

# How Europe Outsourced Border Enforcement to Africa

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**The European Union is militarizing Africa's internal borders to curb migration, with little regard for human rights.**

When Cornelia Ernst and her delegation arrived at the Rosso border station on a scorching February day, it wasn't the bustling artisanal marketplace, the thick smog from trucks waiting to cross, or the vibrantly painted pirogues bobbing in the Senegal River that caught their eye. It was the slender black briefcase on the table before the station chief. When the official unlatched the hard plastic carrier, proudly unveiling dozens of cables meticulously arranged beside a touchscreen tablet, soft gasps filled the room.

Called the Universal Forensic Extraction Device (UFED), the machine is a data-extraction tool capable of retrieving call logs, photos, GPS locations and WhatsApp messages from any phone. Manufactured by the Israeli company Cellebrite, renowned for its phone-cracking software, the UFED has primarily been marketed to global law enforcement agencies, [including the FBI](#), to combat terrorism and drug trafficking. In recent years it's also gained infamy after countries like Nigeria and Bahrain used it to pry data from the phones of political dissidents, human rights activists and journalists.

Now, however, a UFED had found its way to the border guards stationed at the crossing between Rosso, Senegal, and Rosso, Mauritania, two towns with the same name along the winding river that divides the countries, and a crucial waypoint on the land migration route to North Africa. In Rosso, the technology is being used not to catch drug smugglers or militants, but to track West Africans suspected of trying to migrate to Europe. And the UFED is just one troubling tool in a larger arsenal of cutting-edge technologies used to regulate movement in the region — all of it there, Ernst knew, thanks to the European Union technocrats she works with.

As a German member of the European Parliament (MEP), Ernst had left Brussels to embark on a fact-finding mission in West Africa, accompanied by her Dutch counterpart, Tineke Strik, and a team of assistants. As members of the Parliament's Left and Green parties, Ernst and Strik were among a tiny minority of MEPs concerned about how EU migration policies threaten to erode the EU's very foundation— namely, its professed respect for fundamental human rights, both within and outside of Europe.

The Rosso station was part of those policies, housing a recently opened branch of the National Division for the Fight Against Migrant Trafficking and Related Practices (DNLТ), a joint operational partnership between Senegal and the EU to train and equip Senegalese border police in hopes of stopping migration to Europe before migrants ever get close. Thanks to funding by EU taxpayers, Senegal has built at least nine border posts and four regional DNLТ branches since 2018, supplied with invasive surveillance technologies that, besides the black briefcase, include biometric fingerprinting and facial recognition software, drones, digital servers, night-vision goggles and

more. (A spokesperson for the European Commission, the EU's executive body, noted in a statement that the DNLIT branches were created by Senegal and the EU only funds their equipment and training.)

Ernst worried that such tools could violate the fundamental rights of people on the move. The Senegalese officials, she recalled, had seemed "very enthusiastic about the equipment they received and how it helps them track people," which left her concerned about how that technology might be used.

Ernst and Strik also worried about a controversial new policy the Commission had begun pursuing in mid-2022: negotiating with Senegal and Mauritania to allow the deployment of personnel from Frontex, the EU border and coast guard agency, to patrol land and sea borders in both countries, in an effort to curb African migration.

With a budget nearing \$1 billion, Frontex is the EU's best-funded government agency. For the past five years, it's been mired in [controversy](#) following repeated investigations — by the EU, the United Nations, journalists and nonprofits — that found the agency violated the safety and rights of migrants crossing the Mediterranean, including by helping Libya's EU-funded coast guard send hundreds of thousands of migrants back to be detained in Libya under conditions that amounted to torture and sexual slavery. In 2022, the agency's director, Fabrice Leggeri, was forced out over a mountain of scandals, including covering up similar "pushback" deportations, which force migrants back across the border before they can apply for asylum.

While Frontex has long had an informal presence in Senegal, Mauritania and six other West African countries — by helping transfer migration data from host countries to the EU — Frontex guards have never been permanently stationed outside of Europe before. But now the EU hopes to extend Frontex's reach far beyond its territory, into sovereign African nations Europe once colonized, with no oversight mechanisms to safeguard against abuse. Initially, the EU even proposed granting immunity from prosecution to Frontex staff in West Africa.

