

# Djibouti

## MIGRATION PROFILE

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*Study on Migration Routes  
in the East and Horn of Africa*

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# Contents

List of Figures .....	I
List of Tables.....	I
1. Introduction.....	1
2. Forced Migration/ Displacement .....	3
2.1. Refugees in Djibouti .....	3
2.2. Refugees from Djibouti .....	4
2.3. Internal Displacement in Djibouti .....	5
3. Regular/ Labour Migration.....	5
3.1. Immigration.....	5
3.2. Emigration .....	5
4. Internal Migration .....	5
5. Irregular Migration .....	5
5.1. Human Smuggling .....	6
5.2. Trafficking in Human Beings.....	7
6. Migrant’s Vulnerabilities and Protection Issues .....	8
7. Relevant National Policies and Stakeholders.....	8
References.....	11

## List of Figures

Figure 1: Origin of Migrants in Djibouti, 2015.....	2
Figure 2: Destination of Migrants from Djibouti, 2015.....	2
Figure 3: Total Population in Djibouti by Age Group, 2015 .....	3
Figure 4: Migrant Stock in Djibouti by Age Group, 2015 .....	3
Figure 5: Djibouti Tier Ranking By Year .....	7

## List of Tables

Table 1: Djibouti’s Key Demographic and Development Indicators .....	1
Table 2: Djibouti’s Key Migration Policy Responses .....	9

# 1. Introduction

Djibouti is located at the tip of the Horn of Africa, bordering the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea, between Eritrea and Somalia. Its population was last estimated at 846,687 in July 2016 and it is a poor country with high rates of illiteracy, child malnutrition and unemployment. As a nation, it is generally deprived of natural resources and prone to floods and droughts, making it dependent on neighbouring and European countries for food supplies (CIA, 2017). These factors, among others, contribute to its low HDI of 0.473, ranking the country as 172nd out of 188 worldwide (UNDP, 2016). Djibouti also faces widespread poverty, with 23 per cent of its population living in extreme poverty and 96.5 per cent of the rural population below the poverty line (DAI and EuroTrends, 2015).



Source: CIA, 2017.

**Table 1: Djibouti's Key Demographic and Development Indicators**

Indicator	Djibouti
Total area, in sq km <sup>a</sup>	23,200
Population (2015), in million <sup>b</sup>	0.89
Urban Population (2015), % of total <sup>c</sup>	77.3
Population Growth Rate, annual % <sup>d</sup>	1.3
Ethnic Groups <sup>a</sup>	Somali 60% Afar 35% Other 5%
Human Development Index (2015), country rank out of 188 <sup>e</sup>	0.473 172
GDP Based on PPP per Capita, current international dollars per capita <sup>f</sup>	3369.58
Life Expectancy at Birth (2015), years <sup>e</sup>	62.3
Unemployment (2015), % of labour force <sup>e</sup>	53.9
Youth Unemployment (2015), % ages 15-24 <sup>e</sup>	n.d.
Multidimensional Poverty Headcount (2006), % <sup>e</sup>	26.9
Gini Coefficient (2010-2015) <sup>e</sup>	44.1
Foreign Direct Investment (net inflows, 2015), current USD millions <sup>d</sup>	124.00
Net Official Development Assistance Received (13), current USD millions <sup>d</sup>	169.56
Personal Remittances Received (2015), current USD millions <sup>d</sup>	0.63

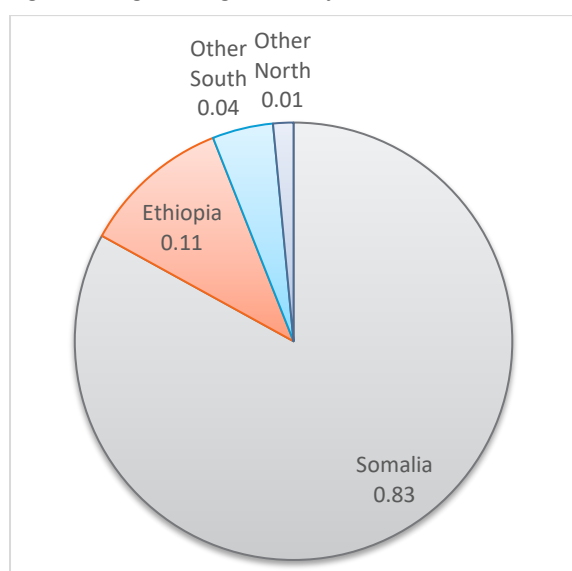
<sup>a</sup> CIA, 2017; <sup>b</sup> UN DESA, 2015b; <sup>c</sup> UN DESA, 2014; <sup>d</sup> World Bank, 2017; <sup>e</sup> UNDP, 2016; <sup>f</sup> IMF, 2017.

