Mounting Crises

How intersecting crises in Ethiopia and Sudan are creating opportunities for exploitation and human trafficking of Eritreans

Audrey Lumley-Sapanski

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Research to Action (RTA) Report

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Mounting Crises: How intersecting crises in Ethiopia and Sudan are creating opportunities for exploitation and human trafficking of Eritreans

Audrey Lumley-Sapanski (The Rights Lab, University of Nottingham) with Research Assistance from Eyob Ghilazghy

Key points

- Conflict in the Tigray region and COVID-19 pandemic restrictions increased outmigration from Eritrea
- Migrating Eritreans are forced to migrate irregularly by governmental migration policies, including a 'shoot to kill' exit policy
- Abducted and taken to Libya, Eritreans are often tortured and forced to pay 5,500USD for release
- Restricted rights in Sudan, lack of security, and insufficient resources are causing aspirations for onward migration
- Border and security forces are often complicit in exploitation of migrating Eritreans in Libya, Sudan and Eritrea

Overview

> The trafficking routes are many. [There are] many porous borders. Perpetrators have support of security forces, and the security forces, they protect them. They have individuals who work with them, so even if you tried to challenge them, in terms of kidnapping, trafficking, if you tried to bring a case against them, you bring it to the attention of the security forces, it further endangers the life of those being abused. This year, this is the worst time, in terms of abuse, violations, extortions, and trafficking of refugees, really, really it is very scary what we are now facing.
>
> ▶ Male, Khartoum (41yo)

Eritrea continues to experience massive outmigration, driven by generalized oppression and systematic human rights violations perpetuated by actors at the highest level of the government and military (Plaut 2017). An estimated 300 people leave daily of a total population of approximately 3-6 million (van Reisen and Mawere 2017). Yet, migration presents no route to safety or humanitarian protection. Those fleeing Eritrea are known to experience risks of death, torture and sexual and gender-based violence. The Central Mediterranean Route (CMR) through Sudan, Libya and the Mediterranean is considered the world's deadliest migratory route (UNHCR 2021b; Hayden 2022) leading one former Eritrean journalist to label it 'suicide migration' (Gerrima 2016).

Risks of human trafficking and exploitation along this route are common. Estimates from IOM surveys in 2016 indicated that 73 percent of migrants along the CMR experienced human trafficking or a form of exploitation (Galos, Bartolini, Book and Grant 2017). Eritreans are considered particularly likely to experience abduction,

hostage taking, and extortion due to their connections to the diaspora (Hovil and Oette 2017). Kidnappers frequently take victims to Libya for long periods—months to years—while they extract thousands of US dollars. Prior scholarship shows how this circuit of exploitation was established and evolved historically, as well as who the main actors are (see Plaut, 2017 or van Reisen and Mawere 2017).

This research aims to better understand 'the points of inflection'—how and why particular individuals became victims of trafficking—so that risks of trafficking may be better mitigated and resilience supported. To do so, it applies the International Organization for Migration Determinants of Vulnerability Framework (IOM DoMV) to trafficking narratives collected in interviews with survivors in Sudan, paired with interviews with stakeholders working in the field of anti-trafficking or migration to understand and locate risk factors and vulnerabilities to human trafficking (IOM, 2019). Findings indicate that key determinants of vulnerability are driven by three intersecting crises. First, socioeconomic conditions in Eritrea have deteriorated due to COVID-19 restrictions on mobility and livelihood opportunities, and more significantly, the increase in round ups and forced conscription driven by the Tigray Conflict. As a result, more Eritreans are migrating. Second, conditions facing Eritreans 'on the move' in Sudan have recently become less secure due to the military coup and the associated desecuritization of life for migrants. Migrants report round ups, harassment, and detention as well as extortion. Consequently, refugees and migrants are more likely to be targeted for abduction without intervention and less likely to seek or receive assistance from authorities. Finally, in Libya the third factor: survivors report experiences of abduction and hostaging with extreme forms of violence and sexual violence perpetrated against them by militias and security forces with the knowledge of international NGOs and actors.

In line with the IOM DoV predictive explanatory factors are grouped by scale: individual, household, community, and structural. Significantly, the research points to a number of structural and community level factors which intersect with individual attributes to increase vulnerability across these three contexts. These include:

- In Eritrea, unilateral migration decision making resulting from community disconfiguration leading to reliance on an unknown smuggler to evade Eritrea's shoot to kill policy;
- In Sudan, Sudan's encampment and registration policies for refugees and corruption within humanitarian and government entities leave migrants exposed to external risks of trafficking, with complicity of state/humanitarian actors; and
- In Libya, the lack of a functional state or an effective and independent humanitarian governance presence in Libya, within an ongoing state of conflict, leave many victims of trafficking trapped in untenable conditions.

This report details the research context, before introducing the methods and use of the DoMV. Analysis of research findings is followed by suggested recommendations to improve conditions.

