
PROTECTION CONTEXT
FOR

MIGRANTS PASSING THROUGH YEMEN

A BASELINE

2019





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KEY FINDINGS

- 1. Migration from the Horn of Africa (HoA) through Yemen is likely to increase in the coming years, and hubs are likely to remain stable.** The number of migrants passing through Yemen has increased over the last decade, and is likely to continue to increase in the future. This is due both to drivers of migration within the Horn of Africa and to the conflict within Yemen, which facilitates irregular migratory pathways to the Gulf. Migrants move along flexible paths to avoid the conflict, but rely on logistical hubs that are stable.
- 2. The migration flow is rooted in Ethiopia and takes place primarily for economic reasons.** Over 90% of migrants passing through Yemen come from Ethiopia; of these, the majority are from the Oromo region, and a significant minority come from the Amhara region. Most migrants are young, and are searching for better economic opportunities and safety from physical harm. Many migrants are looking specifically for relatively low skilled jobs currently available in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) and other Gulf countries.
- 3. The conflict generates specific protection risks, and migrants are likely not to be aware of these risks.** Migrants passing through Yemen are often unaware of the conflict when they leave home. Information about conflict and insecurity is usually shared at exit points on the shores of Djibouti, or inside Yemen itself. Protection risks that migrants face are higher due to the ongoing conflict in Yemen – migrants face increased risk of physical violence at checkpoints and front lines, as well as risk from airstrikes. These risks are heightened by language barriers with migrants unable to communicate or negotiate safe passage effectively in Arabic with security personnel they encounter.
- 4. Migrants face a range of additional protection issues.** In addition to protection issues generated by the conflict, migrants face other protection issues, many of which are generated by smugglers. Smugglers systematically detain and abuse migrants. They sometimes use challenging routes through the desert to avoid front lines. Women and girls, as well as unaccompanied minors, are most at risk of GBV perpetrated by smugglers. Women and girls pay more to travel the same route, and are often extorted upon arrival; for example, they are forced to give a portion of their salary to the smugglers who facilitated their journey and their employment. The physical and security challenges along the route affect children more than adults. Children are more vulnerable to detention, drug smuggling, torture, physical assault/ violence.
- 5. Coping mechanisms are deteriorating.** Migrants generally rely on systems within Yemen for survival. Specifically, they beg and request rides from Yemenis, they request support from mosques and religious communities, and they rely on communities with roots from the Horn of Africa. As the conflict in Yemen worsens, these communities have less space to support migrants. Coping mechanisms for migrants are therefore eroding and migrants are more vulnerable.
- 6. Migration may seem easy – but appearances are deceptive.** The cost of a migration journey from Ethiopia through Yemen to KSA is between 2,000 USD and 5,000 USD, and smugglers often entice potential migrants, offering them the opportunity to travel for free if they recruit more migrants, or to pay on arrival. However, migrants are systematically extorted and required to pay more money along the route. Families in countries of origin are generally required to pay, whether or not they were aware of the departure of the migrant. In some cases, smugglers seize migrant assets in countries of origin. Some migrants can themselves be recruited into smuggling networks.
- 7. Smuggling networks are far-reaching** The migration route is dominated by many small smuggling networks; the networks are often ethnically and nationally based. Ethiopian ‘Highlanders’ (Amhara and Tigray ethnic groups) use different networks compared to ‘Lowlanders’ (Oromo ethnic group). Oromo also often travel with, and use the same networks as, Somalis. Ethiopian networks interact closely with Yemeni and Saudi networks. Different groups play various roles, with Ethiopians being the ‘good’ smugglers who sympathise with migrants, and Yemenis being the ‘bad’ smugglers who commit abuse and extort money. Smugglers rely on economic networks and hubs in challenging conditions.

I. INTRODUCTION

Migration from the Horn of Africa through Yemen to other Gulf countries has been rising over the course of over a decade. In 2019, close to 140,000 migrants entered Yemen, compared to 111,000 in 2016 and 107,500 in 2012¹. In April and May 2019, monthly arrivals rose by over 18,000 – representing the highest monthly arrivals figures since data became available in 2006. Meanwhile, Yemen is facing a crisis of its own: a longstanding conflict has generated one of the world's worst humanitarian crises, in which 80 per cent of the Yemeni population is in need of humanitarian assistance. As humanitarian organizations struggle to meet the basic needs of the Yemeni population, there is limited resources to address the specific needs of migrants.

The overall objective of this study is to improve understanding of paths, profiles, protection risks and coping mechanisms of migrants as they move through Yemen and to make recommendations for humanitarian programming targeting migrants.



A SOMALI WOMAN RECENTLY ARRIVED IN SHABWAH CLOSE TO YEMEN'S COAST.

FOUR RESEARCH QUESTIONS

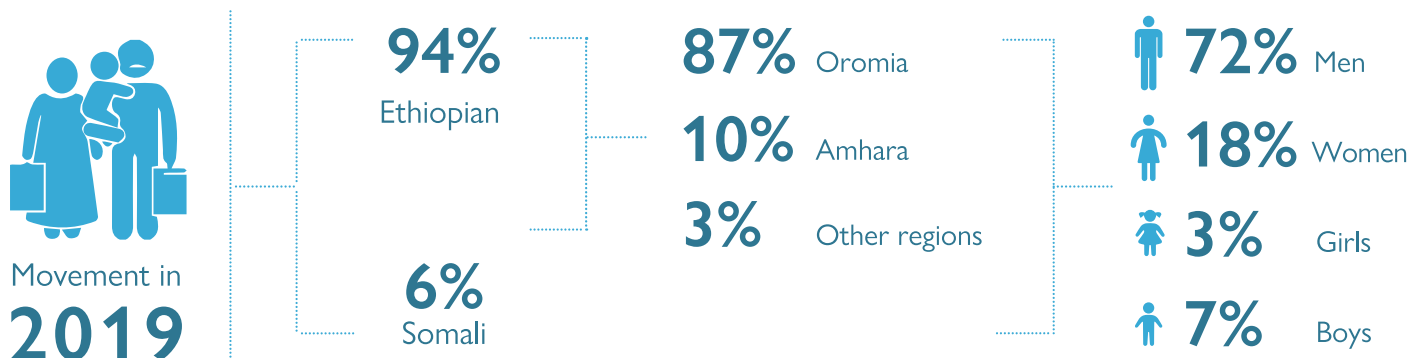
1. What are the migration routes through Yemen? What are pathways and hubs?
2. What protection risks do migrants face as they move through Yemen and into other countries in the Gulf?
3. How are migrants currently protecting themselves and mitigating risks?
4. How do smuggling networks operate through Yemen?

