

Final evaluation of the *EU-China Dialogue on Migration and Mobility Support Project (MMSP)*

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ABBREVIATIONS

ACFTU	All-China Federation of Trade Unions
ANDEX	Asian Network for Document Examination
AVR	Assisted Voluntarily Return
AVRR	Assisted Voluntarily Return and Reintegration
BEEA	Bureau of Exit and Entry Administration
CHINCA	China International Contractors Association of the Ministry of Commerce
CIR	Common Implementing Regulation
COLOMBO process	Regional Consultative Process on Overseas Employment and Contractual Labour for Countries of Origin in Asia
DG HOME	Directorate General for Migration and Home Affairs of the European Union
EEAS	European External Action Service
EQ	Evaluation Question
EMPACT	European Multidisciplinary Platform against Criminal Threats
EU	European Union
EUD	European Union Delegation
EUROPOL	European Union Agency for Law and Enforcement Cooperation
FPI	Service for Foreign Policy Instruments of the European Commission
GAMM	Global Approach to Migration and Mobility of the EU
HLD	High Level Dialogue
ILO	International Labour Organization
IO	International Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China
MMSP	EU-China Dialogue on Migration and Mobility Support Project
MOFCOM	Ministry of Commerce of China
MOHRSS	Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security of China
MS	Member State of the European Union
MPS	Ministry of Public Security of China
NIA	National Immigration Agency of China
OECD/DAC	Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
PI	Partnership Instrument
PSC	Project Steering Committee
SAFEA	State Administration of Foreign Experts Affairs
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
ToR	Terms of Reference

1. INTRODUCTION

The ‘EU-China Dialogue on Migration and Mobility Support Project’ (MMSP) is a project that aimed at strengthening the EU's ties with China as one of its key strategic partners, and promoted both sides’ mutual interest in tackling together the global challenges caused by migration. To this end it provided technical support for the EU-China Dialogue on Migration and Mobility. Beside MMSP the EU financed similar mutual interest actions with third countries in field of migration and mobility through the Partnership Instrument addressing different regions such as India and Argentina.

To this extent, the evaluation of the MMSP can be carried out against the growing experience and evidence of implementation of other similar projects supporting EU dialogues on migration and mobility with partner countries. The MMSP was delegated to the International Organisation for Migration and the International Labour Organisation as implementing partners respectively specialized on migration and labour migration, and was developed in the framework of the EU’s 2011 Global Approach to Migration and Mobility (GAMM) and, since 2015, the European Agenda on Migration, within the wider framework of the EU-China 2020 Agenda for Strategic Cooperation signed in 2013. China, as many other partners worldwide, is developing an institutional and legal framework apt to face the challenges posed by growing flows of international migration. Among other goals, the project is meant to:

- provide support and cooperation for the capacity building of Chinese national and local institutions in this field;
- creating the necessary conditions for China to abide to international obligations and standards, like the ILO *Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29)* still pending its ratification, and;
- reaching the goals or to support further developments in the framework of the new Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, adopted by fourteen EU Member States and by China in December 2018¹.

EU-China Migration Dialogue, and hence the MMSP, reflects the complexity of EU-China migration interactions. The adoption of the Global Approach on Migration and Mobility established four priorities of EU cooperation in the field of migration that became the four pillars and central framework of the MMSP: a) better organising legal migration and fostering well-managed mobility; b) preventing and combating irregular migration and trafficking in human beings; c) maximising the development impact of migration; and d) promoting international protection and asylum.

In line with the GAMM priorities the 2014 Commission Implementation Decision, in its China Action Fiche (Annex H) the Action identified as overall objectives of the action: a better management of mobility and legal migration between the EU and China, as well as a reduction of irregular migratory flows stemming from China. The specific objective of the proposed action is to support the EU-China High Level Dialogue (HLD) and to further develop EU-China cooperation in general in this area, and to strengthen relevant migration

¹ Croatia, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, UK. See information at <https://www.un.org/en/conf/migration/statements.shtml>

management capacities of the competent Chinese authorities. The proposed action would cover the following expected results:

- i. A structured and well-functioning migration dialogue between the EU and China consolidated and supported;
- ii. Legal migration and travel flows between the EU and China better managed;
- iii. Irregular migration, migrants smuggling, and trafficking of human beings originating from China reduced, and cooperation on readmission of irregular migrants improved;
- iv. Chinese capacities for ensuring international protection in mixed migration flows increased;
- v. Positive impact of migration for EU-China political and economic relations as well as their socio-economic development.

The Action's main activities mostly consist in capacity-building measures such as technical assistance and training, as well as studies, seminars, awareness-raising and other preparatory or complementary activities in relation to the EU-China HLD.

The purpose of the present final evaluation, as expressed in the general objectives stated in the Terms of Reference (ToR), is to provide the relevant services of the European Union, the interested stakeholders and the wide public with an overall independent assessment of the past performance of the EU-China Dialogue on Migration and Mobility Support Programme (MMSP), paying particular attention to its results measured against expected objectives, and the reasons underpinning such results, as well as key lessons learned, conclusions and related recommendations in order to improve future Actions. More specifically, the evaluation will serve to understand the performance of the Action, its enabling factors and those hampering a proper delivery of results as to inform the planning of the future EU interventions and actions in the same sector and to draw lessons and conclusions and present recommendations of EU partnership from a sectoral perspective.

The evaluation covers the Action in its entirety, for the whole period of implementation (1/04/2015 to 31/12/2018) and comprising its full geographic scope (China).

Besides the five standard OECD/DAC evaluation criteria (relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and impact orientation) and the two specific EU evaluation criteria (EU added value and coherence), the final evaluation briefly assesses as well to which extent the design of Phase II of MMSP, which was launched in November 2019, took into consideration the lessons learned and results achieved in the Phase I that is the object of the evaluation, and formulate recommendations for the sound implementation of Phase II. Lastly, the evaluation looks at the extent to which role and responsibilities of IOM and ILO as implementing partners were clearly defined and implemented and coordination was ensured.

The evaluation included an inception phase during which the scope of the evaluation was reviewed on the basis of the ToR and the feedback gained at the Kick-off meeting in February 2020. The further step was represented by the preparation of a Desk Note where preliminary findings were presented on the basis of the analysis of the documents available to the team. Following the submission of the Desk Note, the evaluation had, however, to be restructured in order to deal with the constraints linked to the Covid-19 health emergency, which inter alia implied the impossibility to implement the foreseen field phase in Beijing and other locations.

The evaluation was therefore completed solely relying on interviews at distance, via Zoom, Skype, WebEx and other platforms. The interviews implemented with these technical solutions provided certainly a sufficient basis for the completion of the evaluation, although the quality of the interaction with the counterparts is not comparable with that of face-face-interviews, particularly when the person interviewed has an official position within a state institution. The team ensured the interviewees about the confidentiality of the exchange, but this formal guarantee has understandably a limited impact when the interview takes place through a communication platform.

2. ANSWERED QUESTIONS/FINDINGS

2.1. Relevance

EQ1: To what extent were the Action's design and implementation relevant to the perceived needs of its beneficiaries (DG HOME, EEAS, EUROPOL and FRONTEX, EU Member States embassies and consulates in China, Chinese authorities)?

In terms of design, the Action definitely appears as relevant for all involved institutional stakeholders, on both the EU and the Chinese side, notwithstanding the fact that the needs of each specific stakeholder were not detailed in the Action Fiche, and the preparation of the project was not supported by a comprehensive stakeholders' analysis. The scope of the addressed policy areas, the dimension of the different migration flows (regular and irregular) between the EU and China, and the variety of problems related to their control and management are such that the consolidation of the cooperation and communication between the relevant institutional stakeholders can be considered, however, as clearly beneficial.

The Action Fiche (ARES-2015-1661135-20/04/2015) refers solely to a “mutual interest” of EU and China to tackle challenges caused by migration, making reference to GAMM and Partnership Instrument to underline the importance of the promotion of EU's interests abroad and of a deepening of the relations and dialogue with strategic partners. No specific perceived need of any stakeholder is mentioned other than inter-agency coordination involving relevant Chinese ministries and administrations, something which per se is, however, in line with the nature of the project that is not based on a pure “development approach”.

As well with regard to expected results, the Action Fiche has a broad general formulation (e.g. consolidate and support a dialogue, positive impact of migration, etc.), that requires to adopt a global assessment of project outputs, taking into account several different dimensions. Although - as mentioned - the available project documents do not contain a stakeholders' analysis, it can be fairly assessed that the Chinese stakeholders enumerated (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Public Security, Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Co-operation, Ministry of Civil Affairs, Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security, National Tourism Agency) are certainly the key actors of migration management. Moreover, the process of institutional restructuring that eventually brought to the establishment of Immigration National Administration (NIA) clearly increased the relevance of international cooperation during the transition phase, since it facilitated the familiarisation with the new institutional context and the establishment of networks. Relevance was also quite straightforward with regard to EU stakeholders beyond DG Home and EEAS, like EUROPOL and the EU MS embassies and consular offices, that do not have an equally easy access to the Chinese central administration.

When it comes to implementation, it appears that relevance is confirmed along the same lines stressed in the design perspective. All stakeholders perceive that the benefits brought by project activities in terms of strengthening of networks, establishment of communication routines, mutual exchange of professional dimensions and visions on policy issues had the highest relevance for the institutions involved in the different segments of

migration management. The relevance of the implementation of the Action can be confirmed at the same level for DG Home, European External Action Service and the Member States, and extends to all the topics covered across the implementation period. Relevance was ensured also by the adoption of a management approach based on a sound knowledge of the specific *modus operandi* of Chinese institutions.

