

The journey towards Italy for Nigerians: drivers, routes and use of smugglers

Italy, with approximately [119,000](#) Nigerians on its territory, hosts the [second-largest group](#) of Nigerians in Europe (after the UK) and is “[the most important destination for Nigerian victims of trafficking](#)”. This snapshot offers an overview of the journey to Europe, based on 195 [4Mi](#) interviews with Nigerians in Italy. The snapshot aims to contribute towards a solid evidence base to inform targeted responses on the ground, as well as advocacy efforts related to the situation of refugees and migrants in the country.

Key findings

- Respondents’ 3 main reasons for leaving Nigeria were violence, insecurity and conflict (52%), personal or family reasons (46%), and rights and freedoms (38%). **As violence-related drivers, women often mentioned SGBV and domestic violence.**
- All Nigerian respondents followed the Central Mediterranean Route through Libya to arrive in Italy. The vast majority passed first through Niger (89%) (stopping in Agadez) then Libya (88%) (stopping in Tripoli and Sabha). **40% of those who stopped in Libya mentioned having been detained or otherwise held against their will.**
- 88% of the respondents used a smuggler¹ during the journey. Among these, 38% used several smugglers for different part of the journey. **Women (44/63) more commonly reported using one smuggler for the entire journey compared to men.**
- **Smugglers provided respondents mostly with logistical support**, both cross-border (90%) and in-country (59%).

1 MMC uses a broad interpretation of the terms ‘smuggler’ and ‘smuggling’, one which encompasses various activities — paid for or otherwise compensated by refugees and migrants — that facilitate irregular migration. These include irregularly crossing international borders and internal checkpoints, as well as providing documents, transportation, and accommodation. This approach reflects refugees’ and migrants’ perceptions of smuggling and the facilitation of irregular movement. Our interpretation is deliberately broader than the UN Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants’ definition. However, this does not imply that MMC considers all activities it includes in its broad understanding of smuggling to be criminal offences. MMC prefers to use the term ‘human smuggling’ instead of ‘migrant smuggling’ as smuggling involves both refugees and migrants.

- **Half of respondents who used a smuggler agreed/strongly agreed (55%) that the smuggler helped them achieve their goal of migration**, and only 18% disagreed/strongly disagreed. However, 60% believe that they were intentionally misled during the journey by smugglers.
- **57% referred to Italy as preferred destination.** Another 18% had decided to stay in Italy anyway, while the others still intend to move elsewhere.

Profiles

This analysis draws from interviews with 195 Nigerians conducted face-to-face (n=182) and by phone (n=13) in Italy between November 2019 and September 2021. Women comprise 43% (n=83) of respondents and men 57% (n=112). All respondents had arrived in Italy within the past 5 years. Respondents were predominantly aged 18-35 years old (90%), with 42% having a secondary or higher level of education, and 41% having a primary level of education. 15% did not complete any schooling.

