

Moving on:

Exploring onward migration of refugees and migrants from East Africa

MMC Research Report, June 2021



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A girl and a boy walk along a canal in an irrigated farming land in Melkadida, Ethiopia.

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About MMC

The Mixed Migration Centre (MMC) is a global network consisting of six regional hubs (Asia, East Africa and Yemen, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, North Africa & West Africa) and a central unit in Geneva. The MMC is a leading source for independent and high-quality data, research, analysis and expertise on mixed migration. The MMC aims to increase understanding of mixed migration, to positively impact global and regional migration policies, to inform evidence-based protection responses for people on the move and to stimulate forward thinking in public and policy debates on mixed migration. The MMC's overarching focus is on human rights and protection for all people on the move.

The MMC is part of, and governed by, the Danish Refugee Council (DRC). While its institutional link to DRC ensures MMC's work is grounded in operational reality, it acts as an independent source of data, research, analysis and policy development on mixed migration for policy makers, practitioners, journalists, and the broader humanitarian sector. The position of the MMC does not necessarily reflect the position of DRC.

For more information on MMC visit our website: www.mixedmigration.org

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Acronyms

4Mi	Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism Initiative
COVID-19	Corona Virus Disease 2019
DRC	Danish Refugee Council
GCM	Global Compact for Migration
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
IOM	International Organization for Migration
MMC	Mixed Migration Centre
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees

Executive Summary

Many refugees and migrants do not follow a linear migration journey that leads from a set departure point to a set destination. They may not stay in their initial country of arrival, they could be pushed or compelled to choose alternative destinations or routes, or could unexpectedly settle in a country they intended to transit through. Refugees and migrants often continue moving in search of safer or better circumstances, either out of choice or because they are forced to. This movement from an initial destination to a new destination due to a variety of factors, or *onward migration*, is intrinsically linked to mixed migration as many people undertaking onward migration journeys are moving along mixed migration routes.

Migration is a highly politicised topic, and onward migration is increasingly attracting political attention with regional and global audiences. Onward migration can be both irregular and regular and legal status can vary, and can change along the journey. This fluidity poses challenges for policy makers on how to regulate such movement, and raises protection concerns, particularly for those who are mandated to assist refugees and migrants. The situation for people who engage in onward migration is of growing urgency, as regular pathways are increasingly limited and people undertake risky and irregular migration journeys.

This Mixed Migration Centre (MMC) report takes an evidence-based approach to onward migration by investigating the dynamics of onward migration and policy responses, with a focus on the East Africa region. The paper considers how the phenomenon of onward migration has been dealt with in global migration literature, including the various ways in which onward migration has been defined. The policy landscape is then explored, focusing on the national and regional policies that directly and indirectly impact on onward migration. The paper then draws from 340 4Mi¹ interviews with refugees and migrants engaged in onward migration in East Africa to explore the profiles of people engaged in onward migration, their aspirations and decision-making.

1 4Mi is MMC's flagship data collection project, using a unique network of field monitors situated along frequently used routes and in major migratory hubs. See more, [4Mi FAQ](#).

Key findings

- MMC adopts the definition that “onward migration is the movement of a refugee or migrant from an initial destination to a new destination due to a variety of factors. This movement often happens within mixed migration flows.”
- The global discourse around onward migration has become increasingly politicised and problematised in recent years, and attention has shifted from a focus on the needs of refugees and migrants, to framing onward migration as a problem that needs to be solved.
- From a policy perspective, many regional or local policy and legislative measures that directly or indirectly ‘address’ onward migration are framed to stop or stem movement from the region.
- 4Mi data analysis was conducted on interviews with 340 respondents from Djibouti, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, Somalia and Yemen, who engaged in onward migration, mainly from Ethiopia, Kenya, Saudi Arabia and Sudan.
- The main drivers of onward migration among respondents were economic factors (58%), violence and general insecurity (51%), and lack of rights (51%). In line with the drivers, many respondents chose their destinations because of better living standards compared to their country of departure, personal freedom, freedom from oppression, and access to better education.
- Most respondents were working as labourers or unemployed before beginning their onward migration journey.
- Legal status in the country of departure varied: 60% of respondents reported that they were ‘migrants’, and 38% identified themselves as refugees or asylum seekers in their country of departure.
- Family and friends are critical to decision making before and during the onward migration journey. Family and friends were the top source of information about journey, and the majority of respondents also noted that family and friends helped them start their journey. However, smugglers played an increasingly important role along the migration journey.

Methodology

Primary data

MMC's flagship data collection initiative, 4Mi (the Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism initiative)² gathers thousands of interviews with refugees and migrants on the move in and from East Africa and Yemen every year and has developed extensive data sets across several migration routes from the region.

The dataset for this paper is derived from 340 interviews conducted with refugees and migrants who started their migration journey outside their country of origin. In other words, respondents whose 'country of departure' was not the same as their 'country of origin', and were therefore on journeys that fit the MMC operational definition for onward migration.

All respondents were interviewed between November 2017 and February 2020. 43% of respondents were women and 57% were men. The average age of women interviewed was 29 years, and the average age for men was 31. Respondents were interviewed in Denmark (7), Djibouti (2), Egypt (123), Germany (44), Kenya (12), South Africa (136) and Yemen (16).

Table 1. Composition of sample: nationality and gender

Nationality	Women	Men	Total
Djibouti	3	3	6
Eritrea	17	38	55
Ethiopia	84	97	181
Kenya	0	1	1
Somalia	41	49	90
Yemen	0	7	7
Total	145	195	340

4Mi interviews are conducted by data collectors, or 'monitors', who often share the nationality of the refugees and migrants they interview and are deployed to known migration "nodes" and "hotspots" – urban centres, border areas and along transit routes – where there is a large presence of people on the move.

Secondary sources

Secondary sources used in this paper primarily provide information on migration dynamics in East Africa, the discourse around onward migration at a global level, and policy. Sources include media reports, government documents, grey literature and operational dashboards from NGOs and international organizations as well as academic sources and policy documents. All sources are footnoted and referenced.

Limitations

4Mi takes a careful sampling approach, seeking diversity, and providing rich indicative insights for populations travelling on mixed migration routes. However, sampling is not random and findings cannot be generalised to the population. It is important to note that 4Mi collects data regarding onward migration, but the tool is not only focused on the topic.

² For more information on 4Mi and its methodology, see [Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism Initiative Frequently Asked Questions](#).

Onward migration in global discourse

Onward migration is understood by MMC as “the movement of a refugee or migrant from an initial destination to a new place of settlement. This onward movement often happens within mixed migration flows, and may occur for different reasons”. Onward migration can be regular and irregular, and the focus of this paper is on onward migration as it relates to mixed migration, which is the “cross-border movements of people including refugees fleeing persecution and conflict, victims of trafficking and people seeking better lives and opportunities”.³

Mixed migration often takes place through a step-by-step process. Journeys can stop and start multiple times, progressing over potentially long periods during which refugees and migrants adapt their journey and expectations to meet changing external circumstances along their migration route. These could include social and political issues, safety and protection conditions, and economic factors. The concept of step by step migration has been highlighted in other mixed migration studies, notably by Joris Schapendonk in his studies on West African–European migration.⁴ Jorgen Carling uses the concept of “circumstantial migration”, which describes how “migration trajectories and experiences unfold in unpredictable ways under the influence of micro-level context and coincidence.”⁵

Onward migration can be understood as a manifestation of the non-linear nature of mixed migration journeys: intended destinations change, and refugees and migrants migrate onwards from their initial destination, if their needs are unmet, they cannot access services, or the expected opportunities for safety or livelihoods are not available.

This paper applies these concepts and other research to better understand onward migration in and from East Africa. The paper shows that while some people who engage in onward migration are looking for improved access to services and economic opportunities, some may move due to a lack of protection in the country where they first sought asylum (in relation to refugees or asylum seekers).⁶ This paper will explore how the individual trajectories and experiences impact onward migration journeys and can influence migration decisions.

Current understanding of ‘onward migration’

Though onward migration is not a new phenomenon, it has largely been approached through a refugee/asylum lens. For example, in 1989, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees’ (UNHCR) 40th Executive Committee discussed the phenomenon of refugees moving on irregularly to seek asylum or resettlement elsewhere after having “already found protection”.⁷ A discussion paper prepared for a 2015 UNHCR Roundtable on Onward Movement also noted that onward movement of refugees and asylum seekers was part of larger migratory movements and was characterised by its irregular nature.⁸

MMC adopts the definition that **“onward migration is the movement of a refugee or migrant from an initial destination to a new place of settlement. This onward movement often happens within mixed migration flows, and may occur for different reasons”**.

3 MMC (2021). [terminology_mmc.pdf \(mixedmigration.org\)](#)

4 Schapendonk, J. (2010). Staying Put in Moving Sands: The Stepwise Migration Process of Sub-Saharan African Migrants Heading North. In U. Engel & P. Nugent (Eds.), *Respacing Africa* (pp. 113-138). Leiden: Brill. Joris Schapendonk (2018) Navigating the migration industry: migrants moving through an African-European web of facilitation/control, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 44:4, 663-679, DOI: [10.1080/1369183X.2017.1315522](#)

5 Carling, J. and Haugen (2020) [Circumstantial migration: how Gambian journeys to China enrich migration theory](#). *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*.

6 Garlick, Madeline (2016), “The road more travelled: onward movement of asylum seekers and refugees”, *Forced Migration Review* (51), 42.

7 UNHCR Executive Committee 40th Session (1989). “[Problem of Refugees and Asylum-Seekers Who Move in an Irregular Manner from a Country in Which They Had Already Found Protection](#)”. No. 58 (XL).

8 Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies (2015). “[Onward movement of asylum-seekers and refugees: Discussion paper prepared for the Expert Roundtable on Onward Movement](#)” Geneva, 1-2 October 2015.

