

EVALUATION OF THE IOM MIGRATION DATA STRATEGY 2020-2025

**Case Study: East, Horn and Southern Africa
Regional Data Hub 2020–2025**

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1. Overview of Regional Data Hubs (RDHs)

What are RDHs? *Regional Data Hubs (RDHs)* are IOM's regional focal points for migration data and technical leads for its migration data and research programming, which were significantly built upon during the 2020–2025 Migration Data Strategy (MDS) period. These hubs were envisioned to support country offices, develop regional outputs, and improve internal data coordination and serve as regional knowledge centres. In practice, RDHs provide technical support to and convene Country Offices (COs) to share best practices and coordinate data efforts, which interviewees noted has started to “reduce deviation and increase coherence” across countries in some regions. Each RDH is aligned under its Regional Office (RO) structure (typically under the Deputy Regional Director for Operations) and works in close collaboration with IOM’s Global Data Institute (GDI).

They address the gap between IOM’s numerous disparate data initiatives by providing a **regional structure** for data management that did not exist prior to the Migration Data Strategy (MDS). Each RDH typically comprises a few data specialists who support multiple country missions, given that many IOM country offices lack dedicated data staff or statisticians. Externally, RDHs have also taken on a convening role with partners: for example, regional hub teams have started to engage regional bodies and governments on migration data. In sum, RDHs are **decentralized units** that bridge IOM’s headquarters data functions and country-level operations, while also linking IOM with regional stakeholders on data issues and producing regional outputs.

The East, Horn and Southern Africa RDH (EHSA RDH): In broad terms, the EHSA RDH’s work spans three core areas: (1) **Capacity Development**, (2) **Evidence Production**, and (3) **Knowledge Management & Coordination**. First, a major part of its mandate is to build or support the capacity of national institutions and regional organizations to manage migration data. According to the EHSA RDH team, many country offices in the region have close relationships with their national statistical offices (NSOs) and donor delegations, but lack in-house statisticians or research experts. The RDH adds value by “**connecting all of those dots**” – helping country offices identify data needs, design projects, and mobilize donor support for national data improvements. This includes advising on integrating migration modules into national censuses or surveys (when opportunities arise) and ensuring country proposals for data capacity building are backed by technical rigor. The RDH also engages directly with regional bodies in Africa: it works with the African Union’s Statistics Division (STATAFRIC) and several Regional Economic Communities (RECs) – the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), East African Community (EAC), Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), and Southern African Development Community (SADC) – to align migration data standards and training with continental frameworks. There is effectively *no other IOM structure* aside from the RDH that can interface at this regional level on technical standards and capacity support.

Secondly, the EHSA RDH focuses on **generating migration evidence** that has a regional or transnational scope. Some migration phenomena – especially irregular migration flows – are intrinsically regional, cutting across multiple countries’ borders. The RDH takes the lead in monitoring and analysing these **irregular migration routes** and displacement corridors that cannot be understood from a single-country perspective. For example, the East Africa region is characterized by migration routes such as the “Southern routes” from the Horn of Africa down to South Africa, the “Norther route” from the Horn of Africa and Sudan towards North Africa and Europe, and the “Eastern route” from the Horn of Africa to the Arabian Peninsula. The RDH coordinates data collection along these routes (often through flow monitoring or surveys in multiple countries) and then synthesizes the data to produce an **integrated picture of regional mobility trends**. An RDH analyst noted that making sense of an entire route requires coordination of data from different offices and

operations, which the regional hub is uniquely positioned to do. In practice, the EHSA RDH has led thematic research and analysis on topics like migrant journeys, protection risks along routes, and forecasting movements, applying a “**regional lens**” rather than isolated country studies. These evidence products have filled critical data gaps on migration flows that were previously poorly monitored in this region.

