

IOM REGIONAL DATA HUB FOR EAST AND HORN OF AFRICA

# THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON ETHIOPIAN MIGRANTS AND THEIR HOUSEHOLDS IN FIVE COMMUNITIES OF HIGH EMIGRATION

Insights from the Regional Data Hub (RDH) Research on Young  
Ethiopian Migration along the Eastern Corridor: Case Study Report 5

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July 2022



Project funded by the European Union  
Project implemented by IOM

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## ABOUT IOM

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

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## ABOUT THE REGIONAL DATA HUB

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

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## ABOUT THE EU-IOM JOINT INITIATIVE PROGRAMME

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

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## ACRONYMS

**AVRR** Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration

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**CFR** Case Fatality Rate

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**COVID-19** Coronavirus Disease 2019

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**EHoA** East and Horn of Africa

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**FGD** Focus Group Discussion

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**FM** Flow Monitoring

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**GCC** Gulf Cooperation Council

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**HH** Household

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**HoH** Head of household

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**HoA** Horn of Africa

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**IOM** International Organization for Migration

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**KI** Key Informant

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**KII** Key Informant Interview

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**RDH** Regional Data Hub

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**SNNP** Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Region

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## DEFINITIONS<sup>1</sup>

### Head of household

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

### Household

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

### Internally displaced persons

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

### Internal labour migrant

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

### Irregular migrant

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

### Reintegration

A process which enables individuals to re-establish the economic, social and psychosocial relationships needed to maintain life, livelihood and dignity and inclusion in civic life. Reintegration has three key components: **Social reintegration** implies the access by a returning migrant to public services and infrastructures in his or her country of origin, including access to health, education, housing, justice and social protection schemes. **Psychosocial reintegration** is the reinsertion of a returning

migrant into personal support networks (friends, relatives, neighbours) and civil society structures (associations, self-help groups and other organizations). This also includes the re-engagement with the values, mores, way of living, language, moral principles, ideology, and traditions of the country of origin's society. **Economic reintegration** is the process by which a returning migrant re-enters the economic life of his or her country of origin and is able to sustain a livelihood.

### Re-migrating individuals

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

### Returnees

Individuals who have migrated internationally and then returned to their country of origin.

### Remittances

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

<sup>1</sup> All definitions were formulated for the purposes of this research or taken from the IOM glossary unless stated otherwise. [https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/iml\\_34\\_glossary.pdf](https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/iml_34_glossary.pdf).



17-year-old stranded migrant in Bossaso hoping to return to Ethiopia due to fear of contracting COVID-19 during migration.

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## RESEARCH BACKGROUND

In 2019, the IOM Regional Data Hub (RDH) for the East and Horn of Africa (EHOA) launched a multistage research project aimed at better understanding the experiences, decision-making, perceptions and expectations of young Ethiopians<sup>2</sup> along the Eastern Route from Ethiopia to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, in particular the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, via Djibouti and Somalia. This included conducting original research with individual migrants along the route (phase one and two) and in communities of high emigration in Ethiopia (phase three).

The first two stages of the research project were carried out in Obock, Djibouti, and Bossaso, Puntland, where research teams interviewed a sample of migrants transiting through these two main embarkation hubs from where they cross over the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea to Yemen. Three different types of migrants were interviewed: individuals migrating for the first time, individuals who have attempted or successfully completed this journey before; and individuals who have decided to stop their journey and

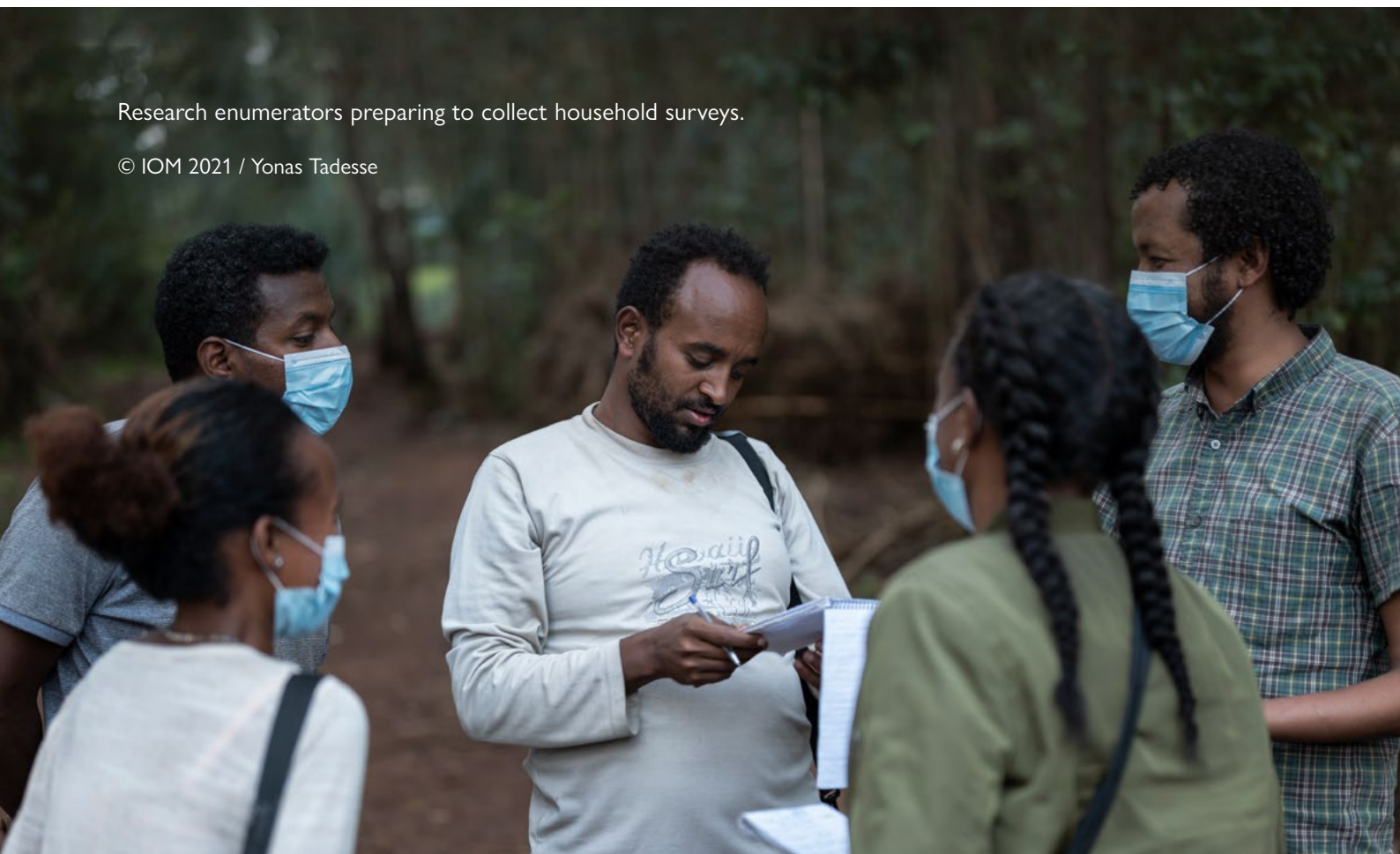
return to Ethiopia. Quantitative surveys were administered to 2,140 migrants in Obock and 1,526 migrants in Bossaso. Qualitative, semi-structured interviews were also conducted with a sample of 66 migrants in Obock.

The third stage of the project was conducted in the first half of 2021 in communities of high emigration in Ethiopia. This stage's aim was to gain a better understanding of the environment in which migration was taking place and investigate how it was lived and experienced at household and community level. Phase three was also designed to better understand how money, information, knowledge and ideas flow transnationally between communities in Ethiopia and migrants abroad, as well as to gauge whether the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) had changed the migration environment and impacted migration from and to these communities. This report builds on the findings of this third phase as per the methodology highlighted on the following page.

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

Research enumerators preparing to collect household surveys.

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## METHODOLOGY

Data collection was carried out by JaRco Consulting PLC in five communities in Ethiopia. Research findings from phases one and two guided the initial selection of target woredas of origin of migrants, which were chosen according to the volume of flows and the presence of a mixed pool of migrants.<sup>3</sup> Selected woredas were then triangulated with annual IOM Flow Monitoring (FM) data on migrations flows along the Eastern Route. Selected woredas included (Amhara), Setema (Southwest Oromia), Deder (East Oromia) and Erer (Harari).<sup>4</sup> The additional woreda of Misha in Southern Nations, Nationalities, and People's Region (SNNP) was selected through FM data as representative of communities of high emigration towards the Southern Route.

### RAPID ASSESSMENT

A rapid assessment was carried out in each woreda to assess whether it was suitable for the research and fulfilled the study requirements, as well as to generate community profiles for each of the planned areas. The rapid assessment involved both primary and secondary data collection on the socioeconomic, environmental, security and migratory landscapes in each location and helped contribute to a better understanding of the local environment, define the geographical boundaries of each data collection site, identify research areas within each woreda (areas with a high concentration of households with at least one member who is currently abroad or has returned),<sup>5</sup> generate an understanding of local migration dynamics and identify key informants (KIs) such as community leaders and former migrants for the qualitative part of the research.

Primary data was collected through observation of study sites and by interviewing KIs to gather in-depth, context-specific information from each target woreda. Within each area, individuals with different areas of expertise were interviewed, including a representative of the economic sector, a representative of women's

affairs, government representatives, religious leaders and informants from the migrant community. Secondary data was collected through a review of relevant literature including research papers, academic studies, migration data and publications from non-governmental organizations, the United Nations and the Government of Ethiopia.

### HOUSEHOLD SAMPLING

A listing was carried out at each area to understand the distribution of migrants' households throughout the area and identify the potential households to interview. Listing was conducted prior to data collection and more households than the target sample size for each domain were identified. The target sample was set at 500 households per area, half with and half without experience of migration to allow for comparison – the target sample was raised at 600 households in Misha since it was the only community representative of the Southern Route. In addition to the presence of migrants and returnees, information on gender, age and intended destination of migrants was also collected. Overall, 4,396 households were listed across the five communities, with a total of 2,439 migrants identified, of whom 991 were returnees. Details on the sociodemographic profiles of surveyed households can be found in Annex.

### QUANTITATIVE DATA COLLECTION

Based on the listing, a sample of 2,600 households was randomly selected, with an equal proportion of migrant households to non-migrant households. The survey covered information on the characteristics of households, their living conditions, attitudes towards migration, direct experience of migration, the impact of COVID-19 on migration and migrant or would-be migrant future intentions. Tools were translated into Amharic and Oromifa by JaRco and surveys were administered individually to household heads – following their informed

3 These included first-time migrants, returnees, re-migrating individuals, female migrants and former internal migrants.

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

5 Each area of research roughly corresponds to 4–5 kebeles for each woreda, except for Erer, where all kebeles were screened and selected, due to low population density and lower incidence of migration.

consent – by trained enumerators in each area. To ensure that data collected were as accurate and reliable as possible, interviews were conducted individually and out of earshot of other community members; data collectors of the same gender as participants conducted surveys, as this is deemed more culturally acceptable in a traditional Ethiopian context and helped to create safe, comfortable environments in which respondents felt able to speak more freely and answer honestly.

## QUALITATIVE DATA COLLECTION

Qualitative data were also collected at each research area through focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KIIs) to obtain more in-depth views from different perspectives and allow for a more nuanced understanding of the household survey findings. Tools were developed to assess parental attitudes towards migration; risk awareness, information sources and knowledge gaps among would-be-migrants; returnees' ambitions and return experiences; migration dynamics before and during COVID-19; the importance of remittances and how the remittance system works; and transnational communication and technology. Tools were translated into the relevant local languages to ensure that the appropriate local vernacular was used so that participants would be able to understand and respond to questions easily.

