

Annual Report 2025




10 AGENZIA ITALIANA
PER LA COOPERAZIONE
ALLO SVILUPPO

Cairo
Egypt and Eritrea

*Organised by the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation
Cairo Office with responsibility for Egypt and Eritrea*

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THE GROWTH OF AN AICS OFFICE DEDICATED TO DEVELOPMENT



Tiberio Chiari, Head of AICS Cairo Office

2025 was a year of consolidation and growth for the AICS Cairo Office. When I took up my post as Head of Office in the month of April, activities continued as normal until November, when the Office acquired competence for Eritrea, thereby broadening its mandate and further strengthening its strategic role on the continent. Important developments to help tackle upcoming challenges and job opportunities.

Egypt is one of the priority countries for the Italian development cooperation, where it operates through a multi-sectoral approach

The year 2025 also marks the tenth anniversary of the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation. An anniversary that provides an opportunity to reflect on the journey undertaken by the Cairo Office, which traces its roots to the Local Technical Office established in 1982 at the Italian Embassy. Over the past decade, the Italian development cooperation has consolidated its presence in Egypt – a priority country – with an Office that has grown both in terms of staff and expertise, thanks to the ever-increasing number of projects funded and implemented, and to the gradual expansion of its portfolio of initiatives, including those supported by the European Union. The total assets under management have risen from approx. €26 million in 2016 to the current figure of €222 million, reflecting the steady growth of the Office's operational capacity.

This process has also been made possible thanks to the relationship of trust built up over the years with the Egyptian institutions, with whom the Office maintains an ongoing dialogue to identify priorities for action, the definition of initiatives and their effective implementation, within the framework of the objectives of the 2030 Agenda, the partnership between the European Union and Egypt, and the country's national development strategies.

Over the years, AICS Cairo has become a key reference point in the field of rural development and food security; since 2015, in collaboration with the FAO, it has been responsible for coordinating the thematic platform on agriculture and rural development within the Development Partner Group (DPG).

A distinctive feature of the Office's work is its strong engagement with and promotion of the Italian System

Also of particular significance is the technical assistance provided to the country as part of the Egyptian Government's ambitious "Robbiki Leather City" programme, which has been supporting the creation of the industrial district for leather tanning since 2001. In this sector, AICS Cairo remains committed to providing technical assistance and training to the district's management and local businesses, as well as supplying state-of-the-art equipment to help make production more efficient and encourage exports.

The Office also stands out for its work in the field of technical and vocational training, promoting a model of education and training tailored to the needs of the private sector, aimed at improving the employability of young people and tackling the root causes of irregular migration. The Italian-Egyptian Centre for Employment and Mobility (DEMO) also forms part of this framework, serving as a key tool to facilitate the matching of labour supply and demand, supporting pathways towards decent employment and promoting channels for regular mobility.

A cross-cutting priority remains the Office's commitment to promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, through initiatives aimed at strengthening their rights, their autonomy and their ability to make informed choices.

Equally a priority is the Office's engagement in the field of social development, where it contributes to Egypt's social vision grounded in equity and inclusion, through grant-based funding for the inclusion of persons with disabilities, the protection of children, and quality access to basic services. More generally, all the initiatives promoted by the Office focus particularly on the most vulnerable population groups, adopting an approach geared towards sustainability and long-term impact.

Since its establishment, the AICS Cairo Office has played a central role in the implementation of the Debt Swap Programme, which, over the last twenty-five years, has become a pillar of the



bilateral partnership between Italy and Egypt and a benchmark in the field of development cooperation in the country. In particular, the Office coordinated the implementation of the third phase of the Programme, which, between 2012 and 2024, funded projects with a total worth of €100 million.

Also part of the overall framework is the inclusion of Egypt amongst the beneficiaries of the new “Debt Relief for Africa” initiative, announced by Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni in June 2025 at the Rome Summit on the Mattei Plan and Global Gateway, amounting to a total of approximately €7.31 million over the decade 2026–2035.

The Office has also gradually expanded its portfolio of programmes financed through European funds under indirect management. It currently manages eight delegated cooperation programmes with a total value of €88 million and works actively with the Delegation of the European Union in Egypt – the main partners in the country – and the Italian System network, to develop new initiatives.

With the extension of its mandate to Eritrea, the Office is now embarking upon a new phase of its work, laying the groundwork for a strengthened Italian Development Cooperation presence in the country through institutional dialogue and the development of initiatives in the sectors of health, agriculture, emergency response and the protection of cultural heritage.

EGYPT



Although Egypt has made significant progress in recent years, it has, however, experienced a marked economic slowdown since 2022, due to the intensification of the Russia-Ukraine war and restrictive monetary policy measures, and the country continues to face major structural challenges. The main challenges include significant demographic pressure, high levels of unemployment – particularly among young people and women – in addition to rising inflation and public debt. Furthermore, significant socio-economic and regional inequalities persist, evident in the differing levels of development and access to opportunities between urban and rural areas. Social indicators point to a particularly precarious situation: according to the latest World Bank figures, around 33.5% of the population lives below the national poverty line, a rising figure that reflects structural difficulties in accessing sufficient incomes and essential services.

Against this backdrop, Egypt is one of the 23 priority countries in Africa for the activities of the Italian Development Cooperation and the Piano Mattei. The areas of intervention,

identified in line with the priorities of the EU-Egypt Partnership for the period 2021–2027 and the Egyptian Government’s “Egypt Vision 2030” development strategy, include agriculture, environmental protection, private sector development, social development, the management of migration flows, the promotion of gender equality, and the promotion of the cultural heritage.

The Italian Development Cooperation in Egypt operates through grants and subsidised loans. Grant funding is disbursed through bilateral channels (grants to local authorities and institutions) and multilateral channels (grants to international organisations and United Nations agencies). Numerous initiatives are also funded through the Italian-Egyptian Debt Swap Programme.

Furthermore, AICS Cairo directly manages projects funded by the European Commission, and in 2025 the Office managed a total of eight delegated cooperation programmes, while continuing to develop new initiatives in cooperation with the European Delegation in Egypt.

