

# Migrant smuggling

## Paths from the Horn of Africa to Yemen and Saudi Arabia

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This report examines the smuggling networks facilitating irregular migration from the Horn of Africa to countries in the Arabian Peninsula, also referred to as the Gulf. In addition to analysing the structure and modus operandi of migrant smuggling networks, the author considers the extent to which these networks are involved in other forms of organised criminal activity, such as arms and narcotics trafficking. The report concludes with recommendations for policymakers and stakeholders operating in the Horn of Africa and Yemen.

## Key points

- ▶ Foreign donors and bilateral partners should promote general capacity-building of relevant state institutions, rather than focusing on migrant smuggling, when training law-enforcement, judiciary, and border-control staff.
- ▶ Policies to counter migrant smuggling must be country specific and adequately account for the social, economic and political context in which it takes place.
- ▶ Dialogue should be encouraged between source, transit and destination countries.
- ▶ Source, transit, and destination countries should redouble efforts to develop opportunities for legal labour migration within the region.
- ▶ In targeting migrant smuggling networks, foreign donors, bilateral partners and governments in the Horn of Africa and the Gulf should embrace a do-no-harm approach.
- ▶ Policymakers should avoid conflating irregular migration and migrant smuggling with the issues of human trafficking, other forms of organised crime, and terrorism.

## Introduction

Although it receives far less media and policy attention, the number of irregular migrants travelling from the Horn of Africa to Yemen and Saudi Arabia dwarfs the number migrating from the Horn of Africa toward Europe. In 2016, a record 117 107 irregular arrivals were recorded in Yemen, 83% of which were Ethiopian. Somalis comprised the remaining 17%.<sup>1</sup>

The numbers detected crossing along the same routes in 2017, close to 55 000 as of the end of May,<sup>2</sup> are lower than in 2016, but these flows still represent a substantial movement of people, raising several questions about human security, organised crime, regional migration management policies, and to a lesser extent armed conflict in Yemen.<sup>3</sup> Given the deteriorating security situation in Yemen and limited monitoring in the transit countries of Djibouti and Somalia, it is likely that actual arrivals are considerably higher than those recorded, with migrants also seeking to avoid detection by local governments as well as humanitarian and aid agencies during their journey.

Despite an ongoing conflict and humanitarian catastrophe in Yemen, a vigorous kidnapping and torture-for-ransom industry along major routes,<sup>4</sup> and threats of deportation by Yemeni and Saudi authorities,<sup>5</sup> migrants from Ethiopia and Somalia continue to travel to Yemen in hopes of reaching labour markets in the Gulf. Facilitating these flows is a vast smuggling network that stretches from Ethiopia to Saudi Arabia, moving tens of thousands of migrants through some of the harshest terrain on the planet, across the sea, through conflict in Yemen, and across one of the world's most heavily monitored borders.

The number of irregular migrants travelling from the Horn of Africa to Yemen and Saudi Arabia dwarfs the number migrating from the Horn of Africa toward Europe

Migrants from Ethiopia pay smugglers to guide them through Djibouti or Somalia to coastal departure points, most notably near Obock in Djibouti and Bosaso in Somalia. Somalis join the flows of Ethiopians at the coast of Somalia. Different groups of smugglers, some loosely linked to smugglers in Djibouti and Somalia, facilitate movement through Yemeni territory; some specialise in moving people across the heavily militarised border with Saudi Arabia.

Previous fieldwork by the Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime, consisting of semi-structured and open-ended interviews with government officials, migrants, migrant smugglers, and other key informants in Ethiopia, Djibouti, Somalia, and Yemen in 2016, indicated that migrants paid on average US\$200–500 to journey from Ethiopia to Yemen via Djibouti. Based on these numbers, revenues from migrant smuggling along the Ethiopia–Djibouti–Yemen corridor could be conservatively estimated at US\$4.5 million in 2016. Meanwhile, migrants from Ethiopia reported paying US\$100–200 to be smuggled from Ethiopia to Bosaso, and both

Ethiopian and Somali migrants most frequently cited prices between US\$100 and US\$250 for boat crossings to Yemen. Conservative estimates, therefore, placed revenues generated by migrant smuggling from Somalia to Yemen in the range of US\$10 million in 2016. Estimates based on research carried out for this report suggest that while the number of irregular migrants traveling from the Horn of Africa to Yemen is likely to be smaller in 2017 than the record number in 2016, revenues from migrant smuggling along this route are still in the millions of dollars.

Estimating revenues from migrant smuggling routes within Yemen and on to Saudi Arabia is considerably more difficult. Unlike in Djibouti and Somalia, where the general routes have remained consistent for several years, migrants moving irregularly through Yemen are forced to take routes that are constantly changing due to the ongoing conflict. Similarly, prices paid for passage through Yemen, as well as for the crossing into Saudi Arabia, are constantly in flux. This price volatility, combined with the fact that there are few reliable figures available to estimate how many migrants pass through Yemen into Saudi Arabia (as opposed to those who stay in Yemen to work), makes it hard to estimate the size of the migrant smuggling industry. That said, since migrants pay smugglers several times during their journey, and the most recent information collected indicates that the cost of crossing into Saudi Arabia is around US\$800, revenues from migrant smuggling in Yemen are easily several million US dollars per year.

While the flows of migrants from the Horn of Africa to Yemen and on to Saudi Arabia are documented, thanks in large part to aid and humanitarian organisations that offer assistance and protection to irregular migrants and asylum seekers, what is less well understood is the nature of the networks facilitating these flows, their linkages with armed groups in the region, levels of state complicity, and the extent to which the actors involved are implicated in other organised criminal activity.

Prior interviews carried out by the Global Initiative in Djibouti, Somalia, and Yemen indicated that some of these migrants might be recruited into armed groups, hired as mercenaries, or conscripted into forced labour during their journey. Others are kidnapped upon arrival, suggesting that smugglers in Djibouti, and to a lesser extent Somalia, may be collaborating directly with traffickers in Yemen. In Somalia, some smugglers offer

to connect migrants with smugglers in Yemen who can facilitate direct passage through Yemen to Saudi Arabia. Other Somali smugglers offer to pass migrants on to local Yemeni smugglers in order to transport migrants through Yemen to the Red Sea coast and from there by boat to Sudan, from where they can connect with other smugglers to continue on to Egypt or Libya and from there to Europe. Both examples of cross-border connectivity between multiple groups of smugglers suggest a degree of coordination among a constellation of criminal opportunists and facilitators operating along various routes.

Prices paid for passage through Yemen, as well as for the crossing into Saudi Arabia, are constantly in flux

This report tries to fill in the gaps in the existing knowledge base to better understand the actors involved in migrant smuggling, how the migrant smuggling networks facilitating these flows are structured, and the implications these networks have for peace and stability in the Horn of Africa and Yemen. It is by no means the final word on these networks and their impact, but an attempt to create a base of knowledge about how they operate in order to inform policymakers working within this space.

To that end, the discussion that follows is divided into six sections. The first profiles the migrant communities and the push and pull factors that drive their migration. The next three sections explore migrant smuggling networks in different areas – Somalia, Djibouti, and through Yemen into Saudi Arabia and Sudan. The report then considers the extent to which migrant smuggling groups are linked to armed groups fuelling conflict in the region. Finally, it offers several recommendations for policymakers.

### A note on methodology

Fieldwork for this report was carried out by a team of researchers for the Global Initiative in the form of almost 50 interviews with migrants, migrant smugglers, government officials, and other key actors in Somalia (primarily in the northern autonomous areas of Somaliland and Puntland),<sup>6</sup> Djibouti, Yemen, and Ethiopia. These interviews were carried out in July and August 2017,

building on earlier interviews by the Global Initiative in all of these locations in May, June, and July 2016.

Given the sensitive nature of the subject, particularly regarding the modus operandi of migrant smuggling networks and the extent to which local government and security forces may be directly involved, anonymity was granted to interviewees upon request. Where necessary, exact locations have been withheld to maintain the anonymity of the interviewee.

## Migration from Ethiopia and Somalia

Nationals from Ethiopia and Somalia comprise almost the entire population of irregular migrants transiting from the Horn of Africa to Yemen and on to Saudi Arabia.

The push and pull factors driving Ethiopian migration to the Gulf are both longstanding having existed for decades (particularly since the 1990s) and new, tied directly to more recent political developments in Ethiopia. While labour migration to the Gulf is not always irregular, migrants who do arrive in Saudi Arabia without papers are able to find work in the informal economy— on farms, in construction, in the service sector (e.g. hotels, restaurants and shops) and as domestic workers. Despite crackdowns on irregular migration and several mass deportations of Ethiopian irregular migrants, Ethiopians continue to travel to Saudi Arabia in search of employment, often at the encouragement of compatriots already living in Saudi Arabia.

Ethiopian migrants transiting to Yemen through Djibouti are almost exclusively male

In addition to these existing structural drivers of irregular migration from Ethiopia to Saudi Arabia and the Gulf, more recent political developments in Ethiopia serve as a push factor. While Ethiopia has enjoyed double-digit economic growth in recent years, among the highest in Africa, much of the population has not experienced the benefits of this growth. Ethnic Oromo, in particular, argue that they are discriminated against politically and have been disproportionately shut out of the growing economy although they are the most populous ethnic group in the country.<sup>7</sup> Lack of opportunity, real and perceived, is regularly cited by Oromo migrants as the reason they seek to migrate to the Gulf.

