

Mixed Migration Task Force Update

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REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON REFUGEE PROTECTION AND MIGRATION IN THE GULF OF ADEN

WORKING TOGETHER TOWARDS A COMPREHENSIVE RESPONSE

Sana'a, Yemen - A regional conference on refugee protection and migration in the Gulf of Aden, co-organized by the Government of Yemen and the UN Refugee Agency, took place on 19-20 May in Sana'a, Yemen. The conference aimed at initiating a discussion between countries of origin, transit and destination. Representatives from the Horn of Africa, the Gulf States and Europe notably discussed topics such as how to enhance the cooperation and the information sharing between the countries affected by the movement, how to strengthen border controls while ensuring identification and protection of refugees and how to reduce human rights abuses faced by people traveling. High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres called for more international help to increase assistance to refugees, and ease the burden on host countries, especially Yemen.

The two-day conference brought together officials from the Horn of Africa, the Gulf States, Europe, the African Union and the European Commission, as well as representatives of International Organizations such as OCHA, UNICEF and IOM and of national and international non-governmental organizations. The Somalia Mixed Migration Task Force was invited to give a presentation.

The final recommendations of the conference, expected to be available shortly, will be shared.

Trends and figures

Since the beginning of the year, more than 20,000 people have reached the Yemeni shores. While Ethiopians represented the majority of the flow during previous years, Somalis from South Central Somalia now significantly outnumber Ethiopians. The scale of the crossing has considerably increased since last year, most likely due to the growing insecurity in Somalia. At a similar date last year, some 8,400 people had reached across the Gulf. However, the proportion of people reportedly disappearing or dying during the crossing has decreased from 5 % to 2 %. This could notably be attributed to the fact that boats are not as crowded as they used to be and that many have been using routes deemed safer, such as the Djibouti route.

Somalis arriving in Yemen notably mention forced recruitment, indiscriminate killing, sexual violence and general insecurity as reasons for fleeing. A limited number of new arrivals settle in Kharaz refugee camp, located in the coastal area of Yemen. Most new arrivals either settle in urban areas or continue their journey onwards to the Gulf States and Europe.



A young Somali girl stands in front of a shack on the coast of Northern Somalia. She and her family are likely to join the thousands of people attempting to cross the Gulf of Aden every year, looking for some security and in some cases, better work opportunities. © UNHCR / A. Fazzina

Flash news

- On 2 June, the American Navy rescued in the Gulf of Aden a boat transporting 82 Somalis and Ethiopians. The boat, heading to Yemen from Bossaso, had been drifting for six days after its engine stopped functioning. Food and water, as well as blankets were provided to the passengers once they reached the Puntland coast by the local authorities, DRC and UNHCR.

- The tracking of the movements of the IDP population undertaken by local NGOs supported by NRC and UNHCR will be broadened to include the monitoring of migrants and asylum seekers. The information gathered should ensure a better knowledge of the routes, the intentions and the protection problems faced by people traveling through Somalia.

- The number of people currently arriving in Bossaso and hoping to travel across the Gulf of Aden to Yemen is reportedly growing. People tend to temporarily stay in Bossaso where they work to pay for their trip. Peaks in crossings are usually reported towards the end of the year.

The Mixed Migration Task Force: The Mixed Migration Task Force (MMTF) was established in early 2007 with UNHCR and IOM acting as co-chairs, under the auspices of the Inter Agency Standing Committee's Protection Cluster. MMTF membership includes OCHA, UNDP, the Danish Refugee Council and the Norwegian Refugee Council. The purpose of the task force is to develop a rights-based strategy to ensure a comprehensive coordinated response to protection and humanitarian needs of migrants and asylum seekers transiting through Somalia.

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