

## Relationships in Transit:

Local communities' interactions with transiting migrants along the Eastern Route in Djibouti and the Somaliland region

MMC Research Report, December 2022



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# Acknowledgements

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## About MMC

MMC is a global network engaged in data collection, research, analysis, and policy and programmatic development on mixed migration, with regional hubs hosted in Danish Refugee Council regional offices in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe and Latin America, and a global team based across Geneva and Brussels. MMC is a leading source for independent and high-quality data, research, analysis and expertise. MMC aims to increase understanding of mixed migration, to positively impact global and regional migration policies, to inform evidence-based protection responses for people on the move and to stimulate forward thinking in public and policy debates on mixed migration. MMC's overarching focus is on human rights and protection for all people on the move. MMC is part of the Danish Refugee Council (DRC). While its institutional link to DRC ensures MMC's work is grounded in operational reality, it acts as an independent source of data, research, analysis and policy development on mixed migration for policy makers, practitioners, journalists, and the broader humanitarian sector.

For more information visit: [www.mixedmigration.org](http://www.mixedmigration.org) and follow us at [@Mixed\\_Migration](https://twitter.com/Mixed_Migration)

## 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.

Disclaimer: The information, views and opinions expressed in this publication are those of MMC and do not necessarily reflect the position of IOM or DRC.



# Contents

<b>Summary and key findings</b> .....	6
<b>1. Introduction</b> .....	7
<b>2. Background</b> .....	9
2.1 Djibouti.....	9
2.2 Somalia and the Somaliland region.....	10
<b>3. Methodology</b> .....	11
3.1 Site selection.....	11
3.2 Data: Profiles of local community respondents in Djibouti and the Somaliland region.....	12
3.3 Sampling strategy.....	13
3.4 Quantitative and qualitative data collection.....	14
3.5 Quantitative and qualitative data analysis.....	14
3.6 Ethics and data management.....	14
<b>4. Perceptions of mixed migration along the Eastern Route</b> .....	16
4.1 Djibouti.....	16
4.2 Somaliland region.....	17
<b>5. Types of interactions between local communities and transiting migrants</b> .....	19
5.1 Migration awareness and frequency of interactions.....	19
5.2 Types and places of interaction.....	19
5.3 Economic and commercial interactions.....	21
5.4 Social interactions.....	23
5.5 Provision of assistance and information.....	24
<b>6. Local communities' perceptions of the impact of migration and transiting migrants</b> .....	26
6.1 Perceived advantages and disadvantages of transit migration on local communities.....	26
6.2 The ties that bind local communities and transiting migrants.....	28
6.3 Implications of perceptions on interactions.....	29
<b>7. Opportunities and challenges</b> .....	30
7.1 Reported positive and negative experiences.....	30
7.2 Role of NGOs/actors working with both populations.....	30
<b>8. Conclusion</b> .....	32

# Maps, tables and figures

Map 1. Research sites: Obock, Tadjourah and Hargeisa .....	11
Map 2. Targeted neighbourhoods for data collection in Hargeisa .....	12
Table 1. Overview of the sample .....	13
Figure 1. Djibouti – Which of the following describes your interactions with migrants in your community? .....	20
Figure 2. Hargeisa – Which of the following describes your interactions with migrants in your community? .....	21
Figure 3. Djibouti – What type of commercial/economic interaction? .....	22
Figure 4. Hargeisa – What type of commercial/economic interaction? .....	23
Figure 5. Djibouti – What type/s of assistance do you/have you provided? .....	24
Figure 6. Hargeisa – What type/s of assistance do you/have you provided? .....	25
Figure 7. In your opinion, what are the main advantages of being a transit location for your community? .....	27
Figure 8. In your opinion, what are the main disadvantages of being a transit location for your community? .....	28

## Acronyms

<b>COVID-19</b>	Coronavirus Disease 2019
<b>DRC</b>	Danish Refugee Council
<b>DTM</b>	Displacement Tracking Matrix
<b>FMP</b>	Flow Monitoring Point(s)
<b>IDP</b>	Internally displaced person
<b>IOM</b>	International Organization for Migration
<b>MMC</b>	Mixed Migration Centre
<b>MMTF</b>	Mixed Migration Taskforce
<b>MRC</b>	Migration Response Centre
<b>MRP</b>	Migrant Response Plan
<b>NDRA</b>	National Displacement and Refugee Agency
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental organization
<b>UNHCR</b>	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

# Summary and key findings

This study focuses on the dynamics between local communities and migrants in key transit locations along the Eastern Route in Djibouti and the Somaliland region, from the Horn of Africa to the Arabian Peninsula. The objective is to inform programming and policy which is community and area-based, inclusive, and sustainable. The findings are based on primary quantitative and qualitative data collected in Obock, Tadjourah, and Hargeisa, in July and early August 2022. Through an in-depth examination of community dynamics, the study presents multiple perspectives on relations between local communities and migrants, of which the key findings are:

- While Djibouti is largely considered a **transit country** for migrants, key informants suggested that relative stability and higher salaries play a role in transiting migrants changing their intentions and staying in the country for longer periods of time. In Hargeisa, community leaders perceived the city's relative safety and low living costs as key factors in the decision to stay.
- A large **majority of respondents** in all locations reported having **exchanges with migrants on a daily basis**. In Tadjourah, close to all respondents (98%) interacted with migrants on a daily basis, while this was true for 82% of residents in Obock and 58% in Hargeisa.
- The provision of **free assistance was the most common form of interaction** between local communities and transiting migrants, reported by 81% of respondents in Djibouti and 49% in Hargeisa, underscoring the sizable role that local communities play in assistance provision.
- **Water and food were the most common forms of assistance** that local community members gave to respondents, in both Djibouti (97% and 92%, respectively) and Hargeisa (58% and 92%, respectively).
- **Commercial and economic exchanges between local community respondents and transiting migrants** include: local communities employing migrants, migrants buying products/services from respondents, and respondents buying products/services from migrants.
- in Djibouti, **perceptions of being a transit location for migrants were considerably more positive in Obock than in Tadjourah**: 60% of Obock residents saw positive or very positive impacts while 24% did so in Tadjourah. Moreover, in Tadjourah, more than half of respondents (53%) stated that there are no advantages of being a transit location, compared to 16% in Obock. This suggests that contributions to the local economy are larger and more positively perceived in Obock.
- Community leaders as well as representatives of the local police and the hospital in Tadjourah, Djibouti, mentioned a **perceived need** among the local community to have **more migration actors present** in the area to provide assistance to migrants and local communities, or to establish another Migration Response Centre (see pages 18 and 30).
- When local respondents were asked whether living in a community often in contact with transiting migrants had made them **more interested in migrating themselves**, 95% of respondents in Djibouti and 75% in Hargeisa answered this was **not the case**.

# 1. Introduction

The Eastern Route from the Horn of Africa to the Arabian Peninsula has traditionally been one of the world's busiest mixed migration<sup>1</sup> routes. Every year, tens of thousands of predominantly Ethiopian (and to a lesser extent Somali) migrants,<sup>2</sup> seeking economic opportunities in the Gulf, leave the Horn from departure points in the coastal areas of Djibouti and Somalia and cross the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. According to IOM, 138,213 migrants (126,469 Ethiopians and 11,730 Somalis) arrived in Yemen in 2019.<sup>3</sup> The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 prompted governments in the region to impose a series of measures to close borders, restrict movement and tighten security along migration routes. These restrictions, as well as the continued conflict in Ethiopia, considerably constrained mixed migration along the Eastern Route, leaving some stranded in cities and towns of transit along the route. In 2020,<sup>4</sup> just 37,535 arrivals were recorded in Yemen and 27,693 in 2021.<sup>5</sup>

As of June 2022, the number of arrivals in Yemen have already exceeded the figures from 2020 and 2021 at 28,092, though still far from the rates observed prior to the pandemic, suggesting an easing of the aforementioned barriers to movement and, perhaps, some signs of the broader migration impacts of the severe drought impacting Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Somalia. In Djibouti, 64,000 migrants have entered the country from January to June 2022, compared to just over 43,000 over the same period in 2021, representing a 48% increase.<sup>6</sup>

This study, based on a collaboration between the Mixed Migration Centre (MMC) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) examines the dynamics between local communities and migrants, most of whom are Ethiopians, in key transit locations in Djibouti and the Somaliland region, from a local community perspective. Unpublished data from MMC's flagship data collection project '4Mi'<sup>7</sup> show that Ethiopian refugees and migrants interviewed in various locations in Somalia and the Somaliland region in 2020 stop along the route for a multitude of reasons, including looking for smugglers (27%), waiting for transportation (24%), resting (20%), and working to earn money for their journeys (17%).<sup>8</sup> Moreover, 4Mi data collected in Djibouti in 2020 show that 99% of Ethiopian migrants said that they had received assistance from the local community and 98% said that they had received information from the local community.<sup>9</sup>

To shed light on the roles and perspectives of local communities as key migration stakeholders and to gain insight into how migration dynamics impact their lives and livelihoods, this study sets out the following **research questions**:

- What are local communities' perceptions of mixed migration along the Eastern Route?
- What are the economic and socio-cultural interactions between local communities and transiting migrants?
- What role do local communities play in providing information, services, and assistance to transiting migrants?
- What perceptions do local communities have about transiting migrants and how do these perceptions inform interactions between the two groups?
- What opportunities or challenges exist between local communities and transiting migrants?

1 IOM uses "mixed movements" (although also refers to "mixed migration" or "mixed flows") to describe "the various migration statuses for those travelling along the same migration routes and using the same forms of transportation, yet highlights that the status of those in mixed movements is driven by different reasons." MMC similarly defines mixed migration as "cross-border movements of people, including refugees fleeing persecution and conflict, victims of trafficking and people seeking better lives and opportunities. Motivated to move by multiple factors, people engaged in mixed migration have different legal statuses, and face a variety of vulnerable situations. Although entitled to protection under international human rights law, they may often be exposed to multiple rights violations along their journey. Moreover, refugees and migrants travel along similar routes, using similar means of travel – often travelling irregularly and wholly or partially assisted by human smugglers."

2 MMC usually refers to individuals engaging in mixed migration as "refugees and migrants", acknowledging that those on the move might be motivated by a multiplicity of factors and drivers, and have different statuses. IOM commonly refers to "mixed movements" (see footnote 1) or 'migrants' as "an umbrella term, not defined under international law, reflecting the common lay understanding of a person who moves away from his or her place of usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons. The term includes a number of well-defined legal categories of people, such as migrant workers; persons whose particular types of movements are legally defined, such as smuggled migrants; as well as those whose status or means of movement are not specifically defined under international law, such as international students." This study focuses on "migrants" as defined by IOM.

3 IOM (2020). [DTM Flow Monitoring Points, Migrant Arrivals and Yemeni Returns from Saudi Arabia in 2019](#).

4 IOM (2021). [2020 Migrant Movements Between the Horn of Africa and the Arabian Peninsula](#).

5 IOM (2022). [2021 Migrant Movements Between the Horn of Africa and the Arabian Peninsula](#).

6 IOM (2022). [Migration along the Eastern Corridor. Report 28 | as of 30 June 2022](#).

7 For more on MMC's 4Mi Project, [see this FAQ](#).

8 Based on 4Mi interviews with 2,358 Ethiopians in the Somaliland region and Puntland between August and December 2020.

9 Based on 4Mi interviews with 305 Ethiopians in Djibouti between August and November 2020.

This project aims to contribute to **Strategic Objective 4 of the Migrant Response Plan (MRP) for the Horn of Africa 2021-2024**: building evidence, partnerships, and coordination to enhance the humanitarian response and migration management throughout the migration route. The overarching **objective** of this project is to provide MRP partners and stakeholders with an in-depth evidence-base of the dynamics between local communities and transiting migrants along the Eastern Route which can inform policy and programming. It is **envisioned** that this research report, as well as two previously published snapshots,<sup>10</sup> will provide evidence on emerging trends and will be used to design and deliver contextually relevant programs and advocate for policies to support safe, humane, and orderly migration.

After this brief introduction to the study, Section 2 and 3 shall provide a short background on specific transit communities in Djibouti and Hargeisa, in the Somaliland region, as well as this study's research methodology, respectively. Section 4 explores some key characteristics of local communities in transit hubs in Djibouti and Hargeisa. Section 5 discusses the frequency and types of interactions between local communities and transiting migrants, while Section 6 elaborates on the perceptions of local community members on migration and transiting migrants. Finally, Section 7 explores potential opportunities and challenges of transit migration from a local community perspective.



**Photo credit:** © Jim van Moorsel

<sup>10</sup> See MMC (2022). [Snapshot: Interactions between local communities and transiting migrants in Djibouti](#); MMC (2022). [Snapshot: Interactions between local communities and transiting migrants in Hargeisa](#).

