

# Ethiopians and Somalis Interviewed in Yemen

The 'Eastern Route' is the mixed migration route from East Africa to the Gulf (through Yemen) and is the largest mixed migration route out of East Africa. An estimated 138,213 refugees and migrants arrived in Yemen in [2019](#), and at least 29,643 reportedly arrived between January and April [2020](#). Ethiopians made up around 92% of the arrivals into Yemen in 2019 and Somalis around 8%.

Every year, tens of [thousands](#) of Ethiopians and Somalis travel through [harsh](#) terrain in Djibouti and Puntland, Somalia to reach departure areas along the coastline where they embark on a dangerous maritime journey across the Red Sea or Arabian Sea to reach points along Yemen's coast. Migrants and refugees traveling along this route face human rights violations at every [stage of the journey](#), with a high risk of being [trafficked, kidnapped](#), or dying at sea on one of the busiest maritime mixed migration routes in the world.

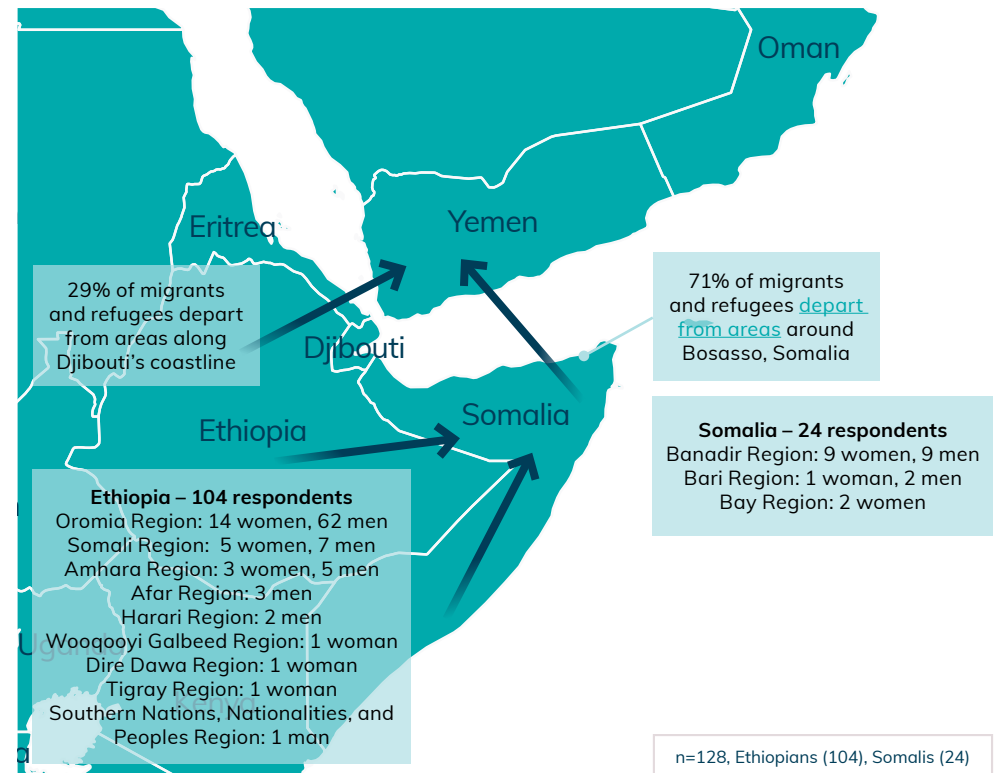
In March 2017, Saudi authorities announced a crackdown on undocumented migrants in the country and widespread deportation of migrants. IOM estimates that as of April 2020, [370,000 Ethiopians](#) have been deported back to Ethiopia. However, these moves have not deterred [migration](#) along the Eastern Route. Despite the ongoing war and escalating humanitarian crisis in [Yemen](#), 2019 saw some of the highest recorded monthly arrivals of East African refugees and migrants in Yemen. In 2020, the COVID-19 situation has had an impact on the Eastern Route, with a [74% reduction](#) in crossings recorded between March (6,753) and April (1,725) 2020.

