



**MMC East Africa
& Yemen**

QUARTER 2 2021



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.

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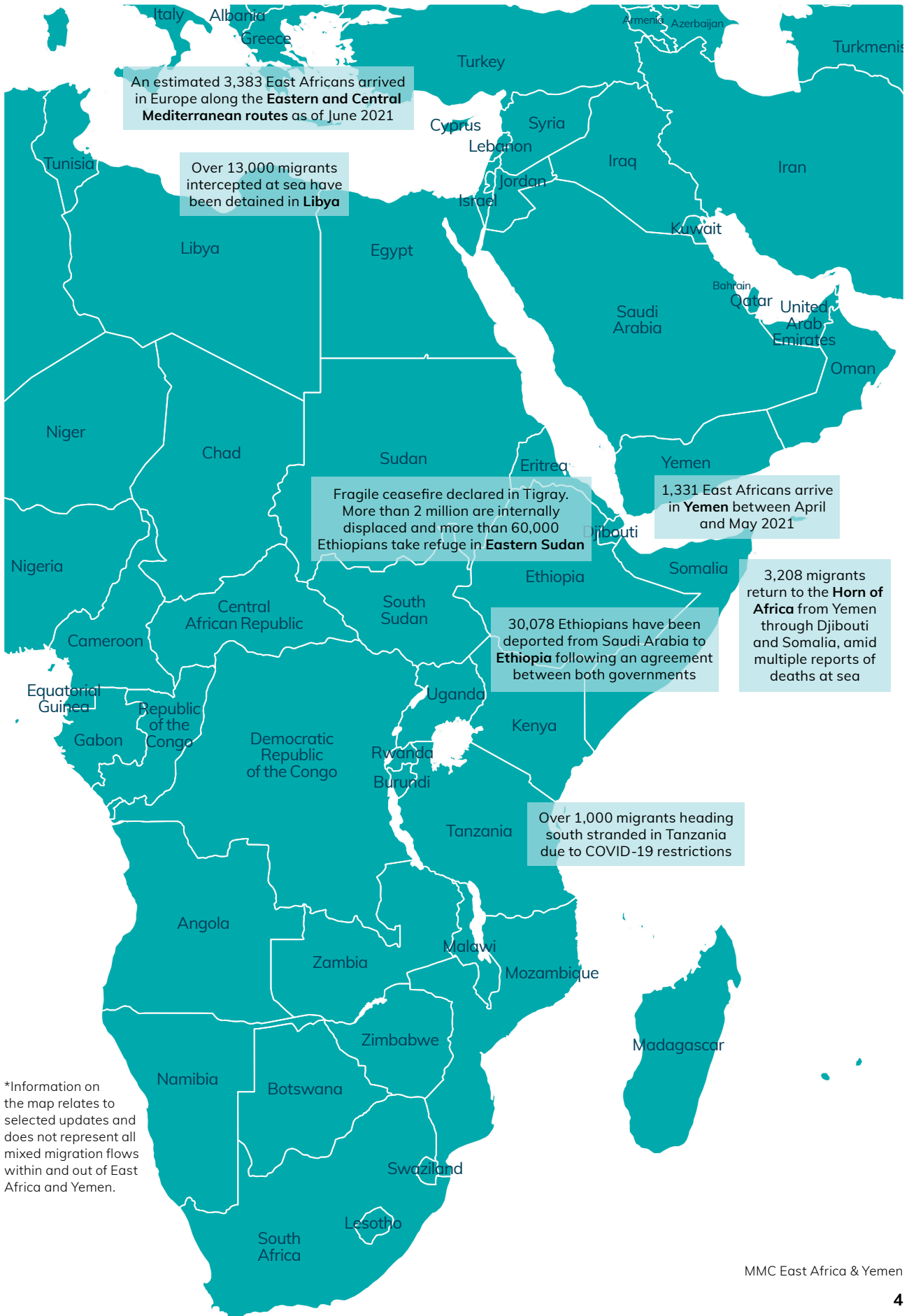
Quarterly Mixed Migration Update: East Africa & Yemen

