

Regional Mixed Migration in the Horn of Africa and Yemen in 2015: 1st Quarter trend summary and analysis

Irregular Movement from the Horn

Northward (through Egypt into Israel)

In the first quarter the border between Israel and Egypt remained closed, restricting mixed migration flows along this formerly popular route. As a result, the trend identified in the third and fourth quarters of 2014 continued into this quarter, with migrants and asylum seekers opting to use the less-restrictive Central Mediterranean route through Libya. In March 2015, the Israeli government announced plans to begin the deportation of asylum seekers from Eritrea and Sudan to unspecified third countries in Africa. If confirmed this potentially violates the protection regime and the principle of non-refoulement as there is no in-built mechanism to ensure that persons are not being sent back to the frontiers of a state where they may face persecution.

The Israeli government continued its policy of migrant and asylum seeker detention at the Holot facility, with a local NGO reporting the detention of 7 Eritrean citizens. In Cairo, local media reported of the arrest and detention of 40 irregular migrants attempting to cross into Italy. The 40 included, 35 Somalis, 4 Sudanese, 1 Yemeni woman, with each paying \$2,500 for the journey.

The combination of the border closure and detention concretizes the anti-migrant sentiment of countries along this route and is expected to continue into the second quarter of 2015.

Eastward (towards Yemen)

The eastward movement of migrants and asylum seekers across the Red Sea and Arabian Sea to Yemen (and mostly onwards to Saudi Arabia) continued in earnest in the first quarter of 2015, with a month on month increase totalling 23,309 new arrivals between January and March (2,746 in January, 9,560 in February and 11,003 in March; denoting a 301% increase over the period). This represents an 84% increase when compared with the same period in 2014, and a reduction of 33% when compared with the fourth quarter of 2014.

The 2013 ban by the Ethiopian government on labour migration of its citizens remains in place, and Ethiopians continue to rely on irregular migration along this route as means to access work opportunities outside of the country. In keeping with 2014 trends Ethiopians dominated the use of this route, making up approximately 88% of those making the crossing, followed by Somalis. [Data](#) presented by RMMS denotes year-on-year increase on the estimated number of Ethiopian migrants using this route, a trend that is likely to continue as young migrants remain driven by economic aspirations.

The continued high number of arrivals has increased pressure on the smuggling networks along this route, and has resulted in an increase in deaths among mixed migrants in the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea. In this quarter, 74 deaths were reported, a 155% increase on the 29 deaths recorded in the fourth quarter of 2014.

Conflict broke out in Yemen on 23rd March 2015 between Government allied forces and Houthi rebels. 39 people were recorded arriving in Somalia as a result of the conflict, 34 Yemeni nationals and 5 Somalis. Reportedly smugglers along the Red Sea and Arabian Sea coasts increased their source of

income by making return journeys to and from Yemen; transporting migrants and refugees from Djibouti, Somaliland and Puntland to Yemen for a fee, and subsequently charging evacuees from Yemen for the transport to the Horn of Africa on their return trips.

Southward (through Kenya towards South Africa)

The Central Mediterranean route, exiting from Libya, continued to be a key convergent point for mixed migratory flows from the African continent and the Middle East in this quarter. Syrians and Eritreans were the top two nationalities, among other Sub-Saharan nationalities, all hoping to cross into the EU. In January and February 2015, [Frontex](#) reported that 7,834 mixed migrants departed from Libya via the Mediterranean for Europe, a 42% increase from the same period in 2014, and in keeping with the climbing numbers reflected in the fourth quarter of 2014. The increased movement along this route is a likely consequence of the closure of the Egyptian-Israeli border and the prevailing lawlessness in Libya, which is fostering a thriving environment for the human smuggling trade.

The increasing number of migrants and asylum seekers using this route has coincided with an increase in the number of people perishing at sea. [IOM](#) figures confirm that 505 migrant deaths were recorded in the quarter, a staggering 998% increase from the same period in the previous year, and a 871% increase from deaths in the last quarter of 2014. The increased number of increased movements and deaths alludes not only to the proliferation of actors trying to enter the smuggling business along this passage, but also their use of low-cost, inferior vessels built to float only far enough into the Mediterranean for rescue.

Westward (also known as the 'Central Mediterranean route')

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Refugees and Asylum Seekers

With over 1 million refugees hosted regionally, the Horn of Africa continued its generous policy of refugee protection. In a reflection of 2014 quarter 4 statistics Ethiopia was the largest host of refugees and asylum seekers in the region (682,761), with South Sudanese making up the largest percentage of refugees in the country, followed by Somalis, Eritreans and Sudanese. Kenya followed Ethiopia as the



second largest hosting refugee country in the region, with 584,989 registered refugees and asylum seekers. Eritrea continued to scale heights as one of the world's top five source countries of asylum seekers in 2014 among a group of 44 industrialised countries. According to UNHCR's Asylum Trends report released this quarter 48,400 new asylum applications were lodged by Eritrean nationals in 2014, double those in 2013 (22,300). As of 31 March 2015, an estimated 42,000 Eritrean and Sudanese asylum seekers/migrants were in Israel.

