

## MIXED MIGRATION IN URBAN SETTINGS

Exploring risks, opportunities and the impact  
of COVID-19 on refugees and migrants in  
Greater Tunis and Bamako



*“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, Tunis

*“Bamako is just a steppingstone because I was not able to go where I was trying to go. So, I found myself stuck here. Now, I am doing my best to return to Dakar but with the coronavirus the routes and the places are closed. Right now I am hearing that it is re-opening everywhere but I am waiting a little because I don’t have money in my hands.”*

Liberian woman, age unknown, Sotuba ACI, Bamako

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<http://www.mixedmigration.org/resource/urban-case-study-tunis/>

## About this report

This report was commissioned and financed by the French Ministry of European and Foreign Affairs (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.

The report presents two case studies on mixed migration in urban settings, conducted simultaneously and independently in Greater Tunis (Tunisia) and Bamako (Mali) between August and September 2020. Both cases studies, after a brief overview of the current mixed migration dynamics in the two cities and the respective national migration policy frameworks, seek to explore mixed migration dynamics from three complementary thematic lenses: 1) Tunis and Bamako as a cities of opportunities; 2) Tunis and Bamako as cities of risks and 3) Tunis and Bamako during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The research methods, data sources and analysis structure have been aligned across both case studies, in an attempt to allow the reader to draw comparisons between the specific situation of refugees and migrants in both cities.

Besides the Bamako and Tunis case studies included in this report, MMC has carried out similar urban case studies in Bogota, Nairobi and Kuala Lumpur, which can be found here:

[Urban case study in Bogota](#)

[Urban case study in Nairobi](#)

[Urban case study in Kuala Lumpur](#)

Also the 2020 edition of our 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 Mixed Migration Centre and do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of the Danish Refugee Council 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.

\* The two cases studies, merged in this report for easier sharing with Rabat Process members, are published separately as part of an urban migration case studies series, along with similar studies in Bogota, Kuala Lumpur and Nairobi, hence the two separate suggested citations.

# Foreword

Martijn Pluim, Director of Migration Dialogues & Cooperation, International Centre for Migration Policy Development; Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères and Roberto Forin, Global Programme Coordinator, Mixed Migration Centre.

We are living in a context of accelerating urbanisation, and the future of migration will increasingly be shaped by how cities address the issue. Cities are key destinations for internal and international migrants, whether for permanent residence, temporary settlement or short-term transit. Urban migration is central to intra-regional migration, as cities provide opportunities for millions of people on the move and boost regional economic growth. A city can move from being a transit hub with a highly mobile migrant population, to becoming 'home' to refugees and migrants who are blocked from moving on, and urban authorities are facing enormous challenges to provide services and develop policy with an inadequate body of evidence. Urban policy cannot ignore migration and migration policies cannot ignore the role played by cities.

Since the beginning of 2020, at the Mixed Migration Centre, we have focused on mixed migration in urban areas because we believe it to be increasingly critical for a better understanding of future migration dynamics and, consequently, for the identification of appropriate responses and solutions. Besides the Bamako and Tunis cases studies included in this report, we have dedicated our annual thematic report, the Mixed Migration Review 2020, to the theme of urban migration and we have also carried out the similar urban case studies in Bogota, Nairobi and Kuala Lumpur.

The Bamako and Tunis case studies were requested by the Ministère Français de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères as part of its work on migration and development aimed, among other things, at promoting a balanced vision of migration founded on effective migration management systems at all levels (local, national, international). The study will be used, generally, to strengthen policy-makers' understanding of the challenges, risks and opportunities that cities represent for refugees and migrants and vice-versa. More specifically, it will feed into the Rabat Process (Euro-African Dialogue on Migration and Development) – an intergovernmental migration dialogue in which France is particularly involved (founding member, Chair from June 2019 to December 2020) – to promote evidence-based policymaking and exchanges which are driven by concrete data. The results of the study will be presented at a Rabat Process Thematic Meeting on Cities, Local Authorities and Migration, organised by France and the ICMPD, to be held in Paris in 2021.

## About MMC

The Mixed Migration Centre (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)

RESEARCHED AND WRITTEN BY:



COMMISSIONED BY:



IN COLLABORATION WITH:



SUPPORTED BY:



## 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.

## 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.



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# Glossary

<b>4Mi</b>	Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism Initiative
<b>AME</b>	Association Malienne des Expulsés (Malian Association for Deportees)
<b>ARACEM</b>	Association des Refoulés de l'Afrique Centrale au Mali (Association of Central African Refoulés in Mali)
<b>CIGEM</b>	Centre d'Information et de Gestion des Migrations (Center for Migration Management and Information)
<b>CREDD</b>	Cadre Stratégique Pour la Relance Économique et le Développement Durable (Strategic Framework for Economic Recovery and Sustainable Development)
<b>COVID-19</b>	Corona Virus Disease 2019
<b>CSO</b>	Civil Society Organisation
<b>DNDS</b>	Direction Nationale du Développement Social (National Directorate of Social Development)
<b>DRC</b>	Danish Refugee Council
<b>ECOWAS</b>	Economic Community of West African States
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>FCDO</b>	Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
<b>ICMPD</b>	International Centre for Migration Policy Dialogue
<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>MME</b>	Ministère des maliens de l'extérieur (Ministry for Malians Abroad)
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organisation
<b>PONAM</b>	Politique Nationale de Migration (National Migration Policy)
<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.

# Key findings – Bamako

## Migration dynamics in Bamako

- Bamako is emphasised first and foremost to be a city of transit, but is also a destination in its own right and a city of return.
- The distinction between transit and destination is not always clear-cut, as also those who do not intend Bamako to be their destination may end up having a protracted stay.

## Migration policy landscape in Mali

- Mali's National Migration Policy (PONAM) is formulated primarily to safeguard and expand migration opportunities related to the migration of Malian citizens, and to leverage their contributions for development. While some aspects of the policy do account for migration of foreigners to Mali, attracting them and incorporating them into the development of the country does not appear to be an objective of the policy. The same is true of Mali's Strategic Framework for Economic Recovery and Sustainable Development (CREDD).
- Although PONAM and CREDD both emphasise the importance of remittances and development contributions on the part of diaspora, it appears that this is still an area that could benefit from elaboration of concrete policies and programs.

## Bamako, migration and opportunities

- Some specific professions in which migrants bring expertise to Bamako include: car mechanics, electricians, heavy equipment operators (primarily for mining), opticians, woodworkers, practitioners of traditional medicine, dressmakers and IT specialists.
- A favorable exchange rate with certain neighbouring countries (Guinea, Mauritania) and a reasonable cost of living are seen as facilitating savings on the part of refugees and migrants.
- Given that Bamako is the capital and largest city in Mali, there is a particular concentration of organisations (state structures, civil society, NGOs and international organisations) which can support expulsés and migrants de retour with reception, accommodation, orientation and legal, administrative, social and medical assistance. Diaspora and the remittances they contribute provide opportunities for Bamako and for Mali more broadly. They support the basic needs and improve the quality of life of families (increasing access to health and education etc.), finance investments for the wider community (construction of dams, mosques, schools, health centres, etc.), enhance human capital through new skills and knowledge and generate employment opportunities.

## Bamako, migration and risks

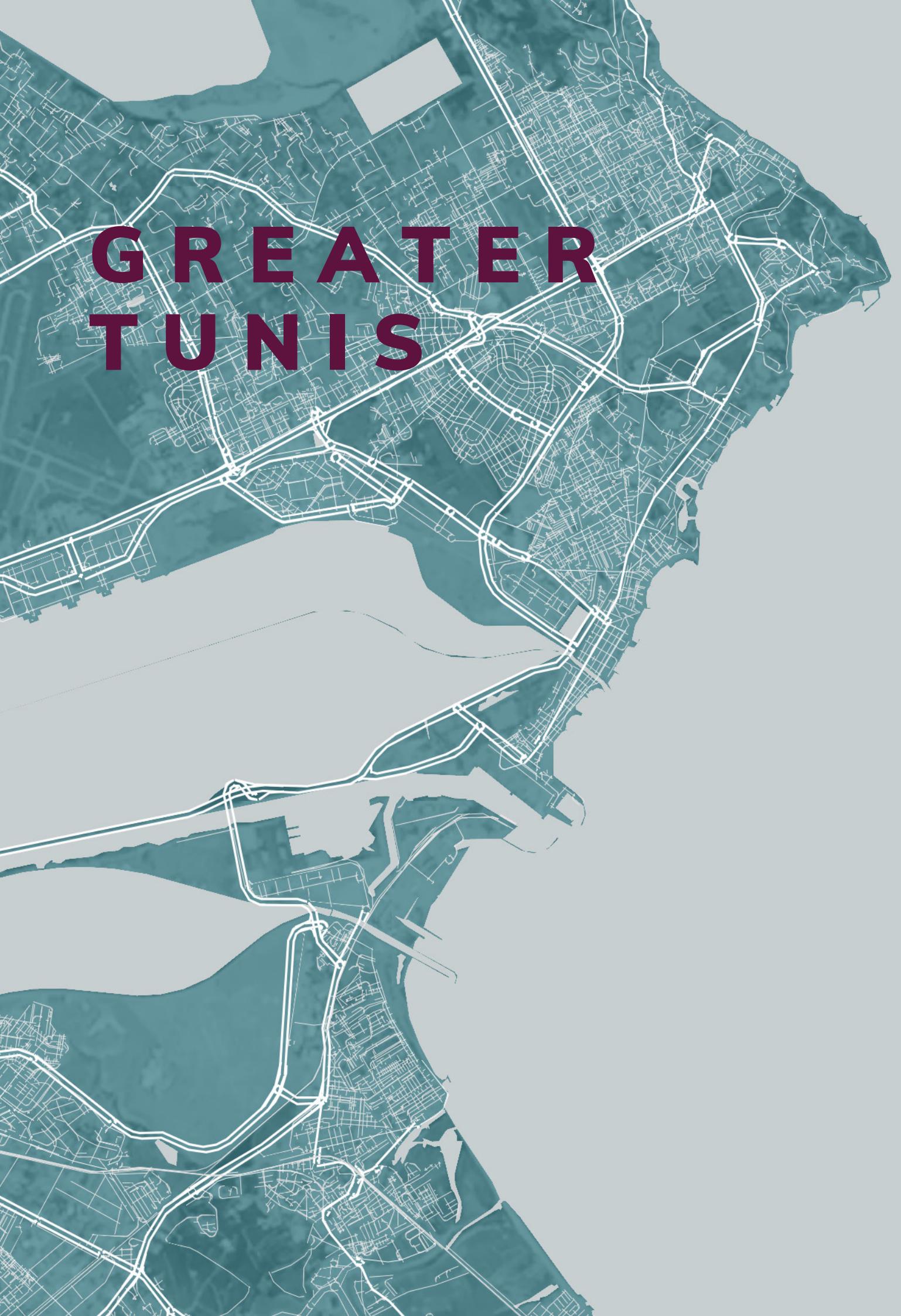
- According to 4Mi data, extortion is the protection incident reported to have taken place in Bamako by the highest proportion of respondents (57%). It is followed by physical abuse (16%), detention (11%), robbery (8%), witnessing or experiencing sexual assault or harassment (5%), witnessing migrant death (2%), and kidnapping (1%).
- Security forces/police/military are the category of actors alleged to have perpetrated the highest number of three types of protection incident: detention (99%), physical abuse (81%) and sexual assault/harassment (43%). Single unknown individuals are frequently cited in cases of death (47%), robbery (43%) and kidnapping (47%). Groups of thugs and criminal gangs are also prominent among reported perpetrators for the latter two incidents (30% and 27% respectively).
- Key informants and migrant respondents tend to emphasise socioeconomic risks faced by refugees and migrants in Bamako over risks associated with violence and aggression. Migrant respondents seemingly found assistance to be fairly readily available in the city.

