

Regional Mixed Migration in the Horn of Africa and Yemen in 2014: Annual trend summary and analysis

RMMS presents an end of year trend summary and analysis for 2014 with a focus on the Horn of Africa and Yemen region and neighbouring areas and routes taken out of the region. For ease of reading this presentation uses few statistics but provides a generic overview of prominent trends. Statistical details can be found in RMMS literature produced during the course of 2014 ([Regional Mixed Migration Monthly Summaries](#) / [Quarterly reports](#) etc.).

Major characteristics

Changing numbers

However, the number of economic migrants and other migrants on the move (out of the region) in 2014 was still lower by far than the number of refugees and asylum seekers, regular labour migrants and displaced people within the region or moving within the region.

When compared with the outflow of estimated Eritreans, Somalis and Ethiopians in the 2011/2012 period, there were on the whole fewer people on the move in 2013 and 2014. In terms of forced migration and displacement (from conflict, drought, food insecurity) there were less crises affecting a smaller number of people with protracted situations the dominant feature of the mixed migration landscape in the Horn of Africa and Yemen. While thousands of Somalis continued to seek asylum in Ethiopia, Kenya and Yemen there was evidence of voluntary return of some thousands of Somalis to their homeland in the same period (from Yemen and Kenya).

On the other hand the number of Eritreans leaving Eritrea into Sudan and in particular into Ethiopia appeared to rise through the year culminating in unprecedented numbers (particularly of child migrants and unaccompanied minors) in the final months of the year (e.g. as many as 5,000 per month in November). Meanwhile, the number of predominantly economic migrants from Ethiopia to Yemen (and onto Saudi Arabia) rose from a trickle in the first two or three months of 2014 to the high monthly averages previous seen in earlier recent years despite the threat of expulsion from Saudi Arabia that caused the virtual halt of Ethiopians entering Yemen in late 2013 and early 2014. Despite the high flows into Yemen the regional flows are lower in number than in the 2011/12 period for mixed migration as a whole.

Trans-regional, trans-continental

Mixed migration, and in particular irregular migration, continued to be trans-regional and trans-continental in 2014. Smuggler networks as a whole operate trans-regionally and inter-continentially (Africa/Europe, Africa/Gulf States & Middle East). Examples include the flow of Eritreans who leave through Sudan, Libya or Egypt for Europe, and the Somali exodus (as refugees and irregular migrants) into the Arabian Peninsula, South Africa, South and North America as well as Europe. It also continued within the region with asylum seekers and refugees flowing into Ethiopia primarily (from the continued conflict and food insecurity in South Sudan), and from Somalia.

Different drivers / same smugglers

In many regions displacement and irregular migration flows are becoming more complex with multiple drivers affecting reason for movement (see below) and more organized with loosely linked groups of smugglers and other criminals expanding their range of operations (in terms of routes offered, modes of movement and distances covered). Nevertheless, the organized nature of the smuggling networks continued to suggest 'loose affiliations' and opportunistic alliances rather than international crime syndicates or hierarchical structures. Despite the smuggling economy being a multi-million dollar economy in the Horn (and possibly a billion dollar economy in the Mediterranean), indicators continued to suggest that a relatively small number of smugglers and criminals are directly engaged.

Key drivers and combined crises

As noted in 2013 the key drivers compelling movement in 2014 were often a combination of drivers, frequently augmented by combined humanitarian and protracted crises. Humanitarian crises included displacement due to natural disasters with environmental stress as well as continued conflict in South Sudan, Somalia, Syria, Libya and Yemen. Protracted crises include the endemic poverty affecting parts of the region, climate change, authoritarian regimes leading to political crisis (reportedly Eritrea and for some Ethiopia) and the securitization in the region (Yemen and Somalia primarily) due to armed militias, terrorism and unresolved conflict (South Sudan and Somalia). Interestingly the number of maritime migrants crossing irregularly the Mediterranean in 2014 were three times the number in 2012 and the second largest single group were Eritreans (after Syrians).

However the importance of pull factors should not be under-estimated: such as 'chain migration' (facilitated by a critical mass of diaspora), 'aspirational migration' (youth primarily hoping to attain what they see increasingly on globalized media and through social media) and the deepening of what can be called a 'culture of migration' affecting some countries more than others. In 2014 the rural and urban poor of many countries in the region (such as Kenya, Uganda, Djibouti etc.) continued to not be recorded in any flows, suggesting that poverty alone may not be as important as driver as normally assumed.

