

## Mixed migration flow : pictures and testimonies from Bossaso



Distressing pictures showing bodies on the Yemeni beaches were printed on the leaflets in order to raise awareness SHS/N.B.



One of the three cartoons which were drawn for the advocacy campaign by a Somali refugee

	2007	Jan-April 2008
People who crossed the sea and reached Yemen	29,500	15,117
People who died / who are missing and believed to be dead	1,400	492

### UNHCR supports asylum seekers, refugees and IDPs in Somalia as part of the Mixed Migration Task Force

In the first four months of this year alone, more than 16,000 people crossed the Gulf of Aden towards Yemen, hoping to access safety and a better life. This is more than half of the number of persons who made the journey last year, and the main crossing season has not yet begun. Desperate people arrive daily in Bossaso, at the north-eastern tip of Somalia. They risk their life in the perilous crossing that claimed the life of almost one migrant out of 20 last year. Many die after being abused by smugglers or thrown into the sea. The number of Somalis attempting the perilous journey considerably increased last year, due to the conflict in the Mogadishu, which forced over 700,000 people to flee.

This "mixed migration" flow across the Gulf of Aden is composed primarily of Ethiopians and Somalis hoping to escape poverty, persecution and the never-ending violence raging in Mogadishu and South Central Somalia. Unaccompanied minors and women are among the most vulnerable.

The UNHCR office for Somalia is part of a Mixed Migration Task Force (MMTF) established by several UN agencies and international NGOs (UNHCR, IOM, DRC, NRC, OCHA, WFP, UNICEF, OHCHR), through which organizations coordinate their activities. UNHCR provides protection to asylum seekers, refugees and IDPs in Puntland and in Somaliland. There are currently 180 registered asylum seekers and 165 recognized refugees in Puntland, 8,613 asylum seekers and 901 refugees in Somaliland.

Asylum seekers and recognized refugees can benefit from services such as free health service, education for their children, literacy classes and vocational training for adults, and financial assistance on a case by case basis.

### UNHCR warns migrants against crossing the Gulf of Aden

UNHCR has led an advocacy campaign in Somalia to warn potential Somali and Ethiopian migrants about the dangers of crossing to Yemen. The campaign has taken place in Puntland as well as in South Central Somalia, and has been extended to Ethiopia by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and UNHCR.

#### Three messages :

- Crossing the Gulf of Aden is extremely dangerous
- Asylum seekers are entitled to claim asylum in Puntland, where UNHCR offers support and protection
- Migrants have rights and should be treated with dignity

#### Various media :

- In Puntland, 10,000 leaflets have been printed in Somali and three Ethiopian languages (Oromo, Amharic, Tigryna) and are being distributed through local NGOs. Radio spots were broadcasted simultaneously on Radio Daljir in Puntland
- In South Central Somalia, 5,000 leaflets have been printed in Somali and distributed by UNHCR staff in Mogadishu and in Afgooye, where 300,000 IDPs are living after fleeing violence in the capital last year. A full radio program is being broadcasted on Radio Somaliweyn in Mogadishu, which includes spots, interviews and a theater play

## Voices of migrants, refugees and internally displaced in Bossaso

In the dusty city of Bossaso, thousands of would-be migrants roam the town. Somalis who came from the south in order to cross to Yemen usually live in the settlements of internally displaced persons (IDPs) which have sprung all around the town in the past 17 years, since the central government of Siyad Barre collapsed. Their flimsy shelters are made of cardboards and rags wrapped around sticks and protected from the rain by plastic sheets given by UNHCR and partners.

Ethiopians used to live together in shanties built next to the port, in the city center. Ethiopian-run cafés offered hot tea and televisions on which migrants watch music video clips. The happy faces of Ethiopian singers offered a stark contrast to the poverty of the audience. In February, two hand-grenade attacks killed 20 Ethiopians and wounded another 90 in two of these cafés.

The Ethiopian displaced tend to gather according to the dialect they speak. Economic migrants mix with asylum seekers, refugees and unaccompanied minors, all sharing their poverty. At night, all of them sleep crowded in the one room of a shanty hotel with tented fabric as walls. The poorest ones sleep directly on the street, with unaccompanied minors gathering together in an attempt to protect one another in the long night.

Once migrants have found enough money to pay for the trip, they wait in “safe houses”, hard-built buildings where they drink tea and chew khat, the Somali narcotic leaf, for hours if not days. They wait till a smuggler decides that the weather is good enough to attempt the crossing. They will then be taken to the mountains out of town, until they can board the boats on the beach.

These are some of their stories.

### Said, Ethiopian migrant

“I left Ethiopia a few years ago to cross to Yemen as I wanted a better life. I took a boat from Bossaso and I did not encounter any problem during the crossing at the time. Once in Yemen I made my way to Saudi Arabia, where I worked as a porter. A few months ago, the police arrested me in the street and since I had no documents I was deported back to Ethiopia. In Addis Abbeba, I talked two friends into coming with me to Bossaso so that they can have a better life too. They came with me as I know which middlemen and smuggler to use in order to reach Yemen more safely. My wife, who works in the house of a Saudi family, has remained in Saudi Arabia and sends me money so that I can go back there. My life is in Saudi Arabia now.”



