

## Djibouti Country Profile

*Updated July 2016*



### Key mixed migration characteristics

- Djibouti is a major transit country for migrants in mixed migration flows from Horn of Africa to Yemen and Gulf States.
- Between 2008 and June 2016, more than 365,000 migrants and asylum seekers arrived in Yemen via the Red Sea departing from coastal areas around Obock, Djibouti. More than 80% were Ethiopians, in addition to mainly Somalis and a small number of Eritreans.
- From 2014, there has been a gradual shift in migration patterns from Horn of Africa to Yemen with more migrants and asylum seekers arriving in Yemen via the Arabian Sea from Bossaso, Puntland (up to 80% of total Yemen arrivals), instead of via Djibouti, which used to be the preferred departure point.
- Djibouti is also an important destination country for asylum seekers and refugees fleeing insecurity, endemic poverty and persecution from Somalia, Ethiopia, Yemen and Eritrea. As of March 2016, there were a total of 22,997 registered refugees and asylum seekers in Djibouti.
- Following the outbreak of conflict in Yemen in March 2015, an estimated 35,862 persons arrived in Djibouti from Yemen as of 16 July 2016. Djibouti is the primary destination for Yemeni nationals who accounted for 56% of total arrivals.
- According to US Department of State's 2016 Trafficking in Persons report, Djibouti is a source, transit and destination country for men, women and children subjected to forced labour and sex trafficking.

### As a mixed migration origin country

Djibouti is only to a limited extent a country of origin for people in mixed migration with very few Djiboutian nationals recorded leaving their country. The country has a total population of nearly 900,000 persons with net migration of 6.06 migrants/1,000 population (2015)<sup>1</sup> meaning that there are more people entering the country than leaving, even though the economic conditions in Djibouti are difficult with a poverty rate of about 40% and

unemployment estimated at 60% of the population<sup>2</sup>. Available data from World Bank indicate that there were an estimated 14,888 Djiboutians<sup>3</sup> living outside their country in 2013 with most of them in France (44%), Ethiopia (26%) and smaller numbers in countries such as Algeria, Egypt and Canada. Data from UNHCR on Central Mediterranean Sea crossings to Europe does not indicate any Djiboutian nationals have joined those migration flows in 2014, 2015 and 2016.

### **As a mixed migration destination country**

Migrants entering Djibouti are mainly escaping persecution, insecurity and endemic poverty and originate from Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea and Yemen. Djibouti offers most asylum seekers from Somalia (South and Central Somalia) and Yemen (following conflict) *prima facie* refugee status while those from Eritrea, Ethiopia and other countries undergo individual Refugee Status Determination (RSD) by UNHCR and its Government counterpart, ONARS (*Office National pour l'Assistance aux Réfugiés et Sinistrés*). According to UNHCR, there were a total of 22,997 registered refugees and asylum seekers from Somalia, Yemen, Ethiopia and Eritrea as of 31 March 2016 with 58% residing in Ali-Addeh (11,093) and Holl Holl (2,297) refugee camps located in southern Djibouti, near the border with Somalia and the rest residing in urban areas in Obock town and Djibouti City. (See figures in the section on Refugees, Asylum-seekers and IDPs below).

Following the outbreak of conflict in Yemen in March 2015, a total of 35,862 persons had arrived in Djibouti from Yemen as of 16 July 2016.<sup>4</sup> Djibouti is the primary destination for Yemeni nationals who accounted for 56% (or 19,936) of the arrivals. Arrivals from other nationalities accounted for 38% (or 13,665), while Djiboutian returnees and Somalis accounted for 6% (or 1,964) and less than 1% (or 297) respectively.

RMMS' analysis of the bi-directional movement between Horn of Africa and Yemen – which started following the outbreak of conflict in Yemen in March 2015 - <sup>5</sup> reveals that Yemeni nationals fled to Djibouti for a number of reasons. Firstly, the Yemenis are allowed visa free entry into Djibouti for the first 30 days after which they are required to renew, apply for refugee status or leave the country. Secondly, many Yemenis, especially those from Aden, Taiz or Bab el Mandeb were able to easily cross the Red Sea to Djibouti because it was the nearest country. Furthermore the two countries have close historical ties and there is a significant Yemeni community in Djibouti. Thirdly, there was a feeling that other Arab countries such as Oman, closed their doors to Yemeni refugees, unlike the hospitality offered to them by Djibouti.

