

Mixed Movements in Somalia: Dangerous locations, smuggling dynamics and access to information and assistance

Drawing on more than 1,000 surveys with refugees and migrants, this infographic examines their perceptions of dangerous locations, direct experiences of abuse and harsh conditions and their interactions with and perceptions of smugglers. Additionally, it explores the sources of information that refugees and migrants relied on before and during their journey, as well as their access to assistance.

METHODOLOGY

DATA COLLECTION SITES:

Garowe (n=530) and Bosaso (n=525)

DATA COLLECTION PERIOD:

05 May – 24 June 2024

METHODOLOGY OF DATA COLLECTION:

Face-to-face interviews

SAMPLE:

1,055 refugees and migrants in Somalia

Background

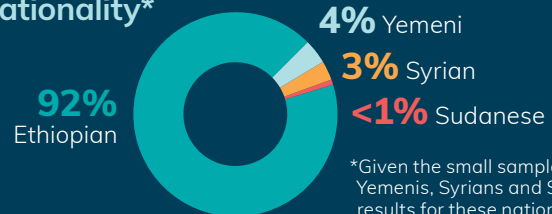
- **Somalia is a key origin and transit country for refugees and migrants moving** along the Eastern Route towards the Arabian Peninsula, with thousands departing by boat each year from the coastal cities of Berbera and Bosaso.¹
- **Somalia is also a destination country.** Out of some 335,000 people observed moving within the Horn of Africa in 2023 captured by IOM's flow monitoring, 32% were aiming to reach Somalia.² Additionally, according to UNHCR, Somalia hosts over 39,000 refugees and asylum seekers as of May 2024.³
- **Ongoing conflict, insecurity and violence significantly impact the lives of refugees and migrants** in the country. Tensions in Laascaanood since February 2023 have forced some refugees and migrants traveling on foot to take longer and more arduous routes to reach Bosaso, prolonging their journeys and heightening their exposure to injury and abuse.⁴
- **Gender-based violence (GBV),** including rape, harassment and physical violence, is a key risk for women and girls in Somalia.⁵ Since January 2023, UNHCR's PSN Report and Protection and Solutions Monitoring Network identified 10,926 GBV cases, making up 56% of the total 19,419 protection violations/abuses identified in Somalia.⁶
- **Criminal gangs and smugglers** were perceived as the **main perpetrators of abuses** by refugees and migrants interviewed by MMC in Somalia in 2023.⁷

Respondents profiles

Sex

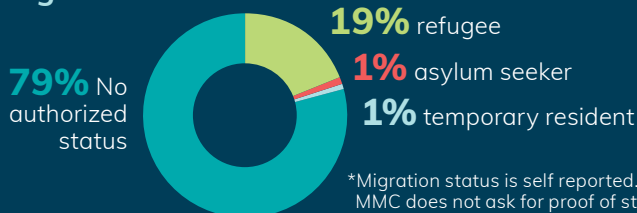


Nationality*



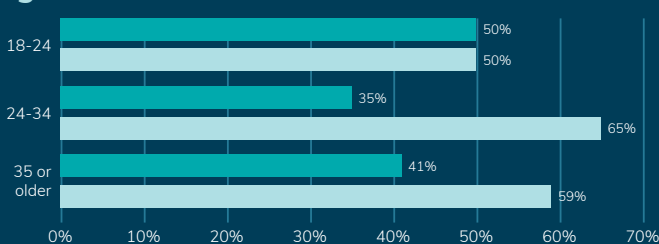
*Given the small samples of Yemenis, Syrians and Sudanese, results for these nationalities should be treated with caution.

