

MONTHLY MIGRATION OVERVIEW

DECEMBER 2019



A Somali woman in Shabwah, the main arrival point for both Ethiopian and Somali migrants travelling from Somalia © IOM 2019

HORN OF AFRICA-YEMEN MIGRATION FLOWS

Yemen is a country of immense importance to the “Eastern route”¹ on which people migrate from the Horn of Africa to the Arabian Gulf, primarily the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). Throughout 2019, migrant flows on this route remained complex and dynamic. Mixed in nature, the flows are comprised of individuals in search of economic opportunity unattainable at home, as well as refugees and asylum-seekers² fleeing human rights abuses and adverse living conditions.

IOM estimates that more than 138,000 migrants, 92 per cent of whom were Ethiopian nationals, entered Yemen in 2019. Flows into Yemen are closely linked to regional dynamics like the security, political and economic situation in the Horn of Africa.

Returns of Ethiopian nationals from KSA and years of conflict in Yemen have not deterred people from migrating on this route. However, the conflict in Yemen did force the major arrival points in and routes through Yemen to change. Before 2015, migrants typically arrived on the western coast around Al Hudaydah but due to increased active conflict in that area, the route was pushed to Yemen’s southern coastline, particularly the governorates of Lahj and Shabwah, over the past few years. In 2019, migration routes were further impacted by the conflict, causing migrants to use secondary as opposed to main roads to avoid parties to the conflict and security actors, as well as front-

line areas. Even with some changes to the routes during the year, the main migrant hubs remained to be Lahj, Al Bayda, Marib, Aden, Sana’a and Sa’ada governorates.

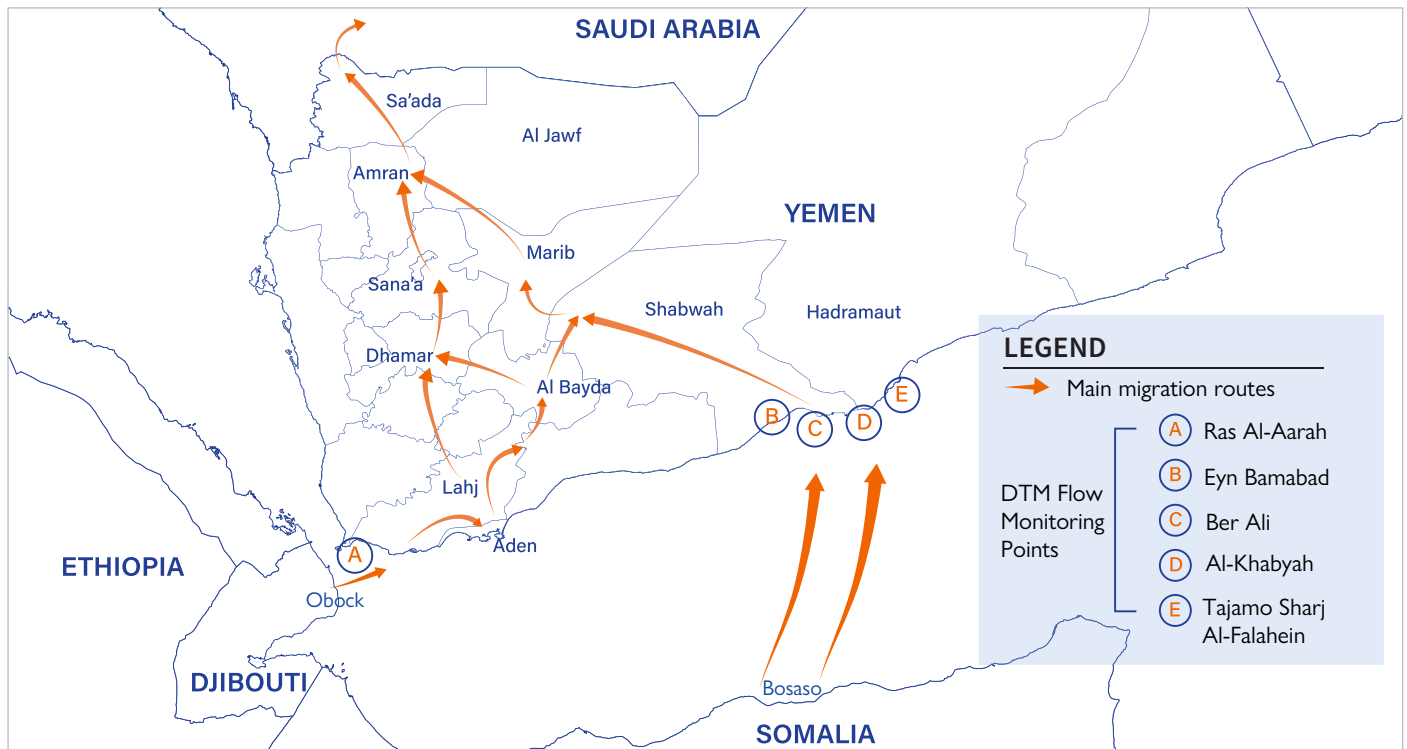
The persistence of migrant flows, despite Yemen’s conflict and tightening of immigration policies in the Gulf, shows that there is a strong network of smugglers, traffickers and criminal gangs facilitating migration along the Eastern route. Lack of rule of law, as a result of the conflict, is leaving more and more space for the proliferation of these networks within the country. Migrant’s engagement with these networks starts in their home communities where smugglers, often known as brokers, come to advertise their services. They target on young and vulnerable members of the community. The migrants travelling on this route are typically young men under the age of 30. There is also a high volume of unaccompanied migrant children (UMCs) travelling, with more than 8,100 UMCs (6%) being reported as having arrived in Yemen from the Horn of Africa by the end of 2019.

