

The impact of the drought on migration from Ethiopia to Somalia: 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 Somalia.²

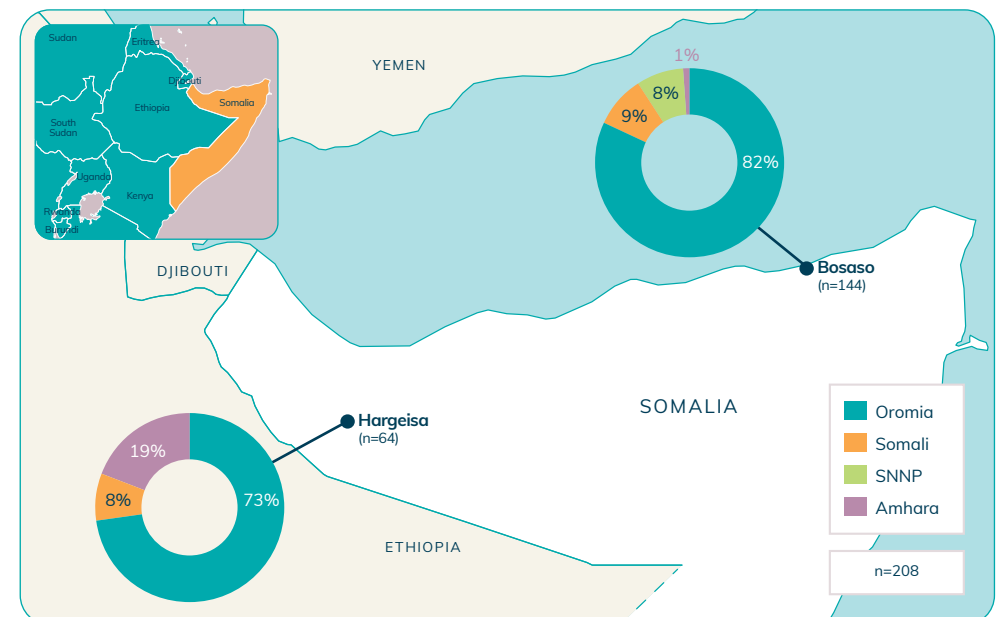
Key findings

- 51% 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 income (80%), crop failure (66%), loss of livestock (65%), food scarcity (53%), crop disease (45%) and high food prices (44%).
- Loss of crops (72%), loss of livestock (65%) and increase in food prices (52%) were cited as key triggers of the decision to migrate.
- 58% of respondents' household members did not move from their location of origin, mainly because they did not have enough money for all to move (45%) or to care for other household members (45%).
- Among those with at least one family member who had also moved from their place of origin, the majority specified they had moved internally, near their place of origin in Ethiopia (48/81).

Data and profiles

This snapshot focuses its analysis on 208 surveys with Ethiopians who said their movement was linked to drought. Data were collected in November and December 2022 in Bosaso (69%) and Hargeisa (31%). Respondents were originally from the Oromia (80%), Somali (9%), Amhara (6%) and SNNP (5%) regions of Ethiopia. 63% of respondents had departed their regions of origin in 2022, while others in 2021 (31%) 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 in Bossaso and Hargeisa



1 OCHA (2022). [Horn of Africa Drought: Regional Humanitarian Overview & Call to Action](#).
 2 An accompanying snapshot on migration from Ethiopia to Djibouti is available [here](#).

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 IOM.

The majority were men (66%); 34% were women. 13% were travelling with children in their care. 40% of respondents were earning an income in the 12 months prior to leaving Ethiopia. Among these (n=84), the most common sectors of work were: agriculture/pastoralism (25/84), small businesses (shop/catering/services) (21), domestic work/cleaning (17) and construction (10). Of the 60% of respondents who were not earning an income prior to their departure, 71% were unemployed, 15% were taking care of the home/children, 11% were students and 2% were sick.³ Additionally, 67% of respondents described their location of departure as rural and 33% 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 51% of a larger sample of 408 Ethiopians (69% men and 31% women) interviewed in Bossaso and Hargeisa, all coming from locations in Ethiopia that were projected either to reach Acute Food Insecurity Phase 4 (Emergency or higher) or Level 5 (Famine) by the Famine Early Warning System (FEWS) by October 2022.⁴ While 4Mi data are not representative and should be treated with caution, 51% underscores the considerable impact that the drought crisis is having on international movements. Additionally, 75% 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.