Through the interaction with IOM, it was possible for the EU and MS representatives to approach Chinese officials building direct relationships going beyond the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, particularly by creating opportunities for European and Chinese officials to meet during several days around workshops and trainings. Europol experts were e.g. invited in connection with the countertrafficking activities launched in the context of EMPACT (European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats), thus enabling EU investigators to spend a significant amount of time with investigators from different parts of China.

Since the Steering Committee included IOM, ILO and the EU Delegation, Chinese authorities did not participate directly in the governance of the Action. However, this does not appear to have produced a negative impact on the benefits deriving from implementation, especially because the design of the partnership was kept flexible, and because the project management was open to interaction and adaptation of the activities. Therefore, Chinese counterparts were constantly given the possibility to introduce topics of their interest upon the planning of activities, and even to select experts from EU institutions and abroad. An example in this sense that was disclosed during the evaluation concerned the interest of Chinese authorities for issues related to visas and document fraud in the Middle East, particularly when relevant for migration routes that could potentially be exploited by members of terrorist organisations (e.g. ISIS in Syria). Chinese authorities were especially proactive in contributing to the planning of specialized events in this field, even asking to select in particular Dutch and German experts. The possibility for the Chinese authorities to get involved in the planning of project activities does not appear, however, to have reduced the capacity of the project management to pursue priorities consistent with EU policy interests.

The Chinese authorities had a proactive role as well in the design of the training activities in different forms, ranging from ad hoc preparatory meetings to less structured requests and inputs. The relevance of the Action for Chinese administration derived as well from a further element, i.e. the improved capacity to offer qualified training to different groups of officials, in an easier and simpler way. The nature of the Action, based on a formal dialogue and partnership signed by China with the participation of IOM simplified the processing by the Chinese administrative hierarchy of the requests of authorization submitted by prospective trainees.

The Action also has a further dimension of relevance linked to the overall agenda of the involved international organisations. It can be noted e.g. that ILO has been for years actively working to facilitate the ratification by China of the 2014 Protocol to the Forced Labour Convention, and had therefore a strong interest in taking part together with IOM in a project with a strong focus on forced labour, trafficking and on establishing a dialogue with China and other counterparts in this area, in view of promoting adjustments in legislation that could facilitate the ratification process. The Action was, therefore, perceived by ILO as an opportunity to step in and keep discussing and maintain the topic on the agenda, now with the EU as a supporting partner, thus providing an additional leverage. This appears as a valuable

example of how the coincidence of EU priorities and those of major international organisations can provide an additional leverage for all involved actors.

- EQ2. To what extent did the general and specific objectives of the Action respond to:
- (i) EU Foreign Policy and EU migration policy;
 - (ii) the overall and specific objectives of the Partnership Instrument as defined in the programming document;
 - (iii) the main priorities of the Action:
 - support to policy dialogue and policy alignment on regular and irregular migration between the EU and China;
 - contribution to a safer environment for both the EU and China in addressing challenges of human trafficking and irregular migration;
 - strengthening of cooperation on tourism between the EU and China;
 - contribution to the socio-economic growth of the EU through well-managed migration and mobility with the EU partners;
 - strengthening of EU-China relations on the migration and development nexus.
 - (iv) the evolving global and regional context in which the Action was implemented;
 - (v) EU Member States' interests?

The general and specific objectives of the Action seem, taking into account their broad formulation, as fully aligned with the EU foreign policy and EU migration policy, and the same applies to the overall and specific objectives of the Partnership Instrument, as defined in the programming document. One can maybe recall that the EU's Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy presented by HR/VP Mogherini in 2016 stated that *"the EU is in a time of existential crisis within and beyond the European Union. Our Union is under threat. Our European project, which has brought unprecedented peace, prosperity and democracy, is being questioned"*. HR/VP Mogherini also suggested that *"the reforms of the Lisbon Treaty have, to some extent, strengthened the capacities of the union, but its overall international position has weakened in the ten years since the treaty's signing"*. The EU's Migration Policy principles are to be found in the GAMM, which suggests strengthening migration and mobility dialogue and operational cooperation with large global/regional economies, among which China. MMSP therefore per se responds to the objectives of GAMM.

When it comes to policy dialogue and policy alignment on regular and irregular migration between the EU and China, in terms of overall assessment the objectives of the Action were established to the advancement of the dialogue. This overall assessment goes, however, together with the awareness that the dialogue must deal with a number of constraints based on the different priorities of EU and China in the migration sector. The most striking discrepancy between the priorities of EU and China was until recently in the field of reduction of irregular migration to which China, that only recently became a destination country in some of its regions, was not interested to pursue with the same commitment as EU MS.

The overall relevance of the Action for the advancement of policy dialogue and policy alignment must not, however, be assessed looking at the different specific objectives in isolation, but rather considering their mutual interaction at the implementation level. Along the implementation of the Action, some of the priorities that were interlinked politically and technically provided indeed a mutual leverage. An advancement on certain issues has in several occasions helped to move the agenda in other areas where the interests and values at stake, on respectively the EU and the Chinese side, were more difficult to harmonise.

In assessing the Action's achievements, it is necessary to bear in mind the rationale behind its objectives and the kind of contribution the Action was expected to bring in order to reach them.

As pointed out by the majority of interviewees (Chinese, EU and international experts), it is necessary to preliminarily acknowledge that EU and China do not have the same priorities, and that this is a factor underlying whatever assessment of the degree of attainment of a specific objective. China is not as any other country the EU is in relation with. It must be therefore accepted that objectives are not easily turned into reasonable expectations, and that this must shape the EU perspective on what is still to be done in certain areas.

Against this backdrop, the logic of the Action is that, since priorities are constantly interlinked both technically and politically, the work done in certain areas can accelerate, condition or even slow down the advances in other areas. Certain more specific priorities can thus provide leverage for some other, possibly with a broader scope. This rationale actually works in both directions. For instance, the efforts devoted to activities concerning slave work and labour exploitation or document fraud have laid the ground for a shift towards more sensible areas, like trafficking and irregular migration, initially not considered as policy priorities for Chinese authorities.

In fact, due to the work done along these lines in Phase I, the early stages of Phase II showed an eagerness by Chinese authorities to get acquainted with the views of EU officials on those topics, and also to accept giving them a higher priority level, by facilitating the organisation of events for mutual exchange of perspectives. Although perhaps still distant from an idea of "alignment", such shifts facilitated a better understanding between partners, paving the way for further - more substantial - advances. For example, the solid experience and knowledge of the EU on document fraud in irregular migration created a momentum for a mutual understanding on the relevance of the issue, that might be at a later stage be conducive to alignment of policies. Furthermore, it must be noted that in the typical area where China was initially not interested in a structured cooperation, like irregular migration, a seminar organized with EU and MS and representatives of the provinces on how readmission agreements work and the differences between China and EU, contributed to provide the right background to launch negotiations on readmission and cooperation on fighting irregular migration, that is now becoming a relevant policy concern for Chinese authorities as well. This and other comparable examples provide a good amount of evidence that the logic behind the Action was adequate to contribute to the advancement of the EU's agenda with China.

On the other hand, since each counterpart has its own priorities sometimes the advance of the Action usually depends on discussions and work being conducted in parallel so that different areas could advance. Thus, advances in one area can act as an incentive for progress in other areas, but the opposite is also true because lack of advances in certain areas can slow down progress in others. For example, EU wants to advance on irregular migration while the Chinese counterpart expects more advances on regular migration. Fortunately, this is not the only logic that pushed things forward, sometimes discussions have advanced because one counterpart has given greater importance to areas that initially were not their priority, due to the dialogue and exchange of experiences. Other external factors also contributed to the progress of policy dialogue on migration, as China is quickly becoming aware that it is a country attracting immigration and certain issues become more urgent to be addressed. For example, EU wants to advance on irregular migration while the Chinese counterpart expects more advances on regular migration.

The final outcome is unavoidably a mixed one. While in formal terms one can say that not all among the listed objectives have been equally attained, the Action certainly substantially contributed to the attainment of most of the objectives set out, in many different ways. This is most evident regarding human trafficking (primarily through the many meetings and workshops organised), the forgery of documents (primarily through trainings open to EU consular staff), and in general helping to pursue MS interests strengthening the understanding of the Chinese system and building networks with officials from different ministries.

The overall positive assessment concerning the reaching of the Action's objectives is certainly confirmed with the regard to advances in labour conditions, where the evaluators recorded the unanimous appreciation on the Chinese side of the sound contribution of the Action to progress regarding slave work and labour exploitation. In this field it was, clearly, possible to build on previous inputs of ILO and IOM with Chinese institutions, but the Action created a momentum conducive to further advancement. For example, the Chinese state authority in charge of coordinating fight against forced labour increasingly embraced an international perspective when tackling the issue, and openly stressed on various occasions the importance of the support provided by the Action in setting appropriate priorities in a context of increasingly swift globalization.

The appreciation of the Chinese stakeholders is relevant as well with regard to the mentioned aspect of the effort aimed at bringing irregular migration and trafficking into the focus of Chinese Administration. Both topics were - as already stressed - until recently mostly a priority for the EU, but Chinese officials acknowledged that the Action provided them with a view of the interconnection between different issues (labour inspection, document trafficking, migrant workers management, etc), thus contributing to reinforce the perception that these were proper priorities also in the Chinese perspective. The contributing experts confirmed that the objectives on irregular migration were properly addressed during the implementation of the Action (particularly trafficking and smuggling, and also document fraud which is relevant as well for visa management). Workshops were attended by MS missions staff and by Chinese officials, and they were in a strong demand by the former as an opportunity to meet their Chinese counterparts.

