



**Mixed
Migration
Centre**

Urban mixed migration:

Experiences of migrants moving
to, through and from cities in
West and North Africa



Rabat Process
Euro-African Dialogue on
Migration and Development

MMC Briefing Paper, November 2021



Project funded by the European Union



In the framework of the
Support Programme to the
Africa-EU Migration and
Mobility Dialogue (MMD)

Project implemented by ICMPD

 **ICMPD**
International Centre for
Migration Policy Development

Front cover photo credit:

© UNHCR / John Wendle.

Abdoulaye, an asylum-seeker from Cameroon, works as a refrigerator repairman in Niamey, Niger.

Acknowledgements

Author: Julia Litzkow, Roberto Forin.

Reviewed by: Bram Frouws, Jessamy Garver-Affeldt, Ayla Bonfiglio, Jane Linekar.

Special thanks: Francesco Teo Ficarelli for 4Mi data analysis, the 4Mi teams in West and North Africa for the implementation of 4Mi, and the Rabat Process Secretariat (funded by the EU and implemented by the ICMPD) for their guidance.

Layout and design: Simon Pegler.

Suggested citation: Mixed Migration Centre (2021) *Urban Mixed Migration: Experiences of migrants moving to, through and from cities in West and North Africa*. Available at: www.mixedmigration.org

The Mixed Migration Centre (MMC) is a global network consisting of six regional hubs (Asia, East Africa & Yemen, Europe, 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 information and views set out in this report are those of 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.

This report was prepared for the Euro-African Dialogue on Migration and Development (Rabat Process) and the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) as part of the partnership between MMC and ICMPD to foster effective and sustainable migration policies and programmes. This publication was produced with the financial support of the European Union in the Framework of the project "Support to the Africa-EU Dialogue on Migration and Mobility" (MMD). Its contents are the sole responsibility of MMC and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.

For more information on MMC visit our website: www.mixedmigration.org



Project funded by the European Union



Project implemented by ICMPD



Contents

Acknowledgements	3
List of figures	4
About this report	5
Introduction	5
Key findings	7
Methodology	9
4Mi - A Global Data Collection Initiative	9
Context and trends	10
Coordination between local and national authorities	10
Rural versus urban origins	11
Migration profiles	11
Migration drivers	13
Urban transit hubs	15
What is the role of cities in migration journeys?	15
Urban living	16
Case study 1. Economic situation in Sfax, Medenine, and Tunis	17
Case study 2. Children and youth moving through Bamako, Niamey, and Ouagadougou	20
Conclusions	26
Policy recommendations	27

List of figures

Figure 1. Did you leave from an urban or rural setting?	11
Figure 2. What is the highest level of education you have completed?	12
Figure 3. Did you obtain information about the journey before you left?	12
Figure 4. How did you initially finance your journey?	13
Figure 5. Do respondents leaving urban areas migrate for different reasons?	14
Figure 6. Why do refugees and migrants stop in cities?	16
Case Study 1.	
Figure 7. How long after you arrived were you able to find a job?	17
Figure 8. What type of employment agreement do you have?	18
Figure 9. What are the key risks in this job?	19
Case study 2.	
Figure 10. What were the reasons for leaving your country of departure, by age?	20
Figure 11. How did you finance your trip so far?	21
Figure 12. Why did you come to this city?	22
Figure 13. Duration of stay	23
Figure 14. Perceived risks for minors by gender	24
Figure 15. How was the stay?	24

About this report

This report is the third of a series of four papers that the Mixed Migration Centre (MMC) will be publishing in 2021 as part of a collaboration with the Rabat Process Secretariat, within the context of MMC's partnership with the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD). This work is in line with the MMC strategic objective to contribute to evidence-based and better-informed migration policies and debates.

Introduction

In a context of continuing urbanisation, the future of migration will be increasingly shaped by how cities address the issue. Cities are key destinations for internal and international refugees and migrants, whether for permanent residence, temporary settlement, or short-term transit. 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 or who decide to stay. At the same time, it can be considered initially as a place of settlement and exposing people on the move to new ideas, educational opportunities, and expanded livelihood options, to name a few, can contribute to decisions to move onward.

Against this backdrop of the urban reality of mixed migration, local governments are increasingly being recognised as integral stakeholders in migration policymaking and implementation, through various global, regional, and city-level processes, particularly across Africa and Europe. The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM),¹ and the Joint Valletta Action Plan² reference the importance of multi-level migration governance. The Marrakesh Mayors Declaration³ calls on mayors' and city leaders' formalised inclusion in the implementation, follow up, and review of the GCM and the Global Compact on Refugees. Other initiatives, such as the Mayors Dialogue⁴ or the Global Cities Fund⁵ aim to better the lives of all urban residents, including migrants, and covers several cities within the Rabat Process region, such as Freetown, Accra, Agadez, and Dakar. With the similar aim of creating more inclusive cities and improving migration governance at the city level, the ICMPD's Mediterranean City-to-City Migration (MC2CM)⁶ project fosters exchange between city leaders, civil servants, and experts from the local,

national, and international level. It is implemented in Morocco and Tunisia as well France, Italy, Portugal, and Spain on the other side of the Mediterranean.

The Euro-African Dialogue on Migration and Development (Rabat Process) is a regional migration dialogue established in 2006, bringing together countries of origin, transit, and destination along the migration routes linking Central, West, and North Africa with Europe.⁷ One of the crosscutting priorities of the current strategic framework, the Marrakesh Action Plan,⁸ is an “inclusive and multi-stakeholder” approach to migration management. The Rabat Process' partners thereby agreed on the importance of involving all relevant actors in the different aspects of migration management, including national and local level authorities. The stocktaking report of the Marrakesh Action Plan further includes a recommendation to “strengthen the interaction of the dialogue with cities and local authorities”.⁹ To support these objectives, a Rabat Process thematic meeting entitled “National authorities, local authorities and migration” was convened in Paris in mid-September 2021, bringing together local and national authorities from Africa and Europe to discuss different models of multi-level governance on migration and exchange good practices for improved national and local coordination on migration.¹⁰

This paper focuses on the role of cities in migration journeys, from origin to transit to destination, offering insights into the experiences of people on the move in West and North Africa. It is grounded in existing literature and MMC's unique primary data collection system, 4Mi. The aim of this paper is to raise awareness and strengthen policymakers' understanding of the

1 United Nations (2019) [Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration](#).

2 Rabat Process (2021) [What is the Joint Valletta Action Plan?](#)

3 Mayors Mechanism (2018) [Marrakesh Mayors Declaration](#).

4 ODI (2020) [The Mayors Dialogue on Growth and Solidarity](#).

5 Mayor Migration Council (2021) [Global Cities Fund](#).

6 ICMPD (2021) [Mediterranean City-to-City Migration \(MC2CM\)](#).

7 Rabat Process (2021) [The Rabat Process](#).

8 Rabat Process (2021) [Marrakesh Declaration and Action Plan](#).

9 Rabat Process (2020) [Implementing the Marrakesh Action Plan: A new report on progress and prospects](#).

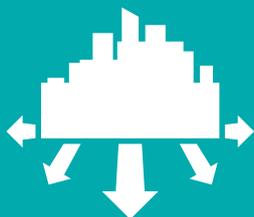
10 Rabat Process (2021) [Rabat Process “labelled” meeting, chaired by France: National authorities, local authorities and migration](#).

urban reality of mixed migration in West and North Africa whilst exploring policy options and encouraging debate - with the voices of refugees and migrants at the centre.

After a short introduction putting urban migration into the broader context of global mobility dynamics and trends, the paper starts with an analysis of the links between urban versus rural origins and mixed migration profiles, drivers, and journeys and continues with an overview of the role of cities for refugees and migrants in transit. Lastly, the paper offers two mini-case studies on socio-economic inclusion in cities in Tunisia and on children and youth on the move in West Africa. The paper concludes with some policy discussion and recommendations on strengthening the role of and coordination between municipal authorities and national authorities for migration governance.

Key Findings

This paper focuses on the role of cities in migration journeys, from origin to transit to destination cities. Using the examples of cities in West and North Africa it offers insight into the experiences of people on the move in cities, with particular focus on youth and children. Key findings emerging from the analysis are as follow:



Urban origins

For West African 4Mi respondents, cities are a springboard for international migration; those leaving from urban areas often have a higher level of education, access to more information, and more resources to finance their own journeys.

West African respondents who left urban areas often had a higher level of education, compared to respondents from rural areas. In some instances, this could be a self-reinforcing cycle, whereby people who previously moved internally, from rural to urban areas, get better education, which in turn contributes to both their aspiration and capabilities to move to another country.

Those starting their journeys from urban areas had more resources to finance their own journeys and less often used money from family or borrowed funds from others. This suggests cities can be places where people accumulate the resources necessary to finance more expensive international migration.

A larger proportion of respondents from rural areas reported leaving for personal or family reasons than those from urban areas (35% compared to 25%). This could point to the role of socio-cultural migration norms in rural areas and the need for youth (as the predominant migrant population) to support their families by looking for opportunities in cities.



Urban transit

Transit cities play different roles: they can be places to find work, to rest, or to arrange the next leg of the journey, including through smugglers.

In some instances, transit cities become de facto destinations, for instance when people stop there temporarily to work and eventually settle, either because they are not able to gather the necessary resources to continue their journey or simply because they change their plans.



Urban living

Cities, while providing a wide range of economic opportunities, are also expensive places to live in and the decision of refugees and migrants to establish themselves there is often a worthwhile but also risky investment.

While refugees and migrants participate in the labour market of cities - often filling existing gaps in low-skilled, manual jobs - they often have no choice but to work in the informal sector. Working without formal contracts and therefore devoid of legal protection exposes refugees and migrants to a variety of vulnerabilities and risks, including exploitation and physical and verbal abuse.

Age impacts upon refugees' and migrants' decision making processes, as well as the opportunities and vulnerabilities they face in cities. For instance younger people tend to have less resources to finance their journeys and this influence their experience when they reach cities. Further, the analysis shows that different cities attract youth for different reasons, including but not limited to their location along the migration route. These are important considerations both for programmes seeking to assist youth on the move, as well as for service providers to tailor their reception infrastructures to refugees and migrants needs.

Methodology

The 4Mi analysis presented in this paper draws on a range of datasets. Details of each dataset, including origin of respondent, data of interview, and country of interview, are indicated in the table below:

	Urban origins	Urban transit		Urban living	
		What is the role of cities/what are the risks?	What type of assistance is needed?	Youth in cities	Socio-economic integration
Who	2,424 surveys with West and Central Africans	2,714 surveys with West, Central, and North Africans	1,472 surveys with West and Central Africans	2,008 surveys with West African respondents aged 15-29	89 surveys with West and Central Africans
When	September 2019 – March 2020	September 2019 – March 2020	February 2021 – June 2021	November 2020 – December 2020	February 2021 – April 2021
Where	Burkina Faso, Italy, Libya, Mali, Niger, Tunisia,	Cities where more than 100 respondents stopped. (Cities = population over 50,000)	Agadez, Bamako, Gao, Medenine, Niamey, Sfax, Timbuktu, Tripoli, Tunis	Bamako (n=501, 194 women, 307 men) Niamey (n=718, 247 women, 471 men) Ouagadougou (n=789, 341 women, 448 men)	Medenine (n=15) Sfax (n=13) Tunis (n=61)

4Mi - A Global Data Collection Initiative

4Mi offers a regular and standardized quantitative system of collecting globally comparable primary data on mixed migration.

Since it first started in 2014 in East Africa, 4Mi has conducted more than 75,000 interviews with refugees and migrants on the move, becoming the largest in-depth data collection mechanism on migration globally, operational in between 15-20 countries with a network of approximately 120 enumerators in Africa, Asia, Europe, and Latin America.

4Mi field enumerators situated along frequently used routes and in major migratory hubs conduct face-to-face interviews with refugees and migrants on a continuous basis.

4Mi uses purposive and snowball sampling¹¹ to get in touch with refugees and migrants traveling along mixed migration routes and is not intended to be representative of the overall volume or characteristics of the refugee and migrant populations in these countries and along the Central and Western Mediterranean Routes. The data is

analysed using descriptive statistics, disaggregating by gender, country, and location of the respondent, whether respondents come from an urban or rural background, as well as other key background characteristics.¹²

11 Potential survey respondents are selected at key locations according to a small set of criteria. Selected respondents sometimes refer others to 4Mi.

12 For more information, see [4Mi FAQ](#). Data is available for visualization through [4Mi Interactive](#). It can be explored and tailored to specific interests.

Context and trends

African countries are rapidly urbanising. The rise of “mega-cities”, hosting more than ten million inhabitants, garners media attention, but urban growth through migration is largely taking place across small and medium sized cities.¹³ Migration is thought to contribute to around 50% of urban population growth on the continent.¹⁴ West and North African countries are experiencing enormous socioeconomic transformations that accompany the shift from rural to urban lifestyles. Some predictions envision the doubling of the continent’s population in the next 30 years, with most of this growth expected to be absorbed by urban areas.¹⁵

In 2015, the African continent was home to six urban clusters, the largest of which being in West Africa, with an estimated urban population of more than 133 million. North Africa comprised more than 40 million urban residents.¹⁶

Mobility across Africa is characterised by intra-regional migration, with a small percentage of people planning to migrate internationally outside their regions and beyond the continent. Some of the key migration hubs in West Africa have served as trading nodes for centuries, including Agadez, Arlit, and Dirkou in Niger and Gao in Mali.¹⁷

For those moving further afield to North Africa, Azzawya, Benghazi, Sebha, Tripoli, and Zwara in Libya; Oujda, Casablanca, Marrakesh, and Rabat in Morocco; Tunis, Sfax, and Medenine in Tunisia have continued to serve as destination and transit points on the way to Europe.¹⁸ While routes have been diversifying, Agadez and Gao have been important cities of transit for West African refugees and migrants moving towards North Africa.¹⁹ From Agadez, the most common route to Libya is via Sebha and the route to Algeria through Arlit.²⁰ Those intending to stay in Algeria tend to travel to Algiers, while others stop over in Oujda, Morocco, on the way to Europe.²¹

Notwithstanding the origin, direction, and ultimate destinations, or even the reasons for migration, cities across the Rabat Process region are the nodes of most people’s migration journeys. Cities of various sizes

attract people for a multitude of social and economic reasons, including improved and diversified employment and education opportunities but also increasingly conflict-related displacement.²² Findings from the University of Oxford’s African Perspectives on Human Mobility research programme identify three processes linked to international migration that contribute to urban migration in Africa.²³ The first concerns the settlement of returning international migrants in urban areas, the second is linked to remittances paving the way for further rural-urban migration and the third is international migration to African cities, particularly “second tier” cities.²⁴ The role of secondary towns and cities as “future frontiers of sustainable, social, economic and spatial urban growth and development” is also emphasised by a recent UNICEF and UN-Habitat report on deprivation in secondary cities in Sub-Saharan Africa.²⁵ A central challenge when studying urban migration is capturing how migration impacts urban spaces and how opportunities and challenges in cities affect people’s mobility, including their aspirations and capabilities.²⁶

Coordination between local and national authorities

With cities at the forefront of attending to the needs of refugees and migrants, national migration policies largely play out at the city level. Urban policies cannot ignore migration and migration policies cannot ignore the role played by cities. Urban migration is central to intra-regional migration, as cities provide opportunities for millions of people on the move and boost regional economic growth. Yet, cities are also spaces where migrants, internally displaced people, and refugees often face complex and unique challenges, including informal or precarious employment, or restricted access to public services and benefits. Their experiences are complicated by language and cultural barriers, xenophobia, racism, and discrimination. An approach which focuses on both mixed migration and cities is therefore essential when considering migration and inclusive policy and governance.

13 OECD/SWAC (2020) [Africa’s Urbanisation Dynamics 2020: Africapolis. Mapping a New Urban Geography.](#)

14 ODI (2019) [Why we need better data on mobile populations in cities – and how to get it.](#)

15 OECD/SWAC (2020) [op.cit.](#)

16 OECD/SWAC (2020) [op.cit.](#)

17 IOM (2020) [Africa Migration Report.](#)

18 This list is not exhaustive. UNODC (2018) [Global Study on Smuggling of Migrants.](#)

19 UNODC (2018) [op.cit.](#)

20 UNODC (2018) [op.cit.](#)

21 UNODC (2018) [op.cit.](#)

22 IOM (2020) [op.cit.](#)

23 Bakewell, O. and Jónsson, G. (2011) [Migration, Mobility and the African City.](#)

24 Bakewell, O. and Jónsson, G. (2011) [op.cit.](#)

25 UNICEF and UN Habitat (2020) [Analysis of Multiple Deprivations in Secondary Cities in Sub-Saharan Africa.](#)

26 Bakewell, O. and Jónsson, G. (2011) [op.cit.](#)

Gaps in coordination and approaches to mixed migration were made evident during the Covid-19 pandemic, which acted as a risk-multiplier for people on the move. It led to an increase of perceived discrimination and xenophobia and exposed refugees' and migrants' precarious living and working conditions, including their limited avenues to access to health services.²⁷ In many instances the pandemic also revealed how hard it is to reach refugees and migrants and attend to their needs, without the relevant data available at the municipal level.

Spurred by this reality, local authorities in West and North Africa increasingly adopted pragmatic approaches regarding the socio-economic inclusion of refugees and migrants in their cities, for example by ensuring their inclusion in Covid-19 response plans and highlighting the important role that municipalities and service providers play as first responders to the needs of people on the move.²⁸ In Tunisia, the Mayor of Sfax called upon regional authorities, the Governor, and the Regional Health Directorate to allow migrants to access health services and Covid-19 testing regardless of their legal status.²⁹ The municipality of Sousse is supporting a legislative proposal drafted by national non-governmental organisations (NGOs) for the regularization of migrants with a focus on those working in the sectors of construction, food services, and tourism.³⁰

These approaches in urban centres are increasingly gaining visibility (and importance in the times of Covid-19), paving the way for local authorities to “become central allies of civil society and IOs, such as UNHCR and IOM, in developing innovative and sustainable solutions on the ground and advocating for reforms of national and transnational policy protection frameworks.”³¹

Rural versus urban origins

Seasonal, temporary movements constitute a large part of mobility in West Africa, and rural-urban migration is the main pattern across the region.³² Movement often occurs internally at first and can eventually be followed by international migration. Across West Africa, urban residents seem more frequently to aspire to leave their country, likely enabled by their previous move from rural

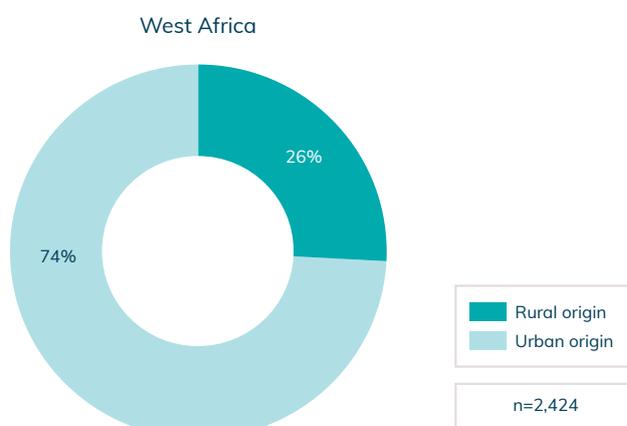
to urban areas.³³ However, while improved access to information and employment might make it easier for some urban residents to migrate further afield, others might lack the means to do so due to limited income in the urban informal sector.³⁴

This section offers insights based on 4Mi data on where refugees' and migrants' journeys began, their socio-demographic profiles and why they left. It aims to support past studies which highlight the impact of coming from an urban background on one's migration behaviour. The analysis draws on 2,424 4Mi surveys with West African³⁵ refugees and migrants on the move - surveyed in Burkina Faso, Italy, Libya, Mali, Niger, and Tunisia between September 2019 and March 2020.

Migration profiles

The majority of West African 4Mi respondents left from urban settings,³⁶ which lends support to the notion that cities are a springboard for international migration, put forward by past studies.³⁷ Among West Africans interviewed, there was no substantial difference between genders, with 76% of women and 73% of men reporting leaving from an urban area.

Figure 1. Did you leave from an urban or rural setting?



27 MMC (2021) [Covid-19 and the socioeconomic situation of migrants in Niger: Analysis of 4Mi data collected in Niger between July and September 2020](#).

28 MMC and UNHCR (Eds.) (2021) [A Roadmap for Advocacy, Policy Development, and Programming: Protection in Mixed Movements along the Central and Western Mediterranean Routes 2021](#).

29 MC2CM (2021) [Going the \(social\) distance: How migrant and refugee-sensitive urban COVID-19 responses contribute to the realization of the Global Compacts for Migration and Refugees](#).

30 MC2CM (2021) [op.cit.](#)

31 MMC and UNHCR (Eds.) (2021) [op.cit.](#)

32 OECD (2018) [Identifying the factors driving West African migration](#).

33 OECD (2018) [op.cit.](#)

34 OECD (2018) [op.cit.](#)

35 Nationalities of West African respondents: Angola, Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Republic of Congo, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo.

36 For the data presented here, MMC defines a city as a place with a population of over 50,000.

37 OECD (2018) [op.cit.](#)

West African respondents who left urban areas often had a higher level of education, compared to respondents from rural areas. In some instances, this could be a self-reinforcing cycle, whereby people who previously moved internally, from rural to urban areas, get better

education which in turn contributes to both their aspiration and capabilities to move to another country. They were also more equipped with information about their impending journey compared to respondents from rural areas.

Figure 2. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

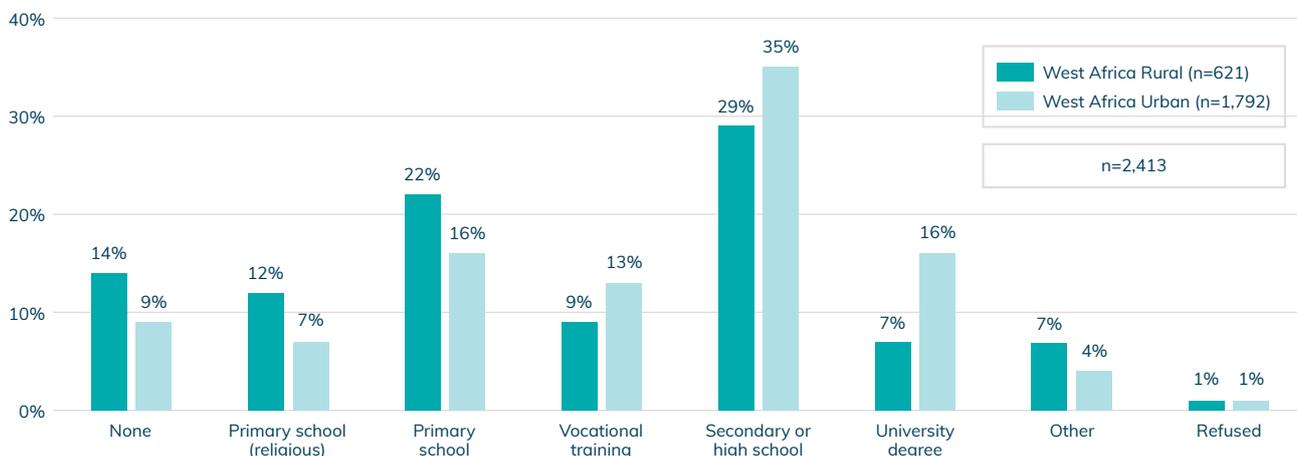
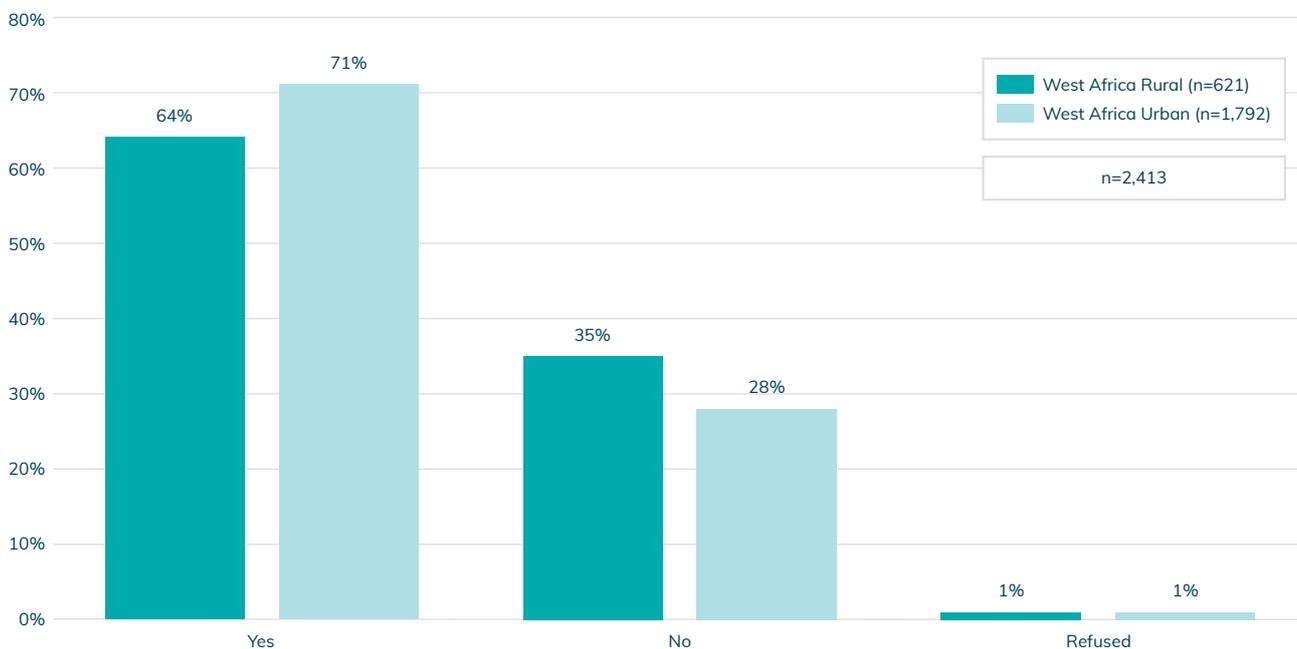


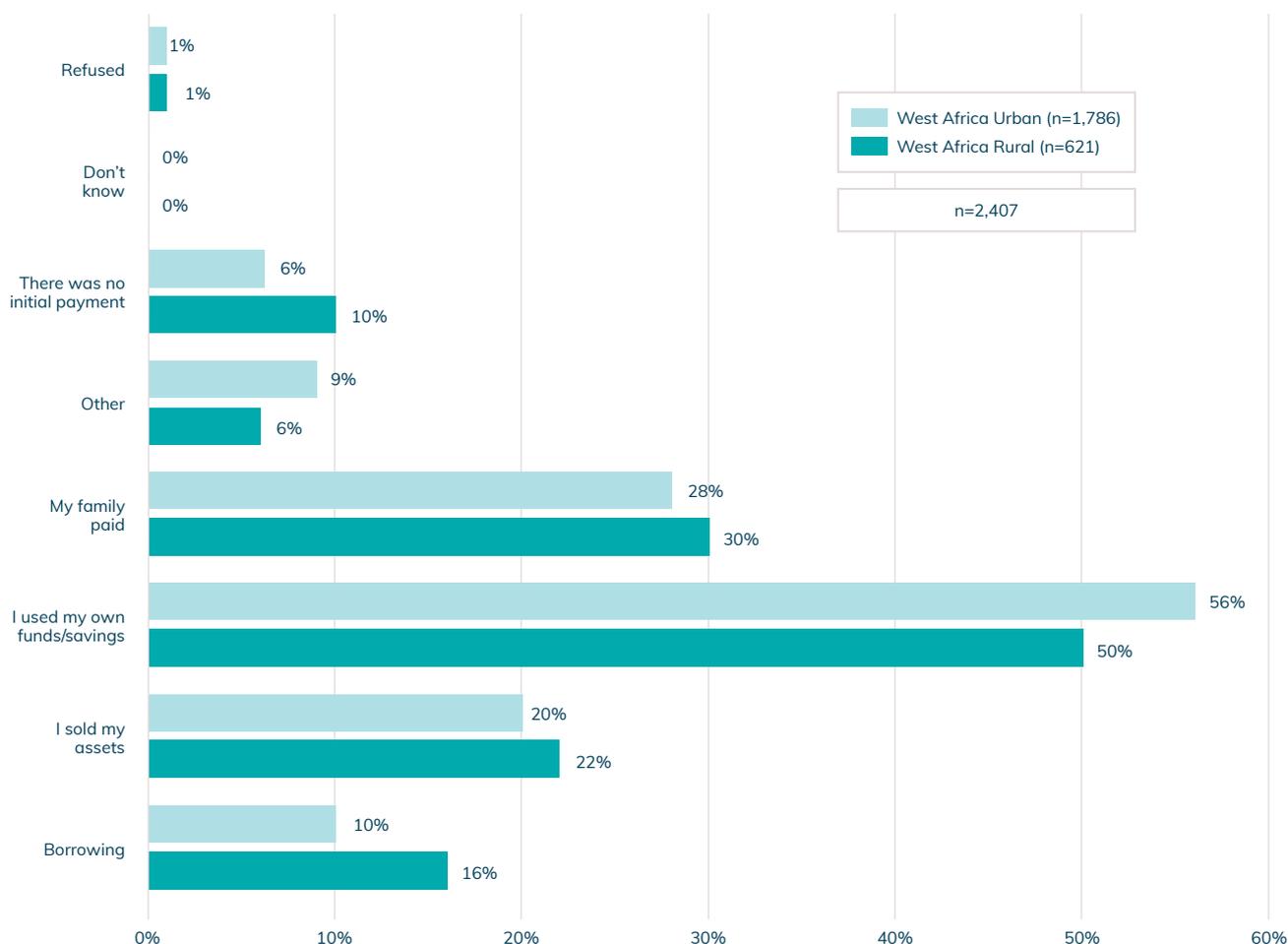
Figure 3. Did you obtain information about the journey before you left?



The financing of journeys also differed depending on urban and rural origins. Those starting their journeys from urban areas had more resources to finance their own journeys and less often used money from family or borrowed funds from others. This suggests cities can be

places where people accumulate the resources necessary to finance more expensive international migration.

Figure 4. How did you initially finance your journey?



Migration drivers

There are usually a variety of considerations factored into migration decision-making, including personal and structural factors. Most 4Mi respondents on the move in West and North Africa – whether from rural or urban areas, point to more than one reason for their departure. Economic and personal or family reasons were the most cited reasons for leaving both among West African respondents from rural and urban areas. A larger proportion of respondents from rural areas reported personal or family reasons than those from urban areas (35% compared to 25%). This could point to the role of socio-cultural migration norms and the need for youth (predominant migrant population) to support their families by looking for opportunities in cities.

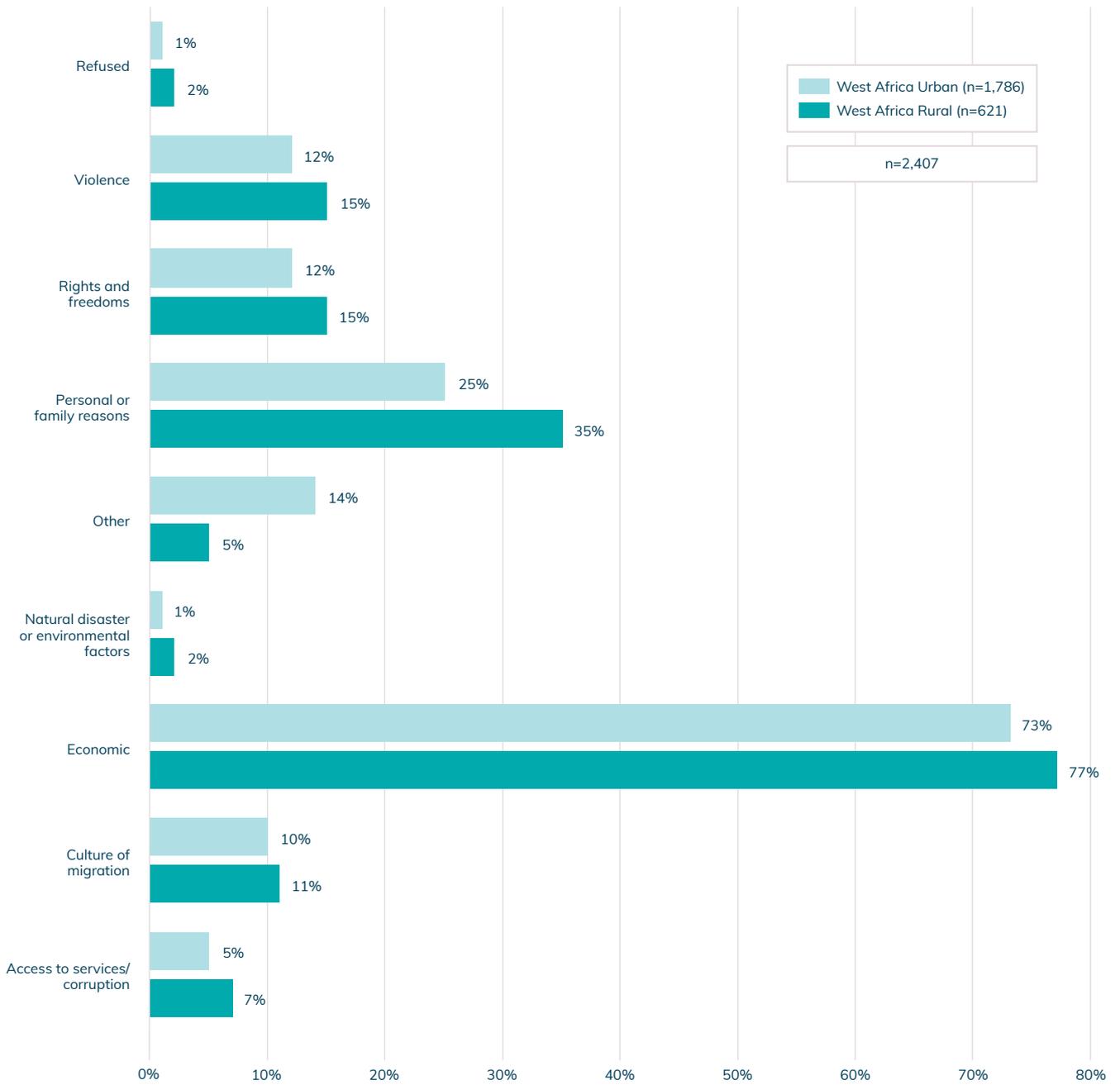
Digging deeper, among people who left for family or personal reasons, a higher proportion of people from rural areas than those from urban areas said they left due to domestic violence (29% vs 23%). The threat of violent conflict was also a stronger driver among the rural group (58% vs 45% of the urban group reporting violence or conflict), however more people left

urban areas because of sexual and gender-based violence (21% vs 12% of those reporting violence or conflict). Crime brought similar results for each group (49% and 47%).

While access to services was not a major driver, the differences seem to reflect the challenges of rural and urban life: those who reported access to services and came from rural areas more often reported lack of access to goods and services (46% vs 20%) and education (63% vs 48%), while the issue among the urban group was less one of presence of services and more one of obstacles, with 66% mentioning corruption compared to 56% of the rural group.

For the main driver, economic reasons, the differences reflect the structures and opportunities of rural and urban economies, with more urban respondents saying they were not earning enough in their job (55% vs 50%), and more rural respondents saying they were unemployed (45% vs 37%).

Figure 5. Do respondents leaving urban areas migrate for different reasons?



Urban transit hubs

Most refugees and migrants transit through cities during their migration journeys to organise onward transportation, temporarily stay, earn money to finance the onward journey or otherwise access funds, or re-connect with others.

Migration hubs are situated along all routes connecting key origin and destination locations across the African continent – this particularly includes border towns and towns connected through transportation nodes.³⁸ In some cases, migrants might stay and settle in initial transit hubs, with smaller towns situated along migration routes growing over time to accommodate those on the move, Agadez, in Niger, being a clear example of this dynamic.³⁹

Between Niger and North Africa, migration has long served as a source of income for many local communities in transit locations in the region alongside other informal activities.⁴⁰ In Agadez - as well as other smaller cities along the routes leading North- the income generated from transit migration has boosted local economies, benefitting individuals, communities, and local authorities, contributing to a very rapid urban development. Disruptions of transit migration can affect local economies and, subsequently, urban growth. For example, the implementation of the 2015 anti-smuggling law in Niger (Loi 2015-36) had significant negative impacts both on the economic situation of individuals and communities in these areas, as well as people on the move themselves.⁴¹

This section takes a closer look at the role cities play in migration journeys. The 4Mi data presented in this section is based on interviews with West and Central African refugees and migrants conducted between September 2019 and March 2020.

What is the role of cities in migration journeys?

“ I didn't have enough money for transport during my journey so I got delayed because I had to work on the road, even though it isn't every day that we manage to find work especially in Bamako, life is very expensive over there. ”

25-year-old-man from Gambia interviewed in Mali

4Mi data found notable differences in respondents' reasons for stopping in cities along the way, but also some similarities according to the route and sometimes within a country. For instance, as we can see in Figure 6, the most common reasons cited for stopping in urban locations in Tunisia were applying for asylum and working. In contrast, in Libyan cities, reasons diverged based on geography: those in the more Southern cities were still very much on the move, therefore mostly looking for a place to rest and connect to further transport, while those in Tripoli were also looking for work. In West Africa, looking for smugglers was more common further along the route to North Africa, with waiting for transport, working, and resting also among the most commonly cited reasons for stopping in cities in the region.

This shows that transit cities play different roles: they can be places to find work, to rest, or to arrange the next leg of the journey, including through smugglers. In some instances, transit cities become de facto destinations, for instance when people stop there to work and eventually settle, either because they are not able to gather the necessary resources to continue their journey or simply because they change their plans. In this sense the distinction between transit and destination cities is not always clear cut and should be applied cautiously when looking at mixed migration dynamics.

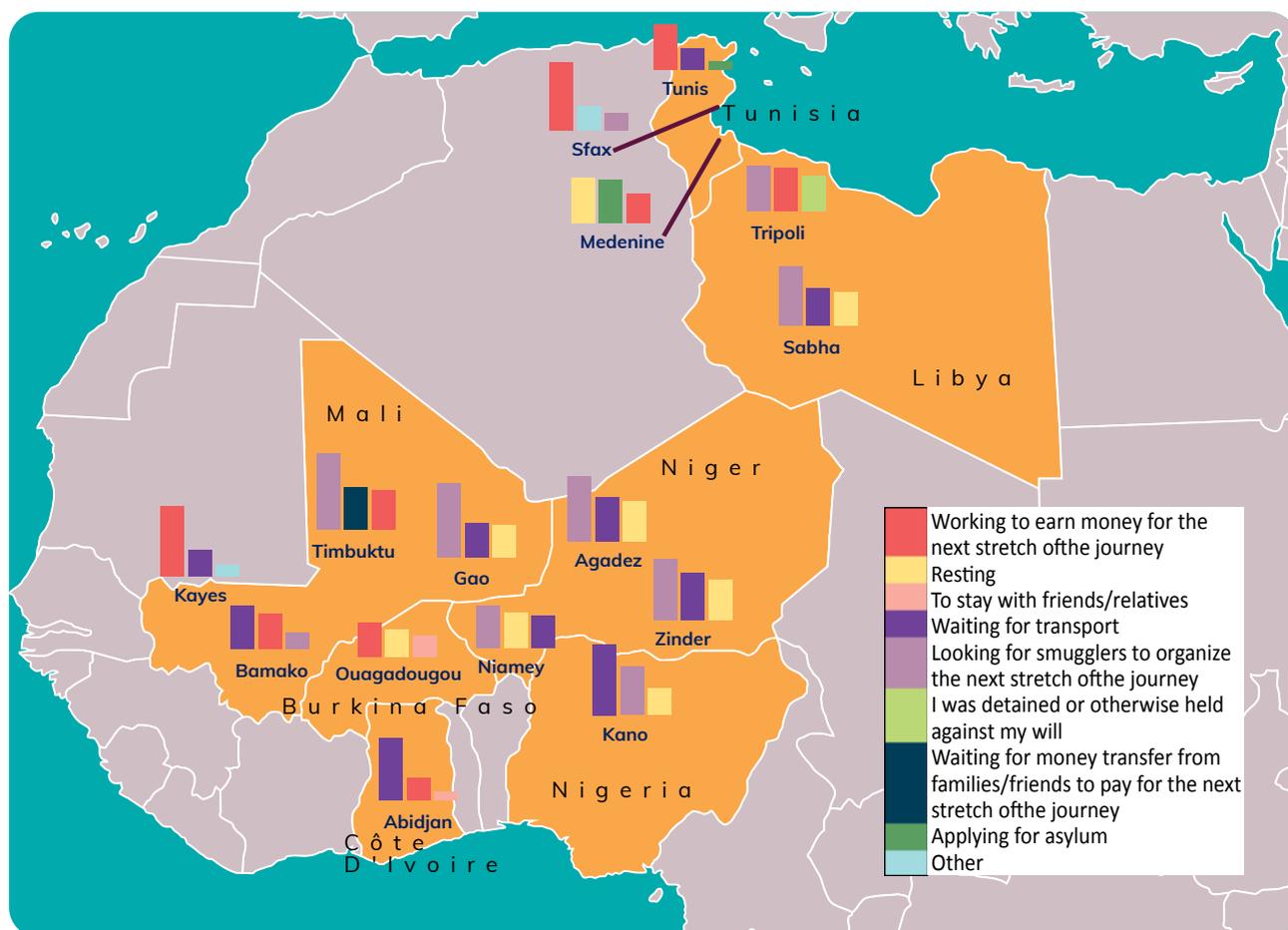
38 European Union (2020) [Intra-African Migration](#).

39 European Union (2020) [op.cit.](#)

40 Sebastien Moretti (2020) [Transit Migration in Niger Migration and Society](#).

41 Colleen Moser (2020) [The adverse effects of Niger's anti-smuggling law Forced Migration Review](#).

Figure 6. Why do refugees and migrants stop in cities?



Urban living

Refugees and migrants move to cities in the hope of finding easier access to work, education, housing, and other services. However, cities face numerous challenges in living up to the expectations and needs of their refugee and migrant populations, especially when it comes to providing access to work, basic services, and protection.⁴²

People change their plans, find opportunities where they are, or find that onward journeys have become impossible, at least temporarily.

This section presents 4Mi data collected in cities in West and North Africa as mini-case studies, which touch, among others, on access to services and socio-economic inclusion for people on the move and the specific experience of children and youth moving through cities.

⁴² Horwood, C, Frouws, B. and Forin, R. (Eds.) (2020) [Mixed Migration Review 2020: Highlights, Interviews, Essays, Data](#).

Case study 1.

Economic situation in Sfax, Medenine, and Tunis

“Although I have had a few arrests in Sfax I will say that it is fine. Thanks to Tunisia I do several profitable businesses. I make a very good living.”

35-year-old man from Gambia interviewed in Tunis

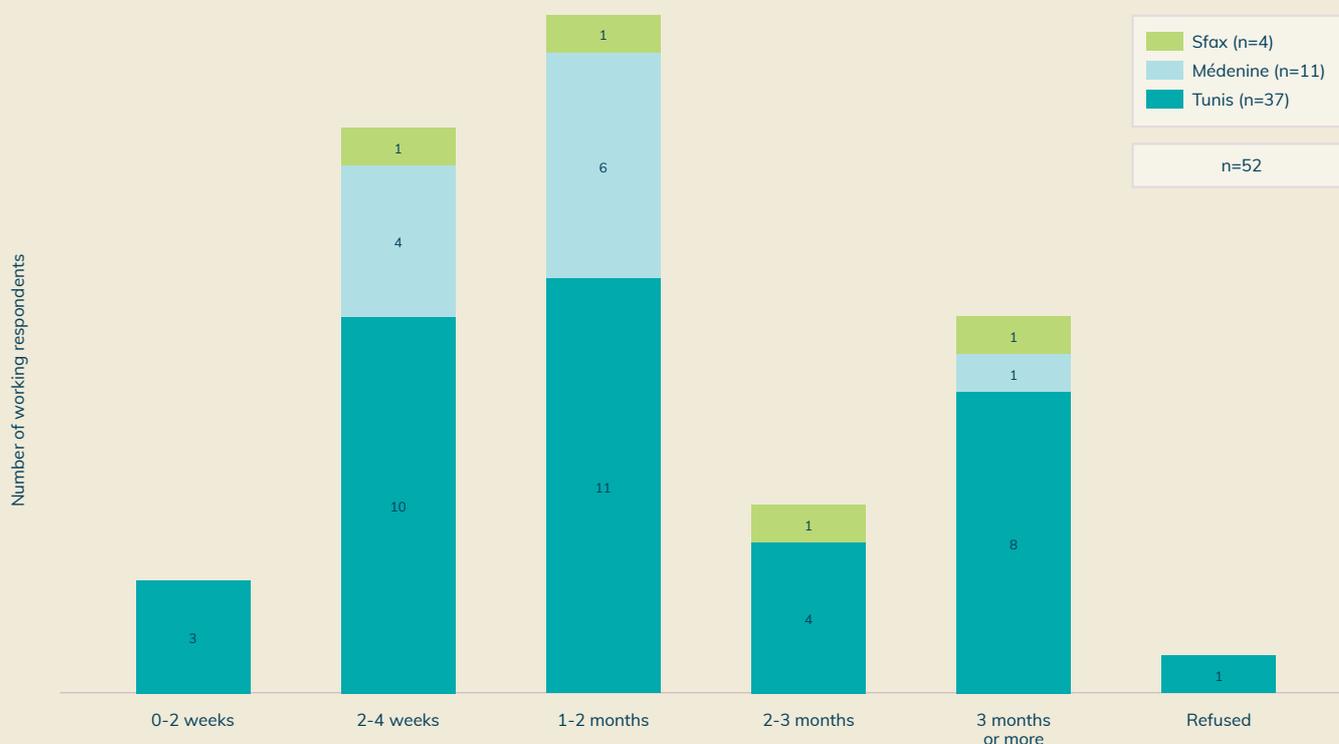
In recent years, Tunisia has been increasingly recognized as a country of origin, transit, and destination for refugees and migrants with diversifying profiles.⁴³ Refugees and migrants move to, through and from Tunisia for a myriad of reasons, including economic considerations, rights and freedoms, and personal reasons, which can exist simultaneously. Further, many Central and West Africans nationalities can enter Tunisia visa free for a period up to three months; however, if they are unable to secure another legal status, for example via a formal employment contract, their status becomes irregular and they become subject to weekly fines, often resulting in accumulating debt. In Tunisia, “a lack of legislation effectively protecting refugees’ and migrants’ rights

pushes many to work in the informal sector.”⁴⁴ Moreover, working without legal protection exposes refugees and migrants to considerable risks, including exploitation and harassment.

This case study focuses on the economic situation of refugees and migrants in Tunisia, based on 89 surveys conducted with Central and West Africans between February and April 2021 in Tunis, Sfax, and Medenine.

When asked about their current occupation in Tunisia, respondents’ replies reveal considerable differences across cities. The rate of employment among respondents was highest in Medenine (73%), followed by Tunis (51%), and Sfax (31%). Moreover, 10% of respondents surveyed in Tunis said they were students who had a job. Overall, more opportunities seem to be available in the country’s capital, and the majority of respondents interviewed in Tunis were able to find a job within one to two months of arrival.

Figure 7. How long after you arrived were you able to find a job?



43 MMC (2020) [Urban Mixed Migration -Tunis Case Study](#).

44 MMC (2020) [Op.cit.](#)

CASE STUDY

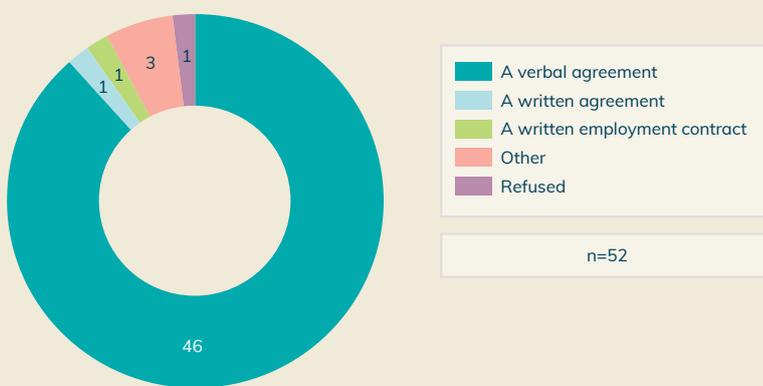
Different cities appear to offer opportunities in different sectors. In Medenine, close to half of the respondents reported working in construction, in Sfax the majority of respondents said they were not working, with those employed working mostly in construction, agriculture, and domestic work, whereas in Tunis most refugees and migrants surveyed were working in the service industry or as domestic workers.

In Medenine, 33% of respondents noted that they worked only part-time, which was true for 23% of respondents in Sfax and 39% of respondents in Tunis as well. Notably, since arriving in Tunisia, 54% of respondents interviewed

in Sfax, 31% in Tunis, and 20% in Medenine indicated they had accumulated new debt, linked to living expenses in these cities. Further, in Sfax 8% of respondents noted they had accumulated new debt due to visa overstay fees, which was also cited by 7% of respondents in Tunis.

As shown in Figure 8, informal verbal employment agreements, as opposed to formal written contract, appear to be the norm for refugees and migrants in the three Tunisian cities. Coupled with the absence of national legal frameworks safeguarding foreign workers' labour rights, this indicates the precarity of the economic situation for refugees and migrants in urban centres in Tunisia.

Figure 8. What type of employment agreement do you have?