88% of drought-affected respondents mentioned that they had not yet reached the end of their journey at the time of the interview in Somalia, suggesting plans for onward movement. Saudi Arabia was the most common intended destination for those not planning to stay in Somalia (88%; 161/183).

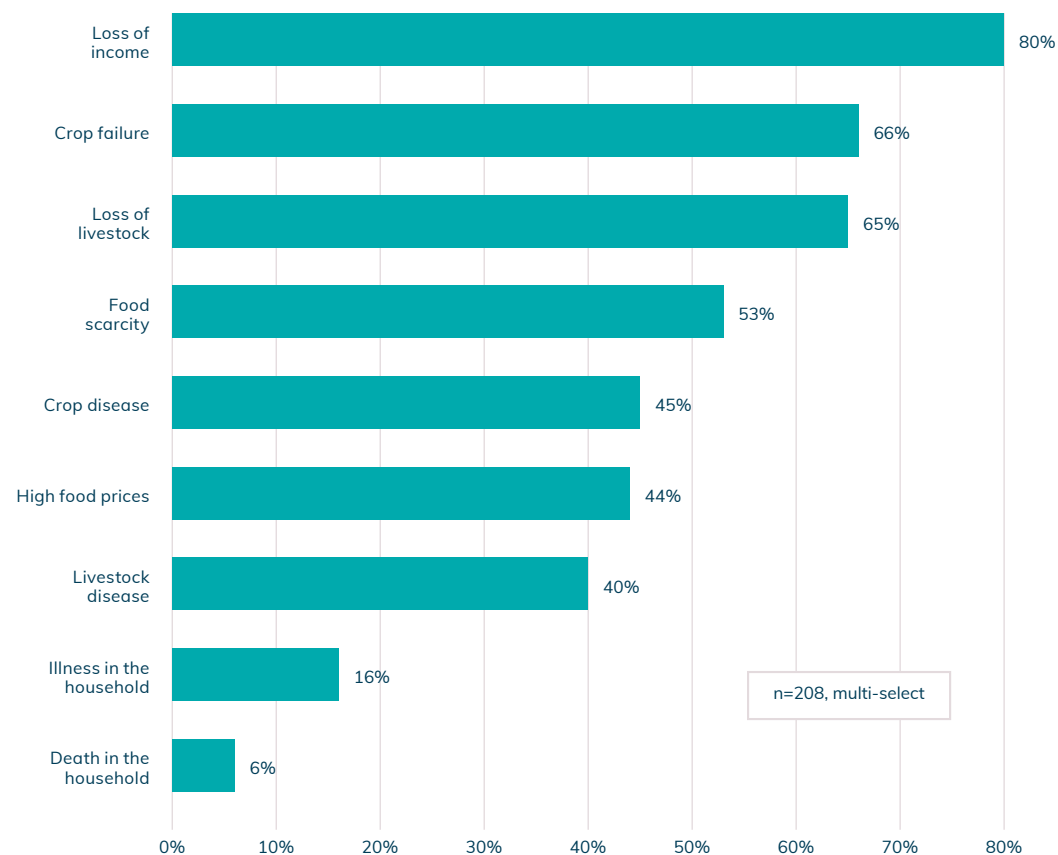
³ 1 respondent refused to answer.

⁴ FEWS (2022). [Key message update: September 2022](#).

Drought impacted respondents' households through loss of income, crop failure, and loss of livestock

Affected respondents reported multiple impacts of a lack of rainfall, including loss of income (80%), crop failure (66%), loss of livestock (65%), food scarcity (53%), crop disease (45%), high food prices (44%), livestock disease (40%), illness in the household (16%) and death in the household (6%), highlighting the multiple stressors brought on by the drought crisis (Figure 2). There was no observable variation in the types of impact that drought had on men versus women respondents' households.