The majority of Yemeni refugees in Djibouti do not register as refugees even after expiry of their visa and while the government urges refugees to reside in refugee camps (Markazi camp near Obock in the case of Yemeni refugees) to receive government assistance, the RMMS study noted that most of non-registered Yemeni refugees preferred to live in Djibouti City, citing harsh conditions and limited livelihood opportunities in the refugee camp.

Despite the on-going conflict in Yemen, UNHCR notes that some Yemeni refugees are returning home. As of 31 May 2016, about 899 Yemeni nationals residing in Obock town and Markazi camp had spontaneously returned to Yemen.



Refugees from Yemen arriving in the Obock port of Djibouti (Photo credit: UNHCR Djibouti)

### **As a mixed migration transit country**

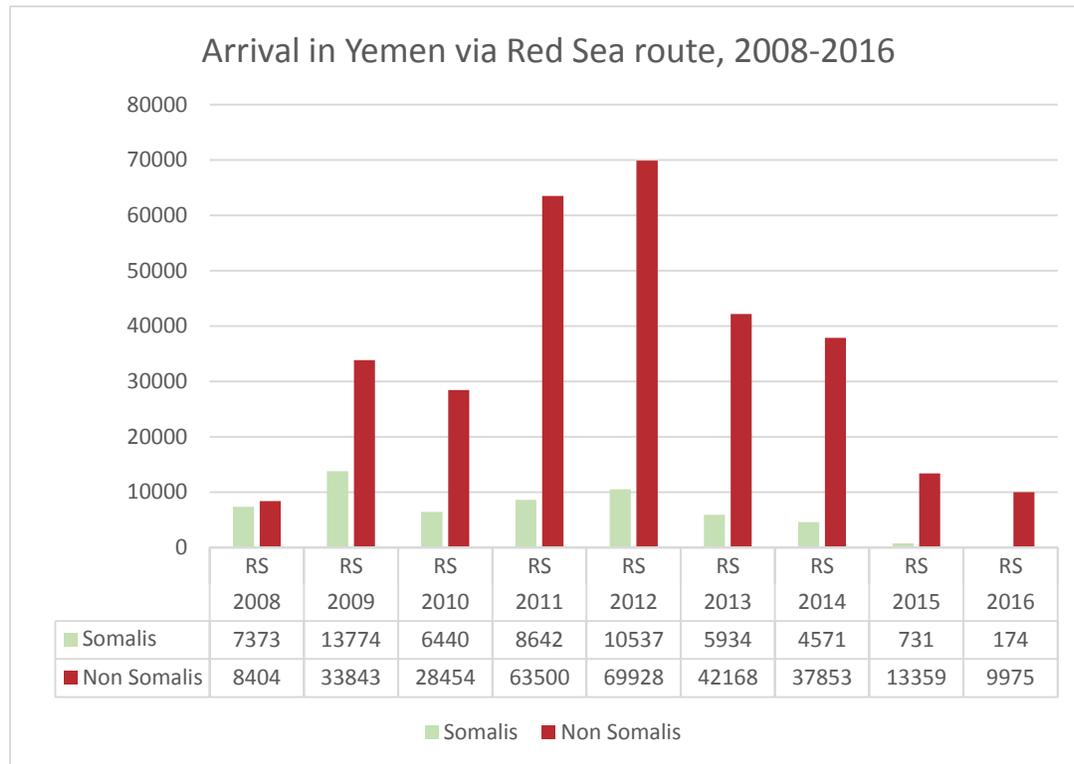
Djibouti serves as a vital transit country for people in mixed migration flows out of the Horn of Africa to Yemen and the Gulf States. The majority of migrants using this route are Ethiopians, followed to a lesser extent by Somalis. Historically, the coastal area around Obock town has been the main departure point for migrants crossing the Red Sea to Yemen. The on-going conflict in Yemen which escalated in March 2015, has not deterred the record numbers of migrants arriving and transiting through Obock for various reasons. Some migrants report being aware of the conflict in Yemen but considering their economic situation at home, they are willing to take the risk to get a job in Saudi Arabia.<sup>6</sup> Others think the conflict will enable them to clandestinely transit through Yemen without being detected by authorities. However there are migrants who learn about the conflict only when reaching Obock, while others report being deceived by smugglers that the conflict in Yemen had ended.<sup>7</sup>

For migrants and asylum seekers going to Yemen, smugglers may provide transport all the way from Ethiopia to the Djibouti coastal points of departure and the smuggling fee could even include sea crossing into Yemen. Migrants who cannot afford smuggling fees walk large stretches of the journey into and/or through Djibouti and these are the most vulnerable and reportedly face numerous hardships including lack of food and water, extortion, severe abuses or detention during the journey.