## Bamako, migration and COVID-19

- According to 4Mi COVID-19 data, 79% of refugees and migrants interviewed in Bamako said that they could access health services if they exhibited symptoms of COVID-19.
- 4Mi COVID-19 data suggests that loss of income in the context of the pandemic is concentrated among female refugees and migrants; for the data collected in Bamako in July 2020, all respondents who reported a loss of income were women.
- Almost half of 4Mi respondents in Bamako (48%) reported that in the face of the pandemic, they had decided to stay where they were for longer. In every other location in Mali where respondents were surveyed, this percentage was substantially lower. This may be seen to dovetail with other findings which point to Bamako's relatively welcoming nature and accessibility of assistance.



# GREATER TUNIS



# 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.

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)?

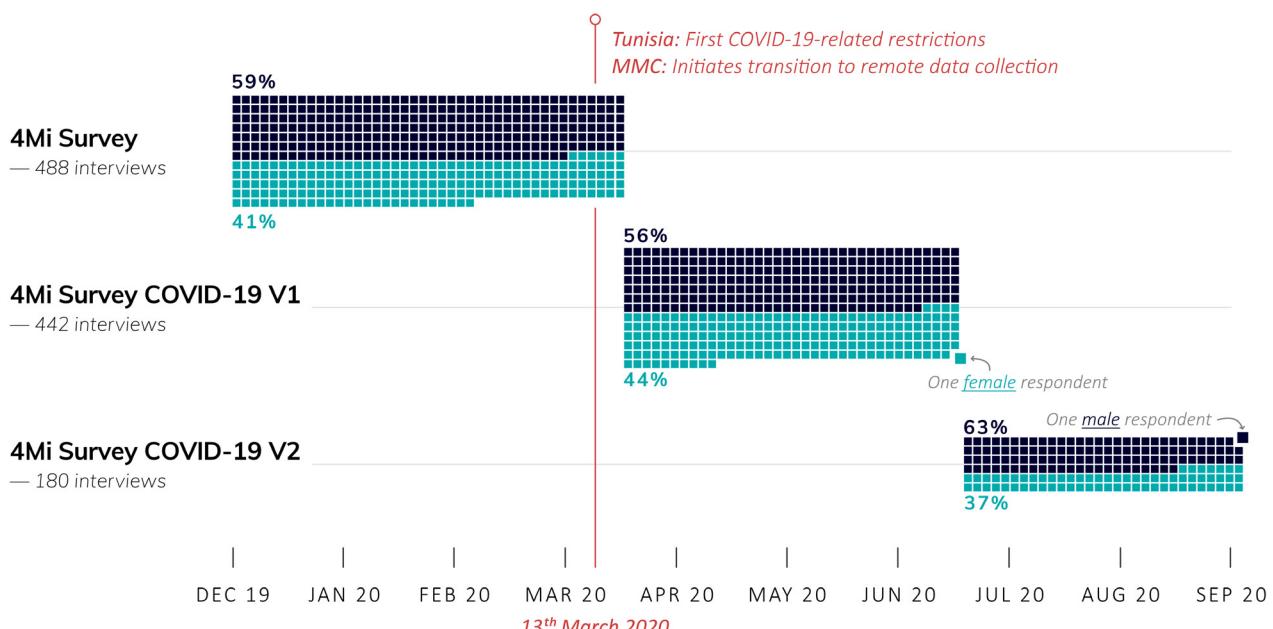
Set up in 2014, 4Mi is a unique network of field monitors situated along frequently used routes and in major migratory hubs. It aims to offer a regular, standardised, quantitative and globalised, system of collecting primary data on mixed migration. 4Mi predominantly uses a closed question survey to 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**

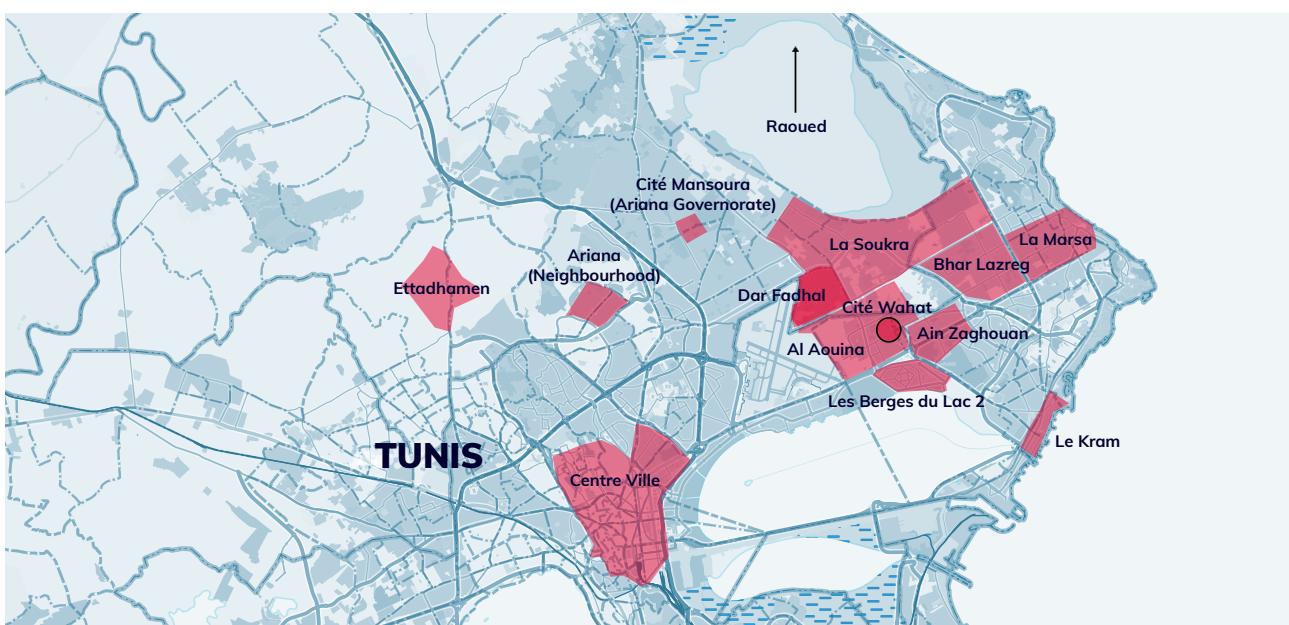


## Qualitative data

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**

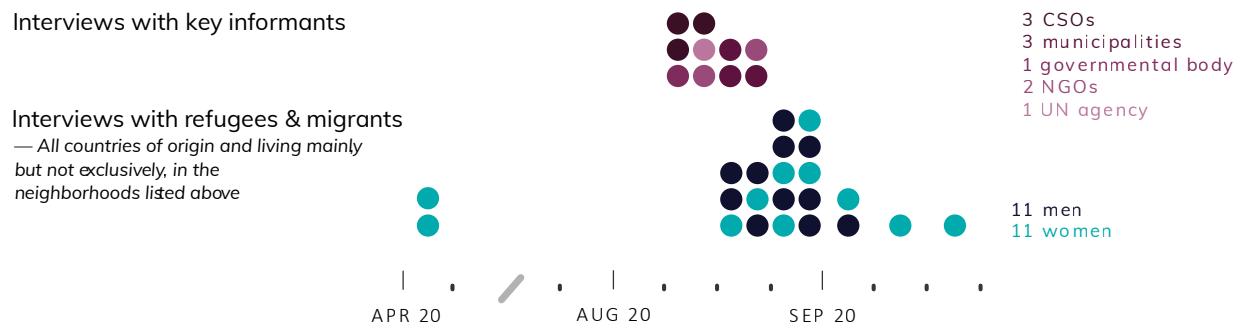


**Table 1: Targeted municipalities and neighbourhoods in Greater Tunis**

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 Zaghouan / 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.

**Figure 3: Qualitative data collection overview**



### 3. Migration dynamics in Tunis

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.

#### Mixed migration landscape

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>

Next to the arrival of Libyans and sub-Saharan Africans fleeing protracted conflict since 2011, movements that have marked the mixed migration landscape in Greater Tunis over the past decade include, although not exclusively, the arrival and settlement of Syrian refugees and the migration of West African and Central African students seeking educational opportunities and qualifying for visa-free entry.<sup>9</sup> In addition, INGOs and UN agencies have reported the rise of victims of human trafficking in the city, with Ivorians representing a large share of victims.<sup>10</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

4 Sebag, P. (1998). Tunis: histoire d'une ville. Paris : Éditions L'Harmattan.

5 Institut Nationale de Statistiques (INS) (2014). [Résultats du recensement 2014 par gouvernorat](#).

6 At the time of writing, the Institut National de la Statistique (INS) and the Office National des Migrations (ONM) is carrying out a census of residing migrants in Greater Tunis (and nation-wide) with the objectives "to quantify the presence of migrant populations to inform Tunisia's migration policy-making, and to study the causes, drivers, dynamics and consequences of international migration and the migration-development nexus." Results to be finalised in 2021. Source: Terre d'Asile Tunisie.

7 Camilli, A. & Paynter, E. (2020, 22 January). [Tunisia: North Africa's overlooked migration hub](#). The New Humanitarian.

8 Foroudi, L. (2020, 1 September). [COVID-19 fallout drives Tunisians to Italy despite deportations](#). The New Humanitarian.

9 Boubakri, H. (2015). Migration et asile en Tunisie depuis 2011 : vers de nouvelles figures migratoires ? Revue Européenne des Migrations Internationales 31 (3/4), p. 17-39.

10 IOM (2019, 11 May). [Combatting Trafficking in Persons Focus of Côte d'Ivoire-Tunisia Bilateral Co-operation](#).

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

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

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).

