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BEYOND TRANSACTIONAL DEALS: BUILDING LASTING MIGRATION PARTNERSHIPS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

By Luca Lixi

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Executive Summary

As maritime arrivals rose in Europe during 2015–16, policymakers renewed their focus on improving cooperation between origin, transit, and destination countries to better manage migration along Mediterranean routes. While the last two decades have seen the development of a plethora of bilateral and multilateral partnerships in this region, cooperation on these issues can be challenging—especially amid crisis. Understanding what has and has not worked in the past is thus invaluable to policymakers pursuing such migration partnerships.

This report examines two prominent examples of cooperation in the Mediterranean, in which destination countries (Spain and Italy) sought closer ties with countries of origin (Morocco and Tunisia, respectively). These partnerships emerged in the early 1990s after the introduction of visa requirements for Moroccan and Tunisian nationals led to a spike in irregular flows to Spain and Italy. Over two decades, these bilateral partnerships have illustrated the strengths and weaknesses of this type of cooperation: what can be achieved when countries cooperate on the basis of shared objectives and, conversely, the tradeoffs of focusing solely on short-term, enforcement-based priorities.

While the last two decades have seen the development of a plethora of bilateral and multilateral partnerships in this region, cooperation on these issues can be challenging—especially amid crisis.

In both cases, the partner countries struggled to reconcile their goals and priorities. While Spain and Italy sought to close their borders and step up the return of unauthorised migrants, Morocco and Tunisia—being more interested in how emigration could serve as an outlet for nationals seeking employment and as a source of remittances—resisted the idea of readmitting either their citizens or third-country nationals. Both relationships began with border-control and readmission agreements that were poorly implemented. Though Spain and Italy used aid and investments to try to facilitate the cooperation of their North African partners, Morocco and Tunisia had few incentives to implement agreements that would curtail further migration, potentially alienating their diaspora and resulting in the loss of future remittances.

These poor initial results led Spain to re-evaluate its relationship with Morocco, expanding their cooperation beyond formal readmission agreements to favour an informal approach that made use of tools such as memoranda of understanding (MOUs), letter exchanges, and ad-hoc arrangements to adapt to changing circumstances. The evolution of this partnership was made possible in part by Morocco's slow transformation from a country of origin into a transit and destination country for asylum seekers and labour migrants from countries such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali, Nigeria, and Senegal, many of whom stay in Morocco after either failing to complete or deciding against the increasingly difficult journey to Europe. As a result, Morocco gradually developed an interest in the Spanish offer of financial and technical support to secure Moroccan borders. At the same time, the increasing flow of sub-Saharan migrants into the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla opened up additional avenues for cooperation. Consequently, Spain invested in building the capacity of Moroccan authorities to manage migration, including brokering European Union (EU) support for this endeavour. Seasonal migration programmes were also developed, providing an alternative legal pathway for tens of thousands of Moroccans to find



temporary work abroad and for the Spanish agricultural industry to meet its labour needs, though this programme was later halted during the Spanish economic crisis that began in 2008.

Meanwhile, the decision by Italian and Tunisian policymakers to favour a similarly informal approach to cooperation on migration met with more limited success. Their partnership continued to focus largely on Italian priorities, namely border controls and readmission, with immigration quotas and investments offered as incentives to Tunisia. These short-term arrangements were difficult to implement—Tunisia only furnished one-quarter of the documents Italian authorities requested to facilitate the return of unauthorised Tunisian migrants—and turned migration management into a bargaining chip; when an agreement lapsed, Tunisia would allow departures to increase in order to improve its bargaining position in future negotiations. Italy's external migration policy relied heavily on the willingness of Tunisian President Ben Ali to play ball and control departures. The Arab Spring—and Ben Ali's subsequent expulsion—made clear the shortcomings of this approach. The change in regime left the two countries without a sustainable partnership to manage the flows of asylum seekers arriving in Tunisia from Libya and the surge in maritime migration towards Italy.

Developing common goals that reflect the priorities of both countries is crucial to avoiding a transactional relationship in which one country 'purchases' the cooperation of the other.

These case studies shed light on how, why, and under what conditions policymakers have pursued bilateral partnerships on migration in the Mediterranean region, as well as some of the benefits and tradeoffs of this approach. Developing common goals that reflect the priorities of both countries is crucial to avoiding a transactional relationship in which one country 'purchases' the cooperation of the other through aid and investments—an approach that can quickly crumble in the wake of political or economic developments. Spanish-Moroccan cooperation is often cited as an example of good practice, and this partnership has proven effective in both managing flows along this route and in deepening cooperation on shared priorities. Nonetheless, this cooperation focused on 'pull factors' that drew migrants to Spain (e.g., economic opportunities and ease of migrating) and largely ignored the broader factors driving migration in the region (e.g., poverty and instability). And without a broader regional strategy to address these, stepped-up enforcement along this route simply served to divert flows from Morocco to other North African countries. Moreover, as the 2017 spike in arrivals to Spain demonstrates, even more robust partnerships can be vulnerable to sudden changes in the social, political, and economic systems of countries or regions of origin, with a protest in Northern Morocco being enough to drive up departures.

The experiences of these two migration corridors offer several lessons for policymakers pursuing partnerships to manage migration:

- ***Reconcile the goals and priorities of partner countries, and base cooperation on shared objectives.*** Partnerships rooted in the goals of one partner are unlikely to prove effective or durable. Informal meetings, seminars, and similar collaborative opportunities can provide partner countries a chance to discuss their priorities, develop common goals, and identify the costs and benefits of joint action, all while helping origin and transit countries feel they have more ownership of the partnership. In addition, while the agendas of migration-management partnerships are often set by interior ministries, bringing in the perspectives of other



ministries (e.g., foreign affairs and development) can enable partnerships to address more comprehensively the factors driving migration. Both of these steps can help policymakers avoid creating fragile, transactional relationships in which destination countries buy origin- or transit-country cooperation on issues such as readmission through aid or investments.

- **Build flexibility into migration partnerships.** These case studies illustrate the importance of utilizing informal tools (such as MOUs, letter exchanges, and ad-hoc arrangements), as well as formal channels (such as bilateral agreements), to cooperatively manage migration in a way that can quickly adapt to changing needs. Informal approaches can also secure greater buy-in from partner countries, particularly when migration is highly politicised—though this should not come at the cost of adequate parliamentary and judicial oversight, to prevent misuse.
- **Strengthen the capacity of origin and transit countries to manage migration effectively.** Offering origin and transit countries the technical and/or operational support needed to manage borders, reintegrate returnees, and provide protection to those in need is not only crucial to the successful implementation of these arrangements, but can also ‘risk-proof’ migration partnerships and ensure they can respond quickly to changing circumstances. For instance, if Italy had invested more in building Tunisian capacity to manage migration instead of continuing to pursue transactional deals, the migration that followed changes in North African political systems may have been less dramatic.
- **Address regional migration dynamics.** Any effort to comprehensively manage migration quickly takes on a regional dimension. Increasing enforcement along the Spain-Morocco route, for example, redirected migrant flows rather than stemming them. But while regional consultative fora, such as the Rabat Process, bring countries and key actors together to build trust and coordinate regional responses to migration issues, destination and origin countries alike often favour the expediency of bilateral partnerships. To encourage buy-in, these fora must go beyond destination-country priorities (such as border control and return) and incorporate the migration priorities and issues facing transit or origin countries; doing so can strengthen the engagement of transit and origin countries and increase their willingness to cooperate on the strategic interests of destination countries as well. Ultimately, the best way forward may be for bilateral and regional approaches to complement one another to achieve a broader range of migration-management objectives.

