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BEYOND THE FORCED–VOLUNTARY DICHOTOMY: THE LIMITS OF REGIONAL AND NATIONAL LEGAL FRAMEWORKS IN ADDRESSING MIXED MIGRATION IN THE HORN OF AFRICA

Dissertation in Europe and Africa: Cooperation and Security

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the structural mismatch between contemporary migration governance and the empirical realities of human mobility in the Horn of Africa. While global, continental, sub-regional, and national legal and policy frameworks continue to rely on traditional, dichotomous categorisations – specifically the voluntary-forced and internal-international binaries – the regional migratory landscape is characterised by complex, multi-causal flows of mixed migrants. Driven by the intertwined pressures of armed conflict, political violence, climate-induced environmental stress, and structural economic underdevelopment, individuals move along fluid continuums that resist rigid classification.

Adopting an interpretivist qualitative research design, this study combines a systematic literature review, policy and legal framework analysis, and a comparative case-study methodology focusing on Somalia and Eritrea. The empirical findings reveal that over-reliance on static categories creates severe, systematic protection gaps, effectively trapping vulnerable populations in a state of high precarity. Ultimately, this dissertation synthesises these gaps to advance an integrated analytical framework, offering recommendations to rethink migration responses beyond the binary trap.

Keywords: *Mixed migration; Horn of Africa; Regional migration governance; Migration categorisation; Refugee protection; Climate-induced migration; Somalia; Eritrea*

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List of abbreviations

AIAI = Al-Ittihad al-islami

AU = African Union

CBM = Coordinated Border Management

CMP = EAC Common Market Protocol

COIE = Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in Eritrea

EAC = East African Community

ENS = Eritrean National Service

EPLF = Eritrean People's Liberation Front

ESARO = UNICEF Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office

EU = European Union

EUTF = EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa

GCM = Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration

GCR = Global Compact on Refugees

GDP = Gross Domestic Product

GPEI = Global Polio Eradication Initiative

HOA = Horn of Africa

IBRU = International Boundaries Research Unit

ICPAC = IGAD Climate Prediction and Applications Centre

ICU = Islamic Courts Union

IDP = Internally Displaced Person

IGAD = Intergovernmental Authority on Development

IGADD = Intergovernmental Authority on Drought and Development

IMISCOE = International Migration, Integration and Social Cohesion in Europe

IOM = International Organisation for Migration

LPA = Lagos Plan of Action

LVI = Livelihood Vulnerability Index

MPF = Migratory Policy Framework

MPFA = Migratory Policy Framework for Africa

NDC = Nationally Determined Contribution

NEPAD = New Partnership for Africa's Development

OAU = Organisation of African Unity

PFDJ = People's Front for Democracy and Justice

REC = Regional Economic Community

RMPF = Regional Migration Policy Framework

SNM = Somali National Movement

SSDF = Somali Salvation Democratic Front

TPLF = Tigray People's Liberation Front

UN = United Nations

UNDP = United Nations Development Programme

UNHCR = United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

UNICEF = United Nations Children's Fund

UNOPS = United Nations Office for Project Services

US = United States

USD = United States Dollar

WFP = World Food Programme

WHO = World Health Organisation

WYDC = World Youth Development Campaign

INTRODUCTION

The Horn of Africa constitutes one of the most complex, volatile, and heavily saturated migration landscapes globally. Situated at the intersection of structural underdevelopment, recurrent environmental shocks, protracted armed conflict, and political instability, the region generates migratory flows that resist traditional classification. Despite the fluidity of these movements, the legal and policy frameworks that govern migration management – at the global, continental, regional, and national levels – continue to rely on dichotomous categorisations that fail to capture the realities they claim to address.

This dissertation examines the failure of binary categorisation in framing migration in the Horn of Africa. Traditional governance frameworks divide migrants into legally distinct categories such as "voluntary" and "forced" or "internal" and "international" therefore producing a structural binary trap. While these classifications carry significant legal and policy consequences, they systematically overlook the complexity of contemporary migration phenomena. In practice, the vast majority of people on the move in the region fall along a spectrum of mobility rather than within rigid categories. They are neither archetypal refugees fleeing persecution in a strictly legal sense nor purely voluntary economic migrants exercising full agency. Rather, they are mixed migrants: individuals whose movement is simultaneously driven by conflict, climate stress, economic deprivation, food insecurity, environmental degradation, and political violence in ways that are deeply intertwined and mutually reinforcing.

The concept of mixed migration has gained increasing recognition among international organisations and humanitarian actors as a means of describing flows composed of refugees, asylum seekers, economic migrants, and other mobile populations travelling together along the same routes for overlapping reasons. Yet despite the conceptual traction this notion has achieved, it remains insufficiently integrated into the operational logic of

existing legal and policy instruments. Migration governance at every level continues to rely on categorical assumptions that struggle to accommodate the multi-causality and fluidity that characterise migratory movements in the Horn of Africa.

The gap this dissertation addresses is therefore both academic and practical. Existing scholarship has examined individual components of the problem, including the conceptual debates surrounding voluntary and forced migration, the drivers of displacement in the Horn of Africa, the architecture of global, continental, sub-regional, and national migration governance, and the empirical realities of countries such as Somalia and Eritrea. What remains largely absent, however, is a comprehensive study that integrates these strands of analysis into a coherent examination of the disconnect between the empirical evidence of mixed migration and the legal and policy responses designed to address it.

The practical relevance of this dissertation is significant. Hundreds of thousands of vulnerable individuals across the region each year fail to obtain recognition or protection under existing frameworks, not because their vulnerability is argued, but because existing governance systems are poorly equipped to respond to the complexity of their circumstances. The consequences of this mismatch are severe, including exclusion from legal status, restricted access to humanitarian assistance, exposure to refoulement, and the perpetuation of precarity in both transit and destination countries. At the same time, the intersecting crises driving mobility in the region show little sign of decreasing. If anything, the pressures associated with conflict, environmental degradation, economic marginalisation, and political instability are intensifying, making the need for more adaptive and nuanced governance frameworks increasingly urgent.

This study advances the hypothesis that existing frameworks fail because of their continued reliance on traditional migration dichotomies. Employing a qualitative research design, the dissertation evaluates contemporary migration governance through a longitudinal lens, supported by targeted quantitative data used to contextualise and prove its conceptual claims.

Indeed, temporally the analysis focuses on the period from the post-Cold War reconfigurations of the early 1990s to the present day. Empirically, it concentrates on two paradigmatic yet distinct national contexts – Somalia and Eritrea – in order to examine how mixed migration manifests across different political, social, and governance environments within the Horn of Africa.

CHAPTER 1
RESEARCH DESIGN

1.1. *Research aim and objectives*

The overarching aim of this dissertation is to examine how regional and national legal and policy frameworks fail to address mixed migration in the Horn of Africa, and to identify their structural limitations. This aim is operationalised through specific research objectives, which will be listed below.

First, to critically assess the traditional and dichotomous categorisations that underpin migration governance – specifically the voluntary-forced and internal-international binaries – and to introduce the concept of mixed migration as a more analytically adequate framework for understanding human mobility in the Horn of Africa.

Second, to explain how migration in the Horn of Africa is empirically mixed, by examining the multi-causality of the drivers of displacement in the region, including armed conflict and political violence, climate change and environmental stress, and structural economic underdevelopment.

Third, to assess existing legal and policy frameworks at several levels – global, continental, sub-regional, and national – and to demonstrate how they fail to capture the complexity of mixed migration and to provide adequate protection to mixed migrants in the Horn of Africa.

Fourth, to provide empirical evidence of the multi-faceted nature of migratory landscapes in the Horn of Africa through two in-depth case studies – namely Somalia and Eritrea – illustrating how the peculiar configurations of displacement in each context expose the limitations of existing frameworks.

1.2. *Research question and hypothesis*

The research question guiding this dissertation is: *How do regional and national migration frameworks in the Horn of Africa address mixed migration, and where do their limitations lie?*

This question is formulated to capture both descriptive and evaluative dimensions: it invites an account of what existing frameworks actually do, as well as critically assessing where and why they fall short.

The hypothesis advanced in this dissertation is that regional and national migration frameworks in the HoA fail to address mixed migration because they over-rely on traditional dichotomous categorisations that do not reflect the multi-causal and heterogeneous nature of the migratory landscape in the region. This over-reliance produces a structural mismatch between the legal categories that determine access to status and protection, and the empirical realities of the individuals who move through the region. The result is a systematic protection gap that disproportionately affects the most vulnerable migrants.

1.3. *Methodology*

This dissertation adopts a qualitative research design. This study adopts an interpretivist framework, grounded in the premise that migration governance cannot be reduced to a technical issue solved by quantitative data alone. Instead, it treats migration as a complex socio-political phenomenon that requires close textual analysis, contextual grounding, and critical interpretation. The subject matter – the intersection of international law, regional policy, humanitarian practice, and individual human experience – calls for a methodology that prioritise meaning, context, and causal complexity.

The primary research strategy combines three complementary approaches. The first is a systematic literature review, which provides the conceptual and theoretical foundations of the dissertation, including the review of academic debates on migration categorisation and mixed migration, as well as the empirical literature on drivers of displacement in the Horn of

Africa. The second is a policy and legal framework analysis, which involves a close reading and critical assessment of the relevant instruments of migration governance at global, continental, regional, and national levels. The third is a comparative case study methodology – applied to Somalia and Eritrea – which provides grounded empirical evidence of how migratory dynamics in specific national contexts challenge the logic of existing frameworks.

The temporal horizon of the study is longitudinal. While the dissertation focuses on the contemporary governance landscape, it situates current policies and frameworks within their historical origins. Understanding the present failures of migration governance in the Horn of Africa requires engaging with the historical roots of both the migratory dynamics – including the legacies of colonialism, post-independence conflict, and structural adjustment – and the legal frameworks that shape them. The longitudinal perspective therefore serves as a means of contextualising the present.

Where relevant, the analysis draws on quantitative data – including figures on migration flows, displacement statistics, and socioeconomic indicators – as supplementary evidence to contextualise and support the qualitative arguments. This does not alter the qualitative grounds on which the study lies, but it reflects an empirically grounded approach that seeks to root conceptual claims in measurable realities.

1.4. *Scope and limitations*

This dissertation focuses on the Horn of Africa, understood primarily as comprising Ethiopia, Somalia, Eritrea, Djibouti, Kenya, Uganda, Sudan, and South Sudan. While the study draws on regional data and frameworks relating to this broader area, the empirical analysis is focused on two case studies: Somalia and Eritrea. These two countries are selected because they represent distinct yet paradigmatic configurations of mixed migration and exemplify the gaps in existing governance frameworks. Other countries in the region are addressed where relevant, particularly in the chapters on drivers for migration and legal frameworks.

The study focuses on legal and policy frameworks rather than on operational humanitarian response or development programming. While the dissertation acknowledges the work of international organisations and NGOs operating in the region, it does not provide a systematic assessment of their operational activities. Indeed, the analytical lens is that of governance: the architecture of norms, instruments, and institutions that determine how mixed migration is legally defined, politically addressed, and practically managed.

In terms of temporal scope, the study covers developments from approximately the early 1990s – when the post-Cold War political reconfiguration of the HoA began to reshape both its migratory dynamics and its governance landscape – to the present day. Key historical antecedents are addressed where necessary to contextualise contemporary developments, but the primary analytical focus is on the current state of migration governance.

Finally, the dissertation does not aim to offer a comprehensive assessment of every legal instrument or policy initiative relevant to migration in the Horn of Africa. The frameworks selected for analysis – at global, continental, regional, and national levels – are those judged most relevant to the specific question of how mixed migration is addressed. Other instruments and initiatives are acknowledged where relevant but are not analysed in depth.

1.5. *Structure of the dissertation*

The dissertation is organised into seven chapters, each addressing a distinct dimension of the research problem.

Chapter 2 provides the literature review and theoretical framework. It critically examines the traditional voluntary-forced and internal-international dichotomies, introduces the concept of mixed migration, and develops the analytical framework that guides the subsequent analysis.

Chapter 3 examines the multi-causal drivers of forced and mixed migration in the Horn of Africa, with particular attention to the intersecting roles of armed conflict and political violence, climate change and environmental stress, and structural economic underdevelopment. It

demonstrates how the co-existence and mutual reinforcement of these drivers produce migratory flows that are inherently mixed.

Chapter 4 assesses existing legal and policy frameworks at four levels of governance: global (the Global Compact for Migration, and the Global Compact on Refugees); continental (the Kampala Convention, Agenda 2063, and the Migratory Policy Framework for Africa); sub-regional (the EAC Common Market Protocol and IGAD initiatives); and national (with evidence from Ethiopia, Somalia, Kenya, and Eritrea). The chapter critically evaluates how these frameworks address mixed migration and identifies their principal limitations.

Chapter 5 presents the first case study, focusing on Somalia. It examines the configuration of political violence, climate change effects, and development challenges that characterise the Somali context, and analyses the resulting migratory landscape.

Chapter 6 presents the second case study, focusing on Eritrea. It examines the distinctive drivers of mass emigration from Eritrea – primarily state repression and the National Service system – alongside climate and development challenges and analyses the resulting migratory landscape.

Chapter 7 synthesises the findings of the preceding sections in a comparative analysis. It identifies the key gaps and failures in the policy and legal frameworks examined, compares the empirical evidence from Somalia and Eritrea in light of the analytical framework developed in Chapter 2, and draws out the implications for regional migration governance. It also sets out recommendations for rethinking migration responses beyond the binary trap.

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Migration is an extremely complex and multifaceted phenomenon, which varies across continents and specific regions. The traditional categorisation of migration is binary, distinguishing between voluntary and forced migration. However, in the geographical area examined in this dissertation – the Horn of Africa (HoA) – this classification fails to capture the fluidity and complexity surrounding human movements. Contemporary literature and humanitarian circles therefore seek to explore the specificities of migration and propose alternative categories that better reflect its dynamic nature.

The figure below briefly illustrates the different typologies of mobile populations in the HoA. It categorises them according to a range of pull and push factors, as well as specific migration trends (e.g. agropastoralism), thereby providing a conceptual foundation for understanding and analysing this complexity.

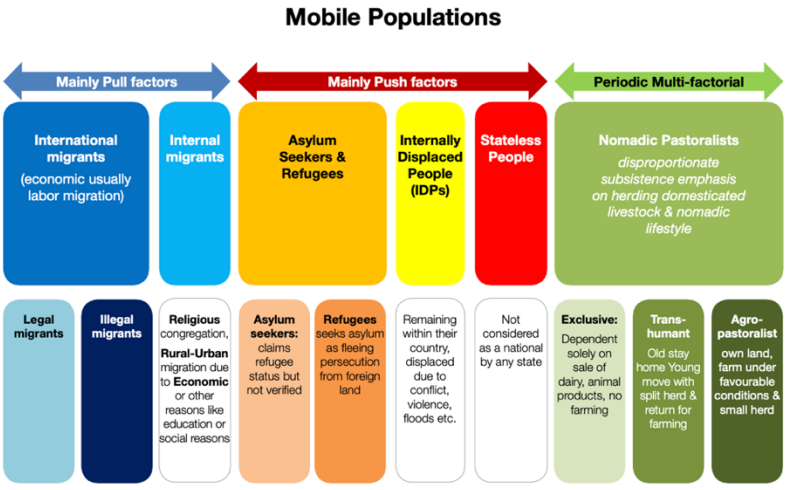


Figure 1: Multidimensional Typology of Mobile Populations

Source: Global Polio Eradication Initiative 2014, 9

This chapter aims to provide an overview of the existing literature on the topic and to clarify the main concepts relevant for this dissertation. It establishes a theoretical framework that will support the subsequent analysis of how regional and national policies and legal frameworks often fail to capture the complexity of migration and adequately address its multicausal nature.

2.1. *Voluntary vs. forced migration*

Migratory phenomena have long been categorised into discrete and bounded groups, by both academia and humanitarian actors, such as the United Nation High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Such classifications often produce dichotomous distinctions that attempt to organise complex human mobility into diametrically opposed categories. Among these, the dichotomy between forced and voluntary migration has become a fundamental parameter to assess migration and translate it into State policies and international protection regimes (Thiollet et al. 2023). Indeed, whether an individual is recognised as a forced migrant or a voluntary migrant has an impact on how it is perceived and treated, having to face widely varying policies and protection regimes (Erdal and Oeppen 2020; Bakewell 2021).

However, there is no universal agreement around the definitions of forced and voluntary migration. On the contrary, scholars are increasingly challenging this categorisation, instead conceptualising migration as a spectrum of experiences, which can overlap, shift, and evolve (Piguet, 2018; Oucho 2009; Bakewell 2021; Thiollet et al. 2023). As Bakewell (2021, 125) states "(…) whether migration is seen as forced or voluntary will vary depending on which part of their overall movement is considered and at what time the assessment is made." and "(…) the boundaries between forced and voluntary migration are inherently blurred and their analytical value is limited."

In order to unpack these dynamics, the following sections will examine the notions of voluntary and forced migration before critically addressing the limitations of this categorisation.

2.1.1. *Voluntary migration*

Voluntary migration is often described as the diametrical opposite of forced migration and is generally understood as encompassing all movements that are not directly imposed through coercion but instead undertaken with a certain degree of volition (Erdal and Oeppen 2020; Bakewell 2021). Bakewell (2021, 124) defines the archetypal voluntary migrant as "(…) free to settle where they choose." Examples of voluntary migration typically include labour migrants, family reunification migrants, and international students.

Despite its widespread use, there is no universally agreed definition of voluntary migration. Scholars such as Ottonelli and Torresi (2013) have attempted to address this gap by setting criteria to assess the voluntariness of human movement. These include: (i) the absence of coercion; (ii) the availability of reasonable alternatives to moving; (iii) the availability of exit options to change the condition of their movement; and (ix) the access to adequate information about the journey (Ottonelli and Torresi 2013).

While these criteria provide a structured framework, their application in practice can be complex. As highlighted by Bakewell (2021), voluntary and forced migration cannot be strictly intended as antonyms, as many migratory experiences involve a combination of choice and constraint. Therefore, voluntariness should not be understood as a fixed category.

For instance, a young individual leaving their country due to inability to find employment might not be subject to threat or coercion. However, the absence of other viable options raises questions about how voluntary their decision is. Moreover, if absence of coercion is taken as the key criterion for classifying voluntary migration, highly diverse experiences ultimately fall within the same category, despite the specificities and variables that shape each movement. For instance, an international student moving from Italy to Denmark to pursue higher education and a Somali young individual

relocating to South Africa in search of better living conditions would both be classified as voluntary migrants, even though their experiences have very little in common.

These observations suggest that, while the category of voluntary migration may appear analytically useful, the fact that such varied migratory experiences are grouped together reveals little about their actual characteristics. In practice, reception, perception, treatment, and impact of policies can vary significantly depending on the specificities (Bakewell 2021). Often, individuals identified as voluntary migrants (e.g. economic migrants) are stigmatised and vilified, and the discourse around them is strongly politicised (Bakewell 2021).

2.1.2. *Forced migration*

Contrarily to voluntary migration, forced migration is usually intended to include individuals "(…) who have no choice about their fate." (Bakewell 2021, 124) and "(…) fleeing from their home in the face of threats of violence, leaving all their possessions behind (…)" (Bakewell 2021, 125). Such a definition is often wrongly associated with that of "refugee". In fact, to obtain such a legal status and international protection certain specific criteria – stated in Art. 1 of the UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol dating back to 1951 – have to subsist. In the latter a refugee is defined as "(…) someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion." (UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees 1951, Art. 1).

Forced displacement is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon which includes refugees, but also expands to several other groups and experiences, such as internally displaced persons (i.e. IDPs) or people displaced by conflict, natural or environmental disasters, development projects, chemical or nuclear disaster, smuggling, or famine (Helton and Jacobs 1998; Oucho 2009; Bakewell 2021). As Helton and Jacobs (1998) stated "While the number of Convention refugees has declined, the number of individuals in

refugee like situations has grown considerably" (Helton and Jacobs 1998, 521). Also, Castle (2004) highlights that the majority of drivers behind forced migration are not recognised by the international refugee's regime.

The main difference between refugees and other forced migrants lay in legal status and the resulting rights and protection regimes. While refugees' need of protection is recognised and translated into rooted and effective legal frameworks – alongside a generally more empathetic perception – other groups of forcedly displaced people are not as represented in migratory policies and protection mechanisms (Helton and Jacobs 1998; Piguet 2018; Oucho 2009).

2.1.3. *Differences between voluntary and forced migrants*

As highlighted by Oucho (2009), the International Organisation for Migration (2008) has attempted to summarise the main differences between voluntary and forced migrants, taking into consideration patterns related to moves, adjustments, and links with their origins (Oucho 2009).

Such an assessment resulted in six findings: (i) voluntary migrants choose to move, while forced migrants have no intention to move until circumstances leave them no other choice; (ii) forced migrants show greater commitment to their homeland and desire to come back compared to voluntary migrants; (iii) forced migrants' levels of psychophysical stress are higher and that compromises their adjustment in the destination settings; (iv) voluntary migrants are more likely to bring with them through the journey money, belongings, and other economic assets compared to forced migrants; (v) voluntary migrants are more likely to have a network with people and institutions at the destination compared to first-wave forced migrants; and (vi) voluntary migrants are less likely to move to a destination where culture, language, food are different from their own, compared to forced migrants.

2.1.4. *Shortcomings of the categorisation*

As already stated above, even though the dichotomous categorisation of forced-voluntary migration is a cornerstone in international protection

frameworks, such a distinction fails to grasp the multifaceted nature of migrations – especially in complex areas like the Horn of Africa – resulting in scarce representation in policies, which rely upon overlapping and complementary practices (Bakewell 2021; Thiollet et al. 2023)

As a matter of fact, most migratory experiences do not fall rigorously in one of the two categories, but instead in blurrier grey zones that lay within the voluntary-forced spectrum (Erdal and Oeppen 2020). For instance, agency cannot be used as a parameter to define whether a movement is forced or voluntary, because in either cases there will be a certain degree of agency (Erdal and Oeppen 2020; Piguet 2018). Therefore, such categorisation can be analytically relevant but is not solid enough to be at the base of legal frameworks and protection regimes addressing migrations.

2.2. *Internal vs. international migration*

Another dichotomous categorisation for migration is that differentiating internal and international migrations.

Internal migrations outweigh cross-border movements by around four times (UNDP 2009; World Bank 2018), being the most important opportunity for individuals coming from the Global South to improve their living conditions (Vullnetari 2020). However, such categories should not be addressed as diametrical opposites in the way they "(…) often co-exist, contemporaneously or sequentially, within the same family, neighbourhood, local community, and country." (Vullnetari 2020, 54). Internal and international migrations should be perceived as conceptually interconnected, just as they are linked in practice. These movements are complex and shaped by factors such as restricted mobility for poorer populations, as well as large-scale displacement driven by violence and environmental distress (Vullnetari 2020).

2.2.1. *Definition*

Internal migration refers to the movement of individuals within a country, involving the relocation to a new residence, whether temporary or

permanent. Internal migration can be either voluntary or forced. The main example of voluntary internal migration could be that of people displacing from rural to urban areas in search for better opportunities. On the other hand, forced internal migration usually refers to Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), namely individuals who are forced to flee their area of residence to avoid the effects of generalised violence, armed conflict, violations of human right, or human-led disasters. IDPs usually reside in camps within the internationally recognised borders of the country. (Migration Data Portal)

International migration refers to the movement of people from their country of usual residence to another country, involving the crossing of international borders. International migrants can leave their country voluntarily or forcedly. An example of voluntary international migration includes people moving for work or education, while forced international migration involves refugees and asylum seekers. (IOM)

2.2.2. *Similarities*

As above stated, internal and international migrations are co-existing and often overlapping phenomena, meaning that they also share common features. Vullnetari (2020) individuates two main similarities: drivers and networks.

