

Interactions between local communities and transiting migrants in Djibouti

The Eastern corridor from the Horn of Africa to the Arabian Peninsula has traditionally been one of the busiest maritime routes with 394,622 migrant arrivals since 2018.¹ The journey undertaken by predominantly Ethiopian migrants² can involve several stops at key transit locations to rest, look for smugglers, or work.³ In these locations, migrants' interactions with local communities are linked to their need for information, for assistance and services, and for income-generating opportunities as well as on potential shared cultural and ethnic affiliations. Recognizing that local communities in transit locations are key stakeholders in the migration process, MMC and IOM have partnered under the 2022 Regional [Migrant Response Plan](#) for the Horn of Africa and Yemen to design and implement a mixed-methods study to generate an evidence-base on the dynamics between local communities and transiting migrants along the Eastern Route.

The study has targeted three key transit locations along the Eastern Route: Hargeisa in the Somaliland region, and Obock and Tadjourah in Djibouti. This snapshot presents the main findings on interactions between migrants and local communities in Tadjourah and Obock, based on 365 surveys conducted with local community members in July 2022 (Map 1).⁴ Both locations are significant migrant hubs where smugglers organize and facilitate journeys and maintain direct contact with interlocutors in Ethiopia and Yemen.⁵ Tadjourah is located on the main migration corridor used by transiting migrants, between the capital, Djibouti Ville, and Obock, the main point of embarkation for coastal departures to Yemen.

Key findings

- The vast majority (90%) of surveyed local community members interact with migrants on a daily basis, and 10% interact weekly.
- The provision of free assistance (81%) is the most common type of interaction between local community respondents and migrants, followed by commercial/economic interactions (33%), the provision of free information (29%), and social interactions (16%).
- Free assistance is primarily given in the form of water (97%) and food (92%).
- The type of free information shared by the local community with migrants includes what conditions to expect along the journey (50%), the conditions at the destination (40%), locations along the route (38%), the duration of the journey (38%), and the cost of the journey (22%).
- Commercial/economic interactions in Tadjourah often involved migrants working for local community respondents (64%; 49/77), particularly in domestic work (80%; 39/49).
- In Obock, commercial, economic interaction mostly saw migrants as clients of local businesses (60%; 33/55).

1 IOM DTM data from 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, and 2022 mid-year.

2 MMC usually reports on 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", or 'migrants', defined 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."

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

4 This snapshot is published alongside an equivalent snapshot on Hargeisa in the Somaliland region. The snapshots will be followed by a full-length report further exploring interactions, but also local communities' experiences with and perceptions of transiting migrants. The report will be informed by both quantitative and qualitative data, as well as research team field observations.

5 Qualitative interview with a smuggler in Obock.

Map 1. Targeted locations – Tadjourah and Obock



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.

Profiles of local community respondents

Almost two-thirds (65%) of respondents were men and just over one-third (35%) were women. In Obock (n=199), a higher proportion of respondents were men (71%) compared to Tadjourah (n=199; 57%). 23% of respondents were 18 to 25 years old, 52% were 26 to 40 years, and 25% were above the age of 40. The majority of respondents were of sole Djiboutian nationality (84%), while some were of Ethiopian nationality (7%), and others self-reported as Djiboutian-Ethiopian (7%),⁶ or other (2%).⁷ In terms of education, 11% of respondents had no schooling, 27% had completed primary education, 39% had completed either lower or upper secondary education, 15% completed religious schooling, and 8% completed some form of tertiary education.

More than half of respondents had an income at the time of interview (61%) (Figure 1). This was the case for two-thirds (66%) of men and 50% women. Of respondents reporting having an income (n=221), job profiles included regular employees (40%), business owners/self-employed (39%), and casual/occasional labourers (21%). Most working women were business owners/self-employed (61%, 34/56), while men more commonly held regular jobs (50%; 67/133).

Figure 1a. Are you currently making money?