Eritrea

Eritrea has been referred to as a 'garrison state' a term used to describe a state governed by a military elite who rose to power in a period of long-term international tension, during which time freedom is curtailed 'while preparation for war becomes the dominant thrust of a society' (Tronvoll and Mekonnen, 2017 p. 1). Other aspects of social and economic life are subordinated and 'influence is in the hands of men who specialize in violence' (Lasswell 1937: 43 in Tronvoll and Mekonnen 2017).

This has been the case in Eritrea where the former military commander President Isaias Afwerki and a military government rose to power in 1991, following nearly four hundred years of colonial occupation and an extended civil war to expel Ethiopia (Tronvoll and Mekonnen 2017). Unresolved border demarcation resulted in disputed territorial claims with Ethiopia, leading to repeat conflict between the two nations and concerns over reoccupation by Ethiopia. The threat of an Ethiopian invasion was made more real when a border dispute escalated into conflict in 1998 and continues to serve as a pretext for a massive standing army and ongoing policy of forced conscription (Plaut 2017).

The stated purpose of national service, instituted in 1995 (proclamation 82/1995), was: 'inter alia, "the establishment of a strong Defence Force based on the people to ensure a free and sovereign Eritrea; to create a new generation characterized by love of work, discipline, ready to participate and serve in the reconstruction of the nation; to develop and enforce the economy of the nation by investing in development work our people as a

potential wealth; to develop professional capacity and physical fitness by giving regular military training and continuous practice to participants in Training Centres'' (Plaut 2017, p. 150). However, following the 1998-2000 conflict with Ethiopia, the time limit governing compulsory national service in Eritrea was extended from 18 months and made indefinite under threat of detention, torture, or familial reprisal. The campaign—the Warsai Yikealo Development Campaign—applies to everyone aged 18 to 50. Conscripts are paid 500nafka per month, or about 25 USD (Hirt and Mohamed 2013) to work in one of four military commission zones with no choice over the placement.

An estimated 350,000 conscripts have been enlisted since 2000 (Hirt and Mohamed, 2013) of a total population of 3-6 million (Van Reisen and Mawere, 2017). This approach has led to a breakdown of society (Hirt and Mohamed, 2013) wherein families are separated, financially unable to support themselves, and conscripts are subject to forced labour and torture (Plaut 2017). Opposition politicians and journalists who have challenged the government have been jailed en masse.

A UN Commission of Inquiry (COIE) was led on the situation in July 2014, a mandate that was extended by a further year following initial findings (UNCOIE, 2015). The COIE found systematic and widespread gross human rights violations and that there was no accountability for them (Hofner and Tewolde-Berhan, 2017). Amongst the more egregious crimes identified was restriction on freedom of movement—individuals require permission to move through the country and there is no freedom of movement. To monitor this, there are military check points throughout Eritrea, and a shoot to kill policy at border. The COIE report calls the practice of "open ended national service a 'practice similar to slavery' which involves the systematic violation of an array of human rights" (Hofner &Tewolde-Berhane 2017). In addition, in a second report accusations of imprisonment, forced disappearance, torture and other inhumane acts, persecution, rape and murder, were deemed credible by the Commission (UN Human Rights Council, 2016). The Commission further acknowledged that the president and a small circle of military loyalists and the National Security Office 'and military are responsible for most of the cases of gross human rights violations and crimes against humanity' (Hofner & Tewolde-Berhane, 2017 p. 81). They recommended Eritrea to the International Criminal Court, finding that there was reason to believe that crimes against humanity had been perpetrated since 1991. In June 2015, the report's lead author Mike Smith (quoted at length in Plaut) said the following:

> Over the past several months, our Commission of Inquiry has found that systematic, widespread, and gross human rights violations have been and are still being committed with impunity in Eritrea. Our findings are sobering. The many violations in Eritrea are of a scope and scale seldom seen anywhere else in today's world. Basic freedoms are curtailed, from movement to expression, from religion to association. The Commission finds that crimes against humanity have occurred with regard to torture, extrajudicial executions, forced labour and in the context of national service.

The impact on the livelihoods and well-being of those forced to serve as conscripts, and their families—combined with human rights abuses, and political, economic, social, and environmental factors—has contributed to the out-migration of millions of Eritreans. Yet, Eritreans have few options for leaving the country, as the government exacts strict control over borders and emigration, and limits access to passports. More specifically, the government operates a 'shoot to kill' policy (Tewolde-Berhane, Plaut, and Smit, 2017). The border to Sudan remains closed and the border to Ethiopia, which had been opened briefly in 2018, is no longer open (Creta, 2019). That pathway has been unilaterally closed and crossing irregularly complicated by the Tigray conflict. This forces many Eritreans to rely on irregular migratory routes, and often to engage smugglers to navigate exit from Eritrea (Van Reisen and Mawere, 2017).

