

# URBAN MIXED MIGRATION TUNIS CASE STUDY

MMC Briefing Paper, November 2020



*“Coming to Tunis was not really a deliberate choice. It was a choice because the person I knew had told me about what Tunis was. But he lied a bit on the salary and on the job. He had told me that the job was very well paid but he gave me the rate in CFA and not in dinars.”*

*Ivorian woman, age unknown, La Marsa*

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**Researched and written by:** Imen Aouani, Maxime Giraudet and Jim van Moorsel.

**Reviewed by:** Ayla Bonfiglio and Roberto Forin.

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**Layout and design:** Ziad Alhemdi

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## About this report

This report was commissioned and financed by the Ministère Français de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères (MEAE) as part of a partnership with the International Centre for Policy Development (ICMPD) and a collaboration with the Mixed Migration Centre (MMC). The MMC was responsible for data collection and wrote this report with the support of the ICMPD. The European Union (EU) and the British Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) supported the collection of a part of the data this study relies on.

This report is a contribution to the MMC's vision that migration policies, responses and public debate are based on credible evidence, nuanced understanding of mixed migration, placing human rights and protection of all people on the move at the centre. More specifically, it contributes to the second strategic objective of the MMC, which is to contribute to evidence-based and better-informed migration policies and debates.

After a brief overview of the current mixed migration dynamics in Tunis and the national migration policy framework, this case study seeks to explore mixed migration dynamics from three complementary thematic lenses: 1) Tunis as a city of opportunities; 2) Tunis as a city of risks and 3) Tunis during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Besides the case study included in this report, MMC has carried out similar urban case studies in Bamako, Bogota, Kuala Lumpur and Nairobi. The research methods, data sources and analysis structure have been aligned across all case studies, to allow the reader to draw comparisons between the specific situation of refugees and migrants across cities.

The other case studies can be found here:

[Urban case study in Bamako](#)

[Urban case study in Bogota](#)

[Urban case study in Kuala Lumpur](#)

[Urban case study in Nairobi](#)

Also, the 2020 edition of the MMC annual report, the Mixed Migration Review, is dedicated to the theme of urban migration and can be found here:

[Mixed Migration Review 2020](#)

The information and views set out in this report are those of the author and the MMC and do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) or any of the donors supporting the work of MMC or this report. Responsibility for the content of this report lies entirely with the MMC.



## About MMC

The MMC is a global network consisting of seven regional hubs (Asia, East Africa & Yemen, Europe, Middle East, North Africa, West Africa and Latin America & Caribbean) and a central unit in Geneva. The MMC is a leading source of independent and high-quality data, research, analysis and expertise on mixed migration.

The MMC aims to increase understanding of mixed migration, to positively impact global and regional migration policies, to inform evidence-based protection responses for people on the move and to stimulate forward thinking in public and policy debates on mixed migration. The MMC's overarching focus is on human rights and protection for all people on the move.

The MMC is part of, and governed by, the Danish Refugee Council (DRC). While its institutional link to DRC ensures MMC's work is grounded in operational reality, it acts as an independent source of data, research, analysis and policy development on mixed migration for policy makers, practitioners, journalists, and the broader humanitarian sector. The position of the MMC does not necessarily reflect the position of DRC.

For more information on MMC visit our website:

[www.mixedmigration.org](http://www.mixedmigration.org)

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SUPPORTED BY:



## About MEAE

The Migration and Development Team of the Ministère Français de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères (MEAE) works to promote a balanced vision of migration, based on the protection of human rights, the need for effective migration management systems and the mobilisation of the diaspora for development. Aware of the importance of migrants' ability to be active within host and transit countries as well as countries of origin, France has developed guidelines on migration and development, which are the focus of a Mobility, Migration and Development strategy aimed at strengthening the contribution of mobility and migration to the development of the countries of origin.

## About ICMPD

The International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) is an international organisation with 18 Member States and over 340 staff members. It advises and supports its Member States and partners by building evidence-driven migration policy options and governance systems to equip them with effective, forward-leaning responses to opportunities and pragmatic solutions to complex regional migration and mobility challenges. Priority regions include Africa, Central and South Asia, Europe and the Middle East. The ICMPD implements the Secretariat of the Rabat Process (Euro-African Dialogue on Migration and Development), an intergovernmental migration dialogue which brings together countries of origin, transit, and destination along the migration routes linking Central, West, and Northern Africa with Europe in order to address migration and development issues, guided by the principles of solidarity, partnership and shared responsibility. The Rabat Process is funded by the European Union in the framework of the Migration and Mobility Dialogue support project.



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# Glossary

<b>4Mi</b>	Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism Initiative
<b>COVID-19</b>	Corona Virus Disease 2019
<b>CSO</b>	Civil Society Organisation
<b>DRC</b>	Danish Refugee Council
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>FCDO</b>	Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
<b>IOM</b>	International Organization for Migration
<b>KI</b>	Key Informant
<b>KII</b>	Key Informant Interview
<b>MMC</b>	Mixed Migration Centre
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organisation
<b>PPE</b>	Personal Protective Equipment
<b>PSS</b>	Psychosocial Support
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNHCR</b>	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
<b>TAMSS</b>	Tunisian Association for Management and Social Stability

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# Key findings – Greater Tunis

## Migration dynamics in Tunis

- Although Tunis does not represent for many a final destination, motivations for further travel and duration of stay in Tunisia's capital vary significantly.
- Migration decision-making on transit and length of stay in Tunis is fluid and might change over time in line with perceived opportunities and risks, both in Tunis and further along the route.

## Migration policy landscape in Tunisia

- For individuals from a number of Central and West African countries, Tunisia has a visa-free entry policy, which grants them the right to enter the country on a tourist visa for 90 days.
- For those who overstay their visas or who have an irregular status, the government applies a fine based on length of irregular stay. Many migrants who cannot secure a stable employment or savings are not able to pay their fines, leading to an accumulation of debt and increased difficulties in leaving Tunisia through regular means.

## Tunis, migration and opportunities

- Migration drivers towards Tunis include employment and education opportunities, but also protection-related motivations, and these factors can simultaneously play a role for an individual. While a higher skill level represents an asset in certain job sectors, migration status is key in securing more profitable and stable employment. The Facebook group "Africamarket" is pointed out as a major resource for sub-Saharan refugees and migrants to find employment and other services.
- Visa-free access for a number of West African countries plays a big role in decision-making processes on the selection of Tunis as a city of transit or destination, while facilitating direct and more secure travels. However, the limited duration of the visa, combined with few status regularisation options, pushes some into an irregular situation, accumulating fines imposed by the authorities, and eventually leading to additional barriers to mobility.

## Tunis, migration and risks

- Risks are localised, and two neighbourhoods (Dar Fadhal and Bhar Lazreg) are identified as particularly unsafe, with a particular multitude of hazards and/or protection abuses reported there. Certain areas (e.g. Cité Wahat) were identified as safer, while also offering better services. Gender, country of origin and other social factors were key in determining vulnerability. In terms of country of origin, Ivorian refugees and migrants are often reported as being particularly vulnerable and visible, while sub-Saharan women in general are particularly vulnerable to sexual harassment.
- Employment and housing are two areas in which refugees and migrants are particularly vulnerable, depending on legal status. Working or renting without a contract is the norm rather than exception for irregular migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, increasing the risk of abusive practices. The absence of a national legal framework to safeguard against the violation of labour rights of refugees and migrants is a key factor in such abuses, especially for those lacking official documentation.
- Support in accessing legal documentation in Tunisia is the type of assistance that respondents requested the most. Refugees, asylum seekers and migrants alike stressed the need for support to understand their rights in Tunisia.

## Tunis, migration and COVID-19

- A majority of refugees and migrants in Greater Tunis lost their main source of income during the COVID-19 lockdown. This led many to rely on negative coping mechanisms (including using up savings), or having to compromise on safety and comfort, entering a cheaper rent agreement in an area perceived less safe, and often in overcrowded living situations. COVID-19 has acted as a threat multiplier on pre-existing protection vulnerabilities for many.
- There have been notable efforts of assistance and solidarity from local organisations, authorities and the Tunisian host community, but there is an identified lack of coordination between institutional actors to adequately map refugees and migrants and their needs in Greater Tunis.



# GREATER TUNIS

A stylized map of Greater Tunis, Tunisia, with a teal background and white line art for roads and water bodies. The text "GREATER TUNIS" is overlaid in a bold, dark red font.



# 1. Introduction

Tunis is the political and cultural centre of Tunisia, with the agglomeration of Greater Tunis formed by Tunis proper and the cities of Ariana, Manouba and Ben Arous.<sup>1</sup> While receiving and hosting refugees and migrants from a diverse range of origin countries, there is a critical lack of data and research available on Tunis as a host city. With no national authority designated to register, assist or integrate refugees, asylum seekers and migrants, total numbers of such mobile populations across the agglomeration remain unavailable.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, Greater Tunis offers a relatively high concentration of employment opportunities, as well as key services and organisations assisting refugees and migrants, providing an apt model for a mixed migration urban case study.

