

# What changes over the course of the migration journey? Results from piloting longitudinal 4Mi

In mid-2021, MMC and the University of Edinburgh partnered to design and pilot a longitudinal survey methodology to repeatedly interview refugees and migrants while on the move in North Africa and East Africa. While MMC's core 4Mi survey is location- and route-oriented, designed to capture patterns of decision-making along pre-determined routes, this longitudinal method was developed to be person-oriented, administering surveys to the same individual at different points in time. It was devised to understand how migration drivers, experiences, decisions and aspirations of refugees and migrants develop over time. This snapshot reveals the main insights and learnings from the analysis of the data collected through the pilot. The methodology is discussed in more detail [here](#).

## Key findings

- At first glance, re-surveying refugees and migrants after two months suggests that little has changed: many are still in the same city (70/75) and have not changed their intentions for the future (49/75).
- At a finer scale of analysis, however, one in five (15/70) had changed neighbourhood. The trend was sharper among people travelling with children and with a legally recognized status (e.g. recognized refugees or migrants with visas).
- In only a quarter of the cases (19/75) had there been no substantial change in people's plans over the period of time between the rounds of interviews. Mostly people felt forced to stay put because of a lack of resources. Women were particularly likely to have had their plans derailed (17/33).
- In a third of the cases (29/75), this period spent "staying put" was a time when more information on the journey was obtained.
- Over time, the measures that individuals take to protect themselves tended to increase slightly, especially so in Libya/Tunisia and for women.
- The sample is limited in size but highlights the importance of longitudinal research for understanding how complex and rapidly changing migration journeys evolve and how.

## Methodology and sample

The methodology was built on the already existing 4Mi data collection infrastructure. In April/May 2021, a filtering question was added to the 4Mi core survey, asking interviewees if they were willing to participate in a follow-up survey. Willing respondents (82% of those asked in East Africa; 49% in North Africa) were asked for contact details and in June/July 2021, at least 6 weeks after the first interview, they were re-contacted and administered the follow-up survey. 89% of those who had agreed to participate in the follow-up survey were successfully reached in East Africa; 63% in North Africa. For more on the methodology, see our report [here](#).

Through this approach, we collected 75 paired surveys, each respondent having taken part in one 4Mi core survey and one follow-up survey. 42 were collected by MMC East Africa teams in Somalia, and 33 by MMC North Africa teams in Tunisia (18) and Libya (15). In October 2021, MMC NA collected a further 8 second-round follow-up interviews with respondents who were first interviewed in Tunisia (5) and Libya (3).

The final sample consists of 42 men and 33 women, aged between 18 and 70 with an average age of 31. Close to all respondents interviewed in Somalia were Ethiopian (39/42), while the remaining individuals were from Yemen (3). In Libya and Tunisia respondents were from Nigeria (12/33), Sudan (6), Guinea (4), Syria (2), Chad (2), Kenya (2) and other countries (4). Over a quarter (21/75) were travelling or living with children under their care.

It is useful to note that this period of data collection coincided with the Covid-19 pandemic. The situation was particularly difficult in Tunisia in July when the number of cases peaked and travel – including between regions – was tightly controlled. The border between Libya and Tunisia was closed for two months from July to September 2021 but travel between countries remained possible provided people had appropriate evidence of a negative test. COVID-19-related restrictions also existed in Libya during the period of interest but were less important than in Tunisia, while no specific restrictions were in place in Somalia.

## Below the surface: local displacement

### Mobility after two months: close to no one had moved country or city

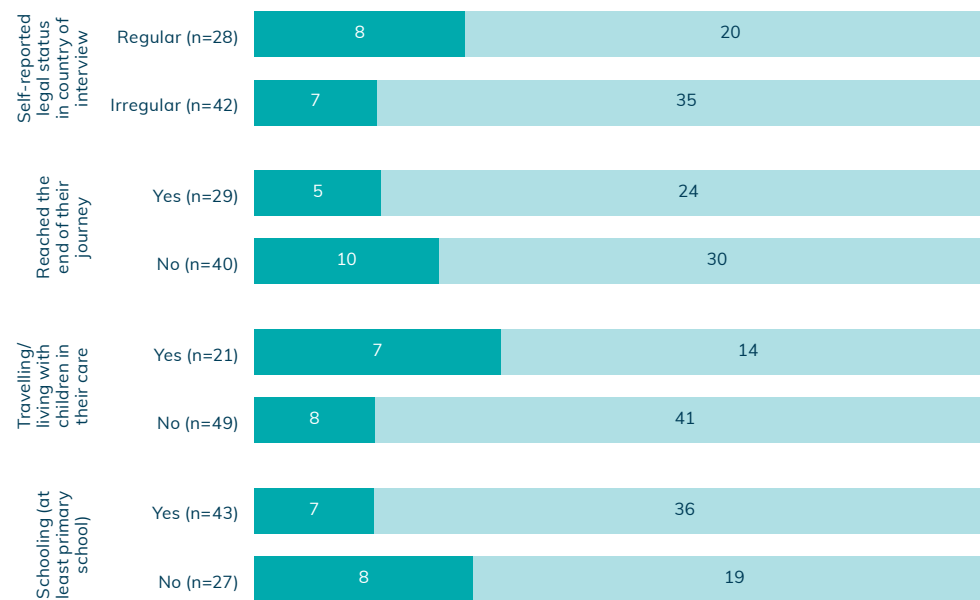
Between the two survey rounds, few people moved: only one respondent had moved country and four had changed cities. For many, however, this was in line with the intentions declared during the first interview. Of those who during the first interview had reported having reached the end of their journey (29/75), all had remained not only in the same country but also in the same city. This group was overwhelmingly composed of Ethiopians settled in Somalia (25/29). Among those who had declared that they had not reached the end of their journey, suggesting plans to move forward (46), only one respondent had moved country, by travelling back to his country of origin: first interviewed in Libya, he had returned to Chad by the second interview (but was still planning to travel to Italy, reflecting the non-linear).<sup>1</sup> All the remaining 45 respondents with plans to move further remained in the same country two months later.

Intended onward movement was directed mostly towards Europe and Saudi Arabia. Specifically, almost all of those interviewed in Libya and Tunisia (27/30) intended to travel to Europe, and a few to Canada/Australia (3). Respondents in Somalia were mostly aiming for Saudi Arabia (9/15), with others hoping to reach Europe (4), Swaziland (1) or they did not know (1).

### Changing neighbourhood, however, was not uncommon

Within the two-month period, individuals nonetheless did change neighbourhood on a more localised scale. Among the 70 that had remained in the same country and city, one in five (15/70) had changed neighbourhood. The decision was most commonly driven by the need to find somewhere cheaper (8/15), or the need to move closer to family/friends (6/15). Here we see the advantages of this methodology for understanding localised patterns of mobility during the course of migration journeys.

Figure 1. Have you changed neighbourhoods? (n=70)



The small sample limits the comparative exploration of the profile of those who did/did not move neighbourhoods, but some trends do appear (see Figure 1): those travelling with children (who also tended to be older) had more commonly changed neighbourhoods, as did those who did not have any schooling and those with a recognized legal status (e.g. refugee or asylum seekers). Interestingly, no stark difference appeared when looking at gender, or the effort people said that they deployed to protect themselves - it could not be established that changing neighbourhood was an active strategy to increase protection.

## Changing plans, re-assessing strategies

### Assessments of the migration experience changed for many

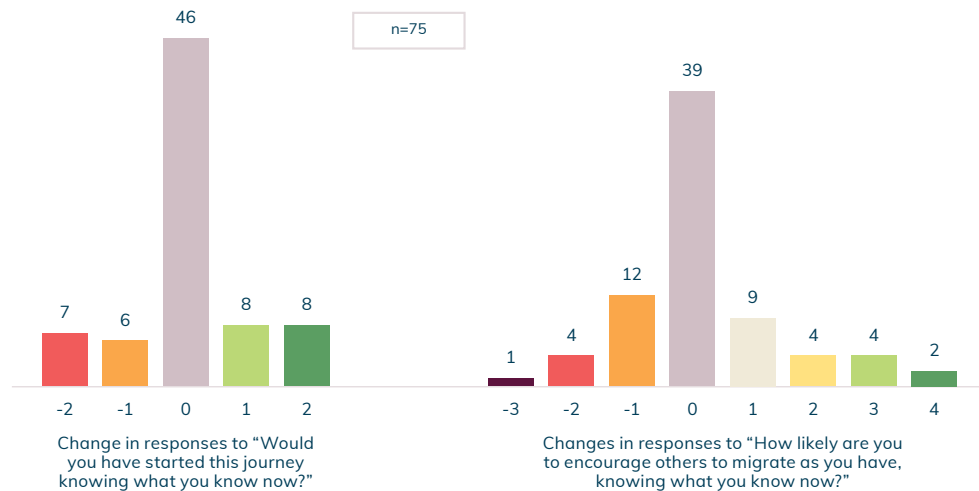
At first glance, it may seem that respondents' reflections on their decision to migrate saw limited change over time: a similar ratio of people said 'yes', they would have started this journey knowing what they know now (37/75 in the second round vs. 38/75 at first interview). Similarly, the results did not substantially change to the question "How likely are you to encourage others to migrate as you have, knowing what you know now?" (1.82 in the second round vs 1.62 at first interview, on a scale from 0-very unlikely to 4-very likely).

<sup>1</sup> This interview shows that the longitudinal methodology is able to capture at least some cross-border movement.

However, looking at *individual* rather than average responses to the same two variables, many did change their answers to these questions (just under half: see Figure 2, where a positive score indicates that a respondent made a more positive assessment in round 2, and a negative score a more negative assessment). These changes go both ways and highlight the unpredictability of migration journeys and intentions and the possible frequent swings in how people perceive and describe their experience when posed a reflective, subjective question. These findings are also not necessarily aligned with changes in how respondents choose to protect themselves, reinforcing research that shows that migration decision-making is influenced by temporally and spatially disparate factors.

Additionally, when asked the question “Do you think differently about your migration journey since we last spoke?” 10/33 of respondents in Tunisia/Libya and 6/42 of those in Somalia explain that they do now think differently about their migration journey, often expressing having found more difficulties than they had envisaged.

**Figure 2. Change in responses to assessments of the migration journey**



Note: A positive score indicates a shift to a more positive answer, and a negative the inverse. Answer options were originally coded as follows to “Would you have started this journey knowing what you know now? no=0, don’t know/unsure=1, and yes=2; “How likely are you to encourage others to migrate as you have, knowing what you know now?” very unlikely=0, unlikely=1, neutral=2, likely=3, very likely=4),

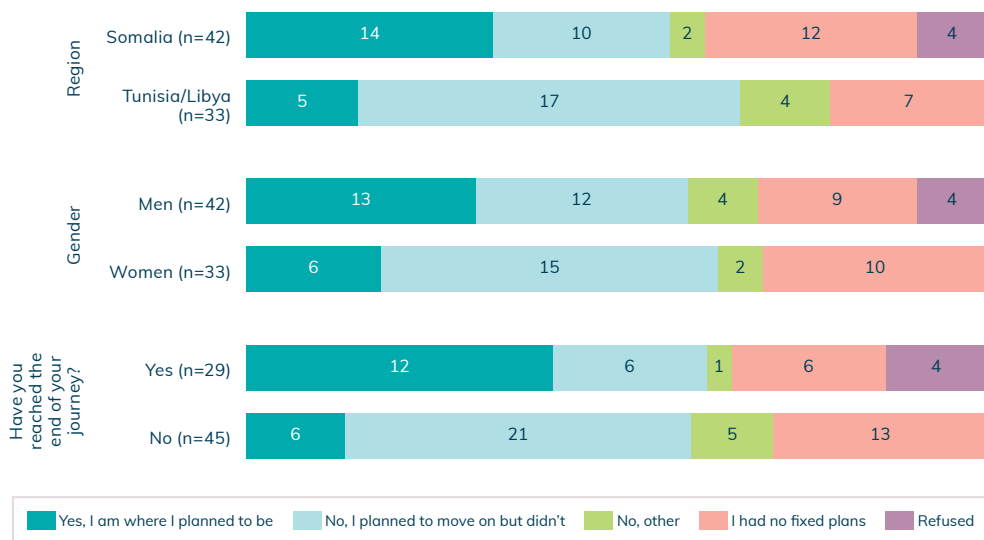
### For many, the two months between interviews did not go as planned

When asked whether, between the first and second interviews, their journey had gone according to plan, around a quarter (19/75) reported that ‘yes’, they were where they planned to be, and another quarter (19/75) had no fixed plans. The other half of the sample stated that their journey had not gone according to their plans (33/75) or refused to answer (4). Albeit limited in size, the sample allows analysis of the profiles of those who said their journey was going according to plan (19) versus those who did not (56).

