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Migration and Displacement Dynamics in the Horn of Africa: A Mobility Mosaic

Laura Hammond, Oliver Bakewell, Padmini Iyer, Louisa Brain, Fekadu Aduigna, Dereje Feyissa, Kalyango Ronald Sebba, and Caitlin Sturridge



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The Research and Evidence Facility Consortium



SOAS University of London
London, United Kingdom
www.soas.ac.uk



The University of Manchester

The University of
Manchester, United
Kingdom
www.gdi.manchester.ac.uk



Sahan
Nairobi, Kenya
www.sahan.global

The Research and Evidence Facility (REF) on migration in the Horn of Africa was a research consortium that explored the dynamics, drivers and implications of mobility, migration and displacement in the Horn of Africa from 2016 to 2024.

The REF was led by SOAS University of London in partnership with The University of Manchester and Sahan Research, based in Nairobi, Kenya.

The REF was founded and financed by the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa. Its mission is to investigate the dynamics and contexts in which Trust Fund initiatives are implemented within the Horn of Africa region, and to generate pertinent knowledge and evidence for programming and policy-making purposes.

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Cover image: Alpha Mukange. The artist is a Congolese refugee living in Kakuma Refugee Camp, Kenya. Instagram: @alphamukangeart

For more information on The Research and Evidence Facility visit the website:

blogs.soas.ac.uk/ref-hornresearch



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Foreword

Since 2015, the EU Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF) has been established to foster stability and contribute to better migration management as well, as to improve migration governance by addressing the root causes of destabilisation, forced displacement and irregular migration. In the Horn of Africa our work has confronted and continues to face a complex array of challenges — conflicts, environmental shocks and displacement. Yet migration in this region is not a single narrative; it is a tapestry of diverse journeys, each shaped by distinct drivers, risks and aspirations.

The Research and Evidence Facility (REF) — supported by the EUTF — has been central in illuminating the complex dynamics of mobility across the Horn of Africa. From 2016 to 2024, the REF has produced over 60 research publications, deepening our understanding of migration, displacement and mobility. REF's research spans eight countries in the region, contributing to regional knowledge production and building local research capacity. Its network of over 70 researchers — mainly based across the region — has helped foster more equitable and evidence-based research collaboration. The REF has also actively engaged with a broad spectrum of stakeholders: EU delegations, donors, UN agencies, NGOs, government bodies, civil society and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). Through these partnerships, it has generated actionable recommendations for decision makers, making research accessible and policy relevant.

The REF has been a cornerstone of EU engagement in the region, ensuring that support is not built on assumptions but grounded in evidence. It has helped us see more clearly what is happening on the ground, and what kinds of interventions are truly making a difference. This is the power of research when it is connected to practice. What lies in these pages is more than just research — it is evidence rooted in real needs. At its core, this book showcases rigorous, policy-relevant research for practitioners from North and South. It highlights the essential link between displacement and development, demonstrating that effective responses must be tailored to local realities. We are especially pleased that this book is fully open access, further contributing to improved policy design, implementation and evaluation.

The research reveals that we can no longer afford to view migration solely as a crisis or a problem to be managed. Migration is a fundamental part of life: it shapes communities, drives economies, and influences futures. The question is not whether people will move, but how we can better work with them to ensure that migration and displacement are safer, regular and contribute to development in contexts of extreme fragility.

This book pays tribute to the dedication of researchers and to the resilience of the people whose lives are shaped by mobility. The EU's ongoing engagement in the Horn of Africa is based on solid evidence and a firm belief in the power of effective partnerships to support individuals in building better futures. The research provides valuable insights to help policy makers make more informed, targeted decisions about where and how to focus their efforts. May this work lay the foundation for innovative thinking, more resilient partnerships, and lasting improvements in the lives of people on the move.

Geza Strammer

Acting Director of Africa

Directorate-General for International Partnerships – DGINTPA

European Commission

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All of our research was conducted collaboratively, and over the course of the REF's lifetime we worked with over 100 researchers. A full list of our network is provided as an Annex to this book, and we want to thank each and every researcher who worked with us. We also would like to make a special mention of all those who, in addition to our volume authors, served as lead researchers: Abdirahman Ahmed, Bathsheba Asati, Margie Buchanan Smith, Ngala Chome, Peter Chonka, Mohamed Fadal, Etsay Gebreselassie Gebrehiwot, Fana Gebresenbet, Kiya Gezahegne, Gianluca Iazzolino, Susanne Jaspars, Tamiru Jote, Hussein Abdullahi Mahmoud, Nassim Majidi, Farah Manji, Ayan Mohamoud, Daniel Mulugeta, Felicity Okoth, Michael Owiso, Greta SImplici, David Tshimba, Bereket Tsegaye, Mahad Wasuge, Haile Yidnekachew, Meron Zeleke.

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Finally, we would like to thank all of those people on the move across the Horn of Africa who gave their time and insights to make our research possible. We hope we have done some justice to the experiences and perspectives that you have shared with us. While we of course take responsibility for any errors in fact, we hope that we have represented well an understanding of how migration, displacement and mobility shapes life in the Horn of Africa, and we remain committed to helping to improve conditions for people on the move through our research.

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Introduction

The Horn of Africa has been associated with population displacement for at least the past half century. Many of the region's trouble spots – the long-standing conflicts in Somalia and South Sudan, the more localised tensions in Ethiopia and the outbreak of war in Sudan in 2023 – have generated large movements of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs). These conflicts, as well as political repression in Eritrea, and a lack of economic opportunity for the burgeoning youth population across the region, have motivated many people to move out of their countries of origin towards Europe, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf countries, and Southern Africa. These movements have become a major concern of European countries since at least 2015, when the number of irregular migrants from the Horn and other countries of origin (including Afghanistan, Iraq and West Africa) arriving through various routes to Europe exceeded one million. According to the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), of 802,570 registered migrants who arrived by sea in Europe between January and December 2015, Eritreans accounted for 42,205 or 4% of the total (the fourth largest group overall after Syrians, Afghans and Iraqis), while the number of Somalis was 18,750 and the number of Sudanese was 8,345 (IOM, 4 February 2016).

As large as the numbers of displaced people moving out of the region are, they are dwarfed by the number of those who remain closer to their homes, often inside their countries of origin. At the end of 2023 the countries in the Horn hosting the largest numbers of refugees were Uganda with 1.5 million people; Ethiopia with over 980,000; and Kenya with half a million people. As of August 2024, 16.7 million people in the region were internally displaced, including nine million fleeing unrest inside Sudan (UNHCR, 2024).¹ The challenges of hosting such large populations fall on some of the poorest countries and communities in the world. Local communities, national economies and regional geopolitics are all influenced by population displacement.

In addition to these major conflicts generating displacement, other population movement dynamics are going on at the same time and in the same places but receive less attention. Labour migration, climate-related mobility, migration for education and other forms of movement are widespread across the region. While reliable figures of the total number of people on the move are not available, it is likely that voluntary migrants far outnumber displaced people.

The main thesis of this book is that mobility in all its various forms – displacement, labour migration, rural to urban movements, migration for education, inter-state movements, etc – features centrally in the socioeconomic life of people in the Horn of Africa and therefore should be taken as a central feature of all development policy and programming. People move for a wide range of reasons that relate to the opportunities that they expect are available in one place or another. Some migration is temporary – people move seasonally to find work or study opportunities, or to bring their animals to new grazing areas – while other movement is more permanent or definitive and there is no intention to return to one's area of origin. Many forms of migration may be understood as the way that people seek to improve their lives and are not particularly problematic. However, mobility and migration become problematic when they are forced, taken under unsafe or desperate conditions or when the hoped-for opportunities that motivate their journeys fail to materialise. Migration that takes place outside legal and regulatory parameters – often referred to as 'irregular' – is a common experience for many people across the region and can bring with it serious risks and vulnerabilities. The reasons that people engage in irregular migration, and the ways that irregularity influences their pathways and

¹ UNHCR Data Statistics. <https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/download/?url=05Nkfy>. Accessed: 12 August 2024.

exposure to risk may vary widely. Irregularity, however, does not represent the experience of all, or even most, people on the move. Understanding how and why people make decisions to move, and the means by which they make their journeys, is a key to developing inclusive policies that can best address problems associated with unsafe or forced movement.

As we will discuss, many development policies, laws and regulations governing internal and international movement, and strategies for pursuing durable solutions, tend to be siloed, focusing on the migrant, IDP or refugee rather than on the community affected by the movement. Migration policies also often sit alongside, but are not integrated with, development policies and plans.

This book paints a holistic picture of migration and displacement within the Horn. The evidence we present here builds a case for a more ‘mobility friendly’ approach that takes its cue from the ways that people in the region engage with mobility, the objectives they have in pursuing movement (or non-movement) and the ways that development policy and migration management strategies can better support people on the move. While it is appropriate to focus some policy on aspects of irregular migration – such as trying to prevent trafficking and exploitation of migrants – very often the interests and rights of migrants can best be addressed by integrating them into national development plans, climate adaptation policies, national health and education policies and other broader policy instruments that apply to all citizens.

The push towards more inclusive policies to support migrants, refugees and the communities within which they live is growing. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development made a commitment to “leave no one behind” and to “endeavour to reach the furthest behind first”. In 2018, the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants linked that commitment explicitly to refugees, IDPs and migrants. Paragraph 47 of the Declaration states, “We will ensure that all aspects of migration are integrated into global, regional and national sustainable development plans and into humanitarian, peacebuilding and human rights policies and programmes”. The Declaration laid the groundwork for the Global Compact on Refugees (and its operational tool, the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF)) and the Global Compact on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. These global policy instruments reflect a political ambition towards more inclusive refugee and migration policies. Their impact, however, can only be seen in the extent to which they are incorporated into meaningful national legislation and policy and, even more importantly, in the ways that they are implemented on the ground to support people who are actually or potentially on the move.

In developing an agenda for more integrated migration and development policies, the Horn of Africa provides a useful set of case studies. Efforts to include support for refugees and IDPs into national development plans and sectoral plans have begun to take shape. A process led by the regional Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), begun in 2018 with the Nairobi Declaration on Somali Refugees and expanded with the Djibouti Declaration on Refugee Education and the Kampala Declaration on Jobs and Livelihoods, has achieved considerable success in raising awareness about the need to ensure that people living in displacement-affected communities are incorporated into national and sectoral development plans and programmes in the region. Support for this work has been facilitated by the EU-funded Migration Support Platform established within IGAD, as well as through policy support mechanisms in individual countries. While a great deal remains to be done to further develop this approach, our research highlights the important work that has been accomplished in this area over the past decade.

The European Union Trust Fund for Africa and the Research and Evidence Facility

Our perspectives are based on research carried out between 2016 and 2024 under the auspices of the Research and Evidence Facility (REF), a project funded by the European Union Trust Fund (EUTF) for Africa which was aimed at generating original research on the dynamics and contexts of mobility, migration and displacement within the region. The REF's mandate was to generate knowledge and evidence to be used in programming and policy making supported by the EUTF. This book is intended to contribute to the legacy of this innovative and collaborative research initiative between the European Union and the research team.

The EUTF itself was established at the Valletta Summit on Migration held in November 2015 in response to the sudden increases in arrivals of migrants to the European Union. The objectives of the EUTF were to deliver an integrated and coordinated response to the diverse causes and dynamics of instability, irregular migration and forced displacement, and to “build a comprehensive approach to support all aspects of stability, security and resilience, aiming at addressing the conditions that could be conducive to violence and destabilisation, and supporting governments in their efforts to improve security” (EUTF website). Initially funded at a level of €2.5 billion, the fund expanded over the years to reach a total of €5 billion. Trust Fund activities were divided into three ‘windows’ – the Sahel and Lake Chad, North of Africa and greater Horn of Africa regions. EUTF programmes were implemented within each of these windows (with a few cross-window projects). Activities in the Horn of Africa window included 94 investments valued at €1.81 billion designed to support “migrants and forcibly displaced people, their origin and host communities, and victims of trafficking in human beings and migrant smuggling. Potential migrants, and notably women and young people [we]re strongly supported by a large range of actions” (EUTF website).

The Research and Evidence Facility as a dedicated research team was an innovation unique to the Horn of Africa window. More than a single research project, the REF operated as a small research centre. Our core staff comprised three institutions – SOAS University of London as the lead, with The University of Manchester and Sahan Research, based in Nairobi, as key partners. Our core team consisted of fewer than ten people, mostly based in the region (the size of the team varied over the life of the project). But we worked closely with a wide network of more than 100 researchers from universities and think-tanks from across the region who were commissioned to carry out primary research in Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Uganda.² This network included some of the most established researchers in the fields of migration and forced migration studies, and most were from the countries in which they worked. The structure of the team, and its expertise, created an opportunity for us to work in an extremely agile and decentralised way, with fewer resources spent on international travel and staff and more going to fieldwork *in situ*. This way of working also enabled us to respond quickly to changing security conditions and to work in areas such as communities in Southern Somalia or South Sudan which would not have been accessible to researchers who were not from the area.

In addition to these and the work of the REF, which was explicitly not meant to be a monitoring and evaluation unit, a Monitoring and Learning System – led by Altai Consulting – was implemented to

² A full listing of all researchers who contributed to the work of the REF is provided as an Annex.

gather monitoring data from the implemented projects. Additional independent impact evaluations of projects and of the EUTF as a whole were also conducted.³

Methodological approaches to research and advocacy

In all, the REF conducted more than 30 different studies and produced more than 60 reports over our eight years of operation. Many of the studies involved research in more than one country, on different aspects of migration, mobility and displacement. Subjects included labour migration, climate-related mobility and migration, urbanisation, cross-border movements, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on mobility, conflict-induced displacement, return, gendered aspects of migration and other themes.

Each of the research projects that the REF team conducted was framed and based on a set of questions that emerged from our discussions with our EUTF colleagues as well as staff of nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) and think-tanks, researchers, and refugees and migrants themselves. Some of the studies were about trying to better understand the reasons that people were moving, or about the journeys themselves. Others examined the context in which EUTF programmes, tailored for people on the move and the communities within which they live, were being implemented. Still others looked at the intended and unintended effects of approaches to supporting mobility-affected communities.

All the studies had their own terms of reference and methodological approach. Most used a mix of qualitative semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and small (sample sizes of less than 500) surveys. Some also involved in-depth ethnographic methods, or life history interviews. All interviews were conducted with informed consent, with people giving written or verbal agreement to participate in the study. Consent agreements included the right of participants to suspend or withdraw from the interview at any time, to refuse to answer any question they did not feel comfortable with, and to be able to request that we remove their interviews from our records if we had not already published the findings of the interviews (no interviewees took us up on this offer). All interviewees were over the age of 18, and in every study we strove to collect data from a wide sample of individuals that was representative of the population.

Our decentralised way of working, where most researchers were from the countries and communities that they were studying, offered us important advantages in terms of flexibility and security. When the Covid-19 pandemic struck in early 2020, grounding aeroplanes and making most international travel impossible, we were able to continue our research with minimal disruption. Our staff were based in or near the research sites and this enabled them to adapt their research plans to the shifting local conditions, and to be able to continue their research using appropriate protection and safeguards. Thankfully, Covid-19 did not affect the communities in which we were working as badly as had been feared. Had we been dependent upon international 'experts' to lead the research on-site, however, we would never have been able to continue our work as easily, given the restrictions on international travel and lockdowns imposed in many countries.

Our engagement with researchers who were from the communities in which they were working also helped us to better navigate the sometimes volatile security contexts. Our researchers' identities were always protected while they were doing research, and we never publicised research that was going on in insecure environments until fieldworkers had safely finished their data collection. We authorised researchers to make informed judgements about the local security conditions and to adjust their research plans as needed, while keeping us always informed as to their whereabouts and what any

³ See for instance EU Court of Auditors, Special Report 17/204.
<https://www.eca.europa.eu/en/publications?ref=SR-2024-17>.

potential risks there might be. As a result, we did not experience any security incidents involving our researchers, and we never paid for armed security in our research sites.

Transcripts of all interviews were kept in a central NVivo database and were coded to enable us to examine cross-cutting themes. In most of our field studies, we held validation workshops with key stakeholders – NGO staff, government officials, refugee and migrant groups, researchers, etc – to share our findings, correct errors or misunderstandings, and to work together on the recommendations that emerged from each study to ensure that they were as appropriate and practical as possible. We would troubleshoot recommendations, asking our colleagues to tell us what they thought the obstacles to successfully implementing a recommendation might be, what kinds of conditions would need to be in place to make them have the desired outcome, and who needed to buy in to the action to make it successful.

‘Front-loaded advocacy’

Very often academic studies are conducted without input from those that the research seeks to influence. Would-be users are presented with the findings of a study once it is finished, in the hope that they will be influenced by the analysis presented or adopt the recommendations made. Yet non-academic audiences often complain that the findings are not useful as the analysis is presented in overly theoretical language, with recommendations that are not specific enough, or realistic enough, or that do not reflect the practical challenges that policy makers and programme implementers face. The result is that reports end up on shelves gathering dust, or as internet links never clicked on.

The work of the REF took a different approach. We framed all our studies around issues and questions that had direct relevance to programmes related to migration and displacement and we worked closely with our EU colleagues while designing the studies to ensure that the information we provided would be useful to them and their partners. We considered the activities that the EU Trust Fund was supporting and whether there was research that could inform these. Our EU colleagues also read and commented on drafts of our reports and attended briefings in which we presented our preliminary findings, engaging us in further questions, sometimes asking new questions that we were able to address in our final draft reports. Importantly, our role as independent researchers was never questioned. We were encouraged to be critical if the data warranted it, and our funders did not try to restrict our autonomy and freedom to present our findings as we found them. All our reports were published online for public access.

We began to see this way of working as what we called ‘front-loaded advocacy’. This was an interesting experiment in and of itself on how to conduct impact-oriented research. While we worked autonomously, having direct access to policy makers, funders (EU colleagues at both Brussels and country level), project implementers and intended targets of EUTF activities helped us to frame our work around identified priorities, to provide information to answer key questions that our colleagues had, and hopefully to better inform the activities that they were involved in. The idea was that, if we could engage those we hoped to influence with our work in a conversation about the topics from the very inception of the research, we would have a greater chance of achieving impact. The end-users would be ready and waiting (and hopefully eager) to see what the findings of our research were. Specific impacts that we contributed to included a set of feasibility studies on conditions in borderland communities between Ethiopia–Kenya, Ethiopia–Sudan and Ethiopia–Somalia that directly informed the design of a €63 million borderlands development programme implemented by IGAD and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

This process of co-production involved the cultivation of relationships with colleagues in country EU-delegations throughout the region as well as in Brussels. It also involved relationship building with

staff of UN agencies, government offices, NGOs, academics throughout the region and research think-tanks who were working on migration- and displacement-related research. We began this process in 2016–17 by hosting a series of roundtables in Nairobi, Addis Ababa, Kampala and Hargeisa. We brought stakeholders together to discuss areas of potential research that people thought were important, under-studied or particularly timely. These roundtables benefited not just us as researchers but the attendees themselves, many of whom were meeting each other for the first time. On several occasions we were told that the roundtables had introduced local academics, in particular, to aid agencies and donors who had not known them before. These links took on a life of their own, and sometimes turned into collaborations and commissioned research that did not depend on the REF to broker them. Several of our research collaborators have become involved in EU- and UK-funded research projects with other colleagues. Many of our Ethiopian colleagues worked on a £20 million research hub known as Migration for Development and Equality (MIDEQ), which considered the dynamics of migration between Global South countries. Another colleague, Professor Abebaw Minaye, was named the inaugural holder of the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) Chair in Forced Displacement at Addis Ababa University. These achievements, we believe, are among the major successes of the REF – that we helped to create a professional network of researchers and humanitarian and development professionals which will outlast the work of the REF.

Aims of the book

In this book we examine the key findings of the research we have conducted by drawing connections between and across the individual studies to consider the trends, dynamics and broader – and deeper – learning that can be applied to some of the larger questions that migration and displacement studies and development policy are concerned with:

1. What are the key drivers of migration and displacement in the Horn of Africa and how do they often intersect?
2. In what ways do migration and development influence each other?
3. In what ways is migration a feature of ‘normal’ life and how can it be seen as an adaptation to changing political, social, ecological and economic realities with which people are faced?
4. How can (and does) development support in the region help to address the vulnerabilities associated with irregular migration and displacement?

To unpack the first question a bit more: literature on the links between migration and development tries to chart the ways in which migration influences development by, for instance, asking such questions as whether migration out of a country or region (sometimes referred to as ‘brain drain’) results in a slowing of development thanks to a lack of skilled workforce. A counter-argument maintains that, while there may be a short-term loss of resource through outmigration, the benefits once people start sending money back to their relatives, friends and communities of origin – as well as when they eventually return with new skills and economic networks – may lead to positive development outcomes. Another strand of the migration and development literature looks at whether and in what ways remittances to a country can be considered a development resource – and consequently how to maximise such flows. This has been the subject of a great deal of policy debate, much of it led by the World Bank (Maimbo et al 2005, World Bank 2006). While some argue that maximising remittances is a promising pathway to increasing funding for development, others have argued that a significant portion of global remittance flows is intended for recurrent and urgently needed costs such as food, educational expenses or emergency health care and therefore that remittance funds cannot be redirected to the kinds of investment or community welfare activities that development often targets.

Migration is often seen as either a cause of underdevelopment or a response to or consequence of it. This binary relationship obscures the possibility of there being multiple reasons why people move, influencing where they go, with whom they move or settle, what their expectations are from the move, and whether the move is permanent, temporary or seasonal. Policy that is based on an understanding of migration decisions as arising because of a failure of development – assuming that people move because there are no jobs in their areas of origin, for example – tends not to address the complexity of migration decision making and the benefits of a great deal of development work. For instance, a central assumption about why people migrate out of the Horn has been that there are not enough jobs available locally. This, to be fair, is one of the reasons that many migrants (regardless of where they come from) give when asked why they are on the move. One policy response to this has been to organise technical and vocational training (TVET) and employment generation schemes to provide people with alternatives to moving away from their homes. With a job, it is assumed that people will not want to move. Hein de Haas and others have long argued, however, that investing in development does not always reduce migration. On the contrary, in the short to medium term it may increase it, as people with newly developed skills seek to move to places where they can use them to gain a living.

Our research (see Chapter 5) bears this out. In one REF study, we looked at the expectations of young people in Ethiopia and Uganda before, during and after they had taken part in TVET programmes. We found, perhaps not surprisingly, that more people wanted to move *after* they had completed the training programme than before. If the simple objective of the training programme had been to dissuade people from moving, then one might think that it was a failure. However, our interviews showed that people actually wanted to move locally – to the nearest city where they had a chance of finding employment using their new skills and education. They were not likely to seek irregular migration pathways, and they had skills that could be used to support themselves. They might, it is true, seek to move onwards to further destinations later (this question was outside the scope of our study) but, at the time that they graduated from the programme, their ambition was to try to stay closer to their family and friends, where they had social, ethnic, linguistic and other ties.

What is important in a study like this is that we look not at whether more or fewer people end up wanting to move, but at whether, if they do decide to move, they have greater freedom to decide where to go, and under what conditions they are more likely to travel safely. They may be able to afford to travel with their families. And, yes, if they can support themselves locally they may decide to stay in their communities of origin. If a person trains as a construction worker, and then moves to the nearest city and is able to support him or herself to save enough money to then move further away, they are in a better position to move safely, without having to literally sign away their lives to unscrupulous smugglers who will soon sell them to trafficking rings. Although the REF was not a monitoring and evaluation body, our research with people who interacted with projects funded by the EUTF helped us to understand how those projects intersected with broader social dynamics and influenced the decisions that people made about their mobility and their livelihoods. In this instance, equipping people with the resources to be able to make safe choices, and enabling them to use physical movement to achieve socioeconomic mobility, may be important positive outcomes of such development interventions, outcomes which are not always recognised. The relationship between migration and development in this example is far more nuanced than is often recognised.

In terms of the second question, migration policy has tended to be treated separately from wider development policy and planning. National development plans are framed around strategies and priorities to help citizens. Such policies tend to be much more effective at supporting sedentary communities than pastoralists, shifting cultivators or other citizens on the move. They also tend not to be inclusive of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) even when the country may host millions of such persons. Instead, strategies for supporting the displaced are often contained within

migrant- or refugee-specific policy implemented outside national planning processes. Somalia and Uganda are the only countries in the region that have actually included provisions for refugees, returnees and IDPs in their National Development Plan. Most governments assign responsibility for refugees to a security institution – such as the Administration for Refugee and Returnee Affairs in Ethiopia, or the Refugee Affairs Secretariat in Kenya. Development policy does not usually touch displacement policy, but it also does not usually have much to do with voluntary migration policy. For years governments have tried to settle pastoral and transhumant communities, encouraging them to adopt agriculture and live in villages so that they can be better served by governance, development and security structures. These efforts have for the most part failed as they have not been framed around actual lived practices, social networks and livelihood systems.

The goal of a great deal of such policy is premised on the notion that migration acts as a brake on, or a blockage to, development processes – sometimes necessitating a shift of focus to humanitarian assistance – or which happens because development is failing. Liisa Malkki (1995) classically critiqued the common characterisation of refugees as being “people out of place” who need to be transplanted back into their place of origin in order to re-establish the “national order of things” (p. 512).

However, an alternative reading of the kinds of migration and displacement that take place in the Horn of Africa is that people on the move are individuals who are using their social and economic wherewithal to protect themselves – often to escape danger, but also to take advantage of opportunities that may enhance their socioeconomic prospects. These two objectives can and do motivate people at the same time. For many people, movement is a positive choice that they make to maximise their access to resources, to use their education and skills and to seize opportunities, even as they are also moving away from threats.

An example of the silo-isation of migration and development policy and the ways that people navigate threats and opportunities can be seen in the context of climate change. Most climate change policy – not only in the Horn of Africa but globally – focuses on reducing carbon emissions, and thereby global warming, and on slowing the impact of climate change on physical environments. Less attention is given to migration as a form of adaptation to the effects of climate change. While migration policy may acknowledge climate change as an influence on mobility patterns, climate adaptation policy has not, for the most part, recognised the importance of migration and mobility in people’s strategies to respond to their changing environment. In the Horn of Africa, climate change is resulting in more frequent drought, which in turn leads to deforestation, land degradation, shorter growing seasons and shifts in the agricultural crops grown, and shifting grazing patterns. Where rural farmers and pastoralists are unable to adapt to these developments, their assets are gradually eroded until they lose their ability to support themselves purely from the land; the result is that people tend to move into nearby cities and towns to seek employment, support from relatives or other benefits of the urban economy. Some people may give up on their rural livelihoods entirely while others maintain a hybrid rural–urban livelihood (see Chapter 3, also REF studies by Sturridge, 2020; Iazzolino et al, 2018). Research for the REF led by Abdurahman Ahmed and Mohamed Fadal (Ahmed et al 2022) in Ethiopia and Somaliland, and by Hussein Abdullahi Mahmoud (2023) in Kenya’s Tana River Basin on the impacts of climate change on livelihood systems show how livelihood systems have adapted and altered migration and mobility patterns. Yet significant work remains to be done to better integrate migration and climate adaptation policy.

In fact, migration towards cities is one of the main forms of adaptation to climate change in the region. Movement into cities is changing entire countries’ economies. It is estimated that, by 2050, Somalia’s urban population will have tripled to nearly 60% of its total population (World Bank, 2020). Addis Ababa, Ethiopia’s capital, has grown by more than 4.4% each year since 2020 (World Population Review, 2025). Most of this movement is directed towards secondary cities, those with a population

of between 500,000 and three million people. This presents a set of challenges for municipal and national governments as they try to adapt to their growing urban populations without creating a magnet that draws even more people into the city.

A claim often seen in media reports is that climate change may cause long-distance, even intercontinental migration and displacement. Narratives suggesting that millions of people are ready to move from regions such as the Horn of Africa in response to the threats posed by climate change are not well supported by the evidence that we and others have gathered. For instance, it was expected that a result of the severe regional drought of 2017 would be an increase in the numbers of migrants seeking to enter Europe. In our interviews during that period in the main ports used to exit the region (particularly in Somalia's Puntland region), drought was not given as a significant reason that people were on the move; most people reported that they were fleeing political insecurity in Ethiopia (Sturridge et al, 2017). Similarly, data gathered by the Mixed Migration Centre (MMC) and IOM did not find significant increases in flows of people leaving the region (MMC, 2017). The data did show, however, a significant move internally of people into urban centres. This shows the importance of localised movement, particularly to urban centres, as a response to environmental change.

In this book we discuss migration decisions and journeys in their full complexity. The starting point in our research has been to ask people why they are moving (rather than to assume that we know why, just because they may be living in a refugee camp or an urban settlement) and to understand that very often there are multiple factors that compel people to move. People who move for multiple reasons are often referred to as '**mixed migrants**' – they may be motivated by an unsustainable or unsafe environment where they are living, but they may also be inspired by a desire to make the most of themselves through education or employment, the ambition to secure for themselves what appear to be luxurious lifestyles that they see through social media. They may want to further their education, or fall in love, or reunite with family and friends who have already moved. Or all of these things at once.

Our research shows that many people move for the simple reason of wanting 'a better life' (a reason we encountered many times in our research), which they defined in a variety of ways, but along the way they fall foul of unscrupulous smugglers or traffickers who take advantage of them. Organised human trafficking networks extort money from travellers who often willingly (or because they have no other option) enter into arrangements to facilitate their movement. They may then be kidnapped and held for ransom, subjected to physical and sexual abuse, or forced into conditions of slavery. If they are lucky enough to escape their abusers, there may be no option of turning back towards their point of origin, as to do so may deliver them into the hands of the traffickers. They must forge ahead in their journey – the voluntary migrant in this way becomes a forced migrant, fleeing from the very network from which they originally sought help.

With reference to our third question, about how migration may be understood as a 'normal' facet of social life and/or as an adaptation to changing political, social, ecological and economic realities, we can draw from several studies to show how patterns of movement have evolved in response to shifting threats and opportunities. As people move, their relationships with their rural and urban-based social networks shifts as well. Money, farm goods and purchased items flow back and forth between members of the network. Even children may be moved in this way, sent into cities to live with extended family members to attend school and to work for urban relatives. By considering these different forms of movement, our analysis considers migration and displacement as the *lens through which development happens*. The two are inseparable processes that determine each other:

development indicators act as primary and proximate drivers of movement;⁴ movement influences the opportunities and challenges that both mobile and sedentary people in areas affected experience.

Finally, we ask how development support can (and does) address the vulnerabilities associated with irregular migration and displacement. As we noted above, the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Global Compacts relating to Refugees and Migrants, respectively, do seek to promote greater inclusion of refugee welfare in national action plans. The Horn of Africa is actually, thanks to the work of IGAD and its partners, one of the regions of the world where most has been done to advance the concept of inclusion, through work across the region and in individual member states to develop the CRRF. The CRRF is meant to provide an operational blueprint for implementing the Global Compact on Refugees. As we discuss in Chapter 8, our study on IGAD-led refugee inclusion in education and livelihoods policy (Hammond et al, 2020), shows important progress has been made in ensuring that refugees have access to primary education and are included in vocational training and employment promotion activities in the region. The 2015 Djibouti Declaration on Refugee Education, signed by seven of the eight IGAD member states,⁵ committed host countries to providing education to refugees. The 2019 IGAD-brokered Kampala Declaration on Jobs, Livelihoods and Self-Reliance committed host countries to the development of national action plans that include refugees and internally displaced persons in economic development activities that would benefit the whole of society.

An example of how more inclusive policy may help reduce vulnerability can be seen in a study that we conducted jointly with the private firm Botho Emerging Markets in Kenya. Many host-country refugee policies – in Kenya and Ethiopia, for instance – do not offer refugees pathways to citizenship, and until recently they have not been able to obtain the right to work, to own property or even to move outside the refugee camps. We looked at the importance of work authorisation and mobility for refugees in Kenya. There have been endless efforts to promote refugee 'self-reliance' in that country by training refugees to make handicrafts, recycle garbage, make soap and produce agricultural crops all within the camps. Refugee professionals are paid 'incentives', worth a tiny fraction of what a Kenyan would make, to work as teachers, health workers or for aid agencies. These opportunities, and the weak economy of the camp, together with its remote location, are insufficient to enable most refugees to become self-sufficient. Legally and theoretically speaking, there is a pathway to legal employment, but to get work authorisation a person needs a job offer, a bank account and identity documents that are virtually impossible to obtain. In addition, those who do have diplomas or documentation certifying their educational and professional qualifications often find that these are not recognised outside their country of origin. Mobility outside the camp is also theoretically possible but in practice one needs to have a sponsor or a scholarship to be able to leave, and these are very difficult to get. So even within the displaced population, restrictions on mobility impinge upon the livelihoods of refugees in significant ways. Making labour and mobility laws more inclusive can enable refugees to help themselves and to access employment markets and educational opportunities to be better able to become self-sufficient. Such research helps to show both the impacts of policies that exclude refugees and other migrants and the ways in which more inclusive policies may benefit them.

Structure of the book

The chapters in this book are focused on themes that bring together the findings of our research. We begin in Chapter 2 by considering the means by which people make decisions about whether and when

⁴ 'Proximate drivers' are those that develop once the migration process has already started. For instance, movement to a place where a person hopes to find a job may bring them into conditions of insecurity that push them to continue moving.

⁵ Eritrea did not take part in the Djibouti Summit.

to move, where to go, how to travel and often who or what to bring with them. Two distinct yet overlapping themes influence people's decision making about their movement: the search for security defined in its broadest sense and the pursuit of ambition and aspirations. Displacement in the face of conflict, political and economic instability and environmental stress is a grim reality for millions of people across the Horn of Africa. There is little doubt that, for many, escape from violence and insecurity is a primary motivation for their moving, whether towards more secure urban areas or to seek refuge in neighbouring countries. Research abounds which provides analysis of the drivers, dynamics and threats that people look to move away from. We have much more limited understanding of what it is that people seek. What constitutes security for different groups? How does it vary according to gender and age? We examine security as a multi-faceted concept that includes not only physical safety, but also economic and livelihood security and the ability to enjoy personal and collective rights. Drawing on REF interviews with displaced persons and others moving in extremely precarious conditions, as well as people moving across borders in search of greater livelihood security, we explore how people's ideas of security shape their movement.

While the search for physical safety and more secure livelihoods may play a central and often visible role in stimulating migration, this is only part of the story. In the chapter we also discuss the role that people's positive aspirations and ambitions for the future play in determining why different people move in different directions, at particular times. The chapter draws on REF research to explore the different hopes and dreams that carry women and men through some of the most difficult migration journeys. We show that many people's aspirations are not just concerned with improving their lives, but more profoundly they may see migration as part of becoming a full person, fulfilling their obligations to their families, or transforming the opportunities for themselves and their children. We also show how different motivations come together simultaneously to influence decision making, creating the conditions for 'mixed migration'. Such an analysis offers an alternative to more linear ways of understanding decision-making processes which focus on single primary motivations to the exclusion of other factors.

From considering motivations for decision making regarding movement, we move to examine the more structural drivers of migration in the region. These refer to the wider environments and contexts that both enable and constrain people's action, in particular shaping their space for decisions about migration. For decades, the Horn of Africa has been one of the most volatile and precarious parts of the world, with chronic conflicts and political instability in Sudan, South Sudan, Somalia, Ethiopia and Eritrea, geographical areas vulnerable to extremes of climate variability, especially droughts and floods, and economies severely exposed to fluctuating agricultural and mineral commodity prices. Mobility is an essential part of people's response to these changing contexts. The next three chapters examine how the changing structural conditions in three critical spheres affect mobility across the region: the environment; conflict; and socioeconomic opportunities and challenges.

In Chapter 3 we consider migration in the context of climate change. In the extensive arid and semi-arid lands that cover large parts of the Horn of Africa, people's movement across the landscape is a core element of their resilience to environmental variability. Focusing on REF studies in Kenya, as well as studies in the borderlands of Ethiopia, Somalia and Kenya, the chapter explores how these 'traditions' of mobility intersect with underlying currents of migration, in particular movement towards urban areas. We describe how livelihood systems have changed in response to environmental change, with people in some cases adopting 'rural-urban livelihoods' that allow people to keep one foot in each place, maximising the resources of each locality. In other cases, where environmental disaster takes the form of drought, people may be entirely dispossessed of their rural livelihoods. As we noted above, rather than seek to move long distances, however, they move shorter distances, towards the nearest cities or relief centres. This enables them to maintain their social networks and keep close to their historical homes in case they are able to return. We look at how climate change is affecting these

patterns of movement and present evidence of new forms of resilience and adaptation emerging in the face of new extremes in environmental conditions.

We then turn to consider conflict-affected displacement in Chapter 4. Conflict and violence have displaced millions of people in many countries across the Horn of Africa in the last half century. Each country has been severely affected by forced migration both internally and with its neighbours. While the flight of refugees and IDPs is primarily a reaction to violence, many other factors come into play to determine who moves, where and when. In particular, displacement often moves along the well trodden migratory paths established by rural–urban migrants or those seeking jobs and education. Moreover, at times the chaos of conflict may even open up more space for mobility that is unregulated by the state. This chapter shows how processes of displacement in contexts of conflict, whether across or within national borders, overlay other patterns of movement. We consider the ways in which the dynamics of violence influence displacement experiences. We also consider how the political economy of conflict influences use of territory and defines which space is considered safe enough to move to.

Our research shows that very often people spread risk across multiple locations. In South Sudan, we found that people were engaged in what the aid community calls ‘pendular movements’, going back and forth between different locations to take advantage of shifting security conditions, availability of resources, or employment or educational opportunities. In Somalia and South Sudan families have tended to spread their members across multiple locations to be able to draw resources from several different areas at once – a refugee camp, a city, their home farms, etc. If one place becomes insecure or people cannot support themselves there, they may shift to another area. Alternatively, they may seek support from family settled in other locations.

With Chapter 5, we shift our focus to consider the socioeconomic opportunities and challenges associated with migration and displacement. Many studies have shown that improving economic conditions, new jobs and expanding markets are likely to act as a draw for migrants. In particular, while urban centres may struggle to cope with the demands placed on them by increasing populations, the arrival of migrants is one sign, and often an essential component, of economic success. Economic fluctuations influence the patterns of movement as opportunities and prices change in scale and location, changing the calculus of migration. The response to the Covid-19 pandemic, which severely restricted mobility, also exposed the reliance of socioeconomic development on people being able to move (see REF papers by Bakewell, 2021 and Brain et al, 2020). This chapter draws on our research to show how the patterns of migration in the Horn are interrelated and respond to changing socioeconomic conditions.

