



Illegal Immigration across the Coast of Yemen

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Introduction

Illegal immigration, a global phenomenon, is one of the most critical issues that face the international community and international organizations. The issue creates problems for transit and destination countries, as illegal immigration is accompanied with high rates of crime, human trafficking, spread of diseases and terrorism.

In 2020, the International Organization for Migration revealed that “an average, 11,500 people boarded vessels each month from the Horn of Africa to Yemen in 2019, making it the busiest maritime migration route on earth”. Illegal immigration constitutes one of the most critical social issues, as it affects all segments of the society. The phenomenon affected youth, females, children and especially males.

Illegal immigration across the coast of Yemen is a severe issue, whereby thousands of Africans board rickety and often overcrowded boats to their long journey to Yemen, where boats sometimes overturn, drowning the passengers. On the contrary, migrants who survive and reach the shore, have their dreams shattered by Yemen’s deplorable conditions.

Illegal Immigration

Illegal immigration is the movement of a non-national or unauthorized person to a country through its land, sea, or air borders, or enters the country by using and possessing false documents. According to the European Commission, “the term illegal immigration is used to describe a diverse phenomenon that involves people of different nationalities. This includes persons who enter the territory of a state illegally by land, sea and air, including airport transit zones. This is often done by using false or forged documents, or with the help of organized criminal networks of smugglers and traffickers”.

There are many reasons that drive people to migrate and leave their countries, whether it’s internal, international or forced migration. Among the reasons are unemployment, insecurity, low wages and poor living conditions are all reasons that pushes people for illegal immigration. Moreover, the East African region share many of these reasons, making the region at the forefront of the African continent in terms of the number of immigrants.



Recent years have witnessed a rise in immigrant numbers, due to the facilitated procedures provided by Houthis' gangs and the Yemeni Coast Guard. Smuggling traffickers, who are Yemeni and African mafias, smuggle people by transporting them through fishing boats and bring them to the Yemeni shores.

For example, after the security forces crackdown in the Oromia region in 2015, tens of thousands of Ethiopians fled their country, with more than 1,000 people killed and 1,000 arrested thousands, leading to the displacement of large numbers of people from eastern Ethiopia to Yemen. Similarly, the drought and insecurity conditions in Somalia perpetuated by armed terrorist group, Al-Shabaab, have led to the fleeing of Somalis to Yemen and then illegally immigrating to Saudi Arabia, which weaken their positions due to the lack of legal documents and are therefore always subject to persecution and expulsion.

Coast of Yemen

The coastal strip of Yemen is estimated to be 2450 km; it overlooks the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden, and the Arabian Sea. In addition, Taiz, Al-Mukalla, Al-Hadidiya, Al-Ghaydah, are the most important cities located on the Coast of Yemen. In regards to authority, power is shared between the internationally recognized government and the Houthis, where the Houthis control northwest Yemen, and Bab al-Mandab Strait area, where the latter is the transit area for illegal immigration.

The Coast of Yemen and Illegal Immigration

The facilitating and colluding of coast guards with gangs smugglers contributed to the establishment of integrated networks that arrange illegal immigration. Gangs support and invest in these networks, motivated by its unstoppable demand and seeking its profit. Smugglers and human traffickers arrange boats for crossing from Obock in Djibouti and Bossaso in Somalia. In 2021, 38% of migrants arrived Yemen through Djibouti, while the majority 62% came to the southern coast of Yemen from Somalia.



Most migrants take a shorter and safer route, for example, it takes several hours to cross between Djibouti and Bab al-Mandab in Yemen by small boats. However, migrants often use smuggling ships for a fee, where the cost exceeds \$300 per person, and sometimes reaches up to \$500 for each person. During their journey, migrants are beaten and are sometimes forced to leave the ship at a far distance from their destination, in fear of being detained; only the lucky ones who reach the Yemeni coast safely.

Moreover, according to the United Nations (UN) estimates in 2019, the number of migrants to Yemen exceeded 10,000 person per month. Most of the migrants are from countries of the Horn of Africa, Ethiopia, Somalia and Djibouti, seeking to have their final destination in the Gulf states, namely, Oman and Saudi Arabia, or to European countries, such as Britain, Italy and France.

The Impact of Illegal Immigration

In recent times, criminal organizations invest and increase their businesses in illegal immigration in order to maximize their profit. These profits amount to \$5 billion, making illegal immigration to be the third profitable trade after the drug and arms trade.

