



A MIGRANT'S JOURNEY

From the Horn of Africa across the Gulf of Aden

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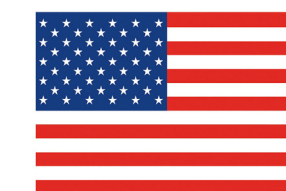
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Each year, thousands of migrants from the Horn of Africa, especially Ethiopia and Somalia, many of them young women, men, and children, take the journey through Djibouti, Somalia and Yemen across what is known as the Eastern Migration Route. They trek for long hours, days, and nights through hot and windswept deserts, risking their lives crossing the El Mandeb strait, hoping to reach the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries for better job opportunities. They are exposed to a myriad of protection risks, including abuse, violence and exploitation by smugglers and traffickers. Many of them are unaware of the ongoing civil war in Yemen. Despite the dangers and ongoing humanitarian crisis in Yemen, more than 6,400 migrants arrived there in the first five months of 2021. According to IOM, more than 32,000 migrants are currently stranded in Yemen in precarious situations, sleeping rough without shelter or access to any essential services, while others are in detention or held against their will by smugglers. In addition to these hardships, their hopes for better prospects have been thwarted by border closures and travel restrictions due to COVID-19.

Migrants usually cross the harsh desert terrain in groups. Occasionally, you can see lone travelers holding nothing but a bottle of water and wearing worn-out sandals on their feet. Others carry young children on their backs. They have limited or no food and water; many die from dehydration. The stories contained within represent only a few of the thousands of migrant journeys and experiences occurring along this perilous route each year.

IOM, the International Organization for Migration, and partners have been responding to the needs of migrants on the Eastern Route since 2018 through the Regional Migrant Response Plan (MRP) for the Horn of Africa and Yemen. The United States Department of State Bureau of Populations, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) and other donors have contributed much-needed funding to the MRP to provide life-saving assistance, including psychosocial support, family reunification and referral mechanisms for people with special needs, as well as other interventions geared towards strengthening the capacities of government to respond to the needs of the migrants.

Together with governments and other MRP partners, IOM is committed to addressing the dire humanitarian, human rights, safety and security challenges faced by migrants along the Horn of Africa-Yemen route.



A young Ethiopian migrant stands near her home in an informal settlement in Hargeisa on 8 July 2021. Photo: ©Tobin Jones / IOM 2021



Portrait of an elderly woman in IOM's supported Migration Response Centre (MRC) in Hargeisa.
Photo: ©Claudia Rosel Barrios / IOM 2021



Nur Idris arrived in Djibouti in late April 2021 from Mersa Woreda Wello in Ethiopia. His plan was to reach the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA).

Nur has been traveling irregularly to Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for the past ten years. The first time he went there, he stayed for two years and seven months before being forcibly returned. He stayed in Ethiopia for six months and then returned to Saudi Arabia again.

He is trying to make his fifth journey to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. All he wants is to find a job in a restaurant or a hotel so that he can live a better life.

To reach the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Nur must first cross the sea to Yemen and then cross the border in the country's north. "I know the journey ahead is full of danger with the possibility of death, my heart is doubting and even thinking of returning. If I can find work somewhere, I can work hard and change my life."

Tadjourrah Region, Djibouti, May 2021. Nur Idris is sitting on the beach near Tadjourah in the evening. Nur and his friend are on their way to Yemen and Saudi Arabia. Photo: ©Alexander Bee / IOM 2021



Koussour Koussour, Dikhil Region, Djibouti, May 2021. Two migrants are walking in the desert. Photo: ©Alexander Bee / IOM 2021



Beach, Tadjourrah Region, Djibouti, May 2021. Migrants are sitting on the beach near Tadjourah in the evening. They are on their way to Yemen and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Photo: ©Alexander Bee / IOM 2021



More than 60 migrants coming from Yemen collect their shoes as they wait for an IOM vehicle to transport them to the Migration Response Centre in Obock, Djibouti. Photo: ©Alexander Bee / IOM 2021

Migrants returning from Yemen who were rescued in the desert are assisted by IOM to go to the Migration Response Centre in Obock Djibouti for further assistance. Photo: ©Wilson Johwa / IOM 2021.