IDENTITY CARD

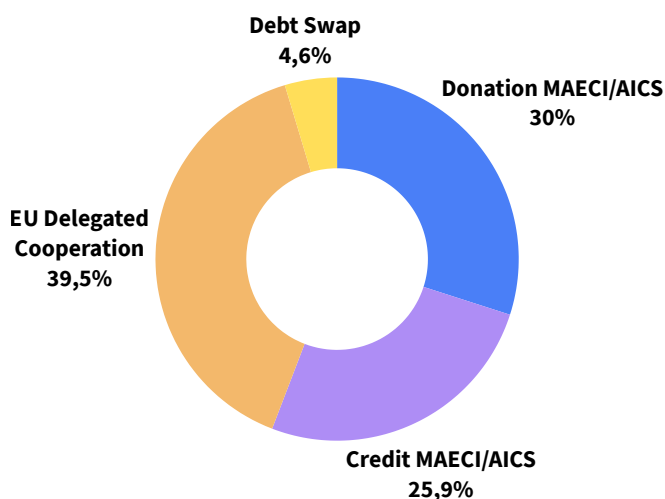
Office: Cairo

Project offices: Beni Suef, Assiut, Sohag, Badr City

Head of Office: Tiberio Chiari

Opening of Local Technical Unit: 1982

Year of establishment of AICS Office: 2016

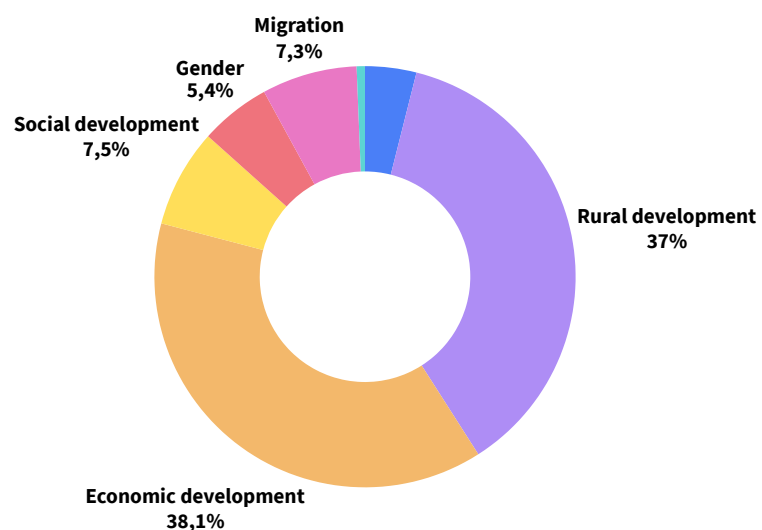


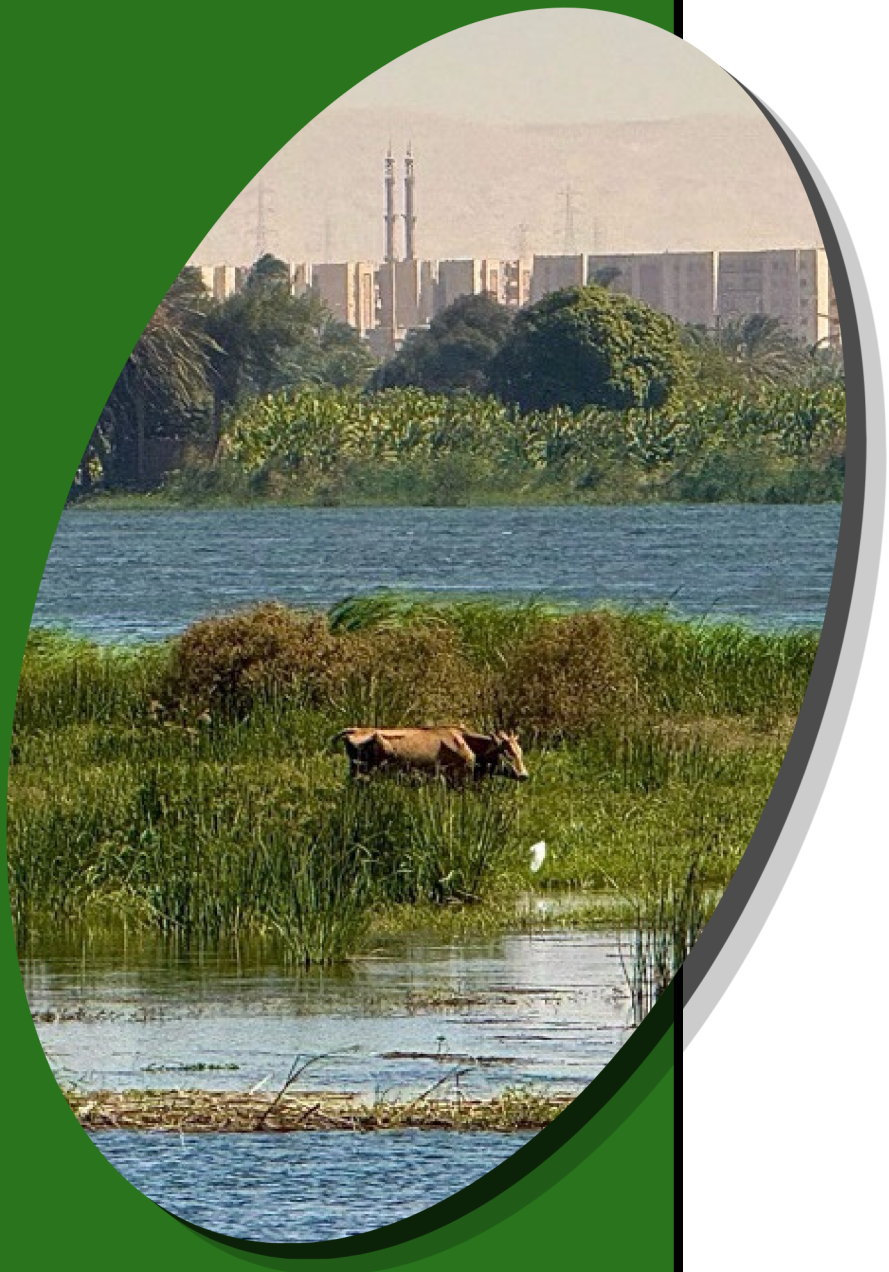
Funding channel and number of projects in 2025

- **Donation from MAECI/AICS: € 66,71 M**
27 projects
- **Credit MAECI/AICS: € 57,6 M**
2 projects
- **EU Delegated Cooperation: € 88,03 M**
8 projects
- **Debt Swap Programme – Phase III: € 10,35 M**
9 projects

Value of areas of intervention in 2025

- **Rural development and food security: € 82,45 M**
- **Economic development: € 84,89 M**
- **Social development: € 16,79 M**
- **Migration and development: € 16,29 M**
- **Gender Equality: € 12,08 M**
- **Culture and tourism: € 1,41 M**
- **Environment: € 8,76 M**





RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND AGRICULTURE



Ph: Marc Ryckaert

Egypt's territory, which is predominantly desert, has most of its fertile areas concentrated along the Nile Valley and in the Delta, where agriculture and its related value chains are developing in competition with ever-expanding urban settlements. The agricultural sector is of strategic importance to the country, employing around 19% of the total working population (World Bank).

Despite its importance, the sector still faces significant structural challenges. Notable among these is the high degree of land fragmentation, particularly in Upper Egypt – with plots becoming increasingly smaller due to the inheritance system, which divides agricultural property from one generation to the next – and the inefficient use of production inputs and water resources. Added to these factors are the processes of desertification and soil salinisation, which are progressively exacerbated by the effects of the climate crisis, thereby affecting the productivity and sustainability of the national agricultural system.

Through targeted initiatives, AICS Cairo contributes to advancing the agricultural sector and to improving conditions for rural communities in Egypt, promoting growth opportunities that meet the needs of both the domestic and international markets, ensuring the efficient use of raw materials, while supporting the agricultural sector's transition towards more sustainable and resilient production models.

Furthermore, Italy's commitment to rural development, food security and the creation of sustainable, inclusive value chains is widely recognised. In fact, since 2015, Italy, in cooperation with the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), has served as coordinator of the thematic platform on agriculture and rural development (Development Partner Group), a forum for dialogue and knowledge-sharing with institutions and key stakeholders operating in these areas.

During 2025, with a portfolio of €9.5 million, the Office supported three grant-based initiatives through the multilateral channel. These initiatives focus on the country's main productive value chains, with the aim of improving the quality and sustainability of agricultural and livestock production, promoting the export of local products, strengthening agricultural mechanisation systems, reinforcing food security, supporting the development of start-ups, and contributing to the reduction of the drivers of climate change.

Through targeted initiatives, AICS Cairo helps boost the agricultural sector and improve conditions for rural communities in Egypt

Among the key initiatives in the area of **support for value chains**, AICS Cairo, through a programme implemented by **UNIDO** – which is currently in its second phase – is collaborating with Egyptian

agricultural research centres and Italian companies operating in the region to support the **value chain of Egyptian cotton**, a prized raw material renowned worldwide for the length of its fibres, which enable the production of soft, lustrous yarns.

Furthermore, by supporting start-ups, the Agency promotes youth entrepreneurship in the agribusiness sector, with the aim of providing solutions to improve agricultural quality and productivity. With this in mind, the **Agritech4Egypt** initiative is being developed, organised by **Alliance Bioversity & CIAT**, which, through acceleration programmes and the building of a network of scientific collaboration, aims to promote the development, dissemination and adoption of scientific-technological innovations for the Egyptian and regional agri-food system.

Finally, the Agency supports the project **“Greening the future of rural communities in vulnerable areas in Upper Egypt”**, implemented by **CIHEAM Bari**, which aims to promote the adoption of green and innovative solutions in the most vulnerable rural areas. The project aims to facilitate the coordination of agricultural activities in selected areas, by encouraging collaboration between farmers and the adoption of integrated and sustainable practices. The productive and sustainable villages promoted as part of the initiative will serve as demonstration models for the gradual transformation of Egyptian villages into economically viable and resilient systems.

EGYPTIAN COTTON: IDENTITY, HISTORY AND PROSPECTS

In the district of Qalin, in the **Kafr el Sheikh Governorate**, the **Ghunaimi agricultural co-operative** is a concrete example of how tradition and innovation can come together to build a more sustainable and inclusive agricultural sector. Here, cotton is not just a crop: it is identity, history and a vision for the future.

“Agriculture lies at the heart of Egyptian civilisation”, notes **Abou Bakr**, Director of Local Agricultural Extension Services, underlining the deep connection between the land and the rural communities. A bond that the farmer **Megahed el Sayed** describes in simple yet powerful words: *“The earth is like a child: if you look after it, it gives everything back to you”*. It is precisely this relationship that underpins the transition towards regenerative farming practices.

Farmers in the Ghunaimi cooperative are, in fact, adopting techniques that improve soil health, reduce water consumption and limit the use of pesticides, favouring bio-based fertilisers and solutions. The result is **more sustainable, higher-quality production**: clean cotton, free from impurities, capable of competing on international markets.

Cotton remains a vital resource for local families, representing the **main source of income and economic security**. *“If I grow cotton and look after it, I can ensure that my children will go to school, have decent clothes and eat well; I can give them a good life,”* says **Samy Gamal**, a farmer with the co-operative.



Samy Gamal – Ph: UNIDO /Mohamed Reda

In addition to fibre, cotton by-products also contribute to the overall worth of the value chain, making this crop strategic from both an economic and a social perspective. It is no coincidence that the Ministry of Agriculture and Land Reclamation and the Egyptian Cotton Research Centre are keen to see an expansion of cultivated areas, but within a sustainability-oriented framework.

The name “Egyptian cotton” still resonates as a globally recognised brand, a symbol of excellence of which the farmers are extremely proud. Today, thanks to their commitment and the support of the UNIDO initiative entitled **“The Egyptian Cotton Project”**, this heritage is being renewed, combining quality, sustainability and rural development.

AGRITECH4EGYPT: A CHALLENGE IN INNOVATION

Agriculture in the MENA region is becoming increasingly vulnerable to the effects of climate change – including drought, progressive soil degradation and the spreading of pests – which are exacerbated by agricultural practices that are not always sustainable. It is against this backdrop that the **Agritech4Egypt initiative** has been launched, with the aim of promoting the development, dissemination and adoption of scientific-technological innovations for the Egyptian and regional agri-food sector.

Through structured innovation cycles, Agritech4Egypt focuses on **five key areas of agribusiness** — digitalisation and precision agriculture, agri-financial solutions, sustainable value chains and circular economy, training and advisory tools for farmers, and efficient irrigation and water management — with a special focus on promoting youth entrepreneurship, with the aim of increasing the sector's productivity and resilience.

To this end, **the project supports start-ups and innovation teams** through targeted technical assistance and business mentorship, offering them concrete opportunities to develop and scale up innovative solutions. The initiative is being rolled out in a series of progressive stages, including bootcamps, tailored acceleration programmes, technology demonstrations and post-acceleration activities with technical and strategic support.

In the medium to long term, the initiative aims to create jobs, **stimulate economic growth and strengthen rural communities**, with a special focus on young people and women.

The approach adopted aims to create **a multiplier effect across the entire sector**, by promoting innovations that are adapted to the local context and capable of delivering tangible results on the ground.

By combining innovation and inclusivity, Agritech4Egypt helps deliver lasting environmental, social and economic benefits, while reducing the future vulnerabilities of the agri-food system and **strengthening Egypt's role as a regional hub** for sustainable innovation in the sector.

