



**MMC East Africa
& Yemen**

QUARTER 4 2020

A wide-angle photograph showing a vast, dry, sandy landscape where many people are gathered. Some are sitting on blankets or mats, while others walk across the area. In the background, there are some simple buildings and more people in the distance.

Quarterly Mixed Migration Update: East Africa & Yemen

This Quarterly Mixed Migration Update (QMMU) covers the East Africa and Yemen region (EAY). The core countries of focus for this region are Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Burundi, Somalia, DR Congo, South Sudan and Yemen. Depending on the quarterly trends and migration-related updates, more attention may be given to any of the countries over the rest.

The QMMUs offer a quarterly update on new trends and dynamics related to mixed migration and relevant policy developments in the region. These updates are based on a compilation of a wide range of secondary (data) sources, brought together within a regional framework and applying a mixed migration analytical lens. Similar QMMUs are available for all MMC regions.

The Mixed Migration Centre is a global network consisting of six regional hubs and a central unit in Geneva engaged in data collection, research, analysis and policy development on mixed migration. For more information on the MMC, the QMMUs from other regions and contact details of regional MMC teams, visit mixedmigration.org and follow us at [@Mixed_Migration](https://twitter.com/Mixed_Migration)

MMC's understanding of mixed migration

"Mixed migration" refers to cross-border movements of people, including refugees fleeing persecution and conflict, victims of trafficking, and people seeking better lives and opportunities. Motivated to move by a multiplicity of factors, people in mixed flows have a range of legal statuses as well as a variety of vulnerabilities. Although entitled to protection under international human rights law, they are exposed to multiple rights violations along their journey. Those in mixed migration flows travel along similar routes, using similar means of travel - often travelling irregularly, and wholly, or partially, assisted by migrant smugglers.

Front cover photo credit:

Michael Kirby Smith (2013)

Ethiopian migrants outside the Migrant Response Centre in Haradh,
Yemen, May 2013.

SUPPORTED BY:



Quarterly Mixed Migration Update: East Africa & Yemen

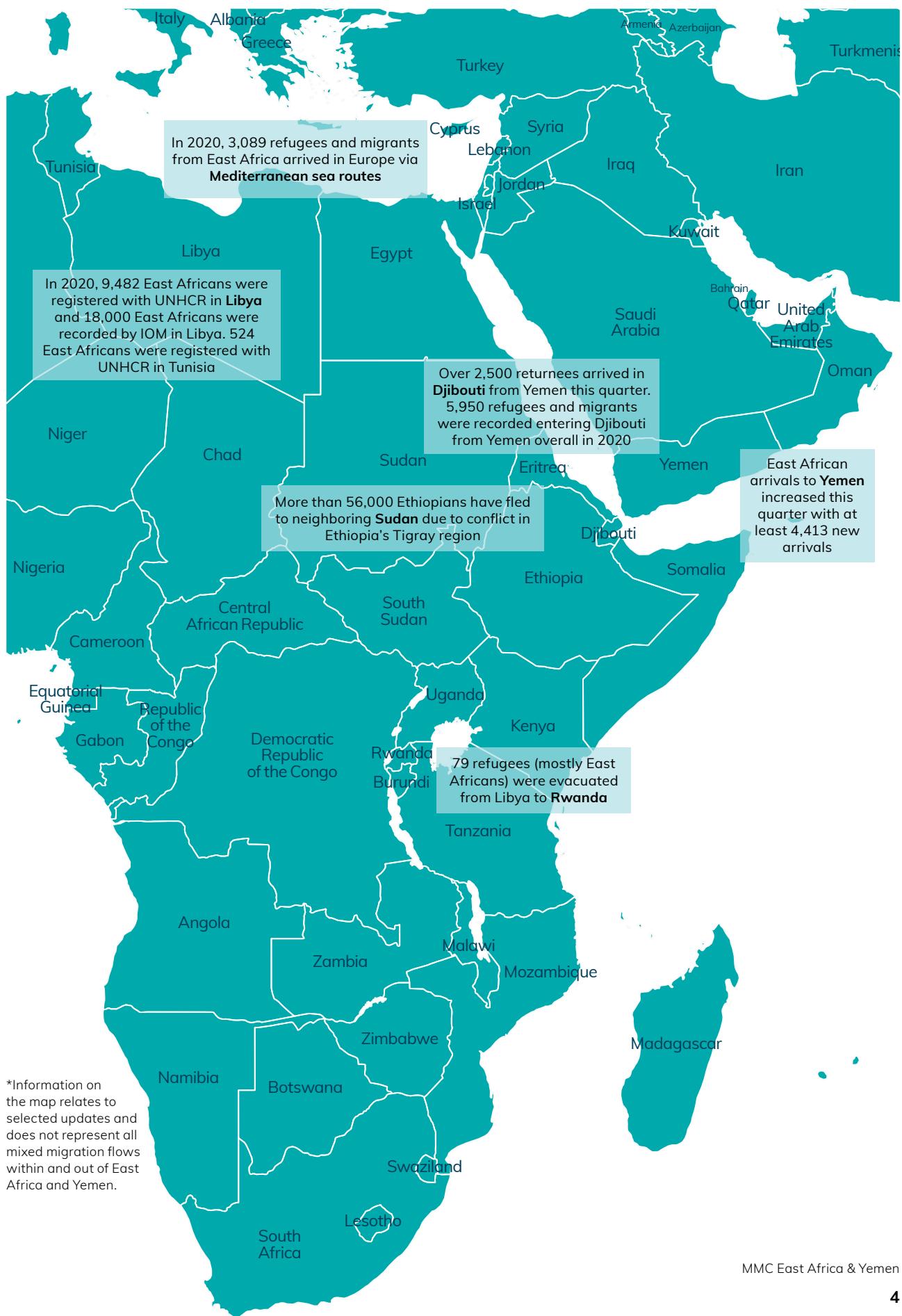
Quarter 4 - 2020

Key Updates

- Conflict in Ethiopia's Tigray region spurs mass displacement:** More than [56,000 Ethiopians](#) have fled to neighbouring Sudan due to conflict in [Ethiopia's Tigray region](#).
- Movement along the Eastern Route slowly restarts this quarter:** Refugee and migrant arrivals from East Africa to Yemen increased this quarter with 4,413 new [reported arrivals](#). This is an overall increase of 193% from 1,505 refugees and migrants who arrived between July and September 2020. In particular, arrivals during this quarter [increased by 51%](#) between [October](#) (1,038) and [December](#) 2020 (2,035).¹
- Increased movement along return route from Yemen to East Africa:** Between May and December 2020, [5,950 refugees and migrants](#) were recorded entering Djibouti from Yemen on maritime journeys. Over 2,500 of these returnees were recorded from [October to December 2020](#).
- Fewer Ethiopian deportations from Saudi Arabia in 2020:** In 2020, [36,632 Ethiopians were deported from Saudi Arabia](#), a 70% decrease from the 120,825 Ethiopians returned in the whole of 2019.
- East African refugees and migrants in Libya:** In Libya, 9,482 East Africans were registered as people of concern by UNHCR by the [end of 2020](#) and over 18,000 East Africans migrants were recorded by IOM in Libya at the end of [October 2020](#).
- East Africans arrivals to Europe remain limited:** By the end of December 2020, 3,089 refugees and migrants from East Africa were reported arriving [in Europe](#) along the [Central Mediterranean](#) and [Eastern Mediterranean Routes](#).
- Reports of abuse of East African asylum seekers by US officials:** [The Guardian newspaper](#) reported mistreatment and abuse of asylum seekers this quarter by US officials on deportation flights from the United States to African countries (including Kenya).

¹ The official IOM record is 2,035 new arrivals, however confidential reports from trusted partners indicate that arrivals in Yemen in December 2020 potentially reached up to 9,000.

Regional Overview*



Mixed Migration Regional Updates

Mixed migration within East Africa

Conflict in Ethiopia triggers mass displacement

In November 2020, unrest erupted in the northern Tigray region of Ethiopia. The fighting has killed [hundreds of people](#), triggered massive [internal displacement](#) in Ethiopia, as well as extensive displacement of Ethiopians across the border into Sudan. As of early January 2021, the United Nations Offices for Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (UNOCHA) in Sudan reported that UNHCR and the Sudanese Commissioner for Refugees (COR) had registered over [56,000 Ethiopians in Sudan](#) since the onset of the conflict.