Obock, Djibouti, June 2021. 60 migrants coming back from Yemen were intercepted by the police as they were walking to Obock who held them in place until IOM's arrival. Photo: ©Alexander Bee / IOM 2021



Photo: ©Claudia Rosel Barrios / IOM 2021

Nimco Cali, 40, left her home in the Somali region of Ethiopia eight years ago. Wishing to find a better future for her children, she travelled all the way to Hargeisa because “there was no other support” to raise her eight children. Like many other migrant women working in the city, she has been getting temporary domestic jobs that are often not enough to make ends meet.

“I am ready to go back to Ethiopia where education is free.”

Nimco is one of the many Ethiopian women who receive support through IOM’s Migration Response Centre (MRC) in Hargeisa. Migrants coming to the MRC are provided with health assistance, psychosocial support, information, as well as return assistance for those who wish to return to their countries of origin.



Migrant women receive support through IOM’s Migration Response Centre in Hargeisa. Photo: ©Claudia Rosel Barrios / IOM 2021



A nurse conducts a medical screening on Ayan’s seven-month-old baby at the Migration Response Centre (MRC) in Hargeisa. Photo: ©Claudia Rosel Barrios / IOM 2021



Two women wait outside an IOM-funded Migration Response Centre in Hargeisa on 7 June 2021. Photo: ©Tobin Jones / IOM 2021



Registration of migrant returnees at the government reception centre in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Photo: ©Safa Msehli / IOM 2021



A smuggler's boat abandoned along the beach in Djibouti. The boat was carrying more than 130 Ethiopian migrants who were later taken to the IOM Migration Response Centre in Obock.
Photo: ©Alexander Bee / IOM 2021



Migrants congregate in an open area in Aden city, Yemen. Some 32,000 migrants are thought to be stranded in Yemen without access to humanitarian assistance. Photo: ©R. Ibrahim / IOM 2020



Isabel* at the IOM Transit Centre in Addis Ababa. Photo: ©Safa Msehli / IOM 2021

Isabel*, (**not her real name*) was only 16 when she got married. But she experienced abuse in her marriage and escaped to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia with five of her friends in search of a better life.

“I was with friends and used a trafficker and it took us one month to reach Yemen. We stayed with traffickers in the desert as they told us the route ahead was closed and we faced a lot of hardship in the desert, including going without food and water. We also had very few clothes to change into. The traffickers were abusive; we experienced sexual violence and they beat up male migrants. They were always extorting us by asking us to call a family member to send money.

It was a trafficker who took us from Dessie city, located in north-central Ethiopia, to a place called Wahalemat in Afar region using a car and we continued the journey towards the border region. Then we started to walk, and it took us 15 days to reach Tadjoura in Djibouti where we were kept in a house for three days.

Despite taking money from us, we never reached the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia because they said the road was closed.

I’m glad to be back home. I have spoken to my parents on the phone and I’m happy.”



Migrant returnee at the IOM Transit Centre in Addis Ababa. Photo: ©Safa Msehli / IOM 2021



Migrant returnee at the IOM transit centre in Addis Ababa, holding on to contact details before calling her family Photo: ©Kennedy Njagi / IOM 2021



Reception and registration of returnees from Djibouti at the IOM Transit Centre in Addis Ababa. Photo: ©Safa Msehli / IOM 2021



