Mixed Migration Centre

Longitudinal research with people on the move

Methodological report on piloting repeated interviews with refugees and migrants in East and North Africa

Introduction

This report presents the methodological innovations of a new longitudinal extension to the core 4Mi survey. This longitudinal research was piloted with refugees and migrants in North and East Africa by the Mixed Migration Centre in 2021, in collaboration with researchers from the University of Edinburgh.

What is 4Mi?

4Mi is MMC's flagship primary data collection system, comprising a standardised in-depth survey administered among refugees and migrants located at various key points on mixed migration routes across the globe. The survey covers eight themes: the participant's profile, migration drivers and aspirations; route; protection concerns; access to information; assistance, financing and smuggling. It provides rich data, including valuable retrospective information on the journey, and the 4Mi teams conduct more than 1,000 interviews every month, working in multiple languages and dozens of locations. While data collection is primarily face-to-face, adaptation to Covid-19-related measures entailed the development of a remote methodology, by phone. This new approach enabled the expansion of 4Mi to longitudinal data collection. Since 2020, enumerators engaged in continuous data collection have the capacity to reach the same participants more than once, and therefore to reach people who may not be using the more commonly used mixed migration hubs and routes, as well as to understand better how perceptions and decision-making change over time, without the 'benefit' of hindsight.

This report is intended to capture the learning and insights that were garnered during the design of the longitudinal extension, and to share important points for further reflection and refinement of the methodology, both within MMC and beyond. It contains details on the process of research design (page 3), the technicalities of the remote implementation of the pilot longitudinal survey, and illustrations of the types of analysis that can be done on this longitudinal data. It considers the results in terms of the success of the methodology (page 6), reflects on some of the ongoing challenges of implementing a longitudinal survey with mobile populations (page 9), and concludes with a consideration of the knowledge generated by the pilot and how this approach could be usefully applied to answering critical questions about mixed migration in the future (page 10).

An accompanying analytical report 4Mi _Snapshot: What changes over the course of the migration journey? Results from piloting longitudinal 4Mi_, explores the findings of the longitudinal pilot, covering what had happened and how perceptions had changed among 75 4Mi respondents first interviewed in Libya, Somalia, and Tunisia.

Objectives and purpose

The purpose of this longitudinal extension to the 4Mi methodology is to provide evidence of how and why the drivers of migration, and the decisions, aspirations and locations of refugees and migrants develop over the course of individual journeys, with a particular focus on perceptions of risk and measures taken to improve safety. Some initial results from the new survey are discussed here. While the core 4Mi survey is thus location- and route-oriented, having been designed to capture patterns of decision-making along pre-determined routes by interviewing refugees and migrants who travel through particular checkpoints, this longitudinal method is designed instead to be person-oriented, with the same survey administered to the same individual at different points in time.

There are various reasons for adopting this approach. **Empirically**, repeatedly surveying the same individuals throughout their journeys will ensure that the actual stages of these movements are better understood, including periods of forced immobility, mobility on a localised or city-wide scale, decisions to 'stay put' or 'give up'. It also allows to better understand and explore the cycling between different legal statuses of the same individual. By making use of remote methods of data collection, it aims to reach individuals who may not enter known transit or humanitarian spaces, and who are not necessarily moving along more publicised, supposedly linear, routes.

As such, this survey intends to challenge certain **theoretical** 'artefacts' of sampling approaches that end up reinforcing the idea of unidirectional migration routes because they can only sample people who are on them. This includes the theoretical tendency to discuss mobility as opposed to experiences of 'staying put', and to portray migratory journeys as linear and continuous, rather than fragmented, involving multiple stops and starts. In capturing decision-making as it evolves, as opposed to being dependent on retrospective accounts of entire journeys to date, it will provide higher resolution data on how, when and why choices are made around mobility, and how and why refugees' and migrants' protection and resilience changes over the course of their journeys.