Agritech4Egypt (AID 13162)

Channel: Multilateral grant-based

Duration: 36 months

Implementing entity: Alliance Bioversity & CIAT

Stakeholders: government agencies, accelerators, venture-capital investors, investment funds, banks, agri-food businesses, research institutes and centres, universities, technology-transfer offices, technology parks and centres, cooperatives and farmers' organisations

Funding: €5 M

Geographical area covered: Egypt

Beneficiaries: 315 entrepreneurs and innovators.
200,000 indirect beneficiaries

Start and end dates: February 2025 to February 2028



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



With a funding portfolio currently totalling almost **€85 million** in grants and concessional loans, the Italian Development Cooperation aims to promote the country's sustainable economic development by supporting **private sector growth**, particularly **micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) and innovative start-ups**, and the transfer of know-how in industrial sectors in which Italy can bring added value, such as leather, marble and timber. Furthermore, initiatives in this sector place particular emphasis on environmental protection, respect for workers' rights, and support for those population groups most affected by unemployment, such as young people and women.

Two initiatives funded through concessional loans are tackling the problem of **access to credit** for local micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) and start-ups. The first initiative, **with a budget of €12.6 million**, finances a credit line managed by the Egyptian Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise Development Agency (MSMEDA), through which loans are offered to MSMEs at a favourable interest rate, to be used for the purchasing of machinery and equipment, and for technical assistance and training services. A second €45-million concessional loan, managed by the Ministry of Industry, provides for the activation of a €36-million credit line for MSMEs, a €5-million Venture-Capital fund-of-funds, and technical-assistance activities in support of local MSMEs and start-ups.

The initiatives funded through donations support the **sustainable growth of MSMEs and start-ups**, and the **creation of decent work opportunities**, as well as fostering **women's and youth entrepreneurship**.

Two initiatives launched by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, with a total value of **€7 million**, alongside EBRD funding of approximately **€35 million**, aim to support local MSMEs. The first initiative supports the transfer of know-how to local businesses and start-ups in order to increase their **ability to generate income and create decent jobs**, while the second aims to support the agricultural sector's transition towards greater efficiency and sustainable practices through technical assistance to local financial institutions, with a view to strengthening their capacity to meet the specific needs of the agricultural sector.

Three grant-funded initiatives provide technical assistance to the country's industrial districts. In this regard, a **€6 million** grant-funded technical-assistance programme for the company managing the **"Robbiki Leather City"** (RLC) industrial park is under way, and a new **€3-million** grant-funded programme for the development of the leather, wood and marble industrial districts is being launched. Both programmes are directly managed by AICS Cairo. The third initiative, with funding of **€2.5 million**, entitled **"Productive Ecosystems for Decent Work in Egypt"** carried out under the guidance of the International Labour Organization, aims

Initiatives in this sector place particular emphasis on environmental protection, respect for workers' rights, and support for those population groups most affected by unemployment, such as young people and women

to promote sustained productivity growth and the creation of decent work in Egypt by supporting micro, small and medium enterprises and informal economic units operating in selected sectors (leather, marble and wood), through **a systemic and integrated approach that tackles the causes of low productivity** and the lack of decent work.



ITALIAN SUPPORT FOR THE CREATION OF A DISTRICT

Dr Emad Abdel Hamid is Assistant to the Egyptian Minister for Industry for International Projects and Financial Affairs. Dr Emad closely monitors the activities of the “Support to the Development of the Robbiki Leather City Tanning District” project, and since taking up his post, has supported the Office in implementing the initiative, which is a key element in the district’s development.

“Italian support for the creation of the Robbiki Leather City industrial district dates back to the early 2000s, when Italian experts worked alongside the Ministry of Industry to draw up the district’s development plan and oversee the relocation of the tanneries from the Magra el Eyoun area, situated in Cairo’s historic centre, where highly polluting processes harmful to both the environment and people were being used.

Over the years, the Italian Government has supported the development of the industrial cluster with a significant contribution of around €40 million, which was used in particular for infrastructure works and the relocation of production facilities, which was completed in 2019.

The “Support to the Development of the Robbiki Leather City Tanning District” project is a key initiative in the field of industrial cooperation between Egypt and Italy. Thanks to the support provided for the relocation of the tanneries from Magra el Eyoun to Robbiki Leather City, the initiative has fostered the development of the leather and tanning industry, contributing to an



Ph: Robbiki Leather City

increase in annual production from 12.5 million m² of semi-processed leather to 35 million m² of finished leather, and to the achievement of several related objectives, among which the creation of 25,000 direct and permanent jobs. Furthermore, productivity at the tanneries that have relocated to the district has risen from 6 m² per worker per day to the international standard of 25 m² per worker per day, enabling tannery operators to offset the environmental-mitigation costs they incurred.”

TECHNICAL SUPPORT AND SUPPLYING OF MACHINERY

The programme “**Support to the development of the Robbiki Leather City Tanning District**” forms part of the Robbiki Programme, launched in 2004 by the Egyptian Government with the aim of creating an industrial district for leather processing in the Robbiki area and relocating there the tanning activities previously carried out in the Magra El Eyoum area in central Cairo, which were characterised by obsolete production techniques that were highly polluting and harmful to health.

The initiative, which arose from a request by the Egyptian Government to the Italian Development Cooperation for technical assistance and the supply of machinery – building on previous initiatives funded by the Italian Government that have supported the development of the district’s infrastructure – is currently under way, and its activities are divided into four components. The first component involved supporting the relocation of the old tanneries from Magra el Eyoum – an area currently undergoing urban regeneration by the Egyptian Government – and the development of the new sites in Robbiki Leather City. This component was fully implemented during the two-year period 2018–2019, and involved the relocation of 193 businesses to Robbiki Leather City. Components 2, 3 and 4 are currently under way, and the Office has selected a service

provider - the PIN Foundation - to carry them out. This provider furnishes technical assistance for the common wastewater-treatment plant and for solid waste management, it conducts support activities for the organisation of the Tanning Technology Centre, and has assisted the Office in preparing the tender dossiers for the supply of the equipment required for the Centre’s operation.



Support to the development of the Robbiki Leather City Tanning District (AID 011128/014)

Channel: Bilateral

Implementing entity: AICS Cairo

Stakeholder: Ministry of Industry

Funding: € 6 M

Geographical area covered: Robbiki Leather City, Badr City

Beneficiaries: Tanning Technology Centre, local private sector

Start and end dates: 2017-2026



SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT



Foto: Stanza risorse per bambine e bambini con disabilità in una scuola primaria di Aswan - AID 12861 - AICS

The social-development sector of AICS Cairo operates within a policy framework that has placed individual and social justice among **Egypt's main development objectives** to be achieved by 2030 (Egypt Vision 2030). Egypt is focusing on improving healthcare, providing quality education, reducing poverty and offering social support to those it considers a priority, including women, children, young people and persons with disabilities.

Through its development cooperation interventions, Italy contributes to this social vision based on equity and inclusion, so as to “**leave no one behind**”, in line with the aspirations of the 2030 Agenda, with funding of approximately €15 million through seven ongoing grant-based initiatives.

The initiatives make use of the multi-bilateral channel, in partnership with UNICEF and the ILO, agreements with Italian universities (Article 24 of Italian Law 125/2014), and direct management.

The protection systems supported by AICS Cairo in Egypt are:

1. Child protection

Strengthening the alternative care system for children without parental care in Egypt (UNICEF, €1.5 million) to improve access to and the quality of child protection services for children at risk and/or who have suffered violence, particularly those without parental care.

Combating the worst forms of child labour in small-scale industries and on the streets, and contributing to the implementation of Egypt's National Action Plan (ILO, €1.5 million). The project supports the implementation of the National Action Plan to combat the worst forms of child labour and to support families in Egypt, 2018–2025 (NAP).

Strengthening child protection systems to safeguard children and adolescents at risk of irregular migration or human trafficking, and their families (Nagah) (UNICEF, €5 million). The intervention strategy aims to help integrate social protection and child protection systems in order to tackle various aspects of child poverty and deprivation, including the risks associated with irregular migration, human trafficking and smuggling.

Restorative approach to juvenile justice: socio-educational models for social reintegration and alternative measures to detention (UNICEF use of remaining funds amounting to approximately €60,000) to promote the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the national law on children's rights in the field of juvenile justice.

Different abilities, unlimited possibilities: expanding access to inclusive education for children with disabilities in Egypt (UNICEF, €3 million): The programme aims to improve the implementation of educational policies for the inclusion of children in 200 state primary schools in the Aswan Governorate, as well as through

Through its cooperation initiatives, Italy contributes to a social vision based on equity and inclusion, so as to “leave no one behind”, in line with the aspirations of the 2030 Agenda

advocacy data collection, technical support curriculum reform, teacher training, capacity-building for national and sub-national officials, and the strengthening of non-formal support networks, civil society and parents' networks.

Promoting the rights and social inclusion of persons with disabilities in Egypt (AICS Cairo, €1.6 million): the project aims to contribute to the full implementation of the United Nations Convention and Egyptian Law No. 10 of 2018 on the rights of persons with disabilities, in order to promote, protect and guarantee the human rights and fundamental freedoms of persons with disabilities.

2. Equitable access to high-quality basic services (health)

Support for the improvement of medical and nursing care in Egypt – Phase III (University of Sassari-UNISS, €3.5 million) to strengthen medical and nursing training, improve the clinical management of patients awaiting bone marrow transplants, and enhance screening and treatment for paediatric congenital heart disease in the Governorates of Cairo, Giza, Alexandria and Port Said.

EDUCATION AS A MEANS OF EMANCIPATION

As part of the project implemented by UNICEF Egypt: **“Strengthening child protection systems to safeguard children and adolescents at risk of irregular migration or human trafficking, and their families (Nagah)”** – AID 013101, Basma and Shaimaa speak of the risks to which children are exposed in the Fayoum Governorate, where child protection is not systematically implemented. The young women interviewed paint a picture of unemployment, irregular migration, limited access to education and harmful practices.



