

IOM REGIONAL DATA HUB FOR EAST AND HORN OF AFRICA

RETURN MIGRATION DYNAMICS IN FIVE ETHIOPIAN COMMUNITIES OF HIGH EMIGRATION

Insights from the Regional Data Hub (RDH) Research on Young Ethiopian
Migration along the Eastern and Southern Corridors: Case Study Report 3

December 2021



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ABOUT IOM

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) is committed to the principle that humane and orderly migration benefits migrants and society. As an intergovernmental organization, IOM acts with its partners in the international community to: assist in meeting the operational challenges of migration; advance understanding of migration issues; encourage social and economic development through migration; and uphold the human dignity and well-being of migrants.

ABOUT THE REGIONAL DATA HUB

Established in early 2018 at IOM's Regional Office for the East and Horn of Africa (EHOA), the Regional Data Hub (RDH) aims to support evidence-based, strategic and policy-level discussion on migration through a combination of initiatives. The RDH aims to enhance the availability of migration related data in the region and promote its dissemination to achieve stronger governance outcomes and positive impacts for migrants and societies as a whole. In particular, the RDH intends to facilitate technical coordination, harmonize the different IOM data collection activities and foster a multi-layered analysis of mixed migration movements, trends and characteristics across the region. Through a combination of IOM data collection methodologies, research initiatives, and continuous engagements with National Statistical Offices (NSOs), key line Ministries and Regional Economic Communities (RECs), the RDH aims to fill the existing gaps in strengthening the regional evidence base on migration. This contribution will, in turn, help improve policy-making, programming and coordination between all the stakeholders involved. The [RDH strategy](#) is structured along four pillars, in line with [IOM's Migration Data Strategy](#). Publications can be consulted at <https://eastandhornofafrica.iom.int/regional-data-hub>. The RDH and this particular research project are largely funded through the generous support of the EU-IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration in the Horn of Africa (EU-IOM JI).

ABOUT THE EU-IOM JOINT INITIATIVE PROGRAMME

The EU-IOM JI programme was launched in December 2016 and is funded by the European Union (EU) Emergency Trust Fund for Africa. The programme brings together 26 African countries of the Sahel and Lake Chad, the Horn of Africa, and North Africa regions, along with the EU and IOM around the goal of ensuring that migration is safer, more informed and better governed for both migrants and their communities. The programme enables migrants who decide to return to their countries of origin to do so in a safe and dignified way. It provides assistance to returning migrants to help them restart their lives in their countries of origin through an integrated approach to reintegration that supports both migrants and their communities, has the potential to complement local development, and mitigates some of the drivers of irregular migration. Also within the programme's areas of action is building the capacity of governments and other partners; migration data collection and analysis to support fact-based programming; as well as information and awareness raising.

“ We were very worried about Meretech while she was gone. We knew she would not be happy there and did not support her going.”

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AVRR Assisted Voluntary Return
and Reintegration

COVID-19 Coronavirus Disease 2019

DTM Displacement Tracking Matrix

EHoA East and Horn of Africa

FGD Focus Group Discussion

GCC Gulf Cooperation Council

IDP Internally Displaced Person

IOM International Organization for Migration

KI Key Informant

KII Key Informant Interview

RDH Regional Data Hub

SNNP Southern Nations, Nationalities,
and Peoples' Region



DEFINITIONS

Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR)

Administrative, logistical or financial support, including reintegration assistance, to migrants unable or unwilling to remain in the host country or country of transit and who decide to return to their country of origin.

First-time migrants

Individuals migrating internationally for the first time.

Head of household

The person who is acknowledged as head by the other members and is the main decision-maker for decisions concerning the household.

Household

A group of people living together and sharing the same dwelling and cooking arrangements.

Irregular migrant

A person who moves or has moved across an international border and is not authorized to enter or to stay in a State pursuant to the law of that State and to international agreements to which that State is a party.

Reintegration

A process which enables individuals to re-establish the economic, social and psychosocial relationships needed to maintain life, livelihood and dignity and inclusion in civic life. Reintegration has three key components: **Social reintegration** implies the access by a returning migrant to public services and infrastructures in his or her country of origin, including access to health, education, housing, justice and social protection schemes. **Psychosocial reintegration** is the reinsertion of a returning migrant into personal support networks (friends, relatives, neighbours) and civil society structures (associations, self-help groups and other organizations). This also includes the re-engagement with the values, mores, way of living, language, moral principles, ideology, and traditions of the country of origin's society. **Economic reintegration** is the process by which a returning migrant re-enters the economic life of his or her country of origin and is able sustain a livelihood.

Re-migrating individuals

Individuals who attempted or successfully completed more than one international migration(s).

Returning migrants

In this study 'returning migrants' refers to individuals who have decided to stop their international migration journey prior to reaching the intended destination and are returning to Ethiopia through IOM's AVRR programme.

Returnees

Individuals who have migrated internationally and then returned to Ethiopia.

Internal labour migrant

Any person who is moving or has moved within Ethiopia for the purpose of establishing a new temporary or permanent residence to seek new employment opportunities.

Internally displaced persons (IDPs)

Persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border.

Remittances

Personal monetary transfers, cross border or within the same country, made by migrants to individuals or communities with whom the migrant has links.

Social remittances/capital transfer

Transfers of non-monetary value as a result of migration, such as transfer of knowledge, know-how, networking and skills.

“ I spent two years in Saudi Arabia but I was deported because I did not have papers. When I came back to Ethiopia, I used the money I saved to open my own Wofcho Bet, a milling business. With the money that I make from my business, I am able to support my family.

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RESEARCH BACKGROUND

In 2019, the IOM Regional Data Hub (RDH) for the East and Horn of Africa (EHOA) launched a multistage research project aimed at better understanding the experiences, decision-making, perceptions and expectations of young Ethiopians along the Eastern Route regarding their migration.¹ The first two stages of the research project were carried out in Obock, Djibouti and Bossaso, Puntland, where research teams interviewed migrants transiting through these two main embarkation hubs from where they cross over the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea to Yemen. Quantitative surveys were administered to 2,140 migrants in Obock and 1,526 migrants in Bossaso. Three survey questionnaires were administered to address the differences between the different types of migrants:

1. Individuals migrating for the first time;
2. Individuals who have attempted or successfully completed this journey before; and
3. Individuals who have decided to stop their journey in Obock or Bossaso and return to Ethiopia.

Qualitative, semi-structured interviews were also conducted with a sample of 66 migrants in Obock.

The third stage of the project was launched in Ethiopia in 2021. Analysis of the data collected in the first two stages of the research project and secondary data helped identify

communities of high emigration in four regions of Ethiopia: Raya Kobo in Amhara, Deder and Setema in Oromia, Erer in Harari and Misha in Southern Nations, Nationalities, and People's Region (SNNP). This phase of the project was conducted in origin communities to gain a better understanding of the environment in which migration is taking place and investigate how migration is lived and experienced at household and community level. Phase three was also designed to better grasp how money and information flow transnationally between communities in Ethiopia and migrants abroad, as well as to gauge whether and how the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has changed the migration environment and impacted migration from and to these communities. While Raya Kobo, Deder, Setema and Erer were all among the main woredas (districts) of origin of migrants surveyed in Obock and Bossaso, migration from Misha occurs both along the Eastern Route and the Southern Route.²

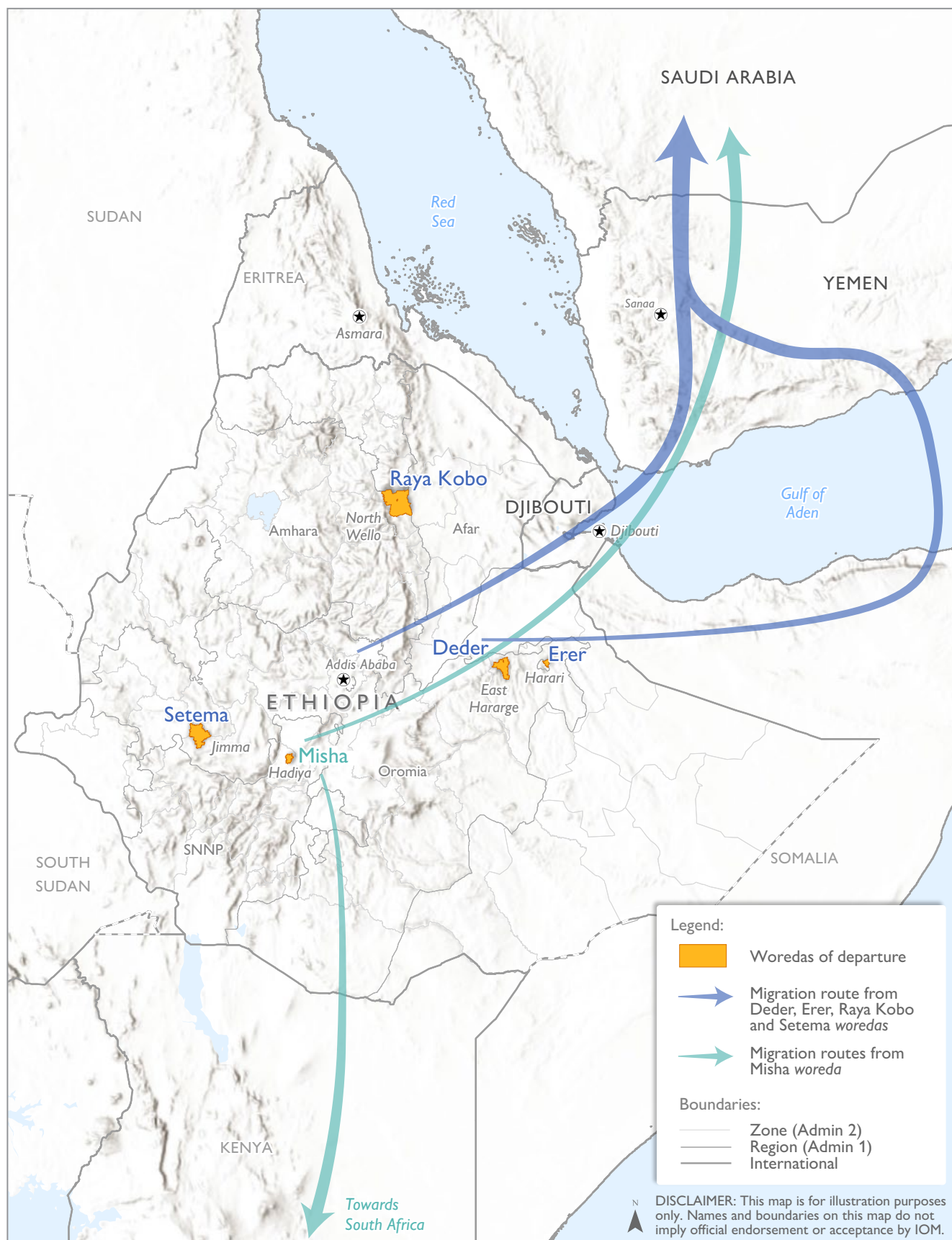
This briefing paper is the third in a series of thematic reports that build on the analysis of data collected during the various stages of this research project. Data gathered in communities of high emigration have been compared to data collected in the first two research phases in Obock and Bossaso, and relevant literature to produce thematic reports that provide in-depth and focused insights on specific indicators, population sub-groups and selected hotspot areas of migration.³

1 Young Ethiopians are defined as young adults aged between 15 and 29 years. Interviews with migrants younger than 15 years were not conducted for ethical reasons.

2 Although the Tigray region is a main region of origin of migrants surveyed in the first two stages of the research, woredas of high emigration in Tigray had to be excluded from the research due to conflict and security issues that erupted in Northern Ethiopia in November 2020.

3 Results are representative of the sample only and cannot be extended to the national level.

RESEARCH AREAS





“ It took me two months to arrive to Saudi Arabia. I lived there for two years before I got deported. Life there was very hard and I would not wish for my kids to go there, even though I made triple the money there than here. After my return, I opened a small shop and a grain store.

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INTRODUCTION

Migration flows from Ethiopia to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and South Africa are bi-directional, involving not only outward migration but also significant return migration movements. A migrant's willingness to return relates to many factors, including his or her experience, duration of stay in the host country and whether the goals the migrant was hoping to achieve through migration have been satisfied.

While migration in certain contexts can be seen as a more permanent solution to addressing livelihood, security and other concerns, the irregular migration of young Ethiopians along the Eastern Corridor is more temporary in nature and mostly driven by strong economic pressures and the desire for a better life. Of the 3,155 first-time and re-migrating individuals interviewed in Obock and Bossaso during the first two phases of this research, only around 5 per cent reported that they were not planning on returning home in the future.⁴ Migrants commonly linked the decision of when to return to reaching a certain financial or material goal rather than a set time frame, and mostly reported that they planned on returning home once they have accumulated enough money to start a business, build a house or buy a car (IOM, 2021a).

However, not all young Ethiopians who migrate along the Eastern Route to Saudi Arabia manage to successfully reach their destination. Migration journeys via both Obock and Bossaso are fraught with danger and are physically as well as emotionally challenging. Migrants often experience a lack of access to basic services, shelter and medical care, and insufficient provision of food and water. Segments of the journey are carried out on foot through the desert in extreme temperatures. Severe dehydration, fatigue or water-borne disease from drinking ground water are not uncommon, and are among the leading causes of migrant deaths on this route. Migrants are

also vulnerable to numerous security threats such as violent extortion and physical and emotional abuse by a range of actors along the route (IOM, 2020b). Migrants who experience particularly difficult journeys to Obock and Bossaso that make them unable or unwilling to continue towards Yemen, often decide to end their journey and return home by themselves or through IOM's AVRR programme and the support of the Migration Response Centres in these two hubs. Around 14 per cent of young migrants surveyed in the first two phases of the research were returning to Ethiopia, mostly due to illnesses or injuries, lack of money to continue their journey or fear of upcoming dangers en route (IOM, 2021a).

Bi-directional flows between origin and host countries often occur when large, irregular migration flows exist. Both the Eastern and Southern Routes are travelled on by many irregular migrants each year, with the Eastern Route being the main migratory corridor out of Ethiopia. The route was heavily impacted by COVID-19 mobility restrictions in 2020. IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) recorded around 158,000 irregular movements in 2020 despite severe movement restrictions reducing migratory flows along this corridor by over 80 per cent around April, due to the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak in March 2020. In 2019, DTM tracked almost half a million irregular movements (468,234) on the Eastern Corridor (IOM, 2019a). Large return migration flows began in 2016, when the Government of Saudi Arabia committed to reducing unemployment in the country by tightening immigration policies and cracking down on undocumented migration. Deportations began in 2017 and IOM has electronically registered 421,709 Ethiopians at Bole International airport between May 2017 and October 2021 (IOM, 2021d).^{5,6}

4 The very high intention to return observed during the first two phases of the research should be handled with care, as the expressed willingness to return (intention) does not always correspond to an actual return. There may be many reasons for this discrepancy, for instance individuals may state more favourable beliefs in theory rather than in practice – a phenomenon called “hypothetical bias”. In addition, migrants interviewed in Obock and Bossaso had already experienced severe challenges during the first leg of their journeys, most of which they had not anticipated prior to migration, and these difficulties may also have triggered their strong willingness to hypothetically return to the safety of home.

