

Protection risks, perpetrators and safety measures for Ethiopian refugees and migrants in Puntland

Somalia annually sees the transit of tens of thousands of Ethiopian refugees and migrants, who are travelling along the Eastern Route to the Arabian Peninsula.¹ This route is considered to be ‘unique in its precarity’ in terms of the degree of trafficking and exploitive smuggling dynamics² and other protection violations including physical and sexual abuse, harassment and discrimination, detention and even death.³ This snapshot, produced in partnership with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), delves deeper into the protection challenges that Ethiopian refugees and migrants face while on the move in Somalia, the perceived perpetrators and the safety measures that refugees and migrants put in place. It aims to inform the advocacy and programming activities of protection actors in Puntland, Somalia.

Key findings

- 82% of respondents identified places inside Somalia as dangerous. Tog Wajaale, Hargeisa and Laas Caanood were the most frequently identified.
- Criminal gangs and smugglers were perceived as the main perpetrators of abuses by refugee and migrant respondents in the three most dangerous locations in Somalia.
- A majority (88%) of respondents had personally experienced protection incidents during their journey, with physical violence and robbery being the main violations.
- 26% of women respondents aged 18-24 had personally experienced sexual violence.
- The majority (73%) of respondents travelled in groups to protect themselves from crime and abuse along the journey.
- Food, water and shelter were the main assistance needs of respondents.

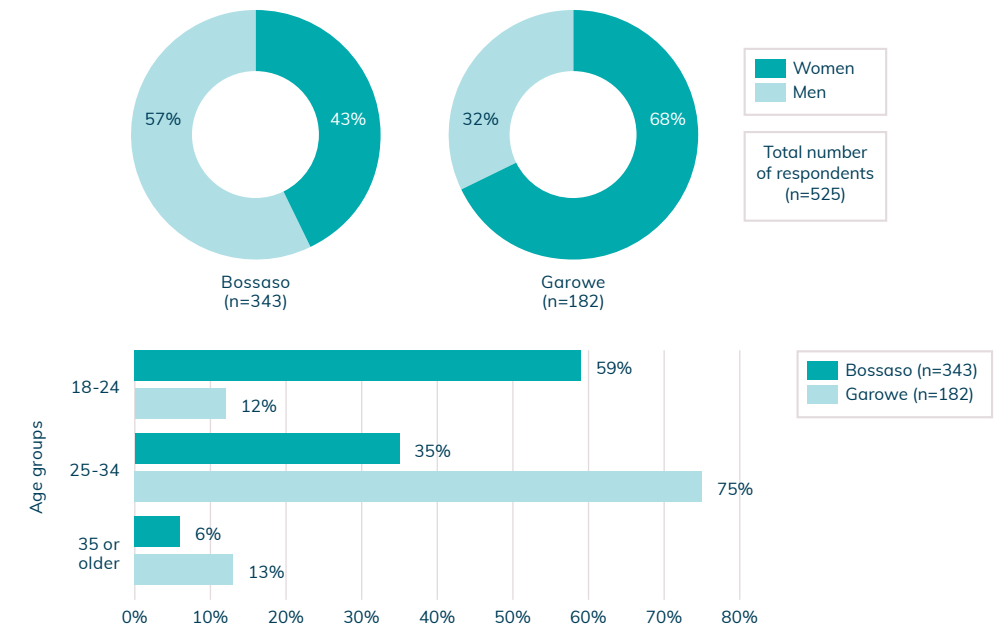
1 IOM (2022). [Migrant movements between the Horn of Africa and the Arabian Peninsula](#)
 2 Ravenstone Consult (2023). [Captive commodities: “This route is like a fire”](#)
 3 MMC (2019). [Everyone’s prey](#)

Data and profiles

This snapshot presents insights from 525 surveys conducted between June and July 2023 with Ethiopian refugees and migrants who arrived in Somalia less than two years before the interview, as per 4Mi’s targeting strategy. 65% of interviews were carried out in Bossaso and 35% in Garowe.

