

Climate-related drivers of mixed migration in East and the Horn of Africa

Climate change is impacting lives and livelihoods across the African continent, through increasing temperatures, shifting rainfall patterns and an increase in the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events, particularly droughts and floods.¹ This snapshot examines environmental drivers of international mobility and their interactions with other migration drivers in East and the Horn of Africa. The aim is to provide national and regional policy actors with some empirical data on the links between climate change and international mobility, to inform discussions on future activities and policy directions.

Key findings

- Environmental factors rarely cited among main migration drivers (1%), making them challenging to target and address.
- However, when directly prompted, 18% of respondents cited the environment as a factor in their migration decision.
- Environmental factors most often interact with economic drivers (59%) and conflict (22%), with the link between the environment and conflict especially high for respondents from Sudan (53%).
- Drought is a major cause of mobility linked to environmental factors among respondents from the Horn of Africa (79%).

Data

This snapshot draws on 4,070 quantitative 4Mi surveys conducted with refugees and migrants in Somalia (41%), Sudan (30%), Libya (15%) and Tunisia (14%) between February 2021 and October 2022. All respondents had arrived in the countries of interview less than two years prior to the interview. 77% of respondents are men and 23% are women.

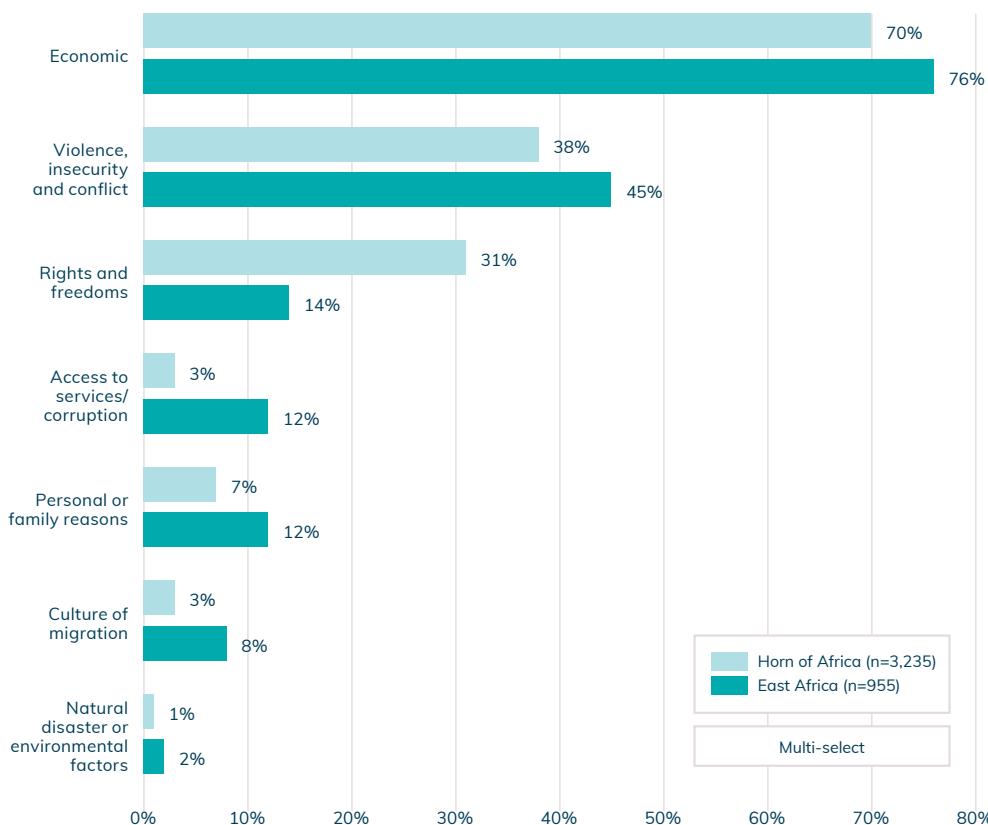
Respondents' countries of departure were Ethiopia (53%), Eritrea (20%), Sudan (14%), South Sudan (8%), Somalia (2%), Djibouti (1%), Kenya (1%) and Uganda (0.2%). Here we group the data to cover the Horn of Africa (HoA), encompassing respondents who left from Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia and Djibouti, and East Africa (EA), comprising respondents who departed from Sudan, South Sudan, Kenya and Uganda.

Environmental factors rarely cited among the main migration drivers, where economic and political factors dominate

Economic factors most often drive the decisions of respondents to leave their places of origin. This was the case for 70% of respondents from HoA and 76% from EA. The second-most common reason in both regions was violence, insecurity and conflict (38% from HoA vs. 45% from EA). Environmental factors were the least cited reason for both groups (1% from HoA vs. 2% from EA). This implies that respondents did not immediately or directly link their decision to migrate to environmental factors. Moreover, the data reveal that many respondents (40%) reported multiple migration drivers, highlighting the multidimensional nature of migration processes.

