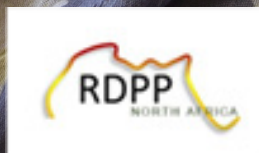


Crossing Paths

A Respondent Driven Sampling
survey of migrants and refugees in
Nouadhibou, Mauritania



Funded by
the European Union



Italy,
lead of the RDPP NA
Consortium

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UNHCR wishes to express its gratitude to Lisa Johnston for analyzing and presenting the data and for co-writing the final report. Lisa Johnston is a worldwide expert in Respondent Driven Sampling. The focus of her work is on innovative sampling and population size estimation techniques among hard-to-reach populations, including people who inject drugs, sex workers, men who have sex with men, transgender persons, youth and migrants.

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Cover page picture

A mother and her child at the ALPD community center in Nouadhibou.

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Disclaimer

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The population in figures



10,000

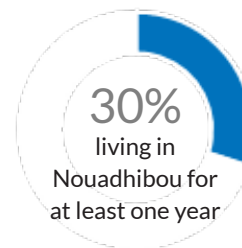
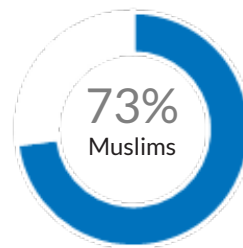
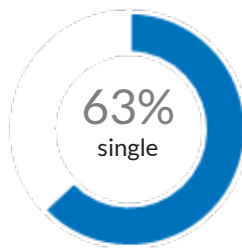
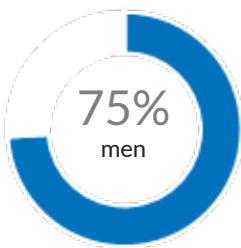
refugees and migrants from Western, Central and Eastern Africa living in Nouadhibou

Male



7,500

male refugees and migrants

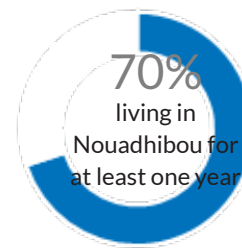
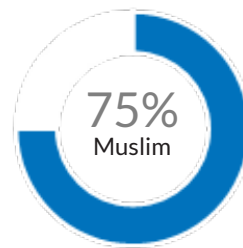
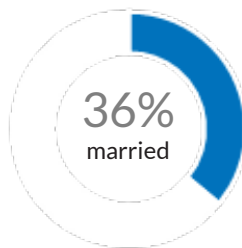
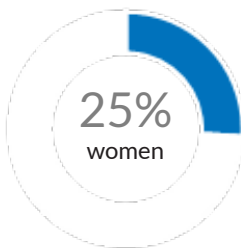


Female



2,500

female refugees and migrants

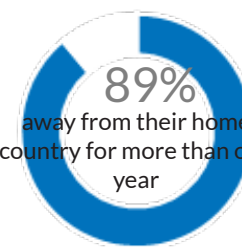
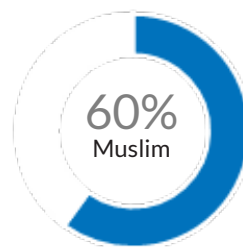
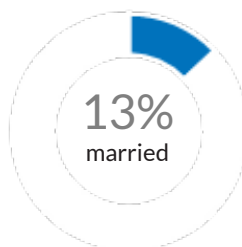
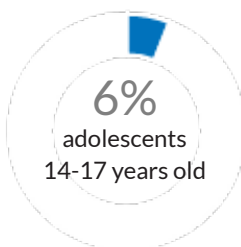


Adolescents 14 - 17 years old



606

adolescents



Summary of Findings

Considering the widely divergent estimations and the hard-to-reach nature of migrant and refugee populations on the move who choose to stay apart and be discreet, the UN refugee agency in Mauritania, UNHCR, used Respondent Driven Sampling (RDS) in Nouadhibou to more accurately estimate this population. RDS relies on peers recruiting their peers.