“ideal mix” of factors, providing a good environment for 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

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

card), enables one to obtain a signed work contract, and more stable employment situation. A 30-year-old Guinean woman with residency status commented:

**“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:

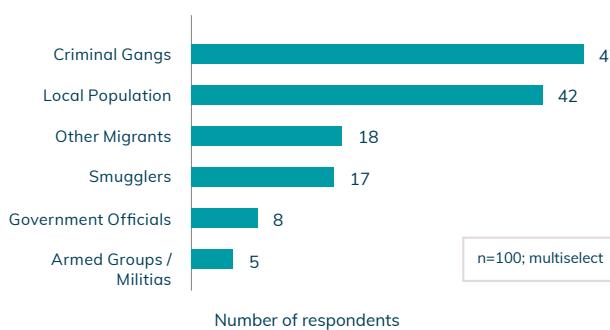
**“In Bhar Lazreg, there are all the risks. You have rape, assault... It is committed by Tunisians and often also by [sub-Saharan Africans] now. What we are now seeing among sub-Saharan [is that] there are groups that also allow themselves to burglarise among them. This was not the case before.”**

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.

25 <https://www.tamsstn.org>

26 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

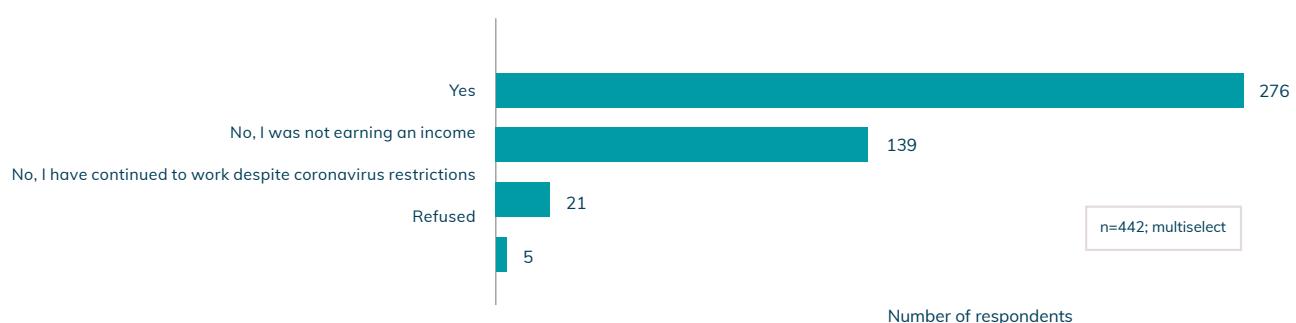
### Loss of income reported by the majority:

#### 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)**



27 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.

28 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).

29 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.

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

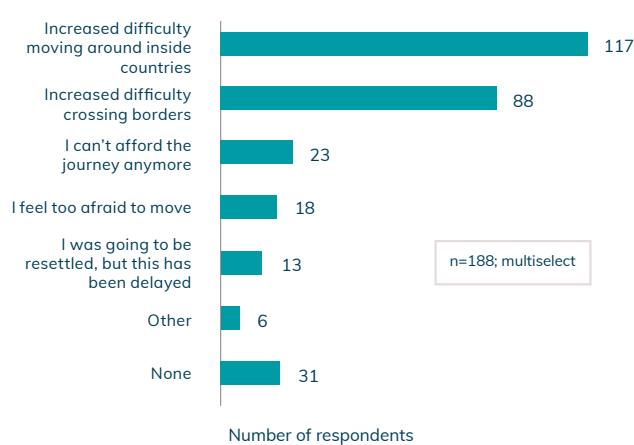
payments of rents...), a majority of landlords reportedly did not follow governmental recommendations in this regard and stuck to pre-COVID-19 rental arrangements, at a time when a majority of refugees and migrants had lost their income.

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 two 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.”**

31 <http://www.aide-covid19.tn>

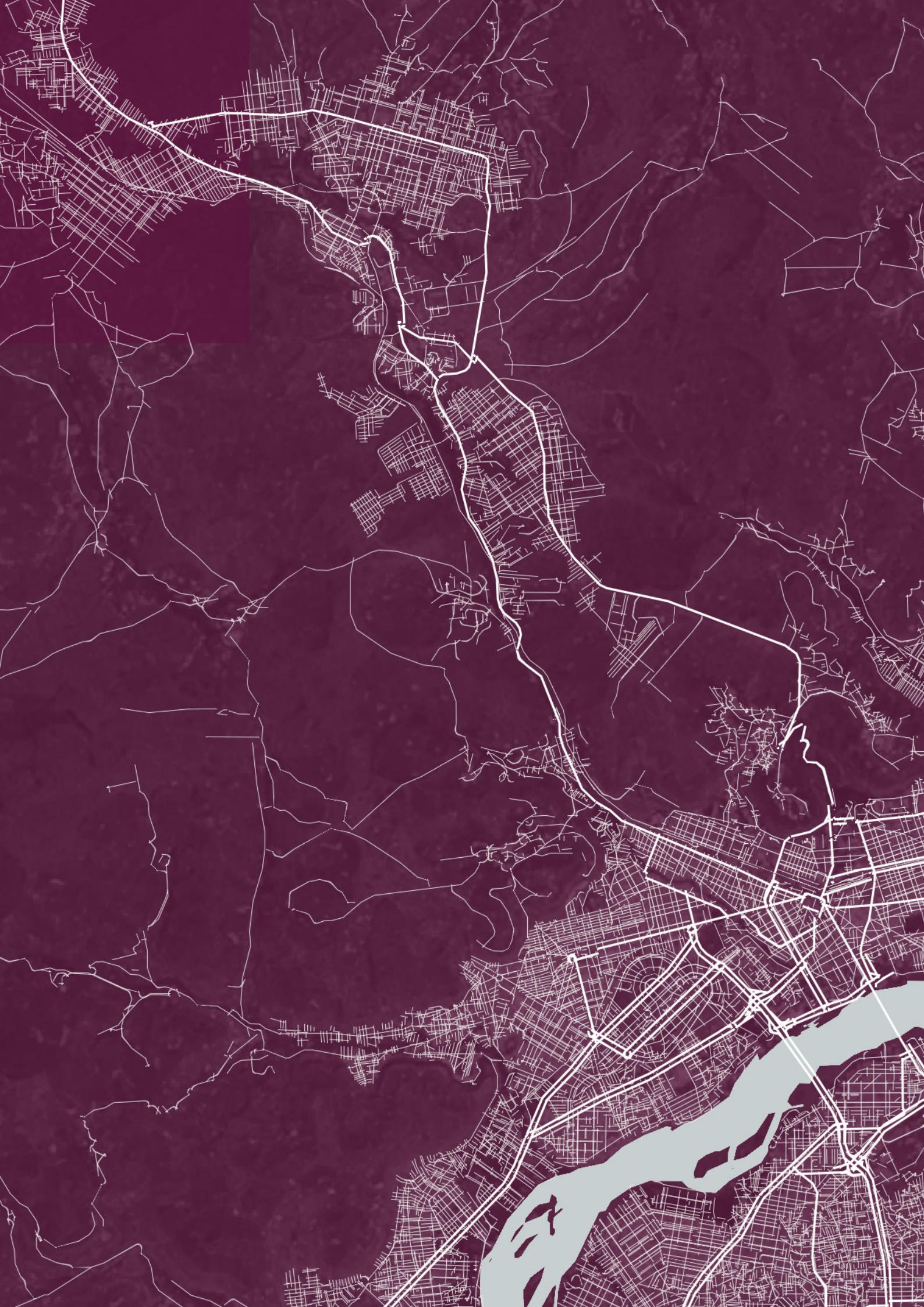
## 8. Conclusion

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 resding 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.





# BAMAKO



# 1. Introduction

Bamako is an important city of transit, destination and return for refugees and migrants in West Africa. After a brief overview of the current mixed migration dynamics in the city and the national migration policy framework this case study seeks to explore mixed migration dynamics in Bamako from three complementary thematic lenses: 1) Bamako as a city of opportunities; 2) Bamako as city of risks and 3) Bamako during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Bamako, migration and opportunities

The largest concentration of foreigners in Mali is found in Bamako. It is also the main destination for internal rural to urban migration, and is an important location for expulsés and migrants de retour. This case study aims to better understand whether and to what extent Bamako is seen as a **city of opportunity**, and by whom, as well as what **opportunities migration can provide for Bamako**, particularly related to development. It examines the contributions of refugees and migrants to the city, and highlights what the city can give back to these groups. Given the importance of emigration of Malians abroad and their impact on Mali's economy and society, it also looks at the role of diaspora and remittances in Bamako's development, doing so against the backdrop of Mali's National Migration Policy (PONAM).

## Bamako, migration and risks

While Bamako may not be seen as a “**risky city**” in the same vein as cities further north in Mali (for instance Mopti and Gao), where prevailing insecurity is much greater, MMC 4Mi data has nonetheless indicated that a substantial number of protection incidents occur there. The case study draws on this data to provide an overview of the types of protection incidents that are prevalent in Bamako, and who is reportedly responsible, while at the same time seeking to better understand perceptions of risk on the part of migrant respondents<sup>32</sup> and key informants in the city. It also looks to assess what opportunities are open to people on the move to receive support and assistance if they need it.

## Bamako, migration and COVID-19

Linked to the above, to understand both risks and opportunity in the current moment, it is important to take into consideration the **effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on refugees and migrants** in Bamako. Bamako was where the majority of cases in Mali were concentrated, at least in the initial months of the pandemic, and government measures to seek to curb the spread of the virus clearly caused disruptions in terms of free movement and for the economy and livelihoods.<sup>33</sup> As a population that may be seen as particularly vulnerable to these disruptions, this case study seeks to gauge how the pandemic has affected the daily lives and migration trajectories of refugees and migrants, as well as to understand to what extent they have been able to access assistance in the face of the pandemic.

<sup>32</sup> The term “migrant respondents” is used to differentiate this group from the second group of key informants (whose affiliations will be specified when and where possible given that some preferred their affiliation to remain anonymous) and from 4Mi survey respondents.

<sup>33</sup> Africanews (2020, 8 May). [Coronavirus - Mali: Michel H. Sidibé Ministre de la Santé et des Affaires Sociales : « Le Mali a un taux de Guérison D'environ 42% Contre 33% pour le Continent Africain ».](#)

## 2. Methodology

To explore the three axes of this study, MMC uses a mixed methodology, combining quantitative and qualitative data.

### Quantitative data

MMC's 4Mi core survey provides primary quantitative data on mixed migration dynamics, including individual profiles, migration drivers, intentions and aspirations, conditions and means of travel, smuggler economics, and destination choices. In this case study, data from the 4Mi core survey (herein referred to as "4Mi data") is used to shed light on protection incidents 4Mi respondents indicate took place in Bamako during the period February 2019-January 2020, as well as those reportedly responsible for them.

