



Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Summary | *IOB Evaluation*

Beyond Forced Displacement

Evaluating the Prospects partnership
2019-2024

April 2026

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Summary

The Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (IOB) of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) conducted an evaluation of the Prospects partnership. The evaluation covers phase 1 of Prospects (2019-2024).

Background

In 2016, the number of forcibly displaced persons reached a record high of 65 million, and these displacements were increasingly protracted. To better respond to these protracted crises, the international community agreed that humanitarian aid needed to be complemented by a development approach that also addressed the medium- and long-term dimensions of crises. Strengthening collaboration between organisations working on short-term humanitarian aid and long-term international development was identified as a top priority.

In response to this need, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs launched the Prospects partnership in 2018: an innovative model of cooperation aimed at improving prospects for forcibly displaced persons and vulnerable host communities. Implemented by IFC, ILO, UNHCR, UNICEF and the World Bank, the programme sought to move beyond traditional siloes of humanitarian assistance and development cooperation by encouraging these organisations to work together and use their comparative advantages towards collective outcomes – the so-called ‘humanitarian-development nexus’ approach (hereafter: the nexus approach).

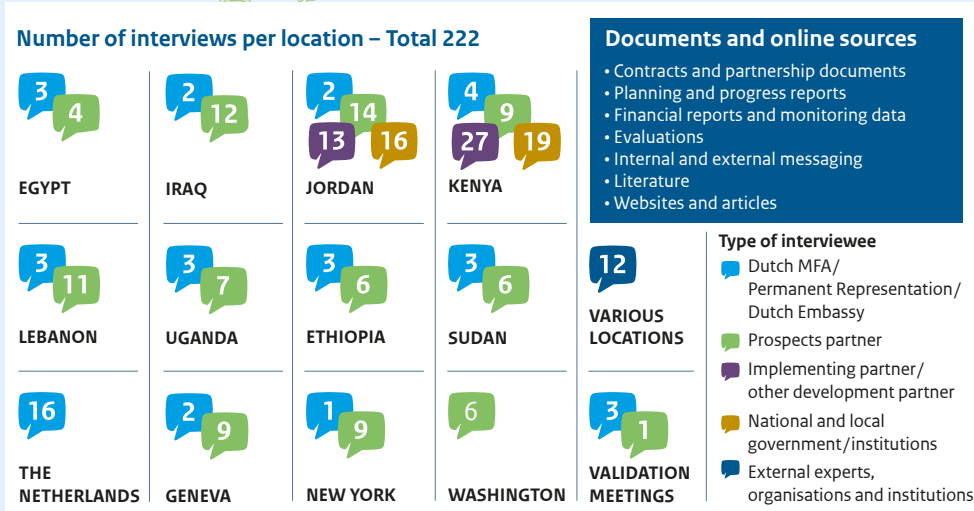
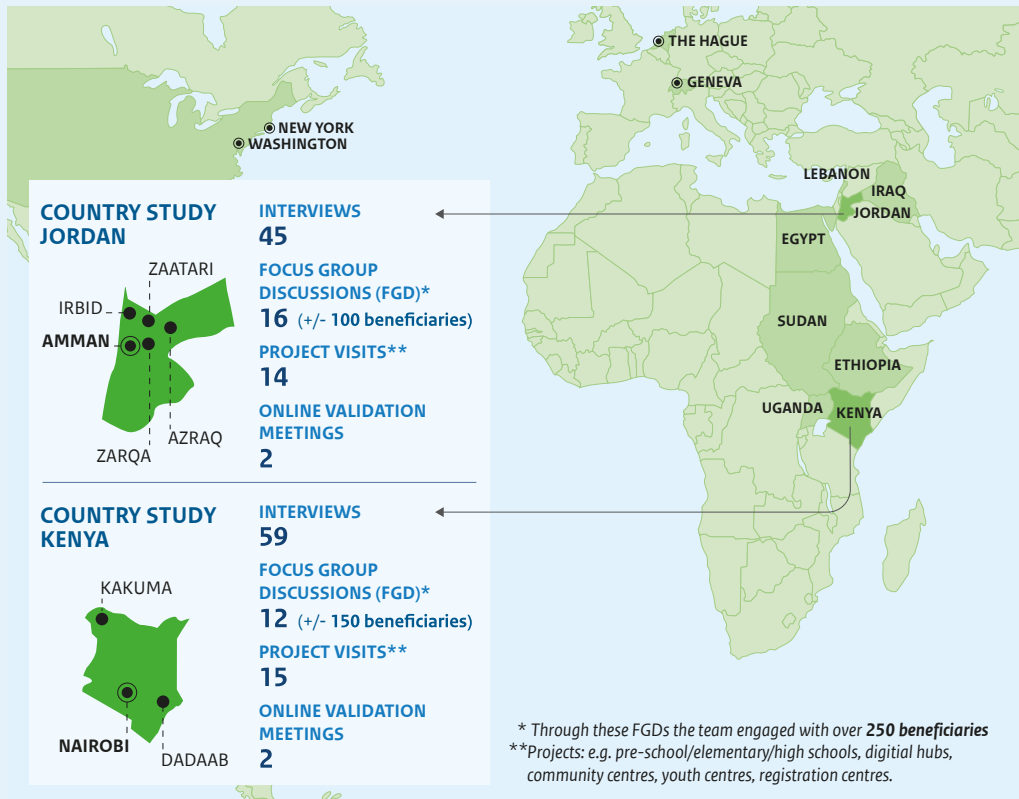
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With a budget of EUR 587 million for the first phase, the programme was implemented in eight countries: Egypt, Ethiopia, Iraq, Jordan, Kenya, Lebanon, Sudan and Uganda. It also included regional and global components. The second and current phase (2024-2027) has a budget of approximately EUR 800 million. Prospects accounts for about 80% of the total Dutch budget for support to refugee-hosting countries in the region.