A smuggler in Somaliland, who facilitates migration from the Ethiopian border to an area near the disputed border with Puntland, said that 98% of his clients are male. In the two vehicles packed with over 40 migrants that the Global Initiative was able to access through this smuggler, there was only one woman.<sup>8</sup> The Global Initiative received similar information in Djibouti from smugglers, local government officials and migrants themselves, who confirmed that Ethiopian migrants transiting to Yemen through Djibouti are almost exclusively male.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to Ethiopians, who comprised over 80% of migrants detected along the route from the Horn of Africa to Yemen in 2016, Somalis also seek the services of migrant smugglers to reach Yemen in significant numbers. Somalis once transited Djibouti, joining flows of Ethiopians, to cross the Red Sea to Yemen but since 2014, when general flows from the Horn began shifting from Djibouti to Somalia (Puntland), the vast majority of Somalis traveling to Yemen do so via Puntland. Relatively few Somalis seek to reach Yemen via Djibouti anymore. Smugglers in Djibouti interviewed during fieldwork for this report said it had been several years since they had Somali clients in any significant numbers and suggested that Somalis who did make the journey via Djibouti had been living and working in Djibouti prior to their decision to migrate.<sup>10</sup>

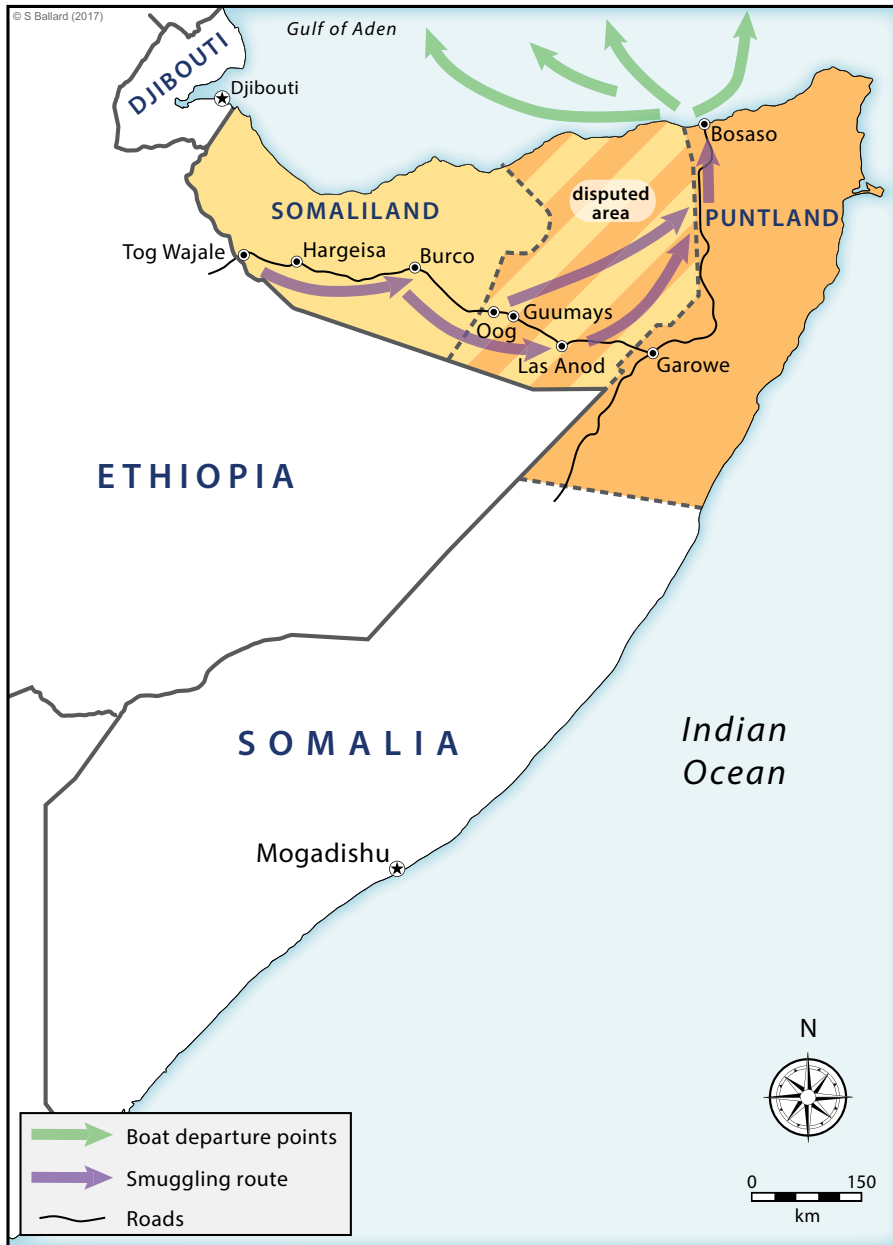
The drivers of Somali migration to Yemen are slightly different from those in Ethiopia, with Somalis citing conflict, famine, and employment opportunities in Yemen and Saudi Arabia as reasons for migration. Until Yemen's recent descent into humanitarian catastrophe due to the ongoing civil war (in which several external countries, such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, the United Arab Emirates, and the United States are heavily involved), Yemen was a destination country for asylum seekers from Somalia, who were granted *prima facie* asylum status upon arrival. According to interviews with Somali migrants in Somalia and Yemen, as well as with Somali smugglers operating in Yemen, the majority of Somali migrants arriving in Yemen now see it as a transit country either to Saudi Arabia or Sudan, though they may seek short-term employment in Yemen to finance the journey.<sup>11</sup>

## Smuggling through Somaliland and Puntland

Migrant smuggling through Somaliland and Puntland follows a fairly uniform route. The structure and

modus operandi of migrant smuggling networks operating in Somaliland and Puntland are shaped by formal and informal political and security arrangements within both territories.

**Figure 1: Map of Somalia**



For irregular migrants from Ethiopia, the journey to Yemen through Somalia begins with travel to the town of Wajale on the Ethiopia–Somaliland border. There, migrants who have already made arrangements (either in person or by text or phone) meet their interlocutor, who they may have met previously or may have been instructed to contact upon arrival. Other migrants arrive in Wajale without having made prior arrangements. From Wajale, Ethiopian smugglers, often referred to as agents or brokers, arrange the trip across the border into Somaliland (sometimes avoiding detection by border authorities, but more commonly paying officials at the border). Migrants are transported



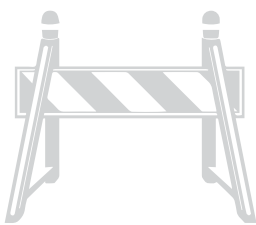
ETHIOPIANS  
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 YEMEN IN 2016

through Somaliland and onward through Puntland to the city of Bosaso, from where boats depart for Yemen.

The first stop after crossing the border is Hargeisa, the capital of Somaliland. There, some migrants choose to continue on foot, without the services of a smuggler. These migrants often seek short-term employment in various towns and cities in order to fund subsequent phases of their journey. The Global Initiative spoke with two Ethiopian migrants, for example, who after paying a smuggler to facilitate the initial border crossing and bring them to Hargeisa, then chose to walk for several days until they reached Burco, where they intended to work as car-washers or cleaners until they had enough money to continue to Bosaso, where they intended to work again until they could pay smugglers to take them to Yemen. Both of these migrants had been to Saudi Arabia before, and the Global Initiative encountered them along a remote path on which there is no checkpoint or state presence, indicating that they knew which routes to take to avoid detection.



*Two Ethiopian migrants making the journey from Hargeisa to Burco on foot.  
Photo: Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime.*



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However, the vast majority of Ethiopian migrants make arrangements in Wajale to be transported through Somaliland and Puntland to Bosaso. Trying to transit both regions without a smuggler is fraught with legal and cultural barriers. Migrants who enter Somaliland and Puntland irregularly without the services of a smuggler risk being arrested by local authorities.<sup>12</sup> Even if they avoid arrest, they have to navigate local political and security dynamics. For example, certain clan-based communities in Puntland are largely self-governing and provide their own security, and are sceptical of outsiders, particularly young men, trying to pass through the territories under their de facto control. Smugglers have established relationships, and in some cases financial agreements, with these groups and are able to ensure passage without incident.

