



Migration Profile

DJIBOUTI

A. Executive Summary

Djibouti is in a strategic location on the Red Sea, at the gateway between the Suez Canal and the Arabian Sea, making the country a crossroads of cultures and peoples arriving from Africa, Asia, and especially Arabia. Once Djibouti became independent from France in 1977, despite internal and external tensions, to-date the country has been the most stable in the Horn of Africa. It hosts numerous migrants and refugees coming from neighbouring countries. International migration has been traditionally welcomed by the Djiboutian population. Mutual support and aid between local communities and migrants are common practises.

In recent years, Djibouti has experienced different migration flows, especially of people departing from the Horn of Africa to reach the Arabian Peninsula, and of returnees mainly going back to Ethiopia. Economic and political instabilities, as well as droughts in neighbouring countries led to a growing number of migrants in the region. Djibouti is a predominantly transit country, but it represents a destination place for people seeking refuge from violence, and for migrant workers attracted by many commercial activities taking place at Djibouti City's port. The harbour is the biggest financial resource and employment provider in the country.

The country is experiencing two main trends of internal migration. Firstly, there is the herders' migration in rural areas looking for water. Secondly, the migration of working-age people from rural to urban areas.

The capital city hosts 623,891 inhabitants, representing around 60% of the country's populationⁱ. Djibouti's GDP for 2020 stood at US\$3.384 billionⁱⁱ, and while its growth rate was 7.77% in 2019, it dropped to 0,5% in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemicⁱⁱⁱ, to come back to 5.1% in 2021^{iv}. Foreign direct investment (FDI) decelerated from a surplus of 13% of GDP in 2019 to a deficit of 9.2% in 2020^v. The inflation rate in 2020 remained stable at about 3.5%^{vi}.

B. Country Profile

I. Basic Information

Djibouti is located in the Horn of Africa. It is bordered by Eritrea to the north, the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden to the east, Ethiopia to the southwest, and Somaliland to the south. It has a

total surface area of 23,200 sq. km^{vii} with a population of 988,002 inhabitants^{viii}. Approximately 78% of the population lives in urban areas, mostly concentrated in Djibouti City^{ix}. The country is divided into five regions freely administered by the intermediary of Councillors elected by universal suffrage^x. The City of Djibouti, instead, has a special status and is governed by a council led by a president, a vice-president, and a deliberative assembly^{xi}.

The official languages of Djibouti are French and Arabic. The main ethnic groups are Somali (60%), Afar (35%), and others (5%, mostly Yemeni Arab, also French, Ethiopian, and Italian)^{xii}. Djiboutians are almost all Sunni Muslim (94%), while others (6%) - mainly foreign-born residents - are Shia Muslim, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Baha'i, and atheist^{xiii}.

II. International and Internal Migration

Djibouti has a hot and arid climate. This factor has led to the concentration of its people in the capital, Djibouti City, while the rest of the population is mainly composed of nomadic herders^{xiv}. Internal migration is a phenomenon affecting mostly the nomadic herders who travel around in search of food and water for their cattle^{xv}. Also, because of limited economic opportunities in rural areas, there is a growing number of young people moving out from the countryside into the capital city^{xvi}, and this migration flow is confirmed by the small percentage of people between the age of 16 and 30 living in the rural refugee camp of Ali Addeh and its host community. The country has very little industry, few natural resources,^{xvii} and less than 4% of arable land, making Djibouti highly dependent on food imports^{xviii}. According to the government, 48.2% of the working-age population are unemployed^{xix}, and 23% of Djiboutians live in extreme poverty^{xx}.

There are 119,700 international migrants in Djibouti^{xxi}, representing 12.1% of the total population^{xxii}. Transiting migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers mainly come from the Horn of Africa (Ethiopia, Somalia, and Kenya), and travel to Yemen and the Gulf States^{xxiii}. Because of its peculiar location at the crossroad connecting Europe, Asia, and Africa, the country has recently witnessed an increasing flow of migrants in transit. In June 2021, there were 11,462 movements reported at the Djibouti population flow monitoring points. 23% of them were registered in Obock, known as the eastern route from where migrants cross the Gulf of Aden to get to the Arabian Peninsula^{xxiv}. In some cases, migrants trying to reach Yemen from Obock are at great risk of being trafficked, kidnapped, or being held for ransom in Djibouti's neighbouring countries^{xxv}.

