MMC North Africa 4Mi Snapshot

Access to information of refugees and migrants in Libya

This 4Mi snapshot follows a similar one recently published by MMC West Africa. It is based on data collected by 4Mi monitors in Libya between May 2017 and January 2019. During this period, a total of 4,584 refugees and migrants were interviewed. The aim of this snapshot is to provide an overview of the different ways in which refugees and migrants in Libya have accessed information about migration and how this may have affected their decision making.

1. Profiles

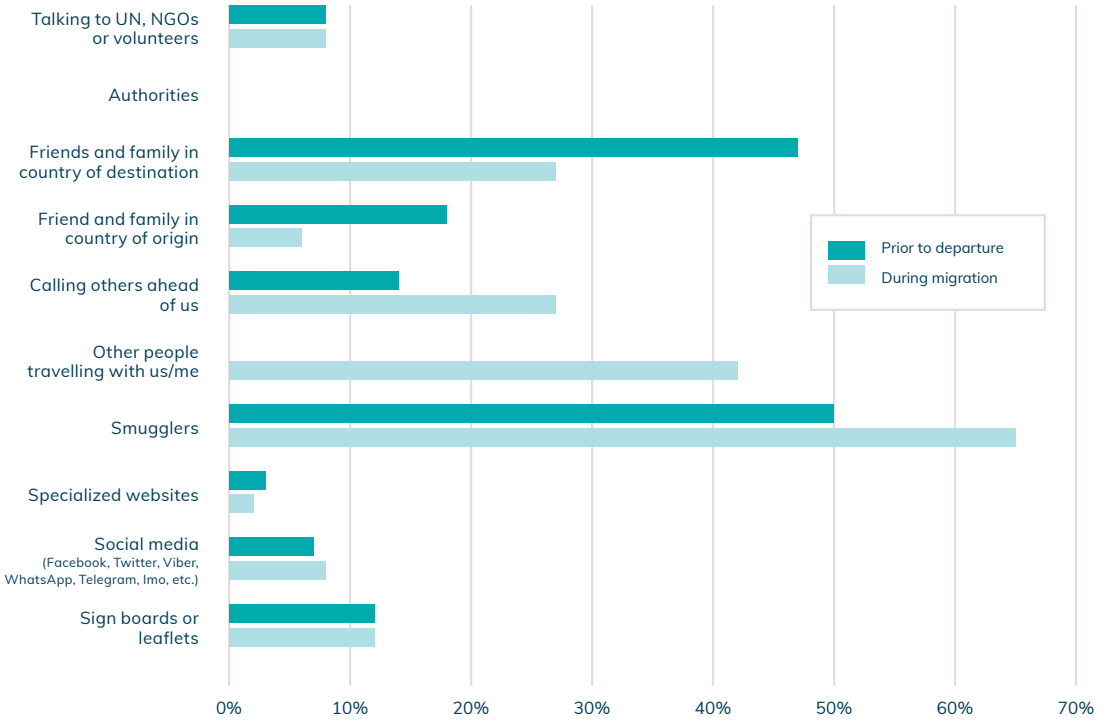
Of 4,584 refugees and migrants interviewed in Libya, 43% were women and 57% were men. Most interviewees were from West Africa (71%) while 19% were from East Africa and 10% from Central African countries[1]. The five most prominent nationalities interviewed were Nigeria (41%); Sudan (11%); Ghana (10%); Burkina Faso (6%) and Eritrea (5%).

2. Main source of information on migration prior to departure and during migration

Prior to departure, 4Mi respondents reported mostly consulting a variety of sources that could be jointly defined as "the migrants' network" whereas during the journey smugglers seem to play a more dominant role in providing access to information.

As shown in graph 1, before departure about half of respondents (47%) consulted with family and friends in the country of destination and an additional 14% reported calling those that had left before them. The second main source of information before departure was smugglers themselves (50%). Against a popular narrative in the media[2], relatively low numbers of migrants and refugees reported

Graph 1: Access to information (N=4,584)



1 This snapshot adopts UNDESA classification except for Sudan that is included in East Africa. As such, regions are defined as follows: i) East Africa: Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, Uganda; ii) West Africa: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo; iii) Central Africa: Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Sao Tome and Principe.

