

BRIEFING PAPER

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Understanding the mixed migration landscape in Morocco

Key findings

- While Morocco has largely been viewed as a country of departure for both Moroccans and transiting refugees and migrants, movements to Morocco as a country of destination as well as within Morocco in terms of seasonal migration, increasingly characterize its mixed migration landscape.
- In 2014, Morocco adopted its first National Strategy for Immigration and Asylum (SNIA), which included important domestic legal reforms around asylum and migration and facilitated the recognition of the rights of people on the move. However, several critical legal reforms which were proposed in the SNIA have not yet been approved, and there is asymmetric implementation across the country.
- Data on migration, particularly irregular migration, are scarce in Morocco. In 2014, a census estimated there were 84,000 foreign

nationals in the country.¹ The limited data that exist suggest a prevalence of young, male migrants from West and Central Africa.

- Refugees and migrants surveyed for this study most often cited economic reasons, personal and family reasons, and violence and conflict when queried on the drivers of their movement from their origin countries.
- International and non-governmental organizations often lack sufficient funding for humanitarian assistance, as donors more often direct their support to the Moroccan government, key informants report. This implies that refugees and migrants are integrated into national services rather than receiving targeted assistance for their basic and protection needs.
- Refugees and migrants entering and moving within Morocco reported risks of arbitrary detention, physical violence, theft or scams, labour exploitation, and racism and xenophobia, at border crossing points and in large urban areas.
- COVID-19 lockdowns and movement restrictions significantly impacted the mobility of refugees and migrants surveyed in Morocco.
- The pandemic also constrained the already scarce labour market opportunities for refugees and migrant respondents, further limiting their ability to meet their basic needs.

Introduction

This paper seeks to provide an overview of the mixed migration context for people on the move in Morocco, with a focus on Morocco as a country of destination and transit for refugees and migrants travelling along the Western Mediterranean Route and the Atlantic Route.² In so doing, it aims to help fill a gap in migration research, as data and research on issues of mixed migration in Morocco are still limited. The 2014 general population and housing census estimated that 84,000 foreign nationals were living in Morocco (56.5% men and 43.5% women), which constituted an increase of 63.3% since the previous census in 2004.³ Of these, 18.3% were under the age of 18, and 17.8% were under 14.⁴ Given the limited data available, this paper seeks to increase

the evidence base for policymakers and humanitarian and development programming actors.

This paper first provides a general overview of the legal framework around migration in Morocco to set out the context shaping mixed migration dynamics. A methodology section outlines the paper's use of quantitative data from a pilot of MMC's flagship data collection project, 4Mi,⁵ as well as its qualitative data collection and analysis approach. Next, the main findings of the research are presented, with analysis of the profiles of refugees and migrants in Morocco, the drivers of their movement, protection issues, journey conditions, livelihoods, and obstacles to accessing basic services in Morocco. The impact of COVID-19 on Morocco's migration trends, refugee and migrant livelihoods, access to basic services and migration intentions is also explored.

Legal and policy frameworks

International policy frameworks

Reflected in its adoption of national and international policies, and its pursuit of a leading role in regional and international migration affairs, Morocco is an interesting case from a migration policy perspective.⁶ In addition, the country occupies an important geopolitical position along the Atlantic and Western Mediterranean Routes and at the crossroads between the African and European continents, and one can see this reflected in its response to increasing immigration and transit migration.⁷

Morocco has ratified several international conventions on displacement and migration, starting with the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees in 1956, and with greater frequency since 1993 with the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, amongst others (see Table 2). In recent years, Morocco also signed the International Labour Organization's (ILO) Migrant Workers (Supplementary Provisions) Convention (No 143) in 2016 and the ILO Migration for Employment Convention (Revised), 1949 (No. 97) in 2019.

1 Not clear the extent to which this figure includes migrants with an irregular status or only those legally resident within Morocco. Haut-Commissariat au Plan (2015) Recensement Général de la Population et de l'Habitat de 2014 au Maroc.

2 For details, see: Garver-Affeldt, J & Seaman, M. (2021) A gateway reopens: the growing popularity of the Atlantic route, as told by those who risk it. Mixed Migration Centre.

3 Haut-Commissariat au Plan op. cit.

4 UNICEF (2019) Situation des enfants au Maroc. Module 4: Les enfants migrants.

5 4Mi | Mixed Migration Centre

6 ODI (2021). What drives reform? A political economy analysis of migration policy in Morocco.

7 Ibid.

Table 2. International conventions ratified by Morocco Convention

Convention	Year of Ratification
1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees	1956
International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination	1970
International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights	1979
International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families	1993
Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women	1993
Convention on the Rights of the Child	1993
Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities	2009
United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children	2011
ILO Migrant Workers (Supplementary Provisions) Convention (No 143)	2016
ILO Migration for Employment Convention (Revised), 1949 (No 97)	2019

In September 2017, Morocco held national consultations with civil society and diaspora representatives, scholars and researchers, members of the private sector and public institutions, to elaborate a series of recommendations for the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM).⁸ In December 2018, Morocco hosted both the Intergovernmental Conference to Adopt the GCM in Marrakesh and the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD). Further underscoring Morocco's active role on the international stage related to migration, Morocco became a GCM champion country in October 2020. Furthermore, displaying commitment to refugee policy on the international stage, Morocco also participated in the Global Compact on Refugees in 2018 and the Global Refugee Forum in 2019. In December 2020, Morocco inaugurated the African Migration Observatory (AMO)⁹ in Rabat to collect data

on migration covering the different sub-regions and African countries.

National legal instruments

Morocco's increased engagement in international fora is also reflective of domestic debates and policy developments. In 2011, a new constitution was adopted in Morocco, establishing the primacy of international conventions ratified by Morocco over domestic law, as long as the country's "immutable national identity" was not undermined.¹⁰ The preamble of the constitution also notes Morocco's engagement in fighting all forms of discrimination. This change has encouraged reforms aimed at enhancing coherence between domestic legislation and Morocco's international engagements.

For example, in 2013, a report by the National Council for Human Rights prompted an important political process to improve the rights of migrants in Morocco.¹¹ Following the publication of the report, King Mohamed VI issued a declaration on policy reforms that instructed his government to develop a human rights-based approach in their work.¹²

These two developments led to the launch of a pioneering migration policy in September 2013, heralded by the reopening that month of the Office for Refugees and Stateless Persons (BRA) and the 2014 adoption of a National Strategy for Immigration and Asylum (SNIA).¹³ Morocco launched an exceptional regularization process in January 2014, allowing irregular migrants in the country to receive legal documentation authorizing their stay, and the ministry responsible for Moroccans living abroad was given the additional docket of "migration affairs". Meanwhile, draft modifications to asylum legislation and to the law on the entry and stay of foreigners were initiated, but these changes have yet to be promulgated. Work also began on drafting human trafficking legislation, leading to the August 2016 promulgation of Law n° 27-14.¹⁴

Trafficking in Persons

Prior to 2016, trafficking in persons was addressed within issues of immigration, despite Moroccan citizens also being victims of trafficking. Law n° 27.14 defines trafficking in persons and clearly defines the "victim" of this crime. It also emphasizes the responsibility of the state to identify and assist victims. Article IV obliges the state to ensure, within the limits of the means

8 IOM (2018) The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.

9 African Union (2020) Official Inauguration in Morocco of the African Migration Observatory.

10 Kingdom of Morocco (2011) La Constitution du Maroc - Edition 2011

11 The Conseil National des Droits de l'Homme is an independent institution created by the 2011 constitution to monitor and promote human rights-related issues in Morocco. See : CNDH (2013) Conclusions et recommandations du rapport "Etrangers et droits de l'Homme au Maroc: pour une politique d'asile et d'immigration radicalement nouvelle".

