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Migration and Asylum Challenges in Eastern Africa: Mixed Migration Flows Require Dual Policy Approaches

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Abstract

Little is known in Europe on the nature and trajectories of migration flows from and within East Africa and the Horn of Africa. With countries simultaneously hosting and assisting internally displaced persons, refugees, returnees, victims of trafficking, as well as labour migrants, this region stands out for the complexity and dynamism of its migration and asylum reality. This brief aims to provide some basic facts about migration and displacement flows in the region, the main challenges they trigger and the EU and regional frameworks established to deal with them. In so doing, it points to the mixed nature of these flows and to the importance of adopting a multi-tiered approach to respond to such challenges

Key words: Eastern Africa, Horn of Africa, mixed flows, Internally displaced people, refugees, labour migration, Karthoum Process.

POLICY
BRIEF



The only image that Europe gets of East African and Horn of Africa migrants is that of disoriented Somali and Eritreans arriving in Lampedusa after a long and hazardous journey, or that of anonymous deaths in the Mediterranean regularly reported in the media. The many others who die trying to cross the Gulf of Aden to Yemen and then to the Gulf countries (223 victims in 2014, according to the United Nations) go largely unnoticed. However, the migration and asylum reality in this region deserves more attention as it is complex and dynamic, with countries simultaneously hosting and assisting internally displaced persons, refugees, returnees, victims of trafficking and labour migrants. Ongoing conflicts are compounding this drama, and call for attention from the international community¹. But most of these flows are mixed, with a significant economic dimension as well, and they require a corresponding multi-tiered approach. This brief describes the main challenges facing the region in the migration and asylum field and the EU and regional frameworks established to deal with them.

Migration flows from and to East Africa are low, for now...

As shown in Chart 1, the current number of migrants from Eastern Africa is limited: fewer than 7 million worldwide out of a total population of around 315 million; i.e. 2.2% of total population, well below the world average migration rate of 3.3%. More than two thirds are settled in other African countries (i.e. South-South migration). Like much of the rest of the continent Eastern Africa has a long history of cross-border migration as people follow their traditional mobility habits over arbitrarily demarcated borders. Chart 2 shows that only Djibouti (a small country of slightly below 1 million inhabitants) and South Sudan (due to its recent creation) have 5% or more migrants in their total population.

¹ See the recent IOM report (2014), *Fatal Journey. Tracking Lives Lost During Migration*, International Organization for Migration, Geneva, http://publications.iom.int/bookstore/free/FatalJourneys_CountingtheUncounted.pdf.

Map & Data of East and Horn of Africa

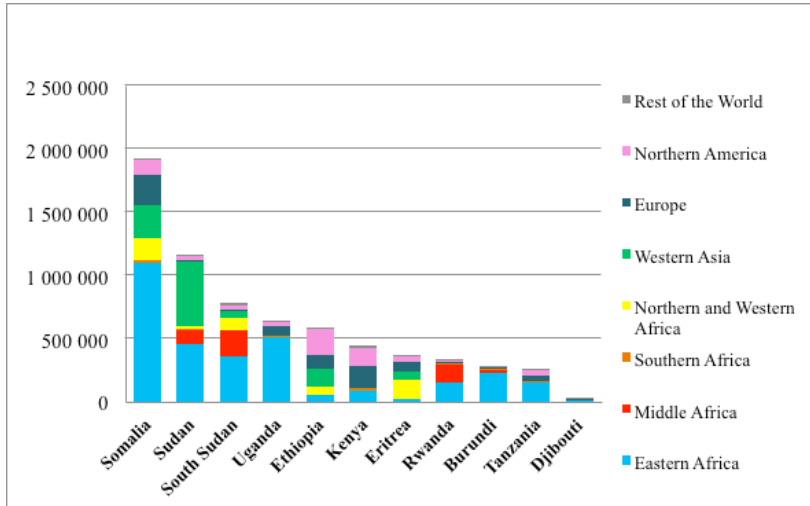
Country	Population (millions) 2013	GNI per capita, PPP (US\$) 2013
Ethiopia	94.101	1,380
Sudan	37.964	3,230
South Sudan	11.296	1,860
Somalia	10.496	n.a.
Eritrea	6.333	1,180
Djibouti	0.873	n.a.
Tanzania	49.253	1,760
Kenya	44.354	2,780
Uganda	37.579	1,470
Rwanda	11.777	1,450
Burundi	10.163	770

Sources: UN DESA, Population Division; The World Bank.



