Better Migration Management (BMM) programme in Uganda

General context

Uganda is a country of origin, transit and destination for migrants and Africa’s largest refugee hosting country, with more than 1.4 million refugees among a total of 1.7 million migrants (UN, 2019). The continuous influx of migrants to Uganda, mainly from South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, has challenged the migration management capacities of Uganda in recent years.

Uganda has progressive policies to support the integration of refugees and asylum seekers. The legal framework grants asylum seekers and refugees freedom of movement and the right to seek employment and gives them options for acquiring land. To date, however, Uganda has no legal framework or policies relating to migration itself. To address migration, the Government is presently working on a comprehensive National Migration Policy.

On the other hand, Uganda has one of the world’s fastest growing and youngest populations, with almost half of its people aged under 15 years and 80 per cent under 30 years. Limited livelihoods are one of the push factors for a significant number of unskilled Ugandan young people, who often emigrate to Middle Eastern countries through irregular channels. According to the Uganda Association of External Recruitment Agencies, a total of 165,000 Ugandans are working in the Middle East (2020).
They are often recruited under dubious work contracts, which can result in migrants facing unexpected circumstances in the host country, including bad living and working conditions. In 2020, many Ugandans abroad were stranded or forced to return home due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Uganda has taken steps to counter human trafficking, including the ratification of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC) in 2005 and the adoption of the Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act in 2009, which has served as a model for other countries. Implementation of the Act is overseen by the Coordination Office for the Prevention of Trafficking in Persons (COPTIP) under the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The COPTIP Task Force comprises representatives of government ministries, departments and agencies concerned with migration, trafficking, foreign affairs and labour externalisation. It coordinates trafficking-related issues in cooperation with civil society organisations (CSOs) to address the needs of victims more efficiently.

In 2016, the European Union and Germany established the Better Migration Management (BMM) programme to improve migration management in the Horn of Africa. The programme supports the Ugandan Government in developing and improving national migration policies and frameworks and in contributing to regional migration governance. It aims to curb trafficking and smuggling of migrants within and from the region and to help strengthen migrant rights to protection.

**BMM’s approach and activities**

The overall objective of the programme is to enable national authorities and institutions to facilitate safe, orderly and regular migration and to effectively address and reduce trafficking in human beings and smuggling of migrants within and from the Horn of Africa region using a human rights-based approach. Activities are implemented in three interconnected components: migration governance, effective institutions to address human trafficking and smuggling of migrants, and protection of vulnerable migrants and victims of trafficking. In Uganda, BMM acts in partnership with the COPTIP Task Force and with its member ministries, further relevant authorities and CSOs. Based on progress made in phase I, it focuses on consolidating a regional, holistic approach to migration management and on ensuring its sustainability beyond the duration of the programme.

BMM’s implementation partners are cooperating with other relevant international initiatives such as EU-funded projects and other donors to build synergies and avoid duplications.

**Migration governance**

BMM continues to promote the National Coordination Mechanism as the inter-ministerial committee to coordinate migration management across Ugandan authorities at different levels and with different ministries. In phase I, the programme supported the establishment of the committee and its review of the National Refugee, Diaspora and Migration Policy. In addition, the Employment Regulations of 2005 on the recruitment of Ugandan migrant workers abroad have been reviewed to align them with international and regional frameworks. Members of the committee receive further training to increase its functionality.

BMM also continues to support COPTIP. Phase I saw the development of the National Action Plan for Prevention of Trafficking in Persons 2019–2023 and its launch in July 2020. The plan seeks to establish structures and systems to prevent crime in a sustainable way and to implement curricula and training on the systematic identification, protection...
and support of victims and on effective investigations and prosecution. It also aims to foster cooperation between the different actors at both national and transnational levels. There are plans to provide COPTIP representatives with training and equipment to further strengthen coordination capacity, including a national database on human trafficking cases, to enhance measures designed to identify and protect vulnerable migrants and refer them to the relevant services.

BMM is also assisting the Government of Uganda in reviewing its Trafficking in Persons Act of 2009 in accordance with the UNTOC, exploring opportunities for ratifying the UNTOC Protocols and finalising the National Migration Policy.

