

Understanding the impact of COVID-19 on refugees and migrants in Kenya and Somaliland

In East Africa, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has had a major impact on migration dynamics in the region. In March 2020, Ethiopia, Kenya, Djibouti, Somalia and other East African countries reported their first cases of the COVID-19 virus. As a response to the growing threat, governments across the region implemented strict travel restrictions and widespread border closures. Kenya reported its first COVID-19 case on March 12 and announced its borders would close on March 15. Somaliland reported its first case on March 16 and subsequently closed its borders on March 26. This snapshot aims to contribute towards building a solid evidence base to inform targeted responses on the ground, as well as advocacy efforts related to the situation of refugees and migrants during the coronavirus pandemic.

Key recommendations

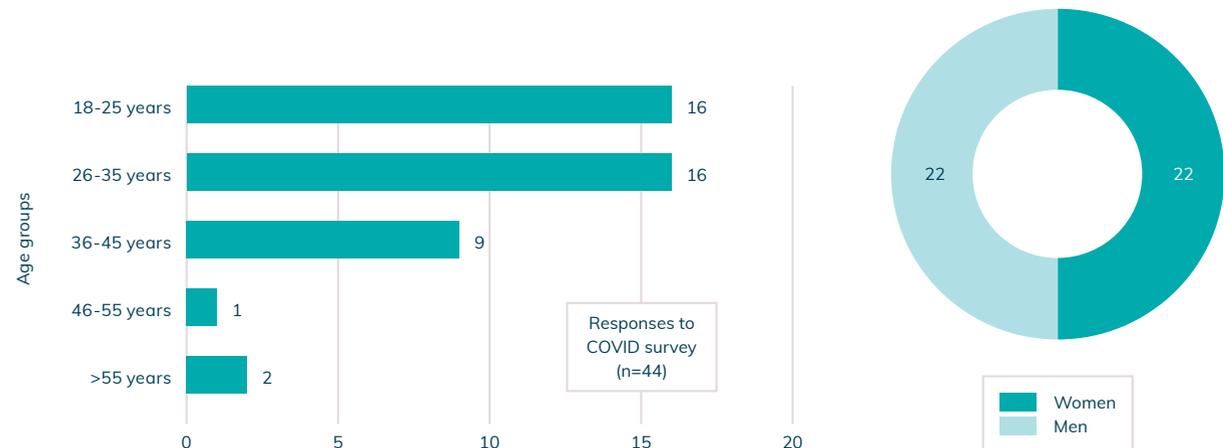
- Increase cash support to vulnerable refugees and migrants to cushion them from the negative impacts of loss of income.
- Support governments to safeguard the right to seek asylum and preserve the principle of non-refoulement in line with international refugee law and human rights law.

Profiles

This snapshot focuses on the impact that coronavirus has had on migration journeys and the day-to-day lives of refugees and migrants. The analysis is based on 44 interviews conducted with refugees and migrants in Kenya and Somaliland between April 15 and May 7, 2020. Interpretations based on this dataset should be made with caution given the small sample size, but findings will become more informative as the dataset continues to grow.

In Kenya, interviews were conducted with respondents in Dadaab (2), Garissa (10), Mandera (1), and Nairobi (14), and in Somaliland interviews were conducted in Berbera (5), Hargeisa (10), and Wajaale (2). Respondents were from Democratic Republic of Congo (13), Ethiopia (13), Rwanda (1), Somalia (14), and Yemen (3). 2 of the respondents in Somaliland were returnees. 22 of the respondents were men and 22 were women. The average age of respondents was 31.

