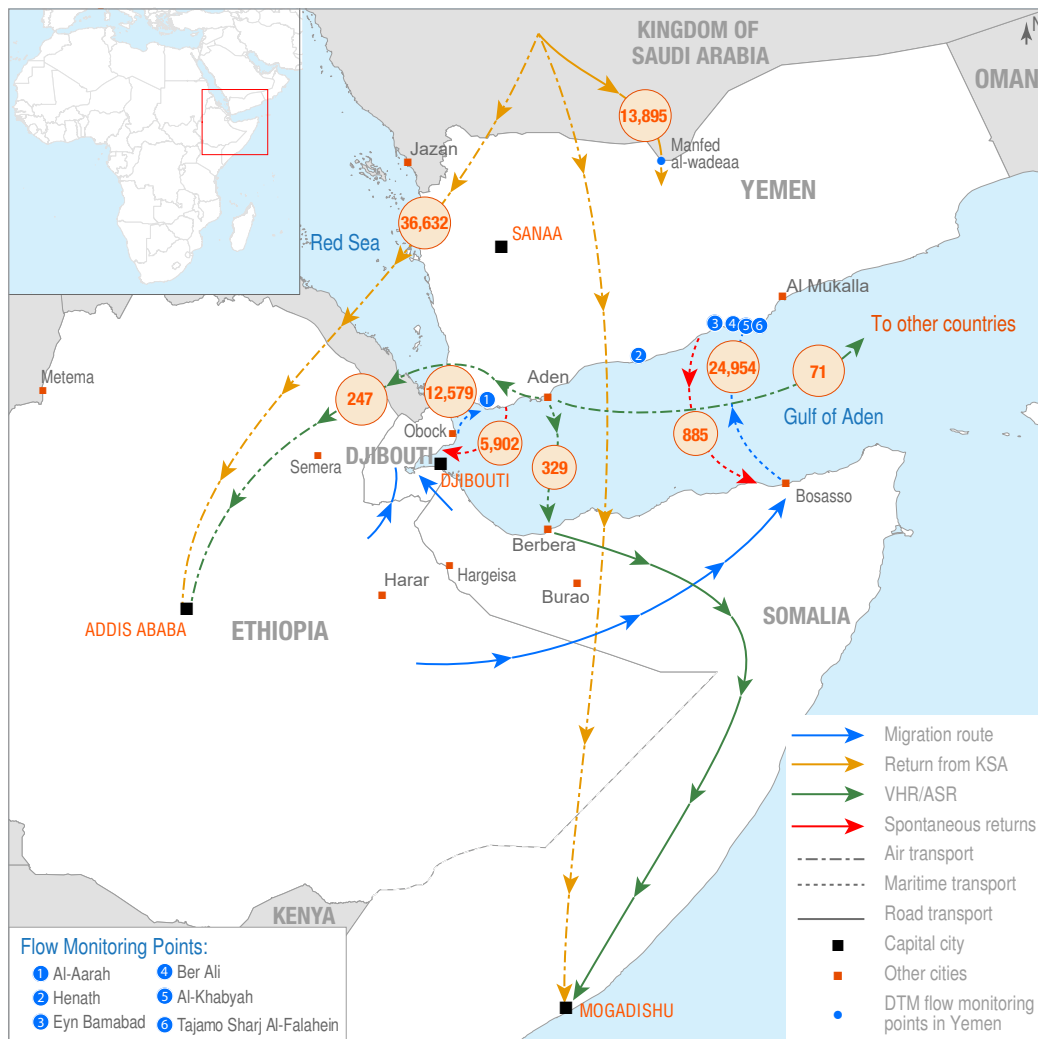


The Eastern Route, which runs from the Horn of Africa to the Arabian Peninsula, in particular to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), has long been the most relevant migratory corridor in terms of volume and characteristics in the East and Horn of Africa (EHOA) region. Mobility along this route is mixed in nature, with different categories of people on the move such as refugees and economic migrants, and is not without significant hardships and challenges.

