

## Opportunities and Risks:

Ethiopian women on the Eastern mixed migration route between the Horn of Africa and Yemen

MMC Research Report, June 2021



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Ethiopian migrant, Ardo, 22, decided to return home with her children. She has not succeeded to improve her income in Somaliland after two years of trying. Her husband has not managed either to raise enough money to cross the Red Sea for better employment in one of the rich Arab states.

# Acknowledgements

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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.

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## Key findings



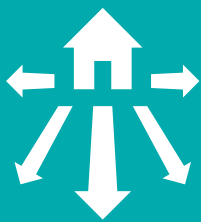
The movement of Ethiopian women towards Yemen and Saudi Arabia is mainly comprised of women travelling with the aim of taking up low-skilled work opportunities in Saudi Arabia as domestic labourers. For most interviewed women, migration to Saudi Arabia is a temporary affair, to earn money and at some point, return to Ethiopia (and possibly later re-migrate).



The business of smuggling Ethiopian women along the Eastern Route from Ethiopia to Yemen was worth in excess of USD 15 million in 2019.



While many Ethiopian women indicated that they had made the decision to migrate alone, 4Mi data highlights that women's migration decisions are also made within the constraints of social norms, relationships and expectations, highlighting their lowered agency and independence in comparison to men who migrate along the same route.



Smugglers become more influential in encouraging people to migrate the further people move away from home. Although the role of smugglers in initiating or influencing interviewees in their initial decision to leave or in starting a journey is very limited (4%), 60% of women indicated they had used smugglers once they departed.



Moving along mixed migration routes exposes women to multiple forms of intersectional discrimination and violence, but there is still limited knowledge about the status and fate of “missing” women (and girls) who arrive in Yemen and there is a need for further research on this section of women's journeys.

# 1: Introduction

## Gender and mixed migration

Women comprise almost half of the world's international migrants.<sup>1</sup> However, migration is often presented through a gender-neutral lens and migration by women treated in research and policy as a corollary to men's migration.<sup>2</sup> Despite the increasing recognition of the ways in which women move, both independently and as part of wider networks, women's experiences are still often subsumed within the experiences of male migrants and refugees.<sup>3</sup> This narrative often overlooks their unique experiences, risks and decision-making processes. This is particularly true for women migrating in an irregular context or in mixed migration movements where the decision-making, aspirations and lived experiences of women are under-researched or the discourse is focused solely on the protection risks that women face.<sup>4</sup>

Women's experiences in mixed migration are highly complex, diverse and personal. However, often these experiences are only presented through the lens of trauma and violence. Though women do face severe risks at various stages of their migration journeys, migration can also bring many opportunities for women including greater access to employment, independence and protection from persecution and conflict in their countries of origin or departure. Women comprise a significant proportion of all people engaged in mixed migration, yet there is still a need for more research into their specific and unique experiences.

Migration is a highly gendered process, as gender norms, unequal power relations, rights and access to resources shape the experiences of men and women on the move; from decision making around migration, routes and facilitators, to outcomes in countries of destination.<sup>5</sup> While migration is often espoused as a development opportunity for women,<sup>6</sup> the gendered aspects of migration are varied and complex.<sup>7</sup> Gender norms influence the migration opportunities available for both men and women and emigration policies treat men and women differently in many countries.<sup>8</sup> The risks of mixed migration are also highly gendered, and women are disproportionately affected by violence, most often perpetrated by men, and particularly when travelling irregularly. It is estimated that 71% of all people affected by modern slavery are women, and that women make up 80% of all trafficking victims.<sup>9</sup>

## Focus: Ethiopian women on the Eastern route

This study focuses on Ethiopian women traveling east towards Yemen and Saudi Arabia along what is known as the 'Eastern Route' through Djibouti or Somalia, across the Red or Arabian Sea into Yemen (most often with the intention of moving through Yemen towards Saudi Arabia). Based on interviews with Ethiopian women on the move, the study enables women's voices to be heard and aims to better understand overall gendered dimensions of mixed migration<sup>10</sup> The study examines why and how Ethiopian women move in mixed migration movements, the modalities of their movement, support and access along their migration journeys and the protection risks they face.

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1 UN Women (2021). [Women refugees and migrants](#).

2 Carling, J. (2005) [Gender Dimensions of international migration](#) Global Commission on International Migration.

3 Ibid

4 Tazreiter, C. et al. (2017) Rohingya Women in Malaysia: decision making and information sharing in the course of irregular migration EUI Working Paper European University Institute.

5 O'Neil, T. et al. (2016) Op. Cit.

6 O'Neil, T. et al. (2016) [Women on the move: Migration, gender equality and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Overseas](#) Development Institute Briefing.

7 Carling, J. (2005) [Gender and Migration](#), Global Commission on International Migration.

8 See for instance: World Bank (2020) [Women, Business and the Law: Mobility](#).

9 Yayboke, E. Gallego, C. (2019) [Out of the Shadows: Shining a light on irregular migration](#) Centre for Strategic and International Studies.

10 Gerard, A. Pickering, S (2014) [Gender, Securitization and Transit: Refugee Women and the Journey to the EU](#) Journal of Refugee Studies Vol. 27 (3) 338-359

## Methodology

For this study, MMC used a mixed methodology, combining primary data collection and secondary sources.

### Primary data: 4Mi interviews with Ethiopian women in Somalia, Djibouti and Yemen

MMC's flagship data collection initiative, the 4Mi project<sup>11</sup> gathers thousands of interviews with refugees and migrants on the move around the world, including in and from East Africa and Yemen, every year and has developed extensive data sets across several migration routes.

4Mi interviewers or 'monitors' 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. Monitors, who are often of the same nationality as the refugees and migrants they interview, conduct structured surveys with migrants and refugees in these migration hotspots and the resulting data is uploaded in real-time to MMC servers. After verification this data is analysed to provide insights into the profiles, drivers, protection concerns and broader experiences of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants along mixed migration routes.

This report draws on a sample of interviews with 169 Ethiopian women: 120 interviewed in Djibouti, 25 interviewed in Somalia,<sup>12</sup> and 24 interviewed in Yemen, exploring their decision-making and the different ways in which women express their agency while embarking on precarious mixed migration journeys. Data collection spanned July 2017 to March 2020.<sup>13</sup> The table below lists the respondent's regions of origin in Ethiopia.

**Table 1. Respondents' regions of origin**

Addis Ababa City	Afar Region	Amhara Region	Dire Dawa City	Harari Region	Oromia Region	Somalia Region	S.N.N.P.R.*	Tigray Region
11	1	75	8	1	55	7	2	9

\*Southern Nations, Nationalities, and People's Region

## Secondary sources

Primary data is supplemented by secondary sources, to provide information on overall migration dynamics across the Eastern Route. These include media reports, government documents, grey literature and operational dashboards from NGOs and international organizations.

11 Mixed Migration Centre (2020). [Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism Initiative Frequently Asked Questions](#).

12 Somaliland and Puntland.

13 In early 2020, MMC adapted its 4Mi data collection to remote surveys, focused on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on refugees and migrants. Thus, the dataset for this paper does not capture surveys after April 2020, as the surveys would not have been compatible or comparable.

## 2: Mixed Migration in East Africa

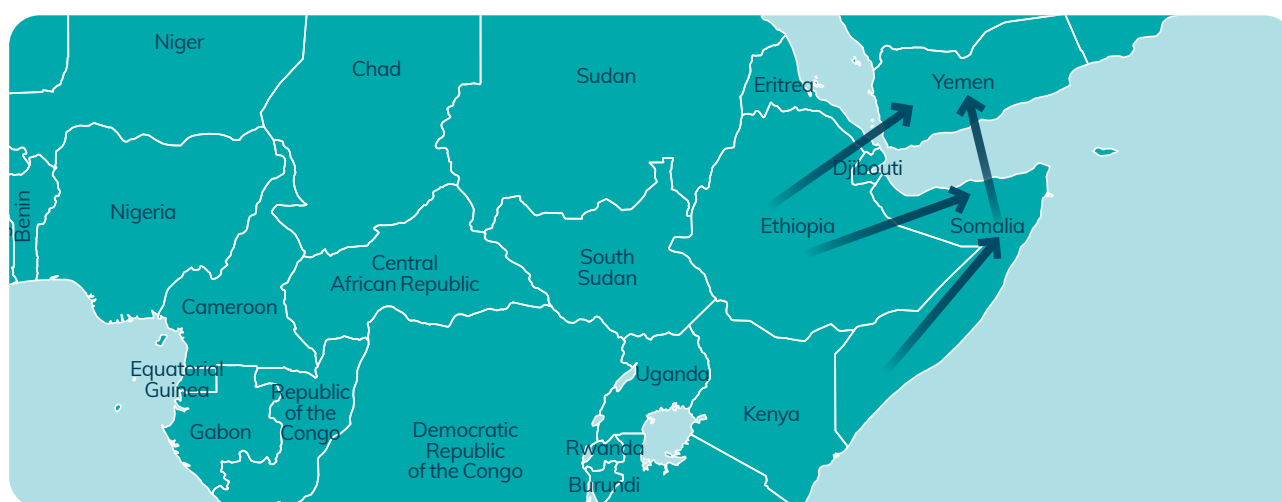
Mobility dynamics in the East African and Yemen region respond to a complex mix of social, economic, and political factors. Drivers of migration from the region include ongoing and protracted conflicts, insecurity and political unrest, uneven development and economic inequality, opportunities for education and employment, among others.<sup>14</sup> Mixed migration within and outside the region includes refugees, asylum seekers and migrants, motivated to move by many different factors but using similar routes and methods, often with the assistance of smugglers.<sup>15</sup> Mixed migration from the East Africa region typically takes place along three main migration corridors: the Northern Route, Southern Route and Eastern Route.