2 See for instance: https://www.irishtimes.com/news/world/europe/mass-migration-guided-by-mobiles-and-social-media-1.2344662

consulting social media (7%) and specialized websites (3%). Nonetheless, social media may overlap with other sources as they are used to keep ties with friends and family.

During the migration journey, reliance on smugglers increases and it is reported as a source of information by most respondents (65%). Also, 60% of the respondents still relied on the "migrants' network" but the number of interviewees mentioning family and friends at destination to access relevant information reduces consistently (from 47% to 27%). Reliance on friends and family at origin also falls (from 18% to 6%) while a relevant share (42%) of interviewees reported consulting with fellow migrants on the journey with them.

As shown in graph 2, information sources differ by region of origin with respondents from West Africa relying more heavily on smugglers prior to departure (61%). To the contrary, migrants and refugees from East and Central Africa seem to have stronger network ties reporting friends and family at destination as the main source of information (75% and 69%, respectively). Similarly, during the journey Western Africans relied heavily on information provided by the smugglers (79%) but this was not the case for Eastern Africans (23%) that more frequently consulted fellow travellers (72%) and others ahead of them in the journey (45%).

3. Access to mobile phones

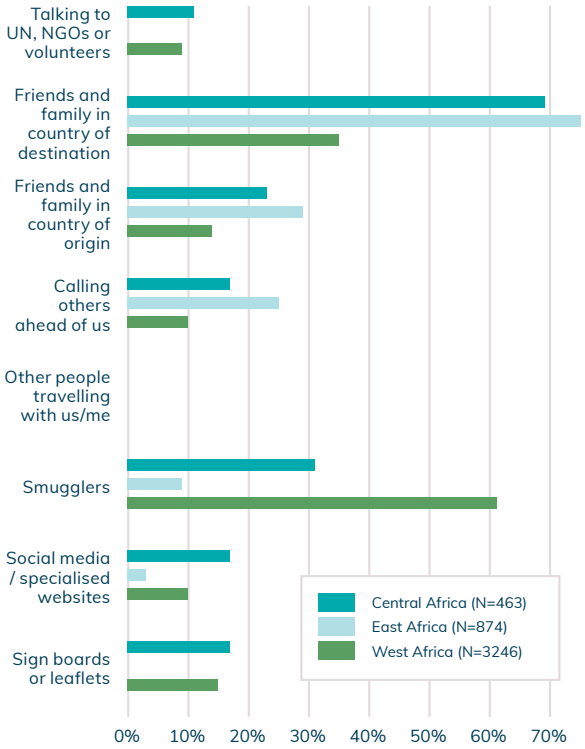
Among 4Mi interviewees, about 74% started off their migration journey with a mobile device: 33% of all respondents had a smartphone; 8% owned a phone when they left but subsequently lost it.

Although most respondents across all regions of origin owned a mobile device, West Africans reported the highest percentage of individuals without a phone. Out of 3,246 West African interviewees, 31% did not own a mobile device against only 11% of East Africans and 16% of respondents from Central Africa. East African interviewees also showed higher frequency of smartphone ownership (47%) compared to West African (37%) and Central African (28%) interviewees.