More recently, the understanding of onward migration has become more inclusive to other types of migration, yet there is not a universally accepted term.⁹ Some terms commonly used to describe onward migration, include:

- **Secondary movement:** Until roughly 2019, the term *secondary movement* was frequently used by UNHCR to explain why some refugees and asylum-seekers may settle in the first country in which they arrive, and some may transit through several countries before gaining access to international protection, and others who have found protection may also move on again to other countries.¹⁰

Secondary movement is also defined by the European Migration Network as “the movement of migrants, including refugees and asylum seekers, who for different reasons move from the country in which they first arrived to seek protection or permanent resettlement elsewhere”.¹¹

The term *secondary movement* has been critiqued for not accurately accounting for people on the move with complex migration histories and for whom a particular movement is “not a second but a third or even fourth stage in their migration”.¹²

- **Onward movement:** Since 2019, UNHCR has used the term *onward movement*.¹³ UNHCR defines onward movement as “movement by refugees and asylum-seekers from one country where they enjoyed international protection, or could have sought and received such international protection, to another where they may request it”.¹⁴
- **Secondary migration:** According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), *secondary migration* is “the movement of a migrant from their first country of destination to another country, other than the country in which he or she originally resided and other than the person’s country of nationality”.¹⁵

Changing trajectories

Just as multiple factors can influence refugees’ and migrants’ initial decisions to leave their country of origin, decisions to continue the migration journey beyond their first initial destination are often complex. Though motivations to move might be not borne solely out of force, if the reasons driving the onward migration are strong enough the refugee or migrant might be compelled to move.

People may reach a destination, and even settle, but find that their own personal circumstances or the conditions in that country have altered. For example, a recent IOM report drawing on Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) data found that over 80% of migrants interviewed in Libya considered Libya as their intended country of destination at the time of departure from their country of origin (largely due to opportunities for work and the chance to earn a better income). Many desired to return to their country of origin, however those who were unemployed in Libya – of which 45% were East Africans – were likely to consider onward migration.¹⁶ This indicates that the lack of opportunities at an initial destination could influence the decision making for refugees or migrants to engage in onward migration to meet their goals.

In a research paper prepared for UNHCR on onward movement, the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies noted some of the causes of onward migration included: limits on availability and standards of protection, such as restricted access to humanitarian assistance or other means of survival; family separation; obstacles to the means of securing documentation; and a lack of comprehensive solutions. They also asserted that there may be barriers to accessing asylum procedures such that “in some cases, the risk of undertaking further, irregular travel may be seen by asylum-seekers to be less than the risk of remaining in a previous State, given the absence or limited scope of protection there”.¹⁷ These factors may vary depending on the local context or region in which onward migration is being undertaken. Studies of onward migration within Europe have also considered the role of family reunion, social

9 For the purposes of this report the term ‘onward migration’ will be used.

10 UNHCR (2006). “[Refugee Protection and Mixed-Migration: The 10-Point Plan in Action: Chapter 8 Addressing secondary movements](#)”, p210.

11 European Migration Network. [Glossary, secondary movement of migrants](#). Accessed Sept 2020.

12 Lindley, Anna & Van Hear, Nicholas. (2007). [New Europeans on the move: A preliminary review of the onward migration of refugees within the European Union](#).

13 UNHCR (2019). [Guidance on responding to irregular onward movement of refugees and asylum-seekers](#).

14 UNHCR (2019). [Guidance on responding to irregular onward movement of refugees and asylum-seekers](#).

15 IOM (2019). [Glossary on Migration](#).

16 IOM 2019, Libya: [Displacement Tracking Matrix - Migrant Vulnerability and Humanitarian Needs Assessment](#).

17 Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies (2015). “[Onward movement of asylum-seekers and refugees: Discussion paper prepared for the Expert Roundtable on Onward Movement](#)” Geneva, 1-2 October 2015.

networks, as well as individual factors with onward migration described as “a constant re-evaluation of opportunities rather than a carefully planned trajectory”.¹⁸

Protection or prevention?

The discourse around onward migration has become increasingly politicised and problematised in recent years. The emphasis in political discourse has shifted from a focus on the needs of refugees and migrants, to concern that onward migration is a problem that needs to be solved. Onward migration has also been drawn into debates about refugee status and protection: the breakdown of protection and lack of legal safeguards in many host and transit countries, or people not seeking protection in the first country they reach, or transit countries as gatekeepers to stop onward migration.

Onward migration has been portrayed in an increasingly negative light, with concerns that people may potentially submit multiple asylum claims that result in “inefficiencies, administrative duplication, delays and significant costs, as well as additional demands on reception capacities and asylum systems in different countries”.¹⁹ UNHCR has expressed concern that, if this is in fact a common practice, it has the potential to lead to misuse of the asylum system. The most recent UNHCR guidance on onward migration²⁰ notes that asylum seekers do not have a right to choose their country of asylum and that onward migration raises questions about state responsibility, indicating the sovereign rights of states to manage and control their borders.²¹

The issue of whether people can and should stay in their country of first asylum continues to be a central question in policy debates around mixed migration. Onward migration creates serious challenges for States, refugees and migrants, and the international protection system as a whole.²² If refugees and asylum seekers do move on, there are issues regarding the irregular nature of the migration being undertaken and the implications this has for protection frameworks and where protection mechanisms can be accessed, as well as a state's ability to manage movements, as was set out in the 2016 United Nations New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants (the ‘New York Declaration’).²³ As such, onward migration may be viewed as particularly problematic when the migration takes place through irregular means. UNHCR’s 10-Point Plan Handbook suggests that secondary movements (onward migration) are often undertaken irregularly, which can be of concern to both UNHCR and States.²⁴ Irregular onward migration of refugees can have an effect on the asylum system, protection frameworks, and management of migration, and also carries risks of abuse and exploitation, in particular related to smuggling and trafficking.

However, the former UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Migrants, François Crépeau, has spoken against problematising mobility and movement. He has proposed that mobility should be harnessed through the introduction of proactive policies which support migrants.²⁵ Related to this are the many calls for ‘safe and regular pathways’ as a measure to address irregular onward migration. The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM), widely adopted in 2018, demonstrates a political commitment to migration that offers a unique opportunity to also re-frame onward migration away from short-term reactive approaches and towards long-term and sustained policy approaches based on evidence.²⁶

Financial support for long-term ‘solutions’ for migration (and onward migration in particular) often comes in the form of development assistance that promotes cooperation along migration routes in origin, transit and intended destination countries and is linked to so-called externalisation policies. This aid is for initiatives that manage migration, such as border management training, support to relevant line ministries, etc. There are also investments in regional-level integration, and in capacity for national governments to host refugees. All these efforts, focusing on controlling or stemming irregular migration, or on improving the chances that refugees remain within the first state in which they arrive, fit with the aim of preventing onward migration.²⁷

18 Toma, S., & Castagnone, E. (2015). What Drives Onward Mobility within Europe? The Case of Senegalese Migrations between France, Italy and Spain. [Quels sont les facteurs de migration multiple en Europe ? Les migrations sénégalaises entre la France, l'Italie et l'Espagne]. *Population*, 70(1), p 84.

19 UNHCR (2019). ‘[Guidance on responding to irregular onward movement of refugees and asylum-seekers](#)’.

20 Ibid.

21 UNHCR (2019). ‘[Guidance on responding to irregular onward movement of refugees and asylum-seekers](#)’.

22 Garlick, Madeline (2016), “The road more travelled: onward movement of asylum seekers and refugees”, *Forced Migration Review* (51), 42.

23 UNHCR (2016). [New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants](#).

24 UNHCR (2006). “[Refugee Protection and Mixed-Migration: The 10-Point Plan in Action: Chapter 8 Addressing secondary movements](#)”, p210.

25 Crépeau, F. (2018). Towards a Mobile and Diverse World: ‘Facilitating Mobility’ as a Central Objective of the Global Compact on Migration. *International Journal of Refugee Law*, 30(4), 650-656 doi: 10.1093/ijrl/eeey054.

26 Costello, C. (2019). Refugees and (Other) Migrants: Will the Global Compacts Ensure Safe Flight and Onward Mobility for Refugees? *International Journal of Refugee Law*, 30(4), 643-649.

27 See for example EU Press Release, 4 December 2018 “[Managing Migration: Commission calls time on asylum reform stalling](#).”

Migration dynamics in East Africa

Migration in and from East Africa is significant in volume and diverse in profile. Nearly 180,000 people are estimated to join mixed migration movements out of East Africa every year and many of these are engaged in onward migration journeys, though the exact numbers are unknown and have dropped more recently especially during COVID-19 pandemic and on eastern route to Yemen (see below).²⁸ People involved in mixed migration in the region include refugees, asylum seekers, forced migrants, as well as migrants who are motivated to move by many different factors but use similar irregular routes and methods. MMC's research finds that a complex mix of conflict, insecurity, and economic factors are key drivers of mixed migration from East Africa.²⁹ New, renewed, and protracted conflict situations are major drivers of forced displacement and impact mixed migration in East Africa. However, legal pathways for migration can be difficult to access for refugees and nearly impossible to access for other people who wish to migrate.

Displacement trends in East Africa have a potentially huge impact on onward migration. East Africa has some of the highest populations of displaced people in the world; there are 6 million refugees, asylum seekers, and internally displaced people in the region. As of early 2021, Kenya hosts 508,033 refugees largely from Somalia, South Sudan, DRC and Ethiopia.³⁰ In February 2021, Ethiopia hosted 801,451 refugees.³¹ There were 870,000 Somali refugees in the region.³² The reality of the large numbers of displaced people in the region is complicated by limits on refugee status and asylum and inadequate protection and opportunities for refugees in host countries, which can push refugees and asylum seekers to join embark on onward migration journeys.

Mixed migration routes from the East Africa region typically follow three main migration corridors:

The **Eastern Route** is the mixed migration corridor from East Africa to Yemen (often onwards to Saudi Arabia or other Gulf countries). This route remains the most frequented mixed migration corridor in the region and for the last few years has seen well over 120,000 refugees and migrants from East Africa moving towards Yemen. However, the COVID-19 pandemic brought migration along the Eastern Route to a halt for much of 2020, and by the end of 2020 only 37,535 refugees and migrants from East Africa arrived in Yemen.³³ This is a huge reduction from 138,213 East Africans arrivals in 2019³⁴ and 159,838 arrivals in 2018³⁵ and is largely attributed to COVID-19 restrictions in countries along the migration route.