Quarter 2 - 2021

Key Updates

- **Fragile ceasefire declared in Tigray:** A fragile ceasefire has been declared in Ethiopia following eight months of violent conflict in the Tigray region. Around 2 million people are internally displaced and more than 63,000 Ethiopians are seeking refuge in Eastern Sudan. 5.5 million are acutely food insecure.
- **Refugee and migrant arrivals in Yemen fall:** 1,331 East African refugees and migrants arrived in Yemen between April and May 2021, a 54% decrease compared to the same period in 2020 (2,920).
- **Over 150 migrants feared dead in boat tragedy off Yemen coast:** A boat carrying 200 people overturned while on a return journey to the Horn of Africa from Yemen. 25 bodies were recovered by fisherman while more than 150 people are feared to be missing or dead.
- **Spontaneous returns from Yemen continue:** Amid multiple reports of boat tragedies in the Bab-el-Mandeb strait between the Horn of Africa and Yemen, 3,474 East Africans return to the Horn from Yemen, 2,845 arrivals in Djibouti and 629 in Somalia.
- **More than 30,000 Ethiopian migrants deported from Saudi Arabia in a span of two weeks:** In a ramping up of deportations from Saudi Arabia, 30,078 Ethiopian migrants were deported from the Kingdom between 26 June – 9 July 2021. Tigrayan returnees account for 40% of returns between November 2020 and June 2021.
- **Increasing pushback from Europe to deter refugees and migrants:** Denmark and the United Kingdom propose to have asylum seekers transferred to a third country as their applications are processed. Unconfirmed speculations suggest that the third country is Rwanda, after Denmark signed an M.O.U. with Rwanda's government to address immigration and asylum issues.

Regional Overview*



*Information on the map relates to selected updates and does not represent all mixed migration flows within and out of East Africa and Yemen.

Mixed Migration Regional Updates

Mixed migration within East Africa

Fragile ceasefire declared in Tigray

After months of [mounting pressure](#) and as the Tigray conflict entered its eighth month, the Ethiopian Federal Government declared an [immediate and unilateral ceasefire](#) on 28 June until the end of the farming season. Tigrayan forces initially described the government's ceasefire a "[joke](#)" after sweeping across large parts of Tigray, and retaking the regional capital, Mekelle, promising to "[liberate every square inch of Tigray](#)" and to continue their "hot pursuit" of pro-government fighters in the region. The rebels later said that they [accept the ceasefire "in principle"](#), but have produced a [long list of preconditions](#), including an independent investigation into alleged war crimes, the delivery of humanitarian aid, and the restoration of basic services.

The African Union (AU) [launched a commission of inquiry](#) under the African Commission on Human and People's rights to investigate the ongoing hostilities. In opposition to the commission, the Ethiopian government cited the move as "misguided and lacking legal basis" and relayed its preference to a joint investigation. On 13 July, the [UN Human Rights Council approved a resolution](#) calling for an "immediate halt to all human rights violations and abuses and violation of international humanitarian law" in Tigray. The text also called for "the swift and verifiable withdrawal of Eritrean troops from the Tigray region".

Over 2 million people remain internally displaced within Ethiopia, and according to the [UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation](#), more than 5.5 million people are in high acute food insecurity (IPC Phase 3), of whom 353,000 in Tigray are in catastrophe (IPC Phase 5). Humanitarian access to Tigray remains strained, and while large areas within the region are now accessible, the flow of humanitarian supplies into the region are blocked.

As of 30 April 2021, [63,110 Ethiopians](#) had crossed into Eastern Sudan seeking refuge from the conflict. More than 41,000 individuals have been relocated to nearby settlements and camps (namely Tunaybah settlement and Um Rakuba camp). In a damning analysis, donors have accused UNHCR of [mismanaging the response](#) in the country, charging them of putting "the safety, security and dignity of refugees at severe risk". At the end of June, UNHCR reported that [severe storms had damaged the shelters](#) of 16,000 Ethiopian refugees in Sudan.

It is unclear at this stage if and how the conflict will impact broader regional mixed migration movements of Ethiopians, Somalis and Eritreans (see [here](#) for earlier MMC analysis on potential scenarios), either along routes into Sudan and further North towards Libya or Europe or East into Yemen and Saudi Arabia. Unconfirmed reports point to a potential increase in the number of young Eritreans leaving their country (reportedly to avoid conscription into the army and having to fight in Tigray) and crossing into Sudan on routes towards Port Sudan and further North. While too soon to establish a link, it is notable that in the whole of 2020 only 562 Eritreans arrived in Italy, while in 2021 during the first 6 months, [1,208](#) arrived. [Media reports](#) also indicated a strong increase in the number of Eritreans smuggled through Sudan and Libya.