## 2. Background

This section briefly outlines the mixed migration dynamics in Djibouti and Somalia, zooming in on the locations of transit selected for this research: Tadjourah and Obock in Djibouti and Hargeisa in the Somaliland region. A detailed explanation of the methodological basis for selecting these locations and the specific neighbourhoods therein is provided in Section 3.

### 2.1 Djibouti

Djibouti is of great significance to the Horn of Africa's mixed migration landscape, owing to its geographical proximity to the Arabian Peninsula, with thousands of refugees and migrants embarking each year on journeys towards the Gulf states, as well as those arriving upon return. Over the years, Djibouti has become both a destination and transit country along the Eastern Route. Food insecurity and instability have forced many Somalis, Ethiopians, and Yemenis to seek refuge in the state with over 35,000 refugees and asylum seekers. Most refugees are Somalis and Yemenis while asylum seekers comprise mostly Ethiopians and Eritreans. There are three refugee villages in Djibouti (in Ali Addeh, Holl Holl and Markazi), as well as an urban refugee population.<sup>11</sup>

From January – June 2022, IOM noted the arrival of 65,814 predominantly Ethiopian migrants in Djibouti, mostly originating from Amhara, Oromia, and Tigray regions, and with a large majority intending to travel to the Arabian Peninsula.<sup>12</sup> Movement across Djibouti is mixed, comprising refugees, asylum seekers, migrants, as well as stateless persons.<sup>13</sup> In June 2022, IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) observed a total of 22,263 movements and a daily average of 745 movements in Djibouti through its Flow Monitoring Points (FMP), exceeding pre-COVID-19 numbers. 13% of these movements were observed in the coastal town of Obock, representing the main transit and entry point in the country for migrants going to and returning from the Gulf.<sup>14</sup> In 2021, Obock constituted the main departure point for people crossing the Gulf of Aden to Yemen, as opposed to earlier years when Bossaso (Somalia) was cited as the main location of departure.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, Tadjourah is a key transit point in Djibouti for migrants seeking to reach Obock to carry out sea crossings to Yemen. Dubbed a 'clearing house' because smugglers organise and facilitate journeys from Tadjourah and maintain direct contact with interlocutors in Ethiopia,<sup>16</sup> the town has become a significant smuggling location since 2007, when Djibouti became a principal conduit for Ethiopian and Somali migrants seeking passage to Yemen.<sup>17</sup>

Migrants travelling in Djibouti have employed different means to traverse the country. FMP data from June 2022 show 65% of migrants recorded at FMP transit points in Djibouti as travelling independently or with other migrants on foot, as opposed to taking transport.<sup>18</sup> Qualitative data from this study reveal migrants opt for traveling on foot to avoid detection. Some also rely on vehicles for (segments of) the journey and employ smugglers. The cost of the journey as well as level of support from smugglers varies according to migrants' ethnicity.<sup>19</sup> People on the move who do not pay upfront for the entirety of their journey or who become stranded in Djibouti with a lack of means to continue their journey, at times remain in Djibouti to work in Djibouti Ville, Tadjourah, or Obock in domestic work, including home security, construction, gardening, and housekeeping; other service professions, such as shopkeeper, tailor, or trash collector; and/or other kinds of lower-skilled and often irregular work which Djiboutian citizens may consider undesirable. In this sense, although Djibouti is still overwhelmingly a transit country when it comes to mixed migration in the Horn of Africa, it has also emerged as a place of (temporary) settlement for a small but growing number of migrants. It is possible that these migrants may still decide to engage in onward or return movement after accruing sufficient resources.<sup>20</sup>

11 UNHCR (2022, June). [Djibouti Operational Update](#).

12 IOM DTM (2022, July). [Djibouti – Migration Trends Dashboard](#).

13 MMC (2014). [Djibouti's Child Migrants: Destitution, deportation and exploitation](#).

14 IOM DTM (2022, July). Ibid.

15 IOM DTM (2022, May). [Djibouti – Migrating along the Eastern Route #1](#).

16 Institute for Security Studies (2017). [Migrant smuggling. Paths from the Horn of Africa to Yemen and Saudi Arabia](#).

17 Institute for Security Studies (2017). Ibid.

18 IOM DTM (2022, July). Ibid.

19 Institute for Security Studies (2017). Ibid.

20 Institute for Security Studies (2017). Ibid.

## 2.2 Somalia and the Somaliland region

Somalia is divided up into five administrative states: Galmudug, Hirshabelle, Jubaland, Puntland, and Southwest. The Somaliland region, located in the north, on the other hand, is a self-declared independent state but is internationally recognized as part of Somalia. Somalia and the Somaliland region are places of origin, transit, and destination for migrants. Nationals commonly take the Eastern Route towards the Gulf, the Central Mediterranean Route north to Europe, or the Southern Route to South Africa (in order of popularity). It is also a country of transit for Ethiopians heading to the Arabian Peninsula and a destination for Yemenis and a small number of Ethiopians. In 2021, IOM's DTM observed 121,095 incoming movements to Somalia through its FMP. 66% of interviewed arrivals originated from Ethiopia, although only a small minority reported carrying a passport or another form of documentation. Similar to 2020, the main reported driver for cross-border movements was economic reasons, followed by natural disasters, and food insecurity. Of the 159,819 movements exiting Somalia recorded at FMPs, 46% cited Ethiopia as their intended destination, 23% Saudi Arabia, and 15% Yemen, highlighting both return and onward movements.<sup>21</sup>

Delving into the specific routes, Ethiopians enter the Somaliland region through Borama and Tog Waajale (border towns) in smuggler trucks or by foot, a key informant interview conducted in 2022 with the DRC's Somalia Country Office revealed. They then carry on towards Hargeisa, the capital of the Somaliland region. Hargeisa is largely a transit town for Ethiopians, but also some Yemenis, who have been fleeing civil war since 2015.<sup>22</sup> Some migrants stop in Hargeisa as they wait for money transfers from family/friends at home or in their diaspora networks, and some stop to work for money to proceed with their journey. In particular, some women and children make the decision to stay in Hargeisa upon arrival, while men and boys tend to continue towards Puntland.<sup>23</sup> Hargeisa is also a place where migrants are sometimes abandoned by smugglers and end up being stuck in limbo.

For migrants who succeed in finding casual jobs in Hargeisa, the aforementioned DRC key informant maintained that gender is a key factor in determining the type of work that can be secured. Men typically work as trash collectors, barbers, watchmen, and dish cleaners in restaurants, among other jobs. Women, on the other hand, often work as housekeepers, salon workers, or street food cooks. Some Ethiopians living in Hargeisa own successful businesses (especially restaurants) and they hire fellow Ethiopians who are in transit. According to MMC 4Mi enumerators in the Somaliland region, most Ethiopians on the move are men and very few are women and children. The road from Hargeisa towards the Gulf is considered long and treacherous, hence only a few women and children embark on it.



**Photo credit:** © All rights reserved by [Yusuf Dahir's Somaliland Photos](#)

21 IOM DTM (2022). [Somalia Border Point Flow Monitoring – 2021 Annual Report](#).

22 MMC (2020, June). [The impact of COVID-19 on refugees and migrants in Somaliland](#).

23 IOM (2020). [Comparative Eastern Corridor Route Analysis: Obock, Djibouti and Bossaso, Puntland](#).

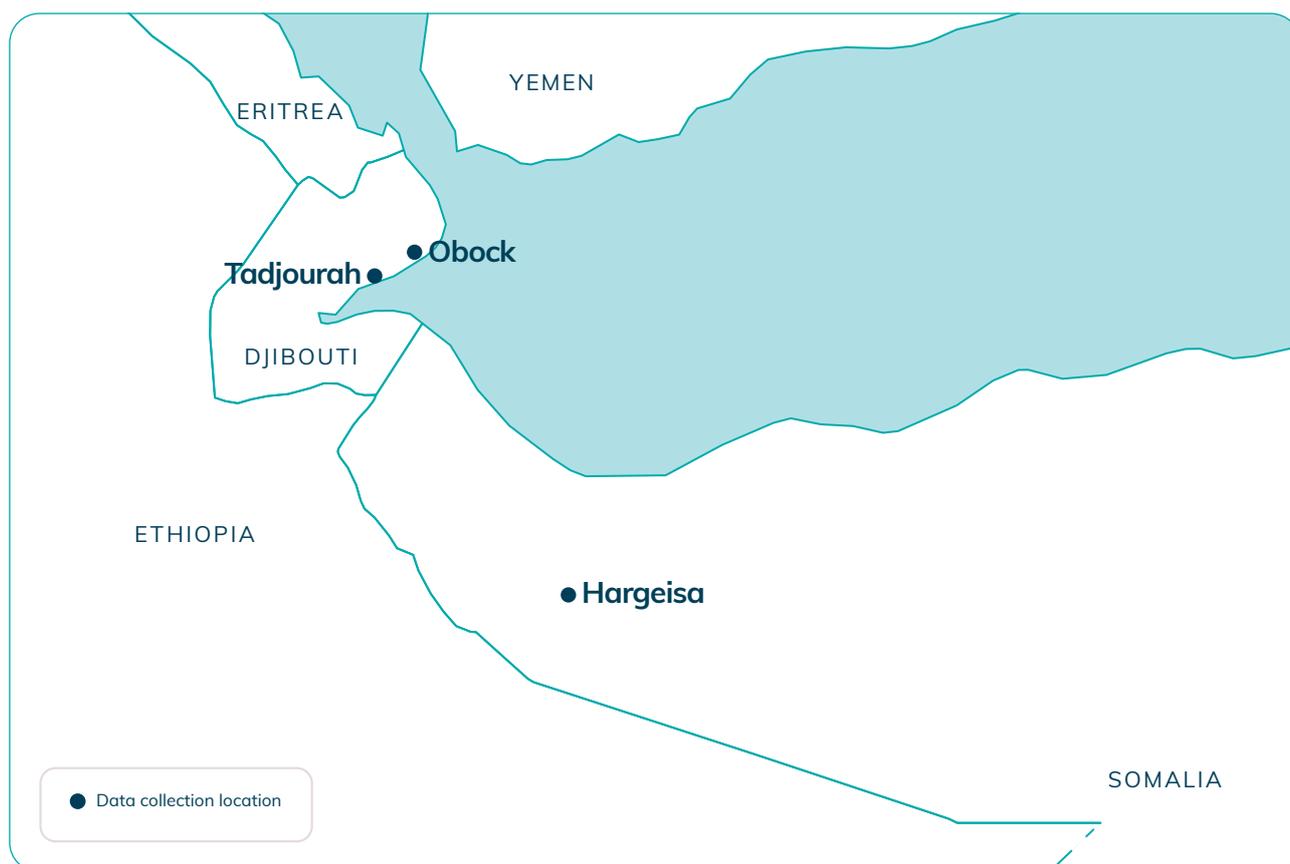
## 3. Methodology

In a recent report on migrants' drivers, experiences, and challenges along the Eastern Route in Djibouti, IOM DTM in Djibouti recommended a "deeper understanding of the dynamic between host communities and migrants" to be critical to design "appropriate inclusive community-based protection and resilience initiatives."<sup>24</sup> In an effort to respond to this knowledge gap on interactions between local communities and migrants with this report, MMC implemented a mixed methods research design, collecting primary quantitative and qualitative data with local community members in Obock and Tadjourah in Djibouti and Hargeisa in the Somaliland region. This section details all steps undertaken in conducting this research, from site selection to methods of data analysis. This section ends with a discussion on ethics and data management practices.

### 3.1 Site selection

According to IOM, the common transit points on the route through Djibouti include Dikhil, Balho, Galafi, Tadjourah, and Obock. In Somalia and the Somaliland region, routes are more varied, but common transit points include Tog Wajaale, Hargeisa, Burao, Las Anod, and Bossaso.<sup>25</sup> Based on time constraints in relation to the duration of the project and feasibility of access in terms of where MMC and the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) have an existing footprint on the ground, MMC, in collaboration with IOM, selected three locations for primary data collection: Tadjourah and Obock in Djibouti and Hargeisa in the Somaliland region.

