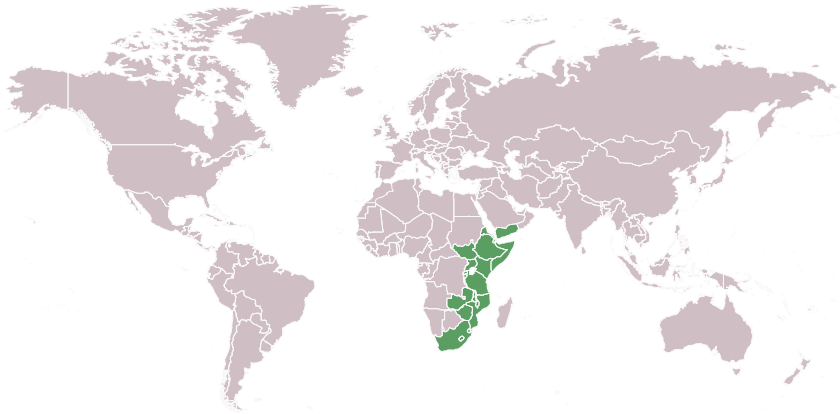
Mixed Migration Centre



MMC East Africa & Yemen

QUARTER 2 2020

Revised version 4th August 2020

Quarterly Mixed Migration Update: East Africa & Yemen

This Quarterly Mixed Migration Update (QMMU) covers the East Africa and Yemen region (EAY). The core countries of focus for this region are Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Burundi, Somalia, DR Congo, South Sudan and Yemen. Depending on the quarterly trends and migration-related updates, more attention may be given to any of the countries over the rest.

The QMMUs offer a quarterly update on new trends and dynamics related to mixed migration and relevant policy developments in the region. These updates are based on a compilation of a wide range of secondary (data) sources, brought together within a regional framework and applying a mixed migration analytical lens. Similar QMMUs are available for all MMC regions.

The Mixed Migration Centre is a global network consisting of seven regional hubs and a central unit in Geneva engaged in data collection, research, analysis and policy development on mixed migration. For more information on the MMC, the QMMUs from other regions and contact details of regional MMC teams, visit mixedmigration.org and follow us at @Mixed_Migration

MMC's understanding of mixed migration

"Mixed migration" refers to cross-border movements of people, including refugees fleeing persecution and conflict, victims of trafficking, and people seeking better lives and opportunities. Motivated to move by a multiplicity of factors, people in mixed flows have a range of legal statuses as well as a variety of vulnerabilities. Although entitled to protection under international human rights law, they are exposed to multiple rights violations along their journey. Those in mixed migration flows travel along similar routes, using similar means of travel - often travelling irregularly, and wholly, or partially, assisted by migrant smugglers.

Front cover photo credit:
Michael Kirby Smith (2013)
Ethiopian migrants outside the Migrant Response Centre in Haradh, Yemen, May 2013.

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Quarterly Mixed Migration Update: **East Africa & Yemen**

Quarter 2 - 2020

Key Updates

- Tens of thousands of **refugees and migrants** remain stranded throughout the region due to border closures and other restrictions, including in Djibouti, Somalia and Yemen. **Many** face stigma and discrimination amid COVID-19 fears.

- COVID-19 border closures resulted in **historic lows of East African arrivals to Yemen**, but at least 14,500 refugees and migrants are trapped within Yemen (though number thought to be much higher).

- Ethiopian returns **from Saudi Arabia** slowed this quarter, with only 3,144 Ethiopians returned between April and June.

