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Transcript

00:00:00 Speaker 1

Hello and welcome to another episode of the Migration Oxford Podcast. I'm rob MacNeil.

00:00:05 Speaker 2

And I'm Jackie broadhead.

00:00:07 Speaker 1

Today we've been talking about restrictive migration agendas and specifically we've been talking about the use of development aid as a means for high income countries to encourage low income countries to restrict irregular migration. People flowing from those countries into the higher income.

00:00:29 Speaker 1

So Jackie, can you just tell me a little bit about what you took from the conversation that we had today?

00:00:37 Speaker 2

Yeah. Thanks, rob. I think this is a really interesting topic because it's something that EU and other governments including in the UK, a destination countries have become quite interested in, which is this idea of making their development aid conditional.

00:00:54 Speaker 2

On restriction or countries of origin, putting more effort into restricting migration and we're hearing from three experts who've been working on a six year research project called the Big Next project about well, does that actually work? How is it seen by the governments in those countries and by the migrants themselves?

00:01:16 Speaker 2

And hearing about.

00:01:18 Speaker 2

The gap actually between what those destination country governments think they're achieving through this type of restriction, or conditionality on the development aid and what the countries of origin actually kind of think about. That and the kind of quite limited effects that it seems to have.

00:01:38 Speaker 2

On migrant decision making and thinking about, if that's not a kind of effective way forward, what might be?

00:01:45 Speaker 1

Which is all really interesting and I I I did some stuff a little while ago, which.

00:01:50 Speaker 1

Looking at some of these questions about how governments have been targeting irregular migration, and one of the things that was interesting was the politics of this right and to the the extent to which even when sort of high income countries, Western countries actually know that this doesn't really work.

00:02:10 Speaker 1

They still do it, which is a strange situation to be in, so there was some work particularly looking at the EU and and and the EU funding development.

00:02:19 Speaker 1

Need telling their constituents, as it were, that this was in order to tackle irregular migration, whereas the reality was that actually a report, their own internal report clarified that they didn't know that that they sorry, rather that they knew that it wasn't an effective strategy for doing it, which seems extraordinary. So it's been interesting talking to people today.

00:02:39 Speaker 1

About the politics of this and about the kind of the, the degree to which this is sort of performative or substantial policy. So yeah, what what do you?

00:02:48 Speaker 1

Think about that, Jackie.

00:02:49 Speaker 2

I think there are a couple of interesting things in that. The first I think is this idea that we have, that policymakers and politicians make rational decisions rather than the idea that they kind of sometimes make good instinct decisions. But I also just wonder whether this might be a bit of trying to kill two birds with one stone so.

00:03:09 Speaker 2

We know, obviously we talk a lot about the politics of migration and you know a lot about the kind of politics of migration and the desire for solutions around restricting, in particular, irregular.

00:03:20 Speaker 2

Aggression, but also a lot of controversy around development aid, right and spending money on development aid or making commitments here in the UK. It was the the nought point, nought, 7% commitment. So I guess my guess would be for governments, you know, this idea of being able to both say that you're gonna kind of restrict migration.

00:03:41 Speaker 2

At source, which is the, I think the term that the Labour Party have been using here in the UK and also say, and this is a.

00:03:49 Speaker 2

Kind of justification for the development aid that we're spending. I can see why that would feel attractive. I guess the downside is in the conversation that we've had is that it doesn't seem that it's a very effective kind of way of doing it. And as ever, the dynamics of migration are just so much more complex and that it's so much based on.

00:04:11 Speaker 2

Individual decision making and and and the term that was used in the in the discussion of the kind of aspirant migrant and how those people make kind of individual decisions based on so many kind of trade-offs and complexities.

00:04:26 Speaker 2

Isn't something that there's a kind of easy switch on and switch off of how you kind of control even if governments sort of wish that there were, they know, the complexity of the decision making of their own populations. I wonder if perhaps sometimes they think the populations of kind of other countries over there kind of their decision making isn't quite as complex, but I imagine it probably is.

00:04:45 Speaker 2

Exactly as complex.

