

# Children and caregivers on the move in Ethiopia: Profiles, risks and needs

Ethiopia currently hosts over 823,000 refugees and asylum seekers, primarily from South Sudan, Somalia, and Eritrea, making it the third largest host of refugees and asylum seekers in Africa. Of these refugees and asylum seekers, over half are children.<sup>1</sup> This does not include less visible irregular migrant populations and migrant children, whose profiles and needs are not well studied. This snapshot, produced in partnership with the East African Migration Routes program of Save the Children, provides valuable insights into the experiences of refugee and migrant caregivers in Ethiopia, and the needs of the children under their care.

## Key findings

- The majority (83%) of caregivers began their journey with children, and about 70% stated they would have made the same choices about their journey even if they were not travelling with children, suggesting that routes and methods of travel were not influenced by travelling with children.
- Over half (55%) of the respondents reported being the sole caregiver for the children. Among these caregivers, a majority (40 out of 64) were women. Additionally, only 29% had a source of income, highlighting the vulnerability of caregivers and the children in their care.
- A significant proportion (27%) of respondents were caring for children experiencing difficulties due to health problems.
- Children faced protection risks both along the journey and at the location of interviews. Girls in particular were perceived to be at risk of verbal abuse, physical violence, sexual violence and forced marriage. Boys were more at risk of physical violence and detention.

- The needs of children varied by location and by movement aspirations: respondents in Addis Ababa cited the need for socio-educational activities, followed by healthcare and psychosocial support, while respondents in Mega cited the need for education, food and healthcare.

## Data and profiles

This snapshot offers insights based on 108 surveys conducted in December 2022 with refugees and migrants in Ethiopia who were either travelling or living with children under their care. At the time of interview, 55% were in Addis Ababa, while 45% were in Mega-Megado in Southern Ethiopia, near the border to Kenya. The survey targeted individuals who had arrived in Ethiopia less than two years before the interview.

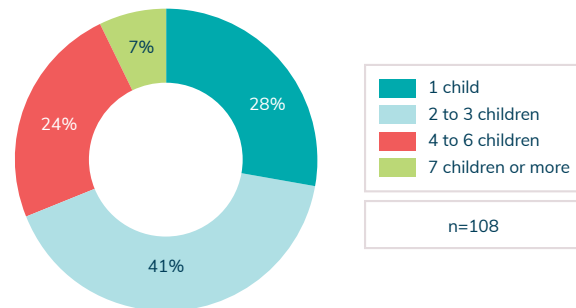
60% of respondents were women and 40% were men. 47% were aged between 25 and 34, 20% between 18 and 24, and 32% 35 or older. Respondents' nationalities were Kenyan (45%), South Sudanese (21%), Eritrean (21%), Sudanese (6%), Somali (6%) and Yemeni (2%). In Mega-Megado, all respondents were Kenyan.

Also in Mega-Megado, all respondents had reached the end of their journey. In Addis, where other nationalities were interviewed, 12 out of 60 respondents had reached the end of their journey, while 44 had not and 4 were uncertain. The majority of those who had not completed their journey expressed a desire to settle in Europe (13), Canada (9) or the United States of America (8), while 9 did not know.

1 UNHCR (2023) UNHCR Ethiopia. [UNHCR Ethiopia – Operational update – January 2023](#)

## The majority of respondents started their journey with children and are sole caregivers

**Figure 1. How many children are currently under your care? (n=108)**



Respondents cared for an average of three children (under 18). The majority (83%) had started their journey with children under their care. 20% had children who were born in Ethiopia. Just 6% had children join them since they migrated to Ethiopia.

Among those who started their journey with children or took care of children during the journey, 70% (64/92) said they would have made the same choices even if they weren't travelling with children, while 16% were uncertain. While the sample size is limited and results should be treated with caution, this suggests that having children did not significantly affect their decision-making process during the journey.

