

The impact of the drought on migration from Ethiopia to Djibouti: Migration triggers & household decision-making

The Horn of Africa is facing the most severe drought in more than 40 years, affecting an estimated 36 million people.¹ Under the 2022 and 2023 [Migrant Response Plan](#) for the Horn of Africa and Yemen, MMC and IOM have partnered to generate an evidence base on the different mobility patterns linked to the drought crisis. This snapshot examines the impact of the drought on international migration along the Eastern Route towards the Arabian Peninsula, shedding light on the profiles, drivers and mobility patterns of affected Ethiopians interviewed in key points of transit in Djibouti.²

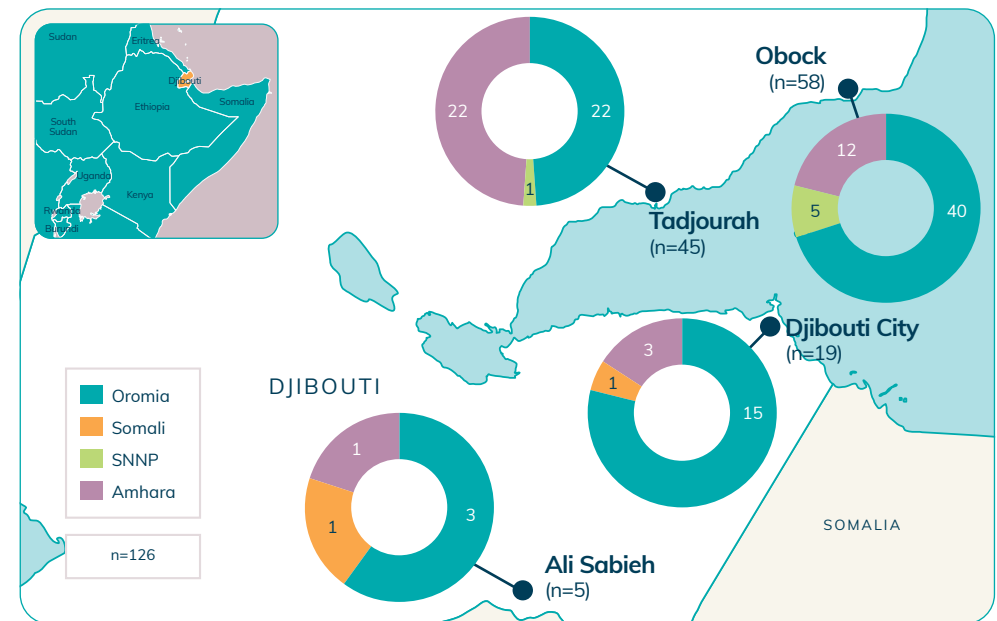
Key findings

- 25% of respondents who had left drought-affected areas of Ethiopia reported their community was affected by a lack of rainfall and that their decision to leave was linked to environmental factors.
- Drought impacted respondents' households through loss of livestock (53%), increasing food prices (46%) and loss of income (43%).
- Loss of livestock and crops were each cited as key triggers of the decision to migrate by over half of the respondents (57%).
- 75% of respondents reported that one or more other members of their household had also left their place of origin due to drought, mostly moving within Ethiopia (62 out of 94).
- Household members who stayed in their place of origin most often did so to care for land (62%), livestock (47%) and other household members (45%), according to respondents who had moved.

Data and profiles

This snapshot focuses its analysis on 126 surveys with Ethiopians who said their movement was influenced by drought. Data were collected in October and November 2022 in Obock (45%), Tadjourah (36%), Djibouti City (15%) and Ali Sabieh (4%).³ Respondents hailed from the Oromia (63%), Amhara (30%), SNNP (5%) and Somali (2%) regions of Ethiopia.⁴ 75% of respondents had departed their regions of origin in 2022, while others in 2021 (22%) and 2020 (3%), highlighting that most left after the 4th and 5th consecutive failed rainy seasons. This may shed light on the timing of decision-making, and when people affected by drought turn to migration as a livelihood strategy.

Figure 1. Respondents' region of origin by location of interview



1 OCHA (2022). [Horn of Africa Drought: Regional Humanitarian Overview & Call to Action](#).

2 An accompanying snapshot on migration from Ethiopia to Somalia is available [here](#).

3 Data from Ali Sabieh were limited owing to challenges with data collection in this location and does not reflect a lack of potential respondents. Agencies working on the ground in Ali Sabieh report not only the presence of drought-affected international migrants, but also a greater proportion of women and children, relative to other locations. Future rounds of data collection by MMC will seek to more adequately target this location.

