



HM Government

HM Government Response

18 April 2017

Response to the Independent Commission for Aid Impact recommendations on: The UK's aid response to irregular migration in the central Mediterranean, March 2017.

The Government welcomes ICAI's Review as an opportunity to gain an independent, real time perspective on the UK's aid response to the migration crisis in the central Mediterranean. The Review identifies a number of helpful lessons for the future implementation of this ongoing response.

We are pleased that the report acknowledges that this is a complex, newly-emerged crisis where the UK is playing an influential role, both in responding quickly to mitigate the humanitarian implications and in developing innovative approaches to tackle its root causes.

We agree that it is still too early to judge the precise impact on long-term migration trends of aid-funded work that is helping to create jobs and reduce poverty in source countries. However, it is important to note that UK funded emergency interventions such as food and medical care for vulnerable refugees and migrants are delivering immediate impact. Our investments are providing care to vulnerable people on the move, including unaccompanied children, saving lives and reducing hardship. We are also supporting longer term durable solutions for vulnerable migrants through voluntary returns and resettlement. At the same time, the government is investing in research to better identify the most effective ways to deliver results in the longer term. We particularly welcome ICAI's recognition of the pace of the government's progress in building both the capacity and cross-departmental coordination structures to support the aid response to irregular migration in the Central Mediterranean.

Recommendation 1: The UK government should not label development programmes as migration-related unless they target specific groups with a known propensity to migrate irregularly and can offer a testable theory of change as to how they will influence migration choices.

Partially Accept

We agree that not every programme with a potential impact on the wide range of factors surrounding migration should be defined as migration programming without qualification, and that a clearer conceptual framework is needed. However, we reject the suggestion that the UK should only classify as "migration-related" development programmes targeting specific groups with a known propensity to migrate. To do this would exclude important work on factors that can impact on migration decisions in the long-run. For example, efforts to reduce conflict, strengthen governance and increase

economic prosperity which are all key factors that may enable people to meet their aspirations at home. As the review itself recognises, a complex range of factors can influence an individual's decision to migrate.

Work is underway to establish a clearer categorisation of programmes linked to migration. This work takes account of the fact that, as the report notes, reducing irregular migration to Europe and the UK cannot be a primary objective of Official Development Assistance (ODA) programming.

Recommendation 2: The responsible departments should invest in adapting monitoring and evaluating methods to the long causal chains between interventions and irregular migration patterns, and ensure that the new portfolio of programmes already in design include strong baselines and monitoring arrangements.

Partially accept

The recommendation reflects current practice in some respects. For some programmes which impact on migratory decisions in the short term, existing monitoring and evaluation arrangements already incorporate appropriate targets and indicators. For example, UK support for assisted voluntary return processes in Libya enables people in detention centres to return to their home countries and this result is reported in programme logical frameworks. In addition, for some programmes such as the Ethiopia refugee and migration programme, we build the evidence base and inform design through adaptive programming. Under this programme, an operational research component helps the Government to test whether our programme is having an impact on addressing the causes and consequences of irregular migration.

The Government recognises the need to develop further the evidence base for programmes that may have an impact on irregular migration in the long run. We believe this is best done through our extensive structured research that helps us understand the complex relationships and informs our programming. As the ICAI review makes clear, the causal chains between interventions and migratory decisions are often long and the timescales over which change might occur (sometimes over generations) present challenges for programme monitoring and evaluation which typically takes place over a more limited timeframe.

Recommendation 3: The UK aid response to irregular migration should be informed by robust conflict, human rights and political economy analysis, to ensure that it does not inadvertently do harm to vulnerable refugees and migrants. This information should be fed in at an early stage of project or programme design and documentation should contain a clear articulation of the risks, benefits and risk appetite.

Accept: Reflects current practice

While we agree that the UK aid response needs to be informed by the relevant analysis, we disagree with the assertion that our funding in Libya does not take the 'do no harm' principle into account, or is inadequately informed by conflict, human rights and political economy analysis. In Libya, as in other fragile states with poor human rights records, we carry out careful assessments of the likely impact of programming before agreeing to provide aid. For example, an Overseas Security and Justice Assistance risk assessment (OSJA) for the UK Conflict, Security and Stability Fund (CSSF) IOM project in Libya was completed in October 2016. This recognised the risks and mitigation procedures associated with operating in the country but concluded that "there is less than a serious risk that this project may directly or significantly contribute to a violation of human rights".

The 'do no harm' principle underpins all UK aid programmes. We have checks in place to ensure that the impacts of programming – both intentional and unintentional – are thoroughly assessed. Therefore, the risk and human rights compliance measures the review calls for are in place and monitored on an ongoing basis. There are risks inherent in working in such a context, which the review recognises, but we consider these risks to be sufficiently managed and are confident that UK programming in Libya is reducing suffering and saving lives.