[The UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Filipo Grande, made a statement about the situation in Tigray](#) in early January, saying, “I continue to receive many reliable reports and first-hand accounts of ongoing insecurity and allegations of grave and distressing human rights abuses, including killings, targeted abductions and forced return of refugees to Eritrea...these are concrete indications of major violations of international law.”

The high numbers of Ethiopians fleeing to Sudan, and the remote location of the area in which refugees are being received, has put UNHCR and COR under stress to provide adequate services to incoming refugees. For example, the transit centres at the Hamdayet and Abderafi border points were set up to accommodate a few hundred refugees, but have seen thousands of Ethiopians arrive in recent months. Tensions have also escalated between [Sudan and Ethiopia in recent weeks](#), with long standing border issues intensified by the conflict in Tigray and incoming refugees. This tension could further complicate integration or [return activities](#).

The estimated [56,000 Ethiopian refugees](#) often use existing mixed migration points to enter Sudan, particularly through the Humera and Metema border crossings. These [border points](#) see thousands of people crossing regularly and irregularly every year, and it is still unclear what impact the displacement and refugee influx will have on mixed migration in the region.

US deportations target East African asylum seekers

Reports in [the Guardian](#) newspaper and in [Kenyan media](#) indicate that East Africans were targeted during the final deportation flights under the Trump administration carried out by the United States Immigration and Custom Enforcement Agency (ICE). A flight left the United States in early January 2021, bound for Nairobi and was reported to have had a total of 53 [Kenyan, Ethiopian, and Somali](#) asylum seekers on board who had been residing in the United States while their asylum claims were being processed. In recent years, ICE has sought to deport more and more African asylum seekers from the United States under instruction from the Trump administration, which [enforced hard-line anti-immigrant policies](#).

[ICE has also come under fire by human rights advocates for a deportation flight in November 2020](#), during which Cameroonian and Congolese asylum seekers were beaten, pepper sprayed, shackled, dragged across the tarmac, and forced to sign 'voluntary repatriation' papers to return to countries with ongoing sectarian violence and conflict. These flights are thought to be the last push to deport as many asylum seekers as possible under the Trump administration, many of whom [according to their lawyers](#) were either pushed to accept their deportations under duress, had active cases open in US courts, or were not given fair trials. Newly inaugurated President Joe Biden, signed a [series of executive orders](#) on his first day in office including one that put a temporary halt on these types of deportations.

Policy discussions

Khartoum Process meeting on the impact of COVID-19 on human mobility

In October, MMC hosted a webinar with [partners engaged in the Khartoum Process](#). The webinar focused on the COVID-19 pandemic and the economic and protection impacts on mixed migration dynamics in East and North Africa. The webinar titled '**Mixed Migration and the COVID-19 crisis: What's next for people on the move in the "New Normal"?**' was based on 4Mi data collection from 4,000 interviews with refugees and migrants in Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, and Tunisia. The analysis focused on the impact of COVID-19 on their lives and migration journeys, risk awareness, access and barriers to healthcare and protection needs. MMC also facilitated a data-driven discussion about responses to the evolving situation in the Khartoum Process region.

The Eastern Route from East Africa to Yemen

2020 started with high levels of migration along the [Eastern Route](#), the mixed migration route from East Africa to Yemen (often onwards to Saudi Arabia or other Gulf countries). However, the COVID-19 pandemic brought migration along the Eastern Route to a halt for much of the year, and by the end of 2020 only [37,535 refugees and migrants from East Africa had arrived in Yemen](#). This is a just fraction of the 138,213 East Africans who arrived in Yemen [in 2019](#).

Tens of thousands of refugees and migrants [remain stranded](#) throughout the region due to COVID-19 related border closures and restrictions. By the end of November 2020, IOM estimated that over 14,500 migrants remain stranded in Yemen, 674 in [Djibouti](#) and between 400 and 500 in [Somalia](#) (in particular, [Garowe](#) and [Bosaso](#)).