While the deals devised to ‘solve’ problems arising from migration in the Mediterranean are often transactional in nature, these case studies make clear the limitations of this *modus operandi* when faced with the complexities of migration management. Although countries such as Italy continue to be drawn to strategies that play on the comparative advantages of destination countries, namely their financial means, this approach fails to address the medium- and longer-term factors that drive migration. In the absence of a more robust and flexible relationship, partnerships are vulnerable to external shocks that can impact the systems that underlie migration and, thus, may fail in the shorter term as well.

I. Introduction

Following the rise of migration across the Mediterranean in 2015 and 2016, policymakers in Europe have renewed their focus on building cooperation between countries of origin, transit, and destination along these routes to manage migration. Although a wealth of bilateral and multilateral migration partnerships has emerged in this region over the past two decades, cooperation on these issues can be challenging, and especially so in times of crisis. As migrants continue to undertake dangerous journeys across the Mediterranean and policymakers look for effective ways to bring flows under control, it is essential to



understand what has and has not worked when it comes to migration partnerships. Many of the difficulties migration partnerships face have their roots in the divergent priorities of the parties involved, as influenced by their standpoint as origin, transit, or destination countries. These differences have led most partnerships to focus on short-term activities, which can often be done without tackling the formidable task of reconciling partners' core goals. Yet this approach thwarts deeper cooperation on migration management that could, for example, address the underlying drivers of migration. And when these short-term activities reflect the interests of one partner but not the other—such as the destination-country interest in returning unauthorised migrants—this can create a transactional relationship, in which one country 'purchases' the cooperation of the other through investments or aid.

The Spain-Morocco and Italy-Tunisia corridors are two examples of longstanding efforts to cooperate on migration management in the Mediterranean region. In both cases, cooperation dates back to the early 1990s, when Spain and Italy started to attract large numbers of unauthorised Moroccan and Tunisian workers. Initially, this cooperation bore limited results. But after a decade of dead-end negotiations, Spain and Morocco began to work together more closely in the early 2000s, creating a partnership that managed to stem irregular migration along this route (though, in the absence of a wider regional response, this redirected flows through other countries rather than curbing them altogether). Meanwhile, Italy and Tunisia continued to pursue short-term, transactional deals for 15 years, resulting in a fragile partnership and limited impact on the overall capacity of Tunisia to comprehensively govern migration. This left Italy and the Central Mediterranean route vulnerable to political instability and associated fluctuation in migration flows, as demonstrated during the Arab Spring.

As governments seek cooperation on migration management, they face the challenges of reconciling divergent interests and overcoming the asymmetry that can characterise such deals. While daunting, doing so has the potential to yield lasting partnerships and the long-term investments needed to effectively manage migration. This report examines the evolution and varied outcomes of cooperation along the Spain-Morocco and Italy-Tunisia corridors. Drawing on these case studies, it examines the benefits and tradeoffs of such partnerships and offers broad lessons for policymakers pursuing cooperation on migration management, whether at a bilateral or regional level.

II. Cooperation Between Spain and Morocco on Migration

The long history of cooperation between Spain and Morocco on jointly managing migration, beginning in the early 1990s, is often cited as an example of good practice.¹ After Spain introduced visa requirements for Moroccan workers in 1991, migration to Spain became increasingly irregular. Movement from Morocco to Spain was driven by a number of factors, including unemployment and inequality in Morocco and demand in the Spanish agriculture, tourism, and construction industries for low-skilled labour.² Without addressing these pull and push factors, immigration controls simply encouraged migrants to

1 See, for example, *The Economist*, 'Forward Defence: What Other Europeans Can Learn from Spanish Efforts to Limit Illegal Immigration', *The Economist*, 15 October 2015, www.economist.com/news/europe/21674726-what-other-europeans-can-learn-spanish-efforts-limit-illegal-migration-forward-defence.

2 Carmen González Enríquez and Miquel Reynés Ramón, 'Circular Migration between Spain and Morocco: Something More Than Agricultural Work?' (policy brief, European University Institute, METOIKOS Project, Florence, 2011), www.eui.eu/Projects/METOIKOS/Documents/CaseStudies/METOIKOScasestudySpainMorocco.pdf.



find irregular means of entering the country, rather than curbing flows altogether—an outcome that drove Spain to seek Morocco’s help in controlling its borders.

A. Goals of cooperation

Within this context of heightened unauthorised flows, the two countries signed the Treaty of Friendship³ in 1991, setting the groundwork for cooperation on migration by recognising the need to jointly manage the border and to work more closely on security and defence issues. The parameters of this cooperation were further developed in the 1992 Agreement on the Movement of People, the Transit and the Readmission of Foreigners Who Have Entered Illegally.⁴ This agreement set out Spanish priorities on migration—controlling arrivals and establishing return and readmission policies—with little attention paid to the underlying drivers of migration between the two countries. It also largely ignored Morocco’s profoundly different priorities, which at the most basic level included support for the emigration of its citizens as a way to reduce unemployment and boost remittances from its diaspora. These priorities are rooted in the significant benefits Morocco has reaped from emigration over the years. Between 1990 and 2015, remittances comprised between 5 per cent and 7 per cent of Moroccan gross domestic product (GDP), and since 2010, about one-quarter of annual remittances have come from Spain (see Table 1).⁵

Table 1. Remittances to Morocco and as a share of Moroccan GDP, in USD millions, 1990–2015

	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015
Migrant remittances to Morocco	2,010	1,970	2,160	4,589	6,423	7,067
Total remittance share of Moroccan GDP	6.7%	5.0%	5.6%	7.4%	6.9%	7.0%
Migrant remittances from Spain to Morocco	-	-	-	-	1,737	1,741

Sources: World Bank, ‘Migration and Remittances Data—Annual Remittances Data, Inflows’, accessed 19 January 2017, www.worldbank.org/en/topic/migrationremittancesdiasporaissues/brief/migration-remittances-data; World Bank, ‘Migration and Remittances Data—Bilateral Remittances Matrices, 2010–2015’, accessed 19 January 2017, www.worldbank.org/en/topic/migrationremittancesdiasporaissues/brief/migration-remittances-data; World Bank, ‘Country Profile: Morocco’, accessed 19 January 2017, <http://data.worldbank.org/country/morocco>.

Spain and Morocco’s different priorities and understandings of what constituted a fair division of responsibilities frustrated efforts to implement these early agreements.⁶ The focus by Morocco on emigration and maintaining close ties with its diaspora meant it had few incentives to implement agreement provisions on readmission and return.⁷ Morocco was also reluctant to accept the return of third-country nationals who had transited through on the way to Spain, concerned that doing so

3 Government of Spain and Government of Morocco, ‘Treaty of Friendship, Good-Neighbourliness and Cooperation’, 4 July 1991, <https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%201717/volume-1717-I-29862-English.pdf>.

4 Government of Spain and Government of Morocco, ‘Acuerdo entre el Reino de España y el Reino de Marruecos relativo a la circulación de personas, el tránsito y la readmisión de extranjeros entrados ilegalmente’, 13 February 1992, www.boe.es/buscar/doc.php?id=BOE-A-1992-8976.

5 Data presented on remittances are considered very conservative as they only include remittances sent via official channels. For a full discussion of the limitations of remittance data, see Sanket Mohapatra and Dilip Ratha, eds., *Remittance Markets in Africa* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2011), http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTDECPROPECTS/Resources/476882-1157133580628/RMA_FullReport.pdf.