## Profiles

This snapshot draws from 128 interviews conducted with Ethiopians and Somalis in Yemen between September 2018 and March 2020 in locations across Yemen. 91 respondents were men and 37 women. (Reports [show around](#) 83% of arrivals are men and boys, and 17% women and girls.) The majority of respondents (104) were Ethiopians (including 24 women and 80 men) and 24 were Somali (including 13 women and 11 men).

Overall, 60% of the respondents were from Ethiopia's Oromia Region (n=76, 62 men and 14 women). Oromia Region is a highly populated region which hosts Ethiopia's capital city Addis Ababa. Oromos [face persecution in Ethiopia](#), and partner reports show that Oromos typically make up the largest proportion of Ethiopians traveling through Yemen, where they are particularly [subject to abuse](#). The highest number of Somali respondents come from Banadir Region (n=18), which some of the highest numbers of [internally displaced people](#) in Africa. The capital city of Mogadishu [is located in Banadir Region](#) and areas around it host many displaced people seeking [safety and jobs](#). Banadir is also the region of origin for many Somalis registered as [refugees and asylum seekers](#) in East Africa and [Yemen](#).

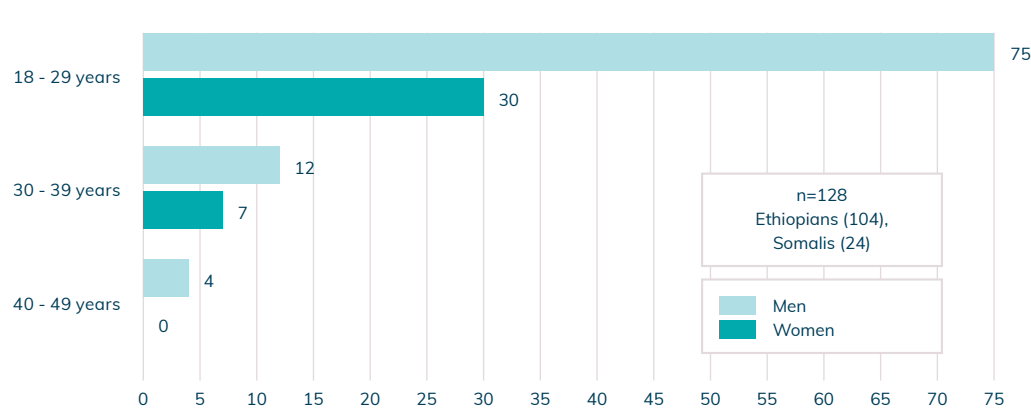
**Figure 1. Eastern Route**



## Most respondents are young people

Overall, the majority of respondents (82%) were aged 18–29, with an average of 22 years old. A further 15% of the respondents were aged 30–39 while 3% of the respondents aged 40–49.

**Figure 2. Age of respondents**



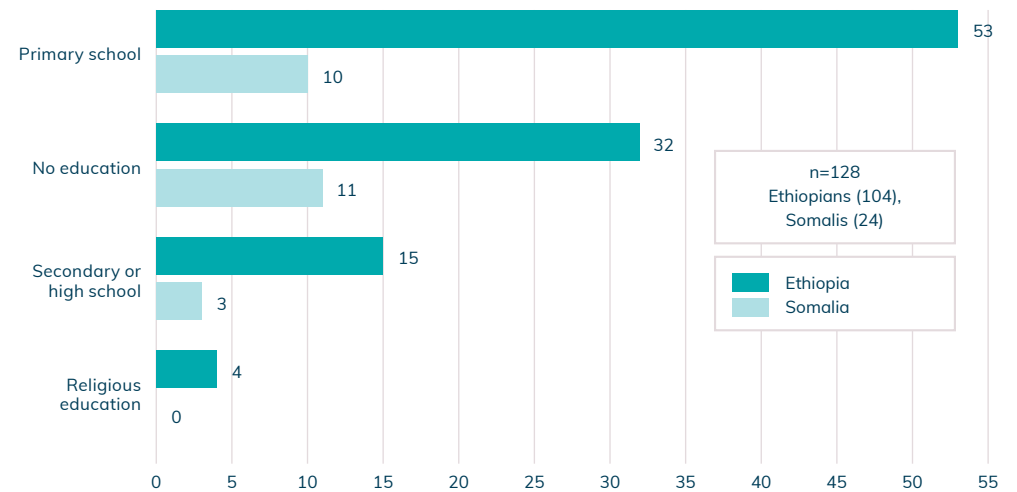
## A third of refugees and migrants had received no education before migrating