This study sets out to fill a gap in knowledge of migration in Greater Tunis and contribute to a growing body of literature on mixed migration in urban areas. It does this by offering an overview of the current mixed migration dynamics in the city and the national migration policy framework and by examining mixed migration dynamics within the capital using three thematic lenses: 1) Tunis as a city of opportunities; 2) Tunis as city of risks and 3) Tunis during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## 1. Tunis as a city of opportunities:

While Tunisia is often studied as a transit or origin country, Greater Tunis can be seen as a city attracting and shaping mixed migration dynamics through and within Tunisia. This is particularly the case in certain economic sectors requiring foreign labour, such as construction and services. This study examines the different ways in which people on the move provide for their livelihoods and experience the socio-economic constraints of living in Greater Tunis. In addition, this study examines how migration can contribute to the sustainable development objectives of cities, including the link between local migration policies and the potential for refugees and migrants to become agents of development at the local level.

## 2. Tunis as a city of risks:

Within Greater Tunis, refugees and migrants are exposed to numerous protection abuses and violations of their rights. This study pays particular attention to the vulnerabilities related to working conditions and the mechanisms linked to their exploitation as well as the impact of the legal environment in Tunisia on protection violations. This research also examines how refugees and migrants perceive socio-economic opportunities in relation to (protection) abuses, as they continue to further explore their livelihoods in the city.

## 3. Impact of COVID-19 on the situation of refugees and migrants in Tunis:

Since March 2020, Tunis has adopted a proactive approach to address the impacts of COVID-19. As a precautionary measure, the government imposed movement restrictions and closed non-essential businesses, forcing many employers to stop their activities and lay-off their employees. This research examines how these measures and government restrictions have impacted the situation of refugees and migrants in Tunis, including the extent to which they may have exacerbated risks, opened up new opportunities, or led to the deployment of new coping strategies.

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1 Cities in Tunisia are administratively denominated by governorates. Tunisia has 24 governorates, including the governorates of Tunis, Manouba, Ariana and Ben Arous

2 According to DRC (2020, February: Urban Programming Assessment Study), nationwide, estimates range from 10,000 to 60,000 irregular refugees and migrants, and from 53,000 to 67,000 individuals with documents. [UNHCR](#) publishes data on the number of registered refugee and asylum seekers in Tunisia, standing at 5,032 as of July 31<sup>st</sup>, 2020.



## 2. Methodology

To explore the three axes of this study, MMC used a mixed methods approach, combining quantitative data from its data collection project, the Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism initiative (4Mi), and qualitative data through key informant interviews. Given the small sample sizes and non-randomised nature of sampling, quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics. Qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis and a deductive coding scheme based on the aforementioned themes. Both types of data were triangulated where possible and instances of convergence and divergence were explored in the results. The following sections provide a brief overview of the data.

### What is the Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism Initiative (4Mi)?

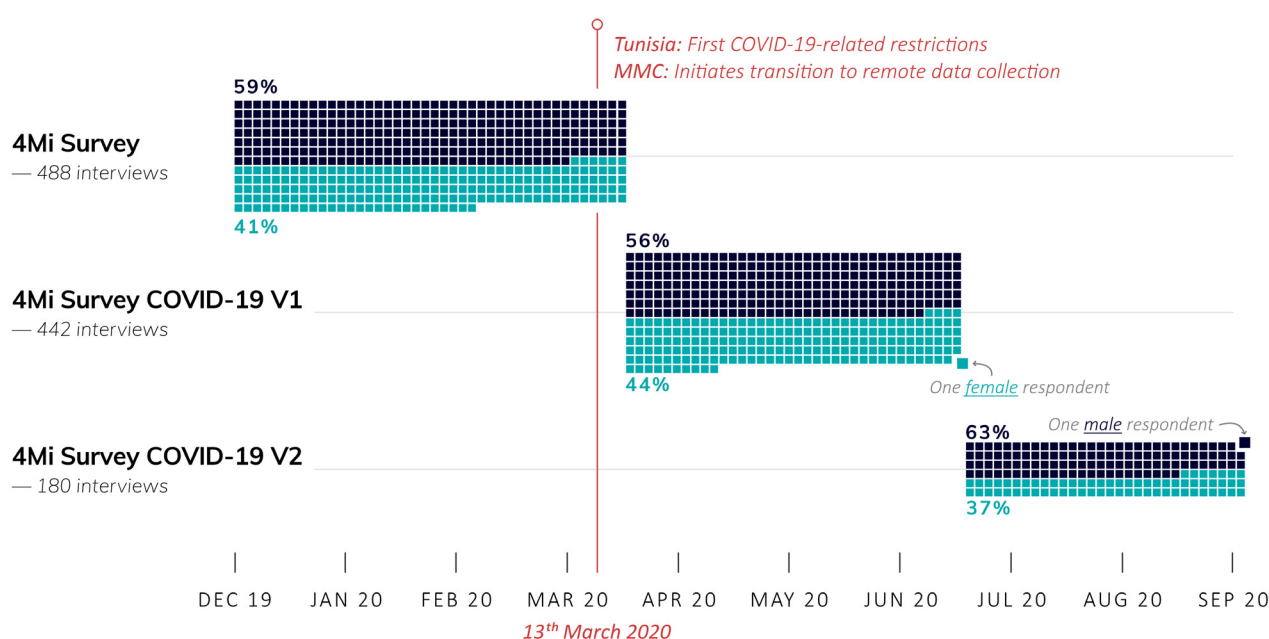
Set up in 2014, 4Mi is a unique network of field monitors situated along frequently used routes and in major migratory hubs. It aims to offer a regular, standardised, quantitative and globalised, system of collecting primary data on mixed migration. 4Mi predominantly uses a closed question survey to invite respondents to anonymously self-report on a wide range of issues that results in extensive data relating to individual profiles, migratory drivers, means and conditions of movement, the smuggler economy, aspirations and destination choices. 4Mi data allow MMC and its partners to inform migration policies, debates, and protection responses for people on the move through the production of high-quality quantitative analysis grounded in evidence.

### Quantitative data

MMC launched its 4Mi core survey in December 2019 in Greater Tunis, collecting primary quantitative data on mixed migration dynamics, including individual profiles; mixed migration drivers, intentions and aspirations; conditions and means of travel; interactions with smugglers; and protection abuses (hereafter referred to as “4Mi data”). Starting in April 2020, the 4Mi survey was adapted to include a focus on the COVID-19 pandemic, with respondents being asked about the impact of COVID-19 on their livelihoods, protection situation, and mobility (hereafter referred to as “4Mi COVID-19 phase 1 data”). A second edition of the 4Mi COVID-19 survey was launched in July, focusing on longer-term impacts of the pandemic (hereafter referred to as “4Mi COVID-19 phase 2 data”). This study draws upon the data collected from these instruments to examine the experiences of refugees and migrants in the context of the three themes.

All three surveys follow the same sampling scheme, which includes refugees and migrants who are: 18 years’ old and above, mainly from sub-Saharan Africa, and who have been in Tunisia for less than two years. These last two criteria are in place to capture people who are moving longer distances along mixed migration routes as well as people who are actively on the move, rather than settled refugee and migrant populations. Given the moderate sample sizes and non-randomised nature of sampling, the findings from the quantitative data should be treated with caution.