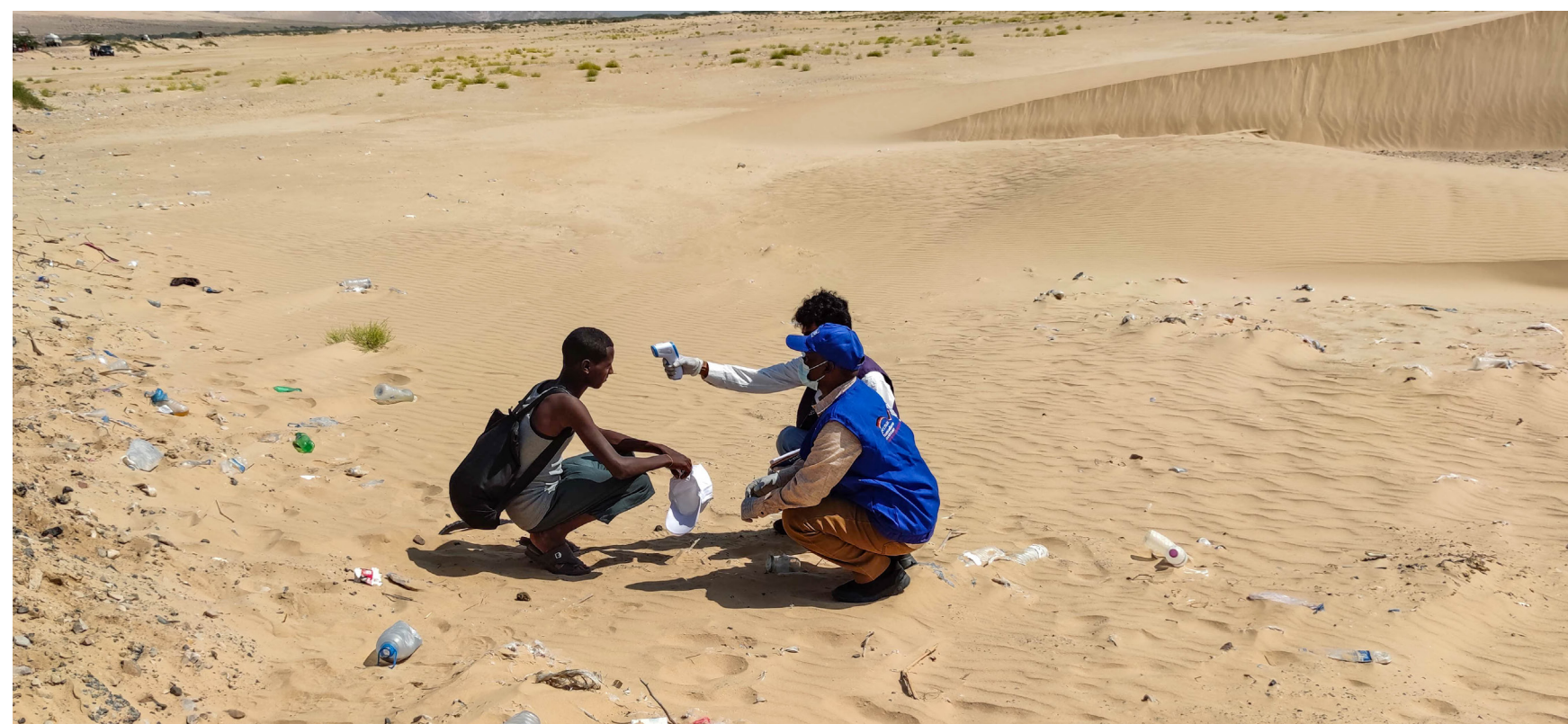
Migrants walk in the desert towards Obock in Djibouti. With just worn out sandals on their feet and a few belongings in hand, they walk for days without food and water. Many die due to dehydration and starvation. Photo: ©Alexander Bee / IOM 2021



Fantahero, Obock, Djibouti, May 2021. Migrants are cooking rice while waiting for a night departure to Yemen. Photo: ©Alexander Bee / IOM 2021



Koussour Koussour, Dikhil Region, Djibouti, May 2021. Migrants gather under a tree while waiting for the night to continue their journey to Obock through Lake Assal. Photo: ©Alexander Bee / IOM 2021



IOM mobile medical team providing medical checks to newly arrived migrants in Shabwah coast, Yemen. Photo: ©Majed Mohammed / IOM 2021



Naima at the Agar shelter in Addis Ababa Photo: ©Kennedy Njagi / IOM 2021.

“After 18 years, I’m back in my country together with my three children.” Naima left her country nearly two decades ago to look for work in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

“It is always difficult to look back at your life. I left my country to go to Saudi Arabia to support my family back home like most migrants do and I worked hard before I got married. I lived with my husband for 12 years and had three children. I then lost my husband who was the breadwinner for the family. The only option I had was to go back to work in Saudi Arabia to feed my children. I was detained for three and a half months before being returned to my country by the authorities. At Agar shelter in Ethiopia, I am receiving various forms of support including life skills training which will help me overcome social isolation and increase my chances of earning a living.”