Having considered the complexity of decision making in the previous chapters, in Chapter 6 we move to examine the migrants’ journeys. We explore migrants’ and displaced persons’ different experiences while en route. We also consider the many actors involved in enabling, controlling or otherwise attempting to steer those on the move. As the previous chapters have shown, the changing contexts give rise to highly complex and varying patterns of mobility across the region. We start by looking at migration management, the attempts of different stakeholders – states, intergovernmental organisations, donors and other actors – to bring order to this flux. We draw on REF research in Ethiopia and Somalia which describes how different stakeholders view migration management and how programming has struggled to take account of the complex mix of different forms of mobility. While migration management usually focuses on problematic areas of irregular or unsafe migration, it can also end up discouraging mobility more widely. The limiting of opportunities to move legally and safely may drive would-be migrants to seek more dangerous options for movement. This runs counter to the interest of some key actors, who see mobility playing a critical role in local development.

This chapter also considers the shifting categories that emerge as a result of the experiences people have while on the move. What may start out as a voluntary or ‘regular’ move may become ‘irregular’ or forced if they are subjected to exploitation, lose their identity documents and are driven into the hands of unscrupulous smugglers or traffickers. Such encounters can be pivotal events in their migration experience, potentially determining people’s ability to move, their routes, their destination or even their survival. It may change the nature of the migration experience. At times, migrants and displaced people may strategically seek out these actors, or they may come across them (for better or worse) by chance. Drawing on multiple accounts of journeys gathered within the REF research, we consider how people on the move use different migration management systems and networks of agents as they travel across the Horn of Africa.

The final two chapters of the volume consider the question of impact from two different angles. First, in Chapter 7, we explore the impacts of mobility on wider development dynamics in the Horn of Africa. We show how migration as a social process interacts with other social dynamics, contributing to demographic changes, gender dynamics and household structures and often shifting delicate balances between ethnic and political groups. We see how the departure of young people may threaten future local economic production and increase pressure on the older generation; or it may enable young people to find employment and support elders through remittances. Where violent conflict and political power are sharply delineated by clan or ethnicity, the settlement of migrants, refugees or IDPs may threaten a delicate equilibrium, possibly feeding into cycles of instability; alternatively – and more optimistically – the shift in population may help to dampen them. Drawing particularly on research in Somalia and South Sudan (relating to youth migration) and Ethiopia and Uganda (relating to gendered migration), this chapter examines the conditions under which migration may serve to reduce or exacerbate inequalities, strengthen or weaken support networks, and contribute to conflict and violence. Understanding this picture of social change is key to understanding wider processes of social and political change as they play out across the region. In doing this we look beyond the humanitarian and crisis-oriented analyses that constitute much of the existing literature.

In Chapter 8 we pan out to address the broad question of how migration and displacement relate to the overall process of development in the Horn of Africa. We discuss the critical role of mobility (in all its forms) in driving development, which runs counter to a popular narrative that high levels of migration are purely a consequence of poverty, insecurity and underdevelopment. At the same time, enabling people to move more easily and safely in a framework of legal protections and rights, and free from exploitation may greatly enhance the potential for migration to contribute to development. We consider work done under the CRRF in Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda and related work in Somalia towards establishing more inclusive policy, and outline opportunities for greater interaction between migration and development policies.

Finally, in our Conclusion, we bring the analysis together, reviewing the key themes covered in the book and extracting key conclusions and recommendations suggested by the evidence presented. We revisit the question of what evidence gathered by the Research and Evidence Facility may teach us about the links between migration and development and how a holistic understanding of the role of mobility, migration and displacement in the Horn of Africa can contribute to a more nuanced approach to development processes in the region. We offer some suggestions about what the legacy of our research, and of the EUTF’s involvement over the past decade in the region, may be, in terms of our understanding of how we might use the insights from the research and empirically based analysis of the lived experiences of people on the move to better support livelihoods and development in the Horn of Africa.

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Chapter 2: Decision making and the search for security

The Horn of Africa has been synonymous with migration – whether forced or voluntary – for decades. It is also a region of rapid economic growth, widening inequality, geostrategic significance, territorial contestations and wars, environmental crises, and political, economic and socio-political turbulence. These and other dynamics of change, upheavals and uncertainties frame the stories and trajectories of migrations and displacements. For many in the region, escape from violence and insecurity is a primary motivation for moving, whether towards more secure urban areas or to seek refuge in neighbouring countries. Yet very often explanations of the ‘drivers’ or ‘root causes’ of migration and displacement seek to identify singular reasons for people’s decision to move. Their status as voluntary or involuntary migrants depends on a judgement about what has caused a person to move. The many factors that influence people’s decision making are often distilled to a single dominant cause to determine and label not only what kind of migrant they are but, by extension, what sort of response they should be met with and what rights they may legitimately lay claim to. What kind of migrant they are deemed to be can determine their ability to cross borders, their access to social services and assistance and their participation in the economy of the destination area.

We can see from the research of the REF as well as other organisations working in the region such as the Mixed Migration Centre (MMC) and the Regional Durable Solutions Secretariat (ReDSS) that people’s decisions to move are usually motivated by several different factors all at once. These relate not only to the conditions in their areas of origin but also to those at their intended destinations. They are both ‘push and pull’ factors, working together in a complex calculus of decisions and realities that people navigate in order to make the best choice for themselves and their family members. This chapter thus considers two distinct yet overlapping themes that influence people’s movement: the search for security, and the pursuit of ambition and aspirations. We offer a conceptual framework for understanding decision-making processes that considers the many different variables that influence the decisions that people make in relation to their movement: whether to move, where to go, who to move with, who to settle with, what kind of livelihood to pursue, what kind of support to seek, and whether to keep moving, stay put or return.

The search for security – defined in broad terms of ‘human security’ – provides a framework for understanding the myriad factors that inform migration decision making at the individual and household levels. Human security is a multifaceted concept that includes not only physical safety, but also economic and livelihood security and the ability to enjoy personal and collective rights. In this chapter we consider decision making through the lens of human security and show how migration decision making among the populations with whom we conducted research emerged out of weighing the different risks and opportunities associated with their human security concerns. Drawing on the REF’s research in different parts of the Horn of Africa with people on the move, the chapter explores how people’s ideas and impressions of security influence their movement. It provides an overarching

conceptual framework of human security as a motivating force that shapes people's movement decisions. Different aspects of human security, particularly as they relate to economic, personal, social and climate matters, is then further unpacked in subsequent chapters of the book.

Our analysis leads us to explore not only the dynamics and threats that people aim to move *away from* but also to recognise what people seek and what they move *towards*, as well as what they hope to achieve from migration. We discuss the role that positive aspirations and ambitions for the future play in determining why different people move in different directions at particular times. We show that, for some, aspirations are not just concerned with reaching safety or improving their lives in material ways; perhaps more profoundly they see it as part of becoming a full person, fulfilling their obligations to their families, or transforming the possibilities for themselves and their children. We also show how different motivations may come together simultaneously to influence decision making, offering an alternative to more linear ways of understanding decision-making processes that focus on primary motivations to the exclusion of other factors.

Human security: a conceptual framework

Since the early 1990s, the idea of 'human security' has been progressively developed to recast the idea of security from away being principally focused on territorial or physical conditions to a broader, more holistic notion that better reflects most people's lived experience. The United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) 1994 *Human Development Report [HDR]: New Dimensions of Human Security* defined the concept of human security as comprising two complementary elements: "freedom from fear" (eg threats from war, conflict and state-sponsored violence) and "freedom from want" (eg preventable diseases, economic hardship, poverty, developmental concerns) (UNDP, 1994, pp 24–25; Vietti & Scribner, 2013). These two elements are framed as essential to achieving and maintaining dignity, or "the universal belief that everyone has an equal inherent worth and value" (UNDP, 2022, p 15); this principle underlies the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). The 1994 HDR identified seven categories of threats to human beings: economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community and political. This influential report helped to galvanise support internationally, culminating in the adoption in 2012 by the UN General Assembly (Resolution 64/291) of a definition of human security as "the right of people to live in freedom and dignity, free from poverty and despair".⁶

The central premise of the human security lens is that it provides a person-focused approach to analyse human realities, which prioritises basic human rights and needs, transcends national or global concerns, and ascribes agency and autonomy to human beings in their search for security (Bilgic et al, 2020; Gasper & Sinatti, 2016). Critically, by upending the focus of security discourse from the state to the person, human security analysis not only breaks away from conventional top-down approaches to addressing threats and vulnerabilities, it also considers intersectionality and the interplay of various forces (economic, cultural, environmental, legal, etc) which our research has shown are all central factors influencing mobility decisions.

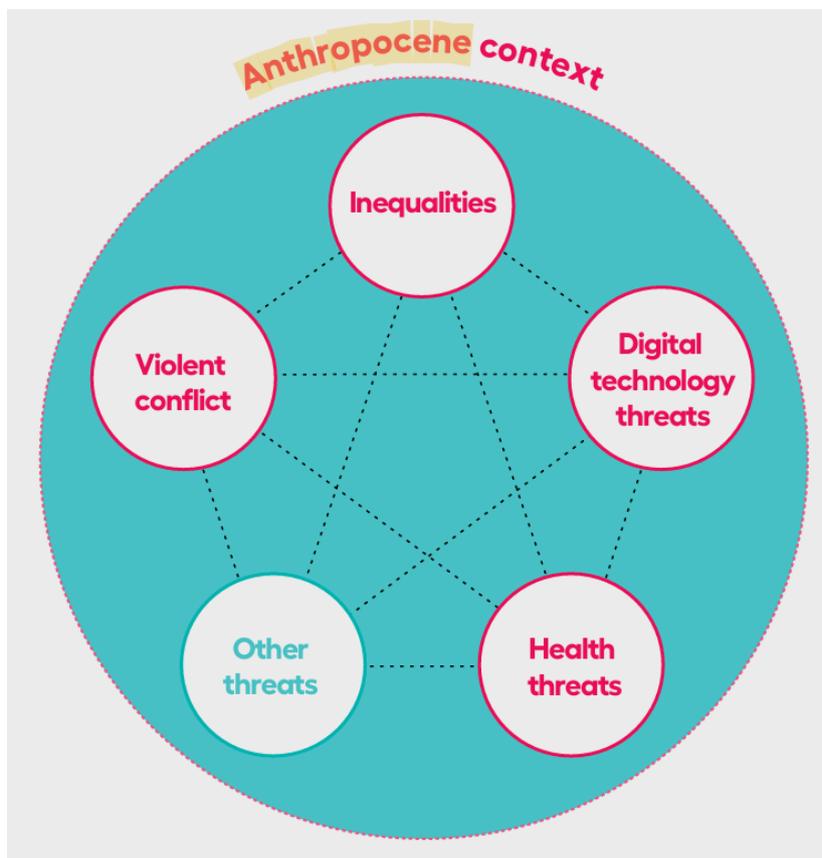
The 1994 HDR effectively argued that individual determinations of what makes people feel secure are often at odds with what a nation or government considers security to mean. Individuals' sense of security derives from their social networks, from their ability to meet their basic needs, or to be able to plan for the future. Dignity is an important component of individual conceptions of security, and the report points out that, "sometimes, the very interventions that seek to address material

⁶ UN General Assembly. Follow up to General Assembly resolution 64/291 on human security (see para 5) [available at <https://www.un.org/humansecurity/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Report-of-the-Secretary-General-A2F662F763-English.pdf>].

deprivations may hurt people’s dignity by stigmatizing them and inducing emotions of shame, especially when poverty is attributed to negative individual dispositions” (p 15).

More recently, UNDP’s 2022 special report on human security, *New Threats to Human Security in the Anthropocene: Demanding Greater Solidarity*, further refined conceptualisations of human security by highlighting five categories of threats to the Anthropocene (the age of humans): inequalities, violent conflict, health threats, digital technology threats and other threats (UNDP, 2022), as shown in Figure 1. These new-generation threats “are global, systemic and interlinked. This new reality gives strong objective reasons for people not only to perceive high human insecurity but also to believe that wellbeing achievements — previously conceived of as development achievements — are insufficient to address human security concerns” (UNDP, 2022, p 21).

Figure 1: New threats to human security



Source: UNDP (2022, p 21).

People’s experience of insecurity is often tied to the ways that their lives have been affected by development processes. Factors that were previously seen solely as indicators of wellbeing (increased economic growth, absence of conflict, improved healthcare systems) are now understood to be insufficient on their own to ensure people’s human security. This is true particularly where structural inequalities prevent certain people’s access to these development benefits. Increased economic growth, for instance, may not result in higher incomes for all people. The poorest level of a society typically includes people who are marginalised or excluded from full participation. Migrants, refugees and displaced persons often fall into this category, as do people whose mobility, which they may depend upon for access to resources and services, is impeded.

The focus on these challenges to human security invites us to retain attention on the personal – the way that (in)security is experienced by individuals and communities – but also to see that this experience is influenced by wider dynamics at state, regional and global levels. By considering how individual and collective agency – the ability to withstand, mitigate or manage the threats one faces – are influenced by these wider dynamics, we can see not only how human insecurity develops but also how it is confronted and overcome. As we show in this book, these elements are interrelated and migration is rarely, if ever, driven by a single variable. The sections below summarise insights from the literature and REF's research on the common drivers of migration and displacement, drawing upon the human security framework.

The search for security and the decision to migrate

REF research highlights the myriad security concerns that influence decision making through the migration cycle of individuals and households. Critically, all seven dimensions of human security – economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community and political – may feature concurrently or at varying levels and in different combinations to influence migration decisions, and the role of inequalities and violent conflict exacerbates these threats. In many migration and displacement contexts in the Horn of Africa, separating these dimensions analytically is difficult because of the intersecting impacts of various insecurities, which aligns with the 'new threats' analysis of UNDP's Anthropocene report. Reducing decisions to one or two primary drivers may in fact lead to incorrect and inappropriate interpretations of why people move or do not move, so it is important to try to consider these decisions within the full and complex context within which they are taken, and to draw connections between the personal, community, national, regional and global dynamics.

The search for economic security is a broad but defining feature of movement in the Horn of Africa. Poverty and the search for better livelihood opportunities and more promising economic outcomes influence people to move from rural to nearby urban centres or to major cities, from one country to another within the region in search of work, or from the Horn to the Gulf countries and beyond. Some of these movements are driven by entrenched poverty and lack of opportunities, degraded land and deteriorating agricultural opportunities or poor working conditions and wages. People who move under such conditions usually have fewer or limited choices (or are more vulnerable) than those who embark on regular (or legal) migration journeys as skilled and educated persons in search of better opportunities.

Whereas economic security is a predominant driver of rural to urban migration, decisions to migrate are arrived at through a weighing of options that often includes cost–benefit analyses based on consideration of a complex set of factors including security, independence and expectations (Lohnert, 2017). Many young people are attracted to cities by the prospect of finding waged work in urban areas. They are also drawn by opportunities (real or perceived) for informal self-employment, where starting a business requires relatively fewer resources than engaging in formal businesses and activities (Bezu & Holden, 2014). Landlessness, declining agricultural prospects as a result of environmental change and ecological degradation, and the absence of rural employment options act as push factors; the prospect of economic, social and study opportunities in urban areas may lure people into urban areas. Industrial and infrastructural investments in urban areas and the growing demand for goods and services associated with rising urban populations is a critical motivator for rural to urban migration, as shown by the REF's research in the secondary or provincial cities of Gulu (Uganda), Dire Dawa (Ethiopia) and Eldoret (Kenya) (Iazzolino et al, 2018). Such secondary cities – cities with populations of between 100,000 and one million (or sometimes more) – are the site of the bulk of urban growth in Africa (Cities Alliance & African Development Bank, 2022).

Rural to urban migration for economic security is often categorised as ‘aspirational’ migration – a strategy to improve one’s livelihood, or ‘displacement’ resulting from the need for environmental and personal security. The possibility of securing employment in the industrial parks in Dire Dawa and Eldoret strongly influenced migrants’ decisions to leave rural areas. Predictably, many of these migrants were young people for whom rural areas provided fewer opportunities than urban ones, especially those cities with burgeoning populations where demand for, and supply of, services was higher. Crucially, the research found that greater educational opportunities in all three cities compared with those in the adjoining rural areas was a major factor influencing young people’s migration. All three cities host higher education institutions and offer young migrants the chance to access or complete education that may have otherwise been interrupted – whether thanks to lack of resources or insecurity.

On the other hand, the search for greater personal security was also a key determinant for these movements. Gulu in northern Uganda provided security and sanctuary to hundreds fleeing the Lord’s Resistance Army insurgency in rural areas from the 1990s to the mid-2000s. Many of the displaced who eventually tried to return to their rural homes when the violence subsided faced landlessness, as their property had been appropriated by others, and contestation over land boundaries and ownership. Resolution of these issues proved extremely challenging thanks to the weak institutional mechanisms in place. Failing to regain tenure, remaining in Gulu became their only possibility for physical and economic security. Similarly, in Kenya, Eldoret was the site of an influx of people escaping post-electoral violence and insecurity in the 1990s and, significantly, after the 2007 elections when clashes pitted Kalenjin against Kikuyu ethnic groups. These clashes were rooted in deep-seated grievances over land ownership and the politics of belonging. Eldoret thus became a sanctuary city offering the possibility of greater safety, livelihood opportunities and support from social networks.

Political, personal and economic securities may all be interlinked in a migrant’s search for greater human security. Whereas some migrants may be solely looking for economic security through moving, in contexts of instability and conflict the search for personal and political security ultimately takes precedence, but economic considerations still play an important role in determining where people move to, whether they seek to settle within an assisted camp or settlement, or whether they try to self-settle without assistance in an urban setting. The REF’s 2017 research on migration between the Horn of Africa and Yemen showed how the quest to improve political, economic and environmental securities all simultaneously influenced migration decisions. Lack of economic and livelihood opportunities were (and remain to this day) principal motivations for Ethiopian and Somali migrants moving to Yemen and onward to Saudi Arabia; however, for some Ethiopians, especially Oromo, fear of political persecution by the Ethiopian government also played a role in their decision to move (Sturridge et al, 2017). Fleeing state persecution, detention and abuse, or prioritising personal and political security, were major motivators for Ethiopian Oromo respondents in this study. Likewise, for Yemeni refugees and Somali returnees moving from Yemen to the Horn of Africa, escaping the conflict in Yemen was a major motivation. Yet where they chose to settle was influenced by the availability of employment, shelter, community support and other resources.

Beyond human security and its multiple dimensions, the REF’s research also pointed to the aspirational and abstract objectives related to a ‘better life’ that many migrants cited. Respondents who did not have a well-defined reason for migrating were described by one key informant as the ‘MTV Generation’, whose primary motive for migrating was linked to their desire for what they perceived to be a better lifestyle, rather than for purely economic reasons. These motives have been fuelled to an extent by socioeconomic advances in sending countries, where urban residents have been able to amass increased incomes, giving them improved access to social media and communications channels and enabling them to compare their lives with those in other countries. Messages sent back from members of the diaspora through social media and direct messages, often portraying the sender

posing in front of expensive cars or houses that are not their own, have contributed to the idea of life in Europe, North America, the Gulf countries and Southern Africa being more luxurious than the reality. The role of media in driving migration decisions is more pronounced among younger, better educated people – particularly urban men – who have access to technology and at least modest means to facilitate their journeys. These individuals may also be more likely to have relatives living abroad with whom they are in communication and who send remittances to them and their families (Chonka & Haile, 2020). This is a different group of migrants from those who move out of economic desperation or an urgent need to reach safety.

Environmental security

As we discuss in Chapter 3, economic security is, in many cases, inextricably linked to environmental security in the Horn of Africa, where the vast majority of people depend on the land and derive their livelihoods from agriculture and pastoralism. Climate change projections for the region show a faster warming process compared with the global mean, with projected changes in surface temperatures and precipitation levels (Osima et al, 2018). Increasing dry spells, shorter wet seasons and an overall reduction in rainfall have significantly affected livelihoods in highlands and arid and semi-arid areas, coastal cities and lake areas. In pastoralist areas, climate change and ecological degradation is expected to negatively affect vegetation growth and quality, cause nutritional stress in animals, and diminish the overall productivity of herds (Herrero et al, 2016; Thornton et al, 2009). In agricultural areas, climate change is expected to cause significant drops in yield for staples such as maize, sorghum, millet and wheat.⁷

Climate change-related factors and the growing occurrence of disasters also modify interactions between pathogen vectors and animal hosts, leading to a rapid spread of animal diseases (FAO, 2021a). These, in turn, have critical socioeconomic consequences. For example, it is estimated that the loss of animals and associated losses in supplies of milk and meat in Kenya could amount to more than US\$630 million by 2030 (Herrero et al, 2010). Moreover, beyond the macroeconomic impact, this production loss also has severe consequences for nutrition and health: for example, between 2008 and 2018, it is estimated that post-disaster production losses amounted to an annual dietary energy supply of 82 days of calorie intake per capita per year (FAO, 2021a). In pastoral areas, declining animal health as a result of climate change effects also has a direct impact on the production of milk. This has serious, negative implications not only for the animals, but also for the humans who depend on dairy products for nutrition.

Under these taxing conditions, individuals and households make a multiplicity of decisions related to food and economic security; migration is one of these and may be voluntary or forced, or very often a combination of the two. Movements related to environmental security may be undertaken over a short or a long distance, for a limited or longer periods of time and with varying outcomes. For instance, pastoralists may decide to change seasonal migration routes, explore new areas and move animals farther away from homesteads to find viable resources. In the case of rural areas, where agricultural yields and related jobs have dropped and where off-farm opportunities are lacking, people may decide to move internally to cities in search of informal employment (Iazzolino et al, 2018). The REF's research in Dire Dawa city in Ethiopia, led by Dereje Feyissa, showed that environmental insecurity was another driver of migration. In drought-prone rural areas around Dire Dawa, land scarcity, shortage of water and the climate crisis are having a significant adverse impact on the livelihoods of those who depend largely on agriculture. Some of these migrants may become day labourers, travelling to urban areas for informal work rather than settling there. Others choose to move permanently to the city and live in informal settlements and slum areas. What is crucial to note, however, is that climate change and

⁷ <https://www.ilri.org/news/climate-change-africa-what-will-it-mean-agriculture-and-food-security>.

ecological degradation frequently accompany other drivers (such as poverty or landlessness) in some migratory decision making by individuals and households.

Sturridge's (2020) research for the REF on the impact of environmental change in Laikipia, Kenya shows that movements that occur in contexts of environmental change are not inherently forced but occur out of complex combinations of both necessity and choice. Households in Laikipia – from a range of socioeconomic and livelihoods backgrounds – are engaging in different forms of migration and mobility to access economic opportunities in urban settings. Some of these movements are over short distances, or are daily commuting jobs; they are rarely long distance. Many movements are cyclical, linked to seasonal farming jobs (either on horticultural farms or neighbouring smallholdings) and in search of pasture during dry spells. The establishment of formal markets on specific days of the week also contributes to the cyclical nature of movements, and a number of young men described moving on a regular basis for several days at a time in order to sell their livestock at specific markets within Laikipia or neighbouring counties. While the direction of movements tends to be rural to urban, many respondents also move in the opposite direction. Rather than being a unidirectional or one-time decision, Sturridge's research shows that people facing resource scarcity are engaged in bi-directional flows of internal movement between rural and urban settings, and enduring connections are maintained between migrants and non-migrants spread across different locations.

Not all mobility and migration from dryland areas are 'distress' movements or movements of last resort – rather, they are further adaptations of centuries-old strategies that have been skilfully employed to deal with uncertainty. This is especially true of pastoralist populations in the Horn of Africa, for whom mobility is key to ensuring the health of herds, lands and people in highly variable environments (FAO, 2021b). Livestock mobility is a fundamental way in which pastoralist communities in the Horn of Africa ensure food and economic security. In large part, this mobility takes the form of transhumance – the practice of regularly and repeatedly moving livestock between seasonal grazing areas. The REF's study in Tana River County, Kenya among Orma pastoralists demonstrated the enduring importance of mobility as a pathway for circumventing the impact of droughts (Mahmoud, 2023). In the study, nearly 40% of pastoral households had reportedly moved to the Tana River Delta to access water and forage. Movements were bi-directional, with people from villages moving to the Delta during the wet season and people living around the Delta accessing villages during the dry season. In their quest for economic security in contexts of environmental insecurity, pastoralists in Tana River County were also bypassing legal movement regulations to access government-owned entities in Kenya – such as the Tsavo East National Park and the Galana Ranch. Kenyan law – under the Wildlife Conservation and Management Act of 2013 – prohibits the entry of livestock into national parks without authorisation.



Migrating family from the rangelands to the delta. Photo by Hussein Abdullahi Mahmoud in July 2022.

Mobility is not only critical for forage and water access, but also for access to primary and secondary markets. As rangelands deplete and degrade, informal governance systems weaken, and land resource exploration and exploitation increase, pastoralist mobility, and therefore livelihood and food security, come increasingly under pressure. Today, whereas pastoralists continue to be mobile, these movements are over short distances, as revealed by the REF's research in Somaliland and Ethiopia (Ahmed et al, 2023). Part of the reason for these short movements, a departure from the long seasonal movements of before, is that widespread and increasingly frequent droughts have led to a decrease in productive areas. In Somaliland, many pastoralists have their own water sources (*berkads*) and rural markets. This has influenced mobility patterns, limiting them to a range of 10 to 30 kilometres. Changing mobility patterns – from long to short movements – is also related to livestock varieties. Pastoralists with larger camel herds in particular usually move more frequently than those with smaller herds, the latter tending to supplement forage with livestock feed.



Gathering water from a berkad in Somali Region, Ethiopia during drought. Photo by Abdurahman Ahmed, 2022.

The decision to leave an area that is no longer able to support a household's crops or herds is often taken as a last-ditch effort to find greater economic security. Where changing rainfall patterns have resulted in shorter growing seasons, missed rains and increased aridity, households experience a slow but steady erosion of assets that eventually renders them destitute. While this process is happening, people do what they can to forestall permanent relocation. Some may move some or all of their family members into nearby cities to seek employment and access to food (Sturridge, 2020); others may attempt to try to stay on the land for as long as possible by growing shorter-cycle crops (which are usually lower-yielding) or taking their herds to new, further grazing areas in the hope that the rains will return and allow them to recover before they have lost the last of their assets.

When people finally do decide to move their entire family out of the affected area, they frequently have to sell off what assets they have. Often their herds will have lost their market value. Some may be facing the negative effects of food insecurity in the form of nutritional crisis for one or more members of the family. The decision about *whether to go* is often one made of desperation, yet the decision about *where to go* is based on an understanding of where they might be able to find resources to support themselves. Because of this, movements that are made largely in response to environmental crisis are usually across quite short distances. People tend to migrate to the nearest city that might be able to support them. They also, at least at first, maintain the hope that they will be able to return to their homes once the rains return and the productivity of the land is restored. As the climate crisis unfolds further, such intentions may give way to a resignation that the move has become longer-term, or even permanent.

Political security and conflict

Economic, food and environmental security in the region are also, ultimately, intricately tied to political security. Large-scale, inter- and intrastate, and militarised conflicts in several countries of the region have influenced the movement of millions of people over the past three decades. In Somalia, the collapse of the state in 1991, and the intermittent periods of conflict that have persisted since that time, have forced hundreds of thousands of people to seek safety in Somali cities and towns or in neighbouring Kenya and Ethiopia. In South Sudan, also no stranger to conflict over the past half century, the political crisis that began in 2013 has been a major cause of internal displacement of South Sudanese people, as well as of international movement into Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia and Sudan. Localised conflicts arising from loss of social cohesion and opposition to regional and/or federal authority across Ethiopia have caused people to flee to regional cities in search of safety. Work by Fekadu and Kiya Gezahegne for the REF has analysed several of these conflict hotspots in Konso zone of Southern Nations Nationalities and Peoples Region and Benishangul Gumuz Region (Adugna & Gezahegne, 2024). This research found that the breakdown in social cohesion has been precipitated by an erosion of communal trust, a breakdown in collective action norms, weakening of people's sense of belonging and inclusion in society, and a diminishing of their civic engagement (Adugna & Gezahegne, 2024, p 7).

Coming after the REF's operational fieldwork ended but before this book was written, the crisis in Sudan which began in April 2023 involving the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces had by mid-2025 displaced over 12 million people, three million of whom have sought refuge in neighbouring countries.⁸ According to the United Nations, in May 2025 more than half the Sudanese population – 24.6 million people – were experiencing hunger and severely limited humanitarian access; people's inability to access markets, employment and cash sources was exacerbating the situation.⁹

While a threat to one's physical security caused by conflict may constitute an urgent need to move, people do not just move in a random manner. Often, they follow routes that they have used before, where they hope or expect to find employment, to settle with family or friends, or to receive assistance from local or international organisations. In this sense the move is not only flight *from* conflict; it is also a move *towards* a place that holds the promise of being able to sustain them. Like those displaced by environmental degradation, conflict-affected people at least initially hope and expect to be able to return to their homes soon. Therefore, they take steps to ensure that they will be able to do so. Some people, if they can, will leave one or more family members behind to keep their property safe, to tend to their farms or animals and to remain connected to their community. If they

⁸ <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/sudansituation>. Accessed: 18 May 2025.

⁹ <https://www.wfp.org/emergencies/sudan-emergency>. Accessed: 18 May 2025.

cannot do this, they may try to relocate to somewhere close to where they left, or to relocate to an area together with others from the same area of origin.

Food security as a motivating factor

Food insecurity may be a symptom of conflict, environmental change or economic crisis. It can also be a distinct factor influencing people's decisions to move. People may be willing to withstand considerable economic stress but when their food security becomes imperilled – by a collapse in food production, lack of availability of food in the markets or inability to get to markets, etc – then the need to move becomes more urgent. During drought, the process of erosion of food security is gradual and to some extent predictable (and often preventable). During conflict, disruption to food systems may happen overnight, leading to a sudden need to move to an area where food can be obtained.

The deliberate blocking of access to food during war is illegal under international humanitarian law – this includes attacking cropland, food stores, marketplaces and essential transport routes for food deliveries. However, violations occur frequently and have been recorded during the REF project period by international observers in Somalia, Ethiopia, South Sudan and Sudan.

Food insecurity appears not only as a driver of migration decisions – the need to move from a place of food insecurity to one of greater possibility of finding food – but also as a motivating factor in determining *where* to move. Often it may motivate people to split their households up to be able to search for opportunity in multiple locations, whether some stay in the area of origin to look after herds or farms while others move to cities, towns or assisted settlements to seek help, or the family members move to two or more new locations – men taking their herds to more remote grazing areas while women and children move into urban areas, for instance.

Personal versus collective decision making

Who makes the decision to move? Often the decision may be taken by an individual, by a family collectively, or by a community through public consultation or through its leaders. As we have noted, these decisions are rooted in questions about the viability of remaining in place or moving elsewhere, as well as in a calculation of what the likely outcome of a move will be. Often the decisions are highly gendered – in our research in South Sudan, we found that men usually took the decision on behalf of their families. When women were the heads of household, they were evidently more centrally involved in deciding when and where to move. Sometimes they made the decision together with other households and move together, providing support to one another. Our research with Samuel Hall also showed how displacement in South Sudan produced empowering and disempowering effects – for women, who were typically disenfranchised and whose mobility space was confined, living without adult male relatives increased their decision-making power in everyday matters in camp settings, where women could access gender-focused programmes and establish solidarity and support networks cutting across community lines (Samuel Hall and REF, 2023).

Older community members in many parts of the Horn of Africa also have significant responsibility when it comes to collective decision making on mobility. Focus group discussions carried out by the REF in the Tana River Delta revealed that, during drought, village elders typically deliberated together on where and when to move. Interviewees remarked that “when drought intensifies, the elders decide for the community to move” (Mahmoud, 2023, p. 20). The elders making the decision to move were typically men. In a departure from the conventional dynamics of decision making, however, the severity of the drought in 2023 reportedly made people in the Tana River area uncharacteristically individualistic and they said that such practices were no longer possible. One of the elders explained

this shift in Swahili as “*wewe ni wewe na mimi ni mimi*” (you take care of your affairs, and I take care of mine). The significance of this change in thought processes during a drought situation like that in 2023 is that the community is slowly losing its grip on collective responsibility and is adopting more individual decision making to survive, particularly when it comes to when and where to move.

Even among pastoralist communities, however, our research shows variations. In Ethiopia’s Somali region, decisions are usually made by male heads of households, but the journey is undertaken collectively. In Somaliland, on the other hand, migration decisions are typically undertaken by individuals and extended families, and often by both women and men together (Ahmed et al, 2023). Whereas male heads of households usually make the final decision, they do so in consultation with the female family members, who do a large portion of the work involved in the move, including taking down the *aaal* (traditional Somali house) and reconstructing it in the new destination. This joint decision making was highlighted in both research sites (Duruqsi and Xaaxi) in Somaliland and in relation to both short and long movements.

Individuals who move often do so without much consultation, or even without any discussion at all, with their family members. This marks a change in the patterns of migration, particularly of young people. Previously, migrants were required to pay their travel costs up front before embarking on their journeys; this required families to contribute their savings to finance the journey of a young person to Europe or Saudi Arabia, and they were therefore in support of these journeys. More recently smugglers and traffickers have adopted a ‘travel now, pay later’ approach, whereby the migrant can begin their journey with as little as \$100, with the expectation that they will pay for their journey once they have arrived at their destination, or that their parents will be contacted for instalments while they are on their journey. This has encouraged some young people to leave their homes without informing their parents – many parents now would not want their children to migrate given the risks that they have been informed of. The families find out only once the individual has already left, and often when their journey has gone wrong and they are in danger (see Sturridge et al, 2018; also Chapter 6).

Mixed migration and the importance of choice

Two key themes emerge from this chapter that will be further developed throughout this book. The first is that migration decisions are rarely made in response to a single ‘root cause’ or ‘primary driver’. Instead, people weigh the complex array of elements that contribute to their sense of security, and their relative ability to achieve such security in a given place, to determine whether to move, where to go, and how to get there. The terms ‘voluntary’ and ‘forced’ migrant can therefore be misleading, since most forms of movement involve an element of choice. Moreover, when choices are constrained – by lack of safety or lack of economic resources, for example – an element of being compelled to move, or being forced to move, becomes part of the picture.

‘Mixed migration’ is a term used increasingly to describe this messy form of movement which contains elements of choice and force. Most mixed migrants are not recognised as refugees or IDPs but they still, as the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) notes, “often face the same risks, have similar needs along the journey and travel along the same routes. However, they may fall through the protection safety net, safeguarding of rights, and assistance, because current international legal frameworks reinforce only two concepts: the migrant and refugee.”¹⁰ Because mixed migrants often follow the same pathways as refugees or economic migrants, they are often not recognised. Nor do we well understand the means by which a person who sets off as a voluntary migrant may become a forced migrant because of what happens to them along the way (see Chapter 6). It is important that,

¹⁰ IOM. <https://www.migrationdataportal.org/themes/mixed-migration>. Accessed: 14 December 2024.

in our research, our analysis and in the policies that we develop based on this empirical work, greater attention is paid to mixed migrants and their particular needs.

The second point related to decision-making dynamics is about the importance of supporting the constitutive elements of human security to enable people to be able to make positive decisions about their lives. In this book we argue that much of the migration that goes on in the Horn of Africa can be understood as adaptation in response to changing opportunities, threats and risks. Mobility is for many people the context in which development happens. In this sense mobility itself is not, *per se*, problematic when people have the resources, security and options to make positive decisions about their movement. It becomes problematic, however, as people's available options are eroded. If they become destitute and have no choice but to move, or are fleeing for their lives, or unable to get to where they need to be without putting themselves at risk through unsafe transit routes and unscrupulous traffickers and agents – these are the problems that give rise to irregular or problematic movement. As we will see in Chapter 8 when we consider policy, the goal of migrant- and refugee-centred policy should therefore be to try to support people to develop the resources they need to be able to decide freely whether or not to move; if they decide to move, they should be able to do so without risking their safety and security. If they have a range of options, they may also decide to stay in their areas of origin. To reiterate, the 'development problem' we are assessing is not how to reduce the number of people on the move, but to support them to be able to have a range of options that they can use to approach the question of whether to move from a constructive, rather than a desperate, perspective.

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Chapter 3:

Environmental change and mobility

In the context of environmental change, people's movements tend to be interpreted by both the academic and policy literature as unplanned and unwanted, and as a last response to insurmountable challenges. In spite of the emergence of more nuanced and positive accounts of mobility, it is the 'crisis' that continues to be perceived as the predominant factor explaining why people move as a result of environmental factors (Lindley, 2014b). "The dominant view is that people who move because of environmental factors are in fact unable to adapt – and thus have no option but to leave" (Piguet et al, 2011, p 15). One might revise this statement slightly to say that in many cases people have adapted as much as they can and thus have run out of options other than to move. This focus on crisis has given momentum to labels such as 'climate refugee' or 'environmental migrant', which are now widely used in policy and practice, even if refugee law does not recognise displacement as a result of environmental causes as a legitimate basis for providing legal protection. While many groups move in contexts of environmental change, this overarching framing remains problematic for a number of reasons.

There is growing (albeit highly context-specific) evidence which suggests that moving can contribute positively to both adaptation and development. Seen in this way, moving may be better understood as the means by which people adapt their lives and livelihoods to environmental pressures (Afifi et al, 2016; Banerjee et al, 2012; Barnett & Webber, 2010; Black et al, 2011b; Fünfgeld et al, 2018; Gemenne, 2013; IOM, 2017; McLeman & Smit, 2006; Tacoli, 2009). Moving is already a normal part of many livelihoods – including those that involve pastoralism, shifting cultivation and seasonal waged labour – and has been for generations. The uneven geographic distribution of resources and opportunities across rural and urban settings in the Horn of Africa and elsewhere means that moving can be an important mechanism for diversifying contemporary livelihoods. Furthermore, improved transport and communication networks, and gendered and generational changes have made mobility cheaper, easier and more socially acceptable (for some) than it has been for previous generations. It is this normality and familiarity of mobility that can make it a logical option when it comes to adapting livelihoods.