**Map 1. Research sites: Obock, Tadjourah and Hargeisa**



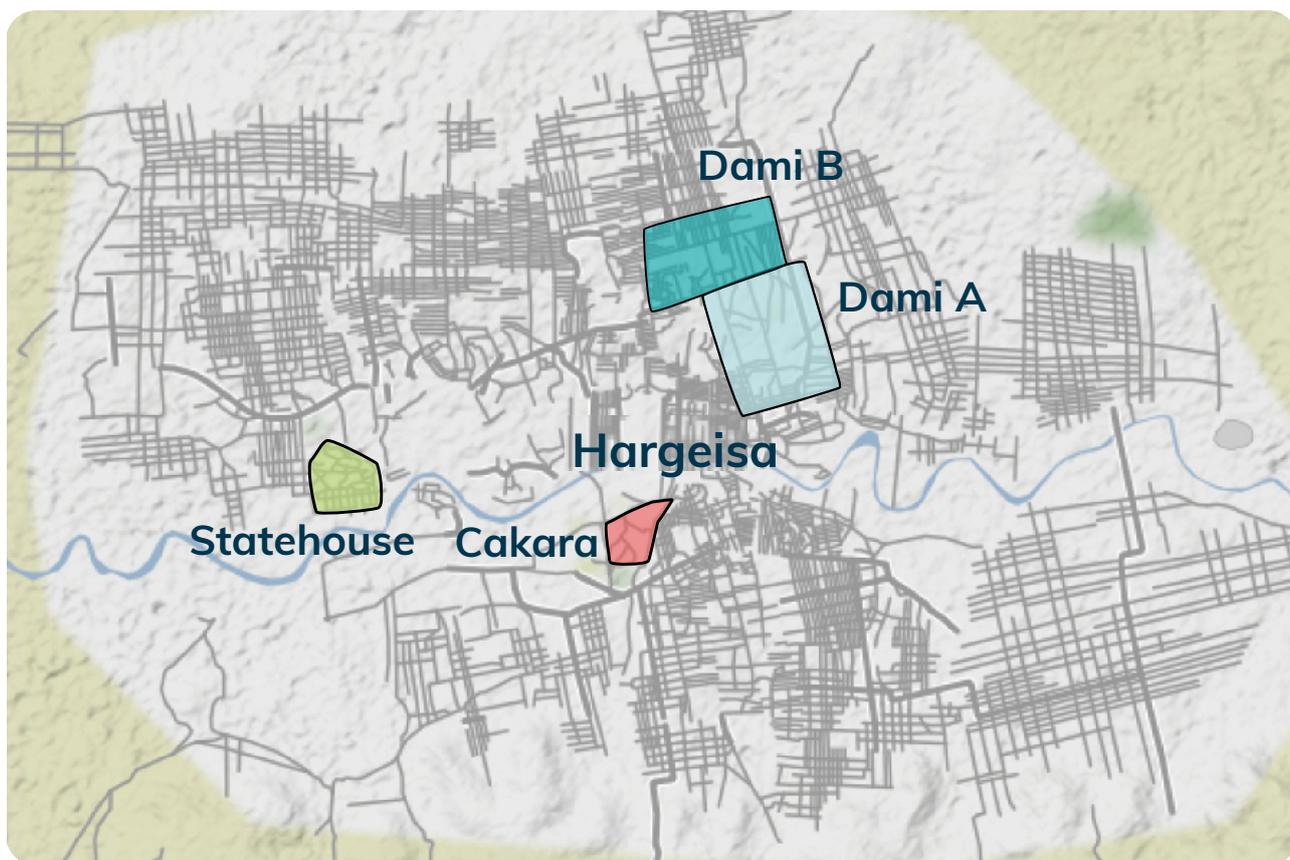
Disclaimer: This map is for illustration purposes only. The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by MMC and IOM.

24 IOM DTM (2022, May). [Djibouti – Migrating along the Eastern route #1.](#)

25 IOM (2020). [Comparative Eastern Corridor Route Analysis: Obock, Djibouti and Bossaso, Puntland.](#)

Obock and Tadjourah in Djibouti and Hargeisa in the Somaliland region vary considerably in their size and level of governance. Obock and Tadjourah are relatively small towns also serving as regional capitals, with estimated populations of 17,776 and 22,193 inhabitants,<sup>26</sup> respectively. For this reason, data collection teams were able to cover 12 neighbourhoods in Tadjourah and 10 in Obock. In contrast, Hargeisa has an estimated population of 1,079,377<sup>27</sup> and is the capital of the Somaliland region. Data collection took place in four neighbourhoods identified by the National Displacement and Refugee Agency (NDRA) in collaboration with DRC and IOM, as having the highest presence of transiting migrants: Dami A, Dami B, Statehouse, and Cakara (Map 2). All four locations are, in large part, informal settlements characterized by temporary shelters and are inhabited mostly by vulnerable minority groups, IDPs, and migrants. The population living in the locations has grown considerably over the recent years, as new waves of IDPs from drought-affected rural areas and migrants have continued to arrive. The differences in the size and character of data collection sites in Obock, Tadjourah, and Hargeisa should be kept in mind when examining the location-specific findings from this study.

**Map 2. Targeted neighbourhoods for data collection in Hargeisa**



### 3.2 Data: Profiles of local community respondents in Djibouti and the Somaliland region

MMC conducted 166 (quantitative) surveys with local community members in Tadjourah, 199 in Obock, and 322 in Hargeisa, totaling 687 surveys, in July 2022. 68% of respondents were women in Hargeisa, as compared to 43% in Tadjourah and 29% in Obock. The reasons for the differences in the share of men and women across research sites are explored in the next subsection. As with the differences in the characteristics of the research sites, differences in sex should be kept in mind when examining the findings from this study.

In terms of education and employment profiles, 11% of the 365 local community respondents in Djibouti had no schooling, 27% had completed primary education, 39% had completed either lower or upper secondary education,

26 World Population Review (2022). [Djibouti Population Review](#).

27 World Population Review (2022). [Hargeisa Population Review](#).

15% completed religious schooling, and 8% completed some form of tertiary education. In Hargeisa, education trends were similar: 8% had received no schooling, 22% had completed primary education, 35% had completed either lower or upper secondary education, 24% completed religious schooling, and 11% completed some form of tertiary education.

More than half of respondents in Djibouti had an income at the time of interview (61%); this was the case for two-thirds (66%) of men and 50% of women. In contrast, in Hargeisa, less than half of respondents were personally making an income at the time of interview (42%); this was the case for two-thirds (61%) of men and 31% of women. In examining the types of work that respondents were engaged in, there were considerable similarities among respondents in Djibouti and in the Somaliland region. In Djibouti, the majority of working women (38/56) were involved in small businesses such as shops, catering, and services, while others were involved in domestic work/cleaning (6), civil service/teaching (5), or other sectors (7). Small businesses (shops/catering/services) (38/133) were also the most common sector of work for men. Others were involved in civil service/teaching (31), construction (15), security (10), police/military (8), and other sectors (31). In Hargeisa, working women were also largely employed in small businesses such as shops, catering, and services (43/69) and domestic work (15), while men were commonly employed in small businesses (shops/catering/services) (18/62), construction (12) and transportation (11).

### 3.3 Sampling strategy

Survey respondents were sampled using a random walk strategy, which involved assigning each enumerator a starting point and direction from which she/he/they would interview 1 person every 4 houses/structures within each research site, alternating sides of the road and choosing a random direction at road intersections. Enumerators were invited to prioritize interviews at shops, cafes, and restaurants when these were encountered using the sampling method, to capture a wide array of respondents. Additionally, each data collection day had a set start and ending point to avoid repetition and to encourage contact with different profiles, including households, business owners who employ or work with migrants, transport drivers/facilitators, health facility workers, and others likely to interact with migrants in their daily environments. To limit data bias towards individuals more likely to be present upon first encounter due to certain occupations, enumerators revisited locations that were not available at first attempt at a different time of day. As per the study's sample inclusion criteria, respondents were all 18 years of age or older, were residents of the target locations, and had lived in the location of interview for at least 3 years.

In terms of qualitative data, MMC conducted 6 semi-structured interviews in Obock, 6 in Tadjourah, and 8 in Hargeisa, with a diverse and purposive sample of host community leaders and representatives from community-based associations, representatives from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international organizations (IOs), other actors working with migrant populations, as well as local authorities. Interviews with community members allowed for more in-depth probing of themes arising from the survey data, while interviews with migration stakeholders (i.e., NGOs, IOs, and local authorities) provided a broad perspective on the experiences of local communities and transiting migrants.

**Table 1. Overview of the sample**

	Tadjourah (Djibouti)	Obock (Djibouti)	Hargeisa (Somaliland region)
Quantitative surveys with local community members	166	199	322
Qualitative semi-structured interviews with local community leaders and associations	3	3	4
Qualitative semi-structured interviews with stakeholders (including NGOs, IOs, actors working with migrant populations, and authorities)	3	3	4

Before discussing the data collection tools, several additional notes must be made on the data. In the Somaliland region, the data collection strategy was reviewed and cleared by NDRA, resulting in slight modifications to the

survey.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, the targeted neighbourhoods in Hargeisa were more residential and less commercial in nature, which likely translated into a comparatively higher incidence of women respondents interviewed at home, and a lower response rate for interactions and dynamics of a commercial nature happening between local community members and migrants. In Djibouti, the exceptionally high temperatures of the hot season coinciding with school holidays meant that a lot of houses in both locations were found to be uninhabited at the period of data collection, not reaching a certain category of affluent respondents who left their homes during this season. Additionally, in both Tadjourah and Obock, there is a noticeable presence, reflected in the profiles of respondents, of a community of long-term Ethiopian residents, who identify as Ethiopian, or as both Ethiopian and Djiboutian, regardless of their official legal and residential status.

### 3.4 Quantitative and qualitative data collection

MMC collected quantitative data through a closed-ended, 40-question survey. Respondents were probed on their awareness of migration and their interactions with and perceptions of transiting migrants, and skip logics were applied to allow for divergent responses. Surveys were collected by enumerators trained by MMC at research sites, with support from IOM, via a two-day comprehensive training including survey piloting. MMC supervised the first days of data collection and maintained continuous review and feedback sessions with enumerators throughout the data collection period to reduce response errors and ensure data quality.

MMC directly conducted semi-structured interviews using a 20-question guide which delved further into local communities' experiences with and perceptions of transiting migrants. Qualitative interviews with local community members benefited from the support from interpreters. On some occasions, when given consent, qualitative interviews were recorded and later transcribed. When consent was not given to record, the team took detailed notes and developed these into transcriptions.

### 3.5 Quantitative and qualitative data analysis

This study relies on descriptive statistics to understand the interactions and perceptions of local community members in selected locations in Djibouti and the Somaliland region on migrants transiting through their communities. Data are disaggregated by town/neighbourhood of interview, sex, age, level of education, and types of interactions with transiting migrants. To triangulate as well as explain some of the findings in the quantitative data, MMC analyzed the data from semi-structured interviews with local community members and migration stakeholders using an inductive approach (arising from the data itself), within the broad themes of the research objectives. Thematic analysis refers to a method that involves the reviewing of interview transcripts, identifying patterns in meaning, and abstracting from such patterns common themes from which to derive potential theories and explanations of observed dynamics. As with the quantitative data, where possible the research team analyzed various themes arising from the data across locations and gender. To query the data and internally validate it, the research team cross-referenced findings with the secondary literature.

### 3.6 Ethics and data management

MMC has strict protocols related to data protection, enumerator trainings on identity safeguarding during the transcription process, and regular debriefs among the information management and research teams during the different stages of the coding process to draw out emergent themes and explore underlying causes. Enumerators were provided with an extensive training on safety guidelines and validation procedures; data protection; research ethics, informed consent, and safeguarding; gender-centered approaches; and DRC's code of conduct and code of conduct complaint mechanism (CCCM). As part of this, enumerators were explicitly instructed to follow the sampling inclusion and exclusion criteria and not interview anyone below the age of 18, regardless of whether an adult is present. During the training, safety and security in the field while carrying out data collection were discussed to ensure enumerators were feeling comfortable to carry out the task.

Project Coordinators supervised data collection and were involved in continuous data monitoring. The Information Management Officer designed and coded the survey, as well as validated, cleaned, and managed collected data. All quantitative and qualitative data, with the exception of interviews with migration stakeholders, who consent to

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28 NDRA review of the survey resulted in the following modifications: 1) reference to 'migrants' rather than 'Ethiopian migrants' throughout; 2) removal of the question "What kind of services to facilitate journeys do you provide?"; 3) removal of the question "What region are you from in your country of nationality?".

be identified by their organizations and potentially titles or scope of work, were collected anonymously. MMC's data protection guidelines are based on the European Union's [General Data Protection Regulation \(GDPR\)](#), the strongest data protection instrument worldwide, and involve informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality of data. Data management guidelines cover the validation, cleaning, and safe storage of data, and adhere to strict data-sharing agreements.



**Photo credit:** © Jim van Moorsel

## 4. Perceptions of mixed migration along the Eastern Route

To gain a complete notion of how local communities interact with and perceive transiting migrants, it is key to first understand their overall perception of migration to their communities. This section therefore explores local communities' perceptions of the migration dynamics in their town and cities, to understand their level of awareness of migration issues as well as their own thinking about migration.

### 4.1 Djibouti

Obock and Tadjourah are located along the northern Djiboutian coastline, where the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden meet, opposite the Yemeni coast. Migration stakeholders and community representatives interviewed for this study in both towns mentioned that exchanges with particularly Ethiopian communities have taken place for centuries, and certainly before the French colonisation. While explaining that migration to Djibouti is not a new phenomenon, they perceived the current movements through Djibouti towards the Gulf as a phenomenon that has gained traction during the last ten to fifteen years.