Female migrant returnees at the Agar shelter, Ethiopia, receive training in weaving with the hope that they can use the skills gained to improve their lives. Agar Ethiopia Charitable Society runs the shelter with the support of IOM. As part of IOM’s reintegration assistance programme in Ethiopia, returnees receive training on life skills and basic business skills in collaboration with the government. IOM assists returnees in drafting business plans based on locally viable livelihoods and supports returnees to acquire the initial in-kind capital to kickstart new businesses.



Assorted woven products made by female migrant returnees being hosted at the Agar shelter in Ethiopia. Photo: ©Kennedy Njagi / IOM 2021.



Naima, creating thread for weaving at the Agar shelter in Addis. Photo: ©Kennedy Njagi / IOM 2021.



Naima, at the Agar shelter Ethiopia, with her three children. Photo: ©Kennedy Njagi / IOM 2021.

Migrants walk in the desert towards Obock in Djibouti. With just worn out sandals on their feet and a few belongings in hand, they walk for days without food and water. Many die due to dehydration and starvation.
Photo: ©Alexander Bee / IOM 2021





A migrant returnee at the Addis Ababa transit centre contacting her family through the assistance of IOM partner Red Cross, who provides the returnees with mobile phones to contact their loved ones upon return. Photo: ©Kennedy Njagi / IOM 2021



Ethiopian migrant children playing at the Caritas Centre in Djibouti where they are being hosted and receiving care. Photo: ©Alexander Bee / IOM 2021.



Monta, single mother migrant from Ethiopia receives assistance at the Shabwah coast, Yemen, by IOM mobile medical team. Photo: ©Majed Mohammed / IOM 2021

“I need a doctor. I cannot even stand. Please help me.” These were the first words that Monta, a young female migrant, said to the mobile medical team in Shabwah. She was barely able to get the words out through her tears.

Eighteen-year-old Monta started her journey from her home in Harar, Ethiopia. She wanted to find a well-paying job to support her younger siblings and child.

“My father is dead,” said Monta. “I have two disabled brothers and a sister who cannot hear. My mom is also sick, so I am the breadwinner of the family.”

Monta recently also became a mother.

“I got married when I was 17 years old. My husband promised to let me study and finish my school, but he left me after one year. Now, I am taking care of our one-year-old baby alone,” she explained.



Exhausted migrants receiving medical assistance from IOM's medical teams in Yemen. Photo: ©Majed Mohammed / IOM 2021



IOM medical personnel providing assistance to a migrant in Obock, Djibouti.
Photos: ©Alexander Bee / IOM 2021



Reception and registration of returnees from Djibouti at the IOM Transit Centre in Addis Ababa.
Photo: ©Kennedy Njagi / IOM 2021



Photo: ©Kennedy Njagi / IOM 2021.

Sayida is from Ashmira Wafiqa, in Ethiopia. He wanted to reach the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia but could not do so due to COVID-19 restrictions. As a result, Sayid and other migrants became stranded in Yemen.

Sayida was assisted by IOM to return from Yemen to Ethiopia. “There are no words that can describe what I and others went through. My concern is for those I have left behind in Yemen and those going through abuses as young as 12 years. They are being abused, having shots fired at them, and are sometimes thrown into the sea by traffickers or dying in the deserts due to a lack of food and water.”

“I witnessed 60 people die and bodies washed up on shore. At least for me, I am alive and back in my country.”



A migrant uses a piece of cardboard to ward off the heat in Aden, Yemen. Photo: ©R. Ibrahim / IOM 2020



Sayida, together with other migrant returnees at the IOM transit centre reception in Addis Ababa. Photo: ©Kennedy Njagi / IOM 2021.



