



SCIENCE FOR POLICY BRIEF

Improving management of migration and forced displacement: Lessons learnt from the EU Trust Fund in the Horn of Africa



HIGHLIGHTS

- The various approaches to migration management implemented under the EUTF have shown different degrees of success, with more promising results in the areas of inclusive governance and cross-border cooperation, if compared to stand-alone capacity building activities.
- The effectiveness of interventions has been influenced by contextual factors, primarily the fluctuating political dynamics and level of institutional commitment in partner countries.
- Effective interventions require a holistic, participatory and whole-of-government / whole-of-society approach, as well as a comprehensive assessment of the different dimensions of migration governance.

CONTEXT

The Horn of Africa (HoA) represents a complex and dynamic migratory context, serving as a point of origin, transit, and destination for significant flows of people within the region and beyond – particularly towards the Gulf States, but also to Europe and Southern Africa. The region has been home to the largest displacement crisis in Africa since over a decade, with numbers of both internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees more than doubling since 2015. With an estimated 242 million inhabitants, today around 10% of the population is forcibly displaced¹, including 18.4 million IDPs.² Besides forced displacement, the region's migratory flows are diverse, driven by various factors, such as economic opportunities, education, climate change, and environmental degradation, and include different types of movements. Regular movements are mixed with seasonal migrations of pastoralists and nomads, irregular migration, smuggling of migrants and trafficking in persons.

Such unique dynamics have posed significant challenges to the management of migration and forced displacement by states and regional actors, including the need to uphold human rights while ensuring well-managed migration.

RESULTS

This Science for Policy Brief analyses the results in one of the four strategic objectives of the EUTF: improved migration management in countries of origin, transit and destination. The analysis covered a wide range of approaches used by the EUTF that can be grouped into the following three categories: (1) government capacity building and operational support in managing migration and forced displacement, (2) inclusive governance to promote the inclusion of migrants and displaced populations in decision-making processes, and (3) enhancing cooperation among stakeholders at the regional and national levels.

The analysed EUTF projects addressed a broad spectrum of migration-related policy areas, including protection and assistance for vulnerable groups, return and reintegration, refugee inclusion, and the facilitation of regional and labour mobility.

To address these multifaceted challenges and better manage migration flows, in 2015 the European Union established the European Union Emergency Trust Fund for stability and addressing root causes of irregular migration and displaced persons in Africa (EUTF) focusing on the regions of the Horn of Africa, Sahel and Lake Chad and North of Africa. From a total EUTF budget of €5 billion, the HoA region received an allocation of €1.8 billion across 94 programmes implemented through 231 projects.³

The JRC Study

The JRC analysed 47, out of a total of 231 EUTF operational projects, in order to **identify what has worked and what has not in terms of addressing the root causes of forced displacement and irregular migration in the Horn of Africa**. Results and recommendations come from a thorough meta-analysis of project documents and reports, as well as from exchanges with experts, practitioners and policy makers. More details on the methodology and results can be found in the JRC Technical Report.⁴

A key finding is that **all approaches have shown some degree of success⁵, indicating a robust pool of expertise and best practices**.

Among the numerous approaches implemented under the government capacity building and operational support category, the most effective ones were those focused on establishing manuals, procedures, and data-sharing systems. **The creation of tools, standardised procedures and information management systems significantly improved the modus operandi of institutions both at national and regional level**. Shared protocols at the regional level were particularly effective when accompanied by efforts to develop and align national policies.

In many cases, governments' limited operational and financial capacities were identified as one of the main obstacles to effective migration management. In such

¹ These include refugees, asylum seekers, returnees and internally displaced persons.