The first one refers to the fact that at the core of decision making for both internal and international migrants lay common drivers and motivations. Although structurally drivers might be similar for both groups of people, they have different impacts and are also influenced by individual features and cognitive factors, including desire, aspiration, and ability to migrate (Vullnetari 2020).

Secondly, networks play a vital role in influencing and shaping both internal and international migrations, often resulting in being interconnected. Indeed, some internal networks reach beyond national borders, while networks of international migrants can extend domestically when migrants return to their country. Beyond facilitating movement, such networks play a broader role, acting as vital channels for transferring financial and social

remittances, directly influencing the relationship between migration and development (Vullnetari 2020).

2.2.3. *Differences*

Although internal and international migrations share common features and are intertwined phenomena, they also differ. Vullnetari (2020) – after highlighting shared characteristics – points out the main differences between the two groups.

As the scholar states, international migration is a "(…) 'distinctive social progress' because of the control that states exercise over their own borders." (Vullnetari 2020, 56). As a matter of fact, cross-border migration is deeply shaped by political borders and migration regimes, that manage human movements. Such regimes can range from relatively open to highly restrictive, and they directly influence who can move, how, and under which conditions. Internal migrants are not subject to these constraints, since their movement occurs within the same national borders and legal system. (Vullnetari 2020)

Moreover, as opportunities for people in less-developed countries to migrate in wealthier countries of the Global North narrowed, migrants started undertaking more and more dangerous journeys. The consequences and costs of international migration are therefore salient for both the individuals and their families, encompassing financial, psychological, emotional, and physical costs, and in the most extreme cases, the ultimate cost: losing their lives. Internal migrants do not face violence or death during their journey, but might deal with stigma, camps clearances, and forced evictions. (Vullnetari 2020)

Vullnetari (2020) also argues that "Internal migration is more accessible to the poor, whilst international migration is often the realm of the better-off sections of society." (Vullnetari 2020, 57) As a matter of fact, internal and international migration are shaped by different forms of access and patterns of migrant selectivity. Internal migration is generally more accessible to poorer populations, as it occurs within the same national borders and legal

framework. In contrast, international migration often requires greater financial resources and is therefore more common among relatively wealthier groups. However, financial capacity alone does not determine who migrates. On the contrary, it intersects with identity markers such as gender, age, and education, producing uneven outcomes for both migrants and the communities they affect. (Vullnetari 2020)

2.3. *Mixed migration*

As a consequence of the shortcomings of traditional and dichotomous categorisations, international organisations coined policy labels to address the complexity and nuance of forced migration (Thiollet et al. 2023).

One of the most relevant concepts for understanding the migration scenario in the Horn of Africa is mixed migration, which captures the complexity and heterogeneity of contemporary migratory flows.

Areas like the Horn of Africa are complex settings, where several factors are intertwined, meaning that push factors like poverty, inequality, conflict, and climate distress coexist. Indeed, migration is defined as mixed in the way both motivations and nature of flows can be multi-causal and varied.

The following sections aim to unpack the notion of mixed migration and critically evaluate it.

2.3.1. Definition

The concept of mixed migration has been increasingly used to describe the complexity of contemporary migration flows, in which individuals with different legal statuses, motivations, and protection needs move along the same migration route. Mixed migration encompasses heterogeneous population movements composed of a variety of migrants – refugees, asylum seekers, economic migrants, victims of trafficking – who travel together in similar circumstances, rather than referring to a single, rigid category (Van Hear et al. 2009; World Bank 2015; Marchand et al. 2017).

The most common definition is reflected in the description provided in the International Organization for Migration (IOM) report “A region on the

move 2023-2024" (2024), where mixed migration is described as "A movement in which a number of persons are travelling together, generally in an irregular manner, using the same routes and means of transport, but for different reasons" (IOM 2024, xi). This definition highlights the key characteristic of mixed migration, namely the heterogeneous composition of migration flows, where individuals belonging to different legal categories move within the same migratory routes and mechanisms. Other interpretations delve into the complex motivations underlying migration. Indeed, such movements might involve both refugees' fleeing persecution and migrants seeking better economic conditions (GPEI 2012).

Scholars and policy actors usually describe mixed migration as being "mixed" in two ways: composition and motivations (Van Hear et al. 2009). First, migration flows are mixed in terms of composition since they involve people with different legal statuses (e.g. irregular migrants, asylum seekers) who travel together. Second, migration is mixed in terms of the motivations and individual experiences that drive it. Motivations can be multiple and overlapped, ranging from armed conflict to food insecurity (World Bank 2015). Indeed, migration decisions often reflect a combination of fears, constraints, hopes, and aspirations. For instance, one may flee political persecution while simultaneously seeking better living conditions.

The overlapping of motivations and profiles in mixed migration challenges the traditional dichotomy between forced and voluntary migration, which has been the core of migration governance and protection frameworks (Van Hear et al. 2009). As a matter of fact, individuals who travel within mixed migration flows share similar risks and vulnerabilities during their journey, even though their experiences fundamentally differ.

The concept of mixed migration has therefore emerged as a useful analytical framework for capturing complex and multifaceted contemporary migration movements, combining both elements of choice and force (Hammond et al. 2025).

2.3.2. Mixed migration in policies

The concept of mixed migration emerged relatively recently within humanitarian discourse. Its development can be traced back to the Global Consultations on International Protection launched in 2000 by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), during which the organisation recognised shortcomings in existing international protection mechanisms (Sharpe 2018). Such a shift is intended by Thiollet et al. (2023, 13) as a tentative to "(…) foster a protection-oriented management of mixed migration". In particular, the traditional dichotomous distinction between refugees and individuals migrating in search of economic opportunities was considered insufficient to capture the complexity and grey zones of contemporary migratory phenomena.

Although no universally agreed definition of mixed migration exists, the term has since been widely adopted by several humanitarian actors within their policies and operations, often in support of their core organisational mandates. Existing definitions of mixed migration generally fall into two broad categories. Some focus primarily on the heterogeneous composition of migration flows, while others emphasise the multiplicity of motivation driving migration decisions (Sharpe 2018).

The UNHCR provides a definition which falls in the first category. In its "10-Point Plan of Action on Refugee Protection and Mixed migration", mixed migration is defined as "(…) a movement in which a number of persons are travelling together, generally in an irregular manner, using the same routes and means of transport, but for different reasons. Persons travelling as part of mixed movements have varying needs and profiles and may include asylum-seekers, refugees trafficked persons, unaccompanied/separated children, and migrants in an irregular situation." (UNHCR 2007). This understanding primarily emphasises the mixed composition of migration flows, while briefly acknowledging different motivations for movement.

On the other hand, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) adopts a definition that falls in the second category. In a discussion note prepared for the 2008 International Dialogue on Migration, mixed migration

flows are described as complex population movements characterised by the irregular nature of the journeys, the multiplicity of factors driving them, and the differentiated profiles and needs of individuals. According to this perspective, mixed flows may include refugees, asylum seekers, economic migrants, unaccompanied minors, environmental migrants, smuggled individuals, and so on (IOM 2008).

Some scholars argue that emphasising individual motivations within the definition of mixed migration adds little analytical value and may contribute to politicisation of debates around migration, fuelling populist hostility or xenophobic tendencies if it is perceived that asylum systems are being misused by those with economic aspirations. (Sharpe 2018). As Thiollet et al. (2023, 13) claim, "In an anti- immigration context, far from advancing protection of migrants, the notion of mixed migration may feed the myth of "fake refugees" and security-oriented policies".

2.3.3. Challenges around the notion

Even though the notion of mixed migration allows to overcome a stiff dichotomy that only categorises migration into "forced" or "voluntary", it also involves challenges. Indeed, while ensuring more flexibility, such a multifaceted definition also makes it difficult to categorise specific types of migrants based on their specific vulnerabilities and needs. This complexity is mirrored in migration policy, where mixed migration demands a nuanced approach that safeguard vulnerable individuals and the resources available to support them.

2.4. ***Analytical framework***

To address the primary research question regarding the limitations of continental, regional and national legal and policy frameworks in addressing mixed migration in the Horn of Africa, this dissertation adopts a multidimensional analytical framework. This framework moves beyond traditional dichotomous classification to grasp the fluidity and complexity of human movements in the region.

This framework is built upon three interconnected pillars that allow for a multidimensional analysis of the grey zones where legal protection often comes short.

2.4.1. *The forced-voluntary continuum*

The first pillar of this framework conceptualises human movement as a spectrum of experiences rather than a set of diametrically opposed categories. By moving away from a strict binary, this study recognises that while an individual may not be subject to immediate physical coercion or violence, the absence of viable local alternatives (e.g. chronic economic instability, environmental degradation) renders the notion of volition alone highly problematic.

This continuum approach allows for a more nuanced evaluation of grey zones where agency and constraint co-exist, acknowledging that a certain degree of agency is present in almost all migratory experiences and that most of human movements do not strictly fall in one of the two categories. Applying this lens is critical for answering the research question, as it identifies whether regional policies are sufficiently elastic to recognise and protect people who do not belong to specific categories.

2.4.2. *The internal-international nexus*

The framework incorporates the internal-international nexus, recognising that domestic displacement and cross-border movements are often sequential or contemporaneous stages of the same migratory phenomenon. This pillar highlights the shared drivers and social networks that influence both internal and international migrants, while simultaneously acknowledging the disparate legal realities they face. While international migrants are subject to the restrictive controls of national borders and migration regimes, internal migrants face different challenges and risks. By examining this nexus, the dissertation aims to pinpoint specific protection gaps that emerge when policies treat these two types of movement as entirely separate legal categories, often ignoring how one may lead to the other.

2.4.3. *Multi-causal mixed migration lens*

Building upon this foundation, the third pillar utilises a multi-causal mixed migration lens to account for the heterogeneous nature of contemporary flows in the Horn of Africa. This perspective acknowledges that migration is mixed both in terms of composition – meaning that refugees, asylum seekers, and economic migrants travel together along identical routes – and in terms of motivations.

By integrating this perspective, the framework provides a foundation for analysing how push factors like conflict, poverty, and climate distress are frequently intertwined rather than isolated. This is particularly relevant for the subsequent analysis as it facilitates an exploration of how overlapping drivers create unique protection challenges that single-issue legal frameworks often fail to address.

CHAPTER 3
MULTI-CAUSAL DRIVERS FOR MIGRATION IN THE HoA

The Horn of Africa is a dynamic and highly strategic region located in the eastern part of the African Continent. It comprises Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, and Uganda. (Mengisteab 2011; Álvaro and Carretero 2024)



Figure 2. Map of the Horn of Africa

Source: On The World Map. (n.d.). *Horn of Africa map*. https://ontheworldmap.com/africa/horn-of-africa/

The Horn of Africa represents a unique geopolitical setting and is considered "(…) one of the most fragile and vulnerable regions in Africa, if not in the whole world." (Corbet and Záhořík 2022, 1). Indeed, all the countries in the region face at least one major structural challenge, including economic instability, ethnic and political conflict, terrorism and violence, extreme poverty, and environmental degradation (Álvaro and Carretero 2024; Villa et al. 2026).

The interaction of these factors has contributed to complex and multifaceted migration, encompassing both internal and cross-border movements, as well as forced and voluntary migration. These range from rural communities migrating to urban areas to large-scale displacement caused by conflict and environmental pressures (Álvaro and Carretero 2024).

As a result, the Horn of Africa has emerged as a major hotspot for migration (Corbet and Záhořík 2022), with "(…) over 26 million people displaced by conflict and disaster across the region by mid-2024" (IOM 2024, 32). Due to its complexity, the region hosts some of the largest populations of refugees and asylum seekers worldwide (Jaulin and Thiollet 2021, 1), to the extent that it is considered one of the most severe displacement and refugee crises globally (Luiss Mediterranean Platform 2024, 4).

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO) (2024, 1), among displaced individuals in the region "(…) 14.6 million are displaced because of conflict, while 4.8 million have been displaced due to natural disasters." In light of this context, this chapters aims to examine the main drivers of forced migration in the Horn of Africa, namely conflict, climate change, and economic motivations.

3.1. *Conflict and violence*

As mentioned above, conflicts and violence remain among the primary drivers of forced migration in the Horn of Africa. This sub-section delves into the peculiarities of the region's conflict landscape and explores how these dynamics intertwine with and shape human movement.

3.1.1. *Conflict landscape in the Horn of Africa*

The Horn of Africa is "(…) widely regarded as the most conflict-affected sub-region in Africa (…)" (Mengisteab 2011, 5), with conflicts that are multi-levelled and varied. Again, as Agyeman-Duah (1996, 1) stated: "Nowhere in Africa were the manifestations of militarization more evident than in the subregion of the Horn (…)".

The causes underlying such propensity to the use of force in the region are multidimensional and complex (Agyeman-Duah 1996). Mengisteab (2011) identifies a primary driver of conflict in the colonial legacy and its governance structures, alongside three key contextual factors: (i) post-colonial fragmented socio-economic structures and institutional systems, (ii) influences by the global system and interference by external powers, and (iii) scarcity of resources caused by deteriorating environmental conditions. Moreover, Agyeman-Duah (1996) finds causes in the African ruling elites that maintain themselves in power through the use of violence, as well as in the massive militarisation inspired by the Cold War, which influences the prolonging of conflicts.

Both Álvaro and Carretero (2024) and the WHO (2024) have identified the main conflicts affecting the Horn of Africa and driving large-scale displacements, namely those in Somalia, South Sudan, Tigray in Ethiopia, and Darfur in Sudan. Such conflicts are varied and involve rebels and government forces, as well as maritime piracy and terrorist groups (e.g. Al Shabaab in southern Somalia). Also, Countries such as Eritrea are affected by internal violence and repression driven by the government. The case studies of Somalia and Eritrea will be further analysed in this dissertation *(see Chapter 5* and *6)*.

As already mentioned, conflicts and violence in the Horn of Africa are multifaceted and include several varieties, which will be examined in the following section *(see 3.1.2.)*.

3.1.2. *Types of conflicts and violence*

As Mengisteab (2011, 7) observes "(…) the region's conflicts occur at several levels, including inter-state wars and armed conflicts; intra-state civil wars and conflicts; and inter-communal conflicts.". Understanding the conflict landscape of the HoA therefore requires a comprehensive assessment of these diverse forms of political violence. In this context, Kalyvas (2019) presents a classification of political violence based on the nature of the actors involved – specifically, whether both the perpetrator and the target are state

or non-state actors *(see Figure 3).* This framework provides a useful lens for unpacking the multi-level conflicts mentioned by Mengisteab (2011).

	Target: State	**Target: Non-State**
Perpetrator: State	Interstate war	State repression
		Genocide
		Ethnic cleansing
Perpetrator: Non-State	Organized crime/ Cartels	
	Mass protest/Rebellion	
	Military coup	Intercommunal violence
	Political assassination	[Political assassination]
	Civil war Terrorism	

Figure 3. Types of Political Violence
Source: Kalyvas 2019, 4

a) Inter-State wars

Inter-state wars are conflicts fought between rival states and are regarded by Kalyvas (2019, 6) as "(…) the highest, most sophisticated manifestation of collective violence (…)" as they are waged by "(…) the highest, most sophisticated form of collective human organization: the state." This form of political violence entails the deployment of vast human, economic, and military resources.

Mengisteab (2011) argues that the Horn of Africa stands out as the region on the African continent that has experienced the highest number of inter-state conflicts. Notably, four major inter-state wars occurred in the region: three wars between Somalia and Ethiopia over the Ogaden[1] territory (1961-

[1] The Ogaden is an arid plateau in eastern Ethiopia, largely inhabited by ethnic Somali nomadic pastoralists. It constitutes the southern portion of Ethiopia's Somali

1967; 1977-1978; 2006-2009), and the war between Ethiopia and Eritrea (1998-2000). In addition, three smaller-scale conflicts have occurred following independence from colonial rule, including clashes between Kenya and Somalia (1963-1967), Uganda and Sudan, and along the border between Djibouti and Eritrea (2008). (Mengisteab 2011)

These conflicts have largely revolved around territorial and border disputes, which in many cases, track back to the colonial heritage of arbitrary boundaries. While such core factor is central, it often overlaps with other contextual factors *(see 3.1.1.)*. (Mengisteab 2011)

b) Intra-state conflicts

Kalyvas (2019, 7) defines intra-state conflicts as wars "(…) primarily fought between domestic factions within a state, sometimes in the name of political and social change and sometimes to promote a secessionist agenda and the creation of a new state." Typically, such conflicts involve the state or state-sponsored militias confronting sub-state actors, including ethnic, regional, religious, and political organisations.

In the Horn of Africa, every country has experienced one or more civil wars in the aftermath of post-colonial independence, although their scope and intensity have varied. (Mengisteab 2011) These conflicts often transcend national borders. In many cases, neighbouring states intervene by supporting domestic groups opposing the central government. Such involvement can be driven by ethnic ties with rebel movements or as an extension of their foreign policies. In the latter case, civil wars may evolve into proxy wars[2]. Nevertheless, even when external actors are involved, the conflicts retain a local character, as foreign support is channelled through internal factions (Mengisteab 2011; Kalyvas 2019). For instance, Ethiopian regimes have

Regional State and has long been a site of conflict between Ethiopia and Somalia, marked by recurring border disputes and secessionist insurgency.

[2] A proxy war is a conflict fought between parties acting on behalf of states that are not directly involved, often involving non-state actors.

supported Somali insurgent movements (i.e. SNM[3] and SSDF[4]) to weaken Somalia's capacity to assert territorial claims over the Ogaden region. More recently, Ethiopia seems to have supported Al-Shabaab's[5] insurgency. (Mengisteab 2011)

The underlying causes of civil wars are rooted in domestic dynamics. These often include mismanagement of diversity, which may be exacerbated by ethnocratic state structures, uneven patterns of development, and external interference. In addition to ethnic reasons, weak nation-building capacities can exacerbate rivalries and tensions. (Mengisteab 2011)

c) *State repression*

State repression refers to the use of coercive measures by authoritarian regimes to suppress opposition activities or dissenting beliefs within the civil society (i.e. individuals or organisations), when these are perceived as a threat to the government and its institutions. This dynamic is unilateral and asymmetrical since civilians are typically unarmed or only weakly equipped. As a result, repression often results into massive violent campaigns that can lead to thousands, if not millions, of deaths. Paradoxically, such strategies frequently result into widespread contestations and political instability. (Davenport 2007; Kalyvas 2019)

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[3] The Somali National Movement (SNM), founded in 1981 by members of the Isaaq clan, was an unarmed opposition group that fought Siad Barre's regime and declared Somaliland's independence in 1991.

[4] The SSDF (Somali Salvation Democratic Front) was an early armed opposition group to Siad Barre's regime, active from 1978 to 2001, operating mainly in northeastern Somalia and supported largely by the Majeerteen clan.

[5] Al-Shabaab is an Islamist militant group in Somalia affiliated with al-Qaeda, that seeks to overthrow the government, expel foreign forces, and impose strict Sharia law, controlling parts of southern and central Somalia while carrying out attacks across East Africa.

In the Horn of Africa, the main example of state repression is Eritrea, widely regarded as the most repressive state in on the continent. The country is governed by the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ), which originated as a secessionist movement known as the Eritrean People Liberation Front (EPLF). Under the leadership of Isaias Afewerki, the regime has evolved into a highly centralised totalitarian system, which has been widely accused of perpetrating serious human rights violations *(see Chapter 6).* (Plaut 2016)

d) Inter-communal conflicts

Inter-communal conflicts are defined by Kalyvas (2019, 10) as "(…) intense, sudden (but not necessarily unplanned), lethal attacks by civilian members of one ethnic group on civilian members of another ethnic group." These outbreaks of violence may become more severe when state authorities intervene, especially when governments support one faction if the other is engaged in rebellion or resistance against the government.

In the Horn of Africa, inter-communal conflict has been a persistent feature across several countries, most notably South Sudan, Ethiopia, and Kenya. In such contexts, ethnic and clan groups fight over access to natural resources or ethno-religious differences. Although such violence is more sporadic and lower in intensity than inter-state and civil wars, its effects are significant. Indeed, these conflicts contribute to overall instability and cause economic disruption in the region, driving large-scale displacement. (Mengisteab 2011)

e) Terrorism

Terrorism is defined by Kalyvas (2019, 14) as "(…) a type of political violence that can be carried out by very different actors as long as there is a distinction between the target of violence and the audience, and as long as the intention is to spread fear in the civilian population." Typically, terrorist tactics are employed by weaker insurgent actors who lack the ability to control territory or confront the state through conventional military means.

The conditions in the Horn of Africa are particularly fertile to the emergence and persistence of terrorist organisations. Structural factors such as widespread poverty, social inequality, porous and arbitrary borders, limited state capacity, and endemic corruption create an enabling environment for the phenomenon. Often, terrorist groups exploit existing inter-state, intra-state, and inter-communal conflicts to expand their influence.

A notable example is the series of attacks carried out by the Somali group al-Ittihad al-Islami (AIAI) against civilian targets in Ethiopia. Across the region, countries such as Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, and especially Somalia *(see Chapter 5)* have been significantly affected by terrorist activity. (Shinn 2003)

3.1.3. *Impact on migration*

In the Horn of Africa – one of world's major migratory hotspots – armed conflict and political violence are among the primary drivers of migration. Violence, persecution, and chronic insecurity push individuals to flee their homes in search of safety, whether within the region or outside its borders. In addition to larger-scale wars, inter-communal and ethnic conflicts, as well as clashes between groups, often overlap with broader tensions, further intensifying migratory pressures. The most affected countries by such dynamics are Somalia, South Sudan, and Eritrea. (Álvaro and Carretero 2024)

Although reliable data collection in the region remains challenging, anecdotal estimates point to extremely high figures. For instance, Sudan's second North-South civil war (1983-2005) is estimated to have generated approximately 420,000 refugees and more than 4 million displaced people (Mengisteab 2011, 7). Similarly, the Darfur conflict led to around 180,000 refugees and 2 million displaced individuals (Mengisteab 2011, 7). Importantly, displacement is not driven by large-scale intra-state conflicts alone, but inter-communal violence also plays a significant role. In South

Sudan, for instance, inter-communal clashes in the Jonglei region[6] are estimated to have displaced over 350,000 people in 2009 alone (Mengisteab 2011, 16).

3.2. *Climate change*

Climate change is increasingly taken into account as a key factor shaping migration. As Mayer (2011, 362) argues: "Climate change is degrading the conditions of life of many inhabited territories, sometimes forcing people to move (…)". The drivers of climate-induced migration are multifaceted: they intensify the vulnerability of local communities, amplify pressures on natural resources, and often overlap with existing factors, exacerbating them (Ofori et al. 2023). For this reason, academic debate regarding whether environmental migration should be considered as significant as migration driven by other factors persists (Álvaro and Carretero 2024).

Focusing on the area of interest of this dissertation, several scholars support the idea that climate change – especially variability in climate patterns and extreme weather events – emerged as structural drivers of displacement in the Horn of Africa, intersecting with other pre-existing vulnerabilities (IOM 2024; Kwanhi et al. 2024; Villa et al. 2026). In this context, Gregson (2020, 12) states: "In the broader Horn of Africa area, droughts and the resulting food scarcity are repeatedly mentioned as a potential driver of migration in various areas (…)", emphasising the centrality of environmental stressors in defining migration patterns in the region.