The survey estimates the number of migrants and refugees, aged 14 and older, originating from Western, Central and Eastern Africa living in Nouadhibou to be around 10,000. The survey found that most migrants and refugees in Nouadhibou are male, single, from Mali, and work mostly in the fishing and construction industries. Women make up 26% of the migrant and refugee population; they are less mobile than men and have been living in Nouadhibou for more than one year; they tend to live more often with others; they have children and are begging. As for adolescents aged 14 to 17, they represent 6% of the migrants and refugees in Nouadhibou. The largest group among them is made of Malians. This population includes migrants and refugees; the reasons for which they left their countries are mainly due to economic hardship, but also to fear of persecution et violence. The survey concludes that a large diversity of nationalities and profiles live in Nouadhibou; the largest group comes from Mali. This population is made up of both migrants and refugees; the reasons for leaving their home country are mainly due to economic hardship, but also due to fear of persecution and violence.

The survey shows that most migrants and refugees are not necessarily trying to move to Europe, rather that most went to Mauritania to look for work (or seek asylum, in particular for women). The survey also shows that the Western African region has dynamic mixed movements, and that migrants and refugees take the same routes to reach Mauritania. An interesting finding is that the migration route from the south to Mauritania has less smuggling activity than the route north of Mauritania. This may be a reason for why few migrants and refugees reported being victim of or having observed trafficking. Last, regarding access to social services, most migrants and refugees face difficulties in having access to basic services and finding decent housing and work. Besides, access to legal documentation is a major concern for all.

The context

Mixed movements

The number of people fleeing war, persecution and conflict reached 70.8 million in 2018; the highest level that UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, has seen in its almost 70 years.ⁱ This figure is conservative, as many who are in need of international refugee protection do not formally apply for asylum. Further, a large proportion of who people are moving to increase their economic opportunities, travel as part of mixed flows.

Refugees and migrants moving as part of mixed flows face many protection challenges including being forced into physically demanding and dangerous jobs, earning low wages, living in sub-standard conditions and having limited access to health care and other social services. Whether part of a forced displacement or a voluntary movement, many refugees and migrants worldwide may face scenarios of human trafficking and smuggling. They have limited social support networks and must adapt to foreign culture, customs and languages. They also face increased health risks, no matter their previous level of health, but are often not granted equitable access to affordable health care or other services. When services are made available to refugees and migrants, these may not be linguistically or socially sensitive. Lost, confiscated or lack of documentation is also a common feature of mixed movements and may have serious implications including risk of statelessness. As for women, they may find themselves in highly vulnerable situations specific to their gender and forced to adopt negative coping mechanisms. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex individuals on the move also face distinct vulnerabilities, including severe discrimination and violence, sexual abuse, lack of police protection and arbitrary detention, exclusion from access to basic services, and social ostracism and exclusion. As for children involved in these movements are at heightened risk of child labour, exploitation, detention, abuse and violence. Many among them miss out on education.

The sub-regional Context

The Sub-Saharan, Western and Central African regions are geographical regions of high mobility. The Islamic Republic of Mauritania has long been a transit and destination country for refugees and migrants passing on their way to North Africa and Europe, arriving for seasonal fishing and mining jobs, or to seek protection.ⁱⁱ Mauritania, located in Northwest Africa, is the eleventh largest state in Africa and is bordered by the Atlantic Ocean to the west, Western Sahara to the north and northwest, Algeria to the northeast, Mali to the east and southeast, and Senegal to the southwest. The country has a 754 km long coastline on the Atlantic Ocean stretching from Ndiago in the south to Nouadhibou in the north. Its population is estimated at 4,163 million in 2013, of which about 1.1 million live in Nouakchott and 130,000 in Nouadhibou. Mauritania is populated by Moors, Fulani, Wolofs and Soninke ethnicities and the official language is Arabic while the national languages are Hassanya, Fulani, Wolof and Soninke. French is also often used in the services of the state.

