



## Co-operation or Mutual Co-option? The Senegal–EU Partnership on Migration

Mamadou Dimé & Rose Jaji

### Summary

This policy brief addresses the tensions between international and domestic interests on issues relating to partnerships on migration governance. It specifically discusses the Senegal–EU partnership on migration, highlighting the unequal relationship between the two partners and the implications of this relationship for the outcomes of migration policy.

The authors highlight how the EU's use of funding to shape migration governance in Senegal creates ownership and accountability challenges for policies that are formulated at the initiative of external actors without much, if any, input by the government of Senegal and its people. The Senegalese government's quest to attract funding from the EU through the partnership on migration results in it being more accountable to its external partners, and less accountable to the Senegalese people and local civil society organisations. The latter argue that the government needs to formulate a policy that addresses migration in Senegal in a comprehensive manner.

Senegal's financially weaker position vis-à-vis the EU does not, however, constrain the Senegalese government from exercising agency in pursuit of its own interests within the EU agenda. It seeks to strike a balance between the interests of the EU and its domestic priorities on migration. It pursues this goal by conflating rent-seeking behaviour with domestic interests that are at variance with the EU agenda – a strategy facilitated by the government's reluctance to adopt and commit to an official document providing the framework for migration governance.

The partnership between Senegal and the EU has the hallmarks of an interface characterised more by mutual co-option than by meaningful co-operation on interna-

tional migration governance norms. This state of affairs is detrimental to the formulation of a comprehensive migration policy addressing various aspects of Senegal's complex migration matrix. In order for the Senegal–EU partnership to go beyond the pursuit of narrow interests and address migration governance issues in a comprehensive manner, several changes are required.

- Donor states, especially in the EU, need to acknowledge the variety of migration challenges Senegal is facing, and not limit their action to their own border externalisation interests. Instead of only engaging with the government, and a few “token” civil society organisations, funders need to take on board the views of significant civil society and local government actors who are more in touch with local realities.
- A holistic migration policy is urgently needed, which goes beyond the current focus, required by external actors, on emigration from Senegal. Such a migration policy has become even more indispensable to Senegal because of the Senegalese diaspora's economic and political role in the country, its contribution to Senegal's development, and the need for the Senegalese government to provide adequate responses to the diaspora's needs. Such a policy is also needed because of the position of Senegal as a destination country for migrants from the West African sub-region.
- The EU needs to transform its current approach to “partnerships” on the governance of migration to a model that is mutually beneficial. The current partnership functions as a vehicle through which the EU and its Member States pursue their own agenda. A more feasible partnership would entail identification of the partners' respective priorities and co-operation on areas of mutual interest.

## EU and IOM influence in migration governance in Senegal

Initiatives taken between 2015 and 2018, under the aegis of the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), to formulate a national migration policy for Senegal failed to yield one because the Senegalese government did not officially adopt the resultant document. Although the Senegalese government insists that it has a migration policy, the absence of an official document outlining this policy raises questions on how the country governs the varied migration trajectories. The Council of the European Union (2022, p. 1) has repeatedly invited it to adopt the IOM document and “designate an interlocutor to lead the dialogue and negotiations on the subject with the EU”. So far, this has been to no avail. The absence of an official document or frame of reference suggests that the Senegalese government is avoiding being pinned down and is, instead, creating room to constantly redefine its policy and re-orient itself according to shifting priorities. Senegal’s migration governance choices are interesting in the context of the options open to them, and the influence national and international actors are trying to place on them.

With specific reference to the Senegal–EU partnership, the EU and its Member States release financial resources essentially to deal with the effects of the so-called “migration crises”. The main instrument for the EU to influence the governance of migration in Senegal is the Emergency Trust Fund for “Addressing the Root Causes of Irregular Migration”. There are other instruments in the framework of bilateral co-operation, for example agreements between Senegal and Spain and between Senegal and France for circular migration, the return of migrants and the governance of migration, among others. In addition, there have been several migration projects financed by the European Union or its Member States addressing the return and reintegration of migrants, migration governance and the setting up of the inter-ministerial committee to combat “irregular” migration. As the

main instrument, the Emergency Trust Fund aims to influence the governance of migration by acting on the scale, nature and trends of migration flows in Senegal (EU, 2019). The implementation of the Emergency Trust Fund in Senegal is structured around four pillars that are indicative of the EU’s desire to deter departure from and facilitate return to Senegal. These pillars, whose goal is to curb migration from Senegal to EU states, are:

- promoting job creation and supporting professional integration;
- strengthening the food and nutritional security of vulnerable households in fragile areas;
- raising awareness on the dangers of migration and facilitating return and reintegration; and
- strengthening the Senegalese government’s capacity to better control its territory.