Figure 1. Sex and age ranges

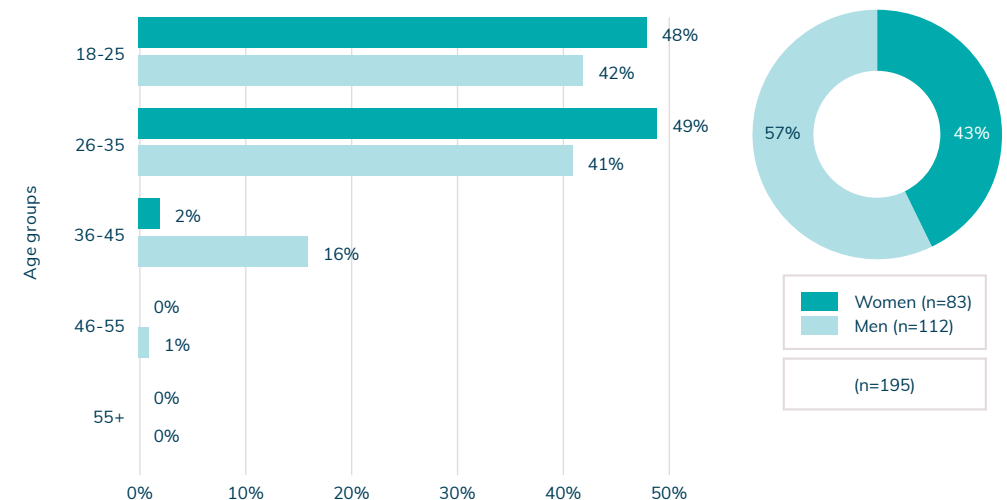
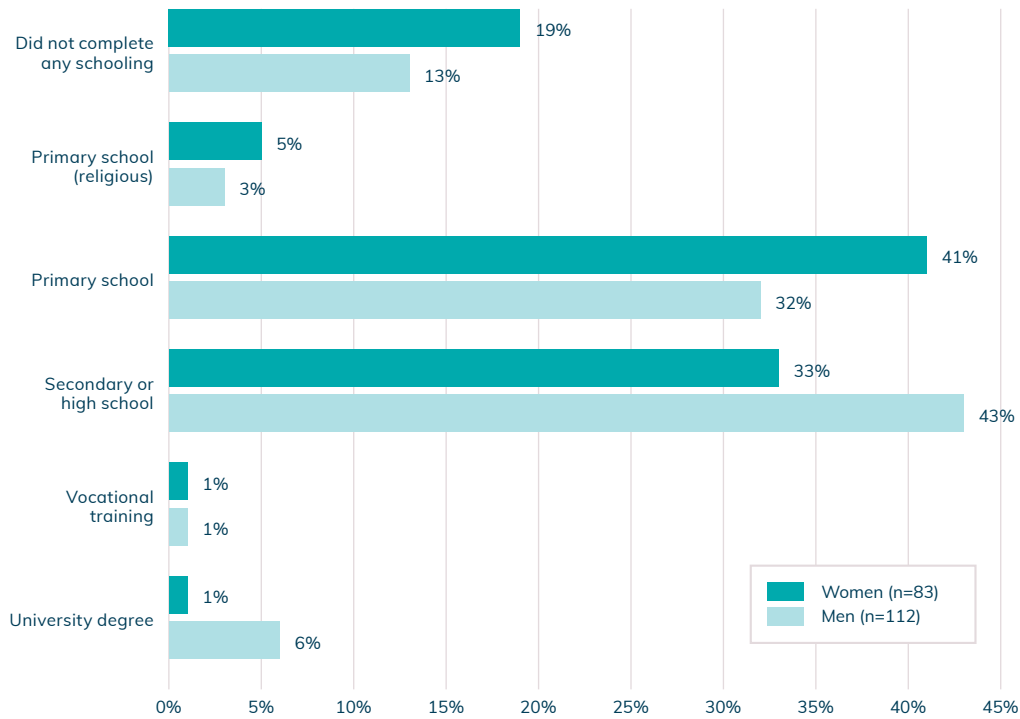