Ph: UNICEF/Egypt 2025/Ibrahim Mohamed

Their testimonies confirm the importance of **measures aimed at strengthening child protection systems at a local level**, in a sustainable and inclusive manner. The Fayoum region is particularly affected by migration to Europe via Libya; according to the girls interviewed, this is due to the lack of secure and decent jobs at a local level.

Basma underlines the girls' right to **a modern education as a means of economic and social empowerment**. Basma has seen first-hand how, in her village, financial hardship forces families to marry off their daughters at a very young age, depriving them of education, protection and freedom of choice. *“Education should be a means of empowerment, not just a qualification”*, she says at the end of the interview.

Shaimaa hopes that the NAGAH project will succeed in supporting community-based solutions, awareness-raising initiatives and skills development programmes, particularly in the fields of languages and technology, as effective alternatives to migration. She also expresses concern about child marriage and female genital mutilation, emphasising **the need for ongoing community awareness-raising** and protective measures geared to safeguard families and girls alike.

IN SUPPORT OF EGYPTIAN HEALTHCARE INSTITUTIONS

The overall aim of the initiative is to help improve the health of the Egyptian population by improving the quality of the healthcare services in the Governorates of Cairo, Giza, Alexandria and Port Said. Phase III consolidates and extends the impact of the two previous projects (Phase I 2015–2019 and Phase II 2019–2023), already funded by AICS. It introduces new activities, in the fields of oncology and bone marrow transplantation, in line with national strategic guidelines.

The initiative benefits from the support of Milan's leading healthcare and educational institutions, such as San Raffaele Hospital, San Donato Hospital and Vita-Salute San Raffaele University.

Main research outcomes:

- 1. The Technical High Institutes (THI) for nurses in the three governorates have improved their educational functions** – minor rehabilitation programmes have been completed, and mentoring and tutoring activities have been carried out in collaboration with the Vita-Salute San Raffaele University in Milan.
- 2. The competencies of nurses and healthcare professionals in Cairo, Giza and Alexandria in areas such as emergency and urgent care have been improved. The same also applies to other areas in which training needs were identified.** - 1,900 doctors and nurses trained.

3. Improvement of the management of cases requiring a bone marrow transplant in Cairo. - 430 doctors trained, 9 scholarships awarded to doctors and nurses at the San Raffaele Hospital in Milan, and support provided for JACIE international accreditation.

4. Improvement of the management of screening for congenital heart disease and other cardiovascular conditions at the National Heart Hospital and the Atfal Hospital in Cairo and Port Said. - Screening for congenital heart defects carried out on 2,100 patients; 17 major cardiac surgeries performed with the support of specialists from San Donato Hospital in Milan; 16 scholarships awarded to doctors at San Donato Hospital in Milan.

Support for the improvement of medical and nursing care in Egypt (AID 12836)

Channel: Grant funding, Article 24 of Law 125/2014

Duration: 48 months

Implementing entity: UNISS – University of Sassari, Department of Biomedical Sciences

Stakeholder: Egyptian Ministry of Health and Population – MoHP

Funding: €2.5 M

Geographical area covered: Cairo, Giza, Alexandria and Port Said

Beneficiaries: the Egyptian people

Dates: from October 2023 to October 2027



GENDER

(GENDER EQUALITY
AND THE EMPOWERMENT
OF WOMEN AND GIRLS)

With a portfolio of MAECI/AICS funding amounting to approximately **€10.4 million**, the Italian Development Cooperation in Egypt supports initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, adopting a rights-based, inclusive and transformative approach, with a special focus on the most vulnerable and marginalised groups.

The initiatives focus on the following priority areas:

1. **Prevention of and response to gender-based violence**, by strengthening specialised services providing protection, support and care for survivors and by promoting safe and inclusive environments;
2. **Promotion of sexual and reproductive health and family planning**, by improving access to high-quality services, strengthening institutional capacities and disseminating accurate and accessible information to women, adolescents and young people;

3. **Economic and social empowerment of women and girls**, through skills development, access to economic and employment opportunities, and active participation in social and economic life.

The “**Enhancing the Role of Women**” initiative, implemented by **UN Women** with funding of **€1 million**, aims to directly strengthen the socio-economic empowerment of women in the rural areas of Upper Egypt. The initiative combines improving access to civil rights – such as the issuing of identity documents – with strengthening the health services and systems for preventing and responding to gender-based violence. Furthermore, the project supports women’s entrepreneurship and income generation, promoting local productive value chains in the traditional handicrafts and organic farming sectors.

Activities include technical, financial and marketing training; the developing of entrepreneurial skills; facilitating access to markets and credit; and engaging the private sector in the promotion of inclusive practices, including through the adoption of the Women’s Empowerment Principles.

The UNFPA programme, with a budget of €4 million, has made a structural contribution to strengthening the gender-based violence prevention and response system. The programme strengthens the provision of multisectoral services for survivors, including basic health services and referrals, as well as psychosocial, legal and protection services, also through the creation and improvement of safe spaces and specialised reception and care facilities.



The initiative also improves referral mechanisms at community level and promotes the active involvement of men, boys and religious leaders in the processes aimed at transforming discriminatory social norms and harmful practices.

At national level, the programme supports the **strengthening of the regulatory framework and public policies on gender-based violence**, promoting inter-institutional coordination and alignment amongst the various actors within the protection system. At the same time, it helps empower adolescent girls and young women through structured programmes such as NOURA and the Girls Assets Framework, which are designed to strengthen their skills, agency and capacity for self-determination.

Particular attention is paid to the most vulnerable groups, including women and girls with disabilities, refugees or migrants, through **strategic partnerships** with national civil society organisations, in a perspective of inclusion, non-discrimination and leaving no one behind.

The **KHADRA project**, implemented directly by AICS Cairo with funding of €800,000, aims to strengthen the economic and social empowerment of women in the Siwa Oasis through vocational and entrepreneurial training programmes, financial inclusion, the development of marketing and sales opportunities, and by facilitating access to credit to support productive activities. The initiative also includes **measures aimed at improving maternal-and child health**, by promoting access to high-quality healthcare services and awareness-raising activities.

AICS is overseeing the project funded by the head office entitled “**Inclusive empowerment for women, girls and boys in Upper Egypt**”, with a budget of **€1.6 million**, implemented by **Save the Children International** in the Assiut Governorate. The initiative aims to strengthen the economic and social inclusion of women and young people in situations of socio-economic vulnerability, including persons with disabilities, by **improving access to vocational training**, livelihood opportunities and financial services.

The Italian Development Cooperation in Egypt supports initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality and empowerment through a rights-based approach

Another initiative is due to be launched soon. It is entitled “**A Holistic Approach to Population Growth: Improving the Quality of Life of the Population & Strengthening Reproductive Health Information & Service Delivery Channels**”, and it has been entrusted to **UNFPA**. The initiative aims to improve access to reproductive health services and promote the dissemination of accurate and accessible information to women, adolescents and young people, so that they can make **informed choices about their well-being and their future**. The project forms part of the new National Programme for Family Development and will help strengthen institutional capacities and the quality of services, promoting a more inclusive and effective approach to reproductive health and family planning.

HEALING TO IN ORDER TO MOVE FORWARD: A STORY OF STRUGGLE

This is the story of S., a young mother who fled Syria ten years ago and found a path to recovery thanks to a safe space for women and girls in Egypt. Today, S. devotes part of her time to volunteering, offering the same compassion and care that helped her rebuild her own life.

“When I first arrived at the safe space in 10th of Ramadan, I was shattered in mind, heart and soul. But with every meeting and every conversation, I slowly began to find myself again.”

S. was alone with her children in a foreign country. The war had robbed her of almost everything: her husband, her two brothers and the life she had painstakingly built. When she arrived in Egypt, she felt broken, carrying with her the invisible scars of war, bereavement and trauma. She would sit in silence for hours, paralysed by grief. It was only when a neighbour told her about the safe space at 10th of Ramadan that she began to feel a faint glimmer of hope.

S. says that, from the moment she stepped over the threshold, something changed. The welcoming smiles, the reassuring voices, the safe environment: everything was different from what she had experienced since leaving Syria. The individual psychosocial support she received helped her, little by little, to untangle the knots of her trauma.



Art therapy session at the Safe Spaces for Women and Girls –
Ph: UNFPA

At first, her words came out in fragments, but gradually S. began to feel the weight of her pain lift.

The group therapy sessions offered her an unexpected gift: a sense of connection. Surrounded by other Syrian women who had also lost their homes and loved ones, S. found strength in their shared experiences. Speaking about this space, she says: *“They didn’t just help me survive; they gave me the strength to live”*.

Today, S. feels a sense of peace she never thought she would find again, and she wants to pass on this hope by volunteering at the same safe space and offering other women the same compassion and support that saved her.

AN APPROACH BASED ON PREVENTION AND ENGAGEMENT

The project is helping create an environment of zero tolerance towards gender-based violence through integrated measures focusing on prevention, protection and economic inclusion.

In terms of prevention, in addition to the engagement of young facilitators and religious leaders and the launching of cultural initiatives, UNFPA and the NCW have begun to strengthen local multi-sectoral referral systems for cases of GBV through regional workshops aimed at local authorities and institutional partners. At the same time, work with young people and communities – through trained facilitators, edutainment activities and the involvement of religious leaders – has helped **mobilise entire communities, raising awareness with regard to harmful practices and promoting positive social change.**

Youth learning spaces and the organisation of a national festival were key moments in engaging adolescents and young people in particular. As regards protection, the network of services has been expanded to include **new clinics and safe spaces dedicated to women and girls**, where psychosocial and multidisciplinary support is provided. At the same time, targeted training for healthcare, social-service providers and actors within the justice system has helped strengthen the institutional response to violence. Additionally, efforts are under way to make services more disability-inclusive and to establish the first One-Stop Centre.

