The journey towards Italy for Sudanese: drivers, routes and use of smugglers

Sudanese are among the 10 most common nationalities for sea arrivals in Italy. Based on 77 4Mi interviews conducted with Sudanese in Italy since November 2019, this snapshot offers an overview of their journey towards Europe, their migration drivers and their future intentions. The snapshot aims to contribute towards a solid evidence base to inform targeted responses on the ground, as well as advocacy efforts related to the situation of refugees and migrants in the country.

Key findings

- **The majority of respondents moved from Sudan**, through **Chad** or **Egypt** and **Libya** before crossing the **Mediterranean** to reach Italy.

- **The most common reasons for leaving Sudan were violence, insecurity and conflict (82%), and lack of rights and freedom (21%).** War/armed conflict/terrorism was the principal violence-related migration driver for respondents who indicated violence as a driver.

- Most of the journeys were long and dangerous. **61%[1] of the respondents took more than 2 years to arrive in Italy, and only a few arrived in less than one year (15%).**

- **Detention (especially in Libya) and lack of money** are among the key factors for the length of the journeys.

- **Almost all respondents (97%) used a smuggler[2] at some point during the journey**, to cross borders (99%), and for transportation within countries (83%).

- **53% of respondents consider that smugglers did not help them in reaching their goal of migrating to another country** – this may relate to most saying they have not reached their destination – and 63% believe that they were intentionally misled by them.

- **Italy is not the preferred destination for the majority of respondents**. 87% (n=67) plan to continue their journey, many to the UK (38/67) or France (16/67).

Profiles

This analysis draws from interviews with 77 Sudanese conducted face-to-face (n=72) and by phone (n=5) in Italy between November 2019 and September 2021. All respondents had arrived in Italy within the past 5 years. All respondents are men, predominantly aged between 18 and 25 (82%), with some (18%) aged between 26-35. The majority had completed primary (45%) or secondary (36%) education, and a small percentage (10%) had completed university.

Our sample reflects the characteristics of Sudanese travelling towards Europe found in other research. According to recent studies, the great majority of Sudanese crossing the Mediterranean are men, while women are more likely to use legal channels (such as family reunification) to reunite with family members already in Europe.

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1   Note that figures are presented in percentages for ease of reading, but the sample size is low, at 77 respondents. Where the number of respondents to a question is lower than 77, this is noted and the fraction of respondents is indicated.

2   MMC uses a broad interpretation of the terms 'smuggler' and 'smuggling', one which encompasses various activities — paid for or otherwise compensated by refugees and migrants — that facilitate irregular migration. These include irregularly crossing international borders and internal checkpoints, as well as providing documents, transportation, and accommodation. This approach reflects refugees' and migrants' perceptions of smuggling and the facilitation of irregular movement. Our interpretation is deliberately broader than the UN Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants' definition. However, this does not imply that MMC considers all activities it includes in its broad understanding of smuggling to be criminal offences. MMC prefers to use the term 'human smuggling' instead of 'migrant smuggling' as smuggling involves both refugees and migrants.