Interviews with Ethiopian migrants and smugglers in Somaliland and Puntland indicated that irregular transit from Wajale to Bosaso and on to Yemen typically costs between US\$300 and US\$450, depending on the agent and

the arrangement. Factors such as time of year, number of migrants waiting to depart, delays due to smuggling networks renegotiating their own internal arrangements, and the extent to which migrants are moving continuously without interruption from Wajale to Bosaso, were all cited as reasons for price differences.<sup>13</sup>

### Burco is an important hub where a small group of smugglers of Ethiopian origin are based

According to smugglers and government officials in Somaliland and Puntland, before 2013, Ethiopian migrants paid as little as US\$150 for transport from Wajale to Bosaso, and prices were relatively fixed and required little negotiation. They attributed the increase in prices to modest efforts to limit irregular migration, which have raised the operating costs of smuggling, as well as to increased collusion between smugglers and local law enforcement authorities, which has reduced competition and limited the smuggling market to actors who have the requisite connections with the right government officials and local leaders.<sup>14</sup>

Ethiopian migrants who enter Somaliland illegally and seek to travel to Bosaso by public transport or a private car risk being detected by local authorities at checkpoints along major roads linking Wajale to Bosaso. If they are detected by local authorities, they are not merely arrested but held until they can pay a fine—at which point they can continue their journey, but only with a smuggler who has established a relationship with local authorities. According to interviews with government officials in Somaliland and Puntland, local agents/brokers have made arrangements with the police in certain localities to hand over any Ethiopian migrants who are caught moving along certain routes without their facilitation. In Puntland, smugglers and government officials told the Global Initiative of cases in which local law enforcement and community militias handed migrants directly over to smugglers. In these cases, smugglers may use physical harassment and torture to extract what amounts to a ransom from the migrant, before agreeing to provide smuggling services.<sup>15</sup>

These threats of violence, and the establishment of agreements between smugglers and local law enforcement agencies and militias, have made the

use of a smuggler almost indispensable for Ethiopians seeking to transit Somaliland and Puntland, shaping the smuggling market in the process. According to one smuggler based in Puntland who liaises directly with agents and brokers in Wajale, 'Ethiopian migrants will have only to deal with local agents in [the] Wajale border town to avoid trouble during the journey to Bosaso.'<sup>16</sup>

Upon making arrangements with agents and brokers in Wajale, smugglers place migrants in cars that take them to Hargeisa, from where they are consolidated and packed into minivans (almost always a Toyota Noah) in groups of 25 to 30. From Hargeisa, smugglers take migrants via roads and pathways that run parallel to the Guleed Haji Highway and Waddada Oodweyne route until they reach Burco.<sup>17</sup>



*A van with 24 Ethiopian migrants, operated by one of the main smugglers based in Burco. Photo: Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime.*

According to smugglers interviewed in Somaliland and Puntland, Burco is an important hub where a small group of smugglers of Ethiopian origin are based, connecting agents and brokers in Wajale with the smugglers facilitating transport through the remaining part of Somaliland and Puntland to Bosaso. Once in Burco, migrants may have to wait until smugglers have assembled sufficient numbers for an onward journey; if there are enough of them, they may continue the journey immediately.<sup>18</sup>

Researchers for the Global Initiative were told the same names and aliases several times over the course of this research, indicating that the smugglers in Burco not only are well known but also operate with relative impunity. Such actors, who have connections that span several borders and transcend ethnic and tribal affiliations, are key players in facilitating irregular migration from Ethiopia to Yemen via Somalia.<sup>19</sup> Once migrants reach Burco,

for example, the transporters wait to be instructed to continue via Oog, Guumays or Las Anod, where smugglers based in Somaliland will hand migrants over to their counterparts who handle the journey to Puntland.<sup>20</sup>

The majority of migrants will have made arrangements in Wajale for the entire journey to Bosaso and on to Yemen, but payment is rarely made at the time of agreement, and almost never directly in cash. Rather, local agents in Wajale use *hawala* banking to operate as third-party guarantors. The *hawala* system, commonly used in large swaths of Africa, the Middle East, and Asia, allows clients to transfer money by paying an agent in one location, who in turn instructs an associate based in another location to pay recipients in that location. In the case of Ethiopian migrants transiting through Somalia, *hawala* allows agents in Wajale to liaise with family members in the migrant's home village or town via their associates in other parts of Ethiopia. In doing so, the agents take on the temporary risk of non-payment, but these risks are mitigated by the fact that transactions are regulated not by official contracts, but by informal mechanism such as shared notions of ethnic or tribal loyalty, longstanding business relationships between *hawala* operators, and mutual incentives to maintain a reputation as a reliable guarantor. While the majority of migrants are ethnic Oromo, there are also ethnic Amhara and Tigrayan from Ethiopia making the journey, and there are agents/brokers in Wajale and Burco from their communities filling the same role.<sup>21</sup>

Local agents in Wajale use *hawala* banking to operate as third-party guarantors

In Burco, smugglers wait until several dozen migrants have assembled; then they arrange for the journey to continue to Bosaso. At certain locations closer to the disputed border between Somaliland and Puntland, drivers operating the Wajale–Hargeisa–Burco legs of the journey pass migrants on to a separate group of smugglers operating in Puntland, paying them about US\$100–150 per head, or a lump sum of US\$2 000–3 000 per van (depending on the time of year and number of migrants). These smugglers in turn take migrants through Puntland, using tribal and ethnic connections and bribery-based arrangements they have

personally cultivated to deliver migrants to Bosaso.<sup>22</sup> Under this model, the key smugglers in Burco have subcontracted local transporters with specific expertise in order to make good on the guarantee, initially arranged back in Wajale, that the migrants will arrive in Bosaso.

A network of Puntland drivers and transporters who take over near the border of Somaliland and Puntland move migrants over rough terrain in trucks, through the Sool and Sanag regions, until they reach consolidation points in the village of Al-Hamdullah or El Dhoofar in the Bari region of Puntland. Once there, migrants are transported to an area several kilometres south of the main checkpoint for the port city of Bosaso. According to smugglers in Puntland, police are fully complicit in this leg of the journey – receiving bribes at checkpoints to allow smuggler vehicles to pass without being searched, detaining Ethiopians who are detected trying to travel without a smuggler and ‘selling’ them to smugglers, and in some cases providing escorts through the territory. ‘[We] bribe police officers at the checkpoints in Al-Hamdullah, Kalabayr, Karin and Lag, so they will not stop the buses ferrying the migrants to Bosaso,’ explained one active smuggler working in Puntland.<sup>23</sup> At the checkpoint south of Bosaso, migrants cross the border on foot and are picked up in minibuses that transport them to compounds or camps maintained by smugglers in and around Bosaso.<sup>24</sup>

The itineraries and procedures described above are designed primarily for Ethiopian migrants; the experience is different for Somali migrants. Although Somalis can travel to Bosaso legally, they seek the services of brokers and agents there before they leave home in order to have a place to stay and contacts upon arrival. Brokers and agents actively encourage Somali youth to make the journey to Yemen, and in some cases offer to connect them with smugglers in Yemen who will offer them employment or easy opportunities for onward travel to Saudi Arabia and even Europe (this is discussed in more detail below in the section on smuggling networks in Yemen).

Somalis who seek the services of an agent or broker before travelling to Bosaso, particularly Somali youth, are reported to pay prices ranging from US\$30 to US\$150 for transport, food, lodging and assurances that they will be accommodated in Bosaso (prices above US\$100 tend to include passage to Yemen as well).<sup>25</sup> For Somali youth, the agent or broker's services may include intervening,



when the youth has been detained at a police checkpoint and accused of trying to migrate irregularly, to pay for his release.<sup>26</sup> Upon arriving, Somali migrants, like their Ethiopian counterparts, can expect to pay between US\$100 and US\$150 for passage by boat to Yemen.<sup>27</sup>

Once migrants reach Bosaso, smugglers hold them in camps or compounds (where they may provide food and shelter free of charge) until they can confirm that the agreed-on price, usually between US\$300 and US\$450, has been paid to the broker or agent in Wajale by a migrant's guarantor in Ethiopia. The money is then transferred, either through a formal commercial service or through informal financial instruments such as *hawala* networks, to the agents operating in Burco, who, having effectively moved the migrants on consignment, receive their final payment for the migrant at this time.<sup>28</sup> Migrants who do not pay are held for ransom, with physical abuse often used to extract payments from families or friends back in Ethiopia, or they may be forced to work until they have paid off their debt.<sup>29</sup>

After receiving confirmation that the fee has been paid in Wajale and transferred to Burco, smugglers make arrangements with boat owners on the coast, and migrants are taken to coastal launch points outside of Bosaso – often near Elayo, west of Bosaso, or Mareero or Shimbro, east of Bosaso. One boat owner and active migrant smuggler in Puntland told the Global Initiative, '[Smuggling] groups contact us to transfer migrants to Yemen; we get US\$50 per migrant we transfer. In a single trip, we can take up to 190 migrants, but there are risks of being captured by the Yemeni coast guard supported by the Saudi-led coalition, so we always move cautiously to avoid arrest.'<sup>30</sup>

While the fees paid in Wajale do not cover smuggling services in Yemen, the smugglers operating outside of Bosaso do liaise directly with smugglers in Yemen. 'When we get the migrants in our camp in Bosaso, we contact our associated group in Yemen, who will receive them once we transport them on boats. They [migrants] are either smuggled into Saudi Arabia or shipped to Sudan so that they can be smuggled to Europe from Libya,' said another active smuggler on the Puntland coast.<sup>31</sup>

Both smugglers and government officials in Puntland alleged that, in addition to collaborating with smugglers in Yemen, migrant smugglers work directly with law enforcement and security services to ensure that

they can carry out their activities from the coast. '[Smuggling] groups pay about US\$150–200 to top police officers of [redacted] stationed in [redacted] for each time they load migrants on the boats to take them to Yemen,' one active smuggler in Puntland told the Global Initiative. This smuggler, who operates along the coast, claimed that smugglers also bribe individuals within the Puntland Maritime Police Forces, paying them US\$200 when a boat is loaded to depart from a coastal area near Bosaso.<sup>32</sup>

Once they reach Yemen, migrants must make new financial arrangements with smugglers operating in that country

