



## In this issue

Mixed migration in southern Africa

## HIGHLIGHTS

- There are more than half a million people of concern to UNHCR in southern Africa, as well as a large number of irregular migrants.
- South Africa remains the recipient of the highest annual number of asylum applications worldwide, with 82,000 applications in 2012.

## FIGURES (SADC)

|                             |         |
|-----------------------------|---------|
| Number of Countries         | 15      |
| Total Population            | 212 mil |
| Asylum Seekers (UNHCR 2012) | 272,000 |
| Refugees (UNHCR 2012)       | 134,000 |

## Mixed Migration in southern Africa

### The changing nature of migration

According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), international migratory movements in Africa have become more complex in recent years and are increasingly mixed in character, involving groups such as asylum-seekers, refugees and irregular migrants, among others. These movements entail women, men and children leaving their homeland and seeking to take up residence in another country for a variety of reasons. There are more than half a million people of concern to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in southern Africa. At the end of 2012 they included some 134,000 refugees, 272,000 asylum-seekers and almost 19,740 returnees. These figures exclude the large number of irregular migrants, for which it is difficult to obtain data.

South Africa remains the traditional destination country for migrants and refugees moving south due to the perceived higher level of safety and greater economic opportunities it provides, as well as the protection the country offers for migrant rights. However, according to IOM, countries such as Malawi, Mozambique and Zambia are increasingly being viewed as alternative destinations.

### From the Horn to the South<sup>1</sup>

According to a preliminary IOM study, the south-bound migrating population of Ethiopia and Somalia is mainly made up of young men between the ages of 18 and 35. However, it appears that a growing number of similarly aged females are travelling within Somali groups and some Ethiopian women with children are transiting alone through Mozambique by air.

The most popular transit countries among migrants bound for southern Africa include Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. While some migrants transit through Swaziland and Botswana, the majority use the aforementioned six countries as transit points for migrating south.



Credit: Kristy Siegfried/IRIN  
Malawi (2012) - Refugees at Dzaleka camp in Malawi wait in line to collect their monthly food.

<sup>1</sup> This information is based on a preliminary study commissioned by IOM and specific observations may have changed in the interval, which itself highlights the dynamic nature of mixed migration flows.

*“South Africa remains the traditional destination country for migrants and refugees moving south due to the perceived higher level of safety and greater economic opportunities it provides migrants, as well as the protection the country offers for migrant rights.”*

Transiting migrants from eastern Africa to southern Africa are transferred by smugglers to different ‘facilitators’ along the route south, at an approximate cost of US\$2,500, but sometimes for as much as \$5,000, for the route through Zambia and Mozambique. Facilitators for smugglers live or visit home villages in Ethiopia and Somalia and/or destination areas and take charge of a specific group of migrants. They make all the arrangements with their associates along the route, even supplying some migrant groups with a “code book” that contains phone numbers and meeting points along the journey. Various brokers within a specific country will work in collaboration with other brokers in the same country or in the next transit country to arrange logistics for different groups of irregular migrants from source countries such as Ethiopia and Somalia. They will assist with various local issues that need a hands-on approach, such as paying bribes and arranging guides for the migrants.



Credit: UNHCR/ E. Hockstein.  
Dadaab, Kenya (2008) - Many Somalis undertake the journey to southern Africa in the hopes of a better life than the one available in Dadaab Refugee camp in Kenya.

The entire process of facilitating migrant journeys seems to have become more efficient and organized over the past few years. Transit time now appears to be faster, taking approximately six weeks, on average, compared with eight weeks in 2009. Safe houses in cities, towns and refugee camps, as well as other transit centres, are used along the journey south.

Routes are normally selected by the smuggler facilitating the transit, who usually base this decision on his/her perceptions of safety along a specific route, factoring in levels of violence, ease of transfer to the next stop on the route and levels of corruption likely to be encountered. Migrants do not normally have a say on the routes designated for them.

While war, poverty, discrimination, violence and the promise of money and opportunity in South Africa continue to be the main push factors for all groups of irregular migrants, some Somali migrants claim that they had left their home country because they feared recruitment by radical/terrorist groups operating in Somalia.

### **The road from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)<sup>2</sup>**

Migrating populations from DRC tend to comprise more women, children and the elderly; they also tend to travel as family units more than migrant groups from Ethiopia and Somalia. There is also evidence suggesting that unaccompanied minors are undertaking this journey.

