

Djibouti: Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling Networks

By Berihu Teweldebirhan Gebresilassie
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1. A Wider Problem

Global migration issues include human trafficking and migrant smuggling. Smuggling migrants encourages illegal immigration for financial gain, often under abusive and dangerous circumstances. Recruiting, transporting or incarcerating people for exploitation – often within the same nation – is human trafficking. Several factors contribute to both of these crimes, including poverty, violence, and a lack of development and distribution throughout the home country. Additionally, the legal migration routes may be very limited. The fight against human trafficking and migrant smuggling requires a global legal response, as well as sustained reform in the home countries.¹ The Palermo Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children ('Palermo Protocol') – which links organized crime, human rights, human trafficking and migrant smuggling – marks its twenty-fifth anniversary this year.² The emerging legal regime includes the Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime ('UNTOC') and the Protocol Against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air.³

East Africa is a complex region marked by resource conflicts, ethnic unrest, and territorial conflicts. Ethiopia and Somalia are currently fighting civil wars. Djibouti serves as a crucial transit point for migrants traveling from Ethiopia and Somalia to Yemen and Saudi Arabia. Human trafficking often involves coercion, deceit or force. But the country struggles to differentiate it from smuggling. Despite not convicting traffickers for seven consecutive years, Djibouti remains on Tier 3 of the United States' State Department's Trafficking in Persons Report. The Djibouti government has also not revised its national anti-trafficking plan or appointed relevant key committee members since 2022. Migrants, refugees and asylum seekers remain vulnerable. It is not uncommon for men to be forced into domestic service, construction or agricultural work – and for women and girls to be trafficked for sexual exploitation. Djibouti's role in mixed migration flows is necessarily tied to cross-border criminal networks.

This policy brief discusses human trafficking and smuggling networks in Djibouti as part of the East African region. It discusses some of the illegal activities that such networks involve, the harm they cause, and the measures Djibouti is and should be taking to combat them.

2. Human Trafficking and Smuggling Patterns in Djibouti

Crimes like smuggling migrants and trafficking people benefit from

East Africa's significant political, economic and security problems.⁴ Human trafficking and migrant smuggling generate vast amounts of money and fuels organized crime networks, while harming regular economies.⁵ Profits support other illicit activities, including drug trafficking, violent crime, corruption and poor governance. Instability, violence and disease are on the rise. Neither the sending nor the receiving countries can grow properly because of these social and economic problems. Smuggling and trafficking of migrants resembles in effect a vast conspiracy. Secret networks often operate during times of conflict, environmental crises and famine. As economies suffer and crime rises, trust in public institutions declines as criminals maximize profits, reinforcing social inequality.

Although a small country in the Horn of Africa, Djibouti has been a significant crossroads for people, commerce and ideas between East Africa and the Arabian Peninsula. The Afar Triangle and Depression are geographically linked to the Great Rift Valley of East Africa along which people have traversed for millennia.⁶ As a result of its strategic location along the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, the government has been able to form profitable alliances with global and regional powers. But the location – combined with porous borders and weak law enforcement – has also made trafficking and smuggling more prevalent. Smuggling networks are deeply embedded in Djibouti's history, economy and politics. Local entrepreneurs, social bandits, and network leaders manage these networks.⁷ Djibouti's political climate, characterized by authoritarianism and inequality, has influenced these networks, often making them a form of protest or resistance.⁸

Being part of the Eastern Migration Route, Djibouti serves as a transit hub for migrants and refugees, including between Ethiopia and Somalia (where smuggling overlaps with human trafficking) and from Somalia to Yemen.⁹ The journey through the Eastern Migration Route

⁴ Joceline Matto, *Causes of Illegal Immigrants and Their Impacts on Prosperity of East Africa Community (EAC)*, Ph.D. Dissertation, Institute of Accountancy Arusha (IAA), 2023, p. 38.

⁵ Tical George-Marius, "The Profound Impact of Organized Crime on the Global Economy", in *German International Journal of Modern Science*, 2024, vol. 91, p. 9.

⁶ Shivali Lawale and Talmiz Ahmad, "The Role of Small States in Power Contestations in the Horn of Africa: Case Study of Djibouti", in *Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies*, 2023, vol. 17, no. 4, pp. 325–340.

⁷ Abraham Ename Minko, "Assessing the Impacts of Regional Integration on Intra-Africa Trade, Migration Patterns, Land Use, and Sustainability: A Case Study of the East African Community", in *African Journal on Land Policy and Geospatial Sciences*, 2024, vol. 7, no. 5, pp. 1222–1223.

