

The Impact of COVID-19 on the Mobility of Refugees and Migrants in Libya

Since mid-March, land borders between North African countries have been closed in an effort to contain the spread of COVID-19.¹ On March 15th, in Libya, the Government of National Accord (GNA) closed the Wazin/Dehiba border and the Ras Ajdir with Tunisia, and on March 30th, the Libyan National Army (LNA) closed the border between Libya and Egypt at Tobruk. In the South, the closures of Libya's southern border with Niger at Tuommo within the Algatroun region (reported March 29th) constrained the movements of seasonal workers from Niger to Libya. Within Libya, [OCHA](#) reports that strong infection control measures remain in place, including internal movement restrictions. This snapshot explores the impact of COVID-19 on the mobility of refugees and migrants in Libya. It aims to contribute towards building a solid evidence base to inform targeted responses on the ground, as well as advocacy efforts related to the situation of refugees and migrants during the coronavirus pandemic.

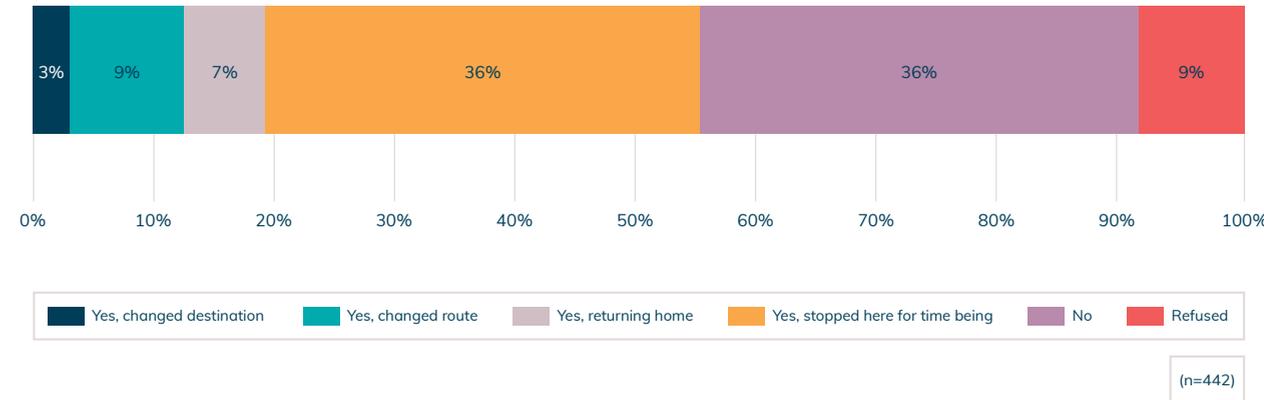
Profiles

This snapshot is based on 442 refugee and migrant surveys in Libya conducted between April 6th and May 7th, 2020. The majority of the respondents were surveyed in Tripoli (38%), followed by Sabha (33%), Ajdabiya (9%), and Benghazi (7%), with additional surveys also taking place in Brak, Ghadames, Misrata, Marj, Algatroun, Ghat, Jalu, Khoms, Shahhat, and Traghan. The primary nationalities of those surveyed include Nigerian (n=115; 26%), Sudanese (n=71; 16%), and Nigerien (n=52; 12%). Other nationalities include, but are not limited to, Ghanaian, Malian, Cameroonian, Chadian, Burkinabe, Ethiopian, Eritrean, and South Sudanese. Of those surveyed, 71% are men, and 29% are women, ranging from 18 to 65 years of age. The survey data were triangulated with qualitative data from 6 key informant interviews carried out with 3 Nigerians, 1 Burkinabe, 1 Cameroonian and 1 Chadian in Tripoli, Sabha and Ajdabiya.

COVID-19 has impacted more than half of respondents' migration planning

Approximately 60% of respondents noted that they had not reached the end of their journey, while nearly 25% highlighted that they had reached their intended destination. 68 respondents (15%) were unsure as to whether or not they had reached the end of their journey.

Figure 1. Have you changed your plans as a result of the coronavirus outbreak?



