



Mixed
Migration
Centre

The impact of COVID-19 on refugees and migrants moving through Puntland, Somalia

Key findings from 4Mi data collection in Puntland
from August to December 2020

MMC Research Report, June 2021



Front cover photo credit:

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Small fishing boats, like this one in Bossaso's busy commercial port, carry up to 125 people when used to smuggle migrants from the Somali coast across the Gulf of Aden to Yemen.

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About MMC

The Mixed Migration Centre (MMC) is a global network consisting of six regional hubs (Asia, East Africa & Yemen, Europe, North Africa, West Africa and Latin America & Caribbean) and a central unit in Geneva. The MMC is a leading source of 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.

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The information and views set out in this report are those of the Mixed Migration Centre and do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of the Danish Refugee Council or of UNHCR. Responsibility for the content of this report lies entirely with the MMC.

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

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Executive summary

On 16 March 2020, the Somali federal government confirmed its first case of coronavirus. This triggered a quick succession of regulations that closed air, land and sea ports of entry, and led to the closure of most public spaces including mosques, schools, and restaurants. At the same time, other governments across East Africa implemented strict travel restrictions and widespread border closures to combat the spread. These restrictions significantly impacted mixed movements¹ throughout the region, and many migrants were stranded and unable to move on or to return to their countries of origin.² The restrictions also disrupted the movement of refugees and migrants³ in mixed movements through Puntland and other regions of Somalia.

With the support of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), in 2020 the Mixed Migration Centre (MMC) and the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) collaborated on a partnership to strengthen the protection of people in mixed movements and to prevent the abuse of people on the move in Puntland. Through MMC's flagship primary data collection program, the Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism Initiative (4Mi), MMC collected systematic data directly from refugees and migrants at various entry and transit locations in Puntland, which was used to understand the dynamics affecting movement and protection risks within the context of the pandemic.

Based on a 4Mi survey conducted with 989 respondents in Puntland between August and December 2020, this analysis aims to provide some insights on the profiles of refugees and migrants on the move through Puntland in the context of the pandemic; awareness and protective measures; and analyse the impact of COVID-19 on their mobility, livelihood situation, needs and access to services, and protection.

About this report

This report is part of a series of reports on mixed movements into and through Somalia that the Mixed Migration Centre (MMC) will be publishing in 2021 as part of the collaboration with UNHCR. This work is in line with the MMC strategic objectives to contribute to a better, more nuanced and balanced understanding of mixed migration, to effective evidence-based protection responses for people on the move, and to contribute to evidence-based advocacy and better informed regional and migration policies and debates.

- 1 MMC normally applies the term 'mixed migration' to refer to cross-border movements of people including refugees fleeing persecution and conflict, victims of trafficking and people seeking better lives and opportunities. See MMC's full definition of mixed migration and associated terminology [here](#). UNHCR applies the term 'mixed movement', defined as: The cross-border movement of people, generally in an irregular manner, involving individuals and groups who travel alongside each other, using similar routes and means of transport or facilitators, but for different reasons. People travelling as part of mixed movements have different needs and profiles and may include asylum-seekers, refugees, victims of trafficking, unaccompanied or separated children, stateless persons, and migrants (including migrants in irregular situations or migrants in vulnerable situations). In light of the partnership between UNHCR and MMC to develop this joint publication the term 'mixed movement' is used.
- 2 IOM (2021), [Djibouti stranded migrants – February 2021](#).
- 3 MMC uses 'refugees and migrants' when referring to all those in mixed migration movements (including asylum seekers, stateless people and others on the move), unless referring to a particular group of people with a defined status within these movements.

Key findings

Profiles

1. All interviewed respondents were Ethiopian nationals. 79% were men and 21% were women, with an average age of 28 years old.
2. The overwhelming majority (94%) of respondents identified themselves as migrants, 3% as refugees, and 2% as asylum seekers.
3. 50% of respondents had not completed any formal schooling. 40% had completed primary school, 6% secondary school, and 3% vocational training. Women were more likely to report not completing any schooling than men (respectively 65% versus 46%), and reported lower levels of education across the board.
4. 90% of respondents said they left their country of departure due to economic reasons. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was the most popular destination for respondents (79%) in Puntland.

Awareness, knowledge and risk perception

5. Most respondents were aware of coronavirus and were concerned about contracting or transmitting the virus. However, 70% of respondents said that they are doing nothing to protect themselves. When asked why they aren't taking precautions, 70% said they don't know how to protect themselves, suggesting that the quality of information received by respondents on the coronavirus is inadequate.

Impact on the journey

6. Economic conditions in country of departure play a major role in driving movement through Puntland. For most (71%), COVID-19 did not impact their decision to move. Where it did play a role however, most respondents (89%) noted that economic factors related to the pandemic were a key factor.
7. 90% of respondents reported that COVID-19 impacted their journeys, with specific effects on mobility across borders (62%) and movement within countries (49%). However, 83% said their intentions to move remained the same even if they were delayed.

Impact on access to health

8. Most respondents felt they would not be able to access healthcare services in Puntland if they presented COVID-19 symptoms. The main barriers to accessing health were: not knowing where to go for healthcare (62%), and not having money to pay for health services (48%).

Impact on work and livelihoods

9. Income loss related to the COVID-19 crisis is contributing to rising vulnerability among refugees and migrants in Puntland, as 72% say they are no longer able to afford basic goods, 42% say they are using up savings and 18% say they are falling into debt.
10. Basic needs which could limit the negative impacts of COVID-19 have not been met. 60% of respondents say they are in need of cash, and 49% say they are in need of food.

Impact on smuggling

11. Respondents report that smuggling through Puntland is more in demand, less accessible, and more expensive since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Impact on protection risks

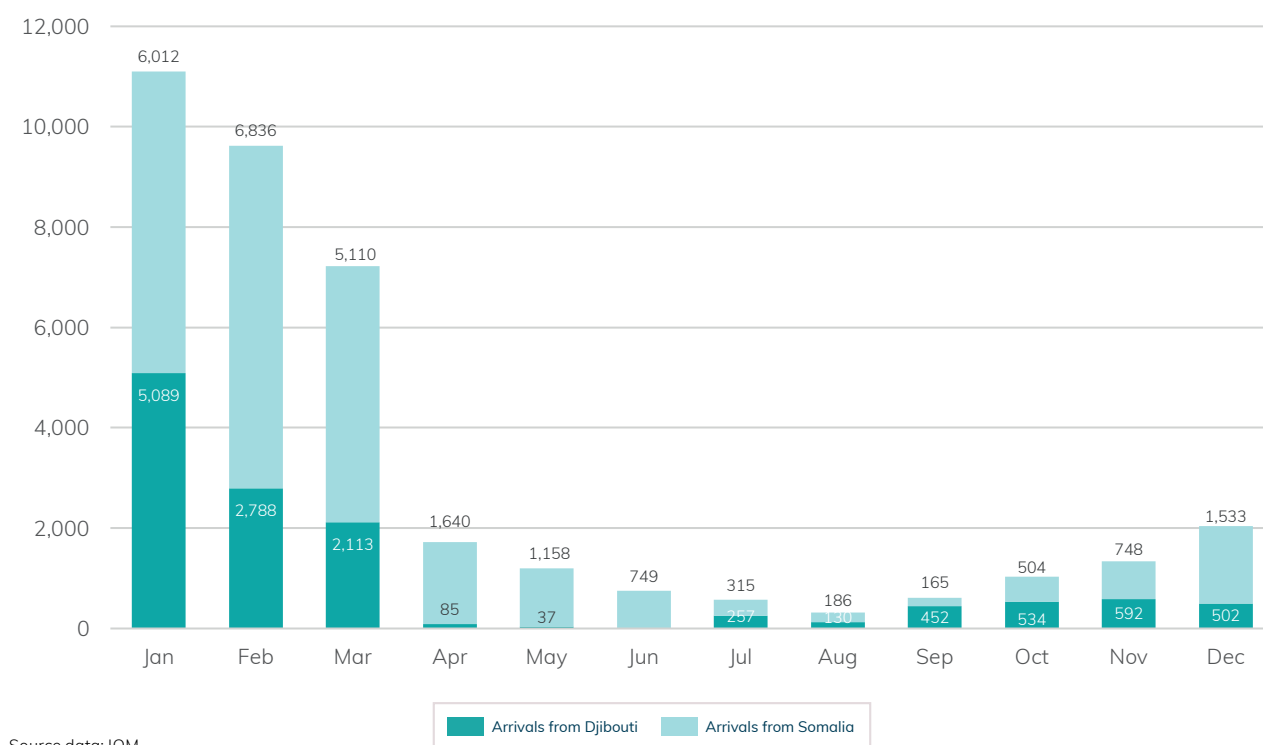
12. 40% of respondents say that they travelled through dangerous locations on their journey. The town of Waajale (which spans across the Ethiopian and Somali sides of the border), and Las Anod (in Somaliland) were frequently mentioned as dangerous locations.
13. Detention, physical violence and robbery were identified as the top risks on the journey. Smugglers and criminal gangs were identified as most likely to perpetrate abuses against those on the move.
14. The majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the COVID-19 pandemic has increased protection risks on the journey, including arbitrary arrest/detention (81%), deportation (74%) and bribery (73%).

Overview: Mixed movements through Puntland

Puntland as a key area for mixed movements in East Africa

Puntland State is located in north-eastern Somalia and is a key transit point along the Eastern Route – a major mixed movement corridor from the Horn of Africa towards Yemen and the Gulf. Every year, tens of thousands of Ethiopian and Somali refugees and migrants leave their homes and depart near or from the coastal areas of Bossaso in Puntland, and Obock in Djibouti, looking for safety, employment and better opportunities. IOM estimates that in 2020, 37,535 refugees and migrants from East Africa arrived in Yemen.⁴ However, this is a just fraction of the 138,213 East Africans who arrived in Yemen in 2019⁵ and the 159,838 that arrived in Yemen in 2018.⁶ This decrease is largely attributed to the COVID-19 movement restrictions throughout the region. Somalia is a key transit point along the Eastern Route; 66% of East African arrivals into Yemen in 2020 left from Somalia, and 43% departed from Djibouti.