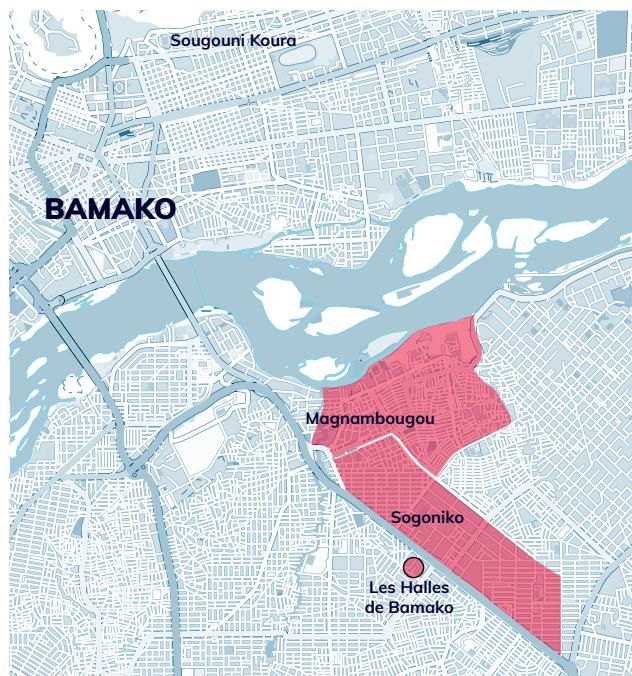
#### What is the Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism Initiative (4Mi)?

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.

Starting in April 2020, the 4Mi core survey was adapted to include a focus on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The first phase of the project (April to June) looked at the immediate impact of the pandemic on refugees and migrants with respondents being asked about their awareness of the illness and how to protect themselves, access to health services, needs and assistance received, as well as the impact of COVID-19 on their livelihoods and migration journeys. The second phase (July to date) looks at the more medium/longer term impact of the pandemic on mixed migration dynamics, namely of migration drivers, smuggling, protection risks and intended destinations. In this case study data from the 4Mi COVID-19 survey (herein referred to as the "4Mi COVID-19 data") is used to gauge how refugees and migrants in Bamako have been affected by the pandemic and government response measures.

Both surveys (4Mi core survey and 4Mi COVID-19

**Figure 7: Bamako - Map of the main areas of interest in the study**

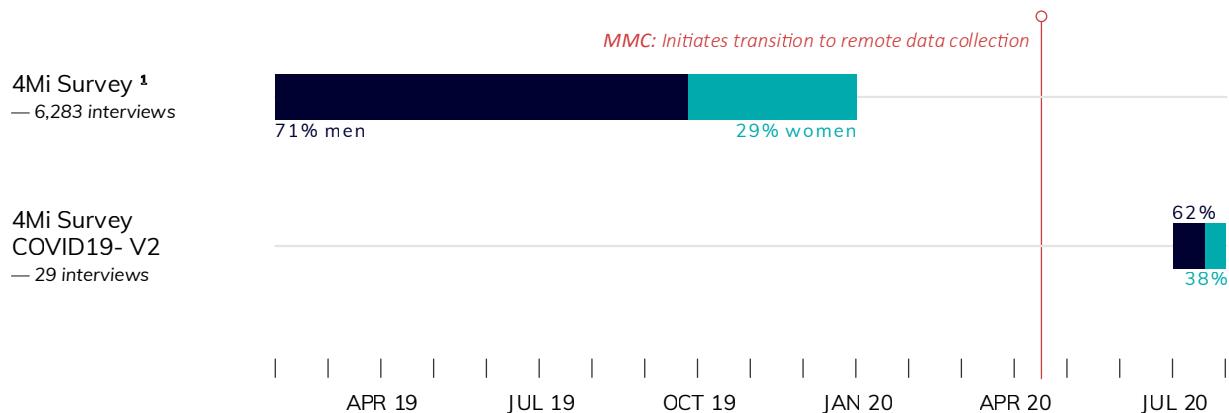


survey) follow the same sampling scheme, which includes refugees and migrants who are: 18 years' old and above who have been in Burkina Faso, Mali or Niger for less than one year at the time of interview (or in the case of the 4Mi COVID-19 data used in this case study, in Bamako specifically). The latter criterion allows for an emphasis on 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 and should not be considered to represent the entire refugee and migrant population in Bamako. Additionally, the responses of survey participants in the 4Mi survey cannot be independently verified, and response bias may be a factor. Nonetheless, the findings from the survey can provide important insights into the current situation refugees and migrants are facing in Bamako. Informed consent and anonymity were communicated clearly with participants before, during, and after the interviews.

4Mi data is not typically collected in Bamako, thus a specific data collection exercise was carried out in the city as of July 2020. Despite effort to quickly scale up data collection the total sample for the COVID-19 specific survey is relatively small (n=29). However, it can provide a snapshot of the situation faced by refugees and migrants in Bamako during the month of July.

**Figure 8: Quantitative data collection overview**



## Qualitative Data

In addition to this quantitative information, MMC conducted qualitative interviews with two groups of key informants: (i) 10 in depth interviews with mixed migration actors (government, NGOs, civil society organisations, transporteurs), and (ii) 6 in depth interviews with migrants in Bamako.<sup>35</sup> The sampling of this latter group aimed at diversity in terms of gender and country of origin, and it also sought to include both migrants in migrant shelters<sup>36</sup> and those outside. The nationalities and genders of the migrants ultimately interviewed were Guinean (3 males), Beninese (1 male), Cameroonian (1 female), Liberian (1 female). Informed consent was communicated clearly with participants before, during, and after the interviews. When requested

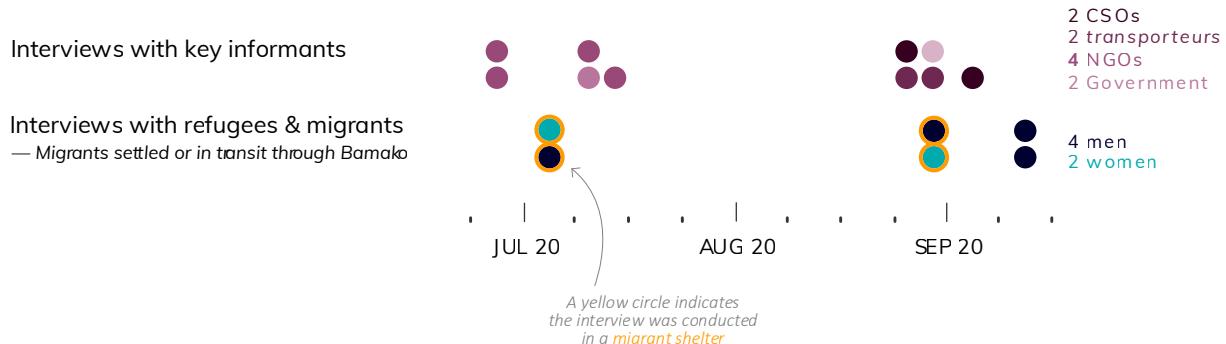
information has been verified with participants prior to publishing and carefully anonymised.

The qualitative data collection took place from June through September 2020.<sup>37</sup>

## Secondary sources

Secondary sources were referred to, primarily to provide information on migratory dynamics in Bamako and Mali, Malian government policy, and response to the COVID-19 pandemic. These included media reports, government documents, gray literature and operational dashboards from NGOs and international organisations.

**Figure 9: Qualitative data collection overview**



34 While 4Mi data does not allow a definitive calculation of all respondents who passed through Bamako, out of this larger sample we can nonetheless identify those who reported experiencing or witnessing a protection incident in Bamako, as well as those who reported stopping there for a significant period of time.

35 Note this group is referred to as "migrant respondents" to differentiate them from other key informants (whose affiliations will be specified when and where possible given that some preferred their affiliation to remain anonymous) and from 4Mi survey respondents.

36 Known as centres d'accueil, these are places where refugees and migrants can access accommodation and other services. Three respondents (2 NGO and 1 CSO) were associated with these shelters.

37 A coup took place in Mali on 18 August 2020. When probed specifically about the effects of the coup on migration, one of the two key informants interviewed after the coup said the following: "The situation will affect everyone, not only migrants, because when you are on the territory you cannot escape the impact of this situation. It's been 2 months that even Malians could not work or circulate properly with the demonstrations. The coup d'état will affect everyone, it will take time for the administration to restart and they will also feel the shock." However, the four migrant respondents interviewed after the coup did not mention the coup or demonstrations in responding to the standard interview questions.

### 3. Migration dynamics in Bamako

#### Bamako as transit hub

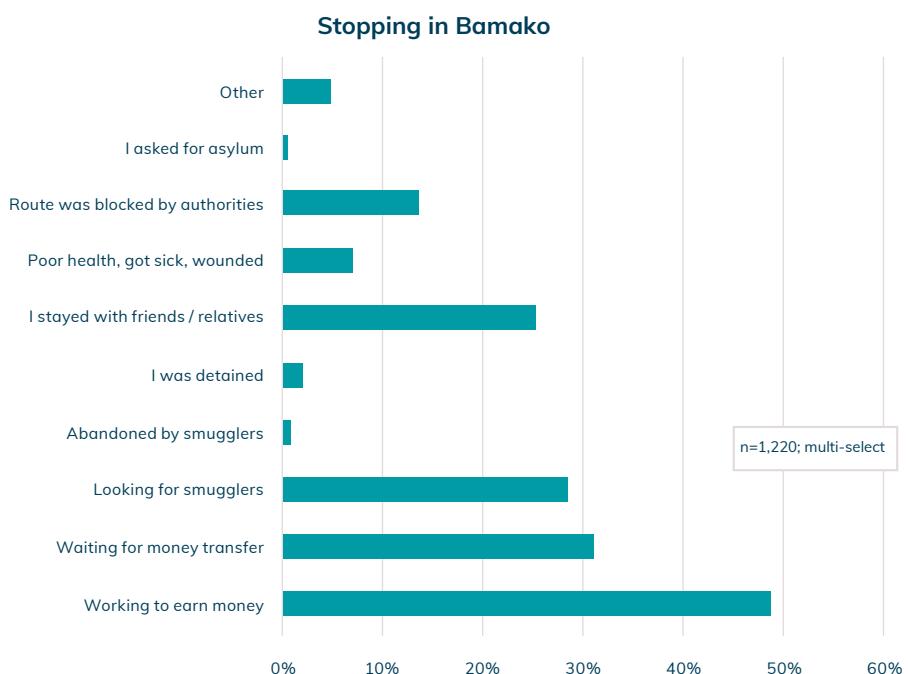
IOM's DTM dashboards note that "the capital city of Bamako is a major transit point for migrants travelling to West and North African countries,"<sup>38</sup> with some of these ultimately seeking to travel onward to Europe.<sup>39</sup> Bamako is a place where one can find information and make connections for onward travel, including by linking to smuggling networks. To paraphrase the perspective of a key informant from the Association of Central African Refoulés in Mali (Association des Refoulés de l'Afrique Centrale au Mali – ARACEM), many West and Central Africans don't necessarily want to go to Bamako particularly, but they want to go to Europe or the Maghreb, and they need to pass through Mali or Niger to do so. These days, due to cooperation between Niger and the EU perceived as deterring migration, it is considered "easier" to pass through Mali.

This orientation – that of Bamako as a city of transit – is echoed by key informants and migrant respondents. When migrant respondents were asked whether they wished to stay in Bamako in the longer term or whether it is just a stepping stone on their journey, only one, a female Cameroonian, indicated that she wanted to stay in Bamako for the long term, saying that she felt at

ease there. In contrast, a female Liberian stated "Many foreigners come here but when they come, they don't stay in Bamako. They only come here as a transit point. When they have enough money, they go elsewhere to another country." 4Mi COVID-19 data showed that of the 29 respondents interviewed in Bamako in July, only one stated Mali to be their intended destination.