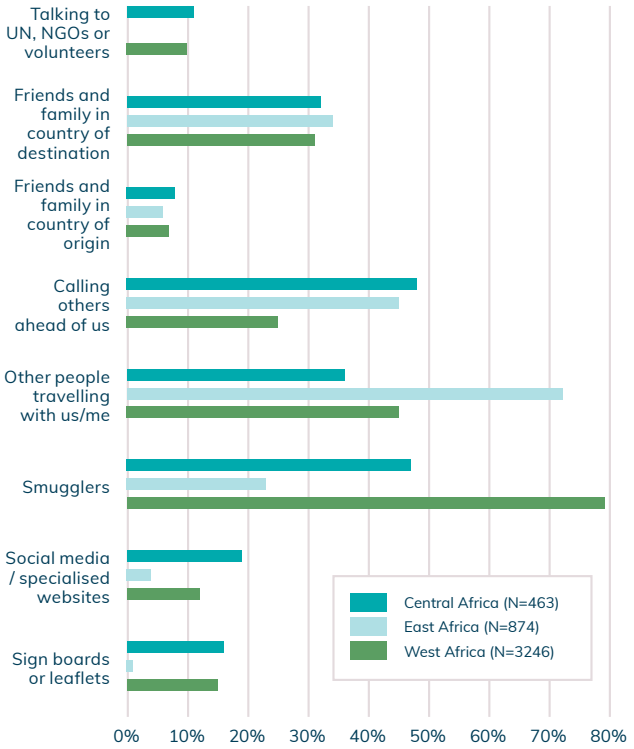
No clear trends emerged between socio-economic conditions, measured through employment status, and mobile device ownership. This may relate to the fact that professional categories overlap, and it is difficult to make rigid distinctions.

When comparing education levels with phone ownership, individuals who had attained an advanced degree (BA or MA) reported higher ownership with only 14% not having a mobile device. In particular,

Graph 2: Access to information prior to departure - by region of origin



Graph 3: Access to information during the journey - by region of origin

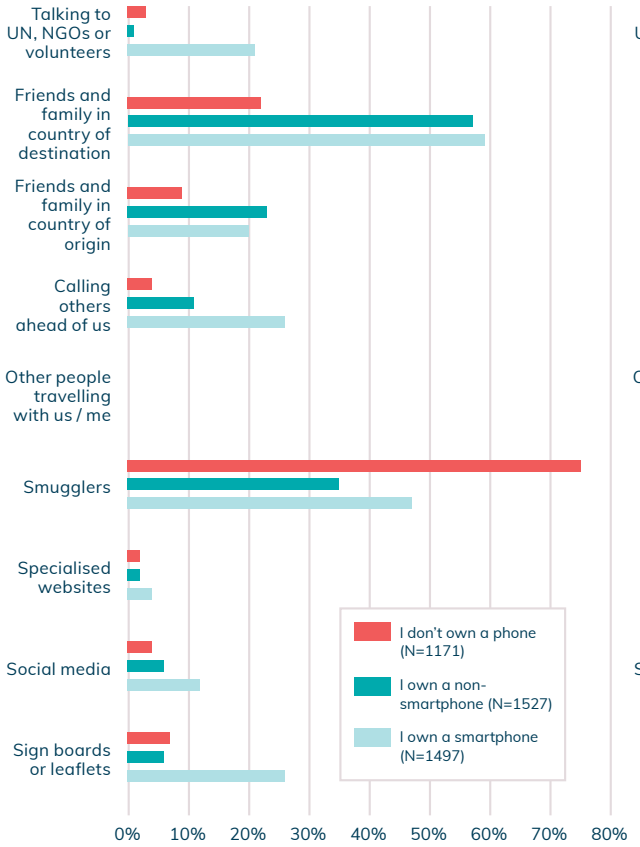


68% of them owned a smartphone, more than double the percentage of individuals with secondary (31%) and primary (32%) education. Beyond this, there seems to be no clear association within the 4Mi sample between education level and phone ownership.