A second problem with the crisis framing is that it reflects underlying interests that may have more to do with politics and power than the reality of how people move in contexts of environmental change. A narrative of crisis speaks to a long-standing sedentarist bias that prioritises fixity over mobility, and imagines 'normal' life as settled (Malkki, 1992). A sedentarist perspective tends to prevail in mainstream conceptualisations of livelihoods and development, whereby moving is seen as an option of last resort or an 'add-on' to the main business of making a life and a livelihood *in situ*. This narrative serves specific political interests, as in the framing of restrictive immigration policies or populist media. Alarmist predictions of millions of 'environmental refugees' describe people on the move towards

Europe as moving at least in part in response to the increasingly felt impacts of climate change.¹¹ Not only has the methodological basis and empirical accuracy of these predictions been challenged but this kind of rhetoric plays into portrayals of migration as problematic and disruptive (Bettini, 2013; Farbotko et al., 2020). The result is the use of technocratic and emergency humanitarian explanations of movement that elide the role of global and regional power asymmetries and colonial histories (Bettini, 2013). Such alarmist narratives may also help to legitimise political inaction or resignation. For example, in conceptualising the impact of climate change as ‘unavoidable’ or ‘too big to be tackled’, it is easier to maintain the underlying conditions that contributed to climate change in the first place (Arnall, 2014; Bettini, 2013). Furthermore, highlighting the large numbers of people who move also takes the focus away from the many people who don’t move but who choose to or are forced to stay in places where they are vulnerable to environmental risk (Foresight, 2011; Zickgraf, 2018).

In this context, this chapter draws on REF research to challenge the conventional starting point of such analysis by shifting the focus from ‘environmental displacement’ to a deeper understanding of how people move in contexts of environmental change. This nuances the narrative from a ‘crisis’ of migration towards a wider understanding of everyday mobile livelihoods and practice. It creates the analytical space for the everyday, easy to miss and uneventful micro-mobilities and translocal connections that are occurring, unnoticed and all around us, and which have the potential to play a positive role in contemporary mobile livelihoods affected by environmental change. Moving in contexts of environmental change does not have to be something special or exceptional. It may be an unremarkable part of everyday life, development and change that is not easily discernible from the wider undercurrents and transformations of urbanisation, globalisation, demographic shifts and environmental change.

This chapter draws on REF research to shift the conventional narrative focus from ‘environmental displacement’ to understanding how people move in contexts of environmental change. Rather than a sole focus on the ‘crisis’ of migration, we show the everyday, easy to miss and uneventful micro-mobilities and translocal connections that are occurring, unnoticed, and all around us. The studies highlighted in this chapter show how mobility is an intrinsic feature of many livelihoods and how mobility becomes a compelling avenue through which to adapt to environmental change. The chapter explores how pastoralists, agro-pastoralists, agriculturalists, traders and businesspeople, among others, use mobility in myriad ways, not only as a principal livelihood strategy in non-equilibrium environments, but also as an adaptive mechanism in the face of ecological and environmental shocks and stressors. The chapter also explores how back-and-forth movements between rural and urban areas, and across borders, and the sending of social and financial remittances can function as a means of adapting livelihoods and building resilience to environmental pressures. Finally, it considers the extent to which environmental policy and programmes take these dynamics into account, and what a failure to do so means for mobile livelihoods.

The chapter draws on several REF projects, including a paper on resilience in Turkana County, Kenya by Greta Semplici; research on mobile and diversified ‘rural–urban’ livelihoods by Caitlin Sturridge in Laikipia County, Kenya; a study on land, climate change and internal migration among the Wolayta youth of southwest Ethiopia by Bereket Tsegay; a report on migration between the Horn of Africa and Yemen that built on fieldwork in Ethiopia, Puntland (Somalia), Djibouti and Yemen; a study exploring the dynamics of return and (re)integration of refugees and IDPs to three Somali cities: Mogadishu, Kismayo and Baidoa; and research in Ethiopia, Somaliland and Kenya focused on dynamic pastoral livelihoods and the challenges that environmental change presents. The latter studies, conducted

¹¹ The most frequently cited figure predicts that by 2050 there could be as many as 200 million environmental refugees (Myers, 2002).

together, had a particular focus on why, in spite of the multiple threads connecting migration and environment, major climate policy and programmes tend to overlook or simplify the connections of migration with ecological and environmental phenomena.

Contextualising environmental changes in the Horn of Africa

The predicted impacts of climate change in the Horn of Africa remain mixed and uncertain, with significant challenges concerning the availability and accessibility of climate data (Gebrechorkos et al, 2019). It is clear that temperatures are rising across the region, with cities such as Khartoum (Sudan), Dar es Salaam (Tanzania), Mogadishu (Somalia) and Nairobi (Kenya) having experienced significant increases of around two degrees Celsius since 1860 (ICPAC, 2022). In the decades ahead, it is projected that the Horn will experience a rise of around three degrees Celsius by 2099 (UNDP, 2021). Warming is expected to increase the frequency of extreme weather events such as floods, droughts, tropical storms and heavy rainstorms (Bates et al, 2008; IPCC, 2007).

While projected changes in precipitation patterns are unclear, the data suggest that the Horn of Africa will probably become wetter (IPCC, 2007). An increase in intense precipitation events is likely, however, to be coupled with an increased frequency of drought (UNDP, 2021). The Horn of Africa has always experienced variable rainfall patterns; however, recent events suggest that the intensity, duration and timing of rainfall is set to become increasingly erratic across the region.

Droughts have become more frequent and longer in duration in the region, particularly during the long rains (ECHO et al, 2021; Marchant, 2021). This has culminated in moments of crisis. In 2011, 260,000 Somalis, half of whom were children, are estimated to have died as a result of famine (UN, 2013; Checchi & Robinson, 2013). Famine was averted between 2016 and 2019 thanks to anticipatory action, but the impacts were nevertheless severe, with six out of seven below-average rainy seasons. Since October 2020, the region has entered into a new episode of worsening conditions of drought (FAO, 2022).

In parallel to drought, rainfall variability is resulting in more intense rainfall at other times of the year, in particular during the short rains (Gebrechorkos et al, 2019). In 2020, six million people were affected by floods in East Africa (Baraibar & Babiker, 2021). South Sudan experienced the worst flooding in 60 years in October 2020, when over 800,000 people were left without adequate food, water or shelter (Davies, 2021; Martinez, 2021; OCHA, 2021). The combination of food insecurity, conflict, economic decline and the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic have eroded South Sudan's ability to cope with recurring extreme weather events such as flooding, making it one of the most vulnerable countries in the world to climate change (Eckstein et al, 2021). Furthermore, ecological and climatic conditions have contributed to the worst outbreak of desert locusts in decades between 2018 and 2022, when recurring locust swarms destroyed crops and pasture, further eroding livelihoods and resilience across Ethiopia, Somalia, South Sudan, Uganda and Kenya (Biggar, 2021).

In this context, climatic factors are already having a significant impact on the Horn of Africa. And yet a one-dimensional focus on climate *per se* only tells part of the story. "Climate is only one aspect of the environment", as human activity and interventions also influence the natural, built and social surroundings that make up our 'environment' (Jónsson, 2010, p 4). Environmental issues such as soil degradation, loss of pasture, changing riparian areas, land pressures, loss of biodiversity, and so on emerge from a mix of natural and societal drivers. This political ecology perspective is not new. Writing about soil erosion back in 1985, Blaikie attributed this to a mix of ecological and societal factors and, in particular, the "political economic context in which land users find themselves" (1985, p 32). A similar political ecology perspective has been applied to land degradation (Blaikie & Brookfield, 1987),

resource conflict (Eriksen & Lind, 2009; Lindley, 2014b), deforestation (Kallis, 2008), conservation (Unks et al, 2019), resource governance, development, drought (Wisner, 1978) and famine (De Waal, 2005; Sen, 1990, p 162), among other variables.

The environmental changes being experienced across the Horn of Africa cannot be attributed to climate alone. They also extend to developments and transformations in the wider political economy, including the impacts of national development policies, urbanisation, population growth, privatisation, globalisation and resettlement. Greta Semplici's paper written for the REF describes how the effects of the 2011 drought in Turkana, Kenya were exacerbated by factors in the region that went beyond lack of rainfall (Semplici, 2020). Unintended negative impacts of development projects in the region, inflated global fuel prices, and inefficient and weak governance processes also contributed to food insecurity.

In addition to contextualising environmental impacts within the wider political economy, Semplici's paper highlights the extent to which rainfall variability is a normal way of life for many groups of people, and has been for many years. Communities have dealt with drought for decades, with recent incidences recorded in 2002, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011–12, 2014, 2015, 2016 and 2017 (Grünewald et al, 2019). This casts doubt on the 'crisis' framing used to describe environmental changes. Semplici describes the fast and unpredictable changes in vegetation structure, ground cover and precipitation that characterise the drylands of Turkana County. She observes: "There is never a fixed 'November' identical to every other November in every other year and across the whole region". In this context, vegetation resources are not necessarily 'scarce', as commonly conceived, but they are unevenly distributed across a vast territory and they grow, wither and flower again in different places at different times (Semplici, 2020). This variability can be an opportunity rather than a challenge when productively employed (Krätli & de Jode, 2015), through, for example, herd flexibility, diversity and mobility (Fratkin, 1997).

With this in mind, Semplici advocates a 'large-scale approach' to ecology that broadens not just the scale of analysis but also the scope of development interventions beyond micro-niches to observe dynamics taking place at a broader regional level. What is needed is a fuller, wider and more contextualised picture than a one-dimensional focus on climate alone.

Multi-causality of moving

Just as a contextualised political ecology approach to understanding environmental changes in the Horn of Africa is needed, a similar multi-causal rationale is required for understanding people's movements that goes beyond a one-dimensional focus on the environment. Understanding the environment–migration nexus and, in particular, the extent to which the environment drives migration, has generated significant research and debate in recent years.

This is epitomised by the debate between the so-called 'maximalists', characterised by environmentalist Norman Myers and 'minimalists' such as geographer Richard Black (Suhrke, 1994). On the one hand, 'maximalists' theorise a direct link between environmental change and migration. They forecast apocalyptic numbers of migrants moving directly as a result of environmental change, and advocate legal recognition of the category of 'environmental refugee' to reflect this. On the other hand, 'minimalists' downplay the environment–migration connection by identifying five universal families of migration drivers: economic, political, social, demographic and environmental (Black et al, 2011a). They emphasise that mobility is just one among a number of possible responses to environmental change, and that, in any case, immobility (as much as mobility) is another likely outcome of environmental change for the many who lack the resources to move away. The debate between 'minimalists' and 'maximalists' has since moved on and there is now general acceptance of

migration's multi-causality (Boas et al, 2022). And yet, as concerns around climate change continue to grow, much research continues to pay lip service to the multiple drivers of migration while still seeking to theorise movements in relation to one-dimensional climatic indicators (such as changes in rainfall or temperature). This ignores the wider social, political, economic and historical context in which these occur.

Research conducted by the REF supports a multi-causal and contextualised approach to understanding the circumstances in which environmental change contributes to the decision to move. Our research examining the reasons that people moved in and to Yemen, Djibouti and Puntland found that most respondents did not link their movements specifically to drought, in spite of this being cited as a major driver of migration and displacement by external analysts and commentators (Sturridge et al, 2017). Some migrants interviewed for this research did cite drought as a reason for moving to Yemen; one Somali man, for example, said that he was planning to travel to Saudi Arabia to help his family after they lost their animals and crops to drought. Overall, however, more migrants attributed their movement to a lack of economic opportunity or to political instability in their areas of origin than to drought specifically. This may be because drought-affected communities often lack the resources and ability – let alone the ambition – to engage in long-distance migration or any movement at all. Those who are able to move are more likely to migrate to nearby urban areas, internally within their own country, or to neighbouring countries, than to attempt to cross the sea to Yemen and beyond. Those experiencing extremely depleted resilience and resources do not have the funds to pay for a long-distance journey and so they either stay put or move shorter distances.

Similar findings have emerged from research conducted for the REF by Caitlin Sturridge in Laikipia (Sturridge, 2020). While water pressures were identified by urban and peri-urban respondents as the topmost challenge affecting people's livelihoods, only 12% of migrants (out of 24 interviewees) highlighted water scarcity as a reason for moving. This is not to say that water was not a significant factor in their decision to migrate, as it clearly emerged as a major challenge for most respondents. Rather, it tells us that movements were influenced less by standalone factors such as water availability than by broader livelihood dynamics. In the context of Laikipia, a web of interconnected natural and societal factors came together to influence the decision to move. These factors included the process of appropriation, privatisation and compartmentalisation of land that dates back to the colonial era and has been a feature of successive governments. They also included water pressures brought about by the combination of unreliable rainfall and river depletion as the number of upstream water users has increased in the wake of population growth and the expansion of horticultural farming. Finally, there was a generalised sense of economic decline as wages had stagnated and prices had risen in an increasingly cash-based society.

The case of a 44-year-old female respondent interviewed in Laikipia County illustrates how these multiple socioeconomic and environmental factors interweave and enmesh with one another to influence livelihoods more generally. These factors had created a ripple effect that extended beyond the woman's individual household to the wider community, and contributed to a generalised condition of vulnerability. She explained how a combination of land degradation, water shortages and pests and disease had diminished her harvest over the years, contributing to food insecurity within her own household, and driving up the wider cost of basic foods that she subsequently had to purchase in the markets. What is more, as other farmers in the community experienced similar challenges, her opportunities for taking up casual labour (tilling, planting and weeding) on neighbouring farms also became fewer; farm size and cash flow were reduced, and households sought to save money by using their own labour reserves.

In this context, "It is rarely possible to disentangle the multiple changes to which people are responding and it makes little sense to try to do so" (Béné et al, 2014, p 602). By situating

environmental considerations within their socio-political context, a multi-causal and contextualised approach can better recognise multi-causality.

Everyday practices of mobility

In contexts of environmental change, people's movements tend to be interpreted as unplanned and unwanted, as a last response to insurmountable challenges. This interpretation of events makes little room for the everyday characteristics of many such movements that are occurring within and to a lesser extent across national borders. Indeed, moving has always been, and one can argue is increasingly becoming, a routine response to pressures and opportunities – albeit not for everyone and often under restrictive and exploitative conditions, as we argue in this chapter. As noted above, improved transport and communication networks have made moving easier and cheaper than for previous generations. At the same time, shifts in gender roles and the expectations of different generations mean that young people and women may engage in more mobile and diversified livelihoods now. Until recently, migration was predominantly undertaken by men. However, the proportion of women migrants is growing fast (Tacoli, 2006a, p 6). Young people across Africa (who are better educated, travelled and connected than their parents) are also more likely than ever to be on the move (Kefale & Gebresenbet, 2021; Potts, 1997).

Our team's research is replete with examples of the normality of moving for a range of people and across different locations. For example, research conducted in the arid borderlands of Mandera, Kenya by Ngala Chome highlights the adaptive, flexible and informal cross-border mobility of local communities who have for generations moved back and forth across porous borders between Kenya, Ethiopia and Somalia in order to maintain and diversify livelihoods under pressure from environmental stress and limited economic opportunities (Chome, 2021). A similar picture emerges from another study we commissioned that explores the circular return dynamics of Somali returnees (Manji, 2020). By moving on a regular basis back and forth across the Somalia–Kenya border, and between camps and places of origin, returnees are able to diversify livelihoods which have become constrained by harsh environmental conditions and insecurity, and maintain access to humanitarian support in the camps, while also securing their assets back in Somalia.

Building on these findings, there is a clear case for expanding and refining the narrative from one of 'crisis' to the everyday perspective of livelihoods when it comes to understanding the interactions of environmental change and migration. While many people do ultimately move out of areas challenged by environmental change under circumstances of displacement, this overarching narrative leaves little room for the mixed experiences and everyday mobilities that many adopt (Maru et al, 2022). Within much of the literature, there is a tendency to confine moving within the domain of the extraordinary. It is seen as a peripheral 'add-on' employed when things go wrong. Or as a trait of ring-fenced minorities that have always engaged in mobile practices, such as nomadic pastoralists, forest people or travellers (Semplici & Sturridge, 2022). And yet the above examples illustrate how everyday practices of mobility play a central role in the routine unfolding of many different kinds of livelihoods, and are not just undertaken out of desperation. In many instances, moving is not just a means to a livelihood but a fundamental part of that livelihood, and of the way in which it is conducted (Semplici & Sturridge, 2022).

In this context, framing mobility through a livelihoods lens can provide a more nuanced and local-level reading of the circumstances under which mobility occurs in contexts of environmental change. It makes space for more subjective, local-level factors, such as perception and vulnerability. A livelihoods framing of mobility reinforces the idea that movements in contexts of environmental change are not inherently forced but may form part of a wider livelihoods strategy. This challenges the dominant framing of environmentally induced movements as being a long-distance, cross-border rupture with

one's place of origin, way of life and livelihood. For many, if not most households under pressure from environmental change, their movements remain internal, close to home and strongly tied to an ongoing way of life thanks to enduring translocal connections.

In addition to nuancing the way in which people are seen to move, a focus on everyday practice can also encourage us to look again, and to look more closely, at the assumptions we make about the resilience of those living in harsh environmental landscapes. For example, in her research Semplici (2020) describes how Turkana herders tend to be seen by development and humanitarian actors as leading vulnerable and precarious livelihoods characterised by a lack of resilience. Yet, by considering mobility as a form of everyday practice, the image of food-insecure herders is replaced by one of endurance and the capacity to 'stay without'. Indeed, Semplici writes that, from the perspective of the herders, the 'vulnerable' are those who cannot sustain life in the drylands, those who suffer from the lack of food and water, those who are 'afraid of the sun'. It is the townspeople, rather than the herders, who the Turkana consider vulnerable to a lack of food because they are incapable of 'staying without' it. Viewed from this perspective, Turkana herders can be understood as more resilient than vulnerable, using their sense of community as a group survival strategy (Bruijn et al, 2001).

Rural-urban mobility and connections

Within the literature as well as across policy and practice, 'rural' and 'urban' settings are conceptualised as specific, distinct and definable entities. There are some exceptions to this. For example, from an economics perspective, there is widespread recognition that "the fortunes of the rural and urban spheres are inextricably linked" (Baker & Pedersen, 1992, p 11). An economic interdependence exists between urban enterprise and rural consumers, on the one hand, and rural producers and urban markets, on the other (Satterthwaite & Tacoli, 2003). Nevertheless, when it comes to questions of livelihoods and identities, people and places are described and categorised as either rural or urban, and rarely as being simultaneously both. This dichotomous treatment of rural and urban mushrooms into wider, connected binaries that are not always helpful or accurate. For example, 'urban-rural' becomes equated with 'rich-poor', 'modern-traditional', 'individual-communal', 'change-continuity', and so on (Andersson, 2002, p 7).

Livelihoods that diversify simultaneously across rural and urban settings are becoming increasingly common across the Horn of Africa, especially for households living in harsh or changing environments. Until the turn of the twentieth century, livelihood diversification was viewed as a short-lived and occasional strategy, often negatively associated with survival and struggle, and standing in opposition to the accepted wisdom of "sectors, specialisation and transition" (Ellis, 1998, p 2). Today, however, it is recognised as 'the norm' across much of Sub-Saharan Africa and beyond (Barrett et al, 2001, p 315).

This rural-urban trend can be attributed to a combination of environmental, socioeconomic and governance pressures, which have encouraged, or in some cases forced, households to diversify their livelihoods across multiple activities and settings. Now, perhaps more than ever, few households can support themselves through a single activity alone, whether farming, pastoralism, trading or wage employment. What is more, key livelihoods resources, such as water, land, pasture, jobs, markets, labour, health, education and financial services, remain unevenly distributed across rural and urban settings. Most government services, large markets, financial institutions, formal employment opportunities, quality hospitals and good schools are located in towns rather than rural areas. Likewise, resources such as farmland, pasture, sufficient water for irrigation and livestock, and affordable casual labour for herding and farming, are typically found in rural settings. This means that, while some households may be able to diversify across a range of activities *in situ*, in many cases some

members of the household must move between rural and urban settings in order to access these geographically dispersed resources and opportunities.

Indeed, growing numbers of rural residents are expanding their livelihoods into small business, casual labour and wage employment, activities which often rely on urban markets. Sturridge's research in the arid north of Laikipia County reveals that many pastoralists continue to maintain their livestock (albeit in smaller numbers) but now supplement pastoralism with business or activities in nearby towns, such as motorcycle taxis, small shops and hostels, and casual labour (Sturridge, 2020). Growing demand for construction materials in Laikipia and beyond has created a busy local industry of 'sand harvesting', which attracts large numbers of young pastoralists to load waiting lorries with sand for daily wages. At the same time, many urban Laikipian households can no longer adequately feed themselves with their earnings, and look to rural opportunities, such as farming and livestock, to supplement their livelihoods. Taking advantage of improved transport and communications networks, urban residents are increasingly leasing fertile plots of rural land in the vicinity of Mount Kenya to farm crops and graze cattle. The produce they derive from these rural activities is sold or consumed and, more often than not, shared with wider family.

In this context, the gap between rural and urban livelihoods is arguably getting smaller. The growing challenge of making a living in cities means that urban migrants are sending less money and goods to rural areas (Bah et al, 2003, p 20), and are instead becoming increasingly reliant on transfers of food and other goods sent by relatives in rural areas (Potts, 1997, p 466). While poverty in rural areas is still more pronounced, many livelihoods have come to feature a mix of urban and rural-based activities, and patterns of migration are shifting to reflect this. There is a prevailing tendency within academia to focus on one-way financial flows, typically from urban to rural settings, and from migrants to stayers that reflects underlying rural–urban binaries and hierarchies. However, the traditional nature and direction of rural–urban and migrant–stayer exchange is changing and is becoming increasingly reciprocal. This shifting reality challenges the general assumption that people naturally move from village to city in search of better opportunities, and that remittances travel in the opposite direction to support struggling rural households.

Similar dynamics may be seen elsewhere in the Horn of Africa, including in displacement settings. In Somalia, for example, REF research conducted in three cities (Mogadishu, Baidoa and Kismayo) found that many displaced households stay connected across rural and urban settings in order to diversify their livelihoods (Sturridge et al, 2017). These rural–urban connections enable the displaced to access jobs, education, resources and assistance in urban centres or settlements, while also maintaining land, livestock and agricultural productivity in places of origin. Somali respondents described sending food (such as rice, oil and sorghum) from the countryside to the city, and vice versa, in order to sustain family members living elsewhere – reflecting again the reciprocal nature of these patterns of exchange.

As well as sustaining households in the short term, the socioeconomic support that these rural–urban linkages provide can also promote sustainable return and (re)integration in the long term. While the dispersal of family members across rural and urban locations may be the outcome of poverty and displacement, it may also reflect a proactive strategy. Maintaining assets and networks through rural–urban linkages makes people more likely to return should conditions improve. Rural–urban linkages facilitate return visits and, by extension, informed decisions based on the actual context on the ground. When it comes to (re)integration, rural–urban linkages (and the financial and social security they provide) can enable migrants to stay in cities and integrate locally thanks to pooled resources and the sending and receiving of money and goods from family elsewhere, while also enabling other family members to stay in rural areas thanks to support from their urban kin. It seems likely that these rural–urban linkages will continue even once return and (re)integration have taken place. Intention

surveys suggest that 30% of IDP respondents who said they would return permanently to rural areas indicated that some family members would remain in cities in order to maintain access to support and assistance (DRC, 2017a, 2017b)

In spite of the importance of rural–urban ties and mobility for a range of groups experiencing environmental challenges, the dichotomous treatment of ‘rural’ and ‘urban’ economies, communities and livelihoods means that the multi-directional webs of exchange and interaction remain poorly understood and regularly overlooked. This has led policy and programmes to treat ‘rural’ and ‘urban’ communities as separate and isolated entities requiring different types of intervention. In the context of Somalia, for example, humanitarian interventions are shifting from rural development to urban resilience (planning, infrastructure and development), as repeated cycles of drought deplete assets again and again, assets which are expensive to replace and rebuild. While urban investments are cheaper, safer and easier than in rural areas (where access and security remain major challenges), a focus on ‘value for money’ should not detract from the desire of displaced people to return to rural places of origin should conditions there improve. In this context, parallel support to rural and urban areas is needed so that displaced people can integrate sustainably in the place(s) of their choosing (whether in cities or rural areas, or both).

In this context, a translocal lens – with its focus on “the relational dimensions of space created by migration, exchange and multiple belonging” (Greiner, 2010, p 134) – can help to transcend conventional rural and urban binaries. In doing so, it can also help to inform policy and practice more generally: interventions should reflect the multi-directional ties and dependencies that connect rural and urban economies. A ring-fenced, micro-scale and selective approach disregards the influence of wider transformations (such as economic decline, urbanisation, environmental change, population growth) that are taking place over a territory at large or at another time. It also overlooks how policy interventions in one place may influence (for better or worse) outcomes elsewhere. Actions that target a particular area or sector are likely to reverberate in unintended ways in sites that are interconnected. Policy and programmes could proactively tap into these rural–urban connections to stretch the reach of their interventions, for example to hard-to-reach areas. This is especially relevant for insecure contexts like Somalia, where access to rural areas is often particularly constrained. Interventions should also strengthen the rural–urban social networks and livelihood strategies of people residing in harsh environmental conditions by facilitating everyday movements and regular communications, as well as by investing in secondary towns to help reduce pressures on major cities and bridge rural–urban divides.

Moving as a form of adapting

Academic interest in how people move and adapt in contexts of environmental change has grown significantly in recent years. This interest spans the social and natural sciences. It stems from the wider climate change literature, which has seen a resurgence of research into adaptation, vulnerability and resilience. It also has roots in social science studies relating to livelihoods, food security, development, political economy and migration and agrarian change, among others. Across this breadth of research, migration is variously conceptualised as a failure to adapt to environmental pressures and a potential strategy for adaptation. Emerging scholarship is recognising that relationships between mobility and environmental change are not straightforward, mono-causal or linear, but rather are highly context-specific (Boas et al, 2022). Place-based, context-specific research approaches such as those adopted by the REF are therefore important in producing knowledge.

Analysis from a growing number of academics now supports the idea that moving can be a positive form of adaptation for some groups and under certain circumstances (Afifi et al, 2016; Banerjee et al, 2012; Barnett & Webber, 2010; Black et al, 2011b; Fünfgeld et al, 2018; Gemenne, 2013, 2013; IOM,

2017; McLeman & Smit, 2006; Tacoli, 2009). For example, Findley (1994) has explored the role that circular migration can play in coping with droughts in Mali. In the context of Nepal, Rigg et al (2016, p 64) suggest that “migration has become key to sustaining livelihoods” under pressure from a mix of social and environmental pressures. Tacoli suggests that mobility should be “a central element of strategies of adaptation to climate change” (2009b, p 513). Likewise, Martin et al (2014, p 104) argue that mobility is an “effective adaptation strategy to offset the impact of climatic stresses and shocks”. Furthermore, the 2011 Foresight report (funded by the UK government) recommended that “migration can represent a ‘transformational’ adaptation to environmental change, and in many cases will be an extremely effective way to build long-term resilience” (2011, p 10).

In spite of the evidence showing that mobility is an important aspect of many contemporary livelihood systems, the relationship between migration and adaptation remains mixed, with uneven and sometimes unpredictable outcomes that are rooted in household inequalities as well as wider structural dynamics. This mixed, uneven and shifting picture is an indicator of why uncertainties and divisions persist within the literature about the extent to which migration contributes to adaptation, illustrating further that the mobility–environmental change relationship is highly context-specific and multidimensional, rather than mono-causal. The experiences of mobile women illustrate this uneven relationship between migration and adaptation. Many women across the Horn of Africa are transitioning from roles of family caregivers and subsistence farmers or pastoralists towards earning an income through business and other activities. This has contributed to an increase in female migration as a shortage of income and employment prospects at home encourage many to look elsewhere in search of better opportunities. As a result, while labour migration is still dominated by men across the Horn of Africa, increasing numbers of women are now also moving for work, education and other opportunities, and not just for marriage (Adepoju, 2003; Curran & Saguy, 2001; Fleury, 2016; Francis, 2002; Jamie, 2013; Livingstone and Ruhindi, 2013; Lutz, 2010; Masanja, 2012; Tacoli, 2002; Trager, 1995).

The ability to move and earn their own money has strengthened many women’s social status not just within the confines of the home, but also within the wider community. Renewed spending power has enabled many women to take greater control of household finances and decisions and to participate, often for the first time, in local leadership structures. These opportunities may expose women to new responsibilities, experiences and knowledge, which further strengthens their position and status. In Bangladesh, for example, migration is conceptualised as an instrument for interrogating the power of traditional elites and reconfiguring class and gender identities (Rao, 2014). In Vietnam, growing transnational demand for so-called ‘marriage migrants’ has reconfigured gender power relations by enhancing daughters’ status and power at home (Bélanger & Linh, 2011). Research conducted across Mali, Nigeria, Tanzania and Vietnam has found that migration and remittances enable young women to renegotiate power relations and increase personal independence (Tacoli & Mabala, 2010). In support of this, Levitt and Lamba-Nieves (2010, p 3) argue that social remittances associated with migration “shake up gender and generational dynamics in ways that benefit women”.

While migration should be welcomed for its potential to strengthen women’s income and status, in many ways it continues to reflect and sustain patriarchal roles and responsibilities. Taken together, these dynamics constrain migration’s potential for adaptation. For example, evidence from Laikipia, shows that married women are more likely to engage in daily commuting than other forms of migration than men, who can move more freely further afield. This is because most women who move and work elsewhere are still expected to return home at the end of each day to look after family, home and livestock. While women are therefore able to move, this is on the condition that patriarchal household and community dynamics and divisions of labour remain relatively undisturbed. Viewed from this perspective, while additional responsibilities and opportunities may be liberating and empowering, they can also be a burden that exhausts opportunities for adapting. What is more, while

many women are now able to assume greater responsibilities, leadership roles (particularly at the higher levels) continue to be dominated by male elders. Women are still outnumbered by men in community forums, are more likely to assume 'tokenistic' roles and are less likely to speak up for fear of being seen as 'confrontational'. This suggests that, while opportunities for adaptive capacity through mobilities are there for some women, widespread gendered and generational changes in household and community leadership structures may be short-lived and superficial without genuine buy-in from wider society.

Considering gendered patterns of movement highlights the structural inequalities inherent in migration, which limit the extent to which moving enables adaptation. Social, cultural, economic and political inequalities within households and communities determine who is able to move and who is not, depending on the differential divisions of labour, access to resources, acquisition of knowledge and skills, and participation in decision making that these inequalities afford (Carr, 2005, p 930; Kothari, 2002, p 4; Nelson & Stathers, 2009, p 82). For example, research conducted in Kenya (Foeken & Owuor, 2001) and Tanzania (Loiske, 1995) suggest that low-income households are less likely to adopt mobile, multi-local livelihoods than those with greater social and financial resources. With this in mind, opportunities for moving remain out of reach for 'potential migrants' (Kothari, 2002) and people who want or need to move may become immobilised by overlapping political, social and economic factors keeping them in place (Zickgraf, 2019). On the other hand, not everyone may want to pursue mobile livelihoods, and analysis, policy and programmes must also pay attention to the dynamics of 'voluntary immobility', including connections to place, aspirations to stay and the right to remain in changing environments (McMichael et al, 2021).

Climate change and migration in policy

While the relationship between the environment and migration has become a familiar subject of migration studies in recent years, it has been relatively neglected or even ignored altogether within climate studies and policy. As a result, migration continues to be treated as exceptional, rather than recognised as already occurring and as an integral part of responses to climate change. This is partly reflective of a tendency for the social and the natural sciences to operate in silos rather than collaboratively, in research and practice, as well as of dominant political framings of climate change and migration (see Chapter 8). Major climate policy and programmes tend to overlook the connection of migration with ecological and environmental phenomena. When movement is included, it is usually framed in negative terms as a problem to be solved, or to be carefully managed if it is to be beneficial. This narrows opportunities for including migration as a potential adaptation strategy in climate policy and programmes.

Research for the REF by Bereket Tsegay (2021) on land, climate change and internal migration among the Wolayta youth of southwest Ethiopia identified these disconnects between climate policy and migration. He found that most national and global climate mitigation policies overlook migration. And, when they do discuss migration as an impact, they tend to be limited to international migration and forced displacement (for example, the Marrakesh, Warsaw Mechanism and Paris Climate Agreements). The everyday mobile practices of internal migration receive significantly less attention. This reflects a critical gap in understanding the interests of young internal migrants, with a low level of recognition of and protection for those who move. Policies have failed either to provide viable opportunities for those who decide to stay, or to explore wider or improved livelihood options for those who choose to move. With this in mind, Tsegay recommends linking climate change and environmental factors with dynamics of outmigration from rural areas as an urgent priority, especially considering the scale of such movements in many parts of Ethiopia.

This has been emphasised in subsequent REF research in Ethiopia, as well as in Kenya and Somaliland, which found extant climate change-focused policies do not sufficiently factor in migration and mobility (Ahmed et al, 2023, Mahmoud et al 2023). When it is included, rural–urban migration trajectories are the priority. When the everyday or seasonal mobilities of pastoralists are incorporated into such policies and plans, the focus remains on economic migration, or on controlling unwanted movements and displacements, rather than on a more holistic perspective on movement. Responses are often reactive and short-sighted. Within this policy context, some interventions contribute to environmental degradation and may worsen inequalities and the possibilities of conflict. For example, in our research in Somali Regional State, the continued prioritisation of water infrastructure, such as *berkads* and dams, along with other efforts at privatising water and land, has entrenched and worsened existing inequalities in some communities, consolidating wealth into a smaller number of households.

This does not mean there are no other responses and actions at work. Other policy areas are incorporating migration and mobility in promising ways, offering an entry point for learning and connecting for climate change initiatives. For example, REF research in Ethiopia identified health, education and agricultural extension policies targeting pastoralist communities; these policies are adopting more ‘mobile’ approaches suitable for people on the move, and these are being incorporated into regional development policies (Ahmed et al, 2023). Such initiatives offer an entry point for more holistic, mobile thinking regarding climate change that builds on the already-existing, innovative mobilities of pastoralists rather than seeking to render these groups sedentary through villagisation efforts. In Kenya, REF research found that county government and humanitarian actors are increasingly recognising the centrality of mobility to ways of life in Tana River County, including to living in contexts of environmental change, despite the relative absence of mobility at the national policy level (Mahmoud et al, 2023).

Similarly, organised efforts at the community level recognise the mobilities of their communities as an integral part of responding to environmental change. In Somaliland, for example, the Regional Drought Mitigation Committee, a temporary voluntary group made up of local leaders, was identified by the Mayor of Burco as “the most effective structure in drought response and climate change disasters”, given that “members are most knowledgeable on the locations, status of the drought and the level of vulnerability among communities” (Ahmed et al, 2023). At the same time, it is important to note that migration is not in itself automatically transformative, and responsibility to adapt to climate change cannot be placed solely with individuals and communities (Bettini & Gioli, 2016). External perspectives on these locally led groups is mixed, with an international agency informant sharing that their *ad hoc* nature, limited administrative and managerial capacity and limited reach remain challenges, and that international assistance does not use these committees (Ahmed et al, 2023). International and NGO assistance, on the other hand, mostly focused on short-term assistance, or water infrastructure, has faced problems around access and coverage. Across research sites, challenges around siloed work, whether between different government ministries, or between national and more local scales, remains a key difficulty.

Conclusion

Mobility, in various forms, is an important part of many livelihoods in the Horn of Africa. It follows, then, that it is an integral avenue through which people are seeking to adapt to environmental change, albeit in highly uneven and differentiated ways. REF research has illustrated how pastoralists, agro-pastoralists, agriculturalists, traders and businesspeople, among others, use mobility in myriad ways, including in contexts of environmental stress and change as these overlap with other social and political change. Taking mobility as already present, as normal and familiar, has enabled the REF to shift our framing and analysis around the role of mobility in contexts of environmental change in the region, beyond the crisis framing that continues to characterise much of the debate.

This brings to light several nuances and in this chapter we have argued that considerations of the role of mobility in responding to environmental change must be context-specific rather than assumed. Mobility is indeed familiar; however, it is differentiated. In contextualising mobilities and environmental change, REF research has traced some of the everyday mobilities and translocal networks that underpin many people's livelihoods in the region. The chapter has illustrated how rural–urban linkages, including social and financial remittances, can function as a means of adapting livelihoods and building resilience to environmental pressures. It has shown how dynamic mobilities may open up space for social change – eg for women – in the process but that this is not guaranteed and instead is highly uneven. The environment and mobility cannot be separated out from broader social, cultural, economic or political inequalities. Who is able to leverage the benefits of mobility or staying put, and who is in control of whether and how to engage mobilities often maps onto existing power dynamics at different scales.

Finally, this chapter has reflected on persistent gaps in environment and climate change policies, in which mobility is insufficiently included or, more often, not included at all. Given that mobility in myriad forms – including displacement, everyday movements, and ways of staying put and staying connected through translocal and transnational networks – is already an integral part of life in the region, a more considered, nuanced incorporation of mobility into environmental policy is important. The REF's approach to normalising, contextualising and pluralising the ways in which people incorporate mobilities into their livelihoods in the region is intended to help guide these conversations moving forward.

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Chapter 4: Conflict and forced migration

Conflict and violence have displaced millions of people across the Horn of Africa over the past half century. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 19% of the global displaced population are in the East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes.¹² Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia, Uganda and South Sudan represent 94% of the displaced and stateless population of the region.¹³ Displacement driven by conflict and insecurity have come to define forced migration in the region; many of these displacements are protracted and affect multiple countries as people cross national borders in search of protection and safety. While the flight of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) is primarily a reaction to violent conflict and insecurity, many other factors come into play to determine who moves, where and when. In particular, patterns of displacement often follow the well trodden migratory paths established by rural–urban migrants or those seeking jobs and education. Moreover, at times, the chaos of conflict may open up more space for mobility that evades or circumvents regulatory regimes if the state’s attention is directed towards the conflict and security concerns.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) broadly defines forced migration as “migratory movement in which an element of coercion exists, including threats to life and livelihood, whether arising from natural or man-made [sic] causes (eg movements of refugees and internally displaced persons as well as people displaced by natural or environmental disasters, chemical or nuclear disasters, famine, or development projects).”¹⁴ Forced migration is a result of a complex interplay of political, social and economic factors such as violent conflict, institutional weakness, governance deficits, vested interests of different actors and structural inequities. Prolonged or protracted displacement, defined as 25,000 or more refugees of the same nationality who have been in exile for five consecutive years or more in a given asylum country,¹⁵ is now the norm rather than an anomaly and derives from loss of property, land and livelihoods, political and social marginalisation, and an inability or unwillingness to return to a context of recurring insecurity.