Migration status*



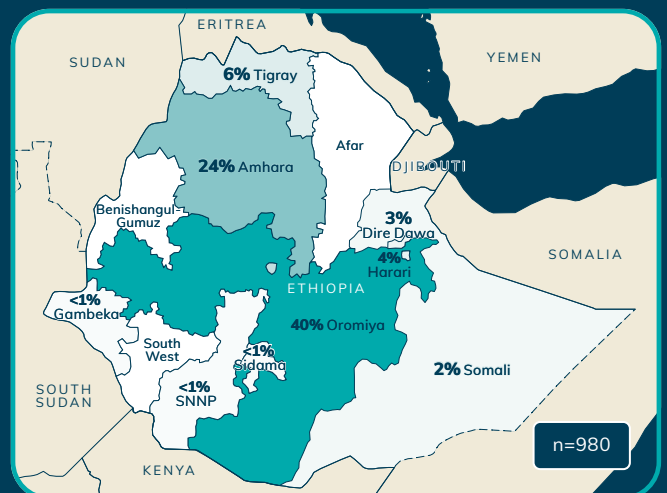
*Migration status is self reported. MMC does not ask for proof of status.

Age



Note: The 4Mi sample is purposive. Data presented in this snapshot cannot be considered as representative of the full population.

Regions of origin of Ethiopian respondents



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 UNHCR and MMC.

1 IOM (December 2023). [Regional Migrant Response Plan for the Horn of Africa and Yemen](#).

2 IOM RDH (June 2024). [Displacement Tracking Matrix - East and Horn of Africa](#).

3 UNHCR (May 2024). [Somalia Operational Update](#).

4 IOM (May 2024). [Migration Along the Eastern Corridor](#).

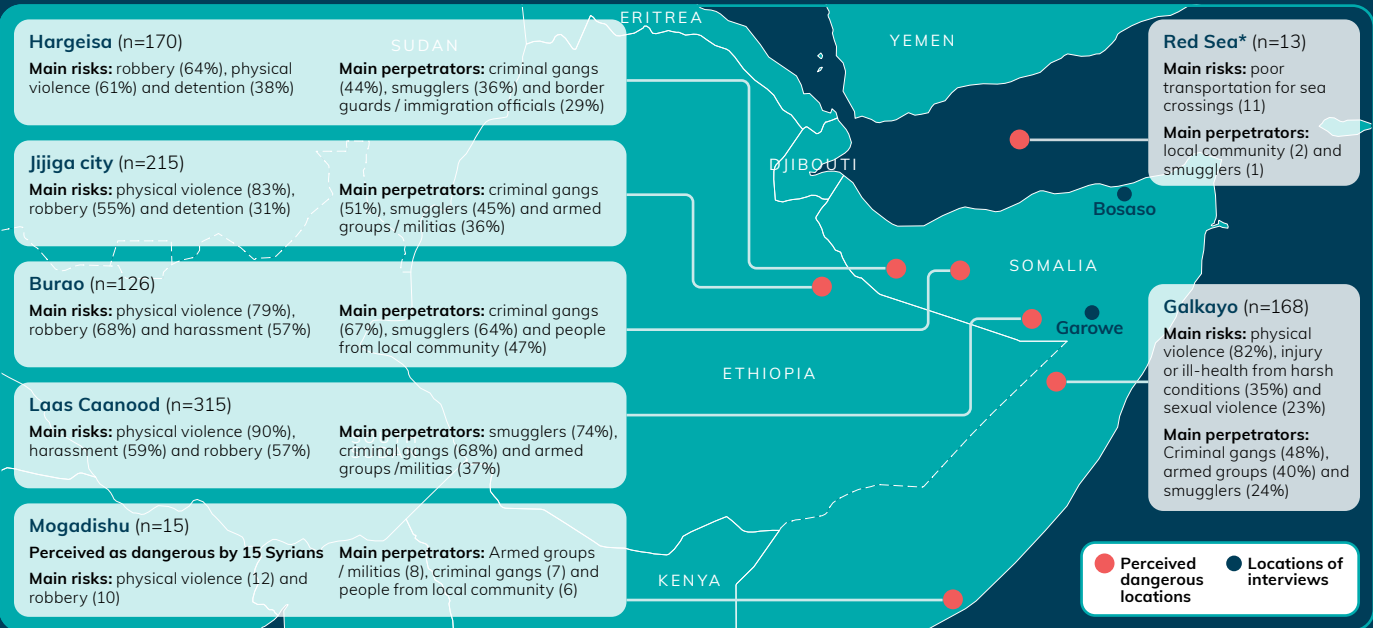
5 MMC (February 2024). [4Mi Snapshot - Protection risks, perpetrators and safety measures for Ethiopian refugees and migrants in Puntland](#).

