



High risk migration in the Horn of Africa

## **SOUTH-SOUTH CHILD MIGRATION**

**South-South migration has surpassed migration to the global North. Children account for 31 percent of overall migration in Africa, but sound policy responses have yet to emerge. A better understanding of child migration is needed in order to provide adequate measures for protection.**

A tiny country at the very confluence of the Horn of Africa and the Arab Peninsula, Djibouti has become the main transit point for a migratory flux heading towards Yemen, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf Countries. As many as 100.000 migrants a year arrive from Ethiopia and Somalia, embarking on a perilous journey

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- International legal tools and migration policies must take childrens' South-South migratory movements into account.
- To adequately address child migration in the Horn of Africa, a better understanding of the root causes triggering child migration is needed.
- To effectively address the protection of child migrants, both child agency and child vulnerability must be taken into account.

**"We are 6 in my family, my brothers are all older than me and they cannot find work in Hargheissa; there's a lot of poverty and no jobs. They are trying to find something to do to help my parents, and I thought that maybe there were more opportunities for a girl in Djibouti. I had put some money aside, so I decided to buy a bus ticket and come here to look for a job, maybe as a housemaid, so that I could help my family."**

*Kadra, 14, Somali*

across arid landscapes to the departure point on the Gulf of Aden. The flux is mixed and includes migrants looking for economic opportunities, asylum seekers fleeing persecution, and individuals looking to reunite with previously migrated family members. A significant number of the migrants are children and teenagers. Lack of control and humanitarian policies makes the route among the deadliest in the world: extreme heat, hunger and thirst characterise the crossing of the country's desert areas, while smuggling networks operating in the Gulf of Aden enjoy almost complete impunity for regular abuses, including torture, abductions, systematic sexual violence, extortion, and deprivation of food and water.

#### **From child migrants to street children**

According to the international organisations monitoring the route, up to 30 percent of the migrants crossing Djibouti are less than 18 years old. Exposed to the same difficult country of origin conditions as their adult compatriots, they develop independent plans of migration in the hope of finding better life conditions and of becoming able to support their families. While underage migrants registered by the aid actors are mainly teenagers heading to the Arab Peninsula, a pool of younger children, who often lack the money and connections necessary for the trip to Yemen, choose Djibouti as their country of destination. With some as young as 7 years old, migrant children in the urban and peri-urban areas of Djibouti City represent a heterogeneous group of young movers. In line with the adult's migration flux, they mainly originate from rural areas in Ethiopia and Somalia with a severe lack of education and employment opportunities. Most of the children consider it a duty to support their household and migrate in search of income; others join their peers' movement looking for adventure, experience and economic independence. Others still leave home in response to intra-familial conflicts or losses. In all cases, children often regard their plans and movements as based on autonomously taken decisions.

Most child migrants who manage to reach Djibouti are destined to a hard life. In a small country with an unemployment rate up to 60 percent, finding a job, even if informal, represents a challenge for both nationals and migrants. Additionally, migrant children often lack the necessary expertise and connections to facilitate their hiring. In most cases, they manage to earn erratic an income from multiple informal jobs, while some barely survive on begging and petty crimes. Having left behind key protective structures as family, clan and village community, and being unable to fit in the social texture of the country of destination, migrant children end up living as outcast. Often the street becomes their habitual residence and source of livelihood and eventually provides them the name of "enfants de la rue" (street children) by the local population.

#### **Marginal life in Djibuti**

As foreigners and on their own, migrant children face mounting risks, due to both their irregular status and a diffused negative local perception of them. Their lack of identity documents means that they cannot access basic public services such as health care and education. Consequently, they are left out by any child protection initiative in the country. Many fall pray to prostitution rings or other exploitative networks depriving them of their informal earnings. Living in the streets expose them to theft and sexual abuses that cannot be reported to local law enforcement officials: Police patrols are appointed to arrest any irregular migrant, including children, and can detain migrants for days before deporting them to the borders. Both in prison and during forced repatriation, children are subject to the same arduous conditions as adult detainees, with whom they have to share overcrowded cells and meagre meals before being left abandoned at the border. From there, a desert area three hours away from Djibouti-ville, children try their best to get back to the city, either by jumping and hiding on the trucks coming from Ethiopia or by walking for days with no access to food and shelter.