Prior research has demonstrated that security forces and border control are often complicit or participants in these exchanges, benefiting from bribery schemes, directly participating, or turning a blind eye (van Reisen and Estafanos 2017). In fact, the UN Monitoring Group on Eritrea and Somalia found that the trafficking occurring out of Eritrea through the Sinai was not possible without knowledge of (UNSC 2016, p. 110) or participation by Eritrean government officials (ibid; van Reisen, Estafanos, and Reim 2017). General Teklai Kifle Manjus is the key Eritrean figure identified in the west of Eritrea (UNSC,

2016) and said to be collaborating with ethnic Rashaida tribes to move individuals across the border (Plaut 2017).

Further, the Eritrean government is said to run its own smuggling operation, despite the 'shoot to kill policy,' facilitating the outmigration of paying customers across the border and into Khartoum for prices around 3,000 to 5,000 USD (van Reisen, Estafanos, and Reim 2017). The market in human beings is highly profitable. Prior scholarship has estimated that approximately 30,000 Eritreans were trafficked or smuggled through the Sinai between 2009 and 2013, for a total net of 600 million USD (van Reisen et al 2017).

Sudan

Eritreans who do cross frequently remain in camps in Eastern Sudan. As a result, Eastern Sudan is host to hundreds of thousands of refugees, many of whom have been held in camps for over four decades. Estimates vary, but UNHCR reports that 300 people are leaving Eritrea daily and an estimated 60,000 left with smugglers in 2017 (van Reisen and Mawere, 2017). Of those, approximately 3,000 people a month enter Sudan seeking refugee status (ibid); 127, 959 were registered as refugees or seeking asylum as of January 2022 (UNHCR, 2022).

Conditions within Sudan are difficult for Eritrean refugees. While they generally apply for, and receive, refugee status within Sudan, their rights are restricted. Sudan practices a strict encampment policy (Hovil and Oette, 2017). Refugees are denied the right to free movement within the country, most lack access to education beyond primary school, and refugees cannot legally work. Widespread corruption and harassment from police and militia entities creates a climate of fear (Hovil and Oette, 2017). In addition, former refugees report being kidnapped and abducted from camps while under the supposed protection of UNHCR and trafficked or sold to traffickers by border police ostensibly responsible for taking them to camps (van Reisen, Rijken and Estafanos 2014; Lumley-Sapanski, et al 2021).

As a result, Sudan is not viewed as a possible settlement destination for Eritreans, contributing to widespread onward migration. An estimated forty percent of individuals who enter Sudan from Eritrea will make a secondary move (UNHCR 2020). To do so, after initially landing in Sudan, many Eritreans engage the help of a smuggler to circumnavigate border management and 'predatory state' actors (Oette and Babiker 2017).

Travelling north through the Sinai Peninsula, often to Israel, was a favoured route, though it has more recently been largely replaced by the Central Mediterranean Route west through Sudan and Libya (van Reisen, Estafanos, and Reim 2017).

Human Trafficking Drivers and Facilitators

After the closure of the Sinai route, migration has largely 'moved' to the Central Mediterranean Route (CMR). Large swaths of the CMR require passage through the Sahara, which involves exposure to severe environmental factors that have made it the world's deadliest migratory route (Galos et al 2020). Engagement with smugglers to navigate the route is viewed as contractual—an exchange of money for a service to escape Eritrea and move through Sudan and Libya. However, migrants are often turned over or sold to traffickers. The lack of formal governance in southern Libya and disputed tribal territories, as well as the challenges of the civil conflict in the north, are contributing factors. Huge areas are ungoverned, or governed by tribal or militia forces (Kuschminder and Triandafyllidou 2020). Tribal rivalries between the Tebu and Tuareg contribute to 'general lawlessness' (Micallef 2017) where abduction and perpetration happen with impunity.

Estimates from IOM surveys in 2016 indicated 73 percent of migrants along the Central Mediterranean route experienced human trafficking or a form of exploitation (Galos et al 2017). Most commonly, refugees and migrants are kidnapped and tortured to extract money from their diasporic connections. Women are often the victims of severe gender-based violence and torture (UNHCR 2020). Refugees, and particularly Eritreans, are sold for sexual or labour exploitation, or they may be held in debt bondage given their diasporic connections (Galos et al 2017). Upon reaching Libya, refugees continue to experience torture, extortion and forced exploitation (sexual or labour) up to and including death (UNHCR 2021b; Kuschminder & Triandafyllidou 2020).

The externalization of European Union borders through agreements like the Khartoum Process (KP) and Joint Valletta Agreement have been critiqued as contributing factors to the exploitation and abuse of migrants and refugees in the region (Reitano 2017; Tubiana et al 2018; Davitti 2018). The EU approach has been described as palliative, focusing on stopping irregular migration to

European states, rather than the root causes of migration (Tewolde-Berhan et al 2017). More specifically, the KP prioritizes cooperative solutions between African and European partners to fight "irregular migration, migrant smuggling, and trafficking in human beings" (Tewolde-Berhan et al 2017, pp. 12– 13). While 'laudable enough' (Tewolde-Berhan et al 2017), in effect the funding mechanism was to be used to train African "law enforcement and judicial authorities" in new methods of investigation and assistance (ibid). Europol and Frontex were to assist in providing technical assistance to partners to enable the recognition of falsified documents. The inclusion of partners like Eritrea and Sudan who have a record of human rights violations and the documented record of participation by high ranking military officials and border officers in trafficking has been widely identified as enabling perpetration (Reitano, 2016/2017; Lumley-Sapanski et al, 2021).

