

desperate choices

conditions, risks & protection failures affecting Ethiopian migrants in Yemen
october 2012



RMMS Regional
Mixed Migration
Secretariat

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The Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat (RMMS)

Formed in 2011 and based in Nairobi, the overall objective of the RMMS is to support agencies, institutions and for a in the Horn of Africa and Yemen sub-region to improve the management of protection and assistance response to people in mixed migration flows in the Horn of Africa and across the Gulf of Aden or Red Sea in Yemen. The co-founders and Steering Committee members for the RMMS include UNHCR, IOM, DRC, INTERSOS and the Yemen MMTF. The RMMS is therefore a regional hub aiming to provide support and coordination, analysis and research, information, data management and advocacy. It acts as an independent agency, hosted by the DRC, and also aims to be a sector catalyst stimulating forward thinking and policy development in relation to mixed migration. Its over arching focus and emphasis is on human rights, protection and assistance.

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The Danish Refugee Council (DRC) is a humanitarian, non-governmental, non-profit organisation founded in 1956 that works in more than 30 countries throughout the world. DRC fulfils its mandate by providing direct assistance to conflict-affected populations – refugees, internally displaced people (IDPs) and host communities in the conflict areas of the world. Also, by advocating on behalf of conflict-affected populations internationally, and in Denmark, on the basis of humanitarian principles and the Human Rights Declaration. DRC's Regional Office for the Horn of Africa & Yemen co-funded and co-published this report with the RMMS.

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Cover photo : rural Yemen by Tim Smith/Panos

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Executive Summary

Various reports compiled in recent years have not only detailed the perils of the journey to Yemen, but also the main drivers causing migrants to leave their homeland and their ultimate chosen destination.¹ This report aims to update existing levels of knowledge and understanding in light of new trends and developments, but, in particular, it aims to focus on the protection risks faced by the largest group of irregular migrants: the Ethiopians.

Yemen acts as a transit country for migrants from the Horn of Africa, predominantly Somalis and Ethiopians going to Saudi Arabia and the Arab peninsula. However, Yemen also attracts migrants in its own right seeking sanctuary, asylum and work opportunities. Since 2006, when the humanitarian community started collating estimates on irregular maritime migrants, the numbers of arrivals have been steadily increasing. 2011 saw almost exactly double the number of arrivals as 2010. Most notable has been the increase in the number and proportion of undocumented migrants from Ethiopia, currently representing over 75% of all maritime arrivals in Yemen. In 2011, over 75,000 Ethiopians arrived at Yemen's coast. Data for 2012 suggests that, as of the end of August at least 56,000 Ethiopians had already entered Yemen.

Migrants in Yemen, especially undocumented migrants who move clandestinely through the country, are vulnerable to abuse and discrimination. Over the last six and a half years, the cumulative number of new arrivals from Ethiopia - at least 230,000 - raises questions as to why they came to Yemen and what exactly happens to them once they disembark on Yemeni sands. How do they survive and what risks do they face? Where do they live and work and under what conditions? What are their actual intentions? These are some of the questions this study seeks to answer.

Recent and alarming accounts from migrants and those that work to assist them, indicate that many Ethiopian migrants face severe human rights abuses that have not been systematically investigated. The findings of the interviews conducted for this report,

corroborating information and testimonies from other sources, suggest an increasingly abusive environment for newly arrived migrants. Kidnap, torture, sexual violence, abduction and extortion are becoming widespread and frequent hazards, sometimes lethal, for migrants in transit to the Gulf States. The details of the brutality being used by criminals (both Yemeni and Ethiopian gang members) were shocking to those conducting interviews with survivors, as they will be to the reader.

Field research was conducted in Yemen over a five week period in May and June 2012. Around 130 individual and group interviews were conducted with Ethiopian respondents. Additional information was gathered from meetings with officials and staff from aid organizations.

The main findings from this new research are summarized here and combined with accumulated information and statistics held by the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) and the Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat (RMMS).

Travelling to Yemen

- Most Ethiopians enter Yemen illegally as irregular maritime migrants, on boats from Djibouti and Puntland, Somalia. Some, particularly women going to work as domestic cleaners, fly to Yemen. It is possible to obtain legal documentation illegally so the distinction between legal/regular and illegal/irregular² migrants can be unclear.
- A small minority of Ethiopian migrants cross the land border into Yemen irregularly from Saudi Arabia. They entered Saudi Arabia regularly as formal labour migrants but became illegal because they overstayed their visa or ran away from their employer. In Yemen they obtain legal documents to travel back to Ethiopia legally, often in order to migrate again to Saudi Arabia.

Profile of Ethiopian migrants to Yemen

- The majority of Ethiopians are motivated to migrate by the lack of economic opportunities in Ethiopia.

¹ Inter alia: (1) Soucy, Anne (2011) Mixed Migration from the Horn of Africa to Yemen: Protection Risks and Challenges, Nairobi: Danish Refugee Council. (2) Human Rights Watch (2012) Hostile Shores: Abuse and Refoulement of Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Yemen, New York: Human Rights Watch. (3) Mixed Migration Flows: Somali and Ethiopian Migration to Yemen and Turkey. Final report. May 2010. Prepared for the Mixed Migration Task Force by Ray Jureidini, Center for Migration and Refugee Studies American University in Cairo (See references).

² The norm for humanitarian and right-based agencies is to refer to international migrants moving without official documentation and approval as 'irregular' and those with official permission / documentation as 'regular'. National authorities normally refer to them as illegal migrants or undocumented foreigners. Both terms when used in this report reflect the context or perspective being discussed.

- Few Ethiopians claim asylum; in addition, some of the migrants to Yemen could also qualify as refugees but are not seeking international protection.
- The economic migrants can be divided into three main groups, mostly in transit towards Saudi Arabia or farther afield:
 - Migrants who have enough resources and are able to travel regularly or irregularly; they pay a high price to smugglers to ensure their safety. They normally have a clear plan and destination.
 - Migrants with limited resources who enter the country illegally only by sea. Yet, they have enough money and knowledge to travel to their final destination directly.
 - Migrants with no resources who travel by sea to Yemen and enter the country illegally. They form the largest and most vulnerable group of Ethiopian migrants and are likely to be uneducated, male Muslim Oromos from rural areas. They have to work en route to finance their journey and work in Yemen to pay smugglers to take them to Saudi Arabia.
- Yemen is host to three main Ethiopian populations:
 - Ethiopians who are settled in Yemen, have regular employment and close social ties. This group is found in urban areas.
 - Ethiopians who intend to stay in Yemen for a few months to earn enough money to pay smugglers to go to Saudi Arabia. This group is located mainly in qat producing areas.
 - Ethiopian migrants who use Yemen as a transit point to Saudi Arabia and elsewhere and travel directly to their next destination. This group is found in entry and transit points on the coast and in urban locations near the border with Saudi Arabia.
- Insecurity in Yemen has attracted irregular migrants because it is easier to enter and transit through the country. From 2011, there has been a decrease of the numbers of

Ethiopians settled in Yemen, as insecurity has reduced the number of profitable employment opportunities available.

Employment opportunities in Yemen

- The main employment for Ethiopian men is on qat farms.
- The main income generating opportunities for Ethiopian women who are settled in Yemen is as cleaners in homes, commercial companies or public buildings such as hospitals.
- Ethiopians who fail to find regular employment clean cars, collect rubbish for recycling or work as daily labourers on farms or in construction.
- Small businesses, international companies and humanitarian organizations offer employment opportunities for Ethiopian men and women who are educated to high school level or higher.
- Obtaining regular and well paid employment is clearly easier for Ethiopians in Yemen who have entered legally.
- Some Ethiopian women supplement their income through prostitution or engage in the sex industry as their main income generation activity. Some Ethiopian men engage in illegal activities such as selling drugs and alcohol to make money.
- Yemenis like to employ Ethiopians because they are regarded as clean, hardworking and cheap.
- Despite the above, Ethiopians feel that they are discriminated against in the workplace and living in Yemen because they are African rather than Arab, Christian and not Muslim. Whether legal or illegal, Ethiopian migrants are paid less than Yemenis.

Protection risks faced by Ethiopian migrants

- The journey from Ethiopia to Yemen is physically demanding and migrants are vulnerable to the elements, the physical rigours of the journey, abuse from crews controlling the sea-crossing and violent attacks from criminal gangs,

both on arrival in Yemen and as they move through the country. The better educated and financially able the migrant, the greater the ability to reduce the risks on the journey by travelling regularly or paying a higher fee for reputable smugglers who facilitate irregular entry into Yemen safely.

- The main danger and human rights risk irregular migrants face entering Yemen on the coast is from criminal gangs who capture, torture and extort migrants. The gangs demand a ransom from family and friends to release the hostages.
- The kidnapping gangs are controlled by Yemenis who are known to employ Ethiopians to beat and torture the Ethiopian migrants. The treatment is typically brutal and many victims die or suffer significant physical and psychological trauma.
- The level of sexual abuse faced by female irregular migrants (and to a lesser degree by regular labour migrants) in Yemen and on the journey to Yemen appears to be high. Even taking into account the issue of under-reporting of sexual violence, an alarmingly high number of migrants describe sexual abuse.
- Ethiopian migrants are vulnerable to trafficking and forced labour. There are alarming reports of women, in particular, disappearing from groups of migrants after encountering criminal gangs. Little is known of the scale and scope of this severe human rights violation against migrants in Yemen or what happens to these women.
- Another protection risk facing Ethiopian migrants is the risk of refoulement when they are detained or deported without being allowed to register as asylum seekers, in clear violation of their rights. Ethiopians outside the country fear that the Ethiopian government is monitoring them and will force them to return to Ethiopia. Amnesty International reports that Ethiopian refugees and asylum seekers are forcibly returned to Ethiopia from Somalia, Sudan and Djibouti. Up to March 2010, when the Yemeni government reformed its policy towards Ethiopians in the country, many were deported without being given the chance to seek asylum.
- In addition to other threats and dangers, Ethiopians often rapidly become destitute in Yemen through various circumstances that may include repeated robbery and harassment, pre-existing poverty, lack of income from work or the absence of any national provision to assist vulnerable migrants. This can lead to multiple risks of hunger, thirst, and little or no access to shelter, clothing, medical health, police protection and/or legal representation. These conditions in turn make them more susceptible to serious rights abuses and protection concerns.
- Ethiopians are discriminated against in the workplace because they are paid less than Yemenis for the same work, and may also be paid less than originally agreed. In addition, women may be subjected to physical and sexual abuse from their employers with little opportunity to seek formal protection or redress.
- Ethiopians who travel to Saudi Arabia face dangers entering the country and risk imprisonment and deportation if they are caught by the authorities. Saudi authorities deport illegal immigrants by leaving them near the border with Yemen and forcing them to cross the desert to enter Yemen irregularly. Reports suggest that some migrants die on their way to the Yemeni border.
- Distinguishing between regular and irregular migrants is not very informative as the lines between the two are blurred. A better distinction is between migrants with the resources and connections to exploit the opportunities offered by corruption, as well as the possibility of moving between regularity and irregularity, and those migrants who due to their social and economic vulnerability are simply exploited by these same forces.

Future Plans

- Many Ethiopians, even those who were refugees and asylum seekers, expressed a desire to return to Ethiopia. Those who had migrated for economic reasons stated that they would return home when they had made enough money.
- Ethiopian migrants with children had sent them back from Yemen or left them in Ethiopia when

they migrated so that they could be brought up with the Ethiopian culture and education system. This suggests a long-term plan to return to Ethiopia.

- Those who had fled and were registered as refugees or asylum seekers said that they would return to Ethiopia if there was a change of government. (In August 2012 long-standing Prime Minister, Meles Zenawi, died but the ruling party remains in power.)
- Ethiopians who did not have long-term plans to return to Ethiopia wanted to travel to Saudi Arabia or stay in Yemen. A minority of economic migrants wanted to travel beyond Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries to North America or Europe. A number of the refugees were hoping that they would be resettled in North America or Europe.

Future Trends

- In the last six years, it is estimated that at least 230,000 Ethiopians have already entered Yemen as irregular maritime migrants. Given the socioeconomic and political situation in Ethiopia and the reasons Ethiopian migrants give for seeking a 'better' life and opportunities abroad, it is fully expected that in the future many more will leave the country to pursue opportunities elsewhere.

- Insecurity in Yemen is ongoing and there is a lack of effective law and order. Consequently, Yemen is attractive to irregular immigrants, smugglers and criminal gangs extorting money through kidnap and ransom.
- The relatively accommodating attitude of the Yemeni authorities and population towards economic migrants, asylum seekers and refugees is expected to come under pressure as the number entering the country increases. In addition to potential conflict over employment opportunities and resources, there are already issues of security being raised against them.
- Yemen suspects that Somali migrants in particular are involved with rebel groups and terrorist organizations. Not surprisingly, the suspicions towards Somalis can easily group all migrants as undesirable, including Ethiopians. Continued immigration and high levels of insecurity could create increased mistrust among host-migrant populations and lead to conflict.

Irregular economic migrants do not fall readily under the mandate of humanitarian assistance. Those organizations that do offer some support to Ethiopians in Yemen are already over stretched. Given the numbers of migrants entering the country and the ongoing demands on their resources from the beleaguered Yemeni population, they will be even more constrained to meet their needs in future.

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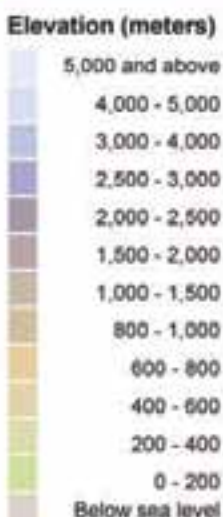
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Acronyms

AQAP	Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula
DRC	Danish Refugee Council
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IOM	International Organization for Migration
KSA	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
MMTF	Mixed Migration Task Force
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
RSD	Refugee Status Determination
OLF	Oromo Liberation Front
ONLF	Ogaden National Liberation Front
RMMS	Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat
SHS	Society for Humanitarian Solidarity
SNNPR	Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's Region
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
YRC	Yemeni Red Crescent



- Legend**
- ⊙ National capital
 - ⊙ Governorate capital
 - Populated place
 - International boundary
 - Governorate level boundary



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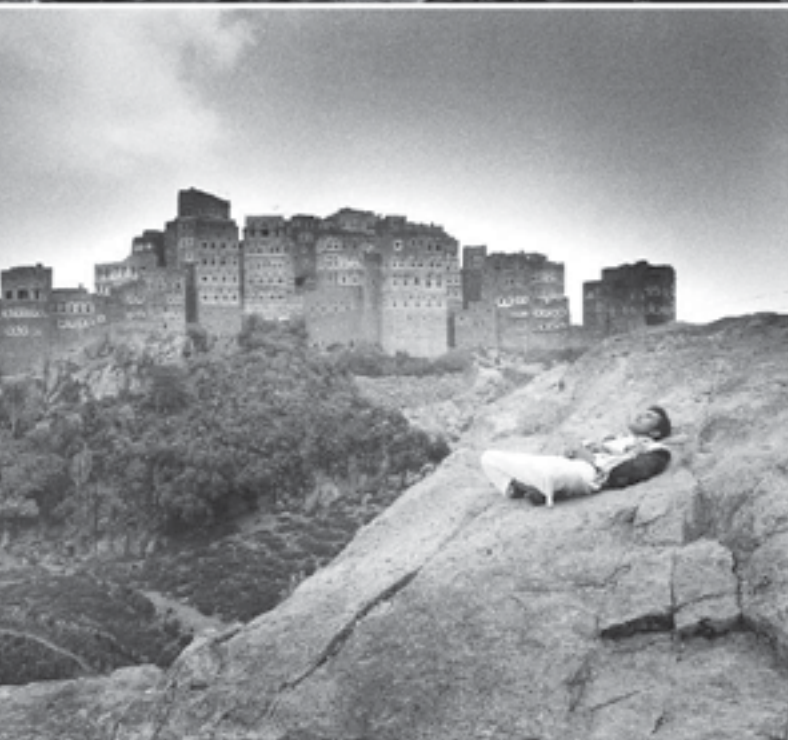


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1. Introduction

Research rationale

In the first eight months of 2012, over 70,000 migrants from Africa entered Yemen and over three quarters of these were Ethiopian. Since 2006, when statistics on immigration from the Horn of Africa started being collected systematically, there has been a marked increase in the numbers arriving annually in Yemen.³ Most notable has been the growth in migrants from Ethiopia. In 2011 alone, it is estimated that over 75,000 Ethiopians arrived at Yemen's coast.⁴ Most say that they are in search of income generating opportunities, claiming that economic conditions in Ethiopia are difficult. The majority enter Yemen irregularly via the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden coast with the intention of transiting through the country to Saudi Arabia, the Gulf States and other Middle Eastern countries where they believe that they will find better paid work than in Ethiopia or Yemen. Consequently, few seek asylum and most live or pass through Yemen irregularly. Economic migrants who travel voluntarily, either regularly or irregularly, fall largely outside the protection of refugee law and have little or no access to humanitarian assistance. In addition to economic migrants, there are Ethiopian refugees and asylum seekers in Yemen who are protected by refugee law but are still vulnerable in certain circumstances. Finally, there are Ethiopians living in Yemen legally, some of whom have been in the country for over 20 years, who can also be at risk and struggle to claim their rights. Although the legal status of a migrant is important, determining whether a migrant is regular or irregular can be problematic and is not the only factor in determining levels of vulnerability. Ethiopians switch between regularity and irregularity, sometimes through choice, sometimes by force: whatever their status, some of the problems Ethiopians experience in Yemen are the same.

Previously, there have been studies examining migration from the Horn of Africa, including the status of migrants and refugees in Yemen. The Horn of Africa is a region known to produce a high level of migrants.⁵ There have also been studies that focus on particular Ethiopian migrant populations in Yemen to provide detailed insights into their lives.⁶ However,

³ UNHCR 2012c

⁴ UNHCR 2012d

⁵ Soucy, 2011

⁶ Marina de Regt has conducted extensive research over a number of years among Ethiopian women working as domestic labour in Yemen, see, for example, (2006) Mapping Study on Women

there is a lack of information about the profile of the Ethiopian migrant population in Yemen as a whole, and no clear explanations for the recent rise in the number entering the country. Organizations providing assistance to migrants and refugees are aware that Ethiopians travelling and entering Yemen are vulnerable to natural hazards and physical violence, but the extent of the problems faced by these Ethiopians is unknown. Therefore, this report is based on research which aimed to profile the different groups of Ethiopians migrating to Yemen, their motivation to leave Ethiopia, their employment opportunities and future plans. The research also examined the risk and protection challenges that the different groups of Ethiopian migrants face in Yemen and sought to identify potential sources of assistance and support. The research was successful in fulfilling most of its aims and has provided a fuller picture of the Ethiopian migrant population and the dangers they face. However, it is a preliminary piece of work which was limited in its geographical scope because of current insecurity. Nevertheless, it contributes to on-going research by the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) and the Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat (RMMS) to provide a better understanding of regional mixed migration.