Migrants and asylum seekers arriving (mainly Somalis) at the Loyada border (with Somaliland) are screened by UNHCR and the government refugee agency (ONARS) and transported to the Ali Adeh or Holl Holl refugee camps.

According to UNHCR, some Somali refugees leave the camps to find jobs in Djibouti City, while others use locally based smugglers to facilitate their travel through the country to Obock and onwards to Yemen.

Monitoring missions established by UNHCR and partners along the Yemen strait have recorded more than 365,000 migrants and asylum seekers arriving into Yemen via the Red Sea crossing from Obock, Djibouti between 2008 and June 2016. Of these, 84% are non-Somalis (mostly Ethiopians).



While the majority of migrants and asylum seekers have consistently used the Red Sea route, accounting for 69% of all arrivals to Yemen between 2009 and 2013, from 2014 however, there was a noted shift in migration patterns of migrants heading to Yemen from Horn of Africa. Figures began to show an increased preference by migrants and refugees to travel from Bossaso in Puntland via the Arabian Sea. By the end of 2014 this had resulted in an inversion of the routes' popularity, with Arabian Sea arrivals accounting for 54 percent of movements. In 2015, this was firmly entrenched at 85 percent. Statistics in the first six months of 2016 confirm the trend, with movements along the Arabian Sea totaling 80 percent. The main reason for this shift is related to protection risks faced by migrants and asylum seekers which are more pronounced on the Red Sea route. Ethiopian migrants in particular face abduction upon arrival in Yemen since they are perceived to be able to more readily pay ransoms than their Somali counterparts.<sup>8</sup> These cases of abduction are more pronounced along the Red Sea route, with no cases of abduction ever recorded on the Arabian Sea route.

Nonetheless, migrants and asylum seekers continue to use the Red Sea. In June 2016, at least 2,091 (2,079 Ethiopians and 12 Somalis) migrants crossed the Red Sea for Yemen from Obock, the highest departures recorded since conflict escalated in Yemen in March 2015. This was partly attributed to a perception among migrants that the border between Yemen and Saudi Arabia would be easier to cross during Ramadan.<sup>9</sup> Somalis reported paying an

average fee of USD 400 for the journey, including the sea crossing to Yemen. Ethiopian migrants, travelling through Dawalle, Dikhil and Tadjoura to reach Obock paid an average of USD 230 – 500 for the entire journey to Yemen.<sup>10</sup>

### **Refugees, Asylum-seekers and IDPs in Djibouti**

Djibouti has hosted refugees and asylum seekers for more than 20 years, with most of them originating from Somalia and others from Ethiopia and Eritrea and, since 2015, from Yemen. Djibouti offers most asylum seekers from Somalia (South and Central Somalia) and Yemen (following the conflict) *prima facie* refugee status while those from Eritrea, Ethiopia and other countries undergo individual Refugee Status Determination (RSD) by UNHCR and its Government counterpart, ONARS.

Available data from UNHCR indicate that there were a total of 22,997<sup>11</sup> registered refugees and asylum seekers in Djibouti as of 31 March 2016; 13,390 refugees (Somalis, Ethiopians and Eritreans) are hosted in the two refugee camps in the south of Djibouti near the border with Somaliland (11,093 Ali-Addeh and 2,297 Holl Holl) and the remaining in urban areas in and around Djibouti City. Yemeni refugees are hosted in Djibouti city or in the Markazi refugee camp (near Obock along the Red Sea coast), which was established in May 2015 following an influx of Yemenis fleeing conflict in Yemen. An estimated 19,936 Yemeni nationals have arrived in Djibouti as of 16 July 2016, of which 6,766 are registered refugees.

