

£1.8 million Partnership to Support Social Protection Advocacy

The Ministry of Social Solidarity (MoSS) commends the United Kingdom for allocating £1.8 million, through the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Egypt, to support the 'Strengthening Institutional and Human Resources Capacities of the Ministry of Social Solidarity' project that aims to address social protection issues of vulnerable groups targeted by the Ministry through different advocacy tools including community dialogue events, launching a dynamic social media platform and mass media channels.

The partnership aims to support the most vulnerable families, improve their livelihoods and enhance accessibility of vulnerable groups to improved social care and welfare services through introducing a comprehensive awareness program to increase the vulnerable families' accessibility to social protection and economic empowerment services. Furthermore, the awareness schemes address social behaviour change on issues related to positive practices related to protection from COVID-19, protection of girls from traditional discriminatory practices, the value of education and good health practices for deprived groups addressed by the Ministry of Social Solidarity, community participation and promoting civil society partnerships through the Ministry.

MoSS currently plays an instrumental role in responding to and mitigating the COVID-19 crisis in Egypt. The ministry has identified six initial priority areas of intervention that are manifested in the new partnership's activities. The ministry has led the synchronisation of accelerated interventions to support vulnerable groups during the COVID-19 pandemic through enlarging the social protection umbrella and responding to the COVID-19's economic challenges. MoSS is also availing and enhancing its digital services; linking institutional support to volunteerism; tailoring awareness material for children; and offering awareness and support services to vulnerable groups.

The new partnership will also support the expansion of the present comprehensive social protection awareness and advocacy programme 'Waa' that focuses on enhancing awareness and knowledge of vulnerable groups on social protection services. It will also help mainstreaming Waa' in MoSS social protection programmes, targeting Takaful and Karama beneficiaries and other targeted groups under MoSS.

The new cooperation will focus on enhancing institutional capacities of MoSS and the National Center for Social and Criminological Research (NCSCR), affiliated with the Ministry, to establish a Social Protection Research Platform to cater to the ministry's research needs.

The Minister of Social Solidarity, H.E. Minister Nivine El-Kabbag said:

Increasing accessibility of vulnerable groups to evidence-based awareness messages falls in the heart of Social Protection Strategies, thus MoSS has placed Waaï program for Community Development on top of its priorities. The Ministry will promote its comprehensive awareness vision through diverse tools such as mainstreaming messages among our social workers on the ground whom I consider the real agents of change, introducing digital targeted solutions to enhance awareness among youth and finally through consolidated partnerships with our national partners and civil society organizations. Social behaviour change is a process that requires us to pound on different dynamic communication tools and furthermore, engage communities to promote social change.

The British Ambassador to Egypt, Sir Geoffrey Adams, said:

All over the world states, international organisations, private companies, and NGOs are working together to reduce the economic impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable people, including through targeted support to protect low-income families. The UK is proud to support the launch of this programme with the Ministry of Social Solidarity and the UNDP, which will strengthen the Ministry's efforts to address the challenges Egypt faces.

UNDP Egypt Resident Representative, Ms. Randa Aboul-Hosn also stressed the timeliness and significance of the partnership to ensure that the most vulnerable are not to be left behind, especially amidst the global outbreak of COVID-19. This pandemic has left governments and social protection systems overwhelmed and under a great strain worldwide, and this is where UNDP aims to continue to support the government of Egypt. The pertinent £1.8 million funding of the United Kingdom and the extensive and vital efforts and policies taken by MoSS will support the protection of the most impacted Egyptians.

Egypt has already developed the largest Social Safety Net (SSN) system in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, with a cash transfer programme that now reaches more than three and half million households, and 11 million beneficiaries that provides vital basic income protection for the poorest and most vulnerable. The new partnership is set to ensure that this safety net continues to be operative and sustainable, while reaching people living in marginalized areas across Egypt.

Regulator issues Official Warning to

poverty relief charity over failures to manage conflicts of interest

The Charity Commission has criticised a grant-giving charity over failures to manage conflicts of interest. Combined Funds Limited, which was set up to relieve poverty and advance religion in accordance with the Jewish Orthodox faith, has been sanctioned with an Official Warning by the regulator.

The Commission launched its statutory inquiry into the charity in March 2018, following serious concerns surrounding unmanaged conflicts of interest and unauthorised trustee personal benefit, as well as loans from the charity to its trading subsidiaries.