5 Following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in the region, deportations from Saudi Arabia were temporarily halted but resumed in reduced numbers towards the end of 2020. In the first half of 2021, figures remained at around half of the average number of returnees registered per month in pre-COVID-19 years, while mass deportations took place in July, when 31,911 returnees were recorded. This figure constitutes the highest number of returnees ever registered by IOM since this data collection began in May 2017. More information on returns from Saudi Arabia can be found here: <https://eastandhornofafrica.iom.int/returns-saudi-arabia>.

6 Even migrants who may have entered Saudi Arabia regularly through formal labour exchange programmes may become irregular if they leave their original employer. Until March 2021, the country's Kafala system stipulated that a migrant worker's immigration status is bound to an individual sponsor or employer, who is the sole entity with the authority to secure and renew work permits, grant permission to transfer to another employer and leave Saudi Arabia. In March 2021, the government reformed this system, allowing foreign employees to leave or change jobs and exit the country without the consent of their employer under certain conditions.

Returnees often arrive in Ethiopia after having spent many months in detention, where reports of abuse and inhuman and degrading conditions are rampant (Human Rights Watch, 2020). Deportation, especially of migrants who were intercepted at the border or did not manage to secure employment prior to interception, may severely impact reintegration outcomes when migrants are not able to recover the cost of their journeys and return home empty-handed, to families that may be worse off than prior to their migration.

Compared to the Eastern Route, migration from Ethiopia to South Africa tends to be more permanent. South Africa has historically been seen as a destination where migrants can prosper economically in a short period of time, allowing migrants not only to improve their own livelihoods but also enhance the lives of their families back home through remittances and other forms of support. In addition to migrants moving in search of better job opportunities in the informal economy of South Africa, the country was also a destination for migrants seeking refuge from political challenges at origin. South Africa welcomed a significant number of Ethiopian refugees and asylum-seekers in the 90s and its 1998 Refugee Act granted migrants the right to work and study while asylum claims were being processed (Estifanos et al, 2019). In recent years, however, South Africa has increasingly tightened its asylum and immigration policies and rising xenophobia within the country has increased migrants' vulnerabilities.⁷ Nonetheless, migrants continue to travel from Ethiopia to South Africa, driven by the success of the large Ethiopian diaspora in the country.

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting movement restrictions, new return trends emerged along the Eastern Route. Many migrants became stranded in transit locations where they were unable to continue their journeys, in host communities that were themselves struggling under the economic and health impact of the disease. Not only did this leave migrants with reduced coping mechanisms to support themselves, they were also confronted with stigma and a rise in xenophobia in some locations where they were perceived as carriers of the disease. At the end of 2020, IOM estimated that at

least 2,700 migrants were stranded in the EHoA region, with a further 32,700 stranded in Yemen in dire conditions (IOM, 2020a). As a result of migrants not being able to proceed with their journeys to Saudi Arabia, many attempted to spontaneously return from Yemen to Djibouti (around 6,000 migrants) or Somalia (around 1,300 migrants) in the hope of returning home. Migrants returning from Yemen are often very vulnerable, as many have experienced prolonged detention and/or abuse in Yemen and most have depleted their resources during the unsuccessful migration journey. Data collected through IOM's Missing Migrant's Project suggest that the journey from Yemen to the Horn of Africa is fraught with danger. Of all migrant deaths recorded by IOM in the EHoA region in 2020, 96 per cent involved migrants returning from Yemen to Djibouti, where some migrants were reportedly forced to disembark in offshore areas and were unable to reach land and others dehydrated while crossing the desert on foot with little or no water for their journey.

Migration along the Southern Route has also been impacted by the pandemic due to border closures, travel restrictions and localized lockdowns in key transit hubs such as Eastleigh in Nairobi. The situation of Ethiopian migrants intercepted and detained in transit countries such as Kenya and Tanzania was also exacerbated during the pandemic, as migrants are held in detention until they are repatriated and border closures and travel restrictions significantly prolonged the duration of their detainment. IOM estimates that over 2,200 migrants are stranded in Tanzanian detention centres as of September 2021. Thus, return migration to Ethiopia is often characterized by involuntariness rather than success, which may impact migrants' return experiences and makes their social and economic reintegration more challenging.

7 Some of the recent amendments to the Refugees Act include punishment for illegal entry, unreasonable five-day reporting periods to Refugee Reception Offices and broader powers given to officials for cessation and exclusion and limitations on the right to work of asylum seekers. In addition, increasing difficulties in accessing proper asylum documents and short renewal periods limit the options of employment and access to social assistance and financial services of individuals seeking refuge (Khan & Rayner, 2020).



“ I lived in Saudi Arabia for three years. I was working as a chicken farmer there but the government told us to go back to Ethiopia because we were there illegally. Now I live in Setema and transport people on my motorbike. I was able to build a house here with the money that I made in Saudi Arabia. I encourage young people to go to Saudi Arabia to try and improve their lives, instead of being jobless here.

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METHODOLOGY

The third phase of the research was conducted in the first half of 2021 to explore how migration is experienced at the household and community level. Data collection was carried out by JaRco Consulting PLC in five communities of high emigration in Ethiopia that were selected according to the research findings from phases one and two. The five study sites were Raya Kobo (Amhara), Setema (Southwest Oromia), Deder (East Oromia), Erer (Harari) and Misha (SNNP). A rapid assessment was carried out in each community to assess whether it was suitable for the research. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected through household surveys, focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KIs) with would-be migrants, returned migrants, parents of migrants and community members and stakeholders with knowledge of the local context.

RAPID ASSESSMENT

The main purpose of the rapid assessment was to ensure that the selected research communities fulfilled the study requirements and to generate community profiles for each of the planned areas. The rapid assessment involved both primary and secondary data collection on the socioeconomic, environmental, security and migratory landscapes in each location and helped contribute to a better understanding of the local environment, define the geographical boundaries of each data collection site, identify possible research areas in each woreda (areas with a high concentration of households with at least one member who is currently abroad or has returned), generate an understanding of local migration dynamics and identify key informants (KIs) such as community leaders and former migrants for the qualitative part of the research.

Secondary data were collected through a review of relevant literature including research papers, academic studies, migration data and publications from NGOs, the UN and the Government of Ethiopia. Primary data were collected through observation of study sites and by interviewing KIs to gather in-depth, context-specific information from each target woreda and/or kebele. Within each of the research areas, individuals with different areas of expertise were interviewed, including a representative of the

economic sector, a representative of women's affairs, government representatives, religious leaders and informants from the migrant community.

QUANTITATIVE DATA COLLECTION

Quantitative data were collected to provide insights into migrants and their households as well as into non-migrant households, by capturing information on the characteristics of households, their living conditions, attitudes towards migration, direct experience of migration, the impact of COVID-19 on migration and migrant or would-be migrant future intentions. Both migrant and non-migrant households were surveyed so that the attitudes and characteristics of migrant and non-migrant households could be compared. Tools were translated into Amharic and Oromifa by JaRco and surveys were administered individually to household heads – following their informed consent – by trained enumerators in each location. To ensure that data collected were as accurate and reliable as possible, interviews were conducted individually and out of earshot of other community members; data collectors of the same gender as participants conducted surveys, as this is deemed more culturally acceptable in a traditional Ethiopian context and helped to create safe, comfortable environments in which respondents felt able to speak freely and answer honestly.

Household Sampling

Surveyed households in each community were sampled from listed households. After purposively selecting research woredas, the research team identified kebeles within each woreda with particularly high migration rates. Overall, 4,396 households were categorized and listed across the five communities, with a total of 2,439 migrants and 991 returnees identified. The 2,600 surveyed households were sampled from listed households through quota sampling by research area (500 households per area, except Misha where 600 households were sampled as it is the only Southern Route community in the study) with an equal distribution of households with an experience of migration and those without.

QUALITATIVE DATA COLLECTION

Qualitative data collection was conducted to obtain more in-depth views from different perspectives such as migrants' parents, would-be migrants and returnees as well as to allow for a more nuanced understanding of the household survey findings. Three FGD and four KI protocols were developed to assess parental attitudes towards migration; risk awareness, information sources and knowledge gaps among would-be-migrants; returnees' ambitions and return experiences; migration dynamics before and during COVID-19; the importance of remittances and how the remittance system works; and transnational communication and technology. Tools were translated into the relevant local languages to ensure that the appropriate local vernacular was used so that participants would be able to understand and respond to questions easily.

Overall, 40 KIIs and 24 FGDs were conducted across the five locations. FGDs were conducted in groups of six to eight participants who were purposefully selected based on their profiles and willingness to participate. All FGDs were separated by gender due to cultural sensitivities and to promote an environment where all participants felt free to speak openly. FGDs were also grouped homogeneously in terms of social backgrounds and employment histories to ensure everyone's opinion was heard and participants could feel they were discussing in a safe space. KIIs were identified during the rapid community assessments and included representatives of community groups, informal foreign exchange providers, returnees, teachers, community elders, local officials, youth representatives and other relevant stakeholders.



“ I only went to school until the fourth grade. My brothers and I wanted to make better lives for ourselves, so we migrated to Saudi Arabia. There, I worked as a guard and shepherd. It has been three years since two of my brothers and I came back to Ethiopia, but we still have one brother living in Saudi Arabia. After living there for four years, I was deported because I was working illegally. I have no intention of going back to Saudi Arabia. I have a wife and a daughter here and was able to build my own house and own a small farm.

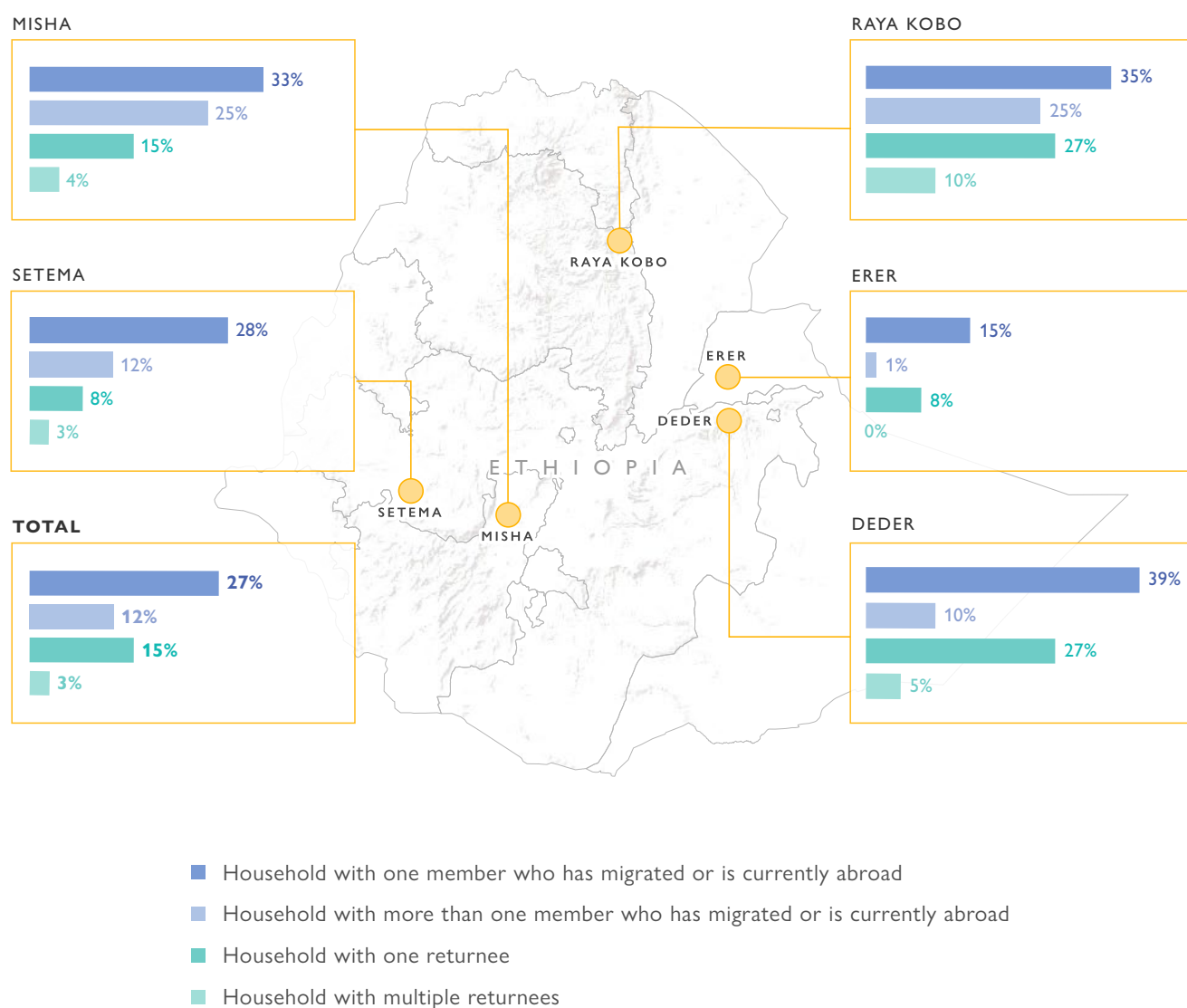
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COMMUNITY MIGRATION AND RETURN PROFILE

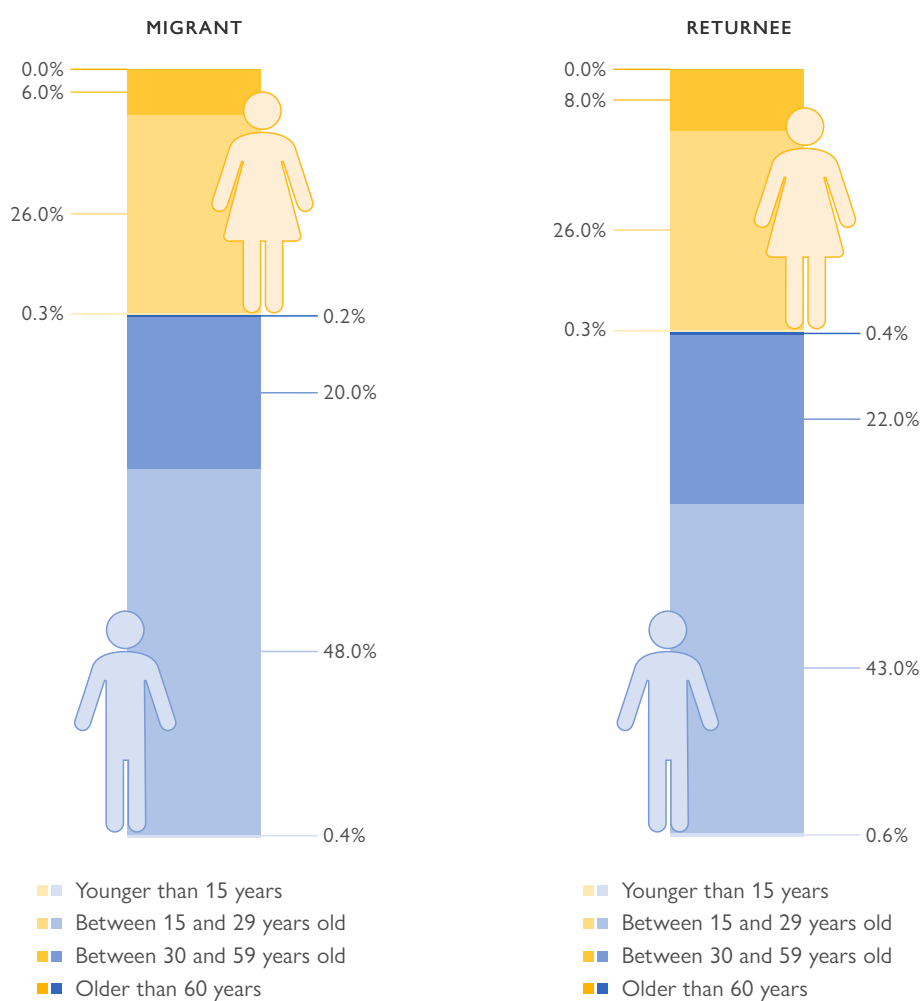
All surveyed communities belong to areas of high emigration. Demographic data derived from the community listing show that 39 per cent of surveyed households have at least one member who has migrated in the past or is currently abroad and 30 per cent of these households have more than one migrant member. Figures range from 16 per cent in Erer to 60 per cent in Raya Kobo, with Setema (40%), Deder (49%) and Misha (58%) also exhibiting high

migration figures. Return migration also seems to be prevalent, with 18 per cent of households having at least one returnee, with returnees most prevalent in Raya Kobo (37%) and Deder (32%). Individuals who migrated to Saudi Arabia and other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries are almost three times more likely to return compared to those who migrated to South Africa.

