The German Society for International Cooperation (GIZ)

by Naemi Gerloff, published in March 2021

The GIZ

In the interweaving of migration, development and security policy, the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) is a hitherto little-noticed but not insignificant actor. The company is currently active in more than 20 African states in the field of refugee protection, migration and border management, as well as in advising and training security forces[1].

Safe, orderly and regular migration[2] is the leitmotif of its migration policy projects. At GIZ, the idea of making migration ‘safer’ also goes hand in hand with the expansion of state control of mobility. Migration management and border security are declared to be development policy goals by invoking supposed improvements for the rights of migrants. For this, the GIZ receives a considerable budget from the German government and the European Union (EU).

GIZ’s political mandate is to integrate third countries into international migration policy and thus counteract the crisis-prone nature of the European border regime. This is because the attempt to govern global migration movements must necessarily bring together different policy areas and also places so-called development cooperation (DC) in its service.

In the following, we will explain how and why GIZ acts in the field of migration policy. Its main areas of work are presented using current examples.

Company for development services

The Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH is a service company in the field of development cooperation. It emerged in 2011 from the merger of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ), the Capacity Building International, Germany (InWEnt) and the German Development
Service (DED)\[^{[3]}\]. In 2019, GIZ employed over 22,000 people in 120 countries and had a business volume of 3.1 billion euros. As a non-profit enterprise of the Federal Republic of Germany, GIZ is wholly state-owned and receives the majority of its contracts from the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and other federal ministries. However, through its separate, taxable *International Services* Division, it can also offer services to other national governments, associations of states or the private sector. The EU has become GIZ’s most important client here, accounting for over half of its International Services’ order volume\[^{[4]}\].

Due to its organisational structure, GIZ is dependent on economic efficiency and on political interests and economic cycles for the content of its work. This explains the growth in migration-related projects in recent years.

**Trend topic migration after 2015**

The global increase in migration movements and, in particular, the events of the *Long Summer of Migration* in 2015/16 created strong pressure for GIZ to legitimise and act\[^{[5]}\]. One staff member expressed this in the interview with the sarcastic question: “And what is DC [development cooperation] doing now to keep people from leaving?”\[^{[6]}\]. GIZ’s development policy mandate to improve living conditions in the global South is systematically linked to the idea of migration prevention.

In 2016, the BMZ tripled its budget for “managing the refugee crisis”\[^{[7]}\], placing combating so-called ‘trafficking in human beings’ and improving repatriation options at the centre of its activities\[^{[8]}\]. The GIZ in particular benefited from this short-term funding, so that the *refugee and migration* department became one of its most important departments\[^{[9]}\]. The then newly appointed coordinator of the refugee and migration department also explains: “Now, however, with the influx of refugees and migrants over the last one and a half years [...] the work and the money has come our way”\[^{[10]}\].

At the same time, a thematic shift in GIZ’s work is also taking place. Whereas before 2015, GIZ framed migration mainly under the paradigm of *migration for*
development, i.e. as a positive driver for development, the issue was now increasingly placed in a security and domestic policy context\textsuperscript{[11]}. Politically, there was a call for return programmes and combating the causes of flight within Africa.

Reducing migratory pressure

The BMZ set the goal of reducing ‘migration pressure’ from African states and combating the causes of flight. The BMZ aimed to ensure that “the way out of a lack of prospects is not seen in Europe, but on the neighbouring continent of Africa”\textsuperscript{[12]}. In addition, the BMZ proposed that the African Union (AU) should be supported in “fulfilling its mandate in the area of migration” and flight – especially in the implementation of the Action Plan on Flight and Migration, which the EU and the AU agreed on at the Valletta Summit in 2015\textsuperscript{[13]}. As a result, GIZ received additional funding for projects in African countries of origin and transit.

