

Impact of COVID-19 on Ethiopian refugees and migrants in Puntland

This snapshot presents findings on the impact of COVID-19 on refugees and migrants¹ in mixed movements² interviewed in Puntland, Somalia. It aims to contribute towards a solid evidence base to inform targeted responses on the ground, as well as advocacy efforts related to the challenges faced by refugees and migrants during the coronavirus pandemic.

Key findings

- 28% of respondents said that COVID-19 played a role in their decision to leave their country of departure (n=122). This was most frequently linked to the pandemic's impact on economic factors (89%), conflict and violence (39%), and a lack of rights (25%).
- Despite high levels of awareness of coronavirus among respondents, 70% (n=624) indicated that they were doing nothing to protect themselves from COVID-19. When asked why not, the majority of respondents (64%) said that they did not know which precautions to take.
- The COVID-19 crisis is contributing to vulnerability among refugees and migrants, 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.

Profiles

The analysis in this snapshot is based on 989 interviews conducted with refugees and migrants in Puntland 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. Interpretations based on this limited sample size should be made with caution, as it does not necessarily represent the entire Ethiopian refugee and migrant population in Puntland.

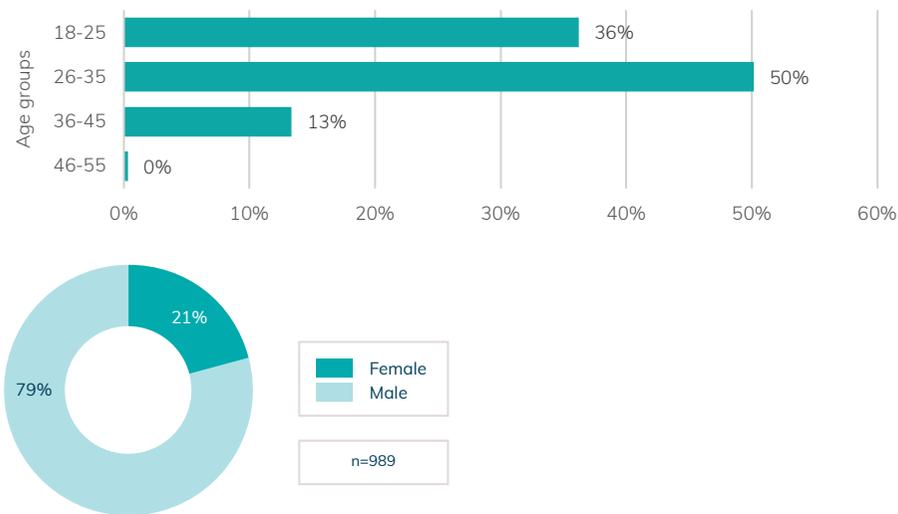
Table 1. Location of interviews

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

1 MMC uses 'refugees and migrants' when referring to all those in mixed migration flows (including asylum seekers, stateless people and others on the move), unless referring to a particular group of people with a defined status within these flows.

2 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.

Figure 1. Age range and sex of respondents



Most respondents do not apply for asylum while in Puntland

The majority of the respondents (95%) did not apply for asylum while in Puntland. 38% of those respondents said they did not want to apply for asylum, while 30% didn't know they could, and 29% thought they would not qualify. The other 2% refused to answer this question.

96% (n=951) of 4Mi respondents indicated that they had not reached the end of their journey, and were therefore in transit through Puntland. 87% of respondents indicated that they intended to go to Gulf countries, 4% to Yemen, 4% to European countries, and 3% to other locations in Somalia. Even though the majority (62%) of respondents cited 'increased difficulty crossing borders' as one of the effects of the pandemic, Puntland remains a major transit point for Ethiopians on the '[Eastern Route](#)'. 83% of respondents reported that their intentions to migrate would remain the same even if they are delayed.

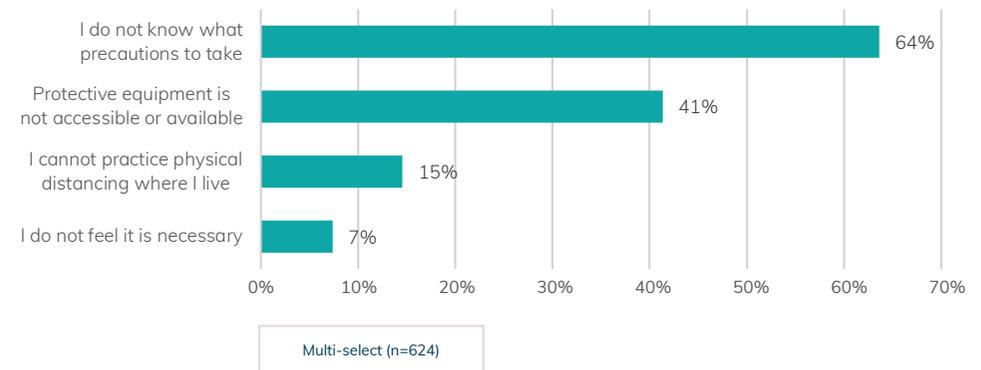
Awareness of COVID-19 remains high, but fewer respondents are taking precautions

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) and are excluded from all of the following analysis.