6 Sergio Carrera et al., ‘EU-Morocco Cooperation on Readmission, Borders and Protection: A Model to Follow?’ (CEPS Paper in Liberty and Security in Europe no. 87, Centre for European Policy Studies, Brussels, January 2016), 7, www.ceps.eu/system/files/EU-Morocco%20Cooperation%20Liberty%20and%20Security%20in%20Europe.pdf.

7 Hein de Haas, ‘Morocco: From Emigration Country to Africa’s Migration Passage to Europe’, *Migration Information Source*, 1 October 2005, www.migrationpolicy.org/article/morocco-emigration-country-africas-migration-passage-europe.



could damage relations with its neighbours, to the detriment of its broader foreign policy⁸—a point of disagreement that remains relevant today as it blocks progress towards the ratification of a readmission agreement between the European Union and Morocco.⁹

A decade after the signing of these first agreements, new possibilities emerged for further cooperation on migration issues. Morocco had begun to transform from a source of migrants to a transit country through which sub-Saharan Africans travelled on their way to Europe and, in some cases, even a destination country.¹⁰ These flows, which began in the mid-1990s, contained both asylum seekers and labour migrants from countries such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali, Nigeria, and Senegal.¹¹ As many transit migrants either failed or decided against trying to complete the increasingly difficult journey to Europe, a significant share remained in Morocco. Thus, Morocco slowly became a new (if unintended) immigration destination.¹² This growing immigrant population prompted the country to change its priorities on social and legal issues, such as border control, and to develop an interest in the Spanish offer of financial and technical support in securing Moroccan borders. Moreover, transit migration increased pressure on Spain's North African enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla, leading to new cooperation on managing the border between Morocco and those cities as well.¹³

As a result of these changing migration dynamics, Spanish and Moroccan migration priorities began to converge on police cooperation and border control. But while this laid the groundwork for greater cooperation, most efforts focused on security issues—a reflection of the Spanish Ministry of Interior's goal of deterring migration through Morocco to Spain.¹⁴ This cooperation centred on addressing the immediate migration 'pull factors'—namely, the ease of migration and destination-country opportunities that attracted migrants—but did not extend to the systemic 'push factors' that underpinned migration in the region.

B. Tools of cooperation

After the limited implementation of the first two migration-management agreements, Spain was forced to develop a new approach to cooperation. Embedding its priority (readmission) within a broader migration management strategy, Spanish policymakers hoped to incentivise Moroccan action by addressing their priorities more directly, treating return as a means rather than an end in itself.¹⁵

Informality was the overarching principle that made this new cooperation possible. Spain soon came to realise that it needed to expand its toolkit beyond formal readmission agreements to include other, less

8 This strategic consideration was already present in the agreement itself, which did not allow for the readmission of citizens of the Arab Maghreb Union, and underlined much of its reluctance in implementing the agreement as regards citizens of sub-Saharan countries. Morocco sought closer ties with its sub-Saharan neighbours (especially in West Africa), partly to gain support for its Western Saharan policies. See Carrera et al., 'EU-Morocco Cooperation'.

9 Ibid.

10 de Haas, 'Morocco: From Emigration Country to Africa's Migration Passage to Europe'.

11 Ibid.; Françoise de Bel-Air, 'Migration Profile: Morocco' (policy brief, issue 2016/05, European University Institute, Migration Policy Centre, Florence, April 2016), 3, http://migration4development.org/sites/default/files/mp_morocco.pdf.

12 Hein de Haas, 'Morocco's Migration Transition: Trends, Determinants and Future Scenarios' (Migration and Development Revisited Working Paper no. 3, Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research-WOTRO Science for Global Development, the Hague, March 2005), [http://heindehaas.com/Publications/De%20Haas%202005%20\(MDR%203%20-%20No%2009\)%20Morocco's%20Migration%20Transition%20-%20Trends,%20Determinants%20and%20Future%20Scenarios.pdf](http://heindehaas.com/Publications/De%20Haas%202005%20(MDR%203%20-%20No%2009)%20Morocco's%20Migration%20Transition%20-%20Trends,%20Determinants%20and%20Future%20Scenarios.pdf).

13 Michael Collyer, 'Stranded Migrants and the Fragmented Journey', *Journal of Refugees Studies* 23, no. 3 (September 2010): 273–93.

14 This is in line with a trend that the Prospects for International Migration Governance (MIGPROSP) project has found across migration governance systems in destination countries in North America, South America, Europe, and the Asia-Pacific region. For further analysis of the relationship between understandings of the causes of migration and deterrence measures, see MIGPROSP, 'MIGPROSP Research Briefing' (issue brief, University of Sheffield, Sheffield, September 2016), http://migrationgovernance.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Research-Briefing_FinalVersion12_09_2016.pdf.

15 Carrera et al., 'EU-Morocco Cooperation', 6.



formal avenues, such as letter exchanges, memoranda of understandings (MOUs), and various ad hoc forms of cooperation, such as police cooperation.¹⁶ This flexible approach permitted the two countries to treat cooperation as an ongoing learning process, through which they developed a richer understanding of how each perceived the cost and benefits of joint actions and adapted to changing conditions.

Even a strategy considered successful ... will face external shocks that challenge its ability to curb unauthorised migration entirely.

Now embedded within joint efforts to manage both Moroccan and Spanish borders, cooperation on readmission and return became more widespread and multifaceted. First, Spain invested resources in developing the Integrated External Vigilance System (SIVE), which was implemented in 2002 and uses infrared and radar technology to monitor Spanish territorial coastlines and detect unauthorised migrants.¹⁷ Next, Spain invested in building the capacity of Moroccan authorities to manage migration, with Morocco expressing interest in technology that could help manage its borders.¹⁸ To this end, Spain brokered support at the EU level for grants of 40 million euros in 2004 and another 67 million euros in 2006 to help Morocco step up its border controls.¹⁹ In addition, Spanish-Moroccan police cooperation was promoted via regular meetings of a joint commission that set priorities for migration management as well as other security concerns. Since 2004, the Moroccan Gendarmerie Royal and the Spanish Guardia Civil have operated joint patrols to intercept migrants crossing the border towards Spain without authorisation, allegedly contributing to the 40 per cent reduction in arrivals from Morocco between 2004 and 2005.²⁰ And while arrivals were initially diverted to the Canary Islands, similar efforts there helped reduce arrivals from 32,000 in 2007 to 200 in 2010.²¹ Even as the European migration crisis began to escalate, arrivals in Spain remained low, never reaching more than 8,500 annually between 2010 and 2015.²² Still, it is important to recognise that even a strategy considered successful, as this approach is, will face external shocks that challenge its ability to curb unauthorised migration entirely. In the summer of 2017, for example, a spike in departures from Morocco to Spain led the number of arrivals that year to climb to 9,738 by mid-August, more than the total for all of 2016.²³ This increased in departures was attributed by the Spanish media to escalating protests in the Rif region of Morocco, with violence driving people to leave while also demanding the attention of police who were therefore less present along the Moroccan coasts.²⁴

16 Jean-Pierre Cassarino, 'Informalising Readmission Agreements in the EU Neighbourhood', *The International Spectator* 42, no. 2 (June 2007): 179–96.

17 This first focused on the coast of mainland Spain and was then extended to the Canary Islands. See Jørgen Carling, 'The Merits and Limitations of Spain's High-Tech Border Control', *Migration Information Source*, 7 June 2007, www.migrationpolicy.org/article/merits-and-limitations-spains-high-tech-border-control.