12 Kingdom of Morocco (2013) Discours de SM le Roi à l'occasion du 38ème anniversaire de la Marche Verte

13 Kingdom of Morocco (2014) National Immigration and Asylum Strategy.

14 Kingdom of Morocco (2016) Loi n° 27-14 du 25 août 2016 relative à la lutte contre la traite des êtres humains. Bulletin Officiel.

available, protection, health care, psychosocial support for survivors of trafficking, temporary accommodation, legal assistance, social integration, and facilitation of voluntary return to countries of origin.

Asylum

The asylum procedure in Morocco still relies essentially on the role of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) even if the Office for Refugees and Stateless Persons (BRA) is involved.¹⁵ UNHCR remains the only institution to determine refugee status on the Moroccan territory. However, if UNHCR recognises an asylum seeker as a refugee under its mandate, the latter must file a separate asylum application with the BRA, which in most cases recognises the status attributed by UNHCR.

Entry and Stay of Foreigners

Currently, Law n° 02-03 on the entry and stay of foreigners remains the sole legal instrument that regulates migration in Morocco.¹⁶ It provides for fines ranging from 2,000 to 20,000 dirhams (\$200 to \$2,200) and jail terms of between one and six months for foreigners who enter the country irregularly. Foreigners must have a valid visa, a registration card or a residence permit to travel within Morocco, in the absence of which they can be fined 5,000–30,000 dirhams (\$550 to \$3,300).¹⁷ Foreigners deemed to be a threat to public order can be sentenced to expulsion from Morocco, with no right of appeal.¹⁸ Deportation can be ordered for foreigners in an irregular situation, although such orders are open to legal appeal, and cannot be issued against children and pregnant women.¹⁹ Furthermore, no foreigner may be expelled to a country where their life or liberty might be threatened, or where they are exposed to cruel, degrading inhuman treatment.²⁰

Policy Implementation

During the research for this study key actors highlighted several differences between official migration policies and their implementation at the local level, a gap that authorities have identified as a critical challenge.²¹

Respondents also questioned the sustainability and even the effective existence of “the spirit of the SNIA” given that no steps to renew the strategy have been taken in more than six years. Moreover, concerns were expressed on the lack of transparency around the process of updating Morocco’s migration policy, which has been compounded by the integration of the former Ministry of African Cooperation and Moroccan Expatriates into the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, leaving no government department

with a mandate to handle the affairs of refugees and migrants within the country. Moreover, key informants noted gaps between norms and rights-holders’ access to services, and pointed to the absence of data collection mechanisms as one of the main limitations of the SNIA, explaining that reliable information on demographics and needs is key to designing policies and programmes on integrating migrants.

15 PNPM (2017) Etat de lieux de l'accès aux services pour les personnes migrantes au Maroc.

16 Kingdom of Morocco (2003) Loi n° 02-03 du 11 novembre 2003 relative à l'entrée et au séjour des étrangers au Royaume du Maroc, à l'émigration et l'immigration irrégulières.

17 Ibid (Art 43).

18 Ibid (Art 25).

19 Ibid (Art 26).

20 Ibid (Art 26).

21 Kingdom of Morocco (2018) Couverture Sanitaire des Migrants au Maroc. Ministry of Health.

Methodology

This briefing paper is based on the findings of a pilot of MMC's 4Mi project, consisting of quantitative and qualitative data collected in Morocco between November 2020 and February 2021. This entailed 24 respondents completing a version of the 4Mi core migrant survey that was modified to account for the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as semi-structured interviews with 20 refugees and migrants, and 22 service providers at international and non-governmental organizations. Data collection was carried out in six locations where refugees and migrants are known to settle and/or transit in Morocco: Rabat, Casablanca, Agadir-Tiznit, Oujda, Nador, and Tangier.

Table 1. Targeted locations for field work (n=20 and n=24)

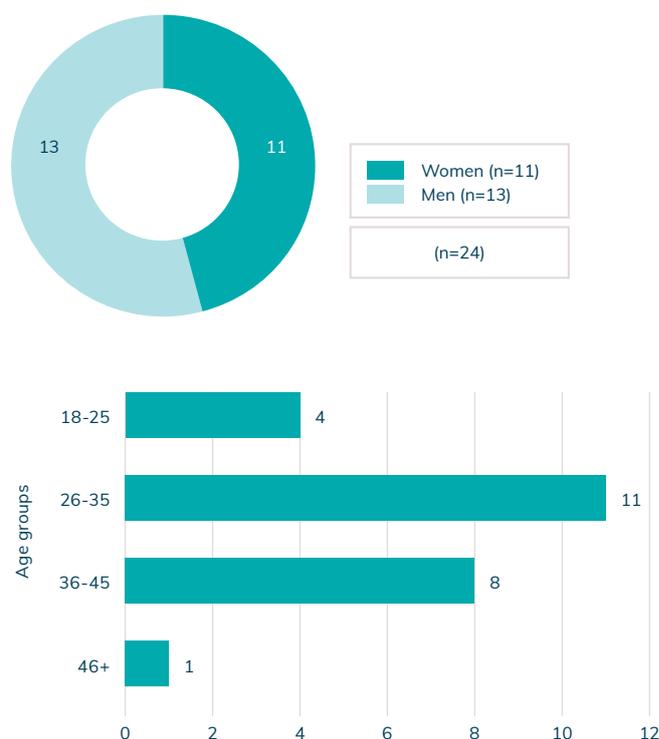
	Qualitative Interviews	4Mi Surveys
Casablanca	2	2
Rabat	6	8
Tanger	5	6
Agadir-Tiznit	2	4
Oujda	3	1
Nador	2	3

Survey respondents were selected based on a purposive sampling scheme that considered three main criteria (sex, age, and country of origin), and the research targeted mainly refugees and migrants in an irregular situation from Central and West Africa (see Table 2). An effort was made to include people on the move from countries and regions where English is the official language, as they are often underserved in research in Morocco.²² Refugees and migrants were approached through the authors' networks, through the support of local organisations, or at random in areas with a large migrant population. It should be noted that despite this sampling criteria for the survey, key informants working as service providers were asked to speak about all the refugee and migrant populations with whom they worked, regardless of nationality, gender and age.

Table 2: Distribution of 4Mi survey respondents by nationality (n=24)

Nationality	4Mi Surveys
Côte d'Ivoire	4
Guinea	3
Mali	3
Nigeria	3
Cameroon	2
Senegal	2
Yemen	2
Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)	2
Central African Republic (CAR)	1
The Gambia	1
Rwanda	1

Figure 1: Distribution of 4Mi survey respondents by gender and age



22 There are no reliable data on the number of Anglophone refugees and migrants transiting Morocco. Although clearly a minority within the whole population, they tend to be harder to reach and face specific obstacles in accessing basic services, as will be explained later in this briefing paper. Moreover, Anglophone women (mostly from Nigeria) are at risk of trafficking in persons.

When respondents' consent was obtained, interviews were recorded. If consent for audio recording was not obtained, rigorous notes were taken. MMC's procedures for data validation, cleaning, and storage were applied to ensure data quality and data protection. Qualitative data from the semi-structured interviews was analysed with NVivo and quantitative data from the 4Mi survey was analysed in Excel. Survey data was also analysed and triangulated with coded interviews to better understand synergies and differences between data sources, and to fill knowledge gaps not covered by the survey to provide a more comprehensive overview of profiles and migration patterns.