6 UNHCR (August 2024). [Protection & Return Monitoring Network](#).

7 MMC (February 2024). [Ibid.](#)

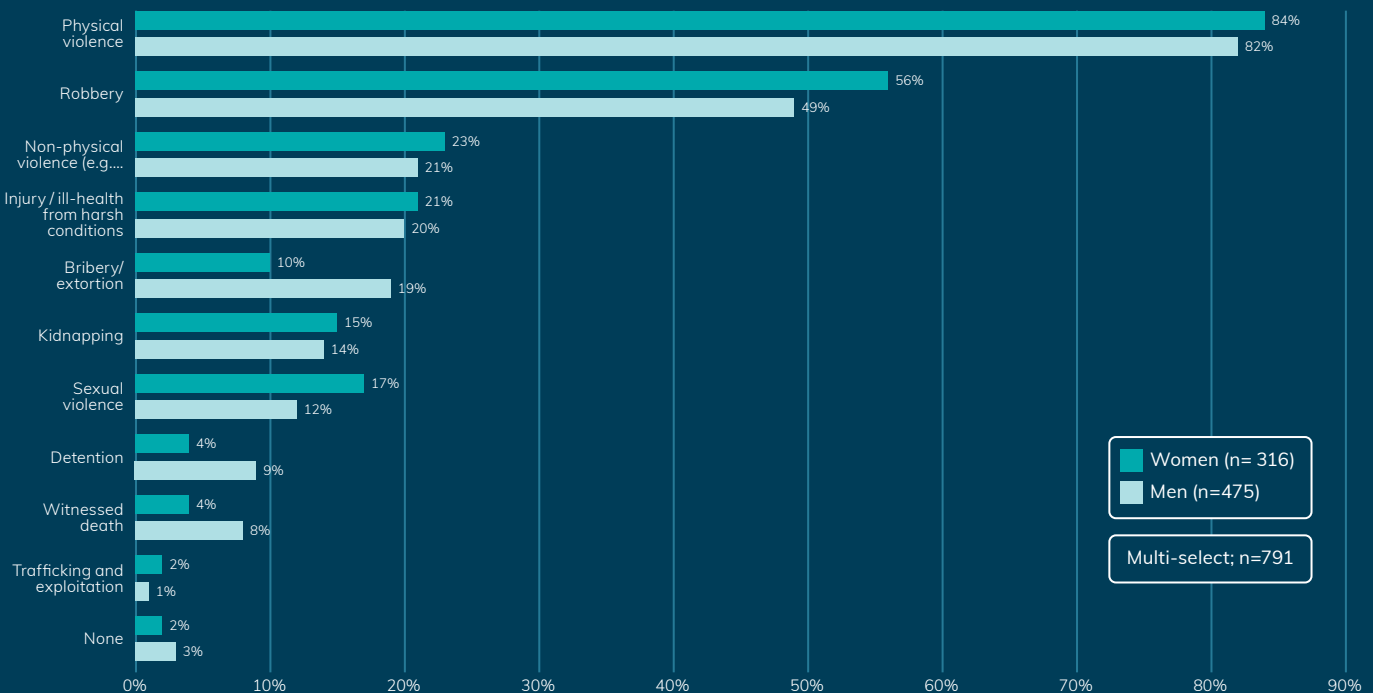
Protection concerns along the route

Top perceived dangerous locations that respondents had transited on their journey



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 UNHCR and MMC. *Cited by Yemenis who crossed to Somalia. Most cited no perpetrators, as capsizing was perceived as a threat from the sea.

Have you personally experienced any of these types of incidents on your journey?*



*This question on direct experiences was only available to respondents who identified at least one dangerous location along their journey. Note: Exposure to abuse did not appear to vary by region of origin among Ethiopians.

