



Executive summary | *IOB Evaluation*

# Evaluation of the Dutch bilateral migration partnerships (2022 - 2025)

June 2026

ateral migration partnerships (2022 - 2025) | IOB | Evaluation of the Dutch bilateral migration partnerships (2022 - 2025) | IOB | Evaluation of the Dutch bilateral migrati



# Executive summary

## Introduction

Since the start of the Rutte IV government, the Netherlands has invested in bilateral migration partnerships with countries of origin and transit of migrants. The partnerships have three objectives: to facilitate the return of people without the right of residence in the Netherlands to their country of origin; to counter irregular migration; and to protect migrants in partner countries. To achieve these objectives, the Netherlands invests in diplomatic relations with partner countries, funds projects, and can use other policy areas to support migration objectives.

This evaluation examines the extent to which Dutch bilateral migration partnership policy contributed to achieving its objectives between 2022 and 2025. The evaluation combines various data sources and research methods. These include five literature reviews; a quantitative analysis of return data for the period 2016–2025; case studies in Iraq, Morocco, Tunisia and Turkey; almost 200 interviews with policy officers, government authorities, international organisations, NGOs and other stakeholders; focus group discussions with 220 migrants and a survey among more than 100 policy officers.

The evaluation covers the period 2022–2025 and focuses on the Dutch bilateral partnerships. The Dutch engagement in the European Union and broader EU migration policy are not part of this evaluation.

| 2 |

## Main conclusions

### Overall conclusion

Dutch bilateral migration partnership policy has made a limited contribution to achieving the objectives in the countries studied. On facilitating returns, the evaluation only found a small measurable effect in Morocco. There is no effect of supported interventions aimed at influencing migration decisions. The effectiveness of migration management projects could not be assessed sufficiently due to access issues. The effectiveness of protection activities was limited: they often did not sufficiently meet migrants' needs or were poorly implemented.

There is a tension between the political desire to 'get a grip on migration' and the limited extent to which irregular migration and return can be influenced. Both are largely shaped by factors that lie outside the sphere of influence of bilateral migration partnerships.

### Conclusion on objective 1: promoting return

According to respondents, promoting the return of people without a right of residence in the Netherlands is the most important objective of the bilateral partnership policy. The aim of the migration partnerships is therefore to improve cooperation with authorities in countries of origin, so that more people can return.

The evaluation shows that the bilateral partnerships contributed to additional return to a very limited extent. Only for Morocco there is a small measurable effect of the partnership policy on return figures. On the basis of quantitative analysis, IOB estimates that the partnership led to approximately 112 additional forced returns per year. This increase was accompanied by a very limited increase in voluntary return. While these effects are tangible, they remain limited in relation to the overall number of arrivals from Morocco to the Netherlands. Between 2018 and 2025, an average of 840 first asylum applications by Moroccan nationals were registered each year. The vast majority of these applicants ultimately do not receive a right of residence.

For the other partner countries, the evaluation finds no evidence that the partnerships led to additional return. The statistical analysis shows a very small effect for Nigeria and no effect at all for Iraq, Turkey and Egypt.

Whether additional people return to these countries does not depend solely on the political willingness of partner countries but also on operational and legal factors in the Netherlands and the partner country. Iraq's greater willingness to cooperate at the political level resulted only to a very limited extent in actual return cooperation.

### **Conclusion on objective 2: countering irregular migration**

To contribute to countering irregular migration, the Netherlands supports projects aimed at strengthening migration management capacity in partner countries. It also funds interventions aimed at influencing the choices of potential migrants.

The European Union and other Member States dominate the field of migration management. The Dutch contribution in this area is limited in scale. Because of risks and potential reputational damage, the Netherlands is more reluctant to meet requests from partner countries for material support for border management. Riskier activities are therefore more often financed at European level. Because IOB researchers had little access to project locations and project beneficiaries, this evaluation could not establish the effectiveness of Dutch projects.

The evaluation finds no effect from projects aimed at influencing individual migration decisions. This finding is in line with the academic literature, in which there is broad consensus that information campaigns and awareness-raising activities have no effect on people's intention to migrate or on actual migration.