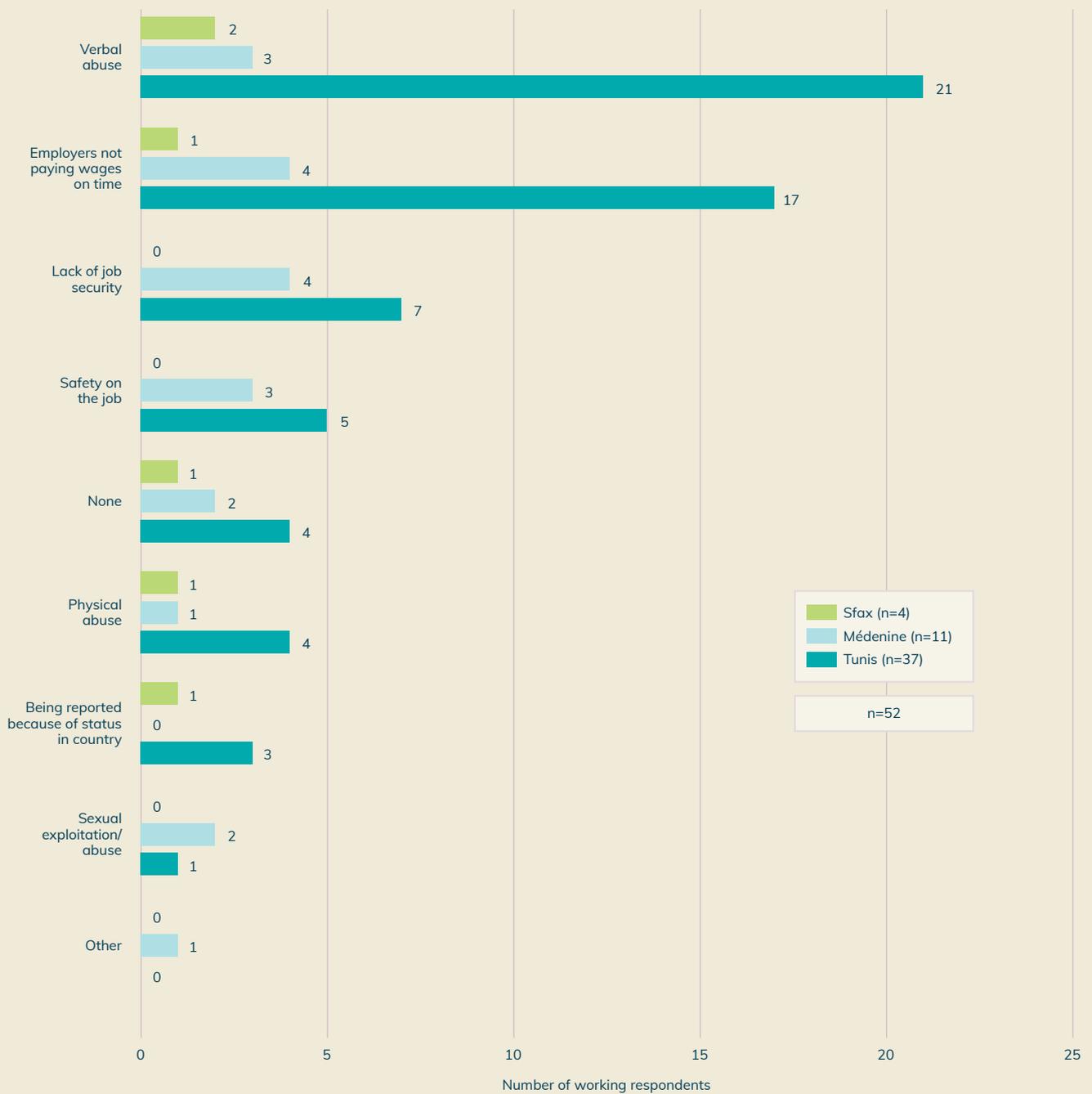


“ The residency card has made me feel much more comfortable, because you don't have a choice [when looking for a job] if you don't have one. ”

30-year-old Guinean woman interviewed in Tunis

Moreover, respondents reported a variety of risks associated with their employment situations. Verbal abuse, employers not paying wages on time, and lack of job security were reported as key risks by refugees and migrants. Risks experienced on the job also differed with the type of employment available across different cities. In Medenine, where many respondents reported working in the construction sector, in addition to employees not paying wages on time and lack of job security, verbal abuse and safety on the job were concerns frequently cited by respondents. Risks also differed across gender. In Tunis, women more frequently cited verbal abuse as compared to men. In Medenine, male respondents cited concerns with employers not paying wages on time, lack of job security and safety on the job, whereas women noted physical abuse, sexual exploitation and abuse, and verbal abuse as main risks.

Figure 9. What are the key risks in this job?



The case study presented above shows how cities, while providing a wide range of economic opportunities, are also expensive places to live and the decision of refugees and migrants to establish themselves there is often a worthwhile but also risky investment. It shows that while refugees and migrants participate in the labour market of cities, often filling existing gaps in low-skilled, manual jobs, they often have no choice but to work in the informal sector. Working without formal contracts and therefore devoid of legal protection exposes refugees and migrants to a variety of vulnerabilities and risks, including exploitation and physical and verbal abuse.

Case study 2. Children and youth moving through Bamako, Niamey, and Ouagadougou

People on the move in the African continent are primarily young people. According to some estimates, 27.5% of all migrants in Africa are aged between 15-29.⁴⁵ Further, Africa’s urban residents are youthful, with more than two-thirds of the population in some of the largest cities (like Lagos, Dakar, Accra, and Abidjan) below the age of 30. The experiences and activities of youth in cities, including refugees and migrants, will therefore strongly shape and impact future urban development.⁴⁶

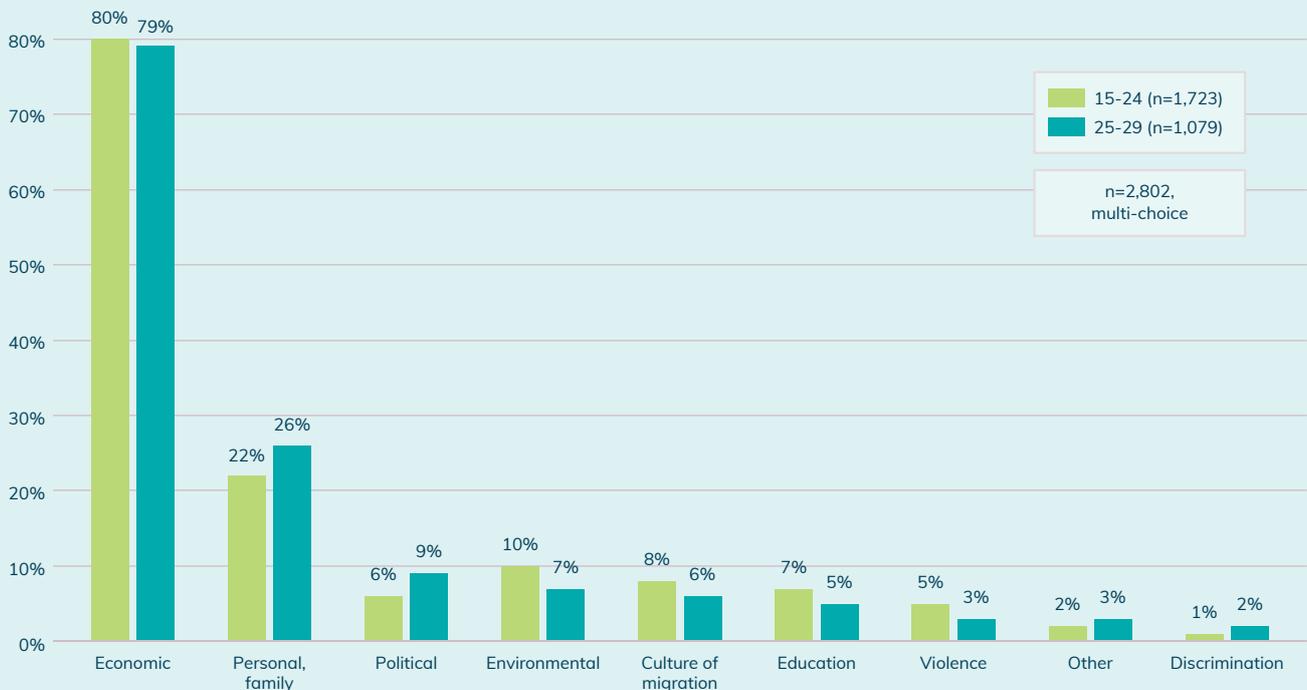
Ouagadougou, Niamey, and Bamako, the capitals of Burkina Faso, Niger, and Mali respectively, are key transit hubs within West Africa including for refugees and migrants moving North. Ouagadougou is at an earlier stage of the route for refugees and migrants starting their journeys from West Africa and travelling towards Niger or Mali.⁴⁷ Bamako attracts both internal migrants and other refugees and migrants primarily from the West African region who come to work, settle, or stay for prolonged periods of time during transit.⁴⁸ Niamey is at the intersection of one of two important migration routes leading across Niger – it is mainly used by Burkinabe, Guinean, Malian and Senegalese refugees and migrants stopping in transit before continuing their journey

towards North Africa and, for some, onwards to Europe.⁴⁹

Between November and December 2020, 4Mi conducted 2,008 interviews with West African youth (aged 15-29) on the move in these cities. Of these, 94 respondents were under 18 years of age (4.7%). This case study outlines some of the opportunities and vulnerabilities specific to young people on the move in those three key migration transit hubs in West Africa.

Overall, the majority of the respondents (79%) said they departed because of economic reasons, followed by almost a quarter of respondents (24%) citing personal and family reasons. However, among the children and youth surveyed by 4Mi, those of different age groups had different migration experiences. Respondents between the ages 25-29 cited personal and family reasons slightly more frequently compared to respondents aged 15-24, likely because they may already have dependents of their own. Environmental reasons, culture of migration, education, and violence were not frequently cited by respondents, but overall mentioned to a higher degree by younger respondents.

Figure 10. What were the reasons for leaving your country of departure, by age?