² UNDP, https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2024-07/11th_jra_draft_9_july.pdf

³ [EUTF 2024 Annual Report](#)

⁴ JRC, 2025, [Addressing root causes of irregular migration and forced displacement. What works and what does not? Lessons learned from the EUTF in HoA](#),

⁵ Success is considered when projects reported long-term sustainable impacts of the interventions, or at least the intended immediate outputs.

context, both **training and direct institutional support proved to be essential, complementing activities that enhance the impact of policy and programme formulation and their implementation.** While the effects of trainings and direct institutional support as such – in the form of personnel or equipment – on improved migration management could not be assessed, the analysis indicates that such interventions contributed to **enhancing the effectiveness of manuals and procedure-focused initiatives.**

In terms of **policy support**, interventions facilitated the development of migration and forced displacement policies and programmes in partner countries. Although not always ratified or implemented, they contributed to **advancing the national agenda and shifting governments' awareness of and commitment to migration issues.** In the context of weak government capacities, this outcome, although falling short of the initial project expectations, remains a relevant achievement.

Projects that integrated government capacity building and policy-level actions with direct support to displaced populations and migrants were more effective. By providing immediate relief while strengthening the ability of local and national institutions, they contributed to the development of durable solutions.

The EUTF strategic orientation document emphasizes the importance of inclusive governance as a key tool for ensuring local ownership, facilitating dialogue, and promoting cooperation. The analysis confirms that **inclusive governance interventions** have delivered on this promise, **demonstrating a positive impact of EUTF projects on local governance, social cohesion and access to services** for both refugees and host communities. Projects across Djibouti, Ethiopia, Somalia and Uganda successfully managed to include displaced population⁶ in government programmes, enhancing their socio-economic integration and access to public services in line with the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF). Furthermore, **the active involvement of displaced people** in the decision-making processes, such as the

design of national policies on returnees and IDPs (Somalia) and refugees (Djibouti), **resulted in policies that comprehensively address the needs of the displaced populations.** When it comes to durable solutions, displaced people are the best placed to propose their own (re)integration plans. Notably, it appears that **involving both refugees and host communities** in identifying obstacles, setting joint objectives and providing feedback fosters a sense of ownership and shared responsibility towards the specific challenges and opportunities of the communities, which ultimately helps strengthen social cohesion and long-term sustainability of actions.

Regional cooperation, and in particular the establishment of cross-border information systems, was a highly successful approach in combating trafficking in human beings and migrant smuggling. By facilitating the sharing of expertise, information, and data, these systems enabled countries to better coordinate their efforts and respond to these complex issues. For instance, the introduction of digital complaint mechanisms in Uganda, Kenya, and Djibouti, supported by the EUTF, improved durably the ability of law enforcement agencies, prosecutors, and the judiciary to track and address human rights violations against migrants and refugees. Additionally, **training of institutions across borders, peer-to-peer learning and the establishment of multi-agency task forces complemented traditional information-sharing arrangements,** ultimately enhancing cross-border cooperation.

National-level multi-stakeholder engagement and coordination have demonstrated significant added value in addressing complex migration management challenges. Regular meetings and dialogue platforms at both national and local levels have facilitated collaboration and information-sharing among key stakeholders. **The coordination between government entities, civil society and international organisations has been instrumental in developing effective responses to the needs of migrants and displaced populations,** as demonstrated by the consortium approach including different actors adopted in several EUTF programmes.

⁶ For the purpose of this study, the term “displaced population” is used regardless of status, and therefore includes refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced persons and returnees.

Figure 1 – More and less promising approaches in improving migration and forced displacement management

More promising approaches	Rather promising approaches	Less promising approaches
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Capacity building through the creation of tools, standardised procedures and information management systems Inclusive governance, incl. involvement of migrants and displaced people in decision-making processes Regional cooperation, incl. the establishment of cross-border information systems National-level multi-stakeholder engagement and coordination 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Training of government officials Capacity building through direct institutional support Policy development support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> n/a

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

The above classification of the effectiveness of approaches has to be considered within limitations related to the context as well as design and monitoring characteristics of projects. A number of obstacles were identified that hindered implementation and impact of actions, including external events such as inflation and environmental shocks, ongoing conflicts, and the Covid-19 pandemic but above all the significant **vulnerability of migration management projects to**

fluctuating political dynamics and institutional commitment, linked to elections, governments restructuring and shifting priorities. In the area of monitoring and evaluation (M&E), projects mostly relied on output and process-related indicators. However, none of the projects in the study sample assessed their impact on forced displacement and irregular migration.

