

Regional Mixed Migration in the Horn of Africa and Yemen in 2015: 4th Quarter trend summary and analysis

Characteristic of preceding quarters in the year, mixed migration movements the final quarter of 2015 typified well-documented drivers including insecurity, acute poverty, social and political oppression and environmental fragility. Migrants, asylum seekers and refugees continued to be at significant risk of harm, ranging from abduction to abuse and death at sea. Countries in the region continued to rely on detention as a form of immigration control.

Irregular Movement from the Horn

Northward (through Egypt into Israel)

Despite the apparent hostile attitude to migrants and asylum seekers in transit and destination countries on this route, migrants and asylum seekers continued to travel northwards from the Horn of Africa seeking better opportunities and protection.

In October 2015, Israel's Bersheba District Court upheld a controversial governmental policy that results in the "voluntary" deportation of African migrants and asylum seekers to third countries within the continent. The ruling builds upon a progressively restrictive policy by the Israeli government to decisively rid the country of African "infiltrators". Migrants and asylum seekers choosing not to be relocated to a third country face detention; a clear coercive tactic to encourage them to leave the country.

The government's position has been heavily criticised by local NGOs, who lodged an appeal at the Supreme Court against the lower court's findings, citing a lack of protection in countries of destination. Many view the government's position as part of a [wider problem](#) in Israel's treatment of foreigners. Despite the shrinking space for African migrants and asylum seekers to reach and remain in Israel, there is still an appetite among those moving to settle in Israel.

In similar hostility to migrants in neighbouring Egypt, the government continued to apprehend and detain migrants from sub-Saharan Africa and Egypt for attempting to cross through the country into Libya. In a more violent incident media reports covered the death of [15 Sudanese migrants](#) who were fired upon by Egyptian security forces in Egypt's Sinai Peninsula while trying to reach Israel. In a separate incident the bodies of [15 African migrants](#) were discovered on the Egyptian-Israeli border.

The Egyptian Cabinet approved a new anti-human smuggling legislation that, for the first time in the country's history, criminalises persons who facilitate the passage of migrants in and out of the country. The passage of this new law is a positive move to bring Egypt in compliance to the standards set out in the "Smuggling Protocol" of the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. It remains to be seen what impact this will have on smuggling networks operating in the country and the numbers of migrants and asylum seekers choosing to ply the route through the country.

As in previous quarter this year, the notorious kidnapping and trafficking cases (mainly of Eritreans) that were so evident between 2011 and 2013 appear to have diminished as on-going fighting between militants and Egyptian government forces in the Sinai Peninsula have significantly disrupted trafficking activities. It is [estimated](#) that nearly 30,000 Eritreans were abducted and taken to the Sinai between 2007 and 2013 to suffer torture and ransom demands.

Eastward (towards Yemen)

Regional power struggles, unrelenting conflict and failed peace negotiations resulted in continued mass displacement within and from Yemen in the final quarter of 2015.

In November, [revised figures](#) by the Taskforce on Population Movement confirmed that more than 2.5 million people were internally displaced in the country, an 8% increase from the third quarter. By 31 December 2015 a total of 78,983 persons (including 29% Yemeni nationals and 37% Somali nationals) had sought refuge in neighbouring countries in the Horn of Africa. With no political solution in sight, and the resulting deterioration of the humanitarian situation in the country, this displacement trend is expected to continue into 2016.

Numbers of migrants and asylum seekers travelling to Yemen (and beyond) via the Red Sea and Arabian Sea confirmed that the eastward route still remains popular among migrants in the region. 92,446 persons made this crossing during the course 2015 – the highest on record since 2012; serving not only to confirm that [conflict does little to deter those moving](#), but may actually enable undetected travel through territories in conflict and therefore encourage more to take their chance. In fact, the final quarter of 2015 had the highest number of arrivals recorded over the year (Q4: 33,294, Q3: 21,736, Q2: 8,098, Q1: 29,318), showing that only briefly after the start of the conflict arrival figures significantly decreased.