90 percent of the people on the move along the Eastern Route are Ethiopian,³⁶ primarily from Ethiopia's Oromo ethnic group (87%), while 10% are Somali.³⁷ Each month, around 20% of the arrivals into Yemen are women, and 10-15% are children (up to 80% of whom are unaccompanied minors). Most refugees and migrants intend to move through Yemen en route to Saudi Arabia or other Gulf countries to find work.³⁸ 4Mi data indicates that 87% of Ethiopians and 67% of Somalis traveling along the route are seeking economic opportunities. 95% of respondents noted they intended to reach Saudi Arabia. Though Somalis were granted prima facie status in Yemen until very recently, some Somalis traveling the Eastern Route also intend to move onwards to Saudi Arabia or potentially Europe.³⁹

The drivers of migration for Ethiopians and Somalis on the Eastern Route are complex and deep rooted. They combine poor economic conditions, discrimination towards certain ethnic groups, violence and general insecurity, lack of respect for human rights in the country of origin, climate change resulting in resource scarcity, the erosion of livelihoods, and lack of adequate service provision. The combination of these factors makes it difficult to establish a clear distinction between refugees and migrants along the route, and those engaged in onward migration.

28 MMC (2019). [Mixed Migration Review 2019](#).

29 MMC (2020). [East Africa Resources](#).

30 UNHCR (2021). [Kenya registered refugees and asylum seekers – January 2021](#).

31 UNHCR (2020). [Data dashboard – Ethiopia](#). Accessed November 2020.

32 UNHCR (2020). <https://www.unhcr.org/somalia.html>

33 IOM (2020) [Flow Monitoring Points Yemen 2020](#).

34 IOM (2019). [Flow Monitoring Points Yemen December 2019](#)

35 IOM (2018). [Flow Monitoring Points Yemen 2018](#).

36 IOM (2019). [Flow Monitoring Points Yemen December 2019](#).

37 IOM (2020). [Flow Monitoring Points Yemen January – June 2020](#).

38 MMC (2020). [4Mi snapshot - Ethiopians and Somalis interviewed in Yemen \(June 2020\)](#).

39 Ibid

Map 1. East African mixed migration routes



The **Northern Route** is the mixed migration route from East Africa towards North Africa and sometimes on to Europe. It is taken primarily by Eritreans and Somalis, and by a small number of Ethiopians.⁴⁰ Arrivals to Europe from East Africa along the Northern Route have significantly reduced in recent years (from more than 31,000 people in 2016 to 3,089 in 2020).⁴¹ In 2020, the route to Europe saw a further reduction due to severe COVID-19 mobility restrictions across all migration routes from East Africa.

Although the percentage of East Africans along the Northern Route (and arriving in Europe) has reduced over the last few years, East Africans continue to travel north and numbers of East Africans in North Africa are still significant. To deal with the changing security and political situation in North Africa,⁴² routes shift frequently. Many people start and stop their journeys multiple times along the route and refugees and migrants often travel together.

40 UNHCR (2020). [UNHCR Dashboard – Mediterranean Situation](#). Accessed November 2020.

41 [Central Mediterranean Route through Italy](#). 1522 Somalis, 914 Congolese 562 Eritreans, 54 Ethiopians

42 UNHCR (2019). [From hand to hand: the migratory experience of refugees and migrants from East Africa across Libya](#).

By the end of 2020, UNHCR had registered 9,482 East Africans⁴³ as people of concern in Libya.⁴⁴ Further, over 18,000 East Africans⁴⁵ were recorded as part of the overall population of 574,146 migrants recorded by IOM in Libya at the end of October 2020. The number of migrants in Libya has been declining since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, and more than 80,000 are reported to have moved onwards from Libya since March 2020 (mostly to neighbouring countries).⁴⁶ This decline has been linked to a combination of factors, including the increasing unemployment rate, reduction in available labour opportunities for migrant workers, and tightened security controls and mobility restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In Tunisia, 524 East Africans⁴⁷ were registered as persons of concern with UNHCR by November 2020.⁴⁸ Refugees and migrants from East Africa also move to or through Egypt; UNHCR reported 51,395 persons of concern from East Africa⁴⁹ in September 2020.⁵⁰

Sudan also hosts a significant number of East Africans, including over 135,000 Eritreans, Ethiopians, and Yemenis as populations of concern⁵¹ in Sudan⁵² in October 2020⁵³. UNHCR reported that “the majority of all new arrivals choose to move onwards”.⁵⁴ While the majority of registered Eritreans (the largest group of East African refugees) in Sudan reside in Shagarab refugee camp (in eastern Sudan)⁵⁵, many others go directly to Khartoum, which is a key transit point on the Northern Route. From there they might join onward migration movements towards North Africa.⁵⁶

Since November 2020, unrest in the northern Tigray region of Ethiopia killed hundreds of people,⁵⁷ triggered massive internal displacement in Ethiopia,⁵⁸ and created extensive displacement of Ethiopians across the border into Sudan. As of March 2021, the United Nations Offices for Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (UNOCHA) in Sudan reported that UNHCR and the Sudanese Commissioner for Refugees (COR) had registered over 61,000 Ethiopians in Sudan since the onset of the conflict.⁵⁹ These movements could have an impact on mixed migration dynamics in the region, with many stakeholders closely watching the potential onward movement of refugees and migrants, particularly along the Northern Route.⁶⁰

Refugees and migrants traveling from East Africa are also seen in significant numbers along the Southern Route, towards southern Africa (most often headed for South Africa). Migration along this route has been last estimated to include up to 16,000 refugees and migrants from East Africa every year – approximately 80% Ethiopian and 20% Somali.⁶¹ Though very few asylum applications are accepted in South Africa, there are reports that migrants entering the country exploit a loophole in the lengthy South Africa asylum process which allows asylum seekers full rights to employment and education while awaiting refugee status determination.⁶² There are indications that the Southern Route has become less travelled. The decline in figures could be due to a combination of factors, including increased border patrols, a worsening economic situation in southern Africa, and an increase in attacks targeting foreigners, including Ethiopians and Somalis.⁶³

4Mi data collection in 2018 with children⁶⁴ and adults along the Southern Route highlights the serious protection risks that refugees and migrants face along this route. Unpublished 4Mi data from southern Africa also indicates that refugees and migrants are traveling towards southern Africa with the intention to move onwards to destinations in North America, Europe, and Australia.

43 5,432 Eritreans, 2,581 Somalis, 1,085 Ethiopian, 296 South Sudanese, and 88 Yemenis

44 UNHCR (2020).

45 8,160 Somalis, 6,623 Eritreans, and 3,394 Ethiopians

46 IOM (2020). [DTM Migrant Report 33](#).

47 265 Eritreans 182 Somalis, 77 people from the Democratic Republic of Congo

48 UNCHR (2020). [UNHCR Tunisia factsheet – November 2020](#).

49 Persons of Concerns registered in Egypt include 19,200 Eritreans, 16,181 Ethiopians, 6,755 Somalis and 9,259 Yemenis

50 UNHCR (2020). [September 2020 Egypt factsheet](#).

51 120,825 Eritreans, 13,100 Ethiopians and 1,857 Yemenis

52 UNHCR (2020). [September 2020 Sudan Fact Sheet](#).

53 In addition, by December 2020, an estimated 50,000 Ethiopians have fled to Sudan to escape violence in Ethiopia's Tigray Region. <https://www.npr.org/2020/12/12/945383928/i-have-lost-everything-ethiopian-refugees-flee-for-their-lives>

54 UNHCR (2019) [August 2019 Sudan – Fact Sheet](#).

55 African Arguments (2019). [With Ethiopia's border now open, why are Eritreans still fleeing to Sudan?](#)

56 Africa News (2019). [Sudan camp burdened with 'fleeing' Eritrean refugees - UNHCR](#).

57 UN (2020). [Tigray: Hundreds of civilians reported killed in artillery strikes, warns UN rights chief](#).

58 ACAPS (2021). [Ethiopia – crisis in Tigray](#).

59 UNOCHA (2021). [Refugee influx from Tigray continues](#).

60 MMC (2021). [Mixed migration consequences of the Tigrayan crisis | Mixed Migration Centre](#)

61 IOM 2019. [A Region on the Move: Mid-year mobility overview January to June 2019](#).

62 MMC (2017). [Smuggled South](#).

63 Ibid.

64 UNICEF (2020). [An unsettled past, an uncertain future](#).

The impact of COVID-19 on mixed migration and onward migration

Throughout 2020, movement restrictions linked to COVID-19 significantly impacted migration dynamics throughout East Africa. In March, governments across the region implemented strict travel restrictions and widespread border closures, and increased surveillance activities to combat the pandemic.⁶⁵ This made movement nearly impossible for people across East Africa, and many refugees and migrants were stranded and unable to move on or to return to their countries of origin. The COVID-19 pandemic and corresponding border closures in East Africa also reduced access to basic needs and left tens of thousands of refugees and migrants reportedly stranded throughout the region,⁶⁶ including in Djibouti⁶⁷, Somalia⁶⁸, and Yemen.

There are few options for the thousands of refugees and migrants stranded in Yemen, and during 2020 and 2021 there have been increased reports of refugees and migrants attempting deadly journeys from Yemen to Djibouti⁶⁹ via smuggling boats in an attempt to return to East Africa. Between May and December 2020, 5,950 refugees and migrants (698 women and 5,252 men) were recorded entering Djibouti from Yemen.⁷⁰ Amid concerns about these people being stranded in Djibouti in the short to medium term, the surge in these return journeys could have an impact on onward migration, as people may re-enter the Eastern Route or look to move elsewhere, potentially taking other mixed migration routes from East Africa.