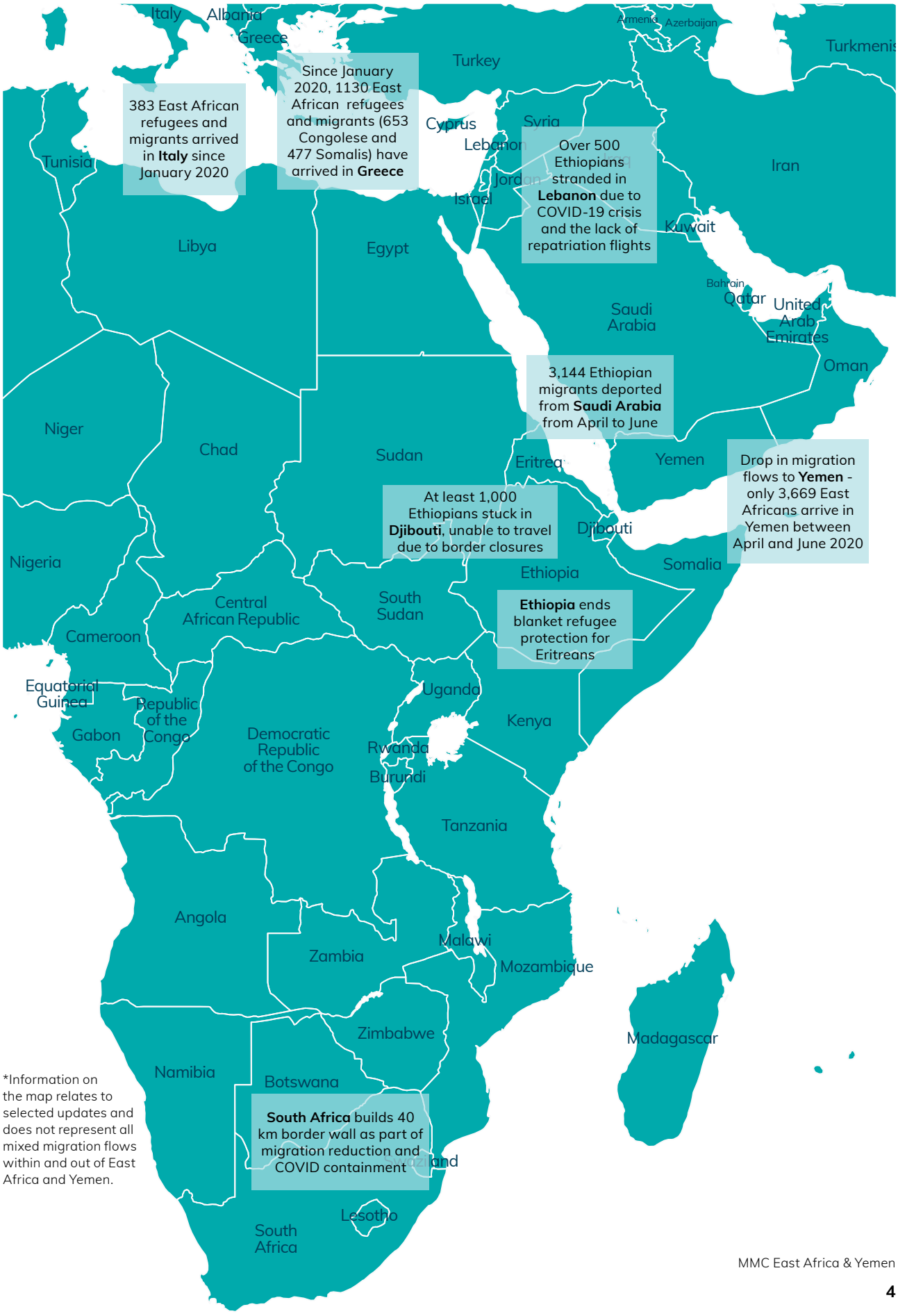
- Uganda temporarily opened key border crossings along its western border with the Democratic Republic of Congo to allow **Congolese refugees to cross the border to escape violence** and access humanitarian relief.

- Unrest in Ethiopia following the **killing of Oromo singer and activist on 30 June sparked fears of a mass crackdown on Oromo population**.

- **Ethiopian migrants are stranded in Lebanon** amid unrest caused by impact of Lebanon's economic downturn and COVID-19 restrictions.

- South Africa completed a **40km wall on the border with Zimbabwe** in May 2020, as part of border security activities which will also see increased patrols along border areas.

Regional Overview*



*Information on the map relates to selected updates and does not represent all mixed migration flows within and out of East Africa and Yemen.

Mixed Migration Regional Updates

Impact of COVID-19 on mixed migration in East Africa

During this quarter, movement restrictions linked to COVID-19 significantly impacted mixed migration dynamics throughout East Africa. In March, governments across the region implemented strict travel restrictions and widespread border closures, and increased surveillance activities to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. This made movement nearly impossible for people across East Africa, and many refugees and migrants were stranded and unable to move on or to return to their countries of origin.

The pandemic and corresponding border closures also blocked repatriation activities including through IOM's Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration program, and the voluntary repatriation of Somali refugees from Kenya. Assisted voluntary repatriation was suspended for migrants in Yemen, leaving hundreds of vulnerable Somalis and Ethiopians in crowded detention facilities. Access to asylum procedures throughout East Africa was also significantly reduced, which was noted by nearly 20% of 4Mi respondents in East Africa.

Refugees and migrants across all routes also reported increased incidents of discrimination, which contributed to reduced access to critical services, like health care. Along the Eastern Route, increased restrictions impacted the journeys of Ethiopians and Somalis, with many stranded at various points within the region. In Somalia, refugees and migrants faced arrest and detention as well as growing stigma from local communities that they are carriers of COVID-19, increasing their vulnerability. Further, refugees and migrants were forced into quarantine facilities indefinitely in Djibouti and Yemen. Conservative estimates indicate tens of thousands of refugees and migrants are stranded in Yemen and Saudi Arabia. In addition, IOM recorded 2,605 cases of stranded migrants across East African countries,[1] the majority of which are 2,131 Ethiopians stranded in Djibouti, Somalia, and Kenya.

