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POLSKI INSTYTUT SPRAW MIĘDZYNARODOWYCH  
THE POLISH INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

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NO. 2 (94), APRIL 2021 © PISM

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### Much Ado About Very Little? Migration-Linked Development Assistance —the Cases of Poland and Norway

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In response to the migration management crisis that peaked in Europe in 2015-2016, the EU institutions and some European states promised to address the “root causes of migration”, with development assistance seen as an important tool in that respect. By comparing the development cooperation policies of Poland and Norway, this paper shows how the development-migration nexus has been implemented in practice by new and traditional donors alike. Despite important differences at the rhetorical level, neither state has substantially changed their development cooperation to link it directly to migration interests. This demonstrates the limited usefulness of the “root causes of migration” approach.

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The 2015 migration management crisis led both the EU and several European states to declare that receiving countries in their future development cooperation had to address much more forcefully the “root causes of migration” and refugee flows.<sup>1</sup> This paper examines how and to what extent this call has been adopted by and reflected in the official development cooperation of Poland and Norway, respectively a relatively new and a traditional major donor. The paper assesses the general changes in development policy in the two states since 2015 and scrutinises official development assistance (ODA) flows to the Middle East and Africa, origins of major irregular migration to Europe. The aim is to understand to what degree the new approaches to development cooperation to address the “root causes of migration” has been implemented or internalised by the two countries.

## Addressing Root Causes of Migration Through Aid—Political Discourse

Since 2015, Poland has officially embraced the “root causes of migration” approach in its foreign and development policies.

Since 2015, Poland has officially embraced the “root causes of migration” approach in its foreign and development policies. An important part of the background to this is that the European migration management crisis unfolded during the Polish parliamentary elections in mid-2015. While the incumbent government reluctantly accepted the EU relocation agreement—frequently referred to as a “quota”—involving refugees who had arrived in Greece and Italy, the main opposition at the time, the Law and Justice Party (PiS), vehemently opposed this mechanism. Speaking at the peak of the election campaign in the Sejm (Polish parliament) in September 2015, PiS Chairman and Member of Parliament Jarosław Kaczyński stated that while Poland should help resolve the crisis, it should do it in “a safe, financial way”, pointing at a contribution of funds for refugee camps in the Middle East rather than relocations within Europe.<sup>2</sup>

After PiS’s election victory and the formation of a new government, Poland actively promoted “assistance at places of origin of migrants” as a better alternative to the EU refugee relocation scheme. The new prime minister, Beata Szydło, at a donors conference on Syria in February 2016 in London, pointed to Polish humanitarian assistance, saying that “we want in this way to solve the problem that was born there so Syrian citizens can return to their homes”.<sup>3</sup> The Polish parliament in a 2016 special resolution on migration policy objected to the EU relocation quotas and fully supported instead “aid delivery and financing of humanitarian assistance in places ravaged by conflicts and bordering countries”.<sup>4</sup> In line with this, in July 2016 the Polish government announced a special package of humanitarian assistance for the Middle East for 2017.<sup>5</sup>

In the following years, the PM and several ministers paid a few well-publicised visits to countries in the Middle East to demonstrate support for refugees. To further strengthen its commitment to the cause, the government created in January 2018 a specific position—a secretary of state for humanitarian affairs in the Council of Ministers. The only such humanitarian minister in the EU, Beata

<sup>1</sup> See also: P. Kugiel, H.U. Erstad, M. Bøås, and J. Szymańska, “Can Aid Solve the Root Causes of Migration? A Framework for Future Research on the Development-Migration Nexus,” *PISM Policy Paper*, No. 1 (176), 5 March 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Sprawozdanie Stenograficzne z 100. posiedzenia Sejmu Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej w dniu 16 września 2015 r., Warszawa 2015, p. 14.

<sup>3</sup> “Szydło w Londynie: Polska przekaże 3 mln euro na rzecz Syrii,” Polska Agencja Prasowa, 4 February 2016, [www.pap.pl](http://www.pap.pl).

<sup>4</sup> Uchwała Sejmu Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej z dnia 1 kwietnia 2016 r. w sprawie polityki imigracyjnej Polski, [www.infor.pl](http://www.infor.pl).

<sup>5</sup> *Pakiet pomocy humanitarnej na Bliskim Wschodzie w roku 2017*, Kancelaria Prezesa Rady Ministrów, Warszawa, 26 July 2016.

