



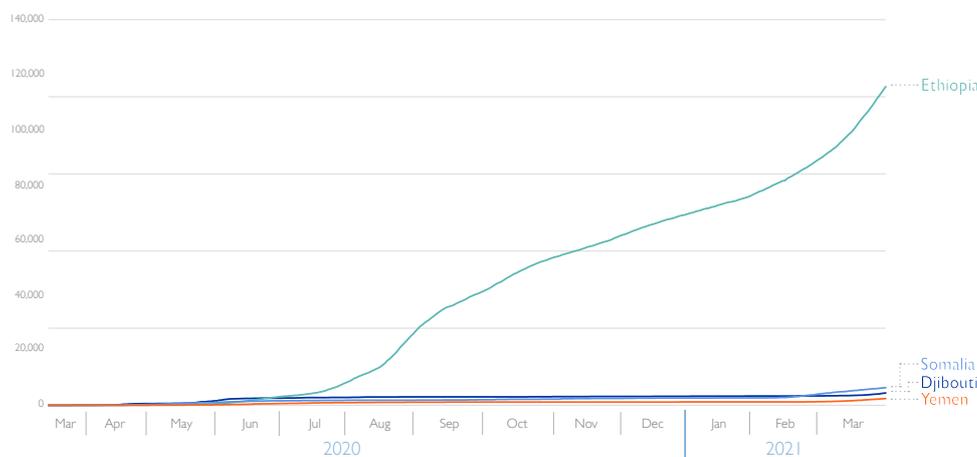
Migrants from the MRC in Obock, Djibouti departing on buses to go to Ar-Aoussa, as part of IOM's AVR programme. © IOM 2020/Alexander Bee

## BACKGROUND

The COVID-19 outbreak has restricted global mobility, whilst heightening the risk of exploitation of vulnerable populations. This report provides a snapshot of the **COVID-19 epidemiological situation** and **mobility restrictions**, and of the **current migration trends** along the Eastern Corridor migration route, in addition to an analysis of the impact that movement restrictions have had in Djibouti, Ethiopia, Somalia, and Yemen. Moreover, it provides **information on the main protection concerns for migrants** and **assistance provided**, and **COVID-19 risk mitigation measures**. This report utilizes data collected through IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) Flow Monitoring Points (FMPs), Migrant Response Centres (MRCs),<sup>1</sup> Assisted Voluntary Return (AVR) data, as well as anecdotal information provided by IOM team members working in the region.

## EPIDEMIOLOGICAL UPDATE AND RESPONSE TO THE OUTBREAK

Incidence Trend of Confirmed COVID-19 Cases as of 31 March 2021



	Djibouti	Ethiopia	Somalia	Yemen
Confirmed cases	8,002	206,589	11,398	4,361
Deaths	70	2,865	529	889
Recoveries	6,460	158,109	4,819	-
Active cases	1,472	45,615	6,050	-