Despite its formal commitment to hosting Somali refugees, the government stepped up efforts to undertake the voluntary repatriation of Somali refugees from Dadaab refugee camp to three return locations in Somalia (Baidoa, Luuq and Kismayo) under the auspices of the [Tripartite Agreement](#). By 31 March, 2,048 Somali refugees had been supported to return to Somalia, the majority of whom returned to Kismayo. Pressure remains on Kenya to ensure that returns are undertaken in accordance with the principle of voluntariness, and are conducted in a safe and dignified manner.

Migrant Vulnerabilities – kidnapping, human trafficking, detention, exposure

As relayed above, the increase in mixed migratory flows across and extending out of the Horn of Africa correspond with an increase in deaths in attempted crossings this quarter. The increased volatility of the sea crossings appear to have done little to stem the flow of mixed migrants, with more and more people seeking to make the journey. However with more robust [search and rescue operations](#) launched in the Mediterranean by both governments and private organisations this quarter, the chances of a rescue are high, which may be encouraging the use of sea routes.

Contrary to international provisions on the detention of persons, governments continued to rely on detention as a method of immigration control. Often used as a [de facto policy](#) and not one of last resort, the detention of migrants as a border control measure is arbitrary. In Cairo 40 irregular migrants (35 Somali, 4 Sudanese and 1 Yemeni) were arrested and detained for attempting to cross through the country irregularly. Following Saudi Arabia's 'zero-tolerance' policy on irregular migration, media reports suggest that the authorities arrest 1,250 irregular migrants on a daily basis in Makkah region. Saudi border officials also claim to have prevented 24,506 people from entering the country and arrested 399 smugglers. In Kenya, 148 refugees/irregular migrants were arrested and held in two detention centres in Garissa, and charged with the offence of unlawful presence outside designated camp areas. 127 Ethiopians en route to South Africa via Tanzania were arrested in Nairobi and charged with being in the country illegally. In Somalia, 47 Ethiopian migrants (34 men, 4 women and 9 children) were reportedly arrested by the immigration department in Hargeisa. 100 Ethiopian migrants were also arrested in Bossaso. In Djibouti, army patrols along borders with Ethiopia and Somalia increased in the quarter. Some reports allege that the army opened fire on a group of Ethiopians trying to cross the border, and one was killed and another seriously injured. Apprehended Somali migrants are deported to Loya Ade in Somalia after being detained. This indicates a rising vulnerability for migrants, but with little capacity of or willingness from states to put in place alternatives to detention it is likely to be a trend that continues in the future.

This quarter, the lack of safety operations in the Red Sea and Arabian Sea was a risk for individuals using the Eastward route to Yemen. In keeping with 2014 trends thousands of mixed migrants were exposed to abduction, abuse and extortion. In January, media reports indicated that 23 refugees were taken hostage in Lahj, a southern province of Yemen, and were tortured in order to elicit ransom payments from family members. Reports also suggested the abduction of 1,490, the physical assault of 243, and robbery/extortion of 63. In March, 2,120 migrants were reportedly abducted upon arrival along the Red



Sea coast and temporarily held before being transferred to unknown mountain locations in Ta'iz governate. Those abducted and later released reported having undergone torture and sexual assault. As has been reported by [RMMS](#), the risk of such abuse and abduction is particularly hazardous for female migrants in Yemen – hundreds, maybe thousands of who go unaccounted for after their arrival in Yemen.

Migrants and asylum seekers continue to face difficult living conditions, including shortages of food, water and shelter, in the Djibouti port town of Obock, where many migrants using the eastward route to Yemen try and get temporary jobs to pay smugglers for their onward journeys.

Regional and Global Initiatives to Address Irregular Migration, Trafficking and Protection at Sea

The European Union extended the period for its border control initiative operating in the Mediterranean, Operation Triton, to the end of 2015 and provided an additional 13.7 million Euros as emergency funding. Operation Triton is a multi-national European border control and surveillance force, which replaced Mare Nostrum, a rescue operation run by the Italian navy.

A High-Level Meeting to Address Unsafe Mixed Migration by Sea was held in London in March 2015. The meeting, hosted by the International Maritime Organization (IMO), aimed to facilitate dialogue and promote enhanced cooperation and harmonisation between UN agencies, international organisations, non-governmental organisations, governments, and the shipping industry. It was decided that a mechanism will be established to enhance inter-agency communication with respect to the maritime aspects of mixed migration.

The European Council on Refugees and Exiles produced a new [report](#) that provides guidance to EU Member States on how the provisions of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights can be used to better regulate the reception and detention of asylum seekers in the EU as contained with the Reception Conditions Directive.