



Mixed
Migration
Centre



PAPER

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Thanks to the 4Mi team and enumerators in West and North Africa

Economic integration of young migrants in urban centres of West and North Africa

Access to work, vulnerabilities and human capital

Key findings

MMC conducted 1,869 interviews with young international migrants in Bamako (n=517), Conakry (n=414), Niamey (n=505) and Tunis (n=433) to study the

extent to which their migratory journeys contribute to improving their living conditions and economic insertion:

Mobility offers economic opportunities for young migrants...

- **Access to economic opportunities for the young people surveyed improves once they move.** The proportion of respondents indicating that they have an income increases from 62% before their departure to 80% during their mobility. Only 10% said they were unable to find a job in the city where they were interviewed, while 4% had no source of income because they were pursuing their studies.
- **When they are on the move, the two main difficulties in finding work are the lack of job offers and the lack of information,** cited respectively by 42% and 41% of young people who were unable to find an income. Length of stay (16%), lack of work permit (10%) and lack of qualification (6%) are other relatively less frequently cited obstacles, questioning commonly accepted assumptions about migrants' difficulties in accessing work.
- **Working during the migratory journey is often a necessity to be able to continue the journey to other destinations.** Almost half of all the respondents (45%) stopped at least once to work during their journey. This score reaches 83% of young respondents who had left with insufficient money to pay all the expenses associated with their journey.
- **With over two-thirds (69%) of respondents working in three business sectors, the opportunities accessible to young migrants are not very varied.** The small business sector offered the most accessible opportunities, with 39% of respondents working in this field, followed by construction (17%) and domestic work (13%). Young women had access to even less opportunities, with the majority working in small businesses (for 35/69 of respondents in Conakry and 39/64 in Niamey), as domestic helpers (up to 37/62 of respondents in Tunis) or sex workers (92/211 of respondents in Bamako).
- **Although respondents had greater access to economic opportunities in their interview city, the majority (89%) expressed the intention to continue their journey.** This intention was motivated by the hope of improving their general living conditions (50%), finding a safer environment (32%), and/or benefiting from a social security system (23%), in addition to access to better economic opportunities (81%).

...but job stability and risk protection remain limited

- **The economic opportunities available to young migrants were mostly precarious and unstable, short-term or in the form of self-employment.** Casual and/or temporary work was the most common form of employment, accounting for 39% of respondents with an income (up to 63% and 60% in Niamey and Tunis). 19% were self-employed workers, sometimes for lack of alternatives and opportunities to access employment.
- **The risks of exploitation and abuse at work underline the inadequacy of protection for young migrants, even when they gain access to a source of income.** 18% of respondents felt that young men migrants were exposed to the risk of forced labour, compared to 15% for the same perceived risk against young women migrants. Yet half (53%) of respondents who had a source of income at the time of the interview said they were in an irregular situation and were therefore excluded from protection schemes.
- **Half of all respondents sought external support to finance their mobility, exposing them to the risk of debt and/or placing a financial burden on their family.** Financial support was most often provided by the family, for 47% of all the respondents and up to 69% of those who had no income prior to departure. Similarly, 11% of the young people surveyed had taken out a loan to finance their mobility.

Recognition of skills and professional experience is a lever that can improve the economic integration of young people on mobility programs.

- **Professional skills obtained through an educational program in the country of origin facilitate access to opportunities in new economic environments.** 17% of respondents who had a source of income at the time of the interview had undergone vocational training, compared with 9% among those who were not working.
- **Practical skills acquired in a work situation, prior to the mobility departure, can also be enhanced during mobility.** Respondents who had a source of income in their home country (62%) worked in a variety of sectors including small business (46%), agriculture (12%), industry (12%), domestic work (9%), construction (9%) and transport (7%).
- **The high demand for educational services among young migrants surveyed illustrates a need to improve their working conditions and/or access new opportunities in another country.** 70% of respondents said they needed education-related services. Half of them (48%) wanted foreign language training, which can improve their integration and help reduce their exposure to the risks of exploitation. 43% wanted vocational training, for example, to obtain recognition of prior learning and gain access to formal employment.

Introduction

This report examines the extent to which young people's migration paths contribute to improving their living conditions, and how the human capital they bring facilitates their economic integration. It provides information through quantitative surveys of young international migrants aged between 18 and 24 conducted in four urban centres in West and North Africa (Bamako, Conakry, Niamey and Tunis).

This study is part of a series of publications¹ designed to inform programming aimed at improving protection, socio-economic insertion and education for migrant children and youth in these regions. These efforts are part of phase 1 of the Children and Youth on Migration Routes in West and North Africa (EJM) project.

The project aims to improve support for children and young people on migration routes by transforming national and regional systems of protection, education, integration and opportunity creation. Within this framework, the Mixed Migration Centre (MMC) provides data and analysis to enable stakeholders to design and implement context-specific programs, and to advocate for the inclusion of protection, access to education and socio-economic integration opportunities in existing national and regional services and mechanisms.

This publication is based on quantitative data collected through 4Mi, MMC's flagship data collection methodology. Its main aim is to fill the gap in quantitative data on the economic integration of young migrants in the four cities studied.

1 MMC (2023), [Les jeunes sur les routes migratoires mixtes en Afrique de l'Ouest et du Nord: Profils et parcours](#). MMC (2023), [Refugees and migrants traveling with children in urban centers of West and North Africa: Conditions and needs](#). MMC (2024), [Risks for migrant children and young people in urban centers in West and North Africa](#). MMC (2024), [Educational realities and needs of migrant children and youth in West and North Africa](#).

Methodology

Profile of respondents sample

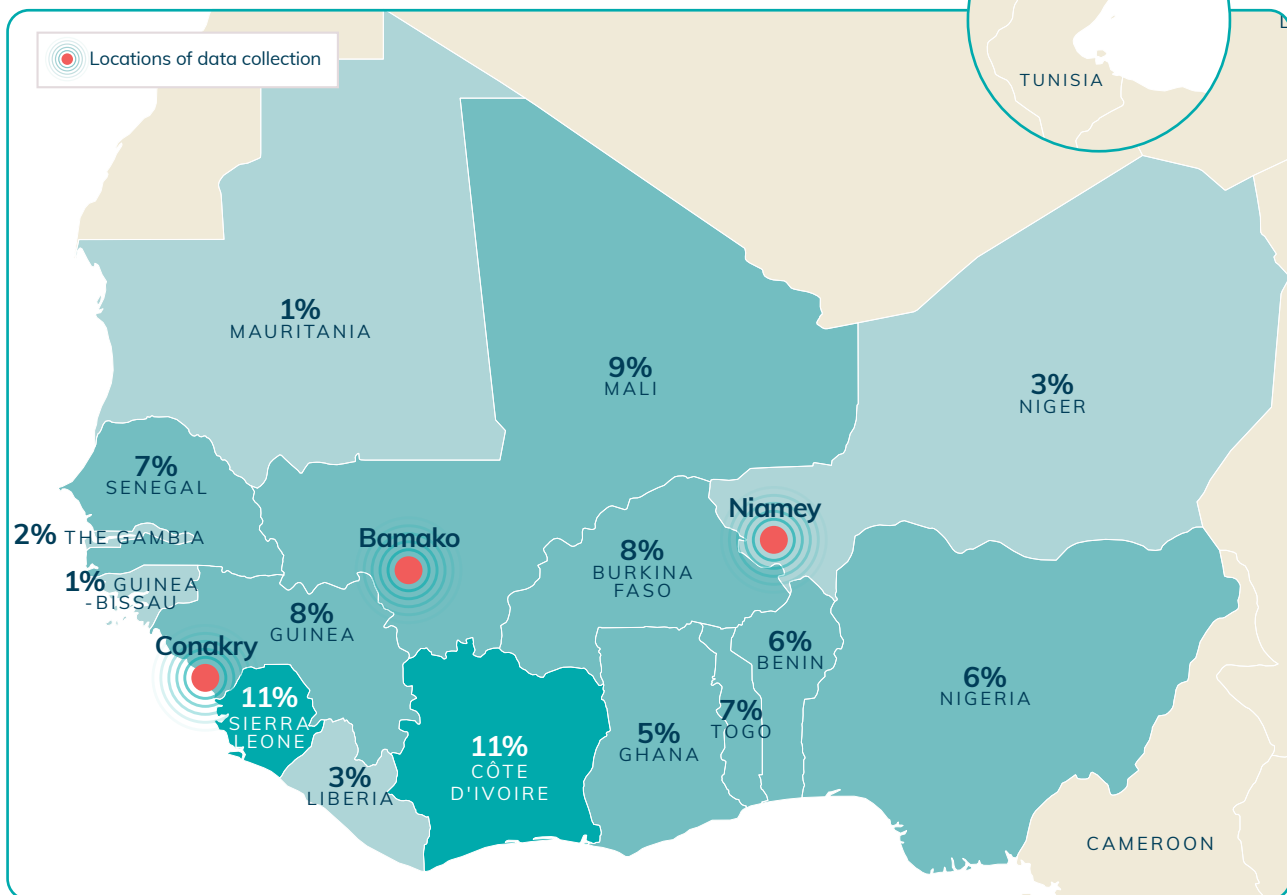
This analysis is based on 1,869 quantitative interviews conducted between August 2020 and November 2023 in the four cities of Bamako (n=517), Conakry (n=414), Niamey (n=505) and Tunis (n=433). Sampling was purposive, targeting young migrants aged 18 to 24. The average and median age was 22, while the highest age category (22 to 24) was over-represented in the sample (58% of respondents) compared to the lowest age category (18 to 20; 31%).² Of all the respondents, 36% were women (n=665) and 64% were men (n=1,204).

