Better Migration Management (BMM) in Eritrea

Context and objectives

Eritrea is a young nation in the northern part of the Horn of Africa. It gained independence in 1991, after 30 years of armed conflict with Ethiopia. Following a period of peace, further border conflicts erupted between the two countries before a peace agreement was signed in 2018, restoring prospects of socio-economic development. Eritrea’s population is estimated at 3.5 million (UN, 2019).

Eritreans, particularly the young generation, are leaving the country in search of a better life and work opportunities. Most Eritreans leaving the country on a permanent basis enter foreign countries without the paperwork they need. Their irregular status makes them vulnerable to trafficking, particularly from refugee camps. Many are kidnapped for ransom, forced into exploitative labour or subjected to physical abuse.

Eritrea is a member of the Khartoum Process, which is a regional dialogue for collaboration on migration between the European Union, its Member States and countries of origin, transit and destination in the wider Horn of Africa region. Initially the Process is focusing on addressing trafficking in human beings and smuggling of migrants. During its chairmanship of the Khartoum Process from March 2019 to March 2020, Eritrea promoted a sustainable and comprehensive approach to migration. It has also taken steps to stem transnational human trafficking.

In 2016, the European Union and Germany established the Better Migration Management (BMM) programme, which responds to needs identified by the African members of the Khartoum Process. The project is currently being implemented in close collaboration with the African Union Commission and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). Its overall goal is to improve migration management in the Horn of Africa. It aims to curb trafficking and smuggling of migrants within and from the region, as well as strengthening migrants’ rights to protection. In Eritrea activities have been implemented in the fields of policy harmonisation, regional cooperation and capacity building.

Results of phase 1 (2016-2019)

- 170 government representatives engaged in workshops, training and other events.
- 5 government institutions supported.
- 4 measures for 90 government actors in the field of capacity building implemented.
Achievements

In Eritrea, the project has promoted regional integration and cooperation in an effort to address the challenges associated with irregular migration. Several activities have been implemented by United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). In 2018, to mark the World Day Against Trafficking in Persons, the project supported the Eritrean Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Justice, and the Eritrean Police Force to raise awareness within their institutions regarding human trafficking. In 2019, the first regional workshop on strengthening international and national police cooperation in Eastern Africa was organised in Eritrea to address transnational organised crime. The workshop was attended by senior criminal justice officials from Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, and Uganda, as well as officials from Interpol’s regional office for Eastern Africa and IGAD. Participants discussed the need for effective, timely and appropriate communication and for sharing information on transnational organised crime. The event also highlighted the importance of enhancing legal frameworks and arrangements governing joint operations and investigations, including digital and financial investigations, in line with the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC) and its Protocols.

Eritrea ratified UNTOC and the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children (TiP) in 2014. With BMM support, Eritrea has also reached the final preparatory steps for accession to the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air (SoM).

Regarding inter-institutional coordination on migration, BMM has made the Government of Eritrea aware of the importance of taking a whole-of-government approach to migration, with all relevant ministries and institutions involved in developing measures. The project initiated a dialogue on migration management in line with human rights standards between representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Information.

Since 2018, BMM has strengthened the capacities of government actors to fight transnational networks engaged in trafficking and smuggling, and has enabled them to afford victims and vulnerable migrants better protection. 50 law enforcement officials have been trained to investigate and prosecute trafficking and smuggling cases, while representatives of the Ministry of Justice have been advised on the importance of criminal justice statistics and data collection. Another 33 judiciary officials have attended specialised training courses, which will enable them to effectively target illicit financial flows generated by trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants. The courses were co-funded by the United Kingdom.