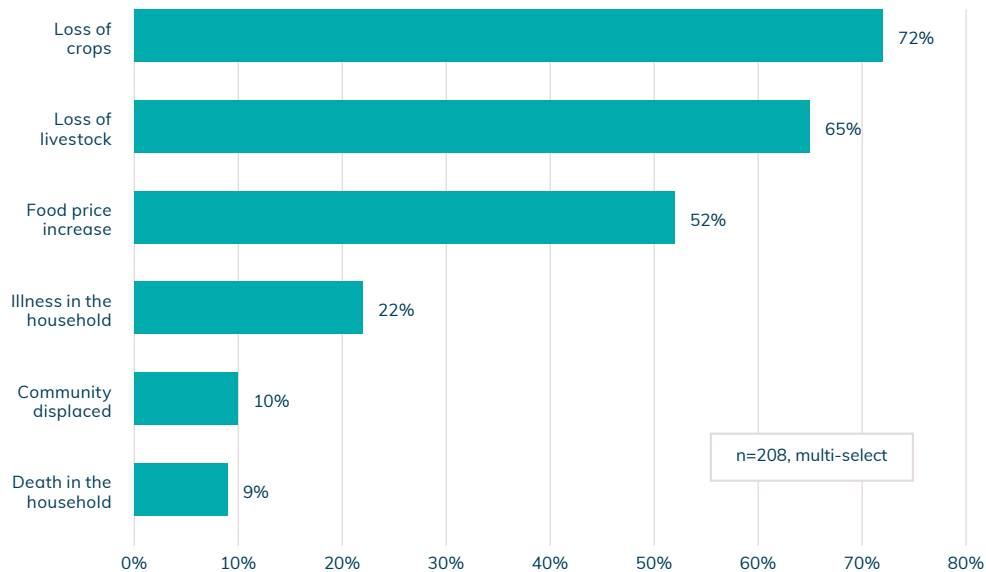
Figure 2. What impact did the lack of rainfall have on your household?



Loss of crops and loss of livestock 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 loss of crops (72%), loss of livestock (65%) and food price increase (52%) as triggers. Illness in the household (22%) and displacement among the community (10%) were also reported as triggers. Men and women respondents experienced the same top three triggers; however, increased food prices were the most-cited trigger among women (73% vs. 44%) (Figure 3). On average, respondents identified 2.3 triggering events, suggesting that movement linked to the drought is less the result of a single additional livelihood constraint and more linked to multiple threats.

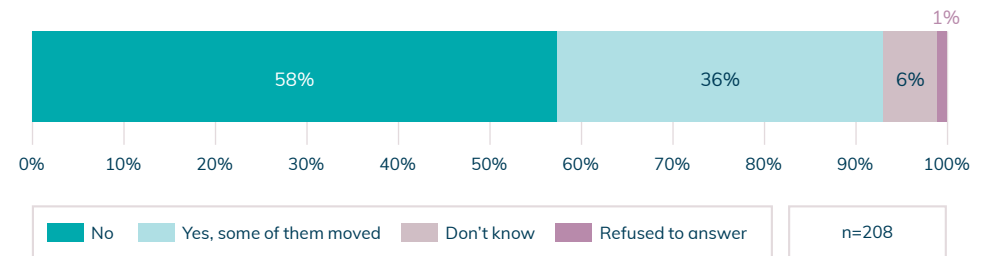
Figure 3. Was there a specific event or events that triggered your decision to leave?



Most respondents' household members stayed behind

58% of respondents reported that members of their households had not moved from their location of origin. On the other hand, 36% of respondents reported that some of their household members had moved, while 6% of the respondents did not know if other household members had moved. Women respondents reported a higher share of other members of their households moving than men (45% vs. 31%), which might indicate that men respondents were more often the first to migrate of their household members.