18 Sarah Wolff, *The Mediterranean Dimension of the European Union's Internal Security* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), 139.

19 Myriam Cherti and Peter Grant, *The Myth of Transit: Sub-Saharan Migration in Morocco* (London: Institute for Public Policy Research, 2013), 13, www.ippr.org/files/images/media/files/publication/2013/07/myth-of-transit-morocco-ENG_June2013_11051.pdf.

20 Ibid.

21 *The Economist*, 'Forward Defence'.

22 Frontex, 'Western Mediterranean Route', accessed 18 January 2017, <http://frontex.europa.eu/trends-and-routes/western-mediterranean-route/>.

23 Simon McMahon, 'Is Spain Really Facing a New Migration Crisis?', *The Conversation*, 25 August 2017, <https://theconversation.com/is-spain-really-facing-a-new-migration-crisis-82951>.

24 Ibid. For examples of Spanish coverage of these arrivals, see Lucas de la Cal, 'Marruecos relaja la vigilancia de la frontera con Ceuta al derivar gendarmes al conflicto del Rif', *El Mundo*, 10 August 2017, www.elmundo.es/sociedad/2017/08/10/598b4c29ca4741113f8b4624.html; Ignacio Cembrero 'Cientos de jóvenes del Rif llegan a Andalucía en patera para escapar de la represión', *El Confidencial*, 27 June 2017, www.elconfidencial.com/mundo/2017-06-27/jovenes-rif-huyen-patera-andalucia-escapar-represion_1406076/.



Another area of renewed cooperation and capacity-building was the development of seasonal migration programmes for Moroccan workers in Spain. Because the Spanish agricultural sector has long relied on a low-skilled migrant workforce, such seasonal labour schemes found broad support among local, regional, and national actors (including employers' associations) in both Spain and Morocco. In 2004, 34,000 Moroccan migrants entered Spain under this arrangement, rising to 47,000 in 2008, before the programme was halted following the onset of the Spanish economic crisis.²⁵ At first, Moroccan authorities struggled to manage this programme, with almost 60 per cent of the migrants who participated failing to return home once their seasonal work finished.²⁶ But support from Spanish authorities—ranging from local authorities to employment services—led a range of stakeholders, including Spanish employers, to begin using recruitment platforms managed by the Moroccan employment services, with the result that the programme became more selective and the rate of non-returns dropped to 8 per cent in 2005.²⁷

This bilateral cooperation helped curb migration to Spain,²⁸ but was accompanied by serious tradeoffs. First, the focus on enforcement—but not the drivers of migration—diverted rather than stemmed flows (see Section IV), with migrants making more perilous journeys through the Sahara Desert and from Tunisia and Libya on to Europe. Second, a number of organisations have criticised the Spanish-Moroccan relationship for normalising repressive border-control and policing practices, stressing the need for safeguards to protect migrants' rights.²⁹

*The focus on enforcement—but not the drivers of migration—
diverted rather than stemmed flows.*

Nonetheless, the partnership between Spain and Morocco highlights the importance of developing areas of common interest around which close cooperation can grow. It also illustrates the importance of flexibility: taking advantage of changing conditions in partner countries and the region more broadly can shift priorities and create opportunities for heightened engagement. In this case, broadening cooperation to encompass a wider range of goals allowed the Spanish priorities of return and readmission to remain important—but not the only—focus of the Spanish-Moroccan partnership.

III. Cooperation between Italy and Tunisia on Migration

Though similar in its origins to the Spain-Morocco partnership, cooperation between Italy and Tunisia evolved into a significantly different and more fragile relationship. In the 1980s, Italy became a destination for Tunisian immigrants. Given the proximity of the two countries, the opportunities in Italy's formal and informal labour markets, and the absence of visa requirements for Tunisians, migration tended to be circular, with Tunisian migrants working in Italy for a few months before returning to Tunisia for the

²⁵ González Enríquez and Reynés Ramón, 'Circular Migration between Spain and Morocco'.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Frontex, 'Western Mediterranean Route'.

²⁹ For example, see Amnesty International, *Fear and Fences: Europe's Approach to Keeping Refugees at Bay* (London: Amnesty International, 2015), 11–47, www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur03/2544/2015/en/; Doctors Without Borders, *Violence, Vulnerability and Migration: Trapped at the Gates of Europe* (Barcelona: Doctors Without Borders, 2013), www.doctorswithoutborders.org/sites/usa/files/Trapped_at_the_Gates_of_Europe.pdf.



rest of the year.³⁰ As in Spain, the introduction of visa requirements in 1990 led much of this migration to become irregular—a development that inspired Italy to seek closer cooperation with Tunisia on migration management issues.

A. Goals of cooperation

As in the case of Morocco and Spain, Italian-Tunisian cooperation on migration was impeded by the very different goals and priorities of the partner countries. Beginning in the mid-1990s, the Italian response to increased arrivals from Tunisia focused on increasing border controls and pursuing readmission agreements.³¹ Italian officials often criticised the Tunisian approach to migration management for allowing irregular migrants to depart from its ports. In turn, Tunisian officials were critical of the Italian and European approach to migration policy since the passage in 1985 of the Schengen Agreement, which increased restrictions on Tunisian migration to Europe and ran counter to their own migration objectives.³² After President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali took power in Tunisia in 1987, Tunisian authorities began to view migration as an economic and political ‘safety valve’, encouraging Tunisians to move abroad to increase remittances and reduce unemployment.³³ Between 1990 and 2015, remittances comprised between 3 per cent and 5 per cent of the annual GDP of Tunisia, and since 2010, about 20 per cent of annual remittances have come from Italy (see Table 2).³⁴

Table 2. Remittances to Tunisia and as a share of Tunisian GDP, in USD millions 1990–2015

	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015
Migrant remittances to Tunisia	551	680	796	1,393	2,063	2,347
Total remittance share of Tunisian GDP	4.5%	3.8%	3.7%	4.3%	4.7%	5.5%
Migrant remittances from Italy to Tunisia	-	-	-	-	392	396

Sources: World Bank, ‘Migration and Remittances Data—Annual Remittances Data, Inflows’; World Bank, ‘Migration and Remittances Data—Bilateral Remittances Matrices, 2010-2015’; World Bank, ‘Country Profile: Tunisia’, accessed 19 January 2017, <http://data.worldbank.org/country/tunisia>.

In addition to very different migration priorities, a number of contextual factors further complicated cooperation between Italy and Tunisia: compared to the Spanish-Moroccan corridor, less established ties and a more difficult political landscape meant that the agreements Italy and Tunisia developed focused almost entirely on Italian enforcement aims³⁵ and cooperation remained transactional. Tunisian participation was largely driven by the international political ambitions of President Ben Ali, who viewed cooperation as an opportunity to gain international legitimacy,³⁶ and by the financial incentives Italy offered.

30 Katharina Natter, ‘Revolution and Political Transition in Tunisia: A Migration Game Changer?’ *Migration Information Source*, 28 May 2015, www.migrationpolicy.org/article/revolution-and-political-transition-tunisia-migration-game-changer.

31 Fabrizio Ravelli, ‘Napolitano: via clandestini ma porte aperte agli immigrati’, *La Repubblica*, 15 August 1998, <http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/1998/08/15/napolitano-via-clandestini-ma-porte-aperte-agli.html>.

32 Natter, ‘Revolution and Political Transition in Tunisia’.

33 Ibid.

34 As previously mentioned, remittance data are considered to be very conservative as they only include remittances sent via official channels. See Mohapatra and Ratha, eds., *Remittance Markets in Africa*.

