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Research-Policy Nexus in Mediterranean Migration Issues

***A critical assessment of the debate
between Guia Gilardoni and Ivan
Martín***

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This policy paper is a critical summary of the debate between Guia Gilardoni (ISMU Foundation, Milan, Italy) and Iván Martín (Associated *EuroMedMig* Member, GRITIM-UPF, Barcelona, Catalonia, Spain), moderated by Luisa Faustini Torres (GRITIM-UPF, Barcelona, Catalonia, Spain), which took place on May 21st 2020. In the debate, entitled “Research-Policy Nexus and the Interaction between Politicians and Researchers in Mediterranean Migration Issues”, the experts discussed the main challenges and complexities regarding this nexus, sharing their experience and providing advice for professionals on the field.

This encounter was co-organized by the European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed) and GRITIM-UPF, in the framework of the [IEMed Series of lectures Aula Mediterrània 2019-2020](#). This Seminar is also part of *EuroMedMig*’s activities within a three-year (2019-2022) Erasmus+ Jean Monnet Network Program (Ref. 611260-EPP-1-2019-1-ES-EPPJMO-NETWORK) entitled “[Mapping European Mediterranean Migration Studies](#)” (Acronym: #EUMedMi). A recorded version of the session is available in this [link](#).

I would like to thank the organizers and mainly Ivan Martín and Guia Gilardoni for the fruitful debate, for their insights and for sharing their expertise on the topic, like this, improving the current corpus of knowledge.

Contents

I.	Conceptual framework of the debate.....	3
II.	The nature of the research-policy nexus: What are the main challenges and why it needs to be tackled?	4
III.	The practicalities of the research-policy nexus in Mediterranean Migration: when, how and where should it be tackled?	8
1.	When to act on the research-policy nexus, i.e. in which phase of the policymaking process?.....	8
2.	How and where can this nexus be enforced?.....	9
3.	Transmission mechanisms and channels.....	9
4.	Who should be targeted and with which approach?	10
5.	Agent and structural challenges.....	11
IV.	Wrap up and conclusions: Golden rules and final advices.....	11
V.	Final remarks: Breaking a vicious circle and fostering a continuous debate	12
VI.	References	14
VII.	List of experts	14

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I. Conceptual framework of the debate

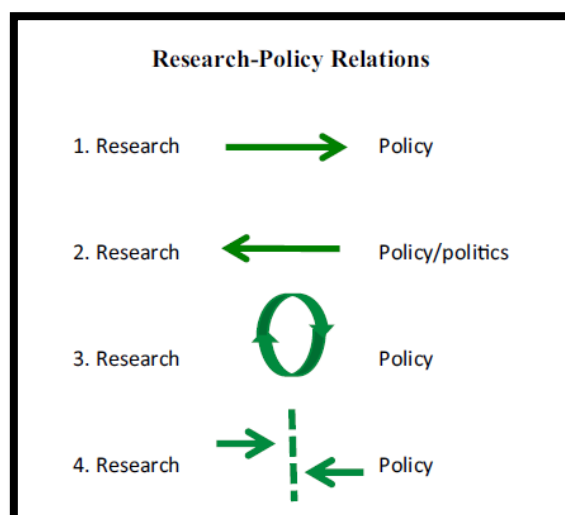
Most researchers are genuinely concerned with the relevance of their research beyond academic circles and mainly with its value on the 'real' political and social world, i.e., with the extent to which their work is capable of shaping and influencing policies. Similarly, policymakers also tend to be truly willing to improve the effectiveness and success of their policies. In the Mediterranean in particular, there seems to be a widespread concern among researchers and policymakers alike, that migration governance needs more evidenced-based policies as well as a joint work of collaboration between the two spheres. In fact, within the Euro-Mediterranean space, the debate about the research-policy nexus seems to be gaining more prominence each day.

First, migration is a field of study generally characterized by epistemic uncertainty and risk, touching a considerable amount of conflicts and tensions over values and interests. Secondly, in the last decades, migration became a highly controversial and politicized topic, especially within the Europe Union and its member states, which gained even more political weight after the so-called migratory crisis in 2015. Finally, there is also an outspread feeling that there is a gap between the goals of migration policies and its outcomes (Castles 2004). As a result, politicians have been constantly accused, mainly by academia and the civil society, of producing policies that fail to fulfil their stated goals, being highly ineffective and even producing undesirable side-effects. In fact, some authors point out that when it comes to Mediterranean migration issues, politicians tend to prioritize the implementation of symbolic policies ('border spectacle') that rather respond to electoral needs and organizational logics than expert knowledge (Boswell et al 2011) or even policy goals.