Complex flows

As with trends from 2013, the movement of people continued to be very mixed with groups of regular migrants (regulated labour migrants), irregular (undocumented economic migrants), forced migrants (asylum seekers and refugees) and trafficked person using similar routes for movement, similar means for movement (smugglers/traffickers) and often facing similar vulnerabilities and hazards while in transit and at points of primary and secondary destination. Those on the move assert their 'rights' where advantageous to do so and refrain from doing so when they have not reached their desired location. Therefore, again, in 2014 there was therefore de facto less distinction between those on the move in and through the region, and less heterogeneity in experience of migrants as they face similar neglect, abuse and rights violations and criminalization (detention / deportation / expulsions).

However, the number of economic migrants and other migrants on the move (out of the region) in 2014 was still lower by far than the number of refugees and asylum seekers, regular labour migrants and displaced people within the region or moving within the region.

Protection deficits and risks

Reports during 2014 suggest that migrants continued to face severe protection deficits within and outside the region. While they face hardship during transit due to thirst, hunger, absence of shelter and health services, they also faced additional risks in terms of vehicle accidents related to smugglers' neglect and overcrowding. Deaths at sea in the Africa-Yemen sea crossing were almost 250 deaths in 2014 (compared with 5 in 2013, and 4 in 2012) and deaths in the Mediterranean (including Eritreans and without doubt other migrants from the Horn) were also high in 2014, well over 3,000 recorded.

The major protection risk in 2014, as in 2014, has been the continued reports of high numbers of kidnappings and extortion of migrants, normally combined with brutality and in some cases torture. In Yemen the report suggest that as many as three quarters of all new arrivals (particularly Ethiopians) are kidnapped on arrival and held for ransom. But during the year these trends have also been reported in Egypt, Sudan, Libya, Yemen and South Africa while related reports of sexual abuse and abduction of girls and women were reported from Yemen, Sudan, Egypt, Libya and Djibouti. A report published by RMMS in 2014 (Abused and Abducted) highlighted the high number of Ethiopian females where could not be accounted for following their arrival on Yemen's shores. A DRC report on trafficking affecting migrants from Somaliland was released in late January 2015 highlighting the level of abuse and trafficking affecting migrant from that region.

On a more positive note, a reduction of abduction was reported from eastern Sudan by UNHCR following its anti-trafficking work with the Government of Sudan there, and also from the Sinai, Egypt where the most egregious reports of trafficking and violence (for extortion) were previous reported. This reduction is reportedly due to the conflict and military activities taking place throughout 2014 in the Sinai that have disturbed criminal activities there in relation to kidnapped migrants.

Harsh treatment/ changing policy environment

Once again, throughout 2014 many migrants have faced harsh treatment from authorities and state officials with high numbers of migrants being detained, imprisoned and/or deported. There is some ambivalence in the region with Kenya, for example, making efforts through new legislation to force refugees to return (particularly Somalis) while Ethiopia and Yemen continue to host large numbers of refugees. In some cases such as the return of a group of Eritreans in July 2014 by the Sudanese authorities, refoulement may have taken place where refugees and asylum seekers were returned without recognized status determination.

The dramatic mass deportations by Saudi Arabia at the end of 2013 continued into the first months of 2014 where over 200,000 Ethiopians and Somalis were expelled. In the same period and throughout 2014 they also expelled Yemeni irregular migrants, possible over 550,000. Some smaller numbers of deportations were also reported from Kenya, Djibouti, and Yemen during the year. Meanwhile many migrants found themselves detained often in an arbitrary manner and some were served sentences: a full report of the detention of migrants will be published by RMMS in February 2015 (Behind bars).

Despite the widespread compassion expressed at the plight of migrants dying in the Mediterranean, 2014 witnessed a hardening of attitudes and policies related to migrants, including those from the Horn. Anti-migrant sentiment (including anti-refugee by default in mixed migration flows) is a central part of popular politics and increasingly a top subject on the political agenda in many countries of the global North. Limited xenophobic attacks on Somali and Ethiopian migrants in South Africa continued throughout 2014 and the policy environment in Kenya also hardened against refugees. Despite this the



indications are that flows out of the Horn of Africa will remain high (particularly from Ethiopia, Somalia and Eritrea) into 2015.