On the political and institutional front, the project has supported **advocacy processes for more comprehensive legislation on gender-based violence** and helped launch new national studies to improve the available evidence base. Finally, in the context of economic empowerment, long-term educational programmes, mentoring and entrepreneurial initiatives have enabled girls and survivors of violence to develop their skills, independence and economic opportunities. A social innovation incubator is also being developed to support emerging initiatives. Overall, the project has achieved significant and integrated results, bringing about **tangible changes in the lives of women and girls** and helping strengthen a structural approach to the prevention of gender-based violence.

GBV: Protection, services, empowerment for a zero-tolerance environment against all forms of gender-based violence (AID 12712)

Channel: Multilateral

Duration: 36 months

Implementing entity: UNFPA

Stakeholders: MoIC, MoYS, MoHP, MOSS, local CSOs

Funding: €4 M

Geographical area covered: Greater Cairo, Qena, Luxor, Fayoum, Bani Suef, Alexandria

Beneficiaries: 25,000 direct beneficiaries, including women and girls who have survived violence, marginalised young women, families and communities, men and religious leaders engaged in raising awareness, service providers and policy-makers

Start and end dates: November 2023 to November 2026



MIGRATION

With a portfolio of MAECI/AICS funding amounting to approximately **€5.7 million**, the Italian Development Cooperation has adopted a strategy based on an integrated, multi-level and multi-stakeholder approach, recognising that effective management of migration dynamics and the promotion of inclusive local development require the strengthening of institutional capacities, the improvement of the socio-economic conditions of migrants, refugees and host communities, the expansion of access to essential services and the creation of concrete opportunities for young people. In particular, by building on the joint contribution of public institutions, international agencies, civil society and local communities, the AICS Cairo Office carries out initiatives that aim:

- on the one hand, **to strengthen social protection mechanisms**, community cohesion and access to essential services – such as education and healthcare – in line with the approach of the **Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus**.
- on the other hand, **to support access to decent employment opportunities** through vocational training, the development of skills required by the labour market and the improvement of employability, thereby facilitating integration into the labour market both locally and within the context of regular migration pathways. In line with the approach set out in the **Migration-Development Nexus**, these measures help improve people's economic prospects and strengthen the development of the communities of origin and the host communities alike.

The office is currently funding two initiatives implemented by the **International Organisation for Migration**. The **SAWA project**, with a budget of **€1.5 million**, implemented in partnership with Save the Children and the Egyptian Red Crescent, aims to integrate the migration dimension into national health and education systems, improving access to essential services for vulnerable groups. The initiative promotes **safe learning environments for migrant children, refugees and minors in host communities** and improves access to healthcare services, with a special focus on women and girls. Through actions promoting inclusion in national plans and strengthening social cohesion, the project offers sustainable responses to the vulnerabilities associated with forced displacement. SAWA also carries out applied research to produce policy papers intended for policy-makers and stakeholders.



The **PLAY project**, with a budget of approximately **€1.5 million**, aims to reduce irregular migration among young Egyptians by strengthening training in the tourism sector, employability and awareness of regular migration pathways. The initiative supports the establishment of an Applied Technology School (ATS) in the hospitality sector, based on a **public-private-partnership** that assigns the private sector a central role in practical training and employment opportunities. The model includes accreditation, curriculum development, staff training, quality assurance, operational management and upgrading of the facilities.

The Italian Development Cooperation adopts a strategy based on a multi-stakeholder approach, which requires the strengthening of institutional capacities and the improvement of the socio-economic conditions of migrants, refugees and host communities

There are also plans to collaborate with an Italian educational institution involving technical expertise and mobility programmes. The Fayoum Governorate, an area experiencing significant migratory pressure, was chosen in order to reach the young people most at risk, while **awareness-raising activities serve to promote an informed understanding of migration dynamics**. Alongside these initiatives, the AICS Office supports two further projects promoted and funded by the head office, which focus on strengthening employability, innovating training systems and promoting the socio-economic inclusion of the most vulnerable groups.

The **OpenMED project**, implemented by Progetto Sud ETS with a budget of **€1.7 million**, supports innovation in the textile and leather sectors in the Cairo Governorate through **work-based training** focused on digitalisation, green technologies and the circular economy. The initiative strengthens the employability and entrepreneurial skills of vulnerable young people and women, combining apprenticeships, incubation and microcredit to support the creation of sustainable micro-enterprises.

The **TAKE STEPS project**, implemented by the NGO M.A.I.S. with a budget of approximately **€1 million**, strengthens the link between technical education and the labour market in partnership with the Federation of Egyptian Industries. The initiative develops apprenticeship programmes and **supports NEETs, women, refugees and persons with disabilities** through career guidance, skills development and inclusive, work-based learning opportunities.



A MEETING OF DETERMINATION AND TALENT

by Nadine Noureldin and Salma Okasha, Communication Team IOM Egypt

Lino was twelve years old when his family moved from Khartoum to Malakal, a place that would soon become their home.

At the age of twenty, despite his parents' concerns, Lino decided to leave Sudan for Egypt. He remembers 10 April 2019 with absolute clarity – the day he arrived: **the start of his life as a migrant** – but not his first farewell. He arrived with no financial resources and no clear plan.

In Egypt, **his determination yielded tangible results**. He enrolled at the Faculty of Economics and Commerce at Cairo University, found a job in a restaurant and supported himself independently for four years. *“Sometimes I felt as though people saw me as desperate,”* he says. *«But I wasn't. ‘I just wanted a better life’ he explains.*



Lino nel cortometraggio “Serendipity” - Crediti: IOM Egypt

Over time, Egypt became home: the coastline of Alexandria, Koshari – a dish he learnt to make while working in the restaurant – and **friendships that have become like family**. *“If they call you by your surname, it means they consider you a friend,”* he says with a smile.

He began attending various auditions, determined to find his own voice. The turning point came with IOM Egypt's theatre initiative **Together We Thrive**. Sharing the stage with Egyptians and migrants, Lino found a form of healing in the power of telling his own story. After three performances, he was chosen as **the lead actor in the short film Serendipity**, which focuses on social cohesion. *“I wasn't acting, I was telling my story – and that of so many others,”* he recounts.

Today, at the age of 26, Lino wants to support his family and **dreams of a Sudan at peace**. To young people navigating different worlds, he leaves this message: *“It's true that what doesn't kill you makes you stronger. Even the things that really put you to the test can shape you – if you let them”* he says proudly.

Lino's story reflects **the experience of many migrants who leave everything behind**, and place all their trust in hope. Thanks to the support of the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation through the SAWA project, and to the efforts of the IOM and its partners, Lino has managed to turn his dreams into reality.

FOR THE WELL-BEING OF MIGRANT AND HOST COMMUNITIES

The project promotes more inclusive policies and better access to **essential services for migrants, refugees and asylum seekers**, focusing on three key areas: **strengthening public policies, expanding access to education and improving healthcare services** for the most vulnerable groups.

As part of our advocacy work, five policy papers have been drawn up to address the main shortcomings in the national policies on Health, Education, Employment, Protection, and Community Cohesion. To support social cohesion, **an awareness-raising campaign** developed in collaboration with the social theatre company, Raizes Teatro, promoted a positive narrative around migration, reaching a wide audience and launching the artistic and educational initiative “**Together We Thrive**”.

Save the Children International has improved access to education through **the training of teachers and facilitators** at Community Learning Centres as part of the Ready to Learn, AEP and Catch-up Clubs programmes, which are aimed at children who are not in the school system. Information sessions have also been organised for migrant families to **facilitate enrolment in state schools**, helping raise awareness regarding enrolment procedures and the educational pathways available.

At the same time, the Egyptian Red Crescent has expanded access to health and psychological services for vulnerable women and girls through awareness-raising seminars, the distribution of information materials, telephone consultations, training for healthcare workers and mobile medical units. These initiatives, which **have reached thousands of beneficiaries**, have focused special attention on mental health, reproductive health and the prevention of gender-based violence, helping strengthen protection and well-being within migrant and host communities.

SAWA: For equitable access to quality education and healthcare services in Egypt for women, children and other members of migrant and host communities in vulnerable situations (AID 12725)

Channel: Multilateral

Duration: 30 and a half months

Implementing entity: IOM

Stakeholders: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, IOM, SCI, ERC

Funding: €1.5 M

Geographical area covered: Greater Cairo and Alexandria

Beneficiaries: 20 researchers and policy analysts; over 1 million migrants and members of host communities reached (including children and caregivers); and around 60 members of the educational staff

Start and end dates: October 2023 to April 2026



ENVIRONMENT



In Egypt, population growth and human activities have far-reaching environmental consequences. The pressure on natural resources, further exacerbated by the **adverse effects of the climate crisis**, has a significant impact on the resilience of ecosystems.

With the majority of the population concentrated along the Nile and in its Delta, rising temperatures, increasing water scarcity, uncontrolled urbanisation and soil degradation are undermining the sustainability of natural and socio-economic systems. These factors intensify competition for natural resources, while at the same time exacerbating **the challenges of social and economic inclusion**, prompting many young people and families to move away from their home towns.

In this scenario, environmental protection and conservation, through the sustainable management of agricultural production activities, are priority objectives for cooperation initiatives. The initiatives promoted by the Office help **strengthen the resilience of rural communities** by mitigating the economic impact of environmental degradation and fostering alternative development opportunities that help protect the environment. The Italian Development Cooperation's activities are **fully aligned with Egypt Vision 2030 and the National Climate Change Strategy 2050**, supporting national priorities in the areas of environmental sustainability, green growth and social inclusion.

During 2025, with a portfolio of **€4.8 million**, the Office was supporting two initiatives under the multilateral grant channel, both aimed at **promoting circular and green economic models** by offering economic and environmental development solutions that make use of livestock manure and agricultural residues.