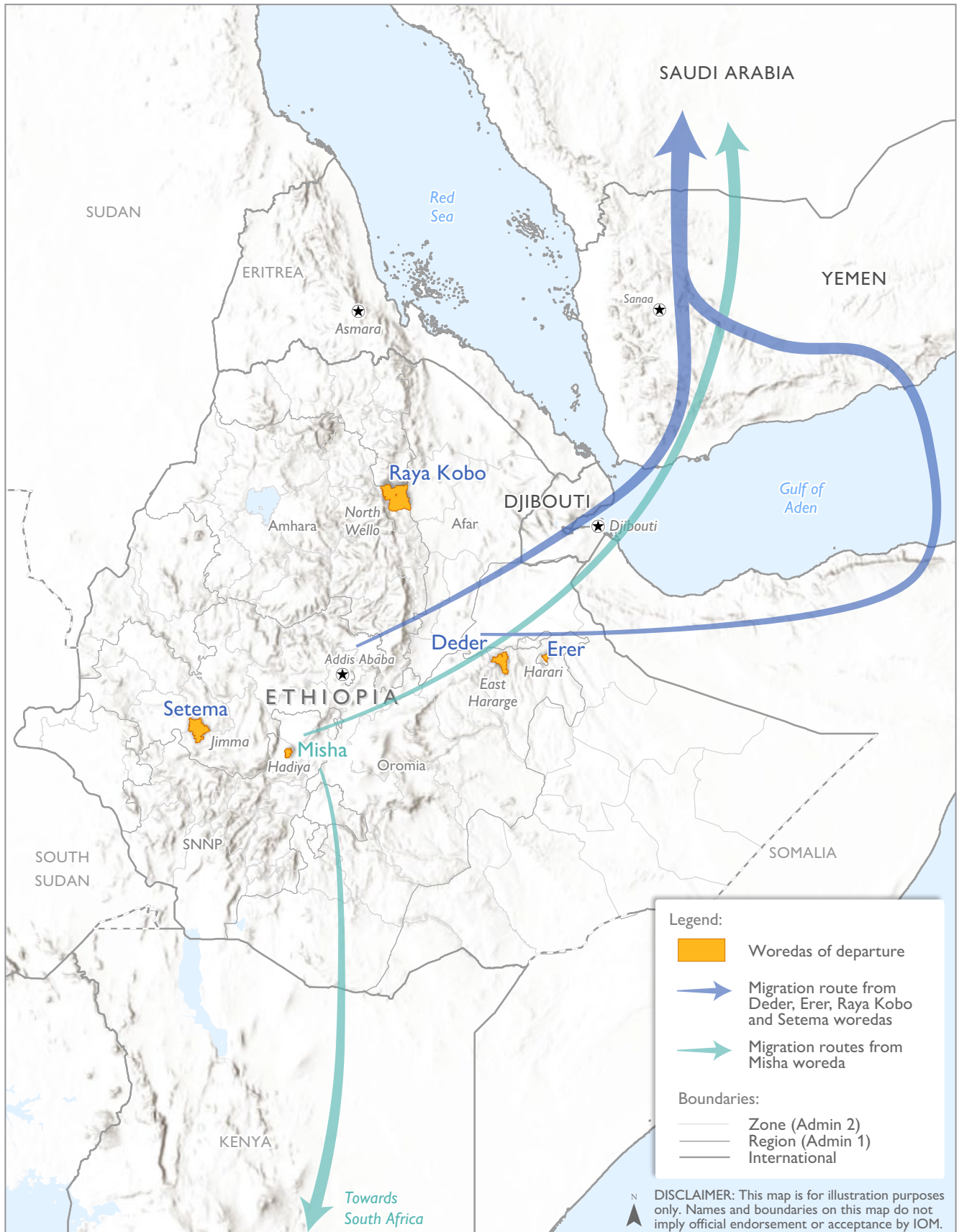
Overall, 40 KIIs and 24 FGDs were conducted across the five locations. FGDs were conducted in groups of six to eight participants who were purposefully selected based on their profiles and willingness to participate. All FGDs were separated by gender due to cultural sensitivities and to promote an environment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

Data from the listing and rapid assessments have been used to profile areas of research. Data from surveys have been used to compare findings across communities and different population groups, such as households with one migrant currently abroad or who has returned versus households with multiple migrants and/or returnees. Qualitative data from FGDs and KIIs have been used to confirm quantitative findings and further explore specific issues. When possible, triangulation with data on individual migrants collected during the first two phases of the research was also carried out.

Table 1. Research Areas and Data Collection Activities

RESEARCH SITES	PHASE 1 AND 2		PHASE 3			
	Individual Surveys	Individual Semi-structured Interviews	Households Screened (listing)	Households Surveyed	Focus Group Discussions	Key Informant Interviews
Bossaso	1526					
Deder			649	500	4	8
Erer			1523	500	5	8
Misha			805	600	6	8
Obock	2140	66				
Raya Kobo			626	500	5	8
Setema			776	500	4	8

RESEARCH AREAS





## INTRODUCTION

The first case of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) in Ethiopia was identified in March 2020, and almost 470,000 cases have been confirmed in the country until April 2022,<sup>6</sup> making Ethiopia the country with the largest case load in the East and Horn of Africa (EHoA) region.<sup>7,8</sup> With a case fatality rate (CFR) of 1.6 per cent in Ethiopia, the crisis has had a measurable impact on the country and affected migration dynamics along all migratory routes in the region.<sup>9</sup>

Following the onset of the pandemic in March 2020, migration drastically reduced for a few months until the region witnessed a gradual increase in movements once restrictions started to ease in July of the same

year. With an estimated 674,000 movements tracked by IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix along the main migratory corridors in the region, migration continued to increase in 2021, with movements gradually approaching pre-pandemic levels (around 744,000 movements in 2019) and over 40 per cent higher than the number of movements tracked in 2020 (around 482,000 movements); (IOM, 2022). The Eastern Route, which was one of the routes most impacted by movement restrictions associated with the pandemic, witnessed a particularly large surge in movements in 2021 (269,000), marking a 71 per cent increase compared to 2020, when only around 157,000 migrants were tracked on this route.<sup>10</sup>

6 These numbers may be under-reported due to limited testing capacity by some health institutions.

7 For the scope of this paper, the East and Horn of Africa comprises Burundi, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Somalia, South Sudan, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania.

8 Total confirmed cases since the onset of the pandemic in EHoA by country as of April 2022: Burundi (38,102), Djibouti (15,550), Eritrea (9,715), Ethiopia (468,966), Kenya (323,075), Rwanda (129,596), Somalia (26,351), South Sudan (17,015), Uganda (163,316) and United Republic of Tanzania (33,620).

9 The Ethiopia and EHoA CFRs are calculated from daily epidemiological data published by the respective Ministries of Health. The Africa and global case rate fatalities (CFRs) are calculated from unpublished data from the World Health Organization.

10 The Eastern and Southern migratory routes constitute two of the main migration corridors out of Ethiopia. Although the Middle East and Ethiopia have been linked along trade and religious pilgrimage routes for decades, the surge in migration from Ethiopia to the Arab Peninsula, and in particular Saudi Arabia, began in the late 1990s, mostly of women migrating regularly to find employment as domestic workers (Fernandez, 2013). Migration from southern Ethiopia to South Africa also dates to the 1990s, when the end of the Derg regime in Ethiopia allowed for international mobility, while the end of the apartheid regime in South Africa simultaneously resulted in the introduction of progressive asylum laws in the country, permitting asylum seekers and migrants to work and study while their claims were being processed. In the last decade both regular and irregular labour migration along these corridors has grown in response to several push and pull factors including climate shocks such as droughts and floods, famine, overpopulation, land scarcity, youth unemployment and extreme poverty.



A child waits with his family at Aden Airport to start their journey home to Ethiopia.

© IOM 2021 / Muse Mohammed

Nonetheless, movements in 2021 remained significantly lower compared to 2019, when almost half a million migrants were tracked on this route alone.

Following the onset of the pandemic, Ethiopian authorities suspended most international flights to and from affected countries and closed all land border points, implementing a de facto suspension of regular international movements (IOM, 2020d). In early April 2020, the Government announced a state of emergency for an initial period of five months, implemented physical distancing measures, suspended interregional public transportation, and postponed the August 2020 election. Swift COVID-19 measures were also implemented by other states along the Eastern migratory route, notably Somalia, Djibouti, Yemen and Saudi Arabia, all of which tightened their borders and imposed movement restrictions into and within their territories. On the Southern Route, regular pathways to migration also became increasingly restricted due to COVID-19 related border closures and travel restrictions. Kenya, a key transit country for Ethiopians migrating along the Southern Route, closed its borders to foreign nationals, banned international flights, restricted entry through land border points and suspended regional movements, including to and from the Eastleigh neighbourhood in Nairobi, a key transit and logistics hub for migrants along the Southern Route. Although the United Republic of Tanzania followed a different strategy to manage the pandemic, it also imposed some movement restrictions and public bus services to and from neighbouring countries were suspended (IOM, 2020d).

Mobility restrictions on the Eastern Corridor affected movement patterns and gave rise to new trends as many Ethiopian migrants traveling to Saudi Arabia found themselves stranded when they could no longer continue their journeys due to partial border closures,<sup>11</sup> and flows became increasingly bidirectional<sup>12</sup> (IOM, 2021e). In addition, many migrants experienced stigmatization as

carriers of the virus in host communities who themselves struggled under the economic and social strains of the pandemic. This increase in xenophobia, discrimination and community tensions contributed to detention, forced relocation and forced return of numerous migrants. People on the move also experienced greater difficulty securing employment and access to essential services due to economic shutdowns and stigma in the context of the public health emergency.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, many who reached Yemen and fell sick or became injured were unable to access care due to limited medical infrastructure in the country amid the ongoing conflict. Given these harsh conditions, many migrants attempted to return to their home countries, with some stranded in transit countries on their way home.

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted not only migrant movements in the region, but also had economic ramifications for sending and host communities. During the economic downturn triggered by the pandemic, migrants reported difficulties with employment, and many lost their jobs, challenging their ability to send critically needed remittances back home. Many East African migrants in host countries also experienced non-payment of wages and pay cuts with limited access to legal recourse (ILO, 2021). Some of the most vulnerable households in Ethiopia, especially those relying on remittances to cover daily expenses, were severely impacted by the pandemic; World Bank data suggest that in 2020, 54 per cent of urban and 55 per cent of rural households in Ethiopia that received remittances experienced a decline in this income (KNOMAD, 2021). Economic challenges and crackdowns on migrants in host countries also led to a sharp rise in migrant returns during COVID-19 and evidence suggests that returnees often faced additional challenges reintegrating into their communities socially and economically and were sometimes stigmatized upon return (IOM, 2022b).

11 Mobility restrictions and border closures led to a greater incidence of migrants becoming stranded during transit through Somalia, Djibouti and Yemen. Border closures between Saudi Arabia and Yemen as well as armed conflict in Yemen caused many to become stranded in the country. By the end of 2021, IOM estimates that around 5,500 migrants are stranded in Somalia, 615 in Djibouti and 35,000 in Yemen. Following years of conflict and economic shocks as a result of the pandemic, an estimated 80 per cent of the population in Yemen lives below the poverty line, and many migrants stranded in Yemen faced xenophobia and discrimination during COVID-19 by host communities who are themselves facing social and economic hardships.

12 Many migrants who stranded in Yemen decided to return spontaneously to the Horn of Africa (HoA) in 2020 and 2021. By the end of 2021, total returns had reached record numbers with a 67 per cent increase in 2021 (13,125) compared to 2020 (7,849), when the trend of migrants returning to the HoA began.

13 Fighting erupted in Tigray region in November 2020, and by July 2021 in Amhara and Afar regions, resulting in the displacement of over 2 million people by the end of the year.



Migrants found returning through the desert to Obock on foot and supported by IOM's mobile unit in the area.

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This situation has been further exacerbated by the conflict and security issues that erupted in Northern Ethiopia in November 2020,<sup>13</sup> as well as the country experiencing its third consecutive year of drought. In November 2021, Ethiopia announced a nationwide state of emergency in response to the armed conflict in the northern region of Tigray which has further complicated the migratory environment and livelihood situation in communities affected by the conflict. Moreover, the conflict has posed additional challenges to migrants originally from these regions who found their options to return limited in view of the armed clashes. Furthermore, separate violent intercommunal clashes occurred in the regions of Oromia, Amhara, Benishangul Gumuz, and the Southern

Nations, Nationalities and Peoples (SNNP) region have further strained community livelihoods in Ethiopia amid the broader context of a third wave of COVID-19, acute food insecurity, climate events, food shortages due to agricultural disruption, drastic inflation of food prices and poverty. Given the emergence of new migratory trends of Ethiopians along the Eastern and Southern Corridor during the COVID-19 pandemic, this paper looks at five communities of high emigration in Ethiopia using household and individual-level data collected by the RDH to explain how the health emergency has impacted mobility dynamics in these communities of high emigration and the households living in them.