Multiple key informants mentioned the importance of temporary work while in Bamako in order to gain money for an onward or return journey, and one specified that it is easier to find temporary work in Bamako than in cities further north such as Gao or Kidal. All migrant respondents who had been in the city for longer than a few days and who were not caring for small children indicated that they were working and that they had intentions to move onward, either back to their country of origin or onward towards Europe. 4Mi data supported this; of respondents who indicated that they had stopped in Bamako, the highest proportion said they did so to work to "earn money for next stretch of the journey" (49%, 599/1220).

**Figure 10: Stopping in Bamako**



38 IOM (May 2020). [Flow Monitoring Report – Mali – Dashboard 52](#).

39 IOM (2016, 1-15 November). [Mali Migratory Flow Monitoring Points Situation Report in Gao and Benena](#).

## Bamako as destination of internal and international mobility<sup>40</sup>

Transit emphasis notwithstanding, Bamako, a city of some 3.5 million, is a destination in its own right.<sup>41</sup> Along with its neighbouring commune of Koulikoro, it was the only net recipient of migrants according to Mali's 2009 census.<sup>42</sup>

While Bamako may not be seen as a pole for international migration within West Africa in the same way as Abidjan or Dakar,<sup>43</sup> it is to some extent a destination city for migrants from other countries in West Africa, particularly in the service sector (domestic work, car cleaning, hotels, maquis), tourism or in the commercial sector (shops, markets).<sup>44</sup> Key informants also mentioned work in more technical sectors, such as IT or optometry. Specific nationalities are often associated with particular fields of work. For example, Togolese are known for construction, Mauritanians for trading, Nigerians for IT, and Senegalese for couture and tailoring.

However, it may not always be easy to make a clear-cut distinction between Mali as a destination and transit country. One key informant working with the Centre for Migration Management and Information (Centre d'Information et de Gestion des Migrations – CIGEM) spoke of refugees and migrants in protracted situations of transit, staying for six months to a year to work before continuing their journey. He indicated that this is particularly the case for people from countries which do not require a visa (ECOWAS citizens). This is supported by the migrant respondents: four out of the six interviewed stated that they had been in Bamako for periods between six months and a year despite the fact that they were ultimately looking for opportunities to move on. Thus, while their intention is to be in transit, this does not seem to be their reality.

Bamako is also an important destination for internal migration, particularly for rural to urban migration, which according to key informants typically involves young people and follows a seasonal, circular pattern. After the harvest these young internal migrants will come to Bamako to find paid work, returning to their villages at the time of the rainy season. A further pattern is that of young women coming to Bamako, frequently to do domestic work, who may then return to their villages

at the time of their marriage. Another specific group of internal migrants are talibés, the young boys who are sent by their families to stay with Koranic masters, many of whom are concentrated in Bamako, or who move between Bamako and their village. Talibés from Burkina Faso and Mali may also pass through Bamako on their way to Senegal.

## Bamako as city of return

Bamako is also an important location for expulsés (migrants who have been forcibly expelled from a country)<sup>45</sup> and migrants de retour, those who are making a return journey of their own volition. These may be non-Malians or Malians for whom Bamako is either a transit point or who opt to stay there for the longer term. These groups were mentioned by multiple key informants, particularly in terms of access to services and their need for psychosocial support. The salience of this issue is also recognised by the Malian government, which acknowledges in its National Migration Policy (Politique Nationale de Migration - PONAM) that between 2002 and 2014 some 91,033 Malian migrants were returned involuntarily to their country,<sup>46</sup> and aims to support their transport, housing, access to health and psycho-social assistance as well as reinsertion.

According to a key informant who works with the Malian Association for Deportees (Association Malienne des Expulsés – AME), there are many reasons that expulsés and migrants de retour opt to stay in Bamako. There can be a logistical element, given the fact that Bamako is a major transport hub, and many expulsés are deported directly there. There is also support and opportunity available in Bamako that may not be found elsewhere in the country, given Bamako's status as the country's economic engine, and the presence of state structures and organisations of support that can help receive expulsés. Given the fact that at least until recently expulsions have been seen in Malian society as a "curse," expulsés may prefer to remain in Bamako even if that is not where they originate from, as "they are afraid and ashamed to return to their homes with empty hands." This may also apply to migrants de retour whose migration project did not succeed as hoped.

40 As conflict has been a prevailing element of the Malian context – and increasingly that of the wider region – dating back to 2012, Bamako is home to several thousand forcibly displaced. While not a specific focus of this case study, as of June 2020, Bamako hosted some [3,107](#) internally displaced persons according to IOM and the Malian Direction Nationale du Développement Social (DNDs). According to UNHCR, as of 31 July 2020, there were an estimated [2,967](#) refugees registered in Bamako.

41 Campbell, J. (2018, 12 September). [Africa is the Fastest Urbanizing Place on the Planet](#) Council on Foreign Relations.

42 World Bank Group. [Bamako : An Engine of Growth and Service Delivery](#).

43 Beauchemin, C & Bocquier, P. (2004, October) [Migration and Urbanisation in Francophone West Africa: An Overview of the Recent Empirical Evidence](#). Urban Studies 41(11): 2245-2272.

44 Mixed Migration Centre & Save the Children (2018, February). [Young and on the move in West Africa](#).

45 Also sometimes referred to as migrants de retour involontaire/forcé (forced or involuntary return migrants), expulsé is used throughout to assist clarity.

46 A more recent dynamic that is also important to highlight is that of expulsions from Algeria to Mali, which have been denounced by organisations like [Human Rights Watch](#), as well as regularly in the press "[for their massive, sudden character and lack of humanity](#)."

# 4. Migration policy landscape

## Mali's National Migration Policy (PONAM)

Mali has a National Migration Policy (Politique Nationale de Migration, or PONAM) which was developed under the auspices of the Ministry for Malians Abroad (Ministère des maliens de l'extérieur – MME) and adopted by the Government of Mali on 3 September 2014.<sup>47</sup> The Policy has eight principle axes: protect and secure migrants; organise and facilitate legal migration; support for a better reintegration of migrants de retour;<sup>48</sup> enhance the capacities of the diaspora for national development; build the capacity of migrant organisations and civil society; aim at a better strategic positioning of Mali on migration issues; improvement of knowledge on migration; and readjustment of conditions of entry, stay and establishment in Mali. It is important to note that with a few exceptions, notably Axis 8 (readjustment of conditions of entry, stay and establishment in Mali), the document is formulated to focus primarily on Malian migrants – current and potential migrants, diaspora, migrants de retour and expulsés etc.<sup>49</sup>

Axis 8 of PONAM, which has the most explicit orientation towards migration of foreigners into Mali is based heavily in the ECOWAS Free Movement Protocol, which extends rights of entry, residence and establishment to citizens of ECOWAS member countries (which includes Mali).<sup>50</sup> One of the elements envisaged for the implementation of PONAM's Axis 8 is to seek to better inform migrants about their rights of free circulation, including by illustrating and translating the Protocol into the six languages of the border regions. Implementation of Axis 8 also seeks to "regulate and rationally control immigration flows," in part by identifying communities of foreigners and supporting their socio-economic integration and by "rationalising immigration flows at the level of mining sites," including through regulating access to sites, sensitising the populations regarding risks and countering insecurity and "degradation of morals." This seems to leave the door open for a constrained interpretation of the ECOWAS protocols, and overall it does not appear that even the Axis most geared towards migration into and through Mali is meant to encourage this phenomenon.<sup>51</sup>

In speaking of PONAM, one key informant working with a migration and development NGO called it "well-defined" and "consensual," highlighting the fact that key actors (including his organisation) had been "consulted from the outset." A key informant from CIGEM stated his belief that

the policy "takes into account all aspects of migration," and supports assistance to migrants. He highlighted the role played by associations of expulsés/migrants de retour in bringing the experience of Malian migrants and expulsés to the attention of policy-makers, and said that these organisations essentially acted as "pressure groups on decision-makers." The implementation of PONAM is to be supported by a five-year Plan of Action currently under development by the MME.

## Mali's Strategic Framework for Economic Recovery and Sustainable Development (CREDD)

Migration is also included in Mali's Strategic Framework for Economic Recovery and Sustainable Development (Cadre Stratégique Pour la Relance Économique et le Développement Durable – CREDD 2019-2023). One of its overall objectives is to "Better manage demographic growth and migration in order to contribute to poverty reduction and the sustainable development of the country." The CREDD particularly seeks to achieve this objective through "mobilising and enhancing the contributions of diaspora in order to reduce poverty and support development," and "establishing an appropriate management system for migration issues." The former clearly echoes PONAM's objective of leveraging diaspora contributions, and the latter further emphasises the priority that the Government of Mali places on supporting Malians abroad, increasing legal migration opportunities and supporting the reintegration of Malian returnees. It notably does not make any mention of migration from outside of Mali.<sup>52</sup>

## International and regional regimes for migration and displacement

In addition to national policy frameworks, Mali has ratified various international and regional conventions and protocols governing migration and displacement. These include the 1951 Refugee Convention, the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, and 1954 and 1961 Conventions on Statelessness.<sup>53</sup> Additionally, Mali has ratified the OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in West Africa<sup>54</sup> and the ECOWAS Protocol relating to Free Movement of Persons, Residence and Establishment.<sup>55</sup>

47 Ministère des Maliens de l'Extérieur (MME) (2014, September). Politique Nationale de Migration.

48 In PONAM, the term migrants de retour also encompasses expulsés.

49 MME. Op Cit.

50 Adepoju, A., Boulton, A. & Levin, M. (2010). [Promoting integration through mobility: Free movement under ECOWAS](#). Refugee Survey Quarterly 29 (3): 120-144.

51 MME. Op Cit.

52 Ministère de l'Economie et des Finances, Cellule Technique CSLP, UNDP (2019, May). [Cadre Stratégique Pour la Relance Économique et le Développement Durable – CREDD 2019-2023](#).

53 IOM (2018, May) [Profil de gouvernance de la migration : la République du Mali](#).

54 [OAU Convention: Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa](#)

55 Adepoju, A. et al. Op Cit.

## 5. Bamako, migration and opportunities

When asked specifically whether migration is an opportunity for the city of Bamako and if and whether it can contribute to development, the answers of key informants were positive, and centered around financial and human capital contributed to Bamako both by migrants who have come from other countries and diaspora Malians. At the same time, conversations with both key informants and migrant respondents also highlighted the ways in which Bamako can be a place of opportunity for refugees and migrants, as well as expulsés and migrants de retour.

### What can migration bring to Bamako?

A 2017 Migration Profile by the Maastricht Graduate School of Governance indicated that while the 2009 census showed that the largest concentration of foreigners in Mali were found in Bamako (27.9%), their impact on the Malian economy was essentially impossible to determine, presumably because the majority are working in Mali's substantial informal sector.<sup>56</sup> Nonetheless, key informants did point to ways in which they saw migrants adding value to Bamako, for instance through an infusion of low-cost labour or support to the tax base. According to one key informant, "migrants in trade pay their taxes and therefore contribute to the development of the country."