Infamous smuggler sentenced and charged in Ethiopia

Renowned Eritrean human smuggler Tewelde Goitom, also known as Welid, was sentenced to 18 years in an Ethiopian prison after being [found guilty of trafficking charges](#). He was also ordered to pay a fine of 200,000 Ethiopian Birr (approx. \$4,608) – the maximum allowed by Ethiopian law – after he was found guilty on five counts of human trafficking. Goitom reportedly operated warehouses in the Libyan town of Bani Walid, where between 2014 to 2018, he held thousands of Ethiopian, Eritrean, Somalia and Sudanese nationals intending to travel to Europe. [Victims interviewed](#) report that the agreed upon smuggling fee would skyrocket once they reached Libya, and those unable to pay were tortured. Dependent on the nationality, this ranged from \$5,000 to \$12,000. Goitom was also [notorious for holding a large number of women captive](#), who he raped indiscriminately.

Goitom's accomplice, Shishay Godefay Demoz was also arrested and found guilty on two counts of trafficking and was sentenced to 16 years and 6 months and ordered to pay a fine of 50,000 Ethiopian Birr (approx. \$1,152). Remote testimonies were not allowed in the trials, and only Ethiopians who had returned to the country were able to give evidence. Commentators called the sentences an "[insult to all the victims](#)" and witnesses who participated in the trials raised concerns that both men would be able to bribe their way out of prison.

Mt Nyiragongo eruption displaces over 415,000 people

On May 22, residents of Goma, Democratic Republic of Congo, were forced to flee their homes after the eruption of one of the most active volcanoes in the world. [415,000 people were displaced](#), of which 52,000 were displaced across the border to Rubavu district in neighbouring Rwanda, and [32 reported dead](#). A few days after the eruption, earthquakes and tremors prompted authorities to order evacuations on May 27th with concerns of a second eruption. Mt Nyiragongo previously erupted in 2002 and 1977 killing over 100 and 600 people respectively. As of June 4, [160,686 had already returned](#).

The Eastern Route from East Africa to Yemen

Refugee and migrant arrivals in Yemen fall

Arrivals from the Horn of Africa to Yemen fell lower this quarter, with just 1,331 refugees and migrants recorded between [April \(842\)](#) and [May \(489\)](#) 2021.¹ April and May are typically peak months for travel along this route,² before rougher seas in July and August prevent many boats from making the crossing. These figures mark a 49% decrease on movements recorded in [February \(1,225\)](#) and [March \(1,358\)](#) 2021, and a 54% decrease compared to arrivals in [April \(1,725\)](#) and [May \(1,195\)](#) 2020. In Somalia, this dip is likely as a result of a combination of increased security and military presence in Bossaso and Mareero (departure points to Yemen) following an [Al Shabab attack on a prison](#), and reports that the Somaliland Immigration Department continued to [deport undocumented Ethiopian migrants](#), deterring travel further east. In Djibouti, [May arrivals](#) from Ethiopia were the lowest in three consecutive months, and recent boat tragedies (see more below) may also have contributed to fewer departures to Yemen. Djibouti was the main departure point in April and May, accounting for 53% of departures compared with 47% of departures from Somalia.

Characteristically, Ethiopians made up the majority (88%) of arrivals, followed by Somalis (12%). 77% of new arrivals were men and 15% were women. The proportion of children tracked along the route was far lower in May, at 4% compared with 11% recorded in April.

Conditions in Yemen continue to deteriorate as fighting escalates in different parts of the country. Hostilities and drone strikes have caused massive displacement in [Al-Hudaydah, Al Jawf and Marib governorates](#). An estimated [36,726](#) people are reported to be newly displaced in 2021 with [4 million](#) internally displaced. As of May 2021, a total of [140,146 refugees and asylum seekers](#), 113,020 Somalis and 16,193 Ethiopians, were in Yemen.