This leads us to the inevitable discussion of what is it and what should be the role of expert knowledge in Mediterranean migration policymaking and the extent to which research can shape the policy process and influence the political debate in this field. So far, the most resonated discourse has been that research should aim to contribute to policy success, being an essential tool to make policies more effective. However, it has been argued that the lack of communication and contact between the two spheres (research and policy-making) is one of the main obstacles preventing research from having a greater impact on policy. For this reason, it is common to hear arguments and initiatives aiming at improving the mechanisms of communication and level of trust between researchers and policymakers, enhancing their exchange and mainly making research accessible and responsive to policy needs.

Although this is an important discussion that should be addressed, we cannot avoid questioning if this is all we can say about the research-policy nexus in this field. Undoubtedly, the literature indicates that the topic is far from being simple and straightforward and that it should be subject to further questioning and debate, especially when it comes to an area as controversial as migration issues in the Mediterranean, which suffers for an increasingly politicization on the one hand and pressure for applying an evidence-based approach on the other.

A serious debate should start by acknowledging that the relation between the spheres of research and policy-making is a complex one, one that is not necessarily unidirectional, nor should it be taken for granted. The perception of how these relations work depends on the different assumptions one might have about the nature of the policymaking process as a whole and the inter-relations between knowledge production, power and politics (Boswell and Smith, 2017).



Research-policy relations. Retrieved from: Boswell, C & Smith, K 2017, 'Rethinking Policy 'Impact': Four Models of Research-Policy Relations'. Palgrave Communications, vol. 3, no. 44, pp. 1-11.

In this sense, it should be a matter of debate not only how research might impact policies, but also how the policies and politics in the Euro-Mediterranean region might be affecting knowledge production and transmission. Problematizing this relation from this point of view opens the floor for a much wider and deeper debate on the topic that goes beyond simple discussion on how questions are formulated, and research findings presented. It is necessary to go deeper and problematize the process of knowledge production on the one hand and the policy process on the other and give special attention to the spaces where these two processes might intertwine.

II. The nature of the research-policy nexus: What are the main challenges and why it needs to be tackled?

What is the nature of the research-policy nexus in the field of Mediterranean migration? What are the main challenges and particularities and why does it need to be tackled? These questions framed the first part of the debate and they were aimed at exposing the issue and introducing the 'state of the art'. It became clear upfront that the issue is a matter of great complexity that should be handled with responsibility and modesty. Even if Guia Gilardoni and Ivan Martín who hold high credentials and expertise to discuss the matter, have both underlined the importance of acknowledging their positionality within this debate, that is, that they were speaking as European researchers, and as such experts in research (and not on policy) that are likely to hold a Eurocentric approach – even if unintentionally. Apart from providing tools for understanding what is the 'state of the art' of the research-policy nexus in this field, the experts invited us to reflect upon the main premises, imperatives and challenges that circumvents this complex relation in this particular field.

To begin with, both Gilardoni and Martín agreed that this research-policy nexus is not only useful but necessary. They argue that these two spheres should not remain in separate boxes and that the dialogue should be the base of their relationship.

“Since there are no mechanisms in place in the EU organizational structure that specify how the findings and policy recommendations coming out of EU-

funded projects might flow into collective efforts towards the revision and improvement of existing policies, the research policy dialogue is of the extreme importance. Indeed, in the migration area there is a contradiction between financing and disregarding expert knowledge. On the one hand, the EU heavily invests in the production of knowledge in the field of mobility governance. On the other hand, this knowledge is almost never included in subsequent points of revising old policies or drafting new ones. And this is systemic” (Guia Gilardoni).

This makes the discussion about this nexus an important part of its own construction and consolidation. However, the experts also claimed that in order to understand the nature of this nexus, the first step consists in understanding the similarities and differences between these two domains. Above all, the professionals in both sides are moved by different motivations, goals and timelines.