Figure 1. 2020 refugee and migrant arrivals in Yemen by departure point



The majority of those transiting through Puntland to Yemen are Ethiopians who cross from Ethiopia into Somaliland, and thereafter into Puntland, where they converge with Somalis, mainly from south and central regions. In 2020, approximately 93% of refugees and migrants arriving in Yemen were Ethiopians and 7% were Somalis. Men also made up the majority of those on the move through Puntland (accounting for 64% of arrivals in Yemen), followed by women (22%), and boys and girls in equal measure (7% each).⁷

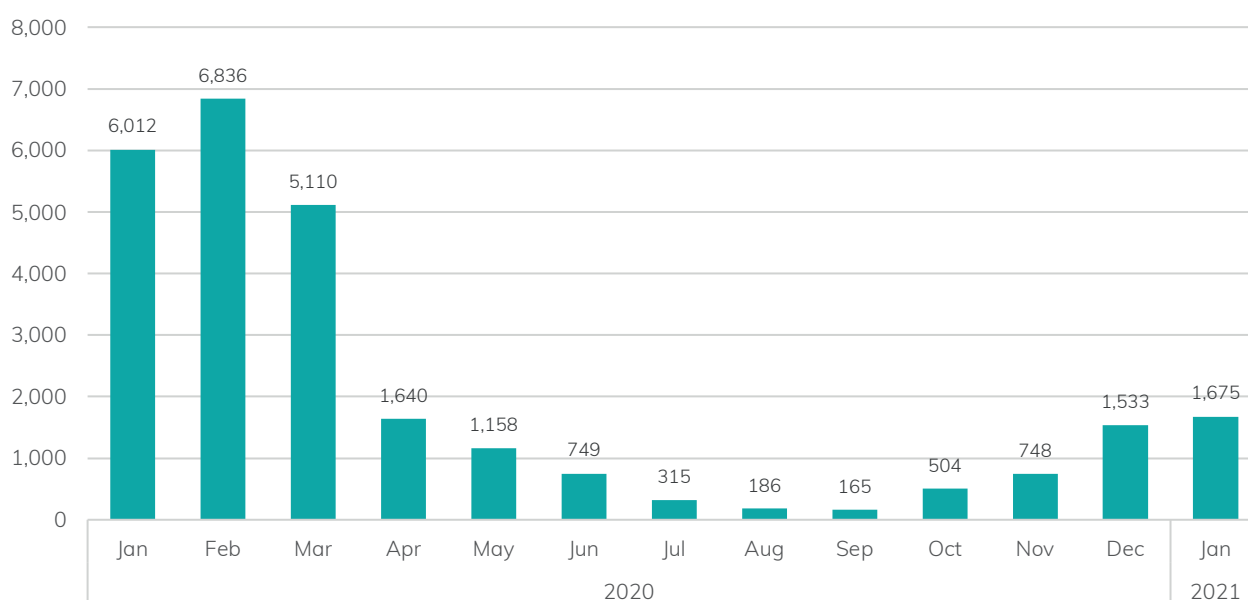
4 IOM (2021), [Flow Monitoring Points. Migrant Arrivals and Yemeni Returns in 2020](#).
 5 IOM (2020), [Flow Monitoring Points. Migrant Arrivals and Yemeni Returns from Saudi Arabia in 2019](#).
 6 IOM (2018), [Flow Monitoring Points. 2018 Migrant Arrivals and Yemeni Returns from Saudi Arabia](#).
 7 IOM (2021), [Yemen Flow Monitoring Data 2020](#)

COVID-19 and the effect on mixed movement through Puntland

The outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic changed the landscape for refugee and migrant movements across the world. In Somalia, the first case of COVID-19 was confirmed in Mogadishu on 16 March 2020. As of 21 May 2021, Somalia reported a total of 14,594 cases.⁸ In response to the global crisis, federal authorities banned international passenger flights into the country on 5 March 2020, which was followed in quick succession by the closure of land borders with Ethiopia and Djibouti on 26 March, and closures along the Kenyan border on 9 April. In an attempt to contain the spread of the virus, schools, universities and madrassas were also closed, along with other public spaces, and authorities instituted nighttime curfews across the country.

These restrictions had a direct impact on the movement of refugees and migrants through Puntland along the Eastern Route, noted by a marked dip in the arrivals recorded in Yemen. Arrival figures that started off characteristically high in January and February 2020, dipped 25% between February and March, and sharply declined by 68% between March and April. In June, authorities began to lift restrictions across the country and on 3 August, international passenger flights resumed. However, arrival from Puntland in Yemen remained suppressed throughout the year, before slowly starting to rise again in October (Figure 2). At the end of 2020, just 24,965 arrivals were recorded from Puntland in Yemen,⁹ a 71% decline from the 85,613 that arrived in 2019.

Figure 2. 2020 and 2021 refugee and migrant arrivals in Yemen (from Puntland)



Source data: IOM

Refugees and migrants continued to arrive in Puntland over the course of 2020, but with limited options to journey onwards, many were stranded in various locations across the territory. In November 2020, IOM reported that there were hundreds of stranded migrants in Bossaso,¹⁰ and in December unpublished partner reports suggest that there were up to 3,000 migrants in Bossaso.

⁸ Federal Republic of Somalia, Ministry of Public Health (2021), [COVID-19 Situational Update](#)

⁹ IOM (2021), [Yemen Flow Monitoring Data 2020](#)

¹⁰ IOM (2020), [Somalia COVID-19 Preparedness and Response](#)

4Mi methodology and COVID-19 adaptation

This report uses data from the MMC's flagship Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism Initiative (4Mi), a unique primary data collection tool for interviewing people in mixed migration movements. 4Mi uses a closed-question survey to invite respondents to anonymously self-report on a wide range of issues that results in extensive data relating to individual profiles, migratory drivers, means of movement, conditions of movement, the smuggler economy, aspirations and destination choices. 4Mi helps to fill knowledge gaps, inform policy and contribute to more effective protection responses. It aims to provide an evidence base for decision-making.

At the onset of the COVID-19 crisis, MMC responded by changing the data it collects and the way it collects it. During April and June 2020, MMC revised its 4Mi methodology to be able to recruit and interview participants by phone instead of face-to-face. A new survey was developed - in collaboration with numerous agencies and partners working in the refugee and migrant space - to focus on the impact of COVID-19 on people on the move, awareness and access to information on COVID-19, access to health services, the impact of the crisis on individuals, changes in needs, changes in migration intentions, the impact the COVID-19 crisis has had on migration journeys, protection issues, smuggling, the drivers of migration and migration routes.

Sampling for this project was achieved through a mixture of purposive and snowball approaches, and participants were recruited through a number of remote or third-party mechanisms, using social media, community networks, and assistance programs. Interviews were primarily conducted by phone. The survey revision considered the different constraints of telephone interviewing, including the more rapid onset of respondent fatigue. In order to remotely identify and interview respondents, some respondents were discreetly identified and recruited via social media. Others were recruited through contacts of previously interviewed respondents, and through community leaders working with refugees and migrants. The potential respondents are contacted by phone for interview, after obtaining informed consent. Data protection measures were in place to ensure that the data collected remains anonymous.

See more 4Mi analysis and details on methodology at www.mixedmigration.org/4mi

UNHCR partnership

For this joint partnership with UNHCR and DRC Somalia, 4Mi data collection interviewed non-Somali adults on the move in Puntland, irrespective of migration status, though often engaging in irregular migration. In collaboration with UNHCR, seven research locations in Puntland were selected, namely Alhambdullah, Burowadal, Celdahir, Dhahar, Kalabeyr, Laag and Qaw. One data collector (monitor) was recruited per location based on their knowledge of mixed movements, experience with data collection, language skills and access to the population on the move. After recruitment, monitors were trained on mixed movements in Puntland, remote data collection techniques, ethics, and on the use of the 4Mi tool.

Map 1. Map of data collection locations in Puntland



The designations employed on this map do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of MMC, the Danish Refugee Council, or of the United Nations concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

4Mi findings

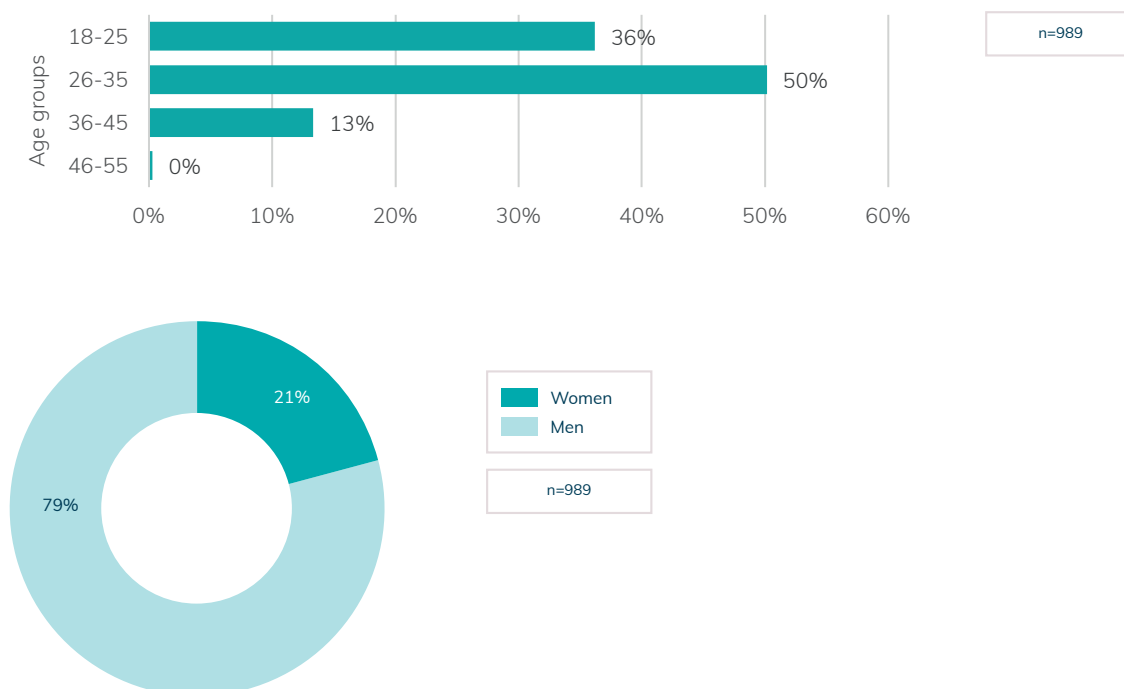
Profiles and demographics

The analysis presented in this report is based on 989 interviews conducted with refugees and migrants in Puntland, Somalia between 26 August and 31 December 2020. All respondents were from Ethiopia with a majority of respondents from the Oromo ethnic group (77%), followed by Amhara (13%), Tigre (8%) and Gurage (1%). 79% of the respondents were men and 21% were women, with an average age of 28. Almost all (986) respondents began their journeys in Ethiopia, two in Somalia, and one in Eritrea. Interpretations based on this sample should be made with caution, as it does not necessarily represent the view of the entire Ethiopian community in Puntland.

Table 1. Location of interviews

Interview locations	Women	Men	Total respondents
Alhamdulillah	47	139	186
Burowadal	19	83	102
Celdahir	28	97	125
Dhahar	0	68	68
Laag	45	138	183
Kalabeyr	10	145	155
Qaw	61	109	170
Total	210	779	989

Figure 3. Age range and sex of respondents



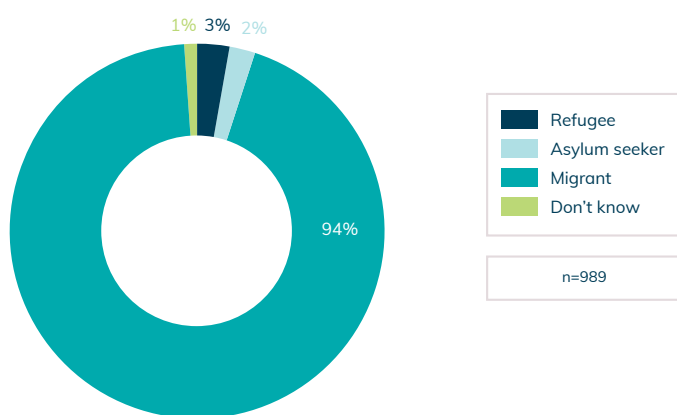
50% of respondents had not completed any form of schooling in their countries of departure. 40% had completed primary school, 6% secondary school, and 3% vocational training. Women were more likely to report not completing any schooling than men (respectively 65% versus 46%), and reported lower levels of education across the board.

47% of respondents were living in private rented accommodation at the time of interview. However, a sizeable proportion were living in collective shelters¹¹ (20%) or on the streets (19%), potentially increasing their vulnerability.

Status of respondents¹²

The majority of respondents (94%) identified themselves as migrants. 3% and 2% self-identified as refugees and asylum seekers, respectively, and 1% were unsure of their status. Almost all respondents (931/933) said that they were in Puntland irregularly and had no legal documents to stay in the country.

Figure 4. Status of respondents



Puntland was a transit location for most respondents, with 96% of 4Mi respondents indicating that they had not reached the end of their journey at the time of interview. Among these respondents (n=951), 79% indicated that they intended to travel to Saudi Arabia, and 9% to other countries in the Gulf. Other intended destinations include Yemen (4%), European countries (4%), and other locations in Somalia (3%).

For the majority of respondents (80%), this was their first attempt to leave their country. 7% said that they had successfully migrated before, and 9% said that they had attempted the journey but were unsuccessful in reaching their destination.

