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Changing Places: Migration and Displacement in the Horn of Africa

This brief report summarises some of the discussions that took place at the recent research forum convened in Nairobi by the Research and Evidence Facility (REF) of the EU Trust Fund for Africa in the Horn of Africa.¹

Taking stock of REF research

Over the last two years, the REF has been carrying out research on many different aspects of the relationship between migration, displacement and development across the Horn of Africa. Its work has focused both on analysing changing conditions in the region and addressing questions and challenges arising from the programming of the EU Trust Fund.



Huge numbers of people are involved in migration across the region, including those moving in search of employment and better opportunities and those displaced by violence and conflict or other conditions, such as drought, that makes it impossible for them to remain in their homeland. A critical area of research has been on examining different aspects of these processes of migration and displacement: what mix of factors drives people to change their places of residence? How does their movement change the places that they leave and where they settle? And how does the intervention of different actors moderate or accelerate these processes?



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Participants and Sessions

The Changing Places forum took place on 21 and 22 January 2019 at the Trademark Hotel in Nairobi. The REF convened the forum to bring together a wide range of stakeholders working across the region to discuss these themes, based on presentations of research findings (from those who have been involved in REF research and many other researchers) and shared experiences and perspectives (from government officials, donors, civil society organisations among others).

Over 135 delegates from 21 countries across the Horn of Africa and beyond participated in the forum. Representatives came from governments, universities, research institutions, the UN, NGOs, media, civil society and private sector. A group of artists from the region, many of whom were refugees from the Artists for Refugees project in Kenya, were also invited to showcase their work at the forum.

In addition, we were delighted to welcome Mr Hubert Perr, Head of Cooperation EU delegation to Kenya, and Ambassador Mohamed Abdi Affey, UNHCR Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa, to open the forum with their personal insights, together with Laura Hammond from the REF. We were also honoured that Ambassador Tom Amolo, Political and Diplomatic Secretary for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kenya, was able to close the forum at the end of the second day.

With the exception of the opening and closing plenary, each forum session consisted of a group of panellists who presented findings from their research or work and then engaged in a broader discussion with the audience. The sessions were grouped into thematic areas, which are outlined below. Two panel sessions were held concurrently throughout the event.



A first set of panels examined some of the factors that determine mobility and its impacts across the world – such as demographic changes and the rapidly expanding youth population in the Horn of Africa, gender relations and ideas of vulnerability, urbanisation and the ever-growing reality of climate change.

Demographic trends shaping mobility

The opening plenary session, led by Edward Paice, Director of the Africa Research Institute, explored the intersection of broad demographic trends, conflict and insecurity, political fragility, high levels of displacement and environmental change. Discussion focused on the interaction between changing demographics (in both Africa and Europe) and migration from the Horn towards European countries. Participants also questioned the assumption that better work opportunities at home deter young people from moving elsewhere; highlighting that aspirations for a mobile life are a common and normal trait across the world. The need to look beyond the headline figures on demography and instead seek to disaggregate these according to different groups and contexts was also discussed.

Gender and Migration

This panel explored how mobility is both shaped by and in turn, transforms gender relations. It considered how ideas of masculinity and femininity affect people's aspirations and capacity to migrate, and how gender influences migration decisions, experiences and outcomes. Discussion revolved around a number of key issues, such as: the lack of data on the gendered causes of migration and displacement; the vulnerabilities that both women and men (who are often overlooked in gender analysis) face, the sensitivity of language and the risk of (often inadvertent) gender bias when conducting research on this topic; and the interactions between gender, insecurity and mobility. A short Refugee Law Project film was screened: [21 Years Running](#), about a successful intervention to help a woman survivor of sexual violence and related health complications during the war in Northern Uganda. Panellists included Chris Dolan (Refugee Law Project), Judith Gardner (Independent Consultant) and Lilian Kilwake (Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation). The session was moderated by Hanina Ben-Bernou from the EU Delegation to Kenya.

Youth and Migration

Large numbers of young people choose to move in search of better opportunities elsewhere. This panel explored how perceptions of young people change when they start to move, and the extent to which their migration is seen as a threat to development, or a symptom of it. Discussion revolved around the role that social media plays in encouraging and enabling young people to move; the impact (financial and emotional) on families when children move elsewhere; the role that other groups, such as government and the diaspora, play in promoting youth migration; and the links between land shortages, agricultural opportunities and youth migration. These themes are related to REF research in process on the influence of youth employment schemes over migration decision-making. Panellists included Catherine Dom (Mokoro International Development Consultancy) and Mulugeta Debalke (Ethiopia WIDE). The session was moderated by Tanja Müller from the University of Manchester.