Through the **Inclusive Green Growth in Egypt** initiative – using blended finance instruments – Italy is supporting the construction of a pilot-scale pyrolysis plant aimed at **optimising the treatment of agricultural waste**. The process makes it possible to control the degradation of biomass and maximise the recovery of high value-added products, such as biochar, syngas and pyroligneous acid.

The initiatives promoted by the Office help strengthen the resilience of rural communities by mitigating the economic impact of environmental degradation and fostering alternative development opportunities that help to protect the environment

At the same time, the project “**Tackling climate change through the sustainable management of livestock farming**” has been developed in response to the growing demand for animal protein in Egypt, which entails risks linked to antimicrobial resistance, the spread of animal diseases and increased greenhouse gas emissions. By promoting the **One Health** approach and drawing on the expertise of the Experimental Zooprophyllactic Institute of

Abruzzo and Molise (IZSAM), the project adopts an integrated approach that recognises **the interconnection between animal, human and environmental health**. The aim is to strengthen the resilience of livestock systems and contribute to the development of sustainable and safe agri-food systems with reduced environmental impacts.

The initiative also aims to integrate the livestock sector into the circular bioeconomy through the production of biogas. This approach helps **promote the sequestration of greenhouse gases**, including by reducing the amount of antibiotics entering the water-soil system from livestock farms, and by enabling **the sustainable production of renewable energy**.

Taken together, these measures help **reduce the environmental vulnerability** linked to agricultural production systems and **promote inclusive development**, demonstrating how environmental challenges can be transformed into opportunities for sustainable development and the strengthening of resilience.



FROM WASTE TO ENERGY: BIOMASR'S STORY FROM BENI SUEF

It all began with the need to reduce the agricultural waste produced on a large scale in the Beni Suef Governorate. Thanks to the support of the **“Inclusive Green Growth in Egypt”** project, funded by the Italian Development Cooperation and implemented by UNIDO, this need took the form of an idea that would enable the production of agricultural inputs for which there is high market demand. The funding, in the form of catalytic and de-risking grants, made it possible to start construction on the pyrolysis plant, taking it **from an abstract concept to a project on the verge of becoming operational.**

“The strength of this partnership lies in the complementary nature of the partners,” explains BioMasr’s CEO, Muhammed Oma. “We have provided technical expertise and operational capacity; UNIDO has offered ongoing support in terms of capacity building, technical guidance and local networking; the Ministry of the Environment has provided full institutional support. A practical, results-oriented partnership based on a shared vision: to generate sustainable and replicable impacts over time for the benefit of farmers and the environment.”

“Through pyrolysis, we can convert biomass and organic waste into four products: biochar, syngas, pyrolytic oils and pyroligneous acid. When managed properly, biochar improves soil fertility by reducing the need for chemical fertilisers, while the other by-products are either used to power the plant itself or for organic farming. A circular model that addresses the region’s climate and environmental challenges.”



Mr. Muhammed Oma - CEO of BioMasr

“It is, however, a result that goes beyond the technical and production aspects. Prior to this initiative, it was effectively impossible to produce and market biochar in Egypt: there was no appropriate regulatory framework in place. This project played an active role in developing the necessary regulatory framework, paving the way for a market that had not existed until then. The Beni Suef plant is therefore not just an end in itself, but a sustainable and replicable pilot scheme, designed to be scaled up and to demonstrate that this change is possible, measurable and transferable to other contexts.”

The **“Inclusive Green Growth in Egypt”** project demonstrates that international cooperation can bring about real change. Beni Suef is only just the beginning.

A ONE HEALTH APPROACH TO NEW LIVESTOCK FARMING MODELS

The country's demographic and economic growth is generating rising demand for animal protein, leading to the intensification of livestock farming. This process involves significant risks: on the one hand, an increase in the incidence of antimicrobial resistance (AMR) and animal diseases; on the other, **growing environmental pressure due to high greenhouse gas emissions** and the intensive use of natural resources such as water and soil.

It is within this context that the initiative, developed in collaboration with the FAO and the Experimental Zooprophyllactic Institute of Abruzzo and Molise, is positioned, **benefiting from the Institute's expertise in the One Health approach** – a model based on the recognition of the deep interconnection between human, animal and environmental health. The project is structured around **four integrated and complementary objectives**, aimed at promoting livestock farming models with low carbon dioxide emissions.

In terms of animal health, the project aims to promote the spread of good farming practices by **improving the expertise of veterinary services and providing technical support to livestock farmers**. Through training activities on the subject of animal feed and the sustainable use of antibiotics, the adoption of biosecurity standards and the strengthening of surveillance and early-warning systems, the initiative helps reduce health risks and increase the productivity of livestock farms.

In terms of environmental sustainability, the initiative also promotes the efficient use of natural resources and the **recovery of waste products in accordance with the principles of the circular economy**. The construction of biogas plants for the treatment of manure makes it possible to manage the fermentation processes in a controlled manner – thereby reducing the uncontrolled release of carbon dioxide and methane into the atmosphere – while simultaneously producing renewable energy and digestate, which can be used as an organic soil amendment to return nutrients to the soil and reduce reliance on synthetic fertilisers.



Tackling climate change through the sustainable management of livestock farming (TACLIM) (AID 12778)

Channel: Multilateral grant-based

Duration: 36 months

Implementing entity: FAO

Stakeholders: MoALR, MoE, MoHP

Funding: €4 M

Geographical area covered: The Governorates of Behiera and Asyut

Beneficiaries: At least 2,000 micro, small and medium-scale cattle livestock farmers. At least 3 national and sub-national veterinary services

Start and end dates: December 2024 to November 2027



THE DEBT SWAP



Inauguration of the grain silo facility in Quwaysna (Monufia) in March 2023

Since its establishment, the AICS Cairo Office has played a key role in managing the Debt Swap Programme, which over the past 25 years has become one of the main pillars of the Italian–Egyptian partnership. Since 2001, through three successive agreements, **the Programme has enabled the conversion of approximately \$350 million of debt** into resources that have funded the **implementation of over 110 development initiatives** in sectors of strategic importance to the country.

Phase Three covered debt instalments due between April 2012 and January 2021, with a nominal value of \$100 million. The instalments, converted into local currency and paid into a dedicated Counterpart Fund at the Central Bank of Egypt, generated funds totalling over 926 million Egyptian pounds (EGP), which were added to the approximately E£ 51 million left over from the previous Agreement.

These resources were invested in 30 initiatives in the sectors of food security (45%), the agri-food sector (15%), technical education (17.5%), environmental and cultural heritage (10.5%) and civil society (10%), as well as covering the Programme's operational and technical assistance costs (2%).

Among the main initiatives carried out, the following are worth noting: **the construction of six grain storage facilities** and the simultaneous development of a pilot-scale information system for the governance of the national cereal reserves; **the creation of two integrated aquaculture districts in Alexandria and Port Said**; and **support for the reform of technical education**, through the establishment of the Applied Technology Schools (ATS) Management Unit within the Ministry of Education and Technical Education, which has overseen the

formalisation of more than 80 schools based on public-private partnerships; as well as a wide range of **initiatives by Italian and Egyptian civil society organisations** in areas such as women's economic empowerment, youth entrepreneurship and child protection.

While the disbursement of funds to the projects and the definitive cancellation of the debt were completed in December 2024, in accordance with the terms and procedures set out in the Agreement, **seven initiatives are still ongoing** to date, **with a total value of over \$14 million**.

Of particular note is the expansion of three initiatives already launched with previous Italian funding: this is the case of the **Inclusive Green Growth (IGGE)** initiative, implemented by UNIDO, which supports the launch and expansion of SMEs operating in the circular economy; the **Strengthening the Wadi El Gemal National Park** initiative, implemented by UNDP as a continuation of the **Environmental Cooperation Programme** (EIECP); the **PLAY 2** initiative, implemented by IOM, which supports the establishment of an Applied Technology School for the tourism and hospitality sector in Fayyum.

Work is also continuing in the agri-food sector, including the construction of **an aquaculture facility** for red tilapia farming in North Sinai and initiatives to **improve the quality of agricultural production** through vegetable-seed development and the establishment of laboratories for pesticide and heavy-metal residue analysis, implemented as a parallel financing initiative to the **EU-ZIRA3A delegated cooperation programme** managed by the Office.

In the cultural heritage sector, a further initiative supports the **diversification of Egypt's tourism offer**, helping improve access to the archaeological sites of Abu Sir and Abu Ghorab, which form part of the necropolis of Memphis.

Finally, with the remaining funds from the previous Agreement, the Programme is also supporting the **strengthening of the private sector** via the HAFIZ platform (see project box).

Over the last 25 years, the Debt Swap Programme has established itself as one of the main pillars of the Italian-Egyptian partnership: since 2001, through three successive agreements, it has enabled the conversion of approximately \$350 million of debt into resources for the implementation of over 110 initiatives

Meanwhile, in light of the interest expressed by the Egyptian Government in launching a new phase, **Italy has confirmed Egypt as one of the beneficiary countries of the new "Debt Relief for Africa" initiative**, announced at the Rome Summit on the **Global Gateway and the Mattei Plan** on 20 June 2025.

As part of this initiative, the Egyptian component, currently under negotiation, **will have an allocation of €7.31 million euros**, corresponding to 50% of the instalments due between 2026 and 2035.

THE ITALIAN DEBT SWAP AS AN INTERNATIONAL BEST PRACTICE

The Compromiso de Sevilla, adopted at the **Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development** in July 2025, has brought sovereign debt management back to the forefront of international debate, recognising **debt-swap instruments** as significant levers for reforming the global financial architecture. During the proceedings, **Rania Al-Mashat**, then Egypt's Minister of Planning, Economic Development and International Cooperation and now Executive Secretary of ESCWA, proposed the creation of **a global platform for sharing knowledge on the debt swap**, offering Egypt's experience as a model for countries facing the same challenges.