Another important benefit that they are seen as bringing to Bamako is a diversification and specialisation in terms of skills. Some specific professions in which migrants were seen to bring expertise to Bamako included: car mechanics, electricians, heavy equipment operators (primarily for mining), opticians, woodworkers, practitioners of traditional medicine, dressmakers and IT specialists. The contribution of migrants to the construction industry was mentioned multiple times, with Togolese singled out particularly, but Beninese and Burkinabés highlighted as well.

One example of a specific skill contributed and shared by migrants is tile-laying, at which Togolese were reported to excel. According to a key informant working for the government, this is a skill that young people are keen to learn given the construction boom in Bamako. "Migrants were able to transmit skills in a field that was not very well known. Migrants have enabled some work. They created the craze."

### What opportunities does Bamako afford refugees and migrants?

Not only can refugees and migrants contribute to the development of the city of Bamako, but the city can also provide opportunity for them. According to PONAM, Mali is a "country of legendary hospitality and great

tolerance," and conversations with key informants and migrant respondents alike painted a picture of Bamako as a hospitable place, with one key informant expressing that in Malian culture, "the stranger is king." No migrant respondent reported experiencing discrimination, and in fact most mentioned experiences to the contrary, for instance saying, "I have made friends with people from Bamako" and "the positive aspects of this city are the peace and friendliness of the people" (male migrant from Guinea). According to a female migrant respondent from Liberia, "When I go to the mosque those people that are there, they are all God's people so they are my people too." The fact that in general refugees and migrants seem able to live in Bamako without feeling unwelcome or discriminated against could be seen as providing the basic conditions which allow them to take advantage of whatever additional opportunities the city may offer them.

In addition to opportunities for employment discussed above, several key informants and migrant respondents mentioned the possibility Bamako presented for saving money, pointing to a somewhat lower cost of living and to favorable exchange rates vis-à-vis the Guinean and Mauritanian currencies in particular. One migrant respondent stated that for her a major advantage of Bamako was that it was easy to get assistance from organisations. She went on to say that "Here in Bamako, to get a place to sleep is easy and cheap. People do things for Allah's sake. It is a more traditional society." Additionally, Malian documentation was mentioned by a key informant from CIGEM as being attractive to non-Malians, as it can "open doors" along the journey due to accords with Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia allowing for visa-free travel.

The city was also seen as presenting opportunities for expulsés and migrants de retour. While benefiting from the wider economic opportunities in Bamako, a key informant who works with these groups (AME) pointed out that they can also benefit from training opportunities in Bamako and from the assistance of various migrant support structures. Given that Bamako is the capital and largest city in Mali, there is a particular concentration of organisms (state structures, civil society, NGOs and international organisations) which can support expulsés and migrants de retour with reception, accommodation, orientation and legal, administrative, social and medical assistance. In terms of training, the focus tends to be on income generating activities, such as soap making and food processing, as well as further capacity building for those who already possess some qualifications in trades such as catering, masonry, metal and wood carpentry, etc.

56 Maastricht Graduate School of Governance (2017, October). Mali Migration Profile: Study on Migration Routes in West and Central Africa.

## **What can emigration contribute to Bamako?**

One of the four specific objectives of PONAM is “to mobilise and enhance the contributions of the diaspora to reduce poverty and support national development,” an aim that is also echoed in the CREDD, which points out that “close to 4 million Malians live abroad.” Government numbers put formal remittances totals at 485 billion CFA (euro 739,378,000 at today’s rate) in 2018, and a key informant stated his belief that informal transfers were at least that great if not greater.

Given the magnitude of remittances, it is not surprising that the Government of Mali places an emphasis on harnessing them productively. However, when key informants were asked if they knew of local initiatives to do so, none of them gave specific examples, and one said that nothing formal in this regard existed at the state level. In spite of this, several key informants pointed to diaspora and remittances as an opportunity for Bamako and for Mali more broadly, in terms of supporting their families (improving quality of life and access to health and education), making investments to the wider community (construction of dams, mosques, schools, health centers,

etc.), enhancing human capital through new skills and knowledge and in generating employment opportunities.

Diaspora are seen as investing in real estate and construction, which helps expand the labour market in Bamako. According to one key informant, “there are several billionaire former migrants in Mali, including major job creators.” Another key informant saw Malian emigrants as “learning new things and becoming experts in their field.” They are also seen as contributing to development of small and medium enterprises and industries for local products, the creation of modern poultry farms and the establishment of modern garages, etc.

Despite these positive contributions, a key informant working for a migration and development NGO sounded a note of caution. While highlighting the importance of funds transferred by the diaspora, he observed that “the cases of (migration) failures are more and more noted, a reality which should therefore be considered. That said, there are always departures and many young people are potential migrants.”

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

### **Safety and security in Bamako**

In general key informants and migrant respondents did not speak of major security concerns in Bamako. According to one key informant from ARACEM who works in a migrant shelter, “usually the migrants speak of problems they have had before arriving in Bamako,” often related to their experiences passing through checkpoints. Several key informants stated specifically that they did not see things like violence, physical abuse or aggression to be major issues for refugees and migrants in the city. All migrant respondents interviewed in migrant shelters stated that they felt safe. Those migrants who were interviewed outside of shelters spoke in general terms about risks related to protection, not indicating that they had personally been victims. According to a male Guinean migrant respondent who is sleeping at a bus station, “security varies according to the vulnerability of the person concerned, a (migrant) without fixed domicile may be safe but not secure; migrants who do not have accommodation can generally be victims or witnesses of several protection or security incidents.”

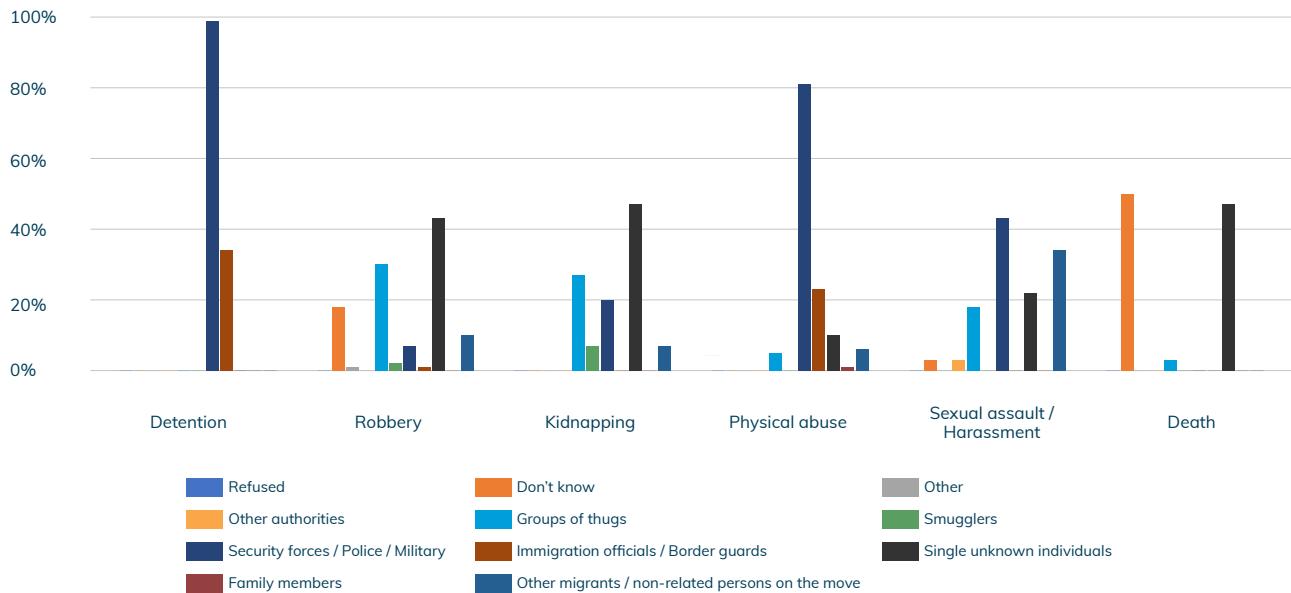
Data from the 4Mi core survey collected between February 2019 and January 2020 shows that extortion is the protection incident reported as occurring in Bamako by the highest percentage of respondents by a substantial margin (57% of respondents reporting incidents; 799/1394). Other categories of protection

incident were reported as taking place in Bamako in much smaller proportions. Key informants considered violence and aggression against refugees and migrants to be rare, and indeed physical abuse was reported by a much smaller percentage of respondents (16%, 216/1394), though this was nonetheless the second most reported incident. This was followed by detention (11%, 160/1394), robbery (8%, 107/1394), witnessing or experiencing sexual assault/harassment (5%, 65/1394), witnessing migrant death (2%, 32/1394) and kidnapping (1%, 15/1394).

The nationality that reported the highest percentage of incidents across all categories – often by a substantial margin – was Guineans (witnessing deaths – 41%, 13/32; witnessing or experiencing sexual assault/harassment – 52%, 34/65; physical abuse/harassment – 33%, 71/216; kidnapping – 53%, 8/15; robbery – 39%, 42/107; extortion – 33%, 265/799; detention – 29%, 46/160). Guineans made up 34% (319/942) of the respondents reporting protection incidents in Bamako, thus there were multiple protection incidents that they reported experiencing or witnessing at a disproportionately high rate (kidnapping, sexual assault/harassment, witnessing deaths, robbery).

In terms of who was reportedly responsible for these incidents that took place in Bamako, security forces/police/military were the actor singled out more than

**Figure 11: Protection incidents by perpetrator (multi-select)**



any other across three categories of protection incident. These were detention, physical abuse and harassment and sexual assault and harassment. In the case of detention, a further distinction was made within this general category, with police reported to be involved in 98% (157/160) of detention incidents. Security forces/police/military were said to have been involved in 81% (174/216) of incidents of physical abuse and harassment. Another official actor – immigration officials and border guards – were also substantially referred to in relation to both of these types of incident; mentioned in 34% (55/160) of detention incidents and 23% (50/216) of cases of physical abuse. Security forces/police/military were reported to be responsible in 43% (28/65) of sexual assault and harassment incidents, followed by other migrants (34%, 22/65), unknown individuals (22%, 14/65) and groups of thugs/criminal gangs (18%, 12/65). Other categories were either difficult to attribute (death) or split primarily between unknown individuals and thugs/criminal gangs (kidnapping and robbery).

According to a key informant from the government:

**“expulsés or departing migrants have to deal with the police, they are easily identifiable... Any candidate for migration is a target for the police, who will take money from them. They often don’t have the full documents, so they are fined.”**

He also felt that these same groups were easy targets for scams by smugglers.