45 Mo Ibrahim Foundation (2019) [Africa's Youth: Jobs or migration?](#)

46 OECD (2020) [How is life in your city?](#)

47 IMREF (2020) [Accessing the Most Vulnerable Migrants in Ouagadougou and Agadez.](#)

48 MMC (2020) [Urban Mixed Migration - Bamako case study.](#)

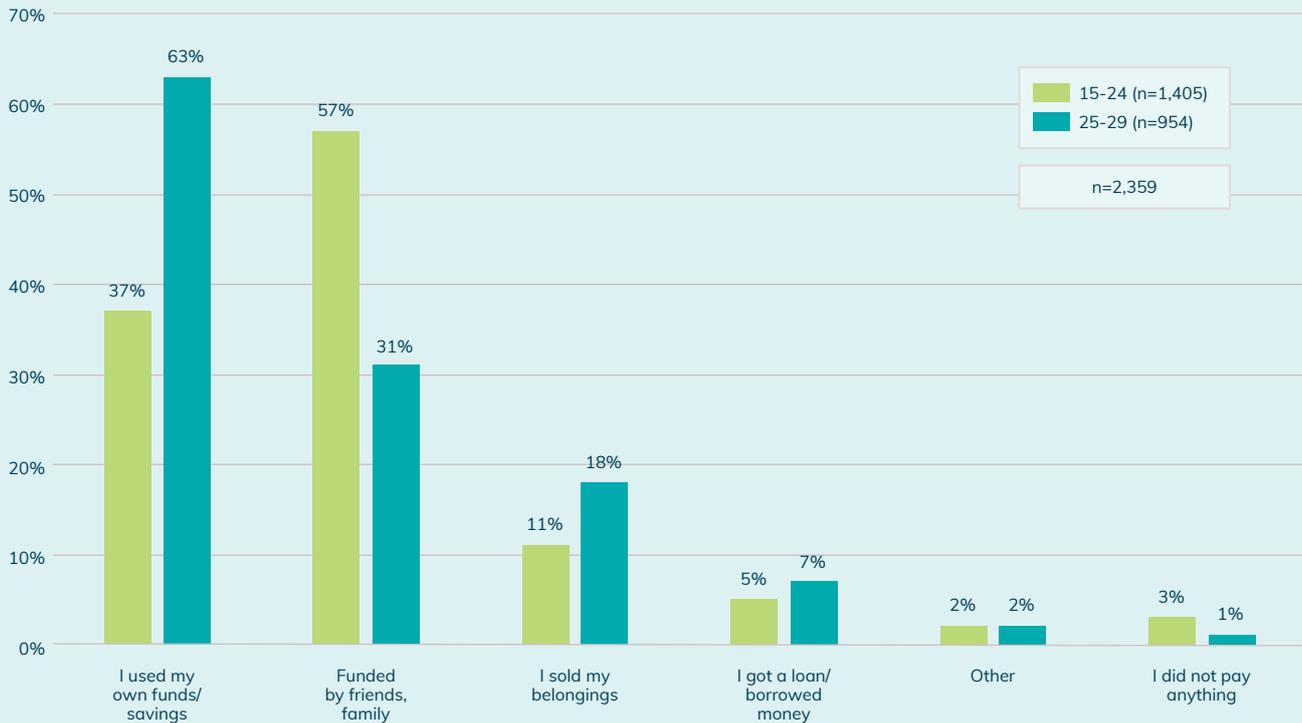
49 IOM (2020) [Migration trends from, to and within the Niger, 2016—2019.](#)

“The cost of education [here in Ouagadougou] is reasonable compared to Benin.”

23-year-old-man, interviewed in Ouagadougou

Overall, refugees' and migrants' own funds/savings and funds provided by their family and friends were the main sources of financing the journey for interviewed youth and children. Disaggregating the data further by age showed that younger respondents were more dependent on friends and family to fund their journeys, whereas older respondents were more likely to be able to finance their own journeys.

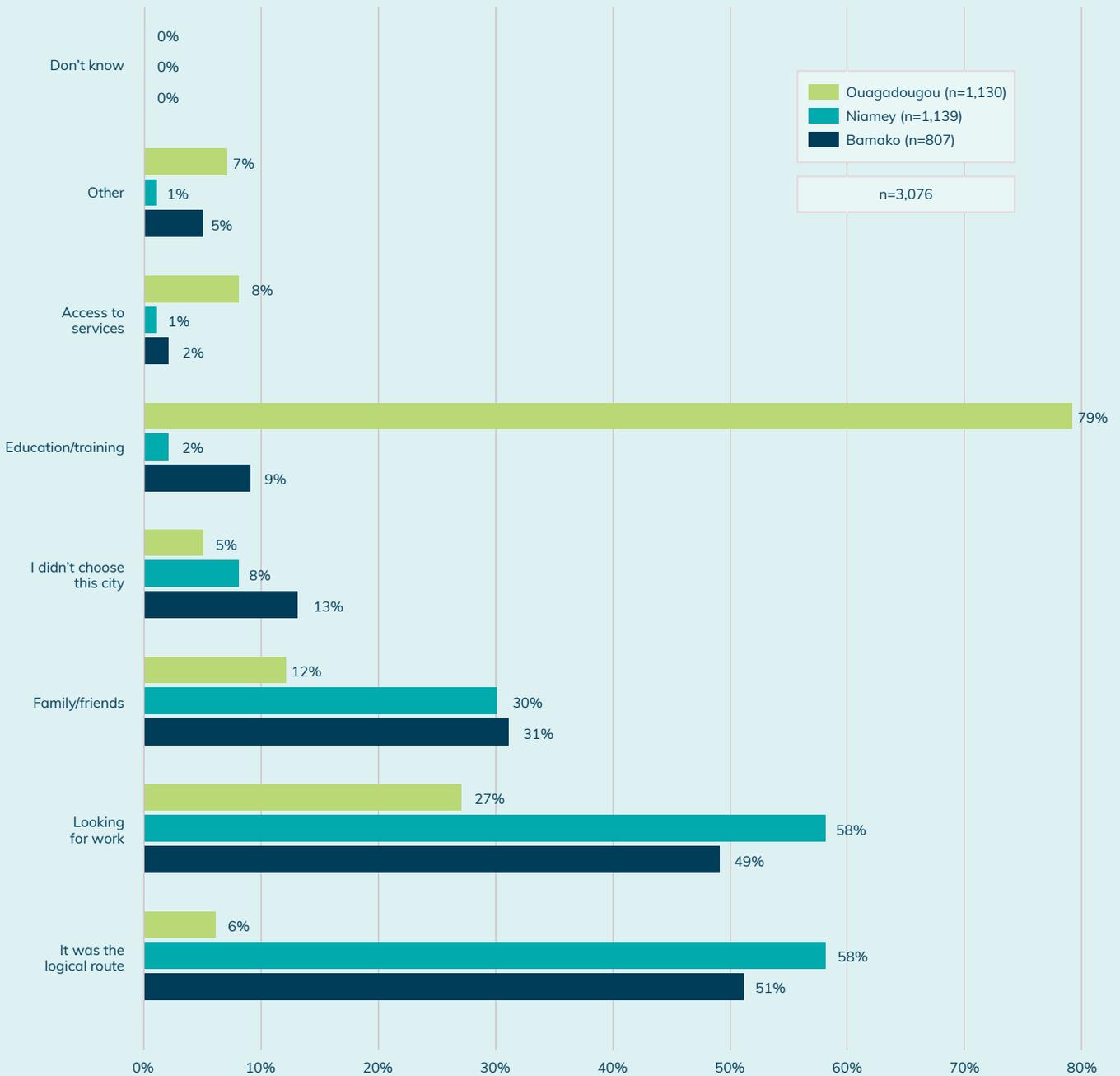
Figure 11. How did you finance your trip so far?



The higher degree of financial independence of older respondents can be explained by their level of economic activity before departure. The older cohort of respondents was more likely to have a small business, to be working in the informal sector, or in construction before departing. Whereas younger respondents were more likely to be students, to work in the service industry or agriculture, or to be unemployed compared to their older peers.

Respondents' occupations during their stay in the three West African cities are largely in congruence with the reasons cited for departure. In Ouagadougou, 66% of respondents stated they were students. In Niamey and Bamako, about a third of respondents cited not having an occupation, while those who worked held jobs in construction, the informal sector, small business, and the service industry. Respondents interviewed in Niamey and Bamako more frequently stated that the city was on their migration route and that they stayed to look for work. Ouagadougou on the other hand is cited by the vast majority of respondents as a destination for education and professional development.

Figure 12. Why did you come to this city?



4Mi data also shows that the length of stay varies depending on the city. Many respondents had been in Niamey for one to three months and in Bamako, between one to six months, while the duration of stay in Ouagadougou reported by most respondents was between one to three years. This confirms that those in Bamako and Niamey are either there to earn an income or are more likely to be in transit (or both), while those in Ouagadougou are staying much longer to be able to pursue their education.

Figure 13. Duration of stay



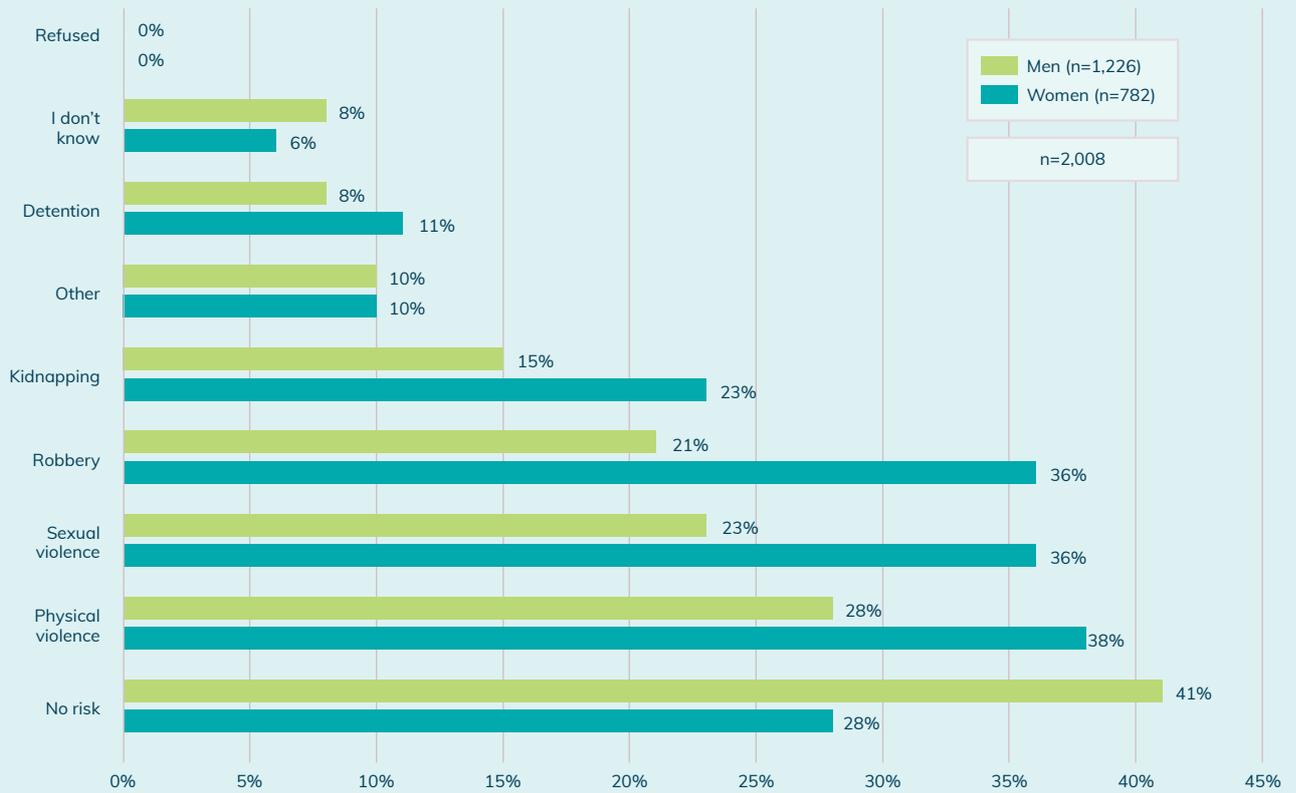
These are important distinctions in the respondents' needs for service providers in urban centres to consider, as in cities of transit it might be more relevant to sensitise refugees and migrants on onward movement, whereas in others focus on socio-economic integration should be a priority.

