

# The impact of COVID-19 on refugees and migrants in Tunisia - a focus on employment and livelihoods

As of June 25th, there are 87 recorded active coronavirus cases remaining in Tunisia, down from 1,160 at its peak, and economic activities are resuming.<sup>1</sup> This snapshot explores the impact that COVID-19 and the measures to prevent its spread have had on refugees' and migrants' employment and livelihood opportunities. It aims to inform the work of humanitarian and development actors assisting affected refugees and migrants.

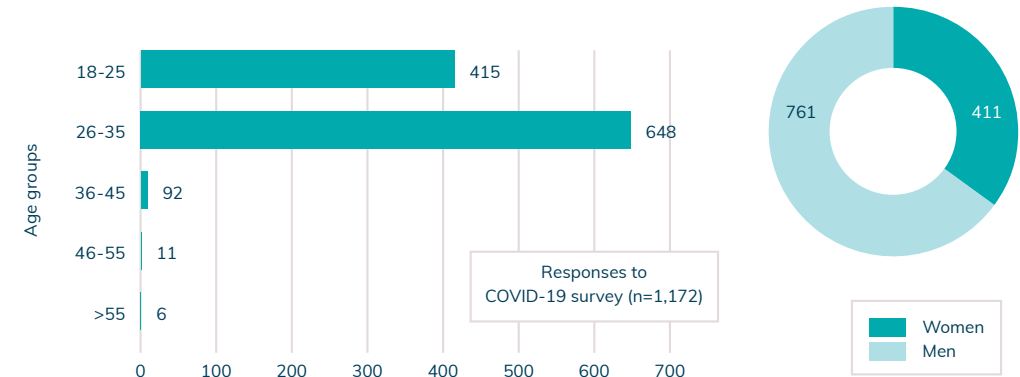
## Key recommendations

- Increase basic needs assistance – food, water, shelter – to vulnerable refugees and migrants across Tunisia, to avoid negative coping mechanisms due to loss of income;
- Increase cash programming, including cash for health services, for the broader refugee and migrant population based on their own assessment of their needs following the loss of work and income;
- The impact of the COVID-19 crisis on refugees' and migrants' access to work – largely in the informal sector – highlights the need for greater legal pathways so that refugees and migrants can access employment opportunities in the formal sector.

## Profiles

This snapshot is based on 1,172 surveys and 12 key informant interviews with refugees and migrants in Tunisia conducted between April 6th and June 15th, 2020. Respondents were surveyed in 15 cities across the country; most notably, in Sfax (29%), Médenine (27%) and Tunis (21%). The main origin countries of respondents are Côte d'Ivoire (24%), Sudan (9%), and Eritrea (9%). Other countries include, but are not limited to Cameroon, Guinea, Mali, and Burkina Faso. Of those surveyed, 65% are men and 35% are women, ranging from 18 to 70 years of age (Figure 1).

**Figure 1. Age range and sex of respondents**

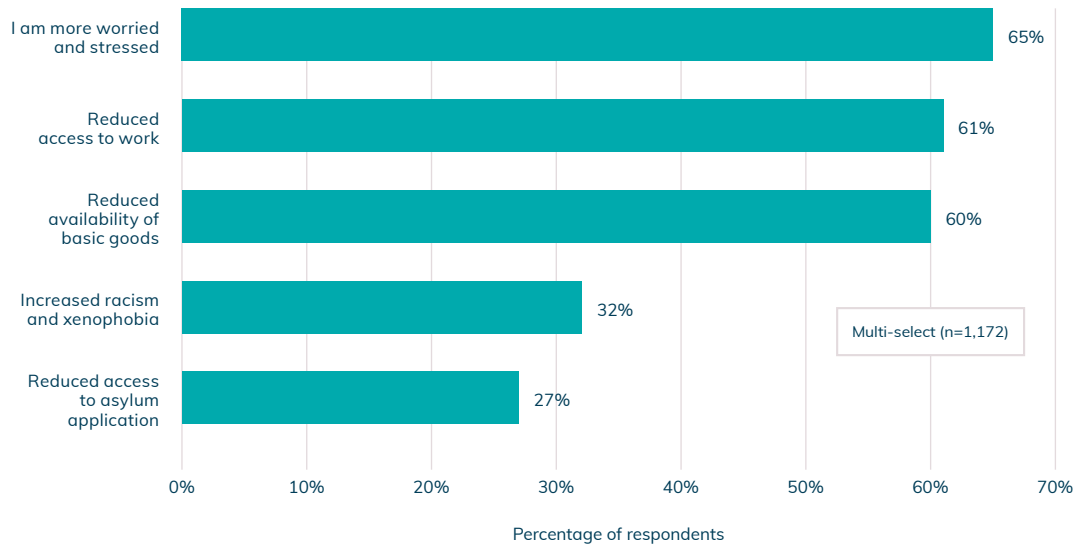


## Most surveyed refugees and migrants are experiencing reduced work and income because of COVID-19

A majority (61%) of surveyed refugees and migrants reported experiencing reduced access to work as one of the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis on their daily lives (Figure 2), while around the same share (60%) reported having lost income due to the imposed restrictions (Figure 3). Some 36% (n=420) of respondents, however, indicated that they were not earning an income at the time of the outbreak.

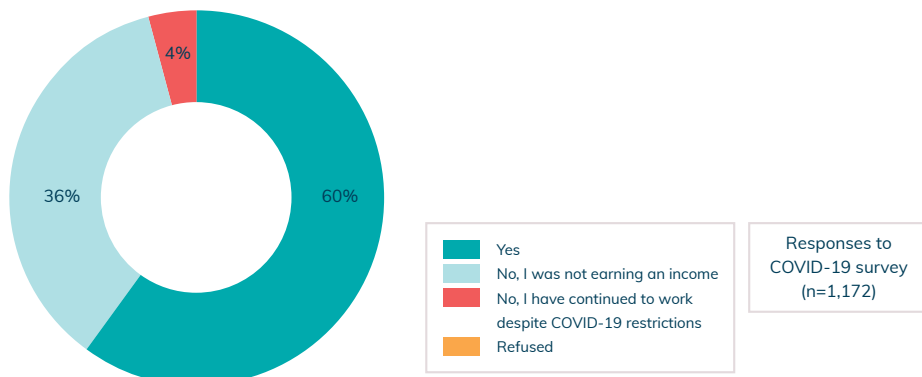
<sup>1</sup> Ministère de la Santé de la République Tunisienne (2020). [Nombre de cas actifs en Tunisie](#).

**Figure 2. What impacts has the crisis had on your day-to-day life?**



Looking only at those respondents who were employed before COVID-19 (n=747), **94% (n=703) have lost income**, while 6% (n=44) were able to continue working (4 respondents refused to answer this question). An Ivorian woman in Nabeul reported: “All people with whom I often speak have lost their jobs, and I have just lost mine. While I am not paid, thank God there are people who are able to help me...”

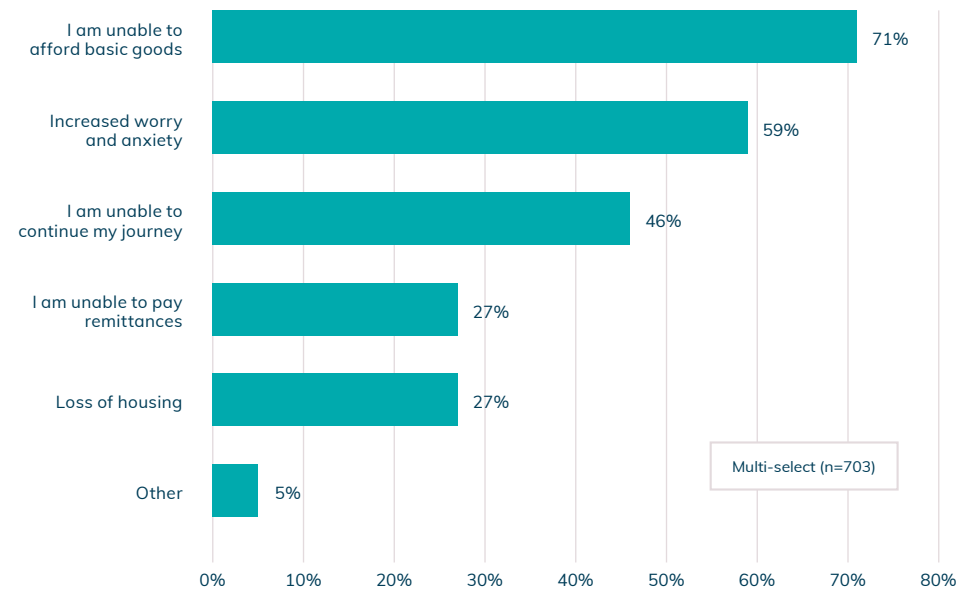
**Figure 3. Have you lost income due to coronavirus restrictions?**



## Three-quarters of those who lost their income report being unable to afford basic goods

Of the respondents who experienced a loss of income (60%; n=703) because of COVID-19 restrictions, more than 70% reported being unable to afford basic goods (Figure 4). Moreover, nearly one-third (27%) cite being unable to send remittances and/or cite losing their housing (27%).

