

APRIL 2017

Stuck in Limbo

Refugees, Migrants, and the
Food Insecure in Djibouti

AUTHORS

Shannon N. Green
Julie N. Snyder

PROJECT DIRECTOR

Kimberly Flowers

CSIS

CENTER FOR STRATEGIC &
INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

A Report of the
CSIS GLOBAL FOOD SECURITY PROJECT

APRIL 2017

Stuck in Limbo

Refugees, Migrants, and the Food Insecure in Djibouti

AUTHORS

Shannon N. Green

Julie N. Snyder

PROJECT DIRECTOR

Kimberly Flowers

A Report of the
CSIS GLOBAL FOOD SECURITY PROJECT

CSIS | CENTER FOR STRATEGIC &
INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

About CSIS

For over 50 years, the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) has worked to develop solutions to the world's greatest policy challenges. Today, CSIS scholars are providing strategic insights and bipartisan policy solutions to help decisionmakers chart a course toward a better world.

CSIS is a nonprofit organization headquartered in Washington, D.C. The Center's 220 full-time staff and large network of affiliated scholars conduct research and analysis and develop policy initiatives that look into the future and anticipate change.

Founded at the height of the Cold War by David M. Abshire and Admiral Arleigh Burke, CSIS was dedicated to finding ways to sustain American prominence and prosperity as a force for good in the world. Since 1962, CSIS has become one of the world's preeminent international institutions focused on defense and security; regional stability; and transnational challenges ranging from energy and climate to global health and economic integration.

Thomas J. Pritzker was named chairman of the CSIS Board of Trustees in November 2015. Former U.S. deputy secretary of defense John J. Hamre has served as the Center's president and chief executive officer since 2000.

CSIS does not take specific policy positions; accordingly, all views expressed herein should be understood to be solely those of the author(s).

© 2017 by the Center for Strategic and International Studies. All rights reserved.

Center for Strategic & International Studies
1616 Rhode Island Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20036
202-887-0200 | www.csis.org

Contents

IV	Acknowledgments
V	Executive Summary
1	Purpose
1	Background
4	Political Environment
5	Migration Dynamics
10	Refugee Situation
19	Current Response
21	Recommendations
24	About the Authors

Acknowledgments

This report would not have been possible without the courageous and willing participation of the refugees and migrants in Djibouti. The CSIS team has tried to portray their realities as accurately as possible to share their stories.

Many thanks to Gillian Locke and Yasmine Acheampong of the Global Food Security Project, who provided integral background research and logistical support for the report. Gratitude is also expressed to those at the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration at the Department of State, International Medical Corps, the U.S. Agency for International Development, and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), for their guidance and input in developing the research question; the many dedicated and kind staff members at IOM Djibouti, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Djibouti, the Danish Refugee Council, the World Food Programme, the government of Djibouti, and various embassies and missions; and the thoughtful academics and practitioners who participated in the scoping session and who reviewed the report. This report was made possible through the generous support of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

Executive Summary

Small, barren, yet inextricably linked with global commercial and strategic interests, Djibouti struggles with its many identities: a safe harbor for desperate refugees and migrants; a presidential republic falling short of guaranteeing rights to its own citizens; a resource-poor and food-insecure nation straddling a strategic chokepoint; and a bulwark of stability in a volatile, crisis-prone region. The nation's location has made it a primary destination for many refugees and migrants fleeing insecurity, endemic poverty, and persecution in the Horn of Africa—a trend that is likely to accelerate given deepening conflict and famine in Somalia, South Sudan, and Yemen. Already, more people are entering Djibouti than leaving. Chronic food insecurity, high levels of debt, and widespread poverty make it extremely vulnerable to the additional pressures of hosting migrants and refugees.

Despite dedicated international partners, enormous gaps remain in addressing the needs of refugees and migrants transiting and residing in Djibouti. Migrants traversing the country face various protection issues, ranging from physical abuse, gender-based violence, detention, and trafficking. In addition to mitigating these dangers, the international community and countries of origin must focus on prevention—addressing the unemployment, food insecurity, and other drivers that cause people to emigrate from their home countries.

While Djibouti maintains an open-door policy and complies with its international commitments, the government and its international and local partners struggle to meet refugees' basic needs. The lives of Yemeni refugees in Djibouti are vastly different than in their home country—prices are much higher, the types of food available are limited, and, despite some familial and cultural ties, they feel underserved, marginalized, and desperate. Predominantly Somali refugees and Ethiopian asylum seekers in the south live in poor, overcrowded conditions with no hope of ameliorating their lives. Long-term solutions must be found to pull these populations out of protracted situations and break the endless limbo of refugee camps.

The situation in Djibouti is reflective of the broader crisis facing the humanitarian assistance community. With unprecedented levels of displacement, the international system is at a breaking point—its creaky infrastructure is ill-equipped to handle the 95.3 million people in need of humanitarian assistance worldwide. Fears of reduced international assistance are growing, even as partners currently operate on less than half of what they need to serve the most vulnerable and food-insecure populations.

To meet the needs of vulnerable populations not only in the Horn of Africa but also globally, international partners must work smarter, more efficiently, and more collaboratively. The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) team crafted both country-specific and broader recommendations to address these challenges. The U.S. government, other governments that are major humanitarian donors, the United Nations, and the government of Djibouti should consider the following recommendations:

- Expand the free flow of independent, credible data and information.

- Create meaningful pathways for integration and advancement.
- Scale up mutually beneficial economic initiatives.
- Harness military presence and capacity to deliver emergency assistance and conduct at-sea rescue operations.
- Create social protections to build resilience to future shocks.

Stuck in Limbo

Refugees, Migrants, and the Food Insecure in Djibouti

Purpose

In winter 2017, researchers from the Human Rights Initiative and Global Food Security Project (referred to here as the CSIS team) set out to explore the linkages among human rights, food security, migration, and displacement. Focusing on the Horn of Africa and Yemen, the CSIS team wanted to investigate the degree to which food security is a factor in migration and displacement and how migrants and refugees cope with food insecurity, physical insecurity, and other challenges while on the move. Moreover, CSIS researchers were interested in the international community's current approach to these issues and ways in which the response could be strengthened to mitigate refugees' and migrants' vulnerability while on the move and at the point of refuge.

To sharpen the focus and inform the field research, CSIS hosted a private scoping session with experts and practitioners from the U.S. government, private sector, and civil society. Following this discussion and interviews with additional experts, Djibouti was chosen as the case study given that it embodies all of the trends and complicated migration patterns that the CSIS team was trying to investigate. Djibouti sits at the crossroads of migration to and from the Gulf countries and North Africa, and hosts proportionally large numbers of refugees from Somalia and Yemen and asylum seekers from Ethiopia.

The CSIS team traveled to Djibouti from February 10 through February 17, conducting interviews with Djiboutian government officials, migrants and refugees, implementing partners, and various embassies and missions. This report, written and produced in March and April 2017, seeks to provide the U.S. government, major humanitarian donors, the United Nations, and the government of Djibouti with ideas to improve the response to the refugee and migration crisis in the Horn of Africa and elsewhere.

