum policy. It also argues that this is essential for social cohesion and for a dynamic economy that works for all.<sup>49</sup>

**Figure 5. Social cohesion and geopolitics as overarching policy considerations**



Source: Erdal et al. (2022).

Geopolitical ties or interests can be reflected in development or migration management priorities. A particular country, like Italy, Turkey or Pakistan, for example, will have a unique set of countries with which it seeks collaboration to manage migration. Similarly, the set of considerations regarding migrant integration and involvement in another society's development will also vary. Mapping the relational interactions of migration management, development and integration can clarify policy goals and priorities, and uncover key dilemmas. Often, such dilemmas will centre on fundamental questions around social cohesion, but also geopolitical positioning and alliances too.

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<sup>49</sup> Commission to the European Parliament, 2020.

## The possibilities for policy coherence are limited

Understanding the complex interrelationships between migration policy areas shows that it is a somewhat futile challenge to aim for policy *coherence at all costs*.<sup>50</sup> In reality, some degree of policy incoherence is a normal and inevitable feature of EU governance in migration because of divergent interests, values and actors.<sup>51</sup>

It is, therefore, more important to identify the dilemmas and opportunities created by the interrelationships of each migration policy in every context, than to aim for absolute policy coherence.<sup>52</sup> For instance, labour market integration and the subsequent higher migrant incomes can lead to greater development in countries of origin, but channels need to be secured for smooth sending of remittances. The question then is how to maximise the benefits for labour markets in host societies, for migrants and their families, and for development in countries of origin.

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50 Den Hertog, 2018; Erdal et al., 2022.

51 Den Hertog, 2018.

52 Lebon-McGregor et al., 2022a.



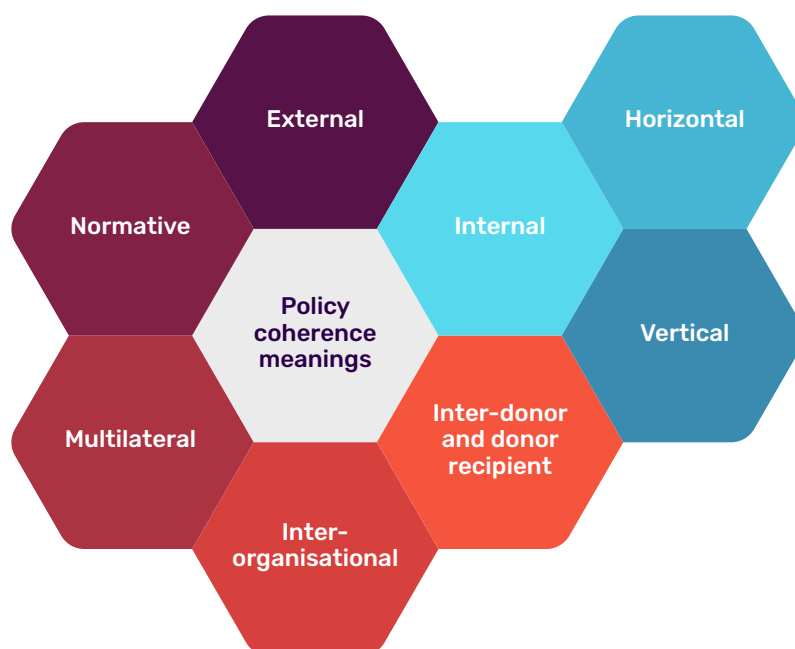
## 2 A critical approach to migration policy coherence should be adopted urgently

A critical approach requires acknowledgement of the multiple meanings of policy coherence as a concept, and of the sources of incoherence. Policy coherence should be understood as relative to objectives and specific normative frameworks.

## Policy coherence can have multiple meanings

At its simplest, **policy coherence** refers to coherence in the outcomes of a policy or in the connections between a policy's objectives.<sup>53</sup> Therefore, if a policy that has the stated goal of reducing irregular migration has the opposite effect in a country, based on competing or faulty assumptions, the outcome can be described as policy incoherence. However, in reality, policy coherence can mean different things according to its source, which can be horizontal, vertical, or inter-donor, among others<sup>54</sup> (see Figure 6).

**Figure 6. Types of policy coherence**



Source: Based on Koff (2017) and Lebon-McGregor et al. (2022a).

<sup>53</sup> Carling, 2019; Lebon-McGregor et al., 2022a.

<sup>54</sup> Koff (2017)



A broad distinction for policy (in)coherence refers to internal and external sources. **Internal policy incoherence** occurs when the internal logic of a policy reflects faulty underlying theoretical assumptions. Identifying internal incoherence within a policy requires tools to reveal the underlying assumptions and the causal chains that are embedded within the policy's design. It also requires an understanding of how different configurations of policy and non-policy factors affect migration processes and how migration processes affect development outcomes, and vice versa. For example, the EU Agenda on Migration<sup>55</sup> has, among others, a stated goal of reducing migration to Europe from the Horn of Africa. However, it has been argued that:

...the lack of coherence between Europe's ambitions to control irregular migration and co-operation with rights-violating States, threatens to create further political destabilisation and repression which will ultimately increase, rather than decrease, outward migration from the region.<sup>56</sup>



Political mural in Redeyef (Tunisia), Safouen Azouzi for MIGNEX.

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55 European Commission, 2015.

56 Crawley and Blitz, 2019: 2261.

**External policy coherence** relates to coherence with other norms such as international laws and agreements. For instance, EU migration policy documents can be more or less coherent with UN Global Compacts.<sup>57</sup>

**Internal (in)coherence in European migration policies**  
*MIGNEX Background Paper*  
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### Box 3. The Policy Coherence for Development approach

Since the early 2000s, coherence in the context of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) was formalised into the Policy Coherence for Development (PCD) approach.<sup>58</sup> PCD was later identified by the EU as a key approach to be adopted in the area of migration, along with four other strategic development areas, namely: trade and finance, climate change, food security, and security. More recently, PCD has been defined as one of the core ‘means of implementation’ of Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), through its incorporation into SDG Targets 17.13–17.14.<sup>59</sup>

Adoption of the PCD approach by the EU was expected to improve coordination and cooperation in migration policy. As a tool to improve coordination, it was expected that PCD would allow greater efficiency and effectiveness of migration policy; and as a ‘normative tool’ PCD would enable policies to be designed to support actors’ cooperation and their development.<sup>60</sup>

The closest application of PCD to migration is expressed in the concept of Policy and Institutional Coherence for Migration and Development (PICMD), which has the support of the World Bank’s Global Knowledge Partnership on Migration and Development (KNOMAD), co-led by the OECD and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). PICMD is defined as policies for migration and development that ‘pursue synergies to advance shared objectives, actively seek to minimise or eliminate negative side effects of policies, [and] prevent policies from detracting from one another or from the achievement of agreed-upon development goals’.<sup>61</sup>

Source: Adapted from Lebon-McGregor et al. (2022a).