66% of respondents had received at least some schooling before migrating (n=47); 34% had received none. None of the respondents had received any tertiary or higher education. Overall, Ethiopian men reported much higher rates of education, see Figure 3. Both Ethiopian and Somali women respondents were less likely to be educated than men.

Among Ethiopian respondents (n=104), 70% reported having either primary, secondary or religious education and 30% of Ethiopian respondents had no education. To put this into context, according to [World Bank statistics](#), Ethiopia's primary school enrolment rates have risen sharply, from roughly 50% in 2004 to 86% in 2015.

Of Somali respondents (n=24), 54% cited having completed some education. 46% of Somali respondents had no education (29% of Somali respondents reporting no education were women and 17% men). Somalia has some of the lowest rates of primary education in the world - less than [45% of children](#) are enrolled in primary school in Somalia,

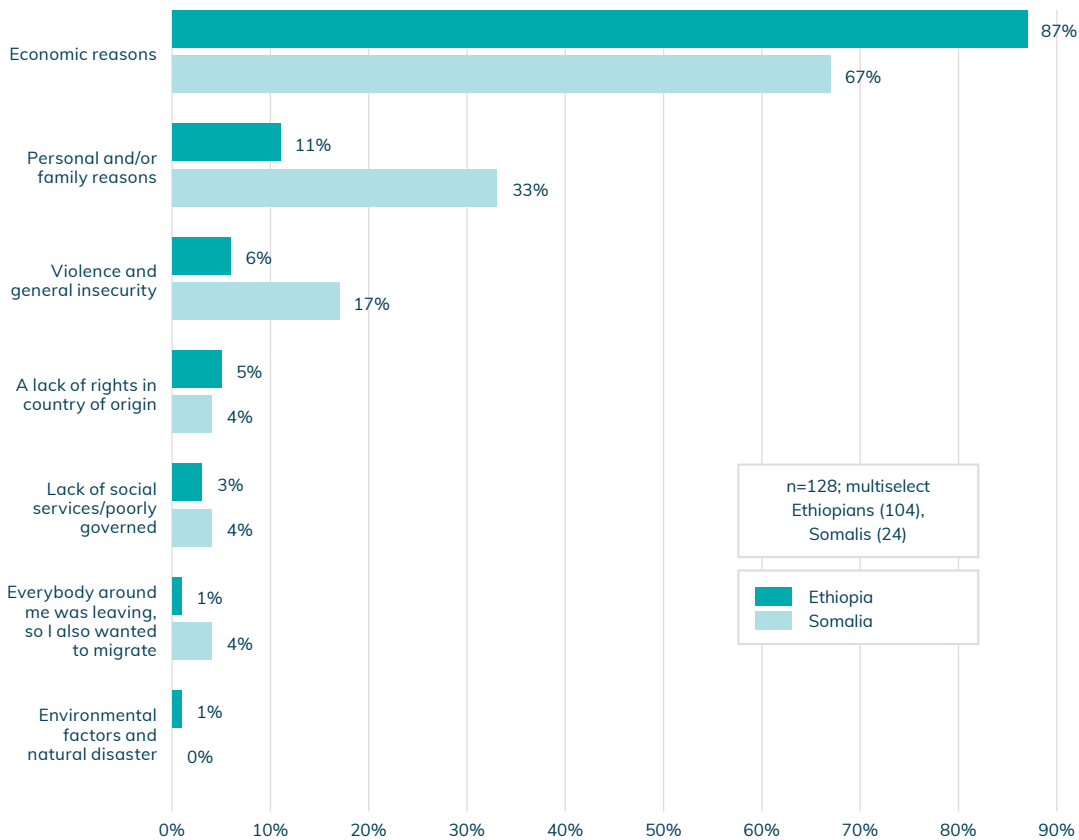
**Figure 3. Level of education by nationality**