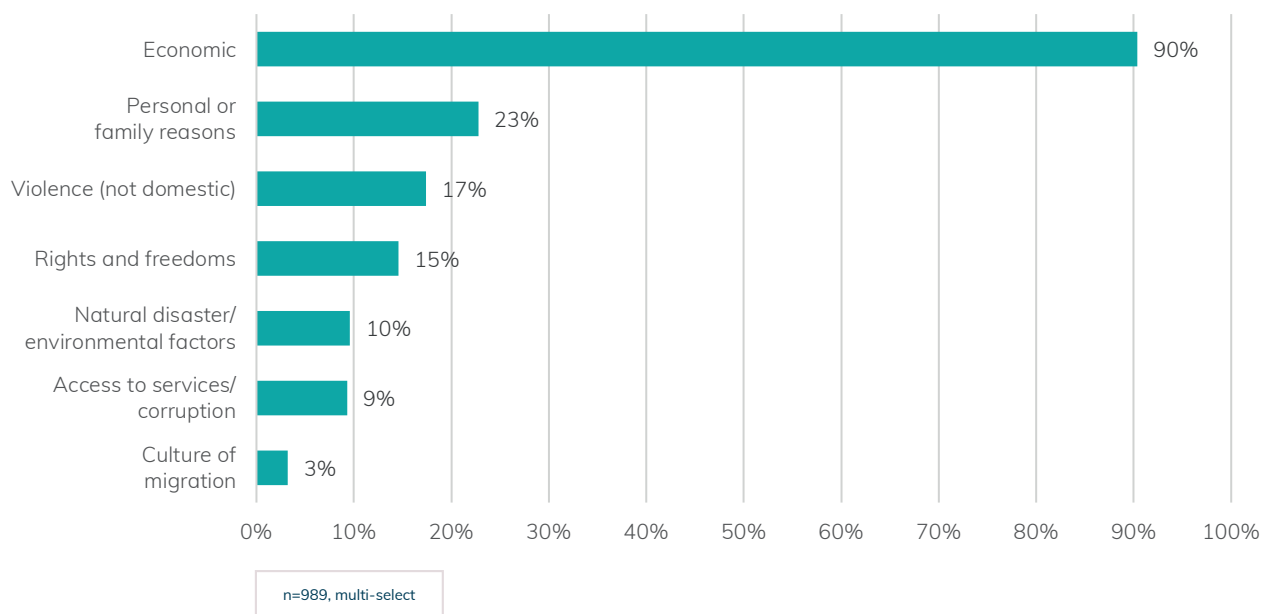
Drivers of movement

Economic factors are driving most migration of Ethiopians transiting through Puntland. 90% of respondents indicated that they left their country of departure for economic reasons. Men were slightly more likely to cite this as a factor than women (91% versus 88% respectively). Women were more likely to cite personal or family reasons (27% versus 22% men), violence (23% versus 16% men), rights and freedoms (17% versus 14% men), and access to services (14% versus 8% men).

¹¹ Includes places such as schools, workplaces or places of worship

¹² Respondents self-report their status. 4mi does not ask for verifying documentation.

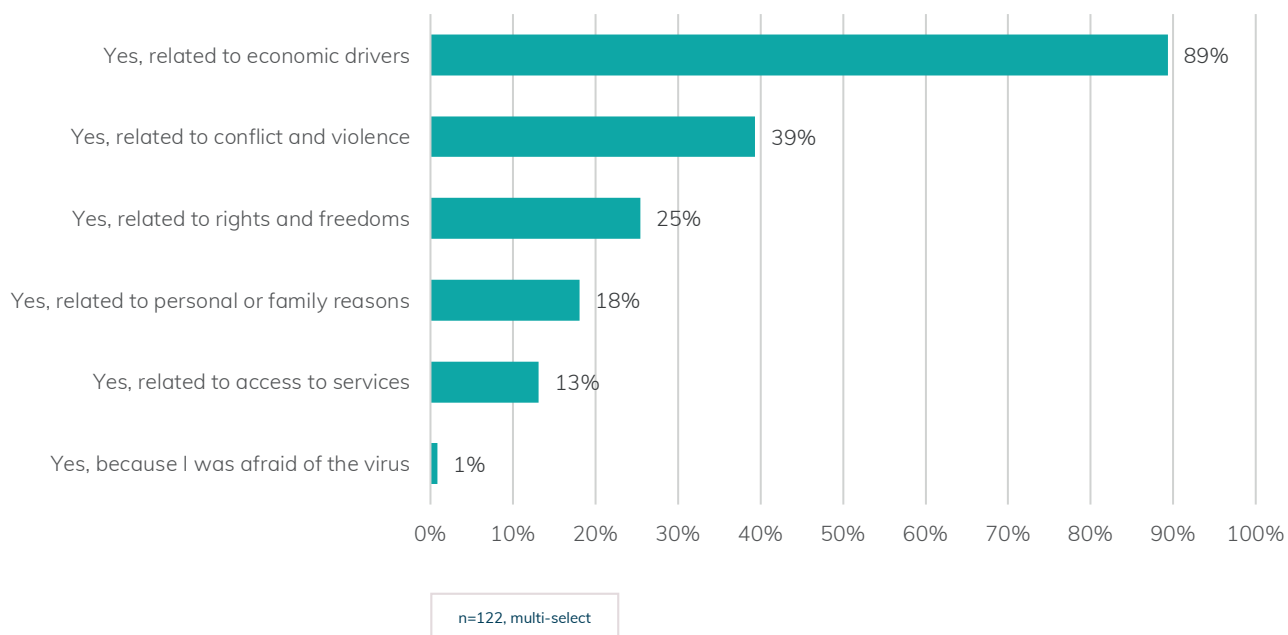
Figure 5. Why did you leave your country of departure?



Most respondents (66%) made the decision to leave based on a single factor. Among this group (n=657), 87% said they left for economic reasons alone, 10% due to personal or family reasons, 2% due to violence, and 1% due to a lack of rights and freedoms. 34% of respondents left for a mix of reasons, among which (n=332) 96% included a combination of economic and other factors.

COVID-19 did not influence the decision to leave for most respondents. The majority of respondents (56%) began their journeys before the onset of the coronavirus pandemic. Among those who left in or after April 2020 (n=431), 71% said that COVID-19 was not a factor in their decision to leave their countries of departure. Among those who said COVID-19 was a factor (n=122), respondents most frequently cited that the pandemic's impact on economic factors (89%) played a role, followed by conflict and violence (39%) and then lack of rights (25%).

Figure 6. Was coronavirus a factor in your decision to leave? (yes responses only)

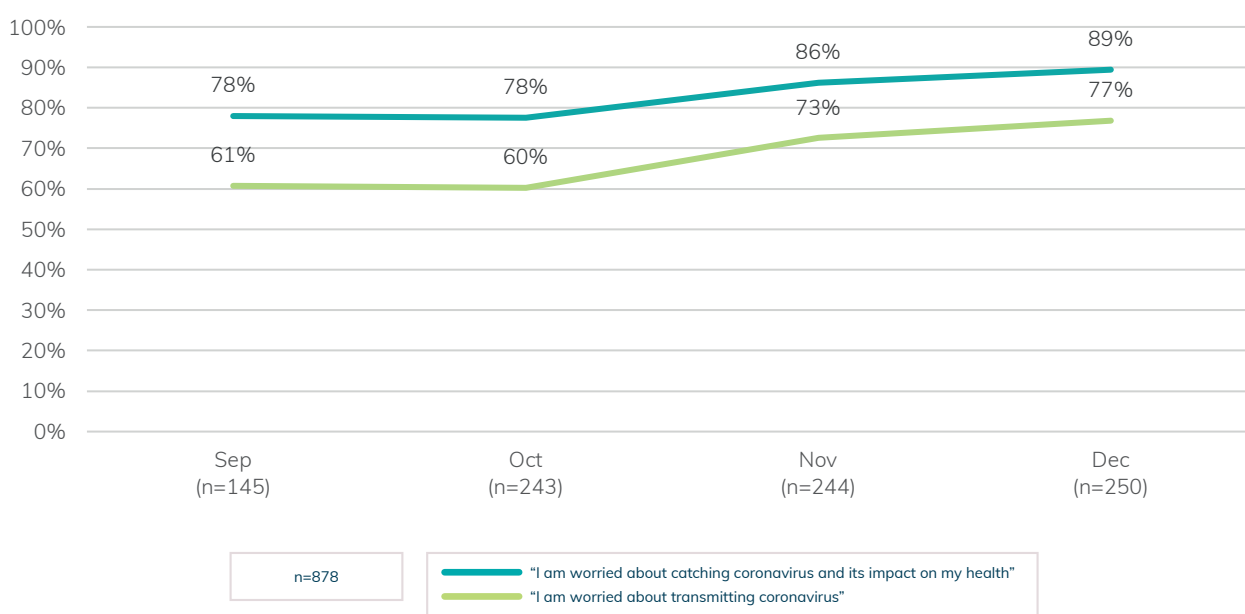


COVID-19: awareness, knowledge and risk perception

COVID-19 awareness was high among respondents. When asked whether they had heard of COVID-19, 90% of respondents (n=895) said that they had. All remaining respondents had either not heard of the virus (n=93), or declined to answer the question (n=1). The following analysis on COVID-19 and its impacts will only include responses from those who were aware of COVID-19.

Most respondents are worried about catching or transmitting coronavirus. Overall, 84% of respondents agree or strongly agree that they are worried about catching coronavirus. This number has tended to increase over time, climbing from 78% of respondents in September to 89% in December. In line with other 4Mi findings across the world, fewer respondents overall agreed or strongly agreed that they are worried about transmitting coronavirus (68%).¹³ However, the data shows a similar upwards trend in concern, with more respondents reporting that they were worried about transmitting the virus in December than in September (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Percentage of respondents who agree or strongly agree that they are worried about catching or transmitting coronavirus, over time

