



## Regional Mixed Migration in East Africa and Yemen in 2017: 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter trend summary and analysis

Mixed migration flows within, from and to the East Africa and Yemen region continued to be affected by a number of complex dynamics, including conflict, drought and economic reasons among others. Migrants, asylum seekers and refugees continued to be at a significant risk of harm, ranging from abduction, physical abuse and death on land and at sea. Policy considerations remained focussed on limiting irregular migration, particularly to Europe.

### Irregular Movement from East Africa and Yemen

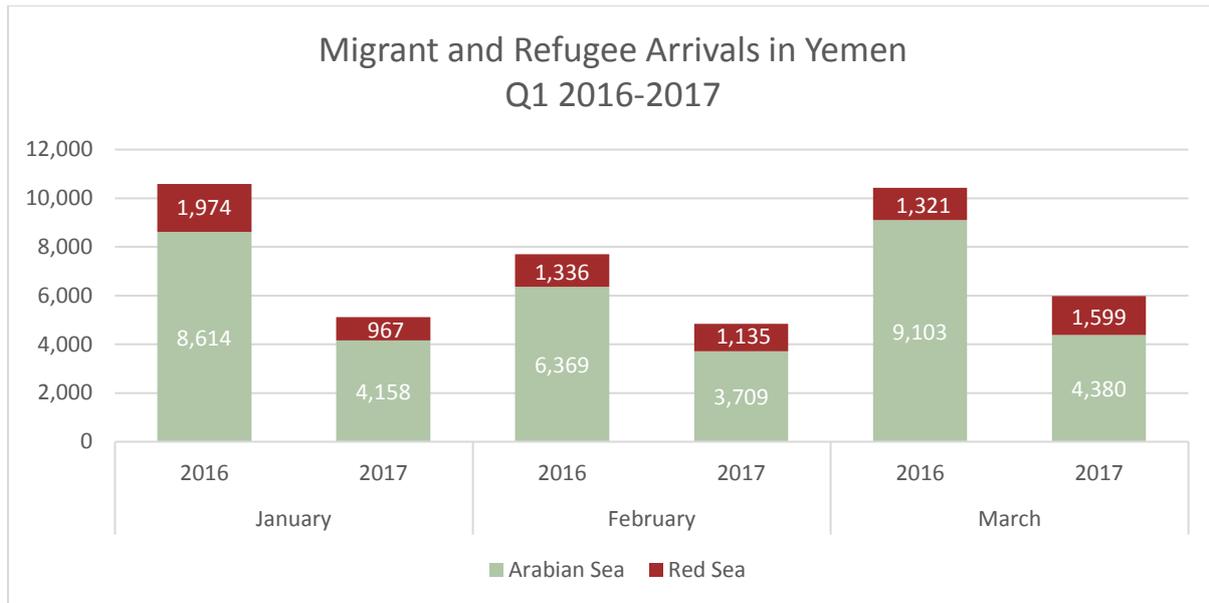
#### *Northward (through Egypt into Israel)*

There were limited reports concerning movements of asylum seekers and migrants from the Horn of Africa towards Israel during this quarter, suggesting that the Northward route remains unsuccessful and to some extent inoperative.

Migration movements through Egypt and across the Mediterranean Sea towards Italy however, continued to be used by those travelling from the Horn. In a persistent effort to show strength against human smuggling networks, the Egyptian government sentenced 56 people up to 14 years in prison over the capsizing of a boat off the country's coast in September 2016, regarded as one of the deadliest to have happened in the Mediterranean Sea crossings. The 56 were charged under a new anti-human smuggling law, effected by the Egyptian government in late 2016, the first of its kind in the country.

#### *Eastward (towards Yemen)*

As witnessed in the final quarter of 2016, arrivals of migrants and asylum seekers from the Horn Africa to Yemen continued to decline this quarter. At least 15,948 persons (78 percent Ethiopian and 22 percent Somali) departed from Obock, Djibouti and coastal areas near Bossaso, Puntland towards Yemen in this period. Arrivals dropped by 17 percent when compared to the final quarter of 2016, and a more significant 44 percent when compared to the first quarter of 2016. Reports surrounding the deportation of those arriving in Yemen, which first surfaced in September 2016, continued during this quarter and seem to indicate that fewer migrants and asylum seekers are choosing to travel to Yemen in the current context.



