European Commission

EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa – North of Africa Window

Evaluation in brief

Final Evaluation of the DEV-Pillar of the Regional Development and Protection Programme (RDPP) in the North of Africa – Phase II and Phase III


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ABOUT THE PROGRAMME

The Development Pillar of the Regional Development and Protection Programme (RDPP) in the North of Africa - phases 2 and 3 were established by the EU under the Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF) to strengthen the resilience and protection of migrants, refugees, internally displaced persons, returnees and host communities in North Africa. The Development Pillar, evaluated here across Phases II (2017–2021) and III (2021–2024), invested EUR 21 million in nine interventions across Egypt, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia. Programming combined livelihood and vocational training, social cohesion activities, access to health and protection services, and institutional capacity-building for local authorities and civil society. This Development Pillar of the RDPP complemented a separate Protection Pillar managed by DG HOME and the EU Agency for Asylum (EUAA).

ABOUT THE EVALUATION

This independent final evaluation, commissioned by DG MENA A 1 (previously NEAR A2.01 Migration unit), was conducted between January and November 2025. It employed a mixed-methods approach combining desk research, 75 stakeholder interviews, 59 beneficiary consultations through focus group discussions, and an online survey (31 respondents). Fieldwork was conducted across all four target countries, with support from national experts. The evaluation assessed performance against four OECD-DAC criteria (coherence, effectiveness, sustainability, and perspectives of impact), together with EUTF added value and EU added value, as well as cross-cutting issues including gender equality, human rights, and the 'leave no one behind' principle.

KEY FINDINGS

Coherence

The evaluated interventions were strategically aligned with EU and international migration frameworks, including the Valletta Action Plan and the Global Compacts on Migration and Refugees. However, national legal and policy frameworks remained uneven and often restrictive. Synergies with other projects occurred at the technical level, but the programme operated as a collection of loosely related national projects rather than a cohesive regional initiative. Collaboration with national governments was positive in Morocco and Egypt but faced increasing challenges in Tunisia and, in some cases, Libya.

COUNTRIES

Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia

PERIOD

2017–2024 (9 interventions across Phases II & III)

TOTAL BUDGET

EUR 21 million

IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS

IOM, Save the Children, DRC, NRC, ACTED, CEFA, Caritas, Soleterre

Methodology and scope of the independent final evaluation (2025)

COUNTRY	INTERVENTION	LEAD ORGANISATION
Egypt	Addressing Unsafe Mixed Migration from Egypt	Save the Children
	MASAR EGABY	Save the Children
	Hand by Hand towards better future for migrants and host community	Caritas
Libya	Promoting Social Cohesion in Libya	DRC / IRC / DDG
	MUNDIL – Municipality Development and Integration Initiative	NRC
	Building Resilience, Inclusion and Social Cohesion in the Fezzan	ACTED
Tunisia	PAAIP – Support programme for population empowerment and inclusion	CEFA
Morocco	Work4Life – Integration of migrants and refugees into the Moroccan labour market	Soleterre
Régional	RDPP II Development Pillar (Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia)	IOM

Effectiveness and impact

Interventions were effective at delivering outputs and generating short-term benefits. Education and vocational initiatives strengthened skills, confidence and employability. Social cohesion, protection and health activities reduced inter-community tensions and expanded access to essential services. However, restrictive labour laws, limited private-sector engagement, and the irregular status of many migrants were structural barriers that prevented many outputs from translating into durable outcomes. At the individual level, the programme improved dignity, skills and confidence. At the community level, projects promoted trust and social cohesion through inclusive activities. Organisational and policy-level impacts were modest: institutional engagement produced isolated successes but remained the exception rather than the norm and policy dimension was not a priority for many of the interventions.

Sustainability

Sustainability was a weaker dimension of the programme. Benefits persisted mainly where activities were structurally embedded in public institutions or multi-donor frameworks. The EUTF's short funding cycles (2–3 years) were structurally incompatible with the long-term engagement required for institutional ownership and migration governance reform. Most services ceased when funding ended, and weak exit strategies limited continuity beyond what was achieved through institutional anchoring.

EUTF and EU added value

The EUTF provided valuable flexibility, speed and multi-sectoral scope, enabling context-specific programming. However, the regional mandate was not realised. The programme functioned as a portfolio of national projects, with limited cross-border dialogue, shared policy exchanges and mutual learning. The EU's added value was visible in reaching additional vulnerable populations and filling urgent protection gaps, but the absence of structured regional cooperation and limited strategic synergies with EU Member States' initiatives constrained the EU's subsidiary role. Overall, the evaluated interventions produced outcomes similar to those achievable by individual Member States acting independently.

Cross-cutting issues

Gender equality was well integrated into the design, resulting in high female participation. However, most vocational training reinforced traditional gender roles, confining women to low-skilled sectors rather than challenging systemic inequalities. The evaluated interventions were not always able to avoid the "*visibility paradox*", which limited access to services for vulnerable people, due to the exposure to authorities. Monitoring systems primarily tracked activity delivery, with limited evidence at the outcome level, constraining adaptive management and learning.