The potential for problems seemed obvious. The day before Ernst and Strik traveled to Rosso, they'd listened to stark warnings from civil society groups in Senegal's capital city of Dakar. "Frontex is a risk for human dignity and African identity," one advocate, Fatou Faye from the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, a progressive policy nonprofit, told them. "Frontex is militarizing the Mediterranean," agreed Saliou Diouf, founder of Boza Fii, a migrant advocacy group. If Frontex is stationed at African borders, he said, "It's over."

The programs are part of a broader EU migration strategy of "border externalization," as the practice is called in eurospeak. The idea is to increasingly outsource European border control by partnering with African governments, extending EU jurisdiction deep into the countries from which many migrants come. The strategy is multifaceted, including the distribution of high-tech surveillance equipment, police trainings and development programs — or at least the illusion of them — that claim to address the root causes of migration.

In 2016, the EU designated Senegal, both a migration origin and transit country, as one of its five priority partner nations in addressing African migration. But in total 26 African countries have received taxpayer euros aimed at curbing migration through more than 400 discrete projects. Between 2015 and 2021, the EU invested \$5.5 billion in such projects, with more than 80% of the funds coming from developmental and humanitarian aid coffers. In Senegal alone, according to a report from the German Heinrich Böll Foundation, the bloc invested at least \$320 million since 2005.

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ensure it won't be used to target others, such as civil society or political actors."

These investments carry significant risks, since it appears the European Commission does not always conduct human rights impact assessments before unleashing them on countries that, as Strik notes, often lack democratic safeguards to ensure the technology or policing strategies aren't misused. To the contrary, the EU's suite of African anti-migration efforts amount to techno-political experiments: equipping authoritarian governments with repressive tools that can be used on migrants, and many others as well.

"If the police have this technology at their disposal to track migrants," explains Ousmane Diallo, a researcher with Amnesty International's West Africa bureau, "there is nothing to ensure it won't be used to target others, such as civil society or political actors."

Over the past year, I have trekked through Senegal's border towns, spoken with dozens of people and sifted through hundreds of public and leaked documents to piece together the impact of EU migration investments in this key country. What has emerged is a complex web of initiatives that do little to address the reasons people migrate — but a lot to erode fundamental rights, national sovereignty and local economies in African countries that have become EU policy labs.

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The EU's frenzy to halt migration can be traced to the 2015 migration surge, when [more than one million](#) asylum-seekers from the Middle East and Africa — fleeing conflict, violence and poverty — arrived on Europe's shores. The so-called migrant crisis triggered a rightward shift in Europe, with populist leaders exploiting fears to frame it as both a security and existential threat, bolstering xenophobic, nationalist parties.

But the peak of migration from West African countries like Senegal came well before 2015: In 2006, more than 31,700 migrants arrived on boats in the Canary Islands, a Spanish territory 60 miles from Morocco. The influx caught Spain's government off guard, prompting a joint operation with Frontex, dubbed "Operation Hera," to patrol the African coast and intercept boats heading toward Europe.

Centuries ago, the very borders now being fortified by EU demand were drawn by European empires negotiating among themselves in the rush to plunder African resources.

Operation Hera, which civil liberties nonprofit Statewatch described as "opaque and unaccountable," marked the first (though temporary) Frontex deployment outside EU territory — the first sign of externalizing European borders to Africa since the end of colonialism in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. While Frontex left Senegal in 2018, the Spanish Guardia Civil remains to this day, continuing to patrol the coast and even carrying out airport passport checks to stop irregular migration.

It wasn't until 2015's "migrant crisis," however, that EU bureaucrats in Brussels adopted a blunter strategy by dedicating funds to stem migration at the source. They created the "European Union Emergency Trust Fund for stability and addressing root causes of irregular migration and displaced persons in Africa," or EUTF for short.

While the name sounds benevolent, it's the EUTF that's responsible for the Rosso border station's black briefcase, drone and night-vision goggles. The fund has also been used to send European bureaucrats and consultants across Africa to lobby governments to draft new migration policies — policies that, as one anonymous EUTF consultant told me, are frequently "copy-pasted

from country to country” without regard for the unique circumstances faced by each.

“The EU is forcing Senegal to adopt policies that have nothing to do with us,” Senegalese migration researcher Fatou Faye told Ernst and Strik.

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But European aid serves as a powerful incentive, says Leonie Jegen, a University of Amsterdam researcher who studies EU influence on Senegal’s migration governance. Such funds, she says, have led Senegal to reform its institutions and legal frameworks along European lines, reproducing “Eurocentric policy categories” that stigmatize and even criminalize regional mobility. All of it, Jegen notes, comes wrapped in the underlying suggestion that “improvement and modernity” are things “being brought from the outside” — a suggestion reminiscent of Senegal’s colonial past.