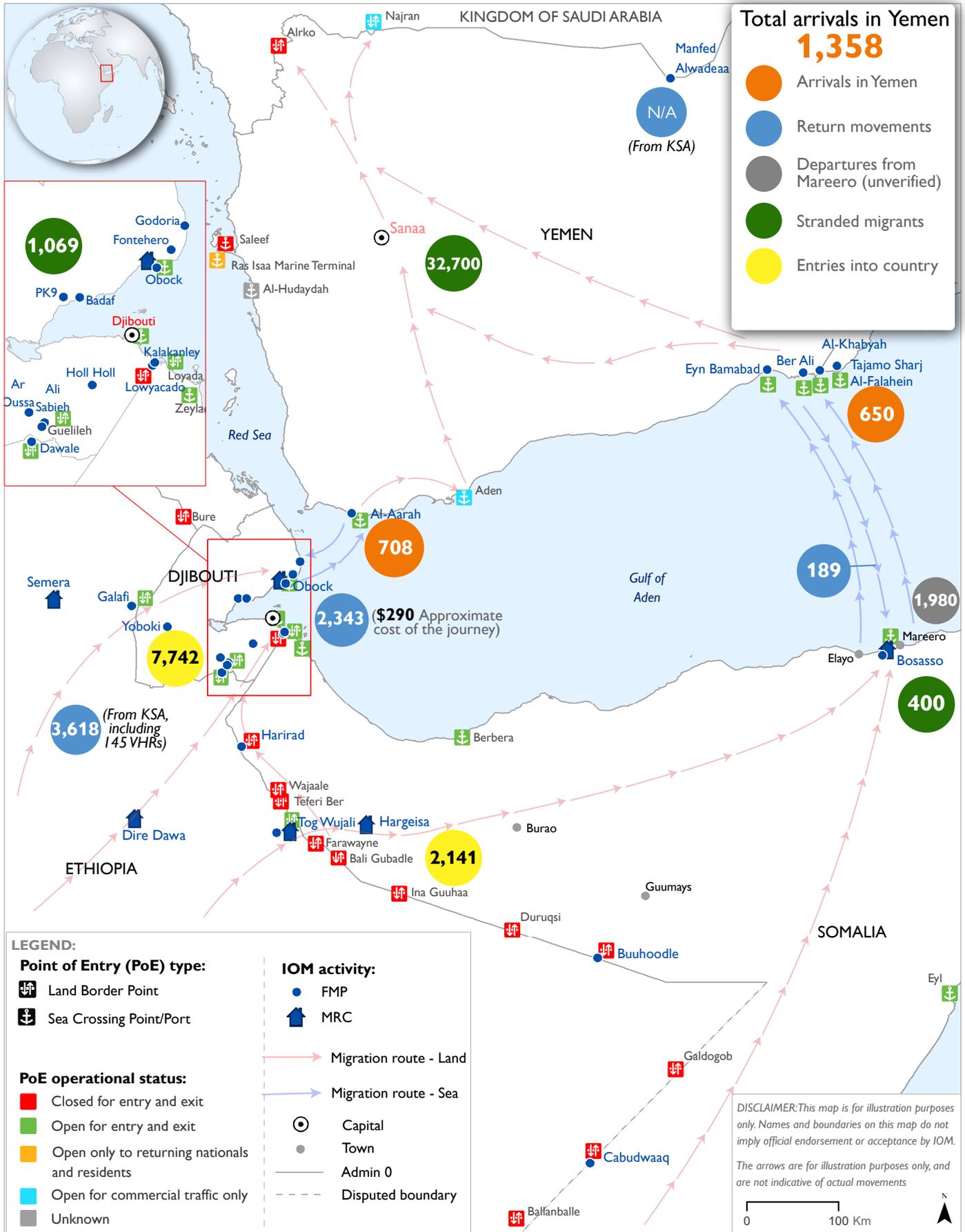
Source: Ministry of Health, Ethiopia (Reported as of 31 March 2021); IOM (DTM) (MRCs)

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

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## COVID-19 Epidemiological Situation

As of 31 March 2021, the number of COVID-19 cases along the Eastern Corridor stood at 230,350. Ethiopia continued recording the highest number of confirmed COVID-19 cases at 206,589 (90% of total cases). The country started rolling out COVID-19 vaccinations on 13 March, obtaining 2.2 million doses through the COVAX initiative. Following Ethiopia are Somalia with 11,398 confirmed cases (5% of total cases) and Djibouti with 8,002 cases (3% of total cases), while Yemen's cases amounted to 4,361 (2% of total cases). As of 31 March 2021, the number of COVID-19 related deaths along the Eastern Corridor stood at 4,353, the majority of which were recorded in Ethiopia (66% of total deaths). Yemen holds the highest case fatality rate (CFR) at approximately 20.4%, compared to Djibouti (CFR 0.9%), Ethiopia (CFR 1.4%) and Somalia (CFR 4.6%). This is much higher than the global average CFR of 2.2% and is largely attributable to the challenges of accessing a health care system which has been decimated by years of war. The extent of the impact of COVID-19 in Yemen is largely unknown given limited testing capacities, reduced health seeking behavior, and growing public skepticism around COVID-19. A public health state of emergency was declared on 23 March in Yemen as infection rates and fatalities have continued to surge since mid-February. The Supreme National Emergency Committee for COVID-19 ordered health centres and hospitals to increase preparation and provide medical staff with personal protective equipment and called on local authorities to close some outdoor venues and implement partial curfews. In addition, the first batch of 360,000 vaccine doses arrived on 31 March as part of the 1.9 million doses expected to arrive throughout 2021.

