



# Migrating and displaced children and youth in Tunisia:

Profiles, Routes, Protection, and Needs

MMC Research Report, May 2021





# Acknowledgements

**Written and researched by:** Ana-Maria Murphy-Teixidor and Flannery Dyon

**Reviewed by:** Dr. Ayla Bonfiglio, Roberto Forin, Jane Linekar, Jim van Moorsel, Samar Abboud, Elizabeth Wardle, and Nourhan Abdel Aziz

**Layout and design:** Simon Pegler

**Copy editing:** Peter Mackenzie

**Special thanks:** To Imen Aouani, Teo Ficarelli, Aziz Dabboussi, Jim van Moorsel, and Flannery Dyon for data collection, and to the entire MMC/Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism initiative (4Mi) team in Tunisia for the implementation of 4Mi.

This publication was commissioned by Save the Children International (STC). Its contents are the sole responsibility of MMC and do not necessarily reflect the views of STC.

**Suggested citation:** Mixed Migration Centre (2021). *Migrating and displaced children and youth in Tunisia: Mixed Migration Centre, North Africa*. Available at: <https://mixedmigration.org/resource/migrating-and-displaced-children-and-youth-in-tunisia/>

## About MMC

The Mixed Migration Centre (MMC) is a leading source for independent and high-quality data, research, analysis, and expertise on mixed migration. It aims to increase understanding of mixed migration, to positively impact global and regional migration policies, to inform evidence-based protection responses for people on the move, and to stimulate forward thinking in public and policy debates on mixed migration. MMC's overarching focus is on human rights and protection for all people on the move, with an increasing focus on children and youth on the move.

MMC is a global network comprising six regional hubs (Asia, East Africa and Yemen, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, North Africa, and West Africa) and a central unit in Geneva. MMC is part of and is governed by the Danish Refugee Council (DRC). While its institutional link to DRC ensures that MMC's work is grounded in operational reality, it acts as an independent source of data, research, analysis, and policy development on mixed migration for policy makers, practitioners, journalists, and the broader humanitarian sector. The position of the MMC does not necessarily reflect the position of DRC.

For more information on MMC visit our website: [www.mixedmigration.org](http://www.mixedmigration.org)

## About Save the Children

Save the Children believes every child deserves a future. Around the world, we work every day to give children a healthy start in life, the opportunity to learn and protection from harm. When crisis strikes, and children are most vulnerable, we are always among the first to respond and the last to leave.

We ensure children's unique needs are met and their voices are heard. We deliver lasting results for millions of children, including those hardest to reach. We do whatever it takes for children – every day and in times of crisis – transforming their lives and the future we share.

[savethechildren.net](http://savethechildren.net)

SUPPORTED BY:



# Contents

Acknowledgements	3
Acronyms	5
Definitions	6
Key Findings	7
Introduction	9
<b>Background: Existing data on migrating and displaced children and youth</b>	10
<b>Methodology</b>	11
Data collection and sampling	11
Data analysis	12
Validity and limitations	13
Ethics and safeguarding	13
<b>Results</b>	14
<b>1. Profiles of migrating and displaced children and youth in Tunisia</b>	14
Nationality	14
Age and gender	14
<b>2. Drivers</b>	15
Violence and rights violations	16
Educational opportunities	16
Economic opportunities	17
Aspirations for children	17
Other drivers	17
<b>3. Mixed migration routes for children and youth</b>	17
Means of transportation	17
Movements through various countries to Tunisia	18
Onward migration aspirations	19
Protection and rights concerns along the journey	20
<b>4. Experiences of refugee and migrant children and youth in Tunisia</b>	20
Settlement patterns	20
Access to documentation	21
Access to childcare	22
Access to work	22
Access to education	23
<b>5. Vulnerability to protection violations in Tunisia</b>	23
Protection abuses by location in Tunisia	26
Harassment and physical violence	26
Sexual exploitation and abuse	26
Forced labor and begging	26
Isolation and integration	26
<b>6. Access to assistance</b>	28
<b>Conclusion</b>	31
<b>Recommendations</b>	32
Tunisian authorities	32
Consular authorities	32
International organizations and local civil society	32
Researchers	33
Donors	33
<b>Annex A: Supplementary 4Mi modules</b>	34
<b>Annex B: List of participating stakeholders</b>	35

# List of figures

Table 1 Quantitative and qualitative sampling scheme .....	12
Figure 1 Care status of surveyed Sub-Saharan African (SSA) migrant children and youth in Tunisia (Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights) .....	10
Figure 2 Number of children registered as refugees or asylum seekers with UNHCR in Tunisia (October 2020) .....	11
Figure 3 Select the ages of all your children .....	15
Figure 4 For what reasons did you leave your origin country? .....	16
Figure 5 Which means of transportation have you used during your journey? .....	18
Figure 6 What risks do [boy/girl] refugees and migrants face in Tunisia? .....	21
Figure 7 What risks do young [male/female] refugees and migrants face in Tunisia? .....	21
Figure 8 Have the children in your care received any of the following forms of assistance? .....	24
Figure 9 Have you reached the end of your journey? .....	25
Figure 10 What type of assistance do you need? .....	28
Figure 11 How far do you agree with the statement “The support for refugees and migrants travelling with children in Tunisia is sufficient”? .....	29
Figure 12 Have the children in your care received any of the following forms of assistance? .....	29
Figure 13 How far do you agree with the statement “The support for youth refugees and migrants in Tunisia is sufficient”? .....	30
Figure 14 What information would have been useful that you did not receive? .....	30

## Acronyms

<b>4Mi</b>	Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism initiative
<b>CRC</b>	International Convention on the Rights of the Child
<b>FTDES</b>	Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights
<b>IOM</b>	International Organization for Migration
<b>KII</b>	Key informant interview
<b>MMC</b>	Mixed Migration Centre
<b>MPHSS</b>	Mental health and psycho-social support
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental organization
<b>SP</b>	Service provider
<b>SSA</b>	Sub-Saharan Africa
<b>SSI</b>	Service Social International
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNDESA</b>	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
<b>UNHCR</b>	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
<b>RSD</b>	Refugee status determination

# Definitions

**Children:** 0-17 years of age

**Youth:** 18-25 years of age

Save the Children defines **migrating and displaced children** as “children moving for a variety of reasons, voluntarily or involuntarily, within or between countries, with or without their parents or other primary caregivers, and whose movement, while it may open up opportunities, might also place them at risk (or at an increased risk) of economic or sexual exploitation, abuse, neglect and violence.”

This umbrella term brings together a number of categories of children involved in mixed migration to highlight their common protection needs, including the following: children who are trafficked; children who migrate (e.g. to pursue better life opportunities, look for work or education, or escape violence); children displaced by conflict or natural disasters, including refugees, asylum seekers, and other persons of concern; nomadic children and children of travelers (including Roma children); and children born to migrant parents in countries of transit or destination.

## Care status of migrating and displaced children

**Unaccompanied children** (also called unaccompanied minors) are those separated from both of their parents or from their previous legal or primary caregivers and other relatives. They are typically either with unrelated adults who are not by law or custom responsible for their care, or with no adult care. They may be with other children who may or may not be related to them.

**Separated children** are those not with parents or with their previous legal or customary primary caregivers, but with relatives, extended family members, or others with a customary responsibility (defined in context) or in government-regulated care placement.

A **caregiver** is someone who provides daily care, protection and supervision of a child. This does not necessarily imply legal responsibility. Where possible, the child should have continuity in who provides their day-to-day care. A customary caregiver is someone that the community has accepted, either by tradition or common practice, to provide the daily care, protection and supervision of a child.

**Mixed Migration** refers to cross-border movements of people including refugees fleeing persecution and conflict, victims of trafficking, and people seeking better lives and opportunities. See MMC's full definition of mixed migration and associated terminology [here](#).

### Sources:

Save the Children “Child Protection Strategy 2013-2015: Making the world a safe place for children.”

Interagency Working Group on Unaccompanied and Separated Children (2013) Alternative Care in Emergencies Toolkit, published by Save the Children on behalf of the Interagency Working Group on Unaccompanied and Separated Children.

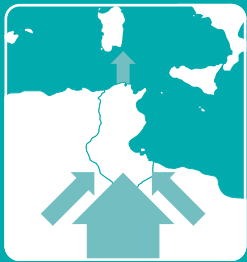
Mixed Migration Centre. MMC's Understanding and Use of the Term Mixed Migration. Available at: [https://mixedmigration.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/terminology\\_MMC-en-fr.pdf](https://mixedmigration.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/terminology_MMC-en-fr.pdf)

# Key Findings

Data and research on mixed migration in Tunisia are limited, and there is a particular dearth of information regarding the experiences of migrating and displaced children and youth. This study has three main objectives: to explore the profiles, routes, and vulnerabilities of migrating and displaced children and youth in Tunisia. The study's key findings, further elaborated in the report, include the following:



**Service providers in Tunisia are often less likely to target migrant children and youth from other North African and Middle Eastern countries than those from Francophone and Arabic speaking sub-Saharan countries, even though all require assistance.** Existing research and assistance programs often target sub-Saharan African refugees and migrants in Tunisia. This report also highlights the specific needs of caregivers and accompanied children from Libya and Syria. Key assistance needs include mental health and psycho-social support (MHPSS) services for those who have experienced physical violence and insecurity both in route to and within Tunisia.



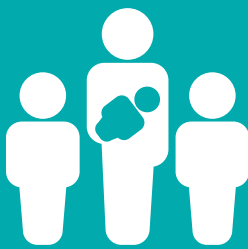
**Tunisia often serves as an interim destination.** Limited work opportunities in Tunisia and limited integration and support services within communities have prompted many surveyed foreign students to aspire to move onward. Many surveyed caregivers who reached Tunisia because they perceived the country as a place of relative safety within the region expressed the desire to move onward given both perceived risks within the country and their aspirations for their children.



**Routes-based analysis provides a better understanding of the profiles and protection concerns of migrating and displaced children and youth in Tunisia.** For instance, while young students and caregivers from West Africa and Syria arrive in Tunisia via short, direct journeys by plane, East African caregivers and those fleeing war and conflict in countries such as Cameroon and Nigeria tend to take riskier and longer overland routes. Those coming overland face specific risks; 97% of caregivers and 93% of youth surveyed between July 2020 and February 2021 highlighted the dangers of transiting across Libya. Over two-fifths of caregivers and just under half of youth who transited across Algeria identified it as the most dangerous country along their route.



**Tunisia is perceived as a country of relative safety in North Africa for migrating and displaced children and youth.** Caregivers, youth, and unaccompanied children all reported moving from Libya to Tunisia in search of safety and protection. Just 5% of youth and 6% of caregivers surveyed by 4Mi identified Tunisia as the most dangerous location along their journey. This perception of relative safety may be due to migrants' previous exposure to risks and trauma along the journey. However, a majority of caregivers and youth still cited some risks within Tunisia.



**Gaps in access to assistance.** A large portion of surveyed caregivers (30 out of 73) noted that they had not received any assistance for the child in their care in Tunisia. The majority of surveyed youth and all but one caregiver noted that they were still in need of assistance at the time of data collection. Key needs they specified included cash, medical assistance, and shelter. A large portion of caregivers also emphasized the need for safe spaces for women and children. Certain national origins for refugee and migrant caregivers were identified through 4Mi migrant networks, including Nigerian, Eritrean, and Somali, but these were less visible to service providers, suggesting a possible gap in assistance coverage.



# Introduction

Limited data and research materials exist on mixed migration in Tunisia, particularly those detailing the experiences of migrating and displaced children and youth, including their age, gender, and care status profiles; drivers and routes of migration; migration intentions; and needs while in Tunisia. A lack of systematic data for young and mobile populations is at the core of gaps in assistance for this population, given their difficult-to-reach nature. This requires investment in child safeguarding and mechanisms for referring critical needs to assistance partners.

Existing studies, which heavily rely on service providers' beneficiary contacts, often highlight the experiences of those already receiving assistance and 'in the system.' Key information gaps remain for children and youth in more irregular situations, who lack information and access to assistance organizations. This study, conducted with support and guidance from Save the Children International, seeks to fill these gaps and generate empirical data to inform mixed migration programming and advocacy. Its three main objectives are:

- 1 To better understand the profiles of migrating and displaced children and youth to and through Tunisia.**
- 2 To identify key mixed migration routes, transit points, and migration aspirations of children and youth moving to and through Tunisia, with a focus on how gender and age-related factors may impact the journey.**
- 3 To provide insight into the experiences of migrating and displaced children and youth in Tunisia, particularly related to risks, vulnerabilities, strengths, and positive coping strategies of children, families, and communities.**

This study comprises six sections. Section 1 presents the report's objectives. Section 2 reviews available statistics on migrating and displaced children in Tunisia. Section 3 outlines the study's methodology, including the data sampling scheme and the analysis strategy. Section 4 presents and discusses the study's findings and examines the profiles of migrating and displaced children and youth, the drivers of their movement, their protection concerns, and their migration aspirations. Sections 5 and 6 synthesize key reflections and recommendations for child-targeted mixed migration programming, policy, and research.

# Background: Existing data on migrating and displaced children and youth

Tunisia is an important node within the North African mixed migration landscape, as a country of departure, transit, and destination. While information is increasingly available about those departing from Tunisian shores and arriving mostly in Italy, there remains a lack of empirical data on Tunisia as a host country for people on the move.