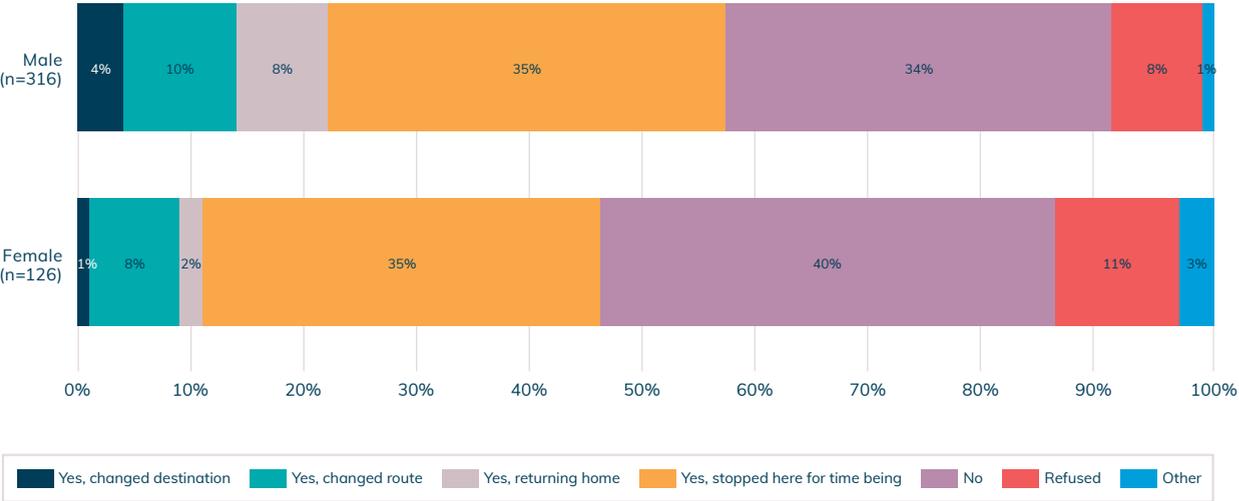
More than half (56%) of respondents noted that coronavirus had caused some change in their migration decision-making, compared to 36% who cited that their migration plans had not changed. As noted in Figure 1, a change in migration decision-making includes: that they had stopped for the time being (36%), altered their intended route (9%), decided to return home (7%), or changed their intended destination (3%). 3 respondents highlighted that they had not yet decided on their next steps.

¹ IOM (2020). [Mobility Impacts COVID-19 Map](#).

Surveyed women report not changing their migration plans more than men

Disaggregating the data by gender (Figure 2), reveals considerable alignment between men and women in the impact of COVID-19 on migration decision-making. That said, women reported not changing their migration planning more often than men (40% as compared to 34%).

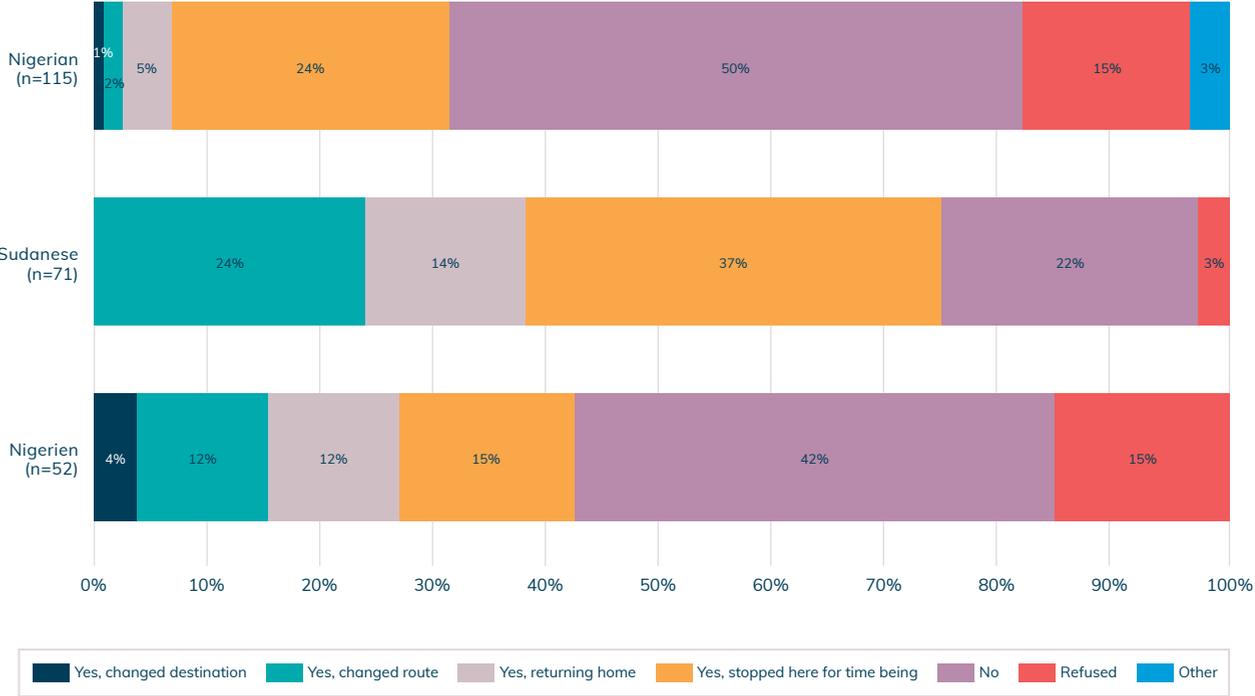
Figure 2. Have you changed your plans as a result of the coronavirus outbreak?



