

The Impact of COVID-19 on Refugee and Migrant Women in Tunisia

A 2020 [report by UN Women](#) suggests that the health and socio-economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have exacerbated women migrants' existing vulnerabilities, which, according to a [2019 report](#) by the Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights (FTDES) include discrimination, exploitation, abuse and other forms of gender-based violence. More specifically, qualitative data presented in MMC's [July 2020 4Mi Snapshot on the economic impacts of COVID-19](#) noted that women on the move in Tunisia, particularly those travelling with children, were in need of increased assistance since the start of the pandemic. This snapshot seeks to further understand the impact of COVID-19 on refugee and migrant women in Tunisia.

Recommendations

- Work with municipalities to create clear and accessible processes for work permits for foreign workers, and conduct outreach and awareness-raising that targets women.
- Organize trainings with local industry and employers on labor and human rights law to help increase the stability of refugee and migrant women within the labour market.
- Deploy information campaigns targeting refugee and migrant women to inform them of the risks around labour market exploitation and of their rights and available assistance.
- Provide additional cash, mental-health and psycho-social support for women on the move in Tunisia, particularly for women travelling with children.

Profiles

This snapshot draws from 2,523 surveys with refugees and migrants conducted between July 2020 and January 2021 in Tunisia. Of those surveyed, 70% are men (n=1,757) and 30% are women (n=766), ranging from 18 to 66 years of age. The main origin countries of respondents include Côte d'Ivoire (17%; n= 423), Sudan (8%; n= 209), Cameroon (8%; n= 209) and Eritrea (8%; n= 195). Other countries include, but are not limited to, Guinea (7%), Mali (4%), Burkina Faso (4%), Syria (3%), Senegal (3%), Nigeria (3%), Democratic Republic of Congo (3%), Somalia (3%), Chad (3%) and Libya (3%). See Table 1 for more on

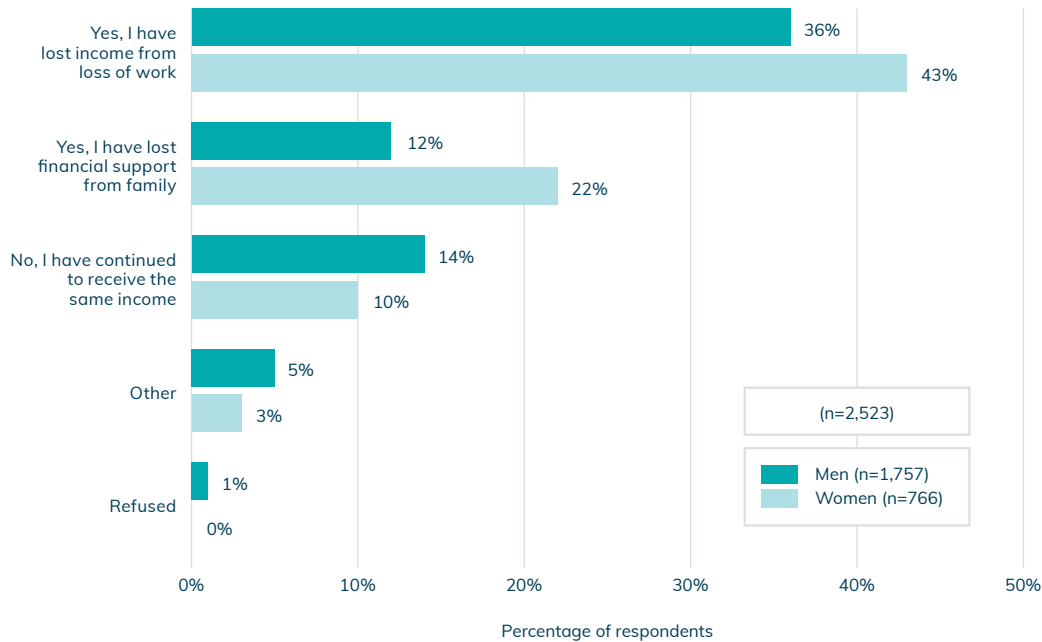
sample composition: age, city of interview, and whether travelling with children.