This position – which subsequently received formal recognition through Egypt's appointment to the presidency of the Borrowers' Platform, launched in Washington in April 2026 – has its roots in **the wealth of experience** gained through the management of the debt swap mechanism, starting precisely with the **partnership with Italy**.

As well as acknowledging Italy's contribution in introducing Egypt to the management of this instrument – enabling it to acquire **the capabilities and credibility needed to replicate it with other creditors**, including Germany and China, for even larger sums – Al-Mashat has reiterated on several occasions that it is the Italian-Egyptian model itself that is regarded as **a best practice, as it is characterised by equal governance** and is now proposed by Egypt as a benchmark.

First and foremost, the programme promotes genuine national ownership: the funds are managed through a joint Management Committee and the programme is aligned with national priorities, utilising Egyptian systems, institutions and procedures for its implementation. A model that overturns the traditional donor-beneficiary paradigm, **placing Egypt at the centre of its development efforts**. The programme also serves as indirect budgetary support: the funds generated by the swap are, in fact, channelled into the public budget, thereby freeing up expenditure margins that can be redirected elsewhere. Added to this is the systematic integration of **a technical assistance and capacity-building component**, which has, over time, built up lasting institutional capacity. Another key strength is the Programme's ability to act as a catalyst, testing pilot initiatives and innovative approaches that are subsequently scaled up and replicated nationwide with the support of other donors.

Over time, this reputation has helped strengthen **the credibility of the Italian Development Cooperation**, with tangible benefits for the Italian System: it has facilitated the AICS Office's access to European Union funds under delegated management, particularly in the sectors of food security and technical and vocational education, and it has created privileged channels for **the transfer of Italian technology and know-how**, thereby promoting the excellence of the national production and academic sectors in a strategic target market.

A DIGITAL PLATFORM FOR INTERNATIONALISATION

Egypt has over 3 million small and medium-sized enterprises, which account for 98% of the business sector and contribute over 40% to the GDP. Nevertheless, **Egyptian businesses face structural barriers to accessing international financing instruments and global markets.** The HAFIZ (Hub for Advisory, Finance & Investment for Enterprises) initiative addresses this issue through a digital platform, managed by the Private Sector Engagement Unit of the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, which brings together at a single access point (www.privatesector.moic.gov.eg) funding opportunities, advisory services and training resources available as part of the development initiatives. The **HAFIZ platform** forms an integral part of the national strategy for entrepreneurial development: the Egypt Startup Charter, presented by Prime Minister Madbouly in February 2026, identifies access to international finance instruments and the strengthening of SME capabilities as the key drivers of economic growth.

Specifically, the project supports the platform through four areas of action:

- the **technical upgrade**, involving optimisation measures, new features and the development of an automated system for monitoring business engagement;

- a **promotional campaign** as part of the key events in the Egyptian business ecosystem;
- a **national Roadshow** featuring thematic workshops held in various governorates, organised with the support of chambers of commerce, federations and business associations;
- a **structured training offer**, featuring a capacity-building manual and online courses accessible directly via the platform.

As part of the Italian Development Cooperation's overall programme in Egypt, the project also aligns with the shared priority of **strengthening the country's competitiveness and economic stability**: the growth of the private sector is a key driver of sustainable development and an important factor in reducing migratory pressure.

Enhancing Private Sector Engagement in Sustainable Development: Expanding Access to and Use of the HAFIZ Platform (IEDS-III-28)

Channel: *The Debt Swap*

Duration: *18 months*

Implementing entity: *Ministry of Foreign Affairs, International Cooperation and Expatriates*

Funding: *£12,174,065 (\$1,045,863 in cancelled debt)*

Geographical area covered: *National*

Beneficiaries: *SMEs in the Egyptian private sector; the innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystem*

Start and end dates: *December 2024 to June 2026*



DELEGATED COOPERATION

With a portfolio of European Union funding amounting to approximately €90 million, the Italian Development Cooperation in Egypt confirms its role as one of the leading actors in delegated cooperation, contributing to the implementation of the priorities agreed with the Egyptian Government. These initiatives promote sustainable socio-economic development by **strengthening human capital, ensuring food security, fostering rural development and creating decent work**, with a special focus on young people, women and vulnerable groups, in line with the **Team Europe approach**.

In the rural sector, the **EU-ZIRA3A programme (€24 million)** supports communities in Upper Egypt through an integrated approach, combining institutional strengthening with operational development, including interventions in the irrigation sector and the launching of numerous tender procedures.

In parallel, **EU-KAFI (€40 million)** constitutes a **key pillar for food security**, supporting the entire cereal value chain: from varietal research and the production of certified seeds to the improvement of storage and monitoring systems, thereby contributing to the resilience of the agri-food system, also in response to recent global crises.

These initiatives promote sustainable socio-economic development by strengthening human capital, ensuring food security, fostering rural development and creating decent work, with a special focus on young people, women and vulnerable groups, in line with the Team Europe approach



At regional level, the **DeSIRA/WATDEV programme (€7.5 million)**, which is being implemented in Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya and Sudan, will come to a close in June 2026. The initiative has strengthened the link between **research, policy and practice**, promoting innovative solutions for the sustainable management of water resources and capacity-building for local stakeholders.

In the field of youth employability, AICS has consistently supported the strengthening of Egypt's Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) system. Within this framework, **MEPEP (€6 million)**, completed in 2025, contributed to improving the quality of technical and vocational education in Cairo's districts most affected by migration, strengthening its alignment with labour market needs and enhancing young people's employability.

Building on these achievements, **DEMO (€2 million)**, funded under the **THAMM Plus Programme**, promotes decent work opportunities for Egyptian youth by strengthening market-relevant technical and vocational skills and supporting employment pathways both in Egypt and in Italy. In line with the **EU-Egypt Talent Partnership**, the project supports the modernization of TVET curricula, strengthens the institutional capacities of Egypt's Ministry of Labour, and establishes an Employment Centre in Cairo equipped with a digital platform to match labour supply with market demand. The initiative also fosters stronger linkages with Egyptian and Italian employers, contributing to the creation of opportunities for domestic employment, regular and skilled labour migration.

Along the same lines, **TEJPA (€9 million)**, financed under **EU4Youth Phase I (EU4YES I)** through a €6 million contribution from the European Union and €3 million in parallel financing from the private sector, supports Applied Technology Schools, promotes the development of competency-based curricula in the Hospitality and Energy sectors, and strengthens the linkages between technical education and the labour market.

DESITA (€1.5 million), funded under the **TAMKEEN Programme**, further complements this portfolio by extending the *Applied Technology Schools* model to the Fashion and Design sector through the establishment of a specialized institute. The project develops competency-based curricula with the support of Italian academic institutions and private sector partners, promotes the transfer of know-how between Italy and Egypt, and advances the socio-economic empowerment of women through business incubation services, mentoring, and support for women-led entrepreneurship.

At the same time, new negotiations are underway to further expand the portfolio in the areas of **technical education, labour mobility, and social inclusion**, including initiatives specifically addressing the inclusion of persons with disabilities.

Overall, the portfolio is characterized by an integrated and multi-level approach that combines education, skills development, employment, labour mobility, and social inclusion, further strengthening the role of the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation as **a strategic partner of the European Union in Egypt**.



PRACTICES FOR SUSTAINABLE WATER MANAGEMENT

The WATDEV project demonstrates how collaboration between the research sector, institutions and local communities can generate practical solutions to tackle water scarcity and improve food security in East Africa.

Samar Gomaa, PhD candidate (HU, Egypt) - Beneficiary

“My background is in hydraulic engineering and my research focuses on water management and food production. Studying abroad was a valuable experience because I worked in an international and interdisciplinary environment. In Egypt, the main problem is water scarcity: resources are limited and alternatives, such as deep groundwater or desalination, are expensive. I believe that research should go beyond scientific publications, involving farmers and stakeholders to find shared solutions that are useful in the field.”



Laura Mikali, Extension Officer (Kenya) - Stakeholder/Decision maker

“The Tana River County is an arid and semi-arid area, where the population relies primarily on agriculture and livestock farming. Farmers use river water for irrigation, often without any metering systems, and they still use diesel pumps and inefficient methods. WATDEV is a good starting point because it focuses on training, raising awareness and the building of local capacity, while introducing practices such as agroforestry and improved water management.”

Ernest, Farmer and member of the Water Users Association (Kenya)

“Among the Best Management Practices promoted by WATDEV, agroforestry reduces conflicts between farmers and livestock keepers: during droughts, livestock can damage rice and maize crops, whereas in agroforestry systems they find water and grass without destroying the crops. Water Users Associations are also vital: they distribute water from the River Tana via canals, ensuring that everyone receives the same amount of water for agricultural production.”

FOOD SECURITY: THE ROLE OF THE EU-KAFI PROGRAMME

The **EU-KAFI programme (EU Support to Improve Cereal Crop Production in Egypt)** is a **five-year initiative funded by the European Union and implemented by AICS**, in cooperation with CREA and the main Egyptian institutions in the agricultural sector and responsible for the management of cereal stocks.

The aim of the programme is **to strengthen Egypt's food security** by increasing the production of sustainable, climate-resilient wheat. The main activities include supporting the genetic improvement of wheat, strengthening the certified seed system, promoting Good Agricultural Practices (GAP), the modernisation of agricultural mechanisation, and the reduction of post-harvest losses by upgrading storage infrastructure and digital cereal-traceability systems.

The programme operates primarily **in the main cereal-producing governorates of the Nile Delta**, combining infrastructure investment and technical assistance. The measures include the modernisation of research and quality control laboratories, the construction of seed processing facilities, the supply of modern agricultural machinery, the construction of new silos and the development of ICT systems for stock monitoring.

During 2025, the programme made significant progress. It took part in the AgriTech Egypt international forum, promoting dialogue on innovation and sustainable agriculture, while a visit by the

European Union Delegation to Egypt highlighted the programme's contribution to the roll-out of **agricultural mechanisation services for small and medium-scale farmers**.