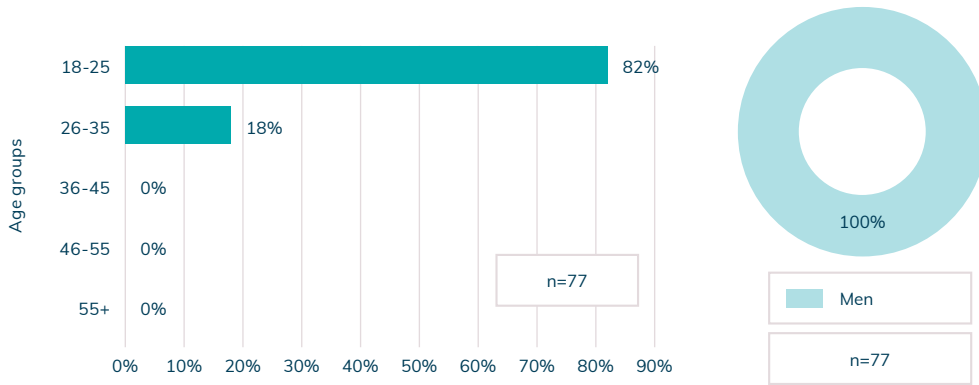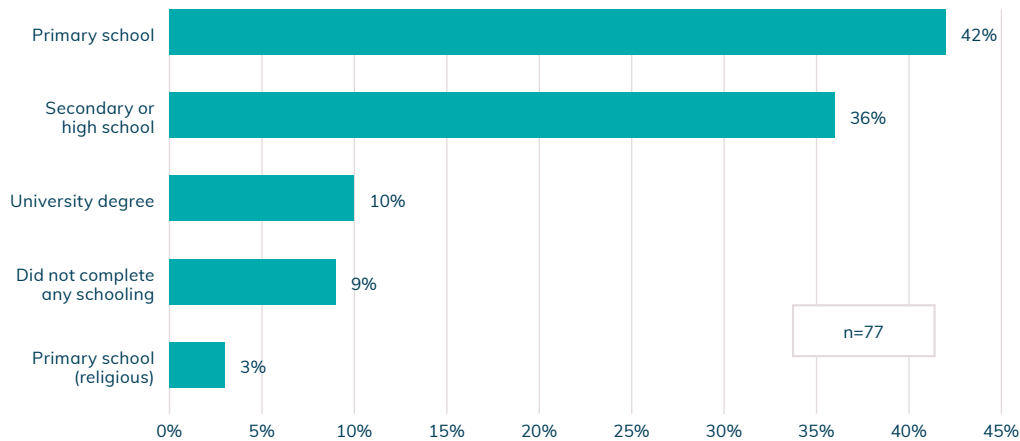## Figure 1. Sex and age ranges