Findings

Profiles

Consulted stakeholders spoke of a wide variety of profiles of people on the move in Morocco. Data collected for this pilot study and secondary sources suggest that the most common profile of refugees and migrants in the country is one of young, single men coming from West and Central Africa, mainly from Senegal, Guinea,

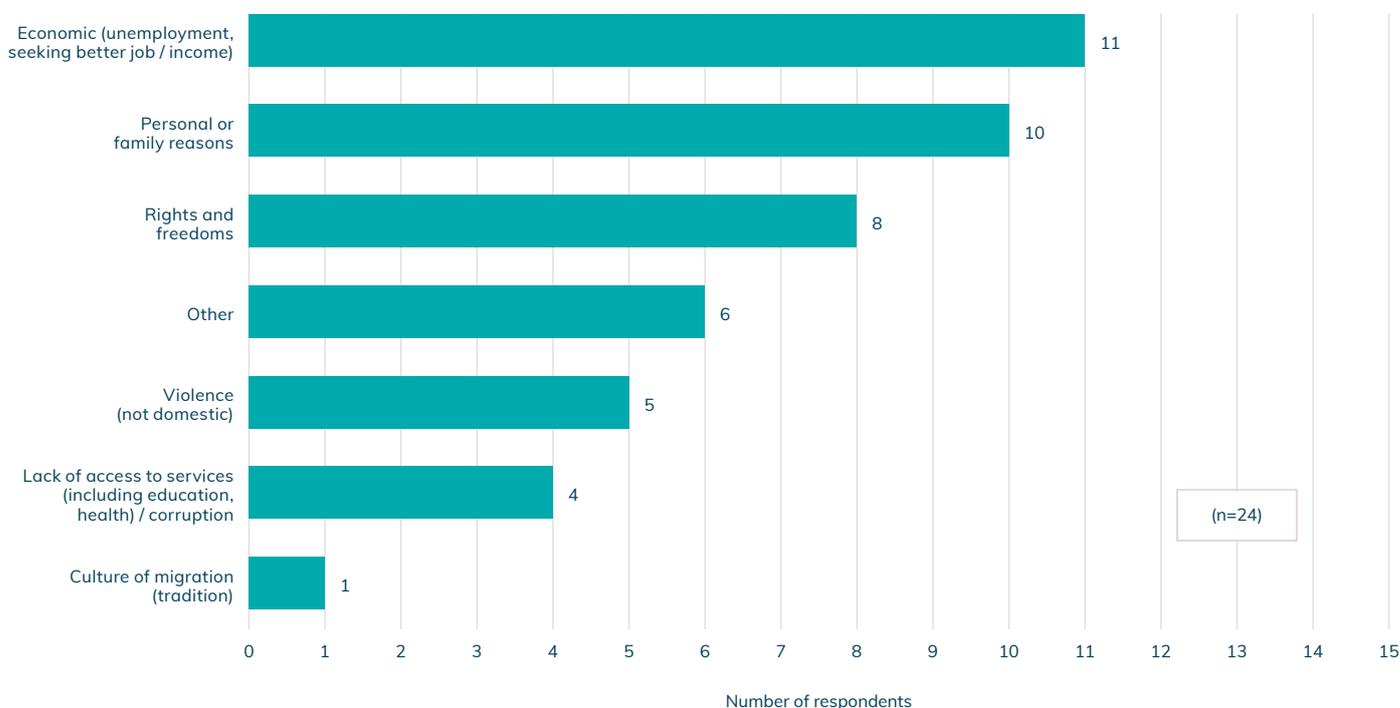
Democratic Republic of the Congo, Cameroon, and Côte d'Ivoire. However, key informants also indicated an increased presence of women on the move in Morocco, as the possibility of traveling to the country by plane has opened safer routes, which encourages women who can afford this means to travel.²³

At the end of 2021, UNHCR reported there are 9,500 refugees and 6,000 asylum seekers in Morocco, totalling 15,500 people of concern from more than 48 countries of origin.²⁴ Moroccan media citing UNHCR stated that the majority of refugees and asylum seekers in Morocco remain Syrian nationals (5,040), followed by 2,503 Guineans; 1,406 Ivoirians; 1,231 Cameroonians, 1,126 Senegalese and 1,097 Yemenis. They also reported an increase in the number of Sudanese asylum seekers in transit from Algeria and Libya, with 542 applying for asylum in Morocco in 2021.²⁵

Drivers

Surveyed respondents most often cited economic reasons when queried on the drivers of their movement from their origin countries.

Figure 2: For what reasons did you leave?



Escaping economic hardship or poverty, leaving precarious jobs that provided insufficient income to

support a large family, or the absence of jobs within their countries of origin, in many cases because of economic

23 For more information on women migrants in Morocco see Garzón Maleno, H. (2018) *Le Maroc et les Femmes migrantes Subsahariennes*. Alianza por la Solidaridad.

24 UNHCR (2022) Morocco.

25 *Le 360* (2021). *Les réfugiés et les demandeurs d'asile au Maroc, en chiffres*.

instability and/or corruption within the country, were frequent responses. One respondent recalled:

““ My life in Nigeria was like looking for a job you can't find. No job and even if you try doing something, the government makes it very difficult. You have to pay up to three different kind of taxes to the local government, and then you can pay up to five different taxes. ””

Nigerian woman interviewed in Tangier

In addition, key informants pointed to growing number of educated middle-class migrants seeking better opportunities. One explained:

““ In my country of origin, it was very hard. After obtaining my Master's [degree] I could not find a job, the living situation was difficult with such precarious conditions. I fought to find a job back home. ””

Cameroonian woman interviewed in Oujda

Some key informants highlighted that economic drivers of migration are also linked to social beliefs and stereotypes associating the idea of success with European countries, and poverty and limited access to good living conditions with African countries. Other respondents explained that traditional ideas of masculinity in many origin countries hold that men must provide for their families, a duty that may push men to leave their origin countries in search of job opportunities in Morocco and further afield in Europe.

Key informants also noted that fleeing violence is an important factor framing the context of mixed migration in Morocco. Armed conflict and terrorism, in particular, are often cited as drivers of movement for refugees and migrants in the country. Most people on the move arriving from the Middle East (Yemen and Syria) — who make up the majority of those recognized to be refugees by UNHCR in Morocco — have fled armed conflict. However, UNHCR data suggest that the arrival of Syrians in Morocco has significantly slowed and that those arriving are mostly entering from third countries and are seeking to reunify with family members. Additionally, key informants noted that the violence of armed groups such as Boko Haram in Nigeria was a key driver for movements to the country.

Violence linked to political instability has also been identified as a driver of migration to Morocco. For example, during field work, respondents referred to the crisis in Cameroon²⁶ and to personal

threats from a former rebel leader in Côte d'Ivoire. Lastly, violence against political opponents has also been identified as a driver of migration for people from Guinea:

““ There are always demonstrations, governance problems and ethnic problems. We were in the centre of Conakry, there are a lot of Fulani - it's my ethnicity. Every time there are demonstrations it is only us who are shot, imprisoned, or mistreated. ””

Male youth from Guinea interviewed in Nador

Intended destinations

Some surveyed refugees and migrants noted that Morocco was their final destination. Of the 24 who took the 4Mi survey, 7 said that they had reached the end of their journey.

For others, Morocco seems to be a secondary destination choice following several unsuccessful attempts to reach Europe. While Spain often serves as entry point to Europe given its proximity to Morocco, many refugees and migrants do not consider it their final destination. Destination choices vary across the profiles of those on the move, and, according to the interviewees, in relation to factors such as age, nationality, sex, and the diaspora networks in countries of destination.

In the findings of the 4Mi survey, the preferred destinations included France (selected by 5 respondents), Europe (no country specified, 4), Germany (2), Canada (2), England (1) and the United States (1). It is important to mention that the onward movement and aspirations of refugees and migrants can change over time depending on their migration experience.

Refugee and migrant key informants explained that many families on the move had to prioritize who among them would cross the border or attempt to reach Europe. This often means that women are left behind as their male partners embark on the onward journey first. It was also noted that there are cases in which children are left behind while waiting for their mothers to cross.²⁷ Further research is needed to shed light on this phenomenon.

Routes to Morocco

The pilot study identified three primary entry points used by refugees and migrants arriving in Morocco, as detailed in Table 3 below.

26 Since 2016, the predominantly Anglophone North-West and South-West regions of Cameroon have been the theatre of protracted violence involving armed separatists and government forces.

27 From the data it is not clear whether such children who are left behind are left in the care of others or left unaccompanied.

Table 3: Entry points to Morocco

Entry point	Details
Algerian border, Oujda	Located on the north-eastern border with Algeria, and mainly used by migrants without any documents travelling from Niger and Mali.
Casablanca Airport	Used primarily by middle-class nationals of countries within the Economic Community of West African States. Since 2018, citizens of Mali, Guinea, and the Republic of the Congo (Congo-Brazzaville) have had to obtain an electronic travel authorisation before departing for Morocco. ²⁸ The airport's popularity as a mixed migration entry point has subsequently diminished.
Mauritanian border, via Western Sahara²⁹	Used mainly by migrants coming from Senegal and other West African nationalities. Much less frequented than Oujda or Casablanca airport.

Routes out of Morocco

When considering onward movements, two main paths of exit from Morocco were identified: the Mediterranean route and the Atlantic route. The choice between the two is influenced by a range of factors, including the means to pay for the boat and the level of control over the routes at the time. Traveling by boat is more expensive than entering the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta or Melilla, which are protected with border fences and represent the only land borders between the EU and Africa. But scaling these fences requires coordination between several people, and the physical strength needed discourages children and women, particularly those who are pregnant.

In May 2021, 8,000 refugees and migrants entered³⁰ Ceuta from Morocco over the course of 24 hours. Reports noted that most were directly returned to Morocco by Spanish authorities, who were subsequently accused of violating international conventions on asylum and the rights of unaccompanied minors. This was, however, not a stand-alone event, but part of a series of attempts to cross the Spanish-administered enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla. The two enclaves are often the object of political

tensions, which first intensified in the early 2000s, when Morocco, under pressure from the EU, tightened its migration policy with a 2003 law aimed at thwarting transit migration to European countries. Controls and expulsions from both sides have since then multiplied. The protection of the borders between Morocco and Ceuta and Melilla was strengthened in 2005 with the installation of a double (Ceuta) and a triple (Melilla) fence, controlled by cameras and security forces. It was in this atmosphere that "the events of autumn 2005" took place, when around 2,000 refugees and migrants tried to enter Ceuta and Melilla by scaling the newly erected fences. At least 11 persons were killed and many more injured as Spanish and Moroccan forces attempted to block their passage into the enclaves. Following these events, additional funds were allocated to the protection of the borders. Crossing attempts continue to take place and while comparatively small, in recent years, numbers have increased again. In 2017, Ceuta recorded the entry of 500 refugees and migrants, presenting one of the highest numbers since 2005. At the time, reports revealed that these crossing attempts may have been a result of relaxed border controls by Morocco influenced by episodes of diplomatic tensions between Morocco and Spain.

In a similar sequence of events in May 2021, Morocco reinforced again its part of the border fence around the enclave with concertinas of barbed wire intended to make passage impossible.³¹ The EU, moreover, has agreed to co-finance an 18 million Euro project to reinforce the fences around the two enclaves. This has led to the strengthening of border controls, especially at Morocco's northern borders.³²

Increased security control measures have prompted some refugees and migrants to take alternative routes. Hence, while the Atlantic Route is seen as more dangerous than the Western Mediterranean Route, it has come back in use.³³ Indeed, the Canary Islands have become the main target for refugees and migrants in 2021, with over 22,000 arrivals.³⁴ In 2021, 4,016 people tried to reach the archipelago and disappeared. According to a report published by the Spanish NGO Caminando Fronteras,³⁵ four different mixed migration routes intersect with Morocco: i) the WMR, ii) routes towards Algeria, iii) the Alborán route³⁶ and iv) the route to the Canary Islands.

Another example of how tight controls in northern Morocco around the Spanish enclaves and sea routes to

28 For more details, see: The Migrant Project (2018) Mali, Guinea and Congo-Brazzaville targeted by travel restrictions in Morocco.

29 Western Sahara has been on the United Nations list of Non-Self-Governing Territories since 1963.

30 This crossing is set against the backdrop of a bilateral diplomatic crisis, linked to Spain's provision of medical aid to the Polisario Front leader, Brahim Ghali. For more information, see here.

31 InfoMigrants (2021) Le Maroc pose de nouveaux barbelés le long de sa frontière avec Ceuta pour rendre le passage impraticable

32 Reasons for the surge in this route's popularity are explored in: Garver-Affeldt, J. & Seaman M. (2021) op. cit.

33 Caminando Fronteras (2021). Monitoring the right to life on the Euro-African Western Border. Year 2021

34 UNHCR (2021)

35 Caminando Fronteras (2021). Monitoring the right to life on the Euro-African Western Border. Year 2021

36 The Alboran Sea is a part of the Mediterranean between the strait of Gibraltar, the Andalusian coast and North Africa

mainland Spain can influence shifts between migration routes was noted by one stakeholder in Tangier:

“I have even seen migrants that have arrived here, they have tried to leave, it did not work for them, they have returned to Oujda, then went to Libya, then arrived to Italy.”

Key informant working with refugees and migrants in Tangier

Against the backdrop of tightened security controls, cooperation agreements between Rabat and Madrid seeking to reduce unauthorized crossings exist. As part of the implementation of the new pact on Migration and Asylum, the EU intends to support Morocco in the areas of governance and migration management, to promote Morocco’s engagement with EU border control agencies and renew joint efforts to tackle the “root causes of migration.” This includes the requests for Rabat to step up its efforts to strengthen border controls and search and rescue operations, and to dismantle smuggling networks.³⁷ In terms of cooperation between the EU and Morocco, Morocco has received some €343 million in financial support since 2014.³⁸

These agreements are often criticised by international human rights organisations³⁹ because they are aimed at reducing irregular migration and criminalizing human smuggling and do not prioritize the protection of human rights and people of concern. This is reflected in the expulsions of refugees and migrants from Spain to Morocco, sometimes without upholding the procedural guarantees during these expulsions. Once deported to Morocco, refugees and migrants might either be detained or expelled to the Algerian border. In addition, the Moroccan authorities are reported to carry out roundups in informal settlements or camps occupied by refugees and migrants.⁴⁰

Settlement locations within Morocco

Key informants identified distinct locations where refugees and migrants settle in the north, centre and south of Morocco, as set out in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Settlement locations

Region	Locations
North	Cities close to the Spanish mainland (Tangier) and the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta (Tetouan) and Melilla (Nador). Informal camps and the forests near Tangier and Nador are places where people planning to access Spanish territory gather.
Centre	Cities such as Casablanca, Rabat, Fes, Meknes, and Marrakech. Informal camps can be found in these cities and are frequently dismantled by police. These cities are used for rest and/or to look for temporary work before heading to the border. Marrakech, Casablanca and Rabat are also final destinations for those intending to stay in Morocco.
South	Cities with seasonal labour opportunities in the fishing and agriculture sectors, such as Agadir, and the Western Sahara cities of Laayoune and Dakhla, which are also increasingly popular points of departure for the Atlantic Route to Spain's Canary Islands.

Mobility within Morocco

Inside the country, key informants reported constant movement with trends varying depending on refugees' and migrants' economic conditions, onward travel expectations and access to networks, as well as rumours of opportunities elsewhere. At times, movement is involuntary, a form of forced displacement resulting from the actions of the country’s security forces. This has led to a greater presence of refugees and migrants in the centre and the south of Morocco, removing them from the North and coastal areas.

37 Challenges.ma (2021) Les plans de migration de l'Union Européenne pour le Maroc.

38 Politico (2021) Morocco uses migrants to get what it wants – POLITICO.

39 Amnesty International (2018). Maroc. Des milliers de réfugiés et de migrants subsahariens sont visés par une répression illégale continue.

40 Amnesty International (2018) Morocco: Relentless crackdown on thousands of sub-Saharan migrants and refugees is unlawful.

One key informant described the movement of refugees and migrants thus:

“It is a survival strategy...because they have to look for work in Fez or Casablanca, look for new job opportunities. Sometimes they have been pushed back by the police.”

According to key informants the movement of refugees and migrants in Morocco can be characterized by four overarching dynamics:

1. **Movement to the centre of the country:** Upon entry into Morocco through the Oujda border, people on the move usually head to the larger cities (mainly Rabat and Casablanca) to find work. These cities are also used for rest or to obtain specific aid or assistance from service providers.

“The first entrance here was Oujda (one night) and then I went straight to Rabat and then Casablanca. I spent over two to three months in Rabat.”

Nigerian man interviewed in Casablanca

2. **Approaching crossing points:** Movement takes place towards northern departure points such as Nador and Tangier, and to the Western Sahara cities of Laayoune and Dakhla for those refugees and migrants who want to try crossing there and have money to do so. Summer and spring are the most favourable seasons to cross the Mediterranean, which increases the presence then of refugees and migrants in northern areas.⁴¹

3. **Seasonal movement:** Seasonal southward movement takes place towards areas such as Agadir, and to Dakhla in Western Sahara (for work in agricultural plantations and the fishing industry) as well as to Marrakech to work in tourism, often followed by returns to Casablanca, Rabat, or to the North.

4. **Forced displacement:** Secondary sources suggest that some movements are the result of forced displacement by the security forces, who move people perceived to be foreigners away from border areas to the south (Agadir-Tiznit) or the centre (Rabat, Casablanca).⁴²

Protection concerns

Living conditions can be harsh for refugees and migrants in Morocco, who are exposed to many protection risks in the country and along their journey. Certain demographic factors play a role in protection concerns, including sex, age, and family status. Moreover, financial resources, travel companions, types of transport used, migration route chosen, and length of the journey are also important factors that influence the risks encountered on the route. All data collected during field work points to the particularly high vulnerability of unaccompanied children and of women, especially those traveling without a male companion, and particularly across land routes. The harshness of the route and the risks encountered along it put refugees and migrants in a very vulnerable situation, not only from a material point of view, but also in terms of psychological impact.

The border crossing from Algeria to Morocco is perceived as one of the most dangerous locations along the journey, not only because of the difficulties in crossing a fence installed in a trench more than seven metres wide, but also due to cases of violence that refugees and migrants report are often committed by Algerian and Moroccan security officials.

Significant protection risks inside Morocco were reported by research participants. Cities, specifically Tangier and Casablanca, were often cited as key dangerous places along the route.

The following protection risks constitute some of the chief concerns of refugees and migrants in Morocco:

Arbitrary physical violence in the streets was reported by several refugee and migrant respondents, mainly men. This violence usually happens at night and in urban neighbourhoods where refugees and migrants usually live. Respondents associated such violence with robberies and xenophobia.

Labour exploitation.⁴³ Some interviewed refugees and migrants reported having been victims of labour abuses such as non-payment or under-payment of agreed wages. Lack of documents and difficulties in accessing formal jobs increased the risk of such exploitation. Men working in construction and women working as housekeepers were particularly concerned by these kinds of situation.

41 UNHCR (2020) Country Portfolio Evaluation: Morocco (2016 -2019).

42 See: United Nations (2019) Visit to Morocco - Report of the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. Human Rights Council; GADEM (2019) Coûts et blessures; GADEM (2017a); Rapport du Conseil Civil de Lutte contre toutes les formes de discrimination. Etat des lieux et discriminations au Maroc; GADEM (2017b) Privés de liberté en zone de transit. Des aéroports français aux aéroports marocains.

43 Victims of trafficking are not included here.

“ I worked a little in the city of Casablanca. I was cleaning for a family, but it was very hard because it was a nasty family. I worked a lot. [...] But I am open to work as a cleaning lady in a place of business, for example. I will never do it in a house, because the woman was very mean to me: I went to sleep very late and she wakes me up early every day. I really felt exploited because the salary was little compared to what I did: cleaning, cooking and babysitting.”

Ivorian woman interviewed in Agadir

Scams targeting people wanting to leave Morocco were mentioned by refugees and migrants and other key informants. As well as financial losses, scams can result in victims being abandoned with no legal documents.

Racism and xenophobia in the form of verbal aggression in the street and discrimination when accessing public services, were highlighted by several respondents.

“ They are too mean. They don't even want to see us. I remember one day a Moroccan passed by, I was just sitting, and he crossed the road. He came to me, I don't know if he's provoking me or what. Anyway, he's yelling at me. I tell him not to touch me, I told him: 'you touch me and it will go badly'. They provoke us.”

Ivorian youth interviewed in Rabat

Detentions and sanctions not in line with current legislation and without the possibility of being overturned have also been reported by refugees and migrants. Moreover, the police often only speak French and Arabic, putting Anglophone migrants at greater risk given their inability to effectively communicate.

“ I know that some people are deported to another city in Morocco, and others like my brother are sent back to their homeland.”

Nigerian man interviewed in Rabat

Refugees and migrants in Morocco are subject to arbitrary detention in violation of national legislation and international agreements ratified by Morocco.⁴⁴ Forced displacements within the country are frequently used to push refugees and migrants back from the northern border, further into the interior. Reportedly, police put detained refugees and migrants in buses and transfer them to the centre and the south of the country. Forced displacements are not limited to irregular migrants; they have also been reported by those with documents, including refugees and asylum seekers, some of them children.

According to respondents in the 4Mi survey, arbitrary arrests have increased since the COVID-19 pandemic began.

Gender-based protection concerns

In addition to the forms of violence affecting all people on the move in Morocco, women, relative to men, are disproportionately subject to gender-based violence and discrimination, including violence inflicted on them by other members of their community and the host community. Forced to resort to negative coping mechanisms such as mendicity, prostitution, and seeking the company of men as a buffer against the greater risks they face on the move increases women's vulnerability to sexual and gender-based violence and to trafficking networks while undermining their control over their sexual interactions and sexual health.

Previous research in Morocco underscores how gender stereotypes and racism interact, leading to the sexualization of black women who are highly exposed to sexual harassment on the streets, as well as to violence and sexual exploitation.⁴⁵ Fear of violence, arrest and subsequent police abuse also inhibits women's mobility.

In general, the vulnerability and discrimination faced by female refugees and migrants deters them from denouncing any violence they suffer or from going to the police. This is particularly the case for women in an irregular situation. Access to justice and protection can be even more difficult when the perpetrator is of the same nationality as the victim or, more broadly, is also a refugee or migrant. In addition, limits to access to protection for the most vulnerable, such as unaccompanied and separated children, refugees and migrants living on the street, victims of gender-based violence, or victims of trafficking, are linked to structural problems in the Moroccan protection system and to the weak capacities of civil society. According to UNHCR, “the provision of accommodation for these cases remains a critical issue.”⁴⁶

44 GADEM (2019) op. cit.; GADEM (2017a) op. cit.; GADEM (2017 b) op. cit.; GADEM (2018) Expulsions gratuites; United Nations (2019) op. cit.