Irregular migration to the Arabian Peninsula is predominantly male and skewed towards younger age groups, while regular migration channels are largely used by women. While predominantly economic, migration along the Eastern Route is fuelled more specifically by unemployment, intermittent or insufficient wages, land-related factors such as climatic shocks and land depletion resulting in economic vulnerability in agrarian communities. In contrast to the oftentimes dire conditions the migrants report at home, they have high salary expectations in the KSA and the success stories migrants witness amongst returnees in their communities spark migration aspirations.

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted migration trends across the EHOA. At the beginning of the outbreak, when restrictions were the most severe, a switch in routes was observed. In fact, with Djibouti's border closures being the most effective, many migrants tried to cross through Somalia instead. Soon enough, pockets of stranded migrants were reported in different parts of the Horn, unable to proceed or return to their place or origin. This resulted in a widespread xenophobic and discriminatory narrative, limited or curtailed access to coping strategies and access to basic services along the journey, as well as episodes of detentions and deportations. By the end of September, it is estimated that at least 3,000 migrants were stranded across the region, with further 14,500 EHOA migrants in Yemen, and another 20,000 in need of assistance in the KSA. Information on EHOA migrant caseloads in critical situations was also received from other countries in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and the Middle East, though precise figures are still difficult to obtain.

In the EHOA region, IOM's Missing Migrants Project recorded a total of 52 migrant deaths and disappearances in 2020, all involving migrants returning from the Arabian Peninsula to the Horn of Africa<sup>1</sup>. All the recorded deaths happened in Djibouti except one, which occurred in Somalia. The majority of the deaths (40) were attributed to drowning in three separate incidents where the migrants were forcefully abandoned at sea by their smugglers near the Gueherere coast in Djibouti. The other incidents occurred in the Djiboutian desert in the Obock region, amongst migrants returning from Yemen, and were attributed to dehydration. The following sections highlight the complexity of the movement trends across one of the most trafficked and dangerous maritime corridors in the globe.

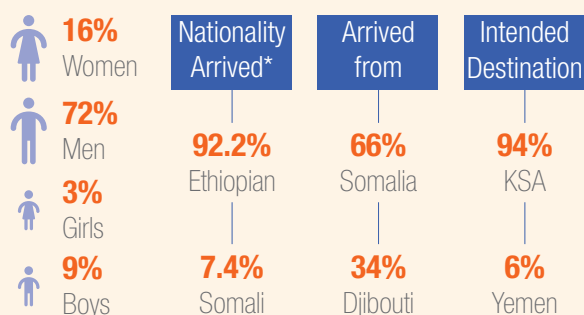


DISCLAIMER: This map is for illustration purposes only. Names and boundaries on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by IOM.

<sup>1</sup> It should be noted, however, that the actual number of migrant disappearances and deaths during 2020 in the EHOA region is likely much higher than the number recorded, as fatal incidents often occur in remote areas with little to no media coverage. <https://missingmigrants.iom.int/>

### YEMEN ARRIVALS FROM THE HORN OF AFRICA

**37,535** Migrants arrived in Yemen through DTM Flow Monitoring Points

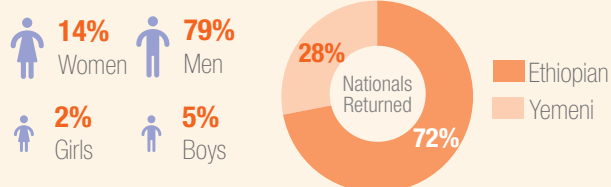


\* Others: 0.4%

In 2020, a total of 37,535 migrants were recorded at six Flow Monitoring Points (FMPs) along the southern coast of Yemen. This represents a 73% decrease as compared to 2019, primarily because of the mobility restrictions put in place following the global COVID-19 outbreak. Ethiopian nationals remained the largest observed group on the move (92%), with Bossaso as the main area of departure. Although migrant crossings continued throughout the year, the numbers decreased drastically following March 2020, with over 74% of all the movements tracked during the first quarter of the year. Economic drivers remained the main reason for moving (above 99%), and a new trend appeared during June and July when Yemeni nationals returning home for religious holidays utilized irregular means of travel due to the various travel restrictions in place. During these two months, 266 such Yemenis were tracked upon arrival in Yemen – all but seven departing from Obock in Djibouti. An even higher percentage of migrants as compared to 2019 intended to travel to the KSA (94%). This route also continued to be characterized by a high volume of unaccompanied migrant children (UMCs), with 3,203 UMCs (9%) being reported by the end of the year; over 71% of all the children travelling were UMCs, which is a drastic increase from the 46% tracked in 2019.