Figure 1: Quantitative data collection overview

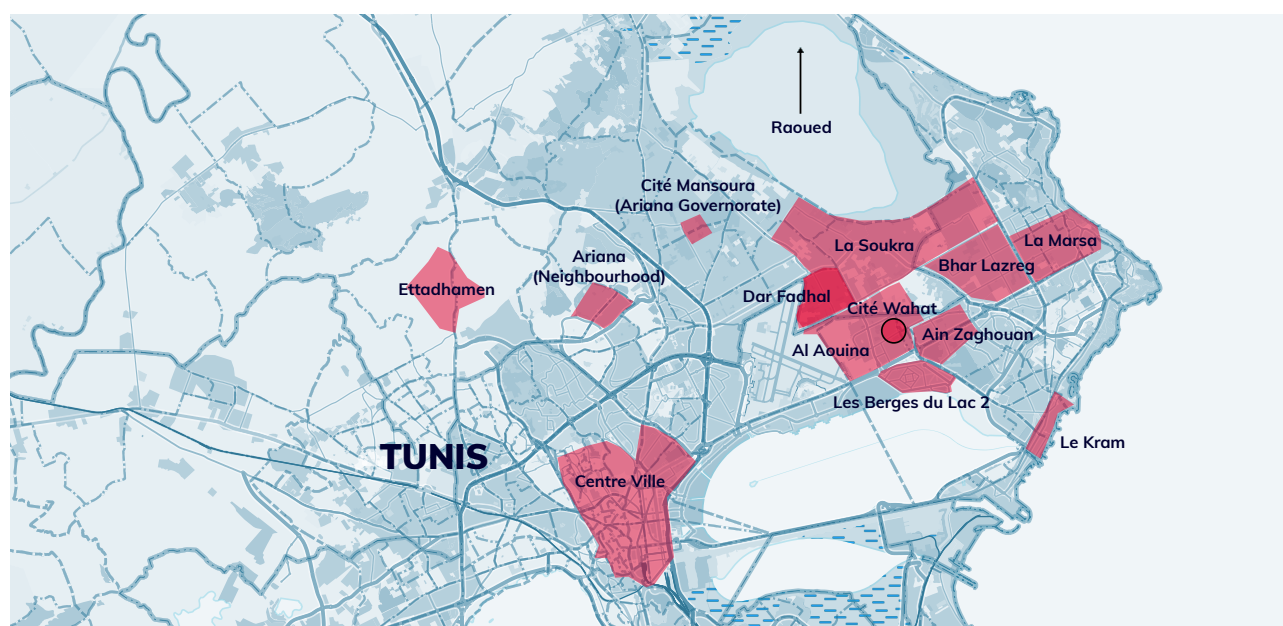


## Qualitative data

Qualitative data collection took place in August and September 2020. MMC conducted qualitative interviews with two groups of key informants: (i) 10 interviews with mixed migration actors (municipalities, governmental and non-governmental organisations, UN agencies, and civil society organisations), and (ii) 22 in-depth interviews with refugees and migrants settled in Greater Tunis. The sampling of this second target group was carried out to achieve a diversity in origin countries and gender balance. Several neighbourhoods were targeted, given the presence of large migrant communities.<sup>3</sup>

It should be noted that links between municipalities and neighbourhoods are tentative, as some neighbourhoods overlap on several municipalities and respondents' own perception of neighbourhoods' borders can vary. A geographical analysis was undertaken to map experiences in Greater Tunis to better understand the variance of the experiences of refugees and migrants in the city. These data were corroborated with data from key informant interviews conducted with refugees and migrants purposefully selected based on the sampling criteria outlined above.

**Figure 2: Tunis - Map of the main areas of interest in the study**



**Table 1: Targeted municipalities and neighbourhoods in Greater Tunis**

Municipality	Neighbourhood
Ariana	Ariana / Ennasr
La Soukra	La Soukra / Dar Fadhal
La Marsa	La Marsa / Bhar Lazreg
La Goulette / Le Kram	El Aouina / Cité Wahat / Ain Zaghuan / La Goulette / Le Kram
Raoued	Raoued
Tunis	Centre-Ville / Ibn Khaldoun / Cité El Khadra / Les Berges du Lac
Ettadhamen	Ettadhamen
Megrine	Megrine
Ben Arous	Ben Arous

<sup>3</sup> Whereas the research team has intended to respect this sampling criteria on neighbourhoods as rigorously as possible, it has sometimes proven to be challenging to manage an equal spread of number of respondents, gender, countries of origin and different neighbourhoods. Therefore, slight variations in terms of location of residence of respondents in the dataset occur.

**Interviews with key informants**

- 3 CSOs
- 3 municipalities
- 1 governmental body
- 2 NGOs
- 1 UN agency

**Interviews with refugees & migrants**  
 — All countries of origin and living mainly but not exclusively, in the neighborhoods listed above

- 11 men
- 11 women

The timeline shows two main periods of activity. The first period, from April to August 2019, includes interviews with key informants (represented by purple dots) and refugees & migrants (represented by teal dots). The second period, from August to September 2019, includes interviews with key informants (represented by purple dots) and refugees & migrants (represented by teal dots). A legend on the right indicates that purple dots represent interviews with key informants and teal dots represent interviews with refugees & migrants. The legend also lists the types of organizations interviewed: 3 CSOs, 3 municipalities, 1 governmental body, 2 NGOs, and 1 UN agency for key informants; and 11 men and 11 women for refugees & migrants.

Greater Tunis expanded significantly over the course of the 20th century, when urban sprawl extended across undeveloped land and urban settlements to the city centre's north (La Goulette, Le Kram, La Marsa and La Soukra, popularly referred to as *banlieue nord*), and to its west (Ariana) and south (Ben Arous and Manouba).<sup>4</sup> As of 2014, the agglomeration counted over 2.6 million inhabitants, comprising around 15% of Tunisia's total population.<sup>5</sup> Further urban developments have led to the enlargement of the municipalities which comprise the greater metropolitan area, with the municipality of Tunis now stretching as far as the business districts of Les Berges du Lac.

Although a large-scale census of refugees and migrants is ongoing,<sup>6</sup> at the time of writing, total numbers of refugees and migrants in Greater Tunis remain unknown. Existing mixed migration research predominantly focuses on arrival and settlement trends in and around the city. Camilli and Paynter (2020) argue that Tunisia's position along mixed migration routes towards Europe is one that is in flux, as it has moved away from being a country of departure to a transit and host country.<sup>7</sup> Recent trends related to the COVID-19 crisis, however, suggest an increase in particularly Tunisian nationals departing from the Tunisian coast.<sup>8</sup>

## Greater Tunis: key characteristics of people on the move

While comprehensive national data are not available on refugees and migrants in Tunisia, let alone Greater Tunis, humanitarian actors working on mixed migration in the country report two main trends: 1) An increase in the number of refugees and migrants residing in the capital, regardless of the length of their stay; and 2) A diversification of profiles in terms of status, country of origin, gender, and reasons for movement.<sup>11</sup> This diversification in profiles is also reflected in UNHCR's statistics of registered refugees and asylum seekers country-wide. The main nationalities - Syrians (36%), Ivorians (31%) and Eritreans (6%) - hail from three different regions of origin.<sup>12</sup> In comparison, the largest

12 UNHCR (2020, 31 July). [Refugees and asylum-seekers in Tunisia by country of origin](#).



respondent groups of 4Mi data collected in Greater Tunis between December 2019 and August 2020 by the Mixed Migration Centre (MMC) are: Ivorians, Congolese (DRC) and Cameroonian.

### Travel modalities from Sub-Saharan Africa to Tunis: greater use of flights and fewer use of smugglers

As reported by recent studies, Greater Tunis is an emerging mixed migration hub in North Africa, with arrivals forming a heterogeneous group in terms of aspirations and intentions, ways of travel, and profiles. While those fleeing from protection risks continue to arrive over land, often through Libya,<sup>13</sup> a notable number arrive by plane, suggesting they have some minimum level of resources. 4Mi data collected between January and March 2020 in Greater Tunis<sup>14</sup> reveal a large majority (288 out of 314) of respondents entered Tunisia by air. This diverges from other cities in Tunisia, where more than half of the respondents (354 out of 647)<sup>15</sup> arrived by land. Moreover, data from key informant interviews with refugees and migrants who qualify for visa-free entry<sup>16</sup> confirm that arriving by plane is perceived as a safe and secure option and, hence, a major consideration in their migration decision-making, regardless of the drivers behind leaving country of origin. A few respondents revealed that this safe and legal entry modality facilitates certain 'grey' business models, operating somewhere in between a smuggling and employment agency and exposing concerned individuals to risk of trafficking and exploitation.

**“The majority of migrants [that I know] come with a contract. The contract is presented to you through a friend of a friend in Abidjan. They are ‘vendors’ who tell you they have a brother in Tunisia, and that there will be work and the possibility to go to Europe, by plane or by boat. If you don’t have money, they can give you everything, but when you arrive, you will work to reimburse.”**

(Ivorian woman, unknown age)

## Settlement within Greater Tunis

### New arrivals tend to settle alongside co-nationals and their pre-existing social networks

Settlement dynamics of refugees and migrants in Greater Tunis are strongly localised at the neighbourhood level. The districts of El Aouina, Dar Fadhal, Bhar Lazreg and La Marsa are reportedly the neighbourhoods hosting the most visible refugee and migrant communities in Greater Tunis. Nevertheless, the characteristics of the communities residing in these neighbourhoods, vary widely.

In terms of settlement factors, most refugees and migrants, from different countries of origin and regardless of status and modality of arrival, reported that they chose their initial place of residence at the suggestion of or to join their co-national communities and social networks. In fact, respondents reported different neighbourhoods as being popular among different nationalities: **Ivorians** and **Cameroonians** are present mostly in the *banlieue nord*, in Ariana, El Aouina, Dar Fadhal, Bhar Lazreg, La Marsa and Raoued; **Libyans** tend to favour the business districts of Les Berges du Lac and high-rise apartment blocks in El Aouina; **Guineans** are reportedly mostly located in the city centre and around in Cité el Khadra and Ennasr; **Eritreans** settle close to the cathedral in El Aouina; and **Sudanese** live mostly in the city centre (around Place de Barcelone) and towards its south and west in the suburbs of Ben Arous, Megrine and Ibn Khaldoun.<sup>17</sup> In terms of how communities are grouped, KI data reveal that different nationalities rarely share an accommodation. KI data also suggests that refugees and migrants do not follow the same strategies depending on their communities of origin: while Ivorians reportedly tend to settle in large clusters in certain neighbourhoods, others (primarily Malians and Burkinabe) were reportedly more likely to set up smaller bases (one rented building, or a few accommodations in one street) in a larger variety of areas around the city.