45 Maleno, H. (2018) op. cit.

46 UNHCR (2020) UNHCR Country Portfolio Evaluation: Morocco (2016–2019)

Access to basic needs

Key informants agreed on the hardships facing refugees and migrants in Morocco, especially those unable to access formal employment, which includes almost all asylum seekers and migrants in irregular situations, as well as many refugees. Poor access to work forces refugees and migrants to survive on very low incomes, making it difficult to cover even basic needs such as food, clothing, and lodging.

Refugees and migrants staying in informal camps known as ghettos, including breastfeeding women, unaccompanied and separated children, and young people, face very challenging conditions. Many refugees and migrants live in tents in forests with scant access to basic services. Some key informants said they provided protection against harsh weather for these refugees and migrants, and highlighted the need for improved food access, mainly for breastfeeding and pregnant women, or children on the move.

For refugees and migrants in urban areas, living conditions can also be difficult. Respondents pointed to problems accessing the rental accommodation market in border cities such as Nador, where landlords often require tenants to show residence papers. Moreover, when access to housing is possible, most refugees and migrants live in poor neighbourhoods and tend to share rooms or apartments with compatriots, which frequently leads to overcrowding and poor sanitary conditions. Most (17 out of 24) of this study's 4Mi respondents said that there was not enough room in their current accommodation for all people living there to maintain a distance of 1.5 metres between one another, as recommended to limit the spread of COVID-19.

The living conditions of refugees and migrants impacts their well-being, including their physical and mental health. Fear, anxiety, and mental suffering is a shared experience of many migrants in Morocco. Moreover, relations and communication with the host community seems to also be a source of friction. Racism and discrimination are phenomena that, although not frequently mentioned by 4Mi respondents, came up during several semi-structured interviews with refugees and migrants: although interviewees identified acts of solidarity by the Moroccan population (particularly related to Ramadan), they also recalled instances of physical and verbal abuse. Moreover, lack of documentation, coupled with a fear of police controls and detentions, may push refugees and migrants to live under the radar, which not only restricts their access to basic services but is often a source of stress that affects mental health. In response,

according to several interviewees, some vulnerable refugees and migrants, mainly unaccompanied children living on the street, resort to abusing drugs as a coping mechanism.

All these factors combined lead to a dependence on charity and assistance provided by non-governmental actors. Stakeholders from international and non-governmental organizations provide humanitarian assistance to refugee and migrant populations, including clothes and food. However, according to key informants, these organisations often lack sufficient funding for humanitarian assistance, as donors more often take a development approach and, following the launch of the SNIA, direct their support to the Moroccan government. This implies that refugees and migrants are integrated into national services rather than receiving targeted assistance for their basic and protection needs. Due to the structural weakness of protection services for refugees and migrants and barriers to accessing public services, people on the move often face a lack of humanitarian assistance.

Access to work

According to 4Mi survey respondents and key informants, poor access to sources of income is one of the main problems facing refugee and migrant populations in Morocco. Refugees and migrants often find themselves unemployed with limited opportunities to enter the labour market, especially in the formal market.⁴⁷

Almost all of the refugees and migrants interviewed for this study said they were unable to obtain any form of employment. Among those who had jobs, two women worked as hair stylists, one man had a part-time job in which he earned 70 Dirham (less than \$8) per day, one woman stated that she had worked as a housekeeper in Casablanca, and another reported that her husband worked in the market in Tangier. All these jobs were in the informal sector.

Lack of a residency permit is the main obstacle faced by refugees and migrants trying to enter the labour market. In addition, the long time required to obtain a work authorization visa from the Ministry of Employment (a full year in some cases) tends to discourage employers.⁴⁸

Even for those with a residence permit, opportunities are scarce. According to stakeholders, call centres and construction sites are the main employers of refugees and migrants, while some associations and international nongovernmental organizations include income generating activities in their programming.

47 According to the HCP, Morocco's planning agency, in the third quarter of 2020, the employment rate stood at 37.9%, a drop of 2.8 percentage points from the same quarter of 2019. The employment rate declined in all categories, especially among young people and women. It fell by 2.1 points in urban areas (from 36.4% to 34.3%) and by 3.7 points in rural areas (from 48.5% to 44.8%). See: Medias24 (2020) HCP: Baisse continue des taux d'activité et d'emploi au Maroc.

48 PNPM (2017) Etat de Lieux de l'accès aux services pour les personnes migrantes au Maroc.

Consequently, most refugees and migrants work in the informal economy and have seasonal jobs, including, as noted above, in agricultural plantations and the fishing industry in Dakhla. These jobs are characterized by their precarious nature and an absence of a formal contract, which exposes workers to rights violations. In cities, refugees and migrants most often find temporary work in restaurants as dishwashers, or as security guards (mainly in the case of men). Women usually work as housekeepers, as hair stylists, or in small retail businesses.

“If I find a job, I'll stay here of course. If this continues, I'll go to Europe, or at least I'll move from Agadir to look for a job in another city.”

Ivorian woman interviewed in Agadir

Many of those interviewed noted that migrants with difficulties in accessing jobs and earning income were often pushed to beg. Women may also turn to prostitution as a source of income, which raises specific gender-based protection concerns. Some refugees and migrants said they relied on family members back home to help them cover basic needs when no other options were available.

Impact of COVID-19

Mixed migration trends and dynamics to and through Morocco have been affected by COVID-19, with a general decrease in authorized movements particularly during the initial lockdown period, from March – June 2020. Moroccan authorities introduced internal and external movement restrictions, which included the obligation to apply for a travel permit to move from one province to another. For people on the move without a residence permit or visa, this presented a new barrier for mobility.

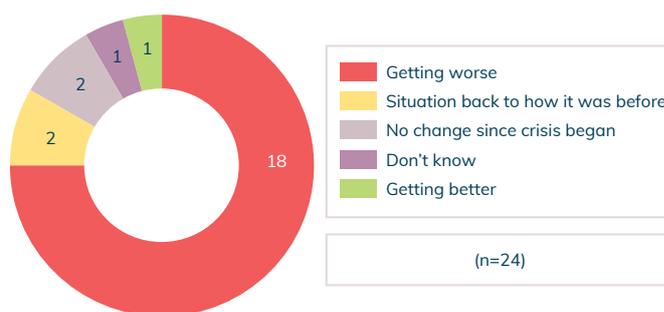
According to key informants, 2020 saw an increase in reports of refugees and migrants heading south to join the Atlantic Route by trying to cross to the Canary Islands. In particular, movements increased to Western Sahara

in order to reach Dakhla, which rose in importance as a point of departure.

In 2021, Morocco continued to impose a state of health emergency⁴⁹ and, at the end of November, the authorities once again closed the borders with the outbreak of the Omicron variant. The closure of airports in 2020 and 2021 meant that the only possibility to enter the country during these periods was via irregular means and by land.

Some respondents said that COVID-19 had exacerbated the vulnerability of refugees and migrants. For those with informal jobs, or who were dependent on charity, the lockdown suddenly cut all forms of income and led to an increase in risk for the most vulnerable populations, such as unaccompanied children and women with children. In the 4Mi survey, as well as during qualitative interviews, most respondents reported that a “crisis situation” was persisting for refugees and migrants in Morocco.