Key findings

- 75% of all respondents perceived at least one dangerous location on their journey, and 73% reported directly experiencing a protection incident. This aligns with MMC's previous snapshot on Somalia that identifies the prevalence of abuse in places of early transit along the Eastern Route and highlights an urgent need for enhanced protection programming for refugees and migrants.⁸
- The perception of criminal gangs and smugglers as primary perpetrators of abuse across multiple locations highlights the pervasive influence of organized crime on movements along the Eastern Route.
- Women respondents cited greater exposure to most abuses, except for bribery, detention and witnessing death.
- 83% of respondents aim to move onward to Gulf States and, hence, will be highly exposed to shipwrecks when crossing the Red Sea – as 13 of the 39 Yemeni respondents who made the crossing had identified this as a principal danger. Indeed, during a single incident in June 2024, over 180 migrants, primarily from Ethiopia and Somalia, were reported dead or missing after a boat from Somalia capsized.⁹

Influence of smugglers on the route through Somalia

Use of smugglers



74% of Ethiopians used a smuggler. Half (16 of 32) of Syrians and few (7 of 42) Yemenis used a smuggler



No use of smuggler



Yes, one for only part of the journey

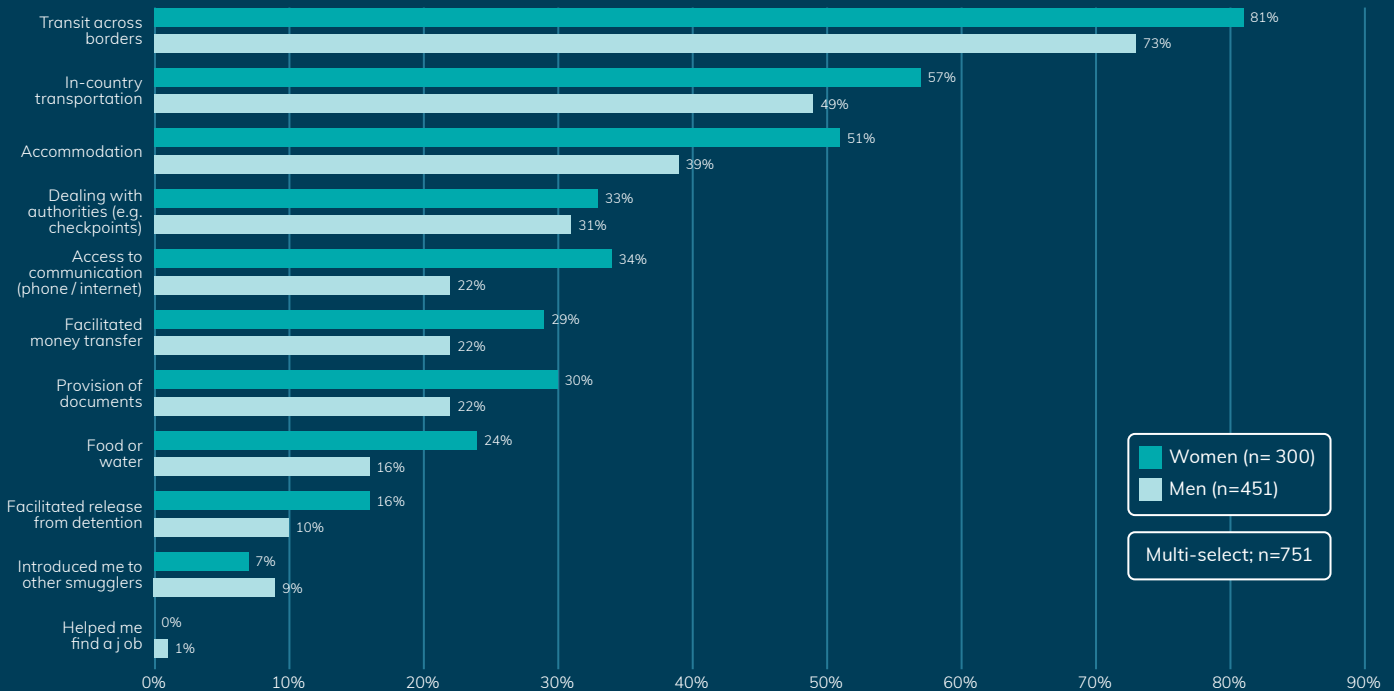


Yes, one for the entire journey