¹ MMC (2022) [Climate mobility in Khartoum Process countries: An exploration of interventions](#).

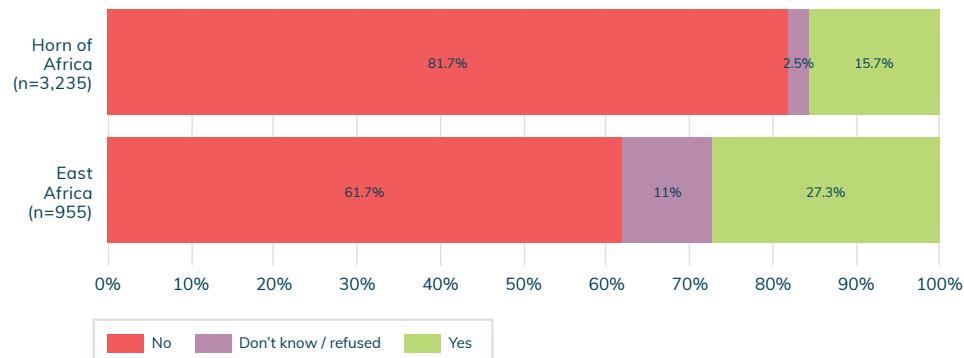
Figure 1. For what reasons did you leave (region of departure)?



Environmental factors are more often indirect drivers, especially for those from Kenya, Somalia and Djibouti

When the same respondents were asked a more targeted question about whether environmental factors played a role in their decision to leave, results shifted. 16% of those from the Horn of Africa and 27% from East Africa reported that environmental factors had an impact on their migration decision. This was particularly the case for respondents from Somalia (40%; 37/92), Djibouti (33%; 16/49) and Kenya (77%; 30/39), which are countries experiencing the effects of a large-scale drought crisis that is significantly constraining livelihoods.²

Figure 2. Were environmental issues a factor in your decision to leave your country of departure?



The difference in the responses emphasizes the importance of targeted survey questions to untangle the interactions between environmental drivers and other drivers. Respondents often describe the direct causes or triggers of their movement, such as loss of livelihoods, obscuring the role of underlying or indirect factors like crop failure linked to drought, which may have contributed to the loss of livelihoods.

Environmental factors interact with economic and conflict drivers, with the link between the environment and conflict especially salient for those from Sudan

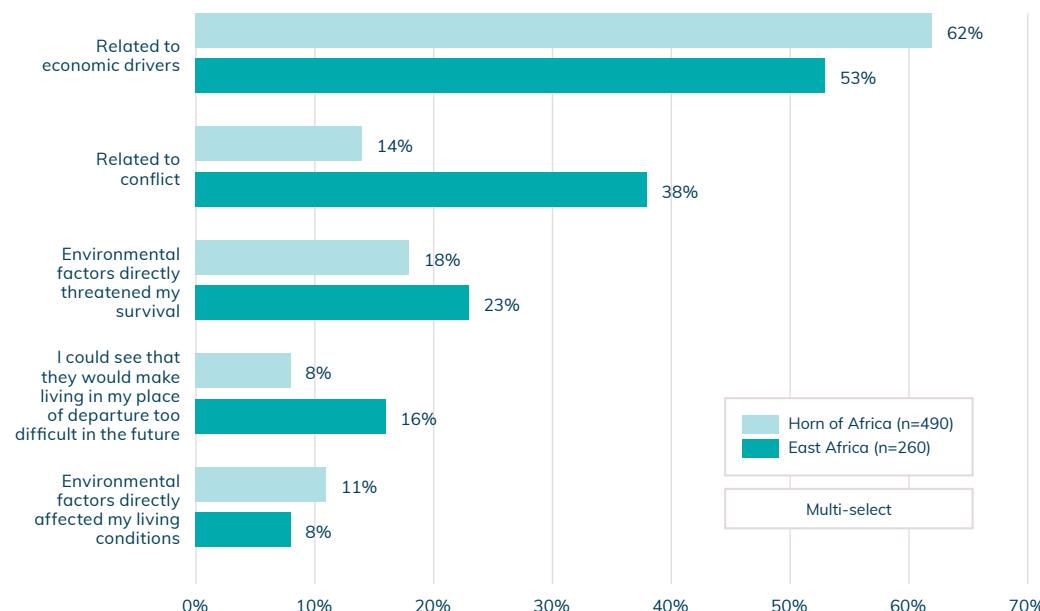
Of the respondents who reported environmental factors impacting their migration decision-making, most explained they had been experienced through economic drivers (62% from HoA vs. 53% from EA), which aligns with the overall data on migration drivers (Figure 1). The second-most frequently cited way in which the environment influenced migration decisions was in relation to conflict (15% from HoA vs. 38% from EA). This was particularly the case for respondents from Sudan (53%), where the conflict in Darfur “is often depicted as the site of the first climate conflict in the world”, and where increased scarcity as a result climate change alongside weak climate adaptation linked

2 IOM (2022) ‘Horn of Africa Drought 2022: Human mobility snapshot.’

to weak institutions, has exacerbated existing grievances and socio-economic and political marginalization.³

Additionally, the data suggest that some respondents are engaging in more proactive movements, possibly as part of a climate adaptation strategy: 8% from HoA and 16% from EA cited moving because they anticipated that environmental factors would make living in their place of departure too difficult in the future.