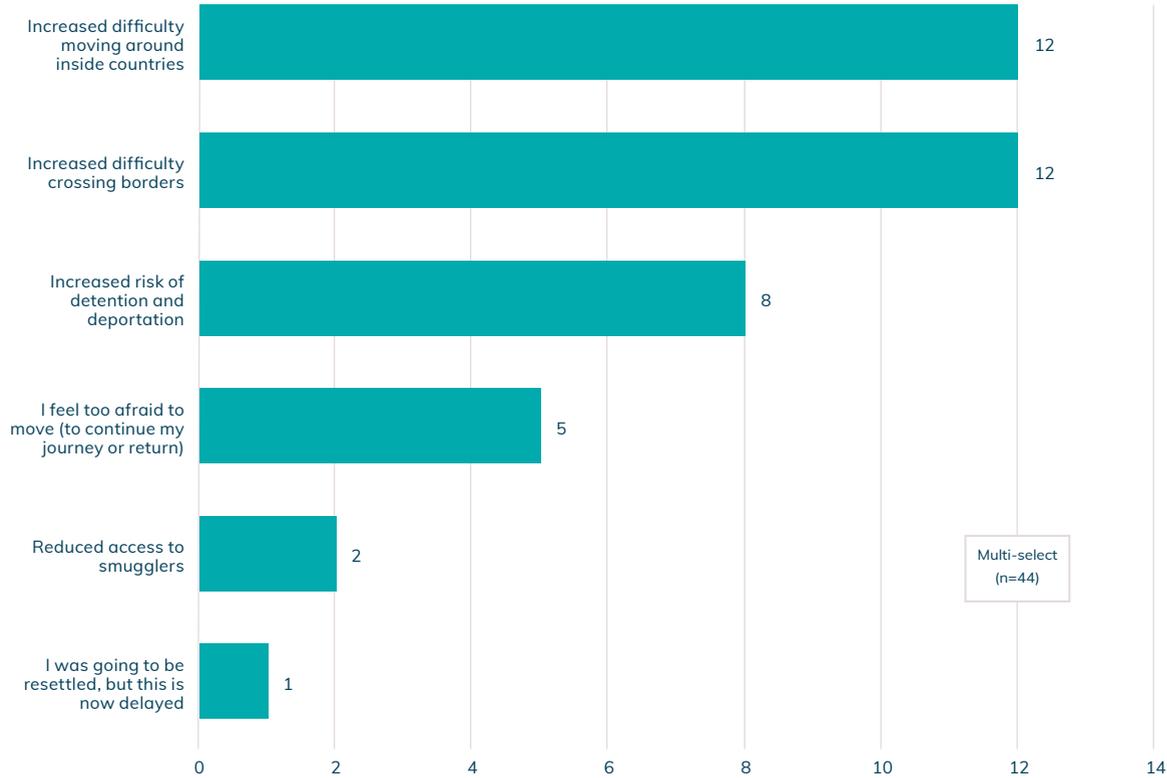
Figure 1. Age range and sex of respondents



The COVID-19 pandemic had impacted all respondents

All 44 refugees and migrants interviewed reported that the coronavirus had impacted their migration journeys in one way or another. The most commonly reported impacts related to travel restrictions put in place by countries. 12 respondents noted an increased difficulty in moving around inside countries, and 12 respondents noted an increased difficulty in crossing borders. An increased risk of detention and deportation was indicated by 8 interviewees.

