The use of smugglers among Ethiopian refugees and migrants in Sudan

Note: this snapshot was amended on 1 June 2022 to remove a reference to Ethiopians fleeing the Tigray crisis, given that the sample analysed comprises Ethiopians from across the country, some of whom left before the crisis began.

More than 73,000 Ethiopian refugees and asylum seekers are registered in Sudan.[1]

In an attempt to shed light on the role of smugglers[2] in facilitating movements across the Ethiopia-Sudan border, this snapshot uses 4Mi data to examine whether and how Ethiopian refugees and migrants have interacted with smugglers during their journeys to Sudan.

This snapshot is produced in the context of a partnership with the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) [Observatory on Smuggling of Migrants](#).

Key findings

- 46% of Ethiopian respondents had used a smuggler during their journey to Sudan.

- Smugglers facilitated transit across the border (65% of respondents who used a smuggler), provided in-country transportation (43%), provided ID and travel documents (39%) and dealt with authorities (34%), amongst other tasks.

- Respondents who used smugglers spent considerably more (526 USD, on average) on their journey from Ethiopia to Sudan than those who didn't (309 USD).

- While 73% of respondents perceived smugglers as helping people, 33% felt intentionally misled by smugglers.

Profiles

This snapshot draws on 244 surveys conducted with Ethiopian refugees and migrants interviewed in Sudan from February 2021 to February 2022.[3] The sample consists of 34% women and 66% men, aged between 19 and 62 years with an average age of 30. The majority of interviews were conducted with respondents located in Greater Khartoum (79%), followed by Kassala (6%), Um Rakuba (5%), Gedaref (3%) and other locations (8%).

Respondents were from the regions of Tigray (48%), Amhara (16%), Addis Ababa (12%), Oromia (7%), Benishangul Gumuz (5%), SNNP (5%) and other regions (7%). A quarter (25%) of respondents had been in Sudan for less than six months at the time of the interview, 44% between six and twelve months and 31% between one and two years.[4] When asked whether they had reached the end of their journey, 8% affirmed this was the case while the majority reported they had not (52%) or did not know (39%).

Figure 1. What region are you from in your country of nationality?

- Tigray — 48%
- Amhara — 16%
- Addis Ababa — 12%
- Oromia — 7%
- Benishangul Gumuz — 5%
- SNNP — 5%
- Other — 7%

n=244

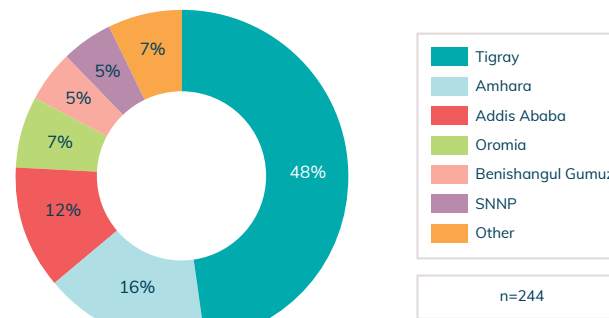1   UNHCR, 2022. [UNHCR Data Portal - Sudan](#)
2   MMC uses a broad interpretation of the terms 'smuggler' and 'smuggling', one which encompasses various activities — paid for or otherwise compensated by refugees and migrants — that facilitate irregular migration. These include irregularly crossing international borders and internal checkpoints, as well as providing documents, transportation, and accommodation. This approach reflects refugees' and migrants' perceptions of smuggling and the facilitation of irregular movement. Our interpretation is deliberately broader than the UN Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants definition. However, this does not imply that MMC considers all activities it includes in its broad understanding of smuggling to be criminal offences. MMC prefers to use the term 'human smuggling' instead of 'migrant smuggling' as smuggling involves both refugees and migrants. This publication is produced in partnership with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) [Observatory on Smuggling of Migrants](#). The Observatory uses the word 'smuggler' when it can reasonably be assumed that the crime of migrant smuggling is constituted, as per Article 3 of the UN Smuggling of Migrants Protocol, while the word 'facilitator' is used whenever the elements of (a) irregular entry and/or (b) financial or material benefit, could reasonably be assumed not to be in evidence. www.unodc.org/res/som/index.html.

3   53% of interviews were carried out face-to-face and 47% via phone due to COVID-19 and security restrictions.
4   4Mi only targets refugees and migrants who have been in the country of interview for less than two years.