The evaluation addresses two important questions. First, what results has Prospects delivered for forcibly displaced persons and their host communities? And second, to what extent has the nexus approach, as implemented by the partnership, increased the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of the programme?

To answer these questions, IOB analysed internal and external documents and conducted over 200 interviews with internal and external stakeholders. In addition, country studies were carried out for Jordan and Kenya, including over 100 interviews, 28 focus group discussions involving approximately 250 beneficiaries, and 29 project visits. Infographic 1 provides an overview of the data sources used in this evaluation.

Infographic 1.1 Overview of sources



Main conclusion

The main conclusion, in response to the first evaluation question, is that Prospects contributed to increased resilience among FDPs and their host communities, and, albeit to a lesser extent, to their self-reliance. It did so through its contribution to increased access to education and protection services and increased employment and livelihood opportunities, and by contributing to refugee-inclusive policies. However, results varied strongly between countries and thematic areas.

Regarding the second question, IOB concludes that the partnerships' combined humanitarian-development response enabled more aligned and comprehensive support to FDPs and host communities beyond immediate relief. At the same time, solutions often remained temporary or semi-permanent, while results proved fragile and difficult to sustain. Given the methodological choices and limitations in the financial and monitoring data, the evaluation cannot draw firm conclusions about the programme's cost-effectiveness.

Sub-conclusions

This overall conclusion is based on the following sub-conclusions, which answer the specific research questions:

1. To what extent has Prospects increased access to education and learning, employment and livelihood opportunities, and protection and social inclusion? And how has this contributed to improved self-reliance and resilience for forcibly displaced persons and host communities?

Prospects contributed to increased resilience and, albeit to a lesser extent, to self-reliance among FDPs and host communities, through its contribution to increased access to education, employment and livelihood opportunities, and protection, as well as through its support for more inclusive policies. Compared with host communities, however, refugees generally experienced lower gains in employment and livelihood opportunities, and self-reliance. Due to the volatile context, these results are fragile and vulnerable to change.

