

## YEMEN

### MIXED MIGRATION UPDATE

January 2016



### MIXED MIGRATION IN YEMEN

Yemen is a historic transit hub for mixed migratory movements of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants from the Horn of Africa to the Arabian Peninsula and beyond. Although Yemen is the poorest of the Gulf countries, it stands out in the region for its generosity towards refugees. It is the only country in the Arabian Peninsula that is a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol. UNHCR Yemen works with local and international partners, UN agencies and other organizations to monitor the movement and provide protection and assistance – particularly to those who need additional support such as women and unaccompanied and separated children.

### SCALE OF MIXED MIGRATION IN YEMEN

Over the last decade the number of new arrivals at the coast of Yemen from the Horn of Africa, primarily Ethiopians and Somalis, has steadily grown. Yemen has been according *prima facie* status to Somali refugees fleeing conflict and violence in their homeland for over 20 years. Many of the Ethiopians are fleeing poverty and drought, and have travelled in pursuit of economic or education opportunities. The vast majority of Ethiopian new arrivals use Yemen as a country of transit and continue onward to other Gulf States, although many become stranded in Yemen. Those seeking asylum approach the Government of Yemen and UNHCR.

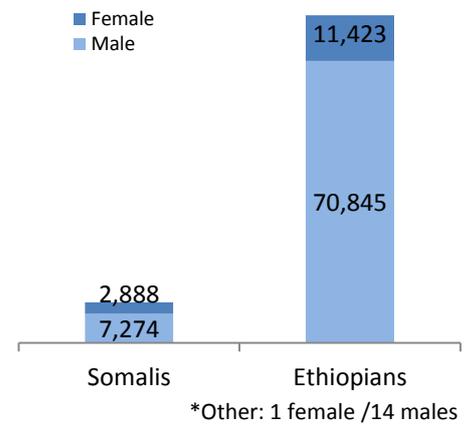
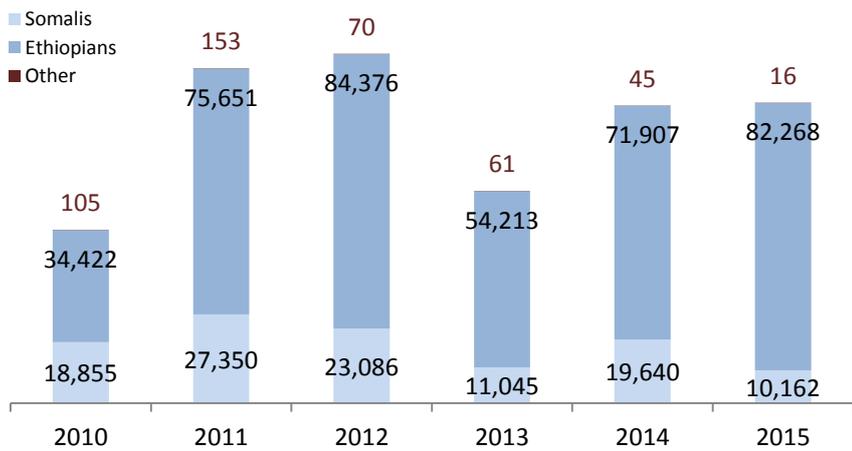
2015 had the third highest number of arrivals (92,446) since UNHCR started the systematic recording of arrivals on Yemen's Arabian and Red Sea coasts in 2006. Only 2011 (103,154) and 2012 (107,532) showed higher arrival figures. The number of Ethiopians that made the crossing (82,268) is the second highest on record after 2012 (84,376). UNHCR and partners in Somalia have been working with the international community and Somali authorities to improve political, security and socio-economic conditions as well as actively pursue durable solutions for returnees and IDPs in Somalia. Consequently, the number of Somalis making the risky journey is at its lowest for a decade at a little over 10,000 from a high of just over 33,000 in 2008.

Over two thirds of the new arrivals in 2015 came after the conflict in the country escalated in March. New arrivals continue to be misinformed about the severity of the conflict in Yemen and believe that the situation has become relatively calm in some of the southern governorates, or follow rumours of improved access into neighbouring Gulf countries. Due to the ongoing conflict, new arrivals face movement restrictions in Yemen, and risk being injured or killed in the conflict. There are now fewer income opportunities and available services, and organized gangs and smugglers continue to operate along the Red Sea coast.