The **Northern Route** is the mixed migration route from East Africa towards North Africa and sometimes on to Europe. It is used primarily by Eritreans and Somalis, as well as a small number of Ethiopians.<sup>16</sup> 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).<sup>17</sup> 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. Gender disaggregated information about women on the move on the Northern Route is limited, but as an indication, at the end of 2020 IOM noted that about 10% of registered migrants in Libya were women.<sup>18</sup> Women made up 36% of those recorded by IOM traveling on the Northern Route in 2019, although IOM notes that sample sizes are too small to draw definitive conclusions.<sup>19</sup>

Refugees and migrants traveling from East Africa are also seen in significant numbers along the **Southern Route**, which consists of movements towards southern Africa (most often with South Africa as a destination). Though recent estimates are not available, migration along this route in 2016 was estimated to include up to 16,000 refugees and migrants from East Africa every year – approximately 80% Ethiopian and 20% Somali.<sup>20</sup> Women made up 29% of those recorded by IOM on the Southern Route in 2018.<sup>21</sup>

MMC's 4Mi data collection in 2018 with children<sup>22</sup> 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.

### Map 1. The Eastern Route



14 Mixed Migration Centre (2020). [East Africa Resources](#).

15 Mixed Migration Centre (2018). [Mixed Migration Review 2018](#).

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

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

18 IOM (2020). [Libya's Migrant Report November - December 2020 Round 34](#).

19 IOM (2020) [A Region on the Move: 2019 Mobility Overview in The East and Horn of African and the Arab Peninsula](#).

20 Mixed Migration Centre (2017). [Smuggled South: An updated overview of mixed migration from the Horn of Africa to southern Africa with specific focus on protections risks, human smuggling and trafficking](#).

21 IOM (2020) Op. Cit.

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



The **Eastern Route**, the mixed migration route connecting East Africa with Yemen and other Gulf countries, is the most frequented mixed migration route from the region (and the focus of this study). In 2019, 63 % of the migratory movements documented by IOM in East Africa were on the Eastern Route towards the Arab Peninsula.<sup>23</sup> Despite an ongoing war and escalating humanitarian crisis in Yemen, in 2019 138,213 refugees, asylum seekers and migrants departed from East Africa to arrive in Yemen, almost all with the intention of traveling onwards to Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries looking for employment opportunities.<sup>24</sup> In 2018, 159,838 people were estimated to have arrived in Yemen.<sup>25</sup> In 2020, only 37,535 refugees and migrants arrived in Yemen, however this notable decrease is due to restrictions on mobility to contain the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>26</sup> Ethiopians make up approximately 90% of the overall arrivals to Yemen,<sup>27</sup> with Somalis making up the remaining 10%.<sup>28</sup> Women account for between 14<sup>29</sup> and 20% of the arrivals into Yemen each year. In 2020, 5,854 women (16% of total arrivals) arrived in Yemen by sea.<sup>30</sup>

Ethiopians use the Eastern Route from Ethiopia by travelling through dangerously hot and difficult terrain through Djibouti or Somalia on their way to coastal departure points. The main coastal departure points in Djibouti are near Obock or Tadjoura (along the Red Sea) or Bossaso in Somalia (using the Gulf of Aden). Since 2014 the majority of migrants have arrived in Yemen via the Arabian Sea from Somalia (Somalia accounted for 54% of departures in 2014 to 84% in 2016).<sup>31</sup> In 2019, Somalia was the departure point for 62% of arrivals.<sup>32</sup>

Refugees and migrants who leave through Djibouti typically arrive in Bab al Mendeb, a coastal area that spans the Lahj and Taiz governorates of Yemen. Those who leave through Somalia arrive in Shebwa or Hadramaut governorates. Routes through Yemen are volatile, but key transit hubs have remained constant: Aden, Sanaa and Raada, in Al Beyda governorate. There are also minor hubs in Marib and Al Dhale'e. Migrants exit Yemen to Saudi Arabia from Monabih district in Sa'ada governorate, primarily through Al Raqw, Al Gar and Al Thabet<sup>33</sup>.

## Risks of the journey

The Eastern Route has become more dangerous in recent years. The ongoing conflict in Yemen, stricter migration policies for undocumented migrants in Gulf countries,<sup>34</sup> and insurgence of radical armed groups in Yemen have resulted in increased protection risks along the route. The journey to and through Yemen exposes those on the move to significant risks, particularly during sea crossings and transit through Yemen. Boats are often overcrowded, increasing the risk of capsizing and smugglers often forcibly disembark migrants and refugees while still at sea in order to avoid detection, forcing them to swim to shore. In 2020, at least 100 Ethiopians were recorded to have lost their lives at sea, with the actual number assumed to be much higher.<sup>35</sup> In June 2021, dozens of refugees and migrants drowned, with 180 reported missing, after their boat capsized off the coast of Yemen.<sup>36</sup>

Upon arrival in Yemen, migrants and refugees face exploitation and torture at the hands of trafficking gangs, who are often awaiting their arrival.<sup>37</sup> Human rights abuses are common and well-documented<sup>38</sup> and detention is a common occurrence for most migrants at some point of their journey in Yemen. In detention centres, migrants and refugees face poor conditions and suffer physical abuse. Perpetrators extort money from detained migrant's families in exchange for release.<sup>39</sup> Such risks have increased as the situation in Yemen has deteriorated.<sup>40</sup>

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23 Migration Data Portal (2020) <https://migrationdataportal.org/regional-data-overview/eastern-africa>

24 IOM (2019). [Migrant Arrivals and Yemeni Returns from Saudi Arabia in 2019](#).

25 IOM (2018). [Migrant Arrivals and Yemeni Returns from Saudi Arabia in 2018](#).

26 IOM (2021). [Migrant Arrivals and Yemeni Returns in 2020](#).

27 IOM (2019). Flow Monitoring Points Yemen December 2019.

28 IOM (2020). Flow Monitoring Points Yemen January 2020.

29 IOM (2020). [Migrant Arrivals and Yemeni returns from Saudi Arabia - November 2020](#).

30 IOM (2021). [Migrant Arrivals and Yemeni Returns in 2020](#).

31 Mixed Migration Centre (2016). [Pushed and Pulled in Two Directions: An analysis of the bi-directional refugee and migrant flow between the Horn of Africa and Yemen](#).

32 IOM (2019). [Migrant Arrivals and Yemeni Returns from Saudi Arabia in 2019](#).

33 Ibid

34 The Guardian (2019). [Ethiopians face beatings and bullets as Saudi deportation machine cranks up](#).

35 Ethiopia Migration Programme (2020). Formative Research Report.

36 The National News (2021). [Nearly 200 African migrants missing after boat sinks off Yemen](#).

37 Human Rights Watch (2019). [Ethiopians Abused on the Gulf Migration Route: Trafficking Exploitation, Torture, Abusive Prison Conditions](#)

38 See for example Human Rights Watch (2019). Ethiopians Abused on the Gulf Migration Route: Trafficking Exploitation, Torture, Abusive Prison Conditions. New York: HRW, and Human Rights Watch (2018). Yemen: Detained African Migrants Tortured, Raped. New York: Human Rights Watch

39 Meraki Labs (2019). [Protection Context for Migrants Passing through Yemen: A Baseline](#).

40 Ethiopia Migration Programme (2020). Op. cit.

Moving along the Eastern Route exposes women to multiple forms of discrimination and violence. In particular, women face greater risks of sexual and gender-based violence, and where journeys are taken irregularly women are often more reliant on the various facilitators, including smugglers, potentially heightening their vulnerability to sexual violence, kidnapping and trafficking.<sup>41</sup> The risks do not end once migrants and refugees reach Saudi Arabia as the border crossing into Saudi Arabia is dangerous and conditions for migrant workers, and particularly irregular migrants, in Saudi Arabia are very poor.

Saudi Arabia has long been condemned by the international community and human rights groups for its treatment of migrants. Since the March 2017 crackdown on undocumented migrants by Saudi authorities, an average of 10,000 Ethiopians were being deported each month, with a reported 380,000 Ethiopians returned between March 2017 and April 2020.<sup>42</sup> The situation for many of these returnees remains dire.<sup>43</sup> Of those who are returned, 92% reportedly do so involuntarily and many suffer from severe physical and mental health challenges due to experiences along their migration journeys, detention in Saudi Arabia, and deportation.<sup>44</sup>

In August 2020, an investigation by the British newspaper *The Sunday Telegraph* revealed at least 16,000 Ethiopian migrants<sup>45</sup> were being held in inhumane conditions<sup>46</sup> in detention centres in Saudi Arabia, allegedly locked away to stop the spread of COVID-19. Personal testimony and photographic evidence that was smuggled out of the detention centres indicate rampant physical abuse by Saudi officials, as well as squalid conditions, and untreated diseases spreading among the detained migrants.<sup>47</sup> According to MSF reports, up to 95% of returnees report witnessing or experiencing violence or abuse during their journey to Saudi Arabia. Many women returning to Ethiopia have reported inhumane and exploitative treatment, including physical and sexual abuse during their day to day working and living conditions in Saudi Arabia for which they had little redress.<sup>48</sup>

## The impact of COVID-19 on mixed migration and the Eastern Route

Throughout 2020, movement restrictions linked to COVID-19 significantly impacted overall 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 COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>49</sup> 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<sup>50</sup>, including in Djibouti, Somalia<sup>51</sup>, and Yemen.<sup>52</sup>

## Evolution of the Eastern Route

Migration between Yemen and East Africa has a long history built on strong trade relations and asylum opportunities, bi-directional migration movements and networks of migrants throughout East Africa and Yemen.<sup>53</sup> Although now mainly used as a country of transit for refugees and migrants moving between East Africa and the Gulf, Yemen has also historically been a country of asylum for Somali refugees and an important country of destination for labour migrants from East Africa.<sup>54</sup> As the only country in the Arabian Peninsula which is a signatory to the Refugee Convention, Yemen was a significant host country for Somali refugees, granting them prima facie refugee status since 1988.<sup>55</sup> During the 1990s, there was an increase in boat crossings from Somalia to Yemen as Somali refugees fled to neighbouring countries in the wake of a complex emergency in Somalia driven by conflict, the fragmentation of