While most migrants are aware of the likelihood of being exposed to some risks on this journey before leaving home, they typically do not know that there is an ongoing conflict in Yemen. Smugglers are the main source of information about the route for many migrants prior to their departure and appear to be in part responsible for this lack of information.

¹ The Eastern route is also known as the Eastern corridor or Gulf route

² The Regional Migrant Response Plan for the Horn of Africa and Yemen 2018-2020

HORN OF AFRICA TO YEMEN MIGRATION ROUTES



A DANGEROUS JOURNEY

At all phases of their journey – walking through deserts in the Horn of Africa, crossing the Gulf of Aden, migrating through a country in conflict and crossing into KSA – migrants face significant protection threats. Women and girls as well as unaccompanied children are the most vulnerable groups moving through Yemen and are more at risk of being exposed to abuse by smugglers and traffickers.

Prior to reaching Yemen, migrants experience many challenges, including exploitation and abuse, and extreme thirst and hunger, as well as a lack of shelter and medical assistance. In most cases, migrants seek out smugglers and criminal groups to facilitate their journey; very few people travelling on this route possess valid travel documents³. The networks facilitating the journey blur the lines between smuggling and trafficking, due to the abuse they perpetrate, the coercive pressure they exert at various points, and the extortion that takes place, especially against women, upon arrival and travel through Yemen.



A migrant is treated by an IOM mobile medical team near Yemen's coast in Shabwah governorate © IOM 2019

Crossing the sea from Djibouti or Somalia to Yemen, migrants travel in unfit and overcrowded boats, risking capsizing, drowning and starvation. Boat incidents reported in 2019 included a situation in July where at least 15 Ethiopian nationals died after becoming stranded as a result of the engine breaking down. More incidents at sea are likely to have taken place during the year but have gone unreported.

Upon arrival and during their travel within Yemen, migrants are subject to dehydration and exhaustion, with very limited access to services. The absence of security actors or the authorities at disembarkation points favours smugglers' presence, increasing the risk of migrants being abducted or trafficked, or being exposed to abuse and violence – especially women and girls, who are often used as a form of bartering among trafficking networks. Migrants are often held in abhorrent conditions by these networks where they are tortured until their families back home can pay a ransom.