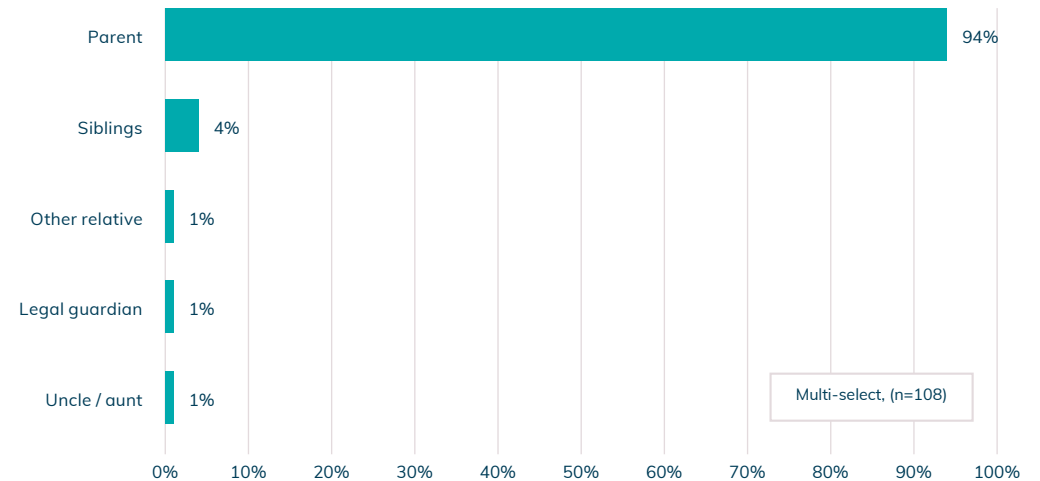
## Nearly all respondents are taking care of their own children

In most cases (94%), the caregivers were the parents. Men and women indicated similar care relationships. The data reveal a comparatively low share of non-parental care arrangements, when compared with findings from similar surveys in Sudan, which indicated that close to half of caregivers (47%) had a non-parental relationship with one of the children under their care, and in Tunisia, where 32% of caregivers indicated not being the parent to one of the children under their care.<sup>23</sup>

2 MMC (2022) [Profiles and needs of caregivers and children on the move in Sudan](#); MMC (2022) [Profiles and needs of caregivers and children on the move in Tunisia](#).

3 4Mi relies on purposive and snowball sampling in all countries where it operates. In Ethiopia, enumerators also relied on referrals through programming actors in order to sample respondents and to snowball from. This may play a role in the higher share of caregivers with direct parental relationships.

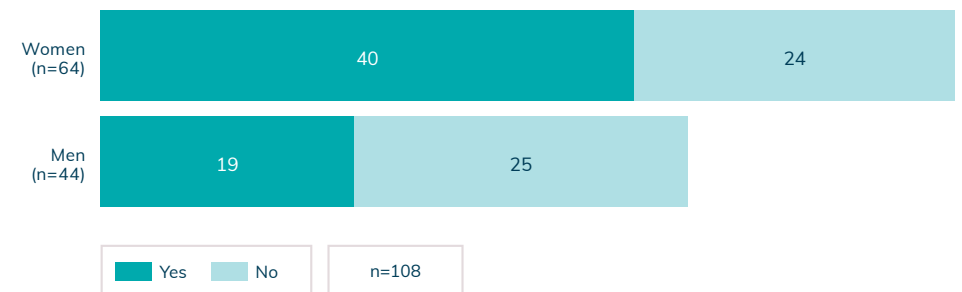
**Figure 2. What is your relationship with these children?**



## The majority of respondents are sole caregivers; only 29% have a source of income

55% of respondents are sole caregivers. Moreover, just 29% (17/59) had a source of income at the time of the interview: most of whom (14/17) indicated they relied on money sent to them by relatives, 3 had casual work, 1 was self-employed and 5 received support from organizations such as UNHCR. This underscores the vulnerability of caregivers and their children along the route.

**Figure 3. Are you the only caregiver to these children here? (n=108)**



## Nearly a third had children with health or disability issues

27% of respondents reported they were taking care of children experiencing different difficulties because of a health problem or disability as shown in Table 1 below.