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Sub-conclusion 1.1 – Prospects offered substantial coverage, but it varied strongly between countries and thematic areas

The programme contributed to increased access to education and learning, employment and livelihood opportunities, and protection and inclusion services for around eight million refugees, IDPs and members of host communities. Coverage in the thematic area of employment and livelihood opportunities was, however, more modest, and activities in this area did not necessarily lead to the intended results. This was mainly due to constraints in the enabling environment, such as unemployment and regulatory frameworks, as well as the longer time frames required to strengthen labour market systems and decent work outcomes.

Sub-conclusion 1.2 – Progress towards more inclusive policies was fragile

Prospects contributed to more inclusive policies and legislation and supported their implementation by strengthening national systems. Although such policy changes are a critical condition for long-term solutions, the available policy space was limited and dependent on governments' willingness and capacity, factors that are largely outside Prospects' sphere of influence. Many of these policy changes were still under negotiation or awaiting approval at the end of the period covered by this evaluation. In addition, volatile contexts meant that approved inclusive policies and regulations remained vulnerable to change.

Sub-conclusion 1.3 – Self-reliance and resilience increased, but the impact is partial and volatile

Through its results on access to education, employment and protection, Prospects contributed to increased resilience among FDPs and host communities, and, to a lesser extent, to increased self-reliance. Refugees generally experienced lower gains in self-reliance than members of host communities. Overall, given the scale of needs and the large numbers of people affected, the impact of Prospects on self-reliance and resilience remained partial and volatile. FDPs and host communities continued to be vulnerable to external shocks and political setbacks.

2. To what extent has Prospects factored in and adapted to different contexts in the host countries and responded adequately to the needs of forcibly displaced persons and host communities?

The MFA's initial ambitions were not always sufficiently attuned to local realities in the selected countries, but country-specific contextualisation and collaboration with national governments ensured better alignment during implementation. Overall, the programme responded adequately and in a balanced way to the needs of host communities and FDPs, but it has been less successful in responding to the specific needs of women and girls and people with disabilities, and in meaningfully engaging stakeholders beyond national government actors.

Sub-conclusion 2.1 – The programme gradually but adequately adjusted to local realities

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs' initial ambition to implement the entire Theory of Change – notably the large-scale private sector investments – was insufficiently attuned to local realities in most of the selected countries. Similarly, inclusive policies showed varying degrees of alignment with national contexts.. Another initial challenge in the implementation was that Prospects worked with partners that had different levels of historical presence and expertise in the countries, as well as different mandates and ways of working. Over time, the programme's thematic and partnership ambitions were adjusted to better fit contextual realities. The MFA's flexibility regarding programmatic adaptation, combined with long-term funding commitments, enabled Prospects to respond adequately to changes in geopolitical and regional contexts.

Sub-conclusion 2.2 – Structural engagement with national stakeholders, far less so with local stakeholders.

Collaboration with national governments was generally strong, as most country programmes were grounded in national strategies, ensuring structural collaboration. Meaningful engagement with sub-national governments and local civil society organisations, however, was less structured. In addition, the programming flexibility granted by the MFA to Prospects partners was not transferred to their implementing partners.

Sub-conclusion 2.3 – Prospects interventions were relevant to FDPs and host communities

The thematic focus was relevant to beneficiaries' needs, and the partners were well equipped to address these needs. Partners responded adequately and in a balanced way to the needs of FDPs and host communities through context-specific country programmes grounded in needs assessments and evidence-based practices. The partners' embeddedness and thematic and contextual expertise were important enablers of programme relevance. The balanced support to FDPs and host communities was also important in sustaining continued support for FDPs.

Sub-conclusion 2.4 – A fair gender balance was achieved, but the impact for specific target groups was limited by insufficient attention to their specific needs

Prospects activities achieved a fair balance in reach among men, women and children. However, the programme was less successful in reaching people with disabilities and addressing gender barriers that limited access to services or the ability to use newly applied skills.