### **The value of children's agency**

It is common for children of the Horn of Africa to face precarious life conditions, and children do move in search of work or better livelihood opportunities. Thus children embark on independent migration even at a young age. The mobility of children represent a feature of many rural communities, with long-standing tradition of nomadic pastoralists and a pervasive presence of cross-border networks. Migratory movements are fluid and can vary in duration and frequency. Especially when spurred by dire economical conditions or the loss of a household member, migration can represent the only viable option of survival. Like adults, children are expected to support the family in times of need, and when children migrate they often send life-saving money to more vulnerable family members back home.

### **From neglect to growing recognition**

Despite the overwhelming numbers, mixed migration in Djibouti is poorly understood by both international agencies and national authorities. Much international migration policy dialogue tends to focus on adult migrants or migrant families heading towards Europe. Despite the magnitude of children leaving their homes and the immense social consequences in the countries of origin and destination, independent South-South child migration has received little attention on the global agenda for migration. Some recent initiatives may change this picture.

**"I was living near Harar with my family. My father went crazy and began beating my mother every day. We were very poor and two of my siblings died. I was the oldest one, so I started helping out: I cooked, planted crops in our garden, looked after the youngest ones. My father started beating me as well. We couldn't live with him anymore. One night we left and went to Jijiga. When we arrived I helped my mother settle. Then I immediately left for Djibouti to look for a job. With some money left I bought the tools and started working (...) Now I do a lot of jobs, I clean cars and shoes in Menelik Square, and I do commissions for people living there.... I got to know some people who give me something to do, take away the garbage or clean their houses. They give me food or let me sleep inside sometimes. (...) I'm saving a lot to send back to my family."**

*Eliás, 15, Ethiopian*



## DEFINITIONS

**Independent Children Migrants:** individuals below 18 years old, who move from home and live at destination without a parent or adult guardian.

**Separated Children:** those separated from both parents, or from their previous legal or customary primary care-giver, but not necessarily from other relatives. These may, therefore, include children accompanied by other adult family members.

**Unaccompanied Children:** (also called unaccompanied minors) children who have been separated from both parents and other relatives and are not being cared for by an adult who, by law or custom, is responsible for doing so.

In September 2012, the Committee on the Rights of the Child devoted its General Discussion's Day to the rights of migrant children. From the debate, the Working Group on Children on the Move created a joint statement to advocate the protection of young movers, highlighting the need to include children's thoughts and ideas in policymaking processes. The report "Children on the Move", illustrating the many challenges of policy makers in this area, was subsequently published.

In October 2013, the UN Member States participated in a High-Level Dialogue on Migration and Development, where the need to protect young migrants was highlighted. In the resulting Declaration, member states committed to "protect the human rights of migrant children, given their vulnerability, particularly unaccompanied migrant children, and to provide for their health, education and psychosocial development, ensuring that the best interests of the child are a primary consideration in policies of integration, return and family reunification".

## INTERNATIONAL LEGAL TOOLS FOR CHILDREN ON THE MOVE

### **United Nations' Convention of the Rights of the Child (1989)**

Article 1. "States Parties shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in the present Convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's or his or her parent's or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status."

### **ILO Convention No. 182 on Worst Forms of Child Labour (1999)**

The term "the worst forms of child labour" comprises:

- all forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery, such as the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage and serfdom and forced or compulsory labour, including forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict;
- the use, procuring or offering of a child for prostitution, for the production of pornography or for pornographic performances;
- the use, procuring or offering of a child for illicit activities, in particular for the production and trafficking of drugs as defined in the relevant international treaties;
- work which, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children.

### **The Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (2000)**

Article 3: "(c) The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation shall be considered "trafficking in persons" even if this does not involve any of the means set forth in subparagraph.

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