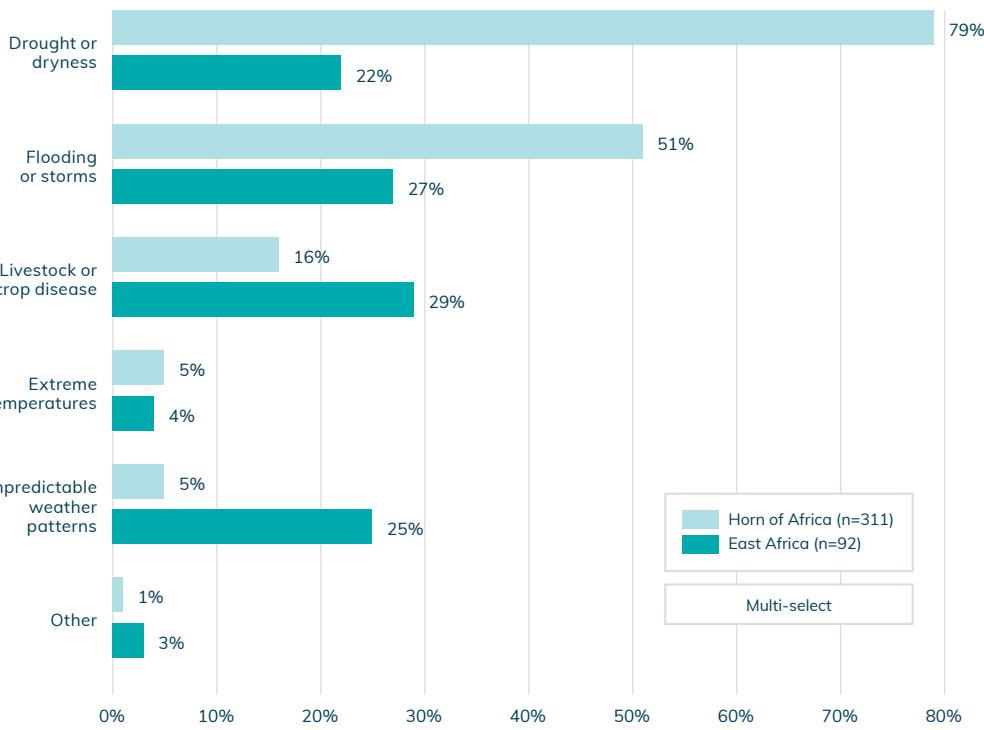
Figure 3. How were environmental issues a factor in your decision to leave your country of departure (among those reporting that environmental issues were a factor in their decision to leave)?



Drought is the main environmental factor prompting climate-related mobility in the Horn of Africa

Among respondents from the Horn of Africa, drought or dryness was by far the largest contributor to mobility linked to environmental drivers (79%), followed by flooding or storms (51%). Indeed, 83% of Ethiopians who cited environmental migration drivers had identified the drought, which reflects the widespread drought emergency impacting many parts of the country.⁴

Figure 4. What kind of natural disaster or environmental factor?⁵



⁴ IOM (2022)

⁵ The condition which determined whether this question was asked was modified in a survey update in July 2021. Prior to this date, only respondents who selected 'Natural disaster or environmental factors' on the first drivers question 'For what reasons did you leave (country of origin)?' were asked this question on types of natural disasters. After July 2021, respondents also answering 'Yes' to 'Were environmental issues a factor in your decision to leave your country of departure?' were asked this question. For this reason, the sample size for this question is smaller than the previous data points.

³ Conflict Sensitivity Facility (2022). 'Climate and Conflict Sensitivity: Improving aid's interaction with climate, the environment and conflict in Sudan' citing Selby, J. & Hoffmann, C., 2014. Beyond scarcity: Rethinking water, climate change and conflict in the Sudans. Global Environmental Change, Volume 29, pp. 360-370.

In contrast, respondents from East Africa cited a more consistent range of environmental factors, reflecting the diversity of climate impacts in the region, including livestock or crop disease (29%), flooding or storms (27%), unpredictable weather patterns (25%) and drought or dryness (22%). For instance, for the past three years, South Sudan has experienced record and unpredictable rainfall leading to catastrophic flooding, aligning with South Sudanese respondents citing unpredictable weather patterns (46%) and flooding (26%).



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