**Figure 1: Migrant and Refugee Arrivals in Yemen, Q1 2016-2017**  
Source: UNHCR and RMMS

A number of other reasons could also be contributing to reduced movement along the route. Firstly, the ongoing conflict in Yemen continues to have an impact on monitoring missions in the country, and it is understood that the total number of arrivals into Yemen could have been higher during the period. Secondly, the ongoing drought situation in the Horn of Africa is reported to have devastating effects on food insecurity, livestock and livelihoods. It is likely that resources typically available to fund migration journeys have been depleted during the period, resulting in fewer migrants deciding to migrate. Moreover, many Ethiopians arriving in Yemen are from farming communities, most affected by drought conditions.

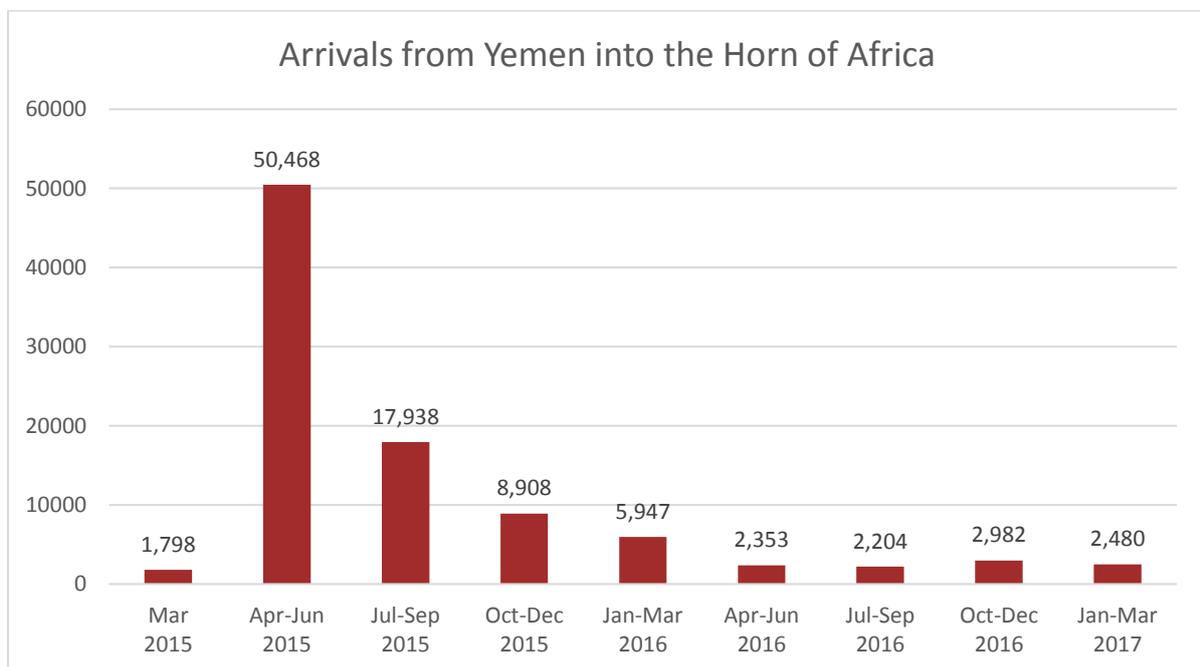
In March 2017, Saudi Arabia announced a 90-day grace period for undocumented migrants in the country to regularise their immigration status. According to the government, all migrants taking advantage of this amnesty will be exempt from any fines or penalties usually ascribed for such violations, and those voluntarily leaving the country during the grace period will be eligible to apply for re-entry through legal immigration procedures. A similar campaign was instituted between April and November 2013, after which more than 170,000 Ethiopians were deported from Saudi Arabia between November 2013 and March 2014. Typically, the majority of Ethiopian migrants entering Yemen continue their journeys onwards to Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states. Based on arrivals figures in Yemen, almost 260,000 Ethiopian migrants have entered Yemen between April 2014 and March 2017, giving an indication of how many Ethiopians could potentially be affected by the policy. The looming threat of deportation could also be having an effect on the numbers of Ethiopians choosing to migrate to Yemen (and onward to Saudi Arabia), who may be biding their time as they wait for the situation to unfold. It remains to be seen whether this trend will continue throughout the year.