For migrants from DRC migrating to southern Africa, Burundi, Mozambique, Rwanda, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe have been identified as transit countries. They use public transport or walk long distances; as such, costs associated with their journey are likely incurred at checkpoints and borders. Furthermore, while migrants from DRC did not appear to have used smugglers to assist them with their travel, their choice of routes was largely influenced by the push factors that had contributed to their exit from DRC. Ongoing conflict and violence in DRC is the major reason behind their decision to leave.

<sup>2</sup> Source: IOM

*“By the end of 2012, some 230,000 asylum-seekers were registered in South Africa.*

### Conditions of Travel<sup>3</sup>

Travel in the back of container trucks – a common means of transport through Tanzania, Mozambique and Zambia – poses serious risks to migrants. There have been reported cases of migrant deaths due to suffocation. A number of incidences of drowning while attempting to cross water bodies have been highly publicized by media reports. Migrants routinely cross forests in order to enter various countries through unofficial borders. These unregulated routes are extremely dangerous because of the physical nature of the journey and the lack of essentials such as water, food and shelter along the route. Furthermore, migrants routinely suffer physical violence on these routes. The abuses reported include murder, rape, cavity searches, torture and muggings. Both male and female migrants’ have reported experiences of sexual violence perpetrated by smugglers, prisoners, the police and even their own travelling companions along the route.

### Stranded

Those who survive these ordeals often end up stranded in transit countries. The majority of stranded migrants are intercepted either on entry to or exit in transit countries, usually en-route to South Africa. They are either abandoned by those that were facilitating their irregular travel, and often arrested by immigration officials. These individuals include men, women, and children (who are normally identified as unaccompanied minors). Their fate commonly involves routinely harsh detention or deportation.

Due to the inability of governments to repatriate these individuals, IOM is in many instances requested to assist with voluntary returns. Asylum seekers are normally referred to UNHCR.

### The pull of South Africa<sup>4</sup>

South Africa continues to be the recipient of the highest annual number of asylum applications worldwide, with 82,000 applications in 2012. However, this figure represents a 64 per cent reduction in comparison with 2010, which may be attributed to a number of factors, including a more stable political and socio-economic situation in Zimbabwe and the imposition of restrictive measures by countries in the region and beyond to reduce mixed-migration movements.



Credit: Duke University: South Africa, Limpopo Province (2012) - Zimbabwean refugees illegally crossing the border into South Africa.

### UNHCR 2014 planning figures for South Africa

| Type of population | Origin  | Dec 2013         |                           | Dec 2014         |                           | Dec 2015         |                           |
|--------------------|---------|------------------|---------------------------|------------------|---------------------------|------------------|---------------------------|
|                    |         | Total in country | Of whom assisted by UNHCR | Total in country | Of whom assisted by UNHCR | Total in country | Of whom assisted by UNHCR |
| Refugees           | Various | 67,500           | 13,500                    | 75,600           | 15,120                    | 83,600           | 16,720                    |
| Asylum-seekers     | Various | 233,100          | 46,620                    | 274,400          | 54,880                    | 283,700          | 56,740                    |
| <b>Total</b>       |         | <b>300,600</b>   | <b>60,120</b>             | <b>350,000</b>   | <b>70,000</b>             | <b>367,300</b>   | <b>73,460</b>             |

Source: [UNHCR](#). See also [www.unhcr.org](http://www.unhcr.org) for more information on UNHCR’s activities.

According to the Department of Home Affairs (DHA), at the end of 2012, approximately 230,000 asylum-seekers were awaiting a refugee status determination (RSD) decision at

<sup>3</sup> Source: [IOM](#)

<sup>4</sup> Source: UNHCR Global Appeal Update: [South Africa](#) and [Southern Africa](#) chapters.

*In South Africa, The total number of recognized refugees currently stands at some 65,000.*

both first instance and appeal stages. The total number of recognized refugees currently stands at some 65,000. For UNHCR, the main groups of people of concern planned for under its South Africa operation in 2014 are: refugees and asylum-seekers escaping conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC); Zimbabweans, Burundians, Rwandans and Ethiopians who may have faced persecution in their home countries; as well as Somali refugees who have fled the security situation in Somalia.

The South African asylum system continues to be overwhelmed by the sheer number of asylum applications it receives, making it difficult to ensure that RSD process is always fair and efficient. Hence, supporting the Department of Home Affairs (DHA) to improve the quality and quantity of its status decisions remains a priority for UNHCR.

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