

# Mixed Migration Task Force Update

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## CIRCULAR MIGRATION IN THE HORN DIFFICULT CHOICES FOR MIGRANTS

Burao, Somaliland - Iffa (not his real name) is a 26 year-old Ethiopian who earns a living by washing clothes in Burao. He was in a group of seventeen Ethiopian migrants who were robbed of all their money when they arrived in Burao from Harta-Sheikh on the Ethiopian border. Some of the migrants decided to work in Hargeisa to pay for their boat journey to Yemen. Like many Ethiopian migrants and asylum seekers in Burao, Hargeisa and Bossaso, Iffa left his family in 2006 and worked for five months in Hargeisa washing clothes. After saving enough money, Iffa went on to Bossaso, took a boat to Yemen, and eventually found his way to Saudi Arabia where he worked as a cleaner in a small restaurant.

As he was working illegally in Yemen, Iffa was deported back to Ethiopia after three months but he was on the road again very soon, trying again to earn enough money to reach Saudi Arabia. He had to work longer in Hargeisa this time, because the fees had increased. And again, once he reached Saudi Arabia, he was arrested by the authorities and deported. The recurrent deportations and the danger of the journey did not stop Iffa from aiming at returning to the oil-rich country: "It is better to take the chance than sit and die of hunger in Ethiopia."

Many Ethiopians migrate for economic reasons. Others seek asylum in Yemen, claiming that they are threatened at home. All travel long, difficult routes through Ethiopia, Somalia and sometimes Djibouti with little money. According to an assessment made by the MMTF in 2008, most migrants and asylum seekers are single men in their twenties from the Ethiopian highlands of Tigray, Amhara and Oromo. They will generally undertake the



A local NGO in Hargeisa is training local leaders on the human rights of migrants and explains the dangers that Somalis and Ethiopians experience on the journey to Yemen across the Gulf of Aden or through Djibouti.

hazardous journey at the beginning and end of the year, when the sea is calmer. The smugglers transporting them keep changing the travel routes so as not to be caught by the local government authorities. Many will be robbed and abused during their journey and as a result will have to take odd jobs in Bossaso or return to Burao.

### Trends and figures

In January 2009, some 3,150 people have arrived on the coast of Yemen, a figure similar to the one reported during the last two previous months. This is a lower number than the one recorded for the month of January last year: nearly 4,500 people traveled to Yemen in January 2008. The proportion of Somalis in the flow has increased to 85 percent, compared to about two-third last year, and Somalis are granted refugee status *prima facie* upon arrival to Yemen. Nearly half of the new arrivals have undertaken the crossing from Djibouti rather than Bossaso and have arrived on the Red Sea coast. This is a slightly higher proportion than last year.

Most Ethiopians choose to cross from Djibouti, while Somalis mostly leave from Bossaso. Seven passengers out of ten on boats arriving from Djibouti are Ethiopians. A limited number of deaths has been reported since January. The crossing from Djibouti is generally safer: the journey is shorter, boats usually carry fewer passengers and less violent incidents take place. Most Ethiopians will not go to the reception centres to be registered and, eventually claim asylum. Most disappear as soon as they arrive on the shores. Some are reportedly arrested and deported by the authorities. Others seem to be continuing their journey to Saudi Arabia and beyond to find some work opportunities. Over the last years, the number of crossings has peaked in August and September and has remained fairly high until May. June and July are usually the lowest months of the year, as the sea is then especially dangerous.

**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, OHCHR, UNDP, UNICEF, 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. For more info, contact Roberta Russo ([russo@unhcr.org](mailto:russo@unhcr.org)), Catherine-Lune Grayson ([Catherine.lune.grayson@drc.dk](mailto:Catherine.lune.grayson@drc.dk)), or Brad David ([bdavid@iom.int](mailto:bdavid@iom.int)).