The pandemic and corresponding border closures also blocked repatriation activities including through IOM's Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration program, and the voluntary repatriation of refugees in the region.⁷¹ Other access to asylum procedures throughout East Africa was also significantly reduced, which was noted by nearly 20% of 4MI respondents in East Africa.⁷²

Further, the East Africa region (which had some of the fastest growing economies in Africa⁷³) saw a sharp downturn in economic stability during 2020.⁷⁴ As a result, the most vulnerable populations (specifically refugees and migrants) are finding it more difficult to make ends meet.⁷⁵ Protection issues related to refugees and migrants are also on the rise in the region, putting many at risk of abuse.⁷⁶ As the COVID-19 crisis evolves over the next year, these impacts on mobility and vulnerability could see an increase in people on the move. These impacts could also affect onward migration trends, as people face pressure to seek better conditions outside of their country of initial arrival. Over the longer-term, there is also risk that the changes and restrictions could lead to involuntary immobility along the route, as often refugees and migrants have a limited amount of resources for their journeys which they are now using to survive in their places of transit.

65 Daily Nation (2020). [COVID-19 - Aerial Surveillance on Somalia-Ethiopia Border Starts](#)

66 IOM (2020). [Yemen COVID-19 RESPONSE UPDATE](#).

67 IOM (2020). [Djibouti Stranded Migrants report, July 2020](#).

68 IOM (2020). [Migrants Headed to Gulf Countries Stranded in Somalia as COVID-19 Spreads | International Organization for Migration \(iom.int\)](#)

69 IOM (2020). [Thousands of African Migrants Return from Yemen, Assisted by IOM in Djibouti](#)

70 IOM (2020). [Djibouti-stranded migrants 30 December 2020](#).

71 UNHCR (2020). [COVID-19 update for Kenya](#).

72 MMC (2020). [Understanding the impact of COVID-19 on refugees and migrants in Kenya and Somaliland](#)

73 African Development Bank Group (2019). [East Africa Economic Outlook 2019](#).

74 International Monetary Fund (2020). [Transcript of Sub-Saharan Africa Regional Economic Outlook Press Briefing, April 2020](#)

75 Voice of America (2020). Urban Refugees in East Africa Resort to Desperate Measures as COVID-19 Takes Hold. [Urban Refugees in East Africa Resort to Desperate Measures as COVID-19 Takes Hold | Voice of America - English \(voanews.com\)](#)

76 IOM (2020) [Migrants Headed to Gulf Countries Stranded in Somalia as COVID-19 Spreads](#); and MMC key informant interviews in Somalia, Djibouti and Yemen in March and April 2020.

Policy responses which may impact onward migration in East Africa

East African States have developed a significant number of policy and legislative measures that either directly or indirectly 'address' onward migration, though many are positioned to stop or stem movement from the region. Bilateral and regional initiatives also provide opportunities for a coordinated focus on drivers and 'solutions'. The policies tend to look to address onward migration through legislation, policies and other instruments such as programmatic interventions. This may include return migration programmes, information and support for people in transit, and promotion of free movement agreements in countries or regions of origin. However, many of these policies fall short on understanding and addressing the critical protection issues related to onward migration, including the often dangerous mixed migration journeys that many people take and the lack of safer options around migration. Though policy frameworks largely exist, in reality full implementation, as well as coordination and mechanisms, are still lacking.

Of the raft of policy measures regarding onward migration, there is still an underlying focus on reducing migration and offering potential 'solutions' that mostly seek to stem migration but do not address the drivers pushing people to join onward migration journeys or the dangerous circumstances of migration, which can prevent real opportunities for people to migrate more directly and safely to an intended destination.⁷⁷ Efforts to develop other legal pathways through temporary visas and promotion of circular and labour migration would arguably be of benefit. However, some doubt as to whether policy measures can have any impact on onward migration given the highly personal nature of decision-making, linked as it is to the unique perspectives of each group on the move and their characteristics of gender, age, education and socio-economic status.⁷⁸

Global Compact for Migration

The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) and the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) were adopted in 2018. While these key agreements are not legally binding, the GCM and GCR draw on international human rights law and set out the case for greater responsibility sharing and governance of migrants and refugees, respectively. The GCM specifically addresses onward migration through its focus on the drivers and factors that force people to leave their country of origin (Objective 2), a stated commitment to regular migration (Objective 5) and to reducing vulnerabilities (Objective 7) and strengthening certainty and predictability in migration procedures (Objective 12).⁷⁹ All of the countries in the East Africa region endorsed the GCM in 2018, which addresses all aspects of international migration. The GCM asks from signatories to demonstrate a political commitment to migration which could encourage long-term and sustained policy approaches to better and safer migration and, subsequently, decrease the prevalence of dangerous, onward irregular migration.⁸⁰

Regional bodies and policies

There are also a number of regional-level initiatives that promote cooperation on migration and mobility. Recognising that many people undertake onward migration within the region or seek to move within their own region, free movement agreements are one mechanism to foster regular movement as opposed to irregular migration. The East African Common Community Market (EAC Protocol) deals with Free Movement of Persons and Labour, and Rights of Establishment and Residence, but implementation remains inconsistent.

African Union

The African Union has agreed on a 'Free Movement Protocol', the Protocol to the Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community Relating to Free Movement of Persons: Right of Residence and Right of Establishment. In East Africa, the protocol has been signed by Djibouti, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Uganda. However, it has not been signed by Ethiopia and Eritrea, and has only been ratified by four countries.⁸¹ The African Union (AU) is committed

77 ODI (2017). [Journeys on Hold – How policy influences migration decisions.](#)

78 Kuschminder, K. (2018). Deciding which road to take: insights into how migrants and refugees in Greece plan onward movement. Migration Policy Institute.

79 Global Compact on Migration (2018). <https://refugeesmigrants.un.org/migration-compact>

80 Costello, C. (2019). Refugees and (Other) Migrants: Will the Global Compacts Ensure Safe Flight and Onward Mobility for Refugees? *International Journal of Refugee Law*, 30(4), 643-649.

81 Madagascar, Niger, Rwanda and Sao Tome & Principe

to the 2006 Migration Policy Framework for Africa, and Plan of Action (2018 – 2030).⁸² The document aims to reflect AU priorities, policies, and incorporates the aims of Agenda 2063,⁸³ the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and international migration standards, and covers areas such as migration governance, labour migration and education, diaspora engagement, border governance, irregular migration, forced displacement, internal migration and migration and trade.⁸⁴

IGAD

The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) has noted the need for regional solutions for people on the move in its 2017 Nairobi Declaration for Somali Refugees, such as greater protection capacity in the region and support for durable solutions.⁸⁵ IGAD has seven members (Djibouti, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan and Uganda) and IGAD as a body has made addressing mixed migration, and specifically onward migration, a priority in its work in building agreed upon policy frameworks between member states.

IGAD facilitates a Regional Consultative Process on Migration (IGAD-RCP also known as the Migration Dialogue for the IGAD Region or MiD-IGAD) that was established in 2008, and is leading negotiations on a Protocol on Free Movement of Persons for the region.⁸⁶ IGAD has also been active in 2019 promoting the Free Movement protocol, which aims at free movement of persons and transhumance in the IGAD Region and thereby improving opportunities for regular labour mobility. The protocol has been approved but is yet to be rolled out. Negotiations are on-going, but if and when the protocol is accepted it will have important implications for migration within the region.

The IGAD Policy Framework for Management of Migration is largely supported by IOM and GIZ (the German development agency Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit) and focuses on migration management/governance efforts, including irregular migration, forced displacement and border management, among other issues.⁸⁷ IGAD has also taken a lead in coordination of efforts to manage the regional Somali refugee and return situation, including integration of Somali refugees in Ethiopia and Kenya.⁸⁸ The IGAD architecture for combatting human smuggling and trafficking consists of various strategies, policies, institutions, and capacities of individual member states.⁸⁹

The Khartoum Process

The European Union–Horn of Africa Migration Route Initiative (known as the Khartoum Process) seeks to establish dialogue for enhanced cooperation on migration and mobility, implement projects to tackle human trafficking and smuggling, and regional collaboration among origin, transit and destination countries. The Khartoum Process members include 40 states (29 European countries and 11 African countries), including Djibouti, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan and Uganda. The Khartoum Process seeks to build cooperation and consensus around a regional approach to migration, and the collaboration and projects of the Khartoum process could have a lasting impact on mixed migration and in particular, on onward migration from the region.

82 African Union. (2018) (Draft) [The Revised Migration Policy Framework For Africa And Plan Of Action](#) (2018 – 2027)

83 African Union. [Agenda 2063](#). The Africa We Want.

84 African Union. [Migration Policy Framework for Africa and Plan of Action 2018 - 2030, Executive Summary](#)

85 [Nairobi Declaration on Durable Solutions for Somali refugees and reintegration of returnees in Somalia](#), Nairobi, Kenya, 25th March 2017

86 IOM. [Ethiopia and Kenya, Ethiopia and Djibouti, and Kenya and Uganda, all have bilateral agreements in place to waive visa requirements.](#)

87 [IGAD REGIONAL MIGRATION POLICY FRAMEWORK](#). Adopted by the 45th Ordinary Session of the IGAD Council of Ministers, July 11th, 2012.

88 IGAD (2017). [IGAD Special Summit On Durable Solutions For Somali Refugees And Reintegration Of Returnees In Somalia](#) (2017).