Asylum in Mauritania

Mauritania operates an open-door policy for refugees and asylum-seekers. While signatory to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, its 1967 Protocol, and the 1969 Organization of African Union Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa, Mauritania has not passed yet a national asylum law. Decree no. 2005/022 adopted in 2005 fixes the implementation modalities of the international conventions related to refugees and created the National Consultative Commission on Refugees. A draft asylum law remains pending approval by the Council of Ministers before transmission to the Parliament. In this context, UNHCR conducts all refugee status determination processes, delivers UNHCR refugee cards, and supports durable solutions. UNHCR works closely with the Mauritanian authorities to enhance the protection of refugees and asylum-seekers in the country, improving access to documentation, birth registration, socio-economic opportunities, as well as basic services such as health and education.

Nouadhibou

Nouadhibou is the second largest city in Mauritania and an important convergence point for mixed population flows coming from Sub-Saharan, West, Central and North Africa. Nouadhibou provides many economic opportunities to migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees, mainly in fishing-related activities at the port and has served as an access point to Europe either through unofficial routes to Morocco or Algeria or directly to the Canary Islands by sea.

The total number of regular and irregular migrants, and people in need of international protection residing in Mauritania is not precisely established. UNHCR Noudhibou had registered 94 refugees and 241 asylum-seekers end May 2019. While refugees are mostly from Syria, Ivory Coast and the Central African Republic (CAR), asylum claimants originate more from Guinea Conakry, Nigeria, Mali (other than Northern and Central regions), Guinea-Bissau and Cameroun. Existing size estimations for the refugee and migrant population in Nouadhibou vary widely between 6,000ⁱⁱⁱ and 32,000^{iv}.

Survey objectifs

On 17 December 2018, the United Nations General Assembly affirmed the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR)^v, a framework for more predictable and equitable responsibility-sharing, recognizing that a sustainable solution to refugee situations cannot be achieved without international cooperation. Its four key objectives are to:

- Ease the pressures on host countries;
- Enhance refugee self-reliance;
- Expand access to third-country solutions; and
- Support conditions in countries of origin for return in safety and dignity.

The GCR recognizes that refugee situations are not homogeneous and may involve both refugees and others on the move^{vi}. In this context, the evidence collected through the survey in the mixed movement context of Nouadhibou supports the search for local solutions at the interface between the Global Compact on Refugees and the Global Compact on Migration^{vii} also affirmed in 2018 by the international community.

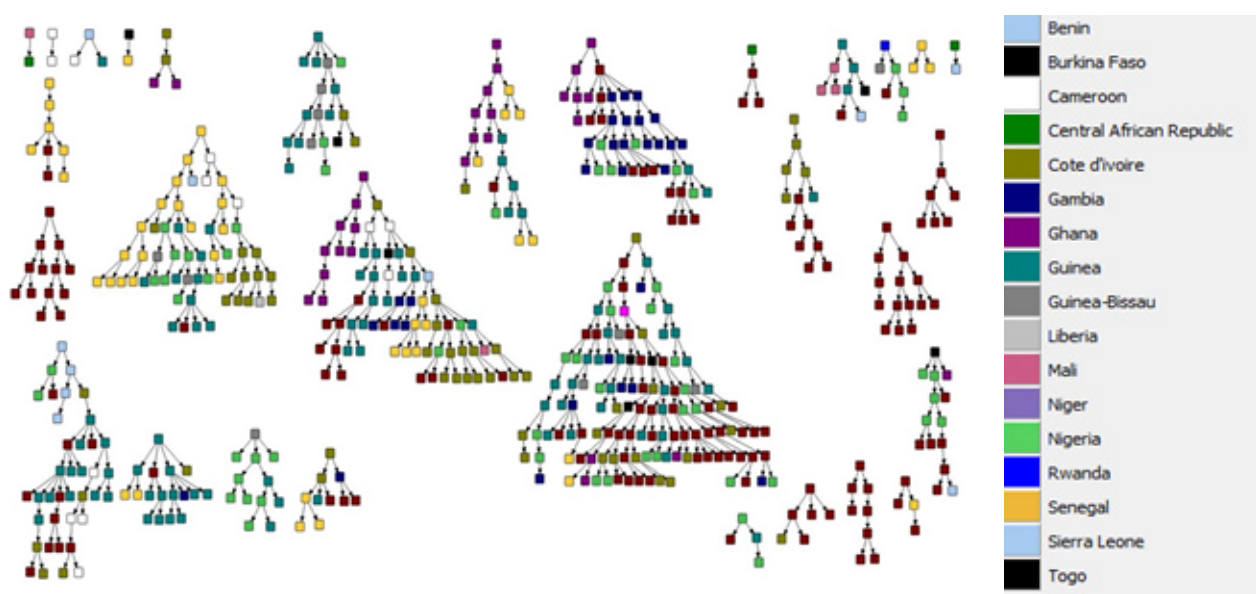
According to UNHCR's data, the average stay of urban refugees in Mauritania is between two and five years, and 13% have been in Mauritania for more than ten years. Further, for many of them, Mauritania was their asylum destination and will continue being so in the absence of peace prospects in their countries of origin. As such, the adoption of responses at the humanitarian-development nexus has become an imperative beyond Mbera refugee camp in the South-Eastern region of Bassikounou. UNHCR in Mauritania is signatory to the 2018-2022 United Nations Sustainable Development Partnership Framework, which integrates humanitarian and development interventions under one umbrella. In this context, this study of the migrant and refugee populations in Nouadhibou aims to provide the necessary evidence basis to support planning, resource allocation, protection and assistance responses, partnerships, and ultimately the solutions needed.