## COVID-19 Mobility Restrictions

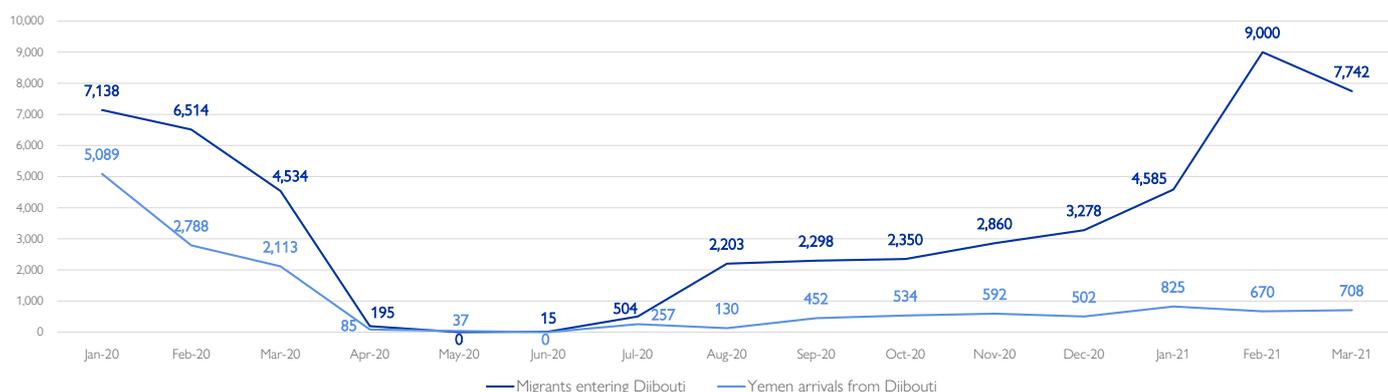
Between the reopening of the country's air, land and sea borders on 17 July 2020 and the end of March 2021, the Djiboutian health authorities recorded a 4.52% COVID-19 positivity rate and a 99.51% recovery rate among all incoming passengers screened at the various Points of Entry (PoEs). On 16 March, the first Voluntary Humanitarian Returns (VHR) resumed bringing back vulnerable migrants from Yemen to Ethiopia. The return was made possible despite the challenge for Yemen to comply with Ethiopia's obligation on all incoming passengers to present a negative polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test on arrival. All evacuated migrants were quarantined upon arrival into a dedicated quarantine centre. At the same time, mobility restrictions have partially eased in Yemen, despite the current state of health emergency. Yemenis returning from Saudi Arabia continue to use Al Wadeeah land border point, provided that they hold a negative COVID-19 PCR test and follow health regulations to enter the country. Ethiopia was added to the United Kingdom's red list on 19 March, banning all commercial and private planes travelling from Ethiopia to protect against new variants of COVID-19. As of mid-March, COVID-19-related restrictions in force in Somalia remained largely unchanged compared to measures in effect during mid-February, however, with infection rates particularly high in Somaliland.

## DJIBOUTI SITUATION

### Migrant Flows Observed Through Djibouti and at Yemen Points of Entry

- Migrants' movements into the country were slightly lower than what was observed in February, with 7,742 entries observed in March from Djibouti's western borders; these include over 20% adult females, over 66 per cent adult males, and 14 per cent children. These movements represent a decrease of 14% compared to February 2021, but an increase of 71% compared to March 2020 at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 708 migrant arrivals from Djibouti were tracked in Yemen near Al-Aarah FMP in Lahj governorate, all of whom were Ethiopian nationals. A large majority of the migrants tracked were adult men (94%), 4% were boys, 3% were adult women, while no girls were tracked.