57 The UN Global Compacts refers to: (1) the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (UN, 2019); and (2) the Global Compact on Refugees (UN, 2018).

58 Lebon-McGregor et al., 2022a

59 UN, 2015.

60 Siitonen, 2016.

61 Lebon-McGregor et al., 2022a: 6.

## Internal policy incoherence can be horizontal or vertical

Scholars distinguish between horizontal and vertical coherence, defined as the two main sources of internal coherence in a given policy (see the red tiles in Figure 6).

**Horizontal coherence** exists between related fields of migration policy.

Incoherence occurs when the focus on migration management and governance contrasts with and sometimes hinders stated goals of migrant integration.<sup>62</sup>

A policy can thus be understood as internally incoherent if it seeks to achieve competing goals or if it is based upon competing assumptions. An example is when the stated objective of using development support to reduce emigration from a country cannot be reconciled with the objective of using emigration to promote development in the same country, via remittances, diaspora investments or other similar mechanisms.

**Vertical coherence** relates to different governance levels. Incoherence occurs when there are different policy objectives at these levels. For example, policies at the supranational EU-level may conflict with policies at the national level of individual Member States, or the policies of EU Member States may undermine policy objectives in third countries. Another example is when EU Member States take unilateral decisions that affect the governability of mobility in other EU Member States.

*“A policy can thus be understood as internally incoherent if it seeks to achieve competing goals or if it is based upon competing assumptions.”*

## All policies have some degree of incoherence

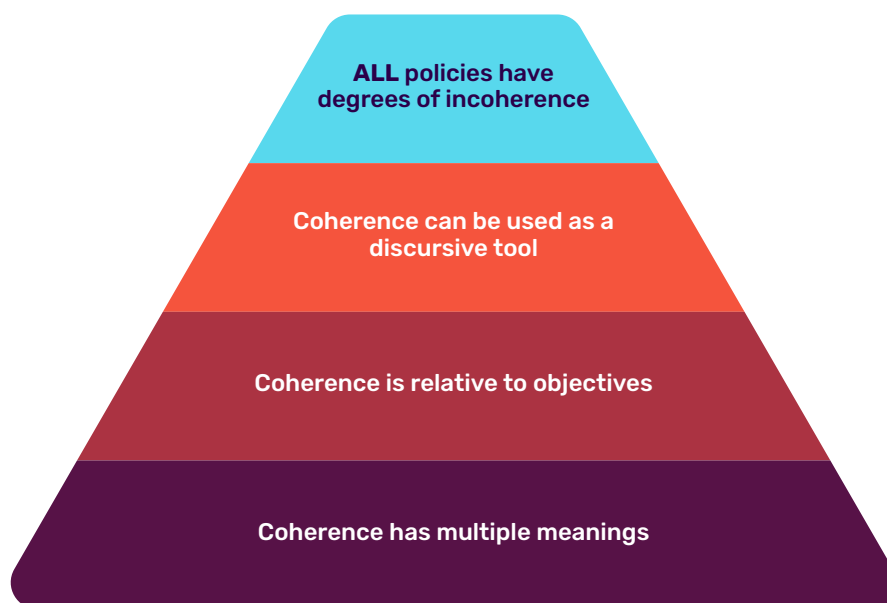
Rather than seeking to achieve internal coherence, policies emerge from negotiations where actors' interests are the main driver. Thus, internal (in) coherence of a policy is the product of negotiations that arise between actors within a policy area with competing understandings of the policy problem. In turn, negotiations are compounded by the interactions that occur between other related areas of policy that involve actors negotiating policies based on

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<sup>62</sup> Erdal et al., 2022.

their own understanding of policy problems. Therefore, there can be internal inconsistencies in the policy logic, but they can also be introduced (*deliberately* or *inadvertently*) through the prioritisation of certain interests over others. Figure 7 shows the main characteristics of policy coherence according to scholars.<sup>63</sup>

**Figure 7. Characteristics of policy coherence**



Source: The authors, based on Lebon-McGregor et al. (2022a).

Internal policy coherence is relative to the objectives that are pursued. This has two important implications. First, internal coherence can be understood as a matter of degree, because from an implementation point of view it relates to how policy components bring about a minimum of contradictions with regard to the fundamental objectives of the policy. Second, there are as many sources of incoherence as objectives and interests involved. Indeed, policies can be coherent with one another in support of a specific objective, but still be at odds with broader normative goals. For example, at the national level, a policy in one country can be incoherent with the objectives of another country. From an international development perspective, interventions may serve donor-country interests and be at odds with the policy objectives in recipient countries.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Lebon-McGregor et al., 2022a.

<sup>64</sup> Godin and Vargas-Silva, 2020.

The PCD narrative (see Box 3) has offered a powerful discursive tool to disguise internal incoherence in EU migration policies.<sup>65</sup> Theoretically, applying PCD principles to migration and development can imply that all policies recognise the interrelationships between migration and development. However, MIGNEX analysis of the New Pact shows how the Pact claims to cover all elements needed for a comprehensive and coherent European approach to migration, but that its main arguments centre on the movements of irregular migrants, asylum seekers and refugees, alongside a focus on strengthening returns and border security.<sup>66</sup>

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65 Lebon-McGregor et al., 2022a.

66 Erdal et al., 2022.





# 3 The EU's external approach aims for coherence towards a restrictive migration agenda

Although the EU external approach expresses an interest in fostering the development of origin countries, the main objective is to limit migration from non-EU countries. This unbalanced view of migration and development creates an important source of policy incoherence.



## The meaning of coherence has changed in EU policy

EU interest in coherence was ultimately conceived in a policy context, with its first use dating to the Treaty of Maastricht in 1992.<sup>67</sup> Policy coherence was conceived as an ideal that, if reached, would allow the EU to reach its full potential as a political project. Since then, coherence has remained an ideal, but its meaning has shifted from a sense of coordination and consistency between migration policies and other policy fields (such as development policies), to mean efficiency – and increasingly in the context of return schemes.