Methodology

UNHCR Mauritania used the Respondent Driven Sampling (RDS).^{viii} RDS is a variant of snowball sampling and is widely used to sample hard-to-reach populations, such as for example populations at higher risk for HIV. Data are collected through peer-referral over social networks. When implemented and analyzed properly, RDS yields data representative of the network of the populations from which the sample was gathered.^{ix} RDS is specifically designed to sample hidden populations and has been used including by UNAIDS, UNICEF, UNDP and UNODC, and to some extent, by the World Food Programme (WFP).^x

Considering the widely divergent estimations and the hard-to-reach nature of migrant and refugee populations on the move, UNHCR Mauritania decided to use RDS for the survey in Nouadhibou in order to more accurately estimate this population. RDS fundamentally relies on peers recruiting their peers. Sampling starts with identifying 'seeds' (i.e. initial participants with large social networks and the ability to recruit diverse peers) in the community along pre-set eligibility criteria. In the case of the Nouadhibou survey, 'seeds' were aged 14 years or older, originating from Western, Central and Eastern Africa as well as the Middle East, in a regular or irregular situation, and residing in Nouadhibou and in Mauritania for more than two months. 'Seeds' were identified by UNHCR and its partners and thus carry bias. However, having long recruitment chains in the sample reduces this initial bias. RDS analysis requires a weighting system using social network information of each respondent to ensure that individuals with large social networks are not overrepresented in the final sample.

Figure A. Recruitment graphic of country of origin among migrants and refugees in Nouadhibou



This was one of few attempts, and the first by UNHCR, to use RDS in mixed movements for the purposes of measuring documentation, birth registration, economic opportunities, and basic services such as health and education to improve protection services. The benefits of using this method is that the final sample should represent the network of the population sampled. Other current methods for sampling hidden populations do not provide representative information. In addition, RDS allows for the estimation of population sizes using one or more methods such as the Unique Object Multiplier or the Service Multiplier.^{xi} The size estimation is calculated using the overlap of those in the RDS survey who reported receiving a defined Unique Object or those who reported accessing a specific service during a specified time period and the number of Unique Objects distributed before the survey or program data of the number of migrants or refugees who receive the service.

The survey in Nouadhibou

UNHCR Mauritania conducted this survey in Nouadhibou, among migrant and refugee populations, aged 14 and older, originating from Western, Central and Eastern Africa as well as the Middle East, from mid-November to end-December 2018. The survey of migrant and refugee populations in Nouadhibou began with 30 individuals selected as 'seeds', i.e. initial participants. Once confirmed for eligibility, respondents were interviewed by trained interviewers who entered data directly into a tablet using KoBO.^{xii} In this survey, 535 respondents completed the survey including adolescents between the ages of 14 and 17 years were. Although an incentive for participation was offered, only 9% reported participating in order to obtain the incentive, whereas 54% explained that they participated because the 'survey seems useful or interesting' and 49% in order to 'access protection services'. To estimate the population size of migrants and refugees in Nouadhibou, one week prior to initiating the RDS survey, the Unique Object Multiplier was conducted by distributing 1,000 Unique Objects (a card with a colored object) to unique refugees and migrants throughout Nouadhibou. During the survey, respondents were asked if they had received the Unique Object. The Service Multiplier used service data consisting of the unique counts of migrant and refugee populations who accessed IOM^{xiii} during a specific time period prior to initiating the RDS survey.

In addition to surveying refugees and migrants, UNHCR Mauritania Protection staff carried out in-depth protection interviews. The quantitative and qualitative data from these surveys were recorded on SMMART, a mobile application used by humanitarian aid workers in mixed movement situations to record and track personal information as well as assistance and internal and external referrals, and to coordinate interventions for migrants and refugees. SMMART (System for Mixed Movement Assistance and Referral Tracking) allowed the UNHCR Protection team to work offline as well as the seamless administration of the survey with KoBO and the UNHCR database proGres.

Population profile

The survey estimates that the population of migrants and refugees in Nouadhibou, aged 14 and older, originating from Western, Central and Eastern Africa, is around 10,000.

Most migrants and refugees in Nouadhibou are men

Most migrants and refugees in Nouadhibou are men (74%) between the ages of 30 and 40 years (26%). These men are Muslim (73%) and single (63%). They work mostly in fishing (12%), at the port (11%) and in construction (18%) work. The population size of male migrants and refugees in Nouadhibou is estimated to be 7,500.

Women have a distinct profile compared to men

Women comprise 26% of refugees and migrants in Nouadhibou. They are mostly 24 to 26 years old (28%) and married (36%) or divorced, separated or widowed (38%). Like men, they are mostly Muslim (75%). Women roughly represent 2,500 of the total migrant and refugee population.

Compared to men, more women have been living in Nouadhibou for at least one year (70% women vs. 30% men), been away from their home country for at least a year (75% women vs. 52% men), have children (82% women vs. 35% men), live with others (89% women vs. 73% men) and have traveled with someone to reach Mauritania (56% women vs. 27% men).

The work profiles of women are different from those of men: 17% are begging (compared to 3% of men); 16% do domestic work (compared to 4% of men); and 10% work as vendors (compared to 4% of men).

Adolescents make up 6% of the populations on the move in Nouadhibou

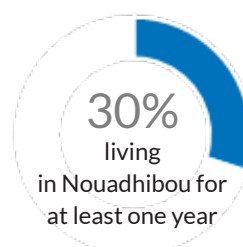
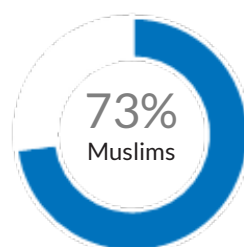
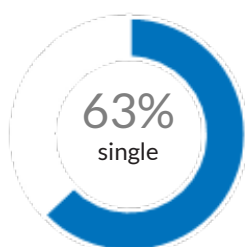
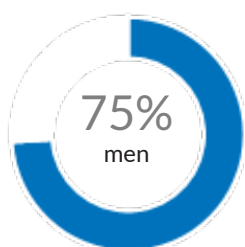
The survey found that 6% of the migrant and refugee population in Nouadhibou are adolescents aged 14 to 17 (i.e. 606 youth). Among adolescents, 21% are girls, 13% are married, and 60% are Muslim. Further, 49% work in construction and 12% are begging. Concerning their travel to Mauritania, 89% have been away from their home country for more than one year and 58% traveled alone.