Centuries ago, the very borders now being fortified by EU demand were drawn by European empires negotiating among themselves in the rush to plunder African resources. Germany seized swaths of West and Eastern Africa; the Netherlands staked its claim in South Africa; the British captured a belt of land spanning from north to south in the eastern part of the continent; and French colonies stretched from Morocco to the Republic of the Congo, including present-day Senegal, which gained independence just 63 years ago.

Outsourcing border control to migration-origin countries isn’t totally unique. The past three U.S. presidential administrations have [provided Mexico with millions of dollars](#) to stop Central and South American refugees from reaching the U.S. border, and the Biden administration has announced it will build regional centers in Latin America where people can apply for asylum, effectively extending U.S. border control thousands of miles beyond its physical limits.

But Europe’s efforts to externalize border enforcement to Africa is by far the most ambitious and well-funded of the experiments worldwide.

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I arrived at the dusty checkpoint in the village of Moussala, on Senegal’s border with Mali, at noon on a sweltering early March day. As a main transit point, dozens of trucks and motorcycles were lined up, waiting to cross. After months of ultimately fruitless efforts to get government permission to access the border posts directly, I was hoping the station’s chief would tell me how EU funding is shaping their operation. The chief refused to go into detail, but confirmed they’d recently received EU training and equipment, which they regularly use. A small diploma and trophy from the training, both emblazoned with the EU flag, sat on his desk as proof.

The creation and equipping of border posts like Moussala has also been an important element in the EU’s partnership with the UN’s International Organization for Migration (IOM). Besides the surveillance tech the DNL branches receive, migration data analysis systems have also been installed at each post, along with biometric fingerprinting and facial recognition systems. The stated aim is to create what eurocrats call an African IBM system: Integrated Border Management. In a 2017 statement, IOM’s project coordinator in Senegal loftily declared that “IBM is more than a simple concept; it is a culture,” by which he apparently meant a continent-wide ideological shift toward embracing the EU’s perspective on migration.

In more practical terms, the IBM system means merging Senegalese databases (containing sensitive biometric data) with data from international police agencies (such as Interpol and Europol), allowing governments to know who’s crossed which borders and when. That’s something, experts warn, that

can easily facilitate deportations and other abuses.

The prospect isn't abstract. In 2022, a former Spanish intelligence agent told Spanish newspaper *El Confidencial* that local authorities in different African countries "use the technology provided by Spain to persecute and repress opposition groups, activists and citizens critical of power," and that the Spanish government was well aware.

A European Commission spokesperson claimed that "All security projects funded by the EU have a training and capacity building component on human rights" and that the bloc conducts human rights impact assessments prior to and during the implementation of all such projects. But when Dutch MEP Tineke Strik asked for those assessment reports earlier this year, she received official responses from three separate Commission departments saying they did not have them. One response read: "There is no regulatory requirement to do so."

In Senegal, where civil liberties are increasingly at risk, the threat of surveillance technology being misused is amplified. In 2021, Senegal's security forces [killed 14 anti-government protesters](#); in the past two years, several Senegalese opposition politicians and journalists have been jailed for criticizing the government, reporting on politically sensitive issues or "spreading fake news." Many feared that in 2024 current President Macky Sall intended to seek reelection for an unconstitutional third term. In June, Sall's main opponent was sentenced to two years in jail on charges of "corrupting the youth." The sentence set off nationwide protests that left 23 people dead in its first few days and saw the government restrict internet access. Sall finally announced in July that he won't be seeking reelection, restoring stability throughout the country, but not dispelling fears among its citizens that their government is becoming increasingly authoritarian. And in that context, many worry the tools the country is receiving from the EU will only make things worse at home, while doing nothing to stop migration.

Just as I was about to give up trying to talk with local police, an undercover immigration officer in Tambacounda, another transit hub that sits between the Malian and Guinean borders, agreed to speak under condition of anonymity. Tambacounda is one of Senegal's poorest regions and the source of most of its outbound migration. Everyone there, including the officer, knows someone who's tried to leave for Europe.

"The EU can't just solve things by raising walls and throwing money," the officer told me. "It can finance all they want but they won't stop migration like this."

"If I wasn't a policeman, I would migrate as well," the officer said through a translator after hustling away from his station. The EU's border investments "haven't done anything," he continued, noting that, just the next day, a group was crossing into Mali en route to Europe.