These organizations smuggle approximately 1 million people annually. The increasing number of illegal immigrants and the repercussions of this phenomenon are both reflected in the living conditions and the various aspects of people's lives in regional communities and on the international level, where the phenomenon impacts countries' adopted development agenda.

The influx of migrants from the horn of Africa to Yemen continued in the past years, despite the fierce war taking place in Yemen accompanied with its harsh repercussions. The phenomenon of illegal immigration has contributed to the moral decay of the society, compounded with the consequent decline in productivity, economic capacity and social disintegration. The social aspect gets also affected by this organized crime through gangs control over governmental and non-governmental organizations, by illegally interfering through the provision of bribes and fund in order to spread their ideas and recruit vulnerable groups to extremist terrorist organizations.



Houthis' smugglers organized crimes threaten regional and global economy. Smugglers interfere in developing countries through laundering their funds, which is evaded from taxes. These actions deprive the country of additional financial resources that could have been invested in public projects, in addition to its negative impact on the financial, banking systems and the stability of exchange rates.

Gangs and smugglers also threaten the sovereignty, social structure of the state and rights of the trafficked persons; in addition, they weaken democracies in countries controlled by these groups. Moreover, illegal immigration negatively affects country's security, whereby the transnational organized crime as an outcome of illegal immigration has resulted in the formation of new criminal activities.

Additionally, security officers find difficulty in detecting crimes due to gangs' proper planning and use of modern technologies among their criminal activities, which requires concerned security departments to regularly update its devices, modify programs and train personnel to confront this type of crime.

Human Rights Violations in The Coast of Yemen

In 2010, the percentage of Ethiopian travelers increased due to the Yemeni security forces and border guards overlooking the crime. However, the number of migrants crossing the Yemeni coast differed greatly under the Yemeni government in comparison to the Houthis'. Since the Houthis took control in 2014 of coastal ports, in addition to the continued escalation of violence and lack of solutions to the political crisis, migration from the Horn of Africa to the Yemeni coast has massively increased.

Yemen is considered to be on the most vulnerable countries in the Arabian Peninsula to receive African displaced persons, who are smuggled through the Yemeni coasts in Abyan, Shabwa, and Hadramout governorates.

Smugglers and migrants bear all the risks of the smuggling process. Migration is evident from Ethiopia to Yemen, especially in the southern governorates that are currently experiencing wars. The flow of migrants has increased significantly on the road linking Aden and Sana'a. According to some reports, hundreds of migrants crosses the coastal road located between the Yemeni city of Aden and the Bab



al-Mandab Strait region, almost on a daily basis. These migrants are driven by the purpose of finding work, taking Yemen as a transit country to reach Saudi Arabia as a final destination. According to UN, 92% of migrants arriving to Yemen in 2019 came from the rural areas of Oromia, Amhara and Tigray regions in Ethiopia, seeking to reach Saudi Arabia. However, the Covid-19 pandemic has further complicated the situation due to the implementation of strict confinement measures.

Most migrants crossing from the Horn of Africa to Yemen are not aware of the dire security conditions in Yemen. Migrants are subject to abuses such as kidnapping, torture, exploitation and human trafficking by Houthis' groups, in addition to the lack of safety and protection. Relief organizations' reports have identified the refugees' difficult living conditions, showing refugees suffrage from poor standards in water, supply, sanitation and food. Reports also reveal the presence of sexual assaults against women and the widespread of infectious diseases as some of the human rights violations experienced by refugees in Yemen.

IOM has also referred to "the types of harm that the young people of the Horn of Africa are exposed to." Human smugglers' hands across the Gulf of Aden pass. IOM also revealed that "about 280 people were crammed into one boat, to reach Yemen" with a lack of oxygen in the boat, stressing that some of these "committed suicide by throwing themselves in the sea". Smuggling gangs also detain migrants upon their arrival in Yemen, where they are beaten, tortured, ill-treated, and are ordered to pay a ransom. Thousands of detained migrants in Yemen live in difficult living conditions, where the UN has constantly called for their release. Concerns and fears have further increased as some migrants were forcibly recruited to fight in the war taking place in the country.

The Iranian-backed terrorist Houthis militia is committing grave violations against African migrants, the latest of which was in March 2021, where the militia shelled a detention center in Sana'a, causing the death of dozens of migrants. The rest of the detained migrants were chased and were forced to flee across the border. Despite the evidence, the Houthis militia has also sought to force representatives of delegations to deny Houthis' crimes against migrants.