**Table 1. Difficulties experienced by children due to health problems. (n=29; multi-select)**

Difficulties experienced	No of respondents
Difficulties related to moving	14
Difficulties related to communicating	12
Difficulties related to understanding or being understood	9
Difficulties related to self-care (e.g., washing all over)	9
Difficulties related to remembering or concentrating	7
Difficulties related to hearing	4
Difficulties related to seeing	1

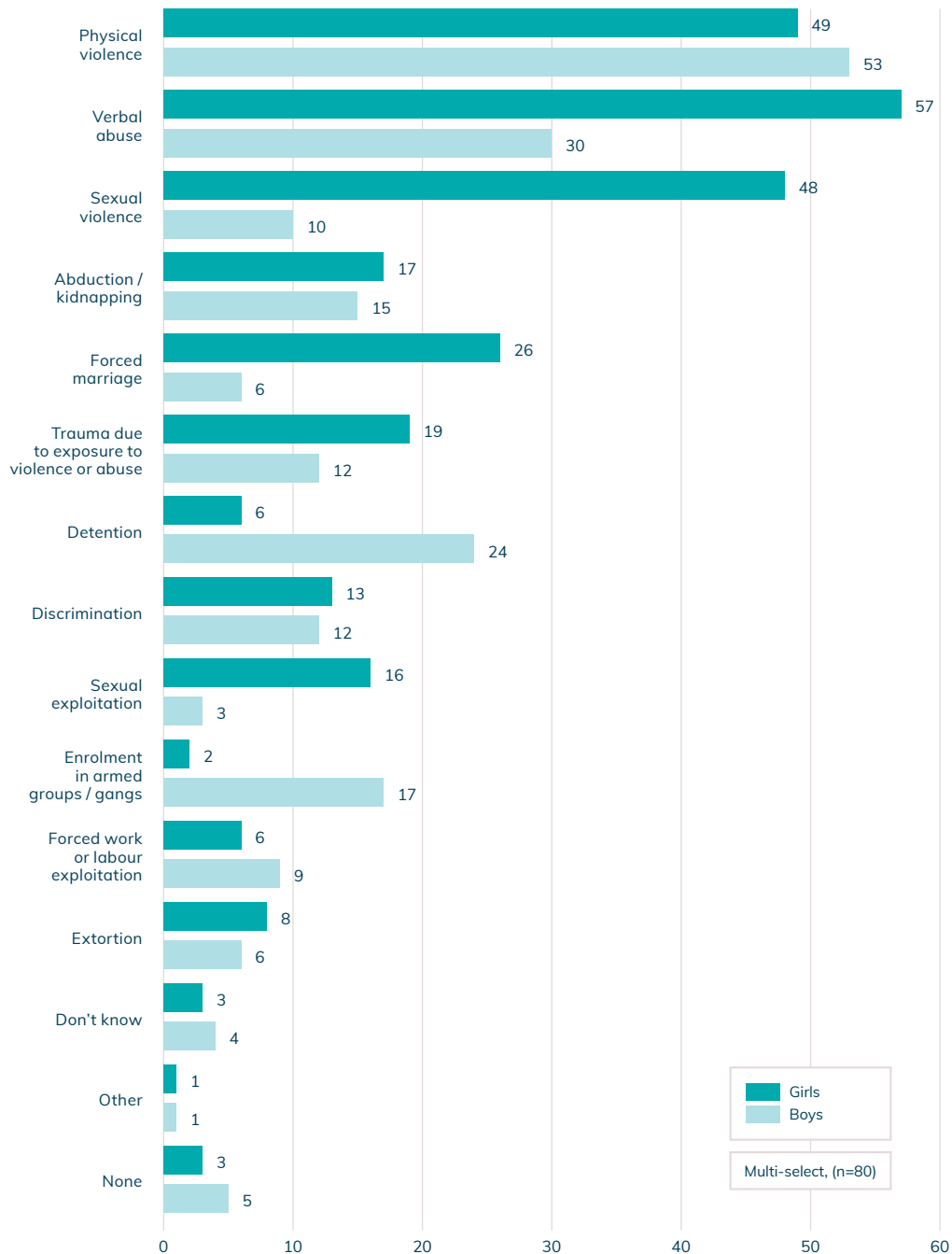
## Girls were perceived to be more at risk of verbal abuse, sexual violence and forced marriage along the journey, while boys were more at risk of detention