Programmatically, this longitudinal approach aims to draw international attention to sites of mixed migration outside of camps and settlements, and of major waypoints on routes towards Europe or North America. Increased knowledge about migrant decision-making,

resilience and individual mobility patterns will enable international organisations and governments to more accurately channel resources, opportunities and support. Expanded data on how people's capacity to react to their surroundings changes, including what mechanisms people might develop to better protect themselves from social, environmental, political or economic shocks, also has strong policy implications in terms of the targeting of funds and development of programmes.

Project background

The utility of using longitudinal methods has already been shown in work with migrants and refugees. In 2016, for example, Seefar launched a longitudinal study with Afghans who intended to migrate to Europe, with four follow-up rounds of data collection planned.[1] Seefar's justifications for employing a longitudinal methodology were threefold: to avoid asking refugees and migrants to retroactively recount or reconstruct decision-making; to capture shifts in how people view their decisions first to leave and then later to return to a place; and to move away from capturing 'snapshots' at a particular point in time rather than the contingent and evolving nature of plans.[2] In terms of empirical focus, the survey was thus designed to provide more accurate data on motivations for irregular migration to Europe and the conditions affecting and facilitating individual decision-making, as well as longitudinal data on how decision-making changed between the rounds of data collection, such as through access to new sources of information and changing expectations around the lengths of journeys, particular regarding protection and resilience.[3]

Design process and considerations

In 2021, with funding from the Scottish Research Council's Global Challenges Research Fund, MMC, in collaboration with the University of Edinburgh, piloted a longitudinal approach. The process intended to build upon the strengths and capacity of MMC's existing 4Mi survey infrastructure, and particularly the pivot to remote phone interviews that was necessitated by Covid-19.

The pilot took place between February and October 2021. It involved team members from across the University of Edinburgh and MMC teams in Nairobi, Tunis and Geneva. The design work took place during and between a series of collaborative workshops, with data collection occurring between April and October 2021, and analysis between October 2021 and April 2022.

In April 2021, a filter question was added to the original 4Mi survey asking whether individuals in North and East Africa would be willing to be recontacted for subsequent rounds of data collection. Enumerators were trained on how to administer this additional component of the survey, and in how to collect and securely store the contact details of those who consented to being recontacted (see below for further details). Consenting individuals were called 4-6 weeks later for the first round of longitudinal data collection, during which a specially adapted survey questionnaire was administered. In October 2021 (3-4 months after the first round), the same adapted survey was administered to a limited number of participants. A summary of the process is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Project timeline and reach

Workshop
- Identify data gaps
- Identify key design tasks
- Determine filtering of participants and consent

Workshop
- Draft of longitudinal survey
- Contact processes
- Parameters of pilot

Workshop
- Finalise survey
- Address outstanding ethical questions
- Retention & retrieval mechanisms

Workshop
- Feedback and reflections

MARCH 21 — APRIL 21 — MAY 21 — JUNE 21 — JULY 21 — AUGUST 21 — SEPTEMBER 21 — OCTOBER 21

4Mi original survey

North Africa	East Africa
479 invited	100 invited
199 agreed	82 agreed
49%	**82%**

Longitudinal round 1

North Africa	East Africa
51 called	47 called
37 reached	42 reached
33 valid surveys	42 valid surveys
63%	**89%**

Longitudinal round 2

North Africa
26 called
9 reached
8 valid surveys
8/26

1 SEEFAR, no date, Reluctant journeys: why Afghans migrate irregularly to Europe; SEEFAR, 2018, Pushed towards migration: understanding how irregular migration dynamics and attitudes are evolving in Afghanistan; SEEFAR, 2019, Sustained interest, delayed migration: emerging irregular migration dynamics in Afghanistan; SEEFAR, 2019, How the Afghan peace process and emotional well-being impact migration decision-making .
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.

The pilot study was conducted within a number of constraints, which meant that it was not possible to fully test every aspect of the longitudinal approach, and we had to prioritise. First, the project had to be completed over 6 months, which reduced the gap between rounds of the data collection. Budget constraints limited the number of follow-up interviews that could be conducted in each round, and the level of technical innovation and experimentation that was possible in designing the methodology. It is important to take these limitations into account when reading both this report and the analytical report.