⁸ Samson Abebe Bezabeh, *Djibouti: A Political History*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder, 2023, p. 406.

⁹ Amina Saïd Chiré and Géraldine Pinaudt, "Djibouti, a Migratory Crossroads in the Red Sea Basin", in Meron Zeleke and Lahra Smith (eds.), *Af-*

¹ Bertrand G. Ramcharan, *The Protection Role and Jurisprudence of the United Nations Human Rights Council*, Brill Nijhoff, Leiden, 2022, p. 68.

² Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, 12 December 2000 (<https://www.legal-tools.org/doc/2a0ffe/>).

³ United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime, 12 December 2000 (<https://www.legal-tools.org/doc/33df9e/>); Protocol Against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, 12 December 2000 (<https://www.legal-tools.org/doc/k6561axi/>).

involves walking through the desolate northern regions, enduring harsh weather, and relying on smugglers.¹⁰ A major gathering place for migrants waiting to be transported to Yemen across the Gulf of Aden is the Obock region in Djibouti.

In 2023, 92,457 Ethiopian migrants arrived in Djibouti, marking a 32 per cent increase from the previous year.¹¹ In September 2023, 17,292 migratory movements were recorded at flow monitoring points, averaging 618 movements per day.¹² Most migration movements involved arrivals (45 per cent), transit to the Arabian Peninsula (41 per cent), transit within Djibouti (5 per cent), transit to Ethiopia (7 per cent), and departures (2 per cent).¹³ The number increased in December 2023: 29,636 migratory movements were recorded at flow monitoring points, marking a 29 per cent increase compared to November. The Obock region surge saw a 69 per cent increase in migration flows compared to November.

Migrant smuggling along the Ethiopia–Djibouti–Yemen corridor is a lucrative business, with prices depending on weather, time of year, boat availability, fuel prices and government activities. Due to cashless travel, smugglers can dematerialize their activities. It costs migrants between 60,000 and 100,000 Djiboutian francs (USD 330 to USD 550) to travel from Ethiopia to Saudi Arabia.¹⁴ In recent years, Djibouti has also become a popular destination for domestic workers, primarily from Ethiopia.¹⁵ There are now ‘bi-directional’ flows of irregular migration in Djibouti, with Ethiopians fleeing Yemen likely passing by Yemeni camps and settlements.¹⁶

Migration patterns are different in Ethiopia, Somalia, Eritrea and Yemen, where Ethiopia has the highest number of migrants.¹⁷ Djibouti’s migration situation is shaped by the instability in the region, the search for economic opportunities, and by environmental factors.¹⁸ Djiboutian authorities are also fighting migrant smuggling networks that facilitate mixed migration flows.

3. Ethiopian Afar Smugglers and Accomplices

Djibouti and Yemen both suffer from increasingly sophisticated and organized migrant-smuggling networks, with a variety of players.¹⁹ In Djibouti, the networks are dominated by Ethiopian smugglers, mostly from the Afar tribe due to geography, history and socio-politics. Ethio-

pian Afar smugglers and accomplices facilitate illegal trade and movement across borders. They exploit their knowledge of local geography to transport goods, people and contraband. Due to their extensive knowledge of the land and border crossings, the Afar people – who live in Ethiopia, Djibouti and Eritrea – have informal mobility based on family and cultural ties. Where formal employment is limited and state presence is weak, smuggling presents a profitable alternative. Kinship and trust play a very important role in smuggling operations. Using unofficial infrastructure, maintaining their reputation, controlling key migration routes, and navigating legal ambiguities, Afar smugglers attract more recruits from Ethiopia and Europe.²⁰ They challenge law enforcement and contribute to regional instability.²¹ Conflict, poor governance, social prestige, and economic despair drive their activities.

Due to increased irregular migration, Djiboutian authorities seek to monitor closely smuggling operations with ‘dematerialized’ payment methods.²² Trade between Ethiopia, Djibouti and Yemen is facilitated by hawala traders.²³ Weather, boat availability, fuel prices, and government activities affect the price of migrant smuggling in the Ethiopia–Djibouti–Yemen corridor.²⁴ Indirect participants include rural communities near the Ethiopian border who provide shelter for migrants and sell food, bottled water and SIM cards, resulting in a multi-million dollar migrant-smuggling industry along the Ethiopia–Djibouti–Yemen corridor.²⁵ Lack of effective enforcement, an inability to investigate sex- or labour-trafficking cases, and failure to fully operationalize the National Action Plan have plagued the nation.