This chapter consolidates key findings from the REF’s research on conflict-related forced migration/displacement using a person-centered approach – moving away from macro-political explanations of forced migration to examining how dynamics of the social, political and ecological environment interact with individuals’ and households’ unique capabilities and resources to inform or influence their migration decisions (Lindley, 2010). Drawing on the REF’s research in Somalia, South Sudan, Ethiopia, Sudan and Uganda, the chapter presents trends in forced migration in conflict contexts, the patterns of movement of people fleeing conflict, the factors that shape decision making and determine people’s movement trajectories, and the processes of return and reintegration in

¹² UNHCR (2023). <https://reporting.unhcr.org/global-report-2023/regional-overviews/east-and-horn-africa-and-great-lakes>. Accessed:

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ IOM. *Essentials of Migration Management* [available at <https://emm.iom.int/handbooks/global-context-international-migration/types-movements-0>]. Accessed: November 2024

¹⁵ UNHCR op cit, note 12.

countries and places of origin. We consider the ways in which the dynamics of violence influence displacement experiences in different contexts and discuss how people weigh the benefits and disadvantages when they make decisions about moving away from their homes, moving to new locations or returning.

Overview of conflict contexts in the Horn of Africa

Forced displacement driven by war, conflict and insecurity has persisted and, in some cases, worsened over the past decade. During the REF project's lifetime, the Horn of Africa witnessed multiple protracted transboundary, intra-state and inter-state conflicts, the latest of which are the conflict in Sudan (2023–ongoing) between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces, and the war in Tigray, Ethiopia (2020–22) between the regional administration and the federal government, which ultimately also drew in parts of Amhara and Afar regions. Many of these wars and conflicts germinated from legacies of the years of colonisation and decolonisation. They comprise inter-state and intra-state civil wars and conflicts, as well as inter-communal conflicts (Mengisteab, 2011). Each country in the Horn has experienced all three of these types of conflict, which have had enormous socioeconomic and political consequences.

Many of the conflicts within these countries have also implicated neighbouring states and their populations. One reason for this is the close ethnic ties shared by many insurgent groups or rebellions. For instance, insurgency movements in the Ethiopia–Somalia–Kenya borderlands have drawn all three state governments into wars and conflicts, notably the wars between Somalia and Ethiopia over the Ogaden region during the 1970s, and between Kenya and Somalia over the 'Shifita wars' of 1963–68 (Mengisteab, 2011). Likewise, Sudan retaliated against the Ugandan National Resistance Movement's support for the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) in the 1980s and 1990s by supporting Uganda's rebel groups, notably the Allied Democratic Forces and the Lord's Resistance Army. It has thus been argued that the region is a 'conflict system' interlinking various local, national and regional conflicts (Mwagiru, 1997). These multidimensional, multilayered and long-running conflicts have significantly shaped intra- and inter-state forced migration trends in the Horn of Africa.

War and conflict-related displacement in the states of the Horn have occurred and are currently occurring across a spectrum of localised conflict, armed struggle, civil war, state fragmentation and state collapse. Below, we examine some general trends in conflict-related forced migration in the countries of the region. Although it is beyond the scope of this chapter to detail the many complex dynamics of conflict occurring within each of the refugee-sending and refugee-receiving countries, this short analysis helps to set the context for a consideration of the drivers and dynamics of displacement.

Somalia

Somalia's long-standing internal conflict, which occupies a central place in any discussion of mass displacement in the Horn of Africa, has mutated from a civil war in the late 1980s to state collapse in 1991, clan factionalism and warlordism in the 1990s, and a 'globalized ideological conflict' in the 2000s (Bradbury & Healy, 2010). Mass displacement has been a feature of each of these shifts. The Somali federal government, led by General Mohamed Siad Barre from 1969–91, manipulated clan loyalties and relations in the run-up to state collapse, making clan identity a principal source of insecurity, conflict and access to political power and resources – a dynamic that persists to this day (Hammond, 2014). In the wake of state collapse, over three million people were displaced outside Somalia, primarily to Ethiopia, Djibouti, Kenya and Yemen, as well as internally (Hammond, 2014).

Contrary to many popular perceptions, the years since state collapse have not been a period of unmitigated violence. Somalia has experienced periods of relative calm, in which some of the displaced have been able to return to their homes. For many people, however, security concerns, lack of administrative and governance capacity, and a paucity of economic opportunities has discouraged the large-scale return of refugees back to Somalia. Since the first mass displacements of the late 1980s and early 1990s, and following a period of relative calm between 1995 and 2005, Somalia witnessed renewed displacement after 2006 when the Union of Islamic Courts was ousted from power by Ethiopian troops with external support. These developments led to the rise of the extremist Salafist movement Al Shabab. What followed was indiscriminate and dramatic violence that drove many more people into exile both internally or in refugee camps in Kenya and Ethiopia. According to one estimate, over 800,000 people living in Mogadishu left the city between 2007 and 2008 (Lindley, 2010). Somalia's more recent history has been beset by political turmoil, localised clan conflict, violent extremism and external intervention, all of which have contributed to further internal displacement and the exile of thousands of people. As of September 2024, over 900,000 refugees from Somalia are living in Kenya, Ethiopia, Uganda, Yemen and Djibouti (in descending order of population size).¹⁶

In 2025, Al Shabab and the Islamic State (IS) remain active in several parts of Somalia (IS especially in Puntland) and have periodically attacked security forces, business centres and each other to control strategic areas in Puntland.¹⁷ Al Shabab continues to control large swathes of central and southern Somalia – particularly the rural areas – and attacked the capital Mogadishu and areas of northeastern Kenya several times in 2024. Although the Somali government has tried to build support through clan influence on the local population in areas vulnerable to Al Shabab takeover, this strategy has not been successful because of long held rivalries between clans and subclans.¹⁸ Several regional and international partners, including the US, Ethiopia and the African Union, have supported the Somali government's attempts in counter-insurgency. Al Shabab's control of areas and governance, combined with flooding and drought, have created additional displacements – reportedly, over 200,000 people have been displaced since April 2024.¹⁹ Recent data show that, in areas under Al Shabab control, some people are fleeing the onerous tax demands placed on them by the authorities and to escape the controlled territories stealthily for fear of imprisonment, torture or death (ICG, 2024).

In Somaliland, conditions have been much more peaceful, but the peace has been fractured from time to time. In 2023, conflict in the contested town of Lascanod on the Somaliland–Puntland border between armed groups linked to the Dhulbahante clan and Somaliland security forces resulted in the deaths of dozens of civilians and the displacement of over 150,000 people.²⁰

¹⁶ 'Somalia Situation: Population Dashboard - 30 Sep 2024' [available at <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/111928>]. Accessed: November 2024.

¹⁷ ACLED. <https://acleddata.com/2024/07/31/the-looming-threat-a-resurgence-of-islamic-state-and-inter-clan-fighting-in-somalia-july-2024/>. Accessed: November 2024.

¹⁸ Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project. 'What's next for the fight against al-Shabaab? Armed conflict location & event data project, 2024' JSTOR [available at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep62965>]. Accessed: 30 October 2024.

¹⁹ Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM). 'Somalia – Emergency Trend Tracking (ETT) – Round 27, 28 September–2 October 2024'. IOM, Geneva.

²⁰ UN Human Rights Commission. '2023 Report of the Independent Expert on the Situation of Human Rights in Somalia, Isha Dyfan'. A/HRC/54/78. Geneva: United Nations [available at <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4021494?ln=en&v=pdf>].

Ethiopia

As of mid-2024, an estimated 4.5 million people in Ethiopia were internally displaced, mainly in Somali, Oromia and Tigray regions, primarily (over 70%) as a result of conflict.²¹ Ethiopia's many intra-state conflicts are strongly influenced by the role of ethnicity in the Ethiopian political landscape. The increased significance of ethnicity as both a unifying and conflict-generating force arguably began in 1991 with the rise to power of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) and its institutionalisation of a system of ethnic federalism through the 1995 Constitution. Under the new constitution, locally dominant ethnic groups were given regional, provincial or district statuses (Turton, 2006). Article 39(1) of the constitution grants every "nation, nationality and people" in Ethiopia the unconditional right to self-determination (as well as secession); however, the terms 'nation', 'nationality' and 'people' are often used interchangeably to refer to ethnic groups.

The institutionalisation of ethnicity in Ethiopia, and formal ethnic recognition that allows for the establishment of politico-administrative units, and thus access to resources, has led to multitudinous contestations and conflicts. Many of Ethiopia's regional state borders are currently contested. These include the Oromia–Somali border, which resulted in the displacement of over one million people in 2017–18 (Jafer et al, 2022; Kenee, 2022); the Oromia–Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's Region (SNNPR) border, resulting in the displacement of one million people in 2018;²² the Benishangul-Gumuz Regional State (BGRS) and Amhara and Oromia Regional States (Adugna & Debale, 2023); and the Afar–Somali conflict over scarce pastoral resources in the Awash Valley (Ali, 1997), which has been rearticulated and changed its features to a violent conflict over the regional border (Mohammed, 2010). While these contestations and conflicts over territories are evidence of the challenges in Ethiopia's ethno-federal political order, most of these conflicts are not new and each has been reframed to fit into the broader institutionally supported politico-administrative frameworks.

The conflict in northern Ethiopia began in Tigray in November 2020 when federal forces clashed with the Tigray regional state's security forces. This resulted in ethnic cleansing of Tigrayans from the Western Zone/Wolkait area and displacement of an estimated 2.6 million people throughout the region.²³ The violence spread to include Eritrean forces, who were allied with the Ethiopian federal military, and also expanded in geographical coverage, engulfing areas bordering Tigray in Amhara and Afar regions. A Cessation of Hostilities Agreement, signed in Pretoria, South Africa in November 2022, silenced the guns, but left unresolved major issues such as the administration of the western areas, withdrawal of Eritrean troops and the ultimate leadership of Tigray region. Until these challenges are addressed, many thousands of people will be unable to return to their homes (Sturridge & Adugna, 2024).

It is critical to note that a large number of IDPs in Ethiopia – estimated at 'over a million' in 2023 – have been displaced as a result of climate related factors, especially drought.²⁴ Often, distinguishing between conflict and climate-related forced migration, in Ethiopia and elsewhere, is problematic, especially when considering mobility as the result of a range of motivating factors. Resource scarcity and conflict are often intertwined dynamics which generate displacement. Long-term and complex conflict-related impacts on state institutions and infrastructure may combine with extreme weather events to generate people's mobility responses or decisions. Whereas the proximate reason may be

²¹ <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-internal-displacement-overview-june-2024>.

²² <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/iom-flash-appeal-ethiopia-gedeo-west-gujijul-dec2018.pdf>.

²³ United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCR) (2022). 'Ethiopia's Tigray refugee crisis explained' [available at www.unrefugees.org/news/ethiopia-tigray-refugee-crisis-explained/].

²⁴ <https://environmentalmigration.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbdl1411/files/documents/2024-05/migration-environment-and-climate-change-overview-revised-2.pdf>.

climate-related factors, weak institutions and protracted insecurity also play a considerable role in forced migration. A burgeoning evidence base now explores the intersecting impacts of climate, conflict and mobility/displacement in different contexts.²⁵

South Sudan

South Sudan's most significant post-independence displacement crisis, starting in 2013, was driven in large part by political tensions among key leaders which erupted into widespread violence around the country. Infighting, political struggle and years of underlying tensions – going back decades – quickly spiralled from a conflict in the capital, Juba, between soldiers loyal to two factions of the government, to inciting various regional conflicts in many parts of the country. The politics of identity, militarisation of communities and relationships between political elites and communities were all crucial drivers of the conflict (Blanchard, 2016; de Waal et al, 2017; Jok & Hutchinson, 1999). One of the main consequences of this complex and protracted conflict was the internal displacement and forced migration of millions of people from South Sudan to neighbouring countries, particularly Uganda, Ethiopia, Kenya and Sudan. As of 2024, more than 2.2 million South Sudanese refugees were living in Uganda, Sudan, Ethiopia and Kenya in order of magnitude.²⁶ Another 1.8 million people were internally displaced as a result of conflict and climate disasters, particularly flooding.²⁷ Moreover, between 2016 and 2024, 2.8 million returns have been registered – 64% from within South Sudan and 36% from outside the country.²⁸

In 2018, key parties to the conflict signed the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS), establishing a cessation of hostilities, power-sharing agreements, humanitarian assistance and reconstruction, and transitional justice. Under Chapter III, R-ARCSS also made provisions for the voluntary return of IDPs and refugees. Armed violence and devastating climate disasters have relentlessly continued, however, leading to further internal and external displacement. The situation has been further exacerbated by the arrival of Sudanese refugees and South Sudanese returnees from Sudan after the outbreak of widespread conflict there in April 2023. Further, climate and conflict dynamics have intersected in a multitude of ways and interacted with state fragmentation and 'fragility' to reproduce deadly conflicts in several areas of South Sudan. Flooding, in particular, in Jonglei State has pushed herders to the southern Equatoria regions – many migrants coming from the north are armed and belong to ethnic identities with strong political connections, which adds to the political instability in the region (ICG, 2022; Tiitmamer et al, 2018).

Conflict, insecurity and forced migration: factors, patterns and decisions

Several REF studies build on and contribute to research disentangling the relationship between conflict, insecurity and migration. A starting point for much of our research has been that the experience of conflict for those who survive it is as an assault on their livelihoods and security which makes staying in place untenable. Civilians caught in conflict often lose their source of livelihood, whether waged employment or agricultural or pastoral production. Their access to markets is blocked, their health infrastructure is attacked, schools are closed and they find it difficult, if not impossible, to access their basic needs. Conflict is often unpredictable, rendering even those who may be relatively

²⁵ See, for example, <https://odihpn.org/magazine/climate-change-conflict-and-displacement/>.

²⁶ <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/southsudan>.

²⁷ IOM. 'DTM Mobility Tracking Round 15 South Sudan' [available at <https://dtm.iom.int/south-sudan>]. Accessed: November 2024.

²⁸ Ibid.

well-off suddenly destitute. This is markedly different from disasters such as drought-induced famines, which develop over several years following predictable, and often preventable, dynamics, or floods, which may strike rapidly but are usually seasonal and cyclical and therefore predictable to some extent. Movement in contexts of conflict therefore becomes a key strategy of self-protection and survival.

In situations of sudden violence and eruption of conflict, the decision to move is complicated, especially when considering that insecurity may be a common feature of places of origin, transit and destination. Those living in conditions of insecurity who are forced to move do not necessarily move from a dangerous place to a safe one. Moving to urban centres or to refugee or IDP camps may not enable people to access all the resources they need, even if they are physically safer. Their sense of physical insecurity may be replaced by another form of human insecurity, such as destitution.

In practice, choice enters into migration and displacement processes at different points. For example, even if people move because they cannot safely remain where they are, their decisions about where to move to and who to seek support from are very often influenced by calculations about where the greatest opportunity lies: where the displaced person is likely to be able to find work, to seek help from their social networks or to access humanitarian assistance. Often these calculations are based on their previous experiences of mobility; they follow pathways to destinations that they have gone to before during times of relative peace for access to resources or support.

Livelihood-related migration patterns, in particular, have a critical bearing on where people go when trying to escape from conflict or insecurity. A study jointly implemented by the REF and the Overseas Development Institute's Humanitarian Policy Group (ODI HPG) on migration from Darfur in Sudan to Europe outlined the many migration pathways that Darfuris used before the civil war, moving to central Sudan, Libya, Chad and Egypt, as well as to the Gulf countries, for economic reasons and in response to periods of acute food insecurity (Jaspars & Buchanan-Smith, 2018). Darfuris who had moved to Khartoum previously to seek employment or other livelihood support then ended up hosting people fleeing war in Darfur in the early days of the conflict (from around 2003). While some groups were more likely to remain within Sudan after displacement, ethnic groups such as the Zaghawa and Fur who had a long history of labour migration, particularly to Libya, comprised the majority of migrants heading towards Libya and onwards to Europe (Jaspars & Buchanan-Smith, 2018).

Migration between the Horn of Africa and Yemen also overlays historical movements of trade, livelihoods, family reunification, religious pilgrimage and educational opportunities. Yemen and the Horn are separated by the narrow strait of Bab al-Mandab at the southern tip of the Red Sea; their close proximity has encouraged long-standing migration flows in both directions, as well as deep political, economic, social and religious ties. A surge in the oil market in the 1970s created a demand for unskilled migrant workers in the Arab Peninsula from the Horn and beyond. During the 1990s, after the unification of Yemen in 1991, large numbers of Ethiopian labour migrants began moving there in search of employment opportunities (IOM, 2014). These were joined around the same time by Somalis moving to Yemen as refugees to escape war and a deteriorating security situation in Somalia.

More often, however, displacement in the wake of large intra-state conflicts – such as in Darfur or in several regions of South Sudan, Ethiopia and Somalia – happens more 'locally', where populations move to IDP camps or other such centres in nearby towns. In South Sudan, for example, Protection of Civilian (PoC) centres were a key feature of internal displacement. PoC sites were set up and protected by the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) and provided sanctuary to civilians under the control and authority of the UN (Cormack & Pendle, 2024). These PoC centres were originally intended to be short-term and temporary shelters, yet by 2021 all but one PoC site (Malakal) had been redesignated as an IDP camp, since they had become semi-permanent settlements.

In PoC sites and IDP camps in South Sudan, displaced persons, often traumatised by the conflict, continue to face enormous disruption to their lives and continued security concerns. Research by the REF and Samuel Hall investigating refugee and IDP return and reintegration in South Sudan (discussed further below) found that security was the most important factor for determining not only where people chose to live while displaced, but also where, when and under what conditions they decided to return (Samuel Hall & REF, 2023). Some interviewees said that they had chosen to move to PoC sites because of the acute and rapidly unfolding crisis, which did not allow for a planned move to a more permanent settlement. Whereas a minimal level of security was guaranteed in PoC sites by UNMISS, many interviewees reported that there had been a marked deterioration of safety in former PoC sites over time. In Wau PoC, interviewees reported that, after the site was taken over by the government of South Sudan (and transitioned to become an IDP camp), security levels dropped; gates were left unguarded and there was a free flow of weapons in and out of the camp. At the time of the study, several residents reported that they had been seeking ways to strengthen their own security and self-protection. While they wanted to leave the site, they often had no means to do so, as assistance provided did not meet their needs.



South Sudanese IDP

Photo: Peter Caton

IDPs' decisions about whether or not to move to a camp also depend on people's migration history and trajectory in a given area, as well as their ethnic affiliation. The REF's research from 2023 in Ethiopia on the breakdown of social cohesion illustrates this well. The research examined conflict-related displacement in the BGRS and Konso Zone in SNNPR (Adugna & Debale, 2023). Many of Ethiopia's past and ongoing conflicts, particularly those involving territorial claims and counterclaims, can be traced back to the post-1991 ethno-territorial administrative arrangement, even though each

of the conflicts has a historical background traceable beyond that.²⁹ The conflict in BGRS centres primarily on the location of regional borders, and placement of interregional boundary demarcation with Amhara and Oromia Regions. A second critical driver of conflict is the question of indigeneity, political inclusion and territorial entitlement. The BGRS constitution empowers five indigenous ethnic groups – the Benishangul, Gumuz, Mao, Komo and Shinasha – as constitutionally recognised ‘owners’ of the region, comprising 57% of the population. Once marginalised, these ‘owner’ ethnic groups have become politically empowered since the introduction of ethnic federalism in Ethiopia in 1995. Non-indigenous or settler groups such as the Amhara, Agaw and Oromo have lost their dominant positions, despite comprising 43% of the population.

In the wake of the conflict in BGRS starting in 2018, non-Gumuz displaced persons fled to towns and communal spaces such as schools, *kebele* (ward) offices and clinics. Many Gumuz IDPs fled to remote, inaccessible rural areas. The historically marginalised Gumuz, despite political changes in the post-federalist period, did not have as privileged a relationship to the state as non-indigenous groups or settlers who had moved into the area since the 1980s. The Gumuz were therefore not as established in the cities’ social, political and economic infrastructure as the settlers were. They received much less attention from the media than did the settlers, who had moved into the area decades earlier. The media landscape in Ethiopia is dominated by the urban elite, among whom the Gumuz have had little presence, and the media have mainly emphasised the displacement of the non-Gumuz. This has rendered the Gumuz, who fled to the remote rural areas, largely invisible and unable to access humanitarian assistance or protection.

Ethnic groups’ proximity to one another and their social networks influence decisions concerning internal displacement, as shown by the REF’s research on internal displacement and return in Somalia (Sturridge et al, 2018). Somalia’s protracted insecurity following state collapse in 1991, and refugee-receiving states’ policy (especially that of Kenya) have continuously modulated movement patterns internally and across borders. Somalia is experiencing a complex situation of protracted and new internal displacement as a result of shifting conflict dynamics, a worsening environment and weakened livelihood systems, and organised and spontaneous repatriation of refugees and the diaspora. The REF’s research considered the factors that shape processes and decisions concerning displacement, return and reintegration in Baidoa, Kismayo and Mogadishu in Somalia and Nairobi in Kenya. The study found that most displaced people (and returnees) prefer to settle near their clans or, for minority clans, close to dominant clans with which they are affiliated and from whom they can expect to receive protection and patronage. For instance, in Baidoa, IDPs belonging to minority clans share a common dialect with the dominant Rahanweyn and thus reported experiencing less discrimination and greater support from the host communities than did IDPs in Mogadishu or Kismayo. On the other hand, some interviewees reported proactively moving away from their clan for fear of retaliation from other clans against them; moving to a bigger city such as Mogadishu afforded them a level of anonymity that was important in a context of retaliatory conflict.

Cultural proximities and differences influence return aspirations variously, as mediated by age, historical relationships and ascribed status. In South Sudan, Samuel Hall/REF research found that several refugee interviewees aspired to local integration in their host countries as a durable solution, as they shared historical relationships with communities facilitated through cross-border mobility and familial ties (Samuel Hall & REF, 2023). This was more frequently the case in Ethiopia’s Gambella region and Uganda’s northwest districts than in Kenya, perhaps reflecting the more permissive national and local policies regarding refugees’ rights to move, work and access resources in those two countries

²⁹ Significant differences of opinion and schools of thought exist on the costs and benefits of ethnic federalism in Ethiopia – the discussion of which is beyond the scope of this chapter. See, for example, Mengisteab (2019).

compared to Kenya, which requires most refugees to remain inside camps. For young people, local integration into hosting communities was a natural preference, since many had either few or no memories of their 'home' before displacement – they had been born and/or raised in the host countries. A REF review of the literature on returns to Somalia also suggested that young Somalis who had grown up outside Somalia found it difficult to integrate culturally upon return (Manji, 2020).

Cultural differences also emerge from the experience of displacement. Interviewees in our study on return and reintegration in Baidoa, Kismayo and Mogadishu in Somalia (Sturridge et al, 2018) explained that being labelled an 'IDP' carried with it the stigma of otherness or being an outsider. This stigma discouraged belonging by making people feel excluded from host communities on an emotional, cultural and physical level. In addition to the physical isolation of IDP camps in cities such as Kismayo, some interviewees said that they felt like outsiders because their "dress, walk and talk" was different to city dwellers. The degree to which people felt a sense of belonging, however, also differed between cities. Whereas informants found adjusting to life in Mogadishu difficult, those in Baidoa reported more conducive conditions for integration thanks to better living conditions and – for some – a less discriminatory and restrictive environment. This was in large part thanks to local clan dynamics, as many of the IDPs came from the surrounding area and were affiliated with the dominant Rahanweyn clan.

Histories of displacement and migration and the long establishment of local and translocal networks not only provide *in situ* benefits but also influence onward mobility. Eritreans leaving their country via Ethiopia, for example, must cross a border which has been securitised since the struggle for independence began in the early 1970s. State repression has compelled thousands of Eritreans to flee the country; most have moved to settle with people with whom they share co-ethnic ties, where they hoped to be hosted at least temporarily. This is partly a matter of geographical proximity but also reflects the strong family ties that transcend the international border between Eritrea and Ethiopia. Despite these ties, most Eritreans have been hosted in refugee camps in northern Ethiopia. After their arrival, according to a study by the TRAFIG project,³⁰ local and translocal networks were crucial both in facilitating onward mobility and smoothing the process of local integration in places of displacement for Tigrinya-speaking refugees. According to these findings, long established networks facilitated multiple connections between migrants, ex-migrants and non-migrants that were instrumental in helping people navigate and arrange movement from refugee camps to urban centres in Ethiopia, and then transnationally to different parts of the world. On the other hand, the Afar and Kunama refugees from Eritrea who did not have the same translocal and transnational networks, had more difficulty moving and thus tended to travel shorter distances, being hosted by their co-ethnic groups – the Ethiopian Afar and Kunama, respectively. These refugees were locally treated with a lot of sympathy and were able to access local resources. For instance, Afar refugees were able to utilise local resources such as arable land and could access the local administration for help in obtaining employment. The phrase 'Afar is Afar' is used to emphasise the commonality regardless of their status, and the hospitality that was extended to Eritrean Afar from their Ethiopian Afar counterparts (Tufa et al, 2021).

Culturally sanctioned mutual support networks also helped shape migration decisions. Returning to the REF study, the majority of Somali returnees and IDPs in 2017–18 came from the minority agricultural clans and groups (particularly Digil-Mirifle and Bantu), who are said to have had weaker mutual support obligations compared to pastoral clans' strong obligatory mutual assistance networks (Menkhaus, 2017). IDP interviewees in the REF's study reported a disconnect with clan structures. They often attributed this to their displacement, economic hardship and social division. Despite changing clan dynamics, the composition of many Somali IDP settlements continues to fall along clan lines and,

³⁰ TRAFIG (Transnational Figurations of Displacement) is an EU-funded Horizon 2020 research and innovation project. From 2019 to 2022, 12 partner organisations investigated long-lasting displacement situations at multiple sites in Asia, Africa and Europe and analysed options to improve displaced people's lives.

as the study showed, had significant implications not only for the composition of cities and areas, but also peace and stability. To that end, the REF's study found that local concerns over clan balances were having a direct impact on processes of return and (re)integration. For example, one Dadaab returnee acknowledged that clan elders in rural areas, alarmed by the influx of IDPs, were actively encouraging return of their kin to rebalance clan numbers, even if conditions were not optimal for returns. Similarly, according to some NGO and government informants, the Jubaland authorities had decided to halt returns from Dadaab in August 2016, not only because of a lack of humanitarian assistance (as they claimed) but also because of concerns about the clan composition of the returnees and concerns that mass return would shift power structures in the state in ways that could inflame conflict or take power away from the ruling class.

Dispersing risk across multiple locations is a central strategy employed by people on the move as a result of conflict. In South Sudan and Somalia, the REF's research found that people were engaged in 'pendular movements' or 'circular returns' or going back and forth between different locations to take advantage of shifting security conditions, availability of resources, or employment or educational opportunities (Manji, 2020; Samuel Hall & REF, 2023).³¹ A related phenomenon is that of 'split returns' – where some family members remain in refugee hosting countries/camps and others return. Pendular movements and split returns are strategic choices undertaken by households to maximise benefits from multiple places. This is especially salient for maintaining refugee status for accessing aid in the country of asylum, as well as keeping open a continuing prospect of resettlement to other countries. Notably, however, most assistance for these groups does not adapt well to such movements; assistance is usually distributed based on registration in a particular place and refugees must make sure they are present when relief items are distributed or else they will miss out on receiving them. This 'sedentarist' policy approach is considered in more detail in Chapter 8.

Circularity, pendular movements and split returns are part of the repertoire of strategies employed by people who are no strangers to crises and have experienced multiple and protracted displacement. In undertaking these movements, people not only disperse risk but also assess risks in various locations for short-, medium- and long-term migration. In Somalia, for instance, circularity is a key livelihood strategy that allows refugees to test opportunities and life on the other side of the border while being able to return to Kenya as a registered refugee. Generally, it is men who make the journeys back to Somalia to access economic opportunities, leaving women and children behind. This also allows them to assess the feasibility and conduciveness of returns for other family members. Refugees with greater economic means are able to make frequent and informal cross-border movements for economic reasons.

Household splitting may be voluntary or a step taken in response to acute crisis, or it may emerge from a set of conditions that are neither fully voluntary nor involuntary. In South Sudan and Somalia, household splits were motivated by the need to access essential services in refugee hosting sites, while other household members remained behind to maintain community ties in the areas of origin. Security had a critical bearing on household splitting decisions: for instance, in Wau and Malakal in South Sudan, returnees interviewed were more likely to have moved alone or with only part of their household compared to those in Juba. This suggests that locations with a comparatively lower level of safety and services available were less likely to attract entire households.

Conversely, the study also pointed to a careful weighing of risks against benefits by people on the move. Whereas Juba was deemed to be unsafe, the availability of services attracted people despite the risks. Moving to Juba, according to interviewees, held the promise of being able to access quality education, healthcare and livelihoods, even with the associated costs of insecurity and the potential

³¹ See also Kaiser (2010).

risk of losing housing and land tenure in places of origin. By contrast, in some rural locations such as Kajo Keji (closer to the Uganda border), although there was relatively greater safety, this came at a cost of limited or no services.

Overall, the wider peace process in South Sudan has also greatly influenced individual and household decisions on return. In the REF's study, participants showed a high level of awareness of the complexity of the political context of their country and how it affected their plans and expectations. Respondents showed a considerable ambivalence and general distrust towards authorities. Often these perspectives were the result of individual trajectories of displacement. For instance, those who had been directly affected by conflict and disputes had limited faith in the national peace process having a tangible impact on their personal safety. This was further exacerbated by limited trust in government institutions, the failure of previous peace processes, and a general dissatisfaction with the implementation of the R-ARCSS. Thus, decision making in contexts of protracted conflict is usually a complex calculus of risk and cost–benefit analyses undertaken by individuals and households.

Borders and borderland areas are of particular significance for forced displacement journeys and return and reintegration. Borders that emerged from political and strategic compromises during the colonial and postcolonial eras remain contested to this day (Feyissa & Hoehne, 2010). Many borders in the Horn of Africa, such as those between Kenya and Somalia, Ethiopia and Somalia, and Kenya and South Sudan are, at once, sites of cooperation and interaction, and places of strife and violence. In many parts of the Horn borders remain un-demarcated and run through arid and semi-arid lands, long marginalised and marked by environmental stress and limited livelihood opportunities. They are also territories that feature prominently in the lives of those fleeing conflict or looking to return home.

Refugees fleeing countries experiencing large-scale war and protracted conflict negotiate borders innovatively in their search for safety and survival. In many cases, these post-conflict movements build on pre-conflict mobilities, especially salient in cross-border areas where historical movements, cooperative networks and familial relationships facilitate movement during forced displacement, and on continued connectedness in protracted exile. Refugees from South Sudan and Somalia, as the REF's research shows, employ transnational strategies that enable them to disperse risk, maintain social networks and hold on to aspects of 'normal life' – all of which blurs the distinction between voluntary and forced migration (Vancluysen, 2022).

Similarly, circular returnees negotiate the risks along the Somalia–Kenya border to assess the risks and access the benefits afforded by the two countries (Manji, 2020). Although the journey across the border may often be risky, it is not difficult to arrange given the porosity of the border, the availability of transportation and the relative proximity of Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya to the border. Importantly, the linkages between cross-border communities are a significant factor facilitating circular returns. Centuries of movement and well-established networks of communication across more recently established borders between communities that share close ties make such circular movements possible, with the border serving only as an imaginary or notional barrier.

Repatriation and return

For people displaced by conflict, the decision about when and under what conditions to return is a process of weighing their options and assessing the risks they are likely to face. Obstacles to return in such cases involve not only assessing whether the situation in the area of return is safe enough to return to – whether the fighting has ended and landmines and unexploded ordnance have been cleared, but also whether they will be able to sustain their lives and livelihoods post-return. An analysis of this sort of calculation takes us back to the notion of human security set out in Chapter 2, for decisions about return involve assessing the viability of the economy to support returnees' lives, the

availability of essential public services such as health care and education, and the likelihood that those returning will be able not just to live safely but to thrive in their areas of return.

To be sure, physical security is an important and often decisive factor influencing return decisions. Yet we also know that it is not that uncommon for refugees and IDPs to return to situations where war may be ongoing and there are still significant security risks (Stein & Cuny, 1994). They may do this to reunite with their family members, to reclaim their property, because they feel that the risks are lower for them, to take part in the conflict,³² or to be the first to benefit from the anticipated end of the conflict and the return of peace. They may also return, however, because they find conditions in the places to which they have been displaced worse than those in the return locations. Assistance may be insufficient or unavailable; conditions in camps or settlements may be unsafe, particularly for women and children, and people may feel hopeless in the face of the prospect of continued displacement. Returning during times of conflict may feel like the least-worst option.

Conflicts tend not to have tidy, decisive ends. Even where conflict actors agree to lay down their weapons, the threat of renewed fighting often remains for some time afterwards, as the terms of the peace are worked out, military forces are demobilised and the process of rebuilding physical infrastructure, economic opportunity and, perhaps most importantly, trust can be painfully slow. In these contexts, people may return even when the process of establishing peace is incomplete.

Research by the REF as well as others working in the Horn of Africa continually highlights the critical importance of housing, land and property (HLP) rights in ensuring sustainable returns and reintegration.³³ Securing one's access to housing, land and property enables returnees to settle without fear of eviction or secondary displacement. Without the guarantee of HLP rights, IDPs and returnees, especially those settled on private or government land, are under constant threat of eviction. As part of the REF's study on returnees to Somalia, we found that the likelihood of local integration is significantly affected by the threat of eviction, which deters people from investing, whether financially or emotionally, in a place for fear of being moved. Furthermore, the threat of evictions also prevents aid agencies from investing in sustainable support and infrastructure as, in many cases, assets (such as schools, water points and latrines) are destroyed during the eviction process (Sturridge et al, 2018). Important to note, however, is that not all returnees are affected equally – those with financial and social capital, such as returning diaspora, have been able to reclaim their property with minimal challenges. On the other hand, IDPs and returnees from marginalised and minority groups have experienced land grabs, forced evictions and a heightened likelihood of living in settlements (Sturridge et al, 2018).

The REF's research in contexts such as Somalia and South Sudan shows how HLP issues, particularly forced evictions, contribute to a continuous erosion of living standards, livelihoods and belonging, which undermines people's ability to locally integrate. In South Sudan, HLP-related challenges are a result of the weak rule of law and inadequate dispute-resolution mechanisms, and of uncontrolled appropriation and commodification of land. HLP issues cannot be separated from the broader conflict dynamics in South Sudan, and the resultant land grabbing, appropriation and secondary displacement that is occurring. At the time of the REF's research, an interviewee from the government spoke of the huge caseload of disputes in the courts related to secondary occupations and land grabs. Given the lack of formal HLP frameworks, especially outside urban areas, and the weak judicial system, access to land and property is often determined by proximity and relationship to power(holders). As recounted

³² See, for example, Zolberg et al (1989).

³³ For example, DRC/IRC/NRC/ReDSS/DSP/ADSP/Samuel Hall (2019). 'Unprepared for (Re)Integration: Lessons learned from Afghanistan, Somalia and Syria on Refugee Returns to Urban Areas'. Migrant Protection Platform [available at <https://migrantprotection.iom.int/en/resources/report/unprepared-reintegration-lessons-learned-afghanistan-somalia-and-syria-refugee>].

by one IDP in Wau, people who lost their land are unable to recover or claim it because those who took their lands were from 'the ruling party' of the country and disallowed land recovery.

Another important consideration is the support provided by external agencies (UN, NGOs, etc) in facilitating returns and the manipulation of returns to serve interest groups. One such example of the instrumentalisation of displacement and returns as a weapon of war was the transfer of IDPs in the Upper Nile region,³⁴ where humanitarian agencies facilitated the return of Padang Dinka into an area from which Shilluk communities had previously been expelled.³⁵ In this way, facilitated returns became a tool for population engineering, where a demographic majority was supported to take over a politically contested area ahead of elections. According to a government official we met during our study, the official government policy is "to return people to their ancestral land"(Samuel Hall & REF, 2023). Political sensitivities around land ownership, tenure and claims, however, are critical considerations for returns and claims of 'ancestry'.

Facilitating returns in conflict contexts requires reconciliatory processes, in the absence of which successful return and reintegration may not be possible. As shown by the REF's research in Ethiopia's Benishangul-Gumuz region and Konso Zone, both of which have witnessed widespread conflict-related displacements, the returns of IDPs have had dismal outcomes. In Konso, IDP returns were attempted twice through customary reconciliation processes between communities in conflict; however, this process did not include the armed group held responsible for driving displacement in the area (Adugna & Debale, 2023). In Konso, as well as Benishangul-Gumuz, our research revealed that hasty and unplanned returns not adequately accompanied by a peace and security plan resulted in further conflict. Whereas, at the time of the study, some progress on successful IDP return with local reconciliation was reported in Benishangul-Gumuz's Metekel Zone, returnees also expressed frustration that the reconciliation process did not include the armed groups operating in the region – some returnees reportedly again left their villages for fear of armed group attacks.

In contexts of protracted conflict, the challenge of post-return integration and the sustainability of return are made more difficult the longer the conflict, and the internal and external displacement, go on. Over time, conflict dynamics can change territorial boundaries so that people are unable to return to the homes they left. Where particular ethnic groups or clans are targeted, as in parts of Somalia and Ethiopia, return to safety may remain impossible for those who were the focus of hostilities. Returns, similar to forced migration, are a reflection of the viability of life in the place of return, measured in terms of its ability to meet the full set of human security requirements: physical safety, economic and livelihood benefits, social belonging and political inclusion. Interviewees in the REF's Somalia returns study spoke of the need for social inclusion and belonging as a key requirement for a durable return.