In this section we outline the key questions that were posed when designing the methodology, and the answers that we arrived at.

Sampling

Sampling for longitudinal: location

The geographical location at which the filter question for participation is added to the initial survey has clear implications for the distribution of those 'staying put' versus those moving onwards (and therefore implications for how likely those individuals are to be reached in a subsequent call-back), as well as the timeframe over which such movement is likely to occur.

Adding the filter question at known transit points could make it harder to recontact respondents but would test the survey's ability to capture movement, whereas using it in more 'static' locations should increase the likelihood of successful call-backs and be able to test the utility of the survey questions and data retrieval systems. However, sampling individuals based on intended movement (or not) would mean sampling according to the very variable that we were interested in better understanding.

Taking into account the project constraints, the team in North Africa added the filter question to all 4Mi surveys administered in all locations. In East Africa, the filter question was added to interviews conducted in western Somaliland because of an assumption that people who did move onwards were more likely to be reached, as they would likely still be in Somalia given the time period between call-backs.

Participant selection for longitudinal extension

In situations where it is not possible to re-interview everybody who consents to participate, it is important to develop a sampling strategy, which depends on the purpose of the data collection exercise. For this pilot, MMC chose to make a random selection from the pool allocated to each enumerator, because of the small scale of data collection, and also in an effort to shed light on population groups who were more difficult to reach with the longitudinal survey.

Replacement strategy

Given the time constraints and small scale of data collection, the replacement strategy for respondents who could not be reached was one of random selection from the pool of respondents. Ideally, with more time and a larger scale, the replacement strategy would involve the selection of the respondent with the most similar profile (sex, age, nationality, etc).

Data protection and consent

Personal data and consent

The consent process had to be changed, because the initial 4Mi survey does not collect any directly identifiable data about individual participants. Participants had to be informed that personal data would be requested if they consented to further interviews; reassured that they could refuse to provide it; and that personal data would be safely stored, separately to the survey data. Participants were informed that enumerators would only have access to a minimum of essential data that would enable the enumerators to reach them and verify that they were speaking to the right person.

Data protection and data matching

To safeguard the anonymity of the data, identifying data was stored separately to survey data. A process was designed to match the identifying data to the surveys via an ID code.

The enumerators administer the survey via mobile phone. Surveys are automatically deleted from phones as soon as they are submitted to the data platform, and then retrieved and safely stored by MMC staff. The contact data was similarly stored, but in separate folders from the survey data.

The decision to separate personal data from the survey data was made to protect respondents' anonymity. Linking the two back together, however, proved extremely resource-intensive. It is thus not a scalable approach. Moving forward, one suggestion is to collect the personal data within the core survey and to anonymise the data afterwards.

Implementing the longitudinal extension

Call-back procedures

Enumerators were provided with a list of contacts to call back. Enumerators made a maximum of 3 calls to each participant, and logged data on the call-back process. Respondents who had not used their personal phone were more difficult to reach. It took time, but Figure 1 (above) shows that in the first round of longitudinal data, a majority of respondents were reached.

Interval between survey rounds

How long to wait between different rounds of a longitudinal survey depends on factors including the questions that the survey is intended to answer, the populations that it is being administered to and pre-existing knowledge about those populations (such as how often particular groups are known to move, or how long their journeys through a particular country/region tend to take) and the practical constraints of project funding and institutional capacity. Too short an interval risks respondents having no change to report; too long an interval risks losing the value of a longitudinal survey that is trying to capture evolving, and not retrospective, decision-making, as well as higher attrition. The unpredictability of the number of interviews in later rounds has implications for the research design and analysis plan, as well as for the organisation of data collection activities.

Reaching all respondents after exactly the same time interval was too ambitious. Instead, 'windows' were set to ensure a minimum and maximum length of time between interviews. The first round of longitudinal data collection took place a minimum of 6 weeks and a maximum of 12 weeks after the original 4Mi survey. In North Africa, a very small number of second round surveys took 12-14 weeks after the previous round.