85% of respondents who had heard of COVID-19 (n=755) said that they had received information about the virus. The top three sources were local people they met on the journey (30%), smugglers (28%) and friends and family in country of departure (25%).

Despite the high levels of awareness, 70% (n=624) of respondents reported that they were doing nothing to protect themselves from contracting or transmitting COVID-19. 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 precautions (Figure 2), the majority of respondents (64%) said that they did not know which precautions to take, and may be indicative of inadequate information.

Figure 2. Why are you not taking any protective measures?



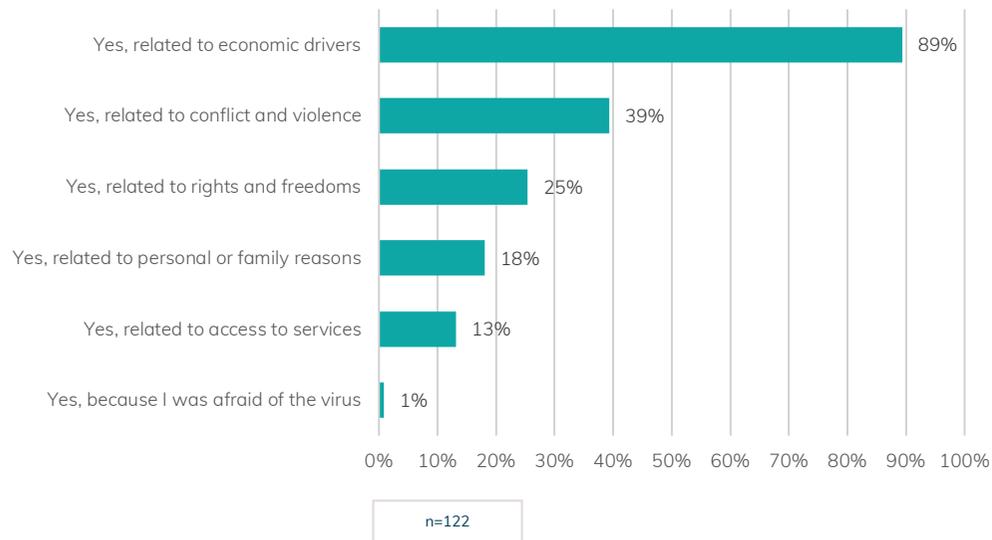
This is of particular concern given that more than three-quarters of respondents (79%) reported living in conditions that did not allow them to practice the recommended 1.5 metre physical distancing. When asked to describe the crisis situation in Puntland, 68% of respondents said that the situation was getting worse, compared to 52% at the end of October.

COVID-19 did not influence the decision to leave for most respondents

Economic reasons remained the top driver for migration with 90% 4Mi respondents. Personal or family reasons was the second most reported driver at 23% (an increase from 1% of respondents in the previous report) and non-domestic violence was the third reported driver with 17% of respondents.

44% of respondents started their journeys in or after April 2020. Among this group (n=431), 71% of respondents said that COVID-19 was not a factor in their decision to leave their country of departure, while 28% of respondents said that it was. Among those who said that COVID-19 played a role in their decision to leave (n=122), the most frequently cited effects were linked to the pandemic's impact on economic factors (89%), followed by conflict and violence (39%) and then lack of rights (25%) (Figure 3).