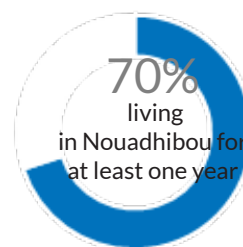
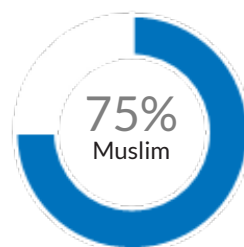
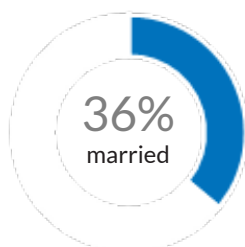
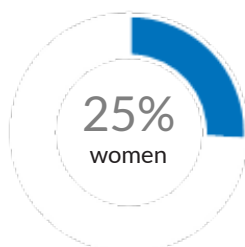
The population in figures



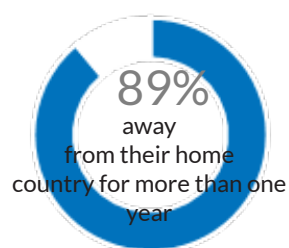
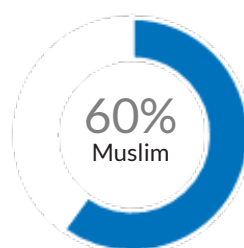
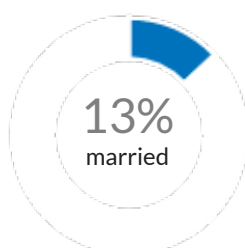
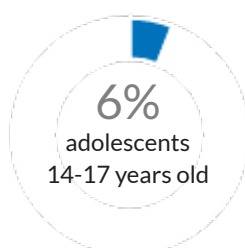
Male