Key informants representing local authorities revealed there was no knowledge from municipalities on specific settlement dynamics, which they linked to a lack of integrated data-sharing and coordination between national and local authorities. Moreover, the absence of a national legal framework on how to integrate refugees and migrants into Tunisian society, as well as the lack of comprehensive data on this population made it difficult for local authorities to identify and distinguish present individuals in terms of status and country of origin.

13 Data from [UNHCR](#) (2020, 31 July) on profiled refugees and asylum seekers since January 2020 indicates 65% of these new arrivals had transited through Libya.

14 This is a subset from the 4Mi survey running between January 2020 and March 2020, as the indicator in question was added later on in an update from the original version implemented in December 2019.

15 This is an outlying subset from the 4Mi survey running between January and March 2020, outside the scope of this case study but included for comparison value, featuring all respondents in Tunisia surveyed outside Greater Tunis.

16 Individuals coming from these countries of origin have the right to reside in Tunisia on a tourist visa valid during 90 days: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Comoros, Côte d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, The Gambia, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Senegal.

17 These are observations of surveyed respondents and interviewed key informants to illustrate findings, and provide by no means an exhaustive overview of settlement dynamics per nationality and/or group.

### Greater Tunis as short to medium-term settlement location

When respondents were asked in the 4Mi survey if they had reached their final destination, 5% (22/488) surveyed in Greater Tunis indicated Tunisia as their intended final destination, while 22% (108/488) were unsure about whether Tunisia was their intended final destination and 73% (358/488) reported that they had not yet reached the end of their journey. Linking to the aforementioned group of refugees and migrants who cross the border from Libya, they are similarly less motivated to reach Tunisia as a destination country and more motivated to leave Libya in search of international protection and relative safety and/or transit to another country. KI interviews with East Africans, who often transited Libya before arriving to Tunisia, reveal respondents do not consider Greater Tunis (and/or Tunisia) as the destination of their journey due to a perceived language barrier, giving them less access to job opportunities and social interactions than their Arabic- or French-speaking peers.

Therefore, most respondents described their movement to Greater Tunis in terms of transit and short or medium-term settlement, determined by and conditional upon employment and educational opportunities.

Longer-term settlement intentions were rarer among respondents. Indeed, key informants who had been in Greater Tunis for years, still considered their stay to be of a “transitory” nature. A 30-year-old Guinean woman, accompanied by a 6-year-old child, who arrived in Greater Tunis in 2014, reports:

**“I will stay just long enough to collect money. But if I can study, I'll enroll [at the university] and I'll stay on.”**

Moreover, living conditions and safety in Tunisia seem to play a significant role in the reasons that lead a number of respondents to come to Tunis. This trend seems to be present across both refugee and migrant respondents, highlighting the similar experiences and motivations of people in mixed flows:

**“We escaped the war in Syria to go to Tunisia because it was willing to take in refugees and we are here as refugees. [...] If there are opportunities in other areas, I will move, but my children want to stay here because of the good lifestyle and security.”**

(Syrian man, 53 years' old)

## 4. Migration policy landscape

After the Jasmin Revolution in 2010-2011 and Tunisia's transition to democracy, a special delegation at the city level was set up to lead the capital's transition and replace former institutions. In parallel with Tunisia's political transition, the Libyan Revolution in 2011 prompted Libyans and sub-Saharan African refugees and migrants residing and/or working in Libya to seek refuge in Tunisia. The Tunisian humanitarian response to the arrival of refugees and migrants centred around the Choucha and Dehibat camps, close to the Libyan border. The combined effects of resettlement programmes and a change in local settlement policies by Tunisian authorities led to the closure of the camps in 2013 and prompted the movement of some refugees and migrants to Greater Tunis, challenging the city's ability to integrate these groups into society.<sup>18</sup>

From a legal standpoint, Tunisia is a signatory to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees.<sup>19</sup> The passing of domestic asylum legislation, however, has been at an impasse since 2012 and, in practice, refugees and asylum seekers remain vulnerable to protection

risks, including discrimination and exploitative working conditions.<sup>20</sup> For individuals from many Central and West African countries, Tunisia has a visa-free entry policy, which grants them the right to enter the country on a tourist visa for 90 days. For migrants who overstay their visas or who have an irregular status, the government applies a fine based on the length of irregular stay. Migrants may not leave until such fines are paid, which creates a situation of ever-increasing debt for some, prompting them to be stuck in Tunisia and vulnerable to exploitation. Notably, the most recent Tunisian constitution (2014) guarantees that every individual, regardless of nationality, has “the right to live, in dignity, and with respect of private life” on Tunisian soil, and a law has been adopted in 2018 to eliminate every form of racial discrimination. That said, it is not clear the extent to which refugees and migrants are enjoying such rights and many remain at risk of other forms of discrimination, for instance based on sexual orientation, as homosexuality is penalised by law in Tunisia.

18 Blaise, L. (2019, 10 June). [Tunisie : du camp de réfugiés de Choucha à La Marsa, des migrants de nouveau dans l'impasse](#). *Le Monde*.

19 Geisser, V. (2019). Tunisie, des migrations subsahariens toujours exclus du rêve démocratique. *Migrations Société* 177 (3), p. 3-18.

20 International Labour Organisation (ILO) (2016). [Protection des droits des travailleurs migrants : vers la révision et l'harmonisation des lois et réglementations tunisiennes avec les normes internationales pertinentes](#).

### National and local policies: between creating flexibility and involuntary immobility

While Tunisia carries out a policy of visa-free access to its territory for nationals from most West African countries,<sup>21</sup> it reportedly seems to facilitate a direct and more secure way of travelling; for some it also generates a situation of involuntary immobility once they have used up the 90 days linked to their tourist visa. With few options to regularise their status in Tunisia, or to apply for asylum, within this timeframe, the chances of overstaying this visa and ending up in an irregular situation with mounting fines are high.<sup>22</sup> As job salaries, particularly upon arrival, often do not provide enough for savings, many migrants are not able to pay their fines, leading to an accumulation of debt. As reported by a

majority of interviewed refugees and migrants in this situation, this system represents a significant barrier to mobility, and prevents them to consider legal means to exit the country, either to continue their journey or return to country of origin.

From a local authorities' perspective, a KI representative from the La Marsa municipality reported that, on the one hand, the Tunisian legislative framework might generate challenges for refugees and migrants to settle and regularise their status in Greater Tunis, while, on the other hand, it could be seen as more "flexible" than other countries in the region. Examples of such flexibility can be seen in access to higher education, which is open to all nationalities, and mixed marriage with a Tunisian spouse.

## 5. Tunis, migration and opportunities

### Drivers and aspirations: heterogeneous dynamics at play

**"Due to personal risks, I had to flee. I was forced into marriage and I wanted to change my religion. In my country, you could get killed for that. Going to a Maghreb country was an easy-to-reach destination. [...] Living in Tunis, I had the possibility to find a job and earn an income. Before arriving, I thought it would also be easier to reach Europe from here, but I did not know that would mean travelling as a 'clandestine'."**

(Malian woman, 36 years' old)

### Migration drivers linked to economic opportunities and protection risks are not mutually exclusive

Zooming in on migration drivers for leaving their origin country, 4Mi data reflect the heterogeneous profiles of respondents residing in Tunisia's capital mentioned in the previous section. In selecting the three greatest influences on their decision to migrate, respondents most often included economic drivers (259), rights and freedoms (181), personal and/or family reasons (127) and violence (126). For the respondent nationalities with greater representation in the sample, a majority of Ivorians cited economic drivers (100/164), whereas this was not the case, for example, for Congolese (13/56)<sup>23</sup> and Gabonese (7/56). Key informants also highlight a diversity of drivers, including an Ivorian woman (of unknown age) reporting her main driver to leave was experiencing threats linked

to her political affiliation, whereas a 37-year-old Ivorian peer described she did "not reflect too much on her decision" before arriving in Tunis by plane.

### Visa-free access and education: two major drivers in choosing Tunisia

KI data suggest that students and respondents with a strong professional specialisation often express a deliberate choice to move to Tunis. Respondents who identified in this way often arrived in Tunisia via regular ports of entry and came from countries that do not require an entry visa as per Tunisia's visa policy vis-à-vis other countries. Respondents from relevant countries highlight visa-free access often played a big role in their decision-making as well as the presence of co-nationals. Students from these countries form a specific group, as they are often actively recruited by co-nationals or Tunisian institutions to come study in Tunis. However, they might not always receive adequate information on the fact that they will reside on a student visa, ending up in an irregular situation after having finished their studies if they are not able to find work and switch to a work visa.