The majority (41%) of respondents were from Oromia, 17% from Amhara, 10% from Tigray and the remaining 32% from other regions of Ethiopia.⁴ 51% of respondents were women and 49% were men, with almost half (49%) aged 25-34, 43% aged 18-24 and 8% 35 and older.

Figure 1. Age and gender of respondents in both interview locations

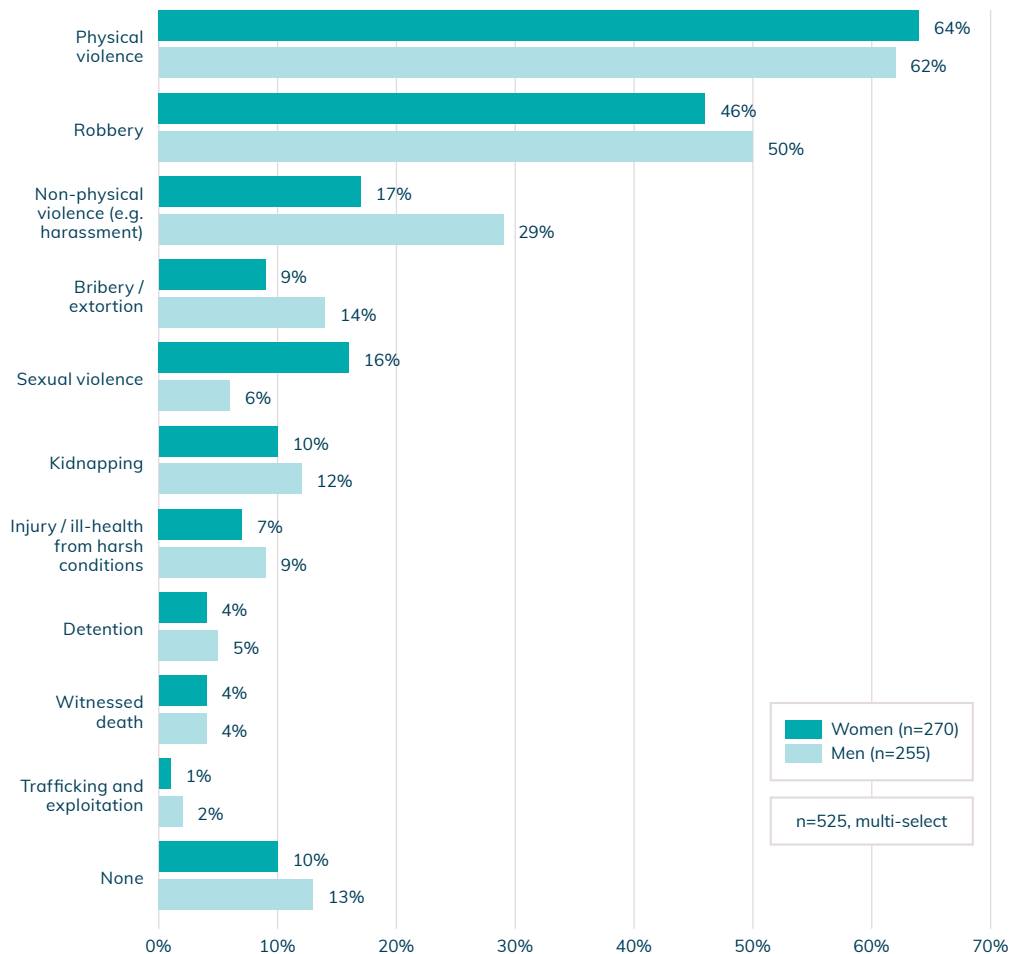


4 Other regions of origin are Addis Ababa (9%), Harari (7%), Dire Dawa (6%), SNNP (4%), Sidama (2%), Somali (2%), Gambela (1%) and Afar (<1%).

Most respondents have direct experiences of abuse, especially physical violence and robbery

A high proportion of respondents (88%) had personally experienced protection abuses, indicating the pervasive security challenges faced by refugees and migrants within Somalia. Among them, a majority (63%) endured physical violence and nearly half (48%) reported incidents of robbery. Further disaggregation revealed that young women, particularly those under 25 years old, were disproportionately affected by sexual violence, with 26% (35/120) of women aged 18-24 reporting such experiences.