The proportion of Somalis travelling to Yemen this quarter (22 percent) is almost on par with the final quarter of 2016 (24 percent), but significantly higher than preceding quarters. In terms of absolute numbers however, the number of Somalis arriving this quarter is actually 24 percent lower than the final quarter of 2016, suggesting that their relative proportional increase is as a result of a reduced number of Ethiopians travelling, and not an increase in flows from Somalia.



In keeping with recent trends, Ethiopians of Oromo descent continue to make up the majority of Ethiopian nationals travelling to Yemen, accounting for some 87 percent of migrants interviewed between January and March 2017. During the quarter, the Ethiopian parliament voted unanimously [to extend the state of emergency](#) that was instituted in October 2016 (due to end on April 9, 2017) by an additional four months. Ethiopia imposed the martial law following a spate of anti-government protests, resulting in the arrest of more than 11,000 people, which some reports suggest were targeted at Ethiopians of Oromo ethnicity. The increased proportion of Ethiopian Oromos within these flows, up from around 50 percent in 2014, indicates a possible correlation between the situation in Ethiopia and outward migration flows. That being said, only a handful of Oromos (27 persons) migrating this quarter did so for protection reasons and indicated that they were intending to seek asylum in Yemen. The majority of Ethiopians cited economic reasons for travelling to Yemen, such as a lack of livelihoods or employment opportunities, or a reduced income due to effects of the drought on their crop and livestock, indicating that economic factors remain the main driver of Ethiopian migration towards Yemen and Gulf states.

In the opposite direction, arrivals of refugees, returnees and third country nationals from Yemen into the Horn of Africa stayed fairly steady over the past three quarters. 2,480 persons arrived into the region (Djibouti, Ethiopia, Somalia and Sudan) between January and March 2017. By 31 March 2017, a total of 95,078 persons had sought refuge in the Horn since the outbreak of conflict in Yemen in March 2015. Intensified conflict in certain areas of Yemen kept internal displacement high – 2 million persons at the end of the quarter.



**Figure 2: Arrivals from Yemen into the Horn of Africa**  
Source: UNHCR and RMMS

**Southward (through Kenya towards South Africa)**

Migrants and asylum seekers from the Horn of Africa continue to travel southwards from the region towards South Africa. A new RMMS paper [Smuggled South](#), gives an updated overview of mixed migration dynamics from the Horn to South(ern) Africa. The paper, published in March 2016, estimates that the number of Somali and Ethiopian migrants entering South Africa irregularly currently stands at 13,400-14,050 persons every year, slightly lower than the 2008/9 estimate of 17,000-20,000 people.



