

A Rapid Review of the European Union Emergency Trust Fund for Africa Research and Evidence Facility

The Research and Evidence Facility

The European Union Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF) was launched in November 2015. It aims “to foster stability and to contribute to better migration management in the continent, including by addressing the root causes of destabilization, forced displacement and irregular migration.”

The Research and Evidence Facility on Migration in the Horn of Africa (REF) was created in May 2016 with the support of the EUTF, with the purpose of collating and generating evidence and policy relevant knowledge. The research is conducted by a consortium consisting of the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London, as the lead partner, together with the University of Manchester, Sahar Research, based in Nairobi, Kenya, and, in the initial stage of the initiative, the University of Oxford’s International Migration Institute.

REF was originally scheduled to conclude in the final quarter of 2018, but has been given a no-cost extension until May 2019. A further extension of the initiative, with additional funding, is under active consideration, and the current review has been commissioned primarily to inform the REF’s future programme of work, should a second phase of the initiative be approved.

The review

This review of the REF’s outputs and impact was commissioned by the lead partner of the REF consortium and undertaken by a consultant who has particular expertise in the areas of evaluation, refugee and migration policy, as well as African affairs.

The review consisted of an analysis of relevant documents and publications, an examination of the REF website and social media accounts; interviews with REF staff members; and consultations with a number of key stakeholders (see Annex 1). The consultant was also able to participate in a meeting of the REF’s Expert Advisory Committee at an early stage of the initiative, as well as a number of REF-related gatherings held in Brussels in October 2018. In addition, the consultant’s findings and recommendations draw on a long history of personal involvement in initiatives closely related to the work of the REF.

In order to test the validity of this review’s findings, and to discuss whether and how its proposals should be taken forward, it is recommended that they be discussed at a REF Regional Conference, due to be held in Nairobi on 21-22 January 2019, the purpose of

which is “to showcase the work of the REF over the past two and a half years, but also that of research institutions and individuals from across the region, and to discuss how to translate recommendations and research finding into action.” The consultant responsible for the preparation of this review has been invited to that meeting.

Key findings

Since its establishment in May 2016, the REF has produced an impressive volume of original, high-quality and timely research, carefully avoiding any duplication or overlap with research undertaken by other institutes or initiatives. According to members of the core team, the research undertaken by the REF to date will also be used as the basis for a number of additional and longer-term outputs, some of them targeted at a primarily academic audience.

Given the limited time and capacity at its disposal and the complexity of population movements in the Horn of Africa, the REF has sensibly focused on the region’s principal migration and displacement scenarios.

Contrary to the expectations of some external stakeholders, who feared that the REF’s work would be excessively oriented towards the EU’s migration management agenda, the movement of people from the Horn of Africa to Europe has not featured at all prominently in the initiative’s programme of work.

More generally, the REF has enjoyed a high degree of independence with respect to its working methods and the content of its outputs, while at the same time focusing on five interlinked themes that derive directly from the EUTF’s own programmatic priorities, namely:

- interactions between rural and urban mobility;
- experiences and impacts of voluntary, involuntary and diasporic return;
- impacts of development changes on people’s movement choices and patterns of mobility;
- cross-border economies and centre-periphery relations; and,
- migration management systems and their impacts on mobility patterns.

Looking to the future, the REF core team has proactively identified a number of additional research themes that could usefully be addressed in a second phase of the initiative, including youth employment and mobility; the impact of climate and environmental change; the role of local actors, including those without a dedicated mandate or role in relation to migration and mobility issues; and the role of documentation in the protection of people who are or who have been on the move.

A particular strength of the REF’s research has been its inclusive approach to the issue of human mobility, encompassing conventional categories such as migrants, refugees, returnees, internally displaced people, diaspora populations and host communities.

Moreover, unlike international organizations that have more specific sectoral mandates, the REF's research has been able to adopt a comprehensive approach, exploring the nexus between human mobility and variables such as armed conflict, human rights and development processes.

As indicated already, the key research themes on which the REF's programme of work has been based are closely associated with EUTF objectives in the Horn of Africa, and the research generated by the REF has contributed to the attainment of those objectives by enabling policymakers, practitioners and other researchers to develop an enhanced understanding of migration dynamics in the region. At the same time, the REF has played a valuable role in shaping programmatic responses to those dynamics, especially by providing the evidence required for the formulation of appropriate project proposals to the EUTF.