Background

A small East African nation of around 900,000 people, Djibouti is an anchor of stability in a region fraught with conflict and fragility, and serves as an important transit point for migrants going to the Middle East and North Africa and those escaping the conflict in Yemen.¹ Djibouti is also a destination for Somalis, Eritreans, and Ethiopians fleeing insecurity, endemic poverty, and persecution. With a net migration of six migrants per 1,000 people, more people are

¹ World Food Programme, "Djibouti," <http://www1.wfp.org/countries/djibouti>.

entering Djibouti on an annual basis than leaving, despite a bleak economic outlook, high poverty, and severe unemployment.² In addition to the steady flow of migrants it has welcomed for decades, Djibouti has now become the primary destination for Yemenis

Chronic food insecurity—affecting about 1 in every 10 people—and high levels of debt and poverty make Djibouti extremely vulnerable to the additional pressures of migrants and refugees.

fleeing a conflict that has left 18.8 million people in need of humanitarian assistance.³

Though reclassified as a lower-middle-income country in 2014 with a gross domestic product (GDP) growing at 7 percent, enduring drought, infertile lands, and

enormous inequality constrain Djibouti's development.⁴ Wealth is poorly distributed, and extreme poverty and unemployment rates remain high, at 40 and 60 percent respectively.⁵

Food security is fragile in Djibouti, particularly in rural areas that are difficult to reach. Chronic food insecurity—affecting about 1 in every 10 people—and high levels of debt and poverty make Djibouti extremely vulnerable to the additional pressures of migrants and refugees.⁶ Agricultural production, which accounts for approximately 3 percent of Djibouti's GDP, is not enough to deal with these challenges, nor is foreign assistance.⁷ Scant rainfall and less than 4 percent of arable land limit crop production to a few fruits and vegetables. As a result, Djibouti imports over 90 percent of its food, and its availability and quality is insufficient to be food secure.⁸

Malnutrition remains an enormous challenge in Djibouti, particularly in the northern region, where children face high rates of wasting, or substantial weight loss, and stunting, or stagnation of growth.⁹ The most recent Standardized Monitoring and Assessment of Relief and Transitions survey conducted by UNICEF found that 18 percent of children in Djibouti City and 25 percent in Obock were wasted, which is astounding considering that there is no conflict in Djibouti.¹⁰ Stunting rates can reach up to 45 percent in rural areas.¹¹

² Central Intelligence Agency, "Djibouti," *The World Factbook*, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/dj.html>.

³ UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), "Crisis Overview," <http://www.unocha.org/yemen/crisis-overview>.

⁴ World Bank, "Djibouti's Economic Outlook—Spring 2016," <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/djibouti/publication/economic-outlook-spring-2016>.

⁵ Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat, "Djibouti," July 2016, <http://www.regionalmms.org/index.php/country-profiles/djibouti>.

⁶ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), "Djibouti," <http://www.fao.org/emergencies/countries/detail/en/c/151584/>.

⁷ World Food Programme, "Djibouti."

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Rainer Gross, Hans Schoeneberger, Hans Pfeifer, and Hans-Joachim A. Preuss, "The Four Dimensions of Food and Nutrition Security: Definitions and Concepts," FAO, April 2000, http://www.fao.org/elearning/course/FA/en/pdf/P-01_RG_Concept.pdf.

¹⁰ UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), "UNICEF Annual Report 2014," 2014, https://www.unicef.org/about/annualreport/files/Djibouti_Annual_Report_2014.pdf.

¹¹ Ibid.

Positioned on the maritime chokepoint of Bab el Mandab, Djibouti is a key node in the Gulf of Aden-Suez Canal trade route, which is central to the world economy.¹² Djibouti's strategic location and major seaports have made it an increasingly important economic and security partner for countries seeking to ensure continued access to this lucrative trade route and a base from which to conduct counterterrorism operations in East Africa. According to the International Monetary Fund, 13 percent of Djibouti's total revenue between 2012 and 2014 came from leasing its land out to foreign militaries.¹³ Djibouti now hosts three military powers—the United States, France, and Japan—and is set to establish military outposts for China and Saudi Arabia.¹⁴

Despite its growing strategic importance and stabilizing role in a chaotic region, Djibouti remains fragile. The tiny country has no natural resources and is highly dependent on the rents it receives from its role as a logistical hub for the world's naval and military powers. Conditions are often more challenging in Djibouti than in parts of northern Somalia because aid does not reach all of its vulnerable populations. Djiboutian people rely on family and clan networks for support, including remittances from members based overseas. Levels of poverty are extreme, especially in areas bordering Somalia, Ethiopia, and Eritrea. The tribes living in these border areas, particularly the semi-nomadic Afar population residing in Northern Djibouti, are largely neglected by the government and aid organizations.

In spite of weak capacity, negligible productive capabilities, and insufficient international support, the government of Djibouti has made significant international commitments to help

The central question for the government now is whether it can translate its increasing prominence as a security and economic partner to tangible improvements for Djiboutian citizens and the many refugees and migrants it currently hosts.

refugees and migrants.¹⁵ For instance, at the Leaders' Summit on Refugees in September 2016, the government pledged to allow refugees to work legally and access the national education system. These rights have been enshrined in legislation passed in January 2017, but require separate decrees to implement them. Living up to these promises will be difficult given the country's limited resources,

overall poverty, and the needs of its own people. Government officials expressed pride in Djibouti's open-door policy, while admitting that the surge of refugees and migrants has placed an enormous burden on already-stressed systems.

¹² Twenty percent of global exports go through this strait yearly. In addition, the route is a conduit for the world's hydrocarbons trade, with almost 10 percent of the world's oil exports negotiating the Bab el-Mandab. Ben Ho Wan Beng, "The Strategic Attractions of Djibouti," *National Interest*, March 18, 2016, <http://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/the-strategic-attractions-djibouti-15533>.

¹³ International Monetary Fund, "Djibouti: Selected Issues," Country Report 16/249, July 2016, 11, <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2016/cr16249.pdf>.

¹⁴ Abdourahim Arteh, "Djibouti Breaks Ground on Massive Chinese-Backed Free Trade Zone," Reuters, January 16, 2017, <http://www.reuters.com/article/china-djibouti-idUSL4N1F649H>.

¹⁵ White House, "Fact Sheet on the Leaders' Summit on Refugees," September 20, 2016, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2016/09/20/fact-sheet-leaders-summit-refugees>.

A self-described “victim of its own ambitions,” Djibouti faces enormous challenges in managing refugee and migrant flows and addressing the needs of both populations. The central question for the government now is whether it can translate its increasing prominence as a security and economic partner to tangible improvements for Djiboutian citizens and the many refugees and migrants it currently hosts.

Political Environment

The government of Djibouti, led for the past 18 years by President Ismail Omar Guelleh, has a poor human rights record.¹⁶ Since 2011, Freedom House has ranked Djibouti as “not free” in both its Freedom of the World and Freedom of the Press reports, noting that freedom of expression and political rights were particularly repressed.¹⁷ The government strictly controls the press and has been criticized for arbitrarily harassing and detaining journalists.¹⁸ As a result, the official media that dominates the scene engages in self-censorship, avoiding sensitive subjects such as human rights abuses.¹⁹

Given the government’s intolerance of dissent, UN agencies, bilateral donors, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) operating in Djibouti face difficult tradeoffs balancing their desire to maintain humanitarian access while expressing concern about human rights and protection issues. One way in which the government maintains leverage and suppresses criticism is by requiring NGOs to renew their registration on an annual basis. If government officials do not like the language being used by its partners, it can get rid of them by denying registration. The government also controls the narrative by expelling aid workers who are too critical of the government. As a result, UN agencies and NGOs use euphemisms to describe the circumstances for refugees and migrants. For example, implementing partners were told to describe an outbreak of cholera in the Markazi refugee camp as “acute watery diarrhea” to avoid the negative associations that come with cholera.

The closed political environment in Djibouti also complicates the discussion around protection issues for refugees and migrants. Migration, though prevalent in Djibouti, is sensitive because it’s difficult to talk about without talking about protection issues, abuses on migration routes, or trafficking rings that operate out in the open. Djibouti also does not want to hurt its strong relationships with neighboring countries, especially Ethiopia, by acknowledging problems in migrants’ countries of origin.

For refugees, the challenges are different. Having a legally protected status, refugees leave their home countries not by choice but to avoid conflict or persecution. Nations that are party to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol have an obligation to provide sanctuary to refugees, as well as extend to them the fundamental rights available to other foreign nationals in their country. The protections due to refugees include safety from being

¹⁶ “Djibouti President Ismail Omar Guelleh Wins Fourth Term,” BBC News, April 9, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-35995628>.