“ My aunt is in Qatar for work. I have heard that they make people work all day and all night and that they do not pay them. I will never go abroad. I want to be a doctor and stay here to help my people.

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## THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON COMMUNITIES OF HIGH EMIGRATION

This section draws on data from the FGDs, KIs and household surveys to ascertain how COVID-19 impacted community life in the five areas of the study during various stages of the pandemic. This report takes a broad look at COVID-19 including the illness itself, prevention measures implemented in response to the disease such as lockdowns and their impact on community life and livelihoods, as well as the longer-term impacts of these restrictions such as job loss and reduced earnings.

Data collected from 2,600 household surveys in mid-2021 suggest that communities were impacted by the pandemic at varying degrees, and the extent to which they were impacted seems dependent on their socioeconomic profile. Although approximately 70 per cent of households self-report no significant change in living standards in their community due to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, qualitative data suggest that the timing of the surveys, which were conducted over a year into the pandemic, may explain the low number of households reporting such impact.

KIs in all assessed areas indicated that COVID-19 related measures and restrictions greatly affected their community in the early months of the pandemic, as inhabitants feared the disease and preventative measures were adopted to curb its spread. Measures reported across all communities included a decrease in social gatherings, ceremonies and in-person meetings, school closures and the wearing of

masks in public spaces. Moreover, KIs reported that some businesses and markets temporarily closed, and the prices of basic goods increased dramatically due to supply issues associated with an increased cost for transportation. Public transport vehicles were not allowed to operate at full capacity and movement restrictions and the increased cost of transport prevented some farmers from selling their products at local markets. The increased cost of local transportation and restrictions on local travel experienced in all five communities was particularly emphasized, as individuals whose livelihood depended on moving between locations, such as daily labourers and traders, were unable to work and support their families.

KIs in all assessed areas also reported that community members who tested positive for COVID-19 in the first months of the pandemic were in some cases stigmatized for contracting the disease, resulting in individuals secretly isolating themselves or hiding their symptoms when they became ill out of fear of social consequences.

“ One person who tested positive for COVID-19 in this community was stigmatized for many weeks by the villagers and neighbours, even after he recovered as the community has poor awareness about the disease.”<sup>14</sup>

14 KI in Deder.

However, KIs in all study locations emphasized that community life normalized again rapidly and the impact of COVID-19 in the form of restrictive measures to curb the pandemic became less visible over time. KIs agreed that at the point of interview in mid-2021, COVID-19 was not impacting community life as preventative measures had been dropped, schools had reopened and social gatherings resumed. KIs described a sense of complacency regarding the disease and several suggested that some members of their communities believe that COVID-19 is not a real threat and that they generally are not worried about contracting the illness. Several KIs did, however, differentiate between rural and urban areas, explaining that while the impact of COVID-19 on rural communities, who have generally stopped fearing the disease and resumed their daily lives without COVID-19 preventive measures, cannot be perceived any longer, members of more urban communities continue to practice some preventative measures.

“ During the early days of the pandemic, COVID-19 caused immense trouble in the community. People were frustrated and highly affected socioeconomically. Social gatherings and meetings were halted, private companies terminated employment and there was no work for daily workers. However, the economic status of the community did not allow people to continue practicing the COVID-19 rules and the community went back to their normal activities even though COVID-19 cases keep increasing. Now only urban communities use face masks, but in the rural community, it seems like there is no COVID-19 at all.”<sup>15</sup>

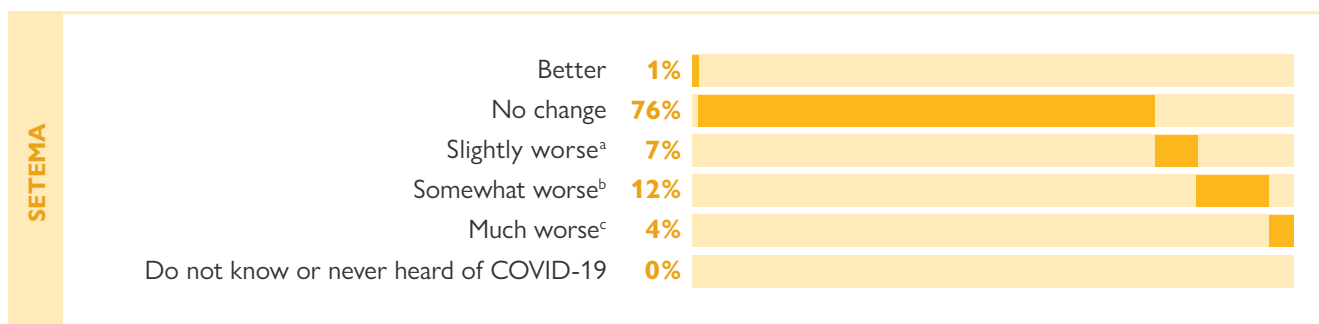
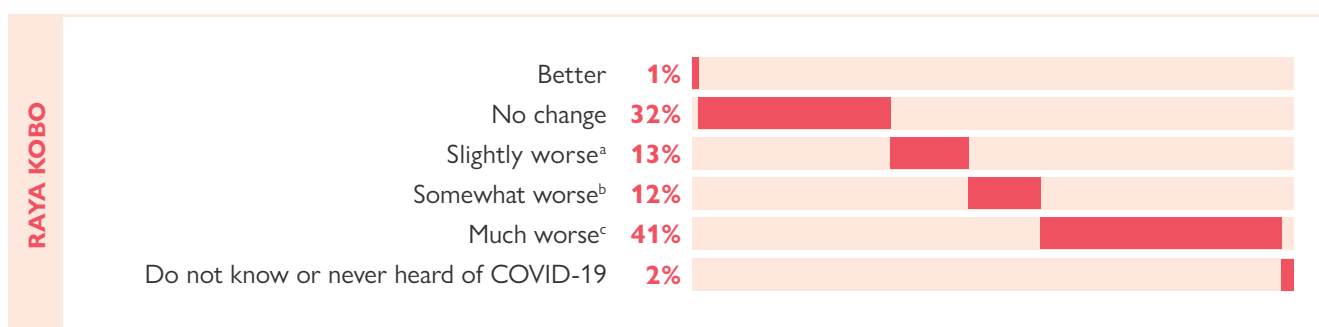
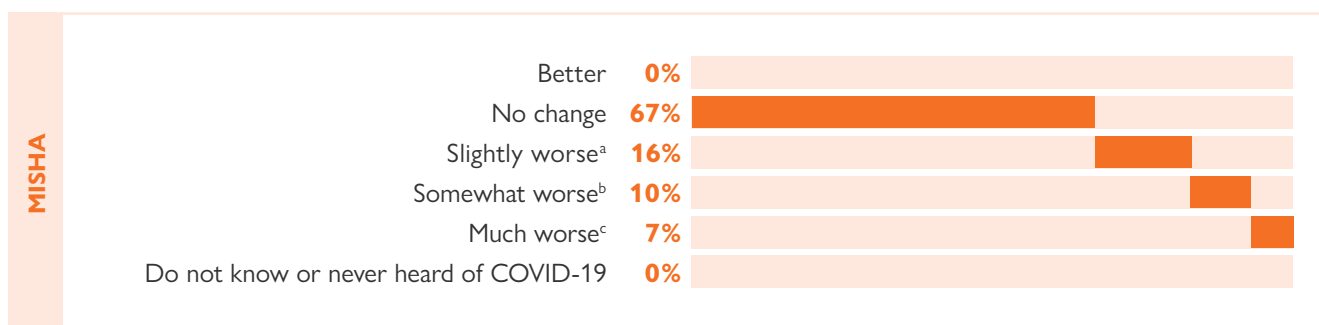
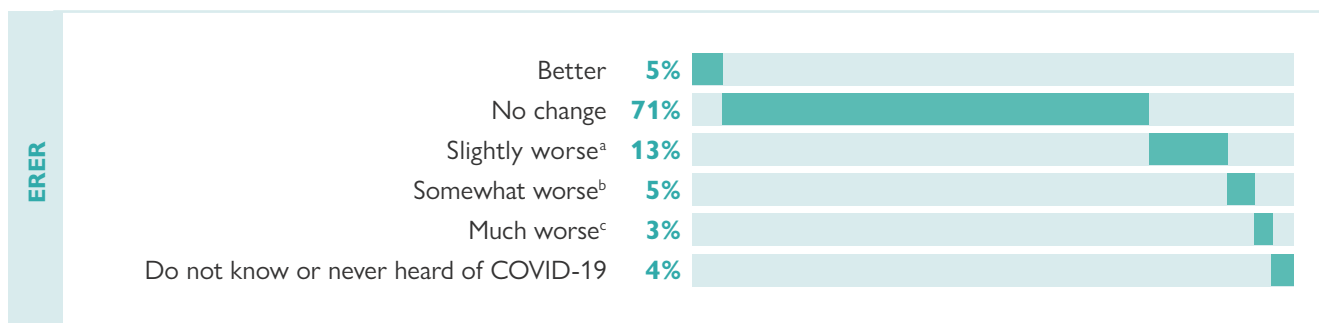
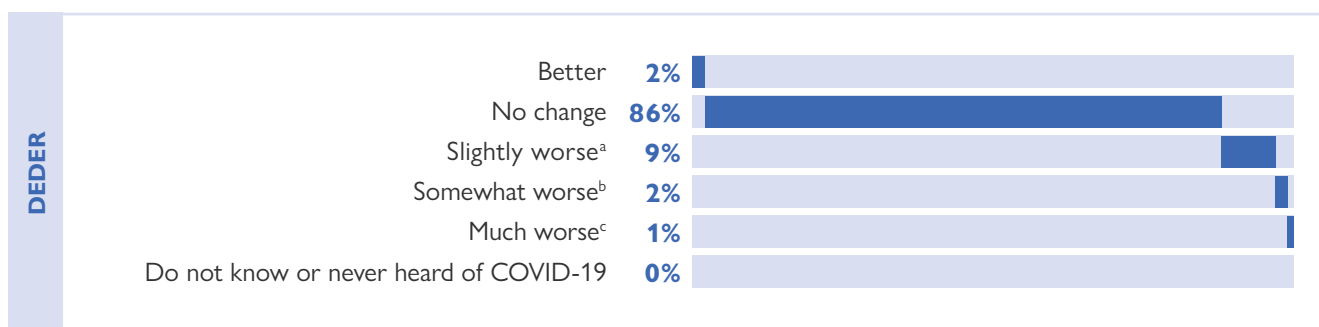
**This finding is supported by the survey results that indicate that sample communities in which a majority of households live in rural settings, sustained mainly by self-owned, small-scale agricultural activities, as is the case in Deder and Erer, overwhelmingly reported that their community had been unaffected by the pandemic.** Eighty-eight per cent of households in Deder and 76 per cent of those in Erer reported no deterioration of living standards at the community level. Moreover, in Deder only 1 per cent reported a ‘much worse community situation’, and in Erer only about 3 per cent reported such a decline. The finding that rural communities were slightly less hardly hit by the pandemic is also corroborated by household survey data from the World Bank on the impact of COVID-19 in Ethiopia that found that 18 per cent of urban and 10 per cent of rural respondents reported job losses, with the most affected sectors being retail, construction and hospitality (World Bank, 2020c).

Setema and Misha also exhibit a fairly high level of resilience, with 77 per cent of interviewed households in Setema and 67 per cent of interviewed households in Misha reporting no changes (or a better situation) since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The percentage of households reporting an extreme worsening of community-level conditions is also low (4% in Setema and 7% in Misha). **The impact of COVID-19 has, however, been perceived as deeply disruptive in Raya Kobo: according to 41 per cent of households, more than 30 per cent of individuals living in the surveyed kebeles lost their job and more than 30 per cent of businesses/shops closed. Raya Kobo, a study area including some semi-urban kebeles<sup>16</sup> and exhibiting a much lower ownership of land, is more dependent on animal farming/small-trading activities and receives significant income from remittances.** Over 40 per cent of households in this area reported a ‘much worse’ situation for the community compared to pre-COVID-19 times and an additional 25 per cent felt that the situation in the community is ‘slightly or somewhat’ worse. Only 33 per cent of households in Raya Kobo reported no change in livelihood standards at the community level.

