

The Impact of the Tigray crisis on Ethiopian and Eritrean Onward Movements within Sudan and to Libya and Tunisia

As of 30 June 2021, UNHCR has registered 46,505 refugees in Sudan who fled the Tigray crisis in Ethiopia.¹ Indications from the field, as well as media reporting,² reveal the dire situation that refugees face in camps in Eastern Sudan, raising questions about the impact on irregular onward movement dynamics. In an effort to inform the programming of protection actors working in Sudan and farther along the mixed migration routes north towards Libya and Tunisia,³ this snapshot explores the onward movement aspirations and routes of Ethiopians and Eritreans who have left since the outbreak of conflict in Tigray in November 2020 and its reported spillover effects to other regions in Ethiopia and Eritrea.⁴

Key findings

- **A majority** of respondents interviewed in Sudan **cited they did not intend to go back to their region of origin.**
- Around 10% of respondents reported they did not know at the time of interviewing if they had reached their final destination, nor if they would move from their current location within the next 3 months. This suggests that, **for some, future mixed migration scenarios remain uncertain** as respondents may wait and see how the next months unfold before making a decision about their onward movements.
- **A majority of respondents interviewed in camps reported intending to move away to other locations.**
- **Khartoum, Kassala, Dongola and Gedaref are the sites of onward movement within Sudan** and, hence, are key sites for protection interventions.

- About 22% of respondents reported planning to work along the route to fund their journey, making them **more vulnerable to protection abuses**, including forced labour and sexual exploitation.
- The diversity of movements and intentions observed in this snapshot highlight **a need for a variety of protection programming interventions along routes in Sudan and in neighboring countries further north and northeast.**

Profiles

This snapshot is based on 158 4Mi interviews with Ethiopians and Eritreans who left Ethiopia and Eritrea after the outbreak of conflict in Tigray, and who were interviewed in Sudan (n=85), Libya (n=56) and Tunisia (n=17) between November 2020 and August 2021. 116 respondents were men, while 42 were women. A great majority (n=152) were between 18 and 35 years old, while 6 respondents reported being older. 17 respondents were surveyed in camps and transit sites, while 141 were surveyed in urban areas.⁵ Out of the total sample, 66 respondents answered questions included in a specific survey module on the impact of the Tigray conflict, which was implemented in July and August 2021. Table 1 sets out region of origin and survey location of the respondents.

4Mi data are complemented by qualitative data gathered from semi-structured interviews in Khartoum with 4 Ethiopian refugees from Tigray in June 2021, as well as from programming partners on the ground.

1 UNHCR (2021). [Sudan – Emergency Response Update to Tigray Situation – New Weekly Update #5](#); IOM (2021) [Emergency Site Assessment: Northern Ethiopia Crisis 7](#).

2 Hayden, S. (2021). "[How Europe deals with the new wave of refugees is a test of our humanity.](#)" *The Irish Times*.

3 MMC will soon publish a companion snapshot, based on interviews in Somalia, on the onward movement along the Eastern Route of Ethiopians who left their country since the start of the Tigray crisis.

4 See, for example, OCHA's [Tigray Region Humanitarian Update](#).

5 Of those surveyed in urban areas, 10 had previously passed through a camp in Sudan, 1 of whom had passed through two camps in Sudan.

Table 1. Composition of the sample by region of origin and survey location (n=145)⁶

| Survey location | Town | Region of origin | | | Total |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------|-----------|--|------------|
| | | Tigray (ETH) | Eritrea | Other regions in Ethiopia ⁷ | |
| Survey Location (Urban; n=141) | Greater Khartoum (SUD) | 12 | 21 | 18 | 51 |
| | Gedaref (SUD) | 6 | 0 | 0 | 6 |
| | Kassala (SUD) | 2 | 3 | 0 | 5 |
| | Other (SUD) | 0 | 2 | 1 | 3 |
| | Sebha (LBY) | 0 | 21 | 10 | 31 |
| | Ejdabia (LBY) | 0 | 12 | 0 | 12 |
| | Other (LBY) | 0 | 0 | 3 | 3 |
| | Médénine (TUN) | 0 | 15 | 2 | 17 |
| Survey Location (in Camps; n=17) | Um Rakuba camp (SUD) | 10 | 0 | 0 | 10 |
| | Shagarab camp (SUD) | 2 | 1 | 0 | 3 |
| | Hamdayet transit site (SUD) | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| | Tunaydbah camp (SUD) | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| | Wad Sharife camp (SUD) | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Total | | 35 | 76 | 34 | 145 |

A majority intend not to return, but many also do not want to remain in their current location owing to a lack of safety and income opportunities

MMC asked respondents in Sudan, Libya and Tunisia in July and August 2021 (n=66) whether and under what circumstances they would go back to their region of origin. A majority reported they did not intend to go back (45), while others cited they would return if all fighting stopped (13), if people they trust tell them it's safe (10) and if they can get

their land/property back" (3). The distribution of answers was similar for Eritrean and Ethiopian respondents. When asked if they were planning to leave their current location within the next 3 months, nearly half (31) reported they would, whereas 19 did not know and 15 did not intend to move. The main reasons for intending to move from their current location were a perceived lack of safety (24), a lack of access to income (17) and a desire to continue their journey towards their final destination (13). Once again, the data reveal no considerable differences between Eritrean and Ethiopian respondents.