3.2.1. *Climate patterns in the Greater Horn of Africa*

The Horn of Africa is among the most vulnerable regions to climate change globally, with several countries severely impacted by climate-induced risks, environmental degradation, and extreme weather events (ICPAC/WFP

[6] Jonglei is the largest and most populous state in South Sudan, lying within the Greater Upper Nile region. It is an expansive and ethnically diverse area, frequently affected by conflict.

2018; Álvaro and Carretero 2024; WHO 2024). The impacts of climate change in the region manifest in diverse ways, varying in both frequency and intensity, and are expected to intensify in the coming years (World Bank 2014; Álvaro and Carretero 2024).

The Horn's high susceptibility to climate impacts is driven by the strong reliance of local communities on climate-sensitive livelihoods, combined with limited state capacity to effectively mitigate and adapt to climate impacts (Álvaro and Carretero 2024).

The primary climate-related changes include decreasing of precipitations levels, rising temperatures, and an increased alternation between extreme droughts and erratic rainfalls causing floods (Álvaro and Carretero 2024; WHO 2024). As a matter of fact, average precipitations have significantly decreased in both the dry season (June to September) and the rainy season (March to June). At the same time, temperatures have progressively increased over the past fifty years, contributing to more frequent and extreme heat events. These trends have profound consequences for agriculture and water availability, as well as for local communities, especially considering that 80% of the Horn of Africa's population depends on rain-fed agriculture (Álvaro and Carretero 2024).

Given that low-income communities rely on these natural resources and that the population-resources ratio is already stretched, such climate-induced changes have resulted in severe food crises and high levels of food insecurity across the region. For instance, in 2011, "The number of people requiring food assistance rose to 12.4 million in Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, and Uganda" (Álvaro and Carretero 2024, 13). More recently, in 2023, "(…) over 43 million people required humanitarian assistance in Ethiopia, Kenya, and Somalia (…) due to severe drought between 2020 and 2023." (Álvaro and Carretero 2024, 13).

3.2.2. *Climate change and conflicts*

Environmental degradation not only intersects with other complex dynamics but also acts as a driver that intensifies them. In the Horn of Africa,

it represents a relevant contextual factor contributing to the escalation of conflicts and broader instability (Álvaro and Carretero 2024). Scholars have long identified grievance as a key driver of conflict. In this regard, climate change has a significant impact on resource availability in the Horn of Africa, where livelihoods are highly climate-sensitive. Scarce rainfall and rising temperatures, combined with population growth and change in land-use patterns, have led to increasing food insecurity and water scarcity (Álvaro and Carretero 2024).

These conditions create fertile conditions for conflict, in particular among local populations, such as nomadic and agrarian communities, who depend directly on natural resources. As competition over scarce resources intensifies, inter-communal conflicts become more frequent. A prominent example is the conflict in Darfur [7], where environmental degradation has played a major role in exacerbating tensions and violence. (Mengisteab 2011)

3.2.3. *Climate induced migration*

Climate change impacts – such as food insecurity, severe environmental changes, land degradation, and water scarcity – are key drivers of migration in the Horn of Africa (Álvaro and Carretero 2024). The World Health Organisation (2024, 1) reports that "The historic four-year drought that hit East Africa caused massive displacement and suffering. This was subsequently compounded by extensive flooding between November and December 2023, displacing more than four million people in the Horn of Africa."

The effects of climate change are particularly significant in the Horn of Africa due to its reliance on agriculture and pastoralism. Evidence from the

[7] Darfur is a large region in western Sudan that has experienced a prolonged conflict and humanitarian crisis since 2003. The situation is often described as a genocide, involving violence between settled farming communities and nomadic herding groups over scarce resources, exacerbated by political tensions and the involvement of government-backed militias.

Ethiopian highlands indicates that land degradation and uncommon precipitation patterns undermine livelihood and increase the desire to migrate, especially among the youth (Groth et al. 2020). Similarly, in Somalia, recurrent droughts have forced pastoralists to relocate and settle in greener and more fertile areas (Kolmannskog 2010).

Overall, environmental pressures in the region stimulate internal and regional migration rather than long-distance international migration. While the Horn of Africa remains one of the most vulnerable regions to climate change globally, climate-induced stressors intersect with other major drivers, such as conflict and violence, and work as an enhancer for migration. Environmental factors are usually not the sole reason that motivates human movement (Álvaro and Carretero 2024).

3.3. *Economic drivers*

Beyond political and environmental factors, economic dynamics serve as a fundamental pillar in the multi-causal framework of migration within the Horn of Africa. This section examines the structural economic conditions of the region and analyses how the pursuit of livelihoods and economic stability shapes both internal and cross-border movement.

3.3.1. Economic landscape in the Horn of Africa

The economic landscape of the Horn of Africa is characterised by a profound vulnerability rooted in structural instabilities and a heavy reliance on climate-sensitive livelihoods. Approximately 80% of the region's population depends on rain-fed agriculture, a factor that renders the economic health of these nations inseparable from environmental conditions (Álvaro and Carretero 2024). Consequently, extreme weather events – such as the historic four-year drought followed by extensive flooding in 2023 – do not merely represent environmental crises but function as systemic economic shocks that collapse local markets and exacerbate food insecurity.

Beyond the agricultural sector, the region is plagued by high levels of poverty, low wages, and a chronic lack of job opportunities, particularly for

a rapidly growing youth population. For instance, in countries like Ethiopia, youth unemployment is a rising challenge even among the educated urban population, creating a significant demographic pressure that fuels the desire for migration (Gregson 2020). However, the economic conditions differ across countries of the region. For instance, although they can be considered poor countries, Djibouti and Uganda are relatively stable and their drivers for economic migration differ deeply from those of war economies, such as those of Somalia and South Sudan (IGAD 2025).

The regional economy is further complicated by the presence of massive displaced populations, which create a dual economic impact. While the sudden influx of refugees can lead to immediate fiscal burdens for host governments and increase the price of essential goods, for the most vulnerable host communities it also introduces new market opportunities. Indeed, refugee settlements like Dadaab and Kakuma in Kenya have evolved into vibrant economic hubs where host and displaced communities engage in trade involving livestock and construction materials (World Bank 2015). These economies are often sustained by significant remittance flows from the global diaspora, which increase the purchasing power within the camps and stimulate local and regional private sectors. Despite this potential, the realisation of a fully integrated regional economy is often hindered by restrictive legal frameworks that limit the rights of refugees to own property, work, or move freely.

3.3.2. Impact on migration

Economic migration in the Horn of Africa is fundamentally driven by a pull-push nexus where individuals act as rational economic agents responding to the search for better living conditions and employment (Rwengabo 2015). This rationality is evident in the increasing trend of migration from rural to urban areas, where young migrants move to secondary cities to escape the lack of economic access in rural settings (Gregson 2020). On an international scale, the pressure to emigrate is intensified by the gap between

slow domestic economic growth and the perceived quality of life in destination countries.

A significant feature of contemporary economic migration in the region is its increasing "feminisation". Driven by urban unemployment rates for women that are more than double compared to unemployment for men, many female migrants seek domestic labour opportunities in the Middle East driven by the promise of higher salaries and the ability to bring about social changes for their families. (Gregson 2020)

In the refugee context, the movement of a country's own nationals toward refugee-hosting areas highlights an often overlooked dynamic: displacement crises can reshape local and regional economies in ways that attract not only aid, but also people. As noted by the World Bank (2015), the concentration of humanitarian assistance – food distribution, infrastructure investments, and service provision – combined with the emergence of cross-border trade networks around camps, can generate new economic opportunities. These areas may experience increased demand for goods, informal employment, and small business activity, effectively transforming them into localized economic hubs. As a result, nationals from less-served regions may migrate internally toward these zones, not because of displacement per se, but because of the relative improvement in livelihoods compared to their places of origin.

At the same time, migration patterns in the Horn of Africa reflect a broader tension between regional mobility and long-distance aspirations. While intra-regional labour migration does occur – often facilitated by shared borders, cultural ties, and regional agreements – many individuals ultimately view opportunities within neighbouring countries as limited or unstable. Consequently, a significant portion of migrants continue their journeys beyond the continent, particularly toward the Gulf states in the Arab Peninsula. As discussed by Gregson (2020), this outward migration, even though significantly more dangerous, is driven by persistent structural factors such as wage differentials, demand for low-skilled labour in sectors like construction and domestic work, and established migration corridors that lower the barriers to overseas movement.

Together, these dynamics illustrate a layered migration system. While transnational labour markets remain the primary long-term destination for those seeking substantial economic advancement, refugee-hosting areas act as short-term economic magnets within the region.

3.4. *Assessment*

The relationship between migration and its drivers varies. While it tends to be more straight-forward in the case of conflict and violence, it becomes significantly more complex when environmental factors are involved. As Álvaro and Carretero (2024, 15) observe "(…) migration is influenced by a complex set of variables at domestic, local, and macro levels, with climate change adding to existing issues like conflict, violence, and food insecurity." This is particularly evident in the Horn of Africa, a complex region characterised by socio-economic challenges, overlapping conflicts, the presence of terrorist groups, extreme poverty, and climate-induced resource insecurity. Consequently, there is growing academic consensus on the fact that "(…) environmental factors in migration and climate conflict are secondary to social, political, and economic conditions." (Álvaro and Carretero 2024, 16)

This highlights the inherently multi-causal nature of migration in the Horn of Africa, where people flee their homes for varied reasons, making migratory patterns in the region complex due to overlapping drivers and experiences (*see Chapter 2)*. As a result, migration in the region defies rigid, binary categorisations, blurring the boundaries between forced and voluntary movement. This complexity poses significant challenges for regional and national frameworks, which are traditionally designed around simplified understandings of migratory phenomena.

CHAPTER 4
MIGRATORY POLICIES AND LEGAL FRAMEWORKS

This chapter examines the principal legal and policy frameworks governing migration and assesses how they relate to the complex migratory landscape of the Horn of Africa. Building on the conceptual and empirical foundations established in the previous chapters, it provides a structured overview of migration governance across multiple levels.

The analysis is organised along four interconnected levels. It begins with global initiatives, focusing on the main international frameworks that shape norms and approaches to migration management. It then turns to continental initiatives developed by the African Union, which seek to translate global principles into regionally relevant strategies. The chapter subsequently explores sub-regional frameworks adopted by organisations operating within the Horn of Africa (i.e. EAC and IGAD), highlighting their role in addressing shared mobility dynamics and cross-border challenges. Finally, it examines national initiatives in selected countries of the region (i.e. Ethiopia, Somalia, Kenya, and Eritrea), illustrating how broader frameworks are interpreted and implemented within specific domestic contexts.

By mapping these different layers of governance, the chapter aims to provide a comprehensive and descriptive account of the existing legal and policy landscape. In doing so, it lays the groundwork for the subsequent analysis by identifying key features, overlaps, and points of divergence in how migration is regulated across the Horn of Africa.

4.1. *Global initiatives*

This section examines the main global framework shaping contemporary migration governance, with a focus on the Global Compact for Migration and the Global Compact on Refugees, promulgated by the United Nations. These instruments represent key reference points at the international level, providing

overarching principles and policy guidance for states in addressing migration-related challenges.

Although both frameworks are non-binding in nature, reflecting a cooperative rather than enforceable approach to migration governance, they play a significant role in influencing national and regional policies by establishing common objectives, standards, and areas of action. By outlining shared commitments and promoting coordinated responses, they seek to improve the management of migration and enhance protection for migrants.

Both initiatives originated from the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, which was adopted in 2016 and marked a pivotal moment in the development of global migration governance. The Declaration acknowledged the need for a more comprehensive and coordinated international response to human movement and recognised that both refugees and migrants may face similar challenges and vulnerabilities during their journeys. Two distinct but parallel processes were launched in this context, leading to the adoption in 2018 of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and the Global Compact for Refugees. Together, they constitute a coherent framework for international cooperation, with each instrument fulfilling its respective mandate while contributing to a more holistic approach to human mobility. (Bloom 2017; Türk 2018)

The following sub-sections provide an overview of these two compacts, highlighting their main objectives, scope, and relevance for migration governance in contexts such as the Horn of Africa.

4.1.1. *Global Compact for Migration*

The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) was adopted in December 2018 and represents the first intergovernmental agreement prepared under the United Nations to address the dimensions of international migration in a comprehensive manner (Solomon and Sheldon 2018; UN Refugees and Migrants 2018). While the Compact is non-legally binding, it serves as a cooperative framework grounded in the principles of state sovereignty, human rights, and burden-sharing.

It marks the beginning of a renewed multilateral dialogue and is closely linked to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development[8], particularly to Target 10.7, which calls for facilitating orderly, safe, regular, and responsible migration through well-managed policies (Bloom 2017; Solomon and Sheldon 2018). As such, it provides a key reference framework for subsequent regional and national initiatives. As Solomon and Sheldon (2018, 589) state: "(…) growing common understanding emerged that addressing these protection gaps in mixed migration situations is more of an operational issue than a legal or definitional one."

The GCM emerged in response to the growing scale and complexity of global migration. The Compact acknowledges that migration, when well-managed, can generate significant benefits for migrants, host communities, and countries of origin, contributing to economic growth, innovation, and sustainable development. At the same time, it recognises that poorly regulated migration may generate serious challenges, including humanitarian crises, loss of life along dangerous routes, and pressure on social infrastructures (UN Refugees and Migrants 2018). In this sense, it promotes a cooperative approach to migration governance, emphasising that no state can effectively address migration alone due to its inherently transnational nature.

Structurally, the Compact is organised around 23 objectives aimed at improving migration management across all stages of the migratory journey. These objectives can be broadly grouped into key thematic areas (Solomon and Sheldon 2018). First, the GCM emphasises the importance of data and information, promoting evidence-based policymaking and the provision of reliable information to migrants. Second, it focuses on vulnerability and rights, including minimising adverse drivers of migration, saving lives, and

[8] The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015, outlines a global framework to eliminate poverty, reduce inequalities, and safeguard the environment by 2030. It comprises 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets addressing economic, social, and environmental priorities.

reducing risks throughout the migration process. Third, it seeks to enhance legal pathways and documentation, encouraging the expansion of regular migration channels and ensuring access to legal identity. Finally, it highlights integration and contribution, aiming to empower migrants to contribute to sustainable development while fostering social cohesion and combating discrimination.

Despite its comprehensive scope, the GCM faces certain practical and conceptual limitations. Firstly, since the Compact is legally non-binding, it does not impose strict obligations on the signing states, which can otherwise pick and choose which elements to integrate. Alongside this, the GCM reaffirms the sovereign right of countries to determine their national migration policies, leaving a vast margin of discretion. Another key issue is the absence of a universally agreed definition of "migration" or "migrant", which may lead to ambiguity in interpretation and implementation. While this flexibility allows states to adapt the framework to their specific contexts, it may also enable selective application or the use of migration policies to justify exclusionary practices. Moreover, although there was broad consensus on many aspects of the Compact, debates around the distinction between regular and irregular migration persist. These tensions highlight the challenges of translating global commitments into coherent and consistent national policies, as well as how ambiguity in terminology risks legitimising problematic policies revolving around racial, linguistic, or ethnic lines. (Bloom 2017; Solomon and Sheldon 2018)

4.1.2. *Global Compact on Refugees*

The Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), affirmed by the United Nations General Assembly in December 2018, constitutes a key framework for strengthening international responses to refugee situations. Like the Global Compact for Migration, the GCR is legally non-binding, yet it reflects the political will of the international community to enhance cooperation and solidarity with refugees and host countries. It builds upon the commitments of the 2016 New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants and is firmly

grounded in the existing international refugee protection regime, centred on the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, as well as broader international human rights and humanitarian law (UNHCR 2018; Türk 2018). As suggested by Türk (2018) the Global Compact on Refugees aligns with the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, particularly in guiding operational responses to mixed movements involving both refugees and migrants.

The development of the GCR was prompted by the unprecedented scale of the 2015–2016 refugee crisis, particularly along the Mediterranean route, which exposed the limitations of existing international response mechanisms (Türk 2018). While many countries in the Global South maintained open-border policies and hosted large refugee populations, other states responded unilaterally by introducing restrictive measures, including physical and administrative barriers. Given that approximately 85% of the world's refugees are hosted by countries in the Global South, it became evident that these states could not bear the responsibility alone due to their geographical proximity to conflict zones (Türk 2018, 576). This recognition led to the adoption of the New York Declaration, which mandated the development of a new global framework aimed at ensuring more predictable and equitable burden- and responsibility-sharing.

The GCR does not create new legal obligations but rather consolidates and operationalises existing norms within the international refugee protection system. It is guided by principles of international solidarity, humanity, and cooperation, and seeks to translate these into more effective and coordinated responses to displacement (UNHCR 2018). The Compact is structured around four interrelated objectives: (i) easing pressures on host countries; (ii) enhancing refugee self-reliance; (iii) expanding access to third-country solutions, including resettlement; and (iv) supporting conditions in countries of origin for return in safety and dignity (UNHCR 2018).

At the core of the GCR lies the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework, which promotes a shift away from traditional encampment models towards the inclusion of refugees within national and local systems.

This approach emphasises access to education, healthcare, and labour markets, thereby benefiting both refugees and host communities and fostering social and economic integration. Moreover, to support implementation, the GCR introduces a range of mechanisms, including the Global Refugee Forum, Support Platforms, and other cooperative arrangements aimed at mobilising political will, financial resources, and technical expertise (Chimni 2018). These mechanisms seek to ensure more predictable and equitable contributions from a broader range of actors, addressing the current imbalance whereby a limited number of states host the majority of the world's refugees (UNHCR 2018). The Compact also highlights the importance of addressing the root causes of displacement, including conflict, poverty, and environmental pressures, through enhanced cooperation across humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding sectors, in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Despite its comprehensive scope, the GCR faces several limitations. As a non-binding instrument, its implementation depends largely on the political will of states, and it does not establish enforceable mechanisms to ensure equitable responsibility-sharing. Moreover, some critiques suggest that the emphasis on balancing host state concerns with protection objectives may risk weakening refugee protection standards, particularly in relation to return policies that may not always guarantee safe and dignified conditions (Chimni 2018). Unlike the Global Compact for Migration, which operates within a relatively fragmented normative landscape, the GCR is situated within a well-established legal framework, raising questions about how its "soft law" nature interacts with existing binding obligations.

Overall, the Global Compact on Refugees represents a significant step towards a more coordinated and sustainable approach to refugee governance. While it does not introduce new legal obligations, it reinforces existing principles and provides a framework for enhanced international cooperation (Gammeltoft-Hanses 2018). In doing so, it complements the Global Compact for Migration, particularly in addressing mixed migration contexts, and

contributes to shaping contemporary responses to displacement at both global and regional levels.

4.2. *Continental initiatives*

This section explores key continental frameworks and initiatives developed throughout the years and aimed at addressing migration in Africa. In particular, it focuses on three instruments promoted by the African Union: the Kampala Convention (2012), Agenda 2063 (2013), and the Migratory Policy Framework for 2018–2030 (2018).

Established in 2002 in Durban, South Africa, the African Union (AU) succeeded the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), born in 1963. Its core mission is to promote continental unity and articulate a shared African position in global affairs. Given that migration represents a major challenge across the continent, the AU has taken an active role in developing policy frameworks to better manage and respond to this complex issue (Manga 2023).

While the Kampala Convention and the 2018 Migratory Policy Framework (MPF) are specifically designed to address migration across the continent – even though they focus on different aspects and forms of mobility – Agenda 2063 adopts a broader perspective and is not limited to migration issues alone. Developed by the African Union, it sets out long-term objectives that Member States aim to achieve over a 50-year period, including addressing the root causes that drive migration.

4.2.1. *Kampala Convention*

The Kampala Convention, adopted by the African Union in 2009 and entered into force in 2012, represents a landmark development in the governance of internal displacement in Africa, as it is the first legally binding regional instrument specifically dedicated to internally displaced persons (IDPs) (Stavropoulou 2009; Dieng 2017; Bamidele and Pikirayi 2025). Founded on the basis of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (Stavropoulou 2009; Adeola 2018), the Convention was conceived in

response to the scale and persistence of forced displacement across the continent and fills a significant normative gap in international law by codifying obligations for states within a single, comprehensive framework (Maru 2011). The Convention defines IDPs as individuals or groups forced to flee their homes due to armed conflict, generalised violence, human rights violations, or natural and human-made disasters, without crossing internationally recognised borders (Maru 2011; Dieng 2017).

Substantively, the Convention is structured around three interrelated pillars: (i) the prevention of arbitrary displacement, (ii) the protection and assistance of IDPs during their displacement, and (iii) the promotion of durable solutions, including return, local integration, or resettlement (Stavropoulou 2009; Kamungi 2010). It explicitly prohibits arbitrary displacement – namely displacement resulting from conflict strategies, ethnic cleansing, or discriminatory practices – and requires States to criminalise such actions within their domestic legal systems (Stavropoulou 2009). At the same time, it reinforces existing international human rights and humanitarian norms, consolidating them into a regionally binding instrument tailored to the African context. A core principle underpinning the Convention is the primary responsibility of States to ensure the protection, dignity, and well-being of Internally Displaced Persons, including access to essential services and the restoration of livelihoods (Bamidele and Pikirayi 2025).

In addition, the Convention adopts a cooperative approach, emphasising comprehensive leadership, solidarity and burden-sharing among African states while recognising the complementary role of international organisations and humanitarian actors in supporting national efforts (Kamungi 2010; Dieng 2017). It also addresses key structural challenges associated with displacement, such as land and property disputes, compensation mechanisms, and post-conflict reconciliation, which are essential for achieving sustainable reintegration (Kamungi 2010).

However, a persistent gap between the ideals of the Convention and the reality on the ground is primarily driven by the political culture of impunity characterising most African countries (Kamungi 2010). Indeed, despite the

Kampala Convention provides a sophisticated legal roadmap, comprehensive and progressive in nature, its implementation remains uneven, as many states face constraints related to limited institutional capacity, political instability, weak enforcement mechanisms, and a gap between formal commitments and practical outcomes (Kamungi 2010). Therefore, while legally binding the Convention still lacks homogeneity in its application.

Nonetheless, the Kampala Convention stands as a pioneering and influential framework, reflecting a collective continental effort to address internal displacement through a legally binding and context-oriented approach.

4.2.2. *Agenda 2063*

Agenda 2063, adopted in 2013, serves as the African Union's fifty-year strategic framework for the continent's transformation, reflected in the slogan "The Africa We Want" (Anozie et al. 2025). Grounded in the principle of "African solutions to African problems" (ASAP), the Agenda reflects the will to deal with domestic challenges without external interference and adopting an Afrocentric approach that emphasises self-reliance, Pan-Africanism, and the mobilisation of African human and natural resources (Marah 2025; Akanle and Olaniyan 2025). It builds on earlier continental initiatives such as the Lagos Plan of Action[9] and NEPAD[10], while aligning with global frameworks like the SDGs (Anozie et al. 2025). It is structured around seven

[9] The Lagos Plan of Action (LPA), adopted in 1980 by the Organization of African Unity (OAU), was a major continental initiative designed to promote Africa's self-reliance and lessen dependence on Western economies between 1980 and 2000. It emphasized regional economic integration, industrialisation, and food security, with the long-term goal of establishing an African common market.

