In the first quarter of 2021, migrant arrivals into Yemen remained low compared to pre-pandemic years, despite some loosening of movement restrictions and border security. Some 5,113 migrants arrived in Yemen in the first quarter of this year, compared with 27,948 in the same period in 2020, and 37,109 in 2019. The few migrants, who have attempted to migrate irregularly to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) during the pandemic, have typically found themselves stranded at some point along the journey in the Horn of Africa or Yemen. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) estimates that more than 32,000 migrants are stranded across Yemen in dire conditions, with extremely limited-to-no access to essential services like shelter, food, water and health care.

On 07 March, a fire broke out in the Immigration Passports and Naturalization Authority (IPNA) Immigration Holding Facility in Sana’a, causing the death of more than 40 detained migrants, and leaving over 170 injured, some of whom were in critical condition. IOM provided immediate medical and protection assistance in the aftermath of the fire, while supplying medical equipment and food to the three hospitals treating the victims and other locations where migrants were held. By the end of this quarter, the locations of those affected by the fire or in the facility at the time was not confirmed; it was believed that some remained in Sana’a city while others were in Aden, who may have been forcibly transferred there or made their own way, and some people were possibly in other locations across Yemen. The Immigration Holding Facility has yet to be used again as a migrant detention site. IOM continues discussions with authorities in Sana’a and Ethiopia to restart its Voluntary Humanitarian Return (VHR) programme from Sana’a city, prioritizing the most vulnerable people outside of detention, including victims of the fire.

Despite the closure of the Immigration Holding Facility in Sana’a, it is reported that forced transfers to southern governorates are continuing. Migrants are typically dropped near the control-line and then make their way over it and onto Aden where there are over 6,000 migrants stranded. IOM estimates that over 22,000 migrants have been forcibly transferred in this manner since November 2019.
As conditions for stranded migrants in Yemen have continued to deteriorate, migrants often feel that they have no options other than to put their lives back into the hands of smugglers to travel home to the Horn of Africa. Over 11,400 people have made this unsafe and, at times, deadly return journey across the Gulf of Aden since May 2020, according to IOM’s Displacement Tracking Matrix. The boat journey between Yemen and Djibouti is short but dangerous, as sadly illustrated by a boat incident in March when smugglers forced migrants into the sea causing some to drown on their way to Yemen. For those returning, once they reach Djibouti, they must make the land journey through the scorching hot Djiboutian desert to the Ethiopian border, often walking a large portion of the way.

With movement restrictions in place globally and possible public health risks related to international travel, IOM’s Voluntary Humanitarian Return (VHR) Programme from Aden to Ethiopia was put on hold as of March 2020 when the last two flights took off. Working with the Government of Ethiopia, IOM was able to restart the Programme with a flight carrying 140 Ethiopian migrants safely from Aden to Addis Ababa on 16 March 2021. This flight was the first in an initial batch of 1,100 people, who have had their nationalities verified by the Government of Ethiopia. Most migrants are undocumented and need travel documents in order to return regularly. In total, IOM has registered over 6,200 migrants who wish to return through the programme via its Aden Migrant Response Point (MRP) since October 2020. IOM’s VHR Programme represents, for many, the only safe lifeline currently available to save them from dire conditions of discrimination and deprivation in Yemen.

To improve living conditions for stranded migrants in Aden, IOM instituted a cash for work programme in November 2020, which continued throughout the first quarter of this year. This programme is providing 1,200 migrants, who have no income or will not be able to return soon, with the means to sustain themselves until a safe means of travelling home is available.
IOM's DTM team recorded 5,113 migrant arrivals into Yemen between 1 January to 31 March 2021, with the majority of people travelling through Somalia to Shabwah and Hadramawt. This was nearly an 82 per cent drop from the same period in 2020 when 27,948 migrants arrived. However, it is a 14 per cent increase from the fourth quarter of 2020 when 4,413 migrant arrivals were recorded. Despite the significant decrease in arrivals from the pre-pandemic period, the profile of migrants in Yemen remains the same, with the majority (87%) being Ethiopian and the remainder Somali (13%). Most of those travelling on this route continue to be young boys or men, with a low level of education from rural areas. They are typically unaware of the conflict in Yemen or its extent as well as COVID-19 and they report that they did not take any infection prevention measures during their trip.

Migrants in Yemen—particularly those stranded in the major hubs of Aden, Ma'rīb, Sana'a and Sa'dah—continue to live in extremely difficult conditions, most of them on the street, struggling to access minimum food and water necessary for survival. This situation not only puts migrants at higher risk of starvation and death, but – if not properly managed – could also constitute a public health issue considering the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. As social distancing, thorough hygiene, water and sanitation facilities are often not an option, migrants are at high risk of contracting communicable and water-borne diseases, while at the same time often denied access to health facilities. Moreover, there are more reports of migrants increasingly falling into smugglers’ exploitative practices, for example, forced labour, physical and sexual abuse, and abduction for ransom. In terms of needs, the main services needed remain water, food, and cash assistance.