In all of these respects, the impact of the REF has been reinforced by the fact that its research findings are presented in an accessible, easily digestible and largely qualitative manner, avoiding the excesses of both technocratic and academic jargon.

On the basis of interviews undertaken by the consultant and correspondence reviewed by him, the research undertaken by the REF has been particularly appreciated by those stakeholders who are familiar with its work and who are engaged in relevant policymaking and programming processes. These include bilateral donors, NGOs, consultancy companies and think-tanks.

At the same time, the work of the REF has coincided with an unusually busy time in international refugee and migration diplomacy, which appears to have limited the ability of some organizations (UNHCR being a case in point) to engage with the REF and to make better use of its research findings.

In addition, a number of respondents who are not directly associated with the REF, especially those in the academic world, expressed a limited understanding of the initiative's objectives and the precise nature of its relationship with the EUTF. Given that the REF is not a traditional research project, greater efforts could now usefully be made to explain its overall mandate, strategy and ways of working, as well as the degree of intellectual and operational autonomy that it enjoys.

In the words of one respondent, the REF "sometimes seems to be more of a European-based effort, rather than a team working on and in the Horn of Africa." Given that the initiative is coordinated in London, funded by Brussels and led by researchers originating from the Global North (who also act as its public face), such perceptions are not completely unreasonable.

But, as explained later in this report, those perceptions are also somewhat unfair, disregarding the extent to which the REF's activities have been based on an extensive engagement with institutions and individuals based in the Horn of Africa. As the initiative moves in the direction of a second phase, every effort should be made to both

strengthen and promote such local linkages.

The output and impact of the REF has undoubtedly been enhanced by the expertise and credibility of its core team. The size and capacity of that team has been modest, however, especially when considered in relation to the ambitious nature of the REF research programme and the need for its many outputs to be produced within a time-frame that is much tighter than that employed for more conventional academic research projects.

As a result, the REF has been somewhat constrained in its ability to establish its brand, to focus on the dissemination and uptake of its findings and recommendations, and to maintain close relations with entities such as the EUTF's Monitoring and Learning System and the project's own Expert Advisory Panel. If a second phase of the REF is approved, such functions should be given a higher priority, with particular attention being given to those recommendations made in the following sections of this report.

Uptake and impact

In formulating the terms of reference for this review, the REF was concerned to learn more about the ways its output has been taken up and used by other stakeholders. Understandably so, as the REF itself has not had the time or capacity to undertake high-quality research, to ensure the effective dissemination of its findings and simultaneously to monitor the use of its research and impact of its activities. As suggested later in this review, that function might more appropriately be undertaken by the Monitoring and Learning System, a separate EUTF-funded entity, established "to measure the overall progress of Trust Fund projects against its key strategic objectives."

The situation is complicated by the apparent absence of any EUTF instructions or guidelines with respect to the relationship between the REF and those entities responsible for formulating and managing Trust Fund projects.

The 38-page 'Action Fiche for the Implementation of the Horn of Africa Window', for example, makes only one reference to the REF, and that is in the broader context of a descriptive paragraph on "challenges and dynamics in the target areas."

Somewhat surprisingly, the Action Fiche paper does not delineate the ways in which the REF's research findings might be used, nor does it contain any reporting requirements on this matter. Further consultations are now needed to ascertain whether such provisions are to be found elsewhere in the EUTF's programme and project documents, and if not, why such an omission exists.

While concrete evidence on the use and impact of the REF's research remains disappointingly thin, there is a broad consensus amongst key stakeholders that the REF has served a number of important functions.

These include generating reliable and timely information on migration and mobility in the Horn of Africa; enhancing understanding of the regional, national and local contexts in which the EUTF is working; challenging the assumptions on which policies are made; and raising awareness of the unintended and potentially problematic consequences of new programmatic interventions.

At the same time, respondents to this review identified a number of areas in which REF outputs had been of particular use for programming purposes. These included the initiatives reports on rural-to-urban mobility; cross-border dynamics; migration between the Horn of Africa and Yemen; and the process of return and reintegration in Yemen.

The March 2017 Desk Review was also commended for the way in which it provided a comprehensive overview of migration and conflict in the Horn of Africa, as well as a justification for the issues included in the REF research programme.