BMM will review and update the existing pre-departure training curriculum for Ugandans going to work abroad, train recruitment agencies and contribute to developing information booklets for Ugandans working abroad. The revised pre-departure curriculum will provide information on ethical recruitment and on safe travel, stays and work abroad. It will highlight prevention and protection opportunities for Ugandan emigrants in the event of trafficking and/or smuggling at source, during transit or in destination countries. Training for the emigrants will be provided by CSOs and private agencies under the umbrella of the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development.

Effective institutions to address trafficking and smuggling

BMM is improving the effectiveness of institutions in implementing updated migration policies and legislation. The programme strengthens inter-institutional cooperation between law enforcement agencies and the judiciary on human trafficking and smuggling of migrants. It will initiate the establishment of standard procedures for cooperation between police officers and prosecutors investigating cases of human trafficking and smuggling of migrants.

BMM seeks to enhance the quality of capacity building. It has strengthened the Immigration Training Academy by improving its performance and management. Moreover, it will re-design a training curriculum on human trafficking and smuggling of migrants and integrate it as a part of regular general training curricula at selected law enforcement training institutions. The aim is to enable law enforcement officers to properly manage cases of human trafficking and smuggling of migrants, to protect presumed and identified victims and refer them to service providers such as shelters and providers of psycho-social support, and to adequately prepare cases for indictment in order to improve the overall quality of investigations and prosecution. In addition, the programme improves cross-border cooperation between Uganda and Kenya on criminal matters, including trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants, through bilateral inter-agency meetings.

BMM also set up the Migration Information and Data Analysis System, including training to simplify entry procedures, analyse migration trends, detect crime and provide support for migrants more effectively. Furthermore, the programme aims to establish cross-border inter-agency working groups on integrated border management involving the relevant bodies such as immigration, customs, police and health authorities.

The programme supports the Uganda Human Rights Commission (UHRC) in addressing the rights of migrants and in monitoring, reporting and following up on human rights violations against migrants. UHRC personnel, community leaders and CSOs be trained on human rights issues related to migration, and a corresponding migrant rights handbook will be developed.

At regional level, BMM continues to promote collaboration between UHRC and the Kenyan National Commission on Human Rights with a view to
sharing best practices and experience. Furthermore, the programme supports activities by UHRC as part of the Programme of African National Human Rights Institutions. A working group made up of human rights institutions in BMM partner countries was initiated to develop sustainable solutions for protecting migrant rights in the region. In addition, BMM supports the institutions in collecting, processing and sharing information about violations against migrants in order to monitor and pursue these cases across borders.

**Protection**

BMM helps provide better assistance and protection for vulnerable migrants and victims of trafficking in Uganda. The programme is supporting effective migrant referral systems through which vulnerable migrants and victims of trafficking receive the necessary assistance and are referred to services such as shelters, legal aid, and medical and psychosocial support. Relevant actors in the system receive training, and a guideline was launched in July 2020. BMM also aims to include sustainable solutions for migrants, victims of trafficking and returnees within the referral system. In cooperation with COPTIP, existing economic alternatives will be mapped out and viable approaches explored.

BMM has also expanded services and protection provided for migrants by state and non-state actors. Service providers such as CSOs have been strengthened through training and the supply of equipment. The programme aims to further strengthen Ugandan CSOs and facilitate their participation in the Regional CSO Network to Promote Safe and Fair Migration with around 60 CSOs from the partner countries with a view to fostering cooperation and exchange. BMM provides the CSOs with training on thematic topics. It also supports the Uganda Coalition Against Trafficking in Persons (UCATIP), a network of CSOs countering human trafficking.

**Results of BMM (April 2016 – September 2020)**

- **1,800** representatives of state departments supported in improving the coordinated management of migration and strengthening national migration policies, legislation and cross-border cooperation
- **12** capacity building measures for **350** state and non-state actors implemented in the field of investigation and prosecution of human trafficking, integrated border management, and referral of migrants to services.
- **15.5 million** individuals potentially reached through public awareness-raising activities on human trafficking and migrant rights.

Furthermore, the programme aims to increase access to information on safe migration and shelters and services for migrants.