00:04:47 Speaker 1

One of the ways that this was described, which I thought was really, really compelling, was that blueprint approaches don't work that you have to provide tailored approaches that are specific to very, very particular needs and that otherwise, you know, all you're doing is kind of imagining this. I suppose this kind of homogeneous mass and.

00:05:07 Speaker 1

If you press this button then exit result will occur and the reality is that like humanity just doesn't work like that, which I think is that I mean I think it's an important point. And I also think this is probably a good point to actually get into our conversation with our with our brilliant speakers.

00:05:24 Speaker 2

I'm joined now by Jessica Hagen, Zanka senior Research Fellow for Migration at Odii. Leander Candelina, A associate professor of migration at the Centre for Migration Studies at the University of Ghana, and Carlos Vargas Silva, Professor of Migration Studies right here at Oxford.

00:05:44 Speaker 2

Carlos, we're going to start with you. Over recent decades, we've seen an emphasis on using development aid by the EU and others to non EU countries as a way of preventing migration. And can you give us a bit of an overview of how some of these policies have developed and how they work in practise?

00:06:01 Speaker 3

There is a great question so the logic here is that people migrate in order to improve their living standards. So if you can send aid to countries and then that will improve their living standards there, it will improve conditions back home that will lead to less migration because the communities of origin.

00:06:22 Speaker 3

Are are developing.

00:06:23 Speaker 3

And and you can divide that into two components. 1 is the impact of aid, where aid can actually lead to that type of development. And 2nd what happens in reality in communities when when you have more development and you have more income in those communities. So as we go to the first part of that.

00:06:44 Speaker 3

And it lead to the type of transformation that actually will decrease migration aspirations.

00:06:51 Speaker 3

And and when you look at the evidence, probably the answer is, well, not really right. Aid is very important. It's a very important thing as a humanitarian, A component. It is

important in in emergency. So it plays a big role. But that long term development that that you will need in communities of origin in order to decrease.

00:07:11 Speaker 3

Migration aspirations. That's something that aid is unlikely to provide.

00:07:17 Speaker 3

Now there's the second component, so let's assume that eight or something else can develop those communities and can actually improve the living standards and the income of of people in many, many of those those countries, what will happen to migration in that case? And I think this is 1 aspect.

00:07:37 Speaker 3

To which mid next and the mid next projects can provide a lot of information and insights.

00:07:43 Speaker 3

Just as as as a parenthesis make next is this 6 year project that covers 10 countries Afghanistan, Kabul, Verde, Ethiopia, Ghana and other countries across the world. And we look at evidence that we collected data in all those ten countries in 25 communities, including 500.

00:08:03 Speaker 3

People in each community in which we conduct the surveys with those people and a lot of the questions were about migration aspirations and and when you look at the data that we collected, the man next, you can see that a lot of people have strong migration aspirations but have not migrated. We call them, you know.

00:08:21 Speaker 3

This is people, what we call immobile. Right? So about one in five or the people in those surveys have strong migration aspirations but have not migrated up from their countries. So what will happen if those people solely have higher income and higher capacity to migrate? You will expect that a lot of those people will actually then.

00:08:43 Speaker 3

Take the opportunity to improve their lives abroad and will actually migrate.

00:08:48 Speaker 3

So the question has 2 components, 1 is 8 as a whole is likely to lead to that big effect, but if it were to lead to that effect or something were to happen to that nature, at least

at the beginning, you will see increasing levels of immigration rather than decreasing ones.

00:09:04 Speaker 2

Thanks so much, Carlos Leanda. I'm really interested in this idea of.

00:09:08 Speaker 2

Kind of the aspirations, how do you think this linking of development aid to the kind of restriction of migration is viewed in the countries receiving that aid? And I guess I'm thinking both by kind of policymakers and politicians, but also by the kind of aspirant migrants themselves.

00:09:27 Speaker 4

Yes. So thank you very much for the opportunity. And just to continue from where my colleague left off Carlos and to start with, normally when you talk about development, it is supposed to trigger or support higher standard of living, improved livelihoods or to support growth. So on the part of the receiving countries.