¹⁷ Freedom House, “Djibouti: Freedom of Press 2016,” 2016, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2016/djibouti>.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

returned to the dangers they have fled; access to asylum procedures that are fair and efficient; and measures to ensure that they can live in dignity and safety while helping them to find a longer-term solution.²⁰ The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is responsible for ensuring that countries meet their treaty obligations, and along with the United States and other bilateral donors, encourages the government of Djibouti to expand protections and access for refugees. Several people interviewed for this report explained that this advocacy on behalf of refugees creates a tension when international actors are pressing for rights for refugees that Djiboutian citizens do not enjoy.

Migration Dynamics

The flow of migrants into Djibouti is staggering—in 2015, migrants composed over 12 percent of the entire population.²¹ Most of these migrants are Ethiopians, followed by Somalis and Eritreans. Though reliable data are difficult to obtain, an estimated 400 migrants transit Djibouti each day.²² An organized, long-standing business that employs smugglers and traffickers, migration has provided economic opportunity for communities along transit routes and at ports of departure.

The needs of migrants differ enormously based on their age, gender, sexual orientation, skills, education level, country of origin, and resources. Migrants are classified as individuals who leave their homes willingly for a variety of reasons, ranging from climate change to finding better economic opportunities.²³ Unlike refugees, migrants are not guaranteed legal protection and thus are subject to the host country's immigration laws in addition to international legal norms.²⁴ Yet, migrants can be very vulnerable, and their rights are often ignored as they traverse national boundaries. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) was established in 1951 to serve this population and "help ensure the orderly and humane management of migration, to promote international cooperation on migration issues, to assist in the search for practical solutions to migration problems and to provide humanitarian assistance to migrants in need."²⁵

Many factors compel people to leave their homes to transit through Djibouti. The promise of well-paying jobs and allure of being able to send money home to their families drive many Ethiopians, particularly from rural villages, to seek better lives in Saudi Arabia and North Africa. Ethiopian government officials, migrants, and aid workers the team interviewed suggested that Ethiopians emigrate in search of economic opportunities rather than causes related to the drought. That is remarkable given that the drought is the worst in 50 years.²⁶

²⁰ UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), "UNHCR Viewpoint: 'Refugee' or 'Migrant'—Which Is Right?," July 11, 2016, <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/news/latest/2016/7/55df0e556/unhcr-viewpoint-refugee-migrant-right.html>.

²¹ International Organization for Migration, "Djibouti."

²² Kimberly Flowers and Shannon N. Green, interview with Nada Mahmoud, International Organization for Migration, Obock, February 14, 2017.

²³ Somini Sengupta, "Migrant or Refugee? There Is a Difference, with Legal Implications," *New York Times*, August 28, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/28/world/migrants-refugees-europe-syria.html>.

²⁴ UNHCR, "UNHCR Viewpoint."

²⁵ International Organization for Migration, "About IOM," <https://www.iom.int/about-iom>.

²⁶ FAO, "FAO Ethiopia: Drought Response Plan and Priorities in 2017," 2017, <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i6971e.pdf>.

The fact that the drought has not led to famine conditions or massive displacement is largely due to Ethiopia's and the international community's investments in creating a productive safety net and selling off livestock before they were distressed.²⁷ These early interventions have allowed Ethiopians to be more resilient to climate-related shocks.

Several individuals interviewed suggested that migrants heading to the Gulf were not conscious of the conflict in Yemen or the risks they would face along the journey. Others explained that migrants were aware of the dangers, and in fact, thought that they would have an easier time making it to Saudi Arabia because of the chaos in Yemen. This suggests that sensitization campaigns can only be so effective; migrants will take extraordinary risks so long as they have the hope, however small, of finding a better life.

Seasonal migration is a common phenomenon in the Horn of Africa. However, sporadic and depressed rainfall and other significant weather events have made the situation worse. A severe drought, related to El Niño and warm West Pacific sea surface temperatures, have greatly limited crop production and pastoral resource regeneration in large swathes of Ethiopia, Somalia, and Kenya.²⁸ Fluctuations in climate have pushed many from their homes, even across borders. For example, facing a particularly harsh drought that depleted their well, pastoralists from eastern Ethiopia moved across the border into Djibouti. The Ethiopians shared a water source with Djiboutian pastoralists without conflict and went back across the border once the rains returned.²⁹ Given the increasingly volatile outlook for the climate of the Horn of Africa, these pressures will only increase for seasonal migrants.³⁰

There are several types of movements migrants undertake through the Horn of Africa: country of origin to Djibouti; border of Djibouti to Obock; Obock to Yemen; Yemen to the broader Gulf. These paths are ancient, having been used for hundreds of years of migration back and forth across the Red Sea.³¹ Many migrants return home through a similar pattern. From 2014, there has been a gradual shift in migration patterns from the Horn of Africa to Yemen, with increasing numbers of migrants departing from Bossaso, Puntland, and crossing the Arabian Sea. According to experts interviewed by the CSIS team, migrants now prefer the Bossaso crossing because abduction was more common for those who arrived in Yemen via Obock.³² Criminal networks and smugglers in Yemen are more likely to abduct Ethiopians taking the Red Sea route because they are perceived as better equipped to pay ransoms, compared to their Somali counterparts taking the Arabian Sea route.

²⁷ Kimberly Flowers and Shannon N. Green, interview with U.S. Agency for International Development in Yemen, CSIS, February 2, 2017.

²⁸ Famine Early Warning Systems Network, "Illustrating the Extent and Severity of the 2016 Horn of Africa Drought," East Africa Special Report, February 3, 2017, <http://www.fews.net/east-africa/special-report/february-3-2017>.

²⁹ Kimberly Flowers and Shannon N. Green, interview with Jacques Higgins, World Food Programme, Djibouti City, February 13, 2017.

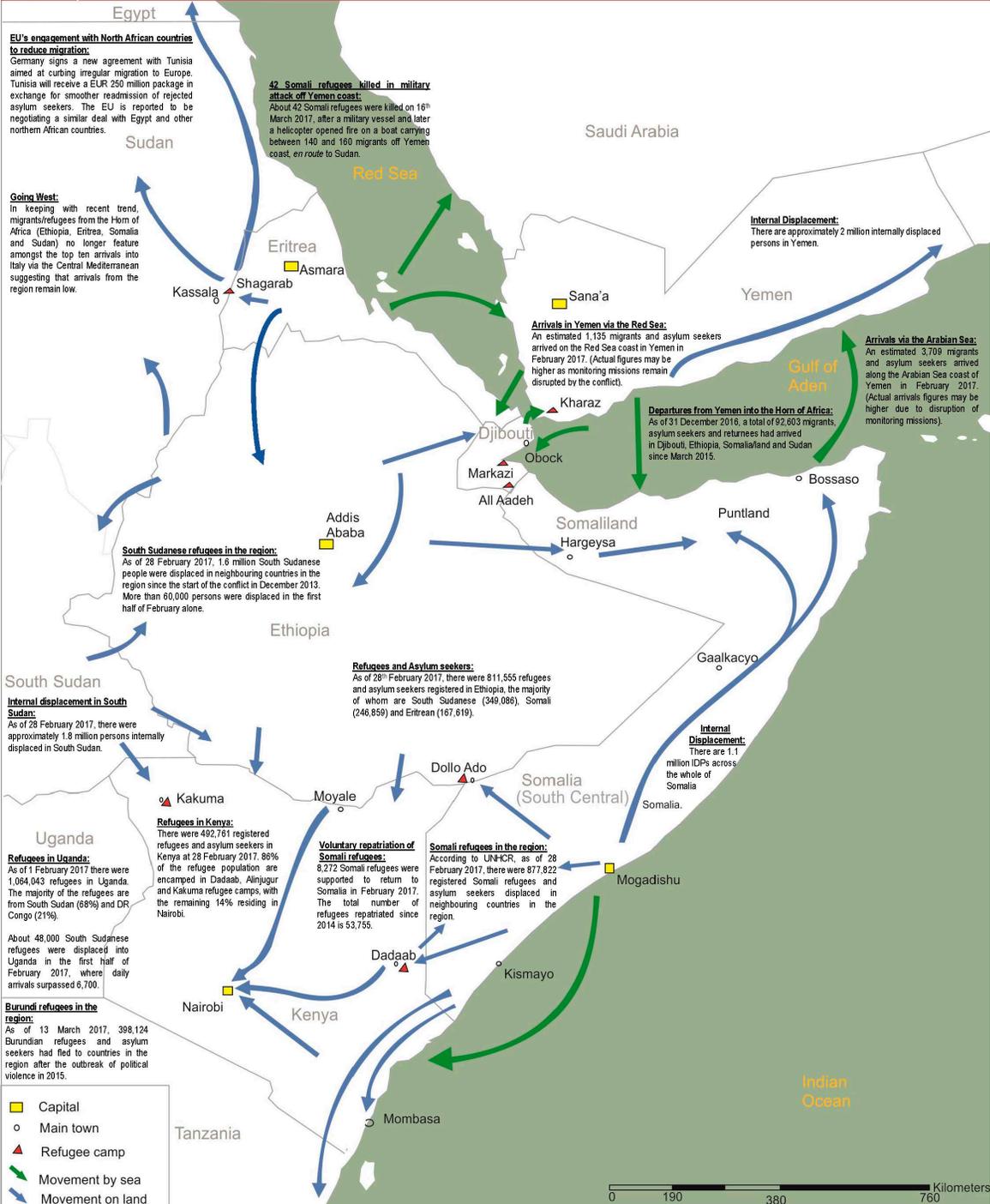
³⁰ Famine Early Warning Systems Network, "Elevated Risk of Famine (IPC Phase 5) Continues in South Sudan, Yemen, and Somalia," Food Security Outlook, March 2017, <http://www.fews.net/east-africa>.