Upon successfully crossing the Gulf of Aden and avoiding detection by Yemeni authorities, migrants are dropped off at various locations, depending on the smuggling network and circumstances within Yemen. Various towns along the coast between Mukalla and Aden were mentioned over the course of fieldwork in Puntland and Yemen, in particular Mukalla itself, Balhaf, Burum, Bir Ali, Shoqra, and Al-Haibala.<sup>33</sup> Several Somali migrants interviewed for this report, as well as others interviewed by the Global Initiative in 2016, said that their boats, often overcrowded with between 150 and 200 passengers, included three or four armed men in addition to the captain.<sup>34</sup>

Once they reach Yemen, migrants must make new financial arrangements with smugglers operating in that country, and may find themselves immediately detained by local armed groups who 'offer' to connect them with smugglers in exchange for ransom payments.<sup>35</sup>

## Smuggling through Djibouti

The networks that smuggle migrants from Ethiopia to Yemen share numerous similarities with their counterparts in Somalia. Migrants transiting irregularly to Yemen through Djibouti are almost all Ethiopian nationals, with ethnic Oromo comprising the vast majority, arriving in Djibouti with the expressed purpose of migrating to the Gulf (even if some will first work in the hubs of Tadjourah and Obock to help finance their journeys).<sup>36</sup>

Like Burco in Somaliland, the town of Tadjoura is a key clearinghouse from where migrant journeys are organised and facilitated; smugglers operating there

maintain direct contact with interlocutors in Ethiopia. Located between the capital, Djibouti City, and the strategic port of Obock, a key consolidation point for coastal departures to Yemen, Tadjoura emerged as a significant migrant smuggling hub in 2007 and 2008, when Djibouti became a principal conduit for irregular migrants and asylum seekers from Ethiopia and Somalia seeking passage to Yemen.

**Figure 2: Map of Djibouti**



ETHIOPIAN MIGRANTS  
MAKE THE JOURNEY  
FROM GALAFI TO  
TADJOURA ON FOOT

Somali migrants often crossed into Djibouti at Loyada, with Djiboutian smugglers, usually ethnic Afar, facilitating transport all the way from the border with Somaliland to the port city of Obock. Smugglers who operated along this route described a very lucrative and permissive smuggling environment during this period. 'I built my house on Somalis in 2007 and 2008,' boasted one former smuggler in Tadjoura. According to this smuggler, contacts on the Somaliland side of the border would inform him the night before that a group of migrants would be crossing. He would drive to the border, meet with the smuggler on the Somaliland side, and designate a rendezvous point on the Djibouti side of the border. He would then wait for the migrants, who crossed the border at night, to arrive in the early morning.

As soon as they arrived, he would call the smuggler on the Somaliland side to confirm receipt of the migrants and initiate a *hawala* transfer in which the smuggler in Somaliland paid him around US\$200 per migrant to transport the migrants all the way to Obock.<sup>37</sup>

From that fee, the smuggler would pay bribes of US\$15–30 at each of the four checkpoints that he had to pass to reach Tadjoura. Once in Tadjoura, he would house the migrants in a compound for a night, and inform a friend in Obock that he would be bringing migrants there the next day and instruct him to prepare a boat. The boat operator would receive about US\$40–50 for each migrant he transported to Yemen. Thus, more people benefit financially from this arrangement than just the smugglers themselves.

With Somalis no longer transiting through Djibouti in large numbers, preferring to cross directly from Somalia to Yemen, the Loyada route has gone dormant. Yet the continued and increasing number of Ethiopian migrants from 2011 to 2016 led to the emergence of well-organised networks, stretching from source communities in Ethiopia all the way to boat operators in Obock. Although some migrants cross the border from Ethiopia to Djibouti at Guelille or Dewele, many of those who do so continue to Tadjoura on foot without making prior smuggling arrangements.

### With Somalis no longer transiting through Djibouti in large numbers the Loyada route has gone dormant

According to government officials in Djibouti City as well as former and current smugglers in Tadjoura, the border town of Galafi is the principal hub from where migrants from Ethiopia, mostly ethnic Oromo, make arrangements with smugglers who are linked directly to smugglers in Tadjoura. While ethnic Afar from Djibouti are the principal smugglers, Ethiopian smugglers also work in Tadjoura, liaising directly with their Djiboutian counterparts. In some cases, after making arrangements in Galafi, migrants are guided by Djiboutian smugglers through difficult terrain, until they reach remote pathways through which smugglers based in Tadjoura, who know the territory near Lac Assal, can transport them directly to Tadjoura, from which they would travel to coastal launching points near Obock.<sup>38</sup>

It is more common, however, for Ethiopian migrants make the journey from Galafi to Tadjoura on foot, walking for four to six days on the main roads. Once in Tadjoura, migrants call a phone number provided by their agent/broker in Ethiopia to reach a smuggler there, who coordinates payments with the smuggler in Ethiopia via the *hawala* system. The smuggler then takes the migrants to Obock and hands them over to a boat owner, who consolidates migrants and transports them to remote launching points north of Obock in advance of their sea crossing.<sup>39</sup>



An Ethiopian migrant making the two-day journey from Tadjoura to Obock on foot. Photo: Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime.

This payment and delivery system, like its equivalent in Somaliland and Puntland, allows a range of actors to coordinate while spreading risk. It allows migrants to travel through Djibouti without having to carry cash, while agents and brokers in Ethiopia, and transporters and logisticians in Djibouti, can settle accounts via *hawala*. These networks, even if they are not highly integrated in a hierarchical or top-down manner, are interconnected and quintessentially transnational.

‘You can’t work in smuggling without contacts in Ethiopia,’ explained one smuggler based in Tadjoura who receives migrants there and then facilitates their transport to Obock and links them up with boat owners on the coast. ‘Migrants pay smugglers in Ethiopia so they have nothing in their pocket when they are here,’ he continued. ‘This is a business in which everything is done by telephone. The telephone has changed everything. With a telephone, anything is possible.’<sup>40</sup>

The same smuggler and several of his colleagues also described a typology of the Ethiopian migrants they

prefer to transport, ranking them by ethnicity. Ethnic Tigrayan and to a lesser extent Amhara, they said, often had more money and would pay more for ‘full package’ and ‘deluxe’ deals that included added assurances, better-quality boats, and being guided for the entire journey from Ethiopia to Yemen. (Researchers for the Global Initiative heard stories from 2013 about groups of as many as 150–200 Tigrayan and Amhara migrants who paid a premium to be escorted through the Dakhil region, accompanied by up to a dozen guides and a small caravan of camels carrying provisions.) ‘They paid more and they paid as fast as possible. They did not want to be mixed with Oromo,’ one smuggler explained, who described Oromo migrants as only being able to afford ‘bargain deals.’<sup>41</sup>

Once in Obock, migrants seek the services of boat owners who can transport them to Yemen

More recent irregular migrant flows through Djibouti, however, have consisted almost exclusively of ethnic Oromo, who do most of the journey on foot, with some making the eight-day journey from Galafi to Obock entirely on foot. Other Ethiopian migrants, some of whom start their journey by traveling to Djibouti City, seek the services of smugglers who send them in minibuses from Djibouti City to Tadjoura. Since there are no checkpoints between Tadjoura and Obock, they can walk for two days to reach Obock without having to worry about the Djiboutian authorities. ‘From Djibouti to Tadjoura, for Djiboutians, it costs 1 500 Djiboutian francs [roughly US\$8]. For Oromo, I charge them 10 000 [roughly US\$55]. So, in my car that seats 14, I like to have four or five Oromo in it,’ explained one transporter based in Djibouti City. According to this transporter, a car full of Oromo is more likely to warrant action by law enforcement but if the car is mostly Djiboutians, authorities at checkpoints will either turn a blind eye to the Oromo or simply ask for a small bribe.<sup>42</sup>

According to smugglers in Tadjoura as well as boat owners operating in Obock, migrants who make arrangements with brokers in Galafi before crossing into Djibouti arrive in Tadjoura and are moved to Obock quickly once they liaise with interlocutors in Tadjoura. Those who arrive in Tadjoura without having made prior

arrangements find an interlocutor in Tadjoura; after they agree on a price, the interlocutor makes arrangements with a boat owner in Obock before leaving Tadjoura.

Once in Obock, migrants seek the services of boat owners who can transport them to Yemen. Migrants who have made arrangements in Galafi or Tadjoura meet with their prearranged liaisons in Obock, and are either taken to coastal launching points north of the city or housed in camps and compounds in and around Obock until there are enough migrants to justify a boat crossing. During this phase, migrants who did not use the services of a smuggler on their journey to Obock are mixed with those who did. Once sufficient numbers have been reached, boat owners in Obock call contacts in Yemen to notify them of an incoming shipment and to agree on a drop-off location.<sup>43</sup>

‘I call my friends in Yemen and say, “Hey, I’ve got 45 people” and they tell me where to go over there,’ one boat owner in Obock told the Global Initiative.<sup>44</sup> According to this boat owner, several smugglers in Tadjoura have his number, and they bring him business. Once a trip has been arranged, migrants are loaded in groups of 40 to 45 on wooden skiffs, although it is not uncommon for as many as 150 to be packed in slightly larger wooden boats.<sup>45</sup>



Members of the coast guard approaching a migrant boat lost at sea. Photo: Djibouti Coast Guard.