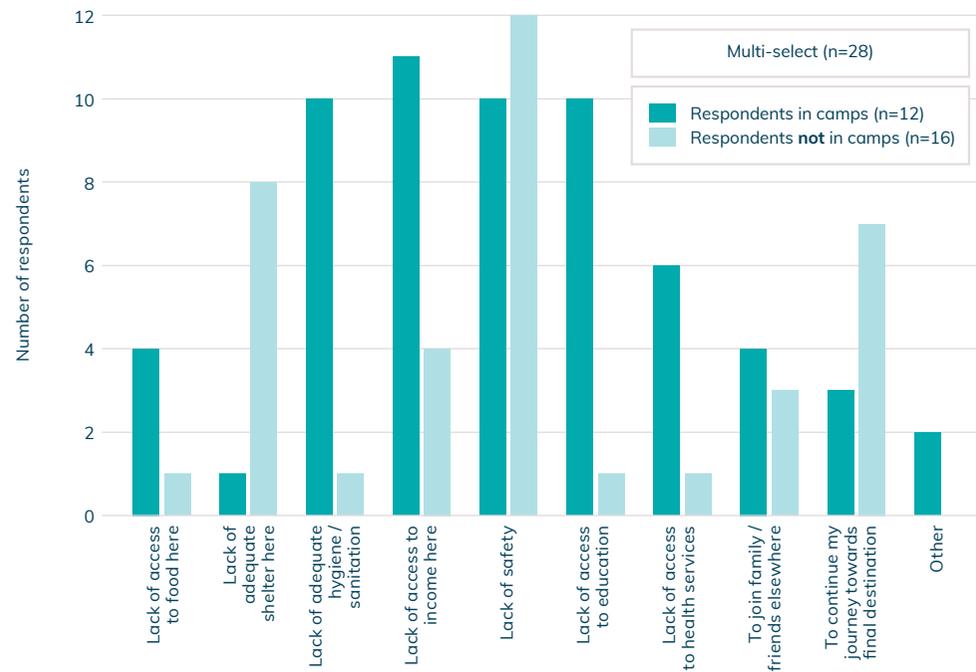
Most respondents in camps in Eastern Sudan plan to move onwards in the next 3 months, owing to a lack of income, WASH, safety and educational access

Zooming in on respondents located in camps and transit sites in Eastern Sudan (16/66), 4 respondents had not yet decided whether to move onward, remain or return while the remaining 12 intended to move in the next 3 months to another country other than Sudan. A lack of access to income (11) was the most-cited reason for not wanting to stay, followed by a lack of adequate hygiene/sanitation (10), a lack of safety (10), and a lack of access to education (10). Though the sample size is very limited and results must be taken with caution, Figure 1 reveals the stark the differences in onward decision-making between those within camps and outside, and underscores the poor conditions in the camps related to basic needs and fundamental rights. A 33-year-old man from Tigray interviewed in Khartoum affirmed the findings in the 4Mi data: "my mother is planning to come soon because she needs to see a doctor. People come from the camp to Khartoum to look for employment opportunities. There will be more people coming because of the deteriorating conditions in the camp during and after the rainy season."

⁶ The sample size here is n=145 rather than n=158, due to this question on region of origin being introduced to a new iteration of the 4Mi survey in March 2021.

⁷ Amhara (13), Addis Ababa (8), Beninshangul Gumz (8), Sidama (2), Gambela (1), Oromia (1) and Afar (1).

Figure 1: Why don't you want to stay [in your current location within the next 3 months]? Respondents in camps vs urban areas.