Over 35,000 stranded in the Horn and Yemen

An estimated [35,697 refugees and migrants were stranded](#) in the Horn of Africa and in Yemen at the end of May 2021. 32,700 migrants were stranded in Yemen, unable to continue with their journeys as a result of the ongoing conflict and COVID-19 restrictions. A further 2,697 migrants on their way to Yemen were stranded at various sites in Djibouti, while 300 were stranded in and around Bossaso, with limited options to continue their journeys or return home.

Spontaneous returns from Yemen continue

With movement restrictions and the conflict limiting movement through Yemen, many refugees and migrants are left with no option to journey back to the Horn. At least 2,845 Ethiopian migrants returned from Yemen in this quarter (1,479 in [April](#), 900 in [May](#), and 475 between 4-17 [June](#)). The return decreased by 45% when compared to movements [between January and March 2021](#). Further, [629 movements](#) (of both returning Somalis and Yemeni nationals) were recorded in Somalia between April and May.

¹ June figures were not available at the time of publication.

² [37,224 in 2019 and 46,786 in 2018](#).

Scores dead or missing in multiple boat tragedies

Despite the low numbers of refugees and migrants traveling along the eastern route, the number of deaths at sea were notably high this quarter. All tragedies were recorded in return journeys from Yemen back to the Horn of Africa. In April, [42 people drowned](#) after their boat capsized off the Djibouti coast after leaving Yemen. Of the 60 people believed to have been onboard, 14 survived the accident. In another incident reported in May, [8 people died after smugglers threw them overboard](#) off the coast of Djibouti. Similarly, [a boat carrying 200 people overturned](#) off the Yemen coast in June. 25 were confirmed dead, and over 150 are feared dead or missing. The nationalities of the victims remain unclear, however, fishermen who recovered the 25 bodies said they “appeared to be of African origin.”

Saudi detention of migrants includes documented Ethiopians

[Close to 20,000 migrants](#) of varying nationalities were arrested and detained in Saudi Arabia in one week in June in a major campaign by officials aimed at netting undocumented migrants in the Kingdom. While the detention of undocumented workers in the country has been ongoing since 2014, [media reports](#) suggest that these arrests specifically targeted Ethiopian neighbourhoods, and indicate that Ethiopians were violently accosted on the streets or had their homes raided by authorities. Notably, Ethiopians with valid documentation and permits were also reportedly detained. Although the numbers of those arrested are not confirmed, testimonies from affected family members suggest that the cells were overcrowded. The Ethiopian Consulate in Jeddah announced that they [secured the release of about 600 Ethiopians](#) with legal documentation and an additional 94 detained near the Saudi-Yemen border, but that the number of those detained was on the increase.

40,000 Ethiopian migrants to be deported from Saudi Arabia

Following [an agreement](#) between the Government of Ethiopia and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to deport 40,000 Ethiopian migrants in the span of two weeks, [30,078 Ethiopian migrants were returned](#) between 26 June and 9 July 2021. After a lull in deportations in 2020 due the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of Ethiopian returnees has increased steadily in both quarters of this year; 10,244 Ethiopians returned in the first quarter ([2,199 in January](#), [3,618 in February](#) and [4,427 in March](#)) and 20,655 returned in this quarter ([4,159 in April](#), [4,453 in May](#) and [12,062 in June](#)). More returnees are expected beyond the target as the Kingdom continues [deporting Ethiopian detainees from the refugee camps and prisons](#) where migrants have reported various human rights abuses.

A total of 376,640 Ethiopians were deported from Saudi Arabia between March 2017 and June 2021. Tigrayan returnees continue to arrive in large numbers from Saudi Arabia, accounting for 40% of return movements between November 2020 and June 2021. As many areas of Tigray Regional State remain inaccessible due to ongoing hostilities, many returnees who are unable to return to Tigray need temporary accommodation and services in Addis Ababa.

The Northern Route towards North Africa and Europe

East African arrivals to Europe along Mediterranean routes

A total of [22,922 refugees and migrants](#) arrived in the Mediterranean (Greece, Italy, Malta, Spain) between April and June 2021, a 41% increase on the 16,281 arrivals recorded between January and March 2021. Arrivals from East Africa (Eritrea 1,208, Sudan 1,174, Somalia 627, Ethiopia 251, D.R.C. 116, South Sudan 7) account for 9% of all arrivals recorded in 2021. Similarly, as more arrivals are recorded, over [13,000 people heading to Europe have been intercepted](#) surpassing the totals of those “rescued, intercepted and disembarked” in all of 2020.

