



‘You’re Not Welcome Here’: How Europe Is Paying Millions to Stop Migration From Africa

By Claudio Butticè



It is a known fact that Europe has been struggling with a serious migrant crisis in the last ten years. What is less known is that the ghost of a tremendous accusation is hovering over the plans established by the European authorities to contain the apparently unstoppable flow of immigrants. [According to some sources](#), the funds that have been allocated to control the migratory flows have been diverted to support paramilitary forces or other nefarious organisations involved in human trafficking.

These forces allegedly act as a buffer that prevent people from reaching Europe by all means (even the most violent ones) rather than addressing the root causes of irregular migration. The European Union (EU) authorities denied all the accusations, and even suspended some of these funds, a move that has been seen by some as an admission of guilt. Although cutting the proverbial Gordian knot and finding the truth may be impossible right now, let's try to clarify what is happening today by providing a better overview of the current scenario.

Europe and the 2015 migrant crisis

Every year, hundreds of thousands of displaced people and refugees from Africa, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East flee complex emergencies, natural disasters, and wars. They join the already immense river of humans who try to escape poverty and desperation by immigrating to the Old Continent. The reasons for this huge flow of humans are many, ranging from the recent political turbulence following the Arab Spring, to the evolution of the many conflict theatres and the harsh consequences of climate change.

Even if a solution could be found to stop each one of these different scenarios, it would require many years before it could bring any tangible change or impact. A lot of rhetoric ensued until a huge divide [split the cacophonous political debate into two entrenched factions](#) whose opinions cannot seem to be reconciled anytime soon. For some, these people are an invaluable resource that can rejuvenate a dying continent suffering from a chronic lack of a fresh young unspecialised workforce. For others, [they are just parasites](#) who can undermine the very roots of the Christian-based European culture, endangering the entire social fabric of a society that has based its wealth upon slavery, colonialism, and the exploitation of people for centuries.

However, an indisputable problem still had to be dealt with – the number of irregular immigrants reaching Europe was way too high to be managed. [With over 2 million illegal crossings](#) detected between 2015 and 2016, it was clear that the old containment policies were desperately failing in so many ways that they held no water whatsoever. Extremist and right wing political forces took advantage of this crisis to pull the whole continent into a populist drift, with racism and segregation running rampant to fuel hate, fear, and ancient religious rivalries. For the first time in decades, the European Union (EU) was facing the risk of having to deal with a widespread social crisis that could destabilise the entire political and economic asset. A plan that could address the different root causes of these never-ending migratory flows could hardly be imagined.

But the EU authorities had to find a rapid solution. They didn't have the time (nor the interest) to tackle the reasons why these people were desperate and poor. Rather than caring about the lives of these masses of destitute individuals who were immigrating to Europe, they decided to stop them in their tracks before they could cross the borders. To put it bluntly, desperate and poor people from Africa, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East were still left desperate and poor – they only had to be desperate and poor *somewhere else*.

Turning a blind eye to the massive human crisis

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In a nutshell, the overall plan was quite simple: the EU authorities would ask other countries to “keep the migrants away” while they turned a blind eye on the methods used to achieve this goal. In theory, they were distributing hefty amounts of money to African and Middle Eastern countries to counter “*human trafficking and smuggling*” by breaking their “*business model*” in order to “*offer migrants an alternative to putting their lives at risk*”. In practice, these funds often [ended in the hands of unscrupulous militia forces](#) and shady organisations that prevented the most vulnerable people from reaching the borders of the EU member states with any means necessary – including the most inhumane ones.

One of the most important steps of this plan to “contain irregular migrants” was making arrangements with Turkey and Libya to prevent refugees from reaching the Old Continent's borders

by blocking all their land or sea routes. On top of that, whenever a migrant was caught crossing the Mediterranean to the nearby Greek islands, Spain or Italy, he or she would be sent back to Turkey or Libya to be “temporarily” locked in some prison. But the scenario that originated from these pacts was less than ideal at best, and eventually forced thousands of refugees to endure months of detainment in inhumane conditions in dilapidated detention centres.

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Several organisations, such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the United Nations Human Rights Council, and the European Council on Refugees and Exiles have already denounced the “degrading” conditions suffered by the detainees in Libya. Men and women are raped, abused, and beaten on a daily basis; some have spent months or years locked up. People are exposed to contagious diseases, such as tuberculosis, and often die from sickness, malnourishment, or neglect while in detention. The UNHRC went so far as to determine that the conditions in some of these detention centers [may even “amount to torture”](#).