Dissemination

The market for research outputs on issues related to the REF's mission, namely the nexus between migration, displacement, conflict, development and governance, is now a highly competitive one, with a myriad of different publications, websites and social media accounts competing for the attention of relevant stakeholders.

For an entity with limited capacity such as the REF, this leads to an inevitable dilemma, namely finding an appropriate balance between the time, effort and resources devoted to the production of high-quality research, and that which is given to the dissemination of project outputs and the promotion of the project itself. Unfortunately, in the view of the consultant, there is now a growing tendency for organizations to focus on the latter functions at the expense of the former.

That is certainly not a criticism that can be levelled at the REF, which has wisely chosen to pursue a judicious approach to the balance between production and dissemination. That approach should be maintained, while ensuring that the REF's research outputs reach their intended audience and provide them with useable information, insights and recommendations. In that respect, the core team should give particular consideration to five issues.

First, the REF should ensure that its research outputs are presented in a consistent and clearly branded manner. In order to maximize their take-up, such outputs should always include a concise executive summary and set of 'conclusions and recommendations.' This should replace the current REF approach, whereby the concluding section of the project's reports variously refer to 'conclusions', 'recommendations' and 'policy considerations'.

Second, it is recommended that the REF establish a detailed dissemination strategy for each of its research outputs. Such a strategy, whose formulation should begin from the

earliest stage of the project design process, should identify those individuals and organizations with a potential interest in each report, so as to ensure that they receive a copy of it.

Third, an 'activity plan' should be drawn up in relation to each REF output, setting out the launch events, blogposts, social media activity, media appearances and follow-up meetings that can be associated with it. A number of respondents pointed out that workshops of the type that the REF has organized in the region represent a more effective form of dissemination than the physical distribution of reports. According to one respondent's comment, "the REF's work should be used to create a space for active dialogue, exchange and debate amongst people working on migration-related issues in the region."

While this is an excellent objective, which has already been partially met by the REF, its full attainment is constrained by the structure and location of the project's core team. In that respect, it is recommended that REF consider the appointment of a full-time outreach and advocacy officer, based in the Horn of Africa and with regional responsibilities.

Fourth, and within the time-constraints that inevitably exist, the REF should continue to exploit the high level of credibility enjoyed by its core team members, providing briefings and presentations to relevant stakeholders, such as EU member state ministries, parliamentary committees and academic conferences.

Finally, the REF core team is to be commended for the extent to which it has been able to engage with the media, including influential and international outlets such as Al Jazeera, the BBC and TRT World. The REF should continue to log such appearances and, whenever possible, maximize their reach and value by featuring them on its own website.

Branding

The brand awareness of the REF does not currently appear to be fully commensurate with the scale and quality of its output. In this respect, the 'Research and Evidence Facility' title is a serious liability, failing to communicate the nature, purpose or scope of the work that the REF undertakes.

As an initiative based in a UK academic institute, particular confusion results from the fact that the same acronym is used in relation to the Research Excellence Framework, a system used to assess the quality and performance of British universities.

The REF core team should now give serious consideration to a modification of the project's title. The initiative's logo, which is well-designed and eye-catching, should be retained and used more boldly on all REF outputs

In terms of its brand image, the REF has been unfairly disadvantaged by its presumed association with the EU's restrictive migration management agenda, as well as the fact that it is coordinated from the UK and led by researchers from developed countries. In fact, one institutional member of the REF research consortium is located in Nairobi, while the REF core team includes individuals who are based in both Nairobi and Addis Ababa. Moreover, and as stated earlier, more than 50 consultants from the region have been contracted to undertake the ground-level research on which the REF's outputs are based.

The local dimensions of the REF's work should now be pursued and publicized more assiduously. As has been the case in the past, research should whenever possible be commissioned from organizations based in the Horn of Africa, rather than in Europe. In addition, and as recommended previously by this review, the REF would benefit considerably from the appointment of a dedicated advocacy and outreach officer located in the region.

Social media

Brand awareness of the REF and the dissemination of its findings could also be enhanced by a more vigorous and systematic use of social media. According to an excellent 'web and social media analytics report' prepared by the core team in October 2018, the REF's twitter account currently has just over 500 followers, whereas the project coordinator's personal account has more than 17,500, suggesting that there is a much larger potential audience to be reached by REF.

To achieve that objective, the REF core team should consider four principle recommendations. First, and in accordance with the preceding section of this report, the title of the current Twitter account ('REF-Horn') should be reviewed.

