



IOM provides vital assistance to Yemeni returnees from Mecca

4-10 March Yemen – On the morning of March 4 over 750 Yemeni migrant workers disembarked from 14 buses at the Al Tuwal land border crossing point, a very isolated and desolate area between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) and Yemen. The migrant returnees, who were all men, had been held and detained by authorities in or around the city of Mecca. Many of the Yemeni returnees required immediate assistance including: (i) Safe drinking water; (ii) Access to sanitation services; (iii) Material assistance; and (iv) Urgent medical treatment.

Approximately 100 of those returnees had to be treated for various health conditions by IOM Yemen medical teams at the Al Tuwal Border. The sudden escalation in Yemeni returnees from KSA followed a riot on March 2 at a detention center for foreign migrant workers awaiting deportation in Jeddah a city near Mecca. The riot prompted authorities in KSA to carry out the immediate return of detained migrants from the general area in unprecedented numbers.

It was the first time that IOM enumerators and medical teams at the Al Tuwal border crossing reported such large numbers of returnees specifically from areas in or around the city of Mecca. By March 10, 11,776 returnees were received and counted by IOM staff. It was reported that 30 per cent of the Yemeni returnees who arrived at the border between March 4-10 were deported from Mecca.

The recent return of Yemeni migrant workers from Mecca and surrounding areas are part of wider efforts by KSA to restructure domestic labor market policies. These changes, and in particular amendments to the Nitaqat system, have resulted in massive returns of foreign migrant workers to their countries of origin.

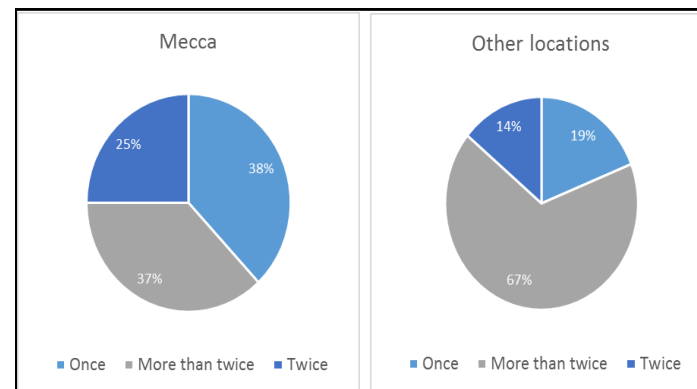
The massive returns commenced last year in 2013 and have continued throughout the first quarter of 2014. Most immediately affected by these policy changes is Yemen, due to its land proximity with KSA, making returns easier to effect overland.

Since June 2013, IOM staff members working at the Al Tuwal border have counted 327,322 Yemeni returnees. The vast majority of these migrants arrive at the border dehydrated and in poor condition as a result of their long and difficult journey. IOM has been providing ongoing emergency assistance to returnees from KSA at the Al-Tuwal border at the request of the Yemeni Ministry of Expatriate Affairs. In addition to the provision of safe drinking water IOM to date has provided (i) 135,051 returnees with emergency food; (ii) 21,072 returnees with immediate healthcare services; and, (iii) 8,217 returnees with material assistance.

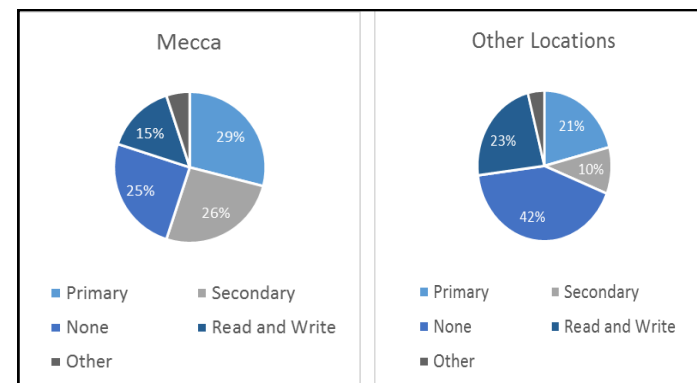
Data collected by IOM at the border crossing indicate that, compared to returns from other locations, recent returnees from Mecca tend to be better educated; more likely to have been in employment in KSA; more likely to have been sending remittances; and, have stayed in KSA for longer periods of time, on average. They may therefore have enjoyed more stable lives in KSA and been less inclined to engage in circular migration.

Given the fragile government transition that Yemen is currently experiencing, and notwithstanding existing concerns such as the stagnant economy, the large rates of unemployment and pervasive malnutrition, it is feared that the massive returns of working age Yemenis will further exacerbate the country's already delicate situation.

Returnees broken down by number of times returnees have been expelled from KSA – March 1-14



Returnees from the KSA broken down by education level- March 1- 14 2014



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