[10] The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) is a strategic programme of the African Union adopted in 2001 to advance the continent's socio-economic development. It seeks to eradicate poverty, promote sustainable growth, and facilitate Africa's integration into the global economy.

aspirations – such as inclusive economic growth, political integration, democratic governance, peace and security, cultural identity, and global influence – and it adopts a people-centred vision that prioritises the empowerment of youth and women and recognises the interdependence of development challenges across sectors (AU 2013; Akanle and Olaniyan 2025).

Migration is given importance within this framework. On one hand, Agenda 2063 promotes flagship initiatives such as the African Passport and the free movement of people to facilitate mobility within the continent, strengthen regional integration, and unlock the socio-economic potential of a unified market (Marah 2025). On the other hand, it acknowledges the structural drivers of forced migration – such as climate change, environmental degradation, conflict, unemployment, and poverty – and tries to tackle them through coordinated, long-term strategies (Mnisi et al. 2024). In aligning with the SDGs, particularly in areas of climate action and sustainable development, the Agenda seeks to mitigate environmental displacement through adaptation measures, improved governance, and integrated humanitarian responses (Mnisi et al. 2025; Anozie et al. 2025). However, despite its transformative ambition, implementation remains uneven due to persistent structural constraints such as weak state capacity, governance deficits, policy incoherence, and limited political will (Anozie et al. 2025). These challenges are further reflected in the disconnect between Pan-African ideals and national practices, particularly where restrictive visa regimes are employed and undermine the goal of free mobility. Ultimately, the success of Agenda 2063 will depend on the ability of African states to translate its normative aspirations into practice through coordinated action, strengthened governance, and a genuine commitment to the principles of Pan-Africanism and self-determined development.

4.2.3. *Migratory Policy Framework for Africa*

The Migration Policy Framework for Africa (MPFA) 2018–2030 represents a revised and comprehensive continental strategy developed by the

African Union to guide the governance and management of migration across the continent (AU 2018). It builds upon the earlier 2006 MPF and responds to evolving migration dynamics by providing updated policy guidelines for Member States and Regional Economic Communities (RECs). Its aim is to foster coherent, coordinated, and well-regulated migration systems. As a strategic instrument, it aligns closely with broader continental and global frameworks, including Agenda 2063 and the SDGs, and adopts a "whole of government approach" and multi-stakeholder approach to migration governance. The framework is structured around several thematic areas – including labour migration, border governance, irregular migration, forced displacement, and migration data – through which it seeks to enhance institutional capacity, policy coordination, and evidence-based decision-making across African states. (Manga 2023)

A central characteristic of the MPFA 2018–2030 is its comprehensive and nuanced understanding of irregular migration, which is defined as a complex socio-economic and political phenomenon linked to issues such as human trafficking, migrant smuggling, and transnational organised crime (Manga 2023). In response, the framework suggests strengthened border governance, regional cooperation, and legal harmonisation, and it encourages states to align national legislation with international conventions and to enhance mechanisms for prevention, protection, and prosecution. Moreover, it promotes "Cooperative Border Management"[11] (CBM) and the development of secure and accessible migration pathways, including improved civil registration and travel documentation systems, to facilitate safe and orderly mobility while reducing reliance on irregular routes. Furthermore, the MPFA highlights the importance of awareness-raising, data

[11] Coordinated Border Management (CBM) is a collaborative approach among customs and other cross-border regulatory agencies that aims to improve the efficiency of trade and travel while strengthening security through coordinated procedures, and the sharing of information, technology, and data to facilitate faster, safer, and more cost-effective border crossings.

sharing, and institutional coordination, positioning migration governance as a multidimensional issue that intertwines with security, development, and human rights. (Manga 2023)

Despite its comprehensive scope and normative improvements, the effectiveness of the MPFA remains constrained by persistent structural challenges across the continent. As a matter of fact, its objectives are constantly undermined by weak state capacity, limited financial and technical resources, and inconsistent policy implementation. While the framework introduces a more precautionary and governance-oriented approach its success ultimately depends on the political will of Member States to translate these guidelines into actionable policies. In addition, the emphasis on security and border control has raised critical questions about the precarious balance between migration management and human rights protection (Manga 2023). Although the MPFA 2018–2030 marks a significant evolution in Africa's migration governance architecture, its transformative potential depends on stronger institutional coordination, resource mobilisation, and the effective integration of development-oriented and human-centred approaches to migration management.

4.3. *Regional initiatives*

This section explores the main regional frameworks and initiatives developed over time to address migration in Eastern Africa and the Horn of Africa. It focuses on efforts led by the Eastern African Community (EAC) and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), with particular emphasis on their efforts in promoting the free movement of workers within these regions.

4.3.1. *EAC Common Market Protocol*

The Eastern African Community (EAC) is a regional intergovernmental organisation founded on a treaty signed in 1999 by its original Partner States –Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania – and entered into force in 2000. Over the time, its membership expanded to include eight countries: Kenya, Uganda,

Tanzania, Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia, Burundi, Rwanda, and South Sudan (Gasto 2022). The EAC's mission is to promote deeper economic, political, social and cultural integration, alongside cooperation in research and technology, defence, security, and legal and judicial affairs, with the overarching aim of improving the quality of life of East African populations (EAC; Gasto 2022; Hirsch 2024). To achieve its objectives, the organisation has developed a series of Protocols that progressively advance regional integration toward a Political Federation.

Although the EAC does not encompass all countries of the Horn of Africa and includes other States beyond that sub-region, it remains highly relevant to this dissertation. As a matter of fact, the EAC Common Market Protocol (CMP) provides a key legal framework for regulating movements of persons within the region. Other instruments, such as the EAC Protocol on Peace and Security and the EAC Foreign Policy Coordination, address migration-related issues, though they tend to focus on irregular migration (Gasto 2022). Additional policies adopted by the EAC – for instance the EAC One Stop Border Posts Act and the EAC Child Rights Policy – further engage with irregular migration and refugees (Gasto 2022).

In 2009, EAC Member States signed the Protocol on the Establishment of the EAC Common Market, which became operational in 2010. A common market allows partner countries of a REC to operate as a single market for goods, services, capital, and labour (Gastorn and Masinde 2017). This arrangement is intended to accelerate economic growth and foster development, while promoting a more liberal approach towards freedom of movement. The CMP focuses on four core freedoms: free movement of goods, labour, services, and capital. In addition, Art. 2(4) of the CMP introduces two complementary rights: the right of establishment and the right of residence (Gastorn and Masinde 2017; Gasto 2022). Migration-related provisions in this Protocol are designed to support and broaden the Community's economic integration. However, while the CMP commits to free movement under Art. 7, migrants are still subjected to a series of limitations imposed by domestic legal frameworks or bilateral agreements,

particularly regarding employment rights (Rwengabo 2015; Gasto 2022; Hirsch 2024).

Free movement of persons is regulated by Art. 7 of the CMP. Under this provision, the Partner States commit to guarantee free movement – including entry, stay, and exit – of persons who are citizen of other member countries within their territories without a visa, ensuring non-discrimination based on nationality. Free movement of labour is ruled by Art. 10 of the CMP, which requires Partner States to guarantee free movement of workers who are citizens of other member countries, ensuring non-discrimination in remuneration and employment conditions. In addition, such workers have the right to be accompanied by a child and a spouse, who benefits of the same freedom and rights. Nonetheless, these freedoms are not absolute and may be limited on grounds of domestic public policy, public security, or public health. Furthermore, these provisions do not extend to refugees, whose status and rights are governed by separate international conventions. (EAC 2010; Gastorn and Masinde 2017)

Art. 13 of the CMP concerns the right of establishment, enabling nationals of Partner State to engage in economic activities as self-employed individuals, including setting up and managing enterprises in other member states, and social security schemes in accordance with national regulations. Art. 14, provides for the right of residence and enables workers and self-employed persons to obtain residence permits in host countries (Gasto 2022).

While the Common Market Protocol constitutes an important framework for analysing economic migration in the region, it fails to adequately address other major drivers for migrations – such as conflict or climate change – which are particularly significant in Eastern Africa and the Horn of Africa.

4.3.2. *IGAD initiatives*

The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) was established in 1996, replacing the earlier Intergovernmental Authority on Drought and Development (IGADD). It currently comprises eight Member States: the founding countries –Djibouti, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan, Ethiopia,

and Uganda – alongside Eritrea and South Sudan, which joined in 1993 and 2011 respectively (Abebe and Mudungwe 2023). IGAD's mandate is centred on strengthening regional cooperation across three ley areas: (i) food security and environmental protection; (ii) economic cooperation, regional integration and social development; and (iii) peace and security. Through these priorities, the organisation seeks to foster a more resilient, stable, prosperous, and peaceful region, ultimately improving the quality of life for its populations.

Given that migration represents a major challenge in the Horn of Africa, IGAD has engaged in developing policies and frameworks to address it guide Member States in shaping their national approaches. For instance, the Nairobi Declaration on Durable Solutions for Somali Refugees and Reintegration of Returnees in Somalia (2017) focuses specifically on Somali displacement. Other Thematic Declarations – such as the Djibouti Declaration (2017) and the Mombasa Declaration (2022) – address broader issues related to refugees' rights and well-being (IGAD 2025). This section, however, concentrates on two key IGAD instruments: the Regional Migration Policy Framework – which provides overarching guidance on migration governance – and the Free Movement of Persons Protocol – which specifically addresses labour migration.

a) IGAD Regional Migration Policy Framework

The IGAD's Regional Migration Policy Framework (RMPF) establishes the foundation for a coordinated regional approach to migration governance, bringing together governments, NGOs, civil society, and other stakeholders (IGAD 2025). Since its adoption, it has served as IGAD's primary policy reference on migration. Although non-binding, the framework is comprehensive in its scope: it supports Member States in managing migration, guides them in developing national policies, and promotes harmonisation across the region. It focuses on regional migratory priorities and addresses peculiar migratory challenges – such as pastoral mobility, IDPs, and forced displacement – while providing targeted recommendations on these issues (Abebe and Mudungwe 2023; Ahimbisibwe and Nkiko 2025).

Its aim is to manage migration in a way that promotes peace, security, and socio-economic development (IGAD 2012).

The RMPF is structured around three main parts. The first provides contextual analysis, outlining migration patterns, the regional policy context, and key challenges, including the need for cooperation and integration. The second examines core migration themes – such as labour mobility, displacement, and migrants' rights – while connecting them to broader social and development concerns. The third addresses implementation, emphasising the need for strong institutional capacity, coordinated policies among member states, and effective monitoring mechanisms (IGAD 2012; Abebe and Mudungwe 2023).

Despite efforts to operationalise the framework through consultations and technical workshops, its non-binding nature, combined with poor governance and weak state capacity, limits its practical impact (Ahimbisibwe and Nkiko 2025).

b) IGAD Free Movement of Persons Protocol

The IGAD Free Movement of Persons Protocol, endorsed in February 2020, represents a significant step toward deeper regional integration. It establishes a legal framework for the gradual realisation of free movement, as well as the rights of residence and establishment across Member States. The Protocol is grounded in the IGAD Agreement and aligned with broader continental integration efforts. (IGAD 2020; IGAD 2025)

The Protocol follows a phased implementation approach, beginning with visa-free entry, followed by the movement of workers, the right of residence, and ultimately the right of establishment. Under its provisions, citizens of the IGAD Member States are entitled to enter, stay, move freely within, and exit other Member States. They are also granted the right to reside and to engage in economic activities, including both employment and self-employment. (IGAD 2020; IGAD 2025)

In addition, the Protocol guarantees equal treatment and non-discrimination, extending rights to workers, self-employed persons, and their

dependants. It includes provisions on labour protections, such as access to social security benefits across borders, and addresses broader concerns including access to education, the protection of vulnerable groups, and mobility in crisis situations. At the same time, it preserves state authority to impose restrictions on grounds such as public security, health, and legal due process. The IGAD Secretariat plays a central role in coordinating, monitoring, and supporting the implementation of these commitments. (IGAD 2020; IGAD 2025)

4.4. *National initiatives*

Drawing on Marchand et al. (2017), this section provides an overview of the principal legal frameworks and policy responses adopted by national authorities to address migration in the Horn of Africa, with a particular focus on Ethiopia, Somalia, Kenya, and Eritrea. Furthermore, it examines the range of instruments developed at the domestic level, highlighting how these approaches seek to regulate migration flows, manage borders, and combat human trafficking.

4.4.1. *Ethiopia*

Ethiopia has developed one of the most advanced and comprehensive legal and policy frameworks on migration in the Horn of Africa. Its legislation regulates multiple dimensions of migration, including entry, stay, employment, naturalisation, and departure, while also establishing procedures for issuing travel documents, visas, and work permits for regular migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. (Marchand et al. 2017)

The Refugee Proclamation (2019) rules asylum applications and procedures and defines the rights and obligations of refugees and asylum seekers. In addition, the Ethiopian government actively addresses human trafficking by both criminalising human trafficking and providing assistance to victims of trafficking (VoTs) (Marchand et al. 2017). It collaborates with the International Organisation for Migration to prevent irregular migration through awareness raising campaigns and has signed Memoranda of

Understanding (MoUs) with neighbouring countries, such as Djibouti and Sudan, to strengthen regional cooperation. Other legal instruments – including the Criminal Justice Policy and National Human Rights Action Plan – further contribute to migrant protection and anti- trafficking efforts (IOM 2015).

Ethiopian legislation also regulates labour migration, particularly to safeguard its citizens from trafficking, abuse, and human rights violations. Indeed, since 2016 employment abroad has been permitted only where bilateral agreements with destination countries exist and where recruitment is conducted through governmental agencies. (Marchand et al. 2017)

Furthermore, the government has developed policies to engage with the Ethiopian diaspora, structured around three core pillars: political, economic, and identitarian. Political engagement involves the extension of specific rights, economic engagement focuses on investment opportunities, and identitarian engagement promotes capacity-building initiatives aims at fostering a sense of community among expatriate members (Kuschminder and Siegel 2011).

Despite this relatively advanced framework, important gaps remain. Ethiopia continues to rely heavily on civil society organisations and international organisations, while state capacity and enforcement mechanisms require further strengthening (Marchand et al. 2017). Although existing policies address several aspects of migration, they do not fully capture the complexity and dynamics of migration in the Horn of Africa.

4.4.2. *Somalia*

Somalia has adopted relatively few laws addressing migration, reflecting the country's limited state capacity and the government's restricted control beyond the capital *(see Chapter 5)*. Existing legislation primarily focuses on asylum, citizenship, exit procedures, and the fight against human trafficking. (Marchand et al. 2017)

Some progress has been made in strengthening migration management systems, particularly through the development of Border Management

Information Systems to process the entry of migrants, alongside improved training of border management officials. In addition, the government has implemented awareness raising campaigns to enhance the protection of VoTs and to highlight the risks associated with human trafficking (US Department of State 2016).

In 2017, Somalia launched the project "RE-INTEG: Enhancing Somalia's responsiveness to the management and reintegration of mixed migration flows", in partnership with international organisations such as EU, IOM, UNHCR, and UNOPS. This initiative aims to strengthen policy and legal frameworks for forces migrants and to improve access to basic services in areas of return and departure (European Commission 2017).

Despite these efforts, Somalia's migration legislation and policies face significant challenges. Somalian authorities lack the capacity and resources required to effectively develop, implement, and enforce migration policies. Moreover, existing frameworks fail to cope with the complex migratory landscape of the HoA as it oversees several forms of migration, including forced migration, IDPs, and refugees. Finally, compared to neighbouring countries, Somalia has made limited efforts to engage with its diaspora. (Marchand et al. 2017)

4.4.3. *Kenya*

Kenya has developed one of the most comprehensive and advanced migration frameworks in the Horn of Africa, reflecting a broader recognition of the multiple dimensions, challenges, and opportunities associated with migration in the region. Indeed, its legislative and policy framework regulates general immigration, labour migration and migrants' rights, as well as the protection of refugees and IDPs. Kenyan law also criminalises human trafficking and smuggling, while providing mechanisms for the protection of victims of trafficking. (Marchand et al. 2017)

The Kenyan National Migration Policy manages labour migration and return processes, with the aim of safeguarding Kenyan nationals abroad. Complementing this, the Kenyan Diaspora Policy seeks to actively involve

the diaspora in national development initiatives. The National Policy on Internal Displacement addresses the protection, profiling, and underlying causes of internal displacement, as well as its broader consequences. In 2016, the Kenyan National Migration Coordination Mechanism was established to enhance coordination in migration management by bringing together governmental and non-state actors. (IOM 2015; Marchand et al. 2017)

Kenya has also made significant efforts to combat human trafficking, although limited funding and resources often limit the effectiveness of these initiatives. As a major host country for refugees, Kenya addresses this reality through the Refugee Act of 2021, which establishes an encampment policy as a condition for accessing humanitarian assistance, while also providing for the recognition and protection of refugees and creating institutional structures to manage refugee affairs. (Marchand et al. 2017)

Despite its relatively advanced framework, important gaps remain. Border management requires further strengthening, particularly in addressing smuggling and human trafficking. In this context, tackling corruption among border officials and enhancing institutional capacity are key priorities. Moreover, the International Organization for Migration has recommended the development of a more comprehensive migration governance framework to improve cooperation between the Kenyan government, migrants, and the diaspora, and to better harness the potential benefits of migration. (Marchand et al. 2017)

4.4.4. *Eritrea*

Eritrean legislation and policies on migration establish administrative rules governing entry, registration, residence, exit, work permits, and possibilities for naturalisation. However, labour emigration is subject to strict state control, reflecting the highly centralised and authoritarian nature of the government *(see Chapter 6).* In practice, the issuance of travel documents for labour migrants is often discretionary, with decisions by officials appearing arbitrary and lacking transparency. (Marchand et al. 2017)

While Eritrean law formally prohibits human trafficking, slavery, and forced labour, there are significant concerns regarding the state's compliance with these provisions. External actors, such as the United States Department of State, have assessed that Eritrean authorities have made limited efforts to address human trafficking, particularly in terms of protecting VoTs and prosecuting perpetrators. (US Department of State 2016)

Although a comprehensive assessment of Eritrea's migration framework remains challenging due to the scarcity of reliable data and sources, existing evidence suggests that current policies fail to adequately capture the complexity of migration dynamics and do not sufficiently address the diverse forms of migration affecting the country and the region, resulting in substantial policy gaps. (Marchand et al. 2017)

4.5. *Key trends in migration governance in the HoA*

The mapping of migration governance across global, continental, sub-regional, and national levels reveal a landscape marked by normative density but operational fragmentation. Although the Horn of Africa is regulated by an increasingly sophisticated array of frameworks – from the aspirational Global Compacts to the pioneering Kampala Convention – a critical synthesis of these layers exposes three dominant trends that directly shape the management of human mobility in the region.

First, a pronounced divergence emerges between regional progressivism and national securitisation. At the continental and sub-regional levels, institutions such as the African Union and IGAD frame migration as a driver of development and regional integration. The IGAD Free Movement Protocol, for instance, represents a significant departure from traditional border logics. Yet, as illustrated by national policies in Ethiopia, Kenya, and particularly Eritrea, these regional norms frequently clash with state-centric priorities. In practice, national approaches tend to prioritise border control and the containment of irregular migration over the protections based on rights, enshrined in regional instruments. The result is a hierarchical protection regime in which the level of legal protection afforded to migrants

depends less on their actual vulnerability than on the political alignment between origin and destination states.

Second, the categorical rigidity of existing frameworks fails to capture the multi-causal nature of migration in the Horn of Africa. Migration in the region is inherently mixed, both in terms of migrant profiles and the overlapping drivers that motivate movement. Nevertheless, global and national legal systems largely operate within a binary framework that distinguishes sharply between political refugees and economic migrants. This dichotomy overlooks the complexity of contemporary mobility and fails to address emerging dynamics such as climate-induced displacement. As a consequence, individuals who do not neatly fit within the 1951 Refugee Convention definition or conventional labour migration categories are effectively excluded from protection, leaving significant populations unaccounted for within the current legal architecture.

Third, the region demonstrates a pattern of subsidiarity without sufficient capacity. There is a growing tendency for global actors to delegate responsibility for migration governance in the Horn of Africa to regional organisations, which in turn depend on member states for implementation. While the principle of "African solutions to African problems" holds strong normative appeal, in practice it often leads to diffused accountability and limited operational capacity. States in the region face overlapping structural challenges – including conflict, political instability, climate stress, poverty, and governance deficits – that hinder the effective implementation of harmonised frameworks and comprehensive national policies. This dynamic produces a form of legal pluralism in which multiple, overlapping regimes exist in principle, but weak enforcement and the absence of binding burden-sharing mechanisms allow states to evade their commitments with minimal consequence.

In conclusion, migration governance in the Horn of Africa is characterised by a fundamental disconnect between normative ambition and practical implementation. While the regional architecture is among the most progressive globally, it remains constrained by insufficient domestic

internalisation and a failure to recognise the multi-causal drivers of displacement. The divergences identified in this analysis suggest that the migration challenge in the Horn of Africa is not merely one of scale, but fundamentally one of legal categorisation and governance coherence.

CHAPTER 5
CASE STUDY: SOMALIA

This chapter offers a hands-on case study of the Horn of Africa's countries – namely Somalia – to better comprehend the dynamics analysed in the previous chapters. Somalia represents a particularly complex and illustrative case, where multiple and overlapping drivers of migration interact in mutually reinforcing ways. Indeed, environmental stress, economic hardship, and insecurity do not operate in isolation. On the contrary, they converge within a fragile political and social context, profoundly shaping migratory patterns of Somali nationals.

Besides being one of the world's poorest countries and widely regarded as a failed state, Somalia is characterised by the interaction between high climate vulnerability, protracted violence, and deep institutional and social fragility. As reported by the World Bank Group (2026), the country suffers from widespread poverty and some of the world's lowest human development indicators. Three decades of state collapse, limited government presence, weak institutional legitimacy, and complex clan dynamics have contributed to a fractured social fabric and ongoing instability. These structural challenges are further exacerbated by an unfinished political settlement, resulting in ongoing contestation over land, natural resources, and political authority. (Warsame et al. 2023; World Bank Group 2026)

At the same time, Somalia is one of the most vulnerable and highly exposed countries to climate change impacts. Its largely arid environment, combined with recurrent droughts, floods, and extreme weather events, places immense pressure on livelihoods, especially considering that the livestock and agricultural sectors impacted by them form the backbone of the economy (World Bank Group 2026). These climate shocks not only undermine food security and economic stability but also intensify existing vulnerabilities by weakening already fragile coping capacities (Maystadt and Ecker 2024). Over the past three decades, repeated climate- and conflict-related crises have

eroded resilience, leaving large segments of the population highly susceptible to further shocks (Warsame et al. 2023).

A growing body of research highlights the linkages between environmental stress, political instability, and conflict in Somalia. Periods of severe drought have frequently coincided with increases in violent conflict, suggesting that climate variability can act as a threat multiplier. By disrupting key economic sectors, drought reduces incomes and economic opportunities, which in turn may increase incentives for participation in armed groups or conflict over resources. (Maystadt and Ecker 2024)

Understanding these intertwined dynamics is essential for analysing migration patterns in Somalia. Climate shocks, poverty, and insecurity jointly shape decisions to move. The Somali case therefore provides a critical lens to examine how environmental change, conflict, and development challenges intersect, shaping migration.

