Migration Between the Horn of Africa and Yemen (Preliminary Findings - April 2017)

This research brief provides a summary of the preliminary findings of research being carried out by the Research and Evidence Facility (REF) on behalf of the EU Trust Fund for Africa. The purpose of the project is to explore the bi-directional migration flows between the Horn of Africa (HoA) and Yemen in order to identify areas of effective policy interventions. It should:

1. Provide a rigorous, research-based analysis that improves understanding of the causes of dangerous and exploitative migration between the HoA and Yemen;
2. Understand the actual and potential role of policy interventions in mitigating the impacts of this migration in areas of origin and transit in the HoA.

The research takes a comparative approach, looking at migration through the two main gateways between the HoA and Yemen: Puntland and Djibouti. Research teams have been established in Puntland (Bossaso, Garowe and Qardho), Djibouti (Obock and Djibouti town) and Yemen (Sana'a, Aden and Houdeidah). Field work has been ongoing for two months in Puntland and several weeks in Yemen. However, due to delays in securing the necessary government approvals, field work in Djibouti has been delayed.

As a consequence, the findings summarized in this report should be considered as preliminary and incomplete, and may be subject to change and modification as new and comparative data becomes available, in particular from Djibouti and Yemen. A final report will be made available following completion of fieldwork, which will include a detailed analysis of all findings, together with recommendations on gaps and opportunities for future programming.

1. Research Aims

The project seeks to address the following core research questions:

1. What is driving the growth in migration from the HoA to Yemen despite the dangers of the journey and the deteriorating security situation in Yemen?
2. To what extent are smuggling and trafficking networks involved in facilitating these movements?
3. What is the impact of these movements on the lives of migrants?
4. What is the impact of these movements on local communities and wider society?
5. What are the existing policy and programme responses to this migration?
6. What are the gaps and opportunities for future programming?

Qualitative primary data collection is carried out through semi-structured interviews, key informant interviews and focus group discussions. Four groups of primary respondents were identified: migrants including Somali, Ethiopians and Yemenis); key informants from institutions (government, UN agencies, NGOs, donors, etc.); key informants from the community, private and public sector); and smugglers and traffickers. In order to ensure comparability of findings, a set of common research protocols has been developed for each of these groups. Focus group discussions will also be conducted in each of the project sites with community members from areas where migrants settle or transit.

In addition to collecting primary data, the research team is carrying out an extensive desk review of existing literature, reports and data from academics, UN agencies, NGOs, government bodies and other sources, on migration between the HoA and Yemen.

Findings and data from the desk review will be incorporated throughout the report to enhance the coverage of the final output.

2. Migration Numbers and Trends
### 2.1. Migration from the HoA to Yemen

While the number of migrants crossing from the HoA into Yemen has fluctuated, data points to an overall upward trajectory, with a record number of 117,095 migrant arrivals in Yemen in 2016 (see Figure 1, below). It is estimated that between January 2006 and December 2016, over 800,000 people have made the crossing to Yemen. Ethiopians and Somalis represent nearly all of these migrants; in 2016, 83% were Ethiopians, and 17% were Somalis. This route comprises mainly young, single males. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that 20 to 30% of Ethiopian migrants are female.

Migrants travelling to Yemen take two main routes. The Bossaso route involves a number of staging points from the Ethiopian border, and across Somaliland and Puntland, much of this by car or truck across dirt tracks, in order to avoid police check points. Once in Bossaso, migrants cross the Arabian Sea by boat to landing points around Al-Mukalla in Yemen. The second route to Yemen traverses Djibouti towards Obock, and involves a shorter, more protected sea crossing over the Red Sea to the coast of Yemen. The popularity of these two routes has oscillated over time in response to evolving events and a number of determinants, including cost, access, danger and risk, and duration of the journey. The relative weight of these factors will depend on the decision maker and their individual context and circumstances. However, cost and access (here defined as migrants' ability to successfully negotiate and access different routes and destinations) are typically most significant in understanding migrants' decisions about which route to take.