East African arrivals to Yemen slowly restart this quarter

Overall, refugee and migrant arrivals to Yemen from East Africa this quarter remained low with 4,413 arrivals (compared to 30,432 arrivals from October to [December 2019](#)). However, this is an increase of 193% from the last quarter, when 1,505 refugees and migrants arrived in Yemen. Reported arrivals also [increased by 51%](#) between [October](#) (1,038) and [December](#) (2,035).² This is likely the result of the easing of some COVID-19 mobility restrictions in the region.

Ethiopian refugees and migrants continued to make up the majority of those travelling on the route (90%), and while the proportion of Somalis make up 10%. The demographics remained similar to trends throughout the year; 18% of arrivals were women and girls while 82% were men and boys. Somalia also regained its place as the most used departure point, accounting for 66% of departure to [Yemen this quarter](#).

Despite more arrivals in Yemen this quarter, movement along the Eastern Route continues to be severely disrupted due to the conflict in Yemen and the COVID-19 movement restrictions.

Deterioration of the situation in Yemen and emergence of a new return route

The situation for refugees and migrants in Yemen worsened this quarter, with [increased reports](#) of human rights abuses and [violence](#) towards refugees and migrants, and [mass deportations](#) of refugees and migrants from the Houthi-controlled Northern Governorates to the Southern Governorates in Yemen.³ The border between Yemen and Saudi Arabia [remained closed](#) for most of the quarter, which had implications for migration dynamics both within Yemen and across the region.

An estimated [14,000 migrants are stranded in Yemen, and many](#) are trying to return home from Yemen. There has been a surge in registrations of Ethiopians wishing to return to Ethiopia through humanitarian flights and voluntary repatriation with more than [2,600 registrations](#), according to IOM and internal partner

² The official IOM record is 2,035 new arrivals, however confidential reports from trusted partners indicate that arrivals in Yemen in December 2020 potentially reached up to 9,000 people.

³ Confidential partner reports.

reports. However, humanitarian flights and voluntary repatriation were suspended for much of the last year and have restarted at very limited capacity.

With few options for these thousands of refugees and migrants stranded in Yemen, there are increased reports of refugees and migrants [attempting deadly journeys](#) from Yemen to Djibouti via smuggling boats in an attempt to return to East Africa. There have been steady reports of refugees and migrants making spontaneous returns back to East Africa in the last 2 quarters of 2020, this phenomenon has been reported by key informants interviewed by MMC as early as May 2020. Between May and December 2020, [5,950 refugees and migrants](#) (698 women and 5,252 men) were recorded entering Djibouti from Yemen, mainly at points near Moulhoule and Ras Bir. There was an increase in these returns during the last quarter of 2020, with over 2,500 returnees reported to have arrived on the [Djibouti coast](#) between [October and December](#). All returns are believed to be Ethiopians, and the government of Djibouti and IOM are providing emergency counselling, medical care, housing, food, and COVID-19 awareness raising and testing services.

Returnees from Yemen to Djibouti continue to [recount](#) extreme [violence](#) towards refugees and migrants in Yemen – not only by [smugglers, armed groups and government authorities](#), but also other Ethiopian migrants of different ethnic groups. At least 1,500 migrants are also thought to be [held in detention](#) in locations across Yemen, and thousands of migrants are in urgent need [of assistance in Marib](#).

Fewer Ethiopians deported from Saudi Arabia in 2020 compared to 2019

Since the [March 2017 crackdown on undocumented migrants](#) by Saudi authorities, an average of 10,000 Ethiopians were being deported [each month](#) with a total of 380,000 Ethiopians [reportedly](#) returned between March 2017 and April 2020. These returns slowed dramatically during the COVID-19 period after [concerns were raised](#) about health and safety implications of returning Ethiopians, particularly around the spread [of COVID-19](#). In 2020, only [36,632 returnees were](#) registered by IOM (with a total 345,741 Ethiopian returnees from 2017 to 2020). This yearly figure is a nearly 70% decrease compared to 2019, when the total number of returns was [120,825](#).