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Kempa claimed that “assistance in places of origin of refugees is the best remedy to the migration crisis” and stated that Poland would direct its aid to two regions: the Middle East and Africa.<sup>6</sup>

Poland also supported the creation of and contributed to several new EU-led programmes and initiatives for refugees outside Europe: the EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey (EUFRT), the EU Regional Trust Fund in response to the Syrian crisis (MADAD), the EU Emergency Trust Fund for stability and addressing root causes of irregular migration and displaced persons in Africa (EUTF for Africa). In September 2017, Poland pledged €50 million—the largest among EU members—to the newly established European Resilience Initiative (ERI), a European Investment Bank programme that aims to address root causes of migration in Europe’s Southern Neighbourhood and the Western Balkans. Speaking in the European Parliament in Strasbourg in July 2018, Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki (who replaced Szydło in December 2017) observed that “migration pressure from Africa will only grow” and urged the EU to “engage in stabilisation and development of these regions”, calling also for a “new Marshall Plan for Africa”.<sup>7</sup>

The political importance of refugees and migration policies tend to wax and wane with the number of arrivals in the country in question.

In the next few years, as irregular migration to Europe has decreased, this topic was, however, mentioned less often by Polish politicians. Thus, in Poland, like in most other European countries, the political importance of refugees and migration policies tend to wax and wane with the number of arrivals in the country in question. When figures of new arrivals are low, this is not a very pressing or politically sensitive issue, but when

numbers rise above a certain threshold (which varies by country in Europe), the question of refugee and migration management quickly becomes politicised and governments in one way or another sense the urgency to react to what they believe is the popular discourse among their electoral bases.

The trends in Poland are also visible in Norway, although they do not necessarily materialise in the same way. Norway has a much longer history than Poland as both a donor country and a recipient of refugees and migrants. Apart from the Progress Party that at regular intervals (most often during elections) suggests reducing the amount of Norway’s ODA, mainly claiming that it is inefficient and wasteful, there has been and still is a broad consensus in the political landscape around Norwegian development assistance, its role (to alleviate poverty and bring about development with few if any political strings attached), and the size of it. This broad political consensus amongst most parties represented in the Norwegian parliament is also reflected in the population.<sup>8</sup> The overall majority is supportive of Norwegian ODA and the general direction of its programmes. Only rarely does the Norwegian parliament devote much time to discussions concerning ODA.

Likewise, in recent decades there has been a similar broad-based consensus on Norwegian refugee and migration policies.<sup>9</sup> Setting aside the issue of labour migration, which in Norway mainly concerns other European countries, the general political consensus on refugee management has been that Norwegian refugee policies should be fair but strict.<sup>10</sup> People fleeing war, persecution, natural disasters, or

People fleeing war, persecution, natural disasters, or other crises have the right to seek protection in Norway, but their need for protection must be real and provable.

<sup>6</sup> “Kempa: Pomoc na miejscu jest remedium na kryzys uchodźczy,” *Gazeta Prawna*, 05 September 2018, <https://www.gazetaprawna.pl>.

<sup>7</sup> “Całe przemówienie premiera Morawieckiego w Strasburgu: ‘Wspólnota europejska znalazła się na zakręcie’,” *W Polityce*, 4 July 2018, [www.wpolityce.pl](http://www.wpolityce.pl).

<sup>8</sup> B.O. Lagerstrøm, L.S. Bye, “Holdning til bistand 2017,” *Rapporter Reports*, 2018:6, Statistisk sentralbyrå / Statistics Norway Oslo–Kongsvinger, [www.ssb.no](http://www.ssb.no).

<sup>9</sup> J.-P. Brekke, A. Fladmoe, D. Wollebæk, “Holdninger til innvandring, integrering og mangfold i Norge. Integreringsbarometeret 2020,” Rapport–Institutt for samfunnsforskning, 2020, p. 8.

<sup>10</sup> A.O. Ask, S. Ruud, “Ap byttet ut ordet «streng» med «konsekvent» innvandringspolitikk, men Støre kaller det fortsatt streng,” *Aftenposten*, 6 April 2019, [www.aftenposten.no](http://www.aftenposten.no).

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other crises have the right to seek protection in Norway, but their need for protection must be real and provable. While the right to seek protection in Norway is clear, the country's overall position is that the majority of the world's refugees must be assisted "where they are", in other words, in refugee camps or similar, far from Norway's borders. This is the general consensus, which does not mean that there are no issues that lead to fissures in the Norwegian political landscape that spill over to the policy arena. Mainly, the debate concerns the balance between how many refugees should be offered protection in Norway and how many resources the government should spend on assisting them in other countries.