**Figure 4. What impact has the loss of income had?**



An Eritrean man based in Médenine who receives assistance in the form of food vouchers explained the effect of price increases on access to basic goods since the start of the outbreak of COVID-19:

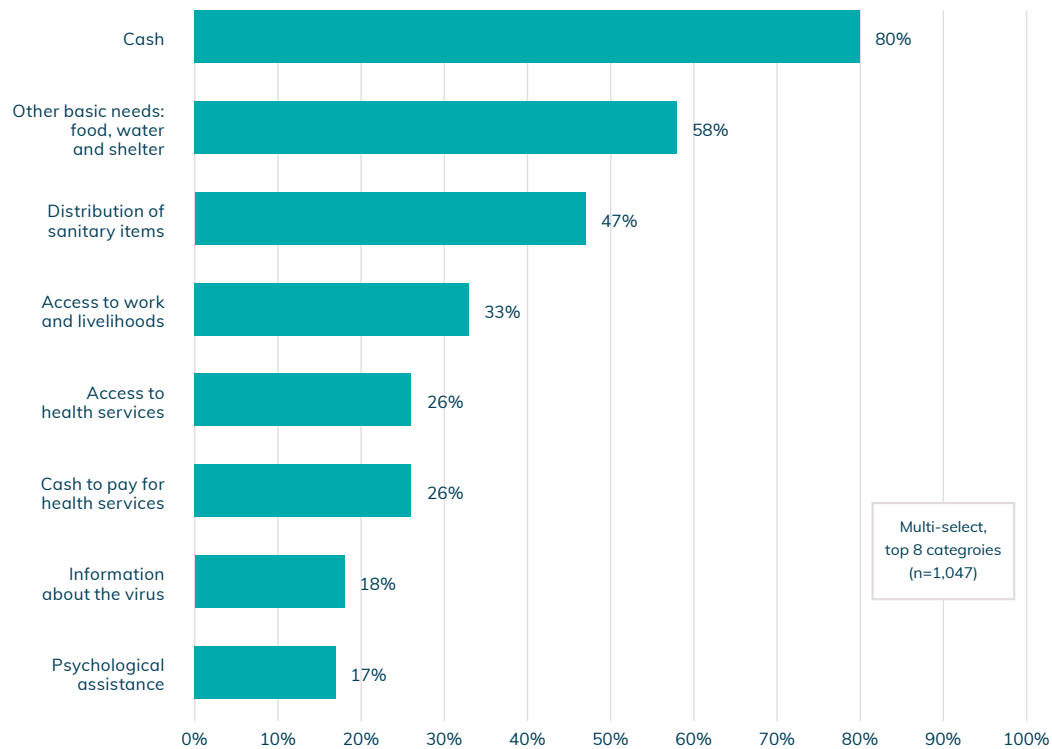
The problem is that we used to receive aid and tickets to buy foods, we [are] still receiving them, but the prices are rising, [and] food vouchers could be used only [at] Monoprix [and] Aziza. But when we go now, we find some rising prices, which is a big problem for us and especially for women with children who need more things than we do.

The issue of price increases was also underlined by an Ivorian woman residing in Sfax: “The needs have changed enormously. People have taken advantage of the situation and they have increased the prices of the products.”

## The vast majority need extra help, but few respondents have received additional assistance

While 89% of respondents (n=1,047) reported being in need of extra help since the outbreak of COVID-19, 28% (n=330) reported receiving additional assistance. The forms of assistance that respondents most often said they needed were cash (79%), other basic needs (food water, and shelter) (64%), and sanitary (PPE) items (56%) (Figure 5). In terms of the assistance that surveyed refugees and migrants reported receiving, these include: basic needs (food, water, and shelter) (35%), sanitary (PPE) items (20%), and cash (18%). In this way, the form of assistance that respondents said they needed most – cash – was the form they received the least.

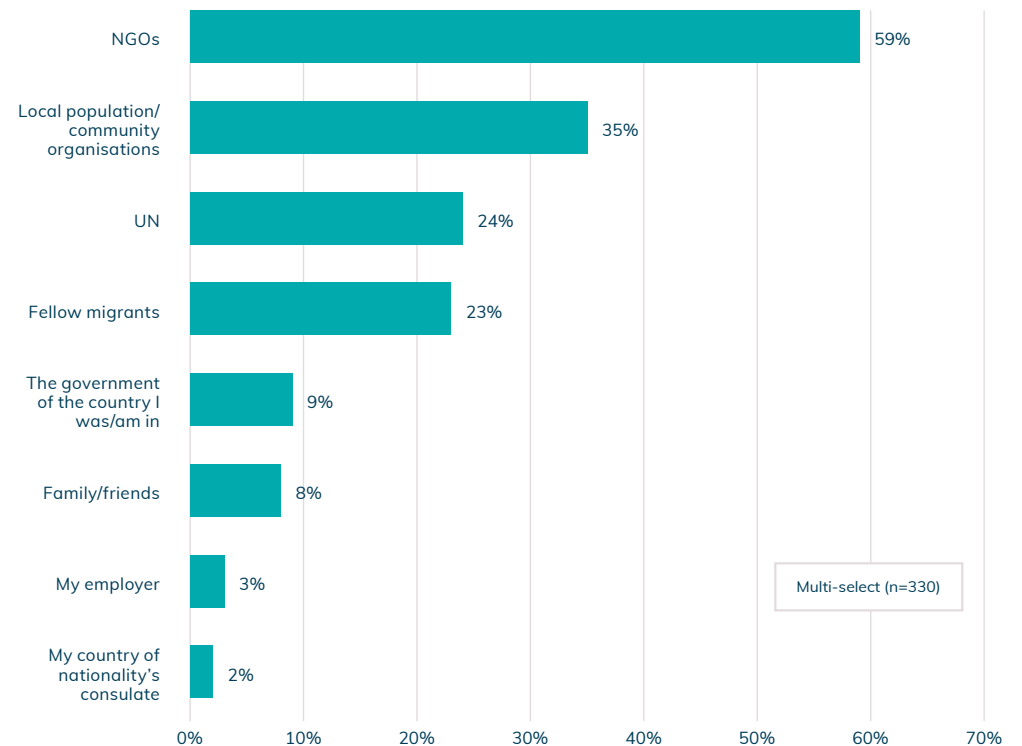
**Figure 5. What kind of extra help?**



## NGOs are the most-cited assistance provider

Refugees and migrants who received additional assistance (28%; n=330) since the outbreak of COVID-19, received it most often from NGOs (59%). This was followed by the local population and community organisations (35%), UN agencies (24%) and fellow refugees and migrants (23%). Employers and home country consulates were the least-cited provider of assistance or services.

**Figure 6. Who did you receive assistance from?**



When disaggregating these data by location, nearly one-third of respondents based in Tunis (32%; 76/240) received additional assistance, compared to around one-fourth of the respondents in Médenine (26%; 83/321) and Sfax (25%; 86/339). The remaining respondents were spread across 12 cities around the country.



## 4Mi & COVID-19

The [Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism Initiative](#) (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. Normally, the recruitment of respondents and interviews take place face-to-face. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, face-to-face recruitment and data collection has been suspended in all countries.

MMC has responded to the COVID-19 crisis by changing the data it collects and the way it collects it. Respondents are recruited through a number of remote or third-party mechanisms; sampling is through a mixture of purposive and snowball approaches. A new survey focuses on the impact of COVID-19 on refugees and migrants, and the surveys are administered by telephone, by the 4Mi monitors in West Africa, East Africa, North Africa, Asia and Latin America. Findings derived from the surveyed sample should not be used to make inferences about the total population of refugees and migrants, as the sample is not representative. The switch to remote recruitment and data collection results in additional potential bias and risks, which cannot be completely avoided. Further measures have been put in place to check and – to the extent possible – control for bias and to protect personal data. See more 4Mi analysis and details on methodology at [www.mixedmigration.org/4mi](http://www.mixedmigration.org/4mi)