### Hotspots in the city

Key informants did not show a lot of consensus regarding areas of Bamako that they felt were specifically risky for refugees and migrants. Several said they didn't know of such locations, and several others mentioned locations –

“along the main arteries” or “in certain neighbourhoods” – which could be dangerous for anyone (i.e. citizens as well as refugees and migrants). Whereas one of the transporteurs working at Sogoniko (bus) station felt that there was a relatively small number of protection incidents affecting refugees and migrants occurring at the station itself, the other transporteur interviewed felt that neighbourhoods not far from bus stations (such as Magnambougou and Sougouni Koura) tended to be more dangerous as they are “where other delinquent migrants who have been here for a long time can be found.” Another key informant from a migration and development NGO spoke specifically of “Les Halls de Bamako,” which is reportedly dangerous for migrants, but where they also have the chance to meet their compatriots, making it “the best and worst for migrants.”

### Emphasis on socio-economic risks and challenges

While it is clear from the 4Mi data presented above that refugees and migrants face protection risks in Bamako, the most cited incident by far – extortion – is primarily economic. This dovetails with qualitative findings in which key informants and migrant respondents tended to emphasise socio-economic risks and challenges over risks related to violence and aggression. Key informants highlighted challenges migrants have accessing “accommodation, health care and livelihoods,” stated that they “face economic risks above all,” and noted that challenges encountered in Bamako tend to be “psychological, emotional and verbal.” The two male Guinean migrant respondents interviewed outside of migrant shelters both acknowledged that they faced risks of “insecurity” and “protection incidents” by virtue of living at a bus station, but they also mentioned risks related to illness and hunger as these are experiences they have already had. A key informant from AME who works specifically with expulsés and migrants de retour

also noted that for these groups risks are primarily psychological and economic, related to social and livelihood reintegration.

### **Greater female vulnerability to sexual exploitation**

Key informants pointed to women and children on the move as being particularly vulnerable to protection risks, although one key informant stated his belief that in the specific case of extortion, men are more likely to be victims. While multiple key informants spoke of the vulnerability of women and children in general terms, several specifically zeroed in on sexual exploitation and prostitution as dangers faced by women and girls. According to key informants, Nigerian women appear to be particularly associated with this phenomenon. 4Mi data relating to protection incidents which took place in Bamako showed that 16% of the female respondents reporting that they had witnessed or experienced a protection incident in Bamako indicated that it was sexual assault or harassment, compared to 3% of male respondents.

At the same time, it is worth noting that the two female migrants interviewed at migrant shelters both gave birth during their time in Bamako, and reported receiving substantial support, making specific reference to pre- and post-natal care and hospital visits. This suggests that while there may be particular vulnerabilities faced by female refugees and migrants, there are also some assistance measures available which are specifically targeted to their needs. Additionally, a key informant from a development NGO spoke of a national referencing tool being developed with DRC which can help in the fight against labour and sexual exploitation of young female migrants. Another, from the government, spoke of his belief that when it comes to labour exploitation in particular, “more and more organisations are defending the rights of these girls so they get a salary.”

### **Access to assistance**

In terms of assistance more broadly, all migrant respondents – whether in a shelter or not – indicated that they had been able to access support. All reported receiving assistance from NGOs, with several specifying “lots of help” or “many times.” According to a female Liberian migrant respondent staying in a shelter:

**“When you have problems, there are many organisations here. They help you; they look into your problem... They are taking care of you; they are feeding you. They are giving you some clothes.”**

The two migrant respondents interviewed outside of shelters – even one who had only been in Bamako for two days – mentioned receiving assistance from NGOs, but they both also spoke of being helped by “people of good will.” However, one of these respondents (a Guinean male), in Bamako for close to a year, did indicate that “as time goes by people will think you are autonomous and will no longer see you being helped.” Migrant respondents also generally reported feeling included in the city, although this seems to largely be tied to the efforts of the local organisations that support them rather than linked to specific government efforts.

Notwithstanding the generally positive outlook of migrant respondents regarding access to assistance, key informants identified some gaps they believed needed be addressed. Several key informants highlighted the need for further psychosocial support (PSS) particularly for people who have returned or have been returned to Mali. One key informant specifically singled out people who have been expelled from Algeria or Mauritania as being in need of this support. Another stated that while it is good for migrants (from outside of Mali) to be taken care of in a migrant shelter, even migrants de retour have needs (housing, psychological, health) for which the Ministry has little budget. A third illustrated his call for further PSS by explaining, “the failure of a migration project is a tragedy for the migrant and his or her family.”

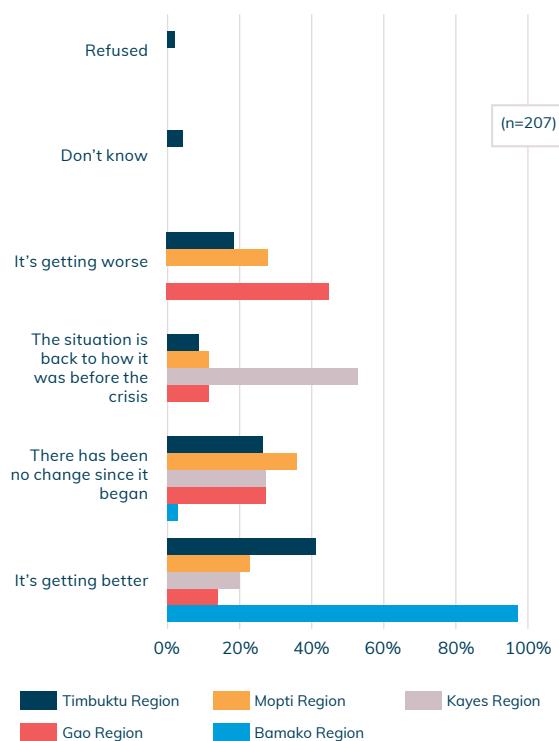
A key informant from AME, which was involved in consultations surrounding the development of PONAM, stated that while he feels that the policy does take into account the needs of these groups, there is nonetheless room for improvement, notably to axes 1 (the protection and securing of migrants) and 3 (the promotion of reintegration of returning migrants). He is hopeful that the Plan of Action currently being developed will take these elements into further consideration, and underlined how the wider migration context makes this so important:

**“In recent years, the socio-political and economic crises in many developing countries have led to the mass departure of young people in search of better opportunities. At the same time, restrictive human mobility policies are being adopted in host and transit countries. This is putting the lives of thousands of people at risk. We would like to see greater protection for migrants and their property throughout their journey.”**

## 7. Bamako, migration and COVID-19

Bamako was initially considered the “epicentre” of the pandemic in Mali,<sup>57</sup> with 88% of confirmed cases as of 9 May.<sup>58</sup> As of late July it still accounted for approximately half of the confirmed cases in the country.<sup>59</sup> Seeking to contain the spread of COVID-19, the Government of Mali took a variety of decisions which affected mobility and livelihoods in Bamako and in the country more broadly, including a curfew (March 26-May 9)<sup>60</sup> and the closure of land and air borders.<sup>61</sup>

**Figure 12: Pandemic situation improving or not?**



Of the respondents to the 4Mi COVID-19 survey in Bamako, interviewed in July, all were aware of COVID-19, and all but one were worried about catching it, and about the impact it could have on their health. No respondent indicated that COVID-19 was a factor in their decision to leave their country of origin, with nearly 60% saying that they had departed before the crisis. Interestingly, 97% (28/29) of respondents in Bamako felt that the situation vis-à-vis the pandemic was “getting better,” which contrasts sharply to responses in other locations in the country. This is apparent when considering the response “it’s getting worse” (Bamako – 0%, 0/29; Gao – 44%, 20/45; Kayes – 0%, 0/15; Mopti – 27%, 12/45; Timbuktu – 19%, 14/73).

### Access to health services and assistance

Several key informants expressed their belief that everyone – whether Malian or not – had access to the same protections against COVID-19 (with one alluding specifically to access to health services). While no specific examples were given of how this may (or may not) be working in practice, 4Mi data does seem to support the idea that refugees and migrants can get healthcare, with 79% (23/29) of respondents saying they could indeed access health services if they had COVID-19 symptoms, and the remaining respondents (6) saying they didn’t know whether or not they could do so. Notably all respondents were over the age of 18; according to one key informant, people under the age of 18 need to be accompanied to access health services, which could pose a barrier to access for young migrants.

When asked whether they had received additional support during the pandemic, all respondents in Bamako stated they had not. However, when asked whether they needed extra help in the context of the pandemic, only 55% (16/29) of respondents in Bamako said yes. This contrasts quite sharply with respondents in the rest of Mali, 98% (175/178) of whom reported needing additional assistance, and may suggest that pre-COVID-19 support structures for refugees and migrants were stronger in Bamako than elsewhere in the country.

### Discrimination / xenophobia during the pandemic

No key informant mentioned seeing an increase in violence against foreigners as a result of the pandemic, and several stated specifically that they did not believe this to have been a problem. However, in terms of discrimination and xenophobia more broadly, the perspectives of key informants were more mixed. While several who work with migration related CSOs/NGOs stated specifically that they did not believe this to have been a problem, two key informants who work in and around bus stations (*transporteurs*) and two key informants who are associated with migrant shelters had a different perspective. According to one *transporteur*, “there was a lot of discrimination against migrants” at the bus station where he was working, and the other stated that “communities saw them (migrants) as sources of contagion for COVID-19.”

The latter two respondents showed some divergence regarding the evolution of community perspectives. One stated that “after the intense moment of COVID-19, the

57 Africanews. Op Cit.

58 Dubois, O. (2020, 13 May). [Mali : le Covid-19 en état entre pouvoir civil et pouvoir religieux](#). Le Point Afrique.

59 Luthi, E & Kone, D. (2020, 20 July). [In Mali's COVID-19 fight, knowledge is power](#). UNICEF.

60 Chahed, N. (2020, 9 May). [Mali/covid-19: Levée du couvre-feu sur toute l'étendue du territoire](#).

61 IOM (2020, March). [West and Central Africa — COVID-19 — Regional Mobility Context Monitoring](#).

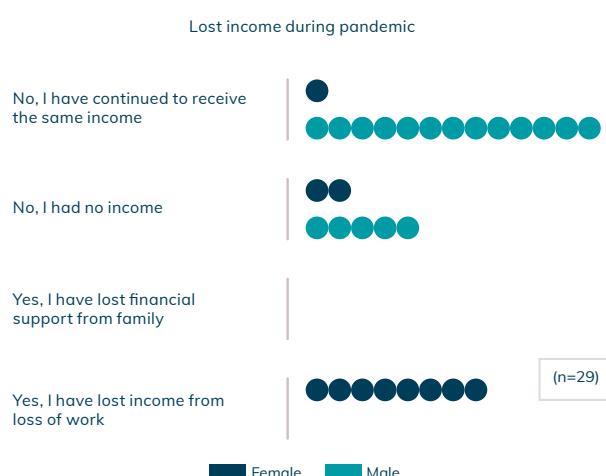
community asks itself a lot of questions about the place of origin of all migrants with a view to not being a victim of COVID-19 contamination." According to the other, "in the beginning there was discrimination against migrants, they were even afraid to leave the shelter so as not to be discriminated against by the population, saying that they are the ones who bring the disease COVID-19 to Mali. But over time this is no longer the case because Malians no longer even believe in the existence of the pandemic – some people think it is a government project to get money."