This debate re-materialised in the wake of the 2015 refugee and migration management crisis. This sparked a heated discussion about migration and development, with the general public and politicians alike split into two camps.<sup>11</sup> The main dividing line is, as mentioned above, whether to receive more refugees (directly or relocated through quota arrangements) or "help them where they are". The latter is more in line with the "addressing the root causes of migration" argument. That said, this has never been an "either/or" issue in the Norwegian debate. It is instead about the balance between these two measures of migration management, and the arguments are often based on the "ethical obligation" of one of the richest countries in the world versus cost-effectiveness.

While debates on refugee and migration policies flare up quite regularly in the Norwegian public discourse, what is relatively new is the discussion that aid can legitimately be used as a means to reduce migration flows to Europe.<sup>12</sup> In 2015, the governing Conservative Party (*Høyre*) and their coalition partner, the Progress Party (*Fremskrittspartiet*), proposed that countries receiving Norwegian aid should also be obliged to take back their citizens if they are not granted asylum in Norway.<sup>13</sup> The Norwegian prime minister said: "First and foremost, African leaders must realise that they must accept their own citizens, they must cooperate on return policy, and they must understand that it is necessary. It is acute in the current situation".<sup>14</sup>

Like Poland, Norway also decided to take part in the Joint Valletta Action Plan in 2015. This resulted in Norway contributing funding to FRONTEX and the EUTF, and to Greece through a European Economic Area (EEA) agreement. Thus, while there is still a considerable degree of political consensus about both refugee and migration management and the overall direction of Norwegian ODA, it also would be fair to say that ODA has to some degree moved in a direction in which short-term Norwegian priorities are put ahead of recipient countries' needs and the main goal of fighting poverty.<sup>15</sup>

The pendulum between altruism and self-interest in Norwegian ODA priorities has swung back and forth with changes of governments and priorities for decades.<sup>16</sup> However, it can be argued that since 2015 the pendulum has at least started to swing in the direction of increased self-interest, especially on the subject of "migration management".<sup>17</sup> Several strategy documents and messages to parliament have shown an

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<sup>11</sup> "Verdens flyktningkrise – årsaker, konsekvenser og mulige løsninger," *Nupi Skole*, 13 September 2015, [www.nupi.no](http://www.nupi.no).

<sup>12</sup> Ø. Eggen, *En bedre organisert utviklingspolitikk*, Civita, 2017, [www.civita.no](http://www.civita.no).

<sup>13</sup> "EU-toppmøte vil stoppe migrasjonsstrømmen: Skal gi milliardstøtte til afrikanske land," *Dagbladet*, 11 November 2015, [www.dagbladet.no](http://www.dagbladet.no).

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Agenda, "NORSK BISTAND VED ET VEISKILLE – Hva bør være Norges prioriteringer i bistandspolitikken?", Notat 5/2019, <https://tankesmienagenda.no>.

<sup>16</sup> O. Stokke, *International development assistance: policy drivers and performance*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, <https://doi.org>.

<sup>17</sup> J. R. Hagen, *Budsjettvinneren bistand*, *Samfunnsøkonomen*(5), 2019, pp. 27-33, [www.uib.no](http://www.uib.no).

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increasing tendency to link Norwegian migration and development concerns. Two white papers to parliament in 2017 stressed that Norway should increase its support to fragile states.<sup>18</sup> While one of the papers justified this shift in focus by the need to support the poorest of the world's poor who live in fragile states, the other also referred to the threat that fragile states represent, as they tend to be conflict-prone, administratively weak, and as such easy prey for terrorist groups and human traffickers.

The same government has also launched a new strategy, titled *Strategic Cooperation for Norwegian Efforts in Fragile States*.<sup>19</sup> It expresses an interest in concentrating ODA on regions geographically closer to Norway and fragile states that are significant origin- and transit-countries of migrants. The government also launched its own strategy in 2018 for the Sahel where migration is seen in relation to the growth of militant Jihadism destabilising the region.<sup>20</sup>

Finally, the new government coalition from 2019 also stated that Norway should enter into negotiations with recipients of ODA to establish agreements for the return of migrants.<sup>21</sup> Such a deal was negotiated with Ethiopia in March 2019.

## Addressing Root Causes of Migration: Aid Flows and Humanitarian Practice

For Poland, the challenge of fulfilling the government's commitment of using ODA to address the root causes of migration has been huge. Despite the growing amount of Polish development assistance since joining the EU in 2004, the rate of ODA to Gross National Income (GNI) for Poland in 2015 was still only 0.12%, one of the lowest among EU donors. It provided most of its aid through multilateral channels (mainly contributions to the EU budget and the EDF) and only provided symbolic bilateral humanitarian assistance. The Middle East and Africa, where most migrants originate, have never been priority regions for Poland, which traditionally focuses on the neighbouring Eastern Partnership countries. However, the priorities of the government that came to power in 2015 soon materialised in increased ODA flows.