Despite these factors, the country is still relatively politically stable which, together with its strategic position between East Africa and the Gulf States, makes it a key transit country for migration flows in the region (CIA, 2017). This trend is so strong that in 2012 three quarters of migrants in Yemen had travelled through Djibouti (DAI and EuroTrends, 2015). Due to its location, its migratory status is directly related to the security situation of its neighbours. Its relative stability also attracts migrants from the region, such as Ethiopians, Eritreans and Somalis (Communauté européenne, 2013). Critical situations in Somalia and Ethiopia have contributed to this trend, such as food insecurity crises in Ethiopia and the breakdown of law and order in Somalia (IOM, n.d.).

Between 2008 and 2016, more than 365,000 migrants and asylum seekers reached Yemen through Djibouti. There has, however, been a gradual shift in migration patterns from the Horn of Africa to Yemen by preferring routes through Somalia instead of Djibouti (RMMS, 2016a). A critical turning point for this migration channel is the conflict in Yemen. This development witnesses Yemeni nationals and migrants fleeing the conflict and arriving in Djibouti, either as a transit country for Northern Africa and Europe or as a destination country (DAI and EuroTrends, 2015). Djibouti's immigration stock is largely composed of refugees from the region, especially Ethiopia and Somalia, amounting to 112,351 migrants in 2015, as Figure 1 demonstrates (UN DESA, 2015a). This number is presumed to increase considering the recent rise in the number of Somali refugees, escalating from 13,077 in December 2016 to 26,256 in January 2017, in addition to the Yemeni refugees (UNHCR, 2017d).

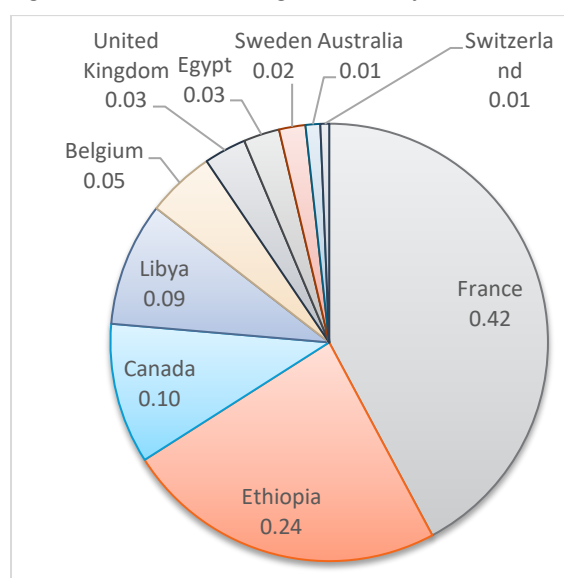
Even with widespread poverty, emigration levels are relatively low with a stock of emigrants of 15,927 in 2015. Main destination countries for migrants from Djibouti are France, Ethiopia, Canada, Libya and Belgium. The high number of emigrants in France is related to the country's colonial history and cultural ties (UN DESA, 2015a).

**Figure 1: Origin of Migrants in Djibouti, 2015**



Source: UN DESA, 2015a.