All (100%) surveyed local community members identified Ethiopia as a key country of origin of migrants present in their communities, and qualitative interviews revealed Ethiopians hailing from Oromia, Amhara, and Tigray.<sup>29</sup> Migration stakeholders and local community representatives moreover perceived most migrants in transit to be very young in age, with a large majority between 15 and 25 years old, including an increasing number of unaccompanied minors. The most common profile is young single men, although an increase was noted in young women traveling along the Eastern route to Tadjourah and Obock. Similar profiles were perceived by survey respondents – 86% mentioned migrants in their communities are mostly men and 46% mentioned the majority of migrants are aged 25 or younger, while 30% perceived migrants to be from all ages. Local community representatives observed most migrants to be from rural areas in Ethiopia, with lower education levels and limited to no work experience prior to their arrival in Djibouti.

When asked about migrants of other nationalities passing through Djibouti, a number of interviewees noted there are also Somali migrants traveling along the same route towards the Gulf, but they are less visible and prominent in number and do not travel in large groups. An interviewed smuggler in Obock noted an increase in Eritreans crossing into Djibouti since the region has become increasingly affected by droughts and failed harvests. Both Somalia and Eritrea were identified by some survey respondents (10%) as other countries of origin of migrants in their communities. Finally, an increase in the return movements of Ethiopians, from Yemen into Djibouti, was mentioned.

Both Obock and Tadjourah have sizeable communities of Ethiopians who have resided there long-term, as echoed by this study's sub sample of Ethiopian respondents in both locations.<sup>30</sup> While Djibouti is now mostly considered a transit country, key informants suggested that certain factors play a role in transiting migrants changing their intentions and staying in the country for longer periods of time. Stability and better salary prospects were identified as two of these factors. An interviewee representing a local health association in Tadjourah mentioned:

*“Here they earn better than in Ethiopia. By working in a store, they earn 20,000 Djiboutian Francs [approximately 113 USD] per month. That’s what a registered nurse makes in Ethiopia. We give them a better quality of life here.”*

29 Due to the ongoing conflict in Tigray, a key informant representing the Migration Response Centre (MRC) managed by IOM in Obock explained that migrants originating from Tigray can apply for asylum in Djibouti and are categorically referred to UNHCR. Despite Afar being the common shared primary language and having closer cultural ties with the local communities, key informants noted only a very small number of migrants passing through Djibouti hails from the Ethiopian Afar region.

30 Out of a total of 365 local community respondents surveyed by MMC with the quantitative questionnaire in Djibouti, 26 self-identified as Ethiopian and 27 as Ethiopian and Djiboutian. Additionally, 4 self-identified as Eritrean and 2 as Eritrean and Djiboutian. A requirement to fall within the sampling criteria was for the respondent to be residing in the location of interview for a minimum of 3 years.

A 28-year-old Ethiopian woman residing in Obock for twelve years mentioned:

*“There are a lot [of migrants]. I don’t know the exact number but there are many who are here since a long time. They have found work and haven’t moved since. There are migrants who have left their homes and who have invested everything to come here, to pursue their dreams. They might have also saved themselves from their situation at home and can’t return now.”*

Obtaining residency for migrants who decide to stay in Djibouti might be a complicated process, but “it is not impossible”, the Vice-President of the Regional Council of Tadjourah noted. From a local community perspective, he added, migrants who have been living for a long time in Tadjourah will likely be considered integrated in the community and “not as migrants anymore”, differentiating between those who have established their lives in Djiboutian communities, and those transiting to or returning from the Gulf.

In terms of the drivers of migration, the majority of local community respondents in Djibouti perceived economic reasons as being the main driver of transiting migrants’ decision to move (99%). 35% of respondents also cited war/conflict as a driver. Several key stakeholders and community leaders in Djibouti noted that for people who migrated largely for economic reasons, whom were perceived as the majority, they were likely to transit through Tadjourah and Obock as quickly as possible.

Respondents in Djibouti maintained that the intended destinations of migrants transiting their communities were Saudi Arabia (95%) and Yemen (76%). Permanence in Djibouti (12%) and return to Ethiopia (8%) were, seen as less common. Some notable differences exist based on location of interview in Djibouti. Over one fifth (22%) of residents of Tadjourah perceived Djibouti as an intended destination while only 4% of those in Obock did so. On the other hand, 15% of residents of Obock cited Ethiopia as an intended destination, which was the case for only 1% of those in Tadjourah. Key informants interviewed in Obock also noted the presence of a sizeable group of returnees, intending to return to Ethiopia after having been in Yemen or Saudi Arabia. Once again, these differences are likely explained by Obock’s position as they primary location for coastal departures and arrivals and, hence, greater contact with those actively in transit. Perceptions on migration drivers and intended destinations did not appear to vary by sex or age.

Turning to examine the migration intentions of local community members themselves, most perceived that Djiboutians do not intend to migrate, and that it is generally not a culturally embedded phenomenon. When survey respondents were asked whether living in a community often in contact with transiting migrants had made them more interested in migrating themselves, 95% answered this was not the case. Yet, qualitative insights obtained through conversations with local NGO staff underscored that migration is likely to be regarded as a sensitive subject in Djibouti, with most not talking openly about relatives who have engaged in migration plans. An interviewee at the hospital of Tadjourah mentioned that a large share of Djiboutian youth is currently seeking ways to leave the country due to a lack of prospects and opportunities, either through legal pathways or engaging in mixed movement. He personally heard of youth leaving Djibouti and traveling along the Northern route, through Ethiopia and Sudan towards Libya, rather than taking the Eastern route.

## 4.2 Somaliland region

Hargeisa is a key city of transit, as well as residence in some cases, for migrants traveling along the Eastern route. Surveyed local community members indicated that Ethiopian was by far the most common nationality of migrants residing in their communities (99%), while some mentioned Yemeni (9%) and Syrian (4%). Qualitative interviews also suggested that most migrants in Hargeisa are Ethiopian, originating from Oromia and Amhara, and to a lesser extent from Dire Dawa, Harari, and the Somali Region. Ethiopian Somalis, who are a minority among arriving migrants, are considered less as migrants and more as fellow Somalis by the local community and have better access to services and work opportunities.

On the profiles of migrants arriving in Hargeisa, a community leader from the Cakara neighbourhood noted:

*“Transiting migrants always pass along our community from different places, but most come from neighbouring countries, especially Ethiopia. It [the number of migrants] has recently doubled compared to before. Most are men between 17-50 years old. Their reason behind choosing this location is that they already have families living here and they directly come to them until they arrange the next part of their journey.”*

A key informant representing the Mixed Migration Taskforce (MMTF) and the Somaliland Ministry of Justice explained that while a majority of Ethiopians were more likely to transit through Hargeisa towards the Gulf rather than to settle in the city, Syrian and Yemeni communities more often have established themselves and stay long-term. That being said, there are reports of Ethiopians who (eventually) decide to settle in Hargeisa and who have now formed Ethiopian communities, also demonstrated by Ethiopian-owned restaurants and barber shops, a key informant representing IOM underlined.

Similar to perceptions in Djibouti, the most common profile for transiting Ethiopian migrants is young adult, single men. A key informant representing IOM at the Migration Response Centre (MRC), managed by NDRA, added that it was more likely for women and minors who arrived as part of families to stay longer periods of time in Hargeisa, as they could access assistance at the MRC, while men plan to continue their journey towards Bossaso intending to cross to the Arabian Peninsula.

In terms of migration drivers, the majority of local community members in Hargeisa perceived economic reasons as being the main drivers of transiting migrants' decision to move (87%). Other perceived drivers included war/conflict (48%), better access to services abroad (12%), and targeted violence/persecution (10%) in their home communities. Residents of Dami A more commonly cited war/conflict as a driver of migration (57%) than respondents in other neighbourhoods, particularly Cakara (37%). A community leader from the Dami A neighbourhood noted the arrival of migrants for the first time around the year 2000, with relative safety and low living costs perceived as drivers of migration to Hargeisa. Respondents in Hargeisa described the main intended destinations of migrants transiting their communities were Saudi Arabia (55%) and Yemen (26%). 28% believed some migrants intended to stay in the Somaliland region (28%) and 17% believed migrants were returning to Ethiopia.

Turning to consider local communities' own migration intentions, unlike their Ethiopian counterparts, the Northern route through Ethiopia and Sudan towards Libya is considered to be the most popular route among Somalis. Interviewees felt that reports of cases of severe mistreatment and torture of Somali migrants in Saudi Arabia have demotivated Somalis to take the Eastern route, as argued by an MRC representative. When survey respondents were asked whether living in a community, often in contact with transiting migrants, had made them more interested in migrating themselves, 24% answered this was indeed the case. A community leader from the Statehouse neighbourhood noted:

*“Yes, sometimes local people leave the country because of transiting migrants, motivating the youth to also go and migrate to somewhere else, but with a different direction to the Ethiopian migrants. Most Ethiopian migrants go to the Gulf countries while the Somali youth goes to the European countries, transiting through Ethiopia, Sudan and Libya, all the way to Italy.”*

# 5. Types of interactions between local communities and transiting migrants

This section zooms in on the interactions between local communities and transiting migrants to gain a better understanding of dynamics between the two groups in selected locations of transit in Djibouti and the Somaliland region. It examines the frequency of local community members' interactions with migrants, before moving on to a detailed overview of types and places of interaction.

## 5.1 Migration awareness and frequency of interactions

All interviewed local community members across the three research sites confirmed the presence of transiting migrants in their communities. Surveyed on the frequency of interactions,<sup>31</sup> a majority of respondents in all locations noted having exchanges with migrants on a daily basis. For Tadjourah and Obock, this amounted to 90% daily and 10% weekly. In Tadjourah, close to all (98%) respondents interacted with migrants on a daily basis, while this was true for 82% of residents in Obock. In Hargeisa, 58% reported interactions every day, followed by 22% interacting on a weekly basis. The differences between transit locations could stem from the small size of transit towns in Djibouti, making contact more inevitable. Qualitative data collected in Hargeisa also suggests migrants are not present or frequenting all neighbourhoods evenly. A community leader in the neighbourhood Dami B mentioned:

*“According to our community, there are very few transit migrants here because most places are [already] occupied, and shelters are more expensive than in other places due to their structure. This means there are no spaces [for them] to live during their transit plan, so they do not always prefer to live here for that time.”*