The Houthis has led to the destruction of both the state and citizen's properties, displaced people, and looted facilities. Not only Yemen nationals suffer from a political, military, and humanitarian crisis, but also migrants, where they are subject to detention, imprisonment, torture and killings.

The Houthis militia brutal actions have led humanitarian organizations to condemn the militia for its acts of killing migrants in Sanaa' and have called the UN to further investigate in the human rights violations taking place in Yemen. Human rights organizations have called for the ratification of international instruments related to human rights and refugee law, including the General Convention 1951 relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, and the 1990 International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families.

Organizations have also called for the adoption of relevant national laws and policies that protect the rights of refugees and migrants, the provision of capacity building trainings to implement legal obligations and policies, advocated for raising awareness for the protection of human rights, the punishment of the perpetrators of violations through strong law enforcement mechanisms and the interception of human traffickers and smugglers.

The Efforts of Saudi Arabia in Combating Illegal Immigration

Since 2009, many factors have contributed to the impediment of illegal immigration; such as the deployment of Saudi forces in Yemen to assist the Yemeni government to quell uprising by Houthis, and Saudi Arabia's temporary closure of borders, which hampered smuggling networks along the route, and reduced smuggles activity in the Port of Bosaso and Southern coasts of Yemen.

In addition, the 2019 agreement between Saudi Arabia and Ethiopia regarding the system for employing domestic workers and allowing the official migration of 100,000 Ethiopians to Saudi Arabia represented a positive step towards the impediment of illegal immigration and the utilization of the economic and development benefits of migration, while protecting the rights of migrants.



The agreement also stipulated the donation of 430 million US dollars by Saudi Arabia to finance the humanitarian response plan announced by the UN to support Yemen for the year 2021, as part of the Kingdom's efforts in Yemen.

Conclusion

The phenomenon of illegal immigration is a severe and complex issue. The phenomenon is a result of overlapping political, economic, social and even psychological and security factors.

Illegal immigration is among the critical topics that incited international, national and regional efforts to combat this phenomenon through the creation of deterring laws and security measures in order to contain the phenomenon.

Findings

- Migrants and refugees face human rights violations in countries of final destination, including forced labor; physical, emotional and sexual exploitation, detention, unpaid wages and forced deportation.
- The lack of legal documents for migrants and asylum seekers in countries of final destination is a contributing factor to migrants' vulnerabilities.
- The onset of the pandemic in addition to increased border control along the coast have decreased the number of migrants.
- Migrants in transit countries are negatively impacted by the humanitarian crises affecting the local citizens.
- In 2018, the Yemen Humanitarian Relief Program indicated that more than 22.2 million people, including migrants, are in need of life-saving humanitarian assistance.



- Yemen is experiencing one of the most severe food crises in the world, with 17 million people facing food insecurity.
- Ansar Allah movement in the northern regions smuggle Ethiopians, Somalis and Eritreans and conscript them into their forces.

Recommendations

- It is necessary to condemn the human rights violations against migrants and refugees and reaffirm the importance of the fulfillment of human rights by all persons without discrimination.
- Encourage governments to take all necessary measures to protect the rights of migrants and refugees, through:
- Conduct experts' workshops, which could enhance regional interdependence and contribute to the development of a regional strategy.

Motivate countries to continue their consultation meetings on the protection issues arising from mixed migration flows across the Gulf of Aden.

- Provide further support and increase assistance to countries hosting refugees, internally displaced persons and migrants in both the Horn of Africa and in Yemen.
- Countries of origin, transit and destination must adopt strict measures to combat human trafficking and migrant smuggling while protecting the victims.
- Coastal states should ratify maritime conventions relating to rescue at sea and establish or improve their search and rescue facilities.
- The international community should provide the needed support to the coast guards in the countries of the region, and the International Maritime Organization should provide technical assistance as well.
- UNHCR and other humanitarian agencies should be allowed access to detention facilities to identify refugees and other persons who are in need of protection.



- Mechanisms for voluntary return, in a safe and dignified way, should be optimally established as outlined in bilateral or multilateral agreements.
- Shelter camps should be located in Yemeni islands, such as the Socotra archipelago, instead of being located in the center of Yemen, which limit refugees' movement, due to extreme supervision and control of the concerned authorities. By relocating the shelter camps, the influx of migrants will gradually fade and the displaced persons will be detained until their problems are addressed.