15 KI in Misha.

16 Gobiye, Robit, and Kalim are (3 of 6 kebeles included in the sample) are semi-urban areas found along the main road from Woldia to Kobo Town.

The impact of COVID-19 on the livelihood situation of studied communities  
(Data from surveys, percentage of households)



a <10% of individuals lost their jobs and/or activities/business/shops closed.  
 b 10–30% of individuals lost their jobs and/or activities/business/shops closed.  
 c >30% of individuals lost their jobs and/or activities/business/shops closed.

However, assessing the impact of COVID-19 on Raya Kobo is difficult, as in addition to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in its early months – such as restricted movement of people and goods, decreased flows of remittances, closed schools and markets, disrupted supply chains and a subsequent economic downturn – Raya Kobo has been subject to multiple, complex and frequent hazards over the last few years that have exhausted the coping capacity and challenged the resilience of local communities in the area. The community has experienced locust invasion and flooding in 2019, as well as drought in 2020, resulting in reduced crop production and food insecurity. Moreover, its geographical profile of moderate to steep slopes makes the woreda prone to severe erosion and environmental degradation, and increasing soil salinity as a result of overflowing is a key concern.

Moreover, according to KIs interviewed for the rapid community profile in Raya Kobo, most arable land is owned by older farmers. Between 1990 and 1992, the Ethiopian Government conducted rural land redistribution in Raya Kobo, leaving individual farmers with small plot sizes. As the population continues to grow, land has become increasingly fragmented and has contributed to a large and growing population of landless young people. This fragmentation and landlessness among young people in the area is considered a core driver of youth migration.

Located in Amhara region, Raya Kobo also lies in close geographical proximity to the conflict that erupted in Northern Ethiopia in 2020 and KIs report the presence of more internally displaced persons in the woreda since November 2020, who may be placing further strain on already scarce resources. The impact of COVID-19 reflected in this data must therefore be viewed within the larger context of events affecting this woreda, which have likely exacerbated the deteriorating livelihood situation perceived by surveyed households.



IOM's mobile unit rescues migrants returning from Yemen to Obock in the desert.

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### The impact of COVID-19 on household livelihoods

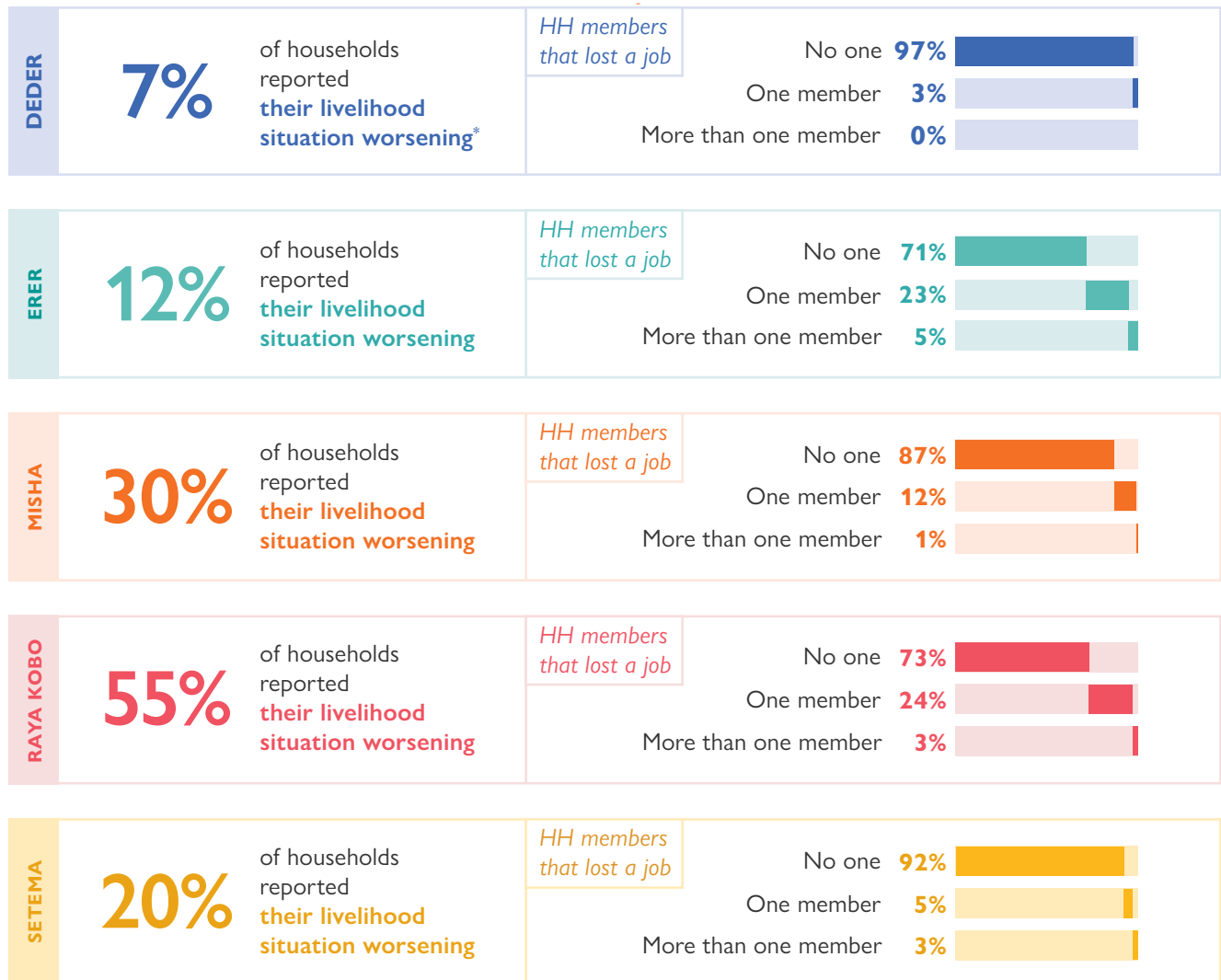
Households tended to evaluate the impact of COVID-19 on their community as slightly worse than the impact on their household. Approximately 75 per cent of the households self-reported no major changes of living standards due to COVID-19, with only around 7 per cent of households reporting that they experienced a severe worsening of their livelihood situation attributable to the pandemic.

Of the 647 households that reported experiencing a worsening of their livelihood situation, most were living in

Misha (28%) and particularly in Raya Kobo (42%), where 27 per cent of households reported a decrease in earnings due to COVID-19 by over 30 per cent. The severity of livelihood deterioration experienced in Raya Kobo is also reflected by the high incidence of job loss and/or business closures (27%). Households in Deder and Setema were the least likely to report experiencing job loss (3% and 8%, respectively). Overall, 19 per cent of households experienced the loss of one or more jobs among household members.

#### Job loss due to the COVID-19 pandemic

(Data from surveys, percentage of households witnessing a worsening in the livelihood situation)



\* Due to the COVID-19 pandemic ('slightly', 'somewhat' or 'much').

Information collected on the demographic and socioeconomic profiles of the surveyed households allow for a more nuanced understanding of the characteristics of those who reported that they had been more affected by the pandemic and their coping strategies. Household size appears to have some relevance in explaining reported changes in living standards, with bigger households exhibiting a slightly higher level of resilience to living standard deterioration due to COVID-19. This could be attributed to more diversified source of goods or revenues and the internal support that larger households can rely on. Households appear to have been similarly impacted by the pandemic, regardless of the sex or age of the head of household. Marital status, level of education and occupational status seem more relevant,

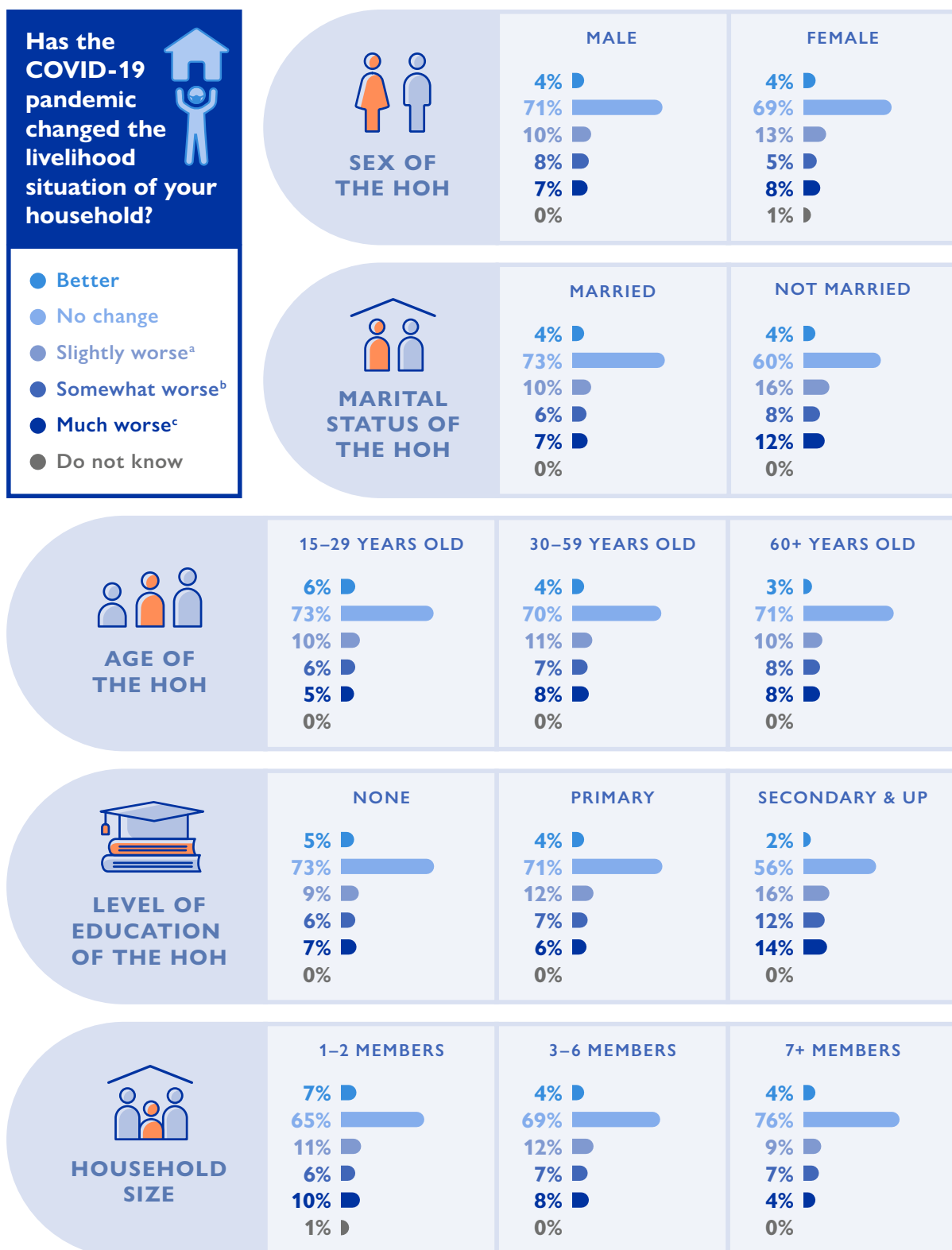
with single-headed households (those where the head of household is single, widowed or divorced) more impacted.

Households where the head of household has a higher level of education also seem more impacted, which may relate to the fact that a higher level of education often correlates with employment or business ownership, both of which were directly affected by COVID-19. Of the 647 households that reported experiencing a worsening of their livelihood situation, job losses and business closures seemed mainly concentrated among households where the head of household was regularly employed, owning a trade or business or working on a daily wage basis, whereas land labourers were much less impacted.

