

Refugees and migrants travelling with children in urban centres in West and North Africa: Conditions and needs

Introduction

This snapshot aims to provide insights on refugees and migrants travelling with children (or “caregivers”) in West and North Africa, including risks, needs and access to income. This overview is the second in a series designed to inform programming to improve protection and access to work and education for young people in the region, including in urban centres. These efforts constitute phase 1 of the Children and Youth on Migration Routes in West and North Africa (*Enfants et jeunes sur les routes migratoires en Afrique d l’Ouest et du Nord*) project.

Key findings

- **More than four out of five respondents (83%) said they had a source of money at the time of the interview**, with little difference between women (84%) and men (82%). For the majority of these caregivers, income came from paid work, with only 8% citing money sent by family and 3% begging.
- **Most caregivers who said they were working were either self-employed (37%) or casual workers (35%)**. Almost the same proportion of men (37%) and women (36%) said they were self-employed.
- **More than half (57%) of caregivers said that the children under 18 in their care were not receiving any educational services** at the time of the interview, mainly due to a lack of financial resources.
- Caregivers said they needed **educational assistance** (27%) for the children in their care, as well as **basic relief such as food** (23%), suggesting that programming should aim to provide multiple types of services.
- **Girls are more generally considered to be exposed to risks than boys. Non-physical violence**, such as discrimination, insults and harassment, emerged as the main perceived risk for both girls and boys under 18, particularly in Greater Tunis.

Profiles

This snapshot is based on 1,053 surveys of refugees and migrants travelling with at least one dependent child under the age of 18 in the capital cities of Mali, Niger, Guinea and Tunisia between June 2022 and March 2023.

Caregiving relationship¹

Nearly four in five (79%) were parents travelling with their own children, 10% were aunts/uncles, 8% siblings, and 4% and 3% family friends or legal guardians. Most caregivers (57%) were travelling with just one child, while almost a third (30%) were travelling with two children and 14% with three to five children. The ages of the children were evenly distributed, with slightly more younger children (under four years old). Almost half (45%) of caregivers looked after at least one child under the age of four, while 41% looked after children aged five to nine and 30% looked after children aged 10 to 14. Nineteen per cent had children aged between 15 and 17. More women (57%) than men (32%) said they were travelling with young children (aged 0-4), while more men (66%) than women (35%) said they were travelling with children aged 10-17.

Journey and nationalities

More than four-fifths (82%) of respondents had not yet reached the end of their journey at the time of the interview, with a slightly higher proportion of men (86%) than women (78%) intending to continue their journey. 98% of respondents were from West or Central Africa. The most common nationalities of respondents in **Niamey** (n=331) were Benin (18%), Togo (14%), Nigeria (12%), Liberia (10%) and Burkina Faso (9%). The main nationalities of respondents in **Bamako** (n=315) were Togo (23%), Côte d’Ivoire (14%), Guinea (10%), Senegal (10%) and Benin (9%). The main nationalities of respondents in **Greater Tunis** (n=248) were Côte d’Ivoire (22%), Mali (15%), Cameroon (14%), Guinea (12%) and Nigeria

¹ Caregivers include parents and family members, as well as other types of relationships, such as legal guardians, family friends, and people from the same community in the country of departure.

(8%). The main nationalities of respondents in **Conakry** (n=159) were Sierra Leone (26%), Mali (21%), Côte d'Ivoire (15%), Guinea Bissau (8%) and Senegal (8%).