Emerging trends in smuggling dynamics in East Africa suggested that smuggling activities decreased in the short-term because of border closures. Since the COVID-19 crisis erupted there was a notable decline in smuggling activities across the eastern routes as security patrols along the marine boundary of Yemen and Somalia were strengthened. COVID-19 restrictions could also increase migrants' reliance on smugglers for segments of the journey they would usually complete independently so as to bypass border points. However, in recent weeks, DRC and partner reports indicate that smuggling activities and abuse of refugees and migrants at the hands of smugglers have grown along the Eastern Route. MMC key informant interviews in Somalia and Yemen indicate that smugglers are looking for new paths to avoid authorities and checkpoints. This could put people in mixed migration flows further at risk and more vulnerable to abuse.

The East Africa region (which had some of the fastest growing economies in Africa) saw a sharp downturn in economic stability during this quarter. As a result, the most vulnerable populations (specifically refugees and migrants) are finding it more difficult to make ends meet. Protection issues related to refugees and migrants are also on the rise (as indicated from MMC key informant interviews). Over the longer-term, there is a risk

1 Burundi, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Uganda, Tanzania

that the changes and restrictions could lead to involuntary immobility along the route, as often refugees and migrants have a limited amount of resources for their journeys which they are now using to survive in their places of transit. Indications of this are already noted in places like Djibouti and Somalia, where refugees and migrants have been unable to move onwards with their journeys or to return to their area of departure.

Refugees and migrants report loss of livelihoods, increased anxiety, lack of access to basic services

The restrictions on travel and commerce put pressure on many of the most vulnerable populations in the region, and the strain has particularly been felt by people in mixed migration flows who find themselves with limited options for movement and are increasingly unable to meet their basic needs. Respondents from East Africa interviewed by MMC's 4Mi (Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism Initiative) data collection reported increased anxiety (reported by over 60% of respondents), reduced access to work (reported by over 60% of respondents), and increased discrimination (around 15% of respondents).

UNHCR warned that thousands of refugees in East Africa are resorting to desperate measures to survive the economic impact of COVID-19. UNHCR specifically raised the issue of refugees living in squalid and overcrowded conditions in Kenya, which puts them at high risk of contracting COVID-19. Key informant interviews in Kenya explained that assistance for basic needs was already in high demand prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, due to dire economic circumstances, overcrowding in camps, continued arrivals of refugees and migrants particularly from Somalia. This raises concerns about the impact of COVID-19 on access to basic needs and safety for people in vulnerable situations.

Refugees and migrants across countries on the Eastern Route to and through Yemen reported reduced livelihood opportunities both along the route and in countries of destination in the Gulf, according to partner reports and MMC data collection. East Africans interviewed in North Africa noted increased difficulty moving within countries and across borders, and had their journeys disrupted by the crisis.

Almost all refugees and migrants interviewed by 4Mi reported that they need assistance, with a majority needing basic needs, like food water and shelter. East Africans also reported a strong need for support in accessing work and livelihoods. Despite increasing needs, individuals in mixed migration flows are reporting significant limitations to their ability to access assistance. In East Africa, 89% of respondents claimed they needed extra assistance, however only 3% of East Africans reported they received any type of assistance.

Further, 49% of refugees and migrants interviewed by 4Mi in East Africa reported they lost income because of the crisis, and over 93% reported that they cannot afford basic goods. This makes them more vulnerable as they are unable to provide for themselves and leaves many at risk of exploitation. Being stuck in transit without the ability to work is likely to have a longer-term impact, not only on migrants themselves, but also on their families in their country of origin who often rely substantially on remittances. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, there are concerns about the impact on remittances for Ethiopia, Somalia and other East African countries. Remittances play a key economic role in countries across East Africa. For example, it is estimated that up to 400 million USD was sent to Ethiopia in personal remittances in 2017 and Somalia receives an estimated 1.3 billion USD every year in remittances. 15% of respondents interviewed by 4Mi in East Africa noted that they were unable to continue to pay remittances due to loss of income (unpublished).

Mixed migration within East Africa

Uganda temporarily opens border to allow Congolese refugees to flee violence in DRC

On 1 July 2020, Uganda relaxed the COVID-19 containment measures and opened its borders to allow Congolese refugees who are fleeing recent violence in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Up to 15,000 Congolese refugees have gathered on the border of Uganda since late May, and up to 45,000 Congolese have fled violence in Eastern Congo. Ugandan authorities allowed the border to be opened in two locations, Guladjo and Mount Zeu in Zombo district, and so far, some 1,500 asylum seekers have crossed into Uganda and are being assisted by UNHCR. In coordination with UNHCR, the Ugandan Government will provide access to life-saving aid, and protection assistance for those remaining at the border (abiding by COVID-19 safety protocols and with established quarantine facilities).