*Migrant Movements through Djibouti to Yemen (January 2020 - March 2021)*

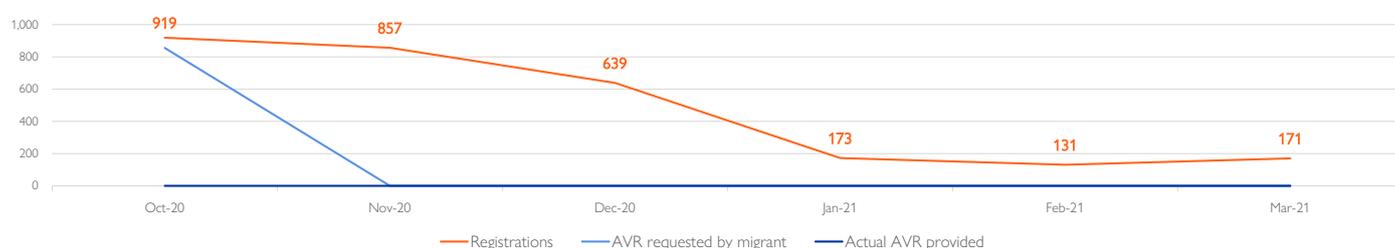


- Spontaneous return movements from Yemen to Djibouti continued in March 2021 with 2,343 Ethiopian migrants, the majority of whom were men (99.6%), returning from Yemen to the coast of Obock; this is a significant increase of 91% compared to February 2021. Since May 2020, IOM tracked a total of 11,222 spontaneous returns of Ethiopian migrants which are believed to have paid roughly the equivalent of 290 USD each for this return journey.

### Migrant Protection and Assistance

- During the night of 3 March, at least 20 migrants were reported missing or deceased off the coast of Obock, according to survivor testimonies. Tragically, migrants were thrown off the boat they were travelling on by smugglers as they were attempting to make their journey to Yemen. According to the survivors, the boat, which carried more than 200 migrants, including 46 children, became unstable and the smugglers pushed off at least 80 migrants in an attempt to reduce the weight of the vessel. Only about 60 survivors managed to swim back to Djibouti where they were assisted by IOM.
- As of 25 March 2021, 1,069 migrants on their way to the Arabian Peninsula were stranded in Djibouti and had gathered in 12 spontaneous sites located along the migration route, majority of them were stranded in the Obock region. All the stranded migrants were Ethiopian nationals and most of them were men (69%). Immediate needs included water, food, hygiene kits and non-food items (NFIs).
- 171 new migrants were registered at the Obock MRC in March 2021, which is a 31% increase from the previous month.
- Only the most vulnerable migrants continue to be admitted to the MRC and to benefit from AVR services. During this month, a group of 52 migrants were returned to Ethiopia as part of IOM's AVR programme.

Registrations at the MRC in Obock and AVR Services Requested and Provided (October 2020 - March 2021)

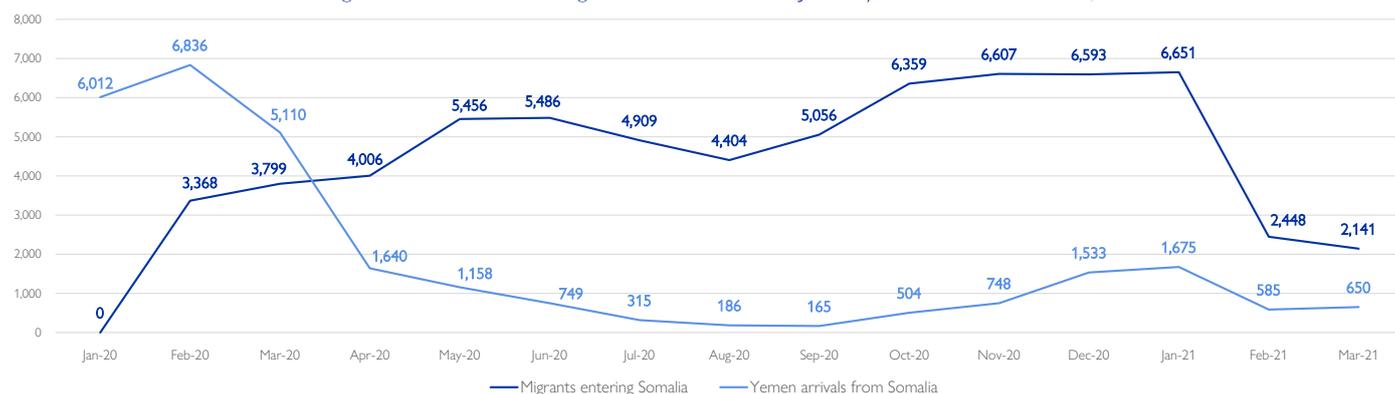


## SOMALIA SITUATION

### Migrant Flows Observed Through Somalia and at Yemen Points of Entry

- Migrant arrivals to Yemen from Somalia stood at 650 in March 2021; a 6% increase from the 585 arrivals recorded in February. The movements consisted of Ethiopian (67%) and Somali (33%) nationals, with the majority of arrivals being adult males (54%), while 26% were adult females, and 20% were children (increase from 13% last month), of which 66% (85) were unaccompanied migrant children (UMCs), up from 60 in February.
- Unverified reports received by IOM stated that 1,980 migrants departed by boat to Yemen from Mareero, a small town 15 km east of Bossaso.
- Migrants' entries into Somalia decreased by 13% compared to February (2,141) with over 96% being Ethiopian nationals.
- Similar to what observed in Djibouti, spontaneous movements from Yemen to Somalia are occurring, and an overall 189 movements were tracked upon arrival in February (147 to Bossaso, and 42 to Berbera), consisting of 68% males and 32% females. 120 were returning Somalis, and 69 were Yemeni nationals.