Table 1. Composition of the sample by gender and age, location, travelling with/without children

| N=2,523 | | Women | Men | Total |
|----------|--------------------------|-------|-----|-------|
| Age | 18-20 | 9% | 8% | 8% |
| | 21-25 | 20% | 30% | 27% |
| | 26-30 | 43% | 37% | 39% |
| | 31-35 | 20% | 18% | 19% |
| | 36-40 | 7% | 4% | 5% |
| | >40 | 2% | 3% | 2% |
| City | Medenine | 29% | 27% | 27% |
| | Sfax | 21% | 35% | 31% |
| | Tunis | 19% | 18% | 18% |
| | Ariana | 17% | 8% | 11% |
| | Other | 16% | 12% | 13% |
| Children | Travelling alone | 74% | 92% | 87% |
| | Travelling with children | 26% | 8% | 13% |

Women on the move more often lose income due to coronavirus restrictions in Tunisia

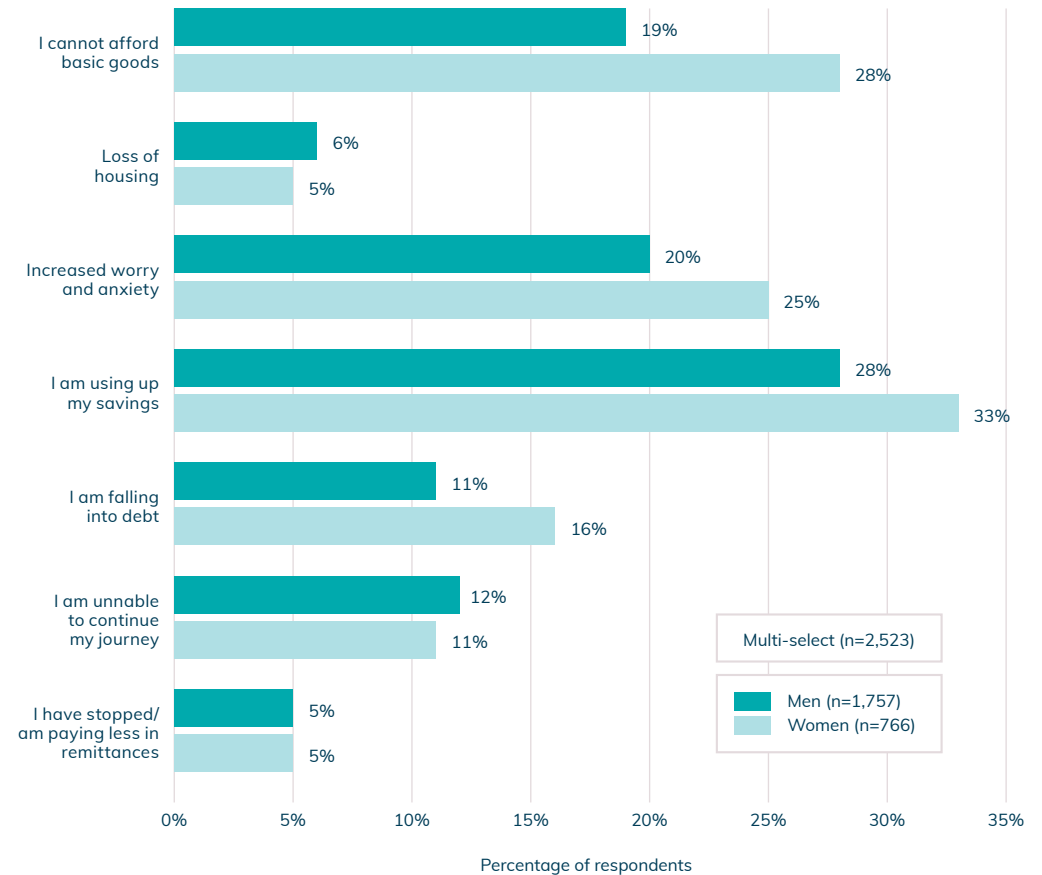
Figure 1. Have you lost income due to coronavirus restrictions?



Women respondents more frequently reported a loss of income from loss of work (43% vs. 36%) and a loss financial support from family (22% vs. 12%) compared to men. Women also less often reported that they have continued to receive the same income as before the start of the pandemic, as compared to men (10% vs. 14%). This was underscored by a Burkinabe woman surveyed in Tunis, highlighting that the situation is only getting worse with the second wave of the pandemic: “The current situation scares us because the virus is coming back again, we have no more savings or more work.”

Loss of income due to COVID-19 has impacted upon women’s ability to afford basic goods