Female



Adolescents 14 - 17 years old

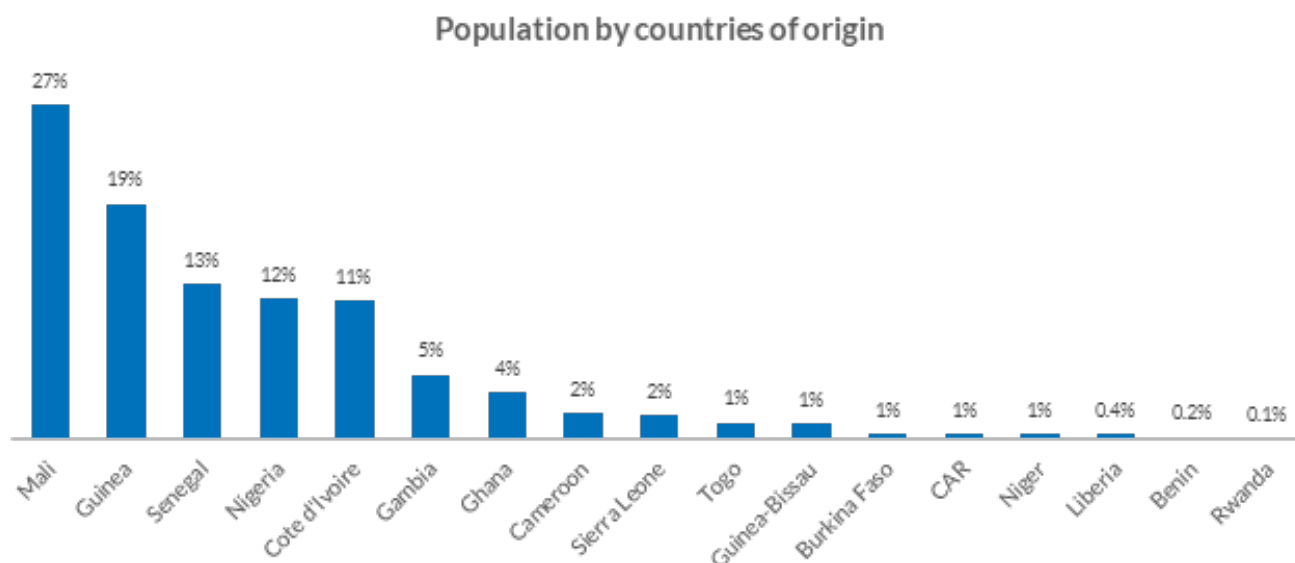


Une population originaire du Mali essentiellement

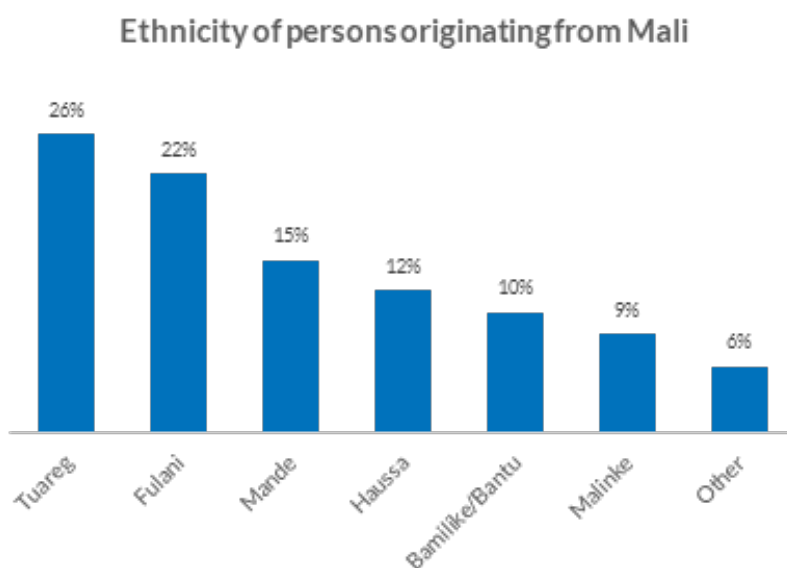
Migrants and refugees in Nouadhibou come from many countries throughout Africa. The highest percentage come from Mali (27%), followed by Guinea (19%) and Senegal (13%).

A., man, 32, North Mali :

“I came to Nouadhibou in July 2018, my wife and children are still in Mbera. I came here to work and send money to my family. It’s temporary, as soon as I have some money, I will go back to Mbera.”



Among the Malians in Nouadhibou, 26% are Tuareg and 22% Fulani. This is an important finding of this survey given the situation in the Northern and Central regions of Mali, and would tend to indicate that these persons are of concern as per UNHCR’s Position on Returns to Mali.^{xiv}



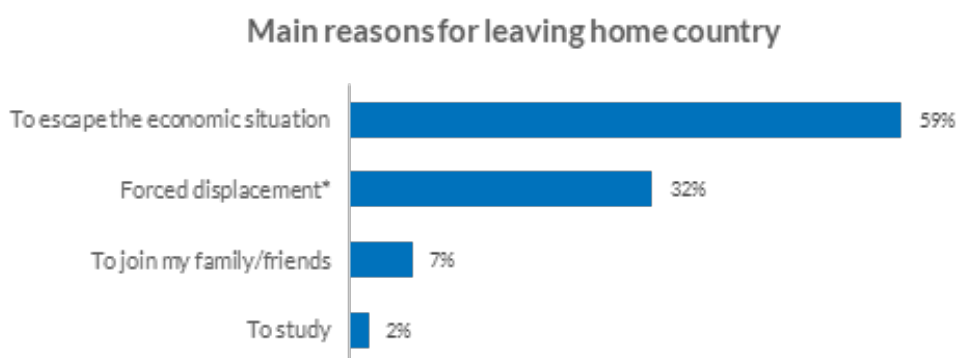
In-depth interviews carried out by UNHCR Protection reveal that while some of the Malians from the North had been to Mbera and registered and effectively hold a refugee card, others had not been because “there is nothing for them at Mbera” as they explained.

M., man, 40, North Mali :

“I know Mbera because I go there to travel but I never stopped or registered. I did not want to go there because I prefer to stay in Nouadhibou because here I can work.”

Reasons for leaving the country of origin

One third of the persons moving in mixed flows in Nouadhibou (37% women and 20% men) report that they were forced to leave their country of origin to escape from a situation of violence, a political or social situation that threatened them or to flee war, armed conflict or persecution.



* Forced displacement includes escape from a situation of violence, a political situation, a social situation against respondent or to flee war/armed conflict, or to escape persecution.

Close to 60% explain that they left their home country because of economic hardship (40% women and 59% men).