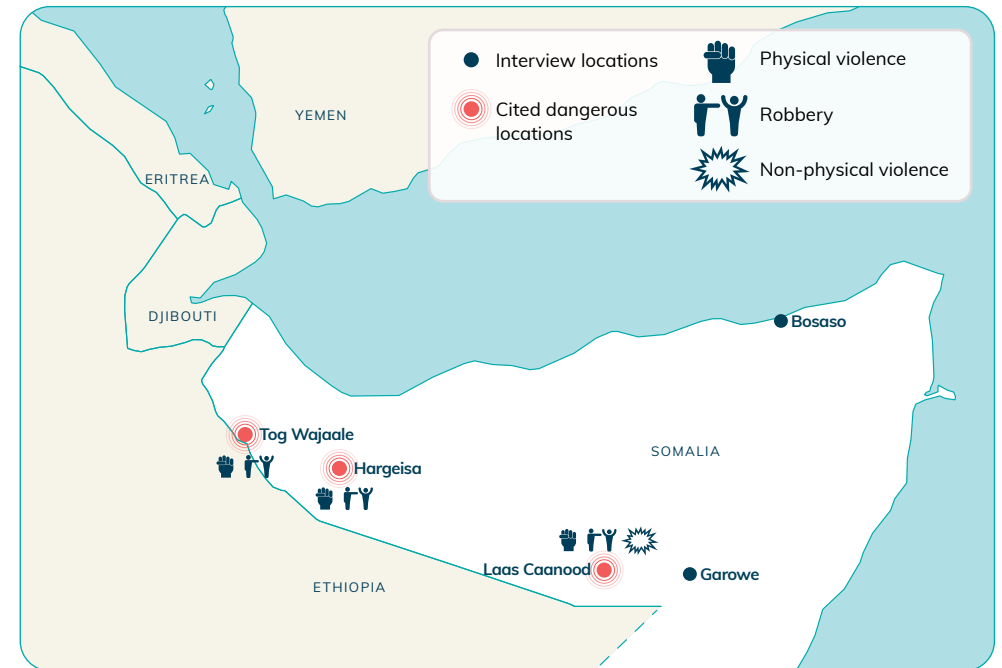
Figure 2. Have you personally experienced any of these types of incidents on your journey?



Tog Wajaale, Hargeisa and Laas Caanood the most dangerous locations for respondents in Somalia

When identifying dangerous places along their journey from points of departure in Ethiopia to locations of interview in Somalia, 82% of respondents said there were dangerous locations in Somalia (relative to 22% in Ethiopia).⁵ Tog Wajaale, Hargeisa and Laas Caanood in Somalia were the three most frequently identified dangerous locations. All three locations are positioned along key routes into and through Somalia towards coastal departure points to Yemen, namely Bosaso.^{6,7}

Map 1. Map showing top 3 dangerous locations in Somalia and the top perceived risks



Disclaimer: This map is for illustration purposes only. The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by MMC and UNHCR.

⁵ On the 4Mi survey, respondents can name more than one location as well as no locations.

⁶ IOM (2023). [Migration along the Eastern Corridor](#).

⁷ IOM (2023). [IOM Calls for Urgent Funding to Assist Thousands of Migrants Facing Life-Threatening Risks in Somalia](#)

Since February 2023, Laas Caanood has also seen clashes between the Somaliland Armed Forces and Dhulbahante clan militia,⁸ increasing risks for transiting refugees and migrants.⁹ Out of 251 respondents who stopped in Tog Wajaale, 52% cited it as dangerous; out of 355 respondents who stopped in Hargeisa, 37% cited it as dangerous; and out of 190 respondents that stopped in Laas Caanood, 57% cited it as dangerous.