Methodology

To explore the status of Ethiopians in Yemen and the risk and protection issues they face, research was conducted in Yemen over a five week period in May and June 2012. A research team of men and women comprising four Ethiopians and one Yemeni conducted semi-structured interviews in several locations around the country, including Aden, Dhamar, Damt, Haradh, Hudayda, Kharaz, Mukha, Mukalla, Rada', Sana'a and Ta'izz. Interviews were conducted in Arabic, English, Amharic, and Oromo with members of the research team and respondents frequently working in a second language. Therefore great care has been taken to ensure that only information that can be triangulated from multiple sources has been used for the final report. Quotes from respondents have been paraphrased and put into correct English, but the meaning of their words has been retained. Research focused on collecting information from Ethiopian migrants, and around 130 group and individual interviews were conducted with Ethiopians in Yemen (see Appendix 1). Key issues covered in the interviews included the background

Domestic Workers in Yemen, International Labour Organization and (2010) Ways to Come, Ways to Leave: Gender, Mobility and Il/Legality among Ethiopian Domestic Workers in Yemen, Gender and Society, Vol 24: 2, April 2010

of the migrants, motivation for migrating, modes and means of travelling to Yemen, employment opportunities in Yemen, future plans and plans to travel to other countries, experiences of violence and discrimination, and sources of support. Findings from interviews were supplemented with information gleaned from informal conversations and observation. Interviews were also conducted with Yemenis who employed Ethiopians, or lived in areas hosting Ethiopian populations. In addition, meetings were held with officials and staff from the aid community.

At the end of the field research period, findings were validated in a briefing to members of the aid community providing support to refugees and migrants.

Respondents gave the costs of travel or payment for labour in several currencies. For ease of comparison an equivalent in US Dollars has been provided. This is an approximate value as all currency conversions were calculated in June 2012 and may not reflect the exchange rate at the time the transactions were made.

Structure

Following the introduction, the report is divided into three parts.

Part One discusses the logistics, motivations and practicalities of movement to Yemen by Ethiopian migrants. It provides a profile of Ethiopian migrants coming to Yemen by examining their motivations to migrate, the nature of their journey, location and employment opportunities in Yemen, and their immediate, mid- and long-term plans. Some aspects of discrimination and abuse are mentioned in Part One, but overall it seeks to offer a detailed picture of who comes, how they come and what they find.

Part Two deals with the issues that primarily motivated the research report, namely the conditions, risks and protection deficiencies that Ethiopians face as they come to Yemen and following their arrival. As such it examines, using frequent extracts from migrant testimony, the protection risks and severe dangers Ethiopian migrants face on their sea journey from Ethiopia to Yemen, the widespread hostage taking on arrival, and the journey through Yemen to other destinations, in particular Saudi Arabia. It also discusses the risk and protection issues for Ethiopians who remain in Yemen by examining the legal status of migrants, the migrant-host relationship, and the employment opportunities available.

The Endnote concludes the report by summarizing the main findings and identifying future migration trends and additional reference items, including text references.

Part One: Ethiopian Migrants in Yemen

Regional context

Ethiopian migration to Yemen is difficult to quantify and profile. Ethiopians from different parts of Ethiopia, from different religions and ethnicities and with different skill sets, are motivated to migrate for a variety of reasons. While some travel directly to Yemen, others work en route or settle for several years in Djibouti or Somalia before deciding to continue their journey. The majority travel to Yemen with the intention of using it as a transit point to other countries, in particular Saudi Arabia, but a minority see Yemen as their final destination. Some are seeking better economic opportunities while others are seeking asylum. A much smaller number of Ethiopians enter Yemen irregularly from Saudi Arabia, intending to secure legitimate travel documents from the Ethiopian Embassy in Sana'a to return to Ethiopia regularly. Although Ethiopian migration to Yemen is complex, it is possible to provide a general overview of the migration flows and to profile the different groups.

Yemen: the host country

As a host country Yemen is relatively accommodating, and staff from organizations that assist migrants and refugees report having a constructive working relationship with the Yemen authorities. Yemen is a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocol, and while Somalis have *prima facie* refugee status, other nationalities, including Ethiopians,

must go through the refugee status determination (RSD) process managed by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)⁷. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) provides assistance to migrants, and a range of other United Nations Agencies and international non-governmental organizations based in Yemen provide assistance to refugees, asylum seekers, migrants and internally displaced persons (IDPs). In April 2012 Yemen was host to 220,928 refugees, most of whom were Somali (210,873). The second largest group was Ethiopian (4,686).

According to the UN, Yemen is one of the least developed countries in the world. It has poor infrastructure and inadequate education and health services for its 22.2 million population (2008 figure), around three quarters of whom live in rural areas. Illiteracy rates are over 47 per cent and, according to figures from 2003, almost 43 per cent of children are malnourished⁸. A report published in May 2012 claims that between 40 and 50 per cent of the population live in poverty,⁹ and UNHCR reports that 17.5 per cent live on less than 1 USD a day.¹⁰ In 2008, unemployment was estimated at 15 per cent and was attributed to reduced employment opportunities in the fishing and agriculture sectors.

⁷ UNHCR, 2012b

⁸ MoPIC & UNDP, 2010

⁹ Ahmad Shammakh, a Yemeni economist, cited in al-Maqtari, 2012a

¹⁰ UNHCR, 2012e

Image: Qat fields are protected from the sun with cloth and from theft by towers with armed guards.
Credit: Tim Smith/Panos



Qat in Yemen

Qat is a leafy shrub containing an amphetamine-like stimulant, classified by the World Health Organization as a drug of abuse. When chewed, it creates a 'mild buzz somewhere between caffeine and cocaine'. The leaves are chewed and stored in the cheek, where they break down in the saliva and eventually enter the bloodstream. Traditionally Yemenis have chewed qat for centuries but until the 1960s it was an 'occasional pastime, mainly for the rich.' As of 2012, however, chewing qat has become a regular social activity. 'Qat sessions' are held in the afternoons with gatherings of men. Women have their own separate and more private gatherings. These sessions are where contacts are forged, business deals sealed and social and even governmental decisions made.

The figures speak for themselves. Up to 90% of adult males chew qat three to four hours or more daily in Yemen. The number of females, though lower, may now be as much as 50% or even higher as uptake increases among younger women: the World Bank estimates that 73% of women in Yemen chew the qat leaf on a regular basis. Meanwhile, 15–20% of children under the age of 12 are also daily consumers¹¹.

The role of qat as a generator of livelihoods and income in Yemen, particularly in the countryside, is very considerable. A report by the World Bank in 2007 states that the production of qat 'plays a vital role' in the rural economy. It accounts for around 6 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP). It has been reported that cultivated areas of qat have increased from less than 10,000 hectares in the early 1970s to 146,810 in 2008. Qat production generated in 2008 approximately 246 billion Yemeni Rial (\$1.1 billion), while fruits and vegetables brought in 276 billion Yemeni Rial (\$1.3 billion) and grains 91 billion (\$422 million)¹².

The production and marketing of qat employs approximately 500,000 people - according to one study, about 16% of Yemen's employment¹³. In recent years, Yemeni farmers have started growing qat instead of other crops as it is more lucrative: the crops are highly profitable, can be harvested throughout the year and there is an increasing demand for the leaf among the population of Yemen. According to the World Bank, qat production is increasing by 10% a year. Qat growing accounts for almost 60% of the land cultivated for cash crops in Yemen¹⁴. At least 2,000 tonnes of qat are bought and sold in Yemen every day, at approximately \$20 per kilo depending on the grade, transferring money to the 70% of the population living in the countryside. It supports more than 2.5m people and may discourage the growth of urban slums in a poor country with a fast-growing population¹⁵.

For Highland farmers, qat is therefore the perfect crop: in the event of drought, it becomes dormant, and will flourish again when the rains return; it is unlikely that qat will ever need to be imported from other nations; and if men are called up for military service or if markets are disrupted by war, as is the current situation in Yemen with 545,318 displaced as of the end of June 2012, qat is considered hardy and will survive by itself¹⁶.

However, qat production also exacts a heavy environmental impact. An estimated 500 litres of water are used to produce one bag of qat¹⁷. It is estimated that 40 percent of the country's water supply goes towards irrigating qat crops. Overall across Yemen, the underground water sources that sustain 24 million people are running out, and some areas could be depleted in just a few years¹⁸. In particular it has been noted that water consumption is so high that groundwater levels in the Sana'a basin are diminishing and it is expected to dry out in just a little over 10 years¹⁹.

11 Al-Mugahed (2008)

12 Al-Aulaqi (2012)

13 Nasser (2012)

14 Al-Muhaged (2008)

15 The Economist (2010)

16 Milich and Al-Sabbry (1995)

17 Nasser (2012)

18 Worth (2009)

19 Ghanem, Zindani and Zindani(2008)

In addition, a significant portion of monthly incomes are allocated to feed people's qat habit in a country where almost half the population live below the official poverty line. Up to 50% of household income is thought to be allocated to the daily qat requirement of the head of the household²⁰. This means that other crucial areas, such as nutrition, can be compromised to satisfy the habit. Long term consumption can also have significant negative effects on health. While qat can induce a state of euphoria and elation, with feelings of increased alertness and arousal, it can also cause persistent hallucinations and affects sleep cycles, raises blood pressure, and increases the risk of mouth and throat cancer. Qat farmers usually sprinkle pesticide residues on the leaf, leading to cancers, liver cirrhosis and kidney disease. It is reported that Yemen is from the lower income range chew qat to suppress their appetites so that they do not have to spend their minimal income on food.

It has also had adverse social impacts: increased production of qat has been accompanied by the growing risk of theft. "A considerable percentage of the violent deaths in [Yemen] result[ed] from theft, and in the absence of efficient police forces, guarding the fields has become one of the significant costs of the qat farmer²¹. The effect of qat on the productivity of the working population, the hours spent chewing qat and the effects of growing the plant on the environment have led some to campaign for a 'No qat day' in protest of the use of the plant in Yemen.

20 Al-Mugahed (2008)

21 Lock (1987)

Given its widespread poverty and low level of development, it seems surprising that Yemen receives so many migrants. However, historically this has long been the case. Its geographical position makes it accessible from the Horn of Africa and a gateway to the Arabian Peninsula. The lack of a strong central government means that land and sea borders are porous, despite efforts in recent years to initiate more effective security, and regulation of immigration is inconsistent as a result. Protracted conflicts and chronic food insecurity in the Horn of Africa mean that Yemen has offered migrants a way to a new life, either in Yemen or another country. Recent insecurity in Yemen has made it even more difficult for the authorities to patrol the land and sea borders: outside the capital, Sana'a, government reach is limited. Rather than deterring migrants, the insecurity has made it easier to enter Yemen and seems to be partly responsible for the increase in migration flows from the Horn of Africa to Yemen from the beginning of 2011.

There are several on-going conflicts in Yemen. The main ones involve the Houthis, a rebel movement with significant territorial control in the north of the country, and the Salafi allies, Al-Ansar al-Sharia and Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), which have power bases in the south. These groups have created no-go areas for government authorities and Yemeni citizens who do not support them²². Tribal

22 AQAP was formed in 2009 and claimed responsibility for a suicide bomb in Sana'a on 21 May 2012 which killed more than 100 people (ICG, 2012: 15 & 16). For detailed conflict analysis see ICG, 2012; for an introduction to AQAP, see 'Profile: Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula', Al-Jazeera, 9 May 2012, www.aljazeera.com (accessed 9 May 2012)



Image: Everyday, a large population of Yemen's adults population chew Qat for [most men and some women] many hours.
Credit: John Miles/Panos

leaders have traditionally had significant powers in their regions: with the decline in central authority, their power is increasing while the role of the national government is being further reduced.

There is still a rift between the north and the south of the country over 20 years after unification and, since the beginning of 2011, there have been major upheavals at the centre of government. Opposition to President Ali Abdullah Saleh, who had been in power for over 30 years, forced him to step down. Following uncontested elections he was replaced by his deputy, Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi, in February 2012. The current government is not only weak but has undergone major restructuring. This has led to significant internal battles to establish organizational structures and build capacity of new officials, while at the same time trying to assert itself over a country which has never been under strong central control, and in the face of new challenges from powerful armed opposition groups²³. For a number of reasons, the conflict and instability have a direct effect on migrants and refugees. Yemeni and international resources are being stretched by a population of around half a million IDPs fleeing conflicts in Yemen. Insecurity means that some areas are inaccessible to the international community, making it difficult not only to provide assistance to migrants and refugees, but also to know where they are and what problems they might be facing. There is evidence that the lack of effective law and order is leading to an increase in the practice of criminal gangs taking migrants hostage on arrival and demanding a ransom for their release.

There is also a fear among the Yemeni authorities and the general populace that the large influx of migrants is destabilizing and threatens the socio-economic status of the Yemeni population - that the unrest is attracting migrants, particularly Somalis from al-Shabaab²⁴, to come and fight²⁵. The perception that migrants are involved in terrorism or threaten the country's stability could lead to hostilities between Yemenis and migrants, whose relationships to date have been relatively peaceful.

23 ICG, 2012

24 There are long standing views that there are links between al-Shabaab and al-Qaeda. See, for example, Brian Bennett (2011) in the Los Angeles Times and for a local perspective Al-Ahale, 2012

25 For instance, in June 2012 the Ministry of Defence identified the killer of an army commander in Aden as Somali. BBC, 2012

Ethiopia: Political and economic challenges

Like Yemen, Ethiopia is experiencing internal conflict and significant development challenges. The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), which came to power in 1991, introduced a federal system based on ethnicity, creating nine regional states – Tigray, Afar, Amhara, Oromia, Somali, Benishangul, Southern Nations, Nationality and Peoples Region (SNNPR), Gambella and Harar – and two federally administered city states of Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa.²⁶ Despite remarkable and sustained economic development in the last two decades as well as rapid advances in meeting different Millennium Development Goals, Ethiopia remains a poor country with millions struggling to survive in fragile environments and as subsistence agriculturists.

Since the elections in 2005, when the ruling EPRDF faced significant challenges from opposition groups, the ruling party has allegedly become increasingly repressive.²⁷ Members of political parties and those who criticize the regime have reportedly faced arbitrary arrest and detention, and opposition groups such as the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) have been branded terrorist organizations²⁸. Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have reported on what they regard as arbitrary detentions, torture and restrictions on the freedom of speech and systematic marginalization of certain groups, in particular those of Oromo ethnicity.²⁹ There are restrictions on freedom of the press and internet use in Ethiopia.³⁰ In June 2012, Reporters Without Borders accused the Ethiopian Government of criminalizing the use of internet communications services, such as Skype.³¹

Ethiopia continues to be one of the poorest and least developed countries in the world, despite an average annual economic growth rate of between 9 -11 per cent over the last decade. The country is vulnerable

26 There are around 80 different ethnic groups. The following are the main groups comprising the population of Ethiopia: Oromo 34.5%, Amhara 26.9%, Tigray 6.1%, Somali 6.2%, Sidama 4%, Gurage 2.5%, Wolaita 2.3%, Afar 1.7%, other nationalities 3%. Estimates from US Department of State, www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2859.htm (accessed 4 June 2012)

27 ICG, 2009

28 The recent death of the long-standing Ethiopian president Meles Zenawi (died 20th August 2012) may herald significant changes that could advance increase political pluralism and open negotiations with opposition groups / banned organisations.

29 Human Rights Watch, 2012; Amnesty International, 2012

30 Amnesty International, 2012

31 Moskvitch, 2012

to climate change, and drought and soil degradation are significant obstacles to development. Other challenges include high inflation, taxation and population density.³² Ethiopia's population has exceeded 80 million³³ and has an annual growth rate of 2.2 per cent. Consequently, there is increasing competition for jobs.³⁴ A study published in 2006 calculated that the mean average unemployment duration among the urban population was three years.³⁵ Furthermore, in rural areas, where just over 80 per cent of the population lives,³⁶ socio-economic challenges have been compounded by forced evictions from farm land. In 2011 and 2012, these occurred in the SNNPR, Gambella, Oromia, Tigray and Somali regions, and have resulted in tens of thousands of people losing access to their means of income generation.³⁷ The Ethiopian government owns all land in the country and, like other African countries, is leasing land to foreign investors for commercial farming operations. Farmers are compensated for the loss of land, but pastoralist groups are not.³⁸

Migration from Ethiopia is mixed and includes migrants seeking economic opportunities and others seeking asylum. Ethiopia continues to demand the forcible return of Ethiopian refugees and asylum seekers. A 2012 report by Amnesty International states that, in the previous 12 months, Ethiopian refugees were forcibly returned from Djibouti, Somalia and Sudan at the request of the Ethiopian government.³⁹ Until March 2010, Ethiopian asylum seekers, often in cooperation with the Ethiopian Embassy in Sana'a, were also forcibly returned from Yemen to Ethiopia.⁴⁰ The principle of non-refoulement is central to international refugee law and the forced return of refugees and asylum seekers to their country of origin contravenes the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol.

32 UNDP, 2012a

33 UN DESA, 2012. The population of Ethiopia is projected to reach over 145 million by 2050. In 1990 it was just under 50 million.

34 World Bank, 2012 (growth rate from 2004-2010). Other estimates for the population growth rate are higher: for example, 2.6 per cent. US Department of State, www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2859.htm (accessed 4 June 2012)

35 Dendir, 2006. Ethnic background, relationship to head of household and sex were found not to have any impact on the duration of unemployment.

36 US Department of State, www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2859.htm (accessed 4 June 2012)

37 Amnesty International, 2012:146

38 Butler, 2010. Also, for example, some research and analysis is documenting how the Ethiopian government is forcibly taking land away from Ethiopians in the Omo valley to make way for sugar plantation schemes. Cf: <http://www.mnn.com/earth-matters/politics/stories/ethiopians-forced-off-land-for-sugar-projects>

39 Amnesty International, 2012:146

40 Human Rights Watch, 2009; Soucy, 2011

Migration drivers

The majority of Ethiopian migrants to Yemen are seeking better economic opportunities. These include uneducated farmers from rural areas in search of employment as labourers, and educated urban dwellers with professional skills. Respondents citing economic reasons for their migration included Christians and Muslims of Amhara, Tigray, Gurage and Oromo ethnicity. Those seeking political asylum were predominantly but not exclusively Oromo. Some respondents of Amhara and Tigray ethnicity admitted to having problems with the regime but were not seeking asylum.

Economic factors

The economic drivers of migration from Ethiopia are numerous and interlinked with the country's political, social and environmental context. The most commonly cited economic factors influencing migration among the educated from urban areas were poor employment opportunities, low pay and high taxes versus the relatively expensive cost of living. Taxes can be so high, in fact, that individuals have to sell their means of income generation to pay their bill. For example, one respondent explained that he was forced to sell his small shop to pay his taxes: having sold it, he then had no means to make a living. Respondents also complained of the difficulties in accessing a job in the public sector unless the person was a supporter of the ruling regime. Even securing a place at a university or establishing a small business can depend on having the right political contacts and affiliations.

Respondents from rural areas cited different reasons for emigrating. All respondents originally from Jima, an Oromo farming area southwest of Addis Ababa, explained that the high cost of fertilizer had led them to migrate. They claimed that Government officials had forced them to purchase fertilizer for their crops from a Government supplier. The high prices and subsequent poor harvests meant that they had become indebted and so, to clear their debts, they had to look for work elsewhere. It is unclear whether the cost of fertilizer leading to indebtedness is a widespread issue in Ethiopia or a problem specific to the Jima region. Research was conducted in and around Rada', an area south of Sana'a, among Oromo who were working on qat farms. For security reasons it was not possible to travel more widely in the area to determine whether all Ethiopians working on the qat farms had come from the same part of Ethiopia for similar reasons or originated from different parts of Ethiopia with different motivations for leaving.

