

Understanding the role of family reunification within mixed movements in Sudan

Refugees and migrants engaged in mixed movement are rarely able to move with their entire families, as conflicts in origin countries can lead families to become separated or the movement of single family members may be part of a family's strategy to spread risk in the face of crisis. Reuniting with one's family members, therefore, features as a driver of migration, either via formal channels, often assisted by international organizations, or informal ones in the form of irregular movement.¹ Between March and November 2022, MMC conducted 181 4Mi surveys with respondents with a family reunification aspiration. This snapshot sheds light on the role of family reunification in the movement decision-making of refugees and migrants in Sudan, the variety of family reunification processes and key obstacles to reunification. This snapshot is produced as part of a research partnership with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) focusing on children and youth on the move.

Note: Data collection for this snapshot took place prior to the conflict that began in Sudan on the 15th of April 2023. As fighting continues it can be expected that increasing numbers of refugees and migrants who are in Sudan and are able to flee will do so, with three options: seeking a safer place within Sudan, returning to their home country or secondary displacement to another country. Owing to their existing vulnerabilities, many if not most refugees and migrants caught up in the conflict will be trapped and unable to flee. As data for this snapshot were collected prior to these events, the findings presented here on the needs of young refugees and migrants in Sudan have likely shifted and increased due to active security threats and a dire humanitarian situation. MMC has recently published an article on the [mixed migration consequences of Sudan's conflict](#).

1 Non-biological family relationships often do not qualify for formal reunification programs, prompting refugees and migrants to organize their own, often irregular movements to rejoin family abroad.

Key findings

- 17% of respondents who expressed a family reunification aspiration reported it as one of the reasons for leaving their country of origin, while 98% of respondents cited it as a factor determining their intended destination.
- 51% of respondents said their intended destination was Canada, 18% cited Europe, 16% Australia, 5% the USA, 4% South Africa and 6% other countries.
- Respondents were seeking to reunite with their brother/sister (39%), uncle/aunt (18%), spouse/partner (17%) and mother/father (15%).
- Women more often cite reuniting with a spouse/partner (26/88) compared to men (4/93).
- 82% of respondents were aware of formal family reunification processes and, among them, 78% are using these processes.
- Respondents engaged in formal family reunification processes most often reported these were being undertaken through UNHCR (83%) and IOM (63%).
- Most respondents (60%) had been engaged in a formal family reunification process for less than 6 months.
- 95% of respondents faced difficulties in the family reunification process, most frequently linked to accessing the required documentation (59%).

Data and profiles

This snapshot draws on 181 4Mi surveys conducted remotely with adult refugees and migrants in Sudan in 2022, who were purposefully sampled based on family reunification being either a driver in their decision to move or a factor in their choice of intended destination.² The majority of respondents were interviewed in Greater Khartoum (91%),

2 These are respondents to MMC's 4Mi survey who answered additional questions on family reunification. Such questions were added to the 4Mi survey for a limited period in 2022 for the purpose of this research. To understand how such dynamics feature in MMC's broader 4Mi sample: Of 1,655 4Mi surveys collected with refugees and migrants in Sudan from February 2021 – November 2022, 24% reported that reunifying with family was either a reason for departing from their country of origin or a factor in determining their intended destination.

while 9% were interviewed in Kassala (6% in Kassala town and 3% in Wad Sharife). As per 4Mi's targeting strategy, all respondents had arrived in Sudan less than two years prior to interview.

51% of respondents were women and 49% were men. 45% of respondents were aged between 18 and 24, 23% between 25 and 34 and 32% 35 and older. Respondents' countries of nationality included Ethiopia (50%), Eritrea (48%), Chad (2%) and Central African Republic (1%).

Family reunification mainly impacts the choice of destination rather than departure from origin country

While family reunification is one of the reasons for leaving the country of origin - and usually not the main reason - it clearly defines people's intended destination. 17% of the respondents indicated family reunification as a reason for leaving, while 98% indicated family reunification as the reason for selecting their intended destination. Other reasons for movement included violence and conflict. Indeed, past research published by MMC reveals that economic factors as well as factors related to violence, insecurity and conflict feature as the main drivers of movement from origin countries to and through Sudan.³ More than half (51%) of respondents had reported that their intended destination was Canada, 18% cited Europe, 16% Australia, 5% the USA, 4% South Africa and 6% other countries.