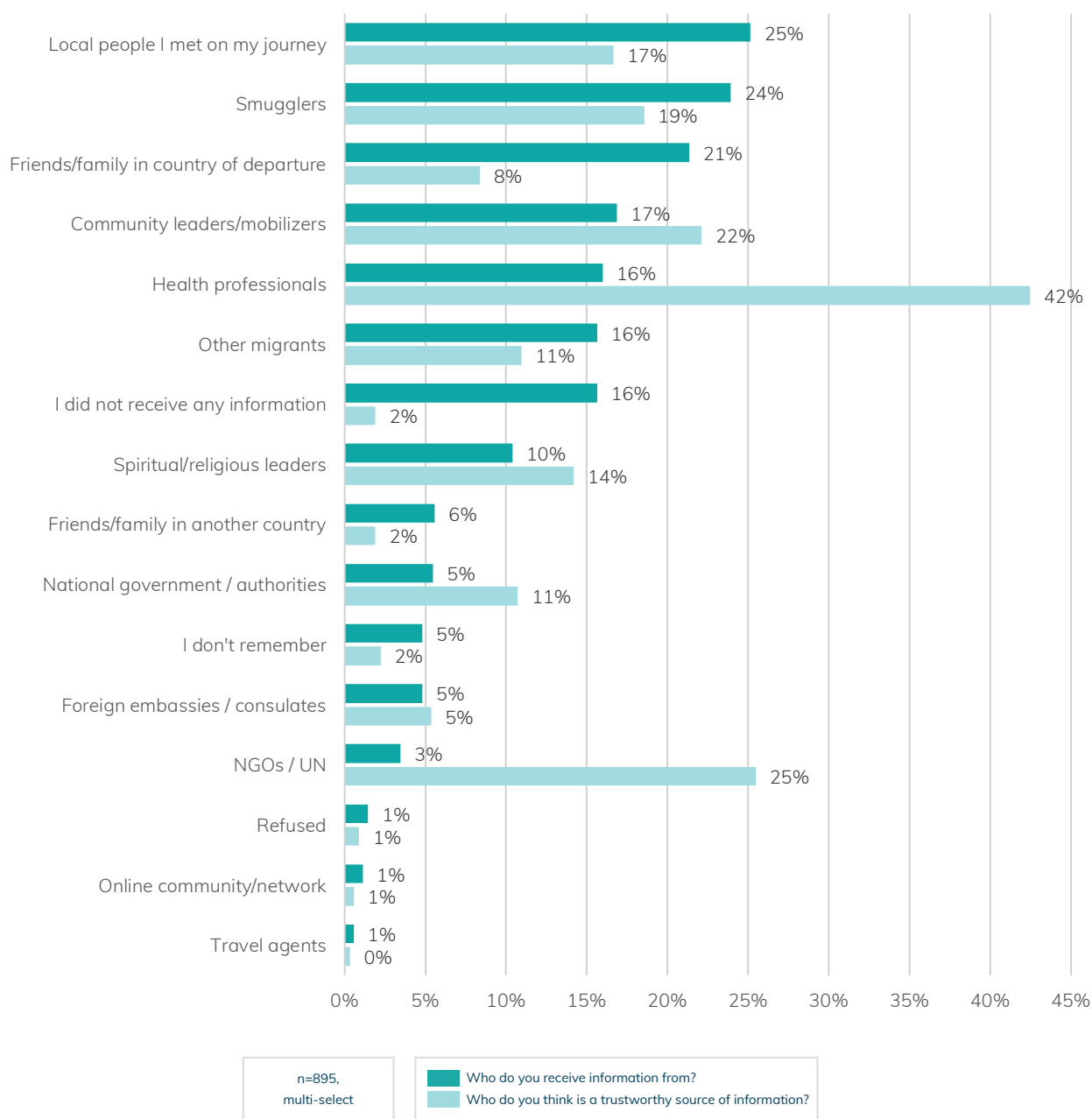


August data excluded due to small sample size (n=17).

85% of all surveyed respondents said that they had received information about coronavirus. When asked about who they received information from, the top three sources of information on coronavirus were: local people that respondents met on the journey (25%), smugglers (24%) and friends and family in their country of departure (21%). However, when asked about who they considered to be the most trustworthy sources, respondents most frequently reported health professionals (42%), NGOs/UN (25%) and community leaders and mobilisers (22%). Thus, as can be clearly seen in Figure 8 below, the sources that are most trusted, are actually among the sources respondents were less likely to have received information from, indicating a lot of untapped potential for more information provision from trusted sources. Most respondents reported receiving the information in-person (65%) or by phone call (35%).

13 MMC (2020), [COVID-19 Global Update #5 – 30 June 2020](#)

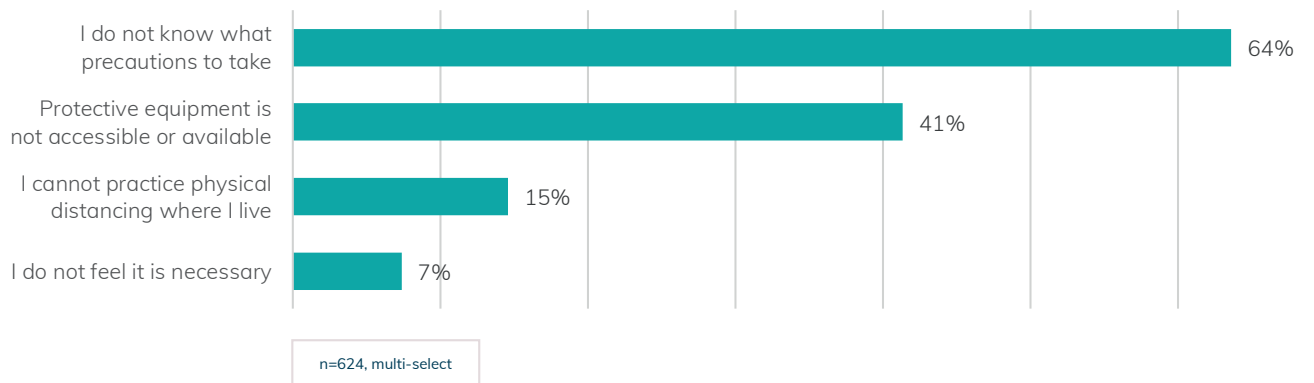
Figure 8. Sources of information on COVID-19



Despite the reported high levels of awareness, overall 70% of respondents said that they were doing nothing to protect themselves against coronavirus. In fact, the proportion of respondents not taking protective measures increased over time, climbing from 56% of respondents in September (n=145) to 86% in December (n=246).

When asked why they were not taking any measures to protect themselves (n=624), **the majority of respondents (64%) said that they did not know which precautions to take** (Figure 9). This is of particular concern given that 79% of respondents said that they are living in conditions that do not allow them to practice the recommended 1.5 metre physical distancing, and therefore are at a higher risk of contracting and further transmitting the virus. When asked to describe the crisis situation in Puntland, 68% of respondents said that the situation was getting worse.

Figure 9. Why are you not taking any protective measures?



Access to health services

Almost all interviewed refugees and migrants perceived that they have limited access to healthcare in Puntland.

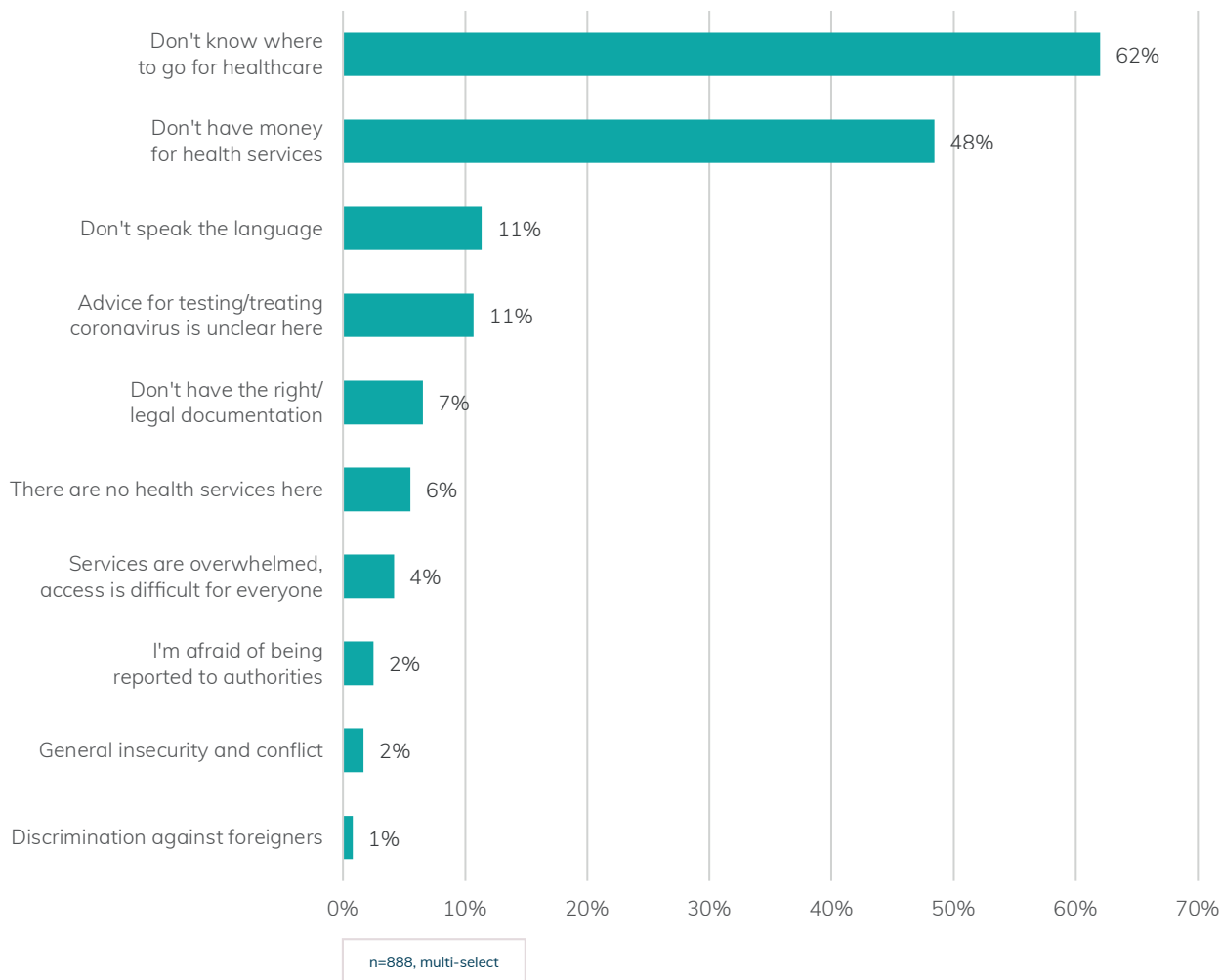
Only 2% of respondents said they would be able to access health services in the event they displayed coronavirus symptoms and needed care, and a similar 2% said they would be able to access health services if they had any other urgent health needs.

Almost all respondents (99%) reported barriers to accessing health services in Puntland (Figure 10). The top-two cited barriers by a margin were: not knowing where to go for healthcare (62%), and not having money to pay for health services (48%). Partners operating in Puntland report that migrants are unable to access health services without paying for them, while refugees and asylum seekers are able to access services for free, although availability of such services differ depending on location.

“The journey was very dangerous and risky because a lot of people whom I was traveling with caught COVID-19 and they did not receive any help.”

Ethiopian woman interviewed in Dhahar

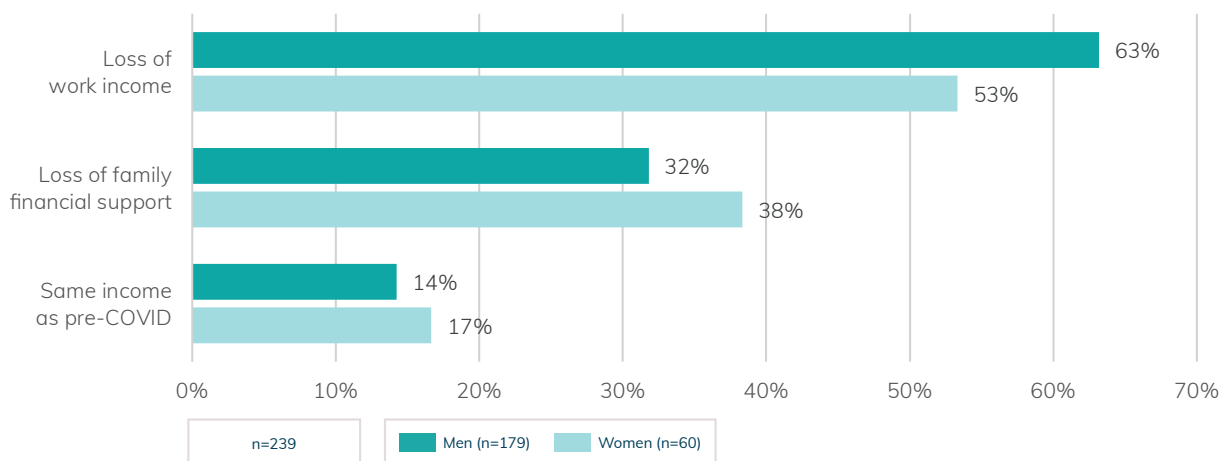
Figure 10. Barriers to accessing health services



The socio-economic impacts of COVID-19

72% of respondents had no income¹⁴ before the COVID-19 pandemic and were potentially already vulnerable. Among the respondents who had an income prior to the pandemic (n=239), only 14% indicated that they had retained their pre-COVID income level, indicating that a large proportion had experienced a loss of income, likely increasing their vulnerability. Men were more likely to report a loss of work income (63% versus 53% women), while women were more likely to report losing financial support from their families (38% versus 32% men).

