



Migrants in Yemen face growing protection risks as a result of COVID-19 fears. Photo IOM

Cairo, 10 May 2020 – COVID-19’s presence in Yemen was officially confirmed on 10 April. Nearly a month later, Sana’a city’s first case was announced, that of a Somali refugee. Migrants in the country are being stigmatized as “transmitters of disease”. Xenophobia and scapegoating campaigns are leading to retaliation against these vulnerable communities, including physical and verbal harassment, forced quarantine, denial of access to health services, movement restrictions, and forced movements to frontline and desert areas, leaving them stranded without food, water and essential services.

The World Health Organization (WHO) and International Organization for Migration (IOM) call on national authorities and the people of Yemen to continue their longstanding charitable acceptance of, and support to, vulnerable communities, including migrants.

“This virus respects no borders—it targets everyone, regardless of race, political affiliation or geographical location. There is absolutely no evidence that one group of people is more responsible for its transmission than another. There are, however, groups of people who are

more vulnerable as a result of having pre-existing medical conditions and/or limited access to care, especially in emergency settings. It is our collective duty to prioritize and protect these groups. This is a global pandemic, and the only way to fight it is do so together. No one is safe until everyone is safe,” said Dr Ahmed Al Mandhari, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean.

Migrants travel through Yemen intending to reach other countries in the Gulf. Although the numbers of arrivals in Yemen has decreased as a result of the pandemic — from 11 101 in January to 1725 in April — many migrants and refugees remain stranded in Yemen, having begun their journey before movements were restricted. An increasing number face crowded and often unsanitary conditions in transit, detention and quarantine centres.

“Migrants should not be stigmatized or associated with the risk of importing diseases. It is conditions on the route from Africa to the Arabian Gulf, including barriers to health services, poor living and working conditions and exploitation, which pose serious health risks. We must join together to address these risks and stop stigmatization,” said Carmela Godeau, IOM Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa.

WHO, IOM and partners have ensured the inclusion of migrants in the public health response led by the Yemeni authorities, with the support of the humanitarian community — an important step towards non-discrimination that needs to be actioned on the ground.

To help protect themselves and the communities hosting them from the virus, WHO, IOM and humanitarian partners have increased migrant awareness of COVID-19 across the country. The Organizations are also increasing health services for all people in Yemen, as well as other assistance to ensure access to clean water and essential hygiene items. The priority health needs of migrants are included in all response activities targeting the population in Yemen as a whole.

With an increasing number of people who have COVID-19 confirmed in Yemen, people across the country need support now more than ever to combat the spread of the virus and ensure that the most vulnerable communities — including displaced people and migrants — have access to health services and information on preventative measures.

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