Ethiopians trapped in Lebanon

Due to travel restrictions and shutdowns due to COVID-19, roughly 500 Ethiopian migrants remain stranded in Lebanon, a majority of whom are women who work as domestic workers in the country. While an estimated 650 Ethiopian migrants were repatriated on Ethiopian Airline flights, the additional 530 Ethiopian migrants have not been able to depart despite efforts to return on repatriation flights that have been cancelled.

Many Ethiopians travel through 'regular' migration channels using employment brokers in Ethiopia, however some of these brokers are known to operate abusive and dangerous conditions for many of their workers. These workers are often exploited and abused, and lack the ability to report abuses or to return home. It is estimated that there are currently 150,000 Ethiopian migrants in Lebanon, a majority of whom are women employed in the domestic sector; however due to the deterioration of the Lebanese economy and the crash of the Lebanese Pound, domestic workers have been laid off en masse. It is unclear if and when additional flights will be arranged to repatriate the Ethiopians.

Unrest in Ethiopia after killing of Oromo musician and activist

Tensions are on the rise in Ethiopia around the killing of the popular Oromo singer and activist, Hachalu Hundessa on 30 June. The Ethiopian government deployed security forces and over 160 people have been killed the subsequent unrest. Strict crackdowns have been enacted on opposition politicians and protestors, and in the days since the killing there have been arrests of activists and the leading opposition politician, Jawar Mohammed, of the Oromo Federalist Congress.

The Oromo people are the largest ethnic group in Ethiopia, but they have suffered a long history of oppression and persecution. A majority of Ethiopians that undertake the journeys on both the Eastern and Northern routes are ethnically Oromo. MMC's 4Mi data indicates that persecution and lack of freedom are important drivers for migration for Ethiopian respondents (from unpublished 4Mi data).

Policy discussions

Ethiopia ends blanket protection for Eritrean Refugees

In January 2020, Ethiopia quietly ended its longstanding policy of providing blanket protection and automatic asylum to all Eritreans crossing its border. The move was made without any official announcement and was only made public in April. The Ethiopian Agency for Refugee and Returnee Affairs justified the move by claiming that many Eritreans that cross the border do not qualify for refugee status, and that the policy was being taken advantage of by unaccompanied minors, and undocumented migrants.

This shift will greatly impact the ability of Eritreans to escape conscription into the Eritrean national service program, and is likely to increase the reliance on traffickers and smugglers to leave the country. The move therefore raises significant protection concerns and NGOs such as Human Rights Watch have registered their concern with the shift in Ethiopia's refugee policies. This latest move comes after the March announcement of a plan to close the Hitsats Refugee Camp that houses up to 25,000 Eritrean refugees. Eritreans make up roughly 22% of the 766,563 refugees hosted in Ethiopia, of these roughly 44% of the Eritrean refugees are children (as of December 2019).

Organizations call on regional governments to open borders for asylum seekers

A coalition of refugee organizations is putting pressure on governments in the Horn, East and Central Africa region to ensure protection and movement for asylum seekers and refugees fleeing persecution and violence. This comes amid growing concern about people trapped at borders and unable to safely move due to COVID-19 measures. Asylum seekers and refugees face detention and arrest when trying to cross borders and activists have urged national governments and regional bodies like the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the East African Community (EAC) to support interventions to protect those seeking asylum.

ILO advocates for support and jobs at home for returning migrants

Remittances are a major source of livelihoods and income for communities across East Africa, however the COVID-19 pandemic has provided a huge challenge to the remittance structure, as migrants are returning home due to border closures and economic downturn. For example, Ethiopia alone expects from 200,000-500,000 migrants to return by the end of the year. At least 14,000 Ethiopians have returned since April, largely from Djibouti, Saudi Arabia and Sudan. The International Labour Organization (ILO) is advocating for awareness that returning migrants will need jobs and economic opportunities, but also that reliance on remittances will need to be addressed through policy interventions and reintegration efforts for returnees in their home communities.

EU redirects controversial funding in Eritrea

In June 2020, the European Union (EU) indicated that it would not use funding for development projects to build controversial roadwork projects in Eritrea, which were reported in January 2020 to have used forced labour. The project brought criticism to the EU's support to initiatives which are intended to stem migration to Europe. In June, the EU noted that roughly €20 million of funding will be aimed at new projects to create jobs, build judicial capacity, and promote human rights. However, it is also reported that an additional €33 million of funding that was earmarked for Eritrea has been diverted to programs in Sudan.

Even with the move of the roughly €20 million away from the roadworks, 70% of the original €125 million earmarked for the roadworks had already been allocated and contracted, however the EU has arranged to undertake periodic site visits in order to ensure that labor conditions are human rights compliant.