Figure 11. Have you lost income due to coronavirus restrictions?



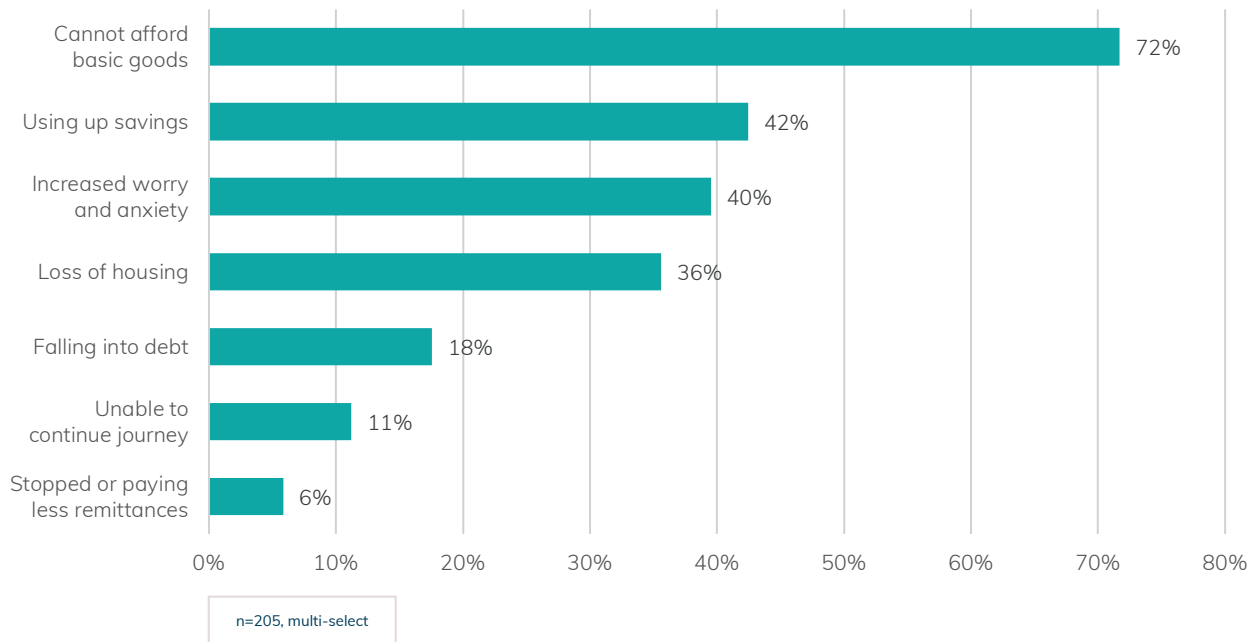
¹⁴ This includes both income from work and financial support from family.

“Coronavirus is worsening the situation because migrants are not able to meet the costs of migration while they are on the move.”

Ethiopian man interviewed in Bossaso

A combination of reduced income and increased prices of basic commodities is likely to have made more respondents vulnerable. The UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reported on shortages and increased prices of most basic commodities in Somalia as early as April 2020.¹⁵ When asked about the impact of the income loss, 72% indicated that they were unable to afford basic goods.

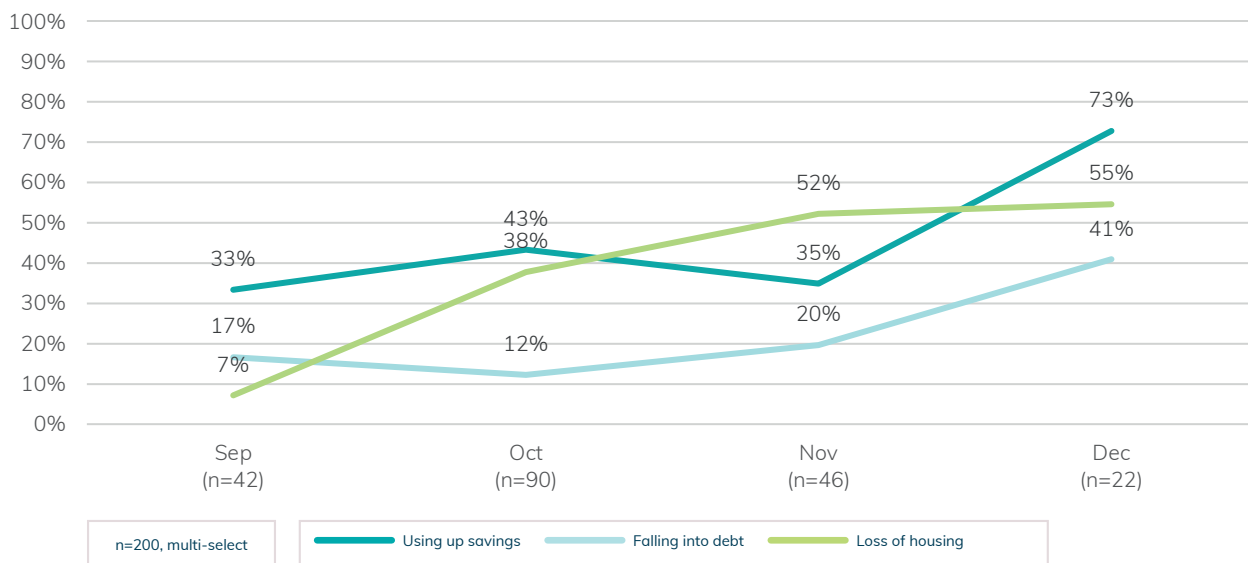
Figure 12. What impact has the loss of income had?



The data also suggests that **respondents may be depleting their assets or using negative coping mechanisms at an accelerating rate.** As shown in Figure 13, the proportion of respondents who say that they were using up their savings, falling into increasing debt, or have lost housing shows an upward trajectory over time.

15 UNOCHA, [Somalia Overview COVID-19 Directives](#)

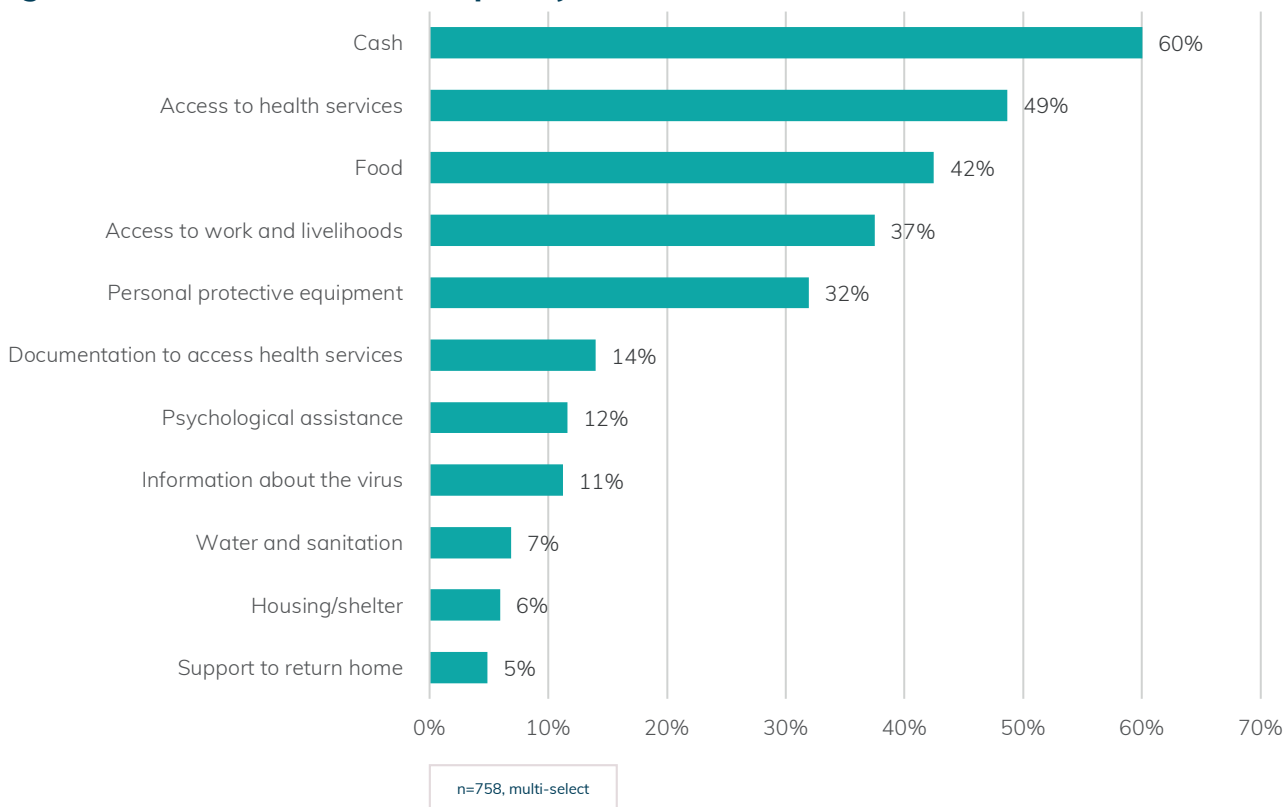
Figure 13. Percentage of respondents using savings, falling into debt or losing housing, over time



These responses were multi-select. This chart uses % in order to make easy comparisons between the months of interview despite the small number of observations. August data excluded to its extremely low sample size (n=5).

The effects of the pandemic have left many refugees and migrants in Puntland in need of extra assistance. The majority of respondents (85%) said they needed extra help since the onset of the pandemic, however only 3% said that they had received additional assistance. When asked about the type of help they required (n=758), the most frequently reported needs were cash (60%), access to health services (49%), and food (42%).

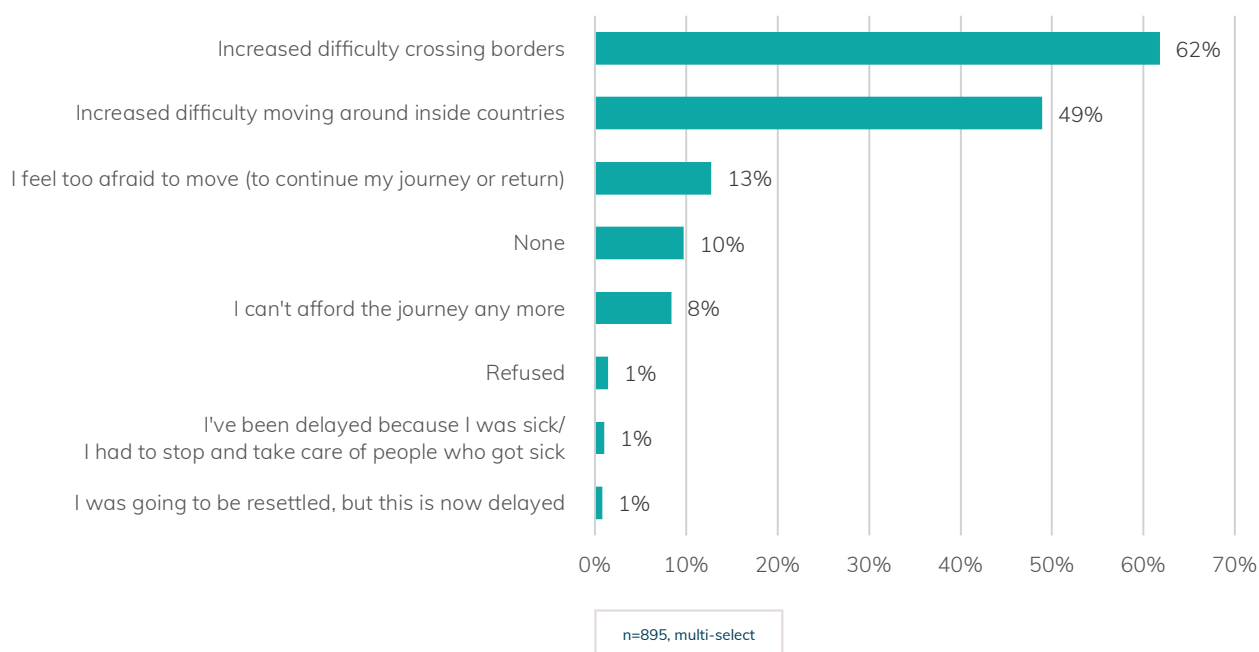
Figure 14. What kind of extra help are you in need of?