Said waits in a “safe house” chewing khat with two friends who try to forget their fear as they are about to board a boat on the same night

### Fehir, Ethiopian migrant

“In our Ethiopian village, my husband talked with people who had been deported from Saudi Arabia. They were richer than us and lived in better houses. They told us that there were plenty of jobs in Saudi Arabia and that we should try our luck too. I traveled with my husband. We were supposed to go together to Yemen but once in Bossaso, he told me he could not afford the crossing for the two of us and he went alone, abandoning me. Once he had left, I found out I was pregnant. Now I feel sick and I cannot find work in Bossaso because people won't hire a woman who is not healthy.

I spend my day in Ethiopian cafés hoping to receive help. I don't want to cross to Yemen anymore, I just want to go home but I have no money to pay for the return trip. I don't know what to do.”



Fehir has been stuck in Bossaso since her husband crossed to Yemen alone. Pregnant and sick, she is unable to find work

## Hassan, unaccompanied minor

"I was living in Ethiopia. One day my mother died. My older brothers left the house and my father began to beat me regularly. It did not help that the new wife he married did not love me. I decided to run away from my home but I did not know where to go. One day, I talked to people living in our village who told me they were traveling to Bossaso because they wanted to cross to Yemen, a place where they would be richer. One week after, my father beat me again and this time I ran away and took the road to Bossaso.

Once there, I found no one I knew but I met other boys my age. Now we stay together because it makes us feel safer. During the day I work on the market to make money so that I can buy food. During the night all of us sleep in a ruined building, into open air, because we cannot afford to sleep inside the small café nearby. We have to pay if we eat and if we want to use latrines. I don't really know what I'm going to do next, as I have no money to cross to Yemen."



16-year old Hassan sleeps on Bossaso's street with another unaccompanied minor

## An Asylum seeker

"Both my 17-year old sister and I fled Ethiopia for political reasons. We traveled to Bossaso because many Ethiopian people come here. Now we live in a hotel for Ethiopians, a shanty hut made of cardboard and rags with only one room where people eat and sleep. At night, men and women rest directly on the floor. I always sleep next to my sister.

To survive, I work as a porter. I make only 10,000 Somali shillings a day, which is just enough to pay for three meals and a night in the hotel. I can't find work every day so sometimes I cannot eat and I go hungry. My sister works as a maid in a Somali house and she gives me money from time to time. Both of us make just enough money to survive but nothing else. I do not want to cross to Yemen because it is very dangerous, and because I fear that once there, the authorities might deport me back to my native country."



An asylum seeker sitting with Ethiopian migrants. They spend their nights crowded in the one room of a shanty hotel

## Hoda, Somali internally displaced person

"I left Mogadishu with my husband and our children one year ago because people told us that Yemen was a proper place to live, and that once there we could reach Saudi Arabia where we would find jobs easily. By the time we reached Bossaso, we could afford only one seat on the smugglers' boats so my husband went first. He was supposed to send me money so that I could join him with our children afterwards. That was seven months ago and I have received no news from him since. I believe him to be dead, he must have drowned during the crossing or he would have contacted me. I can neither go back to Mogadishu with my children, as it is too dangerous there, nor stay in Bossaso where there is only poverty for us.

I am desperate, I plan to cross to Yemen and make money there or in Saudi Arabia. My ten-year old daughter is used to helping me with the youngest children, she will take care of them while I'm away. We cannot go on living in a squalid settlement for displaced people. This is not a life."



A Somali IDP with her newborn. Some mothers cross with young children

**Cheikh Abdulqadir,  
Secretary of the elders in Bossaso**

“Bossaso is full of Tarib (illegal migrants) who want to cross to Yemen, and who refuse to be told otherwise. The international community needs to act to put an end to these tragic, inhuman deaths. It must pressure the local authorities into stopping the smuggling business, which thrives on corruption and takes advantage of the fact that the authorities face many other problems at the same time. The international community must also find solutions for the smugglers, who live a risky life and who might stop their criminal activities, were they to receive compensation, such as being offered alternative jobs. As elders, we want to discuss the issue of smuggling within the community, by organizing public discussions between all the stakeholders, such as traditional and religious leaders, businessmen, smugglers, local NGOs... We will find a durable solution only provided we all work together.”



Migrants wait under the cliff along the Bossaso beach, surrounded by armed militiamen. They stay sometimes several days in the nearby mountains before coming to the beach once the weather is satisfying. The yellow plastic jerry cans full of water they take with them are often already half empty by the time they board the boat. Once on the beach, smugglers ask them to wait in two separate lines, of for Somalis and one for Ethiopians.

*All pictures UNHCR/A.Fazzina  
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