Movements into Italy, the most common arrival point for East Africans, showed a [month a month increase during the quarter](#); 1,595 in April, 5,679 in May and 6,756 in June, the highest numbers in 2021. Arrivals this quarter were 67% higher than those noted in the first quarter of the year (7,868). East Africans (Eritreans, Ethiopians, Somalis) account for 9% of arrivals to Italy between January and June 2021.

[Similarly, in Greece](#) arrivals this quarter (2,023) were 14% higher than the 1,775 arrivals noted between January and March 2021. 399 East Africans arrived in Greece between January and April 2021, including 283 Somalis and 116 people from the D.R.C. [In Malta](#), Eritreans made up 16% of arrivals between January and June 2021.

East African refugees and migrants in Libya and Tunisia

At the end of May 2021, [450 East Africans](#) (193 Eritreans, 149 Somalis and 108 Congolese) were registered Tunisia as asylum seekers or refugees. This is a drop from the [516](#) recorded in April, and may indicate that some have moved onwards, possibly towards Europe.

At the end of June 2021, UNHCR had registered [8,065 East African asylum seekers and refugees in Libya](#) (4,886 Eritreans, 1,941 Somalis, 973 Ethiopians and 265 South Sudanese), a slight reduction from the [8,999 registered by the end of March 2021](#), indicating possible onward movement.

Perilous sea journeys between North Africa and Europe

As of 1 July, an estimated [866 refugees and migrants have died or gone missing](#) on the Mediterranean Sea in 2021. As departures towards Europe have increased this quarter, more boats are reported to have raised distress alarms or sunk off Tunisian and Libyan coasts. On 27 June, [Tunisian naval forces rescued 178 migrants](#) when their boat broke down in an incident that led to the drowning of two people. Migrants from different nationalities including Eritreans were reportedly on board. In the same month, [267 migrants](#) were rescued as they departed from Libya on their way to Italy. In May, one boat sank off the Tunisian coast causing [57 migrants of unknown nationalities to drown](#), as [another 11 people drowned](#) while 12 were rescued after the rubber dinghy they were on capsized off Libya. And in April, [41 people believed to be from Sub-Saharan Africa drowned](#) off Tunisia, and a further [100 migrants are feared to be dead](#) after their boat estimated to have 130 people capsized off Libya.

Over 13,000 intercepted amid increasing human rights violations in detention centers in Libya

The Libyan coast guard has returned over [13,000 people](#) back to Libya between January and June 2021 after intercepting them at sea. Migrants are then held at detention centres run by Libya's Department for Combating Illegal Immigration (DCIM). [Reports of abuse and violence against detainees](#) are not uncommon with many also citing insufficient food and water, unhygienic facilities and exposure to diseases. Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) recently reported [increased violence among detainees and guards](#) as a result of severely crowded facilities. Staff also reported treating detainees for injuries sustained from beatings by Libyan guards.

Increasing pushback from Europe to deter refugees and migrants

In June, the Danish Government [passed a bill to amend the Aliens Act](#) that seeks to have asylum seekers arriving in the country transferred to a third country where their claims would be processed. The signing of a [memorandum of understanding with Rwanda](#) on April 24 has led to [unconfirmed speculations](#) that Rwanda could be the destination for many asylum seekers in Denmark. The bilateral non-binding agreement seeks to address "immigration and asylum issues" as well as including challenges experienced in countries of origin, transit and destination. Further, funding towards [Rwanda's Emergency Transit Mechanism \(ETM\)](#), border management, combating illegal migration, return and repatriation form the focus of the agreement. The Danish government claims the [current asylum system acts as a motivating factor](#) to thousands to undertake perilous journeys to reach Europe. Although asylum applications have decreased since 2015, the government believes the implementation of the bill will deter refugees and migrants from migrating. [UNHCR expressed concern](#) and disappointment and indicated that the amendments "run counter to the letter and spirit of the 1951 Refugee Convention, as well as the Global Compact on Refugees." The Director of [Human Rights Watch](#) regarded the law as "regressive" and others such as the [Danish Refugee Council](#) and [Amnesty International](#) cited similar concerns on Denmark's failure to their legal responsibility to refugees and the safeguarding against human rights abuses.