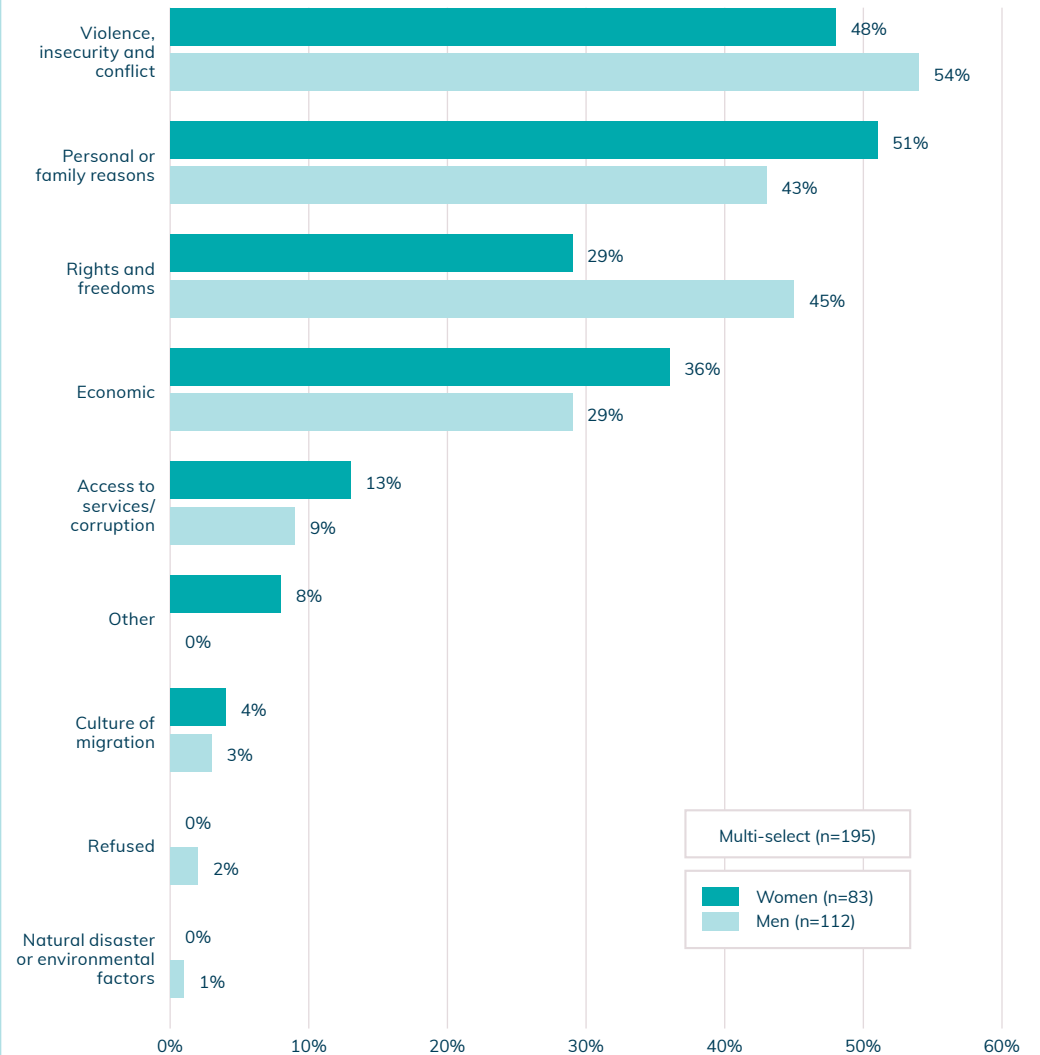
Figure 2. Level of education



Violence, insecurity and conflict are the main reasons for leaving Nigeria; women often report SGBV and domestic violence

Reasons for leaving are complex and vary across gender. Nigerian respondents identified violence, insecurity, and conflict as the main reason for leaving their country (52%), followed by personal/family reasons (46%) and lack of rights and freedom (38%). Violence and rights and freedom were reported more often by men compared to women, who mentioned more often personal and family reasons and economic reason (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. For what reasons did you leave?

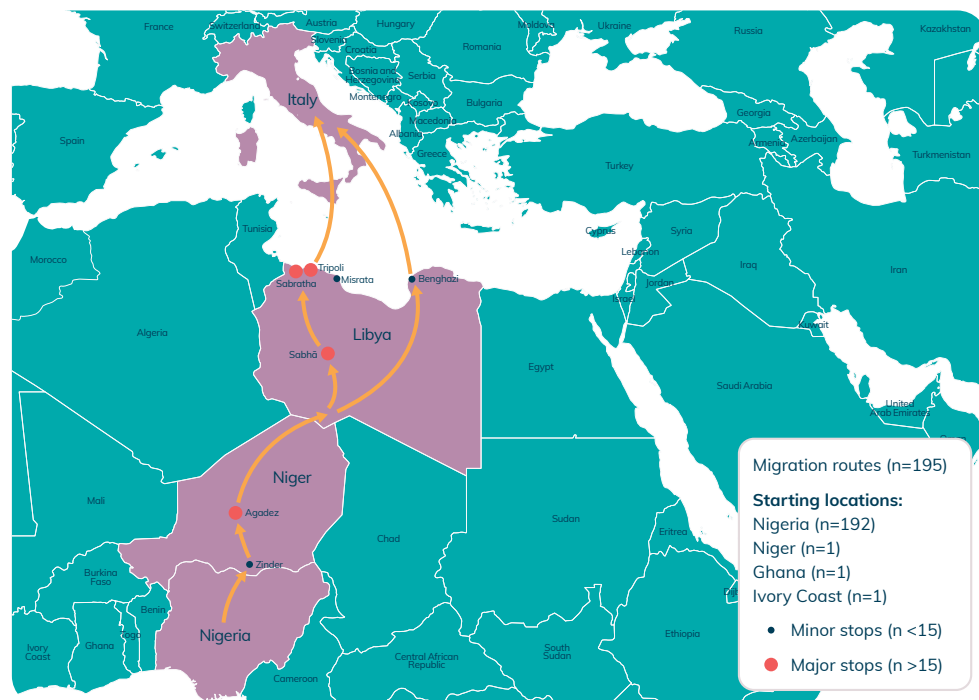


Within the violence-related driver, 4Mi data show noteworthy differences between men and women. The two most common responses among men were, crime/general insecurity (36/61) and war/armed conflict/terrorism (22/61), whereas for Nigerian women the two most common drivers were SGBV (23/40) and domestic violence (13/40). These findings mirror [figures of violence against women in Nigeria](#), with 30% of girls and women aged between 15 and 49 reported to have experienced sexual abuse.