00:09:47 Speaker 4

This aid is viewed slightly differently from what the aid giver tends to see it as, so some receiving countries will see it as part of reparation for maybe past colonial meddling in this country.

00:10:02 Speaker 4

And also some see it as say maybe quick pro code for access to natural resources or influence in regional negotiations, or even as a way of shipping policy priorities in favour of the aid.

00:10:15 Speaker 4

Given.

00:10:16 Speaker 4

Now the issue of linking aid or development aid to restricting.

00:10:21 Speaker 4

Irregular migration is a contentious 1 and the aid receivers plus the migrants themselves tend to take very different positions.

00:10:31 Speaker 4

Formally, when they eat receiver or the government in question is negotiating with the lines of the EU or the aid.

00:10:39 Speaker 4

Giver.

00:10:40 Speaker 4

I think there is a lot of nice cities that surround these type of conversations, but in the end it amongst what I characterise elsewhere as migration mercenaries.

00:10:52 Speaker 4

So it's almost like in the sense that these countries have to condone, they end up condoning because they are desperate for the aid.

00:10:59 Speaker 4

A reality.

00:11:00 Speaker 4

The efforts that I've made towards the so-called stemming of migration, you can see them more or less as lip service because the conditionalities that are attached to the aid means that, because they cannot do without those types of support, they will sign on the dotted line, but the actual execution is always very different.

00:11:21 Speaker 4

Now on the part of the migrants themselves, they feel betrayed and sold out. In exchange for this so-called development aid, which to me I think doesn't actually make his way toward supporting the type of development that will end up leading to a qualitative change in people's lives. So in the end, there's.

00:11:41 Speaker 4

Very little evidence that if you tie development aid to restricting migration, it has any significant impact on the decision making, neither at the governmental level, nor even the the aspiring migrant level. So these governments are constrained. They cannot make the bold decisions that they are expected to make.

00:12:00 Speaker 4

By the development or the aid giver, because they are very unpopular on the ground locally with the local media and civil society organisations and even the electorate, so they stand to lose political capital by following through on the conditionalities that are put by the aid giver.

00:12:20 Speaker 4

Now in terms of the material impact of this aid, in most cases is so minuscule that it doesn't it. It actually has very little effect.

00:12:31 Speaker 4

On the so-called push factors that tend to encourage the irregular migration so you can see that there is a negative perception.

00:12:40 Speaker 4

On the ground in in terms of the receiving countries by governments and also by the aspiring migrants, but the conversations the formal conversations are very different from the reality on the ground. So in in effect, I think that tying the 2 is unfortunate. It might make for good conversation but.

00:13:00 Speaker 4

May impact all the evidence is very thin when it comes to the effectiveness of using development aid to restrict migration. Thank you.

00:13:09 Speaker 2

Thanks so much, Leander. Jessica. I guess we've heard really powerfully from the under there the the kind of drawbacks of this type of approach. So why are so many governments and why at the EU level, are they attaching this type of conditionality around deterrence to aid?

00:13:24 Speaker 5

To a large part, it's it's it's political. What we see is that the messaging around deterrence is really important. So the the kind of discourses that are happening in in election campaign.

00:13:41 Speaker 5

And and there's almost a competition or race to the bottom in terms of different European governments wanting to to look more tough on migration. But what we also see is that there's actually a gap between the discourse and and the migration policies that are happening in reality and that are being implemented.

00:14:02 Speaker 5

And in reality.

00:14:05 Speaker 5

So it's a yeah, to some extent it it is a little bit performative. Another element that's part of that is.

00:14:13 Speaker 5

Some extent politicians, of course, also do really want to reduce migration and they want to achieve those deterrent outcomes. But they put these assumptions in place with misguided assumptions.

00:14:26 Speaker 5

And I think they're doing that because migration decision making is really complicated. We already got a sense of that from from Leander. It is really hard to to put policies in place that take account of all the psychology around decision making. The evidence isn't always clear.