The study draws on existing literature and qualitative primary research. There is a significant amount of existing literature on migration in the Horn of Africa; there is very little literature on the situation in Yemen. Primary data collection took place only within Yemen. 91 people were interviewed for this survey: 73 migrants (of whom 62 were repeat migrants), 11 key informants from host communities and 7 smugglers. Interviewees were identified using purposive sampling. Data was collected from 4 governorates in the South; no data collection took place in the North. The geographic restrictions on data collection were mitigated through the choice to purposively sample repeat migrants; repeat migrants have experience of the entire route and could provide an overview of protection risks and coping mechanisms through the full journey.

¹ Note that these estimates come from DTM Flow Monitoring data collection which cover five of the many entry points along the Yemeni southern coast. Hence it can be assumed that the actual number of migrants who entered the country across the period (in 2019 and also in 2012) is higher than the estimate.

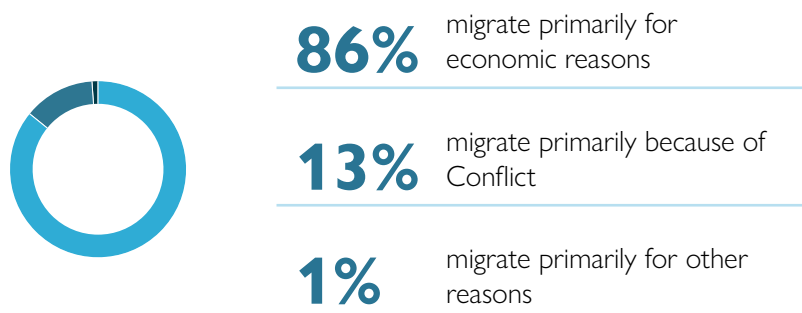
II. MIGRATION PATTERNS

MIGRANT DEMOGRAPHICS²

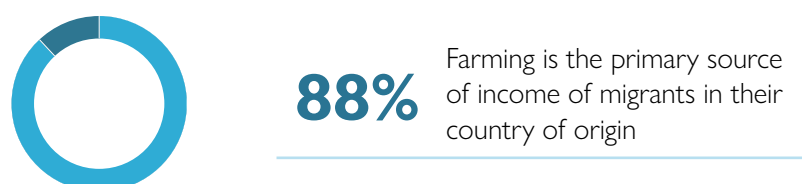


84% of the children migrating are not accompanied by family or caregivers.

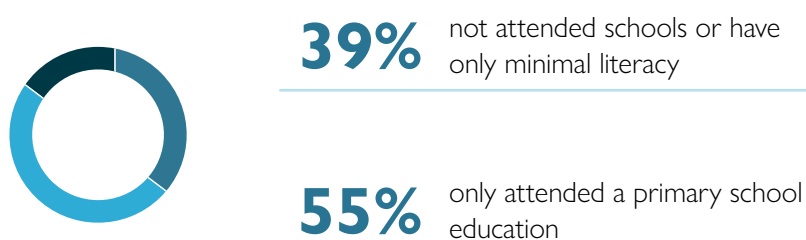
The proportion of women on irregular routes appears to have increased in recent years.



The majority of migrants travelling from the Horn of Africa intend to migrate to Gulf countries, notably the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.



Given the high proportion of migrants relying on farming before departure, it can be assumed that most migrants come from rural areas.



Literacy rates are low amongst arriving migrants.