In 2016, Polish humanitarian assistance rose manifold to PLN 120 million (\$31.9 million), up from just PLN 24 million (\$6.5 million) a year earlier.

In 2016, Polish humanitarian assistance rose manifold to PLN 120 million (\$31.9 million), up from just PLN 24 million (\$6.5 million) a year earlier.<sup>22</sup> Total ODA jumped in that period from PLN 1.66 billion (\$441 million) to PLN 2.61 billion (\$663 million), and for the first time the ODA/GNI ratio reached the level of 0.15%. This relatively sharp rise in humanitarian aid was mainly the result of transfers to the EU trust funds EUFRT, MADAD, and the EUTF for Africa. Polish bilateral humanitarian assistance stood at PLN 13 million (\$3 million). Some projects implemented by Polish NGOs and embassies included the provision of shelters for refugees in Lebanon and Iraq, as well as support for education in Lebanon. The overall rise in total ODA also resulted from the implementation of loans (as tied aid) to African and Asian countries and a new calculation of student scholarships. However, this sharper upward trend in ODA was not sustained in the years that followed.

<sup>18</sup> Utenriksdepartementet, Meld. St. 36 (2016–2017), Veivalg i norsk utenriks- og sikkerhetspolitikk.

[www.regjeringen.no](http://www.regjeringen.no); Utenriksdepartementet, Meld. St. 24, (2016 –2017), Felles ansvar for felles fremtid. Bærekraftsmålene og norsk utviklingspolitikk [www.regjeringen.no](http://www.regjeringen.no).

<sup>19</sup> Utenriksdepartementet, "Strategisk rammeverk for norsk innsats i sårbare stater og regioner," June 2017, [www.regjeringen.no](http://www.regjeringen.no).

<sup>20</sup> Utenriksdepartementet, "Strategi for norsk innsats i Sahel-regionen," 2018, [www.regjeringen.no](http://www.regjeringen.no).

<sup>21</sup> Regjeringen, Granavolden-plattformen, 2019, [www.regjeringen.no](http://www.regjeringen.no).

<sup>22</sup> "Annual Report. Polish Aid," Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2017.

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In 2017, ODA remained about the same as in the previous year (PLN 2.57 billion, or \$679 million) while humanitarian assistance increased further to PLN 173 million (\$46 million).<sup>23</sup> In 2018, total aid rose slightly to PLN 2.88 billion (\$759 million) while humanitarian assistance decreased to PLN 135 million (\$36 million). In 2019, total Polish ODA (grant equivalent) was PLN 2.975 billion (\$761 million), of which 71% (PLN 2.124 billion) was delivered through multilateral channels.<sup>24</sup> The ratio of ODA to GNI did not change compared with 2018 and amounted to 0.14%. Humanitarian aid decreased substantially to PLN 71.4 million (\$18.2 million), out of which PLN 40 million was for EUFRT. Most of the bilateral aid (59%) comprised scholarships and the costs of education of foreigners in Poland.

The recipient of the largest amount of bilateral aid in 2019 was Ukraine (PLN 303.5 million, or \$82 million<sup>25</sup>) and Belarus (PLN 150.29 million, or \$40.6 million), a traditional beneficiary of Polish aid but not a country from which most refugees were coming to the EU. Among the top 10 recipients of aid, only Turkey (third-largest, PLN 51 million, or \$14 million) and Iraq (ninth-largest, PLN 13 million, or \$3.5 million) can be considered major origin countries of refugees. In total, Africa and the Middle East received PLN 128.6 million (\$34.8 million), which was equivalent to 15% of Poland's total bilateral aid. By region, Africa received PLN 84.1 million (\$22.7 million) and the Middle East was given PLN 44.5 million (\$12 million). These sums included PLN 44.1 million (\$12 million) in the form of loans to Africa and PLN 40 million (\$10.8 million) through EUFRT.

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Moreover, the budget for bilateral aid managed by the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs for 2020 was cut to PLN 100 million (\$27 million) from PLN 145 million (\$39 million) in 2019, marking the lowest level since 2008. This has further forced the MFA to limit activities in humanitarian aid for the Middle East and Africa.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> "Aspekty pomocy humanitarnej i rozwojowej w latach 2015-2018," Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, Druk nr 3405 Warszawa, 11 April 2019.

