

IMPACT OF COVID-19 MOVEMENT RESTRICTIONS ON MIGRANTS ALONG THE EASTERN CORRIDOR

Report 4 | as of 30 June 2020

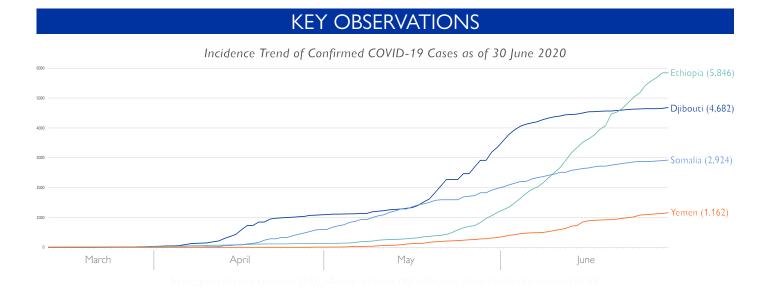
IOM Regional Office for East and Horn of Africa

Publication: 15 July 2020



BACKGROUND

The COVID-19 outbreak has restricted global mobility, whilst heightening the risk of exploitation to vulnerable populations. This report provides a snapshot of the COVID-19 epidemiological situation and mobility restrictions, and of the current migration trends along the Eastern Corridor migration route, in addition to an analysis of the impact that movement restrictions have had in Djibouti, Ethiopia, Somalia, and Yemen. Moreover, it provides information on the main protection concerns for migrants and assistance provided, and COVID-19 risk mitigation measures. This report utilizes data collected through IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) Flow Monitoring Points (FMPs), Migrant Response Centers (MRCs), Assisted Voluntary Return (AVR) data, as well as anecdotal information provided by IOM team members working in the region.



¹ Migration Response Centers (MRCs) are situated along key migration routes, where they fill critical gaps by providing direct assistance, including food and temporary shelter, information and service referrals to migrants on the move. MRCs bring together key partners to facilitate the identification of migrants in vulnerable situations, and ensure that they receive appropriate, immediate and longer-term support. Seven MRCs are currently operational in the Horn of Africa: Obock (Djibouti), Hargeisa, Bosasso (Somalia), Semera, Metema, Dire Dawa and Tog-Wajaale (Ethiopia).

COVID-19 EPIDEMIOLOGICAL SITUATION

As of 30 June 2020, the number of COVID-19 cases along the Eastern Corridor stood at 14,614, with most new cases reported, in June alone, in Ethiopia (+4,674), followed by Djibouti (+1,328), Somalia (+948) and Yemen (+835). Unlike previous trends, Ethiopia recorded the highest number of confirmed COVID-19 cases at 5,846 (40% of total cases). Following Ethiopia is Djibouti with 4,682 confirmed cases (32% of total cases) and Somalia with 2,924 cases (20% of total cases), while Yemen cases amounted to 1,162 (8% of total cases). As of 30 June 2020, the number of COVID-19 related deaths along the Eastern Corridor stood at 560, majority of which were recorded in Yemen (313). Yemen holds the highest case fatality rate (CFR) at approximately 27%, compared to Djibouti (CFR 1.2%), Ethiopia (CFR 1.8%) and Somalia (CFR 3.1%). This is much higher than the global average CFR of 4.9% and is largely attributable to the challenges of accessing a health care system which has been decimated by years of war and the fact that people tend to seek health care when the disease has progressed too far. At the same time, COVID-19 cases in Yemen seem relatively low, and this is largely due to the limited testing capacity, along with lack of access to health facilities and the associated stigma with seeking treatment for COVID-19, which hides the true impact and spread of the virus. As of 30 June 2020, a total of 8,376 people have recovered from COVID-19 along the Eastern Corridor.

COVID-19 MOBILITY RESTRICTIONS

On 15 June, the Government of Djibouti eased some of the COVID-19 restrictions by reopening restaurants and cafes, on condition that handwashing devices are installed, and physical distance is organized. Ethiopia continues operating under the five-months state of emergency which was announced on 8 April. The country has shut its land borders to nearly all human traffic as part of efforts to help curb the spread of the pandemic, but passenger flights are still operating at limited capacity. As of 30 June, Somaliland lifted restrictions of movements and gatherings linked to COVID-19. However, the border with Ethiopia remains closed due to unrest in Oromia region. Since March 2020, Yemen authorities declared a nationwide health emergency and introduced many preventive and mitigation measures, including the adoption of restrictions on movement countrywide, by closure/partially closure of international airports as well as sea and land border points. Please see Annex 2 for an overview of the status of Ports of Entry in the East and Horn of Africa region.