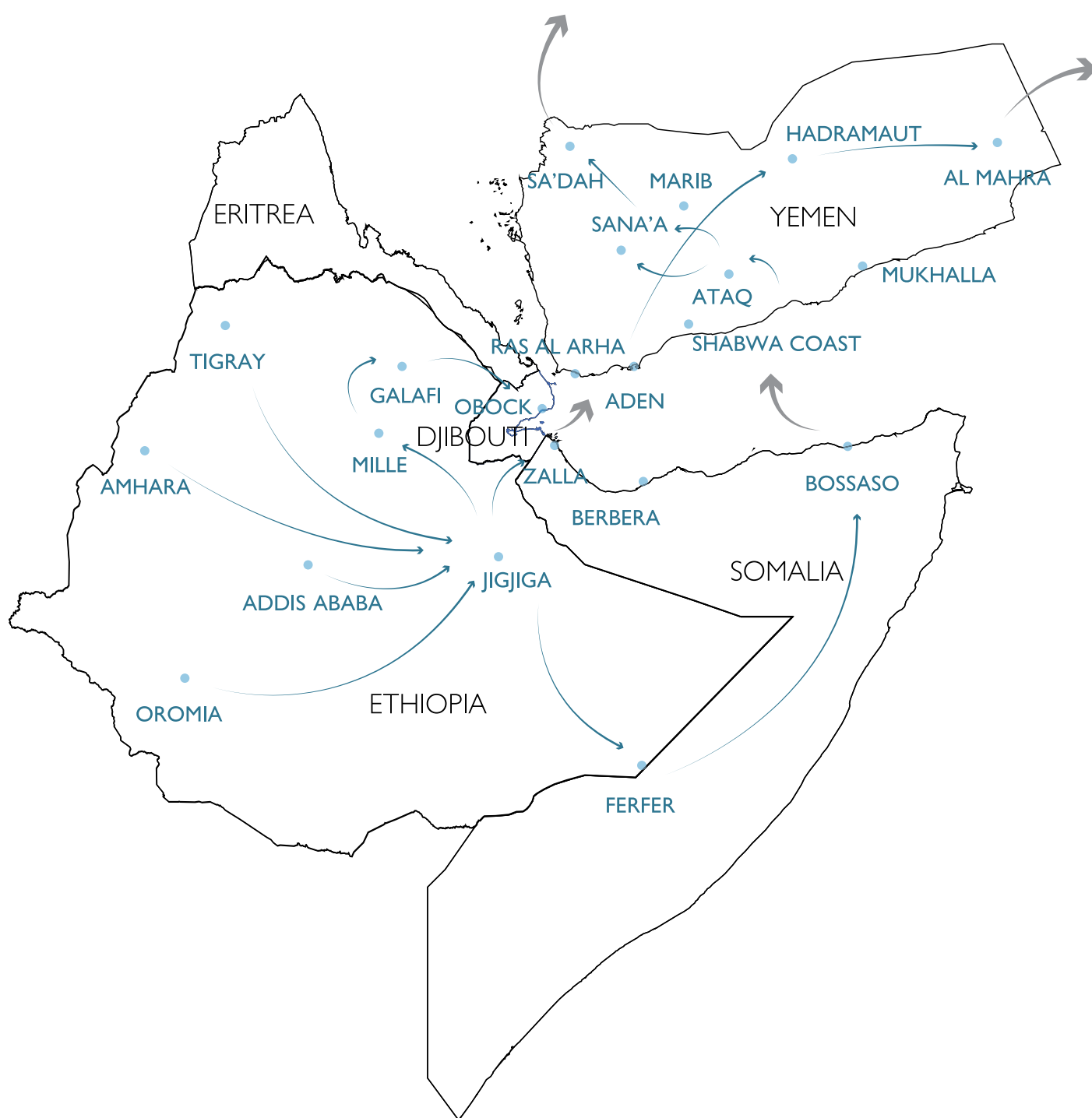
² Data in this section is from a variety of sources, including but not limited to IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM). Other sources include data from both academics and practitioners.

MIGRATION ROUTES

Yemen is a transit point for migrants travelling toward other Gulf countries (mainly Saudi Arabia, while only a very small percentage to Oman). Migrants leaving the Horn of Africa travel to a departure point to cross the Red Sea, either by foot or by vehicle. There are two major departure points to Yemen: from the port of Obock in Djibouti, and from the port of Bossaso in Somalia.

Migrants who leave through Obock arrive in Bab al Mendeab, a coastal area that spans the Lahj and Taizz districts of Yemen. Those who leave through Bossaso in Puntland, Somalia, arrive in Shabwah or Hadramaut governorates.

Through Yemen, routes are volatile, but logistical hubs are constant. These hubs are situated in Aden, Sana'a and Raada (Al Bayda governorate). Migrants exit Yemen from Monabih district in Sa'ada governorate, primarily through Al Raqw, Al Gar and Al Thabet towns, all of which are located on the border with KSA.



MIGRATION TRENDS

Five major migration trends have been observed, related to the underlying factors that encourage movements, migration routes, modes of travel and costs.

More people are moving, and underlying factors encourage more movement: In 2016, approximately 110,000 migrants crossed from the Horn of Africa to Yemen, and at that time, the figure represented a record high. In 2019, close to 140,000 migrants were estimated to move from the Horn of Africa into Yemen³. Poor economic conditions in Ethiopia and discrimination between ethnic groups drive outward migration, together with a demand at the household level for remittances from migrants, and a cultural acceptance and encouragement of migration. Lack of presence of authorities facilitates movement, with several smugglers explicitly stating that conflict in Yemen provides the conditions for their business to grow. There is strong demand for unskilled labour in KSA and other Gulf countries, despite national efforts to reduce irregular migration, including nationalization policies such as the Nitaqat, or Saudi nationalisation of jobs, initiative.



ETHIOPIAN MIGRANTS IN ADEN WAIT IN A COLLECTIVE CENTRE AS THEY PREPARE TO RETURN HOME FROM YEMEN.

Routes are volatile, but hubs are constant: The routes used to pass through Yemen are volatile due to changing route conditions and conflict dynamics. This can include re-routing migrants away from main roads and into the desert and/or rural areas. Despite this volatility, hubs and logistical centers remain constant. Capital cities such as Sana'a and Aden are hubs; not only are there long-standing communities of people from the Horn of Africa, but there is also better access to higher quality services, such as health care. Arrival points (Ras al Arah and Shabwah coast) as well as departure points (Sa'ada district, Al Thabet, Al Raqw, Al Gar) are also major hubs. Ra'ada in Al Bayda is major smuggling hub linked to the presence of khat plantations that provide migrants with temporary jobs – often under exploitative conditions – in order to save some money for the rest of the trip

Paths and modes of travel differ between ethnic groups: Migrants are split into two primary groups: 'Highlanders', consisting of Amhara and Tigray from northern Ethiopia as well as Eritreans; and 'Lowlanders', consisting of Oromo and Somalis. The route a migrant takes and the hubs he or she accesses appear to be dependent on ethnicity. For instance, there is a clear ethnic division in crossing points to Saudi Arabia, with Highlanders leaving through Al Rawq, and Lowlanders leaving through Al Thabet and Al Gar (primarily). Ethnic groups may be taking different routes due to safety and security. There are tensions between the groups and inter-ethnic conflict has been reported. Smugglers may choose to take different ethnic groups along different routes to minimise the chances of clashes.