According to smugglers in Obock, as well as migrants who were preparing to make the trip or had reached Yemen, crossing from Obock to Yemen generally costs US\$55–70, although smugglers may charge more if migrants are willing to pay a premium to leave as soon as possible and have fewer migrants on the boat.<sup>46</sup> Some smugglers try to charge more just to see if they can. ‘Some people don’t know better or they are impatient,

so you can ask them for 20 000 or 30 000 [about US\$110–170] and try to raise the price on them.<sup>47</sup>

For the six to ten most well-known smugglers working out of Obock, most of whom are traders operating between Djibouti and Yemen and do not exclusively work in the transport of people, making contacts with smugglers in Yemen was fairly easy. 'I already had relationships with Yemeni fisherman,' one smuggler in Obock explained. 'When migrants started coming here, Yemenis started asking for reliable contacts. Before, we exchanged merchandise with them. It's the same now, but the merchandise is migrants.'<sup>48</sup>

## Smuggling through Yemen

Collecting reliable, up-to-date information on migrant smuggling networks in Yemen is particularly challenging at the moment, given the ongoing conflict and humanitarian crisis. However, researchers for the Global Initiative were able to carry out interviews with government officials, local leaders, smugglers and Ethiopian and Somali migrants in Sana'a, Aden, Lahj and Shabwa. Smuggling routes and itineraries are constantly shifting due to the fluid security situation. The information presented in this report describes itineraries that were current at the time fieldwork was conducted, and are indicative of how smugglers facilitating migrant flows from Yemen to Saudi Arabia and Sudan operate.

Collecting reliable information on migrant smuggling networks in Yemen is challenging given the ongoing conflict

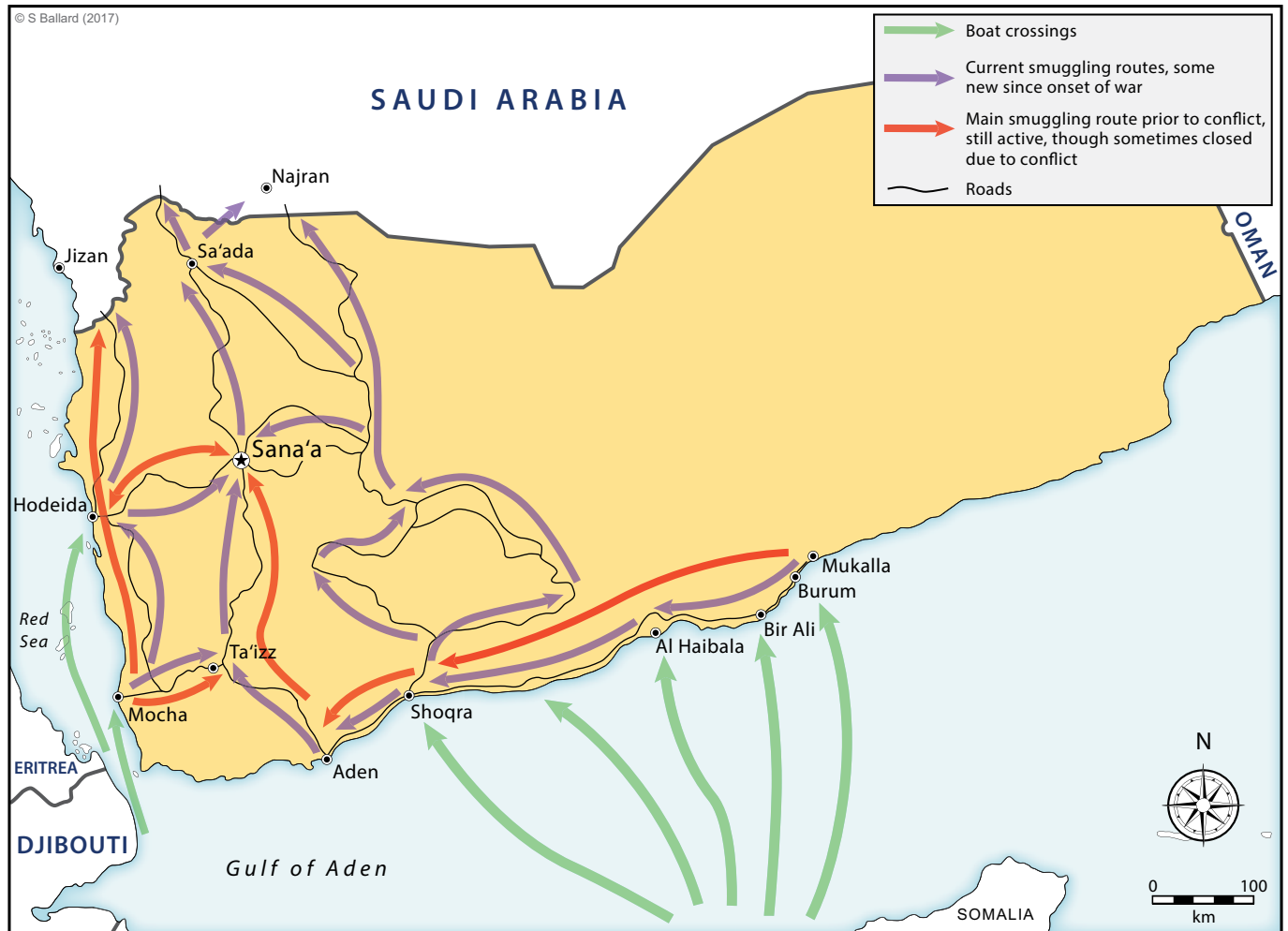
Boats that leave from Bosaso and its environs usually land in the Yemeni governorates of Hadramut, Shabwa, and Abyan. Smuggling networks based in those areas are reported to be of mainly Yemeni and Somali origin and often affiliated with armed groups and security forces operating in the region. One migrant interviewed in 2016 told the Global Initiative that armed guards on his boat threw him and the other migrants off the boat before reaching the coast in an effort to avoid detection by Yemeni authorities. Another Somali migrant interviewed for this report said that the armed crew forced him off the boat as they neared the Bir Ali coastline, forcing him to swim for 45 minutes to reach the shore. These stories track closely with two incidents that gained international attention in August 2017, in which smugglers reportedly pushed a total of 280 migrants from boats off the coast of Yemen; up to 70 are reported to have died.<sup>49</sup>

Interviews with smugglers, government officials and migrants in several locations throughout Yemen indicate that the migrant networks operating in Yemen do not have a uniform structure or business model. This is in part a result of the multitude of routes and the inherent unpredictability of operating within the context of Yemen's civil war. That said, the Global Initiative was able to identify some common characteristics during fieldwork.



CROSSING FROM OBOCK  
TO YEMEN GENERALLY  
COSTS US\$55–70  
PER MIGRANT

Figure 3: Map of Yemen



Although migrant smuggling networks in Yemen are not highly organised, they are highly intertwined. Upon arrival in Yemen, migrants from Bosaso interact with smugglers who offer to help them travel to Saudi Arabia. According to one Somali smuggler based in the Yemeni governorate of Shabwa, migrant smuggling networks operating along Yemen's southern coast have become more interconnected in recent years, in part because smuggling migrants through Yemen to Saudi Arabia has become increasingly difficult since the onset of the civil war and increased controls at the border with Saudi Arabia.<sup>50</sup>

Migrant smuggling networks operating along Yemen's southern coast have become more interconnected in recent years

According to this smuggler, different local groups and smuggling gangs operate within different spheres of influence. Smugglers tend to operate in regions where they have tribal affiliations, working closely with Somali and Yemeni brokers who have been in Yemen long enough to know the

local smugglers in each region and act as liaisons between them. According to this smuggler, migrants are 'exchanged among several networks across the smuggling route.' Ethiopian and Somali brokers play a critical role in gathering migrants, sheltering them, and connecting them to Yemeni smugglers for a commission.<sup>51</sup>

'There is nothing called individual smugglers. It's a chain of networks that incorporates high senior officials,' said one security official in the smuggling hub of Hodeida, who told the Global Initiative that in addition to brokers and transporters, these networks include military officials, local sheikhs, members of parliament, public prosecutors, and law enforcement and customs officials.<sup>52</sup> A local leader in Hodeidah echoed these statements, describing smugglers as local residents working together and coordinating with other groups which include local government officials, police officers, coast guard members, soldiers and armed rebel groups stationed at multiple checkpoints across the smuggling routes, as well as members of the Saudi military stationed at various border crossings.<sup>53</sup>

For migrants arriving from Djibouti, the journey through Yemen to Saudi Arabia has become increasingly complicated and precarious. Migrants arriving from Djibouti can expect to be kidnapped upon arrival, with those who cannot pay held for ransom. Eight Ethiopian migrants interviewed in Aden, who recently crossed the sea from Obock, told the Global Initiative that the smugglers operating their boat were clearly working with smugglers in Yemen. 'Though we reached the shores of Yemen in the middle of the night, traffickers were able to notice us and fired shots in the air to scare those who tried to escape,' one of the migrants told the Global Initiative.<sup>54</sup>