00:14:46 Speaker 5

That it can be quite ambiguous.

00:14:49 Speaker 5

And and also some of the evidence that we now have around migration decision making, especially the the evidence that does take account for example around some of the cognitive biases of how people make decisions. It probably hasn't fully reached reached policymakers yet or.

00:15:09 Speaker 5

They've seen it, but researchers aren't explaining it well enough, so I think that's where we also have a really important role to play.

00:15:18 Speaker 2

Thanks, Jessica. And you mentioned kind of politicians. Do you think that these are in your research just do these type of policies tend to come from political will or are they seen as technocratic solutions or a kind of combination of of them both?

00:15:36 Speaker 5

In, in my opinion, I would say they actually are quite quite political and that it really is about showing the electorate that you're tough on migration. The reason I say that is because I think some of.

00:15:50 Speaker 5

The implementing agencies or their ministries themselves, the bureaucrats within those ministries ministries often have a much better understanding of how migration decision making works. What are the drivers of migration within Mick Necks? We've spoken to lots of policy makers and they've told us yes, we know this, but.

00:16:11 Speaker 5

It's it's hard to to pass on that message to to our Commissioner. Yes, of course. I know that the root causes of migration can't be tackled in a direct.

00:16:23 Speaker 5

Day, but it still sounds good for our Commissioner to say that. So I think it really is much more on a political level and then when you, when you get to the bureaucratic level, that's where the much better understanding exists and also understanding of what the reality of migration is and also how much migration is actually needed.

00:16:44 Speaker 5

In in those destination countries. So it's a they they have much more nuanced views of of migration.

00:16:51 Speaker 2

Thanks so much, Jessica. Yeah, and Carlos, thinking about kind of that idea around trade-offs, you know, we know that there is this kind of overall policy project around reducing migration at source but but also lots of needs within destination countries around labour and skills shortages.

00:17:12 Speaker 2

Can you tell us a little bit about how this type of aid conditionality and restrictionist M functions, when also thinking about labour shortages, skill shortages, the the type of migration that's needed, and also the type of decision making that we've heard about from the other speakers?

00:17:32 Speaker 3

That that is a good question. And as you are saying, Jackie, when we think about trade-offs a lot of times we think about the labour market. So the labour market needs migrants and when you restrict migration you are reducing that that supply of migrants.

00:17:46 Speaker 3

Uhm, I think in theory, if you think of a governing and relates to technocracy versus politics as as you were talking with Jessica, when you think about government, you can think about government that has a very targeted migration policy that responds to the needs of the labour market. So there's a labour market shortage.

00:18:06 Speaker 3

And you respond to that. Now that has been very specific. For instance, you can think that you need in your land market.

00:18:15 Speaker 3

I don't know sushi chefs from Japan, so that would be a very specific labour market need that you can fill in with migration. Now the difficulty is that it is difficult to identify those gaps in the labour market. The labour market is very dynamic. So in order to predict what you will need during one or two years.

00:18:34 Speaker 3

Is going to be very difficult and it is difficult to develop policies that will target those.

00:18:40 Speaker 3

Shortages that specifically, so that there's a challenge related even to technocratic component of migration policy if we wanted to take that route. So it's different from other things that you know when you have a corporation and you think you need a PR person or you have you own a football team and you need a striker.

00:19:00 Speaker 3

So there is more easy to identify the need and when you will need for that season with regards to a labour market, this is a lot more dynamic and when you end up with is with the politics winning, whether you want a restrictive policy of migration or a more open stance on migration that allows for more.

00:19:20 Speaker 3

Movement and if you want to fill those labour markets, then the policy has to be more open, right? Because you cannot predict what the labour market is going to need and.

00:19:29 Speaker 3

In some sense.

00:19:30 Speaker 3

When you talk with, you know voters, they understand some of this. It's not that they're completely ignorant about this component, but politics at the end, basically.

00:19:40 Speaker 3

A lot of times people are being asked to give a thumbs up or a thumbs down on migration.