41 Mixed Migration Centre (2018). [Experiences of female refugees and migrants in origin, transit and destination countries.](#)

42 IOM (2020). [Return of Ethiopian migrants from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Factsheet, April 2020.](#)

43 Danish Institute of International Studies (2020). [The challenges of Ethiopian male return migrants.](#)

44 IOM (2020) [Return of Ethiopian Migrants from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Factsheet, April 2020.](#)

45 Telegraph (2020). [About 16,000 migrants being held in just one Saudi centre, Ethiopian official reveals.](#)

46 Telegraph (2020). [Investigation: African migrants 'left to die' in Saudi Arabia's hellish Covid detention centres.](#)

47 Reuters (2020). [U.N. says Saudi deportations of Ethiopian migrants risks spreading coronavirus.](#)

48 See for example; Ayalew, M. et al. (2019). [Women's Labour Migration on the African-Middle East Corridor: Experiences of migration Domestic Workers from Ethiopia](#) CVM Ethiopia, International Domestic Workers Federation and Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women; for a general overview of conditions for migrant workers in Saudi Arabia see Human Rights Watch (2020) [World Report 2020, Saudi Arabia Events of 2019: Migrant Workers.](#)

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

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

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

52 IOM 2020. Djibouti Stranded Migrants report. July 2020.

53 de Regt, M. (2012). [Ethiopian Women's Migration to Yemen: Past and Present](#) Journal of Archaeology and Social Sciences in the Arabian Peninsula, p 17.

54 Ibid.

55 Hughes, N. (2003). [Yemen and refugees: progressive attitudes but policy void](#) Forced Migration Review, p16.

the Somali State and drought.<sup>56</sup> The movement between East Africa and Yemen largely took place along the mixed migration maritime route known today as the Eastern Route.

Throughout the late 1990s and early 2000s the number of Somali refugees arriving in Yemen fluctuated during a period of relative calm in Somalia,<sup>57</sup> with an average of 57,000 Somali refugees (51% of which were women) present in Yemen each year during this period.<sup>58</sup> As the political situation began to deteriorate again in Somalia in 2005, the number of Somali refugees in Yemen began to increase markedly, from 63,000 in 2004 to 226,000 in 2012.<sup>59</sup> Between 2007 and 2012, an average of 23,000 Somali refugees arrived in Yemen each year according to UNHCR registration numbers.<sup>60</sup> Women accounted for 34% of Somali refugees, totalling 34,000, in Yemen by 2006.<sup>61</sup>

Between 2005 and 2012, Ethiopians increasingly used the Eastern Route frequented by the Somali refugee corridor, developing it into a mixed migration route, used by both refugees and migrants. In 2006, 11,747 Ethiopians arrived in Yemen, 45% of the total crossings in the year,<sup>62</sup> and by 2012, this number had increased to 84,376, representing 78% of the 107,532 recorded arrivals.<sup>63</sup> Although Ethiopian nationals have historically migrated to Yemen to work, including Ethiopian women working in Yemeni cities,<sup>64</sup> the rapid increase in the number of Ethiopians arriving in Yemen after 2007 was driven almost entirely by those intending to move onward to work in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States.<sup>65</sup>

### The rise of Ethiopian migration to Saudi Arabia

The increase in the number of Ethiopians traveling through Yemen after 2007 took place within the context of a significant increase in the number of Ethiopian women traveling by regular channels to work in the domestic sector in Saudi Arabia and to a lesser extent, other Gulf countries.<sup>66</sup> Between 2008/9 and 2012/13 the number of female Ethiopian labour migrants traveling to Saudi Arabia increased dramatically after Indonesia and the Philippines temporarily suspended migration to Saudi Arabia due to serious concerns over abuse and low salaries for domestic workers in the country.<sup>67</sup>

Overall, Ethiopian women seem to have more access to regular or legal migration channels in the Gulf Cooperation Countries (GCC) than men.<sup>68</sup> This could be because the demand for domestic work is higher in the GCC countries (work in the home, childcare, elderly care, etc) and Ethiopian women typically find work in the domestic sector.<sup>69</sup> The number of newly registered female Ethiopian labour migrants increased from 17,393 to 175,430, between 2008/9 and 2012/13, with 80 % of legal female migrants traveling to Saudi Arabia.<sup>70</sup> During this period over 433,000 female migrants left Ethiopia regularly, the vast majority of which migrated to Saudi Arabia.<sup>71</sup> This was significantly more than the 26,137 Ethiopian male labour migrants who departed regularly during the same period.<sup>72</sup> While these figures refer to regular registered migrants, agencies estimate that they represent only half of the total number of people migrating, given the wide prevalence of unregistered recruitment agencies and illegal brokers.<sup>73</sup>

At the same time, between 2006 and the end of 2013, UNHCR and partners estimated that over 300,000 Ethiopians had arrived irregularly in Yemen by sea, the vast majority with the intention of traveling overland towards Saudi Arabia to find employment.<sup>74</sup> Although female labour migrants dominated regular migration between Ethiopia and Saudi Arabia pre-2013, available data suggests that women form a sizable minority traveling overland and sea between

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56 Hammond, L. (2014). [Somali refugee displacement in the near region: Analysis and Recommendations](#) Paper for UNHCR Global Initiative on Somali Refugees.

57 Ibid.

58 UNHCR [Population Statistics: Persons of Concern](#).

59 UNHCR [Population Statistics: Persons of Concern](#).

60 UNHCR [Population Statistics: Persons of Concern](#).

61 UNHCR (2000). Global Report for 2000: Yemen; Yemen (2006) Global Report for 2006.

62 Wilson-Smith, H (2019). [On the move in a war zone: mixed migration flows to and through Yemen](#) Migration Policy Institute.

63 Mixed Migration Centre (2014). [Blinded by hope: knowledge, attitudes and practice of Ethiopian migrants](#).

64 de Regt, M. (2012) op. cit.

65 Mixed Migration Centre (2014). [Abused and Abducted: the plight of female migrants from the Horn of Africa in Yemen](#).

66 Fernandez, B. (2011). [Household Help? Ethiopian Women Domestic Workers' Labor Migration to the Gulf Countries](#) Asian and Pacific Migration Journal, Vol. 20

67 Kefale, A. Mohammed, Z. (2015). [Ethiopian labour migration to the Gulf and South Africa](#) FSS Monograph No.10, Forum for Social Studies

68 IOM (2020). [Gendered patterns of women and girls' migration along the Eastern corridor](#).

69 Ibid.

70 Carter, B. Rohwerder, B. (2016). [Rapid fragility and migration assessment for Ethiopia: Rapid literature review](#) University of Birmingham

71 Carter, B. Rohwerder, B. (2016). Op. cit.

72 Ibid.

73 Mixed Migration Centre (2014). [Abused and Abducted: the plight of female migrants from the Horn of Africa in Yemen](#).

74 Mixed Migration Centre (2014). [Blinded by hope: knowledge, attitudes and practices of Ethiopian migrants](#)

Ethiopia/Somalia and Yemen.<sup>75</sup> Although arrival data was not disaggregated by gender between 2006 and 2011, between 2011 and 2013, women made up 20 % of the 112,618 arrivals in Yemen. Estimates place the actual number of women arriving during this time much higher, as women are often abducted on arrival in Yemen.<sup>76</sup>

## Conflict and increased dangers for Ethiopians in Yemen and Saudi Arabia

The dramatic increase in migration towards Saudi Arabia from Ethiopia from 2011 coincided with the Saudi government's implementation of a policy of 'Saudiization' to redress high youth unemployment in the country following the Arab Spring.<sup>77</sup> The Saudi Government instituted a series of measures to curb irregular migration, including conducting an amnesty period for irregular migrants before arresting and deporting some 163,000 Ethiopians between November 2013 and March 2014.<sup>78</sup> Women accounted for 33% of those deported from Saudi Arabia during this period.<sup>79</sup> The crackdown in Saudi Arabia and subsequent deportations created a crisis in Ethiopia, as the scale of deportations and the vulnerability of returnees outweighed the Government's expectations.<sup>80</sup>

In the context of the crackdown in Saudi Arabia in 2013 and in response to the difficulties in regulating the dramatic increase in the number of labour migrants and associated Private Employment Agencies,<sup>81</sup> along with increasing concerns about the widespread abuse of Ethiopian domestic workers in the Middle-East, the Ethiopian government officially suspended labour migration to the Middle-East in 2013.<sup>82</sup> However, Saudi deportations and the official Ethiopian government ban on travel to the Gulf countries had a limited effect on the overland and sea route to and through Yemen. In 2013, the number of Ethiopian arrivals in Yemen dropped by 40% to the lowest level since 2010, but recovered a year later and continued to increase steadily after 2014, from 54,213 in 2013 to over 117,107 in 2016.<sup>83</sup>

Similarly, despite a slight decline in arrivals immediately after the outbreak of civil war in Yemen mid-2015,<sup>84</sup> arrivals have since continued at a high rate, even as the conflict and humanitarian emergency within Yemen has become increasingly acute.<sup>85</sup> In 2017, Saudi Arabia instituted another crackdown on irregular migrant workers and further large-scale deportations to Ethiopia (nearly 10,000 per month for most of 2018 and 2019).<sup>86</sup> However, the number of arrivals in Yemen continued to increase with IOM estimating that some 160,000 refugees and migrants arrived in Yemen in 2018.<sup>87</sup>

In early 2018, the Government of Ethiopia announced that it had lifted the suspension on migrant workers traveling to the Middle East. However, the process to reinstitute the movement has been slow.<sup>88</sup> In May 2019, the Saudi Ministry of Labour and Social Development announced that it had stopped the recruitment of domestic staff from Ethiopia, after the two countries failed to agree on mutually acceptable contracts.<sup>89</sup> However, in November 2020, Saudi Arabia announced reforms to its Kafala (sponsorship) system, which will make it easier for migrants to change jobs and allow them to leave the country without employers permission.<sup>90</sup> The current system puts workers at risk of exploitation, and the new reforms are set to ease some of the restrictions which were putting workers at risk. These new guidelines could welcome a resumption of relations between Ethiopia and Saudi Arabia to discuss more regular employment options for Ethiopian workers, as they could ensure more rights for workers.