Key actors in Djibouti include local facilitators, complicit officials, informal networks, criminal enterprises, and extremist groups like Al-Shabaab.²⁶ These networks cause loss of life, psychological trauma, economic exploitation, and undermine the rule of law, while posing risks to public health and regional stability. The Djiboutian government has made some efforts to address trafficking and smuggling, but enforcement remains weak as we shall see.²⁷

4. Djibouti’s Response

Through domestic law, Djibouti has implemented the Palermo Protocol and the Protocol against Smuggling of Migrants (both supplementing the UNTOC).²⁸ Djibouti is also part of the EU–Horn of Africa Migration Route Initiative (Khartoum Process) to improve East African co-ordination and capacity.²⁹ In addition, the Constitution provides a

frican Perspectives on South-South Migration, Routledge, London, 2024, p. 169; Ismail Numan Telci, “Escape to the War: Understanding Ethiopian Migration to Yemen”, in *Migration Studies*, 2024, vol. 12, no. 4, pp. 55–73.

¹⁰ Chiré and Pinauld, 2024, p. 178, see *supra* note 9.

¹¹ International Organization of Migration, “2023 Movements Between the Horn of Africa and the Arabian Peninsula: January – December 2023”, 24 May 2024, pp. 1–2.

¹² Xiao Huang *et al.*, “Crowdsourcing Geospatial Data for Earth and Human Observations: A Review”, in *Journal of Remote Sensing*, 2024, vol. 4, pp. 9–10.

¹³ Chiré and Pinauld, 2024, p. 178, see *supra* note 9.

¹⁴ Girmachew Adugna, “Understanding the Forced Repatriation of Ethiopian Migrant Workers from the Middle East”, Working Paper No. 2021/8, Ryerson Centre for Immigration and Settlement and the CERC in Migration and Integration, July 2021, p. 10.

¹⁵ Amina Saïd, Bezunesh Tamru and Omar Mahamoud Ismael, “Domestic Labour and Immigration into the Republic of Djibouti by Young Ethiopians and Somalis”, in Jean-Nicolas Bach (ed.), *Routledge Handbook of the Horn of Africa*, Routledge, London, 2022, p. 9.

¹⁶ Sindew Asmare Wedi and Yimer Gobeze Shiferaw, “The Challenges and Experiences of Young Ethiopian Female Emigrants: A Study of Returnee Domestic Workers in the Middle East at Mekaneselam Town, Amhara Region”, 2025, pp. 11–17 (available on Research Square’s web site).

¹⁷ Girmachew Adugna, “Once Primarily an Origin for Refugees, Ethiopia Experiences Evolving Migration Patterns”, in *Migration Information Source*, 2021.

¹⁸ Linda Adhiambo Ocho, “Migration in the Horn of Africa and the European Union”, in Adeoye O. Akinola and Jesper Bjarnesen (eds.), *Worlds Apart?*, Routledge, London, 2024, p. 23.

¹⁹ Alexandre Lauret, “Stories of Migrant Smuggling: The Soft Power of Djiboutian Smugglers”, in *Revue Européenne des Migrations Internationales*, 2023, vol. 39, no. 4, pp. 12–16.

²⁰ Njuaafac Kenedy Fonju, “Historical Challenges of Alarming, Deadly Illegal Migration Crossing of African Youths Across the Sahara Desert–Mediterranean–Atlantic Pathways Versus Accelerated British Diplomacy of Illegal Migration Bill Facing Upright Internal and External Rejections of the Post-COVID-19 of the 21st Century”, in *Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences*, 2024, vol. 3, no. 2, p. 2.

²¹ Fekadu Adugna, Priya Deshingkar and Adamnesh Atnaflu, “Human Smuggling from Wollo, Ethiopia to Saudi Arabia: Askoblay Criminals or Enablers of Dreams?”, in *Public Anthropologist*, 2021, vol. 3, no. 1, pp. 9–16.

²² Benson Njau Ndungu, *The Effect of Correspondent Banking De-Risking on Trade Dynamics in Djibouti*, Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Nairobi, 2023, p. 19.

²³ Dirk Kohnert, “Money Laundering and Tax Evasion: Do International Measures have a Significant Impact in Sub-Saharan Africa?”, Zenodo, 2024, pp. 15–16.

²⁴ Ashenafi Endale, “Economic, conflict spurring human trafficking in Ethiopia: US State Department”, *The Reporter*, 29 June 2024.