Recently, the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown measures have exacerbated vulnerabilities to human trafficking for at-risk groups, including the 1.1 million refugees currently living in Sudan. While the full extent of the impact is yet unknown, the lockdown measures put in place in Sudan restricted public gatherings, including closing public markets where many refugees worked informally, closing schools and healthcare clinics, and redirecting aid from the humanitarian organizations who served refugees to be used for pandemic related causes (Lumley-Sapanski et al 2021). Food costs soared to nearly 250% year over year, and inflation reached nearly 150% (FAO, 2021). Refugees unable to work, without access to resources and with reduced food rations, are forced to remain in camps where they are unprotected from perpetrators. Though refugees are aware of the risks presented by migration routes, with limited prospects, they describe a lack of alternatives to onward migration (Lumley-Sapanski and Schwarz, 2022).

Description of the Data and Methods

Based in Sudan, this research is part of a larger project focusing on human trafficking in the Sudanese context and the impacts of COVID-19 on prevalence, routes, and perpetration. The analysis combines semi-structured interviews, an evidence review, and data analysis from secondary survey data collected with Eritrean refugees in Sudan by 4Mi/Mixed Migration Centre. The approach provides in-depth analysis of individual experiences contextualized within a broad overview of the processes of displacement, migration, and trafficking. The use of varied methods to collect data facilitated triangulation of information and its validation.

This paper is based on three phases of qualitative research to understand the effects of the pandemic on vulnerability and risks[1] of human trafficking, focusing on migrating populations. The first explored the impacts of COVID-19 on human trafficking in Sudan (February to May 2021), combining a systematic review of existing and emerging evidence with 22 in-depth semi-structured interviews. The systematic review mapped the current state of knowledge, compiling and analyzing academic and grey literature, as well as relevant legal, regulatory, and policy standards. Due to the recent and rapidly changing nature of the COVID-19 situation, newspaper articles and other forms of popular media were also included. A total of 94 pieces of evidence were selected for inclusion and thematically coded. Evidence reviewed was limited to that published in English from 2018-2021 and accessible online.

Building on this initial research, a further targeted evidence review and 12 additional interviews were conducted with stakeholders working in migration and women's rights within Libya, Tunisia, and Sudan (September 2021). This supplementary research focused specifically on impacts on migrants and migrating populations, and the role of gender in shaping vulnerabilities and risk in the pandemic world.

Finally, nine interviews were conducted with Eritrean refugees (registered and non-registered) in Sudan who had survived an experience of human trafficking. These were conducted during March of 2022 and paired with an additional three interviews with Eritreans living in exile. The interviewees were both male (8) and female (4). Most had recently fled Eritrea (within the last 3 years) but two in Sudan left more than five years ago and those in exile left between 2010 and 2014. Follow-up informal conversations were held with stakeholders to understand the change in

[1] Vulnerability is used to describe a susceptibility, or weakness to a negative outcome, in this case human trafficking while risk describes the chance that an action will lead to a loss or undesired outcome. As in, migrants in the Sahara face risk of trafficking versus lack of legal status makes migrants vulnerable to human traffickers.

context based on new information from interviews with survivors.

Together, interviewees represented organisations working on issues of gender, migration, and governance across the IGAD and North Africa region, including the Better Migration Management (BMM), Danish Refugee Council (DRC), the German Society for International Cooperation (GIZ), Global Partners Governance (GPG), Iteru, Midanik, the Mixed Migration Centre (MMC), Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Salmmah Women's Resource Centre, The Refugee Law Initiative, The Regional Operations Centre in Support of the Khartoum Process (The ROCK) and the University of Addis Ababa. Interviews lasted from 30 minutes to two hours and were held via video conferencing software due to the pandemic. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and thematically coded. Participation was voluntary. Interviews were conducted using Microsoft Teams with the help of a research assistant who translated and a 'fixer' who arranged for interviews in Sudan. All participants are anonymous in data analysis for safety, and any specific details linking to the cases of individuals are obfuscated where it could inadvertently lead to the identification of the survivor.

Interview questions for people with lived experiences were directed towards the participants' knowledge of human trafficking and migration within the region. Participants were asked to describe their migratory ambition, route, use of facilitators, motives/causes, and experiences of human trafficking. Additionally, basic demographics and background data was collected to understand where individual attributes might have influenced experiences. Purposive sampling was used to identify these individuals based on their experiences as refugees and with human trafficking by the fixer, who reviewed the interview criteria and is himself a refugee who speaks the same languages and a community leader. Interviewees had a range of backgrounds including: forced conscripts, single mothers/partners of forced conscripts, college educated, and high school educated individuals. The majority were living in Khartoum, the others in Gedaref in camps. The three individuals in exile were in Canada and Norway.