Impact of COVID-19 on mobility

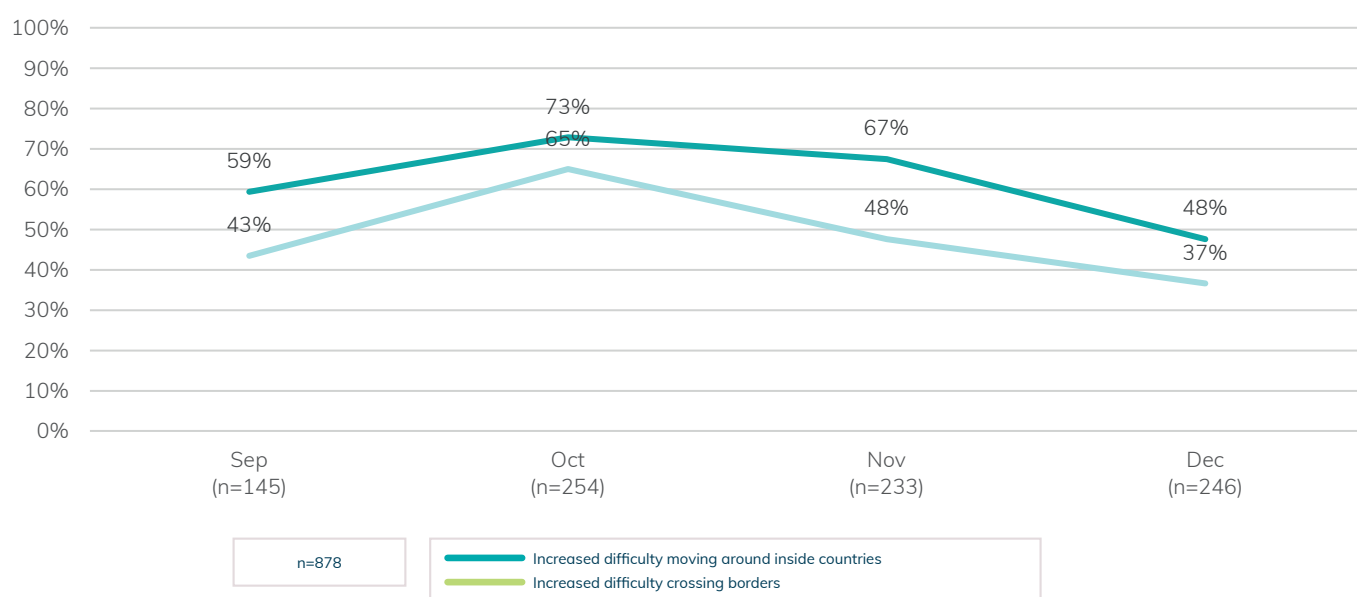
Most respondents say that the COVID-19 pandemic has limited their mobility. 62% of respondents said that the crisis had made it more difficult to cross borders, and 49% said that it was more difficult to move around inside countries.

Figure 15. What impact has the coronavirus crisis had on your migration journey?



As restrictions began to ease, respondents reported being able to move around more freely. As shown in Figure 16, from October 2020 the data shows a decreasing trend of respondents reporting that they were facing difficulties in moving around, corresponding with the increase of arrivals in Yemen shown earlier in this report, suggesting that travel restrictions had begun to ease during this time.

Figure 16. Percentage of respondents who cited impacts on mobility, over time



August data excluded due to small sample size (n=17).

Despite these difficulties, overall 83% of respondents said that their intentions to migrate remained the same, even if they were delayed. The proportion of respondents with this view was consistently high during the data collection period, however this increased to a high of 93% among respondents interviewed in December (n=246), which may indicate greater optimism about being able to move onwards.

“They have blocked all the routes so you can’t move to where you want freely.”
Ethiopian man interviewed in Bossaso

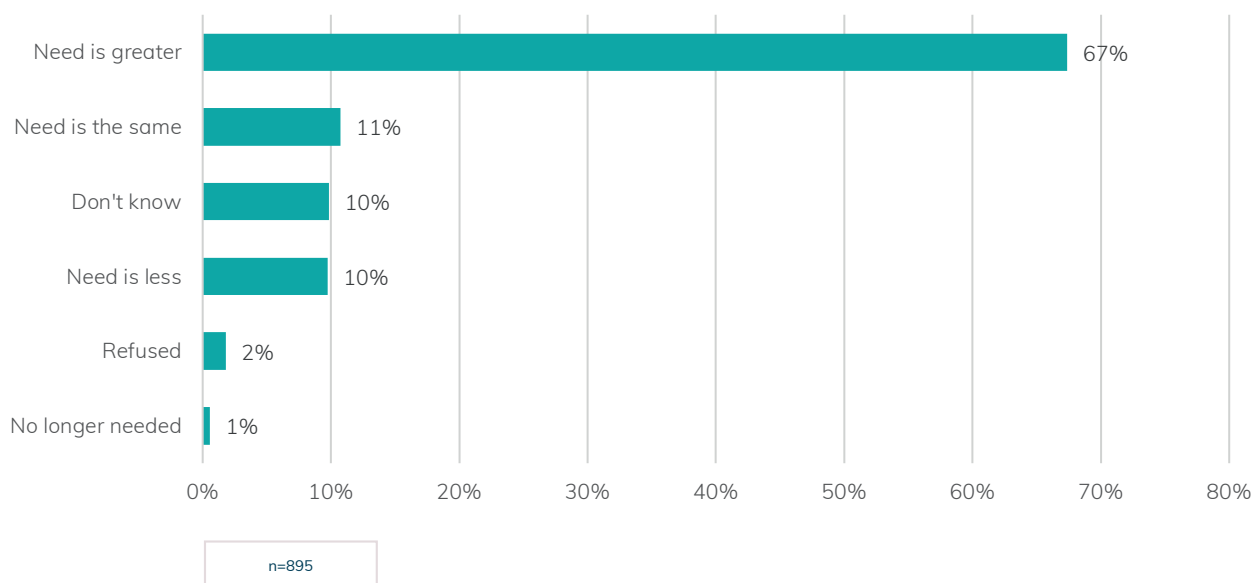
“Migration is very risky. Especially during the COVID-19 pandemic the movement is restricted, people can’t help you and they isolated you.”
Ethiopian man interviewed in Garowe

Impact of COVID-19 on smuggling through Puntland

Respondents report that smuggling through Puntland is more in demand, less accessible, and more expensive. 67% of respondents said that the need for smugglers was greater since the onset of the pandemic. This corresponds with findings earlier in this report that indicated that most respondents found it more difficult to move around inside countries or cross borders, which was likely to drive up the need for smugglers.

Much of the mixed movement along the Eastern Route through Puntland is smuggler-facilitated. Smugglers offer a number of services to those on the move, including avoiding detection/checkpoints, bribing authorities to turn a blind eye, offering accommodation, and facilitating the boat crossing to Yemen, among other services.¹⁶ The nature of the pandemic was characterized by an increased securitization of all ports of entry including land, air and sea, making it increasingly difficult for smugglers to operate as usual.¹⁷

Figure 17. How has the need for using smugglers changed, since the onset of the pandemic?

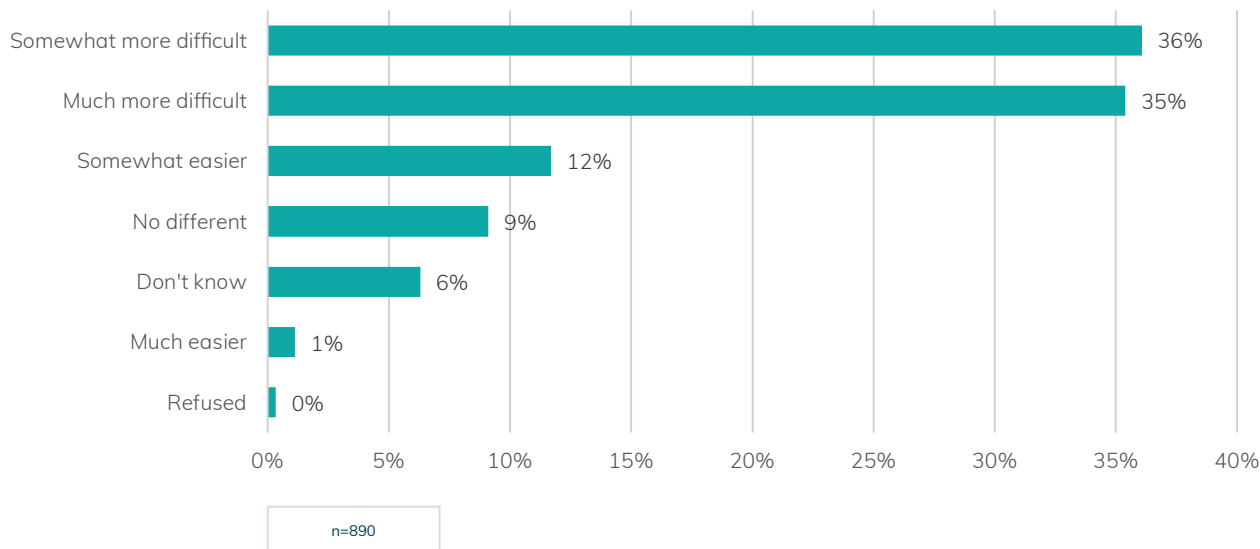


¹⁶ RMMS Horn of Africa & Yemen (2017), [Unpacking the Myths: Migrant smuggling from and within the Horn of Africa](#).

¹⁷ Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime (2020), [Smuggling in the Time of COVID-19](#)

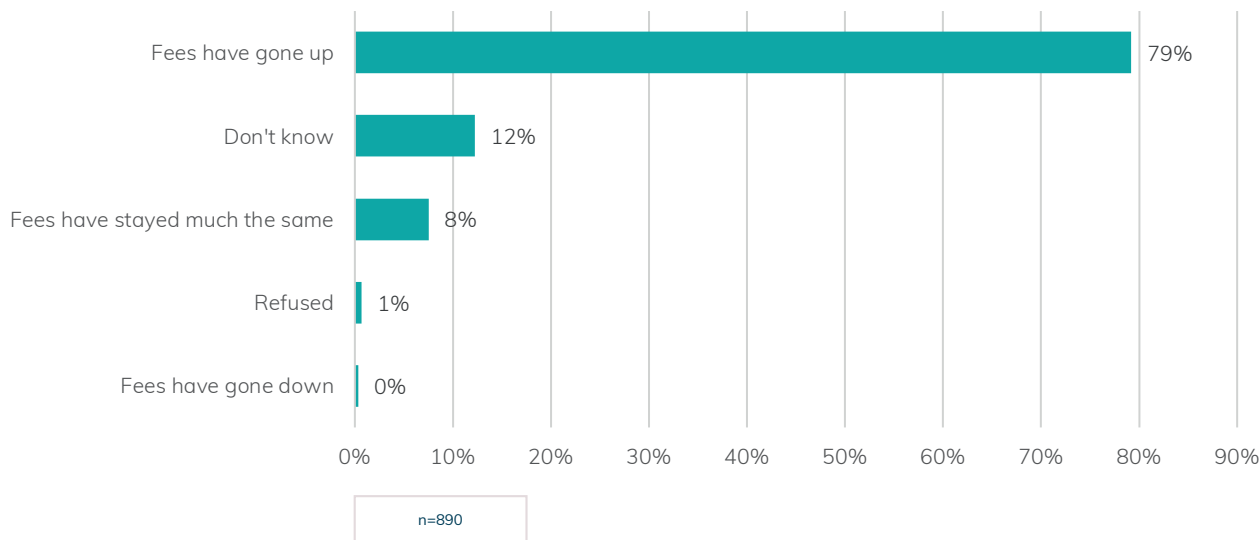
In the context of this increased demand, the majority of respondents said that it was in fact more difficult to access smugglers (36% somewhat more difficult and 35% much more difficult). Smuggling operations are known to move further underground to avoid detection when there is increased surveillance activity, and in the context of COVID-19, smugglers need to avoid not just traditional law-enforcement, but also bypass additional restrictions prohibiting travel.¹⁸

Figure 18. How has the COVID-19 crisis impacted on access to smugglers?