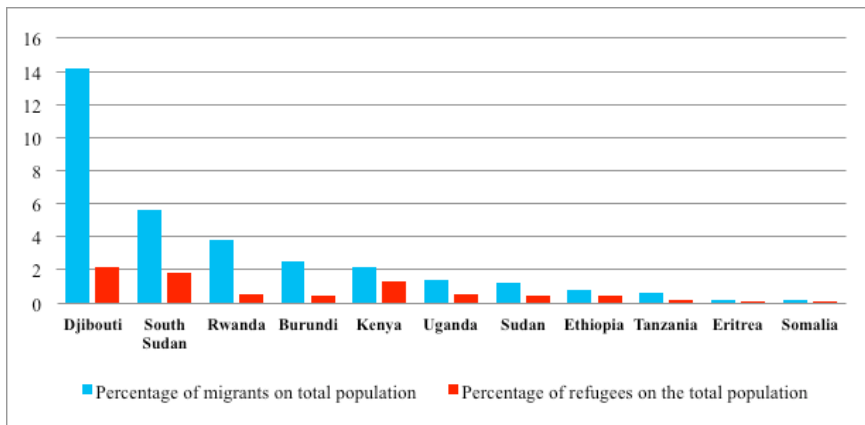


Chart 1. Distribution of migrants from the region across the world in 2013



Source: UN, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2013)

Chart 2. Percentage of migrants and refugees in each country over total population, 2013



Source: UN, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2013)

been taken, but free movement is still far from being a reality: Regulation 6 of Annex II on the free movement of workers provides for the procedure for acquiring work permits, which are not yet harmonized. The EAC is also finalizing an Annex to the CMP on the mutual recognition of professional and academic qualifications. This would lay the foundations for Mutual Recognition Agreements: professional bodies for accountants and architects have already signed.

² On Sudan, see MunzoulAssal (2011), "Conflict-induced Migration in Sudan and Post-Referendum Challenges", CARIM Analytic and Synthetic Notes 2011/75, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, European University Institute, <http://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/19881/ASN2011-75.pdf?sequence=1>.

To a certain extent, these low migration levels are due to the restrictive and even repressive policies applied in many of the countries of the region, both in terms of emigration and immigration. The Ethiopian Government, for instance, has completely banned overseas labour recruitment (i.e. legal emigration) since October 2013; before then, the Ethiopian Government estimated that around 1,500 Ethiopians migrated daily as part of the legal activity of 400 authorized international placement agencies.

Attempts to implement the free movement of persons within the East African Community are still in the preparatory stage. The Eastern African Community (Republic of Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, the United Republic of Tanzania, and the Republic of Uganda) adopted, in 2010, a Common Market Protocol (CPM): this was to guarantee the free movement of goods, persons, labour, services and capital; and to ensure the enjoyment of the rights of establishment and residence of their nationals within the Community.

Important preparatory steps have been taken, but free movement is still far from being a reality: Regulation 6 of Annex II on the free movement of workers provides for the procedure for acquiring work permits, which are not yet harmonized. The EAC is also finalizing an Annex to the CMP on the mutual recognition of professional and academic qualifications. This would lay the foundations for Mutual Recognition Agreements: professional bodies for accountants and architects have already signed.



...but forced migration flows are large and increasing...