Nigerians travelled along the Central Mediterranean Route through Libya

98% of the respondents (n=192) started the journey in Nigeria² to follow the Central Mediterranean Route, transiting first Niger (89%) and then Libya (88%), where migrants and refugees embarked on boats to cross the Mediterranean Sea and reach Italy (see Map 1). In Niger, respondents most often stopped in Agadez; in Libya the main stops were in Sabha and Tripoli. 174 stops were in Niger,³ and most often this was to wait for transportation (49%), to find smugglers to organize the next stretch of the journey (27%) or to rest (24%). In Libya (309 stops) the main reasons for stopping were detention (40%), wait for transportation (27%) or need to earn money for the next stretch of the journey (18%).

Map 1. Migration routes from Nigeria to Italy



² The other 2% started in Niger, Ghana, and Ivory Coast.

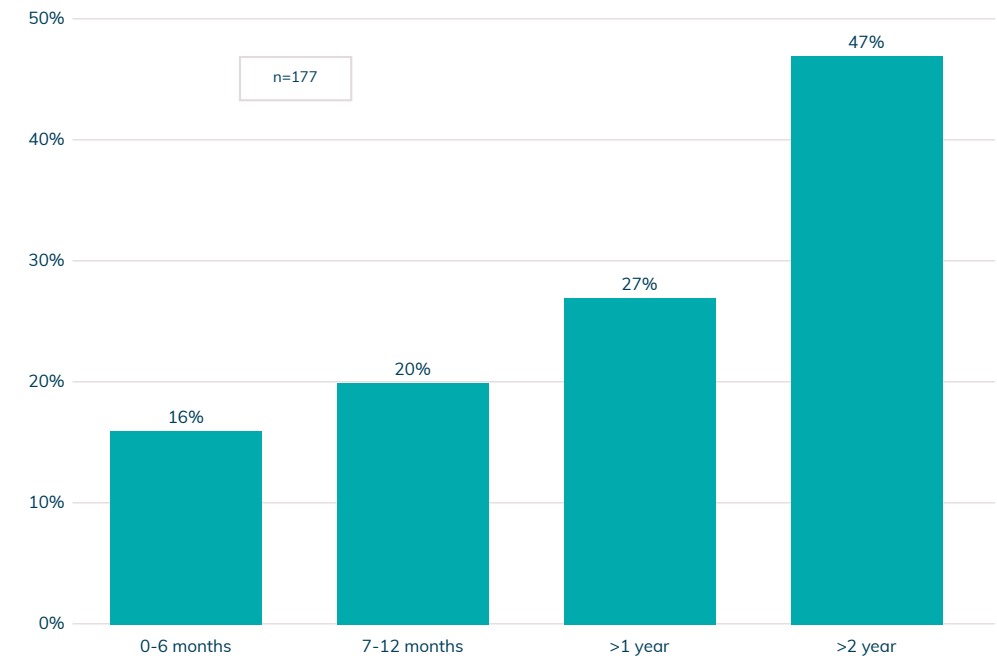
³ Respondents can mention up to five stops along the journey, and can name more than one location in a country. The analysis presented here refers to the number of stops in the country.

Men more often reported stopping to earn money compared to women (41% of 112 men vs 18% of 83 women) while no major difference between men and women emerged with regard to detention. 4Mi data confirm the well-documented protection risks for migrants and refugees attempting to cross the Mediterranean to reach Europe, especially with regard to [detention in Libya](#).

Almost half of respondents took more than 2 years to reach Italy

4Mi data reflect long, risky and fragmented journeys towards Europe. Only 16% of respondents arrived in Italy within 6 months or less while for the vast majority the journey lasted much longer. Almost half of respondents (47%) took more than 2 years to arrive, and 27% more than a year (Figure 4).⁴