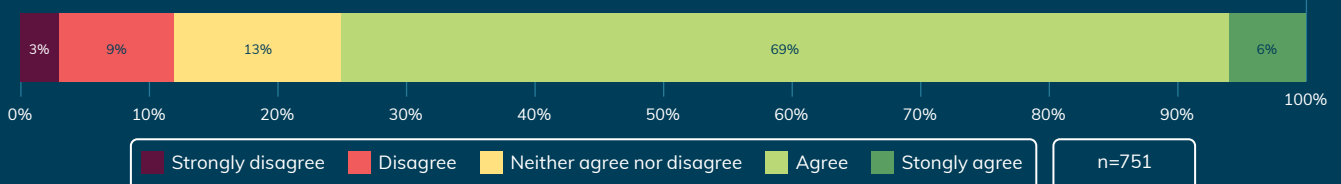
Yes, several for different parts of the journey

Have you personally experienced any of these types of incidents on your journey?*



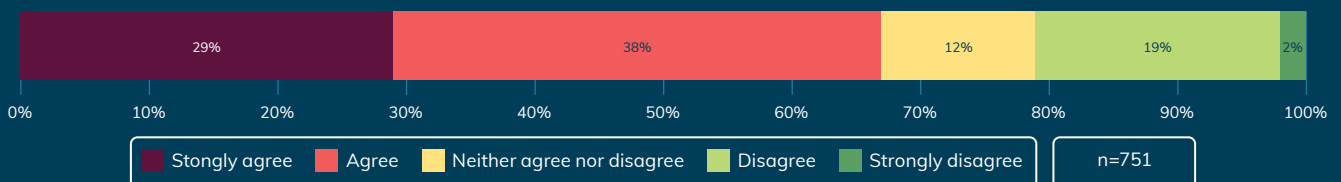
To what extent do you agree with the following statement:

“The smuggler/s I used helped me in achieving my goal of moving to another country”



To what extent do you agree with the following statement:

“I was intentionally misled about the journey by my smuggler/s”



Key findings

- The **use of smugglers was highly prevalent among Ethiopian respondents** along the Eastern Route and underscores the lack of legal pathways available to them.
- Across the board, **women more often sought to engage smugglers for different services**, indicating a potentially greater need for support during their journeys and higher vulnerability to abuse.
- While 75% of respondents agreed that smugglers helped them achieve their goal, 67% also felt intentionally misled by them, stressing the **complex nature of such relationships**. This echoes a finding from MMC's previous Somalia snapshot, which shows smugglers as both perpetrators of abuse and sources of safety.¹⁰

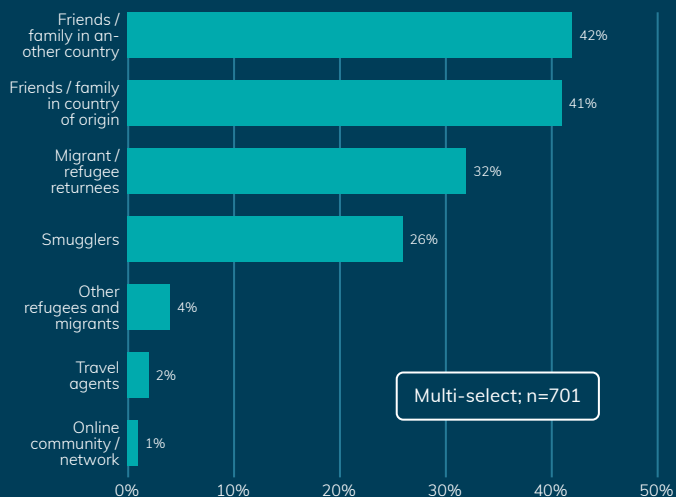
Access to information about the journey

Before the journey

66% obtained information about routes, destination, cost, risks, etc. before the journey



What were your sources of information before your journey?