35 Before signing the first agreement in 1998, diplomatic relations between Italy and Tunisia froze repeatedly and developed in a climate of constant tension. For example, one point of tension was the close ties between the Tunisian leader Ben Ali and former Prime Minister of Italy Bettino Craxi who, following his conviction for corruption, sought refuge in Tunisia. See Marco Ansaldo, ‘La Tunisia lancia la sfida alla fortezza Europa’, *La Repubblica*, 2 August 1998, <http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/1998/08/02/la-tunisia-lancia-la-sfida-alla-fortezza.html>.

36 This reflects a general trend in the region, as reported in Cassarino, ‘Informalising Readmission Agreements in the EU Neighbourhood’, 183.



But after 15 years, the Arab Spring and the fall of Ben Ali's regime transformed the context surrounding Tunisian-Italian relations. Italy could no longer count on the international ambitions of the former president to ensure Tunisian cooperation, facing instead a new government that reinforced its attention on Tunisian citizens' 'right to migration' and on strengthening diaspora politics.³⁷ As a result, Tunisian policymakers sought to move cooperation with Italy beyond the narrow focus on police and border control, pushing for a broader agreement that encompassed substantial economic and trade aspects. This shift led to difficult negotiations in 2011 when it came time to renew their cooperative agreement. With departures on the rise in the aftermath of the Tunisian regime change, Italy was forced to acknowledge that to achieve meaningful cooperation on border control, it would need to make important investments to support the Tunisian economy during this transition. Thus while Italian policymakers felt the pressure of 6,333 arrivals in the first two months of 2011,³⁸ border control and readmission only appeared on the agenda in April, after the Italian Foreign Ministry had invested up to 150 million euros³⁹ in, among other things, support for small and medium enterprises and the development of the tourism industry in Tunisia.⁴⁰

B. Tools of cooperation

Like in the evolution of relations between Spain and Morocco, Italy began to favour an informal approach to bilateral relations with Tunisia in the 1990s.⁴¹ Law 40/98 of 1998 gave the Italian Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Internal Affairs the power to ratify informal agreements, MOUs, and exchanges of letters. Using these types of informal agreements without parliamentary scrutiny, Italian policymakers hoped, would accelerate the readmission of third-country nationals by bypassing standard official return procedures.⁴² Ben Ali also welcomed this informality as it allowed Tunisia to engage in sensitive negotiations without bringing them to the attention of its diaspora, who opposed the return of Tunisian nationals.⁴³

In 1998, the first 'Exchange of Notes between Italy and Tunisia Concerning the Entry and Readmission of Irregular Migrants' was signed.⁴⁴ This agreement sought to balance development aid, support for Tunisian police forces, readmission policies, and quotas for the admission of Tunisian workers into Italy (3,000 work permits annually).⁴⁵ In it, Italy also pledged to provide 8 million euros annually in technical and operational

37 Presentation by Imen Houimel, Director-General of International Cooperation on Migration, Government of Tunisia, at the EUROMED Migration IV peer-to-peer meeting in Tunis, 28 October 2016.

38 Valeria Pini, 'Allarme sbarchi, in due mesi superati gli arrivi del 2010', *La Repubblica*, 4 March 2011, www.repubblica.it/solidarieta/immigrazione/2011/03/04/news/allarme_sbarchi_in_due_mesi_superati_gli_arrivi_del_2010-13173496/.

39 Government of Italy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, 'La Cooperazione italiana in Tunisia: sintesi degli interventi', updated 25 March 2011, www.esteri.it/mae/it/sala_stampa/archivionotizie/approfondimenti/2011/03/20110325_cooptun.html.

40 Technical support for border control still featured in this deal, with 100 million euros in support pledged, but this was accompanied by the investment of a record 150 million euros in aid. See Alessio Lana, 'Il patto fantasma', *Lettera 43*, 6 April 2011, www.lettera43.it/it/articoli/politica/2011/04/06/il-patto-fantasma/8618/.

41 Cassarino, 'Informalising Readmission Agreements in the EU Neighbourhood'.

42 Government of Italy, *Disciplina dell'immigrazione e norme sulla condizione dello straniero*, Law No. 40 of 6 March 1998, *Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana* 59 (12 March 1998): Article 9.4, www.gazzettaufficiale.it/atto/serie_generale/caricaDettaglioAtto/originario?atto.dataPubblicazioneGazzetta=1998-03-12&atto.codiceRedazionale=098G0066&elenco30giorni=false. For a discussion of this law, see Fulvio Vassallo Paleologo, 'Accordi di riammissione—Maroni in Tunisia: Come far esplodere l'emergenza Lampedusa e violare lo stato di diritto', *Progetto MeltingPot Europa*, 26 January 2009, www.meltingpot.org/Accordi-di-riammissione-Maroni-in-Tunisia.html.

43 Author conversation with Tunisian ministerial official at the EUROMED Migration IV peer-to-peer meeting in Tunis, 28 October 2016.

44 Government of Italy, 'Scambio di Note tra l'Italia e la Tunisia concernente l'ingresso e la riammissione delle persone in posizione irregolare', *Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana Serie Generale* no.11, Supplemento Ordinario no. 14 (15 January 2000), www.gazzettaufficiale.it/atto/serie_generale/caricaDettaglioAtto/originario?atto.dataPubblicazioneGazzetta=2000-01-15&atto.codiceRedazionale=99A11131&elenco30giorni=false.

45 In an interview, then Italian Minister of the Interior Giorgio Napolitano described how the agreement was 'carefully crafted around balancing aid support, funding to Tunisian police forces, readmission and quotas for Tunisian workers to Italy'. Quoted in Vassallo Paleologo, 'Accordi di riammissione'.



support to combat irregular migration between 1998 and 2000 and 250,000 euros to create detention centres in undisclosed locations within Tunisia to house migrants apprehended.⁴⁶

This agreement proved difficult to implement, however, with Tunisia furnishing only one-quarter of the documents Italian authorities requested to repatriate unauthorised Tunisian migrants.⁴⁷ As soon as this three-year agreement (and Italian financial support) finished in 2001, Tunisia allowed departures from its coasts to increase in an effort to strengthen its bargaining position for the next agreement.⁴⁸ Italy retaliated by cutting the annual work-permit quota for Tunisians from 3,000 to 600 in 2003. Taken together, the limited implementation and rapid deterioration of relations after the expiration of the agreement illustrate the truly transactional and fragile nature of this cooperation.

Yet despite the glaring shortcomings of this approach, what followed was more of the same. When renewing this agreement in 2003, 2009, and 2011, the Italian Interior Ministers (Giuseppe Pisanu, then Roberto Maroni) adhered to the same strategy of short-term arrangements that offer a blend of aid, police trainings, technical equipment, and preferential work permit quotas in exchange for a Tunisian pledge to prevent maritime departures. Because Italy's ministries have generally worked within siloes on migration issues, this strategy strongly reflected the Interior Ministry's focus on migration management.⁴⁹ As a result, these agreements largely treat migration as a security and border control issue, neglecting the factors that drive migrants to cross the Mediterranean and the links between development and migration. The agreements also failed to engage with concerns about linking development assistance to enforcement, which the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation would have been well placed to address.⁵⁰

The limited implementation and rapid deterioration of relations after the expiration of the agreement illustrate the truly transactional and fragile nature of this cooperation.

