



PROTECTING PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

MIXED MIGRATION IN VOLATILE CONTEXTS

In the twenty first century, different groups of people, asylum seekers, refugees and migrants, can now be found moving together. The term 'mixed migration' is an analytical and policy concept that has been developed in response to this changing reality of mobility. In this Evaluation and Learning Brief, Danish Refugee Council draws out lessons learned from the Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat on mixed migration in the case of Libya.

GOING WEST

In its work in complex humanitarian settings, Danish Refugee Council responds to the protection needs of people on the move. Increasingly this includes migrants, asylum seekers and refugees, at times undistinguishable from each other, moving in the same routes and facing similar vulnerabilities at the hands of smugglers, traffickers and local authorities.

To better respond to the phenomenon that is now understood as 'mixed migration', Danish Refugee Council is part of a group of agencies that has championed the establishment of a Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat (Horn of Africa and Yemen). Now in its third year, the RMMS recently published a report entitled 'Going West: contemporary mixed migration trends from the Horn of Africa and Yemen to Libya and Europe' which was carried out in partnership with DRC Libya. This research highlights issues faced along the westward flow by mixed migrants and will help DRC and others to provide better programme and policy responses to one of the

greatest challenges facing Europe at the present – that of people dying at sea in search of protection.

MIXED MIGRATION AS AN ANALYTICAL LENS

Mixed migration offers an analytical lens with which to understand the complex nature of mobility in the world today. For instance, how to explain a Syrian who has been displaced from his/her home, travelled to Egypt by air, and then crossed the land border with Libya in the hope of reaching Tripoli in order to find a boat that will take them to Europe? Regions such as the Horn of Africa in particular have come to be defined by hyper-mobile populations, porous borders and multiple drivers for flight including persecution, generalised violence, armed conflict, economic hardship and social marginalisation.

International organisations working with displaced people have had to respond to the changing nature of refugee outflows where populations may be geographically dispersed and harder to identify. Related to this is the rise of urban displacement in cities such as Johannesburg, Tripoli, Istanbul and

Danish Refugee Council Evaluation and Learning Brief

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Nairobi. At any one time, a person may identify at one point along a continuum spanning voluntary and involuntary migration, yet the next day their position might change. For example, Ethiopian women leaving their homes for economic reasons to work as domestic labourers in Saudi Arabia often depart with very little knowledge about their journey and can later find themselves in a situation of trafficking at the hands of employment agencies, smugglers or even their employers. The complexity of mixed migration demonstrates why a comprehensive and appropriate conceptual framework is needed to analyse and understand protection responses.

THE CASE OF LIBYA

Libya has for a long time been a destination for migrants from the region, especially West Africans, who are attracted to the country due to the availability of work opportunities and relatively higher wages. Most migrants cannot obtain prior permission to enter the country, as there is no official labour migration scheme (with the exception of those who are privately sponsored for employment

in areas such as nursing). As such, a large network of smugglers has emerged in southern Libya to assist people to enter by land. Globally, smuggling is a billion dollar business that benefits from trade in people and can include practices of abuse, holding people ransom and extortion. Its links with criminal groups and militias, as well as other forms of smuggling (such as drugs and weapons) has been documented by groups such as the UN Office of Drugs and Crime, Small Arms Survey and US Institute for Peace. Concerns about the exploitation and abuse of mixed migrants at the hands of smugglers have been raised by groups such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.

By and large migrants from West Africa only plan to stay in Libya for a short period of time; enough time to accumulate or remit funds and then return home. The same smugglers transporting migrants from West Africa also assist people from the Horn of Africa seeking to enter Libya. Generally this latter group uses Libya as a transit point to earn some money before taking a boat in the hope of reaching Europe. Originating mainly from countries in the Horn of Africa such as Somalia, Eritrea and Ethiopia, this smaller group when compared to migrants, can broadly be characterised as leaving for reasons of persecution and, to a lesser extent, social and economic marginalisation. In recent months they have been joined by Syrians who come to Libya with the expressed purpose of travelling to Europe by boat. Together these groups constitute a significant mixed migrant population in Libya estimated to be around one million in number.

Most mixed migrants are young men, however recent arrivals from the Horn of Africa have included single women, pregnant women, unaccompanied minors and families with young children. Protection concerns for mixed migrants in Libya include the risk of arrest, arbitrary detention and violence such as theft, harassment and beatings. While UNHCR, IOM and other NGOs are present in Libya, the lack of a domestic legal and policy framework for asylum seekers constrains their operations, especially given that Libya has not signed the 1951 Refugee Convention. With no resettlement or local integration available in Libya, there are almost no durable solutions on offer to asylum seekers and refugees, with the exception of return for very few. Such a context highlights the spectrum of protection concerns for mixed migrants in a transit and destination site like Libya.

WHAT IS MIXED MIGRATION?

The term 'mixed migration' is an analytical and policy concept that has been developed in response to the changing reality of mobility in the twenty first century where different groups of people (asylum seekers, refugees and migrants) can be found moving together. As the University of Oxford academic Nicholas Van Hear (2011) describes, "Migration can be mixed in several senses, which to some degree relate to stages of the migratory process: motivations may be mixed at the point of making the decision to move; migrants may make use of the same agents and brokers; they may travel with others in mixed migratory flows; motivations may change en route and after arrival; and people may find themselves in mixed communities during their journeys or at their destination".

In many contexts where DRC operates, mixed migration most accurately describes the movement of people, their varying intentions and fast changing mobility. Going beyond rigid technical-legal categories, using the lens of mixed migration allows DRC as a protection-focused organisation to understand vulnerabilities and offer practical assistance to people in need.