CONCLUSIONS – GOOD PRACTICES

From the analysis of their effectiveness, several interventions have proven successful in supporting migration management. From these findings, a series of good practices can be drawn to inform the design and implementation of future interventions.

For what concerns **protection and (re)integration-focused projects**, the experience of EUTF shows that effective, sustainable interventions shall adopt three types of approaches:

- I. **A holistic approach combining direct assistance and capacity building.** Complementing assistance to migrants and/or displaced populations with capacity building for local governments in host countries is crucial. By supporting host countries in developing their own policies and capacities on managing migration and forced displacement, as well as delivering public services, programmes can promote shared responsibility and more sustainable (re)integration of displaced people and migrants within host communities. This approach helps avoid creating parallel service systems, ensures cost-effectiveness, continuity and sustainability of actions in the long term, and breaks the cycle of dependence on aid funds.

- II. **A participatory approach that involves migrants and displaced populations in the design and implementation of programmes.** This ensures that the services and policies developed are truly in line with the needs and expectations of migrants and displaced populations.

- III. **A whole-of-government and whole-of society approach**, where governmental institutions at different levels (national, regional and local) but also civil society and international organisations contribute their expertise, develop mutual trust and engage in dialogue for joint solutions to migration and displacement challenges.

These principles are also aligned with the recommendations of the NDICI Regulation, which mentions a “coordinated, holistic and structured approach to migration, maximising synergies”.

With regard to the promotion of **cross-border mobility, the support to voluntary returns, and the prevention of trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants, a regional approach is recommended**. In particular, the following actions shall be supported:

- I. **Continue strengthening national as well as regional institutions**, such as the Inter-governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the East African Community (EAC). Running continuous training programmes for decision makers and government officials has proved to be a necessary intervention to raise awareness, commitment and capacities, despite high staff turnover. In order to ensure the sustainability of capacity building efforts, it is suggested to institutionalise capacity building support within national/regional administrations (for example through training of trainers approaches). Regional institutions can play a strategic role, particularly when national capacities and structures are weak, undergoing transition periods, or in cross-border migration settings.
- II. **Promote spaces and tools for regional cross-border cooperation at the technical level** (e.g. for law enforcement agencies), through the establishment of innovative and efficient communication channels, information-sharing mechanisms, and collaborative platforms. This can include joint training programs on standard operating procedures, digital complaint mechanisms, and multi-agency task forces to enhance cooperation and coordination between countries in addressing migration and displacement-related issues. By fostering a culture of trust, mutual understanding, and inclusivity, these efforts can bring together multiple stakeholders and countries to share best practices and respond effectively to common challenges.

CONCLUSIONS – POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The establishment of EUTF and the scale of its operations marked a turning point in the EU's commitment to migration and forced displacement management, and paved the way for a reinforced and sustained focus through subsequent cooperation policies and instruments. The European Consensus on Development mentions EU and Member States' commitment to "promote the better management of migration in partner countries in all its aspects". The Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI)⁷ has gone even further, recognising migration challenges as constant realities that must and can be planned, and hence making migration, forced displacement and mobility as one of its seven priority areas for cooperation. The instrument allocates part of its budget to migration and forced displacement-related activities, specifying that "coherence between migration and development cooperation is important to ensure that the Union's external assistance supports partner countries to manage migration more effectively towards sustainable development".

Based on evidence and lessons learned from the EUTF experience, the following recommendations are proposed for consideration at a strategic and programming level by both EU actors and implementing partners.