²⁵ International Organization of Migration, Regional Office for East, Horn and Southern Africa, “Migration Along The Eastern Route: January–December 2024”, Report No. 58, 6 March 2025, p. 5.

²⁶ Lauret, 2023, pp. 12–16, see *supra* note 19.

²⁷ Mohamed Elewa Badar and Noelle Higgins, “The Challenges of Addressing Transnational Organized Maritime Crimes: A Review of Current Law and Practice in Djibouti”, in *Transnational Criminal Law Review*, 2022, vol. 1, pp. 3484–3499.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Thibaut Jaulin and Hélène Thiollot, “Migration Diplomacy in the Horn of Africa”, Policy Brief, Migration Governance and Asylum Crises, 2021, p. 2.

comprehensive framework for combating human trafficking. Besides harmonizing its laws with regional and international treaties, Djibouti strives to evolve from a post-colonial legal system into one that is transparent, rights-based, and economically competitive. The law protects victims and outlines punishments for those involved in smuggling and trafficking.³⁰ Several policies and legal frameworks have been implemented to combat human trafficking, including specialized law enforcement units.³¹ There are four guidelines for combating human trafficking and migrant smuggling in Djibouti: awareness-raising, capacity building, sub-regional co-operation with states, and victim protection.³² The government has also modernized its criminal code, strengthened its judiciary, and amended the Constitution to combat migrant smuggling and human trafficking.³³ However, Djibouti has not fully implemented its 2015–2022 action plan.³⁴ And anti-trafficking law enforcement efforts have been minimal.

Djibouti's criminalization of trafficking is harsh.³⁵ Law No. 133 of 2016 defines trafficking as an offence with reference to the Palermo Protocol which defines it. Article 10 criminalizes forced labour or service under certain conditions, imposing 10 to 15 years' imprisonment for labour and sexual trafficking. Article 8 provides aggravating circumstances (such as violence, abuse of power, crimes against minors, and involvement with organized crime groups), increasing sentences (10 to 20 years). Attempted trafficking is criminalized under Article 12, imposing the same punishment as if committed. Article 13, in addition to punishing trafficking, also recognizes accomplices. However, those involved in an association or conspiracy to commit trafficking offences may use Article 30 to avoid punishment. Even if there has not been an act of trafficking, association or conspiracy to commit trafficking-related offences is illegal under Law No. 133. The law, which has broad definitions and no exception for non-execution, targets intent and agreement to commit trafficking. Because punishment is both preventive and punitive, it is challenging to try to avoid it through legal technicalities. Legal defence tactics include false accusations, mistaken identity, withdrawal from the conspiracy, and lack of intent.

Notwithstanding Law No. 133, most potential human trafficking crimes moved through the judicial system as sexual assault or migrant smuggling charges, leading to more lenient sentences for perpetrators. The Djibouti government prosecuted 80 suspected traffickers under Law No. 133, but no convictions were achieved due to insufficient evidence.³⁶ At the time of writing, the government had not convicted any traffickers for seven consecutive years, and prosecutions remain rare.³⁷

Providing legal assistance to trafficking victims is part of Law No. 133. Housing and legal support are provided to trafficking survivors by the government.³⁸ Article 31 creates an obligation to provide psychological, medical and social assistance to trafficking victims. The Djibouti National Gendarmerie has a unit dedicated to protecting women and children and preventing trafficking. Their main strategy involves

educating local communities about trafficking dangers, but they also share intelligence and participate in cross-border co-operation. In addition to supporting victims, the unit makes sure they are safe and reintegrated into society. Courts may also seize property related to a trafficking offence under Article 17, and such assets can be used to contribute to the emergency relief or victim assistance funds for trafficking victims. Additionally, Djiboutian authorities have created the Djiboutian Mixed Migration Taskforce and Migration Response Centres to address mixed migration flows. The Centres serve as operational hubs providing essential services such as registration, medical care, and information to migrants in need. The Ministry of Justice has also sent judges, prosecutors and advisors to trafficking seminars, and a unit of the national police has been created to investigate and apprehend traffickers under the Ministry of Interior. Enhancing protection, streamlining migration responses, and fostering collaboration among stakeholders are among the goals of these initiatives.³⁹ Still, repatriation and reintegration are not sufficiently addressed, and co-ordination and co-operation remain lacking.⁴⁰

In Djibouti, the government is now looking at the issue from a security perspective, with the primary concern being the protection of the current regime, through increased application of Law No. 111 for the Fight against Terrorism and other Serious Infractions. Human rights safeguards and national security objectives are intricately linked in Law No. 133, which applies to the prevention, investigation and prosecution of offences committed by foreigners in and outside of Djibouti. Trafficking is hard to distinguish from migrant smuggling in Djibouti, and its focus on terrorism might take resources away from trafficking. While Law No. 111 focuses on punishment and security, potentially criminalizing vulnerable populations, Law No. 133 puts more emphasis on victim-centred approaches. Both laws are in accordance with international conventions and address serious crimes, and should thus complement each other, even if Djibouti has not fully implemented its trafficking action plan.