**Figure 2: Destination of Migrants from Djibouti, 2015**

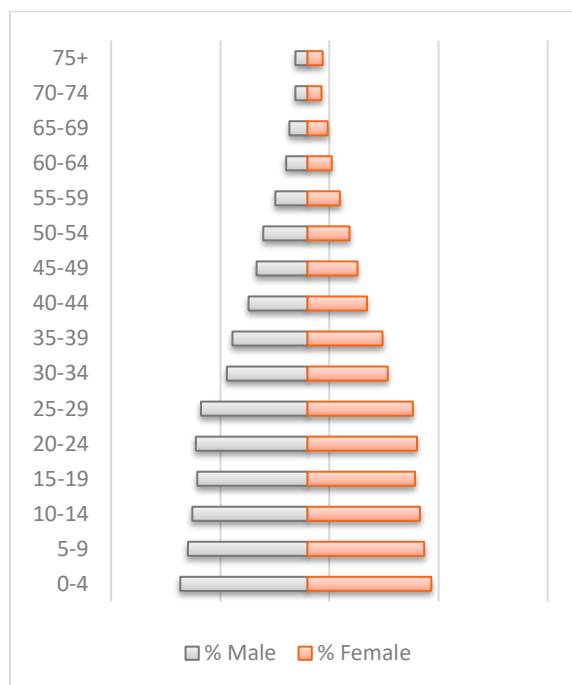


Source: UN DESA, 2015a.

To better understand the migration trends in Djibouti we can compare population pyramids of its population and its migration stock (Figures 3 and 4 respectively). The latter shows a bulge for the youth and young adulthood groups, possibly demonstrating migrants in transit instead of refugee

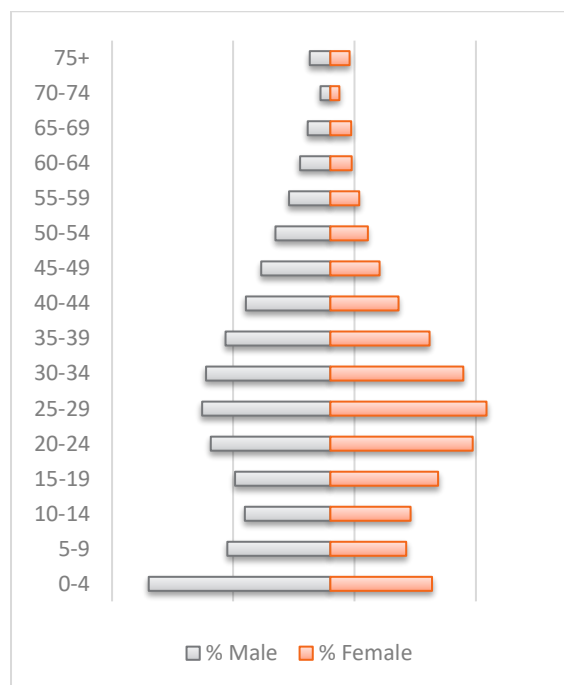
populations next to those settling down and creating families. However, this is a tentative hypothesis which needs further investigation and this research does not have the evidence to make a substantive claim on the matter.

**Figure 3: Total Population in Djibouti by Age Group, 2015**



Source: UN DESA, 2015a.

**Figure 4: Migrant Stock in Djibouti by Age Group, 2015**



Source: UN DESA, 2015a.

## 2. Forced Migration/ Displacement

### 2.1. Refugees in Djibouti

In terms of forced displacement, Djibouti is known as a transit and destination country. While every year tens of thousands of migrants move through the country to cross the Gulf of Aden and move onwards from there, some people displaced from their country of origin do decide to claim asylum in Djibouti. Many factors motivate these movements from, mainly, neighbouring countries: ongoing conflict, fleeing from persecution, human rights violations, food insecurity and the general expectation of better opportunities (IOM, n.d.; RMMS, 2016a).

Djibouti has been hosting refugees from other countries in the region for more than two decades. As of December 2016, there were 25,744 registered refugees and asylum seekers in Djibouti (UNHCR, 2017c). The majority comes from Somalia, but Ethiopians and Eritreans also seek refuge in Djibouti. More recently - since the outbreak of the conflict in 2015 - refugees from Yemen are also being hosted in the small country. They, along with Somalis from South and Central Somalia, are eligible for *prima facie*<sup>1</sup> refugee status. UNHCR cooperates with the L'Office National d'Assistance aux Réfugiés

<sup>1</sup> A *prima facie* approach means the recognition by a State or UNHCR of refugee status on the basis of readily apparent, objective circumstances in the country of origin or, in the case of stateless asylum seekers, their country of former habitual residence. A *prima facie* approach acknowledges that those fleeing these circumstances are at risk of harm that brings them within the applicable refugee definition.

et Sinistrés (ONARS) for the process of determination of refugee status for individual asylum seekers from the other countries (RMMS, 2016a).