In contrast, none of the respondents interviewed in Bamako for the 4Mi COVID-19 survey reported experiencing increased racism and xenophobia in the context of the pandemic. This may indicate that instances of discrimination against refugees and migrants were somewhat limited by both time and location. They appear to be more prominent in the early days of the pandemic when fear and uncertainty in general were high, and in locations – such as bus stations or migrant shelters near these stations – where populations of refugees and migrants were particularly transient.

### **Impacts of COVID-19 on work and daily life**

Key informants in general did not speak of observing major job losses for refugees and migrants brought about by the pandemic, although the two transporteurs interviewed attributed such job losses as they saw to "suspicion" and "distrust" on the part of the general population vis-à-vis migrants. Key informants did, however, point to some domains of work that they believed to have been particularly affected, citing transport and work that occurs in the evening as being impacted due to the curfew. They also highlighted challenges for domestic work and jobs in hotels, restaurants and bars, which were deemed to have affected female migrants in particular. These losses seem to have been temporary, as a key informant from ARACEM interviewed in August noted that as food and entertainment establishments re-opened, he was observing people returning to these jobs.

**Figure 13: Lost income during the pandemic**



The disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on the livelihoods of female refugees and migrants suggested by key informants is corroborated by 4Mi data. 28% (8/29) of respondents to the 4Mi COVID-19 survey interviewed in Bamako said they had lost income due to COVID-19 restrictions resulting in loss of work (48% continued receiving the same income – 14/29; 24% had no income before the pandemic – 7/29). The respondents who reported losing income were all female, 73% of all female refugees and migrants interviewed in Bamako in July.

Stress and limited movement – at times linked – were both observed in and reported by refugees and migrants. Key informants spoke of the stress inherent in being blocked from returning to countries of origin and of being cooped up with limited ability to move around. When asked about impacts on their daily lives, 48% (14/29) of the Bamako respondents to the 4Mi COVID-19 survey reported that they are "more worried and stressed," and a "lack of freedom of movement" was cited by 34% (10/29) of respondents (all male). A key informant working at an NGO-run migrant shelter pointed out that one challenge of constrained movement is that young people stuck at borders or at bus stations face potential emotional and physical mistreatment, and also may be at greater risk for consuming tobacco and alcohol. Another key informant, also working at an NGO-run migrant shelter, saw both a cost and a benefit to limited movement, sharing the following perspective:

**"On the one hand, the impact has been very negative and positive at the same time. Negative on the limit of travel, also financially as they will no longer be able to make their contributions to their respective families. Positive for street children and girls who go to the gold panning areas – they can no longer move around these bad places – at least it curbs prostitution and trafficking of underage girls."**

### **Impacts of COVID-19 on migratory journeys**

Key informants and refugees and migrants responding to the 4Mi COVID-19 survey both emphasised border issues as a particular challenge. In addition to the obvious difficulties border closures pose for onward or return journeys, key informants also spoke of how "being blocked" may cause people to run out of money. Of 4Mi COVID-19 respondents surveyed in Bamako, 66% (19/29) cited an increased difficulty in crossing borders when asked what impact the crisis has had on their migratory journey, although 24% (7/29) of respondents reported no impact.

One key informant working for a migrant shelter stated that:

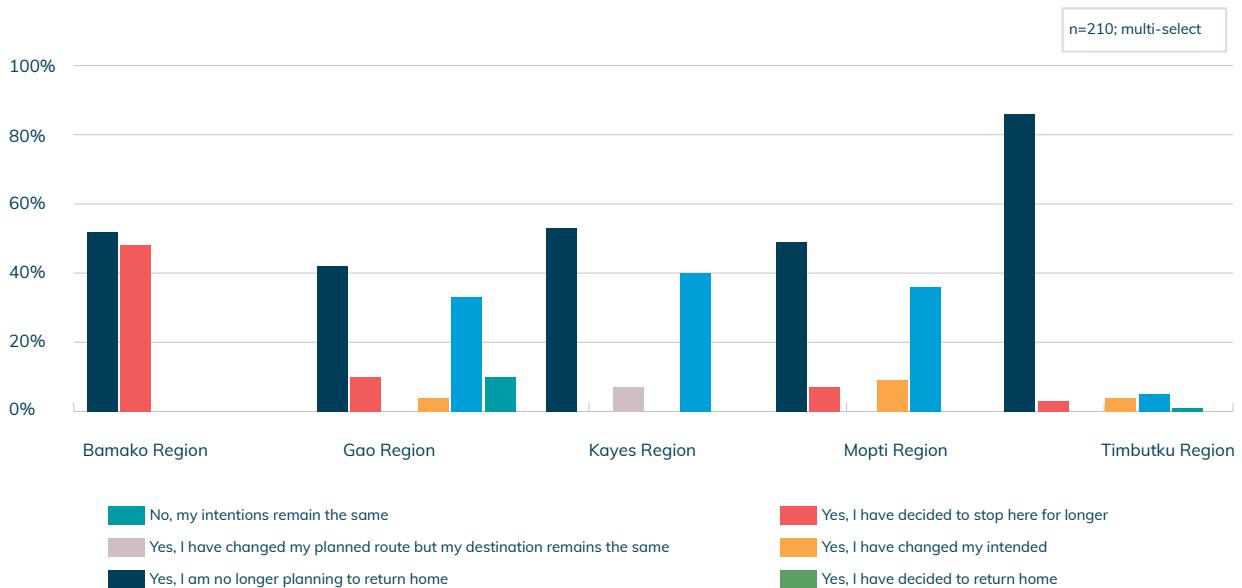
**“faced with this pandemic, many migrants are tired to the point that some of them go to the borders to see if there are any smuggling routes to go back to their countries without going through the main routes.”**

He felt that this was particularly the case for young male migrants from Guinea, Liberia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone. However, according to 4Mi COVID-19 survey data, 97% (28/29) of respondents in Bamako reported that they did not know “how the need for using smugglers has changed” since the start of the COVID-19 crisis. Nobody interviewed in Bamako indicated that they perceived a greater need to use smugglers during the pandemic, as compared to nearly a third to two thirds of respondents reporting this elsewhere in Mali (Mopti – 69%, 31/45; Timbuktu – 64%, 47/73; Kayes – 47%, 7/15; Gao – 31%, 14/45). It may be that there is a distinction to be made here between the migrants observed by

the key informant, who apparently wished to return to their countries of origin immediately, and the sample of refugees and migrants interviewed for the 4Mi survey, none of whom reported wishing to return home and who generally seemed to feel less urgency regarding movement (see below).

There is also an illuminating contrast to be seen between respondents in Bamako and elsewhere in the country in response to the question, “Have you changed your plans as a result of the coronavirus outbreak?” Responses in Bamako were split almost evenly between “No my intentions remain the same” (52%, 15/29) and “Yes I have decided to stop here for longer” (48%, 14/29). Whereas a plurality of respondents in all other survey locations in Mali indicated that their intentions remained the same, only in Bamako did a sizable percentage of respondents say that they have decided to stay where they are for longer. It seems very possible that the previously discussed opportunities that Bamako can afford could play a role in this.

**Figure 14: How have migration plans changed**



## 8. Conclusion

Bamako is a city of complex migration dynamics. It is a major crossroads for people – Malians, West Africans and others – migrating through the region, as well as northward to the Maghreb and Europe. It is a substantial pole of attraction for internal migration, and also brings migrants from other places, primarily in West Africa, who come to work and settle. It is a city where Malians and others who have been forcibly expelled or have returned from migration to other countries can be absorbed and make a new start. It is also a city that benefits from the substantial contributions of diaspora Malians.

While Bamako was emphasised as a city of transit, it nonetheless appears that refugees and migrants in transit find Bamako to be a place where they can stay for more prolonged periods of time – often to earn money for their journeys – and particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. It does not seem that the state has played a major role in creating a conducive environment for refugees and migrants in Bamako through policy; rather factors like the labour market (for instance a booming construction industry), a relative abundance of organisations that can provide assistance and support, and a welcoming and hospitable culture appear to be primary elements of opportunity. Instead, the policy emphasis of the Government of Mali is on creating opportunities and safeguards for the migration of its own citizens, support for them in returning to Mali, and mechanisms to leverage the development impact of diaspora contributions. This is perhaps unsurprising given the magnitude of remittance flows to Mali, and the visibility of these funds in community development projects.

Risks for refugees and migrants do exist in Bamako, and according to 4Mi data, security forces (including the police) play a prominent role in incidents such as extortion, and physical abuses for instance. Nonetheless, risks other than violence came through most strongly in this case study, with the majority of respondents (57%) who reported protection incidents in Bamako indicating that they had paid a bribe or gift to government officials, and an emphasis being placed on socio-economic risks in the qualitative findings.

While the COVID-19 pandemic can be said to have posed a major risk to refugees and migrants, indications of discrimination against them were limited, and 4Mi respondents largely reported being able to access healthcare if needed. However, the pandemic and measures to counter it did lead to increased stress, and a loss of income among female 4Mi respondents.

# Annex: Interviews conducted

Table 2: Key Informant Interviews - Tunis

#	Date	Organisation
1	10/08/2020	Association Tunisienne de la Santé de la Reproduction (ATSR - Tunisian Association of Reproductive Health)
2	11/08/2020	Instance Nationale de Lutte contre la Traite des Personnes (INLTP - National Body for the Fight against Human Trafficking)
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 - Tunisian Refugee Council)
6	12/08/2020	Office Français de l'Immigration et de l'Intégration (OFII - French Office for Immigration and Integration)
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 - Tunis**

#	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>62</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

62 The location of this respondent is kept hidden for safety reasons.

**Table 4: Key Informant Interviews - Bamako**

#	Date	Organisation
1	23/06/2020	Development NGO with migration programming
2	29/06/2020	NGO with migration programming
3	13/07/2020	Government official
4	17/07/2020	Development NGO with migration programming
5	19/07/2020	Migration and development NGO
6	19/08/2020	Transporteur – Medina-Coura
7	20/08/2020	Transporteur – Auto-gare
8	25/08/2020	ARACEM - Association des Refoulés de l'Afrique Centrale au Mali (Association of Central African Refoulés in Mali)
9	27/08/2020	CIGEM – Centre d'Information et de Gestion des Migrations (Center for Migration Management and Information)
10	Throughout September 2020	Email Correspondence with AME – Association Malienne des Expulsés (Malian Association for Deportees)

**Table 5: Refugee and Migrant Interviews - Bamako**

#	Date	Organisation	Gender	Location
1	07/07/2020	Liberia	Female	Sotuba ACI
2	07/07/2020	Guinea	Male	Sotuba ACI
3	26/08/2020	Benin	Male	Niamakoro
4	26/08/2020	Cameroon	Female	Niamakoro
5	10/09/2020	Guinea	Male	Sebenikoro
6	10/09/2020	Guinea	Male	Sebenikoro





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.

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