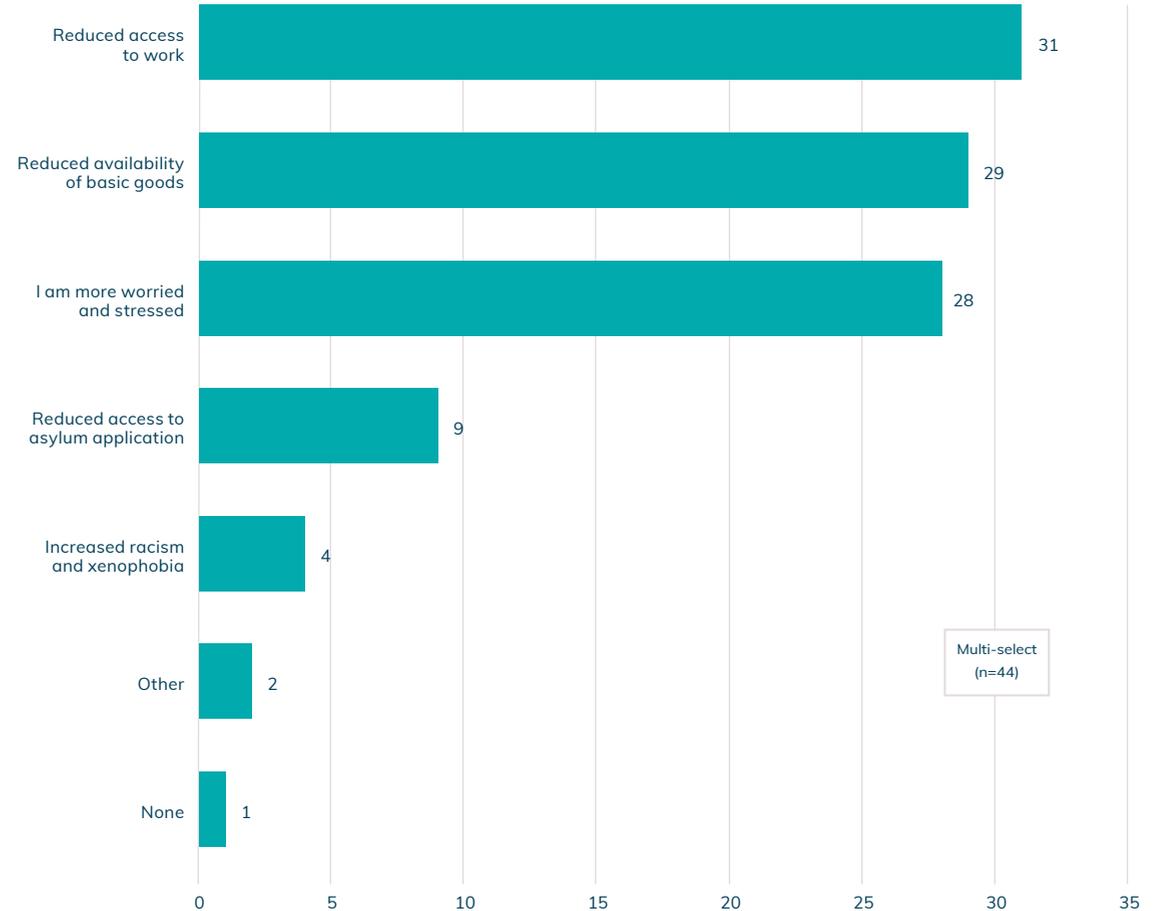
Figure 2. What impact has the coronavirus crisis had on your migration journey?



Restrictions are impacting on access to work and availability of basic goods

When asked whether the COVID-19 crisis had impacted their day-to-day lives, all but one respondent agreed that it had. Reduced access to work was the most commonly cited impact (n=31), followed by a reduction in the availability of basic goods (n=29), and a general increase in worry and stress among respondents (n=28).

Figure 3. What impact has the coronavirus crisis had on your day-to-day life?



A Congolese woman interviewed in Kenya reported:

"I'm afraid that a normal cough can cause me to be brought to quarantine".

Four refugees and migrants noted that they had experienced racism and xenophobia that could be pegged to the COVID-19 crisis. According to an Ethiopian man interviewed in Somaliland:

"I would like to tell people that migration is difficult especially in these difficult times. Moreover, people from here in Wajaale believe that Ethiopian migrants carry the virus and you're more likely to die from starvation. Even if you try to eat restaurant leftovers they will not let you in".

A Somali woman interviewed in Kenya reported:

"My migration journey is difficult and coronavirus has made it more challenging since people have phobia and they suspect that you will infect them with the virus so they will hesitate to help you in case you need help".

More than half of interviewed respondents (n=27) reported that they had lost income as a result of the restrictions put in place by government authorities to manage the coronavirus outbreak. 22 respondents said that this had resulted in them not being able to afford basic goods, and 9 respondents said that they had lost housing. A Congolese woman interviewed in Kenya said:

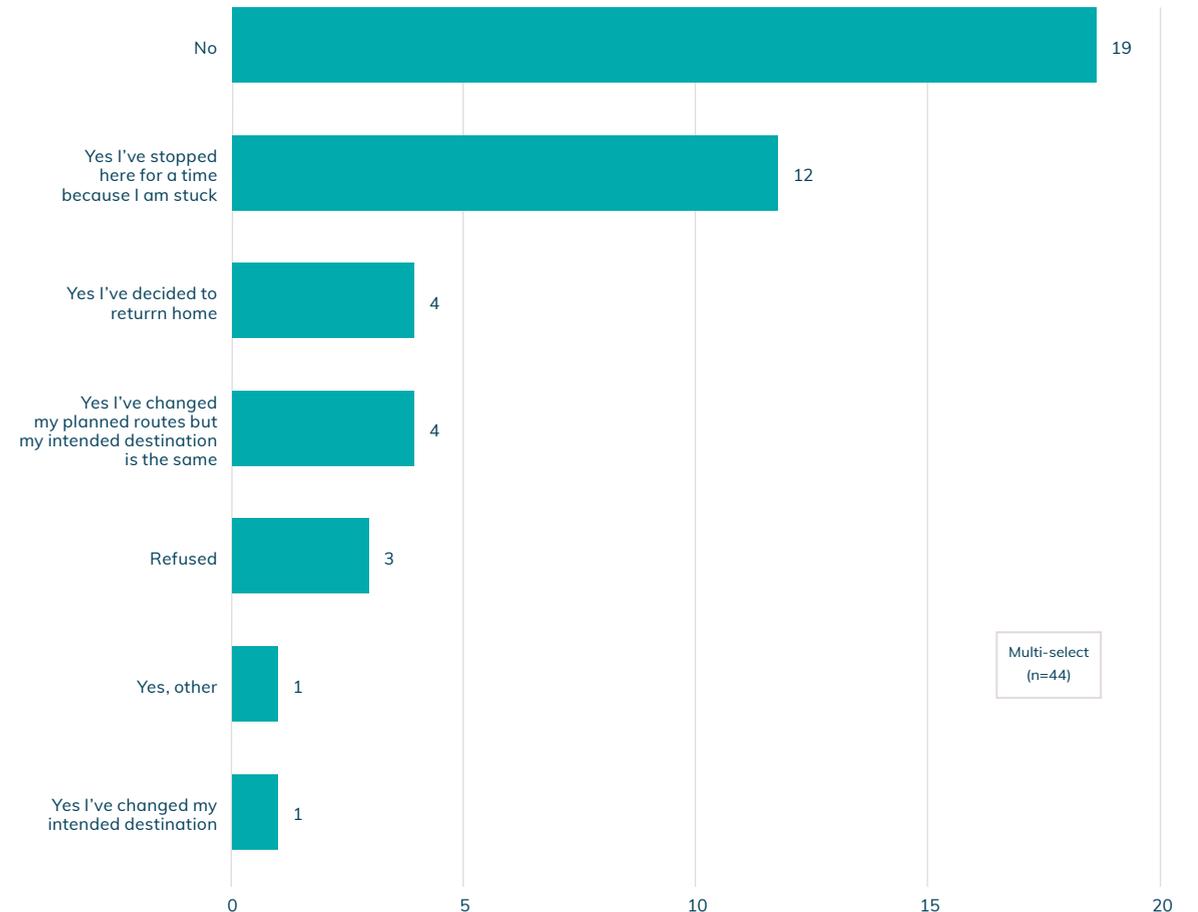
"I need financial support. We are about to leave the house because of lack of money".

Further, 8 respondents reported they would be unable to continue their journeys, and a further 6 that they would be unable to send remittances back home.

Nearly half of respondents said they still have not changed their migration plans

Despite these challenges, nearly half of refugees and migrants interviewed (n=19) said that they had not changed their migration plans as result of coronavirus and the measures taken to combat it. Some respondents reported that they had temporarily changed plans, with 12 pausing their journey because they were currently stuck, and 4 respondents altering their original routes. 4 respondents reported that they were returning home.

Figure 4. Have you changed your plans as a result of COVID-19?





4Mi & COVID-19

The [Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism Initiative](#) (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. Normally, the recruitment of respondents and interviews take place face-to-face. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, face-to-face recruitment and data collection has been suspended in all countries.

MMC has responded to the COVID-19 crisis by changing the data it collects and the way it collects it. Respondents are recruited through a number of remote or third-party mechanisms; sampling is through a mixture of purposive and snowball approaches. A new survey focuses on the impact of COVID-19 on refugees and migrants, and the surveys are administered by telephone, by the 4Mi monitors in West Africa, East Africa, North Africa, Asia and Latin America. Findings derived from the surveyed sample should not be used to make inferences about the total population of refugees and migrants, as the sample is not representative. The switch to remote recruitment and data collection results in additional potential bias and risks, which cannot be completely avoided. Further measures have been put in place to check and – to the extent possible – control for bias and to protect personal data. See more 4Mi analysis and details on methodology at www.mixedmigration.org/4mi