

Refugee and migrant youth in Tunisia - Profiles, access to income, protection risks and assistance needs

Tunisia hosts more than 9,000 refugees and asylum seekers¹ and an estimated 59,000 foreign residents.² This snapshot sheds light on the profiles of young refugees and migrants aged 18-24 in Tunisia, their access to income-generating activities in the country; the main protection risks they perceive, particularly those related to work and their assistance needs. This snapshot is produced as part of a research partnership with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) focusing on children and youth on the move along the Central Mediterranean Route.

Note: Data collection for this snapshot took place prior to the events of early 2023 in Tunisia, which saw an increase of violence in the country targeting sub-Saharan African refugees and migrants as well as Black Tunisians. The surge in xenophobia and discrimination was accompanied by heightened physical violence and enforcement measures against refugees and migrants. These events had a direct impact on their safety and livelihoods, with many individuals reporting heightened needs for assistance as well as greater barriers to accessing services, housing, the labour market and public institutions and spaces. As data for this snapshot were collected prior to these events, it is likely that the needs of young refugees and migrants in Tunisia are now greater than what is presented here.

1 UNHCR (2023). [UNHCR Tunisia Data Portal \(as of 31 January\)](#).

2 This figure comes from the 2021 "National Survey on International Migration" conducted by the Tunisian National Statistics Institute and the National Observatory on Migration. Foreign residents are defined as "all who either have been in Tunisia for 6 or more months or who intend to stay for a duration of at least six months, regardless of their regular/irregular status". It is assumed that a large portion of these people may have left Tunisia in the aftermath of the events in early 2023.

Key findings

- 10% of youth respondents had started their current journey before turning 18.
- 96% of interviewed refugee and migrant youth claimed that they had not reached the end of their journey.
- 84% of interviewed youth reported having some form of income in Tunisia. Of these, 70% were receiving money from family or relatives and 43% were working.
- Respondents perceived multiple protection risks for female and male youth in Tunisia, the most common being verbal abuse/non-physical violence (59% vs. 46%), physical violence (35% vs. 46%), insecurity (37% vs. 38%) and forced work (39% vs. 37%).
- Forced work or labour exploitation³ was perceived as being most common in domestic work for young women and construction for young men.
- Close to all interviewed youth reported being in need of assistance (91%), mostly in the form of cash and medical assistance.

Data and profiles

This snapshot draws on 180 4Mi surveys conducted with refugees and migrants aged 18-24 years old in Tunisia from July to October 2022, who arrived in Tunisia less than two years ago. This group was purposively sampled based on their age.⁴ Respondents were interviewed in Sfax (57%), Sousse (38%), Médenine (3%) and Tunis (2%). 11% of respondents had been in Tunisia for less than six months, 28% had been in Tunisia between six months and one year and 61% between one and two years.

62% of respondents are men and 38% women. The most common countries of nationality are Cameroon (12%), Mali (12%), Côte d'Ivoire (11%), Guinea (9%), Sudan (9%), Gabon (7%), Benin (6%) and Senegal (5%). Close to all (96%) youth respondents indicated that they had not reached the end of their journey. Preferred destinations were Canada

3 Defined as per [ILO Forced Labour Convention 1930](#): All work or service which is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the said person has not offered himself or herself voluntarily.

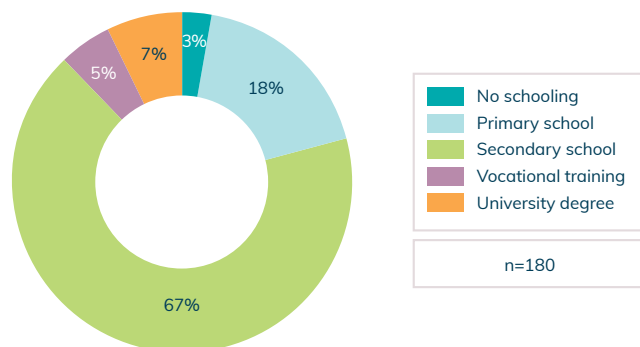
4 In Tunisia, youth represent 32% of MMC's overall 4Mi dataset collected in 2022.

(21%), Belgium (14%), Germany (13%), the United Kingdom (8%) and the United States of America (5%).

10% of youth had left their country of departure before turning 18, mostly with friends/peers (11/17). This was more often the case among interviewed men than women (14%, vs. 3%). Overall, 42% reported starting their journey on their own, 29% started it with friends/peers, 24% with a caregiver and 4% with family. Women more often cited starting their journey alone (51%) than did men (36%). Additionally, most of those who started the journey on their own, arrived legally by air travel (64/75). More than half (55%) of respondents indicated having used a smuggler at some point along their journey. No youth respondent was travelling or living with children under their care at the time of interview.

3% of respondents did not receive any form of schooling, 18% completed only primary level education, 67% completed secondary school, 5% completed a vocational training program and 7% had a university degree.

Figure 1. What is the highest level of education you have completed?



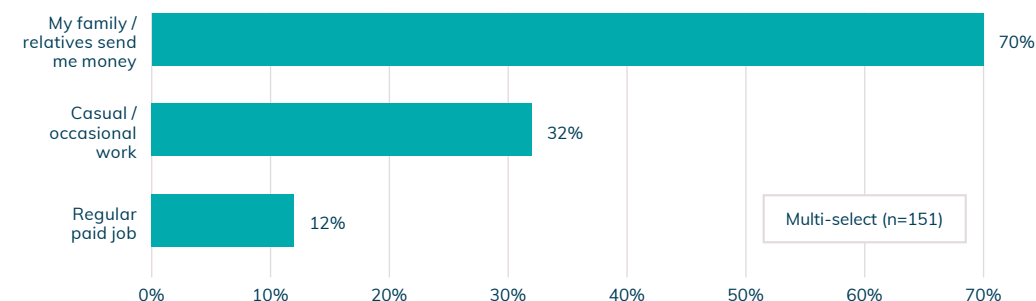
In Tunisia, many young refugees and migrants rely solely on money sent to them by family

84% of youth respondents had some form of income in Tunisia (n=151). Of these, 70% reported receiving money from family/relatives, 32% engaged in casual/occasional work opportunities and 12% had regular paid jobs. Among those receiving money from family/relatives, the majority relied exclusively on this source of income (78%). Of those with access to work opportunities (n=66), the largest share worked in small businesses

(shop/catering/services) (31/66, the majority reported this was casual/occasional work), or domestic work (28/66, mostly women). Due to a restrictive legal framework, regular employment is highly challenging for refugees and migrants in Tunisia.

Figure 2. How do you get money?

(Among respondents with a source of money)



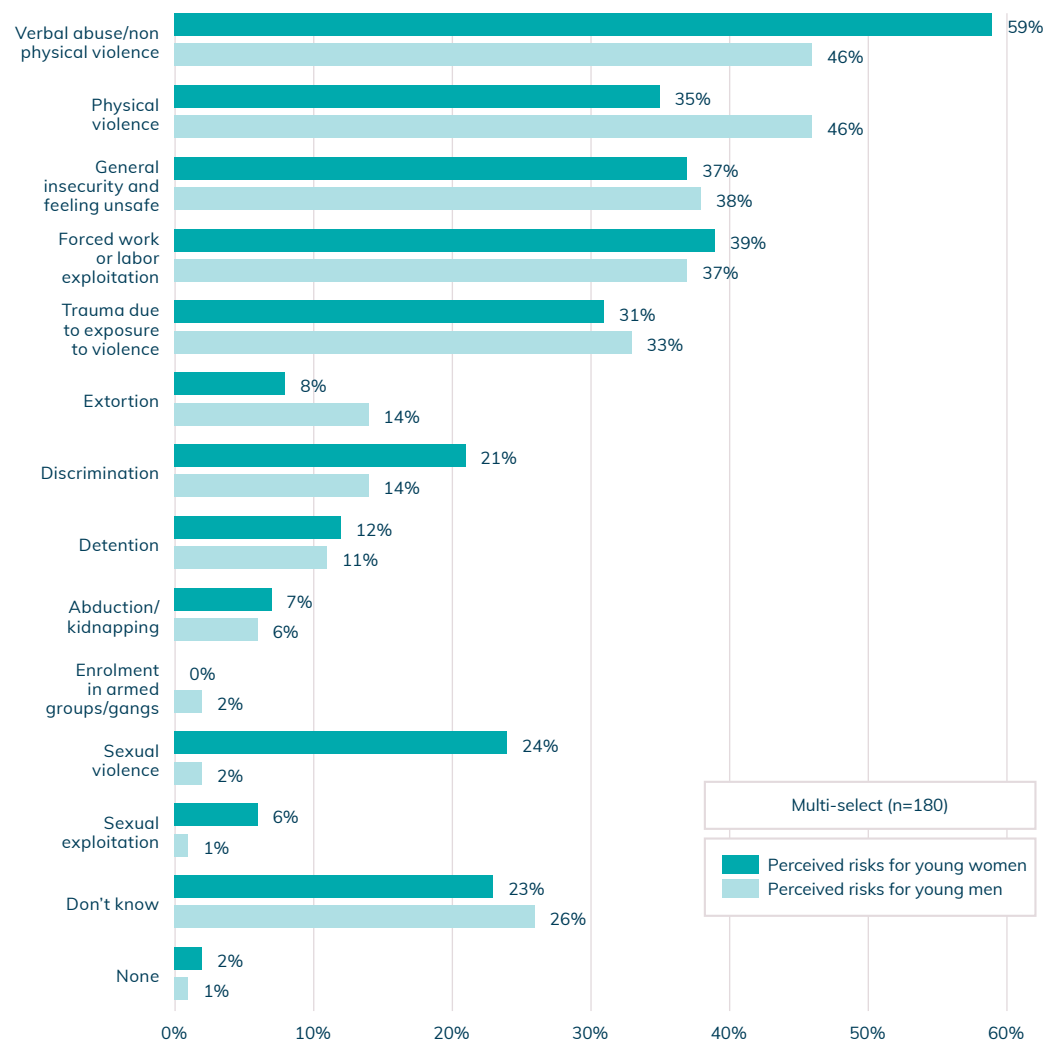
Interestingly, a smaller proportion of respondents with tertiary education (university degree or vocational training) were working (2/22) than those with secondary (41%) or primary (39%) education. This might be linked to the limited work opportunities that align with their skills. Indeed, the data for all education levels reveal that for the 16% of respondents who indicated not having any source of income in Tunisia (n=29), this is because they can't/couldn't find a job (13/29), the work offered does not meet their expectations (7), they are students (5) or they are sick and unable to work (3).

Youth perceive multiple protection risks in Tunisia, including verbal abuse, physical violence, insecurity and forced work

The top four protection risks perceived by female and male youth were the same, albeit ranked differently (see Figure 3): verbal abuse, forced work or labour exploitation, general insecurity and feeling unsafe, physical violence. The perceived risk of sexual violence for female youth was higher than for male youth, but this could be at least partly linked to additional stigma around discussing sexual abuse experienced by men.

Figure 3. What risks do young men/women refugees and migrants face in your current location?

(Questions asked to all respondents – one on risks faced by men and one of risks faced by women)

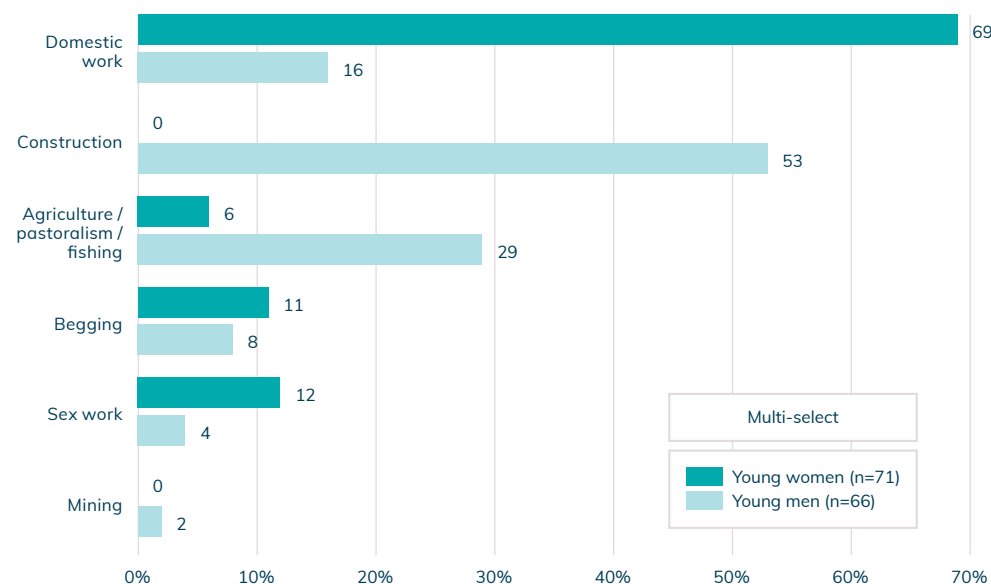


Forced work or labour exploitation most common in domestic work for young women and construction for young men

For women, the most common sectors or work activities perceived to be linked to forced work and labour exploitation were domestic work (69/71), sex work (12) and begging (11). For young men, construction (53/66), agriculture/pastoralism/fishing (29) and domestic work (16) were most often linked to forced work and labour exploitation.

Figure 4. Please specify work

(Among those selecting 'Forced work or labour exploitation' as a risk for young men/women in Tunisia)

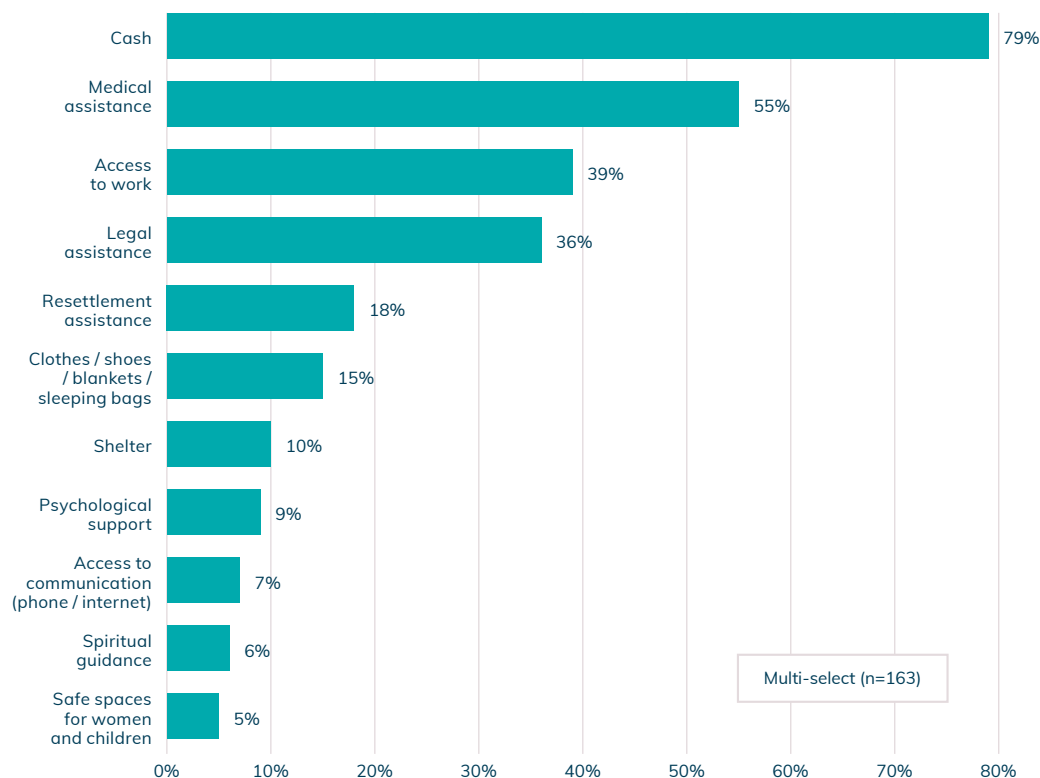


Close to all respondents are in need of assistance in Tunisia, mostly cash and medical assistance

Close to all (91%) respondents were in need of assistance at the time of interview and many reported multiple needs. The most common forms of assistance identified were cash (75%), medical assistance (55%), access to work (39%) and legal assistance (36%).

Figure 5. What kind of assistance do you need?

(Among those who reported being in need of assistance now)



All (n=180) respondents were also asked about specific medical and educational priority needs. Respondents cited general healthcare services (73%) and HIV & STI screening and treatment (24%) as the most needed types of medical assistance. Almost one-third of women cited contraception/family planning (29%). In terms of the types of education services needed, respondents expressed a desire for higher education (35%), foreign language training (42%) and vocational training (29%).

"Going for medical check-ups is tiring and to do it by myself is mentally and physically tiring. Buying vitamins and medicines is not feasible since I only get 200 TND (approximately 62 USD) monthly from UNHCR. No (additional) assistance is provided even with my pregnancy,"

17-year-old Somali girl interviewed by MMC in Tunisia

In case of an emergency, respondents would reach out to support networks outside of Tunisia

Most respondents outlined that, in case of an emergency, they would reach out to relatives/friends outside of Tunisia, suggesting an absence of support structures in Tunisia. Specifically, 54% of respondents said they would reach out to relatives in their country of origin, 40% cited they would reach out to relatives in the country of destination, 38% to friends/community of co-nationals in their country of destination, 24% to associations/NGOs and 23% to friends/community of co-nationals in their current location.



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 Eastern 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