## Refugees and migrants motivated to move due to economic and personal and/or family reasons

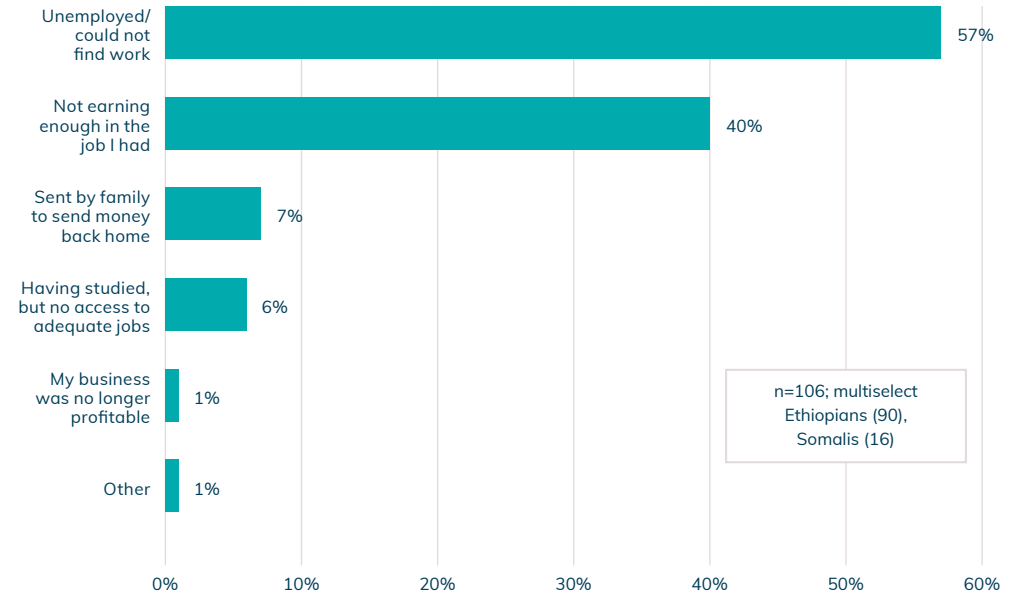
The majority of Ethiopian (87%) and Somali (67%) respondents interviewed in Yemen reported that they were seeking better economic opportunities. The other top drivers for migration were personal and/or family reasons, violence and general insecurity, and a lack of rights in country of origin.

**Figure 4. Drivers of migration**



The most commonly cited economic factors influencing migration were poor employment opportunities (57%) and low earning power (40%).