Certainly, once again, the relevance of the Action at implementation level can in respect to reducing irregular migration be perceived not fully in line with the ambitious wording of the stated objectives. But this does not per se mean there were no advances on the Chinese side. In fact, the views of the Chinese authorities on this issue have been changing over the years -not only as a result of the Action- but primarily because China is both a sending country (of Chinese migrants) but increasingly also a country of destination (of migrants from neighbouring countries). However, as the Action was being implemented in a flexible way, it had the capacity to provide tools and competences properly addressing the swiftly growing need on the Chinese side of valuable information concerning other countries experiences in managing irregular migration. A recent example raised during the evaluation was the handling by Chinese authorities of migrants in Hangzhou during the COVID-19 emergency, that made China aware of the fact that becoming an economic powerhouse also means attracting irregular migration. The wide array of seminars and workshops organised during the implementation of the Action was certainly instrumental to a change of perspective. The invitation of Chinese officials to take part in seminars and conferences at technical level paved e.g. the way to organizing a visit by the Ministry of Public Security, EU and MS capitals, something otherwise extremely unusual.

EQ3. To what extent was the design of the Action adequate (planned activities, logical framework, indicators, implementing modalities, budget) to achieve its specific and overall objectives (assessment of intervention logic)?

Despite the lack of a previous - technically detailed - formulation of the intervention logic, the design of the Action appears as adequate to achieve the foreseen general and specific objectives. This notwithstanding the fact that the Logical Framework contains a sequence of outputs and activities (training, exchanges, research, events, etc.) which are certainly relevant, but for which indicators are not reflecting any result (all indicators are in terms of “number of ...”). Such purely activity-based indicators are in principle not ideal to assess results and potential impact, and could have been at least partly integrated with some data taken from the feedback provided by participants.

The work plans reviewed provide as well a list of activities without any estimate of the results to be achieved by each activity, and of the budget required to implement it. One of the few indicators refers to the “degree” of consensus about the intervention logic among stakeholders and managers of the programme, something which was already raised in the Desk Note. Although a precise measurement of consensus is not easy to realise, the evaluation team formulated an assessment on the basis of interviews in order to verify which opinion prevails among stakeholders.

Against the backdrop of this assessment, one can say that the planned activities, the institutional partners involved and the implementation modalities, are constantly perceived as well suited to support the Dialogue, by exploiting “windows of opportunities” this may create, but also providing additional fora for communication and exchange should the Dialogue experience political difficulties or occasional obstacles deriving from the international context.

Regarding its design, the Action can be considered as a relevant instrument for agenda setting. The choice of partners was definitely adequate: IOM is very respected in China and relies on a solid network of contacts, keeping a focus on the priorities of the EU and organising activities involving both MS Experts and IOM experts. The underlying logic was to use them to build trust between Chinese authorities, EU and MS, and this proved effective and instrumental to the gathering of information and the establishment of the conditions for an effective policy dialogue,

The strategic approach underlying the Action’s design seems to be shared by the majority among the experts interviewed: if the Dialogue gets stuck at a political level (as if China is not interested to advance on one of its components), the FPI instrument can provide inputs at a more technical level, where learning from each other is per se a value thus indirectly feeding the political dialogue. This use of the available resources can be fairly considered as a clever approach chosen by the EEAS.

2.2. Effectiveness

EQ4. To which extent has the Action achieved objectives of the Action, namely to support the EU-China Dialogue on Migration and Mobility and strengthen

relevant migration management capacities of the Chinese Authorities, and to contribute (i) to better management of legal migration and mobility between the EU and China; (ii) to efforts in reducing irregular migratory flow stemming from China to the EU and (iii) to support to Chinese authorities' knowledge of international migration trends?

The Action can be considered to have partially achieved its objectives. The general assessment of effectiveness levels can be, however, considered positive if one takes into account the quite ambitious formulation of the objectives and the fact that the policy areas addressed are not of a kind where results can be quickly reached.

The Action had certainly a role in contributing to improve management of legal migration and mobility between the EU and China, at least providing momentum to parallel diplomacy efforts and making officials in charge of policy choices more aware of the implications of any progress in alignment and of the interests at stake. With regard to irregular migration, the Action provided a constant opportunity of exchange and communication between involved officials, which contributed to set the basis for future advancements, including a familiarization on the EU side with the implications of the recent Chinese institutional restructuring in the field of migration management. For example, as has been already pointed out, the centralization that followed the establishment of NIA brought to an increased mutual interest for a deeper knowledge of migration management and of its administrative framework in the concerned countries. China expressed strong willingness to draw upon the experience of immigration agencies in EU countries, while these were interested in NIA, thus leading to the first international activity of NIA after its establishment.

As broadly presented in the previous comment, the Action was aimed at supporting the Dialogue and while advancing the EU's agenda it also wished to contribute to strengthening migration management capacities of Chinese authorities. As we have seen such priorities were promoted by direct and indirect means, but achieved only in a relatively unequal manner, with some priorities being more strongly promoted than others.

As an initial consideration, most experts highlighted that the Action was implemented in a policy area where results cannot be achieved quickly, but only upon the completion of time-consuming processes and negotiations. Furthermore, this is an area where - in view of their past positioning - ministries of China initially provided scant evidence of an interest to participate, so the common departure point at the beginning was low, albeit with differences among fields. Thanks to the combined effort of the different actors in implementing the Action, most of the involved Chinese authorities modified their initial attitude. For example, regarding forced labour, China had initially shown a limited interest in the development of the framework necessary to ensure compliance with the ILO Convention. Therefore, it was important to have Chinese authorities involved, including authorities at provincial level, and even other partners (recruitment agencies, etc.). This to enhance their capacity and to ensure an actual commitment in order not to end endangering or double victimising migrants. The same could be said about areas as visa waivers for diplomats (an important milestone) or document forgery.

An important step forward occurred when Chinese were allowed to travel without visa and MS could build visa application centres (not in Embassies or Consulates) in fifteen cities. This was what Europeans needed, but required Chinese authorities to allow it. Obviously, this result was not due only to the Action, since it follows to a combination of diplomacy efforts,

but undoubtedly the Action contributed to that achievement. A key factor in this effort of persuasion was that officials attending the meetings were the ones that authorised those agreements/outputs. As a further example, one can mention the long-lasting difficulty to bring readmission to the discussion table with China, until it showed interest in joining global migration management systems. Through the Action the EU could keep a constant vigilance on the agenda setting of Chinese institutions.

There are of course events that are even more difficult to label as a “direct outcome” of the Action but are, however, unavoidably linked with it and the overall policy process. This is the case of the institutional restructuring in the field of migration, that highlights a whole new interest for international population movement and focus on a set of topics close to the Action and the Dialogue. The Action was a clear contributor to this focus and interest. Certainly, although the Action helped the EU to advance its diplomatic agenda and priorities towards a strong counterpart - as China is nowadays. In terms of tangible results China emerges as a clear benefiter from the Action, Chinese authorities have received training and improved their management capacities, like enhanced management capacities of the provincial tourism authorities/travel agencies on Common ‘Schengen’ visa policy, European up-to-date visa application practices and developments; or improved administrative capacities.

On the EU/MS side, the concrete benefits are globally less tangible or direct, but steps forward are taken; there are areas where advance is mutually beneficial for China and the EU. For example, China’s adjustment to international standards and practices could be considered an example of the latter. Of the former, for example it is an advance for EU citizens in China the new simplified working permits and residence schemes and procedures, specially the high-skilled due to new policies and regulations adopted to attract foreign professionals. Better managed tourism programs also facilitate ordered tourism to the European Union, for example with the Approved Destination Status (ADS). It is true that in areas like irregular immigration, steps are less substantial, nevertheless, some examples like the migrant pre-departure orientation and information services promoted by the Chinese administration together with IOM aims at reducing irregular migration. Activities such as training aimed at improving document verification specially when they do not only cover the needs of Chinese officials contributed to this goal as well as training at EU embassies on different areas (bank statements, border management practices, etc.,).

In terms of better management of legal migration and mobility between EU and China, the participation of 395 Chinese officials in training/workshops is considered a reasonable result, given the profile of the participants and the need to keep workshops and trainings in reduced numbers in order to facilitate real exchange and build mutual trust. The training activities were assessed by means of an end-of-training assessment questionnaire, the results showing a high degree of satisfaction among participants, although this of course cannot precisely measure the impact of the training. Project also produced research papers and publications on best practice guidelines and studies on legal migration for Chinese authorities.

With regard to the reduction of irregular migration flows, the final report refers to the participation of hundreds of EU and Chinese officials in training/workshops and to the implementation of several activities like cooperation with EMPACT, network building with EUROPOL, providing information on European Assisted Voluntarily Return (AVR) and Assisted Voluntarily Return and Reintegration (AVRR) programmes, working groups on trafficking, and information sharing and the possibility to establish channels for joint investigative operations on individual cases related to trafficking and criminal networks).

With regard to the knowledge by Chinese authorities of international migration trends, according to available documentation, the Action successfully delivered information workshops on migration trends, and published research papers (e.g. A Snapshot of Migration trends in and out of China: Key destinations and new frontiers of Europe). Project reports are primarily activity-based and do not attempt an assessment in terms of results achieved and/or impact. This notwithstanding, it is possible to affirm that these activities, considering their nature and the features of the implementation context, were reasonably capable to achieve the results originally envisaged.

EQ5. How was the quality of trainings, seminars and publications assessed by beneficiaries, and what results did they achieve?

The Action provided a relevant amount of training events, that all interviewees (including the Chinese counterparts, IOM and ILO representatives, EU officials) confirm having been of good quality, an assessment that is supported by the materials produced. Lecturers were chosen among experts from all over the European Union plus experts from non-EU countries for very specific topics (African countries, Mexico, etc...). Trainings were, however, assessed by IOM by means of end-of-training questionnaires, which show an “overall positive feedback”, while in other ones the assessment took place via a dedicated application. The final report mentions that the questionnaires have revealed that “the training course encouraged participation and exchange and everyone acknowledged that they improved their understanding on specific topics covered in the training”. This statement is used for all trainings and it would probably have been more appropriate to follow-up on trainings by means of a critical assessment (based on a representative sample) of how the information provided during the trainings has been reflected in the work of participants and their institutions. The project has produced “Summary Reports” for the trainings delivered, which provide a good overview of the topics covered, but no indication on the potential use to be made with the information provided.