4 No respondents from Afar cited their community was affected by lack of rainfall before their departure.

The majority of respondents were men (91%); 9% were women. 5% were travelling with children in their care. 66% of respondents were earning an income in the 12 months prior to leaving Ethiopia. Among these (n=83), the most common sectors of work were: agriculture/pastoralism (48/84), construction (14), small businesses (shop/catering/services) (13) and driving/transportation (8). Of the 34% of respondents who were not earning an income prior to their departure, 20/43 were students, 17 were unemployed, 3 were taking care of homes/children and 2 were sick. Additionally, 71% of respondents described their location of departure as rural and 29% as urban, demonstrating that the effects of drought extend into towns and cities.

Drought interacts with other drivers of migration along the Eastern Route towards Saudi Arabia

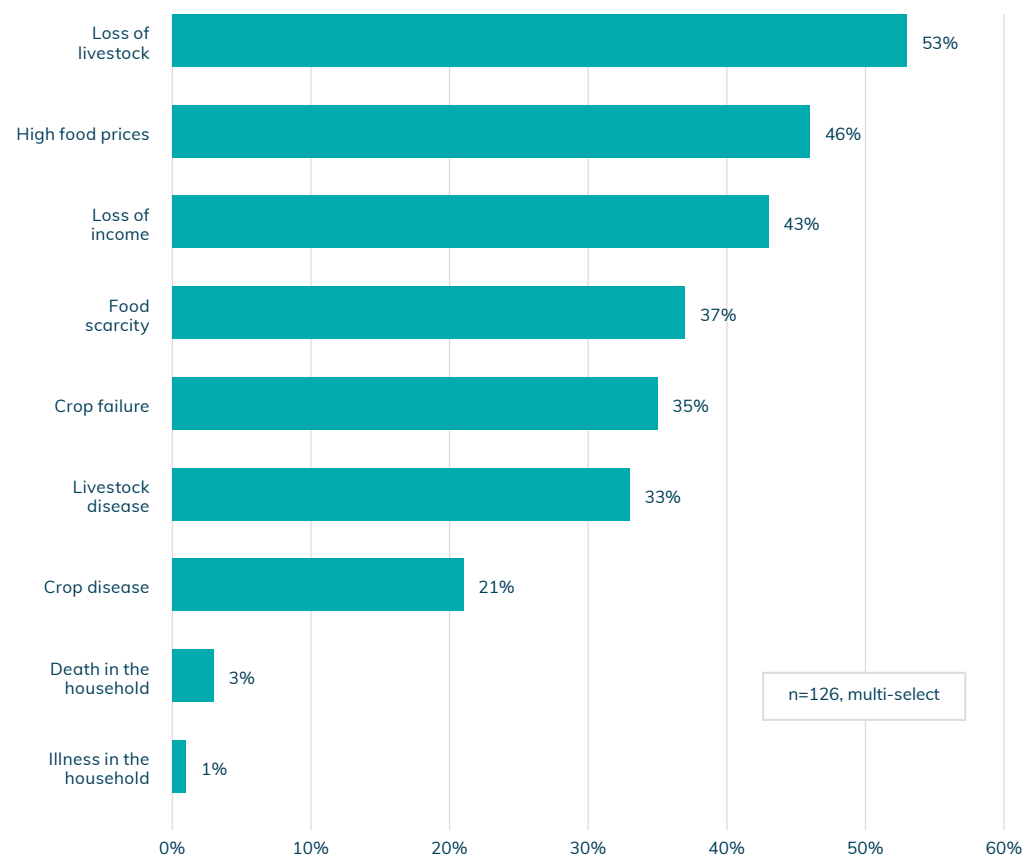
Respondents who cited drought as a driver of their migration represented 25% of a larger sample of 513 Ethiopians (82% men and 18% women) interviewed in Djibouti City, Ali Sabieh, Obock and Tadjourah, all coming from locations in Ethiopia that were either projected to reach Acute Food Insecurity Phase 4 (Emergency or higher) or Level 5 (Famine) by the Famine Early Warning System by October 2022.⁵ While 4Mi data are not representative and should be treated with caution, 25% underscores the identifiable impact that the drought crisis is having on international movements, though it is not the most common migration driver from drought-affected areas. Additionally, 98% of drought-affected respondents cited at least one other migration driver influencing their decision to move, suggesting the drought is interacting with other drivers of movement.