Sudanese respondents more often changed their migration plans as a result of COVID-19 in comparison to their Nigerian and Nigerian peers

In addition to subtle variations with respect to gender, the data reveal that respondents from different countries of origin report different impacts upon their migration decision-making in relation to COVID-19. Nigerian and Nigerien respondents more often reported that COVID-19 had not affected their migration plans compared to Sudanese respondents. Conversely, Sudanese more often reported that they had paused their journey, changed their planned route, or decided to return home.

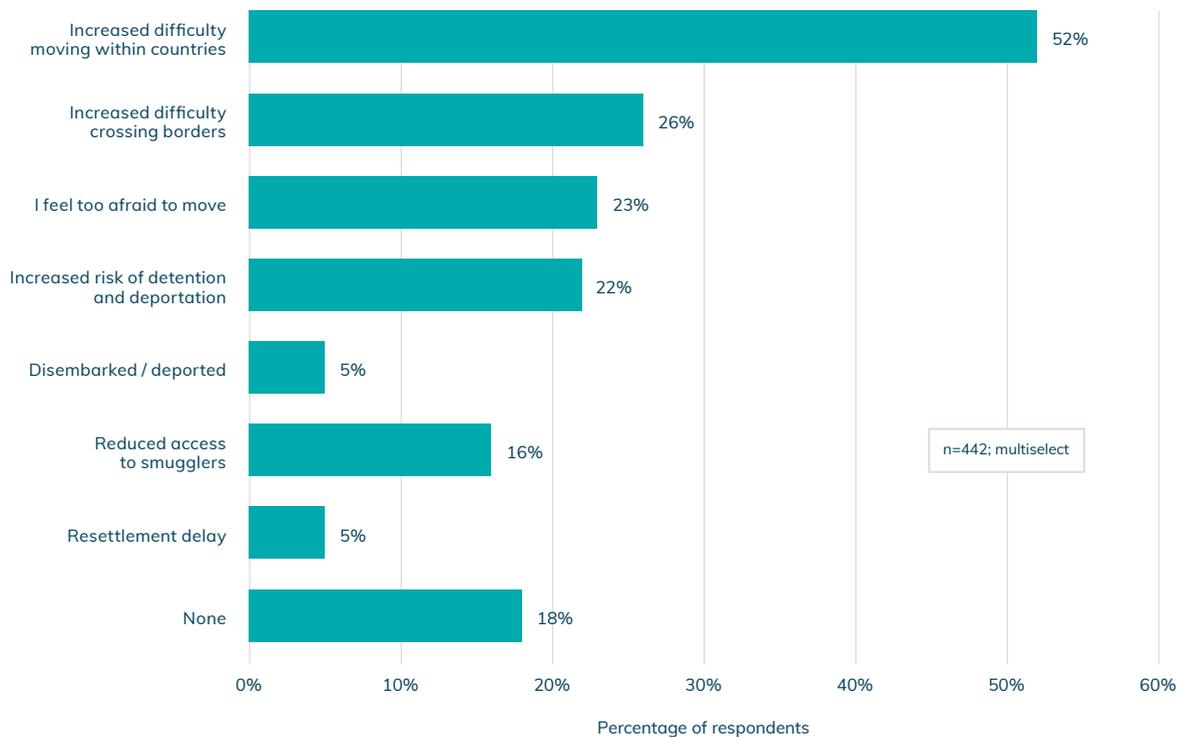
Figure 3. Have you changed your plans as a result of the coronavirus outbreak?