In terms of results/impact of the trainings organised within the Action, all sources of information confirm that, besides their technical quality, they actually contributed to the success of the Action primarily by building trust between professional groups and by involving members of the Chinese administration who previously did not easily have access to comparable training opportunities.

Among the features of the training programmes that contributed more to the overall impact, several sources consistently mention the involvement in the training of officials operating at local level, who have less frequently the opportunity to share their experiences from the field and to be informed about the international legal framework and policy development.

The interviews provided a wealth of remarks conveying the appreciation for the value of specific seminars/workshops. An especially positive feedback was for instance addressed towards a session focused on human trafficking and modern slavery, that was considered as “very useful”, and particularly fortunate in terms of location (Hunan province). With regard to seminars on forced labour, it was stressed that - notwithstanding the fact that the focus was on the work of a specific ministry - they served as well as a knowledge sharing tool, due to the inclusion of trade unions, various ministries of various branches of the central government (Health and Safety, Public Security) international organizations, supreme prosecutor’s office,

etc), and local authorities, that was considered as an element of primary importance, due to the scarcity of first-hand information from the field and the corresponding lack of knowledge at local level about international instruments.

EQ6. What have been the main factors contributing or creating obstacles to the achievement of the objectives of the Action?

The Action took benefit from the overall increase of the awareness on the Chinese side of the importance of dialogue and policy alignment in some fields that did not previously represent an actual priority, as illegal migration.

The Action benefited as well by the establishment of successful relations between implementing partners (particularly IOM) with relevant Chinese ministries, also in the context of the establishment of NIA.

A relevant issue to ensure the effectiveness of the Action was the necessity to rely on strong inter-agency cooperation on the EU side (EEAS/DG Home). This issue appears to have been dealt in a relatively successful way thanks to the role of the EU delegation in Beijing in managing the different phases and liaising between institutional actors. In an Action of this kind, EU's inter-service cooperation must, however, always be an absolute imperative. It must indeed not be neglected that in projects supporting a dialogue advancement is always dependent on both counterparts. This means that not only the EU but also Chinese policymakers are responsible of the advance and have control over it. However, China acting in this field mainly through one or two administrations (Foreign Affairs and Internal Security) has a comparative advantage here, because control of the advancement is more centralized. On the EU side, FPI is a service that EEAS manages to the benefit of the whole European Union, but where different services converge, like DG HOME, with a risk that EU services act in a too fragmented manner. That the EU delegation in China manages the project is generally considered an advantage.

In this sense, part of the success of the Action may be that the project inception, strategy, design and implementation were conducted from the EU's representation in Beijing and not from Brussels. However, the lack of strong coordination within the EU and with MS (and between capitals and delegations, and also different EU actors) is still a challenge. An example that was reported during the evaluation is from 2016, when a Chinese Minister of Public Security was invited to tour several capitals of EU (and as pointed out this was extremely unusual, since this is usually done by Ministry of Foreign Affairs). The IOM was a key player in facilitating all this (and this was considered a very good decision) but during the trip the support from the EU/MS side in receiving the Chinese authorities could have been better coordinated and liaised. This shows that there is room for improvement in the interaction between EU Delegation in Beijing and the contact persons in the EU MS Embassies to ensure the importance of the Action is understood in MS capitals, to ensure adequate coordination and policy/implementation alignment.

The evaluation disclosed a widespread perception that the horizontal and vertical mobility of MS/EU officers was prejudicial for the trust and connections created during the program. The MS special liaison officers, in particular those with specific expertise (the example is mentioned of a liaison officer from Netherlands, working on document fraud) with longer appointments in China were seemingly very effective for the creation of networks

and the sharing of knowledge. As put by one expert “the Chinese system takes time to be known and more time to move forward, so if Europeans are shifting positions or jobs they cannot stay to follow or influence sustained changes”. The DG HOME representative stayed longer and this was reported as very beneficial to create trust. The Director General of IOM was allowed to stay in China longer after China joined IOM for giving the sense of continuity and these 7 years were very fruitful. Time is a key factor in China, thus the timespan has to be adapted to the internal logics of the country in order to be effective. Staff rotation is a key component of diplomatic representations organization, but it needs to be organized in a way that the trust and networks built by departing staff could be transferred to the new staff. Similarly, the rotation of Chinese officials may also have an impact on the effectiveness and pace of the Action, and although this was not raised by any interviewee it may be also a matter of concern to ensure the maximal effectiveness of the Action.

EU-China Migration and Mobility Dialogue deals with very sensitive issues in a context of global competition and cooperation between both partners, and as such is far from being easily implemented. Unavoidably, the ups and downs of the Dialogue had an impact on the implementation of the project active activities, which depended to a certain extent of the expression of preferences or cooperation of Chinese authorities. The project has been implemented in a period of intense institutional transformation of the migration sector in China. This was particularly true in April 2018, when NIA was created as a migration management agency, including immigration policies, border control, nationality issues, entry and exit of Chinese and foreign nationals, refugees and other immigration-related matters, as a state bureau at sub-ministerial level under the MPS combining the MPS's immigration duties (formerly assigned to the Bureau of Exit and Entry Administration, BEEA) and border inspection duties (formerly assigned to the Border Control Department). This has often made it difficult to get clear indications from Chinese authorities as for their preferences, or the greenlight for certain activities (examples: cancellation of exchanges visit to Europe or “the internal restructuring of All-China Federation of Trade Unions eventually led to the cancellation of the Inter-country trade union cooperation on protection of the rights of overseas Chinese workers. This limited responsiveness of Chinese authorities, for example difficulties to agree on the concrete organization of certain workshops with MFA, led to their cancellation or postponement to the next Phase (e.g. *Workshop on migration and development* to be held in Beijing in April 2018). However, this was most problematic in relation to the Ministry of Public Security, which was often difficult to reach.

EQ7. To which extent and how were gender, environment and climate change mainstreamed; the relevant SDGs and their interlinkages identified; the principle of Leave No-One Behind and the rights-based approach methodology followed in the identification/formulation documents and all of them reflected in the implementation of the Action, its management and monitoring?

The project does not directly target the listed cross-cutting issues as part of its objectives. This silence, however, does not imply per se that the Action has a major weakness in terms of mainstreaming of these issues. This derives in the first place from the systemic implications of migration management and the now generally accepted multifaceted social, economic and cultural implications that population movements have for the societies concerned.

The Action does not address a limited segment of migration between EU and the China, but the whole phenomenon that as such implies global consequences in terms of environment and climate change. A reference is made to “international and regional frameworks that provide foundation for cooperation among countries on migration, including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (various thematic targets including 10.7 on migration governance) and the recently adopted Global Compact on Migration”. Although there is no effort for precisely identifying specific SDGs and their interlinkages, this can be explained by the level chosen for the formulation of the objectives.

It would have been probably possible to develop during the identification and formulation phase a set of well-structured references to the principle of Leave No-One Behind and the rights-based approach methodology. It is, however, fair to say that these frameworks are primarily made to ensure that the related global targets are not jeopardised by the adoption of too narrow implementation features exceedingly focused on the specific issue addressed by a given action or project. In this case we have a set of objectives that are per se part of broader policy goals. Without proper migration management no action in the field of gender, environment and climate could claim to be effective.

In principle, one could think about an action focused in general on migration management but not respecting minimum standards of consistency with the Leave No-One Behind and the rights-based approach. This would be the case, for instance, if the action is framed purely in terms of border control. This is not the case, however, for the Action here under scrutiny, that has a strong focus on migration management perspectives that are indeed based on the assumption that priority must be given to reduce the rights deprivation and the loss of dignity that are often related to the condition of migrants, as e.g. in the case of human trafficking and slave work.

All this can be considered to absorb as well the gender dimension, since one can easily assume that any advancement towards the objectives of the Action has immediate positive consequences for the promotion of the rights of the most vulnerable groups, including women under certain constraints. Trafficking for instance, one of the main topics addressed by the Action, has by nature a strong gender dimension, in terms certainly of number of women involved, but also in terms of reproduction of gender discrimination patterns. One can highlight the value implied in the fact that issues related to the respect for fundamental freedoms and human rights are here promoted via direct management by the IOM with the support of the ILO. The CIR (Common Implementing Regulation) specifically states indeed that advancing these issues is also done in part by supporting these types of organizations.

At the implementation level, the evaluation positively verified that gender distribution of participants to activities was systematically monitored (overall, 516 out of 1,452 individuals participating in project activities were women). The ratios were considered representative of the security sector and border force dynamics given the domination by men due to intra-agency in-country transfers. Despite this, the project could have made a greater effort to bridge this gap after the mid-term evaluation. In the same vein, a stronger emphasis could have been made on the gender dimension in several reports produced, in particular *Research on recruitment, employment and working conditions of domestic workers in China* (2016), *Research on improving social protection for internal migrant workers in China* (2018) or *Research on improving social protection of workers migrating between China and the EU* (2018).

2.3. Efficiency

EQ8. How efficiently were the resources used in terms of funds, human resources, time and expertise? Did the outputs delivered justify the costs?

In general terms, the Action highlights a fairly efficient use of resources. The change is two-folded: on the one hand, it presents a different approach and rationale, it is more politically oriented and is more open to the participation of the counterpart and different stakeholders in its design and development. On the other hand, this new mechanism is based on capacity building, and the partnership instrument is more flexible even though it is tied to the funding. In addition, it allows the participation of a variety of actors, including international organizations, that performed a crucial role, allowing the EU to team-up with international agencies to scout the potential for collaboration in China, with eventually the assignment of the implementation to ILO and IOM.