For those who fled their homes many years previously, or who were born into displacement, the notion of return may bear little more than symbolic meaning. More than 30 years after their initial displacement, the refugee population in Dadaab refugee camp, for instance, is made up of at least three generations. Those who were adults when they were first displaced in the early 1990s have children who were born in the refugee camps, and that generation has grown up and now has children of their own. These two younger generations have no experience of having lived in Somalia, and the idea of 'going home' bears little meaning in practical terms. Although they may come from a pastoral or agricultural family, they will have had no experience of these activities while living as refugees and

³⁴ <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/analysis/2022/1/5/why-return-displaced-people-thorny-issue-South-Sudan#:~:text=5%20January%202022-,Why%20the%20return%20of%20displaced%20people%20is%20such%20a%20thorny,%20&text=This%20Protection%20of%20Civilians%20site,million%20internally%20displaced%20South%20Sudanese.>

³⁵ Ibid.

thus are very likely to move into the cities of Somalia to look for work. 'Reintegration' in this context is not a return to a previous way of life but a move to a new kind of life (Hammond, 1999).

Conclusion

This chapter has considered the experiences of civilians living in areas affected by conflict and the impacts that these experiences can have in terms of determining not only whether they are displaced but also the directions in which they move, their experiences in displacement and the conditions under which they may seek to return. The intention here is to show that, while conflict-induced displacement may seem as if it is an act taken in desperation when people have no choice but to leave their homes, in fact there is quite a bit of choice involved, which reflects people's need not only to remove themselves from physical insecurity but to ensure that their wider security needs – to be able to support their livelihoods, to maintain their social networks as far as possible and to access services – are met.

As we will see in Chapter 8, policy and assistance responses to displacement can be important – but will never be entirely sufficient – in meeting the needs of forced migrants. For this reason, the decisions and measures that displaced people take to protect themselves and to maximise their access to key resources are vital coping strategies.

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Chapter 5: Socioeconomic opportunities and challenges

As we have seen in the previous chapters, the patterns of human mobility across the Horn of Africa are profoundly affected by the distinctive characteristics of this region, in particular the volatile political and environmental conditions that bring multiple forms of insecurity. These factors are drivers of the migration and displacement of millions of people across the region, in the sense that they make it more likely that people will decide to move in particular ways along some routes (Van Hear et al, 2018). Chapter 2 described how these drivers also interact with the personal characteristics of individuals who harbour ambitions and aspirations for their future life, which may be realised through migration or by staying in place. Except in the most extreme situations of forced migration, decisions to move are also shaped by concerns about improving one's socioeconomic conditions, or for 'economic security': strengthening livelihoods, increasing incomes and expanding opportunities. In this respect, the Horn of Africa is like any other region of the world, where the search for better socioeconomic conditions is one of the principal drivers of migration.

This is an important point to emphasise in a region where a dominant narrative of migration is one of people moving to flee unbearable conditions in their homeland, including war, insecurity, floods, droughts and other environmental disasters, political oppression and violence, and economic collapse. Mobility in the region is most commonly discussed as mainly forced migration resulting in large populations of displaced people. Some are formally recognised as refugees or internally displaced persons (IDPs), but many others are ascribed other displacement labels – environmentally displaced, economic refugees, survival migrants, and so forth. As a result, any analysis of migration across the region tends to start from the perspective of migration as a problem or a symptom of a problem. The danger of this starting point is that it assumes either that ending migration may be some part of a solution to the problems in the region, or that solving the root causes which are assumed to underlie people's displacement will result in a reduction in migration.

To some extent, the programme of research undertaken by the REF has been no exception to this tendency to focus on displacement and migration related to problems. The Horn of Africa hosts millions of people displaced by war and conflict in refugee and IDP settlements and camps, and the reality of forced migration in the region cannot be disregarded. Nonetheless, REF studies have cast light on the critical role of mobility in shaping people's lives and supporting their resilience.

This chapter examines the different ways in which mobility intersects with livelihoods. Based on the REF's research, we show how mobility is embedded in the livelihoods of many people across the region. While it may create enormous challenges for states and societies – and those who move, especially across national and regional borders – it is fundamental to the flourishing of individuals, families and societies. We focus on three core forms of interaction: mobility as part of regular livelihoods practices; mobility undertaken to secure new livelihoods opportunities; and strategic mobility to enhance future livelihood opportunities. We then explore how these play out in different socioeconomic contexts: border areas, urban areas and secondary cities, and zones of displacement, rehabilitation and resettlement.

Mobility and livelihoods

Mobility is intimately related to livelihoods. The search for more resources, better chances of employment or other opportunities are the most widely cited motivations for people's migration in any part of the world (de Haan & Rogaly, 2002; Olwig & Sørensen, 2002). Moreover, the failure of livelihoods can also be an important factor in triggering people's decisions to move (Van Hear et al, 2018). However, mobility is more than a response to livelihood changes; it is also a fundamental ingredient of the livelihoods of millions of poor people. It has long been recognised that migration plays an important role in strengthening livelihoods through the transfer of remittances (Housen et al, 2013; Taylor & Castelhana, 2016) and the spreading of risk (Stark & Bloom, 1985). In addition, mobility is fundamental to the practice of some livelihood activities, such as pastoralism. Hence the analysis of livelihoods needs to take account of people's (potential for) movement and the transfers of resources across different spaces (de Haan, 1999; Ellis, 2003). While the widely used sustainable livelihoods approach framework does note the important of migration (McDowell & de Haan, 1997), it is still based on a largely sedentary approach that tends to cast mobility in a rather negative light (Natarajan et al, 2022).

The evidence from the REF studies that we present in the next three sections builds on these insights. First, we look at examples where mobility is part of the fabric of life and embedded into people's livelihoods. The next section turns to those for whom migration marks a break in life, where they move to find a livelihood in a new place. Finally, we look at those who move, sometimes in very difficult circumstances, with the aim of improving the future prospects for themselves and their children.

Mobility as part of livelihoods

Mobility, including cross-border mobility, plays a critical role in the livelihoods of millions of people across the Horn, and comes in multiple forms. Perhaps the most evident is the mobile lives of nomadic pastoralists, who need to range across large areas to find pasture and water for their herds. There has been extensive research into nomadism across the Horn of Africa over many years, in particular examining how the lives of nomadic peoples are affected by environmental, social, economic and political change (for example, see FAO, 2021; Catley et al, 2013; Scoones, 2023). Many of these start from a deficit model, where nomadic people are losing pastureland to settled agriculture and large-scale developments, or are pushed into moving across ever more remote arid/or semi-arid areas that are being steadily degraded by overgrazing exacerbated by climate change. From this perspective, nomads are moving in response to scarcity, having to range further afield in search of pasture and water for their herds. Hence, the pastoralist way of life is widely seen as particularly vulnerable to the onset of climate change (Tebboth et al, 2023). At the same time, there has been extensive research into the resilience of pastoralists in the face of these challenges, highlighting especially how pastoralists innovatively use their variable environments for the health and prosperity of their herds, and by extension, their families (FAO, 2021).

Despite the continuous production of evidence by researchers on the resilience and success of pastoralism, narratives of its inevitable end have persisted since the 1970s. Some of this narrative continues today among policy makers, the development sector and the wider public. Simultaneously, a countervailing perspective is emerging from new research showing that pastoralism continues to be a viable, adaptable and resilient livelihood in the Horn of Africa's drylands. In an in-depth study of resilience among the Turkana people in northern Kenya for the REF, Greta Semplici contributes to this literature by highlighting the importance of variability in the semi-arid Turkana area, finding that, rather than scarcity driving people to move, they move in tune with the shifting distribution of an array of resources, making connections between ecological micro-zones (Semplici, 2020).

The research shows how Turkana people are continuously adapting to take advantage of changing opportunities, moving towards changing sites of abundance. Likewise, they move in and out of other livelihood activities such as trading, fishing, agriculture or salaried jobs alongside maintaining their herds: there are "fisherfolks with cows and pastoralists with shops; everybody had a small farm and did farming any time they could as long as there was some rain" (Semplici, 2020, p 11). This calls into question any notion of a distinctive pastoralist way of life separate from others. For the Turkana, this 'mesh of livelihoods' provides a strong safety net in this complex and variable environment, making pastoralists more resilient than town dwellers (see also Little et al, 2001; Moritz et al, 2011). However, this resilience does depend on people being able to move across the area. Hence, any programming that hinders mobility – whether by design or default – may undermine this resilience, confining people within fixed territories and eroding their extensive knowledge of large areas and their capacity to respond to changing conditions.

The research also questions the construct of 'time' as applied by development and humanitarian interventions and temporal notions of Turkana communities. Often, interventions are designed around an 'event', as is evident in the conceptualisations among external actors of early warning systems, disaster risk management and livestock insurance. Semplici argues that, for her interviewees, the importance of time lay in its relationship to the territory and landscape, rather than in linearity. Turkana herders' real-time experience of the landscape drove decision making, as did a combination of precipitation, herbage growth, food availability, etc. Thus, the paper calls for the reimagining of time among pastoralists to be articulated around more complex flows of lived-with time and not distinctly punctuated by events (Scoones & Nori, 2020).

It is not just nomadic pastoralists for whom mobility is an essential element in their livelihoods. The REF research in the borderlands of the Horn showed how the existence of the border and cross-border mobility is fundamental to the livelihoods of many others. In particular, a number of REF studies have highlighted the scale of seasonal labour migration across some of the region's borders. There is a long-established pattern of labour migration from west and northwestern Ethiopia and Eritrea towards eastern Sudan, dating back to the 1960s and the introduction of mechanised agriculture. While there are standard conventions that manage the movement of labour migrants, usually involving border officials, the process of border crossing remains largely informal. As a result, the numbers of people involved are unknown but it has been estimated that around 200,000 seasonal migrant workers were crossing into Sudan each year (REF, 2016, pp 30–32). Their movements back and forth in response to changing patterns of agricultural labour demands are an intrinsic part of their livelihoods.

The REF's research on the border between Sudan and Ethiopia around the district of Metema showed the importance of cross-border trade in the economic landscape of the region (Bakewell et al, 2020). Communities along the border trade in agricultural products, including crops and livestock, as well as in items not produced locally such as beverages, soap, electronics and vehicle parts (typically acquired illegally from Sudan). Cooperation agreements between the governments of Sudan and Ethiopia

afford joint market days and the ability of trucks to cross borders (through Gallabat and Metema) without the need of additional paperwork.

Importantly, the Ethiopia–Sudan border also sees the movement of thousands of people migrating either short or long distances, temporarily or more permanently. The largest number of migrants comprises agricultural seasonal workers (*saluge*) from northern Ethiopia, who migrate to work on commercial farms in eastern Sudan around Gedaref. Seasonal workers also work in Metema on sesame production. The other set of migrants comprises those who aim to reach Khartoum or beyond. In addition, there are those who make their living from the border, such as those engaged in cross-border trade, smuggling and providing services for people on the move. As the REF's research on the Sudan–Ethiopia border in Metema shows, while there are a few legal ways to cross the border, for instance through the issue of *Tasrih* (a temporary residence card issued in Sudan) and a cross-border agreement that allows residents from both sides to cross without documentation, many migrants turn to brokers to facilitate their journeys (Bakewell et al, 2020). The brokers charge hundreds of dollars in fees for the migration and the price depends on the season and other arrangements, such as better accommodation, protection from abuse, safety and assurance of reaching one's destination.

The significance of cross-border mobility for local livelihoods must be an important consideration for development programming. First, it is essential to assess how any interventions that change the conditions in which people cross the border will affect these border livelihoods. While there may be a broad consensus around the overall goal of reducing people smuggling and trafficking, it is important to recognise the likely negative consequences for the incomes of those directly or indirectly involved in the business. In order to sustain local support, it may be necessary to find ways to mitigate these impacts.

A final key area of mobility as part of livelihoods is 'translocality' – defined as "sets of multidirectional and overlapping networks, constituted by migration, in which the exchange of resources, practices and ideas links and at the same time transforms particular places" (Greiner, 2010, p 137). Translocality builds on the concept of 'transnationalism', defined as the process through which migrants build cross-border "familial, economic, social, organisational, religious and political" (Kutsche, 1995, pp 1–2) activities and networks through "sustained contacts and travel across national borders (Ahmed, 2003, p 3). However, it represents a departure in that it also encompasses migrants who have not crossed a national border, but move internally within a country. REF research on the links between rural and urban communities and livelihood systems undertaken by Sturridge (2020) in Laikipia, Kenya, discussed in Chapter 3, demonstrates the importance of translocality in shoring up livelihoods challenged by environmental and other economic pressures.

Migration for new livelihood opportunities

Millions of people across the Horn of Africa live in multidimensional poverty – a measure of poverty that goes beyond monetary deprivations to include lack of access to education and basic infrastructure. Nearly 75% of people in South Sudan, and over 80% of the population in Ethiopia and Somalia are multidimensionally poor.³⁶ The greatest labour market challenge for young people in Sub-Saharan Africa is the lack of productive and decent jobs, and the youth not in employment, education or training rate of 21.9% in 2023 exceeded the global rate (20.4%) (ILO, 2024). With few opportunities to earn a decent living, moving to new areas is seen as a positive prospect for many people in the region to acquire wage labour or establish a business and, ultimately, to improve their standard of

³⁶ <https://ophi.org.uk/global-mpi-report-2020/>.

living. Such economic or labour migration is perhaps the most researched form of migration around the world. In economic terms, it is fundamental to development in the sense of enabling labour to move towards areas where it can be more productive. However, here migration enables people to achieve a better livelihood but, having moved, people are focused on getting on with their lives in destination areas. In this way, the relationship between livelihoods and mobility is different from that discussed in the previous section.

In every study undertaken by the REF, respondents made reference to the limited livelihood opportunities and the lack of employment as a critical factor in decisions to move, whether they were talking about internal migration or going abroad by using regular or irregular routes. Even when people were describing flight from violent conflict, as far as they were able, they steered their way to places where they thought they had better prospects of making a living. In Ethiopia, as an example, youth from poorer households and from villages with less agricultural potential are more likely to migrate to cities (Bezu & Stein, 2014) as are educated youth (Bundervoet, 2018). Gender and age are critical variables when analysing migration as driven by economic insecurity (Birchall, 2016). Bundervoet's (2018) study has shown that rural–urban migrants were, on average, 10 years younger than rural non-migrants. They also had twice as many years of education compared with non-migrant rural dwellers and were three times more likely to have attained secondary-level education.

There is little doubt that the lack of jobs is one of the factors that drives people towards irregular migration along dangerous routes, such as those across the sea towards the Gulf and into Sudan towards the Mediterranean. Economic insecurity, as previously highlighted in the book, may be interlinked with political and environmental insecurity, and it is rarely, if ever, possible to distinguish unemployment as the sole driver of migration. It is, however, a primary motivation for migration out of areas of economic deprivation, weak markets and low employment availability. Finding ways to boost opportunities for employment or self-employment *in situ* is often one of the strategic aims of programmes seeking to reduce irregular migration, including the EUTF. Investment in technical and vocational training (TVET) is an important element of such programming. The REF thus undertook research to explore the association between participation in TVET and migration through case studies in Ethiopia and Uganda (Bakewell & Sturridge, 2019). The study's objectives were to improve understanding of the linkages between enrolment in TVET for employment and the potential for young people to engage in irregular migration; and to provide evidence to improve the design and implementation of programmes that aim to address youth unemployment in the Horn of Africa, in particular through critical evaluation of the theories of change used for programming in this field. Fieldwork for the study was carried out in Amhara and Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Regions in Ethiopia, and Arua District in Uganda, which hosts a large number of refugees from South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo.



Youth trained by EU Projects in Uganda. Photo by Kalyango Ronald Sebba, November 2018.

One of the key findings of this work was that graduating from TVET courses tended to increase people's aspirations to leave their home areas in search either of work or better businesses opportunities. As one woman from Arua in northern Uganda said:

I want to move, because there is market outside. Now even if there was decent work here, I will move because I want to expand my business. Before joining the course, I had never known that I could want to move out of Arua, but now with the skills I have, I want to expand my business.

For nearly all participants in the study, this increased interest in migration was concerned with movement to other parts of the country, often urban areas, or within the region. In particular, for some South Sudanese refugees in Uganda, gaining new skills opened up the prospect of return to their country to take advantage of new business opportunities:

There are four of us in this class that have formed a group and we have collected money and bought a piece of land in South Sudan where we intend to set up a small garage like the one here to enable us to earn some money and also, with time, we hope to train other youth interested in learning motor vehicle mechanics and maintenance.

However, the research found very little evidence of a link between improved job opportunities and any significant change in interest or attitudes towards irregular migration. In Ethiopia, where many of the research participants had some knowledge of irregular migration towards the Gulf, and some had first-hand experience of it, people tended to come into the training with a negative view of irregular migration, which remained unchanged at the end of it. In Uganda, where few had any experience of

irregular migration beyond moving from South Sudan as refugees, engagement in TVET slightly increased their level of interest in international migration, even moving by irregular routes, but it was a small increase from a low base. Data also showed that nearly all Ethiopian respondents were planning to move in search of better job opportunities, while a third of the respondents in Uganda gave reasons such as joining family members, returning home or simply looking for adventure or the good life. These differences between the refugee setting of Uganda and the relatively more stable environment of the Ethiopian research sites highlight the fact that the particular mix of factors that shapes people's movements varies with the context. Ultimately, the study found that ideas about migration are not major factors in explaining young people's interest in participating in TVET. In Uganda, fewer than 2% of respondents referred to their interest in moving as a reason to start training. In Ethiopia, 13% of respondents acknowledged 'making it easier to move' as one of their reasons for enrolling and fewer than half of these (just over 5%) listed this as the most important reason.

These findings reinforce the message from the wider literature (Crivello, 2011; Schewel & Fransen, 2018; Villalobos Barría & Klasen, 2016) that education and improved skills do tend to increase levels of mobility. How far TVET is an effective intervention to deliver any reduction in irregular migration is unclear. Many agencies, including the EUTF, have made significant investments in TVET and other employability programming on the assumption that these activities will: provide alternatives to migration and reduce young people's incentives to follow irregular migratory routes; and reduce young people's incentives to become involved with violent groups, thus contributing to conflict prevention and stability in the region. To explore these interlinkages, the REF also carried out an analysis of EUTF interventions in the Horn to understand the influence of such programmes on young people's decisions around mobility and engagement in conflict. The study found that multiple reviews of programmes showed that engagement in TVET and various forms of employment-related trainings had a positive impact on the prospects of finding employment and labour market integration (Gezie & Iyer, 2022). For example, the Support to Skilling Uganda Strategy (SSU – implemented jointly by the Belgium Development Agency, Enabel, and the Ministry of Education and Sports, with financial support from the Belgian government, EUTF, Irish Aid and the German Agency for International Cooperation – GIZ) conducted a survey of 1,200 trainees and 58 employers. This indicated that, of those who undertook regular trainings (between six- and nine-month periods), 65% found employment, with 16% in wage employment and 49% self-employed. Likewise, GIZ's skills development programme under the Kenya Consortium showed a job placement rate of 87% in formal and self-employment in the seven counties of implementation.

Despite successes registered in improving the lives of young people by providing them opportunities for employment and income generation, the review of selected project documents and interviews with key informants did not find a notable impact of employability initiatives on conflict and migration. A principal issue with answering this question is the short-term nature and limited time frame of such projects, which do not always – if ever – have robust follow-up mechanisms with graduates and trainees; moreover, labour market information and job placement systems in these contexts (whether related to projects or not) remain limited. While, in the life of the project, several successes (at the output level) have been noted – in terms of the number of youth trained, and number of businesses launched, number of youth who were employed/self-employed – there have been few attempts to understand the long-term impact or sustainability of such initiatives.

The REF's study on migration between the Horn and Yemen suggests that the link between economic security and migration aspirations may be qualitatively different for those who have higher levels of formal education, including university graduates. Respondents expressed concerns that were not just with finding a job but also with finding a lifestyle that was unattainable in the region. Despite the conflicts and violence that have resulted in thousands of people leaving their homes as refugees, the majority of Somalis and Ethiopians travelling along the significantly dangerous maritime route to

Yemen reported that their lack of adequate livelihoods opportunities was the principal reason for setting out on their journey (REF, 2017). Some complained about being unemployed, but many others, especially among the young educated Somali respondents, left low paying unskilled jobs as they could see no route to improve their situation at home. This encompassed not just employment and income but also their idea of the good life. From their perspective, a livelihood is associated with achieving the kind life you want. One respondent described young Somalis taking such journeys as the ‘MTV Generation’ (REF, 2017). This reveals something of the generation gap between parents, who yearn for their children to stay at home and would like to see irregular migration stopped, and their children, who will take huge risks to achieve their aspirations (Bakewell & Sturridge, 2019 – see also Chapter 6).

Strategic mobility looking to future lives

It has long been recognised that people move not only towards better livelihood opportunities today, but also in the hope of better opportunities tomorrow. Rather than looking at a simple model weighing up the difference in the wages and cost of living in origin and destination sites, Harris and Todaro (1970) discounted the urban wages according to the likelihood of securing a job and introduced a model which takes account of the likelihood of getting a job in its cost–benefit analysis. This idea was widened beyond the economic sphere in De Jong and Fawcett’s value-expectancy model that assessed the tendency for an individual to migrate depending on the likelihood (expectancy) that they would achieve a set of goals and the value of those goals to the individual (De Jong & Fawcett, 1981). Such models helped to explain why people kept moving from rural areas towards cities, despite widespread urban unemployment, limited housing and overstretched services.

However, for many of our respondents in the Horn of Africa, decisions about moving seemed more complex and not readily captured by such models. Decision making in economically (and often politically and environmentally) insecure contexts was driven in part by the possibility of securing employment in the current job market, as well as by an imagined future benefit. Interviewees in various research projects of the REF discussed their choices around migration in terms of opening up future possibilities, in particular for their children, thus showing a non-present bias in decision making. They may see no immediate prospects in the destination but think there may be more chances for education and training for them or their children, or the greater potential to move on elsewhere.

The REF’s research in South Sudan and countries hosting South Sudanese refugees identified education as one of the most important factors shaping mobility decisions for refugees and IDPs considering movement outside the acute phase of a crisis (Samuel Hall & REF, 2023). This in-depth study showed the complex array of factors that families were weighing up in making decisions about relocating, including physical security, livelihoods and access to services in different places in the present and looking forward to the future. The provision of free primary level education was a particular draw at refugee camps in countries such as Ethiopia and Uganda. According to a 22-year-old South Sudanese refugee interviewed in Gambella,

the pursuit of education opportunities has forced me to look for a place where I could study and learn. In my homeland [in Upper Nile], no one will be able to support my education or be responsible to help me get access to education. Because of that, I came to a refugee camp in Gambella, Ethiopia as an alternative to me.

Data gathered for the study point to education as the most important service guiding mobility decisions. The availability of free basic education was often quoted by research participants as one of the reasons to move to refugee camps in neighbouring countries, and the abrupt interruption of those

services during the Covid-19 pandemic has partly contributed to the recent waves of spontaneous return. Although the quality of schools in IDP camps and to a lesser extent in refugee settings is widely recognised to be low and opportunities beyond secondary education are limited, education is a key motivator for young South Sudanese refugees who see it as positively influencing their future prospects. As relayed by one young man, the lack of purpose and independence in refugee settlements in Uganda was a reason for return to South Sudan.

Socioeconomic contexts

Having discussed some of the ways that livelihoods shape people's mobility, in this section we look at how different interactions come to the fore in varied socioeconomic contexts. We look at three broad contexts that have been the focus of much of the REF's research. First, we consider border areas and we show that mobility as part of livelihoods is a particularly important aspect here. Second, we turn to secondary cities, which, not surprisingly, attract migrants in search of new opportunities today but also those hoping to open up new possibilities for their futures. When it comes to zones of displacement, return and resettlement, the picture is equally mixed. Many move in search of a more sustainable future, but with rather limited expectations for today. Moreover, here we see the day-to-day constraints on mobility limiting how refugees can realise their potential to secure their own livelihoods and contribute to the wider economy.

Border areas

Border zones are inevitably areas of transit not just for goods and services but also for people. The REF research into migration between the Horn of Africa and Yemen explored the impact on the local economy of the movement of people on the coastal towns of Bossaso in Puntland, Somalia and Obock in Djibouti (Sturridge et al, 2017). These are important hubs for smuggling migrants to Yemen en route to the Gulf countries, but they have also been destinations for refugees and migrants coming from Yemen and Ethiopia. The influx of people to the area has acted as a stimulus to the local economy but the distribution and significance of any benefits varies. Inevitably, those who are directly involved in the smuggling business depend on the flow of irregular migration for their livelihoods. Further, there is some additional demand for food and accommodation associated with the arrival of migrants. For the smaller town of Obock, where other livelihood opportunities are very limited, smuggling represents the main source of income and employment; as community respondents said, "the community lives because of the smuggling" and "the communities and migrants need each other". In the larger town of Bossaso, respondents reported more limited impact, suggesting that most of the migrants passing through had too little money and too few chances to spend it to have any impact on local markets.

In both Djibouti and Puntland, the settlement of migrants from Yemen and Ethiopia, whether arriving by regular or irregular routes or as refugees, gave a distinct boost to the local economies. Some Yemenis came with significant resources and were able to establish businesses, particularly in construction and catering. Ethiopians, many of whom were from rural backgrounds, were finding work in the local agriculture sector and were credited with introducing new farming techniques. However, for many local respondents, these benefits came at the cost of increased strain on public services and competition for work that reduced wages.

Secondary cities

While most research on rural to urban migration has focused on large cities as analytical units, this risks glossing over the complex networks connecting cities, towns and their peripheries. According to De Boeck et al (2009, p. i), the ambivalent situation of these towns “generates a particular and, by definition, highly hybrid, socio-cultural urban dynamic in which there is more room for improvisation”. The REF study on secondary cities, *The Lure of the City* (Iazzolino et al, 2018), highlights how population movements from rural to urban areas are ever increasing as a result of multiple drivers informing the decision to move. The study shows how secondary cities in Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda provide zones of opportunity whereby growth of urban areas becomes greatly associated with migration. In some instances, the development of the city demands migration – for example, the establishment of the Dire Dawa Industrial Park in Ethiopia draws in migrants from the local area, which in turn creates markets for the hinterland through networks facilitated by migration and the redistribution of migrant workers’ income to local markets.

Cities provide relative security for persons fleeing armed conflicts as well as environmental crises by providing a refuge. This was particularly the case for Gulu, Uganda, which became a safe haven for farmers, rural youth, and women and children fleeing the incursion of the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) in the early 2000s. There, thousands of people commuted to the city at night to seek shelter and escape violence, abductions and forced recruitment. Concurrently, secondary cities also provide economic opportunities not afforded easily in rural areas. Again in Gulu, during the LRA’s insurgency, a humanitarian economy thrived in the city, providing employment to people as administrators, guards, office assistants, cleaners or drivers, while others were employed in the service sector that grew up around the humanitarian industry. Gulu attracted many displaced persons looking for income-earning activities, while IDP camps were a fallback for those unable to sustain themselves in town. As a result, a circular migration between IDP camps and Gulu developed.

The location of such secondary cities also significantly influences the forms that migration takes. In Ethiopia, the city of Dire Dawa, which is close to the borders of Djibouti and Somalia/Somaliland, is an important destination for migrants. Its proximity to Djibouti is a major part of its attraction. Secondary cities also provide opportunities for higher education, which are crucial for upward socioeconomic mobility, especially for young people. Universities in Dire Dawa, Eldoret and Gulu attract not only young people who wish to study but also migrants who invest in businesses linked to the education sector. Eldoret in Kenya has seen similar large investments in universities and banking. Lastly, secondary cities also transform into sites of humanitarian assistance, as described above in Gulu.

Secondary cities abound in formal and informal jobs, a critical draw for those seeking economic security. Whereas many migrants are attracted to formal jobs provided by industries in secondary cities, a vast majority find work in the informal sector such as street vending, petty trade and *jua kali* (informal fixers and intermediaries) or transporters, including *boda boda* (motorcycle taxis). Participation in the urban informal sector points to the ingenuity and entrepreneurship of migrants to realise economic goals. Migrants find a niche within the informal sector to meet their livelihood objectives. However, not all labour migrants to secondary cities have low investment capital. For instance, in Gulu, the hotel business is primarily dominated by migrants to South Sudan from Ethiopia and Eritrea, who fled from Juba in 2013 following the outbreak of conflict in South Sudan. They found Gulu a useful alternative location for business investment and, having arrived with capital, reportedly purchased many of their businesses from people residing in Gulu, with some estimates suggesting that around 80% of the hotels in the city are owned by Ethiopians and Eritreans (see Sebba, 2018).

Despite their steadily growing importance, secondary cities are not without their challenges. They are often sites of contest, even at the same time as being spaces of relative safety. Dire Dawa has faced

regular administrative turnover thanks to its strategic importance and its ethno-political composition, particularly over Oromo and Somali political organisations. While having a cosmopolitan makeup and representation from diverse communities such as Oromo, Somalis, Amhara, Gurages and Tigrayans, and people of various faiths, Dire Dawa has witnessed the increasing politicisation of ethnicity, which also affects the composition of migrants from different regions. For instance, between 1994 and 2007, the number of Oromo and Amhara declined, while the proportion of Somalis increased (Central Statistical Agency, 2012). Similarly, in Eldoret, growing ethnic politicisation combined with the economic importance of the area has pitted Kalenjin and Kikuyu communities against each other – conflict stoked by political elites caused violent clashes during elections in the 1990s and 2000s. Devolution reforms further exacerbated relations between the communities as a result of the changing demographics of the city, which has attracted migrants for decades because of its location in a highly productive agricultural area and a resultant competition over land.

Secondary cities have also seen dramatic population growth thanks to investments in industry, strategic investments by better-off individuals and the arrival of those seeking economic opportunities. Large-scale industrial investments attract migrants from adjoining and far away rural and urban areas in search of work. Investments by wealthier Kalenjin and Kikuyu farmers also pointed to a political undertone in the multi-locality strategy, and this additionally shaped the development trajectory of the city as related to ethnic politics. Likewise, in Dire Dawa, the study showed how political and economic logic are interwoven. In the words of one Somali interviewee, “when Somali Issa become rich, they come to Dire Dawa”, where they buy land and build houses. As a result, not only were demographic changes contributing to ethno-political tensions, but these changes were also increasing demand for housing and straining the cities’ infrastructure (especially health, education, sanitation and waste management). The shortage of affordable housing had resulted in an expansion of informal settlements and slums in the cities, as observed during the REF’s research.

The arrival of migrants has also resulted in job market competition and migrants are accused of driving down wages and increasing competition over jobs in a context of widespread unemployment. Competition for jobs was a sensitive issue compounded by the lack of a government-established minimum wage in Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda at the time of the REF’s study (Sebba, 2018). According to local residents, the intensification of rural flows to these cities is inducing dramatic changes not only to the cost of living and rent, but also to the underlying socio-cultural fabric, exacerbating tensions between cosmopolitanism and tribalism, and stirred by the rising political and economic significance of secondary cities. Refugees in urban areas bear a particular brunt through the competition for jobs and livelihoods, a primary driver of tensions with local residents. One case in point is that of Eritrean migrants who have fled military national service since 1995 and find their way, through various social networks, into other parts of the region. Migrants often draw the resentment of the local population, as seen in Gulu with the entry of Ethiopians and Eritreans who were considered competitors for local housing and jobs (Sebba, 2018). These tensions are made manifest in conflicts between street vendors and shop owners.

While nationals moving from rural areas to cities within their own country may face less antagonism, they also have to overcome many obstacles. In a working paper for the REF, Getahun Kebede Fenta notes problems young migrants from rural Ethiopia to urban areas face when attempting to secure livelihoods in large cities (Fenta, 2021). In his study undertaken in Addis Ababa, Adama, Bahir Dar and Hawassa, Fenta finds that urban centres fail in planning for and accommodating young migrants in wage or formal employment, leading to a large majority of this group working in informal employment, primarily street vending. Young migrants to cities in Ethiopia face several political, regulatory and administrative bottlenecks, including politicisation of entrepreneurship; lack of understanding of the nature and demands of young people; weaknesses in business organisation and

developing markets; weak instructional systems; low levels of service capacity and inefficiency; lack of entrepreneurship education; youth negligence; and corruption.

Displacement, return and resettlement zones

Finally, socioeconomic challenges and opportunities are key determinants of return and resettlement for those forcibly displaced. Zones of displacement, return and resettlement are areas where we see people both weighing up their immediate prospects of strengthening their livelihoods and also looking to improve the longer-term prospects for their families. The REF's research on return and reintegration in Somalia showed how the chances of securing a livelihood were almost always one of the factors shaping people's decisions about moving, even in contexts where they faced great insecurity (Sturridge et al, 2018). While physical safety was often a primary concern, livelihood opportunities played a critical role in determining if people moved, when they did so and where they would go. When it came to decisions on return, people were weighing up the conditions in the places where they were living (often in refugee camps) and their expectations of what they would find if they moved back towards their area of origin. Although many respondents who returned from Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya referred to the poor conditions in the camps and the restrictions on their movement, some also saw Somalia as opening up with growing business opportunities: "I returned to Mogadishu because I have heard that life is returning to normal and the rebuilding has started" (Sturridge et al, 2018).

However, in many cases the reality of the move often failed to live up to people's expectations. Weak labour markets and the high costs of living in Mogadishu, Baidoa and Kismayo (the three cities included in the study) meant that people moving to the cities, whether as returning refugees, IDPs or even member of the diaspora returning, struggled to secure a living. The study did clearly show that those who were in the weakest position were IDPs. Not only did they tend to come from a more rural background and have lower levels of education but also they were often settling in areas dominated by different clans, especially in Mogadishu. In the context of Somalia, this seemed to put them at a particular disadvantage. The local hostility to these incomers was exacerbated by the perception that they were competing for low-skilled jobs and pushing down wages for other local residents.

The mix of drivers and aspirations in determining people's movements meant that there was no clear distinction between displacement and rural–urban migration. This is a critical issue when it comes to aid programming. Where movement is understood as 'displacement', aid actors tend to assume there will be a greater desire to return to the rural areas and call for rural investment (Sturridge et al, 2018, pp 35–36). However, when economic factors are seen as a primary driver of people's settlement in urban areas, there is more focus on urban development to provide long-term livelihoods for this larger population. REF's research on returns to Somalia showed that the complex array of drivers shaping migration make any such neat distinctions between displacement and rural–urban migration fail in practice. The balance of responses needs to take account of the many different interests rather than be designed around categories such as 'IDP' or 'migrant'.

In protracted refugee hosting contexts, there has been considerable interest from the private sector (in addition to the international aid community) in providing socioeconomic opportunities for displaced persons (and hosting communities). The private sector has the ability to enhance economic inclusion for refugees as well as host communities by facilitating greater access to economic opportunities, navigating market systems, supporting integration into the formal labour market and leveraging resources for investment in refugee-owned enterprises. One such example is Kenya, where significant investments have been made in counties with large refugee populations. Kenya is a signatory to the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, the Comprehensive Refugee

Response Framework (2016) and the Kampala Declaration on Jobs, Livelihoods, and Self-Reliance for Refugees, Returnees and Host Communities in the IGAD Region.² Kenya's Refugee Act (2021) allows essential rights such as freedom of movement, the right to work and access to financial services; it also envisions refugee camps as integrated settlements and the "shared use of public institutions, facilities and spaces between the refugees and the host communities" (Government of Kenya, 2021).

Against this background, a joint research project conducted by the REF and Botho Emerging Markets investigated the pathways to employment and entrepreneurship for refugees in Kenya, and the actual and potential role of the private sector in creating economic opportunities in Kenya's refugee-hosting areas (Dadaab, Kakuma, Kalobeyi and Nairobi). The study found that there was considerable interest from the private sector in working with refugees, many of whom have skills, innovative ideas and existing businesses that could contribute to wider economic activities within Kenya (Asati et al, 2021). Some businesses have employed refugees with a view to easing their access to the market within refugee camps. One financial services employer said:

And right now, about a third of our team in Kenya are refugees themselves. And then the rest are a mix of Kenyan nationals as well as locals from the host community. And so, we really do believe that hiring refugees is vital to the success of our work. Nobody knows these communities better than the people who live there (Asati et al, 2021, p 14).

However, such engagement is hindered by the restrictions on refugees' rights to work and move outside the refugee camps. There has been a growing literature on 'camp economies' that explores the dynamic economic activity associated with refugee camps (Betts et al, 2017a, 2017b; Jacobsen, 2005). In Kenya, as in many other countries, refugee camps are sited in quite remote and poor districts, where they are likely to be the largest population centre. Moreover, they rely on government, NGO and international aid actors to develop infrastructure, such as roads, water and sanitation, and to provide services, including clinics and schools, and basic needs in the form of food and non-food rations. As a result, refugee camps emerge as economic hubs for these remote areas. They create new markets for jobs, goods and services. The REF study echoed these findings, showing that there were high levels of business activity in the Dadaab, Kakuma and Kalobeyi refugee camps, with refugees engaged in a wide range of jobs spanning data clerks and clothing designers, and some running small, and even large, businesses (Asati et al, 2021).

The potential for this activity to grow is constrained by the lack of mobility. The study found that movement outside the camps was essential to enable refugees to exploit economic opportunities, to find suppliers, gain access to wider markets, interact with potential employers and link with potential business partners. The geographical separation of the refugee population greatly limits both the potential integration of the camp economy into the wider economy and also its potential contribution to Kenya's growth. In practice, refugees are mainly allowed to leave the camp to get urgent medical attention or education that is not available in the camp. The REF study identified this as a missed opportunity for facilitating greater economic inclusion and self-reliance by allowing refugees to pursue employment or entrepreneurship opportunities outside remote camp settings. Moreover, the government's previous attempts to discourage refugee mobility often drove refugees' movement underground and made it much harder for them to engage in livelihood activities (Asati et al, 2021).