Map 1. Main locations of interview and regions of origin

The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations. Final boundary between the Republic of Sudan and the Republic of South Sudan has not yet been determined. Final status of the Abyei area is not yet determined.

Almost half of Ethiopians interviewed in Sudan had used a smuggler

Just under half (46%) of Ethiopians interviewed in Sudan had used a smuggler to facilitate their journey. When disaggregating the data by region of origin, responses varied considerably. Respondents from Tigray least often used the services of a smuggler to reach Sudan (18%; 21/118), while the vast majority of those from Addis Ababa (93%; 27/29) and Oromia (71%; 12/17) used a smuggler. Respondents from Amhara more closely reflected the sample's average (45%; 17/37). This suggests that proximity to the border plays a role in the use of smugglers. There were no observable differences in smuggler use between men and women. Overall, of those respondents who had used a smuggler (n=111), most (58%) had used one smuggler for the entire journey, while 26% had used one for only part of their journey and 16% used several smugglers for different parts of the journey.

Beyond facilitating transit across borders, smugglers provided in-country transportation, documentation and dealt with authorities

Smugglers provided a range of services to respondents. Among respondents who had used a smuggler for at least part of their journey, the most common services provided were: transit across borders (65%), in-country transportation (43%), providing documents (39%), dealing with authorities (34%), facilitating money transfers (28%), providing accommodation (18%), providing food or water (17%) and providing access to communication (14%).

Figure 2. What did the smuggler provide you with? (Amongst those who had used a smuggler)
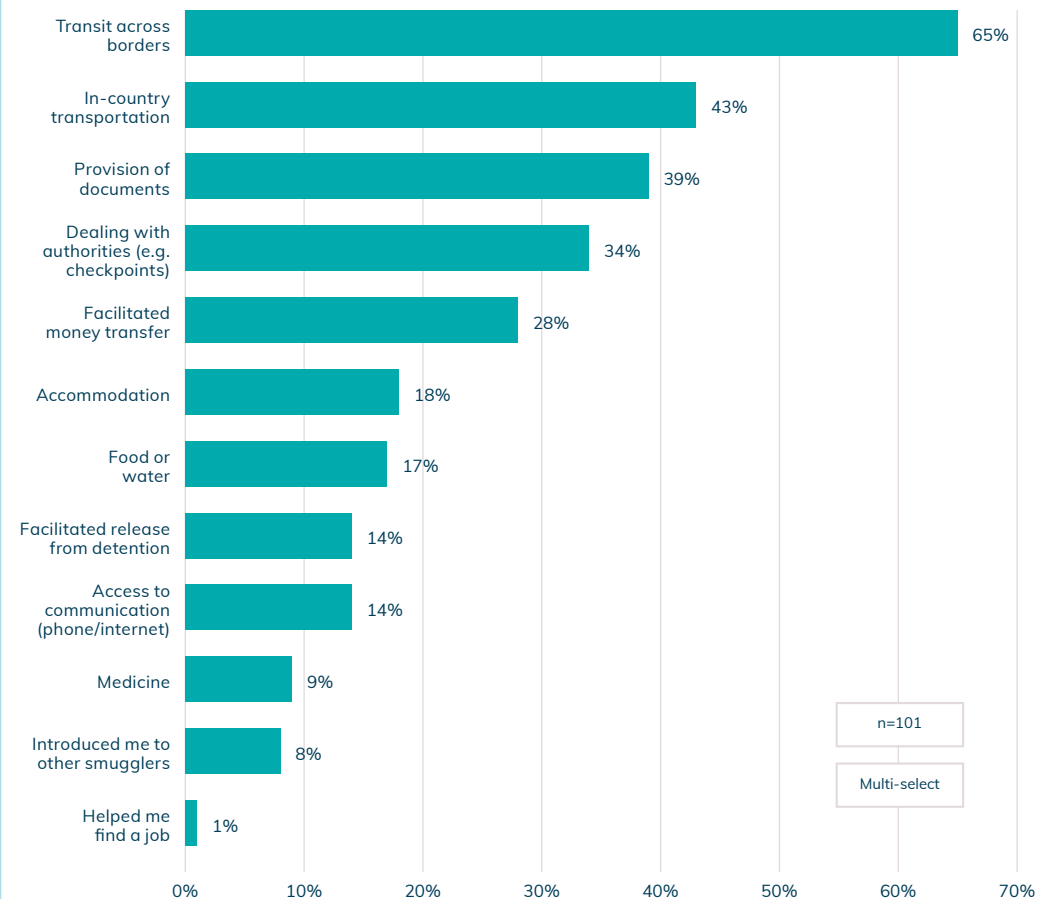
It was more common for women respondents to receive a wider array of services from smugglers, although the small sample size means these findings should be considered with caution. In particular, women more frequently reported receiving documents (22/38 vs 21/73 men), smugglers facilitating money transfers (16/38 vs. 15/73 men) and release from detention (12/38 vs 4/73 men). The prevalence of document provision for Ethiopian women may indicate smuggler involvement in recruitment for international domestic work and potentially international trafficking networks. The ILO finds that Sudan is both a transit and destination country for regular and irregular Ethiopian domestic workers[5] and research shows women account for 95% of regular migration from Ethiopia to the Middle East,[6] where risks of abuse and exploitation are well documented.[7]