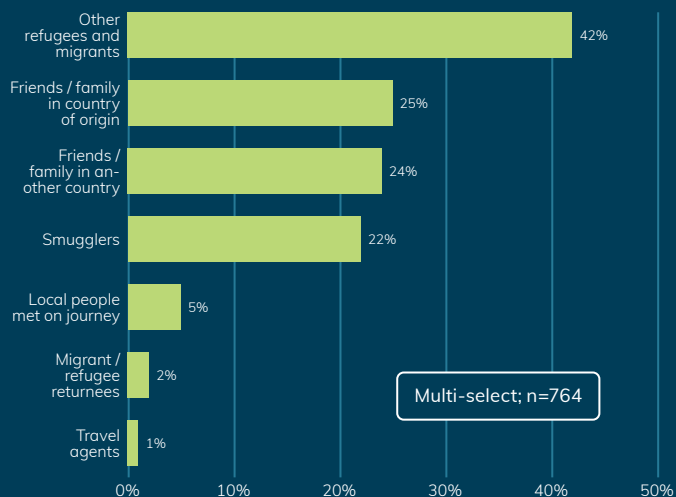
*Yemenis and Syrians primarily relied on friends/family in their country of origin, followed by friends/family in another country and travel agents.

During the journey

72% obtained information about routes, destination, cost, risks, etc. during the journey

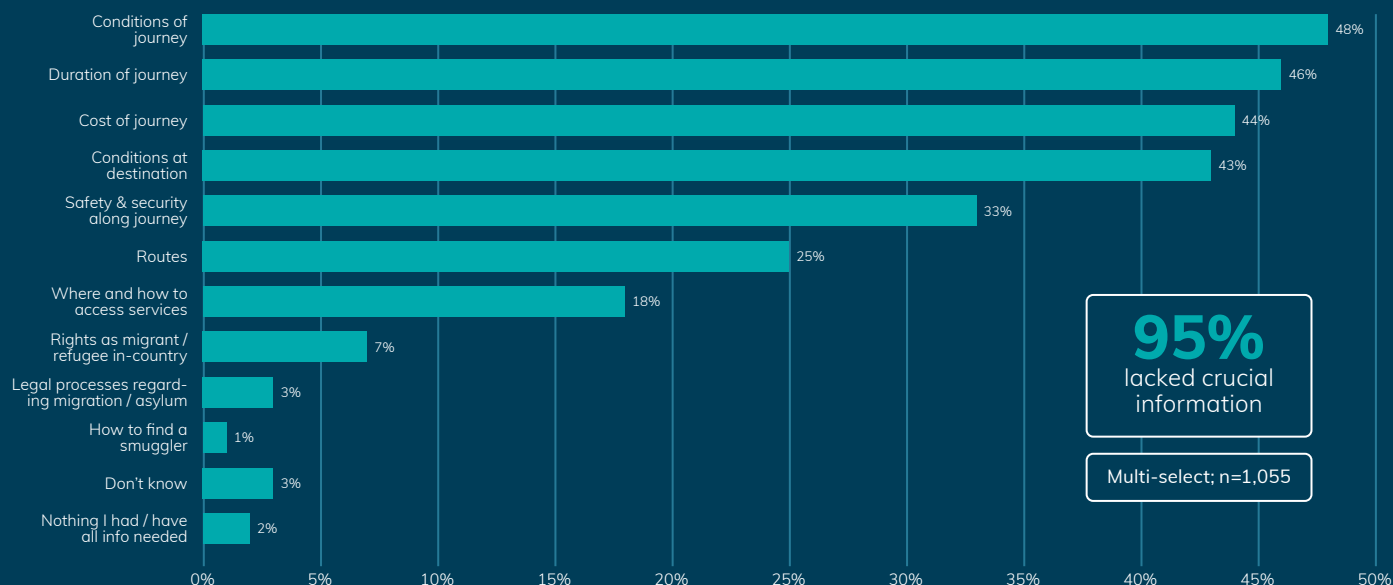


What were your sources of information during your journey?