**Figure 5. Economic drivers of migration**

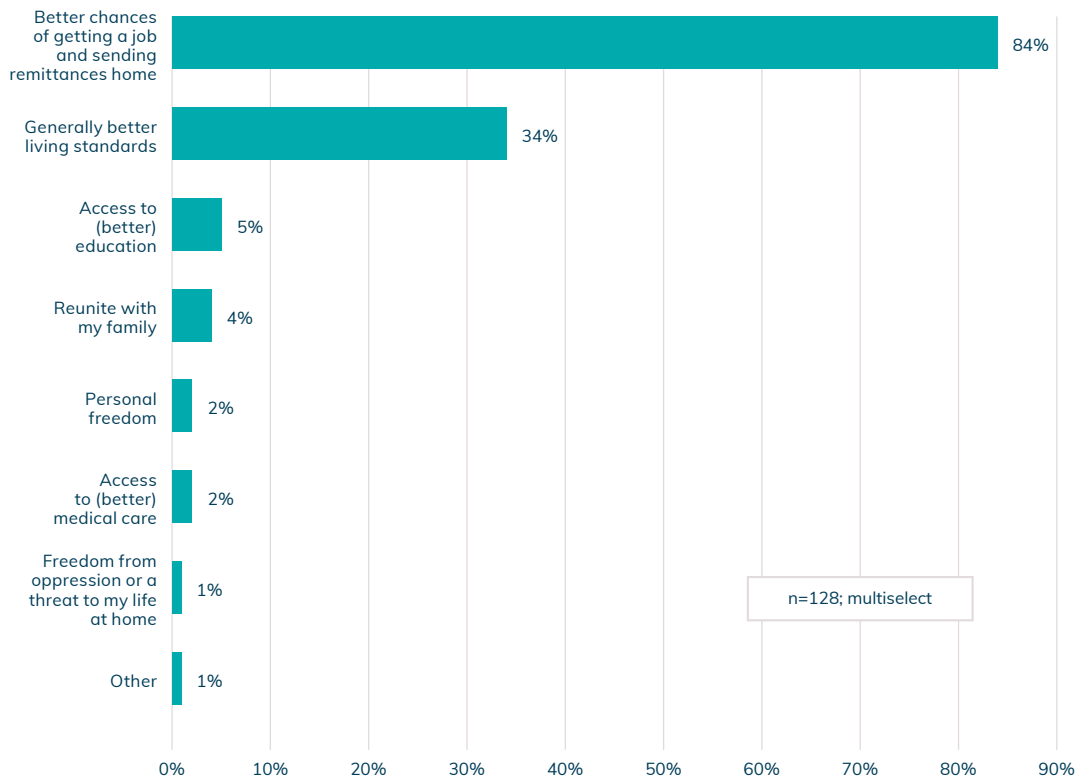


## Saudi Arabia is preferred destination country of respondents interviewed in Yemen

During interviews in Yemen, the majority (95%) of respondents had not reached their final destination country, 3% had not yet decided on their final destination country, while only 2% cited Yemen as their final destination country. The majority (80%) of respondents who had not reached their final destination listed Saudi Arabia as their final preferred destination country (n=97). Other reported preferred destinations included Canada (7%), USA (2%), Norway (2%), Italy (2%) and Germany (2%), among others.

When deciding on their intended destinations, the respondents mentioned a number of factors, many of which correspond with the reported drivers. The top factor was better chances of getting a job and sending remittances home (84%). The perception that the destination country would provide better living standards (34%) also factored highly.