In this sense, the program benefitted from the transfer of knowledge, networks, know-how and social capital from IOM and ILO. Such a transfer was, clearly, not of the same degree for both entities. Certainly, ILO did not play a role comparable to IOM but still was quite relevant and lent political weight to the project in front of the Chinese counterparts.

Overall, the activities of the project seem to have been implemented as planned, though a no-cost project extension of six months (June-December 2018) that was granted based on the justification of the changes intervened in the Chinese institutional framework of migration management, that delayed approval of some planned activities.

Both IOM and ILO experienced project personnel rotation during the project implementation period: if this is a normal occurrence for top management positions (both Chief of Mission of IOM, and Country Director of ILO left in September 2018), this risks to entail considerable inefficiencies and discontinuities in the case of project officers in charge of daily management of the project. As a whole, one can say that staff rotation did not cause prejudices exceeding those that are ordinarily experienced in actions of comparable scope and dimension.

EQ9. To which extent did the modalities for Project management, oversight, coordination and monitoring contribute to facilitate the effective implementation and the cost-efficient achievement of the objectives of the Action? Were roles and responsibilities between IOM and ILO clearly defined and implemented?

The Action design allowed the main policy owners of the Action within the EU (DG Home and officer/s in the Delegation) to reach priorities largely out of their areas of action, through the involved implementing partners (IOM in the first place).

The presence of two implementing partners on formally equal terms (ILO and IOM), albeit per se unusual, improved the overall visibility of the Action without any significant negative impact in terms of cooperation and coordination, that proved effective and smooth also due to the clear-cut subdivision of areas of action. All this created a positive impact and utility for the MS, facilitating study-visits, etc. Therefore, the strategy of involving UN agencies in reaching EU's goals related to the design and implementation of policies by the

Chinese government in the migration sector seems the most appropriate one as it enhances and strengthens the role of EU institutions.

What was objectively new in the Action was that ILO and IOM were formally both implementing partners, against the prevailing practice that wants to have one organisation in a primary position and the other in a secondary one, but in this case the negotiation ended in the decision to have the two organisations on equal footing. Surely, equality was not such in economic and functional terms, but it worked well in terms of visibility. Actions and objectives were clearly divided, as was the division of budget and tasks, that well fitted into the different profiles of the two organisations (IOM is stronger in field work, while ILO has more access to government and relations), and eventually the cooperation proceeded as a whole quite smoothly.

With regard to monitoring, the final report states that “The logical framework was the reference guide for monitoring project implementation with clearly defined indicators for impact, outcomes, outputs and activities and set targets”, although this statement is not accompanied by the provision of precisely defined indicators. Always according to the final report, monitoring was done by IOM Programme Manager with the support of an external consultant and by the Project Steering Committee, the minutes of which show that presentations were made on activities implemented and planned, with limited discussions on isolated topics.

EQ10. How effective was the project management in adjusting the Action design to address changing external conditions (assumptions), new needs or implementation issues to better achieve the objectives of the programme?

The flexibility of the Partnership Instrument was considered as a key factor of success. The capacity to adapt to an evolving reality on the ground was essential. The combination between the instrument’s flexibility -because as stated in one interview “sometimes the project can be a straightjacket and this was not the case”- and the availability of very adaptable and proactive EU officials on the field in Beijing made possible to manage the Action in a way that closed the gap between the demands and what was offered.

According to all interviewees, the flexibility of the instrument provided room for success because of the adaptability to new proposals for collaboration and joint initiatives coming from multiple international partners with different interests at stake. For example, a Booklet for prospective migrants was envisaged in the project, but in China WeChat was very popular, and the selected technical solution eventually relied on the latter. Flexibility allowed to adapt to different stakeholder demands, proposals, changes of topic or of implementation instruments, and when it happened the answer from the management team was supportive and navigated through the paperwork to deliver in the required terms. The evaluation questionnaires seem to fully support this perception.

This flexibility was also based on a constant adaptation to the needs and openness to the demands by the different stakeholders, through the adoption of a “consulting before implementing” approach within all activities. Regarding the issue of the formalised participation of Chinese counterparts on the orientation of the project, as in the case of a consultative board with Chinese representatives or a similar body, the evaluation did not find

evidence that this would have significantly improved the performance of the Action.

At the same time, the success of the Action depended very much on the practical, actual, participation, input and consultation of Chinese officials, and on the achieved level of attendance to trainings and discussions of staff members from different ministries, and not only from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In such respect to have on board IOM, with its own previous knowledge, experience and contacts, was a key factor of success. During the relevant period China became member of the IOM, so in that time IOM was very well positioned to perform this function.

It is interesting to note that in several situation the Chinese authorities were proactive in fine-tuning the technical content of activities. They knew e.g. which MS had more knowledge on visas and document fraud, accordingly asking for Dutch and German experts. IOM acted often as a facilitator, since Chinese officials do not ordinarily have much leeway without the previous endorsement by their superiors. As an European interviewee put it, having a formal project signed by their government and an invitation from a respected international organization like IOM to participate in trainings, exchanges and meetings, Chinese officials were provided with a safe framework to collaborate with foreign States that they usually do not have - as MFA is the one in charge of this. In summary, the Dialogue and the Action allowed them to better justify their participation and for their superiors it was a solid ground to authorize their participation.

On the basis of available activity reports, there was no comprehensive risk management plan to address unexpected circumstances (such as unwillingness of Chinese authorities to carry out certain activities such as the study tours). As a consequence, the proposals for alternative activities made to the EU Delegation (see for instance the proposal to devote additional resources to communication activities at the end of the project) were often made at short notice.

This notwithstanding, the Action – once again - showed a remarkable capacity to adjust to new requests from the EU or from Member States or linked to the developments in EU-China Dialogue on Migration and Mobility to better achieve the objectives of the programme, often here also at very short notice. As indicated in the Action document for Phase II, “Finally, flexibility in implementation to incorporate concrete activities proposed by EU Member States – for example, practical seminars on document fraud – is regarded as one of success factors of the previous action”.

Flexibility also allowed for the adjustment of activities responding to some of the EU Member States needs and requests. It has been already described an international activity organized after the establishment of NIA that helped Member States to gain more knowledge and understanding of Chinese migration management. It happened with some workshops on very specific issues, like training on examination of bank statements, or visits organized to China checkpoints at mainland borders.

In terms of practical cooperation in specific cases, the project proved also a fertile field to facilitate contacts between MS Embassies and Chinese officials, for example regarding a case related to mixed migration and risk of trafficking in human beings that was requested by the Embassy of Greece to the MPS. The project also contributed to facilitating the visit to Spain of Chinese provincial officers to assist with the identification of a Chinese victim of trafficking. In this context, the meetings organized between EMPACT and China representatives to share intelligence and resources in counter-trafficking provide examples of

the use of meetings, training and information exchange to channel Member States' requests and needs and provide some organizational structure to do it.

2.4. Sustainability

EQ11. To which extent are the results/benefits of the Action sustainable after the project funding and assistance are over? Did the project prepare an exit strategy for Phase I?

A very significant sustainability element is implied in the establishment of an exchange at different levels and of stable communication patterns between different institutions, which is clearly highlighted by all sources.

All involved actors strengthened their network and visibility in China, with key officials currently much more aware of the respective role and of the policy issues where institutions can bring an input.

Evaluations are very important but they risk being only a snapshot of a period, focus on the objectives of the action, its impact and recipients. One should not forget that in actions of this kind, the overall goal is to establish a dialogue with a very relevant partner amidst constant challenges and difficulties. Even if assessment's outcome would be that the action was not perfectly implemented, the evaluation should recognize that, with all its limitations, maintaining a high level dialogue is in itself a goal, and in this respect the Action can be considered as having achieved its goal.

Phase I was extremely relevant for DG HOME and EEAS and the MS. Trust was built between Chinese authorities and MS, building a major information flow. Phase II was able to build on the trust already created, with a comparative advantage compared with the Phase I starting point, although a higher level of achievement is now expected.

As in August 2018 the EU officially communicated its intention to continue with a second phase of MMSP to be implemented by IOM, the Action did not prepare any exit strategy, considering that sustainability would come from a follow-up project. Sustainability and/or exit strategy is not mentioned in any PSC; the minutes of the last PSC of September 2018 mention the EU's commitment to MMSP II, hence reducing the need to think any further on sustainability following the decision to enter in a follow-up project. Sustainability, according to the final report, would also come from the continuous political engagement of the EU and China to improve migration policies and management, and from IOM's further engagement in the follow-up project.

EQ12. Did the MMSP Phase II design take into account results achieved and lessons learned in the first phase to ensure continuity between both phases?

The continuity in design between phase I and II is evident, and no significant lesson learned seems to have been neglected. No adaptation to the different magnitude of the challenges to be faced under phase II seems, however, to have been introduced. The most recent developments, including the Covid 19 health emergency are likely in any case to impose a fine-tuning of phase II that will reduce the importance of the punctual continuity of its design with that of Phase I.

The final report does not show precisely to what extent the Chinese counterpart is interested to actually contribute. The overall idea was to sustain the Dialogue, and during the first phases it was indeed useful. The last meeting of the Dialogue on Migration took place in 2017, and the negotiation on visa facilitation agreement and irregular migration have been remarkably slow. Negotiations slowed down in Phase II (one negotiation round in 2019 and another in 2018). China is not an easy partner, and there has been an overall cooling down in relations in the field of migration.