The majority of caregivers (84%) considered children had been moderately to highly exposed to some risks along their journey. Of those (n=91), most cited places on the journey in their countries of origin as the most dangerous locations. The majority of Kenyans cited Kenya (28/48), and likewise, the majority of South Sudanese cited South Sudan (17/23), Sudanese cited Sudan (4/6), and Somalis cited Somalia (4/6). Overall, 18 respondents found Ethiopia to be the most dangerous country on their journey. This was particularly the case for Eritreans (9/23), who specified Shire as the most dangerous location – as their journeys to and through Ethiopia coincided with the conflict in Tigray.

Caregivers reported a similar risk of physical violence to both girls and boys (49/80 and 53/80 respectively) along the journey. Girls, however, faced a greater risk of verbal abuse (57/80),<sup>4</sup> sexual violence (48) and forced marriage (26). On the other hand, caregivers perceived boys to be at a greater risk of detention (24). Out of the 24 respondents who cited the risk of detention to boys along the journey, 11 were South Sudanese respondents followed by Kenyans (4), Eritreans (3), Somalis (2), Yemenis (2), and Sudanese (2). Notably, the locations reported as the most precarious for detention by South Sudanese respondents were predominantly in Upper Nile state (in South Sudan).

<sup>4</sup> 11/91 respondents could not identify a most dangerous location on their journey.