COVID-19 IMPACT ON MIGRANT FLOWS

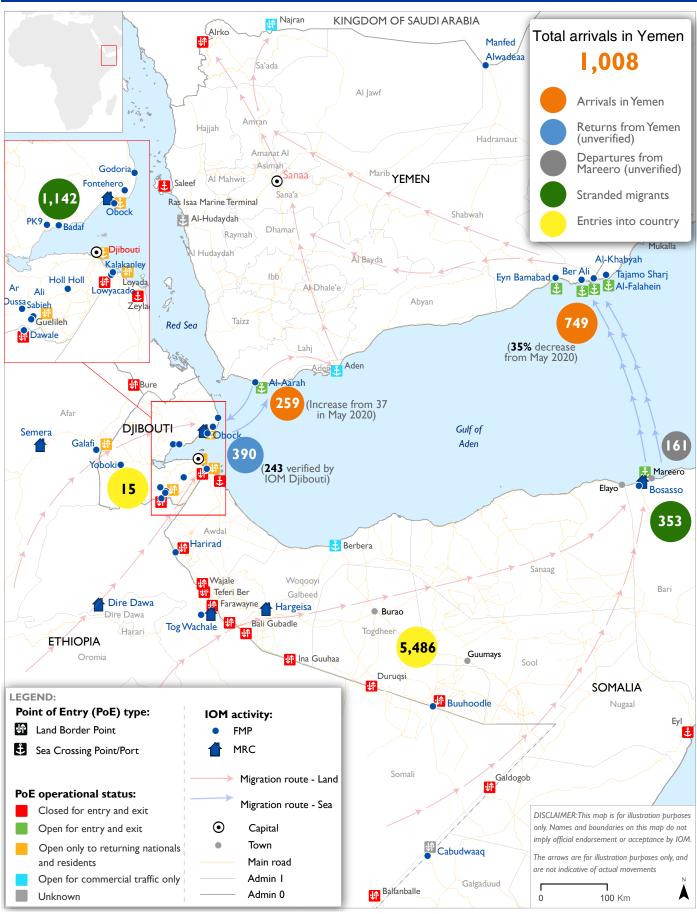
Overall migrants' arrivals to Yemen from the Horn of Africa decreased by 16% between May (1,195) and June (1,008), and over 90% in relation to arrival trends during the second quarter of 2019 (47,269 arrivals in Q2 of 2019 and 3,928 arrivals in Q2 of 2020). Yemen arrivals from Somalia saw a further 35% decrease in June from 1,158 to 749, possibly due to adverse weather conditions, while arrivals from Djibouti increased from 37 in May to 259 in June, but all June arrivals were of Yemeni nationals. Meanwhile, spontaneous return movements continued to be observed with at least 243 verified returns of Ethiopians from Yemen to Djibouti, the 259 above-mentioned Yemenis leaving Djibouti to return to Yemen, and numerous reports of Ethiopian migrants making the journey across states back from Puntland to Somaliland and on to the border with Ethiopia. Spontaneous returns across Ethiopia's land borders also continue, with 3,605 crossings registered by IOM in June and with many more crossing undetected at unmonitored crossing points. Please see Map 1 on the following page for an overview of the impact of COVID-19 on migrant flows along the Eastern Corridor.

MIGRANT PROTECTION AND DETENTION CONCERNS

As of 30 June 2020, 1,142 Ethiopian migrants were stranded and had gathered in 19 spontaneous sites in Djibouti. The 728 migrants discharged from the quarantine site in Ali-Sabieh because negative to COVID-19 were all taken to the border with Ethiopia. However, the closure of the borders, the related suspension of AVR services and the stretched reception capacity in Ethiopia represent a concern with regards to the capacity of migrants to return safely to their place of origin. In Somalia, 353 migrants have been registered for AVR assistance since March, but due to the suspension of assistance, many are no longer reachable and often opt to return on foot or via buses, if they can afford it, to Ethiopia via Burco and Hargeisa. Migrants expressed concern over their capacity to support themselves during the journey as COVID-19 restrictions have reduced daily job opportunities and opportunities to maintain contact with the host communities which provide support. Meanwhile in Yemen, migrants are at increased risk of incidents of violence, forced movement, arrests and detention. Over 14,500 migrants are estimated to be stranded in the country as a result of movement restrictions and increased anti-migrant policies, without any means of returning home.