5.1. *Political violence*

Political violence in Somalia is the outcome of deeply intertwined local, regional, and international dynamics operating within a fragile political setting. Although often portrayed as a fragmented landscape of clan-based conflicts and militia activity, violence is both a symptom and a driver of the country's structural collapse. In the past 30 years, Somalia has been characterised by the absence of an effective central authority and consequent monopoly over the use of force. This led to multiple actors – ranging from local factions to regional powers, alongside global actors like the United States – to operate within a highly volatile and unpredictable security environment (Cliffe et al. 2009). Crucially, the causal relation runs in both directions: while state fragility fosters conflict, protracted violence actively prevents the consolidation of central authority (Collier et al. 2003). Somalia has therefore evolved into a contested arena in which overlapping interests, shifting alliances, and external interventions have reinforced cycles of instability.

At the core of this ever-lasting violence lie mutually reinforcing drivers of fragility, conflict, and violence. Continued intra-state instability and elite contestation, fractured relations between the state and the civil society, and rooted inter-communal divisions together sustain a cycle of instability and insecurity that undermines state-building and long-term development prospects (World Bank Group 2026). However, political violence in the Somali context is not merely a consequence of weak institutions, it is also a mechanism through which power, resources, and legitimacy are actively contested. The absence of stable governance structures and state capacity have enabled both state and non-state actors to compete for territorial control and influence, further alimenting insecurity. By continually deepening the underlying instability, war creates self-reinforcing cycles that are notoriously difficult to escape. (Collier et al. 2003).

This fragility is further exacerbated by the interaction between conflict and climate-related stress. Armed violence and the constant militarisation of Somali territory intensify the impacts of climate shocks, while simultaneously weakening the capacity of institutions and communities to respond effectively to them. As a result, conflict and climate vulnerability operate in a mutually reinforcing fashion, exacerbating the chronic insecurity faced by the population (Warsame et al. 2023).

Since the failure of the State in 1991[12], Somalia has continued to experience sustained levels of violence. Armed groups such as Al-Shabaab maintain a significant presence in southern and central regions of the country, continuing to challenge state authority. The group's resilience reflects its capacity to exploit governance vacuums, adapt its tactics, and draw on local grievances to sustain recruitment and legitimacy (Hansen 2013). However,

[12] Somalia's state failure in 1991 resulted from the collapse of General Muhammad Siad Barre's military regime under pressure from armed clan-based rebel groups. On 27 January 1991, militias of the United Somali Congress drove Siad Barre out of Mogadishu, ending his authoritarian rule, which had become increasingly brutal during the late 1980s.

even though military offensives have led to partial territorial gains, they also triggered violent backlash and highlighted the challenges of maintaining control over recovered areas. At the same time, cuts in international security support and continued political contestation undermine this fragile progress. In recent years, the high levels of conflict-related fatalities in recent years have reflected a broader equilibrium of violence that continues to shape Somalia's political and security landscape (Menkhaus 2006; Hansen 2013; World Bank Group 2026).

Understanding political violence in Somalia therefore requires a multidimensional approach that transcend singular explanations. The following sections examine its key manifestations: the legacy of civil war and state failure, the evolution of terrorism and insurgency, and the dynamics of clan-based violence. Together, these dimensions illustrate how different forms of violence intersect and reinforce one another within Somalia's broader context of fragility.

5.1.1. *Civil war and failure of the State*

The contemporary dynamics of political violence in Somalia lie their bases in the state's failure and the protracted civil war that broke out in 1991, when Siad Barre's regime was overthrown. The latter marked a critical turning point which triggered the collapse of central governance structures and created a power vacuum in which state authority rapidly dissolved (Nyadera et al. 2019). In the absence of a functioning central government, Somalia descended into an arena of violent struggle for control, where warlords, clan-based militias, and emerging armed groups have long competed over territory, resources, and political influence.

The aftermath of state collapse was marked by widespread violence, humanitarian crisis, and the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people, laying the foundations for prolonged instability (Nyadera et al. 2019). Since then, Somalia has experienced a persistent condition of state fragmentation and lacking sovereignty. Indeed, no central authority has been able to exert all-around control over the national territory, leaving it divided into de facto

autonomous regions, such as Somaliland and Puntland (Maystadt and Ecker 2014). While Somaliland has achieved a relative degree of stability compared to the rest of the country, southern and central Somalia continue to experience high levels of violence, marked by ongoing contestation between the central government and non-state actors such as Al-Shabaab (Linke and Raleigh 2011; World Bank Group 2026). Figure 5 juxtaposes the geography and scale of conflict before and after the state failure of 1991, highlighting a significant shift of violence from northern areas to central and southern Somalia, where a heavy saturation of conflict occurred. Furthermore, the increased density of smaller markers around the map suggests the presence of generalised violence around the country.

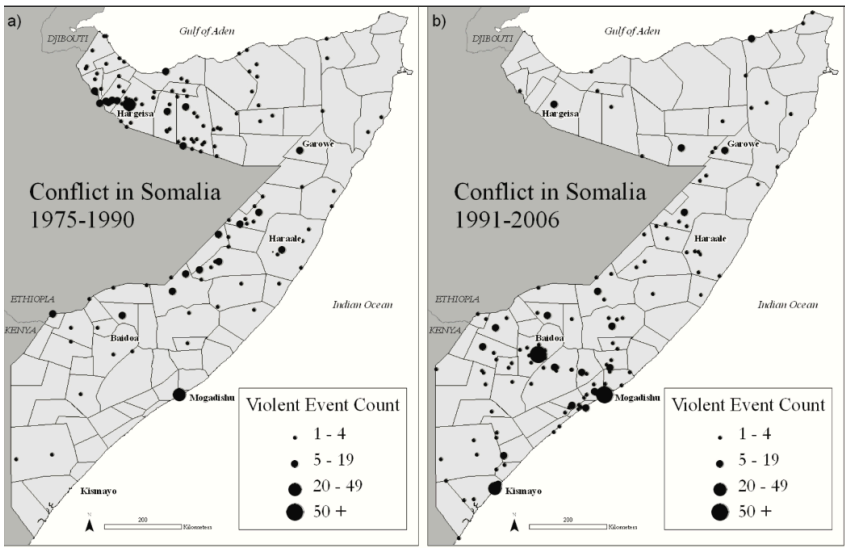


Figure 4: Aggregated Conflict Events in Somalia by Location pre- and post-State collapse

Source: Linke and Raleigh 2011, 55

The roots of state failure in Somalia trace back to deep structural and historical vulnerabilities that made the state inherently fragile long before it actually collapsed. Key among these factors were the authoritarian nature of Siad Barre's regime, the deliberate weaponisation of clan identities for political gain, and a lasting legacy of colonial division coupled with post-independence governance failures (Yusuf 2025; Menkhaus 2014). The

regime's collapse not only dismantled central institutions but also exacerbated existing divisions, entrenching clannism[13] within political competition and alimenting violent fragmentation. As a result, the Somali civil war cannot be understood as a singular event but rather as an evolving and protracted conflict shaped by overlapping political, social, and economic grievances. Mudane (2018) briefly summarises the variables that influenced Somali civil war in the table below.

PRECONDITIONS	**CORRELATES**
Communal content	Politicized clan identity
Human needs	Basic need deprivation
State's role	Scales of political repression
International linkage	Military and economic aid

Figure 5: Variables contributing to the Somali Civil War
Source: Mudane 2018, 45

After the collapse of the state, several efforts to rebuild its institutions and capacity were carried out, however they have faced significant obstacles. As a matter of fact, multiple peace and reconciliation initiatives have failed to produce sustainable and durable political arrangements capable of restoring trust between the state and civil society (Nyadera et al. 2019; Menkhaus 2014). Although a provisional constitution was adopted in 2012, marking an important step towards institutional reconstruction, Somali state authority remains limited, especially in rural and conflict-affected regions (World Bank Group 2026; Menkhaus 2006). External institution-building efforts have similarly struggled to deliver lasting results. Indeed, decades of international assistance have failed to revive a functional central government, largely because external actors have repeatedly underestimated the depth of

[13] Clannism is the practice of favouring one's own clan or kinship group, often prioritising group loyalty and interests over the wider society.

Somalia's structural barriers to governance (Menkhaus 2014). The endurance of insecurity, combined with weak governance capacity, continues to undermine the effectiveness of state institutions and restrict their ability to provide basic services and security to its citizens.

The long duration of the conflict has also had deep socioeconomic consequences. Three decades of instability have devastated infrastructure, disrupted agricultural production, and contributed to widespread poverty and latent underdevelopment (World Bank Group 2026). These conditions reinforce cycles of violence as they limit economic opportunities and increase the incentives for participation in armed groups. As a result, the Somali case illustrates how civil war and state failure are not only outcomes of political violence but also key drivers sustaining and reinforcing conflict.

Understanding Somalia's civil war and state collapse is therefore essential for analysing its broader patterns of instability. The absence of a cohesive and legitimate state has created a fragmented political order in which authority is contested, governance is uneven, multiple actors seek power, and violence remains a central way for obtaining it.

5.1.2. *Terrorism*

Terrorism in Somalia has emerged as a central dimension of political violence and it is closely linked to the broader dynamics of state failure, external intervention, and contested authority. The transformation of the Somali conflict into part of the global "War on Terror"[14] marked a significant shift in both its nature and in how it was framed internationally.

As a matter of fact, the creation and subsequent dismantling of the Islamic Courts Union (ICU)[15] in the mid-2000s played a central role in

[14] The "War on Terror" is an ongoing, US-led international military and political campaign launched after the 9/11 attacks. It aimed to combat terrorist organizations, particularly Al-Qaeda and its allies, as well as governments that supported them.

[15] The Islamic Courts Union (ICU) was a coalition of Sharia courts that brought relative stability and order to parts of southern Somalia, particularly Mogadishu,

reshaping the landscape of violence in the country. Indeed, the military intervention by Ethiopian forces, backed by the United States, not only overthrew the Islamic Courts Union but also contributed to its fragmentation, facilitating the radicalisation and consolidation of certain groups, most notably Al-Shabaab (Nyadera et al. 2019).

Al-Shabaab's rise must be understood within the broader context of institutional weakness and political fragmentation. It initially formed around 2005 as a relatively small and poorly organised group but capitalising on the absence of effective central governance and on the deficiencies within the Somali security apparatus, it succeeded to expand its territorial control and influence (Mueller 2018; Nyadera et al. 2019). The group's expansion was further facilitated by external dynamics, as regional military interventions and climate-induced crises exacerbated socioeconomic grievances and created fertile ground for recruitment (Mueller 2018). In this sense, terrorism in Somalia is not an isolated phenomenon, on the contrary it is deeply rooted in the country's broader political economy of conflict.

Throughout time, Al-Shabaab evolved from a marginal actor into a dominant insurgent force, capable of administering territory and conducting large-scale operations. By the early 2010s, the group had significantly increased both the frequency and sophistication of its attacks, employing a diverse range of tactics from guerrilla warfare to conventional clashes and, increasingly, asymmetric strategies such as bombings and suicide attacks (Mueller 2018). The adaptability of its tactics has allowed the organisation to remain resilient despite sustained military pressure, adjusting its strategies in response to shifting political and territorial conditions.

Even though – on an ideological level – Al-Shabaab is commonly associated with Salafist interpretations of Islam, its success and perdurance cannot be explained through religious motivations alone. Indeed, the group

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before being defeated by the Transitional Federal Government and Ethiopian forces later in 2006.

has demonstrated a pragmatic approach to mobilisation by adopting nationalist rhetoric and exploiting local grievances, rather than relying solely on ideological appeals, in order to broaden its support base (Mueller 2018). This highlights the importance of understanding terrorism in Somalia not only as an ideological phenomenon but also as a strategic and adaptive response to the opportunities created by state fragility, conflict, and climate-induced stressors.

Ultimately, the persistence of terrorism in Somalia reflects the broader challenges of state-building in a context where the state does not possess the monopoly over violence. Armed groups such as Al-Shabaab continue to compete with the government for legitimacy, control over resources and territories, reinforcing Somalia's framing as a weak or even failed state (Nyadera et al. 2019). Lastly, terrorism not only is a manifestation of state failure, but also a key factor sustaining ongoing instability, further complicating efforts to achieve long-lasting peace and security.

5.1.3. *Clan Violence*

Clan violence represents one of the most evident yet frequently misunderstood dimensions of political violence in Somalia. While often framed as the product of primordial divisions or persisting inter-clan rivalries, a growing body of literature emphasises that such interpretations are overly simplistic. Rather than being inherently conflictual, clan identities have been historically politicised and instrumentalised by political elites, transforming them into mechanisms for competition over power and resources (Mudane 2018).

The roots of contemporary clan violence can be traced to the authoritarian rule of Siad Barre (1969-1991), during which clan identities were deliberately manipulated to consolidate his power. The regime institutionalised divisions through practices of patronage, repression, and selective resource distribution, thereby rooting clannism within the political system (Mudane 2018; Ingiriis 2018). In this context, violence was not only directed by the state against its opponents but also structured in ways that

fostered mistrust and conflict between clans. This is why the eventual collapse of the regime in 1991 did not simply unleash pre-existing clan antagonisms. On the contrary, it exposed and intensified divisions that had been actively produced and exploited by the state itself.

Following the fall of the central government, clan-based violence rapidly became a dominant form of conflict, particularly in southern areas of Somalia. In the absence of a unifying authority, clans and sub-clans engaged in competitions over territory, resources, and political influence, leading to widespread fragmentation and insecurity (Ingiriis 2018). However, this form of violence differed significantly from state violence, as the latter had the capacity for large-scale, organised destruction, whereas clan violence was more decentralised, episodic, and often driven by cycles of retaliation and competition. As no single clan possessed the ability to establish full control over the state, such struggles resulted in a prolonged stalemate that further emphasised instability.

This perspective challenges the notion that clan identity itself is the root cause of conflict. Instead, it highlights how violence emerges when these identities are mobilised and instrumentalised for political and economic gain. Factors such as deprivation of basic needs, lack of political participation, and weak governance structures have further reinforced these dynamics, creating conditions in which clan affiliation becomes a key means of accessing resources and security (Mudane 2018). In this sense, clan violence should be understood as part of a broader political economy of conflict, rather than as an isolated or purely cultural or ethnic phenomenon.

The persistence of clan-based conflict has had profound consequences for Somalia's political development. It has contributed to the fragmentation of authority, the erosion of national cohesion, and the perpetuation of a system in which violence remains a central tool of political negotiation. At the same time, the legacy of state-led manipulation of clan identities continues to shape contemporary patterns of conflict, illustrating how past governance practices can produce long-lasting and self-reinforcing cycles of violence.

Understanding clan violence in Somalia therefore requires moving beyond reductionist explanations and recognising its deeply political nature. It is not the existence of clan divisions per se, but their strategic use within a context of state fragility and competition for power, that has made them such a persistent driver of conflict.

5.2. *Climate change effects*

Climate change is another critical dimension of Somalia's fragility, acting both as a direct source of vulnerability and as a multiplier of existing socioeconomic risks and political violence. Globally, extreme weather events have increased in both frequency and intensity since the second half of the 20th century, and this trend is projected to increase throughout the 21st century (Maystadt and Ecker 2014). This pattern is particularly evident in the Horn of Africa, where rising temperatures, prolonged aridity combined with more erratic precipitation have contributed to increasingly severe and recurrent droughts. Somalia is especially exposed to these dynamics as it is characterised by a predominantly arid and semi-arid climate.

Although it increased in the past decades, drought is not a new phenomenon in Somalia. On the contrary, it is a recurring feature of the country's climate system. However, the growing frequency, duration, and intensity of droughts have significantly amplified their impacts. For instance, the 2011 drought, which resulted from consecutive years of failed rainfall, was the most severe in over half a century. Even if less severe compared to the latter, more recent events – including the prolonged 2022 drought – have brought the country close to famine conditions (Maystadt and Ecker 2014; Ahmed and Ali 2024). These shocks have devastating consequences for food security, agricultural productivity, and livestock, leading to millions of people facing acute food insecurity and malnutrition. Given that a large proportion of the population depends on climate-sensitive sectors such as pastoralism and rainfed agriculture, the effects of drought are widespread and systemic (Ahmed and Ali 2024).

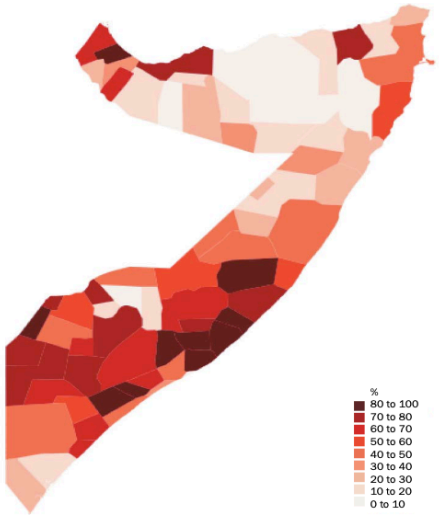


Figure 6: Exposure to climate shocks, household and exposed population
Source: World Bank Group 2026, 7

Somalia's vulnerability to climate change is further amplified by its structural characteristics. Limited arable land, low and variable rainfall, and heavy reliance on the Juba and Shabelle river systems limit agricultural production and increase dependence on fragile natural resources (World Bank Group 2026). At the same time, traditional coping mechanisms – such as community-based support networks – are increasingly insufficient in the face of large-scale and overlapping shocks affecting entire regions (Maystadt and Ecker 2014). As a result, households are frequently exposed to multiple and simultaneous crises, including drought, rising food prices, and loss of livestock, with a disproportionate effect on poorer and rural populations (World Bank Group 2026).

The socioeconomic impacts of climate shocks are profound. Periodic droughts have devastated rural livelihoods, contributed to widespread poverty, and triggered large-scale internal displacement. As a matter of fact, the 2016–2017 drought alone caused billions of dollars in losses, particularly in the livestock and agricultural sectors, which constitute the backbone of Somalia's economy (World Bank Group 2026). At the same time, food insecurity remains chronic, with significant portions of the population facing frequent and severe shortages (Ahmed and Ali 2024). These conditions not

only undermine development prospects but also erode resilience, leaving communities more and more vulnerable to expected crises in the future.

It is fundamental not to frame climate change in Somalia in isolation from the country's broader context of fragility, conflict, and weak governance. Climate shocks place immense burdens on already limited state capacity, revealing the government's inability to deliver essential services such as water, sanitation, and emergency assistance (World Bank Group 2026). In many regions – particularly in southern and central Somalia – weak state presence and limited territorial control further constrain effective responses, forcing communities to rely on informal networks or non-state actors for support and provision of services. Over time, this governance vacuum contributes to declining trust in state institutions and reinforces cycles of fragility.

Climate change also plays a significant role in shaping patterns of conflict and insecurity. By intensifying resource scarcity – particularly access to water and fertile land – climate shocks increase competition between communities, mostly along pastoralist and agricultural lines. In regions such as the Shabelle River basin, these tensions have frequently escalated into localised conflicts, especially during periods of drought (World Bank Group 2026). At the same time, competition over scarce resources creates opportunities for political elites to mobilise support along group lines, further deepening social divisions and undermining cohesion.

Moreover, climate-related vulnerabilities are actively exploited by non-state armed groups. In areas where state presence is limited, groups such as Al-Shabaab have leveraged control over critical resources – especially water sources – to strengthen their influence and legitimacy. By providing or restricting access to essential services, these actors position themselves as alternative governance providers and consequently entrench their authority within local communities (World Bank Group 2026). This dynamic highlights how climate change not only exacerbates existing vulnerabilities but also reshapes power relations within conflict-affected settings.

Overall, climate change acts as a "threat multiplier" in Somalia, amplifying existing risks associated with poverty, conflict, and weak governance. The convergence of environmental shocks and political instability undermines resilience, complicates recovery efforts, and contributes to a cycle of vulnerability that is difficult to break. Understanding these dynamics is essential for analysing broader patterns of insecurity and displacement, as well as for designing effective strategies to promote adaptation, resilience, and sustainable development.

5.3. *Development challenges*

Somalia's socioeconomic conditions are characterised by pervasive poverty, scarce economic performance, and structural underdevelopment, all of which reinforce the country's broader fragility. As a low-income economy, Somalia has experienced persistently low and volatile growth, as a resulting effect of conflict, climate vulnerability, limited access to financing, and structural constraints in the labour market, including low participation rates and widespread skills gaps (World Bank Group 2026). These factors have restrained the development of a stable and productive economic system, leaving large segments of the population in conditions of chronic vulnerability.

Poverty remains widespread across the country, impacting more than half of the population. Approximately 54% of Somalis live below the national poverty line, with significantly higher rates in rural areas (65%) compared to urban centres (46%) (World Bank Group 2026). These disparities reflect the strong dependence of rural communities on climate-sensitive sectors such as agriculture and pastoralism. At the same time, overall human development indicators remain among the lowest in the world with limited access to education and healthcare services which further reduce development prospects long-term. For instance, school enrolment rates are particularly low with only 25% of children attending primary education and just 15% progressing to secondary education (World Bank Group 2026).

Socioeconomic inequalities are further compounded by significant gender disparities. Women and girls face systematically worse outcomes across key indicators (e.g. education, health, and labour market participation). As a matter of fact, maternal and infant mortality rates are among the highest in the world, while Somalia's fertility rate remains exceptionally elevated, placing additional pressure on already strained household and public resources (World Bank Group 2026). These dynamics not only reflect structural inequalities but also contribute to the intergenerational reiteration of poverty and vulnerability.

The limited provision of infrastructure and basic services represents another critical constraint. Access to electricity, financial services, and water remains low, with only a minority of the population able to rely on formal systems (World Bank Group 2026). The economy is largely informal, with a relatively small share of the population engaged in salaried employment, especially among women. As a result, livelihoods are often insecure and dependent on subsistence activities or external sources of income, remaining heavily reliant on remittances and foreign aid.

Overall, these structural socioeconomic conditions play a central role in shaping vulnerability in Somalia. High levels of poverty, limited access to services, and weak economic opportunities not only constrain development but also interact with conflict and climate change to reinforce cycles of fragility. In this context, socioeconomic deprivation is not merely an outcome of instability but also a key driver of it, influencing patterns of insecurity, displacement, and long-term development trajectories.

5.4. *Migratory landscape in Somalia*

5.4.1. *Internally Displaced Persons*

Internal displacement represents one of the most significant and persistent features of human movement in Somalia. Driven by the combined effects of conflict, climate shocks, and structural fragility, millions of nationals have been forced to leave their homes. Conflict and climate crises have displaced over 3.5 million people, with more recent estimates indicating

approximately 4.1 million IDPs across the country (IOM 2026; World Bank Group 2026). Displacement is also a key driver of rapid urban growth, as affected populations move primarily from rural areas to urban centres in search of safety, livelihoods, and humanitarian assistance.

IDPs are disproportionately drawn from marginalised groups and minority clans, this exacerbates their vulnerability and limits access to protection and resources. A common experience is that of multiple displacements, which reflects the protracted and cyclical nature of crises impacting the country. The majority of displaced populations are concentrated in and around major cities such as Mogadishu, Baidoa, and Hargeisa, where over half of the totality of IDPs reside (World Bank Group 2026). However, living conditions remain extremely precarious: approximately 75% of IDPs inhabit informal settlements on the outskirts of urban areas, with limited access to water, sanitation, healthcare, education, and labour opportunities (World Bank Group 2026).

The demographic composition of displaced populations further highlights their vulnerability. Women and children represent over 70% of IDPs, exposing them to heightened risks of exploitation and gender-based violence. Between 2020 and 2024, the number of IDPs increased steadily from 3.09 million to 3.43 million, with displacement heavily concentrated in regions such as Banadir, Bay, Gedo, and Lower Juba (Somali National Bureau of Statistics 2025). These patterns reflect both environmental pressures and insecurity, as well as the concentration of humanitarian assistance in urban centres.