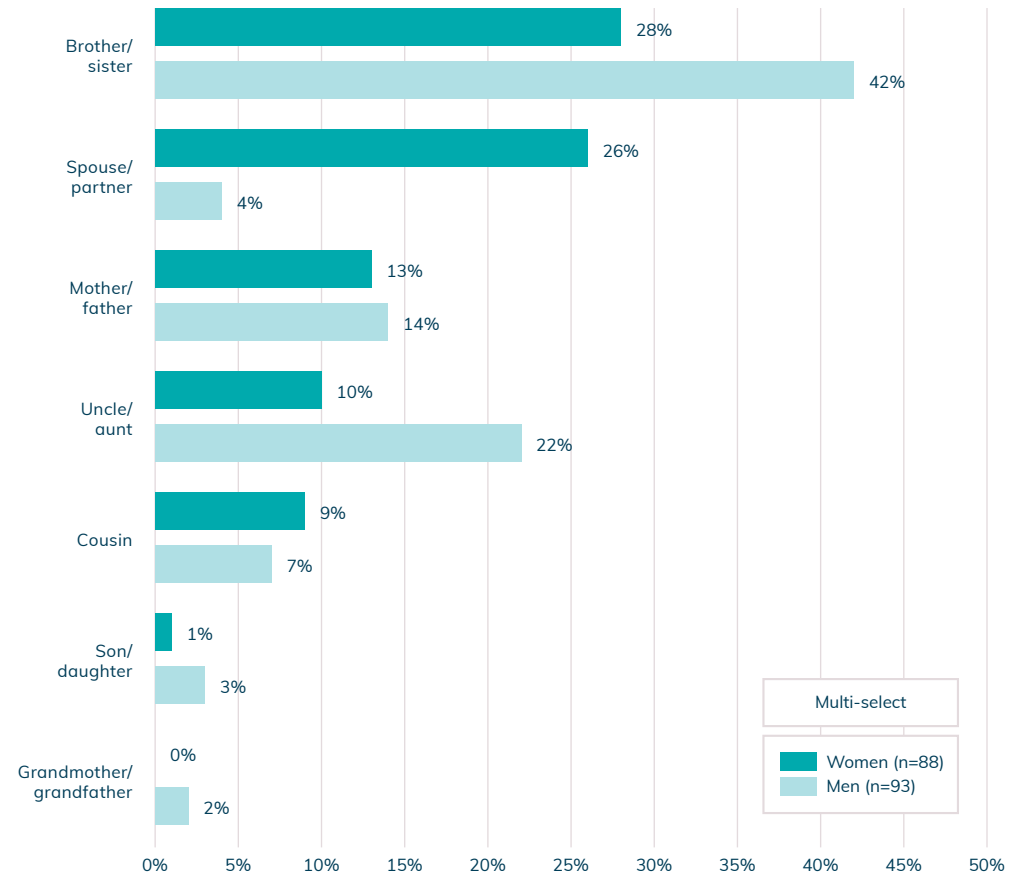
Respondents most often seek to reunite with brothers and sisters

Overall, respondents sought to reunite with their brother/sister (39%), uncle/aunt (18%), spouse/partner (17%), mother/father (15%) or cousin (9%). Men more often reported reuniting with their brother/sister (42/93) and uncle/aunt (22/93) than women (28/88 and 10/88, respectively). Women, on the other hand, were more often reuniting with their spouse/partner (26/88 of women vs. 4/93 of men). This may indicate, in cases of dangerous irregular migration journeys, plans for men to travel first, with the hope of being able to bring family legally and safely through family reunification processes. All 26

respondents who reported having children remaining behind in their countries of origin mentioned intending to reunite with them once they reach their destination.

Among youth respondents, aged 18-24, reunification with a brother/sister (37/82) and mother/father (16/82) was more common than among older respondents. Additionally, respondents aged 25-34 more frequently reported reuniting with a spouse/partner (13/41) than those younger or older.

Figure 1. Who are you reuniting with?



³ MMC (2021) [Aspirations and intended destinations of people on the move in Sudan](#) and MMC (2022) [Climate-related drivers of mixed migration in East and the Horn of Africa](#).