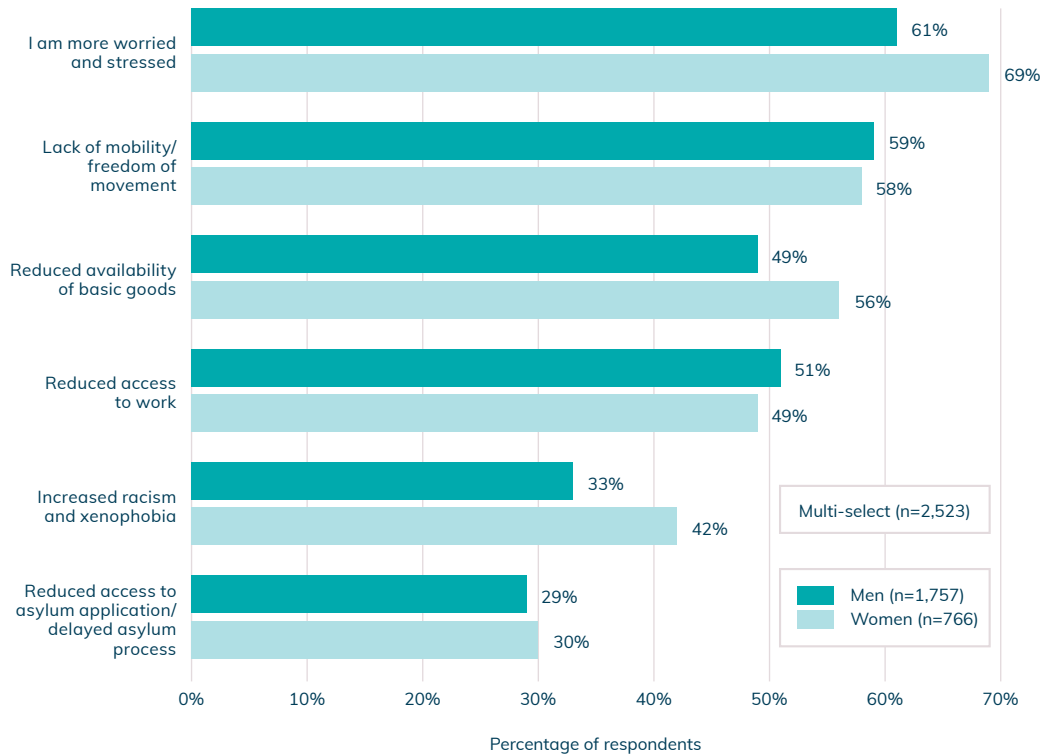
Figure 2: What impact has the loss of income had?



Women reported greater impacts of loss of income on their lives compared to their male counterparts. This was particularly the case for women respondents’ inability to afford basic goods (28% vs. 19%), suggesting that women are reporting a greater impact of their loss of income. Additionally, women more often reported using up their savings (33% vs. 28%), feeling increasingly worried and anxious (25% vs. 20%) and falling into debt (16% vs. 11%) as compared to their male peers. An Ivorian woman in Sfax noted “I live in difficulties here, my salary goes to childcare centers and also my accommodation.”

Women more often reported greater stress, reduced availability of basic goods and increased discrimination

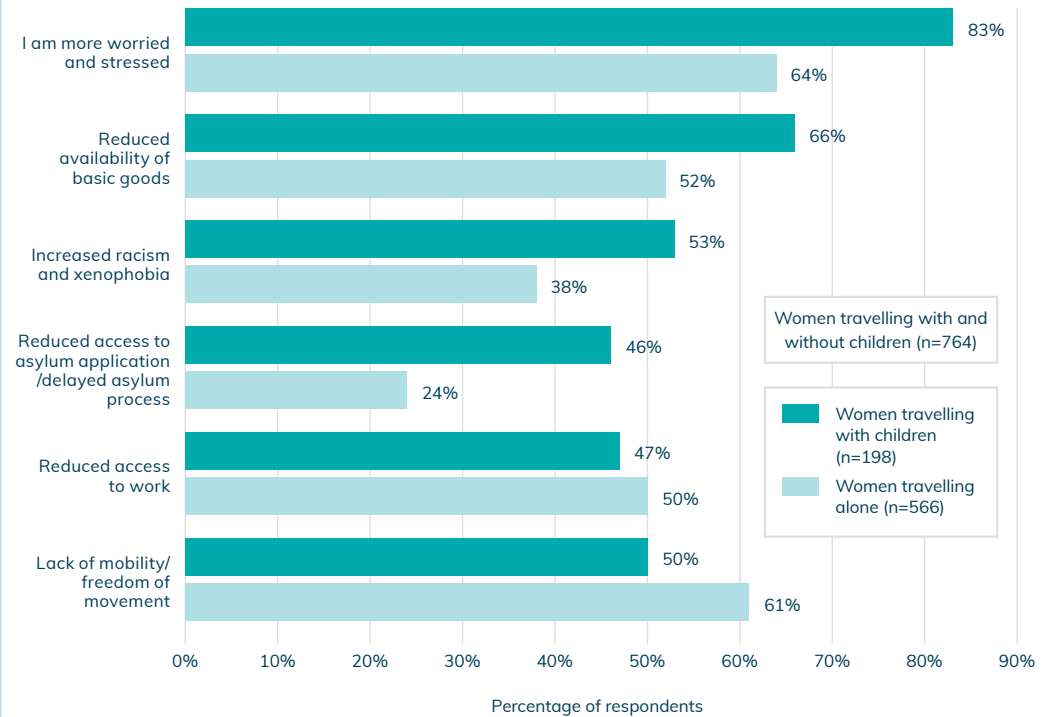
Figure 3: What impacts has the crisis had on your day-to-day life?



When queried on the impact of COVID-19 on their day-to-day lives, women respondents more often noted that they suffered from increased worry and stress (69% vs. 61%), reduced availability of basic goods (56% vs. 49%) and increased racism and xenophobia (42% vs. 33%). Women and men respondents similarly highlighted a lack of mobility (58% vs. 59%), reduced access to work (49% vs. 51%) and reduced access to asylum application (30% vs. 29%).

Women travelling with children more often reported negative impacts resulting from COVID-19

Figure 4: What impacts has the crisis had on your day-to-day life?¹



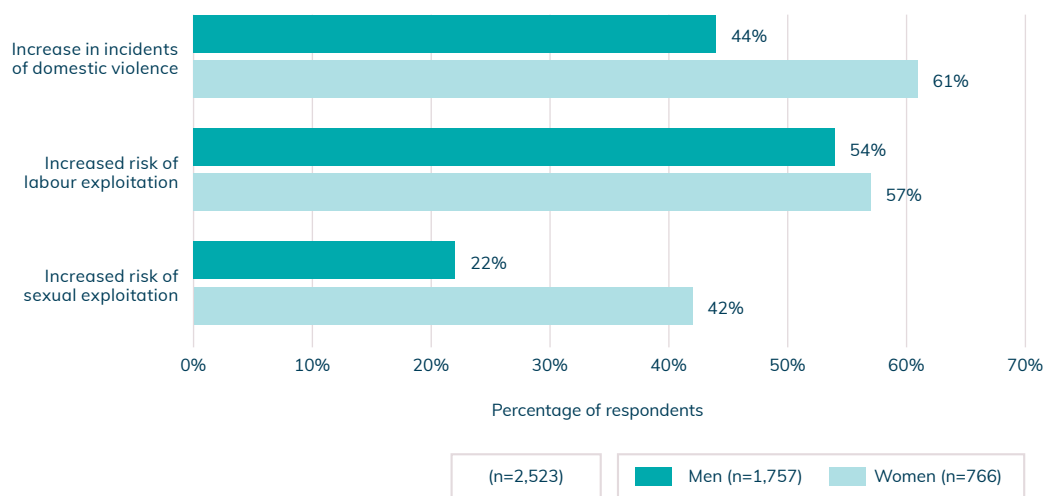
When comparing women travelling alone to those travelling with children, women travelling with children more often reported feeling anxiety and stress (83% vs. 64%), facing reduced availability of basic goods (66% vs. 52%), increased racism and xenophobia (53% vs. 38%) and reduced access to asylum application (46% vs. 24%) than women travelling alone. Conversely, albeit with a smaller disparity, women travelling alone more often reported facing a lack of mobility (61% vs. 50%) and reduced access to work (50% vs. 47%). These results may be explained by the fact that women respondents travelling alone are more dependent on their own work and mobility restrictions are jeopardizing their income generation.

¹ Two women surveyed refused when queried if they were travelling with children.

Perceptions of a heightened risk of sexual and domestic abuse

The disparities across gender are considerable for the perceived risks of domestic violence and sexual exploitation since the pandemic began. 61% of women agreed there had been an increase in domestic violence compared to 44% of men. 42% of women considered the risks of sexual exploitation to have increased, compared to 22% of men. These findings align with those presented by FTDES in their 2019 report and suggests that these particular vulnerabilities for women on the move are being further exacerbated by the ongoing pandemic. Interestingly, just over half of both men and women respondents perceived an increased risk of labour exploitation, which is likely linked to this form of exploitation being experienced to a similar extent by both sexes.

Figure 5: There is an increased risk of domestic violence, labour exploitation and sexual exploitation since the COVID-19 pandemic began (strongly agree & agree)



Conclusion

A majority of surveyed refugees and migrants in Tunisia noted that they had lost income due to COVID-19 restrictions, but women refugees and migrants are more frequently affected, and are reporting more impacts. Women respondents more often noted not being able to afford basic services, an increase in worry and stress, and using up their savings, which would also place them in more precarious situations in the future. Women travelling with children particularly noted an increase in stress and an inability to afford goods. Moreover, women respondents in Tunisia more often noted an increased risk of domestic violence, labour exploitation and sexual exploitation since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.



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