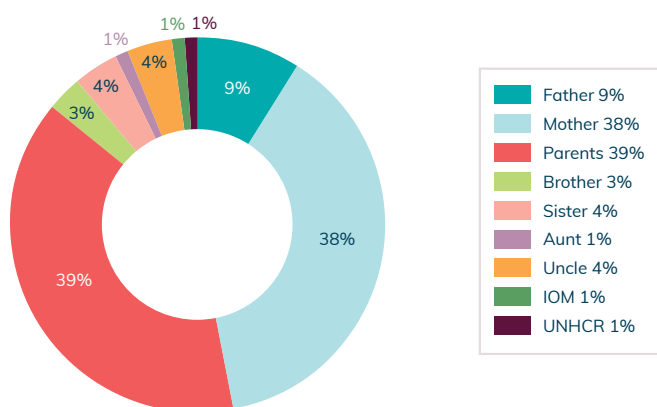
National and international migration stakeholders have yet to publish a comprehensive mapping of refugee and migrant settlement patterns across the country, though efforts are underway to do so.<sup>1</sup> In order to gain a better understanding of the refugee and migrant population within Tunisia, the Mixed Migration Centre (MMC) launched its Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism initiative (4Mi) in December 2019, aimed at collecting detailed information on the experiences of refugees and migrants over the age of 18.

Current estimates suggest that approximately 57,500 refugees and migrants of all ages from sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) live in Tunisia.<sup>2</sup> The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reports that just under 8,185 refugees and asylum seekers are registered in the country, largely from Côte d'Ivoire and Syria.<sup>3</sup> The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) estimates that, as of 2019, 19% of refugees and migrants with a regular status in Tunisia are below the age of 19, numbering just under 11,000 individuals. Given the lack of data on irregular migrants, this estimate must be taken with caution.

Organizations engaged in research on migrating and displaced children and youth in Tunisia, including those in irregular situations, tend to conduct qualitative studies with limited sample sizes. Analysis is rarely age and gender-sensitive and does not provide a comprehensive overview of experiences throughout the country, including children and youth's vulnerabilities and their migration decision-making processes. These limitations make it difficult for protection actors to derive insights for programming.

The Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights (FTDES) and Service Social International (SSI) have provided the most comprehensive review to date of non-national migrating and displaced children in Tunisia. Between June and September 2019, FTDES conducted 962 interviews with refugees and migrants from sub-Saharan Africa, with minors accounting for 40% of their sample.<sup>4</sup> Of those surveyed, 21% were between the ages of 0 and 5, 11% were between 6 and 10, 3% were between 11 and 15, and 6% were between 16 and 20 years old. While the majority were accompanied, approximately 2% were unaccompanied and in the care of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) or UNHCR (Figure 1).<sup>5</sup> This breakdown is representative of the survey sample, not the larger population in Tunisia.

**Figure 1. Caregivers of surveyed SSA migrant children and youth in Tunisia (FTDES)**



1 Between July 2020 and March 2021, the [Tunisian Institute Nationale de Statistiques \(INS\)](#) and the [Office National des Migrations \(ONM\)](#), with support from the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), launched a nationwide migrant census: "to quantify the presence of migrant populations to inform Tunisia's migration policy-making, and to study the causes, drivers, dynamics and consequences of international migration and the migration-development nexus." The findings of this census were scheduled to be published in May 2021..

2 UNDESA (2019). [International Migrant Stock 2019: Country Profile Tunisia](#).

3 UNHCR. Operational Portal Refugee Situations. Accessed on April 30th, 2021.

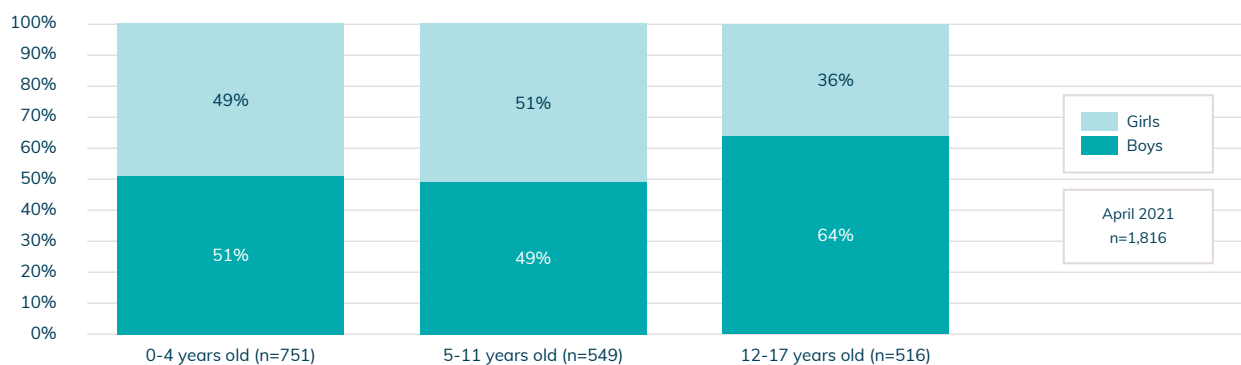
4 The Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights (FTDES) "From Sub-Saharan States to Tunisia: A quantitative study on the situation of migrants in Tunisia: general aspects, pathways, and aspirations" 2019.

5 Ibid.

In 2019, SSI attempted to estimate the number of unaccompanied children in Tunisia, identifying 85 cases between 2014 and 2018 using the databases of various organizations. The majority (84%) were aged 15 to 18, while a smaller number were aged 13 to 15 (6%) or 0 to 13 (10%).<sup>6</sup> SSI noted similar numbers of unaccompanied girls and boys, identifying no significant gender discrepancies in overall care status.<sup>7</sup>

In UNHCR's 2021 update, children accounted for 22% of all refugees and asylum seekers registered within the country (1,816 out of 8,185). Figure 2 provides a further disaggregation based on age.

**Figure 2. Number of children registered as refugees or asylum seekers with UNHCR in Tunisia<sup>8</sup>**



## Methodology

### Data collection and sampling

To understand the experiences of migrating and displaced children and youth in Tunisia, this study relies on multiple sources of quantitative and qualitative data targeting children, youth, caregivers, and service providers.<sup>9</sup>

MMC draws its quantitative data from its flagship [4Mi project](#), first established in Tunisia in December 2019, which continuously surveys people on the move who are 18 years of age or older. 4Mi works through a unique network of refugee and migrant monitors, who collect a set number of surveys each month through a mobile phone-based application. Following the outbreak of COVID-19 in early 2020, 4Mi adapted its data collection approach to remotely recruit and interview respondents. It developed additional training for monitors along with procedures to ensure the safe storage of personal data, a protocol for reaching respondents, and additional data validation checks. In March 2021, the research team added two new modules to the 4Mi survey to better understand the experiences of accompanied children (via their caregivers) and youth (aged 18-24 years old) (Annex A). Both the MMC research team and Save the Children International felt that a remote survey was less appropriate for reaching migrating and displaced children, as this would not allow for effective safeguarding (further detailed below in the Ethics and Safeguarding section).

This study employed qualitative data collection tools to examine the journeys and vulnerabilities of children and youth and to provide a point of triangulation with the quantitative data. Key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted with child protection and mixed migration specialists, while more open-ended and semi-structured interviews were carried out with caregivers as well as youth and children (both accompanied and unaccompanied). Semi-structured interviews allowed the research team to gain a deeper understanding of the aspirations and norms of young refugees and migrants and to delve into more sensitive topics around their vulnerabilities and coping strategies along the journey and after arrival in Tunisia.

Table 1 provides a full breakdown of the sample. The study considered factors including gender, age, origin country, and city of settlement in Tunisia in aggregating a diverse sample. Please see Annex B for a list of organizations that participated in service provider interviews.

<sup>6</sup> Service Social International (2019). *Parcours et Profils des Enfants Migrants en Tunisie*.

<sup>7</sup> However, when disaggregating by age and gender simultaneously, SSI reported there were more unaccompanied adolescent boys than girls (ages 13-18).

<sup>8</sup> UNHCR (2021). [UNHCR Tunisia Registration Fact Sheet](#).

<sup>9</sup> Service providers refer to all the protection and assistance actors providing support to refugee and migrant children, youth and caregivers.

**Table 1. Quantitative and qualitative sampling scheme**

	Target groups	Data collection instrument	Sampling criteria	Size	Gender and nationality
Quantitative	Refugees and migrants travelling with children (caregivers)	4Mi survey + module on travelling with children March to May 2021	Gender, age, origin country, city in Tunisia	73	57 women, 16 men 15 countries: Most often cited countries of origin include: Côte d'Ivoire; Nigeria; Cameroon; Sierra Leone
	Refugee and migrant youth (18-25 y.o.) on the move	4Mi survey + module on the experiences of youth March to May 2021	Gender, age, origin country, city in Tunisia  (Note: None of the youth surveyed within this population were caregivers)	54	18 women, 36 men 15 countries: Most often cited countries of origin include: Guinea; Eritrea; Gabon; Mali; Nigeria
	Refugees and migrants travelling with children (caregivers)	4Mi COVID Version 2 survey July 2020 to February 2021	Gender, age, origin country, city in Tunisia	381	223 women, 158 men 35 countries: Most often cited countries of origin include: Syria, Côte d'Ivoire, Libya
	Refugee and migrant youth (18-25 y.o.) on the move	4Mi COVID Version 2 survey July 2020 to February 2021	Gender, age, origin country, city in Tunisia	1,013	255 women, 758 men 40 countries: Most often cited countries of origin include: Eritrea, Sudan, Côte d'Ivoire
Qualitative	Refugees and migrants travelling with children	In-depth semi-structured interviews March to May 2021	Gender, origin country, city in Tunisia, length of stay	6	4 women, 2 men Côte d'Ivoire, Sudan, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Eritrea, and Guinea
	Accompanied, unaccompanied, and separated migrating and displaced children and youth	In-depth semi-structured interviews March to May 2021	Gender, age, care status, origin country, city in Tunisia, length of stay	10	3 children (2 unaccompanied, 1 accompanied; 2 girls, 1 boy) 7 youth (5 young men, 2 young Women) Burundi, Libya, Eritrea, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Cameroon, Nigeria
	Service providers (SPs) working with migrating and displaced children	Key informant interviews March to May 2021	Sample based on different profiles with whom SPs work	10	Operating in Tunis, Sfax, and Médenine

## Data analysis

Using 4Mi data, the study generated descriptive statistics to identify the profiles of indirectly sampled migrating and displaced children and youth and to better understand their journeys to and experiences within Tunisia. Researchers took care to focus on the experiences of specific sub-population groups (for example according to gender, age, and country of origin) to examine the impact of legal status, care status, and other factors on the journeys of migrating and displaced children and youth in Tunisia. The study analyzed qualitative data from service providers and refugees and migrants through thematic analysis using both inductive (arising from the data itself) and deductive (based on the aforementioned themes and child migration concepts) coding schemes. As with the quantitative data, where possible the research team aimed to analyze themes arising from data across various age, gender, and care status groups. The team then triangulated its findings using quantitative and qualitative data from migrants in Tunisia.

### **Note on the quantitative analysis**

To provide a broader picture of the experiences of migrating and displaced children and youth, the study first analyzed survey data collected between July 2020 and February 2021 from youth (n= 1,013) and caregivers (n= 381). When exploring the experiences of accompanied children (via their caregivers) and youth in greater depth, the sections drew on data collected with youth (54) and caregivers (73) from March to May 2021 through a set of more targeted questions.

### **Validity and limitations**

The study did not employ randomized sampling and does not claim that its findings are generalizable to the total population of migrating and displaced children and youth in Tunisia. Given the hidden nature of this population, it is not possible to ascertain its size and composition in order to design an externally valid sampling scheme. During data collection, the research team also found it difficult or impossible to access some of the most vulnerable population groups, including women who had just given birth, those reported to have undertaken sea journeys towards Europe, or those who had begun the repatriation process owing to difficulties during their stay in Tunisia.

Another factor that may have impacted findings was that respondents may not have been comfortable discussing their experiences with enumerators, particularly those related to protection abuses. However, none of the caregivers refused to answer any of the child-focused survey questions and just 6 youth respondents refused to answer a single question, mostly related to why a particular city was risky. This suggests that discomfort around questions may have been less of a factor in biasing data. Concerns about interviewer bias in the quantitative component of data collection were mitigated through the use of enumerators integrated into local refugee and migrant networks or currently working within organizations focused on child protection and providing them with specific training on data collection with children and youth. During semi-structured interviews, at times the research team chose to forgo asking certain sensitive questions, particularly with respondents who had clear experiences of trauma and particularly unaccompanied children.

With migrating and displaced children and youth, researchers emphasized building trust between interviewer and interviewee. Children were interviewed on the premises of Terre d'Asile Tunisie to ensure they were in a safe and familiar environment. This may have impacted the information they shared in terms of speaking freely about protection gaps. In addition, these children were already receiving assistance from an organization and therefore could not speak to the experience of those without any access to services. One interviewed child was accompanied by an older brother, potentially impacting how much they were willing to discuss.

### **Ethics and safeguarding**

All members of the team, especially those interviewing children, received training from Save the Children on child-sensitive approaches and safeguarding. The MMC Project Coordinator and 4Mi Project Manager trained 4Mi enumerators who were responsible for implementing the survey with youth and caregiver respondents. Following the training and during the course of the project, MMC and Save the Children teams closely coordinated on issues of safeguarding where questions arose, to ensure continuous coordination.

During interviews with children on the premises of Terre d'Asile Tunisie, the purpose of the interview was presented, discussed, and explained to participating children, and interviewers obtained informed consent directly from them and any caregivers in attendance. In the absence of a caregiver, additional consent was obtained from Terre d'Asile Tunisie as the main assistance provider to the children being interviewed. Trained MMC staff also conducted youth interviews in a location of their choice, after obtaining informed consent from youth interviewees. Children, caregivers, youth, and stakeholders were informed of data storage and privacy procedures and procedures to lodge feedback or complaints.