To be able to continue their journey, migrants often resort to working in farming and other sectors in Yemen and can become exposed to exploitation or forced labour. On their journey, migrants pass through and often get trapped in areas of active conflict; some have even been seriously injured or killed. Among the main incidents of this type recorded in 2019 were three strikes in November and December on a market area in Sa'ada governorate, which is frequented by migrants waiting to cross the border into KSA. Over 100 people were reported to have lost their lives, and more injured, the majority of whom were reported to be Ethiopian nationals.

Once in KSA or back home in Ethiopia, many of these migrants suffer from severe physical and mental health challenges due to the violence and abuse suffered during their migration journey or possible detention in KSA and forced return back to Ethiopia.

3. IOM World Migration Report, 2018 (page 53)

MIGRATION TRENDS

IOM estimates that 138,213 migrants arrived in Yemen in 2019. A great majority (88%) intended to transit through the country in an attempt to reach KSA. Similar to 2018, Bosaso, Somalia, remained the main departure area from the Horn of Africa in 2019 (62%), with Obock, Djibouti, being second (38%).

Although migrant arrivals continued throughout 2019, like 2018, the smallest number was observed during the third quarter (17%) of the year when heat waves in Djibouti and choppy seas were reported. In April and May 2019, monthly arrivals rose over 18,000, representing the highest monthly arrival figures since 2006⁴. Regular fluctuations in arrival numbers to Yemen are common and depend on conditions at points of departure, access to transport, smugglers and weather conditions.

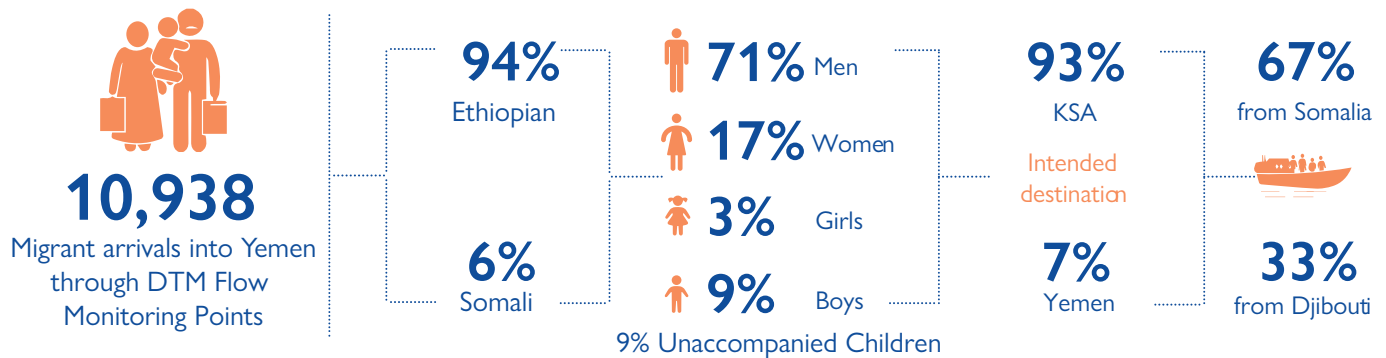
IOM's protection and medical mobile teams in Lahj and Shabwah governorates observed an overall increase in their caseload during December compared with the previous four months. Throughout the year, among the five entry points monitored by IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) flow monitors, Ras Al-Arah (Lahj) and Al-Khabayah (Shabwah) were the ones where a significant increase in arrivals was observed, while in the other points – Eyn Bamabad, Ber Ali and Tajamo Sharj Al-Falahein in Shabwah – the number dropped due to increased security presence.