On the other hand, there is also a large movement of returnees to Ethiopia. Therefore, after reinstating border services in July 2020, the number of Ethiopians in Djibouti increased sharply from 504 movements detected in July 2020 to 5,487 in June 2021^{xxvi}. In addition, since May 2020 the COVID-19 restrictions in Yemen and Saudi Arabia forced more than 14,453 Ethiopians to return^{xxvii}. According to an estimation of the Ministry of Interior, around 127,000 migrants reside in Djibouti without documentation^{xxviii}, and many of them are economic migrants. In the informal sector, the most common jobs available are domestic work, masons, mechanics, guards, workers in the construction and IT sector, small businesses, and shops^{xxix}. High-skilled migrant workers in Djibouti are employed as university lecturers, teachers in private schools, specialized doctors, military bases, IGAD (Intergovernmental Authority on

Development in Eastern Africa) Secretariat, international organisations, NGOs, and embassy workers^{xxx}.

III. Emigration and Skilled Migration

Specific data regarding the number of Djiboutian emigrants and their destination countries is not available. Despite their harsh economic conditions, only a few Djiboutians emigrate, due to relatively low salaries in neighbouring countries and the general use of English, rather than French, for business purposes^{xxxi}. Together with national and international partners, the government has put in place programmes and agreements to facilitate the outbound of Djiboutian migrant workers. A pilot circular migration project has been implemented to send 50 local people to work in Canada, specialising in food processing^{xxxii}. Djibouti signed two bilateral labour agreements (BLA), one with Qatar and the other with Saudi Arabia to allow the expatriation of Djiboutian bus and truck drivers and domestic workers. Djibouti is also working on a BLA with Kuwait^{xxxiii}. In 2017 Djibouti received a remittance inflow of US \$69 million, which represented 3.3% of the national GDP^{xxxiv}.

There is no specific data about the number of highly skilled Djiboutian workers abroad, and one of the reasons is the fact that Djibouti lacks skilled labourers because of its generally low level of education. In fact, in 2019 the rate of primary school enrolment was just under 53%^{xxxv}. Some of them are sent to France for education purposes and choose to stay there after completing their studies, while others willing to work as teachers and nurses prefer Canada as their main destination^{xxxvi}. The 2021 human flight and brain drain in Africa indicates that Djibouti is below the world average of 5.25 index points, being only at 4.6^{xxxvii}.

IV. Forced Migrants (Internally Displaced Persons, Asylum Seekers, Refugees, and Climate Displaced Persons)

By August 31, 2021 there were in Djibouti an estimated 34,005 refugees and asylum seekers^{xxxviii}. The top countries of origin were Somalia (14,132) and Ethiopia (12,742). Other refugees came from Yemen (6,021), Eritrea (1,026), and other countries (84)^{xxxix}. 53% of them were male, and 47% female. 44% were between 0 and 17 years old, 52% between 19 and 59, and only 4% were more than 60 years old^{xl}.

Refugees enter Djibouti mainly via bus or boat; however, Ethiopians travel on foot, facing the risk of being trafficked, while crossing the desert surrounding Djibouti^{xli}. In the country, there are three refugee camps: Ali-Addeh, Holl-Holl, and Markazi, near Obock. The first two are located in the south of Djibouti and host primarily Somali and Ethiopian refugees, while the third camp is placed in the north, receiving mainly Yemeni refugees^{xlii}. Most registered refugees and asylum seekers live in these three camps and in urban areas, but there is no clear data about their exact number^{xliii}. Their living conditions are very difficult. In Markazi, for example, refugees live in tents, have thin sleeping mats, and need to keep away from snakes and scorpions often swarming in the camps; there is also a real concern about the recurrent sandstorms^{xliv}.

In 2018, Djibouti implemented a more inclusive approach to refugees, adopted the Global Compact on Refugees, and enacted the Djibouti Declaration on education for refugees, returnees, and host communities. These legal frameworks aimed at finding durable education solutions for refugees and host communities^{xlv}. Nevertheless, in 2020 68.4% of refugee children were still out of school. The lack of adequate school buildings, materials, and teachers did not allow them to reach the goals set by the Ministry of Education^{xlvi}.

