Document of Conclusions and Recommendations

Below is a synthesis of the main conclusions gathered during the "Africa-Spain Think Tanks Meeting on Migration," organized by Casa África (Las Palmas de Gran Canaria) on December 4, 2024. The objective is to make the main elements shared during the meeting a basis for reflection and a roadmap for improving migration governance and narratives on the migration phenomenon. The document is presented in the form of recommendations organized by the themes of the sessions: labor integration of migrants (1), regular mobility channels (2), narratives on immigration (3).

1. **Integration, Work, and Social Cohesión**

- **Address Integration as a Multidimensional Process**
  Migrant integration is a complex multidimensional process involving individual (agency), institutional, and structural dimensions, as well as socioeconomic, demographic, legal, and political factors spanning the "migratory space" between origin and destination countries. **Access to work and inclusion in the labor market are key elements of this process.** The Spanish experience is a paradigmatic example of this, reflecting both strengths and limitations.

- **Recognize the Limitations of the Spanish Integration Model**
  Since its inception, the Spanish model of migrant integration has centered on labor market incorporation, following a non-interventionist approach where the market has played the main regulatory role. This model, sustained by regularization mechanisms (*arraigo*), has rewarded **flexibility and allowed a sufficient degree of integration** of the foreign population. However, it has **generated segmentation dynamics** that have become chronic over time, **disadvantaging specific groups such as foreign women and people from African countries.**

- **Adopt a Pragmatic and Transversal Approach to Integration**
  To address these issues and generally improve the integration process of migrants in accessing and including in the labor market, experts agree on the need for a shift **towards a pragmatic, transversal, and long-term perspective focused on**

creating conditions for coexistence, combining labor, social, and cultural dimensions, and addressing contexts of origin and destination.

- **Strengthening Public Policies in Complementary Sectors**
  This cross-cutting approach calls for strengthening the regulatory framework (and executive tools) of other public policy sectors. **Housing policies** are particularly important. As demonstrated by structural problems observed in the Spanish context, facilitating migrants' access to housing is essential for their inclusion in the labor market. Educational policies and training programs also play a key role in determining job access opportunities. **As evidenced by Mali's experience, it is crucial to align educational and training programs with labor market needs.**

- **Promote Collaboration Among Various Actors**
  Transversal approaches call for strengthening collaboration among actors (state and non-state) within the multilevel governance system of integration, emphasizing the **role of private sector actors, civil society**, and coordination among different levels of public administration. Civil society participation should not be merely symbolic but should play a real and active role in the process of analysis and strategy development.

- **Base Policy Decisions on Empirical Evidence and Concrete Experiences**
  In this shift of approach, the importance of data and empirical knowledge stands out as a fundamental basis for political reflection and the development of effective measures tailored to existing challenges. **The IOM's MGI indicator system is highlighted as good practice in this regard**, for example, in evaluating and reworking reintegration programs in countries of origin.

- **Identify and Analyze Good Practices**
  More generally, identifying and analyzing (feasibility, scalability, and replicability of) good practices is crucial for improving labor integration. Notable examples include the **successful bilateral circular mobility agreements signed by Senegal with Germany and Spain** in the construction and agriculture sectors, respectively.

4_
12_
2024

THINK
TANK

Casa África
Las Palmas
De Gran Canaria
España_
Spain_
Espagne

- **Ensure Migrants' Rights "on Paper" and "in Practice"**
  Protecting and guaranteeing migrants' rights must be a sine qua non condition in political actors' reflections and the implementation of political measures. **Legal advances are needed**, such as the reform of Article 211 of the Foreign Law to allow unaccompanied minors to start their training and undertake internships with Social Security registration. **The recent reform of the Foreign Law represents a significant step in this direction**, improving access to rights and benefits for migrants and preventing labor exploitation. It is also essential **to ensure substantial rights by removing barriers that hinder effective access to these rights**, such as long visa appointment wait times or bureaucratic hurdles preventing the recognition of qualifications and skills for labor market access. Effective executive tools and adequate resources are crucial to bridging the gap between formal rights and their practical application.

1. **Towards Safe and Regular Labor Mobility Benefiting Migrants and Countries of Origin and Destination**

- **Recognizing the Need for Regular Immigration**
  Migration is essential for the economic and social sustainability of the EU, especially in the context of an aging population and a shrinking native workforce. During the refugee crisis, each migrant contributed over 1,500 euros net to EU state coffers, 47 times more than the native population. Additionally, Europe faces a growing skills shortage in key sectors such as construction, agriculture, and technology. By 2100, the European population is expected to decrease by 6%, increasing pressure on public finances. Global competition for talent, including from middle-income countries, complicates the EU's ability to attract the necessary workers. **Promoting active labor inclusion policies for migrants is crucial to alleviate pressure on public finances and harness their economic potential, ensuring the region's progress and sustainability**.

CASA ÁFRICA   CIDOB
BARCELONA
CENTRE FOR
INTERNATIONAL
AFFAIRS

COMPASS   MAC 2021-2027
Cooperación Territorial   Interreg
MAC   Cofinanciado por
la Unión Europea

- **Overcome the Limitations of the Current European Migration Governance Model**
  The new Migration and Asylum Pact enshrines and extends the security imperative. Its main axes revolve around border defense and the externalization of migration control to origin and transit countries. **This approach has made European territory increasingly inaccessible to migrants, including asylum seekers, generating perverse migration dynamics**. The EU's border externalization policies in the Sahel, for example, have hindered intra-African mobility, pushing people from Sub-Saharan Africa towards irregular migration routes to Europe. Additionally, it has **reduced programmatic space for other action axes. Regular labor migration is currently a low priority on the European political agenda**. As a result, labor migration programs are often small-scale and fail to meet European labor market needs.