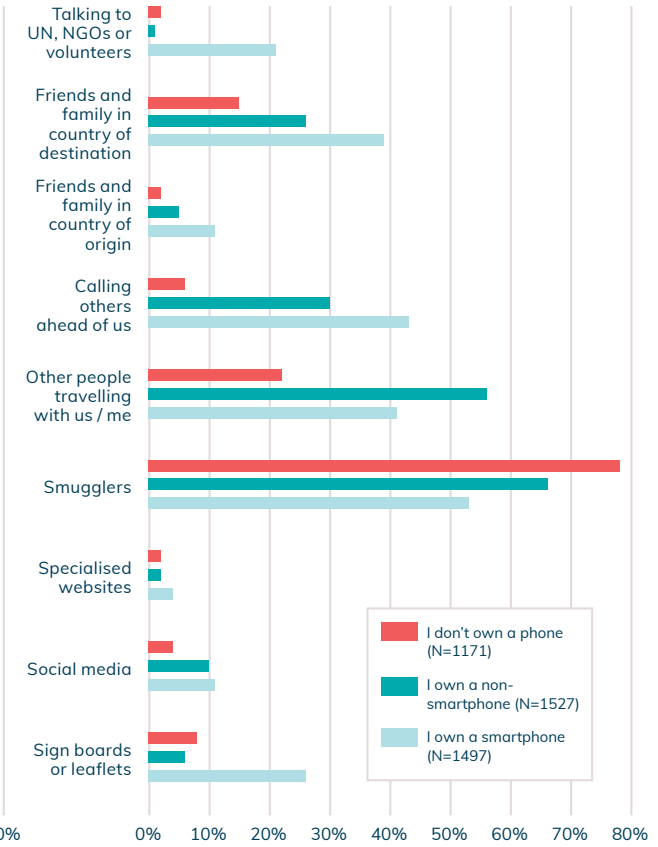
Respondents who owned a mobile device reported accessing a wider variety of information sources both prior to departure (Graph 4) and during the journey (Graph 5). Over half of interviewees with a smartphone (59%) or a non-smartphone (57%) were able to consult friends and family at destination while this was the case for only 22% of respondents who did not own a mobile phone. A higher percentage of respondents with a mobile device were also able to obtain information by calling people

that had travelled before them, by talking to UN and NGOs or by accessing information circulating on social media and other internet sites. In contrast, respondents without a mobile phone predominantly relied on a single-information source: smugglers (75%).

Graph 4: Access to information prior to departure - by phone ownership



Graph 5: Access to information during the journey - by phone ownership

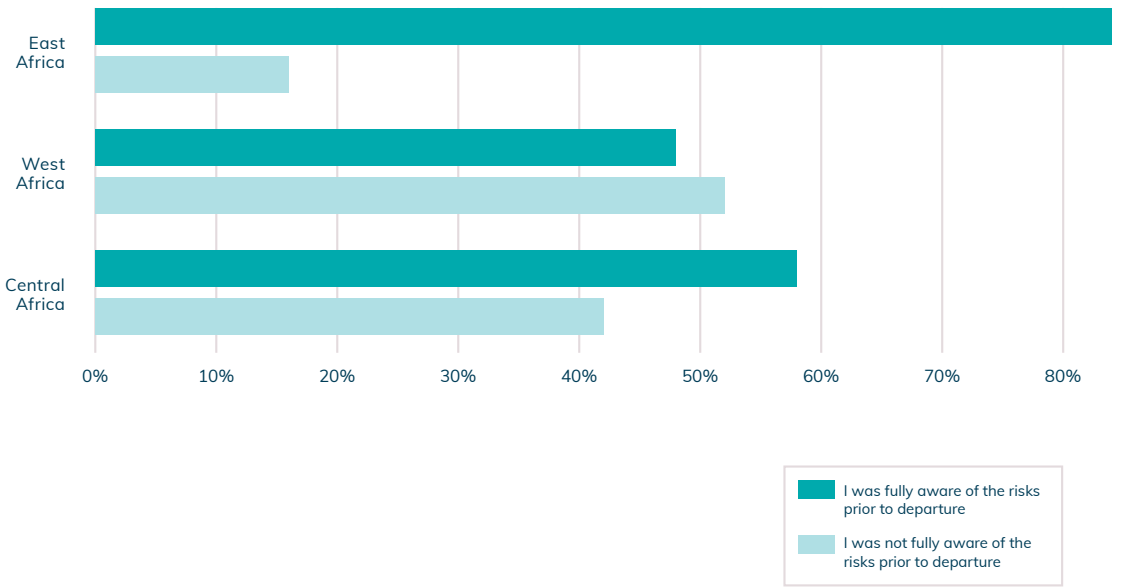


4. Access to information and risk awareness

Out of the 4,584 4Mi interviewees in Libya, 2,527 (55%) said they were, to some extent, aware of the risks of the journey prior to departure. Of these, 62% claimed they were fully aware of the risks while 35% said they were aware but described their experience as worse than expected. As shown in graph 6, East African respondents reported most often (84%) that they were aware of the risks prior to the journey compared to only 48% of West African and 58% of Central African respondents.