The conflict in Yemen has pushed a total of 37,428 persons to Djibouti by May 2017 (UNHCR, 2017b). Of those, 53 per cent were Yemeni nationals, 42 per cent transiting migrants and 5 per cent Djiboutian returnees (UNHCR, 2017a). As such, the route between Djibouti and Yemen is now used bi-directionally between Yemen and the Horn of Africa. Yemeni refugees often choose Djibouti and other countries in the Horn of Africa as a destination. Djibouti is the primary destination for them and several reasons for that have been identified: a thirty day free visa policy, geographical proximity, historical ties between the two nations and more hospitality than Yemenis encountered in other Arab countries. It has also been found that the majority of Yemenis in Djibouti do not register as refugees even after their visa expires, as they are wary of living in camps and settlements due to the dire conditions and limited livelihood opportunities. As such they would rather take their chance in urban areas like Djibouti City (RMMS, 2016a).

Djibouti does not follow a strict encampment policy and recognizes basic rights of refugees, however, the enjoyment of these is denied in practice. Djibouti has three refugee camps: Markazi, Holl Holl and Ali Addeh. Markazi was established in May 2015 in reaction to the arrivals from Yemen. It is located close to Obock at the Red Sea coast. The camp is marked by harsh environmental conditions, with temperatures rising to 51°C during the summer. Ali Addeh, on the other hand, is reportedly overcrowded and hosts more than half of the refugees hosted by Djibouti. Both are known for inadequate access to basic resources, such as clean water, encouraging migrants to search settlement in urban areas (DAI and EuroTrends, 2015; RMMS, 2016a). However, conditions in urban areas are often as bad or even worse. Asylum seekers often lead a marginalized life, due to high unemployment. Xenophobic and sexual violence are often reported in urban areas, and at Ali Addeh camp (Trueman, 2012).

The government encourages refugees to stay in camps if they want to receive aid and reports have shown that police officials round up refugees outside of camps and order them to return to the camps. It is hard for refugees to be self-reliant as they do not, in practice, have access to formal employment or to primary and secondary education (UNHCR, 2010). However, recent changes in law imply a positive change for Djibouti's refugee hosting profile. The country's new refugee law promulgates regulations to ensure refugees and citizens equal rights to education, health care, work and movement outside of camps. Still, it remains to be seen if these new steps will translate into de facto improvements in the integration of refugees in the country (Smith & Carruth, 2017).

## **2.2. Refugees from Djibouti**

There are a low number of refugees from Djibouti, as estimates of 2014 show a general stock of 860 Djiboutian refugees worldwide (World Bank, 2016). The low number of Djiboutian refugees is not surprising as there are no outstanding reasons to expect this type of migration flow from the country.

### **2.3. Internal Displacement in Djibouti**

There is no literature or available data on internal displacement in Djibouti and there are no factors to infer that internal displacement is a problem in this country (UNHCR, 2016). This has been identified by other analysts, however this gap has not been addressed (RMMS, 2016a).

## **3. Regular/ Labour Migration**

### **3.1. Immigration**

Djibouti is not a popular destination country for labour migration with its failed economic structure and agricultural fragility, due to droughts and floods (RMMS, 2016a).

### **3.2. Emigration**

In spite of a harsh economic reality, Djiboutian people are not generally recorded emigrating through regular channels (DAI and EuroTrends, 2015).

## **4. Internal Migration**

Literature on internal migration in Djibouti is limited, with the exception of nomadic people of generally Somali descent. Nomads in the region cross borders regularly, moving through and between Kenya, Ethiopia, Somalia and Djibouti. They tend to follow the seasons, searching for water and thus internally migrating through Djibouti (Adepoju, 1998). Additionally, climatic events such as droughts are considered to drive Djiboutian internal migration as well.