The Eastern route from the Horn of Africa to Yemen

Arrivals to Yemen decrease to historic lows

Movements along the Eastern Route from East Africa to Yemen, witnessed a dramatic decrease during this quarter. According to IOM reports, a total of 3,669 refugees and migrants arrived in Yemen between April and June 2020, a 87% decrease from the 27,948 that arrived between January and March 2020. Border closures and restrictions on the route east appear to have had an increasingly negative impact on movement with 1,725 refuges and migrants arriving in Yemen in April 2020, 1,195 in May and just 749 refugees and migrants in June. This is a 58% decrease in the number of arrivals January-June between 2020 and 2019 (31,617 by June 2020 compared to 84,378 by June 2019).

There is a large reduction in movement along mixed migration routes from Somalia, and migrants and refugees face arrest and detention as well as growing stigma from local communities that they are carriers of COVID-19. This has been reported by key informant interviews in Somalia as well, which show that many Ethiopians have been trapped in Somalia for extended periods, though some have been able to cross back into Ethiopia. In recent weeks, DRC and other partners have reported a small number of boats with refugees and migrants leaving Puntland's shores headed for Yemen, largely from the port city of Bossaso and areas around Mareero. This could indicate a trend of slowly increasing arrivals to Yemen over the next quarter.

Changes have also been reported on the demographics of East African arrivals to Yemen. There were a slight increase of women on the route, who made up 18% of arrivals in April to June (up from 15% of arrivals in January to March 2020). Further, reports of children on the route increased to 16% of June arrivals, up slightly from 12% reported in January to March. While Ethiopian refugees and migrants continued to make up the majority of those travelling on the route, the proportion of Somalis showed a slight increase from 6% between January and March 2020, to 10% between April and June. This could be due to the shift in routes: as detailed in the next section, the only open departure points are in Somalia.

Djibouti border closure traps refugees and migrants

Since the closure of Djibouti's borders in March, the number of movements observed through and from Djibouti decreased significantly. This also had a big impact on mixed migration to Yemen; in January 2020 46% of East African arrivals left from departure points in Djibouti. During this quarter, almost no maritime movements were recorded leaving Djibouti. Further, a 37% increase of Ethiopians entering Somalia was recorded by IOM in May (5,399 movements observed at compared to 3,939 in April 2020), indicating a change in route for those determined to make it to Yemen. In addition, according to internal reports, IOM observed an increase in the number of migrants coming back from Yemen to Djibouti since mid-May 2020. Up to 250 migrants were recorded in this quarter.

This cessation of movement also provided a problem for people in mixed migration flows, as more than 1,000 Ethiopian migrants remain trapped in Djibouti, particularly along coastal areas.

When the border closure was announced, there was a spike in movement of Ethiopians in Djibouti back to Ethiopia, and many crossed the border 'illegally' - without going through quarantine and testing for COVID-19. This led Ethiopian authorities to ensure strict border controls as there were not adequate quarantine facilities and procedures in place, leaving many Ethiopians stuck.

Refugees and migrants in Yemen face discrimination and abuse amid COVID-19 crisis

Though the arrivals into Yemen slowed significantly this quarter, at least 14,500 East Africans are trapped in Yemen by COVID-19 border closures and face xenophobia, arrest and detention. The abuse of refugees and migrants in Yemen is well documented, however the situation for East Africans has gotten worse since the country's first confirmed COVID-19 case (the first case in the north of the country in May 2020 was a Somali). Migrants face stigma in Yemen around coronavirus, are frequently denied medical care, and are often harassed while trying to get food and water for fear that they will bring the virus into host communities. There are many restrictions on the movement of refugees and migrants, with increased checkpoints around major cities, including Sanaa, Aden and Sa'dah. There are reports from partners on the ground that in these urban centers, migrants are frequently arrested and detained. Key informants in Yemen also report that refugees and migrants (and the smugglers who often facilitate their movement) are changing routes within country to avoid harsh checkpoints and forced detention, putting them at risk of protection incidents, abuses and lack of basic goods.

Militias controlling territory in northern Yemen have used the coronavirus pandemic to force out migrants - driving them towards the Saudi border, or relocating them to the south of the country. IOM estimates that up to 1,500 migrants have been arrested and relocated from Northern to Southern Yemen in the last two months. Key informant interviews in Yemen and other partner reports show that these types of arrests are very common with forced and extended detention in ad hoc 'quarantine facilities'. This forced 'quarantine' is said to be intended to avoid the spread of COVID-19, but informants say that local authorities use the quarantine facilities in order detain migrants.

Key informant interviews in Yemen highlighted increasing protection incidents at the border between Saudi Arabia and Yemen this quarter. Thousands of migrants were reported by partners as stranded and trapped in a border area of Al Raqw valley and western reaches of Monaibh District without any basic support or services. Accounts from Ethiopians in northern Yemen and in detention in Saudi Arabia describe ongoing violence and highlight a particular attack on 8 April at the Al Ghar settlement on the Saudi border which targeted refugees and migrants. Unverified accounts claim that up to 250 were killed in the attack.