**Figure 6. Why did you choose your destination?**

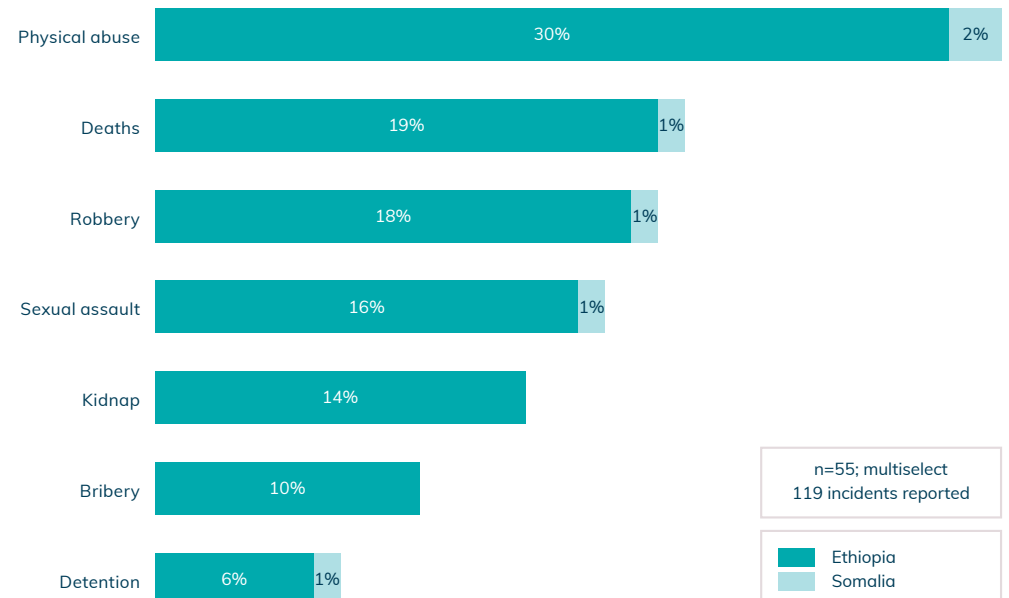


## 43% of respondents witnessed or experienced protection risks - smugglers are the main perpetrators

Overall, 43% of respondents (n=55) report witnessing or experiencing protection risks during their journey towards Yemen. 53 Ethiopian respondents reported protection incidents (more than 50%), and only 2 Somali respondents (out of 24 interviewed). Further, 51% of people who identified as Ethiopian Oromos reported witnessing or experiencing protection incidents. This was notably higher than respondents from any other region of origin in Ethiopia or Somalia.

The most commonly reported abuses by both Ethiopians and Somalis were physical abuse, death, robbery and sexual assault. 25% of respondents reported experiencing physical abuse or harassment (of a non-sexual nature), 16% of respondents witnessed the death(s) of a migrant, 15% of respondents were robbed and 13% witnessed or experienced sexual assault. The most cited types of physical abuse included mild physical abuse, verbal abuse and extreme physical abuse.

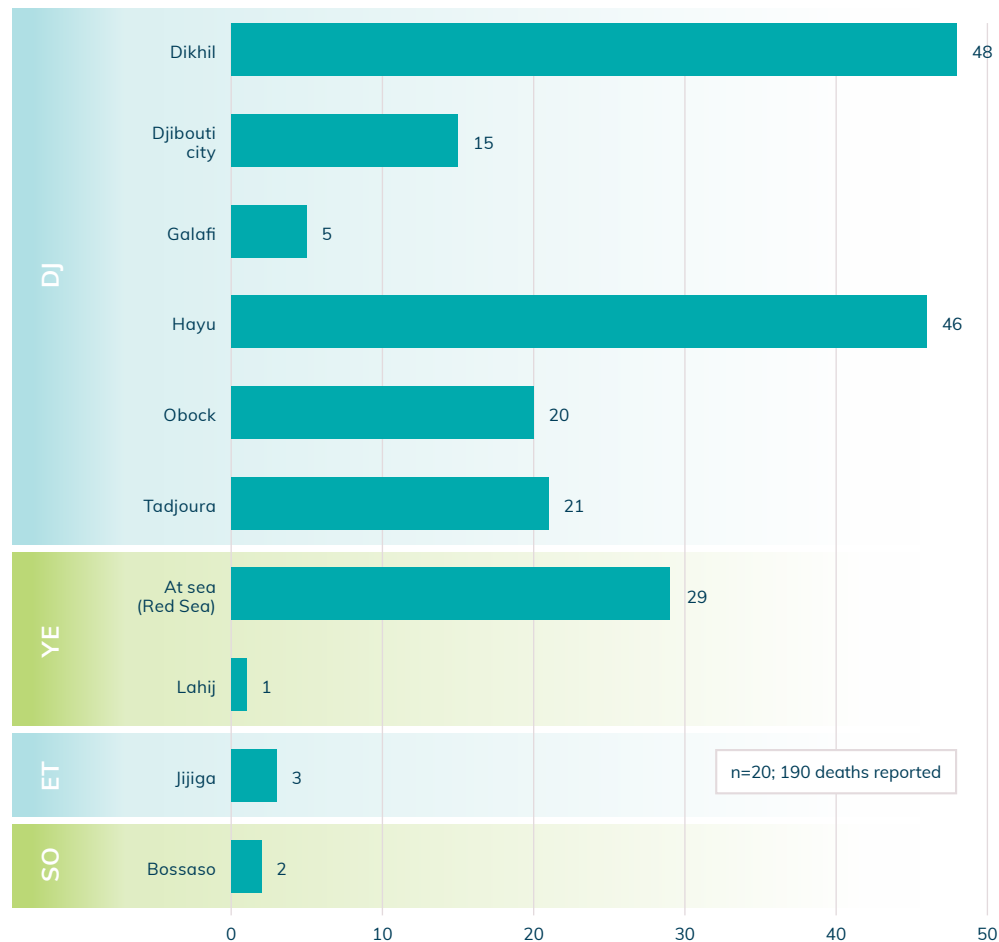
**Figure 7. Types of reported protection incidents**