Thirdly, the RDH plays a **knowledge management and coordination** role. It curates and disseminates evidence products, guidance, standards, and tools to both Member States and IOM missions in the region to promote **evidence-based policy making**. This involves compiling best practices on data collection, promoting common indicators, and ensuring regional actors are aware of resources (e.g. the IOM Migration Data Portal, guidelines on data protection) that can support their work. In East Africa, the RDH also acts as a convener among UN agencies on data. Under the UN Network on Migration, for instance, an **East and Southern Africa** regional **data working group** has been established, which IOM’s RDH co-leads with other agencies. The RDH spearheaded a mapping of “who is doing what” in migration data across agencies – a first step to coordinate efforts and identify overlaps or gaps. This convening power extends to joint analytical initiatives; for example, the RDH team highlighted an **inter-agency Migrant Response Plan (MRP)** for the main Eastern migration routes as a key initiative (described more below). Through such efforts, the EHSA RDH provides a platform for **networking and data sharing** among governments, UN partners, and researchers in the region. Notably, what might not be explicitly listed in strategy documents – the RDH’s “**network effects**” or convening power – has emerged as an important part of its value in East Africa.

2. Development Timeline of the EHSA RDH (2020–2025)

The East Africa, Horn and Southern Africa Regional Data Hub evolved incrementally over the MDS implementation period. Key milestones in its development include:¹

2020 – Strategy Foundation: IOM launches the global Migration Data Strategy (2020–2025), which for the first time articulates the vision of strengthening data coherence across the organization. At this point, Regional Data Hubs had already been established in some regions, but not all, and they were funded through project and programme funding and responsive to country- and region-specific data gaps and technical needs. The EHSA RDH (which at the time covered only East Africa) was resourced through multi-year funds from the EU Trust Fund. The launch of the MDS allowed for a strategic alignment of the RDH concept to cover all regions and align with the three core MDS objectives of supporting evidence generation, national and regional capacity, and uptake and use of migration data.

2021 – Addition of migration resource allocation committee (MIRAC) allocations: In response to the MDS and identified gaps, IOM leadership allocated funding to all RDHs, including the East Africa RDH, from the Migration Resource Allocation Committee (MIRAC). The MIRAC mechanism is an internal IOM funding mechanism supporting strategic, innovative and underfunded migration-related initiatives. The receipt of MIRAC funding paved the way for further institutionalization of the RDHs through sustainable funding beyond project or regional funding.

2022 - 2023 – Ongoing activities despite the closure of the EU Trust Fund: Following the closure of the EU Trust Fund in 2022-2023, the East Africa RDH complemented its funding through MIRAC allocations and unearmarked funding to fill the gap. At the same time, the RDH continued working in the context of the updates to the Migration Response Plan (MRP) for the Horn of Africa and Yemen.

¹ The timeline presented here is based on the evidence available in evaluation reports and interviews.

Formalized in 2018, the MRP is a multi-agency inter-regional framework to address the humanitarians and protection needs of migrants and host communities. In 2022, the MRP began emphasizing data-driven planning, using the Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) to monitor flows and vulnerabilities along the route. Also during 2022, the RDH intensified technical support to countries (for example, advising on upcoming census preparations in countries like Somalia and Djibouti – ensuring migration-relevant data needs were considered) – though such support often required developing new projects and securing donor funding in tandem with country offices. Internally, by late 2022 the RDH's role as a **regional thematic unit** was clarified: it became the **primary technical backstop** for all dedicated data projects in the region and a secondary support for data components in other projects (e.g. in health or protection programs). This integration into the IOM Regional Office structure signified that by 2022, the RDH was recognized as the go-to source of data expertise for East Africa missions.

In 2023, the RDH continued this work, with activities including the establishment of a **UN Network on Migration Data Working Group** for East and Southern Africa, bringing together agencies like UNHCR, ILO, and UNODC to align their data efforts. A major focus was a “**knowledge management exercise**” to map all ongoing migration data initiatives, tools, and data resources across agencies in the region, thereby identifying opportunities for collaboration. The RDH also stepped up engagement with African regional bodies: together with IOM’s West Africa and North Africa offices, the Nairobi RDH began regularly coordinating with the **African Union** (through IOM’s Addis Ababa Liaison Office) on continental data initiatives. Notably, because no data specialist was posted in the AU liaison office, the three African RDHs jointly provided input to AU-level discussions on migration data standards and the development of an African Migration Statistics Harmonization program. This year also saw the expansion of the RDH’s own routine outputs – such as quarterly regional mobility trend reports, displacement dashboards, or research studies – had expanded, enhancing the evidence base on regional migration dynamics, e.g. through the Regions on the Move reports, which, since 2017, has provided an advanced understanding of the main migrant groups and the environment in which mobility takes place, with a focus on internal displacement and mixed migration flows along the major migration corridors of this region.