Among the most significant achievements was the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between ARC and AICS, which strengthened institutional cooperation and defined the agricultural machinery, research and quality control laboratories, and seed processing facilities to be established, initiating the respective procurement activities. Additionally, **a study visit to Italy organised by CREA** took place, dedicated to the **exchange of experiences on cereal production, research, mechanisation and agricultural extension**.

Training on Good Agricultural Practices also played a key role. CREA and ARC developed technical protocols tailored to Egypt's agro-ecological conditions and launched a multi-year Training of Trainers programme designed to train 200 technicians. In November 2025, the first 50 trainers were trained, and they **passed on sustainable farming practices to over 5,000 farmers in the initial phase**, with the aim of gradually expanding the adoption of GAP **to around 400,000 farmers across the country**, thereby contributing to the resilience, productivity and sustainability of Egypt's cereal sector.

Finally, **a gender analysis** of the wheat value chain in Egypt was carried out, leading to the formulation of specific recommendations.

EU KAFI – (EU كافي (Kafi) – EU Support to Improve Cereal Crop Production in Egypt)

Channel: European Commission – Delegation of the European Union to Egypt

Financial instrument: NDICI-GEO-NEAR/2023/442-279

Duration: 60 months

Implementing entities: Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS) – Cairo Office, Agricultural Research Centre (ARC), Egyptian Holding Company for Silos and Storage (EHCSS), Central Administration for Seed Certification (CASC), Council for Agricultural Research and Economics (CREA)

Partners: Ministry of Agriculture and Land Reclamation (MoALR), Ministry of Supply and Internal Trade (MoSIT)

Stakeholders: Ministry of International Cooperation (MoIC), Delegation of the European Union to Egypt,

Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS), project beneficiary governorates in Egypt, Ministry of Agriculture and Land Reclamation (MoALR), Ministry of Supply and Internal Trade (MoSIT), Private sector companies, national and international organisations

Total funding: €40 M

Geographical area of operation in Egypt in the following governorates: Sharqia, Gharbia, Beheira, Monufia, Dakahlia, Kafr El Sheikh, Damietta, Beni Suef, Sohag

Direct beneficiaries: Staff of partner institutions and implementing entities, communities of small and medium-scale farmers, rural women and family organisations

Indirect: The Egyptian population, which will benefit from the increased availability of wheat in the country.

Project start date: 1 February 2024



ERITREA



Since November 2025, the AICS Cairo Office has been responsible for **Eritrea**.

Although the country is situated in a strategic location along one of the major trade routes crossing the Red Sea, it is characterised by significant **structural vulnerabilities**. In fact, following the crisis with Ethiopia from 1998 to 2000, Eritrea experienced a prolonged stalemate described as “neither war nor peace” and had to face international sanctions for a decade.

The normalisation of relations with Ethiopia in 2018 and the lifting of the sanctions have allowed gradual development. However, Eritrea remains a **country vulnerable to economic and climate shocks and to regional instability**: its relations, not only with Ethiopia but also with Sudan, Somalia, Djibouti and Yemen, are regarded as key external factors affecting the country’s socio-economic prospects.

Eritrea is characterised as a high-risk crisis context, according to the European Union, requiring urgent humanitarian assistance and, at the same time, development interventions, in line with the **Triple Nexus approach** (humanitarian action,

development and peace). The Eritrean government’s long-standing isolation from the international community means that information and data on the country’s humanitarian needs are extremely scarce and difficult to verify. The level of coordination amongst humanitarian agencies and of strategic assessment of the country’s needs is still minimal, as confirmed by the absence of a humanitarian response plan agreed upon by the United Nations agencies. According to the latest figures, **1.1 million people** – out of a total population of **3.7 million** – are in need of humanitarian assistance, including 745,600 children.

At present, the country remains extremely poor, with a **Human Development Index (HDI)** of 0.503, placing it **178th** out of 193 countries, below the average for sub-Saharan African countries (UNDP data for 2023), with multiple factors contributing to this situation.

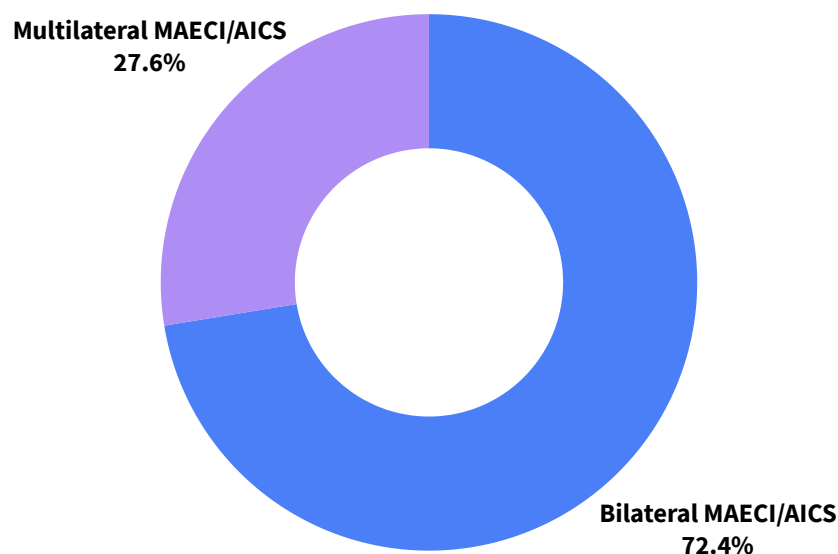
Humanitarian and emergency aid, rural development and food security, healthcare, and the promotion of cultural heritage: **these are the areas of focus for the Italian Development Cooperation** in the country.

IDENTITY CARD

Responsible office: Cairo

Project offices: Asmara

Head of Office: Tiberio Chiari

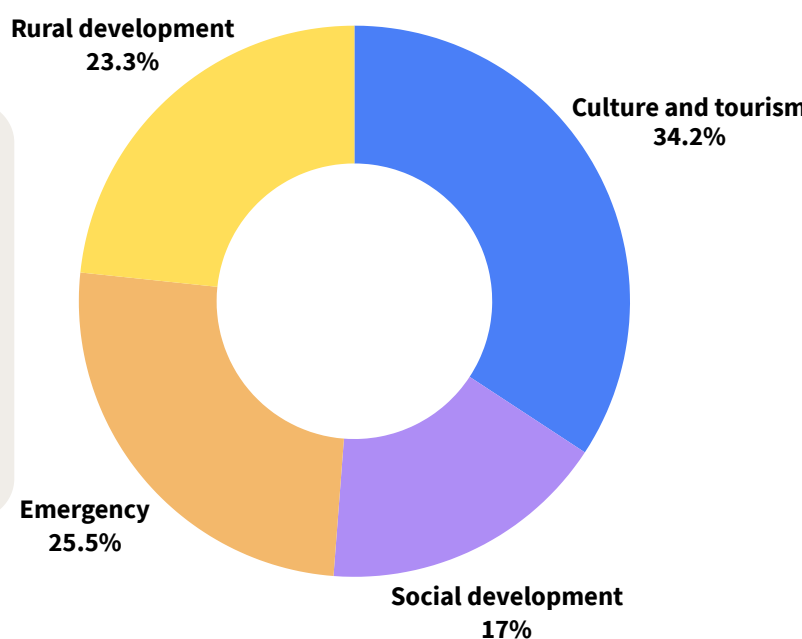


Funding channel and number of projects in 2025

- **Bilateral from MAECI/AICS: €17.57 M
7 projects**
- **Multilateral MAECI/AICS: € 6.5 M
2 projects**

Value of areas of intervention in 2025

- **Rural development: € 5.5 M**
- **Culture and tourism: € 8.07 M**
- **Social development: € 4 M**
- **Emergency: € 6 M**



GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS

- **AICS - Agenzia Italiana per la Cooperazione allo Sviluppo**
- **AMR - Antimicrobial Resistance**
- **ATS - Scuole di Tecnologia Applicata**
- **CASC - Central Administration for Seed Testing and Certification**
- **CIHEAM Bari - Centre International de Hautes Études Agronomiques Méditerranéennes**
- **CREA - Consiglio per la ricerca in agricoltura e l'analisi dell'economia agraria**
- **CSO - Civil Society Organization**
- **DPG - Development Partner Group**
- **EHCSS - Egyptian Holding Company for Silos & Storage**
- **EIECP - Egyptian-Italian Environmental Cooperation Programme**
- **ERC - Egyptian Red Crescent**
- **ETS - Ente del Terzo Settore**
- **FAO - Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations**
- **GBV - Gender-Based Violence**
- **HAFIZ - Hub for Advisory, Finance & Investment for Enterprises**
- **HDI - Human Development Index**
- **ILO - International Labour Organization**
- **IOM - International Organization for Migration**
- **LE - Lire Egiziane**
- **MAECI - Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale**
- **M.A.I.S. - Movimento per l'Autosviluppo, l'Interscambio e la Solidarietà**
- **MoALR - Ministry of Agriculture and Land Reclamation**
- **MoIC - Ministry of Planning, Economic Development and International Cooperation**
- **MoHP - Ministry of Health and Population**
- **MoSIT - Ministry of Supply and Internal Trade**
- **MoSS - Ministry of Social Solidarity**
- **MoYS - Ministry of Youth and Sports**
- **MPMI - Micro, piccole e medie imprese**
- **NCW - National Council for Women**
- **NEET - Not [engaged] in Education, Employment or Training**
- **PMI - Piccole e medie imprese**
- **SCI - Save The Children International**
- **UNFPA - United Nations Population Fund**
- **UNICEF - United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund**
- **UNIDO - United Nations Industrial Development Organization**
- **UNISS - Università degli Studi di Sassari**



10 AGENZIA ITALIANA
PER LA COOPERAZIONE
ALLO SVILUPPO

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