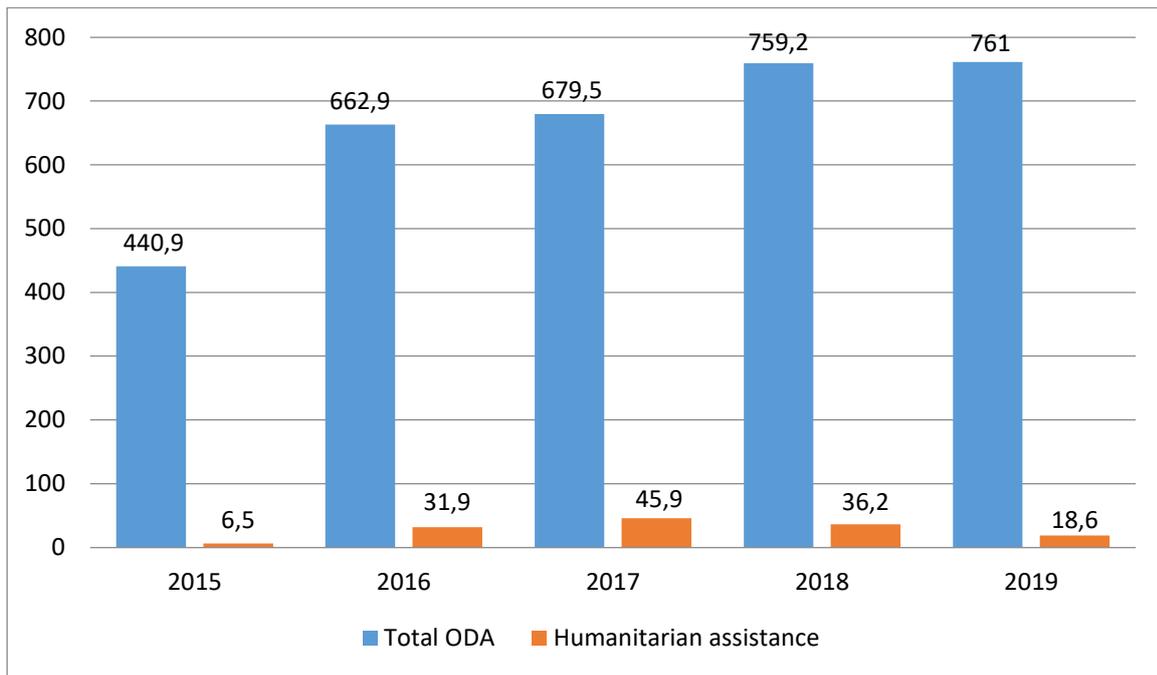
<sup>24</sup> "Oficjalna Pomoc Rozwojowa (ODA) 2019," 23 July 2020, [www.gov.pl](http://www.gov.pl).

<sup>25</sup> Calculations in \$ are used hereinafter as per the average exchange rate of the National Bank of Poland on 5<sup>th</sup> January 2021 when 1 USD = 3.6998 PLN.

<sup>26</sup> Pełny zapis przebiegu posiedzenia Komisji Spraw Zagranicznych (nr 5) z dnia 15 stycznia 2020 r., Kancelaria Sejmu, Biuro Komisji Sejmowych, 15 July 2020.

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Figure 1. Polish ODA and Humanitarian Assistance, 2015-2019 (millions USD, current prices).



Source: OECD QWIDS dataset on ODA flows.

The special position of minister of humanitarian affairs was removed in the second PiS government after the parliamentary elections in 2019. The creation of this post had been strongly criticised by the Supreme Audit Office (NIK) in its report in 2020, as controllers observed that it led to problems in coordination between two separate centres of power (the MFA and the Council of Ministers) in administering humanitarian assistance.<sup>27</sup>

In total, between 2017 and 2019 Poland spent PLN 380 million (\$102 million) on humanitarian assistance, mostly to Middle Eastern countries.

In total, between 2017 and 2019 Poland spent PLN 380 million (\$102 million) on humanitarian assistance, mostly to Middle Eastern countries. This included almost PLN 60 million (\$16.2 million) for projects funded by the MFA, PLN 51 million (\$13.8 million) in support by the Council of Ministers, and PLN 267 million (\$72 million) in contributions to international organisations and funds.<sup>28</sup>

Norway stands in contrast to Poland, given its tradition as one of the largest and most active donors in the world. Starting in the 1960s, Norway since the mid-1970s has steadily increased ODA to make it something of a humanitarian aid powerhouse. In 2015, compared to other OECD-Development Assistance Committee countries, Norway ranked among the ten largest donors in ODA spending at \$3.92 billion, ranking it third by percentage of GNI (1.05) after Sweden and Luxembourg. Norway is also often seen to be less concerned with its own national interests compared to other donor countries.<sup>29</sup> However, national interests have never been completely absent from Norway's priorities as a donor, and as discussed in the previous section, the current government in its statements and

<sup>27</sup> "Realizacja zadań administracji publicznej w zakresie udzielania pomocy humanitarnej poza granicami Polski. Informacja o wynikach kontroli," Najwyższa Izba Kontroli, 03 August 2020.