The supply-demand dynamics of increased need and reduced access to smugglers also appeared to drive up prices for smuggling services in Puntland. The majority of respondents (79%) said that smuggling fees had gone up when compared with fees charged before the pandemic. This puts an additional burden on refugees and migrants, who are already struggling under the economic strain brought by reduced access to work and livelihoods due to the pandemic.

Figure 19. How have smugglers' fees changed since before the COVID-19 crisis began?

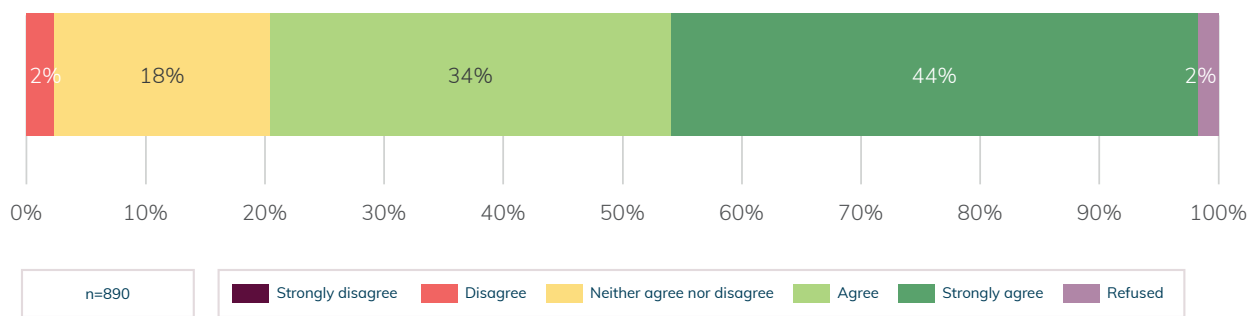


Research shows that when smugglers move further underground to evade detection, they often employ riskier tactics, including taking more dangerous routes, with major consequences for migrant safety.¹⁹ In Puntland, **the majority of 4Mi respondents (78%) agreed or strongly agreed that smugglers were taking more dangerous routes since the start of the pandemic.**

18 Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime (2020), [Smuggling in the Time of COVID-19](#)

19 The Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime (2018). [Understanding contemporary human smuggling as a vector in migration](#)

Figure 20. To what extent do you agree: Smugglers are using more dangerous routes since the COVID-19 crisis began

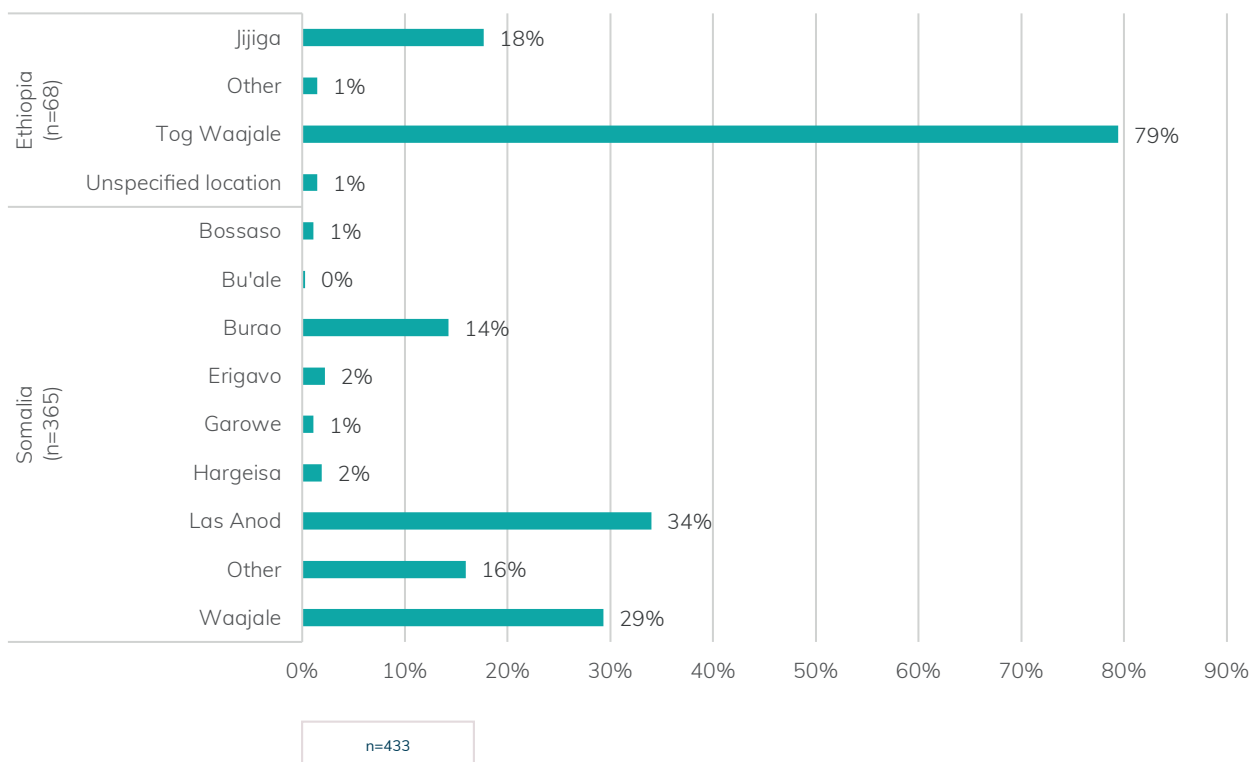


"The smuggling situation is too dangerous now because the smugglers are charging too much money."
Ethiopian man interviewed in Dhahar

Protection risks

44% of respondents said that they had travelled through a dangerous location on their journey. 40% said they had not travelled through a dangerous location, 13% were unsure, and 4% declined to answer. Among those who identified unsafe locations (n=433), 84% noted locations within Somalia and 16% in Ethiopia. As shown in Figure 21, most dangerous locations in Ethiopia were identified in transit and border areas with Somalia, such as Jijiga and Waqjale. While the border town of Waqjale was also frequently reported as a dangerous location in Somalia, other transit areas were also identified, including Las Anod and Burao.

Figure 21. What was the most dangerous location on your journey?



When asked about the main risks in these locations, responses varied by country (Figure 22). **In Ethiopia (n=68), detention was the most frequently cited risk** by a large margin, noted by 68% of respondents. It is unclear why respondents cited the risk of (non-immigration) detention inside their own country, and needs further exploration. Whereas **in Somalia (n=365), physical violence was the top risk (64%), followed by robbery (51%).**

Figure 22. What were the main risks in this location?

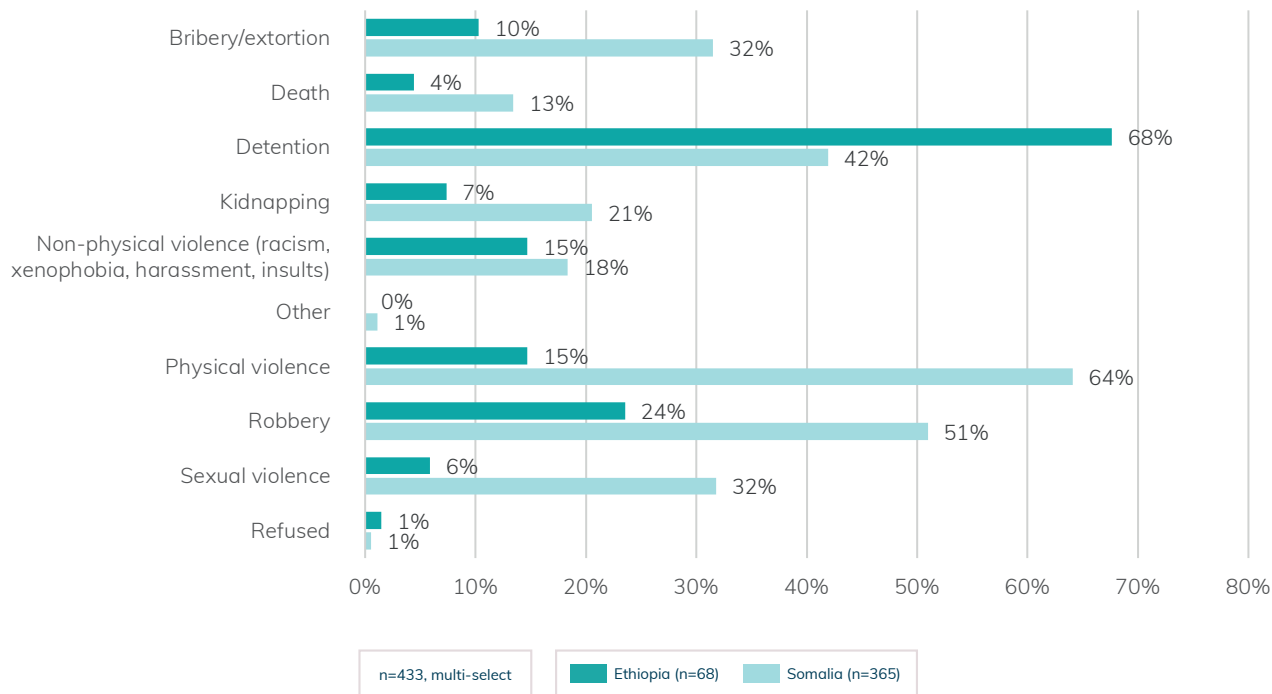
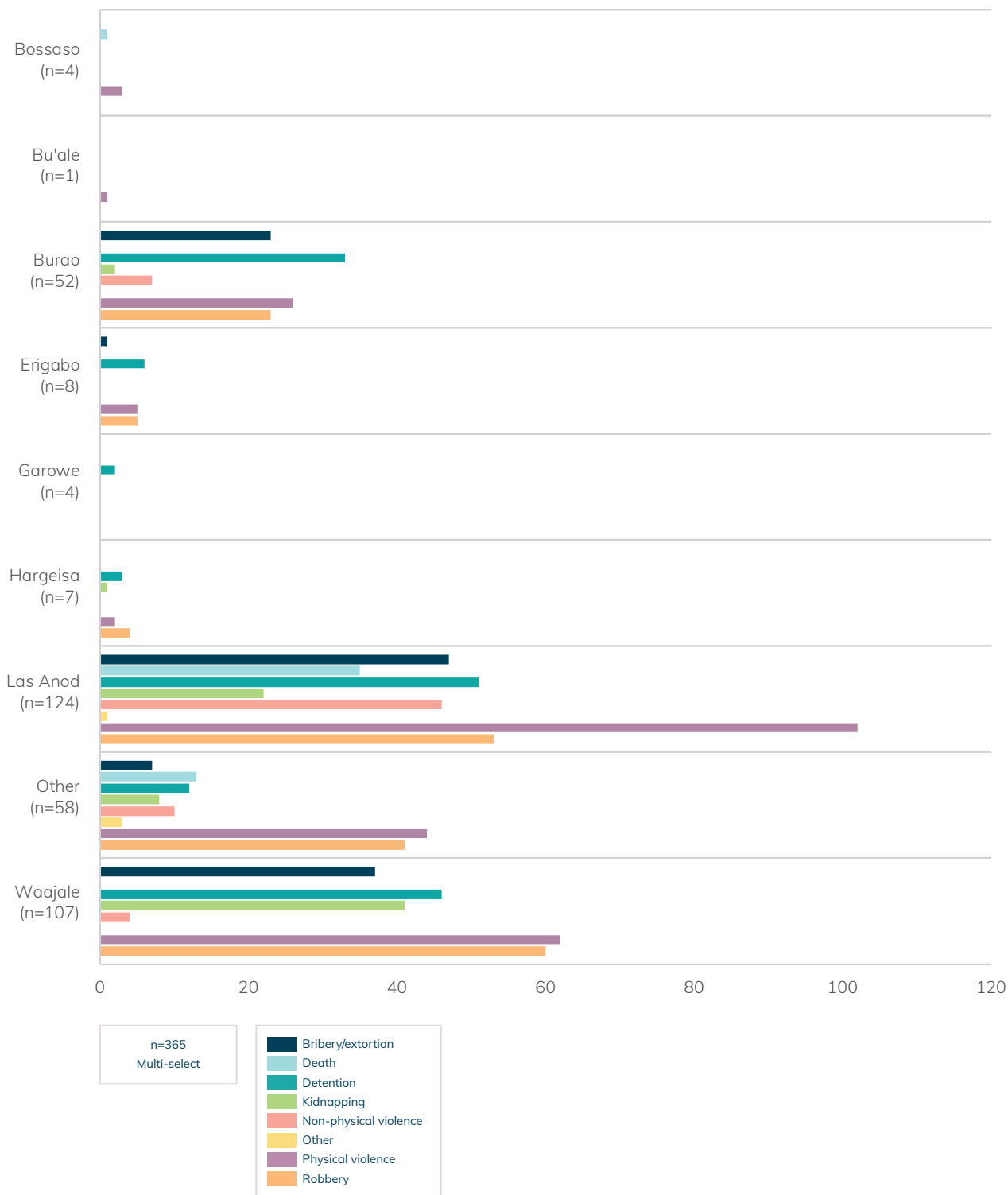