Additionally, in response to data requests, the Mixed Migration Centre (MMC) provided specific analysis of survey data collected in Sudan with Eritrean refugees. This is referenced to support findings. The data and analysis are drawn from 450 surveys with refugees and migrants in Sudan undertaken by MMC in the context of its Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism Initiative (4Mi), conducted between 2020 and 2021. This data includes data from the flagship survey, as well as a COVID specific module (63 respondents).

▶ A note on language

In international law, human trafficking is defined in the 2000 Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime, on the basis of three cumulative elements:

An act: "…the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons…"

A means: "…by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person…"

The purpose of exploitation: "Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs."

Experiences of Eritreans abducted and hostaged often include kidnapping and extortion, including sexual violence, torture, and exploitation that may fall outside of the legal definition of trafficking. Eritreans are subject to criminal acts of torture and extortion for profit (for further discussion see Kuschminder and Triandafyllidou 2020). We use both trafficking and exploitation to cover the range of experiences detailed by survivors.

IOM Determinants of Migrant Vulnerability (DoMV)

The International Organization for Migration developed the DoMV to 'identify, protect and assist migrants who have experienced or are vulnerable to violence, exploitation and abuse before, during or after migrating' and for use in guiding interventions to increase protection and resilience (IOM, 2019; p. 5). As such the framework

understands that individual subjectivities are situated within broader social environments, and therefore it considers vulnerabilities to be determined by risk factors at the individual, household/family, community, and structural level. Risk factors and protective factors can serve either function depending on the context or type of harm.

▶ **Fig. 1 IOM Determinants of Migrant Vulnerability**

The framework offers a useful tool for consideration of risk factors throughout the journey, such that one can target a response. In this case, the research findings present the most significant areas of risk or points of vulnerability using the model (see Fig. 2).

Analysis

Figure 2 categorizes significant risks or vulnerabilities identified within survivor narratives following the structure of the DoMV.

In the following analysis, factors are structured geographically, differentiating the risks and vulnerabilities within Eritrea, Sudan, and Libya. In so doing, the findings highlight the multiple impacts of three intersecting and simultaneous crises, which have had implications for people's risk-taking behavior and the intersecting individual vulnerabilities compartmentalized above.

▶ **Fig. 2 Risks to Migrating Eritreans of Human Trafficking**

Individual	**Household/Family**
18-50 (Eligible for Forced Conscription) Unilateral migration decision Diasporic connections Migration status Use of (unpaid) smuggler to exit Eritrea Cost of smuggler/Choice of smuggler Lack of livelihood Registration requirements (location)	Family member in national service Responsibility for household Socioeconomics Female headed households
Community Xenophobia Mobility restrictions 'Unscrupulous Officials' Lack of humanitarian protection Lack of permanent settlement options Disinformation Lack of access to technology Cross border security forces	**Structural** Lack of legal migration routes Forced reliance on smugglers/traffickers Lack of safe routes Trafficking chokepoints Lack of governance in Sudan and Libya Conflict in Ethiopia Corruption in INGOs and government Encampment policies Slowed third country resettlement Lack of durable solutions to refugee situation Khartoum Process/JVAP/EUTF strengthened abusive regimes/legitimized abusive regimes Border patrols/forces

Origin Vulnerabilities

My father was in the army, and they kept him the army most of the time. The last few months, he was taken to Tigray in the war. So he was away from us, and the family was suffering from economic problems. Nobody takes care of the family and we have our mother who got sick. And we have to look after her, so I dropped out [of school] and …my sister as well. They rounded me up. It was very difficult to live in Eritrea. Finally, I had to escape the country.

▶ Woman, Khartoum (18yo)

Of the nine survivors interviewed for this research project five had migrated in the last two years. Their migratory decisions were driven by deteriorating conditions within Eritrea itself. The war in Tigray increased demand for forced conscripts. Conscripts are generally unable to return home, sometimes for years. Information about conscripts is restricted, leaving their families unable to plan in their absence. Further, wages paid to conscripts are insufficient to support families, estimated at 25 USD per month (G, Interview). As the interviewee above describes, families are unable to meet their basic needs on this salary, but technically forbidden from moonlighting. This in turn drives outmigration.

A further factor was the role of COVID-19 restrictions. Prior to the pandemic, Eritrea implemented mobility restrictions nationwide that required prior permission to

move between areas. Road blocks were in place to prevent free movement. COVID-19 increased mobility restrictions and the number of road blocks, as well as placing further limitations on the ability to work. These restrictions limited the ability of households to meet their basic needs, and, perhaps more significantly impacted social structures. The inability to raise a family or to visit family, influenced the decisions to leave,

> The contributions: war in Tigray and COVID. Because the rounding up and recruitments have been increased. They were intensified. Also, COVID. People['s] movement is restricted. You cannot work. You cannot move. Negative impact on the daily life of the people, and on their economy and their livelihood. All this contributed to people deciding to move out. Even if you have a relationship, you have long plan to marry and establish families: the person you're in love with, relationship with, you don't even have contact with [them] in Eritrea now.
>
> Woman, Khartoum (22yo)