Figure 4. Length of the journey



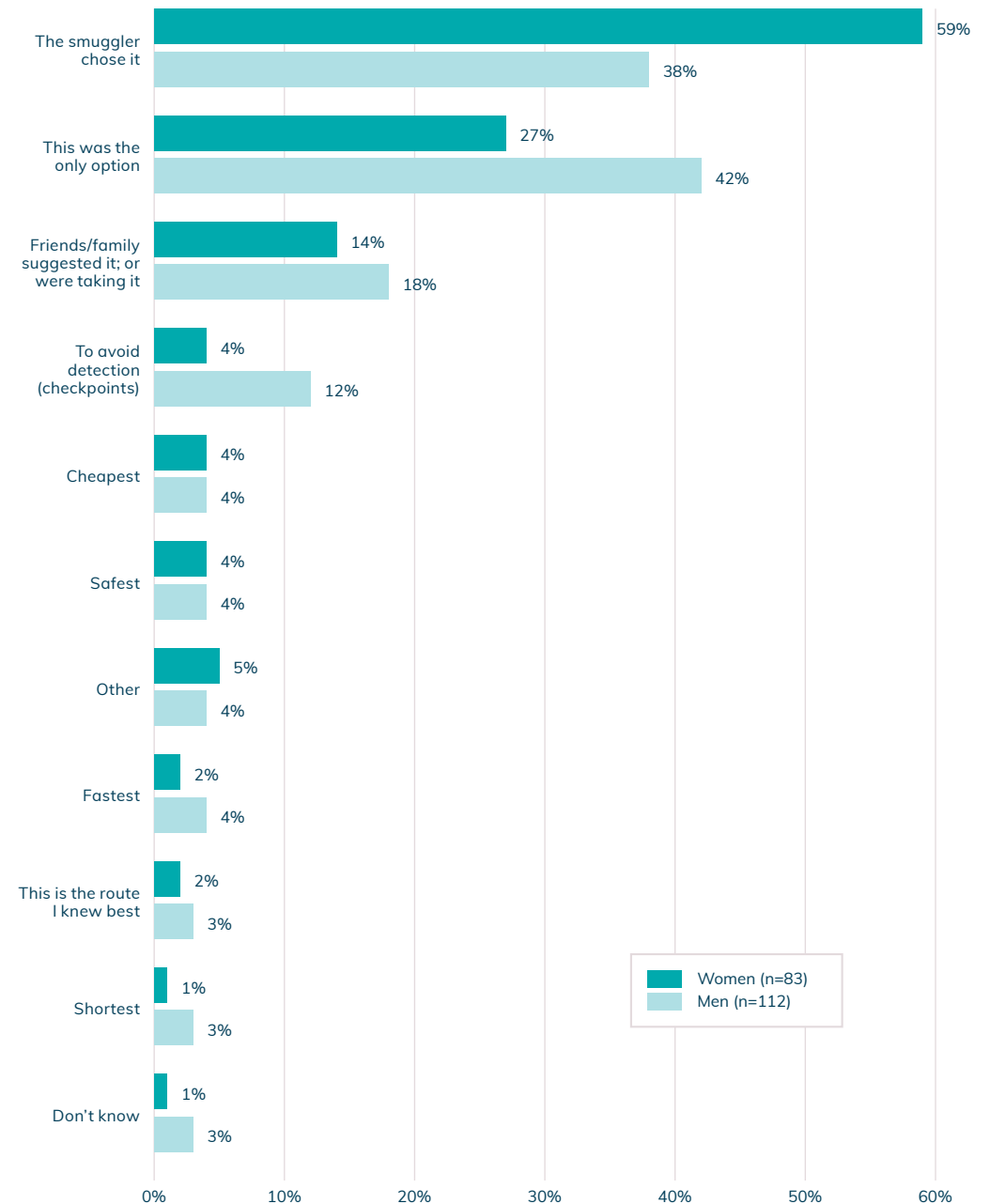
⁴ "n" is 177 because out of 195 Nigerians interviewed, 18 respondents did not reply to the question, could not remember when they arrived in Italy or provided conflictual dates.

Smugglers play a key role with regards to the route to take

Many respondents said that the smuggler choose the route that they took (47%) or that it was their only option (35%). Very few considered safety as a factor in the decision (4%) or mentioned the fastest or shortest route (4% and 2%, respectively). Male reported more often factors such as the absence of other feasible alternatives (42% vs. 27%) or the need to avoid detection (12% vs. 4%) while female respondents reported more often being influenced by smugglers (59% vs. 38%) (see Figure 5).

We noted in previous publications how this, together with the role smugglers play in other aspects of the journeys, shows that smuggling of Nigerian women towards North Africa and Europe is different from the smuggling of other West Africans, more frequently takes place in a rather organised manner, which all seems to be [pointing to a potential link to human trafficking](#).