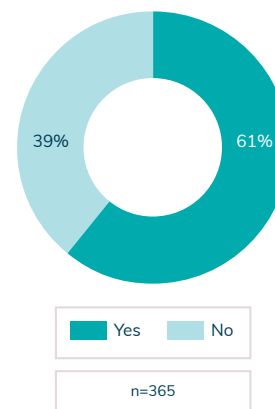
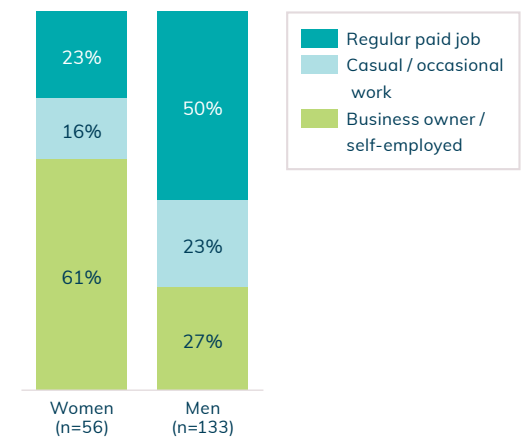


Figure 1b. How are you making money?



⁶ Slightly more respondents self-reported as Djiboutian-Ethiopian in Tadjourah (13%) than in Obock (3%).

⁷ 'Other' includes 6 Eritreans and 1 Yemeni.

In terms of work sectors, the majority of working women (38/56) were involved in small businesses (shops/catering/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). No large differences in work profiles and sectors were noted between respondents interviewed in Tadjourah and Obock. Of the 144 respondents who were not making an income, most (51%) reported being unemployed, taking care of their homes/children (27%), or being students (19%). Men were most often unemployed (53/80), while women were taking care of the home/children (36/64). In Obock (22/83), it was more common to have no income because of being a student than in Tadjourah (5/61).

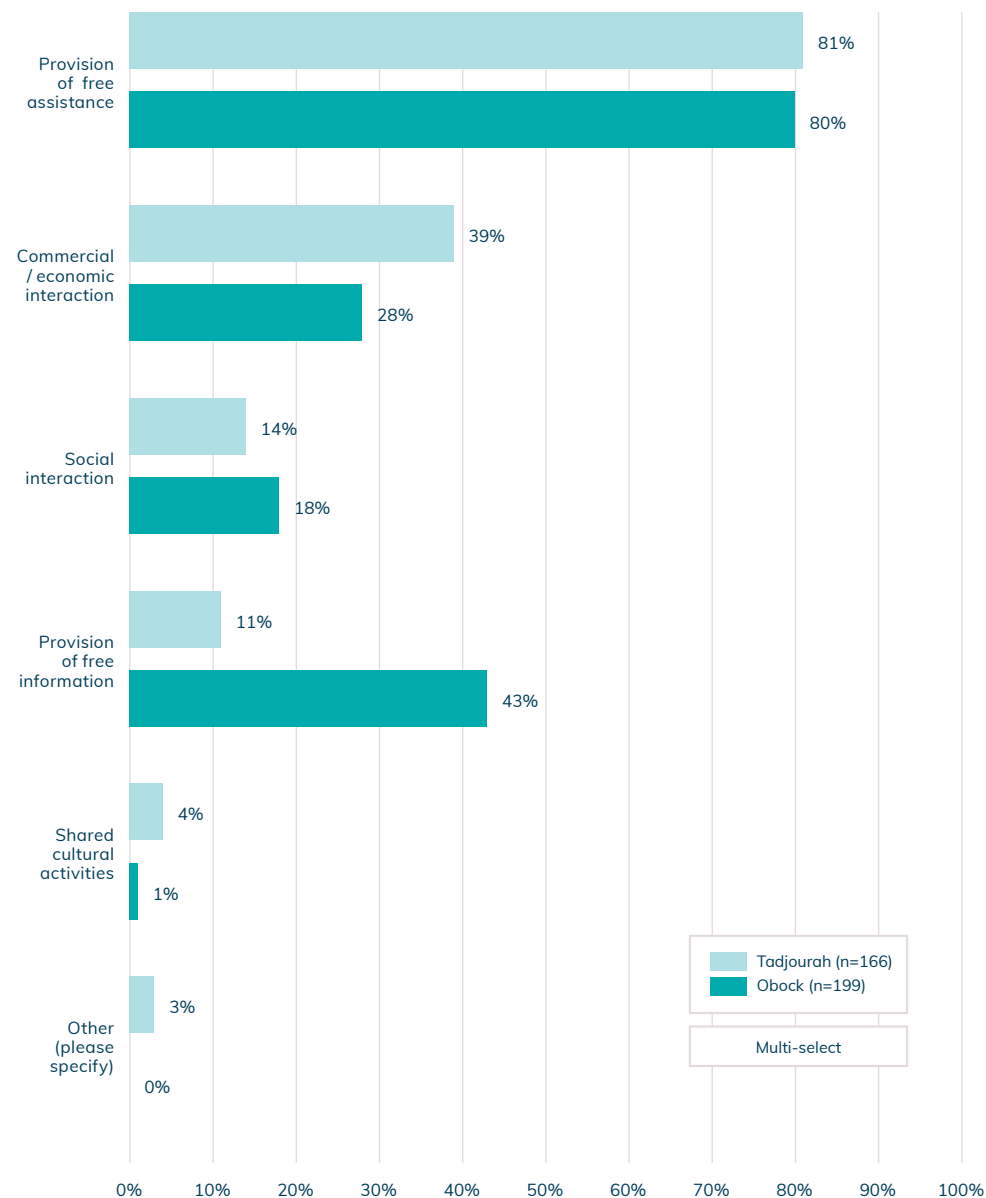
Local community respondents interact with migrants on a daily basis