**Figure 4. What risks did boy/girl refugees and migrants face in the most dangerous locations along the journey?**

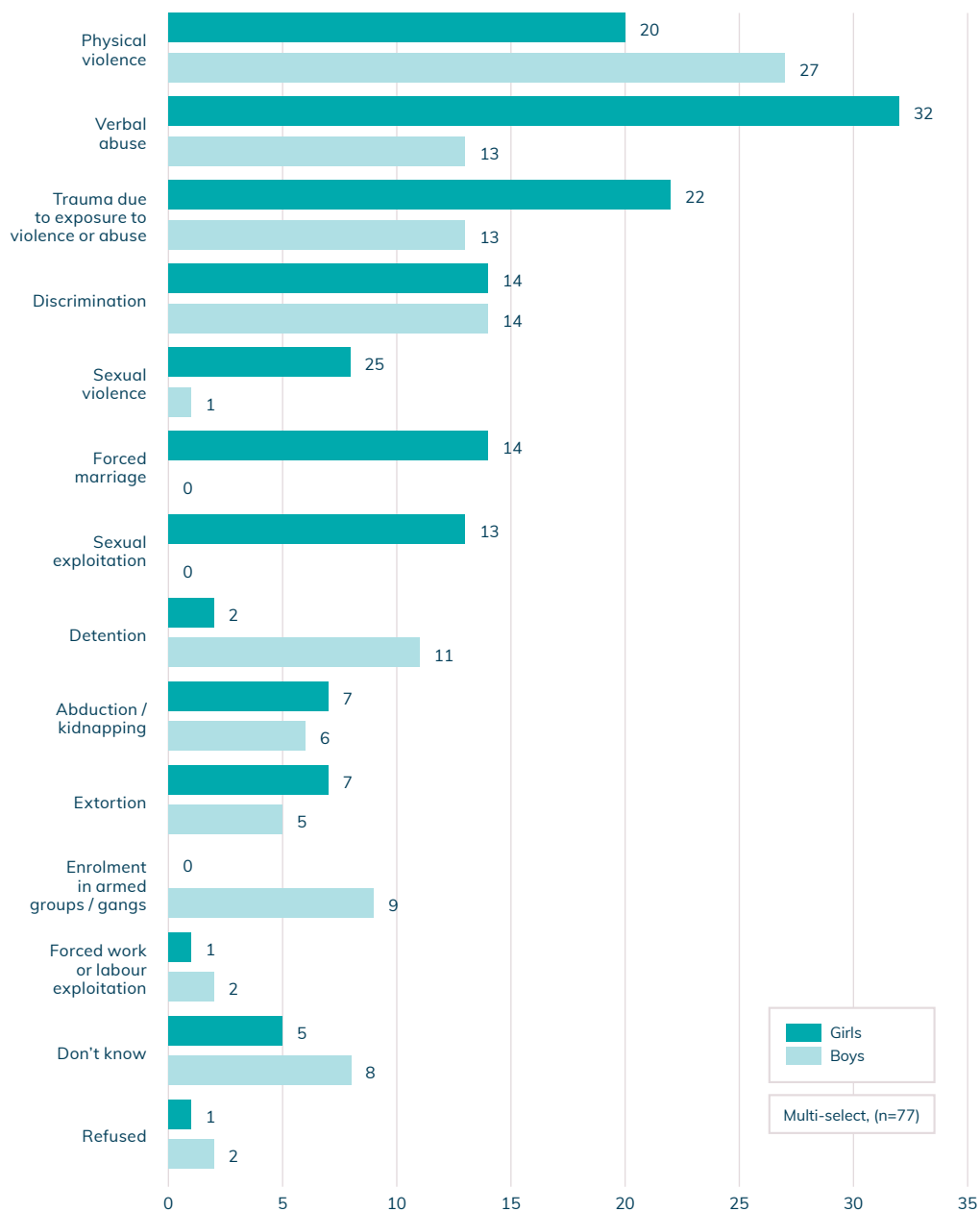


## Children face similar protection risks in locations of interview in Ethiopia, as well as trauma due to exposure to violence or abuse

While most respondents did not perceive Ethiopia as a whole or their current location within Ethiopia as the most dangerous along their journey, some identified specific risks in their current location. These risks include the exposure of girls to sexual violence (25/66), verbal abuse (32/66) and trauma due to exposure to violence or abuse (22/66) and boys to physical violence (27/62).

Disaggregation by location showed that 15 out of 20 respondents in Mega-Megado reported that children in that location did not face any risks. In contrast, 51 out of 57 respondents in Addis Ababa perceived that girls faced risks, while 47 perceived that boys faced risks in this location. All respondents who perceived the risk of detention for both boys and girls in their current location were interviewed in Addis Ababa. The majority of respondents perceiving the risk of detention were South Sudanese (7), followed by Eritreans (3), and one Somali. It is noteworthy that a majority (8 out of 11) of these respondents identified themselves as either asylum seekers (4) or refugees (4) at the time of the interview.

**Figure 5. What risks do boy/girl refugees and migrants face in your current location?**



## The majority of children were attending school or childcare services

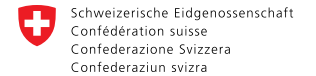
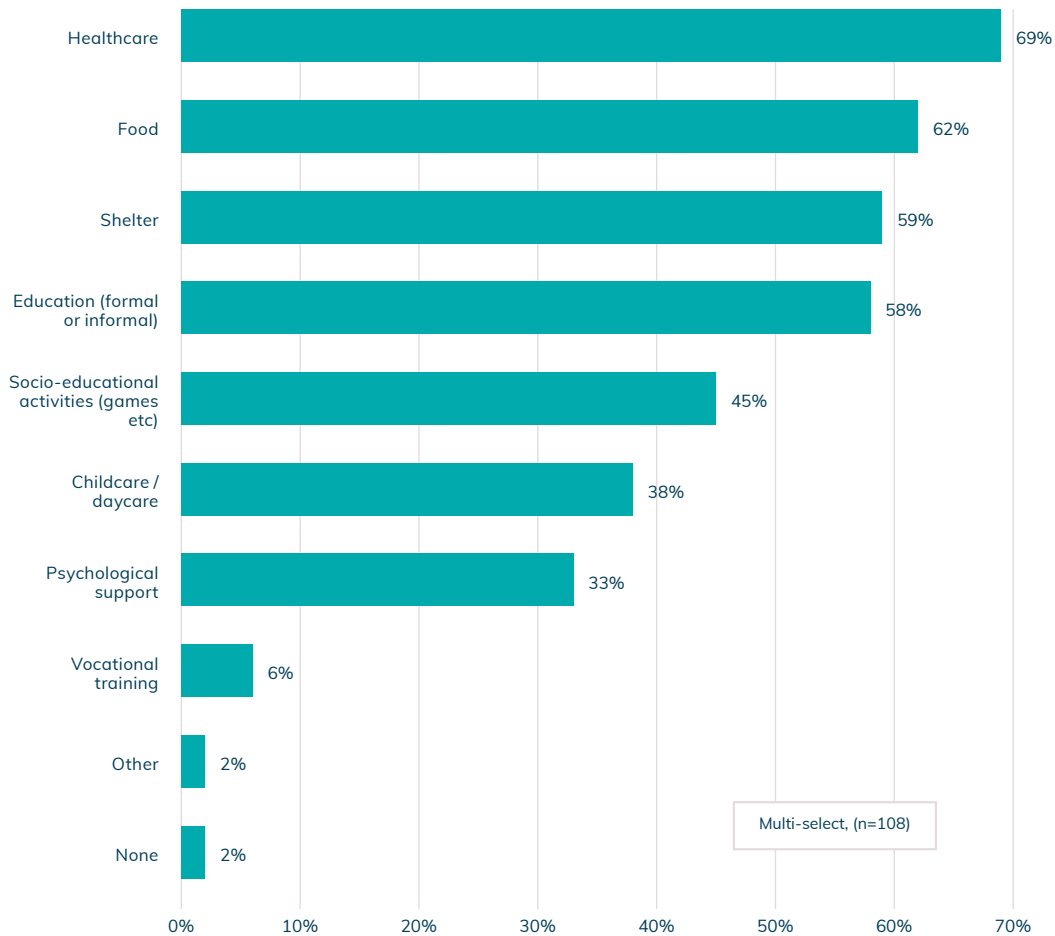
52% of the respondents reported having at least one child attending primary or secondary formal education, 19% had a child attending formal or informal daycare and 3% had a child attending koranic school. 35% reported that none of their children were attending any form of school or childcare because of lack of financial resources (13/38), short stay (12) or because the children under their care were not of school age.

On further disaggregation by nationality and location, 42 of the 48 migrants in Mega-Megado, who were Kenyan, had children attending some form of schooling or childcare. This could be linked to the fact that all respondents in Mega-Megado had reached the end of their journey. In contrast, the majority of caregivers in Addis Ababa (32/60) did not have any children attending school or childcare. This was particularly the case among South Sudanese (14/23), Somali (5/6) and Eritrean respondents (10/23) respondents in Addis Ababa. This may be linked to the more mixed movement aspirations for respondents in Addis as 44/60 had not reached the end of their journey. In fact, short length of stay (12/32), along with lack of financial resources (12/32), were the most often cited reasons for children not being in school or childcare.

## Needs for children varied by location

The greatest needs reported for children were healthcare (69%), food (62%), shelter (59%) and education (58%). However, there were variations in the needs reported based on respondents' nationality and the location of the interview. Among the 48 Kenyans surveyed in Mega-Megado, despite a majority of children being in school or child/care, education was the greatest need for children (41), followed by food (34), healthcare (33) and shelter (32). On the other hand, among the 60 respondents in Addis Ababa, the greatest needs for children were socio-educational activities, such as games and contact with other children (42), followed by healthcare (41) and psychosocial support (35). This suggests different programmatic priorities for each location. In Addis Ababa, no clear differences were observed based on age or nationality but this could be a result of the limited sample.

**Figure 6. What type of assistance or service do the children in your care need the most?**



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

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](http://www.mixedmigration.org/4mi)