75 Mixed Migration Centre (2014). [Abused and Abducted: the plight of female migrants from the Horn of Africa in Yemen](#). Data on the number of East African women traveling overland from East Africa to Saudi Arabia through Yemen is limited and it is difficult to establish the number of women moving on this route. In 2014, the Mixed Migration Centre reported that data collection in Yemen had captured only 8% of the estimated arrivals of Ethiopians in Yemen from Djibouti between 2011 and 2013, and did not capture the arrival of 15,915 Ethiopian women during this period. More recently IOM reported that it had recorded the arrival of 93,091 East African nationals in Yemen in 2018, but estimated the total number of arrivals at 159,838, including 66,747 crossing from Djibouti undetected.

76 Mixed Migration Centre (2014). [Abused and Abducted: the plight of female migrants from the Horn of Africa in Yemen](#).

77 Fernandez, B (2017). [Irregular Migration from Ethiopia to the Gulf States](#) in Fargues, P. M. Shah, N. (eds), *Skilful Survivals Irregular Migration to the Gulf*, Gulf Labour Markets and Migration (GLMM) Programme, Gulf Research Centre Cambridge, 2017.

78 Lecadet, C. Tafesse Melkamu, M. (2016). [The expulsion of Ethiopian workers from Saudi Arabia \(2013-2014\): The management of a humanitarian and political crisis](#) *Annales d'Ethiophe* Vol. 31

79 Ibid.

80 Ibid. See also; Kefale, A. Mohammed, Z. (2015). op. cit.; Mixed Migration Centre (2014). [The Letter of the Law: regular and irregular migration in Saudi Arabia in a context of rapid change](#).

81 380 out of 400 of officially registered PEAs at the time were thought to be involved with irregular migration activities in addition to their regular work. See; Mixed Migration Centre (2014). [Abused and Abducted: the plight of female migrants from the Horn of Africa in Yemen](#).

82 BBC News (2013). [Ethiopian bans citizens from travelling abroad for work](#)

83 UNHCR (2016). [New Arrivals in Yemen Comparison 2013-2016](#); Mixed Migration Centre (2016) [Mixed Migration in the Horn of Africa and Yemen Region Monthly Summary: December 2016](#)

84 Akumu, O. (2016). [Shifting Tides: The changing nature of mixed migration crossings to Yemen](#) Mixed Migration Centre.

85 Ibid. Botti, D. Phillips, M. (2019). [Record numbers of refugees and migrants arrive in Yemen amidst intensifying and complicated war](#) Mixed Migration Centre; Wilson-Smith, H (2019). [On the move in a war zone: mixed migration flows to and through Yemen](#) Migration Policy Institute

86 300,000 Ethiopian migrant workers as of July 2019

87 IOM (2019). [2018 Migrant Arrivals and Yemeni Returns from Saudi Arabia](#)

88 Walk Free Foundation (2019). [Ethiopia's new migration policy: A positive step but continued scrutiny needed](#)

89 Saudi Gazette (2019). [Saudi Arabia revokes visas of Ethiopian housemaids after differences over recruitment conditions](#)

90 BBC (2020). [Saudi Arabia eases Kafala system](#). 4 November 2020.

## 3: Key Findings

The respondents interviewed for this study come from a wide range of ethnic, socio-economic and educational backgrounds across Ethiopia. Most women are concerned with increasing their access to employment and earning an income abroad through skilled or unskilled labour or domestic work. Some are supported by their families to move in order to send money home. Some women move to join their husbands, while others are migrating to leave forced marriages and domestic violence. Some are fleeing violence and persecution, perpetrated by governments, non-state actors or members of their families. The varied backgrounds from the women interviewed speaks to the complex and very personal experiences that each woman on the move faces.

### Profiles

**The movement of Ethiopian women towards Yemen and Saudi Arabia is mainly comprised of women travelling with the aim of taking up low-skilled work opportunities in Saudi Arabia as domestic labourers.** This movement takes place in the context of wider structural inequality between the Gulf States and Horn of Africa, where prospects for income in the informal sector in Saudi Arabia far outweigh those available to many working in the informal economy in Ethiopia.<sup>91</sup> It also highlights the structural inequality of what is known as the 'global care chain', in which women's care labour is transferred vertically between women in the Global North and South rather than shared between men and women, emphasising the rigid gendered division of domestic and care labour in both the sending and receiving countries.<sup>92</sup>

Most of the Ethiopian women interviewed by MMC came from the regions of Amhara (44%) and Oromia (33%). 53% of women said they were living in rural areas before leaving Ethiopia, while 47% were living in urban or semi-urban locations. Respondents had an average age of 24. Almost all women began their journeys in Ethiopia (n=162); 5 began in Djibouti, and 2 began in Somalia.

**The majority of Ethiopian women interviewed had no education (59%), and only 25% had completed primary education.** Women from rural locations (n=90) were more likely to say that they had no education (81%) compared with women from urban/semi-urban areas (n=79, 34%). In fact, only 16% of women from rural areas said that they had completed formal schooling to either a primary or secondary level, compared with 61% in urban/semi-urban areas. In Ethiopia, particularly for women in rural areas, formal education is often inaccessible after primary school and, despite significant recent gains, enrolment rates for females in Ethiopia drop steadily after primary/secondary school.<sup>93</sup> Further education and training requires income and often is only available in urban centres, making it expensive and difficult to access for many.<sup>94</sup> Without higher education, opportunities for working in formalised employment are very limited, particularly for women.<sup>95</sup> Once they have left school therefore, women, who often bear the burden of provisioning for their families, commonly work in the informal economy.<sup>96</sup>

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91 Ibid.

92 Fernandez (2011). [Household Help? Ethiopian Women Domestic Workers' Labour Migration to the Gulf Countries](#) Asia and Pacific Migration Journal, Vol. 20 (3-4)

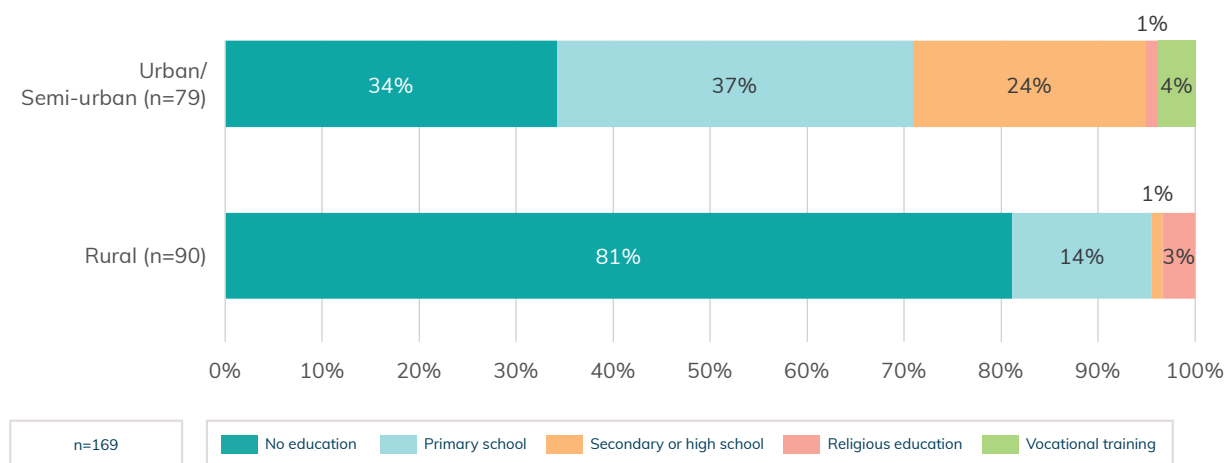
93 UNESCO Ethiopia [Education and Literacy](#)

94 Schewel, K. (2018). [Why Ethiopian women go to the Middle-east: An aspiration-capability analysis of migration decision-making](#) Working Paper 148, International Migration Institute Network

95 Ibid. see also Jones, N. et al (2014). [Rethinking girls on the move: The case of Ethiopian adolescent domestic workers in the Middle East](#) Overseas Development Institute

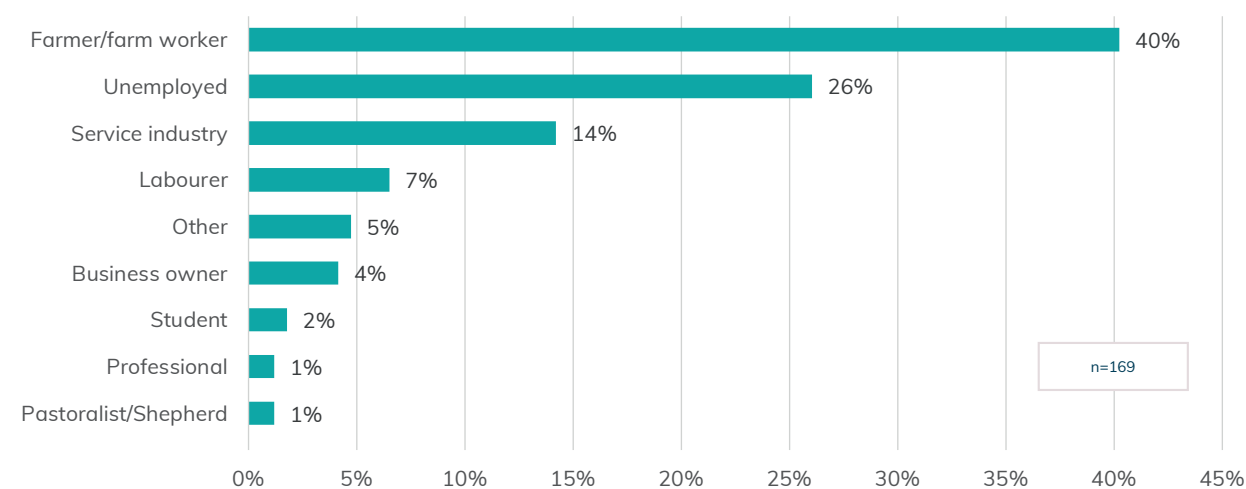
96 Ibid.