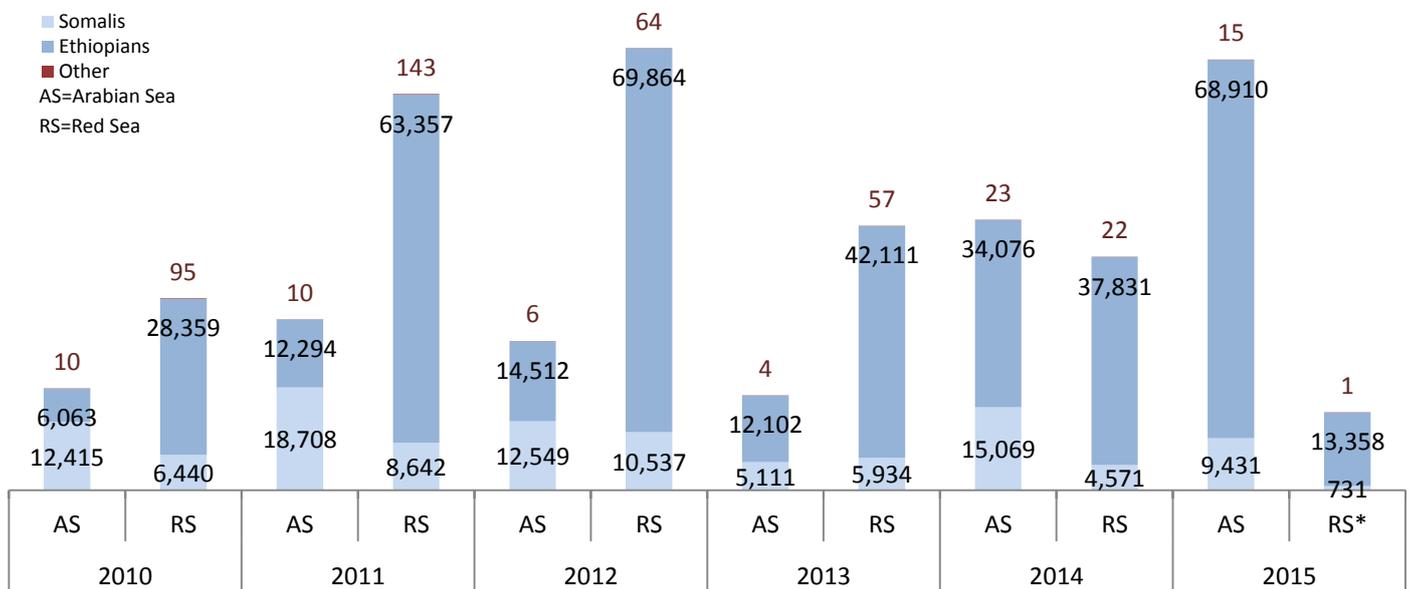
Alongside the continuing inflow, due to the conflict and ever-deepening humanitarian crisis in Yemen there has also been an outflow of 169,863 Yemenis, refugees and third country nationals who have fled to countries in the Horn of Africa and the Gulf in 2015.