[A similar plan](#) to have asylum seekers transferred to a third country was also proposed by the United Kingdom on July 6. The "Nationality and Borders Bill" tabled by the British Home Secretary, provides grounds for arrests based on illegal entry into the UK and "would make it easier to remove someone to a safe country while their asylum claim is processed." Although not yet confirmed, reports state UK representatives held talks with Denmark concerning [joint collaboration on offshore asylum processing in Rwanda](#). Human rights advocates described the bill as "inhuman" and further call out the government of not honouring its commitment to asylum seekers. Rights groups have termed the bill as "[unjust](#)" and "[legislative vandalism](#)" that would undermine the right to asylum and put asylum seekers at risk of detention or in countries with no structure.

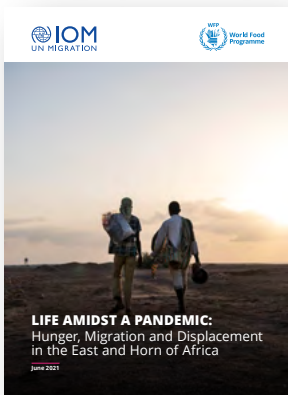
The Southern Route towards South Africa

Over 1,000 migrants stranded in Tanzania and scores detained in Kenya

As of 24 June, [1,177 Ethiopians, 7 Somalis and 3 Eritreans](#) were reported to be stranded in Tanzania due to border closures as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is possible that migrants crossed into Tanzania via flight to Kenya or accessed land border points that were still open between Ethiopia and Kenya. In February, the President of Tanzania is reported to have pardoned [1,789 Ethiopians who had been detained in the country](#). Those in custody were released unconditionally, with the President stating that, "Ethiopians can go home today if they want to."

A number of Ethiopian and Somali refugees and migrants have also been intercepted in Kenya this quarter. In April, [40 undocumented Ethiopians were arrested in Nairobi](#) in separate locations. They told the police they were waiting on the agent who had brought them to take them to South Africa. Another [4 Ethiopians were found stranded](#) in May in Narok, close to the Kenya-Tanzania border where it is speculated they were waiting for smugglers. [7 Somalis](#) were also arrested while heading to Nairobi by bus that departed from Daadab and another [5 arrested](#) and charged in Garissa before they could make their way to Nairobi.

Highlighted New Research and Reports



[Life amidst a Pandemic: Hunger, Migration and Displacement in the East and Horn of Africa](#)

IOM & WFP | June 2021

Building on the global joint work by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the World Food Programme (WFP) on the impact of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) on hunger, migration and displacement in the world from November 2020, this report aims to provide an overview of the unique challenges faced by migrants and forcibly displaced populations in the East and Horn of Africa (EHOA) region during 2020.



[Immigration Detention in South Africa: Stricter Control of Administrative Detention, Increasing Criminal Enforcement of Migration](#)

Global Detention Project | June 2021

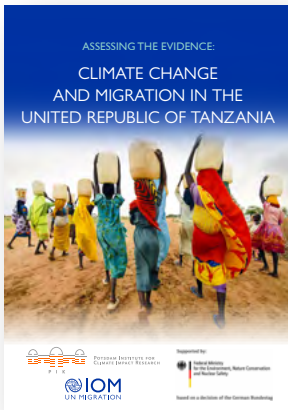
South Africa has increasingly viewed cross border movements through the lens of national security and criminality. The country's Border Management Act, adopted in 2020, reflects this embrace of a securitisation agenda, so much so there are concerns that migration detentions will be encouraged. This report delves deeper into the country's laws and policies as well the detention structure and the link to immigration detention.