At the Euro-African Migration Summit in Valletta in November 2015, a European Union Emergency Trust Fund for stability and addressing the root causes of irregular migration and displaced persons in Africa (hereinafter referred to as EUTF) was launched, whose mission is to address root causes of flight and improve transnational migration management\textsuperscript{[14]}. It is significant that in Valletta, development cooperation agencies were commissioned with the implementation of a migration policy action plan. The extent to which the criteria of the officially defined development aid of the OECD Development Assistance Committee are adhered to remains controversial. According to a study by the German Development Institute, the EUTF has the essential function of providing planned migration policy projects with a development policy rationale\textsuperscript{[15]}.

Compared to other development organisations, GIZ has received a particularly large number of awards from the EUTF. It is involved in a total of 26 projects with a total volume of over 776 million euros\textsuperscript{[16]}. An overview of all projects financed through the EUTF and implemented by GIZ can be found here.
Better Migration Management

The regional project Better Migration Management (BMM) is a particularly heavily criticised project that GIZ is implementing from the EUTF. According to the title, the overall objective is to improve migration management in the Horn of Africa region and to effectively combat human trafficking and smuggling\textsuperscript{[17]}. It includes all states of the Khartoum Process (Sudan, South Sudan, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Somalia, Kenya, Uganda), a framework agreement for the Horn of Africa that was adopted at a Euro-African ministerial meeting in 2014 as the \textit{EU Horn of Africa Migration Route Initiative}, and aims at migration management along the transit routes towards Europe\textsuperscript{[18]}.

The BMM thus represents a direct continuation and expansion of the Khartoum Process. GIZ writes: “BMM [...] will be the central hub for migration management work at the heart of the Khartoum Process”\textsuperscript{[19]}. GIZ is leading a consortium of organisations that are implementing the various parts of the project\textsuperscript{[20]}. A regional office was set up in Khartoum to coordinate the measures in Sudan and Eritrea\textsuperscript{[21]}.

While 46 million euros were available for the first BMM project phase (2016-19), the budget was increased to 81 million euros for the start of the second phase of the project in 2020\textsuperscript{[22]}. Thematically, the first project phase dealt with the four fields of action policy harmonisation, capacity building, protection measures and public awareness. GIZ claims to have reached several thousand people in all areas of action. Among other things, “16,800 representatives of state authorities were supported to improve the coordinated management of migration and to strengthen national migration policies, legislation and cross-border cooperation” and “242 capacity-building measures [...] were implemented in the areas of criminal investigation and prosecution of human trafficking, integrated border management and referral of migrants to services”\textsuperscript{[23]}.

In fact, mainly stocktaking, workshops and expert discussions on policy advice seem to have been implemented\textsuperscript{[24],[25]}. The establishment of new bodies, the creation of task forces and the reformation of legislation on the ground are listed as partial successes. “The partners”, says a GIZ staff member to the BMM, are to be enabled “to assume and fulfil their own role in migration management
according to international and humanitarian standards\textsuperscript{[26]}. Policy advice is therefore an essential field of the BMM, which aims to improve cooperation between the countries of the Khartoum Process.

In addition, the BMM also focuses on the material development of border security. For example, a new border post between Ethiopia and Djibouti was built as part of the project. A statement by the EUTF asserts that the new border crossing strengthens cross-border cooperation between the two countries. Many migrants are currently travelling without visas or valid documents\textsuperscript{[27]}. However, for the BMM, migration must be regularised. This means that migratory movements across this border will be subject to greater state control.

It is striking that almost all BMM measures are geared towards cooperation with state actors. Government officials from the national police and immigration authorities were mainly involved in the training programs. In supra-regional trainings, officials were also trained from states that are actually excluded from bilateral development cooperation with Germany, such as the Sudanese police authority\textsuperscript{[28]}.

This point is also a central criticism of the BMM. As early as 2016, human rights organisations pointed out that the BMM was leading to a normalisation of cooperation with authoritarian regimes, such as that of the Sudanese ruler at the time, Omar Al-Bashir\textsuperscript{[29]}. GIZ board member Preuß dismissed this accusation with the sentence “If you are in hell, you have to talk to the devil!”\textsuperscript{[30]} as a pragmatic necessity. Internally, however, the BMM was also discussed controversially. Employees admit that they are acting in the political interest of the EU: “From a realpolitik point of view, it is not only about the rights of migrants, but also about the security policy interests of the EU. Where, of course, we are trying to get a grip on terrorism through better border management and better control. Which of course sometimes has the opposite effect on regular migration”\textsuperscript{[31]}.