## **5. Irregular Migration**

Djibouti is mainly a country of transit, but also of destination, for irregular migrants. Djiboutians themselves, on the other hand, are only recorded leaving their country irregularly in very few instances. Specifically, the 4mi project reported only 40 Djiboutians in irregular migration flows in 2017 (4mi, 2017). The records of UNHCR on crossings of the Mediterranean, for example, do not show any Djiboutian nationals for the period 2014 to 2016. This trend is observed despite the widespread poverty and dire economic conditions in the country (Horwood, 2015; RMMS, 2016a).

Migrants from the East and Horn of Africa cross Djibouti on their way to Yemen and the Gulf States. Most migrants that follow this route are Ethiopians, followed by Somalians, who go through the country to reach the coastal area of the town of Obock. UNHCR missions monitoring the Yemen strait have recorded more than 365,000 migrants following this route between 2008 and mid-2016. The conflict in Yemen has seemingly not really impacted these movements, with July 2016 alone seeing over 2,000 migrants crossing the Red Sea through Obock. The monitoring missions along the Red Sea coast of Yemen have decreased since the onset of the conflict and as such it is expected that the recent numbers in fact underestimate actual arrivals. There are several explanations for the

continued flows across the Red Sea. Some migrants report being deceived by smugglers who claim Yemen's conflict has ended whilst others see the conflict as a way of more easily bypassing authorities allowing them to move across the country to other Gulf States. Others state that they prefer facing the conflict in Yemen and the risks associated with it, in the hopes of getting jobs in Saudi Arabia for instance, in light of the bad economic conditions of their home country (RMMS, 2016a; b).

Irregular migration is a dangerous enterprise as it puts people in vulnerable positions and exposes migrants to economic exploitation, physical abuse, gender-based violence, subhuman detention conditions and the potential for dissemination of diseases and, in extreme cases, death. These conditions heightened by the growing flux of irregular migrants from both sides of the strait raises the challenge to Djiboutian authorities who are not fully equipped to best deal with this situation. International organizations, like IOM and UNHCR, often partner with the government to build capacity in migration and border management, among others (IOM, 2016).

In order to try to reduce irregular migration flows, Djiboutian authorities tend to regard Ethiopians as irregular migrants and not asylum seekers leading to detention of these migrants if they miss proper documentation. The military also monitors the Obock coastline, arresting and deporting Ethiopian migrants it encounters. Detention facilities are of common use, where arbitrary detention is a common practice as migrants are detained as a group and do not undergo individual judicial trial. Migrant testimonies also point to corruption of border officials, often bribing and working with smugglers. In some cases, migrants claim to have witnessed smugglers and members of the coast guard sexually abusing female migrants (Horwood, 2015).

## **5.1. Human Smuggling**

Smuggling is a common feature in Djiboutian irregular migration, as its networks transport migrants to Yemen across the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. Smugglers often operate within refugee camps, such as Ali Addeh, trying to recruit clients for the journey (Horwood, 2015). These operations charge fees from Ethiopia to Djibouti coast cities and those who cannot afford it must walk long stretches of the journey. That can prove critical, as those migrants are most vulnerable to hardships such as lack of food and water, extortion and abuse (RMMS, 2016a). Thus, many see smuggling as a more viable option. Smuggling networks are organized as loosely affiliated criminal networks, which often force migrants to pay higher fees for each transfer (DAI and EuroTrends, 2015). Reports show that sea passage cost on average USD140 per person, amounting to roughly USD 34 million between 2011 and 2015. Considering Djibouti's very low GDP and the underpayment of state officials, bribes are a common practice and the smuggling economy is an attractive enterprise (Horwood, 2015).