Migrants stranded in Aden try on shoes which they received from IOM moments before. Photo: ©R. Ibrahim / IOM 2020

IOM nurse checking temperature of a migrant at the MRP entrance in Aden. Photo: ©IOM Yemen 2021





A migrant having a rest in an abandoned building in Aden, Yemen. Many migrants are forced to sleep rough on the streets in abandoned buildings like this one. Photo: ©R. Ibrahim / IOM 2020



Migrants congregate in an open area in Aden city where an estimated 4,000 migrants are stranded. Photo: ©R. Ibrahim / IOM 2020



Two migrants sit together on a mattress in the building where they sleep in Aden. Photo: ©R. Ibrahim / IOM 2020



A group of female migrants, many with children, wait outside an IOM funded Migrant Response Centre in Hargeisa awaiting various assistance, on 7 June 2021. Photo: ©Tobin Jones / IOM 2021



A nurse conducts a medical screening on Ayan's seven-month-old baby at the Migration Response Centre (MRC) in Hargeisa. Photo: ©Claudia Rosel Barrios / IOM 2021



IOM team conducts COVID-19 awareness session with migrants stranded in Aden city. Photo: ©R. Ibrahim / IOM 2020



Photo: ©Claudia Rosel Barrios / IOM 2021.

Suad, 25, arrived in Hargeisa, one year ago. Originally from Ethiopia, Suad was about to give birth to her nine-month-old baby when her husband abandoned them to go to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

“I haven’t heard from him since he left and now I want to go back home.”

Suad’s story is like that of many other migrant women who are stranded in the city. Migrant women receive support through IOM’s Migration Response Centre in Hargeisa. Migrants coming to the MRC are provided with health assistance, psychosocial support, information, as well as return assistance for those who wish to return to their countries of origin.



Iftin Musa, an Ethiopian migrant with her baby at the IOM Migration Response Centre in Hargeisa. Photo: ©Tobin Jones / IOM 2021



Women register with a worker for an aid package at an IOM-funded Migration Response Centre in Hargeisa on 7 June 2021. Photo: ©Tobin Jones / IOM 2021



IOM staff at the Migration Response Centre in Hargeisa during an outreach activity. Photo: ©Claudia Rosel Barrios / IOM 2021



Migrants participating in the cleaning campaign. Photo: ©Yemen / IOM 2020.

A migrant mother with her baby waiting to start the boarding process at Aden Int'l airport, Yemen. Photo: ©N. Nadhem / IOM 2021



IOM nurse checking migrants' temperature as they check in at Aden airport, Yemen. Photo: ©N. Nadhem / IOM 2021



Migrants board a plane in Yemen back to Ethiopia with the support of IOM's Assisted Voluntary Humanitarian Return programme. Photo: ©N. Nadhem / IOM 2021



Shopkeeper in Bossaso supported to open the business under IOM's Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration Programme. Photo: ©Mohammed Muse / IOM 2021



Sanitizing tunnel donated by IOM to the Ethiopia Immigration, Nationality and Vital Events Agency. Photo: ©IOM 2021

IOM, as the coordinator of the Regional Migrant Response Plan for the Horn of Africa and Yemen, acknowledges the valuable contribution of the MRP partners, including:

Action for Social Development and Environmental Protection Organization (ASDEPO), Agar Ethiopia Charitable Society, Danish Refugee Council (DRC), Danish Red Cross, Ethiopian Catholic Church, Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus Development and Social Service Commission North Central Ethiopian Synode Branch Office (EECMY-DASSC-NCES-BO), Ethiopian Kale Heywet Church, Ethiopian Red Cross Society (ERCS), Good Samaritan Association, Humedica e.V., HUNDEE - Oromo Grassroots Development Initiative, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)-observer members, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF)- observer members, Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), International Labour Organization (ILO), International Rescue Committee (IRC), INTERSOS, Mahibere Hiwot for Social Development, Médecins du Monde - France (MDM), Mixed Migration Centre (MMC), Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), Organization for Prevention Rehabilitation and Integration of Female Street Children (OPRIFS), Positive Action For Development (PAD), Save the Children, Terre des Hommes Netherlands (TdHNL), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN WOMEN), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), World Food Programme (WFP) and World Health Organization (WHO).

On behalf of the MRP partners, IOM also expresses deep gratitude for the support from all donors who have contributed significantly to the overall objectives of the MRP:



