MIND THE INFORMATION GAP

Access to information and assistance of Ethiopian returnees throughout their migration journey

June 2023

Ethiopia Migration Programme

UKaid from the British people

Mixed Migration Centre

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About MMC: MMC is a global network engaged in data collection, research, analysis, and policy and programmatic development on mixed migration, with regional hubs hosted in Danish Refugee Council regional offices in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe and Latin America, and a global team based across Copenhagen, Geneva and Brussels.

MMC is a leading source for independent and high-quality data, research, analysis and expertise. MMC aims to increase understanding of mixed migration, to positively impact global and regional migration policies, to inform evidence-based protection responses for people on the move and to stimulate forward thinking in public and policy debates on mixed migration. MMC's overarching focus is on human rights and protection for all people on the move.

MMC is part of the Danish Refugee Council (DRC). While its institutional link to DRC ensures MMC's work is grounded in operational reality, it acts as an independent source of data, research, analysis and policy development on mixed migration for policy makers, practitioners, journalists, and the broader humanitarian sector.

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About EMP: The Ethiopia Migration Programme (EMP) is a four-year programme [2019-2023] funded by the UK Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) which aims to improve the protective environment for migrants in Ethiopia, including Ethiopian would-be migrants, returnees, and Eritrean refugees. During the programme's lifespan, EMP activities have been implemented in Addis Ababa, Tigray and Amhara regions. The programme has been implemented by a consortium of partners (Save the children International, BBC Media Action, Altai Consulting and Mixed Migration Center) led by the Danish Refugee Council (DRC).

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Key Findings

This paper examines Ethiopian returnees' access to information in Ethiopia before their initial migration, in their country of destination before their return journey back to Ethiopia and in Ethiopia after their return, along with their expectations and access to assistance. It seeks to contribute to a growing evidence base on Ethiopian return migration, in particular unpacking the role of information and assistance in the return migration process, in shaping the experience of return and in impacting re-migration decision-making. Based on 504 4Mi Returns surveys with Ethiopian returnees, this study finds:

- **The majority of surveyed returnees lacked awareness about the risks and conditions of the journey and at the destination.** 53% of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed they were aware of the difficulties and risks they would face during the migration journey and a similar proportion also disagreed or strongly disagreed they were aware of how life would be in their intended destination.

- **Very few respondents had received information from authorities, the UN or NGOs about the dangers of migration or about the challenges of life in destination countries.** 91% of respondents reported they did not have access to such information.

- **Over a third (38%) of respondents did not receive information about the return process prior to return**, while those who did relied mostly on information from other migrants (23%) and friends and family in Ethiopia (18%).

- **Most (61%) surveyed returnees felt unprepared to return. Not surprisingly, most of these were respondents returned by force (80%).** It is notable that 20% who cited feeling unprepared had returned through an Assisted Voluntary Return (AVR) programme or spontaneously (by their own means).

- **A majority (80%) had not received any type of assistance in Saudi Arabia in the period before their return**, and often faced harsh conditions in detention with no safeguarding of human rights and the ability to consent to return. Those who did cite receiving assistance mainly received basic needs assistance provided by the host country's government and NGOs as part of AVR.

- **9% of all respondents had received legal representation in the host country** before their return to Ethiopia. This corresponds to 16% of assisted returnees (28/175) and 5% of forced returnees (15/298).

- **Since returning to Ethiopia, the majority (62%) of surveyed returnees had not received assistance or support. However, this varied significantly by type of return**: 64% of AVR returnees had received assistance or support after arriving in Ethiopia, as compared to 21% of forced returnees.

- **Nearly all respondents (98%) reported needing assistance and support at the time of the interview**, mainly to start a business (75%), find a job (53%) or cash support (53%).

1. Introduction

In 2022, thousands of Ethiopians on the move and in destination countries in the Middle East, North Africa and Eastern and Southern Africa returned, both voluntarily and forcibly, to Ethiopia. Saudi Arabia is perhaps the most noteworthy country for returning Ethiopians, based on the sheer volume of returns and their forced nature. Since 2017, almost 500,000 Ethiopians have been forcibly returned from Saudi Arabia.[1] In 2022, three-quarters of a million Ethiopians were still estimated to reside in Saudi Arabia, including 450,000 who traveled through irregular means.[2] In March 2022, the Governments of Ethiopia and Saudi Arabia reached an agreement to repatriate more than 100,000 Ethiopians.[3] That target was reached at the end of 2022.[4] In April 2023, the number of deportations from Saudi Arabia reportedly stood at over 131,000,[5] with the Ethiopian Disaster Risk Management Commission announcing the conclusion of returns under the agreement signed in March 2022.[6]

The mass forced returns of 2022 are by no means the first of their kind from Saudi Arabia to Ethiopia. In 2014, the Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat (RMMS)[7] published a report on hundreds of thousands of forced returnees at the end of 2013 and in early 2014, who were forced to leave through a campaign launched by Saudi Arabia to expel all undocumented migrant workers. RMMS reported at the time that returnees were arriving in large numbers of up to 7,000 daily at Bole International Airport, and in need of immediate humanitarian assistance.[8] While returnees perceived the Ethiopian Government to be prioritizing support, RMMS reported, they found that too little attention was paid to the human rights abuses taking place in Saudi Arabia prior to return. The report moreover noted that it was not entirely clear how many returnees traveled to their locations of origin, versus those who stayed in Addis Ababa to find work, or to avoid being confronted with the ''shame they would feel once being reunited with their family members.'' In 2017, a similar campaign took place again, with the Ethiopian Government establishing a national taskforce to better manage the arrival of forced returnees from Saudi Arabia.[9] In 2018, Ethiopian authorities issued a Reintegration Directive to guide the overall return and reintegration process in-country.[10]

Turning to other parts of the Arabian Peninsula, in May 2022, IOM resumed Voluntary Humanitarian Returns (VHR) from Yemen to Ethiopia, organizing flights and travel documents and supplying temporary shelter and food assistance upon landing in Ethiopia.[11] In 2022, IOM assisted at least 6,750 Ethiopians' return from Yemen. IOM estimates that over 73,000 migrants arrived in Yemen in 2022, and most were Ethiopians.[12] Additionally, in July 2022, the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced[13] a program, in partnership with IOM, to repatriate 12,000 Ethiopians "in dire conditions abroad" in Tanzania, Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Djibouti, Yemen, Oman and Sudan. This list of countries highlights the diverse routes being taken by Ethiopians on the move and the precarity of many of their situations on those routes: the Southern Route towards South Africa, the Eastern Route towards the Arabian Peninsula, and the Northern/Central Mediterranean Route towards North Africa and Europe.

1 IOM (2022). Migration Response Plan for the Horn of Africa and Yemen 2023.
2 IOM (2022). Funding Needed to Assist Over 100,000 Ethiopian Migrants Returning from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.
3 IOM (2022). Funding Needed to Assist Over 100,000 Ethiopian Migrants Returning from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.
4 IOM (2023). Ethiopia: Migration Management Overview (February 2023).
5 Deportations are defined as the forced transportation of an individual to their country of origin (also referred to as country of return) and is organized by the authorities of the host country. This study sometimes uses the term 'forced return', but in this context we are referring to deportations.
6 Fana Broadcasting Corporate (2023, April 4th). Repatriation of Ethiopian Migrants From Saudi Ends After 131,642 Citizens Returned Home.
7 The Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat (RMMS) constitutes MMC under its previous name.
8 RMMS (2014). The Letter of the Law. Regular and Irregular Migration in Saudi Arabia in a Context of Rapid Change.
9 RMMS (2017). Mass Deportations Looming: Saudi Arabia gears up to expel millions of migrants...again.
10 Also see: Andersson, L. (2022). Migration-relevant policies in Ethiopia. MIGNEX Background Paper.
11 IOM (2022). Hundreds of Migrants Return to Ethiopia via IOM's First Voluntary Return Flights from Yemen in 2022.
12 IOM (2023). IOM Yemen 2022 Achievements.
13 Ethiopian Monitor (2022). Ethiopia to repatriate 12,000 citizens from Africa, Middle East.