The primary shifts occurred in the type of coherence that EU policies relied on. MIGNEX research shows that the GAMM is concerned with horizontal coherence in the interest of responding to a broad understanding of the connections between migration and development. The New Pact, on the other hand, is more concerned with vertical coherence to ensure that the EU and its Member States cooperate ‘efficiently’ to manage irregular migration through enhanced policies around asylum and return. In doing so, the New Pact alludes to the use of development aid to leverage enhanced coherence.

Rather than searching for an objective measure of policy coherence, a more fruitful approach to analyse coherence in EU migration policy is to understand what type of coherence has been prioritised (e.g., horizontal versus vertical), what its main objectives are, and who has been involved and excluded in the process of creating these policies.

## The EU external dimension focuses on containment

As described in Chapter 2, policy coherence is relative to objectives. Scholars point out that the main purpose of the EU external dimension of migration is to limit migration from non-EU countries to the EU, through control and preventive measures.<sup>68</sup> Traditional tools such as strengthening border controls, tackling migrant smuggling and trafficking, and developing asylum systems are used to

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<sup>67</sup> European Parliament, 1992.

<sup>68</sup> Boswell, 2003b.

control migration. Meanwhile, the preventive goal is achieved by addressing the ‘root causes’ of migration and refugee flows through development assistance, foreign direct investment and other tools of foreign policy.

Although the EU external dimension has evolved over recent decades, a constant focus has been maintained on the containment of migration. This is expressed in the securitisation of borders and a functional relationship with non-EU countries to render certain migration routes as infeasible. From its foundation with the Maastricht Treaty in 1992 to the early 2000s, the EU formulated its migration policies to prioritise border security.<sup>69</sup> Migration is framed in terms of security risks for destination countries from the migration of non-EU nationals, rather than a concern for migrants themselves or their country of origin.<sup>70</sup>

*“Scholars point out that the main purpose of the EU external dimension of migration is to limit migration from non-EU countries to the EU, through control and preventive measures.”*

## Development is instrumental to preventing migration

The narrow EU objective of reducing and controlling migration implies a very specific link with development, through efforts to address the ‘root causes’ of migration of non-EU nationals towards Europe.<sup>71</sup>

Current EU policies have a comprehensive narrative in which the development of origin countries should play an important role alongside migration management. However, a closer look at EU policies such as the GAMM and the New Pact reveals a near absence of development goals.<sup>72</sup> Scholars point out that the EU’s discursive framing of migration in development terms has been a narrative exercise rather than a real shift in priorities.<sup>73</sup>

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69 Geddes, 2000; Lavenex, 2001.

70 Faist, 2004; Lavenex and Kunz, 2008.

71 Lebon-McGregor et al., 2022a.

72 Lavenex and Kunz, 2008.

73 Joppke, 1998.

The only development aspect is the EU's offer of additional development funds for states that cooperate on migration control. Consequently, migration is reduced to a negotiation of development aid in return for curbed emigration.<sup>74</sup>

## **The focus on containment creates horizontal incoherence**

The EU has engaged with many international partners in defining its migration policy, but policy coherence is fundamentally defined by cooperation between EU partners to stop migration from non-EU countries. EU emphasis is placed on the need for more vertical coherence, where 'development policies' are only instrumental in achieving migration management goals. This hierarchy between policies and among actors is more obvious in the New Pact than it is in the GAMM, as we describe in Chapter 4.

In this sense, third countries are less involved when it comes to establishing a 'coherent' EU migration policy framework. Instead, the EU aims for the internal reconciliation of return policies across different governance levels. However, this comes at the expense of horizontal coherence across other policy areas (i.e., trade, development), and of external coherence when considering international agreements such as the Global Compacts.<sup>75</sup>

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74 Geddes and Taylor, 2013; Lebon-McGregor et al., 2022a.

75 UN, 2018; UN, 2019.



# **4 EU partnerships are varied but limited, with few tools**

EU partnerships are designed around conditionalities and compensations, in pursuit of coherence on the prevention and control of migration. Although ‘partnership’ may suggest equality, the relationships result from an unequal power dynamic that tends to benefit the EU.

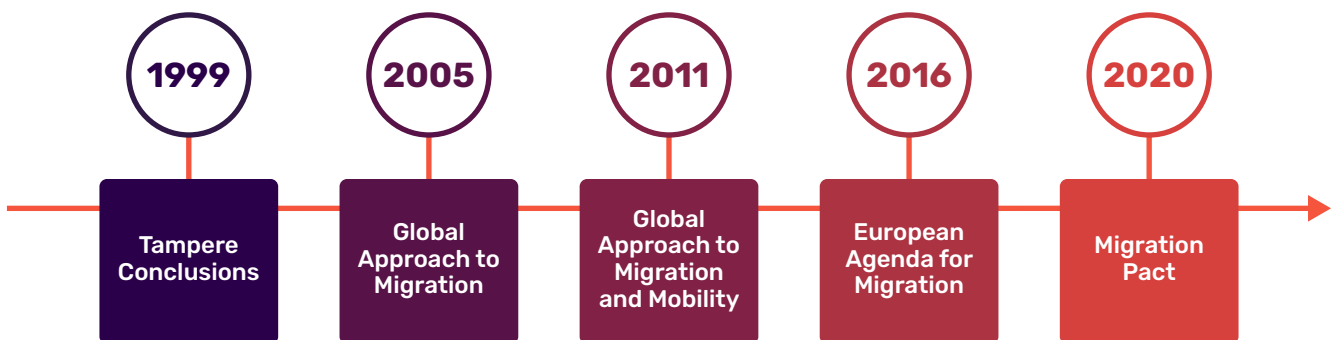


## Partnerships in EU migration policy are not new

Partnerships between the EU and non-EU countries have existed since the beginning of the EU, but the institutionalisation of these partnerships has been promoted under the most recent policy instruments (see Figure 8). Specifically, the denomination of partnerships as ‘mobility partnerships’ dates back to 2009, when they were defined as a tool of the Global Approach to Migration (GAM).<sup>76</sup> Mobility partnerships (MPs) are non-legally binding arrangements or ‘deals’ made with non-EU countries under the EU external approach to migration, which are built upon such policy instruments.<sup>77</sup>

The establishment of the Tampere Presidency Conclusions (1999) signalled the first explicit inclusion of partnerships with countries of origin within the EU’s migration policy agenda. In the following years, a new idea emerged on the possibility of EU partnerships with third countries, namely: connecting cooperation and partnership with migration control. This conditioning of cooperation was deepened in the 2005 Global Approach to Migration (GAM), which became the GAMM in 2011.