The Tunisian Revolution of 2011 and the sudden political, social, and security changes it brought further exposed the shortcomings of a short-term, security-focused approach to cooperative migration management. The change in political regimes resulted in a security void and near complete absence of border controls, which sparked a surge in maritime departures toward Italy. In early 2011, Italian authorities reported that 43,000 migrants, including 28,000 Tunisians, had arrived on Italian shores—a significant increase compared to prior years, in which Italy received approximately 19,000 arrivals (including about 1,700 Tunisians) annually.⁵¹ Meanwhile, the uprising in Libya prompted about 171,000 Maghrebi and sub-Saharan asylum seekers to flee to Tunisia.⁵² While some subsequently travelled on to

46 Vassallo Paleologo, 'Accordi di riammissione'.

47 Natter, 'Revolution and Political Transition in Tunisia'.

48 Vassallo Paleologo, 'Accordi di riammissione'.

49 Author interview with official from the Italian Ministry of the Interior, Brussels, July 2016.

50 Another example of how Italian ministries have worked in silos on this issue was the intergovernmental tension that arose during the process of defining the annual immigration quota for 2000, when the Minister of the Interior, backed by the President, confronted the Minister of Labour, stating that the latter's suggested quota of 105,000 labour migrants was not in line with political needs and considerations. See Giovanna Casadio, 'Immigrati, richieste boom: Ne servono altri 105mila', *La Repubblica*, 14 December 2000, <http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2000/12/14/immigrati-richieste-boom-ne-servono-altri-105mila.html>.

51 Natter, 'Revolution and Political Transition in Tunisia'.

52 Government of Italy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, 'La Cooperazione italiana in Tunisia'.



Italy, many remained in Tunisia, placing additional pressure on the authorities that had recently come to power there. Italy was similarly unprepared for this sudden increase in flows and resorted to issuing six-month temporary visas that in practice allowed new arrivals to transit through to other European countries.

Although Italy signed another agreement with Tunisia in April 2011, it was constrained by the fragile nature of their partnership. The fate of this deal was dependant on the willingness of Tunisian authorities to consider departures for Italy both a problem and a priority, while at the same time contending with the arrival across their own southern border of 150,000 people fleeing Libya. In this difficult context, even when readmission was discussed and became part of an agreement, not much time had passed before planes repatriating Tunisian emigrants from Italy were denied authorisation to land in Tunisia.⁵³

Italy had placed all of its eggs in one basket by allowing its external migration policy to hinge on the willingness of the Ben Ali regime to play ball and control departures. Though many actors in the Tunisian migration management field remained in place under the new government, Italy was not well placed to take full advantage of this; over 15 years of cooperation, Italian authorities had never developed strong interinstitutional relations with their Tunisian counterparts. Moreover, the focus on security issues meant that the limited funding available for migration policy went to the Tunisian ministries with enforcement-related portfolios, such as the Ministries of Interior and Defence.⁵⁴ For example, Italy pressured the Tunisian government to pass counter-smuggling legislation, but neglected other aspects of migration policy that could have improved management of the crisis, such as developing a strategy for asylum seeker reception. The result was a purely reactive approach on the part of Italian policymakers, who, however prompt in their mobilisation of resources and aid, could do little to slow the flow of unauthorised migrants from Tunisian shores.⁵⁵

The years following the Arab Spring saw a shift in migration trends from the Maghreb. Initially, unrest in Libya led to a steep drop in departures through 2012; beginning in 2013, however, instability and insecurity prompted the reorganisation of strong smuggling networks. Libya became the main port of departures for migrants attempting the crossing from North Africa to Europe, and crossings along the Central Mediterranean route rose from 40,000 migrants in 2013 to 171,000 in 2014, and even further to 181,000 in 2016.⁵⁶ This increase in crossings from Libya shifted Italy's attention away from Tunisia and led the Italian Interior Minister Minniti in summer 2017 to attempt to strike deals with the various factions that exert power in Libyan territory. Such deals have been rightly criticised for legitimising actors responsible for infringing on the rights of migrants. At the same time, departures from Tunisia have not completely stopped, with smuggling networks continuing to operate within the country.⁵⁷ As one European Commission official noted,⁵⁸ it would be a mistake to consider Tunisia stable and prepared to control its borders should routes shift again to flow primarily through Tunisia. Italy, recognising these facts, continues to pursue cooperation with Tunisia, even while also seeking to partner with other actors in the region.

53 Lettera 43, 'Esplode il caso Tunisia', Lettera 43, 2 April 2011, www.lettera43.it/it/articoli/attualita/2011/04/02/esplode-il-caso-tunisia/8375/.

54 Author conversation with Tunisian ministerial officials, Tunis, 27 October 2016.

55 Frontex, 'Central Mediterranean Route', accessed 18 January 2017, <http://frontex.europa.eu/trends-and-routes/central-mediterranean-route/>.

56 Ibid.

57 Fabio Tonacci, 'La rotta segreta degli scafisti italiani: con loro non rischi di affondare in mare', *La Repubblica*, 18 September 2017, www.repubblica.it/cronaca/2017/09/18/news/la_rotta_segreta_degli_scafisti_italiani_con_loro_non_rischi_di_affondare_in_mare_-175793180/.

58 Author interview with European Commission official, Brussels, 25 July 2017.



Overall, the relationship between Italy and Tunisia offers two key lessons: the importance of (1) defining priorities that reflect the goals of both partners and (2) adjusting the approach taken, particularly by the destination country, in light of policy failures and shortcomings. The absence of both shared goals and flexibility in the Italian-Tunisian partnership became readily apparent during the Arab Spring—a time when more robust cooperation may have helped mitigate instability, mass displacement, and the resulting spike in irregular departures the partnership sought to stem.

IV. The Key Elements and Limitations of Bilateral Cooperation

These case studies shed light on why, how, and under what conditions bilateral migration-management partnerships have emerged in the Mediterranean region. As evidenced by the Spain-Morocco partnership, this type of cooperation is most beneficial when the partner countries identify and pursue a range of shared interests, rather than persistently adhering to the wealthier country's goals and priorities. The latter can lead to a transactional (and often less stable) approach to bilateral migration management, as in the Italy-Tunisia case, in which one partner incentivises the other to cooperate in exchange for aid and other forms of support. This section considers two steps that partners can take to avoid creating a transactional relationship, as well as the potential benefits and limitations of broader regional approaches to migration management.

A. Defining shared goals and building flexibility

Partner countries, as demonstrated in both case studies, often struggle to reconcile divergent goals and priorities. On the one hand, destination countries generally want to close borders and step up readmission efforts, while origin or transit countries are often focused on the benefits of emigration, making readmission an incredibly sensitive subject for many. Initially, Spain and Italy both 'threw money at the problem'⁵⁹—pushing for readmission and increased border control in return for aid, technical support, and favourable immigration quotas—rather than working with their partners to set a more balanced agenda.

While both partnerships experienced the limitations of a strategy that focuses solely on the aims of one party, the differences between their subsequent strategies are instructive. The failures Spain experienced during the implementation of its first two migration management agreements, coupled with Morocco's transformation into a transit and destination country, forced Spanish policymakers to reconsider their enforcement-centred approach to cooperation. As their approach shifted and began to include more informal modes of cooperation, readmission agreements became 'a means to an end'⁶⁰ rather than the ultimate goal of these negotiations, allowing Spain and Morocco to develop a deeper partnership that included Spanish financial and technical support to address Morocco's border control and migration management concerns. Changing migration dynamics meant Morocco was eager to engage if doing so would improve its own border security, and Spain capitalised on this by broadening their relationship at both the local and national level. While Spain and Morocco stopped short of addressing the underlying drivers of migration, this example illustrates the merits of moving away from fixed objectives (e.g., readmission) toward a more flexible strategy around jointly set priorities.