All interviewed local community members confirmed the presence of transiting migrants in their communities. In both locations of interview, all respondents cited interacting⁸ with transiting migrants at least on a weekly basis. In fact, in Tadjourah, close to all (98%) interacted with migrants on a daily basis, while this was true for 82% of residents in Obock.

The majority of respondents provide free assistance to transiting migrants

The provision of free assistance was the most common form of interaction between local communities and transiting migrants, reported by 81% of respondents – delineating the sizeable role that local communities play in assistance provision (Figure 2). 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 gender 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 the next section. 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.

Figure 2. Which of the following describes your interactions with migrants in your community?

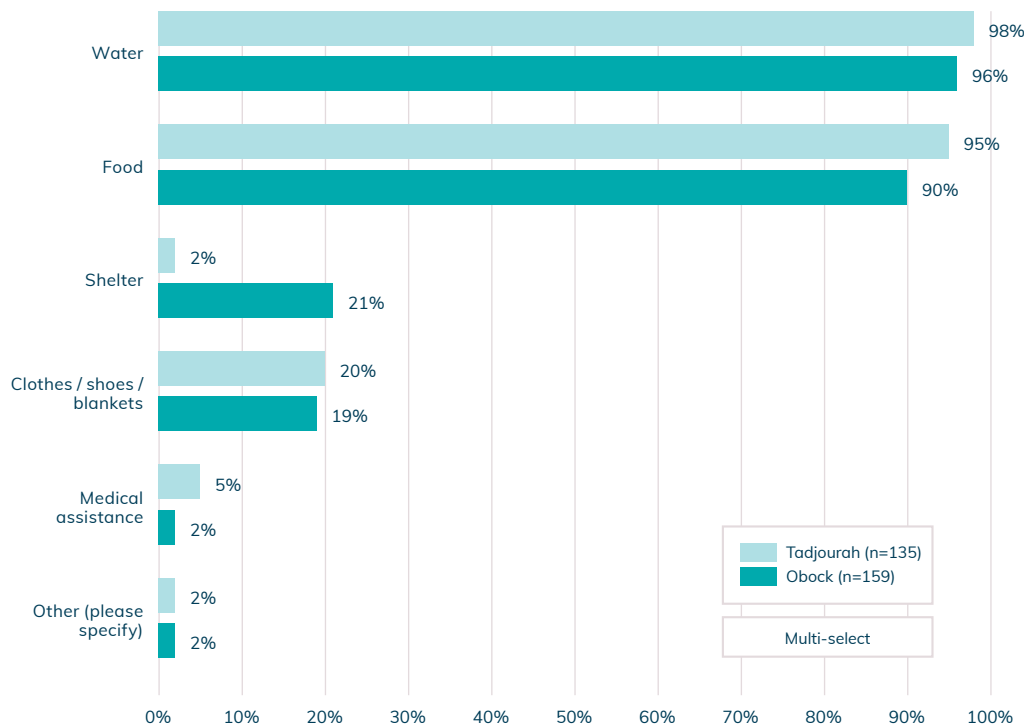


⁸ During enumerator training, interactions were defined as anything from exchanging a few words to doing an activity together.