**Figure 8. Timeline of EU external migration policy**



Source: Lebon-McGregor et al. (2022b).

<sup>76</sup> European Commission, 2009.

<sup>77</sup> Kunz and Maisenbacher, 2013.

The European Agenda for Migration was launched in June 2016 as the ‘EU’s comprehensive approach to address the challenges of irregular migration and its root causes as part of its broader cooperation with [its] partners’.<sup>78</sup> As a result, the Migration Partnership Framework (MPF) was created,<sup>79</sup> which continued the approach to partnerships that was first conceptualised in the Tampere Conclusions and operationalised in the GAM(M).

The New Pact consolidated the externalisation of EU migration policy in September 2020. Proposals in the New Pact include a contentious Screening Regulation on migrants arriving irregularly in Europe, a revised Asylum Procedures Regulation (APR), an Asylum and Migration Management Regulation (RAMM) on solidarity measures between Member States, a Crisis and Force Majeure Proposal on responses to ‘crisis’ at the external borders, and a Union Resettlement Framework on safe refugee resettlement to Europe.

Notably, the New Pact emphasises further strengthening the security dimension of migration management. In this regard, although the Pact claims to cover all elements needed for a comprehensive European approach to migration, its main arguments are on the movement of irregular migrants, asylum seekers and refugees, and on returns and border security. The Pact is premised on the same deterrence model that has driven EU migration and asylum policy for years now – basically to manage the flows of irregular migrants and refugees to reduce the pressure on Member States’ own national systems for asylum, integration or return, with the view that they will not be able to cope in the event of large flows.

In sum, while partnerships between the EU and non-EU countries have existed for several decades, the focus has narrowed to stopping migration and to the instrumental use of development aid.

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78 European Commission, 2017: 2.

79 Collet and Ahad, 2017.

## Mobility Partnerships have limited tools

Various instruments can be used in partnerships, yet alternatives are limited to those that aim to contain migration. Given the theoretical potential to reduce migration through return, the EU is particularly interested in incorporating RAs or informal readmission schemes within its migration partnerships with non-EU countries. **Readmission Agreements** are defined as bases, procedures and modalities to return non-nationals who do not or no longer fulfil the conditions for entry or stay.<sup>80</sup> In exchange for signing an RA, countries could be offered a Visa Facilitation Agreement (VFA, a simplified visa regime), development aid, or beneficial trade agreements, among other policy tools.

However, a key limitation of possible partnerships is the EU's lack of authority to offer mobility opportunities and other legal pathways in exchange for cooperation on other aspects, such as RAs.<sup>81</sup> Furthermore, Member States view mobility opportunities for third countries as electorally unpopular.

**Comparative experiences of third country cooperation**  
*MIGNEX Background Paper*  
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One consequence of this lack of authority has been the EU's shift to offer development support or beneficial trade agreements to third countries as an alternative. Table 2 maps the EU Partnership Frameworks currently in place in the 10 countries explored in the MIGNEX project. It suggests that, despite obstacles, the scope of EU partnerships has increased over time, with 8 out of 10 countries having partnerships. In particular, Ethiopia, Nigeria and Somalia are defined as priority partners in the Migration Partnership Framework (MPF). Ethiopia, for instance, was designated by the EU as a priority country in 2016 to reduce the arrival of migrants and refugees in Europe. Under the MPF, the country would be compensated with incentives such as development aid and trade.<sup>82</sup>

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80 IOM, 2019.

81 Reslow, 2015.

82 Abebe, 2020.



**Table 2. Mapping MIGNEX countries and EU partnership frameworks**

	Afghanistan	Cabo Verde	Ethiopia	Ghana	Guinea	Nigeria	Pakistan	Somalia	Tunisia	Turkey
Mobility Partnerships		2008							2014	
Readmission Agreements		2014					2010			2014
Visa Facilitation Agreements		2014								
Common Agendas on Migration and Mobility			2015			2015				
Migration Partnership Framework	NP		P	NP	NP	P	NP	P	NP	

Notes: NP = non-priority country; P = priority country. Priority countries are defined by the New Pact.  
Source: Lebon-McGregor et al. (2022b).

## Partnerships are heterogeneous

While EU governance of migration flows follows a general principle of externalisation towards the containment of irregular migration, various types of partnerships exist between the EU and third countries.

**Conditionality** refers to what the EU requires a third country to accomplish in return for a given compensation. This will generally require a partner country to limit outward emigration towards the EU, as well as to facilitate the return of migrants. In exchange, the EU tends to promise compensation through visa liberalisation, favourable trade agreements and development support (see Case study: Nigeria).

To aid systematic comparison, MIGNEX has developed a typology of the combinations of conditionality and compensation present in EU migration partnerships – with five different types.<sup>83</sup> The first is the *carrot and stick* approach where, for instance, financial compensation and the number of visas offered by the EU are conditional on specific actions. In *work around* partnerships, the partner country seeks to circumvent a formal partnership with the EU by negotiating directly with Member States in bilateral agreements. Such approaches are evident in, for instance, the Western Balkans where several countries have pursued agreements with Germany, and also, in the context of MIGNEX countries, in the case of Tunisia. The *pick and choose* approach encompasses partnerships that do not fall neatly into other categories, and cases where no specific partnership agreement has been made yet cooperation still exists (e.g., Ghana). The *façade* partnership acts more symbolically than practically, because while agreements may be made, implementation is lacking. For instance, Ethiopia's history of accepting but not implementing donor conditions shows that Ethiopia's general approach to aid has been the creation of facade partnerships with donors. *Reversed conditionality* can be explained as partnerships where the third country derives their leverage and bargaining power from their importance in achieving the EU's migration policy goals (see Case study: Turkey).

### Case Study: Nigeria

For several reasons, the EU is incapable of enforcing an RA with Nigeria through the rather traditional carrot and stick approach. Firstly, Nigeria is not dependent on EU development aid, which gives the country leverage in readmission negotiations.