Voluntary repatriation suspended

Assisted voluntary repatriation has been suspended for migrants in Djibouti and Yemen, leaving hundreds of vulnerable Somalis and Ethiopians in crowded detention facilities[2]. Access to asylum procedures throughout East Africa were also significantly reduced this quarter, which was noted by nearly 20% of East African 4Mi respondents.

Key informant interviews with stakeholders in Yemen reported that refugees and migrants in Yemen are increasingly asking for repatriation. Migrants in northern parts of Yemen (including near Marib) are making their way towards the south, sometimes forced back from areas in the north of the country. Once in the south, some refugees and migrants have attempted to make spontaneous returns back to the Horn of Africa.

Deportation of Ethiopians from Saudi Arabia slows

Since the March 2017 crackdown on undocumented migrants by Saudi authorities, an average of 10,000 Ethiopians were being deported each month, with a reported 360,000 Ethiopians returned between March 2017 and February 2020. However, between March and April 2020, returns decreased by almost 70% from 8,963 in March to 2,757 in April. No returns were recorded in May and in June 387 Ethiopians were returned to Ethiopia. There were serious concerns about health and safety implications of returning Ethiopians, particularly around the spread of COVID-19, and the ability of the Ethiopian government to deal with the influx of returnees from Saudi Arabia (and other countries). Though the numbers for returns is low, the health and sanitation conditions in detention facilities in which migrants are kept before deportation from Saudi Arabia could increase their risk of exposure to COVID-19.

2 IOM East and Horn of Africa and Yemen: Regional Impact of COVID-19 on IDPs and Migrants. April 2020

The Northern route towards North Africa & Europe

East African refugees and migrants in North Africa

As of the end of June, there were 47,859 persons of concern registered with UNHCR in Libya. East Africans comprise a sizable population, with 5,756 Eritreans, 2,649 Somalis, 1,159 Ethiopian, and 255 South Sudanese. However, the numbers of registered refugees and asylum seekers is only a portion of the total number of East Africans believed to be in Libya. IOM also reported that 13,024 Somali, 6,824 Eritrean and 5,457 Ethiopians were part of 625,628 'migrants' present in Libya in April 2020.

In Tunisia, UNHCR reported that the total number of registered refugees and asylum seekers from East Africa at the end of May 2020 was 491 (260 Eritreans, 178 Somalis and 51 Ethiopians). Tunisia has been seen as an emerging alternative route / destination for East African refugees and migrants (as well as other nationalities) since the deteriorating security situation in Libya and serious abuse towards migrants and refugees.

Arrivals to Europe on Mediterranean routes

Overall, mixed migration arrivals to Europe along the Mediterranean routes dropped this quarter. 28,729 refugees and migrants have arrived in Europe so far in 2020, a 23% drop from the 37,100 that arrived in the same period in 2019. However, on the Central Mediterranean route, almost three times the amount of refugees and migrants crossed the Mediterranean to Italy and Malta from Libya between January and May 2020 as the same time period in 2019. Media reports based on Frontex figures note that there was a spike in the number of refugees and migrants crossings from Libya in May 2020. However, this is likely just an indication that movement is slowly restarting after a significant lull in mixed migration, and a near complete drop in arrival figures in March 2020, due to the coronavirus restrictions across the Mediterranean.

While a majority of these refugees and migrants are from Sudan, Bangladesh, and Côte d'Ivoire, there has also been more Somalis attempting to travel to Europe from North Africa. In the second quarter of 2020, 383 people from the Horn of Africa (241 Somalis, 136 Eritreans, and 6 Ethiopians) were reported arriving into Europe along the Central Mediterranean Route. This was a slight increase from the previous quarter, though numbers remain low.

There has been an increasing number of African refugees and migrants arriving in Greece along what's known as the Eastern Mediterranean Route. Greece has the highest reported migrant and refugee arrivals in Europe, with 10,408 land and sea arrivals as of June 2020 – including 653 Congolese (8.6% of new arrivals) and 477 Somalis.

COVID-19 restrictions force reduction in asylum claims and support in Europe

The EU Asylum Agency (EASO), released a report in May 2020 warning that the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting economic and social unrest could drive an increase in asylum-related migration, especially as Europe begins to reopen its borders. However, the report also highlights that the COVID-19 restrictions that were put in place eliminated almost all asylum claims in the EU. For example, there was a 43% reduction of asylum claims in the EU for March 2020 as compared to the same period in 2019.

Thousands of East Africans (notably Eritreans and Somalis) apply for asylum in Europe every year. There are concerns that Covid-19 will do long-term damage to refugee and migrant rights, as European countries adopt stricter policies which could exclude people seeking better economic opportunities, as well as those fleeing political persecution.