There are a series of abuses migrants can suffer during smuggling operations. Firstly, land transport is often dangerous since traveling the hot deserts often results in migrants suffering from dehydration and starvation. Migrants are vulnerable to robberies, beating and gender-based violence. Smugglers also are known to crowd migrants in container trucks, which can lead to death by suffocation. Secondly, the sea passage holds many dangers. Boats are constantly overcrowded and migrants frequently report abuses such as violence, rape, murder and forced disembarkation in deep water. Men are packed with engine fuel and exhaust fumes, causing burns and suffocation; while women are held on deck and frequently subjected to sexual abuse and sometimes murder (Horwood, 2015). Thirdly, once arriving in their destination, smugglers are also known to charge exorbitantly high rents



and kidnap migrants, especially children, demanding ransom (US Department of State, 2016). Moreover, many migrants are abducted by gangs and traffickers, once in their destination, demonstrating that smugglers and traffickers regularly work together (DAI and EuroTrends, 2015).

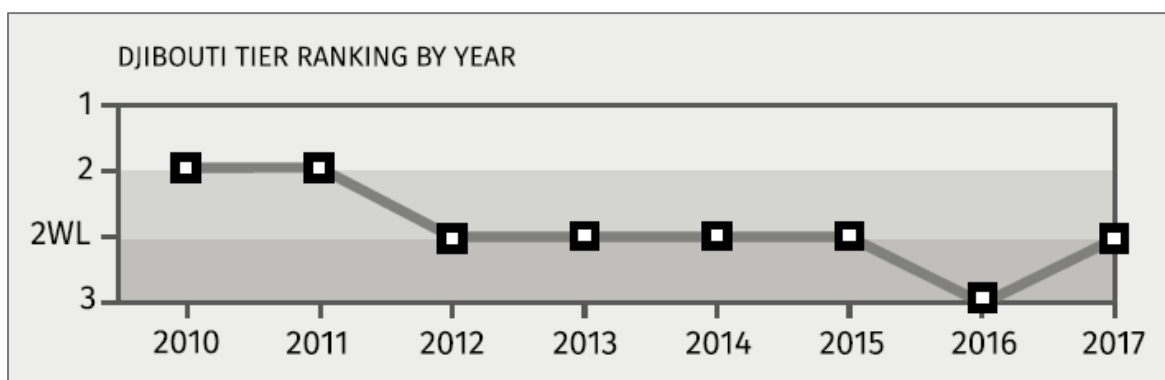
## 5.2. Trafficking in Human Beings

According to US Department of State (2017), Djibouti is considered a Tier 2 Watchlist country. It is a source, transit and destination country for VoTs. As a transit country, Djibouti witnessed over 90,000 men, women and children from Ethiopia, Somalia and Eritrea on their way to Middle East as undocumented migrants where they are often subjected to forced labour and sex trafficking. As described, the Yemen conflict also created an influx of migrants through the opposite direction, some of whom are subjected to trafficking. Children, for example, travel from other countries like Ethiopia and Somalia and are subjected to forced begging. They are also vulnerable to domestic servitude and sometimes coerced into petty crimes (US Department of State, 2016). Women and girls from Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia are forced into domestic servants and sex trafficking in Djibouti City and Obock (RMMS, 2016a).

Human trafficking in Djibouti is related to an increasing illegal sex industry. The journalism community OneWorld did extensive field research for one year and demonstrated how this illegal sex industry is significantly tied to American military presence in the country in light of USAFRICOM. As Somali refugees and undocumented Ethiopian migrants are coerced into sex labour, the main demand comes from American contractors and foreign soldiers. This trend is ignored by the TIP reports and further research is recommended to halt this practice (Kooy & Terlingen, 2015).

Djibouti's government is facing considerable challenges to best address its trafficking situation. In 2016, the government adopted a new anti-trafficking law to follow its 2007 legislation. Nonetheless, the government did not use its prior law to prosecute traffickers, investigate trafficking cases, and did not fully operationalize its National Action Plan to combat trafficking. These failures, tied to its lack of support to victims due to resource constraints, pushed its ranking to the lowest category, as Figure 5 demonstrates. It is concerning to see the constant degradation of its anti-trafficking laws, in light of the increasing number of irregular migrants in the country who are susceptible to these abuses (US Department of State, 2016).

**Figure 5: Djibouti Tier Ranking By Year**



Source: US Department of State, 2017.