The MMC and Save the Children teams worked together to develop an orientation mechanism to be used by MMC enumerators who encountered respondents in need of assistance during quantitative data collection. This mechanism indicated the names and phone numbers of focal points in the three main centres of Tunis, Sfax, and Medenine from whom migrating and displaced children and youth could request assistance. The mechanism provided information on available services but did not act as a referral mechanism in terms of prescribing the assistance needed. One extremely vulnerable caregiver with young children was encountered during data collection and connected to partners.

# Results

## 1. Profiles of migrating and displaced children and youth in Tunisia

### Nationality

Surveyed adult refugees and migrants who had children in their care at the time of interviews provided researchers with some insight, into the nationalities of migrating and displaced children and youth, as we would expect their children to be from the same countries of origin.<sup>10</sup> Of the more than 380 caregivers surveyed between July 2020 and February 2021, a large portion came from Syria (56, or 15%), Côte d'Ivoire (54, or 14%), and Libya (52, or 14%). There were also respondents from Cameroon (23, or 6%) and Guinea (17, or 4%). While these data are not representative, they align with the key groups highlighted by service providers as well as the few UN and NGO estimates on adults. Other nationalities of caregivers of accompanied children surveyed, but not indicated by service providers, include Nigerian (31, or 8%) and Eritrean (31, or 8%). These groups may be less often identified for assistance by service providers as these communities are more likely to speak English whereas services tend to be provided in Arabic or French.

Service providers perceived changing trends in relation to the nationalities of young refugees and migrants in Tunisia. They highlighted that at the time of data collection they were witnessing an increase in Guinean and Cameroonian children and youth seeking out their services, relative to beneficiaries from Sierra Leone, Sudan, and Côte d'Ivoire, who were previously more numerous. Service providers highlighted the prevalence of Syrians and Ivorians among children under the age of 13 and noted that children of these nationalities were often accompanied by a caregiver.<sup>11</sup>

### Age and gender

Most interviewed stakeholders noted that there were equivalent numbers of young girls and young boys on the move in Tunisia. In addition, while accompanied children ranged in ages, stakeholders noted that most unaccompanied or separated youth were above the age of 12. Data from various stakeholders provide varying information on the gender breakdown of this cohort. The 73 caregivers surveyed using MMC's more in-depth module from March to May 2021 reported having between 1 and 4 children in their care,<sup>12</sup> of ages ranging from less than one year old to 16 years old, with an almost equal share of girls and boys. This data confirms the observations of stakeholders regarding accompanied children in Tunisia. Figure 3 depicts the ages of all children within the care of adults whom MMC surveyed. Notably, 13 out of 73 respondents had a child with a disability in their care.

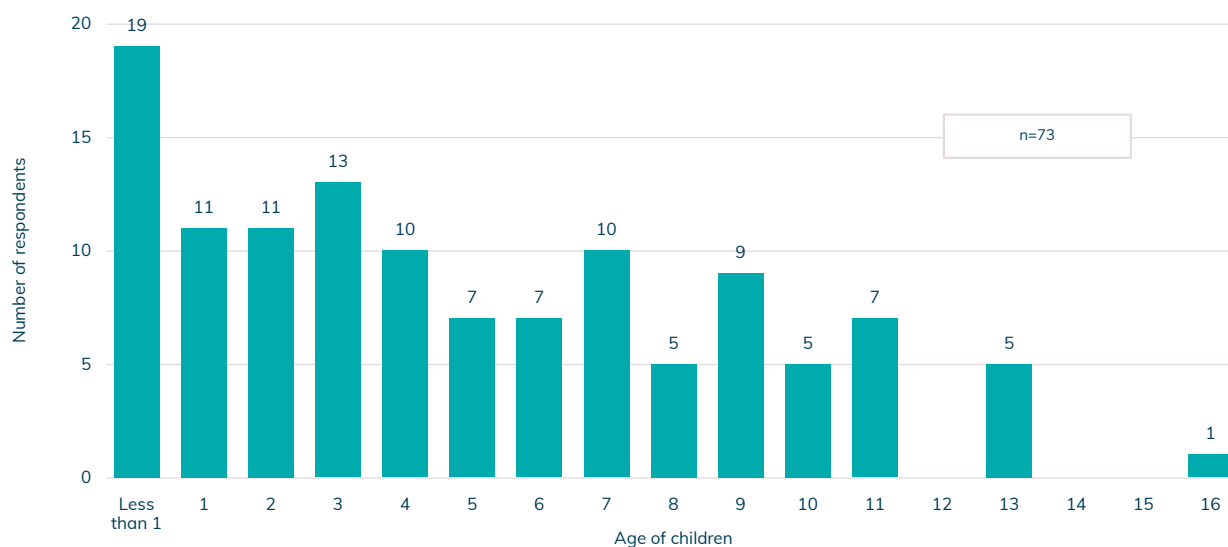
The majority of the 73 caregivers were women (57 as compared to 16 men) and were between the ages of 23 and 42, with a median age of 31. Nearly two-thirds (47) of the surveyed adults reported that they were the only caregiver to their child. When disaggregating by the caregiver's gender, 36 of the 57 women caregivers and 11 of the 16 men noted that they were sole caregivers.

10 The 73 caregivers more recently surveyed hailed from 15 origin countries, mainly including Côte d'Ivoire (n=16), Nigeria (n=9), Sierra Leone (n=7), Cameroon (n=7), Somalia (n=6), and Guinea (n=6). Additionally, the 54 surveyed youth represent 15 nationalities, most notably Guinean (n=10), Eritrean (n=7), Gabonese (5), Malian (5), and Nigerian (5).

11 Service provider KII

12 At the time of the survey, 41 caregivers had 1 child in their care, 17 had 2 children, 11 had 3 children, and 4 had 4 children in their care.

**Figure 3. Select the ages of all your children. (Caregivers)**



Among the youth respondents surveyed between July 2020 and February 2021, one-quarter were female (255) while three-quarters were male (758). Among the 54 youth surveyed using MMC's more in-depth module from March to May 2021, just under one-third reported that they started their journey before turning 18 (16 out of 54), which has specific implications in terms of needs and provision of services. None of the youth surveyed with this module were caregivers themselves.

## 2. Drivers

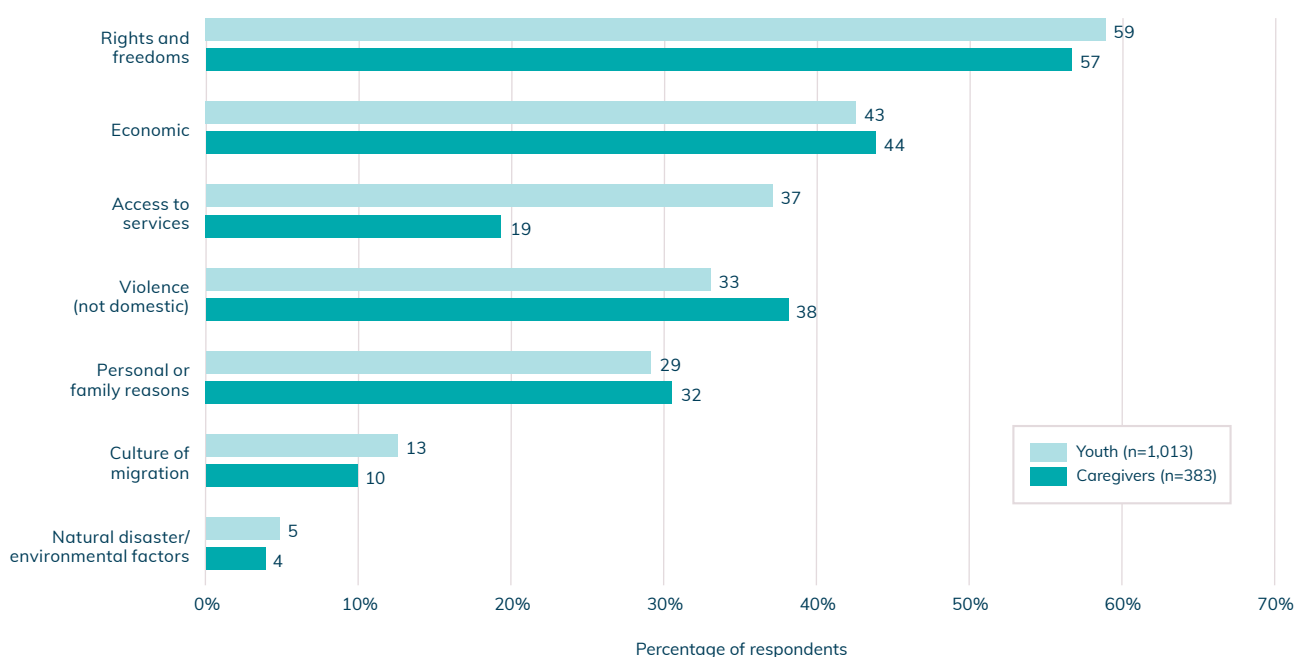
The qualitative and quantitative data highlight several drivers impacting the journeys of children and youth to Tunisia (Figure 4). These include rights and freedoms; economic factors; violence, insecurity and conflict; and personal or family reasons. This section explores the most common of these drivers.<sup>13</sup>

The multiplicity of drivers for both accompanied children and youth underscores the complexity of their movement decision-making. More than three-quarters of the 381 caregivers surveyed between July 2020 and February 2021 cited multiple drivers impacting their movement (289 out of 381, or 76%). The survey found a median of two drivers per accompanied child. Findings were similar among youth surveyed in the same period, with a median of two drivers per respondent and more than three-quarters of respondents citing multiple drivers of migration (799 out of 1,013, or 79%). While the complexity of migration decision-making is firmly established in migration literature related to adults traveling alone, this study found similar complexities for people traveling with children and youth. A 16-year-old unaccompanied Cameroonian boy reported having fled attacks connected to the Anglophone crisis at the age of 14 and then undergoing a migration journey with a caregiver before being separated in Tunisia.

Surveyed caregivers cited rights, freedoms, and violence as well as economic, personal, or family reasons among their key migration drivers, whereas youth cited rights and freedoms, economic reasons, access to services, and violence (Figure 4). The largest discrepancy in drivers between caregivers and youth involved access to services, which was cited by 37% of youth but only 19% of caregivers. This discrepancy may stem from the fact that a large portion of surveyed youth came to Tunisia in search of better educational opportunities, potentially due to a lack of opportunities at home.

<sup>13</sup> As mentioned in the methodology section, we draw upon caregiver data as we would expect it to provide some insight into the drivers shaping the journeys of the children within their care, while acknowledging that children also exhibit agency and may shape the migration decision-making of their caregivers. Where possible, we complement this with data from qualitative interviews with children.

**Figure 4. For what reasons did you leave your origin country? (multiselect; July 2020-February 2021)**



### Violence and rights violations

Nearly two-thirds of surveyed caregivers and youth (57% and 59% respectively, surveyed between July 2020 and February 2021) cited a lack of rights and freedoms as key drivers of migration. In the more targeted survey, responses varied with 28 of the 73 surveyed caregivers and 18 of the 54 surveyed refugee and migrant youth noting that they had left their country of origin due to violence, insecurity and conflict. 23 of the 73 caregivers and 15 of the 54 youth reported moving due to a lack of rights and freedoms. Certain forms of violence also appeared as specific drivers for young respondents, particularly adolescent girls, such as sexual and gender-based violence, child marriage, female genital mutilation, and rape. A 14-year-old unaccompanied Congolese (DRC) girl reported: “After my father passed away, my father’s family decided to forcefully marry me. My mother refused and asked me to travel.” An accompanied 14-year-old Libyan girl stated: “We lived in Sebha in Libya. It is not secure at all. Our 17-year-old neighbor was kidnapped and raped [...]. Especially for women, Sebha is not a place to live...The mentality in Sebha kills every woman’s rights.”

### Educational opportunities

Many sub-Saharan children and youth come to Tunisia for educational opportunities, particularly those from Francophone countries. Key informants highlighted that there are approximately 10,000 sub-Saharan African students in Tunisia, of more than 25 nationalities. 21 of the 54 surveyed young migrants noted that the lack of good educational opportunities in their origin countries was a factor in their decision to migrate. A majority of those 21 respondents came from Francophone countries including Burkina Faso, Chad, Côte d’Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gabon, Guinea, and Mali.<sup>14</sup> Semi-structured interviews with youth revealed a perception that Tunisia offers better educational opportunities at the tertiary level than sub-Saharan countries and cheaper tuition fees than those in Europe. A 23-year-old man from Burundi reported: “I was already seeing Tunisia as the most developed country in Africa with very good education structures.” A 20-year-old Congolese man noted: “I chose Tunisia because it was cheaper than going to Europe or France and it is a developed and well-organized country.” While Tunisian universities actively recruit students in countries with visa-free access to Tunisia, some young students also come spontaneously and look for relevant study options once they are already in the country.<sup>15</sup>

While, as noted above, many respondents reported a lack of appropriate tertiary education opportunities in their origin countries, no surveyed stakeholder, refugee, or migrant cited primary or secondary education as a driver for migration to Tunisia.

<sup>14</sup> When disaggregating by gender, young women more often noted moving given a lack of educational opportunities (9 of 18) as compared to their young male peers (12 of 36).

<sup>15</sup> Individuals coming from these countries of origin have the right to reside in Tunisia on a tourist visa valid during 90 days: Algeria, Angola, Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Comoros, Côte d’Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, The Gambia, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Mauritius, Morocco, Namibia, Niger, Senegal, Seychelles and South Africa.