Secondly, remittances constitute a vital source of income for Nigerians and a significant part of Nigeria's economy.<sup>84</sup> This causes a great divergence between Nigeria's domestic interests and the EU's immigration policy goals in terms of readmission, causing Nigeria to avoid entering into an RA.

Thirdly, aside from the EU, many actors (such as China) are interested in cooperating with Nigeria and investing in the Nigerian economy. This gives Nigeria options for who to partner with and weakens the negotiating position of the EU.<sup>85</sup>

Source: Adapted from Ike et al. (2023).

83 Lebon-McGregor et al. (2022b).

84 Zanker et al., 2019.

85 Adunbi and Stein, 2019.

## Partnerships vary according to power dynamics

Although ‘partnership’ may suggest equality, in reality, they result from unequal power dynamics in which the EU tends to reap the benefits. The power of each third country depends on several factors that influence their ability to contain irregular migration to Europe.<sup>86</sup> These factors are defined by geographic proximity to Europe, level of development, historical ties and bilateral flows, as well as the nature of migration to European countries. For instance, a country with great potential to contain irregular migration flows to Europe enters negotiations with more leverage, such as in the case of Turkey (see Case study: Turkey).

Variation in partnerships relates to policy instruments and tools used in each negotiation. For example, development aid is invested in those areas that are thought to be reducing out-migration from that particular third country. The European Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF) is one initiative that has been designed specifically to fund programmes that respond to the causes of irregular migration and forced displacement. The Ethiopia Job Compact, funded in part through the EUTF and other donors such as the World Bank and the European Investment Bank, aims to enhance economic opportunities through job creation in Ethiopia to prevent migration from that country.

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<sup>86</sup> Boswell, 2003b.



# **5 The conditionality and compensation approach has uncertain impacts**

The rationale that underlies EU migration partnerships limits the policy tools available and has counterproductive effects. It makes it difficult for the EU to reach agreements with third countries and causes negative consequences for returnee migrants.

## Current partnerships have questionable impacts

The conditionality and compensation approach is fundamentally limited. It emerges from a narrow view of the links between migration management, development support and migrant integration, where third countries are excluded from the overall policy framework. Such countries are only included via migration partnerships that consider the development of countries of origin as instrumental to migration containment.

Containing migration via instruments and tools that aim to reduce mobility can be counterproductive to a partner country's domestic policy goals. For instance, the EU–Nigeria case suggests that the EU's goals of migration containment and reduction are in direct contradiction with Nigeria's domestic development goals, as a country whose economy relies heavily on remittances.

For other partnerships, such as the EU–Turkey partnership, the EU's migration containment policy has potentially contributed to further irregularity within partner countries. A significant number of third-country nationals are hesitant, or are unable due to access issues, to apply for international protection within Turkish borders for fear of not being able to reach their final destination, which is often the EU. There have been numerous reports of returned individuals being unable to apply for protection due to bureaucratic bottlenecks, difficulty in accessing procedural information and lack of legal aid. Additionally, the Syrian population in Turkey is currently under temporary protection as Turkey continues to apply the geographic limitation to the 1951 Refugee Convention (i.e., it only applies to refugees from Europe). It has been argued that the containment of a population of approximately 3.2 million Syrian nationals under temporary status

### Case Study: Turkey

Reversed conditionality is best represented in the case of the EU–Turkey migration cooperation partnership. Turkey, which hosts the largest refugee population in the world, is vital to the EU's externalisation and containment policies and therefore it is not a 'passive receiver' of the EU's migration control agenda. This relative power enables Turkey to set certain conditions as part of its partnership with the EU (further financial aid, pragmatic cooperations in other policy fields, etc.) and circumvent other obligations that contravene its domestic policy goals, such as the readmission of third-country nationals.

Source: Ike et al. (2023).

can add to a feeling of precarity and continued irregularity among the refugee population who might attempt to seek protection in other destinations including the EU.<sup>87</sup>

## The current rationale is a source of incoherence

The EU's conditionality and compensation approach is a source of incoherence for partner countries as well as the EU. Analysis of the 10 MIGNEX countries show that countries with low negotiation power tend to accept asymmetric agreements that often contradict their domestic policy goals and add to societal and political tensions. For instance, Cabo Verde signed an RA even though the country lacked the capacity and the logistical infrastructure to receive returned and readmitted migrants.<sup>88</sup>

Overall, the conditionality and compensation approach focuses on different rather than common interests, and it excludes third countries from discussion on major EU policy frameworks. Irrespective of the success of policy measures to actually contain people, scholars have questioned whether, in the long run, these policies are truly effective and/or morally sustainable.<sup>89</sup>

### Case Study: Cabo Verde

Cabo Verde has a long history of migration cooperation. Cabo Verde signed an EU MP in 2008 and it is the only sub-Saharan African country to date to have agreed on such a partnership with the EU.

The MP paved the way for two legally binding agreements – an RA and a VFA which both entered into force in 2014. The VFA allows for short-stay, multiple-entry Schengen visas and is unique in several ways. The RA obliges Cabo Verde to readmit not only its own nationals and their non-national spouses and underage children, but also third-country nationals who have entered the EU through Cabo Verde.<sup>90</sup>

From the perspective of Cabo Verdean policy-makers, the partnership with the EU is inconsistent with their political aims. Cabo Verde entered the MP with the objective of negotiating labour mobility agreements but it has been unsuccessful in this regard. This mismatch of political aims not only illustrates the power imbalance of this partnership, but it is also a source of incoherence: by not offering long-term visas, the agreement incentivises overstaying of short-term visas and thus fuels irregular migration. Moreover, the RA allows for the deportation of third-country citizens of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to Cabo Verde, which may lead to tensions within ECOWAS and contradicts the Cabo Verdean commitment to regional integration.<sup>91</sup>

Source: Lebon-McGregor et al. (2022b).

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87 Alpes et al, 2017; Erdogan, 2022.

88 Tittel-Mosser, 2018.

89 Smith and Schapendonk, 2018.

90 European Commission, 2013.

91 Hennessey, 2021.



## Soft-law instruments convey risks

In addition to new policy tools included in mobility partnerships, the EU has increasingly resorted over the past decade to concluding ‘informal arrangements’ with third countries instead of establishing formal agreements. This trend was amplified in the aftermath of the so-called ‘European migration crisis’ at the EU’s external borders in 2015. The rise of informal arrangements between the EU and third countries can be understood as a desire for more efficient processes; however, there are several risks involved.