### Employment opportunities in and around Greater Tunis

#### Choice of neighbourhood: attractiveness based on opportunities and services

In addition to the presence of co-nationality communities, employment opportunities and a number of livelihood factors also shaped the place of settlement in Greater Tunis. Some neighbourhoods were reported to be an "ideal mix" of factors, providing a good environment for

21 Individuals coming from these countries of origin have the right to reside in Tunisia on a tourist visa valid during 90 days: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Comoros, Côte d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, The Gambia, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Senegal. More information on the role of visa-free access as a migration driver in the next section.

22 The penalty for residing irregularly in-country or overstaying a tourist visa is 20 Tunisian Dinars per week (cf. [REACH](#), 2018).

23 Respondents from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).



refugees and migrants to reside and work. Cité Wahat, part of El Aouina, has been reported by a number of refugees and migrants as a lively and multi-ethnic neighbourhood known for safety, comfort, low levels of discrimination, lower-perceived language barriers and a high concentration of available services. Moreover, it was perceived as close to employment opportunities in and around El Aouina, but especially in the nearby districts of Les Berges du Lac. However, cost of living in Cité Wahat was reported to be higher than in areas that are perceived as less safe.

### **Africamarket, a major resource for informal employment, and more...**

Job opportunities in Greater Tunis are often found through community networks and involve the use of social media. The Facebook group “Africamarket”, in particular, was pointed out as a major resource for sub-Saharan refugees and migrants by a large number of KIs. A central hub for finding informal and flexible jobs, respondents reported that some refugees and migrants serve as intermediaries and brokers sometimes between employers and potential workers, taking fees for identifying the right candidates for jobs. In this way, information shared on the group is itself a valuable source of income. Besides informal job offers, the groups serve as a resource for information and a marketplace for many goods and services (ranging from buying furniture to warnings about protection incidents or to advertisements for smuggling trips to Europe).

### **Skill level in certain sectors is a significant factor in accessing the job market**

Holding specific skills or higher education may be a key factor to successful and sustainable employment for refugees and migrants in Greater Tunis. A 26-year-old Ivorian woman said that she has been able to work in the same beauty salon since she arrived in 2017:

**“It was easy for me because I already knew my job and I already had my salon in Côte d’Ivoire. My friend showed me the salons and I ended up working in a Congolese salon in El Aouina until now.”**

For those who came without a specific skill or vocation, opportunities seem to be more limited. A 22-year-old Libyan woman, with a 6-month-old baby, who arrived in Grand Tunis in 2019 explains:

**“Talking about the opportunities in beauty salons, it was such a difficult experience. They always ask for experience, and in some cases they only accept [a] certain level of education.”**

4Mi data collected in Greater Tunis between December 2019 and March 2020, reveal 48% of respondents (234/488) reported making money in the 12 months

before they left their country of origin, of which 45% (106/234) was involved in casual and/or occasional work, and 22% (54/234) owned a business or was self-employed. Of those who owned their own business in their country of origin, around two quarters were men. Women were more often involved in casual labour.

However, this finding on greater and more sustainable integration into the city’s labour market might not extend to all sectors, as public sector employment (such as in public health facilities) and certain jobs including lawyers, pharmacists and architects are reserved for nationals, and exceptionally for foreigners with a pre-determined duration. There are some exceptions for Algerians, Moroccans and Libyans, as they do not need to hold a residency card to stay in Tunisia, but “a national preference” could still be legally performed when selecting a candidate.<sup>24</sup> A 49-year-old Libyan man reported:

**“To be honest, as I am a judge, I can’t see myself looking for casual work. I looked to find work in my field and specialty, searching on internet and on social media, but I did not find opportunities.”**

On another note, a skill or previous experience, was also not a guarantee for respondents to be performing work that was matching their levels of previous education or experience.

### **Gender as a major factor of segregation in accessing the job market**

Refugee and migrant key informants maintain that women were more often employed as domestic workers, cleaners, babysitters, beauticians, and servers and washers in restaurants and cafés. Such forms of employment may draw refugee and migrant women to cities, as opposed to rural areas, though it is difficult to draw any comparisons without data from rural areas. In contrast, refugee and migrant men in Greater Tunis were more often employed in construction, fisheries, and gardening and delivery services. They also reportedly worked in restaurants and cafes, suggesting the services sector is a key employer for both men and women refugees and migrants.

### **Migration status is key in securing more stable and profitable job opportunities**

Refugees and migrants declared that finding irregular working opportunities in and around Greater Tunis was not complicated, as there are always employers that do not ask for documents. However, holding legal documentation (such as refugee status or a residency card), enables one to obtain a signed work contract, and more stable employment situation. A 30-year-old Guinean woman with residency status commented:

24 Terre d’Asile Tunisie (2020). [L'accès au travail des migrants en Tunisie. Du cadre juridique à la pratique.](#)

**“The residency card has made me feel much more comfortable, because you don’t have a choice [when looking for a job] if you don’t have one.”**

A majority of refugees and migrants reported that not having a status and legal documents would lead to having to accept employment offers they would otherwise refuse.

#### **Local level policies and programmes aimed at labour integration mostly absent**

Representing a major concern for all respondents, a majority of refugees and migrants mentioned the need for more support from municipalities, the United Nations (IOM and UNHCR), and/or NGOs to help them find employment opportunities that are tailored to their individual skills and/or education and are sustainable. While such dedicated programmes are absent, a number of respondents with refugee status noted the support of the Tunisian Association for Management and Local Stability (TAMSS),<sup>25</sup> a local CSO cooperating with UNHCR and acting as intermediary between employers

and refugees, protecting the legality of their contract and working conditions.

While dedicated policies or programmes related to the employment of refugees and migrants at local levels remain absent, a KI from the Raoued town hall described the increasingly important position that refugee and migrant workers take in guaranteeing the sustainability and development of Tunis’ labour market, adding that:

**“Refugees and migrants are generally hard workers and will take the jobs that Tunisians do not want, mostly in construction, restauration services, domestic work and cleaning.”**

Within this regard of development of the city economy, a KI from the La Marsa municipality adds that, although facing legal obstacles, refugees and migrants are increasingly looking to start their own businesses and start-ups, also confirmed by a Syrian 53-year-old man, reporting that a number of Syrians have looked into partnering with Tunisians in order to be able to set up restaurant and bakery businesses around the city.

## **6. Tunis, migration and risks**

### **Spaces of risk and discrimination**

**“Popular neighbourhoods change all the time - it’s always a balance between cheap rent and safety for everyone. [...] In Dar Fadhal and Bhar Lazreg, they are forced to live there because the rent is cheap. [...] I have listened to some horrible stories from Dar Fadhal. It is a risk to live in this neighbourhood.”**

(Ivorian woman, 26 years’ old)

#### **Perception of risky areas in Greater Tunis: financial resources required to avoid riskier places**

When reporting on “risky” places and neighbourhoods for refugees and migrants in Greater Tunis, and without the aim to quantify or to discard protection risks in other districts, two places stand out in terms of frequency and the variety of protection risks: Dar Fadhal (Municipality of La Soukra) and Bhar Lazreg (Municipality of La Marsa). These districts nevertheless attract refugees and migrants as they offer relatively cheap rents and the option to share accommodation (potentially leading to overcrowding), as reported by KIs. Furthermore, perpetrators of incidents are reported to come from different origin countries, with both Tunisians and refugee and migrant communities engaging in illicit activities, as

an Ivorian woman (age unknown) describes:

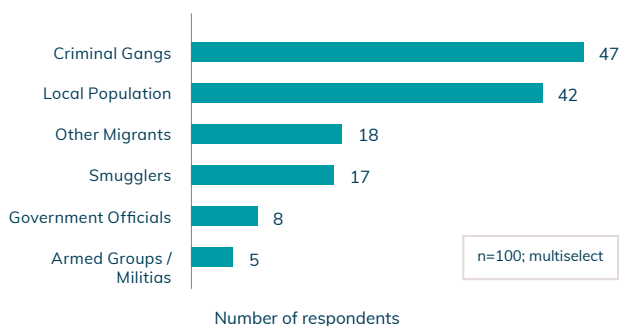
**“In Bhar Lazreg, there are all the risks. You have rape, assault... It is committed by Tunisians and often also by [sub-Saharan Africans] now. What we are now seeing among sub-Saharan [is that] there are groups that also allow themselves to burglarise among them. This was not the case before.”**

Between December 2019 and March 2020, 118 out of 488 (24%) respondents surveyed in Greater Tunis reported Tunisia as the most dangerous country of their journey,<sup>26</sup> of which 100 out of 118 specified a location in Greater Tunis as the most dangerous. The most cited risks within Greater Tunis included physical violence (81/100), robbery (62/100) and sexual violence (24/100). When asked who was most likely to be perpetrating such incidents, criminal gangs were reported by almost half of respondents (47/100), followed by local host communities (42/100) coinciding with testimonies from in-depth interviews with refugees and migrants.