## 6. Migrant's Vulnerabilities and Protection Issues

The following vulnerabilities and protection needs have been identified for migrants coming to or moving through Djibouti (RMMS, 2016a):

- As described above, there are three main refugee camps in Djibouti. Reports from Ali Addeh camp show that it faces several challenges, mainly due to being overpopulated. Access to potable water and other basic services is therefore limited. Holl-Holl camp was established in 2012 to address these challenges in Ali Addeh, but this has only been successful to some extent due to the increasing number of refugees in the country. It is, however, reported that access to basic services in Holl-Holl is indeed better. The newly established Markazi camp for Yemeni refugees was built in a part of Djibouti where temperatures reach highs of more than 50 degrees Celsius. Access to water and other services is also limited and as a consequence many Yemeni refugees decide to not go to or stay in the camp. Instead they settle in urban areas, which comes with a different set of protection needs.
- Migrants transiting through Djibouti face many challenges and risk as they make their way to Obock and onward to Yemen. The well-established smuggling networks operating on this route cooperate strongly and are known to ask migrants to pay higher fees than were originally agreed upon. If migrants refuse to pay, the smugglers may drop them and they have to walk the rest of the way, which exposes them to other risks such as a lack of access to water and food, extortion and physical abuse.
- Female migrants in particular are vulnerable to become victims of gender based sexual violence (GBSV) while in Djibouti. There is evidence that perpetrators include military members, smugglers and brokers. The incidence of abuse is especially high in Obock, where migrants wait to make the sea crossing to Yemen, as are other forms of exploitation, as well as dehydration and starvation. Overall, experts indicate that the shift of the eastern route from Obock to Bossaso in Somalia is a result of the high incidence of abuse along the Red Sea route.

## 7. Relevant National Policies and Stakeholders

Laws governing migration in Djibouti focus on administrative procedures regarding entry and residence, refugee protection, and the fight against irregular migration, including human trafficking and smuggling (see Table 2). The fight against human trafficking and smuggling seems to be a priority for Djibouti, as the Country's National Plan of Action for 2014-2020 shows. It is furthermore enshrined in other legislation not primarily focusing on migration, such as the Constitution, the Djiboutian Penal Code and the Djiboutian Labour Code (IOM, 2015).

**Table 2: Djibouti's Key Migration Policy Responses**

Law/Policy	Content
<b>Loi n°201/AN/07/5ème</b>	Defines rules and procedures regarding entry to and residence in Djibouti; it prohibits irregular migration (lack of valid travel documents, not having sufficient resources to live)
<b>Ordinance n°77-053/PR/AE</b>	primary law on refugees, in line with international and continental conventions, Art.7 refugees have the same rights as other foreigners in Djibouti
<b>Loi n°210/AN/07/5ème</b>	Aims at combating human trafficking; prohibits forced labour and sex trafficking; covers women, minors and physically or mentally challenged persons as possible victims of trafficking (VoTs);  Penalties for traffickers: 2-5 years imprisonment plus fine of 2,500 to 5,600 USD; in severe cases 10-15 years + 2500 – 25000 USD; penalties are doubled when VoTs disappeared or died; defines penalties for any person engaged in, or an accomplice to a person engaged in, trafficking in human beings
<b>Loi n°133/AN/16/7ème</b>	Aims at combating trafficking in persons and illicit smuggling of migrants
<b>Loi n°111/AN/11/6ème</b>	Aims at fighting terrorism and other crimes, including human trafficking.
<b>National Action Plan against Trafficking in Persons</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Establishes inter-ministerial committee to coordinate fight against human trafficking</li> <li>- Stresses the need for regional, multilateral, bilateral and international cooperation</li> <li>- Provides for protection of and assistance to VoTs,</li> <li>- Acknowledges need for capacity-building</li> </ul>
<b>Program to grant residency status to undocumented Ethiopian migrants</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Implementation of residency status for undocumented Ethiopian migrants (vulnerable to trafficking in Djibouti)</li> <li>- No formal legal alternatives were offered to foreign trafficked victims who may face hardships or retribution</li> </ul>

Sources: IOM, 2015; Marchand, Roosen, Reinold & Siegel, 2016; RMMS, 2015, 2016a; US Department of State, 2016.