Age group	Male	Female	Total
0-4	233,625	285,875	519,500
5-11	279,300	341,700	621,000
12-17	170,550	208,450	379,000
18-59	827,400	1,011,600	1,839,000
60+	31,050	37,950	69,000
Total	**1,541,925**	**1,885,575**	**3,427,500**

Figure 7: IDP population by age group and sex in 2024

Source: Somali National Bureau of Statistics 2025, 21

5.4.2. *International departures*

Alongside internal displacement, Somalia experiences significant levels of international migration. The country functions simultaneously as a place of origin, transit, and destination, reflecting its complex migratory landscape. International departures have increased in recent years, with air travel serving as the primary exit route. Departures via airports rose from approximately 133,000 in 2020 to over 312,000 in 2024, indicating a steady upward trend despite temporary fluctuations due to data gaps (Somalia National Bureau of Statistics 2025).

Border type	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Airport	133,183	171,454	112,332	302,041	312,530
Sea	14,475	-	222	2,052	4,360
Land	22,692	15,954	6,776	16,359	-
Total	**170,350**	**187,408**	**119,330**	**320,452**	**316,890**

Figure 8: International departures by border type between 2020 and 2024
Source: Somali National Bureau of Statistics 2025, 29

Other routes, such as land and sea, play a more limited but still relevant role. Sea departures remain relatively low, while land movements fluctuate depending on regional conditions and border dynamics. Overall, international mobility reflects both economic aspirations and forced migration dynamics, as individuals seek better livelihoods, security, or opportunities abroad.

5.4.3. *Remittances*

A significant feature of migration in Somalia is closely linked to the role of the diaspora and the relevance of remittances. Financial transfers from nationals abroad constitute a critical support for many households, sustaining daily needs such as food, housing, healthcare, and education. Beyond household-level support, remittances play a broader macroeconomic role by sustaining domestic consumption, providing foreign exchange, and contributing to economic stability in the absence of strong formal financial systems (Somalia National Bureau of Statistics 2025).

Years	Remittances
2020	1,642.00
2021	2,101.81
2022	2,150.85
2023	2,181.29
2024	2,720.01

Figure 9: Annual remittances from nationals abroad in USD

Source: Somali National Bureau of Statistics 2025, 32

The Somali diaspora remains a central pillar of the national economy. These transnational financial flows highlight the strong connections between migration and development, illustrating how mobility can serve as both a coping strategy and an economic resource in contexts of rooted fragility.

5.4.4. *Drivers of migration*

Migration dynamics in Somalia are shaped by a complex interplay of environmental degradation, economic insecurity, political instability, and protracted violence. Internal displacement, in particular, is primarily driven by recurrent droughts, floods, conflict, and insecurity.

While conflict has historically been a major driver, climate-related shocks have increasingly gained relevance, becoming the dominant driver for migration in the country. For instance, in 2023, approximately 653,000 people were displaced by conflict, compared to the 2.2 million displaced by climate shocks, such as flooding and drought (World Bank Group 2026).

The figure below highlights the multicausal nature of migration in Somalia, illustrating the key drivers of displacement between 2016 and 2023, alongside trends in conflict and climate-related shocks. As shown, conflict and climate shocks have been the primary drivers of migration during this period. While displacement caused by both factors has increased over time, the rise in climate-related displacement has been particularly steep in recent years, exhibiting an exponential growth pattern compared to the relatively stable trend associated with conflict.

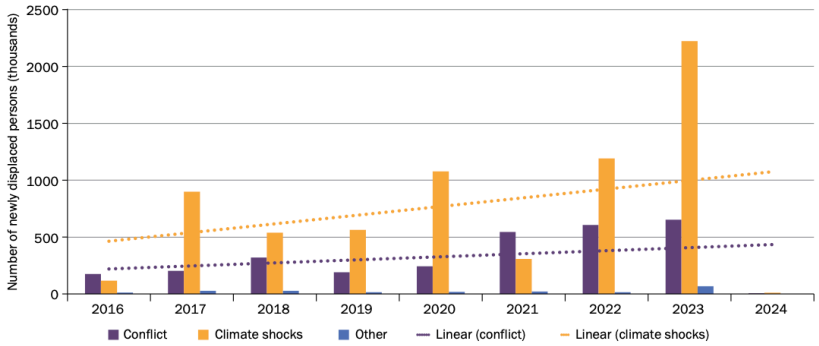


Figure 10: Trends and drivers of displaced people between 2016 and 2023

Source: World Bank Group 2026, 9

Also, as assessed previously in this chapter, drivers for migration not only coexist but they overlap and reinforce one another. Climate change acts as a threat multiplier, intensifying resource scarcity, weakening state capacity, and exacerbating existing inequalities. This, in turn, exacerbates competition over land and water, increases intercommunal tensions, and contributes to cycles of violence and displacement. At the same time, structural factors such as poverty, lack of economic opportunities, and limited access to services further incentivise migration, both internally and across borders.

Indeed, these drivers rarely operate in isolation. Instead, they interact in mutually reinforcing ways, producing complex and multidimensional migration patterns. For instance, displaced populations often move to urban peripheries, where they remain exposed to environmental risks and face limited prospects for integration. As a result, migration in Somalia is not only a response to immediate shocks but also a structural feature of the country's broader fragility, shaped by the intersection of conflict, climate change, and underdevelopment.

CHAPTER 6
CASE STUDY: ERITREA

This chapter offers another case study, this time of Eritrea, to better comprehend the multifaceted dynamics analysed in the previous chapters and to grasp the peculiarity of each country's migratory phenomena. Eritrea represents a particularly complex and illustrative case, where multiple and overlapping drivers of migration interact in mutually reinforcing ways. Indeed, institutionalised coercion, economic isolation, and severe state repression do not operate in isolation. On the contrary, they converge within a highly militarised political and social context, profoundly shaping migratory patterns of Eritrean nationals.

Besides being one of the world's most politically closed societies and widely referred to as a prison state by human rights organisations (e.g. Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch) as well as by the United Nations, Eritrea is characterised by the interaction between extreme human rights vulnerability, institutionalised surveillance, and deep structural and socio-economic fragility. As reported by international bodies, the country suffers from widespread economic stagnation, alongside some of the world's most restrictive human development conditions (Abraha 2004; Tessema 2009). Three decades of post-independence autocracy, a totalising government presence, an unconstitutional governance framework, and a pervasive planned economy have contributed to a rigid social fabric and ongoing systemic instability (Abraha 2019; Ogbazghi 2011). These structural challenges are further exacerbated by an open-ended national service system and a permanent state of emergency, resulting in ongoing contestation over personal freedoms, civic rights, and political authority (Bozzini 2011; Kibreab 2014).

Crucially, this total absorption of society by the state has earned Eritrea a consistent ranking among the most hyper-militarised countries in the world, frequently leading global indices in terms of military expenditure as a

percentage of GDP and the proportion of the population currently under arms. This systemic militarisation is further compounded by critical development issues, most notably the deliberate dismantling and legal suppression of the domestic private sector by party-owned monopolies, alongside a catastrophic brain drain and human capital flight that has hollowed out the civil service and public administration (Tessema 2009). Parallel to these institutional stressors, the country faces persistent environmental shocks and severe aridity trends that systematically destabilise traditional, rain-fed rural subsistence (Billi 2022; Measho et al. 2019). When agricultural livelihoods collapse under recurring droughts, the lack of viable domestic options leaves the youth with virtually no choice but to enter the state's totalising military apparatus or flee the country (Belloni and Cole 2016; Kibreab 2013).

6.1. *State repression and political violence*

Political violence and state repression in Eritrea are the outcomes of a highly centralised and hyper-militarised governance system that emerged from a protracted history of conflict. Differently from contexts characterised by state collapse, fragmentation of central authority, and competition among non-state actors, Eritrea represents an extreme reiteration of state consolidation, where political power is preserved through a pervasive use of a tightly coordinated system that coerces its citizens (Ogbazghi 2011; Pool 2001). Following its independence, the high hopes held by Eritreans inside the country and within the diaspora for a democratic transition from military despotism to a constitutional framework ultimately failed to concretise (Pool 2001; Hirt and Mohammad 2013). Instead, the contemporary political landscape has regressed into a dictatorial system not only lacking an institutional constitutional framework but organised strictly around a cult of personality surrounding President Isaias Afewerki and a power structure that integrates the military with to the country’s single political party – namely the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ) (Ogbazghi 2011; Hirt 2015).

Within this autocracy, political institutions designed to simulate democratic governance function are merely an illusion, as the PFDJ operates to legitimise and execute the president's extensive social mobilisation policies by appealing to nationalistic pride and symbols of national unity (Hirt and Mohammad 2013). As a matter of fact, power remains totalising and concentrated. President Afewerki – as Head of State, Chairman of the National Parliament, Commander-in-Chief of the Army, and Chancellor of the University of Asmara – personally appoints cabinet ministers, military commanders, and judges, ensuring almost total control over most facets of national life (Ogbazghi 2011). To insulate this regime from external scrutiny and repress political pluralism, the state is profoundly distrustful of its own population, severely limiting domestic civil society, strictly monitoring local organisations, and heavily restricting the mobility of tourists, foreign journalists, and diplomats (Pool 2001; Hirt 2015).

The primary mechanism for maintaining this despotic modality of governance is a system of perpetual military mobilisation and domestic surveillance (Bozzini 2011; Kibreab 2014). Inheriting a socio-economic scenario devastated by three decades of guerrilla warfare, reconstruction efforts were centralised around the Warsay Ykäälo Development Campaign (WYDC), which integrated indefinite mandatory National Service conscription (Bozzini 2011; Kibreab 2014). Initially established as a circumscribed civic duty, the duration of the National Service has since been extended to an unlimited, indefinite period of time (Kibreab 2014). Because genuine demobilisation and release from national duty have been indefinitely postponed, many Eritreans have deserted and fled the country (Bozzini 2011; Hirt and Mohammad 2013). In response, the primary objective of the Eritrean military and state security has shifted toward targeting domestic individuals or social institutions perceived as threats to national security, systematically restricting desertion and draft objection (Bozzini 2011; Ogbazghi 2011).

To retain hundreds of thousands of conscripts within this system, the government has progressively strengthened its coercive measures and institutionalised a surveillance apparatus revolving around bureaucratic

tracking and physical barriers (Bozzini 2011). This network relies heavily on the production and distribution of compulsory state documentation – such as IDs and laissez-passer[16] travel permits – which must be presented at hundreds of checkpoints deployed throughout the national territory to restrict internal travel and prevent defection (Bozzini 2011). Although military attempts to strengthen control over conscripts have never culminated in an entirely efficient system of bureaucratic surveillance, the state successfully keeps hundreds of thousands of conscripts working in the National Service for many years (Bozzini 2011; Bozzini 2015).

Crucially, the efficacy of Eritrean state repression does not depend on technological perfection, but rather on the illusionary capacity that is projected, which produces psychological, social, and emotional anxieties produces (Bozzini 2011). The surveillance apparatus, through daily bureaucratic procedures and police interventions, generates a widespread feeling of insecurity, arbitrariness, and unpredictability (Bozzini 2011; Bozzini 2015). Conscripts and their families are subjected to severe psychological distress as they attempt to find patterns behind of the authorities' actions, evaluate the risks of bureaucratic encounters, or navigate the retaliatory measures enacted by the state against deserters' families (Bozzini 2015). This produces a pretence to surveillance where the strategic imagination of state power and efficiency shadows the actual logistical limits of its low-tech operations, fostering an environment of fearful anticipation, pervasive mistrust, and a diffuse phenomenon of state terror (Bozzini 2011; Bozzini 2015).

Ultimately, this climate of state terror and governance by fear is not contained within national borders as it extends transitionally, characterising diaspora experience. This leads international agencies and media to

[16] Laissez-passer is primarily used as an emergency passport or temporary travel document issued by governments or international organizations to allow individuals –including diplomats, humanitarian workers, or stateless persons – to travel when they are unable to obtain a standard passport.

characterise Eritrea as a "prison state" (Bozzini 2015). The pervasive anxieties engineered by the regime affect the thousands of Eritreans who have fled the country, who continue to expect state monitoring abroad and fear domestic reprisal due to the rumoured presence of state spies reporting back to the government from within diaspora communities (Bozzini 2011; Bozzini 2015). State repression and political violence in Eritrea have therefore evolved into self-reinforcing dynamics: the erosion of established behavioural norms and the institutionalisation of systematic coercion have dragged the nation into a perpetual cycle of war, poverty, and backwardness, transforming the state from a promising forefront of democratic transition into the principal source of instability for its own population (Ogbazghi 2011).

6.1.1. *The legacy of independence and authorisation rule*

The contemporary political architecture of Eritrea fundamentally draws back to its historical path as a recently constituted African state, emerging from a thirty-year liberation struggle against Ethiopian rule (Bozzini 2011; Bozzini 2015). Eritrea achieved independence in 1991 and subsequently gained juridical statehood in 1993, after an extended period of guerrilla warfare that deeply fractured its socio-economic fabric and simultaneously forged a powerful, highly centralised liberation front – namely the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) (Bozzini 2011; Bozzini 2015; Muller 2012). During the liberation era, the EPLF was remarkably successful in designing an Eritrean nation (Müller 2012). By implementing a specific interpretation of history and producing traditions that framed "Eritreanness" as a unique, distinct identity, the movement managed to bridge and overcome deep-seated divisions within a highly diverse, multi-ethnic, and multi-religious society (Müller 2012). This foundational identity was explicitly constructed around core pillars of national unity, collective sacrifice, and strict economic and political self-reliance (Müller 2012).

In the immediate aftermath of independence, the newly established state strongly reflected the ideas and structures of its wartime architect (i.e, the EPLF) (Müller 2012). Despite the high hopes of Eritrean nationals, the

transition from rebel governance to formal statehood did not result in democratisation. On the contrary, state consolidation reiterated the exact dynamics of mobilisation, centralised resource control, and coercion that had characterised the EPLF's wartime operations (Müller 2012). Leading EPLF cadres directly assumed key positions across government ministries and state bureaucracies, embedding the liberation movement's institutional culture directly into the apparatus of civil governance (Müller 2012). Initially, the regime gained political support by promising post-war recovery and development, which until 1998 led successful outcomes such as rebuilding devastated infrastructure, stimulating economic growth, and expanding basic social services (Müller 2012). However, for the ruling elite, these material achievements remained secondary to the ideological preservation of national unity and self-sacrifice as outlined in the movement's national charter (Müller 2012).

This early phase of post-war reconstruction and tentative state-building was abruptly disrupted by the outbreak of the Ethio-Eritrean conflict from 1998 to 2000 (Bozzini 2015), rooted in unresolved border demarcation issues inherited from the colonial era – most notably the border town of Badme – as well as escalating economic and political frictions that emerged in the aftermath of Eritrea's independence. The return to active warfare served as a critical turning point, fundamentally altering the trajectory of Eritrean governance. Following the ceasefire, President Isaias Afewerki indefinitely suspended planned democratic reforms, cancelled forthcoming constitutional implementations, and executed a severe political purge of potential contenders and dissenting voices within the ruling party (Bozzini 2015). This consolidation led to the entrenchment of an authoritarian regime based on a tightly bound nexus of the government, the military, and the People's Front for Democracy and Justice – the political incarnation of the EPLF formed in 1994, which remains the sole legally allowed political party in Eritrea (Bozzini 2011; Bozzini 2015). To maintain total hegemony, this regime systematically minimised the influence of both the private sector and

international donor agencies, instead engineering a strictly controlled planned economy (Bozzini 2015).

The legacy of "the struggle" continues to actively dictate the domestic policies of the post-independence state, as the leadership seeks to systematically reproduce the rigid discipline, obedience, and self-sacrifice of the guerrilla fighter era within a generation that did not experience the war firsthand (Bozzini 2011; Müller 2012). Consequently, the nation's youth have become the primary targets of pervasive social mobilisation and indoctrination programs designed to forcefully socialise them into this culture of perpetual sacrifice (Müller 2012). Within this political framework, the ruling EPLF/PFDJ elite views coercion as an entirely viable and necessary political tool to deploy whenever its institutional legitimacy or narrative hegemony is questioned (Müller 2012). Any individual or group that challenges the state's monolithic historical narrative or critiques its mobilisation strategies is immediately constructed as an existential threat to the survival of the Eritrean nation and labelled a traitor (Müller 2012). Through these historical mechanisms of wartime mobilisation and post-war political repression, the revolutionary legacy was successfully exploited to legitimise a permanent state of emergency and an enduring system of authoritarian rule.

6.1.2. *The National Service System*

The cornerstone of modern state-engineered control and the primary instrument for the complete militarisation of Eritrean society is the open-ended Eritrean National Service (ENS) system. While initially introduced under Proclamation No. 11/1991, the program was not originally conceived as universal, on the contrary it targeted only a limited segment of the population – particularly unemployed youth – and provided exemptions for several societal categories (Kibreab 2014).

However, this framework was fundamentally altered with the introduction of Proclamation No. 82/1995, which abrogated the previous decree and established a universal mandate for the NS (Kibreab 2014). Under

the revised law, all Eritrean citizens – both men and women aged 18 to 50 – were required to participate in the National Service, with exemptions circumscribed to liberation veterans and individuals suffering from severe physical or mental infirmities (Bozzini 2011; Kibreab 2014). The state enforced this universal obligation rigidly, eliminating concessions for gender or family responsibilities and forcibly recruiting even conscientious objectors, such as Jehovah's Witnesses (Kibreab 2014). Explicitly designed to transmit the liberation era's culture of martyrdom onto new generations, the ENS positioned military discipline and systematic sacrifice as the core expectations of citizenship, treating any rejection of service as a betrayal of the nation (Müller 2012).

In its institutional structure, the ENS begins with a highly centralised phase of physical and ideological preparation before transitioning into long-term deployment. Conscripts are initially subjected to six months of rigorous military training at the Sawa Military Camp, followed by twelve months of compulsory development work under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Defence, regional administrations, or commercial firms owned by the PFDJ (Kibreab 2014). Throughout their time at Sawa and subsequent deployments, conscripts undergo intensive political socialisation and state indoctrination explicitly intended to instill unquestioning patriotism, sacrificial nationalism, and absolute obedience to state authority (Kibreab 2014).

Following the 1998–2000 border war with Ethiopia, the ENS evolved from a temporary civic duty into a permanent, totalising structural apparatus through its convergence with the Warsay Ykäälo Development Campaign, launched in May 2002 (Bozzini 2011; Kibreab 2014). Nominally established to mobilise the population for post-war reconstruction, infrastructure renovation, agricultural modernisation, and industrial development, the WYDC effectively transformed the National Service into the central labour supply for a highly centralised command economy (Bozzini 2011). Under the pretext of a protracted "no war, no peace" diplomatic impasse with Ethiopia, and utilizing Article 21 of the National Service proclamation – which grants authorities the power to extend active duty during times of general

mobilisation – the state indefinitely suspended demobilisation (Bozzini 2011; Kibreab 2014). Consequently, despite repeated state promises of release, National Service conscription became entirely open-ended, forcing hundreds of thousands of citizens into labour for over a decade (Bozzini 2015; Kibreab 2014).

Within the framework of the WYDC, the state distributes conscripts across all functional sectors of society based largely on educational stratification. Less educated conscripts are predominantly deployed directly into military units and trenches along the heavily fortified Ethiopian border, while those with stronger educational backgrounds are channelled into state bureaucracies, party offices, or civilian public service roles (Bozzini 2011). This system employs a vast army workforce across party-owned enterprises, state institutions, urban housing developments, construction projects, clinics, schools, and banks (Bozzini 2015; Kibreab 2014). Conscripts are assigned diverse roles, serving as soldiers, builders, teachers, nurses, clerks, or technical staff (Bozzini 2015; Kibreab 2014). Crucially, regardless of whether their day-to-day duties are military or strictly civilian, all conscripts remain legally classified as soldiers under the direct authority of the military apparatus and can be re-mobilised for combat operations at any moment (Bozzini 2011; Kibreab 2014).

This extensive mobilisation framework is maintained through a legal regime that deprive conscripts of fundamental rights (Bozzini 2015). Indeed, conscripts do not hold genuine professional responsibilities or labour rights within state institutions. Indeed, they are strictly prohibited from seeking alternative employment, securing land allocations, or accessing essential state services without explicit military authorisation (Bozzini 2011; Bozzini 2015). Furthermore, the ENS serves as a mechanism to divide society into two rigid legal categories: the small minority exempted from service and the vast majority forced to serve under severely restricted civil freedoms (Bozzini 2011). To prevent flight and maintain its workforce, the state denies conscripts the right to obtain official documents, secure passports, or legally

exit the country without state-issued travel permits (Bozzini 2011; Bozzini 2015).

To deter draft evasion and desertion, the Proclamation on National Service institutes severe legal and extrajudicial penalties. Individuals who attempt to avoid conscription or desert their posts are completely stripped of their remaining civic rights and routinely subjected to severe detention conditions, institutionalised torture, and physical abuse (Kibreab 2014). Despite these harsh coercive measures, the realisation that National Service had become an endless, uncompensated obligation triggered a massive wave of flight from the country (Bozzini 2011). Since the declaration of the WYDC in 2002, the open-ended nature of the ENS, combined with its devastating social and economic consequences on families, has emerged as the single most critical driver of forced migration from post-independence Eritrea (Kibreab 2014). Virtually the entire population of post-independence Eritrean asylum seekers and refugees consists of National Service deserters or draft evaders escaping this indefinite mobilisation (Kibreab 2014).

The severe conditions of the ENS have attracted substantial international scrutiny regarding its alignment with global human rights standards. The United Nations Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in Eritrea (COIE) formally concluded that the state's military and national service program violates the international prohibition against slavery (Palacios-Arapiles 2021).

6.1.3. *Border disputes and regional militarisation*

The totalising securitisation of the post-independence state is inextricably linked to regional geopolitical volatility, specifically marked by unresolved territorial disputes and a broader trajectory of regional militarisation. The structural catalyst for this permanent mobilisation was the devastating 1998–2000 border war between Eritrea and Ethiopia, an event that fundamentally altered domestic political dynamics, consolidated state security architectures, and codified restrictive policies aimed at suppressing both political dissent and emigration (Müller 2012). From its inception, the conflict was explicitly

framed around conflicting definitions of sovereignty and border delimitation (Péninou 1998). The Eritrean state claimed the historical colonial boundaries established through international treaties following the defeat of Italian forces at the Battle of Adwa in 1896 (Péninou 1998). Conversely, the Ethiopian state and the leadership of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) promoted alternative territorial assertions based on administrative maps produced within Tigray that incorporated fertile agricultural zones Eritrea regarded as its sovereign territory (Péninou 1998).

The structural roots of this border conflict extend deeper into the liberation struggle era, during which the EPLF and the TPLF maintained a highly fractious alliance against the Marxist Derg regime, characterised by profound disagreements regarding territorial control, ideological orientation, and tactical priorities (Puddu 2018). While Eritrea consistently insisted on the absolute sanctity of inherited colonial borders, the Ethiopian leadership favoured principles of effective occupation and ethno-regional self-determination (Puddu 2018). These latent historical frictions were further intensified in 1997 by acute economic tensions following Eritrea's introduction of its independent currency – the Nakfa – which disrupted regional trade and monetary arrangements with Ethiopia (Puddu 2018).