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have provided highlights from the REF's research and wider literature on how different forms of mobility are intertwined with livelihoods across the Horn of Africa. Everyday mobility, such as between rural and urban areas and the transhumance of pastoralists, are

foundational to livelihoods in large parts of the region. Our empirical studies in Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia, Somalia and South Sudan demonstrate the different types of journeys people take to realise livelihood goals and achieve economic security. While people take advantage of changing opportunities and move towards changing sites of abundance, the migration decision is strongly informed by livelihood opportunities and enhanced by facilitating factors including education and skills. The studies also show that people not only move towards better livelihood opportunities today, but also in the hope of better opportunities tomorrow. How migrants realise their livelihood aspirations is, however, governed by socioeconomic contexts such as borderlands, secondary cities and/or displacement, return and resettlement, which restrict as well provide room for manoeuvre for migrants to realise their goals.

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Chapter 6: Journeys through contested and shifting categories

As we have seen in the previous chapter, mobility plays a fundamental role in the lives of many people across the Horn of Africa. It can enhance their livelihoods today or offer new hope for them and their families in the future. In addition to offering new opportunities and hope, for many others migration may also be a critical means of escape from violence and a way of finding safety elsewhere. Whether we are talking about moving in search of opportunity or fleeing from despair, mobility is a fundamental social process that underpins the lives of millions of people.

At the same time, the movement of people creates huge and multifaceted challenges for states and societies, in particular around labour supply, production capacity and demand, security, welfare and human rights. Hence, many different actors at all levels of government, in communities as well as in the private sector have a critical interest in understanding and responding to these patterns of mobility and addressing these challenges. This concern extends beyond the state to a broader set of international actors including regional bodies, international organisations and other states that may be affected by internal and out-migration.

In a region such as the Horn, where there are huge problems of insecurity, conflict and impoverishment, mobility is a particularly sensitive issue. As our research shows, attempts to manage migration – to make it legible to external actors, to record, control and tax movement – may be seen as all the more important, not only to address states' concerns about sovereignty and national security but also to enable actors to provide support and protection.

In order to make sense of and respond to the vast array of movements across the region, many different terms are used, such as refugee, irregular migrant, economic migrant, seasonal labour migration, rural–urban migration and smuggling. Each of these reflect some characteristics of who is moving, how they move, where or why. These range from the category of refugee as defined in international and domestic law to much looser terms like seasonal labour migration that have no legal standing but usefully describe a particular form of movement. Whether they are enshrined in law or simply widely adopted in various policies, these categories are always open to debate about who or what fits into them. In many cases, the answer to this question may determine people's rights to

protection, aid or employment. How people and their movement are categorised is, therefore, very important. At the same time, such categories can never fully capture the complexity of people's lives and movements.

This chapter considers the contested and shifting categories that emerge as a result of people's movements. Drawing on accounts of journeys gathered by REF researchers, we show that the idea of well managed migration rests on a clear distinction between different categories of movement. The complex trajectories of people's lives defy this process of categorisation, creating a huge challenge for migration management. What may start out as a voluntary or 'regular' move may become 'irregular' or forced if people are subjected to exploitation, lose their identity documents and/or are driven into the hands of unscrupulous smugglers or traffickers. Such encounters may be pivotal, potentially determining people's ability to move, their routes, their destination or even their survival. They may change the nature of the migration experience. At times, migrants and displaced people may strategically seek out these actors, or they may come across them (for better or worse) by chance. Moreover, we find that the meaning of basic concepts varies among actors, all of whom have their own interests in supporting (or hindering) migration management.

Migration management

As a result of widespread concerns about the impacts of migration – particularly irregular migration – and all the challenges and opportunities it brings, there have been many calls for migration to be better or more tightly managed. This has been embedded in the Sustainable Development Goals' target 10.7, which demands the "implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies" as one route to facilitate the "orderly, safe, and responsible migration and mobility of people".

From the REF research and many conversations in the field, it is clear that this notion of migration management means different things to different people. Therefore, it is important to offer some clarification of the term. Geiger & Pécoud (2010) suggest that the concept has its roots in the work of a number of intergovernmental organisations, including the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the European Commission, which has elevated the visibility of migration and brought it into a central position on the international policy agenda. By providing technical assistance, training and workshops, helping to design policies and programmes and developing systems to exchange information, these organisations have been instrumental in marking out the parameters of the field of migration management. Perhaps most importantly, they have promoted the idea of migration as a phenomenon to be managed, and defined the norms that set out what well managed migration looks like, what problems need to be addressed and why it matters. In particular, they reinforce the norm that migration should be safe, orderly and regular.

In practical terms, a standard set of components of migration management programming has emerged. These include capacity building, mainly targeted towards national and local government officials responsible for migration and border management and control; policy coordination to help countries develop coherent and effective migration policies consistent with international norms; reducing irregular migration, especially smuggling and trafficking; and facilitating regular migration.

This is reflected in the collection of projects and programmes supported by the EU Trust Fund for Africa, where migration management is concerned with a range of activities which aim to improve the quality of migration for those on the move: ensuring that people's rights are respected as they move; that their movement is facilitated by more efficient and effective border regimes; and that there is an appropriate framework of law that enables regular, and reduces irregular, movement. One of the

EUTF's largest investments (€122 million across the region – GIZ, 2024) has been the Better Migration Management (BMM) programme implemented by a consortium led by the German development agency, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ). Its work has focused on four priorities: supporting the development of coherent national migration policies; building capacity to implement these policies, including improving the quality of law enforcement through the training of front-line actors; enhancing the protection of migrants who are vulnerable to abuse, in particular those who are subject to trafficking; and awareness raising on the dangers of irregular migration and the benefits of alternative options. This involves interventions with a wide range of stakeholders, including government officials, NGOs and others who have some direct engagement with migrants or potential migrants. The design and implementation of the BMM programme has been enormously challenging and sometimes quite controversial (Norman & Micinski, 2023; Ndiaye, 2023).

A direct assessment or evaluation of BMM was beyond the scope of the REF, which was concerned with the broader dynamics within which EUTF investments were implemented. However, the REF did undertake studies exploring the theme of migration management in the port of Bossaso in Somalia and the town of Metema in Ethiopia on the border with Sudan. These identified some important fundamental challenges facing BMM and other migration management initiatives in the region. First, at the most basic level, they highlighted divergent views around what counts as migration, or what movements need to be managed or controlled. Second, they showed the wide array of actors with different interests in aspects of migration, many of whom were not directly involved in formal migration management activities at any level.

Different views of migration

REF research in the port town of Bossaso, Somalia (REF, 2018) revealed very different attitudes to the figure of the irregular migrant depending on the migrant's origins. There were large numbers of Ethiopian migrants arriving in the area, often from poor rural backgrounds with very low levels of education. However, they came with good agricultural skills and were credited with boosting agricultural production and the labour supply for the construction and service industries in the Bossaso area. Overall, respondents from government, civil society and private businesses suggested these migrants contributed to economic activity. Other REF research identified some resentment among poorer, less educated Somalis, who saw the Ethiopian migrants competing for jobs and pushing down wages (REF, 2017). However, for many key actors in Bossaso, the irregular migration from Ethiopia was not a major concern. Many Ethiopians had come to Bossaso in order to cross the Red Sea to Yemen and ultimately to Saudi Arabia, and were therefore just passing through the area. Those who had exhausted their cash and needed money to be able to continue their journeys would stay in and around the port until they had raised enough money to make the sea crossing.

The REF study found that Somali authorities, communities and families were all much more concerned about the increasing numbers of young Somalis attempting to reach Europe using irregular routes. This practice had become so common that it had acquired a Somali name, *tahriib* (Ali, 2016). In particular, authorities and communities were greatly distressed by the actions of traffickers, who regularly captured irregular migrants, abused them and demanded huge amounts of money to release them.

This was echoed by further REF research at Metema on the Ethiopia–Sudan border (Bakewell et al, 2020), which showed how different actors understood migration in very different ways. Metema is well known as an important hub on the route for migrants from Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia, who use the crossing towards the start of their long and dangerous irregular journey further into Sudan, towards Libya and the Mediterranean in the hope of reaching Europe. However, the largest number

of people using the crossing point are seasonal migrant workers heading towards the large farms of Eastern Sudan, especially around Gedaref and Kassala. The research showed that there were many informal arrangements at the border to enable traders, local businesspeople and these agricultural workers to cross into Sudan without passports and visas. This irregular migration is seen as completely normal and unproblematic by locals and authorities; indeed, the regional economy depends upon the seasonal migration of labourers. When asked about the mobility of workers in the area, many respondents declared that they did not consider this as migration at all; instead, they reserved the term 'migration' for those moving with the help of smugglers.

In practice, in many cases it was impossible to differentiate between the many groups of people crossing the border. Among the regular migrants were some Ethiopians moving into Sudan with tourist visas but with the intention of moving further to Khartoum to replenish their resources by working, even if they would end up overstaying their visa. They planned eventually to move on towards the Mediterranean and were mixed together with the large number of seasonal labour migrants crossing irregularly.

Balancing interests

These different views from the ground mean that there was no easy agreement on the problem that needed to be solved through migration management programming. Given these different perspectives, it is not surprising that there were contradictory views of what action should be taken. In Bossaso, many people interviewed emphasised the contributions that Ethiopian migrants made to the local economy. They had no interest in reducing the arrival of irregular migrants. They felt that the work of migration management in relation to these movements should be focused on registering migrants to enable them to be integrated more transparently into the local labour market and economy. It should be aimed at regularising the irregular movement, not stopping it. When it came to the problematic longer-distance migration of Somali youth, their interests were in finding ways to boost employment opportunities in the hope of discouraging them from leaving (REF, 2018). Mothers, for instance, started to give their sons cars to use as taxis (which became known as *hooyo ha tahriibin*, meaning 'my child, do not *tahriib*') so that they could support themselves without having to leave (Ali, 2016).

REF research identified important gaps in views between respondents actively engaged in migration-related work and those working in other roles affected by migration but not directly concerned with it. The latter had a much more open attitude to the movement of people and were less exercised by distinctions between regular and irregular movement. If anything, their larger concern was ensuring they maximise the benefits of migration rather than controlling it. In practice, on the ground there was limited understanding of the term migration management. It seemed to be a closed book only available to those concerned with migration programming. In Metema, an official from the local trade bureau noted that his organisation provided support to returning migrants and was promoting entrepreneurship and job creation, which might deter people leaving via dangerous irregular routes but that his organisation was not included in discussions on migration management. Local business owners who rely on migrants as their customers and, most poignantly, farmers who have faced finding the dead bodies of migrants in their fields expressed deep scepticism about any engagement with migration management initiatives. They see the advertisements advising them to inform on smugglers and traffickers but they also know that many actors, including government officials, are involved in the industry (Bakewell et al, 2020).

Nonetheless, findings from a number of REF studies suggest that discussions about migration and migration management could usefully be extended to some actors that do not have direct engagement with migration issues, but whose work is affected by migration. For example, the study

on movement between the Horn and Yemen (REF, 2017) concluded that government line departments, such as agriculture, industry, trade, education, health and employment, should be made more aware of how migration affects their area of work, since their departments stand to benefit from the presence of migrants or may be required to provide additional and inclusive services to the migrant population. In this way, migration becomes a cross-cutting development concern rather than purely a matter for security and immigration authorities.

It is important to remember that not only are there multiple definitions of migration management but also multiple interests in enabling or preventing it. While the SDGs, the Global Compact for Migration (GCM), the Khartoum Process and the EUTF emphasise the importance of well managed migration, its benefits are contested. One of the reasons that it is so important to understand the interests of different stakeholders is to identify how and why different actors may oppose or subvert measures designed to improve the process of migration, making it safer, more orderly, and upholding human rights.

REF research highlights multiple cases where interventions designed to better manage migration have been undermined by other actors. For example, the Puntland Maritime Police Forces are reluctant to arrest people trying to move irregularly across the Red Sea as they lack the resources to hold them. This basic lack of resources discourages police from stopping boats at sea or raiding sites where migrants may be being held before being put on boats (REF 2018). However, it is not just the lack of resources that enables those involved in smuggling and trafficking to escape any penalties. In research in Ethiopia, Sudan and Somalia, respondents made frequent references to corruption and the direct involvement of government officials in facilitating irregular migration. As the REF study on the financing of smuggling and trafficking (Deisser et al, 2019) shows, there are extensive networks of people and finance across the region underpinning these activities. This extends the number of actors who have an interest in perpetuating irregular and dangerous migration.

REF research on migration between the Horn of Africa and Yemen showed how migration management measures that tended to criminalise smuggling and trafficking sometimes create a dangerous vicious cycle. More enforcement measures to secure the borders and increased penalties for offences tended to push smugglers and traffickers to use longer and more dangerous routes to avoid detection and push up the prices they charge or extort from migrants en route (REF, 2017). Given the involvement of many officials in these businesses, it is difficult for migration management measures to have a significant impact on changing the scale of irregular migration. Instead, restricting movement and clamping down on illicit people-moving networks results in greater risk and danger and more expense for migrants, with greater profits for all those organising their journeys.

Given these dynamics, some individuals and organisations have called for the expansion of opportunities for regular migration as a more effective and humane approach to managing migration. This call from the ground level is to some extent echoed across the region. The Intergovernmental Authority on Development's (IGAD) five-year Migration Action Plan (2014, p 20) prioritised labour migration management, mobility of pastoralist communities, building national data systems and free movement of people in the IGAD region. These examples suggest that there is an appetite among states for opening up legal channels for migration within the Horn which should be pursued and encouraged through dialogue, incentives and regional consensus.

A more insidious and perverse outcome of this vicious cycle, associated with criminalising smuggling and trafficking and making it more dangerous, can be seen in the case of (often well educated) Somali youth trying to reach Europe. A typical profile of such a potential migrant is a male, with a secondary or sometimes university education. As greater awareness of the risks involved in these journeys has increased among the public, the authorities and other actors have become more aligned in wanting

to dissuade these young people from moving. However, there is evidence to suggest that the measures taken to reduce it have sometimes had the opposite effect.

Young people interviewed in our study were desperate to leave but they realised that they could not get support from their parents to do so. even through reasonably safe routes, which might still be irregular. A generation ago, these journeys had to be paid for in advance, and families had been deeply involved in financing and preparing the move. However, in response to rising public opposition to out-migration, smugglers adapted their practices, offering a ‘travel now, pay later’ model of business. This enabled young people to set off with an initial payment of as little as US\$100. In this way, they could leave without their parents knowing of their plans. Those taking up these offers knew that they would most likely end up being detained or held for ransom along the journey and that their families would have to pay funds to release them rather than see them die. Only through these extreme threats could they force their families to pay for their migration. With the increase in migration controls and harsher penalties for those involved in smuggling and trafficking, the expense, the violence and danger has only increased, making this all the more effective as a way to force parents to pay (REF, 2017; Bakewell & Sturridge, 2019).

Contested categories

As we have shown above, what counts as regular or irregular migration may be contested depending on who is making the distinction. Moreover, the migration stories of many, perhaps most, migrants across the Horn of Africa are much more complex than simply moving from a permanent home in A to a new permanent home in B. This is vividly illustrated by the detailed narratives collected by the REF and Samuel Hall (2023) research on South Sudanese displacement and return. This presents the life trajectories of Diing and Eternity, two South Sudanese people who have experienced multiple displacements and return throughout their lives (see text box).

As they and many others move across the region, they come to the attention of states, international organisations, NGOs and multiple other actors who may variously try to control their movement, provide them with help or intervene in their lives in other ways. Of course, every individual will have an extremely complicated story, perhaps known only to them or their close families. The external actors they encounter may reduce their story to a category that can define how they should be treated at that moment in time – as an irregular migrant, a victim of trafficking, a labour migrant, a refugee, returnee, internally displaced person (IDP), and so forth. In practice, such labelling is essential for bureaucratic organisations to make some sense of their world (Zetter, 1991). It is important to understand whether the people who are on the move are refugees – fleeing with a well founded fear of persecution – or economic migrants most interested in finding work, since these different categories bring with them different rights and entitlements. However, describing any person as simply a refugee or economic migrant denies the complexity of factors that has led to their movement and influenced their migration experiences (Bakewell, 2008; Bakewell, 2021).

Diing’s story

Diing was born in 1980. He was three years old the first time he witnessed war. At 11 years, he had become an orphan and was taken in by relatives. In 2022, when we interviewed him in Juba, he explained: “my life is the life of an orphan – it cannot be good, wherever I am”. His life became a life of displacement as well – from South Sudan his relatives left for Kenya, Ethiopia, Uganda, and some to the US through resettlement programmes in the early 2000s. He joined those who went to Uganda, which was the closest and least costly destination.

At the age of 20, he met his wife and started to hope for a better life. He followed his uncle's advice: "live a life that can help your family, plan with what you have". He could not see a life for himself and his children in the Ugandan refugee camp and started planning for return. He tried to return 'home' to South Sudan in 2005, in 2016 and again in 2020 – all three attempts to return were unsuccessful. War broke out in December 2013, and again in 2016. Every time the family returned, war broke out. The third return in 2020 was forced upon them by the Covid-19 pandemic, as schools in the Ugandan refugee camp closed. He explained that he had to return to enable his children to study. This time, conflict did not erupt, but their village was flooded, forcing them to leave again. They relocated from their village to Mangala camp, as IDPs. Instead of a return 'home' or a costly return to Uganda, his family has been living in this IDP camp for the past two years. In 2021, Diing came to Juba to try to find work, and his family remained in the camp. He told us that "there is no more hope for me. Perhaps there can be hope for my children: if they get a good education, they may be able to help me."

Eternity's story

Eternity was born in 1979. She explained that she never left South Sudan because she did not have the support of any family or community. When we interviewed her in January 2022, she was living alone with her nine children in an IDP informal settlement in Konyokonyo. She showed both resignation and resolve. Her life is an account of displacement across decades, driven by repeated rejection, abuse and violence perpetrated by those closest to her. "From the time I was a grown-up child, I was told I had to start a new life. I was sent off to get married – a forced marriage. Home life was harder than I had ever imagined it would be. I was beaten up so often and so hard that I could not eat. I was 15 years old."

She left with her children, moving to Juba where they survived on basic means, collecting and selling bottles on the street to be reused. She has nine children, six of whom are from her first marriage and three from her second marriage to a Dinka man she met in Juba. His community never accepted her and their marriage was short-lived, as she learnt that he was married to 16 women, all from the dominant tribe, while she is from a minority tribe. "For the Dinkas," she said, "when you bring another tribe, you insult the tribe, and the other women you have married. I had to leave."

She managed on her own to put two of her children in school but could not afford to educate the other seven. Her oldest son, who has graduated from high school, is jobless, and stays idle under the tent or roaming the streets. They live together in an area of town where there is no toilet or latrine, and no NGOs are supporting them. She questions why refugees living abroad get assistance, while she considers IDPs to be worse off, with less financial means and less support. "Here it is not like Uganda, where refugees get everything. Here you won't find anything." She finishes by telling us how "everyone has made me feel unsafe." (REF & Samuel Hall, 2023, pp 97–100)

There is often a discrepancy between how external actors categorise people on the move and how they see themselves. This can create some significant misunderstandings. In the REF study on returns to Somalia (Sturridge et al, 2018), it was clear that there were very high levels of displacement of people who had no realistic prospect of being able to return to their homes. However, for many respondents who were formally categorised as IDPs in Mogadishu, Baidoa and Kismayo, the category of IDP was seen as a trap. They were subject to discrimination and faced accusations of harbouring disease, taking jobs from local residents and causing insecurity. They were also extremely vulnerable to having their rights violated, including becoming victims of violence and evictions with no recourse. As one respondent said in Mogadishu: "I want to live in an IDP-free place because I want to live like any other citizen with all his freedoms and [be] entitled to all the rights enshrined in the constitutions."

While they faced such problems, Somali IDPs' living conditions and economic position appeared to be little different from those of people identified as rural–urban migrants, many of whom had been compelled to move for similar reasons. These migrants were not recognised as IDPs, and they were able to avoid the stigma of the label.

Another group identified by the research were the wealthier migrants who had the resources to move into better living conditions. It was their economic position that helped ensure they could avoid being labelled IDPs, despite having been forced to leave their homes under the threat of violence (Sturridge et al, 2018). This suggests that the (policy) category of IDP may say more about a person's relatively lower class and sometimes their membership in a less powerful clan than it does about their experiences of displacement. This then raises the question of who is served by the use of the term IDP.

Similar concerns were raised in South Sudan, where people's movements were labelled return when they were often engaged in a complex process of moving back and forth between South Sudan and neighbouring countries where they had been refugees, in many cases splitting up families across borders. This was part of a complex strategy to take advantage of opportunities, or rumour of opportunities, and just another stage of their mobile trajectories through life. While their choices are often severely constrained by the extremely difficult security, social, political and physical environment in which they move, they cannot be neatly captured by terms such as returnee, IDP and the like.

This is not to say that these labels are not important. They are often critically important, as they determine access to resources. As a South Sudanese scholar reported, the category of 'returnee' was effectively generated by the way aid was distributed to particular people identified with the label. This was largely internalised, so people came to refer to themselves as IDPs in a context where this could be related to resource allocation (REF & Samuel Hall, 2023, p 82).

Shifting categories

A further complication is added as the conditions in which people move change continuously along the way, which means they may be categorised quite differently by external actors depending on where they are encountered. These shifts may be part of a well trodden path as people navigate the different situations they face. For example, Kiya Gezahegne (2020) explains that the journeys of many Ethiopian irregular migrants into Sudan start with their crossing the border at Metema as regular migrants with passports and tourist visas. It is only when they overstay their visas that they slip into irregularity. Others obtain a temporary residence permit, issued by the Sudanese government, but falsify the reasons for their stay and its duration, so they are documented but irregular. Others cross into the country with the assistance of smugglers to avoid all border formalities.

There are also many settings where migrants are duped and end up being subject to some form of trafficking. In the case of women seeking work in the Gulf, they believe they are dealing with legal recruitment agencies but they are illegally charged fees before departure and then left unsupported in the hands of employers who are free to exploit and abuse them with impunity (Nampewo et al, 2022). This has been a widespread concern for countries across the Horn of Africa.

Those seeking to travel towards Europe are likely to jump between categories multiple times. Whichever way they cross the first border, at some stage they will move into irregularity. Some respondents gave disturbing accounts of how they had engaged brokers or smugglers at the start of their journey, but then found these same people extorting more money from them along the way, or selling them into the hands of traffickers. They were subject to horrific physical, sexual and

psychological abuse by the traffickers, who held them to ransom until they could raise money to pay for their release. Along this traumatic journey, how far they were victims of traffickers, willing migrants looking to continue their journey, or possibly stuck migrants ready to sign up for voluntary return programmes varied depending on the point of observation (Bakewell et al, 2020; Gezahegne, 2020).

REF research also found other groups of people on the move shifting categories, sometimes with highly negative results. The case of circular returns to Somalia is a good example (Manji, 2020). Many, if not most, Somali refugees in Kenya have maintained strong links with Somalia and kept a close eye on the changing conditions there. Since 2014, UNHCR has supported a voluntary repatriation programme and assisted over 85,000 Somalis to return. This formal repatriation programme entails giving up one's refugee status in Kenya. In addition, many others organise their own return to Somalia without any assistance but without giving up their status in Kenya. Between 2015 and 2018, over 110,000 Somalis returned unassisted from Kenya, Ethiopia and Djibouti. While there are no accurate figures, there is much evidence to suggest that significant numbers of those who repatriate to Somalia later return to Kenya (Manji, 2020).

Those who have given up their refugee status by signing up to the formal repatriation programme have little prospect of regaining it if they return to Kenya, especially since the Kenyan government suspended refugee registration in the Dadaab refugee camp. Those who organised their own repatriation are more likely to retain their status, but UNHCR routinely tries to identify those who have left the refugee camp and deactivate their registrations. As a result, there are thousands of Somalis who were once recognised refugees but are now categorised as irregular migrants or undocumented asylum seekers.

Not only does this limit their access to humanitarian aid, education and health services, but it also means they are in a precarious legal position and could be subject to arrest and deportation to Somalia as they no longer have protection as refugees. Being in the 'right' category makes a huge difference to the daily lives of people from Somalia in Kenya. At the same time, having the ability to explore the reality of return, to navigate moving back and forth between countries and to identify ways to secure livelihoods and a future in Somalia requires more flexible policies. Similar issues have been identified among refugees considering repatriation in many other settings – including the REF study on returns to South Sudan (REF & Samuel Hall, 2023). Where people have a choice and return is fully voluntary, it is often a messy back and forth business.

Conclusion

There is a notable gap between most people's lived experiences of migration and displacement and the bureaucratic systems and legal regimes that demand sharp lines between categories. There is a complex array of motivations and degrees of choice and compulsion that can be seen in the trajectory of any one person on the move, which is further complicated when we are considering a group of people. The challenge of distinguishing forced from voluntary movement, most notably the refugee from the economic migrant, has been widely recognised. In response, there is widespread use of the term 'mixed migration' to refer to the mix of motivations underpinning the movements of any group of people (Van Hear et al, 2009; Maple et al, 2021; Sharpe, 2018). The term is also used to refer to the mix of experience seen in individuals' movements, reflecting their changing motivations and degrees of agency, as when voluntary migrants fall into the hands of traffickers and lose all choices about their future direction.

In effect, this response to the problem of drawing boundaries between forced and voluntary migrants has generated yet another category that maps out an area of policy intervention to count, assess

situations, and find ways to govern and respond to the phenomenon of ‘mixed migration’ (Oelgemöller, 2021; Maple et al, 2021).

Our findings suggest that developing such hybrid labels cannot solve the basic problem: put simply, people will not fit into boxes. As Sharpe argues, in terms of defining states’ obligations, the concept of mixed migration adds little value, because the motivations for moving have no role in determining states’ duties under international law (Sharpe, 2018). Moreover, it does not tell us anything much about the mix of interests, needs or aspirations that will vary enormously in any group of people on the move, whether they are identified as mixed migrants, refugees, economic migrants or by any other label.

Inventing new categories will not deal with the challenge of finding ways of recognising the rights of people on the move (in particular in terms of protection) and providing appropriate assistance. The systems to deliver such support are necessarily bureaucratic but how can they operate without fixing people in categories that constrain their options and make it harder for them to pursue their own strategies to improve their lives? In Chapter 8, we explore in more detail the implications of this for policy and development in the region. First, however, in Chapter 7, we look beyond the question of categories, to better understand the dynamic and relational ways in which mobility is connected to broader demographic and socio-political balances.

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Chapter 7: Demographic and socio-political balances

Migration is key to understanding broader processes of demographic, social and political change in the region. As people move, whether in the context of conflict, environmental change, livelihood strategies, or to improve their lives in myriad other ways, demographic and socio-political dynamics are remade. For example, processes of urbanisation are not only reshaping cities, they are also transforming life in rural areas. The departure of young people may threaten future local economic production and increase pressures on elders, or it may bring support for households through remittances. Where conflict and political power are sharply delineated by clan or ethnicity, the presence of migrants, refugees or internally displaced persons (IDPs) may change a delicate equilibrium, feeding into cycles of instability. Alternatively – and more optimistically – the shift in population may help to dampen trends towards instability. Gender and relational dynamics are also being reshaped, for example as women migrate to the Gulf for employment, with impacts for gender roles and family relationships in areas of origin and destination.

This is not a one-directional relationship, in which exceptional migration affects or disrupts an otherwise static, sedentary region. Just as people in the Horn of Africa are on the move in terms of migration, the region is undergoing multiple, dynamic changes along demographic, social and political lines. For example, populations are becoming younger, with changing pressures on labour markets; social norms around gender relations remain in flux, intersecting with other relational dynamics such as generation and class; livelihoods are under changing pressures in the face of climate change and economic precarity; and new conflicts have emerged alongside increasingly protracted ones.

Nevertheless, migration is not simply an outcome of demographic, social and political changes as distinct ‘drivers’ either. The relationship between migration and demographic and socio-political change is more dynamic, it is messier. REF research demonstrates that it is more useful to view migration and demographic and socio-political dynamics as being co-constituted, with each influencing the other in intrinsic ways. Migration cannot be understood without analysing the complex and dynamic demographic and socio-political changes unfolding in the Horn, and those changes cannot be understood without considering the impacts of migration. This is because they co-constitute social life in the region, albeit in multifaceted, non-linear ways. Migration is a key part of social life and change, rather than an exception. This is important in reframing our understanding of life in the Horn of Africa, away from seeing it as a sedentary place to viewing it as one that is and has always been characterised by movement and change.

In taking these dynamics as co-constituted, it is important to emphasise the ways that migration and demographic, social and political change are configured in context-specific, uneven ways. In this chapter, we illustrate how migration is connected to reduced or exacerbated inequalities; to support networks and relational dynamics such as around gender and families; and to protracted conflict settings. The chapter is informed by three approaches that have underpinned REF research. First, we think through differentiating factors shaping who can access the benefits of migration and who is forced to move or stay under more constrained conditions. Second, we take a relational approach, to understand how people stay or move not as isolated individuals but through their dynamic relationships, including around gender, religion and/or ethnicity (Feyissa, Zekele & Gebresenbet, 2024). Third, we situate migration and conflict within their broader social, economic and historical contexts, rather than singling out people on the move in isolation from these processes. In doing so, we look beyond the humanitarian and crisis-oriented analyses that constitute much of the literature, instead tracing the ways that migration can be understood as an integral component of broader processes of change in the region. Understanding these processes is key for development frameworks to better account, and programme for change. We draw on our empirical research, as well as including a more in-depth case study examining the transformational, albeit uneven, role of migration among the Hadiya of Southern Ethiopia, which brings together the three framings.

Researching migration and demographic and socio-political dynamics as co-constituted

The starting point for considering migration and demographic, social and political processes as being co-constituted is to reframe migration, not as exception or crisis but as integral to processes of change in the region. Sedentarist framing that sees migration as exceptional has long been critiqued (Malkki, 1992), as has framing migration narrowly in terms of crisis (Lindley, 2014). Nevertheless, in the African context, sedentarist and crisis narratives often jointly persist, despite long histories of mobility, leading to problematic analysis, as summarised by Francis Nyamnjoh (2013, p 659):

The impression is given that Africans are mobile only when things go wrong or others so desire that they would ordinarily stay grounded, were it not for rapid population growth, economic stagnation, poverty, unemployment, conflicts and ecological disasters...The literature overly dramatises the role of external pull and push factors, for Africans daring to leave their otherwise bounded communities, frozen realities and grounded existence.

When migration is decoupled from demographic, social and political change, the analysis of both is limited. It is not just that migration is mischaracterised, but also that broader social dynamics are seen as bounded and frozen. This chapter argues that it is more useful to conceptualise migration as a normal part of social life and change (Castles, 2010). As the case study presented here of the Hadiya ethnic group in Ethiopia demonstrates, deeply ingrained mobility norms centre around migration as being a natural and integral part of life, rather than an anomaly that needs to be managed. The relationship between migration and demographic, social and political change is, however, not linear or one-directional, but rather context-specific and multifaceted. This can be illustrated by reference to three approaches that have broadly underpinned REF research.

First, examining intersectional dynamics illustrates some of the ways migration and change are differentiated. That is, they generate opportunities for some, while constraining others. Migration “can both create new inequalities and exacerbate existing ones” and, as such, “not everyone has equal access to the benefits of migration” (Crawley, et al, 2022, p 4). For example, migration may present opportunities and benefits for some households through remittances, but this may increase

inequalities too. Given that it takes resources and networks to be able to move in the first place, those without access to resources may not benefit or, if they do move, it may be under precarious or forced circumstances, again reinforcing inequalities and making any straightforward connection between migration and inequality impossible to assume (Bastia, 2013). Among the Hadiya, both international and internal migrations have helped address historically entrenched social inequalities between them and Ethiopia's dominant groups. These movements have been facilitated by the transnational flow of finance, ideas and knowledge. However, this migration has also generated new forms of inequality, particularly between migrant and non-migrant families. For example, in peri-urban areas, the unequal exchange of land between returnee land speculators and local farmers highlights these emerging disparities. Importantly, “sometimes it is the perception of inequalities, rather than objective differentials, that initiates (or prevents) migration” (UNRISD & MIDEQ, 2023, p 18). As such, perceptions matter, something the REF has focused on throughout its research by speaking directly with communities about their perspectives on their experiences and aspirations, rather than assuming that certain dynamics (eg climate change, unemployment) will ‘drive’ particular migration outcomes.

Second, these differentiated inequalities and opportunities of migration and social change can be more fully understood by considering relational dynamics. That is, people do not move or stay put in isolation, but rather in the context of support networks and relationships. These are already always in flux – gender, age and other social norms are already dynamic and changing – but to understand with more nuance how these norms shift it is useful to consider too the role of migration trajectories. For example, migration may be associated with success and increased opportunities for women, as well as benefits for households at home through the receiving of remittances, but these moves are also often precarious and constrain women’s agency in other ways. They may also generate new challenges for family members who remain at home, as well as for women’s reintegration after being away. The REF has examined these dynamics in a number of ways, including speaking with prospective migrants, current migrants and returnees at different stages in their migration experiences. We have also spoken with multiple people within support networks, including those who have not migrated but whose lives are influenced by the movement of others in their social network.

Third, migrants in distinct categories (refugee, IDP, returnee, etc) are not separate from those who stay, and indeed such categories can be somewhat problematic given that migration is part of normal social life and change. People who are not categorised as migrants at the time that research is done may indeed have moved in the past or plan to move in the future, and those who do not move are nevertheless bound up in demographic, social and political changes that are in part shaped by migration trajectories. As such, REF research has approached migration and displacement within their broader contexts. This is particularly useful in the context of increasingly protracted conflict and displacement settings in the Horn of Africa. Shifting away from short-term emergency or crisis thinking, and from singling out displaced communities, our research instead follows whole-of-society approaches. These help to make visible ongoing and subsequent migration beyond an initial need to flee (for example, circular returns or onward movement after displacement) that are part of the picture of how social change dynamics are changing in the region, as well as the ways that displaced communities relate to and exist within broader social and political contexts, whether in cities or camps.

Taken together, these three kinds of framings are used in this chapter to trace migration’s connections with changing opportunities and inequalities, with the reconfiguration of support networks and relationality around gender and families, and with impacts from protracted displacement contexts. The three areas of focus are all related and overlapping but we distinguish them for analytic purposes here in order to nuance different aspects of the co-constituted relationship between migration and demographic, social and political dynamics.

The case study from Hadiya, Ethiopia, contributed by REF researcher Dereje Feyissa, helps to illustrate the overlapping and nuanced relationships between migration, social structure and inequalities.

Case study: the transformational role of internal/international migration among the Hadiya of Southern Ethiopia

Since the early 2000s, migration has been a powerful and transformative force for the Hadiya people of southern Ethiopia, reshaping their social and economic landscape more effectively than top-down, state-led development initiatives. Both internal migration within Ethiopia and international migration, particularly to South Africa, have played pivotal roles in this transformation. Driven by high population density, land scarcity and limited local opportunities, migration is further supported by deeply ingrained mobility norms, a heightened historical consciousness, and a strong spiritual framework that imbues their migration with sacred significance. These factors have collectively empowered the Hadiya, enabling them to pursue new economic and social possibilities.

Darifirma – Hadiya mobility norm

The Hadiya do not have a native term for migration as understood in the modern sense; instead, they use '*darifirma*', meaning 'to stroll' or 'to wander', which carries positive connotations of mobility. Historically, migration was seen as part of the natural order and was encouraged by societal norms, particularly among young men, who were expected to seek opportunities beyond their village. This cultural framework views migration not just as an economic necessity but as a valued means of personal and collective advancement.

Darifirma has been adapted to changing circumstances such as new opportunities for agricultural labour migration. The Hadiya's tradition of labour migration dates back to the 1940s, when the commercialisation of agriculture, including coffee and sugar cane plantations, spurred labour migration to new regions like Wonji and Metahara. This migration continued through the 1980s with resettlement programmes, and further reinforced a culture of mobility. South Africa became a major destination beginning in the early 2000s, with successful migrants returning as role models, further fuelling the desire to migrate.

The Hadiya's belief in equality underpins their migration patterns. They view social inequality as unnatural, motivating individuals to improve their standing relative to others. This competitive spirit is a driving force behind migration, with individuals aspiring to achieve the same success as those who have already migrated and prospered. Migration has thus become a means of social mobility, economic success and communal prestige, deeply ingrained in the cultural fabric of Hadiya society.

Hadiya migration as a historical project

Hadiya migration can also be understood as a historical project aimed at addressing long-standing social and economic inequalities. Historically marginalised within Ethiopia, the Hadiya have used migration as a strategy to improve their socioeconomic status, seeking wealth and social capital abroad. Their migration is rooted in regional inequality between Ethiopia's northern and southern regions, where the Hadiya have faced political exclusion, social discrimination and economic exploitation, particularly after their forced incorporation into the Ethiopian Empire in the late 19th century.

This marginalisation intensified under imperial rule, with the Hadiya relegated to labour migration, first to coffee plantations and later to sugar estates, without significant economic benefit or societal change. Despite promises of transformation following the 1974 revolution, the Hadiya continued to face exploitation, including heavy military conscription during the Derg period (1974–91). The

introduction of ethnic federalism in 1991, which aimed to address these inequalities, did not result in the expected socioeconomic empowerment, as political elites continued to serve the central government's interests, while local migration policies became increasingly politicised.

In the early 2000s, a key event in Hadiya migration to South Africa was the role of an Ethiopian ambassador, himself of mixed Hadiya and the neighbouring Kembata descent, who actively supported and facilitated migration, seeing it as part of a broader Southern Ethiopian struggle against regional inequality. His actions, rooted in a sense of historical solidarity and defiance against government discrimination, were pivotal in accelerating migration to South Africa.

While the national government framed migration, particularly to South Africa, as 'illegal' and 'human trafficking', local officials, often from migrant families themselves, adopted a more sympathetic stance, at times subverting the government's crackdown. This local resistance illustrates how migration is not just an individual endeavour but a collective historical project, shaped by broader socio-political forces and local acts of defiance against state policies.

Migration as collective redemption

Hadiya migration, especially to South Africa, is deeply intertwined with spiritual and historical beliefs. Rooted in a 2001 prophecy by Canadian pastor Peter Youngren, migration is seen as part of a divine plan to correct historical inequalities that have marginalised the Hadiya in Ethiopia. This belief frames migration not just as an economic necessity but as a spiritual journey towards collective redemption and justice.