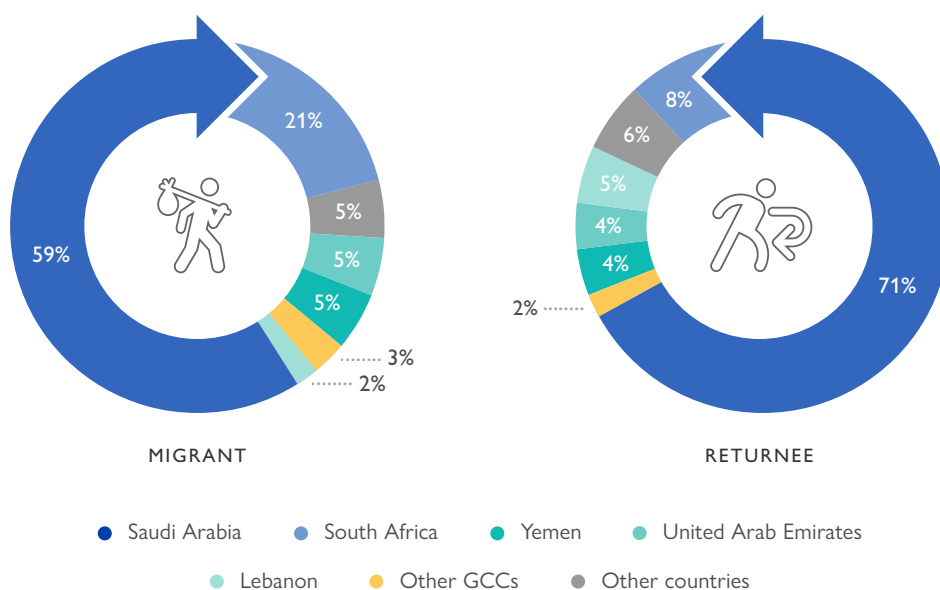
Migration profile of research areas (data from listing)



Demographic profile of individual migrants (data from listing)



Mobility profile of individual migrants (data from listing)



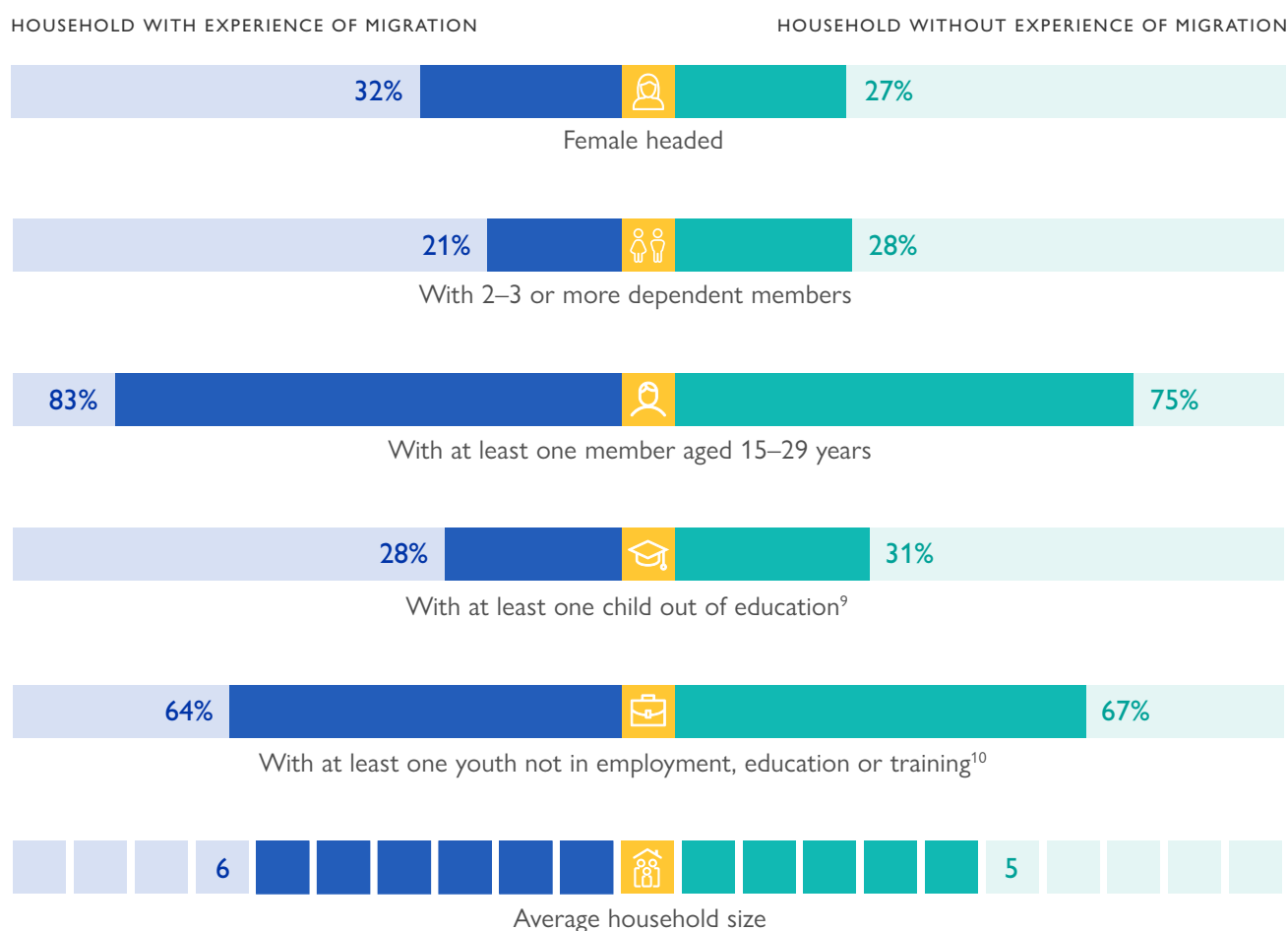
DEMOGRAPHIC, MOBILITY AND LIVELIHOOD

PROFILES OF SURVEYED HOUSEHOLDS⁸

Households surveyed tend to be large (around 30% have 7 or more members) and quite young (around 25% have 2–3 or more dependent members). In around 30 per cent of households, children aged 7–14 years are not attending school, and in around 65 per cent, youth aged between 15–29 years are not employed or following education

or training. Compared to households with no experience of migration, households with migrants abroad and/or returnees are slightly more likely to be larger, female-headed and with one or more members in the 15–29 years age bracket, which is not unexpected considering that this is the age group most involved in migration.

Demographic profile of households by migration experience (data from surveys)



⁸ Data from surveys. Overall, 2,600 households were interviewed: 250 with experience of migration and 250 without experience of migration in each of the four communities of high emigration along the Eastern Route – Deder, Erer, Raya Kobo and Setema – and 300 with experience of migration and 300 without experience of migration in the community with high emigration along the Southern Route, that is, Misha.

⁹ Only households with children aged 7–14 years.

¹⁰ Only households with young members aged 15–29 years.



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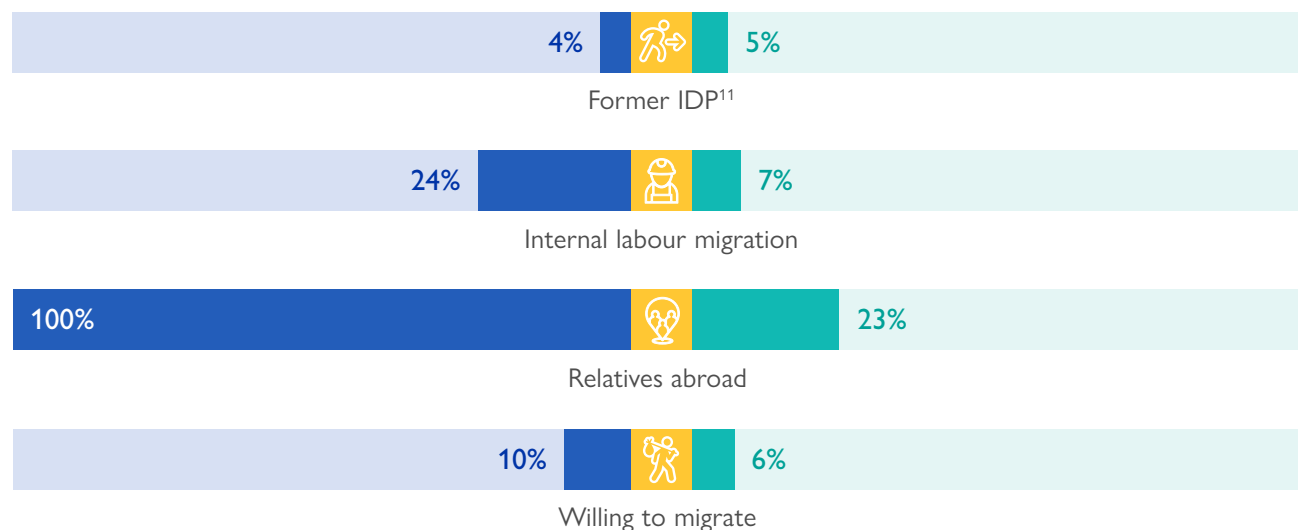
A previous experience of internal labour migration (24%) and the presence of relatives abroad (100%) are the strongest predictors of migration. Around one in

ten households with experience of migration would like to 'move abroad', almost twice as many as among non-migrant households.

Mobility profile of households by migration experience (data from surveys)

HOUSEHOLD WITH EXPERIENCE OF MIGRATION

HOUSEHOLD WITHOUT EXPERIENCE OF MIGRATION



¹¹ As of January 2021, IOM recorded around 1.96 million IDPs in Ethiopia. Most of this displacement was conflict-induced (62%), followed by droughts (17%) and flash floods (9%). Other reasons for displacement included: seasonal floods, social tension, landslides, swampy lands, hydropower projects, strong winds, volcanoes, economic factors and absolute poverty (IOM, 2021c). Figures have risen due to the conflict in Northern Ethiopia that erupted in November 2020. The Emergency Site Assessment, conducted in April 2021, showed that there were around 1.65 million IDPs in the Tigray region and around 70,000 in Afar and Amhara regions and these figures are only indicative of even larger numbers as many zones remain out of reach to humanitarian partners due to continuing access and security issues (IOM, 2021b).

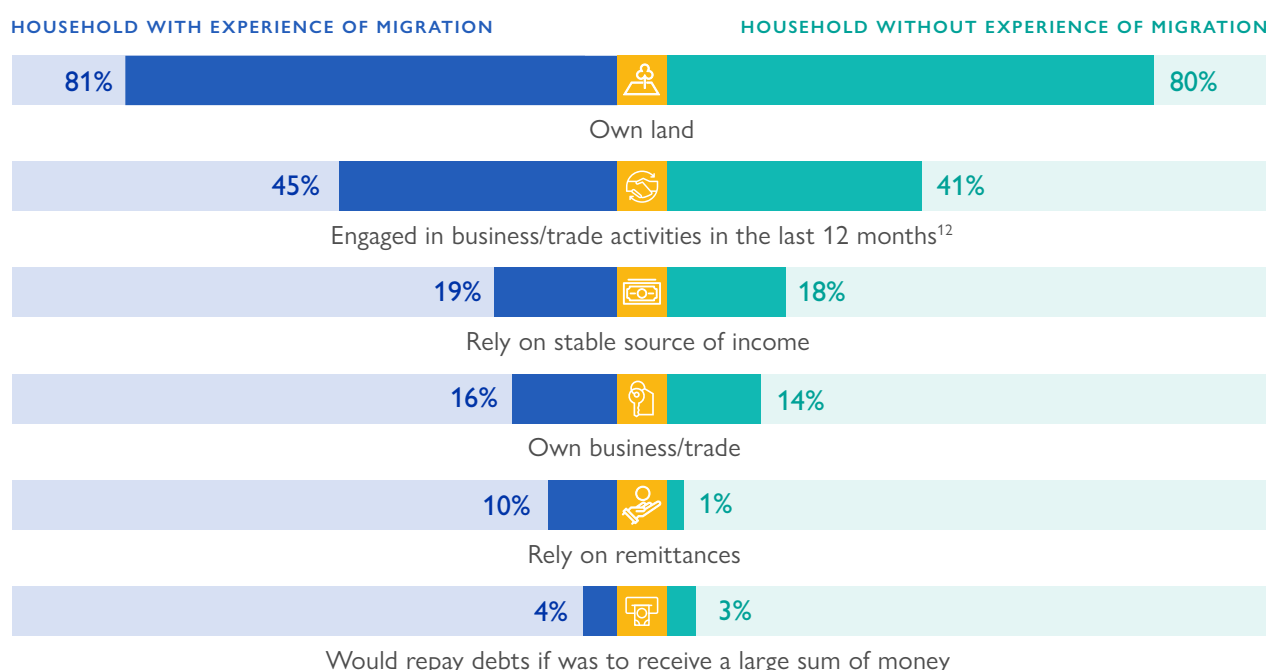


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The livelihood profiles of migrant and non-migrant households are similar, with nearly all households relying on owned land as a main source of income and only around one in five depending on more stable sources, including formal employment, pensions/retirement income and/or

passive income. In addition to a heavier reliance on remittances, households with experience of migration tend to display slightly more entrepreneurial activities, with 45 per cent of households engaged in business/trade activities and 16 per cent owning a business.