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Perception of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the livelihood situation of the household by different characteristics<sup>17</sup> (Data from surveys, percentage of households)

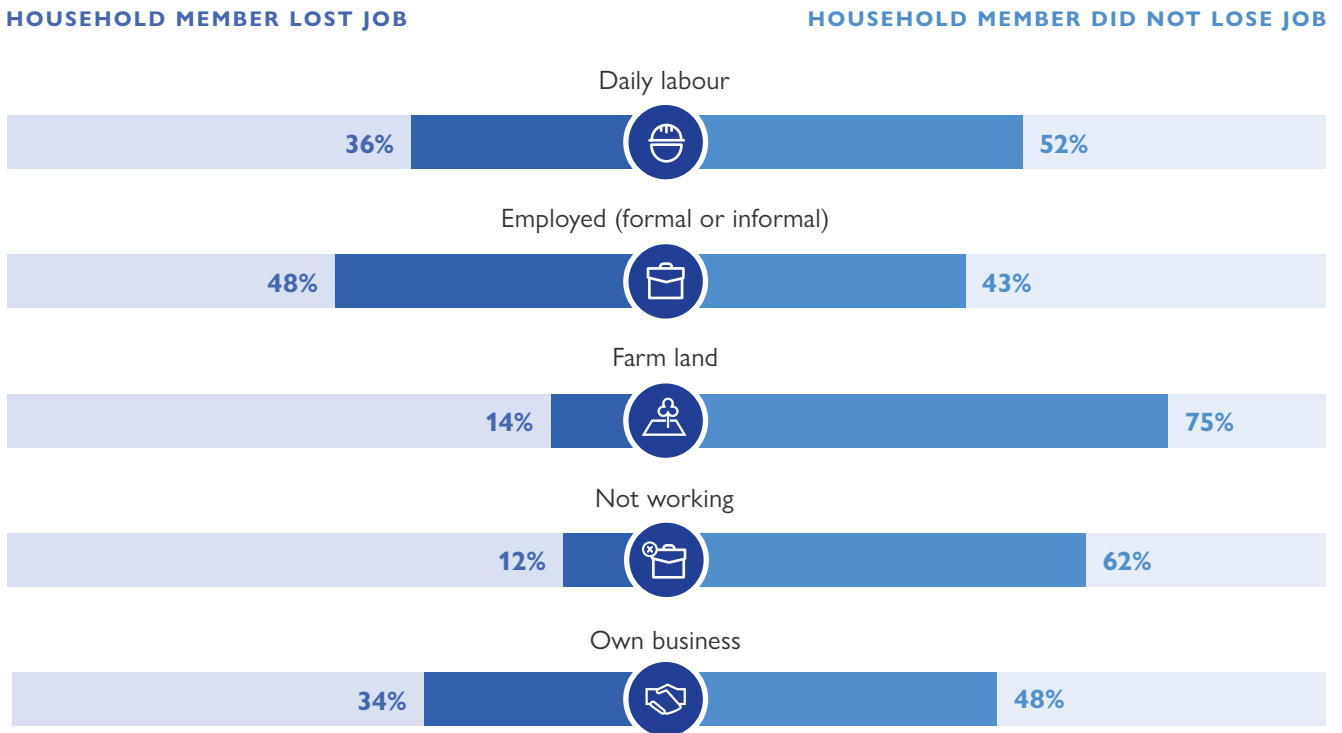


All categories indicate the characteristics of the head of household except for household size.

- a Income/earnings reduced by less than 10%.
- b Income/earnings reduced by 10–30%.
- c Income/earnings reduced by >30%.

17 Percentages are calculated on 2,575 respondents of a total sample of 2,600.

Job loss due to the COVID-19 pandemic by occupational status of the head of household  
 (Data from surveys, percentage of households witnessing a worsening in the livelihood situation)



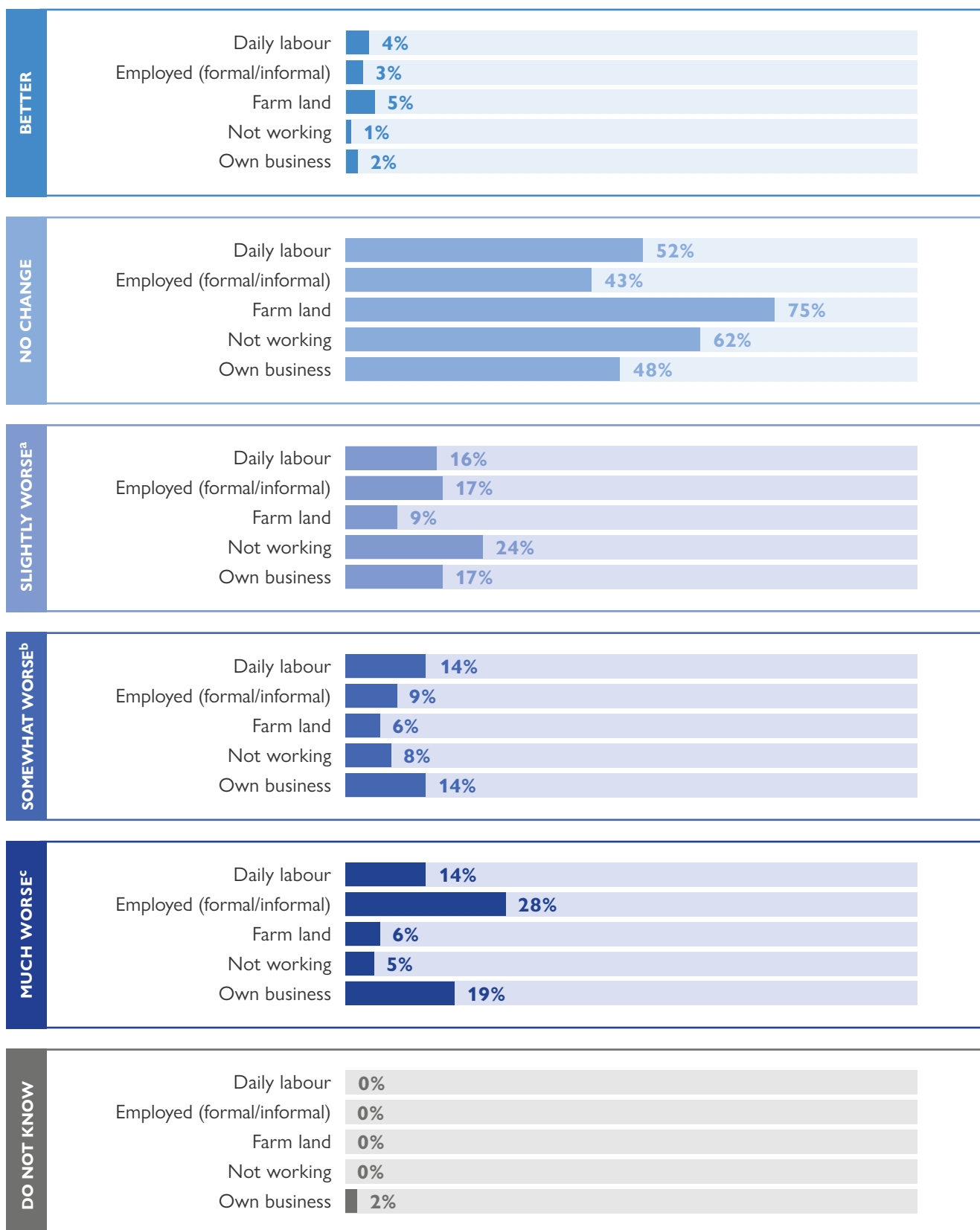
The relative resilience of larger households can also be linked to their socioeconomic characteristics, especially land ownership, which is more frequent among larger households and represents a source of livelihood stability for most. In contrast, business ownership seems to be linked to a more negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on households' livelihood standards. This finding is corroborated by qualitative data collected from KIs who reported that certain employment sectors were hit more significantly than others, especially in the early months of the pandemic when issues with public transportation prevented local mobility. While traders and farmers who rely on selling their crops were impacted in the early weeks

of the pandemic by problems transporting their goods and market closures, these difficulties reportedly improved relatively quickly. Individuals who were particularly affected were teachers (due to school closures, which lasted over six months in some of the assessed communities), individuals working in factories, and those in the hospitality business (restaurants, cafes, hotels etc.) as many closed or had to restrict the number of employees due to a reduced number of customers. Diversified income sources make households more resilient to external shocks such as the COVID-19 outbreak, especially when not all sectors are equally hard hit.



Perception of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the livelihood situation of the household by occupational status of the Head of Household (Data from surveys, percentage of households)

HAS THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC CHANGED THE LIVELIHOOD SITUATION OF YOUR HH?



a Income/earnings reduced by less than 10%.  
 b Income/earnings reduced by 10%-30%.  
 c Income/earnings reduced by >30%.



“ It is hard for us to let our children out of our sight but it might be better to let them go to Saudi Arabia than seeing them struggle to find opportunities for work. After they finish high school, it is very hard for them to find a job.

## HOUSEHOLD COPING STRATEGIES IN DEALING WITH THE IMPACT OF COVID-19

Faced with deteriorated livelihood conditions due to COVID-19 and, in some cases, job loss and closure of business, households adopted a variety of strategies to cope with the situation. Reported strategies included a broad set of behaviours and decisions ranging from cuts in expenditures on food/changing eating patterns, to resorting to savings or selling family assets. Adopted coping strategies differ across research locations, with households in Deder least reporting that they adopted coping strategies or changed their behaviour in response to COVID-19.

Resorting to savings is common in most areas and particularly common in Misha (78% of households) and Setema (56% of households), which suggests that surveyed households in these areas may be slightly more affluent than in Raya Kobo (37%), Erer (25%) or Deder (16%). Selling crop stock or livestock and agricultural assets was most common in Erer (44% and 14%) indicating how households whose livelihoods have been impacted by the pandemic in this community were forced to resort to more severe coping measures. Receiving help from friends or relatives was the third most reported coping strategy, especially in those communities where linkages with people abroad are stronger (Misha (25%), Raya Kobo (23%) and Setema (15%)).

### Coping strategies following a worsening of livelihood situation due to the COVID-19 pandemic

(Data from surveys, percentage of households witnessing a worsening in the livelihood situation; multiple responses possible)

	DEDER	ERER	MISHA	RAYA KOBO	SETEMA
Relied on savings	16%	25%	78%	37%	56%
Reduced food expenditure or changed eating patterns	3%	4%	32%	24%	12%
Received help from friends/relatives	8%	5%	25%	23%	15%
Engaged in spiritual efforts	0%	4%	36%	16%	2%
Sold crop stock or livestock	3%	44%	4%	8%	5%
Obtained credit/debts	0%	7%	20%	3%	0%
Sold agricultural assets	0%	14%	2%	3%	1%
Sold durable assets	0%	7%	1%	1%	1%
HH members worked more	0%	2%	3%	1%	3%
Assistance from government	0%	4%	1%	2%	1%
Sold land or property	0%	4%	1%	1%	0%
Sent children to live elsewhere	0%	4%	1%	0%	2%
Assistance from NGOs	0%	0%	3%	0%	2%
Reduced health and education expenditure	0%	2%	0%	0%	0%
No coping strategy	73%	4%	0%	8%	24%

“ Other than farming, there are not many jobs here. There are so many people without jobs in my community. There are many young people who finish university and are unable to find a job. I believe it is better to stay here than to migrate, but because of joblessness, some people don't have any other choice but to go. I have now finished high school and am supposed to go to university in Tigray, but as of right now, I can't go because it is unsafe. If I am unable to go to university, I might be forced to migrate to Saudi Arabia too.