The upholding of human rights of both assisted and forced returnees is provided for in a number of international guidelines, agreements and conventions. For its Assisted Voluntary Return (AVR) programmes, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) lists as its first principle: ''rights-based approaches through active protection and upholding of migrant rights.''[14] On forced returns, the Council of Europe recommends a set of guidelines, among which the ''prohibition of collective expulsions'', as a removal order ''shall only be issued on the basis of a reasonable and objective examination of the particular case.''[15] Furthermore, ''The State must respect international human rights and refugee law and standards, including the principle of non-refoulement.''[16] While the Council of Europe has no jurisdiction over returns from outside the European Union, these guidelines provide some basis for what could be envisioned for a global standard. Contrasting global norms and regional guidelines with what happens in practice, a 2022 report from Amnesty International details the human rights abuses faced by Ethiopian forced returnees from Saudi Arabia.[17] In 2014, RMMS reported on Saudi Arabia's non-alignment with the principle of non-refoulement, noting that it ''does not determine if the forced returnees had valid asylum claims before returning them.''[18]

In terms of return assistance, despite appeals for support from the Government of Ethiopia, IOM and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), many returnees to Ethiopia receive insufficient return assistance either before return or upon arrival.[19] Returnees to Ethiopia have faced crowded reception and limited shelter capacity upon arrival at Bole International Airport in Addis Ababa,[20] insufficient longer-term reintegration assistance and unequal assistance and access to information. Additionally, data and research to inform Ethiopian returnee programming tends to be siloed into different categories of return and often does not examine returnees' overall migration journeys, aspirations and perceptions, which would help to grasp how these factors may impact their return and reintegration experiences.

With this in mind, this study seeks to understand Ethiopian returnees' access to information during the different phases of their migration and return journeys: before their migration abroad, before their return journey to Ethiopia, and after their return. Studies have shown the extreme risks and abuses that Ethiopian migrants face while on outward migration journeys,[21] which contribute to the traumas and challenges Ethiopians face upon return. The study examines how their access to information connects with their migration and return expectations and their access to assistance, to gauge how improving access to information might improve the return experience and future migration programming. Further, this study analyzes how information and assistance access may vary depending on returnees' profiles and migration experience, including the type/category of return, gender, age, region of origin within Ethiopia, and the amount of time spent abroad.

14 IOM (2023). Return and Reintegration.
15 Council of Europe (2005). Twenty Guidelines on Forced Returns.
16 IOM (2023). EMM 2.0 – Forced return.
17 Amnesty International (2022). ''It's like we are not human.'' Forced returns, abhorrent detention conditions of Ethiopian migrants in Saudi Arabia.
18 RMMS (2014). *Ibid.*
19 Eshete Bekele (2022). Deported Ethiopian migrants tell of suffering in Saudi Arabia detention. *DW.*
20 MSF (2021). Caring for migrants deported to Ethiopia.
21 Ravenstone Consult (2023). Captive Commodities.

2. Methodology

This study is based on primary quantitative data from 504 surveys collected in Ethiopia in January 2023 through MMC's 4Mi Returns survey. This survey covers aspects of the initial outbound migration journey, factors determining the decision to return from the host country, the return journey process, reintegration in the country of return and future plans. Respondents were surveyed by phone, and sampled through participant referrals by a range of partners working with returnees.

2.1 Sample Overview

The sample includes both assisted and forced returnees in an effort to capture and compare their varied reintegration experiences and re-migration aspirations. As this survey relied on referrals from returnee assistance organizations to identify respondents, few spontaneous returns feature in the sample. Owing to their small numbers, this study does not analyse the experiences of spontaneous returnees against the other categories of returnees. 60% (n=301) of respondents were forced returnees, 36% (n=183) had returned via AVR processes and 4% (n=20) were spontaneous returnees. This categorization is based on the status of respondents as indicated by programmatic partners.

2.1.1 Variation in the self-reporting of type of return

While partners provided MMC with respondents' return status, the 4Mi Returns survey prompts respondents to self-report their method of return. Comparing the two variables (information on status provided by programming partners and self-reporting) shows that 11% of forced returnees perceived themselves as AVR participants and 9% of AVR participants perceived themselves as having been forced to return. This difference is examined in more detail in Table 1.

Table 1. Self-reported return category, against official status (n=504)

Official return status	Self-reported return type	% of respondents
Forced returnees 60% (n=301)	AVR	11%
	Forced return: Deportation	85%
	Forced return: Expulsion[22]	4%
	Independent / spontaneous	>1%
Assisted returnees (AVR) 36% (n=183)	AVR	86%
	Forced return: Deportation	9%
	Forced return: Expulsion	>1%
	Independent / spontaneous	4%
Spontaneous returnees 4% (n=20)	AVR	55% (11/20)
	Forced return: Deportation	25% (5/20)
	Forced return: Expulsion	-
	Independent / spontaneous	20% (4/20)

22 Expulsion refers to the forced removal of an individual from a country often to a neighbouring country, and not necessarily to the individual's country of origin.

The variation in self-reporting versus official status raises questions around the various returns processes and how they are implemented. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has, for instance, called into question the ability of refugees and migrants to consent to be returned under conditions of detention and other abuses, which have the effect of compelling people on the move to escape their circumstances by whatever means.[23] Indeed, 94% of respondents returning from Saudi Arabia had been detained in Saudi Arabia because of their migration status. In addition, according to a key informant interview with an NGO staff member working with returnees in Ethiopia, some migrants in Saudi Arabia seek deportation, presenting themselves to law enforcement once they have decided to return. This may explain why some forced returnees perceived their return as assisted. Throughout this report, the analysis relies on the official return status of the respondents, and not on the self-reported status.

2.1.2 Age, gender, duration of migration, and region of origin

This study interviewed adult returnees (aged 18 and above) who had returned to Ethiopia between 6 months and 2 years from the date of interview. This timeframe allows for return journeys to still be fresh in the minds of respondents while also allowing sufficient time to have passed since return to examine reintegration processes and remigration considerations. Most respondents (64%) had arrived in Ethiopia between April and June 2022 (Table 2).

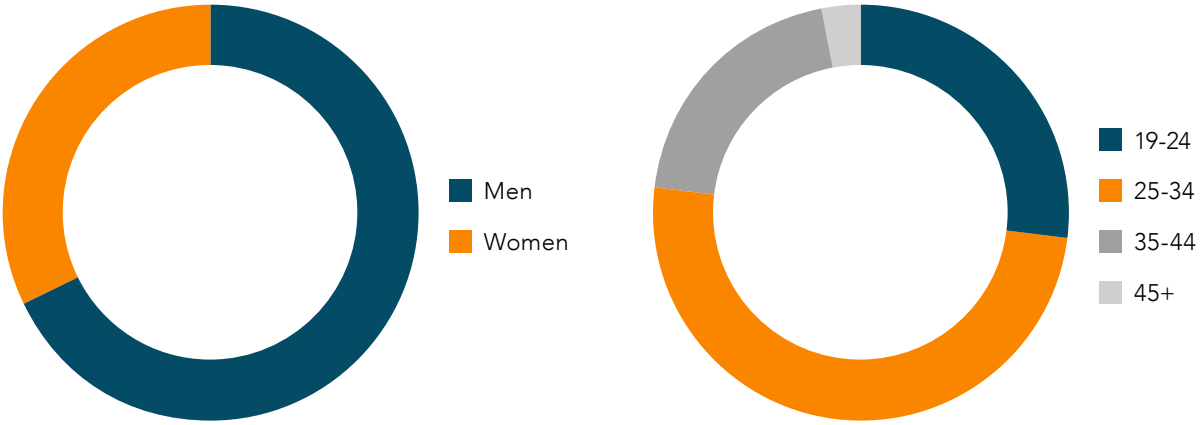
Table 2. Date of return to Ethiopia (n=504)

Year of return	Quarter	% of respondents
2021	Q1	4%
	Q2	6%
	Q3	9%
	Q4	1%
2022	Q1	3%
	Q2	64%
	Q3	13%
	Total	100%

Of the 504 refugees and migrants surveyed, most are men (68%) and the largest share are aged 25-34 (50%) (Figure 1). Of note, 83% of women were forced returnees versus 50% of men, while all spontaneous returnees were men. This is important when interpreting the data as differences observed between return categories may be linked to gender and vice versa.

23 Speaking on the case of Libya: OHCHR (2022). Libya: UN human rights report details violations of migrants' rights amid 'assisted return' programmes.

Figure 1. Sex and age of respondents (n=504)



The majority of respondents originated from Amhara (73%), followed by Oromia (18%) and the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Region (SNNPR) (4%) (Table 3). This is consistent with data from Ethiopia, which identifies these three regions as areas of high emigration.[24] The vast majority (91%) of respondents were interviewed in their region of origin, with the exception of those from Tigray (12/14).[25]

Table 3. Region of origin and current region of respondents (n=504)

	% respondents originating from region	% respondents in the region at time of interview
Amhara	73%	71%
Oromia	18%	18%
SNNP	4%	3%
Tigray	3%	-
Addis Ababa	1%	5%
Other	1%	3%

Respondents had mainly returned from Saudi Arabia (93%), as well as Yemen (4%) and Djibouti (1%) (Table 4), which is also in line with data on overall Ethiopian return movements.

24 IOM (2021). Return migration dynamics in five Ethiopian communities of high emigration.
25 This may provide a departure from a finding from RMMS (2014), stating it was not clear how many forced returnees from Saudi Arabia did make the full return journey back to their locations of origin, versus those remaining in Addis Ababa.

Table 4. What country did you return from? (n=504)

Country	%
Saudi Arabia	93%
Yemen	4%
Djibouti	1%
Sudan	<1%
United Arab Emirates	<1%
Malawi	<1%
Tanzania	<1%
Qatar	<1%
Syria	<1%
Kuwait	<1%
Somalia	<1%

2.2 Limitations

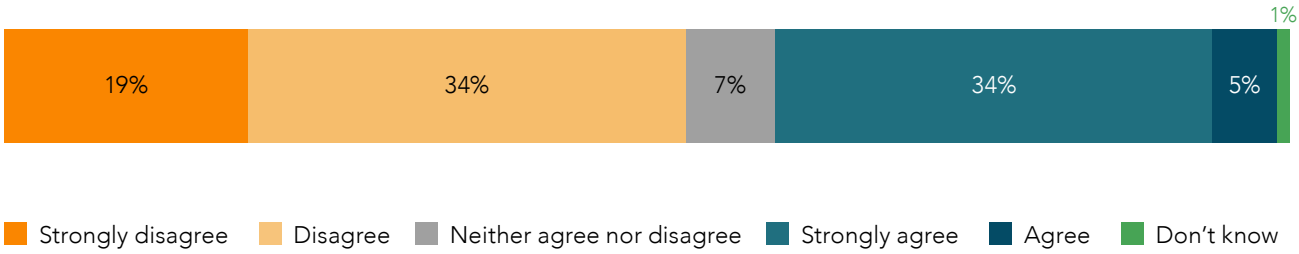
As the 4Mi sampling process was not random, the data are not representative of the entire returnee population in Ethiopia. Respondents had all been referred to the research team by programmatic stakeholders working with returnees in Ethiopia. Returnees who have not encountered agencies, therefore, are not represented in this study. The quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics and so any apparent relationships between variables should be interpreted with caution.

Photo credit: © Pascal Maitre/Panos Pictures
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia - The crowded lanes of the sprawling Grand Market.

3. Access to information and expectations before migration

This section examines Ethiopian returnees' level of awareness and their access to information about the dangers associated with their migration journey and conditions of life in their destination country before they left Ethiopia. It maintains that understanding returnees' initial awareness and access to information is key to understanding their migration expectations and, in turn, their perceptions of their migration and return experiences, with a view towards understanding how access to information and future migration programming may be improved.

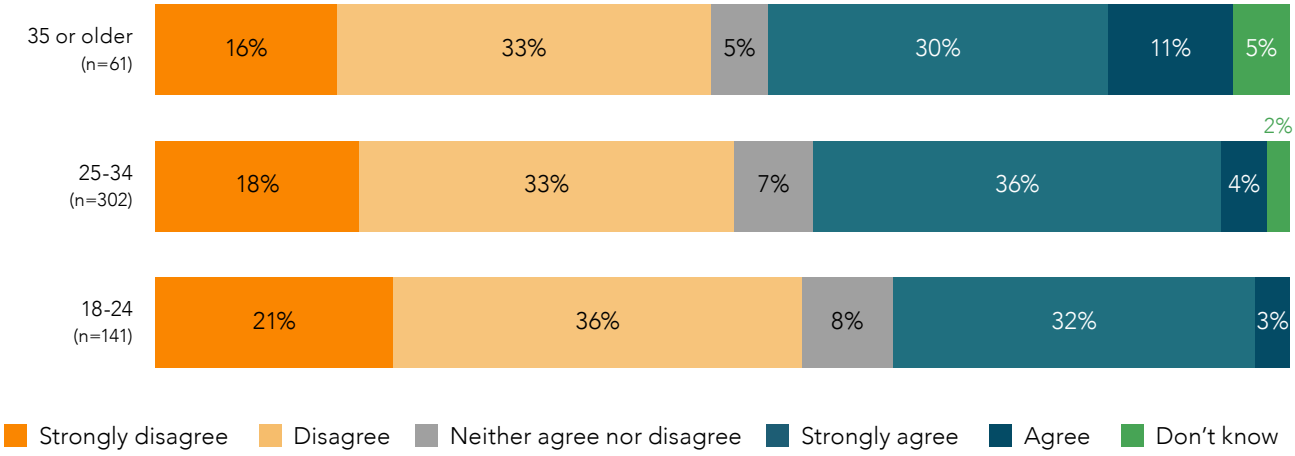
Figure 2. To what extent do you agree with the following statement: 'Before I started my outward migration journey, I was aware of the difficulties and risks that I might face during the migration journey.' (n=504)



More than half of respondents (53%) described being unaware of the risks and difficulties they might face during their migration journey (Figure 2). Disaggregating the data by gender revealed slight differences between men and women, with men (54%) being slightly less aware than their female counterparts (48%). In terms of age, youth aged 18 to 24 appeared to be the least aware age group (57%), with awareness increasing with age (Figure 3). A 2020 IOM study on Ethiopian migrant youth traveling along the Eastern Route found that 65% of those surveyed made their decision to migrate less than one month before leaving.[26] The more spontaneous and less planned nature of their movements could explain why they end up considering that they were unaware of the risks. Respondents with lower levels of education also appear to have been less aware of the risks and challenges of the journey. 55% (232/420) of respondents with no schooling or only primary school education described being unaware, as compared to 38% with secondary education (28/74).

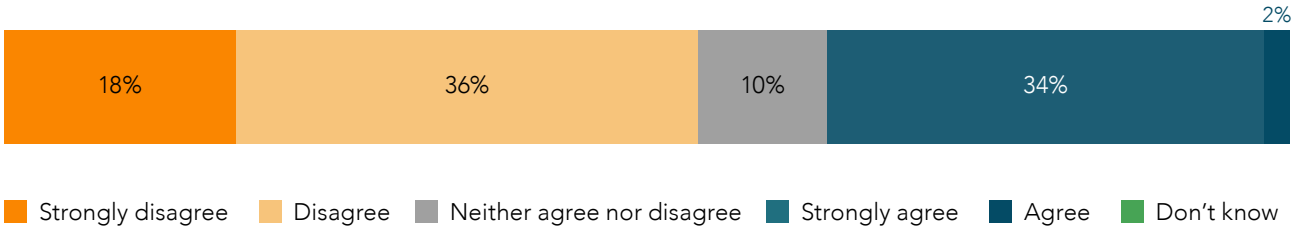
26 IOM (2020). The desire to thrive regardless of the risk.

Figure 3. To what extent do you agree with the following statement: 'Before I started my outward migration journey, I was aware of the difficulties and risks that I might face during the migration journey.' – by age. (n=504)



Lack of awareness about journey risks among respondents was matched by lack of awareness of the conditions they would encounter at their destination. More than half of respondents (53%) said they were unaware of how life would be in the country in which they intended to settle, before starting their migration journey (Figure 4). As with the data on journeys, men (55%) more frequently described being unaware than women (50%). This difference may be linked to the way women and men travelled and entered Saudi Arabia: 54% of women travelled in an irregular manner compared to 95% of men. Women respondents' regular travel to Saudi Arabia could mean they were in touch with recruiting agencies in Ethiopia before departure and received information on life and working conditions.[27] Both younger and less educated respondents reported lower levels of awareness of conditions in the destination.

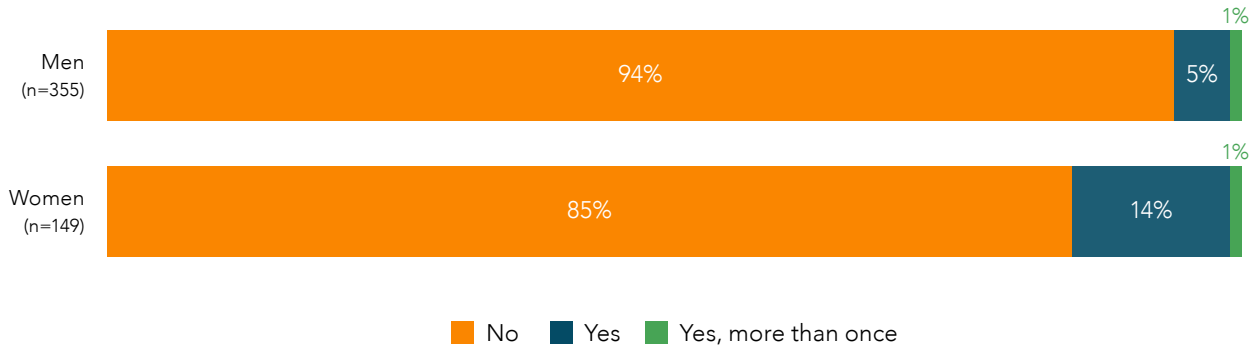
Figure 4. To what extent do you agree with the following statement: 'Before I started my migration journey, I was aware of how life would be in the country I would settle in.' (n=504)



27 IOM reported in 2022 they were training such recruitment agencies in ethical and better informed recruitment procedures. See: IOM (2022). IOM Trains Private Recruitment Agencies in Ethiopia in Ethical Recruitment.

Despite efforts by the Ethiopian Government, donors, UN agencies and NGOs to raise awareness about the risks of irregular movement along mixed migration routes,[28] 91% of surveyed returnees said that they had not come across information from any of these actors about the dangers of migration or about the challenges of life in destination countries. 8% had received information once about the dangers of the journey, and 1% had received such information two or more times. Women (15%) had more often received information than men (6%) (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Before you started your migration journey, did you come across any information from governments, the UN or NGOs, about the dangers of migration or about the challenges of life in destination countries? – by gender.



Overall, the data reveal that before the respondents had left Ethiopia, they had a low level of awareness of both the dangers along the journey and the conditions in their destination country. The vast majority of respondents had not been exposed to any information from the Ethiopian Government, UN agencies or NGOs on the risks associated with irregular migration. Men and youths appeared to be less aware than women and older age cohorts. These data suggest a need not only for increased general awareness of the risks of irregular migration, but also targeted information for men and youths in Ethiopia. It is possible that in addition to greater investments in awareness-raising activities on risks, alternative methods for communicating the risks are needed as well as information on risk mitigation strategies while on the journey. For instance, past MMC research found that particular payment modalities for smuggling services appeared to increase respondents' exposure to protection violations along the route.[29] Such information could be a part of communication strategies to reduce risks associated with the journey.

28 See for instance the FCDO's Support to Refugees and Migration programme in Ethiopia; Ethiopia's Disaster Risk Management Commission and the European Union Trust Fund for Africa's and World Bank's support to Disaster Risk Management in Ethiopia; IOM's Migrant Response Centre in Metema and Save the Children's support to community-based activities in Amhara that raised awareness on migration to name a few.

29 MMC (2020). A Sharper Lens on Vulnerability (North Africa).

4. Access to information and assistance prior to return

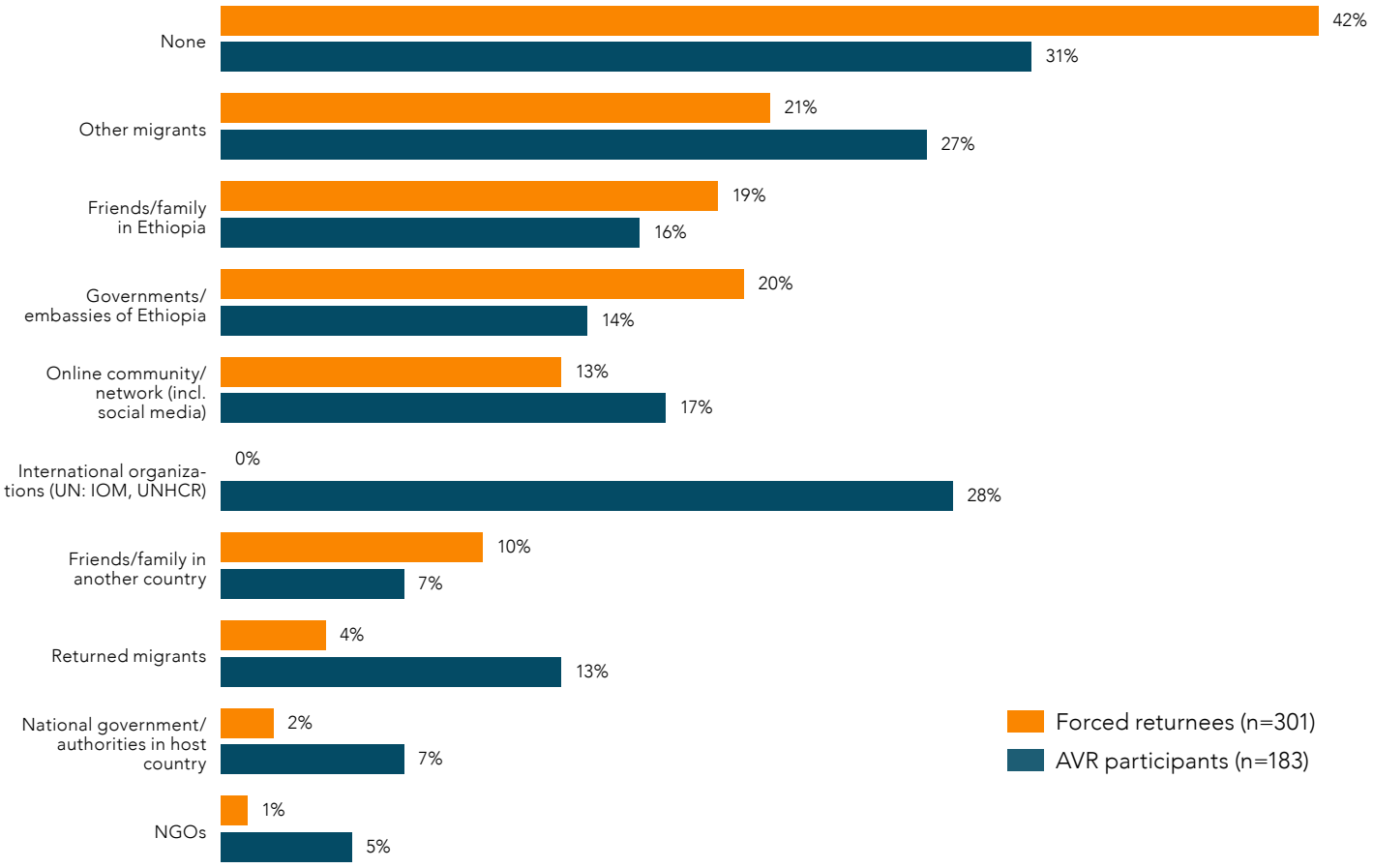
This section examines returnees' access to information about the return process itself, while in the host country. It also considers respondents' access to assistance to support their return. The assumption here is that greater information on and assistance during the return process might balance Ethiopians' expectations about return as well as promote better return outcomes once in Ethiopia.

69% of assisted and 58% of forced returnees reported having received some information about the return process, including the journey itself, the administrative process of return and/or life after returning.[30] The leading sources of information for assisted returnees were international organizations (28%), other migrants (27%) and online communities and networks (17%). By contrast, the top sources of information for forced returnees were other migrants (21%), governments or Ethiopian embassies (20%) and friends or family in Ethiopia (see Figure 6). This variation by type of return supports what is known about these different return processes, since assisted returns are facilitated by IOM and forced returns involve detention and contact with governmental bodies. Still, a considerable share of both assisted (31%) and forced returnees (42%) cited having no information about the return journey – and by implication, little preparation – which may lead to vulnerabilities during the return process, and challenges upon arrival in Ethiopia with regard to reintegration. While this finding might be unsurprising for deportees, it is particularly striking for assisted returnees, as one would expect that assisted return would automatically mean receiving information about the return process. The data therefore suggest a need for increased access to information across all categories of return.

As per forced returnees, the data on information access reveal yet another challenge faced by this group whose basic human rights have already been violated through harsh detention conditions and a lack of legal representation, and who may be out of reach of most international organizations.[31] 4Mi data highlight that other migrants are a leading source of information, over and above official sources. State officials and international organizations might consider introducing more community-based activities inclusive of returnees, as well as friends and family of migrants, with reliable and up-to-date information on return processes and available assistance for returnees.

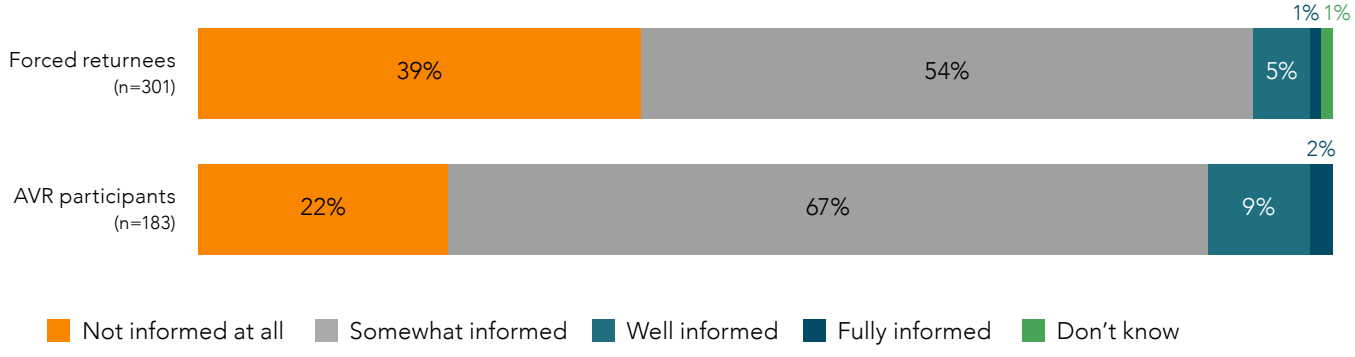
30 Due to the small number of spontaneous returnees, the disaggregation per type of return focuses on assisted and forced returnees.
31 Amnesty International (2022). Saudi Arabia: "It's like we are not human": Forced returns, abhorrent detention conditions of Ethiopian migrants in Saudi Arabia.

Figure 6. Before return, what were your sources of information about the return process - the journey, administrative process, and life after returning? – top 10 responses. (multi-select)



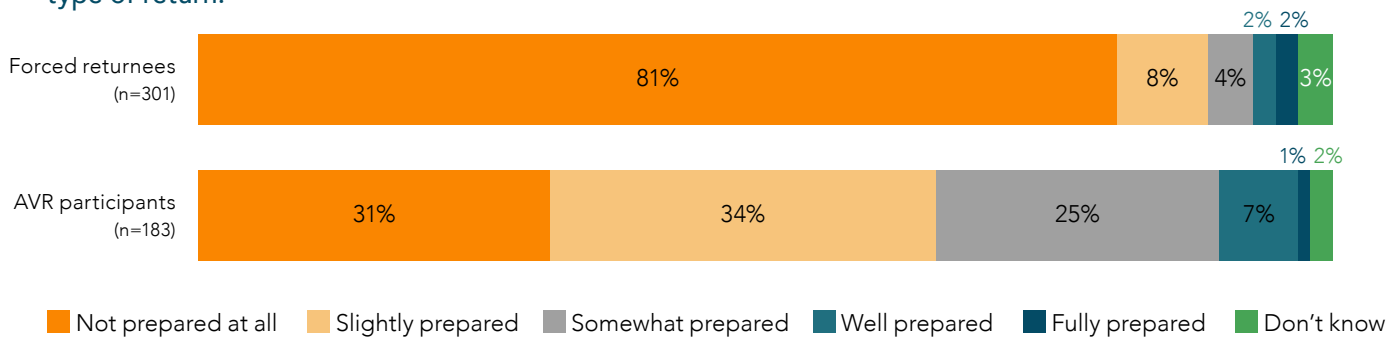
78% of respondents had at least a partial understanding of the return process, which aligns with the share of respondents reporting access to information. Disaggregating the data by category of return shows that forced returnees felt less informed than assisted returnees, which aligns with the nature of their return processes (see Figure 7). 39% of forced returnees felt not at all informed as compared to 22% of assisted returnees. Yet, as mentioned above, 22% is notable considering this category of returnees is defined by its access to assistance. The results highlight once again that all returnees, even those facing deportation, should have access to information about the return process and life back in Ethiopia, to improve their preparedness and prospects for reintegration.

Figure 7. How well informed do you feel you were about the return journey and life after return? (single-select)



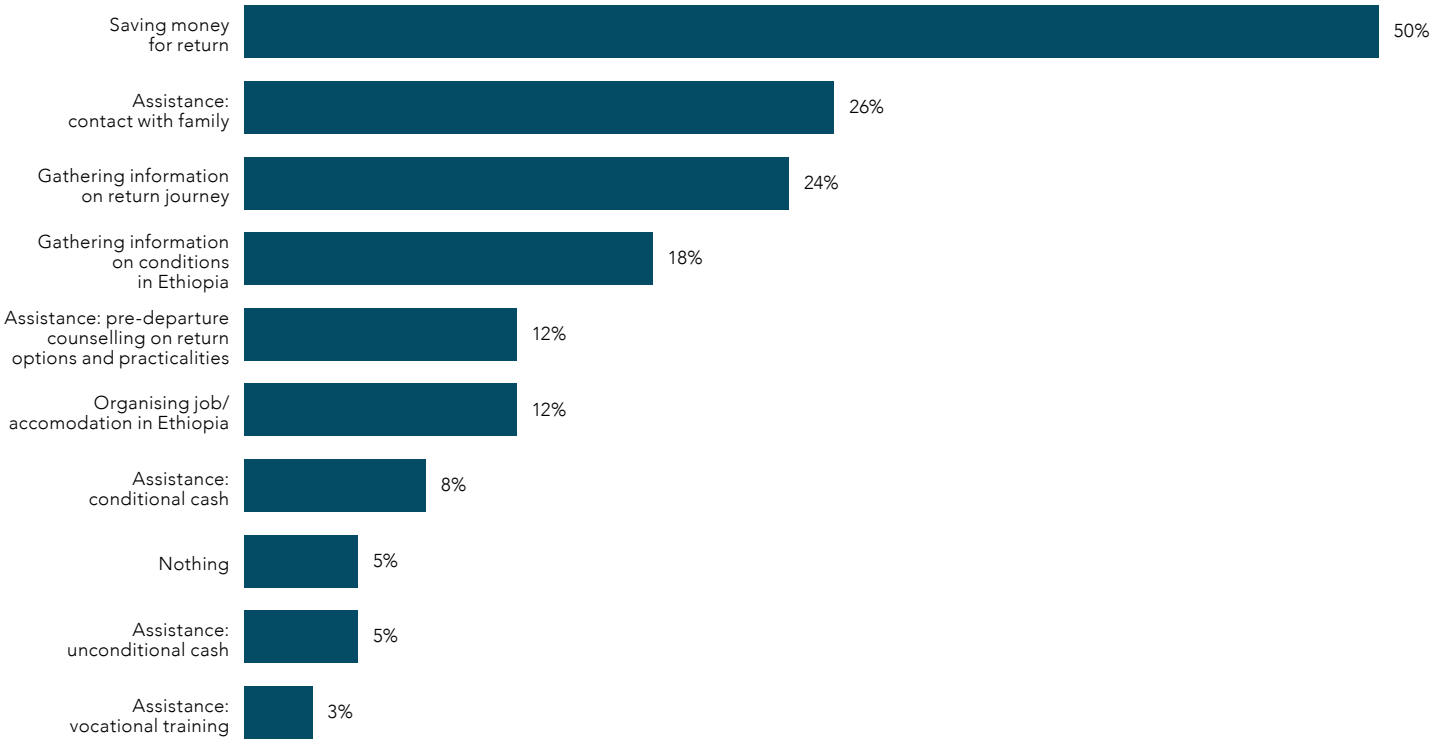
Receiving information and feeling informed about the return journey and life back in Ethiopia represents one aspect of the return process, whereas feeling prepared to return indicates a more practical readiness to return. Respondents were less prepared for return than they were aware of what it might be like. The majority (61%) reported not feeling prepared to return. Disaggregating the data by type of return, most (81%) forced returnees reported not having been prepared at all. In contrast, less than one-third (31%) of assisted returnees felt not prepared at all, reflecting the nature of these two return categories (see Figure 8).

Figure 8. Before you left on your return journey, to what extent did you feel prepared to return? – by type of return.



Among the minority citing some level of preparedness,[32] surveyed returnees mainly prepared by saving money (50%), establishing contact with family (26%) and gathering information on the return journey and conditions in Ethiopia, respectively (24% and 18%) (Figure 9).

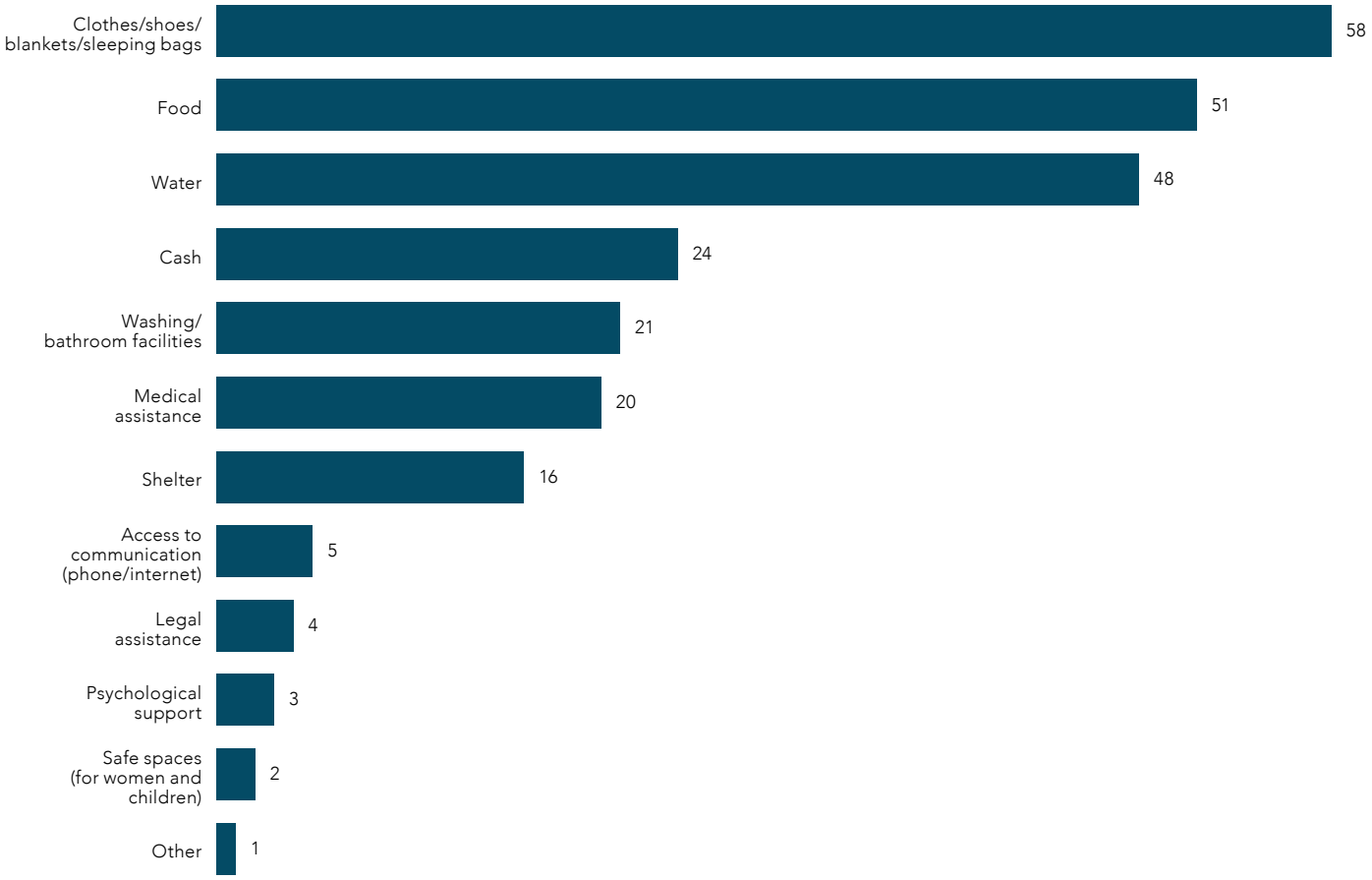
Figure 9. How did you prepare for your return? (n=189; multi-select)



32 This corresponds to respondents who had cited they were either only slightly prepared, somewhat prepared, well prepared or fully prepared.

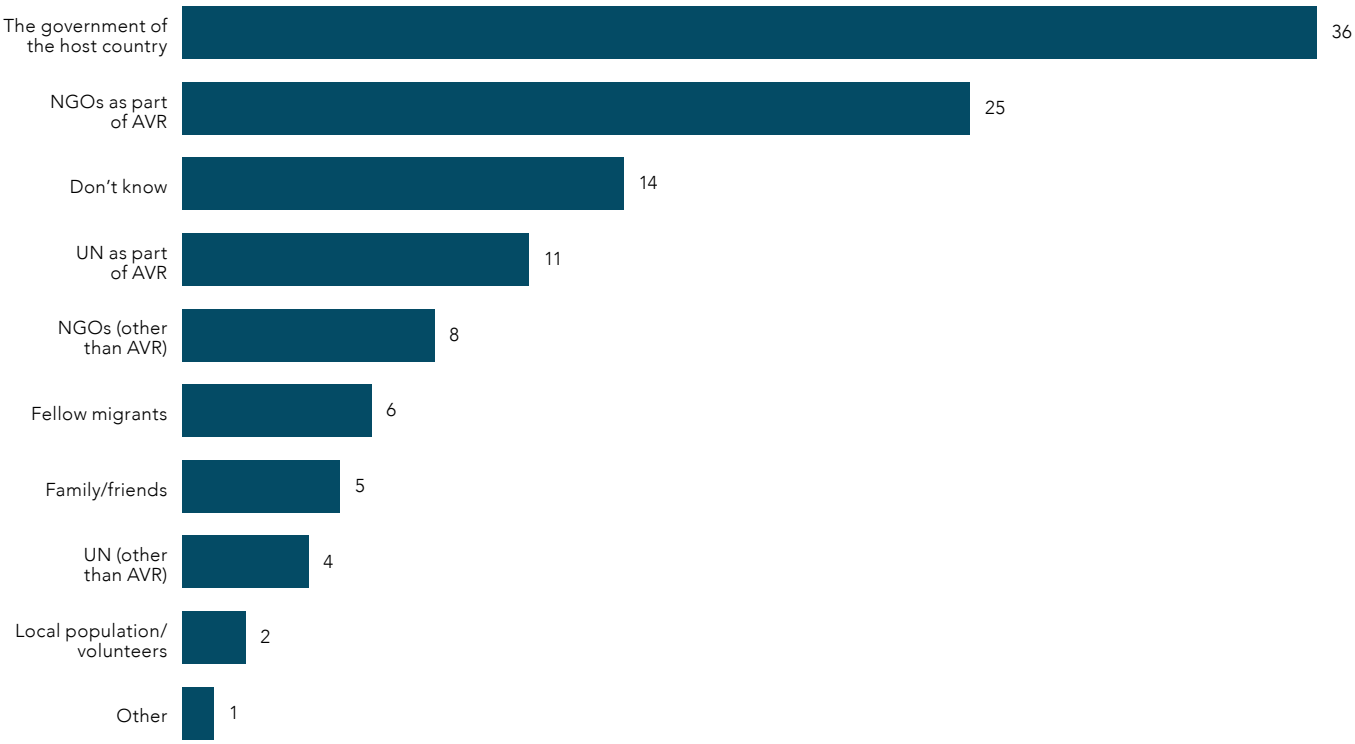
Another feature of preparedness is whether respondents received assistance. 20% of respondents reported having received assistance just before their return. For most, this took the form of clothes and shoes (58/99), food (51) and water (48). Surprisingly, both assisted (54) and forced returnees (45) reported receiving assistance. It is possible that forced returnees may be describing any basic relief they received while in detention.

Figure 10. What kind of assistance did you receive? (n=99; multi-select)



Most of the respondents who received assistance reported having received the assistance from the host country's government (36) and from NGOs as part of AVR (25), reflecting the kind of return that most respondents experienced. Spontaneous returnees more often reported receiving assistance from other migrants, friends and family and the local population.

Figure 11. Who provided this assistance? (n=99; multi-select)



Just 9% (43 out of 489)[33] of all respondents had legal representation during the return process. This corresponds to 16% of assisted returnees (28/175) and 5% of forced returnees (15/298).

