



Perilous Journeys: Migration between the Horn of Africa and Yemen

This policy brief highlights some of the key policy implications from the findings of a recent study on movement between the Horn of Africa and Yemen undertaken by the Research and Evidence Facility of the EU Trust Fund for Africa. This study set out to explore how and why people continue to move in large numbers between the Horn of Africa to Yemen despite the dangers of the journey and the deteriorating security situation in Yemen. The research was conducted across three countries with field work in Puntland (Bossaso, Qardo and Garowe), Djibouti (Djibouti town and Obock) and Yemen (Sana'a, Aden, and Al Hodeidah) between January and June 2017. Through interviews with migrants, government officials, aid agencies, civil society and individuals involved in smuggling and trafficking, it examined the factors driving people's movement, their experiences of the journey,

Migrants detained in Ceelayo, Puntland
(Source: PMPF)

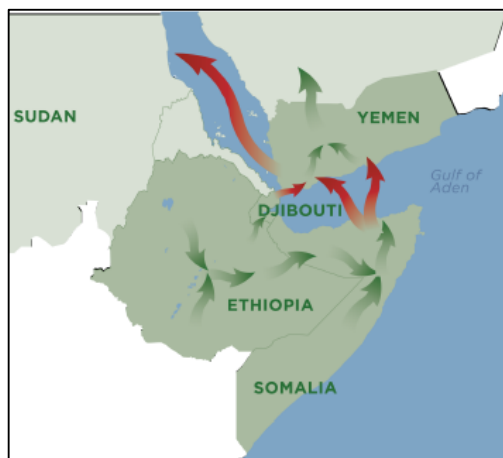


the wide range of agents involved in facilitating irregular migration and the impacts of migration on the wider community in each setting. This policy brief presents findings from the analysis of movements from the Horn of Africa to Yemen. It is important to note that the research also explored movements in the reverse direction, from Yemen to the Horn.

The key findings of the research:

1. Over the last year **there has been a reduction in the number of migrants** from the Horn crossing the Arabian and Red Sea towards Yemen. In particular, there has been a fall in the number of Ethiopians (the largest national group using these routes) making the journey; **the State of Emergency in Ethiopia does not appear to have resulted in larger flows of people.**
2. Most of those using these routes (and in particular Ethiopians) **aim to reach Saudi Arabia to work.**
3. A small but growing number of **young Somalis are crossing to Yemen as the first part of a new route to Europe** (see map below). They cross the Gulf of Aden or the Djibouti Strait, then move north over land through Yemen, then make another boat journey across the Red Sea to Sudan, and then over land through Egypt or Libya towards the Mediterranean. This new route is more risky than ever, as it involves three dangerous sea crossings (back and forth across the Red Sea and from Libya across the Mediterranean) and many migrants end

Map: Migration routes from the Horn of Africa To/Through Yemen



up in the hands of trafficking groups. There has been little research on the later sections of this route as migrants move on from Yemen.

4. There are a **growing number of women** using the Red Sea route: women make up 20-30% of the migrants. (In addition, many women also travel to Gulf Countries by air, their journeys facilitated by brokers or agents.) Most migrate with the aim of finding employment as domestic workers in the Gulf.
5. On average, **Ethiopian migrants using these routes are poorer and have less education** than the Somalis. As a result, Ethiopians are **more likely to travel on foot** and struggle to cover the basic costs of their journey (such as food, accommodation, or medical care) leaving them **much more exposed to exploitation**.
6. Migration is driven primarily by the **search for better employment and livelihoods** reflecting the chronic poor economic conditions. A few migrants referred to the **drought and potential famine** in the region as a factor prompting their departure. Many Oromo respondents cited **political upheaval** in Ethiopia as a reason to leave, but the **increased restrictions on movement appear** to have reduced the flow of migrants.
7. While the collapse of order in Yemen makes it **much more insecure** for migrants, it also opens up a space where they can **move without formal controls**.
8. Many of those on the move have **previous experience of migration** or have close **connections with previous migrants**. They are aware of the routes, the agents to use and the dangers involved.
9. Migrants distinguish between **'good' and 'bad' smugglers** and share details of them within migrant networks.
10. Somali youths, both male and female, are **leaving in a 'Travel Now, Pay Later' arrangement, without the consent of their parents** and with little or no money, anticipating that their parents will pay fees/ransoms when they are demanded by smugglers or traffickers along the way. **Parents are very unhappy** about their exodus of the youth to Europe.
11. Despite enormous and varied challenges, most migrants **do not regret their decision** to leave their country. They are aware of, but are not dissuaded by, the risks and dangers of migration.
12. There has been an **expansion of smuggling activities** especially over land routes. Where migrants used to first come in contact with smugglers at the ports, as controls on irregular movement have been strengthened, migrants are now more **likely to use smugglers to cross the border** from Ethiopia and move across Somalia.
13. There is widespread evidence that smuggling activities and networks are facilitated by **state collusion**.
14. **Host communities are ambivalent** in their feelings towards migrants. For the most part, their interactions were rather very limited as the migrants are in transit and often under the control of smugglers. Local communities did not associate migrants with insecurity.
15. **Official mechanisms of assistance, protection and support** provided by states, UN agencies and NGOs are **extremely limited** due to a lack of funding, capacity,

political interest, challenges of security and access, and apprehension at the scope and scale of the issue.