RESPONDING TO MIXED MIGRATION

DRC has been operating in Libya since the Revolution in 2011, implementing demining, armed violence reduction (AVR) and protection programmes in the southern city of Sabha and the capital, Tripoli. Its EC-funded protection programme targeted



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vulnerable mixed migrants (asylum seekers, refugees and migrants) both in the community and in detention centres. Utilising the expert knowledge of RMMS, exchange visits had taken place between RMMS and DRC Libya in order to resource the protection programme team on mixed migration issues. Following a survey of mixed migrants conducted in 2013, it was decided that RMMS and DRC would jointly undertake a more comprehensive study of mixed migration trends into and out of Libya. Such a study would capture the regional dimensions of mixed migration, acknowledging that a large proportion of Libya's asylum seeker and refugee population originated from the Horn of Africa (specifically Eritrea and Somalia).

The research commenced in 2013 and the final report was published in June 2014. While data collection was underway, the Lampedusa tragedy occurred in October 2013 where a large boat load of people seeking to reach Europe collapsed resulting in the death of approximately 400 people. This event brought even more attention to bear on the westward route, also known as the 'Central Mediterranean route', and its growing scale and importance; a fact that has increased in recent months with tens of thousands of people departing from Libya and arriving in Italy.

PROTECTING PEOPLE ON THE MOVE: CHALLENGES FOR DRC AND OTHER PROTECTION ACTORS

Increasingly the 'westward route' has grown in importance due to the closing off of other routes, such as the Sinai crossing to Israel, and the very real possibilities of reaching Europe. People are not only just heading west geographically, they are also drawn to western countries where there is respect for human rights and agreed norms of treatment for asylum seekers and refugees.

The routes take people through Sudan and into Libya, crossing through the desert and avoiding major towns so as not to get caught. Often they are far away from the eyes of international organisations, in precarious situations at borders and at the mercy of smugglers where they risk being kidnapped and held for ransom. People face degrading conditions but having invested in the journey they will keep taking risks and move on, because return is not an option nor is staying permanently in a transit country like Libya.

As other RMMS reports have shown, there is incredible family and community pressure on individuals to migrate so that they can remit funds back home and repay the investment made in their journey. Huge sums of money are paid for each step of the journey that can add up to several thousands of dollars being paid over many weeks or even months and years. As this brief has shown the contexts within which mixed migrants are moving and that DRC encounters in its work entail multiple protection risks from robbery, neglect in remote locations, brutal extortion to outright murder and negligent

INTRODUCING THE REGIONAL MIXED MIGRATION SECRETARIAT

The Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat (RMMS) is:

- An independent body that was established in 2011 out of a growing concern about the impact of mixed migration flows and an urgent need for responses to assist people on the move especially in the Horn of Africa.
- It is governed by a Steering Committee of members and co-founders that includes UNHCR, IOM, Danish Refugee Council, INTERSOS and the Yemen Mixed Migration Taskforce (MMTF). RMMS is hosted by Danish Refugee Council's Regional Office for the Horn of Africa and Yemen (HOAY) in Nairobi.
- RMMS supports agencies, institutions and forums to improve protection and assistance responses in mixed migration flows through coordination and support, provision of analysis and research, information sharing, data management and advocacy.
- The Secretariat also strives to stimulate forward thinking and policy development in the sector through an emphasis on human rights, protection and assistance. In addition to bi-monthly teleconferences with field-based partners, RMMS circulates statistical information and trends through its mailing list.
- RMMS operates through funding provided by the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office, European Commission, the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development, Swiss Development Coordination and others.
- The RMMS also operates a website that acts as an information portal for resources on mixed migration, responds to requests for training and also produces a research series focusing on different aspects of mixed migration.

loss of life. Protecting people en route demands innovative ways of delivering services, such as through community groups and local civil society organisations. It also requires constant information gathering to ensure programmes are informed by current data on trends, migration routes and patterns.

ADVOCATING FOR EVIDENCE-BASED POLICIES AND PROGRAMMATIC RESPONSES

In light of current mixed migration trends, RMMS has identified a number of factors that will help inform programme and policy responses to alleviate the protection needs of mixed migrants. These include:

- Addressing the gap in data collection about the numbers of migrants moving across the region;
- Ensuring a focus on regional protection measures and labour migration options;
- Including family and diaspora networks as sources of information and groups that provide messages about protection risks to migrants and potential migrants; and
- Acknowledging that mandated agencies like UNHCR and IOM may have specific organisational responses to mixed migration; the multiple drivers of mixed migration mean that there cannot be a 'one size fits all' policy response.

Protecting people on the move is one of the biggest challenges facing governments, international organisations and regional inter-governmental bodies. Reducing irregular migration and the risks people face requires programmatic and policy responses that incorporate a mixed migration lens. DRC is pioneering both programmatic and policy responses to mixed migration through its work in countries like Libya and its auspicing of the Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat.

FURTHER READING

Van Hear, Nicholas, 2011. *Mixed Migration: Policy Challenges*. Migration Observatory Policy Primers, Oxford: University of Oxford.

Going West: contemporary mixed migration trends from the Horn of Africa to Libya & Europe, 2014, Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat Study.

DRC Policy Position on Mixed Migration, June 2014 available on DRC's intranet INSITE

We Risk Our Lives for Daily Bread - Findings of the Danish Refugee Council Study of Mixed Migration in Libya, 2013, available on the DRC and IRIN websites.

RMMS is currently implementing a Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism (4Mi) project to track and collate mixed migration information.

For more details: regionalmms.org

CREDITS

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