When the gap between the original survey and the first round of the longitudinal survey exceeded 50 days (7 weeks), 42% of interviewees said that their plans had changed, versus 16% amongst those who were re-interviewed within 50 days.

Similarly, there is a statistically significant relationship between the duration between the two interviews and the measures people were taking to keep themselves safe. The more time that elapses between the two interviews, the more likely people are to have changed measures, and it is more likely that they increased those measures than reduced them (when analysed according to more than and less than 50 days between the two interviews). More data would enable this relationship to be explored further, to ensure that the time gap between the interviews is determined in an evidence-based way.

Enumerator training

Delivery of the longitudinal survey differed from the main 4Mi survey in certain key ways: enumerators needed to request consent for repeated interactions, to gather personal data, to match personal data with the original survey, to make and log call-backs, and to deal with the changes to respondents' expectations that came with repeat interactions. Enumerators are given more responsibility for engaging respondents and for data protection, and are required to have a broader knowledge about the various contexts respondents might be travelling through, as remote interviews may take place in locations that they are not familiar with. Additional training, as well as feedback and support, was implemented to address these needs. The signposting mechanism (see below) is another means to equip enumerators with tools to handle the change in role, especially any emotional burden from repeated interaction.

Ethical considerations

Incentives

There are clear ethical and methodological dimensions to consider when deciding whether to offer incentives for participating in surveys and interviews. Incentives can encourage people to participate in research, which can reduce the attrition rate between rounds of a longitudinal survey. It can be appropriate to compensate participants for their time, which may be even more important in longitudinal work where people are being interviewed on multiple occasions, potentially over several hours.

There is nonetheless no clear consensus on offering incentives to survey participants, including due to concerns that this would change the intentions or answers of respondents. In addition, if it is the researcher who selects participants (from a larger pool who consented to participate), then there is an ethical question about the fairness of only participants selected by the researcher receiving an incentive.

There are also serious practical constraints around how and when incentives can be provided to participants who are being contacted remotely, and potentially across borders. It was decided for this pilot that incentives would not be used, but that this should be reconsidered in future longitudinal approaches, given the demands made on respondents.

Assistance/referrals

Repeated interactions with the same individual may also reveal vulnerabilities and needs for assistance, particularly among the 4Mi target population of refugees and migrants on mixed migration routes.

Enumerators are not trained in making referrals, and cannot judge what assistance an individual may need; however, they can provide information. 4Mi has developed a 'signposting' mechanism, providing information on available services in the respondent's location, which has been implemented in a number of countries. The short time frame for this project, however, meant that signposting could only be provided where it already existed (in Libya). It is recommended that future longitudinal research develops a reliable signposting system that reaches locations where the respondents may be.

Survey content and structure

In order to maximise the value of longitudinal data, the survey questions need to be able to register and measure change. This can be done in different ways, through

asking the same question at multiple points in time and comparing the answers, or through asking individuals to consciously reflect on what has changed between the different rounds of the survey. It is also important to be able to account for 'why' those changes happened.

The aim of the pilot was to discover what could be done with a longitudinal approach that fits closely to the existing 4Mi survey format and infrastructure. We therefore chose to rely primarily on closed questions with an extensive list of pre-coded answers. Closed-question surveys with a vulnerable and hard-to-reach population have the advantage of ensuring anonymity. It is also easier to train enumerators, and, in certain contexts, can be less challenging for the participants who are not required to provide open-ended reflections on their experiences. A closed-question survey eases comparative analysis and allows for rapid implementation and scale-up. It is possible to conduct qualitative interviews as part of the longitudinal layer, but this has implications in terms of capacity and analysis that the 4Mi infrastructure is not adapted to.

Within the survey, we included both 'comparative' and 'reflective' questions to assess whether one type of question provided more insightful data for assessing longitudinal change. (See Results section below).