**Figure 1. What is the highest level of education you have completed?**



40% of Ethiopian women interviewed indicated that before migrating they had worked either on farms (40%), were unemployed (26%) or worked in the service industry (14%). In rural areas of Ethiopia, opportunities for generating incomes rely heavily on agriculture.<sup>97</sup> Ethiopian women have significantly less access to land-use than men, and despite their significant contribution to the rural economy, women often face multi-faceted constraints on their ability to negotiate pay and access agricultural inputs, credit and capital.<sup>98</sup>

**Figure 2. What was your main area of occupation in your country of departure?**



## Intentions, aspirations and drivers

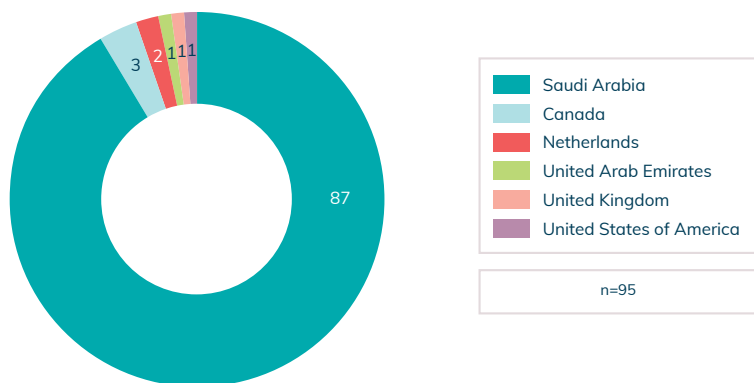
68% of Ethiopian women said that they had reached the end of their journeys at the time of interview (n=47). 45 of those were in Djibouti and 2 in Yemen. A further 16% said that they were unsure about whether they would continue with their journeys or not (n=27). **Among those still on their journeys (n=95), almost all respondents said they intended to get to Saudi Arabia.** In line with other studies on the Eastern Route,<sup>99</sup> interviewee's aspirations for traveling towards Saudi Arabia were primarily related to finding better-remunerated employment, often because they were not earning enough in the jobs they had or did not have access to credit to start or improve their businesses.

97 See Jones et al (2014) op. cit.

98 See FAO [Gender and Land Rights Database](#)

99 Schewel, K. (2018) op. cit. see also; Research and Evidence Facility (2017) Op. Cit. IOM (2020) [The desire to thrive regardless of this risk: Risk perception and migration experiences of young Ethiopians migrating along the Eastern Route towards the Arabian Peninsula](#)

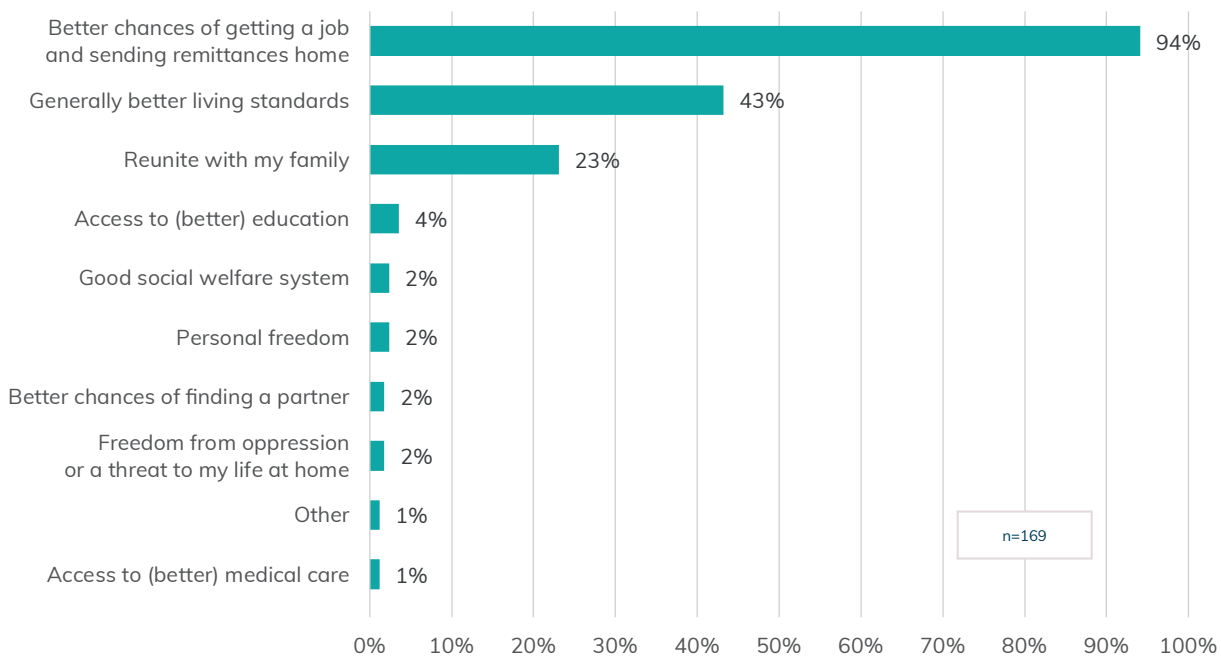
**Figure 3. What is your preferred destination?**



**91% of Ethiopian women said that they left their country of departure for economic factors**, including finding work and better remunerated employment, and almost all of the women interviewed (95%) said that they chose their destination because of the better chances of getting a job and sending remittances home. Other commonly cited reasons include relatively better living standards (43%), and the opportunities to reunite with family members (23%).

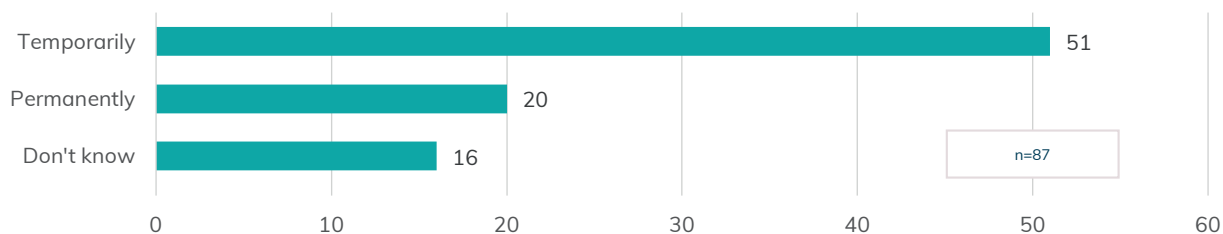
*“When I saw migrants coming home with more money than I thought would have been earned by any means at home, [that] made me migrate”*  
**Ethiopian woman, age unknown**

**Figure 4. Why did/do you want to go to your destination country?**



However, migration to Saudi Arabia is not so much a matter of starting a new life overseas. **For most interviewed women, migration to Saudi Arabia is a temporary affair, to earn money and at some point return to Ethiopia (and possibly later re-migrate).** Not many respondents have the intention to stay and settle in Saudi Arabia, as can be seen in Figure 5 below.

**Figure 5. Do you intend to stay in Saudi Arabia permanently or only temporarily?**



### Shaping aspirations

**Friends and families in both Ethiopia and Saudi Arabia exercised a strong influence over the decision to leave home for the women interviewed, as well as their ability to travel.** Other than the main drivers, many women interviewed indicated that what they had been told by families abroad (47%) or returnees (30%) influenced their decision to migrate. The influence of returning migrants and/or remittances sent from migrants overseas can influence migration decisions in a variety of ways. The relative wealth of returning migrants, or the wealth disparity between those with relatives overseas, may fuel a sense of 'relative deprivation' between migration and other 'locally imagined futures'.<sup>100</sup>

*"...it is me who decided to migrate by observing what returnees could bring in money with them when came back home, and could do substantial business which would hardly be possible within such a short period of time if they could have been at home and done any kind of work instead of migrating."*

**Ethiopian woman, 21 years old**

Migration can transform power relations and gender dynamics at home as women may have new and increased resources, potentially increasing women's status and increasing their opportunities for education, income generation and marriage. However, there is also the potential risk of resistance and backlash to newfound gender roles when women migrants return home,<sup>101</sup> as men may seek to reassert their authority through violence and resist women's economic influence.