Costs depend on a variety of factors: The average cost of a trip from Ethiopia to Yemen is between 2,000 and 5,000 USD. The variation in cost depends the extent to which the migrant negotiated with smuggling groups in areas of origin, the ability to travel in groups and gender. Interviews with smugglers indicate that women pay higher rates and often have value as commodities to smugglers. Many migrants also mentioned prices changing due to transfer between networks along the route; adjustments in price were often associated with detention and extortion.

³ Note that this estimate comes from DTM Flow Monitoring data collection which covers five of the many entry points along the Yemeni southern coast. Hence it can be assumed that the actual number of migrants who entered the country in 2019 is higher than the estimate.

III. THE PROTECTION ENVIRONMENT

PROTECTION RISKS

Migrants face extreme protection risks in Yemen, including violence, coercion, deliberate deprivation and abuse, at the hands of smugglers, employers and parties to the conflict. They have limited and steadily eroding coping mechanisms, as well as limited information about the situation in Yemen. Women and girls as well as unaccompanied children are at greatest risk to harm dynamics. Protection risks include:

CONFLICT AND CONTACT WITH ARMED ACTORS

Conflict and contact with armed actors has three major protection consequences:

1. There is high likelihood of encountering violence at checkpoints and front lines; 15 per cent of respondents reported facing this risk. Migrants may be deliberately targeted by guards at checkpoint or may be collateral at front lines. Migrant vulnerability to physical violence at check points and front lines may be exacerbated by lack of language skills; there were reports of migrant shootings and deaths at checkpoints instigated by the inability of migrants to follow the instructions of guards, issued in Arabic.
2. Ten per cent of respondents reported fear of bombings, primarily in Al Hudaydah and Sa'ada governorates. Three of the airstrikes, which took place in Sa'ada in 2019 resulted in the deaths of an estimated 60 migrants. The risks posed by airstrikes are exacerbated by the fact that migrants frequently lack shelter; migrants are likely to sleep in open areas where airstrikes are likely to occur, and less likely to have shelter and protection in case of an airstrike.
3. There are indications that migrants may be forced against their will to join armed groups. There are also indications that migrants suffer from discrimination due to the belief that they are associated with armed groups. One researcher reported having witnessed forced recruitment twice: he witnessed smugglers selling migrants to armed forces after the migrants requested to return home. One migrant reported having been offered large amounts of money to join armed forces in the vicinity of front lines; offers of money, food and water made when migrants are facing life threatening physical conditions can be seen as coercive. In addition, one migrant reported having seen soldiers target other migrants because the soldiers assumed the migrants were linked with armed forces.



A SOMALI MAN WAITS UNDER SOME TREES IN OBOCK, DJIBOUTI, BEFORE MAKING THE SEA CROSSING TO YEMEN.

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One migrant went to Raada with five people, he was the only one that survived... soldiers refused to let them go ... a misunderstanding took place because [the migrants] do not understand [Arabic], they cannot explain their names, and then soldiers shot at the group.

RESEARCHER INTERVIEW 10, FEMALE

TRAFFICKING, ABDUCTION, DETENTION AND PHYSICAL ABUSE

Seventy-nine per cent of respondents had been detained and abused; the primary perpetrators of the abuse were smugglers. Detention occurs primarily on the coast immediately after landing and at the border between Yemen and Saudi Arabia and may last from one day to over six months. In detention, migrants face poor conditions with dirty and inadequate water supply, unsanitary conditions, scarce food and inadequate medical care. Migrants are physically abused; this includes regular beatings with electric cords, being bound so tightly

that cords cut the skin, and being starved. Detention and associated abuse takes place to extort money from migrants; most are requested to call their family and request additional funds to continue the route and some are required to give up their income upon arrival in the destination country. Women are particularly susceptible to detention and to further assault once detained. Several male interviewees reported being forced to watch their wives being raped.

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Most [migrants] were taken hostage upon arrival in Yemen ... they would not be able to pay the requested ransom money ... we will hand over them to the Yemeni smugglers and they know how to get the money.

SMUGGLER INTERVIEW 2, MALE, ETHIOPIA, 38 YEARS OLD

FORCED LABOUR

Migrants engage in various forms of low paid labour along the route to fund their journeys. In urban hubs, migrants take on low-skilled jobs (e.g., car washing and construction), whereas in more rural areas such as Marib they work in agricultural jobs (e.g. qat and orange farms). Migrants often lack documentation

and are working irregularly; they are therefore subject to exploitation. Ethiopians may receive approximately 50 per cent of the salary received by Yemenis for doing the same work, or they are detained by employers and not provided with wages. There are reports of abuse resulting in death of employees.

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I was working for a Yemeni farmer in Rada'a governorate without payment, only for food. If I didn't work hard, I couldn't get my food from them. If I ask them [for the money they owed me] they would fire me.

MIGRANT INTERVIEW 34, MALE, ETHIOPIAN, 30 YEARS OLD

CHALLENGING PHYSICAL CONDITIONS

Difficult physical conditions, including hunger, thirst and heat, are important protection risks. Migrants often arrive in Yemen with inadequate clothes and shoes. During the trip through Yemen, measures are often taken to avoid checkpoints; these

include diversions through desert areas where migrants experienced life-threatening hunger and thirst. Harsh physical conditions were identified as challenges not only by migrants but also researchers and smugglers.

SEXUAL AND GENDER BASED VIOLENCE

Primary research for this study, as well as press articles, indicate that instances of SGBV are prevalent along the migration route. Most women report instances of rape while in detention, particularly on the coast as well as in centres on the border with KSA. Many women are subject to repeated

abuse over an extended period of time. Violations are often perpetrated by smugglers, according both to interviews and to press reports. SGBV appears to have been normalized in smuggling networks, with one smuggler casually referring to women as a way of bartering with other networks.