The Djiboutian government has taken measures to assist irregular migrants; however, these can be improved. The conflict in Yemen increased the inflow of migrants, refugees and return migrants to Djibouti. In cooperation with IOM, the Djiboutian government assisted these migrants and returnees with “documentation, onward transportation to country of origin/destination, and provi[sion of] health assistance, accommodation, food and WASH [water, sanitation and hygiene] services” (IOM, 2015, p.28).

There are efforts to improve border management also, in cooperation with neighbouring countries. While no bilateral labour agreement can be identified in the case of Djibouti, Djibouti signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Ethiopia in 2009 to cooperate in the fight against irregular migration, including smuggling and human trafficking (IOM, 2015). The countries also issued a Joint Communication in March 2017, expressing their interest in strengthening cooperation, especially in the field of justice. The Communication also acknowledges the benefits of free movement and improved cross-border transport for economic cooperation between Djibouti and

Ethiopia and stresses the importance of continuing annual Joint Border Commission meetings (Capital, 2017).

Most refugees hosted by Djibouti come from Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Yemen (RMMS, 2016a). Somali and Yemeni asylum seekers are generally offered *prima facie* refugee status in Djibouti, while refugees from other countries must go through "individual Refugee Status Determination (RSD) by UNHCR and its Government counterpart, ONARS (Office National pour l'Assistance aux Réfugiés et Sinistrés)" (RMMS, 2016a). However, there are few essential services such as health care available to migrants, attributable to an under-resourced Djiboutian government (OHCHR, 2015).

Direct diaspora engagement is, as discussed at the 2014 Conférence de la Diaspora Djiboutienne (Conference of the Djiboutian Diaspora), minimal, due to the authoritarian nature of the Djiboutian government, which makes it difficult for members of the diaspora to effect change (Creates, 2014). In general, information regarding Djiboutian migration policy is scarce.

Key stakeholders involved in formulating, implementing and enforcing migration legislation, policies and programmes are the Office National pour l'Assistance aux Réfugiés et Sinistrés (National Office for Protection of Refugees and Disaster Victims - ONARS), the National Gendarmerie and the Djiboutian Army (RMMS, 2016a).

## Gaps

Having reviewed the existing legislation and policies of Djibouti relating to migration, several gaps remain. First, there seems to be a lack of understanding concerning the differences between human trafficking and smuggling. The prosecution of traffickers and smugglers is an issue, not only because identifying them is difficult due to the clandestine nature of their operations, but also because of a lack of capacities to support victims of trafficking (VoTs) if the case is brought to court (RMMS, 2015). Second, there is a need to better protect (irregular) migrant women and minors who are at particular risk of (sexual) exploitation and do not have access to health care, social security and education. In addition, migrant women often work in the domestic sector to resource their journey, where they are "invisible and inaccessible" (RMMS, 2015, p.15). The health of migrants is a concern because of the harsh environmental conditions and limited drinking water in the country. In case of illness, migrants have to spend large sums of money on health services, which puts them at risk of not being able to continue their journey (RMMS, 2015). Harsh conditions are also reported as being problematic in refugee camps. In addition, there are limited livelihood and integration opportunities for refugees in Djibouti (RMMS, 2016a). The police and military are responsible for border management and immigration controls. Due to limited capacities and resources, these operations are ineffective, inefficient and can even increase vulnerability of migrants by causing separation (RMMS, 2015). Labour migration does not seem to play a role in Djiboutian politics since it is mainly a transit country. The social security system only covers individuals in formal employment, which can be problematic as it excludes large parts of the national and migrant population (AfDB, OECD, UNDP & UNECA, 2012). Internal migration as a consequence of droughts also deserves further attention from the government. This brief review shows that there are needs for capacity building in various fields, including knowledge about migration, its different forms, potentials and challenges. In addition, capacity building is needed to facilitate the systematic, effective and efficient responses to migration challenges with the limited resources and facilities available.

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