Image: Most Ethiopians transiting Yemen are escaping the harsh reality of subsistence agriculture while seeking economic opportunities in Saudi Arabia or beyond.
Credit: Sven Torfinn/Panos



Other respondents from rural areas explained that the Ethiopian Government had taken their land for schemes backed by Government supporters. Although respondents acknowledged that there was financial compensation for those who had lost the right to farmland, without access to land the farmers are unable to generate an income and so are forced to leave.⁴¹ Studies have confirmed that Ethiopia is vulnerable to climate change, which impacts on rural livelihoods⁴², but only one respondent cited this as a reason for migrating. A number of respondents blamed low rainfall and poor harvest as reasons for their migration, but did not indicate that they saw these as long-term shifts in climatic conditions. It is possible that the research was not conducted among respondents from the most affected areas, or that those questioned did not identify climate change as the root of their problems of low rainfall and poor harvests.

Closely connected with the economic motivations for migration is the sense of duty respondents felt towards their families. Many stated that because of their particular role in the family - and that could

be as a parent or child, male or female - it was their responsibility to ensure that the rest of the family had an income. Children from the age of 14 to men over the age of 60, young single women and married women with children still living in Ethiopia all said that they wanted to be able to provide a better life for their families. None of the individuals motivated by a sense of responsibility said that they were forced to migrate. They claimed that it had been their choice because they wanted to be able to support their family and could do so more effectively outside Ethiopia than if they remained at home.

The research did not identify any respondents who claimed to having been forced to come to Yemen, but a number did admit to being persuaded by the promise of a better life. This persuasion often takes the form of anecdotes spread informally about Ethiopians who have travelled through Yemen to Saudi Arabia and made their fortune. These stories are given credence by Ethiopians who have been able to buy cars and houses after working abroad and support their families with a high standard of living. Children can be easily influenced by such stories and those that were interviewed admitted to hearing about Ethiopians leaving the country and becoming wealthy. Consequently, they decided to leave home without the knowledge of their parents to make their own fortune. A minority of respondents said that they

41 This is corroborated in a report by Amnesty International in 2012.

42 Ethiopian, United Nations Environment Programme, www.unep.org/climateneutral/Default.aspx?tabid=804 (accessed 4 June 2012); oXFAM (2010)

had been deceived into migrating by brokers who came to their village and exaggerated the money that could be made by working abroad. These brokers work on behalf of smugglers and seemed to be most active in rural areas. This is probably because rural populations have less access to information than those in urban areas, so are easier to deceive and have fewer possibilities to migrate regularly without the involvement of a broker.

Political factors

In addition to economic reasons, some Ethiopians were forced or motivated by political problems to leave the country. Some migrants and their families, claiming to have experienced imprisonment and torture, fled Ethiopia in fear of their lives. These included individuals involved with, or accused of being involved with, opposition parties and groups identified by the government as terrorist organizations, such as the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF). These people have sought asylum. Others, finding it difficult to make a future for themselves in Ethiopia because of their political views and activities, had chosen to leave. Some left regularly, living in Yemen legally and returning to visit friends and family in Ethiopia. These include a number of students who were involved in anti-government demonstrations in 2006. As their former activities have made it difficult for them to complete their university education and find work, they decided to leave the country in search of what they considered a temporary solution.

Some of the economic reasons given for leaving Ethiopia could be interpreted as the result of the alleged deliberate social and political marginalization of certain groups by the government, meaning the people affected might be entitled to claim asylum. However, respondents did not articulate their motivation for leaving Ethiopia in those terms. As far as they were concerned, they left because they wanted access to better economic opportunities than they could find in their own country.

Recruitment by smugglers

Though Ethiopian migrants come from different parts of Ethiopia, there are definite patterns illustrating that key factors of endemic poverty, land scarcity, unemployment and alleged political discrimination and/or persecution affect certain areas/communities more than others. Evidently, these are the main drivers compelling people to look for alternatives. However, often overlooked is the significant role that smugglers themselves play in creating aspirations,

instilling dreams and tempting vulnerable persons into being recruited. Frequently embedded in towns and visiting communities where the local population may be highly susceptible, these brokers are able to generate demand for their services through deception and manipulation.

IOM research conducted in 2008 in southern Ethiopia found that the desire to migrate strongly correlated with the presence of brokers or smugglers in the area⁴³. In cases where the community had no contact with brokers offering to take them abroad, local people had little aspiration to migrate and hardly knew where places like Yemen were. In areas where brokers were present, on the other hand, there was a far higher awareness of the possibility of being smuggled and the imagined wealth that might result from irregular migration. Importantly, not all of this was fantasy, as brokers could point to brick houses, tin roofs and pick-up trucks as evidence of those who had been successful and were able to assist their families back home. In these communities, there was evident excitement and expectation amongst many men and some women about the possibility of one day migrating. Once they arrived in the destination country, however, many migrants found that their own experiences fell far short of the positive representations that had lured them there:

Due to the agent's propaganda I left Ethiopia hoping to get a new job and money. But when I got here I found nothing – no job opportunity and no money. So if God willing I will return to Ethiopia, I would even advise my fellow citizens not to be deceived by agents- that all rumors are untrue and advise them not to think (of) going to Arab countries.

Ethiopian male washing cars in Aden, Yemen

A relevant, and unexplained question surrounding continued Ethiopian irregular migration is that despite the severe risks, the numerous deaths, rapes and other disastrous outcomes, the demand to migrate is still high. The initial presumption might be that conditions in Ethiopia are sufficiently dire for people to try their luck, despite the dangers they must hear about from those who return – or, indeed, the untold stories of those who never return. But there may also be other factors that keep demand high, including the convincing propaganda of the smugglers and their agents, the fact that some migrants do eventually succeed or that many see the hardships and suffering of the journey as a necessary 'rite of passage' to reach their dream. Additionally, the worst of the stories of the journey may never reach the community of origin for various reasons, and if they do are simply not believed.

⁴³ Horwood (2009)

The journey to Yemen

Migrants use different routes and means to travel from Ethiopia to Yemen. There are Ethiopians who arrive in Yemen regularly at the airport, with documentation (obtained legally or illegally) or enough money to bribe their way into the country. These migrants are drawn from those with the financial resources to fund this option. For others the choice is a sea voyage from areas around the ports of Obock in Djibouti or Bossaso (and some from Zeila, in Somaliland) in Puntland. Although the sea crossing from Djibouti to Yemen is a matter of hours, in contrast to the three or four day crossing from Bossaso, the overland route to Somalia and Puntland is easier for some Ethiopians than travelling north through Ethiopia to reach Djibouti. Ethiopians living in areas bordering Somalia are able to speak Somali, so travelling through Somalia is relatively easy for them.

Migrants with resources pay more money for better and safer boats, and will pay more for better and more comfortable places in the boats. Although longer and more dangerous because of rougher seas, the crossing from Somalia is cheaper than that from Djibouti. Furthermore, some Ethiopians, fearful of the Djibouti authorities, prefer to avoid them. The Ethiopian and Djibouti governments are perceived as being close allies and migrants fear that, if detained, they are likely to be forcibly returned to Ethiopia – an occurrence reported by Amnesty International.⁴⁴ The limited application of the rule of law in Somalia (Somaliland and Puntland) means that detection by the authorities there is unlikely, but that attacks from criminal gangs are more probable than in Djibouti. Nevertheless, numerous new arrivals interviewed in Yemen who departed from Obock reported being attacked and robbed by the Afar in Djibouti on their way to Obock. Some female migrants also reported sexual attacks in Obock area itself.

The route and means of transport Ethiopians use to travel to Yemen is dictated by their individual knowledge, resources and point of origin. This also determines the length of the journey and identification of income generating opportunities. Broadly speaking, it seems that there are three main groups of economic migrants:

- **Migrants with resources** travel regularly or irregularly and pay a high price to smugglers to ensure their safety. They have a clear plan and destination.

- **Migrants with limited resources** travel by sea to Yemen and enter the country irregularly. They have enough money and knowledge to travel to their final destination directly.
- **Migrants with no resources** also travel by sea to Yemen and enter the country irregularly. They form the largest and most vulnerable group of Ethiopian migrants to Yemen and are predominantly male Muslim Oromo. They have to work en route to pay for their journey and work in Yemen to pay smugglers to take them to Saudi Arabia. They do not have the knowledge or resources to travel directly to their final destination.

These three different groups seem to have little or no knowledge of each other, taking different routes to and through Yemen and engaging in different activities on the way and at their final destinations.

The migrants with resources have knowledge and money to travel to Yemen, by air or by sea, and other destinations which involve transiting through Yemen, regularly or irregularly, and in relative safety. They know where Yemen is, why they are going and have their journey planned in advance. If they travel regularly they are able to obtain the necessary documents for travel, but these documents may be obtained illegally by paying bribes. There are some smugglers who rely on smuggling people as their long term livelihood and so are more professionalized, with a reputation for ensuring that those they are smuggling arrive in safety. These smuggling groups are more expensive than others, but the migrants with resources can afford to pay. This group appear to be the most likely to be 'repeat migrants' – either those who return to Yemen (and Saudi Arabia) after going back voluntarily to Ethiopia in between work trips and/or those who may have been deported.

Members of this group have enough money to travel directly to what they consider their final destination, whether this is Saudi Arabia or somewhere in Yemen. It has not been possible to confirm the process for securing employment. It is thought that some, through friends and family, will have a job waiting for them or use agents, while others may rely on finding a job when they arrive at their destination.

Those in the second group, comprising migrants with some knowledge and resources, know where Yemen is and have a plan to go there and an idea of what they will do next. They travel irregularly by sea. They may arrange the journey as they travel,

⁴⁴ Amnesty International, 2012

making the journey overland independently or using smugglers. They have enough money to fund their journey without working on the way. They may take time to plan their travel but the overall journey is made quickly, probably lasting no more than two or three weeks. The majority of this group of migrants appear to make their way from the Yemen coast directly to Saudi Arabia to find work through personal contacts or agents.

The third group has little knowledge or money, but decides to migrate based on the promise of a better life and opportunities without knowing very much about Yemen or the nature of the work to be found. Migrants from this group walk or hitch lifts for much of the land journey. The journey can take many months because the migrants have to work en route to earn money for food and water, as well as pay the smugglers. At the ports, particularly in Bossaso⁴⁵, many migrants said that they had worked for several months to pay for the voyage. On arrival in Yemen, they had to work to fund being smuggled into Saudi Arabia. For example, among those interviewed as part of this research, many were working on the qat farms in and around Rada'.

Some migrants, especially those with severely limited resources, start their journey on foot or with only limited assistance. They immediately face the hardship of the unforgiving and arid terrain that characterises much of the Horn of Africa and Yemen, and which forms the migrant's principle route. One boy recounted a harrowing testimony of the first stage of his journey, long before he and his group had passed out of Ethiopia:

We started the perilous journey through Afar desert, where some looters attacked us, beat us badly and took the money we had. After around one week of walking in the desert, during which some people died of starvation, we reached Tajoor Mountain, where we stopped in order to have a rest. I was looking around me, I found some people dying, some were sleeping, and others were crying and asking for water or food. I was walking among people laying down, looking at them and talking they were staring at me, but no answer from their side, then I realized that they were dead! There I realized that I was going through a journey of death, some people died during the desert crossing, some while climbing the mountain and some on the top of it.

Molla 15 yrs old Ethiopian boy, interviewed in Haradh, February 2012

⁴⁵ Bossaso is the capital of Puntland, the semi-autonomous territory in Northern Somalia.

During our trip through the desert we came across the body of a dead girl that was half buried in the sand, probably she died of starvation.

Ethiopian male, travelling through Ethiopia towards Djibouti

The smugglers used by the second and third groups are likely to be engaged in other criminal activities besides the smuggling of people. They are not as expensive as the more professionalized smuggling groups which rely solely on smuggling for their income and have a reputation for ensuring the safety of the migrants in their charge. Consequently, it is the migrants from these two groups, those with little or no resources, who seem to be the ones who most frequently experience physical violence on the journey, particularly on reaching the Yemeni coast.

Up to March 2010, Ethiopians arriving on the Yemeni coast were arrested, detained and/or deported back to Addis. There were fears of refoulement and according to the Ethiopian community, there was no monitoring of what happened to those arriving off planes back in Addis Adaba. The perception among Ethiopian refugees was that, even with their protected status, they were not necessarily safe.

Some [refugees] are returned back to Ethiopia by force. The regime had made alliance with neighboring countries. Djibouti, Somalia, Yemen, Kenya committed crime on refugees and also immigrants. The refugees, even those who are living with [the protection of the] mandate are not safe.

Oromo Muslims, living in Yemen since 1995 as recognized refugees

As many were fleeing alleged political oppression, these deportations may have resulted in subsequent arrests or interrogations by officials on arrival. This was regarded by international refugee and migration agencies as a serious violation of the 1951 Convention, continuing up to March 2010 when UNHCR persuaded the Yemeni government to end the discriminatory practice of denying Ethiopians the right to apply for asylum.

The following experience of one Ethiopian man is an example of the protracted journey that some migrants make and shows how, although the intended destination may have been Saudi Arabia, some migrants stay in Yemen:

In 1997 I travelled from Wollo to Addis Ababa and then onto Djibouti. Sometimes I walked, other times I took the bus and for part of the way I hid on a cargo train. In Ali Sabieh in Djibouti I was caught by the police. They beat me and took my money then let

me go. I travelled on to Djibouti city but I had no friends and no money so I slept on the street for 15 months. It was a very bad time. I thought about going to Saudi Arabia but discovered that was very difficult from Djibouti so I went to Somalia instead. I tried to go to Saudi again by stowing away on a cargo ship. I hid below deck among the animals but the crew found me and chained my legs so I couldn't move. We reached Saudi but I had to remain on board and travelled back to Somalia on the return voyage. I then set off for Yemen on a boat with 316 people. It was a difficult journey that took 3 days. All the passengers made it to Yemen. I spent three years in Aden and then came to Sana'a.

Ethiopian male interviewed in Sana'a

Quantifying Ethiopians in Yemen

Although there are some estimates on the numbers of Ethiopians entering Yemen and their location in the country, accurate figures are unavailable. This is because migration flows are notoriously difficult to measure and in a country like Yemen, with limited resources and civil unrest, collecting and maintaining accurate data is especially difficult. As much of the migration to Yemen is irregular and transitory, there are concerted efforts to avoid the authorities and any kind of monitoring. "Given that a significant number of arrivals landing on the Red Sea coast are reported to be immediately transported away through smuggling networks, there exists a challenge in establishing complete data on migrants, monitoring treatment and assessing the nature of population flows."⁴⁶

Since 2008 the Yemen Mixed Migration Task Force (YMMTF) and its members have been collecting data from migrants arriving at the Red and Gulf of Aden coasts that help to identify trends.⁴⁷ The figures that are available from 2009 until the end of May 2012 for the total number of immigrants arriving at the coast, the number of Ethiopian arrivals and their ethnicity are shown in Table 1. (Table 1: Arrivals in Yemen: January 2009 to May 2012) : Ethnic Group

46 UNHCR, 2012a

47 The MMTF is a joint initiative supported by the Government of Yemen, UNHCR, IOM, DRC, Care International, INTERSOS, Society for Human Solidarity (SHS), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Food Programme (WFP), and the Yemen Red Crescent. Statistics collected by the MMTF can be accessed at <http://registration.drcyemen.org/> Statistics in the number of arrivals are given for the Red Sea and Arabian Sea but monitoring patrols are conducted on the Red Sea coast and Gulf of Aden rather than the Arabian Sea coast

48 This table was compiled with data supplied by DRC. The Somali ethnic group are also known as Ogaden.

Since 2006, the total number of Ethiopian new arrivals as of the end of June 2012 recorded by UNHCR/DRC monitoring teams is 230,000. Given that the estimations of new arrivals based on monitoring patrols information are certainly an under-estimation of the real total. Well above 230,000 Ethiopians have probably entered Yemen as undocumented migrants in the last 6 years. Some of these migrants have stayed in Yemen, either temporarily or long term, but probably a larger proportion have transited through to find work in Saudi Arabia. Of course, some of these had no intention to move on to Saudi Arabia or elsewhere, and specifically chose Yemen as their destination. Nevertheless, the implications of transit passage of such a large number through Yemen, the irregular entry of such a large group of migrant workers to Saudi Arabia, and the temptations of the unscrupulous to exploit these migrants is considerable.

Much of this data and information is collected as a corollary to the protection activities of UNHCR and its partners patrolling the Red Sea coast and Gulf of Aden.⁵⁰ After explaining the concept of asylum to migrants, those who want to seek asylum are transported to the registration centre and refugee camp at Kharaz⁵¹. The registration process involves gathering personal information such as name, age, religion and ethnic origin and also information about the size of the vessel used to travel, the numbers and nationalities of passengers and crew, dates of travel and the number of boats departing for Yemen around the same time. One in 10 of those interviewed completes a questionnaire to provide additional information such as the route they have taken, their coping mechanisms, and risk and protection issues they faced on their journey. Those who are not interested in seeking asylum are issued 'welcome packs', which include clothes, shoes, water, biscuits, a rucksack and a torch, before continuing their journey independently. Based on the information gathered from the migrants who are interviewed, calculations are made to estimate the total number of migrants arriving by sea. For example, in 2011 details and data from around 45,000 migrants of all nationalities were used to estimate that around 103,000 migrants had entered Yemen. These figures are likely to be underestimates for a variety of reasons:

49 Data on ethnic origin is unavailable for 2009

50 UNHCR partners include DRC, YRC and SHS.

51 Migrants may be provided with information and registered in reception centres at Ahwar and Mayfa'ah and a transit centre at Bab al-Mandeb before those deciding to claim asylum are transferred to Kharaz.

Table 1: Arrivals in Yemen: January 2009 to May 2012⁴⁸

	2009	2010	2011	2012 (end May)
Total Coastal Arrivals	77,802	53,382	103,154	51,441
Ethiopian Coastal Arrivals (UNHCR Figures)	44,744	34,422	75,651	41,210
Ethiopian Asylum Seekers(DRC Figures)	5,040	8,232	16,689	8,893
Ethnic Group⁴⁹				
Afar		222	9	1
Amhara		1,584	2,067	1,707
Gurage		29	48	35
Oroma		5,552	10,807	4,704
Somali/Darood		0	475	304
Somali/Dir		1	84	67
Somali/Hawiye		0	120	70
Tigray		1,049	3,063	1,997
Other		15	16	8
Clothes		69	131	167
Other		138	172	770

- The patrols do not cover the entire length of the Yemeni coast.⁵² Insecurity means that some areas are inaccessible and there are not enough resources to monitor all possible entry points. Patrols are concentrated on the Gulf of Aden coast, which is known to be the most popular entry point, although there are plans to extend monitoring northwards on the Red Sea. However, even if these expanded patrols are implemented, a remaining 600-800 km of coastline will remain un-monitored.
- For security reasons the patrols do not start until 08.00 in the morning. Respondents claim that the most popular time for arrival is in the early hours of the morning. By 08.00 many of the migrants will have been dispersed or captured by criminal gangs.
- It is known that the smugglers are in contact with associates on the coast so they can time their arrival to avoid the authorities or monitors. Some respondents reported waiting out at sea for several hours until it was considered safe to approach the shore.

⁵² Figures for the length of the Yemeni coast line vary between 1,900km and 2,500km

Not all irregular migrants in Yemen enter at the coast:

- It is known that migrants enter through the airports regularly with valid documentation (which may have been obtained illegally) and then overstay their visas and become illegal/irregular.
- **Some migrants enter Yemeni irregularly overland from Saudi Arabia and Oman.**

According to respondents, staff members working for the Ethiopian, Saudi Arabian, and Yemeni authorities are complicit in irregular migration and accept bribes to facilitate the movement of people. Yemeni visas can be obtained at the Yemen Embassy in Ethiopia for a price, irregular immigrants in Yemen pay officials to overlook their presence in the country, and guards on both sides of the Yemen-Saudi border are paid by smugglers to allow migrants to cross the border. Legal processes approved by the Ethiopian authorities allow Ethiopians to change their names and obtain new passports and travel documents with relative ease, which facilitates irregular migration. Therefore, separating irregular immigrants from regular immigrants is problematic and adds to the difficulty of calculating how many migrants enter and remain in the country.

Finally, the migrant population is dynamic and highly mobile. It is generally accepted, and is the conclusion of this research, that the majority of irregular immigrants are using Yemen as a transit point to Saudi Arabia. This means that some migrants are in Yemen for only a few days, while others stay long enough to earn the cost of the journey. Consequently, the size and profile of the migrant population is in a state of flux and so it is difficult to calculate the numbers involved, particularly when migrants are trying to pass through the country undetected. According to UNHCR, 'given the illegal and underground nature of smuggling/trafficking networks it is impossible to derive accurate figures for the number of migrants entering KSA from Yemen. However, informed assessments suggest that the majority of irregular migrants entering Yemen do travel onto KSA.'⁵³

UNHCR estimated that in April 2011 there were more than 12,000 Ethiopians stranded in the north of Yemen at the border with Saudi Arabia.⁵⁴ According to IOM, the number in April 2012 was over 12,000 – but these can only be estimates. These Ethiopians are by all accounts a desperate group with virtually no resources who have been harassed and in some

cases seriously abused (held and tortured) by criminals and smugglers before either failing to get into Saudi Arabia or, having reached there, subsequently been deported. As new migrants join their number, others try again to go home or enter Saudi Arabia, so it is also a fluid group. International aid and relief organisation are assisting some hundreds of the most vulnerable cases in this group, but do not have sufficient resources to do more. IOM organize AVR for large numbers of stranded Ethiopians migrants.

Although the figures collected by the coastal patrols may not provide a full picture of the number of migrants entering Yemen, they help to identify trends. The numbers entering Yemen have grown significantly, in 2011 and the first five months of 2012, from the previous two years.⁵⁵ More noticeable is that the number of Ethiopians travelling to Yemen increased sharply from 34,422 in 2010 to 75,651 in 2011. As mentioned previously, during the first eight months of 2012 an estimated 56,000 Ethiopians arrived at the Yemen coast.

It is not possible to explain with certainty the rise in the number of immigrants entering Yemen, but it seems likely that the instability in the country since early 2011 has made smuggling easier and more attractive because there is little government control of coastal areas. For Ethiopians, it appears that economic conditions are becoming more difficult, thereby encouraging them to travel outside their country in search of work. Yemen may be more appealing to them than in previous years, as it is now more readily accessible. Beyond the general drivers, specific reasons for migrating were mentioned by Ethiopian migrants and seem to have become significant in the last couple of years. These include the forced purchase of fertilizer and their resulting indebtedness, as well as the compulsory sale of their land – in many cases, their sole source of livelihood. However, further research is needed to explore the motivations for migration in more detail and identify reasons for the increase in Ethiopian migration to Yemen in the last two years. It is probably too simplistic to identify poverty as the main driver. Not only has poverty been present for decades preceding present migration trends, but other areas of the Horn experience poverty and yet do not have such high levels of migrant outflow.

Although the number of Ethiopians entering Yemen has increased, these migrants are mostly in transit on their way to Saudi Arabia. In contrast, respondents argue that the stable population of Ethiopians in Yemen has decreased because their employers,

⁵³ UNHCR, 2012a

⁵⁴ UNHCR, 2012a

⁵⁵ Figures from UNHCR

Table 2: Location and Profile of Ethiopian Populations in Yemen

Location	Profile of Ethiopian Population
<p>Sana'a</p> <p>The capital city hosts numerous migrant populations. Ethiopians are concentrated in the areas of Hadda, Zubhairie, Kefgi, and the Habessa Airport Road</p>	<p>The majority of Ethiopians who have settled in Yemen are in the capital. The Ethiopian population in Sana'a is mixed and comprises Muslims and Christians from different ethnic groups and educational backgrounds. Some are employed as administrative officers or managers of small businesses, while others work as unskilled labour cleaning for companies or private households. Monthly wages for regular employment were reported to be between 100 USD and 250 USD. Ethiopians consider this to be relatively good and will plan to stay for a few years.</p> <p>In Sana'a cleaning cars is a common activity for Ethiopian men who fail to secure regular employment. Income is uncertain and new arrivals have to find an area that is not already in use for cleaning cars because migrants are protective of their patch.</p> <p>Those in Sana'a have entered the country both regularly and irregularly. Most women are employed as domestic labour. There are higher numbers of Ethiopian women in the capital than elsewhere because there are Yemenis here with the income to pay for domestic labour. Recent unrest in the country has affected the labour market, so many of those Ethiopians who considered themselves settled in Yemen have returned to Ethiopia. Ethiopian women also found good employment as domestic labour with expatriates from Western countries who were working in Yemen. These families have returned home so there is less demand for domestic labour.</p> <p>There is also less disposable income among the Yemeni population so women who relied on or supplemented their income from prostitution have fewer opportunities to make money through selling sexual services.</p>
<p>Aden</p> <p>Port city and capital of the former People's Democratic Republic of Yemen before reunification in 1990</p>	<p>Aden probably has the second largest stable population of Ethiopians after Sana'a.⁵⁸ The majority live in Basateen, an area of the city inhabited by migrants. Many of the Ethiopians here sleep on the streets and beg for food. This group seem to be mainly male, Oromo and Muslim.</p> <p>Ethiopians also pass through Aden as it is a transit point to the border with Saudi Arabia and Oman and the qat farming areas to the north. They typically appear ill and exhausted after their journey from Ethiopia.</p>
<p>Haradh</p> <p>Located close to the border with Saudi Arabia</p>	<p>Possibly the third largest concentration of Ethiopians in Yemen (with 12,000 'stranded' according to IOM in April 2012. Government sources claim there may be as many as 20,000). They are usually irregular and in Haradh to try to enter Saudi Arabia. There is a transitory population of Ethiopians and it must be assumed that most are successful in entering Saudi Arabia, as they do not appear to be elsewhere in Yemen. However, there are Ethiopians here who have failed to get into Saudi Arabia or have been deported from there to Yemen. This group have become stuck in Haradh and lack the means to go elsewhere or return home.</p> <p>When funds are available IOM repatriates migrants from Haradh wishing to return home. There is a camp operated by IOM for vulnerable Ethiopians waiting to be returned home, but due to over crowding many leave. Other Ethiopians live on the streets in makeshift shelters near the IOM camp and beg for food or eat leftovers from the tables at restaurants.</p> <p>It is likely that most Ethiopians in Haradh aiming to enter Saudi Arabia make their way here directly from the coast and do not travel through the qat producing areas.</p>
<p>Sa'ada</p> <p>Located close to the border with Saudi Arabia</p>	<p>This city is under the control of Houthis who have created a 'state within a state'. It is reported that gangs from Tigray in Northern Ethiopia are involved in smuggling weapons and hashish on behalf of the Houthis. Other Ethiopians do not like these groups, arguing that they damage the reputation of all Ethiopians in Yemen.</p> <p>Sa'ada is located close to the border with Saudi Arabia so many Ethiopians travel there with the plan of crossing the border. Ethiopians who have been working in and around Rada' are likely to pass through Sa'ada rather than Haradh to reach the border with Saudi Arabia.</p>

Sa'ada (cont.)	<p>It is reported that many Ethiopians, including women and children, are in Sa'ada and rely on begging to survive. It is assumed that these are the Ethiopians who have failed to enter Saudi Arabia.</p> <p>Insecurity meant that it was not possible to travel to Sa'ada so information was gathered through telephone interviews and from people who had visited the town recently.</p> <p>In May 2012 there were reports that Ethiopians were being arrested by Houthis on suspicion of conspiring to fight against them on behalf of Saudi Arabia. It was not possible to verify the reports.</p>
Rada' Damt and Dhamar Rada' and the vicinity are qat producing areas	<p>Since 2010, the local population reported that there are tens of thousands of Ethiopians coming to Rada' and the surrounding areas to work in the qat farms. They come with the intention of working for five months to earn enough money to pay to be smuggled to Saudi Arabia. They travel directly from the coast to the qat farms. All those interviewed had chosen to work on the farms and were being paid for their work.</p>
Tai'zz Yemen's third largest city	<p>There are Ethiopians settled in the main city running small businesses and working as domestic labour, but Tai'zz is not home to a large number of Ethiopians. Ethiopians pass through the city on their journey through Yemen.</p>
Seyoun East Yemen in Hadramaut	<p>A location for oil companies which employ legal Ethiopians and skilled and unskilled labour. According to a former Ethiopian employee, several hundred Ethiopians are employed here. (Nearby Tarim is another location for oil companies, but checks by telephone suggest that no Ethiopians are employed there).</p>
Hudayda Red Sea Coast, entry point	<p>Ethiopians arrive at this coastal town. They stay one or two days to recover from the voyage before continuing their journey. There are a few Ethiopians working in the local hotels and reports that Ethiopians are working in a plastic factory there. However, most Ethiopians pass through the town on their way to Saudi Arabia or to qat farming areas.</p>
Mukalla Gulf of Aden, entry point/transit point to Oman	<p>Mukalla is an entry and transit point. There are no patrols here monitoring the arrival of migrants, but it is considered to be one of the less popular entry points. There is a small stable Ethiopian population, but these have registered themselves with the Yemeni authorities as Somali. (Somalis are granted refugee status on a prima facie basis, hence an almost 100% acceptance rate). Ethiopians pass through Mukhalla to travel to other countries. From Mukhalla, Ethiopians and other migrants cross irregularly overland into Oman with the intention of travelling to the Gulf.</p>
Mukha Coastal town in Gulf of Aden	<p>Mukha is an entry and transit point. Ethiopians stay one or two days to recover from the voyage before continuing their journey. There are a few settled Ethiopians here.</p>
Kharaz Reception centre and Camp on coast	<p>According to statistics provided by DRC in June 2012, the reception centre and refugee camp at Kharaz houses 1,094 Ethiopian refugees, the majority of whom are of Oromo ethnicity. 730 have been in a refugee camp in Yemen since 1996, while 80 arrived in 2009 and 284 more after the protests in Sana'a. In total, according to UNHCR statistics from July 2012, there are 4,882 Ethiopians registered as refugees.</p>
Prisons	<p>Since the unrest began in Yemen, the international community has been unable to conduct its usual prison visits. However, it is thought that there are around 2,000 Ethiopians in prisons around Yemen.</p>
Hospitals	<p>A small number of sick and wounded Ethiopians are in Yemeni hospitals around the country. In addition, a number of bodies, thought to be those of Ethiopians, are also in hospital mortuaries waiting for burial. In June 2012, there were 7 bodies of Ethiopians in the hospital in Ta'izz waiting for burial.</p> <p>Respondents reported seeing, in coastal areas, the dead bodies of Ethiopians who had died as a result of the journey to Yemen or at the hands of kidnappers.</p>

many of whom were expatriates working for foreign companies, have left the country in the wake of the instability. Without employment, Ethiopians have returned home or travelled to other countries. A recent Yemeni newspaper article estimated that Ethiopians represent the largest foreign community in Yemen, totalling around half a million.⁵⁶ This figure is significantly larger than the Ethiopian Embassy's 2012 estimate of around 30,000 Ethiopians settled in the country. Given the lack of reliable data, numbers can easily become a self-serving tool: for political and economic reasons host countries often tend to inflate figures, while countries of origin may wish to play down any internal political and economic problems by deflating them. This can make it difficult to assess what realistic figures for immigrant populations might be. As table 2⁵⁷ suggests Aden probably has the second largest stable population of Ethiopians after Sana'a.⁵⁸

Locating Ethiopians in Yemen

Although it is not possible to confidently state the size of the Ethiopian population in Yemen, it is possible to identify the main locations for Ethiopians and the profile of these communities. It is important to differentiate between those areas with a stable and settled Ethiopian population, and those locations which are entry and transit points or provide temporary employment. In some locations, such as the border with Saudi Arabia and the qat farming areas, the transitory Ethiopian population is several thousand.

The host-immigrant relationship

The Ethiopian attitude towards Yemen and Yemen is ambivalent. Many Ethiopians appreciate the opportunity to travel to Yemen to work or the possibility of using Yemen as a transit country. The lack of rule of law and widespread corruption can be used by migrants to their own advantage to travel, obtain employment and change their legal status. In coastal and rural areas, despite the presence of criminals who brutalise and exploit migrants, Ethiopians report kindness from local people who provide food and shelter or offer lifts in their cars to those walking along the road. Ethiopians have noted that Yemen is have taken injured and ill Ethiopians to hospital. Muslim communities normally have a prevailing social ethic to assist travellers in their land, particularly if they are

fellow Muslims, which some Ethiopians are. One 16 year old girl who escaped from hostage takers after being raped said:

I ran away and fled into a street where there were other people. I was crying because I thought no one would help me and I had no idea what to do next. An elderly man and his wife stopped and spoke to me in Arabic but I didn't understand what they were saying. They put me in their car and took me to the Red Crescent in Basateen where I was given medical treatment.

Young Ethiopian female interviewed in Aden

Ethiopians have also reported being assisted by the Yemeni police and army with directions to help them avoid checkpoints. Members of the police and army stop and search Ethiopians, and some take money and valuables, but these incidents have not been particularly violent. Ethiopians claim that Yemen is are kind towards them because the two peoples

Image: View of Tai'zz. Most Ethiopians pass through Yemen as quickly as they can, but some seek work in urban centres as well as rural areas.

Credit: Jan Banning/Panos

⁵⁶ Al-Maqtari, 2012a

⁵⁷ Information in this table is based on research findings.

⁵⁸ Since completing the fieldwork for this report, the Ethiopian Community in Basateen, in a meeting with DRC in July 2012, estimated that there were fewer than 500 Ethiopians settled in Basateen, 80% of whom are Oromo and the rest Amhara.



face similar difficulties. Both Ethiopians and Yemenis have to work hard to survive and Yemenis respect the fact that Ethiopians come to Yemen in an effort to improve their lives. Therefore, ordinary Yemenis do not actively impede what Ethiopians are trying to do and may even offer help.

Historically, links between Yemen and Ethiopia have been strong. The former President Saleh of Yemen has been offered exile in Ethiopia. Recently the ties between the two countries have been reinforced by the re-establishment of the Yemen-Ethiopian Friendship Association although, as we shall see below, this is viewed with suspicion by many migrants.

Despite the above and in contrast to these positive experiences, many Ethiopians also reported feeling discriminated against because they are not Arab or Muslim.

The way we [Christians] are treated is really very painful... The Somalis have good opportunity since they are Muslim.

Ethiopian refugee in Yemen since 1991

If you are not Muslim also they don't want to give work for you when you go on road they say bad things when you work with them.

Ethiopian female, domestic worker before she was raped at the house she worked

Therefore, they argue, it is more difficult for them to get work because Yemenis do not trust them. Some Ethiopians argue that Somalis, because they are Muslim, are favoured by Yemenis as employees over Ethiopians. Yemenis contradict this view, claiming that they prefer to hire Ethiopians over other immigrants because they are considered clean and hardworking, and (perhaps more critically) can be paid less than Yemenis, whether they are regular or irregular⁵⁹. Other research has highlighted that Somali women hired by Yemeni families as domestic cleaners are not allowed to live in the home, whereas Ethiopian women hired as cleaners are regarded as clean and so are given accommodation.⁶⁰ Therefore there is evidence which challenges the views of some Ethiopians that Somalis are preferred over them.

Despite having a reputation as hard workers and many employers being pleased to hire Ethiopian cleaners, Ethiopians are also abused. The level of abuse seems to be highest in Sana'a, but this could be perception rather than reality because there is a settled Ethiopian population in Sana'a which comes into daily contact

with Yemenis in a way that Ethiopians in transit through the country do not. Settled Ethiopians also have a good command of Arabic so have a better understanding of what is being said around them. Ethiopians who have just arrived in Yemen have little understanding of the local language, so do not know whether they are being insulted.

Ethiopian women, particularly those in Sana'a, complain that Yemeni men see them as sexual objects and, although women do not fear being attacked in the street, they dislike the abusive terms men use towards them. Consequently, many Ethiopian women cover their hair and wear 'abyas or the full niqab to reduce the likelihood of being verbally abused in the streets. Ethiopian respondents reported that some Ethiopian women working as domestic labour, particularly those that live in, are raped by their male employers.⁶¹ During the research, Ethiopian respondents said that male Ethiopians, often minors, were raped by Yemeni men but information about where and under what circumstances was not provided.

We have been tortured and detained by the regime. Even in neighbouring countries immigrants are kidnapped, tortured and killed (...) Women refugees are raped in a house they are working by Yemenis. They even raped in the street. Our children are even kidnapped and raped by the Yemenis. In the work area they don't give us our wages. Our women refugees are being insulted by the Yemeni and stones being thrown by the Yemeni showing their dislike towards us.

Claims from three Oromo men living in Yemen since 2003

Ethiopian men and women reported that they use a Muslim name in Yemen as they believe that it reduces discrimination. However, many said that they were paid less and charged more for their accommodation because they were Ethiopian. Irregular migrants in Yemen are vulnerable to such treatment, but even those in Yemen regularly experience the same discrimination. Ethiopians working as daily labourers, particularly those working on the qat farms, claimed that they were paid less at the end of the day than they had been promised at the beginning.

From their side, many Yemenis suspect that Ethiopians are involved in criminal activities such as selling drugs or smuggling alcohol. Ethiopians admit that some are engaged in illegal activities out of economic necessity, but that this damages the general image of Ethiopians in Yemen.

⁵⁹ For example, a hotel owner in Rada' claimed that he always hired Ethiopian women as cleaners because they did the job better than anyone else.

⁶⁰ De Regt, 2009

⁶¹ None of the respondents admitted to being raped by their employer.