Through the Emergency Trust Fund, the EU took on an even greater role, starting in 2019, in defining priorities and identifying the migration-related challenges on which it intends to focus its actions and resources. This has created a scenario in which the adage “he who pays the piper calls the tune” comes to mind. The EU and some of its Member States, mainly France, Italy and Spain, as well as intergovernmental organisations such as IOM, have played an influential role in setting the priorities of migration policy in Senegal. This is particularly the case regarding the focus on “irregular” migration, which has led to “Europeanisation of migration policies” (Boyer et al., 2018).

The EU’s choices in the field of migration are conveyed through its cooperative instruments, such as bilateral and multilateral aid and economic and technical co-operation (Charles & Chappart, 2017). In pursuit of the agenda to deter “irregular” migration through border controls, EU Member States such as Belgium, France, Germany, Italy and Spain signed several bilateral agreements with Senegal. These agreements provided reference points for a framework for migration policies and programmes in areas such as border management, flow control, curbing “illegal” migration and co-development. This has

essentially meant intensification of the externalisation of EU borders in the wake of the first wave of emigration deaths in 2005. As a result, FRONTEX, the agency that co-ordinates the management of the EU's external borders and co-operation on border controls among Member States, assumed an active role in the increased surveillance of the Senegalese coast and the intensification of the upstream fight against "irregular" emigration. FRONTEX deployed equipment and logistics (helicopters, drones, surveillance, intelligence devices, etc.) in collaboration with the Senegalese police, navy and gendarmerie to control the key departure points for pirogues in Mbour, Joal, Kafountine and Saint-Louis, among others, mainly towards the coasts of the Canary Islands.

Senegal appears to internalise the EU and its Member States' agenda, which is framed around combating "irregular" migration, encouraging return migration and tightening border control. These external actors' priorities often set the tone, orientation, implementation strategies and targets of migration policies and programmes in Senegal. Whenever migration is discussed in Senegal, the focus is invariably on the issue of "irregular" migration to Europe. From the mid-2000s to date, "irregular" migration has not ceased to generate tragedy, desolation and distress in Senegal. The colossal resources deployed to monitor the coasts or to prevent the use of land routes have not curbed the strong desire for mobility of the many would-be emigrants. The opening up of "illegal" emigration land routes by Senegalese and other African migrants from Senegal through Mali and Niger to Libya around 2012 resulted in an influx of funds to finance a series of developmental initiatives with Senegal and other countries of origin in the West African sub-region.

These development initiatives were intended to tackle the main motivations for migration by offering alternatives to people who were tempted by this risky and dangerous path. Increased border surveillance arrangements and the use of increasingly sophisticated means of technological control through FRONTEX were integral to these

responses. EU Member States' influence on migration in Senegal is illustrated by the fact that the European Community (EC)–Senegal co-operation framework document for 2008–2013 recommended the formulation of a migration policy that emphasised curbing "irregular" migration and promoting the return of "irregular" Senegalese migrants from Europe. In line with this agenda, EU funding was earmarked for coordinated action by government institutions to manage migration, income-generation and employment creation. This funding was provided mainly through a reorientation of the EU's official development assistance (ODA). The EU has not released any new assistance funds and has, instead, drawn on money intended for development aid to finance co-operation mechanisms in the field of migration (CIMADE, 2017).

