

In search of mechanisms linking the pseudo-causal narratives and policy outcomes: the case of the Trade-Development-Migration nexus in the EU's approach towards the countries of its Southern Neighbourhood

However counterintuitive it may sound, there is little evidence that more development in the developing countries necessarily translates in less migration towards the developed countries, and the vast literature on the relationship between socio-economic development and migration is, at best, inconclusive. In fact, there is a broad academic consensus that in the short-term, more of socio-economic development may bring more migration rather than stop it. Therefore, there is a **striking paradox in the European Union's (EU) approach to understanding the relationship between socio-economic development and migration**, which translates into its growing tendency to achieving the external migration policy goal (of reducing migratory pressure) through the use of its development cooperation and trade policies. Although present in the EU already since decades, the idea of reducing irregular migration through poverty reduction stemming from trade interventions, jobs creation and investment, has become increasingly prominent in the context of the "European migration crisis" of 2015. Since then, a "**pseudo-causal narrative**" of migration-development nexus was embraced in the concept of "addressing irregular migration root causes" coined by the European Commission which soon after became a fundamental assumption underlying numerous EU policy initiatives.

Noteworthy, the EU's narrative of relationship between migration and development in which trade can be used as a vehicle for economic development and jobs creation – in consequence, leading to curtailing irregular migration – frames its policy as knowledge- and evidence-based despite the fact that its underlying central claim has been unproven (or even disproven) by scientific evidence. And although the EU currently links migration, development, and trade in its approach towards less developed countries (i.e. the trade-development-migration nexus – hereafter, T-D-M nexus), the role played in this context by trade and how trade is framed in the EU external migration policy as part of a solution of the problem is an under-researched issue. In addition, little is known about the causal mechanisms linking political narratives and policy outcomes in the migration field.

Hence, the project will examine **what causal mechanisms link the pseudo-causal policy narratives and policy outcomes in the EU's T-D-M nexus, and how they do it**. To address this question, the project will focus on the narratives about addressing the root causes of migration through trade and development cooperation, produced by the EU institutions in reference to the countries of its Southern Neighbourhood. The main objective of this project is thus **to uncover the causal mechanisms and their scope conditions which link the pseudo-causal policy narratives and policy outcomes in the EU's T-D-M nexus**.

The project will focus on mapping the involved institutions and their narratives. This will involve the Narrative Policy Analysis, and collection of the necessary data through gathering relevant documents, and conducting interviews with officials from relevant international institutions. Subsequently, the project will trace the process of linking pseudo-causal narratives with policy outcomes in the EU's T-D-M nexus. This should allow for identifying and conceptualizing the causal mechanisms which were underlying this process. In this regard, the project will focus on two case studies which concern the EU's T-D-M nexus in its approach towards Morocco and Tunisia.

Apart from the contribution to narrowing down the research gaps in literature, our better understanding of the project's topic may be considered as a pressing issue in the debate on the EU's approach to managing external migration. And since the EU's response to the irregular migration from developing countries is a highly controversial, and often politically instrumentalized topic, the research will contribute to the **improvement of the quality of academic and public debate about the use of development aid and trade instruments** in this context. Besides, focusing on the initiatives within the EU-Southern Mediterranean relations can also contribute to providing valuable insights about the most recent EU T-D-M initiatives towards its Southern Neighbourhood.