The choices of the interviewees to exit the country were extremely limited and made with a degree of blindness. To navigate the shoot to kill policy, out-migration requires a facilitator. Yet, the surveillance state combined with the lack of access to technology forces people to make decisions without consultation with prior migrants or family members. Thus, people choose a facilitator [smuggler] with limited information about them, their capabilities, or the route. The lack of shared information or vetting contributes to use of smugglers who are linked to human traffickers. The interviewees who crossed from Eritrea to Sudan in the last two years were categorically sold at the border by the smuggler to traffickers who then took them to Libya, as the interviewee indicates:

> When I left Eritrea, I was under tremendous pressure. I was under tremendous stress and anxiety. Even my decisions I don't know whether I made the right decisions. At that time, I was pregnant and the person with whom I got pregnancy was in the army. I didn't have any information about his whereabouts. I just started the journey with some people. And the journey was very risky and dangerous. There was hunger, thirst, [it was] very difficult. When we reached Sudan, in Ghirba, we faced another danger. I came to Sudan…on Thursday evening. And Saturday… got kidnapped. Another group, came and kidnapped us. A shoot out happened and one tire exploded and they had to drive us with three tires. It was very scary. Then this guy took us to his home. We stayed in his home. He sold us to the other group. And this group took us to Libya.
>
> Woman, Khartoum (22yo)

The woman's experience described was common across interviewees. Immediately upon crossing into Sudan, they were abducted, most frequently sold by the person who had facilitated their outmigration to a trafficker who in turn moved them to Libya. Unable to leave Eritrea legally, with no funds and with limited knowledge of migratory options, the smugglers they relied on in turn sold them at the border.

Risks in Sudan

> The Eritrean security forces, if they target someone they easily come and kidnap them [in the camps]. The traffickers, they also target people who they think have money [in the camps]. It is easy to come and kidnap them, because also the Sudanese government has not put enough security forces. There are not enough facilities in the refugee camp. Life is very, very harsh. When the COVID outbreak came, life became more harsh because lockdown and then lack of facilities. It became very, very difficult for people to live there. So the flow of people out of there, [from] the camps to the cities like Khartoum increased.
>
> Male, Khartoum (~40yo)

Refugees and asylum seekers in Sudan face complex and intersecting risks to trafficking driven largely by Sudanese refugee policies and a lack of governmental accountability (and participation). A set of pre-existing factors that shaped risks to trafficking in Sudan were negatively impacted by the coup, exacerbating vulnerability for Eritrean migrants. Specifically, refugee encampment policies, corruption within the Sudanese security forces,

and a lack of security at the border were already known to create risks to trafficking (Plaut, 2017; Yohannes, 2021). The coup exacerbated the risks within these geographies, removing a semblance of oversight from the security forces or police who, instead of protecting at risk populations, increased their targeted hostility towards Eritrean migrants. Interviewees faced with forced roundups, extortion, and risks of abduction (and return to Eritrea) were considering risky migration through and to Libya.

> When I came to the refugee camp, I had expectations, high expectations the camp had enough protection and facilities but I found it is the opposite of what I was expecting. There are almost no, facilities that provide the basic services. There is no…even shelter. People don't have the tent. They sleep outside. There is no food. There is nothing provided in the camp, only like, seven thousand Sudanese pounds in a month and the only money we get and its less than 5USD a month.
>
> ▶ Male (40yo)

Sudan's refugee policies (registration and encampment) described by a survivor above were identified by both survivors and camp administrators as contributing factors to risks of trafficking. Chiefly, encampment policies in Sudan dictate that refugees are unable to work and have no pathway to citizenship. Eritreans are largely ineligible for state assistance (Crowder and Plaut 2019). This leaves them dependent on aid and humanitarian organizations for food, shelter, and safety.

Yet, camp conditions are poor and aid quantities are limited, often insufficient for survival. This encourages both negative coping mechanisms and risky migration. A camp administrator described the relationship between levels of aid and risks to exploitation, '*We saw a direct correlation again, and the protection violations and trafficking increased when the World Food Programme [WFP] suspended food distribution. So people who officially are not allowed to leave the camp, were cut off from their food rations, and that led to an increase [in protection violations and trafficking]' (Camp Admin, Interview 2022).* Women in particular were forced to engage in sex work or were sexually exploited in exchange for resources according to camp administrators.

Furthermore, the lack of security within and around camps puts refugees at risk of both coercive recruitment for trafficking and other forms of violence. Refugees who did not initially live in camps were required to do so (in Shagarab camp in Eastern Sudan), and were abducted on the way. Traffickers and smugglers were able to enter and leave the camps, to coerce victims, and abduct them. Women were abducted and raped: '*some human traffickers who were used to abusing refugees, would pick up some girls rape them and return them' (Interview, Exile, Canada)*. Perhaps most significantly, the Eritrean government coordinates forced returns from Sudan, kidnapping Eritreans from camps and forcibly returning them to Eritrea (Interview, Exile, Canada). These are routine events 'designed to instil terror' in the population with the additional effect of encouraging onward migration (Gerrima, 2016). The traffickers benefit from this situation, using it coercively to encourage use of their services.

