

# Syrians in Tunisia: Routes to Tunisia and destination intentions

Since 2011, more than 5.7 million Syrians have been internationally displaced, mainly to neighbouring Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan, but also farther afield to countries in Europe and North Africa.<sup>1</sup> Over the last 10 years, many Syrians have undertaken fragmented journeys to reach safety. In Tunisia, Syrians represent the second largest nationality among refugees in the country (27%) with a population of 2,575.<sup>2</sup> Using 4Mi data collected between April 2020 and October 2021, this snapshot explores the most common routes undertaken by Syrian respondents arriving in Tunisia within the last two years, as well as their intentions for the future. This snapshot is published alongside a qualitative study available [here](#) which further unfolds the complexity of trajectories shaped by changing border regimes, bilateral pre-war ties, and Syrians' socioeconomic status.

## Key findings

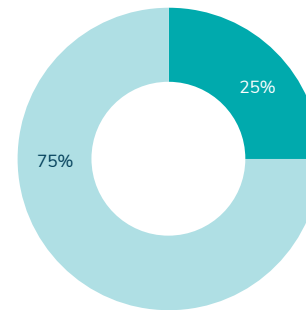
- Most respondents (57%) started their journeys to Tunisia in third countries (most commonly Egypt, Algeria and Libya), implying they had temporarily settled elsewhere before travelling to Tunisia.
- Movements to Tunisia were shaped by violence and political events in countries of departure, be that Syria or elsewhere.
- Routes from/through Egypt and Sudan to Tunisia most often involved crossing Libya.
- Algeria was more frequently a country of departure or transit for respondents travelling with children (45% vs 17% of those travelling without children), while respondents travelling without children more often travelled from/through Libya (63%).
- The majority of respondents intend to move onward from Tunisia, with 62% indicating they had not reached the end of their journey.

## Profiles

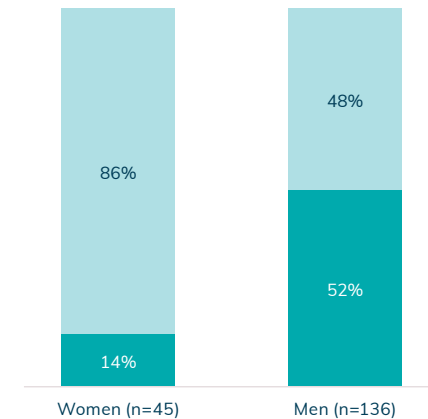
This snapshot draws on 181 4Mi surveys conducted with Syrian refugees and migrants interviewed in Tunisia between April 2020 and October 2021. The sample consists of 25% women and 75% men, aged between 19 and 52 years with an average age of 27. The majority of interviews were conducted with respondents located in Sfax (80), Greater Tunis (63), and Medenine (16), as well as other locations (22). All had reached Tunisia after January 2020. More than half (57%) of respondents were either travelling or living with children under their care, however, this was much more common for interviewed women (86%) than men (48%).

**Figure 1. Profile of respondents: Gender and travelling with children**

### Gender



### Are you currently travelling/living with children under your care?



Total number of respondents (n=181)

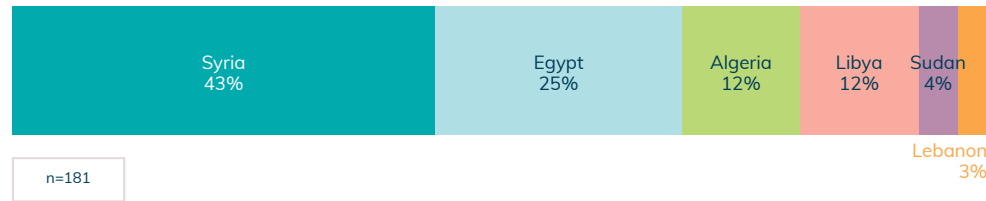
1 UNHCR, 2022. [UNHCR Data Portal - Syria Regional Refugee Response](#)