It must be recognised that in Phase II, especially following the Covid-19 health emergency, it is much more difficult to create a level-playing field between different interests. It is also true that changes in last years have taken place very quickly in China, regarding the importance of migration management. However, lack of strong coordination of the EU Delegation and MS Embassies with their MS capitals is still a considerable problem/challenge, as highlighted in 2016 where (as already mentioned), when the Chinese Minister of Public Security was invited to tour several capitals of EU. According to some interviewees, the attention paid to such extraordinary event (and opportunity to strengthen collaboration) was not the same at the EU/MS delegations in Beijing as in the MS' capitals.

While continuity between Phase I and II seems in substantial terms to be ascertained, this is not precisely stressed in the relevant documents (Action Fiches). The Action Fiche for MMSP II has indeed a section on lessons learnt which suggests that the project will build on the achievements of previous projects implemented since 2007, including MMSP I. This section refers, however, only to a few examples of achievements (visa waiver for diplomats, exchanges on irregular migration, etc.) without pointing out which lessons have actually been learnt. The MMSP II Action Fiche is, however, more detailed on Monitoring requirements than Action Fiche for MMSP I.

2.5. Impact Orientation

EQ13. To which extent was there a change observed as regards to Chinese beneficiaries' knowledge of migration management and have the results of the Action influenced Chinese migration management practices or positions in regional/international fora?

There is an objective difficulty in proving causal links between the implementation of the Action and changes intervened in legislation and practice in China, although one can highlight the fact that policy makers were involved in a variety of opportunities of networking, discussion and information gathering while transformation processes were ongoing (like the establishment of NIA and the related changes).

The Action provided a forum of discussion that was immediately available when Chinese authorities autonomously developed, due to the pressure of external factors (like new migration flows towards China), an increased awareness of the relevance of certain policy areas (like e.g. irregular migration and forced labour).

Chinese experts, although not admitting a direct relationship between the activities organised and the changes intervened in legislation, acknowledge nevertheless that activities provided good chances to put together different organizations to discuss, know each other,

etc., and that discussion of technical issues provided different angles to certain problems, etc. This probably awakened some political interest and a better understanding of the problem and the need to better tackle it, contributing inter alia to the shift from a focus on the *Convention on Labour Inspection*, which by the time was better known, to the lesser known *Forced Labour Convention*. After years various Chinese ministries and International Organizations enjoyed this fresh opportunity to resume conversations and restart dialogue to try to better understand and exchange ideas on those instruments, the reasons behind their provisions and the challenges deriving for the Chinese system. It is a working process, with still work ahead.

EU and experts also underline that there is not direct causality but also that changes took place at the end of it: the Chinese improved their migration management structure and triggered some programs in areas where initially there were not too high expectations they would consider. For example, regarding irregular migration it was an area Chinese did not initially want to display but afterwards they were much more interested in the issues. They were e.g. aware of smuggling, but their approach was very much focused on leaving illegally China and not on staying illegally abroad (some fleeing China were being searched on corruption grounds, etc..) but nowadays they also have to deal with issues concerning irregular migrants in the East of China or Koreans working illegally. Regarding the problem of trafficking effective advances are more debatable, because it is very difficult to establish international police cooperation. Objectives and procedures are not the same (Europol has an agreement – a memorandum of understanding), and what is in place is not operational cooperation but rather exchange of information.

Instead, and even surprisingly, a workshop and discussions on readmission programs were conducted for the first time during the Action in China when for the first time the Chinese Interior Ministry paid for these programs; particularly relevant was a Chinese delegation visit to three Member States to explore and exchange on return/readmission mechanisms. Even though Chinese wanted to focus on other parts of the dialogue and leave the return/readmission aside, but perhaps the views changed a bit, even politically, as the *EU-China Joint Statement*² recently adopted shows, where readmission was a bit more integrated.

The project's strategy and first goal was to build trust, but there were tangible results, for example, the visa application centres (VAC) advanced to reach some 350 opened³ benefiting the Visa Waiver Agreement (VWA). As an interviewee pointed out, there were also concrete outcomes of the Action and the Dialogue, also there was some pieces of legislation changed on issues like trafficking on human beings.

Now China better understands the global dimension of the migration challenge, that explains its active engagement in the Marrakesh Conference regarding the *Global Compact on Migration*. The Action may have helped in this, and also IOM deployed major efforts to create an awareness. China has, by the way, recognized the importance and work of IOM by joining it.

² *EU-China Joint Statement* as of 9th April 2019, para. 8, acknowledging their commitment to actively engage in the EU-China Mobility and Migration Dialogue and to swiftly conclude the parallel negotiations on the agreements on visa facilitation and on cooperation in combating illegal migration. (available at <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/39020/euchina-joint-statement-9april2019.pdf>)

³ See *EU-China Summit Joint Statement* as of 29 June 2015 para 22, establishing a roadmap for future agreements and arrangements, and launching its implementation. The roadmap included, in the first stage to be completed by the end of 2015, negotiation and signing of a mutual visa waiver agreement for diplomatic passport holders, the opening of visa application centres in mutually agreed Chinese cities without consular presence as specified in the roadmap, and launching practical cooperation in combating illegal migration. It also announced the second stage the starting of negotiation of agreements on visa facilitation and cooperation in combating illegal migration.

This new multilateral approach and the increasing international leadership of China is translated in a solid engagement in joining international organizations involved in global migration management, in the launch of the Global Compact on Migration with a overall good quality of their participation and contribution. Also at regional level, China have kept strongly supporter and is a member of the COLOMBO process, which included the sending countries that send labour migration workers, and has also participated on ANDEX (Asian Network for Document Examination)

The final report suggests that “the project’s technical support has incrementally contributed to strengthening EU and Chinese stakeholders’ capacity in migration management”. Workshops on migration management (European best practices, management techniques, etc.) have been delivered to 723 Chinese government officials. No information provided on results of training.

Advocacy to manage migration according to international standards has been done by IOM and ILO. Advocacy has resulted in improved integration measures (simplified work permit process, foreign talent visa system, visa rules for high-skilled migrants, reform on permanent residence policy) being adopted. Migration management plans have been developed (e.g. in Guangdong, Migrants’ Services Bureau established 5-year plan for migration management). A New agency National Immigration Administration (NIA) has been assigned the duty to be central in formulation of good migration policies and effective migration management.

During the time of the Action’s implementation, China gradually adjusted its policies and regulations to better match with international standards and practices, but also to simplify procedures for the more 600.000 foreigners residing in the country. This included reforms on its work permit and permanent residence schemes (like the so-called “green card”), implemented new policies and regulations to attract foreign professionals and other skilled international migrants (revised “R talent visa”, resident permit schemes and traveller’s transit rules). Measures to facilitate ordered tourism to the European Union have been promoted with the collaboration of provincial tourism agencies through the development of the Approved Destination Status (ADS). In the area of irregular migration, migrant pre-departure orientation and information services were promoted as part of programs aimed at reducing irregular migration and promote safe and regular migration. The project also engaged Chinese authorities in the exchange of technical inputs with EUROPOL and EMPACT, a collaboration with EUROPOL that extended to other areas and was relevant to the signature of the Agreement on Strategic Cooperation between China and Europol in October 2016, just to cite some concrete examples.

EQ14. To which extent did the Action contribute to the adoption by Chinese authorities of EU and international agreements and best practices related to regular and irregular migration management?

A direct link between the implementation of the Action and the adoption by Chinese authorities of EU and international agreements and best practices can hardly be verified. One signed agreement is, however, mentioned in the report: the “Agreement on Strategic Cooperation between the European Police Office and the Ministry of Public Security of the People’s Republic of China” (signed in April 2017) to which the project is said to have

“indirectly” contributed. Similarly, in 2018 the State Council abolished the Administrative Regulations on the Labour Re-education Programme.

EQ15. To what extent have the MMSP interventions generated additional benefits to what would have resulted from Member States' interventions only?

The Action refers to a policy level where the impact of individual EU Member States interventions can be very limited, with limited exceptions for specific MS. Project is about migration to the EU in general and not to specific MS, since individual Member States interventions do not ordinarily have the necessary dimension to cover EU-China dialogue. Stakeholders on EU side are European organizations (EUROPOL, FRONTEX) which would normally get involved with individual MS interventions. This of course does not per se exclude that individual Member States interventions could, however, support the MMSP intervention.

2.6. EU added Value

EQ16. What specific added value did the Action bring to the EU as a global player? What is the PI/FPI specific added value in implementing the project?

The Action appears to have successfully contributed to the external presentation of the EU as a global player in migration management, operating in the framework of international organisations and placing EU interests in a broader perspective.

The Action definitely appears to have facilitated the work of EU diplomacy by providing for certain controversial issues discussion fora where - due to the distance from ordinary negotiation settings - it is possible to have a more open dialogue that can prepare the ground to further more formalized steps. The Action sent a strong message to China that EU was a serious partner to work with, interested in a long-term collaboration. It emphasizes the positioning of the EU as a global player that is willing to carry out actions based on building trust, dialogue, technical exchanges, mutual learning, etc.

The specific sort of action that is here assessed has a number of positive implications at both internal (in the MS) and external level, linked to the improvement in the perception of the EU in the negotiation of migration management policies. This fits indeed with the image of the EU as a reliable partner working multilaterally in the international context hand-in-hand with international organizations, something that is consistent with the approach privileged in the Global Compact on Migration, and also fitting the EU-China dialogue within the GAMM.

More than that, the mere fact of the interest of China in engaging in a dialogue and accepting its implications (for example the Government's authorization to ILO to deploy some programs in China), is in itself already an opportunity. As one interviewee from an International Organization put it a bit dramatically “so you have a tiny player which is the Commission, but if you start acting as a bigger player and you bring money to the table, then you start discussing with this giant partner which is China, so you are positioning yourself”. It

is a very effective diplomatic move to address very controversial issues while respecting the voluntary participation of China, facilitating this process by providing funds aimed at exploring chances, testing the field and even promoting some limited technical advances, as a preliminary step before engaging in serious negotiations for which a better knowledge of the counterpart and some level of trust is needed. So that “disguised in the form of a respectful dialogue” it allows the EU to diplomatically move forward its negotiating agenda.