### New Arrivals at the Coast: 2010 to 2015

### Gender breakdown for 2015\*



### New Arrivals at Coast by Entry Point 2010 to 2015



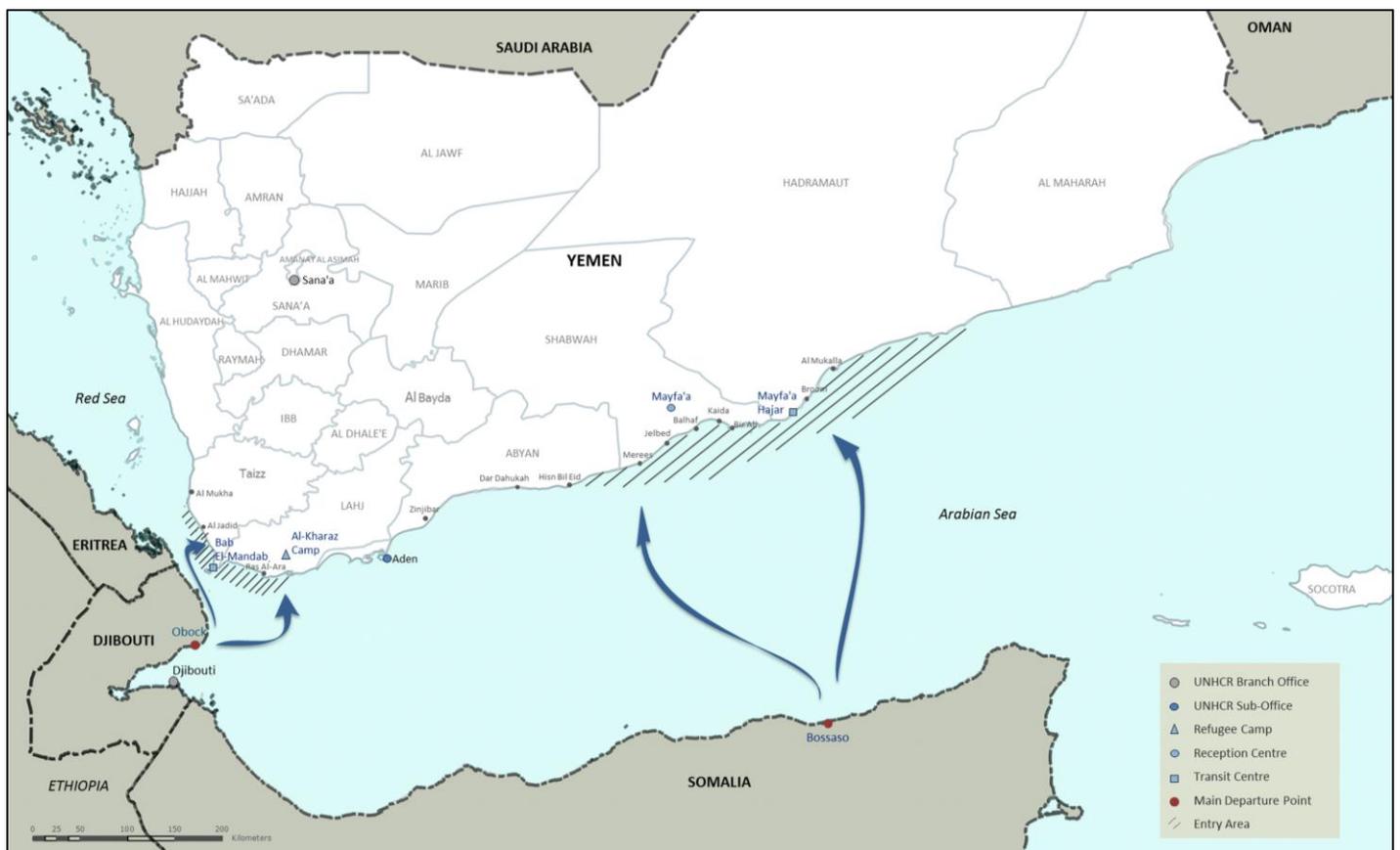
\* Patrolling and data collection have been suspended along the Red Sea coast for much of 2015 due to the ongoing conflict.

## DEPARTURE FROM THE HORN OF AFRICA

In 2015, Bosasso in Puntland, Somalia and Obock in Djibouti were the most frequent embarkation points to Yemen for Somalis and non-Somalis. New arrivals take established routes into Yemen used by smugglers to avoid checkpoints and security personnel. New arrivals often pay money in several locations to smuggling agents as they make their journey by land and eventually by boat. Those travelling from Somalia via the Arabian Sea require a few weeks to move between countries and several checkpoints. Smugglers and traffickers are very well organized and have continued to operate despite the ongoing conflict in Yemen, enticing travellers with what may seem like rather low fares and misleading travellers on the extent of the conflict in Yemen. The smugglers and traffickers, as well as checkpoint authorities, extort further costs at the various legs of the travel. The total travel costs to other Gulf countries can reach up to 1,000 USD. Security and socio-economic conditions in the countries of origin in recent years have not improved enough to discourage flight, primarily for Ethiopians, even with the risk of entering into conflict areas in Yemen. The movement is further influenced by ongoing demand for domestic and irregular labour in the region.

**Red Sea coast:** New arrivals from Ethiopia had been mainly taking the route along the southern border of Ethiopia to Obock, Djibouti. Only few Somalis had been coming to Yemen through the Red Sea as the journey is longer, more costly (around 350 USD on boats carrying around 25-60 persons), and Somalis face difficulties entering Djibouti. Many travellers along the Red Sea often spend 1 to 3 months cleaning cars, domestic work, shoe shining, construction and other daily labour to afford the trip. However, in 2015, most new arrivals have entered Yemen along the Arabian Sea coast, as some of the most intense conflict has been centred in Taizz governorate.