In contrast, several countries in East Africa and the Horn of Africa face huge flows of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs). In 2012, the region had the largest increase in the number of refugees globally. In 2014, the total number of refugees and IDPs exceeded the number of migrants. Somalia and Sudan, in particular, are home to almost 2.5 million refugees and IDPs each², and the same predicament affects Eritrea and South Sudan (see Chart 3)³. South Sudan has seen its number of IDPs increase to 1.5 million as a consequence of the civil conflict which exploded in December 2013, and 600,000 further refugees have fled to Sudan, Uganda, Ethiopia and Kenya since then.

As seen in Chart 4, most refugees end up stranded in the region and, in particular, in Kenya, Ethiopia, Chad and, to a lesser extent, in Yemen and South Sudan, where local populations often resent their presence. Funding for these increasing flows is lacking throughout Africa, but especially in this region.

With more than one million IDPs each, Sudan, South Sudan and Somalia are among the ten countries with the largest number of IDPs in the world.

³ The United Nations defines IDPs as “people or groups of individuals who have been forced to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of, or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalised violence, violations of human rights or natural- or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an international border.” Since 2007, UNHCR statistics have included both IDPs directly assisted by the organisation and those assumed to be in IDP-like situations but who, for whatever reason, cannot be registered as such. As UNHCR does not operate everywhere, its statistics do not reflect the full number of IDPs in the world today. A more comprehensive count is provided by the Norwegian Refugee Council’s Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC). For more information about the differences in the estimates provided by the two organizations see <http://www.migrationpolicycentre.eu/>.

Interestingly, the region also boasts the only international legal tool to protect IDPs, namely the Kampala Convention. This convention was adopted in the framework of the African Union in October 2009, and entered into force in December 2012, after ratification: 22 out of the 54 AU Member States have ratified to date. The AU Convention is the world’s first continental instrument that legally binds governments to protect the rights and wellbeing of people forced to flee their homes. What is more, it covers all phases of displacement from prevention to protection, assistance and durable solutions. It also embraces all causes of internal displacement including armed conflict, generalized violence, human rights violations, natural or human-made disasters.

The convention sets out the obligations of all concerned parties including States Parties, the African Union, International Organizations and Humanitarian Agencies as well as Members of Armed Groups. It does so for each of the three phases of the displacement process. The actual implementation of this Convention is a crucial challenge, and deserves international assistance.

In comparison to intra-regional flows, the number of asylum applications received in European countries, though it has increased steeply in the last three years, remains relatively marginal (around 60,000 in 2014, see Chart 5).

...leading to widespread trafficking and smuggling

Under these conditions, the Horn of Africa has become a pivotal point in human smuggling and trafficking of human beings, which according to the Danish Refugee Council affects up to 80% of migrants from the region. Eritreans fleeing the country’s militarized regime and Ethiopians trying to cross the Gulf of Aden are the most frequent victims. On Eritreans, the publication of *The Human*



*Trafficking Cycle: The Sinai and Beyond*⁴ excited much attention in the media after a hearing in the European Parliament in November 2013. It estimated the number of victims of trafficking between 25,000 and 30,000 between 2009 and 2013, with possibly 10,000 deaths and USD 600 million paid in ransoms.

Ethiopians trying to cross from Djibouti and Somaliland into Yemen – with the aim of reaching Saudi Arabia – were estimated at 200,000 between 2011 and 2013. They too suffer systematic hijacking and torture for ransoms⁵.

According to UNHCR figures, the number of migrants irregularly arriving in Yemen from the Horn of Africa in 2014 stood at 82,000, against 65,000 in 2013. The verified deaths also increased, from 179 in 2013 to 223 last year. A recent report of the Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat⁶ shows the increasing difficulties and closing of routes taking migrants and refugees from the region east (Yemen and Saudi Arabia) and north (through Egypt and the Sinai into Israel, a route sealed since 2013 due to the construction of the Negev desert wall by Israel). This explains the increased recourse to the “Western”

route through Libya into Europe. The Southern route continues to be used as well, as at least 20,000 Somalis and Ethiopians are estimated to make the journey to South Africa (RMMS, 2013)⁷.