Rescue boats 'docked'

In addition, the coronavirus crisis and the continued closure of borders and travel into Europe has impacted the ability of NGOs and humanitarian organizations to carry out rescue operations in the Mediterranean Sea. Specifically, the closure of ports in Italy and Malta has left refugees and migrants as well as rescue boats stranded for extended periods at sea. Though the number of arrivals is low, there are still refugees and migrants from East Africa undertaking dangerous maritime journeys across the Mediterranean to reach Europe. NGOs operating rescue ships in the Mediterranean have accused the governments of Italy and Malta of using the coronavirus crisis to illegally close borders for asylum seekers. Governments in Rome and Valetta maintain that it is crucial for ports and points of entry to remain closed to contain the coronavirus pandemic.

The Southern route towards South Africa

South Africa builds border wall with Zimbabwe

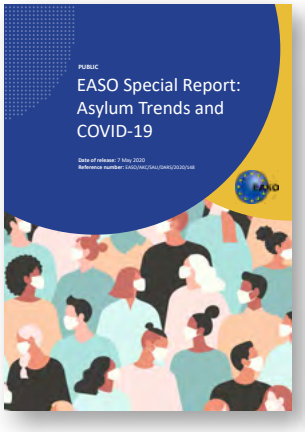
South Africa completed a 40km border wall on the border with Zimbabwe in May 2020, as part of border security activities which will also introduce increased patrols along the border areas. This is the latest effort to step up border controls with Zimbabwe, where much of the irregular migration into South Africa occurs. The South African government announced the border wall in March 2020, though it's now being touted as tool to control the spread of COVID-19. There are reports that the South African government used the opportunity of the pandemic to complete a border fence with Zimbabwe that fits in line with its efforts to reduce migration. South Africa and Zimbabwe are both Member States of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the erection of this border wall points to a prioritisation of securitised approaches to border management governance in the region.

Migrants feeling strain of COVID-19 lockdown in South Africa

East African refugees, asylum seekers and migrants in South Africa have been reportedly feeling pressure due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and government lockdown. South Africa is host to more than 260,000 refugees and asylum seekers, largely made up of East Africans from Somalia, Ethiopia and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Migrants and asylum seekers in South Africa are particularly struggling due to the economic strain of the lockdown and the exclusion from the formal economy that many migrants experience in the country, which also largely excludes them from government relief packages. South Africa requires migrants to provide national identification for health services, so East African refugees and migrants who don't have appropriate identification face stigma and exclusion (including for COVID-19 testing). As a result, migrants and asylum seekers have largely been left behind in the national response to the pandemic, which puts them in an increasingly vulnerable position.

UNHCR reports that over 95% of the calls that they now receive from refugees in South Africa are now from those in dire need of food and financial assistance. UNHCR also warns that evictions and detentions of refugees during the lockdown are on the rise, due to loss of income. In addition, asylum seekers and migrants make up a disproportionate percentage of the low paid informal or 'gig economy' of South Africa, specifically working as dispatch and delivery drivers, which puts them at high risk of contraction of Covid-19.

Highlighted New Research and Reports



Special Report: Asylum Trends and COVID-19

European Asylum Support Office | May, 2020

The European Asylum Support Office (EASO) released a Special Report which highlights asylum cases in 2020 and the risk of COVID-19 spread in lower income countries, leading to more insecurity, could result in increases in asylum applications in the medium term.

Smuggling in the Time of COVID-19: The impact of the pandemic on human smuggling dynamics and migrant protection risks

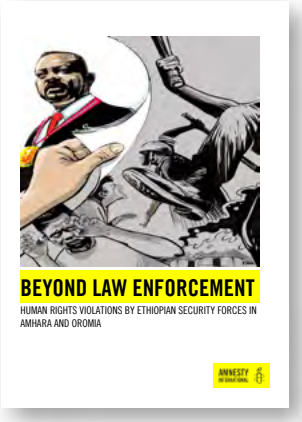
Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime | April 2020

This report looks at the increasingly hostile environment towards migrants, which is likely to get worse with stigma against migrants related to the Covid-19 pandemic. However, the reliance on smugglers and trafficking networks for migrants may increase in the medium term due to the restrictions put in place to contain the virus, while also increasing the vulnerability of migrants.