Investigators found that the charity had made a grant to cover £250k of private medical care of a person connected to the original trustees. The trustees' connection to each other and the beneficiary meant they were unable to appropriately manage this conflict of interest. Trustees told the inquiry that there were no formal systems in place for assessing applications for grants. Applicants would make requests either by phone, letter or in person, or they would be identified from the trustees' knowledge of the community. The charity did not keep a record of requests, or its decision-making process.

The inquiry also found that the charity gave loans of over £1m in total to four subsidiary companies, of which a trustee was the sole Director. The original trustees' connection to each other meant they were not able to make unconflicted decisions in relation to the charity's subsidiaries.

There were also serious failures in the administration of the charity – the original trustees failed to register it, despite being legally required to do so. They also failed to properly prepare and ensure independent scrutiny of the charity's accounts.

During the inquiry, investigators took protective action to restrict access to the charity's bank account. The inquiry concluded that there had been misconduct and/or mismanagement in the administration of the charity. As a result, the Commission issued the remaining original trustees with an Official Warning.

Since its intervention, the regulator has seen positive steps towards improvement. Two independent trustees have been appointed to the charity's board, and the trustees have formalised written investments, grant making and conflicts of interest policies. They have also confirmed that the loans have all now been repaid to the charity. The inquiry did not see any evidence of a misappropriation of funds or of any loss to the charity.

An Action Plan has been issued to the current trustees, to ensure they continue complying with their trustee duties. The charity remains under statutory supervision and the regulator will continue to monitor the

trustees' progress.

Amy Spiller, Head of Investigations at the Charity Commission, said:

Our inquiry uncovered a number of poor governance arrangements that were not serving this charity well. This case serves as a reminder that good governance is not a bureaucratic detail – it underpins the delivery of a charity's purposes to the high standards expected by the public and for those it was set up to help. While this charity receives its funding from a trustee and the trading subsidiaries they control, charity law expects all charities' governance to meet high standards, regardless of their income source, given the special status charities enjoy in the public mind and the privileges that charitable status brings.

Our intervention has ensured marked improvements at this charity and I expect to see continued progress in line with the Action Plan we have set.

[Read the full report of the inquiry into Combined Funds Limited.](#)

Ends.

Notes to editors:

1. [View the charity's entry on the register of charities.](#)
2. The Commission has a duty to maintain an accurate register of charities. Where it has an annual income of over £5,000 the duty to register a charity rests with the trustees of the charity. Failure to register a charity where there is a legal obligation to do so does not exclude the charity from the Commission's jurisdiction.
3. The Charity Commission is the independent, non-ministerial government department that registers and regulates charities in England and Wales. Its purpose is to ensure charity can thrive and inspire trust so that people can improve lives and strengthen society.

[**Border Force in Northern Ireland seize more than 2 tonnes of black market tobacco**](#)

The tobacco was detected within a shipping container which had arrived at Belfast Docks from the Netherlands on Wednesday 11 November. Border Force Officers searched the shipment, which was labelled as air filters, and found the tobacco on nine pallets which weighed a total of 2.34 tonnes.

The operation was conducted under the umbrella of the Northern Ireland Organised Crime Task Force, which includes Border Force, HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC), Police Service of Northern Ireland and other partners.

Chris Philp, Minister for Immigration Compliance and the Courts, said:

This was an outstanding seizure by Border Force, whose efforts have prevented a significant amount of illegal tobacco from reaching our streets and cheating the taxpayer out of hundreds of thousands of pounds which can fund our children's schooling and the NHS.

This is not a victimless crime and is often linked with other criminality. Children and young people are key targets for those who peddle illegal tobacco, encouraging them to take up smoking and exposing them to crime.

Steve Tracey, Assistant Director, Fraud Investigation Service, HMRC, said:

The sale of illegal tobacco will not be tolerated by us or our partner agencies. Disrupting criminal trade is at the heart of our strategy to clampdown on the illicit tobacco market, which costs the UK around £1.9 billion a year. This is theft from the taxpayer and undermines legitimate traders.

We encourage anyone with information about the illegal sale of tobacco to report it online or call the Fraud Hotline on 0800 788 887.

Had the smuggling attempt not been detected, it would have cost the Treasury £700,000 in unpaid duty and VAT. No arrests were made but HMRC is investigating further.

Last month, Border Force had further success in stopping illicit cigarettes entering the UK when they seized around 10 million cigarettes at Harwich worth almost £3 million in unpaid duty.