Despite being fully aware of the inhuman conditions faced by these migrants, the EU keeps contributing to this massive process of human exploitation in many ways. The Libyan authorities have been provided with the necessary funds and resources to intercept men, women, and children at sea. Italy donated several patrol boats to the Libyan coastguard and the training required to operate them as efficiently as possible [during Operation Sophia](#). Even the Visegrad Group countries (Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic) provided an additional 35 million euros on top of the 10 million handed over by the EU. It comes as no surprise since their borders are constantly under the pressure of the thousands of immigrants who hope to escape poverty and find a chance for a better life.

One word - *interception* - has become the answer to the whole migrant crisis rather than *reception*. What happens to these people once they are stopped from reaching the borders of the richer First World countries doesn't matter anymore. One may wonder whether this choice was just the result of a somewhat short-sighted strategy that only cared about reducing the death toll of people drowning in the Mediterranean sea. Maybe it is a component of a more complex (and inhumane) plan of externalising border control to Northern African countries. A strategy to keep poor people from *escaping* the poor countries where they live.

The Khartoum Process

Another action taken by the EU to stem the number of people reaching their coasts and borders was establishing the so-called “Khartoum Process”. Amidst the 2015 crisis, African and European leaders met in Malta during the Valletta Summit on Migration to discuss a common plan to address the problem. After the summit was over, the EU agreed to provide the African countries who accepted to help out in the crisis with an [Emergency Trust Fund](#) that was worth billions of euros. The fund was set up “*to foster stability and to contribute to better migration management, including by addressing the root causes of destabilisation, forced displacement and irregular migration.*”

Many projects eventually fell under the banner of the Emergency Trust Fund, such as the Operation Sophia mentioned above, as well as the less known but no [less opaque Khartoum Process](#). Once again, this initiative consists of a series of financial incentives provided by the EU member states to African countries who can help in the fight against human trafficking and people smuggling. The

only difference is that these funds are provided to prevent exploitation along the migration route between the Horn of Africa and Europe. The countries involved include Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan, South, Sudan, Uganda, and Tanzania.

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Sudan, in particular, has been used as a buffer zone to exert effective extraterritorial control of the migration routes used by people who want to reach Europe from across Africa. Just like Italy did with Libya, Germany started a project to train Sudanese police officers and border guards, and an intelligence centre was founded in the capital Khartoum.

So, why did [the EU announced the suspension of these projects](#) in July, some of which were halted at least since March?

This time, some Sudanese and Eritrean rights groups accused Donald Tusk, the president of the European Council, of cooperating with "*regimes and militia forces that are entirely unaccountable*" and are "*known for systematic abuses*". The funds have been, in fact, used to deploy the infamous Rapid Support Forces (RSF) - the heirs of the brutal Janjaweed led by Mohamed Hamdan "Hemeti" Dagolo. We already talked about [the violence that the Janjaweed unleashed upon Sudanese civilians](#) during the recent uprising, as well as the war crimes and genocide they committed in Darfur back in 2003. The RSF fighters found their own solution to stop migrants - they tortured them, forced them to pay bribes, and in some instances, even smuggled them (possibly if they paid enough).

So, in a nutshell, the EU paid smugglers to stop human smuggling and traffic - and they were fully aware of that. It was even noted that the RSF could divert resources "*for repressive aims*". Just like in Libya and Turkey, Europe knew what was happening, but preferred to simply look the other way.

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Even if the project is now suspended, and the EU maintains that the RSF forces have never been funded or equipped, the Sudanese police received training and significant financial resources (40 million euros). This is the same Sudanese police that brutally repressed the pro-democracy, anti-government demonstrators during the last months of protest. Once again, all the projects that fall under the Khartoum Process umbrella do not address any of the "root causes" of uncontrolled migration and human trafficking. Without going so far as to say these projects are a true travesty, it can't be denied that right now they're nothing but extraterritorial disguised control of the borders.

Not my brother's keeper

Today, Europe is simply turning a blind eye to one of the largest humanitarian crisis of this century. But hoping that desperate people will bring their misfortune somewhere else is not just a cowardly policy, it is a downright cruel choice made by people with no traces of humanity. It is highly hypocritical for Western countries to claim that they want to address the "root causes" of the tremendous strife that brings so many people to leave their homelands. In fact, most of these "root causes" originate from the endless exploitation of lands and resources of the Global South that

seemingly sustains the whole capitalist system. In fact, when over 37,000 people are being forced to flee their homes every day, it doesn't look like the situation has improved in any way. Today, the developed countries host just 16 per cent of these refugees, while the vast majority of them are found in Turkey, Pakistan, Uganda, and Sudan.

When the Roman Empire had to deal with the massive migrations that occurred during the fourth century A.C., the Emperors simply preferred to close their borders, leaving countless displaced people to die of sickness and starvation in front of their doors. Open revolt ensued, however, when those masses of destitute people became so desperate as to kill Emperor Valen, eventually causing the fall of the entire Roman Empire.

History teaches us that everything that happened once may happen again - especially if so many people are driven up the wall for so long.

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