Second, the REF should tweet more regularly (since the REF account was established in October 2016, only nine tweets have been posted on average each month). In this respect, there is evidence to suggest that organizations and individuals who post on a regular basis are more successful in attracting an audience than those who make only intermittent use of social media.

Third, when new REF reports are released, greater efforts should be made to attract the attention of potential readers. A recent tweet, for example, simply stated: "New durable solutions analysis on Somalia out now," and was not accompanied by a photo or video. Given the competitive nature of the social media market, more striking, challenging or intriguing captions are required, and should always feature a visual.

Fourth, and most significantly, the Twitter account should not be restricted to the promotion of REF publications and events, but could be used as a much more general forum for news and views on issues related to the mission of the REF and the EUTF. Such an approach has already been envisaged by the core team, which acknowledges

the need “to convert traffic into interactions, in which visitors regularly ‘like’, share, comment and retweet posts.”

The REF Facebook page has gained only 56 followers, raising questions as to its viability. A time-limited effort to increase that number should be undertaken, with particular efforts being made to drive traffic from Twitter to Facebook. This promotional initiative should also be used as an opportunity to experiment with different types of post, visuals and multimedia outputs, so as to identify those topics that attract most interest.

The Facebook icon on the REF website currently connects to the SOAS rather than the REF Facebook page. This should be corrected.

Website

The REF website is attractively designed, clearly structured and easily navigated. It is accommodated by SOAS rather than the EUTF, an approach that underlines the independence and academic credibility of the project.

As well as enabling access to all REF publications, the website provides full information about the REF itself, including its funding, staff, partners, advisory committee members and media appearances. In addition, the website provides a valuable set of links to external resources on issues related to migration, displacement, conflict, governance and development in the Horn of Africa.

The REF website has a significant readership. According to an analysis undertaken by the core team, the project’s research papers are accessed on average around 3,500 times a month, while the working papers attract around 1,300 readers each month. Less satisfactorily, however, a disproportionate number of the website users are based in the UK (and to a lesser extent Belgium), trailed by readers based in Kenya, Ethiopia and Uganda.

In accordance with the ‘localization’ strategy recommended by this review, every effort should be made to generate more interest in the website in the region. At the same time, it was felt by some respondents that the REF website could be more interactive in nature, providing greater opportunities for website users to submit comments, provide feedback on REF outputs and to initiate discussions on relevant topics.

Unfortunately, it is not possible to access a full list of the blogposts that are regularly published on the REF website, an omission that should be corrected. The design of the banner that appears at the top of each page of the website is also a little confusing due to some overlapping text, and should be amended.

Finally, it should be acknowledged that the core team’s October 2018 ‘Web and Social

Media Analytics Report' (See Annex 2 of this report) contains a range of recommendations which, if effectively implemented, would strengthen the REF's outreach capacity.

These include (a) examining the gender bias of the initiative's social media visitors, 66 per cent of whom are currently male; (b) making increased use of social media that ask questions or invite action, rather than simply making statements; and (c) making more extensive use of photos, videos and other visuals, which are known to elicit a greater response than text-only outputs. In this context, the initiative's outreach efforts will undoubtedly be strengthened by the completion and dissemination of a brief documentary on the work of the REF, commissioned from an independent production company.

Research briefs

The REF core team has produced four 'research briefs', the most recent one in October 2018, providing a valuable digest of the initiative's research activities and publications. In addition, a blogpost dated February 2018 summarized the REF's recent achievements and listed research activities planned for the rest of the year.

In future, it is recommended that REF issue a research brief on a biannual basis and with a standard format. REF's name and logo should appear more prominently on the research briefs than has previously been the case, so as to enhance brand awareness.

Expert Advisory Panel members might be invited to provide brief endorsements of specific REF publications, similar to the 'blurbs' that are to be found on the rear cover of many books. The titles of and links to REF's working papers should also appear in the research briefs.

Working papers

The REF has established a working paper series on migration and conflict in the Horn of Africa. This series provides an important opportunity for the REF to promote its brand, to establish its reputation as a thought leader in relation to these issues and to expand the range of information and insights that it can provide to key stakeholders. As mentioned previously, the series also provides the REF with an opportunity to cover migration and displacement scenarios that are not included in the project's core research programme.