³¹ International Organization for Migration, "Regional Mixed Migration Program: Horn of Africa & Yemen, 2016–2017," June 2016, <http://ronairobi.iom.int/resources/infor-sheets/item/878-regional-mixed-migration-program-overview-horn-of-africa-yemen-2016-2017>.

³² Kimberly Flowers and Shannon N. Green, interview with Danish Refugee Council, Djibouti City, February 15, 2017.



February 2017



RMMS is mainly funded by the Swiss Government, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra
Federal Department of Foreign Affairs FDFA

NORWEGIAN MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
Foreign & Commonwealth Office

info@regionalmms.org
www.regionalmms.org
@Mixed_Migration

Source: Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat: Horn of Africa, <http://regionalmms.org/monthlymaps/RMMS%20Mixed%20Migration%20Monthly%20Map%20February%202017.pdf>.

Usually these migrants employ traffickers to move them across land and sea. Border control is sparse and easily avoidable, and the Coast Guard of Djibouti is new and inexperienced. Even when informed of the risk of transiting across Djibouti and the Red Sea, migrants press forward with the expectation of a better future and the fear of disappointing their families.³³

Migrants often pass through Djibouti multiple times. The staff at IOM's migrant response center (MRC) in Obock—a critical site of service provision, information, and assisted return—had seen individuals return from their home country to Djibouti as many as 13 times.³⁴ Generally speaking, the MRC in Obock is able to meet the needs of migrants transiting through Djibouti to reach the Gulf. They provide basic needs, such as food, shelter, and hygiene, as well as information to inform their travel. The MRC also works to repatriate willing Ethiopians, in coordination with IOM Ethiopia, the government of Djibouti, and the government of Ethiopia.³⁵ However, one major gap is its inability to provide effective psychosocial support as migrants only spend up to two weeks at the MRC.³⁶ High demand combined with limited and dwindling resources require an integrated approach from actors partnering with the humanitarian assistance community.

As they transit through Djibouti, migrants face a range of risks and protection issues, including physical and sexual abuse by traffickers, hunger and thirst, and psychosocial damage. There is little assistance for migrants on their way to their ultimate destinations except for the kindness of strangers and the MRC. Migrants face serious risks of abuse but are unlikely to talk about these issues or report violations. Of those surveyed by the Danish Refugee Council (DRC), nearly 100 percent of women start to take contraception before they leave their points of origin.³⁷ This is an indication that migrants anticipate being raped or compelled into sexual relations on their journey, and are taking precautions to avoid pregnancy.

Another significant threat stems from the highly organized smuggling and trafficking networks that operate in Djibouti. In January 2017, IOM interviewed several individuals transiting through Djibouti. After having paid the traffickers to assist their safe crossing to Yemen, these individuals were held captive until they paid an even larger sum.³⁸ In another incident, two teenage girls who escaped from a trafficker in Djibouti "claimed that instead of facilitating their trip across the sea, [he] raped them and attempted to force one to marry his

³³ Nicolas Niarchos, "The Dangerous Route of Ethiopian Migrants," *New Yorker*, July 20, 2016,

<http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/the-dangerous-route-of-ethiopian-migrants>.

³⁴ Kimberly Flowers and Shannon N. Green, interview with Nada Mahmoud, Obock, February 14, 2017.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Kimberly Flowers and Shannon N. Green, interview with Danish Refugee Council, Djibouti City, February 15, 2017.

³⁸ Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat and Danish Refugee Council, "Mixed Migration Monthly Summary," January 2017, <http://regionalmms.org/monthlysummary/RMMS%20Mixed%20Migration%20Monthly%20Summary%20January%202017.pdf>.

associate.³⁹ After they escaped, their assailant took them back forcefully from another trafficker they had encountered.⁴⁰

Of all of the vulnerable populations in Djibouti, undocumented urban migrants are in greatest need of protection and support.

Migrants are also at risk of being bribed and abused by the police that detain them. Following a terrorist attack in Djibouti in May 2014, the government has increased monitoring, detentions, and

deportations of migrants without the benefit of refugee status determination. This is particularly worrisome for Ethiopians who identified themselves as Oromo, Ethiopia's largest ethnic group. Since November 2015, the Oromo have led protests against the Ethiopian government, initially in opposition to its development plan, which would have expanded the capital's municipal boundary to encompass part of the Oromia region. The government brutally cracked down on the protesters, causing tens of thousands to flee to Djibouti. As such, many Oromo have a credible fear of persecution if they are returned to Ethiopia.⁴¹ The DRC has also reported that police round-ups have intensified in Djibouti City as a strategy to curb irregular migration.

Of all of the vulnerable populations in Djibouti, undocumented urban migrants are in greatest need of protection and support. By some estimates, at least 80 percent of unaccompanied minors are from Ethiopia.⁴² They are mainly street children, some as young as newborn babies. Because the trip from Ethiopia to Djibouti is easier for children as they are less detectable, they often return to Djibouti City after being sent back home.⁴³ Migrants in Djibouti City cannot work out in the open or send their children to school because they would risk being deported. They do not have access to food distribution, hospitals, or other social safety net programs. Moreover, their lack of legal status makes them nearly impossible to identify and serve. In essence, they do not exist.

There are a few organizations, like Caritas Djibouti, that are able to aid these populations. Caritas is the charity arm of the Catholic Church funded by Italian and U.S. donors. Though purposely small, it serves all vulnerable populations of Djibouti City in various ways, including providing education, food, and health services, solely for the purpose of humanitarian assistance, not proselytization. Mosques also play an important role in filling humanitarian gaps, collecting money and redistributing it to vulnerable people; however, it is reserved for Muslims, and mostly only for Djiboutians.⁴⁴ Addressing the plight of undocumented urban migrants through expanded work opportunities and access to the national education system is critical to addressing a major source of vulnerability in Djibouti.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Awol Allo, "The Oromo Protests Have Changed Ethiopia," Al Jazeera, November 21, 2016, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2016/11/oromo-protests-changed-ethiopia-161119140733350.html>.