One of the many concerns pertaining to the trend for informal agreements has been the regulation of fundamental rights through non-binding agreements. One such example is the informal readmission arrangement between the EU and Afghanistan, which does not respect the principle of non-refoulement. Another concern has been the issue of legal jurisdiction, where the Court of Justice of the EU has stated that it has no jurisdiction over instruments that cannot be considered formal agreements, such as in the case of the 2016 EU–Turkey Statement. Currently, this appears to leave such instruments outside of the jurisdiction of *any* international judicial mechanism in case of violations.

The use of soft-law and informal tools is problematic because it allows the EU to circumvent its own democratic and judicial procedures. The absence of legally binding consequences in informal arrangements raises questions about accountability, effectiveness and compliance with international human rights standards.

***“The rise of informal arrangements between the EU and third countries can be understood as a desire for more efficient processes; however, there are several risks involved.”***

## Readmissions Agreements as a tool should be revised

Readmission agreements (RA) aim to standardise return procedures and streamline the return of irregularised migrants to their countries of origin.<sup>92</sup> Historically, the EU coupled RAs with promises of greater visa liberalisation. However, due to waning support for Visa Facilitation Agreements (VFA) from Member States, these processes have become decoupled over time. As a result, the EU lacks an effective incentive to negotiate with partner countries. Instead, it uses financial aid, trade agreements and other prospective partnerships.

There are economic and pragmatic reasons that disincentivise the signing of RAs by origin countries. For instance, in the case of Nigeria, there is still no EU RA even after a decade of negotiations. As mentioned previously, remittances sent by Nigerians abroad, regardless of their migrant status, are a crucial source of income for many Nigerian families. In addition, the proposed draft agreement lacks reintegration assistance for readmitted nationals (see next section).

Informal readmission arrangements are not viable solutions,<sup>93</sup> and it is fundamental to understand that a narrow focus on return and readmission can be counterproductive as it often contradicts the domestic interests of the partner country. For Nigeria, interviewees indicated that opening legal regular migration channels and providing reintegration support are among the most constructive and appealing incentives.

## There is a need for an EU reintegration policy

The EU lacks a coherent, comprehensive and explicit reintegration policy. Currently, the MPs and the EU externalisation migration policy do not account for the serious challenges associated with return migration, and especially forced return.

Challenges relate to a lack of public acceptance of RAs by the local population, but also to the precarious and vulnerable situation in which returnees arrive when forced to return. In Nigeria, for instance, forced returns are politically

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<sup>92</sup> Ike et al., 2024.

<sup>93</sup> Gabrielsen Jumbert et al., 2024.

sensitive and divisive, becoming issues that can also change domestic electoral support when RAs are endorsed.<sup>94</sup> Migration scholars point out that post-return life in Nigeria is associated with increased social exclusion – individuals struggle to find housing and employment, and face greater isolation and stigmatisation. This vulnerability is also expressed at the societal level, manifesting as negative consequences for the development of local communities.<sup>95</sup>

Because migrants tend to fund their migration journeys with borrowed money, being deported prevents them from being able to pay off their debts. This increases their vulnerability further still, and it deepens their migration aspirations, as individuals are now also motivated to pay previous debts.

Indeed, the vulnerabilities faced by returned migrants are mutually reinforcing and interrelated, and they lead to complex and multifaceted problems for individuals and their communities. Among other reasons, this is why coherence is needed with the development of origin countries through more effective MPs.

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94 Ike et al., 2023.

95 Bisong, 2022; Digidiki and Bhabha, 2020.



## 6 Focusing on the root causes of migration assumes migration can be prevented

The EU's preventive approach to migration rests on two assumptions, for which there is insufficient evidence: that there are root causes of migration, and that migration can be managed through policy that addresses these causes. Even if root causes of migration could be tackled, there are fundamental ethical and political dilemmas for policy-makers.

## Various assumptions underlie the aim to prevent migration

There are two fundamental assumptions in the preventive objective of the EU external dimension to migration, namely: (1) that migration has root causes; and (2) that migration can potentially be managed by employing effective policies to address its root causes.

MIGNEX research shows that **root causes** is a meaningful label for some causes and some forms of migration. The first formal definition states that root causes of migration are widely experienced hardships to which migration is a possible response, that are perceived to be persistent, immediately threatening, or both.<sup>96</sup> They are specific drivers related to hardships classified across four domains: livelihoods and poverty; governance and public services; security and conflict; and environmental hazards and stresses. Moreover, root causes align most effectively with migration that is instrumentally valued and that has an element of adversity.

Several steps are required to examine whether migration can, in principle, be managed by tackling its root causes. On the one hand, we must identify root causes that influence migration aspirations. MIGNEX research shows that hardships related to livelihoods, together with high levels of corruption and poor governance are three root causes of critical importance.<sup>97</sup>

**Tackling the root causes of migration**  
*MIGNEX Background Paper*  
[mignex.org/d065](https://mignex.org/d065)



Although, in principle, root causes of migration could be tackled, investing in migration management by tackling its roots raises fundamental ethical and policy dilemmas.<sup>98</sup> Moreover, policy options are scarce that have been proven to deliver the kind of transformation necessary to reshape those root causes that affect migration aspirations.<sup>99</sup> A thorough understanding of the complex mechanisms that drive migration is required also for policy tools to be configured effectively.<sup>100</sup>

<sup>96</sup> Hagen-Zanker and Carling, 2023; Vargas-Silva et al., 2023.

<sup>97</sup> Carling et al., 2023; Erdal et al., 2023; Czaika and Weiser, 2023.

<sup>98</sup> Vargas-Silva et al., 2023.

<sup>99</sup> Carling et al., 2024.

<sup>100</sup> Carling et al., 2024.



## Tackling root causes raises important dilemmas

A key ethical dilemma in tackling the root causes of migration relates to whether efforts are directed at alleviating hardships in countries of origin that affect migration, or those hardships that matter the most to the affected population. While investment in migration-related hardships may be coherent with the objective of stopping migration, this is difficult to justify for origin countries and their citizens.