Urbanisation

This panel explored the dynamics behind rapid urbanisation in the Horn of Africa, and the impact that this has had on development in both urban and rural settings, as well as people's view of mobility. Discussion points included: the challenges of categorising and labelling IDPs

in Somalia's urban settings; the importance of putting migration at the centre of discussions on urbanisation; the need to improve urban planning; and the question of defining what we want or imagine our cities to look like, and what place migrants can have within this imagining? This theme tied in to recent REF research entitled [the Lure of the City](#), which explored rural to urban migration in Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda, as well as on displacement and return to Somalia's urban centres. Panellists included Nassim Majidi (Samuel Hall), Kalyango Ronald Sebba (Makerere University) and Amun Osman (UN Habitat). The session was moderated by Natalie Mitchell-Bennet from the EU Delegation to Kenya.

Environment and Food Security

Livelihoods across the Horn are vulnerable to environmental change and variability. With this in mind, this panel explored the implications for food security, political stability and patterns of mobility. It considered the role that mobility can play in building resilience and adapting livelihoods to changing conditions. The panel discussed a range of topics, including: the importance of local knowledge and perspectives; changing perceptions of pastoralist communities and lifestyles; the challenges of counting those who move as a result of environmental factors; the need to recognise diversity in how people cope and adapt to environmental change; and the importance of considering the environmental impact of policies and programmes. Panellists included Greta Semplici (University of Oxford), Abdi A. Hussein (Pastoralist Concern), Chris Print (FAO) and Laura Hammond (REF/SOAS University of London). The session was moderated by Vincent Chordi from the REF/Sahan.

A second set of panels focused on issues that are felt particularly sharply in the Horn of Africa: the critical role of borders in people's livelihoods; displacement and the return of refugees and IDPs; and the challenges of providing protection for people on the move.

Borders

This panel explored what it means to cross a border for different groups, as well as the constraints and opportunities that borders can have for people's livelihoods, particularly in a context of growing border control. The panel discussed how borders can be spaces of opportunity, creativity and imagination, whilst acknowledging that not everyone has equal access to such opportunities. Discussion points were wide ranging and included: citizenship and borders; cross-border trade; the opening up of the Ethiopia-Eritrea border; the role of the state on borders; the role of diaspora; the impact of rural-urban migration on borders; the impact of large-scale investments and development projects on borders; and prospects for free movement within the Horn of Africa and beyond. This theme relates directly to two research projects carried out by the REF on migration and borderlands in the Horn of Africa. Panellists included Aleu Garang Kuek (Makerere University), Dereje Feyissa (Addis Ababa University) and Vincent Chordi (REF/Sahan). The session was moderated by Immaculada Guixe Ancho from the EU Delegation to Ethiopia.

Protection Needs and Development

This panel considered what protection looks like for different groups, contexts and over time and at different stages of the journey. In this context, it contemplated how well policy and programmes reflect these differences, and how development and protection can become more closely linked. Discussion revolved around a number of questions including: what constitutes a protection failure, and who decides on thresholds of failure? What is the relationship between protection and development, and to what extent is this relationship

well defined and politicised? How is it possible to ensure that the protection of IDPs stays on the agenda? And how to ensure that protection programmes are well implemented, but also sufficiently flexible to adapt to a changing protection environment? Panellists included Mette Steen (Danish Red Cross), Joanna de Berry (World Bank), Danielle Botti (Mixed Migration Centre) and Laura Buffoni (UNHCR). The session was moderated by Anna Schmidt from DEVCO-EU.

Displacement and Return in the Horn of Africa

A number of countries in the Horn of Africa are undergoing complex processes of displacement and return. In this context, this panel explored the implications for the places where people settle, and how local and national authorities can respond. The panel also considered the role that states and donors can play in these contexts, and how approaches can be better coordinated and aligned. The panel recognised that these movements, challenges and responses are not necessarily new, and need to be understood within the history, context and politics within which they occur. Other discussion points included: the role of local development plans; the role of the private sector; the need to ensure adequate risk sharing; and the importance of working with multiple levels of government on these issues, and improve coordination between them. The panel related to the findings of recent REF research on [return and displacement to Somalia](#). Panellists included Anders Djurfeldt (EU Delegation to Somalia), Freddie Carver (ODI) and Sorcha O’Callaghan (Independent Researcher). The session was moderated by Aude Galli from the Regional Durable Solutions Secretariat (ReDSS).

A third set of panels looked closely at migration programming by critically examining the process of labelling and categorisation that underpins many interventions; the meaning of migration management in practice; smuggling and trafficking; and the current and future role of different actors in the migration industry.

