

Regional Mixed Migration in the Horn of Africa and Yemen in 2013: Annual trend summary and analysis

RMMS presents an end of year trend summary and analysis for 2013 with a focus on the Horn of Africa and Yemen region and neighbouring areas. For ease of reading this presentation avoids using statistics and more detailed elaboration but provides a generic overview of prominent trends. Statistical details can be found in RMMS literature produced during the course of 2013 (Regional Mixed Migration Monthly Summaries / Quarterly reports etc.) and can be located on our website.

1. Major characteristics

Trans-regional, trans-continental

Mixed migration, and in particular irregular migration, is trans-regional and trans-continental. It is difficult to constrain analysis and response to single regional sphere as movement can be regional but normally far wider. Smuggler networks (and traffickers) as a whole operate trans-regionally and inter-continently (Africa/Europe, Africa/Gulf States & Middle East). Examples include the flow of Eritreans who leave through Sudan, Libya or Egypt for Europe, and the Somali exodus (as refugees and irregular migrants) into the Arabian Peninsula, South Africa, South and North America as well as Europe.

More complex and organised

In many regions displacement and irregular migration flows are becoming more complex with multiple drivers affecting reason for movement (see following section) and more organized with loosely linked groups of smugglers and other criminals expanding their range of operations (in terms of routes offered, modes of movement and distances covered).

Combined crises

Flows in mixed migration are augmented by combined humanitarian and protracted crises. Humanitarian crises affecting flows in and from this region include displacement due to natural disasters with environmental changes and drought, as well as conflict or civil unrest in South Sudan, Somalia, Syria, Libya and Yemen. Protracted crises include the endemic poverty affecting parts of the region, climate change, authoritarian regimes leading to political crisis (reportedly Eritrea and for some Ethiopia) and the securitization in the region (Yemen and Somalia primarily) due to armed militias, terrorism and unresolved conflict (South Sudan and Somalia).

More mixed

Movement of people is becoming more mixed with groups of regular migrants (regulated labour migrants), irregular(undocumented economic migrants), forced migrants (asylum seekers and refugees) and trafficked person using similar routes for movement, similar means for movement (smugglers/traffickers) and often facing similar vulnerabilities and hazards while in transit and at points of primary and secondary destination. There is therefore de facto less distinction between those on the move in and through the region, and less heterogeneity in experience of migrants as they face similar neglect, abuse and rights violations.

Less protection

Reports suggest that mixed migrants are less protected in the region. While they face hardship during transit due to thirst, hunger, absence of shelter and health services, they also face additional risks in terms of vehicle accidents related to smugglers' neglect and overcrowding. RMMS considers this to be

related to the 'commoditisation' of migrants where arriving migrants can be sold on arrival to criminal gangs (see below) and are therefore worth more alive than dead. A positive trend in 2013 was the continued reduction of the number of deaths at sea of migrants (crossing from mainland Africa to Yemen). Half a dozen deaths at sea were reported in 2013 as opposed to the hundreds reported in years of 2008 and 2009.

Rising kidnapping and torture

The major and increasing protection risk in 2013 has been the escalation of numbers of kidnappings and extortion of migrants, normally combined with torture. These trends have been reported in Egypt, Sudan, Libya, Yemen and South Africa while related reports of detention of girls and women (with accompanying labour and sexual exploitation) and abduction (subsequently disappeared) were reported from Yemen, Sudan, Egypt, Libya and Djibouti. The number of rapes associated with migration in 2013 were alarmingly high, the main 'victims' of sexual violence and exploitation appear to be Ethiopian females.

Harsh treatment

Additionally throughout 2013 many migrants have faced harsh treatment from authorities and state officials with high numbers of migrants being detained, imprisoned and/or deported. In some cases refoulement may have taken place where refugees and asylum seekers were returned without recognized status determination. The most dramatic deportations occurred as Saudi Arabia removed hundreds of thousands of irregular migrants (mainly from Yemen and Ethiopia but also from Asia) in an operation that started in November 2013 and is on-going. But deportations are routinely reported from Kenya, Djibouti, Sudan, Somaliland and Yemen.