Once they have reached Yemen, the intention for the majority of migrants is not to stay, but to continue on to the Gulf States, in particular Saudi Arabia, where they hope to work and save money. A growing minority of mainly Somali migrants also choose to migrate to Europe via Yemen. After taking the usual crossing from Bossaso to Yemen via the Arabian Sea, the migrants travel overland to the Red Sea coast, typically to Mokha, from where they take a second boat to Sudan. From there, they travel overland through Sudan, to either Libya or Egypt, and then on to Europe. A number of

Figure 1: New arrivals in Yemen from 2006 to 2016 (Source: UNHCR)
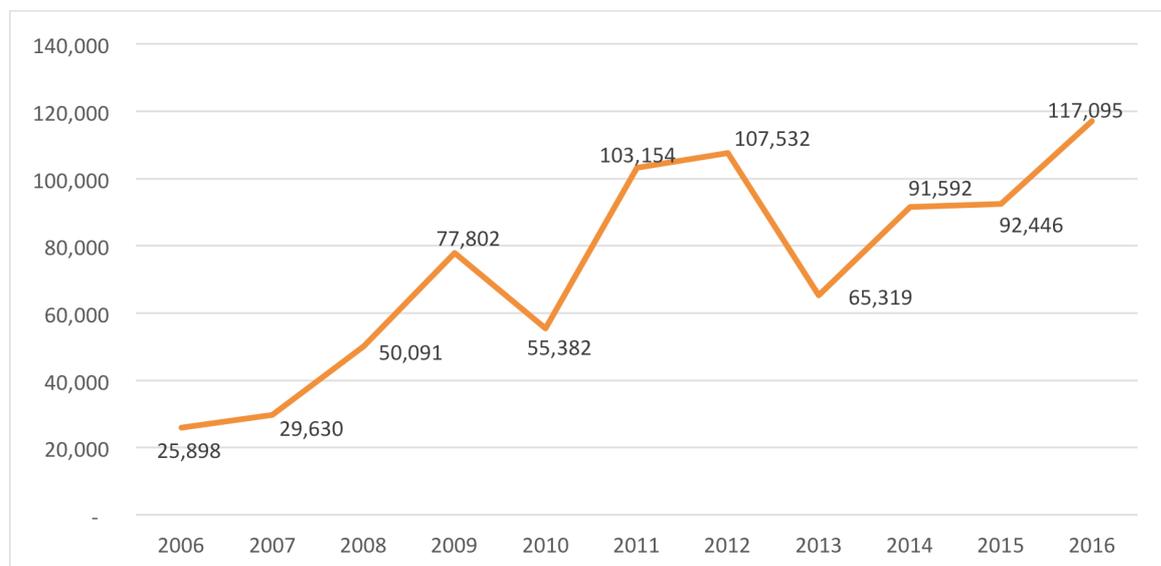
respondents indicated that they were planning to embark on this journey, or had family members who had already travelled to Europe along this route. International awareness of this route increased in March 2017, when 42 Somali refugees travelling from Yemen to Sudan were killed by a missile attack from an Apache helicopter 30 miles off the coast of Yemen, near the Bab al-Mandeb strait.[i]

2.2. Migration from Yemen to the HoA

Large numbers of migrants also move in the opposite direction from Yemen to the HoA. UNHCR estimates that 92,603 people have left Yemen for the HoA (mainly Djibouti and Somalia) since the start of the conflict in Yemen.[ii] Somalis returnees and Yemenis refugees make up the majority of these migrants, constituting 35% and 30% of the totals respectively. In terms of gender, 52% of migrants are male, 48% female, and 46% are under the age of 18 years.

3. Drivers of Migration

As in many contexts, the reasons or drivers for migration between the HoA and Yemen are multiple, overlapping and change over time. Some of the drivers may be aspirational in nature, in that migrants are choosing to move in order to increase their options. Other drivers may carry less agency or ambition, whereby migrants feel that they have no choice but to move in order to escape unsustainable physical or economic insecurity. Broadly speaking, drivers can be divided into three categories.

First, there are the changing political, economic and security conditions, that determine people's living conditions and subsequently contribute to incentives to move elsewhere. Economic factors were the most common driver voiced by both Ethiopian and Somali migrants. A shortage of employment or livelihood opportunities, low salaries and land scarcity (amongst Ethiopians especially) were the main contributing factors to economic uncertainty. Most of the respondents indicated that they were not able to earn enough money, and their main aspiration for moving was to find a good job and save money. The majority believe that it is relatively easy to secure a well-paid job abroad, and they are encouraged by friends and other migrants who describe positive experiences in Saudi Arabia. Political and security factors, linked to fear of political persecution and conflict were also commonly cited by both Ethiopian and Somali respondents.