00:19:45 Speaker 3

Now, so. So they're related to that and and to which mechanics projects also added a lot of information is, is and I'm sure Leander can, can expand more on this is that the same kind of trade-offs that we are talking with regards to migration policy in Europe are also happening in many countries of origin, right?

00:20:05 Speaker 3

Because they have to decide between protecting their citizens abroad or allowing them to migrate or earn higher income abroad, they have to think about whether if they don't allow them to go to certain countries, they might take more dangerous routes and ways to go into those.

00:20:23 Speaker 3

Countries. So I think migration policy in general, whether it is in the receiving side in Europe, thinking about the labour market or whether it is in the sending side thinking about protecting citizens abroad is full of trade-offs that are difficult to solve.

00:20:39 Speaker 2

Thanks, Carlos. And yeah, Leanne, I'd love to hear a little bit more about those trade-offs or any kind of.

00:20:46 Speaker 2

The unintended consequences of this kind of development, I guess in some ways you spoke earlier that you know this type of conditionality might be kind of paper conditionality and then the reality on the ground is a little bit different. But, you know, does this adding this type of conditionality shape? What actually happens on the ground?

00:21:07 Speaker 2

And does that then change or have kind of unintended consequence?

00:21:12 Speaker 2

In terms of the type of development that's going on, I'm thinking, you know, in terms of education, for example. And you know, if you're, if you're gonna kind of develop particular skills with a view to restricting migration versus kind of choice around migration, does that make a difference or?

00:21:31 Speaker 2

Is it all kind of skirting around the edges a little bit?

00:21:34 Speaker 4

Yes. So I think that the difference that is intended is not achieved in the end. So what the development aid giver intends to achieve is to restrict or to limit the number of people who arrive on their shores and they think that they can do that by externalising.

00:21:54 Speaker 4

They their responsibilities to the aid recipe.

00:21:57 Speaker 4

Now the evidence on the ground suggests that this development it normally takes maybe three key forms. They come in the form of equipment support to the likes of Immigration Services or the security services, and they also come in the form of paying of consultants to deliver.

00:22:17 Speaker 4

Capacity or so-called capacity building trainings or information campaigns and these are normally executed by these migration intermediaries like IOM, that's the International Organisation for Migration, ICMP, DJI Z and so on and so forth.

00:22:33 Speaker 4

Now, the unintended consequence of this creates about limited migration is the emergence what I call the emergence of a dishonest discussion or discourse about migration? OK, because I see a clear disconnect between the priorities of the recipient countries and then those of the development.

00:22:53 Speaker 4

Development aid giver. So whereas the recipient country is genuinely looking for that support, maybe for basic survival in some circumstances, or just to stay afloat, you see that the aid giver is literally, I would say, blackmailing impoverished countries into doing their bidding.

00:23:12 Speaker 4

And hoping that in the process that will discourage people from moving. I think that the way we should look at this link between development aid and then migration is the fact that it only has this potential long term effect if and only if such development aid is.

00:23:32 Speaker 4

Substantial, consistent, sustained and is sincerely targeted at poverty alleviation for his own sake without putting these self interested conditionalities to them.

00:23:45 Speaker 4

And now our madness research makes it very clear that socioeconomic development is actually associated with an increase in migration in the short term.

00:23:55 Speaker 4

Before possibly a reduction which will be more gradual than expected in the long.

00:24:00 Speaker 4

Term.

00:24:01 Speaker 4

OK, so with this kind of understanding of the development, I think that there is a need for us to or for countries to decouple the two.

00:24:09 Speaker 4

Aid from restricting migration because if you don't do that, it's almost like taking countries that are impoverished hostage and using so-called development aid as a bitter carrot to extract obligations from these countries of origin or the source countries. And I also think that it also marks.

00:24:30 Speaker 4

A fundamental misunderstanding of how irregular migration actually happen.

00:24:35 Speaker 4

Because these are mostly individual decisions that are executed with support of maybe migration intermediaries or social network members. So if you want to hold countries collectively accountable for individual decisions and acts of desperation, I think it is unfair.