### **The total refugee and asylum seeker population in Djibouti, March 2016**

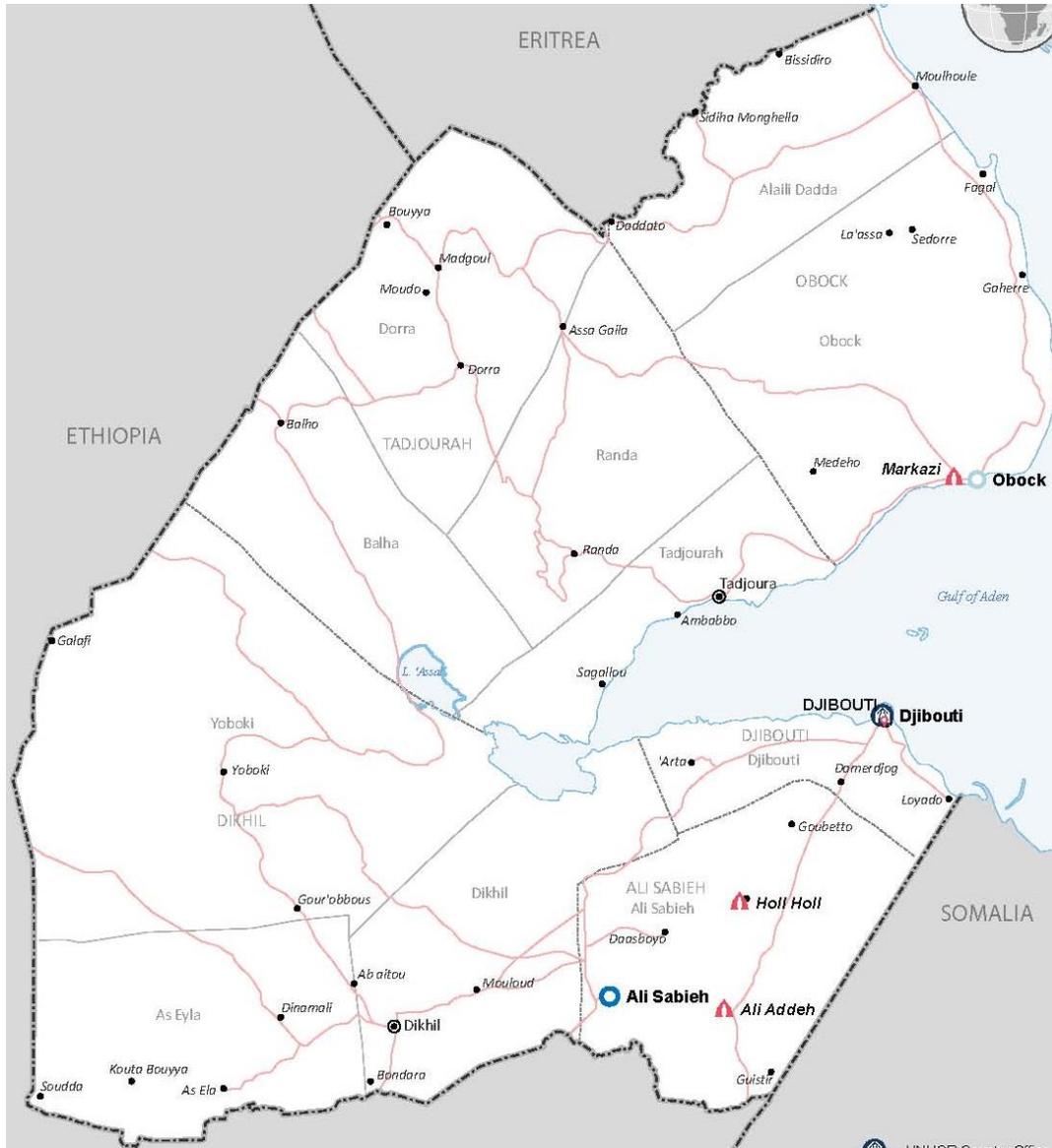
<b>Country of Origin</b>	<b>Refugees and asylum seekers</b>
Somalia	12,674
Yemen	6,766*
Ethiopia	2,500
Eritrea	1,000
Other nationalities	57

Source: UNHCR

\* This figure is subject to change as UNHCR is set to carry out verification exercises in Obock town and Djibouti city.

### *Internal displacement*

There is no available data or information about internal displacement in Djibouti.



