

RETURN OF ETHIOPIAN MIGRANTS FROM THE KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA

ANNUAL OVERVIEW 2023

IOM Regional Office for the East and Horn of Africa

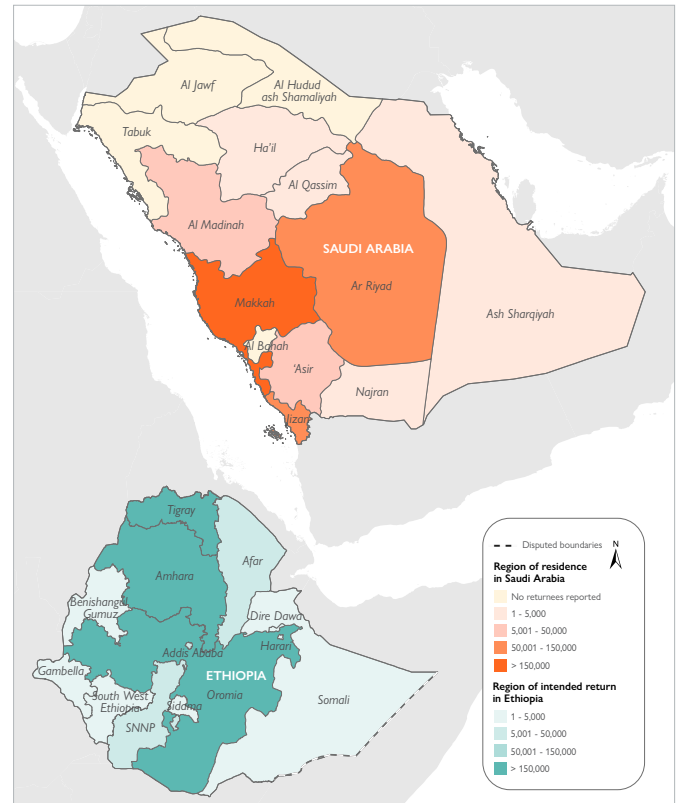
Background

In 2017, the Government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia launched a large-scale airlift operation to forcibly return irregular migrants to their countries of origin in a bid to curb unemployment in Saudi Arabia. Ethiopian migrants have been returned to Bole International Airport in Addis Ababa, where they are registered by IOM before continuing to their destination and the most vulnerable are extended further assistance.¹ Between May 2017 and December 2023, 561,714 migrants were returned to Addis Ababa.

In 2023, 43,000 people were forcibly returned, around half (-54%) the number returned in 2022 (93,500). This decrease can be partially attributed to a pause in returns from April to October 2023.² The share of women and girls (15%) and men and boys (85%) in 2023 remained relatively similar to 2022, and children formed (7%) of all returns.

November 2022 saw a peace agreement between the Government of Ethiopia and conflicting factions, allowing for provisional access by those whose place of origin is in the affected regions of Tigray and Amhara. However, reintegration in areas where economies and infrastructure have been devastated by fighting – as well as drought and flooding – with many displaced, poses a challenge. Additionally, in 2023 conflict renewed in Amhara and Oromia, while tensions remain in Tigray. In 2023, 95% of forced returnees reported their destination as the affected regions of Amhara (35%), Oromia (34%) and Tigray (26%).

Returns by Region of Residence and Intended Destination, May 2017 – December 2023³

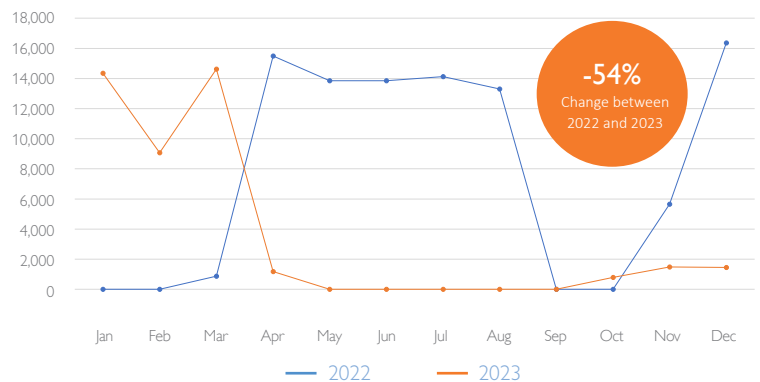


This map is for illustration purposes only. Names and boundaries on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by IOM.

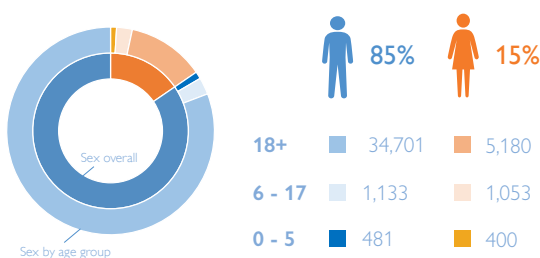
Numbers at a Glance

- 561,714** electronically registered by IOM from May 2017 to December 2023
- 42,948** electronically registered by IOM in 2023
- 3,067** children registered by IOM in 2023
- 6,135** returnees arriving at Bole Airport on average each month in 2023

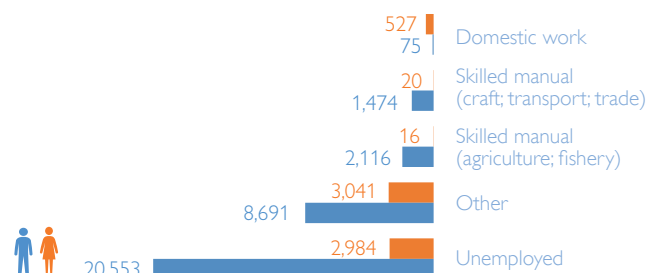
Monthly Registrations in 2022 and 2023



Migrant Sex and Age Breakdown



Occupation in Saudi Arabia



¹ IOM began collecting data on returnees from Saudi Arabia in April 2017 and switched to electronic registration in May 2017.

² Returns from Saudi Arabia have been periodically suspended since the start of the operation for reasons including the COVID-19 pandemic, conflict in northern Ethiopia and strained reception capacity at centres in Addis Ababa.

³ In early 2022, the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' (SNNP) region was split into the three regions of SNNP, South West Ethiopia and Sidama. Figures from before this restructuring are not captured in the new regions, resulting in low figures in new regions. Data for region of residence were not available between September 2020 and February 2021. A total of 18,726 returnees did not report their previous region of residence, while 96 did not report their intended destination.