Migrant Movements through Somalia to Yemen (January 2020 - March 2021)

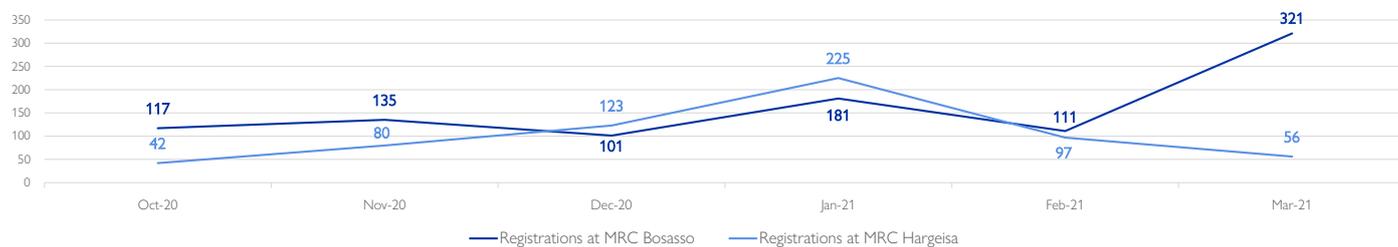


Source: IOM, UN Migration, and other sources for January 2020 to March 2021. Data is preliminary and subject to change. IOM is not responsible for any errors or omissions.

## Migrant Protection and Assistance

- IOM was not able to update the estimates for the 400 to 500 stranded migrants in and around Bossaso.
- With COVID-19 infections rapidly increasing, particularly in Somaliland, in addition to the sad passing of the the MRC Director in Hargeisa, it was reported by the Ethiopian Community Centre (ECC) that three migrants had also passed away in Burao allegedly due to the virus. The MRC centre was closed for two weeks from 22 March. Following this period, the MRC and the National Displacement and Refugee Agency (NDRA) will resume operations only with critical staff to mitigate further risk of infection.
- A total of 377 migrants were registered at the Bossaso (321) and Hargeisa (56) MRCs; a drastic 81% increase from February. With the approach of the month of Ramadan, which is traditionally a peak month for migration in this area, an increased number in migrant registrations is expected in the following months. Similarly, the improved visibility of the Bossaso MRC through billboards in several stronghold areas is also expected to draw more migrants to the MRC.
- A total of 82 AVR requests were received at the Bossaso (48) and Hargeisa (34) MRCs, which is a slight 5% decrease from the previous month. Nonetheless, the actual provision of AVR services still remains limited with only two AVR movements taking place in March, from the MRC in Bossaso.
- Figures on returns from Saudi Arabia are no longer available to IOM since funding constraints do not allow the organization to continue supporting these returnees which are now handled directly by the government and figures are not disclosed.

Registrations at the MRCs in Bossaso and Hargeisa (October 2020 - March 2021)