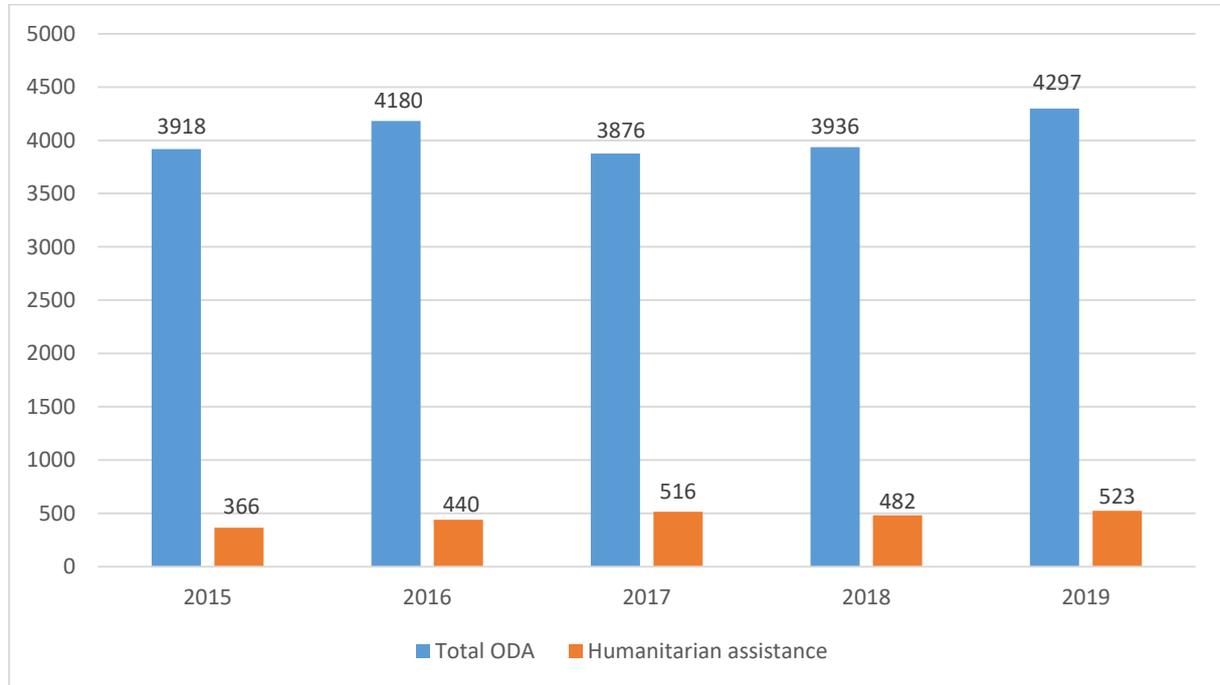
<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Gulrajani, N., "Bilateral Donors and the Age of the National Interest: What Prospects for Challenge by Development Agencies?" World Development, Vol. 96, 2017.

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strategies on migration and development concerns has shown some political will to place a greater priority on Norwegian interests.

Figure 2. Norwegian ODA and Humanitarian Assistance, 2015-2019 (millions USD)



Source: Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) dataset on ODA flows.

Like Poland, Norway too increased its ODA budget from 2015 to 2016, adding a little over \$250 million.

Indications of this can be observed in the difference in spending between 2015 and 2016. Like Poland, Norway too increased its ODA budget from 2015 to 2016, adding a little over \$250 million.<sup>30</sup> Percentage-wise, the increase is comparably small to that of Poland, but it is significant in absolute terms as Norway continued to spend about 1% of GNI.