Reports of abuse of migrants in Gulf States increase during COVID-19

Saudi Arabia has long been condemned by the international community and human rights groups for its treatment of migrants, most recently in its attempt to deport [thousands of Ethiopians during the COVID-19 pandemic in April 2020](#). A UN investigation was launched into the matter and the [UK government raised concern](#) about the conditions in which migrants are being kept. Despite this global attention Human Rights Watch reported that the abuse, mainly beatings and torture, [continued in recent months](#). Human Rights Watch also [reported that at least 3 Ethiopian migrants died](#) in Saudi detention centers between October and November 2020. In addition, the detention centers have no measures in place for avoiding the spread of COVID-19 between detainees, and reports indicate that up to [350 people are forced to sleep in one room](#) despite many detainees showing symptoms of the virus.

In its [World Report 2021](#), Human Rights Watch said that the COVID-19 pandemic has [increased rates of abuse and mistreatment](#) of migrant workers in the UAE. A report by the Business & Human Rights Resource Center also found a [275% increase in reports of labour abuse](#) towards migrants in Gulf countries from April to August 2020 compared to cases in 2019. The abuses and mistreatment outlined in the report include non-payment of wages, health and safety, living conditions, and lack of food. While the data has not been disaggregated by nationality, East Africans are included in these statistics. It is also clear that there have been [very few precautions put in place in the Gulf](#) to stem the spread of COVID-19 in the tight quarters in which migrant workers typically reside.

The Northern Route towards North Africa & Europe

The Northern Route is primarily used by Somalis and Eritreans, and by a small number of Ethiopians and others, often with the intention of traveling to Europe. Though East African arrivals to Europe have sharply decreased since 2015 many East Africans continue to make the journey towards North Africa and are reported by partners in [Libya](#) and [Tunisia](#).

East African arrivals to Europe along Mediterranean routes

In general, refugee and migrant crossings into Europe were affected by the [COVID-19 pandemic](#) and subsequent border closures. The number of refugees and migrants arriving in Europe fell by 13% from [123,663 in 2019 to 94,950 new arrivals in 2020](#). East African arrivals in Europe remain relatively low (over 31,000 East Africans reached Europe in 2016 compared to 3,089 East Africans in 2020). From January to December 2020, 1,401 refugees and migrants from East Africa were reported arriving in Europe along the [Central Mediterranean Route through Italy](#) (785 Somalis, 562 Eritreans, 54 Ethiopians) and [688 East Africans](#) were reported arriving [in Greece along the Eastern Mediterranean Route](#) (914 Congolese and 737 Somalis). These numbers are significantly lower than last year when 7,336 East Africans arrived in Europe (300 Somalis and 236 Eritreans via the [Central Mediterranean Route](#), and 4,100 Congolese and 2,700 Somalis via the [Eastern Mediterranean Route](#)).⁴ This reduction can largely be attributed to the severe mobility restrictions across all migration routes from East Africa throughout most of 2020.

Somalis are now the most common nationality from East Africa arriving in Europe (with over 1,500 Somali refugees and migrants arriving in 2020). An increasing number of East Africans are arriving via the Eastern Mediterranean Route (compared to the Central Mediterranean Route which has seen the most East Africans in recent years). However, the variance is slight at this moment and a trend that will continue to be monitored.

East African refugees and migrants in Libya and Tunisia

Although the percentage of East Africans along the Northern Route has reduced as more North and West Africans continue to join mixed migration flows, East Africans continue to [travel north](#) and numbers of East Africans in North Africa are still significant.

⁴ The MMC Quarterly Mixed Migration Update for Q1 2020 indicated a smaller number of arrivals, as at the time the calculation didn't include Congolese refugees and migrants.

In Tunisia, 524 East Africans (265 Eritreans 182 Somalis, 77 people from the Democratic Republic of Congo) were registered as people of concern with UNHCR by [November 2020](#). This similar to the [total number of 491 registered refugees and asylum seekers from](#) East Africans in February 2020 (248 Eritreans, 192 Somalis and 51 Ethiopians).