Historically the Hadiya were part of the medieval Hadiya Sultanate but, after being incorporated into Ethiopia in the late 19th century, they faced socio-political and economic marginalisation. In response, migration – particularly to South Africa – has become a means of reasserting their dignity and addressing these imbalances.

The 2001 prophecy, which spoke of a 'southern door' to prosperity, gave migration its sacred dimension, motivating Hadiya migrants with a sense of divine protection and purpose. This belief is reinforced by local prophets who guide migration decisions, framing the journey as part of God's redemptive plan. Prophets also act as intermediaries, advising on when to migrate, whom to sponsor and how to navigate the risks involved.

Migration is not only seen as a path to economic improvement but as a way to renegotiate the historical and regional inequalities between Ethiopia's north and south. For the Hadiya, this journey is a divine effort to restore social balance and elevate their status, positioning them as a vanguard of Protestantism in Southern Ethiopia. Ultimately, Hadiya migration is a collective spiritual endeavour, deeply connected to historical grievances and aspirations for social equality. It is viewed as a divine act of empowerment, with the potential to transform not only their material conditions but also their self-identity, helping them overcome the legacy of marginalisation and achieve socioeconomic progress.

Interplay between internal and international migration

The interplay between internal and international migration among the Hadiya is a complex and dynamic process that highlights the reciprocal relationship between these two migration patterns. Historically, the Hadiya's experience with agricultural labour migration during the 1960s and 1970s laid the foundation for their more recent migration trends to South Africa and elsewhere starting in the 2000s. This early internal migration, primarily to agricultural zones within Ethiopia, allowed many Hadiya to gain the experience and skills necessary for more distant international migration.

The migration to South Africa has, in turn, fuelled further internal migration within Ethiopia, particularly to urban centres like Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa. These cities have increasingly become essential transit hubs for the Hadiya, where they can earn money and save for their journeys abroad. Many young Hadiya migrate to these cities seeking temporary employment in industries or trade, using the income to fund their migration plans to South Africa or other international destinations.

Urban centres like Addis Ababa, with their relative proximity to regional and international migration routes, offer key economic opportunities, such as employment in construction, trade and service sectors, that are unavailable in their rural hometowns. These cities not only provide financial resources to facilitate international migration but also serve as staging points for the movement of people across the country and beyond. In this way, the internal migration to Ethiopia's cities is deeply interlinked with the larger trend of international migration, forming a continuous cycle where each migration type supports and amplifies the other.

This complex relationship between internal and international migration demonstrates how patterns of mobility are shaped by both historical forces and contemporary aspirations. For the Hadiya, migration is not only a response to local economic challenges but also a broader strategy for social and economic mobility that spans local, national and international spaces. The cities serve as vital nodes in this migration network, offering economic opportunities while facilitating connections to global migration flows.

Migration as the quintessential future-making project among the Hadiya

The reciprocal migration dynamic has transformed the socioeconomic landscape of Hadiya society, particularly in Hosanna, the capital of Hadiya Zone. The influx of remittances has fuelled rural-to-urban migration, doubling Hosanna's population and shifting its identity from that of a military town to a vibrant economic centre. The growing influence of the Hadiya in the region has reshaped local demographics and increased the visibility of the Hadiya in the local economy. The transnational flow of finance has enabled Hadiya businesses, a sector which has hitherto been dominated by members of Ethiopia's dominant groups.

Beyond financial remittances, Hadiya migration has also facilitated the transfer of entrepreneurial skills, self-worth and a culture of saving. These new economic practices are challenging Ethiopia's traditional, state-led development model. As a result, the Hadiya are increasingly empowered, not just economically but also socially and politically, shifting from a marginalised group to one that has surpassed its neighbours in many respects.

The most significant change is a shift in self-identity. Historically viewed as inferior, the Hadiya now recognise that their struggles were systemic, tied to Ethiopia's unequal socio-political structure. This awareness has sparked a collective consciousness, accelerating social change and economic empowerment and fostering a more assertive, confident citizenry.

Differentiated inequalities and opportunities

In this section we turn to the REF's research on technical and vocational education and training (TVET) and rural-urban linkages, to draw out some of the ways the inequalities and opportunities of migration, within a backdrop of other overlapping demographic, socio-political changes, are differentiated. In Uganda and Ethiopia, we interrogated the relationship between migration aspirations and TVET, using quantitative and qualitative methods (Bakewell & Sturridge, 2019). This field research was complemented by a subsequent review of TVET in Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia and the

Mandera Triangle which critically examined the connections between TVET and the decisions of young people regarding engagement in mobility as well as conflict (Gezie & Iyer, 2022).

While investments in TVET often assume that these interventions provide alternatives for young people to (particularly irregular) migration and conflict, REF research contributes a different picture, illustrating the differentiated connections between movement and opportunities and inequalities. These studies took place in a region experiencing population increases, one which is growing younger, accompanied by significant labour market pressures. For example, in Ethiopia, two to three million young people per year enter the labour market but face high unemployment in both rural and urban areas (UNDP, 2022, p 2).³⁷ Most people work in the agriculture sector, and rural youth constitutes the majority of Ethiopia's population. However, employment barriers are significant, including "land scarcity due to population pressure, lack of rural job opportunities, and minimal access to education and skills training" (Shuker & Sadik, 2024, p 2). Similarly, in Uganda, young people make up 64% percent of the unemployed population, with those in urban areas, and females, most likely to be unemployed (Ahaibwe & Mbowa, 2014). Roughly 8.8 million people in Uganda aged between 15 and 24 are not engaged in employment, education or training (UNFPA, 2017). In Kenya, 24% of young people are unemployed and, again, urban unemployment rates are higher than in rural areas (Government of Kenya, 2019). Across the region, many people are pushed to engage in insecure, irregular and poorly paid work.

These demographic and labour market dynamics are unfolding in a broader context of climate change, conflict and other economic and structural pressures, all of which influence inequalities in the region. Taken together, these dynamics are placing pressure on labour markets and educational establishments, making TVET and related programmes more important. Migration intersects with these dynamics, as both a cause and a result of demand for skills training.

As we discussed in Chapter 5, REF research conducted in Ethiopia and Uganda found that participating in TVET increased young people's plans to migrate; however, they were likely to intend to migrate internally (for the study sites in Ethiopia) or within the East African Economic Community (for Uganda). The skills developed through TVET may set people up for mobile, often more urban, employment. One participant in Adjumani, Uganda explained:

I will not confine myself to Adjumani only. As long as I am able to get work in other places, be it in other districts, I will go, as our work is mostly through recommendation from one client to another.

Conflict and displacement of people into Uganda from South Sudan overlaps with TVET participants' plans to migrate, with many South Sudanese TVET participants in Uganda hoping to return home with their skills. Young people's interest in migrating was not a significant motivating factor in their enrolment into TVET. These dynamics suggest such contexts cannot be reduced to simple 'push-pull' dynamics that TVET can 'solve'. Indeed, while most Ethiopian participants planned to move for better job opportunities, a third of participants in Uganda cited other reasons, including to return home or to join other family members, or to search for opportunities for a better life and adventure. These examples illustrate the opportunities available for those able to leverage the benefits of migration, as well as the ways that an interest in and reasons for moving overlap onto existing inequalities, movements including displacement and plans for the future.

TVET programmes may also contribute towards shifting or new inequalities, rather than reducing them. Our 2022 review, based on monitoring and learning information submitted to the EUTF from its

³⁷ Different governments, development programmes and researchers use 'young people' or 'youth' differently, but they are terms generally used to refer to people who are aged over 18 up to early 30s.

project implementers as well as key informant interviews (Gezie & Iyer, 2022) found that an unintended negative impact of TVET programmes was resentment, leading to tensions or conflict, between those who had participated and those who were excluded from the programme because they did not meet the beneficiary criteria. Further, the quality of work people are able to find post-TVET illustrates the persistence of inequalities in opportunity for young people in these countries: our two research projects on TVET found that securing decent work either at home or further afield was an ongoing challenge.

Delving into the experiences and impacts of rural–urban migration, research conducted jointly by the REF and the Rift Valley Institute in the destination cities of Gulu in Uganda, Dire Dawa in Ethiopia and Eldoret in Kenya captured the dynamic changes occurring in both rural and urban areas through urbanisation processes (Iazzolino et al, 2018). This research provides further insights into the ways inequalities and opportunities in the region are differentiated. The extent to which people can leverage the benefits of migration is dependent on their access to resources. For example, women often need access to resources (such as capital and social networks) in order for their migration to contribute to their economic independence. This means migration trajectories often map onto existing class privileges, as one study participant’s story illustrates:

She has been living in Eldoret for the past two and a half years. She initially came to study public speaking and marketing but recently she has begun trading produce from her family’s farm in her school. She initially lived with her aunt but her father was so pleasantly surprised by her entrepreneurial skills that he did not blink when she told him that she had found an accommodation for herself. (Iazzolino et al, 2018, p 31)

This is in contrast to those without access to such resources, whose migration aspirations may be thwarted, as explained by a participant from a village northeast of Dire Dawa:

Our village has been hit by recurrent drought. We used to be agro-pastoralists, combining sorghum and maize cultivation with cattle and camel. We used to sell milk in Dire Dawa city. But now, crops failed and we no longer rear cattle; only goats and camel. We are left with only goats and camel thanks to their capacity to survive even extreme drought. We see people going to Dire Dawa where they work during drought. But you cannot simply go there without relatives who support you until you start working or to get a job. As a result, we depend on relief distributed by the government. Our children are also not educated. (Iazzolino et al, 2018, p 35)

Differentiated migration trajectories may entrench existing inequalities, as above, whereby those without access to the resources required to move may become worse off in comparison to those who do. Yet they may also generate new opportunities among migrants who do move even without strong access to resources. Migrants arriving in cities from rural areas without more direct kinship networks may negotiate new networks of solidarity with others in similarly precarious, marginalised positions, often working in the informal economy: “I got to know more people, we help each other” explained one young migrant in Eldoret who arrived knowing no one, but who had forged new relationships in the city. Further, the research found that, in Eldoret, young migrants were overcoming historic ethnic tensions, illustrating the negotiations between constraining structures and agency that recent arrivals engage with in the city. This is seen through the story of another young migrant in Eldoret:

With customers from different backgrounds, staying in a mixed neighbourhood and playing football with other youths, he has developed his own network of

friends, cutting across ethnic lines. In the discussion, he stressed his identity as a resident of Eldoret and a citizen of Kenya, rather than as a Kalenjin. (Iazzolino et al, 2018, p 38)

Dereje Feyissa's research for the REF in Dire Dawa also found that political drivers for inward migration influenced Somali and Oromo efforts to enhance their political standing in the contested city. Some residents of Dire Dawa, as well as government officials, reported to our researchers that they believed that migrants from the south were actively supported by the government of the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region, and particularly by the Southern Ethiopia Development Association. This is exemplified by a local resident of Dire Dawa who indicated:

People from all over the country come to Dire Dawa. But the way migrants from the south come to Dire Dawa is a bit strange. They come in numbers and a day after their arrival you see them as street vendors or day labourers. How is this possible unless they are supported by their regional government? The Southern Ethiopia Development Association gives them seed capital. Migrants from the south also do not stay long in one place. They are mobile. Maybe they also work as intelligence for the federal government, which does not like the fact that Dire Dawa belongs to the Oromo and the Somalis. (Feyissa, 2018, p 32)

Through overlapping demographic, social and political processes, both cities and rural places are being remade. People are differently positioned in relation to these changes, with some better able to leverage opportunities, whether by moving or staying put. Some interventions, such as TVET, may help to set people up for work, including in urban areas, but decent work remains an ongoing challenge across rural and urban spaces. Migration, whether planned for or already realised, often maps onto existing inequalities, frequently meaning that those with access to resources to move are able to leverage opportunities for migration. Nevertheless, even in constrained circumstances, migrants without significant resources are navigating new cities, forging new networks of solidarity across ethnic or religious lines and contributing to the remaking of those cities in the process. To further understand these differentiated migration–demographic–socio-political dynamics, the relationships between those who move and those who stay require further consideration.

Support networks and relational dynamics

As the examples above illustrate, people do not usually move, or stay put, in isolation but rather in relation to others, whether this is family or broader networks and social groups. As people move within and beyond the region, support networks and relationships are being reconfigured across space. These relational dynamics are also already in flux, being socially constructed over time, rather than rigid or preconfigured. And these may lead women to migrate, thereby further influencing gender roles and relations. Some of these dynamics are evident in the examples above. We build on those in this section, turning to REF research that has examined gendered migration dynamics, tracing some of the relational changes unfolding in the context of women's migration beyond and within the Horn of Africa. We also draw on REF research on internal movements, showing how families and networks are connected across translocal spaces, even for those who do not migrate.

Our research exploring gender and the family dynamics of labour migration from Uganda to the Gulf countries has traced experiences from the decision to migrate to experiences abroad to return and reintegration processes (Nampewo et al, 2022). In Kampala, an important transit city for migrants and migrant recruitment companies, REF researchers spoke with aspiring migrants, returnees, immigration personnel, government and nongovernment actors, and recruitment agencies. In a

context of high unemployment, particularly for young women, migration to Gulf countries represented a route to work at a higher wage than they would find in Uganda.

In this context, gender and family relationships continue to be dynamic. While there were some persistent negative attitudes, for example migrant women being associated with sex work or abandoning family responsibilities, women's migration to the Gulf was increasingly seen as a path to supporting families at home in Uganda. For some women, migration to the Gulf represented a 'socially acceptable' option for them to leave abusive partners. Such migration represented a secondary move for some, with one participant aspiring to move to the Gulf explaining that she had already "moved to Bweyogerere [locality in Kampala] where I was working for different people for meagre payments, yet I want to get more money to study nursing". Women's family relations and obligations were thus playing out in mobile ways. This is a shift from migration research that has often portrayed women as passive, eg following men who move, or as left behind in places of origin.

However, others detailed a loss of social networks and changes in family dynamics at home in Uganda, contributing a more ambivalent picture of dynamic relationships in the context of women's migration to the Gulf. These challenges may be exacerbated by many women's limited access to communications while away, with phones and internet often controlled by employers, and it is important to recognise that migration is often precarious and risky even while it may be an opportunity. Women who remain are also affected, as it is often women who take up care roles on behalf of other women who migrate, in increasingly global care chains (Hochschild, 2001). Further, there are implications for broader family dynamics. The following excerpt from our research with a returnee aptly summarises some of these complexities:

My husband feels annoyed that I built a house and he always makes me feel bad when I complain about something but I know that he is a beneficiary of my hard work. I plan to go back and I know that he will not be happy. I want to get more money so that I pay school fees for my children. (Nampweno et al, 2022, p 35)

Many participants who were returnees said they wanted to return to the Gulf in the future. Women's plans to return, despite the challenges involved, and men's ambiguous or negative attitudes towards this as expressed above, must be understood within a context in which earning opportunities for returnee women in Uganda remain lower than for returnee men. Further, men who return may exert more control over the women in their families (and may also do so through other male relatives while they are gone) relative to women. While migration may offer opportunities to renegotiate some gender relations, these are also constrained in contexts of persistent gender expectations and patriarchal power structures.

Looking at movement within the Horn of Africa, Meron Zeleke's (2018) REF Working Paper draws attention to the ways women's migration from Ethiopia to Djibouti is reconfiguring gender and family relations. This research illustrates the importance of considering not just women's longer-distance international migrations but also intra-regional moves. Zeleke's research documents how long histories of migration from places of origin in Ethiopia have seen migration become "associated with personal, social and material success" such that it is "the norm rather than the exception" (Zeleke, 2018, p 7). Juxtaposed with migration's associations with success, the research highlighted the intersections of gender and youth in unemployment within Ethiopia, where young women were least likely to be employed. In this case study, Djibouti was seen as a stepping stone in longer migration journeys for some women, but a destination for others, illustrating the interconnectedness of migration and employment dynamics in the Horn of Africa.

Changes in demographic and socio-political trends in receiving countries are also key. For example, one informant told Zeleke that:

The speedy urbanisation of Djibouti and its population on the one hand has led to the rise in the number of female working forces. Since the end of the 1990s following the large-scale sedentarisation of the nomadic population, there was a shift in lifestyle of Djiboutians, leading the Republic of Djibouti to face shortage of labour forces. (2018, p 8)

This has led to a change in demand for paid domestic labour at the individual household level in Djibouti, rather than for this work to be filled through extended family networks as was the case historically. Further, the research illustrated changing Djiboutian women's attitudes towards domestic tasks, which were reported during a focus group discussion as being 'humiliating jobs'. A relational approach to the connections between migration and demographic and socio-political change therefore highlights the ways that dynamic host contexts, not just migrant and sending contexts, are also shaping and shaped by migration (and, in the case of Djibouti, sedentarisation).

Shifting scale again, Caitlin Sturridge's (2020) research on translocal livelihoods in Laikipia, Kenya examines the connections formed around internal mobility. This case study is examined in detail in Chapter 3, but it is worth reiterating here its finding that "the relationality and interconnectedness of many collective livelihood strategies mean that extended family and the wider community are nonetheless implicated in rural–urban livelihoods, even if they themselves do not move" (Sturridge, 2020, p 4). These case studies trace some of the ways that migration is reconfiguring social life across different scales for those who stay and those who move and, as such, demonstrate the importance of thinking of migration as a part of the fabric of the region. Attentiveness to transnational and translocal connections helps nuance analysis of the ways migration and mobility are shaping life in the region, at the same time that dynamic demographic, social and political change are reshaping migration trajectories. These examples illustrate that any analysis seeking to understand social change in the region must look beyond distinct groups (migrant, non-migrant), something we pick up in the next section.

Protracted conflict and displacement

In this final section of the chapter, we turn more explicitly to examine protracted conflict and displacement contexts, as these too are reshaping demographic and socio-political dynamics in the region, as well as being reshaped by these dynamics. While marked by periods of heightened emergency such as an initial need to flee, the often-protracted nature of displacement in the Horn generates more complex time frames for change, as many people remain displaced for years and across generations. And these protracted conflicts and displacements unfold in the context of gender roles, household structures, and kinship and other social relationships and inequalities changing. As such, our research examining not only the experiences of refugees and IDPs, but also those of hosts and the wider socio-political contexts of protracted conflict settings, is useful in understanding these longer-term and multilayered dynamics. We refer to research done jointly by the REF and Samuel Hall on displacement in and from South Sudan (Samuel Hall & REF, 2023), involving interviews with more than 1,000 South Sudanese people in South Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda about displacement, return and reintegration. To further draw out the impacts of displacement on longer-term socio-political dynamics, we also bring into the analysis REF research on return and reintegration experiences after displacement from Somalia (Sturridge et al, 2018).

The experiences of young South Sudanese refugees, many of whom were born outside the country, allows us to explore how demographic and socio-political change are entwined with protracted

displacements. Many young refugees we spoke with expressed stronger attachment to countries of exile, where they were born and raised, than to South Sudan, challenging static assumptions about home, and linear ideas of return and reintegration. This was playing out in family relationships, with different family members constructing different ideas about home over time, as one woman in Ethiopia explained:

I do have four children and all of them were born here. If I tell them about South Sudan, they consider it as a foreign country and they reply to me that this is our land and home. (Samuel Hall & REF, 2023, p 75)

As well as duration of displacement, particularly for young people spending their entire lives away from their parents' country of origin as described above, ideas of attachment and home were also informed by unequal access to opportunities in South Sudan and refugee hosting countries, relations with host communities, and trauma. For example, people who opt to stay in host communities often do so for reasons relating to their cultural proximity to the hosts and longer histories of mobilities connecting groups across borders. As such, ongoing mobility remains a key strategy for many South Sudanese people we spoke with, such as splitting up family members to spread risk and pursue different opportunities. This opens up opportunities for change; for example, some women have been able to renegotiate gendered decision-making roles and access new ideas and resources during displacement. Some family members have been able to access education or split livelihood risks across geographies. A refugee who returned to Kajo Keji while his family remained in Uganda explained:

[We] benefited from the separation of the family. I am currently supporting them in Uganda every month. I am able to send them 50,000 UGX [roughly US\$15] every month, which can cater for their diet at home and buy other things which can support them in the house. The money can also help for the education of other cousins we have at home and medication because food here in Kajo Keji we can get from the gardens. (Samuel Hall & REF, 2023, p 32)

These coping strategies are not all necessarily experienced as positive, however. One IDP in Malakal reflected on his split family: "the war divided us". Another refugee in Kampala we spoke with had lost track of his family during an attack on their village and had spent 20 years without knowing what had happened to them. An ambiguous picture thus emerges, where displacement and mobility are entwined with demographic, socio-political changes: both are dynamic and remade over time and across borders.

Existing inequalities and expectations can also be entrenched, for instance, where women already have relatively less control over their mobilities and decision making or young people are increasingly unable to fulfil social norms about transitioning to adulthood. For one young man we spoke with, moving away to access education appeared to be a "last-resort vehicle to social status in a life shattered by displacement and multiple failed returns"; for another moving away appeared a means to "avoid confronting his family's disappointment and his aborted path to adulthood" (Samuel Hall & REF, 2023, p 35). Further, not everyone has equal access to mobility as a coping strategy, even in displacement contexts, and examining other participants' experiences illustrates the ways existing inequalities can map onto current prospects. A single mother of nine children, who did not have the social network or economic resources to move to Uganda, explained:

I would have wanted to go to Uganda but to go there you need to have money to cross the border, and I never had that kind of money. I cannot go back to my village as I do not have anything under my name, and as I am scared my children would be taken from me...We have nothing...we are on our own in the middle of

Juba. Our tribe has been discriminated against, and it happens here again. Even in poverty, even in displacement we are the ones who have it the worst. (Samuel Hall & REF, p 99)

Here, several dynamics of marginalisation overlap, from access to economic and social resources to isolation, discrimination and gendered inequalities. Taken together, these different examples from our research emphasise how mobility during protracted conflict contexts both shapes, and is shaped by, other demographic and socio-political dynamics.

Given the blurred picture that emerges, in which displacement within and across borders overlaps with other mobilities, returns and immobilities, core to our approach in our research has been not to single out different categories of people (refugee, IDP, returnee, host) but instead to bring together multiple perspectives and lived experiences through place-based research. This has provided an entry-point into considering a more nuanced picture of the connections between conflict and displacement and demographic and socio-political change. In our research on return, reintegration and belonging in Somalia (Sturridge et al, 2018), we found that many host community members faced similar challenges to refugees and IDPs, such as around housing and livelihood precarity. These dynamics are brought to the fore through our focus on broader socio-political dynamics.

Moreover, the dynamic socio-political makeup of cities is a key part of return experiences. One returnee to Baidoa explained that they “feel part of the city” in a context of shared clan and linguistic connections. In contrast, some participants sought out diversity and a shift away from clan-based ties, with one returnee explaining that they “chose to stay in Mogadishu as it is a cosmopolitan town where you can hide your identity and clan linkage”. And reiterating the ongoing remaking of places and connections, one participant summed up a sentiment expressed by many IDPs we spoke with:

The role of the clan has changed. This is mainly because we are IDPs, living in hardship without homes or food. People are tired of hearing about clans, we just want to have a normal life. (Sturridge et al, 2018, p 20)

These different perspectives illustrate that migration dynamics in the context of protracted conflict are not “a marginal and reversible side-effect of conflict” but rather a core part of how conflict and post-conflict contexts unfold (Lindley, 2013, p 293). As people move (in displacement, return and myriad other forms of mobility), places and the demographic and socio-political dynamics that constitute them are remade, just as these movements are shaped by these changing dynamics in the first place, “leading to new forms of social and political interconnection, cooperation and contestation” (Lindley, 2013, p 293).

Conclusion

Migration is key to understanding demographic, social and political change in the Horn of Africa. It is not something exceptional that disrupts an otherwise sedentary, static region; instead, the relationship is messy, multi-directional and differentiated. It is through understanding migration and broader processes of demographic, social and political change as co-constituted that a more nuanced picture of the region emerges. The REF has illustrated this co-constituted relationship through three overlapping approaches to research with lessons for policy and programming. First, we have illustrated some of the ways migration and change are differentiated. That is, they generate opportunities for some, while constraining others. Our research has shown that migration often traces over lines of existing inequalities, and thus can reinforce these. Nevertheless, new expressions of solidarity and opportunities through movement occur even under constrained circumstances and are

remaking places, illustrating how migration and demographic and socio-political changes go hand in hand.

Second, we showed how these differentiated inequalities and opportunities of migration and social change are relational. People navigate moving, or staying put, in ways that are shaped by support networks and relationships. These relationships are already in flux, just as they are constantly being shaped by migration trajectories. We illustrated this in the context of dynamic gendered experiences across scales, incorporating migration trajectories between the Horn and the Gulf, within the region and within country borders.

Third, we drew out these co-constituted dynamics by more explicitly considering protracted conflict and displacement settings. Here, displacement is not a separate, temporary outcome of conflict, but rather a core part of unfolding demographic, socio-political dynamics in flux in protracted conflict settings. We drew this out through focusing on overlapping displacement and return dynamics over time in the cases of the South Sudan and Somalia conflicts, showing the persistence of existing demographic and socio-political dynamics in shaping people's experiences, while also illustrating how, through various movements, these dynamics are being remade.

We demonstrated the importance of weaving together these three framings through an in-depth case study of migration among the Hadiya of Southern Ethiopia. In this example, migration has been a transformational force, shifting the community from a place of historical marginalisation, with migration key to understanding Hadiya development along social, political and economic lines. At the same time, migration trajectories were indeed shaped by these dynamics, and the case study highlights the importance of placing contemporary change within the historical context. This is a pertinent illustration of the connection between migration and development possibilities. In the next chapter, the implications of these impacts for policy and programmes are explored in more detail.

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Chapter 8: Integrating approaches to migration and development in policy and practice

In Chapter 7 we considered the many ways that migration may influence, and be influenced by, demographic and socio-political shifts. This argument invites us to consider migration as an integral part of social, political and economic life in the Horn of Africa and thus to see it as being closely tied to wider development processes. In this chapter we consider how humanitarian and development policy can not only respond to changing migration dynamics but can also itself be an influence on migration and displacement. We argue for an inclusive approach to policy which seeks to address the implications of ongoing processes to migration and displacement within society.

Policies that support people to move more easily and safely, in a framework of legal protections and rights, can also help them avoid exploitation and being forcibly displaced in the absence of other viable options for mobility. Where taken as a positive step towards improving one's livelihood and future prospects, migration may be a positive force for development. This runs counter to the popular and policy narratives which argue that high levels of migration are a consequence of poverty, insecurity and underdevelopment. Successful policy can help those on the move access the resources they need to be able to realise positive outcomes. At the same time, policy that does not promote such an approach may block access to resources or narrow the possibilities for safe and legal movement, widening inequalities and making people more vulnerable during their movement.

Much of the empirical material for this chapter comes from work done by the REF examining the regional efforts led by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and supported by the EUTF and other donors to assist refugees and displacement-affected communities. Research was conducted in four countries: Djibouti, Kenya, Somalia and Uganda. All but Somalia were designated as pilot countries for the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF), the operational strategy that was developed out of the 2016 New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants. Although it was not a major refugee-hosting country, Somalia took a similar approach to the CRRF-designated countries with respect to policy revision and implementation related to internally displaced persons and others affected by displacement. The research involved 130 interviews with government, NGOs, regional and international organisations, private sector actors, refugees and hosts (see Manji, 2020).

Follow-up interviews were conducted in 2023 for a research project commissioned by the World Bank as a background paper for the *World Development Report*.

We also draw on data from two other REF research projects. One was conducted in Uganda by David Tshimba of the Refugee Law Project with refugees who moved between settlements and cities (Tshimba, 2022). The research was carried out in Kampala, Mbarara and Arua cities, and involved focus group and individual interviews with 62 self-settled asylum seekers and refugees; 18 state or government humanitarian actors, who included representatives from the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) at the Department of Refugees, city councils and urban authorities in the education and health sectors, and the police; 12 non-state or nongovernmental humanitarian actors, including representatives from international and national NGOs as well as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR); and nine Ugandan hosts, who included chairpersons of the local council or ward in the selected cities, as well as Ugandan landlords. The second project, by Farah Manji, focused on the circular movement of refugees between Somalia and Kenya (Manji, 2020). It involved 18 interviews with returnees, community leaders, government, civil society groups and the international community in Nairobi, Garissa and Dadaab, Kenya.

We argue here for migration policy to be joined up to development policies, including labour policy, climate adaptation policies and national development plans. Many development policies, laws and regulations governing internal and international movement, and strategies for pursuing durable solutions, tend to be siloed, focusing on the migrant, internally displaced person (IDP) or refugee rather than on the communities affected by the movement. Migration policies also often sit alongside, but are not integrated with, development policies and plans. Because they often single out or target migrants, and because development plans tend not to include migrants, these policies may often – sometimes unwittingly, sometimes deliberately – create or widen inequalities between different categories of people. These inequalities may in turn lead to jealousies, tensions or competition for resources and they may also leave areas of vulnerability within a society unaddressed.

We begin our analysis by providing an overview of refugee law and refugee hosting policy in the region. We discuss how these approaches have shifted, particularly since the signing of the 2016 New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, which has led to a focus on displacement-affected communities and more inclusive policies, benefiting not only refugees but other migrants, host communities and others affected by migration. This work has been the result of a process of diplomacy, technical support and advocacy led by IGAD and involving its member states and international and national partners, which has brought significant improvements. At the December 2019 Global Refugee Forum (GRF), IGAD's work in achieving visible results from the GCR was recognised as an example of best practice globally.

National and regional legal and policy instruments supporting refugees

All countries in the Horn of Africa have signed and ratified the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, the key treaty setting out the rights of refugees and responsibilities of sending and host countries. The 1951 Convention sets out the legal definition of a refugee as being a person who:

owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the

country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.³⁸

Although initially developed in the aftermath of World War II and intended to apply only to those who had been displaced in Europe as a result of the events of the war, the 'Convention Definition' was subsequently expanded, most distinctly in the form of the 1967 UN Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, which established the universal applicability of the Convention, removing the geographical and historical limitations. This meant that people fleeing state persecution not related to World War II anywhere in the world could be recognised as refugees and were entitled to protection and assistance.

All Horn of Africa states are also party to the 1969 Organization of African Unity (OAU – now known as the African Union) Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa, a regional treaty which expands the definition of refugee to:

apply to every person who, owing to external aggression, occupation, foreign domination or events seriously disturbing public order in either part or the whole of his country of origin or nationality, is compelled to leave his place of habitual residence in order to seek refuge in another place outside his country of origin or nationality. (OAU, Article 2)

This reference to disruptions to public order has been used to apply to people fleeing conflict as well as famine within Africa and represents a significantly broader basis for refugee recognition. In addition, while the 1951/1967 'Convention Definition' of a refugee refers to an *individual's* right to protection, the OAU Convention's expanded definition recognises broad categories of people, making it possible for groups of people fleeing from one African country to another in order to escape persecution, war or famine, for example, to be recognised and protected as refugees without every individual needing to prove their claim, providing that they have not committed a serious crime.

National hosting policies and practices

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to consider in detail the long and significant history of refugee hosting in the Horn of Africa. However, particularly as a result of protracted refugee flows associated with conflicts in South Sudan, Somalia, Ethiopia and Eritrea, but also because of famines and political instability, all the countries of the region have significant experience of hosting refugees in their territory, of generating large numbers of refugees, or both.

Despite the common legal foundation governing refugee recognition and protection in the region, there has been considerable variation in the ways that countries have taken on the role of refugee hosting nation. Uganda, no stranger to displacement as a result of its own insurgency involving the Lord's Resistance Army and other rebel groups fighting against the Ugandan Armed Forces since the 1990s, has maintained a relatively open approach to hosting refugees. Ever since its first policy formulation of refugee self-reliance in 1999, Uganda's refugee response has privileged a protection-through-settlement model, in which refugees who reside in designated rural settlements receive humanitarian support from a host of state and non-state agencies. Assistance includes food rations (or cash-for-food) and non-food items as well as access to primary healthcare and formal education services. Refugees are also granted a parcel of land (typically less than 0.05 hectares) on leasehold to boost their capacity for self-reliance through agricultural and other income-generating activities.

³⁸ <https://www.unhcr.org/media/convention-and-protocol-relating-status-refugees>.

This approach to the economic inclusion of displaced persons has proven to be beneficial in terms of supporting positive livelihood outcomes and contributions to the local economy, according to research by Betts et al (2019). However, refugee decisions about remaining in settlements or moving into urban centres is often influenced by the availability of assistance and services. The REF's research on self-settling urban refugees in Uganda (Tshimba, 2022) showed the limits of economic self-reliance as a framework within which refugee hosting is approached. Under Uganda's Refugees Act of 2006, and reinforced by the 2010 Refugee Regulations, an asylum seeker or recognised refugee can choose whether to stay in a place "other than the designated places or areas [refugee settlement]" by applying "to the Commissioner for permission to reside in any other part of Uganda" (Section 44(2) of the Act). Critically, this right is further qualified under Article 44, stating that refugees must live in designated places or 'settlements' and may only leave with official permission.

Uganda's settlement-based approach to refugee protection has been strained in recent years as a result of decreasing funding from donors and the protracted displacement of refugees, as well as new arrivals from the Democratic Republic of Congo and South Sudan. In an interview with the REF team, the Minister of Relief, Disaster Preparedness and Refugees noted that Uganda has gone from managing 500,000 refugees with a budget of US\$300 million per year in 2013, to 1.5 million refugees with a budget of \$120 million per year. He went on to state:

Let's also be mindful of the fact that land is a finite good, while Uganda's own demographics are bulging. What this may imply is that business-as-usual, hosting refugees in those settlement arrangements may not be sustainable. Perhaps, it is high time to start thinking of putting up high-rises for these refugees, that is, going vertical instead of keeping horizontal in terms of accommodation for the refugees. This would mean transforming those refugee settlements into nuclei of urbanity, which could grow to become important urban centres of the country. The UNHCR should accompany the government in investing more and more in urban asylum, in arrangements that would exert much less pressure on land. (Tshimba, 2022, p 32)

The REF's research highlighted the gap in scholarly and policy literature on modes of refugee recognition and protection for self-settled/settling refugees in Uganda today. Refugees seeking asylum in urban spaces are *ipso facto* denied access to various kinds of humanitarian assistance available to those in rural settlements. Some refugees self-settle in the country's cities, municipalities and towns upon arrival from their countries of origin, while others first register in rural refugee settlement areas before moving to these urban areas (Tshimba, 2022; Hovil, 2007). When asylum seekers are granted refugee status in Kampala, they lose access to all humanitarian assistance and support.

Kenya has hosted Somali and South Sudanese refugees in large numbers since the early 1990s. While the first refugees to flee state collapse in Somalia and conflict in South Sudan came in smaller numbers and were able to integrate into host communities, since 1991 the government has sought to host refugees in the large camp complexes of Dadaab (mostly for Somali refugees) in Garissa county and Kakuma (for a mix of South Sudanese and Somali refugees) in Turkana county (see Hammond, 2014). In 2015, the Kalobeyei Integrated Settlement was established in Turkana West sub-county to promote an integrated and local economic development approach. Kenya operates a 'closed camp' policy; as of 2020 84% of the country's refugees were located in camps, and the remaining 16% resided in cities, mostly in Nairobi.

Djibouti hosted 31,505 registered refugees and asylum seekers at the end of 2023,³⁹ although the Djiboutian authorities estimate that the true number of people being hosted may be as much as five times greater. The refugee population is settled in three camps at Ali Adeh, Holl Holl and Markazi, but increasingly refugees are also settling in Djibouti City and Ali Sabieh, the two main cities in the country. The refugee population is young: 49% are under the age of 18. Until recently the Djiboutian government considered most refugees to be in transit to other destinations, mostly to Yemen and Saudi Arabia, and therefore there were not many services extended to them. However, this position has shifted in recent years as refugees' time spent in Djibouti has extended, and there is now greater engagement, particularly in the area of refugee education.

Somalia's displacement context is characterised more by internal displacement – with 3.9 million IDPs at the end of 2023,⁴⁰ and refugee/IDP returnees (804,559, most of whom were IDPs) – than by refugee hosting, but it has oriented much of its policy concerning these groups around the principles of community-based protection and assistance. Its National Policy on Refugee-Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons (2019) adopts a very similar approach to those countries taking part in the CRRF, as described below.

Ethiopia issued its first statutory asylum and refugee law in 2004 (Proclamation No 409/2004). This proclamation focused on strict encampment and restricted refugees' rights to movement and work on the assumption that they would be returning to their countries of origin within a short period of time and could be supported in camps until their return. Refugees were hosted in large refugee camps close to the Somalia–Somaliland border for Somali refugees, in Gambella and Benishangul to the west for South Sudanese and in the northern region of Tigray for Eritreans. These camps were for the most part quite remote from Ethiopia's major cities and towns.

In a move that loosened some of the terms of this restrictive proclamation, in 2010 Ethiopia provided an out-of-camp policy (OCP) option for Eritrean refugees only. This policy stipulated that those who could afford to forfeit their claim to humanitarian support and who were able to present an Ethiopian citizen as a guarantor could live outside the camp and work and move freely. The number of Eritrean refugees seeking to take advantage of this policy increased following the 2020–22 war between the federal government and Tigray regional forces, when all the Eritrean refugee camps in Tigray were dismantled or destroyed. Eritrea's involvement in the war in support of the Ethiopian federal army turned many Tigrayans against the refugees. While around 20,000 Eritrean refugees were relocated to a new camp in Amhara Region, the majority sought to settle themselves in Addis Ababa under the OCP (Harter 2024).

From New York to Nairobi: the development of inclusive policy approaches to displacement

The 2016 New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants set out a holistic agenda for addressing the needs of refugees and communities affected by displacement through international responsibility sharing and cooperation. It mandated a Global Compact for Refugees (GCR) and its operational blueprint, the CRRF, whose primary objectives are to ease the pressures on host countries, enhance self-reliance for refugees, expand access to third-country solutions and support conditions in countries of origin for safe and dignified return.

³⁹ UNHCR data [available at <https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics>]. Accessed: 18 December 2024.

⁴⁰ Internal Displacement and Monitoring Centre (IDMC). <https://www.internal-displacement.org/countries/somalia>.