91% of drought-affected respondents mentioned that they had not yet reached their intended destination at the time of the interview in Djibouti, suggesting plans for onward movement. Saudi Arabia was the most common intended destination for those not planning to stay in Djibouti (78%), followed by the USA and Canada (8%) and the United Arab Emirates (7%).

Drought impacted respondents' households through loss of livestock, increasing food prices and loss of income

Affected respondents reported multiple impacts of a lack of rainfall, including loss of livestock (53%), high food prices (46%), loss of income (43%), food scarcity (37%), crop failure (35%) and livestock disease (33%), highlighting the multiple stressors brought on by the drought crisis (Figure 2).

Figure 2. What impact did the lack of rainfall have on your household?

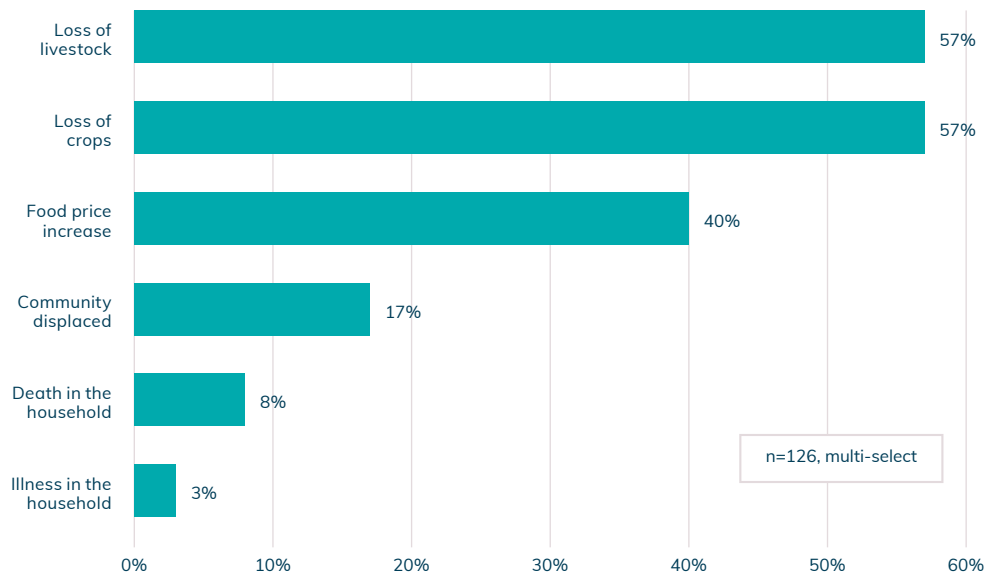


⁵ FEWS (2022). [Key message update: September 2022](#).

Loss of livestock and crops are key triggers to migrate

While the previous section examined the drought's impacts on respondents' households, this section examines which of those impacts ultimately triggered their decision to migrate. Most cited the loss of livestock (57%) and crops (57%) as triggers. Food price increases (40%) was also a common trigger, as well as displacement among the community (17%). On average, respondents identified 1.8 triggering events.

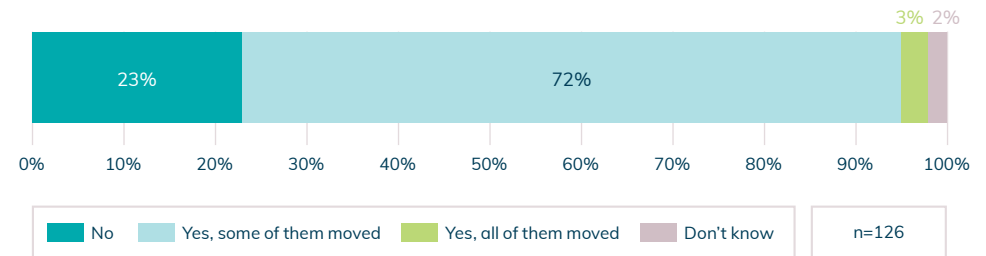
Figure 3. Was there a specific event or events that triggered your decision to leave?



