

## Assessing the impact of migration management systems on livelihoods and migration: Evidence from Puntland

This brief report outlines the findings of the first case study for a REF research project exploring the actual and potential impact of migration management initiatives on sustainable development. The research was conducted in Puntland where international action on migration has been focused on responses to the growth in irregular movements between the Horn of Africa and Yemen. The site of the research, Bossaso, has been identified as one of the major hubs for movements across the Gulf of Aden to Yemen, involving four different sets of migrants. First, the port attracts significant numbers of Ethiopians, many of whom are seeking eventually to reach Saudi Arabia where they hope to find employment. Second, there are Somali youth, who cross to Yemen as the first stage of an extremely dangerous route to reach Europe. Third, the war in Yemen has resulted in a fluctuating flow of Yemeni refugees arriving in Bossaso. Finally, there are also returning Somali refugees, who were living in Yemen but have been forced back to Somalia by the war. In addition, to these migrants who move between the Horn of Africa and Yemen, Bossaso has received large numbers of IDPs from the south of Somalia, escaping from the chronic insecurity.

The focus of this research was on how this mix of movements is perceived by different government, business and civil society stakeholders in the area and how far these actors are engaged with the array of responses to the challenges of migration. Alongside interviews with those involved in migration programmes, the project also explored the perspectives of key actors, including respondents in government departments, private sector and community representatives, who are not directly involved in

migration issues. This has made it possible to get a much more nuanced sense of the broader institutional support for different responses to migration in general and to migration management in particular. With this in mind, the research explored the following core questions:

- How do ideas and practices about migration management take shape, align across different actors and take long-term hold within them?
- What are the actual and perceived impacts of migration management activities on the lives of individual migrants and others, in particular with respect to people's rights and their willingness to engage in high-risk irregular migration?
- What are the actual and perceived impacts of migration management on key development dynamics and enablers?

Interviews were conducted in Bossaso and Garowe with 50 respondents, 25 working in areas not directly related to migration (*non-migration key informants*), 10 community key informants and 15 whose work directly related to migration (*migration key informants*).

The interviews were conducted between August and September 2017 and they were then transcribed for analysis. This brief report presents some preliminary findings that are emerging from the data.

### Emerging findings

#### *A mixed view of migration*

Attitudes to migration were very different depending on the type of migration under

consideration. When it came to irregular immigration, in particular the arrival of Ethiopians, many respondents did not see this as major concern. Instead, nearly all cited the economic benefits brought by the arrival of both Ethiopian and Yemenis in Bossaso.

The former are largely uneducated and from poor rural backgrounds in Ethiopia. While they may have limited formal education, it is inappropriate to describe them as unskilled as many respondents referred to their skills in farming. They are credited with introducing new farming techniques and boosting agricultural production in the area. The other areas of economic activity for Ethiopian migrants are the construction industry and services including restaurants and hair dressing. Respondents claim that the Ethiopians are taking jobs that are not popular with local Somalis, so they are not harming the local labour market. Instead, they are helping to reduce the cost of production – reducing prices in shops for local consumers. However, it is important to remember that this positive view comes from our respondents who were working for different institutions ranging from government to civil society organisations and private businesses; this may not be representative of the wider population. Indeed, previous REF research suggested that among poor Somalis in Bossaso<sup>1</sup> there is some resentment about Ethiopian migrants competing for jobs and pushing down wages.

Yemenis in Puntland tend to have higher levels education and are more likely to be taking up professional roles or starting up their own businesses. The arrival of Yemeni refugees has provided a boost to services, with their involvement in engineering, construction and establishing restaurants. Yemeni food has become very popular.

While many respondents acknowledged that the overall impact of these migrants is relatively small as the population is not very large, they are still making a distinctive contribution to the local economy and their absence would be felt.

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<sup>1</sup> See 'Migration Between the Horn of Africa and Yemen: A Study of Puntland, Djibouti and Yemen'

The only major concerns about the arrivals of the migrants raised by respondents were related to health and sanitation and the transgression of cultural norms among Ethiopians. There is some concern that irregular migrants arrive without any health screening and are living in insanitary and overcrowded conditions in Bossaso. Moreover, some are associated with culturally unacceptable behaviour, including drinking alcohol and prostitution. This has caused some tension in the areas of town where the Ethiopians stay. In contrast, the Yemenis are seen as fitting in very well and nobody raised any concerns about their presence.

It is also important to note that the only respondents who suggested the presence of these migrants was a threat to security were those who were involved in programmes to address smuggling and trafficking. They were concerned that irregular migration was creating a market for the services of smugglers and encouraging their operation.



*Ceelayo, Puntland*

It was striking that these negative perspectives on these migration flows were much more prevalent among migration key informants. Those not engaged in migration activities were more likely to refer only to the benefits of the settlement of migrants in Puntland.

When it came to the emigration of Somali youth, crossing to Yemen in the hope of reaching Europe, there was much greater consensus about its negative impacts. For most respondents, this is the most important issue about migration that far outweighs the other movements. Some had direct

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

experience of seeing their staff or colleagues suddenly disappear as they started on their journey. First, respondents lamented the way that young Somalis were using such dangerous route: they were both putting their lives at risk and parents were being forced to bail them out, resulting in severe financial hardship for some households. Second, they felt this was taking away the future of development for the area as the best educated and most aspirational are seeking to leave Puntland.