It is apparent that the relationship between Ethiopians and Yemenis is complex and dynamic. Both Ethiopians and Yemenis identified the long standing ties between them and recognized that both countries are host to populations from the other. There have been marriages between Ethiopians and Yemenis for generations; they are not a recent phenomenon resulting from increased migration. Yet the accommodating official and personal attitude towards Ethiopian migrants in Yemen could change as Yemen faces further instability and struggles to support its own population. The Government alleges that there are already two million Somalis in Yemen and an increasing number of Ethiopians. This is, of course, approximately ten times the official UNHCR figures and most likely an exaggeration, but without doubt there are probably more Somalis in Yemen than official UNHCR figures suggest.⁶²

International assistance to migrants and refugees can cause resentment among the host population, particularly if the host population is experiencing similar problems.⁶³ In Yemen, the government also regard the high number of foreigners as a drain on resources and a threat to stability.⁶⁴ Yemenis also expressed concern that they could not continue to help Ethiopian migrants because they were struggling to support their own families. Kharaz camp, in the south of the country, also cannot be expanded further because the local population objections.⁶⁵

Mixed Race

One group of people who seem to experience particular problems in Yemen are those with both Ethiopian and Yemeni parents. They complained that Yemenis do not like people of mixed race and that they are regarded with suspicion. Legally, even though people from this group often possess a passport for either Yemen or Ethiopia, they find it difficult to access support. For example, a woman of mixed race, divorced from a Yemeni with whom she had had two children, could not access legal help from either the Ethiopian or Yemeni authorities to resolve disagreements with her husband over a family inheritance and travel documents for the children. She was told by both authorities that she was not their responsibility. Similar stories were recounted by other mixed race Ethiopian-Yemenis.

62 Al-Arabia Net, 2012

63 Harrell Bond, 1986

64 Al-Arabia Net, 2012

65 Information from the international assistance community

Very difficult to get Yemeni nationality because they say you don't know how to speak Arabic and your colour is black. Yemen people they don't trust mix race people.

Mixed race Yemeni, living legally in Yemen since 1995

The Ethiopian government in Yemen and abroad

Most Ethiopians migrants in Yemen, even those who have left Ethiopia for economic reasons, fear the Ethiopian authorities and avoid them when they are abroad. Consequently, Ethiopians lack any official support while they are in Yemen. They suspect the authorities of trying to monitor them and so rarely contact the Embassy. Around 2,000 Ethiopians are registered at the Embassy, but Ethiopian officials know that this represents only a fraction of the Ethiopians resident in Yemen. The Ethiopian Community, which is based in Sana'a, is regarded as an extension of the Embassy and is managed by the husband of an embassy official. Respondents argued that although the Ethiopian Community runs a restaurant, shop and kindergarten, only those with money and links to the authorities can access them. Rather than being a source of support, respondents complain, the community exists to collect money from the diaspora to send to Ethiopia.

Here if you have money the [Ethiopian] Embassy or community will help you. They don't care about Ethiopian people...they care about money.

Ethiopian / Yemeni man, living in Yemen since 1995

Although the majority of respondents regarded the Ethiopian Embassy and Community with suspicion, these two bodies work with the Yemeni authorities and international community to repatriate Ethiopians wanting to return home. Ethiopians wanting to send their children home, and those wanting travel documents, voluntarily approach the Embassy and Community for help. There are stories of Ethiopians having their documentation stolen by their employers and the Community then intervening to buy it back. It is returned to the individual once the Community has been repaid for the initial outlay. Although there is suspicion of the Ethiopian authorities in Yemen, Ethiopians who can afford to pay for help, or Ethiopians receiving help from the international community, do interact with the Ethiopian authorities.

Respondents also expressed fears that they would be forcibly returned to Ethiopia if caught by representatives of the Ethiopian authorities in

Yemen.⁶⁶ They claim that Ethiopia has spies in the country and that some accompany the migrants on the sea crossing. Refugees in particular were afraid of the Ethiopian authorities, and recounted stories of Ethiopian refugees in Yemen disappearing. These alarming stories could be based on events which occurred prior to March 2010, when Yemeni and Ethiopian authorities still forcibly returned Ethiopians from Yemen. Nevertheless, as noted earlier, in 2012 Amnesty International reported that Ethiopian refugees were being forcibly returned from Djibouti and Somalia.⁶⁷ The Ethiopian and Djibouti governments are regarded as close: similarly, the strong connections between Yemen and Ethiopia have recently been reinforced by the re-establishment of the Yemen-Ethiopian Friendship Association. This renewed relationship may increase anxiety among Ethiopian migrants. However, the Association claims that it will be offering legal support to Ethiopian workers who are vulnerable to mistreatment, so some Ethiopians may welcome the Association's rehabilitation.⁶⁸

Migrants' intentions

Most respondents who migrated for economic reasons stated that their future plans included return to Ethiopia, staying in Yemen or going to Saudi Arabia. In Mukalla, respondents talked about Ethiopians going to Oman. A few expressed a desire to migrate to the Gulf and even fewer to travel to Europe. Generally, those who planned to stay in Yemen were settled in the country, married with children, or better educated than the majority of Ethiopian migrants and felt that the overall quality of life was better than in Saudi Arabia, despite the more advantageous economic opportunities there. Those wanting to continue to Saudi Arabia or the Gulf represented a broad cross section of the Ethiopian migrant population, as did those Ethiopians expressing a desire to return home. Those who had fled to Yemen for political reasons and had refugee status were the most likely to state that they wanted to go to North America or Europe.

Few Ethiopians arriving in Yemen seek asylum. Many of those who initially express an interest in applying for asylum do not pursue their claim. Refugee status is granted on a *prima facie* basis to Somalis in Yemen. However, all other nationalities are required to go through the full status determination process by UNHCR and acceptance is not always guaranteed.

66 Amnesty International, 2009 and Soucy, 2011

67 Amnesty International, 2012

68 Al-Maqatari, 2012b

From October 2011 to June 2012, an average of 25% of Ethiopian new arrivals registered every month, compared to 95% of Somali new arrivals over the same period.⁶⁹

The 20-day grace period agreed by the Yemeni government allows for the migrant to register and initiate the process of seeking asylum. It is thought that Ethiopian arrivals often accept the letter of attestation as it allows them to remain in Yemen legally for that period while they make their way to a registration centre to apply for asylum - even if they have little actual intention of exploring this option. Others take the transport offered to the registration centre at Kharaz near the coast, but leave after a few days without applying for asylum.

Therefore, it is assumed that these migrants use the system to recover from the journey and provide them some legal protection in Yemen while they try to get to Saudi Arabia. It is also thought that asylum applications among Ethiopians are low because few are aware of the system. Many of the Ethiopians are economic migrants and so they would not qualify for asylum anyway. Nevertheless, another reason why they do not consider other options is because, as economic migrants, they have planned to travel to Yemen or Saudi Arabia in search of work. By the time Ethiopians learn about seeking asylum, many rule it out because they do not want to give up the possibility of going home. They are also aware that the process can take a couple of years, particularly following the unrest in Yemen, because UNHCR has been operating on a skeleton staff and there is now a backlog of applications. Respondents said that migrants did not want to wait while decisions were made. There is also a perception that the system is corrupt and it is necessary to pay to obtain an appointment with UNHCR. To offer an illustration of the numbers: according to the Yemen MMTF statistics, between May and July 2012 some 196 new individuals were officially recognised as refugees by UNHCR out of a total of 2,584 who registered as asylum seekers in the same period.

Many of the respondents expressed a desire to return to Ethiopia in the long-term. Those who left for economic reasons claimed that they would return once they had 'enough' money, but they did not explain how much would be 'enough'. The female respondents who reported that they had left their young children, some of whom were only babies, with relatives in Ethiopia so that they could travel without them and search for work all said that they would

69 Yemen MMTF statistics, 2012.

return to Ethiopia to be with their children when they had earned enough. Those who had chosen to leave for political reasons all said that they would return home when the regime changed. Only respondents who had refugee status said that they would never return to Ethiopia, although even some from this group stated a desire to do so once a different government was in place. Migrants have a tendency to express a desire to return home, regardless of their practical intentions, but two factors suggest that with many Ethiopians in Yemen this is in fact the case: only a minority of Ethiopians entering Yemen seek asylum, and many maintain close links with their families in Ethiopia to ensure that their children are raised and educated appropriately. Respondents explained that they wanted their children to be educated in Ethiopia so that they spoke their mother tongue properly and understood the culture and traditions of Ethiopia. It is true that diasporas are protective of their culture, but these respondents seemed to envisage the long-term future for their families in Ethiopia.

However, making the journey home is not easy and, because of that, several respondents expressed despair at what they considered the impossibility of

return to Ethiopia. Having left the country irregularly, it was now difficult to return home either regularly or irregularly. Without the necessary paperwork, Ethiopians cannot legally board a boat or aeroplane. As Ethiopia does not have a coastline, those making the journey by boat must travel through Somalia or Djibouti without documentation. To return irregularly, Ethiopians have to use the sea route and must make arrangements for a smuggler's boat to wait for them in the sea once passengers coming the other way have disembarked. Apart from Mukalla on the Red Sea, boats rarely come to shore so a returning migrant must have transport to the boat. While it is possible to make arrangements to return to Ethiopia irregularly, it is more expensive than the outward journey to Yemen. Some respondents argued that if an individual has enough money to return to Ethiopia irregularly, they have enough money to be smuggled into Saudi Arabia irregularly instead. Therefore, an Ethiopian with this amount of money would be more likely to choose to go to Saudi Arabia than return home.

There are options to return to Ethiopia regularly, but some respondents expressed a fear of returning

Image: Most settled Ethiopian migrants in Yemen live in Sana'a
Credit: Jan Banning/Panos



regularly through an airport. They argued that the Ethiopian Government would know that they had left the country irregularly and would question their reasons for doing so. Respondents worried that they might be detained, questioned and imprisoned if it were thought they had been involved in anti-government activities or in contact with opposition groups while outside Ethiopia. Oromo account for the majority of all Ethiopian new arrivals, on average 50% every month as seen from Nov 2011 – June 2012 (according to MMTF data). Other Ethiopian migrants in Yemen were so desperate to return home that they had sought help from the aid community and were issued laissez passer documents from the Ethiopian

Embassy in Sana'a so that they could fly back to Ethiopia.⁷⁰ In 2011, IOM assisted the voluntary return of 5,399 Ethiopians. IOM's figures indicate that they assisted the return of over 9,000 Ethiopians between 2010 and September 2012, and even more since 2006.

⁷⁰ UNHCR, 2011a

Image: Ethiopian migrants waiting to be smuggled to Yemen from Bossaso, Puntland.
Credit: Sven Torfinn/Pano



Part 2: Risk and Protection

Whatever the profile of the Ethiopian migrants, whether regular or irregular, they are all vulnerable to some level of risk. The nature of the dangers they face depend on their profile, legal status, income generating opportunities and future plans. Dangers include exposure to the elements, physical violence, kidnapping and torture, mental abuse and discrimination, economic deprivation, detention by the authorities, trafficking and slavery. This section outlines some of the main risk and protection issues surrounding Ethiopian migrants in Yemen.⁷¹

The journey overland

Ethiopian migrants face numerous dangers on their journey to Yemen. Some walk for days or weeks to reach the coast of either Djibouti or Puntland with little access to food, water or shelter. They are vulnerable to attacks from thieves, particularly in Somalia where there is little law and order, or from the authorities in Djibouti anxious to prevent migrants from entering the country.

The journey to Somalia was not safe. The locals beat us and took all our money, put us in some concentration camp for a couple of days and released us after taking all our property.

Ethiopian male from Addis

The risks of the overland journey are also determined to an extent by the arbitrary policies of the authorities in the various territories that are travelled through. In May 2012 the authorities in Djibouti carried out two round-ups in Obock, reportedly arresting approximately 100 migrants on each occasion. Further, new arrivals informed the UNHCR/DRC monitoring teams in Yemen that some 300 migrants were rounded up and deported to the Loya Ade border checkpoint with Somaliland earlier this year. And most recently, in June 2012 some 276 Ethiopians were arrested in Tadjoura. In September 2011, the Somaliland authorities announced that all 'illegal foreigners' (mainly Ethiopians) had two months to leave. Failure to do so would result in deportation, a policy that was subsequently randomly applied.

While it is sometimes possible to buy food and water along the way, these are sold at exorbitant prices which some migrants cannot afford. Not all migrants walk to the coast: others are smuggled in container trucks, though some - because of the heat and lack of fresh air - die during the journey. Some

recently reported incidents may shed some light on the numbers of migrant deaths during the overland journey.⁷² In February 2012, a container-truck was apprehended in Ethiopia near the Djibouti border in which 75 Ethiopian migrants were being smuggled: 11 of the migrants had suffocated to death. In April 2012, an accident with a bus transporting 33 Ethiopian migrants in Djibouti resulted in 6 being seriously injured. Similarly, in June another accident resulted in the death of 27 Ethiopians and the injury of 54 others.

Some respondents claimed that as many as 50 per cent of those who begin the migration journey die from either exposure to the elements or suffocation in transit. This figure is impossible to verify, but many felt that more die during the journey overland than during the sea crossing. One respondent gave a distressing description of the human cost:

There were so many dead bodies and skeletons en route from my home in Wollo [Ethiopia] to the coast in Djibouti that if you had to make the journey on your own you would not get lost because you could follow the remains of all those people who had failed to complete their journey.

Young Ethiopian male interviewed in Haradh

The Sea Voyage

Figures collected by coastal monitors suggest that the number of deaths during the sea crossing have decreased in the last two years.

Year	Drowned or missing on arrival
2008	1056
2009	529
2010	19
2011	131
2012 (end June)	8 (plus 45 off Puntland)

The downward trend in deaths at sea has been attributed by Soucy in her 2011 report, as well as staff from international aid organizations, to training provided by UNHCR and other agencies to the Yemeni coastguard to allow boats to come closer

⁷² Soucy (2011) provides more detailed information about the dangers to migrants on their overland journey and sea voyage from the Horn of Africa to Yemen.

⁷¹ Unless otherwise stated, this chapter is based on information and quotations supplied by respondents interviewed for this research.

to shore for passengers to disembark. Previously, knowing that the boats contained irregular migrants, the coast guard had attempted to intercept the boats. This resulted in the smugglers throwing passengers who were unable to swim overboard.⁷³

Other observers from international organizations dispute the impact of the training provided to coast guards, given that the capacity of the coast guards to patrol the Yemen coast effectively is in practice very limited. Since the beginning of the instability in Yemen in early 2011, there has been little, if any, official security presence at the coast. Therefore, smugglers have been able to off load passengers near the shore. Another perspective among the international community is that because of the profit in smuggling, passengers are regarded as a valuable commodity. Consequently, smugglers are more likely to ensure that they make it safely to shore. The reduction of murder at sea does appear to coincide with the rise in kidnapping and widespread extortion of migrants. Although the gangs that take migrants (sometimes through collusion with smuggling boat crews) also brutalise and sometimes murder the migrants they kidnap, as far as the boat crews are concerned the delivery of migrants alive is where they stand to make money from the land-based gangs. Indeed, these gangs may be directly linked to the sea smugglers.

In addition to drowning, according to the UNHCR/DRC monitoring teams, many new arrivals mention being physically assaulted during the sea voyage by the smugglers in an attempt to control them and out of sheer brutality. Female new arrivals report of being sexually assaulted and raped on the boat by the smugglers. From these accounts, it appears that Ethiopian females are targeted more frequently than Somalis. Although accurate figures for the number of sexual assaults are not readily available, in December 2011 17 rapes and 8 attempted rapes were reported by migrants landing on the Red Sea coast alone. In July 2012 there were 21 cases of sexual assault reported by arriving migrants. This is a typical reflection of what has been reported to the monitoring team on a monthly basis over the past year or so.

Ethiopian respondents questioned the accuracy of figures supplied by those arriving at the shore of the numbers that die in the sea passage. They suggested significant levels of under-reporting. It is true that migrants interviewed for this research, arriving in the last two years, in general reported fewer deaths than those arriving more than two years ago - which

supports the view that there is a downward trend in the number of deaths at sea. However, in an overloaded boat during a rough crossing, respondents suggested that passengers, and not just crew members, might push weaker passengers overboard to improve their own chances of survival. Given the enormity of what they had done, and the fact that they arrived exhausted and disorientated, migrants would be unlikely to report such events or to provide accurate numbers to organizations monitoring arrivals. If this is the case, then the number of deaths at sea is probably higher than recorded.

In fact, numbers collated relating to drowning or 'missing at sea' are almost certainly a considerable underestimation: for instance, some incidents (such as the sinking of an entire boat with crew and passengers) are unlikely to ever be known to those recording smuggling-related fatalities. Furthermore, violence often happens at night, while fellow migrants are highly congested and terrorised by the crew; those that finally arrive and give information to monitors may not be aware of the extent of the abuse and killing. Nevertheless, there were many stories that illustrated how frequently the boat owners and crew abused and even killed their passengers.

We were sad, angry and had lost hope due to the voyage. How many are thrown by the owner of the boat...how many are drown near the beach. We couldn't help those (who) drown near to the beach since it was dark.

Amhara male from Addis Ababa, having witnessed killings on the sea crossings

When I was in the boat the Somalia people they beat us Ethiopia people including me. Also the shot their guns and threw bodies into the sea.

Oromo woman interviewed

On a boat carrying 66 people in 1997, one of the surviving passengers interviewed for this study claimed that 'many' people died. In 2006, an Oromo fleeing Ethiopia for political reasons claimed that two of the 45 people on the boat with him from Djibouti were in ill health. When the boat became unstable in rough seas, the owner of the boat pushed the two sick men over board. Another respondent travelling to Yemen in 2008 reported that because the sea was rough and the boat overloaded, the owner of the boat beat the passengers and threw some of them overboard: 'It was night so I have no idea how many were thrown into the sea.' In one event in early 2012, off the Puntland coast, an overcrowded smuggler boat that had run into difficulty floated adrift for 4 days before it was engulfed in rough seas. Fearful for their safety, the crew forced 22 men off the boat to their

⁷³ Soucy, 2011: 23

deaths. Those that were reluctant to jump were shot and thrown overboard. In the ensuing wreck a further 11 migrants died or went missing. Only 13 survived.

In addition to the deliberate killing of passengers, some die of exposure, dehydration or suffocation if migrants are stowed below deck. Reports from migrants speak of being stowed in tight conditions where they are prevented from moving their limbs for many hours on end. They are stowed below deck in toxic conditions amongst petrol fumes and with fuel mixed in water, along with faeces and urine from their fellow passengers around and above them. Migrants report having their skin burnt and damaged by the toxicity of the conditions. Some suffocate to death. Dead bodies are thrown into the sea. Migrants reported that they heard bodies hitting the water but, in the dark, were unsure how many were thrown overboard. In 2006, in one of the larger boats carrying an estimated 138 migrants, a respondent reported that 11 men died during the journey as a result of dehydration and suffocation, but such stories have become less common in recent months.

There is a history of troublesome disembarkations as the boats arrive on the Yemeni coast. Between 2008 and 2010 the arrival was notoriously dangerous as smugglers forced passengers off their crafts in deep

water. Most Ethiopians have never learnt to swim and drowning was common, but those that made it to the shores would arrive on predominantly empty beaches, often at dawn. It is guessed that the reason for such a callous approach by the smugglers was their fear of capture by the Yemeni coast guard. It is not clear if they feared possible arrest and conviction or the possibility of having to share their profits with corrupt coast guards.

Increasingly in recent months, and over the last two years, boats appear to come closer to the land and disembark their passengers in shallow water near waiting vehicles and armed men on the beach. This new Yemeni welcome is for many migrants the first glimpse of what is to become the start of a chilling ordeal.