89 IOM (2015). [Human trafficking and smuggling of migrants in the context of mixed migration flows: State of play in the IGAD Region.](#)

National policies

Countries across East Africa play a mix of roles as places of origin or as transit countries (and to a lesser extent destination) for people on the move. The following are some examples of national policy measures that impact onward migration.⁹⁰

Ethiopia

Ethiopia is a sending, transit and destination country for refugees and migrants in mixed migration and onward migration journeys, as many refugees and migrants from the East Africa region travel to or through Ethiopia to join other migration routes. Ethiopia has also long been regarded as a country with one of the more progressive refugee asylum policies in Africa, and effectively had an “open asylum policy” for those fleeing conflict or persecution from its neighbouring countries (particularly refugees from Eritrea, South Sudan and Somalia).⁹¹

However, Ethiopia’s policy landscape is rapidly changing, and in early 2020, the Ethiopian government enacted changes to the asylum policy. In January 2020 the granted blanket asylum status for Eritreans was revoked.⁹² The Ethiopian Agency for Refugee and Returnee Affairs justified the move by claiming that many Eritreans that cross the border do not qualify for refugee status, and that unaccompanied minors and undocumented migrants were taking advantage of the policy to access entry into Ethiopia. The new policy framework relating to Eritreans will instead be ‘evidence based’ and will take into account conditions in the country of origin, such as human rights, security situation, and socio-economic and humanitarian factors.⁹³ In addition, the Ethiopian government has proposed to close Hitsats refugee camp in northern Ethiopia, which hosts up to 25,000 Eritrean refugees, although the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has halted these plans temporarily.⁹⁴

Ethiopia launched a Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) in 2017. The CRRF was designed to provide work permits to qualifying refugees and encourage local integration where feasible; to expand out-of-camp options and benchmark employment and education figures; in addition, it earmarked a percentage of jobs within industrial parks to refugees.⁹⁵ The CRRF is designed to serve as the launching point of a National Comprehensive Refugee Response Strategy (NCRRS) on the part of the Ethiopian government, a draft of which was released in November 2019, but which not yet been finalized.⁹⁶ While the CRRF seeks to provide employment opportunities for refugees, in the past Eritrean refugees have reportedly complained about the low pay of the available jobs, and in addition, the low skill level among refugees has made it difficult for them to access economic opportunities.⁹⁷

Fighting which broke out in Ethiopia’s northern Tigray region in November 2020 is estimated to have displaced more than a million Ethiopians internally⁹⁸ and at least 61,000 Ethiopians and people living in northern Ethiopia have fled to neighbouring Sudan.⁹⁹ These dynamics could have an impact on mixed migration dynamics in the region, with many stakeholders paying particular attention to the potential onward movement of refugees, particularly along the Northern Route.¹⁰⁰ Similarly, reports point to the destruction of refugee camps hosting Eritrean refugees in Tigray,¹⁰¹ and indicate that as many as 20,000 refugees are unaccounted for.¹⁰² Moreover, the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Eritrea has called for an investigation into allegations that Eritrean refugees are being forced to return to Eritrea.¹⁰³ It is not clear yet if or how this might lead to increasing numbers of Eritreans trying to leave Ethiopia and move on along various migration routes, and whether they even have the resources and possibility to do so while caught up in the fighting.

90 For more see Expertise France Country Statements produced by MMC’s predecessor, the Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat for the ‘Addressing Mixed Migration Flows in Eastern Africa’ project <https://www.expertisefrance.fr/>.

91 UNHCR (2020). [Ethiopia Country Refugee Response Plan 2019-2020](#).

92 Voice of America (2020). [Ethiopia Ends Blanket Protection for Eritrean Refugees](#).

93 ibid

94 Aljazeera (2020). [Ethiopia plans to close Eritrean refugee camp despite concerns](#)

95 <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/65262.pdf>

96 Regional Durable Solutions Secretariat (2019). [ReDSS Ethiopia – Global Refugee Forum preparations](#)

97 ODI (2017). [Journeys on hold: how policy influences the migration decisions of Eritreans in Ethiopia](#)

98 France 24 (2020). [More than a million displaced in Tigray as Ethiopian PM warns of ‘final’ offensive against region](#)

99 UNOCHA (2021). [Refugee influx from Tigray continues](#)

100 MMC (2021). [Mixed migration consequences of the Tigrayan crisis | Mixed Migration Centre](#)

101 UNHCR (2021). [UNHCR reaches destroyed camps in northern Tigray](#).

102 Al Jazeera (2021). [Ethiopia: UN says 20,000 refugees missing in Tigray](#).

103 Voice of America (2021). [UN investigator probes alleged forced return of Eritrean refugees from Ethiopia](#).

Eritrea

Eritrea's position in the mixed migration landscape is primarily as a major country of origin for thousands of people who flee national service and forced conscription. Eritrea's policy impact outward migration from Eritrea, and the ability for Eritreans to return home or to potentially join wider mixed migration routes. It is estimated almost 10% (or 500,000 out of a total of 5 million) of the population lives in exile.¹⁰⁴ The national service laws, and the resulting forced conscription in Eritrea are a key driver that is often cited by Eritreans on the move.¹⁰⁵ The policy of national service was first enacted in 1995 after Eritrea's split from Ethiopia and mandates that all Eritreans must enter into national service before the completion of secondary school. While the conscription period is legally supposed to last for 18 months, it is more indefinite.¹⁰⁶ The policy has driven thousands of young men and women to flee the country and claim asylum, either in neighbouring Ethiopia, or further abroad through onward migration. After the 2018 peace agreement with Ethiopia it was widely speculated that the national service laws, and forced conscription would be relaxed, and it was promised that the 18-month limit would be strictly enforced.¹⁰⁷ However, to date reports indicate that this change in directives has not been followed, and the practice of indefinite conscription continues.

Eritrea is a signatory and participant of the Khartoum Process, and as such has received aid aimed at improving economic conditions in Eritrea, which in turn are supposed to dissuade migration from the country. However, this initiative has come under fire, as the projects funded have been found to have used conscripted labour.¹⁰⁸

Kenya

Migration in Kenya is largely characterized by the refugee and asylum seeker landscape. The Kenya Refugee Act 2006 provides the guidelines for the management of refugees. Though the official policy prioritizes accommodating refugees in camps, in practice there is an increasingly large refugee population tolerated in Nairobi. Also, while the right to work is highlighted in the Refugee Act, access to the required work permits are extremely difficult to obtain. A new Refugee Bill is being debated in Parliament that recognises the right of refugees to participate in the economic and social development of Kenya, and imposes a duty on the government to ensure the integration of refugees into host communities. These policies and perceived restrictions can impact onward migration, particularly in reference to the refugee and asylum seeker population. A recent MMC paper on urban migration in Nairobi highlighted that most 4Mi respondents were moving through Kenya with an intention of travelling to other countries, and could potentially embark on onward migration journeys.¹⁰⁹ The government's announcement in March 2021 to close the Dadaab and Kakuma refugee camps within 14 days,¹¹⁰ was temporarily halted by a 30-day stay order issued by the Kenya High Court.¹¹¹ The lingering threat might add pressure on Somali refugees – at least those with the resources, networks and possibilities to do so – to move on from the camps to other destinations in Kenya or within or even beyond the region.

Somalia

Many Somalis are driven by conflict and insecurity to seek asylum in Ethiopia and Kenya, and Somali refugees and migrants move along all migration routes. Somalia also serves as a major transit point along the Eastern Route, with many refugees and migrants moving through the territory.¹¹² Somalia has embarked on multiple policy frameworks to manage migration.

Somalia – Federal Member States

In 2016 the Prime Minister of the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) announced the establishment of several High Level and Technical Task Forces to better manage migration in and from Somalia. These taskforces worked closely with both IOM and UNHCR to develop policies and plans to manage migration in Somalia. In addition, in 2013 the FGS entered into a tripartite agreement with Kenya and UNHCR to govern the voluntary return of Refugees from Dadaab to Somalia. The agreement was initially to be in place for 3 years but was extended in 2016 and 2019 respectively. In the agreement, the three parties recognized the need for voluntary repatriation as a means to ensuring durable solutions for the Somali refugee populations in Kenya. The agreement lays out the need for effective and efficient border operations and policies to allow movement to Somalia from Kenya, and the need for the Somali Government to build systems for the reintegration of refugees into Somali society.¹¹³

104 ibid

105 MMC 2020. [Profiles and drivers of Eritreans in mixed migration flows.](#)

106 Human Rights Watch (2019). [They are making us slaves not educating us.](#)

107 Reuters (2018). [Eritrean conscripts told unlimited national service will end: sources.](#)

108 European Parliament (2020). [Parliamentary questions – 9 January 2020.](#)

109 MMC (2020). [Urban Mixed Migration Nairobi Case Study.](#)

110 Al Jazeera (2021). [Kenya orders closure of Dadaab, Kakuma refugee camps.](#)

111 Al Jazeera (2021). [Kenyan court 'temporarily blocks' closure of refugee camps.](#)

112 MMC (2020). [Refugees and migrants interviewed in Somaliland.](#)

113 European Council on Refugees and Exiles (2013). [UNHCR, Somalia and Kenya sign agreement to facilitate voluntary return of Somali refugees.](#)

However, the adherence to the tripartite agreement has come under fire from NGOs and advocacy groups, especially in 2016 when the Kenyan Government pushed forward with proposals to close Dadaab refugee camps; which called into question the voluntary nature of returns to Somalia from Kenya, as the camp closure would leave thousands of refugees with little recourse but to return to Somalia where conditions were not conducive for return, or engage in onward migration to other destinations.¹¹⁴

Somaliland

As Somaliland is not an internationally recognized state it cannot be a signatory to conventions on the movement of people and the right to asylum, however the government of Somaliland has aligned its policies to international conventions, including conventions governing the right to asylum and refugee status. In addition, the government of Somaliland has engaged extensively on issues surrounding *Tahriib* (the term for irregular migration in Somaliland), and among the Somaliland Government there is widespread acknowledgement that irregular migration is a key issue that needs to be addressed by the government.¹¹⁵ To this end, in 2013 Somaliland created a Ministerial Committee on Tahriib – the Committee on Illegal Migration and Unemployment- which is mandated to curb the trend of Somalilanders departing the country illegally by creating opportunities and building employment opportunities at home.

Sudan

Sudan has a major role in onward migration from East Africa, with its geographical proximity and position along the Northern Route. Sudan also hosts over 135,000 Eritreans, Ethiopians, and Yemenis as populations of concern^{116 117}, however, UNHCR reports have indicated that “the majority of all new arrivals choose to move onwards.”¹¹⁸

Since 2016, Sudan and the European Union¹¹⁹ have been involved in controversial efforts to fund migration and anti-trafficking initiatives in Sudan to stem onward movement through Sudan.¹²⁰

114 Human Rights Watch (2016). [Kenya: Involuntary Refugee Returns to Somalia](#).

115 Nimo-Ilhan Ali (2016). [Going on Tahriib: The causes and consequences of Somali youth migration to Europe](#). Rift Valley Institute.