### Agency enhanced or constrained?

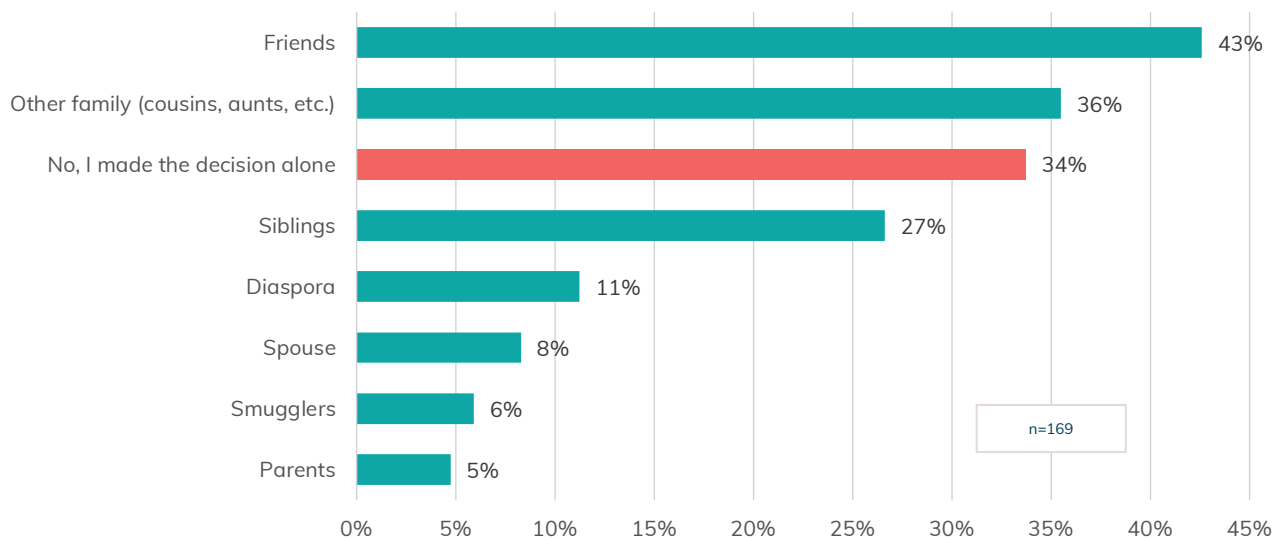
Many women reference the influence of their family, including that they have been sent by their families to earn money to send home. As seen in Figure 6, those at home and abroad were often the first source of encouragement to migrate. That said, **many women also indicated that they had made the decision to migrate alone, pointing to women's agency in migration decision making.** However, more indicated that they were encouraged to migrate, including by their friends (43%), family members (other than parents or siblings; 36%), siblings (27%), diaspora (11%) or their spouse (8%).

100 Schewel, K. (2018) [Why Ethiopian women go to the Middle-east: An aspiration-capability analysis of migration decision-making](#) Working Paper 148, International Migration Institute Network

101 Sijapati, B. (2015) [Women's Labour Migration from Asia and the Pacific: Opportunities and Challenges](#). Issue in Brief Issue No. 12. Bangkok and Washington DC: International Organization for Migration/Migration Policy Institute



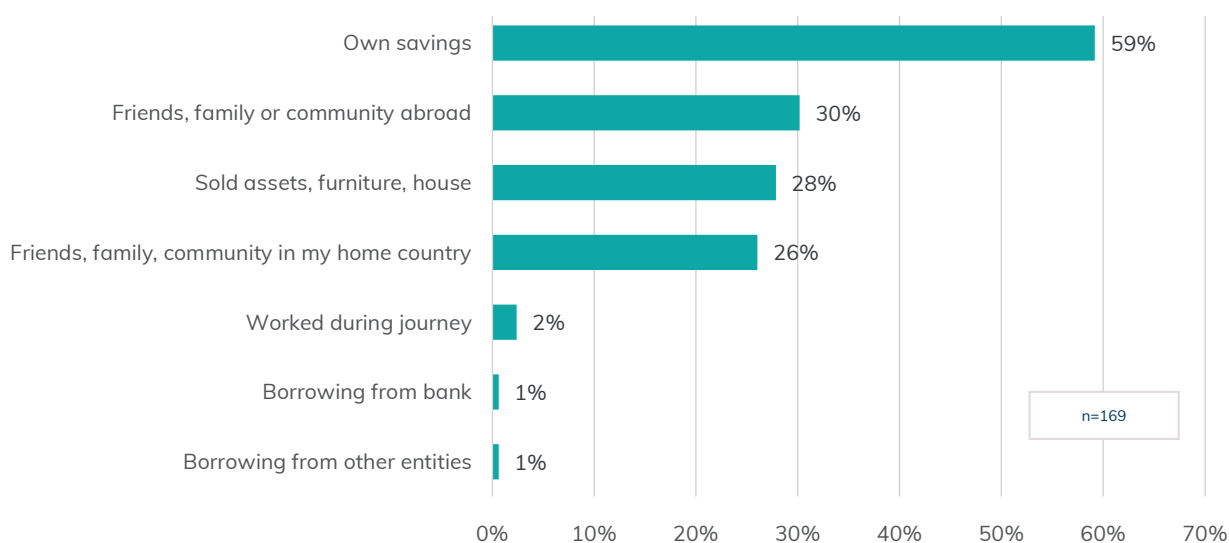
**Figure 6. Did anyone encourage you to migrate?**



**The majority of women (75%, n=127) indicated that they were encouraged by their families<sup>102</sup> to send money back home.** The decision of women interviewed to migrate clearly reflects the social contexts and relationships in which women are embedded at home. This highlights the amplified burdens that female migrants face. Women can be expected to migrate to serve the family by earning money and sending remittances, affecting also the choice of destination. Previous research on Ethiopian adolescent migration found that parents prefer to send girls to Gulf countries rather than boys, as daughters were seen as more reliable in sending money home; if a boy migrates 'he does so for himself'.<sup>103</sup> It also highlights the greater agency that men have over their decision to migrate.

**Women's journeys were more likely to have been financed through a group or community effort.** While 59% of women primarily financed their journeys through their own savings, and 30% of women said they were supported by friends and family abroad (30%) and family and friends at home (26%), in comparison, 79% of Ethiopian men interviewed in the same locations (n=360) said they financed the journeys through savings, 23% relied on support from friends and family at home, and 15% on family and friends abroad. This reflects both the unequal access that women have to generating income and financial independence, but also highlights the potential future obligations due towards those who have assisted the women to move.

**Figure 7. How was this journey primarily financed?**



<sup>102</sup> Including parents, siblings, spouse or other family

<sup>103</sup> Jones, N et al. (2014) [Rethinking girls on the move: The intersection of poverty, exploitation and violence experiences by Ethiopian adolescents involved in the Middle-East 'maid trade'](#) Overseas Development Institute

On the one hand, migration may be framed as an opportunity taken by women to realise aspirations inaccessible in the patriarchal economic, political and social contexts of their home country.<sup>104</sup> And this is true for many. However, **4Mi data actually highlights that women's migration decisions are also made within the constraints of social norms, relationships and expectations.**

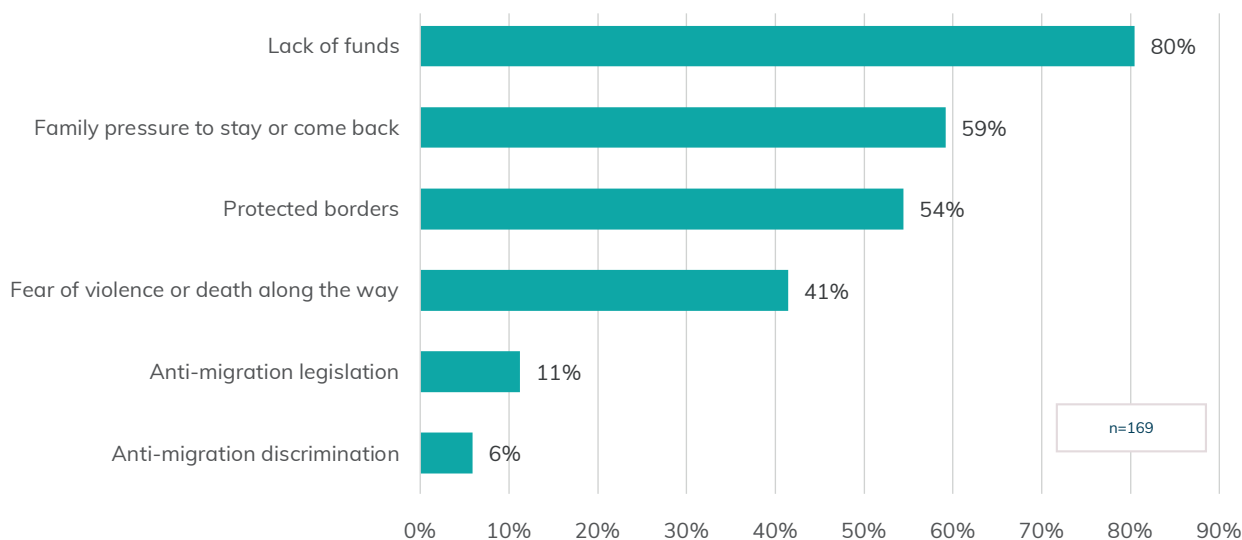
Women's empowerment can be defined as the process through which women are able to gain capacity to exercise agency and make decisions in relation to their own lives.<sup>105</sup> Empowerment, involves the process of change in which women are increasingly able to exercise choice, as well as, challenging dominant relations of power.<sup>106</sup> Empowerment therefore implies not only actively exercising choice, but also doing so in ways that challenge the power relations in which they are embedded.<sup>107</sup>

In the long term, migration for economic opportunities may increase women's independence and the ability to make independent economic choices. However, while women who migrate gained increased access to resources and mobility, women are still subject to, and embedded in, patriarchal social norms and systems despite having independently left their home countries. Thus, the extent to which migration is empowering for women who migrate may be limited by familial obligations and debt.<sup>108</sup>

The extent to which women's migration increases women's independent resources and power is outside the scope of this paper. However, it is clear the women migrating through Yemen to Saudi Arabia are still subject to constraints. This is demonstrated through their references to family pressure, and the decision to migrate as an expression of caring for their families and meeting their family responsibilities. **In deciding to leave, therefore, women are exercising agency, but are still operating within constraints that highlight their lowered agency and independence in comparison to men who migrate along the same route.**

The commitment to migrate seems strong. As shown in Figure 8, **serious risks, concerns and barriers, such as discrimination, anti-migration legislation and even fear of violence or death, would only stop people from migrating to a limited extent.** Lack of funds and family pressure – the latter again pointing to the strong influence of family over women's migration decisions – play a bigger role as potential barriers to migration for women along the Eastern route.