## Economic opportunities

Sub-Saharan children and youth, particularly those who qualify for visa-free access, look to Tunisia for labor market opportunities.<sup>16</sup> This was also shown by previous MMC research on refugee and migrant adults who came to Tunisia from certain Francophone countries in West Africa with visa-free access, including Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, Guinea and Mali.<sup>17</sup> 30 of the 54 youth respondents noted leaving their origin countries due to economic reasons. When further queried on the specific reasons they left their origin country, youth most often noted that they were not earning enough in their job at home.

## Aspirations for children

When caregivers were surveyed about the ways in which traveling with a child had influenced their destination decision-making, approximately half (35 out of 73) affirmed that their decision-making was shaped by their perceptions of the prospect for a better job to support their children in the destination country. More than half of the sole caregivers surveyed noted selecting their destination country because it offered higher wages to support their children (26 out of 47). While economic factors featured highly among the drivers of movement, respondents often paired them with drivers related to protection concerns: 15 caregivers who cited economic factors also cited a lack of rights and freedoms in their countries of origin, while 16 cited violence and insecurity.

## Other drivers

18 out of 73 caregivers cited personal and family issues as drivers of migration in the quantitative survey, although they did not often detail these in qualitative interviews. These issues included family reunification, joining friends abroad, ill health in the family, the death of a spouse, and forced marriage. 7 out of 54 surveyed youth noted personal and family reasons for migration, such as family reunification, joining friends abroad, and getting married abroad. Youth respondents also cited a culture of migration (15 out of 54)- everybody around them was leaving, which influenced their decision to leave.

A Tunis-based service provider highlighted that “There is active recruitment in the countries of origin by Tunisian universities, but also by football teams, the ‘dream seller ticket.’ They very often arrive here, and their abilities are tested.” Following this testing, they explained, “If they are not of the requisite level, they are abandoned by the clubs in the street, in precarious and irregular situations.”

# 3. Mixed migration routes for children and youth

Children, youth, and caregivers (accompanied children) take many routes to Tunisia, including land, air, and sea routes. This section examines various means of transportation, direct versus indirect routes, onward migration aspirations, and protection concerns along these routes.

## Means of transportation

Survey data reveal that youth and accompanied children are roughly similar in terms of the means of transportation they use for their journeys (Figure 5). The only exception involves traveling by plane. Just under half of surveyed youth traveled by plane as compared to approximately one-third of accompanied children. While samples are limited and should be taken with caution, the data suggest that migrants’ countries of origin may influence these dynamics, mostly likely linked to visa requirements. The dynamics differ substantially between those from West and East Africa. For example, of the Ivorian caregivers surveyed, 14 out of 16 noted travelling by plane, along with all 3 Senegalese caregivers and 3 out of 4 Syrian caregivers. Only one of the surveyed youth was Ivorian, but he too had traveled by plane. Among the surveyed youth, all 5 Gabonese and all 4 Burkinabe respondents noted arriving by plane, along with 5 out of 10 Guinean respondents. One Ivorian caregiver who had arrived by plane explained in an interview: “We came directly by plane. We didn't need a visa, and I knew it well because before I could come and go to Côte d'Ivoire easily because I had the residence permit.” Notably, no youth or caregiver respondents from Chad, Sudan, Eritrea, or Somalia arrived via plane. The difference between youth and caregivers in use of flights may be explained by the fact

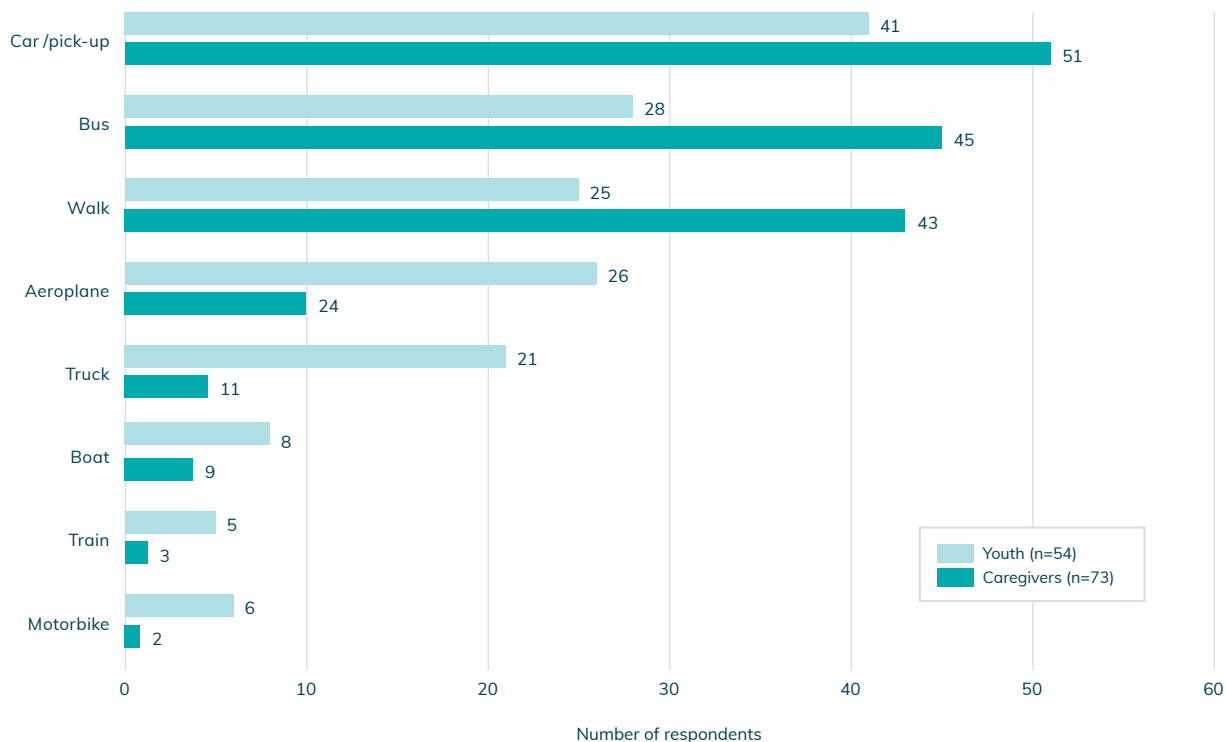
<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Mixed Migration Centre (2020). [Urban Mixed Migration Tunis Case Study](#).

that youth more often travel for international student migration or job recruitment, so this subset is more able to afford air travel.

Cars are by far the most cited means of transportation for both caregivers and youth, followed by buses. Walking was the third most cited mode of travel for accompanied children and fourth most cited for youth, outstripping movement by truck, boat (including crossings from Libya and disembarkations in Tunisia following attempts to move to Europe), train, and motorbike. More than half of youth and accompanied children had to walk during portions of their route, underlining how difficult these journeys can be.

**Figure 5. Which means of transportation have you used during your journey?**



Key informant interviews and survey data indicated that air travel provides the safest route into Tunisia. On the other hand, interviewed youth and caregivers highlighted protection concerns following arrival at Tunisian land borders or shores following boat crossings from Libya or disembarkations in Tunisia after failed attempts to cross the Mediterranean. Caregivers raised specific concerns involving the Libyan side of the Tunisia-Libya border, including young children who risked dehydration or crying out and being discovered by authorities or other perpetrators, such as traffickers. This is further detailed below in the section on protection concerns.

### Movements through various countries to Tunisia

A majority of surveyed youth and caregivers noted that Tunisia was a secondary destination choice, following initial journeys to Libya and Algeria, although it was unclear if these countries were migrants' intended destinations or just stops along the route.<sup>18</sup> This was supported in the surveys conducted between July 2020 and February 2021, in which more than 60% of caregivers (229 out of 381) and youth (637 out of 1,013) noted passing through Libya on their journey to Tunisia, while nearly 20% of caregivers (66 out of 381) and over 10% of youth (103 out of 1,013) reported passing through Algeria.

Some respondents noted the relative safety that migrants enjoy in Tunisia, as compared to the violence and persecution they often endure in other North African countries. A mother from Sierra Leone referred to Tunisia as an "intermediate plan" while she intended to move to Europe, and stated: "I was raped in Libya, and when I realized that I was pregnant I decided to leave for Tunisia because Libya is not safe for my children. I gave birth here in Médenine." A Guinean mother highlighted a similar experience: "Once in Libya, I was arrested after trying to take the boat and raped in the prison. That's how I got pregnant. When I left the prison I saw people from Eritrea and Somalia escaping Libya to

18 Of the 73 surveyed caregivers, 35 had passed Libya on their journey to Tunisia, and 11 had passed Algeria. 2 caregivers had passed both Libya and Algeria. Of the 54 surveyed youth, 16 had passed Libya, and 7 had passed Algeria. 4 youth had passed both Libya and Algeria.

Tunisia so I joined them.” She credited her choice of Tunisia to the relative safety it offered her child: “His safety came first. This is why I preferred to have him grow up in Tunisia rather than in Libya.”

Some youth and caregiver respondents moved to Tunisia after experiencing racism and xenophobia in Libya and Algeria. One 23-year-old Nigerian noted: “The journey was long but not dangerous. My father paid the smuggler fees and I brought my savings with me. My goal was to come to any Northern African country. I went to Algeria and stayed in Oran but I faced a lot of problems with locals because they always wanted to steal my belongings and police would always arrest me just for being black. So I decided to come to Tunisia.”<sup>19</sup>

Semi-structured interviews with unaccompanied and accompanied children and youth revealed that some had attempted the sea crossing from Libya but were returned to Tunisia. This was the case for three sub-Saharan and Libyan respondents. A 21-year-old Eritrean man in Sfax explained:

*“My goal wasn't to come to Tunisia. I and around 60 other refugees had an agreement with a smuggler in Azzawya, Libya, to take us to Italy. The smuggler made us ride an inflatable boat, and he told us that we were on our own and left. We had no choice but to risk it hoping that we could reach Italy. The engine broke and we spent four days at sea without GPS or enough provisions until some local fishermen found us and informed Tunisian coast guards who came and rescued us and brought us to Sfax.”*

The qualitative data revealed cases in which child and youth respondents moved to Tunisia to seek protection following a failed sea crossing. A 14-year-old accompanied Libyan girl noted: “When my older brother decided that we would all migrate, we moved from Sebha to Zwara and then we tried to take the boat to Europe, but we failed. My brother had to sell everything we had so we could leave. When we failed to cross the sea, we walked for a long distance to the Tunisian border.”

### **Onward migration aspirations**

As highlighted in the previous section, several of those surveyed noted that Tunisia was an unintended or interim destination, rather than their intended final stop. Of those surveyed between July 2020 and February 2021, less than 7% of caregivers (26 out of 381), and 8% of youth (81 out of 1,013) noted that Tunisia was their final destination. The surveyed caregivers often cited Europe<sup>20</sup> (114, or 30%), Canada (56, or 15%), and France (34, or 9%) as intended destinations. Surveyed youth cited Europe (313, or 31%), France (103, or 10%), and Canada (101, or 10%). Some noted uncertainty with 15% of caregivers (57 out of 381) and 8% of youth (78 out of 1,013) highlighting that they did not know whether they had reached the end of their journey. Among all surveyed refugee and migrant youth and caregivers, only one noted that Tunisia was their final destination.

Limited work opportunities and economic vulnerability were often noted as factors shaping onward movement. A Guinean caregiver highlighted: “I want to go to Canada with my son, but through a legal way. To have a better school for my child and to find work for me, with more secure jobs and no risks of being kicked out or not paid.” A service provider in Médenine explained: “Tunisia is not a final destination. They want to go to Europe. They know that the refugee status in Tunisia is not too effective and does not open the doors to work.”

Students who initially sought to remain and work in Tunisia were especially vocal about the limited economic opportunities. A 20-year-old Congolese (DRC) man stated: “At first I thought I could find a job here after I finished my studies. But...it is very difficult to find work. Tunisia does not allow foreigners to work. But I could do small training here (internship). After my studies I think either I'll go to another country (but I don't know) or go back to Congo.”

Other students discussed their intentions to return home, as they viewed their academic degrees from Tunis as an advantage when entering their home job markets. One young man from Côte d'Ivoire stated: “The reason is that in Côte d'Ivoire there are a lot of young people, a lot of graduates. Everyone has the same diplomas so they give a lot of value to foreign diplomas. It will be very good to find work in the future if I come back with a diploma from Tunisia. I will be able to find work faster.” Others are seeking to pursue advanced degrees in other countries. A Burundian youth reported: “For myself, Tunisia is not my final destination. I am planning to resume my studies in either Cyprus or Belgium.”

19 Of the 54 youth respondents, 12 noted that their parents were the biggest influence on their decision to migrate.

20 Many respondents did not have a specific European country in mind, but aspired more generally to reach Europe.

Limited access to safe migration channels and protection concerns along alternative, irregular routes also shape the migration aspirations of many caregivers and youth on the move in Tunisia. Many noted a lack of options in continuing their journey given the costs and risks. An Ivorian mother reported feeling temporarily stuck in Tunisia: “Before, I thought I could go to France from here. But the only option is the boat...I don't think my son has a future here, and the boat is too risky.” In several key informant interviews, refugees and migrants noted having attempted the sea crossing but having been returned to Tunisia.

When children were queried during semi-structured interviews on their migration aspirations, most noted that they had yet to make any decisions. Unaccompanied children stated that they would like to stay in Tunisia but only if they could access appropriate schooling. An unaccompanied 14-year-old Congolese girl noted: “I asked to join the school. An Ivorian friend helped me talk to UNHCR and IOM, who said I have to wait until next year. I will study first and then I will decide according to the information I have if I will stay in Tunisia.” Those who could not obtain schooling in their language in Tunisia stated that their choice of destination would be based on access to education. All three unaccompanied children highlighted a desire to attend school and increase their integration with peers. One Libyan girl said: “I want to go to another country where I can study in English.”