Specific information on internal forced displacements in Djibouti is not available. The brief report provided by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs shows that this phenomenon is mainly due to weather-related disasters. In 2019, flash floods caused around 10,000 new internal displacements^{xlvii}. The most affected areas were Djibouti city, where an estimated 200,000 people were hit by the floods, as well as the towns of Arta, Damerjog, Goubet, and Tadjourah^{xlviii}. In 2020, Djibouti had 11 new IDPs because of floods that occurred countrywide^{xlix}. Recurrent droughts often cause the forced displacements of herders, while the COVID-19 pandemic has worsened the economic situation and the country's health system, restricting access to basic services and water in camps, as well as in rural and urban areas^l.

V. Victims of Human Trafficking

Djibouti is ranked tier 2 in the 2021 Trafficking in Person Report, as the country does not meet the minimum standard for the removal of human trafficking activities. Over the past five years, human trafficking in Djibouti exploited domestic and foreign victims, including adults and children. Traffickers often employ migrants in forced labour and sex trafficking going to destination countries via the eastern route. Other people on the move using this very route are also at risk of being trafficked, and this happens in other transit areas like Djibouti for people arriving from Yemen^{li}. In some cases, migrants who appeal to smugglers to assist them in crossing Djibouti to reach their destination country may be subjected to human trafficking or kidnapping^{lii}.

In Djibouti City, human traffickers exploit migrants and local children for sex (particularly along the Siesta Beach road), begging, and peddling^{liii}, but also for labour purposes in the construction sector and food services. The top countries of origin of these victims are Ethiopia, Yemen, India, Pakistan, and the Philippines.

The Djibouti's government offers formal identification and referral procedures to provide the identification of victims^{liv}. It also cooperates with international and civil organizations to provide appropriate services, such as dedicated hotlines, or to conduct screenings of migrants in transit^{lv}. In 2019, a locally-operated NGO opened the first 24-hour dormitory to properly host trafficking victims^{lvi}. In the same year, the Djiboutian government officially identified 33 potential cases of human trafficking, but no formal trafficking victim was singled out^{lvii}, and although trafficked victims were reported, their specific number was unknown^{lviii}. The officials' ability to recognise victims and to pursue investigations on trafficking crimes was prevented by resource and capacity limitations. Since 2017 the number of investigations and prosecutions of trafficking crimes by the Djibouti government decreased, and no convicted trafficker was registered. Furthermore, the government did not identify any formal victims of

human trafficking, and even if someone had been identified, that person received no special care or protection service^{lix}.

VI. National Legal Framework

Djibouti, only after adopting the New York Declaration on Refugees and Migrants in 2016, implemented a National Strategy on Migration. Mandated and coordinated by the Ministry of Interior, Decree No. 2016-148/PRE defines the government policies on migration^{lx}.

Through Decree 2017-410/PR/MI, Decree 2017-409/PR/MI, and Decree No. 2019-279/PR/MI^{lxi} a definition was applied to refugees and asylum seekers, their rights and obligations were established. The three decrees paved the way to the creation of competent agencies for their eligibility and management: the *Office National d'Assistance aux Réfugiés et Sinistrés*, the *Commission Nationale de Recours au statut de réfugié* and the *Commission Nationale d'Eligibilité au statut de réfugié*^{lxii}.

In December 2017, Djibouti ratified the Declaration on education for refugees, returnees, and host communities to enhance quality and inclusive education for refugee children and adults too. The Law against human trafficking was adopted in December 2007, the 2011 Law No. 111 regarding the Fight Against Terrorism and Other Serious Crimes prohibited sex trafficking and labour trafficking, while the 2016 Law No. 133 criminalized sex trafficking and labour trafficking^{lxiii}.

At the regional level, Djibouti is a party to the Common Market for East and Southern Africa (COMESA) and its protocols, promoting the freedom of movement of persons, goods, capitals, services, the right to residence, and establishment. Djibouti is a member of the 1996 Intergovernmental Authority on Development in Eastern Africa (IGAD), fostering regional cooperation and integration, the African Union (AU), the Arab League, and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation.

At the international level, Djibouti is a signatory to the 1951 Convention relating to the status of refugees and its 1967 Protocol. Djibouti also signed the 1969 AU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugees Problems in Africa, ratified the 1969 International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination, the 1990 International Convention on the Protection of the Right of All Migrants Workers and Their Families, to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Person Protocol, the 2000 Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants, and the 2009 African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa. Djibouti adopted the New York Declaration on Refugees and Migrants in September 2016 and signed the Global Compact on Migration and the Global Compact on Refugees in 2018.