The presence of smugglers and traffickers kidnapping migrants upon arrival from Djibouti has been well documented by human rights groups and aid organisations in recent years, and by all accounts, the phenomenon has continued to the present day.<sup>55</sup> Migrants who cannot pay US\$200–300 for their immediate release through a third party are often forced into unpaid labour or abused and even tortured to extract ransom from family members back home. Some of the groups operating these kidnap-for-ransom schemes are also reported to offer smuggling services upon payment. Migrants pay for their release, and then are offered the

opportunity to be smuggled to Sana'a or a crossing near the Saudi border. According to one security official in Hodeida, a well-known smuggler who oversees kidnap-for-ransom schemes in the area offers to arrange passage into Saudi Arabia for US\$650–800, a price competitive with what other smugglers offer.<sup>56</sup>

Migrants arriving from Djibouti can expect to be kidnapped upon arrival, with those who cannot pay held for ransom

Prior to the current civil war in Yemen, which erupted in 2015, most migrants arriving on Yemen's southern coast via Somalia would seek asylum (in the case of Somalis), employment (in the case of Somalis and Ethiopians) or passage to Saudi Arabia. Migrants who wished to continue to Saudi Arabia would most often travel overland along the coast to the port city of Aden or directly to the capital, Sana'a, from where they would travel north along smuggling routes that intersected with routes from Djibouti to Yemen. The current conflict in Yemen, which is principally fought between forces loyal to Yemeni President Mansour Hadi (backed by a Saudi-led coalition) and forces allied to the rebel movement led by ethnic Houthis (supported by Iran among other actors), precludes a straightforward convergence of migrants from Djibouti and Yemen. The coastline on which migrants departing from Bosaso arrive in Yemen is controlled by forces allied with the Hadi government and territories under the control of Al-Qaeda affiliate Ansar al-Sharia. Forces aligned with ethnic Houthis (supported by Iran and other actors) control the corridor along western Yemen that is traditionally used to smuggle migrants into Saudi Arabia, particularly those arriving in Yemen from Djibouti.

According to a high-level security official in Aden, smugglers used to collect migrants from areas in Aden and Lahj and transport them on pickup trucks and buses all the way to Saudi Arabia. Most journeys started from Hodeida, passed by Hajjah and ended in Haradh, where migrants stopped and prepared to cross the border at al-Tuwal.<sup>57</sup> Given the current conflict in Yemen, however, Saudi Arabia has tightened its border security in that area, and now smugglers follow sub-routes within mountain ranges and agricultural areas across the border from Najran.<sup>58</sup>

As a result, new routes have emerged to reach these areas. One Somali smuggler interviewed for this report, based in Yemen, outlined one of the more recent routes on which he works. The route begins on the Yemeni coast in Shabwa and winds around various strategic towns and transit hubs until Marib. Once in Marib, migrants are taken onward to Sa'adah, from where they can link up with smugglers who specialise in crossing the Saudi border.<sup>59</sup>

### There is increasing evidence that Yemen is serving as a transit country to Sudan

The constant closures and openings of several main roads along this route due to the ongoing conflict has prompted smugglers to find alternative routes from Shabwa to Marib, and now requires travelling off-road through certain areas until they can reach Marib. Prices along this route, from coastal arrival points in Shabwa to Marib, were reportedly about US\$180 at the time of research. Smuggling packages from Sa'adah into Saudi Arabia costs about US\$800 and require travel on foot through the al-Nahouqa mountains, which overlook the Saudi city of Najran. Other smugglers quoted similar prices to researchers for this report, ranging between US\$800 and US\$1 000 to cross into Saudi Arabia in areas near Najran and Jizran.<sup>60</sup>

Unlike Somaliland/Puntland and Djibouti, there is no uniform payment scheme in Yemen that governs the migrant–smuggler relationship or links smugglers across borders. This is in part due to the chaotic nature of the market, the constant blurring of kidnap-for-ransom schemes with smuggling services, and the fluid security dynamics and external shocks interrupting migrant flows. Interviews with smugglers and migrants in Yemen indicated that individual transportation payments are often made in cash, with migrants paying for one leg of the journey at a time. Such arrangements are particularly common when migrants do not have enough money to reach Saudi Arabia and do not have a friend or relative in Saudi Arabia who can act as a third-party guarantor. In these cases, migrants try to find work, often on farms, until they can pay for the next leg of their journey.<sup>61</sup> Migrants who have reached the border but do not have enough money to continue are reportedly offered

passage in exchange for carrying drugs, most often khat, over the border into Saudi Arabia.<sup>62</sup>

Security officials in Lahj governorate told the Global Initiative that some smuggling networks offer payment schemes in which payment is made in Saudi riyals to a third party in Saudi Arabia who is known to a relative of the migrant who lives in Saudi Arabia. In the event that the migrant does not successfully cross into Saudi Arabia, the fee can be refunded. Other smuggling networks employ third-party guarantors who are of the same nationality as the migrants, with connections on both sides of the border, with an understanding that migrants are more likely to trust someone from their own community (and may have more recourse in the event of mistreatment if they have shared connections) than a Yemeni national.<sup>63</sup>

For such arrangements, in which migrants are paying smugglers in Lahj or Taiz to be taken all the way to Saudi Arabia, smugglers are reported to charge US\$800–1 300.<sup>64</sup>

In addition to being a transit country to Saudi Arabia, there is increasing evidence that Yemen is serving as a transit country to Sudan, from where migrants continue to North Africa in hopes of reaching Europe via Libya or Egypt. A 2016 report by the Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat noted the emergence of this itinerary, in which migrants travel by sea from Bosaso to southern Yemen, by land to western Yemen, and then by sea again to Sudan. According to the report, the route first emerged in 2015 and came to the attention of local Somali officials who, investigating reports that Somali youth had gone missing, discovered that they had travelled to Yemen with the goal of following this route.<sup>65</sup>

In 2016, three Somali migrants in Yemen told researchers for the Global Initiative that they had witnessed negotiations and arrangements made by migrants with brokers in Bosaso for a trip from Yemen to Sudan then to Libya. They said that the cost of the Bosaso–Yemen–Sudan trip would be US\$1 000, with an additional US\$1 000 for the trip from Sudan to Libya.<sup>66</sup> A more recent (March 2017) helicopter attack on a migrant boat travelling from Yemen to Sudan, in which more than 40 Somalis were killed, provided yet more evidence of emerging smuggling routes from Yemen to Sudan.<sup>67</sup> It is unclear who is responsible for the helicopter attack, although subsequent reporting has suggested that the Saudi-led coalition was responsible.<sup>68</sup>



During fieldwork for this report, two separate migrant smugglers operating in Bosaso told researchers for the Global Initiative that they work with associates in Yemen who can arrange journeys across Yemen to Sudan. ‘When we get the migrants in our camp in Bosaso, we contact our associated group in Yemen, who will receive them once we transport them on boats. [Migrants are] either smuggled into Saudi Arabia or shipped to Sudan so that they can be smuggled to Europe from Libya,’ one smuggler explained.<sup>69</sup>

## Migration, organised crime and terrorism

When analysing migrant smuggling networks, which are by definition made up of actors engaged in a transnational organised crime, there is a natural impulse to examine the extent to which these groups are involved in other forms of organised crime, such as smuggling or the financing of terrorism. Government officials are often eager to frame irregular migration as a state security issue, and have every incentive to portray migrants as drug couriers, hardened criminals, and foreign fighters. Given that migrant smuggling from the Horn of Africa to Yemen does take place in a volatile region in which civil war and insurgencies are ongoing and a range of terrorist groups are operating, it is worth examining the extent to which there is a migrant smuggling–terrorism nexus, the potential for one to emerge, or other potential links between migrant smuggling networks and armed groups in the region.

In the case of Djibouti and Somaliland, government officials interviewed for this study, including defence and intelligence officials, did not view the fact that Ethiopians transit their territory as a threat to security. To the extent that Djiboutian authorities expressed any security-related concerns about irregular migrants, it was over the potential for militants affiliated with the Somali group al-Shabaab to attack targets in Djibouti (al-Shabaab bombed a restaurant popular with tourists and expatriates in Djibouti City in 2014).<sup>70</sup>

Intelligence officials in Djibouti and Somaliland affirmed their belief that Ethiopians transiting their territory are recruited into armed groups in Yemen upon arrival

In 2016, intelligence officials in Somaliland regularly referred to a trend of Ethiopians being recruited or forced into the war in Yemen, claiming that they were coveted by both pro- and anti-government militias as well as by Islamist rebels. It was unclear if the majority of Ethiopians allegedly joining these groups are forced to join, do so willingly for religious or ideological reasons, or are simply paid mercenaries.<sup>71</sup> During subsequent interviews in 2017, intelligence officials in both Djibouti and Somaliland affirmed their belief that Ethiopians transiting their territory are recruited into armed groups in Yemen upon arrival.<sup>72</sup>

An intelligence official in Yemen told the Global Initiative in 2016 that while his colleagues were initially concerned that Somali fighters were being brought to Yemen by armed groups, they were increasingly seeing other African



SMUGGLING PACKAGES  
FROM SA'ADAH INTO  
SAUDI ARABIA COSTS  
ABOUT US\$800

nationals, some Eritrean but mostly ethnic Oromo from Ethiopia, drawn into the conflict. According to this official, armed groups seek to recruit Oromo because they are perceived to be tough fighters and willing to work for wages ‘half that of a Yemeni.’ The official also posited that Ethiopians are easier to recruit because they are at risk of being detained, deported by the Yemeni government, or mistreated by criminal gangs upon arriving in Yemen, and thus armed groups willing to provide accommodation and a salary can capitalise on their vulnerability.<sup>73</sup>