On one stream of this nexus we have researchers, who are usually moved by a sort of ‘moral imperative’ that pushes them to produce work that could potentially have a political and social impact. In other words, they are motivated by the idea that their work might produce some change in the world. When this is not achieved – i.e. when researchers are not capable of reaching policymakers and influencing policy – there is an unavoidable shared feeling of frustration. For this reason, researchers tend to genuinely believe in the necessity of fostering a dialogue between the two fields and make the nexus work. Both Martín and Gilardoni were very emphatic about this point, resorting to their own personal experiences to stress it:

“Research aims to produce knowledge, and this is very clear, the question we should ask is: knowledge for what? Just a personal confession to begin with: I studied economics and then became a researcher. However, my goal was not to have an academic career and get many citations, but rather to change the world for the better, to improve people’s lives. To accomplish that I needed, at a certain point, to have some impact on policy. And this is basically what I have been trying to do for the last 30 years through different means (research, training, consultancy, think tanks and public activities...)” (Ivan Martín).

“From a moral point of view, I feel bad when I realize that my work does not reach the goal of bringing research knowledge to policymakers. The dialogue must be built and the effort should be made on both sides. It is a reflexivity exercise, an ongoing debate and a challenge for both academics and scholars. Also, scholars can be challenged by policy-makers’ perspective. But if we do not take the time to have a plain talk about some specific topics that are highly important from a policy point of view, we will be failing. I am really eager to foster this dialogue because I believe in it. If we remain in separate boxes ... what is the sense of what we do?” (Guia Gilardoni).

Even though most researchers have an honest interest in their research influence and in having an impact on policies, this goal is far from being easy or spontaneous. In many instances – and more than scholars would like to admit – researchers do not even get close to achieving it. One should question what are the reasons for this? In general, there seems to be an overall tendency to blame policymakers for not listening to researchers and their findings. Martín disagrees with this sort of statement, contending that if scholars are not being listened to, this is not related to policymakers’ lack of interest in it, but rather to the fact that the evidence produced is not policy relevant.

In fact, this would be one of the main pre-conditions for this nexus to work: the production of policy relevant evidence. In order to emphasize it, Martín refers to the World Migration Report 2020 which states that:

“Public policy has been defined as ‘anything a government chooses to do or not to do’. Policymaking involves action through the setting of rules, laws, procedures, programmes, guidelines and other forms of regulation. But how do States decide on what should be regulated, and what should go into those regulations? Questions of policy settings transcend political systems, although policymaking processes vary across different types of systems. The ‘raw ingredients’ of policymaking include evidence (statistics and other data, research and evaluation) as well as funding, public sector capability and political dynamics.”

This would by no means imply that with policy relevant evidence the rest of problems would be solved. But the existence of this type of evidence is considered a first condition, a raw ingredient without which this nexus is unlikely to work. Martín also argues that the absence of this essential condition would be a failure of researchers and not necessarily of policymakers. In this same line, he asserts that there is a hierarchy within this nexus that should be acknowledged. According to him, the definition of policy objectives is a political and not a research task. This means that the research occupies a subordinated place within this nexus and that the client is the policymaking – regardless if researchers feel comfortable with it or not. Martín argues that researchers might:

“contribute by answering some questions, like how to reach the defined policy objectives, if policies are effective or not, what are the conditions to reach those objectives... or by analysing contextual factors influencing in policy implementation and the achievement of policy objectives, but the definition of priorities and objectives is a task of policymakers.”

However, this does not mean losing independence in the process of knowledge production. About this Gilardoni and Martín are very emphatic in differentiating between being *policy relevant* and being *policy driven*. Both consider that independence in the process of knowledge making is crucial for maintaining researchers’ capacity to feed into the policy process. Gilardoni adds that, paradoxically, many research experiences of working on EU-funded projects are successful stories. However, even if research projects are highly successful (they generated many peer-reviewed publications, received media attention, yielded significant career advancements for scholars working on them, and even resulted in further successful EU funding applications on migration governance) paradoxically, within the EU structure there is a separation of the production of expert knowledge from policymaking, particularly in the field of mobility and migration governance.

Apart from having different goals, researchers and policymakers also face different constraints and work with different timelines. Researchers are interested in expanding the frontiers of knowledge, to think outside the box and are essentially critical. They are usually constrained by methodological issues, data availability and other formal procedures and goals that they are expected to meet. Policymakers, on the other hand, have winning elections as a primary goal, having a much broader agenda. Moreover, they tend to be constrained by a much shorter timeline and the need to provide immediate solutions that will please their electorate. The timeline of researchers is usually focused on the long term, with projects that are extensive and that might endure for years before providing results. Due to these differences in goals and approaches researchers might produce evidence that is not relevant for policymakers, something that should not be perceived as a total failure. Martín and Gilardoni agree that even when evidence is not

used in the short term, academia has the capacity of contributing to the creation of public discourses that influence policymaking in the long term.