Migration space more restricted

Overall the space for regular and irregular movement in the region has become more restricted and limited. With Israel and Saudi Arabia constructing physical frontier barriers and enforcing stricter border controls the flows have been restricted and have dramatically affected Ethiopian, Eritrean and Yemeni previous direction and capacity for movement. While Ethiopia continues to host and welcome asylum seekers/ refugees (mainly from Somalia, Sudan and Eritrea) Kenya has refused to register new refugees from Somalia throughout 2013 and actively pursued policies of effecting the return of over half a million Somali refugees currently residing in Kenya. This resulted in a tripartite agreement in late 2013 between UNHCR, and the governments of Somalia and Kenya to programme the non-forced return of Somalis in the coming years.

Anti-migrant sentiment

Harsher government policies against migrants in mixed flows appear to reflect, or contribute to, a rising anti-migrant and anti-refugee sentiment in the region. Stories and reports of abuses against refugees and migrants have escalated along with negative characterization in national media in a context that is less welcoming and more aggressively anti-foreigner. Politicians and local communities have been vocal in demanding the return of refugees and other migrants in Kenya, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Somaliland and Djibouti during 2013.

Stakeholders overwhelmed

At the same time donors, governments, mandated agencies and other stakeholders are more challenged and overwhelmed by the scale of mixed migration and how to address unwanted

movement. Some States have weak, misguided, contradictory, arbitrary or non-existent policies in place to address or manage migration and effectively censure smuggling and trafficking in their jurisdictions. Where there are policies and laws they are often breached or not implemented fairly or may be suborned by corruption. Generally many stakeholders have little understanding of scale and scope of the changing dynamics of mixed migration in the region.

2. Trends in movements (HoA & Yemen region)

Increased labour migration: From the Horn to the Gulf States and Middle East (Ethiopia sends approximately 200,000 maids alone)

Sea crossings to Yemen: Still high but in 2013 over 30% down from 2012 figures (107,532 total estimated) with October, November and December figure representing the lowest numbers using the 'eastern route' out of the Horn for at least 4 years.

Ethiopians dominate: They remain approximately 85% of flow to Yemen while Somalis make up the rest. Otherwise, from the region, the main groups on the move are Somalis, Ethiopians, Yemenis (to Saudi Arabia only) and Eritreans and to a lesser extent (but rising) Somaliland. People from Kenya, Djibouti and Puntland area are rarely found in mixed migration flows and when they move they normally fly and have documentation.

Westward movement: New evidence suggest that as the 'northern' and eastern' routes are restricted and closed migrants are choosing to go west via Sudan into Libya in an attempt to enter Europe. There is no clear data to date but RMMS hope to implement a data gathering mechanism to monitor change in flows during 2014.

Somali returns: There has been evidence throughout 2013 of 'spontaneous' movement of Somali refugees back to Somalia. Some have permanently moved but others are temporarily returning only to return again to Kenya after some weeks or months. The numbers are in the tens of thousands only and at the same time there has been a steady flow of asylum seekers from Somalia to refugee camps in Ethiopia as well as Kenya (although unregistered) so it is unclear whether the net number of returns to Somalia were significant in 2013.

3. Regional Drivers

The well-documented drivers causing mixed migration within the region and out of it remain strong comprising: impoverishment (livelihoods and unemployment); insecurity (civil conflict and forced recruitment); social oppression (forced marriages, dysfunctional home-life); political oppression; environmental fragility / natural disasters.

In 2013, more than ever, trends can be identified that point to the high influence of the 'culture of migration' taking root, where irrespective of conditions in countries of origin many families opt to having one or more member working overseas. Equally the importance of 'aspirational migration' facilitated by aspects of an increasingly globalised and digital world where opportunities to study, visit, communicate and travel are higher than ever. The critical mass of Diaspora abroad with finances to effect 'chain migration' of relatives and friends is also a strong pull factor. Finally, the power of seduction by 'brokers' and smugglers to lure new waves of economic migrants with the accompanying impact of success stories (through social media networks, in particular Facebook).



4. Contested issues

The issues around mixed migration and efforts by States and stakeholders to address mixed migration revealed numerous contradictions and contested areas in 2013. These contested areas are by no means exclusive to the region but are common for many regions grappling with the global phenomenon of mixed migration flows. They can be characterized as follows:

- Forced migration/displacement .v. Economic migration
- Irregular movement .v. Regular movement
- Welcoming .v. Hostile environment
- Migrant/refugee rights .v. Security / sovereignty
- Corruption .v. Rule of law
- Policy .v. Implementation