MAIN CONCLUSIONS

C1	**Misalignment between programme objectives and national regulatory framework.** The programme funded 'employability' in contexts where legal employment for irregular migrants was largely unavailable, creating a structural gap between supply-side investment and demand-side constraints.
C2	**Structural fragmentation limited integrated delivery.** The siloing between project components and intervention streams prevented a programme-wide 'continuum of care' for migrants and host communities, though individual implementing partners created effective ad hoc linkages.
C3	**Individual gains were meaningful but fragile.** Projects launched migrant-led businesses and strengthened skills, yet few beneficiaries believed livelihood gains would last, owing to a lack of sustained follow-up, access to credit and post-training support.
C4	**Gender-sensitive design did not produce gender-transformative outcomes.** High female participation was achieved, but vocational training concentrated women in feminised, low-growth sectors, reinforcing rather than challenging structural norms.
C5	**Institutional anchoring was the strongest predictor of sustainability.** Benefits survived project closure where activities were embedded in existing institutions. Sub-national cooperation offered pragmatic space for delivery but remained legally fragile and vulnerable to political reversal.
C6	**EUTF flexibility was an asset, but the regional mandate and EU added value could be further strengthened.** The programme's national and small-scale focus fragmented the portfolio, undermining the EUTF's regional added value and limiting cross-country learning.
C7	**A 'visibility paradox' deterred some of the most vulnerable profiles from receiving assistance.** Irregular migrants avoided some programme services because accessing them increased their exposure. The programme's reach was more effective with those who already had some degree of safety.
C8	**Monitoring focused on output delivery, constraining learning.** The absence of systematic outcome-level tracking limited evidence of whether outputs translated into sustained changes and restricted cross-portfolio learning.

KEY LESSONS LEARNED

LL1. Untested political assumptions created a structural ceiling on outcomes. Institutional embedding during implementation was a more reliable predictor of sustainability than formal exit strategies.

LL2. Comprehensive support packages outperformed standalone training only when post-training follow-up was sustained.

LL3. Cross-pillar linkages strengthened beneficiary outcomes where individual partners created them. The most at-risk populations were systematically least likely to access services.

KEY BEST PRACTICES

BP1. Aligning programming with national policy frameworks enabled institutional partnerships and legitimacy. Building targeted partnerships with state institutions created openings even in challenging environments. Institutionalising services through formal structures and partnerships enabled continuity. Inclusive programming serving both migrant and host communities reduced tensions and built broader support.

BP2. Creating safe physical spaces enabled service delivery and trust-building for populations who fear engaging publicly.

BP3. Engagement with local authorities proved relevant for project success when national frameworks were less cooperative. Integrated support maximised impact through complementary humanitarian and development linkages.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Ten recommendations are grouped into four clusters corresponding to the conclusions. They are proportionate to implementing partners' capacity and to EU HQ and Delegations' monitoring resources, and to provide evidence for the design of new projects.

Cluster I – Design and coherence

R1. Systematise institutional and regulatory framework analysis as a standard design input. Commission independent analysis of political will, legal barriers to migrant labour access and prospects for institutional anchoring in each target country before finalising Action Documents, so that programming approaches are differentiated according to country-level feasibility. (Lead: EC, DG MENA).

R2. Scale up and formalise protection-development transition pathways. Establish structured referral protocols, joint local-level planning and explicit criteria for when and how beneficiaries transition from protection-phase support to development-phase pathways, rather than leaving cross-stream integration to individual implementing partners. (Lead: EC, DG MENA & DG HOME).

Cluster II – Implementation and results

R3. Extend comprehensive support packages with sustained post-training components. Budget for a minimum post-training accompaniment period that includes access to microfinance, ongoing technical mentoring and shared business service provider agreements, particularly for smaller CSOs lacking capacity for sustained follow-up. (Lead: IPs, EU Delegations).

R4. Move from gender-sensitive to gender-transformative approaches. Incorporate gender-focused labour market assessments to identify sectors where demand exists, and norms are evolving, structured employer engagement to create hiring pathways, and gender-disaggregated outcome tracking to identify where barriers persist. (Lead: IPs, EU Delegations).

Cluster III – Sustainability and EU instruments

R5. Embed service delivery within public institutions and require costed anchoring and transition plans from programme inception. Shift sustainability planning from end-of-project exit strategies to inception-stage institutional anchoring pathways, assigning the brokering role to EU Delegations and larger INGOs with the leverage to negotiate such agreements. (Lead: EC, EU Delegations).

R6. Ensure programming continuity between funding cycles. Design bridging mechanisms to protect sustainability gains and prevent service gaps for vulnerable populations during transitions between funding instruments. (Lead: EC, DG MENA).

R7. Establish a cross-country learning mechanism in any future regional project. Create structured platforms for the systematic exchange of lessons, the transfer of innovations, and the scaling of successful models across countries, moving beyond the portfolio's current pattern of project-specific, nationally confined learning. (Lead: EC, EU Delegations).

Cluster IV – Inclusion and cross-cutting issues

R8. Scale up proven discrete outreach modalities for irregular migrants. Invest in mobile teams, community intermediaries, home-based support and explicit anonymity protocols from the outset, budgeting for higher per-beneficiary costs to reach those who avoid conventional service delivery points. (Lead: IPs, EU Delegations).

R9. Improve adaptive management through outcome-level monitoring, risk management and cross-project learning. Track both what programmes deliver and whether the external conditions for success hold, with structured reporting on the status of critical assumptions and mechanisms to feed lessons across the portfolio. (Lead: EC, IPs).

R10. Consolidate existing vulnerability approaches into a common, coherent framework. Develop shared vulnerability assessment tools and targeting criteria across the portfolio to improve coherence, comparability and the systematic inclusion of the most marginalised groups. (Lead: EC, DG MENA).

This evaluation was commissioned by DG MENA A 1 (previously NEAR (DGA2.01 Migration unit).
The opinions expressed represent the authors' views, which are not necessarily shared
by the European Commission or by the authorities of the countries involved.

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