COVID-19 is making it increasingly difficult to move within Libya² and across borders

When queried about the impact of COVID-19 on their migration journey, nearly 18% of respondents (n=78) noted that the pandemic had no impact. However, the remaining 82% affirmed the pandemic had impacted upon their mobility in a variety of different ways, including constraining their movements within the country and across international borders, increasing their risk of detention and deportation, reducing their access to smugglers, and interrupting their resettlement processes.

Figure 4. What impacts has COVID-19 had on your migration journey?



On the internal mobility challenges in Libya, a Nigerian man in Sabha explained, “People are still coming to Sabha now, but they’re not going out of the town....going from Sabha and onward is very difficult.” A Cameroonian woman in Sabha commented on the multiple and overlapping factors impacting upon mobility:

“Most people already come with a plan in mind, now some of them decided to stay in Libya for a particular time while waiting for the pandemic to end, while others decided if it finishes they would go back to their country, while others said it hasn’t affected their journey.”

She further explained that most refugees and migrants seem to base their decision-making on the information they receive from other migrants and national authorities. This includes information on closed borders and the possibility of not being able to enter Europe, as well as the risk of catching the disease and not being able to access health facilities in Europe.

Refugees and migrants fear detention and deportation

Refugees and migrants with an irregular status appear more vulnerable than they were before the outbreak. In interviews some reveal that increased police and military on the street has prompted them not to leave their homes, for fear of being arrested and deported. The increased risk of detention and deportation was reported to a similar degree by men and women (22% vs. 20%, respectively).

² OCHA reported that on April 26th, the GNA rolled-back its 24-hr curfew, making the curfews in the West and East from 18h-6h.

Reduced livelihood opportunities linked to COVID-19 may impact involuntary immobility

Research by [Hein de Haas](#) argues that for people to migrate, they must have a minimum level of financial, social, and human capabilities. The severe health and economic effects of the pandemic have led 62% of MMC's respondents to lose their income and many to have their resources constrained by rising [prices for basic goods](#). This finding is supported by [IOM research](#) noting that in 93% of assessed locations in Libya, migrants relying on daily labor were negatively affected due to the impact of COVID-19 in reducing economic activities. Moreover, in research undertaken to inform the Libya Protection Sector, [REACH](#) highlights that increased job insecurity linked to COVID-19 continues to impact people's ability to cover basic needs and pay rent. Overall, this suggests that COVID-19 may impede the mobility of refugees and migrants – beyond movement restrictions and curfews – through constraining their resources and capabilities, causing some to be involuntarily immobile in Libya.

Alongside socio-economic factors impeding movement, MMC key informant interviews reveal that in an effort to find sources of income, some refugees and migrants are seeking informal loans from Libyans and smugglers, which may require the handing over of identification documents, including passports, as collateral (interview with a Chadian man in Ajdabiya). In surrendering their travel documents, refugees and migrants experience a highly precarious form of immobility.



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4Mi & COVID-19

The [Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism Initiative](#) (4Mi) is the Mixed Migration Centre's flagship primary data collection system, an innovative approach that helps fill knowledge gaps, and inform policy and response regarding the nature of mixed migratory movements. Normally, the recruitment of respondents and interviews take place face-to-face. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, face-to-face recruitment and data collection has been suspended in all countries.

MMC has responded to the COVID-19 crisis by changing the data it collects and the way it collects it. Respondents are recruited through a number of remote or third-party mechanisms; sampling is through a mixture of purposive and snowball approaches. A new survey focuses on the impact of COVID-19 on refugees and migrants, and the surveys are administered by telephone, by the 4Mi monitors in West Africa, East Africa, North Africa, Asia and Latin America. Findings derived from the surveyed sample should not be used to make inferences about the total population of refugees and migrants, as the sample is not representative. The switch to remote recruitment and data collection results in additional potential bias and risks, which cannot be completely avoided. Further measures have been put in place to check and – to the extent possible – control for bias and to protect personal data. See more 4Mi analysis and details on methodology at www.mixedmigration.org/4mi