Physical violence and robbery perceived as common risks in Tog Wajaale, Hargeisa and Laas Caanood

Across all three locations, physical violence and robbery were perceived as the most prevalent abuses by a majority of respondents who identified them as dangerous locations along their journey (Figure 2). In Hargeisa, detention (cited by 51% of those reporting Hargeisa as a dangerous location) was also expressed as a key risk. In Laas Caanood, other prevalent risks included non-physical violence (72%), kidnapping (50%), detention (49%) and bribery/extortion (47%). The perceived risks of specific types of abuse are high, but the types of abuse respondents consider to be risks in these locations is also broad, particularly in Laas Caanood. Assistance agencies should consider whether their current programmes address the needs arising from these abuses, and what the impact of programmes like cash assistance might be on the risk of certain abuses, and how they should engage and partner with state and local authorities to work towards reducing such abuses.

Figure 3. What were the main risks there? Protection risks in the top 3 dangerous locations in Somalia (multi-select)

	Tog Wajaale (n=131)	Hargeisa (n=131)	Laas Caanood (n=109)
Physical violence	89%	84%	94%
Robbery	86%	86%	72%
Non-physical violence (e.g. harrassment)	34%	30%	72%
Detention	24%	51%	25%
Injury/ill-health from harsh conditions	21%	24%	49%
Sexual violence	18%	11%	41%
Kidnapping	16%	22%	50%
Bribery/extortion	11%	18%	47%
Death	2%	0%	37%

Criminal gangs and smugglers perceived as the main perpetrators of abuses in Somalia

Respondents most often perceived criminal gangs as perpetrators of protection abuses across the three dangerous locations (Figure 3). Smugglers were also highlighted as key perpetrators in Laas Caanood (cited by 84% of those reporting Laas Caanood as a dangerous location) and Tog Wajaale (47%). To put this into context, 76% of all respondents used a smuggler during their journey for services like border crossing assistance, accommodation and in-country transportation.

Additionally, in Laas Caanood, 60% of respondents identified armed groups and militia as likely perpetrators, as well as military police (52%), border guards/immigration officials (51%) and local community members (49%). As with the data on protection risks, this reveals a diverse range of actors potentially threatening the safety of refugees and

⁸ DIIS (2023). [Conflict in Laas Caanood and Crisis in Somaliland](#).

⁹ IOM (2023). [IOM Calls for Urgent Funding to Assist Thousands of Migrants Facing Life-Threatening Risks in Somalia](#)

migrants. Not only does this demonstrate that people on the move experience multiple threats from multiple sources, but also it highlights that actors responsible for safety and security can be sources of abuse and raises questions about whether refugees and migrants have sufficient safe spaces in these locations to which they can go.