### **Protection and rights concerns along the journey**

This final section about the journeys of children and youth focuses on specific discussions with respondents about the protection challenges they faced in route to Tunisia. More than four-fifths of both caregivers and youth noted risks along their journey, with just 16% of caregivers (60 out of 381) and 18% of youth (183 out of 1,013) noting that nowhere along their route was dangerous.

97% of caregivers (221 out of 229) who passed through Libya said it was the most dangerous place along their route, along with 93% of youth (595 out of 637). Many of those who took an overland journey, particularly between Libya and Tunisia, noted the difficulty of the crossing. Caregivers traveling with children under the age of five emphasized this both in key informant interviews and in survey responses. One Sudanese father noted: “When moving from Libya to Tunisia it was super hard holding two kids and walking for hours in the Libyan desert.” A mother from Sierra Leone explained: “I crossed the land borders. I was alone and pregnant. I was very sick, I had to walk two days in the desert towards the borders instead of 10 hours because I was sick.” Surveyed caregivers noted the risk that travelling with young children posed at border crossings, as children suffering dehydration and sickness were often unable to remain silent and hide in risky situations. Multiple caregivers and their children also expressed the risk of being identified and detained, particularly in Libya, though it was not clear if they were referring to detention by authorities, local militias, or smugglers.

Over two-fifths of the surveyed caregivers (28 out of 56) and just under half of the youth (48 out of 103) who transited through Algeria identified it as the most dangerous country along their route.

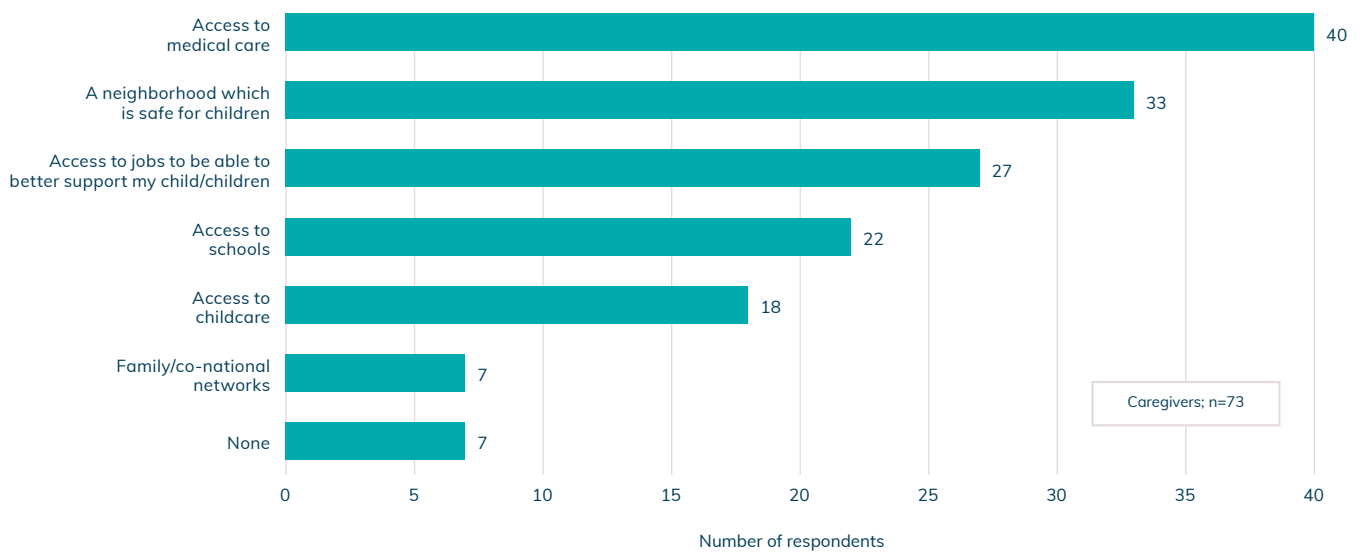
## **4. Experiences of refugee and migrant children and youth in Tunisia**

After making the journey to Tunisia, caregivers, children, and youth must decide where to settle and how to access basic rights and services including healthcare and schooling. This section explores the experiences of children, youth, and caregivers settling in Tunisia.

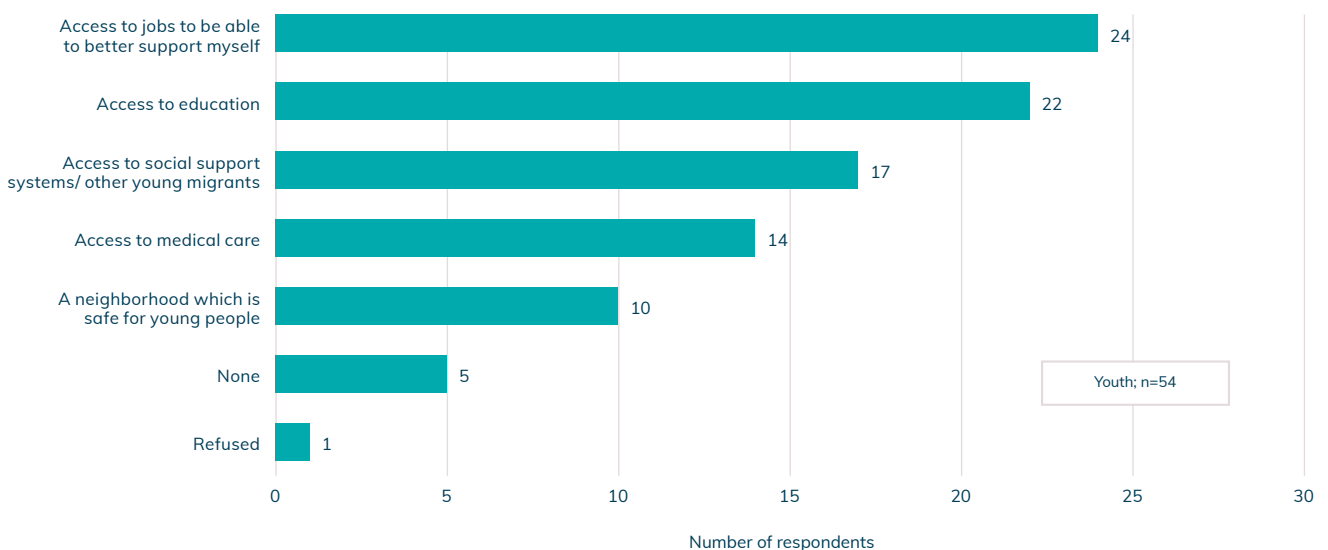
### **Settlement patterns**

Decision-making patterns regarding settlement in Tunisia vary among surveyed refugee and migrant caregivers and youth. More than half of surveyed caregivers (40 out of 73) noted that access to medical care was a key factor in their choice of city of residence in Tunisia, while smaller numbers cited access to neighborhood safety (33 out of 73) or jobs to better support their children (27 out of 73) as key factors (Figure 6). Young refugees and migrants, on the other hand, highlighted access to better jobs, education, and social support as key factors driving their choice of city of residence in Tunisia (Figure 7).

**Figure 6. In what ways has travelling with children influenced the city you have decided to stay in for the time being in Tunisia?**



**Figure 7. In what ways has travelling while being young influenced where you have decided to stay for the time being in Tunisia?**



One interviewed service provider explained that some refugees and migrants move to the capital after arriving to Tunisia, both because of the greater opportunities available and the faster asylum procedures: “Those who enter from the south apply for asylum. It takes time in the South so they travel north to speed up the procedure and look for better conditions.”

### Access to documentation

Some interviewed refugee and migrant youth and caregivers noted difficulties in applying for a residency permit (*carte de séjour*) in Tunisia. A 20-year-old Congolese migrant noted a lack of clarity in the procedure and the multiple barriers he faced in obtaining a residency permit:

“Even to get the residence permit I fought alone and it was very complicated. The agents who work in the offices do not speak French and they do not know the information. They make you submit the same things several times. The system is very difficult, and the rules change at random. I had to pay 40 TND (\$15 USD) to register for finance receipts and make four certified copies of the housing contract...but my friends who did this before me had not done that.”

An Ivorian mother told interviewers: "I've been trying to do the papers on my own. I put a lot of money aside, paid the fees, and my application was rejected. I just lost money." It can also be difficult for caregivers who give birth within Tunisia to get appropriate documentation for their child. While a birth certificate can be produced if requested within 15 days of a child's birth, birth within the territory of Tunisia does not necessarily confer citizenship. If a birth certificate is not requested within 15 days, the caregiver needs to seek legal assistance to obtain the document.<sup>21</sup>

In two semi-structured interviews with refugee and migrant youth, the respondents said that even when one has proper documentation, one can still face administrative barriers with Tunisian ministries and services. At times, there is limited understanding among administrative staff of refugee status and its associated card, perhaps due to the lack of a domestic asylum law.<sup>22</sup>

## Access to childcare

Surveyed refugee and migrant caregivers, particularly sole caregivers, expressed the need for childcare services to allow them to work to support their children. As mentioned previously, 47 out of the 73 interviewed caregivers were sole caregivers, most of whom were women. Several of these explained that the price of daycare in Tunisia was unaffordable. A 30-year-old mother of two from Côte d'Ivoire surveyed in Tunis noted: "As a single mother it is very difficult to support my children alone. I could not put the children in daycare; I do not have the means. To support my sons, I do hairdressing at home and I often have to accept men's appointments to have some money."

The prohibitive cost of daycare can place caregivers and their children at increased risk of protection violations. One interviewed Nigerian caregiver explained that begging was her only option to earn an income, and due to a lack of childcare options, she brought her children with her to beg on the streets. Others who were able to afford childcare noted the existence of nurseries that cater specifically to sub-Saharan African refugees and migrants. One respondent described a nursery in which African staff looked after refugee and migrant children while Tunisian staff minded Tunisian children: "[My son] goes to a nursery, an African crèche in l'Aouina, from Monday to Friday. It costs 250 TND [\$90 USD] per month. The Nigerian, he only cares for African children, but the director of the nursery is a Tunisian woman and there are also Tunisians."

## Access to work

Among the 54 surveyed youth, 12 had jobs, 9 were working and studying at the same time, 11 were only studying, and 22 were neither studying nor working. While nearly half of the surveyed young men were neither studying nor working (17 out of 36), less than one-third of the surveyed young women were neither studying nor working (5 out of 18). A 21-year-old Nigerian man explained "I usually go looking for jobs at construction sites or painting, but the latter is difficult to find. If I don't find anything I stay home or hang out with some friends I met here."

The limited legal framework for refugee and migrant employment in Tunisia exposes them to the risk of labor exploitation and precarity, hindering social and economic integration. Interviews with students and a student association underlined a discrepancy between the active recruitment of sub-Saharan students to enroll in Tunisian universities and the absence of opportunities for them to join the Tunisian job market during school or upon graduation. A stakeholder noted: "It would have been wonderful for many of these students to be able to work a little here, one or three years, before returning home and becoming points of contact between Tunisia and their country of origin, and to really act to transfer skills or facilitate regional trade. It would be a win-win for everyone!"

As noted in the previous section, a lack of affordable childcare options impacts caregivers' ability to find work, which constrains their ability to pay for childcare, thus perpetuating a vicious cycle. A mother from Sierra Leone highlighted: "It's very difficult to find a job with children because I can't leave them somewhere. Bosses accept women with children aged 10 or over." Many mothers who lack secondary caregivers to help them with their children during working hours cannot accept jobs in certain industries. An Ivorian mother noted: "I cannot work on weekends or in the evening in a cafe or restaurant for example. I cannot work double hours, because I have to take care of [my son]." Another mother from Guinea emphasized: "I work sometimes in houses [cleaning], and I leave my child with my friend while she works during nights in cafes."

---

21 Tunisian Code of Nationality (January 26, 1956)

22 While Tunisia is party to the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, the drafting of the country's national asylum law has been at an impasse since 2012. With no asylum law in place, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) remains the sole entity within the country in charge of refugee status determination (RSD).