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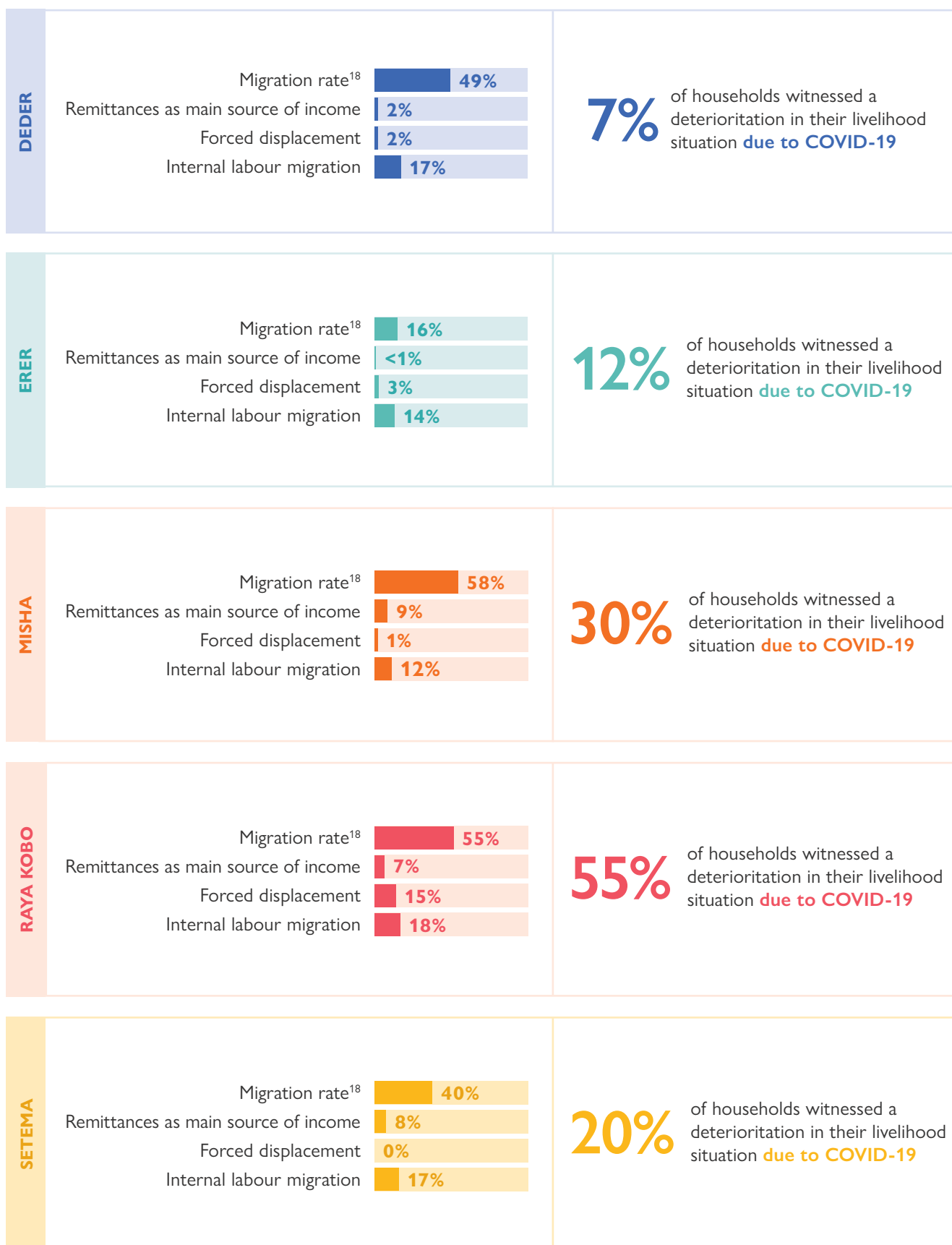


## THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON MIGRANTS AND THEIR HOUSEHOLDS

Drawing on survey data as well as information collected through KIs and FGDs, this section delves into the impact of COVID-19 on migrant households (including those experiencing internal migration), in particular to assess whether migrant households are more or less resilient to the shocks of the pandemic and how COVID-19 impacted remittances to Ethiopia. The chapter will also explore the impact of the pandemic and related restrictions on the migration process and would-be migrants' aspirations to migrate. Lastly, this chapter will look at how COVID-19 has impacted returns to Ethiopia. Overall, 4,396 households were listed across the five communities of research. Data derived from the community listing show that 39 per cent of households have at least one member who has migrated in the past or is currently abroad. Figures range from 16 per cent in Erer to 55 per cent in Raya Kobo, with Setema (40%), Deder (49%) and Misha (58%) also exhibiting high migration figures.

Raya Kobo and Misha display similar mobility profiles with high international flows (mostly irregular) and strong ties to migrants in destination countries through remittances. In these communities, the migration of multiple members within the same household is also very common, with around one in two households reporting that more than one member has migrated. In Setema and Deder, flows are only slightly smaller in size than in Misha and Raya Kobo, but migration mostly involves one member of the household and is more commonly undertaken through regular channels. In Deder, remittances seem less important than in Setema (2% versus 8%), possibly due to a higher return rate, which makes migration less successful. Erer displays the least movements of people and capital. Internal labour migration is quite common in all five communities (15%), while households in Raya Kobo more commonly reported forced displacement from their homes at some point prior to data collection compared to the other communities where forced displacement was very uncommon.

Mobility profile and deterioration of household livelihood situation due to COVID-19 by research area  
(Data from listing and surveys, percentage of households)



18 Data from listing. Overall, 4,396 households were screened in the five communities and 2,439 migrants were identified, of which 991 returnees.

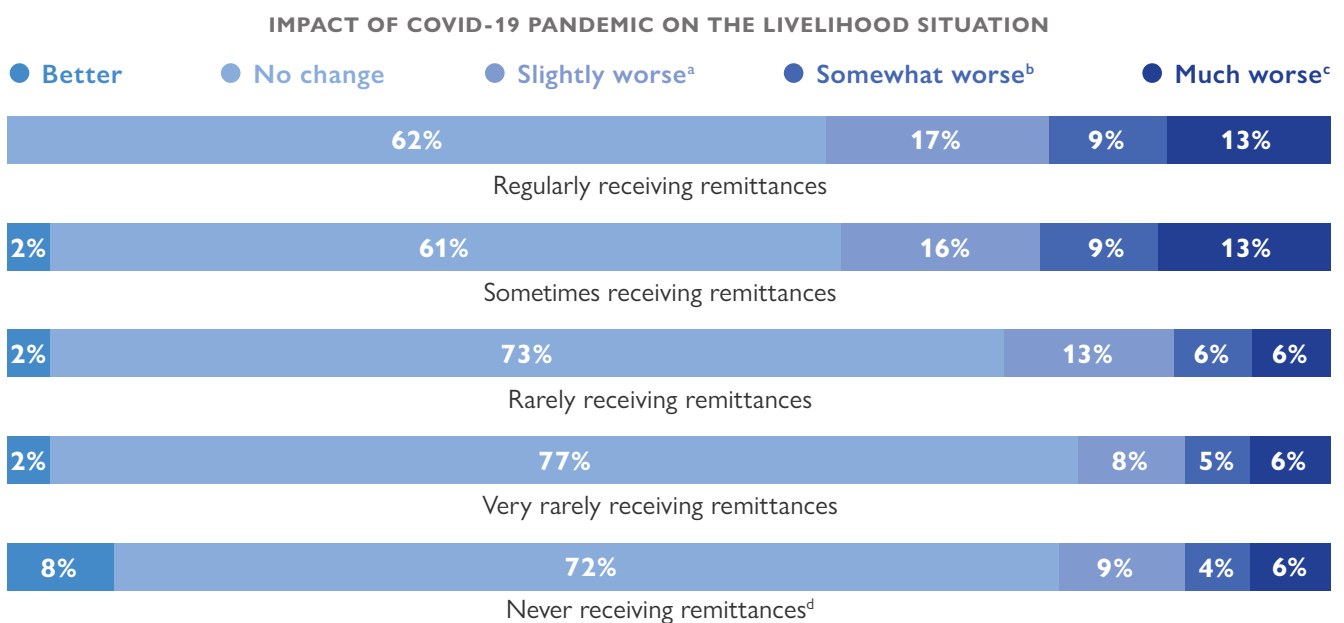
## THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON MIGRANT HOUSEHOLDS AND THE ROLE OF REMITTANCES

At the beginning of the pandemic, the World Bank projected that global remittances would decline sharply by about 20 per cent in 2020 (World Bank Group, 2020b). The projected fall was largely due to the expected decrease in the wages and employment of migrant workers, who tend to be more vulnerable to loss of employment and wages during an economic crisis in a host country. A household survey conducted by the World Bank on the impact of COVID-19 in Ethiopia in 2020 found that 24 per cent of households reported a reduction and 39 per cent a total loss in remittances from abroad (World Bank, 2020c).

While survey data suggest that households' perceived impact of COVID-19 on their livelihood standards barely differs between migrant and non-migrant households, the deterioration of living standards in some migrant households most likely lies in the negative effect of a reduction in remittance flows in those households that receive(d) them. Households receiving no remittances

or receiving them 'very rarely' or 'rarely'<sup>19</sup> reported that their livelihood and living standards had been unaffected by COVID-19 in almost three quarters of cases (72%, 77% and 73%, respectively), while families receiving remittances more frequently ('sometimes' or 'regularly') were less likely to report that their living standards had been unaffected by COVID-19 (61% and 62%, respectively). Similarly, households that received remittances ('regularly' or 'sometimes') were more likely to report that COVID-19 worsened their situation (includes response categories: 'much', 'somewhat' and 'slightly' worse), compared to families who were 'rarely', 'very rarely' or never receiving remittances. **While existing literature on remittances often shows that remittances are key to household resilience in times of crisis, our data suggest that in a crisis affecting both the remittance sending and remittance receiving country, households reliant on remittances may be more vulnerable than those for whom remittances are not a vital part of their livelihood.**

Perception of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic by availability and frequency of remittances  
(Data from surveys, percentage of households)



a Income/earnings reduced by less than 10%.  
 b Income/earnings reduced by 10%-30%.  
 c Income/earnings reduced by >30%.

d 'Not receiving remittances' is defined as the sum of HHs with no experience of migration plus HHs with no migrants currently abroad plus HHs with migrant abroad not receiving remittances. The definitions of frequency of remittances are as follows: Very rarely=once or twice overall; Rarely=at least one-two times per year; Sometimes=at least once every three-four month; Regularly=at least once every one-two months.

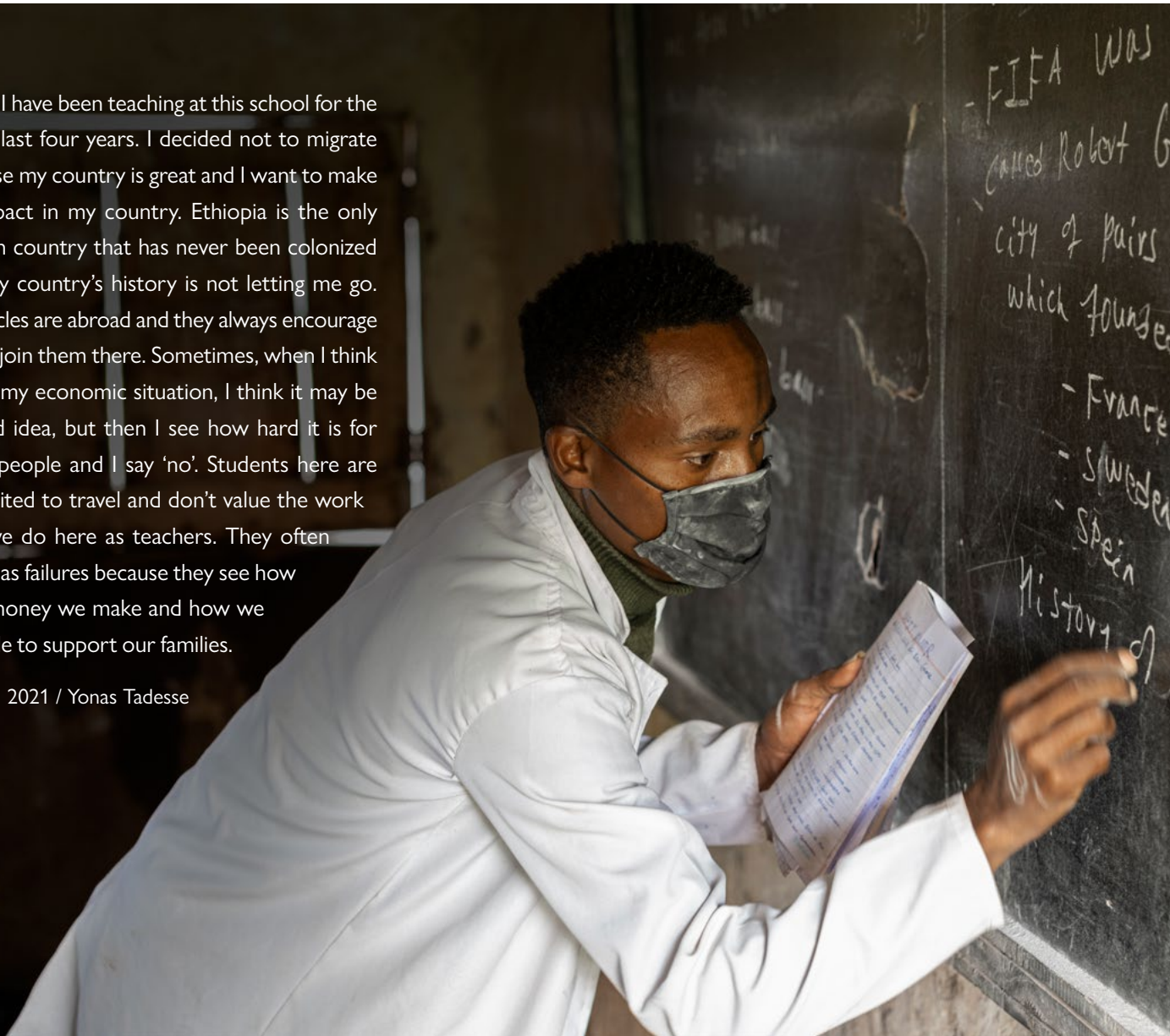
19 The definitions of frequency of remittances are as follows: Regularly: at least once every one-two months; Sometimes: at least once every three-four months; Rarely: at least one-two times per year; Very rarely: once or twice overall.

