

10 - Cooperation funds used in European externalisation policies

Giacomo Zandonini, journalist, explains how and which European funds for development cooperation are used in an instrumental way for border control and mobility purposes, with specific reference to countries such as Niger and Nigeria.

Audio n. 10

Giacomo Zandonini: I am Giacomo Zandonini, I have been working for years on migration funds, especially in Niger and West Africa. The main instruments used at European level by the European Union are those of the Trust Fund for Africa, which was actually the only instrument created specifically to intervene on migration in Africa and in particular in 26 countries of sub-Saharan North Africa and East Africa. There are also other pre-existing instruments that have been increasingly directed in recent years towards projects linked to the externalisation of borders.

First of all, the European Development Fund, which is the European Union's largest development cooperation fund. Therefore, we are talking about a humanitarian part that has been increasingly addressed in the last seven years of the European financial plan to issues that actually concern border control. Then there are other funds that have a more internal component such as the migration and asylum fund. However, even within this, there has been an introduction of various funds which have an external dimension. For example, in the Migration and Asylum Fund there are annual calls for proposals that have financed a series of projects on the fight against trafficking in persons, therefore one of the pillars of the European external intervention on migration. The so-called wellness raising, i.e. the campaign to raise awareness in countries of origin or transit of migrants on the risks of migration, are made with the aim of informing but also to reduce, to discourage the departure of people. Then, there are a series of Sunds for Security, the Democracy Fund, the Instrument for Democracy and Human rights, the instrument for Stability and Peace. These are all the smaller funds in terms of budgets, but they have also been more consistently channelled into border control projects. For example, take the case of Niger. Niger is the second largest beneficiary of the Africa Trust Fund after Libya. In fact, since the creation of the fund, from 2015 to the present day, a large part of these funds has been channelled into development projects. Usually these development funds are given to non-governmental organisations such as the United Nations or various UN agencies. In Niger, on the other hand, about 70 million euros have been dedicated to support the budget of the state of Niger

The Global Corruption and Transparency Index has lost its position in Niger in recent years. So we can say that it is a bit paradoxical how European funds - 50 millions of these come from the Italian African fund

and have passed through the European Union - have been injected into the coffers of the Niger state without real control over the use of these funds and in a situation where the corruption has grown in the country. So, this is one of the controversial aspects of this kind of cooperation.

Through the development and employment creation programme Fund, a project has been created in Nigeria which aims to provide employment opportunities for young Nigerians. This project, moreover, is the largest project of the Trust Fund for Africa and is a German cooperation project financed by the European Union. This project has been de facto blocked for almost a year due to the lack of understanding between German cooperation and Nigerian partners on where to target these funds and thus where to intervene in a country with almost 200 million inhabitants. This is because clearly from a European and German point of view the priority is to intervene in areas such as the Edo state where most people come from. This created some tension because it was not considered to be fully aligned with Nigerian labour policies. It is interesting to observe that the first aim of this project was to reduce the number of asylum applications from Nigerian citizens in Europe. As a result, there is a paradoxical link between job creation in Nigeria and the reduction of asylum applications from Nigerian citizens in Europe, as if the fact that these applications are being curtailed - which is actually due to a thousand other reasons - could be an element of positive assessment of the impact of this job creation project.