2024 – Merger of IOM’s regional offices and restructure of the RDH: In 2024, IOM merged its regional offices for East and Horn of Africa (Nairobi) and Southern Africa (Pretoria), to form one regional office for 25 countries in East, Horn and Southern Africa (EHSA). At the same time, following the whole of organization restructure, the RDHs were formalized as a standard regional unit with IOM’s core structure. Each regional unit has revised Terms of Reference and must comprise a regional specialist/head, one of the following (a research officer, data analyst, regional DTM officer) and a programme support officer, all funded from core IOM funds.

The RDH was then operating with a refined scope, allowing it to routinely support **resource mobilization** for country-level data initiatives (reviewing proposals, linking missions with donors), ensure that new projects aligned with the MDS objectives (the team used the MDS as a “*checklist*” for planning), and uphold data quality, responsibility, and protection standards in the region. In late 2024, as IOM’s new Strategic Plan (2024–2028) came into effect (emphasizing data as a cross-cutting priority and ‘enabler’ for the strategy’s implementation), the RDH aligned its workplans with this broader organizational strategy. This included aiming to become more client oriented to support other IOM operational pillars. It also included the development of multi-regional and multi-year data programmes, such as the EU Data Action project, started in November 2024 and managed by the EHSA RDH, and the Climate Change and Migration Data Program for North, East, West and Central

Africa. In 2024, the RDH supported 77 ad-hoc requests related to data from other units within IOM and with external partners.

2025 – Evaluation and Future Outlook: By early 2025, the EHSA RDH had demonstrated how a regional hub can advance IOM’s data goals in a humanitarian-development context. Moving forward, the RDH’s priorities are expected to continue under IOM’s mainstream planning. However, sustainability remains a concern: as of 2025 the hub relies on limited core funds and must continually seek project funding for many activities. Both IOM staff and donors are examining how the RDH model can be strengthened in the long term – for example, through multi-year donor support or integration into a global institute – to ensure that gains made from 2020–2025 are not lost. The **next strategic phase** will determine whether the EHSA RDH can transition from a largely **MDS-driven pilot** into a durable, well-resourced component of IOM’s data architecture. By June 2025, the RDH had supported 78 ad-hoc requests related to data from other units within IOM and with external partner, indicating an increased demand as compared with the previous year.

3. Achievements of the EHSA RDH 2020–2025) and Alignment with MDS Objectives

During 2020–2025, the EHSA Regional Data Hub made substantive contributions in line with the Migration Data Strategy’s three core objectives. Table 1 below summarizes the RDH’s key achievements in two broad domains – **(A) building partner capacity** and **(B) generating migration evidence** – and indicates how these map to the MDS objectives. The third MDS objective (promoting the use of data in programming and policy) is inherently intertwined with the first two and is reflected in several of the achievements.

Table 1: EHSA RDH Key Achievements Map to MDS Objectives (2020–2025)²

MDS OBJECTIVE (2020–2025)	EAST AFRICA RDH ACHIEVEMENTS (EXAMPLES 2020–2025)
Objective 1: Strengthen the Global Evidence Base on Migration <i>Enhance the availability and quality of migration data and analysis.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expanded the evidence base on migration flows in East and Horn of Africa. These efforts have filled critical information gaps and provided timely data for both humanitarian planning and policy dialogue. In particular, the RDH: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Improved the interoperability of DTM mobility data and consolidated data at the regional level. It established regional monitoring of key routes (e.g. movements from the East and Horn towards Gulf countries, Southern Africa, North Africa, and internally within the region) and produced analytical reports on these mixed migration flows. ○ These efforts were expanded with a route-based migration research series in which the RDH collected primary qualitative data and published 17 reports containing thematic analyses drawing on these data.