In Libya, UNHCR had registered 9,482 East Africans as people of concern by the [end of 2020](#) (5,432 Eritreans, 2,581 Somalis, 1,085 Ethiopian, 296 South Sudanese, and 88 Yemenis). Over 18,000 East Africans were recorded as part of the overall population of 574,146 migrants recorded by IOM in Libya at the end of [October 2020](#) (8,160 Somalis, 6,623 Eritreans, and 3,394 Ethiopians). This is a reduction from the 32,460 East Africans who were recorded in 2019 as part of 654,081 migrants present in Libya in [December 2019](#) (15,445 Somali, 8,663 Eritrean and 8,352 Ethiopians). The number of overall migrants in Libya has been declining since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, and more than 80,000 migrants are reported to have [left Libya since March 2020](#) (mostly for neighboring countries). This decline has been linked to a combination of factors, including the increasing unemployment rate, reduction in available labour opportunities for migrant workers, and tightened security controls and mobility restrictions due to the current COVID-19 pandemic. If prolonged, this may also result in an emergence of new migration routes and/or departure points across the North African coast. Similarly, an easing of movement restrictions could result in a surge of movements across the Mediterranean.

Refugee evacuations from Libya to Rwanda restart this quarter

In November, a group of [79 vulnerable asylum seekers](#) were evacuated from Libya to Rwanda. The group included men, women, and children from Eritrea, Sudan and Somalia. Most were living in Tripoli, but many had previously been held in detention, some for several years. They were evacuated under the Emergency Transit Mechanism (ETM), announced in [mid-2019 by the Government of Rwanda, UNHCR and the African Union](#). According to the agreement, refugees and asylum seekers evacuated to Rwanda could be granted the option to resettle to a third country, while others may be assisted to return their home countries if conditions on the ground were to allow that. The group follows 306 other asylum seekers evacuated previously, mostly [in 2019](#).

Denmark launches “dissuasion campaign” to stop migration

The government of Denmark launched a communications campaign that [will target potential refugees and migrants in East Africa, specifically in Sudan, Somalia, and Ethiopia](#), with messages aimed at dissuading them from undertaking migration journeys to Europe. The campaign will cost a total of \$2.5m and will use accounts and testimonies of migrants who have undertaken the journey to inform young people of the dangers and risks of attempting to reach Europe. The Danish Minister of Immigration, Mattias Tesfaye, made the argument that the efforts to dissuade migration will be combined with work within the European Union for “fairer asylum processes” which will [“be for the benefit of European countries and migrants themselves”](#). This program follows previous efforts that were carried out by [Denmark in 2015 to dissuade African migrants](#) from undertaking migration to Europe.

Evidence of the effectiveness of such dissuasion campaigns is limited. In fact such messaging has been assessed to often be based on the [“wrong assumptions”](#) and based on a limited evaluation of migrant

decision-making processes, where [scare-mongering efforts have little impact](#) on those on the move, or those deciding to make a move.

The Southern Route towards South Africa

South Africa begins deportation proceedings against refugees and asylum seekers

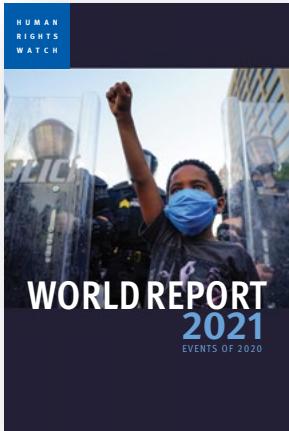
In November 2020, the government of South Africa began the process of deporting [20 refugees and asylum seekers](#) that were part of a month-long sit-in protest against xenophobia in Cape Town. For its part, the Department of Home Affairs claimed that it followed 'due process' in the deportation process, and as of November, [the 20 individuals had been transferred to South African deportation facilities](#). Though it's unclear what countries the refugees and asylum seekers are from (or their names), South Africa hosts more than [260,000](#) refugees and asylum seekers, largely made up of East Africans from Somalia, Ethiopia and the Democratic Republic of Congo who are impacted by the xenophobia and violence.

South Africa closes land borders to stop spread of COVID-19

In early January 2021, the South African government [closed the Beitbridge border, the busiest border crossing in Africa](#). This crossing serves as the only legal border crossing between South Africa and Zimbabwe. The decision was taken as hundreds of thousands of Zimbabwean migrants (along with travelers from across Southern Africa) sought to return to South Africa after the Christmas holiday season, and the queue for the crossing took up to [4 days \(without basic services\)](#) due to measures to quell the spread of COVID-19.