MAP 1 | COVID-19 IMPACT ON MIGRATION ALONG THE EASTERN CORRIDOR (JUNE 2020)



MIGRANT ASSISTANCE (MRC/AVR)

IOM continues to provide basic life-saving assistance and psychosocial support at the MRCs. IOM Djibouti is currently assisting 49 vulnerable migrants at the MRC in Obock, all of which have been stranded for several months. Only 12 new migrants were admitted to the MRC in June, as AVR assistance is still suspended. Migrant registrations have remained stable in Bosasso (173 in June) and have more than doubled in Hargeisa between May (30) and June (69). A total of 69 new AVR requests were submitted in June, adding to the migrants' backlog awaiting for AVR. Since the adoption of COVID-19 related travel restrictions by the Government of Ethiopia (23 March 2020), IOM's AVR operations have been suspended, negatively impacting the 1,142 stranded migrants in Djibouti and the 354 Ethiopian migrants stranded in Somalia. The Government of Ethiopia, however, coordinated the repatriation of 1,016 Ethiopians from Kuwait. In Yemen, movement restrictions, deterioration of migrants' living conditions and the increased danger they are facing is leaving many of them with no other option than seeking to return home. In this scenario, the resumption of Voluntary Humanitarian Return (VHR) assistance is a priority to address life-threatening conditions migrants are living in Yemen. Please see Annex 1 for an overview of registrations per MRC in 2020.

MIGRANT RETURNS TO ETHIOPIA AND SOMALIA

Between March and April 2020, returns of Ethiopian migrants from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia had decreased by almost 70%, falling from 8,963 to 2,757. While no returns were reported in May, flights from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia resumed in the first week of June, returning 387 migrants to Addis Ababa. Return movements from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, however, did not only take place towards Ethiopia, but also targeted Somali nationals with the return to Mogadishu of 334 migrants at the beginning of the month of June. Some of these returnees require onwards transportation to other parts of the country but the operations are rendered more complicated by the travel restrictions in force. On 10 June, migrants were supported to return to Puntland (Garowe) and Somaliland (Hargeisa) from Mogadishu via United Nations Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS) flights as 109 were hosted in a centre in Mogadishu post arrival.

QUARANTINE MEASURES

The Government of Djibouti continued bringing migrants into the quarantine site in Ali Sabieh region which is dedicated to land travellers and migrants. In June, the center admitted 354 new migrants – six (6) of which tested positive for COVID-19 - and discharged 728 migrants which were taken to the border with Ethiopia. In Somalia, the 18 functional quarantine and isolation facilities continued operating across the country, with varying bed capacity. With raising community transmission and pressure on the quarantine facilities, the Government of Ethiopia is considering converting two (2) quarantine centers which currently host returnees (total bed capacity over 2,000) into treatment centers. In Yemen, IOM also keeps advocating against quarantine centres for migrants and refugees only, as a measure to avail discriminatory policies of arrest, encampment or detention.



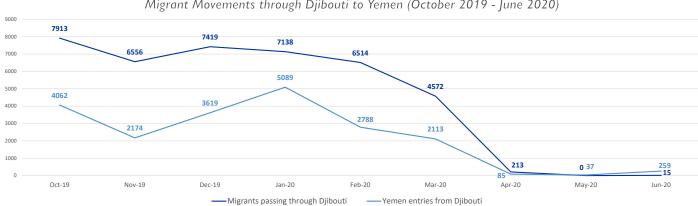


DJIBOUTI SITUATION

As of 30 June, Djibouti recorded a total of 4,682 confirmed individuals, 54 deaths and 4,524 recoveries. In June, the country recorded a significant slowdown in the number of new COVID-19 positive cases which increased by 40% (1,328) compared to May, while between April and May new cases had more than doubled (2,265). A higher number of severe and critical cases was identified, but the case fatality rate was significantly lower than the 4.9% global average, standing at 1.2%. On 1 June, the Government of Djibouti, with support from the UN, organized a COVID-19 screening campaign in Ali Sabieh quarantine site. Restaurants and cafés were allowed to resume their activity as of 15 June on condition that handwashing devices are installed, and physical distance is ensured. Borders, however, remained only open to cargo movements and the international airport is planned to reopen in July.