00:24:54 Speaker 4

Is illogical and probably misplaced.

00:24:57 Speaker 4

So in the end irregular migration should be seen as a symptom of a bigger or a larger problem of lack of regular pathways to migration and not the problem itself.

00:25:10 Speaker 2

Thanks so much Leander. Jessica leanders. I think just set out a really powerful sort of.

00:25:18 Speaker 2

Pathway for how things could change and how you could kind of close the gap and and shift some of the power imbalances in in this area looking to the future. You know what from the mid next project and the research what are the alternatives and how.

00:25:36 Speaker 2

Thought.

00:25:37 Speaker 2

Likely you know when we were talking about some of the kind of political imperatives. Do you think they are to kind of come into fruition? What's the, what's the pathway for kind of seeing those alternatives actually happen?

00:25:50 Speaker 5

Thanks. In terms of the alternatives that need to take place, first of all, I think the most important one Leander, has already stated really clearly, and I just.

00:25:58 Speaker 5

Like to reemphasize that and that's about separating development aid from migration it it.

00:26:06 Speaker 5

Was just all.

00:26:07 Speaker 5

Across the Magnex project, where where we saw that and it's just really important that development aid is seen as important in its own right to improve the lives and well-being of people and it's not.

00:26:19 Speaker 5

An easy short term fix for migration and it also just doesn't work, so it's also misspent and misguided development aid if that is the objective and the purpose. So I think that's the the 1st and and most important starting.

00:26:33 Speaker 5

Point. The second one is I think to accept that migration is a reality and needs to be managed in an effective, humane and also fair way. And both colours and Leander talked about this. So it's about thinking how how can migration be managed and we all know that's.

00:26:53 Speaker 5

Through legal pathways.

00:26:55 Speaker 5

And the EU, for example, is of course now also very much trying to increase legal migration from the EU to the EU. I mean, but the the processes.

00:27:09 Speaker 5

Don't work very.

00:27:10 Speaker 5

Well, yet they're very bureaucratic. They're poorly communicated. They're also.

00:27:15 Speaker 5

Quite expensive.

00:27:17 Speaker 5

So that's where my third recommendation would come in, which is about communication. So to really think about how to communicate those policies to to the countries they're being implemented in, but also to the people that are being targeted by these policies.

00:27:37 Speaker 5

Just putting the information out there doesn't mean that it will actually reach the people. Leandra already explained very clearly that the information is actually interpreted and filtered in different ways in in the countries of origin, that they interpret the policies.

00:27:55 Speaker 5

In the way that that benefits them and the same is also for beneficiaries who are being targeted, for example, by these deterrence policies, they interpret and perceive political policies in their own subjective ways. So just putting information out there doesn't mean that people will.

00:28:15 Speaker 5

Act accordingly.

00:28:17 Speaker 5

And and then finally, what also comes out very clearly from from mid next is that blueprint approaches don't work and we need really tailored and local responses to address challenges around migration to to, to address development.

00:28:38 Speaker 5

Even within countries we found very different patterns in.

00:28:41 Speaker 5

In terms of the factors that Dr Migration and also how migration affects development, people's concerns, motivations are different everywhere. And so we really need an in depth understanding of the migration dynamics within different communities and then tailor their policies around that.

00:29:02 Speaker 2

And finally, Carlos, if people want to find out a little bit more about the project, where should they go?

00:29:07 Speaker 3

But I guess as a as a final point, I will encourage people to visit the the mid next website. As I mentioned it has been six years of research in 10 countries, 25 different research areas. We have developed dozens of of papers policy briefings report.

00:29:27 Speaker 3

Boards block and a lot of material for different audiences, for policymakers, for journalists and, of course, for academics using qualitative and quantitative data sets. And the address is www.mainnext.org.

00:29:44 Speaker 2

Thanks so much, Jessica, Leander and Carlos.

00:29:47 Speaker 2

You've been listening to the Migration Oxford Podcast. I'm Jackie broadhead.

00:29:51 Speaker 1

And I'm rob MacNeil.