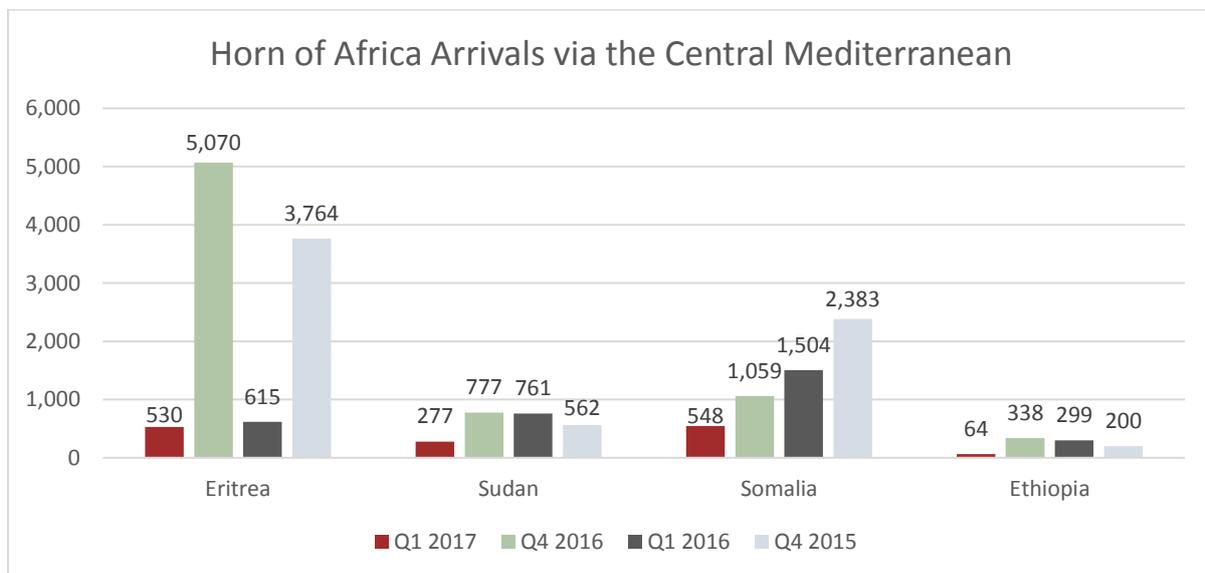
Based on these numbers and reports of fees paid to smugglers, RMMS estimates that the illicit migrant smuggling economy on the southern route is worth at least USD 47 million per year.

Migrants from the Horn of Africa continue to be at risk from detention and deportation on their journeys. In January 2017, a group of 147 Ethiopian migrants were supported to repatriate from Zambia. The migrants were facing prison sentences for irregularly entering the country, and were recently pardoned by the Zambian president. In another group, six migrants from Ethiopia and Somalia were deported from Zimbabwe after being apprehended as they crossed into the country from Zambia. [RMMS 4Mi data shows](#) that other abuses, including physical and sexual abuse, extortion, robbery and death are also prevalent on the southern route towards South Africa.

**Westward (also known as the ‘Central Mediterranean route’)**

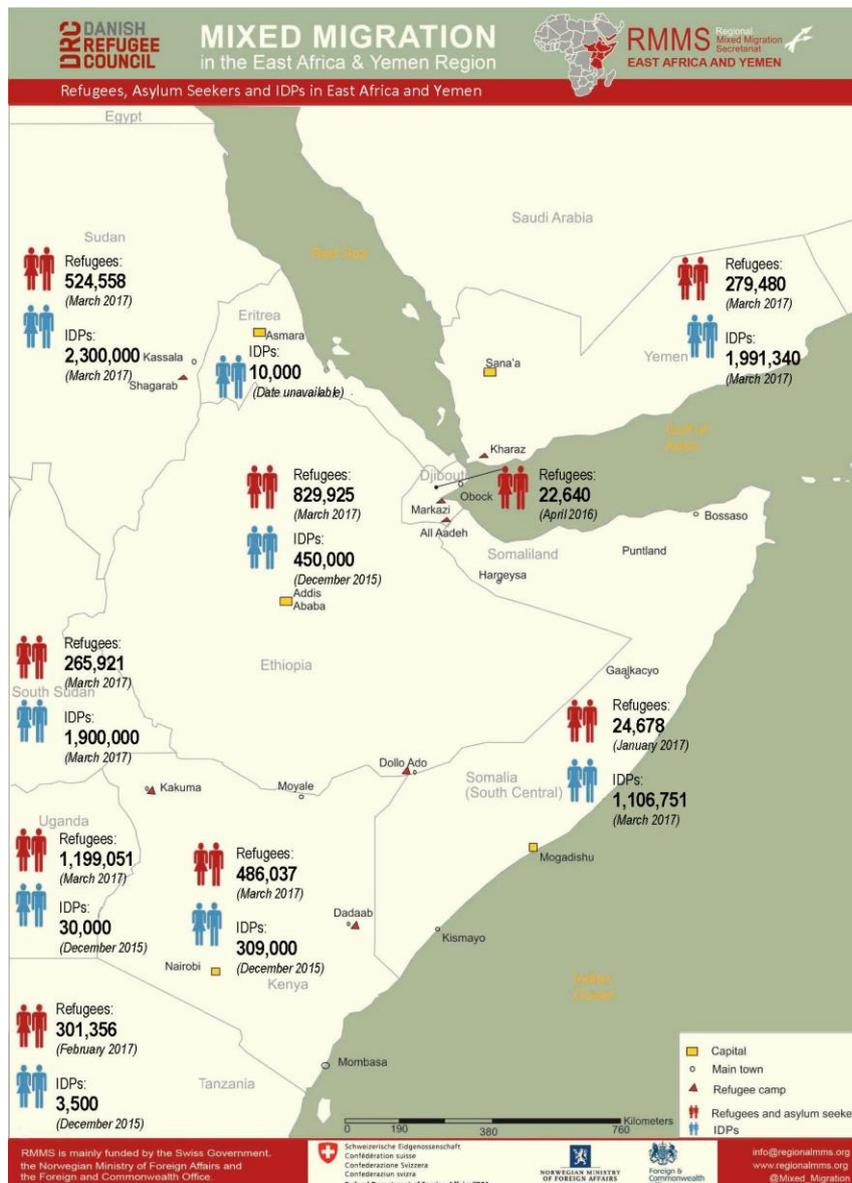
Migration from the Horn of Africa along the western route towards Europe dropped drastically this quarter. While a subdued level of movement is typical in the first quarter of the year, often brought about by adverse weather conditions on the Mediterranean, movements between January and March 2017 were far below typical patterns. A reported 1,419 migrants from the Horn (Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia and Sudan) arrived in Italy this quarter. This is a comparative 80 percent decline on movement in the final quarter of 2016 (7,244 arrivals), and 55 percent drop on movements in the same period in 2016 (3,179 arrivals). The most significant drop was witnessed among Eritrean nationals whose arrivals in Italy in the first quarter of 2017, were 90 percent less than those in the final quarter of 2016. A [number of factors](#) may have contributed to the trend, including the interception and deportation of Eritrean migrants (and in some cases refugees) from transit countries such as Sudan and Egypt, and Eritrean refugees biding time in transit in refugee camps and urban centres in the region.