While migrant smuggling networks are not directly involved with armed actors, these groups are able to use smugglers to move from Puntland to Yemen and vice-versa

In interviews carried out in 2017, Yemeni intelligence officials told the Global Initiative that they had evidence that some smugglers from Djibouti had coordinated directly with armed groups to bring migrants to them (they did not elaborate). According to one Yemeni official, two Ethiopians and five Somalis were captured in 2015 during fighting between local forces and Houthis, who had allegedly recruited them into their forces.<sup>74</sup> Similarly, a Somali smuggler in Shabwa told the Global Initiative that forces loyal to the Hadi government had arrested a number of Africans who were fighting on behalf of the Houthis, and that armed groups, including Ansar al-Sharia and ISIS (also known as the Islamic State), approach migrants offering salaries of US\$150–300 per month.<sup>75</sup> The Global Initiative was also told of occasions on which Houthi units tried to recruit African migrants, offering a salary of US\$80 per month.<sup>76</sup>

The incidents and allegations listed above have not been fully substantiated, however, and various actors on the ground have good reasons to accuse others of recruiting foreign fighters into their ranks. Security sources in Puntland told the Global Initiative that while migrant smuggling networks are not directly involved with armed actors such as al-Shabaab and ISIS, these groups are able to use smugglers to move from Puntland to Yemen and vice-versa.<sup>77</sup>

In terms of links between migrant smugglers and arms traffickers in the region, officials in Puntland expressed concern that boats smuggling migrants to Yemen return to Puntland with contraband, including weapons that can be sold to local militias or weapons traders, or find their way to al-Shabaab and pro-ISIS fighters.<sup>78</sup> Similarly, interviews with officials and smugglers in Puntland indicated that some of the boat operators on the coast are hired by both migrant smugglers and weapons traffickers. This is less an indication of a migrant smuggling–arms trafficking nexus than a reflection of the incredibly permissive smuggling environment that exists on the Puntland coast, in which weapons and people flow in both directions with relatively little oversight.<sup>79</sup>

Migrant smugglers operating within Yemen are believed to be involved in other smuggling activities as well, with one smuggler based in Shabwa telling



THE OVERLAP OF WEAPONS AND MIGRANT FLOWS IS NOT NECESSARILY EVIDENCE OF A MIGRANT SMUGGLING-ARMS TRAFFICKING NEXUS

the Global Initiative that most of his colleagues also smuggled oil products, cigarettes, weapons, alcohol and cannabis.<sup>80</sup> A prominent local leader from Sa'adah (the aforementioned smuggling hub that emerged after border security was heightened at other locations) told the Global Initiative that he has personally witnessed a dramatic increase in arms, ammunition and drug trafficking in his community coinciding with the increase in migrant smuggling in the area. 'It's flourishing and almost doubled from last year, even with coalition forces monitoring Yemen's coastlines,' he told the Global Initiative, adding that everything can be found in Sa'adah and its environs, including smuggled weapons, cigarettes, cannabis and other narcotics.<sup>81</sup> Migrants being smuggled across the border, departing from Sa'adah, are also believed to be used as drug couriers, carrying khat, cannabis and heroin in exchange for reduced smuggling fees or free passage. In other cases, migrant smugglers themselves are believed to be acting as couriers in exchange for payment from other smugglers.<sup>82</sup>

Migrant smugglers operating within Yemen are believed to be involved in other smuggling activities as well

In determining the extent to which migrant smuggling intersects with other forms of criminal activity—particularly terrorism, drug smuggling and arms trafficking—it is important to consider that the immense revenues generated from migrant smuggling in Somalia, Djibouti and Yemen are injected into a broader political economy. In some cases, security forces receive direct payments from smugglers; in others, the proceeds from migrant smuggling are reinvested in the legitimate economy, providing livelihoods for communities that struggle economically. Local governments in transit countries, therefore, have little incentive to crack down on migrant smuggling.

## Policy recommendations

Developing coherent, holistic policies toward migrant smuggling networks is particularly difficult due to the multitude of competing incentives and challenges faced by state and non-state actors involved. With the notable exception of cases in which systemic abuse of citizens from source countries such as Ethiopia and

Somalia prompts domestic outrage, there are relatively few incentives for governments in source countries to crackdown on a phenomenon that allows citizens to search for employment opportunities abroad and send remittances back home. Migration, both legal and irregular, is a driver of economic development.

Similarly, transit countries such as Djibouti and Somalia have few incentives to devote limited monetary and human resources toward preventing migrants from transiting through their territory, especially when revenues generated from migrant smuggling have created entrenched political economies within which a range of state and non-state actors benefit. For destination countries where there is demand for low-cost, informal labour, governments have few little incentive to prioritise stemming the flow of irregular migrants unless they are perceived to be a security risk.

Furthermore, there is a tendency within the donor community to emphasise law enforcement measures, increased border control, and even militarised engagement. While law enforcement and border control are components of holistic migration management policies, they can prove counterproductive if not combined with policies that address the underlying drivers of migration. With these realities in mind, this paper concludes with six policy recommendations for policymakers.

1. Foreign donors and bilateral partners seeking to engage Ethiopia, Djibouti and Somalia (including Somaliland and Puntland) on the issue of irregular migration should promote general capacity-building of relevant state institutions, rather than focusing narrowly on the issue of migrant smuggling when training law enforcement, judiciary, and border-control staff. A police force or a judiciary that lacks the capacity to carry out core functions is unlikely to be able to effectively tackle the difficult issues of migrant smuggling. Given the limited budgets and human resources devoted to these institutions in much of the Horn of Africa, pushing weak state structures to address such a complex social phenomenon risks exacerbating the situation, creating new problems and damaging the credibility of these already weak institutions in the eyes of local communities, thus undermining other governance goals. Specialisation should be a supplement to capacity development, not a replacement for it.

2. Foreign donors and bilateral partners should help countries in the Horn of Africa develop policies that are country specific and adequately account for the social, economic and political context in which migrant smuggling takes place. Just as countries in Europe or North America take different approaches to managing migration, so too should countries in the Horn of Africa. There is no one-size-fits-all policy. Similarly, policymakers should acknowledge and even embrace the fact that, in certain contexts within the Horn of Africa, the state may not be the most credible actor or interlocutor in addressing the issue of migrant smuggling and human trafficking. Increasing law enforcement capacity, and encouraging a more aggressive posture toward migrant smugglers, may run counter to other goals of social cohesion, such as building trust between the government and certain communities.
3. Foreign donors, bilateral partners, and countries in the Horn of Africa and the Gulf should encourage dialogue between source countries (Ethiopia and Somalia), transit countries (Djibouti, Somalia and Yemen) and destination countries (Yemen and Saudi Arabia), focused on how migrant smuggling affects each of them. This will help them not only to develop more holistic, multi-country approaches to managing migration, but also to better understand each other's competing incentives and challenges.
4. Source, transit and destination countries should redouble efforts to develop opportunities for legal labour migration within the Horn of Africa and the Gulf. Providing safe and legal opportunities to work abroad and enabling circular labour migration (by means of multiple-entry or easily renewable visas) would not only reduce the demand for migrant smuggling services but also accelerate economic development within communities that now see labour migration as the only viable means to sustainable livelihoods.
5. In targeting migrant smuggling networks, foreign donors, bilateral partners and governments in the Horn of Africa and the Gulf should embrace a do-no-harm approach. Policies that restrict movement but do not address the desire to move are likely to push migrants to take more dangerous routes and deal with more unscrupulous actors. There are, however, opportunities to target smugglers who have been identified as the most abusive and who regularly subject their clients to unnecessary risk. Targeting these smugglers would help develop trust between governments and migrant communities, which have a mutual interest in rooting out the worst smugglers.
6. Foreign donors, bilateral partners and governments in the Horn of Africa and Gulf should avoid conflating irregular migration and migrant smuggling with human trafficking, other forms of organised crime, and terrorism. Some of the core capacity and border control measures needed to effectively manage migration overlap with measures needed to deal with these other issues. But conflation risks encouraging overly militarised and counterproductive approaches to migration. Donors and bilateral partners, in particular, should be clear about whether they are using the issues of terrorism, arms and drugs smuggling, and human trafficking as pretexts for encouraging policies and building capacities that are really designed to curb irregular migration.