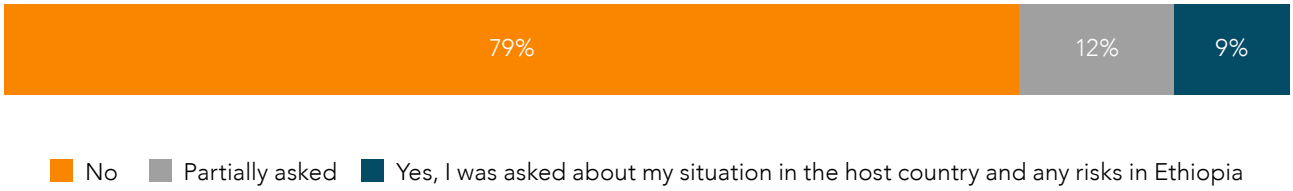
A 40-year-old man who returned from Saudi Arabia recalls how he was deported:

> *"I was living in Saudi Arabia for a long time. But one day the police asked me to stop the car and asked for my nationality, I told him I am an Ethiopian. Then he said: 'You are the ones who are stopping the natural water flow.' I think he was talking about the Ethiopian Abay Dam[34] and he arrested me. He didn't ask for my legal status. The only thing he asked is my nationality. Then my wife tried to solve the situation and she also asked the Ethiopian embassy for help, but nothing was done for me. Then I was forced to leave the country. Unless the situation changes I would not advise a person to move to Saudi Arabia. Previously, I liked Saudi Arabia, I married and had children there. But finally I faced this problem."*

33 15 respondents who self-reported as having returned to Ethiopia independently were not asked whether they had legal representation while preparing for return.
34 The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam.

79% of respondents reported they were not asked by any officials or organization in the host country about their political or security situation, including the risks they would face upon their return. Assisted returnees were more often asked or partially asked about their security situation upon return (39%), than forced returnees (11%). This may reflect the difficulties in access to detention centres in Saudi Arabia by UN agencies and NGOs, as well as by the Ethiopian embassy.

Figure 12. Before your return, did any officials/organizations ask you about your situation, including the risks you could face after return? (n=504)



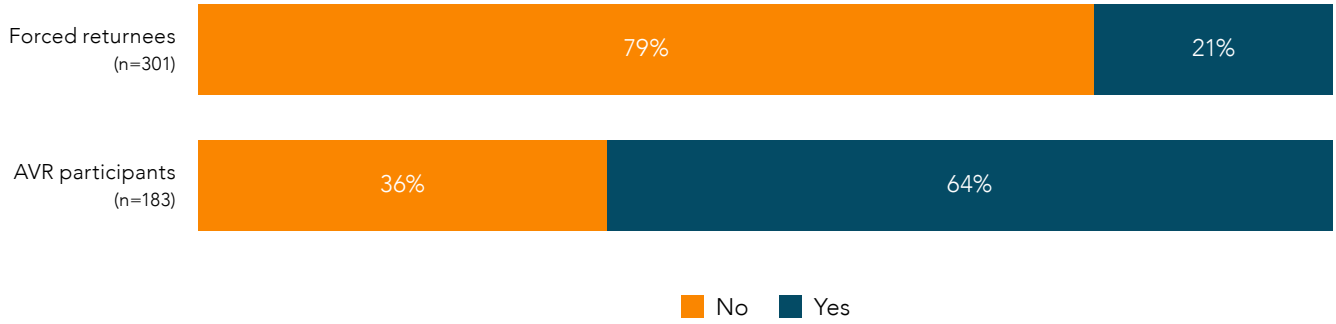
Overall, despite some variation based on type of return, access to information remained low. Assisted returnees more often had greater access to information, felt more prepared and more often received assistance. That being said, when one considers that assisted returnees are by definition supposed to be receiving information and support, the levels reported by respondents is markedly low. Generally speaking, people are returning underinformed and underprepared, which likely impacts their return and reintegration prospects.

Photo credit: © Ian Swithinbank
Addis Ababa market.

5. Access to assistance and support upon return to Ethiopia

The majority of respondents had not received assistance or support[35] since returning to Ethiopia, although 38% (189/504) had received assistance, which is higher than the 20% who received assistance in the host country prior to return. Disaggregating the data by type of return reveals diverging assistance trends: a majority of assisted returnees had received assistance or support after arriving in Ethiopia, whereas a majority of forced returnees had not (Figure 13). As with the data presented in sections 3 and 4, the findings by type of return align with the very nature of these two return processes.

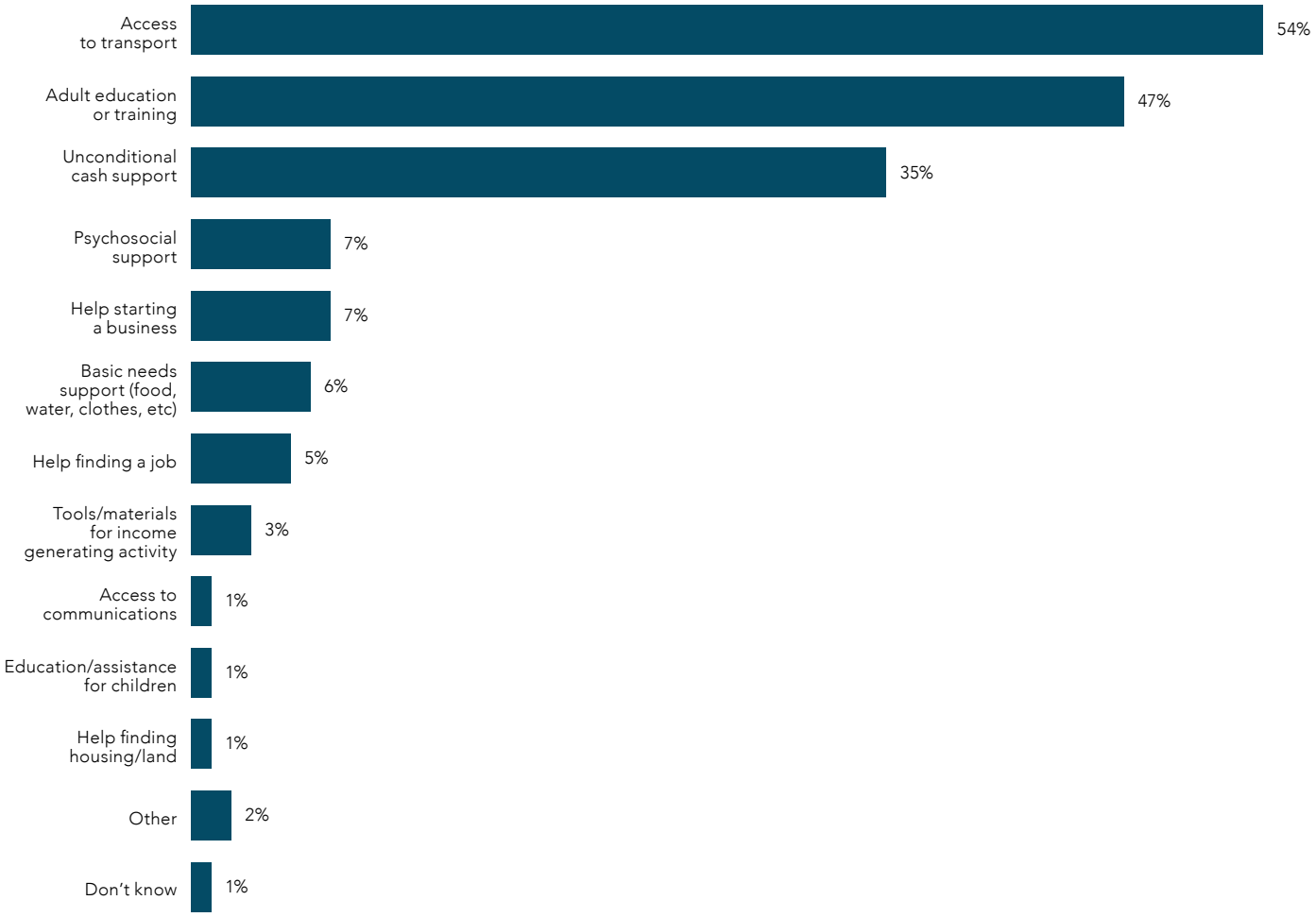
Figure 13. Have you received assistance or support since you arrived back in Ethiopia? (free of charge) – by type of return.



Assistance most often took the form of access to transport (54%). 47% had received adult education or training and 35% had received unconditional cash support (see Figure 14).