**Figure 8. What can/could stop you from migrating?**



104 Schewel, K. (2018) [Why Ethiopian women go to the Middle-east: An aspiration-capability analysis of migration decision-making Working Paper 148](#), International Migration Institute Network

105 Kabeer, N. (2005) [Gender equality and women's empowerment: A critical analysis of the third millennium development goal 1](#) Gender and Development Vo. 13 (1)

106 Ibid. See also; Cornwall, A (2016) [Women's Empowerment: What Works?](#) Journal of international development Vol. 28 (3)

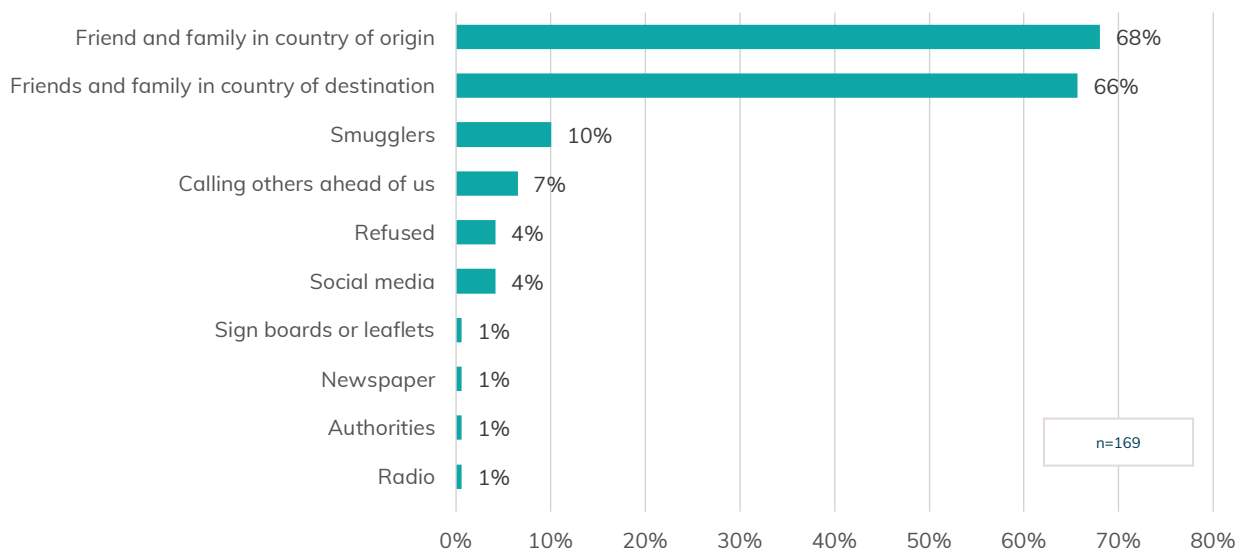
107 [Ibid.](#)

108 Htun, M. et al (2019) [Gender Discriminatory Laws and Women's Economic Agency](#) Social Politics Vol. 26 (2).

## The role of smugglers along the journey

Current and returned migrants are an important source of information for both men and women before they leave. Women who were interviewed before leaving accessed information about their trip almost exclusively through friends and family in their country of origin (68%) and friends and family in country of destination (65%), and to a much more limited extent through smugglers (10%).

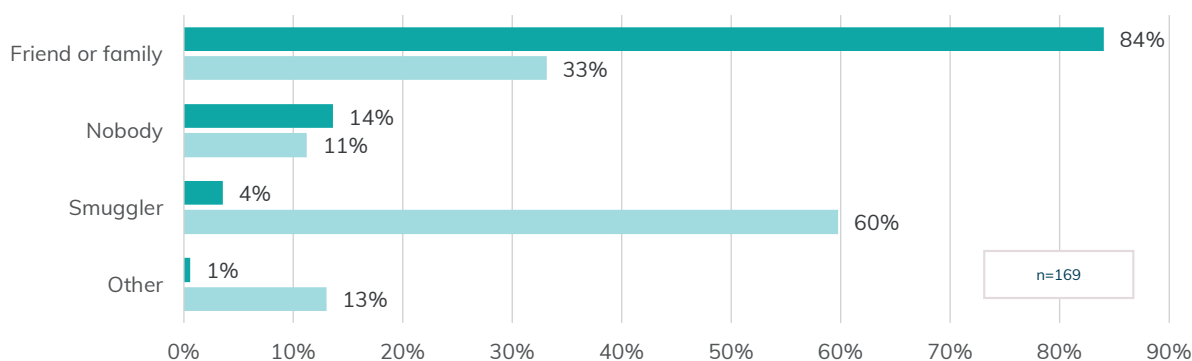
**Figure 9. What was your first source of information on migration (including routes, destinations, costs and risks) prior to departure?**



Although the role of smugglers in initiating or influencing interviewees in their initial decision to leave or in starting a journey is very limited (4%), 60% of women indicated they had used smugglers once they departed (see Figure 10). In other words, and **contrary to what is commonly assumed, smugglers are not so influential in encouraging people to migrate, but the more people move away from home, the more influential and important they become in the facilitation of people's journeys.**

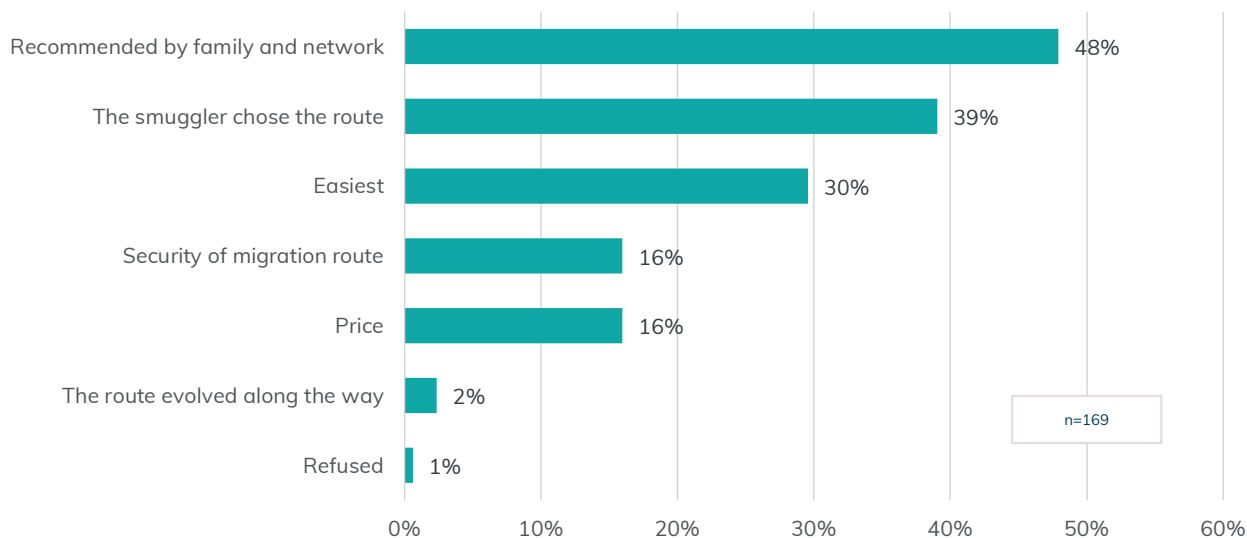
The use of smugglers has important implications for migrants' and refugees' ability to control their trajectory once it has begun, even on a relatively short journey. Of those women who used a smuggler, their smuggler chose the route in many cases (48%, see Figure 11). Studies have found that women are not seen at common assistance points in Djibouti despite making up a large percentage of those crossing the border.<sup>109</sup> This **limited visibility increases women's risks of exploitation and abuse.**

**Figure 10. Who helped you to start your migration journey vs. who facilitated the rest of your journey?**



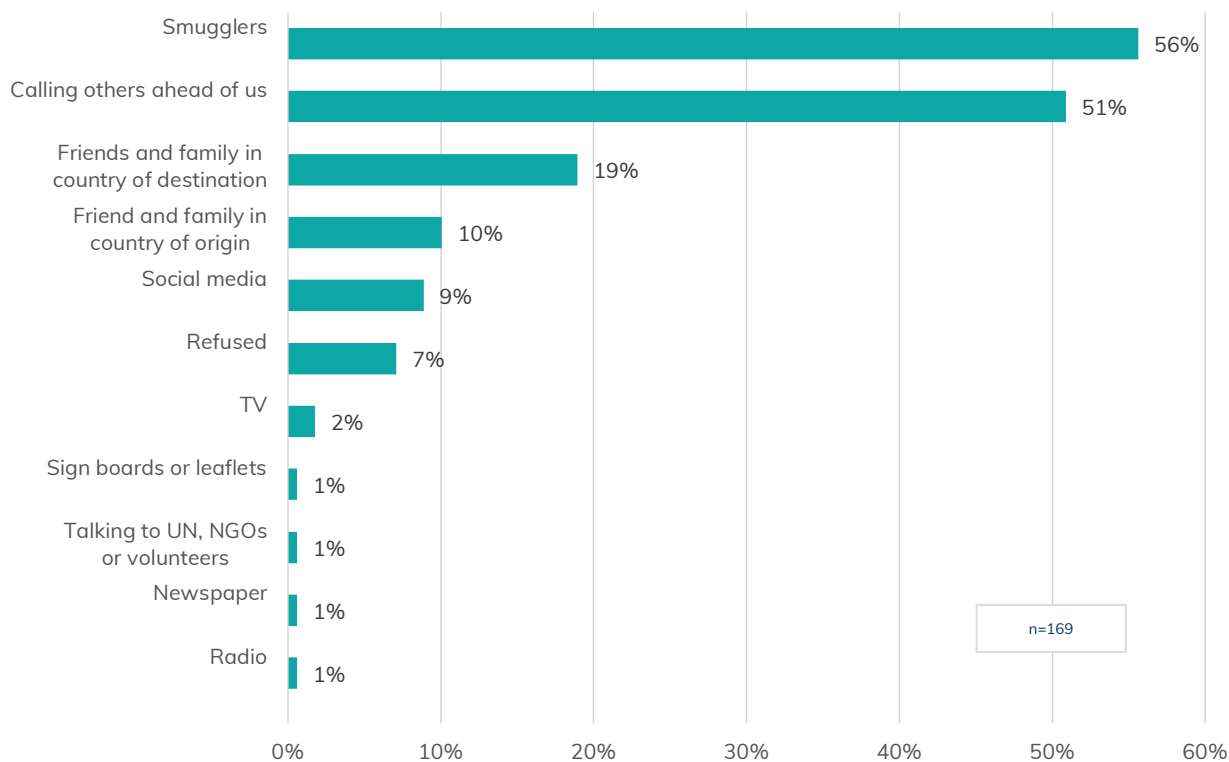
<sup>109</sup> Research and Evidence Facility (2017) op. cit.