⁴² Kimberly Flowers and Shannon N. Green, interview with Père Eder Carvalho Assunção, Djibouti City, February 15, 2017.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.



The CSIS team talk with migrants who arrived after a six-day journey from Ethiopia. Under IOM's protection, these young men received food, water, and shelter, as well as the agency to either return home or continue along their journeys with a better understanding of the dangers they will face. Credit: Kimberly Flowers, CSIS.

Refugee Situation

Djibouti is a transit point and safe harbor for refugees and asylum seekers from Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, and Yemen. Approximately 26,000 refugees, most from Somalia, currently reside in Djibouti.⁴⁵ Since the outbreak of conflict in Yemen in March 2015, an estimated 37,000 persons have fled Yemen to Djibouti.⁴⁶ Yemenis make up more than half of those arrivals, followed by Somalis, Ethiopians, and Eritreans who had previously found sanctuary in Yemen. The number of Ethiopian asylum seekers has increased significantly since violence escalated in the Oromia region in November 2015, according to those interviewed.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ European Commission, Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection, "Djibouti: ECHO Factsheet," March 2017, http://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/aid/countries/factsheets/djibouti_en.pdf.

⁴⁶ UNHCR, "UNHCR Data: Yemen," http://data.unhcr.org/yemen/regional.php#_ga=1.221258584.1388129736.1487703846.

⁴⁷ Data are unavailable to quantify the number of Ethiopian asylum seekers.

Interviews with Migrants

Three young Ethiopian migrants were interviewed at the MRC in Obock by the CSIS team. All of them were passing through Djibouti with the intent of transiting through Yemen to the Gulf. The major driver for all three of those interviewed was the allure of finding a well-paying job in Saudi Arabia.

Employing smugglers to move across the Horn, they each walked for approximately six days in threadbare flip-flops, hungry and tired upon their arrival in Obock. There was no formal assistance along their route, but food, drink, and shelter were available from local communities if they could pay for it. Below are their stories.

Kadir (23, from Addis Ababa, Ethiopia)

The eldest of the migrants interviewed, Kadir traveled to Djibouti in search of a well-paying job. At home in Addis Ababa, he was a truck driver, but there was not much economic opportunity. On the walk to Djibouti, there were people who sold food and drinks to passing migrants. Local communities also provided shelter. Kadir said that the walk was very tiring. He walked for six days before hitching a ride by car to Obock.

Before he arrived in Obock, he was trying to transit to the Gulf via Yemen but says he was not aware of the war in Yemen until he came to the MRC. He and his friends came to the MRC to figure out their next steps.

Kadir (12, from Abrouk, Ethiopia)

The younger Kadir had just arrived with five others on the morning of February 14. He sold his cell phone to buy passage from traffickers and left his small village without his parents knowing. Kadir was heading to Saudi Arabia, where he thought he would find money and a good job.

He knew who the traffickers were in his region—it was not difficult to connect with them and make the arrangements.¹ The traffickers would hit them if they stopped to rest along the journey.¹

Kadir wished other people knew not to leave home because there are no opportunities abroad. The promises are false. When he returns home, he will share his story with others.

Yassin (21, from Addis Ababa, Ethiopia)

Yassin walked for six days, mostly at night. Throughout the journey, he was very tired, hungry, thirsty, and scared. He was frightened by strange animal sounds in the night during his trek.

The trafficker did not provide him or the other migrants with food or drink, as promised. He just took their 750 Djiboutian francs, equivalent to about \$4 USD, and made them fend for themselves.

His family did not know that he had left until he called from the MRC.

Yassin wishes that he had money to start a business and stay in his community in Ethiopia. He is educated and can read and write, but he does not have opportunities to put those skills to use.

Djibouti is the primary destination for Yemeni nationals, hosting 71 percent of those fleeing the conflict.⁴⁸ There are several reasons why Yemenis have fled to Djibouti in greater numbers than other countries in the region. First, Yemenis are allowed visa-free entry into Djibouti for 30 days, after which they have to apply for refugee status, renew their visa, or return home. Second, Yemen and Djibouti enjoy close historical and cultural ties, and many

⁴⁸ European Commission, Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection, "Djibouti: ECHO Factsheet."

Yemenis had family members or friends already established in-country. And finally, Yemenis, especially those living in coastal cities, could cross into Djibouti with relative ease and safety.

Djibouti is the primary destination for Yemeni nationals, hosting 71 percent of those fleeing the conflict.

However, few people hope to make Djibouti their final destination. Though the Somali refugees in Djibouti have been there for decades, they still hope for resettlement. Yemeni refugees

interviewed expressed a strong desire to come to the United States or Canada. Despite knowing that there are few opportunities for resettlement in a third country, particularly in the United States given the Trump administration's suspension of the refugee admission program, their hope is still strong.



Djibouti is the primary destination for Yemeni nationals, with 71 percent of those fleeing going to Djibouti. Among the approximately 1,000 Yemenis who remain in the Markazi refugee camp, hope remains strong that their lives before the conflict will resume once they are resettled, preferably in the United States. Credit: Kimberly Flowers, CSIS.

Refugees in Djibouti are primarily housed in three camps—Ali Addeh, Holl Holl, and Markazi. Located in the South, Ali Addeh and Holl Holl are the two oldest camps, hosting approximately 10,000 and 1,500 people respectively of primarily Somali origin.⁴⁹ Established in 1978 during a period of intense conflict in Somalia, Ali Addeh reached a population of over 17,000 at its height, despite being built for a maximum capacity of 7,000 people.⁵⁰ Due to overcrowding, the government of Djibouti reopened Holl Holl in 2012 and transferred approximately 1,500 refugees from Ali Addeh.⁵¹ These camps do not have adequate resources to serve the populations under their jurisdiction.⁵² Conditions were described to the CSIS team as austere and difficult, as shelters degrade, resources dwindle, and the world forgets about the residents of the Southern camps. The last tents were given out in 2012 and refugees receive barely half of the recommended water intake each day, despite the influx of asylum seekers from Ethiopia since mid-2016.⁵³

Markazi, the camp visited by the CSIS team, is the smallest and newest refugee camp in Djibouti. Nestled in the harsh northern region of Obock, Markazi currently hosts about 1,000 refugees who are almost exclusively Yemeni.⁵⁴ Temperatures in the camp often top 120 degrees Fahrenheit in the summer, and strong winds of over 40 miles per hour kick up dust storms known as the *khamsin*. While it has attracted greater levels of financial support from international donors, including from the Gulf, refugees in Markazi suffer from inadequate access to basic services such as clean water and latrines.

Refugees in Djibouti are dependent on humanitarian assistance and have very few opportunities to gain skills or livelihoods. According to an UNHCR official, refugees in Djibouti are merely being kept alive and safe.⁵⁵ Most of those displaced left their homes with nothing but the clothes on their back, running from the threat of war and insecurity. These quick escapes gave them no time to plan or make strategic decisions about where they would settle or how they would support themselves.

For decades, Djibouti has provided asylum for refugees from Somalia. The government offers most asylum seekers from Somalia *prima facie* refugee status, while those from Eritrea, Ethiopia, and other countries undergo individual refugee status determination by UNHCR and its government counterpart, Office National pour l'Assistance aux Réfugiés et Sinistres (ONARS). Due to the mutually beneficial relationship between Ethiopia and Djibouti, persecuted Ethiopians from Oromia are granted asylum, not refugee status. As the largest landlocked nation in the world, Ethiopia depends on access to Djibouti's ports for its imports and exports. Djibouti gains significant economic benefits from this arrangement and does not want anything to disrupt it.⁵⁶ Furthermore, a new railway linking Djibouti and Ethiopia has

⁴⁹ Shannon N. Green, interview with Amira Abdelkhalek, Djibouti City, February 16, 2017.