4Mi data also indicate that there may be a positive association between risk awareness and mobile device ownership. As shown in graph 7, respondents owning a mobile device more frequently reported being aware of the risks associated to the migration journey. 72% of those who owned a non-smartphone and 57% of smartphone-owners said they were aware of the risks prior to starting their journey compared to only 30% of individuals without any mobile device.

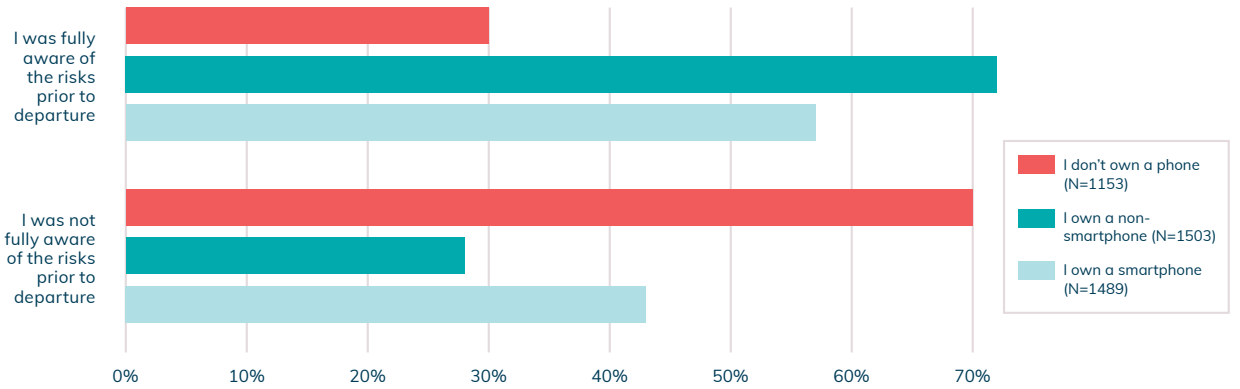
Graph 6: Risk awareness by region of origin



According to our analysis, East Africans are more aware of the risks while also more likely to own a phone (79%). These findings seem to indicate that phone possession is an important enabler of access-to-information strategies. However, further research is needed as it is only one factor in a complex set of variables that expose migrants and refugees to risks on migration routes.

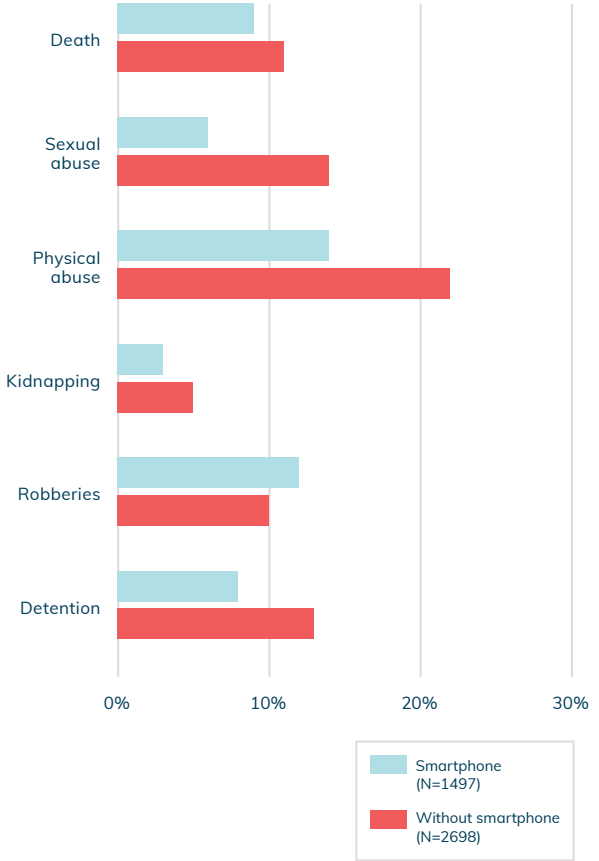
4Mi respondents who owned a smartphone also reported fewer protection incidents than respondents without a smartphone or a mobile phone. As shown in graph 8, the percentage of individuals without a smartphone who experienced sexual abuse (14%) was more than double that of smartphone owners (6%). Similarly, 22% of respondents without a smartphone experienced physical abuse against only 14% of smartphone owners.