Migrants Flows Observed Through Djibouti and at Yemen Ports of Entry

- · In June, only 15 migrants, all Ethiopian nationals, were tracked upon entering the country along Djibouti's western borders at various flow monitoring points;
- For the first time, migrants' departures from Djibouti were all Yemeni nationals returning home. Of the 259 Yemenis arrivals near Al-Aarah FMP in Lahj governorate, most were man (250) and only 9 were women; nine (9) individuals were recorded on 2 June, while 250 arrived via boat on 26 June;



Migrant Movements through Djibouti to Yemen (October 2019 - June 2020)

- Informal reports from Yemen state that 390 migrants had left Yemen for Djibouti, but IOM Djibouti confirmed the arrival of only 243 migrants (37% of which were women) around Khor Angar, respectively on 17 June (109), on 23 June (19) and on 28 June (110). Migrants allegedly pay 10,000 ETB (around 294 USD) to return to Djibouti departing from Ras al Ara and surrounding, along Lahi coast;
- 825 migrant movements were tracked in the Obock region in Djibouti, which is a large reduction from the 2,994 movements tracked in May. Many migrants may have moved to sites where they are assisted or may have been conducted to the quarantine facility or just managed to leave for Yemen.

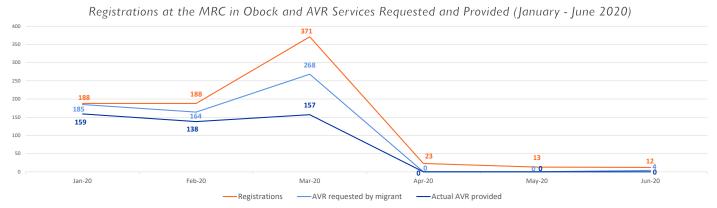
Migrants' Protection and Detention Concerns

· Both the closure of the Djibouti-Ethiopia border and the stricter border controls in Yemen have left many migrants stranded in the country. As of 30 June, 1,142 migrants who were transiting through Djibouti on their way to the Arab Peninsula were stranded and had gathered in 19 spontaneous sites located along the migration route. All stranded migrants were Ethiopian nationals.

Migrant Assistance (MRC/AVR)

- The MRC in Obock was assisting, as of 30 June, 49 vulnerable migrants who have been stranded for several months. This includes 12 new migrants who were admitted to the facility in June, as AVR assistance is still suspended. The prolonged suspension and long waiting time prompted some of the migrants to leave the MRC;
- In the context of COVID-19 prevention, admission of new migrants at the MRC in Obock was reduced to admission only of the most vulnerable migrants, namely women, children, and sick migrants. Additionally, 14 UMCs have remained hosted by CARITAS since May, with no immediate return option available to them;
- No requests for AVR have been recorded in the country between April and May 2020. Only four (4) AVR requests were received in June, and in close collaboration with the Embassy of Ethiopia in Djibouti, IOM registered for assisted return 80 stranded migrants living outside of the MRC in Ali Sabieh and Dikhil regions who were willing to return. Return of migrants will be facilitated as soon as the border with Ethiopia reopens.





Ouarantine Measures

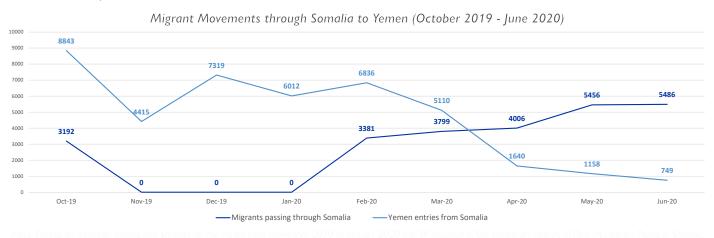
• As of 30 June, the Government of Djibouti's quarantine site in Ali Sabieh run by ONARS (National Office for Assistance to Refugees and Disaster Victims) admitted 354 new migrants – six (6) of which tested positive for COVID-19 - and discharged 728 migrants. All migrants discharged were accompanied by the authorities to the border with Ethiopia.

