Drivers and aspirations of Ethiopians impacted by the Tigray conflict: Data from Somalia and Sudan

This snapshot[1] explores the migration drivers and aspirations of Ethiopians in Somalia and Sudan who have left Ethiopia since the outbreak of conflict in Tigray in November 2020. In so doing, it sheds light on how the conflict has impacted upon mixed migration dynamics in the region and farther afield, including movements west into Sudan to camps along its border[2] and to Khartoum and other urban areas in Sudan; farther north to Libya and Tunisia, with some seeking to reach Europe;[3] as well as east to Somalia,[4] with some Ethiopians joining routes towards the Gulf.[5] This snapshot aims to inform protection responses outside of Ethiopia, highlighting the need for not only a routes-based approach, but also coordinating responses across routes given the complex movement dynamics emanating from the crisis.

Key findings

- 95% of respondents in Sudan cited **violence, insecurity and conflict** as among the main drivers for leaving Ethiopia, while 77% of respondents in Somalia cited **economic factors**.

- Respondents in Somalia had **not reached the end of their journey, while Ethiopians in Sudan expressed a higher degree of uncertainty related to their future movement intentions.** Qualitative data collected in camps in Sudan, highlight that some people **intend to return**, but these are conditional upon an end to conflict and violence.

- The **preferred destination** of respondents in Somalia was Saudi Arabia (82%), while Europe was the intended destination for respondents in Sudan.

Profiles

This snapshot is based on 549 4Mi surveys with Ethiopians from the Tigray, Amhara and Afar regions[6] who left Ethiopia after November 2020. Respondents were interviewed in Somalia (n=430) between August 2021 and December 2021, and in Sudan (n=119) between February 2021 and March 2022.

In Somalia, interviews took place in Bosaso-Alhamdulilah (23%), Bosaso (22%), Celdahir (21%), Kalabayr (20%), Dhahar (13%) and Laag (1%). 61% of respondents originated from Amhara region, 37% from Tigray and 2% from Afar (map 1). 89% of respondents are men, while 11% are women. A large majority (94%) are between 18 and 35 years old. The majority of respondents in Somalia (91%) were not making any money in the 12 months before leaving Ethiopia due to being unemployed (85% of those not making any money), perceiving themselves as displaced (7%), taking care of the home/children (3%) and being students (3%).
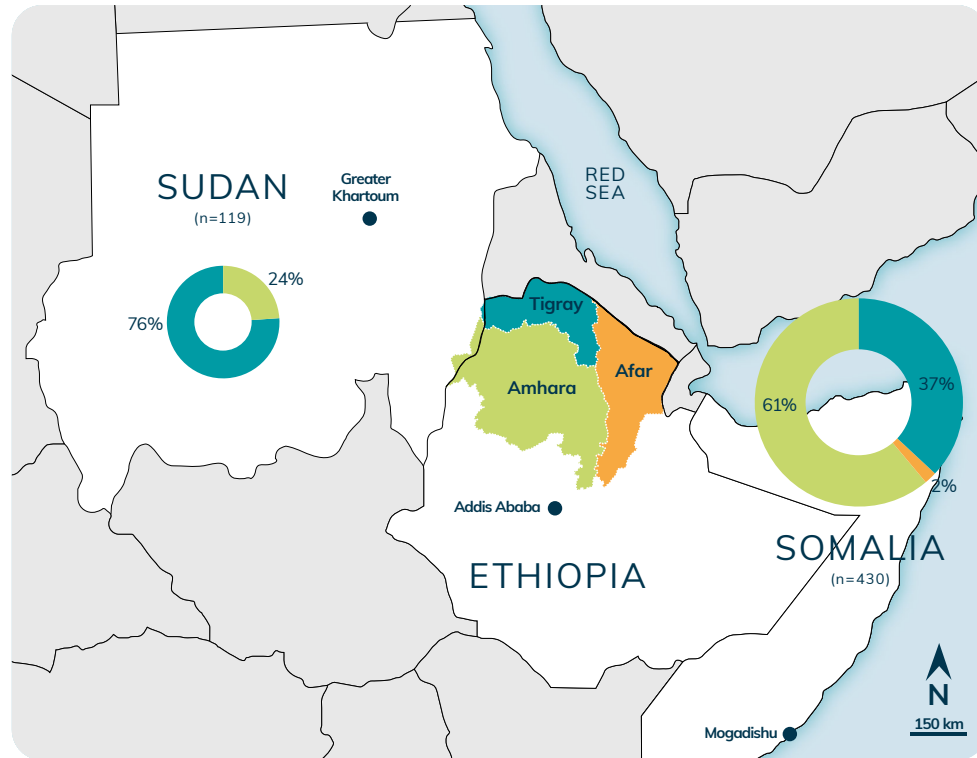
In Sudan, most respondents were interviewed in Khartoum (48%) while other locations include Um-Rakuba camp (5%), Gedaref (3%), Hamdayet camp (1%), Kassala (1%), Shagareb camp (1%), Humera (1%) and Tunaydbah camp (1%). 24% of respondents were from Amhara while the rest were from Tigray. 65% of respondents are men, while 35% are women. 85% are between 18 and 35 years old. 73% of Ethiopians in Sudan were not making money prior to their departure, mostly because of unemployment.