While the media and human rights organisations continue to report violence against migrants and their forced return by the Sudanese border guards, the number of asylum seekers from the region in the EU has decreased\textsuperscript{[32]}. For example, the number of initial applications from Eritrea fell from 18,854 (2016) to
3,520 (2019). It therefore seems unrealistic that the Better Migration Management programme can fulfil a humanitarian function, as claimed by its staff. Rather, the BMM works as part of the European commitment to migration and border management in the Horn of Africa to prevent migration movement towards Europe.

**Expansion of international migration governance**

Similar to the BMM, other GIZ projects are also aimed at promoting transnational cooperation on migration policy. The governments of African third countries are to be persuaded to harmonise legislation, exchange migration management practices and, above all, to accede to international agreements. This applies both in relation to the EU and between different African states.

For the West African region, a new project called *South-South Cooperation on Migration* was launched in 2018. This is about building regional migration governance between Morocco, Mali, Senegal and Côte d’Ivoire. The states are to exchange experiences in migration management and be supported in implementing agreements reached.

Morocco has long been considered a model country for migration policy cooperation with the EU. Here, GIZ has implemented several projects in cooperation with the Ministry for Moroccans Abroad to advance the implementation of the national migration policy and the Moroccan asylum system. The country’s reception capacities are to be expanded in order to promote the local integration of transit migrants and ‘returnees’.

Since many migrants from Senegal, Mali and Côte d’Ivoire reside in Morocco and are prevented from travelling on to the EU, the South-South Cooperation project follows a similar path. It is about the mobilisation of the inner-African diaspora, their integration in transit states or their potential return to their countries of origin. If there is good integration in Morocco, consequently the ‘migration pressure’ towards Spain decreases.

“The second important point,” says GIZ staff member Wittenborg about the
engagement in Morocco, “is that partnerships are concluded, that a dialogue takes place between the sending country and the country of arrival, and that both countries think about issues such as mobilising the diaspora, integration, but also about issues such as repatriation”[37]. For Wittenborg, the mobility partnership constructed between Morocco and the EU in 2013 is “an instrument that offers many opportunities”[38]. At the same time, however, it is also an instrument for the readmission of Moroccan migrants from the EU[39].

GIZ’s migration policy advice is therefore aimed at integrating states like Morocco into international migration management policies. The development of state administrative structures, asylum systems and (re)integration measures provides a dangerous basis for the legitimisation of European efforts to repatriate migrants in order to ‘fix’ them in transit states and externalise international requests for protection.

**Managing Mixed Migration Flows**

“The term mixed migration flows refers to a situation where different categories of migrants move along the same routes, for example refugees and people leaving for economic or family reasons”[40]. Dealing with these so-called mixed movements is the focus of two GIZ projects in Niger and Libya, also funded by the EUTF. Niger and Libya are of interest primarily as transit regions for European migration policy. Here, GIZ takes on the task of supporting the management of migration movements at the municipal level.

In the project *Strengthening the sustainable management of the consequences of migration flows* in Niger, this support consists of setting up so-called observatories in 17 Nigerien municipalities. “As an internal advisory tool”, says the project description, “they support the municipalities and regions throughout in gathering information and analysing the impacts of migration”[41]. Furthermore, the exchange between municipal and ministerial levels is promoted in order to incorporate local experiences into national migration policy.
In Libya, since 2017 GIZ has been involved in a project with the long title *Managing mixed migration flows in Libya through expanding protection space and supporting local socio-economic development*. Its stated mandate is to promote community development along the main migration routes, expand public services and employment opportunities. Project partners are the Ministry of Local Governance as well as local councils and mayors[^42].

