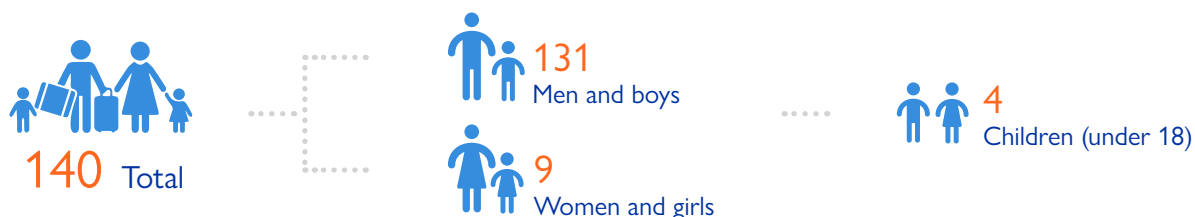


VOLUNTARY HUMANITARIAN RETURN | FLASH UPDATE



On 16 March, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) supported the voluntary return of 140 Ethiopian migrants from Aden, Yemen. This was the first flight from Yemen to Ethiopia under IOM's Voluntary Humanitarian Return (VHR) programme since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. The last VHR flights to Addis Ababa took place in early March 2020, days before the global pandemic was officially declared causing the programme to Ethiopia to be put on hold.

Despite a reduction in the number of migrants arriving in Yemen — from 138,000 in 2019 to just over 37,500 in 2020 — the dangers they face have drastically increased over the past year. Unable to continue across Yemen to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), many stranded migrants lack shelter, water and food. Migrants also have been at increased risk of experiencing xenophobia, exploitation and detention over the last year.

In total, IOM has registered over 6,000 stranded migrants who wish to avail of the Organization's return support. In

December, the Government of Ethiopia sent a delegation to Aden to verify an initial group of 1,100 returnees. The flight was the first in the initial group, with the remaining expected to take place in the coming weeks and months. Additionally, thousands of other migrants remain stranded elsewhere in Yemen, including Ma'rib, where IOM hopes to extend its return efforts soon.

Prior to departure, IOM carries out medical and protection screenings to ensure that returnees are fit to travel, while those with special needs are identified and supported. The Organization also provides clothing and hygiene items to those in need. In coordination with the Ethiopian government, IOM supports the government-run COVID-19 quarantine facility set up to accommodate the returnees in Addis Ababa and provides cash assistance, essential items and onward transportation assistance to home communities. The Organization also supports family tracing and the reunification of unaccompanied migrant children. Across the Horn of Africa and Yemen, IOM provides life-saving support to migrants through health care, food, water and other assistance.

WHAT IS VOLUNTARY HUMANITARIAN RETURN?

Migrants travel to Yemen typically en route to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Many experience human rights abuses on their journeys and lack access to essential services. Given the difficulty and danger of the route, some decide not to continue. The VHR programme in Yemen provides stranded undocumented Ethiopian migrants with the option of returning home safely. IOM gives priority to the most vulnerable including unaccompanied and separated children, women, the elderly, medical cases, and persons who have experienced grave human rights violations. All migrants receiving VHR assistance are individually counselled and provided with necessary information to make an informed decision in line with their needs. During counselling, IOM makes an initial assessment of any risks of ill treatment, persecution or other human rights violations that the migrant could suffer should they return to their country of origin. Persons with such protection concerns are referred to UNHCR. IOM provides pre-departure assistance consisting of movement logistics, nationality verification and issuance of emergency travel documents—when applicable—in coordination with officials from the Government of Yemen and the country of origin and a medical fit to travel assessment. For unaccompanied children, family tracing is carried out in coordination with UNICEF and its partners.



IN FOCUS MIGRANT VOICES



An Ethiopian woman waits to start her journey home with her young baby ©Majed Mohammed/IOM 2020

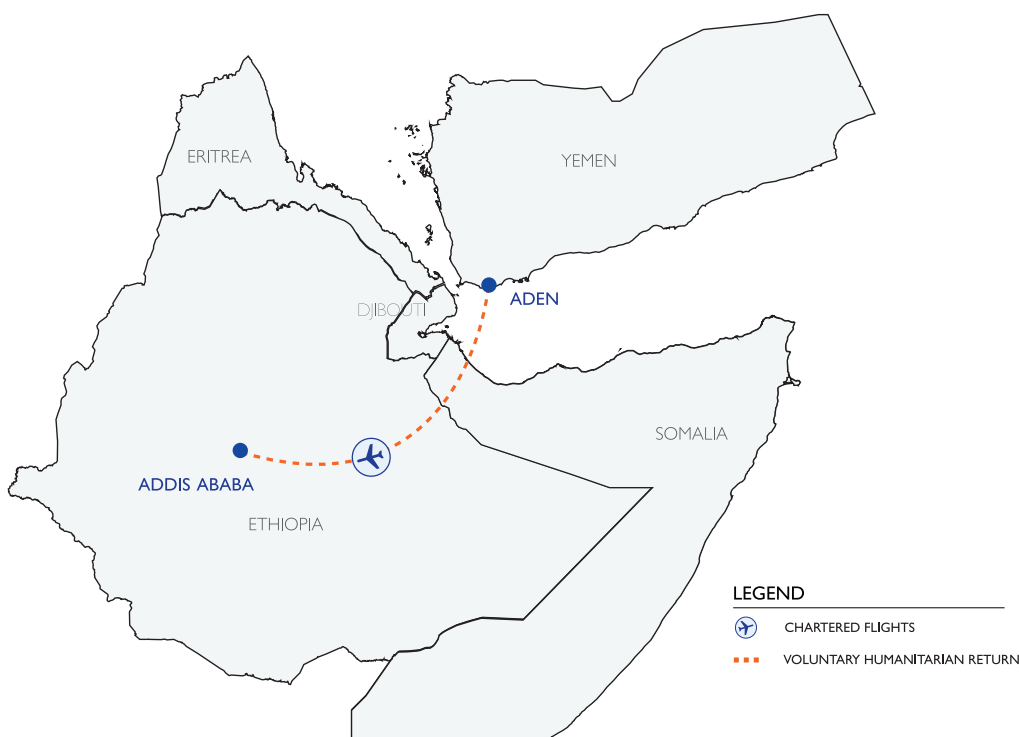
Mohammed Awal, 25 years old

"I have a family to provide for in Ethiopia, so I left to find work. I came to Yemen to make it to Saudi Arabia, but I was not successful. I can't describe my situation here, as it has been very difficult. I have been homeless and poor. I am happy to be going home but I have nothing to bring back to my family. I will never leave again."

Shafi Abudllah, 25 years old

"I have been here for one year. I left my country because I couldn't find work and I had to do something. When I reached the Saudi border, I faced issues and could not cross, as the border was closed. Because of COVID-19, I need to return home. I'm so happy that I'm going back, and my family are glad too."

MOVEMENT ROUTE



The return flight from Aden to Addis Ababa was funded by the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM), the humanitarian bureau of the U.S. State Department. Post-arrival assistance in Addis Ababa was supported by EU Humanitarian Aid, as well as PRM.



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