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.tamssn.org>

<sup>26</sup> It is to be noted that 117 out of these 118 respondents selecting Tunisia as the most dangerous country had not transited Libya.

**Figure 4: “Who were likely to be perpetrating such incidents in Greater Tunis?”**



When asked which measures refugees and migrants were taking to avoid districts considered “risky,” most of them reported not going there, or avoiding them at night. However, not all refugees and migrants seem to be in the position to make such a choice, as the choice of neighbourhoods is made on the basis of the self-ranking of opportunities versus constraints. This implies that those who have a smaller budget will have to settle with less comfort and security. Moreover, it is noteworthy that the level of information on the different characteristics of the neighbourhoods seems to be consistent among respondents who have been living in Greater Tunis for more than a year. Generally considered safe and comfortable places to live are the earlier-mentioned Cité Wahat (in El Aouina), La Soukra (with the exception of Dar Fadhal) and La Marsa (with the exception of Bhar Lazreg).

#### **Sources and types of risk: individualised experiences**

Sources of risk might differ according to the gender, country of origin, culture and other defining factors. In terms of country of origin, Ivorian refugees and migrants were often (self-)reported as being particularly vulnerable and visible, linked to their presence in high numbers in certain areas of the city, but also to their community culture, often described as outgoing and less family-oriented than other nationalities. Secondly, a majority of sub-Saharan women cited having experienced sexual harassment, describing their relationship and interactions with Tunisian men in particular to be a difficult one. While such episodes might take place on the street, they are also reportedly occurring in work settings, as an Ivorian woman (age unknown) detailed:

**“The risks are very present. Rape, also in households we encounter this kind of situation. A Tunisian approaches you [so that you can come and clean his house], you arrive at his house and there is no woman or family. You do the housework and he acts as if he were leaving, but finally he comes back and he starts talking to you and he offers to sleep with him. There have been cases like that, it happens a lot.”**

An Ivorian key informant (28 years' old) working in Cité Wahat (and residing in Dar Fadhal) described the almost institutionalised character of physical harassment faced by sub-Saharan women working in the city.

In terms of protection risks instigated by acts from other refugees and migrants, a number reported abuses from co-nationals or co-ethnic communities, echoing the political, social, and cultural fault lines of their countries and/or regions of origin. While these communities in Greater Tunis may represent a strong social and cultural anchor for respondents as well as a resilience mechanism, they may also echo some of the conflict behaviours or discriminatory mechanisms that led to their departure. Geographic proximity to one's origin country is a particularly salient issue and security concern for Libyan respondents, who fear conflict spillover with the large numbers of Libyans in Greater Tunis:

**“I want to leave Tunisia for a specific reason: I am looking for a safer place. Tunisia is close to Libya and the militia can easily find me. They already found me once and kidnapped my child. Thank God the Tunisian authorities were on time and saved her. That's why we moved to another neighbourhood, because there are no Libyans with ties to the militia here and it's safer.”**

(Libyan man, 49 years old)

Linked to these experiences, but also to the riskier neighbourhoods where co-national or co-ethnic communities might be well represented, a number of interviewed refugees and migrants preferred to live in parts of the city without too much involvement in big communities and forming their social networks in a more organic way and across nationalities. Alternatively, a number of refugees and migrants who cited not living with or close to many co-nationals stressed the importance of having one or more Tunisian friends as being part of their social integration process.

#### **Risks related to work and housing**

##### **Irregular working conditions considered a norm for many**

The practice of working without a contract is the norm rather than the exception for irregular migrants as well as for refugees and asylum seekers. This situation is intensified by the absence of a national legal framework to safeguard against the violation of labour rights of refugees and migrants, especially if refugees and migrants lack official documentation or have a pending refugee status. In addition to these aforementioned risks, 54 out of 314 respondents surveyed by 4Mi between January and March 2020 self-reported as “I don't know my status”, creating another layer of status insecurity compounding other risk factors related to the violation of labour rights.

KI data suggests that exploitation of refugees and migrants working without legal document is widespread. Respondents reported they often did not receive their salary on time, or did not receive it at all. Moreover, leaving a job can lead to not getting paid at all, and interviewed refugees and migrants said they advised their peers against leaving before payment. Another consequence of not being protected by law sometimes means refugee and migrant workers receive a lower salary than their Tunisian peers in similar roles.

### **Risky housing conditions spur hyper mobility around the city**

The legal vacuum surrounding refugees and migrants also creates the conditions for a number of abuses by the landlords to whom refugees and migrants rent their homes. Respondents reported numerous cases of abuse, ranging from pressure to extortion and arbitrary eviction. A fairly common practice appears to be asking tenants to pay inflated bills under threat of eviction. The language barrier (bills are written in Arabic) and the inability of refugees and migrants to claim their rights from the police (for fear of being identified as in irregular situation) leaves them at the mercy of the landlords' goodwill (who are reportedly often aware of the impossibility of their tenants to refer to the police). Moreover, the irregular nature of rent agreements leaves the landlords free to inflate rents, compared to the prices usually in force with lease contracts. Regular cases of debts being associated with legitimate or illegitimate invoices increases distrust between landlords and tenants. The most frequent consequence of such practices tends to be having to move to a new place every so often (including moving to different neighbourhoods or other parts of the city), with a number of respondents reporting they felt forced to move into a new place on a monthly or bimonthly basis, arguably detrimental to social integration, participation and inclusion processes.

## **Vulnerabilities and risks from a policy perspective**

### **An absence of policy to reduce protection risks**

Refugees and migrants without refugee status or a pending asylum application stressed the need for support to understand their rights in Tunisia. Moreover, because of a lack of domestic legislation focused on the rights of foreigners in-country, a majority of respondents highlighted not having been able to report incidents (including physical, verbal and sexual harassment and discrimination) to the police and/or local authorities, increasing their vulnerability. Conversely, several KIs reported that, in their opinion, refugees often have higher chances of being heard by the police, reducing risks of exploitation with employers and landlords. When asked about assistance needs, several respondents highlighted that access to legal status was their primary concern.

Representatives from the town halls in La Marsa and Raoued, and NGO and CSO spokespersons, reported that the current lack of progress in terms of protection laws for refugees and migrants likely stems from the instability in the Tunisian political landscape both on national and local levels, having to rely only on international declarations signed by Tunisia. Although the Tunisian labour code aims at protecting all workers, current provisions are deemed too restrictive and do not put address specific needs of vulnerable refugees and migrants. As a result, there is, in practice, no specific legislation to tackle discrimination and abuses experienced by refugees and migrants in work environments. The work of NGOs and CSOs is cited by the same officials as instrumental and "making a difference", until an awaited political momentum allows for legal changes.

## 7. Tunis, migration and COVID-19

### Impact on livelihoods and daily life

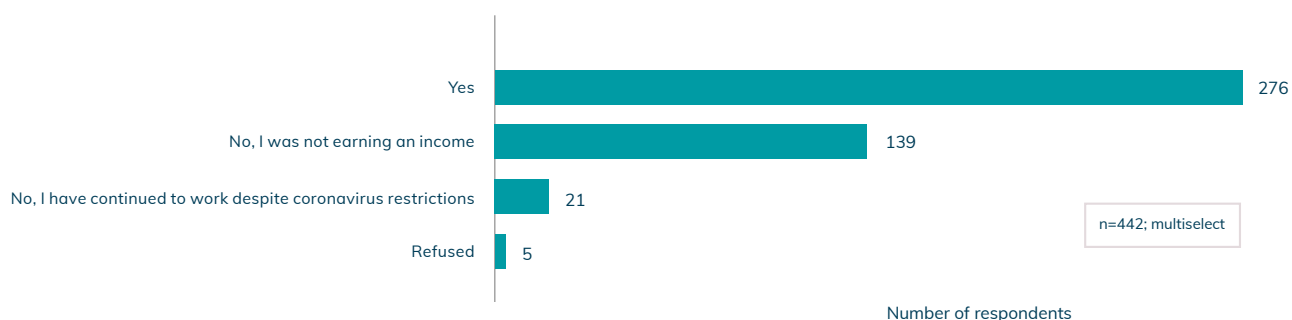
#### Loss of income reported by the majority:

##### Education level, gender and status as major factors

As Tunisia went into lockdown at the end of March, key informants have reported on the high numbers of refugees and migrants losing their job, estimating that around three quarters of all those employed in Greater Tunis had lost their main source of income. Indeed, according to 4Mi COVID-19 data collected between April and June 2020, 62% (276/442) of respondents in Tunis, Ariana, Ben Arous and Manouba had lost their jobs due to restrictions implemented by the authorities to stop the spread of COVID-19, while 5% (21/442) could continue working (the remaining respondents were not employed at the time of the survey or refused to answer the question).