While arrivals from the Horn appear to have reduced during the period, overall arrival figures in Italy along the Central Mediterranean route are higher than ever. A total of 10,439 persons arrived in Italy between January and March 2017, 23 percent higher than in the final quarter of 2016 and 8 percent higher than the same period in 2016. The rise is particularly as a result of increased numbers of West Africans and Bangladeshis using the route. Observers estimate that if current levels are sustained that 2017 could be another record year, with an estimated 250,000 people arriving in Italy by December.



**Figure 3: Horn of Africa Arrivals via the Central Mediterranean**  
Source: UNHCR and RMMS

**Refugees and Asylum Seekers**



**Figure 4: Refugees, Asylum Seekers and IDPs in the Horn of Africa and Yemen**  
Source: UNHCR, IDMC and RMMS

Displacement dynamics in the first quarter of 2017 were dominated by the South Sudan crisis, which at the end of the quarter had displaced a total of more than 1.7 million persons in the region, since the beginning of the crisis in 2013. The situation has been termed the world’s fastest growing refugee crisis, and has propelled Uganda to the largest refugee hosting country in the region and the continent, hosting 1,199,051 refugees at the end of the quarter.

At the end of March 2017, there were more than 3.95 million refugees and asylum seekers displaced within the region (Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda and Yemen), and 8.09 million IDPs.

The Government of Kenya remained committed to its pledge to return Somali refugees to Somalia.

Between January and March 2017, a total of 20,897 Somali refugees were supported to return to Somalia as part of the voluntary repatriation programme, the highest ever return movements in any period since such support began in 2014. In March 2017, a ruling by the Kenyan High Court termed the government’s plan to close Dadaab refugee camp as “illegal” and “discriminatory” and deemed the targeting of Somali refugees as “an act of group persecution” and therefore “unconstitutional”.