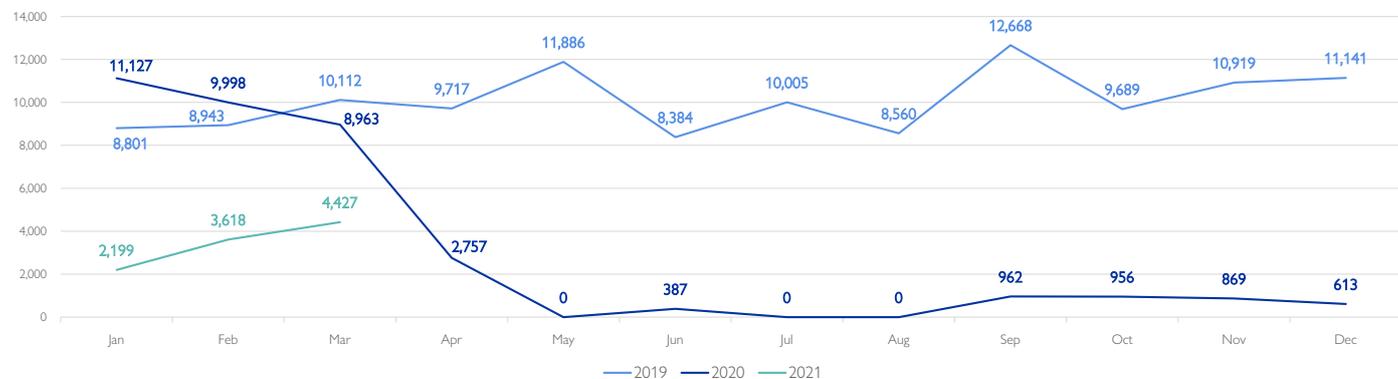


## ETHIOPIA SITUATION

### Migrant Flows, and Protection and Detention Concerns

- The returns of Ethiopian nationals from Saudi Arabia to Addis Ababa increased by 22% from February (3,618 Ethiopian returns) to March (4,427). However, when compared to last year, this represents a 51% decrease from the 8,963 returns recorded in March 2020, at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Tigrayan returnees continue to arrive in significant numbers from Saudi Arabia. Many areas of the Tigray Regional State remain inaccessible due to ongoing hostilities, and other areas are suffering from disruptions of basic services and food insecurity. Many returnees who are unable or unwilling to return to Tigray are choosing to reunify with family or relatives outside of Tigray. The Federal Government is organizing bus transportation to the Southern part of Tigray region.

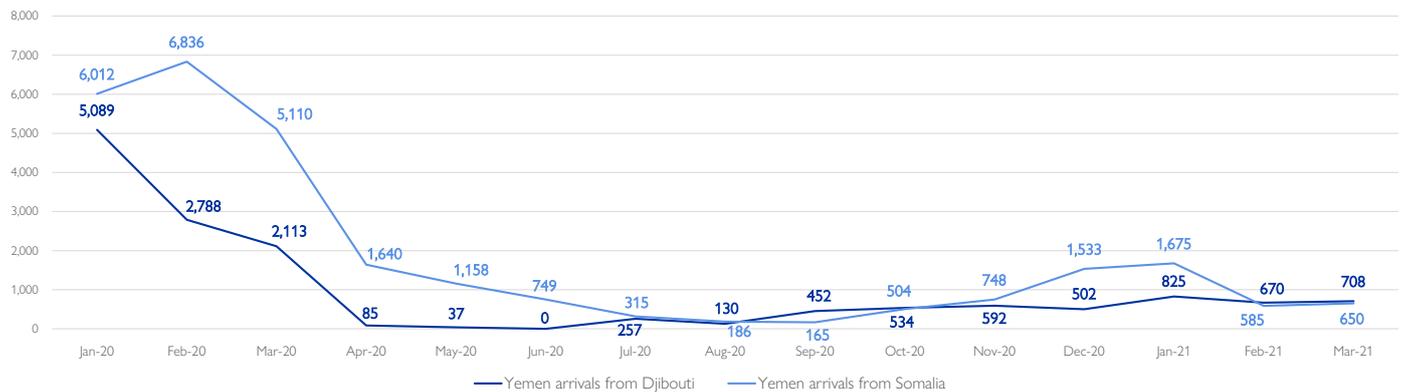
Returns of Ethiopian Nationals from Saudi Arabia Electronically Registered by IOM



