Better Migration Management (BMM) in Uganda

Context and objective

Uganda is a country of origin, transit and destination for migrants and has Africa’s largest refugee community with more than 1.4 million refugees (UN, 2019). The continuous influx of refugees to Uganda, mainly from South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, has been a challenge to the country’s migration management capacity in recent years.

Uganda has progressive policies in place to support the integration of refugees and asylum seekers. Legal frameworks allow asylum seekers and refugees freedom of movement, the right to seek employment and the possibility to acquire land. On the other hand, Uganda still has no legal framework or policies on migration. The government is presently working on a comprehensive national migration policy to address this.

With a high number of young Ugandans seeking jobs abroad, the country faces serious challenges with trafficking in persons. According to the Uganda Association of External Recruitment Agencies, 140,000 Ugandans are working in the Middle East. They are often recruited by human traffickers, which frequently results in migrants being forced to work and physically abused.

Uganda has taken steps to counter human trafficking, including the adoption of the 2009 Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act.

In 2016, the European Union and Germany established the Better Migration Management (BMM) programme to improve migration management in the Horn of Africa. In Uganda, activities have been implemented since 2018 in four interlinked areas: policy harmonisation and regional cooperation, capacity building, protection, and awareness raising.

Achievements

The project has promoted regional and bilateral collaboration in several areas. It supported the third regional Forum to Promote Safe and Fair Migration, which Uganda hosted in 2019, attended by around 40 civil society organisations and which provided a platform for cross-border cooperation and exchange. The project also facilitated collaboration between Uganda and Kenya through bilateral interagency meetings on criminal matters, including trafficking in persons and the smuggling of migrants.

Results of phase 1 (2016-2019)

- 3,983 migrants, potential migrants, and host community members involved in outreach activities
- 1,800 government and civil society representatives engaged in workshops, trainings or other events
- 10 government institutions and 4 civil society organisations supported
- 12 capacity building measures for 350 government and civil society representatives implemented
Regarding inter-institutional coordination on migration, the capacities of the National Coordination Mechanism (NCM) and equivalent structures have been continuously strengthened to coordinate migration management at the national level. This NCM is part of a process supported by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) to ensure a whole of government approach. BMM has strengthened the NCM to review updates to the national refugee, diaspora, and migration policy. Also, the Employment Regulations on the recruitment of Ugandan migrant workers abroad have been reviewed to align them with international and regional frameworks. In addition, BMM has advised on preparations for the accession to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC) protocols: the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air and the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children. The project has also facilitated consultative meetings in Uganda on the signing of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. Furthermore, BMM has worked closely with the Coordination Office for Prevention of Trafficking in Persons (COPTIP) to develop its National Action Plan 2019-2023.

BMM has strengthened the capacities of government officials and representatives of civil society organisations (CSOs) through training courses, study trips, and thematic workshops to increase safe and legal migration. The project assisted the Immigration Training Academy (ITA) to improve its performance and management. More than 140 border officers, police officers, and representatives of CSOs (first responders) have been trained to refer vulnerable migrants and victims of trafficking to appropriate shelters and service providers for legal aid, medical and psychosocial support.

BMM has also established the Migration Information and Data Analysis System (MIDAS) with accompanying training, which can simplify entry procedures, analyse migration trends, detect crime, and improve the support of migrants more effectively.

‘Exchange is key’

‘Benchmarking visits facilitate continuous learning and collaboration between countries tackling common migration challenges,’ says Agnes Igoye. ‘A well-trained, professional workforce is a prerequisite to effective migration management. A critical lesson learnt by visiting the Immigration Service Academy and Training School (ISATS) in Ghana was that the structured, continuous and systematic training of immigration officers is a worthwhile investment to reap the economic and social benefits of migration. It also enables the countries to approach migration challenges in today’s dynamic migration environment.’ Agnes Igoye is convinced that 'benchmarking visits, including the exchange of ideas, knowledge and experiences are key to improving migration management.'

Agnes Igoye is the head of the Immigration Training Academy (ITA) in Uganda and participated in the benchmarking visit to Ghana. The visit was part of BMM’s capacity-building activities in Uganda.

BMM has expanded the services and protection for migrants. The project renovated and refurbished one existing shelter and improved its services for vulnerable migrants. It has also supported a communication platform that provides information on safe migration and legal aid referrals. The freephone hotline is tailored to address the needs of young Ugandans seeking employment abroad and those of refugees who opted not to stay in the settlements and thus might be more vulnerable to exploitation and trafficking. Cases of human trafficking have been registered through the hotline and the victims referred to shelters and legal aid services. The project also established a Victim Case Management System (VCMS) in Uganda to improve the documentation of human trafficking.

Finally, BMM has provided information and advice on migration. The project runs information campaigns about human trafficking and immigration services and has raised awareness on combating human trafficking and promoting safe migration among local communities and district officials at 14 events attended by more than 500 participants.