SOMALIA SITUATION

As of 30 June, Somalia reported 2,924 confirmed positive COVID-19 individuals, 90 deaths and 932 recoveries. The first positive case of COVID-19 was announced on 16 March, and the Federal Government of Somalia has since implemented flight and ground crossing restrictions intended to limit the spread of the virus. As of 30 June, Somaliland lifted restrictions of movements and gatherings linked to COVID-19, requiring that anyone coming from abroad by land, air and sea holds a COVID-19 certificate. However, the border with Ethiopia remains closed due to unrest in Oromia region. The certificates are to be valid for four (4) days from the date they are issued, and invalid or missing certificates will trigger a 14-day quarantine requirement.

Migrants Flows Observed Through Somalia and at Yemen Ports of Entry

- Like the 5,456 movements tracked in May, a total of 5,486 movements through Somalia were observed in June; almost all of these were Ethiopian nationals (99.6%);
- In June, migrant's arrivals in Yemen from Somalia stood at 749, a 35% decreased from the 1,158 recorded in May; 90% of these were Ethiopian nationals (671) while the remaining were Somali nationals (78);
- Similar to the previous month, majority of the migrants travelling from Somalia were adult males (67%), while 17% were adult females, and 16% were children, of which 9 were UMCs;
- Of concern is the fact that less than half (46%) of the migrant groups interviewed by DTM in Somalia were aware of the COVID-19 pandemic;

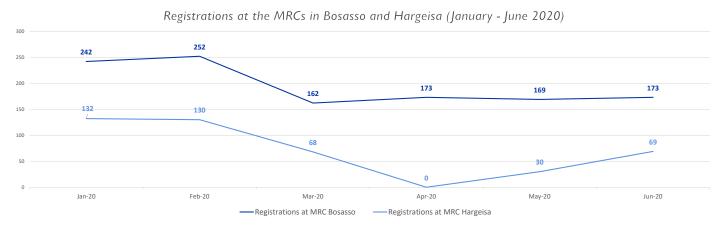


- Unverified reports received by IOM stated that 161 Ethiopian migrants departed by boat to Yemen from Mareero, a small town 15km east of Bosasso. Departures took place on 6 June (94) and 13 June (67);
- Irregular Ethiopian migrants entering Somaliland region use various routes mainly through Wajaale border town area. While their routes may have changed due to COVID-19 restrictions, immigration authorities in Berbera report that migrants keep trying to reach Puntland as confirmed by the data;
- The Ethiopian Community Center in Hargeisa continued reporting the return of an unverified number of discouraged Ethiopian migrants from Bosasso through Burao and Hargeisa attempting to return to Ethiopia via Wajaale border town.

Migrants' Protection and Detention Concerns

• Migrants seeking assistance at MRCs are reporting that COVID-19 is having an adverse impact on their capacity to provide for themselves during the journey through Hargeisa, Borama, Berbera and Burao because daily work opportunities are scarce, food prices have increased and COVID-19 limits movement and interaction with the local community.

Migrant Assistance (MRC/AVR)



Bosasso

- In June, fewer migrants were observed in Bosasso as July is generally a windy month and smugglers start slowing down the number of departures. Last summer a similar trend was observed;
- Migrants' registrations at the MRC in Bosasso have remained fairly stable over the past three months with 173 migrants' registrations in June, 169 in May, 173 in April and 162 in March;
- A total of 65 new AVR requests were recorded in June. Of the 200 migrants registered for AVR assistance since March (when the service was suspended), only 40% are reachable. Some migrants may have returned home by their own means, others may have continued with their journey towards the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia while others may still be in Bosasso but unreachable;
- IOM and its implementing partners continue providing shelter and basic services to vulnerable migrants, including children residing at safehouses for which IOM started conducting family tracing;
- MRC staff have expressed concern over the livelihood conditions of stranded migrants around Bosasso; there are reports that some migrants who started the return journey back to Ethiopia by foot have joined other Oromos working in farms in Barookhle, Dhud and other farming locations of Bari region.

Hargeisa

- A total of 69 new migrant registrations were carried out by the MRC in Hargeisa which in May registered less than half this number of people. No UMCs were among the admissions. The newly registered migrants add to the 153 migrants that are being assisted and are awaiting AVR;
- Between 17 and 28 June, the MRC conducted outreach activities inside the MRC compound and at the Ethiopian Community Centre to raise awareness about COVID-19, and provided protection material such as handwashing devices, mask, soap and hand sanitizer to 215 migrants.