### RETURNS FROM THE KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA

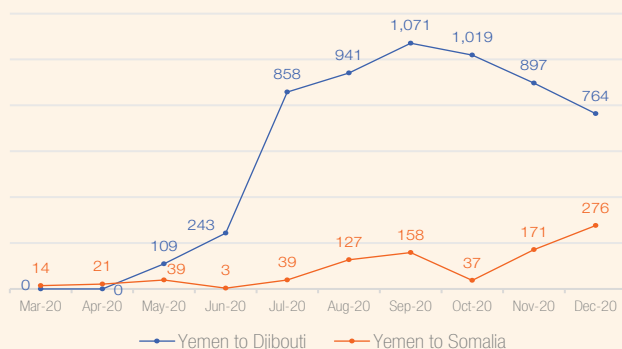
**50,527** Migrants returned from KSA to Yemen and Ethiopia



In April 2017, the Government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia launched a campaign titled 'A Nation without Violations', granting all irregular migrants an amnesty period of 90 days to leave the country without facing penalties. As the KSA authorities launched a large airlift operation to return migrants, IOM began registering these migrants returning to Ethiopia. In 2020, IOM registered 36,632 returnees to Ethiopia, marking an almost 70% decrease compared to 2019 when 120,825 returnees were registered upon arrival. The majority (93%) of migrants registered in 2020 reportedly returned involuntarily. Additionally, 13,895 Yemeni migrants returned from KSA to Yemen during the same time period. Somali migrants were also returned from the KSA to Somalia in 2020, 195 of whom were supported by IOM upon arrival, although the full extent of this movement remains unclear.

### SPONTANEOUS RETURNS FROM YEMEN: MARCH TO DECEMBER 2020

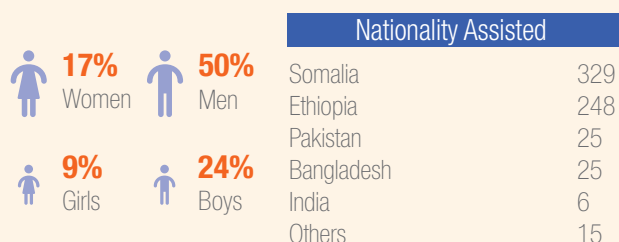
**6,787** Migrants returned from Yemen to Djibouti (5,902) and Somalia (885)



The COVID-19 outbreak resulted in a widespread effort by governments in the region to curtail cross-border movement in unprecedented ways. As a direct result of movement restrictions along the border between Yemen and the KSA, a new trend of spontaneous returns back to Djibouti and Somalia emerged, as thousands of migrants remained stranded in Yemen, unable to continue their journeys. Those that could afford to do so used the same network of smugglers that were used in the journey eastwards to try and return to their areas of origin. This return journey is arguably even more perilous for the migrants who are already in precarious conditions, often as a result of prolonged detention and/or abuse in Yemen. These migrants are also likely to be abused by their smugglers and are sometimes made to disembark in the middle of the ocean, while others report having been forced to cross the desert on foot with little or no resources left for their return journey. The figure shows this trend of returns, and how they have increased since March 2020 when the restrictions on movements were put into place.

### IOM ASSISTED RETURNS FROM YEMEN

**648** Migrants assisted by IOM to return home from Yemen



To assist those stranded in Yemen, IOM helps migrants wishing to return to their home country through its Voluntary Humanitarian Return (VHR) programme. IOM provides counselling, ensuring that migrants make an informed decision, provides medical screenings and escorts, and organizes their travel home via chartered flights to Ethiopia and commercial flights to other countries. IOM assisted 319 migrants to voluntarily return home in 2020, of whom 78% were Ethiopian nationals. In partnership with UNHCR under the Assisted Spontaneous Return (ASR) programme, IOM also provides return support to Somali refugees who express a wish to return home. In 2020, IOM facilitated the movement of 329 refugees back to Somalia by commercial vessel from Aden, Yemen. A large majority of these movements happened before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in the region.