Another actor that plays an important role in migration in Senegal is IOM, which is also involved in many other African countries, particularly in the production of data and knowledge and the elaboration of norms relating to migration (Aguillon, 2022). This enables IOM to play an important role in setting priorities and defining thematic agendas. There have been accusations that IOM, which receives its funding primarily from the EU and its Member States, mainly France, Germany, Italy and Spain, acts as a "megaphone" for the concerns of Western countries through several mechanisms, such as the production of statistics that determine migration policies and, above all, the development of strategic documents such as migration profiles and policies (Aguillon, 2020). African countries' lack of financial, human and technical resources to finance the development of public policies opens up space for IOM to play a more decisive role in the orientation of priorities relating to migration. IOM favours standardised interventions that it establishes as norms and models. As such, IOM was able to convince the Senegalese government of the need to develop a national migration policy. The process started in 2015 and was financed by IOM, with the Ministry of Economy, Finance and Planning acting as the institutional anchor. IOM

played a leading role in steering the process of drawing up Senegal's national migration policy document, which the initiators on IOM's side wanted to position as a tool to bring together the most crucial migration issues and challenges in Senegal.

However, the document failed to meet these expectations. Civil society played a minor role in the drafting of the document but the civil society organisations that were involved later became critical of the content of the document because of its failure to take a holistic approach to migration in Senegal. Some civil society organisations expressed their frustration and dissatisfaction with the content of the document and its focus. For example, they argued that the document was not aligned with the real migration issues and challenges specific to Senegal. They also considered the document "Eurocentric", or strongly linked to the interests and instructions of the European Union, and excessively focused on the Senegalese diaspora settled in European countries to the detriment of Senegalese established on the African continent, who have a greater demographic weight and provide better representation of emigration from Senegal. They advocated an approach that would treat migration as a development lever in line with Senegal's development agenda rather than as a problem.

IOM was involved in training, advocating migration governance practices that were development-oriented, and collecting data to track migration routes in order to integrate border management among the countries involved. The integration of border management was central to the migration control framework, which was extended to the establishment of control systems at all land, sea and river borders, the interconnectedness of which made controls more effective. The framework was implemented through the control system developed by FRONTEX, whose presence in Senegal was strengthened in 2006. Senegal agreed to FRONTEX patrolling the Senegalese coast. There are also training sessions for the Senegalese police and gendarmerie, in

addition to logistic support and joint patrols. FRONTEX is currently equipped with increasingly sophisticated technological means to exercise close surveillance of the Senegalese coast and thus thwart attempts at "irregular" migration. This suggests that the Senegalese government is more interested in accessing funds accruing from accommodation of the EU agenda on migration rather than in pursuing a comprehensive migration policy that addresses the country's multi-faceted migration-related challenges.

## **Senegal, domestic interests and modes of action in the partnership**

In terms of migration governance, Senegal is an interesting case study due to its quadruple status as a country of destination, departure, transit and return. This status necessitates a coherent, comprehensive and well-co-ordinated mechanism for the governance of migration in the country. Yet, Senegal remains without a national migration policy in terms of an official document that it can refer to, which renders the Senegalese government's actions unpredictable, and thus detrimental to migrants' interests and the effective governance of migration. The Senegalese government presents and encourages migration as an integral part of the country's tradition. It only promotes return migration by the established Senegalese diaspora, from which it seeks to harness resources as part of its development agenda. The Senegalese diaspora carries enormous demographic, financial and political weight. The Senegalese public authorities thus encourage the return of migrants capable of putting their resources, experience, knowledge and skills to the service of the country through entrepreneurial initiatives and political and civic involvement, for example, in accordance with the government's objective of making migration a lever for development. While the Senegalese government sees the relevance of the Senegalese diaspora to the country's development agenda, it does not see deported "irregular"

migrants as a resource and is therefore reluctant to prioritise their reintegration. For example, despite pressure from the EU and some of its Member States, Senegal has not yet signed any readmission agreements. According to the Council of the European Union (2022, p. 1), “more than 16,000 Senegalese in an ‘irregular’ situation have received a return decision over the last three years, and less than 1,000 have actually been returned”.

In terms of national political interest, the existence of emigration opportunities appears vital to relieving the pressures created by youth unemployment. In view of these considerations, closure of migration opportunities in the name of curbing “irregular” migration would be tantamount to exacerbating these pressures, which would in turn generate social and political tensions and contestation of such action. The Senegalese government’s focus on developmental returns from the Senegalese diaspora has also resulted in the government failing to take comprehensive action on managing immigration and the presence of foreign nationals in Senegal, who were estimated at 2% of the Senegalese population as of 2018 (ANSD & IOM, 2018).