CONDITIONS ARE WORSENING IN SA'ADA

The crossing into KSA has grown more challenging over time. Within the last half of 2019, three major security incidents took place in Monabih district, affecting an estimated 170 migrants. Migrants are detained in poor conditions. Women are at high risk of gender-based violence (GBV). Smugglers note that there are issues with conflict and with lower willingness on

the part of authorities to allow migrants to make the crossing. Migrants also mentioned poor conditions at the border that resulted in being refused entry or deportation. Some migrants reported being abandoned by smuggling groups at the border, exposing them to greater protection risks

COPING MECHANISMS

Migrants only have access to a limited range of coping mechanisms, and the ones that are in use are currently being eroded. Many of the coping mechanisms include reliance on host communities and institutions within the host community; these individuals and institutions have, as a result of the conflict, experienced loss of assets, food insecurity and displacement, and are therefore less able to provide support to migrants.

PREPARATORY ACTIVITIES

Migrants appear to engage in limited preparation before they start the journey. Some of the most common measures for staying safe include travelling with mobile phones and carrying cash to cover unexpected costs. Most of those who carried phones or cash reported that they were robbed along the route. In addition to these more standard coping mechanisms, Ethiopians mentioned other methods of keeping safe. Twelve percent of migrants mentioned carrying

knives as a coping mechanism; they were trying to protect themselves against tribal conflicts with other migrant groups. Women employed a range of coping mechanisms, including the use of different migration routes; 36 of 73 respondents mentioned that women use separate routes. Women also got IUDs (contraceptives) before departure. The literature review indicates that many women choose to try the regular route before resorting to the irregular route one altogether.

HOST AND MUHAMASHEEN COMMUNITIES

One of the most commonly used coping mechanisms among migrants is a reliance on host communities; specifically, migrants hitchhike, beg and request general support. Reliance on host communities is a traditional coping mechanism; historically, despite ethnic distrust between people from the Horn of Africa and Yemenis, Yemenis have provided food and transport to migrants. However, as the conflict in Yemen has intensified, the local Yemeni population has fewer resources to share with

migrants, and as a result, attitudes to migrants are worsening. In this study, several migrant respondents indicated that they had received “verbal abuse [and] hate” and “insults, cursing and embarrassment” from Yemenis. Some mentioned that Yemenis were unwilling to take the additional risk associated with transporting migrants through checkpoints. Yemenis along the shore may also be linked to smuggling networks, and hand migrants to smugglers or traffickers.

Migrants are more likely to approach communities with roots from the Horn of Africa known as muhamasheen. The presence of the community forms an emergency resource for those on the move. The muhamasheen communities are, however, often themselves discriminated against; their support for migrants may drain their already limited resources.

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I looked up Oromia people in Aden to [find a] safe place... [It is] common [for us to engage in] working together within communities; I am babysitting for a woman who works... When I was sick, it was very difficult because I didn't earn money and couldn't work. I couldn't pay [a share of the] rent, couldn't share tasks [with the household].

MIGRANT INTERVIEW 55, FEMALE, ETHIOPIAN, 17 YEARS OLD

RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES

More than half of the migrants interviewed in the course of this research reported going to mosques for assistance. It is assumed that most of the people requesting support are Ethiopian Muslims, due to the fact that the majority of the flow consists of Ethiopians from Oromia, and 60% of the Oromo population is Muslim. Mosques were cited as providing emergency shelter, food and clothing. While many

migrants did request and receive support from mosques, some were denied support due to their own physical conditions (poor clothing, being dirty, etc). The dynamics between Ethiopian Orthodox Christian migrants and the Islamic religious community are unclear, but there are indications that Christians hide their religion to receive support.

RETURN

For a minority of migrants, the challenges they face along the route are too great, and they want to return home. One migrant was very clear: “if I had the chance to do it again, I would not come to this country.” Three migrants expressed clearly their desire to return home as a coping mechanism, and one requested assistance from international

agencies in order to return. 14 migrants out of 73 (20%) identified repatriation as a form of assistance that they recommended putting in place. Return does however entail risks, in particular, the risk of smugglers continuing to extort money from returned migrants.

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It is my second time [migrating]. After the last time I [was] obligated by the smuggler and traffickers to refer [transfer ownership of] my property to them, so that I have not option to survive in my homeland the local people consider me as shameful. My solution was to travel to [have a livelihood].

MIGRANT INTERVIEW 2, MALE, ETHIOPIAN, 34 YEARS OLD

RELIANCE ON SMUGGLERS

Smugglers have extensive knowledge of the route, Yemeni communities, authorities and conflict dynamics, whereas migrants often lack even basic Arabic skills. Nineteen migrants responded to the question “Did the people who organised your journey protect you?” in the affirmative. Migrants

acknowledged that smugglers would keep migrants safe when migrants have more money to pay, thus their safety is linked to their ransom value. Reliance on smugglers is likely to be a damaging coping mechanism, however, as smugglers are also perpetrators of protection violations.

VULNERABLE GROUPS

WOMEN AND GIRLS



18% of the migration flow through Yemen are women and girls. The anticipation of sending a female to migrate to a foreign destination on behalf of the household severely limits female mobility and autonomy prior to migration; girls are systematically given limited opportunities to study due to higher expectations for contributions to domestic work. Interviews with smugglers indicate that females are treated differently from males along the route. Women

systematically pay more than men to travel the same route. Women are also more tied to and potentially exploited by smuggling networks compared to men, as smugglers also find work for women upon arrival, and often take a proportion of their wages. Upon arrival, gender-based discrimination is combined with structural opportunities for abuse and exploitation by employers, who may withhold wages, perpetrate SGBV, and otherwise compromise basic rights.

UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN (UNDER THE AGE OF 18)



11% of the migration flow are children, with the vast majority of them unaccompanied (80%). Children are less likely to have documentation than their adult counterparts; some interviews also indicate that children are also more likely to be targeted by smugglers as potential 'clients', and that they may be used to recruit other children to travel as a means to 'pay' for a migration journey. Youth seek to migrate not only because of lack of opportunities at home, but also due to family dynamics and protection concerns at home. The literature review found studies indicating that youth in Ethiopia are

more likely to migrate to escape violence and abuse at home, as well as harmful work, lack of food, and gender roles and barriers. On the route, children and youth are subject to detention accompanied by the denial of medical care, toilet facilities and food. They may also experience forced return, ransom/ extortion, drowning, rape, forced drug smuggling, torture, execution and physical assault/violence. It is understood that children are more vulnerable to these risks than adults; both migrants and smugglers stated in interviews that children could be at risk of health issues due to the journey.

INFORMATION

Migrants do not understand risks associated with Yemen. While migrants understand that there are risks such as death and abuse on route, they link this primarily with sea crossing, and are unaware of the conflict in Yemen. Migrants became aware of the conflict either the day before or the day of their departure from Djibouti or Somalia, or upon their arrival in Yemen. Many migrants did not ask specifically about Yemen because they believed it was only a transit point, and as such, their stay would be short.



[1] Didn't know there was a conflict in Yemen until two days ago. [1] don't have a plan to avoid the conflict. Plan to be guided by recyclers [return migrants]. Scared but nothing to do but keep going on.

MIGRANT INTERVIEW 54, MALE, ETHIOPIAN, AGE NOT INDICATED

Several interviewees indicated that children were more at-risk to false information than adults. Specifically, children appeared to be more susceptible to misinformation about the quality of life that could be achieved through migration. One interview indicated that smugglers target minors and isolate them from their families as they make the decision to migrate. In addition, some data from Ethiopia indicates that

children are targeted by migrants, and offered free travel in exchange either for a proportion of wages upon reaching the Gulf, or for finding other migrants who are willing to pay for the trip. Due to these arrangements, children may leave without the knowledge or consent of their families. However, smugglers nonetheless contact families for additional money in Djibouti and Yemen.

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According to my knowledge, people who intend to migrate or brokers entice the children with false hope [in order to] exploit them. For example, the children [are forced to] call their family [while en route] for help. [The parents will give] money [and the adult migrant or smuggler will receive it] and share it with the partner.

MIGRANT INTERVIEW 38, MALE, ETHIOPIAN, 27 YEARS OLD



A YOUNG ETHIOPIAN MIGRANT HOPING TO TRAVEL TO THE GULF NOW STUCK IN DJIBOUTI, DECIDING WHETHER TO RETURN HOME.

IV. SMUGGLER NETWORK DYNAMICS

The increase in the number of people migrating through Yemen over the past decade demonstrates that, not only has the demand to migrant increased, but capacity of smuggling networks to facilitate movement has increased.

THE LINE BETWEEN SMUGGLING AND TRAFFICKING

The line between smuggling and trafficking is heavily blurred on the route from the Horn of Africa to various Gulf states. Migrants generally enter voluntarily into relationships with smuggling networks, and male migrants have limited ties with smugglers upon arrival; these factors indicate a smuggling relationship. However, the abuses perpetrated by smugglers and the increasingly coercive nature of the journey indicate a trafficking relationship. Most of the journeys through Yemen can be categorised as conducting ‘smuggling with aggravating circumstances’, that is, smuggling that creates “circumstances that endanger the life or safety of the people being smuggled, as well as inhumane or degrading treatment”⁴. Although migrants may voluntarily enter into transactions with smuggling networks, and may not be trafficked, the abuses perpetrated against them are so severe that they are perceived by some academics as crimes against humanity⁵.

People moving through Yemen are typically not initially coerced into movement – they choose to move voluntarily – and those who facilitate movement do so for financial gain, as a primary motivation, rather than exploitation. As such, migrants who move through Yemen are smuggled, not trafficked, in line with the definition of smuggling laid out in the Protocol Against Smuggling of Migrants by Air, Sea and Land supplementing the UN Convention against Transnational Organised Crime⁶.

Increasingly, though, migrants in Yemen are coerced into continuing at various points along the journey. Some migrants, particularly women, are subject to exploitation and

experience coercive treatment while on the move. Those who facilitate movement also perpetrate abuses including, but not limited to, detention, physical abuse, abduction and extortion. Women in particular are likely to face GBV and may be traded within smuggling networks for the purposes of sexual exploitation. Instances were also reported of migrants who requested smugglers to return home but were instead sold to armed forces. These examples clearly represent a coercive and exploitative relationship.

For some migrants, the line between smuggling and trafficking is crossed, as they continue to be coerced and exploited after arrival in destination countries. Smugglers reported that women are likely to give a portion of their salary to smugglers for several months after arrival, an arrangement that involves a significant degree of coercion, and can be defined as trafficking. Migrants also reported that upon returning home, their assets had been sold, pushing them into travelling again. One migrant indicated that his property was seized by smugglers as payment.

In the case of both smuggling with aggravated circumstances and trafficking, the migrants who make the journey should not be seen as criminals, despite their irregular status. When migrants engage voluntarily with smuggling networks, they generally do so to access a service, and often with incomplete information about the services they are receiving. The Protocol Against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land Sea and Air is generally understood to criminalise only the activities of smugglers, not the migrants who make the journey.

4 Smuggling with aggravating circumstances’ encompasses, according to the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants, activities perpetrated by smugglers that endanger or are likely to endanger the lives or safety of migrants, as well as activities that entail inhuman or degrading treatment, including for exploitation, of migrants. For more information, please see : <https://www.unodc.org/e4j/en/tip-and-som/module1/-/key-issues/aggravating-circumstances.html>

5 Kuschminder and Triandafyllidou argue that abuses perpetrated by smuggling networks against Eritreans in Libya, in circumstances that parallel closely those of Ethiopians and Somalis in Yemen, are crimes against humanity. For more information, please see: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/anti.12579>

6 The Protocol Against Smuggling of Migrants by Air, Sea and Land supplementing the UN Convention against Transnational Organised Crime, defines smuggling as: “procurement, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit, of the illegal entry of a person into a State Party of which the person is not a national or a permanent resident.” Smuggling is distinct from trafficking on three main counts: (1) smuggling is voluntary whereas trafficking involves coercion, (2) the intent of smuggling is financial or material gain, whereas the intent of trafficking is exploitation and (3) smuggling always takes place across international borders, whereas trafficking may take place internally within a country.