Certainly, it matters whether the funding to alleviate root causes comes from migration management or from development cooperation, and how much weight is placed on different outcomes. If development aid is reallocated to places and sectors where it is expected to alleviate the root causes of migration, levels of effectiveness might drop in terms of development outcomes. Moreover, this emphasis also limits the potential impacts of European development policy. Now, development initiatives are often evaluated based on their perceived impact on migration, which overshadows the intrinsic value of development itself.

## Policy objectives must focus on expansion of choice

Policy objectives should expand the choices for potential migrants by making it more feasible or desirable to stay in their country of origin, rather than focusing on stopping migration by any means. For instance, evidence suggests that migration aspirations could be reduced by ensuring that the poor stay poor, while promoting upward mobility among the middle classes.<sup>101</sup> In this sense, policy coherence towards limiting migration by any means is also a source of incoherence, particularly towards globally accepted normative frameworks, such as those on human rights.

The point is not to reduce undesired migration across the board, but to make it unnecessary for an individual or household to meet their basic needs. The outcomes of interest of more ethical policy objectives may be elusive and hard to measure, but they are easier to align with the objectives of development cooperation and with national policy priorities.

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<sup>101</sup> Vargas-Silva et al., 2023.





# 7 Countries of origin do not have an arsenal of effective policies to reduce emigration

MIGNEX research shows that emigration aspirations are driven by factors linked to livelihoods, governance and corruption. Countries of origin could be encouraged to tackle these areas to decrease emigration pressures; however, they do not have an arsenal of effective policies to do so.

## Tackling job scarcity in countries of origin is difficult

Addressing job scarcity and its far-reaching implications for livelihoods is a critical endeavour to mitigate the economic hardships that can drive migration. The challenge lies in the task of job creation, which is fraught with complexity and substantial costs.

Job creation can take several forms, contingent on the intricacies of the labour market in a certain context. Where demand for workers is high, the focus shifts to bridging the gap between labour demand and supply – that is, to connect workers with employers. While jobs may already exist, impediments such as information gaps, transportation hurdles or specific skill deficiencies often prevent individuals from taking full advantage of these work opportunities.

Interventions that facilitate the job search process and that provide tailored training offer potential solutions. A key facet of this discussion revolves around youth unemployment, a group with a pronounced tendency to migrate. Initiatives and studies targeting youth employment, including the MIGNEX project, have yielded varied results globally.<sup>102</sup> Larger systematic reviews suggest that the impacts of active labour market programmes directed at youth worldwide often do not have an impact on employment and, when they do have a positive impact, the implications for employment tend to be small.<sup>103</sup>

However, in many of the countries explored by MIGNEX, creating new jobs is more complicated than just linking employers with potential employees. In many of these countries, structural economic challenges contribute to a lack of sufficient jobs. Therefore, ‘creating jobs’ in this context entails creating new jobs. Interventions must target specific sectors, expand existing businesses or even create new ones that require capital and substantial operational expenditures (basic services, insurance, equipment, rent, etc.). Large-scale initiatives of government investment can lead to a substantial increase in the number of jobs available in this context, but these initiatives come at a high cost.

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<sup>102</sup> Erdal et al., 2023.

<sup>103</sup> Card et al., 2010; Kluve et al., 2019.

In sum, traditional policy alternatives for job creation fall short of delivering the transformative change that is required to tackle the economic root causes of migration in many countries.

## Monitoring and punishment may decrease corruption

Corruption increases the cost of public service provision and of doing business. It acts as an additional tax. One way to tackle corruption is to improve monitoring and enforce punishments for those found guilty.<sup>104</sup>

Monitoring can take different forms, from additional government audits to increased grassroots participation. Yet anti-corruption efforts themselves have often been corrupted; measures only work if they involve actors with the power, capabilities and interests to ensure their success.<sup>105</sup> Moreover, anti-corruption measures have been shown to have unintended consequences, with worse outcomes for the most vulnerable and poor.<sup>106</sup>

A systematic review of anti-corruption measures finds that efforts are most effective when supported by other contextual factors and when the measures are integrated into a broader set of institutional reforms. The review highlights the relative success of public financial management reforms in some contexts.<sup>107</sup> But it also suggests that while measures to fight corruption have some effectiveness in the short term, in the longer term corrupt policy-makers find alternative ways to profit from corrupt behaviour.

Common policy alternatives to fight corruption can be effective in the immediate term or at the sector level. However, corruption tends to be an incredibly protracted issue across different sectors and institutions. Where configurations of power and capabilities do not support a rule of law, anti-corruption efforts are likely to have limited results.<sup>108</sup> This means that short-term or sector-specific measures are unlikely to have a sustainable or large enough effect to stop corruption from being a root cause of migration.

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<sup>104</sup> Banerjee et al., 2012.

<sup>105</sup> Khan and Roy, 2022.

<sup>106</sup> Fisman and Golden, 2017.

<sup>107</sup> Rocha Menocal, 2015.

<sup>108</sup> Khan and Roy, 2022.

## Civil servant autonomy can improve efficiency

Besides corruption, other forms of inefficiency included on the ‘good governance’ agenda can have different consequences for government finances and public service provision. For example, take the case of unfinished projects. A government starts building a school, hospital or similar project and leaves the project half-finished and inoperative. This is common in many low- and middle-income countries. Corruption means that the cost of a project is inflated, but, in this situation, there are incentives to finish the project as each step of the process allows (corrupt) contractors to make additional profits. Other forms of government inefficiency, such as insufficient resources at the start of a project or unstable government priorities (i.e., money is reallocated during construction) are more likely to lead to unfinished projects.

Traditional ways of tackling government efficiency involve monitoring and incentives for performance. The first step is to measure project and public service delivery, which is still uncommon in many low- and middle-income countries.<sup>109</sup> Then there are rewards for those civil servants with good achievement indicators. However, the evidence for countries such as Nigeria and Ghana suggests that monitoring and incentive schemes do not work well. In fact, these schemes have led to lower completion rates in some instances.<sup>110</sup> This suggests that, once again, government efficiency is dependent on the underlying political economy and context, pointing to the futility of blueprint approaches.

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<sup>109</sup> Banerjee et al., 2007.

<sup>110</sup> Rasul and Rogger, 2018.

# Policy implications

This report disentangles the narrow focus of current EU migration policies, which put excessive emphasis on controlling or preventing migration from non-EU countries. The EU uses development and partnerships with third countries as tools to achieve its migration management goals. This approach has proven ineffective in stopping migration and counterproductive in the relationship between the EU and non-EU countries.