Second, there are the underlying socio-political structures that shape responses to these conditions. These include state policies, cultures of migration, assistance frameworks and family and social networks, which play an important role in determining whether, when and how migrants move or stay put. For example, common traditions or cultures of migration have emerged over time, which shape migrants' decisions and choices about when, where and how to move. These become established and strengthened over time by the formation of established routes, recognised agents and diasporic groups in destination countries. In this

Figure 2: Number of migrant arrivals from Yemen to Djibouti and Somaliland, Puntland and South Central (Source: UNHCR)
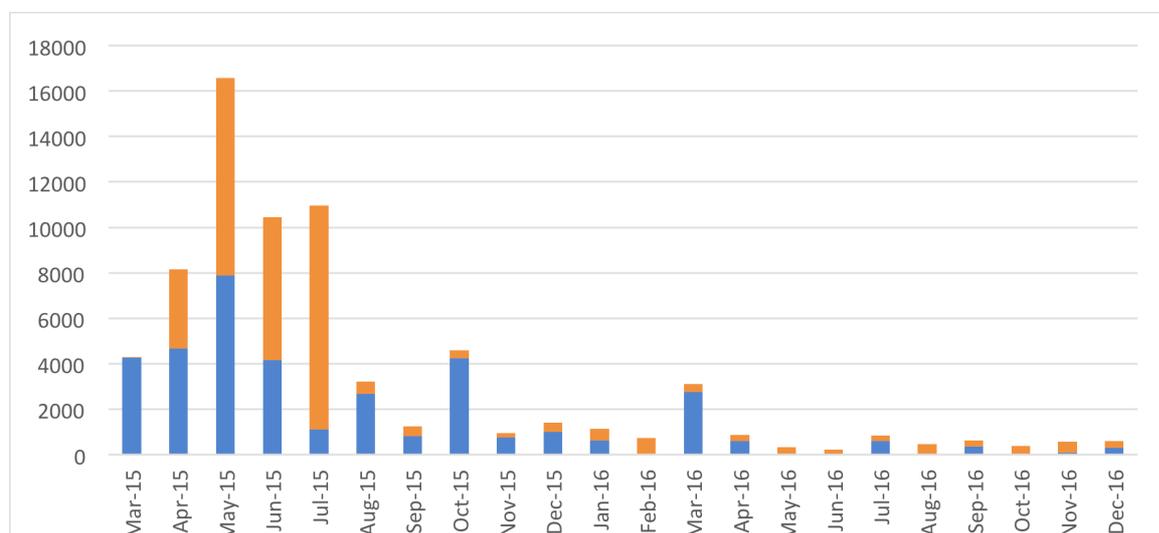
context, family and social networks are important when it comes to migration choices and patterns. In many cases, they play an active role in encouraging, paying for and pushing would-be migrants into moving, raising questions about who ultimately makes decisions about migration. That said, in a break with common practice, there is growing evidence that Somali migrants are choosing to move independently and without the approval or knowledge of family members. The 'leave now, pay later' scheme increasingly adopted by smugglers negates the need to involve other family members or social networks in the decision to migrate, whilst also implicating them later on in the associated costs.

Third, the research explores the possible implications of a deterioration in conditions in the region on migration patterns, with a particular focus on conflict in Yemen, political unrest in Ethiopia, and drought and potential famine in Somalia. In this context, while drivers may be linked to migrants' specific circumstances or individual situations, they may also be structural and underlying in nature, over which migrants can have little or no control. Nevertheless, patterns of migration in response to deteriorating conditions have not always emerged in line with common expectations or assumptions. Logically, places of conflict are generally characterised by increased out-migration and reduced in-migration as people look for greater safety and security elsewhere. In spite of ongoing conflict, the scale of out-migration from Yemen quickly slowed after the first few months, and the anticipated larger influx of refugees into neighbouring countries never occurred. What's more, the expected reduction in in-migration by Ethiopian and Somali migrants also did not materialise. Many Ethiopian and Somali migrants have been encouraged by the breakdown of state institutions in Yemen and subsequent lack of policy and control. They believe (or are led to believe by smugglers) that this vacuum provides an opportunity to enter, travel through and exit the country unnoticed.

4. Smuggling and Trafficking Networks

The scale and scope of smuggling and trafficking activities has increased in recent years, together with the revenue they earn and the scale and severity of the abuses they inflict on migrants

(Human Rights Watch, 2014). The networks have evolved over time to span borders across Ethiopia, Somaliland, Puntland, Djibouti, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, and beyond. These often work in a syndicate, selling migrants from one group to the next as they pass from country to country. This shift in scope and professionalism can be attributed to a number of factors. Firstly, with the increase in migrants travelling along these routes, there has been a significant growth in demand for smugglers' services. Secondly, the potential profits linked to smuggling and trafficking are substantial, which has encouraged a growing supply of individuals and groups eager to offer their services. Thirdly, smugglers and traffickers appear to operate with relative impunity, as a result of a lack of sustained or meaningful response from local or national authorities. In spite of high-level rhetoric and the adoption of international and national smuggling and trafficking legislation, in practice, states have failed to challenge to the networks on the ground.