*Yemenis and Syrians primarily relied on friends/family in their country of origin, followed by friends/family in another country and travel agents.

What information would have been most useful that you did not receive?



Key findings

- Before and during their journey, **respondents primarily relied on personal networks for information** and on other refugees and migrants while en route. This underlines the important role of trusted personal connections and the notable (and corresponding) absence of reliance on authorities, NGOs and UN agencies in providing essential information.
- Despite the fact that most respondents accessed information before and during the journey, **nearly all (95%) reported lacking crucial information**, mostly related to the conditions of the journey (48%), duration (46%), cost (44%) and conditions at destination (43%).
- The lack of crucial information suggests that **refugees and migrants are making decisions with insufficient data**, increasing their vulnerability to and dependency on smugglers during the journey, and making them susceptible to exploitation, abuse and injury due, among others, to the harsh conditions on the routes.

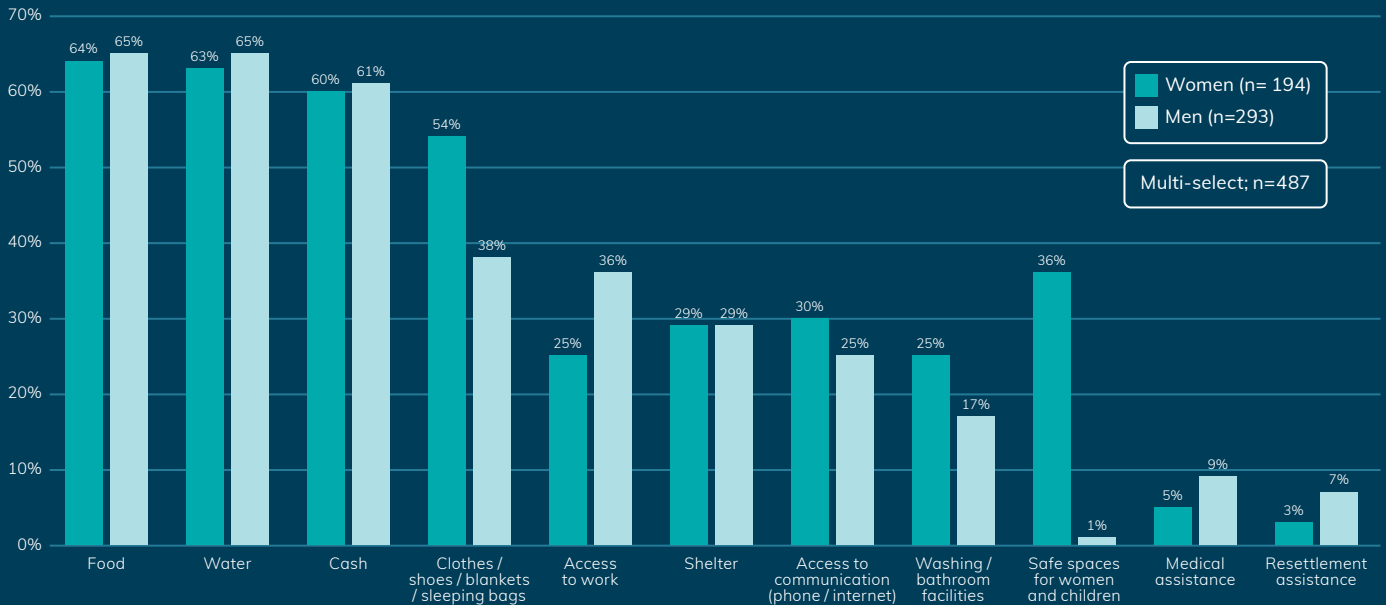
Assistance needs in Bosaso and Garowe

What kind of assistance do you need in your current location?