Map of Djibouti showing location of refugee camps (Markazi, Holl Holl and Ali-Addeh) (Source UNHCR)

### Protection issues and vulnerable groups

Given the high income disparity, high unemployment rate of 60% and poverty rate of up to 40%, there are limited opportunities (e.g. livelihood and integration) for refugees and asylum seekers in Djibouti who depend solely on humanitarian assistance provided by UNHCR and partners. Documented refugees are permitted to work, and many, especially women, do so in low-wage jobs such as house cleaning and babysitting.

The Ali Addeh camp is reportedly overcrowded and access to basic services such as potable water is inadequate. Access to basic services is better in Holl-Holl camp which was established in 2012 to reduce congestion in Ali Addeh camp.<sup>12</sup> Yemeni refugees in Markazi refugee camp have reported on the harsh environmental conditions in the camp, with temperatures rising to highs of 51 degrees during summer. There is inadequate access to basic

services such as clean water and many refugees as a result do not want to go to the camp or have left the camp altogether to live in urban areas.<sup>13</sup>



Ethiopian migrants stay in Obock for a number of days or weeks before crossing to Yemen (Photo: Addis Insight)

Migrants transiting through Djibouti also face various protection risks *en route* to coastal areas in Obock and during their sea crossing to Yemen. Highly organized migrant smuggling and trafficking networks operating in Djibouti facilitate the movement of migrants through the country and across the Red Sea to Yemen<sup>14</sup>. Smuggling networks pass migrants from one smuggling group to another along the journey with migrants being forced to pay higher amounts of money than the originally agreed amount. Those who fail to pay are forced to walk the remainder of the journey and are most vulnerable to protection risks such as physical abuse, extortion, lack of food and water.

Female migrants have also suffered sexual abuse and gender based violence during their journey to and stay in Obock before departing for Yemen. Perpetrators of these crimes are reportedly members of the Djibouti military, smugglers and brokers. Migrants usually wait in Obock before they can make the crossing to Yemen and during this time they may face various risks including physical abuse, violence, dehydration, starvation and abduction for ransom at the hands of smugglers and brokers. The shift in migration patterns with more migrants and refugees preferring to travel from Bossaso (Puntland) via the Arabian Sea from 2014 to date is partly attributed to the high prevalence of abuses on the Red Sea route.

### *Detention of migrants*

Following a terrorist attack in Djibouti in May 2014, the government has tightened security measures in the country with movements of refugees in and out of the camps being subjected to controls. Police round ups in the city of Djibouti have also been reportedly intensified to curb irregular migration. Djibouti coastguard also patrol the Obock coastline to arrest migrants departing from Yemen. The US State Department 2015 report on human rights in Djibouti note that there were numerous instances where large numbers of irregular migrants were detained and then returned home without granting them the benefit of a refugee status determination. Most of the returnees were Ethiopian nationals, whom the government officials categorically identified as economic migrants.<sup>15</sup>

Nagad Detention Facility, operated by the police, is primarily used to detain irregular migrants. Migrants are also detained in other small prisons supervised by local police. Arbitrary arrests are common in Djibouti and migrants are often detained without access to independent legal assistance or individualized assessment to determine whether detention is necessary or reasonable.<sup>16</sup> Authorities usually deport most detainees within 24 hours of arrest. Reports indicate that the detention of migrants in practice does not distinguish between minors and adults, and migrant children are commonly detained alongside adults. Conditions at the Nagad detention are reportedly poor although detainees had access to potable water, food and medical treatment.

### *Trafficking*

The US Department of State's 2016 Trafficking in Persons report places Djibouti on Tier 3.<sup>17</sup> According to the report, Djibouti is a source, transit and destination country for men, women and children subjected to forced labour and sex trafficking. The report notes that migrant women and girls from Ethiopia, Somalia and Eritrea (including Djibouti) are subjected to domestic servitude or sex trafficking in Djibouti City, along the Ethiopian-Djibouti trucking corridor and in Obock. Some migrants *en route* to Yemen and other countries in the Middle East (especially Saudi Arabia) are sometimes kidnapped for ransom or subjected to trafficking and other forms of abuse in Djibouti. Some migrant children from Ethiopia and Somalia have also been subjected to forced labour, coerced to beg on the streets or commit petty crimes in Djibouti.

*Compliance:* The government does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking and is not making significant efforts to do so. The government passed a new anti-trafficking law in March 2016 to supersede the existing 2007 anti-trafficking law however it did not use the prior law to prosecute any trafficking offenders. The national action plan to combat trafficking was not fully operationalized partly due to lack of capacity and coordination among relevant government agencies.