Since gaining independence in 1960, Senegal has been hailed as a beacon of democracy and stability, while many of its neighbors have struggled with political strife and coups. But over a third of the population lives below the poverty line, and the lack of opportunities drives many to migrate, particularly to France and Spain. Today, remittances from that diaspora constitute nearly 10% of Senegal's GDP. As Africa's westernmost mainland nation, many West Africans also cross through Senegal as they flee economic hardship as well as violence from regional offshoots of al Qaeda and ISIS, which has forced nearly 4 million people to leave their homes.

"The EU can't just solve things by raising walls and throwing money," the officer told me. "It can finance all they want but they won't stop migration like this." Much of the EU money spent on policing and borders, he said, has accomplished little more than buying border town officials new air-conditioned cars.

Meanwhile, services for deported people — such as protection and reception facilities — are left severely underfunded. Back at the Rosso border crossing, hundreds are deported weekly from Mauritania. Mbaye Diop works with a handful of volunteers at the Red Cross center on the Senegalese side of the river to receive those deportees: men, women and children, sometimes bearing wounds on their wrists from handcuffs or after being beaten by Mauritanian police.

But Diop lacks the resources to actually help them.

The entire approach was wrong, Diop says. “We have humanitarian needs, not security needs.”

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The EU has also tried a “carrot” approach to [dissuade migration](#), offering business grants or professional training to those who return or don’t try to leave. Outside Tambacounda, scores of billboards advertising EU projects pepper the road into town.

But the offers aren’t all they promise, as 40-year-old Binta Ly knows well. Ly runs a pristine corner shop in Tambacounda, selling local juices and toiletries. Although she finished high school and studied a year of law in college, the high cost of living in Dakar ultimately forced her to drop out and move to Morocco to find work. She lived in Casablanca and Marrakech for seven years; after falling ill, she returned to Senegal and opened her shop.

In 2022, Ly applied for a small business grant, meant to entice local Senegalese to not migrate, from an EU-funded migration reintegration and prevention initiative office called BAOS, which opened within the Tambacounda branch of Senegal’s Regional Development Agency that year. Ly’s proposal was to start a printing, copying and laminating service in her shop, conveniently located next to a primary school with a need for such services.

Ly was approved for a grant of about \$850 — a quarter of the budget she requested, but exciting nonetheless. A year after approval, however, Ly hadn’t seen a single franc of that funding.

In Senegal overall, BAOS has received a total \$10 million from the EU to fund such grants. But the Tambacounda branch got only \$100,000, according to Abdoul Aziz Tandia, director of the local office of the Regional Development Agency — enough to fund just 84 businesses in a region of more than half a million people, and nowhere near enough to address the scale of its needs.

A European Commission spokesperson said that grant distribution finally began this April, and Ly received a printer and laminating machine, but no computer to use them with. “It’s good to have this funding,” Ly says, “but waiting so long changes all my business plans.”

Tandia admits that BAOS isn’t meeting the demand. Partly that’s because of bureaucracy, he says: Dakar must approve all projects and the intermediaries are foreign NGOs and agencies, meaning local authorities and beneficiaries alike have no control over the funds they best know how to use. But also, Tandia acknowledges, with many regions outside the capital lacking access to clean water, electricity and medical facilities, micro-grants alone aren’t sufficient to keep people from migrating.

“For the medium- and long-term, these investments don’t make sense,” Tandia says.

The EU’s professional training opportunities seem about as helpful, as Omar Diaw’s experience makes clear. Now 30, Diaw spent at least five years trying to reach Europe, crossing the unforgiving deserts of Mali and Niger until he reached Algeria. But once he arrived, he was promptly deported back to Niger, where there were no reception services; he was stranded in the desert for weeks. Ultimately, the International Organization for Migration flew him back to Senegal, classifying his

return as “voluntary.”

When he got home to Tambacounda, IOM enrolled Diaw in a digital marketing training course, which was supposed to last several weeks and come with a roughly \$50 stipend. But Diaw says he never received the promised payment and was left with a training that is virtually useless in his situation, since there’s little demand in Tambacounda for digital marketing. He is currently saving up to try again for Europe.

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Few of the EU’s migration projects seem responsive to local realities. But saying so out loud carries substantial risk, as migration researcher Boubacar Sèye knows better than most.