A number of key findings in smuggling activities have been identified by the research.

- Until recently, overland movements through Somalia were generally made independently. However, it is clear that the geographic reach of smugglers and traffickers has expanded in recent years to include both maritime and overland sections.

- Migrants' descriptions of their experience of smuggling suggests that the organised crime groups are carrying out 'smuggling with aggravated circumstances.'[iii] There are numerous examples of abuse, torture, degradation, risk of life and death of migrants at the hands of smugglers. Furthermore, migrants are actively coerced into using smugglers' services, and reported being picked up or "captured" by smugglers who obliged them to pay for their services, or risk facing detention or abuse. This marks a change in the standardised definition of migrant-smuggler relationship (one based on a consensual and transnational transaction), and suggests a greater blurring of the lines between smuggling and trafficking.

- Reports and testimony by migrants points to the collusion of a range of officials in

smuggling and trafficking activities. The definition of collusion ranges from turning a blind eye, to active involvement by the authorities. This includes the police, military and intelligence services, as well as border and customs authorities, and higher ranking government officials. Concerns that local authorities may be implicated in the smuggling and trafficking networks are reinforced by local governments' seeming reluctance to meaningfully tackle the criminal groups, or target the transit and departure points frequented by the networks.

- Anecdotal evidence suggests that these networks are involved in other criminal activities, in particular the illegal smuggling of goods and commodities, as well as weapons and ammunitions, between Yemen and Puntland. This claim was supported by a number of key informants from governmental and security institutions in Bossaso, as well as photographic evidence collected by the research team. Connections between smuggling networks and extremist groups in the region are possible given their close geographic proximity, but not substantiated by any real evidence. That said, extremist groups are known to exploit migrants to their advantage, and this threat should be monitored in the context of migration to Yemen. For example, the maritime routes from Turkey to Greece gained notoriety when a number of ISIS operatives were identified as having used the same routes, posing as migrants and refugees in order to enter Europe undetected.

5. Impacts of Migration

5.1. Impact on Migrants

Irregular migration between the HoA and Yemen is dangerous, involving contact with criminal groups, risky sea crossings and exposure to the elements. Migrants typically suffer a range of challenges and difficulties along these routes. These include well-documented cases of protection risks and abuse, including murder, theft, sexual violence, economic exploitation, abandonment in the desert,

prostitution, trafficking, arbitrary detention and refoulement. Yemen appears to be a focal point for much of the abuse that is occurring, in particular during sea crossings and disembarkation, and upon during transit through the country. Not only is it much harder for asylum seekers and refugees to access international protection in Yemen, but smugglers and traffickers function with the most impunity there, and many of the protection risks and abuses are associated with these networks. Migrants also face a range of hardships during their journey, including a lack of access to food and water, basic services, shelter and livelihoods, as well as challenges of security and climate. Whereas the above-mentioned protection risks and abuse are propagated upon migrants by individuals or groups, hardships are associated with the general conditions of journey, in particular the social, political, economic, security and environmental structures along the different routes.

As a consequence of these risks, abuse and hardships, many migrants never reach their intended destination. They may be forcibly or voluntarily returned to their place of origin, deported to another country, prefer to settle permanently in a transit location, or die during the journey. Other migrants, who are still en route or arrived at their destination, regret their decision to migrate as a result of their negative experiences along the journey. One female migrant, left traumatised by her experience with the smugglers, and was now destitute in Bossaso, wished to return home. However, more often than not, migrants do not regret their decision to migrate. One Ethiopian respondent reported that his legs had been beaten and injured by smugglers who restricted his movements and freedom, that he had lost money and was in debt, was sick but could not access health services, and had nowhere to sleep and no sanitation facilities in Bossaso. Nevertheless, when asked whether he was better off after moving than he would have been had he stayed in Ethiopia, he replied that he was. Not only do these examples highlight migrants' determination to move, no matter what the consequences. It also calls into question the effectiveness of campaigns that seek to deter migrants from moving by raising awareness of the risks, dangers and difficulties. Many migrants are already aware of these risks and prepared to make the journey regardless, making it unlikely that such campaigns will have their desired effect.