A split picture emerges when studying regional flows of Norwegian ODA to Africa and the Middle East. The ODA to the Middle East is clearly dominated by humanitarian responses to the various crises in the region following the Arab Spring, while in Africa, where Norway has many long-term partners, ODA is much more evenly distributed across different sectors and partners and varies to a much lesser degree both in the short and medium-term horizon. Looking at humanitarian aid, the larger trend in Norwegian ODA is an increase in both percentage and real terms when comparing the period of 2011-2015 with 2016-2019. Norway spent a total of \$1.961 billion on humanitarian aid in 2016-2019 compared to \$1.405 billion from 2011 to 2015.<sup>31</sup>

In 2011, Norway's ODA to the Middle East stood at \$103 million, with more than two-thirds going directly to Palestine, the only long-term development partner in the region. Fast forward to 2019 and Norway is spending \$398 million in the Middle East, with extensive involvement in Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, Jordan, and Iraq, in addition to Palestine. The level of humanitarian aid was a staggering 70% for the whole region. It may seem that the government's "assisting refugees where they are"

<sup>30</sup> Figures collected from NORAD, [www.norad.no](http://www.norad.no).

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

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strategy is at the forefront of Norwegian ODA to the Middle East. However, there are different ways to interpret this development.

It may seem that the government's "assisting refugees where they are" strategy is at the forefront of Norwegian ODA to the Middle East. However, there are different ways to interpret this development.

An indication of the "addressing the root causes for migration" paradigm can be seen in the transition from 2015 to 2016 when humanitarian aid went from \$155 million to \$231 million, concentrated on aiding Syrian refugees. By turning the focus towards more fragile states and using even more ODA on humanitarian aid, Norway has fewer resources available for long-term development. The countries Norway focuses on in its long-term cooperation are not necessarily those that receive the most aid. However, one can also argue that such large increases in spending on humanitarian aid are simply the result of the tradition to offer support whenever humanitarian crises erupt and worsen. For example, Norwegian humanitarian aid to the Middle East tripled from \$25 million to \$77 million from 2012 to 2013 when the debate on migration flows into Europe was far lower on the agenda. From 2013 to 2014, its humanitarian aid doubled again, going from \$76 million to \$156 million.<sup>32</sup>

In relation to Africa, the importance of the "root causes to migration" paradigm is even more difficult to decipher when looking at aggregate statistics on ODA. One reason is the long-term involvement of Norway on the continent with many development-partner countries. However, with caution, some trends in the allocation of aid to Africa seem to be in line with an increasing Norwegian interest in attaching domestic political objectives to ODA.

East Africa has been a focus area for Norwegian ODA for a long time. This is notable because, while West Africa contains the most valuable trading partners for Norway, the bulk of ODA has been concentrated on the other side of the continent. Tanzania, Malawi, Mozambique, and South Sudan have received billions of Norwegian ODA.<sup>33</sup> Interestingly, since 2015, ODA has shifted somewhat towards the Horn of Africa, concentrating more in Ethiopia and Somalia, while South Sudan continues to be a main recipient.<sup>34</sup> The countries further south still receive a lot, but a smaller share than before 2015.

The new Sahel strategy of 2018 has also led to increases in ODA directed to Mali, Niger, and Nigeria. This ODA is primarily focused on education, "governance, civil society and conflict prevention" and humanitarian aid. However, once again it falls in line with Norway's tradition to offer aid whenever crises erupt. For example, during the Ebola epidemic in 2014-16, Norwegian aid to affected countries rose significantly. The earthquake in Pakistan in 2005 led to an increase in humanitarian aid from zero to \$53 million in the following year. The tsunami that hit Indonesia in 2004 led to a fivefold increase in ODA from Norway.<sup>35</sup> Spikes in humanitarian and development aid are nothing out of the ordinary for Norway, so one should be careful not to jump to quick conclusions about a supposed turn towards more self-interest in Norwegian development politics due to the recent migration concerns.

Perhaps what we are seeing today is coinciding interests between the recipient's humanitarian needs, Norwegian NGO interests, the country's long tradition in delivering humanitarian aid, and its interests in preventing irregular migration. However, as the think tank Agenda pointed out, the more Norway concentrates its ODA on geographically close areas with an emphasis on aiding refugees,

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

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internally displaced people, providing emergency relief, and preventing conflict, the less funding is available for more long-term development programmes in traditional partner countries.<sup>36</sup>

## Conclusions

The strong political commitment of the Polish government to try to address the “root causes” of migration through ODA has not been fully demonstrated in financial flows or a clear redirection of efforts towards the Middle East and Africa.

Comparing how Poland and Norway have responded to the European refugee and migration management crisis, both rhetorically and through various ODA instruments, reveals interesting similarities and differences.