Born in Senegal but now living in Spain, Sèye himself is a migrant. He left Ivory Coast, where he was working as a math teacher, when violence erupted after its 2000 presidential election. After brief stints in France and Italy, he arrived in Spain, where he ultimately obtained citizenship and started a family with his Spanish wife. But the heavy death toll that came with the 2006 migrant surge to the Canary Islands prompted Sèye to start an organization, Horizons Sans Frontières, to help integrate African migrants in Spain. Today, Sèye conducts research and advocates for the rights of people on the move more broadly, with a focus on Africa and Senegal.

In 2019, Sèye obtained a document detailing EU migration spending in Senegal and was shocked to see how much money was being invested to stop migration, while thousands of asylum-seekers drown every year along some of the deadliest migration routes in the world. In press interviews and at public events, Sèye began demanding more transparency from Senegal about where the hundreds of millions of dollars in EU funding had gone, calling the programs a “failure.”

In early 2021, Sèye [was detained at the airport](#) in Dakar on charges of “disseminating fake news.” He spent two weeks in prison, and his health deteriorated quickly under the stress, culminating in a non-fatal heart attack.

“It was inhumane, it was humiliating and it gave me health issues I have to this day,” Sèye says. “I just asked: ‘Where is the money?’”

Sèye’s instincts weren’t wrong. EU migration funding is notoriously opaque and difficult to track. Freedom of Information requests are delayed for months or years, while interview requests to the EU delegation in Senegal, the European Commission and Senegalese authorities are often declined or ignored, as I’ve seen myself. The DNL and border police, the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Senegalese Living Abroad — all of which have received EU migration funds — did not respond to repeated interview requests for this story made in writing, by phone and in person.

EU evaluation reports also fail to give a full view of the programs’ impact, perhaps by design. Several consultants who have worked on unpublished impact assessment reports for EUTF projects, speaking anonymously because of nondisclosure agreements, warned that little attention is given to the unforeseen effects some EUTF projects have.

In Niger, for instance, the EU helped draft a law that criminalized virtually all movement in the north of the country, effectively making regional mobility illegal. While the number of irregular crossings on specific migration routes decreased, the policy also made all routes more dangerous, increased prices for smugglers and criminalized local bus drivers and transport companies, with the result that many lost their jobs overnight.

The inability to assess this sort of impact mainly stems from methodological and resource constraints, but also because the EU hasn't bothered to look.

After Boubacar Sèye called EU anti-migration funding a failure, he was jailed on charges of "disseminating fake news."

One consultant who works with an EU-funded monitoring and evaluation company explained it this way: "What is the impact? What are the unintended consequences? We don't have time and space to report on that. [We are] just monitoring projects through reports from the implementing organizations, but our consultancy doesn't do truly independent evaluations."

An internal report I obtained noted that "very few projects collected the data needed to track progress towards the EUTF overall objectives (to promote stability and limit forced displacement and irregular migration)."

There is also a sense, one consultant said, that only rosy reports are welcome: "It's implied in our monitoring that we need to be positive about the projects so we get future funding."

In 2018, the European Court of Auditors, an independent EU institution, criticized the EUTF, charging that its process for selecting projects was inconsistent and unclear. A [study](#) commissioned by the European Parliament similarly called the process "quite opaque."

"Parliamentary oversight is unfortunately very limited, which is a huge issue when it comes to accountability," German MEP Cornelia Ernst says. "Even as someone very familiar with EU policies, it is almost impossible to understand where exactly the money is going and for what."

In one case, an EUTF project to create elite border police units in six West African countries, meant to fight jihadist groups and trafficking, is now being investigated for fraud after allegedly misappropriating more than \$13 million.

In 2020, two other EUTF projects, meant to modernize the civil registries of Senegal and Ivory Coast, sparked significant public concern after revelations that they aimed to create national biometric databases; privacy advocates feared the projects would collect and store fingerprints and facial scans of both countries' citizens. When Ilia Siatitsa, of Privacy International, requested documentation from the European Commission, she discovered the Commission had conducted no human rights impact assessment of these projects — a shocking omission, considering their scale and the fact that no European countries maintain databases with this level of biometric information.

A Commission spokesperson claimed the EUTF had never funded a biometric civil registry and that the projects in Senegal and Ivory Coast were always limited to just digitizing documents and preventing fraud. But the EUTF documents Siatitsa obtained clearly outline the biometric dimension in the diagnostic phase, specifying the aim to create "a biometric identification database for the population, connected to a reliable civil status system."

Siatitsa later deduced that both projects' true purpose seemed to be facilitating the deportation of African migrants from Europe; documents about the Ivory Coast initiative explicitly stated the database would be used to identify and return Ivorians illegally residing in Europe, with one explaining the objective of the project was to make it "easier to identify people who are truly Ivorian nationals and to organize their return more easily."