Policy Implications

Current interventions to respond to the challenge of irregular migration between the Horn of Africa and Yemen have had limited impact. The full report outlines a wide range of gaps and opportunities for future policy and programming. This policy briefing highlights just five broad areas of policy where analysis of the research findings suggests new approaches that could help to strengthen the policy response and increase their impact. While these have been identified through the research on movements between the Horn of Africa and Yemen, they are also likely to apply to other settings, including other EUTF areas of operation. These are presented here.

1. Support for local communities is critical.

There is no realistic prospect that external interventions will grow sufficiently to provide adequate protection and assistance to meet the needs of all migrants in the region. It seems inevitable that local communities must continue to play a critical role in responding to migrants. It is therefore very important that their ambivalence is not allowed to turn to hostility; instead their willingness to accept migrants needs to be nurtured. Measures to reduce possible points of tensions should include bolstering sanitation and health facilities in areas where migrants are staying; supporting civil society organisations working with migrants and local populations; broader acknowledgement of role of migration and migrants in local economy – rather than focusing exclusively on insecurity, criminality and restricting flow of people.

2. More refined approach to anti-smuggling and trafficking measures. For many in the region, smugglers are seen as providing a vital service in helping people to move. It may not be constructive to tar all smugglers and traffickers

with the same brush. Attempts to crack down on all smuggling are having limited success, not least because many officials are involved in different aspects of the business and some provide a good service in their eyes of their clients. There needs to be more focus on identifying common ground where a broad range of actors agree the activity is wrong and that those involved in gross human rights abuses, kidnappers, extortionists, and so forth should be stopped. Alliances can then be built around tackling those perpetrators as priority.

3. Maximising legal migration. The demand for the right to migrate is likely to expand, even as conditions improve. It is important that people's access to legal migration opportunities are maximised. This may include increasing awareness of existing opportunities – such as those under the bilateral agreements between the Government of Ethiopia and Kuwait, Qatar and Jordan; facilitating access to these schemes by decentralising procedures so potential migrants do not have to apply via the capital city; and improved regulation of employment agencies to ensure the costs are controlled and transparent. It is also important to promote new agreements that open up legal avenues for people of the Horn to move for work, study or on humanitarian grounds in both the Gulf and Europe.

4. Rethinking public information campaigns. Awareness campaigns that seek to deter migrants by warning them of the dangers and risks of irregular migration appear to be largely ineffective; most migrants are already aware of the risks and decide choose to move regardless. Instead, it may be more valuable to focus on other types of awareness campaigns: for migrants, focusing on sources of protection and opportunities for regular migration; for the wider community, eliciting understanding of migrants' situation by explain their reasons for moving, with a view to reducing potential tension.

5. The role of mobility in people's livelihoods and aspirations. Many of the current responses

quite rightly focus on the problem of livelihoods. Much of the irregular migration in the region is undertaken in the context of extremely limited options for local livelihoods. Livelihood programmes will be more effective if they are primarily concerned with increasing people's incomes and making them more resilient to shocks such as droughts. If successful, they may not dampen down migration demand. For some families, migration may be an important way of diversifying incomes, thereby increasing resilience. Moreover, it is not the poorest who migrate. Somali youth who seek to reach Europe are those who think their families can secure large sums to pay for their safe passage. Others are trapped in place by poverty and political repression. Improving livelihoods needs to be seen as strategy to improve the quality of migration rather than prevent it.

Mobility has always been a fundamental part of the lives of people across the region especially for agro-pastoralists. With the transformations of societies, growing connections with the global economy, and growing populations, it is inevitable that it will continue to play an important role in the future. Achieving sustainable development will only be possible if room is made to enable migration and mobility within the framework of national and international policy.

The **Executive Summary** of the report: Migration between the Horn of Africa and Yemen can be found here:

<https://www.soas.ac.uk/ref-hornresearch/research-papers/file122638.pdf>

And the **Main Report** is available at:

<https://www.soas.ac.uk/ref-hornresearch/research-papers/file122639.pdf>

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