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



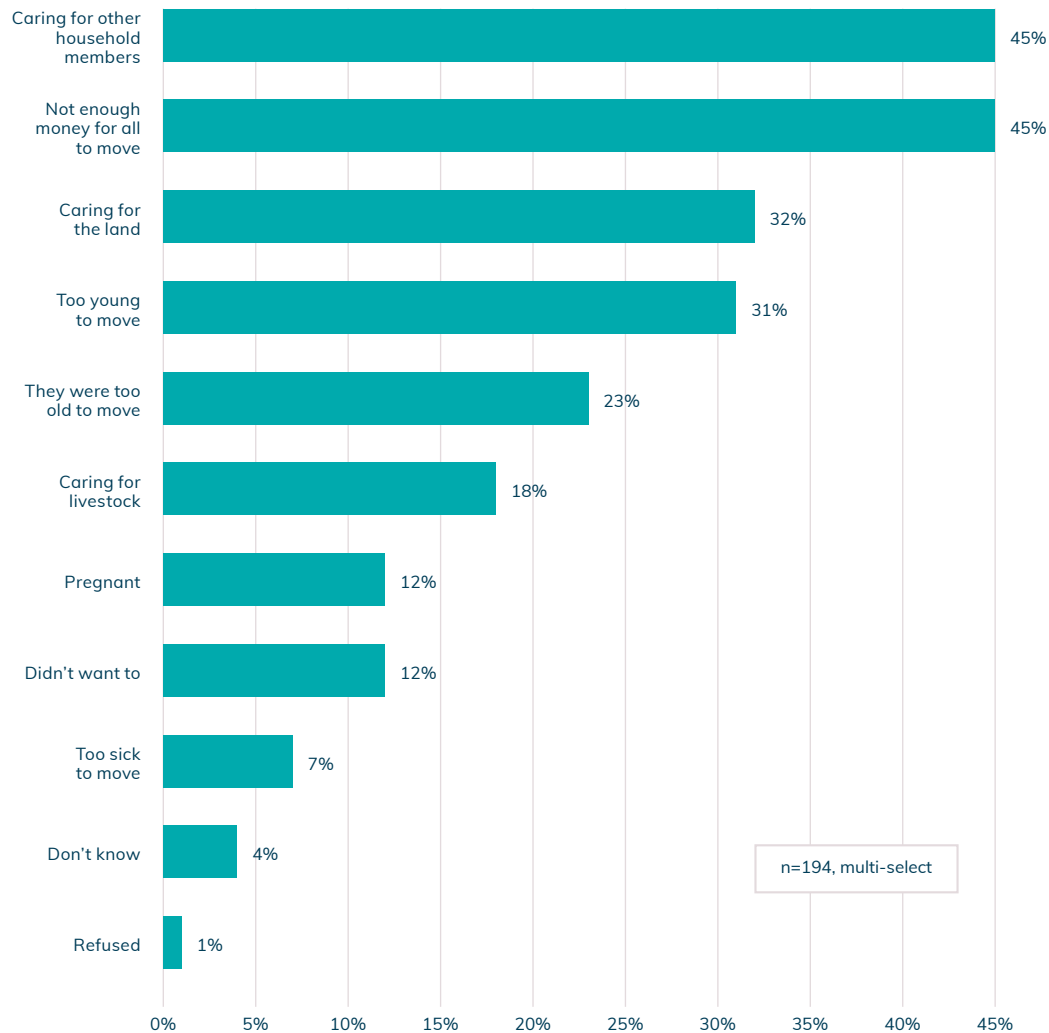
Among those with at least one family member who had also moved from their place of origin (n=81), the majority specified they had moved internally, near their place of origin (48/81), or across borders, but near their place of origin (29). 15 had members who had moved internationally across longer distances.

Household members stayed behind because there was not enough money to leave, or to care for others

Most respondents with at least one household member who had remained in their place of origin (n=194) cited that they did so because they did not have enough money for all to move (45%), they remained to care for other members (45%), they remained to care for the land (32%), they were too young to move (31%) or they were too old to move (23%). Others remained to care for livestock (18%), remained because they were pregnant

(12%), too sick to move (7%) or did not want to move (12%). With 12% of respondents 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. Differences between gender were slight.

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