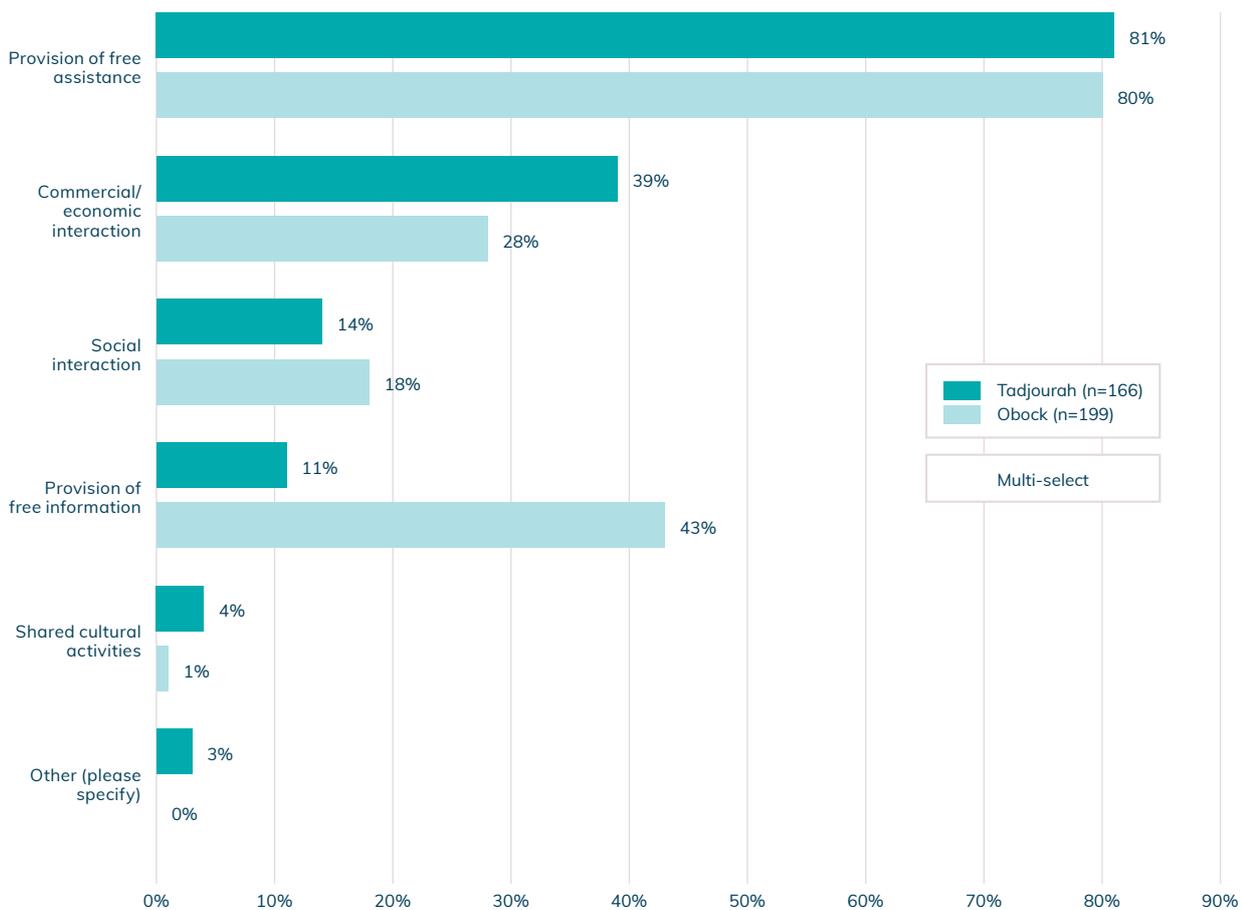
## 5.2 Types and places of interaction

Interactions between local community members and transiting migrants can be categorized as: 1) economic and commercial interactions, 2) social interactions, 3) provision of information and assistance, and 4) provision of transportation and onward journey services. Economic and commercial interactions refer to business exchanges, such as when migrants buy goods or services from local communities or vice versa, or work for local businesses. Social interactions may be defined as exchanges based on shared cultural and religious practices or personal interests. The provision of assistance considers what goods, information, and/or other help local communities provide to transiting migrants. Lastly, the provision of transportation and onward journey services examines how local community members may be involved in the facilitation of migration or, in some cases, migrant smuggling. Given the varying sizes of the research sites, the analysis below draws comparisons, where relevant, between Obock and Tadjourah in Djibouti and between the four sampled neighbourhoods in Hargeisa.

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<sup>31</sup> During enumerator training, interactions were defined as anything from exchanging a few words to engaging in an activity together.

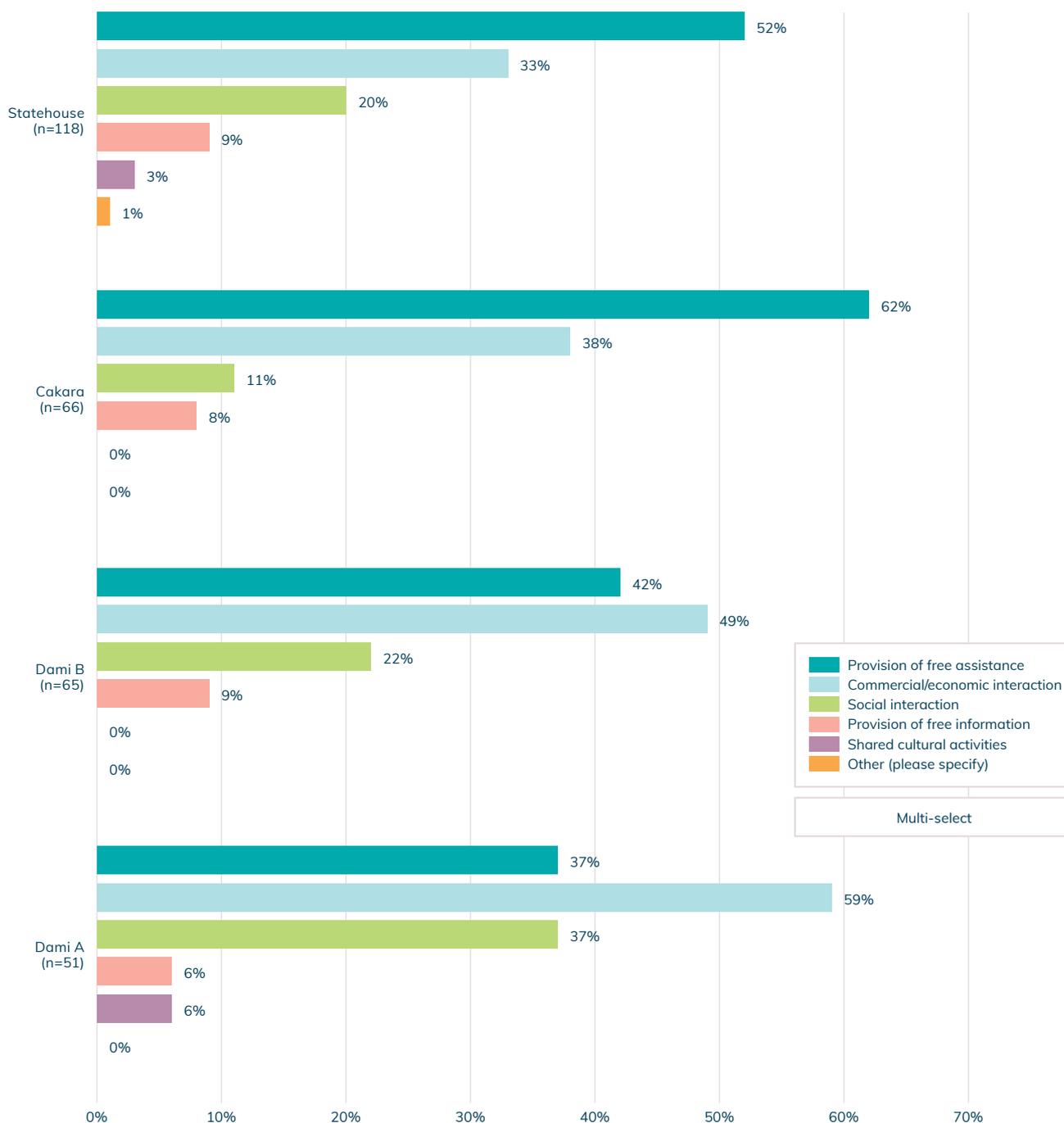
**Figure 1. Djibouti – Which of the following describes your interactions with migrants in your community?**



In Djibouti, the provision of free assistance was the most common form of interaction between local communities and transiting migrants, reported by 81% of respondents – indicating the sizeable role that local communities play in assistance provision (Figure 1). 28% of respondents also cited providing free information to transiting migrants. Furthermore, 33% of local community respondents described having commercial/economic interactions with migrants and 16% described having social interactions. While most interaction-types were cited with similar frequency across sex and location of interview, the provision of free information was more commonly reported in Obock (43%) than in Tadjourah (11%), and concerned different aspects of the journey, as detailed in Subsection 5.5. This is perhaps linked to Obock’s position as a key point of departure for sea crossings, and the kinds of information that migrants seek out. In this regard, a local smuggler interviewed in Obock noted how many transiting migrants are stuck in the town waiting for departures. The smuggler mentioned being connected to an international smuggler network with contacts in Ethiopia and Yemen, and noted he provided migrants with information on estimated waiting times in Obock and conditions of the journey to Yemen.

In Hargeisa, of the local community members who reported interacting with transiting migrants (n=300), 49% interacted by providing free assistance to migrants, followed by interactions based on commercial/economic exchanges (42%), and social interactions (21%). Additionally, it was almost twice as common for women to cite social interactions (25%) than it was for men (14%), while interactions based on free assistance, commercial exchanges, or information exchanges did not appear to vary by sex. When considering respondents’ neighborhoods, residents of Dami A and Dami B most commonly cited commercial/economic exchanges (59%; 30/51 and 49%; 32/65, respectively) while residents of Cakara and Statehouse primarily cited providing free assistance to migrants (62%; 41/66 and 52%; 61/118, respectively). Commercial/economic interactions in Statehouse (39/118) were less frequent than in other neighbourhoods. Social interactions were proportionally more common in Dami A (19/51) than in the other areas.

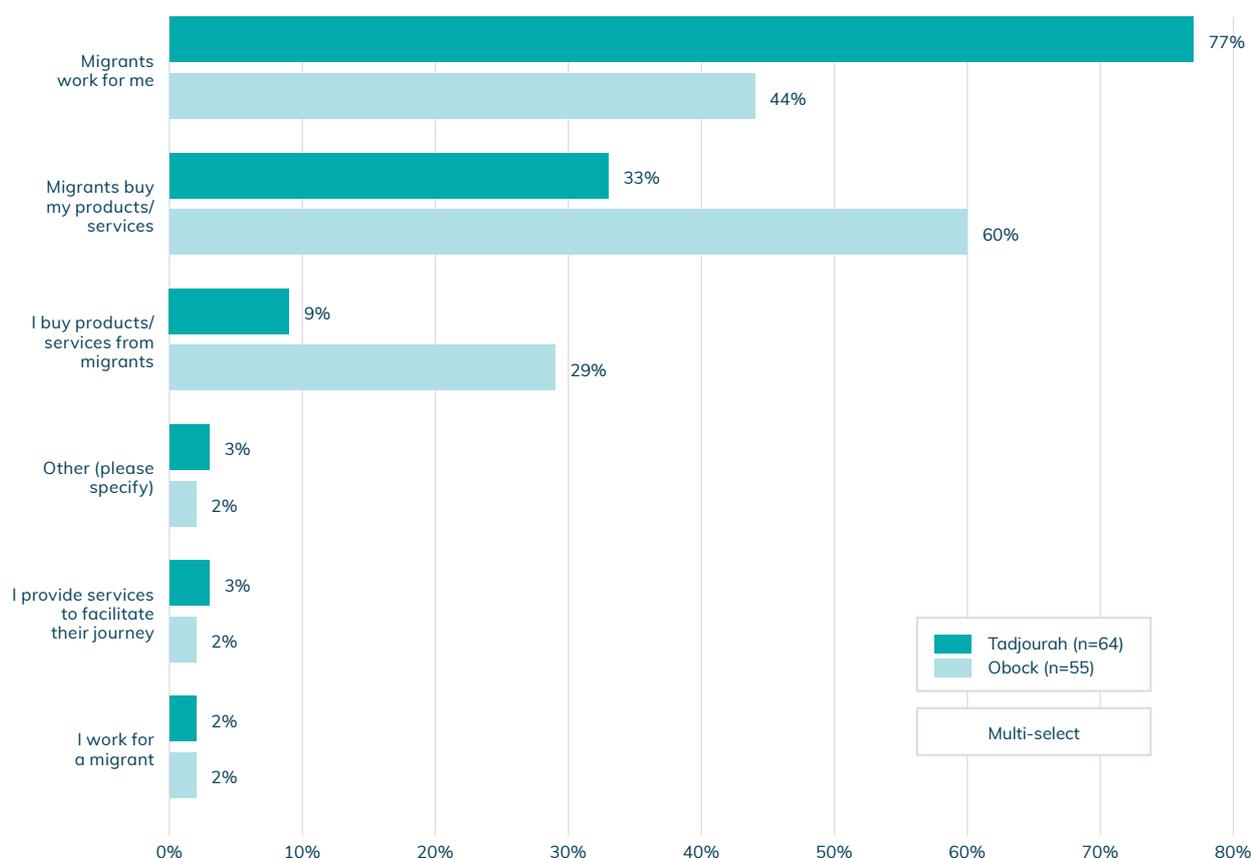
**Figure 2. Hargeisa – Which of the following describes your interactions with migrants in your community? (Among respondents reporting interactions)**



### 5.3 Economic and commercial interactions

In Djibouti, of the local community respondents who engaged in commercial/economic exchanges (n=119) with transiting migrants, such exchanges fell within three main categories: migrants working for local community respondents (61%), migrants buying products/services from respondents (45%), and respondents buying products/services from migrants (19%). Economic and commercial interactions varied between Tadjourah and Obock (Figure 4). In Tadjourah, 77% (49/77) of respondents citing commercial exchanges had migrants working for them, as compared to 44% (24/55) in Obock. In contrast, respondents more frequently bought and/or sold products/services from/to migrants in Obock than in Tadjourah.