As outlined in Figure 3, it was more common for respondents in Libya/Tunisia to report that the journey had not gone as planned (21/33), than those in Somalia (12/42), where more participants had reached the end of their journey in round one. Proportionally, more women reported their journeys had not gone as planned (17/33) than did men (16/42). As may be expected, among those who had reached the end of their journey, more were where they planned to be (12/29) than among those who had not yet reached the end of their journey (6/45).

The most frequently cited reasons for people’s inability to move on as planned (27) were due to a lack of money (16/27), not being able to decide where to go (6), or because their route was blocked by regulations or border closures, including those related to Covid-19 (5). Most (10/16) of those citing the lack of financial resources as a barrier to further movement, which had rendered them involuntarily immobile, outlined that their financial situation had worsened over the past two months. Conversely, a few respondents had not moved as planned because they had found work/income opportunities in their current locations, outlining decisions to voluntarily stay put.

**Figure 3. Has the journey between when we last spoke and now gone according to plan?**



**Changing journey plans, not future plans**

It is, however, important to bear in mind that the question focused on how past journey plans had unfolded. Future plans – i.e. where people intend to go– did not change substantially during the time between the two survey rounds: the majority of respondents had not changed their plans for the future (49/75). In a similar pattern to previous observations, this was more common among those interviewed in Somalia (32/42), than it was for those interviewed in Libya/Tunisia (17/33). Among those in Libya/Tunisia who had changed their plans (16/33), this most commonly entailed a change in intended destination (6/16), a change in planned means of travel (5/16) or a change in the duration of the journey (3/16).

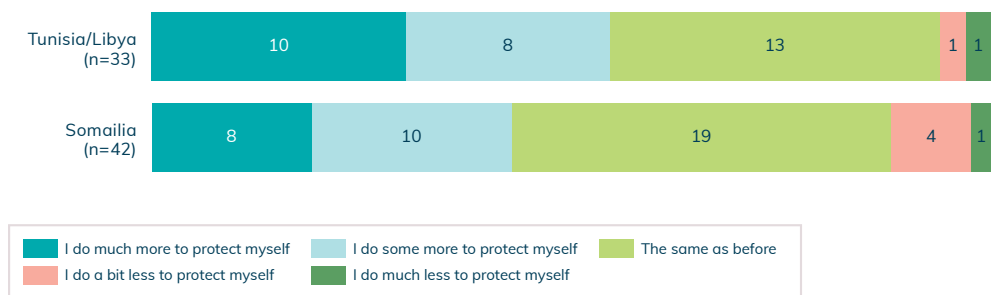
The two months or so of “staying put” between survey rounds was a period of time during which refugees and migrants reconsidered and reassessed their options. During the time considered, 29/75 explained having obtained more information about routes, destinations, costs, risks, etc. Interestingly, it was more common for those who had obtained more information to have changed their future plans in some way (15/29) than for those who had not obtained any additional information (8/46). It was also more common for respondents who responded ‘yes’ to the question “Do you think differently about your migration journey

since we last spoke?” to have changed their future plans (9/16) compared to those who did not think differently about their migration journey (14/56).

**Increasing protection levels**

As outlined in Figure 4, protection measures changed for many respondents. Around half of the sample cited doing more to protect themselves than they did at the time of the first interview (36/75), with a higher proportion doing so in Libya/Tunisia (18/33). It was rare in both regions of data collection for respondents to be doing less to protect themselves than in the first round of data collection, even if they may have become more familiar with the context. It was more common for those who had changed city or neighbourhood during the two months to be doing more to protect themselves (11/19) than it was for those who remained in the same location (24/55). Proportionally, more women (18/33) than men (18/42) reported doing more to protect themselves than before.

**Figure 4. To what extent do you think that you have changed how you protect yourself from abuse and crime?**



## What we learned: the analytical value of a longitudinal approach

As a pilot project with a limited sample size, there were clear limitations to how far analysis could be brought forward. Nevertheless, the insights gained from this longitudinal data pilot project were invaluable. The analysis unveiled what happens when people on the move seem to “stay put” – showing that a lot is happening “under the radar”. It has allowed us to better consider dimensions that are crucial to understanding migration and are known to change over time such as access to information, security provision, livelihoods, and journey planning. Where the data collected through cross-sectional surveys only provides snapshots, the longitudinal data allows a deeper understanding of the non-linear changes in such elements, and how they relate to personal and group characteristics, and scaling up this kind of data collection would be valuable.



### 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 East and Southern Africa, North Africa, West Africa, Europe, Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean.

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](http://www.mixedmigration.org/4mi)