1. **Comprehensively assess migration and forced displacement management frameworks in volatile contexts**

In light of the Horn of Africa's history of conflict and disasters triggering both sudden and slow mobility patterns, it is essential to comprehensively strengthen migration and forced displacement management in the region, enabling countries to adapt and respond effectively to the complex and evolving dynamics of migration and displacement. This is also in line with the EU's New Pact on Migration and Asylum, which emphasizes the importance of supporting partners in developing effective migration governance and management capacity. To achieve this, **a thorough assessment of a country's migration and displacement management framework is necessary at the design stage of interventions**. The **Migration Governance Indicators (MGI)**⁸ offer a valuable tool for this purpose, allowing the identification of areas of strength and weakness across the five key domains: 1) institutional capacity, 2) migrant rights, 3) safe and orderly migration, 4) labour migration management, and 5) regional and international co-operation and other partnerships. Such assessment

⁷ See Article 10 of the NDICI-Global Europe Regulation, available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32021R0947>

⁸ The Migration Governance Indicators (MGI) are a tool developed by the International Organization for Migration (IOM)

to assess and strengthen national migration governance frameworks. For more information see: <https://gmdac.iom.int/migration-governance-indicators>

should inform the development of targeted interventions, allowing for better prioritisation of areas for support and effective allocation of resources.

2. Support regional labour mobility

Considering the steady and large intra-regional movements, **the EU should strengthen its efforts to facilitate labour migration within the region, in line with the priorities of the Joint Valletta Action Plan.** This can be achieved by renovating support to regional spaces and cross-border tools. For example, with IGAD on the development of the free movement and transhumance protocols, building on previous programming and focusing on their effective implementation. Another relevant initiative is the Intra-Africa Mobility Scheme under the EU-Africa Global Gateway Investment Package.⁹

3. Leverage existing dialogues for programming and policy alignment

The EU should build on existing dialogues, such as the Khartoum Process, to **better align programming efforts to policy priorities of partner countries, including issues around return and legal migration.** These dialogues provide an opportunity for partner countries to share their experiences and priorities, ensuring the cooperation agenda remains mutual and relevant. Furthermore, considering the urgency of addressing the complex situations of forced and protracted displacement (including internal displacement) in the region, it is essential to broaden the existing dialogues to **include discussions on durable solutions and the respective responsibilities of all stakeholders involved.**

4. Establish clear objectives for migration management and governance

To enable more targeted monitoring and evaluation efforts, clear and specific objectives should be established within the broad concepts of migration management and governance. This approach aligns with the requirements of the NDICI Regulation, which mandates the development of a robust and transparent tracking system to measure migration-related expenditure and report on it. Starting from and expanding on the EU Result Framework, the Commission and implementing partners could **develop SMART¹⁰ impact, outcome and output indicators for measuring the effects of interventions on migration.** Particular attention should be placed on outcome-level and long-term impact, as these areas currently have the most significant information gaps. The integration of sector-specific indicators, such as those identified in the existing technical guidance on results and indicators for development¹¹ for forced displacement, can also contribute to making the framework more robust.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This science for policy brief is part of a series of three thematic briefs that complement the JRC Technical Report "*Addressing root causes of irregular migration and forced displacement. What works and what does not? Lessons learned from the EUTF in HoA*". The four products are part of a larger study jointly carried out by DG INTPA and JRC E.5 Unit.

COPYRIGHT

© European Union, 2025, except: image 1, At the entrance of the Association GarGar in Ali Sabieh, one of the Djiboutian associations active in assisting migrants. ©GIZ/Omar Saad.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Camilla.Fogli@ec.europa.eu



EU Science Hub

[Joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu](https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu)

⁹ See: https://www.eacea.ec.europa.eu/grants/2021-2027/intra-africa-academic-mobility-scheme_en

¹⁰ Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound

¹² See https://capacity4dev.europa.eu/resources/results-indicators_en