It was important to bear in mind survey length. Existing literature and 4Mi experience with telephone interviews suggested that to be effective, the longitudinal survey must be shorter (particularly since participants are consenting to a second, or third, interview). The longitudinal survey was less than half the length of the 4Mi original survey. We prioritised questions that covered the types of movement people had undertaken, changes in their security situation or access to protection, and whether or not their resilience in terms of enablers and barriers to accessing resources or services had changed.

Longitudinal data analysis

Data analysis came with the usual challenges related to statistical representativeness. The sample size strongly restricted the options available. The study of attrition did, however, benefit from a sample that allowed regression analysis (assuming some randomness in the sample selection). This condition did not hold for the smaller sample of people who were effectively followed (75 individuals). For the rest, we largely stuck to basic comparison of means and proportions – statistical tests of difference were also of limited use given the sample size and the sampling approach.

The analysis of the longitudinal approach (rather than the substantive content of the data collection) focused on three levels:
(1) assessing and understanding who is likely to agree to take part in the follow up,

(2) assessing and understanding who is likely not to agree to the follow up or who is not successfully called back by the enumerators,
(3) understanding the dynamics between survey rounds (see Results section below).

This last level is the most important and the most interesting and could only be done for one extra round of data collection, and with the strong limitations reported above. An improved strategy for integrating and cleaning the different rounds of data would help in the future.

The substantive analysis focused on the main variables that changed somewhat: neighbourhood, plans, and how people were trying to keep safe. It is, however, clear that other aspects could be explored and linked to each other, even with the limited data that collected in this pilot. For example, one could analyse the relationship between changes in individual's expectations and changes in their future plans, and whether changes in respondent's legal, financial and personal (e.g. who they are travelling with) statuses affect perceptions and experiences of protection.

Finally, additional rounds of data collection will allow for much more analysis. For instance, the dataset has huge potential when it comes to looking at whether increasing hardship on a journey does actually translate into a change in people's plans or exploring whether/how exposure to information does potentially change travel plans, and in what ways.

Results

In this report, we consider those results that concern the implementation of the longitudinal methodology, such as retention rates and successful call-backs. A more substantive discussion of the survey data collected from respondents through the multiple rounds of data collection can be found in a separate report, *4Mi Snapshot: What changes over the course of the migration journey? Results from piloting longitudinal 4Mi*.

Consent to participate in the longitudinal extension

In East Africa, 82% of participants agreed to be contacted again for a follow-up survey and to share their contact details to enable this contact to be re-established, with the same proportion of positive responses seen across female and male participants.

Despite the enumerators stressing that this would not lead to those individuals accessing any assistance from MMC, feedback from the enumerators suggests that repeated interactions raised expectations that material support would be forthcoming. The data does not suggest, however, that those who said that they were in need of material assistance during the initial 4Mi survey were more willing to participate in subsequent rounds of

data collection than those who did not.

In North Africa, only 49% of individuals agreed to be called back, compared to 82% in East Africa. Across the sample, those who agreed were on average slightly older and more frequently travelling with minors. Table 1 below provides more details. Differences between the East Africa and North Africa samples (e.g. whether they had reached their destination) may imply that context and movement dynamics may also have an effect, for example, how comfortable the participant feels about being contacted again.