When we could see the Yemeni coast the boat stopped. One of the two boatmen was calling somebody in Yemen. We thought that he got lost. Later we realized that he was waiting for the smugglers to arrive before he lets us reach the beach. He asked the girl to translate for us migrants that there will be a man called Abdul Alqawi who will be waiting for us on the beach and that he will feed us and provide us with water and help us to reach

Image: Ethiopian migrants are especially vulnerable once they arrive on Yemen beaches.
Credit: Espen Rasmussen/Panos



Saudi Arabia. When two small trucks appeared on the beach, our boat turned and reached the beach in few minutes and it stopped a short distance from the beach. To go ashore we had to swim. When we reached the two trucks we realized that there were 8 armed men on them. We got on the trucks and we were transported to a house in the desert.

Ethiopian boy interviewed in Haradh

Rights abuses and criminality: Hostage taking, ransom demands and brutality

In recent years, migrants landing on the coast of Yemen have reported being taken hostage, beaten and forced to hand over any money or valuables such as mobile telephones and watches, or telephone family and friends to demand payments for their release.

Although recognized as a problem, and despite efforts to tackle the perpetrators, hostage taking is widespread and the level of brutality horrific. In the last 18 months, the lack of security and government control has meant that gangs have been able to operate with impunity. The majority of respondents who arrived in Yemen in the last 18 months reported being taken hostage. Respondents arriving as many

as six or seven years ago also said that they were captured, and it is a practice that has been noted as a regular occurrence by the international community since around 2006/2007. Research findings since then suggest that the size of the hostage taking operations has increased significantly. These are not small, poorly-resourced disparate gangs trying to make a living, but reportedly well organized and coordinated international networks of smugglers and criminal gangs accumulating significant levels of revenue.

The international community has been aware of the hostage-taking and encouraged the government to take action - even during the tumultuous political changes of 2011/12. There was some condemnation of criminal activities involving migrants in the Yemeni press in 2011 and 2012 as the media took increased notice of their plight. In two events in early 2012, the authorities (both police and military) raided two compounds where 'African' (migrant) hostages were being held. The involvement of heavily armed military in the second raid suggested that they knew of the fire-power of the kidnappers, at the same time recognising that the local police force may have been compromised in terms of their possible collusion with

Image: Ethiopian migrants are often forced into vehicles and kidnapped on arrival. Women are often raped and in other cases their never seen again.
Credit: Espen Rasmussen /Panos



local criminals. A small number of kidnapers were arrested. The authorities say that they rescued 170 African migrants in Haradh between the start of 2011 and February 2012: 91 young men, 19 elderly men, 10 women and 50 children.

Given the increasing frequency of migrants being kidnapped and abused along the Red Sea Coast, as far up as Haradh, it is hard to imagine that the police (and military) are not aware of some of the activities. To what extent the two raids in Haradh were 'show case' interventions playing to the media, popular sentiment and/or international donors remains to be seen. Certainly, from March to August 2012, following the raids, there has been no reduction in the number of reports from migrants of abuse, kidnapping and extortion.

According to respondents, the criminal networks extend through Ethiopia, Yemen, Djibouti, and Saudi Arabia. It seems highly likely that these gangs would have contacts in other countries, but these were not mentioned. The gangs maintain contact with each other as the migrants' journey progresses so that those based on the Yemeni coast can be ready when the migrants arrive. Although the gangs have contacts in Ethiopia so that migrants can be monitored from the start of their journey, the strongest network links seem to be between Djibouti and Yemen. Gang members, or those collaborating with and/or in the pay of gangs, call contacts in Yemen as the boats are leaving Djibouti and maintain contact throughout the voyage. In Yemen, gang members on the shore tell the boats when they can approach the shore to avoid the authorities and patrols monitoring the arrival of migrants. It is also possible that rival gangs are trying to avoid each other to protect their own profits, but no information about gang rivalry was collected. Some migrants reported that they waited for several hours a long way from the shore before making the final approach to land. Equally, smugglers may be avoiding state officials not out of fear of arrest, but rather a reluctance to share profits with officials who would demand a cut for 'looking the other way'.

On land, sometimes the gangs are dressed in what look like police uniforms, presumably to trick migrants into believing that they are being detained by the authorities. Respondents say that when they arrive at the Yemeni coast, people are waiting for them in pickup trucks. These gangs are controlled by Yemenis, but they employ Ethiopians to cheat, beat and abuse the hostages.

These Oromos who were employed by Abdulkawe were rough and cruel beating us severely day in and day out.

Oromo male from Bale, formerly a farmer

In Hodeida I met an Ethiopian guy who told me that he could take me to Saudi Arabia but I have to pay 40000 YER [\$185] and he took me to a place where we met some Yemenis and they started to beat me and there I have my arm broken.

Ethiopian girl from Desie

It is unknown whether the gangs have any links to local tribes or the authorities. Once on the shore, many migrants are taken hostage. It is not clear how commonplace this is, but what started as an occasional hazard for migrants appears to have become almost routine and affecting an ever larger proportion of new arrivals. In July 2012, new arrivals, particularly Ethiopians, reported to the monitoring teams that they were released once they paid a ransom of \$100 - \$300 to the criminal gangs who had abducted them upon disembarking in Yemen, mainly along the Red Sea coast. What these gangs are prepared to inflict on their victims for these relatively low amounts of ransom is shocking.

Men and women are separated and it is unclear what happens to the women as their male relatives and travelling companions often never see them again.

When we arrived to Yemen they came Abdel Kewe group they beat too much they set fire to a plastic water bottle and they put it on my hand. After that they take my wife and I don't know where she is now.

Ethiopian man, who travelled with his wife

I was caught by the gangsters. There were other women who were caught along with me. I was separated from my [male] cousin thereafter. The men and women were not kept at the same place. So I had no any contact with my cousin thereafter.

Wollo girl, 16, victim of gang rape

Trafficking of women appears to be a very serious reality for Ethiopian new arrivals. No clear evidence points to their exact fate, but scattered reports from Yemenis and Ethiopian migrants suggests they may be sold to Saudi Arabia families as virtual 'slave' domestic workers while others are used in clandestine sexual exploitation networks.

In a small boat, we were around seventy migrants, some were young girls. Four Yemeni smugglers were on board of the boat. They raped the girls on the boat in front of us, we were not able to move or to speak, and those girls were already sold to Yemeni traffickers.

Ethiopian boy, travelling in 2011

Evidence from other regions of the world indicates that when criminals abduct young women, they quickly end up in situations of sexual exploitation. Although speculative, this report would assume that these women are being exploited either as domestic workers or sexually in Yemen or elsewhere in the Arabian peninsula. There are credible reports that traffickers could be operating in and around Kharaz refugee camp itself.⁷⁴ Those abducting / trafficking them presumably operate with high levels of impunity and with little risk of exposure, exploiting women who are entirely 'under the radar', without documentation or the protection of any companion or relative.

The men are often separated into their different ethnic groups. Although the gangs seem to target non-Somalis, there are emerging reports of Somalis being kidnapped as well. However, at the time of the research they did not report being subjected to the same levels of violence as the non-Somalis.

Sometimes it can be a couple of days before migrants realize that they are hostages. They are offered transport from the shore to a house or are lured from the road to a house by offers of help. Once in the house migrants are told to wait and someone will come to smuggle them to Saudi Arabia. The gangs have buildings or land in the coastal areas, many vehicles and are heavily armed. Some migrants talk about being held in cages.

The gangs are frequently referred to as Abd al-Qawi's gang⁷⁵, which is the name that seems to have become synonymous with hostage taking in general. Apparently there was a gang leader called Abd al-Qawi who died two or three years ago. Some stories allege he was a Colonel in the Yemeni army with links to senior Yemeni officials, and that he was killed by his sons who have since assumed the persona of Abd al-Qawi. However, the number of references to Abd al-Qawi by different respondents who landed in different places on the Yemeni coast make it unlikely that Abd al-Qawi is one man, so it is either a term used for all hostage takers or is the name of a large

⁷⁴ "Moreover, a participant has mentioned that a new phenomenon appeared in Kharaz which is that the traffickers take the wife of an Ethiopian male and threaten to send her to Saudi Arabia to work there in prostitution. The husband is forced to pay a huge amount of money to free his wife. This a pressure policy used by the traffickers that guarantees for them the flow of money." DRC-facilitated focus group discussion with male and female employees in NGOs from Aden and Lahj of Kharaz Refugee Camp in Lahjgovernorate.

⁷⁵ Migrants frequently refer to the gang with variations of the same. These variations are captured and included in the different quotations in this report.

hostage taking network.⁷⁶ On the boats, migrants are reassured by the sailors that on shore they 'do not need to worry, Abd al-Qawi will take care of them.'⁷⁷ None of the respondents seem to have seen anyone they thought was Abd al-Qawi. One interviewee claimed to know the background:

Abdulkawe was a colonel, he used to work as smuggler. Since he died this crime is committed by his sons. His son has big connection from Djibouti, Ethiopia, Saudi, and there are higher officials of Yemeni who were linked to these gangsters. They have some hidden places in the coastal area to keep the immigrants. These gangsters keep watch against the immigration officers in the coastal area.

Ethiopian male, settled in Yemen for 30 years

The Abd al-Qawi gangs capture and torture the migrants until a ransom is paid for their release or it becomes apparent, after several days, that a ransom will not be paid.

They kept us prisoner until we got some money from our friends or relatives in Ethiopia. If money sent from our friends or relatives we would be released and be free if not they would beat us to death. Our group was 35 at first but three of our friends died due to the beating.

Ethiopian male migrant

Abdul Kawi men captured them on the coast, separating the women from the men. If you tried to escape from their capture they gunned you down. After being beaten for two days they released me. I walked away and reached Mukha.

Ethiopian male migrant

In the coastal area we were caught by the Yemeni gangster named AbduKawe who has got many Oromo employees. These employees beat us and kept us in the desert area a couple of km from the shore. We kept prisoners by the gangsters we could be released only if we gave them enough money sent from our relatives or friends if we gave them the money they could release us and could go anywhere we want. If not they would beat us to death.

Ethiopian male from Jimma, 33, married with 2 children

⁷⁶ Respondents were often vague about where they had landed on the Yemen coast so it is unknown where exactly migrants were captured. However, based on this research, it seems that it is a widespread practice. Respondents in all research locations reported hostage taking. The interviews with those reporting hostage taking were conducted by different members of the research team, some of whom had little contact with each other during the research process, so they collected this information independently.

⁷⁷ Information from kidnap victims recounted to an aid worker

The level of brutality is shocking. Common forms of torture include: severe beatings so that victims suffer multiple fractures and limbs are damaged to the extent that they will never heal properly without specialist medical treatment; dripping melted plastic onto skin or stubbing out cigarettes on skin; gouging out eyes; pulling out teeth; firing bullets through limbs; and hammering nails through hands and feet⁷⁸.

Concerning myself, I had nobody who could send me money for my release so I was beaten severely and my hand nailed to the ground. After two months of suffering I was thrown to the desert when they realized I had no money.

Ethiopian man, 22, from Gaffan, Chagni District

In order to be released from the hold we have to pay some money from relatives or from friends. If we go the money automatically we would be released and not beaten to death. I had no one to send me some money for my release because I sold my only ox to come to Yemen. I had nothing to pay so I was severely injured by the beating. I was in their hold for more than two months.

Oromo male from Bale, formerly a farmer

Some hostages are shot dead, either because they are protesting or trying to escape, or the hostage

takers want to make an example of one of the hostages to control the others. Nevertheless escape is not uncommon. It is not hard to imagine that, acting with almost complete impunity and knowing that fresh migrants arrive every day along the coast, the smugglers may become careless about guarding their victims.

They take to by car in small room and they beat me and my friends. We were seven. After that they came at night to take two my friends and they killed them. When we saw this we broke the door down and we escaped before anybody saw us. We got to Djibouti by running, walking and sometimes by car.

Ethiopian male from Harari, Oromia region

A 15 year old Ethiopian boy who travelled alone to Yemen, arriving in February 2012, thought he might have landed at Mukha on the Red Sea coast. He said:

I was captured by Abd al-Qawi's gang. They tied a rope round my legs and hung me upside down and beat me almost to death for three days. I was made to watch an Ethiopian woman being raped and an Ethiopian baby about one year old being killed.

Ethiopian boy interviewed

⁷⁸ These tortures were mentioned by many respondents. One group of Ethiopian men said that some male hostages had their penises cut off.



Image: Criminals increasingly intercept and abduct migrants before agency monitors or UNHCR can assist them. Being thrown into waiting trucks is the start of a brutal kidnapping for many Ethiopians.
Credit: Espen Rasmussen/Panos

Another victim recounted his experience from 2012:

I travelled on a boat with around 35 people from Djibouti to Yemen....At the Yemen coast, I don't know exactly where, we were captured by a criminal gang led by Abd al-Qawi of Yemenis and Ethiopians. The gang demanded 800 Saudi Riyal [215 USD] from us or our families. Those who said that they could not pay were beaten and tortured. We did not sleep for three days because every time someone started to sleep they were woken up. Three people were shot in their feet and one person was shot in the eye and blinded. One person protested and tried to stop the shooting but he was shot in the stomach and died. After three days I was released with seven other people including the injured. We managed to travel to Sana'a...We don't know what happened to the others who were captured with us: we never heard from them again.

Ethiopian man, 40, from Wollo

These examples are typical of the information provided by numerous respondents. Some respondents claim that they were unable to raise any money for their ransom but, despite being threatened with death unless payment was made, they were released after several days. It is assumed that the hostage takers realize that the chances of making any money from certain individuals are low and that the cost of keeping them outweighs the possible benefits, particularly if the place where the hostages are being kept is overcrowded and the space is needed for new arrivals. The figure demanded for ransom ranges between 100 to 300 USD.⁷⁹ the money is transferred using the traditional *hawala* system, but the mobile phone is always the means of communication.⁸⁰ The mobile phone that enables vital communication between relatives and the migrant, as well as his/her potential employer abroad and his/her broker/smuggler, becomes the tool used by the criminals for extortion and cruelty. Without mobile telephones, the current mode of kidnapping and violence could not function.

The length of detention by gangs, reported by respondents, varies from a few days to months. In one case, a 16 year old girl from Wollo who had been travelling with her cousin reported that she had been held by a gang for 6 months and raped multiple times by different gang members:

I was forcefully disvirgined [sic] by one of the gangster and he gave me to the others to rape me and I fainted and I didn't know how many gangsters made use of me. Their action was brutal and inhuman. As a result of these I became sick for 15 days and when I recovered again they use to rape me and again make use of me as they wanted. I cried and wept but nobody was going to help me. After 6 months of sexual harassment I managed to escape from the gangster and fled to a main street.

Wollo girl, 16

The level of brutality is traumatic for the victims. However, what they also seem to find very difficult to accept is that it is Ethiopians who are performing the torture. Furthermore, the hostage taking and torture are organized so that the violence is perpetrated by Ethiopians from the same ethnic group as the victims. This means that once released, the migrants are wary of trusting anyone. Some migrants are taken hostage more than once, finding that they are released by one gang only to be captured by another. Respondents referred to the Ethiopians working in the hostage gangs as 'animals' and 'devils' and one Ethiopian said, 'It is an evil thing they are doing to us. These Ethiopians are not human.'

There is a clear escalation of brutality. The experience of those captured by hostage takers a few years ago does not seem to compare with the levels of violence experienced by those taken hostage in the last 18 months. Respondents who arrived in Yemen up to six or seven years ago say that, though they were stopped and beaten, and if they had money or valuables these were taken, they were otherwise free to go. The gangs or individuals appear to have been Yemeni and do not seem to have been highly organized, nor did they make demands that hostages telephone friends and family to pay ransoms. Some may have been detained for a few days, but the experience does not seem comparable to those reported from 2011 and 2012.

I travelled from Dire Dawa to Somalia (then) Yemen... At that time it was possible to go out from your country to Yemen without being beaten...People would even help you but not now.

Ethiopian female, living in Basateen, who came to Yemen in 2001

After being released or escaping, the migrants continue their journey, although often not without risk of fresh encounters with other gangs. Some succeed in finding work in Yemen while others cross the border to Saudi. Those who are unsuccessful become stuck in northern Yemen and claim that they want to return to Ethiopia. Although many Ethiopians expressed a wish to return to Ethiopia in the long term, once they had made enough money, the desire to return was

⁷⁹ This figure may seem low in contrast to the ransoms demanded from migrants abducted by the criminal gangs operating in the Sinai peninsula in Egypt, which is in the thousands of dollars. It may be that as these criminal networks in Yemen become increasingly sophisticated and complex, the ransom demanded will increase.

⁸⁰ System for transferring money through brokers which relies on honour and trust. It does not use banks and there is no external regulation.

particularly strong among the Ethiopian population in Haradh. This could be because these people, despite their efforts to travel to Yemen and their multiple attempts to cross into Saudi Arabia irregularly, had failed. Their experience of being taken hostage reinforced these feelings. Now, stranded in Haradh with no real income generating opportunities, limited support available from the assistance community, no money to pay to be smuggled to Saudi Arabia, and physically and mentally weakened by their experiences, they had little choice or hope for the future but to return home.

Although respondents included a few women who had been taken hostage, few women who arrive on the shore are seen again. As mentioned earlier, these severe rights violations – apparently amounting to trafficking in many cases - deserve far wider attention. The male relatives of the women do not know where they are and, although there is speculation about what happens to them, it was not possible to verify their fate. During their detention, men report being forced to watch their female relatives being raped in front of them.

They beat me and they put fire on my leg...about my sister they beat her as well and they make all things they want with her. That means they raped her and they force me to watch as they rape her.

Ethiopian male from Harer

As mentioned, the type of hostage taking practiced by the Abd al-Qawi gangs appears to be a relatively new phenomenon, so it is possible that little information about the dangers facing migrants on arrival in Yemen has reached Ethiopia. However, as this report highlights, there were also scattered reports of extortion and abuse from previous years. Even if victims have told family and friends what happened, this information may not be shared widely or beyond the immediate community. As the majority of Ethiopians live in small and remote rural communities, it may take a long time for information about hostage taking in Yemen to be disseminated. At the same time it seems to contradict the reality of mobile phone communication, where information can be transmitted rapidly with virtually no time lag. This issue deserves closer analysis, perhaps, if we are to understand why Ethiopians continue to arrive on Yemen's shores despite the high chance of being intercepted by criminal gangs.

The onward journey

Once in Yemen, most migrants aim to go to Saudi Arabia: some travel independently, others with the help of smugglers. It is known that the Saudi border patrols are less effective during Ramadan so many Ethiopians appear to plan their border crossing then. More importantly, recently Ramadan has often coincided with the end of two or three months (June to August) of rough sea conditions that restrict the normal flow of smugglers' boats. By the end of the bad weather the backlog of migrants causes a surge, accounting for the annual rise in new arrivals in late August, September and October. In the meantime and during the rough seas period, a cohort of Ethiopians working on qat farms or other work may have bided their time, waiting for Ramadan to start before attempting to slip into Saudi⁸¹. This could account for the fact that many try to pass into Saudi Arabia at the same time of low numbers of new arrivals along the coast.

Women who try to cross the border on foot are at high risk of being raped. Others who pay for help from smugglers can cross the border in a car wearing an 'abaya and niqab so that they pass as Saudi women. It is reported that some Ethiopian women carry condoms, knowing there is a risk of being raped and hoping that they can persuade their attacker to use a condom. According to respondents, smugglers are highly organized and have contacts in the Saudi Arabian and Yemeni border controls who are bribed to allow certain vehicles and individuals to pass unhindered between the two countries. One Yemeni border guard claims to be making 20,000 USD a month from facilitating irregular migration between Yemen and Saudi.⁸²

In the weeks before Ramadan, the Saudi authorities increase their effort to capture and deport irregular immigrants. In the past, the authorities deported immigrants directly to their home countries. Now, they 'drop' the immigrants in the desert several kilometres from the border with Yemen, who then have to travel the remaining distance without food or water. A number of respondents had been forced out of Saudi Arabia in this way and reported that they had seen the dead bodies of hundreds of immigrants who had been trying to leave Saudi Arabia.