² “NSOs” = National Statistical Offices; “AU” = African Union; “RECs” = Regional Economic Communities; “MRP” = Migrant Response Plan. The achievements listed are drawn from interview testimony and evaluation reports; where direct quantitative metrics were not available, qualitative examples are given. Notably, no specific feedback from academic research institutions was documented in the provided sources, suggesting the RDH’s primary interactions were with government and UN partners rather than independent researchers (aside from making data publicly available through portals and reports).

MDS OBJECTIVE (2020–2025)	EAST AFRICA RDH ACHIEVEMENTS (EXAMPLES 2020–2025)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Led the development of an IMPACT study to evaluate protection and return assistance for sustainable reintegration, helping to define a standard impact evaluation methodology for future reintegration programmes and improve evidence-based programming. ○ Established the <i>A Region on the Move</i> report, described as the flagship migration series for the region, drawing from a range of official and operational data. The report provides an advanced understanding of data and trends on internal displacement and mixed migration flows. ○ Helped improving understanding of deaths and disappearances of people while migrating, facilitating the collection, sharing, and analysis of data. It supported research on missing migrants and their families producing frequent regional overviews on this topic. ○ Produced regular products on the displacement landscape in the region, particularly during emergencies such as drought and flood-driven displacement or cross-border movements linked to conflict. ● Innovated in data collection and analysis: Under the MDS's impetus to improve data, the RDH piloted new approaches such as forecasting mobility trends and using mobile data collection along routes. It also contributed regional data to global initiatives (e.g. the 2025 global routes stocktake mentioned earlier) ensuring that East Africa's realities were reflected in the worldwide migration evidence base.
Objective 2: Develop Capacity of States and Partners to Enhance Migration Data Build the skills, systems and cooperation for better migration data at national/regional levels.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Facilitated technical assistance to National Statistical Offices (NSOs) in the region, e.g. scoping migration data needs for national censuses and surveys. When countries like Djibouti or Somalia identified gaps, the RDH helped develop project proposals and connected them with donors to fund these activities. ● Trained and advised government officials through regional workshops (in collaboration with African Union RECs) on adopting common migration indicators and standards, aligning with global norms. The RDH served as IOM's link to the African Union's statistical initiatives and regional bodies (IGAD, EAC, COMESA, SADC), helping roll out frameworks for harmonized migration data collection.
Objective 3: Ensure More Evidence-Based IOM and UN Programming, Operations, and Policy Advice Embed the use of data in IOM's and partners' decision-making.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Provided data for inter-agency planning: The RDH was integral in developing the <i>Migrant Response Plan</i> for the Eastern Route, supplying analysis on migrant volumes, routes, and needs. By compiling data from multiple countries, it enabled a coherent, evidence-based plan to assist ~300,000 people on the move annually. ● Supported UN and academic partners by sharing evidence, tools, and guidelines. For instance, co-chairing the UN Network on Migration's regional data working group, the RDH conducted a mapping of all agencies' data activities and promoted knowledge exchange on methodologies. The RDH also regularly contributes to

MDS OBJECTIVE (2020–2025)	EAST AFRICA RDH ACHIEVEMENTS (EXAMPLES 2020–2025)
	<p>the quarterly Joint Regional Analysis (JRA) for the Office of the Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa (OSE-Horn of Africa) by providing key mobility trends and insights across the region. These efforts built a community of practice around migration data in EHSA.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hosted and participated external partnership events advancing evidence base on migration. These included a hackathon on Bridging Climate Change and Human Mobility in London and Nairobi in 2023, with data cloud provider Snowflake and University College London (UCL), exploring data-driven solutions to improve understanding of the region's complex relationship between climate change, disasters, environmental degradation and human mobility. Ensure evidence is used and integrated in humanitarian system through support and coordination of DTM operations at country level towards informing Humanitarian Needs Overviews and Response Plans.