Livelihood profile of households by migration experience (data from surveys)



¹² Most common business/trade activities involved trade or sales of goods from house, market or in the streets and agricultural business (crops, staple crops, livestock by-products, fresh/processed fish).

WHY DO MIGRANTS RETURN TO ETHIOPIA?

The strongest predictor of the reasons driving the return process seems to be the country from which migrants are returning. Along the Eastern Route, returns from Saudi Arabia seem to be mostly involuntary and migrants often return to Ethiopia without having achieved the goals and aspirations that triggered their migration in the first place. Only 1 per cent of surveyed households stated that migrants returned from Saudi Arabia because they “earned enough money”, while 59 per cent returned as they were deported from Saudi Arabia and 28 per cent did not manage to reach Saudi Arabia or returned through IOM’s AVRR programme, which is offered in key transit locations en route. Similarly, households with returnees from Yemen mostly reported that their relatives returned due to deportation (66%) or unsuccessful journeys (29%). Across the FGDs conducted in Eastern Route communities, only two returnees reported that their return was voluntary, due to the abusive conditions they had experienced as domestic workers in Saudi Arabia. All other participants had experienced unsuccessful journeys or had been deported against their will and in many cases detained directly upon entry into Saudi Arabia. In some cases, migrants reported that it was the smugglers they were traveling with who turned them in to the police: “I was arrested at the border of Yemen and Saudi Arabia at a place called ‘Rago’ by smugglers and they gave me to Saudi Arabian police after they took my 50,000 Ethiopian birr and beat me.”¹³

Unsuccessful journeys or AVRR from transit countries seem to be most common along the Southern Route (43%). FGD participants who had unsuccessfully migrated to South Africa reported having spent years in transit countries in detention, in inhumane conditions: “I was detained for four years and tortured naked. I wished I would die as the suffering was too much”.¹⁴ Another FGD participant in Misha reported that despite “suffering from severe psychological trauma [he] was beaten by police in prison, not given food for three to four days and mocked for his poverty.”

However, in contrast to the return of migrants who reached Saudi Arabia, migrants who reached South Africa seem to return in a more planned and voluntary manner, with 21 per cent choosing to return due to ‘health issues’, 16 per cent reporting that they returned because they had ‘earned enough money’ and 14 per cent returning because ‘they could not bear life abroad’. Two male FGD respondents in Misha who had successfully migrated to South Africa and started their own business explained that they had chosen to return voluntarily to start a business in Ethiopia and live a more stable and peaceful life: “In South Africa there is so much robbery, especially on Ethiopian migrants, and high crime in the country generally. Working in South Africa is not as simple as the tales we heard.”

Female FGD respondents in Misha, all of whom had migrated to South Africa for marriage, reported returning voluntarily to be closer to their families and for cultural reasons: “Raising a child in South Africa is difficult because that was a new environment, new culture and different social life for us. After I gave birth, I decided to return. Here in Ethiopia, our children will grow up accustomed to their culture and social life.” Female respondents also reported having more opportunities for themselves in Ethiopia: “South Africa is not the best place for female migrants. There are no job opportunities, the only option we had was being a housewife, which is very depressing.”

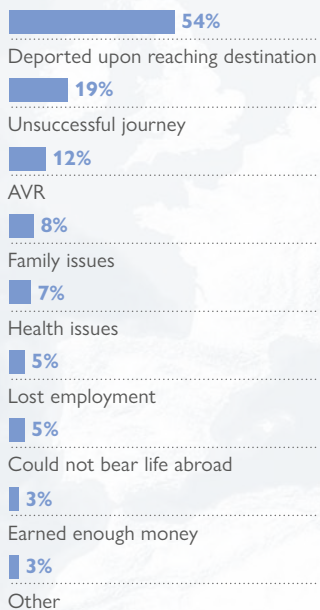
Gender was found to be a significant factor in decisions to return across all five communities, with families of female returnees more commonly mentioning health problems, family issues and unbearable living conditions abroad as reasons for return, while families with male returnees mostly reported unsuccessful journeys and deportation. This confirms findings from the first two phases of the research that boys and young men undertake cheaper, longer and more perilous journeys, where they spend more time traveling on foot compared to women and girls on the same route (IOM, 2021a). Women migrating to South Africa usually travel regularly by air, while men and boys use the dangerous overland route where they may be detained in transit.

¹³ Male FGD Participant in Erer.

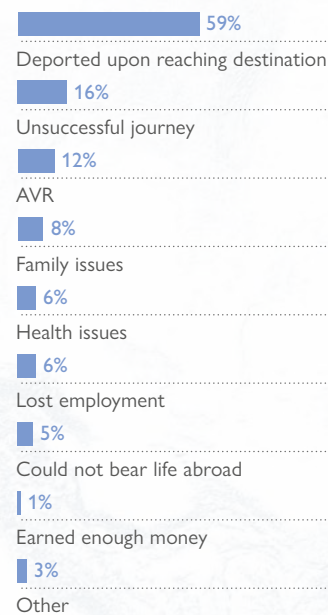
¹⁴ Male FGD Participant in Misha.

REASON TO RETURN BY COUNTRY OF DESTINATION (% OF HOUSEHOLDS WITH RETURNEES)¹⁵

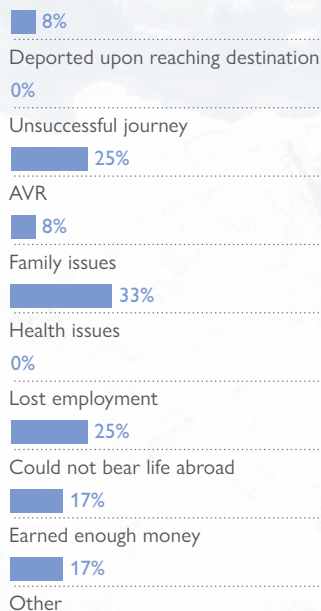
TOTAL



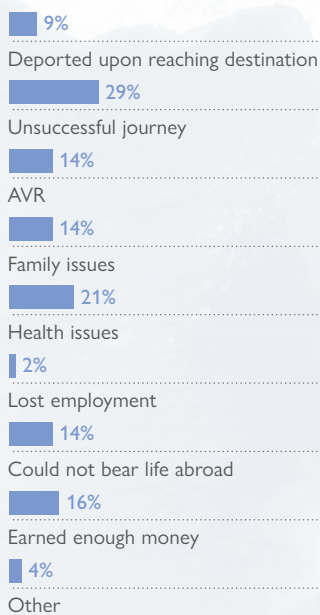
SAUDI ARABIA



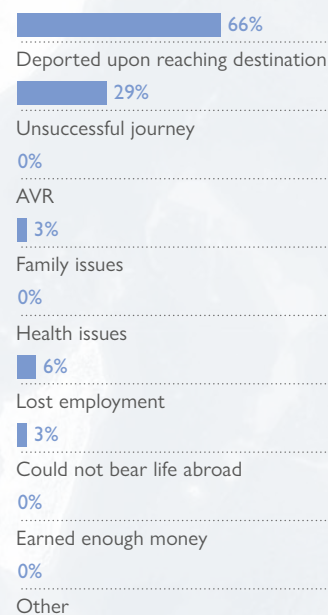
OTHER GCCs



SOUTH AFRICA



YEMEN



¹⁵ Overall, 553 households with at least one returnee were interviewed in the five communities: the country of return was Saudi Arabia in 468 households, South Africa in 56 households, Yemen in 35 households and other GCC countries in 12 households. Multiple returns occurred in around 3 per cent of households.

“ I started the journey to Saudi Arabia with two of my friends. Because I am blind, my friend Mohammed Salin led me. We traveled by car, by boat and by foot and it took me two months to get there. When we crossed the sea, we were packed in a boat for five days and we would be beaten when we made the slightest move. We had to walk from Yemen to Saudi Arabia and the trip took us 14 days. At the time, there was a war in Yemen which made the journey very hard. My two friends, with whom I started the journey in Ethiopia left me during the journey and I was stranded in the desert. I had to beg people to help me when I reached Saudi Arabia but the police arrested me and I was deported back to Ethiopia right away.

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“ It took me four months to get to Saudi Arabia and I had to travel by foot for a total of 40 days. I lived there for three years and was able to save some money. There were Ethiopian gangs in Saudi Arabia that would target, attack and rob other Ethiopians because they knew we could not save our money in a bank. I was afraid to stay because of them so I turned myself in to the police and got deported.

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Migrants returning from Saudi Arabia also recounted that they had experienced challenges during their time in detention and while working in Saudi Arabia. Both male and female FGD participants reported that their living and working conditions had been difficult. Migrants described experiencing physical, emotional and verbal abuse: “My employers harassed me and kept saying ‘you are a slave’ which made me feel bad morally.”¹⁶ Most female FGD participants who had all been domestic workers in Saudi Arabia also reported abuses such as being denied communication with their families at home, their employers withholding several months of their salaries and degrading treatment: “My employer was not treating me as a human being. She locked the food in the refrigerator before I ate. She forced me to work a lot even while I was sick. I was captured by the police when I escaped from my employer.”¹⁷

Migrants in three different FGDs suggested that the COVID-19 outbreak triggered their return from Saudi Arabia, due to companies closing and police crackdowns on irregular migrants due to the pandemic. Two migrants explained how their employers’ fears of COVID-19 made them report their employees to the Saudi Arabian police: “My employers reported me to Saudi Arabian police because they suspected me of having COVID-19 when I had a mild cough. But the police did not take me to hospital for a COVID test, they took me to prison and I stayed there for two months.”¹⁸ KIs in Misha, Raya Kobo and Setema reported that the pandemic has resulted in them seeing an increase in the number of returnees in their communities, although migration overall has reduced and fewer migrants are departing. KIs in two of these communities stated that return migration was higher than outbound migration since the pandemic.

16 Male FGD Participant in Setema.

17 Female FGD Participant in Setema.

18 Female FGD Participant in Raya Kobo.

RETURN ENVIRONMENTS

Findings from the first two phases of the research indicated that the nature of return is key to understanding returnees' well-being and reintegration. Migrants reported that returnees who have been deported or returned without at least partially achieving their goals are often not welcome at home and in their communities, especially if the money sunk into the failed journey was collected in a family effort and the family is worse off than before migration. First-time migrants and re-migrating individuals reported that returnees are often framed as mentally unwell or given condescending nicknames such as 'dim light'. Shame and stigma upon return were also found to be linked to traumatic experiences during the journey or at destination, which can trigger physical and mental health problems and lead to poor reintegration results. The findings also showed that rapid re-migration is very common (IOM, 2021a). The data collected in communities of origin in phase three of the research further support these findings.

FAMILY REACTIONS TO RETURN

Although all FGDs conducted with returnees included both successful and unsuccessful returnees, no participant reported that their families were unwelcoming towards them upon their immediate return. However, FGD participants in all communities and across both genders reported that over time, unsuccessful returnees are treated differently from those who have been successful and many reported tensions with their families following the initial relief over their safe return: "When I returned, my family welcomed and hugged me with love and had missed me. But then after some time, I quarrelled with my family on the issue of money spent on the journey. I am really sad about my family's concern for the money spent rather than my life."¹⁹ In contrast, successful returnee participants mostly reported very positive welcomes and less tension following their return. One male FGD participant in Deder explained: "There are huge preparations to welcome successful returnees home while no preparation is made to welcome unsuccessful ones."

Unsuccessful returnee participants in all five locations reported that post-return tensions with their families mostly revolved around money spent on and during the journey. Many families help send their children abroad or help pay for children who depart without informing their parents but run into financial difficulties en route by taking loans from friends, banks, pawnbrokers or selling their assets such as oxen for their children's travel.

“ My family sent money to brokers by selling land and cattle. They are still in a difficult situation to lead their lives because of me. So, when I returned without money, they abandoned me and they do not feel good about me when they see me at home.”²⁰

Some returnees also reported that their relatives wished for them to re-migrate to recover some of the money spent on migration.

Participants in returnee and parent FGDs reported that irregular migration, particularly of youth who did not inform their parents of their migration and left without saying goodbye, damages social relationships and erodes trust between family members. A male FGD participant in Erer reflected on this by saying: "We didn't inform our families about our migration. Once we started the journey, we made them spend so much money. Some other migrants successfully start working and send money to their families. Due to that, our families don't trust us like before and sometimes talk hatefully about us." FGD participants in Raya Kobo and Misha also reported that their family dynamics had changed since their migration and that communication and mutual understanding with their families had decreased.

Migration journeys and experiences in host countries are complex, with migrants facing a score of stressors such as exhaustion, dehydration, illness, labour exploitation, sleep deprivation, withholding of salaries and emotional, sexual and physical abuses, all of which are associated with mental health conditions such as anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. Perceived and actual mental health problems and trauma stemming from arduous journeys and difficult experiences at destination causing tension

¹⁹ Female FGD Participant in Erer.

²⁰ Male FGD Participant in Erer.

with families were raised in female FGDs in Deder, Raya Kobo and Erer. This does not mean that male returnees do not experience significant mental and emotional trauma but could indicate that it is less culturally acceptable for them to discuss such matters in a group with their peers and at home with their families. In particular, many unsuccessful returnees reported that their families believe them to be depressed or affected by psychological problems and treat them differently from other family members in an effort to support them: “As our parents care about our psychological well-being, they try to treat us equally with our sisters and brothers because they saw that many fellow returnees commit suicide due to mistreatment and stigmatization at home.”²¹

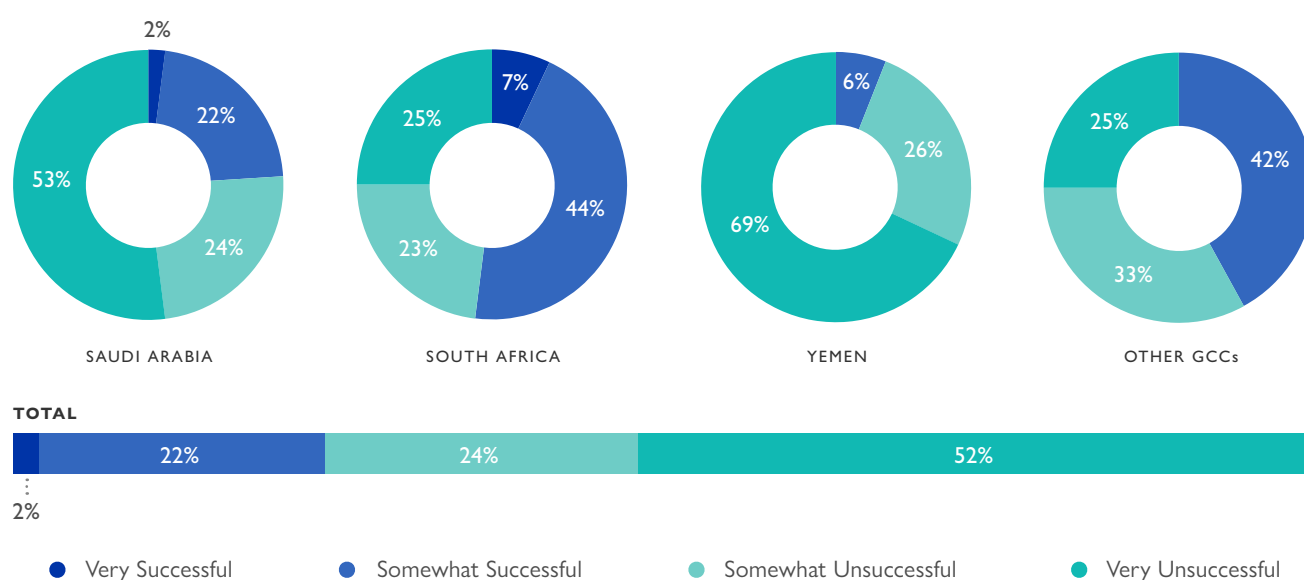
Female returnee participants also reported strained relationships with their husbands following their return. Marriage tensions were often attributed to husbands expressing disappointment that their returning wives would not support them anymore: “I returned to my country and entered my husband’s home. When he heard that I was deported and returned home, he waited for me with anger and was so furious. After a few days of serious arguments and fighting, he decided to divorce me.”²² Divorce upon

return was also reported by other female FGD participants who suggested that the conflicts they were experiencing with their husbands following their return were related to their husbands not valuing them anymore due to female returnees being stereotyped as sexually abused.