## Migrant Flows Observed in Yemen

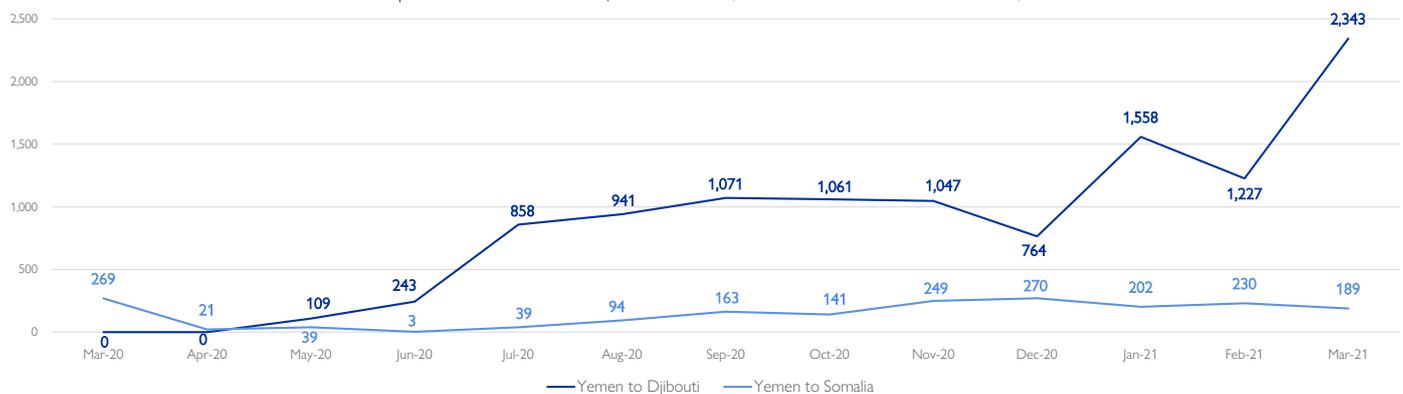
- Overall, 1,358 migrant arrivals to Yemen from the Horn of Africa were recorded in March 2021; an 8% increase from February, however, this represents a significant decrease of 81% compared to March 2020. Similar to the previous month, but contrary to the trend observed in the past, the majority travelled from Djibouti (55%), with the remaining travelling from Somalia (48%), likely due to the border closures in Somalia; the arrivals from Somalia increased by 11% while the arrivals from Djibouti increased by 6%.
- Most migrant arrivals were Ethiopian nationals (84%), while the remainder were Somali nationals (16%).
- The majority of migrants were adult males (75%), while 14% were adult females, and 11% were children (same as last month), of which 55% (85) were UMCs.

*Migrant Arrivals to Yemen from the Horn of Africa (January 2020 - March 2021)*



- Due to the difficulties faced by migrants upon arrival in Yemen with their inability to move onwards towards Saudi Arabia, as well as the protection environment and living conditions in Yemen, many of them often opt to return back to the Horn of Africa. Since March 2020, over 13,000 migrants have made this perilous return journey, using the same network of smugglers utilized on the journey towards the Arabian Peninsula.
- DTM Yemen could not track any returning migrants from Saudi Arabia in March 2021 due to the inaccessibility to the FMP at the Saudi Arabia-Yemen border.