The differences and the consequent difficulties to finding common ground do not imply that their position is irreconcilable. A dialogue between the two spheres is not only desirable but possible and ongoing, and the practicalities of it will be explained in more detail in the next section. However, in order to build the ground for a fruitful dialogue it is crucial to acknowledge and understand the differences between the two spheres discussed here. Particularly, Gilardoni insists on the need to prepare the nexus beforehand – especially due to its extreme fragility. The research-policy nexus does not evolve spontaneously.

This happens primarily through respecting each other's perspective and acknowledging its own position, strengths, and limitations. Martín makes an important statement on this point, according to him:

"[...] researchers do not know more than policymakers, they know different things and this is very important. Researchers are not experts in policymaking, they are experts in research, so they don't know more than policy-makers, they know different things and in a different way. This is an important starting point."

Moreover, policymakers also produce knowledge and stimulate knowledge production, even if thinking within the box, through different means (cabinets, consultants etc.) and with different goals than researchers. Starting from this basis of respect and mutual recognition of each other's respective roles, it will increase the probability of the nexus to work.

Two final points were stressed about the nature of this nexus that increases its complexity. Both are related to the particularities of this field, that is, to the fact that the field of Mediterranean migration holds its own peculiarities that should be kept in mind. On the one hand, Gilardoni underlined that this nexus should be dealt with urgency, mainly because what is at stake is human migration, a very sensitive topic from a human point of view. This means that certain policies or lack of them might directly lead to human suffering. This argument alone should be enough to enhance this dialogue and to use all available resources for making it possible. On the other hand, this might be challenged by a second issue related to this field brought up by Martín. By definition, the research-policy nexus target governments and their policies. However, in the Euro-Mediterranean context this government is missing: such geographical space is not a real polity, that is, it is not a political community with a common set of governance rules. Martín argues that the EuroMed space is basically a European created structure. In this sense, there would be no EuroMed policymaking but rather European policymaking towards the Mediterranean. Consequently, the government addressed in this nexus is the EU and not the Mediterranean as such. This has many implications not only for the policy side but also the research part of this nexus. The main concern being that the Eurocentrism embedded in scholar's work is hard to escape. As Martín puts it:

"[...] "in the EuroMed space a lot of the research focused on EuroMed topics is policy driven because is framed also epistemologically in a setting which has been created on the basis of very concrete interests of the EU, funded by the EU and ultimately addressed to the EU."

The fact that southern research partners are mostly included as funded partners and not as equal partners is another consequence of this that should be addressed (see Pinet and Leon-Himmelstine 2020). All in all, since Eurocentrism is sometimes unavoidable, self-criticism and positionality awareness become key tools for dealing with it, it also sets the stage to overcome it. Martín's final statement goes in this sense: "We are two

Europeans talking about this nexus and it is natural that it is so because we are discussing our own policymaking.”

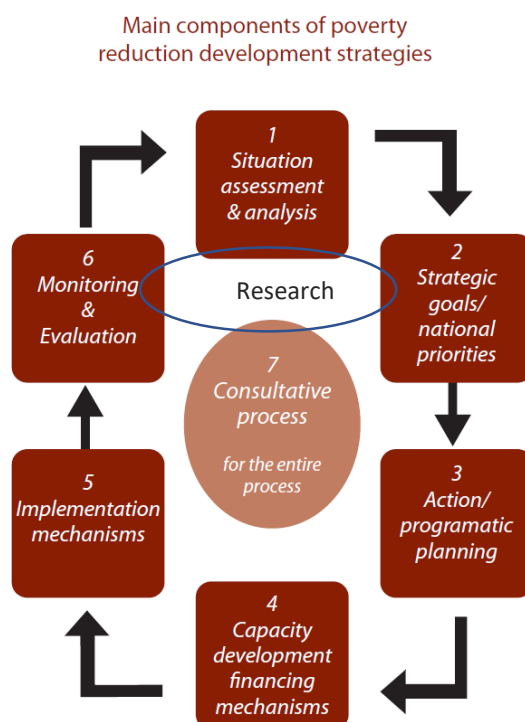
III. The practicalities of the research-policy nexus in Mediterranean Migration: when, how and where should it be tackled?

After understanding the nature of the research-policy nexus, with its complexities, challenges and particularities, the second part of the debate focuses on the practicalities. That is, on how to conciliate in practice two spheres with such different dynamics, priorities and goals. Both Gilardoni and Martín resort on their own experiences to share some ideas about *when*, *how* and *where* this nexus should be better operationalized.

