

**BORDER EXTERNALISATION AND  
MIGRATION CONTROL IN AFRICA:  
RISKS FOR DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION  
CONCLUSIONS AND PROPOSALS**

**CEA(R)**

Comisión Española  
de Ayuda al Refugiado

This report was drawn up by the Advocacy Area of the Spanish Commission for Refugees (CEAR) as part of the project '**Observatory on the right to asylum, migrations and borders**', funded by the Agencia Extremeña de Cooperación Internacional y Desarrollo (AEXCID).

Year and place of publication: Mérida, 2022



The Spanish Commission for Refugees (CEAR) is a non-profit organisation founded in 1979 and engaged in voluntary, humanitarian, independent and plural action. Our aim is to work with citizens to defend the right to asylum. Our mission is to defend and promote human rights and the comprehensive development of asylum applicants, refugees, stateless persons and migrants in vulnerable situations and/or at risk of social exclusion. Our work approach is comprehensive, including temporary shelter, legal care, psychological and social care, training and employment, and advocacy and social participation.

In 2021, under a project titled 'Observatory on the right to asylum, migrations and borders', funded by the Agencia Extremeña de Cooperación Internacional y Desarrollo (AEXCID), CEAR analysed the impact of border externalisation and development cooperation policies linked to migration control in priority transit countries for Spain in these matters. To do so, the main development cooperation and foreign action instruments employed by the EU and Spain on issues of migration in Mauritania, Senegal and Algeria were analysed. Here we present the conclusions drawn from the four reports, as well as our proposals to the Spanish government to address migration issues in development cooperation policy.

## CONCLUSIONS:

- Currently, the response of the EU and Member States to the reality of migration reinforces and boosts the externalisation of borders and migration control. An example of this is the proposal for the New European Pact on Migration and Asylum, which is based mainly on these issues and reinforcing returns. In this sense, conditionality is an increasingly visible tool in relations with third countries to effectively achieve these objectives. Development cooperation is one of the conditionality tools used by the EU and Member States for these purposes. There are other important tools to consider as well, such as economic/trade agreements and investments, readmission and visa policies and political/diplomatic partnerships and relations.
- Development aid should be focused on eradicating poverty and improving the living conditions of the population of the countries to which it is destined. In no case should it be aimed at or conditioned by migration control. In this sense, it is concerning that development cooperation funds are currently being channelled towards issues unrelated to these objectives and focused purely on border control and externalisation. In our investigation, we were able to verify this situation in the EU, especially as regards funds from the European Union Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF) aimed at migration control, and new financing instruments such as the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI-Global Europe).

In the case of Spain, the Ministry of the Interior allocates ODA funds for police cooperation with these countries. In the absence of official information on the purpose and content of these projects, we must highlight the risk that they may be dedicated to border control and externalisation.

**Mauritania** is a priority country for development cooperation for Spain and the EU and has gained importance in recent years thanks to its collaboration and relevance in issues of migration

As far as Spanish ODA is concerned, most of the cooperation is focused on the needs of the population. However, as one of the top donors to Mauritania, the amount of ODA funds from the Ministry of the Interior earmarked for police cooperation activities. Of all the ministries, the Ministry of the Interior allocated the most ODA funds to Mauritania for several years (2010, 2011 and 2015).

On the other hand, the FIIAPP executes development cooperation projects related to border control and externalisation, such as the Common Operational Partnership (COP-Mauritania).

In this sense, the EUTF has played a critical role in funding many national and regional projects. (As of September 2021, Mauritania benefits from nine national projects worth over €80 million in total and 16 regional projects.) Several of these projects are directly linked to migration and border control as the previously mentioned COP or The EU for the security-resilience-development nexus project (with €25 million earmarked for the Mauritanian government)

As for **Senegal** the ODA it receives from the EU and its Member States, including Spain, is especially important for Senegal the country. The projects executed by the AECID and development NGOs are generally aimed at improving the living conditions of the population by reducing poverty and inequality. There are also ODA disbursements for police cooperation activities l by the Ministry of the Interior: they accounted for 3% of total net ODA for the 2005-2009 period, 10% for 2010-2015 and 4% for 2016-2019.

As for the EU, the EUTF has played a key role in funding many national and regional projects directly linked to migration and border control. In this regard, it is important to highlight the EU funds managed by FIIAPP and destined for projects related to migration with weighty security and control objectives.