In an increasing trend, almost 90% of those arriving in Yemen in 2015 were identified as Ethiopian nationals (the majority from Oromo region), compared to 79% in 2014. Tough drought conditions in parts of Ethiopia have intensified food insecurity in the country, and may be contributing to the increasing number of Ethiopians seeking livelihood opportunities in nearby Gulf States.

Southward (through Kenya towards South Africa)

This quarter, migrants and asylum seekers continued to move irregularly along the eastern corridor from the Horn of Africa towards South Africa, facing risks of detention and deportation along the way. [Local media](#) reported on the arrest of 105 Ethiopian undocumented migrants in Tanzania as they moved through the country on their way to southern Africa.

Tensions between migrants and South African nationals continue to balance on the precipice of violence as migrants remain a perceived threat to the availability of jobs for locals. In a flare up of xenophobic attacks early November, six Ethiopian migrants were [reportedly](#) killed in the city of Durban. In a move to curb the numbers of undocumented migrants sneaking into the country, South Africa announced a USD 1,000 fine for cross-border transport operators found to be transporting persons into the country with expired passports, invalid visas or without documents.

Every year thousands of Ethiopian nationals irregularly migrate from Ethiopia, through Kenya, Tanzania, Malawi and Mozambique en route to South Africa. While the number of undocumented migrants from other African countries crossing into South Africa is unknown, but conservative [estimates](#) place this number anywhere between three and six million people.

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

The Central Mediterranean route remained a consistently popular route for migrants and asylum seekers from sub-Saharan Africa during the quarter. Those on the move from the Horn of Africa, predominantly Eritreans, Somalis and Sudanese, continued to face protection risks including kidnapping and drowning at sea.

21,771 migrants and asylum seekers made the sea crossing to Italy this quarter, a significant drop from the 61,717 crossing in the third quarter. The drop in numbers may be attributed to poor sea conditions in the winter months. Cumulative totals for the year totalled 153,842 persons at the end of 2015, with arrivals from the Horn of Africa steadily dominating movements on this route; Eritreans accounted for 27 percent of those crossing, Somalis 8 percent, and Sudanese 6 percent.

Refugees and Asylum Seekers

New, renewed and protracted conflict situations continued to play a major role in driving the mass of displacement of populations in the region. Volatile conditions in South Sudan and Yemen in particular were the cause of much of the new displacement. At the end of this quarter, there were a total of 2.22 million refugees and asylum seekers displaced within the region (Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, and Yemen), representing a steady 11% increase in forced displacement since the end of 2014.

Ethiopia and Kenya continued to host the largest number of refugees and asylum seekers in the region, totalling 733,644 and 593,881 respectively by the end of 2015.

The protective environment for Yemeni nationals fleeing the conflict situation in their country was safeguarded by receiving states in the region who by and large, offered prima facie recognition status to Yemeni nationals arriving on their territories. Djibouti, Ethiopia and Somalia all offered such recognition. Sudan, which does not recognise nationals of Arab countries as refugees, but rather as "brothers and sisters", did not offer such a status.

Despite the increasing numbers of those forced to flee their homes in 2015, prospects of viable durable solutions for those displaced remained elusive. The voluntary repatriation exercise for the return of Somali refugees from Kenya, facilitated by the [Tripartite Agreement](#), only resulted in the return of 5,616 persons in 2015. The slow pace of returns has fallen short of ambitions of the Kenyan government, who have driven a [consistent campaign](#) to close Dadaab refugee camp, despite evidence to suggest that conditions in Somalia are [not conducive for mass return](#). In Yemen, attempts to hold conclusive peace talks between warring factions have not borne success. And in South Sudan, in the wake of more than seven failed ceasefires, international observers have [cast doubts](#) on the parties' commitment to the provisions of the latest peace agreement.

Migrant Vulnerabilities – kidnapping, human trafficking, detention, exposure

In an enduring trend identified in previous quarters, migrants and asylum seekers face continuing protection deficits within and outside the region.