1. When to act on the research-policy nexus, i.e. in which phase of the policymaking process?

As mentioned in the previous session, both knowledge production and policymaking are two different processes that have their own dynamics and timelines that should be considered in order to make the nexus between them work. In this sense, Martín indicated that we should keep the policy cycle in mind, that is, the different phases including: diagnosis of the situation, setting of objectives, policy programming, funding, implementation, evaluation etc. (see Figure below). This is mainly because researchers cannot influence policy in all and each of these stages. In fact, there are particular phases where the intervention of researchers is not only more effective, but also desired, and this is the case of the analysis of the situation and even in policy design. However, researchers should be aware that they do not have a role in implementation for example, nor in the definition of objectives. Researchers might be involved or consulted as experts in these other phases, but not as knowledge producers.

Diagram: Stages of Development Planning



2. How and where can this nexus be enforced?

In order to clarify how this nexus could be better enforced, Martín again resorts to the IOM World Migration Report of 2020, in which they mention the four required conditions ('raw ingredients') of migration policymaking (OIM, 2020, p.125). (1) First, "evidence exists and is accessible to policymakers". (2) Second, "policymakers are motivated to use evidence". As Martín puts it, this might not always be the case and they have their reasons to act like this (different motivations, timelines, goals and so on). (3) Third, "policymakers have the capacity to use evidence" and researchers should never take it for granted. Finally, (4) policymakers and policymaking bodies have relationships that facilitate the relevance and use of evidence. That is, that an institutional arrangement exists that makes this relationship possible.

3. Transmission mechanisms and channels

It has been argued that lack of communication and contact between the two spheres (research and policymaking) is one of the main obstacles preventing research from having a greater impact on policy. For this reason, it is common to hear arguments and initiatives aiming at improving the mechanisms of communication and level of trust between researchers and policymakers, enhancing their exchanges and mainly making research accessible and responsive to policy-making needs. Here the main challenge seems to be how to package the results (policy relevant evidence) in a way that they are accessible for policymakers?

Gilardoni considers that the accessibility of evidence is a crucial step, being the basis upon which the dialogue is built. In her experience, making research readable for policymakers, either by reducing the number of pages or simplifying the message, is something that works favourably in having the evidence be used and researchers be heard. This implies then a sort of translation exercise that researchers should do to bring the fields closer. As an example, she mentioned the King Project - *Knowledge for Integration Governance* funded by the EC, DG Home Affairs under the European Integration Fund in 2013-15. The KING research team, composed by 46 researchers from 10 European countries and 7 disciplines, operationalized the results through Common Basic Principles on Integration thus providing several evidence-based recommendations. The output of 90 pages (out of 1.200 produced) was taken as the background note of the Fifth Ministerial Conference on Integration, held in Milan in 2014. At the end of the meeting, the 28 Ministers finally agreed to sign 3 pages. Only the fact that a document was signed at the meeting, regardless of its length, is enough reason to consider the exercise a success. However, it is also true that such effort of cutting and reducing the research output leads to some frustration on the side of researchers.

Gilardoni considers this as a clear example of how the dialogue - the nexus - can work in practice, even if with limitations and perhaps way below researchers' expectations. She is mainly concerned with research communication capacity since they are usually not professional communicators.

Martín agrees with Gilardoni to a certain extent, but he is less concerned with the format of research results and he considers that communication tends to be overvalued. He argues that if the results produced are policy relevant policymakers will find ways to access it. He even problematizes the role of scholars in writing policy briefs, questioning if this should really be the work of researchers, alongside translating the work to make it more accessible or pre-packaging policy issues.

Martín's concern is mainly with the channels through which the message will be sent. In particular, he is very emphatic about the importance of enhancing the capacity and presence of research in the media. This latter is considered one of the most important tools for leveraging researchers' influence on policymakers and an 'easy' way of participating in the public debate. In this sense, scholars that want this nexus to work should focus on how to use the media and get its attention. And this might involve adapting it to the media format, in a way that it becomes accessible to any audience. He gives as an example of 'good practices' using the IOM Missing

Migrant Project¹, which has got great media attention through a targeted use of figures of dead people along the irregular migrations routes. In his sense, he defends that even research that is simple in the eyes of academia but that has good media coverage might have a greater capacity to influence policymakers.