## 190 deaths reported along the Eastern Route; most in Djibouti

20 Somali and Ethiopian migrants and refugees travelling to Yemen reported witnessing 190 deaths along their journey. Out of the 190 deaths, one Somali respondent reported 5 deaths, which occurred in Djibouti, in Tadjoura (3) and Obock (2); the remaining 185 deaths were reported by Ethiopians. Most reported deaths occurred in Djibouti (109), around the Red Sea crossing, Ethiopia (49), and Yemen (30), with 2 deaths reported in Somalia. The most cited causes of migrant and refugee deaths were dehydration (33%), starvation (24%), sickness and lack of access to medicines (17%) and harsh weather/lack of adequate shelter (15%).

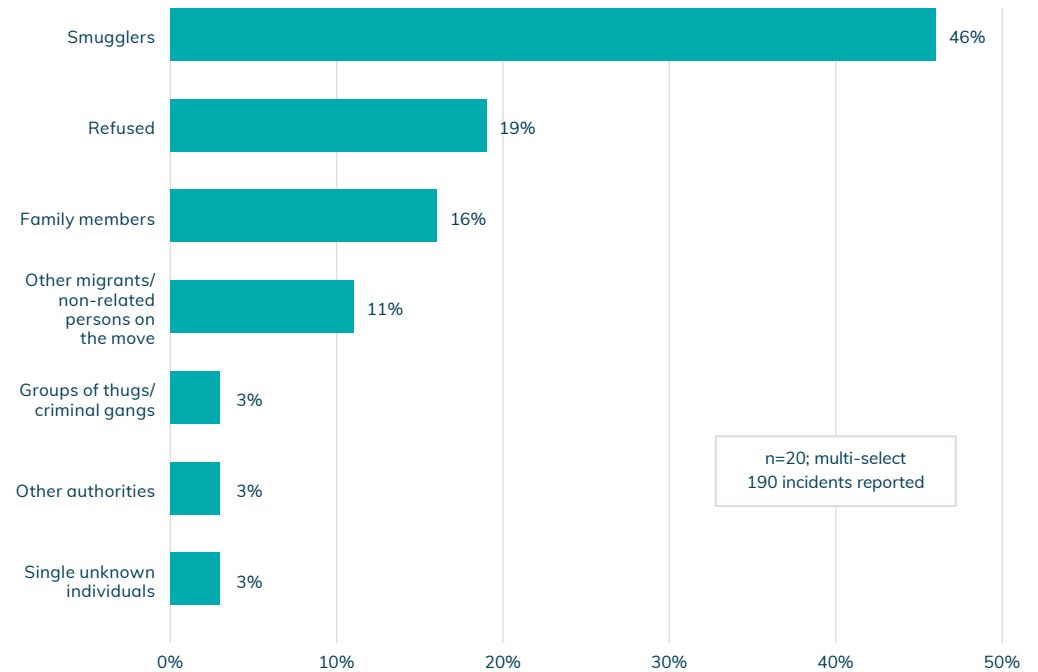
**Figure 8. Where did the deaths occur?**