Most respondents had some or all their household members move from their place of origin as well

72% of respondents reported that other household members had also moved, but only 3% reported that all household members had moved. 23% reported that they were the only member of the household to have moved - no others had left.

Figure 4. Have other members of your household also left your location of origin?

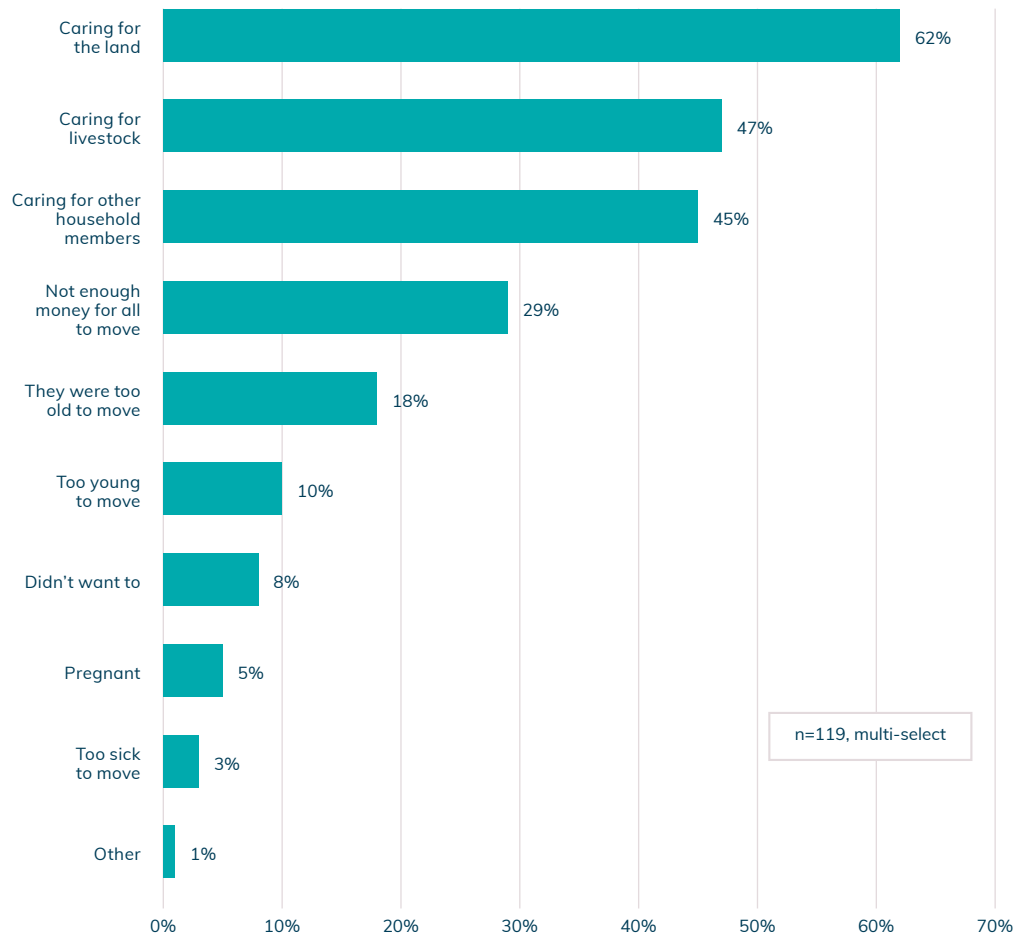


Among those with at least one family member who had also moved (n=94), the majority specified they had moved close by, mainly internally (62/94), but some across borders (11). 25 had members who had moved internationally across longer distances.

Household members stayed behind to care for land, livestock and other household members

Respondents with at least one household member who had remained in their place of origin (n=119) cited that they did so to care for their land (62%), for livestock (47%), for other household members (45%) or because there was not enough money for all the household to move (29%). Others remained because they were too old (18%), too young (10%), pregnant (5%), sick (3%), or did not want to move (8%). With just 8% not wanting to move, this suggests that without the constraints of maintaining their source of livelihood, caring for family or simply not having sufficient resources to move, more household members would have migrated.

Figure 5. Why did some or all of your household stay in your location of origin?



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 Asia and the Pacific, Eastern and Southern Africa, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, North Africa, and West Africa.

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