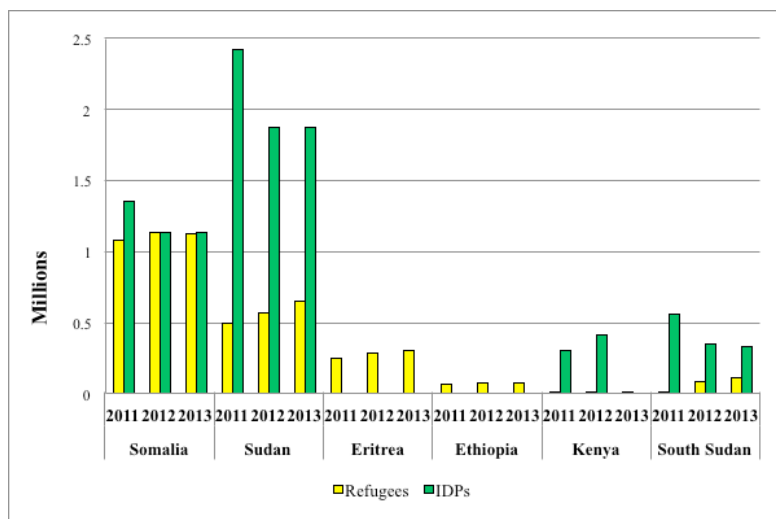
⁴ Mirjam van Reisen, MeronEstefanos and ConnyRijken (2013), *The Human Trafficking Cycle: The Sinai and Beyond*, Wolf Publishers, http://www.eepa.be/wcm/dmdocuments/Small_HumanTrafficking-Sinai2-web-3.pdf.

⁵ See Karen Jakobsen (2013), *Ransom, Collaborators and Corruption: Sinai Trafficking and Transnational Networks*, Tufts University, <http://fic.tufts.edu/assets/Ransom-Collaborate-Corrupt-8-12.pdf>.

⁶ RMMS (2014), *Going West: Contemporary Mixed Migration Trends from the Horn of Africa to Libya and Europe*, www.regionalmms.org/fileadmin/content/rmms_publications/Going_West_migration_trends_Libya_Europe_final.pdf. The RMSS is a joint project of IOM, UNHCR, Danish Refugee Council and Intersos.

⁷ RMSS (2013), *Migrant Smuggling in the Horn of Africa & Yemen: The Political Economy and Protection Risks*. RMMS, Nairobi, http://regionalmms.org/fileadmin/content/monthly%20summaries/series_booklet_Leo.pdf.

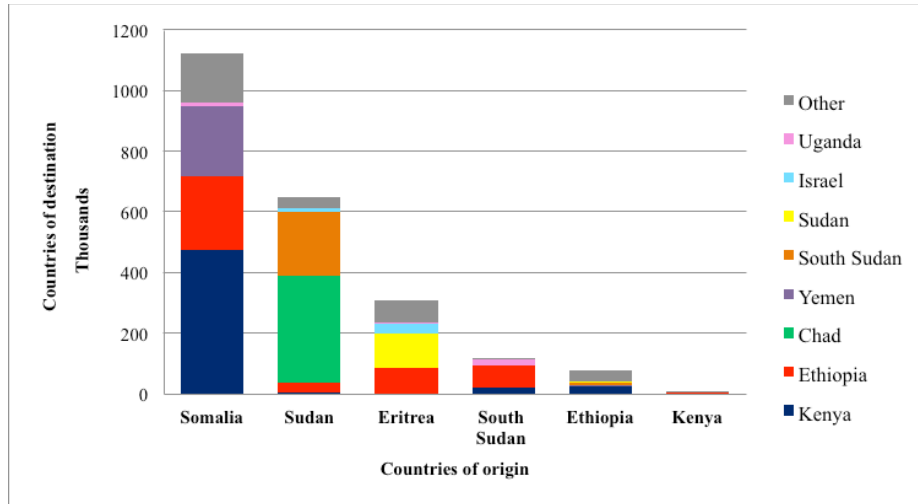
Chart 3. Number of refugees and IDPs from the Region (main countries of origin), 2011-2013