## Smugglers reported as main perpetrators of abuse

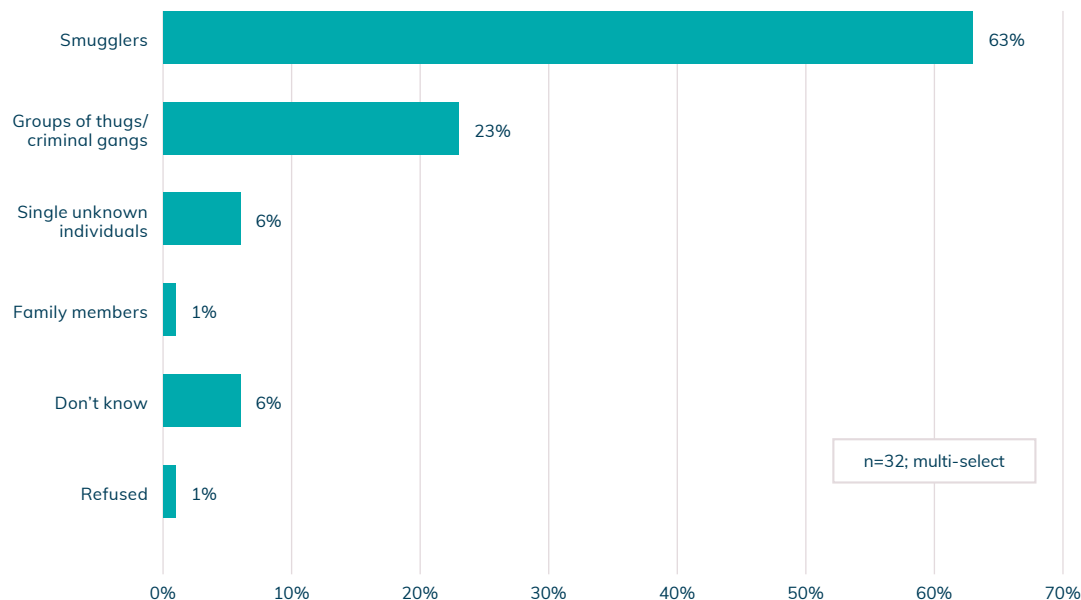
Smugglers were most commonly reported as the perpetrator of migrant deaths (46% of respondents who reported witnessing deaths stated that smugglers were responsible).

**Figure 9. Reported perpetrators of refugee and migrant deaths**



Relating to physical abuse, thugs/criminal gangs were the next most cited perpetrators (23% of respondents who witnessed or experienced physical abuse) after smugglers (63%).

**Figure 10. Perpetrators of physical abuse**



## Sexual assault and harassment

16 of the 104 Ethiopian respondents interviewed (n=16) and 1 Somali respondent witnessed or experienced sexual assault or harassment during their journey to Yemen. Indecent assault or touching and rape were the most frequently reported SGBV incidents. Overall, 10 cited smugglers reportedly committed the cases of sexual assault or harassment, 6 respondents cited group of thugs/criminal gangs, and 1 said abuses were committed by other perpetrators.



The [Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism Initiative](#) (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 monitors are currently collecting data through direct interviews with refugees and migrants in West Africa, East Africa and Yemen, North Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America.

Sample sizes are clearly indicated and represent a limited section of those on the move. The findings derived from the surveyed sample should not be used to make any inferences about the total population. See more 4Mi analysis and details on methodology at [www.mixedmigration.org/4mi](http://www.mixedmigration.org/4mi)