Additionally, refugees in camps and camp administrators both described situations in which camp administrators or aid workers were involved in exploitation:

> At the same time, the sexual exploitation and abuse etc, are perpetrated by government counter parts, be it [x] or the military counterparts… And us as a protection actor that is trying to support survivors of these acts, and then bring perpetrators to justice, to refer them to court, it is obviously a quite tricky business. They were involved, we advised the entity on how to prevent some of these things from happening, but this very entity is very often the perpetrator.
>
> ▶ Camp Administrator, Male

While INGOs were involved in identifying and referring cases of exploitation to the criminal justice system, and providing protection and assistance to survivors, the participation of other governmental entities in the exploitation of refugees was problematic. This situation made it difficult for survivors to receive justice or security.

Refugees additionally raised concerns that they had been asked to 'buy' their resettlement spaces by local staff in 2018. Though UNHCR undertook a full investigation (see UNHCR 2018), refugees stated that they faced retribution from local staff for raising concerns (Interviewee, Khartoum). This left them in a difficult position where they were unable or unwilling to seek safety from the

protective actor and lost hope in a legal solution to their displacement. Corruption within UNHCR may not be pervasive and may have been addressed, but the perception contributed to a lack of trust in the system.[2]

Consequently, having lost hope in legal routes or a durable solution, refugees were considering or had considered irregular migration. Refugees are forbidden from moving legally to Khartoum, requiring 'illegal' movement between the two places. One refugee described the challenges this entailed and risks to trafficking:

> Because of the hardship in the refugee camp, people get out of the refugee camp, and they migrate to Khartoum. They have to pay smugglers, in the process they get kidnapped. They are asked to pay like $6,000 USD. The safer way uses the main road...but the cheaper way is $4,000 USD but it is more risky. Most likely you get kidnapped by traffickers and you pay like $6,000 to be released. The situation in the refugee camp is frustrating.
>
> ▶ Man, Khartoum (37yo)

Finally, the deterioration of the security conditions in Sudan were manifest predominately in Khartoum, where refugees were living in fear. Refugees and refugee NGO workers described experiences of constant harassment by police and military personnel who arrested, detained, and in some cases physically attacked them. The security forces targeted them due to their migratory status; they were frequently stopped and asked to demonstrate their legality. However, upon doing so, the card was ripped up and a bribe of between 300 and 500 USD was demanded (Interview, Male, Khartoum). Failure to pay can result in threat of expulsion to Eritrea (ibid). UNHCR was able in some cases to help refugees to guarantee release from detention, but this was not a given. As one man described:

> I have a refugee card. I have status, because when I was in the refugee camp I got it. But in the city of Khartoum, having refugee status or not does not help you at all, because the security forces have, aggressive attitude towards the refugees. They see them as subjects to exploit to take money and they abuse their rights and restrict them. They round them up. When they arrest you, they ask you for money for your registration. In most cases, if you show your card, they tear it. Sometimes it is better to have it. In some cases, the UNHCR was successful to intervene and get you out of detention. But in many cases, there are people who have the card who have been deported to Eritrea. Having the card doesn't mean you have a guarantee especially now after the political changes, things have changed so much it has become so difficult, continuous rounding up, and arresting, and certain sections of the general public has a negative attitude towards the refugees.
>
> ▶ Male, Khartoum (41yo)

As a result of the deteriorating conditions in Eritrea and Sudan, lack of security, and risks of repatriation, Eritrean refugees and migrants were considering further migration, despite experiences of human trafficking in Libya and knowledge of current conditions.

Libya: Abduction, Torture, Ransom

The most common and defining experience of trafficking described by Eritrean refugees and migrants was forced abduction for a protracted period to Libya. The five interviewees who were taken to Libya were abducted from Khartoum or the border of Sudan-Eritrea for a period of between eight months and four years. Interviewees described conditions of mass detention, physical abuse, and sexual violence in line with experiences detailed by UNHCR and IOM (see UNHCR 2020). Abductees were kept with dozens of others in warehouses, in the dark, without access to the outside. Several experienced violent clashes between militias or armed forces and witnessed death.

> From Sudan to Libya, I was kidnapped in Khartoum. The kidnapping happened at some people offered a job to work, and when we went

[2] Refugees stated that the reduction in size of the US resettlement program under the Trump Administration played a further contributing role, as it eliminated a major source of hope and one of the few places of opportunity.

to work, in the city of Khartoum, it was a trap. We ended up in Libya. They put us in a warehouse in Libya, a lot of beating and torture. They made us communicate with our family members and friends. To raise money. But I don't have anyone to pay. I suffered for a long time, handing over form one warehouse, to another.