**Figure 3. Djibouti – What type of commercial/economic interaction?  
(Among respondents reporting commercial/economic interactions)**



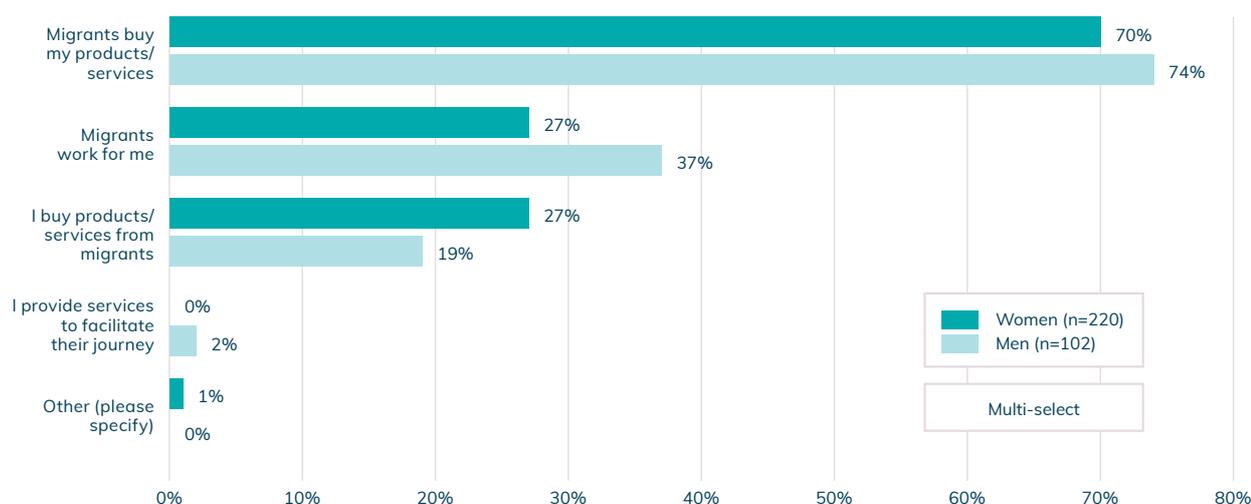
Among respondents who reported employing migrants (n=73), most (57/73) reported that migrants were working for them at home, suggesting employment as domestic workers, while others mentioned migrants were working in their businesses (32) or on their land/with their animals (8). Several interviewed local community leaders noted that a considerable number of community members in Tadjourah and Obock are unemployed due to the small size of local labor markets and a lack of opportunities, implying that local community members might share similar vulnerability profiles and patterns with migrants who are transiting or residing in the towns. In Obock, the neighbourhood of Fantahero was highlighted as an area where marginalized local community members and migrants live together in poor conditions. With regards to recruiting migrants while there is widespread unemployment among the local community, a key informant representing a local health association in Tadjourah noted:

“There are unemployed people here, but as we know they [migrants] have nothing at all, we still call them. We work with them, even if there are unemployed locals. We leave [locals], because [they] have families. They will find the help of a brother, a cousin... But him [a migrant], as he is all alone... We give them work. They work well too. It is their need. They have the mentality to work well, and they are not forced. They are the ones asking for it.”

A key informant representing a local authority in the region of Obock noted that Djiboutians are perceived as less likely to accept jobs that might be perceived as ‘below their standards’, or which do not guarantee employment over the long term. He mentioned it is therefore often perceived as easier to work with migrants for small projects or tasks in several sectors, including construction, gardening, and agriculture.

In Hargeisa, local community respondents who engaged in commercial/economic exchanges (n=126) with transiting migrants most often reported migrants buying their products/services (71%), migrants being employed by them (30%), and them buying products/services from migrants (24%) (see Figure 4). It was more common for women to buy products/services from migrants than men (27% versus 19%), whereas it was proportionally more common for men to employ migrants (37%) than for women (27%).

**Figure 4. Hargeisa – What type of commercial/economic interaction?  
(Among respondents reporting commercial/economic interactions)**



When comparing Djibouti with Hargeisa, it stands out that respondents more commonly employed migrants for work in Tadjourah and Obock (61%) than in Hargeisa (30%). Qualitative data suggests Ethiopian migrants who are transiting might be employed by the Ethiopian community residing in Hargeisa rather than by local Somali community members, as a key informant from IOM at the MRC mentioned:

*“Most barbershops in Hargeisa are owned by Ethiopians and have only Ethiopian employees, they are very good barbers. Ethiopian restaurants are also very popular. Both are owned by richer Ethiopians with work permits, who then employ irregular migrants.”*

Another key informant at the Somaliland Ministry of Justice, and focal point of the MMTF, reported that Ethiopians employing Ethiopians has led to mounting tensions with local community members in Hargeisa, with Somalis risking being pushed out of certain professional sectors in the local economy where Ethiopians are considered more skilled.

## 5.4 Social interactions

In terms of social interactions, men (19%) in Djibouti interacted slightly more often with transiting migrants in social settings than women (12%). In this regard, community leaders interviewed in Tadjourah and Obock expressed that most interactions took place on the basis of helping migrants in need, and/or offering them with free assistance or remunerated opportunities. It was also noted that due to the transitory nature of migrants' stay in town, local community members might perceive it as not worth it to invest in social interactions with them. Finally, several reported that transiting migrants arrived in a state of exhaustion, and poor hygiene and health in Tadjourah and Obock, which has created a sentiment of concern over safety and health among local community members which obstructs engaging in a more meaningful way outside of assistance and economic interactions.

In Hargeisa, in contrast, women (25%) more often reported having social interactions with migrants than men (14%). Data at the neighbourhood level reveals that more respondents in Dami A (37%) had social interactions with migrants than in the other surveyed neighbourhoods. Interviewed community leaders noted that the local community and migrants shared some religious and cultural similarities, but also reflected on the perceived language barrier and other cultural and ethnic differences making social interactions more difficult. A community leader located in Dami B explained:

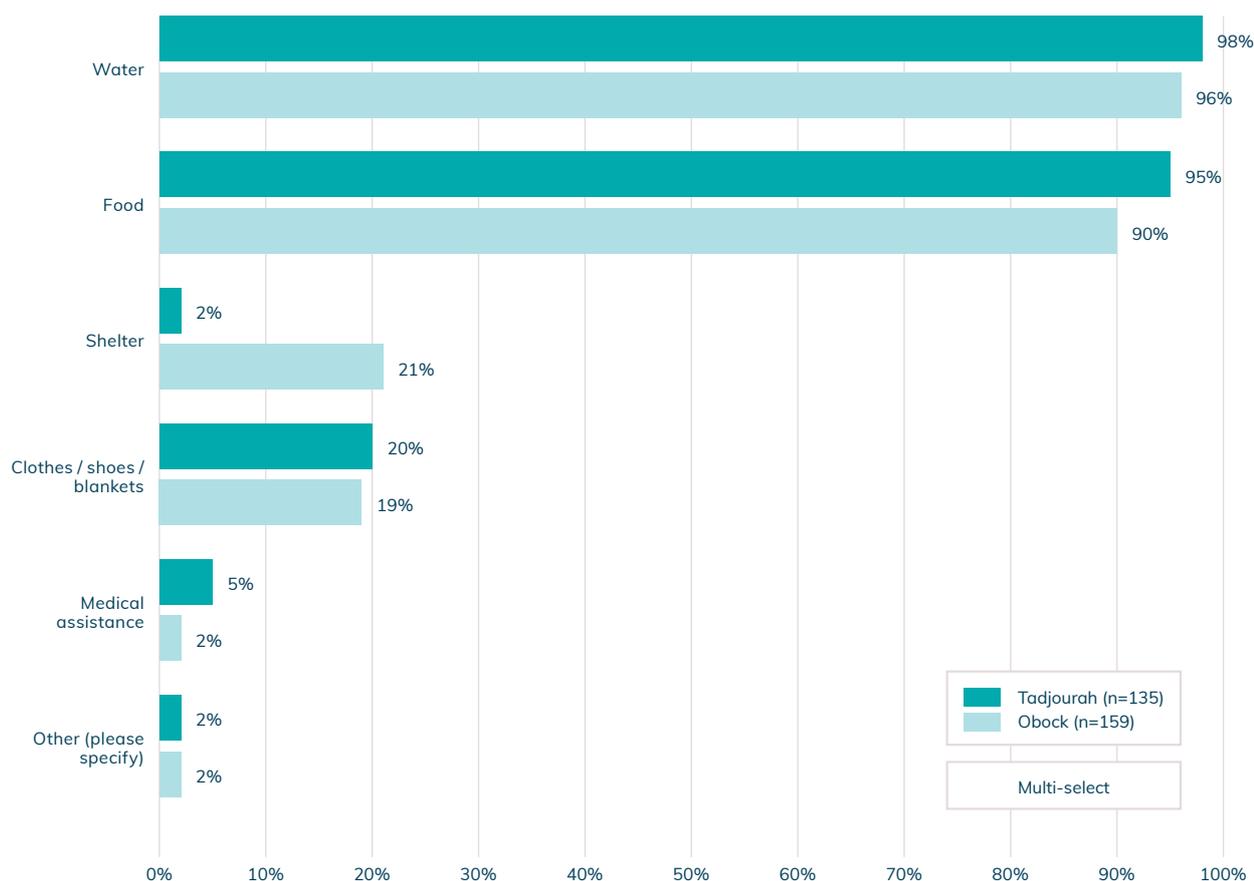
*“Actually, there are not a lot of interactions between the groups because of language barriers and cultural and ethnic differences, but even with the existence of the above constraints they are still interacting to some extent, including social interactions, economic interactions, and they interact in some of the common social places like mosques, markets and public transport points.”*

## 5.5 Provision of assistance and information

In Djibouti, of the 294 respondents who provided free assistance to migrants, water and food were the most common forms of assistance (97% and 92%, respectively). Clothes, shoes, and blankets were provided by 19% of respondents, while shelter was provided by 12%. Local community respondents almost never gave cash (1%) to migrants. While most forms of assistance were provided in similar proportions in the two targeted locations, shelter was more frequently offered by respondents in Obock (21%) than those in Tadjourah (3%) (Figure 5). Interviewed community leaders noted the local community is hospitable and has a culture of supporting those in need or transiting through the area. Yet, they also noted that providing water and food has become less of a choice and more of an obligation, with growing safety and security concerns around transiting migrants going to homes to ask for assistance. A key informant representing the local police in Tadjourah noted:

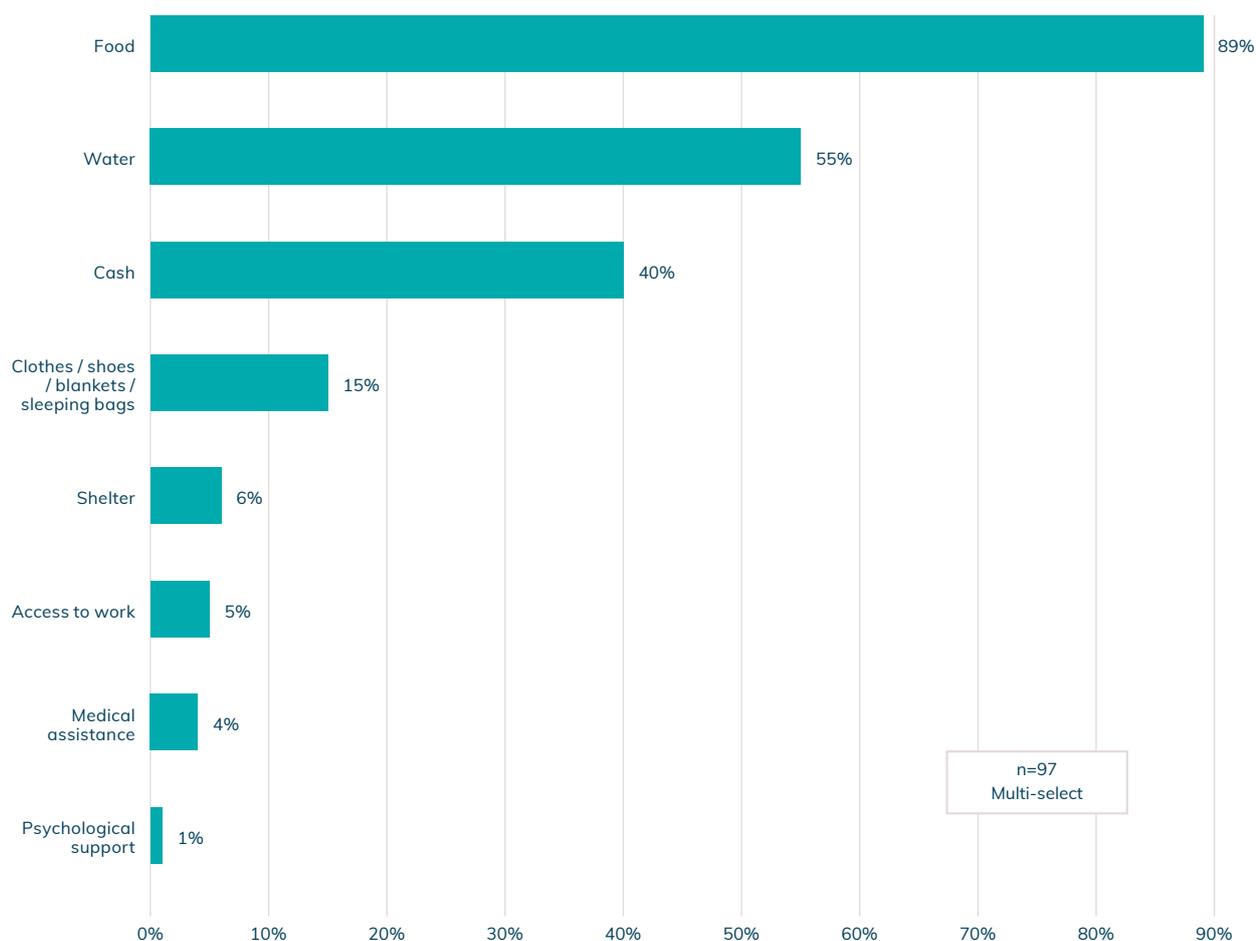
“Migrants in Tadjourah are everywhere. They knock on the doors of houses when looking for food. They arrive with nothing and are very hungry. The community here gives everything it has, we show solidarity with their situation. But recently, we had some problems regarding migrants coming to our houses at every time of the day and during the night. This situation is getting a bit out of hand and there are people who have become afraid.”