Some groups of migrants are more vulnerable to abuse and hardship than others. These include migrants who have recruited the services of smugglers, as these groups have been widely accused of carrying out abuse and exploitation of migrants, and migrants under their supervision are therefore at greater risk. Migrants that do not register with UNHCR, other agencies, NGOs or government authorities may also be more susceptible to abuse and hardship, as they are subsequently excluded from support and assistance provided by these institutions. Female migrants are more vulnerable to abuse, in particular rape and sexual assault, as well as trafficking. Age is another factor and children, especially unaccompanied migrant children, are very vulnerable, especially as they often lack to access to welfare rights, education, and health services. Finally, nationality and ethnicity can also play role in the levels of abuse experienced by migrants. Migrants coming from countries, or parts of countries, that share cultural, language or religious similarities with the hosting community are more likely to receive greater protection and support than those with greater differences.

5.2. Impact on Communities

It is worth noting that migrants and the transit communities that host them suffer from many of the same hardships. Both Obock and Bossaso are struggling to absorb the influx of migrants and refugees, and living conditions remain difficult for both local residents and migrants. Poverty, unemployment, vulnerability and drought are a feature of both contexts, and the influx of large numbers of additional people is putting further pressure on already overstretched social services, natural resources and livelihoods. This underlines the importance for programmers to implement initiatives that take into account both migrants and residents' needs. Failure to do so can create tensions and discrimination, and has the potential to undermine already strained relations between these two groups.

Generally speaking, however, community respondents voiced mixed feelings towards migrants, recognising that migration brought about both positive and negative impacts on their community. The most commonly reported positive impacts related to economic opportunities associated with the opening of new restaurants, shops and businesses. On the other hand, frequently cited complaints centred around poor sanitation, the spread of disease, cultural differences, and inter-ethnic clashes between Ethiopian migrants. In spite of the difficulties and challenges faced by local communities and the tension and occasional hostility between the two groups, this report documents acts of generosity and kindness by local communities towards migrants. What's more, migrants did not report any significant difficulties in living alongside local communities. These examples point to the potential for a relatively harmonious relationship between migrants and hosting communities, and policy and programmes should seek to build on this.

6. Policy and Programme Responses to Migration

The final report (to be submitted following completion of the fieldwork) will document policy and programme responses from a range of different actors, including states, UN agencies, international and national NGOs, migrant response centres and community level actors, including communities and migrants themselves. Data and information on these is still being collected, however a number of preliminary findings can already be shared:

- There is a clear divide between state policy and practice, whereby official rhetoric or legislation does not reflect practical action on the ground. Large numbers of migrants is a major challenge to the authorities in Puntland, Djibouti and Yemen, and they are unable to meaningfully address or reduce it due to a shortage of funding and capacity. In many cases, local authorities are reluctant to detain migrants as they lack sufficient resources to either detain, deport or protect them. In this context, they have tended to focus on 'quick fix' responses, with limited impact and sustainability. This highlights the need to differentiate between governmental levels and departments when considering migration management, and to take into account their contrasting perceptions, responses and capacities vis a vis migration.

- In spite of the range of risks, abuse and hardship faced by migrants during their journeys, their access to support and assistance is extremely limited. This is due to the peripheral setting of some of the transit areas, and the security risks associated with these locations, which makes it difficult for agencies and NGOs to operate. What's more, only a minority of the organisations that are operational in these areas provide dedicated projects or services for migrants. As a consequence, few migrants interviewed by this project reported receiving support from projects or initiatives run by development or humanitarian actors.

- Support provided to migrants at the community level is also important. This and other research highlights how, in spite of migrant-host community tensions, local residents can provide life changing support to migrants in danger or distress. This includes provision of food, clothes, medical assistance, money, translation services, general support and advice. There are cases of long-established migrants providing shelter and support to new arrivals, particularly those from the same ethnic background. Individuals or groups of migrants are also known to pool funds in order to help others in need of financial assistance. In a context of limited official assistance from governments, agencies and civil society, community-level support plays a vital role in filling gaps, and policy and programmes should seek to strengthen and build upon these grassroots structures of support.

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Notes:[i]

[i] https://www.theworldweekly.com/index.php/reader/view/magazine/2017-03-23/the-gulf-of-adens-new-treacherous-refugee-route/9846/
[ii] http://data.unhcr.org/yemen/regional.php
[iii] Smuggling with aggravated circumstances describes circumstances that endanger the life or safety of the people being smuggled, as well as inhumane or degrading treatment (Sahan, 2016).