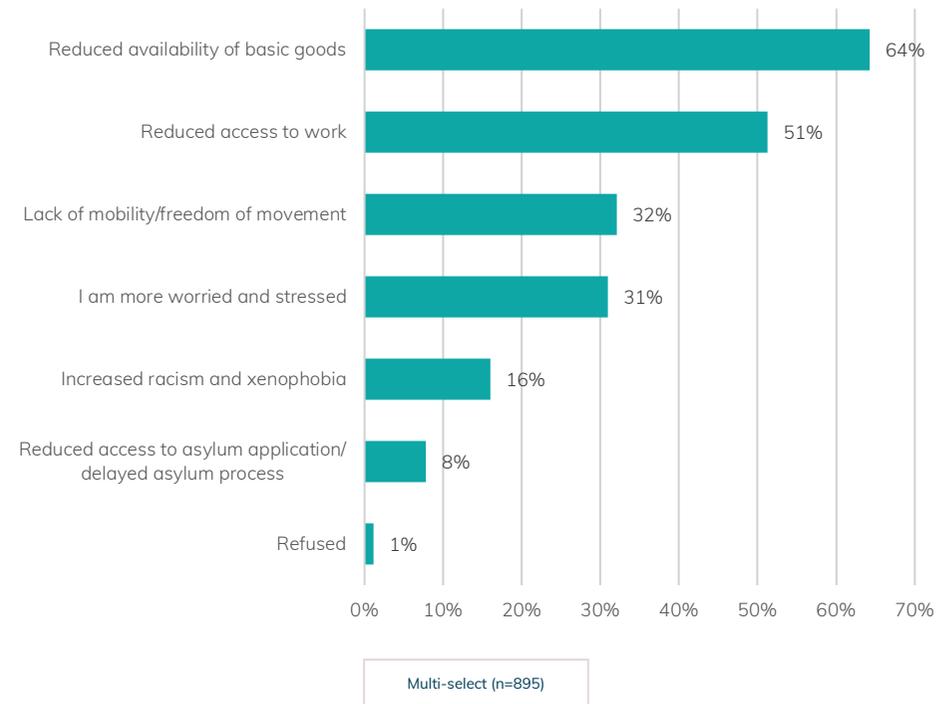
Figure 3. Was coronavirus a factor in your decision to leave? (yes responses only)



64% of respondents report reduced access to basic goods

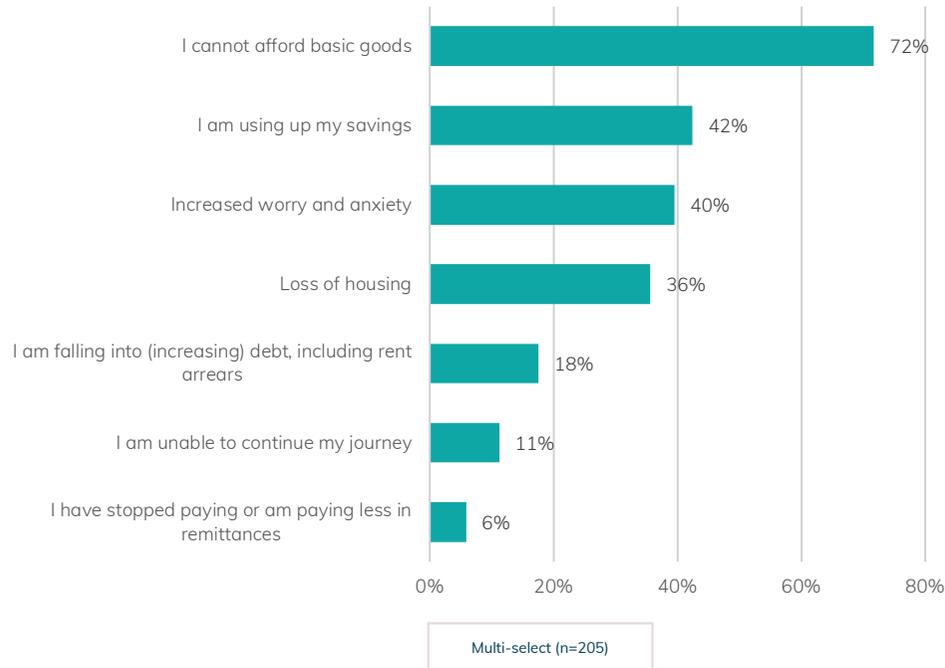
The COVID-19 crisis still has a major impact on the day-to-day lives of Ethiopian respondents in Puntland. Reduced availability of basic goods was the most frequently reported impact (64%) followed by reduced access to work (51%) and lack of mobility (32%).

Figure 4. What impacts has COVID-19 had on your daily life?



A majority (72%) of respondents were not receiving income before the COVID-19 pandemic. However, among the 239 respondents who were, 86% said they lost income due to coronavirus restrictions. The main effect of income loss was failure to afford basic goods, cited by 72% of respondents.

Figure 5. What impact has the loss of income had?