81 Previous start dates of the month of Ramadan: 2012 – mid July, 2011- end July, 2010- mid August, 2009 – end August, 2008 – mid September, 2007 - end September, 2006 – mid November.

82 Gulf News, 2012.

They say two or three women die in every journey, by illness and thirst. Half of them are seriously raped. After they came back from the Saudi border the Red Cross treated them and sent them to the IOM camp.

Ethiopian female interviewee

Yemenis can re-enter their country without difficulty, even though they originally left irregularly. A Yemeni border official reported that 1,200 Yemenis are returned from Saudi Arabia every week. For Ethiopians and other nationalities it is more difficult, because they need to enter Yemen irregularly, but if they approach the border after midnight and pay 100 SAR (25 USD) the Yemeni border guards will allow them to enter. Those who do not have money can hand over valuables, such as watches and jewellery, and reportedly it is common for women to be allowed to cross the border in exchange for sex.

Those who failed to get into Saudi Arabia are left stranded on the Yemeni side of the border in places such as Haradh and Sa'ada. After they have made three or four attempts to cross the border, they have no money left. They have also usually experienced violence from hostage takers so are physically and mentally weakened, and often find themselves begging to survive. This is because there are few income generating opportunities in the border area and also, by this stage, because they are frightened of experiencing more violence and dare not travel far from centres of urban population in search of work.

If migrants are caught in Saudi Arabia irregularly, many find themselves in Jizan prison, close to the border with Yemen. Respondents report appalling conditions in prison - poor sanitation, little food and water, no access to medical care and beatings by the prison guards.⁸³ In one testimony a 16 year old boy spent 87 days in detention in different Saudi locations:

I found a job in a farm for 400 SAR [USD 100]. I worked 25 days then the owner of the farm delivered me to the police and they took me to jail for 5 days, my cell was a bathroom, then they moved all prisoners to another jail where I stayed 34 days. They beaten us and treated us worse than animals. Even for requests of food they were not answering. One day one of the prisoners in my cell died, the wardens took him and just threw him out of the prison like a bag of rubbish. I was released on Yemeni border and I went to Haradh in Yemen where I stayed 3 days, but I decided to go back to Saudi Arabia. I walked for 3 days and arrived,

⁸³ Information confirmed by staff from the international community and Human Rights Watch (2007) www.hrw.org/news/2007/04/26/saudi-arabia-new-video-confirms-torture-prison (accessed 14 May 2012)

with other 2 people to a place called KhamisMshait but unfortunately we were arrested again by police, I spent in jail 13 days exposed to physical assaults and hunger. I was transferred again to Jizan prison where I spent 33 days, at the end of which I was released on the Yemeni border and I went again to Haradh.

Ethiopian boy, 16, later returned to Ethiopia

Once released, the migrants are forced to make their way to Yemeni border. At this stage, they are still vulnerable to raids and assaults from gangs:

During our walk to Harad we were stopped by a group of armed men who took the 3 women who were expelled from Saudi Arabia with us, I was so tired and sick that I was not able to think about what was going on around me.

Ethiopian boy, interviewed in Haradh early 2012

Ethiopians also travel to Saudi Arabia regularly, direct from Ethiopia, having arranged work there through agencies and personal contacts. Once in the country, many Ethiopians run away from their employers to work for themselves as they can earn more this way. Ethiopians in Yemen report that Ethiopians in Saudi Arabia engage in illegal activities because these are profitable. Illegal activities include supplying drugs and alcohol, acting as smugglers and brokers to transport other migrants in and out of the country, and thievery.

From the east of Yemen, migrants attempt to cross into Oman to access the Gulf. As the area is desert, some migrants die of dehydration and exposure during the journey. Migrants have heard that the Oman authorities imprison any irregular immigrants who are caught, so they avoid contact with Omanis when they are travelling through the country. Lack of security meant that research in the east of Yemen was limited to Mukalla. This was the only place where research was conducted that the respondents mentioned knowing people who had entered Oman over the land border. Based on research findings, it seems that very few migrants try to cross through Oman to the Gulf, but further research is needed to confirm this.

Women and children

As women have more opportunities to enter Yemen regularly through the airport, the majority of Ethiopians embarking on the overland route to Yemen, followed by a sea crossing, tend to be men. Some women do make the sea crossing, accompanying brothers and husbands, while others make the journey unaccompanied by a male relative. An earlier section of this report detailed the high vulnerability of women who entered as irregular maritime migrants to robbers, rapists, abductors and even possible traffickers. In

an effort to guard their own safety, some women seek protection from a male Ethiopian migrant and may propose marriage to him for the duration of the journey. Testimonies also suggest, however, that travelling as someone's wife, sister or cousin appears to be irrelevant to those who want to abduct and/or rape female migrants. Women try to choose men they feel they can trust and, although intended as a temporary measure, some of these marriages endure, particularly if the woman becomes pregnant. In some cases women are used as modern slaves (either as 'wives' or cleaners or both) and thereby become victims of overt trafficking:

The women when they come by sea the Yemeni men catch them when they arrive and sometime they sell them or they make them become like their wives or cleaner for them without salary. Also, when they sell women that they catch ...these Ethiopian women have to work without salary.

Ethiopian female in Yemen since 1997

After we arrived in Yemen [shore] they caught me and Abdul Kawei's groups took me to a small room...they beat me like a snake. These people are very dangerous people. They catch our women and they rape them...One woman they make relations with four men and then they sold her to Yemenis... She had to work without salary.

Ethiopian male's testimony from 2012

In another vivid example of exploitation and sexual violence, a woman from Oromo explained how she was only released from her enslavement when her abusers made her pregnant:

They gave me to a Yemeni family and I was forced to work without any pay. When the woman of the house was angry with me she sent her security guard to my room and he raped me. He was sent to do this again and again until after a few months my menstruation stopped [and she became pregnant]. When I told them they said I had not got it from them and then they let me go.

Ethiopian Oromo woman

Ethiopian women reported being raped in Djibouti, Somalia and Yemen, mainly by the local population, although one respondent said that she was raped by an Ethiopian man on the beach after they had both arrived in Yemen on the same boat.

One of the immigrants raped me. He [played upon me] abused me as he wished and disappeared when it was dawn. Being raped and not sleeping the whole night because of this cruel immigrant, I didn't have much strength so I only walked a little and when I got to the main road I asked for a lift.

Oromo woman with child from Bale, eastern Ethiopia

The pregnancies that result from consensual relationships and from rapes place the women in danger. They have little or no access to medical help and, if the baby is born alive and healthy, it is difficult for them to work or travel while looking after a baby. Women who are able to secure jobs hide their babies or leave them unattended while they are at work. Although none of the respondents reported any accidents to their babies while they were unattended, this situation is obviously undesirable. Some women stated that it was almost impossible to find work if they admitted to having a young child. Women supported by a husband or friends were able to cope, but without such support networks and no access to work, they have no means to support themselves and their children.

In some cases, the difficulties in working and bringing up a child in Yemen result in single mothers and couples arranging for their children to be returned to Ethiopia to live with relatives. It may be that some children are returned to Ethiopia by one or both of their parents, but no interviews were conducted with respondents who said they had done this. Instead respondents reported that they arranged for others, regularly and irregularly, to take their children to Ethiopia. Probably the safest way for children to travel to Ethiopia regularly is with the help of the Ethiopian community. Respondents explained that they would 'send' their children to the Ethiopian community in Sana'a. Respondents did not provide details about how this is done but, presumably, the Ethiopian Community arranges *laissez passer* documents for the child through the Ethiopian Embassy and then a flight from Sana'a to Ethiopia. Other parents reported that they had handed their young children over to friends who smuggled them by sea and then land into Yemen and delivered them to relatives. Although parents, single mothers in particular, may feel it necessary to send their children to Ethiopia to be cared for by relatives, some see it as a choice they make for the future of their children. Ethiopians typically want their children to be raised as Ethiopians, speaking an Ethiopian language and attending school in Ethiopia. They regard the lifestyle and education in Ethiopia as superior to that of Yemen and want their children to be Ethiopian rather than Yemeni. Therefore, some Ethiopian migrants see their decision to send their children to Ethiopia as positive and not a decision they have been forced to make for practical reasons. Few migrants revealed how their children had travelled to Ethiopia, but many reported that one or more of their children was living with relatives in Ethiopia, and none reported any deaths or injuries to their children as a result of the journey.

Stranded and disappointed

Although many Ethiopians can be found as diaspora in different parts of the world - apparently successful in their new lives, with some well integrated into the host community and others earning a high income – many others find themselves trapped in a limbo of uncertainty, vulnerability and physical insecurity. Agencies working in the Horn and Yemen normally have minimal and cursory contact with Ethiopian migrants who move on to find work in cities or in the interior of Yemen, or those who go through to Saudi Arabia, the Middle East and/or Europe. Instead, agencies and civil society groups (as well as the researchers for this study) have contact with those migrants who are unlucky, unsuccessful, who have been violated or deceived, detained or deported, or for any other reason remain stranded in Yemen in various states of desperation and destitution.

Haradh is a northern Yemeni city bordering Saudi Arabia where thousands of Ethiopian migrants can be found. Haradh acts as a crossroads for smugglers and migrants, with migrants coming north from the southern coasts of Yemen hoping to cross into Saudi Arabia and others returning from Saudi in order to get papers in Yemen to return to Ethiopia. Others are in Haradh as a result of being deported from Saudi Arabia, and either have no resources to

move elsewhere or are regrouping in order to cross again. As described earlier, some migrants claim to have attempted irregular entry into Saudi Arabia on multiple occasions. Some are captured in the desert and immediately returned (after detention) to Haradh border area, while others are caught as undocumented irregular migrants in the farms and cities of Saudi Arabia and deported to the Yemen border.

The Saudi police ordered me to stop but I refused and ran, then the police take me down with a bullet. Then they return me to the Haradh border.

Ethiopian male, discussing his attempt to re-enter Saudi Arabia after 4 years there as an irregular migrant

Before coming to Aden I worked in Rada' in the qat farm for two months. After two months I paid 35,000 Yemeni Riyal (\$162) to the agent to take me to Saudi border. At the border the agent ran off but I was caught by the Saudi guards. The Saudis returned me back to Yemen and leave me in the desert.

Ethiopian male, now washing cars and sleeping in the streets of Aden

The lure and reality of economic opportunities in Saudi Arabia are sufficiently strong for Ethiopian migrants (and tens of thousands of Yemenis, Somalis and other nationalities) to repeatedly attempt to



Image: Many thousands of stranded Ethiopian migrants end up homeless, hungry and with few options on the streets of Haradh, near the Saudi border. Even Yemenis internal migrants often sleep rough as in this photo from Tai'zz. Credit: Abbie Trayler-Smith/Panos

enter the Gulf States irregularly. Some in Haradh seeking medical help from IOM are migrants who have escaped or survived kidnapping, rape, torture or are elderly or unaccompanied minors. Reports from Haradh in 2012 suggested that as many as 12,000 predominantly Ethiopian migrants, many in a desperate state, were sleeping rough in the streets and surviving by begging and foraging through dustbins. Agencies trying to assist the most vulnerable have limited capacity to offer medical assistance or food aid, shelter and assisted voluntary return⁸⁴ in comparison to the rising number of 'stranded' and destitute in Haradh, and to a lesser degree in Aden and Sana'a.

If no money we beg the used food from a hotel. Sometimes these hotel workers demand some money to give [us] the used food which is going to be thrown to the garbage.

Ethiopian male

There are multiple and repeated hazards facing the Ethiopian migrant. Apart from their exposure to criminality and rights abuses from the local community and state officials, they live constantly with the threat of possible exposure. Both in Yemen and Saudi Arabia, they can be detected, detained and deported at any time. This may be accompanied by violence from officials as well as robbery. Being 'shaken down' for small immediate payments and harassed by police and other officials is also a common experience.

Even after giving huge amounts of money to go to Saudi, these migrants are captured by Yemeni police at the border and beaten and tortured and forced to give all the money in their pockets, and then they are put behind bars.

Ethiopian migrant of 30 years in Yemen

Not surprisingly, some migrants carry deep physical and psychological wounds. Many are left profoundly traumatized by their ordeals and disoriented by their ongoing insecurity. A large number of those interviewed combined their sense of bitter disappointment with a plea to be helped to return to Ethiopia.

I am illegal in the country. So I live in a critical condition with no documentation at hand. I have suffered enough and now I want to return to Ethiopia. I want any relevant bodies – Red Cross, NGO or

government to take me back to my homeland – Ethiopia and if I return [to Ethiopia] I hope I can work hard and change my life.

Ethiopian male, Ade

All patients who are in the Yemeni Red Crescent [medical treatment centre in Haradh] including myself want to go back to Ethiopia. Because they already see how it's impossible to cross the border.

Ethiopian male from Tigray, victim of being shot by Saudi border guards

I came here to get some money and support me and my family. But what I got is sexual harassment and physical and mental sickness... I want any relevant bodies, UNHCR, NGO or governmental to take me back home.

Young Ethiopian girl, victim of gang rape

An added source of pain among many respondents was the gulf between their present circumstances and their optimistic expectations at the beginning of their journey:

I come for a better life but what I got is the worst – living in the street and eating used food.

Ethiopian male, Aden

When I think about my experience I feel a deep sorrow for what I went through, I feel a deep sorrow for my friend who died in my hands in the desert, I feel disturbed when I cannot sleep at night because I have in mind his image or the image of the dead girl in the desert. I feel perturbed when I think about what I have seen in Abdul Alqawi place, about torture and humiliation of poor people, about the attitudes of Abdul Alqawi men toward us and their absolute readiness to torture and even kill without any remorse or hesitation. I feel anxious about each moment in which I thought that I was going to lose my life. I feel disturbed when I think that there are many boys like me who are planning to do the same convinced that they will have a better life out of their country.

Ethiopian boy, 15, Haradh, later assisted by IOM to return

Working in Yemen

Some Ethiopian migrants come to Yemen with the intention of staying and working in the country for a number of years, while others plan to stay for a few months to earn enough money to go to Saudi Arabia or elsewhere. Although it is thought that there are significant levels of human trafficking and forced labour in Yemen and Saudi Arabia, no Ethiopian who had been trafficked or enslaved was interviewed as part of this research. IOM has received telephone calls from Ethiopians in Rada' claiming that they were working as slaves on the qat farms. Respondents

⁸⁴ As previously mentioned IOM has been actively offering assisted voluntary return to Ethiopia to as many migrants as it can afford to, budget permitting. In 2011/12 up to 9,000 Ethiopian migrants were taken home by IOM.

working on the qat farms claimed to be earning around 150 USD a month and had not heard that Ethiopians were being used in the area as forced labour. However, if there were migrants being used as forced labour, they would be kept in isolation from others and would be difficult to access for an interview. It is thought that women are trafficked to be used as domestic labour without pay in Yemen and in Saudi Arabia, and there has been media coverage and reports by human rights organizations about Ethiopian women in various Arab countries working as slave labour. Respondents suspected that the women who were taken hostage at the border were trafficked to Saudi Arabia, but it was not possible to verify this information. There were also rumours among the Ethiopians that some were trafficked and used for body parts.

Most Ethiopian women in Yemen work as cleaners in domestic homes or companies and are paid between 100 USD and 250 USD a month. While this may be comparatively good, relative to opportunities and pay levels in Ethiopia, and may allow them to send occasional remittances home, migrants are often forced to live in hard and unsavoury conditions, accepting long working hours and abusive treatment from their employers.

When I arrive here another broker took me from airport and he gave me for Yemen family for work. I stay with them for two years by force because they abuse me and they don't treat me like human. I was always working...actually when I finished two years they said they would send me to Ethiopia. But when I finished two years they refused to send me Ethiopia. ... so I ran away.

Ethiopian female, 25, regular migrant through a labour agency

Some women work as office assistants and others in cafes and restaurants. In Sana'a there are numerous Ethiopian restaurants and coffee shops, owned by Ethiopians and employing Ethiopian staff. Ethiopian women also find employment in the more westernized restaurants frequented by expatriates and wealthier Yemenis, although many are not so lucky:

Nobody could employ me because of my children... Now I only earn money by collecting plastic bottles from the garbage and selling them.

Ethiopian female with two children, living in Yemen since 1973 and abandoned by her Yemeni husband

While many are able to survive in these circumstances, they may still struggle to escape the poverty trap and continued insecurity. After years of domestic labour or farm work, migrants may return

to Ethiopia with almost no savings and little to show for their years abroad. Of course for others the story may be much more positive, although few Ethiopians will have made their 'fortune' (however big or small) in Yemen itself. As one Ethiopian female migrant put it, speaking from several years in Yemen, 'In Yemen you can live, but you can't change your life.'

Employment opportunities for Ethiopian men are even more limited. Those who are educated and regular can find work with oil companies and other international organizations. There are also opportunities for work in local factories, and as guards and drivers for businesses, embassies and NGOs. Men work as cleaners for companies and in public buildings such as hospitals, but they would not be employed to clean in a domestic home. In rural areas a few look after animals and, on the coast, some are involved in fishing. For uneducated Ethiopian men, the main form of employment is on the qat farms.

Men also work as day labourers, either on the qat farms or in construction. Unlike Somalis and Yemenis, because Ethiopians are usually in the country irregularly, they are less likely to wait at recruitment points in urban centres in case they are arrested, although in rural areas they will wait with the other day labourers. As a form of protection for employers and Ethiopian employees, the potential employers go to local restaurants and coffee shops where they know the staff to see whether any day labourers are available. This personal connection provides some security for those involved and is a less public process than recruiting labourers where they gather on the streets.

Those who fail to find employment wait in the traffic to clean cars at junctions, collect rubbish for recycling or beg. Migrants who find themselves in this group, eking a living from irregular employment, often live on the street and become ill and weak with no access to medical care. Some international NGOs and local organisations offer support for migrants and refugees in urban settings. Some of their projects include income generation and vocational training initiatives, but few are assisted through these opportunities. Clearly, too it is problematic for aid agencies to justify assistance to undocumented migrants (most Ethiopians) as opposed to urban refugees (Somalis).

Ethiopian respondents acknowledge that Ethiopian women are involved in prostitution. Some of the women who were interviewed admitted that they supplement their income, usually from cleaning, by

accepting money for sex. They suggested that they slept only with men they knew and who would pay a good price so they could ensure their own safety and a payment that would be enough to make it worthwhile. Another way to identify 'safe' and high paying clients is in the more up market clubs and restaurants, and using existing contacts to provide introductions to potential clients. Respondents **suggested that the Ethiopian women who engage in prostitution are more likely to be settled in Yemen in a regular capacity, rather than being in the country irregularly and temporarily.** This is because to go to a hotel or to pass through checkpoints easily, it is necessary to show some form of Yemeni issued identity card. Therefore, Ethiopian women who work as prostitutes are more likely to be found in Sana'a or Aden than places that act as transit points⁸⁵.