⁵⁰ UNHCR Djibouti, "Holl-Holl—A New Camp Intended for Somali Refugees," December 7, 2012, http://data.unhcr.org/horn-of-africa/flash_read.php?ID=138.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Kimberly Flowers and Shannon N. Green, interview with Danish Refugee Council, Djibouti City, February 15, 2017.

⁵³ UNHCR, "Holl-Holl."

⁵⁴ Shannon N. Green, interview with Amira Abdelkhalek, Djibouti City, February 16, 2017.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Kimberly Flowers and Shannon N. Green, interview with U.S. Embassy, Djibouti City, February 16, 2017.

reduced travel time from Addis to Djibouti from three days to 12 hours, further solidifying this bond.⁵⁷ Decreased transit times may also have ramifications for migration, as migrants could use the railway to shorten their journey.

Refugees in the southern camps have been in limbo for decades, with few options for returning home, integrating into local communities, or resettling in a third country. They are in desperate need of solutions to improve their situation. The biggest requests for those at Ali Addeh and Holl Holl are to be able to work outside the camp and for their children to have access to secondary schools. Based on the law passed in January 2017, refugees will have the right to legally work. However, opportunities are limited, and the government has made it clear that it will not provide assistance to refugees living outside of camps. Ali Addeh and Holl Holl have primary schools in the camp, but in order to access the secondary schools outside the camp, refugees must have a birth certificate.⁵⁸ Those born in Djibouti do not have a birth certificate, but the government is working to fix that by automatically granting them for those born in 2013 and later. Refugees born before 2013 have to apply for their birth certificate, and there is a huge backlog.

Refugees from Yemen, who began arriving in mid-2015 as the conflict escalated, are also given *prima facie* status. They can be divided into two groups: urban and rural. Those coming

The lives of Yemeni refugees are vastly different in Djibouti than what they were in their home country—prices are much higher, the types of food available are limited, and, despite some familial ties, they feel underserved, marginalized, and desperate.

from urban areas were well educated—the bleak, arid isolation of Obock was shocking upon arrival. Many of them were so traumatized by the scorching summer in Obock that they went back to Yemen or fled to Djibouti City. The refugees in Markazi camp are deeply dissatisfied with the conditions there. One of the major complaints is the lack of a certified education curriculum for the

400 children in the camp. The refugees want a school in the camp rather than in Obock. In addition, refugees complained of not having opportunities to work outside the camp and better support themselves. During the CSIS team’s visit to Markazi, many refugees pleaded for help getting out of the camp, which they described as a prison or purgatory. Those interviewed emphatically conveyed their sense of hopelessness and abandonment as they languish in the inhospitable desert.

Moreover, the lives of Yemeni refugees are vastly different in Djibouti than what they were in their home country—prices are much higher, the types of food available are limited, and, despite some familial ties, they feel underserved, marginalized, and desperate. Though not malnourished, Yemenis are not familiar with the staples in their food baskets such as yellow peas, so they sell them on the local market. Rather than the fresh fish and vegetables that comprised their diets in Yemen, refugees are given unfamiliar ingredients such as oil and

⁵⁷ “Ethiopia-Djibouti electric railway line opens,” BBC News, October 5, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-37562177>.

⁵⁸ Shannon N. Green, interview with Amira Abdelkhalek, Djibouti City, February 16, 2017.

flour and few materials with which to cook. Pests are known to spoil food distributed in non-hermetically sealed bags, and hungry baboons roam the camp at night.⁵⁹



A typical kitchen in the Markazi refugee camp is far from familiar for most Yemeni families. Rather than the fresh fish, vegetables, and fruit they were accustomed to, Yemenis struggle to adjust to their portions of rice, flour, and oil amidst a bleak and hopeless landscape. Credit: Kimberly Flowers, CSIS.

The World Food Programme (WFP) provides the same food rations to Markazi as they do for Ali Addeh and Holl Holl, but they give different amounts. Currently, the WFP employs cash vouchers in the Southern camps, a program that allows refugees to receive the equivalent value of cash for a portion of their food basket. In situations where cash vouchers can be implemented, the program often stimulates local economies and encourages integration.⁶⁰ The Yemenis CSIS researchers spoke to said that they want this cash program, but local market conditions up until now could not support it.⁶¹ Moreover, privately, female heads of household in Markazi expressed concern that their husbands would use the vouchers to buy food, and then sell that food to get money for *qat*, a popular and addictive plant with mild

⁵⁹ Kimberly Flowers and Shannon N. Green, interview with Markazi Camp refugees, Obock, February 14, 2017.

⁶⁰ World Food Programme, "Cash-based Transfers," <http://www1.wfp.org/cash-based-transfers>.

⁶¹ Kimberly Flowers and Shannon N. Green, interview with Jacques Higgins, Djibouti City, February 13, 2017.

stimulant properties, rather than staples.⁶² The WFP and its partners recently conducted an assessment that might result in monetizing part of the food basket for refugees in Markazi, so they can get cash. This will enable the refugees to diversify their basket and will likely improve food security.

The lack of money is a driver of friction and domestic violence. Gender-based violence (GBV) is the main protection issue facing refugees, and it pertains to more than rape—it includes forced marriage, female genital mutilation (FGM), and domestic violence, which the DRC believes is common.⁶³ Protection concerns within Markazi include GBV, divorce, and child abuse. Every month, staff run a session on GBV in the camp. Ali Addeh and Holl Holl are in a protracted situation, and GBV is rampant in these camps, particularly FGM and early marriage.⁶⁴ It is difficult to get accurate statistics because the refugees do not disclose rape and other issues due to cultural sensitivities.

The response for urban refugees and camp-based refugees differs enormously. This is largely because the government of Djibouti strongly prefers that refugees stay in camps for security reasons—having them in a camp environment allows the government to keep better track of refugees, which they do through basic recordkeeping and the advanced biometrics system in the camps of southern Djibouti.⁶⁵ Yet, most Yemenis choose to live in Djibouti City if they have family ties and the resources to go there. The refugees in Markazi either do not have the connections or means to live outside the camp.

It is very difficult to assess the needs of urban refugees as they often disappear into the city. CSIS interlocutors explained that urban refugees rely on familial ties and the distribution of aid from organizations such as the WFP. While refugees are legally allowed to work in Djibouti as of January 2017, with an unemployment rate of 60 percent, there are few opportunities for those not of Djiboutian origin.⁶⁶ Gulf donors will deliver food rations sporadically to Yemeni refugees in the city, though efforts are uncoordinated, unstructured, and rarely respond to the needs expressed by vulnerable populations.⁶⁷

The situation in Djibouti mirrors the challenges currently confronting the international humanitarian community. This system is overwhelmed and underfunded, its creaky infrastructure ill-equipped to handle the 95.3 million people in need of humanitarian assistance worldwide.^{68,69} Humanitarian assistance is meant to be life-saving rather than supporting comprehensive needs over years and decades. Therefore, durable solutions are

⁶² World Bank, "Qat Consumption, Unemployment Represents 'Catch-22' in Djibouti," January 12, 2016, <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2016/01/12/qat-consumption-unemployment-in-djibouti>.

⁶³ Kimberly Flowers and Shannon N. Green, interview with Danish Refugee Council, Djibouti City, February 15, 2017.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Kimberly Flowers and Shannon N. Green, interview with European Union Delegation, Djibouti City, February 15, 2017.

⁶⁶ Central Intelligence Agency, "Djibouti," *The World Factbook*.

⁶⁷ UNHCR, "Inter-Agency Update for the Response to the Yemen Situation #43," June 20, 2016, https://www.ecoi.net/file_upload/1930_1467203559_djibouti-inter-agency-update-for-yemen-situation-1-20jun16.pdf.

⁶⁸ Shannon N. Green, "Taking Stock on World Refugee Day," *CSIS Commentary*, June 20, 2016, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/taking-stock-world-refugee-day>.