Source: UNHCR



Chart 4. Main countries of destination of refugees from the region, 2013



Source: UNHCR

A permeating economic migration dimension

Despite the prevalence of refugee and IDP flows, all analysis and practitioners stress the mixed nature of migration flows in the region: namely, the economic dimension underlying the recorded forced migration flows. This is particularly true if one considers migration flows to the Gulf countries, which are particularly relevant from Sudan, with an important professional diaspora (see Sudan Migration Profile)⁸, Somalia and, to a lesser extent, Ethiopia and Eritrea (see Chart 1). The recent IOM report on this phenomenon (IOM, 2014)⁹ also highlighted this economic dimension on the basis of interviews with asylum candidates in Europe and an analysis of their profile country by country.

Of course, the prevalence of forced migration flows is mainly a consequence of conflicts and repressive regimes. In Eritrea, for instance, the exodus is to a large extent motivated by the implementation of National Service (military or social service/employment in public administration) of undefined length imposed in 1991 for all young people. But the lack of meaningful regular migration channels (for permanent or temporary migration, as well as family reunification mechanisms or scholarships) adds to

the pressure. A look at the population and income data of the countries in the region (see table above) helps to complete the picture.

Additionally, both demographic and development considerations suggest that labour migration pressures will, if anything, increase significantly in the coming years (see RMSS 2012)¹⁰. According to a UNICEF report¹¹, because of their extremely young population the eleven Eastern African countries have more than 165 million children under 18 in 2015

⁸ CARIM (2012), CARIM Migration Profile: Sudan, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, European University Institute, http://www.carim.org/public/migrationprofiles/MP_Sudan_EN.pdf. See also MunzoulAssal (2010), « Highly-Skilled Sudanese Migrants: Gain or Drain ? », CARIM Analytic and Synthetic Notes 2010/13, http://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/13450/CARIM_ASN_2010_13.pdf?sequence=1.

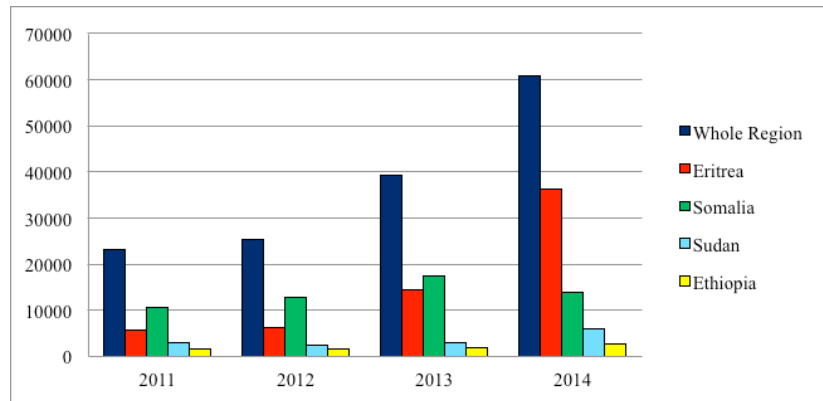
⁹ IOM, Op Cit.

¹⁰ Global Migration Futures. Using Scenarios to Explore Future Migration in the Horn of Africa & Yemen, <http://www.imi.ox.ac.uk/pdfs/projects/gmf-pdfs/global-migration-futures-using-scenarios-to-explore-future-migration-in-the-horn-of-africa-yemen>, pp. 9-12.

¹¹ UNICEF (2014), Generation 2030. Africa, August 2014, www.unicef.org/publications/files/UNICEF_Africa_Generation_2030_en_11Aug.pdf.