**Figure 11. Why did you choose the route you have traveled so far?**



Sources of information about migration both before and after departure have an impact upon the route, exposure to risk and potential access to assistance. **Before leaving women accessed information about their trip almost exclusively through friends and family in the country of destination and friends and family in country of origin. However, once they had left, women became increasingly reliant on smugglers (56%) and other migrants ahead of them to access information about the journey (51%).**

**Figure 12. How do/did you access information during migration?**



This reliance on smugglers for information may not be a major concern, however, as **three-quarters of the women interviewed reported that they were not misled by their smuggler (76%) and agreed or strongly agreed that their smuggler had helped them in migrating to another country (82%).** Where women did feel misled (n=13), it was most frequently in relation to costs of the journey (n=11). It is possible that in the absence of adequate state protection for migrants in an irregular situation, reliance on smugglers may protect women from predatory state officials. However, **smugglers were identified as perpetrators in nearly all (84%) incidents of abuse<sup>110</sup> either experienced or witnessed by 4Mi respondents,** confirming the complex role of smugglers in mixed migration journeys, as they may play both a protective and/or exploitative role in women's journeys.<sup>111</sup>

### Costs of the journey and the value of the irregular migration and smuggling business

In 2019, it was estimated that more than 22,000 Ethiopian women<sup>112</sup> travelled from the Horn of Africa to Yemen. Overall 4Mi female respondents indicated they had spent an average of USD 105 between Ethiopia and Djibouti, an average of USD 390 between Ethiopia and Somalia, and USD 719 USD by the time they were interviewed in Yemen. Based on these numbers, **the business of smuggling Ethiopian women along the Eastern Route from Ethiopia to Yemen was worth in excess of USD 15 million in 2019.**

**Figure 13. Female respondents' average costs of journeys**



### Protection concerns

**Moving along any mixed migration route exposes women to multiple forms of discrimination and violence, and migration along the Eastern Route is dangerous for women.** Women face severe risks of sexual and gender-based violence, and are often more reliant on the protection of various facilitators, including smugglers when traveling, potentially heightening their vulnerability to sexual violence, kidnapping and trafficking<sup>113</sup>. While it is clear that women face significant risks when entering and traveling through Yemen, there is a need to continue to further document this section of women's journeys. Moreover, as noted in MMC's study 'Abused and Abducted' in 2014, many women who made the sea crossing from Djibouti or Somalia went missing upon arrival in Yemen, and were likely abducted by criminal and trafficking gangs operating on the Yemeni coastline.<sup>114</sup> There is still a lack of in-depth follow-up and investigation into the fate of women and girls upon arrival in Yemen.

110 This excludes the risk of extortion by government officials. See section below on protection concerns for more detail on the types of risks identified.

111 Peter Tinti and Tuesday Reitano (2016). *Migrant, Refugee, Smuggler, Saviour*.

112 IOM (2019). [Migrant Arrivals and Yemeni Returns from Saudi Arabia in 2019](#). The precise figure for Ethiopian women travelling on this route in 2019 is not available. However, IOM estimates that 24,160 women (of all nationalities) made this journey in 2019, and that 92% of all arrivals in Yemen were Ethiopian nationals. This figure is an estimation based on these numbers.

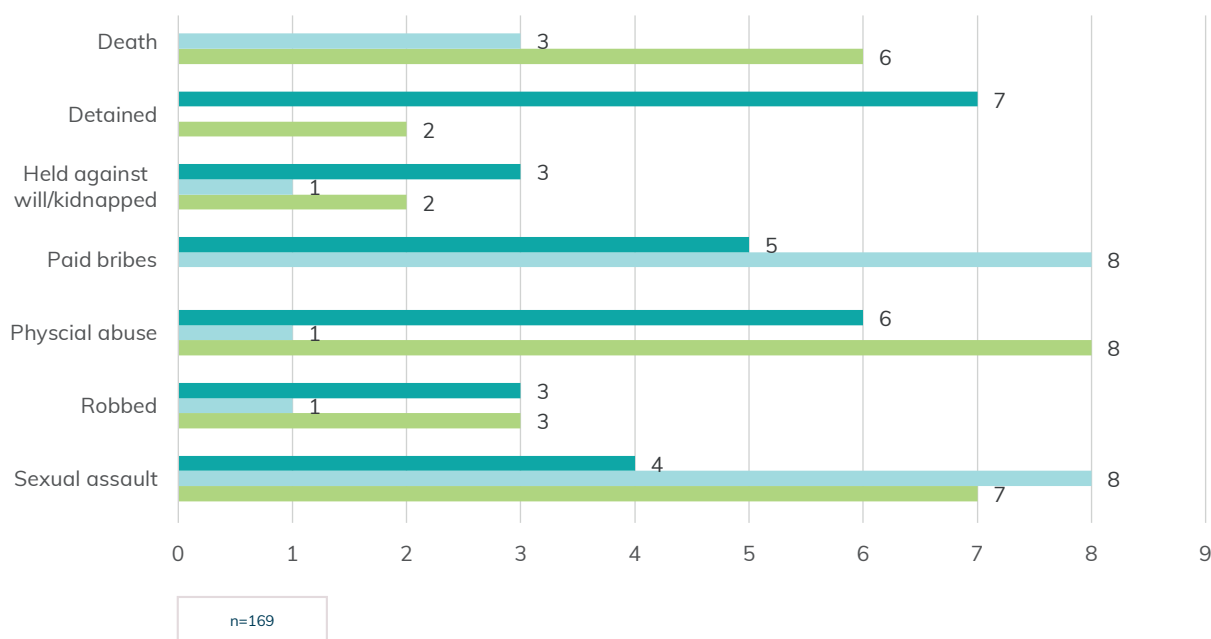
113 Mixed Migration Centre (2018). [Experiences of female refugees and migrants in origin, transit and destination countries](#).

114 Mixed Migration Centre (2014). [Abused and Abducted. The plight of female migrants from the Horn of Africa in Yemen](#).

**Overall, 30% of women interviewed (50 women) reported that they had either experienced or witnessed some type of protection risk on their journeys towards Yemen.** This was highest among women interviewed in Yemen (n=11/24, equivalent to 46%) and is consistent with earlier 4Mi analysis,<sup>115</sup> where 43% of respondents reported protection incidents on their journeys. 40% of women interviewed in Somalia (n=10/25) and 18% of women interviewed in Djibouti (n=22/120) reported experiencing or witnessing risks.

**Sexual harassment was the most commonly cited risk,** noted by 11% of respondents (19 women). 15 women (9% of respondents) noted that they had experienced physical abuse of a non-sexual nature. Physical assault encompasses a wide range of abuses. The most cited types of physical abuse included mild abuse (e.g. slapping, hitting), verbal abuse and denial of food/water. 9 women noted that they had witnessed the death of 100 fellow migrants (91 deaths were reported to have happened in Djibouti, 3 in Ethiopia, 3 in Somalia, 3 on the sea crossing to Yemen).

**Figure 14. Number of respondents who either witnessed or experienced protection risks**



It is worth noting that compared to women, a slightly higher percentage (38%) of Ethiopian men interviewed in the same locations and within the same timeframe (n=465) said they had either experienced or witnessed risks on their journeys, with notable differences for physical abuse (13% versus 9% for women), paying of bribes (13% versus 8%) and robbery (9% versus 4%). Women however, were more likely to report witnessing or experiencing sexual assault (11% versus 8% men).

115 Mixed Migration Centre (2020). [4Mi Snapshot: Ethiopians and Somalia interviewed in Yemen.](#)

## 4: Conclusion

**Migration can bring many opportunities for women, including greater prospects for independence, employment and protection from persecution and conflict outside their countries of origin;** however, the patriarchal contexts that women leave and move through, have significant impacts upon their experiences. Women's movement along the Eastern Route is influenced by the gendered limitations and disadvantages of the opportunities available in Ethiopia, including early marriage, lack of employment opportunities and negative social norms. For many of the women interviewed by 4Mi, decision making and the financial ability to leave was contingent upon their networks and families, constraints which research shows is often stronger for women than men.<sup>116</sup> When combined with the notable risks that women face during this migration journey, the extent to which women are able to meaningfully make an informed decision whether to undertake the journey themselves is critical.

**Moving along mixed migration routes exposes women to multiple forms of intersectional discrimination and violence.** In particular, women face greater risks of sexual and gender-based violence, and are often more reliant on the protection of various facilitators, including smugglers when traveling, potentially heightening their vulnerability to sexual violence, kidnapping and trafficking. While this research report shows that women face significant risks when entering and traveling through Yemen, there is **still limited knowledge about the status and fate of "missing" women (and girls) who arrive in Yemen** and there is a need for further research on this section of women's journeys.

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116 IOM (2020). [Gendered Patterns of Women and Girls' Migration along the Eastern Corridor](#).



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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