The working paper series also represents an attractive proposition to researchers, providing them with an opportunity to publish the early results of their work in a speedy and open access manner, with financial compensation and without precluding subsequent publication in a recognized academic journal.

Hitherto, only three REF working papers have been published, and every effort should now be made to accelerate the pace of production. Active efforts should be made to identify potential authors for the series, with particular emphasis being given to emerging scholars and researchers from the region.

In the author's experience, however, such an approach requires a considerable amount of 'shepherding' if it is to be implemented successfully, and in that respect, working paper production should not take precedence over the publication, dissemination and uptake of REF's core research reports.

Monitoring and Learning System

In addition to the REF, the EUTF has supported the establishment of a Monitoring and Learning System (MLS), in order to "measure the overall progress of projects implemented under the Horn of African window of the EUTF, against key strategic objectives and regional priorities," and to "use an evidence-based approach for programming and implementing interventions in the Horn of Africa, as well as to inform policy around the themes of the EUTF in the region."

In the opinion of the consultant, it was a wise decision on the part of the EUTF to keep this entity separate from the REF, which was created for the closely related but ultimately distinct purpose of "generating a better understanding of the drivers of instability, migration and displacement in the greater Horn of Africa, with the aim of informing EU policy and programming."

A striking feature of the MLS project document is the extent to which it refers to the need for cooperation with the REF. It points out, for example, that "strong research and analysis is central to understanding the context and ensuring that interventions have a positive impact," and goes on to say that the MLS "will have to operate in very close cooperation with the REF to ensure streamlined information sharing, make possible deeper analysis into the dynamics of irregular migration, displacement and conflict that are the chief concerns of the REF."

On the basis of the current review, it is not certain whether the degree of cooperation and interaction envisaged between the MLS and the REF has in fact been attained, and both entities should strive to achieve this objective if they go into a second phase.

It would be useful, for example, for the REF to report on its relations with the MLS in its research briefs and reports to Advisory Panel members. Ideally, moreover, an MLS representative should be invited to participate in the multi-stakeholder REF meeting that has been planned for January 2019. As recommended earlier, MLS might also be requested to track the use and impact of the REF's research reports, or to advise the REF on ways in which such information can be more effectively captured.

Expert Advisory Panel

The REF has established an Expert Advisory Panel comprised of seven distinguished academics and practitioners with extensive expertise in the REF's key research areas. The Advisory Panel met in Brussels in the early days of the project's existence and is due to meet again in early 2019. In the intervening period, communication between the REF core team and the Advisory Panel has been somewhat intermittent and inconsistent, with some panel members contacted by the core team more frequently than others.

The Advisory panel has an important role to play in a number of respects: providing substantive input to the REF work programme, ensuring the rigorous and independent nature of the REF's research; and promoting the REF's findings and recommendations to relevant stakeholder groups, including governments, international organizations, NGOs and the media. To maximize these opportunities, the REF core team should ensure that panel members receive the six-monthly research briefs recommended by this review, and that they are regularly alerted to other important developments in REF's programme of work.

Conclusion

While the EU Trust Fund for Africa has been the subject of some scepticism amongst academics and activists, its decision to establish the REF must be regarded as a positive, progressive and innovative one.

Recognizing that it was about to make some major programmatic investments in an unstable and under-researched region of the world, and taking note of the very tight timeframe within which it had to work, the EUTF recognized the need to equip itself with a better understanding of the trends, developments, risks and opportunities related to migration and mobility in the Horn of Africa.

The Trust Fund was also fully aware that it did not have the necessary in-house expertise and capacity to assume responsibility for this function, and consequently turned to what one EUTF official described as "a group of people who know what they are talking about" and who "could help us to be more smart in the way that we went about our business."

For its part, the REF has been able to meet these high expectations, and in doing so has helped to craft an intriguing new model of cooperation between academia, the EU's development directorate and the delegations of states in the Horn of Africa. While at least one of those states has been described as being "allergic to research," others have appreciated the consultative and responsive approach of the REF, as well as its constructive engagement with the EUTF and its Operational Committee for the Horn of Africa.

Looking to the future, if the REF were to continue into a second phase, it is recommended that an emphasis should be placed on three objectives: strengthening the dissemination of REF outputs; emphasizing the local linkages of the initiative; reinforcing the utilization of REF research; and tracking the ways in which that research has impacted on the programming process, and has consequently led to meaningful improvements in the lives of people residing in the Horn of Africa.