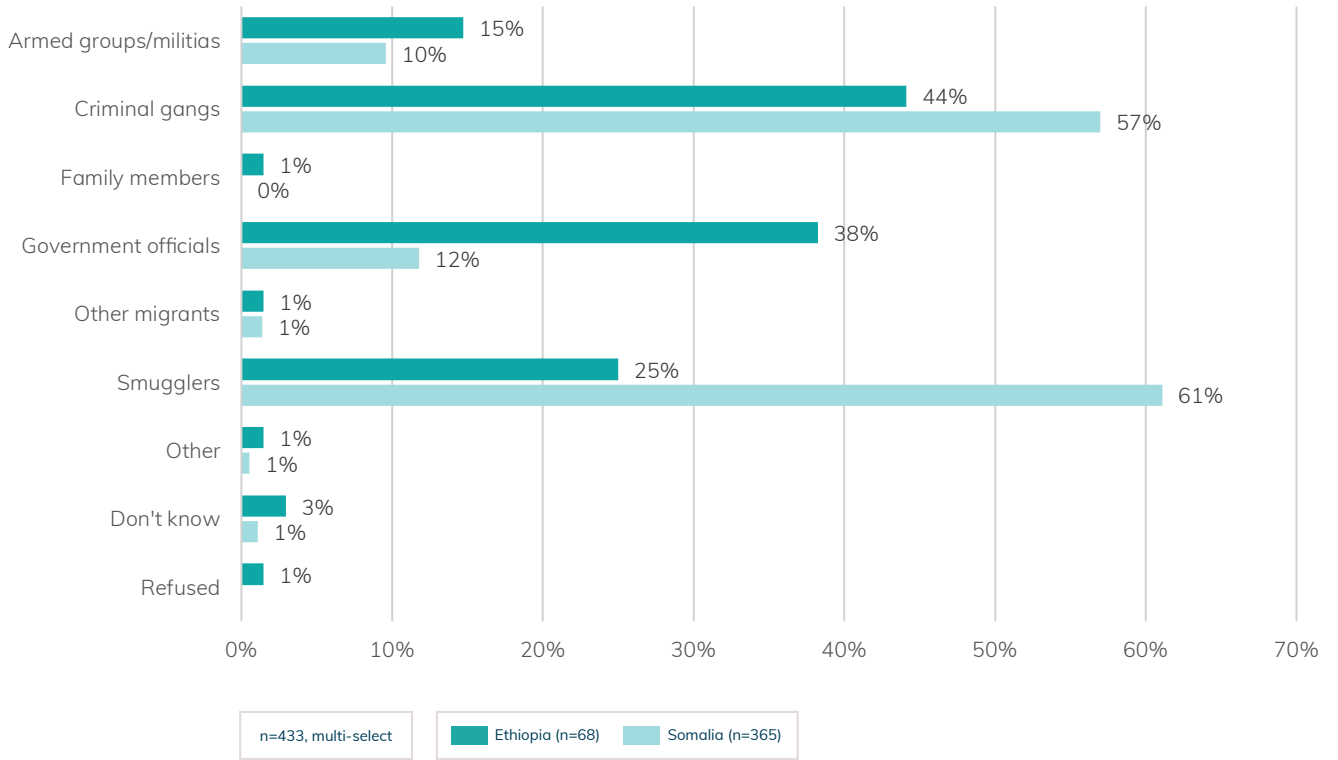
Figure 23. Types of risk, by location in Somalia



Criminal gangs (55%) and smugglers (55%) were identified as the most likely perpetrators of abuse. This confirms previous 4Mi findings, which indicate that smugglers are responsible for a large share of abuses on such journeys.²⁰ However, in Ethiopia (n=68), government officials were also identified as one of the top likely offenders (38%). This coincides with the top risk identified in Ethiopia; detention was identified as a risk in more than half of the instances in Ethiopia where government officials were cited as likely perpetrators (n=14/26).

20 Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat (2017), [Weighing the Risks: Protection risks and human rights violations faced by migrants in and from East Africa](#)

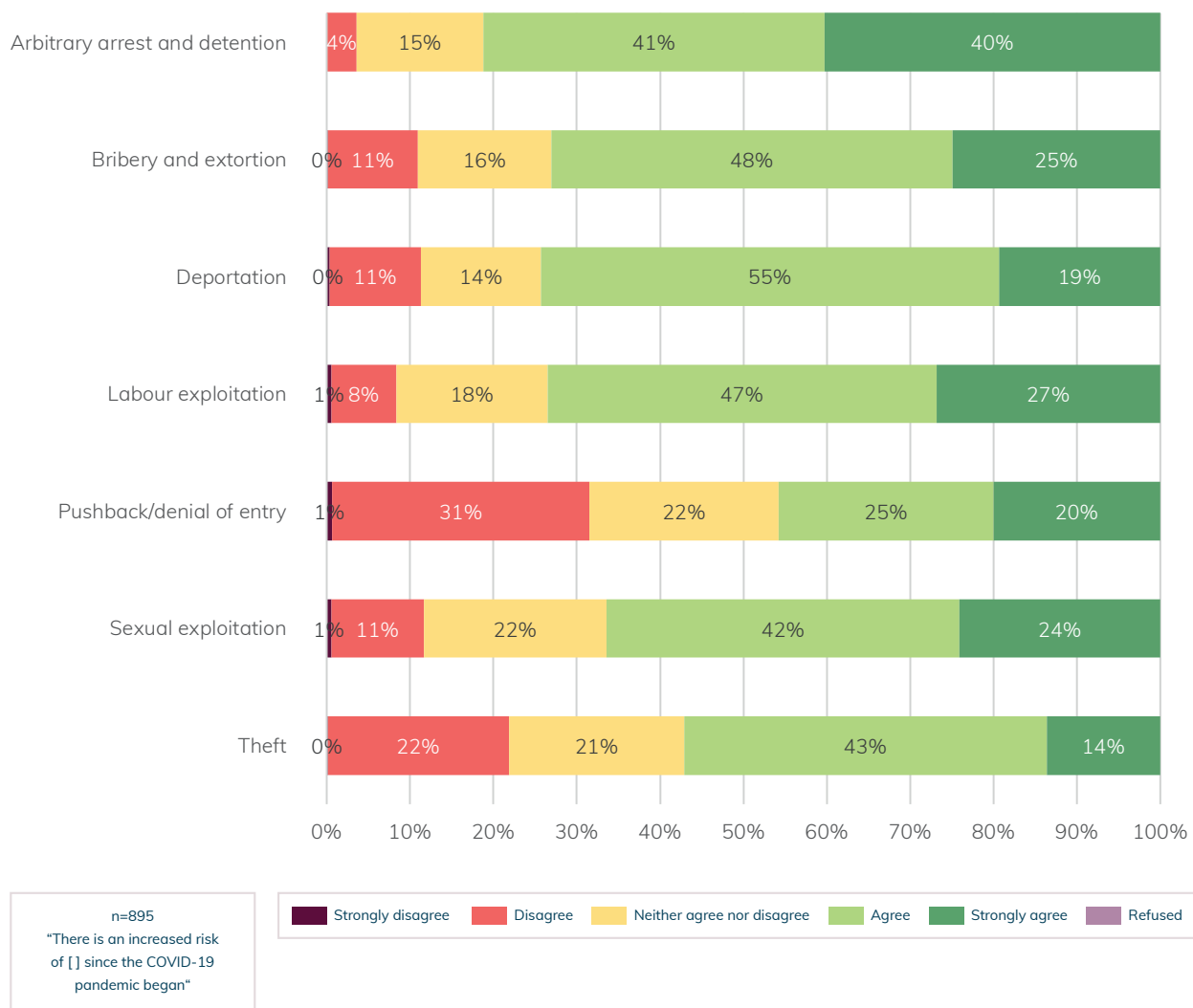
Figure 24. Who was likely to be perpetrating such acts?



COVID-19 as a threat-multiplier

Overall, the majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the COVID-19 pandemic has increased the risk of a number of protection issues. As seen in Figure 25, this perception was high for all risks except the risk of denial of entry or pushback at borders. Where respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the perception of increased risk of pushback or denial of entry (n=405), they frequently cited locations in border areas between Ethiopia and Somalia and at the border between Somaliland and Puntland, and in specific locations such as Hargeisa, Garowe and Waajale.

Figure 25. Protection risk perception²¹



21 Note that the data does not represent respondent's actual experience of incidents, rather respondents' direct perception of the prevailing situation, based on their own experience (this is made explicit during interview). It depends on respondents' interpretation of the situation and contributes to an explanation of the relatively high number of neutral responses to some questions. It is an indicator of the prevalence of a phenomenon, not the severity.

Recommendations

- Increase the engagement of UN agencies, NGOs and local stakeholders – as most trusted, though under-utilized sources - in the dissemination of comprehensive information on COVID-19, with practical information about how to avoid transmission of the virus in crowded living conditions.
- Enable and support accessibility of health services for refugees and migrants across Puntland.
- Support implementing partners to strengthen multi-sector programming to address the needs of refugees and migrants in Puntland and to mitigate the adoption of negative and damaging coping strategies.
- Increase capacity building among border officials and security actors on refugee and human rights law, and human rights-based approaches to border management.
- Expand research on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on vulnerable groups (including young people and women and girls in mixed movements) with particular attention to the impact of COVID-19 on protection risks and socioeconomic fallout.



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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