

VOLUNTARY HUMANITARIAN RETURN (VHR)

ADEN UPDATE MARCH 2020



The IOM protection team helps returning migrants prepare for their flight from Aden airport to Addis Ababa. ©IOM 2020/ Rami Ibrahim

On 2 and 3 March 2020, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) supported the voluntary return of 247 Ethiopian migrants from Aden, Yemen, to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The two charter flights were the first to be conducted by IOM under its Voluntary Humanitarian Return (VHR) programme in 2020. A majority of those travelling were children (under the age of 18) who had approached IOM and partners in Aden seeking return assistance. The Organization plans to carry out regular flights, given the significant desire of migrants to return from Aden and surrounding governorates. IOM's team in Ethiopia provided post arrival assistance, which included onward transportation assistance, medical and psychosocial support, temporary shelter for the most vulnerable including victims of human trafficking or unaccompanied and separated children, and family tracing and reunification.



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, a medical fit to travel assessment, and family tracing for unaccompanied children in coordination with UNICEF and its partners.

IN FOCUS: TRAVELLING HOME TO ETHIOPIA

Saeed and Abdo returned home to Ethiopia with IOM's assistance.

"My name is Saeed. I'm 30 years old, from Ethiopia." For a long time, Saeed had wanted to travel to KSA. He thought that he would be better able to provide for his family if he worked there. But when he reached Yemen, the reality of the crisis situation and the danger of irregular travel hit him. "It doesn't work; you reach the border and cannot cross. Then, in the end you go back to your country," said Saeed.

"I left Ethiopia with six people. We walked for around two to three weeks. When we found the smugglers, they took us the rest of the way to the coast by car. In Yemen, we were forced to transfer more money in addition to what we had already paid for the boat. They kept torturing me for two weeks," he described his journey.

Saeed stayed in Yemen for three years before making the decision to return home to Ethiopia. "Today, I will travel home. I'm so happy that I cannot describe how glad I am. If there was a scale to weight happiness, it would be off the scales," he concluded.

Eighteen-year-old Abdo travelled home on the same flight as Saeed. His friends were the ones who had originally encouraged him to travel. "I stopped studying in the 9th grade. I bought a Tuk Tuk motorcycle and worked as a driver. I was influenced by my friends to travel (to KSA) and came here to Yemen," explained Abdo, who decided that what he experienced in Yemen was not worth continuing on his journey to KSA.

"I have been six months here, but I am lucky to be going home. When I get back, if I meet someone coming here, I'll stop them. I think we need to stay in Ethiopia, work and develop our country. I'm an example that can be learned from," he said.



Saeed is one of the 247 migrants that IOM helped return home safely to Ethiopia in early March. ©IOM 2020/ Rami Ibrahim

MOVEMENT ROUTES