3. To what extent has the nexus approach, as implemented by the partnership, increased the (cost-) effectiveness of interventions?

The combined humanitarian and development interventions provided comprehensive support to host communities and FDPs beyond immediate relief, thereby increasing the effectiveness at the beneficiary level. Solutions nevertheless remained temporary or semi-permanent due to factors beyond Prospects' control. The evaluation does not draw overall conclusions regarding the (increased) cost-effectiveness of Prospects due to methodological choices and limitations in the financial and monitoring data.

Sub-conclusion 3.1 – Programme support went beyond immediate relief, but solutions remained temporary or semi-permanent

The combined implementation of humanitarian and development interventions enabled partners to address short-term needs on the ground while simultaneously working towards an enabling environment for more sustainable results with refugee-inclusive policies and strengthened government services. Improved alignment and cooperation between humanitarian and development partners enabled them to build on each other's strengths. Partners' interventions were increasingly coordinated, resulting in more comprehensive support for beneficiaries, while the partnership also worked to strengthen the enabling environment for more sustainable results.

At the same time, the intended transition from humanitarian assistance to more development-oriented approaches proved challenging, limiting the extent to which long-term solutions could be addressed and achieved. Efforts to strengthen the capacities of host countries to respond to forced displacement did not automatically lead to sustainable solutions. Host governments often prioritised short-term strategies or host community needs, or pursued other objectives within the scope of programme support. The willingness of host governments is largely beyond Prospects' control, and volatile environments make host countries' priorities even more unpredictable.

Sub-conclusion 3.2 – Private sector investment remained limited, despite some innovative approaches

During the period covered by this evaluation, Prospects achieved only limited results in attracting large-scale private sector investments despite innovative approaches. The inclusion of IFC to broaden private sector engagement and investment in forced displacement settings in these countries was itself a major innovation, but the strategy was challenged by labour market developments, policy restrictions and limitations to investments in high-risk environments. Prospects did succeed in increasing access to finance and financial services for community entrepreneurs and business owners, but these initiatives remained relatively small in scale.

4. What has been the added value of the partnership model for the implementation of Prospects' nexus approach?

The partnership enabled better alignment and coordination between partners. Partners indicated that the balance between transaction costs and benefits improved compared to the substantial initial investments in time and resources. However, it was not possible to quantify this change.

Sub-conclusion 4.1 – Partnership coordination gradually strengthened, although with high initial transaction costs

The Prospects partnership improved alignment and coordination within and between humanitarian and development interventions implemented by the partners involved. Initially, investments in building the partnership and the related financial and organisational transaction costs were relatively high compared with the advantages achieved through collaboration. Towards the end of phase 1, however, the perceived balance between the benefits and the costs of the partnership was positive. Strengthened collaboration between the partners led to increased use of each other's research, analytics and methods, and contributed to joint strategizing, as well as joint efforts in advocacy and implementation. Partners indicated that this process was far from automatic and that donor support had been an important driver for collaboration.

Sub-conclusion 4.2 – Limited insight into the links between financial flows and activities

The Prospects' contractual arrangements relied heavily on the administrative framework agreements with the partners. Consequently, contractual arrangements required insufficient detail regarding monitoring, reporting and communication. This limited insight into the links between financial flows and activities. These limited contractual arrangements also reduced the visibility of Prospects and the Netherlands as a donor at the country level.

5. How is the nexus approach as implemented by Prospects likely to be sustained?

Prospects contributed to advancing the nexus approach by further refining nexus implementation, increasing buy-in at the headquarters level within partner organisations and generating programmatic insights relevant to international policy dialogue on forced displacement settings.

Sub-conclusion 5.1 – Prospects contributed to further developing the nexus in forced displacement

Together with other global initiatives working on the nexus, Prospects contributed to further refining and implementing the nexus approach. It did so by strengthening relationships between UN and IFI partners and supporting the integration of humanitarian and development approaches within participating agencies. At the global level, Prospects partners published a range of valuable and insightful reports and studies covering multiple aspects of the nexus approach, which also helped generate donor interest in sustaining essential interventions. Through the scale and innovative structure of Prospects, and in line with broader international commitments, the MFA positioned itself as an important actor in the global refugee-response landscape.