This quarter, drought conditions in the region have prompted the movement of populations across borders. In Eritrea, reports indicate that the drought has affected half of all Eritrea’s regions, resulting in widespread acute malnutrition in more than 22,000 children under 5 years. According to IOM and UNHCR, more than 4,500 Eritrean refugees have crossed into Ethiopia since the beginning of 2017 as a result of the drought, with an expected daily flow of 150-200 people into the country. It is not clear



whether this outflow is in addition to previous estimates of 5,000 Eritreans leaving per month, or instead of it, indicating that drought conditions may be having an impact on depleting resources usually reserved for migration. In Somalia, official figures still suggest that 1.1 million persons are internally displaced within the country, however the drought situation is pushing thousands of Somalis to abandon their homes in search of food and water, with over 3,000 people a day being displaced. UNHCR reported that 536,000 people in Somali have been displaced since November 2016, with more than half (278,000) being displaced in March 2017 alone. Regionally, at least 2,000 Somalis have crossed into Dadaab, some 100 of who are among the refugees who had returned to Somalia as part of the voluntary return programme, and some 4,300 Somalis are reported to have entered Ethiopia since the beginning of 2017.

### **Migrant Vulnerabilities – kidnapping, human trafficking, detention, exposure**

Migrants and asylum seekers moving within and beyond the Horn of Africa and Yemen region continued to face protection risks while on the move.

This quarter, the risk of abduction as reported by migrants arriving in Yemen along the Red Sea coast remained acute. Among 3,701 arrivals this quarter, 1,941 instances of kidnap and abduction for ransom were reported during the quarter, with migrants frequently reporting that those abducted would be held captive in “dens” where they would be tortured, sexually abused, and forced into domestic labour until they were able to raise a ransom from family members.

In February, [media reports](#) indicated that 42 Somali refugees carrying official UNHCR documents were killed after a military vessel and later a helicopter gunship opened fire on a boat carrying between 140 and 160 migrants off the coast of Yemen. The boat had reportedly departed from Yemen’s Hodeida province and was *en route* to Sudan. The attack was immediately condemned by humanitarian agencies, who called for an investigation into the incident. [RMMS first reported](#) on the use of this route by young Somali migrants in mid-2016, but this instance is the first indication that the route may also be frequented by refugees practicing onward secondary migration. At the end of March 2017, there were 255,598 Somali refugees in Yemen.

According to IOM’s Missing Migrants Project, there were 733 recorded deaths on the Central Mediterranean during this quarter. While the breakdown of nationalities is unknown, this route is frequented by migrants and asylum seekers from the Horn of Africa and Yemen region as they attempt to reach Europe.

### **Regional and Global Initiatives to Address Irregular Migration, Trafficking and Protection at Sea**

Efforts in the region and globally continue to focus on initiatives to address mixed migration.

In early February, the European Union signed a migration compact with Libya that it hopes will reduce the migration flows from the African continent towards Europe. The Malta Declaration pledges EUR 200 million in support to training and equipment for Libya’s coastguard, the setting up of “safe” refugee camps in Libya and the voluntary repatriation of those willing to return from Libya to their countries of origin. The Italian government also pledged an additional EUR 200 million of its own to support the work of the Libyan coastguard. However, navigating the complex parallel political and administrative structures in Libya appears to be presenting multiple challenges for the EU. In March, a Libyan court (part of the UN-backed Government of National Accord (GNA)) suspended the agreement signed with Italy, “pending a final ruling” on the matter. Libya’s Tobruk-based parliament had earlier rejected the migrant



deal between Italy and the GNA on the basis that the latter had “no legal status. Meanwhile the Italian government reportedly struck a deal with 60 Libyan tribes to improve the security situation in Libya and curb the flow of asylum seekers and migrants attempting to reach Europe.

In February, the Kenyan government established a National Coordination Mechanism on Migration (NCM) that is tasked with facilitating coordination, collaboration and information sharing on migration issues at the national level. The NCM has completed a draft National Migration Policy for Kenya that once validated will cover various migration issues including citizenship, the management of foreign nationals, migration enforcement, trafficking in persons, refugee movement, labour migration and border management.

In March, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) held a special summit in Nairobi on attaining durable solutions for Somali refugees. The convention adopted the [Nairobi Declaration on Durable Solutions for Somali Refugees and Reintegration of Returnees in Somalia](#), which commits to developing a comprehensive regional approach to facilitate durable solutions and to strengthen the protection environment for Somali refugees in host countries in the region.