⁶⁹ UNOCHA, "Global Humanitarian Overview 2017," <http://www.unocha.org/stateofaid>.

necessary to fill the enormous gap of opportunity and security for people on the move as well as mitigate the many protection issues.

Interviews with Refugees

The CSIS team met with Yemeni refugees in Markazi camp and residing in Djibouti City. The following stories are of two Yemeni families living in Djibouti City.

The two families interviewed came from coastal Yemen and laid down roots thanks to previous family ties. The first were two sisters, Fatima and Salama, who came over with their children—six of Fatima’s and four of Salama’s. The second were two men, Ameen and Mohamed, who were joined by two young boys and two women.

Both groups arrived in Djibouti a little over a year ago. They fled because of the war in Yemen. Ameen was a salesman and Mohamed was a mechanic in Yemen. When the war broke out, they traveled internally in search of work and peace, but both eluded them. According to the refugees, “Djibouti was the only place where there is security.”

It took both groups approximately 24 hours to reach Djibouti by boat. Their journeys were windy, wet, and frightening. While they were in the boats, Fatima pled, “God, let us go in one piece.”

For Fatima and Salama, their boat originally stopped in Obock to let some refugees off. However, their contacts in Djibouti City told them to stay on until they reached the port in the capital. Ameen and Mohamed stayed in Obock and occasionally went to Markazi camp for resources before eventually settling in Djibouti City.

Fatima, Salama, their other sister, and all of their children originally stayed with friends in Djibouti City. They are now living in one house together. They subsist on monthly transfers of about \$300 USD from Fatima’s husband who is still working in Yemen. They explained that this money is not enough; it only covers the cost of food.

The price of food, including basic commodities, makes cooking traditional Yemeni foods such as fish very difficult. Familiar food is available if refugees have the means to pay for it. Ameen and Mohamed said, “If you have money, you can buy good food.”

They need medical treatment and more clothes for the children, in addition to healthy food.

Their main goal is to return home to Yemen once the conflict ends. Much of their family and friends still remain in country. Yet, when asked about their options, they explained, “This is what we have. We have no other choice.”

For both families, although tuition to the Yemeni school is free, the cost of transportation is so high that they cannot afford to send their children.

Both groups noted that their young adult children have had difficulty pursuing jobs and receiving additional certification due to the war and lack of access to education and economic opportunities in Djibouti.

The biggest frustration for Ameen and Mohamed was that they were draining their loved ones’ resources and felt like a burden. They wanted to be able to provide for themselves and live in their own place, but could not find work. Because they were residing in Djibouti City, they are not regularly receiving assistance from aid organizations, only every four to five months at most.

The second group witnessed violence in Yemen, which traumatized the children. After they spent some time in Djibouti, they were able to adjust

Current Response

An estimated 30 percent of the population is in need of humanitarian assistance in Djibouti.⁷⁰ According to some interviewees, the inefficiency of humanitarian assistance and the fact that it does not reach the most vulnerable and marginalized people can be discouraging.

The U.S. government has historically played a key role as a partner and donor to UN agencies and NGOs operating in-country, as well as to the government of Djibouti. The United States has also been instrumental as an advocate for policy changes to improve refugees' and migrants' access to education, health care, and employment. Yet, the ambassador has to walk a fine line given that the U.S. government's biggest priority is making sure that the U.S. military is able to continue operating in Djibouti. This creates disincentives to express human rights concerns and call for additional protections for refugees and migrants.

Continued engagement from trusted partners like the United States has made significant, albeit slow, progress possible in providing for the needs of refugees and migrants in Djibouti. However, fears are growing surrounding future funding under the Trump administration. The U.S. government is the biggest donor to the WFP,

WFP receives less than half of what it needs to serve the most vulnerable and food-insecure populations

which relies on the United States for over 40 percent of its total funding in Djibouti.⁷¹ Yet, despite U.S. support, the WFP's resources are still woefully inadequate to meet the vast needs in the small country. The WFP receives less than half of what it needs to serve the most vulnerable and food-insecure populations.⁷² These agencies fill significant humanitarian gaps, and funding cuts would be "very detrimental," as described by a WFP official.

While food security may not be a primary driver for migration, there is a perception that chronic food insecurity in Djibouti has been further stressed by increased flows of refugees and migrants. While this is a logical conclusion, food insecurity levels and staple food prices have not dramatically increased since the beginning of the Yemen conflict and renewed violence in Ethiopia. A long-term analyst of food security explained to the CSIS team that though food prices are high overall in Djibouti, the cost of staple commodities has remained steady despite refugee and migrant influxes. On the other hand, prices for luxury items like meat, fish, fresh vegetables, and other goods have increased.

Though Djibouti is still experiencing chronic food insecurity, its relative situation has progressed markedly over the past five years. Pastoral areas have moved from phase 3, which describes individuals who are barely able to meet minimum consumption "only with accelerated depletion of livelihood assets that will lead to food consumption gaps," to phase

⁷⁰ FAO, "GIEWS—Global Information and Early Warning System," Country Briefs: Djibouti, November 15, 2016, <http://www.fao.org/giews/countrybrief/country.jsp?code=DJI>.

⁷¹ Kimberly Flowers and Shannon N. Green, interview with Jacques Higgins, Djibouti City, February 13, 2017.

⁷² Ibid.

2, which describes individuals who have adequate food consumption but cannot buy “some essential nonfood expenditures without engaging in irreversible coping strategies.”⁷³



Limited resources, harsh conditions, and growing needs have plagued the international community's response to the crisis of mixed migration not only in the Horn of Africa but also globally. Additionally, fears are growing surrounding future funding under the Trump administration. Credit: Kimberly Flowers, CSIS.

Much of this progress is due to interventions supported by the international community. The WFP has played an enormous role in combating food insecurity and malnutrition in Djibouti, assisting approximately 10 percent of the population in the country, from refugee assistance, targeted distribution, food for work, nutrition, and school feeding programs. One of its most notable programs is a food-for-work project that encourages locals to create water access points to capture rain during summer rains and coastal rains. Increased access to water prevents people from migrating from their points of origin.⁷⁴ Such efforts to improve access to water are especially important given the persistent drought in the Horn of Africa. When its largest logistics hub opened in 2016 in Djibouti, the WFP increased its ability to provide life-saving assistance in the Horn of Africa.⁷⁵

⁷³ Famine Early Warning Systems Network, “Integrated Phase Classification,” <http://www.fews.net/IPC>.

⁷⁴ Edward R. Carr, Annelieka Douma, Kirstin Dow, Gouyi Han, and Karl Hallding, “Linking Water Scarcity to Population Movements: From Global Models to Local Experiences,” Stockholm Environment Institute, 2005, https://www.sei-international.org/mediamanager/documents/Publications/Risk-livelihoods/SEI_Dow_Water_Migration_2005.pdf.

⁷⁵ World Food Programme, “WFP Opens Logistics Hub for Humanitarian Assistance in Horn Of Africa,” January 20, 2016, <https://www.wfp.org/news/news-release/wfp-opens-logistics-hub-humanitarian-assistance-horn-africa>.

Beyond humanitarian assistance, other organizations are addressing the systematic challenges facing vulnerable populations. The European Union (EU) Delegation is working to instill respect for human rights and advance the protection of migrants, refugees, and victims of trafficking in the Horn of Africa. Through its Mission in Djibouti, it is funding research to produce more reliable data on mixed migration flows to better inform EU programming. Reliable data about migration patterns is essential to better managing migration so that it is safe, efficient, and bolsters local economies.

UNHCR also is a prominent force in ensuring that refugees' needs are met and rights are respected. Working with IOM, the government of Djibouti, and other partners, UNHCR provides most services for refugees, such as running the camps and paying for tuition to Djiboutian schools. UNHCR's operations in Djibouti are primarily funded through contributions from the United States, Germany, Norway, Japan, and Sweden. However, UNHCR has major fears about the impact of the Trump administration on its operations and budget. It is already seeing potential cuts following smaller donations from European partners.