**Figure 5. Djibouti – What type/s of assistance do you/have you provided? (Among respondents who reported providing assistance)**



In Hargeisa, the share of respondents citing having provided free assistance to migrants (n=148, or 49%) is lower than in Djibouti (n=294, or 80%). Most described providing food (92%), water (58%), and cash (39%). Some also provided clothes, shoes, and blankets (15%); shelter (6%); access to work (3%); and medical assistance (3%). No notable differences were observed among the four sampled neighbourhoods. These findings suggest that in Hargeisa it is more common practice to give cash to migrants (39%) than in Obock and Tadjourah (1%).

**Figure 6. Hargeisa – What type/s of assistance do you/have you provided? (Among respondents who reported providing assistance)**



Respondents who reported providing free information to migrants (n=104) in Djibouti mostly gave information on what conditions to expect along the journey (50%), the conditions at destination (40%), locations along the route (38%), the duration of the journey (38%), the cost of the journey (22%), and how to find a smuggler (8%). Although based on a limited sample size, it was proportionally more common for respondents in Tadjourah to provide information on how to find a smuggler (6/19) than it was in Obock (2/85). In contrast, it was more common in Obock to provide information to migrants on the cost, duration and conditions of the journey, as well as the conditions at the destination. Delving into why respondents provided free assistance and/or information (n=314) to transiting migrants, surveyed local community members described doing so out of general courtesy/courtesy towards people in need (97%), and/or due to their custom of helping all travelers (19%).

In Hargeisa, respondents who reported providing free information to migrants (n=25) mostly gave information on the migration routes (64%), conditions of the journey (40%), conditions at destination (36%), and safety and security along the journey (32%). Few also provided information on where and how to access services (3). Delving into why respondents provided free assistance and/or information (n=173) to transiting migrants, surveyed local community members described doing so out of general courtesy (59%), courtesy towards people in need (53%), and/or due to their custom of helping all travelers (33%).

In relation to medical assistance, in Tadjourah, this was provided by 5% of respondents, relative to 2% in Obock. Key stakeholders interviewed at the hospitals in Tadjourah and Obock reported that migrants have full access to the medical centres, and first aid is provided for free. However, they noted that the assistance given to migrants has put pressure on resources, as there is no government budget allocated for assisting them. In Hargeisa, a key informant representing IOM reported that migrants also have free access to health services, among other public services.

## 6. Local communities' perceptions of the impact of migration and transiting migrants

Having explored the various types of interactions between local community members and transiting migrants in Section 5, Section 6 outlines the perceptions that local communities in Djibouti and the Somaliland region have of the impact of migration and specifically of transiting migrants on their communities, and the implications of such perceptions.

### 6.1 Perceived advantages and disadvantages of transit migration on local communities

Local community members were asked what, in their opinion, was the impact of the presence of migrants on their community. Overall, in Djibouti, 44% reported either a positive or very positive impact, 21% no impact or didn't know, and 35% reported a negative or very negative impact. In Obock, perceptions were considerably more positive than in Tadjourah: 60% of Obock residents saw positive or very positive impacts while 24% did so in Tadjourah. A religious leader interviewed in Tadjourah argued:

*"Except for the smugglers, it is not beneficial for us. People in transit don't buy anything. The smugglers, or those who work for them, the network, they are the ones who earn the money. We don't see anything from it. For those who stay here a long time it's different, they work. They marry, between Ethiopians, and they reside here. There are people like that. Children go to school here, and they speak the language."*

In the Somaliland region, 25% of respondents in Hargeisa considered the overall impact on their community was positive or very positive, 24% saw no impact or didn't know, and around half (51%) negative or very negative. Differences can be noticed by neighbourhood of interview: 40% of residents of Dami B perceived positive impacts versus 18% in Cakara, which may be linked to the fact that respondents in Cakara reported the highest incidence of providing free assistance to migrants (Figure 2) whilst also perceiving that migrants are a strain on resources (Figure 8). In Djibouti and Hargeisa, whether respondents had commercial/economic interactions with migrants seemed to influence their perception of impacts on their communities. In Djibouti, 57% of those having had commercial/economic interactions considered a positive impact (vs. 37% of those who did not) and in Hargeisa 41% did so (vs. 16% of those who did not).

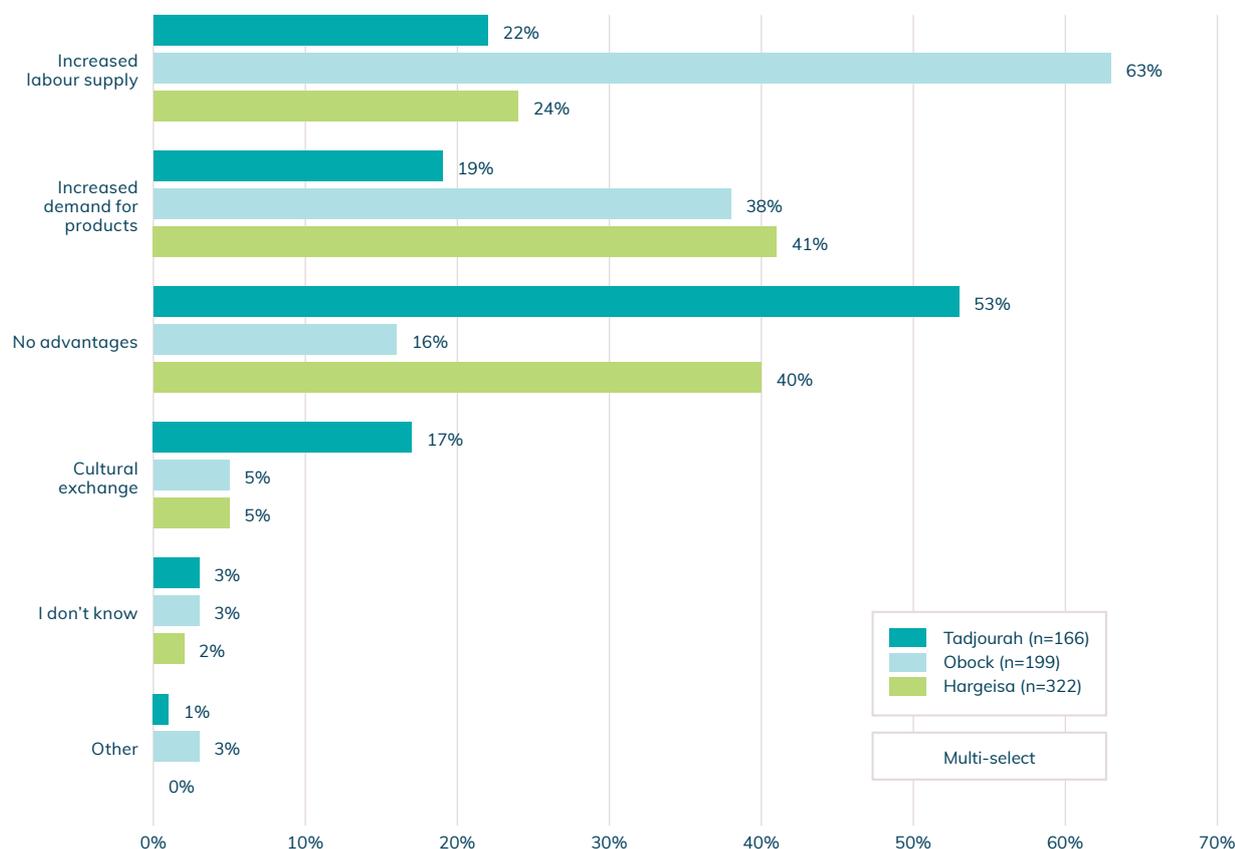
The main perceived advantages of being transit locations varied slightly between (and within) Djibouti and the Somaliland region (Figure 7). In Djibouti, the increased supply of labour was mentioned as an advantage by 44% of respondents and the increased demand for products by 30%. Cultural exchanges were mentioned as an advantage by 10% of respondents. A stark difference exists between respondents in Obock, where 63% cited the increased supply of labour as an advantage, versus 22% in Tadjourah. Similarly, 38% of Obock respondents mentioned the increased demand for products as an advantage, while 19% did so in Tadjourah. In Tadjourah, more than half of respondents (53%) stated that there are no advantages in being a transit location, compared to 16% in Obock. This suggests that contributions to the local economy are larger and more positively perceived in Obock than in Tadjourah, potentially also indicating the position of Obock as a point of departure and the implications this has on the local smuggling economy. An interviewed restaurant owner in Obock argued migrants filled vacant positions in his business:

*"Migration has a huge influence on this city. Honestly, it's always the migrants who do the work here. So, for my restaurant I almost only work with migrants. Djiboutians don't want to do this kind of work."*

In Hargeisa, the most commonly cited advantage of being a transit location was the increased demand for products (41%), followed the increased supply of labour (24%). 40% of Hargeisa respondents saw no advantages in being a

transit location. Residents of Dami B perceived more advantages than other neighbourhoods, with 51% citing the increased demand for products, 33% citing the increased labour supply, and 25% perceiving no advantages. Whether respondents had commercial/interactions with migrants considerably changed perceptions: 58% of those interacting economically with migrants cited the increased demand for products (vs. 30% of those who did not), 32% cited the increased labour supply (vs. 19% of those who did not) and 21% saw no advantages (vs. 52% of those who did not).

**Figure 7. In your opinion, what are the main advantages of being a transit location for your community?**



Respondents in Djibouti and Hargeisa also had different perceptions of the main disadvantages that being a transit location represented. In Djibouti, the most commonly cited disadvantage was the littering of common spaces (69%), followed by harassment for assistance (54%). As mentioned previously, interviewed community leaders noted that community members have begun to perceive migrants asking for assistance as harassment and generating a sense of insecurity due to them going from door to door. Littering of common spaces was particularly noted in Tadjourah (80%), where 22% also cited increased tensions. In Obock, respondents also mentioned increased crime (16%) and the perceived presence of criminal groups (11%).

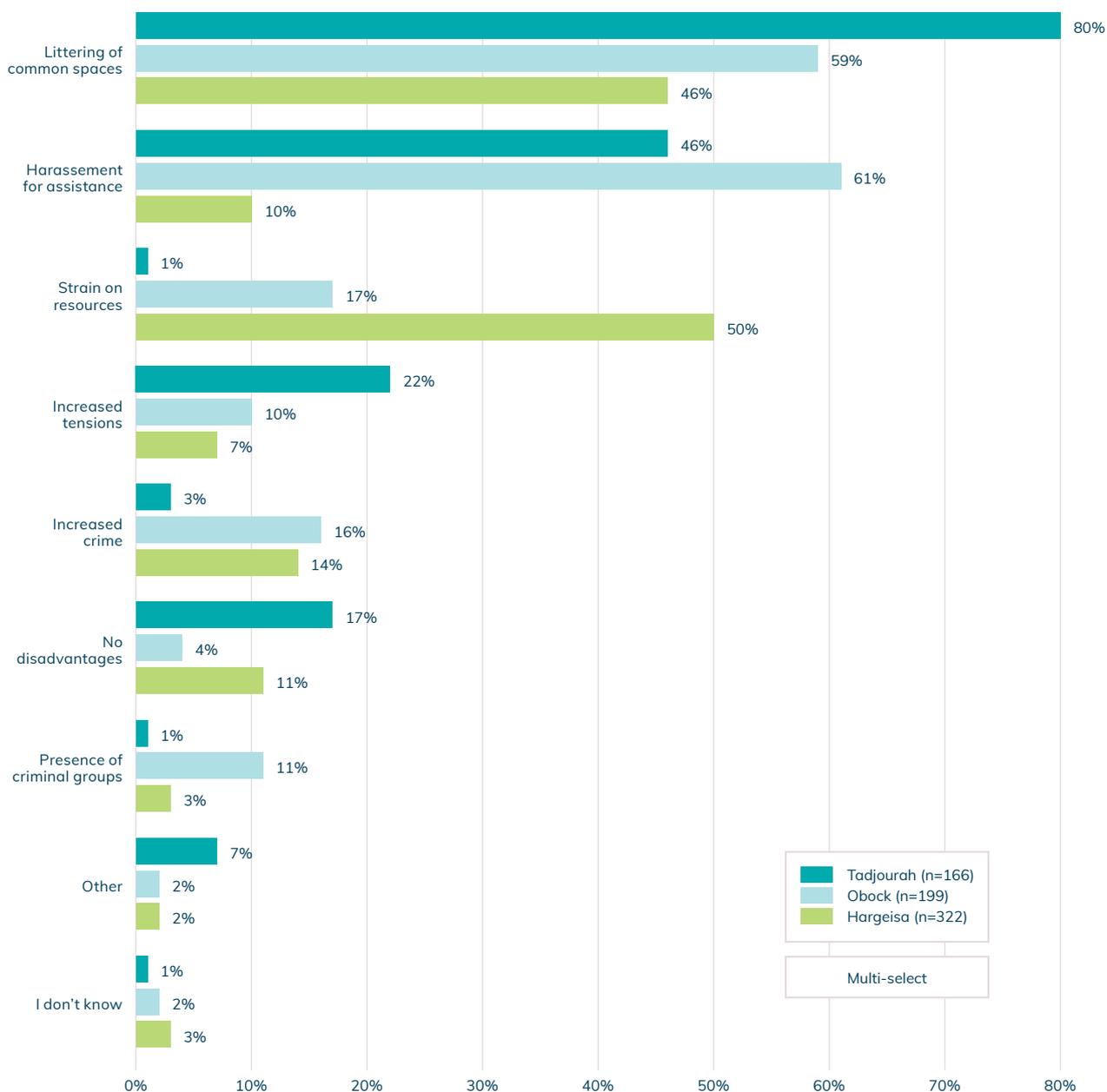
Several key stakeholders and community leaders in Djibouti noted that the majority of migrants seek to transit Tadjourah and Obock as quickly as possible, as mentioned in Section 4. Migration was perceived as having a negative impact on local communities, for being a transit location impedes sustainable economic benefits and investments. Finally, community leaders in Tadjourah and Obock noted there were hygiene and health concerns linked to migrants arriving and passing through the towns, as they often had come a long way by foot in extreme weather conditions without regular access to water and food. Concerns were particularly raised around recent tuberculosis cases among migrants.

