

# **ICAI follow-up of: The UK's aid response to irregular migration in the central Mediterranean**

A summary of ICAI's full follow-up review

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# Executive summary

ICAI’s follow-up review is an important element in the scrutiny process for UK aid. It provides the International Development Committee and the public with an account of how well the government has responded to ICAI’s recommendations to improve spending. It is also an opportunity for ICAI to identify issues and challenges facing the UK aid programme now and in the future, which in turn helps to inform subsequent reviews.

This document is a summary which focuses only on the results of our follow up of The UK’s aid response to irregular migration in the central Mediterranean. The full follow-up report of all our 2016-17 reviews, including overall conclusions from the process and details of our methodology, can be found on our website.

## Findings

### The UK’s aid response to irregular migration in the central Mediterranean

Our second rapid review, published in March 2017, looked at a new area of UK aid spending: responding to irregular migration across the central Mediterranean route through North Africa into southern Europe. Under the rules governing the use of ODA, reducing the numbers of undocumented migrants arriving in Europe cannot be the main purpose of ODA-funded programmes. The review focused on how well the UK government was designing and implementing relevant and effective aid programmes in response to irregular migration in the central Mediterranean.

We offered three recommendations, summarised in Table 1, aimed at DFID and the CSSF, which implement programmes in this area.

Table 1: Summary of the government’s response to ICAI recommendations

ICAI recommendation	Govt’s initial response	Our assessment of progress since then	
		By recommendation	Overall
<b>The UK’s aid response to irregular migration in the central Mediterranean, March 2017</b>			
Only label programmes as migration-related if they credibly influence migration choices.	Partially accept	There is improved guidance on categorising new programmes. The government has chosen not to revisit existing programmes, but a new flagship programme is clearly migration-focused, with an approach addressing issues arising along the whole migration route.	<b>Positive action in all areas with progress at an early stage</b>
Adapt monitoring and evaluation to reflect the long causal chains from intervention to migration decision.	Partially accept	Research has been commissioned to inform evidence-based programming on why people migrate. There is resourcing in place to develop migration-sensitive monitoring and evaluation frameworks, although this is at an early stage of development.	
Ensure that the UK aid response to irregular migration does not do harm to vulnerable refugees and migrants.	Accept	Measures have been taken to ensure that programmes identify, assess and mitigate potential risks of human rights violations and other forms of harm. It is too early to assess the results of this.	

### Limit the ‘migration-related’ label to programmes that target specific groups with a known propensity to migrate irregularly and adapt monitoring and evaluation methods to the long causal chains between intervention and migration

While acknowledging that this was a new area of expenditure, our review found that many ‘migration-related’ programmes were pre-existing programmes relabelled as such. They were not designed with the aim of targeting populations and individuals more likely to migrate irregularly, and did not have theories of change setting out how the intervention would influence migration choices. Nor did they have a clear approach to monitoring and evaluation and building an evidence base on what works in achieving these aims.

In its initial response, the government only partially accepted these two recommendations related to labelling, monitoring and evaluation. It agreed on the need for a better conceptual framework to categorise programming. It also agreed on the need to improve the evidence base to understand why people migrate, but argued that this was “best done through our extensive structured research that helps us understand the complex relationships and informs our programming”. The government also preferred a broader definition of ‘migration-related’ interventions, arguing that social development programmes in a range of areas could over time impact on migration choices.

Nonetheless, in the year since the review, the government has begun to implement measures to address the two recommendations. The government has made the reasonable choice not to revisit existing migration-labelled programmes to retrofit theories of change and monitoring arrangements. It has instead concentrated its efforts on the design of a new £78 million programme, the Safety, Support and Solutions Programme for Refugees and Migrants Phase 2 (SSS II). The SSS II programme is developed within a whole-of-route perspective, in accordance with the latest research on migration dynamics. A theory of change is included in the design, and an independent third party will be contracted to monitor and evaluate outcomes. The evaluation methodology has yet to be agreed.

DFID has also commissioned research on why people move, in order to inform more evidence-based programming. We agree that focusing efforts on new research and programmes in response to our recommendation is an appropriate prioritisation, considering limited resources.

### **Ensure that the UK aid response to irregular migration does not do harm to vulnerable refugees and migrants**

Initiatives to address irregular migration flows often take place in fragile or conflict-affected countries with poor national law enforcement standards. Within such settings, there is a risk that programming could, without due attention to conflict dynamics and political economy challenges, cause unintended harm to vulnerable migrants. We found that the risk of inadvertently causing harm was not sufficiently addressed in the UK’s aid response to irregular migration. The review therefore recommended that programmes should be informed by robust conflict, human rights and political economy analysis, fed in at an early stage of project or programme design, and that programme documentation should contain a clear articulation of ‘do no harm’ risks and risk appetite.

The government accepted this recommendation and has implemented several measures to improve risk assessments and mitigation activities. After our review, the FCO-DFID North Africa joint unit reviewed and strengthened its procedures to document and assess the risk of harm, and DFID’s department for migration and modern slavery delayed elements of the new SSS II programme in order to strengthen its risk analysis. The SSS II programme has strong procedures in place to ensure that ‘do no harm’ risks are considered and documented. In its engagement with the European Commission, DFID has emphasised the importance that the EU Trust Fund, through which much of the EU’s funding to address irregular migration in the central Mediterranean is channelled, assess and monitor the risks of harm caused by EU programming along the irregular migration route.

We are encouraged to hear that there is now a clearer and stronger focus on assessing and mitigating risks in the design of programmes, in the requirements provided to implementing partners, and in communications with those partners. This is an area which needs constant vigilance and active monitoring, particularly for programmes in Libya. Independent monitoring and evaluation is essential, and there should be a willingness not just to delay, but also to cancel programmes if the risk of human rights violations or other harm is high and cannot be effectively mitigated.

### **Conclusion**

Although the government only partially accepted two of the three recommendations from this review, there has been useful action to address ICAI’s concerns on all the issues raised. Most importantly, we can discern more careful thinking around the ‘do no harm’ principle and how aid can and should be used in the context of irregular migration.

Much action is at an early stage. For instance, some projects have been delayed while human rights and 'do no harm' concerns are assessed. We would like to look at the results of these assessments in next year's follow-up exercise. We would also like to revisit the plans for SSS II monitoring and evaluation, as these are rolled out. We will therefore come back to these topics in next year's follow-up exercise.



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