Bosaso



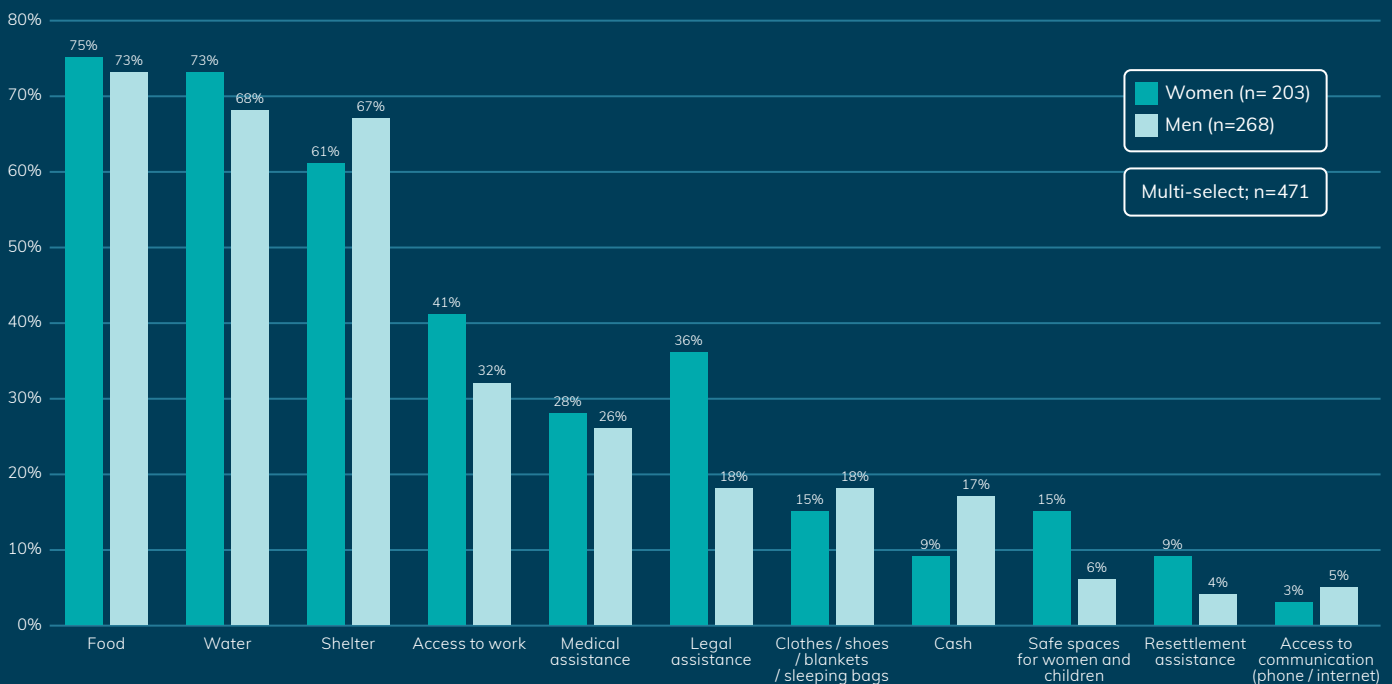
93% of respondents in **Bosaso** cited they were in need of assistance



Garowe



89% of respondents in **Garowe** cited they were in need of assistance



Key findings

- The primary needs among respondents in Bosaso were food (64%), water (64%) and cash (60%). In Garowe, they were food (74%), water (70%) and shelter (64%), **emphasising the urgent demand for basic sustenance and essential resources across both locations.**
- **The need for safe spaces for women and children was reported more often in Bosaso,** suggesting greater gender-specific needs there.
- **Access to work** as a key need may indicate economic instability, barriers to employment, dependency on external support and the need for targeted interventions to support livelihoods.
- **In Garowe, medical and legal assistance were notable needs.**

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 and IOM - among other refugee protection actors - apply 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, IOM 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 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