116 UNHCR (2020). [September 2020 Sudan Fact Sheet](#).

117 In addition, by December 2020, an estimated 50,000 Ethiopians have fled to Sudan to escape violence in Ethiopia's Tigray Region. <https://www.npr.org/2020/12/12/945383928/i-have-lost-everything-ethiopian-refugees-leave-for-their-lives>

118 UNHCR (2019) [August 2019 Sudan – Fact Sheet](#).

119 European Commission (2020). [THE EU EMERGENCY TRUST FUND FOR AFRICA \(EUTF\) IN SUDAN](#).

120 New York Times (2018). [By Stifling Migration, Sudan's Feared Secret Police Aid Europe](#).

Onward Migration - 4Mi Key Findings

This section provides an analysis of 4Mi data focusing on the profiles of refugees and migrants in onward migration, decision-making, and the role of smugglers in onward journeys.

Onward migration profiles

This analysis is based on interviews with 340 respondents from the East Africa and Yemen region, between November 2017 and February 2020. All respondents started their migration journeys outside their country of nationality. 43% of respondents were women and 57% were men. The average age of women interviewed was 29, and the average age for men was 31 years old. Respondents were interviewed in Denmark (7), Djibouti (2), Egypt (123), Germany (44), Kenya (12), South Africa (136) and Yemen (16).

Table 1. Composition of sample: nationality and gender

Nationality	Women (43%)	Men (57%)	Total
Djibouti	3	3	6
Eritrea	17	38	55
Ethiopia	84	97	181
Kenya		1	1
Somalia	41	49	90
Yemen		7	7
Total	145	195	340

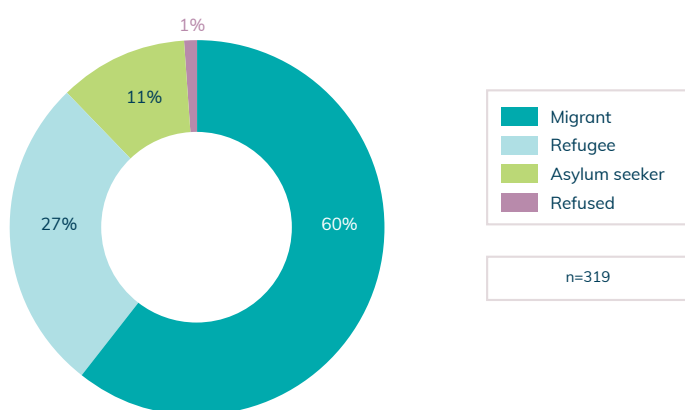
Nationality	Country of departure																Total
	Djibouti	Eritrea	Ethiopia	Kenya	Libya	Mozambique	Saudi Arabia	Somalia	South Africa	South Sudan	Sudan	Tanzania	U.A.E.	U.K.	Yemen	Zambia	
Djibouti			4	2													6
Eritrea	1		34	6				1		1	12						55
Ethiopia	12	2		34	1		52	10			59	4	1	1	3	2	181
Kenya			1														1
Somalia	2		10	71		2			2			2				1	90
Yemen							6	1									7
Grand Total	15	2	49	113	1	2	58	12	2	1	71	6	1	1	3	3	340

Legal status in country of departure

4Mi respondents engaged in onward migration were of different legal status.¹²¹ 60% of respondents (n=204) identified that they were migrants, and among this group, 62% declared that they were present in the country of departure irregularly. This was notably high among respondents interviewed in Kenya (n=113), where 73% of respondents had no documentation to support their stay in the country. Irregular status puts those on the move in a precarious position, as they are often vulnerable to a number of risks including detention, deportation, exploitation and extortion.

38% of respondents identified themselves as refugees or asylum seekers (27% as refugees and 11% as asylum seekers) in their country of departure.

Figure 1. What was your status in your country of departure?



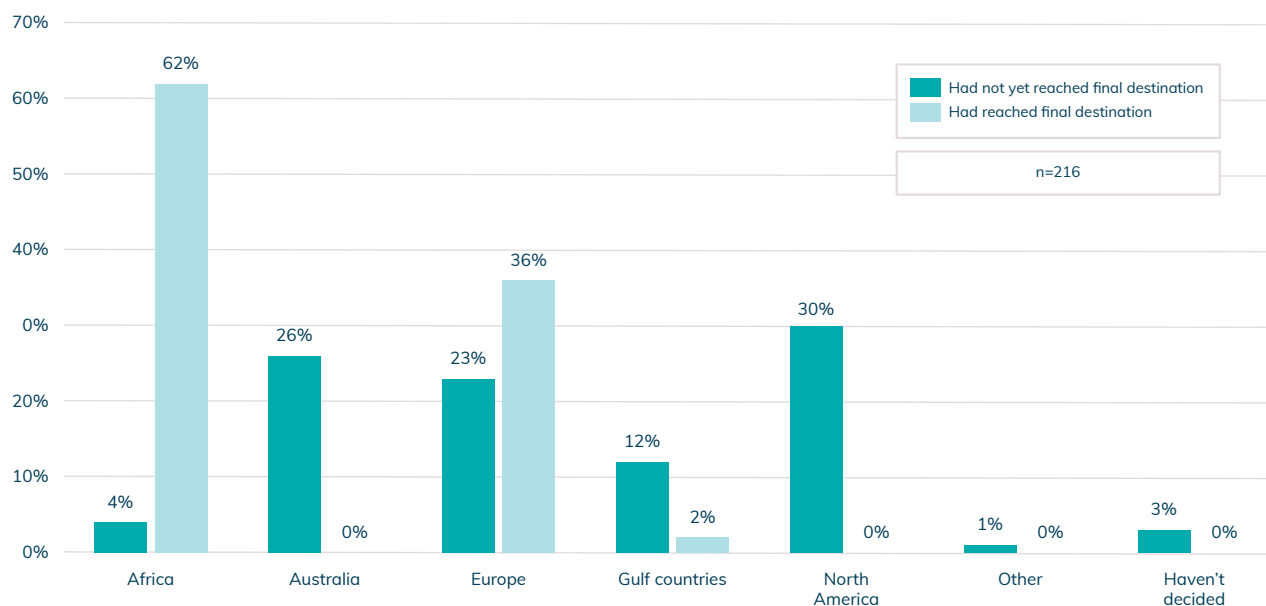
Destinations

Respondents named a large variety of destination countries. Overall, 36% of respondents said they had reached their final destination at the time of interview, 36% of respondents had not yet decided, and 27% said that they had not reached their destinations.

Those who had reached their destination (n=124) were in South Africa (n=76), Germany (n=39), Denmark (n=6) and Yemen (n=2). For those who were not in their intended destination (n=92), top destination countries noted by respondents included Australia (n=24), Canada (n=24), Saudi Arabia (n=10), Germany (n=7), United Kingdom (n=5), and the United States (n=4).

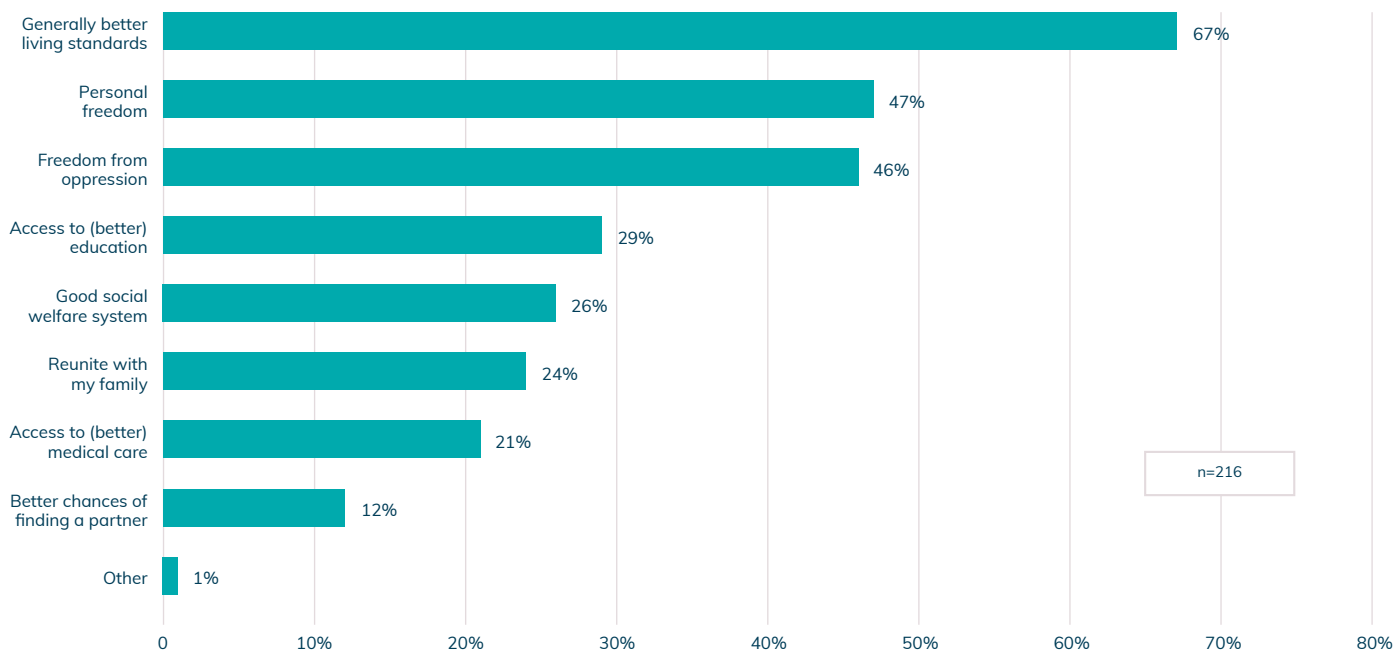
¹²¹ Respondents self-report their status. 4Mi does not ask for verifying documentation.

Figure 2. What is your final preferred destination?



The driving factors behind choosing a destination were perceived to offer better living standards (67%), personal freedom (47%), and freedom from oppression (46%), among other considerations (Figure 3). These factors are in line with the suggestion that respondents did not feel that the country of departure provided economic opportunities or the protection mechanisms that they needed. An earlier study by the Swiss Forum for Migration and Population Studies on the onward movement of Somali refugees to European destinations found that those who engaged in onward movement did so because of poor quality protection, limited livelihood opportunities, limited freedom of movement, and limited access to durable solutions such as local integration.¹²²

Figure 3. Why did/do you want to go to your destination country?