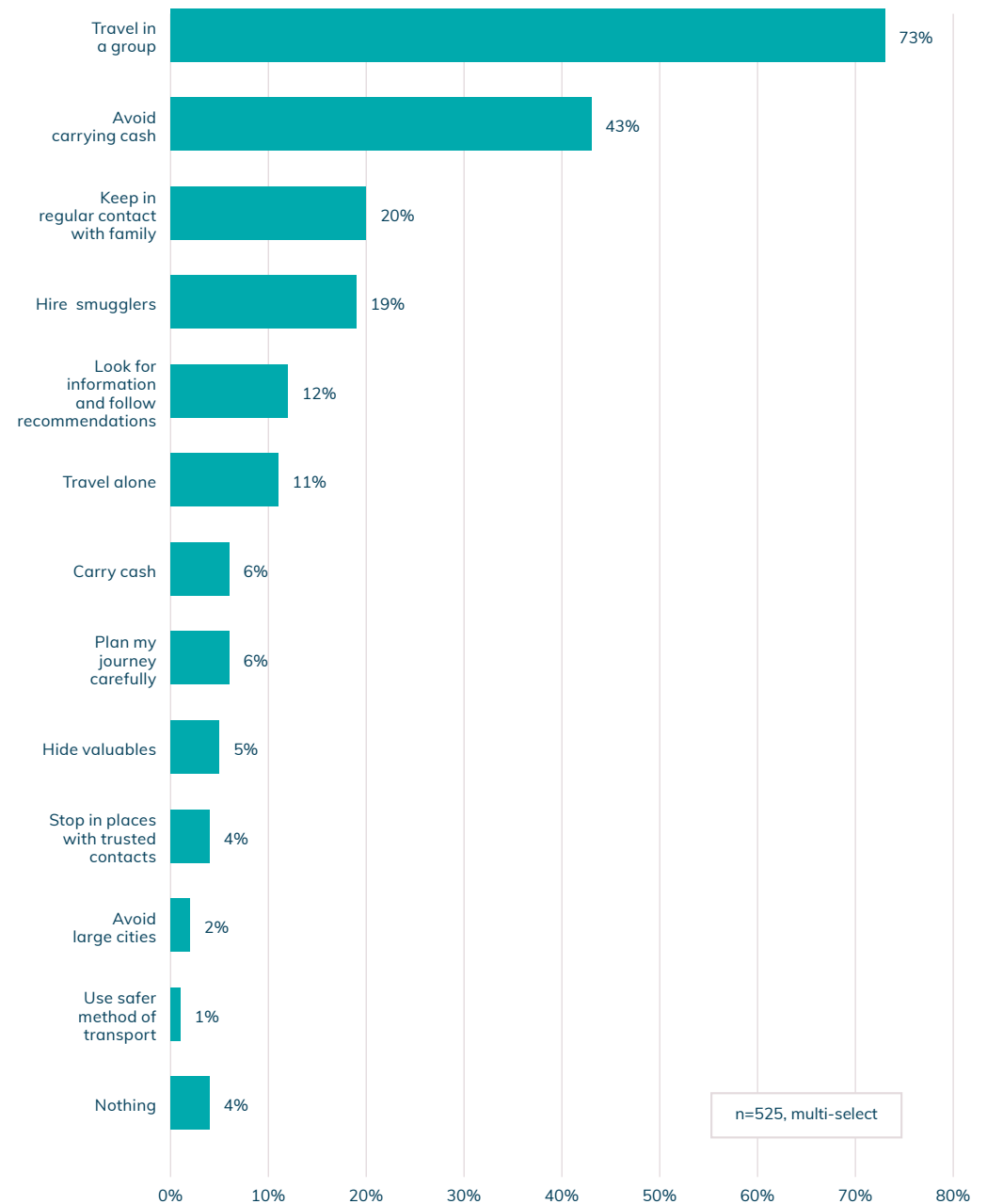
Figure 4. Who was likely to be perpetrating such incidents? Top 3 dangerous locations in Somalia (multi-select)

	Tog Wajaale (n=131)	Hargeisa (n=131)	Laas Caanood (n=109)
Criminal gangs	76%	78%	67%
Border guards/immigration officials	25%	46%	51%
Armed groups/militias	40%	44%	60%
Smugglers	47%	42%	84%
Military police	19%	41%	52%
People from local community	20%	30%	49%
Other migrants	2%	1%	7%
None	4%	5%	0%

To protect themselves from crime and abuse, respondents travel in groups

73% of respondents cited travelling in groups to protect themselves from crime and abuse. 43% also avoided carrying cash and 20% kept in regular contact with family as a way of protecting themselves. Further disaggregation by age group revealed that young men and women aged 18-24 hired smugglers in an attempt to protect themselves along the journey (35% of young men and 26% of young women). However, as mentioned earlier, smugglers were also often cited as perpetrators of protection incidents along the journey, highlighting the complex nature of these relationships.

Figure 5. What do you do to protect yourself from abuse and crime on your journey?