## Access to education

Under Tunisian law, all children are supposed to have access to education, but many factors impact children's ability to attend school.<sup>23</sup> A mother from Sierra Leone stated: "There are those [refugees and migrants] who do not know that their child has the right to education." Unaccompanied children may not be aware of their own rights. Respondents also reported that even if caregivers understand their children's right to education, some schools have racist tendencies and refuse to accept refugee and migrant children, as one interviewed caregiver highlighted:

*"I really regret having brought my daughter to Tunisia...I can't find a school for my daughter. Once I went to see a school and the principal told me bluntly that their school was not made for blacks. At least if she had told me that the school wasn't made for foreigners I would have understood, but her way of speaking shocked me. I called all the NGOs for my daughter's school, and they didn't do anything for me."*

Many caregivers noted that their children encountered linguistic challenges, as they faced economic barriers to accessing linguistically specialized schools. An Ivorian mother noted:

*"[My son] is five years old. He will be 6 years old soon and will have to go to school. At the nursery everything is mixed—French, English, Arabic—and at home he plays with the little Tunisian neighbours. But I don't want him to go to an Arabic school where he doesn't learn written French. I would really like to put him in French school but it's too expensive. I inquired."*

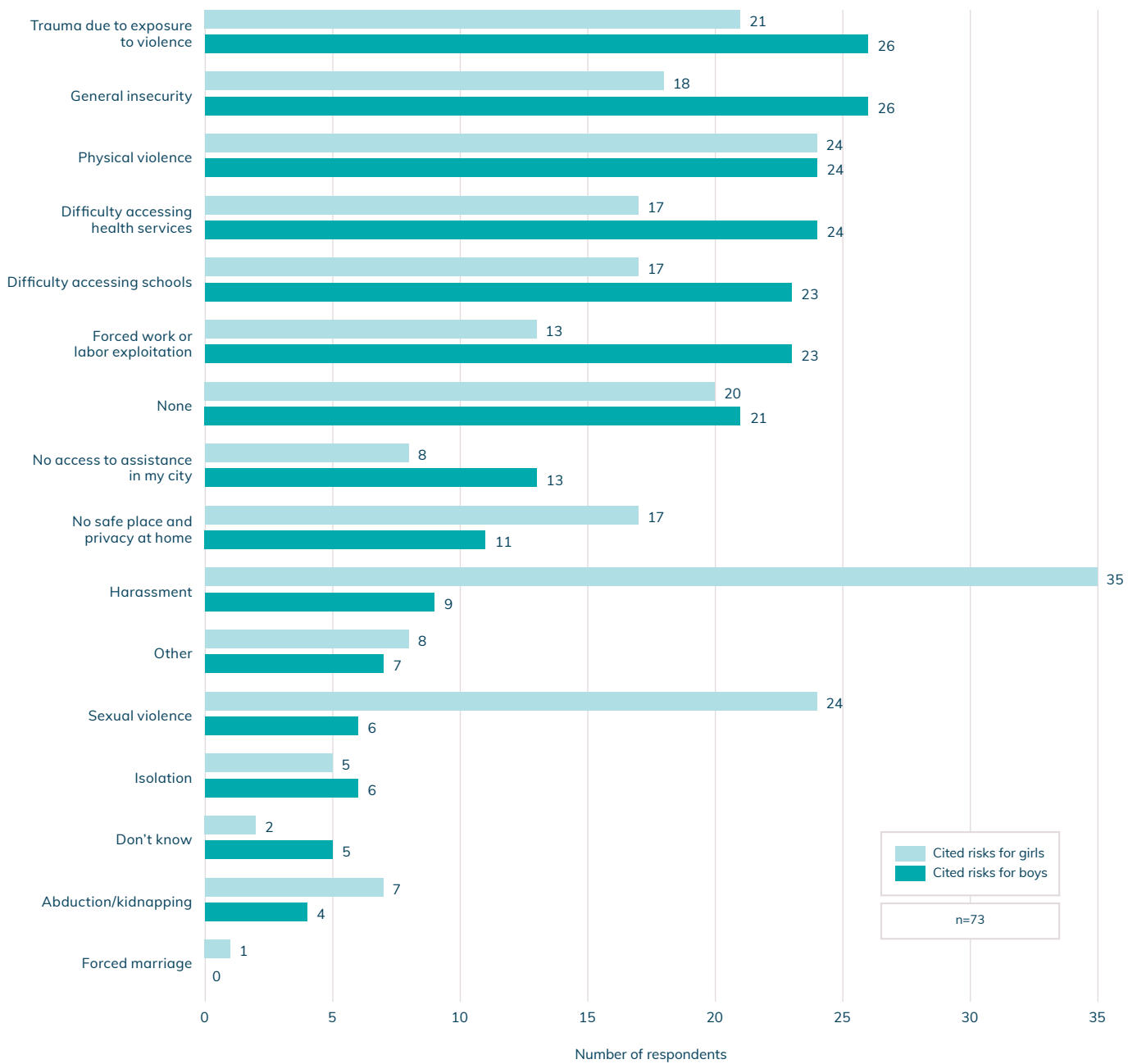
Surveyed service providers agreed that a priori access to education is in place for all children in Tunisia, regardless of country of origin, but no system exists to actively target the integration of refugee and migrant children. While service providers did not discuss as explicitly the racism and xenophobia reported by interviewed refugees and migrants, they noted the need to address language barriers and improve training of instructors who teach refugee and migrant children with different needs than those of Tunisian children. An unaccompanied Anglophone Cameroonian boy noted that it was difficult to find educational opportunities in English. Children's access to education has an impact on caregivers' migration aspirations, separate from the impact it has on children's own wellbeing and aspirations. Both of these factors will be further examined in subsequent sections.

## 5. Vulnerability to protection violations in Tunisia

As previously discussed in Section 3, Tunisia is perceived as a comparatively safe country in the region for refugee and migrant children and youth. Under 5% of youth (50 out of 1,013) and only 6% of caregivers (22 out of 381) surveyed by 4Mi from July 2020 to February 2021 identified Tunisia as the most dangerous location along their journey. Nonetheless, refugee and migrant children and youth remain vulnerable to protection violations, including harassment, physical and sexual violence, general insecurity, and forced work. This section examines in-depth survey data collected from March to May 2021 on protection risks, including various protection abuses disaggregated by gender and location in Tunisia, and explores key protection themes arising from the qualitative data in relation to isolation and integration, sexual exploitation and abuse, begging, and discrimination.

<sup>23</sup> Article 47 of the Tunisian Constitution notes: "Children are guaranteed the rights to dignity, health, care and education from their parents and the state. The state must provide all types of protection to all children without discrimination and in accordance with their best interest." Additionally, in line with the protections set out in the International Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), ratified by Tunisia in 1992, on November 9, 1995, the country enacted a national child protection code (Code de la Protection de L'Enfant; CPE) through Law n° 95-92. Moreover, regardless of nationality, the CPE guarantees the child access to various social, health, and educational services.

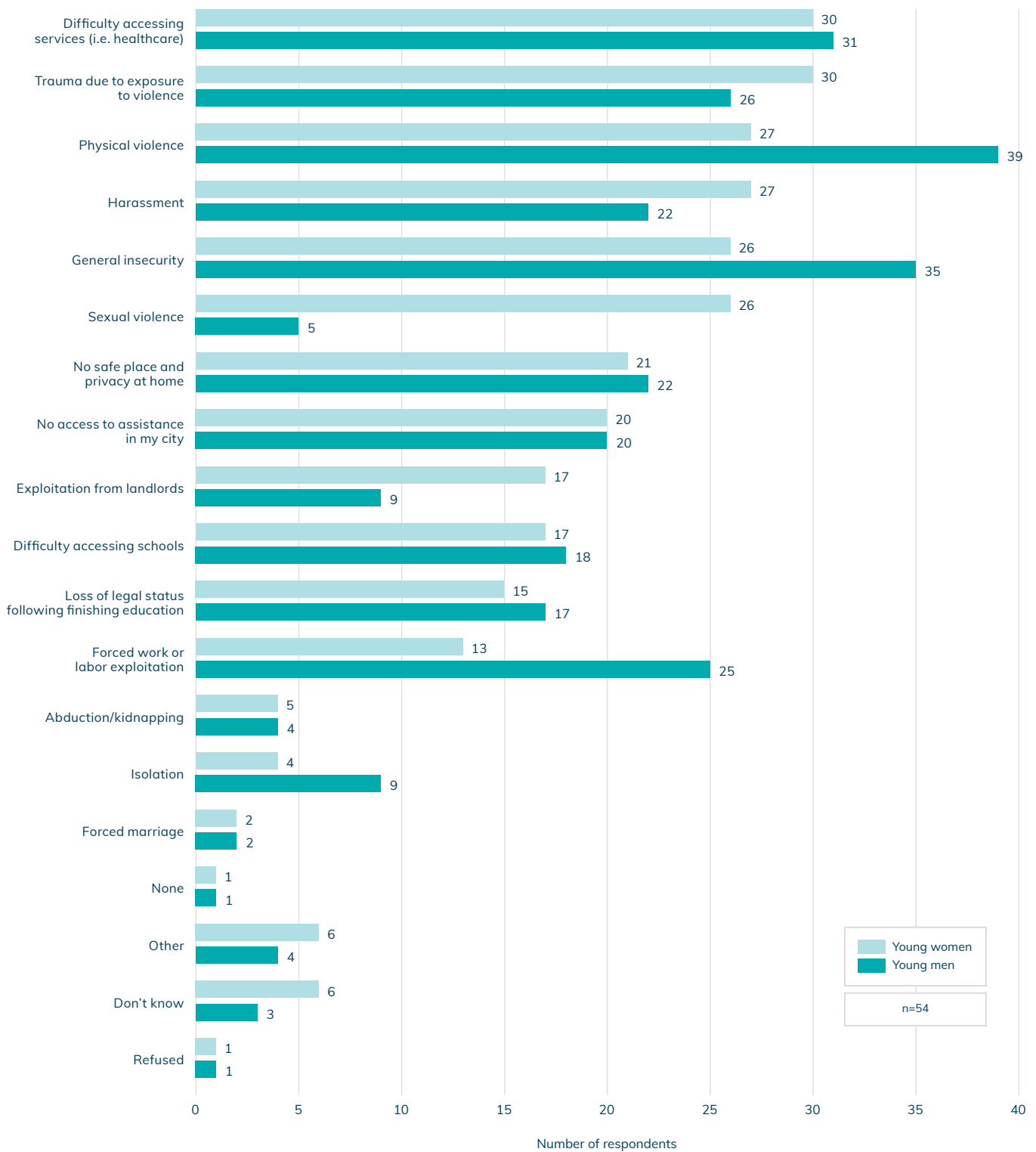
**Figure 8. What risks do [boy/girl] refugees and migrants face in Tunisia?**



Figures 8 and 9 reveal the gender-specific risks for children and youth. Girls and young women are perceived as more exposed to harassment, sexual violence, and, in the case of young women, exploitation by landlords. Boys and young men are perceived as more exposed to forced labor, exploitation, and physical violence. Children and youth were perceived as exposed to trauma and general insecurity.



**Figure 9. What risks do young [men/women] refugees and migrants face in Tunisia?**



## Protection abuses by location in Tunisia

The majority of caregivers either agreed (34 of 73) or strongly agreed (7) that the city or neighborhood they in which they currently live is safe for the children in their care. Caregivers in Medenine in particular (19 out of 21) either agreed or strongly agreed that they lived in a safe place for children. This sense of safety may be relative, as all but one had arrived in Tunisia after transiting across Libya.

In contrast to the caregivers, out of the 8 youth respondents in Medenine, only 3 agreed that their current city or neighborhood was safe, while 5 neither agreed nor disagreed. In Greater Tunis (including Ben Arous and Ariana), 14 out of 34 respondents disagreed and 5 strongly disagreed that their city was safe. Among the 8 respondents in Sfax, 2 strongly disagreed, 1 disagreed and 3 neither agreed nor disagreed that their city was safe. These data reveal a higher perception of risk among youth than their caregiver counterparts, across all of the cities of settlement.

When further prompted on risk, surveyed youth noted that the riskiest city for young migrants in Tunisia was Greater Tunis (17 of 54, 4 of whom specified the city of Ariana), followed by Sfax (8), Medenine (4, including the commune of Zarzis), and Nabeul (1). Notably, 10 respondents refused to answer this question, 8 answered that they did not know, and 3 stated that no cities are risky. The respondents who identified Greater Tunis as the riskiest city specifically cited the risk of robbery (15 of 17), general insecurity due to local gangs (14), and sexual abuse (11).<sup>24</sup> Some respondents also cited the risk of arbitrary detention (8) and being trafficked (6). The eight respondents who identified Sfax as the riskiest city cited the risk of being trafficked and robbery (7 each), followed by arbitrary detention (6), general insecurity (5), and sexual abuse (5).

## Harassment and physical violence

While many caregiver respondents noted that the city or neighborhood in which they currently lived was safe for the children in their care, many also reported that children were at risk of various protection concerns. Interviewed youth and caregivers frequently cited harassment and physical violence as common experiences. Caregivers travelling with children reported that physical violence was a common risk for children (24 of 73 for girls and boys). Harassment was a commonly noted risk for girls (35 for girls and 9 for boys). An Ivorian mother explained that she avoided taking the bus with her 5-year-old boy to avoid exposing him to racial slurs or harassment. Physical violence was the most cited challenge for young men (39), while harassment was noted as affecting both young men (22) and women (27).

## Sexual exploitation and abuse

35 of the 73 surveyed caregivers noted that girls were at risk of harassment, and 24 out of 73 noted that they were at risk of sexual abuse. Youth on the move often cited sexual harassment as a risk to young women refugees and migrants (26 of 54). A service provider in Sfax highlighted the risk of adolescent girls being drawn into prostitution, citing a case where a 16-year-old girl victim of trafficking died following violence and sexual exploitation. Another service provider in Tunis emphasized that young girls, particularly those carrying out domestic work, were vulnerable to sexual exploitation. Some service providers also noted the risk to boys of sexual exploitation and abuse, particularly when linked to trafficking and drug networks.

## Forced labor and begging

23 of the 73 surveyed caregivers noted that boys were often at risk of forced labor. A mother from Sierra Leone highlighted: "Children more than 10 years old are at risk of walking in the street and begging, because their families push them." Unaccompanied or unattended children who live in bigger housing communities with non-caregiver family members or non-family adults also risk being exploited through begging. A Sierra Leonean mother suggested that begging usually has a gendered dimension, as more often families push boys to engage in begging: "We see boys in the street begging because their families have no money." A service provider in Tunis confirmed that boys were often at risk of forced labor and begging, and the survey data suggests that adolescent boys most often face this risk. Like prostitution, begging is not only a risk to children but also a negative coping mechanism by parents, which highlights the lack of support in extremely vulnerable cases.