Out of the total sample, 500 respondents (428 of them were interviewed in Somalia and 72 in Sudan) answered a specific set of questions on the impact of the Tigray conflict,

1   This snapshot follows a snapshot released in September 2021 analysing the movement intentions of Ethiopians and Eritreans affected by the Tigray conflict who were interviewed in Sudan, Libya and Tunisia.
2   UNHCR (2022). Sudan – Operational Update January.
3   Hayden, S. (2021). ''How Europe deals with the new wave of refugees is a test of our humanity.'' *The Irish Times.*
4   IOM (2022). Flow Monitoring Dashboard Somalia – January 2022.
5   Data collection at IOM's flow monitoring point in Humera, in Northern Tigray, did not take place due to security and access constraints, providing an incomplete picture of the total number of movements and particularly those towards Sudan and North Africa. IOM (2021). Flow Monitoring Dashboard Ethiopia – December 2021.

6   These three regions are the ones most directly affected by the Tigray conflict according to OCHA's situation reporting on Northern Ethiopia. This snapshot follows OCHA's classification of regions in Northern Ethiopia affected by the Tigray crisis.

which was deployed between July 2021 and March 2022. 4Mi data are complemented by qualitative data from 12 semi-structured interviews conducted in Khartoum (4) in June 2021, and in Umrakuba Camp (5) and Tunaydbah Camp (3) in Eastern Sudan in October 2021, as well as through insights from programming partners on the ground.

Map 1. Distribution of region of origin of respondents interviewed in Sudan and Somalia

Source and credits: Mixed Migration Centre, 2022.
Note: Data collected through MMC 4Mi migrant surveys between February 2021 and March 2022. N=549.

Drivers differ according to route

A majority of Ethiopians interviewed in Somalia (77%) reported economic factors to be a main reason for leaving their location of origin. Among those, respondents cited being unemployed - or the main earner in their household being unemployed - before departure (64%), or not earning enough in the job they had (32%) (n=332). This aligns with previous MMC 4Mi data on Ethiopians traveling along the Eastern Route through Somalia, collected before the Tigray conflict, suggesting that conflict dynamics have not significantly impacted the trends along this migration route but serve as an additional driver of movement. Indeed, 51% of Ethiopian respondents in Somalia also cited violence, insecurity and conflict as a reason for leaving, linked to war, armed conflict and terrorism (94%) and political unrest and riots (57%) (n=220). 17% also cited a lack of freedom and a repressive government as a reason for departure from Ethiopia. **In contrast, the majority of respondents in Sudan (95%) cited violence, insecurity and conflict due to war, armed conflict and terrorism** (100% of those citing violence, insecurity and conflict) as well as political unrest and riots (23%) (n=113). Rights and freedoms were reported as a driver of departure by 20% of respondents. Just 7% of respondents in Sudan cited economic reasons.

Drivers differ according to region of origin in Ethiopia

Zooming in on region of origin[7] (table 1) reveals that 86% of respondents from Amhara interviewed in Somalia cited economic drivers, followed by violence, insecurity and conflict; rights and freedom and personal or family reasons. On the other hand, 79% of respondents from Amhara interviewed in Sudan were driven by violence, insecurity and conflict, followed by rights and freedom and economic reasons. 86% of refugees and migrants from Tigray in Somalia reported violence, insecurity and conflict; economic reasons; rights and freedom and personal or family reasons, while all 90 respondents from Tigray in Sudan cited violence, insecurity and conflict. *These and other drivers are represented in table 1 on the following page.*

---

7   Since there are no respondents from Afar region interviewed in Sudan, this section will focus on respondents from Tigray and Amhara in both Somalia and Sudan.

Table 1. For what reasons did you leave [By region in location of interview] (multi-select, n= 540)

Country of interview	Drivers - Region of origin	Economic	Violence, insecurity & conflict	Rights & freedoms	Personal or family reasons
Somalia (n=421)	Amhara (n=262)	86%	32%	10%	3%
	Tigray (n=159)	61%	86%	30%	7%
Sudan (n=119)	Amhara (n=29)	21%	79%	34%	0%
	Tigray (n=90)	2%	100%	16%	1%

When asked directly about the conflict, nearly all (99%) respondents from Tigray interviewed in Somalia (n=159) stated that the recent fighting in Tigray was a factor in their decision to leave, compared to 63% from Amhara (n=260). The direct impact of fighting/bombing, the risk of being conscripted to fight in the conflict, food insecurity related to the conflict, destroyed infrastructure and increased xenophobia/discrimination were all cited as conflict-related drivers of movement.