To operationalise the principles, several countries around the world were chosen as pilots for the CRRF, including, within the Horn, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda. Taking its cue from these global commitments and seeking to broaden the CRRF approach beyond the officially designated pilot countries, IGAD embarked on a process of multi-track diplomacy to build political commitment and technical capacity for more inclusive and coordinated action for refugee hosting and durable solutions across the region.

In March 2017, it convened its member states to agree a Comprehensive Approach to Durable Solutions on the Somali Refugee Situation. The resulting agreement, also known as the Nairobi Declaration, set out central principles for support of refugee populations which included adopting a ‘whole of society’ approach to refugee protection and assistance to enable civil society, diaspora and private-sector actors to be involved in supporting refugees (see also Bakewell & Wanga, 2023). It also called both for support to facilitate return of refugees to their areas of origin, as well as greater assistance to enable refugees who were not returning to achieve self-sufficiency, and for the creation of more options for third country resettlement. In this sense, calling as it did for development of each of the so-called durable solutions, the Nairobi Declaration was unique, for it recognised the futility of advocating a single solution for all Somali refugees. This simple idea that “solutions for Somali refugees will be differentiated to reflect their diverse needs” had come out of a previous high-level panel meeting convened by the then UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Antonio Guterres, in November 2013 (UNHCR, 2013): several of the high-level panel members were involved in the later IGAD process, including Ambassador Mohamed Affey, who later served as UNHCR Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa.

This Nairobi Declaration was subsequently adopted as a general approach to guide regional discussions concerning all refugees in the region, regardless of their country of origin (often referred to now as the Nairobi Process). Since the start of the Nairobi Process, two technical meetings and ministerial summits have brought member states together on the themes of education and jobs and livelihoods.

Each of these meetings brought together technical teams to develop and learn from best practice across the region, as well as high-level ministerial representation to make firm commitments. The meetings used a form of what might be crudely referred to as international peer pressure to encourage member states to take greater responsibility for supporting the displaced populations that they were hosting. They encouraged a focus on community-based support whereby refugees, IDPs, returnees and local communities living among these specific groups would be supported together.

The Djibouti Declaration on Refugee Education, which came out of the Djibouti conference in December 2017, included commitments to provide educational opportunities for refugees, returnees and host communities and to integrate refugees into national education policies and programmes.

The Djibouti Declaration was followed up at national level by the preparation of Action Plans for implementation. In Djibouti, perhaps the most notable impact of the Declaration was the commitment to provide education to all refugee children as part of its National Education Plan. In Kenya, a National Refugee Education Inclusion Plan was developed to include refugees and asylum seekers in the national education system.

The Kampala Declaration on Refugee Jobs and Livelihoods, which was agreed at the ministerial meeting held in Uganda in March 2019, committed member states to working to “advance livelihood

opportunities and economic inclusion to improve self-reliance of refugees, returnees and host communities”.

Key components included commitments on:

- Strengthen[ing] free movement of refugees within countries of asylum and simplify[ing] related procedures;
- expand[ing] access to labour markets by simplifying procedures for accessing employment including work permits, self-employment and business opportunities;
- improving access to basic services including justice institutions;
- ensuring the inclusion of the needs of refugees and returnees in national and local development plans;
- ensuring national and local development plans aimed at achieving social cohesion and equitable access to social and economic resources, as well as opportunities in refugee hosting areas are supported by the international community;
- promoting the equality of opportunity and treatment of all refugees in accordance to national policies and laws. (IGAD, March 2017).

In assessing evidence of the uptake of these commitments at the national level, the REF team found that the commitment to create jobs and support livelihoods in some countries was limited by a reluctance to extend the right to work and to move freely in all host countries. In areas where the informal labour market is a more significant potential source of employment than the formal sector, there was a need for technical training, financial inclusion and infrastructure development for all members of society, not only for those who were migrants or displaced. Uganda had already introduced the Refugee and Host Population Empowerment (ReHoPE) Strategy of 2017, in the wake of the New York Declaration. Following the Kampala Declaration, it developed the Jobs and Livelihoods Integrated Response Plan for Refugees and Host Communities in Uganda, 2021–25.

Kenya’s Refugee Act, which had been stalled within the legislative process for years, was finalised in 2021. The act provided for the inclusion of refugees in sustainable development and environmental plans (Article 35). It gave hosting counties a greater role in the management of refugee affairs, thereby enabling an approach to refugee support that focused on displacement-affected communities rather than on isolation of refugees as a particular target group. It also specifically provided that refugees “have the right to engage individually or in a group, in gainful employment or enterprise or to practice a profession or trade where he holds qualifications recognized by competent authorities in Kenya” (Article 28(5)). These provisions help to create a space for the further articulation of inclusive policies and plans for national and local development that incorporate the needs and priorities of refugees in the context of the wider displacement-affected community.

The commitment to recognise the right of refugees to work is central to the ambition of enabling self-sufficiency among refugee communities. As research by REF and Botho Emerging Markets shows, the economic activity that takes place in refugee camps is generally insufficient to provide opportunities for economic self-sufficiency for all refugees. Camps are often physically remote from commodity and labour markets. The local market and service sectors are not strong enough, as there is insufficient cash circulating within the local economy, to support everyone. Therefore, being able to leave the camp to seek employment opportunities is a key requirement, as is being able to obtain the necessary documentation to secure employment. The REF/Botho study showed, however, that, despite there being a legal possibility of obtaining work and travel authorisations for refugees, the practical obstacles to securing these documents were so prohibitive that very few refugees were able to avail themselves of the opportunity (Asati et al, 2021).

Having been one of the hosts of the New York Summit in 2016, Ethiopia was designated a CRRF pilot country.⁴¹ As part of its approach to implementing the CRRF, it introduced legislation to expand the rights of many refugees. In 2019 the Refugee Proclamation No 1110/2019 was enacted, attracting acclaim as being one of Africa's most progressive refugee laws (UNHCR, 2019).⁴² In principle, the proclamation allowed refugees to obtain work permits and be employed in the areas of agriculture, industry, micro-enterprises and handicrafts, which were supposed to support refugees' self-reliance. However, the directives issued by the Refugees and Returnees Service (Directives No 02/2019) following the Proclamation limited the issuance of work permits and employment to those involved in 'joint projects' (externally funded projects benefiting both the refugees and the host communities) and to areas permitted for foreigners. Similarly, according to Directives No 01/2019, refugees are required to fulfil at least one of three conditions to benefit from the OCP: 1) prove that he/she can cover the costs of living outside camp; 2) produce a sponsor who can cover his/her cost of living on a regular basis outside camp; and/or 3) receive a work permit that allows him/her to work legally in accordance with applicable laws. Practically speaking, these conditions provide effective barriers to refugee employment and self-sufficiency. The most important provisions listed in the proclamation and supposed to support refugees' self-reliance were thus restricted, if not reversed, by the directives.

In Ethiopia, the 2019 Refugee Proclamation was developed in large part as an effort to create employment opportunities for both refugees and host communities. An Ethiopian Jobs Compact, with funding from the World Bank, was intended to create up to 100,000 jobs for locals on the condition that some jobs (as many as one-third of the total) were also reserved for refugees. The Jobs Compact was not implemented as hoped as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, of Ethiopia's internal security problems and of a rapid increase in internal displacement within the country. However, in the first year after the Proclamation was passed, over 2,000 temporary work permits were granted to refugees and the number of free movement passes was expanded from 19,633 in 2018 to 35,340 in 2019.⁴³ Efforts to build political support for the implementation of the CRRF has been supported by several donors, including the World Bank, through the promotion of the Ethiopia Jobs Compact, which finances Ethiopia's development priorities in exchange for progress on refugee support and inclusion.⁴⁴

IGAD's harmonisation work on refugee policy was temporarily halted during 2020–21 as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. However, the shared health threats that all countries faced also helped to bring about greater harmonisation of health policy during that period. In March 2022, ministers of health from the IGAD member states met in Mombasa, Kenya for the 13th IGAD Health Ministerial Committee Meeting on Refugee and Cross Border Health Initiatives. Member states agreed a declaration committing, among other things, to promotion of health and nutrition among refugees, returnees and "cross border populations". The declaration pledged to promote refugee, returnee and cross-border populations' and host communities' access to quality healthcare services; to commit to improving women's health and including them in decisions relating to their health; to improving the provision of healthcare to the target populations and to integrate refugee health programmes with

⁴¹ Ethiopia was not included in the 2020 REF study on the impact of CRRF implementation in view of other research initiatives focusing on the country, most notably by ODI's Humanitarian Policy Group (see Crawford & O'Callaghan, 2019).

⁴² Federal Government of Ethiopia, Proclamation 1110/2019. Addis Ababa: Negarit Gazeta [available at <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/68964>]. Accessed: 18 December 2024.

⁴³ Refugees International (2021). *From Displacement to Development: How Ethiopia can Create Shared Growth by Facilitating Economic Inclusion for Refugees*. 15 June. Washington DC: Refugees International.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

the national health system “including joint planning, implementation and reviews” (see Hammond & Mukuki, 2022).⁴⁵

REF research found that, while there were significant commitments made at regional and national level as a result of the Nairobi, Djibouti, Kampala and Mombasa (see below) agreements, there was a challenge in translating these commitments into action at the local level. Some local government officials and NGO staff interviewed felt that this was a failing on the part of IGAD. However, this view is a fundamental misreading of IGAD’s role as an international organisation rather than as an implementing body. To be sure, the challenges of implementing the commitments required concerted efforts from all stakeholders to develop not only strong ownership at the national level but also adequate funding, training and coordination of policies to ensure that they were made meaningful at the local level.

The opportunities created by the IGAD-led process for incorporation of refugee and IDP concerns within national development and sectoral development planning is a direct extension of the basic principle of the New York Declaration, and before that the Sustainable Development Goals, to leave no one behind, to measure development by its application to all people, and to ensure that policies are inclusive of those most vulnerable within society, including refugees. This is a clear example of how policy has shifted over time, acknowledging the significance of refugees and IDPs as people who have not only short-term humanitarian needs but longer-term development needs as well. As one donor interviewed by the REF team said about the CRRF: “What the CRRF has done is to change the debate”, while an NGO staff member based in Nairobi described it “as an approach rather than a programme, that signifies a new way of working”. Another donor representative in Nairobi said: “the CRRF is the realisation that no one can go it alone”. This observation was echoed in work for the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) by Crawford and O’Callaghan, who found that one of the most significant contributions of the CRRF was to shift thinking and consensus away from seeing refugee assistance as simply a humanitarian concern towards one of inclusion in national systems (Crawford & O’Callaghan, 2019, p 4). In an international conference organised by the REF in 2022 on the theme of ‘Greater inclusion and Protection for Migrants and Forcibly Displaced Persons’ several contributions were focused on analyses of GCR and CRRF implementation. There was a strong call for meaningful participation of refugees in national refugee responses as well as a focus on the emerging role of refugee-led organisations within the region (REF, 2022).

The shifts seen in the region also reflect the recognition that most displacement there is protracted and that refugees, IDPs, returnees and local non-migrant communities in the region live together, depend on the same resources and are affected by the same social, economic, climatic and political shocks. This is an important step towards taking a more developmental policy approach to people on the move.

Policy as an influence on migration and durable solutions

Not only can policy and assistance be responsive to the dynamics of migration and displacement in the region, they can also influence or drive migratory and displacement flows. There are numerous examples within the Horn of mobility in protracted conflict contexts being influenced by the availability or lack of aid and assistance, as well as by the legal and policy environment in countries of origin and asylum.

⁴⁵ IGAD. *Declaration of the 13th IGAD Health Ministerial Committee Meeting on Refugee and Cross Border Health Initiative*. 25 March 2022.

State policies and laws concerning legal recognition and management of asylum seekers can influence whether people cross international borders to become refugees or remain internally displaced. Where would-be host countries close their borders (as Kenya has done with its border with Somalia several times since refugees started attempting to enter the country in the early 1990s), there is a clear detriment to those seeking to enter to claim protection and assistance as refugees. As discussed above, encampment policies influence whether refugees choose to remain in camps or settlements under the jurisdiction of a country's refugee hosting policy or decide to self-settle without seeking protection and assistance as registered refugees. This was evident in the REF's research among self-settling refugees in Uganda (REF, 2022).

As noted above, refugees in Uganda have the option, enshrined in the 2006 Refugee Act (Section 30(1)), to remain in settlements or to relocate to other areas. In practice, there have been many instances of cross-over mobilities by *prima facie* refugees (those belonging to a group that is automatically recognised as such) from designated settlements to urban areas, on the one hand, and by refugees who were initially self-settled in cities and have been granted refugee status individually moving to the rural-based designated refugee settlements, on the other (Mulumba, 2010). Whereas previous studies into these cross-over mobilities from refugee settlements to urban areas have focused on 'economic/livelihoods reasons' as the chief motivation, the REF's research revealed a plurality of other reasons why some refugees choose to self-settle.

Self-settled refugees who break away from established rural settlements in the peripheral regions of Uganda to reside in peri-urban or urban areas reported that they did so because of their previous lifestyles and experiences of living in urban areas; of a desire to hasten local integration as a possible durable solution; the possibility of being included in a fast-tracked international resettlement process if they were living in cities; and to seek support for special protection-related concerns. In some cases, refugees reported that they would rather not register as refugees, in order to maintain a level of invisibility that would help protect them from law enforcement and enable them to better navigate the informal sector. Our research demonstrated the fallacy of many assumptions that underpin the legal and policy frameworks of refugee hosting in Uganda. Economic survival and economic self-sufficiency dominate the narrative of refugee self-settlement in cities and other urban areas and overlook various other unrelated and individual motivations. The remote locations in which most settlements are situated contribute to the physical, social and economic separation of refugees from the rest of the country, while allowing humanitarian and government agencies to exercise control and have access to the settlements' inhabitants.

Many refugees in Uganda who, for a variety of reasons and motivations, break away from containment policies of refugee protection through self-settling in cities or urban areas face insurmountable challenges. Even though the Refugees Act of 2006 grants all refugees the right to access employment opportunities and engage in gainful employment, there has been little clarity on whether refugees require work permits. The Ministry of Internal Affairs argued for (free) work permits for refugees, while the Department of Refugees under the OPM asserted that work permits for recognised refugees were unnecessary. In a key informant interview with the REF research team, we were told that refugees did indeed need to apply for a work permit, although they would not be charged a fee. The ambiguity around the legal necessity of obtaining work permits no doubt has a bearing on employers' decisions about whether to employ professional and highly skilled refugees in the formal sector. Refugees in urban areas thus find themselves in a confusing and weaker position when negotiating employment, and potential employers may end up withdrawing offers of employment to refugees as a result of these ambiguities. Many self-settled/settling refugees with professional qualifications or specialised skills end up in informal jobs or informal self-employment.

Hosting policies may, over time, influence the ways that displaced people think about and weigh options for durable solutions. Durable solutions policy concerning forced displacement encompasses three possibilities: voluntary return to the place of origin; local settlement in the area of displacement; or onward movement or resettlement to a third location. Deciding which of these so-called solutions to pursue depends on the opportunities that the displaced person perceives as being available if they choose one course of action over another. Policy may also influence those decisions. In countries where there is no possibility of refugees obtaining citizenship, for instance, or where refugees are expected to remain in camps with limited educational and livelihood prospects, local integration may not be a very attractive option. Yet refugees will continue to live under such conditions if they feel that the risks of returning to their homes are greater, or the resources likely to be available are fewer, than if they were to remain in the camps or self-settled elsewhere.

Our research on circular returns between Somalia and Kenya, for example, showed that aid may serve as an additional pull factor for returns. In our research on the Voluntary Repatriation Programme's (VRP) return package to Somalia offered by UNHCR (Manji, 2020), a refugee community leader told us that refugees who participated in the VRP thought they would benefit from the money offered by UNHCR and would be able to start a small business in Somalia. However, their decisions were also influenced by the concurrent reduction in funding for assistance to the Dadaab camp, which had led to reduced rations and other support. The drop in assistance was reportedly a disincentive for staying in the camp; this also made the return package more attractive and incentivised return. By choosing to take the return package and repatriate, returnees were motivated more by the short-term prospects of the benefits being distributed by the VRP than by the longer-term likelihood of prosperity or security in Somalia, which was still quite uncertain.

Other assessments of return programmes such as the VRP have found that they may have distorting effects on communities in which returnees benefiting from the reintegration packages have settled alongside non-migrant and internally displaced community members who have not been eligible for such support. This has had detrimental effects on other displacement-affected communities and has aggravated tensions within communities. Research conducted by the REF in Somalia found that some key informants considered the returns package to be undermining social cohesion and contributing to tensions between returnees, IDPs and host communities (Sturridge et al, 2018). Other research conducted in Somalia revealed that some IDP camp managers were evicting IDPs to make room for returnees carrying resettlement cash (ReDSS, 2019). To address this, and to recognise that displacement and return affect whole communities rather than solely individuals who are on the move, assistance began to be targeted at displacement-affected communities, with some success at alleviating tensions.

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Conclusion

A major argument of this book is that mobility in all its various forms – including displacement, labour migration, rural to urban movements, migration for education and inter-state movements – is a central feature of the socioeconomic life of people in the Horn of Africa. Nearly every person living in the region experiences some form of movement during their lifetime, across short or long distances, most of which is undertaken for a variety of reasons. They want to reach a safe place that has the resources to support them, but they also want to be able to take advantage of opportunities in other places, to use their education and skills (or to obtain those things). Where people can afford to do so, they will usually choose to travel through ‘regular’ channels, which are safer and often cheaper than the ‘irregular’ channels operated by smugglers and traffickers.

As we have discussed in the previous chapter, as well as in Chapter 6 when we examined migration management, the policy implication of recognising the centrality of migration to life in the Horn is that we must also recognise that it is the context through which development happens. It is the way that people pursue development on their own, often without the help of, and sometimes in spite of, policy or help from governments or aid agencies, which is often premised on the judgement that all movement is problematic and needs to be limited or controlled through the instrumentalised use of resources.

However, in our recognition of the importance of movement as a facet of development and of social life in general, we are not naïve. We acknowledge that, when people are forced from their homes as a result of war and violence, or are unable to remain on their farms because of the effects of drought and resource scarcity, their displacement may be deeply problematic. Displacement is often traumatising and may involve negative effects, including rendering people even more food insecure, removing them from the sources of support in their social networks and disrupting their access to health and education services. Communities who live among internally displaced persons and refugees also suffer, as they often must share or compete for scarce resources with the displaced population. The shift towards action directed at displacement-affected communities is a welcome innovation in humanitarian and development policy that should be expanded upon.

As we argued in the early chapters, however, migration is best understood not as an assemblage of different types of people on the move with different categorical labels. Causes of movement cannot be reduced to a single driver; people on the move often inhabit multiple categories simultaneously. Rather, as we have shown here, most movements are undertaken for multiple reasons; most sit somewhere on a continuum between regular and irregular, forced and voluntary, safe and unsafe. Some moves start out being voluntary or regular and, as we have discussed in Chapter 4, become forced and unsafe when people fall into the hands of unscrupulous traffickers or smugglers, or when they run out of money while en route to their final destination. Mixed migration arguably describes the dynamics of mobility in the Horn of Africa better than the more specific terms ‘refugee’, ‘IDP’ or ‘economic migrant’. As the effects of climate change evolve within the region, and as political instability continues to result in shifting conflict dynamics, the mixed-ness of migration flows can be expected to continue to be a defining feature.

Creating conditions for people to thrive in peace and safety, so that they are able to make positive decisions about whether to move, where to go, how to get there, how to support themselves once they have arrived at their destination, and when to return is not only a challenge for (im)migration policy, it is a challenge for development policy and foreign policy. It involves broadening perspectives

on who are the subjects of development, as was argued in the last chapter, as well as recognising the links between conflict resolution, mediation and peace building in creating lasting security that will enable those who have been displaced and have a realistic possibility of thriving if they return to their homes to do so.

In this book we have used a broad human security lens to consider the ways that people make decisions about their lives which may or may not involve movement. A central feature of this approach has been to consider the ways that different constellations of factors relating to climate, conflict and shifting demographics and social roles influence people's lives. Our interest has not been in showing a direct correlation between these factors and migration numbers. We feel that a focus on migrant numbers is not all that helpful, since such numbers may mask other important considerations, like whether people's livelihoods are stressed to the point that they can no longer support themselves, whether their adaptive capacities have reached their limit or whether the level of security and peace in their home areas has become so compromised that they have no choice but to leave. They may also mask important questions about how the networks that facilitate and prey on migrants operate, how changes in border management policies influence the choices people have and their ability to find support for themselves close to home.

Legacy of the REF

Our eight years of research with the Research and Evidence Facility has generated a significant body of primary research on migration and displacement in the Horn of Africa. We have worked with over 120 researchers, most of whom are from or are based in the region. Already several of these researchers have gone on to play key roles in major research initiatives throughout the region. For instance, between 2020 and 2024, researchers Professor Laura Hammond, Dr Oliver Bakewell, Professor Dereje Feyissa and Dr Fana Gebresenbet all served as key members of the Migration for Development and Equality (MIDEQ) research hub, a major £20 million research initiative funded by the UK Research and Innovation's Global Challenges Research Fund. Core team members Dr Padmini Iyer and Dr Caitlin Sturridge have moved on to work with a major global NGO and think-tank, respectively. Dr Abebaw Minaye of Addis Ababa University has been named inaugural International Development Research Centre Chair in Forced Migration Studies. Ugandan research lead Dr Kalyango Ronald Sebba and Kenyan researcher Dr Michael Owiso have gone on to work with the Local Engagement Refugee Research Network, a seven-year project funded by the Social Sciences Research Council of Canada. Dr Fekadu Adugna has been a core research team member for several internationally funded research programmes and recently worked with Sturridge on a study of IDPs in Tigray, Ethiopia (Sturridge & Adugna, 2024). While we do not take full credit for the achievements of our network members, the fact that they have gone on to conduct research on themes related to the work they did with the REF, with prestigious funding and often in collaboration with others whom they met while working with the REF, gives us reason to feel that our work has contributed to an important legacy of research excellence within the region that continues to provide important insights about migration and displacement within and from the region.

Our work has been premised on the idea of 'front-loaded advocacy', which we discussed in the first chapter. By engaging our funding partners in the design of our research, ensuring that we sought answers to questions that the EU and other partners had identified as being important to their work, we were able to target our research towards generating impact. EU Delegations were ready and eager to hear about the findings of our research when it was completed because we had followed a process of co-production throughout. In some cases we were able to influence how funds were spent (such as in the design of the €63 million borderlands development programme). In others we gave important contextual information relating to refugee return (as in the case of our studies on circular migration

(Manji, 2020), return to Somalia (Sturridge et al, 2018) and return and pendular movements in South Sudan (REF & Samuel Hall 2023)). We combined the research with a webinar series, a regular blog series,⁴⁶ as well as validation workshops in the countries where research had been done and briefings of European Commission staff, EUTF contributing state representations, and the broader aid communities in Brussels and London. In May 2025, we were requested to convene a series of roundtables for the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, including a dedicated briefing for the State Development Minister, on migration priorities for the new UK government.⁴⁷

Commissioning a unit to provide contextual research and evidence on the context and wider dynamics in which EUTF programmes were operating was in many ways an experiment for the European Commission, and one that has proven to be successful. The Horn of Africa REF was used as a template for the development of a similar research and evidence facility to be established within the European Union's Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI). This unit, led by the University of Sapienza in Rome will have a remit to gather and analyse evidence on forced displacement across Sub-Saharan Africa.⁴⁸

What has changed over the eight years of REF research?

The EUTF has involved the commission of some €5 billion in funds to the regions of origin of African migrants heading towards the European Union. €1.8 billion of this funding was directed to the Horn of Africa. During the years of the EUTF, the numbers of people seeking to enter the EU irregularly has dropped significantly from the one million seen in 2015 to 239,000 in 2024 (Al Jazeera, January 2025). The extent to which this drop is the result of increased opportunities and better migration management systems enabled through EUTF funding will probably never be understood. Increased border control along the Mediterranean, as well as within individual member states, and accelerating concerns about immigration, which have risen up the political agendas of most member states, have certainly played a role as well.

Yet, as we have suggested here, the effectiveness of the EUTF, and the REF's role in that work, should not just be measured by whether migrant numbers have gone up or down. There is a need to consider whether people have more livelihood options, whether refugee policies are more inclusive, whether development policies create opportunities for safe and regular movement (to echo the Global Compact on Safe and Orderly Migration as well as Sustainable Development Goal 10). Here we can see that there have been important positive developments facilitated by EUTF investments, and made visible through REF research. The inclusion of refugees, IDPs and returnees in Uganda's and Somalia's national development plans, the expansion of mobility for refugees in Ethiopia and Kenya, and the right of refugees' children to receive education in Djibouti are all positive developments. The expansion of training and job opportunities through EUTF-sponsored activities has clearly given many people options for local employment that they would not otherwise have had.

At the same time, the region has been beset with new challenges. The conflicts in northern Ethiopia, in which it is estimated that more than 150,000 people have lost their lives, and in Sudan, where it is estimated that more than 12 million people have been displaced and over 25 million people face food insecurity, have unleashed new regional crises that will take years to recover from. We were not able to do much research on these crises because of lack of access to Ethiopia and the fact that the Sudan crisis broke out just as our project was ending.

⁴⁶ All blogs can be found at our website: <https://blogs.soas.ac.uk/ref-hornresearch/category/blogs/>.

⁴⁷ Although the UK formally exited the EU in 2020, it was a major funder of early EUTF activities, including via direct funding through the EUTF for the Research and Evidence Facility.

⁴⁸ As a UK-based research consortium, REF members were not eligible to bid for the NDICI REF.

However, some of the REF team have, following the end of our own project, independently become involved in a separate EUTF project, through our partner Trocaire, which delivers support to two universities in Tigray Region of Ethiopia to rebuild their conflict and peace studies curricula and research capacity. We have been humbled to be engaged in this work with a community of people who, by their own characterisation, have been left traumatised by two years of war and by being completely cut off from the outside world. Here academics are struggling with the challenge of teaching a field which they previously knew mostly in theory, but now have had the misfortune to experience first-hand. They must reconcile their training about how conflict arises, how it is resolved and how peace is built with the reality of both themselves and their students having lived through a horrifying conflict (and in many ways still living through it). This challenges the notions of humanitarian protection and principles and shows the true complexity of how peace is built. They are engaged with legal clinics, community outreach and research relating to conflict and displacement even as they try to bring the university back to full teaching capacity.

In Sudan, the war between the Rapid Support Forces and the Sudan Armed Forces has left civilians unprotected. The country is largely in ruins, including the capital Khartoum – which had more-or-less been spared in Sudan’s previous conflicts. Lack of access to civilians in need, the displacement of the very humanitarian and diplomatic apparatus from the capital to Port Sudan, and the shrivelling of available funding for humanitarian assistance has created the largest humanitarian crisis in the world today. It is a crisis that struggles to be noticed, caught in a grotesque competition for media attention with the wars in Ukraine and Gaza, among other places.

While the EUTF and the REF’s work may have come to an end, the relevance of its work, and the need for continued engagement with the Horn of Africa through humanitarian, political and developmental means, is still urgently required.

Key recommendations

It is challenging after eight years of research and more than 30 studies to highlight our key recommendations. Each of our individual studies contains specific recommendations relevant to the focus of the research. The recommendations offered here are based on our reading across the studies we have done and are thus necessarily broadly framed:

1. There must be a greater recognition among policy makers and donors of mobility as a normal feature of social life in the Horn of Africa and, as such, there remains a need for the meaningful and swift implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees, the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and IGAD’s declarations on education, jobs, livelihoods and self-reliance. Going further, however, national development plans and sectoral development plans must incorporate the needs of people on the move and of those affected by displacement.
2. Not only should policy move between the silos of migration and development, assistance frameworks should also become more integrated. Whereas such efforts have already begun among several donors, including the EU, development programmes that integrate migration and displacement issues or include people on the move need to be scaled up and must mainstream expertise on migration within markets, livelihoods, education, health and other sectors.
3. Irregular migration, in which people enter into extra-legal channels and networks in order to facilitate movement, is often characterised by lack of safety and of choice. Attempts to curb

illicit networks that facilitate irregular migration – ‘smash the gangs’ efforts, seizures of boats at sea and tightening of immigration restrictions – cannot be effective in isolation. They must be supported by efforts ‘upstream’ in the regions of origin, especially through support to the countries of origin, to create opportunities for people to support themselves closer to home, and must be able to work so that, if people do choose to move further afield, they can do so more safely, through channels that are regular and better protected.

4. Mass displacement as a result of conflict, particularly when it becomes protracted, is best approached not merely as a humanitarian challenge but as a development and governance challenge. With humanitarian aid budgets increasingly under attack, the imperative to facilitate people’s own efforts to support themselves becomes ever more important. This can be done by enabling local mobility between settlements where refugees or IDPs are living and urban centres or other labour markets where they are more likely to find employment or to sell their goods in local markets. Enabling refugees to work legally can also help to encourage self-reliance and reduce the need for care-and-maintenance support.
5. For those living in protracted displacement, all three durable solutions – return, local integration and resettlement – should be available. The best solution for someone who has lived their entire life as a refugee may not be ‘return’ to a country that they have never known. Local integration may be necessary, and host countries need to do more to develop options for long-term refugees and IDPs to settle in their areas of displacement, being able to come and go as needed. Refugee camps and settlements can in this way become new cities providing opportunities for displaced people and their so-called hosts. Finally, for some people, particularly those who continue to face risks following displacement, resettlement to a third country may be required. However, globally there is diminishing appetite and funding for sponsored resettlement. It is crucial to continue to press for resettlement for the most vulnerable. Finally, durable solutions need to consider the importance of translocality, of movement between different places, in helping the displaced spread their risk and maximise their opportunities across multiple locations as a coping strategy. This can be seen in the pendular movements of displaced South Sudanese and the unsanctioned but still frequent moves between refugee camps and cities in Kenya. Whereas durable solutions programming tends to look for a single-location resolution to displacement, there is a need to consider the simple but powerful possibility of promoting different solutions for different people as a way of helping resolve protracted crises of displacement.
6. Climate policy, which has so far been focused inordinately on reducing emissions or protecting ecosystems, should embrace adaptation more directly. Migration, and mobility involving co-location in more than one place, are among the main ways that people respond to environmental and resource stress. Facilitating this translocality can help support both urban and rural economies through the circulation of people, goods and money. This is a practice that many people are already involved in, largely in the absence of support from development, cross-border trade or labour market policies that could enable these practices.
7. In assessing the different types and pathways of movement, it is crucial to consider the evidence around who moves in which direction. People moving in response to climate pressures, for instance, tend to move locally to the nearest town or city that can support them rather than across longer, more expensive routes out of the region or even towards Europe. In this way, the story of climate adaptation is very much about urbanisation and livelihoods split between rural and urban locations. Much of the popular media coverage of so-called ‘climate refugees’ expounds the idea of floods of people travelling vast distances in order to ‘escape’ climate change. The reality is that those who do make those longer journeys tend to be better educated, middle-class young people who have more economic and human

resources (even if perhaps not enough to travel safely and regularly). Historical and cultural factors also influence the direction of travel, as we saw in the example of the Hadiya of Ethiopia migrating to Southern Africa.

8. Efforts to socially engineer the actual decisions that people make about whether to move, in order to prevent them from doing so, are usually doomed to failure, because those decisions are rooted in the complex calculus of variables about what makes a life safe and sustainable. Trying to influence those factors – by helping people have the chance to earn a decent living, to take advantage of local opportunities and by supporting the resolution of conflicts that create unsafe conditions – is a more appropriate and doubtless a more effective option. To do this there is a need to develop better frameworks for measuring the links between livelihoods development and the migration decisions that people make, in order to evaluate on their terms what constitutes a safe and sustainable life and whether they are able to realise that closer to home or feel they need to move further afield to find those resources for themselves and their families.

In the REF's research, and in this analysis, there are many aspects of migration that we have not been able to explore. We have not, for instance, been able to study in much detail (except for one study by Jaspars & Buchanan-Smith (2018) which followed Darfuri refugees to Europe and another by Deisser et al (2025) on the experiences of Ethiopians migrating to and from the Gulf countries) the experiences of those who have left the region, given that the mandate of our funding was to study movement within the Horn of Africa. There are fascinating and important dynamics which others have explored relating to the links between diaspora communities in Europe and elsewhere and their countries of heritage, including the role of remittances but also the influence of social and mass media on migration aspirations.

However, the research we have done has enabled us to discern broad trends within the region, and connections between different types of migration, different displacement complexes and different policy processes that have helped us to make these contributions towards better understanding the links between migration and development not only in the Horn of Africa but in other regions on the move.

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Appendix 1: List of Researchers

#	First name	Last name	Country/Core Team
1	Laura	Hammond	Core Team/Team Lead
2	Oliver	Bakewell	Core Team
3	Vincent	Chordi	Core Team
4	Padmini	Iyer	Core Team
5	Lavender	Mboya	Core Team
6	Louisa	Brain	Core Team
7	Maissoun	Hussein	Core Team
8	Idil	Osman	Core Team
9	Allan	Mukuki	Core Team
10	Rashid	Abdi	Core Team
11	Saliha	Majeed	Core Team
12	Farrah	Hussein	Djibouti
13	Hanad	Mohamed	Djibouti
14	Idyle	Abdourahman	Djibouti
15	Wameedh	Shakir	Djibouti
16	Abdirahman	Ahmed	Ethiopia
17	Abebaw Minaye	Gezie	Ethiopia
18	Dereje	Feyissa Dori	Ethiopia
19	Etsay	Gebreselassie Gebrehiwot	Ethiopia
20	Fana	Gebresenbet	Ethiopia
21	Fekadu	Adugna	Ethiopia
22	Getahun	Fanta	Ethiopia
23	Kelklachew	Ali	Ethiopia
24	Ketema	Debale	Ethiopia
25	Ketema	Wakjira	Ethiopia
26	Kiya	Gizahegne	Ethiopia
27	Melaku	Tekle	Ethiopia
28	Meron	Zelege	Ethiopia
29	Messay	Gobena	Ethiopia
30	Milkessa	Midega	Ethiopia
31	Tamiru	Jote	Ethiopia

32	Tekalign	Ayalew	Ethiopia
33	Yordanos S.	Estifanos	Ethiopia
34	Emmanuel	Deisser	Europe
35	Gianluca	Iazzolini	Europe
36	Greta	Semplici	Europe
37	Miriam	Badoux	Europe
38	Aparupa	Chakravarti	Kenya
39	Bathsheba	Asati	Kenya
40	Elvis	Abuga	Kenya
41	Farah	Manji	Kenya
42	Hussein Abdullahi	Mahmoud	Kenya
43	Javans Okhonjo	Wanga	Kenya
44	Kennedy	Mwangi	Kenya
45	Liviya	David	Kenya
46	Michael	Owiso	Kenya
47	Nassim	Majidi	Kenya
48	Hervé	Nicolle	Kenya
49	Ngala	Chome	Kenya
50	Amanda	Sperber	Other
51	Josh	Friedman	Other
52	Tanya	Zack	Other
53	Abdinasir Ali	Osman	Somalia
54	Aweis	Ahmed	Somalia
55	Farhia	Mohamed	Somalia
56	Hassan	Adow	Somalia
57	Mahad	Wasuge	Somalia
58	Mohamed	Mahdi	Somalia
59	Ayan	Mohamoud	Somaliland
60	Jama Musse	Jama	Somaliland
61	Mohamed	Fadal	Somaliland
62	Mohamed Warsame	Duale	Somaliland
63	Samuel	Buol	South Sudan
64	Tewelde	Adhanom	South Sudan
65	Achayo Rebecca	Loum	South Sudan
66	Alfred Taban	Richard	South Sudan
67	Bikila	Abera	South Sudan
68	David	Ruach Tang	South Sudan
69	Diana	Peace Ropani	South Sudan
70	Emmanuel	Manza	South Sudan
71	Gach	Pal Wa	South Sudan

72	Giulio	Morello	South Sudan
73	Hui	Yin Chat	South Sudan
74	Innocent	Ojobile	South Sudan
75	Jared	Owuor	South Sudan
76	Jimmy	Onono	South Sudan
77	John	Yata	South Sudan
78	Jonathan	Buckley	South Sudan
79	Joseph	Malish	South Sudan
80	Joseph	Luka	South Sudan
81	Lucy	Nagawa	South Sudan
82	Martin	Sebit	South Sudan
83	Mohammed	Ibrahim	South Sudan
84	Nhial Gatkuoth	Nyaw	South Sudan
85	Ohisa Franco	Obiala	South Sudan
86	Peter Kuol	Thon	South Sudan
87	Stefanie	Barratt	South Sudan
88	Wendy	Indira	South Sudan
89	Abduljabbar	Fadule	Sudan
90	Alessandro	Cristalli	Sudan
91	Alsadiq	Sharifeldin	Sudan
92	Asadiq	Adam	Sudan
93	Bashir	Abbas	Sudan
94	Dalal	Rajab	Sudan
95	El Fateh	Osman	Sudan
96	Hisham	Adam Ali	Sudan
97	Ibrahim	Jamilala	Sudan
98	Manal Ali	Bashir	Sudan
99	Mariam	Adam	Sudan
100	Musa Adam	Abdul-Jalil	Sudan
101	Musa Adam	Ismail	Sudan
102	Sahar	Ali	Sudan
103	Zuhair	Bashar	Sudan
104	Kalyango Ronald	Sebba	Uganda
105	David	Tshimba	Uganda
106	Edgar Emmanuel	Mugarura	Uganda
106	Felicity	Okoth	Uganda
107	Hadijah	Namyalo-Ganafa	Uganda
108	Isabella	Amony	Uganda
109	Kindi Fred	Immanuel	Uganda

110	Mohamed	Hersi	Uganda
111	Zahara	Nampewo	Uganda
112	Bereket	Tsegaye	United Kingdom
113	Daniel	Mulugeta	United Kingdom
114	Georgia	Cole	United Kingdom
115	Jessica	Gregson	United Kingdom
116	Margie	Buchanan-Smith	United Kingdom
117	Pete	Chonka	United Kingdom
118	Susanne	Jaspars	United Kingdom
119	Yidnekachew	Haile	United Kingdom