“ Our families, especially husbands, say ‘while you were traveling to Saudi you slept with brokers and other male migrants’, and they called us prostitutes. We did not tolerate this and quarrelled with them. That is why some of us got divorced.”²³

Household surveys confirm that migration is often considered a failure at the household level, with less than one in four households selecting a ‘somewhat’ (22%) or ‘very’ (2%) positive rating of the migration outcome. In general, the more permanent migration flows are, as is the case with successful migration to South Africa, the more returns tend to be rated positively, as they are more likely to occur on a voluntary basis. On the other hand, where migration has a very low rate of success, as is the case with Yemen, and/or many returnees are deportees, as is the case with Saudi Arabia, households will rate the migration experience less positively.

Rating of migration outcome (% of households with returnees)



21 Female FGD Participant in Deder.

22 Female FGD Participant in Erer.

23 Female FGD participant in Deder.

“ I attempted to go to South Africa three times but could not make it. I was in prison twice, once in Tanzania and once in Malawi. My brother had to pay for a broker to take me out of prison and bring me to Mthatha, South Africa. I was working in a shop in South Africa for six years. Robbers stabbed me while I was working at the shop and I had to have surgery and stay in the hospital for three months. I could not continue working afterwards, because the robbers continued to follow me so my brother sent me back to Ethiopia. It has been eight months since I have been back in Ethiopia and I opened my own shop here. I am happy to be working here again and to be close to my three children.

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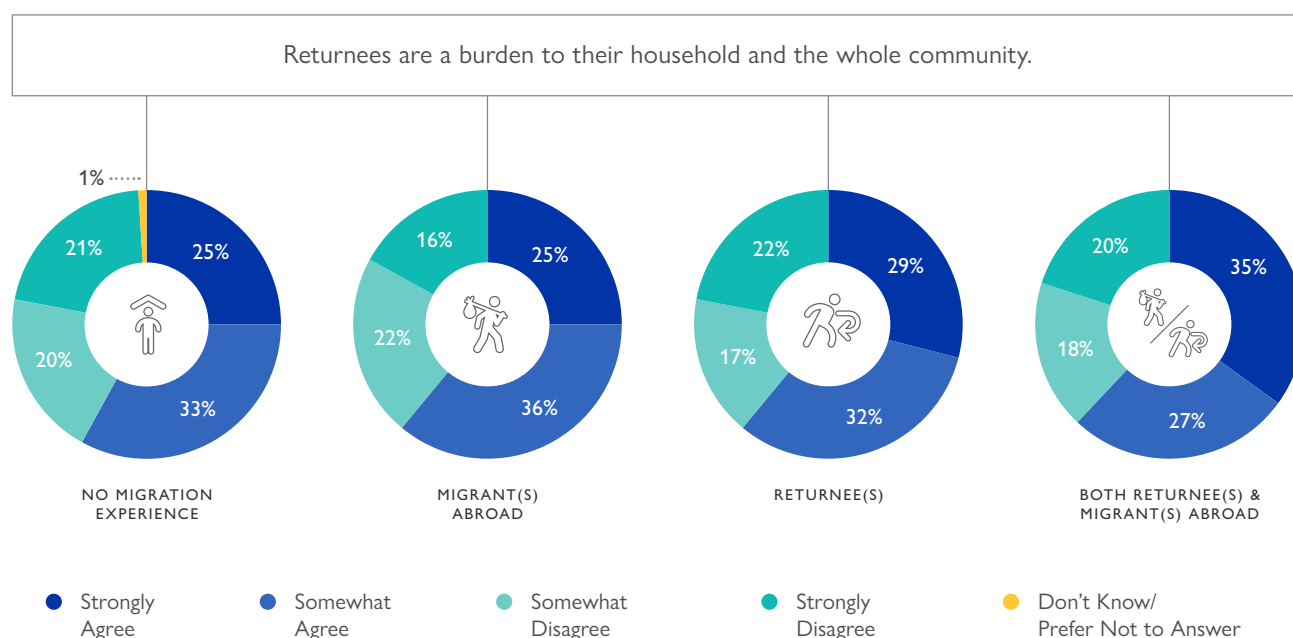


COMMUNITY PERCEPTION OF RETURNEES

While returnees reported that their families mostly welcomed them for returning safely, despite post-return tensions between returnees and their families being commonly reported, returnees' experiences within the wider community are often fraught with discrimination, stigma, judgement and social isolation. Respondents in all communities reported that unsuccessful returnees were not treated and respected in the same way as successful returnees. In Erer and Misha for example, returnees reported that successful returning migrants are

given large welcome ceremonies and relatives travel from near and far to greet them, while unsuccessful migrants' ceremonies are only attended by family, not the wider community. Negative attitudes of rejection towards returnees were also identified in the household surveys, where around 60 per cent of interviewed households, regardless of the presence of a migrant, returnee or both, stated that they perceived returnees as "a burden to their household and the whole community."

Attitude towards returnees (% of all households)²⁴



The stigma and discrimination unsuccessful returnees experience upon return was raised in FGDs in all five communities. Returnees suggested that the most common theme in the insults they receive from other community members is that they have wasted their families' money. Respondents of both sexes said they had been called 'useless' and respondents in Deder reported that community members were labelling them as lazy: "They named those who were successfully working and

earned money as 'diaspora', while those who returned without money are 'Blash-zora' [which means people who go around doing nothing, according to the participants]."²⁵ Another common theme that was expressed by participants in several communities was that communities perceive unsuccessful returnees as 'untrustworthy': "I always feel discrimination when our neighbours invite my sister and brother but not me to their celebrations and other ceremonies. I also feel discriminated when

²⁴ Of all households with migration experience, 734 had migrant(s) abroad, 440 had returnee(s) only, and 113 had both migrant(s) and returnee(s). In 13 households, members did not know what happened to the migrant(s).

²⁵ Male FGD Participant in Deder.

“ It took me 15 days to arrive to Yemen. As I was crossing a road, I was hit by a car and the car sped off and I was left lying in the street. The Red Cross came and took me to a hospital where I stayed for one year. I never made it to Saudi Arabia because from there I was deported and brought back to Ethiopia.

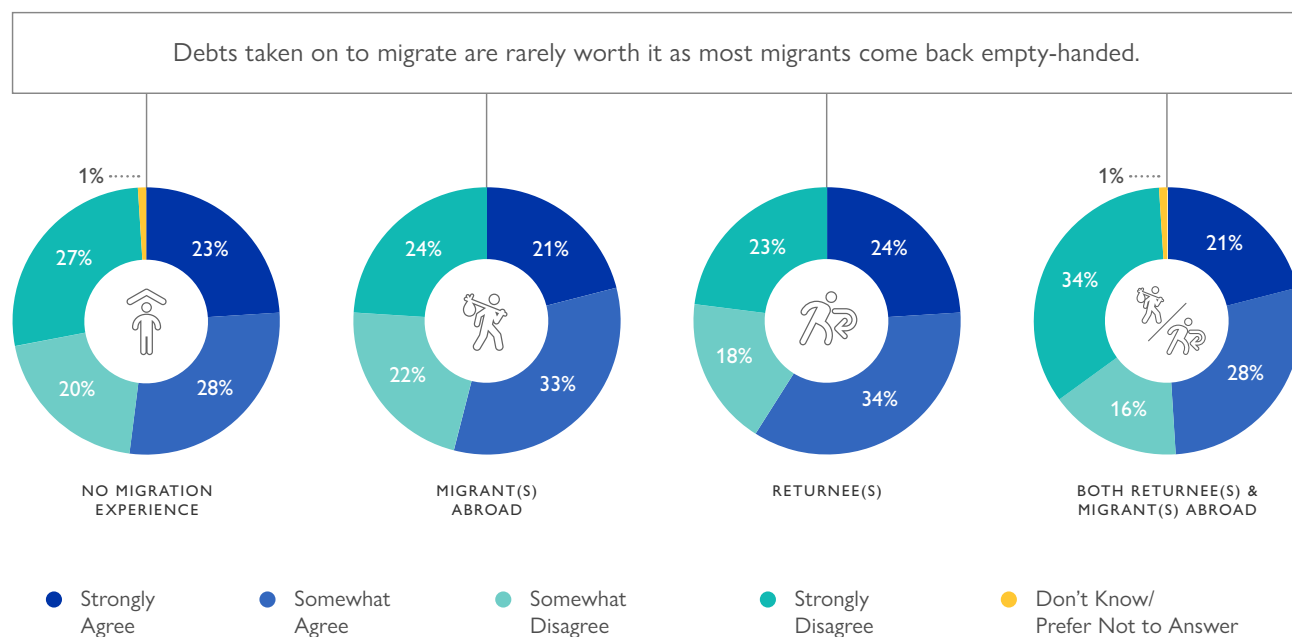
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people do not recruit me for a job because they assume I am not trustworthy. It hurts a lot.”²⁶ Participants from Setema also said that they had not been invited to ceremonies and weddings since their return and some reported that their neighbours were not greeting them on the street anymore. In Raya Kobo, KIs and FGD

participants explained that deportees are given the name ‘Tiriz’, which translates to ‘packed’. They believe this nickname derives from their experience of being forcibly arrested and treated as goods rather than human beings, but returnees disagreed over whether this nickname was meant to be derogatory.

Attitude towards returnees (% of all households)²⁷



Although successful returnees seem to generally be welcomed more positively, they also reported discrimination, in particular female FGD participants. Female FGD participants in Deder reported that they felt judged by former friends for not staying in Ethiopia and living a more traditional life by marrying and having children. Female returnees in Setema suggested that their former friends were not approaching them anymore as their friends assume that all returnees have mental disorders. Successful female FGD participants in Erer and Raya Kobo also reported experiencing discrimination and a lowered status in the community due to the community's perception that they had been sexually abused: “People perceive that any woman who migrated to Saudi is considered to sleep with brokers and other

fellow migrants during the journey. People think that the brokers and other male migrants will rape the women who migrate with them. So, they insult us saying things like, ‘you are a prostitute,’ and they don’t give respect to female returnees.”²⁸ A theme that was identified in FGDs with parents was that they mistrust successful returnees out of fear that they may convince their children to migrate.

“ The community does not trust returning migrants, fearing that they may misinform or facilitate the migration of others. It is believed that returnees are always thinking of migration and will spread such ideas to other community members.

²⁶ Male FGD Participant in Raya Kobo.

²⁷ Of all households with migration experience, 734 had migrant(s) abroad, 440 had returnee(s) only, and 113 had both migrant(s) and returnee(s). In 13 households, members did not know what happened to the migrant(s).

²⁸ Female FGD Participant in Erer.

“ My family thought I was dead because I was missing for five years. I came back from Zambia one year ago. My journey started by bus from Hossana to Moyale. To get from Kenya to Tanzania, sometimes we had to travel long distances at night by foot. I was arrested at a checkpoint along with 18 other people. The judge sentenced us to prison for 15 years, but I was released after five years. Life in prison was unbearable. They would beat us and ask us “why did you come here?”.

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Returnees also believed that changes in their sociocultural behaviour such as the way they dress compared to the rest of the community had fostered jealousy between them and their former friends: “Some community members give returnees the nickname ‘Adidas’, because in this community only returnees wear Adidas shoes.”²⁹ The dissonance between returnees who have experienced life abroad and their communities at home was also evident in FGDs with mothers who reported that their returnee children not only stand out in the community through their new cultural ways of dressing, communicating and religious beliefs, but they are also viewed as not fitting into the community anymore. A KI in Raya Kobo explained that many of the communities in Raya Kobo are very rural and traditional, and that community members generally

distrust returnees and consider them disloyal to their home communities – whether they return with money or not. This is especially the case for returnees who do not adhere to tradition in terms of how they dress and present themselves to the community and results in the community fearing that their culture will be fragmented and broken. According to this KI, both successful and unsuccessful returnees are the ‘least valued members of society’. Such dissonance between how returnees were living abroad and how their communities expect them to act upon return may induce a reverse culture shock, whereby returnees may be expected to transition from an identity of status and prestige to resume identities they have long left behind.

29 Male FGD Participant in Setema.

“ Sixty people died crossing the Red Sea on their way to Saudi Arabia. I was lucky to make it there alive but the journey took me two years. I spent 12 years living in Saudi Arabia and worked for a family of eight as their driver and guard. The family that I worked for abused me but I knew that I needed to support my own family back home. I only slept for two hours per day.

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REINTEGRATION CHALLENGES UPON RETURN

SOCIAL PARTICIPATION AND PSYCHOSOCIAL REINTEGRATION

The social stigma and rejection experienced by returnees may severely complicate social reintegration, as returnees are often not respected, not trusted and excluded from social events. Returnee FGD participants in all communities reported challenges reintegrating into their communities, both socially and economically. As discussed in the previous section, unsuccessful returning migrants can face a wide range of social rejection and stigmatization upon return, which may result in voluntary or involuntary social exclusion from community and social events that returnees had previously been invited to.

Both male and female returnees in Deder, Raya Kobo, Setema and Erer explained that they were making a conscious decision not to attend social events, even those to which they had been invited, out of fear that others would criticize them: “Sometimes, people from my neighbourhood talk about what happened to me without me. They don’t know my pain but laugh at me saying, ‘he tried to travel to Saudi by seeing others but he failed.’ So, why would I socialize with these people?”³⁰ Unsuccessful returnees in Deder, Erer and Misha also reported staying away from social events out of fear that they would have to contribute financially to the event or shame that they were unable to do so. A few returnees in Setema and Misha stated that they chose to isolate themselves and not to socialize with anyone as they prefer the solitary lifestyle they got accustomed to abroad. Successful returnees in all communities reported that they were not

only invited, but also attending social events more frequently as they are now able to financially contribute to them.