In this regard, the attitude of the Senegalese state can be described as ambiguous. The Senegalese government favours “strategic selection”, and an opportunistic logic that prioritises migration issues that attract funds from the EU without committing to comprehensive migration governance. The Senegalese government accepts the conditionality of the funds to readmit deported “irregular” migrants and simultaneously resists the readmission of Senegalese expelled from countries such as France, Spain, Germany, etc., despite pressure from European donors, who make readmission a condition for official development assistance for African countries. Despite the use of readmission of deported “irregular” migrants as a means of diplomatic, financial and bilateral pressure on Senegal, the Senegalese government seeks ways also to pursue its interests in the process of applying this clause. The Senegalese government’s pursuit of migration objectives that

are relevant to national interests and priorities enables it to direct a large part of its migration projects and programmes towards two main interests, namely promotion of return migration by the Senegalese diaspora and facilitating its contribution to the country’s development. These are the interests where one can observe the implementation of projects financed from the country’s public funds without waiting for external support. For example, the state used its own funds to set up the Investment Support Fund for Senegalese Abroad in 2008. This fund targets only those Senegalese abroad who wish to contribute to development projects in Senegal. It excludes “irregular” migrants, who are the focus of EU funding for migration-related projects.

Senegal’s approach to migration issues is thus built around closer engagement with the diaspora, the creation of legal migration channels, the prevention of forced returns and, more recently, the protection of vulnerable migrants on their journeys. These priorities are in contrast to EU interests, which include improving border control capacities and reintegrating deported migrants. Reconciling internal with external interests from which funding accrues places the Senegalese government in a situation where it has to pursue what Adam et al. (2020) describe as “intermestic” policy, which the country has pursued through equivocation, a wait-and-see attitude and opportunism (Aguillon, 2020). The Senegalese government seems to be working in a “utilitarian” logic and instrumentalising migration issues with the goal of capturing the financial resources circulating in the “migration industry” (Gammeltoft-Hansen & Sørensen, 2013). It aims to use these resources to carry out development policies in its priority sectors, such as youth employment, entrepreneurship and migration. At the same time, it has to address the migration interests and priorities of external actors who provide these financial resources. The government’s approach crystallises into the management of compromises on issues and standards that may seem contradictory. It has to meet, simultaneously, European requirements to contain “irregular” migration and

the demand by civil society organisations and other local actors for a migration policy focusing exclusively on Senegal’s interests and priorities on migration.

It appears that the lack of an official document clearly outlining Senegal’s priorities may allow the Senegalese government’s balancing act, or its “intermestic” position, to work better. Maintaining the status quo suggests a deliberate choice by the Senegalese government to avoid getting trapped by a policy document. The absence of a frame of reference facilitates equivocation and a case-by-case approach, which allows Senegal to constantly redefine its policy and re-orient it towards its priorities at any given moment. This situation allows Senegal not only to follow the EU’s interests but also to implement its own projects within the EU project, or to use EU projects to address domestic priorities. An illustration of this situation is the Senegalese government’s implementation of border control projects. The EU’s objective to deter “irregular” migration overlaps with Senegal’s desire to secure borders in a sub-regional context marked by jihadist violence, which threatens serious destabilisation of West Africa. Senegal’s primary objective, to control its borders, especially the border with Mali, coincides with that of the EU to combat “irregular” migration. The Senegalese government thus “instrumentalises” the EU’s fight against “irregular” migration by translating it into an opportunity to strengthen the capacity of border guards and integrate border communities into border surveillance.

Pragmatism explains the Senegalese government’s ambiguity, and why its initiatives poorly and incoherently cover immigration-related issues. The challenges related to immigration into Senegal constitute a blind spot in terms of migration governance, as they are not a central concern in the priorities of donors regarding migration. At most, transit migration and refugees manage to attract the attention of public authorities only because of their connection with “irregular” migration. Broader migration issues are thus side-lined

**Box 1: A flagship project financed by the EU Emergency Trust Fund and Senegal’s Security Interests**

Objective	Strategy	Expected outcome
EU: controlling the borders to deter “irregular” migration	EU funding for creation of Rapid Action Groups – Surveillance and Intervention in the Sahel (GAR-SI) within the security forces, especially the armed police force	EU: deterrence of “irregular” migration
Senegal: securing the border with Mali in order to deter transnational terrorism		Senegal: secure borders from transnational terrorism

Source: Authors

by a strong focus on external priorities that allow the government to raise funds, implement projects, establish development-oriented links with the diaspora and strengthen border control in order to combat “irregular” migration and concurrently deter transnational terrorism. Overall, the Senegalese government seeks to balance internal and external interests in a context characterised by power asymmetry between Senegal and the EU.