35 This includes immediate humanitarian assistance as well as long-term economic and social reintegration assistance. The survey does not distinguish between these two types of assistance and instead asks respondents to identify the exact assistance they received, e.g. help finding a job or access to transportation.

Figure 14. What kind of assistance or support have you received? (n=189, multi-select)



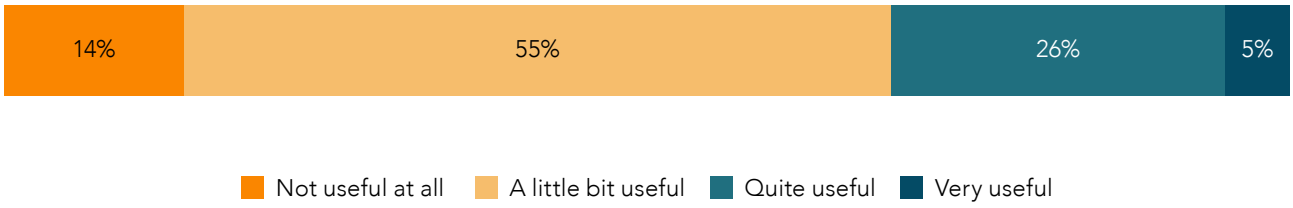
In terms of assistance providers, 61% of the respondents received assistance or support from the government while 44% from NGOs (Figure 15). Just 1% of respondents cited receiving assistance from family and friends. The low reporting of family and friends may be linked to whether respondents' initial migration was part of a strategy to assist their households and communities. For this reason, asking for and receiving assistance from family and friends upon return might be a source of stigma and shame. A 30-year-old woman who returned from Saudi Arabia explained:

> *"We become dependent on our parents for our livelihood. It's very terrible that we have been doing nothing since we returned."*

Figure 15. Who did you receive assistance or support from? (n=189, multi-select)

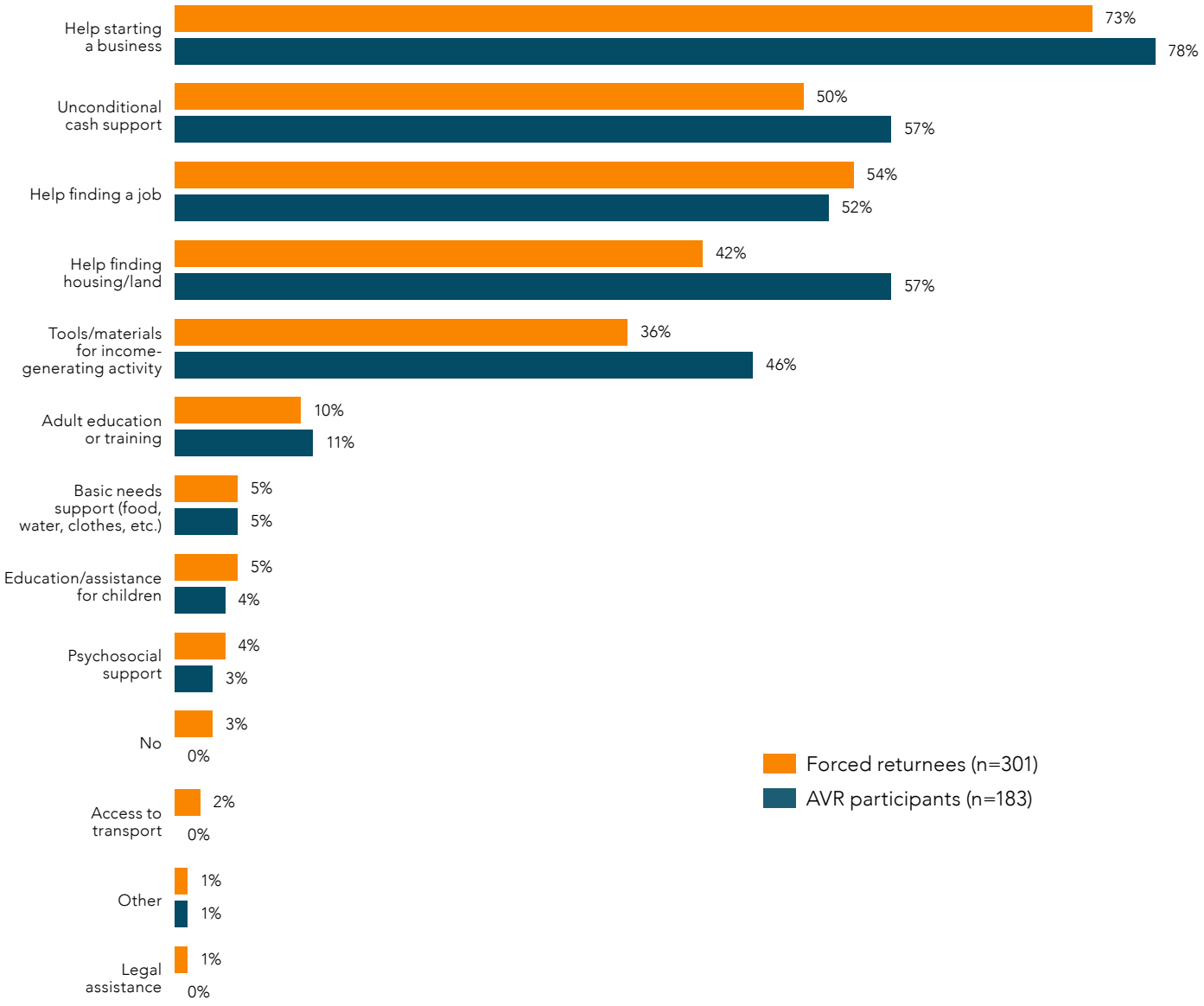
Most surveyed returnees (55%) found the assistance they had received back in Ethiopia to be just 'a little bit' useful, and 14% found the assistance 'not useful at all' (Figure 16). There was no major difference between men and women respondents.

Figure 16. How useful did you find this assistance? (n=189)



Across the sample, the state of respondents' livelihoods and wellbeing could be assessed as low, given that 98% expressed still needing assistance at the time of the interview and most cited multiple needs. In particular, 75%, needed help to start a business, 53% needed help finding a job, 53% needed cash support and 47% need help finding housing/land (Figure 17). Needs were largely consistent across categories of returnees, despite the difference between them in terms of assistance, as reported above.

Figure 17. Do you currently need assistance? – by category of return.



A 29-year-old man returned from Saudi Arabia explains:

> *"Compared to the discrimination and embarrassment I faced in Saudi Arabia, it's an honour to live in our country. But the Government of Ethiopia should support us, because if we continue being unemployed, eventually we will be a burden to the society."*

6. Conclusion and implications for programming

This study set out to examine Ethiopian returnees' access to information over the course of their migration and return journey, along with their expectations and access to assistance. The findings presented seek to contribute to a growing evidence base on Ethiopian return migration, in particular unpacking the role of information and assistance in the return migration process, in shaping the quality of return and impacting re-integration and re-migration decision-making.

Based on the findings, the following implications can be derived for returnee programming:

- Improving access to information is key during all phases of the migration journey. Despite efforts by governments, UN agencies and NGOs to raise awareness on the dangers of irregular migration, many Ethiopian returnees reported not having access to such information.

- Notwithstanding the forced nature of return, deportees should be included in assistance or support during the return process and upon return to and reintegration in Ethiopia.

- Equally, the lower-than-expected rates of access to information and assistance among surveyed assisted returnees suggests greater support is needed for this already-targeted group and perhaps qualitative investigation into why assisted returnees are not consistently reporting access to information and assistance.

- The at times similar experiences of assisted and forced returnees raises questions about the voluntariness of assisted returns and the widespread impacts of detention on longer-term return and reintegration outcomes. This report has shown that vulnerabilities and needs not only arise from prolonged periods of detention and the inhumane conditions therein, but also in the deportation process itself.

- Similarly, given the shared vulnerabilities and experiences regardless of profile or category of return, more research and programming are needed that go beyond status- or profile-based activities.

- Assistance should be more tailored towards the needs of returnees in Ethiopia to increase the changes of successful reintegration. There is an opportunity for programming to support returnees in starting their own business, in the form of training and cash/microcredit assistance, as a considerable number wish to start their own businesses.

- Based on the varied experiences of men and women, more gender-sensitive research and programming is needed.

- More data and research are needed on spontaneous returnees, who are more challenging to access and less linked to formal assistance networks and programmes.

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Photo credit: © Pascal Maitre/Panos Pictures
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia - The crowded lanes of the sprawling Grand Market.

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