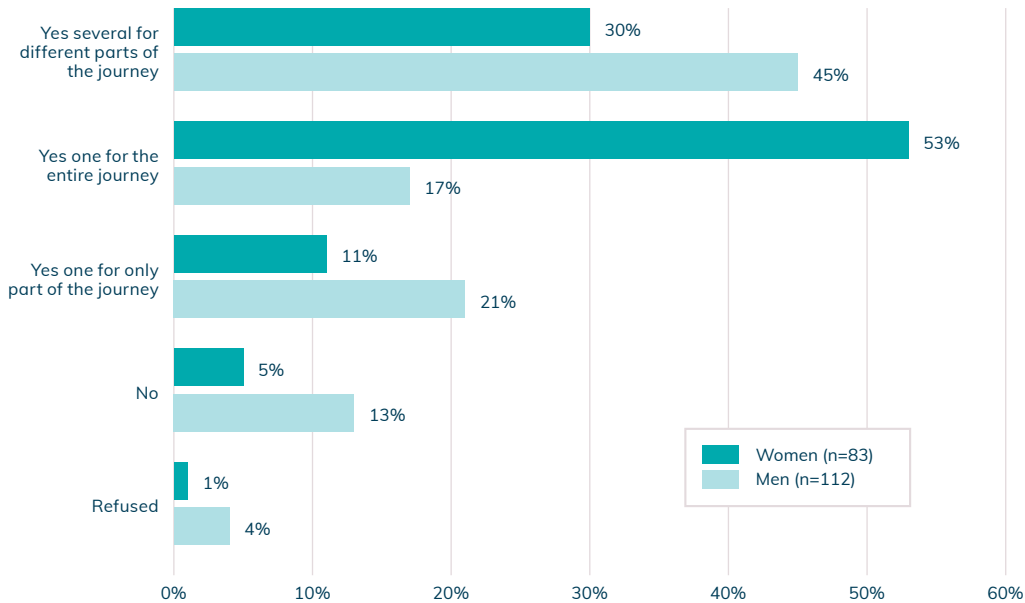
Figure 5. Why did you take this route?



The use of smuggler(s) is widespread among Nigerians travelling towards Europe

Nigerians extensively used smugglers to reach Europe. 88% of them used a smuggler(s) at some point during the journey. 38% used several smugglers for different part of the journey, 32% used the same smuggler for the entire journey and 17% used one smuggler for part of the journey. Women more commonly reported using one smuggler for the entire journey compared to men (53% Vs 17%) (Figure 6).

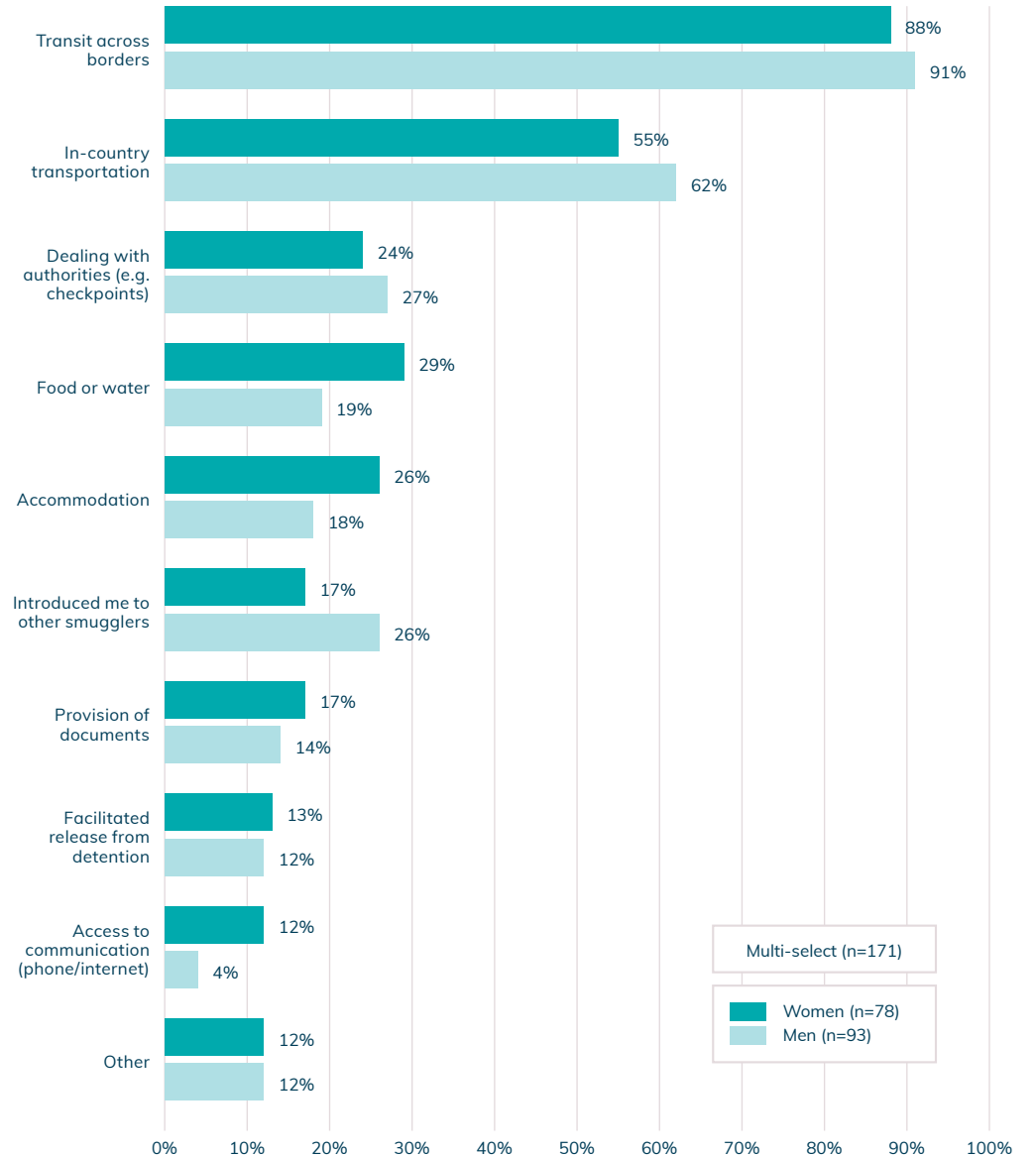
Figure 6. Did you use a smuggler?