EU policy-makers should stop co-opting ‘development policies’ to achieve migration management goals. On the contrary, they should maximise the potential benefits of migration for development. This could be through remittances, the opening of regular labour migration pathways or by supporting diaspora engagement, instead of applying a one-sided lens on returns policies.

A more comprehensive approach to migration policy should include non-EU countries and it should view their development as a valuable outcome. Policies tackling the root causes of migration should focus on expanding people’s choices in countries of origin – offering individuals a genuine choice whether to migrate or stay. In addition, policy-makers should consider that, in practice, few policy tools have proven to deliver the kind of transformation necessary to reshape migration aspirations.<sup>111</sup>

EU policy-makers should be aware of the detrimental consequences for cooperation of a superficial relationship with non-EU countries. Although third countries may only be included in migration partnerships as instruments for the EU to achieve certain goals, these countries are aware of their negotiating power. Migration has become one of the most contentious and politically sensitive issues within the EU, which further strengthens the bargaining power of third countries.

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<sup>111</sup> Vargas-Silva et al., 2023.



At a regional level, power relationships between the EU and other partners are shifting too. For instance, the African Union (AU) is playing a more active role in shaping migration policies on the continent, in pursuit of greater benefits from the linkages between migration and development. This is in line with the ideals of Agenda 2063, Africa's development blueprint.<sup>112</sup> The AU has also developed the Migration Policy Framework for Africa (2018–2030), which provides its Member States with guidelines for more coherent migration management aligned with their individual development agendas.<sup>113</sup>

Coherence with international norms such as the UN Global Compacts<sup>114</sup> should also be addressed in the design of EU migration policies. Currently, the EU's New Pact not only omits to mention this international agreement, but in many ways contradicts many of the core principles of the Global Compacts.

As shown, the EU has been using RAs as a foreign policy tool. However, increasingly, it seems that the EU needs to offer better incentives if it wants to secure the signatures of third countries. A one-sided and narrow focus on return and readmission can be counterproductive, often contradicting the domestic interests of the partner country. In fact, as argued in MIGNEX policy briefs,<sup>115</sup> the EU should consider the following incentives:

- Opening legal, regular migration channels and reintegration support (as endorsed by the Nigerian stakeholders interviewed).
- Listening to partner countries, engaging in inclusive multi-stakeholder dialogues and offering evidence-based incentives that are in the interests of third countries. These incentives should go beyond financial aid to address societal, economic and political tensions in a holistic manner.
- Establishing partnership cooperation frameworks with an emphasis on 'responsibility sharing' rather than 'burden shifting'.

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<sup>112</sup> African Union, 2024.

<sup>113</sup> African Union, 2018.

<sup>114</sup> UN, 2018; UN, 2019.

<sup>115</sup> Gabrielsen Jumbert et al., 2024; Ike et al., 2024.



# Publications and data

MIGNEX research is documented through more than 80 publications across five types within the MIGNEX series. In addition, analyses are further developed as articles in peer-reviewed journals. The range of formats ensure that insights are available to diverse audiences, including policy makers, practitioners, students, and researchers.

Project publications are available at [mignex.org/publications](https://mignex.org/publications).



**14 MIGNEX Handbook Chapters** contain foundations, procedures and documentation of the research process and the data that have been collected



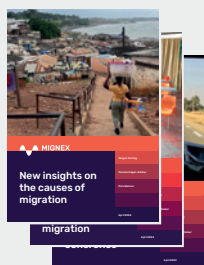
**26 MIGNEX Case Study Briefs** present migration and development dynamics in each of the 26 research areas



**29 MIGNEX Background Papers** contain development of methods, reviews of migration-related policies and empirical analyses across a range of research questions



**10 MIGNEX Policy Briefs** highlight selected findings and point out their relevance for policy on migration and development



**3 MIGNEX Reports** synthesize selected insights from across the more specific and technical analyses



**Journal articles based on MIGNEX research** contain analyses further developed for peer reviewed journals

Raw data from the survey, focus group discussions and policy reviews will be available for secondary analyses when the project ends. The data have been anonymised to ensure the confidentiality of research participants.

Data and documentation are available at [zenodo.org/communities/mignex](https://zenodo.org/communities/mignex).

# Concluding remarks

A critical approach must be adopted towards the use of policy coherence within the EU external dimension of migration management.

Understanding the complex interrelationships between migration policy areas implies accepting that policy coherence will always be challenged. When designing and implementing migration policies, policy-makers should be explicit about the fact that objectives in one area may have consequences in another. It is fundamental to define clear objectives, and as part of this to promote public debate with all stakeholders involved about those policy objectives and their potential consequences.

The assumption that migration flows can be stopped by preventing its root causes should be reviewed – not only due to the lack of evidence, but also because of the important ethical dilemmas that arise.<sup>116</sup> Shifts in EU migration policy result from a narrow view of migration and the interrelationships between migration management, development in countries of origin and migrant integration in destination countries.

Policy goals should strive to promote, as much as possible, the mutual benefits for all parties. Of course, this does not mean being naïve by failing to consider the different geopolitical interests at play. On the contrary, it means embracing the complexity of the interrelationships between migration policy areas. Simplistic and linear approaches to why people migrate should be avoided, along with zero-sum games regarding the development of origin versus settlement countries.

Cooperation frameworks can be opened up through more effective partnerships. While a conditionality and compensation approach might be an efficient tool to get partnerships signed between the EU and third countries, the heavy focus

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<sup>116</sup> Lebon-McGregor et al., 2022a.

on containing migration excludes alternative types of cooperation. Instead of instrumentalising development to constrain flows, EU external migration policy could first look for opportunities of mutual benefit with non-EU countries.

While the rise in informal migration arrangements between the EU and third countries can be understood as an effort to improve efficiency, there are several risks involved. Such informal partnerships risk cutting off the usual democratic and judicial control of partnerships, and they can result in non-binding agreements that lack transparency and accountability. This is particularly serious given the significant risks of human rights violations inherent in migration management. Furthermore, questions arise on the (mis)use of public funds, as these agreements often include considerable financial provision and incentives. It is essential, therefore, that migration partnership agreements and the underlying negotiation process allow for public scrutiny and democratic oversight. This can be achieved by prioritising the negotiation of formal bilateral agreements, which comply with international human rights standards.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Gabrielsen Jumbert et al., 2024; Ike et al., 2023.

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