## Notes

- 1 Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat, *Regional mixed migration in the Horn of Africa and Yemen in 2016: end of year trend summary and analysis*, 2017 [www.regionalmms.org/trends/RMMS\\_Annual\\_Report2016.pdf](http://www.regionalmms.org/trends/RMMS_Annual_Report2016.pdf).
- 2 Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat, *Regional mixed migration monthly summary: September 2017, East Africa and Yemen*, 2017, <http://regionalmms.org/monthlysummary/RMMS%20Mixed%20Migration%20Monthly%20Summary%20September%202017.pdf>.
- 3 It is unclear just how abrupt this decline may actually be, in part because monitoring activities carried out by non-governmental and international organizations in Yemen have been significantly reduced or suspended altogether due to ongoing insecurity.
- 4 See, for example, Human Rights Watch, *Yemen's torture camps: Abuse of migrants by human traffickers in a climate of impunity*, 2014, [www.hrw.org/report/2014/05/25/yemens-torture-camps/abuse-migrants-human-traffickers-climate-impunity](http://www.hrw.org/report/2014/05/25/yemens-torture-camps/abuse-migrants-human-traffickers-climate-impunity); L Schlein, IOM: Ethiopians kidnapped for ransom in Yemen, Voice of America, 21 July 2015, [www.voanews.com/a/iom-says-ethiopians-kidnapped-for-ransom-in-yemen/2872053.html](http://www.voanews.com/a/iom-says-ethiopians-kidnapped-for-ransom-in-yemen/2872053.html).
- 5 In 2013, for example, Saudi Arabia expelled over 100 000 Ethiopians as part of an 'amnesty' program in which unauthorised migrants were given a set time to leave the country without a penalty. In 2017, the Saudi government launched a similar program, giving migrants 90 days to leave. As of the beginning of July 2017, as many as 111 000 Ethiopians had agreed to leave Saudi Arabia, with numbers of actual returnees estimated at 70 000 at the time of the amnesty deadline in late July.
- 6 Somaliland, a self-declared state, lacks international recognition but operates independently of the rest of Somalia; Puntland operates autonomously but does not seek recognition as an independent state outside the Federal Republic of Somalia.
- 7 The ethnic makeup of Ethiopia is a contentious political issue, and there are no reliable numbers beyond the most recent census, which was conducted in 2007. At that time, Oromo were estimated to comprise 35% of the population, making them the largest single ethnic group in Ethiopia, followed by Amhara at 27% and Tigrayan and Somali at about 6% each.
- 8 Interviews in Hargeisa and Oodaweyn, Somaliland.
- 9 Interviews in Djibouti City, Tadjoura, and Obock, Djibouti.
- 10 Interviews in Djibouti City, Tadjoura, and Obock, Djibouti.
- 11 Interviews in Bosaso, Puntland, and Shabwa, Yemen.
- 12 A smuggler interviewed in Bosaso, Puntland, for example, warned that migrants detected trying to pass through Puntland alone risk being held for ransom by local militias.
- 13 Interviews in Puntland.
- 14 Interviews in Hargeisa, Somaliland, and Bosaso, Puntland.
- 15 Interviews in Somaliland and Puntland.
- 16 Interview in Puntland.
- 17 Interviews in Hargeisa, Burco, Oodaweyn, Somaliland, and Bosaso, Puntland.
- 18 Interviews in Somaliland and Puntland.
- 19 Interviews in Hargeisa and Burco, Somaliland, and Bosaso, Puntland.
- 20 Interviews in Hargeisa and Burco, Somaliland, and Bosaso, Puntland.
- 21 Interviews in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, Hargeisa, Somaliland, and Bosaso, Puntland.
- 22 Interviews in Hargeisa, Somaliland, and Bosaso, Puntland.
- 23 Interview in Puntland.
- 24 Interviews in Puntland.
- 25 Interviews in Puntland.
- 26 Interviews in Puntland.
- 27 Interviews in Puntland.
- 28 Interviews in Burco, Somaliland, and Bosaso, Puntland.
- 29 Interviews in Puntland.
- 30 Interview in Bosaso, Puntland.
- 31 Interview in Bosaso, Puntland.
- 32 Interview in Puntland.
- 33 Interview in Puntland.
- 34 Interviews in Puntland.
- 35 Interviews in Puntland and in Shabwa, Yemen.
- 36 One exception is Ethiopian women who come to Djibouti to work as domestic workers or in bars and nightclubs; they do not continue on to Yemen and the Gulf in any significant numbers. These women are outside the purview of this report.
- 37 Interview in Tadjoura, Djibouti.
- 38 Interviews in Tadjoura and Djibouti City, Djibouti.
- 39 Interviews in Tadjoura and Obock, Djibouti.
- 40 Interview in Tadjoura, Djibouti.
- 41 Interview in Tadjoura, Djibouti.
- 42 Interview in Tadjoura, Djibouti.
- 43 Interviews in Obock, Djibouti.
- 44 Interview in Obock, Djibouti.
- 45 Interview in Obock, Djibouti.
- 46 Interviews in Obock, Djibouti, and Aden, Yemen.
- 47 Interview in Obock, Djibouti.
- 48 Interview in Obock, Djibouti.
- 49 UN News Centre, Smugglers throw hundreds of African migrants off boats headed to Yemen – UN, 10 August 2017, [www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=57336#.WfD6whNSxmA](http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=57336#.WfD6whNSxmA).
- 50 Interviews with government officials and smugglers in Yemen.
- 51 Interview in Shabwa, Yemen.
- 52 Interview in Hodeida, Yemen.
- 53 Interview in Hodeida, Yemen.
- 54 Interview in Aden, Yemen.
- 55 See, for example, Human Rights Watch, *Yemen's torture camps: abuse of migrants by human traffickers in a climate of impunity*, 2014, [www.hrw.org/report/2014/05/25/yemens-torture-camps/abuse-migrants-human-traffickers-climate-impunity](http://www.hrw.org/report/2014/05/25/yemens-torture-camps/abuse-migrants-human-traffickers-climate-impunity).
- 56 Interview in Hodeida, Yemen.
- 57 Interview in Hodeida, Yemen.
- 58 Interviews in Yemen.
- 59 Interviews in Shabwa and Lahj, Yemen.
- 60 Interviews in Shabwa and Sana'a, Yemen.
- 61 Interviews in Shabwa and Hodeida, Yemen.
- 62 Interviews in Yemen.
- 63 Interviews in Lahj, Yemen.
- 64 Interviews in Lahj, Yemen.
- 65 Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat, *Pushed and pulled in two directions:*

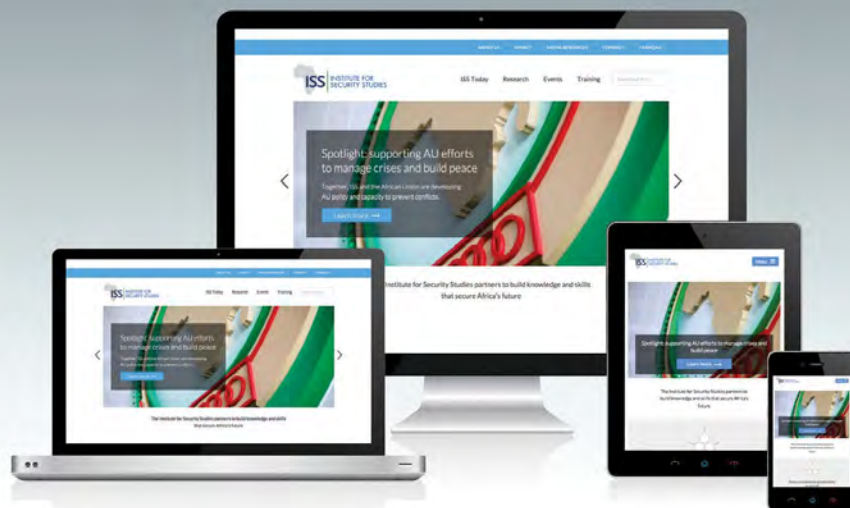
*an analysis of bi-directional refugee and migrant flow between the Horn of Africa and Yemen*, 2016, [http://regionalmms.org/images/briefing/ Pushed\\_and\\_Pulled.pdf](http://regionalmms.org/images/briefing/Pushed_and_Pulled.pdf).

- 66** Interviews with Somali migrants in Yemen, July 2016.
- 67** More than 40 Somali refugees killed in helicopter attack off Yemen coast, *The Guardian*, 17 March 2017, [www.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/17/somali-refugees-killed-helicopter-attack-off-yemen-coast](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/17/somali-refugees-killed-helicopter-attack-off-yemen-coast).
- 68** Human Rights Watch, Yemen: Attack on Refugee Boat Likely War Crime – Failed Investigations into Abuses as War Turns 2, 26 March 2017, [www.hrw.org/news/2017/03/26/yemen-attack-refugee-boat-likely-war-crime](http://www.hrw.org/news/2017/03/26/yemen-attack-refugee-boat-likely-war-crime).
- 69** Interview with migrant smuggler in Bosaso, Puntland.
- 70** Interviews with multiple government officials, Djibouti City, Djibouti.
- 71** Interviews with government officials in Somaliland, June 2016.
- 72** Interviews with multiple government officials in Hargeisa, Somaliland, and Djibouti City, Djibouti.
- 73** Interview with intelligence official in Yemen, July 2016.
- 74** Interviews in Yemen.
- 75** Interview in Shabwa, Yemen.
- 76** Interviews in Aden and Hodeidi, Yemen.
- 77** Interviews in Bosaso, Puntland.
- 78** Interviews in Bosaso, Puntland.
- 79** A security official in Puntland conceded to the Global Initiative that they are unable to adequately patrol or monitor their coastline.
- 80** Interview in Shabwa.
- 81** Interview in Yemen.
- 82** Interview in Yemen.

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## Acknowledgements



This report was made possible with support from the Hanns Seidel Foundation. The ISS is also grateful for support from the other members of the ISS Partnership Forum: the European Union and the governments of Australia, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the USA.

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ISSN 1026-0404



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