2 UNHCR, 2022. [UNHCR Data Portal - Tunisia](#)

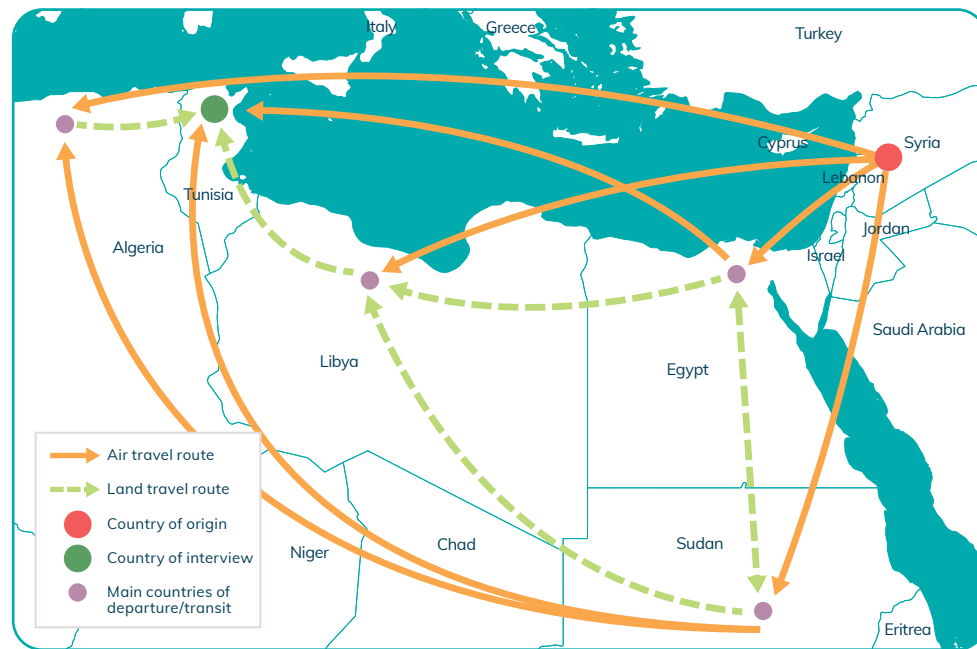
## The journey from Syria is not direct

Most respondents (57%) said they started their journey from a country other than Syria, suggesting they had first settled in a third country prior to making the decision to move to Tunisia. 25% left from Egypt, 12% from Algeria, and 12% from Libya (see Figure 2).<sup>3</sup>

**Figure 2. From which country did you start your migration journey?**



**Map 1. Overview of most common routes to Tunisia of Syrian 4Mi respondents**



3 It is important to note that perceptions of the journey may vary. Enumerators ask about the country a participant started their migration journey from: one respondent may consider a trajectory that includes relatively long stays in intermediate locations to be one journey from Syria, and another may consider these to be multiple journeys.

If we consider Syria as the country of origin even for those who left third countries (since they too had left Syria at some point),<sup>4</sup> then close to all (99%) respondents had passed through at least one other country between leaving Syria and reaching Tunisia (see Map 1).<sup>5</sup> A majority (57%) had passed through at least two countries during their journey, outlining often long and fragmented journeys involving both air and land travel.

## Egypt was the most common first country of transit among departures from Syria

Respondents who reported starting their journey from Syria most often first traveled to Egypt (31/78). Around one-quarter reported their first transit country was Sudan (19/78), Others transited Jordan, Lebanon or Turkey, before undertaking similar trajectories to Tunisia.

## Libya is a transit country for a majority

In addition to the 21 respondents who started from Libya, Libya was transited by everyone who left Sudan (8 respondents), a majority who left Egypt (41/46), and 23 out of 78 who left Syria. Overall, 94 of the 181 respondents had either left from or transited through Libya.

A smaller sample of respondents were also asked to list any stops taken along the route and to outline the reasons for each stop.<sup>6</sup> In Libya (n=39), most stopped to organize the continuation of their journey to Tunisia, either by working to earn money (19/39) or looking for smugglers (19/39). Of the stops recorded in Algeria and Sudan, 13 out of 24 were described as stops originally taken with the intention to settle there.

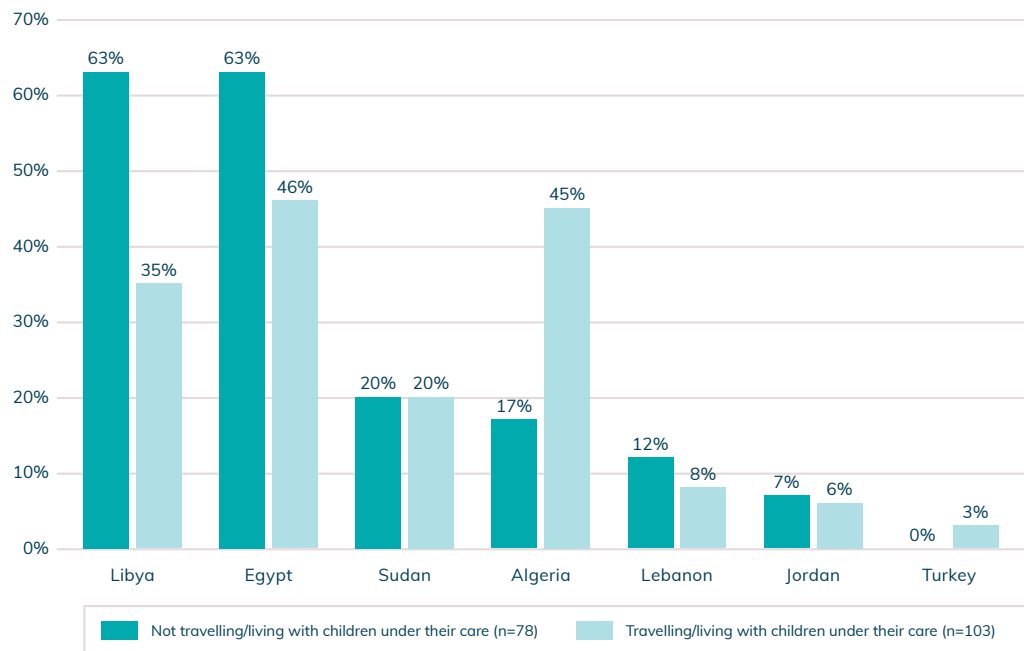
4 It is understood from qualitative research with Syrians in Tunisia that those who indicated having started their journeys in third countries had left Syria after the conflict began in 2011.  
 5 Among those indicating that their journey began outside Syria, it is possible that additional countries were transited since departure from Syria, which have not been captured by the 4Mi survey.  
 6 Interviews conducted after February 2021 included listing of stops along the route and reasons for each stop – these were not present in the previous version of the survey. Therefore, analysis of this variable is based on a smaller sample of 37 interviews conducted after this date.

## Algeria was frequently on the journey of respondents traveling with children, while those traveling without children more often travelled through Libya

It was more common for respondents who reported travelling with children to either depart from or transit Algeria than it was for those without children. Specifically, 45% of respondents travelling with children had travelled through Algeria, while this was the case for 17% of those without children in their care. This may be due to the route through Algeria being perceived as less dangerous than through Libya.

Respondents not travelling with children had more often departed from/transited Libya (63%); the majority were young men travelling on their own. Qualitative research identified a new (since 2021) refugee profile of young men from southern Syria aiming to cross the Mediterranean from Tunisian and Libyan shores.<sup>7</sup>

**Figure 3. Countries departed from/transited on journey between Syria and Tunisia**



7 MMC, 2022 - [Destination North Africa: Syrians' displacement trajectories to Tunisia](#)

## Violence and political events drive movement to Tunisia from Syria as well as other countries

Among respondents who outlined that their journey had started in Syria, most had started their journeys from Syria between 2016 and 2018 (49/78) and all reported leaving due to violence and conflict.

Respondents who had left Libya and Algeria generally began their journeys in 2019 (16/21 and 17/22, respectively). This coincides with the start of the Western Libya military conflict (April 2019)<sup>8</sup> and the start of mass protests in Algeria (February 2019).<sup>9</sup> Respondents who started their journey from Algeria and Libya commonly indicated having left because of violence, insecurity and conflict (17/21 and 17/22, respectively).

Most respondents who had departed from Egypt did so in 2017 or 2018 (37/46), and were prompted by a variety of reasons, most commonly related to rights and freedom (34/46) and economic drivers (33/46), possibly linked to the austerity measures implemented in Egypt in 2017 that drastically increased costs of basic goods.<sup>10</sup>

Journeys reported as starting from Syria took, on average, 28 months, while those from Sudan took 23 months, from Egypt 20 months, and from neighbouring Libya and Algeria less than one month.

8 The Guardian, 2019 - [Battle for Tripoli escalates as fighting nears Libyan capital](#)

9 The New York Times, 2019 - [Algeria Protests Grow Against President Bouteflika, Ailing and Out of Sight](#)

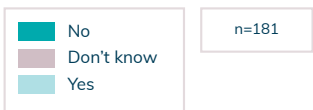
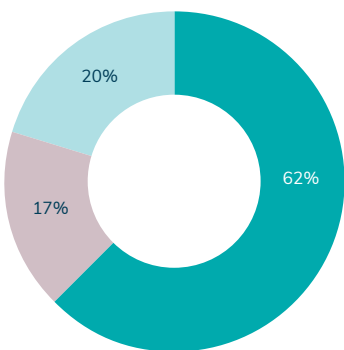
10 Reuters, 2019 - [Refugees in Egypt struggle to live as economic hardships deepen](#)

## The majority of respondents intend to move onward from Tunisia

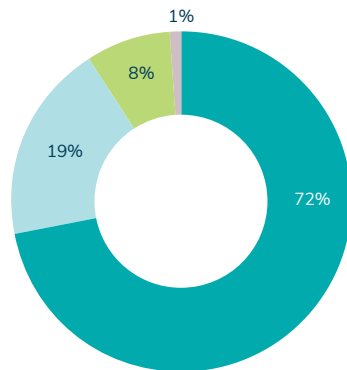
Almost two-thirds (62%) of respondents indicated that they had not reached the end of their journey, suggesting an intention to move elsewhere at some point in the future. 20% had reached the end of their journey and 17% did not know. Of those considering moving onward, most identified a European country as their preferred destination, 19% cited Canada, and 8% cited the United States (see Figure 4). All those intending to move toward Europe or North America described planning to apply for asylum once they arrived and to stay there permanently.

**Figure 4. Have you reached the end of your journey? What country is your preferred destination?**

Have you reached the end of your journey?



(If 'no' or 'don't know') What country is your preferred destination?



People traveling without children seem to have more uncertainty about whether their journey will continue, with 26% saying they don't know if they have reached the end of their journey (compared to 0% of those traveling without children).

Additionally, Covid-19 appears to have been a factor in people's ability to move onward: 22% said they had been in Tunisia longer than planned and 25% said that plans for resettlement had been delayed.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> This question was posed only to respondents interviewed between April 2020 and February 2021 (n=144), when a COVID-19-focused version of the 4Mi survey was used.



### 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 Asia and the Pacific, East and Southern Africa, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, North Africa, and West Africa.

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](http://www.mixedmigration.org/4mi)