[Families of Missing Migrants: Their Search for Answers, the Impacts of Loss and Recommendations for Improved Support](#)

IOM | May 2021

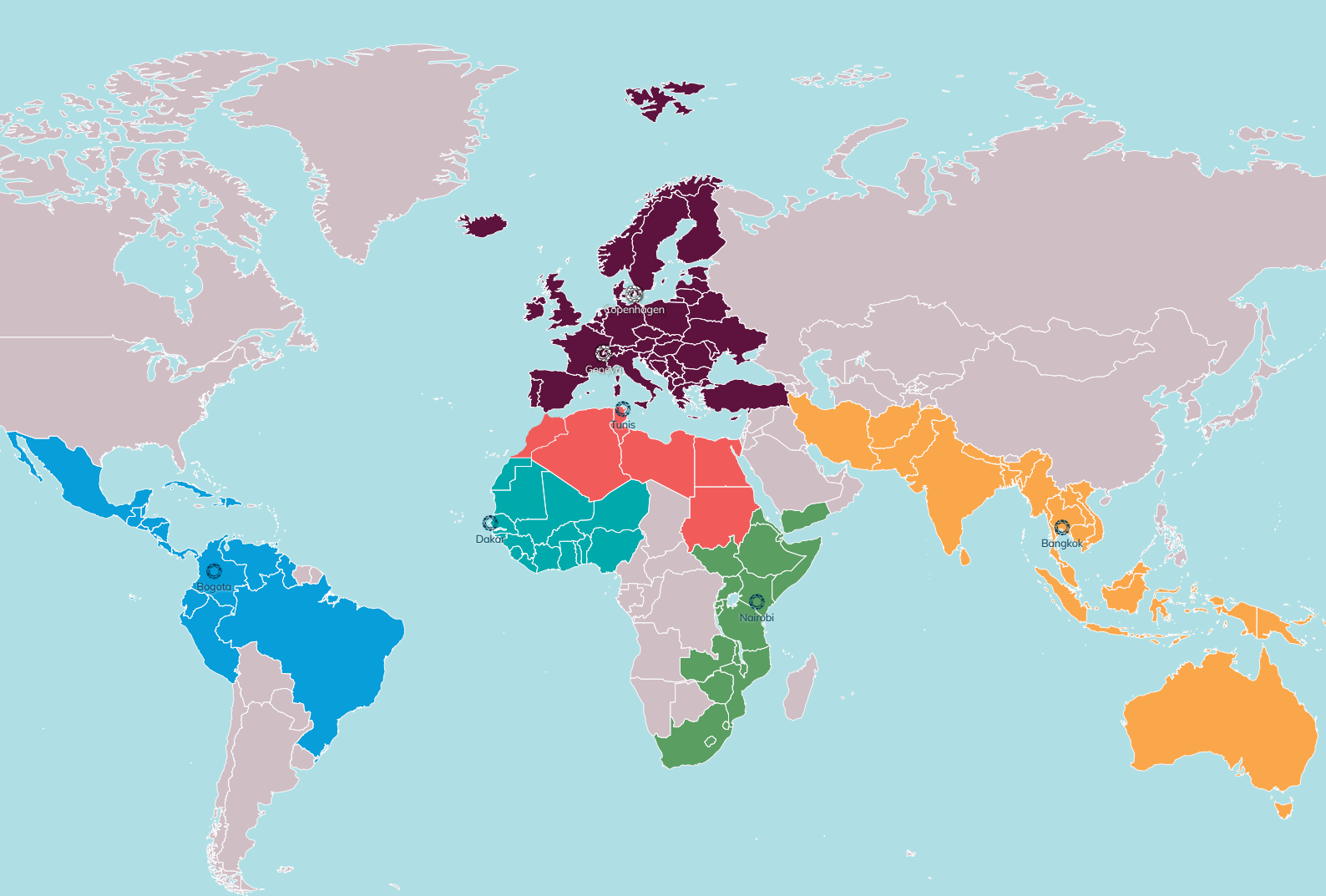
Based on qualitative interviews conducted in 2020, this report explores the challenges and needs of Ethiopian families who have relatives who went missing or died in the context of international migration, against the backdrop of the legal, policy and institutional frameworks applicable to issues of missing migrants in Ethiopia.



Assessing the Evidence: Climate Change and Migration in the United Republic of Tanzania

IOM | May 2021

The publication attempts to comprehensively address climate change impacts in the United Republic of Tanzania, current mobility patterns and trends, and the possible linkages between them. Further, it focuses mainly on the internal, rural-to-rural migration flows that are still prevalent in the country. It provides an analysis of the existing research on both climate change and migration in the country, drawing from evidence from the wider climate and migration literature.



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)