SMUGGLER PROFILES

When Victims Become Perpetrators

Interviews with smugglers indicate that there is a dynamic in which victims become perpetrators. Specifically, migrants who make the journey several times develop links with smugglers and become a part of the network.



Recycle migrants [repeat migrants] are working with us and like giving [would-be migrants] information about Arab Gulf Countries [and] examples that there are many jobs opportunities in Arab Gulf countries and so on.

SMUGGLER INTERVIEW 3, MALE, ETHIOPIAN, 39 YEARS OLD

The victim perpetrator relationship becomes complex for those who are underage or moving into adulthood. In this study, migrant interviewees consisted primarily of repeat migrants, and many of these migrants made their first trip when they were underage. Some started to recruit others to join them on route when still children, thus becoming underage perpetrators.

ORGANIZATION OF SMUGGLING NETWORKS

Smuggling in Yemen is organized through loose networks that engage with each other on an occasional basis. Smugglers reported working with a wide variety of other networks that included agreements about profit and cost sharing. Several smugglers mentioned meeting other associated networks face-to-face, though the majority of communication between smuggling networks takes place by phone and secure messenger apps (WhatsApp and Telegram). Meetings between networks were reported to range from quarterly to annually. The combination of regular in person meetings and frequent contact between networks using messenger apps has served to cement relationships between different

networks and strengthen the overall smuggling network from the Horn of Africa through to various Gulf countries.

Smuggling networks appear to be comprised primarily of men; no women were interviewed in this study because no female smugglers could be identified through existing networks. Networks are organized by ethnicity, with Highlander (Tigray and Amhara), Lowlander (Oromo and Somali), and Yemeni groups working in coordination. There is also close coordination with smuggling groups in Saudi Arabia. Networks agree to collaborate for different phases of the journey in order to leverage a comparative advantage.



I have many smuggler networks in Ethiopia, Djibouti, Somalia, Yemen and Saudi Arabia. In Horn of Africa I will discuss the smugglers based in there and in Yemen I will communicate with Yemeni smugglers and in Saudi Arabia I will communicate with Saudi smugglers. Our communication methods are by phone call and every three to four months I will meet them personally for more discussion and also to overcome many challenges.

SMUGGLER INTERVIEW 1, MALE, ETHIOPIAN, 33 YEARS OLD

Different smuggling groups have different roles, with Ethiopian networks located within Ethiopia responsible for providing information about the routes and the job opportunities, as well as acting as guides for groups who move across into Saudi Arabia. Yemeni smugglers reportedly play the role of 'bad cop' in that they enforce payment, in the words of smugglers, or extort additional money. Yemeni smuggling

networks also maintain the network of contacts required to assure movement; this may include providing payments to actors along the route to ensure safe passage. Payments take place, not only by transfer of cash, but also by transfer of mobile phone credit and provision of favours and services. Networks are often maintained via ethnic and family ties.



My first line challenges [most significant challenge] is the migrants ... they will promise to pay the money up on arrival ... and they [do] not, during this time I will sell them to Yemeni smugglers and they will beat them and force them to pay money.

SMUGGLER INTERVIEW 6, MALE, ETHIOPIAN, 42 YEARS OLD

COST OF TRIP AND PAYMENT METHODS

The migration journey can be paid for in two ways. One payment option involves migrants and smugglers agreeing on a price for the full journey before departure; interviews indicate that this package costs between 2,000 and 5,000 USD. According to UNODC's 2018 smuggling report, prices for the full Ethiopia – Saudi Arabia journey through Djibouti were, on average, 850 USD in 2017. The difference in price could be due to the fact that price information gathered on the coast of the Horn of Africa (Obock and Bossaso) likely to exclude the cost associated with ransom paid in Yemen. Even though the full price is agreed up-front in these cases, payment often takes place in instalments. Most migrants referred to making a minimum of two payments to smuggling networks, with the first payment typically made after reaching the Yemen shores and the second after reaching Saudi Arabia. Some migrants also mentioned that smugglers offered different payment options: migrants could either pay several large lump sums or pay a monthly fee upon arrival in Saudi Arabia. The use of monthly fee structures implies an element of coercion or trafficking. Highlanders (Amhara and Tigray) typically agree to full journeys more frequently than Lowlanders as they are perceived to have better connections and resources required to arrange for the full journey.

Another option is to plan and pay for the journey on a piecemeal basis. In this structure, migrants do not operate with one smuggling network. Instead, they schedule and pay only for portions of journeys at one time. For example, crossing from the Horn of Africa to Yemen before working and engaging another smuggler to move to a hub in central Yemen. Based on this research, the journey from Horn of Africa to Yemen costs between 300 and 600 USD, the journey from the coast

to Sa'ada can cost up to 160 USD, and the journey across the border into Saudi Arabia costs 300 USD. Migrants may also choose a specific destination in Saudi Arabia from a hub; the journey from Sa'ada to Riyadh costs 1,000 USD. This research was not able to indicate leg prices from the Saudi border to major cities. Migrants using this approach stop to earn money along the route, with could last weeks to years. Several migrants interviewed in this survey mentioned stopping in Djibouti for up to six months to earn the money for the boat journey and indicated that they intended to continue their journey in short instalments. Migrants using this system are more likely to be Lowlanders from Oromia due to fewer financial resources and networks on average.