Such discrimination and stigma, together with the severe experiences of migrants during their migration journeys, may damage relationships with former friends and relatives. Across all returnee FGDs – except for male FGD respondents in Erer – all participants agreed that they mostly socialized with fellow returnees since returning to Ethiopia as they could relate to their experiences, while their friends from before their migration could not understand them anymore: “We don’t want to meet with old friends as they can’t sense the pain that we have been through during our journey to Saudi. But those who migrated with us know the pain and understand us. So, I meet with fellow returnees and socialize.”³¹ In addition to seeking the company of other returnees who can emotionally understand the experiences they have been through, returnees also reported that their old friends gossiped about them and rejected them for their new ways of dressing and behaviour. Economic and lifestyle barriers between returnees who had returned without money and were unemployed and their friends who had remained and worked in Ethiopia were also posited as reasons for why returnees are often estranged from their previous friends: “Since we left this community, many of our old friends were working hard and some of them have already changed their economic status. We the returnees are poor at this time and there is no way to meet those economically better-off friends, so we prefer to socialize with those who returned with us.”³²

30 Male FGD Participant in Deder.

31 Female FGD Participant in Deder.

32 Male FGD Participant in Deder.

ECONOMIC REINTEGRATION

In addition to challenges in reintegrating into their communities socially, returnees in all FGDs, except for successful returnees in Misha, reported that they were struggling to reintegrate economically. The economic challenges migrants reported facing included their inability to repay debts owed to their relatives or other community members, difficulties accessing employment opportunities and challenges mobilizing resources to re-establish themselves economically. Returnees commonly stated that they are living in dire economic conditions and some expressed being worse off than before migrating.

“ Now, I am living a lower standard of life than before I migrated to Saudi Arabia because before I migrated, I had many cattle and got money by selling them. I sold all my cattle for my migration, but I returned without money. I have become dependent on my family.”³³

Not only did participants report returning to economic situations that were worse than pre-migration due to money lost on the migration journey, they also reported that they were struggling to find employment in their communities as “no one wants to recruit unsuccessful returnees”³⁴ because they are stereotyped as untrustworthy.

Returnees’ prospects for resource mobilization upon return were reported as being extremely difficult in all communities, particularly in Deder and Erer where participants of both sexes reflected that to take formal loans from banks and other institutions, they need to have some money already in the bank, property or assets that they do not have, while individual community members were refusing to support them financially through loans – the way they would have done prior to their migration – as they have lost the trust of their neighbours and relatives: “One of the challenges that we face to obtain loans from people who are in a better economic condition is that the people who have money have no confidence in us and they don’t believe that we are going to pay the money

back since we have already lost so much money during our migration.”³⁵ Returnees in both communities also reported that community members are not willing to support them through loans as they believe they will migrate to Saudi Arabia again using the money.

The inability to access funds leaves unsuccessful migrants in a predicament, since their families are also often unable or unwilling to provide them with resources. Moreover, participants in several communities reflected that their dependency on their families, who are in many cases worse off economically due to their failed migration, was causing them to feel shame: “I am not feeling good to be dependent on my family at my age because I came without money, and I am not able to get a job in my country.”³⁶ Even successful returnee participants, who had returned with money and in some cases even established a business in their communities, often reported that their main reintegration challenges were economic in nature, either due to them having depleted their resources or their business ventures not having succeeded: “I opened a mini shop after I returned, and I started a business but the rent price for the shop was too high and I closed it and now I have lost everything and am living without any business.”³⁷

The household surveys corroborate the qualitative findings that returnees often struggle to reintegrate into their communities economically. The survey data suggest that reintegration into the labour market is extremely challenging for returnees, with only 13 per cent of households reporting that their relative(s) were able to reintegrate into the labour market and 13 per cent reporting that their relative(s) had been able to acquire new assets or open a business due to migration. The limited time spent abroad may also explain why only few returnees return home with “more financial resources” (29%).³⁸ In around 40 per cent of returnee households, returnees were not working and where they were, most were working in agriculture (45%). Households also rarely reported that returns had granted them a higher social status (9%). The exception to this finding is Misha, where returnees from South Africa seem to be better off than other returnees,

33 Male FGD Participant in Setema.

34 Male FGD Participant in Raya Kobo.

35 Female FGD Participant in Erer.

36 Female FGD Respondent in Raya Kobo.

37 Female FGD Participant in Setema.

38 In addition to being informal, economically driven and highly risky, migration to the Middle East tends to be temporary, meaning that most migrants return to Ethiopia after having spent less than two years abroad.

“ Three of my friends and I started our journey by foot. After we arrived in Tanzania, the broker who was supposed to take us to South Africa left us in the forest for 15 days, and told us he would bring us food. After waiting for 15 days, the police found us and took us to prison. Thirty-three of us were packed into one room and they barely gave us food or water. I was in prison for sixteen months. Now I work at a youth centre in Misha.

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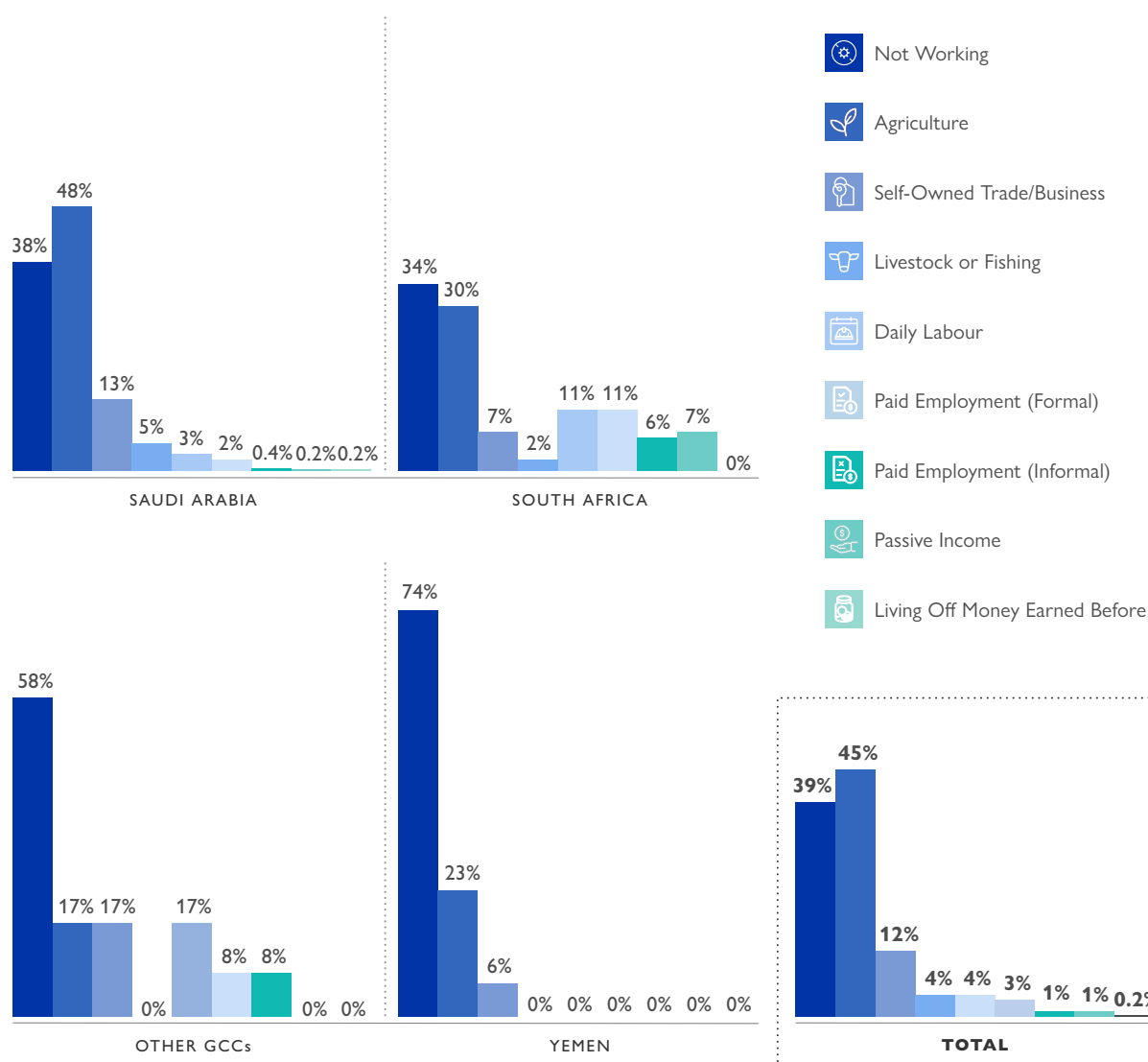


slightly less dependent on land and reporting more diversified sources of income. Not only do migrants often stay and work in South Africa for many years, but they also most commonly work in small businesses and trade that allow them to save money and learn skills that can be transferred home.

Age and gender appear to be linked to the economic reintegration of returnees, with younger migrants struggling to acquire financial independence and female migrants often starting self-owned businesses, potentially because females are much more likely than males to find employment in

Saudi Arabia and return after having earned some money. In households with at least one female migrant, 40 per cent of working returnees are involved in trade or own their own business (versus 11% of households with no female migrants). These households were also slightly more likely to report that returnees had more financial resources or had acquired new skills or assets. It is also worth noting that the data suggest that economic reintegration of returnees seems to be more successful when family ties are stronger and households were involved in the migration experience at all stages.

Main sources of income of returnees (% of households with at least one returnee)





“ My youngest brother lives in South Africa and paid for me to start the journey to join him there. I could not make it. I had to spend two years in prison in Tanzania and the Red Cross brought me back to Ethiopia.

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CHALLENGES UPON RETURN RELATED TO COVID-19

Government KIs in three of the five communities reported that there had been instances of COVID-19 among migrants returning to their areas. These KIs suggested that their communities were worried about returnees carrying COVID-19 at the start of the pandemic when fears were still heightened, but that over time the community got accustomed to COVID-19 and returnees stopped being stigmatized when they returned home. In all three communities, KIs reported that villagers would refuse to visit and interact with the returnee and his or her family, in some cases months after the returnees presented a negative COVID-19 certificate. The stigmatization and isolation of returnees with COVID-19 seems to have been particularly challenging in Setema, where KIs explained that there were instances of families refusing to welcome returning relatives during the early months of the pandemic, irrespective of whether they had been tested for COVID-19 or not: “We were challenged by the migrants’ families during COVID-19, because the families were refusing to welcome home their children. Almost all communities were not happy to welcome returnees during that time because what the media was saying the pandemic was not good, and communities considered that all returnees were carriers of COVID-19. I even know families who refused to accept their children after the test result showed negative.”

Returnees were asked to evaluate the impact of the pandemic on their return experiences in FGDs. Participants in all ten FGDs discussed that the pandemic has worsened their economic situation and made their economic reintegration more difficult than it would have been in pre-COVID-19 times. The more successful returnees reported that their businesses had to shut down or they didn’t open a business at all, while others suggested that they had exhausted the resources they had brought back during the pandemic: “When I returned, I was planning to open a small café but due to COVID, I feared that I wouldn’t receive any customers.”³⁹ Unsuccessful returnees most commonly noted that finding employment had become even more challenging during the pandemic, while the costs of living and transport had simultaneously increased. Returnees also reported that the stigma unsuccessful returnees experience generally was heightened during the pandemic as all returnees were either deportees or migrants who had not managed to reach their destination due to COVID-related movement restrictions, and migrants were not only labelled as ‘unlucky’ but also sometimes viewed as carriers of the disease.

39 Female FGD Participant in Raya Kobo.

“ I worked as a babysitter in Saudi Arabia for six years. I used to work all day and night, and was never able to get enough sleep or eat when I was hungry. They used to pour water on my bed if I was tired or pour water on me, straight from the fridge. I came back to Ethiopia because my mental health was not good. When I came back to Ethiopia, I got married and now have a 3-year-old son. I am much happier here.

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SUPPORT FOR MIGRANTS EXPERIENCING REINTEGRATION CHALLENGES

Returnee FGD participants and KIs were asked to discuss support mechanisms for returning migrants who are struggling to reintegrate into their communities. KIs in Raya Kobo, Deder, Misha and Erer reported that NGOs with a presence in their areas offer returnees financial support to start businesses and micro enterprises, skills training and in the case of Deder, temporary shelter, food and non-food items. In Deder and Erer, KIs also reported that the community sometimes facilitates fundraising events for unsuccessful returnees whose families are unable to support them. Returnees and KIs in all communities reported that there are no organized groups of returnees, or organized groups to support returnees, but that returnees do tend to cluster together and socialize with each other informally.

However, most returnee FGD participants, except for participants in Erer, reported that they had not received financial support from organizations or the community and those who did report having received financial support since returning were mostly supported by their parents. When asked about who had supported them the most since their return, participants across locations reported having felt assisted by other returnees, their families and religious leaders. In all communities, some participants reported counting on family members for psychological and emotional support,

while others reported that although they are receiving financial and daily livelihood support from them, they are not supported emotionally. “My family helped me with food and other daily expenses, but I do not think they are supporting me psychologically. When my father sees me, he always starts his complaints about the money he spent for migration.”⁴⁰

The lack of reintegration programmes and support for returnees poses a challenge to both returnees and the families they depend on. Although some returnees reported having been provided with basic assistance upon their return, support was never long-lasting. Reintegration is not a brief process, and while economic and livelihood support is important to avoid the rapid re-migration of returnees, it does not address the psychological trauma many have endured during their migration. Psychosocial disorders are particularly frequent among individuals who have suffered abuse; the data collected for this research as well as several other studies (Zelege et al., 2015; Zewdu & Suleyman, 2018; Fentaw, 2018) have measured a prevalence of mental health disorders among returnees in Ethiopia. Recent evidence suggests that one in four Ethiopians returning from the Middle East is likely to be suffering from mental health conditions (Zelege et al., 2015). Despite the prevalence of mental health challenges among returnees, support and understanding of mental health is not always guaranteed due to societal and cultural norms that dictate that shameful events such as sexual abuse are often not openly discussed.

40 Female FGD Participant in Raya Kobo.

RETURNEES' ASSESSMENT OF THEIR RETURN

FEELINGS ABOUT RETURN

Despite the numerous challenges returnees report facing upon return to their communities, participants shared mixed feelings about their return to Ethiopia. Some expressed regret over the money they lost on their journeys or, in the case of successful returnees, over money they would have liked to have earned before returning to Ethiopia. Returnees in most communities also reported regret that they have had to endure such difficult journeys without reaping the benefits of their suffering.

“ I travelled and spent more than four months in prison. I have seen many sufferings, such as hunger, thirst and torture. I wonder why I have suffered so much but have not found anything in return and why I have returned without even replacing the money lost on migration.”⁴¹

The reality of not being able to improve their families' living conditions, which was often times the main reason for migrating in the first place, also weighed heavily on participants, with several experiencing regret over the economic hardship their families were enduring as a consequence of their unsuccessful migration: “I have a bad feeling when I think of the money that I wasted for just nothing in return. Instead of changing the lives of my families, I became the cause for their current poor life.”⁴² Other participants reported not feeling good about their return as they were facing economic instability and had reverted to dependence on their families.