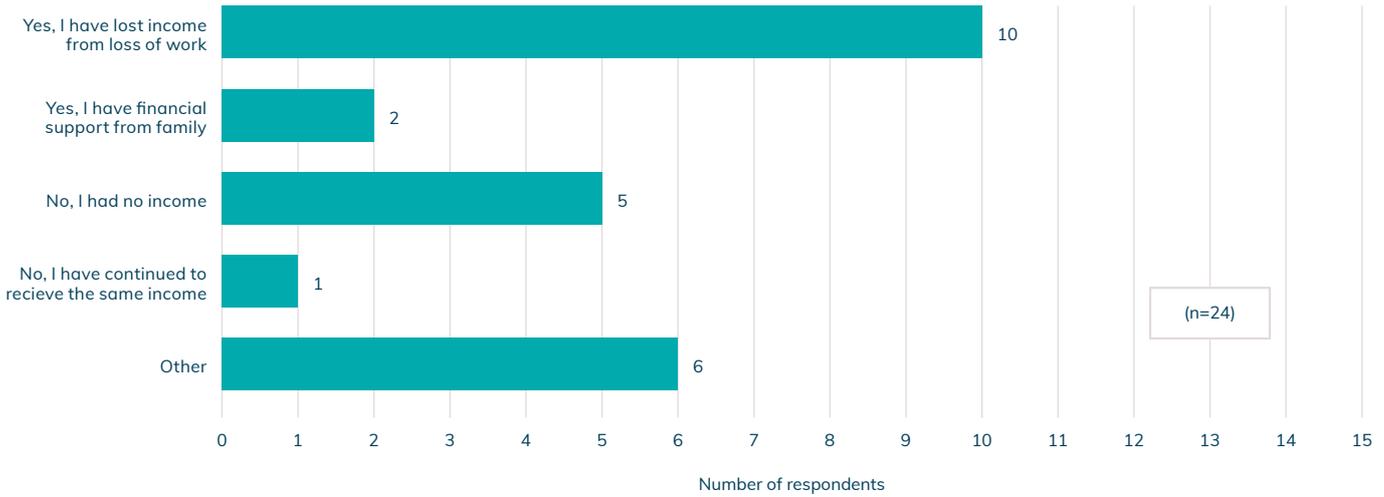
Figure 3: How would you describe the crisis situation where you live?



When looking at the impact of the pandemic on income, findings from the 4Mi survey suggest that slightly less than half (10) of respondents had lost income. When further queried on their situation, the six respondents who reported “other” in Figure 4 mainly reported that they no longer received income from begging.

49 France24 (2021) Covid-19 : le Maroc va refermer ses frontières après un premier cas du variant Omicron.

Figure 4: Have you lost income due to coronavirus restrictions?



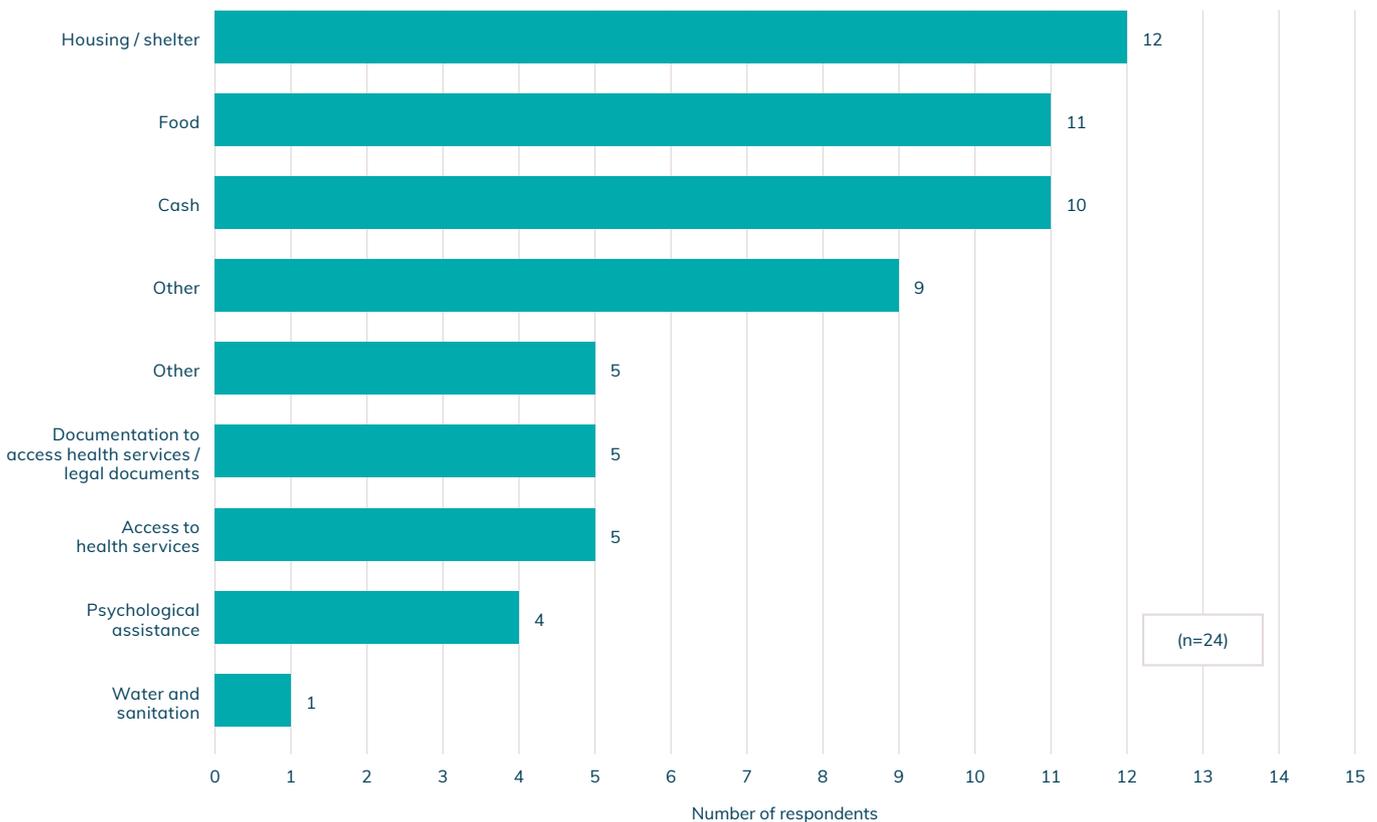
Refugees and migrants receiving economic help from family members in their home countries reported that the value of their remittances declined or stopped altogether.

“Yes, [the situation] has changed, my parents no longer work as before, the money is coming in little by little. In addition to all the trips, the borders, the airports, everything has stopped.”

Guinean female youth interviewed in Nador

The special pandemic measures of support introduced by the government did not reach those refugees and migrants with an irregular status, who consequently found themselves unable to provide for their basic needs, including food and rent. Stakeholders called attention to a high number of refugees and migrants at risk of eviction, and all 4Mi survey respondents reported needing extra help since the coronavirus outbreak began. Twelve respondents reported needing help to pay for their housing/shelter and nine reported needing cash, of whom five needed it to pay for housing/shelter.

Figure 5: Are you in need of extra assistance? If yes, what type of extra help?



According to several stakeholders, the number of refugees and migrants living on the streets has risen since the onset of the pandemic. In addition, prejudice against and stigmatization of migrants have increased during COVID-19.