Examining the frequency and role of remittances in the different study areas may also be a factor in explaining why Raya Kobo seems to have been more adversely impacted by COVID-19 than other areas in the study. **In Raya Kobo, remittances seem to play a much larger role as a livelihood strategy than in other areas, both in terms of the reported frequency of remittances and the importance they have for household livelihoods.** Almost half of the migrant households assessed in Raya Kobo reported frequently ('sometimes' or 'regularly') receiving remittances, compared to an average of one in four households across all surveyed migrant households. Around one in three households in Setema (34%) also reported frequently receiving remittances, while surveyed migrant households in Deder and Misha mostly 'rarely' received remittances (47% and 67%, respectively) and households in Erer mostly reported that they 'never' received remittances (83%).

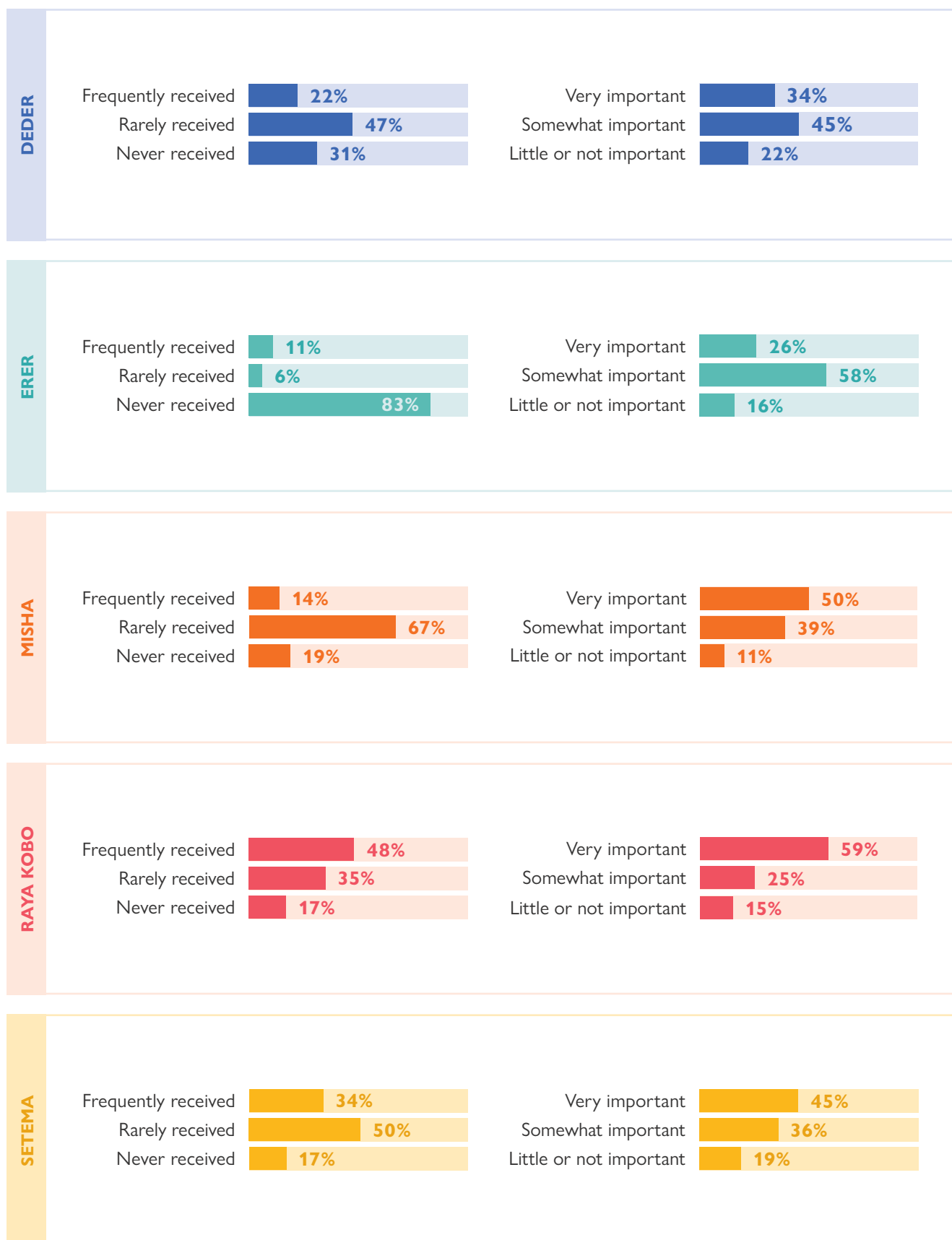
The heightened importance of remittances for migrant households in Raya Kobo is confirmed by KIs in the area, who reported that remittances have reduced significantly since the pandemic, an observation that was also put forward by KIs in Setema, another study area that seems to rely heavily on remittances (only 17% of migrant households reported never receiving remittances). KIs in Raya Kobo observed that the economic fallout of reduced remittances was particularly acute in kebeles where migration is considered a source of community income, such as Gedemeyu, Rohit and Gobiye. Households in Raya Kobo also attributed an above average importance to remittances, with 59 per cent of households reporting that remittances were 'very important' to their household, compared to an average of 47 per cent across all five communities.

“ I have been teaching at this school for the last four years. I decided not to migrate because my country is great and I want to make an impact in my country. Ethiopia is the only African country that has never been colonized and my country's history is not letting me go. My uncles are abroad and they always encourage me to join them there. Sometimes, when I think about my economic situation, I think it may be a good idea, but then I see how hard it is for many people and I say 'no'. Students here are so excited to travel and don't value the work that we do here as teachers. They often see us as failures because they see how little money we make and how we struggle to support our families.

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## Frequency and role of remittances by community<sup>20</sup>

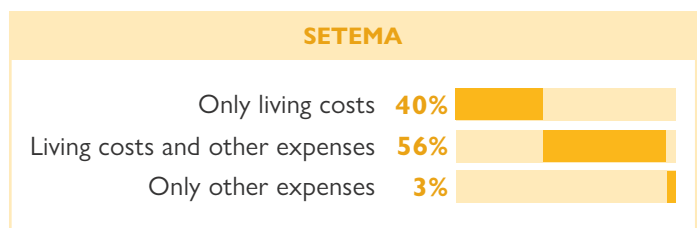
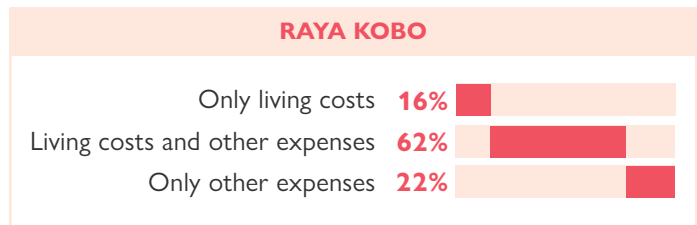
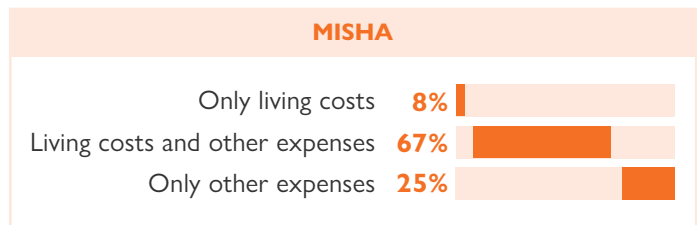
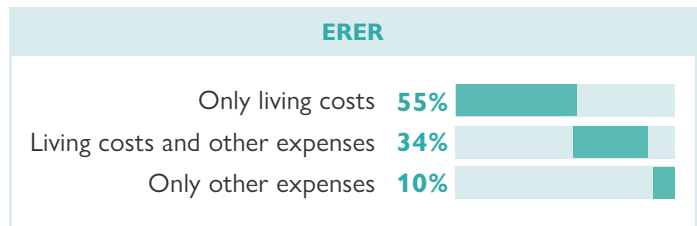
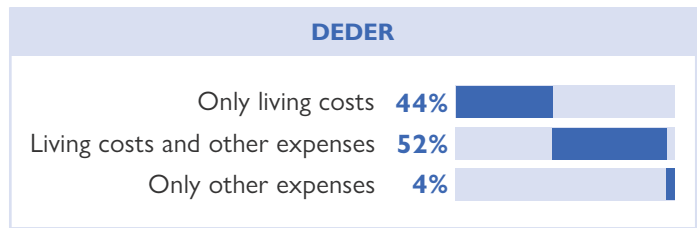


20 'Not receiving remittances' is defined as the sum of HHs with no experience of migration plus HHs with no migrants currently abroad plus HHs with migrants abroad not receiving remittances. The definitions of frequency of remittances are as follows: Very rarely = once or twice overall; Rarely = at least one-two times per year; Sometimes = at least once every three-four months; Regularly = at least once every one-two months.



The role of decreased remittance flows in the effect of COVID-19 on livelihood standards is further supported by data on the use of remittances among households receiving them. In over 85 per cent of the households, remittances are used, exclusively or not, to finance the everyday living costs of the household (food, clothes, medicine, fuel etc.) and in about one quarter of assessed households' remittances are exclusively used on everyday living expenditures. Only 22 per cent of households receiving remittances do not use them to finance everyday living costs, but instead use them for other expenditures (mainly to improve housing and to finance land or trade). While between 40 and 55 per cent of households in Erer, Deder and Setema use their remittances exclusively on living costs, those in Misha and Raya Kobo display a more varied use of remittances on living costs and other expenses (67% and 62%, respectively). While households in Raya Kobo seem to receive remittances more frequently than the average household in other communities, those in Misha receive remittances less frequently but place a very high importance on the remittances they do receive (only 11% of households report that remittances have little or no importance to their well-being, the lowest number across all communities).

Household use of remittances by community<sup>21</sup>



21 Use of remittances reported by HHs that declared to have at least one migrant able to send money to them. Multiple responses possible.

IOM's mobile unit rescues migrants returning from Yemen to Obock in the desert.

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## THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE MIGRATION PROCESS AND WOULD-BE MIGRANTS' ASPIRATIONS TO MIGRATE

**Our data show that the desire to migrate has generally not decreased, despite travel restrictions, border closures and increased cost of journeys having led to some individuals reconsidering or postponing their migration.**

KIs reported witnessing a reduction in outward movements, especially at the onset of the pandemic, as internal movement restrictions within Ethiopia and international border closures hindered migration. Moreover, reports of migrants stranded at international borders and in transit countries led to many individuals temporarily putting their migration plans on hold. Increased journey costs, reports of imprisonment of migrants in destination countries such as Saudi Arabia, and an increase in migrants returning to their communities following deportation or after getting stranded during their journey also acted as deterrents.