In Hargeisa, on the other hand, the main perceived disadvantage was the strain on resources (50%), followed by the littering of common spaces (46%). An interviewed community leader in Cakara noted:

“According to our community the biggest challenge is resource scarcity in food, water, shelters and other basics, which are considered not enough for all the people coming here from different areas.”

Both perceived disadvantages of resource scarcity and littering were cited in similar proportion in all targeted neighbourhoods while perceived harassment for assistance was more common in Cakara (18%) and Statehouse (14%) than in other neighbourhoods. Around 10% of respondents in Djibouti and Hargeisa saw no disadvantages.

**Figure 8. In your opinion, what are the main disadvantages of being a transit location for your community?**



## 6.2 The ties that bind local communities and transiting migrants

The strength of the ties between local communities and transiting migrants was perceived to depend in large part on the profiles of migrants. In Djibouti, local community respondents cited religion (67%), languages spoken (34%), gender (33%), and age (27%) as impacting the strength or quality of their relationships with transiting migrants. The languages spoken by migrants particularly influenced the quality of relationships in Obock (53% vs. 11% in Tadjourah). Women in Djibouti more frequently cited the gender of migrants as affecting the quality of their relationships (45%) than men (26%).

In the Somaliland region, religion (45%) was the factor most perceived as influencing relationships with migrants. One interview with a migration stakeholder in Hargeisa revealed that some non-Muslim Ethiopians might even say they are Muslim to be better accepted by local community members. Gender and age were also commonly cited (36% and 31%, respectively) as factors determining the strength of ties to transiting migrants, though it is not clear why from the broader data. Aside from profile characteristics, migrants' financial resources were commonly referred to by Hargeisa community members as a factor impacting the quality of relationships, but largely by those respondents who had commercial/economic interactions with migrants (33% vs. 5% of those who did not).

Respondents were also asked about how their relationship with migrants had changed over time, specifically over the last year. In Djibouti, similar proportions of respondents indicated their relationships had improved (28%) as those indicating that they had worsened (31%), while 41% stated that they stayed the same or didn't know. Considerable differences in perceived changes were observed between Obock and Tadjourah. While 44% of Obock respondents indicated the relationship had improved, 45% that it stayed the same/did not know, and 11% that it worsened, in Tadjourah only 8% indicated improvements, 36% indicated no changes/did not know, and the majority (55%) indicated a worsening in the relationship. Qualitative data collected in Tadjourah through key stakeholders and community leader interviews suggests an increased number of transiting migrants present in the town, and an increase in perceived harassment linked to requests for assistance, may explain this finding. In Hargeisa, overall, 18% indicated improvements, 46% no change/did not know and 35% indicated relations had worsened. No notable differences were observed among neighbourhoods. However, improvements were more commonly indicated among respondents who had commercial/economic interactions (35%) with migrants than those who did not (8%).

When interviewed, community representatives were asked about events in which local communities and transiting migrants come together, responses were mixed in Djibouti. A restaurant owner interviewed in Obock mentioned that watching sports games brought local community members and migrants together in social settings, particularly when there is a big football match. Some others noted that migrants attend Djiboutian weddings and funerals, while a number reported migrants do not attend local events and social interactions aimed to improve connections between the two groups are minimal. In the Somaliland region, a key informant representing IOM at the MRC mentioned the occurrence of intercommunal marriages, but those are considered rare. Shared cultural events focusing on music, dance, and traditions at the Ethiopian Community Centre and the Hargeisa Cultural Centre were also referenced.

## 6.3 Implications of perceptions on interactions

Overall, an increase in the presence of transiting migrants was perceived in all locations. Several key stakeholders noted that particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic, there is a general sentiment among the local community that migrants who intend to transit and cross to the Arabian Peninsula have remained stranded in the towns and in regular need of assistance from the local community. This has put a strain on interactions, with local communities' perceptions of migrants becoming more negative. At the same time, an interviewed representative of the local authorities in Obock noted that the situation is paradoxical, given that smugglers coming from local communities do benefit from the town's position along the Eastern route:

*"Their perception of transiting migrants is negative. They are tired of being a transit point and seeing migrants stranded in the city. Therefore, there is also tension between the community and the smugglers. They really don't like smugglers. At the same time, it is paradoxical because the smugglers are part of the community and earn money for the community. Life here is not easy and there are unemployed people, as I said before. Families' needs have to be met too. Sometimes there are also conflicts between migrants, giving a negative image to the local community...."*

While religion was often cited as a common factor stimulating interactions, at the same time cultural traits and traditions are regarded as a barrier to interactions, particularly in Hargeisa. In all locations, it was reported that once migrants intend to stay longer and have started to speak the local language, perceptions from the local community improve and more meaningful relationships are built.

## 7. Opportunities and challenges

Building off the previous section on perceptions, this section focuses on the opportunities and challenges reported by local communities vis-à-vis the migration dynamics described in this study.

### 7.1 Reported positive and negative experiences

In both countries, more respondents revealed having had positive personal experiences with migrants than they had negative. In Djibouti, 60% of respondents had personally had positive experiences with migrants. However, as seen throughout, experiences varied considerably between residents of Obock and Tadjourah. In Obock, 78% had positive personal experiences versus 39% in Tadjourah. A higher proportion of men reported positive experiences (66%) than women (50%). In Hargeisa, just over a third (35%) of respondents cited having had positive personal experiences, 32% of women and 41% of men.

Positive experiences were most often described as friendships in Obock (62% of 155 reporting positive personal experiences), followed by business partnerships (35%), increased customers for businesses (19%), and cultural exchanges (13%). In Tadjourah (n=65), friendships were less common (25%), and positive experiences were most frequently described as increased customers for their business (48%). A key informant representing the hospital in Tadjourah noted about personal interactions and friendships between the local community and migrants:

*“It's something that we encourage, and unfortunately lacks, perhaps out of concerns because people don't understand [the situation] enough. [...] We must also be open to the idea that people can settle here, after looking for a visa, papers, have access to work... And for whoever works, it's a win-win situation.”*

In Hargeisa, positive experiences were also dominated by friendships (57%), followed by increased customers for their business (33%) and cultural exchanges (20%). Women more frequently described friendships (42/65) than did men (18/40).

Following the same trend as positive experiences, negative personal experiences were also more commonly experienced in Djibouti (54%) than in Hargeisa (31%), underscoring the overall higher level of interactions between local communities and transiting migrants in Djibouti. Despite an overall perception of a more positive contribution of migration to the local economy, Obock residents revealed more negative interactions (62%) than Tadjourah residents (45%). Negative personal experiences in Djibouti were mostly described as cases of harassment (53%), particularly in Tadjourah (58/75) where harassment linked to assistance provision came through strongly in interviews with community leaders. In Obock, being a victim of robbery was the most common negative personal experience (43%). Women in Djibouti more often cited cases of harassment (63%) than men (48%). In Hargeisa, negative personal experiences were more varied: personal disagreements (33%), victims of robbery (22%), community-level disagreements (19%), harassment (19%), victims of physical violence (14%), and other (15%). Personal disagreements were more frequently raised in Dami A (50%) and Dami B (48%) than in other neighbourhoods. A community leader representing the Dami A neighbourhood explained that disagreements arose over scarce resources:

*“Due to the shortage of food and water and also health facilities not having enough capacity for all, sometimes this creates conflicts among the different communities. Then both the local committees and the government security body resolve the issue through enforcing the Somaliland law and also respecting the migration laws that protect the migrant communities living in Somaliland.”*

## 7.2 Role of NGOs/actors working with both populations

Surveyed local community members were asked what the impact of actors (e.g., NGOs and UN agencies) working with migrants was on the relationship between local communities and transiting migrants. In Obock, where there is an IOM-managed MRC, the majority of respondents described positive or very positive impacts on the relationship (88%). In Tadjourah, most respondents outlined there being no actors in the area (41%) or that there was no impact on the relationship (22%). Community leaders as well as key informants representing the local police and the hospital in Tadjourah mentioned a perceived need among the local community to have more migration actors present in the area, or to establish another MRC. In Obock, the positive impact of the MRC was reported by community representatives, while it was also noted that many migrants remained in dire circumstances outside the centre without assistance as they intended to make the crossing to Yemen.

In Hargeisa, opinions were varied, with 37% perceiving a positive impact, 17% no impact, and 28% a negative impact, while others did not know or stated there were no actors in their area (19%). Perceived impacts were slightly more positive in Dami B (53% considered positive impacts) and more negative in Cakara (43% considered negative impacts). A key informant representing the MMTF and the Somaliland Ministry of Justice noted that it is the responsibility and mandate of the MMTF to improve awareness and information in areas where local community members and migrants reside together. Apart from sharing information on how to access services, he noted the importance of spreading awareness on migrant rights and understanding how migrants are perceived by the local community to make awareness-raising sessions more effective.



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## 8. Conclusion

This study has carried out an in-depth examination of local communities' interactions with migrants and of their perceptions of migrants transiting through their towns along the Eastern Route towards the Arabian Peninsula. Focusing on Obock and Tadjourah in Djibouti and Hargeisa in the Somaliland region, the primary quantitative and qualitative data collected and analyzed for this research shows how the size of transit locations, their positions along migration routes, and the services and assistance available both to local communities and migrants shapes their relationships. In so doing, and by directly eliciting the views of local community members themselves, this study has also attempted to highlight existing challenges and opportunities for positive interactions between local communities and transiting migrants.

An image arises of local communities that show solidarity and support with migrants, who often arrive in poor conditions after long journeys on foot or by car. Assistance from the local community provided in the form of food and water is common and underscores their role as key migration stakeholders and assistance providers. Yet, it also must be mentioned that voices from the local community suggest, particularly in the smaller towns of Tadjourah and Obock, that the needs of transiting migrants can be challenging to absorb and the role of local communities members as humanitarian actors cannot be taken for granted. Alongside existing assistance programmes for migrants, greater coordination with government structures and international organizations could further alleviate local communities' perceived burdens and create a more intentional role for them as migration actors. Furthermore, area-based approaches and activities open to both local communities and migrants could help foster socio-cultural interactions and integration efforts.



MMC is a global network engaged in data collection, research, analysis, and policy and programmatic development on mixed migration, with regional hubs hosted in Danish Refugee Council regional offices in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe and Latin America, and a global team based across Geneva and Brussels.

MMC is a leading source for independent and high-quality data, research, analysis and expertise. MMC aims to increase understanding of mixed migration, to positively impact global and regional migration policies, to inform evidence-based protection responses for people on the move and to stimulate forward thinking in public and policy debates on mixed migration. MMC's overarching focus is on human rights and protection for all people on the move.

MMC is part of the Danish Refugee Council (DRC). Global and regional MMC teams are based in Brussels, Geneva, Dakar, Nairobi, Tunis, Bogota and Dhaka.

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