

Beat: News

200,000 Yemenis struggle after being forced to leave Saudi Arabia

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USPA News - The Yemeni government has asked the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to provide assistance to some 200,000 Yemeni migrant workers forced to leave Saudi Arabia as part of a crackdown on undocumented migrants in the Kingdom, the organization said Friday. More irregular Yemeni migrants could return from Saudi Arabia in the coming months, following the extension through November of a Saudi amnesty for undocumented migrants previously scheduled to expire this week, according to IOM Yemen.

The Yemeni government has now asked IOM Yemen to support vulnerable returnees, some of whom are thought to have been in Saudi Arabia for two or three generations, by providing basic assistance in terms of shelter, access to water through well rehabilitation and water trucking, non-food relief items and hygiene kits. They have also asked for IOM medical and other facilities in the border town of Haradh to be made available to vulnerable Yemenis returning overland. Currently, the facilities are used mainly to help stranded migrants from the Horn of Africa. In recent weeks, many returning Yemenis have been seen on roads near Haradh trying to hitch rides on passing trucks to get back to their villages. The returnees add to a growing pool of often destitute migrants who make the dangerous and expensive trip across the Gulf of Aden from the Horn of Africa to Yemen in the hope of finding jobs in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf countries. The number from the Horn of Africa arriving in Yemen reportedly increased from 34,000 in 2010, to over 75,000 in 2011 and 84,000 in 2012. Over 35,000 have arrived in the first five months of 2013. Since the fencing of the border with Saudi Arabia, the Saudi crackdown on undocumented migrants and raids on people smugglers' camps carried out by the Yemeni Ministry of Defense, many more migrants have become stranded in Haradh, where an estimated 25,000 irregular destitute migrants are now living in often terrible conditions, without adequate shelter and access to food, water and medical assistance. IOM, which runs a Migrant Response Center (MRC) including a clinic in Haradh, has already assisted almost 19,000 Ethiopian migrants to voluntarily return home since 2007. Since April, IOM has assisted another 765 Ethiopians, a third of them unaccompanied minors, to fly home. But while the number of stranded migrants continues to increase, funding for the program has shrunk. At the beginning of 2013, IOM was forced to scale back its distribution of free meals, provide less shelter and make fewer medical referrals. UN funding and in-kind donations from WFP and UNICEF enabled the resumption of flights in June and some humanitarian services provided by the MRC. But IOM Yemen still needs \$3 million to meet the Yemeni government's appeal to provide ongoing shelter, food, basic health care and protection for migrants and returnees, as well as voluntary return flights for stranded Ethiopian migrants.

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