**Overall, KIs in all communities agreed that COVID-19 has heightened the vulnerability of migrants who do decide to travel during the pandemic, as they are more likely to experience abuse by brokers when they run out of money due to increased (and often undisclosed) costs of the journey. KIs also reported that migrants experienced increased stigma in transit communities and recounted instances of migrants stranded in transit in dire conditions and local authorities forcibly quarantining or detaining migrants in an effort to curb the spread of the disease.**

KIs in all five communities also generally agreed, however, that young members of their communities continued to have a strong motivation to migrate irrespective of the pandemic. **KIs also suggested that school closures contributed to youth boredom and in some cases even amplified youth's desire to migrate,** while brokers in some of the assessed communities reportedly spread false information on borders being open and travel being easier during the pandemic to encourage youth to migrate.

“ They have a strong motivation to improve their livelihood and change their family's life. The occurrence of COVID-19 doesn't affect youth's willingness to migrate. This is because for the young migrants, COVID-19 is perceived as a simple disease and never compares with the benefit they get if they successfully reach Saudi Arabia.”<sup>22</sup>

**FGDs with would-be migrants confirm KI's assessment that although would-be-migrants were aware of additional risks of migrating during the COVID-19 pandemic, their desire to migrate remained largely unaffected as migration drivers, such as youth unemployment and the desire to improve their living standard, remained unchanged or even worsened during the pandemic and the associated economic fallout.** Would-be-migrants also commonly reported that they did not believe in COVID-19 as posing a real threat to them, as they had never seen anyone die from the disease and had only heard about it on the news, while others explained that they did not fear the risks associated with COVID-19 more than other migration-related risks they were willing to take such as detainment, deportation and even death:

“ Do you think we care about COVID-19 while we are living such a bad life here? I have never seen a person in the community who caught this disease and died, I tell you it is a lie. If I find the necessary resources for my migration, I want to migrate today.”<sup>23</sup>

This opinion echoes findings from the first phase of the research where many participants explained that they had either not engaged with risk information or not been dissuaded by it as their strong assumptions about the perceived benefits of migration outweighed the difficulties they knew they may encounter.<sup>24</sup> Migrants also displayed a very high tolerance of risk that is likely linked to the very strong drivers of migration along this route, with many migrants suggesting that they were migrating out of necessity and not just by choice.<sup>26</sup>

22 KI in Erer.

23 Female FGD participant in Erer.

24 For more information please refer to [“To Change My Life”](#).

“ We see families of migrants that have corrugated iron houses and they can purchase big oxen for annual festivals for their family and get blessings from their parents. Our friends bought vehicles and built a house and leads a luxurious life, so how could COVID-19 affect our desire to go with all these benefits from migration?”<sup>25</sup>

Some respondents did, however, express concern over how COVID-19 will affect their migration journey and a few participants suggested that they intended on waiting for the pandemic and movement restrictions to relax and for the situation to become more predictable before attempting to migrate. Although these respondents had a strong desire to migrate, they were less willing to take on the risks of becoming stranded during the journey. Participants who reported that they had postponed their migration expressed concern over border closures en route, difficulties securing employment at destination due to crackdowns on irregular migrants perceived to be associated with the pandemic, and several recounted stories of migrants in Saudi Arabia who had lost their job and stopped sending remittances. Would-be-migrants were also worried about heightened journey costs as brokers were charging higher fees due to the increased difficulty of moving individuals across tightened borders. Nonetheless, all respondents who expressed concern over migrating during the pandemic agreed that while they could imagine delaying their migration by around six months, they were not willing to postpone their journeys longer than that.

## THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON RETURN MIGRATION

While KIs generally agreed that outward migration had, at least initially, reduced due to the COVID-19 pandemic, several communities witnessed a sharp increase in return migration. Returns increased during COVID-19 for several reasons, including crackdowns and deportations of migrants from destination countries and increasingly difficult journeys resulting in many migrants stranded in transit. Returnees in different FGDs also discussed that the COVID-19 outbreak had caused their return from

Saudi Arabia due to an increased crackdown on irregular migrants in the country:

“ The police were searching for undocumented migrants by going from house to house during COVID-19 to deport us, because the government ordered undocumented migrants to return to their countries.”<sup>26</sup>

Other migrants reported that their employers had reported them to the police as they feared they would contract COVID-19 from them. Irregular migrants' employment is particularly precarious in times of crisis as they can be let go arbitrarily and with limited access to legal recourse. The economic fallout of job loss does not only affect the migrant but also families at home who are depending on remittances.

Returnees also seem to have experienced more challenging return environments due to the pandemic. Although few KIs reported that there had been instances of COVID-19 cases among migrants returning to their areas, KIs suggested that, especially at the start of the pandemic, communities and migrant families were concerned about returnees carrying COVID-19 into their communities. In these instances, villagers socially isolated returnees (and in some cases their families). In some cases, returnees' families also refused to interact or welcome their returning relative, irrespective of whether they had COVID-19 or not. However, KIs reported that as the initial fear of the disease subsided, and communities became more accustomed to COVID-19, returnees stopped being stigmatized as carriers of the virus.

“ We were challenged by the migrants' families during COVID-19 because the families were refusing to welcome home their children. Almost all communities were not happy to welcome returnees during that time because what the media was saying about the pandemic was not good, and communities considered that all returnees were agents of COVID-19. I even know families who refused to accept their children after the test result showed negative.”<sup>27</sup>

25 Male FGD participant in Misha.

26 Female FGD participant in Setema.

27 KI in Setema.

Returnees in all FGDs also discussed that COVID-19 posed additional challenges to their economic reintegration into their communities. Some returnees had been forced to close their business due to the pandemic, while others had planned on opening a business but didn't think it was a good time to do so:

“ *When I returned, I was planning to open a small café but due to COVID-19, I feared that I wouldn't receive any customers.*”<sup>28</sup>

Returnees also suggested that living costs in their communities had increased since the pandemic and finding employment had become more challenging, as there were more people seeking employment and the cost of transport had increased. **Coupled with the societal stigma returnees in all five communities report experiencing irrespective of the pandemic, and the fact that most returnees who returned during COVID-19 did so without bringing back money to re-establish themselves, often after having experienced horrific journeys and circumstances while they were stranded or detained, COVID-19 has amplified the already precarious situation many returnees in Ethiopia find themselves in following their return home.**<sup>29</sup>

It is estimated that over 100,000 Ethiopians are expected to be repatriated from Saudi Arabia in the near future, as tens of thousands remain in detention in the country. Transit centres have been established in Addis Ababa to accommodate migrants who cannot return home, as many returnees are from non-accessible, conflict-affected areas in Tigray, Amhara and Afar. Those who return to Ethiopia may encounter increased challenges in reintegrating into their home communities, and such reintegration difficulties are often informed by whether they managed to secure employment or send remittances while abroad, which is often not the case for those who have returned during the pandemic.

28 Female FGD Participant in Raya Kobo.

29 For more information on return migration and return experiences to Ethiopia please refer to the briefing paper on [Return Migration Dynamics in Five Communities of High Emigration](#).



## CONCLUSION

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted most households in the study, albeit to varying degrees. In line with evidence from other studies that have examined the impact of COVID-19 on livelihoods in Ethiopia, our survey data suggest that households in more rural settings and those who farm for a living were less adversely impacted than households in more urban settings and those where the head of household was engaged in business or other particularly affected sectors such as the hospitality industry. Similarly, households that reported having received remittances sometimes or regularly prior to the start of the pandemic were more likely to report that their situation had worsened since the pandemic, compared to families who did not receive remittances. The repercussions of the pandemic have been particularly felt by households who rely heavily on remittances to cover basic, daily living expenses. Job losses and forced repatriations associated with the pandemic have rendered households relying on remittances particularly vulnerable in a time where the pandemic and other shocks have already heavily impacted local economies. Such vulnerability especially affects Raya Kobo, where the situation seems to be critical.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shaped the migratory landscape in the region in a multitude of ways and heightened the vulnerability of migrants along routes that were already extremely challenging. Although the willingness to migrate does not seem to have significantly reduced, migration has become more difficult and dangerous as a result of various factors including local and regional movement restrictions, the health risks associated with the disease itself, increased travel costs and reduced access to basic services in host communities along the route. Migrants became stranded in countries along both the Southern and Eastern migratory routes, oftentimes in precarious and life-threatening conditions, and detainment and deportation of migrants from destination countries led to a surge in return movements to Ethiopia. Although FGDs with would-be migrants demonstrated that they were aware of the heightened risks of migrating during the pandemic, their desire to migrate remains largely unaffected. Strong migration drivers such as youth unemployment, low wages and lack of opportunities continue to persist and may have worsened due to the economic fallout and high inflation rates associated with the pandemic's impact.

Returning migrants in all five communities reported that the pandemic and its impact on their communities posed additional challenges to their return. Returnees reported experiencing stigma as carriers of the virus during the early months of the pandemic, while the worsening economic situation in their communities further compounded their return experience, making economic reintegration even more challenging than it was in pre-pandemic times. Their reintegration may also be impeded by the fact that many returnees who returned during the pandemic did so after horrific journeys during which they may have become stranded in transit or have been detained for prolonged periods of time.

The COVID-19 pandemic is an unprecedented crisis, affecting all regions and countries of the world including Ethiopia. However, recovery has not progressed equally for different communities and households in Ethiopia and the findings presented in this report demonstrate that remittances and migration are important factors in that recovery. Unlike in other crises where remittances are often able to create resilience for families at home, the global nature of this crisis meant that remittance-reliant households were more vulnerable and less resilient in recovery. Further research is necessary to understand the long-term effect of the pandemic on these households and if the negative impact of the pandemic was quickly resolved or has led to longer term vulnerabilities.

## ANNEX: SAMPLE DATA AND SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF COMMUNITIES AND HOUSEHOLDS

Table 1. Migration Profile of Research Areas (Data from Listing)

RESEARCH AREA	HH with one member who has migrated or is currently abroad	HH with more than one member who has migrated or is currently abroad	HH with one returnee	HH with multiple returnees
Deder	39%	10%	27%	5%
Erer	15%	1%	8%	0%
Misha	33%	25%	15%	4%
Raya Kobo	35%	25%	27%	10%
Setema	28%	12%	8%	3%
<b>Overall</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>3%</b>

Table 2. Sociodemographic Profile of Households by Woreda (Data from Surveys)

	Average of HH size	Female-headed HHs	HHs with at least one child (7–14 years) out of education <sup>30</sup>	HH with dependents >2/3	HHs with at least one NEET <sup>31</sup>	HHs with prevalence of women (Fem Ratio >2/3)
Deder	6.1	27%	39%	30%	76%	18%
Erer (Harari)	5.3	24%	34%	28%	76%	20%
Misha	5.7	39%	29%	25%	55%	26%
Raya Kobo	4.3	33%	24%	16%	64%	31%
Setema	5.6	22%	20%	24%	59%	23%
<b>Overall</b>	<b>5.4</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>66%</b>	<b>24%</b>

30 Among HHs having at least one child aged 7–14 years.

31 Among HHs having at least one youngster aged 15–29 years.

Table 3. Socioeconomic Profile of Households by Woreda (Data from Surveys)

	Ownership of land	HHs with a relatively stable main source of income <sup>32</sup>	HHs with agriculture among their main (or sole) sources of income	HHs having earned money from self-owned business/trade in the last 12 months	HH having remittances among their main sources of income
Deder	85%	12%	92%	49%	2%
Erer (Harari)	92%	17%	95%	45%	0%
Misha	96%	11%	94%	9%	9%
Raya Kobo	65%	35%	72%	62%	7%
Setema	61%	21%	78%	42%	8%
<b>Overall</b>	<b>80%</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>86%</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>5%</b>

32 Stable source of income is hereby defined as: Paid employment (formal/informal contract), Self-owned trade/business, Pension/retirement, Passive income from renting assets, unemployment/welfare benefits, Cash/grant/aid from national institutions.



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