Looking at more recent figures from July and August 2020,<sup>27</sup> 49% (94/180) reported a loss of income due to COVID-19, followed by respondents reporting they did not previously have an income (27%, 51/180), those who reported having lost (non-employment) income from family (15%, 28/180), and those who had continued working and earned the same income (9%, 17/180). From those that continued working, although small in number, a majority was highly educated (having completed a university degree), whereas the majority of those citing having lost income had finalised secondary school or vocational training. Although this finding has to be met with caution, given a small sample size, surveyed women seemed to be more likely to keep their job than men in Greater Tunis in July and August.<sup>28</sup>

**Figure 5: “Have you lost income due to coronavirus restrictions?” (April - June)**



Finally, when focusing on status, the data suggest no relationship between holding legal documentation and maintaining income: out of those who reported having continued receiving the same income (17 respondents), 5 respondents reported to reside in Greater Tunis irregularly, while another 5 were permanent residents and the remainder were refugees, temporary residents and 1 asylum seeker. However, it is to be noted that from the subset of respondents that reported not having lost income due to not being employed at the time, the majority was composed of asylum seekers, permanent residents or temporary residents (43/51).

In order to afford basic needs (including rent, sanitary items, food or PPE) during the pandemic and despite losing income generating activities, a majority of respondents and key informants indicated a recurrent implementation of negative coping mechanisms to compensate for a loss of income and to meet certain expenses (mainly rent and basic necessities), such as using up savings.

#### COVID-19 further accelerated housing insecurity and pushed tenants to less secure neighbourhoods

As a result of the restrictions implemented by the authorities to limit the spread of COVID-19, a first analysis indicates that a number of refugees and migrants had to abandon their homes due to a lack of sufficient resources and lost income. According to 4Mi COVID-19 data collected between April and June 2020 around Greater Tunis, 34% (94/276)<sup>29</sup> of respondents reported the loss of their homes (either by eviction or as a negative coping mechanism when moving to riskier neighbourhoods to afford other basic needs) as a consequence of the loss of income during the pandemic. While some respondents mentioned they could keep their accommodation as their landlord was flexible (freezing of the rent, delays in

<sup>27</sup> Comparisons between different timeframes in the 4Mi data are to be met with caution as the 4Mi survey does not have a longitudinal analysis approach, and livelihood opportunities, personal decisions and other factors might not be comparable over time.

<sup>28</sup> Out of 17 respondents who reported having kept their income, 10 were women and 7 were men. At the same time, women composed a smaller part of the total sample (40%, 72/180) compared to men (60%, 108/180).

<sup>29</sup> This is a subset from the 4Mi COVID-19 survey running between April and June, as the indicator in question is part of a follow-up question using a skip logic and therefore only answered by respondents who reported having lost income as a consequence of COVID-19.



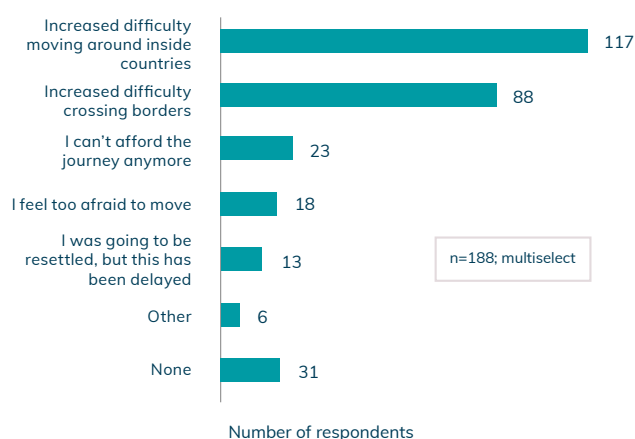
payments of rents...), a majority of landlords reportedly did not follow governmental recommendations in this regard and stuck to pre-COVID-19 rental arrangements, at a time when a majority of refugees and migrants had lost their income.

4Mi COVID-19 data collected in July and August 2020, after most COVID-19 restrictions were lifted, shows less indications of an impact on housing, with 3 out of 180 respondents reporting the loss of housing as a consequence of having lost income. However, on another note, it has been reported that the loss of income has pushed a number of refugees and migrants to neighbourhoods offering cheap but less secure rents and poorer housing conditions (overcrowding in particular). In the trade-off between security, comfort and price, the 'economic effect' seems to be largely prevalent in times of (post-)crisis and for individuals with little or no savings.

### COVID-19 impacted mobility

In terms of the impacts of COVID-19 on mobility, Figure 2 reveals that the greatest shares of respondents in Greater Tunis experienced difficulties moving within Tunisia and across borders since the outbreak. Additionally, 31 respondents said they were either too afraid or too constrained to move, suggesting they may be experiencing involuntary immobility.

**Figure 6: “What impact has the coronavirus crisis had on your migration journey?”**



Some refugees and migrants explained that increased economic constraints led to a delaying of their plans to continue the journey. This aligns with the 4Mi data in Figure 2 and what we know from migration theory, that people need some minimum level of capabilities to engage in migration. In terms of economic constraints, the temporary closure of government offices has further aggravated the situation for refugees and migrants who have to pay a fine to leave the territory, and has had a lasting impact on their situation as irregular migrants:

**“Popular neighbourhoods change all the time - it's always a balance between cheap rent and safety for everyone. [...] In Dar Fadhal and Bhar Lazreg, they are forced to live there because the rent is cheap. [...] I have listened to some horrible stories from Dar Fadhal. It is a risk to live in this neighbourhood.”**

(Ivorian woman, 26 years' old)

While authorities announced they would freeze the penalisation of irregular stay in Tunisia during the COVID-19 lockdown due to the closure of administrations,<sup>30</sup> refugees and migrants reportedly feared that certain inertia in the implementation of this ad-hoc rule would still have consequences for them.

### The risk-multiplier effect of COVID-19

Widespread loss of income, generated (involuntary) immobility, as well as elevating levels of stress and potential irregular/restricted access to basic goods that were directly or indirectly caused by the impacts of COVID-19 have had a risk-multiplying effect on refugee and migrant populations in Greater Tunis. The exhaustion of savings through weakening coping mechanisms, and the prioritisation of economic factors over safety and comfort have further increased their vulnerability and potentially eroded earlier set up safety nets and coping mechanisms.

### Received assistance and access to services

**Notable assistance and solidarity from local organisations, authorities and Tunisians, but lack of coordination between institutional actors**

KIs representing (I)NGOs, CSOs and the UN reported on how the COVID-19 crisis impacted their workload, with a representative from Terre d'Asile Tunisie detailing:

**“Our workload has tripled during the onset of the pandemic, while we have been working round the clock.”**

The majority of refugees and migrants reported on the extra assistance they had received from these organisations, particularly underlining the responsiveness and accessibility to locally rooted, often smaller, (I)NGOs and CSOs, and their critical role in providing assistance of all sorts during the lockdown.

On another note, a considerable number of refugees and migrants describes having experienced spontaneous support and solidarity from Tunisians and specific local authorities during the COVID-19 pandemic, with some going as far as reporting they experienced much less incidents of discrimination compared to the period before. An Ivorian woman (age unknown) details:

30 Afrikyes (2020, 9 July). [Tunisie: Décret gouvernemental sur l'annulation des pénalités.](#)



**“You walk, you pass a Tunisian, he parks his car, he goes shopping, and he gives you a bag [of supplies]. Or, for those with babies, they would give diapers and packs of milk. These are spontaneous individual initiatives, that’s what it’s all about, sincerely...”**

A key informant representative from the La Marsa town hall reported that the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the complexity of mixed migration dynamics to the municipality personnel, and the levels of vulnerability of which refugees and migrants are subject, and especially related to a loss of income and the lack of support mechanisms. The municipality, therefore, set up a specific municipal support programme to deliver basic needs assistance, and aims to work on a local level to put migration governance on the agenda and to pledge for a new legal framework on the status and rights of refugees and migrants in Tunisia through advocacy efforts. As reported, assistance support projects during COVID-19 were also setup by the Ariana and Raoued municipalities, among others in Greater Tunis. All three municipality KIs further stressed the need for an integrated database to be able to support the most vulnerable local individuals, and for a coordination between local administrations, NGOs and CSOs to effectively increase outreach to all refugees and migrants in need of assistance. Although several NGOs reported coordination effort being made with the government during the COVID-19 crisis, such relationship seem to have been engaged through ad hoc channels more than through a coordinated system at the national level.

#### **Lack of information towards assistance by national authorities**

A high number of refugees and migrants reports not having been informed on a platform set up by national authorities to provide specific indicated support to refugees and migrants during the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>31</sup> Those who reported they knew about the platform mostly did not make use of it, as they described it was not accessible enough in terms of language, formulation and type of questions. This sentiment is shared by a KI from the Raoued municipality, reporting that refugees and migrants had mentioned having trouble understanding the authorities’ online assistance platform due to a perceived language barrier (for those who do not read Arabic or French). This difference was further fueled by the general mistrust some respondents reported about sharing personal data online and with authorities. Moreover, there had been no apparent communication and coordination between national and local authorities on the existence and use of the platform. However, on another note, a KI working for an NGO pointed out that

**“Although the platform is not [without flaws], it is the first time ever the Tunisian authorities have set up something specifically aimed at helping refugees and migrants”**, deeming it a positive development and a work in progress.

