



Regional migration narratives: The case of East Africa

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Migration from and within the Horn of Africa (HoA) is complex. The complexity stems not only from the magnitude of outflows and drivers of that movement but also from the diversity of the movers as well as their place of origin and country of destination. The mobility of people from the HoA is increasingly characterized by the intra- and extra-regional nature of their movement within the continent and other regions in the Global South, mainly the Middle East. This presentation argues that despite the fact that the trans-Saharan-Mediterranean migration route is less significant for East African migrants, it remains the dominant narrative. This narrative is pronounced in many areas ranging from policy and politics to research and media as well as migration-related project interventions, which are often supported by the European Union or its member states. Irregular migration, especially through the northern route – from the HoA to Sudan, Libya to Italy, and beyond – is also dominating the migration discourse, such as through campaigns tackling the root cause, which is often assumed to be poverty. However, this movement can be attributed to a combination of factors, namely conflict, environmental change, the culture of migration, local and transnational social networks and limited pathways for legal migration options. Local migration narratives in Ethiopia and other countries in the region focus more on the securitization of the southern borders of the European Union and negative perceptions toward African migrants. Indeed, border securitization is also a concern among African countries, and intra-African migration is often negatively framed. However, this nuance is missing from the migration conversation. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic also contributed to this perception, as the region experienced massive-scale forced return flows, mainly from the Persian Gulf and other countries in Africa.