As shown above, the EHSA RDH delivered results across multiple fronts. In **capacity-building (Objective 2)**, a hallmark achievement has been its role in **strengthening national capacities** indirectly by brokering support: e.g., one evaluation finding highlighted a donor-funded project (by NORAD/Sweden) that IOM used to support statistical offices – reflecting the type of multi-year capacity support that the RDH facilitated in practice. The RDH also effectively became a **regional knowledge hub**, ensuring that states and IOM missions had access to up-to-date standards (on things like migration definitions, data protection) and training resources. This included capacity-building workshops through the Missing Migrants Project (MMP) in Kenya, Djibouti and Ethiopia, and the establishment of a Circle of Practice – a community engagement platform designed to encourage regular peer learning and cross-regional collaboration on key thematic areas related to missing migrants. In addition, the RDH conducts coordination and advisory efforts. For instance, in the UN Network on Migration's data workstream, the EHSA RDH's mapping of resources helped clarify "who has what" and where **priorities lie**, enabling more targeted capacity interventions. One gap in documentation is the perspective of **academic researchers** – the sources did not provide specific examples of the RDH working with universities or research institutes in East Africa, which requires further programme resources. It appears the RDH's support to "migration researchers" mainly took the form of sharing its data outputs (e.g. via the Migration Data Portal or regional reports) rather than bespoke collaborations. The absence of explicit evidence on this point suggests that while the RDH improved the data landscape, direct engagement with academia may have been limited or at least not captured by the evaluation.

In terms of **evidence generation (Objective 1)**, the EHSA RDH demonstrably **expanded IOM's data coverage**. By 2025, IOM was able to report much better information on migration routes in East and Horn of Africa than five years prior, partly due to RDH-coordinated initiatives. Interviewees credited the RDH with collecting data on previously under-monitored movements (e.g. flows towards Southern Africa, or secondary movements of refugees), thereby **solidifying IOM's role as a primary source** for data on displacement and migration in the region. These data have been used in regional dialogues – for example, informing the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) Regional Consultative Process on Migration – and in global forums on migration statistics. Additionally, the RDH's innovative mindset (encouraged by the MDS) led to trying new tools such as geographic

information system (GIS) mapping of migration routes and exploratory studies on topics like climate change and mobility (mentioned in internal reports), which are also the focus of the Climate Change and Migration Data Program launched in 2024. While many of these innovations were in early stages, they contributed to IOM's incremental improvements in data during the MDS period.

Finally, regarding **evidence use (Objective 3)**, the EHSA RDH has begun to influence how data informs action. A clear example is the **Migrant Response Plan**: data assembled by the RDH underpinned a multi-agency plan that connects humanitarian response with long-term development efforts along migration corridors. In providing the evidence base for this plan, the RDH ensured that programming decisions (e.g. where to set up migrant support centres, how to target assistance) were grounded in facts on migrant numbers and needs. This is also integrated into Climate Change Migration Data programming to ensure data is more responsible and useful for program needs, especially regarding protection. Internally, the RDH's role as **technical backstop in project design** means that new IOM projects in the East Africa region are more likely to have coherent data components and monitoring frameworks. One regional data officer explained that the RDH now reviews project proposals to check alignment with data objectives – effectively embedding data considerations into IOM's operational planning. This is a shift from earlier years when data was often an afterthought. While it is hard to quantify the impact on “outcomes for migrants and societies” (which remain indirect, as noted in the evaluation), these practices set the stage for more evidence-informed policies by governments and more adaptive programming by IOM in the future.

In summary, the EHSA RDH made **meaningful contributions** under each of the MDS's objectives: it boosted partner capacities, generated new regional data, and helped channel that data into policy and action. Many of these achievements are documented qualitatively (through interviews and internal assessments) or quantitatively (through surveys conducted with users of RDH products). For example, 90% of RDH product users read materials produced by the RDH in the past year, with most of them considering that the information is relevant (85%), easy to understand (81%) and timely (75%). Consequently, much of the RDH's impact must be inferred from case examples and stakeholder feedback. The evidence available, however, consistently indicates that the RDH added value where there were previously gaps, particularly in **regional coordination and technical support**. Any shortcomings (e.g. not reaching all potential research users, or the scale of impact being constrained by funding) are also important to acknowledge. These points lead into how the Migration Data Strategy itself influenced – and sometimes fell short in influencing – the RDH's design and functioning.