When Senegalese privacy activist Cheikh Fall learned about the database proposed for his country in 2021, he reached out to the country's data privacy authority, which, by law, should have been the one to approve such a project. Fall learned that the office had only been informed about the project



after the government had already approved it.

In November 2021, Siatitsa filed a complaint with the EU's ombudsman, which, after an [independent investigation](#), ruled last December that the Commission had failed to consider the potential negative impact on privacy rights that this and other EU-funded migration projects could have in Africa.

Based on conversations with several sources and an internal presentation from the project's steering committee that I obtained, it appears the project has since scrapped its biometric component. But Siatitsa says the case nonetheless illustrates how technologies forbidden in Europe can be used as experiments in Africa.

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In late February, the day after their visit to the Rosso border crossing, MEPs Cornelia Ernst and Tineke Strik drove two hours southwest to meet a contingent of community leaders in the coastal town of Saint-Louis. Most likely named for the canonized 13<sup>th</sup>-century French King Louis IX, the city was once the capital of France's West African empire. Today, it's the epicenter of Senegal's migration debate.

In a conference room at a local hotel, Ernst and Strik's EU delegation gathered before leaders of the local fishing community to talk about the proposed deployment of Frontex and migration dynamics in the area. On one side sat the MEPs and their aides; on the other, the locals. On the wall behind the Senegalese contingent hung a painting of a white colonizer in a pith helmet sitting in a boat on a Senegalese river, lecturing the two African men who rowed it. The irony was thick, the atmosphere tense.

For dozens of generations, Saint-Louis' local economy has relied on the ocean. The catch from artisanal fishing represents 95% of the national market and the core of the local diet. The fishermen, the women processing the catch for sale, the boat builders, the painters and the local distributors all rely on fishing as it's been practiced in Senegal for hundreds of years. But a 2014 agreement between the EU and Senegal's government, allowing European vessels to fish off the West African coast, has [decimated the area's once plentiful bounty](#) and threatens to collapse its economy.

Since European industrial boats threw their first nets, Saint-Louis' local fishermen have been forced farther and farther offshore. Now, as Chinese trawlers also compete in their waters, they regularly travel 60 miles out to sea.

There's also a new BP gas platform offshore, which has enticed European leaders as a means of reducing dependence on Russian energy, but which also represents another area Senegalese fishermen can't go. Locals charge that the coast guard, which primarily used to conduct search and rescue missions for fishermen in distress, now focuses on guarding the foreign rig.

"The people earning money from the exploitation of gas will be at the expense of the blood of the fishermen," said Moustapha Dieng, the secretary general of the national fishing union.

As the situation has deteriorated, many locals lost their only source of income and were forced to consider migration instead.

After several hours of heated complaints, Strik acknowledged this irony, which was becoming painfully apparent. "It is very clear," she said, "that the EU trade policy and its fishing agreement is creating migration towards Europe."

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blood of the fishermen,” said Moustapha Dieng, the secretary general of the national fishing union.

The month after Ernst and Strik returned from Senegal, the European Parliament’s human rights committee held a hearing about the impact EU migration policy is having on human rights in West Africa. Cire Sall, from Boza Fii, together with a Human Rights Watch researcher working in Mauritania and an NGO staffer from Mali, all voiced their concerns that the EU’s policies in the region don’t address local needs but undermine sovereignty and human rights.

The Commission’s representatives brushed away these complaints, as well as Strik’s call for a monitoring system to suspend EU participation if human rights are violated. There was no need for a human rights assessment, one representative said, seeming to downplay a major announcement, because Senegal’s government had signaled it wasn’t open to Frontex moving in.

In the hearing room and in Senegal, the news brought a sense of relief. Strik saw it as a sign that the “EU is losing influence in Senegal because of frustration about the unequal relationship.”

But that relief shouldn’t last. While Frontex’s deployment has been (at least temporarily) blocked in Senegal, it appears on track for Mauritania, and likely other countries soon. The European Commission has committed to funding international partnerships in Africa until at least 2027, including through another, recently launched fund, the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument, which is dedicating nearly \$9 billion for what are essentially anti-migration projects worldwide.

All of it means that one of the wealthiest regions on earth will continue redirecting sorely needed development aid toward stopping the flow of migrants instead, under the pretext of addressing migration’s root causes. But as the experience in Senegal makes clear, the real root causes — the ones that serve European interests — are here to stay.

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