The strong political commitment of the Polish government to try to address the “root causes” of migration through ODA has not been fully demonstrated in financial flows or a clear redirection of efforts towards the Middle East and Africa. Poland’s

bilateral engagement in these regions remains rather symbolic. The special formal arrangements that came into being have been dropped and the Polish call for a “Marshall Plan for Africa” has not yielded any results and has hardly been a foreign policy priority for the government. Most likely, this was more a rhetorical tool than a signal of new and comprehensive engagement with Africa.

Thus, while Poland was big on the rhetoric of addressing the “root causes” of migration, it was conversely small on real action. It seems that the “root causes” approach was a useful tool for the authorities to score political points at home and ease pressure from abroad. Domestically, it gave the impression that the government had a better solution to the migration challenge, was in control of the situation, and did not need to bow to unpopular EU decisions that called for refugees to be let in. Externally, it helped to ease European calls for the relocation of refugees. As minister for humanitarian affairs, Kempa openly admitted in 2019, while explaining the reasons for establishing her post, that “at the international arena, the Polish government needs strong and convincing arguments, some kind of weapon, to defend its current migration policy”.<sup>37</sup>

The Norwegian case is similar but also different. Here, as elsewhere, the foreign policy dimension of ODA is utilised for domestic political purposes. As such, it can be particularly useful when it can either be used to score political points against an opponent or to capitalise on another policy area, in this case, the much more politically delicate issue of refugees and migrants. That said, while policies followed after 2015 do signal a desire to rebalance genuine long-term development objectives with more narrow-based Norwegian interests in refugee and migration management, there is no evidence in the available figures that this has significantly impacted the trajectory of Norwegian ODA. Yes, there is a new focus in Norwegian aid to fragile states. However, while these states are understood to have both insurgents and migration routes towards Europe, they are also home to some of the world’s poorest populations. Thus, while suggesting that this new focus is partly explained by Norwegian security interests, the same ODA could easily be used to represent a continuation of Norway’s focus on aiding the world’s poorest.

This means that both Poland and Norway are influenced by the international debates about refugee and migration management in their respective donor policies, but also that this new debate hardly can be said to have become a game-changer in any of the two countries.

<sup>36</sup> Agenda, “NORSK BISTAND VED ET VEISKILLE – Hva bør være Norges prioriteringer i bistandspolitikken?” Notat 5/2019, <https://tankesmienagenda.no>

<sup>37</sup> “Beata Kempa Minister—Członek Rady. Ministrów Podsumowanie działalności w zakresie polskiej pomocy humanitarnej grudzień 2017 r.,” May 2019, <http://orka2.sejm.gov.pl>.

# PISM STRATEGIC FILE

While the refugee crisis triggered a large increase in Polish humanitarian aid to the Middle East and Africa, it was a short-lived mobilisation and has not been accompanied by more development assistance to the region. Norway's stepping up of ODA to migrant-sending countries seems to be driven more by real humanitarian need and support for the poorest countries and not by migration concerns.

These two cases show that the “root causes of migration” argument plays a limited role in the practice of development cooperation, regardless of the rhetorical endorsement of this policy or not.

These two cases show that the “root causes of migration” argument plays a limited role in the practice of development cooperation, regardless of the rhetorical endorsement of this policy or not. It is almost impossible to establish whether aid from Norway or Poland played any role in the reduction of migration pressure on Europe from the Middle East and Africa. While the limited aid from Poland might have had some

effect on the local level, more substantial assistance from Norway was more useful in improving cooperation on return and readmission with recipient countries. This supports the authors’ findings elsewhere<sup>38</sup> that the main usefulness of aid in the migration context is political leverage in dealing with migrant-sending countries. However, the actual impact of aid on the migration decisions of refugees and migrants is far more difficult to prove.

The analysis also shows some potential for Poland-Norway cooperation in the development field. The growing focus of Polish aid on the Middle East and Africa means increasing alignment with Norwegian priorities and opens an opportunity for collaboration and joint projects in the region. As a newcomer to aid in this part of the world, Poland can learn from Norway about the most effective tools and modes of development and humanitarian aid to fragile states. More exchange of information at the government level and joint projects in the field can serve as a force multiplier for both donors. Apart from migration concerns, these regions will need more attention and resources from Europe, and closer cooperation between Poland and Norway can only bring benefits to all partners.

*The publication is prepared in the framework of the initiative: Migration and Development: Sharing knowledge between Poland and Norway (MiDeShare). The Initiative is funded by Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway through the EEA Grants and Norway Grants.*

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<sup>38</sup> J. Szymańska, P. Kugiel, H. Erstad, M. Bøås, “The External Dimension of EU Migration Management: The Role of Aid,” *PISM Policy Paper*, No. 6 (181), July 2020.