

Report

# Transit in Hell

## The Horrific Violations Targeting African Migrants During Their Journey Across Yemeni Territory.

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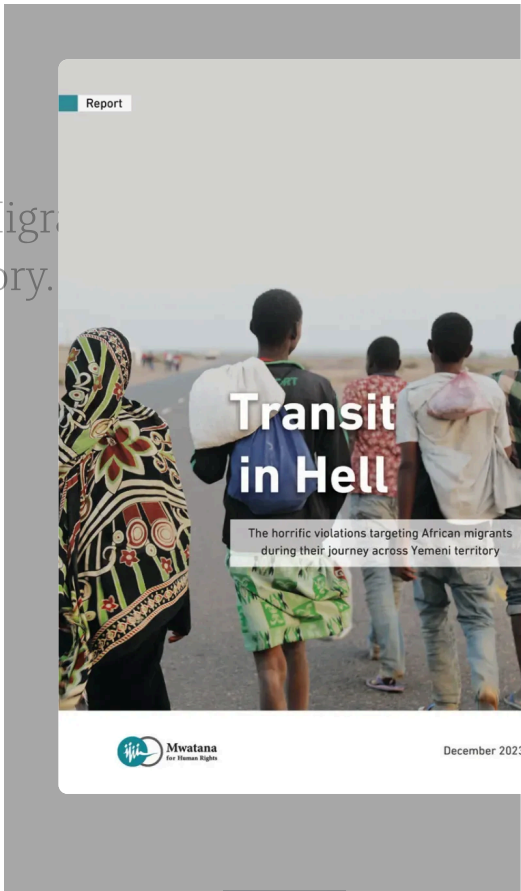


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Executive Summary

## Executive Summary

African migrants in Yemen have faced a spectrum of hardships, diverse challenges, risks, and numerous forms of violations since the outbreak of the armed conflict in late 2014. Their suffering has been exacerbated by the involvement of multiple warring parties and the intervention of regional and international actors, mainly the coalition led by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), in the armed conflict. In addition, the geographic distribution of the Yemeni Republic among multiple conflict parties adopting a non-humanitarian policy towards African migrants has led to various violations against them, blatantly disregarding international humanitarian law and/or international human rights law.

This report aims to highlight the violations faced by African migrants in Yemen by shedding light on these abuses and conveying a true picture of the suffering experienced by this vulnerable group and those responsible for it. African migrants are one of the most fragile and marginalized segments of Yemeni society, lacking the means to express their suffering and exposure to various violations. This reality makes them a forgotten category, with their suffering often being invisible to many. In other words, this report represents an attempt to convey the voices of migrants, expose their tragedies, and uncover the violations committed against them by the conflicting parties. The report not only presents findings on these issues, but also discusses ways to alleviate



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Human Rights with African migrants who have been victims of violations, their family members, eyewitnesses, healthcare workers, and others. Mwatana's field research team conducted approximately 155 interviews concerning at least 112 incidents involving violations against African migrants committed in various Yemeni governorates. Moreover, at its headquarters in Sana'a, Mwatana organized focus group discussions from March 12 to 16, 2023, to identify migrants' migration routes and determine the patterns of violations they face in areas controlled by different conflict parties. Furthermore, the central research team conducted field visits to several governorates, including Saada, Aden, Shabwah, Abyan, and others, where they met with migrants, conducted numerous interviews, tracked various migration routes, and inspected arrival points and gathering centers.

This report is also informed by discussions held by Mwatana with humanitarian organizations, such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM), to understand the challenges they encounter in providing assistance to migrants. In a particular section of this report, secondary sources, including data and statistics from international organizations, relevant reports, and agreements related to migration, were utilized to elucidate the broader perspective on migration in Yemen. Additionally, Mwatana sought the expertise of a legal specialist to frame and legally adapt the report's subject matter.

The report begins with a general background section that discusses the context of the armed conflict in Yemen and the conditions faced by migrants. Subsequently, the main body of the report consists of five chapters, with the first four specifically dedicated to examining the violations committed against African migrants by the parties involved in the armed conflict in Yemen. These four chapters respectively address violations by the Saudi/UAE-led coalition forces and Saudi border guards, the Ansar Allah (Houthi) armed group, the Southern Transitional Council (STC) forces, and, finally, the internationally recognized government forces. These four chapters also include attacks committed by smuggling and human trafficking gangs in areas controlled by the various parties to the conflict. The final, fifth chapter delves into the legal framework governing the violations against migrants within the context of international law.

The four chapters dealing with violations have been further subdivided into sections that address the migrants' arrival points and gathering areas within the territories controlled by each of the four conflicting parties. Other sections delve into the patterns of violations committed by these parties. They also provide specific examples of the violations suffered by African migrants in the areas under the control of the parties, whether perpetrated by the parties' own forces or by human trafficking and smuggling gangs operating within their areas of control.

## **The report concludes with several key findings:**

1. Most African migrants in Yemen seek to reach Gulf countries, primarily Saudi Arabia, in search of a better quality of life and high-income job opportunities. Many of them are unaware of the armed conflict in Yemen and do not realize the extent of the risks they face during their journey. As a result, returning to their home countries after arriving in Yemen becomes extremely challenging.
2. African migrants take complex and unsafe routes, often relying on human trafficking and smuggling gangs that use inadequate and unsafe means of transportation. Along their journey, they encounter numerous difficulties and are subject to various direct violations, including killings, mutilations, arbitrary

violations to occur.

3. Migrants in Yemen engage in various forms of work to cover their needs and secure the funds necessary to continue their journey to Gulf countries. However, they often face low wages and unfair working conditions, being exploited by both human trafficking networks and the host communities. Communication proves to be challenging for most migrants due to language barriers.
4. All conflict parties, without exception, adopt a single policy towards migrants and commit multiple violations against them. Mwatana for Human Rights documented 112 incidents involving violations perpetrated against African migrants by the parties to the conflict in Yemen as well as human trafficking and smuggling gangs operating along the migrant routes across land and sea from the Horn of Africa passing through Yemen, ultimately reaching the border region between Yemen and Saudi Arabia. These incidents include 32 incidents committed by the Ansar Allah (Houthi) armed group, 40 incidents committed by Saudi/UAE-led coalition forces including 36 incidents committed by Saudi border guards, 10 incidents by STC forces in their various formations, and 6 incidents by forces of the internationally recognized government. Human trafficking and smuggling gangs' gangs operating in areas controlled by different conflict parties bear responsibility for 24 incidents involving violations against migrants. It is important to note that the examples presented in the report are illustrative of the cases that Mwatana was able to access and document. These examples do not cover all the violations against migrants, as the actual extent of violations far surpasses what has been documented.

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