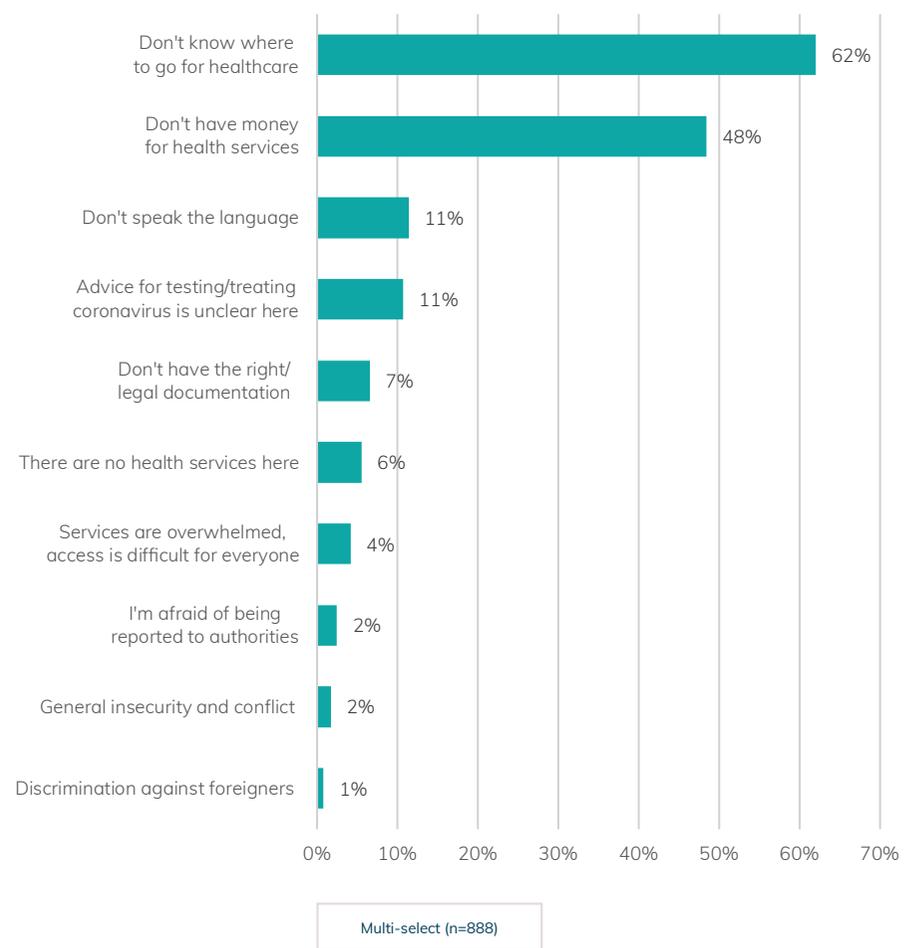
The data also indicates that respondents may be depleting their assets or using negative coping mechanisms. 42% of respondents said that they were using up their savings and 18% said that they were falling into increasing debt. A further 36% of respondents said that they had lost housing.

Health services remain largely inaccessible for respondents

Respondents' perceptions about their ability to access health services remain extremely low. Only 2% of respondents said they would be able to access health services in the event they had the virus, and a similar 2% said they would be able to access health services if they had any other urgent health needs.

The main perceived barriers to health services were not knowing where to go (62%), while others mentioned that they did not have money to pay for health services (48%).

Figure 6. Barriers to accessing health services



Voices of people on the move

"The virus ... did affect one of us and we left him in Burao city."

Ethiopian woman interviewed in Dhahar

"They have blocked all the routes so you can't move to where you want freely."

Ethiopian man interviewed in Bosaso

"Migration is very risky especially during COVID-19 when movement is restricted. People can't help you, but they isolate you. They can't even give you a cup of water because they are afraid of COVID - so that can cause you to die out of hunger."

Ethiopian man interviewed in Garowe



4Mi & COVID-19

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. Normally, the recruitment of respondents and interviews take place face-to-face. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, face-to-face recruitment and data collection has been suspended in all countries.

MMC has responded to the COVID-19 crisis by changing the data it collects and the way it collects it. Respondents are recruited through a number of remote or third-party mechanisms; sampling is through a mixture of purposive and snowball approaches. A new survey focuses on the impact of COVID-19 on refugees and migrants, and the surveys are administered by telephone, by the 4Mi monitors in West Africa, East Africa, North Africa, Asia and Latin America. Findings derived from the surveyed sample should not be used to make inferences about the total population of refugees and migrants, as the sample is not representative. The switch to remote recruitment and data collection results in additional potential bias and risks, which cannot be completely avoided. Further measures have been put in place to check and – to the extent possible – control for bias and to protect personal data. See more 4Mi analysis and details on methodology at www.mixedmigration.org/4mi

This document includes activities implemented with the financial assistance of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The views expressed herein should not be taken, in any way, to reflect the official opinion of UNHCR.