MIGRANT PROFILES

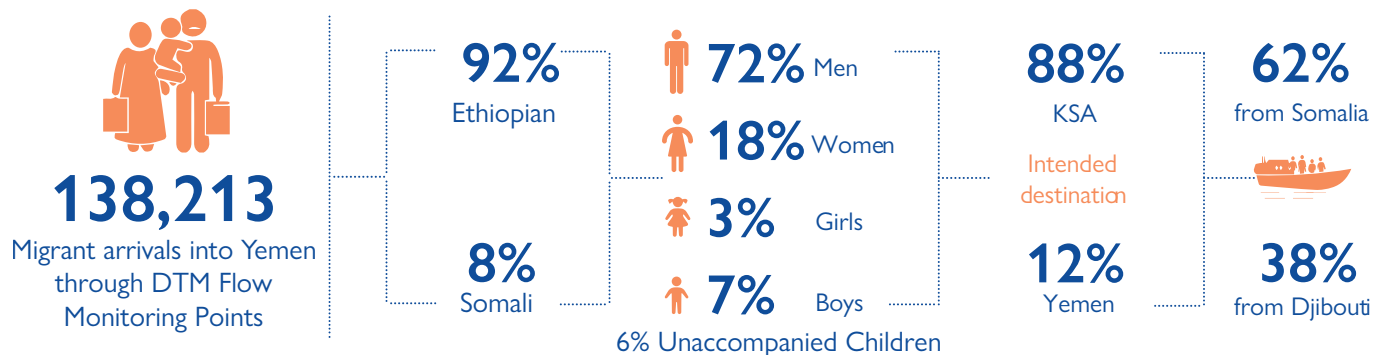
The profiles of migrants recorded in December reflect the overall profiles of migrants observed throughout the year. In 2019 Ethiopian nationals, 92 per cent of the total annual migrant arrivals, represented the majority, followed by Somali nationals (8%). Economic drivers remained the main reason for travelling (above 98%) and 88 per cent indicated that the KSA was their intended destination. Most of the migrants were adult men (72%), followed by adult women (17%), boys (9%) and girls (3%). An overall increase of numbers of women and unaccompanied children has been observed in the 2019 flows – respectively, from 14,684 women in 2018 to 24,160 in 2019, and from 1,828 in 2018 to 8,186 unaccompanied migrant children in 2019.

Although the majority of migrants left their home communities hoping to reach KSA, in a small amount of cases, they intend to work in Yemen. Depending on the country of departure, the journey to KSA can take up to five months and the drivers are complex and over-lapping. Most commonly, migrants leave in search of employment but other underlying factors encouraging people to move include discrimination, ethnic tensions, political instability and insecurity, as well as environmental factors, such as drought, making it difficult to secure a livelihood. These factors, coupled with the opportunities for employment and the proximity of KSA and the Gulf states, are the main reasons why migrants are willing to accept huge risks in pursuit of a better life.

BREAKDOWN OF DECEMBER 2019 ARRIVALS



ARRIVALS JANUARY TO DECEMBER 2019



IOM's latest reports on migration can be found here: <https://dtm.iom.int/yemen>

4. Mixed Migration Report: <http://www.mixedmigration.org/articles/record-numbers-of-refugees-and-migrants-arrive-in-yemen-amidst-intensifying-and-complicated-war/>

MIGRANT VOICES

SHAJO, 18 YEARS OLD

"I grew up in the Amhara Region of Ethiopia and I am the oldest son in my family. My father was a trader, but now he has stopped working. I was travelling to KSA because I heard that there are jobs there like farming. I am travelling alone, and I don't know anyone in KSA. When I first left my town to look for a job [in Ethiopia], I found one with little salary. I then heard from people that there are good jobs with good salaries in KSA. I collected money to travel and initially paid USD 500. The smuggler promised me that the journey would be easy. I walked the desert [in the Horn of Africa] with around 100 other people. Some people died because they were so hungry and thirsty.