What is interesting here is less the official mandate than the political purpose of these projects. Similar ways of working by IOM (International Organisation for Migration) show that community development along transit routes is primarily aimed at transforming communities from transit stations to stay-put stations and compensating for losses from lost transport business. In this case, the ‘integration’ of migrants lies in making it more difficult for them to continue their journey[^43].

It is also questionable whether the cooperation with state representatives in Niger and Libya in the expansion of local data collection on migration flows can be about improving the situation of migrants at all. A distinction between supposedly voluntary migration and migration resulting from coercion, as inherent in the concept of *Mixed Migration*, does not do this at any rate. Such a categorisation of migrants only leads to the fundamental exclusion of some from
Border management and police training

GIZ considers functioning border management to be a component of the rule of law, ‘good governance’ and thus a prerequisite for positive development processes. Informal border crossing, on the other hand, is associated with human trafficking and organised crime and is seen as a potential danger. The services offered by GIZ in this area range from the establishment of technical support units and the procurement and maintenance of material equipment for border authorities to the strengthening of border management institutions. There is often close cooperation with the German Federal Police or the IOM, the International Organisation for Migration.

Two long-term projects that GIZ has been implementing since 2008 and 2009 are the Border Governance Support to the African Union Border Programme (AUBP) and the Police Programme Africa.

In the AUBP, GIZ works with a total of 19 AU member states on the implementation of the African Union Border Programme. This was extended again in 2020 and entered its fourth implementation phase. The aim is to completely demarcate the colonially drawn borders of African states and reduce the permeability for cross-border viral diseases, organised crime and ‘irregular’ migration movements. In addition, supply infrastructure is being built in border areas to promote cross-border cooperation between communities and combat the causes of flight. By the end of the third project phase, GIZ said it had helped demarcate more than 6,000 km of African borders. National border commissions were formed or reformed in the individual states. Project partners, such as the Niger Border Commission, were supported in setting up border posts and border infrastructure and received vehicles, satellite telephones and surveying instruments such as high-precision GPS devices.

In the AUBP, GIZ also promotes cooperation between AU regional organisations (ECOWAS, IGAD, etc.) and supports the AU in setting up the AUBIS border
information system\textsuperscript{[51]}. In 2020, the adoption by the African Union Assembly of a joint strategy for integrated border management was recorded as a success. This aims to formalise border control processes and align border management policies and practices across the AU\textsuperscript{[52]}.

In the \textit{Africa Police Programme}, GIZ is also promoting the institutional and material expansion of border protection. The fourth project phase, which began in 2019, focuses on the states of Benin, Côte d’Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Cameroon, Kenya, Mauritania, Nigeria and Senegal\textsuperscript{[53]}. To date, the programme has had a strong focus on the Sahel and Niger. Among other things, eleven new border stations were set up on the Nigerien border. “Motorcycles worth €7 927.23, vehicles worth €240 553.44, computers and accessories worth €49 125.35 and office furniture worth €11 868.90 were delivered to the Niger Police Authority. The materials and vehicles were used to “equip”\textsuperscript{[54]} the newly built border stations. In addition, border staff are trained to “carry out border management according to international standards, i.e. to be able to check identity cards and goods, identify forged documents, recognise criminals and arrest them – of course in compliance with human rights”\textsuperscript{[55]}, according to one staff member. It is true that staff members point to the objective of a human rights protection function through the police programme. In practice, however, the expansion of the state border police primarily leads to making informal border crossings more difficult for migrants.\textsuperscript{[56]}

\textbf{Return Migration}

Finally, a programme to promote the return of migrants will be implemented by GIZ. As already mentioned, domestic political pressure to implement return programmes increased after 2016. To this end, the BMZ set up a project entitled \textit{Perspektive Heimat} (Perspective Home) and entrusted GIZ with a financial volume of 150 million euros for its implementation\textsuperscript{[57]}.