“ Upon arrival in this city I lost all my belongings including money and documents. ”

25-year-old man from Guinea interviewed in Mali

Despite the opportunities that these cities offer for youth and children on the move in West Africa, allowing for temporary stays to earn money or further their education, 4Mi data shows that respondents identified several risks for children in these three cities. When asked about the main risks for children under the age of 18, women respondents most frequently indicated physical violence, sexual violence, and robbery, each cited by over one-third of female respondents. Up to 41% of male respondents did not perceive risks for children under the age of 18, with 28% citing physical violence and 23% sexual violence as dangers for minors.

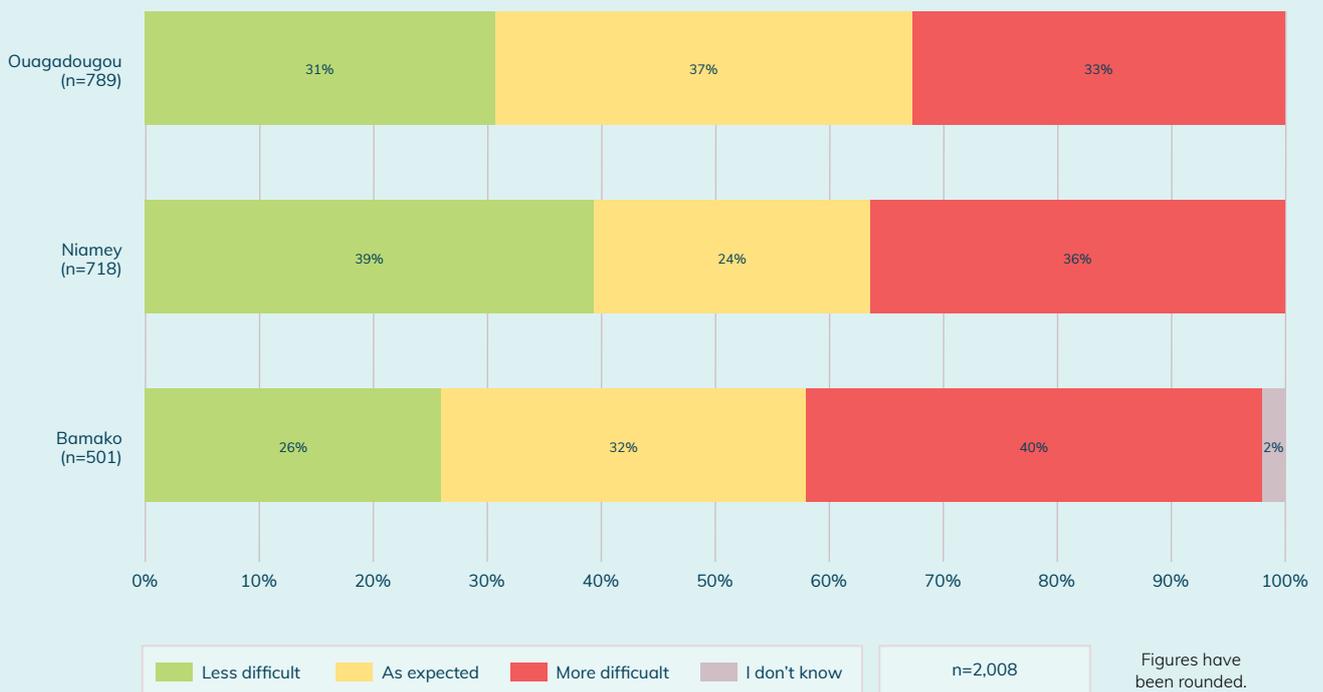
Figure 14. Perceived risks for minors by gender



Refugees and migrants often come to cities with great hopes and expectations, though also with a sense of realism, as indicated by the 4Mi data. For a minority of respondents, their stay in the cities was more difficult

than anticipated, especially in Bamako (40%) and to a slightly lesser extent in Niamey (36%) and Ouagadougou (33%). In Niamey, a higher percentage found their stay in the city less difficult than expected.

Figure 15. How was the stay?



The case studies presented above show that age is an important factor to take into account when considering and designing responses to urban mixed migration dynamics in cities. Herein, some respondents' experiences were similar across ages, such as reasons for departure, whereas other aspects were impacted by the specific age group of the respondents, such as means of financing the journey. The examples of Bamako, Niamey, and Ouagadougou also show that the vulnerabilities and exposure to different risks vary according to age, as well as gender, with women more frequently perceiving risks for minors. Further, the analysis shows that different cities attract youth for different reasons, including but not limited to their location along the migration route. These are important considerations both for programmes seeking to assist youth on the move, as well as for service providers to tailor their reception infrastructures to refugees and migrants needs. It also highlights the importance of collecting disaggregated data to be able to respond to the specificities of refugee and migrant populations across different urban centres.

Conclusions

This paper has focused on the role of cities in migration journeys from urban origins to urban transit and urban living, using 4Mi data to offer insights on the experiences of people on the move in North and West Africa.

It looked at the role of cities as a springboard for international migration, providing refugees and migrants with higher levels of education, more information, and more financial resources to fund their own journeys, compared to their peers originating from rural area. We noted how this, in some instances, can be a self-reinforcing cycle, whereby people who previously moved internally, from rural to urban areas, get better education which in turn contributes to both their aspiration and capabilities to move to another country. Our analysis suggests that cities can be places where people coming from rural area accumulate the financial resources necessary to fund more expensive international migration journeys.

While noting that the distinction between transit and destination cities is not always clear-cut, as in many instances cities initially intended as a rapid stop become de facto long-term destinations, we looked at the role played by transit cities. Transit cities can be places to find work, to rest, or to arrange the next leg of the journey, including through smugglers. This can change based on cities' positions along migration routes but also on the mixed migration dynamics context, whereby some routes become increasingly difficult while others open up.

Next, using the case studies of experiences of refugees and migrants in selected cities in North and West Africa, our analysis moved to cities as destinations, with particular focus on the economic opportunities they can offer and the needs of children and youth on the move. 4Mi data analysis shows that while providing a wide range of economic opportunities, cities are also expensive places to live in and the decision of refugees and migrants to establish themselves there is often a worthwhile but also risky investment.

The analysis highlighted how migration can sometimes be a win-win for refugees and migrants and cities alike. People can find the economic opportunities they sought, and cities can fill important gaps in their labour market, often in low-skilled, manual jobs. However, for this interaction to be of mutual benefit, regular work contracts and decent working conditions are needed, both of which were often not available to our respondents. Finally, analysing the experiences of children and youth moving through Bamako, Niamey, and Ouagadougou showed how age shapes refugees' and migrants' opportunities and vulnerabilities in cities and is an important factor to consider when designing responses to urban mixed migration dynamics in the region.

Policy recommendations

With the expectation that urbanisation in North and West Africa will continue and accelerate, and that cities will continue to play a key role in people's migration journeys, whether as places of origin, transit, destination, or all of those at the same time, the following are points for migration policy makers to consider:

- **Account for intra-regional mobility hubs in city planning and facilitate their development**, keeping in mind the adverse economic impacts of disrupting mobility patterns between and through cities.
- **Ensure that at the local level resources, mandates, legal frameworks, capacities, and data collection mechanisms** are in place, recognising the presence of refugees and migrants in cities and providing clear guidelines on their rights and obligations while ensuring their access to basic services.
- **Increase and improve coordination between national and local authorities** for more pragmatic and whole-of-societies approaches to migration management, including the transfer of relevant legal competences to the municipal level, to increase availability of services and protection for migrants and refugees.⁵⁰
- **Cities along different points in migration routes, which experience different or multiple migration dynamics – including cities of rapid transit, temporary settlement, and/or longer-term settlement – should explore different approaches to migration programming.** For example, migration hubs along the Central Mediterranean Route can support local civil society and NGOs in sensitising refugees and migrants in transit and provide them with information in relevant languages, whereas other urban centres, where refugees and migrants tend to settle, might focus on socio-economic integration efforts.
- **Invest in further quantitative and qualitative research and data collection** to overcome the key barrier of lack of data facing many urban authorities and service providers in cities, which host considerable hard-to-reach and mobile populations. This data is needed for evidence-based policy making, inclusive of and responsive to the needs and specificities of urban refugee and migrant populations and the effects of ongoing rural-urban and transit migration. Better data and information on migration to and through cities is also needed to develop policies that contribute to turning migration within the region into a development opportunity for cities.

50 MMC and UNHCR (Eds.) (2021) [A Roadmap for Advocacy, Policy Development, and Programming: Protection in Mixed Movements along the Central and Western Mediterranean Routes 2021](#).



The MMC is a global network consistent of six 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, information, research and analysis on mixed migration. Through the provision of credible evidence and expertise, the MMC aims to support agencies, policy makers and practitioners to make well-informed decisions, to positively impact global and regional migration policies, to contribute to protection and assistance responses for people on the move and to stimulate forward thinking in the sector responding to mixed migration.

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

For more information visit:

mixedmigration.org

and follow us at: [@mixedmigration](https://twitter.com/mixedmigration)



Mixed
Migration
Centre

DRC DANISH
REFUGEE
COUNCIL