4. Influence of the Migration Data Strategy (MDS) on the EHSA RDH

The MDS and the Regional Data Hubs were in one sense, symbiotic elements within the evolution of IOM's migration data approach in the period since 2020. The early RDH team members provided inputs into the design of the MDS during its inception phase. Once the MDS was established, it then provided additional impetus for the institutionalization of the Regional Data Hubs, including the EHSA RDH. According to IOM's evaluation, the **move towards core funding and standardized TORs for the RDHs was a direct outcome of the Strategy's emphasis on improving data coordination**. By highlighting objectives such as regional capacity-building and data coherence, the MDS effectively *“prompted structures like the Regional Data Hubs”* to emerge within IOM. This is evidenced by the decision around 2024 to allocate core funding for regional data positions – an effort explicitly attributed to advocacy under the MDS, which built upon earlier decisions to use larger regional programmes as opportunities to establish data capacity in regional offices. In interviews, staff recognized these moves as important steps: one person described the new RDH posts and the launch

of the Global Data Institute as “efforts made to improve” resourcing in line with the Strategy’s vision. Without the MDS, it is unlikely that IOM would have dedicated funding to three full-time data experts in the Nairobi regional office during that period.

Beyond structural setup, the MDS influenced the **priorities and language** of the EHSA RDH’s work. The RDH team consciously used the Strategy’s three objectives as a guiding checklist when planning activities. A regional coordinator noted that they would “**review if activities refer to the [MDS] objectives – it’s more of a guideline to show you the way**”, and if a proposed activity fell outside those objectives, they would question whether it should be pursued. In practice, this meant the EHSA RDH aligned its projects to cover all major areas: enhancing the evidence base (Objective 1), building capacity (Objective 2), and supporting data use in policy (Objective 3). Likewise, the emphasis the RDH placed on data protection and ethical use was reinforced by the MDS’s cross-cutting principles, ensuring those considerations were woven into RDH activities (though details on this were sparse, anecdotal evidence suggests RDH staff consulted IOM’s Data Protection Guidelines – themselves a product of the MDS period – when supporting country offices).

However, the influence of the MDS on the RDH was mostly **conceptual and catalytic, rather than operational**. The evaluation found that the MDS lacked a robust implementation plan and was “not actively managed or reviewed” during 2020–2025. This was echoed by RDH staff: they did not receive detailed directives from HQ on how to run the hub under the MDS, nor was there a dedicated budget attached to each MDS objective. Instead, the EHSA RDH had to **interpret and apply the broad strategy on its own initiative**, aligning with MDS goals where feasible. In some respects, the RDH became a vehicle to realize the spirit of the MDS from the bottom-up, even as some headquarters’ units did not provide guidance on or enforce the strategy strongly. For instance, capacity building (Objective 2) was somewhat deprioritized at the global level initially – one observation was that the creation of GDI in Berlin tilted focus toward high-end data analytics over field capacity work. The EHSA RDH, seeing the on-the-ground needs, took on that capacity-building role in the region, effectively filling a gap the MDS had identified but not operationalized from the top. Over time, as the RDH consolidated its role (helped by the addition of additional funds and core staff in 2024). In other words, the MDS set the **initial direction** (“a common vocabulary and goals”) and legitimized investing in data, but the RDH’s day-to-day functioning was shaped by practical considerations and the regional context.

One concrete way the MDS **shaped the RDH’s functioning** was through networking and partnership expectations, as well as positioning and relevance within IOM. The Strategy called for IOM to be a player in the “international data ecosystem,” which encouraged regional entities to engage externally. The EHSA RDH’s outreach to the African Union and participation in UN data groups can be seen as a response to this call for coherence and partnership (the evaluation specifically cites RDHs convening regional organizations as aligning with MDS aims). Additionally, the MDS highlighted innovation and data integration, under which the RDH pursued new pilot projects like the Migrant Response Plan. Staff indicated that having the MDS as a reference helped them secure buy-in for such initiatives from IOM leadership and donors – it was easier to argue for a new data activity if it could be tied to the Organization’s official strategy (one interviewee said the MDS was useful for “talking to donors” about data needs). In East Africa, the RDH leveraged the MDS when approaching donors for multi-country data projects, framing them as part of IOM’s strategic objectives, which reportedly helped in resource mobilization discussions. The MDS also helped internal alignment. As the first institutional acknowledgement of migration data within the organization, the MDS sent a strong signal to IOM missions, regions and headquarters that migration data was a priority for them.