Shaajo in IOM's Migrant Response Point in Aden © IOM 2019

About 160 of us took a small boat [to Yemen]; it was so narrow. When we arrived in Yemen, other smugglers held us for a month.

We were beaten, tortured, abused and threaten for ransom. My family sent USD 900 to save my life.

I was released with some other people who had paid. After a while I arrived in Aden, I have seen that life is so hard here and that it will be impossible for me to reach KSA because of the situation in Yemen. I want to return home."

BIYAA, 32 YEARS OLD

"I left Ethiopia to get a job in KSA. The smuggler told me that the route would be easy and not dangerous. First, we drove by car to Ethiopia's border with Djibouti and then we walked for two weeks to reach the coast. I paid the smuggler USD 450 at the beginning of the journey and he promised me that I would not face any problems but in Djibouti, another smuggler took over.

Some people died of thirst and hunger along the way.

To get to Yemen, they crammed about 280 of us into one boat. There was no oxygen, and some people committed suicide by throwing themselves into the sea."

All names have been changed in this section to protect the interviewees identities.

KEEYSAN, 20 YEARS OLD

"I didn't have a job in my country. A smuggler told me that, if he took me to KSA, I would find work. I paid him USD 360. We walked for three weeks [in Djibouti] without clean water and food. Then, after we arrived to Yemen's shores, we got lost and walked the wrong way in the desert for a week. Eventually, we made it to Aden... I have been here for two months. I haven't been able to find a job and can't leave Aden because of the fighting in Yemen.

I don't know before I left Ethiopia that there is a war taking place in Yemen.

Now, I want to return home."



Three young migrants walk inland from the Shabwah coast where their boat from Somalia arrived in Yemen © IOM 2019

IOM MIGRATION RESPONSE IN YEMEN

Since IOM began operations in Yemen, its migrant assistance programme has aimed to ensure that migrants in Yemen have access to life-saving humanitarian assistance and protection of their rights, safety and dignity.

PILLARS OF INTERVENTION

1. Protection and life-saving humanitarian assistance is provided through fixed centres, for example, health clinics, migrant response points and mobile teams which provide access to immediate medical care, relief items (clothes, shoes and hygiene items), food, information on safe migration, case management, psychosocial support, and options for voluntary humanitarian return.
2. Opportunities for safe and voluntary return assistance for undocumented Ethiopian migrants and stranded migrants from other nationalities is offered through IOM's Voluntary Humanitarian Return mechanism. Somali refugees are provided return solutions through the Assisted Spontaneous Return (ASR) programme, in coordination with the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR). Assistance includes the provision of 'fit-to-travel' medical screenings and medical escorts before and during travel.
3. Analysis of mixed migration flows, risks and mitigation measures, continues to be strengthened; including protection dynamics related to migrants in Yemen, and push and pull factors.
4. A regional approach to safe, dignified and orderly migration is being developed and implemented to promote dialogue and engagement within the region on a coordinated rights-based response at the governance and policy levels, including migration-aware health care policies. A component of this also involves strengthening the capacities of relevant actors in counter-trafficking and assistance to victims.
5. Coordination with partners is being enhanced on multi-sectoral migration responses, strengthening advocacy and ensuring clear referral mechanisms at both regional and Yemen country level.

DECEMBER 2019

145 Somali refugees helped return through ASR with UNHCR
5,211 Migrants provided with health assistance
6,430 Migrants supported with protection assistance

JANUARY-DECEMBER 2019

1,681 Somali refugees helped return through ASR with UNHCR
3,785 Ethiopian migrants and stranded migrants of other nationalities assisted through VHR
69,881 Migrants provided with health assistance
53,769 Migrants supported with protection assistance

Over the course of 2019, IOM Yemen also hosted migration management workshops with the authorities and undertook research on mixed migration flows in Yemen and related protection risks.

IOM MIGRANT ASSISTANCE ACTIVITY LOCATIONS