Nearly all those aware of reunification programmes were actively pursuing them

82% of respondents were aware of formal processes or assistance programmes to facilitate family reunification. However, 64% (116/181) were engaged in formal family reunification process at time of interview. The remaining 36% (65/181) who were not engaged were, nonetheless, still seeking to reunite with family via their own means, likely involving irregular movement.⁴ Among this 36%, around half (32 individuals) were not aware of formal processes, while the other half (33 individuals) were aware but not engaged.

Examining the data by nationality, close to all Ethiopian respondents (88/90) were aware of formal reunification programmes, while a smaller proportion of Eritreans were (59/87). Despite a lower awareness existing among Eritreans about formal family reunification processes, more Eritreans than Ethiopians tended to engage in these processes (34/87 vs. 28/90 for Ethiopians). Such respondents were asked whether they had ever sought out formal reunification processes in the past, and all cited that they had not.

UNHCR and IOM most often facilitating reunification

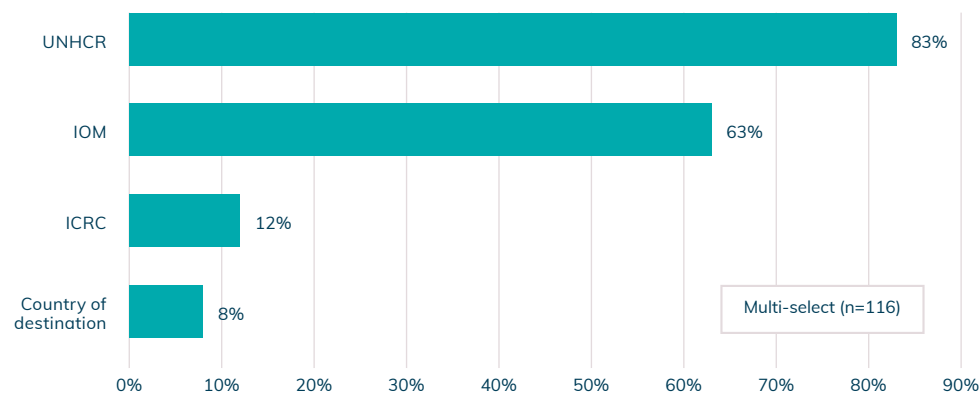
Respondents most often reported participation in reunification programmes led by UNHCR (83%) and IOM (63%). 12% identified the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) as the agency through which their process was being undertaken. Also of note, 9 respondents (8%) reported that they were engaged with other actors⁵ in the country of intended destination to facilitate their reunification, including in Canada (4), Australia (1) the USA (1), the Netherlands (1), Denmark (1) and Finland (1).

4 Additional probing carried out by enumerators into the types of informal channels employed by respondents revealed cases of planned irregular movement by land and sea to Europe as well as to Turkey (by air) to obtain false documentation and then movement to Europe through a 'sponsorship process'.

5 While respondents do not name specific entities, other actors may include lawyers in the country of destination.

Figure 2. Through which agency is the process being undertaken?

(Among those engaging in a process for family reunification)

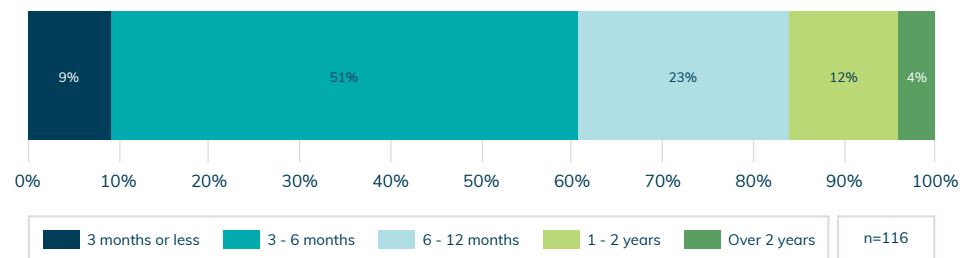


Most respondents had been engaged in a formal family reunification process for less than 6 months

Of the 116 respondents engaged in a formal process for family reunification, 60% outlined having started this process less than 6 months prior to being interviewed by MMC. 23% started the process between 6 and 12 months prior, 12% between 1 and 2 years prior and 4% more than 2 years prior (i.e., started the family reunification process before arriving in Sudan).