Following the conclusion of active hostilities and the signing of the 2000 Algiers Agreement, an independent international arbitration court – the Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission – formally awarded the contested flashpoint town of Badme to Eritrea (Puddu 2018). However, Ethiopia's subsequent refusal to implement the ruling without preconditions triggered a protracted, decades-long "no war, no peace" diplomatic and military stalemate (Puddu 2018). This perpetual impasse was highly instrumentalised by both regimes for domestic political consolidation. The government in Asmara exploited the unresolved border demarcation to systematically justify indefinite military conscription, maintain an oddly large standing army, and permanently eliminate domestic political pluralism (Müller 2012; Puddu 2018). The state routinely vindicated this hyper-securitisation by pointing to

ongoing tensions with Ethiopia and accusing the international community of failing to enforce the binding Algiers arbitration (Müller 2012).

Crucially, this border dispute was not an isolated event as it formed part of a broader pattern of regional conflicts with Sudan, Djibouti, Yemen, and Ethiopia, which President Isaias Afewerki systematically leveraged to maintain an absolute grip on domestic power (Ogbazghi 2011). Under the pretext of the post-2000 Ethiopian threat, the regime institutionalised an undeclared, ever-lasting state of emergency (Ogbazghi 2011). During this critical juncture, the government shut down the independent free press, arrested prominent journalists, and executed a severe clampdown on all internal dissent, most notably through the extrajudicial detention of the G-15 – a group of high-ranking reformists EPLF veterans who had publicly called for constitutional implementation and democratic accountability (Ogbazghi 2011).

6.2. *Climate change effects*

While institutional coercion, political repression, and the open-ended National Service remain the primary and direct drivers of displacement in Eritrea, environmental shocks act as a significant underlying structural strain on the population. Eritrea is located in an ecologically fragile region where an arid and semi-arid climate dominates, ranking the country among the world's most vulnerable states to the impacts of global climate change (Eritrea 2025; Ghebrezgabher and Yang 2018). These environmental hazards function as background threat multipliers by interacting with deep-seated institutional fragilities and a highly climate-sensitive economy, forming an interconnected pattern of severe land degradation, critical biodiversity loss, and compounding socio-economic vulnerabilities (Eritrea 2025).

The structural baseline of this vulnerability is rooted in Eritrea's peculiar physiography[17] and topography[18], which produce highly variable temperature and rainfall profiles over remarkably short distances (Billi 2022). The country's landmass ranges from sea-level lowlands along the western border and the 1,083-kilometre coastline, up to the central highlands and the Asmara plateau situated at elevations between 2,000 and 2,400 meters above sea level, before dropping into the Danakil Depression at an extreme low point of 75 meters below sea level (Billi, 2022). In light of such diversity, temperatures vary drastically by region: the central highlands maintain a milder annual mean of 16-21°C, whereas the scorching western and eastern lowlands endure average annual temperatures of 25-30°C, with coastal peaks regularly exceeding 40°C (Billi 2022; Debesai 2020; Eritrea 2025; Ghebrezgabher and Yang 2018). This dramatic relief dictates highly uneven and irregular rainfall patterns, dividing the country into a summer monsoon regime – from June to September – in the highlands and western lowlands that yields 400 to 700 mm of rain, and a winter regime – from October to March – along the eastern coastal lowlands that generates a sparse 50 to 200 mm (Billi 2022; Eritrea 2025).

Despite localised microclimates along the eastern escarpment, long-term meteorological analysis confirms that climate change is systematically eroding Eritrea's environmental baseline. Historical gridded data spanning more than a century reveal a permanent increase in mean temperatures nationwide, with a projection of an increase of 1.7°C over the next sixty years (Measho et al. 2019; Ghebrezgabher and Yang 2018). Moreover, long-term precipitation models demonstrate that Eritrea displays a distinct, unidirectional decreasing trend in annual rainfall, with nationwide average precipitation shrinking (Billi 2022; Measho et al. 2019). Consequently,

[17] Physiography refers to the branch of physical geography concerned with the systematic description of Earth's surface features, landforms, and natural landscapes.

[18] Topography is the study and representation of Earth's surface features, emphasising elevation, terrain, and physical landforms.

roughly 70% of Eritrea's total land area is now classified as hot and hyper-arid, pushing the country into advanced conditions of desertification and permanent water deficits (Billi 2022; Debesai 2020). This chronic desiccation has elevated drought to the most pervasive natural hazard in Eritrea, with extensive and nationwide growing-season droughts occurring in 2000, 2008, 2009, 2011, 2012, and 2015 (Measho et al. 2019). Furthermore, because the country is bounded by an extensive coastline, it remains vulnerable to accelerating sea-level rise (Billi 2022).

The immediate consequence of these shifting climate parameters is the destabilisation of rural livelihoods across the country, where approximately 80% of the predominantly rural and young population relies on traditional, low-input rain-fed agriculture and livestock husbandry for survival (Debesai 2020; Eritrea 2025). Because erratic rainfall and recurring droughts routinely depress crop yields, domestic harvests are structurally inadequate to meet the basic food security requirements of the population (Debesai 2020; Measho et al. 2019). This agricultural crisis is compounded by severe ecological degradation across the rural landscape, characterised by continuous deforestation, acute overgrazing, rapid soil erosion, and severe susceptibility to flooding when sudden, intense downpours occur (Billi 2022; Debesai 2020). According to empirical Livelihood Vulnerability Index (LVI) modeling, an overwhelming 88% of agricultural households are categorised as either vulnerable or highly vulnerable to climate shocks (Debesai 2020).

Ultimately, although the state's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC 3.0) framework aims to promote climate-resilient development, the reality for rural communities remains one of chronic ecological stress (Eritrea 2025). However, in the context of Eritrea's migratory landscape, climate change does not typically act as an isolated, direct catalyst for flight.

6.3. *Development challenges*

The broader migratory landscape of Eritrea cannot be fully understood without analysing the systemic development challenges that affect the national economy and limit domestic options for survival. While

environmental shocks erode rural subsistence, the structural foundation of Eritrea's underdevelopment is rooted in the state's political economy. Since gaining independence in 1993, despite initial promises and public macro-economic declarations claiming a commitment to a liberalised, private-sector-led market economy, the ruling PFDJ has systematically instituted a highly restrictive, state-controlled economic model (Abraha 2010; Abraha 2019). This approach functions as a centrally planned command economy that has prioritised an absolute doctrine of state-enforced self-reliance and total party control over all strategic economic nodes (Abraha 2010). By actively suppressing private enterprise and maintaining institutionalised coercion through its policies, the government has generated severe structural barriers, choked off economic growth, and triggered a massive flight of vital human capital (i.e. brain drain) (Abraha 2010; Tessema 2010).

The primary structural bottleneck to sustainable economic growth in Eritrea is the totalising dominance of state- and party-owned enterprises, which has effectively dismantled the domestic private sector (Abraha 2010). Following the formal demarcation of party and state assets in 1994, the PFDJ absorbed commercial firms established during the liberation struggle and seized remaining national financial and material resources (Abraha 2019). This consolidation allowed the ruling party to construct an exclusive, highly integrated business network that operates parallel to formal state institutions (Abraha 2019). PFDJ-controlled commercial clusters – most notably the Red Sea Trading Corporation (RSTC)[19] – completely dominate domestic commerce, shipping, import-export, and wholesale distribution (Abraha 2010; Abraha 2019). These party-owned monopolies operate with massive, non-market competitive advantages, enjoying unlimited access to state-backed financing, foreign exchange allocations, tax exemptions, and state-subsidised transport networks (Abraha 2019).

[19] The Red Sea Trading Corporation is a commercial enterprise established in 1984 to implement the PFDJ's development program. The corporation is mainly engaged in international trade and is regarded as the country's largest importing company.

Conversely, the independent private business sector is subjected to a deeply hostile institutional environment characterised by severe regulatory shortsightedness from the political leadership (Abraha 2010). Independent private operators are starved of essential operational resources due to the complete non-existence of an autonomous market economy network (Abraha 2010). The state actively crowds out private firms from the formal financial sector, deliberately engineering a series of visible and invisible barriers designed to weaken, decapitate, and ultimately eliminate independent private operators from the market (Abraha 2010; Abraha 2019). This systematic eradication of commercial competition is enforced through an arbitrary, complex, and highly unpredictable matrix of regulatory requirements and direct state interventions, including the sudden closure of private firms based on unproven allegations, the legal prohibition of holding foreign hard currencies, and the state-directed opening of parastatal businesses to forcefully dictate prices (Abraha 2010). While the government publicly blames the independent business community for being fundamentally incapable of flourishing, its own policies have choked off foreign and domestic investment, disrupted supply chains, and triggered severe shortages of basic commodities, an exponential cost of living, and hyperinflation (Abraha 2010; Abraha 2019).

Compounding the collapse of the private market is a catastrophic deficit of qualified human capital, driven by institutionalised repression and the open-ended national service policy. Sustainable development requires a robust baseline of specialized human capital, which has been severely lacking since independence due to the legacy of the thirty-year liberation war. To redress this deficit, the state partnered with international donors like the World Bank to launch expansive human resource initiatives, most notably the Eritrean Human Resource Development Project (EHRDP)[20], which

[20] The Eritrean Human Resource Development Project was a capacity-building initiative that sponsored Eritreans to study abroad to strengthen the country's civil service and education sector between 1998 and 2005.

sponsored hundreds of highly competitive domestic and overseas scholarships for advanced degree programs. While these efforts initially succeeded in modernising and uplifting the educational profile of the national civil service, the gains have been almost completely undone by severe, systemic "brain drain" and human capital flight. (Tessema 2010)

The public sector and civil service face a chronic, debilitating inability to attract, motivate, or retain the professional personnel necessary to manage a developing state apparatus. This critical retention crisis is illustrated by the fact that a staggering 64% of all Eritrean nationals awarded prestigious overseas scholarships actively chose not to return to their home country upon completing their studies. This massive flight of doctors, engineers, lecturers, and civil administrators is directly caused by deteriorating domestic economic conditions, a flagrant lack of good governance, widespread human rights violations, and persistent political instability. (Tessema 2010).

Furthermore, professionals who do remain within the country face a profoundly counterproductive domestic working environment (Tessema 2010). Highly trained specialists are routinely misutilised, subjected to rigid political interference, denied professional autonomy, and trapped under unattractive, non-livable compensation scales that fail to respond to the actual cost of living (Tessema 2010). Most critically, the state's reliance on the National Service allows it to conscript an unlimited amount of professional labour for indefinite periods (Tessema 2010). This converts highly educated youth into state property under a system of institutionalised coercion, turning potential professional careers into dead ends (Tessema 2010). Deprived of its most educated and dynamic demographic, Eritrea is locked in a structural development trap where economic stagnation and the lack of viable domestic livelihood options continuously reinforce the necessity of flight, feeding directly into the broader, self-perpetuating cycle of mass external migration (Abraha 2010; Tessema 2010).

6.4. *Migratory Landscape in Eritrea*

The historical expectation that Eritrea's hard-won independence in 1991 would prompt democratic transition and eliminate the structural factors driving nationals to seek international protection has failed to materialise (Kibreab 2013). Paradoxically, post-independence state consolidation has led to an extraordinary, continuous humanitarian exodus (Belloni and Cole 2016; Kibreab 2013). Despite a relatively small resident population, Eritrea has become a major country of origin for refugees globally. It is estimated that as much as one third of the total Eritrean population – which numbers roughly 6 million – currently lives abroad, driven by a persistent flight from one of the most repressive autocratic regimes in the world (Poole and Riggan 2025). This external migration has sustained a remarkably constant pace: in 2023 alone, approximately 71,600 Eritreans applied for asylum internationally, a figure corresponding to more than 2% of the country's entire domestic resident population (Poole and Riggan 2025). By late 2024, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) documented between 660,000 and 683,000 registered refugees and asylum seekers from Eritrea worldwide, meaning that approximately 18% of the country's estimated 3.8 million home population lives in forced exile (Human Rights Watch 2026; Poole and Riggan 2025).

6.4.1. *Drivers of flight*

The demographic profile of contemporary Eritrean migration reflects a targeted structural crisis that positions the state's militarised labour apparatus as the ultimate driver of displacement. During the 1961–1991 liberation war, refugees spanned all demographic age brackets, including multi-generational families and the elderly (Kibreab 2013). Starkly contrasting these figures, post-independence asylum flows are overwhelmingly dominated by single individuals aged between 15 and 40 (Belloni and Cole 2016; Kibreab 2013). This acute generational shift is a direct response to the open-ended nature of the National Service and the concurrent Warsay Ykäälo Development

Campaign, which disproportionately affect this specific age group (Belloni and Cole 2016; Kibreab 2013).

The ultimate cause of this massive migration is an interplay of rooted political authoritarianism, economic distress, and human rights violations. The universal and indefinite NS is the most notable driver of forced migration in post-independence Eritrea. (Kibreab 2014; Danish Immigration Service 2014). The system has effectively transformed from a civic recruiting device into a mechanism of mandatory forced labour, trapping most of the adult population in endless state service without an operational timeline for demobilisation (Bozzini 2015; Kibreab 2014). The reality that young citizens must spend their entire working lives in unpaid, compulsory government duty renders them completely unable to pursue independent life plans or meet basic social milestones (Kibreab 2013; Poole and Riggan 2025; Treiber 2013).

Furthermore, the NS enforces compliance through a brutal system of military supremacy and severe human rights violations. Any perceived draft evasion, desertion, or perceived objection exposes individuals – even children fleeing early to avoid future conscription – to harsh extrajudicial treatment, including arbitrary detention, systematic torture, and sexual violence (Kibreab 2013; Kibreab 2014; Poole and Riggan 2025; Treiber 2013).

At the household level, this totalising militarisation has caused deep socio-economic dislocation and family disintegration, as adults are kept away from their homes for decades (Belloni and Cole 2016). In Eritrea, where the majority of families subsist dangerously close to the margins, economic survival depends on diversifying household income by pooling resources from multiple members (Kibreab 2013). By conscripting several siblings simultaneously and providing them with non-livable allowances, the state effectively wipes out the domestic subsistence base, forcing many households into absolute poverty (Kibreab 2013).

This domestic economic implosion has created a structural dependency on external remittances (Belloni and Cole 2016; Kibreab 2013). Remittance income, which historically comprised between 26 and 38% of Eritrea's GDP,

operates as a major pull factor and resource pipeline that feeds an intense desire to emigrate among the youth (Belloni & Cole, 2016; Kibreab, 2013).

This migration loop is actively sustained by the diaspora, whose members finance the exorbitant bribes paid to corrupt military officers for safe domestic corridors and cover the smuggling fees required to navigate international escape routes (Kibreab 2013). The desire for family reunification, combined with the flight of children seeking to evade future conscription and targeted repression on religious minorities like Pentecostal Christians, further accelerates these flows (Kibreab 2013).

6.4.2. *Trajectories of Eritrean migrants*

Because the Eritrean state strictly forbids legal emigration and makes exit visas nearly impossible to obtain, the physical journey out of the country is extremely dangerous (Poole and Riggan 2025). Migrants are forced to use highly fluid, clandestine corridors, primarily choosing between crossing the Western border into Sudan or the Southern border into Ethiopia based on shifting border surveillance risks (Belloni and Cole 2016). For decades, the standard path involved traversing the Western lowlands north of Tessenei into Kassala, Sudan, or crossing directly into the Tigray region of Ethiopia (Belloni and Cole 2016; Treiber 2013).

Historically, the vast majority of these refugees remained within East Africa, with the largest concentrations settled in Ethiopia (nearly 180,000 as of 2024) and Sudan (around 150,100 as of 2024) (Poole and Riggan 2025). However, the regional protection space has contracted drastically, leaving Eritrean refugees caught in violent regional conflicts and forcing them into cycles of secondary displacement (Human Rights Watch 2026; Poole and Riggan 2025). The outbreak of full-scale war in Sudan turned a precarious asylum situation into an acute crisis, exposing Eritrean refugees to widespread abuses by warring factions, including severe sexual violence (Human Rights Watch 2026; Poole and Riggan 2025). Concurrently, the security climate in Ethiopia has turned deeply hostile (Poole and Riggan 2025). Since 2021, the Ethiopian government has systematically denied

Eritreans access to formal asylum procedures by suspending refugee status determinations, documentation issuance, and new claim registrations (Human Rights Watch 2026). Eritreans trapped in camps within the conflict-affected Amhara region have faced direct violence, forcing them to flee toward Addis Ababa, where Ethiopian security forces have subjected them to arbitrary mass arrests, extortion, and unlawful deportations back to Asmara (Human Rights Watch 2026).

For these reasons, from these initial borderlands, thousands continue onward via secondary transit routes: North through the Sahara Desert and Libya toward the Mediterranean Sea, through the Sinai Peninsula toward Israel, or along the Eastern route through Djibouti and Yemen toward Saudi Arabia and South Africa (Kibreab 2013; Poole and Riggan 2025).

6.4.3. *Diaspora and remittances*

The vulnerabilities of the migratory landscape are compounded by the authoritarian state's ability to project its coercive power across international borders. The PFDJ regime has engineered a sophisticated system of transnational surveillance and extraction to maintain a tight grip on its global diaspora (Human Rights Watch 2026; Poole and Riggan 2025). Operating through embassies and overseas party offices, the state exercises strict monopoly control over the distribution of national IDs, passports, and essential civil documentation (Poole and Riggan 2025). To access these documents, regularise their legal status in host countries, or travel onward, exiled Eritreans are forced to sign a formal letter of apology acknowledging their irregular departure and agree to pay a mandatory 2% transnational tax on their annual foreign income (Poole and Riggan 2025).

This extraterritorial extraction mechanism operates as a double-edged sword that enforces compliance both abroad and at home. If an emigrant refuses to pay the diaspora tax or engages in opposition politics, the state enacts swift domestic reprisals against their family members residing in Eritrea, including arbitrary imprisonment, heavy financial fines, and the

cancellation of business licenses or confiscation of land (Poole and Riggan 2025).

Paradoxically, the state relies heavily on the very exodus it seeks to deter. The PFDJ uses its embassies to organise investment conferences aimed at drawing diasporic capital into the country's stagnant economy, although investors routinely object to the severe lack of private sector protections and unpredictable regulatory risks (Belloni and Cole 2016). More importantly, the massive influx of informal remittances sent home by refugees operates as a core macroeconomic stabiliser (Belloni and Cole 2016). These financial inflows provide the impoverished regime with vital foreign currency reserves, effectively subsidising the uncompensated National Service apparatus and mitigating the total absence of a public safety net (Belloni and Cole 2016; Poole and Riggan 2025).

As a result, even as Western destination states implement highly restrictive policies, the structural conditions driving the outflow remain completely unchecked (Belloni and Cole 2016; Human Rights Watch 2026). Trapped within a self-perpetuating cycle where domestic environmental decay, economic mismanagement, and indefinite state conscription fuel mass flight, the Eritrean migratory landscape has solidified into a permanent structural feature of the Horn of Africa’s broader geopolitical fragility.

CHAPTER 7
ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION

While the previous chapters explored the academic literature on traditional categorisation of migration, and examined the conceptual notions surrounding regional dimensions of migration in the Horn of Africa, providing in-depth case studies of drivers and migratory landscape of Somalia and Eritrea, this analysis chapter serves as the definitive nexus putting the research components together to address the central research question: *How do regional and national migration frameworks in the Horn of Africa address mixed migration, and where do their limitations lie?* Indeed, this chapter moves beyond description to provide a structural analysis of pitfalls in current migration governance in the HoA. By bringing together theory, policy, and empirical evidence, it evaluates how frameworks developed by the African Union (AU), the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the Eastern African Community (EAC), and national governments address the notion of mixed migration in practice.

Using the three analytical pillars established in *Chapter 2* – the forced–voluntary continuum, the internal–international nexus, and the multi-causal mixed migration lens – the chapter argues that the key limitation of existing frameworks is their categorical rigidity. While migration in the Horn of Africa is fluid and driven by overlapping causes, governance systems remain rooted in static binaries and securitised, state-centred approaches, which fail to grasp the multi-causality of such phenomena.

7.1. *Gaps in policy and legal frameworks*

The structural governance of migration within and from the Horn of Africa takes place across a multi-layered architecture spanning between global compacts (i.e. the Global Compact on Refugees and the Global Compact for Migration), continental conventions (i.e. the Kampala Convention), and regional integration agreements (i.e. the Common Market

Protocol, the Regional Migration Policy Framework, and the Free Movement of Persons Protocol) *(see Chapter 4)*. Although deeply differing from one another, a leitmotiv behind all these legal and policy instruments is the over-reliance on dichotomous and rigid categorisation of human movement. Indeed, an analysis of these overlapping instruments reveals deep operational gaps when confronted with the empirical realities of human mobility in the Horn of Africa. As established in the conceptual foundations of this dissertation *(see Chapter 2)*, these deficiencies stem from a foundational misalignment: while the drivers of mobility in the HoA are characteristically multi-causal, intersecting, and fluid – making migration "mixed" – the legal structures designed to manage them remain static, institutionalised within separate systems, and bound to traditional definitions.

7.1.1 *Rigidity of binary categorisation*

At the core of international and national migration governance lies a persistent attachment to dichotomous classifications, most notably the distinction between forced and voluntary migration. This conceptual division serves as the primary operational criterion for determining legal status, distributing humanitarian resources, and setting a state's international protection obligations towards migrants. The archetypal forced migrant is legally codified through the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, which strictly require a "well-founded fear of being persecuted" based on specific identity, racial, or political indicators. On the contrary, more nuanced situations – individuals moving due to structural economic deprivation or advanced environmental decay – fail to fall into this definition and are relegated to the category of voluntary or economic migrants – namely individuals assumed to exercise full volition, agency, and free choice in their departure.

As argued in the theoretical framework *(see Chapter 2)* of this dissertation, this rigid dichotomy creates a severe protection grey zone within the context of the Horn of Africa. When evaluated through the forced-voluntary continuum (the first pillar of the analytical framework), volition is

rarely an all-or-nothing calculation, but in contexts where structural collapse, state fragility, and chronic climate degradation undermine local coping mechanisms, the abstract "choice to remain" is fundamentally eliminated. Indeed, if leaving their own country is the only viable option for migrants because of environmental distress, food insecurity, and poverty it cannot be considered as a purely voluntary choice in the same way as an Italian student moving to Denmark to study or find a better-paid job.

As Bakewell (2021) notes, the line between forced and voluntary migration is inherently blurred, and its analytical value is severely limited when capturing actual experiences. Similarly, Erdal and Oeppen (2020) and Thiollet et al. (2023) highlight that because global frameworks lack the elasticity to evaluate vulnerability along a more nuanced spectrum, individuals fleeing structural traps cannot gain access to legal protection pathways. By forcing heterogeneous populations and phenomena into singular, reductive legal boxes, the international, regional, and national regimes fail to accommodate the millions of individuals who occupy the spaces between convention refugees and labour migrants.

7.1.2. *The internal-international nexus*

A parallel operational gap manifests in how legal frameworks treat the spatial trajectories of mobile populations. Dominant policy responses consistently divide human mobility into entirely separate legal regimes based on whether an international border has been crossed. Internal displacement is governed continentally by progressive instruments such as the African Union's Kampala Convention, which places primary responsibility for protection and assistance on the domestic state apparatus. Cross-border movements, by contrast, immediately activate international refugee regimes or restrictive national border controls.

This separation ignores the internal-international nexus (the second pillar of the analytical framework). As Vullnetari (2020) emphasises, internal and international migrations should be perceived as conceptually interconnected, as they continuously co-exist contemporaneously or sequentially within the

same human experience. In practice, domestic displacement and international flight are rarely isolated events. On the contrary, they represent sequential stages of a unified migratory phenomenon.