Additionally, international partners rely heavily on UN agencies to coordinate efforts with the government of Djibouti. Through these relationships, partners can channel their assistance through a partner that has already gained the trust of Djibouti's government.

Recommendations

In many ways, Djibouti is a microcosm of the challenges faced by countries that host large numbers of refugees and migrants, and the international community more broadly. The humanitarian assistance architecture relies heavily on frontline states, which are often ill-equipped to handle large and sustained flows of displaced persons. As of 2015, a full quarter of all refugees were in countries considered "Least Developed" by the United Nations. The CSIS research team, therefore, developed the following recommendations specific to Djibouti that could also apply to other frontline countries with similar dynamics: endemic poverty and food insecurity, volatile neighbors, protracted refugee populations and ongoing arrivals, and weak democratic institutions.

To strengthen the humanitarian response, promote durable solutions, and ensure safe migration, the United States, other major humanitarian donors, the United Nations, and the Djiboutian government should:

- **Expand the free flow of independent, credible data and information.** The lack of reliable data and reluctance to discuss sensitive topics make identifying the challenges facing refugees and migrants and executing a timely, effective response exceedingly difficult. To address the protection and basic needs of migrants, the government and its partners need reliable data and information about the number of migrants, routes they are taking, abuses they are suffering, traffickers they are relying on, and deprivation they are experiencing. Likewise, to ensure that refugees' needs are being met, implementing partners must have the freedom to discuss sensitive issues, like an outbreak of a dangerous disease in a camp setting or sexual and gender-based

violence that is taking place. Finally, refugees and migrants need access to credible information about the situation in Djibouti, their country of origin, and surrounding countries to make informed decisions about their movements and next steps. For all of these reasons, it is essential that the government of Djibouti loosen restrictions on independent journalists and allow the media to cover refugee and migrant issues without fear of reprisal.

- **Create meaningful pathways for integration and advancement.** The response to the refugee crisis in Djibouti—as in most other countries—is reactive and focused on providing temporary, emergency assistance, despite refugees having been displaced for prolonged periods. As a result, refugees are languishing in camps without the ability to provide for themselves and their families, get an education, or gain skills that will allow them to contribute productively to society. The government needs to follow through on its commitments to allow refugees to work legally and to access the national education system. Going beyond those commitments, the government, donors, and aid agencies should explore offering workforce development programs, seed funding and micro-credit for start-ups, life skills building, scholarships to secondary and tertiary educational institutions, and other opportunities to refugees. Similarly, undocumented migrants, particularly minors, are in a precarious situation with no legal status, employment opportunities, schools, or medical care. Steps should be taken to provide them with temporary legal status so they can work, gain an education, and benefit from aid provision. Such solutions would help assuage the burden placed on the government by migrants and refugees and position Djibouti as a leader in experimenting with innovative approaches to bridge humanitarian assistance and development.
- **Scale up mutually beneficial economic initiatives.** The government should seek out opportunities to harness the capabilities of vulnerable populations to support Djibouti's economic development and improve refugees' and migrants' financial independence. For example, the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries is implementing a project in Obock through which Yemenis, 80 percent of whom are fishermen, would teach Djiboutians how to fish. In exchange, Yemenis would be able to borrow boats. This approach seeks to reduce food insecurity and incorporate Yemeni refugees into local communities and economies.⁷⁶ Similar opportunities should be sought out in other sectors.
- **Harness military presence and capacity to deliver emergency assistance and conduct at-sea rescue operations.** Djibouti benefits economically from the presence of multiple foreign militaries. Yet, the unique logistical capabilities of these forces have not been harnessed to address humanitarian conditions. For example, military assets could be used to deliver food to underserved, hard-to-reach populations on Djibouti's border with Eritrea. Foreign militaries could also conduct regular vaccination campaigns or open military health care units to migrants and refugees in need of advanced medical treatment. Furthermore, the United States,

⁷⁶ Kimberly Flowers and Shannon N. Green, interview with Beydane Miyir, Djibouti City, February 16, 2017.

Japan, and other naval powers should build the capacity of Djibouti's navy and coast guard to conduct rescue operations at sea. Migrants and refugees from Yemen are being dumped at sea with little notice to the authorities or IOM, putting their lives in great danger. Japan, through the Japan International Cooperation Agency, is already providing rescue training to the Djiboutian Coast Guard to better perform rescue operations for migrants and refugees dumped offshore. The United States has conducted exercises with the Djiboutian navy and coast guard to improve their capabilities to counter sea-based illicit activity. These efforts should be augmented and focused on difficult rescue operations given the number of vulnerable refugees and migrants traversing the Red Sea.

- **Expand social protections to support poor and vulnerable communities' welfare while building their resilience to future shocks.** Ethiopia's productive safety net program has enabled poor and vulnerable communities to withstand the worst drought in five decades while preserving and building assets. The government-run program is a distribution network that identifies chronically food insecure households and provides predictable transfers of cash or food (or some combination) to improve livelihoods. In some cases, transfers are conditioned on labor supplied to public works programs that improve community infrastructure and resilience. Ethiopia's commitment to preventing famine and ultimately lifting its population out of poverty is a model that others should adapt and replicate. The government of Djibouti has learned from its neighbor and built a pilot safety-net program focused on childhood nutrition. With the likelihood of increased climate-related shocks and continued insecurity in the region, governments, and their international partners, should consider how to expand such efforts to reach more of the rural poor.

Implementing these recommendations will require an infusion of financial and political support from international donors and the Djiboutian government. During a time of unprecedented need and significant budget shortfalls, the instinct will always be to focus on emergency, lifesaving assistance and put off longer-term investments. However, refugees and migrants cannot remain in limbo forever. The international community and frontline countries must embrace creative solutions to enhance opportunities, restore dignity, and protect the rights of the world's refugees and migrants.

About the Authors

Shannon N. Green is director and senior fellow of the Human Rights Initiative at CSIS. She brings deep experience in human rights, civil society strengthening, and international development, with 13 years in the U.S. government, academia, and the nonprofit sector. Prior to joining CSIS, Ms. Green was senior director for global engagement on the National Security Council staff. In that role, she developed and coordinated policies and initiatives to deepen and broaden U.S. engagement with critical populations overseas, including spearheading the president's Stand with Civil Society Agenda and young leader initiatives in sub-Saharan Africa, Southeast Asia, and the Western Hemisphere. She was also involved in the White House Summit on Countering Violent Extremism and in efforts to discredit and delegitimize ISIL and counter its propaganda. From 2008 to 2013, Ms. Green worked at the Center of Excellence on Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance at the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), where she led the development of policies, strategies, and programs to advance political reform and human rights in the Middle East and North Africa. She contributed to USAID's response to the Arab Spring, initiating new programs to support civil society and enhance the transparency and credibility of elections and other political processes across the region. In 2009, Ms. Green joined the interagency elections team in Afghanistan, where she coordinated the international election observation effort and put measures in place to enhance women's participation. From 2004 to 2008, she served in USAID's Asia and Near East Bureau, where she was responsible for managing strategic planning, performance reporting, and budget formulation processes and pioneering new development approaches in fragile, conflict, and post-conflict environments. Prior to joining the government, she worked at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in the Environmental Change and Security Project and for nongovernmental organizations combating HIV/AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa. Ms. Green received her B.A. in political science and history from the University of Georgia and her M.A. in international peace and conflict resolution from American University.

Julie N. Snyder is program coordinator and research assistant in the Human Rights Initiative at CSIS, with a primary focus on the human rights and security nexus, transitional justice, and countering all forms of extremism. A graduate of the College of William & Mary, her research interests include conflict and human rights in postcolonial Francophone states; the role of women, peace, and security; and the rehabilitation and reintegration of former extremists.

COVER PHOTO KIMBERLY FLOWERS



1616 Rhode Island Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20036
202 887 0200 | www.csis.org