Respondents mostly used smugglers to cross borders or for in-country transportation

90% of the 171 respondents who used a smuggler said that the smuggler provided transit across borders, and 59% reported having used a smuggler for in-country transportation with no major differences across gender. Respondents also mention that smugglers helped them with other 'activities, including dealing with authorities (26%), providing food or water (24%), arranging accommodation (22%), and introducing respondents to other smugglers (22%) with no major differences across gender.

Figure 7. What did the smuggler provide you with?



Higher mistrust towards smugglers from women

Half of respondents who used a smuggler agreed/strongly agreed (55%) that the smuggler helped them achieve their goal of migration, and only 18% disagreed/strongly disagreed with the statement. Among these, women seemed to be less confident than men about the utility of smugglers (see Figure 8). Overall, 60% believe that they were intentionally misled during the journey by the smuggler, with only 17% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. A higher proportion of women strongly agreed with the statement (see Figure 9).

Figure 8. To what extent do you agree with the following statement: “The smuggler or smugglers I used helped me in achieving my goal of migrating to another country”

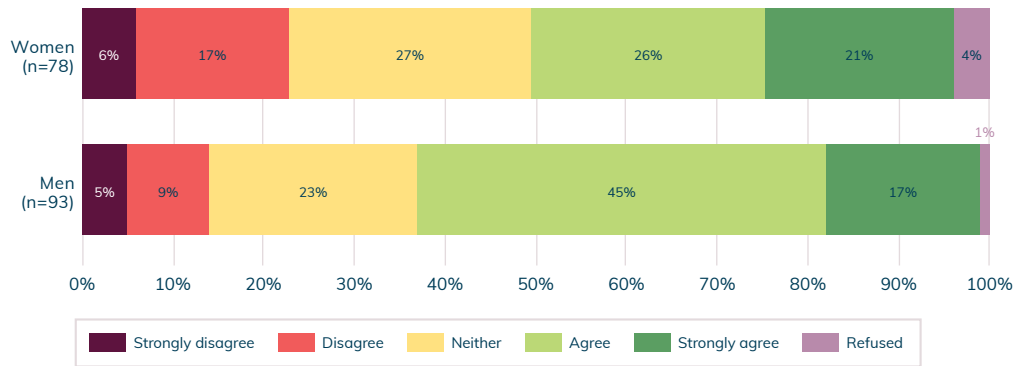
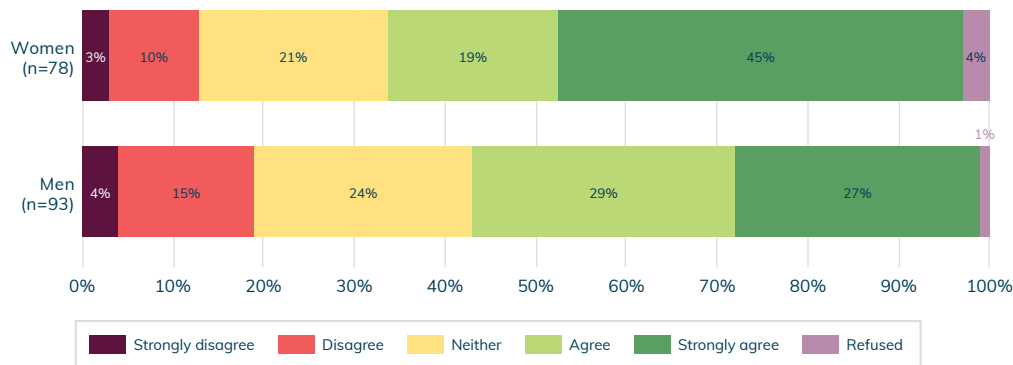