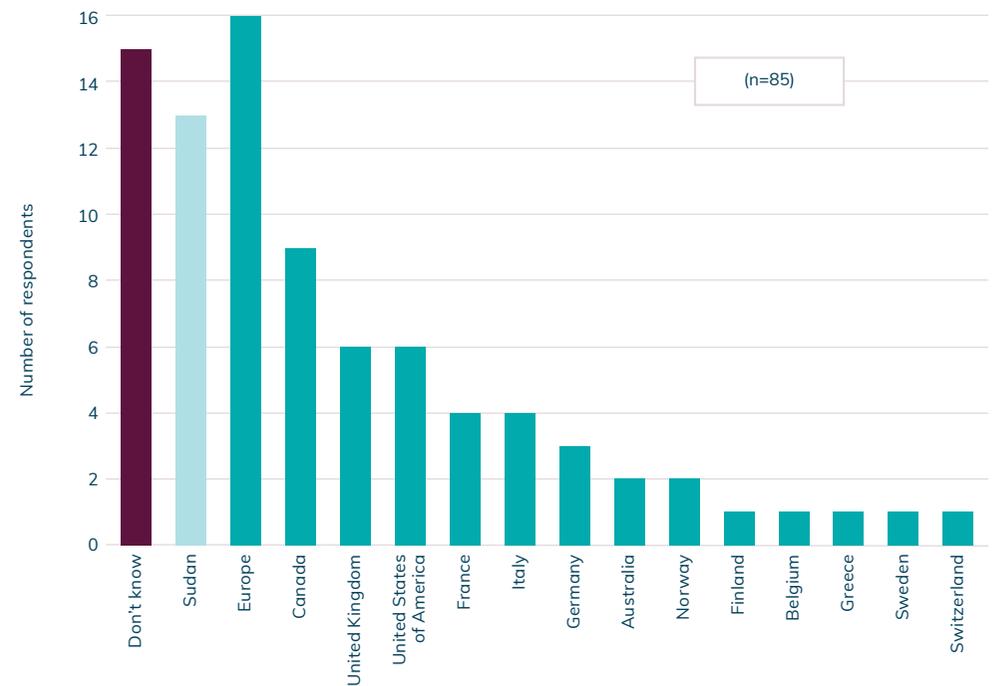


Most respondents in Sudan aspire to move to Europe and North America, some intend to remain in Sudan, while others are still unsure

Of the respondents interviewed in Sudan between November 2020 and August 2021 who intended to continue their journey outside the country (57/85), most aspired to move to a European country (37), including the United Kingdom (6), or North America (15). 13 respondents cited Sudan as their intended destination, and 15 respondents were undecided about whether they intended to remain or move onward. For refugees and migrants intending on moving onward or who are uncertain about their plans, protection actors should carry out awareness-raising on what makes people more vulnerable to experience project incidents.⁸

8 Mixed Migration Centre (2020) [A Sharper Lens on Vulnerability \(North Africa\) - A statistical analysis of the determinants of vulnerability to protection incidents among refugees and migrants in Libya.](#)

Figure 2: What is your intended final destination? Respondents interviewed in Sudan.



Most respondents in Libya and Tunisia have not reached their intended destination and aspire to reach Europe

While they had already moved onward from Sudan, the vast majority of respondents interviewed in Libya and Tunisia indicated they had not yet reached their intended destination (67/73). Rather than settle in these countries, the majority aspired to move to a European country. Interestingly, recent data on arrivals to Italy from the Central Mediterranean crossing reveal an uptick in Eritreans and Ethiopians in the first 7 months of 2021 compared to the same period in 2020, as reported by UNHCR.⁹ Although it is not possible to ascertain when these arrivals left Eritrea and/or Ethiopia and whether their

9 Up until 31 July 2021, 1,557 Eritreans (7th most common nationality) and 289 Ethiopians arrived in Italy. For the same period in 2020, neither nationalities figured in the top 10 most common nationalities to arrive, as reported by UNHCR (2020 / 2021). That being said, it must be noted that the easing of COVID-19-related movement restrictions and livelihood constraints may also be playing a role in the increases in movements observed in 2021.