In Sudan, all but one respondent (71/72) cited the fighting in Tigray as a factor shaping their departure from Ethiopia, hence no observable differences emerged based on region of origin. Surveyed Ethiopians overwhelmingly reported food insecurity (68/71) as a specific conflict-related driver, followed by the impact of fighting/bombing, the risk of being conscripted to fight in the conflict, destroyed infrastructure and increased xenophobia/discrimination.

The data on region of origin underscore Tigray as the key site of ongoing conflict and acute displacement, while the situation in Amhara is more mixed, with the movements of many respondents being shaped both by the direct impacts of war and economic considerations, prompting journeys towards Somalia and further east. Moreover, the data suggest that respondents from Amhara who are driven by violence and who experience acute displacement, more often move to Sudan.

A 30-year-old woman from Humera (Tigray), interviewed in Tunaydbah camp in Eastern Sudan, noted:

> ''The situation was very dangerous when the [...] soldiers came and starting firing on us. I fled with my mom and daughter, but my mom ended up wanting to return. So we returned again. It was too far for her to come to Sudan by foot, she didn't want to. She said she preferred to die in Ethiopia. It was hard for me, but I ended up leaving again in the end with my daughter. The situation was too unstable to stay.''

All respondents in Somalia intend to leave the country, most of them to Saudi Arabia

None of the respondents interviewed in Somalia (n=430) intended to remain in the country. The vast majority aspired to move to Saudi Arabia (82%), followed by Oman (4%), North America (4%), and Germany (1%). Respondents' reasons for selecting Saudi Arabia were mainly economic (73%), it being considered the safest option (36%) and an association with better living standards (30%). Once again, this aligns with broader movement trends of Ethiopians transiting Somalia.[8] In terms of the length of stay, 44% of refugees and migrants interviewed in Somalia cited they were intending to remain in Saudi Arabia (n=351) permanently as compared to 41% who thought they would stay temporarily and 15% who were undecided. This intention appears misaligned with Saudi Arabia's increasingly restrictive return policies impacting Ethiopians since 2017,[9] underscoring the fact that aspirations do not always translate into migration outcomes. 67 of 79 respondents choosing destinations other than Saudi Arabia highlighted economic opportunities, safety and the ease or pace of access to asylum (26). The majority of these respondents intend to stay permanently at their preferred destinations.

8   MMC (2021) The impact of COVID-19 on refugees and migrants moving through Puntland, Somalia.
9   QMMU MMC (2021) Quarterly Mixed Migration Updates, October to December 2021 | Mixed Migration Centre.

Most respondents in Sudan are uncertain about continuing their journey

In contrast to Ethiopian respondents in Somalia, **respondents interviewed in Sudan had a higher degree of uncertainty about their movement intentions, as 51% did not know whether they had reached the end of their journey.** 43% expressed they had not reached the end of their journey and just 5% confirmed they had. 55% of the respondents who either expressed uncertainty or said they had not reached the end of their journey (n=111[10]) cited a country in Europe, including the United Kingdom, followed by North America (31%) and Australia (10%). The main reasons for selecting these destinations were respect for human rights (84%), being considered the safest option (84%), better living standards (76%) and economic opportunities (74%).

91% of Ethiopians interviewed in Sudan were intending to stay at their preferred destination permanently, while 5% had temporary plans and 5% were undecided. It must be noted that a majority of 4Mi respondents were interviewed in out-of-camp contexts.

Qualitative interviews in Umrakuba and Tunaydbah camps in Eastern Sudan point to intentions to leave the camp to return to Ethiopia once the situation is deemed safe, or to engage in onward movement if ''legal opportunities'' (i.e. resettlement or family reunification) are available or the situation in camps becomes unsafe. In this regard, a 23-year-old woman from Tigray interviewed in Umrakuba noted:

''I want to go to Tigray when the situation calms down. If it does not, I will have to stay in this camp. If the situation in this camp becomes unsafe, I will consider travelling to other places onwards.''

4Mi data collection

4Mi is the Mixed Migration Centre's flagship primary data collection system, an innovative approach that helps fill knowledge gaps, and inform policy and response regarding the nature of mixed migratory movements and the protection risks for refugees and migrants on the move. 4Mi field enumerators are currently collecting data through direct interviews with refugees and migrants in East and Southern Africa, North Africa, West Africa, Europe, Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean.

Note that the sampling approach means that the findings derived from the surveyed sample provide rich insights, but the figures cannot be used to make inferences about the total population. See more 4Mi analysis and details on methodology at: www.mixedmigration.org/4mi

---

10   Only respondents who were uncertain or cited they had not reached the end of their journey are prompted to choose a preferred destination.