**Arabian Sea coast:** Ethiopians move from their hometowns, mostly in Oromia, to larger cities in Ethiopia where they encounter smuggling agents, or move towards border towns to connect with agents. Many Ethiopians enter Somaliland to meet brokers who facilitate their way to Bosasso. Several checkpoints line the route and there is a risk of detention and extortion. Many also take a long route on foot across the remote mountainous area to exit Ethiopia and enter Somalia. Somalis, mostly coming from Mogadishu and Banadir, often go to great effort and take risks to avoid checkpoints in order to continue their journey to Bosasso without paying bribes or risk being sent back. The cost of travel to Yemen from the point of embarkation in Somalia ranges from USD 150 -250. The boats are larger but packed beyond capacity, often carrying up to 120 passengers.



## ARRIVALS IN YEMEN

With around 3,000 km of coastline, new arrivals in Yemen are spread across a vast area. Most common points of arrival are Al Jadeed in Taizz governorate prior to escalation in conflict in 2015, and Al Shujeirat, Al Hamra and Rujiyma in Hadramaut governorate. New arrivals face physical and gender-based violence, human trafficking, migrant smuggling, inadequate access to basic goods and services, limitations to freedom of movement, and pay prohibitive fees to make their perilous journey often on rickety, overcrowded smuggler boats risking their lives during the journey at high seas. They land dehydrated, in shock and in need of basic assistance, and further face the risk of abduction, exploitation and insecurity within Yemen or of being transported onward through smuggling and human trafficking networks. Non-Somalis, who are not granted *prima facie* refugee status in Yemen, are typically in danger of being arrested, detained, and deported as irregular migrants. Yemen border authorities allow new arrivals asking for protection to be transported

to UNHCR registration centres in order to receive basic assistance and to seek asylum if they so choose. Ethiopians not seeking asylum, look for informal work in Yemen, or carry on to other Gulf countries.

As the conflict in Yemen has continued to ravage the country, various parties including armed forces, security officials and popular resistance committees (local armed groups) have taken to arbitrarily detaining new arrivals on suspicion that they may join the conflict. There have also been reports of armed groups forcibly recruiting some new arrivals. Above all, as new arrivals make their onward movements, they risk being caught in severe ground fighting, airstrikes and heavily mined areas, reportedly resulting in the death or maiming of refugees and migrants. Unaccompanied or separated children arriving to Yemen, with or without the consent of their families, in search of work and/or education, face increased risk of exploitation.

## UNHCR ACTIVITIES FOR NEW ARRIVALS

UNHCR and its partners patrol coastal governorates in areas where new arrivals frequently make land. Society for Humanitarian Solidarity (SHS), which received the Nansen Award in 2011 for its life-saving rescue work, patrols along the Arabian coast to identify new arrivals and transport them to UNHCR's Mayfa'a Hajar transit centre or Mayfa'a reception centre where they can rest and recover. SHS provides food, water, medical care, and referrals for serious medical cases to the local hospital in Al Al Mukalla. In the Mayfa'a reception centre the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) conducts registration and collects basic protection information, and refers persons with specific protection needs such as unaccompanied and separated children to UNHCR in Aden or Kharaz refugee camp. The majority of new arrivals along the Arabian Sea coast pass through the Mayfa'a reception, based on which UNHCR compiles statistics for all new arrivals sighted or received along Yemen's coast to track trends in mixed migration, and analyse movements and specific protection threats. Yemeni Red Crescent (YRC) and DRC have almost entirely suspended patrolling and reception along the Red Sea coast due to the ongoing conflict. Furthermore, in September 2015 airstrikes hit the village where the Bab-al-Mandab transit centre is located, killing two YRC staff. Subsequently, the transit centre and adjacent clinic were looted. This has further hampered the ability of UNHCR and partners to provide reception or life-saving medical assistance to new arrivals at the Red Sea coast.

In the reception and transit centres, UNHCR provides Somali refugees and non-Somalis who intend to seek asylum with an attestation letter that allows them to transit: UNHCR directs Somalis, who are considered by the Government of Yemen as *prima facie* refugees, to the Government registration centres in Al Mukalla, the Basateen urban area in Aden, Sana'a or Kharaz camp; UNHCR directs non-Somali asylum seekers to its offices in Sana'a or Aden for registration and the refugee status determination (RSD) process. SHS provides persons of concern with specific needs transportation from Mayfa'a reception centre to Kharaz refugee camp. UNHCR and partner InterSOS also screen for persons of concern in detention facilities. Generally, only a limited number of non-Somalis screened in detention, primarily Ethiopians, seek asylum. InterSoS also provides child protection services for unaccompanied and separated children.



