

**Abstract:**

This PhD project contributes to ongoing academic and policy debates on the relevance of development–migration aid by examining how EU development–migration aid in West Africa conceptualises, operationalises, and targets the drivers of migration, with a focus on assessing whether programme design reflects the complex and context-specific environments in which migration decisions are made. While development cooperation has long been framed as a means to address the “root causes” of migration, there is limited empirical consensus on whether, and how, such interventions influence migration decisions. Nonetheless, international donors like the EU increasingly use development aid to manage migration, often with simplistic assumptions on the relevance of such programmes to local migration dynamics. The project addresses this gap by analysing the alignment between local migration driver configurations and the assumptions embedded in EU development–migration policies and programmes in selected West African contexts. The main research question guiding the study is: *How and to what extent does EU migration management aid in West Africa reflect the complex, locally configured environments in which migration decisions and behaviours are embedded?* To answer this question, the study pursues three objectives: (1) to develop an analytical framework that conceptualises migration drivers as interdependent and hierarchically structured within context-specific configurations; (2) to assess whether and how these configurations are incorporated into EU development–migration programming, identifying patterns of alignment and misalignment; and (3) to analyse how programme assumptions are interpreted and experienced by target populations. The project will focus on two West African (to be selected). It employs a mixed-methods research design structured around three interlinked work packages combining systematic literature review and expert interviews, qualitative analysis of policy and programming documents, and analysis of existing survey data complemented by qualitative case studies of EU-funded projects.