Figure 2. Level of education

Violence, insecurity and conflict are the main reported drivers

Globally, 4Mi data shows that decision to migrate is rarely straightforward, even for those who flee in search of international protection, and in general respondents give more than one reason for leaving. However, among the Sudanese interviewed In Italy, 79% gave only one reason for leaving their country of origin, with violence, insecurity and conflict cited most often (82%), followed by lack of rights and freedom (21%), and economic reasons (10%) (see Figure 3). Among those who said they had left their country for reasons related to violence (n=67), 54 specifically referred to war/armed conflict/terrorism, and 22 mentioned political unrest/riots. Respondents felt compelled to migrate. None of the respondents thought they had an alternative to migration: the vast majority (94%; n=72) did not think they had any other options than migrating while the remaining respondents did not know (see Figure 4)
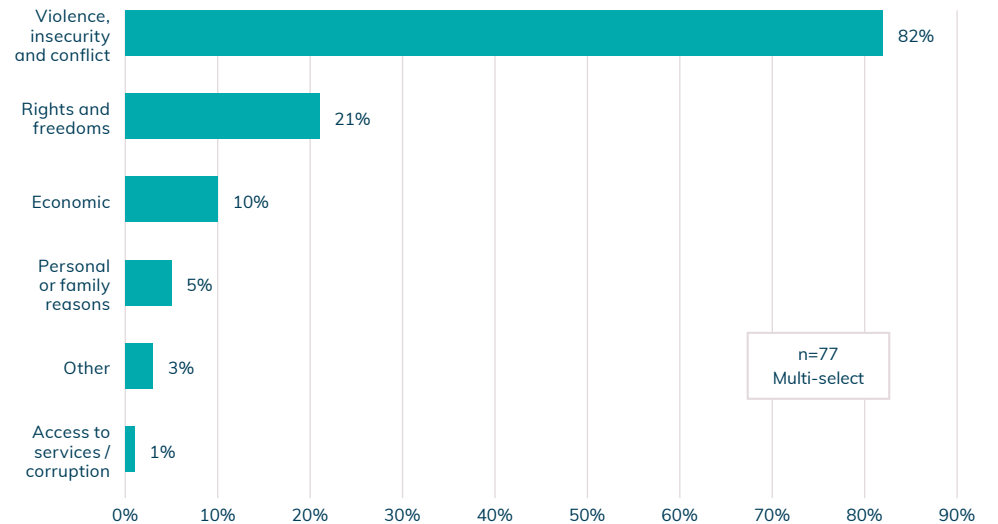
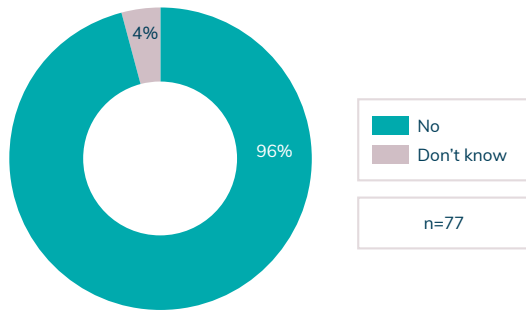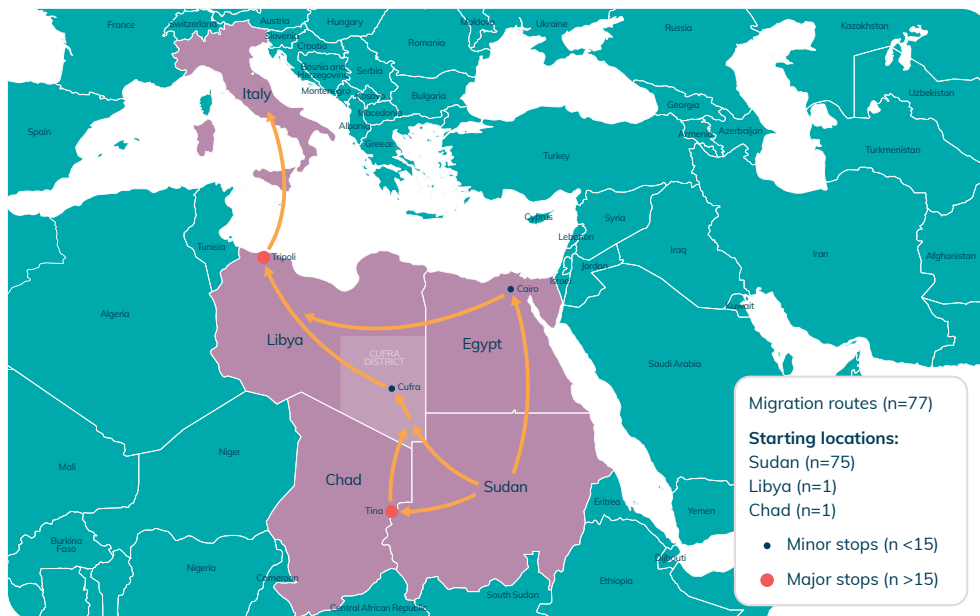## Figure 3. For what reasons did you leave?

Figure 4. Did you think there were things that you could do to address the reasons for leaving?

- 96% No
- 4% Don't know

n=77

A 2-year journey to reach Italy

For almost all respondents (97%) the journey started in Sudan. Respondents travelled through Libya to arrive in Italy. 42% of respondents passed directly through Libya, whereas 43% passed first through Chad and 13% through Egypt, before reaching Libya. From Libya, the journey continued across the Mediterranean to southern Italy (see Map 1). In Libya, Sudanese mostly stopped in Tripoli and Cufra while in Chad the main stop was Tina, right across the border.

Map 1. Migration routes from Sudan to Italy

Migration routes (n=77)

Starting locations:
Sudan (n=75)
Libya (n=1)
Chad (n=1)

- Minor stops (n <15)
- Major stops (n >15)

Car/pick-up was by far the most common mean of transportation across land (96%), followed by trucks (22%) (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Which means of transportation have you used during your journey?

- Car / pick-up 96%
- Truck 22%
- Boat 10%
- Bus 10%
- Walk 4%

n=77
Multi-select
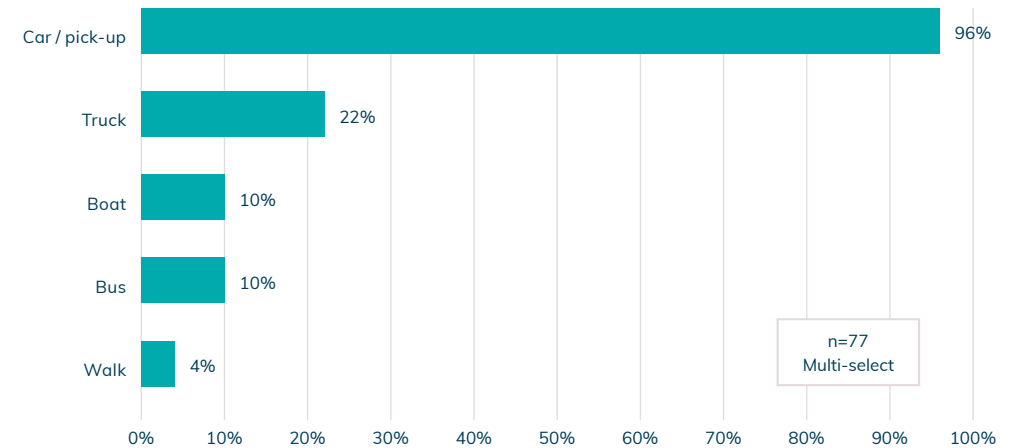
61% of respondents took more than 2 years to arrive in Italy, and 11 (15%) arrived within less than one year (see Figure 6). The length of the journey might depend on a number of factors: of those who took more than 2 years to reach Italy (n=46), 39% were detained or otherwise held against their will in Libya, and 37% worked in Libya to earn money for the next stretch of the journey. Those who stopped in Chad, most frequently mentioned stopping for lack of resources or logistics such as waiting for transportation (55%) and working to earn for money the next stretch of the journey (24%); fewer mentioned being detained (9%).

Figure 6. Length of the journey

Length	No. Respondents	%
0-6 months	3	4%
7-12 months	8	11%
>1 year	18	24%
>2 years	46	61%
	75	

Note: Out of 77 Sudanese interviewed, 2 respondents could not remember when they started their journey.

Almost all respondents used a smuggler at some point during their journey

Almost all respondents (97%) used a smuggler at some point during their journey. 71% used several different smugglers along the way; 18% used one smuggler for only part of the journey and 8% used one smuggler for the entire journey (see Figure 7). These data reflect the fragmented nature of the migration journey and the difficulties of the path towards Europe.

The role of smugglers was mostly related to transportation/logistics. Smugglers generally provided transit across borders (99% of the 75 respondents who used a smuggler) and in-country transportation (83%). However, they also provided food or water (20%), dealt with authorities (11%), and arranged accommodation (8%). Some respondents also mentioned that smugglers facilitated release from detention (7%). Interestingly, 20% said that a smuggler introduced them to other smugglers (20%).
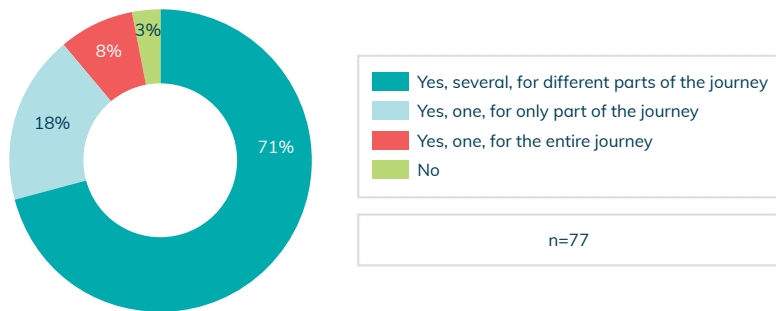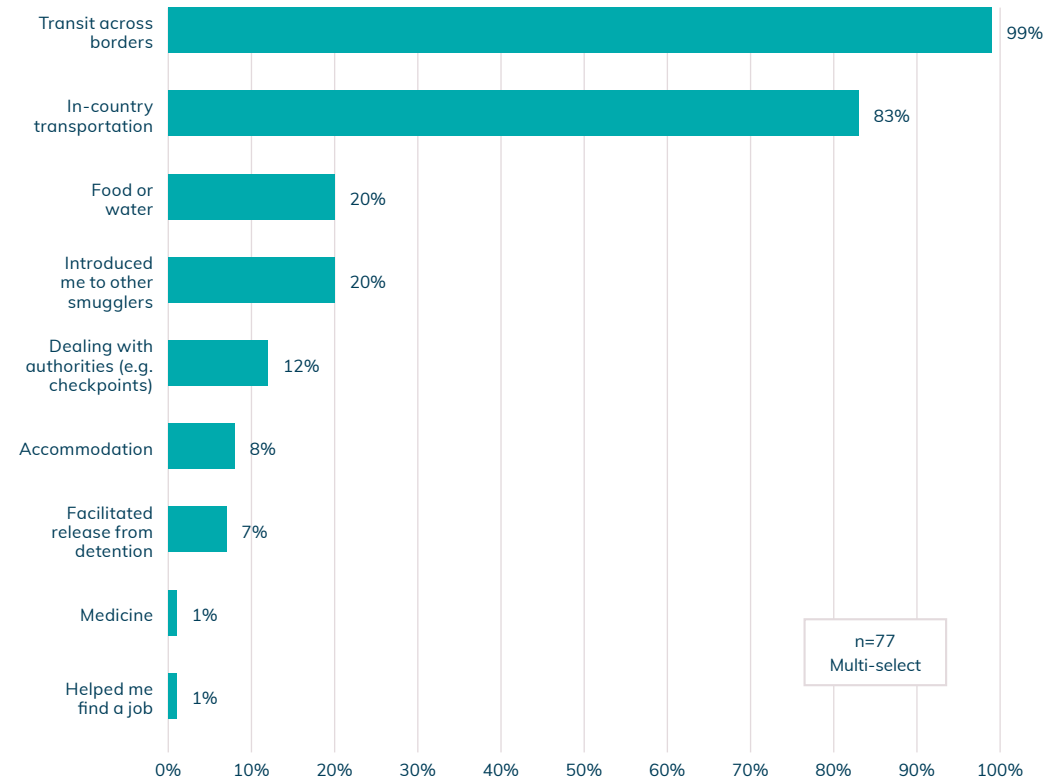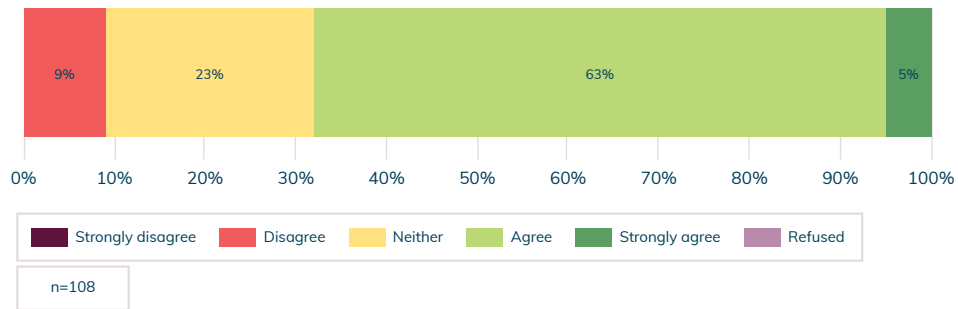
Figure 7. Did you use a smuggler?

Legend:
- Yes, several, for different parts of the journey — 71%
- Yes, one, for only part of the journey — 18%
- Yes, one, for the entire journey — 8%
- No — 3%

n=77

Figure 8. What did the smuggler provide you with?

Category	Value
Transit across borders	99%
In-country transportation	83%
Food or water	20%
Introduced me to other smugglers	20%
Dealing with authorities (e.g. checkpoints)	12%
Accommodation	8%
Facilitated release from detention	7%
Medicine	1%
Helped me find a job	1%

n=77
Multi-select

The majority of respondents were intentionally misled by smugglers

While the vast majority of respondents used a smuggler, at least for part of the journey, 63% of the 75 people who used a smuggler believe they were intentionally misled by them about the journey (see Figure 9). This is concerning, because being misled about the journey reduces the agency of concerned individuals and make them more vulnerable to abuses and incidents.