Many migrants, especially women, report suffering violence and abuse on their journey, particularly at checkpoints, with no means of seeking help. Women and girls are the most exposed to risks of exploitation and, and are often exploited by traffickers and smugglers, who control their freedom of movement and sources of income. For example, women cannot leave where they are being held except to use unsanitary latrines and when they reach their destination, they are expected to pay back the trafficker, as they have not paid the full cost in advance. For stranded women migrants in Ma'rīb, some were forced during the quarter to move to Sana'a to work as domestic labourers until the KSA border opens. Other migrant women are increasingly being forced to work off debts on farms in Ma'rīb or moved to Sana'a to work as domestic labourers.
BREAKDOWN OF JANUARY, FEBRUARY, MARCH ARRIVALS

ARRIVALS JANUARY TO MARCH 2021

Migrant arrivals into Yemen through DTM Flow Monitoring Points

87% Ethiopian
13% Somalis

73% Men
16% Women
8% Boys
3% Girls

97% KSA
3% Yemen

57% from Somalia
43% from Djibouti

JANUARY

90% Ethiopian
10% Somalis

70% Men
20% Women
7% Boys
3% Girls

100% KSA
0% Yemen

67% from Somalia
33% from Djibouti

FEBRUARY

87% Ethiopian
13% Somalis

78% Men
11% Women
8% Boys
3% Girls

89% KSA
11% Yemen

47% from Somalia
53% from Djibouti

MARCH

84% Ethiopian
16% Somalis

75% Men
14% Women
8% Boys
3% Girls

100% KSA
0% Yemen

48% from Somalia
52% from Djibouti
MIGRANT VOICES

Farsan, Aden

“It has been a year since I came to Yemen and my life isn’t any better; it’s getting worse by the day. My journey from Ethiopia to Yemen was very difficult and exhausting. Smugglers show no mercy. I left my home to work in Saudi because the money there is better than in Ethiopia, but I never reached my destination. In Sana’a, I heard from others that the road to Saudi was closed and no one could go because of the war and corona. I decided with other Ethiopian men to come back to Aden to try find a way to work and live. But here in Aden, I could not find a place to sleep and there is no food or work. I sleep on the streets next to the stadium and eat leftovers from restaurants. I don’t want to stay here; I am really tired, and I want to go back to my country.”

Obsi, Aden

“When I saw everybody in my village go to Saudi and come back with a lot of money, I decided to go there and work. I wanted to help my family. One year ago, I left home for Yemen. We travelled by sea, which took nearly a whole day. We landed on a beach and went straight to a car and after that, we had three days of walking to reach Sana’a. In Sana’a, I could not go to Saudi due to the corona. I spent a long time there and it was horrible. I had no place to stay or eat. I was beaten badly by people in the street, so I decided to go back to my country. I came to Aden and spent time in the same bad situation. Now after working with IOM in their cleaning campaign, my life is a little bit better. I can buy food and even clothes. I’ve had enough here in Yemen and I need to get home.”

All names have been changed to protect the identity of the people interviewed
IOM MIGRATION RESPONSE IN YEMEN IN 2021

PILLARS OF INTERVENTION

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.

1. Protection and life-saving humanitarian assistance is provided through fixed centres, for example, health clinics, migrant response points and mobile teams provide access to immediate medical care, relief items (clothes, shoes and hygiene items), food, information on safe migration, case management, psychosocial support, cash for work 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 Returns 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 as needed before and during travel.

3. Analysis of trends including inflows, push and pull factors, migration routes, protection dynamics, risks and mitigation measures.

4. Development and implementation of a regional approach to safe, dignified and orderly migration to promote engagement within the region on a coordinated rights-based response at the governance level, a component of which involves strengthening the capacities of relevant actors in counter-trafficking and providing assistance to victims.

5. Enhancing coordination with partners on multi-sectorial migration responses, strengthening advocacy and ensuring clear referral mechanisms at both regional and country level.

COVID RESPONSE

IOM’s aim is to ensure that principled public health and protection interventions are integrated into Yemen’s COVID-19 response plan and are inclusive of all population groups, including migrants and irrespective of status. IOM’s main interventions include:

1. Hygiene and health prevention awareness among the migrant population and local communities.

2. Access to life-saving assistance including food, water, and hygiene and relief items.

3. Continuation of standard health and protection assistance through IOM migrant centres, supported clinics and mobile teams at main transit hubs, along migratory routes and at new arrival points along the southern coastline.

4. Protection monitoring to continue to identify, mitigate and respond to protection risks and violations of human rights, exacerbated by conditions created by COVID-19.

5. Resumption of safe and dignified return from Yemen to Ethiopia for those who express the desire to return home.
## IOM RESPONSE JANUARY-MARCH 2021

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>JANUARY</th>
<th>FEBRUARY</th>
<th>MARCH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Migrants provided with health assistance</td>
<td>2,520</td>
<td>3,086</td>
<td>2,674</td>
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<tr>
<td>Migrants supported with VHR</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>183</td>
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<tr>
<td>Migrants supported with protection assistance</td>
<td>6,580</td>
<td>4,808</td>
<td>7,216</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal protection monitoring monthly report, in coordination with partners</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yemen Regional Migration Response Plan (RMRP) consultations meeting between</td>
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</tbody>
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## JANUARY

- Migrants provided with health assistance: 2,520
- Migrants supported with VHR: 33
- Migrants supported with protection assistance: 6,580
- Internal protection monitoring monthly report, in coordination with partners: 1
- Yemen Regional Migration Response Plan (RMRP) consultations meeting between

## FEBRUARY

- Migrants provided with health assistance: 3,086
- Migrants supported with VHR: 66
- Migrants supported with protection assistance: 4,808
- Internal protection monitoring monthly report, in coordination with partners: 1
- Yemen Regional Migration Response Plan (RMRP) consultations meeting between

## MARCH

- Migrants provided with health assistance: 2,674
- Migrants supported with VHR: 183
- Migrants supported with protection assistance: 7,216
- Internal protection monitoring monthly report, in coordination with partners: 1
- Yemen Regional Migration Response Plan (RMRP) consultations meeting between

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A protection session with an unaccompanied migrant child in IOM’s MRP in Aden © O. Headon/IOM 2020

IOM’S MIGRANT ASSISTANCE IN YEMEN IS SUPPORTED BY