While many participants expressed regret over missed opportunities, most also reported feeling a sense of relief that they had returned home alive after all the suffering they had endured during their migration and that they had managed to escape the difficult conditions most had faced in detention prior to being deported: “I'm thankful to Allah for escaping that horrifying desert travel and the Saudi prison, and I feel lucky for being here alive. Many people died in the desert of thirst and hunger, also some people were shot dead, tortured and many became mentally ill. I feel so happy to have been reunited with my family.

Returning here alive is a big success for me.”⁴³ Returnee participants in Misha were particularly positive about their return, as most of them had chosen to return voluntarily from South Africa or had returned to Ethiopia after spending years in detention centres in transit countries.

PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

Even though the vast majority of FGD respondents reported that they found their life in Ethiopia challenging, in two out of the five communities all migrants reported that they do not want to re-migrate. Returnees discussed that if they worked hard and managed to secure some money to start a business at home, they would be able to build a life in Ethiopia. Particularly, returnees in Misha reported that they would never migrate again, either because they had already achieved their goals and earned enough money in South Africa to live comfortably or, in the case of unsuccessful returnees, because they could not afford another journey to South Africa, and they feared being detained in transit again. The female FGD participants in Misha also emphasized that raising their children in their own culture is very important to them. Although opinions were more mixed in Setema and Erer, most migrants reported wanting to stay in their area and try to establish themselves there.

Raya Kobo stands out, with both male and female FGD participants overwhelmingly reporting that they would like to re-migrate regardless of the challenges they experienced during past journeys, that they found the living conditions in Saudi Arabia more comfortable than at home and that they would only stay in their communities if they found decent work and get a better income. Plans to re-migrate therefore seem to be directly linked to the level or lack of economic re-integration and success at home: “I migrated to Saudi and spent a lot of money on the journey. I'm now thinking about how I'm going to replace the money that I spent. There's no way to work and re-gain that money here. So, I'm thinking about how I can migrate again and earn money to replace what I spent.”⁴⁴

41 Female FGD Participant in Erer.

42 Female FGD Participant in Erer.

43 Male FGS Participants in Deder.

44 Male FGD Participant in Erer.

FGD participants and returnee KIs also discussed whether they had learned useful skills during their migration. Unsuccessful returnees who commonly do not even reach their destination often suggested that while they hadn't learned skills that would help them start a business in Ethiopia, they had learned how to overcome very difficult and challenging situations, and some stated that they had learned they should not migrate again, as they now know what the journey is like. Among the skills successful returnees reported learning were cooking Middle Eastern food, speaking Arabic, breeding animals such as goats using modern technology, driving and fixing vehicles, running a shop, operating kitchen appliances, carpentry, henna and hair colouring as well as time management. A few migrants reported that they were able to use their acquired skills in Ethiopia, for example opening a small cafeteria thanks to their acquired cooking skills and working as a carpenter after learning carpentry abroad.

Nonetheless, most migrants who reported having acquired new skills explained that they were unable to use and share those skills effectively because they live in rural areas. Respondents explained that the unavailability or unaffordability of specialized cooking ingredients, lack of modern appliances and in some cases of electricity in their villages meant that they couldn't apply their new skills at home. Female FGD participants explained that both the cooking and cleaning styles differ greatly between urban and rural settings, making it hard to transfer skills: "I am teaching some future migrants how to speak basic Arabic. I was also trying to show them how to clean and cook food in Saudi Arabia but due to the lack of necessary materials here I couldn't do that."⁴⁵ Household surveys conducted for this research support these findings, with only 13 per cent of households reporting that returnee relatives have achieved specific skills due to migration.

45 Female FGD Participant in Raya Kobo.



“ Hossana has become a more developed city because many people who worked in South Africa came back here and built schools, hospitals, hotels and other businesses. My father returned after working in South Africa for six years and built a small hospital here. He supported me through medical college and I now work at our family's hospital.

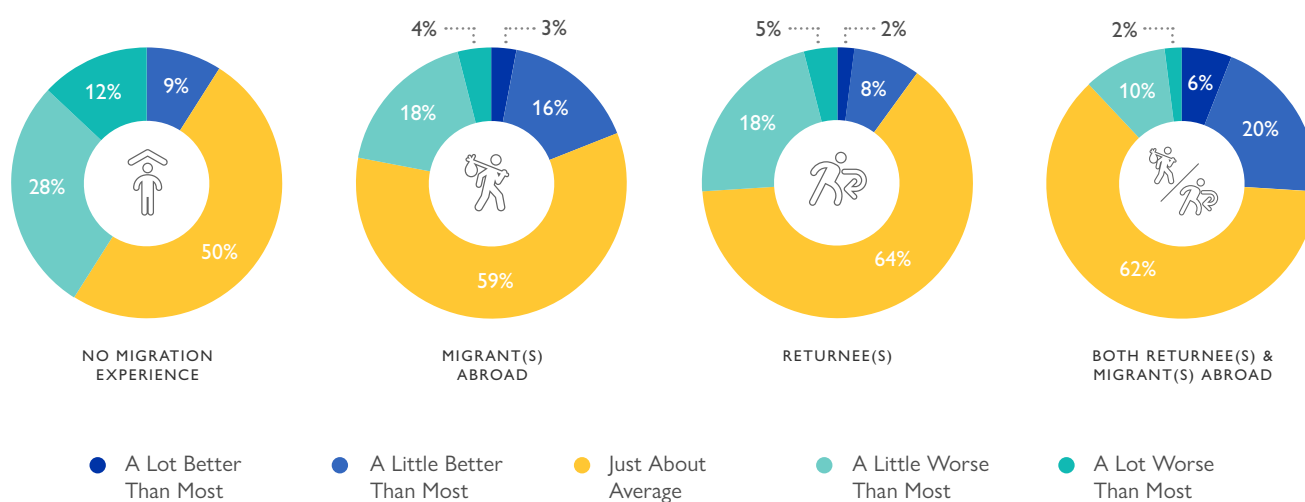
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THE IMPACT OF RETURNS ON HOUSEHOLDS

Survey data suggest that migration affects the well-being of households, but the effect tends to be short-lived and eventually fades after return. Around 20 per cent of households with migrants currently abroad (or both migrants and returnees) consider themselves to be either a little or a lot 'better off than most households in their community', compared to 9 per cent of households without experience of migration and those with returnees only (10%).

Households with migrants abroad often receive remittances, but the remittance flow ceases when migrants return to Ethiopia. The fact that families with migrants abroad seem to evaluate their households' well-being as 'a lot better than most' or 'a little better than most' more frequently than families with no migration experience or those with only returnees speaks to the importance of remittances as a source of income in these contexts.

Self-perception of well-being (% of all households)

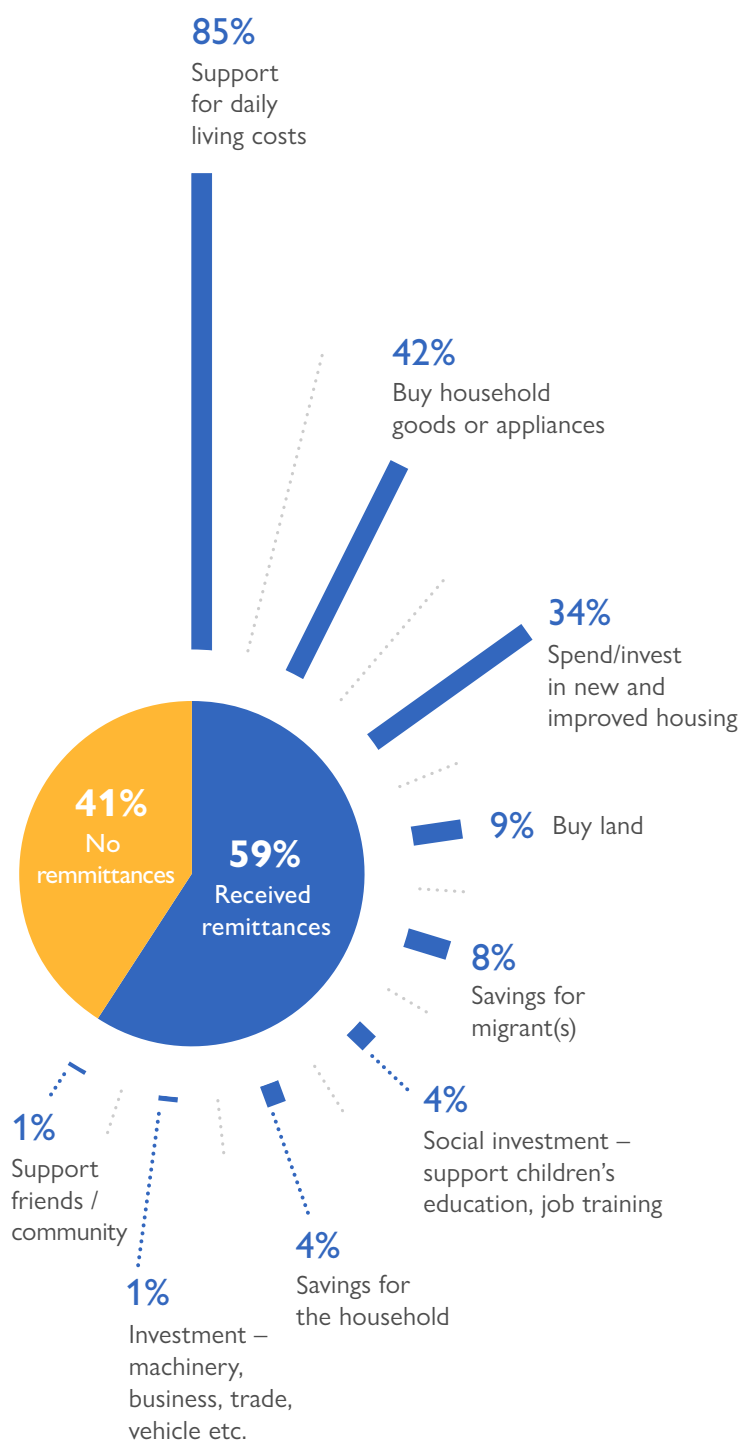


As stated in previous sections, involuntary returns impact returnees and their families economically. Even migrants who do successfully find employment abroad usually send the money they earn home to their families through Hawala networks and money agents, but remittance usage is not always sustainable and families rarely save the money that is sent. Only 8 per cent of surveyed households that received remittances reported that they saved "something" for the migrant(s), whereas nearly all households used remittances to support daily expenses, such as food, clothes, medicine and fuel (85%). Returnees therefore often return to Ethiopia with limited or no savings, which not only hampers their ability to reintegrate economically into their community but also renders

the household members who depend on remittances for their daily living expenses worse off than when their relative was still abroad. Some returnees even report that they were deceived about how the money they were sending home was being used in their absence: "When I was in Saudi Arabia, I sent my monthly salary to my husband, but he bought a house in Jimma town for his father and mother. I asked him to give me the legal documents of the house, but he refused to give them to me because the house file is in his family's name. Now I have nothing and he is filing for divorce."⁴⁶

46 Female FGD Participant in Setema.

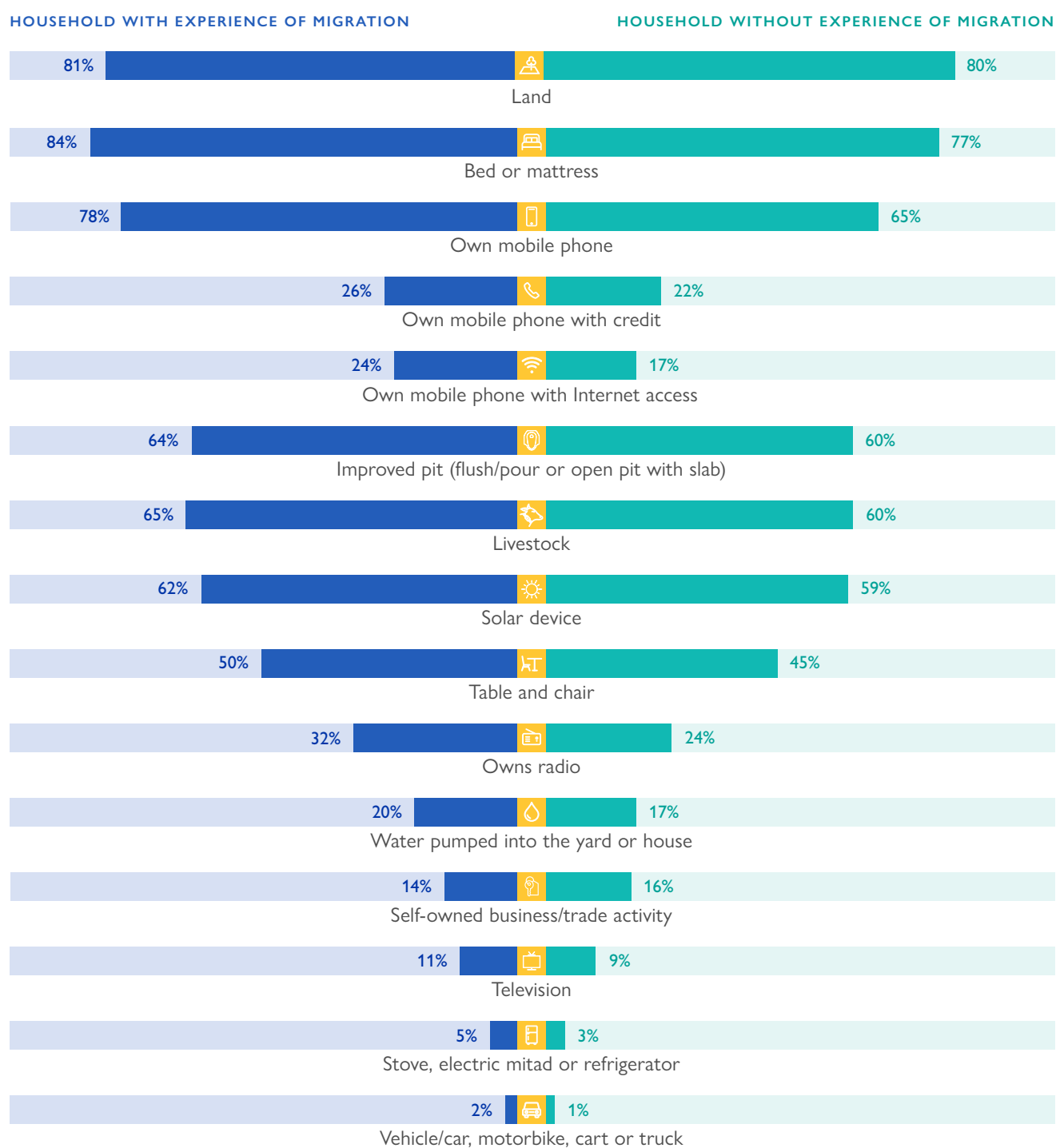
Remittances and their usage (% of households with experience of migration)



Although most households report using remittances for everyday living costs, around 42 per cent reported that they used remittances on consumer goods and appliances. Survey data show that all households with migrants abroad and/or returnees have higher rates of household goods ownership compared to non-migrant households, including furniture, entertainment devices (such as radios and TV), vehicles/bikes/carts and communication equipment, such as phones. Moreover, 78 per cent of households with migrants abroad and/or returnees own at least one mobile phone compared to 65 per cent of interviewed non-migrant households. Migrant households owning a phone were also more likely to have credit on their phone (26% versus 22%) and internet access (26% versus 22%) compared to non-migrant households. Migration also impacts living circumstances, with 34 per cent of migrant households reporting that remittances were spent on new or improved housing, which may have a positive effect on the whole community, as the usage of improved water and sanitation habits spreads. Households with migrants abroad and/or returnees are slightly more likely to use improved pits and/or have water directly pumped into their yard or house. Overall, migrant families seem to be slightly better off than surveyed non-migrant families, a notion that was echoed in several of the FGDs conducted with parents: “We have changed our ways of life by sending our children abroad. Before their migration, our families were unable to meet basic needs throughout the year; both food and clothes were basic needs that we could not have; we also built iron corrugated houses. Currently, we are enjoying a lot because our children are supporting us.”⁴⁷ Parents and KIs in Misha in particular, reported that migration has changed their families’ and community’s well-being.