▶ Man, Khartoum, (40yo)

In these detention situations, migrants at times interacted with authorities—be it international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) or state entities—but with no intervention. These interactions took several forms. When migrants were transported to Libya, they went through military check points or were followed by border security forces in armed vehicles. One woman gave birth in a Libyan hospital where, due to complications, she was forced to stay for several days. When she recovered, she was released to the people who had abducted and detained her. They then brought her back, with the baby, to the detention facility. Another man was 'rescued' from one center by UNHCR and taken to a government detention facility run by security forces, where conditions were worse:

Finally, I was handed over to the UNHCR. But UNHCR works with the security forces. Even the UNCHR we were safe under their care and control, but we were in detention we never got the chance to get out. We were starving. In 24 hrs we got one piece of bread, and a small piece of cheese.

▶ Male, Khartoum (40yo)

Interviewees described physical harm and severe trauma during their captivity. One had no shoes and had developed severe pain as a result; they are currently housebound. The woman who gave birth, was unable to breastfeed due to conditions around birth and struggled financially to provide formula. The baby survived despite being born at one kilo. Others suffered from trauma, fear, and psychological illness.

During these experiences, as the man above describes, Eritrean migrants and refugees were forced to solicit money from their networks. The average cost cited was 5000 to 5,500 USD to be released. Their torture was often conducted while on the phone with their families to elicit a response. Once refugees had paid the smugglers, they were transported by the same individuals back to Khartoum. In Khartoum, they did not seek or receive medical treatment due to fears of interacting with security forces or a lack of knowledge of available resources.

Discussion and Conclusions

The purpose of this research was to identify where in their journeys Eritreans become victims of human trafficking, to pinpoint interventions to reduce risks and support resilience. The initial focus was on understanding whether and how COVID-19 had played a role. However, in the course of the research period, the research context shifted dramatically, creating additional crises with impacts on the vulnerabilities faced by Eritreans. Consequently, the research found a situation of extreme vulnerability for Eritrean refugees who are living in a political and economic context where multiple actors seek to benefit from their exploitation. An existing human trafficking market built on extortion of enormous sums of money is benefiting from the destabilization of Sudan and conflict in Ethiopia, with negative impacts on the safety of refugees and asylum seekers.

Eritreans are driven to migrate by a situation deemed to involve 'crimes against humanity' by the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC). There is no resolution in sight and conscription is escalating; the Eritrean government's attempts to force individuals to fight in the war in Tigray has led to more outmigration. However, the reception conditions within the neighboring countries of Ethiopia and Sudan—traditional host countries—have disintegrated. The risks are known to migrants, but migration is described as 'unavoidable' given the alternative options of life in Eritrea. Of migrant groups, Eritreans within Sudan are particularly at risk given the ability to extort funds from diasporic connections. Consequently, individuals are frequently abducted and ransomed. Often, they are tortured, abused, and sometimes killed.

The use of the IOM framework demonstrates the multiscalar vulnerabilities borne by Eritreans. In particular, the use of the DoMV highlights the ways in which structural factors interact with individual vulnerabilities to create risks. Diagramming where the risks lie shows how migratory status creates vulnerabilities for Eritreans who lack the protection of any state actor and receive inadequate protection from humanitarian organizations. Stateless, and with no prospects of third country resettlement, Eritreans have few if any options for safe migration and are likely to fall victim to exploitative actors.

What can be done?

The policy recommendations named here are intended to help alter conditions that produce or contribute to exploitation of victims. These recommendations follow and expand on those made by the ILO in their PROSPECTS report on Sudan and the Country Response Plan Refugee Consultation Forum/UNHCR (US Department of State, 2019; Refugee Consultation Forum, 2020; ILO, n.d.).

- Multilateral entities and states in the region should work with the new government of Sudan to facilitate proactive, durable solutions to resolve protracted displacement situations. This involves commitment by third country states to accept refugees as well as committed investments that make local integration feasible, such as investments in security within camps, educational systems, infrastructure (health systems and socioeconomic systems), access to work permits and livelihood training that would contribute to a tenable local integration options.
- Nominally, refugee status determination processing times are said to take 30 days in Sudan. However, decisions being made within this time frame are uncommon as noted by UNHCR, the US DOS and interviewees. Granting refugees arriving from Eritrea access to humanitarian protection upon entry would significantly reduce fear of deportation, sense of liminality, and improve access to resources.
- Additional international organizational presence in border areas in Eastern Sudan and access to support services for arriving Eritreans would reduce risks of trafficking.
- Refugees described corruption within gatekeeper roles of international governmental organizations who controlled eligibility for refugee services including resettlement. Perceptions of corruption deterred trust in the organization. Improving perceptions of the UNHCR and other INGOs in Sudan and Libya by addressing previously stated concerns and protecting whistle-blowers would help to re-establish trust.
- Opening more refugee registration sites across Sudan and removing requirements to travel to Shagrab to file for status would eliminate abduction hotspots.
- Promote peaceful co-existence between host and refugee communities through awareness raising within the host communities to combat negative stereotypes and xenophobia, including by working with police and border forces.

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Contact details

International Labour Organization
Route des Morillons 4
CH-1211 Geneva 22
Switzerland

T: +41 22 799 7239
E: @ilo.org

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