*Jeff Crisp,
Oxford,
25 November 2018*



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Annex 1:

Individuals Consulted for this Review:

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Woldamlak Abera, IGAD
Mohammed Affey, UNHCR
Abdullahi Alas, Federal Ministry of Planning, Somalia
Hodan Ali, Benadir Regional Administration
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Oliver Bakewell, University of Manchester/REF
Danielle Botti, Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat
Mark Bradbury, Rift Valley Institute
Vincent Chordi, Sahan Research/REF
Mads Frilander, Danish Demining Group
Aude Galli, Regional Durable Solutions Secretariat
Laura Hammond, SOAS/REF
Mary Harper, BBC
Cindy Horst, Oslo Peace and Research Institute
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Iqbal Jhazbhay, University of South Africa
Nassim Majidi, Samuel Hall Consultants
Steve Morgan, Save the Children International
Takiwaa Manuh, African Union
Maimuna Mohamud, Cambridge University
Caroline Njuki, IGAD
Idil Osman, SOAS/REF
Linda Oucho, African Migration and Development Policy Centre
Virginie de Ruyt, EUTF
Aburahman Sharif, Somali NGO Consortium
Nuur Mohamud Sheekh, UNHCR
Caitlin SurrIDGE, Sahan Research/REF
Mahad Wasuge, Heritage Institute for Policy Studies
Mark Yarnell, Refugees International

European Union Delegations:

Djibouti: Isabelle de Ruyt
Eritrea: Lucia Di Troia
Ethiopia: Stephen Powers, Immaculada Guixé-Ancho, Maria-Elena Ruiz-Roman
Kenya: Natalie Mitchell-Bennett, Hanina Ben-Bernou
Somalia: Anders Djurfeldt
South Sudan: Christer Hermansson
Sudan: Piotr Zaporowski
Uganda: Petr Pribyla and Sabrina Bazzanella

Annex 2:



Web and Social Media Analytics Report

6 October 2018

The Research and Evidence Facility (REF) of the EU Trust Fund for Africa (Horn of Africa Window) is managed by a consortium led by SOAS University of London, with the University of Manchester and Sahan Research Ltd. The REF provides independent, policy- and programme-relevant research on conflict and irregular migration in the Horn of Africa.

Further information about the REF can be found at: www.soas.ac.uk/ref-hornresearch, on Twitter at @REFHorn or Facebook at 'Research & Evidence Facility'. For enquiries, please contact Dr Idil Osman, io7@soas.ac.uk



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Introduction

This report outlines the performance of the Research and Evidence Facility (REF) website and social media channels. It is based on findings collected from monitoring website and social media channels performance by tracking metrics like visitors, page views and visitor engagements. The information is consolidated into concise insights that help illuminate the sections of website and social media channels that are performing well and which areas that require further attention with regards to communication platforms complementing REF research awareness and dissemination. The report is divided into three areas: overview of website performance, overview of social media channels performance and areas that require further attention.

Overview of Website Performance: Web pages by popularity

The three most visited pages of REF website are the landing page, research papers and working papers pages. This indicates that the research outputs of the REF are attracting most visits. Table 1 below shows that on average, the research papers page is visited 3494 times per month. Additionally, the page attracts 2013 new visitors every month. The working papers page is second most visited page, attracting 1314 regular visitors every month and 1020 new visitors per month. These figures indicate favourable performance in terms of having regular returning visitors as well as attracting new visitors on a monthly basis.

Table 1

Page	Monthly page views	Unique monthly page views
1. /ref-hornresearch/index.html	5,824 (42.59%)	4,038 (43.47%)
2. /ref-hornresearch/research-papers/index.html	3,494 (25.55%)	2,013 (21.67%)
3. /ref-hornresearch/working-papers/index.html	1,314 (9.61%)	1,020 (10.98%)
4. /ref-hornresearch/members/index.html	756 (5.53%)	525 (5.65%)
5. /ref-hornresearch/organisations/index.html	539 (3.94%)	415 (4.47%)
6. /ref-hornresearch/panel/index.html	344 (2.52%)	279 (3.00%)
7. /ref-hornresearch/events/index.html	331 (2.42%)	244 (2.63%)
8. /ref-hornresearch/resources/index.html	322 (2.35%)	226 (2.43%)
9. /ref-hornresearch/media/index.html	223 (1.63%)	145 (1.56%)
10. /ref-hornresearch/ref-funder/index.html	194 (1.42%)	145 (1.56%)