Border Force officers use hi-tech search equipment to combat immigration crime and detect banned and restricted goods that smugglers attempt to bring into the UK.

In 2019, Border Force protected the Treasury from losing more than £210 million in unpaid duty from black market cigarettes.

Extension of seabird haven to benefit 15,000 birds

Today (17 November), the government has announced the expansion of a protected area in the Isles of Scilly, home to some of our rarest seabirds such as the Manx shearwater and storm petrel.

This decision is based on extensive work by Natural England with a comprehensive package of over 4 years of scientific advice and research on the new boundaries and a public consultation which took place in early spring 2019.

The Isles of Scilly supports a greater diversity of seabirds than any other site in England, with internationally important populations of European storm petrel and lesser black-backed gull. The expansion will see the site boosted by approximately 12,930 hectares and benefit 15,000 seabirds. It is one of only two protected sites in England where Manx shearwater and European storm petrel breed, and is also home to the largest population of great black-backed gulls in the UK.

Our seabird populations are an important barometer of the health of the marine environment and this marine extension to the Isles of Scilly site demonstrates the UK Government's commitment to securing the sustainable use of our seas.

With the expansion of the Isles of Scilly site into the coastal seas around the archipelago, there are now 114 Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) specifically protecting birds across the UK. The newly-expanded site protects the waters around the islands for activities like feeding and preening that are crucial to the life cycles of over 15,000 seabirds.

Environment Minister Rebecca Pow said:

The UK seabird population is of global importance with the UK holding more than a quarter of Europe's breeding seabirds. The expansion of this site demonstrates our ongoing commitment to protect and improve the resilience of our marine environment and precious wildlife.

Together with the development of our Seabird Conservation Strategy, we will help the coastal environment to recover and thrive for future generations to enjoy.

Kate Sugar, Marine Lead Adviser at Natural England, said:

The Isles of Scilly is one of the most important areas for breeding seabirds in England and their continued presence is important to

the sense of place for the local community and visitors.

These inshore waters are just as important to protecting breeding seabirds as the nesting sites themselves. Natural England's public consultation on the proposals for this site enabled the local community to understand the evidence collected, the importance and implications of the designation.

Today's announcement secures greater protection for thousands of seabirds and is a positive step forward as we continue to protect and enhance Britain's sea and shorebirds.

The expansion of the site will help encourage population growth and recovery in European storm petrel and the lesser black-backed gull, while additionally offering new protections for the European shag and the great black-backed gull.

This MPA forms part of the UK's 'Blue Belt' in helping to boost resilience to man-made pressures, as well as providing space to help species adapt to the impacts of climate change.

There are now 358 MPAs in total across the UK. Regulators, such as the Marine Management Organisation and local Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities (IFCAs), are responsible for ensuring the MPAs are managed to protect their species and habitats, working with local fishing communities and other organisations.

National recognition for project delivery at Sellafield

News story

Our Project Delivery Directorate has won a top award from the Association for Project Management for its commitment to safety.



APM Awards 2020 winning entry.

The virtual awards took place early Monday evening, with the Health, Safety, Security and Environment Award coming our way against strong competition from organisations across the UK.

[APM Awards 2020](#)

Neil Crewdson, Sellafield Ltd's Interim Project Delivery Director said:

This is a global awards ceremony showcasing projects success from the UK and across the world. We had 3 entries in the final, which is a recognition of the quality and scale of the work we carry out at Sellafield every day.

Winning awards of this nature, and being recognised by such a respected body as the APM, shows that our delivery performance and professional capability is UK leading.

This means we have now won 5 APM awards which is testament to the hard work and efforts of our team and supply chain partners. Our success demonstrates the ambition and capability of our teams working across the enterprise. This year has been unprecedented due to the coronavirus, yet as an organisation we have managed the risk and impact to the best of our ability – if any organisation can rise to this challenge, Sellafield Ltd can.

The 3 finalists from Sellafield Ltd were:

- Alpha Remediation (Engineering, Construction and Infrastructure project of the year – shortlisted)
- Beta Gamma Programme (Programme of the Year – shortlisted)
- Project Delivery Directorate – (HSSE Award – winner)

Sellafield Ltd was also featured in another award, with one of our employees Martin Parlett being part of the team which won Programme Management Office of the year for the government of Montserrat.

You can read more about the awards [here.](#)

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