Djibouti is also active in international collaboration and partnerships, improving prosecution, victim protection and prevention.⁴¹ The current posture is one of managing the impact of irregular migration and migrant smuggling within Djiboutian territory, rather than seeking to curb the activity altogether. Djibouti has received international assistance to combat migrant smuggling and human trafficking.⁴² As part of an anti-trafficking project, the UNODC aims to strengthen the criminal justice system by supporting Djibouti's efforts to enhance criminal justice responses in Ethiopia and Djibouti. The UNODC is attempting to create a Joint Investigation Team in Ethiopia and Djibouti, strengthen law enforcement capabilities, foster regional co-operation, and bring national laws into compliance with international norms. In Eastern Africa, a major trafficking hotspot, this collaboration seeks to improve human trafficking detection, prosecution and protection systems, exchange intelligence and co-ordinate cross-border investigations. By doing so, victims are receiving justice and perpetrators are being held accountable.⁴³ Nevertheless, human rights organizations as well as the United States' State Department have expressed concerns over the Djiboutian government's perceived inability to tackle migrant smuggling and human trafficking within its territory.⁴⁴

5. Requisite Reform in Djibouti

A serious overhaul in strategy, enforcement, and political will is needed for Djibouti to become a regional leader in anti-smuggling efforts. Due to its strategic location in the Horn of Africa and porous borders,

³⁰ Ndivhuwo Tshikota, *Demystifying the 'Movement' Element in the Prevention and Combating of Trafficking in Persons*, Ph.D. Dissertation, University of the Western Cape, 2024, p. 87.

³¹ Badar and Higgins, 2022, pp. 3484–3499, see *supra* note 27.

³² Oucho, 2024, p. 23, see *supra* note 18.

³³ Getye Abneh Tadesse and Tesfaye Tafesse, "Human Trafficking in the Horn of Africa with Emphasis on the Eastern Route to the Gulf States through Djibouti", in *Migration and Development*, 2025, vol. 14, no. 1, p. 37.

³⁴ International Fund for Agricultural Development, "Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia: Country Strategic Opportunities Programme 2024–2030", November 2023, p. 24.

³⁵ Abdulkadir Mohamud Sahal, "Human Rights Violations by the Peace-keeping Forces in Somalia", Master's Thesis, Near East University, 2021, pp. 58–73.

³⁶ Getye Abneh Tadesse and Tesfaye Tafesse, "Conflict-Driven Human Trafficking, Internally Displaced Persons, and Legal Responses in Ethiopia: The Northern Conflict in Focus", in *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 2025, vol. 36, no. 6, pp. 37–43.

³⁷ Tadesse and Tafesse, 2025, p. 37, see *supra* note 33.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Chiré and Pinauld, 2024, p. 178, see *supra* note 9.

⁴⁰ Adugna, 2021, see *supra* note 17.

⁴¹ Ali Mohamed Ali, "Strengthening and Enhancing Regional Security Through Collaborative Efforts in the Horn of Africa", East African Institute for Peace and Governance, 2024, pp. 6–10.

⁴² Tadesse and Tafesse, 2025, p. 37, see *supra* note 33.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Assefaw Bariagaber, "States, Migrants, and the Challenge of International Human Smuggling and Trafficking in the Horn of Africa", in *Journal of Global South Studies*, 2023, vol. 40, no. 2, pp. 249–273.

Djibouti faces significant challenges in combating migrant smuggling and human trafficking.⁴⁵ Djibouti's approach to combating smuggling and trafficking networks is weaker than some of its regional neighbours.⁴⁶ Trafficking cases have been reclassified as smuggling in the country since 2017, leading to minimal convictions. Law No. 133 exists but it is rarely enforced. Civil society co-ordination is sporadic, and the National Action Plan remains inactive. Political will and institutional infrastructure are lacking, and there is lack of enforcement and co-ordination. As a consequence, vulnerable populations remain at risk and organized crime persists. The issue must be tackled by improving legal frameworks and improving collaboration among stakeholders.