#### **A perceived increase in discrimination and xenophobia**

While instances of solidarity were indeed observed during the pandemic and experienced by respondents, 4Mi data collected in July and August 2020 reveal that 54 out of 180 respondents (close to one third) in Greater Tunis said they were not able to access health care because of discrimination against foreigners. Moreover, 21 out of 180 (12%) perceived increased racism and xenophobia in their day-to-day lives since the COVID-19 outbreak. An Ivorian woman (28 years’ old) residing in Dar Fadhal reported that, in principle, all refugees and migrants have access to health facilities, but that she has clearly noted discriminatory behaviour, as Tunisian citizens are given priority in treatment.

#### **Outlook**

While this section has highlighted many of the challenges experienced by refugees and migrants as a result of the pandemic, some of these challenges are being alleviated through assistance programmes and as refugees and migrants develop coping mechanisms to adapt to the new “normal” of COVID-19. Out of 4Mi respondents interviewed in Tunis during the months of July and August (n=180), a majority (105/180) either described the situation related to the pandemic as “better than before” or “back to how it was before.” 40% (72/180) reported that the situation had turned “worse than before,” or “had not changed since it began” (while 2%, 3/180, reported “I don’t know”). Furthermore, the data demonstrate differences between neighbourhoods. In the city centre, a majority reported “it was getting worse” or “no change since it began” (15/28), whereas in El Aouina, 21 out of 30 respondents described the situation as “getting better” or “back to how it was before.” This geographical difference is also reported by a Malian woman (36 years old):

**“We have started working in El Aouina, but I know migrants living in Dar Fadhal that have been unemployed up until now. This is the same for migrants living more towards [the area of] La Soukra.”**

<sup>31</sup> <http://www.oide-covid19.tn>

## 8. Conclusions and recommendations

### Conclusions

While traditionally Tunisia has been described as a country of emigration, this study has outlined the different ways in which we can study both Tunisia and in particular its capital city, Tunis, as a space of mixed migration. Since 2011, the country, and Tunis specifically, has increasingly welcomed refugees and migrants fleeing civil unrest and war, particularly from Syria and Libya, including sub-Saharan residents and/or transiting Libya. Moreover, Tunisia's visa-free entry policy towards a number of countries in mainly West Africa has spurred different types of migration, including refugees fleeing persecution and conflict, but also student and labour migrants. Over time, Greater Tunis has become a hub for these, often hypermobile, and heterogeneous populations.

An image of Greater Tunis arises as a short to mid-term settlement location for most refugees and migrants, often linked to opportunities that (are perceived to) exist in and around the city. On the one hand, from a legal perspective, there is an absence of domestic legislation to effectively safeguard refugees' and migrants' rights and define their status. On the other hand, there are indications this is not perceived as a particular obstacle to access employment, as job opportunities without a contract are reported commonplace. Working without a contract, and without being protected by law, generates considerable vulnerability to different types of protection violations in and outside the work environment, including exploitation, discrimination and harassment. In the absence of national and local policies working towards the social and labour integration of refugees and migrants in the city, NGOs and CSOs play a vital role in providing assistance.

Based on data from MMC/4Mi, this study argued that COVID-19 represented a major shock to the lives of refugees and migrants, eroding livelihood opportunities, pushing migrants to resort to negative coping mechanisms, and increasing pre-existing vulnerabilities. On the other hand, solidarity efforts from organisations, local authorities and Tunisians have reportedly had a positive impact on alleviating the situation. Moreover, the impact of the pandemic seems to have further pointed out the need for coordination and structure between national and local institutions to improve knowledge on refugees and migrants residing in Greater Tunis and the capacity to adequately support and assist them.

### Recommendations

Based on these findings, this study puts forward the following recommendations for programming and policy:

1. Implement the objectives and actions of the Global Compact for Migration (GCM), adopted by Tunisia. The GCM also offers a blue print for targeted responses to COVID-19 for people on the move. For example, access to health care should be available for all - irrespective of migration status ; maintaining "firewalls" between immigration enforcement and access to services; releasing migrants from immigration detention; extending work and residency permits; regularising status; eliminating discrimination and promoting evidence-based public discourse on migration.<sup>32</sup>
2. Support the creation of a coordination body between administrative bodies and the humanitarian sector to overcome the existing gaps on quantitative and qualitative information on mixed migration dynamics to, in and around Greater Tunis.
3. Foster coordination between authorities, NGOs and CSOs, both at the national and local levels, on how to improve support and assistance refugees and migrants in Greater Tunis, making use of the capacity and knowledge already available through involving the humanitarian sector, including particularly local NGOs and CSOs.
4. Rely on the vibrant CSOs network across Tunisia to further support grassroots initiatives supporting refugees and migrants' socio-economic integration in Tunis.
5. Support existing advocacy groups and CSOs to carry their message at the national level and with the relevant institutions in order to promote migrants and refugees' rights and concerns.
6. Advocate for a politico-judicial framework that recognises the existence of refugees and migrants, regardless of status, on Tunisian soil, conforming to the latest revised Tunisian constitution from 2014, providing clear guidelines on their rights and obligations while residing in Tunisia, as well as to work towards a solution for refugees and migrants who are not able to leave the country due to accumulated fines.

32 For more detailed findings and recommendations on the relevance and use of the GCM in the COVID-19 response see Mixed Migration Centre (2020), [COVID-19 and the Global Compact for Migration. Is a Compact born in a crisis born again in the whirlwinds of three global crises](#); and United Nations Network on Migration (2020), [The Global Compact for Migration \(GCM\): Well Governed Migration as an Essential Element of Effective COVID-19 Response](#).

# Annex: Interviews conducted

**Table 2: Key Informant Interviews**

#	Date	Organisation
1	10/08/2020	Association Tunisienne de la Santé de la Reproduction (ATSR - <i>Tunisian Association of Reproductive Health</i> )
2	11/08/2020	Instance Nationale de Lutte contre la Traite des Personnes (INLTP - <i>National Body for the Fight against Human Trafficking</i> )
3	12/08/2020	United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)
4	12/08/2020	Arab Institute for Human Rights (AIHR)
5	12/08/2020	Conseil Tunisien pour les Réfugiés (CTR - <i>Tunisian Refugee Council</i> )
6	12/08/2020	Office Français de l'Immigration et de l'Intégration (OFII - <i>French Office for Immigration and Integration</i> )
7	17/08/2020	Raoued Municipality
8	19/08/2020	Ariana Municipality
9	19/08/2020	Terre d'Asile Tunisia
10	21/08/2020	La Marsa Municipality

**Table 3: Refugee and Migrant Interviews**

#	Date	Country of Origin	Gender	Location
1	01/04/2020	Côte d'Ivoire	Female	La Soukra
2	02/04/2020	Côte d'Ivoire	Female	Raoued
3	18/08/2020	Mali	Male	Cité Mansoura (Ariana)
4	19/08/2020	Côte d'Ivoire	Female	Ariana
5	19/08/2020	Guinea	Female	El Aouina
6	20/08/2020	Syria	Male	Ariana
7	20/08/2020	Côte d'Ivoire	Male	Ain Zaghouan
8	22/08/2020	Côte d'Ivoire	Male	La Marsa
9	24/08/2020	Libya	Female	Les Berges du Lac 2
10	24/08/2020	Côte d'Ivoire	Female	La Marsa
11	25/08/2020	Mali	Female	Cité Wahat (El Aouina)
12	25/08/2020	Libya	Male	.. <sup>33</sup>
13	25/08/2020	Sudan	Male	El Aouina
14	26/08/2020	Sudan	Male	La Marsa
15	26/08/2020	Côte d'Ivoire	Female	La Soukra
16	28/08/2020	Côte d'Ivoire	Male	Ain Zaghouan
17	30/08/2020	Cameroon	Male	Ettadhamen
18	30/08/2020	Central African Republic	Male	La Soukra
19	31/08/2020	Sudan	Male	City Centre
20	01/09/2020	Cameroon	Female	City Centre
21	17/09/2020	Côte d'Ivoire	Female	Dar Fadhal (La Soukra)
22	21/09/2020	Burkina Faso	Female	Le Kram

<sup>33</sup> The location of this respondent is kept hidden for safety reasons.





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

The MMC is part of and governed by the Danish Refugee Council (DRC). Global and regional MMC teams are based in Amman, Copenhagen, Dakar, Geneva, Nairobi, Tunis, Bogota and Bangkok.

For more information visit:  
**[Mixedmigration.org](https://Mixedmigration.org)**