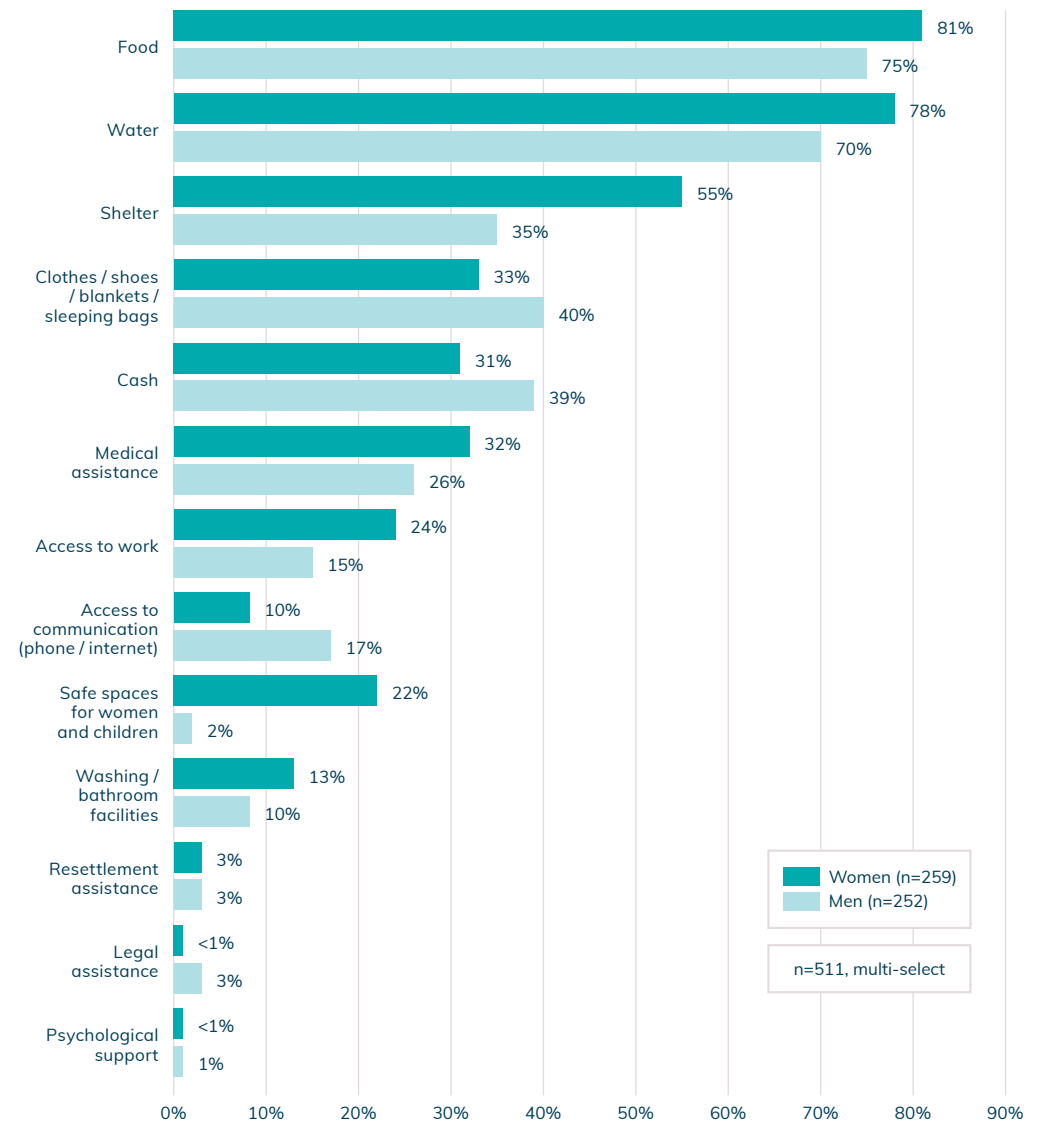


Ethiopians on the move in Somalia highlighted the need for basic necessities such as food, water and shelter

Beyond the protection risks described above, respondents did not have adequate access to basic needs along their journey. Nearly all (97%) respondents reported needing assistance at time of interview, with the majority (78%) citing food, water (74%) and shelter (45%) as needs. In Garowe, a higher percentage of respondents expressed a need for basic necessities, with 93% citing a requirement for food, 93% for water and 92% for shelter. In Bosaso, the numbers were lower, with 70% needing food, 64% needing water and 22% needing shelter. Interestingly, a notable difference was observed in the need for cash, with 51% of respondents in Bosaso requiring it, relative to 2% in Garowe (despite a higher need there for basic relief).

Additional analysis also revealed that alongside basic needs, more women needed medical assistance (32%), access to work (24%) and safe spaces for women and children (22%). On the other hand, men, in addition to basic needs, were more in need of clothes (40%) and cash (39%).

Figure 6. What kind of assistance do you need?



Note on terminology

MMC 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 economic opportunities. UNHCR - among other refugee protection actors - 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 in publishing this snapshot, the term “mixed movement” is used.



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 East 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