What is special about \textit{Perspektive Heimat} is that the programme includes a domestic assignment, which is unusual for GIZ. Return counselling centres in Germany are supported by so-called \textit{Reintegration Scouts}, who are to establish
contacts in the countries of origin and provide reintegration measures[58]. The GIZ’s declared goal is to improve return policies in the sense of ‘sustainable reintegration’: “Return so that people do not come back to us in a revolving door effect, ideally with a development orientation”[59].

The second essential component of Perspektive Heimat is the opening of so-called ‘migration counselling centres’ in certain countries of origin. There are currently centres in the Balkan states of Albania, Kosovo and Serbia, as well as in Tunisia, Morocco, Iraq, Nigeria, Ghana and Senegal. Others are being planned in Egypt, Gambia and Pakistan[60]. According to GIZ, the aim here is to advise both the local population and returnees about local employment opportunities, reintegration offers and possibilities for regular migration. However, since there are hardly any opportunities for regular migration to Germany from the countries mentioned, the counselling is presumably rather limited to ‘options to stay’[61]. One staff member puts it this way: “You might think it’s about preventing migration: don’t come! But it is about information, what migration realistically means, what the risks are”[62]. In the first few years, however, the counselling centres did not achieve the politically desired attendance figures. The number of returnees who were placed in jobs was poor[63].

Even before this programme, GIZ was involved in counselling for returnees. However, this was aimed at the target group of qualified professionals and was relatively expensive to implement. Perspective Home, on the other hand, addresses all ‘voluntary’ departures. However, all people who are denied long-term prospects of staying in Germany or who are facing unavoidable pressure to leave are considered to be leaving voluntarily. For example, the GIZ describes the case of an expired residence status as “voluntary but unavoidable”[64].

**Conclusion**

GIZ is an actor in international migration governance whose role shift since 2015 has not yet been sufficiently questioned and publicly discussed. It works on the development of transnational cooperation and state capacities in the field of border protection, law enforcement, migration management and governance, and the return of migrants to countries of origin.
GIZ staff seem to be aware that they operate within a migration policy framework that aims to reduce migration flows to Europe. In contrast, they try to give the concept of migration management a humanistic veneer and serve the narrative of migration control to avoid human tragedies. However, they remain within the premise of classical migration control, of subjecting cross-border movements to state regulation and filtering them according to their criteria. GIZ projects support hegemonic policies of migration management and anchor their programming in the agendas of African states. Their impact affects both intra-African migration and transit migration towards Europe. GIZ thus functions politically as part of the externalisation of the European border regime. Compared to classical border management institutions, however, it has the advantage of being locally established far beyond the Mediterranean border and of being able to legitimise its actions socially through a humanistic development paradigm.

Footnotes


[2] https://www.giz.de/de/weltweit/40602.html [04.03.2021]


Interview Mitarbeiter2. Skype, 9.2.2017

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Ebd.

https://ec.europa.eu/trustfundforafrica/index_en [04.03.2021]


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Deutscher Bundestag (2017): Antwort der Bundesregierung auf die Kleine Anfrage: Stand der Umsetzung des europäischen Migrationsmanagements am Horn von Afrika. Drucksache 18/12275, 04.05.2017
Deutscher Bundestag (2017): Antwort der Bundesregierung auf die Kleine Anfrage: Stand der Umsetzung des europäischen Migrationsmanagements am Horn von Afrika. Drucksache 18/12275, 04.05.2017


Interview Mitarbeiter3. Eschborn, 11.1.2017

Interview Mitarbeiter2. Skype, 9.2.2017


[34] https://www.giz.de/de/weltweit/83854.html [04.03.2021]

[35] https://www.giz.de/de/downloads/Fiche-RECOSA-DE.pdf [04.03.2021]

[36] https://www.giz.de/de/weltweit/34158.html [04.03.2021]


[38] Ebd.


[40] https://www.giz.de/en/downloads/FINAL%20Hauptbericht_USE%20Flucht%20und%20Migration_final%20200618.pdf [04.03.2021]

[41] https://www.giz.de/de/weltweit/43838.html [04.03.2021]


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