

RETURN OF ETHIOPIAN MIGRANTS FROM THE KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA

ANNUAL OVERVIEW 2021

IOM Regional Office for the East and Horn of Africa

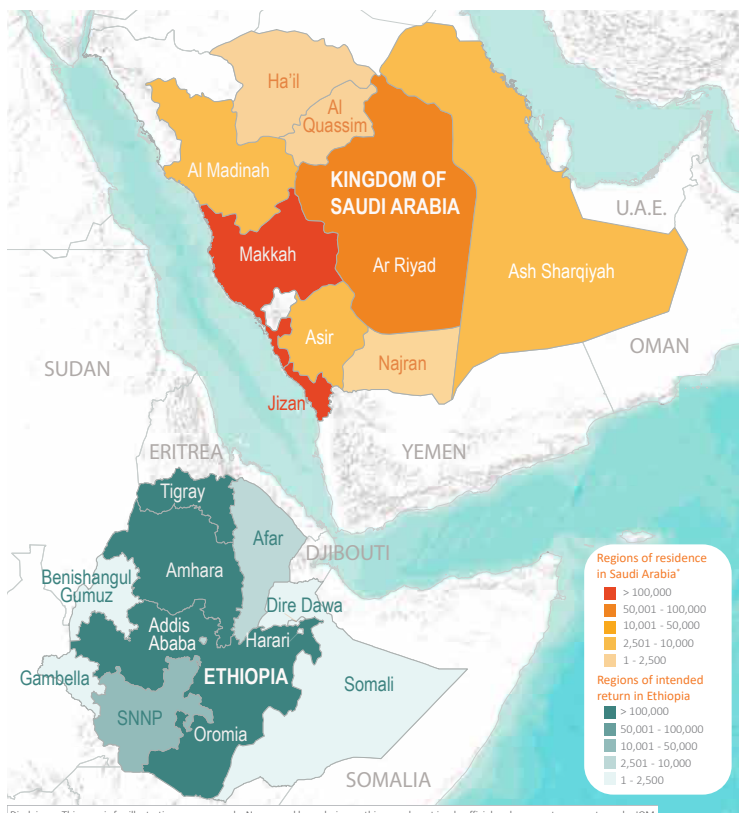
Background

Since 2017, IOM has been registering migrants returning to Ethiopia from Saudi Arabia upon arrival at Bole airport.¹ The large flows are the product of an initiative of the Government of Saudi Arabia aimed at reducing unemployment by tightening its immigration policy. Irregular migrants were afforded a 90-day amnesty period during which they were encouraged to leave the country without facing penalties. Following this period, authorities launched a large airlift return operation. Over 425,000 migrants were returned to Ethiopia between May 2017 and December 2021.

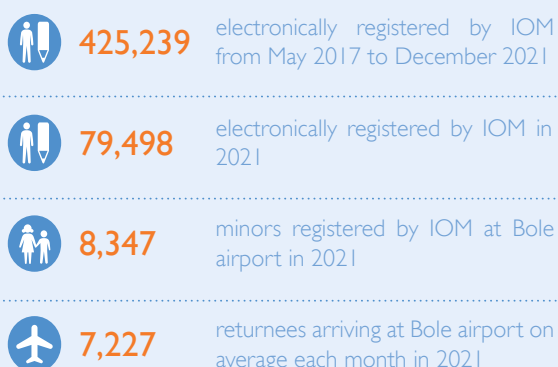
In 2021, IOM registered 79,498 Ethiopian returnees, more than double the number of returns recorded in 2020 (36,632). In June 2021, the Government of Ethiopia announced that 40,000 Ethiopian detainees in Saudi Arabia would be returned to Ethiopia in the span of two weeks. Around 9,000 Ethiopian nationals were returned in June and nearly 32,000 returns were recorded in July. The latter represents the highest number of returnees ever registered by IOM since May 2017.

Returns were suspended over several months in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and then were paused again at the end of 2021 but no official communication on the reason behind this interruption was made by either government. Additionally, many Ethiopian migrants who returned in 2021 were not able to return to their place of origin due to the conflict in Northern Ethiopia.

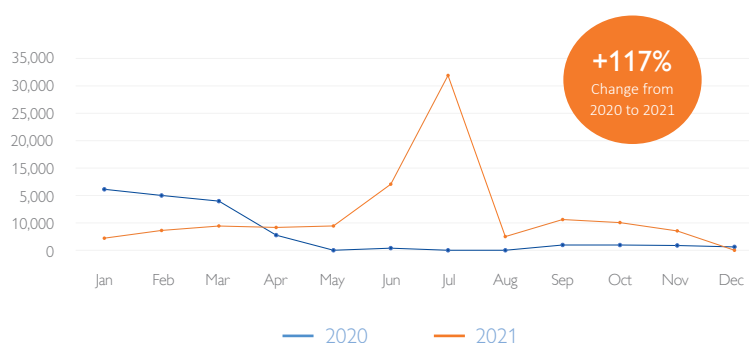
Returns by Region of Residence and of Intended Destination



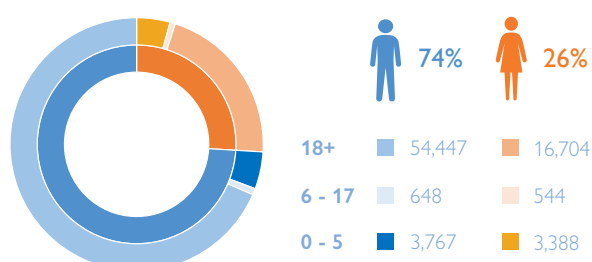
Numbers at a Glance



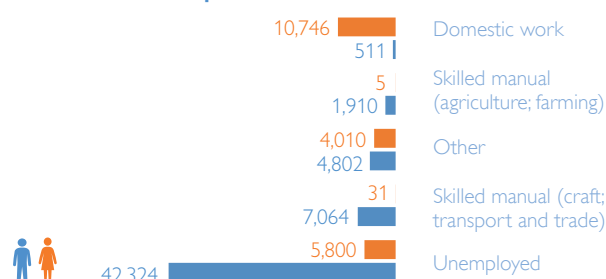
Monthly Registrations in 2020 and 2021



Migrant Sex and Age Breakdown



Occupation in Saudi Arabia



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

* Data for this indicator was not available between September 2020 and February 2021.