However, even with great and accessible knowledge policymakers might still lack the capacity to use the evidence provided. Therefore, Martín defends that researchers should engage more in training of practitioners (public officers among them) if they want to be relevant. According to him, this sort of activity would be useful not only for policymakers but for researchers as well, since through it they would be able to learn and better understand “what makes the world move”. In this regard, Martín highlighted that comparative research and analysis is a crucial tool to attract attention from policy-makers and bring in evidence from other contexts into the policy-making process.

4. Who should be targeted and with which approach?

Apart from producing evidence that is accessible, both in terms of format and reach, Gilardoni and Martín also mentioned the importance of considering *who* are the actors being targeted in this nexus, that is, who should be included and how should they be approached.

Martín reminded us that there are many actors involved in the process of policymaking, from field level bureaucrats to high level policymakers. It is important to keep in mind that depending on the issue it will be more fruitful to target one level or the other – both are relevant but require different approaches. Following this line, Gilardoni commented on the importance of bringing other actors into the building of this nexus, mainly civil society stakeholders. From her experience, both policymakers and the civil society have great knowledge of the empirical reality and can bring different perspectives on one specific topic to the same table. Therefore, she defends a sort of research-social-policy dialogue that is broader than the research-policy nexus since it brings together civil society, politicians and academia. According to Gilardoni, this enlarged nexus is beneficial for all sides. Scholars have a stronger and more comfortable position; they can concentrate on providing evidence-based knowledge while the advocacy part is done by civil society organizations.

Choosing the right actors is certainly essential to make this nexus work, but equally important is which elements to consider when approaching them. Gilardoni and Martín mention three interconnected elements to take into consideration: motivation, trust and respect. First, actors should be motivated to get involved in the dialogue and although researchers might be frustrated for not seeing immediate results, according to Martín they need to build into the policymaking power game and convince them of the importance of the evidence they are providing. Policymakers are usually easily motivated, but scholars should keep in mind that it is not knowledge itself that motivates them but rather to have a good performance in front of the media and voters. As mentioned in the previous section, their motivations are different, but this does not mean one is wrong or less legitimate than the other.

The second element is trust. According to Gilardoni, meetings between the two communities should be thought strategically to create trust among its members and build confidence among the groups. If they feel comfortable and trust each other it is more likely that a real and honest dialogue will occur. In order to have good and meaningful meetings, some practical indications like providing the participant with materials prepared in advanced, and having close door working sessions possibly under the Chatham House rules, will allow experts from different professional backgrounds (scholars, policymakers, civil society stakeholder) to ease into communication even on sensitive issues. Finally, respect should be the basis of the relationship between the two groups. In this line, Martín insists that researchers should not underestimate a policymaker's own knowledge and priorities. As the subordinated part of the nexus hierarchy, researchers should be modest and acknowledge that policymakers are usually genuinely interested in improving policy outcomes (for their own interests). But they have other constraints (and interests!): they are interested in research outcomes. Gilardoni agrees with this idea, contending that each side should

¹ Check <https://missingmigrants.iom.int/>

respect the other's expertise, mainly by listening to each other and keeping an open mind for new learnings – something that she admits that policymakers tend to be better at.

5. Agent and structural challenges

Even with all the aforementioned elements in place this nexus might still be unsuccessful. This might be related to some additional challenges mentioned by Martín and Gilardoni that are worth noticing. The first one is related to the role of researchers in this nexus. Researchers are not activists, although some might be more interested in directly influencing the political domain than others – something that is totally legitimate. In fact, most researchers working in this nexus do not consider themselves as pure researchers but as in the middle of these two communities. As Gilardoni explains:

“I'm not pure researcher – I'm in and out academia – but this is not the job of a researcher - this is another kind of job. Indeed, there is room for new expertise for those who want to work in between”.

Martín also made a statement about this same ‘new expertise’, questioning the necessity of fostering a new profession, such as a ‘research-policy mediator’.

The second challenge is related to the nature of migration policymaking. Both Martín and Gilardoni mentioned that depending on the level of governance considered, the research-policy nexus might be easier to operationalize. They consider the EU and the local levels to be easier than the national one on this particular issue. To a large extent, this is due to the fact that it is at the national level that most of the migration policy-making power lies. Gilardoni explained that in her own experience she encountered some difficulties working at the national level and even situations where not all results from a project were allowed to be published. According to her, at this level there are evident and implicit constraints that researchers need to deal with, whereas at the EU level this collective tends to receive a fairer treatment. Martín considers this particularly concerning since migration policymaking happens above all at the national level.