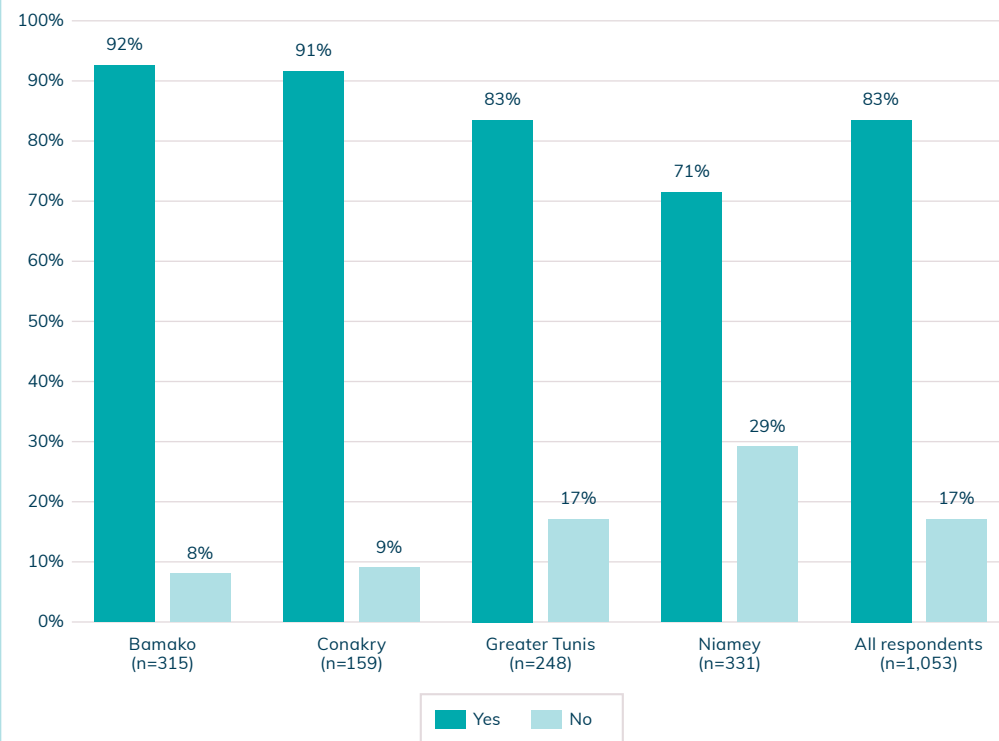
Table 1. Respondent profiles by interview city

City of interview	Niamey	Bamako	Greater Tunis	Conakry
Total (n=1053)	331	315	248	159
Sex				
Women	41%	65%	55%	38%
Men	59%	35%	45%	62%
Age				
18-24	1%	1%	4%	13%
25-34	64%	46%	73%	46%
35-54	35%	52%	23%	37%
55+	0%	1%	0%	4%
Sole caregiver?				
Oui	80%	52%	35%	52%
Non	20%	48%	65%	48%
Have you reached the end of your journey?				
Yes	20%	0%	2%	37%
No	80%	95%	94%	40%
I don't know	0%	5%	4%	23%

Most caregivers are employed; many are self-employed or depend on casual work

Most caregivers (83%) in the four capitals had a source of income at the time of the interview (see Figure 1). For these caregivers, self-employment and casual work were the most frequently cited means of earning money, by 37% and 35% of respondents respectively, followed by regular paid employment (26%).

Figure 1. Do you currently have a source of money?



Men and women reported a source of income in similar proportions: 84% of women and 82% of men, and in similar fashion, although women seem more likely to have a regular job (28% vs. 22%) or to receive money from family and friends (11% vs. 5%), and men to have a less stable job (40% have an occasional job vs. 30% for women).

Type of employment varied by city. Among respondents who said they had a source of money, occasional work was reported by more respondents in Greater Tunis (63%), Niamey (46%), and Conakry (30%) than in Bamako (9%). In contrast, 58% of respondents with a source of income in Bamako said they had a regular paid job, compared with 15% in Niamey, 2% in Greater Tunis, and 10% in Conakry.

Caregivers in the four cities reported being self-employed at relatively similar rates: 43% in Niamey, 37% in Conakry, 36% in Bamako, and 31% in Greater Tunis. Although this type of work can offer a degree of flexibility, particularly for people who are able to

support their work online², it can also result from necessity due to barriers to regular paid employment.

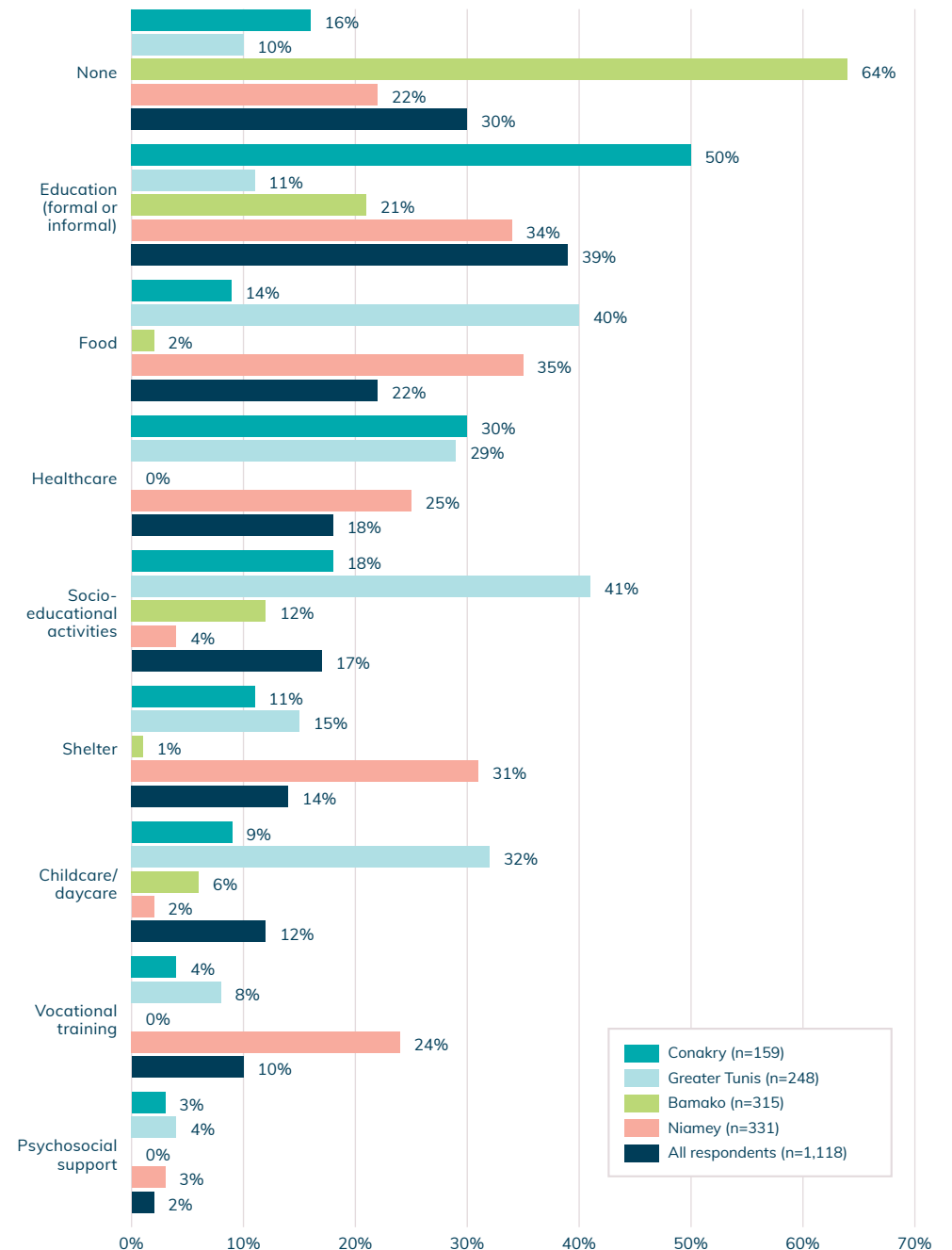
Education and food reported as top needs for children, with variations by city

Respondents cited education (27%) and food (23%) as the most important needs for the children in their care, with significant variations between cities (see Figure 2). Caregivers therefore place a high priority on education and training alongside food, suggesting the need for multi-dimensional programming to meet this range of needs.

Socio-educational activities (such as games, contact with other children and other learning activities that can take place outside the classroom) were the top need cited by caregivers in Greater Tunis, at 41%, although food was also mentioned by 40% of respondents in the city. The need for formal or informal education was most common among respondents in Conakry (50%) and Niamey (34%), and 35% of respondents in Niamey also said they needed food. In Niamey, a relatively high proportion of caregivers said they needed vocational training (24%, compared with less than 10% elsewhere). Education was also the top need cited by caregivers in Bamako (21%), although 64% of respondents in Bamako said that the children in their care had all their needs met.

The need for food in Tunis can be explained by the recent shortages of basic foodstuffs such as milk, rice and flour, which have persisted throughout the country since 2022, making many essential foodstuffs either unavailable or much more expensive. In Niamey, food and shelter - the latter also cited much more often than in other cities, by 31% of those accompanying people in the city - are consistent needs reported by refugees and migrants. This is due to the lack of shelters and reception facilities in the city, which migrants often rely on to meet these needs.

Figure 2. Children's needs by city of interview



2 MMC's research into the use of social media by refugees and migrants has shown that some people on the move use social media as a means of making a living, for example by advertising the services of a hair-dressing salon to potential clients.

Fewer than half of caregivers say they have access to education for the children in their care

More than half (57%) of the caregivers surveyed said that the children in their care did not have access to any type of educational services. In Niamey, 77% said that the children in their care did not have access to any kind of educational services, compared with 43% in Bamako, 53% in Greater Tunis and 48% in Conakry.

Lack of financial resources was cited by 41% of caregivers as the main reason why their children were not enrolled in school, while 28% said that they did not want their children to access these services and 24% said that the length of their stay in the location of interview was too short. This finding is consistent with the overall need for cash cited by caregivers in response to the question about their current needs at the time of the interview. Short stays are particularly significant for caregivers in Niamey, where 30% cited this as a reason why the children in their care do not have access to education, as well as in Conakry (cited by 36% of respondents in this city). Despite this, respondents in these cities cited the need for education more frequently than those in other cities (Figure 2). Together with one-third of respondents not wanting children to access services, these results indicate that education services are not meeting the needs of people in transit, which merits further exploration.

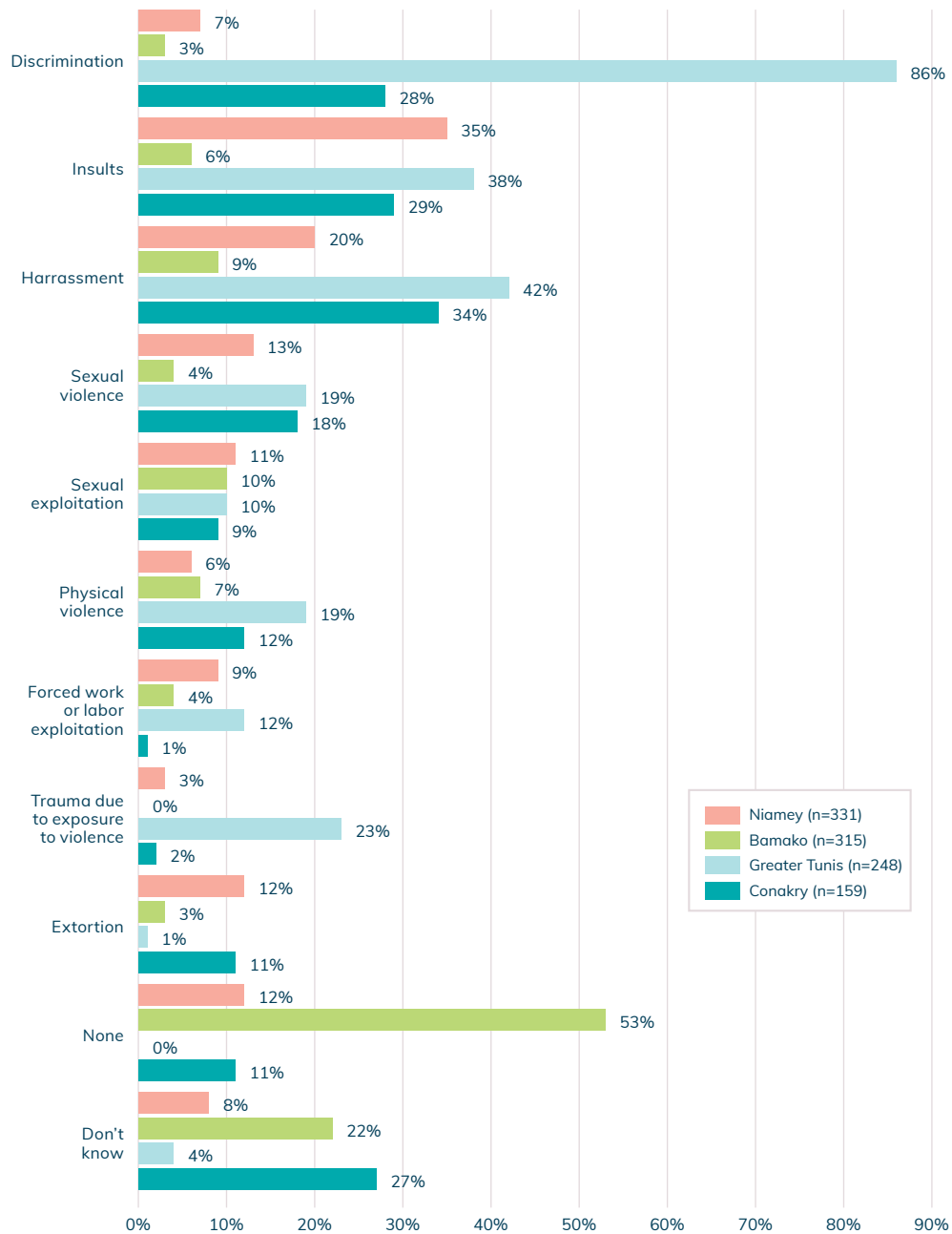
Non-physical violence reported as top protection risk for girls and boys

55% of women and 62% of men said that children were very strongly or strongly exposed to the risk of abuse or violence. Only 6% of caregivers said that children were only slightly exposed to risks, while 33% cite slight to moderate exposure. In Bamako, however, a majority considered that boys and girls were not exposed to any risks at all. This may be linked to the fact that the majority of respondents in Bamako also stated that the needs of the children in their care were being met, which could reduce vulnerability to risk.

Caregivers most often reported the risk of non-physical violence, such as discrimination, insults, and harassment (see Figures 3 and 4). Harassment concerned more girls (24%) than boys (8%). Many more caregivers in Tunis reported discrimination as a risk than in West African cities. This finding can be explained by the racial dynamics of migration from West and Central Africa to North Africa, where incidents of racism and xenophobia against refugees and migrants from sub-Saharan Africa are more frequently cited by 4Mi respondents.