Graph 7: Risk awareness vs. phone possession

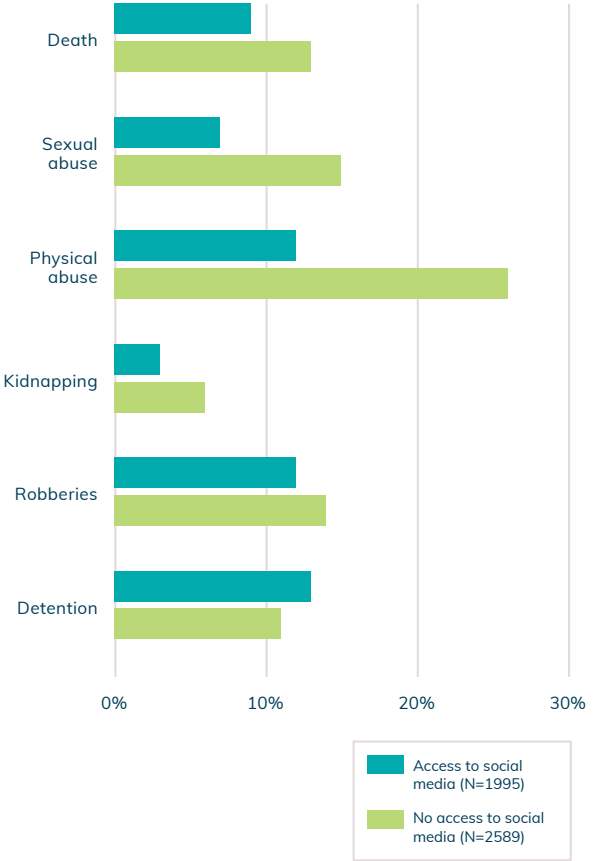


Similar indications are given by correlating social media usage and protection incidents. Graph 9 indicates that access to social media is associated with less exposure to protection incidents along the journey. Among the 1,995 4Mi respondents who reported using social media , 12% experienced physical abuse, compared to 26% of the 2,589 respondents who reported not using social media. Similarly, only 7% of social media users experienced sexual abuse compared to 15% of respondents who did not use social media.

Graph 8: Percentage of people who experienced protection incidents - by smartphone status



Graph 9: Percentage of individuals who experienced protection incidents - by social media usage

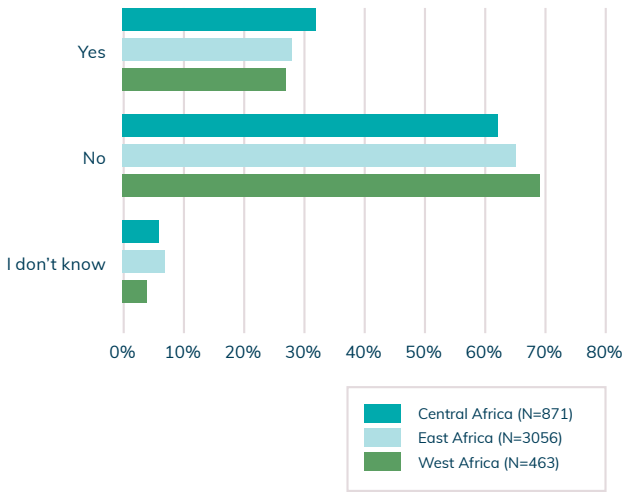


5. Information gaps in migrants and refugees' decision making

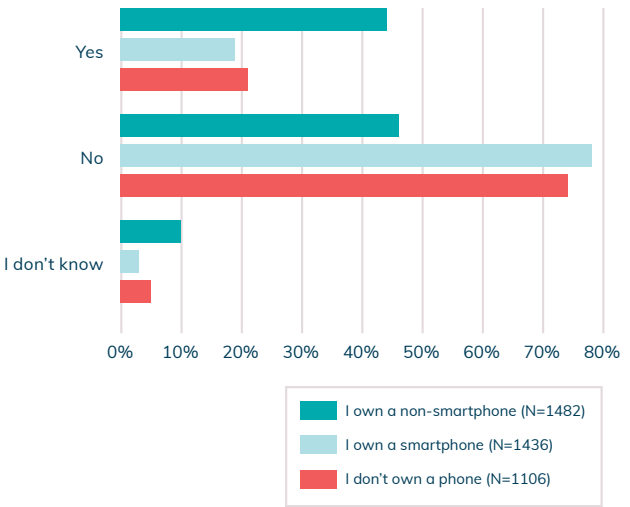
4Mi data suggests the existence of an informational gap related to migration decision making. When 4Mi respondents were asked if they would have still undertaken the journey knowing what they know now (having reached Libya), 62% said they would not while only 28% confirmed they would still attempt it. In this regard, there seem to be no significant differences across regions of origin.

4Mi data also suggest that ownership of a mobile device did not provide a substantial advantage in making more informed decisions prior to departure. A majority of both smartphone-owners (78%) and interviewees who did not own any mobile device (74%) reported that they would not undertake the journey given what they know now. To the contrary, slightly more than half (54%) of those owning a non-smartphone would still undertake the journey. Thus, no clear trend can be identified within the 4Mi sample.

Graph 10: Percentage of people who would have migrated anyways knowing what they know now - by region of origin



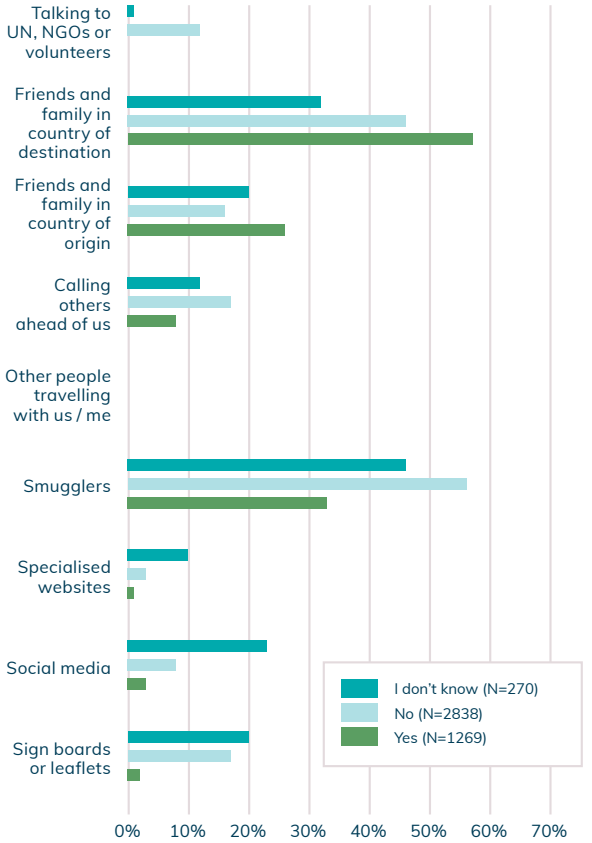
Graph 11: Percentage of 4Mi mobile users who would have migrated anyway knowing what they known now- by phone ownership