VII. Main Actors

The State

The Ministry of Interior handles migration in Djibouti. A National Coordination Office for Migration was created, within the Ministry of Interior, to ensure the national coordination of

activities related to migration. The office is made up of an inter-ministerial committee including the Presidency, the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Budget, the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Defence. The secretariat of this office is overseen by a National Coordinator who proposes the national strategy on migration and serves as a framework for consultation and dialogue between members of the government and other non-governmental and international partners^{lxiv}.

Within the government, the following bodies deal with refugees: the *Office National d'Assistance aux Réfugiés et Sinistrés*, the *Commission Nationale de Recours au statut de réfugié*, the *Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale et de la Formation Professionnelle*, the *Ministère de la Santé* and the *Union Nationale des Femmes de Djibouti* work together with UNHCR in humanitarian and refugee-related issues.

The agency in charge for the determination of the refugee status is the *Commission Nationale d'Éligibilité au statut de réfugié* (CNE).

International Organisations

The two main international organisations focusing on migration in Djibouti are the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). IOM helped Djibouti in developing the first National Strategy for Migration. It also assists vulnerable migrants in the country, supports governmental institutions in their capacity building, and helps strengthen the link between migration and development.

UNHCR was instrumental for the new legislation on the protection of refugees and their integration in the Djiboutian society in the spectrum of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework. UNHCR also promotes programs aimed at facilitating access to education, rights and work for refugees and asylum seekers, the empowerment of refugees, and the strengthening of collaboration with the government.

The European Union promotes activities related to the provision of drinking water, the improvement of hygiene conditions, the promotion of socio-economic development, support to vulnerable groups, and building the capacity of the Djiboutian administration.

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) regulates labour migration and migrants' access to labour markets and decent work conditions.

The World Trade Organisation focuses its activity in the country on rural and urban development, social services, and governance.

The World Bank, UNICEF, the Global Partnership for Education, and the Islamic Development Bank are fundamental for the improvement of the education system and to promote the access of migrant and refugee children to school. The Danish Refugee Council, Caritas, the World Food Program, FAO, Red Cross, ActionAid International, International Aid Services, the Organisation of the United Nations for Science, Education and Culture, Action

Against Hunger, and the Japan International Cooperation are other important actors developing programs on behalf of migrants and refugees in Djibouti.

NGOs and Other Organisations

The Association for the Protection and Development of the Family (APEF) trains its members and employees on human rights of displaced persons, initiates programs for them, and provides community services in refugee camps. The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) prompted an agreement to harmonize remittance policies across the IGAD and promote technical support on topics related to migration, internally displaced persons, and refugees. The Hawa Society for Women is mainly involved in poverty reduction, focusing on the empowerment of women, training in new technologies, and strengthening NGO participation. The Organisation of Bender Djedid aims to facilitate the socio-economic development of the country, fight against poverty, and promote sustainable human development. The National Commission for Human Rights (CNDH) represents the political will of the Head of State to work for the promotion of human rights.

The Catholic Church

Djibouti is a predominantly Muslim country, where the Catholic Church does not have the right to openly and publicly evangelize. The Christian community is mainly made up of foreigners. Despite these national limitations, the local diocese located in Djibouti City is undertaking projects especially at a social level.

The Catholic Church's main activities in the country are carried out by Caritas Djibouti, which is involved in several projects focusing on street children and potential victims of human trafficking. Most of these children come from Ethiopia and live on the street in very difficult conditions^{lxv}. The Catholic agency provides clothes, food, training, and schooling, and also free medical care to the poorest migrants and Djiboutians in the Catholic Clinic. Caritas Djibouti has launched an environmental protection project, and specifically supports hinterland communities affected by droughts. It also helps Yemenis living in Djibouti, providing vocational training, micro-credits, and basic assistance. Caritas is also involved in taking care of the disabled by providing them with educational opportunities, through its initiative "School for Everyone"^{lxvi}. They train teachers and equip them with skills to teach disabled children, learning how to read and write.

The Consolata Missionaries (IMC) is a religious congregation present in Djibouti since 2004. It developed a project aimed at caring for children with disabilities, creating later on a state agency responsible for the care of people living with disabilities. In 2013, the Church also implemented an inclusive school for physically and mentally disabled children, and provided training to its teachers.

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