COVID-19 and mobility, conflict, and development in the Horn of Africa

Research and Evidence Facility (REF) | June 2020

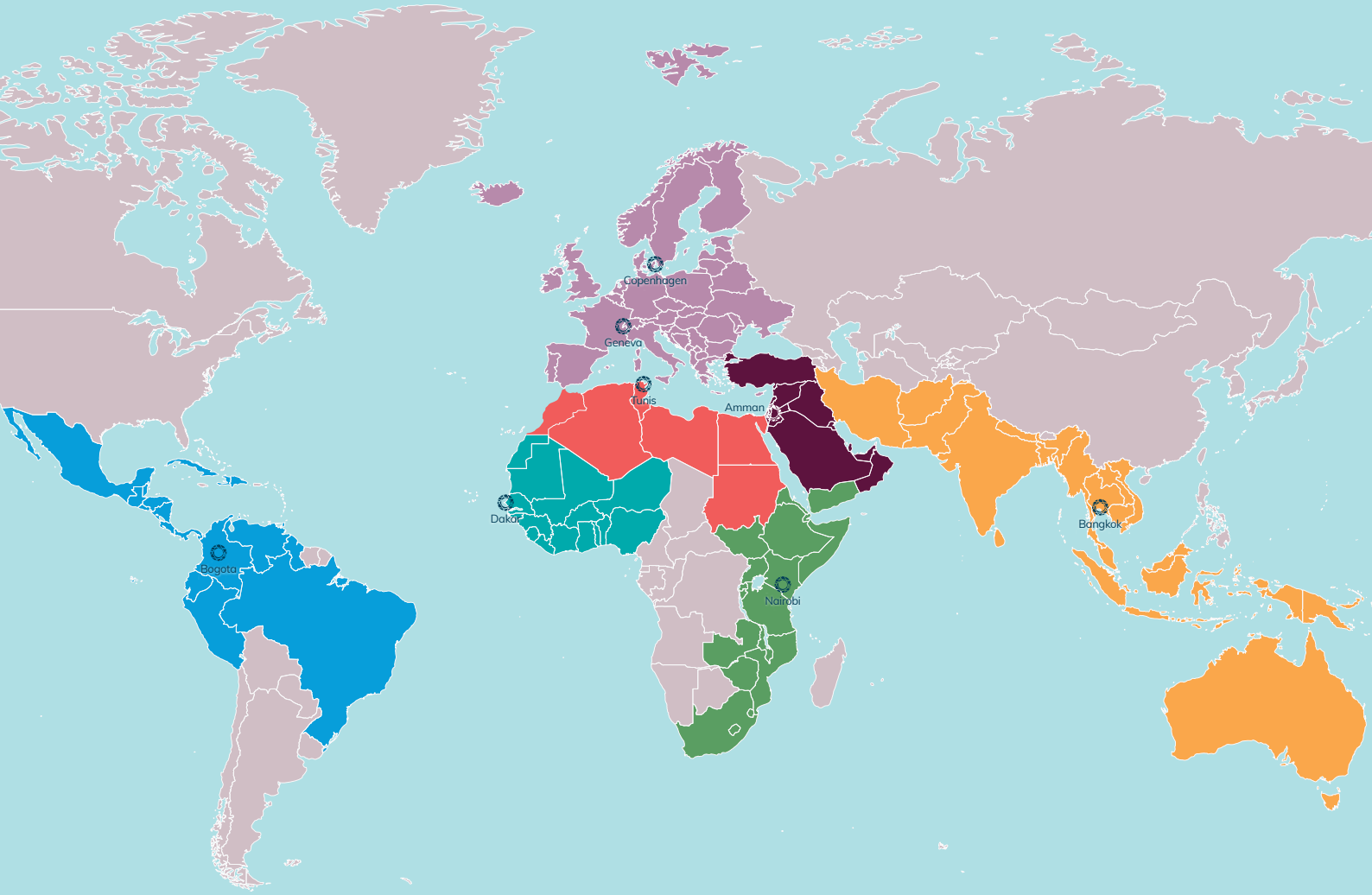
This briefing paper lays out preliminary findings on the impact that COVID-19 has had on the mobility, conflict and development in the Horn of Africa.



Ethiopia: beyond law enforcement: human rights violations by Ethiopian security forces in Amhara and Oromia

Amnesty International | May 2020

The political reforms introduced in Ethiopia in 2018 presented the country with an opportunity to break with its poor human rights record. This report lays out that while initial first steps have been taken towards improving the human rights environment in the country, violence threatens to derail sustained long-term gain.



The MMC is a global network consisting of seven regional hubs and a central unit in Geneva engaged in data collection, research, analysis and policy development on mixed migration. The MMC is a leading source for independent and high-quality data, research, analysis and expertise on mixed migration. The MMC aims to increase understanding of mixed migration, to positively impact global and regional migration policies, to inform evidence-based protection responses for people on the move and to stimulate forward thinking in public and policy debates on mixed migration. The MMC's overarching focus is on human rights and protection for all people on the move.

The MMC is part of and governed by the Danish Refugee Council (DRC). Global and regional MMC teams are based in Amman, Copenhagen, Dakar, Geneva, Nairobi, Tunis, Bogota and Bangkok.

For more information visit:
mixedmigration.org and follow us at @Mixed_Migration

Mixed Migration Centre

DRC DANISH REFUGEE COUNCIL