## Isolation and integration

Several key informants highlighted the risk, particularly to young children, of loneliness, boredom, and a lack of social integration. A Sudanese father noted: "Little kids are facing the risk of isolation and getting bored and not being well integrated into Tunisian society." An Eritrean father further highlighted this point: "Children from 0 to 5 need more entertainment, which is absent. There is also a lack of integration strategy in Tunisian society." The lack of integration was particularly mentioned by those who did not speak Arabic as their primary language, especially those who faced

<sup>24</sup> 17 respondents noted that Greater Tunis, including Ariana, was the riskiest city, after re-coding of an 'other – please specify' option. In the survey, 16 respondents provided details on specific risks.

language barriers in accessing education, such as an unaccompanied Cameroonian boy. A 13-year-old Libyan girl reported a lack of extracurricular activities for children: “We have nothing to do in our free time, and we get bored sometimes.” A service provider in Tunis noted that there is a “lack of integration with children given the absence of cultural spaces. This is especially the case for those with irregular situations.”

These issues were further discussed by some interviewed youth. A 23-year-old Ivorian woman stated: “Life and integration is difficult. Especially the search for accommodation and work.” These problems can exacerbate limited opportunities to foster integration.

Many refugee and migrant youth seeking educational opportunities in Tunisia reported overt classroom discrimination within schools and universities. An Eritrean father reported: “For my two daughters who go to school, one is black and one has a fairer skin. The teacher asked them how they can be sisters. Afterward, my daughters were wondering why they were different. I consider this a psychological risk.” Discrimination also affects young students in Tunisia. A young man from Burundi stated: “Me and my friends were, during our first year of study, confronted with a discrimination situation. The professor was giving us low degrees comparing to others and was calling us kahloush (black).” Another young Ivorian student noted: “They refuse to sit next to sub-Saharan students or they laugh at you if you don't give the right answer.”

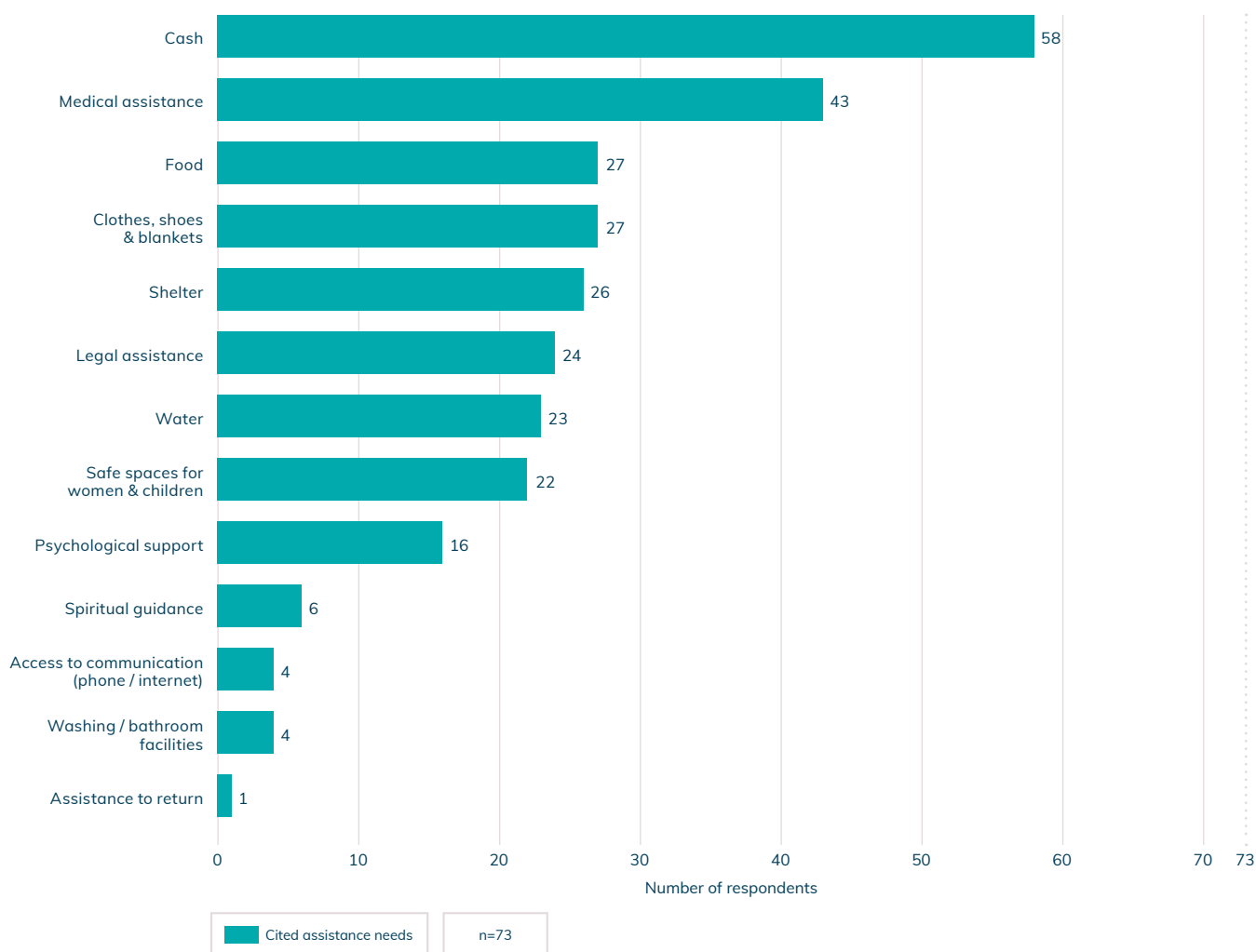


**Photo credit:**  
© UNHCR/Peter Horton

## 6. Access to assistance

More than half of caregivers (199 out of 381) and nearly two-thirds of youth (661 out of 1,013) surveyed between July 2020 and February 2021 noted that they had not received assistance since the onset of the coronavirus pandemic. More than 86% of youth (875 out of 1,013) and 94% of caregivers (358 out of 381) noted that they were still in need of extra assistance.<sup>25</sup>

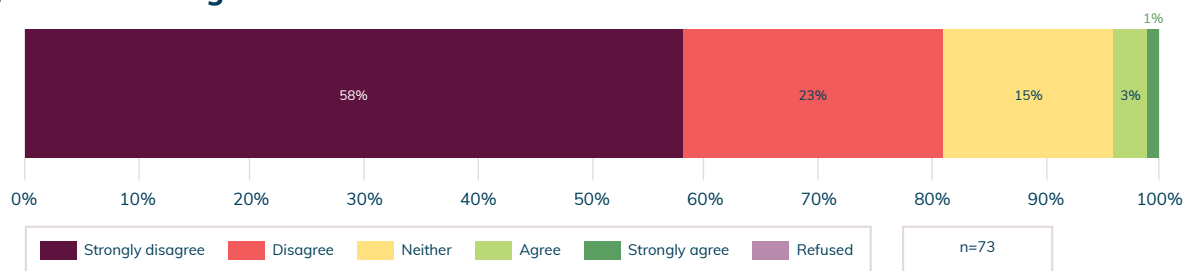
**Figure 10. What type of assistance do you need?**



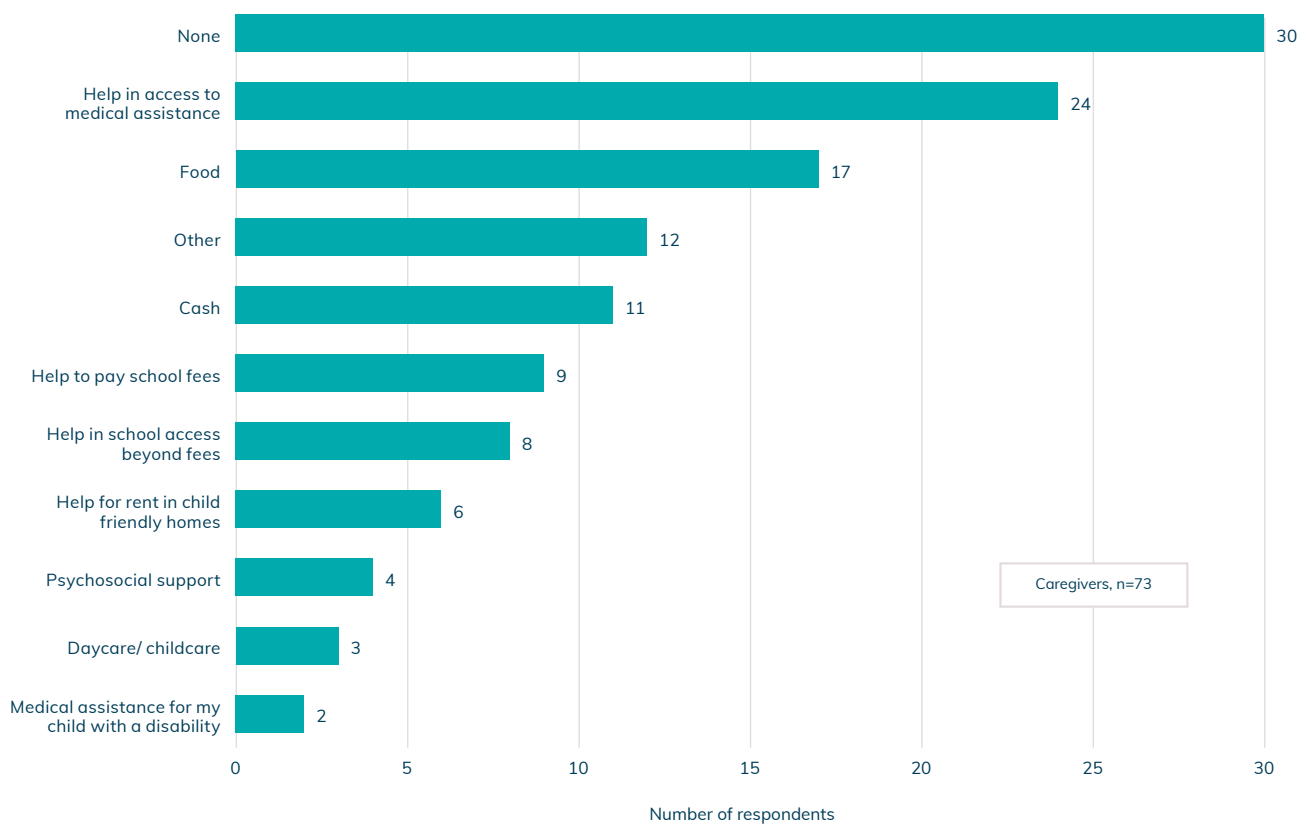
Most surveyed caregivers (59 out of 73) disagreed or strongly disagreed that the available assistance was enough to cover their existing needs (Figure 11). All but one of the caregivers noted that they still needed assistance. Respondents noted persistent needs for cash (58 out of 73); medical assistance (43); food (27); clothes, shoes, and blankets (27); shelter (26); legal assistance (24); water (23); and safe spaces for women and children (22). Some interviewed caregivers expressed knowledge about specific organizations from which they could request assistance, but they noted that the level of care was not sufficient to meet their needs. The considerable number of respondents who reported not receiving any assistance may indicate that some caregivers do not apply for assistance because they perceive it as insufficient.

<sup>25</sup> A large portion of the caregivers surveyed for this paper (30 of 73) also noted that they had not received any assistance for the child in their care (Figure 10). Of those who had received some form of assistance for their children, help in accessing medical care (24) and food (17) were among the most common.

**Figure 11. How far do you agree with the statement “The support for refugees and migrants travelling with children in Tunisia is sufficient”?**



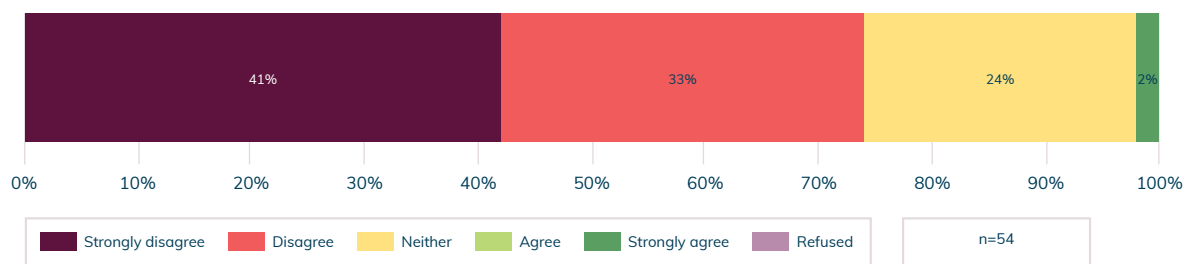
**Figure 12. Have the children in your care received any of the following forms of assistance?**



Key informants noted that assistance needs varied across age categories for children. Caregivers and service providers alike highlighted similar needs for young children (0-5), including access to extracurricular activities, health services, and childcare centers. An Ivorian caregiver reported: “I took my young son to a hospital downtown and we paid 90 TND [\$30 USD] for the stitches. A friend lent me the money and I paid it back little by little.” Service providers explained that refugees and migrants need not just access to school, but also assistance, materials, and support to benefit from their education. A service provider in Medenine noted: “Unfortunately many have started to leave school due to the lack of assistance in terms of school needs.”

33% of surveyed youth agreed and 41% strongly agreed that support was not sufficient (Figure 13). 47 of the 54 surveyed youth reported needing additional help, particularly in the form of cash (32), legal assistance (30), medical support (24), and shelter (19). A 23-year-old man from Burundi explained: “I think youth need assistance from NGOs to regularize their status and guarantee their rights.” A service provider in Sfax emphasized that refugee and migrant youth on the move required support to obtain legal documentation, which would in turn improve their access to work and specialized training opportunities to bring their skills in line with labor market needs.