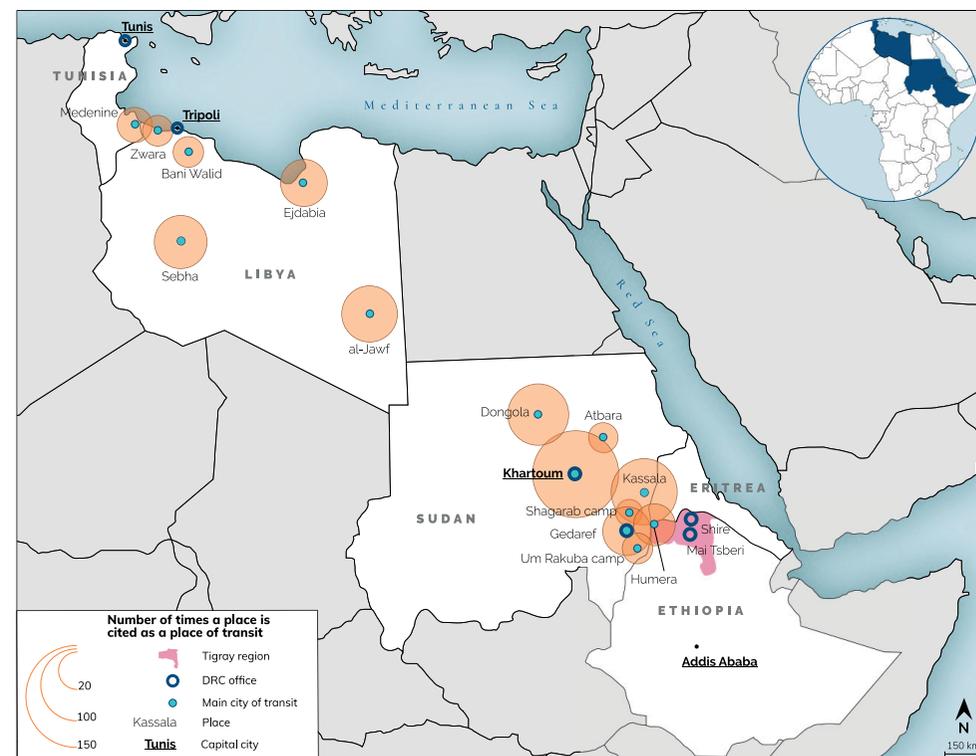
departures were connected to the Tigray crisis, we can look to 4Mi data to get a sense of the average length of time needed to undertake this journey and of migration divers. Of the 56 respondents who were interviewed in Libya, the vast majority had arrived during the same month they left Eritrea or Ethiopia, with the exception of two respondents who arrived the following month. The 17 4Mi respondents interviewed in Tunisia spent an average of 6 months reaching the country, with the shortest period being 4 months and the longest 8 months.¹⁰ Of the 66 respondents interviewed in July and August 2021 across all three interview countries who were asked whether their movement was directly connected to the Tigray crisis, 43 answered in the affirmative. Therefore, 4Mi data lend some support to the notion that current sea arrivals of Eritreans and Ethiopians may be linked to the crisis in Tigray.

Khartoum, Kassala, Dongola and Gedaref: key sites of onward movement within Sudan

In Sudan, Greater Khartoum (102), Kassala (60), Dongola (53) and Gedaref (30) were identified by respondents as key locations of onward movement within Sudan (Map 1). Comparing the data of respondents interviewed in Libya and Tunisia with those interviewed in Sudan to shed light on locations of transit versus temporary settlement, shows that Dongola and Atbara are places of transit, while Gedaref is more often a place of temporary settlement. Kassala and Greater Khartoum are sites of both settlement and transit. This diversity in movement dynamics indicates a need for programming interventions that not only target those in camps and in Greater Khartoum, but also key nodes along routes through Sudan. It also indicates a need for programming that is geared towards supporting the humanitarian needs of Ethiopians and Eritreans during their stay in Sudan as well as towards promoting safer journeys.

¹⁰ Of note for protection actors, the longer time spent reaching Tunisia appears linked to protection violations experienced while transiting Libya. 13 of the 17 respondents interviewed in Tunisia had been detained or held against their will in Libya (10 in Bani Walid and 1 in Al Jawf, Khoms and Tazirbou each). This highlights the additional protection abuses that refugees and migrants encounter, after their initial displacement, underscoring the importance of programming that addresses complex protection needs farther along the route.

Map 1. Count of main locations where respondents noted stopping along the route. (multi-select; n=158)



Some refugees and migrants work along the route, which may expose them to protection violations

The most-cited reasons to stop along the route for top 4 locations - Greater Khartoum, Kassala, Dongola and Gedaref - include resting (124), looking for smugglers to organize the next step of the journey (59), waiting for transport (37), staying with friends/relatives (25) and working to fund the journey (18). The finding on working along the route is important as it highlights that refugees and migrants are engaging in movement despite the fact that they may not be able to afford the whole of the journey. Previous MMC research on the determinants of vulnerability highlights that working along the route to

fund the journey makes refugees and migrants more vulnerable to protection abuses including forced labour and sexual exploitation.¹¹

Routes taken by respondents are based on their being perceived as the 'only option', cost and the choice of the smuggler

When surveyed on why they had taken their migration route, respondents most often reported that the route they chose was the only option (47), that it was the cheapest (37), or the smuggler chose it (32). Qualitative data from interviews in Khartoum confirm those travelling through the Tigray region often simply followed others to cross the border into Sudan, citing risks linked to war and armed conflict a key factor to move as quickly as possible without having the time to balance different options. This sudden displacement was also narrated by a 24-year-old man from Tigray in Khartoum: *"I had no choice. I fled because of the armed conflict, and many of us left leaving everything behind. I don't know where the rest of my family is until now."*

11 Mixed Migration Centre (2020) [A Sharper Lens on Vulnerability \(North Africa\) - A statistical analysis of the determinants of vulnerability to protection incidents among refugees and migrants in Libya](#).



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 West Africa, East Africa, North Africa, Asia, Latin America and Europe.

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