In the specific PI/FPI perspective, the project brings a supplementary added value primarily in terms of leveraging EU’s influence in the global management of migration flows, promoting policy cooperation with a country that has a clear strategic interest. The nature of the problems related to migration in its different forms facilitates also the integration/mainstreaming in the Multiannual Indicative Programme of a variety of cross-cutting issues like human rights and fundamental freedoms, respect for human dignity, the principles of equality, including gender equality, and solidarity.

EQ17. To what extent has the Action contributed to more visibility of the EU in China?

The Action provided a significant contribution to the visibility of the EU in China at different levels, ranging from technical and political actors to the dissemination of the information relevant for prospective migrant workers.

All MMSP project documents and materials were produced in accordance with the Communication and Visibility plan approved by the EU in 2015. The implementation of the project communication activities was guided by the Communication and Visibility Manual for EU External Actions.

The Final report provides an overview of visibility outreach (folders, stickers, brochures, etc.) but most importantly the project produced regular Newsletters. The Project was actively promoted on social media (Wechat, Facebook) and through press releases.

2.7. Coherence

EQ18. To which extent was the implementation of the Action aligned with the EU Global Strategy 2020, the EU’s Global Approach to Migration and Mobility (GAMM) and the European Agenda on Migration, the EU-China Dialogue on Migration and Mobility and the EU-China 2020 Agenda for Strategic Cooperation and with other EU policies?

Project’s design and outputs are fairly well aligned with the GAMM’s objectives, while the project implementation approach is well aligned with the overarching EU-China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation, which emphasizes the need for strengthened EU-China collaboration on irregular migration and information sharing mechanism between parties on migrant smuggling, illegal migration, and trafficking in human beings. The facilitation of people-to-people exchanges drawing attention to supporting the EU-China Dialogue on Migration and Mobility (MMD) and its Roadmap is also upheld.

A perhaps unintended effect of the Action's design and implementation was the chance for two UN agencies (ILO and IOM) to collaborate and common planning, thus advancing other EU goals and priorities in the global arena, instead of competing for funds and preserving their mandates or influence, without feeling forced into it. In this it provided ground for the UN reform, that calls in for further integration and in this it is necessary the recognition of each agency mandate. The experience provided by this kind of programs in helping agencies to work together within an EU call was per se very good, and this was a relevant contribution to UN reform. It is clearly an unintended side-effect of the programme, but it shows the Action shouldn't be assessed only from a too narrow perspective as it also advances, though indirectly, other global goals and priorities of the EU (supporting multilateral international bodies, involving UN Agencies as stakeholders, etc.).

Assessing the whole general program, is too difficult and above some of the interviewed experts' position and ranks, however Chinese experts tended to strongly encourage and continue with the program and with more concrete proposals.

Project's design and outputs echo the GAMM's objectives, while responding, among others, to the inclusive growth priority set forth in the Europe 2020 strategy.

Project implementation approach adhered to the overarching EU-China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation, which emphasizes the need for strengthened EU-China collaboration on irregular migration and information sharing mechanism between parties on migrant smuggling, illegal migration, and trafficking in human beings. Outputs of the project, as described in the final report, responded to each of these priorities, as well as to enhancing regular migration and the migration and development nexus.

While the Migration and Mobility Dialogue remains a politically driven process with no direct involvement of either IOM or ILO, the project's technical support has incrementally contributed to strengthening EU and Chinese stakeholders' capacity in migration management as a catalyst to sustaining the necessary environment for continued dialogue and cooperation on migration and mobility.

EQ19. To what extent were activities of the Action implemented in coordination with the EU Member States?

Project documents highlight the regular involvement of officials from MS embassies and consular offices in the different activities, although these were not specifically addressed to them. This participation had a number of positive aspects, as for instance the sharing of experiences and transfer of knowledge between the consular representations of major EU MS and those of smaller states with smaller migration flows from China.

From project reports it is possible to infer the regular participation of MS officers (mainly consulates and embassies officers in China) in several project activities, both as participants and as presenters in the different workshops and seminars organized across the country. According to PSC minutes, the project was also presented to MS representatives in at least one occasion. Considering the turnover of staff in relevant embassies/consular offices, the team was able to contact only a few persons who were involved in such activities, although the interviews implemented provided a consistent picture of the interaction between the project and MS diplomatic representations in Beijing during the implementation period.

The persons interviewed consistently stressed different positive aspects linked to the involvement of MS in project activities, although the project did not include core activities specifically devoted to the capacity building of MS diplomatic and consular representations.

To this extent, it is possible to infer that Member States were systematically informed about project activities.

Regarding the participation of Member States in the next stages of the Programme under the Dialogue, one of the interviewed consular representations reported that no update was received in the last 18 months (despite some insistence on their side) on the advancement of the meetings and negotiations eventually leading to an agreement on visa facilitation, despite the fact that this is a key piece of information regarding relations with China. While it is true that with the COVID-19 emergency the first period of the pandemic crisis had been extremely complex, the asymmetry in the relationship with China as regard visas, residence, migration, vis-à-vis EU nationals has become wider and much more evident. However, the same source acknowledged that activities were still being conducted in 2019, when they participated in the opening of the meetings on Mobility and Migration in November 2019, although the staff probably could not attend the seminars and workshops.

3. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This final section of the report provides an opportunity for summarizing the outcomes of the overall assessment of the evaluation team, beyond the more specific aspects that are highlighted in the answers to each EQ.

3.1. Conclusions

Conclusions are best developed starting from the general and specific objectives of the evaluation as described in the ToR.

The focus of the evaluation is in this case on the performance of the action, the “results measured against its expected objectives; and the reasons underpinning such results”. The general conclusion reached by the evaluators is that the action achieved most of the results foreseen in the ToR, and that the main difficulty in the assessment lies rather in the formulation of the objectives, that is influenced by the policy framework – the EU-China Dialogue on Migration – within which the action develops.

The action is indeed designed to support foreign and migration policy goals, that by the very nature require a very flexible approach to adapt to changing political contexts. The broad formulation of the objectives cannot be considered in this case as a weakness in the design of the action, but simply the reflection of its nature, that is meant to act as foreign policy tool, and not as a development support measure.

The design of the Action interlinked political and technical levels around a set of different priorities. In that sense, it provided a mutual leverage for both Chinese and EU/MS officials to collaborate and maintain alive the dialogues at technical level. It contributed to opening up opportunities to exploit any “window of opportunity” this may create, but also provided additional fora for communication and exchange, should the Dialogue experience political difficulties or occasional obstacles deriving from the international context. Therefore, advancements on certain issues helped to move the agenda in other areas that initially did not equally fall under the priorities of both counterparts.

Flexibility has clearly been a key feature in the implementation of the Action. It enabled policy dialogue advances, mainly due to the existence of a clear road-map based on a set of priorities, goals, plans and activities clearly aligned. As any dialogue, the policy dialogue on migration and mobility is sensible to acceleration, slow-downs and changes of direction. This is why flexibility is a key factor for the Dialogue to be able to adapt to an ever-changing political environment. Such flexibility serves the achievement of the overall objectives of the Dialogue, but extending it also to other areas could improve the general effectiveness of the Action, for example if activities may need to quickly be adapted or substituted, some budgetary flexibility was also pointed out as a key factor of success in this area.

While there can be a difficulty in matching the results against the objectives, for the reason just explained, it was less difficult to identify the reasons underpinning such results. In general terms, the results were indeed based on one side on the presence of implementing partners that had a very strong mix of competence on the different aspects of migration

management and capacity to interact with Chinese institutions, while on the other side it was possible to observe a strong and genuine interest of Chinese officials to take part in trainings and discussion fora on migration issues even where not yet a political priority.

Such features of the action make relatively easy to duplicate the enabling factors of the good performance of Phase I, but at the same time the reaching of the objectives remains conditioned by the possible occurrence of political tensions or other situation hampering a proper delivery of results.

The assessment of actions of this kind pose a number of specific challenges, which were increased by the conditions imposed by the Covid-19 health emergency. The value of supporting transnational dialogues in the field of migration lies primarily in providing additional fora for communication and exchange between stakeholders in areas that are ordinarily politically very sensitive.

The establishment of common understandings and integrated approaches towards migration and mobility is unavoidably a piecemeal process, the advancement of which is not easily measured with indicators, and is often linked to the effectiveness in reaching less tangible results, like networking between different actors, and the exposition of policymakers and technical elites involved in migration management to new cultural perspectives, primarily those that can help in promoting a more nuanced and less stereotyped look at migration flows.

This implies that the evaluation can less than usual rely on purely quantitative data, and must be integrated with the qualitative information obtained in interviews with a qualified sample of persons that have been involved in the activities, particularly those who took part in representation of institutional stakeholders (governments, international organisations), whose feedback can help in “framing” the information obtained by project documents, for instance highlighting areas where the reaching of the action’s objectives can be negatively or positively affected by political factors. This specific kind of interviews certainly suffers a prejudice from its implementation at distance due to the health emergency, and this element imposed a careful preparation of the interview matrixes.

3.2. Lessons learnt

L1. The Action has very much benefited from the knowledge, contacts, experience and prestige of the **implementing partners (particularly IOM, but also ILO) before the relevant Chinese ministries** involved in the Actions, including in an ulterior stage in the context of the establishment of NIA. The Action showed that, granted a clear allocation of tasks and responsibilities, the partnership between international organisations with strong subject matter competence and solid roots in the country is certainly a plus in actions of this kind.