Labelling, Documentation and Citizenship

This panel explored the implications of labels and categories when it comes to protection and assistance. It considered under what circumstances labelling and registering leads to worse outcomes, and how the documentation of some can exacerbate the vulnerabilities of others. The panel discussed the implications of a number of labels associated with migration, including IDP, rural-urban migrant, refugee and host community. Other discussion topics centred around the politicisation of labelling, the limitations of the term mixed migration, civil registration in Somalia, the problems of using labels to target assistance to certain groups, the challenges of counting and enumerating people who move, and the difficulty of escaping labels once they have been attributed. These themes were among the most significant findings of the REF’s report on [return and displacement to Somalia](#). Panellists included Caitlin Sturridge (REF/SOAS University of London), Abdullahi Alas (Federal Government of Somalia) and Hervé Nicolle (Samuel Hall). The session was moderated by Edward Paice from the Africa Research Institute.

Towards a Broader Understanding of Migration Management

Recognising that the term ‘migration management’ is now widespread in policy and programmes, this panel explored how such initiatives play out on the ground, particularly when it comes to the lives and livelihoods of those involved. It also considered how ideas about migration management differ between actors, and the extent to which these are

reconcilable. Discussion revolved around key issues such as smuggling and trafficking, the role of the nation state, how to define migration management and the allocation of resources to migration management initiatives. This work relates to the REF's work on experiences of, and perceptions about, [migration in Puntland, Somalia](#). Panellists included Oliver Bakewell (REF/University of Manchester), Hussein Halane (Sahan) and Grace Lubaale (Sustainable Urban Economic Development). The session was moderated by Amb. Iqbal Jhazbhay from the University of South Africa and Ministry of Foreign Affairs, South Africa.

Smuggling and Trafficking

This panel explored the networks involved in smuggling and trafficking, their means of operation, and how these have evolved over time. Discussion centred around data, and the need to be clear about what data is needed, how it is used, the implications of sharing sensitive data, and the potential for unintended consequences. Given the strong desire of many people to move, the panellists also discussed the challenges and practicalities of tackling smuggling, the alternatives for migrants if smuggling routes are shut down, and the need for better coordination between partners. The linkages between smuggling and state collapse and the closing of state borders were also discussed. Panellists included Emmanuel Deisser (Sahan) the author of an upcoming REF report on this topic, Meron Estefanos (independent researcher via skype) and Tuemay Aregawi (IGAD Security Sector Program). The session was moderated by Virginie De Ruyt from the EU Trust Fund.

The 'Migration Industry'

As global concerns about migration have increased, the 'migration industry' has drawn in an ever-expanding cast of actors, each with its interests in different aspects of migration. With this in mind, this panel explored how and whether these different interests should be reconciled. It also considered what the future might look like for this industry. Discussion revolved around the term 'migration industry'; how to define it, and how useful it is in capturing the complexities of migration and the specific protection needs of some groups of migrants? The session also discussed the role of the private sector and innovation in migration management. Panellists included Benjamin Hounsell (Samuel Hall), Matthieu Dillais (Altai Consulting), Josh Friedman (GIZ) and Caroline Njuki (Africa Centre on Displacement and Migration). The session was moderated by Sabrina Bazzanella from the EU Delegation to Ethiopia.

A fourth set of panels discussed how to communicate new research findings to the right audiences and how to ensure the best chance of bringing changes in policy, practice and, ultimately, people's lives.

Media and Migration

This panel explored the ways in which media influence people's thinking and decision-making about migration. Discussion centred around the difficulty of deciding what to report on and what to stay silent on. Journalists have a duty of care to the people they feature, and both sides (journalists and researchers/NGOs/policy makers) need to find more effective ways of working together to inform the debate on migration. To enable this, the journalists within the panel stressed the need to make press releases accessible and usable, so that stories can be easily picked up and reported on. Other discussion points included: the role that social media is increasingly playing in shaping both media stories and migration; and the need to move beyond binary portrayals of migration as 'good' or 'bad' in the media in order to reflect its

complexity and diversity. Panellists included Mary Harper (BBC), Rashid Abdi (International Crisis Group) and Muhyadin Ahmed Roble (Radio ERGO). The session was moderated by Tanja Müller from the University of Manchester.

Research and Action

Research on migration and instability is being produced by a number of entities across the region. This closing plenary session explored issues such as ownership, access and control of this knowledge, as well as how to make use of research by translating knowledge into tangible policy and programmes. A wide range of discussion points were raised. The panel discussed the importance of bridging the academic/ policy-maker divide through better investments in dissemination, greater ownership of the research process and questions, ensuring that research is easy to use and access, and by building trust between partners. The importance of language was also recognised and, in particular, the need to ensure that language and policy recommendations are neutral, and also that outputs are translated and therefore accessible to a wider audience in the region. There is also a need to think about what is being produced, whether it is needed, and who is the target audience. Panellists included Anna Schmidt (EU Trust Fund) and Aude Galli (ReDSS). The session was moderated by Oliver Bakewell from the REF/University of Manchester.

The REF team would like to thank all who attended the forum, and all who have supported our work since the project's inception in 2016. We are now working on a research agenda for 2019-21 and look forward to continuing to work with, and growing, our network of valued contacts.