### **Conclusion on objective 3: protecting migrants**

The ministries involved differ in their views on the extent to which protection is an independent objective of bilateral migration partnership policy. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs does regard protection as an objective, but there is no clear definition nor operationalization of protection of migrants. The Ministry of Justice and Security sees protection more as a theme to be mainstreamed into all migration related activities than as a separate objective. It does not implement protection projects.

Compared to other European Member States, the Netherlands is more visible and active on the protection and human rights of migrants. At the same time, protection does not play a prominent role in the diplomatic engagement under the bilateral partnerships. Protection is a sensitive issue for the authorities of partner countries. In order not to undermine its migration objectives, the Netherlands has adopted a more restrained position on human rights and protection issues in recent years.

Evaluated protection activities often did not sufficiently meet migrants' needs. A significant part of funded activities in Morocco and Tunisia concerned voluntary return, while the main need of vulnerable migrants was access to basic services. Smaller protection projects implemented by NGOs generally aligned better with migrants' needs.

Several protection activities were poorly implemented. The largest Dutch-funded protection programme is COMPASS. On paper, COMPASS services are accessible to vulnerable migrants regardless of their intention to return to their country of origin. Nevertheless, a substantial proportion of the interviewed migrants who had approached COMPASS in Morocco with a request for assistance said they had not received support. In practice, registration for voluntary return was often a condition for receiving support. Moreover, some implementing organisations focused mainly or exclusively on the local population and not specifically on migrants.

**Other conclusions**

Dutch engagement has contributed to the establishment of consultation structures with several partner countries. These structures provide a platform for diplomatic dialogue and political negotiations on Dutch migration objectives. At the same time, their contribution to improved migration cooperation remained limited.

In practice, the relationship with partner countries is asymmetric and transactional. The main incentives for better cooperation on migration lie outside the migration domain. This evaluation finds strong indications that the Dutch wording on the Moroccan autonomy plan for Western Sahara was a decisive factor in initiating cooperation on Dutch migration objectives. In the cooperation with Iraq, the threat of European visa measures led to a greater willingness to cooperate on Dutch policy objectives.

**Conclusion on the efficiency of the policy**

Between 2022 and 2025, the Netherlands allocated a total of € 105 million on projects under the bilateral migration partnerships. But the partnerships entail more than financial costs. The policy also involves non-financial costs, in the form of political concessions and competition between European Member States. At the same time, results on the policy's three main objectives remain limited. Given the limited results and the financial and non-financial costs, the evaluation concludes that the efficiency of the migration partnership policy is limited.

**Recommendations**

The above conclusions lead to the following recommendations:

1. Translate the political mandate into concrete objectives.
  - a. Formulate realistic objectives based on the political mandate.
  - b. Take existing (academic) evidence into account when designing objectives.
  - c. Inform Parliament periodically about progress made and challenges encountered.
2. Focus on the concrete interests of partner countries. In doing so, ensure clear safeguards in terms of respect for rule-of-law and human rights.
3. Formulate concrete targets for the return objective of the bilateral migration partnerships.
4. Clarify the protection objective. Make clear what place protection has within the partnerships, and define precisely what protection means.
5. Revise the use of projects funded under the migration partnership policy.
  - a. Stop funding interventions for which there is convincing evidence that they are ineffective, such as information campaigns.
  - b. Stop funding interventions where access and independent monitoring are not possible.
  - c. If the policy seeks to contribute to the protection of vulnerable migrants, align the engagement with their needs and avoid conditional service provision.
6. Improve the quality and independence of evaluations of projects under the migration partnership policy.
7. Continue sharing information between European countries.

Published by:

Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (IOB)  
P.O. Box 20061 | 2500 EB The Hague

<https://english.iob-evaluatie.nl>  
[nl.linkedin.com/company/iob-evaluatie](https://nl.linkedin.com/company/iob-evaluatie)

Lay-out: DPI

Authors: Caspar Lobbrecht, Johannes Claes, Zeineb Romdhane

© Ministry of Foreign Affairs | June 2026