Regarding **Algeria**, although the country is a priority for Spain and the EU in issues of migration, it bears only very marginal weight when it comes to development cooperation. At the EU level, it is reflected in projects funded under the European Neighbourhood Policy and a small number of regional projects funded by the EUTF that include Algeria, some in the field of migration but unrelated to border control issues. Regarding Spanish Development Cooperation, aspects of migration control may be included in the funds from the Ministry of the Interior for police cooperation, although comparatively much less than the other countries analysed.

- On the other hand, regarding the potential conditionality of development aid funds, we have identified that the prioritisation of certain countries responds in part to their willingness to work with EU countries on migration control issues.

The conditionality of the provision of aid in the form of Spanish ODA on border control cannot be established directly in any of the studied countries (Senegal, Mauritania and Algeria). . In any case, it is important to bear in mind that conditionality may not be easily visible and may not only be related to monetary items for development cooperation but to other aspects such as investments, geostrategic alignments, or diplomatic relations. All this can have an impact when it comes to conditioning migration strategies and policies.

- Regarding the potential risks inherent to instrumentalising ODA for border control and externalisation, it is important to note the impact that it may have on the credibility of development cooperation: on the one hand, it distorts the true purpose of ODA, which is the eradication of poverty and inequality; and on the other hand, it leads us to question the principles of appropriation and effectiveness since despite what the European agenda aims to impose, forced displacement and migration to the EU are not priority issues in terms of development for most of the countries to which aid is intended.
- The serious impact that projects focused on strengthening border control, externalisation and return funded with ODA have (or could have) on migrants and refugees is especially relevant. In our research, we have observed that these practices are blocking the legitimate right to mobility, going against regional efforts in Africa to create zones of freedom of movement for workers. The psychosocial effects and potential violations of human rights during returns and internments inside and outside of Europe must also be considered. It is also important to mention that preventing or limiting migration has a strong impact on the development of African countries, where remittances are a source of financial and development aid that, in some cases, surpassed the amount of ODA received. To all this, it must be added that, far from stopping migration, control practices result in routes being modified, making them more costly (fuelling the smuggling and trafficking networks) and dangerous (in terms of lives lost and violations of rights).

In addition to all the above, it is important to note that the control of migration flows has become a lucrative business, especially in relation to border control and defence.

The impact of European control policies hinders regional movement in Mauritania (currently not part of ECOWAS but does have mobility agreements with it) and Senegal (ECOWAS member).

Moreover, these practices of limiting mobility and the sense of external control and imposition that comes with them generate discomfort and mistrust regarding the EU and its MS in the population, especially in Senegal.

On the other hand, people returned by expulsion from the EU or returned in transit suffer the psychological consequences of failing in the life project they undertook and the social and community stigmatisation they may face. This is especially noteworthy in the case of Senegal, where remittances and the diaspora are a fundamental part of the country's development.

Migrants are also impacted by the violence they may have suffered during their migration journey (smuggling, human trafficking, abuse). In the case of Algeria, people who leave or enter the country irregularly (including its nationals) are criminalised. Migrants, refugees and organisations testify to the violations of rights that take place in the expulsions and internments in Algeria, even contravening the obligation of non-refoulement.

In the case of Mauritania, the Spanish Ombudsman has shown concern about the violations of rights that may be taking place in the readmissions of people coming from deportation flights from Spain.

Lastly, we cannot forget that the risks migrants face can be deadly: in 2021 the highest number of deaths and disappearances ever was recorded on the Canary Island route. The Sahara Desert has become another immense sea of death of which it is difficult to know the number of lives lost to it.

- The lack of transparency and difficulty accessing information on matters related to border control, externalisation and return is especially pressing. Throughout our investigation, we have experienced difficulties obtaining specific and complete information on cooperation funds and activities and documents (such as bilateral agreements and memorandums of understanding) related to migration and border control, readmissions or returns.

## PROPOSALS TO THE SPANISH GOVERNMENT

- Develop a more coherent foreign policy that conceives of development cooperation as a national policy aimed at improving the living conditions of people in the countries that receive aid. Development aid must remain far removed from political and partisan interests and coherently focused on real and effective development objectives. In no case should it be aimed at or conditioned by migration control or border externalisation. Its objectives must focus on the well being and improvement of people's living conditions and reflect the principle of appropriation.
- Eliminate the securitised approach to migration from development and foreign action instruments and policies. This approach promotes the criminalisation and negative perception of migrants and refugees, in addition to encouraging hate speech that directly affects coexistence and social cohesion. This has a serious impact on the lives and rights of migrants on their migration journey.
- Endorse and promote greater transparency and access to information related to development cooperation and issues of migration. The information must be public, clear, accessible and understandable.