Regular or irregular?

The legality of migration and individual migrants can be difficult to determine. Corruption among the authorities in Ethiopia, Yemen and Saudi Arabia, limited government control in Yemen, lack of awareness and understanding of the law among migrants, and the possibility of moving from regular to irregular and back again, by choice or force, creates a confusing picture. This ambiguity and the absence of regulation or law and order are used by all migrants, at some point, to their own advantage - although of course, such ambiguity also makes them vulnerable. The financial resources migrants have at their disposal determine the extent to which they can manipulate the situation themselves or are manipulated by it. For example, the majority of Ethiopians are able to enter the country irregularly and many pay smugglers who bribe officials at checkpoints and borders. In other cases, there is a less clear distinction between regularity and irregularity, as one respondent explained:

Yemen has stopped issuing visas to Ethiopian men. For this reason a lot of Ethiopian men travel to Yemen illegally by sea. However, Ethiopian men in Ethiopia can buy a visa to Yemen illegally. Therefore, if an Ethiopian man arrives at Sana'a airport, officials know that the visa, although legal, has been purchased illegally so the man is arrested but he can buy his freedom for 200 USD, leave the airport and enter Yemen.

Long term Ethiopian migrant living in Sana'a

Migrants who enter the country regularly sometimes overstay their visa or fail to renew their residence visa. This may be because they are out of work at the time and cannot afford the fees, or because the bureaucratic system can be difficult to navigate. However, payments to the right official can circumvent these problems. One Ethiopian reported that he pays 100 USD a month to a Yemeni official so that he can remain in the country irregularly.

One of the most notable exploitation by migrants of official corruption and the possibility of moving between regularity and irregularity is the practice of Ethiopians who enter Saudi Arabia legally, then run away from their employers and enter Yemen irregularly. At this point they apply for documentation to become regular in Yemen and return to Ethiopia legally. They do this so they can return to Saudi Arabia in the future without any problems or records to connect them with their previous time in the country. The process is complex and appears to be expensive, so is likely to be practiced only by the group of migrants with the financial resources and knowledge to do so. A group of 13 Ethiopian men and women from the Tigray region who had been working in Saudi Arabia for several years explained how the process worked:

We entered Saudi legally from Ethiopia. It was all arranged before we left. We went to jobs in Saudi as housemaids and day labourers. Most of us worked for our sponsors for six months to a year and then we ran away. This means that we were then illegal in Saudi. We could have gone to the authorities and left from Saudi to Ethiopia but they would have taken our eye and finger prints which means that we could not return to Saudi for work. We have made money and we want to return to Saudi so we paid a broker to smuggle us across the border to Yemen. They took us from our houses in Jeddah by car to Jizan near the Yemeni border. We stayed in Jizan until the smugglers had contacted the Saudi guards at the border to make sure that we could pass the checkpoints without any problems. We waited a week until the 'right' guards were patrolling the border. The smugglers came in a Toyota pickup and all the women went inside the car and the men in the back. We were afraid that we would be caught by the Saudi or the Yemeni guards but they knew we were coming and they recognized the car. We crossed the border without any problems. The driver took us to Haradh and introduced us to another man. He took us to a house, gave us food and water and sim cards. We stayed at the house for three days and then were taken from Haradh to Sana'a. We were worried about all the checkpoints but the driver paid the guards money at each checkpoint and we completed our journey without any problems. We

⁸⁵ Attempts to conduct research among women who relied on prostitution for their livelihood had to be abandoned as interviews with known prostitutes were cancelled by the person suspected of being their pimp. For the safety of the respondents and the research team it was decided not to pursue this line of research. However, further research is needed to understand the profile of and risks to Ethiopian women involved in prostitution.

paid 5,000 Saudi Riyal [1,300 USD], half before we left and half on arrival. The Ethiopian Community in Sana'a will help us to get to Ethiopia legally with laissez passer documents that can be issued through the Ethiopian Embassy. In Ethiopia, we will change our names and get new passports in those names. Then we will return to Saudi legally with our new names and passports and it will be as if we are entering Saudi for the first time.

Quote from group interview of Ethiopian migrants

Sources of support

Perhaps because Ethiopians are suspicious of the authorities, they are reluctant to form organizations. There are no real community based organizations or official networks which Ethiopian migrants in Yemen can access, although people draw on the informal support networks of family and friends. On Thursdays, the first day of the weekend, many Ethiopians gather with family and friends to socialize. Members of the international community believe that there is financial support to Ethiopians in Yemen from diasporas in North America and Europe.

Religious structures can also play a limited support role for some Ethiopians in the country. The Orthodox Church for Ethiopians and Eritreans in Sana'a⁸⁶ claims to provide some support for those in financial need, as well as day care for children of working parents and additional schooling at the weekend. For adults there are social events and Bible study classes. Ethiopian Muslims report that as they attend Yemeni mosques, they do not have the same formal opportunities to socialize with other Ethiopians. As for those transiting Yemen or caught by criminal gangs on the coast – typically desperate and often in danger of their lives - even these limited levels of support are unavailable.

In Basateen (Aden) there is an Ethiopian Community organization that has no links with the Ethiopian Embassy or authorities, but also has no resources - so its ability to support Ethiopians is limited. The lack of Ethiopian organizations and representation is noted by the international community as a problem. There is no means to contact and access Ethiopian populations to assist them. In cases of disputes, such as the recent protests outside UNHCR in 2011 and 2012, staff argue that there was no effective means

of negotiation with the protestors because they had no representatives that were regarded as legitimate by the Ethiopians.

Despite the presence of various refugee or mixed migration-related activities by local and international NGOs, as well as United Nations agencies, specific support from the international community for Ethiopian migrants is limited. Due to overstretched resources and insecurity, organizations are operating on a skeleton staff and cannot easily access many parts of the country. Furthermore, Ethiopian migrants do not easily fall within the mandate of humanitarian organizations. IOM has been most active in trying to find solutions to the problems of stranded migrants and organising assisted return packages for over 9000 individuals in the last two years. It also has activities to track, fight and advocate against human trafficking and provide essential and emergency care to injured migrants. The Yemeni Red Crescent, Danish Refugee Council and UNHCR are notably active with local NGOs in the coast patrol and monitoring projects, as well as the reception centres offering immediate relief for newly arrived migrants and asylum seekers. They also contribute to the database that tracks new arrivals and registrations. Other agencies seek to assist migrants and refugees in different ways, according to their mandates, and are most visible and active in Kharaz, where most basic services (such as health, education, shelter, water, food and training) are provided to some level. It would be fair to say that the average Ethiopian migrant is unlikely to directly benefit from any assistance from an international or local NGO, except in the briefest of instances – for example, some water and biscuits on the road after they arrive.

There are perceptions among some migrants that international organizations such as UNHCR are corrupt or working on behalf of the Yemeni and Ethiopian authorities. Consequently, some Ethiopians migrants are suspicious of them. Relationships between the migrants and the international community have been further damaged by the protests outside UNHCR. Over a period of almost a year from mid-2011, Ethiopian refugees wanting third country resettlement staged a protest outside the agency's offices. The protests disrupted the work of UNHCR and caused problems among the neighbouring Yemeni population. It was a drawn-out protest that was an open manifestation of the frustrations and impotence refugees often feel when their cases remain unresolved. Initially the Yemeni police and different ministries tolerated the peaceful sit-ins, but later they were involved in the forced movement of refugees – with tear gas used at one stage. The protesters were subsequently offered either a one-off

⁸⁶ The Yemeni government has granted visas to Orthodox priests to come from Ethiopia to the Church in Sana'a. These are the only Ethiopian Orthodox priests in the country so, although there are Orthodox churches elsewhere, Ethiopians try to come to Sana'a for weddings and christenings.

payment, to be moved to Kharaz refugee camp or taken to the immigration centre in Sana'a.

Help from UNHCR is limited to asylum seekers and those with refugee status, not migrants in general. But while around a quarter of Ethiopian refugees are housed in Kharaz camp (numbering 1,094), their situation is also precarious. As it is located in a remote area away from urban centres, there are no real opportunities for work in the area. Respondents in the camp also reported tensions, insecurity and violence. For example, one woman reported that her house had been set alight, and another that she had been attacked by her ex-husband. Elsewhere, refugees do not necessarily fare any better. Although a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocol, there is no legal framework or official support in place to assist refugees in Yemen.⁸⁷ There is a policy of trying to settle refugees within Yemen in urban environments, but as work opportunities are limited and there are few sources of support, life is often difficult for them.

IOM provides assistance to Ethiopian migrants in the north of the country. As these services are overstretched, the majority do not have shelter and receive only one meal a day. Although IOM can accommodate only a small number of migrants in its centre, other migrants set up temporary shelters nearby because they are afraid to leave the vicinity. They believe that close to the international community, they are safe from attacks by criminal gangs and the problems caused by the general insecurity in the country. Many migrants are waiting to be returned to their country, but by mid-2012 IOM had exhausted the funds available for repatriation, although it continues to request support for this. May 2012 saw the last Assisted Voluntary Return (AVR) of 277 individuals, due to lack of funding - even though in the previous month 1,687 Ethiopians had registered for assisted voluntary return with IOM.

⁸⁷ UNHCR, 2012b

Beyond this, other organizations, including UNICEF, MSF, Intersos, the YRC and some local NGOs, are providing assistance to minors and those in need of medical care. It is thought that 90 per cent of Ethiopians in Haradh have been physically abused. Many migrants are traumatised by their experiences, but it is possible to help only a few of these people.

One migrant returning from Saudi Arabia had totally lost his mind, he couldn't control his urine, he couldn't stand or walk by himself, he was just total out of his mind. Others had some similar problems like skin infections.... He said it started when he was on the Saudi border and began to see blood in his urine. He was detained for some 15 days in a Saudi prison before they threw him back to Haradh.

Ethiopian male in Haradh

In Yemen I suffered a lot. I was beaten and stabbed by a knife. Due to this torture I lost my senses. I have got blood pressure due to the anger and depression. I have a medical document which clearly shows my injuries.

Ethiopian male, 25, former student in Addis

Women who have been raped have to explain what has happened to them to medical personnel through male interpreters. The sick and wounded are anxious because medication is in short supply, staff overstretched and operations frequently delayed. Minors are housed in accommodation without proper sanitation and not enough food and water. All the humanitarian organizations are struggling to deal with the number of migrants and the many injured as a result of kidnapping, attacks and the rigors of the journey. Nevertheless, given the volume of migrants arriving at the coast and continued insecurity in Yemen, it is likely that the demand for assistance will only increase

Endnote: Future Trends

Given the context in Ethiopia and Yemen, it seems likely that Ethiopian migrants will continue to arrive in Yemen looking for work or opportunities to transit to Saudi Arabia or other destinations. Despite the rapid and much acclaimed economic growth taking place in Ethiopia, the prospects for educated and uneducated Ethiopians alike are poor. There is limited formal employment, low wages, and high inflation and taxes. In rural areas, farmers are becoming indebted and losing their land through government policies. The Oromo and Ogaden qualify for refugee status because of their political marginalization and persecution by the authorities, but the status of other Ethiopians who also experience marginalization as a result of their political views is unclear. The Ethiopian Government is becoming increasingly defensive towards any opposition and outlawing democratic activities such as freedom of speech, as well as closing down local human rights NGOs with more than 10 per cent external funding under the Charities and Societies Proclamation Law of 2009. This legislation allows government surveillance of, and interference in, the operation and management of civil society organisations.

Historical ties between Yemen and Ethiopia, and Yemen's proximity to Saudi Arabia and other potential destination countries, make Yemen an attractive final destination or transit country. The widespread insecurity and lack of rule of law mean that irregular access to Yemen has become easier since the beginning of 2011. This has been exploited by both smugglers and irregular migrants, and will continue to be so. Simultaneously, the instability has allowed the practice of taking migrants hostage for ransom to increase, to the extent that the majority of Ethiopian migrants arriving at the coast are now captured. As the authorities have limited or selective control in these areas, and the practice appears to be profitable, the hostage taking is likely to continue.

The Saudi Arabian authorities are becoming increasingly harsh in their treatment of irregular migrants. Because conditions in Yemen and Ethiopia are leading to a larger number of Ethiopians and other migrants trying to enter Saudi Arabia, the country will continue to forcibly deport migrants through its desert border with Yemen. This will likely increase the presence of migrants in Yemen, in particular its border region.

Image: Some Ethiopian migrants end up in Basateen, a migrant ghetto in Aden, with minimal services and few income opportunities.
Credit: Espen Rasmussen /Panos



The continuing flow of migrants (including asylum seekers) from Ethiopia, instability and increasing criminality in Yemen, and strict Saudi Arabia policies towards irregular migrants have increased pressure on humanitarian organizations providing assistance, protection and repatriation for migrants. However, these organizations are already overstretched and underfunded, and are dealing with other crises in Yemen such as large numbers of IDPs and endemic poverty among the general population. The increase in the number of irregular immigrants entering the country and the high numbers of those needing medical attention as a result of kidnap indicate that migrant-associated criminality is now well entrenched and will continue into the future. Unless the rule of law is applied and the apparent culture of impunity ends, there seems little to stop the increase of criminality against migrants - except the flow of migrants itself, which is unlikely to reduce in the short to medium term. The international community and the authorities of all countries involved need to assess the situation to determine what can be done to protect and assist the migrants. Lack of action could lead to further instability and increase criminal activities, as well as create tensions between the Yemeni and migrant populations over resources leading to accusations that the presence of large numbers of irregular migrants is contributing to insecurity. Yemen is already a fragile state and Ethiopians and other migrants already face significant dangers. Without measures to strengthen rule of law and address the needs of migrants, the situation for Yemenis, Ethiopian and other immigrants will only deteriorate.

Appendix 1: Survey Sample

Sample size	130 interviews (individual as well as group) were conducted across Yemen.
<i>Geographic distribution</i>	
<i>Aden</i>	
<i>Damt</i>	27 (2 male/female Ethiopian and 1 male Ethiopian/Yemeni group interviews)
<i>Dhamar</i>	1 (Ethiopian group interview - males)
<i>Haradh</i>	5 (2 Ethiopian/Yemeni and 1 Ethiopian group interviews – all male)
<i>Hudayda</i>	15 (1 Ethiopian male and 7 male/female Ethiopian group interviews)
<i>Kharaz</i>	5 (3 Ethiopian group interviews –males)
<i>Mokha</i>	15 (3 Ethiopian group interviews – 2 male/female and 1 male)
<i>Mukalla</i>	3
<i>Rada'</i>	8 (1 Ethiopian/Yemeni group interview - male)
<i>Sana'a</i>	5 (2 Ethiopian group interviews – male/female)
<i>Ta'izz</i>	41 (2 male Ethiopian and 7 male/female Ethiopian group interviews, 4 female Ethiopian/Yemeni and 3 male Ethiopian/Yemeni group interviews)
	6
<i>Gender</i>	Of the 90 individual interviews, 32 were with females (36%).
<i>Ethnicity and religion</i>	Of the 90 individual interviews, 46 were with Oromos, 16 were with Amharas and 3 with Tigrayians. 43 were with Muslims and 17 with Christians. Religion for the other 30 was not stated. The group interviews were mainly with a mixture of ethnicities (Amhara, Tigray and Oromo).
<i>Age</i>	Those interviewed were between 15 and 50 years in age, with the majority falling in the 20 – 35 years range.

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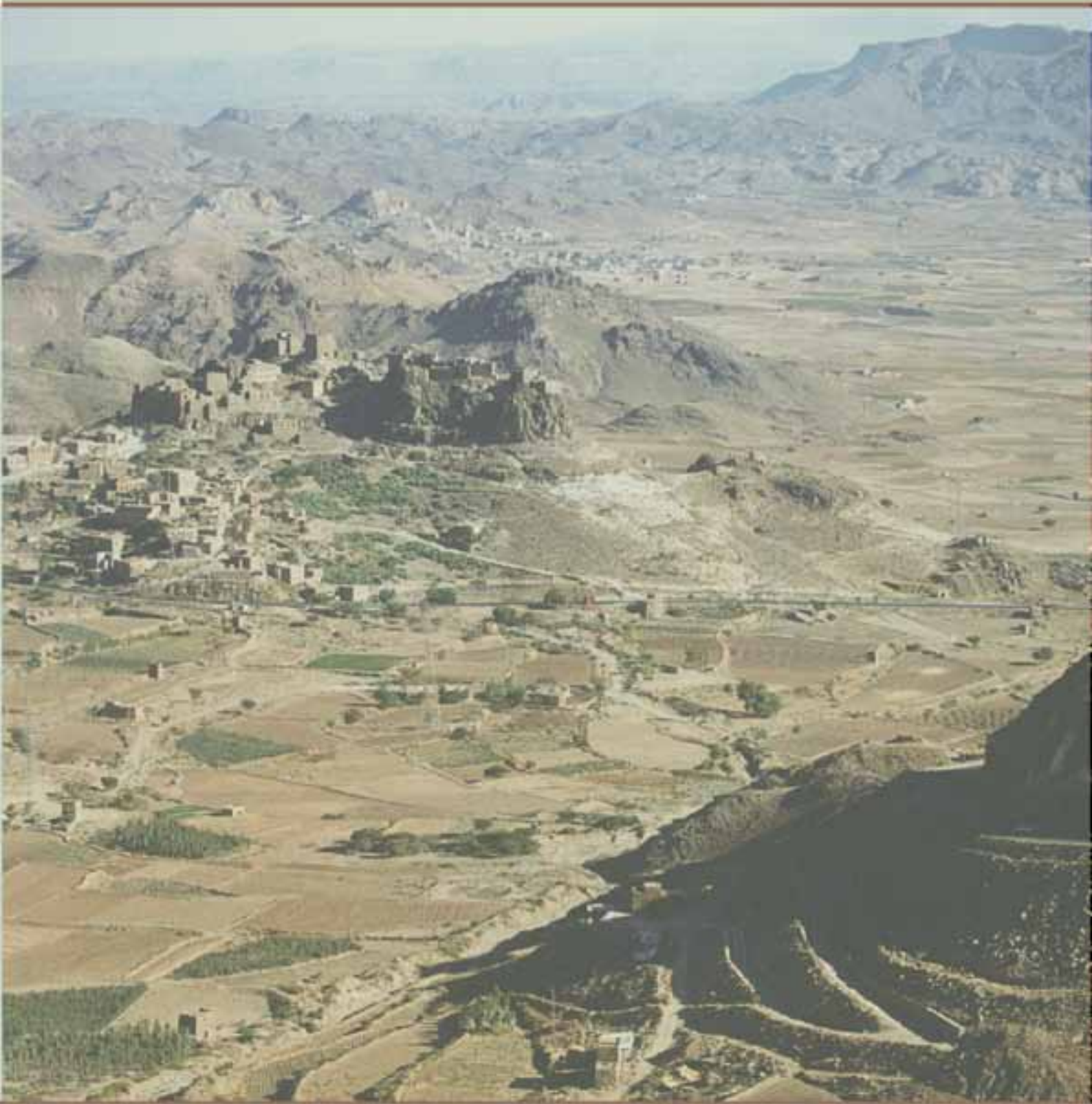
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Image: Yemen is a harsh journey for most Ethiopian migrants. Many make it, survive and go on to find better lives and opportunities beyond Yemen but many also fail.
Credit: C. Horwood



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