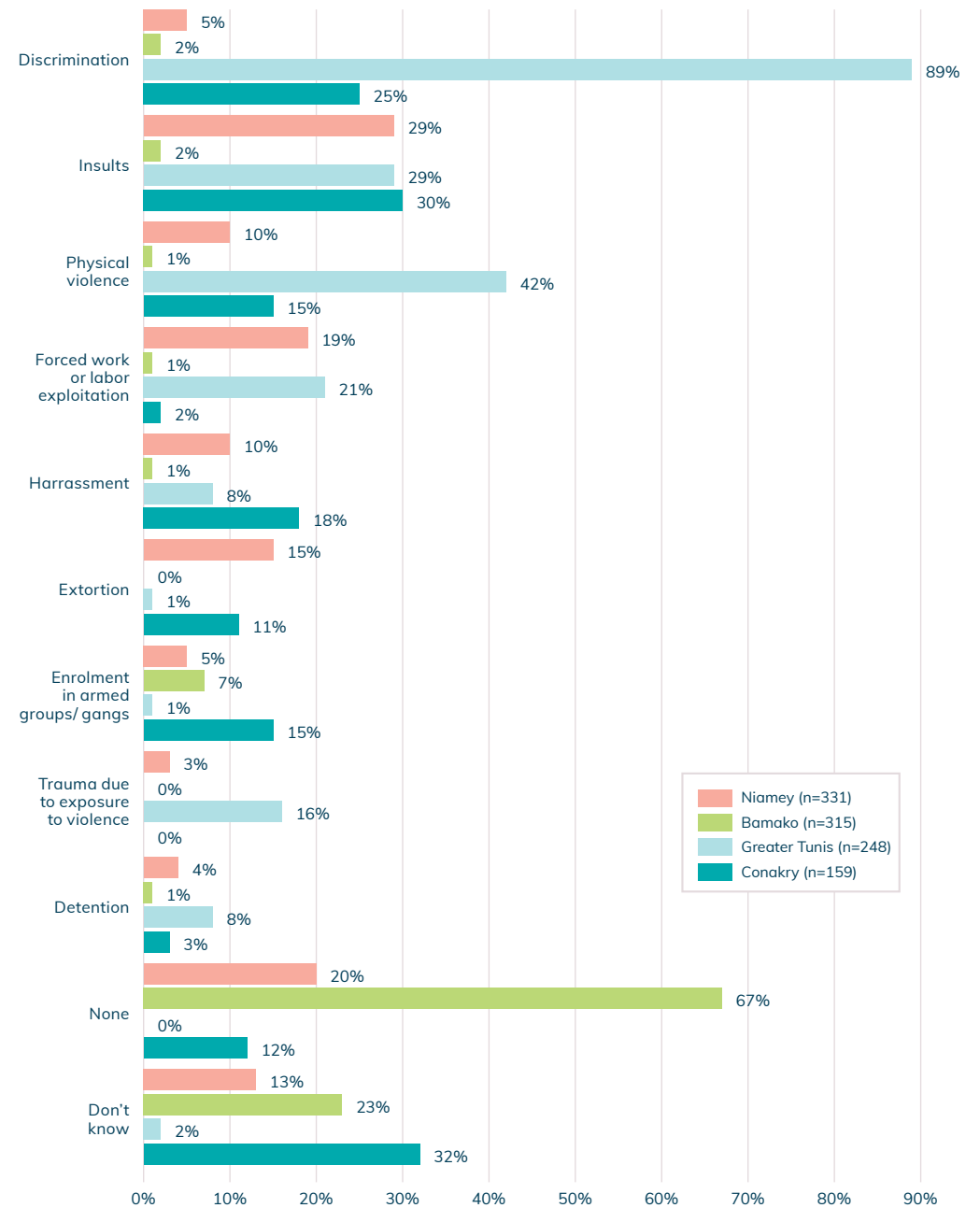
The main risks for girls cited by caregivers were discrimination (28%), insults (26%) and harassment (24%). However, the main risks for boys were discrimination (32%), insults (22%) and physical violence (21%). Similar proportions of respondents cited no risk for girls (24%) and boys (28%).

Figure 3. Risks for girls by city of interview³



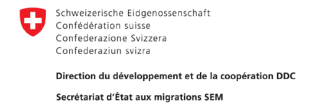
3 The graph shows the responses most frequently cited in the data. For girls, the other risks cited by respondents were enrolment in armed groups/gangs (2% or 21 respondents), detention (2% or 19 respondents), forced marriage (1% or 11 respondents), and abduction/kidnapping (1% or 6 respondents).

Figure 4. Risks for boys by city of interview⁴



4 The graph shows the most frequently cited responses in the data. For boys, the other risks cited by respondents were abduction/kidnapping (1% or 14 respondents), sexual violence (1% or 8 respondents), sexual exploitation (0% or 3 respondents) and forced marriage (0% or 1 respondent).

MMC is a member of the extended EJM project consortium and produced this snapshot in collaboration with HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation, the Terre des Hommes Foundation and GIZ.



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 Asia and the Pacific, Eastern and Southern Africa, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, North Africa, and West Africa.

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