Also in early January 2021, South African President Cyril Rhamaphosa declared that [20 land borders between South Africa and its neighbors would be closed until mid-February](#) as the country struggles to cope with the impact and spread of COVID-19. The closure left [both regular and irregular migrants stranded in neighboring countries](#), namely Zimbabwe and Mozambique, and cut off a significant portion of South Africa's workforce from their homes and jobs.

Highlighted New Research and Reports



Human Rights Watch: World Report 2021

Human Rights Watch | January 2021

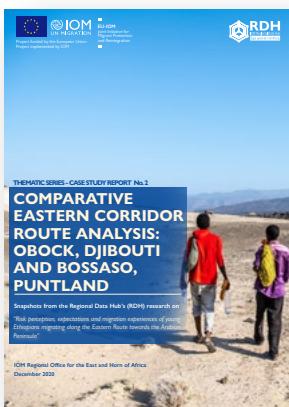
The 31st annual World Report summarizes human rights conditions in nearly 100 countries and territories worldwide in 2020. It includes extensive investigative work from Human Rights Watch staff, often done in close partnership with domestic human rights activists.



Gendered Patterns of Women and Girls' Migration Along the Eastern Corridor

IOM | December 2020

Based on data collected in Obock, Djibouti and Bossaso, Puntland, this thematic report provides in-depth and focused insights on gendered migration patterns along the Eastern Route. The paper includes a brief introduction to gendered labour migration out of Ethiopia, followed by an analysis of key indicators and insights from qualitative interviews.



Comparative Eastern Corridor Route Analysis: Obock, Djibouti and Bossaso, Puntland

IOM | December 2020

This briefing paper compares the two main migratory routes (through Djibouti and Somalia) along the Eastern Corridor. The briefing paper includes an introduction to the different Eastern Corridor routes, followed by an analysis of key indicators and insights from qualitative interviews.



Africa Migration Report: Challenging the Narrative

IOM/African Union Commission | November 2020

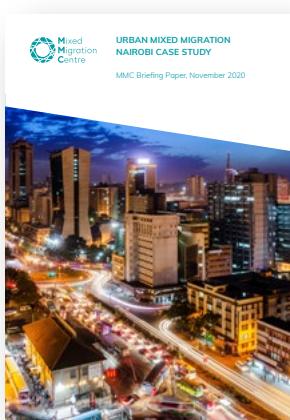
This first ever 'Africa Migration Report' released by IOM and the AUC takes a comprehensive view of Migration in Africa, and seeks to dispel myths and misconceptions around migration in Africa. The report undertakes an extensive analysis of migration in Africa, looking at all aspects, from looking at what the challenges are with the current narrative, to examining trends of movement, to trade and migration, border management, as well as the environmental impacts of migration on the continent.