*Police checkpoint, Boosaaso, Puntland*

It was striking that the situation of the Somalis youth much was raised as a much more pressing issue by those not involved in migration programming. Some of the informants who were working on migration programming (migration key informants) made little reference to the Somali youth migration apart from acknowledging that they were moving; for these respondents, their primary interest was in the situation of refugees and IDPs, or Ethiopian irregular migrants, which are the main areas of programming.

## Ideas of migration management

These different views on the various migration flows are reflected in the attitudes to action on migration. Most respondents, including those who had no involvement in migration issues, were familiar with the humanitarian action taken to support Yemeni refugees and Somali refugees returning from Yemeni and were aware that UNHCR and IOM were involved in these programmes. Only one non-migration key informant made any reference to the Migrant Response Centres and many commented that there was no action being taken in response to the arrival of Ethiopians. Given that these respondents do not see their arrival as a major

priority, the lack of action was not a great concern for them.

When it came to discussion of migration management, many expressed an interest in ensuring that migrants could be registered and given legal status which would allow them to work. They recognised that many of the Ethiopians (in particular) were looking to stay only a short time, but they wanted their position to be regularised. A number of respondents emphasised that they were not concerned with stopping this flow of migrants. They saw it as beneficial. Moreover, they recognised that attempts to stop the movement was likely to be futile and would only lead to expanding the role of smugglers and forcing people into more dangerous routes. Their interest was also economic: to register people and enable them to be integrated into the local labour market. In short, this irregular migration was not something to be resisted so much as made legal.

As might be expected given the views of different migrations outlined above, there was much more interest in preventing the emigration of Somali youth via Yemen. Here, the ideas about migration management were around tackling smuggling and trafficking – although few seemed to think much could be successfully done about it as long as young people wanted to leave. With this in mind, many referred to the need to invest in development initiatives that would increase employment opportunities and create an environment in which young people could flourish at home. Many also referred to information campaigns to make people aware of the dangers of the irregular journey to Europe. However, few seemed to think this was achieving much. One community activist did refer to a local initiative to disseminate information about the dangers and claimed this had persuaded many youths to stay and focus on making their living in the region.

The term ‘migration management’ appeared to mean little for most respondents. Even among those involved in migration programmes (migration key informants), only two said that they used the term in their work.

Some non-migration key informants expressed an

interest being involved in consultations about responses to migration as they see it as an issue which directly affects their work, whether it causes the loss of staff as young people Somalis leave Puntland or ensuring that they can know about the skills of immigrants with a view to hiring them.

## Impacts of migration interventions

Given the limited knowledge of the various interventions relating to migration in Bossaso, it is hardly surprising that most respondents knew even less about their impact. Most assumed that programmes to deliver humanitarian aid or welfare assistance improved the situation for the target populations: Yemeni refugees and returning Somali refugees. As noted above, there was little optimism about the impact of awareness raising campaigns to warn people about the dangers of the journey for irregular migrants.

In other areas, such as registration, border control, tackling smuggling and trafficking, integrating migrants into the local community, or dissuading Somalis from crossing to Yemen, there was a widespread acknowledgement of the lack of resources, making it impossible to take effective action. Some respondents also noted the lack of co-ordination between the government and international organizations.



*MRC in Bossaso, Puntland*

Few people not involved in migration response identified any impact of migration management initiatives on the situation of migrants or the conditions in which people move. This was not surprising given that among these respondents there was very little awareness of any government, NGO or other programmes to intervene on migration issues. Perhaps what was

more surprising was that those involved in such programmes did not anticipate their having any impact on the wider economy.

This seems to point to an important disconnect between the non-migration respondents who are quite positive about the impact of migration in the area, and the migration focused respondents who do not appear to recognize that impact. It seems that migration is seen as a realm of activity to be concerned about and managed that sits apart from the wider society. This runs both ways. Those involved in migration action do not see their work having wider consequences.

Likewise, those working in other sectors see very little significance in the migration work that is continuing. If anything, for the non-migration key informants, if migration management starts to have its intended impact and reduces the flow of irregular migrants it will have a negative impact on the local economy. The migration key informants seem to have very little awareness of this. Or, if they have, perhaps they have so little expectation of actually making a substantive change to the flows of migrants that it is nothing to worry about. In this case, it suggests the programme staff are presenting a formal picture of intended impacts and progress made with little conviction that it will be delivered.

## Conclusion

These preliminary results cast some light on the diverse perspectives of different actors on migration, the actual and potential responses to it, and the impact of these responses. They suggest there is no uniform understanding of the significance of migration nor the priorities for policy. It shows that in the context of Bossaso there are many institutional actors who have little buy-in to the current migration management programmes. Those engaged in migration programming appear to operate somewhat apart from other areas of government, business and society that are affected by migration but not invested in these responses. The absence of this buy-in calls into question how far these interventions to address the challenges of migration can achieve a sustainable impact beyond their implementation phase. These findings may be indicative of a broader challenge



that is replicated in other settings. However, this requires further case studies that explore the extent to which these gaps between migration actors and non-migration actors exist in different contexts.

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For full paper, see 'Migration Between the Horn of Africa and Yemen: A Study of Puntland, Djibouti and Yemen' <https://www.soas.ac.uk/ref-hornresearch/research-papers/file122639.pdf>

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