Figure 3. How long ago did you start this process?

(Among those currently engaging in a process for family reunification)

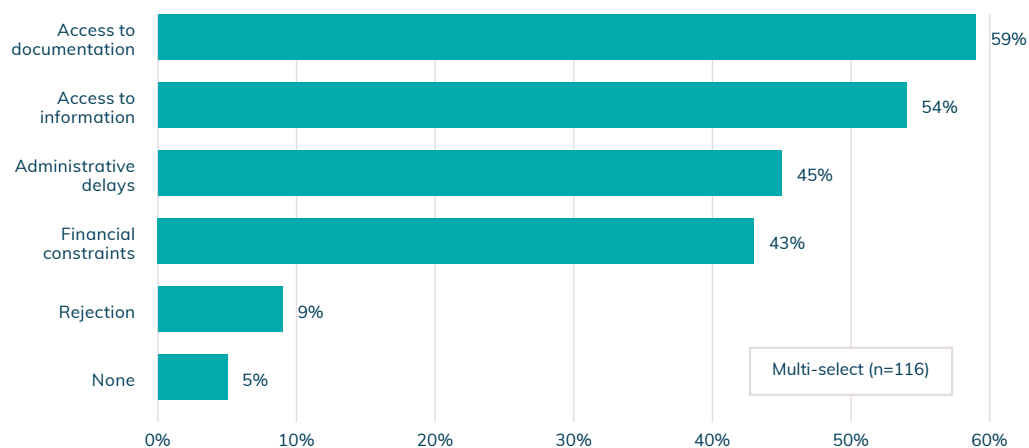


Most respondents faced difficulties in the reunification process, linked to accessing documentation

95% of respondents faced difficulties in formal family reunification processes. These difficulties were commonly related to access to documentation (59%),⁶ access to information (54%), administrative delays (45%) (most often registration) and financial constraints (43%). Eritreans tended to identify difficulties related to access to documentation (42/53 vs. 27/62 among Ethiopians) and access to information (40/53 vs. 23/62 among Ethiopians). These challenges reflect the difficulties that Eritreans face in leaving their country, especially if they are fleeing forced conscription, and in subsequently accessing any documentation through Eritrean embassies abroad, which makes it difficult to access legal migration channels. Eritreans fleeing military service would have had no access to mobile phones during their service to plan their journeys and would not have the support of their embassies abroad or authorities back in Eritrea to obtain documentation.⁷

Figure 4. Did you experience/Are you experiencing any difficulties in this process?

(Among those engaging in a process for family reunification)⁸



6 Documentation including documents of personal identification, as well as documents providing proof and justification of family ties.

7 Jeffrey, J. (March 16, 2017) [Face to face with the Eritrean exodus into Ethiopia](#). *The New Humanitarian*.

8 'Rejection' likely describes respondents who had their initial claim for family reunification rejected, and are currently undergoing an appeal process.

The wish to reunite with family, while not the main factor driving people to leave their country of origin, certainly defines people's choice of destination. However, in doing so, people face multiple challenges, including a lack of access to the right documentation and information, as well as administrative and financial issues. As such, legal channels for family reunification are often not available to refugees and migrants leaving their countries of origin, with their families scattered, their whereabouts sometimes unknown and with limited ability to plan their journeys. More than a third of the respondents are therefore not pursuing formal channels and instead move irregularly by their own means to ultimately reunite with family. Family reunification remains an underexplored issue within our broader understanding of mixed, irregular movement, while it is a key component factoring into people's decision making in terms of how and where to move. More support is needed to assist people in accessing legal channels for family reunification, which might decrease the need to engage in dangerous, onward and irregular journeys.



4Mi data collection

[4Mi](#) is the Mixed Migration Centre's flagship primary data collection system, an innovative approach that helps fill knowledge gaps, and inform policy and response regarding the nature of mixed migratory movements and the protection risks for refugees and migrants on the move. 4Mi field enumerators are currently collecting data through direct interviews with refugees and migrants in Eastern and Southern Africa, North Africa, West Africa, Europe, Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean.

Note that the sampling approach means that the findings derived from the surveyed sample provide rich insights, but the figures cannot be used to make inferences about the total population. See more 4Mi analysis and details on methodology at:

www.mixedmigration.org/4mi