At the same time, it must be noted that the MDS's **limitations** also translated into constraints for the RDH. The lack of dedicated MDS funding or a monitoring framework meant the RDH had to scramble for project funds like any other unit, and successes were often **fragmented** rather than systemic. The evaluation describes IOM's data efforts (including RDHs) as "pockets of effectiveness" that grew under the MDS but did not achieve organization-wide change. This rings true in East Africa: the RDH made progress, but it did so largely **in spite of** the absence of institutionalized support and funding mechanisms. For example, while the MDS gave the RDH a mandate, it did not resolve internal issues like siloed data systems or clarify HQ vs RO responsibilities for all relevant HQ units (DTM being mentioned as performing better in this regard). An RDH staff member voiced concern about ongoing ambiguities – for instance, who at HQ is the focal point for certain thematic data streams (like labour migration statistics) remains unclear, leading to potential overlaps or gaps. This indicates that the MDS did not fully succeed in unifying IOM's data governance, leaving the RDH at times to navigate a "messy" institutional landscape without clear global guidance or expectations about how some HQ units were meant to work with regional offices in line with IOM's wider organizational structure. The EHSA RDH thus innovated and adapted locally, but some structural issues were beyond its remit to fix (e.g. long-term funding sustainability, integration of data systems across departments). Gaps and lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities for engagement on migration statistics coordination at the Africa continent level were also raised, given lack of capacity at IOM's Special Liaison Office in Addis Ababa and HQ previously leading efforts and then stepping back without putting replacement coordination mechanisms in place.

In conclusion, the Migration Data Strategy had a **significant but nuanced influence** on the EHSA Regional Data Hub. It was aligned with the broader drive to institutionalize the RDHs, as they each sort to embed the ideas of capacity building, evidence generation, and data use at regional level. The RDH can be seen as one of the tangible legacies of the MDS within IOM – a new institutional mechanism that did not exist before 2020. The Strategy's value for the RDH was mostly in providing a *strategic compass* and justification for undertaking certain activities. However, the RDH's experience also underscores the MDS's shortcomings: lacking enforcement, clarity on roles and responsibilities, or resources for implementation and monitoring, the strategy's influence was in some cases symbolic or aspirational. The EHSA RDH had to rely on its own initiative to fulfil the Strategy's goals, and it did so to the extent possible, achieving incremental improvements rather than transformative change. The independent evaluation summed it up well: the MDS "**served more as a conceptual catalyst than an operational strategy**", spurring developments like the RDH but falling short of ensuring their full institutional support. For IOM staff and donors looking ahead, the key lesson is that strategies like the MDS can "**plant seeds**" (such as the RDH) that grow into valuable capabilities – yet nurturing those to full potential requires sustained commitment, clear governance, and resources beyond what the MDS alone provided. The EHSA RDH's journey from 2020 to 2025 illustrates both the promise of a strategic vision and the practical challenges of bringing that vision to life on the ground.

Annex I Case Study Data Sources

Table 1: List of persons met

Name	Role
1. Davide BRUSCOLI	Regional Data Hub Analyst
2. Harry COOK	Data & Analys Regional Thematic Specialist
3. Melisa MAGALHAES	Regional Data Hub Analyst
4. Meryem EL MOUHIB	Regional Data Hub (RDH) Junior Analyst
5. Christopher ZAPP	Regional DTM & Information Management Officer

Table 2: List of Documentation Reviewed

Organisation	Year	Title
IOM	2024	Regional Data Hub Research in the East and Horn of Africa Info Sheet
IOM	2022	Regional Data Hub Research in the East and Horn of Africa Info Sheet
UNHCR, IOM, MMC	2024	On This Journey No One Cares If You Live or Die: Abuse, Protection and Justice along Routes between East and West Africa and Africa's Mediterranean Coast.



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