Violence, abduction, robbery, physical and sexual assault were consistently reported by migrants and asylum seekers crossing the Red Sea and Arabian Sea from coastal towns in the Horn of Africa to Yemen. Yemeni criminal gangs and possible trafficking elements were particularly active along Yemeni shores



targeting new arrivals. In an alarming report in [October 2015](#), and reminiscent of the high levels recorded in 2014, all Ethiopian new arrivals were abducted and held hostage until family members were able to raise ransom funds to secure their release.

Detention and deportation was a favoured method of immigration regulation by countries in the region and beyond, as many migrants found themselves arrested and detained, often under arbitrary conditions. In November, the Kenyan government launched a new initiative run by military forces and the Anti-Terrorism Police Unit to control human smuggling from Ethiopia, and reported the arrest of more than 1,000 Ethiopian migrants over a one week period. A government official reportedly termed the influx of Ethiopian migrants a [security threat](#). Similar arrests were reported throughout the quarter.

The securitisation of migration is not a novel development in Kenya. The government has often resorted to linking migrants and refugees to security challenges in the country, in an attempt to justify the erosion of the protection of people on the move, but often without any evidence to support such conclusions.

The risk of death by drowning continued to be a risk for migrants and asylum seekers travelling across bodies of water, although the risk varied according to the route used. Nine fatalities were recorded along the Eastern route to Yemen this quarter, far below the numbers (86) witnessed in the first quarter of 2015, bringing the year total to 95 deaths. This represents 0.1 per cent of the 92,446 persons who crossed to Yemen throughout 2015.

In contrast, 162 migrants and asylum seekers perished while attempting to make the crossing across the Central Mediterranean to Italy this quarter, bringing the total for the year along this route to 2,892 deaths. This marks the deadliest year on record and represents 1.9 per cent of the 153,600 persons who crossed to Italy during 2015. Smuggling networks continue to rely on a model that uses flimsy vessels to transport migrants and asylum seekers from point to point, putting the lives of those on board at risk. Statistically speaking, however, the risk of death by drowning does not pose a significant risk to migrants and asylum seekers from this region. This relatively low, but real, risk of drowning does not deter migrants from attempting to make sea crossings.

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

Governments in the region and around the world continued to grapple with the large scale movement of migrants and refugees and showed commitment to addressing irregular migration. In November, the European Commission backed a proposal to provide 1.8 billion Euros in funding, known as the [EU Trust Fund](#), to African countries to contribute to tackling the root causes of irregular migration and forced displacement. The Fund was endorsed at the [Valletta Summit](#), a meeting convening European and African Heads of State and Government in an effort to strengthen cooperation and address challenges and opportunities related to migration. Importantly, it recognised that migration is a shared responsibility of countries of origin, transit and destination. Leaders endorsed an action plan to: address the root causes of irregular migration and forced displacement; enhance cooperation on legal migration and mobility; reinforce the protection of migrants and asylum seekers; prevent and fight irregular migration, migrant smuggling and trafficking; and improve cooperation on return, readmission and reintegration.

In December, the Commission approved its first package of [ten actions](#) amounting to EUR 253 million, targeting activities in Ethiopia, South Sudan and Uganda aimed at stemming irregular migration,



resilience building, provision of basic health and education, and addressing the development needs of people affected by long-term displacement. It remains to be seen whether these cash injections will tackle root causes of migration and have any impact on mixed migration flows.

The [Pan-African Network on Migration](#) to further the interests of migrants on the continent and beyond was launched in December 2015, as an African chapter of the World Social Forum on Migration. The Network aims to be the voice of African migrants and an interlocutor between migrants and authorities in the countries of origin and destination in an effort to strengthen their relations for the betterment of African migrants. It aims, among other things, to contribute to the promotion and protection of African migrants' rights and interests in and outside of Africa; collaborate with authorities to ensure that African migrants are given a space in local governance; and serve as an interface with authorities in countries of origin where the migrants will ultimately return.