*Spontaneous Returns from Yemen (March 2020 - March 2021)*



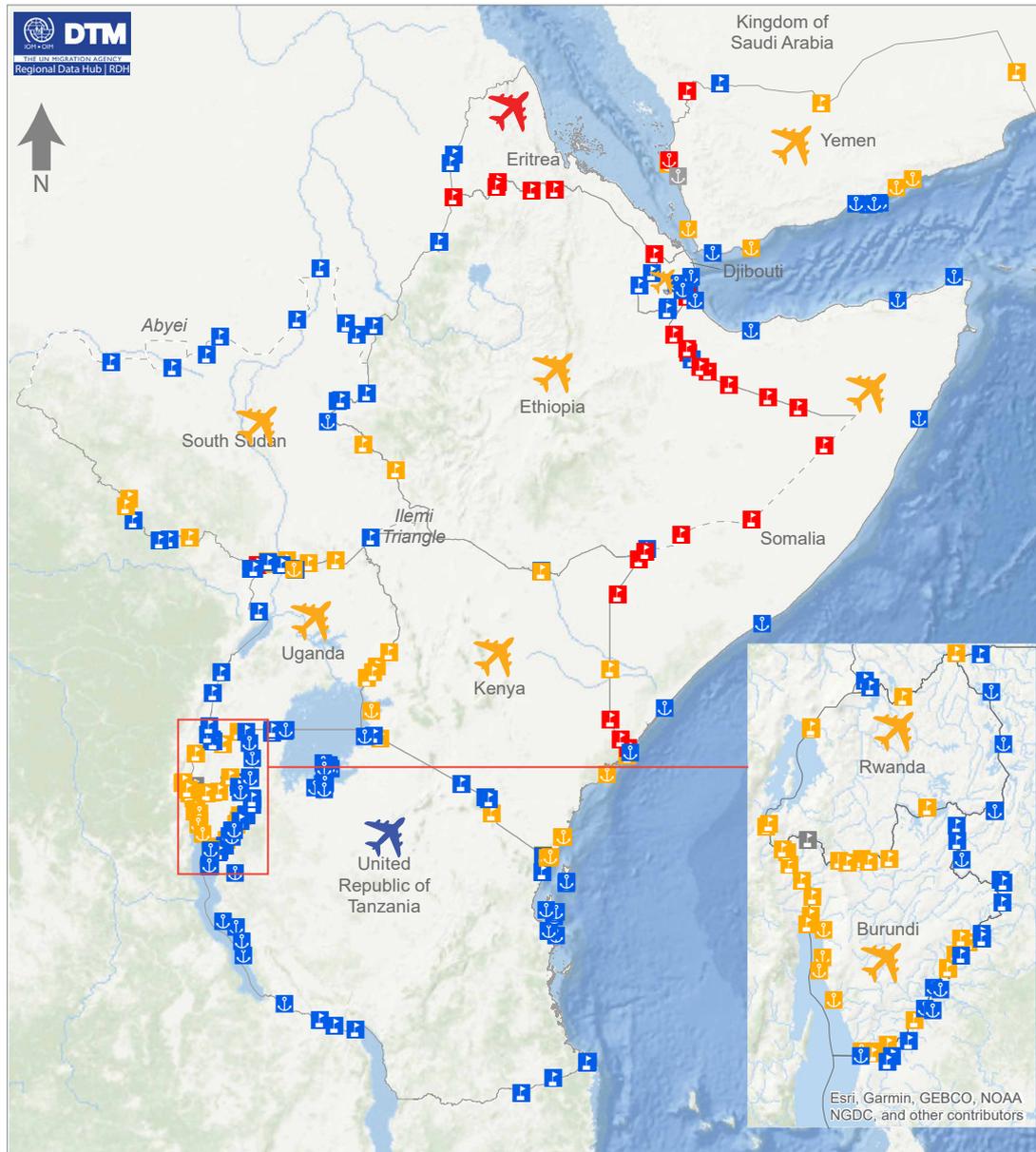
## Migrant Protection and Assistance

- Over 32,700 migrants were estimated to be stranded, including around 5,000 migrants in detention across the country.
- Migrants' living conditions across the country continue deteriorating due to a reduction in support from the local community since the beginning of the pandemic and widespread discrimination that prevents them from accessing essential services such as health care.
- Since October 2020, over 6,500 migrants have approached IOM's Aden MRC asking for return assistance to Ethiopia through VHR. These VHR flights resumed in March after months of disruption, and a total of 145 migrants (120 men, 8 women, 15 boys) and 2 girls were returned to Ethiopia.
- On 7 March, a large fire broke out at the Immigration, Passports and Naturalization Authority (IPNA) Holding Facility in Sana'a. In total, it is estimated that over 900 migrants were present at the site during the incident. 45 people lost their lives, over 170 were injured, and many who were left in critical conditions were transferred to hospitals. The forced transfers of migrants within the country continue, leaving many of them exposed to smugglers and traffickers' exploitation and with no access to essential services.

## ANNEX 1 | 2021 MRC REGISTRATION DATA

MRCs	Jan-21	Feb-21	Mar-21	MRC Total
Bossaso	181	111	321	613
Dire Dawa	0	0	0	0
Hargeisa	225	97	56	378
Metema	0	0	72	72
Moyale	-	-	187	187
Obock	173	131	171	475
Semera	0	0	71	71
Togochale	31	126	14	171
<b>Monthly Total</b>	<b>610</b>	<b>465</b>	<b>892</b>	<b>1,967</b>

## ANNEX 2 | STATUS OF POINTS OF ENTRY IN THE EAST AND HORN OF AFRICA REGION AND YEMEN



### Status of international flights\*

- Not Restrictive
- Partially Restrictive
- Totally Restrictive
- Not available
- Disputed Areas
- Countries East and Horn of Africa

### Status of other border points

- Sea Border Point
- Land Border Point
- Closed for entry and exit
- Partial closure
- Open for entry and exit
- Unknown

\*Details of the travel restriction can be found on IATA website: <https://www.iata.org/>

SOURCE:  
International Air Transport Association (IATA)  
Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM)

DATE: 31 March 2021

DISCLAIMER: These maps are for illustration purposes only. Names and boundaries do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by IOM.