59 Carrera et al., 'EU-Morocco Cooperation', 7.

60 Ibid., 7.



By contrast, cooperation between Italy and Tunisia never moved beyond short-term deals rooted in Italian enforcement priorities. Focusing on border control and readmission—areas of little interest to Tunisia—left Italy heavily reliant on Tunisian interest in promises of technical assistance and aid. Yet even in 2011, when Italian aid reached a reported 150 million euros,⁶¹ official remittances sent from Italy to Tunisia accounted for more than twice this amount. Aid thus did little to sway Tunisia's stance on migration. When partnerships become transactional and cooperation must be bought, as in this case, migration management can quickly become a bargaining chip. By allowing maritime migration from its shores to increase as one short-term deal expired, Tunisia was able to strengthen its position when negotiating the next agreement with Italy and, in doing so, to secure additional aid and support.

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Being able to integrate the aims of both parties and change course as migration dynamics change is thus key. Initially, cooperation yielded meagre results in both case studies, with limited progress on short-term goals (e.g., securing borders, boosting readmission, and/or creating legal migration opportunities) and even less on the longer-term aim of addressing the underlying drivers of migration. And while Spain managed to adjust its approach, Italy did not modify its strategy for nearly 15 years. The reason for the Italian maintenance of this flawed *status quo* likely lies in the highly politicised atmosphere surrounding migration issues, in which policymakers feared changing course and risking unintended consequences, instead favouring agreements that gave the public impression of taking action in defence of their citizens.⁶² Setting an agenda that integrates the priorities of both parties from the outset and ensuring that this agenda can be amended as circumstances change are thus two important steps toward building effective and less volatile migration-management partnerships.

B. The importance and challenges of a regional strategy

Though Spain and Morocco's cooperation is often held up as an example of how bilateralism can successfully slow irregular migration,⁶³ the actions of this partnership were not without adverse consequences. Rather than curbing unauthorised migration altogether, border closures in Morocco simply diverted flows to other North African countries.⁶⁴ Without addressing the underlying drivers of these flows—many of which begin in sub-Saharan Africa—instability, security issues, poverty, and other factors will continue to push migrants north. The fact that migrants from countries such as Mali, Niger, Nigeria, and Senegal now primarily travel through Libya and Tunisia and then, via the Central Mediterranean route,

61 The exact figures of the 2011 agreement Maroni signed with the transitional government that succeeded Ben Ali remain unknown, but various news outlets have reported a 150 million euro investment in economic aid and 100 million euros for technical equipment to improve border control. See Lana, 'Il patto fantasma'; *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, 'Berlusconi e Maroni in Tunisia, 150 milioni per fermare gli sbarchi', *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, 4 April 2011, www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2011/04/04/berlusconi-e-maroni-in-tunisia-150-milioni-per-fermare-gli-sbarchi/102021/.

62 Jean-Pierre Cassarino, 'Accordo Italia-Tunisia, per che fare?' *AffarInternazionali*, 7 April 2011, www.affarinternazionali.it/articolo.asp?ID=1722.

63 See, for example, *The Economist*, 'Forward Defence'.

64 See, for example, Tuesday Reitano, 'Perilous but Profitable Crossing: The Changing Nature of Migrant Smuggling through Sub-Saharan Africa to Europe and EU Migration Policy (2012–2015)', *The European Review of Organized Crime* 2, no. 1 (2014): 1–23, http://sgocnet.org/site/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/1_Tuesday-Reitano_pp1-23.pdf; Martijn Pluim and Veronika Bilger, 'How Closed Borders Detour Migrant Routes' (news release, International Centre for Migration Policy Development, Vienna, 15 March 2016), www.icmpd.org/news-centre/news-detail/qa-how-closed-borders-detour-migrant-routes/.



on to Europe,⁶⁵ shows both the unintended consequences and limitations of bilateral cooperation if not linked to a long-term, regional approach.

Recognition of this need for a regional approach drove the creation of the Euro-African Dialogue on Migration and Development, also known as the Rabat Process, in 2004.⁶⁶ This forum was developed as a regional consultative process that could bring together in an informal setting the many actors involved in migration management in the region. It focuses on four key themes: (1) organising legal migration and mobility; (2) improving border management and combatting irregular migration; (3) strengthening the coordination of migration and development policies; and (4) promoting international protection for migrants in need.⁶⁷

But even with the launch of this comprehensive regional forum, African and European policymakers alike continued to favour direct bilateral arrangements over multilateral processes.⁶⁸ African countries have realised they can get more out of direct bilateral relations, whether with individual EU Member States or with the European Union itself. And as one African Union official noted,⁶⁹ African countries often feel these multilateral processes pivot around the needs and priorities of EU actors, such as managing flows toward Europe, while neglecting the much larger phenomenon of mobility within Africa. Meanwhile, European Member States tend to favour direct bilateral relations they see as easier routes to accomplishing their short-term objectives of border control and return agreements. As a result, multilateral processes such as the Rabat Process struggle to secure and sustain participation, build consensus around common goals, and produce action plans that will be fully implemented. As a European Commission official put it, this divergence between the recognised need for a regional approach and the ability to maintain one is strongly felt by the actors involved, who may doubt the ability of these perennial negotiations to reach shared priorities.⁷⁰ Left with limited state buy-in, efforts to overcome the limitations of bilateral migration-management partnerships by creating a regional governance framework are likely to continue to struggle to deliver results.

V. Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

The Spain-Morocco and Italy-Tunisia corridors demonstrate the starkly different priorities that drive destination and origin or transit countries to seek cooperation on migration, as well as the challenges of forging a meaningful partnership. At the most basic level, destination countries, such as Spain and Italy, are typically interested in curbing migration through stepped-up border control and readmission, whilst origin and transit countries, such as Morocco and Tunisia, seek to maximise remittances and ease

65 International Organisation for Migration (IOM) data presented in European Commission, 'Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council and the Council: First Progress Report on the Partnership Framework with Third Countries under the European Agenda on Migration' (COM [2016] 700 final, 18 October 2016), https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/com_2016_700_f1_communication_from_commission_to_inst_en_v8_p1_english.pdf.

66 As of August 2017, 57 African and European countries participated in the Rabat Process (including Italy, Morocco, Spain, and Tunisia), alongside the European Commission and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), with other observer organisations including Frontex and several United Nations agencies. See IOM, 'Euro-African Dialogue on Migration and Development (Rabat Process)', accessed 23 August 2017, www.iom.int/euro-african-dialogue-migration-and-development-rabat-process.

67 For further information of the working programme of the Rabat Process, see the Rabat Process, 'Third Euro-African Ministerial Conference on Migration and Development—Dakar Strategy' 23 November 2011, https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-is-new/news/pdf/dakar_strategy_ministerial_declaration_migration_and_development_en.pdf; Rabat Process, 'Declaration de Rome,' 27 November 2014, http://italia2014.eu/media/3775/fr_declaration_prog_rome_final_27_11_2014.pdf.

68 Author interview with IOM official, Brussels, 12 July 2016.

69 Author interview with African Union official, Brussels, 27 September 2016.

70 Author interview with European Commission official, Brussels, 22 June 2016.



domestic economic and political pressures by facilitating emigration. These four countries' experiences with bilateral cooperation may prove instructive to policymakers pursuing migration-management partnerships—both in the Mediterranean region and elsewhere.

A common criticism of bilateral and regional migration partnerships is their tendency to focus on destination-country priorities.