Migrant Returns to Somalia

• At the beginning of the month, 334 Somali nationals were returned from Jeddah in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to Mogadishu by plane. Among them, 24 particularly vulnerable individuals were referred to IOM. These returns had started at the end of May when 368 people were flown back to Mogadishu. On 10 June, returnees were assisted to return to Hargeisa and Garowe onboard United Nations Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS) flights while more than 100 are currently hosted at a centre in Mogadishu waiting for onward travel assistance. Among the returnees from the May flights from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, seven Ethiopians continue to be in need of transportation back to Ethiopia.

Quarantine Measures

 According to WHO, there are currently 18 functional quarantine and isolation facilities across Somalia, with varying bed capacity. In Galmudug, the Ministry of Health opened a new isolation centre in Cabudwaaq, equipped with 10 beds, and five oxygen equipment.



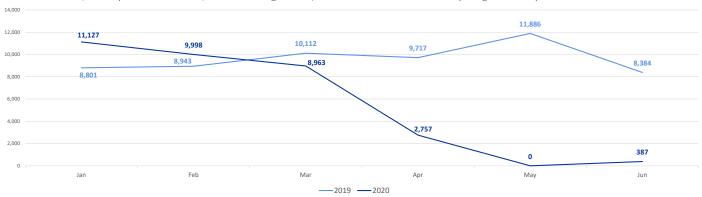
ETHIOPIA SITUATION

As of 30 June, the Government of Ethiopia recorded the highest number of COVID-19 cases in the region, passing Djibouti, with a total of 5,846 confirmed individuals, 103 deaths and 2,430 recoveries. The month of June saw the steepest increase as COVID-19 cases have risen almost fivefold since 31 May when 1,172 cases were recorded. While the state of emergency which was declared on 8 April (approved by Parliament on 10 April) is still in place, community transmission rates rose sharply over the past month, increasing pressure on quarantine, isolation and treatment facilities and the health system in general. As a result, the government is considering converting two (2) quarantine centers which currently host returnees (total bed capacity over 2,000) into treatment centers.

Migrants' Flows, and Protection and Detention Concerns

• In June, a total of 387 Ethiopian nationals were returned from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to Addis Ababa after a brief suspension of returns throughout May. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia kept retuning migrants in March (8,963) and April (2,757) despite COVID-19 risks. The returns carried out in June represent an overall 95% decrease as compared to the same month in 2019, and a 43% decrease in cumulative returns between January and June (33,232 in 2020 and 57,843 in 2019);





• Spontaneous returns across Ethiopia's land borders have continued, with 3,605 crossings registered by IOM in June from Djibouti, Kenya, Somalia and Sudan, and with many more crossings undetected at unmonitored crossing points.

Migrant Assistance (MRC/AVR)

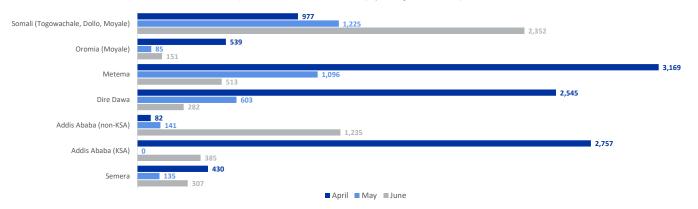
- Since the adoption of travel restriction by the Government of Ethiopia last 23 March 2020, IOM's AVR operations have been kept on hold. As a result, IOM is not in a position to provide voluntary return support back to Ethiopia for Ethiopian migrants stranded in Djibouti, amounting to more than 1,142 and the 353 Ethiopian migrants stranded in Somalia;
- The Government of Ethiopia however coordinated the repatriation of 1,016 Ethiopians from Kuwait during the second week of June. After the last of four return flights from Kuwait landed on 15 June, the government once again suspended returns;
- Assistance at MRCs in Ethiopia has been suspended as a result of the pandemic. However, IOM continued to assist returnees upon arrival at several points of entry, including Bole International Airport in Addis Ababa, and quarantine centers designated for returnees in Addis Ababa and regional states (namely Afar, Amhara, Oromia, Somali, Dire Dawa);
- Post-quarantine transportation support and assistance, including family tracing and reunification for UMCs, has been provided to all migrants in need;
- IOM Ethiopia strongly advocates for the inclusion of stranded Ethiopian migrants in the national, multi-stakeholder COVID-19 response plans of host and transit countries in terms of humanitarian responses, socioeconomic and psychosocial support, as well as legal assistance to migrant workers.