Table 1. Who agreed to be called back? Analysis by profile variables

	Tunisia and Libya (n=479)				Somalia (n=100)			
	Agreed to participate?				Agreed to participate?			
	No		Yes		No		Yes	
	Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %
Sex								
Female	88	57%	66	43%	9	19%	39	81%
Male	192	59%	133	41%	9	17%	43	83%
Travelling with children (under 18)?								
Yes	45	44%	57	56%	7	12%	51	88%
No	232	62%	141	38%	11	26%	31	74%
Refused	3	75%	1	25%	0	0%	0	0%
Journey ended?								
Yes	48	70%	21	30%	9	14%	57	86%
Don't know	20	63%	12	38%	0	0%	1	100%
No	212	56%	166	44%	9	27%	24	73%
Country of interview								
Libya	140	60%	93	40%	0	0%	0	0%
Somalia	0	0%	0	0%	18	18%	82	82%
Tunisia	140	57%	106	43%	0	0%	0	0%
Migration status								
Refugee	41	50%	41	50%	3	25%	9	75%
Asylum seeker	52	60%	35	40%	0	0%	15	100%
Irregular	103	53%	91	47%	15	21%	58	79%
Regular migrant	82	72%	32	28%	0	0%	0	0%
Don't know	2	100%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Nationality*								
Ethiopia	5	50%	5	50%	15	17%	74	83%
Nigeria	51	47%	57	53%				
Sudan	19	38%	31	62%				
Côte d'Ivoire	30	86%	5	14%				
Burkina Faso	20	83%	4	17%				
Niger	18	69%	8	31%				
Cameroon	16	57%	12	43%				
Guinea	11	55%	9	45%				

*Note: Results for nationality only shown if minimum 20 participants of that nationality in sample.

Attrition rate

The table below sums up the profiles of those who could be reached. Age and gender profiles among those reached and not reached were similar. Some differences appeared between countries of interview – respondents in Libya feature more heavily within the unreached sample, and between nationalities - Sudanese respondents composed a large share of those not reached (38%), while only representing 8% of those reached.

Table 2. Who was reached with the longitudinal survey? Analysis by profile

	Reached?			
	No		Yes	
	Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %
Sex				
Female	8	20%	33	80%
Male	8	16%	42	84%
Country of first interview				
Libya	11	42%	15	58%
Somalia	4	9%	42	91%
Tunisia	1	5%	18	95%
Nationality*				
Ethiopia	6	13%	39	87%
Nigeria	0	0%	12	100%
Sudan	6	50%	6	50%

*Note: Only three most common nationalities shown here.

Success of comparative vs reflective questions

Some enumerators indicated that the comparative questions created more survey fatigue, as a respondent, particularly one whose situation had not changed, did not understand or appreciate the same questions being asked again.

While the survey aimed to be shorter, it was actually of very similar duration: both surveys took around 31 minutes each, with a similar standard deviation (17 vs 15 minutes).

Points for reflection and recommendations for future longitudinal approaches

Impact of Covid-19 related constraints: future approaches may have very different results

While the Covid-19 pandemic and 4Mi's transition to remote data collection via phone calls facilitated the development of a longitudinal methodology, Covid-19 restrictions also impacted this pilot. Covid-19-related measures in all countries meant that all enumerators were operating fully remotely, even for the initial 4Mi interviews. This was the case in Libya, but here also the security situation was an additional factor meaning that data collection was fully remote. This may have affected consent to participate in the longitudinal extension – different results may be observed following a face-to-face interview. Covid-19 may also have impacted on migration dynamics.

Time intervals between surveys: determine according to objectives of research

Because of the short timeframe between interviews, likely compounded by the restriction of movement due to Covid-19 during data collection, the majority of respondents did not move or reported change in their situation between data collection rounds. Of note, however, is that a sizeable minority did move within cities and the majority of respondents experienced changes in their plans or protection situation.

In future longitudinal research we could experiment with longer time gaps to see how this affects attrition, especially of particular populations, the data collected, and the strength of recall. Enumerators indicated some confidence that 3- or 6-month gaps could be feasible.

Attrition bias: critical to improve reach

It is obviously impossible to confirm why individuals are uncontactable; a 'known unknown' of attrition. Our assumption, based on the profiles of those who did consent to being recontacted and were contactable, and our knowledge of how phones are used on migration journeys, is that the attrition rate was greater amongst those who moved, and particularly those who crossed borders and subsequently changed numbers.

It will be critical to improve the ability to gather these people's experiences through establishing more reliable mechanisms for contacting them, although it will remain impossible via this methodology to reach those who cannot access a phone, meaning that a certain – potentially more vulnerable – group is not fully represented in the research.

Sampling and target population: determine a specific target

As mentioned above, the limitations on the scope and scale of this pilot mean there are many elements still to explore. In future longitudinal research, it is recommended to attempt to contact everyone who consents (as mentioned in the above point). And when there is a larger pool of participants and longitudinal interviews, it would be recommended to replace unreachable respondents with respondents who have a similar profiles.

More broadly, it could be of interest to select a particular target group for longitudinal research, determined by a baseline survey. An example could be to re-interview all those who said that they had reached the end of their journeys six months on to assess whether this remains the case, and how they perceive their ongoing financial, security and protection-related situation.

Data protection and validation: simplification of processes

Simpler methods would be recommended to match contact details to survey data, to be able to conduct longitudinal data collection at scale.

Interview setting: renewing consent

In face-to-face interviews, or interviews in one location/city, it is easier to gauge whether the setting for the interview is appropriate. Remote interviews evidently make this harder. Consent to be called back may be given months before somebody is actually contacted. It is appropriate to check consent with participants prior to arranging the next interview.

Incentives recommended

In future longitudinal research, we would recommend exploring implementation of an incentive scheme, to recompense participants for their time, encourage participation in follow-up interviews, and provide some kind of assistance. This would require preliminary investigation of feasibility.

Analysis: a larger dataset and a theoretical framework

Future implementation of the longitudinal approach would benefit from a focused theoretical framework. Such an approach could be informed by empirical research, experience, predictions or purely theoretical concerns. More advanced modelling and analysis will also require larger datasets.

Conclusion: What we learned – the analytical value of a longitudinal approach

What happens when 'nothing' happens

The insights gained from the longitudinal data are invaluable. One example is that this approach, as shown through the limited analysis we did on the data collected, can open the black box of what happens when people seem to 'stay put'. Our analysis showed that a lot is nonetheless happening 'under the radar' in terms of relocation within cities and changes to how people are trying to keep themselves safe, which, with more data about these precise dynamics, could be used to inform more targeted support to these populations.

Following lesser-known trajectories

This approach enables an assessment of when and why people return to their country of origin or more generally 'err' from the main routes that the core 4Mi survey interviews respondents on, allowing us to draw more accurate maps of mobility, and capture more often overlooked dynamics of migration.

The factors affecting migration journeys and plans

The longitudinal approach has allowed us to better consider dimensions that are crucial to understanding forced migration and are known to change over time such as access to information, security provision, livelihoods, and journey planning. It can also show us which constellation of factors, if any, actually influences people's decision to change their journey plans or final destinations.

The longitudinal data allows a deeper understanding of the non-linear changes to these dimensions, and how they relate to personal and group characteristics – our analysis flagged, in different points, the role played by gender or the influence of travelling with minors. It allows us to assess how changes in personal circumstance map onto changes in people's journeys, and vice versa, in a way that may deepen our ability to anticipate the shocks and risks that refugees and migrants face.

Changes in perceptions over space and time

The pilot project clearly came with limitations in terms of how far the analysis could be pushed, particularly because of the sample size, but it has nevertheless highlighted the potential of longitudinal data as well as the methodological possibility of collecting this data at an expanded scale.

The longitudinal approach would seem particularly useful for analysing a focused set of research questions in relation to a targeted population, such as how does the protection situation of a particular demographic change when they enter a particular country, or once they have gained access to employment/been reunited with their families, or how does the delivery/access to certain information affect people's expectations and plans? The creation of short longitudinal surveys for administering at 3-6 month intervals would lessen the risk of survey fatigue among respondents, while providing more robust bodies of evidence for informing policies that support how people's journeys actually evolve and change.

The Mixed Migration Centre (MMC) is a global network, with regional hubs in Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America hosted in DRC regional offices, and a small global team in Geneva, engaged in data collection, research, analysis and policy and programmatic development on mixed migration. The Mixed Migration Centre 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. Its overarching focus is on human rights and protection for all people on the move.

The Mixed Migration Centre is part of, and governed by, the Danish Refugee Council (DRC). While its institutional link to DRC ensures its work is grounded in operational reality, the Mixed Migration Centre 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 Mixed Migration Centre does not necessarily reflect the position of DRC.

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