Recommendations

Based on the above conclusions, IOB formulated recommendations for: 1) the remaining period of phase 2; 2) policies and programmes on refugee response in the region; and 3) programmes using a partnership approach.

1a. To increase the results in the thematic area of employment and livelihood for the remaining period of phase 2:

- Prioritise testing and gradual scaling up of best practices from existing projects over the development of new pilots, for example by strengthening the inclusion of microfinance institutions to improve access to finance.
- Strengthen the policy dialogue to improve the enabling environment for livelihood and employment opportunities, particularly for forcibly displaced persons.
- Focus on strengthening knowledge and improving access to formal and informal markets through digitalisation and stronger legal frameworks, including safe working conditions.
- Strengthen investments in targeted support and address barriers affecting specific groups, particularly women and people with disabilities.

1b. To improve learning by monitoring and evaluation:

- Ensure uniformity in the measurement of indicators in the dashboard.
- Ensure all partners conduct external end evaluations and carry out a synthesis of these evaluations at the end of phase 2.
- Make stronger use of regional functions within partner agencies to facilitate cross-agency and cross-regional learning and exchange.
- Institutionalise the participation of implementing partners, including refugee-led organisations and youth-led organisations, in planning, monitoring, evaluation and learning.

1c. To improve visibility:

- Tailor the communication strategy to better reflect the scale and the global, regional and country dimensions of the partnership.

2a. In the event of continuation of the current approach to refugee reception in the region:

- Continue the system of long-term funding for refugee response programmes to enhance the focus on durable solutions and the long-term processes required to improve the living conditions of vulnerable populations.
- In MOA's policy theory, clarify whether and how the refugee response programmes relate to the ministry's objectives regarding regional stability and the prevention of onward migration to third countries.
- Develop an assessment framework that clarifies and operationalises political priorities, assesses risks related to the principle of nonrefoulement, and guides investments in refugee response programmes in relation to durable solutions: resettlement, integration and voluntary return, including reconstruction in countries of origin. Set realistic short- and medium-term objectives.
- Strengthen coherence and learning with other refugee and migrant programmes of the ministry, exploring how this can enhance a more effective refugee response.

2b. In the event of a new refugee response programme and/or third phase of Prospects:

- Reassess partner selection and include criteria on partners' proven experience, in-country embeddedness and mandate relevance for working in fragile settings in the selected countries, and include flexibility for partner diversity between countries.
- Broaden and strengthen stakeholder engagement in line with the ministry's localisation agenda.
- Take into account the diversity of needs and barriers affecting host communities and FDPs, as well as the structural barriers faced by women and other marginalised groups.
- Broaden the programme's support base to facilitate scaling-up by leveraging other financial resources, including from non-traditional donors and the private sector, in particular from the region itself, and invest in enabling structures for multi-donor programmes.

3a: If the Ministry decides to set up new partnership programmes with UN partners and/or international financial institutions:

- Structurally involve embassies and relevant departments in decision-making regarding country and partner selection to ensure contextual alignment.
- Ensure sufficient preparation time for new partnerships and related governance structures by involving relevant departments and embassies.
- Assess and address barriers for collaborative programming resulting from internal processes and institutional structures.
- Maintain sufficient capacity at the embassies and in The Hague for the implementation of large-scale partnership programmes.
- Avoid overly complex monitoring systems that require major investments from partners.
- Start with a limited number of countries to allow focused implementation and testing of structures and approaches before scaling up further.

Colofon:

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Infographics: Things To Make And Do

Cover photo: ©UNICEF Ethiopia | Education programmes in Ehtiopia's Somali Region - A group of Somali refugee girls changing their shoes to play volleyball at Melkadida primary school for host community and refugee children.

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