Finally, apart from considering the challenges related to migration governance on the northern shore of the Mediterranean it is important to consider what happens with this nexus in the southern part of it, on the countries of origin and transit in the Southern Mediterranean. Two reflections made by Martín and Gilardoni are worth emphasizing. The first is related with the lack of integration between northern and southern countries in the topic of research-policy nexus. As it has been already mentioned, the Euro-Mediterranean space is largely a European construct, and as such it is far from being integrated. The overpower of Europe vis-à-vis southern countries makes it difficult to promote a comfortable dialogue among peers as it should be to enforce this nexus. On the contrary, what you usually find is a situation where the North is talking *to* the South but not talking *with* it. Gilardoni reminds us that this is related to the Eurocentrism that is inherent in most European academics, making them blind to certain unfair and unequal mechanisms.

A second challenge on this shore of the Mediterranean is related with the authoritarian contexts where many academics and policymakers in the Southern Mediterranean countries are embedded. Martín reminds that the research-policy nexus can only work in democratic countries since freedom of expression is a crucial element. This makes fostering this nexus in countries of origin and transit an endeavour close to impossible. Here is where the responsibility of European researchers comes in, who for having an easier path on those countries should push the limits of what is possible – the limitations will still be there, but some margin of manoeuvre exists and should be used to foster this debate as much as possible.

IV. Wrap up and conclusions: Golden rules and final advices

In the last part of the debate the experts shared some do's and don'ts (some ultimate golden rules) for making the research-policy nexus work. Even if aware that we cannot talk about a single formula, they commented on some final caveats for professionals on both sides of this nexus.

Gilardoni, for instance, insisted on the necessity of creating a good and strong relationship between the two sides based on respect and trust. She believes that relations should be built from the bottom and that policymakers should be included in the process from the beginning. According to her, it is essential to fully respect each other's perspective and at the same time to let yourself be challenged by different viewpoints, enlarging your own. She also mentioned the importance of giving continuity to the process, that should be repeated several times and at different levels (local, national and regional).

Additionally, Gilardoni also argued the importance of building the dialogue over narrower issues. According to the experience she had in leading the H2020 Project ReSOMA – Research Social Platform on Migration and Asylum funded by the DG RTD of the European Commission from 2018 to 2020, working with a specific and concrete agenda makes policymakers more likely to join the table and feel comfortable in the process.

This is related with Martín's comment about one particularity of the migration field. In the academic world, migration is categorized as a single academic discipline. This leads to a clear mismatch between the complexity of the policymaking process in the field of migration and the simplicity of discipline categorization. In his opinion, this implies some risks, since as a migration researcher you cannot produce policy relevant evidence in all migration topics then you should limit yourself only to research from which you can really produce new knowledge. However, since migration is considered to be a single discipline, researchers might be solicited and venturing into giving policy recommendations in every migration-related field, something that is not advisable nor possible and leads to discredit and bad research. In this regard, researchers should be the first ones to respect the hierarchy of knowledge. No knowledge is neutral, but policy-oriented research and knowledge should be based in solid evidence, solid methodology and theoretical framework, not predetermined by ideological considerations, or sheer amateurism. Providing evidence and knowledge is the only legitimacy of research.

Another remark made by Martín is concerning the prevalence of policy-making priorities within the research-policy nexus. Researchers are free to pick their research theme, approach and perspective...but policy-makers and politicians are free to decide what is relevant for them. Actually, in the Research-Policy Nexus one has to accept the prevalence of policy, because the main objective of research is not to inform policy, it is to produce knowledge and the experts in policy-making are...policy-makers... So, if policy-makers do not read your work and they do not seek your advice they are not to be blamed...it is because you are not relevant for them. Researchers, on the other hand, should accept this reality and try their best to gain relevance in the eyes of policymakers, if they are interested in that nexus. But they should be aware that this will not come without consequences. Martín reminds us that there is a trade-off between making policy relevant research and maintaining the robustness of your research (and research career).

What this means is that by making research policy relevant you might have to compromise its academical relevance, and vice-versa. Boswell and Smith (2017) also refer to this, contending that "What makes for politically useful knowledge is fundamentally distinct from what makes for good science". Ultimately, researchers should acknowledge that engaging in policymaking might come at a cost to their academic lives. As Martín puts it: "it is very rare, apart from star academics, to find researchers much appreciated by policymakers and at the same time are outstanding scholars in terms of citations and publications." Choosing one path or the other is of course a personal choice, but one that should not be seen as definitive, since many scholars find ways to navigate through and interact with the two worlds.