**Conclusion and policy implications**

The Senegal–EU partnership illustrates how the interface between domestic and international actors in the governance of international migration is characterised by pursuit of individual interests. Senegal’s reliance on funding from the EU puts it in a position where it pursues a migration agenda, which is consistent with EU interests, in this case, containment of “irregular” migration. The focus on this dimension alone creates problems of accountability and policy ownership, as illustrated by the strong criticism by civil society organisations that are trying to have a more audible voice in order to influence the choices of the Senegalese government on migration governance. Civil society actors advocate a more holistic

migration policy, which is in line with the characteristics and evolution of Senegalese migration, and more focused on the role of migration as a lever for development in Senegal.

At the same time, Senegal demonstrates its agency by pursuing its own interests in the area of migration, and these are oftentimes at odds with those of the EU. This has placed Senegal in a situation where it has to do a delicate balancing act between external and domestic interests. The difficulty of finding a balance between the two forces the Senegalese government to prevaricate on adoption of the existing migration policy document or formulation of a new document, which embraces the views of local actors such as civil society organisations. The strategies that the government devises as it juggles the divergent interests demonstrate that Senegal's financially weaker position in relation to the EU does not necessarily leave it in a position where it blithely adopts policies at the behest of the EU and IOM. As much as the two influence Senegal's migration choices, the Senegalese government is able to assert its interests by relying on equivocation, instrumentalisation of the migration issue and dithering on enacting a migration policy document with the goal of creating wriggle room for itself. By facilitating the implementation of numerous programmes of interest to the donors, the Senegalese government finds the means to advance its quest for greater security of the country's borders in response to regional security threats without untying its purse strings. The absence of a reference framework in the governance of migration leaves the field open to the multiplication of initiatives aimed at guiding, orienting or influencing the Senegalese government's choices in this field, all the more so as migration has become a field to which the EU directs funding.

Interpreting the Senegal–EU partnership strictly in terms of inequality obscures the complexity of Senegal's strategy, which favours ambiguity, equivocation and pragmatism. This strategy seeks to reconcile the intrinsic tension between containment of “irregular” migration on the one

hand, and the Senegalese government's interest in migration's growing contribution to Senegal's development on the other. In view of this, we conclude by highlighting the following recommendations.

- The Senegal–EU partnership needs to go beyond the interests of the EU funding partner and include Senegal's multi-faceted migration-related challenges. The absence of ownership of the current policy thrust by local civil society actors raises questions as to whether the Senegalese government is accountable to these actors or to the EU. Addressing the question of ownership and accountability calls for inclusion of concerns raised by civil society and other local actors who have criticised the government's approach to migration issues.
- Senegal needs a holistic migration policy, which is not limited to emigration from Senegal and the role of the Senegalese diaspora. Such a policy is imperative if Senegal is to address the concerns of various migrant populations without prioritising some to the detriment of others, as is the case with its current focus on the Senegalese diaspora and exclusion of immigrants and refugees from other West African countries.
- It is imperative for the EU to transform its current approach to “partnerships” to a model in which mutual interest takes precedence over the various actors' agendas. This model would require identification of both partners' interests and co-operation in areas that are mutually beneficial.

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**Dr Mamadou Dimé** is professor of Sociology at Gaston Berger University, Senegal.

Email: [mamadou.dime@ugb.edu.sn](mailto:mamadou.dime@ugb.edu.sn)

**Dr Rose Jaji** is senior researcher in the “Transformation of Political (Dis-)order” programme at the German Institute of Development and Sustainability (IDOS).

Email: [rose.jaji@idos-research.de](mailto:rose.jaji@idos-research.de)

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Tulpenfeld 6, 53113 Bonn

Email: [publications@idos-research.de](mailto:publications@idos-research.de)

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