Food and water are the most common forms of free assistance provided by local communities

Of the 294 respondents who provided free assistance to migrants, water and food were the most common forms of assistance provided (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. As shown in Figure 3, 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 3. What type/s of assistance do you/have you provided? (Among respondents who reported providing assistance)



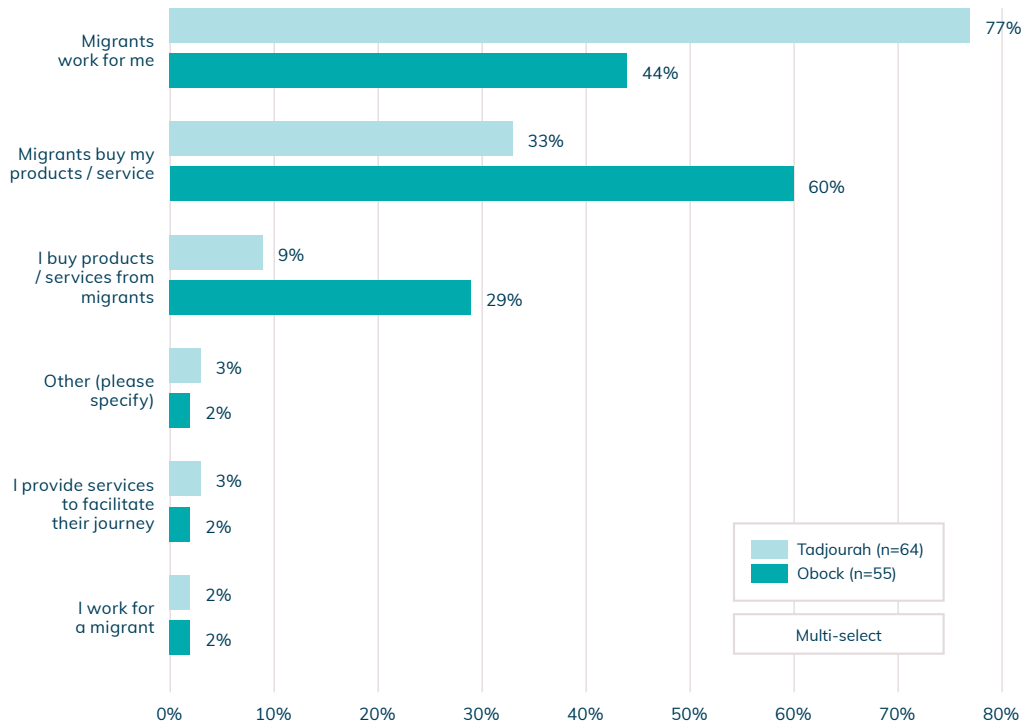
Respondents who reported providing free information to migrants (n=104) mostly gave information on what conditions to expect along the journey (50%), the conditions at destination (40%), locations along the route (38%), the duration of the journey (38%), the cost of the journey (22%), and how to find 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).

Delving into why respondents provided free assistance and/or information (n=314) to transiting migrants, interviewed 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%).

Local community respondents frequently hire migrants in Tadjourah

For 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%), or respondents buying products/services from migrants (19%). Commercial/economic 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 4. 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).



Methodology

This snapshot draws on 365 quantitative surveys conducted with local community members in Tadjourah (45%; n=166) and Obock (55%; n=199) in July 2022 using a random walk sampling methodology. The random walk sampling methodology involved assigning each enumerator a starting point and direction from which the enumerator would interview 1 person every 4 houses/structures, 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. As per the study's targeting strategy, respondents were all residents of the two locations and had lived in the location of interview for at least 3 years.