L2. On the EU side it is important to bear in mind when designing and implementing and Action like this one, that **cooperation projects with Chinese institutions must adopt adequate time-frames**, with sufficient space for networking and familiarisation with the specific legal and cultural context. The time frame for the ex post assessment of actions like MMSP must be sufficiently long to take into account the fact that policy changes in the field of migration take place at a quite slow pace, while processes can get stuck for longer periods due to contingent political and geopolitical factors.

L3. In order to assess/evaluate actions of the dimension and scope of MMSP at least four considerations need to be considered. First, the assessment cannot be conducted focusing just on one specific activity/component of the Action to isolate it for analysis, to the contrary, each activity needs to be considered as an **element of a global diplomatic strategy**, to analyze it as part of that general strategy. Second, another additional difficulty is that any impact assessment in this context must equally pay attention to **intangible outputs of the actions**, like e.g. networking and establishing personal contacts between Chinese and EU officials, and the familiarization on both sides with the cultural dimension of the counterpart, even detached from the immediate acquisition of specific technical notions. Those are outputs that are difficult to measure in an objective way, nevertheless in this kind of Action, and particularly in Phase I where crucial to shift to the next stage. Third, when precise measurement of results is possible, the preparation of an analytical framework, including matrixes and other monitoring tools as well as indicators, becomes essential; in that case, though, and for the reasons above exposed the **analysis cannot be purely activity-based**. Finally, even clearly tailored measures aimed at very concrete goals (enactment or amendment of pieces of legislation, changes in administrative practice, embracement of international standard, signing of international treaties, policy change, etc...) cannot be considered as the sole factor influencing changes in China, is in this sense that **causal links due to the Action activities or overall impact are very difficult to establish**.

L4. The **EU delegation has played a central role** in providing an updated and precise picture of the situation, including relevant actors and possible institutional bottlenecks, as well as in the design and implementation of actions.

L5. Involvement of Chinese institutional stakeholders has been a key factor of success, in particular the constant involvement by the management of the project of their counterparts even through **informal consultation and feedback in the preparation of activities**, particularly with regard to trainings and workshops has proved crucial to ensure wide-spread interest and attendance to the activities organized. Such involvement included the joint identification of the most appropriate expert profiles, and of MS best practices or models more appropriate for the Chinese context. It also explains the interest and even the proactivity of the Chinese counterpart in the Action creating the conditions to shift from the technical to the political level, even to attract the interest of the Chinese counterparts towards areas that initially did not fall under their priorities and opening up opportunities for a more nuanced political dialogue.

L6. The planning of activities aimed at facilitating dialogue was not directly linked to immediate negotiation priorities, so in short-term not fruits could be collected from this actions, but they created a **favourable and constructive environment that opened medium-term prospects for starting dialogue** in areas even initially not considered ripe (readmission, visa facilitation centres, etc..). This was quite important to support the establishment of negotiations in Phase I, but it may become less relevant in ulterior stages of negotiation.

L7. Actions like MMSP that include a major training component, required a great deal of attention to the **participation of Chinese officials or other professionals from a diversified range of institutional contexts**. With regard to state officials, attention were paid to avoid that international hierarchies could create obstacles to active participation by their staff.

L8. In the organisation of trainings on certain issues (e.g. document fraud, visa processing) it is worth to take into consideration the **positive aspects of the interaction between consular staff of EU Member States**, particularly with regard to the importance for the staff from major countries of sharing their experiences with colleagues of consular offices with a weaker technical structure or less experience in managing migration flows with China. In this sense, relying on the cooperation of MS when planning activities like study tours or official visits linked to the action expanded the positive impact of the Action as involving a great variety of key stakeholders in the activities.

L9. The Action is sustained in a close dialogue between different counterparts, starting at the technical level to reach the political one. Recent developments, including the **Covid 19** health emergency and the limitations to mobility it has brought with it, are potential sources of disruption of the Programme. It will probably require some fine-tuning during Phase II to mitigate the impact that the discontinuity of contacts and meetings and exchanges between the counterparts. Although beyond the scope of this evaluation it teaches a lesson also about the **risks of supporting too much the EU strategy around the Dialogue on activities that require constant personal contact**, and that a more balance approach that includes e-training activities, online meetings, etc... will probably needed in the future.

3.3. Recommendations

R1. The assessment points out that the Action Fiche (Annex H) included too broad objectives. We recommend **establishing a combination of general but also more specific and detailed objectives around some key priorities** under GAMM (*or the new European Pact on Migration and Asylum 2020, if and when adopted*). General objectives would allow to cover not previously listed activities that could emerge during the implementation of the project and prove beneficial for it, especially if unexpected advances or new courses of action occur. Specific objectives would provide the Action with a clearer frameset aimed at better guiding short and medium-term goals and activities. This way the necessary flexibility that lies at the centre of the Actions' rationale would be preserved while at the same time a detailed workplan could be planed and developed.

R2. The assessment has underlined the importance of preserving the flexibility of the Action, here we recommend to further **ensure flexibility and adaptability become a key elements or principles in the development of the Action**, at least ensuring that planned activities and budget do not become a straightjacket for the adaptation of the Action to the needs of the different stakeholders. In particular, although staff rotation is a key component of diplomatic representations organization we recommend ensuring that rotation takes place in a way that the trust and networks built by departing staff could be transferred to the new staff, and rising awareness that high rotation ratios may slow down the dialogue , as building trust with Chinese counterparts is a broadly agreed key factor for the success of the Action and an unhindered communication flow. Or at least, bearing in mind that in this tasks a high rate of project personnel rotation may reduce the efforts to build trust between counterparts that in such cultural environment are very much based on personal relations. Inversely, the rotation of Chinese officials may also impact on the efficacy and pace of the Action, because Chinese staff shifts as well between posts and/or is transferred to different locations; in this sense, measures aimed at minimizing the impact on the Action can be studied in close contact with

the delegation in place, actions consisting of support or introduction from previous staff to new staff and/or update of the state of the discussions, of the knowledge and training accumulated, etc..

R3. The assessment has identified several strengths in the intervention logic of the Action, but it would greatly benefit from including some **impact-oriented actions, indicators and goals in the intervention logic and the action framework** some in order to ensure that the Dialogue also advances the priorities of the EU and to be able to assess how the EU agenda moves forward beyond building trust and creating political *momentum*, which are key foundations of the Dialogue and necessary but not sufficient, in particular as we move to Phase II and beyond.

R4. As expressed by different stakeholders, the Action would have relevantly benefitted from a tailor-made approach to the needs of the different stakeholders, but in particular the EU institutions, so we recommend that a **needs assessment for each specific stakeholder would be conducted** prior to each Phase of the Action, in order to nurture the Commission Implementation Decision and Action Fiche.

R5. As suggested by several stakeholders, we recommend to **involve in the training the Chinese officials operating at local level**, who less frequently enjoy the opportunity to share their experiences from the field and to be informed about the international legal framework and policy development. Participation of staff from the provincial administrations must be encouraged, as well as the organization of events in remote locations, particularly those more directly touched by migration flows. Being true that the training of Chinese local officials might not so directly be conducive to create leverage at political level for moving forward the Dialogue, it is equally true that they are also highly relevant to promote changes in Chinese administration daily practice and to reach out all the Chinese officials territory, as exemplified by advances in the fight against forced labour and slave work.

R6. Although the Action greatly benefited in Phase I from having two International Organizations as implementing partners (particularly IOM) and facilitating the to approach relevant Chinese ministries, we consider **their role as facilitators should not be disregarded in future phases of the Action** when a more political approach will be needed and complex negotiations will take place. In this context, continued training activities, exchange of practices and knowledge and mutual learning activities might prove not sufficient and their experience and expertise might be of use to contribute to create a common ground and playing field for the negotiations.

R7. The assessment shows that the EEAS/EU Delegation in Beijing played a central role in managing the different phases and liaising between institutional actors, however we recommend ensuring that **strong and structured inter-service cooperation** takes place within the different EU bodies and agencies is also recommended (EEAS/DG Home/Frontex/Europol/etc..). Also when the results of diplomatic efforts are conducive to key activities or actions at a political top level (EU institutions or country visits by Chinese high rank officials), thus creating exceptional opportunity windows to push forward the political agenda of the Dialogue, inter-agency cooperation should be provided with the tools to maximize those opportunities.

R8. The assessment of the Action has shown that Member States have been involved at different stages of the Action, in particular regarding the training activities, not only as

participants but also providing experts. However, a sustained **effort needs to be made to include MS in the design of the Action, the implementation of the activities and in the evolution and outcomes of the Dialogue**, as some high rank officials raised that they were not updated regularly on the negotiations.

R9. The assessment indicates that some activities need to be planned without being linked to immediate negotiation priorities, whereas others certainly need to be aimed at promoting the EU's negotiation agenda. The importance of the former, as highlighted in this assessment, does not need to be underestimated and some indicators (number of training, attendance, satisfaction, etc..) still need to be used to provide objective data as to the degree of success of activities conducted to create the conditions for negotiation and mutual learning. However, the gap between intangible and tangible goals is still wide and the **activities conducted should need to be planned more strategically to better bridge the gap between creating trust and reaching political goals**.

R10. The Action covered different cross-cutting issues, but the **gender dimension** of immigration management policies needs to be reinforced. We recommend including it as a component of the trainings in a more systematic manner and into the design of the Action. Same can be said of **Human Rights**, in particular the training activities tended to concentrate around technical issues but that have deep implications in terms of human rights, the HR dimension needs to be **incorporated systematically in the trainings and activities** as it is not at the same priority level among the different stakeholders. In summary, the integration of cross-cutting issues and SDG in actions of this kind would benefit from the development during the identification and formulation phase of a clear-cut reference to the gender dimension, the principle of Leave No-One Behind and the rights-based approach methodology.