122 Swiss Forum for Migration and Population Studies (2006), [The Path of Somali Refugees into Exile: A Comparative Analysis of Secondary Movements and Policy Responses](#).

What would have made you stay?

68% of all respondents stated that they would have stayed in their country of departure, if the reasons they left were not affecting their lives (n=231). This shows how better circumstances in initial (temporary) destinations countries could clearly affect people's motivations and intentions to move on. Asked what would have to improve to stay, most respondents noted more than one reason, including financial circumstances (94%), security/stability (81%), personal freedom (65%) and social status (58%). This again aligns to the suggestion of multiple drivers of onward migration.

Figure 4. If any of the reasons you listed were not affecting your life, would you have stayed at your country of departure or would you have migrated anyway?

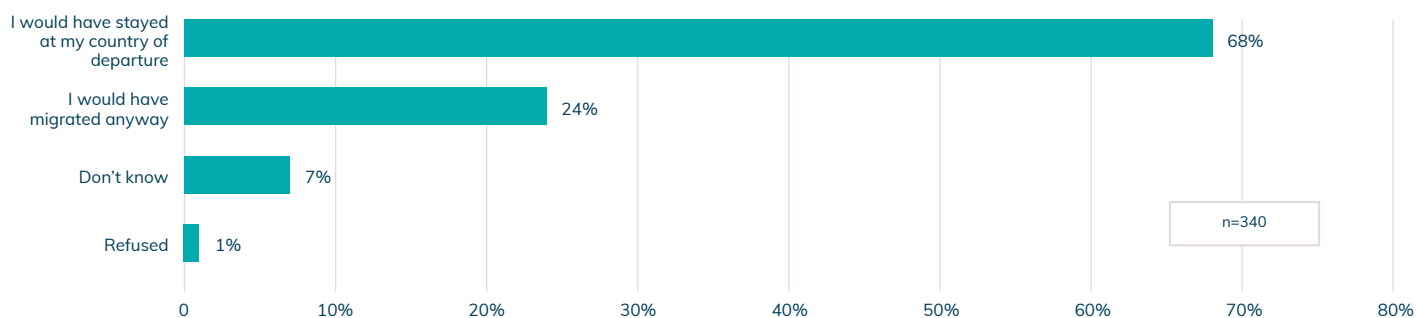
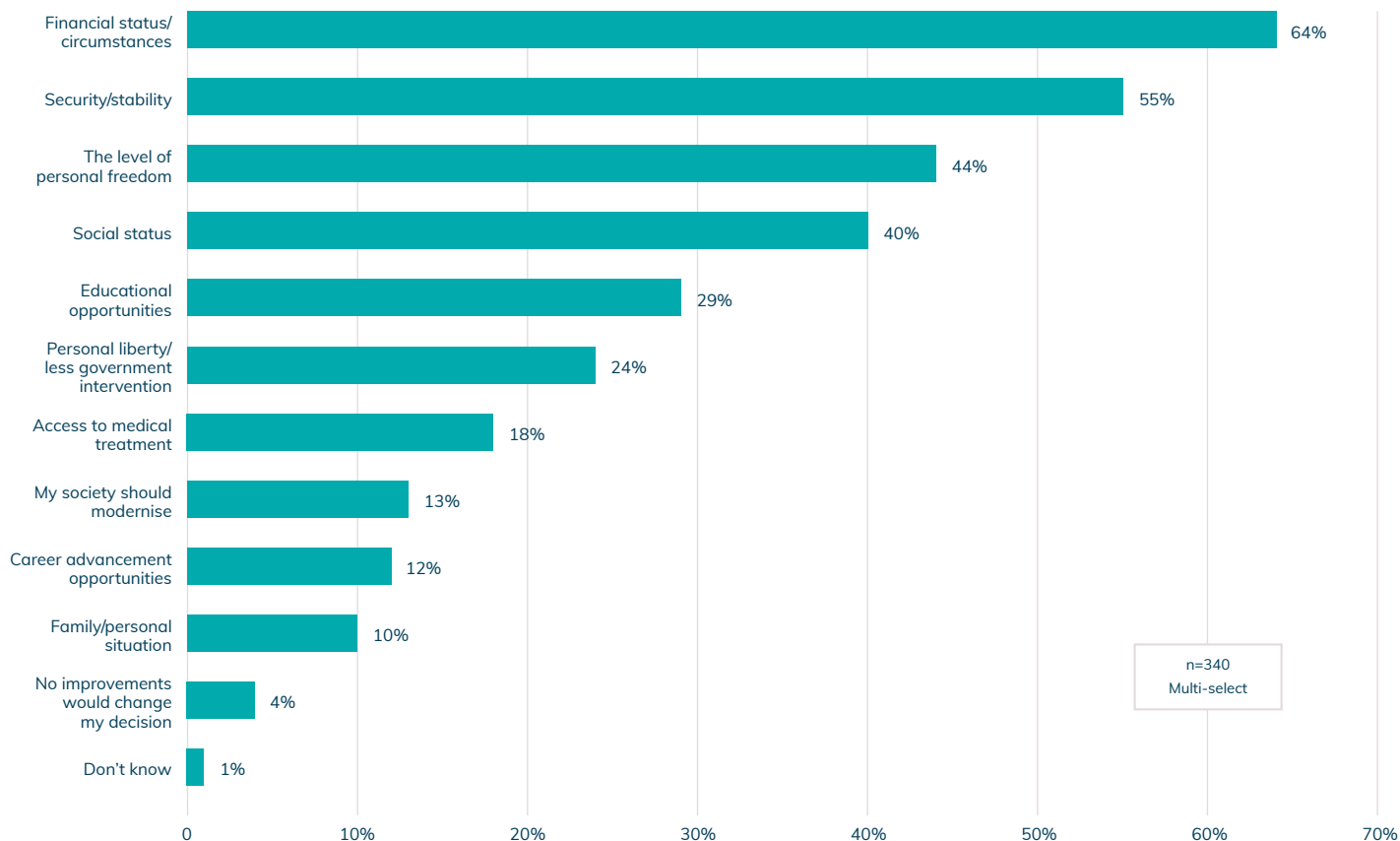


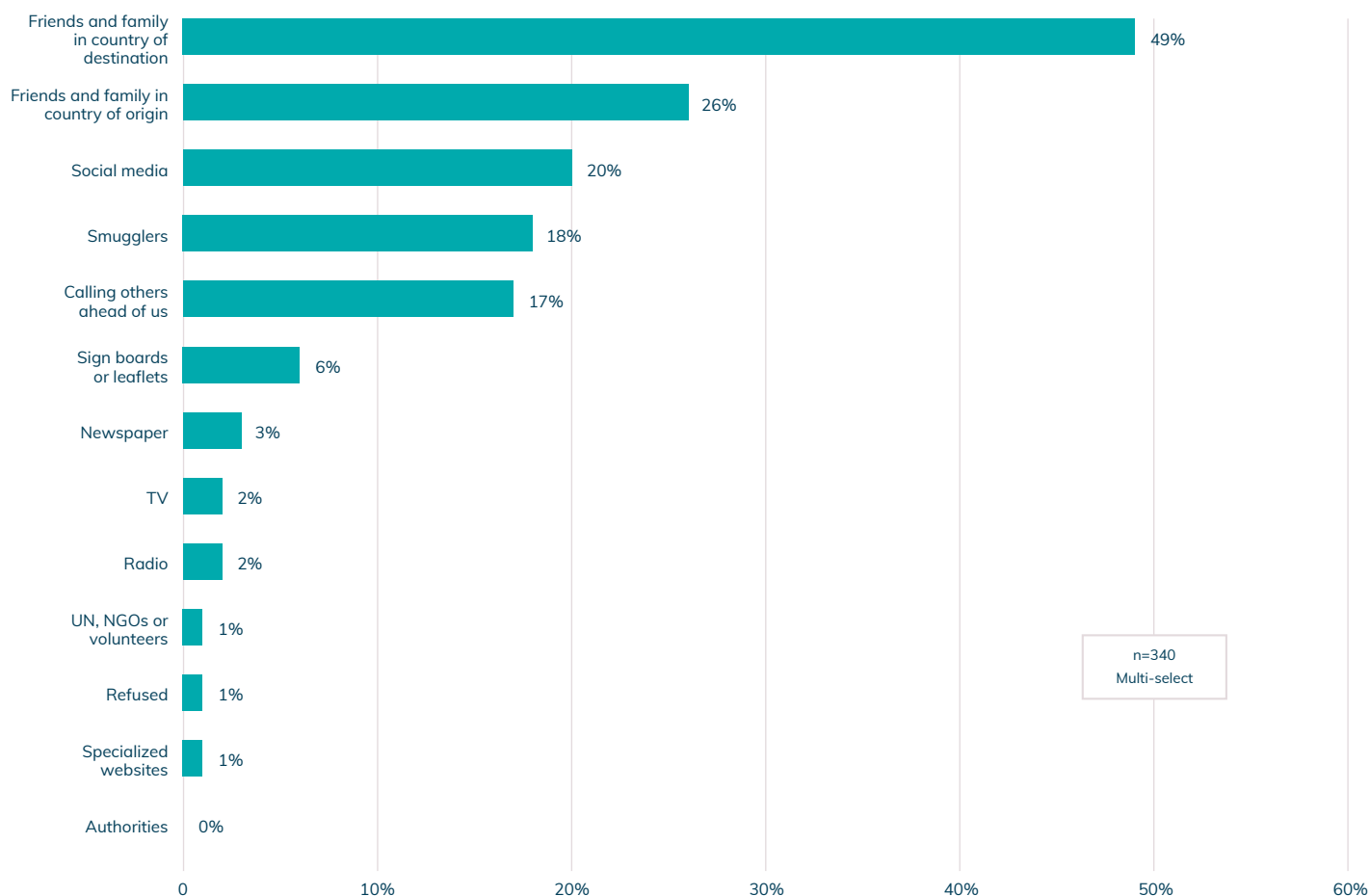
Figure 5. What should improve in order for you to have considered remaining in your country of departure?