Figure 9. To what extent do you agree with the following statement: “I was intentionally misled about the journey by my smuggler or smugglers”



Italy is the preferred destination for the majority of respondents

75% of respondents interviewed in Italy reported that they had reached the end of their migration journey (Figure 10). 57% referred to Italy as preferred destination. 18% decided to settle in Italy despite it not being their preferred destination; 25% intend to move elsewhere. (Figure 11).

Figure 10. Have you reached the end of your journey?

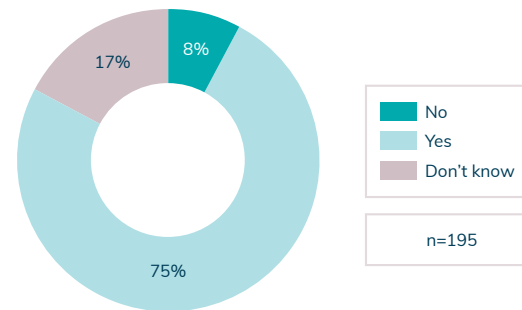
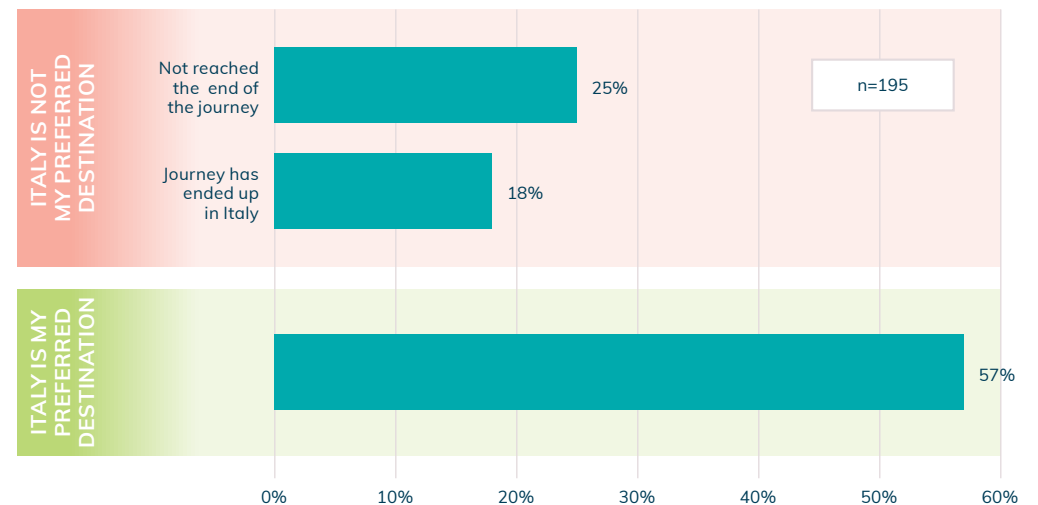


Figure 11. Destination and future intentions





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4Mi data collection

[4Mi](#) is the Mixed Migration Centre's flagship primary data collection system, an innovative approach that helps fill knowledge gaps, and inform policy and response regarding the nature of mixed migratory movements and the protection risks for refugees and migrants on the move. 4Mi field enumerators are currently collecting data through direct interviews with refugees and migrants in West Africa, East Africa, North Africa, Asia, Latin America and Europe.

Note that the sampling approach means that the findings derived from the surveyed sample provide rich insights, but the figures cannot be used to make inferences about the total population. See more 4Mi analysis and details on methodology at www.mixedmigration.org/4mi