The target group for the 4Mi³ survey is migrants who have left their country of origin as part of a mixed migration, regardless of their status. Respondents had therefore crossed a border, while internally displaced are not covered by the 4Mi methodology.

Country of origin

Almost all the respondents (87%) were from West Africa (see Map 1).⁴ They had started their journey from 29 different countries, the most frequently cited being Sierra Leone (11%), Côte d'Ivoire (11%), Mali (9%), Guinea (8%) and Burkina Faso (8%). The country of origin of the young migrants surveyed varies significantly from one interview city to another, and reflects short-distance migration trends, except for Tunis. Nearly half of Bamako's respondents were from either Côte d'Ivoire (23%), Guinea (14%) or Togo (12%). In Conakry, the nationality most represented in the sample was Sierra Leone (39%), ahead of Mali (15%) and Senegal (11%). Young Malians (13%) and Burkinabés (12%) are the most represented among respondents in Niamey, while in Tunis the only nationality that stands out is Guineans (12%).

Map 1. Distribution of respondents by country of origin in West Africa



This map is provided for informational purposes, it does not reflect an official position regarding the borders or legal status of the territories represented.

² Respondents aged 21 represented 11% of the total sample.

³ For more information on the 4Mi methodology, visit <https://mixedmigration.org/4mi/>

⁴ The other regions of origin are Central Africa (9%), East Africa (4%) and Southern Africa (<1%).

Part 1. Mobility paths and economic integration

Economic situation in the country of origin and migration motivations

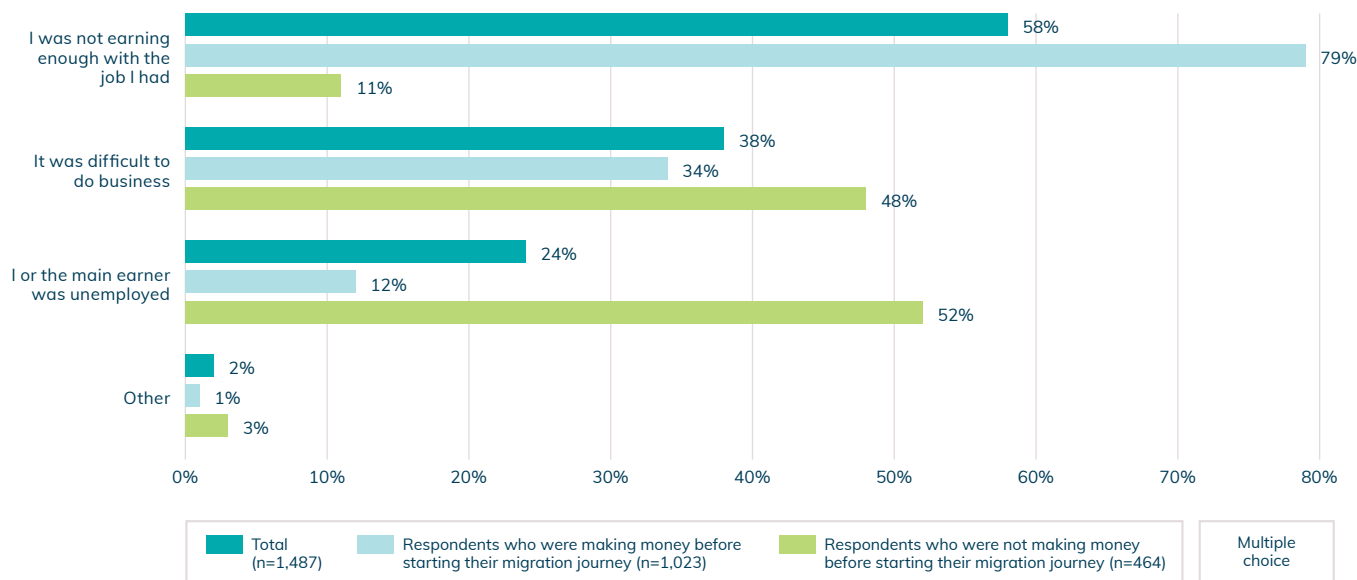
The majority of respondents, particularly among young men, already had a source of income before their mobility departure. Nearly two-thirds (62%, n=1,156) of them said they had earned money in the 12 months prior to their departure. Young women were less likely than young men to have access to a source of income before their mobility departure (51% and 68% respectively).

Although the aspirations of young migrants are manifold, economic motivations are the main factor influencing their migration decision. Indeed, economic reasons are, by far, the most frequently cited by 80% of respondents (85% of men, 71% of women). Almost half (47%) of all respondents even cited only economic motivations. Nevertheless, other factors mingle with these economic considerations: the culture of migration (29%), personal or family reasons (16%), access to

services and/or perceived corruption (13%), as well as insecurity, violence and conflict (9%), particularly among respondents from Nigeria (n=108; 21%).⁵

Economic motivations are more common among respondents who were already economically integrated before going on mobility. Among the respondents who already had a source of income before they left (n=1,156), a very large majority (88%) indicated that economic reasons played a role in their decision to go on mobility. In this case, mobility is a clear choice to improve one's general living conditions, highlighting the age among young respondents. Furthermore, this score is 23 points higher compared to respondents who had not earned any money in the year prior to their departure (n=713; 65%). Economic motivations and expectations therefore vary between these two respondent profiles.

Figure 1. For what kind of economic reasons did you leave?⁶ According to whether respondents indicated that they had earned money in the year prior to leaving or not.



The economic reasons cited by respondents who had a source of income in the year prior to their departure (n=1,023) show the limits of their economic insertion in their country of origin. The vast majority (79%) said they did not receive sufficient income from the jobs they

held in their country of origin, and one in ten (12%) were even unemployed when they left. The typology of jobs held by young respondents before they left (see Part 2) highlights the link between job insecurity and economic motivations for migration.

5 Other factors recorded marginal scores: rights and freedoms (4%), natural disasters or environmental factors (2%), other (1%). However, these factors are more often reported under their economic aspects, insofar as they may constitute underlying conditions of these economic factors. MMC (2022), [Climate-related events and environmental pressure factors: impact on migration in West and North Africa](#)

6 Among respondents who indicated economic reasons among the factors that influenced their decision to go on a mobility trip.

For the 464 respondents who had no income prior to their departure and cited economic reasons for their mobility, migration seems to present an opportunity to put an end to their situation of economic exclusion in the country of origin. This marginalisation manifests itself in the lack of opportunities for paid work, whether in the form of employment (cited by 52% of respondents) or self-employed economic activity, while 48% cited an unfavourable business environment. Leaving the country

of origin is therefore seen as an opportunity to access income in other contexts that they would consider more favourable. Mobility offers them access to economic opportunities; the vast majority (79%) said they had a source of money in the country of interview. But these aspirations come up against difficulties in accessing information on available work opportunities and, when they do find a job, precarious working conditions (see Part 2).

Stages of mobility and work

Making stops along the way to work is a strategy commonly employed by the young migrant interviewees looking to finance their trip. Almost half of all the respondents (45%) stopped at least once to work during their transit before reaching the location where he/she was interviewed. Young men more often reported stopping en route to work (51%) than young women (35%). However, this strategy can prove dangerous in contexts stopping several times during the journey is often associated with greater vulnerability to protection risks, including physical and sexual abuse, exploitation and human trafficking.⁷

A proportion of the young interviewed migrants had left with insufficient money to finance their trip, forcing them to pause their journey to work. Nearly two

respondents out of five (38%) in fact stated that the sum of money with which they had left had not enabled them to pay all the expenses associated with their journey (n=679). Among them, 83% worked during their transit to pay for these expenses. Financial aid sent by family and friends and borrowing money from other migrants are two other strategies also employed, albeit in much lower proportions (by 19% and 8% of respondents respectively). There are many possible reasons for insufficient financial means, such as lack of initial means, financial planning, reluctance to travel with large sums of cash, uncertainty about the final destination, or unforeseen expenses along the way. All these reasons therefore force many young migrants to interrupt their journey, underlining the centrality of work in the migratory process, but also their exposure to increased risks during their journey.

Economic opportunities in four major cities in West and North Africa

Overall, the young migrants interviewed access more economic opportunities after their mobility than before they left. Indeed, the proportion of respondents declaring they have a source of income rises from 62% before their departure to 80% during their mobility, at the time of the interview. The profile of the interview cities, all capital cities and centres of economic activity, is a factor that may explain this better access to employment and entrepreneurial opportunities.⁸

Bamako and Conakry seem to offer more economic opportunities than Tunis and Niamey. A higher proportion of respondents had a source of income at the time of the interview in Bamako (85%) and Conakry (84%) than in Tunis (73%) and Niamey (73%). This score is lower in Tunis partly because the city attracts more students in pursuit of quality higher education.⁹ In

addition, this proportion should be treated with caution due to the high proportion (53%) of respondents whose income comes, wholly or in part, from their family rather than from paid work.¹⁰

The opportunities accessible to young migrants are concentrated in an undiversified number of sectors that vary according to the interview city and a gendered division of labour. Each interview city presents characteristics specific to its employment area in terms of the sectors of activity accessible to young migrants workforce, which are explored in Figure 2 and the following sections. The concentration of opportunities accessible to young migrants exposes them to the risks of job insecurity, difficult working conditions, economic dependence on specific employers,¹¹ and the risks of sexual exploitation.¹²

7 MMC (2020), [A sharper lens on vulnerability \(West Africa\). A statistical analysis of the determinants of vulnerability to protection incidents among refugees and migrants in West Africa.](#)

8 ILO (2020), [Exploring the potential for skills partnerships on migration in West Africa and Sahel](#)

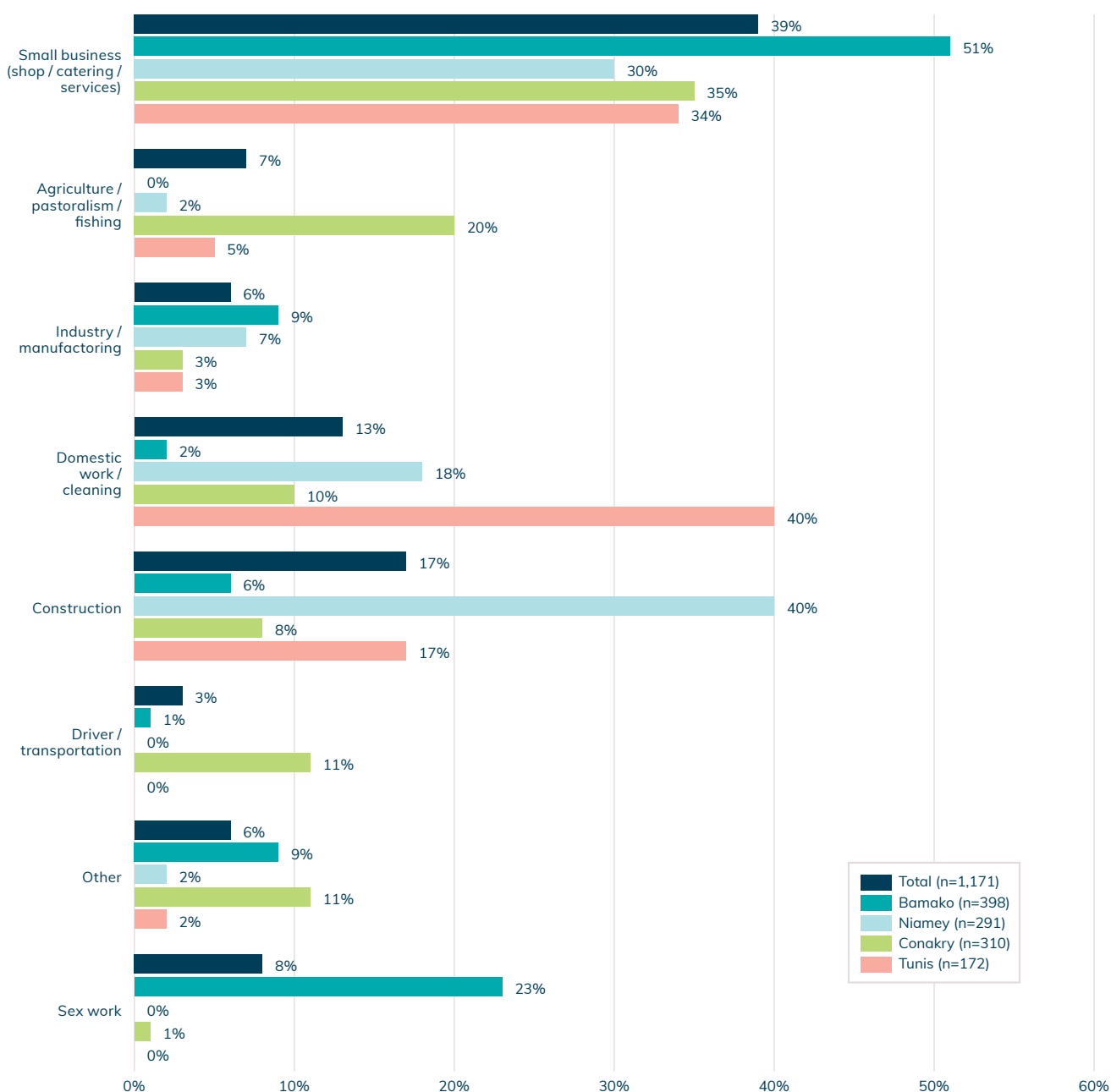
9 MMC (2024), [Op. cit.](#)

10 The same proportion is only 1% in Bamako, 9% in Conakry and 5% in Niamey.

11 ODI (2018), [Decent work, migration and the 2030 agenda for sustainable development.](#)

12 ODI (2016), [Women on the move: migration, gender equality and the 2030 agenda for sustainable development.](#)

Figure 2. In which sector do you earn money?¹³ By maintenance city.



Small businesses are the sector that offers the most integration opportunities for young people on the move (39%), but this area of activity also makes them vulnerable. This is an area of activity where the need for unskilled labour is high. Young migrants can quickly adapt by developing their skills on the job or transferring those acquired in other professions and/or in their home country.¹⁴ It's also a sector where self-employment, particularly necessity entrepreneurship, is common, as it enables

people to start a small business with few prior resources. However, young migrants who start a self-enterprise are particularly vulnerable to economic fluctuations, have limited access to markets and lack financial capital.¹⁵ In addition, working arrangements in small businesses are flexible, facilitating hiring but often under precarious conditions characterised, among other things, by casual and/or temporary work, the prevalence of low wages or the absence of social protections (see Part 2).¹⁶

13 Among the respondents who indicated earning money at the time of the interview through regular, temporary or occasional employment, and/or as an entrepreneur/self-employed. Among them and for all cities, the "Other" option includes the following response choices: security (n=10), finance and IT (n=7), civil service and teaching (n=10), health professional (n=4), creative sector (n=3), refusal (n=1), mining sector (n=2), and other (n=40).

14 This sector of activity may have been favored because almost half (46%) of respondents who had a source of income before leaving already had experience and skills in retail, customer service and/or catering.

15 UNCTAD (2018), [Policy guide on entrepreneurship for migrants and refugees](#).

16 ODI (2018), [Op. cit.](#)

Bamako

The gendered division of labour is very marked among respondents in Bamako (n=398, young women: n=211, young men: n=187).¹⁷ Young women worked mainly in two sectors in Bamako; small businesses (47%) and sex work (44%). These two areas of activity underline their greater vulnerability to job insecurity and the risks of exploitation, including sexual exploitation,¹⁸ in a context of prevalence of human trafficking networks in the sex industry in Mali.¹⁹ On the other hand, and in contrast to the other cities surveyed, only a minority of women were employed as domestic workers (2%). In Bamako, domestic workers are more likely to be young women, sometimes underage, from the surrounding rural areas.²⁰ Young men, on the other hand, benefited from more varied economic opportunities in the small business (54%), industrial (18%) and construction (13%) sectors.

Conakry

Young migrant women surveyed in Conakry appear to have more limited access to economic opportunities.

Overall, 84% of respondents who had a source of income in Conakry (n=348) had a source of income at the time of the interview. But young women less often reported having a source of income than their men counterparts (78%, n=86, and 87%, n=262 respectively). Similarly, 13/86 (15%) of them received all or part of their income from money sent by their families (compared with 7% of the young men interviewed).

In Conakry, the distribution of work among the population of young migrants (n=310, young women: n=69, young men: n=241) **seems relatively balanced between the different sectors.** Admittedly, the fields of small business (35%) and agriculture (20%) dominate, together employing more than half of the young migrants interviewed, but transport (11%), domestic work (10%) and construction (8%) are also employment sectors in Conakry. Access to economic opportunities in the agricultural sector is a peculiarity specific to young migrants interviewed in Conakry that is not found in the other interview cities and is linked to the prevalence of this sector in Guinea, including in the Conakry employment basin.²¹ This sector is characterised by

the seasonality of economic opportunities, which contributes to the predominance of casual and/or temporary work in Conakry (see Part 2). In addition, the opportunities available to young women migrants are more concentrated around two sectors, namely small businesses (35/69) and domestic work (11/69). Conversely, certain professions are only accessible to young men migrants, such as transport, where 15% were working at the time of the interview.

Niamey

In Niamey, three sectors alone account for 88% of the young migrants workforce surveyed (n=291, young women: n=64, young men: n=227): construction (40%), small businesses (30%) and domestic work (18%). Women are mainly found in the small business (39/64) and domestic work (19/64) sectors. Men also work in these areas, but in lower proportions (21% in small businesses, 15% as domestic workers). Niamey in particular stands out as a hub for construction, with half (52%) of the young men surveyed working in this field. The reputation of migrant construction workers in Niamey is based on the recognition of their specialized skills. They fill a gap in the local labour market and are in high demand.²²

Tunis

In Tunis, the economic opportunities available to young migrants surveyed (n=172, young women: n=62, young men: n=110) **were limited to three sectors mainly;** domestic work (40%), small businesses (34%) and construction (17%). The gendered social division of labour is even more marked than in Niamey, with 37/62 (60%) of young women employed as domestic workers (versus 28% of young men) and 26% of young men working in the construction sector (versus only one respondent among young women). By working in physically demanding sectors neglected by the local workforce, young migrant workers are filling gaps in the Tunisian job market. But these sectors are also characterised by a greater prevalence of informal work, which accentuates their vulnerabilities and contributes to the lack of visibility and recognition of young migrants' contribution to the Tunisian economy and its development.²³

17 Only respondents who derived their income from (i) regular employment, (ii) casual/temporary work and/or (iii) self-employment were asked about their sector of activity.

18 MMC (2020), [Migration mixte en milieu urbain - Etude de cas sur Bamako](#)

19 IOM (2019), [An increasing number of Nigerian migrants are victims of exploitation and trafficking in the sex industry in Mali](#)

20 Educo (2018), [Carrying out a study for the implementation of the "promotion of the rights and protection of girl domestic workers in Bamako, Mali" project](#).

21 However, the Guinean workforce works more frequently in this field than people born abroad. IOM (2020), [Migration in Guinea. National Migration Profile 2020](#)

22 Interview with key informant, June 12, 2024.

23 MMC (2021), [The hidden trials of an invisible workforce. The economic life of refugees and migrants in Tunisia](#)

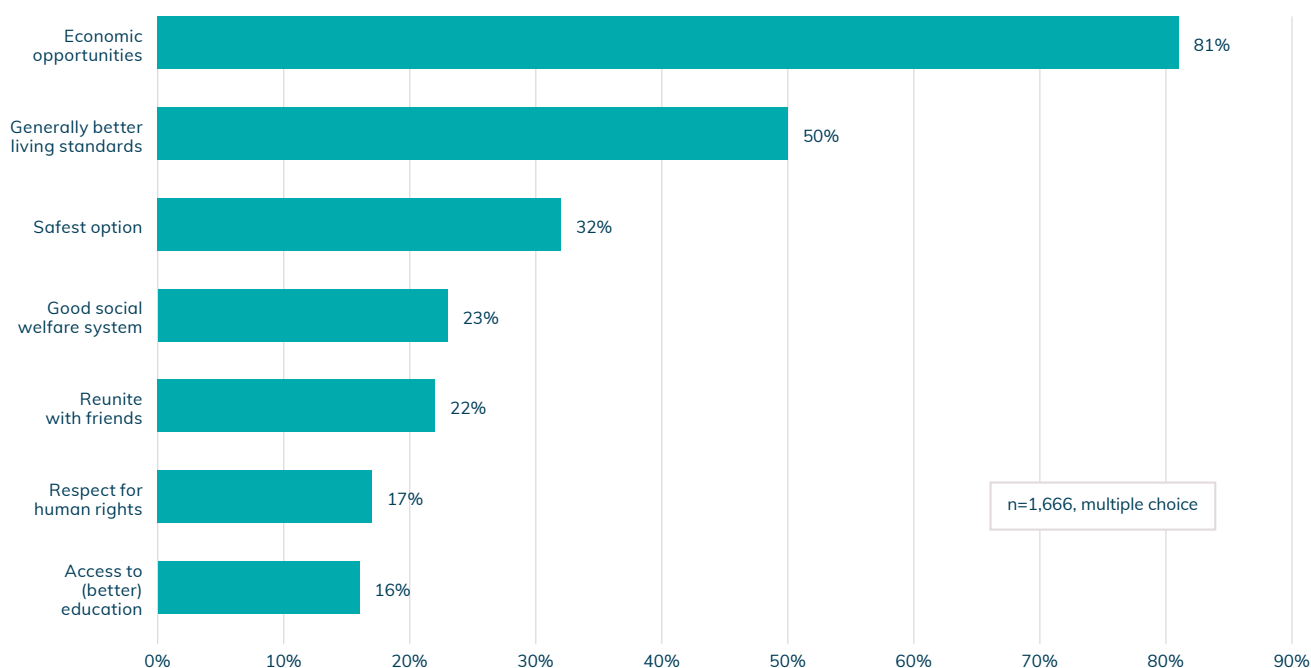
Mobility intentions and mixed aspirations

The majority of young people interviewed felt that their migratory journey was not over. Nearly nine in ten respondents (89%, n=1,666) did not consider the city where they were interviewed as their final destination. The five most frequently mentioned preferred destination countries were France (13%), Canada (11%), Belgium (9%), the USA (8%) and Germany (7%). A further 10% of respondents cited Europe, without specifying a particular country, as their preferred destination.

In most cases, economic aspirations are intertwined with other factors in the choice of destination. Economic

reasons are the factor most often cited, by 81% of young people, to explain the choice of their preferred destination. But among them (n=1,357), 83% cited other reasons in addition to economic ones. Other aspirations motivate their choices, such as the hope of accessing better general living conditions (for 50% of young people who didn't reach their final destination), a safe destination (32%), or a social security system (23%; see Figure 3). These motivations show that, for the young migrant interviewees, the search for a protective environment is as crucial as access to economic opportunities.

Figure 3. Why did you select this destination? (Top 7 answers)²⁴



²⁴ Among respondents who did not reach their final destination. Other response options included the presence of a community from the same culture (16%), the opportunity to reunite with family members (16%), quicker or easier access to asylum (13%), access to (better) healthcare (10%), personal freedoms (7%), proximity to the country of departure (2%).

Part 2. Limits to the economic integration of mobile young people

Difficulties accessing economic opportunities before and during mobility

Lack of financial resources before departure

Lack of income prior to departure was mainly due to unemployment and further education. Of the respondents who said they had not earned any money in the 12 months prior to their departure (n=713), 48% were unemployed and 43% were learners.²⁵ The first reason (unemployment) highlights the difficulties of the young population in West and North Africa in finding their place in the formal labour market. The second reason (education) does not imply a situation of constraint; the age of the respondents (between 18 and 24) is consistent with this score where almost half of them had not completed their education. On the other hand, this score raises the possibility of a possible interruption of schooling at the time of leaving on mobility. Beyond a certain age, access to a better education seems less attractive than economic opportunities for young people going on mobility.²⁶

Family and domestic responsibilities make it more difficult for young women to access a source of income in their country of origin. The proportion of young women who did not have access to a source of income before their departure (49%, n=325) was higher than the same proportion of young men (32%, n=387). Among them, 11% of young women declared that they had not earned any money before leaving because of the family and domestic tasks they had to take on, compared with only 2% of young men. At the same time, the proportion of respondents citing unemployment as a reason why they had no source of income was higher among young men (53%) than among young women (43%).²⁷ This does not mean that young women were less often unemployed than young men, but that they faced other constraints linked to an unequal division of unpaid work associated with family and domestic tasks.

Obstacles encountered in the search for economic opportunities in localities of interview

Lack of income during mobility is mainly explained by difficulties in finding paid employment or pursuing further education. Only 18% (n=339)²⁸ of all respondents

had no source of income at the time of the interview. Of these, 22% were learners and 55% were unable to find work. The young women interviewed (n=108) more often cited the pursuit of their studies (44%) than their men counterparts (n=231, 12%) to explain their lack of income. They were also more often in a situation of unpaid work, which underlines their greater financial vulnerability. In fact, they were more frequently delegated with domestic and/or family responsibilities (for 7% of them, compared with none of the men respondents) and more commonly exercised an activity remunerated in kind (for 13% of them, compared with 6% of the young men surveyed).

The two main reasons holding back young migrant interviewees from finding economic opportunities are lack of offers and lack of information about available jobs. Of the respondents who couldn't find a job (n=185), 42% said their search had been unsuccessful and 41% didn't know where to look for a job. These factors are the result of obstacles that also affect non-migrant populations in the employment areas studied, justifying there the adoption of comprehensive approaches to improve access to employment for young migrant and non-migrants.

Commonly accepted assumptions about the shortness of stay and level of education to explain difficulties in accessing work for mobile people are challenged by respondents perceptions. 16% of respondents said they didn't stay long enough in the interview city to be able to find a job, and 6% said they didn't have the qualifications and/or diploma required for the job market. Similarly, exclusion from a formal work regime, which concerned 10% of young respondents who said they had no right to work (see Figure 4), was relatively infrequently cited. Nevertheless, these three factors justify inclusive solutions aimed at facilitating access to employment for young migrants, taking into account their limited length of stay and difficulties in accessing regular status.

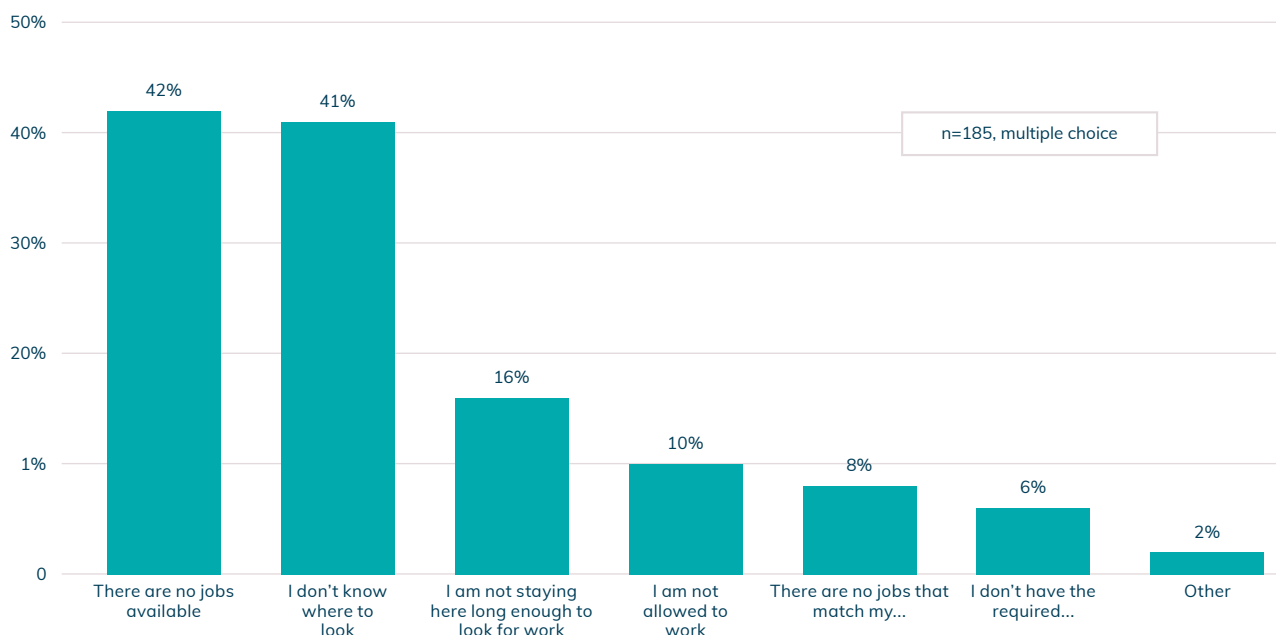
25 The term "learner" is a generic one that includes several categories of pupils, students, pupils and/or apprentices in a West and North African context where young people aged 18 to 24 may as much not have completed secondary education as be enrolled at university or undergoing vocational training.

26 MMC (2024), [Op. cit.](#)

27 The proportion of learners was similar between men and women (45% and 42% respectively).

28 Disaggregated analyses by interview city are not possible for this section, as the sub-samples studied are too small.

Figure 4. Why haven't you been able to find a job so far?²⁹



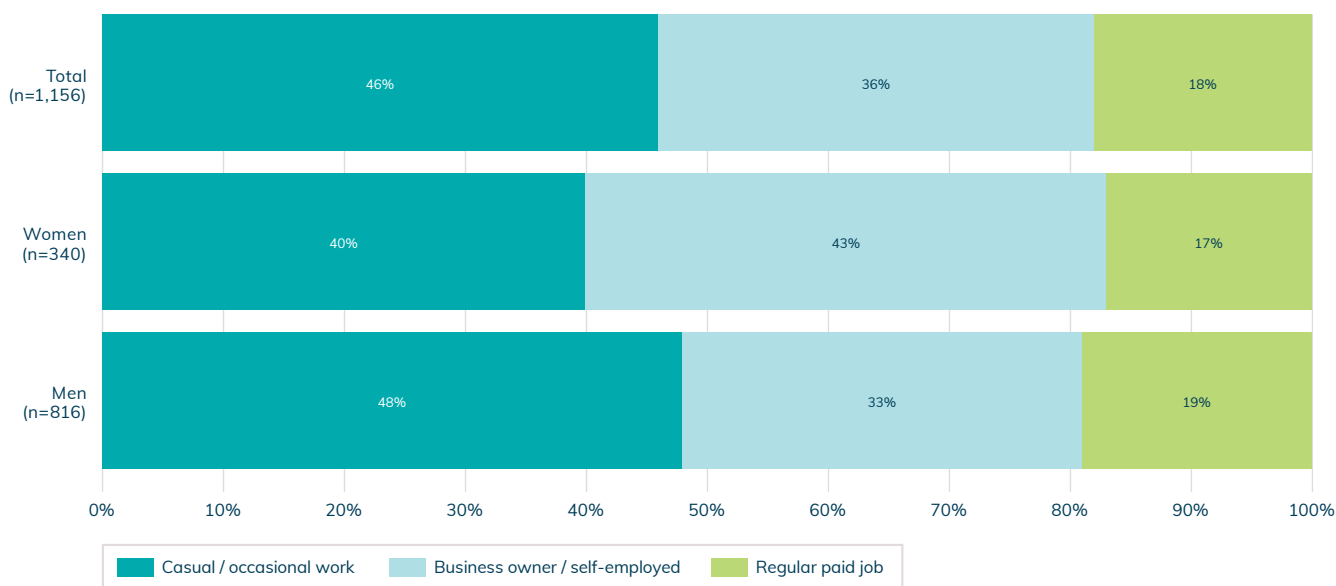
Job insecurity

From job insecurity in the country of origin...

The majority of the 1,156 young respondents who had a source of income in their country of origin did not enjoy job stability guaranteeing them financial security. Among them, only 18% had a formal job offering regular work and income. Conversely, 46% had income from occasional and/or temporary sources. Over a third (36%) were self-employed, as entrepreneurs and/

or self-employed (see Figure 5). In the West and North African context, this frequently translates into necessity entrepreneurship where individuals are forced to create a subsistence activity for lack of other alternatives.³⁰ These figures also illustrate the youth employment situation in Sub-Saharan Africa, where the lack of decent working conditions, underemployment and informal work are omnipresent.³¹

Figure 5: How did you earn money in the 12 months preceding your departure?³² By gender.



29 Among respondents who indicated that they were not earning money at the time of the interview because they couldn't find a job.

30 The World Bank defines necessity (or subsistence) entrepreneurship as "a person who engages in entrepreneurial activity primarily as a means of providing a subsistence income for him/herself". The World Bank (2016), [Growth entrepreneurship in developing countries: a preliminary literature review](#)

31 ILO, [Youth employment in Africa](#), consulted in May 2024

32 Among respondents who indicated earning money in the 12 months preceding their departure.

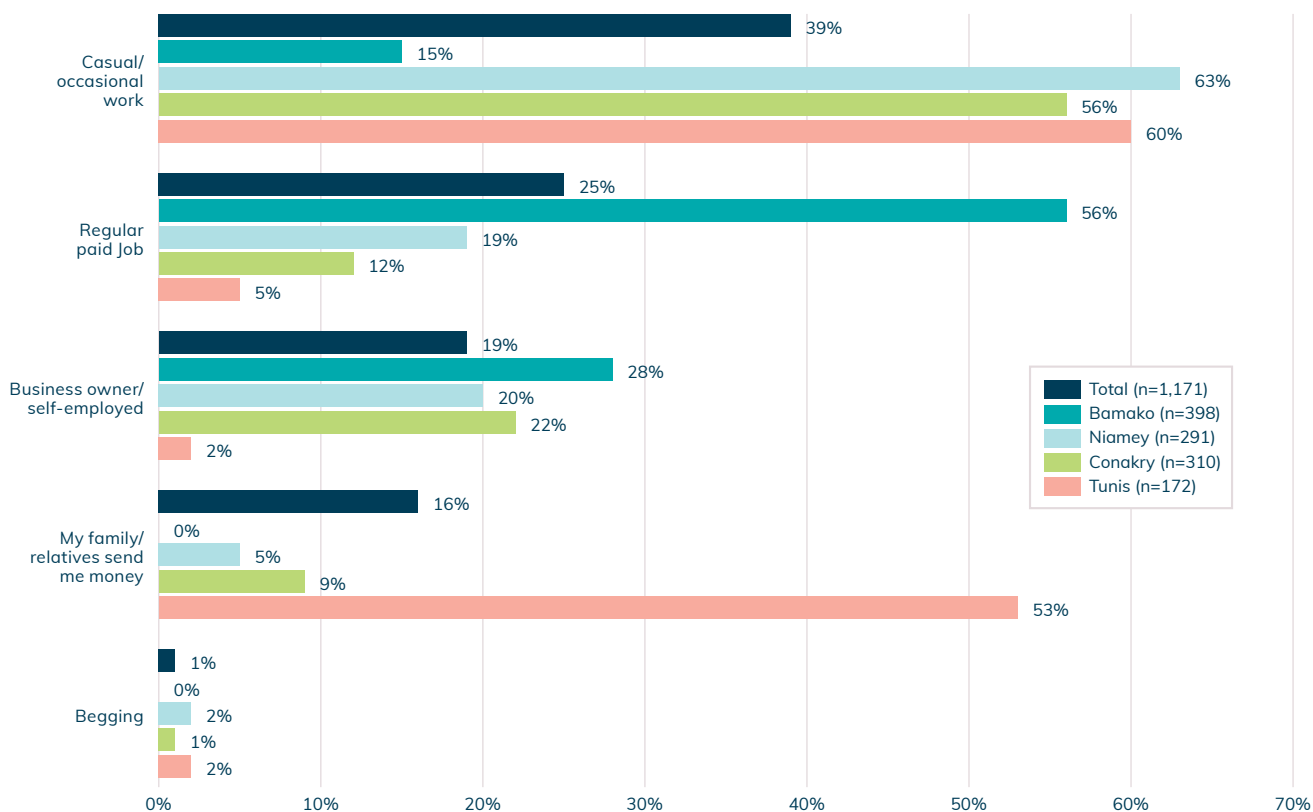
In their home countries, the young women surveyed were generally less well integrated into the employment sector than their men counterparts. As indicated in Part 1, young women were less likely than young men to have had access to a source of income prior to their mobility (51%, n=340, and 68%, n=816, respectively). Among them, young women were more often self-employed (43%) than young men (33%, see Figure 5),³³ for lack of other alternatives.³⁴ Young men therefore enjoyed better access to employment than young women, even if these jobs remained mostly precarious in the form of temporary and/or occasional work (for 48% of them).

...to precarious economic opportunities during mobility

The young people interrogated in Conakry (n=348), Niamey (n=299) and Tunis (n=329) who had a source of income were unable to obtain job stability guaranteeing them financial security. Respondents in these three urban centres most often had access to short-term

economic opportunities in the form of casual and/or temporary work. Indeed, this was the majority form of work for respondents in Niamey (63%), Tunis (61%) and Conakry (56%), while Bamako was the exception (15%). Self-employment and auto-entrepreneurship are an alternative to employment that respondents from Conakry (22%) and Niamey (20%) could access, while young migrants surveyed in Tunis more often relied on financial help sent by family and relatives (53%). In contrast, the majority of young migrants surveyed in Bamako who had a source of income (n=406) enjoyed relatively stable working conditions. Indeed, Bamako recorded the highest share of respondents with access to regular employment³⁵ (56%) among the four interview cities. Access to stable economic opportunities does not necessarily mean that these are in the formal economy; on the contrary, the majority of migrants in Bamako work in the informal sector.³⁶ On the other hand, it does indicate a good base of their livelihoods in terms of stability and regular financial resources.

Figure 6. How do you earn money?³⁷ By interview city.



33 At the same time, young men were more likely than young women to say they depended on occasional resources (48% and 39% respectively).

34 Leora F. Klapper and Inessa Love (2011), [Entrepreneurship and development: the role of information asymmetries](#)

35 A regular job is usually formalized by an employment contract and offers a form of stability through consistent working hours, stable and predictable income, benefits and social protection. ILO (2022), [Forms of work: an overview of the new statistical standards](#)

36 Maastricht Graduate School of Governance (2017), Profil migratoire du Mali : Etude sur les routes migratoires en Afrique de l'Ouest et du Centre.

37 Among respondents who indicated earning money at the time of the interview.

Economic vulnerability and risk exposure

Migration status and economic integration

One in two respondents (53%) said they had no legal documents to stay in the country of interview. This score was highest in Conakry (64%) and Bamako (63%), despite the fact that young migrants from another ECOWAS country could benefit from the protocol on the free movement of people. Conversely, 27% of respondents said they were in a regular situation without needing a residence permit, and 8% said they were in the country in possession of a temporary permit. Only 4% were asylum seekers, but this score masks disparities between interview cities with, notably, 15% of young people interviewed in Tunis who had initiated an asylum application procedure.

In economies where informal employment dominates, respondents migration status does not prevent access to economic opportunities but may exclude them from protection schemes. Out of the respondents who reported having a source of income at the time of the interview (n=1,382), over half (53%) were in an irregular situation. Similarly, the proportions of respondents who had access to a source of income are similar between those who were in an irregular situation (n=921, 79%) and those with a regular status (n=452, 83%) at the time of the interview. Only 10% of the young people interviewed who had not found a job (n=185) said they were not allowed to work to explain their situation of exclusion (see Figure 4). On the other hand, migrant workers in an irregular situation would be more exposed to precarious working conditions and protection risks such as exploitation, job instability, arbitrary withholding of wages, or dangers to their health.³⁸

Migration project financing and debt risk

The young migrant interviewees had several means at their disposal to finance their migration journeys, but the majority resorted to a single source of funding. Personal savings (49%) and financial support provided by family (47%) were the two main means used by respondents to finance their trip, ahead of selling their material goods (14%) and/or borrowing from a third party (11%) (see Figure 7). The young women surveyed more often resorted to financial help from their families (for 52% of them, versus 45% of young men), while their men counterparts had more often used their own funds (for 53% of them, versus 42% of women).

Access to a source of income prior to mobility facilitates the use of personal savings to finance the migration plan independently. Among respondents who had a source of income in the year prior to their departure (n=1,156), 70% financed their trip thanks to the funds they had been able to accumulate, notably through their work. This score reached only 15% among respondents who had no source of income in the 12 months prior to their mobility (n=713) (see Figure 7).

The absence of income prior to mobility could create a dependence on external financial support, a risk of debt and/or place a financial burden on the family. For respondents who had no source of income in the year preceding their departure, mobility was often a family investment. In fact, 69% of them received help from their family to finance their migration project, compared with 34% among those who had an income prior to their departure. A minority (14%) also took out a loan from a third party (see Figure 7). The risk of debts, even to family and/or in the form of moral debts, may encourage this category of migrants to resolutely persevere in their migratory journey. In these circumstances, excessive debt can lead to dangerous migration and greater exposure to the risks of exploitation, abuse and human trafficking.³⁹ The burden of debt also constitutes an additional obstacle to return migration,⁴⁰ increasing the potential sense of failure and shame.⁴¹

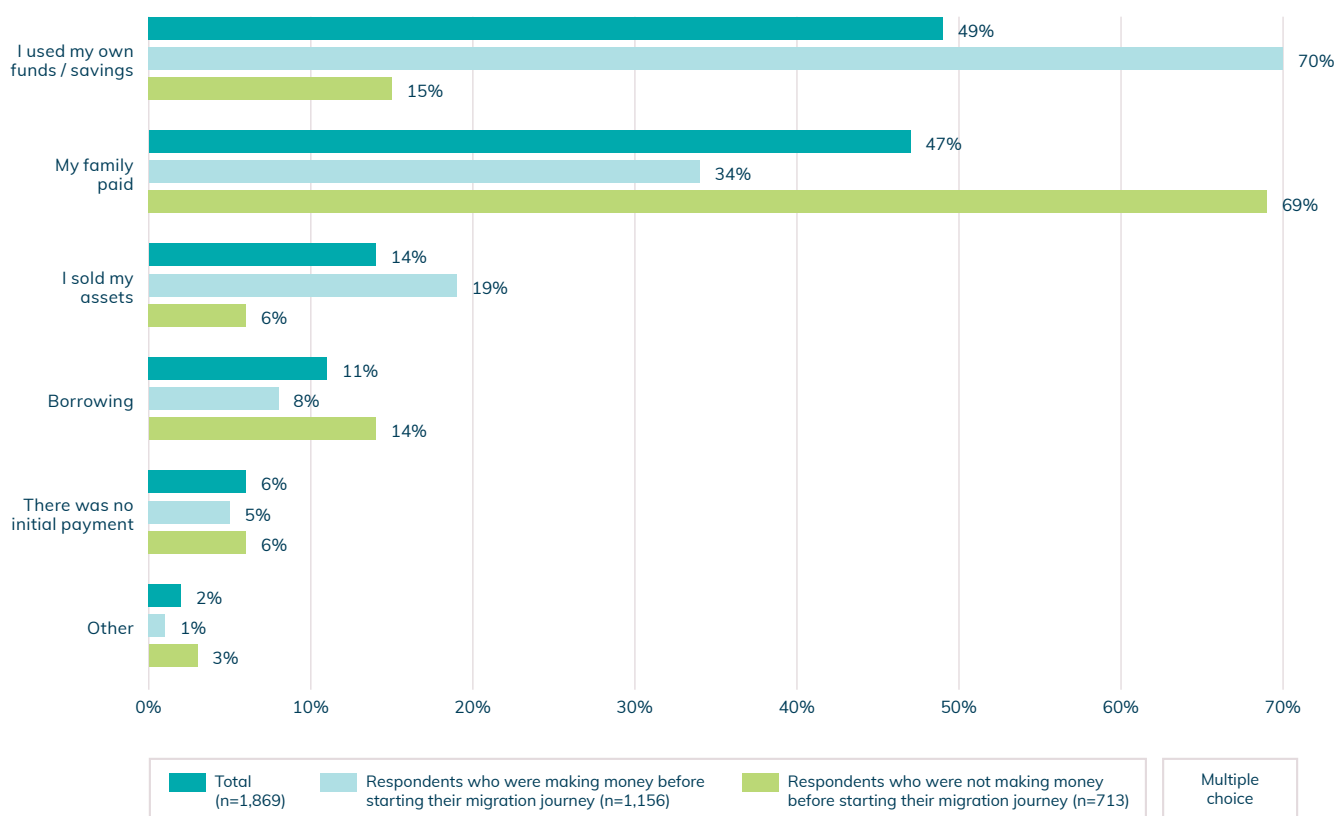
38 IOM (2022), [Integrating migration into employment interventions](#)

39 ODI (2023), [Debt, exploitation and trafficking of labour migrants](#)

40 IOM (2020), [Research brief - Migrant debt, Mali](#). IOM (2020), [Research brief - Migrant debt, Ivory Coast](#)

41 MMC (2024), [Multiple and intersecting harms: examining use of force in return and its detrimental impact on migrants' human rights during and after return to Senegal](#)

Figure 7. How did you initially finance your trip? According to whether respondents indicated that they had earned money in the year prior to their departure or not.



Forced labour and abuse

Overall, respondents considered that young migrant men and women were unlikely to be exposed to the risk of forced labour, except in Tunis and Niamey. They were

as commonly of the opinion that young migrant men ran the risk of being exploited at work (18%, n=308) as their women counterparts (15%, n=250). However, disparities between interview cities exist. More than a third of respondents in Tunis believe that young men (36%) and women (34%) migrants are exposed to the risk of forced labour. In Niamey, the perceived risk of forced labour for young men migrants is also high (33%, versus 15% for the same perceived risk for young women migrants).⁴² Niamey and Tunis also appear to be the cities where young migrants are more commonly exposed to abusive practices by their employers. These abuses can include physical and/or verbal abuse, excessive working hours, dangerous working environments, withholding of identity documents, threat of denunciation to the authorities, or arbitrary deductions from their wages (particularly in cases of debt bondage).⁴³

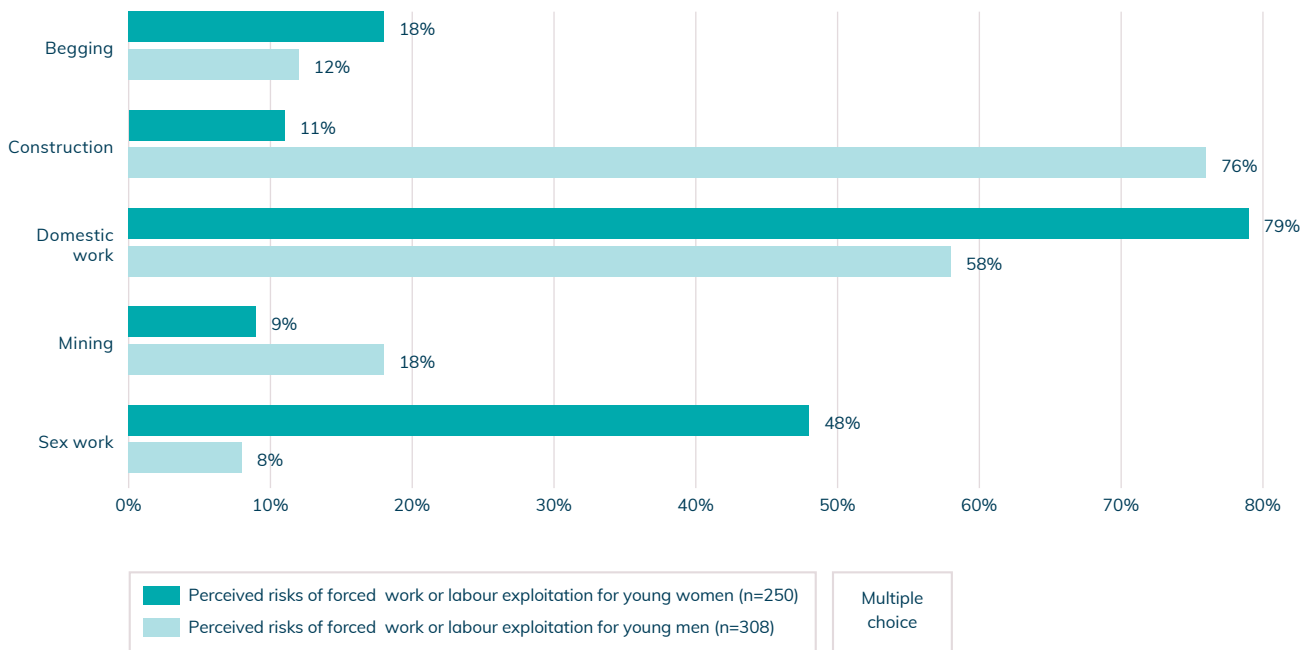
Young migrant women and men face the risk of forced labour in different sectors of activity. In line with the areas in which they are most commonly active, young

migrant women are said to be more often exposed to the risk of forced labour when working in domestic jobs and/or engaged in the sex trade. Indeed, 79% of respondents who perceived a risk of forced labour for young migrant women listed domestic work as the sector of activity where they would be exposed to it, and 48% (n=119) cited sex work. Of the latter respondents, 29% were interviewed in Bamako, where sex work was an activity carried out by 44% of young migrant women with a source of income. These sectors of activity employ an inconspicuous workforce, which accentuates the risks associated with exploitation. For young men migrants, the construction sector is the main area in which they would run the risk of exploitation at work. Three quarters (76%, n=235) of respondents perceiving a risk of forced labour incurred by young migrant men indeed cited the construction sector as being conducive to this type of risk (see Figure 8). Of these, almost half (49%) were interviewed in Niamey, where 52% of the young men interviewed with a source of income were working in the construction sector at the time of the interview. The construction sector can offer many economic opportunities to young migrant men, but these would be perceived as not offering decent conditions.

42 By way of comparison, 2% of respondents in Bamako considered that young men migrants incurred the risk of forced labour, versus 9% for the same perceived risk for young women migrants. Similarly, 2% of respondents from Conakry considered that young men migrants were exposed to the risk of exploitation at work, and 1% perceived this risk for young women migrants.

43 ILO & IOM (2022), [Global estimates of modern slavery: forced labour and forced marriage - Executive summary](#)

Figure 8. In which sectors of activity do young women and/or men run the risk of labour exploitation in your current place of residence?⁴⁴



44 Among respondents who indicated forced labour as a risk faced by young women and/or young men in their current place of residence.

Part 3. Economic integration and human capital of mobile young people

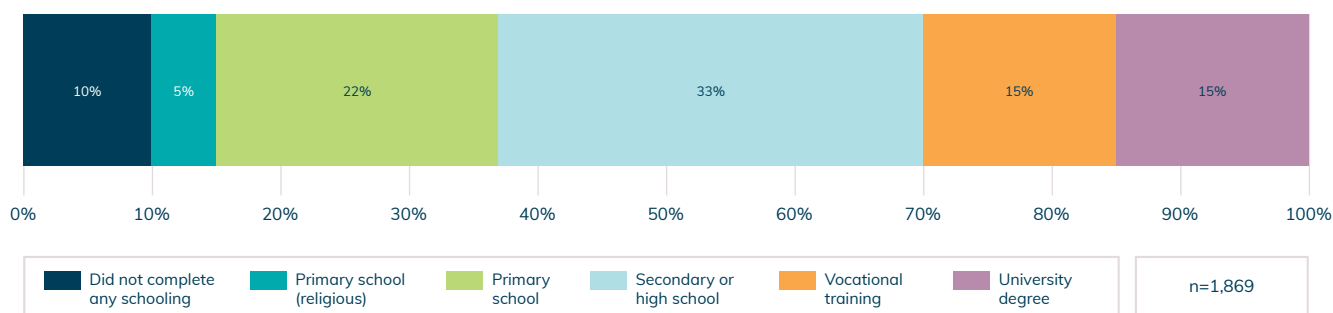
Prevalence of practical skills over education level

Education level

Overall, the level of education of young migrants surveyed was higher than that of the general population in West and Central Africa. Indeed, 90% of respondents had accessed education, and 63% had at least secondary education (see Figure 9). These figures are higher than the average completion rates for primary education (61% in 2022)⁴⁵ and lower secondary

education (43% in 2022)⁴⁶ among the general population in the West and Central African regions. In addition, with 30% of respondents having completed either university education (15%) or vocational training (15%), the young migrants surveyed are able to participate in the growth of the workforce and the dynamism of the employment basins they seek to integrate thanks to their specialized qualifications.⁴⁷

Figure 9. Education level of respondents



Level of education is not perceived as a tool facilitating access to economic opportunities, but recognition of prior learning can help improve working conditions.

Only 6% of respondents who did not have access to a source of income at the time of the interview indicated that they did not have the necessary training to access a job (see Figure 4). The high demand for educational services, particularly vocational training (see Figure 11), qualifies this finding. Formal recognition of skills and experience acquired on the job (see Figure 10) and/or the acquisition of new knowledge and qualifications can thus offer advantages in terms of, for example, access to a better status (formal employment) or better pay.⁴⁸

Skills and know-how

The fields of activity in which the respondents worked prior to their departure ease the acquisition of transferable skills, which can be put to good use in

the labour market of the locations along their journey.

Nearly half (46%) of the young people interviewed who were working before they left had worked in a profession requiring skills in retail, customer service and/or catering. The other half worked in fields that require specialised practical and technical skills that are acquired through vocational training and/or experience, on the job. These include agriculture (12%), industry (12%), domestic work (9%), construction (9%) and transport (7%). Young respondents who developed these skills by working before they left were then able to demonstrate greater adaptability in integrating into new economic environments. Indeed, 84% of respondents who had a source of income in the year prior to their departure also reported earning money at the time of the interview, compared with 73% among the category of respondents who had no source of income prior to their departure.

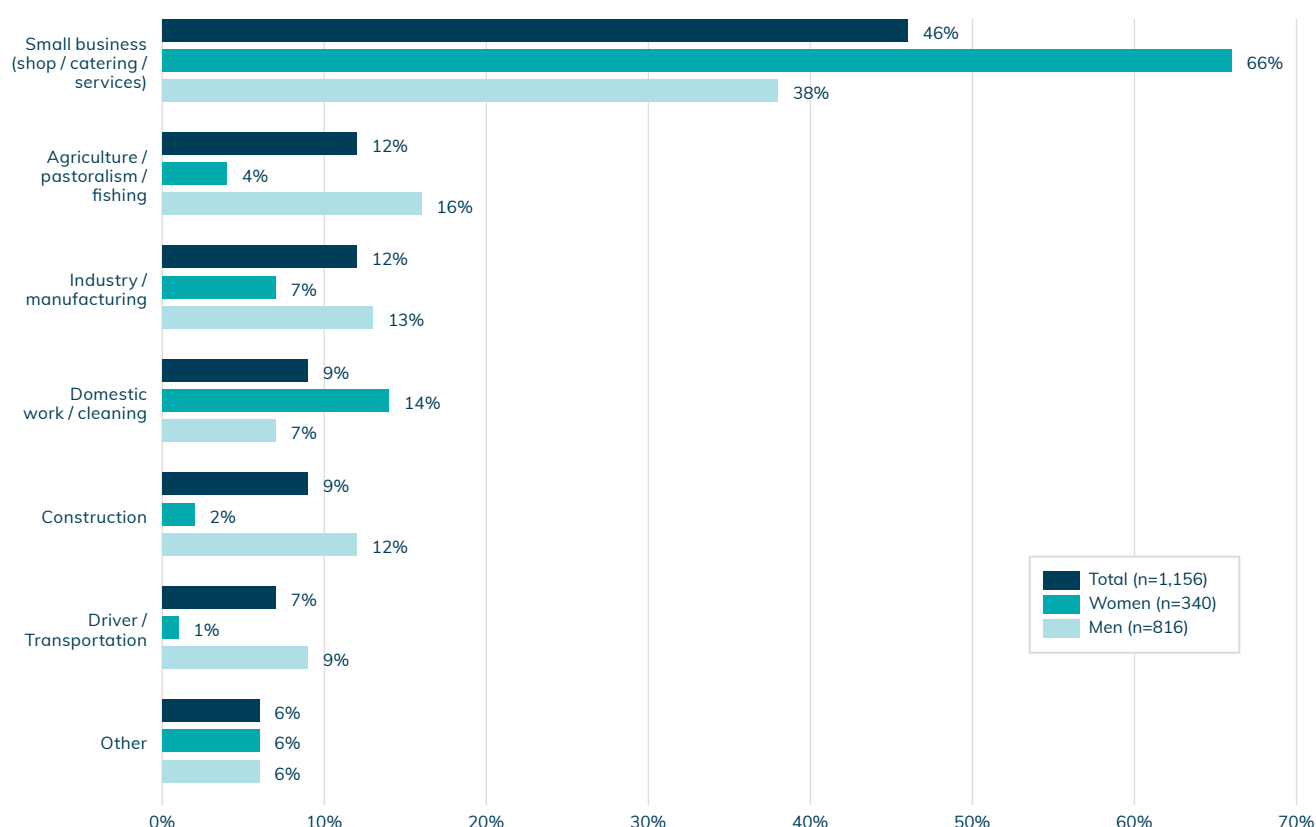
45 World Bank Group (2022), [Education Strategy for West and Central Africa](#)

46 Unicef, [Secondary education data](#) (accessed April 18, 2024).

47 IOM (2021), [Migration and Development in West Africa](#)

48 ILO (2020), [How to facilitate the recognition of skills of migrant workers. Guide for employment services providers](#)

Figure 10. In which sector did you earn money in the 12 months preceding your departure?⁴⁹ By gender.



The sectors in which young women worked in their countries of origin were generally less varied than for men. Indeed, only 4% of women were gainfully employed in the agricultural sector, compared to 16% of men. Although agriculture is the main activity of rural women in West Africa, it is often unpaid work in the form of subsistence farming.⁵⁰ Only 2% of young women respondents worked in construction (compared with 12% of men) and 1% in transport (compared with 9% of men). On the other hand, they worked mainly in retail, customer services and/or catering (66%), but also as domestic workers (14%). These sectors of activity correspond to the socially prescribed economic roles of women in urban environments, mostly in the informal sector and/or through own-account subsistence activities.⁵¹ As young women have developed fewer practical and technical skills than young men prior to their departure, their integration in destination countries is often limited to a small number⁵² of economic opportunities in basic sectors.⁵³ Their journey can also be a strategy to gain access to new sectors of activity and emancipate themselves from a gendered division of labour.⁵⁴

The job opportunities available to young migrants interviewed in the employment sectors of their interview city require, above all, practical skills. Respondents who had a source of income at the time of the interview had more often undergone vocational training than those with no income (17% and 9% respectively). Similarly, across all employment areas, respondents who were gainfully employed at the time of the interview (n=1,222) worked mainly in small business (37%), domestic work (13%) and construction (16%). These sectors do not always require formal qualifications. Instead, they value practical skills and work experience more than qualifications and educational achievements. Young migrants can thus succeed in integrating into these employment areas by drawing on their professional skills acquired either before their departure (see Figure 10), or during their journeys. In addition, recognition of their prior learning through formal certification of their practical skills is a tool that can open up access to decent, formal and better-paid employment opportunities.⁵⁵

49 Among the respondents who indicated earning money before their departure through regular, temporary or occasional employment, and/or as an entrepreneur/self-employed. Among them, the "Other" option includes the following response choices: security (n=10), finance and IT (n=23), civil service and teaching (n=9), health professional (n=9), refusal (n=3), police or army (n=2) and other (n=13).

50 IFAD (2015), [Dossier: gender equality and rural development](#)

51 OECD (2011), [Society at a Glance 2011. OECD Social Indicators](#)

52 ILO (2020), [Who are the women on the move? A portrait of female migrant workers](#)

53 ILO (2008), [Women and men migrant workers: moving towards equal rights and opportunities](#)

54 IOM (2020), [Central and West Africa: more and more women seek equality through migration](#)

55 ILO (2020), [Op. cit.](#)

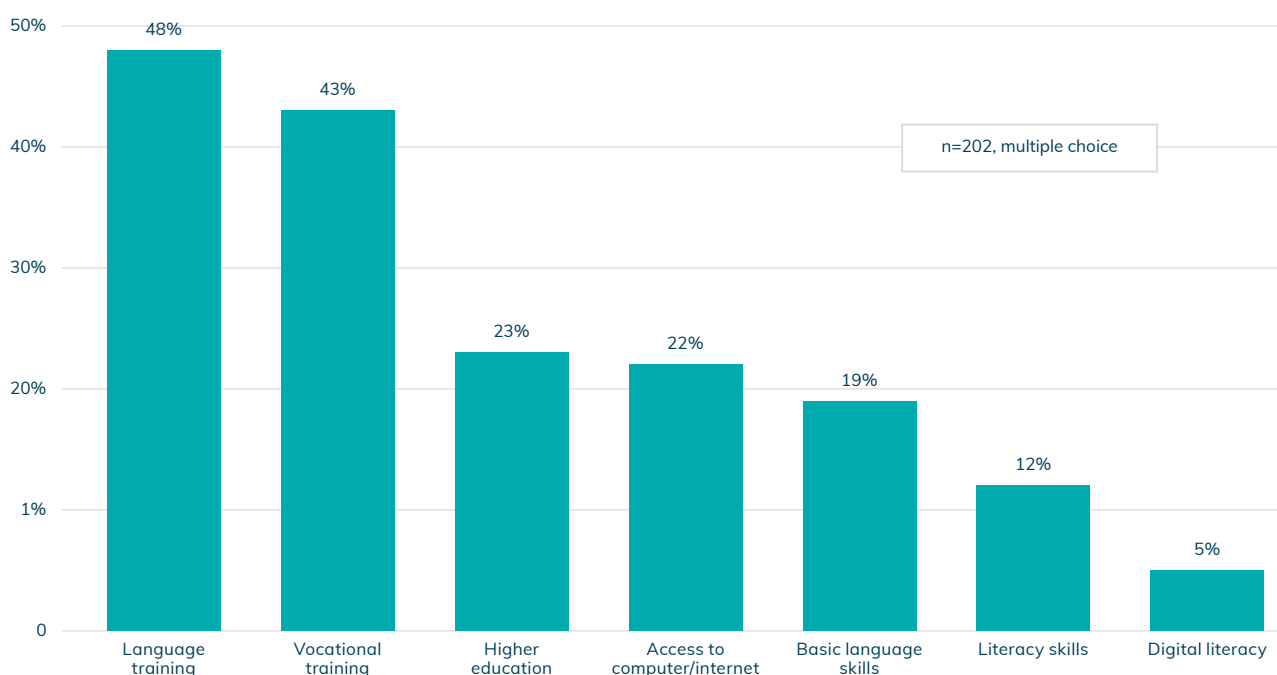
Skills development needs

Demand for educational services remains high among the young migrants surveyed, even when the latter have a source of income. Indeed, 70% of all respondents said they needed education-related services, a similar proportion (68%) among those who had a source of income at the time of the interview (n=1,382).⁵⁶ Access to economic opportunities during journey therefore does not necessarily mean that young migrants have given up pursuing an educational path. On the contrary, pursuing an apprenticeship can be seen as an opportunity facilitating their present and/or future integration into new working environments. It is also a means, in the same way as recognition of prior learning, of improving prospects of access to formal and/or better-paid employment.⁵⁷ This need is particularly marked among young migrants in Tunis, Niamey and Conakry, where 95% (n=403), 79% (n=324) and 72% (n=300) respectively of respondents reported a need for educational services, compared with 37% (n=175) of respondents in Bamako.

The nature of the educational service needs reported by the young interviewed migrants demonstrates the centrality of skills that would facilitate their adaptability

in new work environments. Of the respondents who indicated one or more needs in terms of educational services (n=1,202), almost half (48%) made a request for foreign language training. Proficiency in French and/or Arabic can indeed be a tool for integration into the labour market in the locations crossed, serviced and/or destination, while also reducing exposure to protection risks.⁵⁸ In this regard, 57% of respondents from Tunis⁵⁹ reported a need for foreign language training.⁶⁰ The second type of educational service need reported by 43% respondents concerned access to vocational training (see Figure 11). This category of needs registers significant variations between interview cities, reaching a score of 58% in Tunis and only 12% in Bamako.⁶¹ This difference may be skewed by mobility intentions after the interview city. Respondents in Tunis were more likely to express the need to develop technical skills in demand on the European job market, envisaging this destination as their next step. On the other hand, those from Bamako were more likely to have professional skills adapted to economic opportunities in their interview city and/or for the next stages.

Figure 11. Education-related services needed by young respondents⁶²



⁵⁶ The same proportion is 78% among those who had no source of income at the time of the interview.

⁵⁷ ILO (2020), [Op. cit.](#)

⁵⁸ MMC (2020), [Op. cit.](#)

⁵⁹ MMC (2021), [Op. cit.](#)

⁶⁰ By comparison, this score was just 29% among respondents in Conakry.

⁶¹ The same proportions were 39% in Conakry and 43% in Niamey.

⁶² Among respondents who answered "none" to the question "What types of education-related services do you need most?"

Conclusion

Mobility offers young migrants economic opportunities, increasing their access to sources of income compared to their pre-departure situation. However, this opening up to new opportunities does not lead to more decent employment conditions. The sectors of activity accessible to young migrants remain restricted and precarious. The majority work in temporary or self-employed jobs, often without social protection, exposing them to risks of exploitation and abuse. Working during journey can also be a necessity to reach new destinations, especially for those with limited financial resources and/or who have had to borrow money to finance the costs associated with their mobility. In these circumstances, the risk of debts can add to other forms of economic vulnerability linked to exploitation at work. In addition, young people on mobility are generally more educated than the average in West Africa, and their labour can benefit host countries. Recognition of the skills acquired, both in their home countries and during their mobility, appears to be a key lever for improving the economic integration and employment conditions of young migrants. A strong demand for educational services, particularly in language and vocational training, reflects the need to better adapt to labour markets in destination countries. These challenges can be met through actions aimed, for example, at improving the decision-making and preparation of people with migration plans and/or aimed at encouraging fair and ethical recruitment of migrants to ensure their protection and promote more decent working conditions. This can include support for employment intermediation services, as well as the setting up of support and information-sharing systems on job opportunities available on labour markets in destination countries.⁶³

63 Helvetas (2021), [Migration and development. West Africa regional document](#)



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MMC is a leading source for independent and high-quality data, research, analysis and expertise. MMC aims to increase understanding of mixed migration, to positively impact global and regional migration policies, to inform

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