V. Final remarks: Breaking a vicious circle and fostering a continuous debate

The reflections provided by Guia Gilardoni and Ivan Martín throughout this debate left no room for doubting the importance and complexity of the research-policy nexus in Mediterranean migration. Apart from clarifying the main issues and challenges related to this nexus, they provided us with concrete examples and ideas for overcoming them. They also left space for continuing to enquire about this field, implying that this is just a small part of a discussion that should be continuous. It seems that the most important lesson to be extracted from it is that a

continuous debate should form part of the dynamics of constructing a fruitful and successful research-policy nexus.

This is mainly because the feeling that much more can and should be done by researchers and policymakers alike remains. This year is the 25th Anniversary of the Barcelona Process and many challenges of integration persist. This lack of a regional structure that could support and foster this nexus in an institutionalized way has obvious repercussions for its promotion in the Mediterranean. Mainly, that the only structure left to promote is that of the EU with all the Eurocentrism that it implies.

However, within the EU the situation does not seem to be ideal either. Researchers point out that the EU also lacks an evidence-based policymaking structure (Calir and Cantat, 2020). In a recent letter addressed to the European Commission, hundreds of academics denounced that the expert knowledge being produced by the projects financed by the EU is being disregarded by the decision-makers. Calling for a complete revision of policies, they argue that “it seems contradictory, to fund with public money big research projects that aim to improve migration governance and enhance the protection of refugees, and then completely disregard their findings and knowledge building about humane, forward-looking, and sustainable options, when drafting crucial new policies” (Open letter to the EU Commission, 2020). What they are mainly denouncing is the existence of a fund-but-disregard dynamic in the usage of expert knowledge in the field of migration governance that would be unthinkable in other fields of expertise - culminating in a general sense, frustration among academics. They also considered it as a systematic failure, a consequence of lack of engagement of policymakers and an opaque policy process.

This letter illustrates the sort of challenges that remain and that need to be tackled. Both Martín and Gilardoni would agree that more can be done on both sides. Several strategies have been mentioned in the previous sessions regarding the research role in this nexus, mainly with relation to the sort of evidence produced. As Martín constantly reminded us, research might be good but not policy relevant. However, Gilardoni also calls for the responsibility of policymakers, claiming that there is a lot of knowledge and studies ready to be used and it should be a moral duty to do so. She questions the willingness of policymakers to incorporate this evidence in to their policy and contends that researchers might help by providing them with the good reasons to use it.

As a conclusion, for making the research-policy nexus on Mediterranean migration work we need to count with a facilitating structure on the one hand, and with motivated and capacitated actors on the other. Moreover, it is important to acknowledge the bidirectionality of this nexus, to understand how knowledge and policy are produced and disseminated/implemented and how these spheres interact with each other. Finally, an effort should be made to keep the debate about this nexus alive since there are still many pending questions that could not be addressed in this short exercise.

It could be discussed, for example, the extent to which these relations might lead to the politicization of research and how much it could influence academic freedom. We could also consider the role of science in transforming the social world and the consequences this might entail. We tend to reflect uniquely upon how research can provide solutions for social problems, but not on how it can create problems that the government might not be ready to deal with. In this same line, should we take for granted that the policy impact of research is necessarily and always good? Mainly taking into consideration that expert knowledge can either inform policy or legitimize political interventions, particularly in the field of migration. Ultimately, the ethical implications of the research-policy nexus seem to be central and should be a matter of further debate, especially in such a delicate field of study as migration policy, in a complex geo-political space as the Mediterranean, and in a time of raising politicization and polarization over this particular topic.

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VII. List of experts

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Ivan Martín is an economist and he is currently an Associate Researcher at GRITIM-UPF, where he teaches a master course on Comparative International Labour Migration Policies. Between 2013 and 2016 he was a Part-time Professor at the Migration Policy Centre (MPC) of the European University Institute in Florence, as well as member of the Expert Group on Economic Migration of the European Commission and Key Expert on Labour Migration providing External Technical Expertise on Migration to DG DEVCO of the European Commission (ETEM V Project). Formerly, he has been a Research Fellow at several research centres mainly in Spain but also other countries. He has coordinated several international research projects and since 2010 he has worked as consultant and trainer on labour migration, youth employment and migration, and development in Southern Mediterranean Countries, Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America.