Overview of Website Performance: Web pages by country

The website is also performing well in terms of attracting visitors from countries within REF remit. Table 2 below shows that the website receives most of its visitors from EU countries and countries in the Horn. The website receives majority of its visits from the UK with a monthly average of 5080 regular visitors and 2562 new visitors every month. From Kenya, 427 people visit the website every month whilst also attracting 360 new visitors on a monthly basis. This indicates regular consumption of REF research as the most viewed pages by the visitors are the research papers and working papers pages (see table 1 above).

Table 2 Countries from where REF web is most visited

<i>Country</i>	<i>Monthly page views</i>	<i>Unique monthly page views</i>
United Kingdom	5080	2562
Belgium	494	472
Kenya	427	360
Ethiopia	315	180
Uganda	292	225
Spain	291	135
Germany	157	136

The REF website is also attracting visitors from beyond its remit. As can be seen in table 3 below, the website is drawing in regular monthly visitors from countries beyond the REF remit such as Malawi, Senegal, Colombia and Canada. There are also consistent new visitors from those countries every month. Looking at these together with figures from table 1, it indicates that

Table 3 REF research consumption is occurring beyond REF remit.

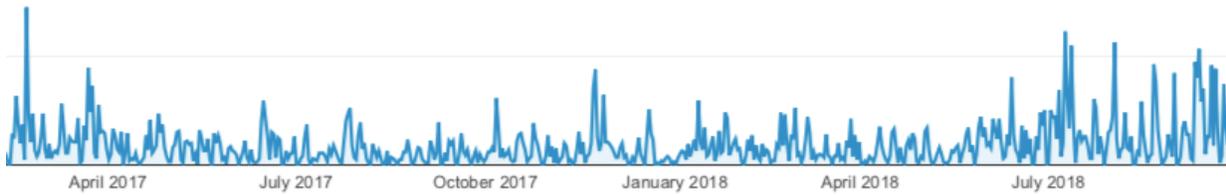
Countries reached beyond REF remit

<i>Country</i>	<i>Monthly page views (average)</i>	<i>Unique monthly page views (average)</i>
Malawi	49	24
United States	47	45
Lesotho	32	22
Pakistan	23	21
Senegal	22	19
Turkey	20	12
Ukraine	18	16
Colombia	17	14
Cyprus	17	8
Canada	15	14
India	14	10

Overview of Website Performance: Web pages ebb and flow

The analytics indicate the website has regular traffic but peaks at times of report releases. Table 4 below shows the traffic flow of a year and three months. As can be seen it peaked in March/April 2017 for example, which is when the Desk Review was released.

Table 4



The accompanying REF blogsite seems to cover the interaction gap that the website has, allowing visitors to leave comments. The website currently does not have mechanisms to receive comments but the blogsite does and it is embedded on the landing page of the website. The blogsite’s key objective is to showcase REF research studies and topics in a more digestible format. To this end, visitors who have found the research helpful and/or inspiring have the platform to leave their feedback. Below is an example comment:

Chelsey

March 28, 2017 at 12:48 pm

Hi there! This is my first visit to your blog! We are a group of volunteers and starting a new project in a community in the same niche. Your blog provided us beneficial information to work on. You have done a marvellous job!

Overview of social media growth

REF has two social media platforms; Twitter and Facebook. Thus far REF Twitter handle has gained 510 followers and the Facebook page has 56 followers. They’re performing quite well in terms of visits. But the visits aren’t translating into interactions, as can be seen from table 5 below. For example, the tweet of the story of Rashid, part of the Somalia Return and Displacement Blog Series, attracted 3563 visitors but only 34 visitors engaged with it in the form of likes, comments and retweets.