Family and friends frequently play a role in influencing onward migration journeys

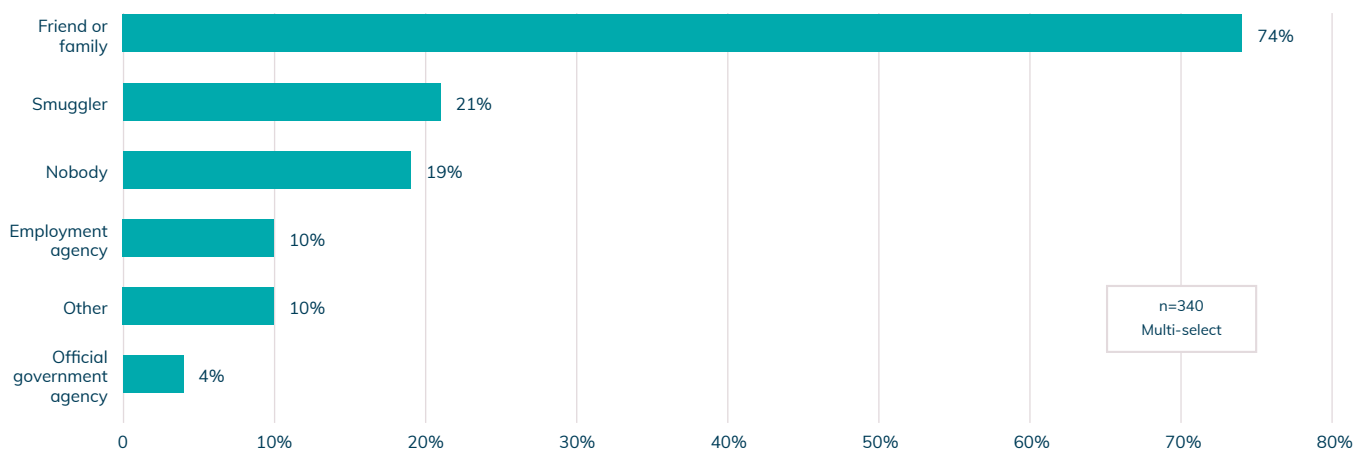
Family and friends are critical information sources at the start and during the onward migration journey. 49% of respondents said that they communicated with friends and family in their intended destination to gather information about the country, and about the route, costs, and risks along the way. The second source of information was family and friends in country of origin (26%).

Figure 6. Who was your first source of information on migration including routes, destinations, costs and risks prior to departure?



In addition to being the first source of information for respondents, **friends and family also helped 74% of respondents start their onward migration journey.**

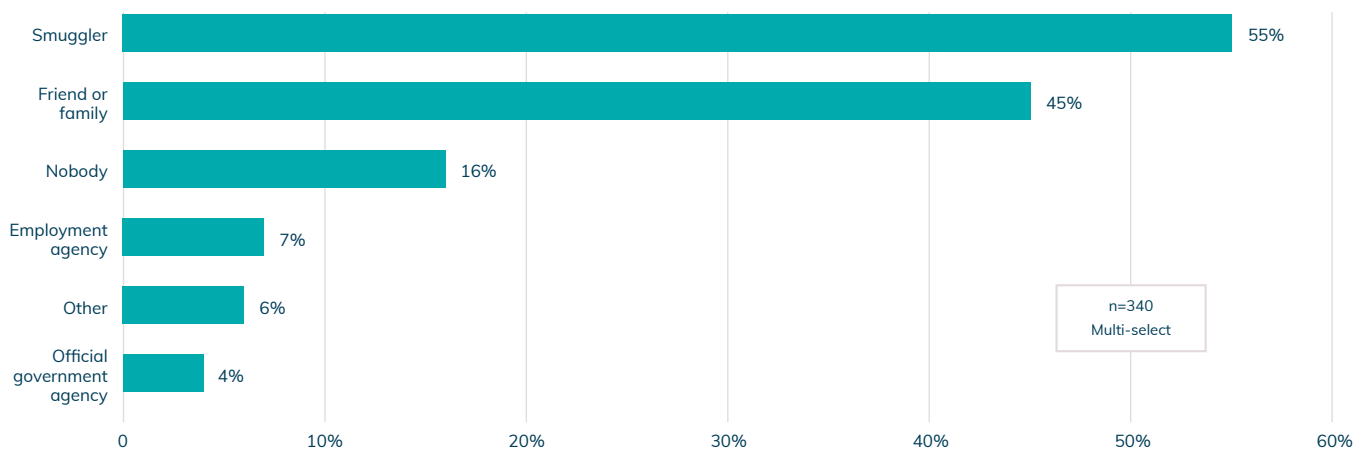
Figure 7. Who helped you start your migration journey?



An increasing role for smugglers along the migration journey

The data shows that respondents were more reliant on smugglers to facilitate their journeys than on other groups. While only 21% of respondents stated that smugglers helped them begin their journeys, 55% of respondents reported that smugglers helped facilitate the rest of their journeys. This could indicate that the further they got from the start of their journey, the less they were able to call upon the initial sources of support –family/friends dropped from a source of ‘help’ for 74% at start of journey to 45% during the journey.

Figure 8. Who facilitated your migration for the rest of the journey?



Conclusion

The phenomenon of irregular onward migration has become a permanent feature of the migration landscape globally, and a key component of the mixed migration environment in East Africa. Though the current discourse on onward migration tends to focus on refugees and asylum seekers,¹²³ migrants and refugees undertake onward migration journeys for a variety of (often overlapping) reasons. This paper shows that in East Africa, onward migration is often driven by a lack of opportunities and safety, combined with aspirations and the very limited availability of legal migration channels. Three main points are outlined below:

Circumstances and experiences drive onward migration decisions

Circumstances can drive refugees and migrants to embark on an onward migration journey towards a safer destination or one with more opportunities, but there is not always a permanent destination in mind. The 4Mi analysis shows that many respondents noted that if conditions improved in their country of departure (including meaningful access to employment, security and personal freedom) they might not have moved on.

Though not included in the analysis above, it still remains to be seen how the COVID-19 pandemic will influence onward migration. On the one hand, the economic impact of the pandemic on refugees' and migrants' livelihood opportunities might increase the aspirations to leave an initial country of destination and seek better opportunities elsewhere. However, it is also likely to limit people's capability to move on, due to depleted resources to finance migration as well mobility restrictions along migration routes.

Other sudden changes in circumstances and events could also trigger onward movement – or the intention to move on – such as the ongoing conflict in Tigray and the impact on Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia, the announced closure of refugee camps in Kenya or other sudden changes in the security situation in places and countries hosting large numbers of refugees and migrants.

Decisions are very personal and influenced by family and friends. Before departure on migration journeys, respondents relied primarily on family and friends and others traveling ahead of them. However, once on the move refugees and migrants may have less direct control over decision making and routes. 4Mi respondents relied heavily on smugglers to facilitate their journeys after they were already on the move. This reliance on smugglers can put refugees and migrants in a more vulnerable position as they have less control over the migration journey

National and regional policies on migration should focus on supporting people on the move along migration routes

When developing state and regional policies, the principle of protection should be paramount. Increasingly, however, a number of state and regional policies on migration and refugee issues appear to make it difficult for people to remain in initial countries of destination (referred to in this report as country of departure) and take a punitive approach towards irregular migration. Policies should ensure access to basic services – such as health, education or livelihoods – both for people who have arrived in their initial destination and those still on the move, irrespective of legal status. Yet as this paper has shown, despite multiple policy and regulatory frameworks, lack of implementation can be a factor in driving onward migration beyond first countries of asylum and destination. On the other hand, though beyond the scope of this paper to further explore, full implementation of free movement protocols (or even free movement across the African continent) would also ease the possibility for onward movement, in a regular and safe fashion, up until the geographic boundaries of the free movement region.

At the same time onward migration is determined by multiple highly personal factors and drivers that may not be only targeted at a policy level but could be addressed through targeted programmes improving circumstances and creating opportunities in places (cities, countries, regions) hosting large numbers of refugees and migrants. With the majority of refugees and migrants living in urban areas, cities are the front line responders in terms of offering better

123 UNHCR (2019). ['Guidance on responding to irregular onward movement of refugees and asylum-seekers'](#)

opportunities for local economic and social integration and city authorities as such should play a greater role in policy discussions on onward migration at a programmatic level.^{124 125} More information is needed on this.

More research is needed to fully understand the dynamics of onward migration

There remains a lack of consensus regarding how terms describing onward migration, such as secondary movement, onward journeys and secondary migration, should be used and defined. This can inhibit efforts to develop a solid evidence base for policies, as is called for in the GCM. Further research is needed on the scope, scale, and dynamics of onward migration, people's agency in making decisions on onward movement, the factors that draw people towards new destinations, but also the often overlooked 'risk of staying', while some people move on, and others in similar circumstances do not, and so on. Moreover, new approaches in migration research, such as longitudinal research (interviewing the same people repeatedly over time), could help to better understand how drivers, experiences, decisions and aspirations developed over time and at several points along onward migration journeys and fit the non-linear nature of many of the onward migration journeys of refugees and migrants. With this knowledge, it will be possible to better analyse the policy impact on people's decision making, particularly when and if policies in destination countries inform decision making.

124 MMC (2020). [Urban Mixed Migration. Nairobi Case Study](#);

125 MMC (2020). [Mixed Migration Review 2020. Highlights. Interviews. Essays. Data](#).



The MMC is a global network consisting of six regional hubs and a central unit in Geneva engaged in data collection, research, analysis and policy development on mixed migration. The MMC is a leading source for independent and high-quality data, research, analysis and expertise on mixed migration. The MMC aims to increase understanding of mixed migration, to positively impact global and regional migration policies, to inform evidence-based protection responses for people on the move and to stimulate forward thinking in public and policy debates on mixed migration. The MMC's overarching focus is on human rights and protection for all people on the move.

The MMC is part of and governed by the Danish Refugee Council (DRC). Global and regional MMC teams are based in Copenhagen, Dakar, Geneva, Nairobi, Tunis, Bogota and Bangkok.

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