SHS providing newly arrivals on the Arabian Sea coast of Yemen with food and water. © UNHCR/SHS

## COOPERATION ON MIXED MIGRATION IN THE GULF OF ADEN

- Regional cooperation:** The context of movement between the countries in the Horn of Africa and the countries of the Arabian Peninsula has become more complicated given the increasing insecurity and political instability in Yemen. UNHCR works with the Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat (RMMS) based in Nairobi, Kenya, which supports agencies, institutions and forums in the Horn of Africa and the Arabian Peninsula to improve the management of protection and assistance response to people in mixed migration in the region. Throughout the

region UNHCR continues to monitor and provide support to authorities, non-governmental organisations, service providers and refugees and asylum seekers affected by the Yemen situation. UNHCR Yemen also coordinates with UNHCR offices in the region, Regional Refugee Coordinator's Office and Headquarters on mixed migratory movements.

- **Regional frameworks:** Efforts to implement the Sana'a Declaration are currently on hold due to the ongoing conflict in Yemen. Signed in November 2013 by the Government of Yemen and ten countries from the Arabian Peninsula and the Horn of Africa, the Declaration calls for the strengthening of government efforts in the region to reduce irregular migration, including smuggling and trafficking, address the root causes of mixed migration, strengthen refugee protection systems in the region and invest in data collection and analysis as well as return programmes. In October 2015 UNHCR and IOM issued a Proposal for Strategic Action in the Gulf of Aden, building upon the objectives of the Regional Response Plan for countries affected by the Yemen situation, which calls for the facilitation of safe, legal and orderly movements, in humane and dignified conditions, of those fleeing from Yemen or moving to/through Yemen; promoting protection at sea through timely search and rescue interventions and disembarkation to a place of safety; strengthening humanitarian action, including through identification, registration and referral to appropriate services and procedures on the basis of identified protection needs and vulnerabilities (stranded migrants, refugees, victims of trafficking, or other forms of abuse or exploitation, SGBV survivors and unaccompanied and separated children); and facilitating access to solutions, including regularization of stay, voluntary return and reintegration, local integration and labour mobility schemes.
- **Coordination and Cooperation:** UNHCR has been coordinating and engaging in information sharing on trends, incidents and responses to ships in distress with its offices in Djibouti and Somalia, as well as with the Combined Maritime Forces (CMF) and EU Naval Force (EUNAVFOR) to support rescue at sea efforts. UNHCR also coordinates closely with IOM on migration in Yemen. IOM offers targeted assistance to migrants, which may include assisted voluntary return for extremely vulnerable migrants.

## UNHCR'S PRIORITIES ON MIXED MIGRATION

- UNHCR actively advocates for improvements in search and rescue capacity in the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea and in safe disembarkation mechanisms to prevent avoidable deaths at sea.
- UNHCR is working to strengthen regional coordination through the operationalization of the Gulf of Aden strategy; supporting information campaigns in countries of origin, and advising persons in the region considering movement to Yemen on the situation in the country.
- There is presently an urgent need to re-engage the Mixed Migration Task Force (MMTF) for Yemen, co-chaired by UNHCR and IOM, and the Mixed Migration Working Group (MMWG) in Aden to address the increasing challenges for mixed migration flows i.e., conflict in Yemen, limited access to areas of arrival, diminished Government capacity, armed gangs and smugglers along the Red Sea coast, and protection issues such as detention, lack of documentation and lack of law enforcement. Actors continue to coordinate on humanitarian programming, but due to the ongoing conflict the MMTF has been dormant at Sana'a level and the MMWG has not been able to formally meet in Aden.
- UNHCR continues to advocate with the Government of Yemen to maintain the open door policy for refugees and asylum seekers and for *non-refoulement*, freedom of movement and access of refugees and asylum seekers to basic services. While efforts to strengthen government capabilities and practices in responding to the migration flow have been placed on hold due to the ongoing conflict, there remains a need to re-establish strategic partnerships with immigration, coast guard, law enforcement officials, particularly in coastal governorates.
- UNHCR prioritizes assistance for children and women, and persons with special needs through targeted services, also in cooperation with partners and other agencies.

### For further information:

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