Table 5

Tweet	Views	Engagements	Percentage of engagements
 REF-Horn @REFHorn · Jun 29 The next instalment for our Somalia Return and Displacement Series is a personal account from Rashid, a former Dadaab refugee who returned to Somalia. Here's his story: @lhammondsoas @SOASDevelopment @idil_osman blogs.soas.ac.uk/ref-hornresea... View Tweet activity	3,563	34	1.0%
 REF-Horn @REFHorn · Jun 22 Our next instalment in the Return and Displacement Blog Series is Ahmed's Story: @lhammondsoas @SOASDevelopment @idil_osman blogs.soas.ac.uk/ref-hornresea... View Tweet activity	3,189	41	1.3%
 REF-Horn @REFHorn · Jun 14 Our Return and Displacement in Somalia blog series continues with Aishawara's story: blogs.soas.ac.uk/ref-hornresea... @lhammondsoas @SOASDevelopment @idil_osman View Tweet activity	2,764	64	2.3%

The low visit-to-interaction conversion rate could be due to perceived lack of requirement to engage. The snapshot below from REF Facebook page shows that when a statement is posed i.e. ‘*Check out our latest blog on recently completed research*’, it attracts visitors (in this case 17 views) but they don’t engage with the post. Whereas when a question is posed accompanied by an invitation for engagement i.e. ‘*Working on interesting research related to migration, conflict or development? Then consider submitting a paper to our working Paper Series*’ it generates high volume of visitors (in this case 1000 views) as well as interaction in the form of likes, shares and comments (in this case 41 likes and 12 comments).

23/02/2018 17:43	 Check out our latest blog on recently completed research,			17		0 0		Boost Post
12/01/2018 14:57	 Working on interesting research related to migration, conflict or			1K		41 12		Boost Post
22/11/2017 18:30	 Check out our new Research brief summarising latest research			219		9 8		Boost Post

A similar picture can be observed from how visitors deal with REF posts related to media activities. The Al Jazeera Op-Ed proved to be popular as it reached over 1400 people. But as can be seen from the snapshot below, only 92 people clicked on it and only 24 people interacted with it in the form of reactions, comments and shares.

Research & Evidence Facility
3 April 2017 · 🌐

Al Jazeera Op-Ed by REF's Idil Osman on Horn migrants and refugees still going to Yemen despite conflict
<http://www.aljazeera.com/.../african-men-women-fleeing-yemen-...>



ALJAZEERA.COM
Why are African men and women still fleeing to Yemen?
The search for a better life continues to drive people from the Horn of...

Performance for your post

1,440 People Reached

24 Reactions, comments & shares 🗨️

15 👍 Like	0 On post	15 On shares
2 ❤️ Love	0 On post	2 On shares
1 😞 Sad	0 On post	1 On shares
1 Comments	0 On Post	1 On Shares
5 Shares	5 On Post	0 On Shares

92 Post Clicks

0 Photo views	41 Link clicks	51 Other Clicks 🗨️
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There also seems to be a gender disparity with regards to REF social media visitors. Table 6 below shows that majority of visitors are male, making up 66% of total number of visitors. Female visitors make up only 34% of the total number. This could be for a variety of reasons but it would be worth exploring how the gap could be lessened.

Gender

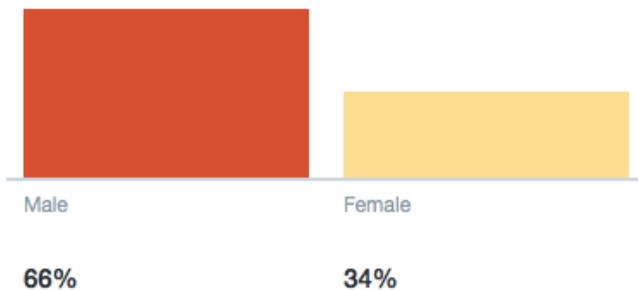


Table 6

Areas of improvement

The REF communication channels are performing quite well in terms of attracting and keeping a high volume of visitors. Figures for the website show visitors from countries within and outside the REF remit are regularly visiting the website. Additionally, they show that the site attracts new visitors on a regular monthly basis. The social media platforms also attract high numbers of visitors.

Where attention needs to be paid is converting that traffic into interactions where visitors regularly like, share, comment and retweet posts. This could be done through language alteration posting actionable posts and/or posts that ask a question rather than statements. There is also evidence that viewers engage more with posts accompanied by visuals such as photos and videos. Posting more of those kind of posts and taking advantage of visual tools

already available on Facebook and Twitter such as Facebook Live and Twitter Vids would also more likely increase visitor interactions.

REF website: <https://www.soas.ac.uk/ref-hornresearch/>

REF Blog: <https://blogs.soas.ac.uk/ref-hornresearch/>

Twitter: @REFHorn

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/Research-Evidence-Facility-165896020554486/>

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