Respondents who used smugglers spent significantly more on their journey to Sudan

Among respondents who had travelled directly from Ethiopia to Sudan (i.e. excluding those who transited through third countries) and could remember their total journey costs (n=116), the average cost of travel was 470 USD. A large difference in journey costs arises when comparing those who used a smuggler to those who did not: respondents who used a smuggler (n=86) spent, on average, 526 USD for their journey, while those who did not (n=30) spent an average of 309 USD for their journey.

The payment of smugglers occurred through a variety of arrangements. Around a third (32%) of respondents who had used a smuggler reported paying smugglers in full before departure. The majority, however, did not, and either paid in full at destination (29%), in full upon service delivery (27%) or in instalments along the way (5%). Some had not yet paid the smuggler (4%) or were to pay the smuggler through labour (2%).

Women more often felt intentionally misled by smugglers about their journey than men

Overall, a majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed (73%) that the smuggler had helped them achieve their goal of migrating to another country. Others (14%) neither

agreed nor disagreed, or 13% disagreed/strongly disagreed. No differences were noted between men and women. On the other hand, when asked whether they agreed with the statement: "I was intentionally misled about the journey by my smuggler or smugglers," responses were more varied. A third of respondents (33%) agreed/strongly agreed that this was the case, 22% neither agreed nor disagreed and 45% disagreed/strongly disagreed. As shown in Figure 3, a larger proportion of women (18/38) felt they had been intentionally misled by smugglers than did men (19/73). Although it is not possible to confidently identify cases of trafficking, deception is the most common mechanism used by traffickers to initiate recruitment of victims.[8]

Figure 3. To what extent do you agree with the following statement: "I was intentionally misled about the journey by my smuggler or smugglers"? (Among respondents who used a smuggler)

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Men (n=73)	8	11	19	30	5
Women (n=38)	3	15	5	12	3
n=111					
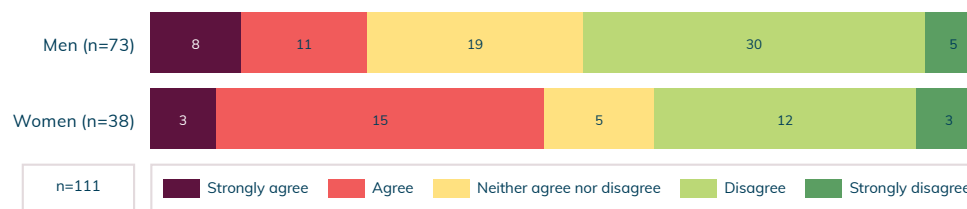
8   UNODC, 2020. GLOBAL REPORT ON TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS

4Mi data collection

4Mi is the Mixed Migration Centre's flagship primary data collection system, an innovative approach that helps fill knowledge gaps, and inform policy and response regarding the nature of mixed migratory movements and the protection risks for refugees and migrants on the move. 4Mi field enumerators are currently collecting data through direct interviews with refugees and migrants in East and Southern Africa, North Africa, West Africa, Europe, Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean.

Note that the sampling approach means that the findings derived from the surveyed sample provide rich insights, but the figures cannot be used to make inferences about the total population. See more 4Mi analysis and details on methodology at: www.mixedmigration.org/4mi

5   ILO, 2017. MIGRANT DOMESTIC WORKERS IN ACTION.
6   Migration Policy Institute, 2021. Once Primarily an Origin for Refugees, Ethiopia Experiences Evolving Migration Patterns.
7   Al Jazeera, 2021. 'She just vanished': Ethiopian domestic workers abused in Lebanon