Quarantine Measures

• In June, the quarantine period first introduced on 23 March for all persons entering Ethiopia was reduced from 14 days to seven days. The first quarantine center opened on 3 April as Ethiopians were returned from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Since then a total of seven (7) quarantine centers in Addis Ababa have been opened and have hosted returnees. As per IOM Ethiopia's count, in June, there were 41 quarantine centers in the regions currently isolating returnees.



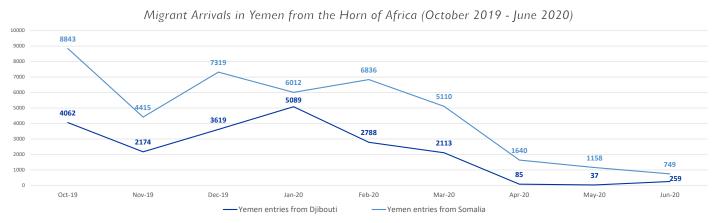
Quarantined Returnees (April - June 2020)



YEMEN SITUATION

As of 30 June, the Yemeni authorities have reported 1,162 confirmed COVID-19 cases, 313 deaths and 490 recoveries across 10 governorates in Yemen. COVID-19 is rapidly spreading across Yemen, with Hadramaut, Aden and Taizz governorates reporting the highest number of cases. However, COVID-19 testing is extremely limited — only six (6) labs across the country have testing capacity. The limited testing capacity, along with lack of access to health facilities and the associated stigma with seeking treatment for COVID-19, hides the true impact and spread of the virus. As Yemen grapples with community wide transmission, the risks of rapid transmission are especially high within displaced and migrant communities, who already face challenges accessing critical basic and health services. About 70% of Yemen's population lack access to soap and 60% do not have access to enough water.

Migrant Flows Observed in Yemen



- Overall, migrants' arrivals to Yemen from the Horn of Africa decreased by 16% between May (1,195) and June (1,008), and 90% in relation to arrival trends during the same period in 2019 (10,045);
- Yemen arrivals from Somalia saw a further 35% decrease in June from 1,158 to 749. Arrivals from Djibouti increased from 37 in May to 259 in June;
- Overall, majority of the migrants were adult males (74%), while 14% were adult females, and 13% were children, of which 10% (97) were UMCs.

Migrants' Protection and Detention Concerns

• As COVID-19 spreads across Yemen, key influencers and social media are increasingly contributing to the spread of xenophobic and discriminatory narratives that are leading to increased threats, violence and physical assaults against migrants across the country. In this vein, two concerning incidents were reported towards the end of June, as over 1,400 migrants were rounded up and arrested in Aden and Marib governorates. These groups were forcibly transferred to secluded areas where there is no access to water, food, health or other basic services.



Migrant Assistance

• Provision of humanitarian assistance through IOM and partners health and protection mobile teams continues, with COVID-19 hygiene and health prevention awareness sessions integrated into these interventions. However, humanitarian response capacity in the country remains limited compared to migrants' increasing needs as their living conditions in the country are worsening and coping mechanisms are being eroded. In addition to that, as national health care facilities are unable to cope with the increasing needs, many migrants with COVID-19 symptoms are not being allowed admission. Against this backdrop, resuming a regular safe and return process — as soon as the situation in Ethiopia allows — is paramount to immediately address life-threatening conditions migrants in Yemen are increasingly facing.

Quarantine Measures

• IOM and partners continue to advocate against discriminatory policies and human rights abuses against migrants – including detention and forced transfers, the establishment of quarantine centres to hold migrants, and the lack of inclusive solutions in the management of COVID-19 crisis throughout the country.



ANNEX 1 | 2020 MRC REGISTRATION DATA

MRCs	Jan-20	Feb-20	Mar-20	Apr-20	May-20	Jun-20	MRC Total
Bosasso	242	252	162	173	169	173	1,171
Metema	149	220	246	41	8	0	664
Tog-Wajaale	200	267	38	33	0	0	538
Dire Dawa	172	168	89	0	0	0	429
Hargeisa	132	130	68	0	30	69	429
Obock	188	188	325	23	13	12	749
Semera	56	92	235	0	0	0	383
Monthly Total	1,139	1,317	1,163	270	220	254	3,889

ANNEX 2 | STATUS OF PORTS OF ENTRY IN THE EAST AND HORN OF AFRICA REGION