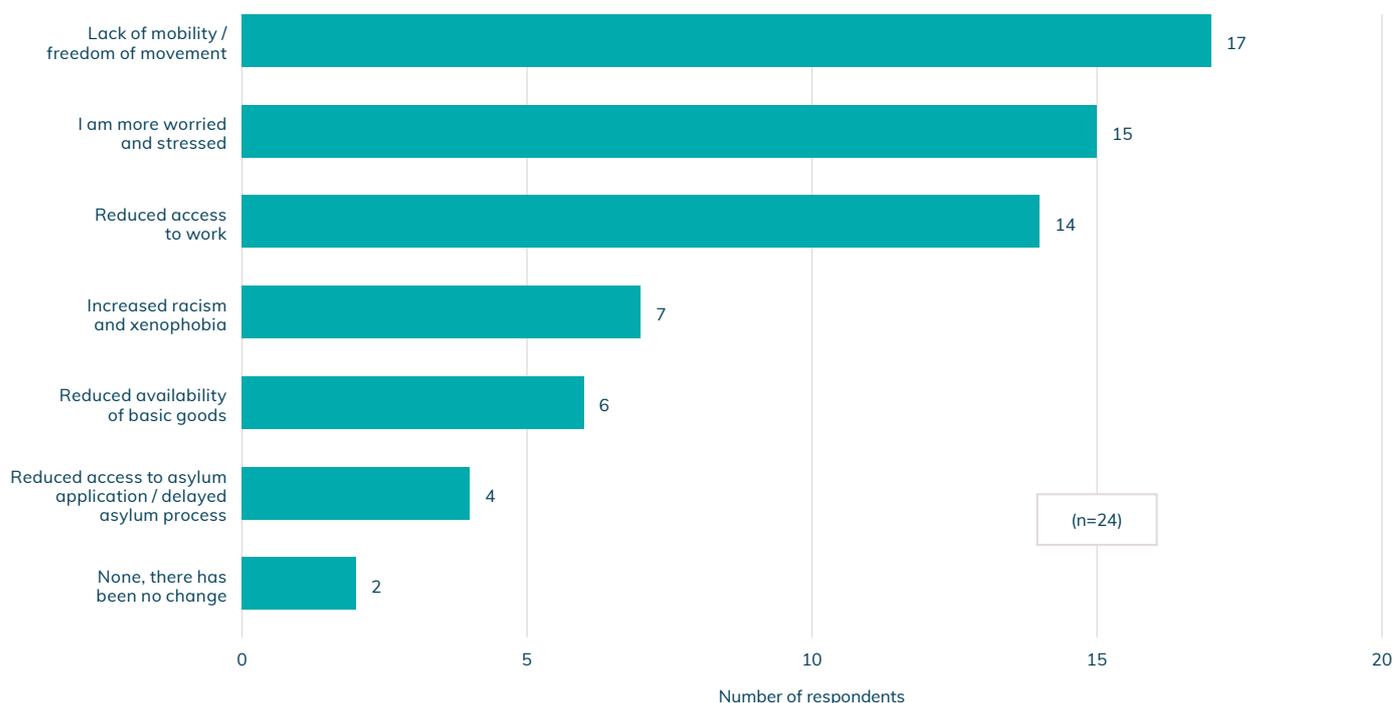
After the lockdown ended, the health crisis and measures to control the pandemic continued to affect refugees and migrants. According to consulted actors, the social and economic impact of the situation is severe, both for refugees and migrants and the Moroccan population. Restrictions that are still in place hinder access to informal work and other sources of income.

“ For me it’s difficult, because most of the people who go on the street, the one you ask for something, well they don’t have anything to give to you anymore. So it does affect me on that area. There are less people on the street.”

Nigerian man interviewed in Casablanca

The mental health of refugees and migrants, often already compromised by their arduous journeys, was further affected by COVID-19. Fifteen of the 24 survey respondents said the pandemic caused more worry and stress, which was often linked to the fear of coronavirus infection. Stakeholders also highlighted the impact of COVID-19 and lockdown measures on the mental health of Morocco’s refugee and migrant population.

Figure 6: What other impacts has the crisis had on your day-to-day life?



Furthermore, consulted stakeholders detected an increase of gender-based violence during the lockdown. Of the 11 women surveyed, five agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that there was an increased risk of sexual exploitation during the COVID-19 pandemic, and

five agreed that domestic violence had increased. The pandemic has made it even more difficult for children and women victims of violence to be identified and enter the national protection system for victims of violence.

Conclusions

- Morocco's adoption of its first National Strategy for Immigration and Asylum (SNIA) in 2014, as well as the extraordinary regularizations carried out in 2014 and 2016, constituted a promising shift in migration policy towards protecting the rights of people on the move within the country. However, the absence of the passing of expected legal reforms, including the reforms of the law governing asylum and the law regulating the entry and stay of foreigners in the country, contributes to a lack of clarity regarding the potential next steps of the SNIA, and casts doubts on whether this new approach is still moving forward.
- The number and demographics of people on the move in Morocco remains unclear due to the lack of national and international data collection mechanisms and a lack of information sharing regarding the most recent extraordinary regularization processes.
- People on the move experience considerable protection risks during their journey to and through Morocco, particularly those with an irregular status. Several factors affect the severity of these risks, including the route taken, gender, and age. Physical and sexual violence, as well as racism and discrimination, were protection risks often identified during field work.
- In general, people on the move in Morocco live in extremely precarious conditions which have been exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic. Access to basic services and protection remains unequal across the territory, despite efforts to guarantee refugees and migrants equal access to education and healthcare via their inclusion in national systems. Access to these services depends to a great extent on the involvement of civil society actors. There are persistent challenges in accessing humanitarian assistance, employment, and justice both for those with irregular and regular status.

The initial findings from this pilot study suggest that young men escaping economic hardship or poverty constitute a large portion of those on the move in Morocco. The research also suggests, however, that there is an increasing number of educated middle-class refugees and migrants seeking better opportunities. Fleeing war, as well as political and gender-based violence, are also among the key drivers that made refugees and migrants in Morocco decide to leave their home countries.

- The research highlighted three main entry points to Morocco: two over land and one by air. Oujda was cited as the most used entry point for undocumented refugees and migrants. Within the country, flows of refugees and migrants primarily move to the north to approach the border and then cross to Europe. However, displacements by security forces and better labour market opportunities encourage the settlement of migrants in the south and the centre of the country, as well as in Western Sahara. Most departures from Morocco take place through the Mediterranean Route. However, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic led to restrictions on mobility inside the country, although southward movements and Atlantic Route departures grew in number.

Recommendations

To Moroccan authorities:

- Ensure the uptake of legislative modifications which have already begun including the implementation of the law of asylum and the reform of the law regulating the entry and stay of foreigners in the country.
- Guarantee compliance with national legislation and international agreements on migration and strengthen the rule of law ensuring accountability.
- Formulate and implement the second phase of the SNIA to ensure the longevity of accomplished objectives and to mitigate challenges, including by ensuring that the SNIA includes protection measures for refugees and for migrants in irregular situations.
- Introduce a national mechanism to collect data on the numbers and profiles of people on the move in Morocco and adjust public policies accordingly.
- Ensure transparency by providing clear and public data on the results of the 2016 regularization process as well as regular data on the number of refugees and migrants in the country.
- Continue to reinforce national protection systems and ensure that all people on the move are included regardless their legal status in the country.
- Work to counter xenophobia and racism towards refugees and migrants in Morocco.

To the National Human Rights Council:

- Update the 2013 national report on the human rights situations of refugee and migrant populations in Morocco with recommendations for a continuation of the national migration strategy.

To civil society:

- Ensure the integration of refugees and migrants regardless their legal status in activities carried out by civil society organizations.

To donors/international aid community:

- Encourage the Moroccan authorities, civil society and other local actors to define a new phase of the SNIA, including through the establishment of monitoring and accountability mechanisms
- Strengthen and support the work of civil society in the protection of people on the move, including by guaranteeing suitable funding for activities aimed at humanitarian assistance and emergency measures.
- Continue to facilitate dialogue between countries of origin and countries of destination in order to build inclusive approaches around migration that guarantee human rights-based and protection responses for the most vulnerable populations on the move.



The Mixed Migration Centre (MMC) is a global network consisting of six regional hubs (Asia, East Africa and Yemen, Europe, Middle East, North Africa & West Africa) and a central unit in Geneva. 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). 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

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.

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