A. Reconciling goals and priorities for migration management

A common criticism of bilateral and regional migration partnerships is their tendency to focus on destination-country priorities, such as border management and returns. In both case studies, the partner countries struggled to reconcile their goals and priorities on migration management. Destination countries Spain and Italy viewed migration through the lens of pull factors, such as the ease of crossing borders and the draw of jobs, which led to a narrow focus on deterring migration through enforcement.⁷¹ Such an approach neglects the underlying social, economic, political, and environmental drivers of migration—and prevents the development of a long-term strategy that addresses migration's true complexity. In turn, by focusing solely on destination-country priorities, such as border enforcement, partner third countries end up directing their (sometimes scarce) resources toward these measures, even if they are not in line with their own strategic priorities.⁷² The following steps can help create a more balanced migration-management strategy:

- ***Destination countries should integrate the expertise of different ministries when setting their migration agenda.*** Establishing a cross-ministry working group to share the perspectives of different ministries (e.g., development and foreign affairs) can help steer and expand government priorities on migration. These discussions could be supported and strengthened by efforts to improve the collection and sharing of information across ministries, including both statistical data on border crossings and interceptions and more qualitative analysis of the drivers of migration.
- ***Create opportunities for partner countries to discuss their migration priorities and develop common goals.*** One way to reconcile divergent priorities is to hold a series of informal technical workshops and high-level meetings at which partner countries can discuss their goals and the perceived costs and benefits of joint action.⁷³ These discussions can build trust between partners and help origin or transit countries feel greater ownership over the jointly agreed objectives.

B. Building flexibility into migration partnerships

The case studies this report explores highlight the need to 'risk proof' migration partnerships by ensuring they can respond quickly to changing circumstances. The Italy-Tunisia partnership especially illustrates

71 MIGPROSP, 'MIGPROSP Research Briefing'.

72 For example, in discussions with the author in [2016], various Tunisian ministerial officials described how despite Tunisia's strategic priorities being emigration and maximising the benefits of remittances for development and growth, not enough resources were allocated to realise this goal. See author conversation with Tunisian ministerial officials, Tunis, 27 and 28 October 2016.

73 MIGPROSP, 'MIGPROSP Research Briefing'.



the dangers of relying on the same, unsuccessful measures time and again. To create partnerships that can quickly adapt to rapidly changing contexts, policymakers should seek to:

- **Strike a balance between formal and informal channels of cooperation.** Keeping partnerships flexible and utilising informal, as well as formal, channels to cooperate can broaden the array of tools in partners' policymaking toolkits. Spain and Morocco's use of less formal avenues, such as MOUs, letter exchanges, and ad hoc arrangements (e.g., police cooperation), expanded their cooperation far beyond formal readmission agreements and allowed them to tailor their approach when circumstances changed. The use of informal tools can also result in greater buy-in from origin- and transit-country partners (particularly when migration is highly politicised)—but, of course, this must not come at the cost of adequate parliamentary or judicial oversight to prevent misuse.

C. **Moving away from a transactional approach to cooperation**

Partnerships that focus exclusively on the enforcement priorities of destination countries risk becoming transactional relationships, in which destination countries simply 'buy' the cooperation of their partners with aid or investment. As the Spain-Morocco and Italy-Tunisia cases show, this *modus operandi* leaves partnerships fragile and without a comprehensive medium- to long-term strategy for managing migration. Perversely, it can also create incentives for origin or transit countries to suddenly allow unauthorised flows to increase in order to get more out of negotiations. To build partnerships that are more meaningful and less transactional, policymakers must take several steps:

- **Avoid making return and readmission the starting point for cooperation.** Launching a partnership with a narrow focus on return and readmission risks poisoning the well and impeding deeper cooperation. Instead, countries should begin by pursuing broad cooperation on less controversial issues, building up to eventually include returns as one dimension of this relationship. Such was the case for Spain and Morocco who, after experiencing the limitations of a readmission-focused partnership, broadened their cooperation to include other priorities (e.g., building the capacity of the Moroccan police and coastal guard), though returns eventually became an important component of this cooperation. While standard operating procedures (SOPs) on return might not be agreed and implemented in the short term, this is often a necessary tradeoff for ensuring lasting, deeper cooperation. Within a flexible and informal approach to cooperation, returns may be effectively carried out on an ad hoc basis through adaptable agreements that avoid triggering the political tensions that surround the issue in many origin and transit countries.
- **Build the capacity of origin or transit countries to help them manage migration effectively.** By strengthening the capacity of origin or transit countries to manage migration, partners can help them meet both the objectives set out for the cooperation and the national priorities that act as added incentives to engage. Capacity building efforts may focus on border enforcement, humanitarian protection, diaspora engagement, or the development of interinstitutional channels to improve the governance of migration. Doing so can make third countries less susceptible to shocks that affect migration flows in unstable regions by strengthening capacity to deal with problems proactively, rather than relying on the development of reactive support systems following the outbreak of crises.
- **Address regional migration dynamics.** Migration management quickly takes on a regional dimension, as evidenced by the redirection (rather than cessation) of flows following increased enforcement along the Spain-Morocco route. Regional consultative processes such as the Rabat Process offer a forum for countries and key actors to come together, build



trust, and coordinate regional responses to shared migration issues.⁷⁴ Yet if these fora focus narrowly on destination-country enforcement priorities, such as border control and return, origin and transit countries may see few reasons to engage. To encourage buy-in, these fora must go beyond European enforcement priorities, such as border control and return, and incorporate the migration priorities and issues facing their African partners.⁷⁵

While policymakers have repeatedly devised transactional deals to ‘solve’ the problems arising from migration in the Mediterranean, these case studies show the limitations of this approach to migration management. Yet, such deals are often seen as the best possible means of achieving short-term objectives. This seemingly simple strategy, while it may reap political gains, fails to take stock of the lessons of the past two decades. As policymakers (re)negotiate agreements to collaboratively address migration in the Mediterranean, it will be essential that they look past short-term internal political pressures to acknowledge the importance of more long-term measures that build partner capacity and address the broad spectrum of factors that drive migration. It is in doing so that partnerships will be best equipped to handle unpredictable shocks in the future.

As policymakers (re)negotiate agreements to collaboratively address migration in the Mediterranean, it will be essential that they look past short-term internal political pressures.

74 In addition to the Rabat Process, other regional consultative processes have been created between European and African countries, such as the Khartoum Process between origin, transit, and destination countries along the route between the Horn of Africa and Europe, and the 2015 Valletta Summit between EU and African leaders that resulted in a Joint Action Plan. See IOM, ‘EU-Horn of Africa Migration Route Initiative (Khartoum Process)’, accessed 23 August 2017, www.iom.int/eu-horn-africa-migration-route-initiative-khartoum-process; European Council, ‘Valletta Summit on Migration, 11–12 November 2015—Action Plan and Political Declaration’ (press release, Valletta, Malta, 12 November 2015), www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2015/11/12-valletta-final-docs/.

75 African countries themselves face very significant migration management problems which they would like such processes to reflect. For example, at the end of 2016 Uganda hosted 941,000 refugees, Ethiopia hosted 792,000, the Democratic Republic of the Congo hosted 452,000, Kenya hosted 451,000, and Sudan hosted 421,000. Meanwhile, a number of African countries host substantial populations of internally displaced people (IDPs); at the end of 2016, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nigeria, and Sudan each hosted 2.2 million IDPs; South Sudan hosted 1.9 million; and Somalia hosted 1.6 million. For more information, see United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2016* (Geneva: UNHCR, 2017), Annex Table 1, www.unhcr.org/5943e8a34.



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