- **Elevating the Priority of Labor Migration in Europe**
  Elevating the priority of labor migration is **crucial to developing more effective and large-scale programs that address skills and labor shortages in Europe**. One way to achieve this is by **scaling up good practices, such as the EU's "talent partnerships,"** which train and attract workers from partner countries. Currently, there are five partnerships with countries like Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, Bangladesh, and Pakistan. However, it is essential to decouple these programs from migration control and containment strategies, as these conditions reduce incentives for partner countries' participation and can have destabilizing effects. Focusing exclusively on labor mobility and training can create more attractive and effective partnerships, benefiting both Europe and partner countries and more efficiently addressing European labor market needs.

- **Promote Policies that Strengthen Existing Migration Dynamics**
  Senegal's experience with spontaneous circular migration highlights the need to enhance synergies between "both shores" and develop policies that strengthen existing migration dynamics. Policymakers should think and adjust mobility programs based on these dynamics. This **requires a deeper and broader understanding of migration models and a shift in perspective**, more attentive to

the socioeconomic realities of origin countries and more respectful of the interests and needs of people who want to migrate.

- **Ensure Transparency and Fairness in Circular Migration**
  While circular migration is a promising solution, it is essential to ensure **transparency and fairness in selection and recruitment processes**. This means establishing clear and objective criteria for selecting migrants and ensuring their rights are protected during their employment abroad.

- **Simplifying Access to Work Systems in the European Union**
  The current work permit system in the EU is too complex, **with approximately 300 different entry channels to the European labor market**. This complexity only benefits large employers who can navigate and exploit the opportunities, creating confusion for potential migrants. Simplifying this system would benefit both migrants and employers.

- **Simplifying Administrative and Bureaucratic Procedures**
  Simplifying administrative and bureaucratic procedures is crucial for ensuring smoother and more effective regular mobility. Long waits for visa appointments and other procedures represent significant obstacles for migrants. A recent example in Senegal showed significant problems in obtaining visa appointments, requiring personal intervention by officials**. Improving the efficiency of reception systems through digital tools and process streamlining can alleviate these difficulties**. Simplifying administrative procedures can enhance migrants' experiences and optimize economic and social benefits for both origin and destination countries.

2. **Towards New Narratives on Migration**

- **Promote Narratives Centered on Migration as a Complex and Historically Necessary Social Phenomenon**
  Narratives about migration permeate the public debate on the migration phenomenon. Generally, **negative narratives** dominate, and among positive ones,

utilitarian stories presenting migration as economically beneficial for the host country prevail. A shift in focus is needed to **promote narratives centered on migration as a complex and historically necessary social phenomenon, part of human nature**. It is also necessary to counter public debate clichés and work on alternative discourses that, for example, shift from the current focus on vulnerability and precariousness to an opportunity-centered approach; or clarify that migrants often do not wish to stay permanently in the host country.

- **Foster Inclusive and Fact-Based Dialogue in Both Europe and Africa**
  Migration is a complex and politicized issue worldwide, not just in Europe**. In Africa, intra-African migration is also politicized**. For example, politicization dynamics and anti-immigration discourse have been observed in African countries, as evidenced by recent elections in Senegal. **To reduce the politicization of migration, it is crucial to foster inclusive and fact-based dialogue among all stakeholders.** Additionally, it is essential to promote awareness campaigns highlighting migrants' positive contributions to host societies, thereby reducing the political tension associated with the issue.

- **Reflect on How and When to Talk About Migration**
  It is noted that the space for an alternative debate on migration is limited. However, **the debate on migration is essential and should not be avoided, as it is crucial for improving society**. That said, the current level of politicization of the migration debate makes it imperative to **reflect and debate on how and when to talk about migration**. Regarding the "how," narratives should be based on evidence while going beyond facts and figures to connect with the audience. Regarding the "when," a pragmatic position should be adopted, evaluating those moments when it may be useful to influence the debate and those when it may be counterproductive to focus on the migration issue. In this sense, it is sometimes preferable to focus on specific legislative changes that can have a real impact rather than actively promoting narratives about these changes in the public debate. Additionally, recognizing their limitations, utilitarian arguments such as "migration is good for the economy" can be a useful tool.

In the last decade, European migration governance has taken a restrictive and security-oriented turn. Obsessed with border control and combating irregular immigration, member states have intensified investment in security forces and surveillance technologies, and the externalization of migration control to origin and transit countries. **This governance model has made European territory more inaccessible to migrants, even those seeking international protection**. The European ideal of promoting "safe, orderly, and regular migration" fits very little with the disorderly, irregular, and dangerous human mobility we are witnessing today.

In this context, Spain has also been able to provide alternative solutions. The reform of the immigration law, the strengthening of circular mobility, and the improvement of the reception and humanitarian assistance system are clear examples of this. Although these are partial and limited measures, they represent virtuous exceptions that demonstrate that another migration governance is possible. **The central question is how to turn this exception into a solid and credible proposal, an alternative governance model to follow in the European context.**

As noted in the recommendations gathered during this meeting, this path requires, on the one hand, **addressing the critical limits and strong contradictions of the Spanish governance model itself**, both in the management of integration and human mobility. On the other hand, it is a path that necessarily involves **consolidating an approach: pragmatic, based on empirical evidence, an essential condition for effective political solutions (1); transversal, built on collaboration and solidarity among all actors involved in the governance system (2); and long-term, where the guarantee of migrants' rights (formal and substantial) is always the expected outcome of political negotiation and never part of it (3).**

Spain has the opportunity to demonstrate that an alternative to the European security model is possible, paving the way for a fairer, more effective, and sustainable immigration management.