Figure 9. To what extent do you agree with the following statement: "I was intentionally misled about the journey by my smuggler or smugglers"?

| 9% | 23% | 63% | 5% |

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

Strongly disagree Disagree Neither Agree Strongly agree Refused

n=108

Italy is rarely the preferred destination

The majority of respondents (86%) had not reached the end of their journey (see Figure 10). Only 5% referred to Italy as their preferred destination. Another 8% decided to settle in Italy despite it not being their preferred destination, and the majority (87%, 67/77) still intend to move elsewhere, having other preferred destinations in mind, mostly UK (38/67) and France (16/67). The reasons for choosing these countries rather than Italy is often related to knowledge of the language, educational opportunities or due to the (perceived) lack of work opportunities in Italy.

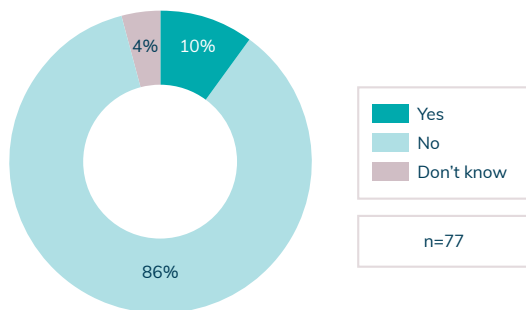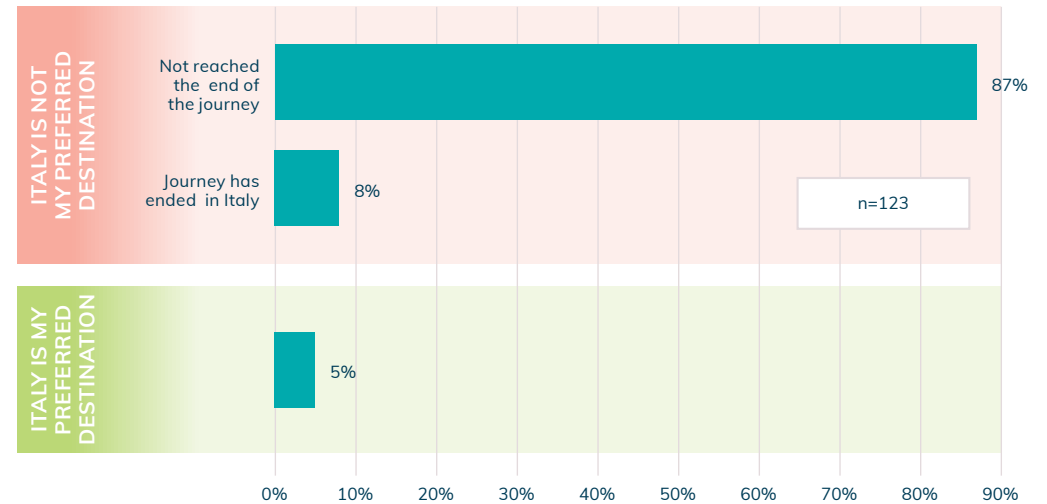**Figure 10. Have you reached the end of your journey?**

10%		
4%		
86%		

Yes
No
Don't know

n=77

Figure 11. Future intentions

ITALY IS NOT MY PREFERRED DESTINATION

Not reached the end of the journey — 87%

Journey has ended in Italy — 8%

n=123

ITALY IS MY PREFERRED DESTINATION

5%

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90%

4Mi data collection

4Mi is the Mixed Migration Centre's flagship primary data collection system, an innovative approach that helps fill knowledge gaps, and inform policy and response regarding the nature of mixed migratory movements and the protection risks for refugees and migrants on the move. 4Mi field enumerators are currently collecting data through direct interviews with refugees and migrants in West Africa, East Africa, North Africa, Asia, Latin America and Europe.

Note that the sampling approach means that the findings derived from the surveyed sample provide rich insights, but the figures cannot be used to make inferences about the total population. See more 4Mi analysis and details on methodology at www.mixedmigration.org/4mi