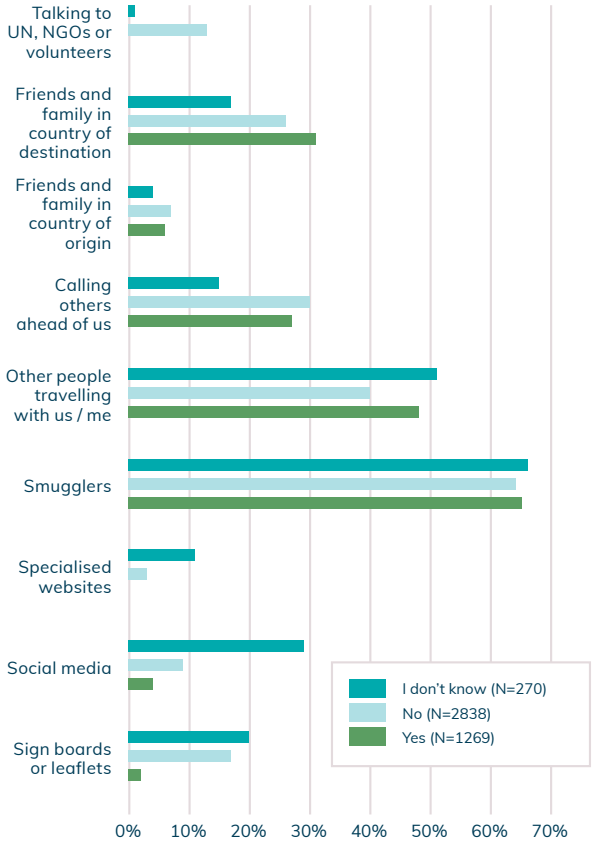
4Mi interviewees who confirmed an informational gap (they would not migrate with the additional information they have now) were most likely to have relied on information provided by the smugglers both prior to departure (graph 10) and during the journey (graph 11). Before departure, 56% of them had relied on smugglers as one of their sources of information compared to only 33% of those who would still migrate with the additional information they have now. To the contrary, the majority of 4Mi respondents who would still migrate obtained information from the migrant network at destination (57%).

Interestingly, 12% of 4Mi respondents who confirmed an informational gap relied on UN and NGOs to obtain information prior to departure while this was the case for none (0%) of interviewees that would not change their decisions given what they know now. Also, 4Mi respondents that remained unsure about whether they would still attempt the journey more frequently relied on social media both prior departure and during the journey. This suggests that the migrants' network may be a more reliable source of information than social media and UN or NGOs.

Graph 12: Percentage of individuals who would have migrated anyways knowing what they know now versus sources of information accessed *prior* to departure



Graph 13: Percentage of individuals who would have still migrated knowing what they know now versus access to sources of information *during* the journey



6. Conclusion

While 4Mi respondents in Libya rely on a variety of information sources, these differ depending on the region of origin. East Africans are more reliant on the migrants' network and West Africans depend more on information provided by smugglers. During the journey the importance of smugglers generally increases compared to other sources of information.

Respondents who own a mobile device tend to use of a wider variety of information sources both prior and during the journey. Access to a mobile phone may have allowed many of them to better connect with diaspora and family abroad. Mobile device ownership seems to depend more on region-specific variables than education levels and professional status.

4Mi data analysis suggests that access to social media may reduce exposure to protection risks for people on the move. Individuals who owned phones reported being more aware of the risks during the journey and those owning a smartphone experienced fewer protection incidents than respondents without a smartphone. This, in turn, may be linked to smartphone owners having a better access to social media. However, there may be several confounding factors between mobile phone ownership and social media access, and the importance of mobile device and social media should not be overestimated.

The migrants' network (mainly family and friends at destination) seemed to remain a more reliable source of information for refugees and migrants compared to social media as well as UN agencies and NGOs. Most of migrants and refugees who would still attempt the journey relied on family and friends to access information. Nonetheless, information gaps still exist:

> ***"It was my friend that brought me here, so that things can be better for me. He told me about this journey when he came to visit his family in Nigeria. I decided to follow him because we both grew up together from childhood, but what I met here was beyond my expectations. I just need to endure it so that I can achieve something."***
>
> (4Mi interviewee 30-year old Nigerian man)

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 and the protection risks for refugees and migrants on the move. 4Mi field monitors are currently collecting data through direct interviews with refugees and migrants in West Africa, East Africa and Yemen, North Africa, Asia, and Europe.

Sample sizes are clearly indicated and represent a limited section of those on the move. The findings derived from the surveyed sample should not be used to make any inferences about the total population. See more 4Mi analysis and details on methodology at www.mixedmigration.org/4mi

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