**Figure 13. How far do you agree with the statement “The support for youth refugees and migrants in Tunisia is sufficient”?**

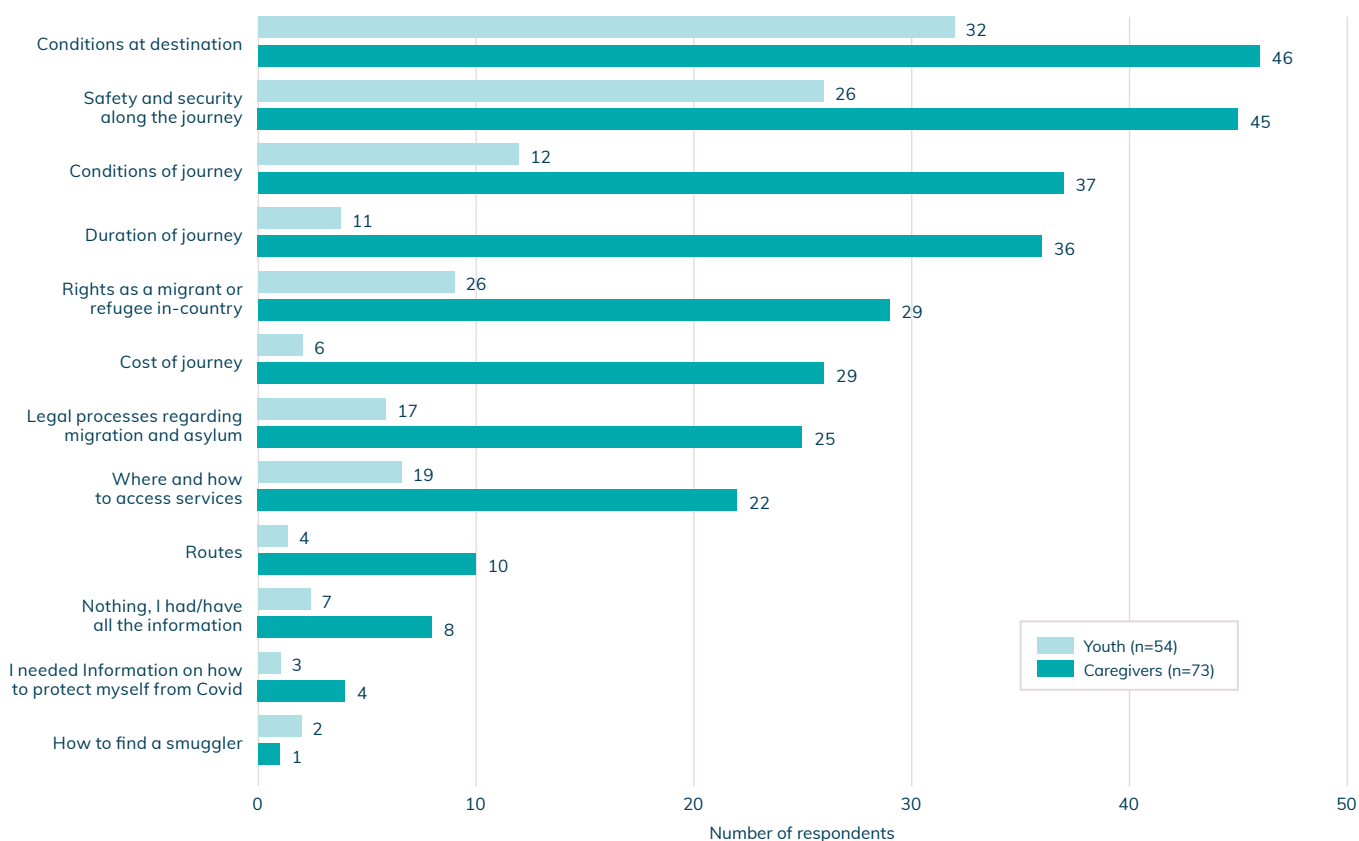


Outside of support from NGOs, refugee and migrant children and youth sometimes receive support from their Tunisian neighbors. The kindness of these neighbors during Ramadan was specifically highlighted by a young Burundian respondent: “During Ramadan my Tunisian neighbors give me food on a daily basis.” A Libyan girl added: “Tunisians help us sometimes with food and items, for example during Ramadan.”

Beyond the assistance provided by Tunisian civil society or international organizations, 19 of the 54 youth respondents stated they did not have a strong support network in Tunisia, while 20 stated that their support network comprised family and friends abroad. In Tunisia their main support networks included other migrants not in their age group (13), local associations, or NGOs (12). One young Ivorian migrant stated: “From time to time I receive food aid from the Ivorian community.” Unaccompanied children in particular have very limited support networks. An unaccompanied Cameroonian boy told interviewers that he had no one to turn to, and an unaccompanied Ivorian girl stated that her sources of support were Terre d’Asile Tunisie and her mother, who is in DRC.

When asked about the types of information that would have been useful along their migration routes, youth most often cited information related to conditions in Tunisia, followed by information on safety and security along their route and information on their rights within Tunisia. Caregivers most frequently cited information on conditions in Tunisia, along with safety and security along their route, and the conditions and duration of their journey. The few interviews with unaccompanied children suggested that they were most interested in information on access to schooling and whether they would be able to change their current living situation. Only a small number replied that no additional information was needed.

**Figure 14. What information would have been useful that you did not receive?**



# Conclusion

This study seeks to provide an overview of the experiences of refugee and migrant children and youth in Tunisia and a strong evidence base for those working to support these populations. It underlines the complexity of migration decision-making for children, youth, and caregivers, as already established in the migration literature for adults traveling alone. Surveys and interviews conducted for this study highlighted that migration by children and youth to Tunisia has a variety of contributing factors, including forcible displacement due to conflict and the desire of migrants to find a place of safety, seek tertiary education, pursue economic opportunity, and move onward after initial precarious migration to Libya and Algeria.

Migrants use various modes of transport, often determined by their chosen route, the drivers influencing movement, and the financial capabilities of caregivers and migrating and displaced children and youth. Children and youth face specific vulnerabilities, and refugees' and migrants' ability to choose specific routes has implications for the dangers they face along their journey and their protection needs in Tunisia.

While Tunisia is viewed as a relatively safe country in the region, protection concerns persist for migrating and displaced children and youth, including harassment and physical and sexual violence, along with discrimination in access to schools and services. Caregivers and youth alike noted a lack of access to sufficient assistance once in Tunisia. While Tunisia has ratified many international conventions pertaining to child protection, gaps remain in addressing protection concerns for refugee and migrant children.

## Photo credit:

© UNHCR/Peter Horton



# Recommendations

## Tunisian authorities

- Increase access to information on the right of foreign children born in Tunisia to birth registration, and provide clear guidelines on how to register newborn children, in French, English, and Arabic.
- Increase access to information, including for youth, regarding how foreigners can apply for residency in Tunisia, in French, English and Arabic.
- Enable children and youth to access mechanisms to monitor and respond to complaints regarding discrimination over migrant and displaced children's access to civil documentation, residence permits, security, education, health, and social services.
- Promote training of authorities from the national to the local level on the rights of migrants and of migrating and displaced children and youth, and on non-discrimination and social inclusion practices.
- Mainstream the integration of migrating and displaced children, youth, and families in all dimensions of the child protection system and in social assistance programs to ensure social, economic, and political inclusion for refugee and migrant children, on a par with national children.
- Ensure appropriate and integrated child protection care and services for migrating and displaced children, starting from their time of arrival.
- Ensure that children moving between localities are referred to appropriate authorities in the new locations and that they benefit from a continuity of case management.
- Assign responsibility to appropriate public entities to review, monitor, coordinate, and improve multisectoral care and protection policies, procedures, and standards for migrating and displaced children.
- Promote public awareness of Tunisia's commitments to non-discrimination.
- Incentivize the development of spaces where children and youth of many nationalities can interact, to promote integration.
- Strengthen the application of quality care standards for alternative care and support a range of appropriate care options for migrant and displaced children and youth, including interim shelters, small group homes, and care facilities.
- Increase pathways for young refugees and migrants to access work opportunities in Tunisia.
- Support coordination between administrative bodies and the humanitarian sector to overcome existing quantitative and qualitative information gaps regarding mixed migration dynamics.

## Consular authorities

- Increase access to information for caregivers, youth, and children including students on legal rights and conditions for migrating and displaced children within Tunisia.
- Provide information to caregivers of foreign children born in Tunisia, including clear guidelines on how to register newborn children and apply for civil documentation in the appropriate languages.
- In countries of departure, provide information on the risks of migration journeys, with particular sensitivity to the experiences of children and youth on the move.

## International organizations and local civil society

- Organize a working group to increase coordination among NGOs, UN agencies and governmental entities in compiling and sharing statistics and other information on migrating and displaced children and youth.
- Facilitate safe identification and access to justice for refugee and migrant child victims of discrimination, racism, or xenophobia and help children, youth and families deal with perceptions and experiences of discrimination, violence, and insecurity.
- Prioritize access to safe and private accommodation for unaccompanied children and youth.
- Support caregiver and family well-being and invest in caregiver and family strengthening interventions.
- Develop linkages and participate in referral mechanisms with existing state, UN, and NGO services that facilitate access to assistance and respond holistically to child, youth, and family needs.
- Provide childcare services for sole caregivers with children under the age of 10.  
Improve access to education for children and youth on the move and address the secondary needs of children and youth to integrate and to remain in school (including remedial learning, language learning, and extracurricular activities).
- Foster opportunities to promote social inclusion for migrant and displaced children, youth, and families.
- Develop gender-sensitive child and youth-friendly safe spaces where migrant and displaced children and youth can access information and assistance.



- Strengthen community-based mechanisms in Tunisian and migrant communities, empowering them to identify protection concerns and provide migrant and displaced children and youth with information about access to relevant services, practical advice on ways to keep safe, and legal advice.
- Increase programming targeting migrant and displaced children, youth, and families, and hire staff who can speak languages beyond French and Arabic to better support migrating and displaced children and youth who speak other languages.

### **Researchers**

- Further study the coping mechanisms of migrant and displaced children and youth in Tunisia to improve protection and resilience capacities.
- Further study the ways in which migrants' experiences in route to and within Tunisia have contributed to positive outcomes for children, youth, and families.
- Generate more research on the experiences of sole caregivers on the move, including their drivers, risks, and coping mechanisms.
- Regularly conduct actor mapping to better understand which organizations and services are present and active in which areas of the country.
- Work with NGOs to compile comprehensive statistics on migrant and displaced children in Tunisia.

### **Donors**

- Continue supporting system strengthening programmes with Tunisian actors to improve access by migrant and displaced children and youth to basic services including education, appropriate care, case management, and youth programming.
- Support projects that improve coordination among child protection actors in Tunisia.
- Provide support to programming for migrant and displaced children, youth, and families, particularly relating to access to assistance at border points and in urban centers.
- Continue to support research for migrant and displaced children and youth, particularly projects pertaining to the identified research gaps.

# Annex A: Supplementary 4Mi modules

## Caregivers

1. How many children are currently within your care in Tunisia?
2. Select the ages of all of your children.
3. What is the gender(s) of your child(ren)?
4. Do any of the children in your care have disabilities?
5. Are you the only caregiver for these children here in Tunisia?
6. In what ways has travelling with children influenced your chosen or intended destination?
7. In what ways has travelling with children influenced the city in which you have decided to stay for the time being in Tunisia?
8. How far do you agree with the statement "The city/neighborhood I currently live in is safe for the child/children in my care"?
9. What risks do girl refugees and migrants face in Tunisia?
10. What risks do boy refugees and migrants face in Tunisia?
11. Have the children in your care received any of the following forms of assistance in your current city?
12. How far do you agree with the statement "The support for refugees and migrants travelling with children in Tunisia is sufficient"?
13. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience of travelling with children?

## Youth

1. Were you under the age of 18 when you started your migration journey?
2. What is your current occupation in Tunisia?
3. In what ways has traveling as a young refugee or migrant influenced your chosen or intended destination?
4. In what ways has traveling while being young influenced where you have decided to stay for the time being in Tunisia?
5. How far do you agree with the statement "The city/neighborhood I currently live in is safe for young people"?
6. What challenges do young women migrants face in Tunisia?
7. What challenges do young men migrants face in Tunisia?
8. How far do you agree with the statement "The support for youth migrants in Tunisia is sufficient"?
9. Who is within your support network?
10. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience of traveling as a young person in Tunisia?

## Annex B: List of participating stakeholders

Date of interview	Organization
16/03/2021	Enfants de la Lune
18/03/2021	Maison du Droit et des Migrations
23/03/2021	Terre d'Asile Tunisie
25/03/2021	Médecins du Monde
29/03/2021	Avocats sans Frontières
21/04/2021	Association Tunisienne de Défense des Droits de l'Enfant
26/04/2021	Conseil Tunisien pour les Réfugiés
30/04/2021	UNFPA
03/05/2021	Direction Générale pour la Protection de l'Enfance
05/05/2021	Association des Etudiants et des Stagiaires Africains en Tunisie



The MMC is a global network consisting of six regional hubs and a central unit in Geneva engaged in data collection, research, analysis and policy development on mixed migration. The MMC is a leading source for independent and high-quality data, research, analysis and expertise on mixed migration. The MMC aims to increase understanding of mixed migration, to positively impact global and regional migration policies, to inform evidence-based protection responses for people on the move and to stimulate forward thinking in public and policy debates on mixed migration. The MMC's overarching focus is on human rights and protection for all people on the move.

The MMC is part of and governed by the Danish Refugee Council (DRC). Global and regional MMC teams are based in Copenhagen, Dakar, Geneva, Nairobi, Tunis, Bogota and Bangkok.

**For more information visit:**  
[mixedmigration.org](https://mixedmigration.org) and follow us at @Mixed\_Migration