47 Female FGD Participant in Setema.

Household assets (% of all households)



However, savings for migrants (8%) or the household (4%) and investments such as opening a business, buying machinery or a vehicle (1%) were very rarely reported, indicating that remittance management may not always be sustainable and living circumstances may abruptly

deteriorate if the remittance flow is interrupted or ceases completely. Data collected during KIIs and FGDs suggest that the COVID-19 pandemic caused remittance flows to decrease, leaving families that were reliant on remittances for their daily living expenses very vulnerable.

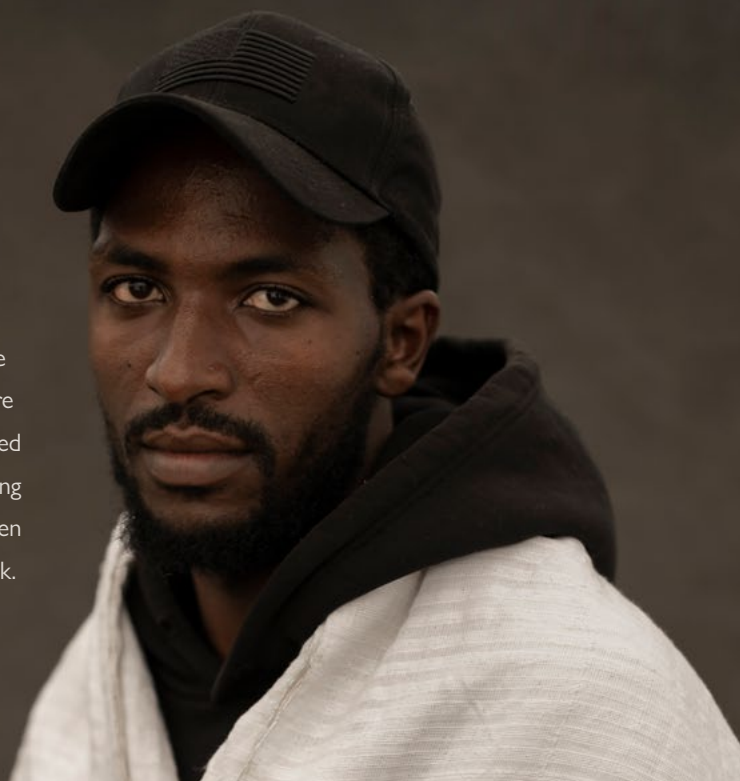


“ I went to school until the sixth grade and thought that I would be able to make more money if I migrated. I started the journey to Saudi Arabia with my brother and it took us 20 days to arrive. We were lucky and worked in the same area and I spent six years there working as a shepherd. One day, the police arrested me at my place of work, and I was forced to return to Ethiopia although I did not really want to. I am now married and have one child and have built a house, but if things work out, I would like to go back to Saudi Arabia.

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“ I graduated from high school and I didn't have a job. I couldn't find a job here so my brothers asked me to go to South Africa. I left with my best friend and used my passport to travel until Nairobi. After Kenya, I arrived to Tanzania by bus. To get from Tanzania to Mozambique, we travelled for two days. I was in a group of 97 people who journeyed by boat. The trip was very dangerous, we were thirsty and hungry. We only ate one piece of bread in two days and we saw people die on the road. We were arrested at the border of Tanzania and Mozambique and were imprisoned for two years. After being released, the government did not have the funding to send us back to Ethiopia so we stayed for six more months. IOM then brought us back to Ethiopia. If I can't find work here, I will try to go back. I will try to go knowing it is dangerous, but I have to improve my life.

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THE IMPACT OF RETURNS ON MIGRATION ASPIRATIONS

Returns not only impact returning migrants and their families but also the community. Successful returns can trigger further migration from the community by inspiring young, would-be migrants to follow in the footsteps of those who succeeded before them. Interviews and surveys conducted with migrants in transit during the first two phases of this research highlighted how successful returnees play a significant influencing role in promoting migration of young community members, with almost 50 per cent of qualitative respondents reporting that they had felt drawn to migrate to Saudi Arabia after seeing the 'success stories' of others, which may fuel a sense of relative deprivation and trigger aspirations to go abroad.⁴⁸

KIs who frequently interact with young community members in all five communities confirmed the findings of the first two phases and reported that a significant number of young people in their communities aspire to migrate to improve their economic situation and change their lives and the lives of their families: "The young people in this community are eager to change their life by making money. For any ordinary young person, one thing that comes to their mind is migration to another country. Migration is a common trend in this area and most young people are aware of this from early childhood". While KIs posited several reasons why young Ethiopians leave their communities to migrate,

they all mentioned that returnees play a role in triggering these aspirations: "Honestly, youths have a big inspiration to migrate because they do not want to listen to the negative experiences of returnees, they only focus on positive stories of migrants abroad. The older community members, returnees and migrants abroad started discouraging migration, but youth still have no ears to listen to the risks. I think this aspiration comes from the observation of what successful migrants do for their families, like sending remittances and constructing nice houses." KIs explained that migration is frequently discussed in the community in a variety of fora, including beauty and hairdressing salons, during khat chewing ceremonies, in restaurants and coffee shops, in pool houses and places of worship.

KIs in all five communities suggested that it is often returnees who initiate these discussions by talking about their lives in Saudi Arabia and how they have enhanced their families' lifestyle, while negative experiences are rarely discussed publicly. One KI suggested that not only are negative migration experiences less talked about, but they are also less believed by aspiring migrants: "I always hear children and youth discuss more about the inspiring advantages of migration like the type of food they will eat, the type of car they can buy and the amount of money to be gained from jobs than the negative impacts like imprisonment and death.

⁴⁸ For more information on this, please refer to the report 'To Change My Life': https://eastandhornofafrica.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbdl701/files/documents/IOM_RDH_Eastern%20Route%20Research_Final%20Report_Obock%20Djibouti_0_0.pdf.

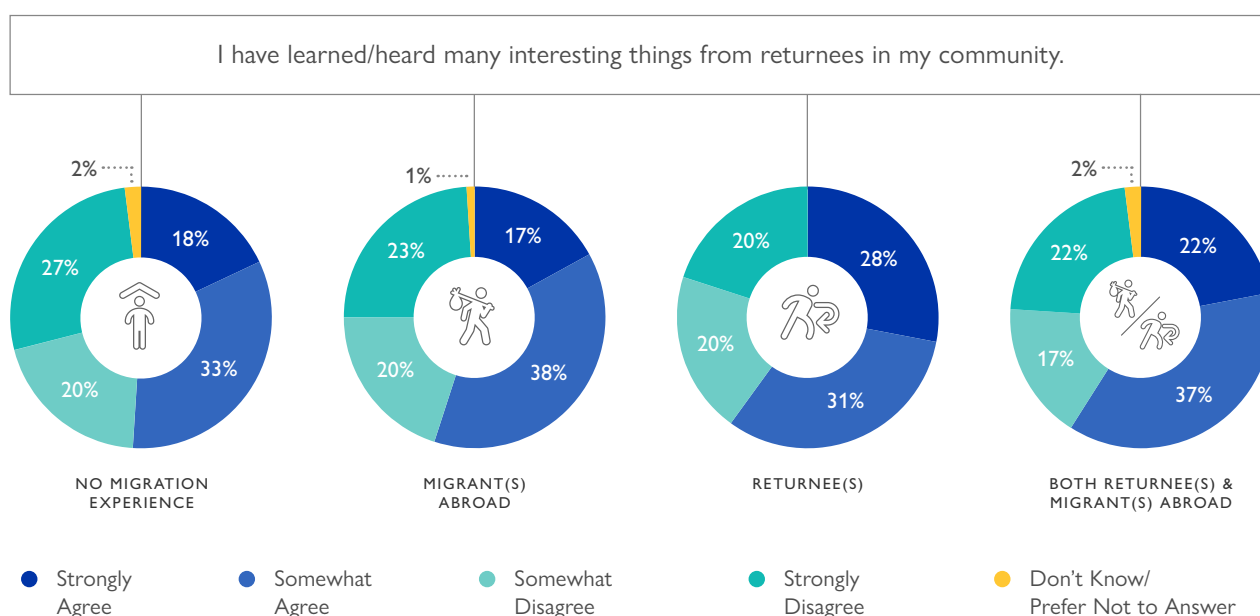
What I perceive is that the youth believe only the positive things they are told as returnees mostly provide information on both the risks and benefits but the young selectively listen to the benefits instead of the risks. When they do hear about the dangers of migration, they consider that danger is due to bad luck.” KIs also explained that would-be migrants are often misled by the fact that although returnees may tell them about the dangers and challenges of the journey, many returnees themselves re-migrate to Saudi Arabia.

FGDs with would-be migrants also strongly suggest that returnees play a huge role in disseminating information on migration and sometimes even play a role in encouraging migration: “Those who return to this community sometimes suggest that instead of living here, it would be better to face the challenges of the journey and even be imprisoned. So, the returnees incite us and make us give up on our lives here. Although they openly tell us what might happen during the journey, they encourage us not to fear the challenges and say that it would be better to die than live here.” Some would-be-migrants also explained that some returnees purposefully encourage migration because they have agreements with brokers that if they recruit new migrants they will travel back to Saudi Arabia

for free. However, participants in all groups also reported that many returnees, especially the unsuccessful ones who do not wish to re-migrate, openly discourage migration.

Would-be migrant participants in all FGDs agreed that returnees or migrants abroad are their preferred source of information on migration because returnees have gone through the challenges of the journey and can speak about what they have experienced and how to mitigate risk. Data from the household surveys also suggest that returnees are a key source of information on migration, with 20 per cent of households saying they would reach out to a relative or a friend who is currently abroad or had lived abroad if they were to actively search for information about migration. Similarly, in around 25 per cent of households, members mentioned “talking to returnees” among strategies to mitigate risks associated with irregular migration. Moreover, attitudes towards returnees were most positive when households were asked about ‘knowledge’ that returnees may have or could share with the community, with around 60 per cent of returnee households and 50 per cent of non-returnee households reporting they had ‘learned/heard many interesting things’ from returnees.

Attitude towards returnees (% of all households)⁴⁹



⁴⁹ Of all households with migration experience, 734 had migrant(s) abroad, 440 had returnee(s) only and 113 had both migrant(s) and returnee(s). In 13 households, members did not know what happened to the migrant(s).

“ I used to be a soldier many years ago. When I left the army, I started my own business but the previous government was not good for my business so I left for South Africa. I started the journey with 14 other people, but only four of us made it all the way to South Africa. In South Africa, I only made a small amount of money and I was able to build my own house there. I now have seven children (3 sons and 4 daughters). My kids tell me that they want to go to South Africa but I do not think it is a good idea to send them to South Africa or to Arab countries. I will not fund their trip because they will just get killed there. There is no peace like there is here. Here we work as a family in our restaurant and my kids are the cooks.

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“ I spent four years in Saudi Arabia as a guard at a farm. One day, robbers came to rob the farm and they shot me in the leg. My boss was kind and helped me to get treated but once I was released from the hospital, I was deported. I am still trying to find a way to go back to Saudi Arabia.

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CONCLUSION

Migrants return to Ethiopia for a variety of reasons: making a voluntary choice to return, reconsidering migration while in transit for reasons such as illness, having run out of money to pay for onward passage, deportation from their destination country or following detention in transit. Returns along the Eastern Corridor are often involuntary and the result of deportation or aborted journeys, while the returns of migrants who successfully arrived in South Africa are mostly voluntary. The way in which migrants return to Ethiopia matters, in particular whether they return with or without funds to establish themselves economically and what kind of experiences they endured prior to their return, as these factors often times predict reintegration outcomes. This study found that return and reintegration can prove very challenging for migrants, as they are often not in the same economic and social position as when they left their communities. Reintegration and return are also closely linked to understanding the conditions in which individuals have migrated and lived abroad and evidence suggests that both the Southern and Eastern Route are extremely arduous. Even for those migrants who managed to reach their destination, life and work in Saudi Arabia and South Africa seem to be dominated by social, emotional and physical hardship. Such hardships may greatly affect migrants' psychosocial well-being and define their reintegration experiences.

Data collected from KIs, returnees, would-be migrants and migrants' parents suggest that most returnees face a plethora of reintegration challenges, not only economically

but also socially and in some cases psychologically, while very few support mechanisms for returnees who are struggling were identified. Unsuccessful returnees reported experiencing conflict and tension with their families and many reported that they were excluded from community and social life as they were viewed by neighbours and other villages as 'failures'. Community reservations towards unsuccessful returnees also seem to extend to their economic participation, with returnees reporting that they were not able to find employment as they are viewed as 'untrustworthy'. Although successful returnees generally reported more welcoming attitudes, they also reported experiencing discrimination, particularly female returnees who are often stigmatized as sexually abused and very frequently reported that their husbands divorced them after their return.

Returns not only pose a challenge to the returning migrants, but may also severely impact their households. While failed migration journeys make households who supported these journeys financially worse off than pre-migration, even the families of migrants who successfully entered Saudi Arabia, found employment and sent remittances may suffer when their relative returns to Ethiopia. Remittances are most commonly used on daily living expenditures, to buy consumer goods and for housing upgrades and rarely saved or invested into income-generating assets and business ventures, indicating that remittance management may not always be sustainable and living circumstances may abruptly deteriorate when the remittance flow is interrupted.

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“ I left my family behind to work as a farmer in Saudi Arabia for five years. The Ethiopian government asked us to return because there was a conflict between migrants and the Saudi government. While I was hiding from the government so that I could stay in Saudi Arabia, I was robbed by Algerian migrants and was forced to return to Ethiopia empty-handed.

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