*Prosecution:* Minimal law enforcement efforts to combat trafficking were observed during 2015. This is partly attributed to the existing two anti-trafficking laws (2007 and 2016) which even though similar, are not identical and may create confusion, raise legal issues, and make it difficult for law enforcement and prosecutors to implement the new law effectively. In addition, the government did not investigate any potential sex or labour trafficking cases or initiate prosecution of any suspected trafficking offenders who include government officials complicit in human trafficking offences in 2015.

*Protection of trafficking victims:* The State Department report noted that the Djiboutian government sustained inadequate efforts to protect trafficking victims. The government continued to lack a formal system to proactively identify victims of trafficking among vulnerable populations such as undocumented migrants, street children and

persons in prostitution. Official round-ups, detentions and deportations of non-Djiboutian residents including children remained routine without standardized mechanisms to assess for trafficking indicators.

### **International and national legislation and migration policies**

Djibouti has ratified the following international legislation relevant to mixed migration and protection of human rights of migrants and refugees.

- 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees & its 1967 Protocol
- 1969 International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination
- 1969 OAU Convention Governing Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa
- 1976 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights & its 1976 and 1991 Protocols
- 1976 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights :1976
- 1981 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
- 1987 Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment
- 1990 Convention on the Rights of the Child
- 2002 Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography
- 2003 United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the Palermo Protocols (by accession)
- 2009 African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (Kampala Convention)

#### *National legislations*

- Act No. 201/AN/07/5<sup>ème</sup> entry and residence Djibouti
- Ordinance No.77-053/PR/AE primary law on refugees
- Act No. 210/AN/07/5<sup>ème</sup> combating trafficking in human beings
- Act No. 133/AN/16/7<sup>ème</sup> L combating trafficking in persons and illicit smuggling of migrants

#### *Bilateral agreements*

Memorandum of Understanding on human trafficking between Djibouti and Ethiopia, November 2009

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- <sup>1</sup> CIA (2016). The World Factbook: Djibouti. Available: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/dj.html> [Accessed: 18 July 2016]
- <sup>2</sup> UNDP (2016). About Djibouti. Available: <http://www.dj.undp.org/content/djibouti/fr/home/countryinfo/> [Accessed: 18 July 2016]
- <sup>3</sup> World Bank (2015). Migration and Remittances Data. Available: <http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/migrationremittancesdiasporaissues/brief/migration-remittances-data> [Accessed: 18 July 2016]
- <sup>4</sup> UNHCR (2016). Yemen Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan. Available: <http://data.unhcr.org/yemen/regional.php#>
- <sup>5</sup> RMMS (2016). Pushed and Pulled in Two Directions: An analysis of the bi-directional refugee and migrant flow between the Horn of Africa and Yemen.
- <sup>6</sup> RMMS (2015). Regional Mixed Migration in the Horn of Africa and Yemen: End of year trend summary and analysis. Available: <http://www.regionalmms.org/fileadmin/content/monthly%20summaries/AnnualReport2015.pdf>
- <sup>7</sup> RMMS (2016). Pushed and Pulled in Two Directions: An analysis of the bi-directional refugee and migrant flow between the Horn of Africa and Yemen.
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid
- <sup>9</sup> RMMS (2016). Mixed migration in Horn of Africa and Yemen monthly summary: June 2016
- <sup>10</sup> Ibid
- <sup>11</sup> UNHCR (2016). Djibouti Factsheet January – March 2016
- <sup>12</sup> UNHCR (2016). UNHCR Operations Worldwide: Djibouti. Available: <http://reporting.unhcr.org/node/2526?y=2016#objectives>
- <sup>13</sup> RMMS (2016). Pushed and Pulled in Two Directions: An analysis of the bi-directional refugee and migrant flow between the Horn of Africa and Yemen.
- <sup>14</sup> RMMS (2013). Migrant Smuggling in the Horn of Africa and Yemen: the political economy and protection risks
- <sup>15</sup> US Department of State (2015). Djibouti 2015 Human Rights Report. Available: <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/252887.pdf>
- <sup>16</sup> RMMS (2016). Behind Bars: the detention of migrants in and from the East and Horn of Africa.
- <sup>17</sup> US Department of State (2016). Trafficking in Persons Report: 2016