Chart 5. Number of new asylum applications in EU28, 2011-2014



Source: Eurostat

Note: Data for December 2014 are missing for Czech Republic, Croatia, Hungary, Malta, the Netherlands, Austria and Portugal. Data for Finland are not available for November and December 2014

(Ethiopia 48 million, Tanzania 27 million, Kenya 23 million, Uganda 22 million and Sudan 19 million), and the total number of children in that age bracket will still increase by 60 million by 2030. So the number of young people reaching working age each year in the region will increase from around 10 million a year now to around 15 million a year in 2030. To compound this demographic challenge, the region is the worst affected by extreme poverty in Africa, with 54% of its population living under 1.25 dollars a day per person and 77% living under 2 dollars per day and per person. Projections all suggest that even a good performance in economic growth in those countries will likely translate into increased emigration, at least at first (see RMMS 2012, pp. 23 and 27).

What EU cooperation frameworks within and beyond the Khartoum Process?

In this context, in November 2014 the European Union and the African Union launched a regional initiative to deal with migration and asylum challenges: the so-called Khartoum Process or “EU-Horn of Africa Migration Route Initiative”. Involving the European Union and Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia,

South Sudan, Sudan, Djibouti, Kenya, Egypt and Tunisia, the “Rome Declaration”¹² focused on trafficking and smuggling of human beings from the region, and commits the signing states to establishing and managing reception centres, cooperating in the identification and prosecution of criminal networks, supporting victims of trafficking and protecting the human rights of smuggled migrants. It does not tackle, however, the issue of the hazards and dangers to which forced migrants are exposed in many of the countries of the region in which the reception centers are based, which often are far from being “safe”.

The Rome Declaration also generally commits to promoting sustainable development in countries of origin and transit in order to address the root causes of irregular migration and mixed migration flows between Africa and Europe. However, it is completely silent on legal migration channels, which build one of the four key pillars of the other EU’s continental cooperation framework with Africa, the Rabat Process¹³.

¹² http://www.esteri.it/mae/approfondimenti/2014/20141128_political_declaration.pdf.

¹³ <http://processusderabat.net/web/>.

This notwithstanding, the Rome Declaration allows for cooperation, beyond trafficking and smuggling, in “assisting in improving national capacity building in the field of migration management in all its components”. More promising, the Declaration opens up new perspectives through “our firm political commitment to expand the Khartoum Process into a sustainable regional dialogue on migration and mobility which will address the root causes of irregular migration and mixed migration flows in a comprehensive and balanced way”. Indeed, in the meantime, the thematic priorities agreed in the Rome Declaration allow for wide-ranging cooperation actions in the field of migration: “better organizing legal migration and fostering well-managed mobility, including intra and inter-regional labour mobility; assisting in improving national capacity building in migration management in all its components and addressing irregular migration [...], preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and smuggling of migrants; maximising

the development impact of migration and mobility through concrete initiatives; promoting cooperation on protection and its principles for refugees and asylum seekers”.

In this spirit, there are negotiations under way for a bilateral Common Agenda on Migration and Mobility with Ethiopia, the most populous country in the region. A regional programme for “Addressing mixed migration flows in the Horn of Africa” (€5,000,000 for 2015-2017)¹⁴ has already been approved and others should follow on.

There is notable lack of reliable data on migration flows in the region and many knowledge gaps¹⁵. Therefore, a first step for a regional strategy on migration and mobility might be the development of strong migration information systems and national migration profiles, as a basis for evidence-based policy formulation.

¹⁴ http://eu-un.europa.eu/articles/es/article_15894_es.htm.

¹⁵ See ACP Observatory on Migration (2011), Overview on South-South Migration and Development in East Africa. Trends and Research Needs, www.acpmigration-obs.org/sites/default/files/Regional%20Overview%20East%20Africa.pdf.

Migration Policy Centre

The Migration Policy Centre at the European University Institute, Florence, conducts advanced research on global migration to serve migration governance needs at European level, from developing, implementing and monitoring migration-related policies to assessing their impact on the wider economy and society. The Migration Policy Centre is co-financed by the European Union.

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