Djibouti should focus on strengthening anti-trafficking laws, creating effective anti-trafficking units, operationalizing the National Committee to Combat Trafficking, updating the Penal Code, clarifying the differences between trafficking and smuggling, and including non-testimonial evidence. These measures can effectively combat human trafficking. By addressing gaps and lack of clarity in laws and operational setups, Djibouti should aim to enhance victim protection and improve prosecution results. The judiciary and law enforcement need continuing training to better gather evidence. It is important to safeguard whistle-blowers. Border officials should be trained to enforce Djibouti's anti-trafficking law, especially since the country is a transit hub for undocumented migrants. Disrupting smuggling networks can be achieved through risk profiling, regional intelligence sharing, and community outreach. Human trafficking victims must be identified and supported through the National Referral Mechanism. A fully operational referral system will boost victim protection and streamline support services. Increasing data sharing and regional co-operation will make it easier to identify trafficking networks and tackle systemic issues. It also helps ensure victims' safety and supports their rehabilitation.

Despite being a key migration corridor, Djibouti's government has made limited progress in dismantling smuggling networks.⁴⁷ Djibouti should develop a locally grounded, politically supported, and regionally connected system to effectively combat smuggling. Taking this approach requires political will, community trust and international co-operation. Since 2022, Djibouti's government has not operationalized its National Committee, allocated funds, or drafted its National Action Plan. The anti-smuggling strategy of Djibouti should prioritize livelihoods, economics and empowering marginalized communities. A rights-based approach can provide alternatives, foster trust, and end cycles of exploitation.

Despite the overlap between migrant smuggling and human trafficking in East Africa and the Horn of Africa, most human trafficking occurs in Djibouti independently of Ethiopian migration.⁴⁸ Yemen has a high risk of human trafficking, especially for those who pay smugglers on arrival. Djibouti and Yemen's migrant smuggling networks are becoming more sophisticated and organized, with various individuals playing different roles. Partnering with Ethiopia, Somalia and Yemen can allow Djibouti to actively combat human trafficking by improving rescue operations, data sharing, border management, and human rights

protection. Civil society and non-governmental organizations must also be engaged, along with religious and community leaders who hold moral authority, dispel misinformation, challenge norms, support early detection, mobilize communities, and promote social cohesion.

Due to its limited capacity and geopolitical importance, Djibouti relies heavily on international aid. However, human rights and anti-trafficking measures need to be improved to secure such support. Aid has supported training programmes, anti-corruption measures, and non-governmental organizations. Djibouti's progress is slow and uneven, and it will need sustained international pressure, targeted aid and stronger political will to protect migrants and reduce trafficking.

6. Conclusions

Djibouti, a key transit point for migration and trafficking, faces challenges in combating the smuggling industry, which generates millions of USD. The country faces limited resources, weak institutional capacity and political inertia. To address this, Djibouti is receiving targeted international support, such as from the UNODC, which is building an emergency shelter near Lake Assal, providing specialized training to Djibouti's National Police, Gendarmerie, and prosecutors. However, Djibouti has not convicted traffickers under its Law No. 133 since 2017, and its legal tools are outdated. The country's success depends on sustained political will, better co-ordination, and stronger enforcement. Djibouti has the potential to transform from a trafficking corridor into a regional leader in migrant protection and human rights with targeted reforms.

Recommendations include strengthening legal enforcement, establishing a National Referral Mechanism, revising and funding the National Action Plan, enhancing border and migration controls, and promoting regional and international co-operation. Policy recommendations include developing a formal mechanism for sharing information and intelligence, developing a uniform system of collecting data on migrant smuggling, training security personnel, establishing more migrant reception centres, creating a dedicated budget for combating migrant smuggling networks, and considering alternative mechanisms to law enforcement measures. These measures will help identify, refer and support victims of trafficking, monitor irregular migration flows, and promote regional co-operation. To combat human trafficking and migrant smuggling, Djibouti should improve protective services, create procedures for victim identification and referral, and increase efforts to find, apprehend and convict traffickers.

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⁴⁵ Tadesse Simie Metekia and Matt Herbert, "Troubled Transitions and Organised Crime in Ethiopia and Tunisia", Paper No. 45, ENACT, 2024, pp. 13–16.

⁴⁶ Badar and Higgins, 2022, pp. 3484–3499, see *supra* note 27.

⁴⁷ Oucho, 2024, p. 23, see *supra* note 18.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*



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