This is highly visible in the empirical findings of this dissertation. As shown in the Somalia case study *(see Chapter 5)*, individuals forced from rural communities by localised violence or environmental shocks routinely relocate internally to urban peripheries or IDPs camps as an intermediate stepping stone before gathering the resources or networks required to cross an international border. Conversely, as demonstrated in the Eritrea case study *(see Chapter 6)*, the hyper-presence of state surveillance and strict domestic travel permits compress internal mobility, transforming flight immediately into a dangerous, clandestine international crossing. The first hubs for Eritrean migrants feeling the country are Sudan and Ethiopia, from which almost 80% of the people continue their journey to other countries in the region or overseas. This shows how human movement is rarely characterised by a big moving event, but it's rather a compound of shorter journeys within their country of origin and between countries.

By maintaining strict legal boundaries between internally displaced persons and refugees, contemporary governance structures create severe protection gaps, failing to recognise how vulnerabilities amalgamate across a migrant's continuous journey.

7.1.3. *Missing the multi-causality of realities*

The limitation of these rigid categories is further exacerbated by the multi-causality of drivers underpinning mixed migration in the Horn of Africa. As detailed in *Chapter 3*, political violence, conflict, environmental stress, and economic collapse do not function in isolation. On the contrary, they operate as heavily intertwined and mutually reinforcing phenomena. For instance, as observed by Álvaro and Carretero (2024), extreme weather events – erratic rainfalls and recurring droughts – act as severe threat multipliers, intensifying existing inter-communal competition over resource,

undermining agricultural livelihoods, and driving rapid urbanisation or cross-border flight.

Despite this clear empirical reality, global initiatives – such as the United Nations Global Compact for Migration and the Global Compact on Refugees – remain distinct instruments operating within separated normative structures. Utilising the multi-causal mixed migration lens (the third pillar of the analytical framework), this dissertation highlights how these divisions introduce significant policy friction. Because these global frameworks address conflict, climate, and economics as drivers operating alone, they lack the structural tools needed to protect individuals whose flight is triggered by an accumulation of these overlapping causes.

This friction directly supports what Thiollet et al. (2023) and Sharpe (2018) identify as a primary challenge surrounding the policy label of mixed migration. In an anti-immigration context, single-issue legal frameworks fail to capture the multi-causal reality of migration, and often inadvertently fuel populist rhetoric regarding fake refugees and justifies security-oriented exclusion.

7.1.4. *Continental progressiveness vs. national securitisation*

Finally, a profound structural tension exists between the progressive, rights-based aspirations of continental and sub-regional frameworks and the highly securitised execution of national migration policies. At the continental level, the African Union has articulated an expansive, development-oriented vision for mobility through Agenda 2063 – which promotes initiatives like the African Passport and the free movement of persons – and the Migration Policy Framework for Africa 2018–2030. At the sub-regional level, this progressive shift is mirrored in the Intergovernmental Authority on Development's Regional Migration Policy Framework and the landmark 2020 IGAD Free Movement of Persons Protocol.

However, because these supranational frameworks rely entirely on the voluntary political will of member states, their transformative elements are routinely neutralised on the ground. As analysed by Manga

(2023) and Ahimbisibwe and Nkiko (2025), the effectiveness of instruments like the MPFA and the IGAD Protocol is severely undermined by inconsistent national policy implementation, weak state capacity, and a primary political emphasis on security.

When translating these guidelines into national practice, states consistently opt for a selective containment logic. This is especially evident in the case of Eritrea *(see Chapter 6)*, where the state completely decouples itself from regional mobility goals, treating unauthorised emigration as treason, enforcing an open-ended National Service apparatus (Bozzini 2011; Kibreab 2014), and severely restricting exit options.

Consequently, as summarised in the regional overview, a pronounced divergence emerges: while regional rhetoric celebrates integration and human-centred migration management, national architectures are actively redesigned around exclusion, border containment, and the criminalisation of irregular migration. This persistent gap ensures that the protection space for mixed migration flows in the Horn of Africa continues to contract, leaving the most vulnerable populations exposed to structural violence and legal erasure.

7.2. *Comparative analysis: Somalia vs. Eritrea*

To critically evaluate the structural limitations of migration governance in the Horn of Africa, this section provides a comparative analysis of human mobility in Somalia and Eritrea, which have been explored separately in *Chapter 5* and *Chapter 6*. While both nations represent primary source countries for mixed migration flows in the region, each domestic landscape reflects a peculiar manifestation of structural fragility.

On one hand, Somalia embodies an extreme manifestation of state failure, central government's collapse, spread violence, varied conflicts, and severe environmental distress. On the other hand, Eritrea represents a hyper-centralised, authoritarian prison state where human mobility is strictly suppressed by a militarised governance apparatus. By juxtaposing these two divergent case studies against the three pillars of the dissertation's analytical

framework, this section demonstrates how different combinations of drivers produce structurally distinct, yet deeply interconnected, mixed migration realities.

7.2.1. *Empirical manifestations along the forced-voluntary continuum*

When evaluated through the lens of the forced-voluntary continuum, the migratory landscapes of Somalia and Eritrea reveal fundamentally different configurations of coercion, agency, and vulnerability.

In Somalia, the decision to migrate typically manifests as an accumulation of compounding, multi-causal drivers rather than a singular one. As detailed in *Chapter 5*, approximately 54% of the Somali population lives below the national poverty line, heavily relying on climate-sensitive agricultural and pastoral activities for survival. For a Somali household, the choice to move is triggered when localised armed conflict (e.g. Al-Shabaab incursions or inter-communal violence) intersects with systemic environmental shocks, such as the historic four-year drought followed by catastrophic flooding. The overlapping of these catalysts destroys rural livelihoods, turning what might traditionally be classified as an economic search for work into an existential survival strategy. Agency and constraint are therefore structurally intertwined: while individuals choose their final destinations and specific routes based on diasporic networks, the structural conditions in their home country leave them with inconsistent viable local alternatives to flight.

In contrast, the Eritrean migratory landscape represents an entirely different configuration along the forced-voluntary continuum, one driven almost exclusively by state-enforced, institutionalised coercion. As established in *Chapter 6*, the primary driver of the massive humanitarian exodus from Eritrea is the universal and open-ended National Service apparatus. This system strips conscripts of fundamental labour rights, prohibits independent employment, and traps the productive demographic in indefinite forced labour under absolute military totalitarianism. While Eritrea also faces advanced desertification, environmental degradation, and a

structural agricultural crisis affecting most of rural households, these stressors are subordinate to state violence. The choice to flee Eritrea is not a response to market failures or climate anomalies in isolation, but an explicit escape from state terror and the criminalisation of independent life planning.

7.2.2. *Operationalising the internal-international nexus*

The comparison between Somalia and Eritrea reveals a substantial difference in how the internal-international nexus shapes the physical and legal trajectories of mobile populations.

In Somalia, internal and international migrations are deeply interconnected, typically occurring as sequential stages of a continuous migratory trajectory. Systemic shocks force rural communities into internal displacement, driving rapid urbanisation as individuals migrate to informal settlements on the outskirts of major urban hubs like Mogadishu, Baidoa, and Hargeisa. These peri-urban IDPs camps – which host over 4.1 million individuals – function as structural transit zones. Within these precarious settings, internal displacement routinely acts as an intermediate launching pad. As vulnerabilities accumulate and local humanitarian assistance proves insufficient, individuals leverage family connections or mobilise diasporic financial remittances to transition from internal displacement to irregular international departures. The transition from an IDPs to an international asylum seeker is fluid and continuous.

Differently, in Eritrea, the internal-international nexus is artificially compressed and blockaded by the state. To prevent flight and maintain its conscript workforce, the regime enforces a strict domestic travel permit system, monitors internal checkpoints, and denies citizens the right to secure passports or official travel documentation. Consequently, the traditional intermediate stage of internal displacement is structurally minimised. Instead, the internal-international nexus manifests as an immediate, high-risk leap. Flight from the unliveable conditions of the National Service must bypass domestic channels entirely, transforming migration immediately into a highly dangerous, unauthorised cross-border escape.

While Somali migrants utilise internal displacement to gather resources for international journeys, Eritreans must undertake immediate, clandestine international crossings where any perceived draft evasion or unauthorised exit exposes them and their remaining family members to severe extrajudicial penalties.

7.2.3. *Heterogeneity of composition and motivation under the multi-causal lens*

Applying the multi-causal mixed migration lens exposes how the distinct institutional architectures of Somalia and Eritrea produce unique protection challenges along shared migratory corridors. Under this final pillar, mixed migration flows are understood to be mixed in both their demographic composition and their underlying motivations.

In the Somali context, the overlap of motivations is highly diffuse. Because the state lacks the capacity to provide security and services, populations travel along the same routes driven by different underlying causes. A single Somali flow contains individuals fleeing targeted political persecution by non-state armed actors, individuals displaced by total economic collapse in drought-affected regions, and pastoralists whose traditional migratory routes have been permanently disrupted by climate change. This high degree of multi-causality complicates the screening processes of regional protection frameworks, as the boundaries between refugee protection needs and economic survival strategies are substantially blurred.

In the Eritrean context, the multi-causal mixed migration lens highlights a more concentrated, state-centric configuration. Post-independence asylum flows from Eritrea are overwhelmingly dominated by single individuals aged between 15 and 40, a targeted demographic profile that directly corresponds to the age group which has to undergo the National Service. While these individuals are traveling along similar if not identical irregular routes as Somali migrants, their motivations are fundamentally anchored in escaping institutionalised human rights violations.

However, as Thiollet et al. (2023) and Sharpe (2018) claim, when these heterogeneous populations travel together within the same mixed flows, the underlying political specificities of their displacement are frequently erased by destination states. In highly securitised regional and global policy environments, the presence of multi-causal economic drivers within a shared flow is systematically leveraged by states to implement containment strategies, fuel populist hostility, and justify the collective exclusion of both Somali and Eritrean arrivals under the reductive label of irregular economic migrants.

7.2.4. *The labour-refugee policy bifurcation*

The structural protection gap is further reinforced by the fact that contemporary migration frameworks – at national, regional, and sub-regional levels – are almost exclusively designed around two highly separated, parallel policy lines: labour migration regularisation or refugee protection. Supranational instruments such as the East African Community Common Market Protocol or the IGAD Free Movement of Persons Protocol are explicitly tailored toward facilitating the orderly market integration of documented workers, professionals, and cross-border traders. Conversely, traditional asylum frameworks focus strictly on verifying localised political persecution under rigid international legal definitions. By prioritising these two distinct tracks, the regional governance architecture suffers from a structural blind spot, failing to comprehend mixed migration as a peculiar, overlapping phenomenon where economic survival and forced displacement are inherently intertwined.

Moreover, this institutional bifurcation results in a punitive operational paradox across the Horn of Africa. In nearly all national legislation and regional strategy papers, there is a unified, explicit emphasis stating that irregular migration must be strictly criminalised, combatted, and deterred to protect state sovereignty. However, while these frameworks are highly efficient at codifying punitive measures, border surveillance, and deportations against irregular entries, they offer zero legal or humanitarian

solutions for populations who are forced to flee their countries due to structural lack of viable alternatives – caused by the cumulative effects of climate decay, food insecurity, and state fragility – but completely fail to satisfy the rigid criteria required for convention refugee status. By aggressively criminalising the patterns of survival migration without providing alternative legal pathways or intermediary humanitarian statuses for non-convention refugees, national and regional architectures trap the Horn of Africa's most vulnerable mobile populations in a systemic cycle of illegality, state-sanctioned violence, and legal erasure.

7.3. *Implications for regional migration governance*

The divergent empirical realities of human mobility in Somalia and Eritrea, as detailed in the preceding comparative analysis, carry profound structural implications for the wider architecture of regional migration governance in the Horn of Africa. Migration management within this sub-region is primarily guided by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development and the African Union, which have increasingly advanced progressive, rights-based, and development-oriented legal frameworks *(see Chapter 4)*. However, when these supranational instruments are confronted with the fragmented, multi-layered, and complex reality of migratory phenomena in the region a severe operational disconnect emerges.

This section analyses how the structural specificities of these migratory flows systematically challenge the foundational assumptions of regional governance, leading to a contraction of regional protection spaces and exposing the deep limitations of regional integration initiatives.

7.3.1. *The operational fiction of the "uniform migrant"*

The first and most significant implication for regional governance is the complete breakdown of the assumption that mixed migration flows can be managed via a uniform, standardised policy response. Regional governance mechanisms – such as the IGAD Regional Migration Policy Framework – are fundamentally designed around the concept of establishing orderly,

predictable, and harmonised immigration procedures across member states. However, applying the multi-causal mixed migration lens reveals that the populations moving along the Horn of Africa's primary corridors do not possess uniform needs or motivations.

For instance, if we take into consideration the case studies of *Chapter 5* and *Chapter 6*, because the structural drivers in Somalia and Eritrea are so fundamentally distinct, they cannot be grasped and addressed by a singular regional policy approach. As a matter of fact, regional initiatives aimed at mitigating migration through "climate change adaptation" or "rural resilience funding" may generate operational relevance when addressing the environmental threat multipliers forcing pastoralist communities out of Somalia or fuelling inter-communal conflicts. However, such interventions miss the point when applied to the Eritrean exodus, where migration is driven not by market failures or environmental shocks in isolation, but by an explicit escape from state-enforced labour, open-ended military conscription, and political terror. By failing to account for this profound structural heterogeneity, which renders each case peculiar, regional governance architectures operate on a policy fiction, attempting to apply a standardised, developmental logic to populations fleeing entirely different forms of fragility.

7.3.2. *The contraction of protection space*

The failure of regional mechanisms to address the fluid, overlapping nature of contemporary flows has led to a dramatic contraction of the protection space for migrating and asylum-seeking populations within the Horn of Africa. When evaluated through the forced-voluntary continuum, it becomes evident that regional governance has failed to protect mobile populations as they navigate neighboring transit states. Due to the categorical rigidity of national asylum systems, which are heavily influenced by a global binary trap (Bakewell 2021; Thiollet et al. 2023), both Somali and Eritrean nationals are regularly misclassified by regional transit governments as irregular economic migrants.

This misclassification triggers severe secondary vulnerabilities along the migratory corridors. As mixed flows pass through regional hubs such as Sudan, Ethiopia, or Kenya, transit states increasingly bypass regional protection protocols in favor of highly securitised domestic responses. As highlighted by Sharpe (2018), in an environment dominated by an anti-immigration political consensus, the multi-causal drivers of migration are systematically leveraged by states to justify exclusionary border controls and migratory policies.

Consequently, Eritrean and Somali refugees frequently find themselves trapped in secondary cycles of state violence within transit countries – facing arbitrary detentions, the suspension of registration procedures, and unlawful deportations. Rather than functioning as a continuous safety net, the regional governance architecture effectively breaks under geopolitical pressure, leaving mobile populations legally abandoned and highly exposed to structural violence.

7.4. *Rethinking responses beyond the "binary trap"*

The analytical findings generated across this chapter demand an explicit paradigm shift in how human mobility is conceptualised, legally codified, and managed within the Horn of Africa. The persistent reliance on stiff, dichotomous, and anachronistic categories has proven to be an operational failure when confronted with the realities of contemporary mixed migration flows in the region. To address the protection grey zones that leave millions of mobile individuals in states of legal erasure and structural vulnerability, regional and national policymakers must dismantle the traditional binary architecture. Rethinking migration governance therefore requires moving toward a more elastic, integrated, and rights-based system of human-centred migration management. Grounded in the three analytical pillars of this dissertation, this final section outlines the structural parameters of this necessary shift.

7.4.1. Operationalising spectrum-based vulnerability assessment

The first step in moving beyond the binary trap is the formal institutionalisation of spectrum-based vulnerability assessments across regional transit and destination hubs. As established throughout this study, evaluating a migrant's legitimacy based on whether they possess a "well-founded fear of persecution" under the 1951 Refugee Convention is deeply inadequate as it fails to protect individuals who fall into more nuanced categories. As demonstrated throughout this dissertation, in the Horn of Africa volition is not an all-or-nothing calculation.

By applying the forced-voluntary continuum to policy design, regional bodies like IGAD must encourage member states to transition from status-based determination to vulnerability-based screening. This means that instead of attempting to instantly classify a newly arrived individual as either a "convention refugee" or an "irregular economic migrant", border and immigration authorities should evaluate the cumulative deprivation of options driving flight.

If an individual's local livelihood has been completely destroyed by the mutually reinforcing cycles of climate degradation, state fragility, and non-state violence – as seen in the Somali context – their movement must be treated with a high baseline of protection, regardless of whether a specific state actor targeted them for persecution. Legal frameworks must introduce more nuanced legal instruments that explicitly recognise the grey zones of the migration spectrum.

7.4.2. *Institutionalising the continuity of protection pathways*

Secondly, to eliminate the severe protection gaps that occur across spatial trajectories, migration governance architectures must be redesigned to recognise the structural continuity of human movement. Contemporary frameworks maintain an artificial and counterproductive legal wall between the governance of IDPs and cross-border asylum seekers.

Operationalising the internal-international nexus requires regional and international actors to synchronise these separate legal regimes. In practice,

because internal displacement in urban camps systematically function as an intermediate stepping stone toward international flight, protection pathways better be continuous rather than fragmented.

7.4.3. *Transitioning to multi-sectoral, coordinated frameworks*

Finally, addressing the structural complexity of mixed migration requires a complete departure from single-issue focused policymaking. The global division between the Global Compact on Refugees and the Global Compact for Migration is continually replicated at regional and national levels, resulting in separate, competing agencies handling conflict, climate development, and border enforcement.

Utilising the multi-causal mixed migration lens, this study demonstrates that because the drivers of migration are deeply intertwined, the institutional responses must be similarly operationalised. Regional governance can no longer afford to treat migration management as a standalone security or border-control issue.

Instead, migration policy must be formally mainstreamed into regional development plans, environmental adaptation strategies, and peacebuilding initiatives. For example, to address an exodus like that of Eritrea, where state coercion, economic isolation, and forced labour are completely locked together, a security-oriented border containment strategy will never succeed. It merely drives desperate individuals into highly dangerous, irregular smuggling networks.

Regional governance must pivot toward building multi-sectoral frameworks where rights-based integration mechanisms are backed by enforceable supranational standards. Only by aligning economic development, environmental resilience, and human rights enforcement within a single coordinated architecture can the Horn of Africa move past the performative containment logic of the past and build a sustainable protection space for mixed mobile populations.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation has critically examined the shortcomings of migration governance in the Horn of Africa, revealing a persistent mismatch between the realities of human mobility and the legal and policy frameworks designed to govern it. Through an analysis of migration drivers, governance structures, and the case studies of Somalia and Eritrea, the study has confirmed its central argument: the continued reliance on rigid categorisation between voluntary and forced migration, and between internal and international displacement, creates significant protection gaps for those whose movements do not comply to these conventional categories. In the Horn of Africa, mobility is rarely driven by a single factor. On the contrary, it emerges from the interaction of political instability, protracted armed conflicts, environmental stress, economic insecurity, and governance failures, producing complex patterns of movement that go beyond traditional legal classifications.

The findings presented in *Chapter 3* and *Chapter 4* demonstrate that migration governance in the region is characterised by fragmentation across multiple levels of authority. Although regional organisations such as the African Union and IGAD have increasingly embraced comprehensive and development-oriented approaches to migration, the implementation of these frameworks remains constrained by state-centric priorities and security-focused national policies. This tension is particularly evident in the cases of Somalia and Eritrea. In Somalia, prolonged state fragility, armed conflict, and recurring climate shocks have generated overlapping forms of displacement that blur the distinction between internal and cross-border movement. In Eritrea, authoritarian governance, indefinite National Service, and widespread political repression have produced large-scale emigration driven by a combination of coercive political conditions and severe socio-economic constraints. Together, these cases illustrate the inadequacy of existing governance frameworks in capturing the multidimensional nature of contemporary mobility.

Three overarching patterns emerge from this analysis. First, there is a growing divergence between the progressive aspirations of regional migration frameworks and the securitised approaches adopted by many states, resulting in a persistent implementation gap whereby commitments to free movement and rights-based mobility are subordinated to national priorities of border control, containment, and the criminalisation of irregular migration. Second, legal and policy systems continue to rely on rigid categorical distinctions that fail to reflect the complexity of migration experiences on the ground. Third, responsibilities for protection are increasingly delegated to regional and local actors that do not possess the institutional capacity or resources required to implement meaningful safeguards. As a result, many migrants and displaced persons fall into gaps between legal categories and governance mechanisms, leaving them exposed to exponential vulnerability and insecurity.

Addressing these shortcomings requires a fundamental shift in how migration is understood and governed. Rather than approaching migration primarily through the lens of border control and containment, policymakers must adopt more flexible and multidimensional frameworks that recognise the interconnected nature of contemporary displacement. Governance responses should be capable of addressing overlapping drivers of mobility while maintaining robust protection standards for those at risk. Only through the development of adaptive, integrated, and human-centred governance structures can policy responses begin to reflect the realities of migration in the Horn of Africa.

Beyond its regional focus, this dissertation contributes to wider debates within migration studies concerning the adequacy of traditional migration categories in an era of increasingly complex mobility. The Horn of Africa should not be regarded as an exceptional case, but rather as an example of broader global transformations shaping migration today. Across many regions of the world, conflict, environmental degradation, economic insecurity, and weak governance increasingly interact to generate movement that challenges conventional distinctions between refugees, economic

migrants, and internally displaced persons. The limitations identified in the Horn of Africa therefore reflect not only regional governance failures but also deeper structural tensions within the contemporary international migration regime.

These findings raise important questions about the continued suitability of governance systems built around categories developed in a different historical context. While the refugee protection regime established after the Second World War remains indispensable for safeguarding those fleeing persecution, the experiences of Somalia and Eritrea demonstrate that displacement today often results from the cumulative interaction of multiple forms of vulnerability rather than a single identifiable cause. As climate change accelerates, inequalities deepen, armed conflicts continue, and political instability persists in many parts of the world, the distinction between "forced" and "voluntary" migration is likely to become increasingly difficult to sustain in practice. The challenge for policymakers is therefore not to replace existing protection frameworks, but to adapt them in ways that recognise overlapping vulnerabilities while preserving established rights and protections.

The dissertation also underscores the need to move beyond reactive approaches to migration management and towards strategies centred on prevention, resilience, and long-term development. Effective migration governance cannot be limited to asylum procedures, return policies, or border enforcement. Instead, it requires sustained investment in conflict prevention, climate adaptation, livelihood creation, and institutional capacity-building across countries of origin, transit, and destination. The interconnected drivers of migration highlighted throughout this study demonstrate that mobility is fundamentally linked to broader issues of development, environmental governance, and human security.

Finally, this research points to several avenues for future study. Comparative analyses of mixed migration in other regions could help determine whether the patterns identified in the Horn of Africa are replicated elsewhere. Further research could also examine the practical implementation

of vulnerability-based protection mechanisms, the evolving legal status of climate-related displacement, and the capacity of regional organisations to bridge the gap between normative commitments and policy implementation. Such work would contribute to the development of governance frameworks that are more responsive to the realities of contemporary mobility.

In conclusion, the challenge facing migration governance in the Horn of Africa is not simply one of managing migration flows more effectively, but a challenge to the conceptual foundations upon which migration governance itself is based. As long as legal and policy frameworks continue to rely on binary distinctions that fail to capture the complexity of human mobility, substantial protection gaps will remain. Moving beyond these binaries is therefore not merely a matter of administrative reform but a necessary step towards building a migration governance system that is more coherent, equitable, and capable of responding to the realities of the twenty-first century.

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