Impact of Covid-19 Movement Restrictions on Migrants along the Eastern Corridor

IOM | November 2020

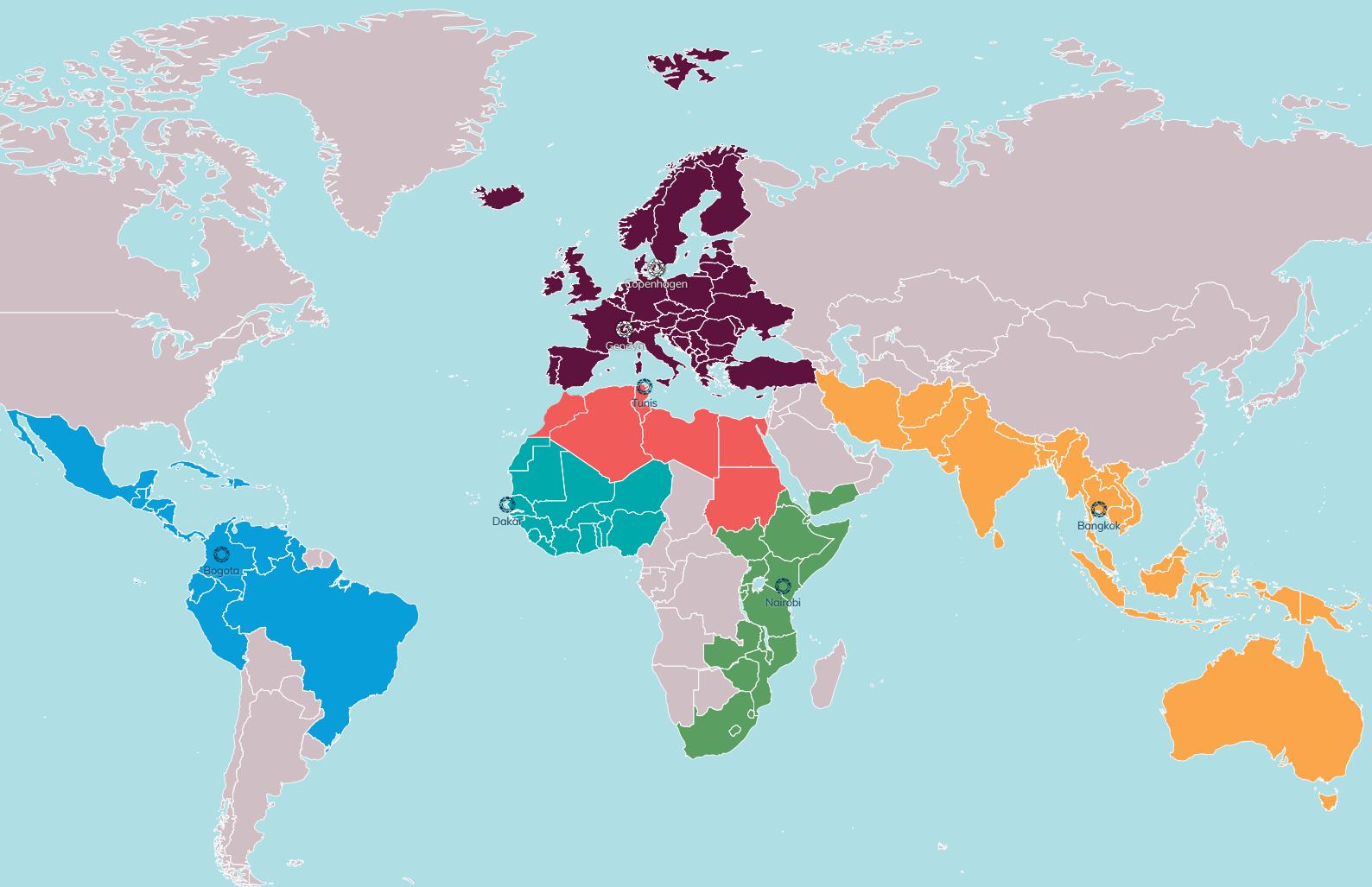
Drawing on various data sources, including IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix, Assisted Voluntary Returns, Flow Monitoring Points, and Migration Response Centers, this report provides a comprehensive update on the situation for Eritrean, Ethiopian, and Somali mixed migrants along the Eastern Corridor towards Yemen and Saudi Arabia, as well as the situation with Covid-19 along the route.



Urban Migration Case Study Nairobi

Mixed Migration Centre | November 2020

This Urban Mixed Migration case study focuses on Kenya's capital city of Nairobi which hosts a significant refugee and migrant population who choose to either settle permanently or transit through to other destinations in and out of the East Africa region. This study offers an overview of the current mixed migration dynamics in the city and the national migration policy framework and by examining mixed migration dynamics within the capital using three thematic lenses: 1) Nairobi as a city of opportunities 2) Nairobi as city of risks, and 3) Nairobi during the COVID-19 pandemic.



The MMC is a global network consisting of six regional hubs and a central unit in Geneva engaged in data collection, research, analysis and policy development on mixed migration. The MMC is a leading source for independent and high-quality data, research, analysis and expertise on mixed migration. The MMC aims to increase understanding of mixed migration, to positively impact global and regional migration policies, to inform evidence-based protection responses for people on the move and to stimulate forward thinking in public and policy debates on mixed migration. The MMC's overarching focus is on human rights and protection for all people on the move.

The MMC is part of and governed by the Danish Refugee Council (DRC). Global and regional MMC teams are based in Copenhagen, Dakar, Geneva, Nairobi, Tunis, Bogota and Bangkok.

For more information visit:
mixedmigration.org and follow us at [@Mixed_Migration](https://twitter.com/Mixed_Migration)