For both journey structures, money exchange takes place primarily by bank or hawala transfer⁷. Many migrants mentioned transferring money to Ethiopian bank accounts, with family members conducting the transfers on their behalf. This suggests that the formal banking system is used by networks. The use of the formal banking system to support migrant smuggling businesses out of Ethiopia is unusual in comparison to other routes. According to Legorano and Parkinson (2015), 90 per cent of human smuggling is done through money transfers made in the informal systems (e.g. hawalas). The linkages between the formal banking system in Ethiopia and human smuggling networks have not been investigated but may offer an alternative avenue for identifying smugglers and supporting legal action. A secondary mechanism of receiving payments is in-person. Several migrants referred to the fact that smugglers 'reach across countries to receive payments', which likely refers to smugglers' ability to send a broker to different countries specifically to collect money.

⁷ The hawala system is an informal fund transfer system in which money does not pass through regular banking channels. Instead, trusted social connections are used to make transfers. The hawala system is in common use across Somalia, Yemen and parts of Ethiopia. Due to the informal nature of the transfers, the hawala system is often used by smugglers and actors on the grey and black market.

SMUGGLING ECONOMIES

Smuggling networks can be seen as businesses, which provide services to migrants for a fee. In order to provide this service, they rely on a logistical supply network. Actors in the smuggling economy include restaurants, companies and individuals providing transportation, companies and individuals providing supplies (e.g., food, NFI), and businesses and chiefs who provide accommodation and/or protection.

Smugglers engage with the local marketplace on a regular and sustained basis. Several smugglers referred to restaurants and shops providing them with food and non-food items (NFIs) on credit or free of charge. One smuggler referred specifically to a chain of payment: “I will work with service providers ... to get from them a credit and I will pay back their money when I collect from migrants.” The credit provided to smuggling networks and the chain of payments organized indicates a substantial degree of trust between local economic actors and smuggling networks. One smuggler pointed to a co-dependence between economic actors and smuggling

networks, saying “we will work together because their income is depending on us and also our safety is depending on them.” This suggests that smugglers form a large and profitable part of the client base in the local economy. The economic dependence on smugglers as customers may be due at least in part to the conflict in Yemen and associated currency fluctuations. Local customers have lower purchasing power than previously, however smugglers can sustain and build local economies that exist in Yemen. This mirrors the economic conditions at points of departure, where migrant smuggling is the key economic activity, and sustains local markets.

The relationship between smuggling networks and local economies – and the potential for local economies to be reliant on smuggling business – has not been researched. Given the increasing trend to frame smuggling as a relational, the interaction between the smuggling economy and local economic actors may gain interest.

PARALLEL SMUGGLING NETWORKS

Globally, many migrant smuggling routes run in parallel to other routes. For example, migrant smuggling into Greece sometimes took place together with, or using the profits from, drug and cigarette smuggling. Although the networks are not intertwined, high level members of migrant networks also ‘invest’ in other forms of smuggling. In another example, West African migrant smuggling routes often run parallel to petrol and cigarette smuggling routes. So far, the Horn of Africa migration routes have not been systematically linked to

other types of smuggling. This study reinforced the conclusion that migrant smuggling networks from the Horn of Africa to Saudi Arabia operate somewhat independently, though have some cross-over with qat smuggling. This research recorded incidents of Yemenis crossing the border into Saudi Arabia with migrants being used for the purpose of selling ‘drugs’. One of the migrants referred specifically to Yemenis selling qat to Saudis across the border.

V. CONCLUSION

The number of migrants passing through Yemen has been steadily increasing over the last decade and is likely to continue to increase in the coming years. Migrants passing from the Horn of Africa toward employment in the Gulf countries take on massive protection risks throughout the journey, and some of the biggest risks occur in Yemen. They have access to only a very limited range of coping mechanisms. In country, much of their coping capacity depends on their networks – migrants rely on Yemeni households, households from their own communities (muhamasheen) and religious communities for support. As the conflict in Yemen extends and competition for resources increases, however, these groups are less likely to provide support to migrants.

Women and girls, as well as unaccompanied children, are the two groups most vulnerable groups on route. Women and girls often migrate to escape a restrictive home environment; they face gendered issues along the route, and they are then employed as domestic workers, in poor circumstances, upon arrival. Return can be fraught with additional issues. Unaccompanied minors, as well, often migrate to escape from protection risks at home, and face increased exposure to risks along the route, heightened by lack of ID. In addition to these two groups, migrants who are abandoned by smugglers – because they fall

ill, want to turn back, or do not have money – represent a third extremely vulnerable group.

Humanitarian actors should play a key role in helping the most vulnerable to mitigate protection risks across the route. As the protection situation facing migrants becomes steadily clearer, there are more opportunities for humanitarian actors to build relevant and context specific interventions, ranging from short-term measures to reduce exposure to physical violence to long term programs to encourage improved information flow and develop cross border initiatives. However, humanitarian assistance is constrained by several factors, including operational and access constraints, challenges in meeting the needs of the Yemeni population, and challenges at the global level in identifying and implementing durable solutions for irregular migrants. As the challenges facing migrants passing from the Horn of Africa to the Gulf become clearer, it will be imperative for the humanitarian community to collaborate with other actors to implement life-saving programs: within the international community, relevant actors include regional donors, the UN, and others. Within Yemen, close cooperation with the Yemeni community, religious actors and communities from the Horn of Africa will be necessary.



SOMALI REFUGEES ON A BOAT RETURNING TO SOMALIA, AFTER BECOMING STRANDED IN YEMEN DUE TO THE ECONOMIC CRISIS AND CONFLICT.



YOUNG MIGRANTS RECENTLY ARRIVED FROM THE HORN OF AFRICA WALK ALONG A COASTAL ROAD IN SHABWAH, YEMEN, MAKING THEIR WAY NORTH.