S., woman, 36, Gambia :

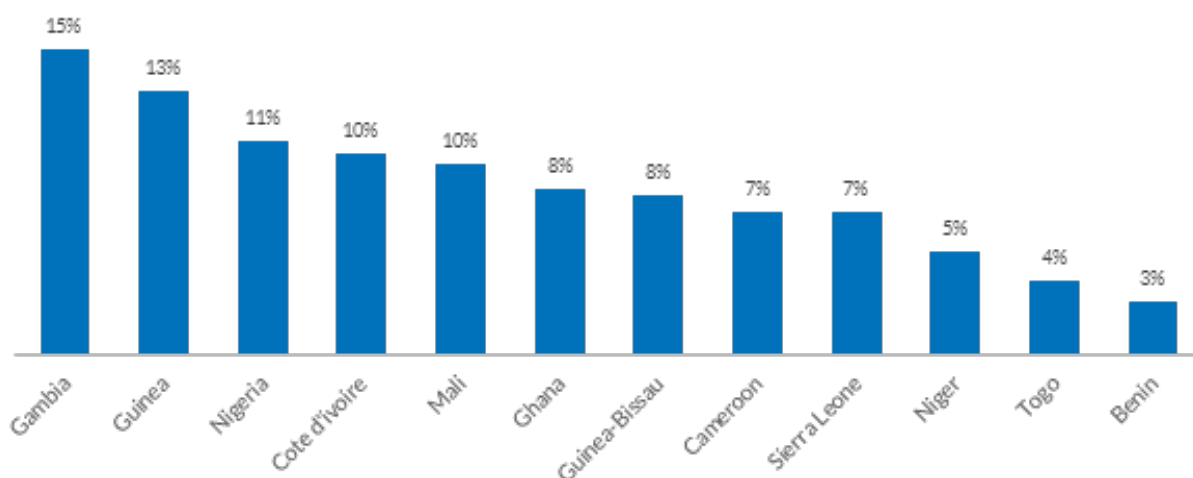
“I came with my husband to Nouadhibou. My husband died trying to cross the sea when I was 3 months pregnant. I live with difficulty in Mauritania with my 2 year old daughter in a small room. But I prefer to stay in Mauritania to work because the situation here is better than in The Gambia.”

Migration and Forced Displacement

Mauritania – Destination country

It is often assumed that migrants and refugees on the move seek to reach Europe. However, in the context of Nouadhibou, close to 75% report that their intended destination when leaving their home country was Mauritania. Only 13% declare that they want to go to the European Union (7% to Spain, 2% to France and 1% to Germany). Of those, 15% are from the Gambia, 13% from Guinea, 11% from Nigeria and 9.5% from Mali.

Nationalities of those who intended to go to the European Union



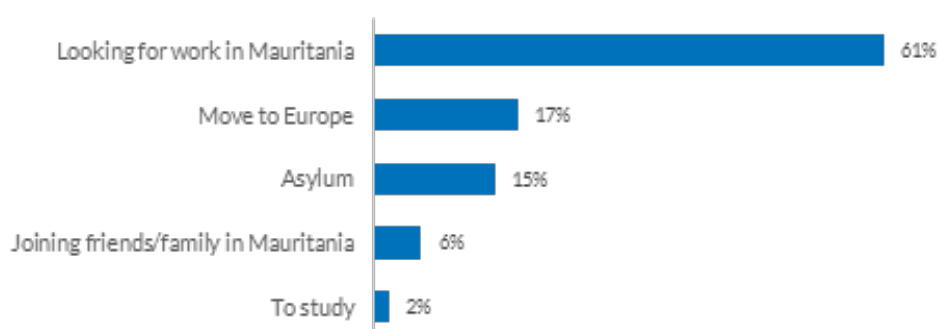
Experiences en route may have an impact of people's decisions about destinations. In Nouadhibou, 60% of migrants and refugees changed their minds because of the lack of funds.

Reasons for going to Mauritania

Close to two thirds report that their main reason for deciding to go to Mauritania was to look for work - 61% men and 41% women.

However, the second most cited reason among women is to seek asylum (22%) while among men, this is to move to Europe (19%).

Main reasons for going to Mauritania



Of note, none of those who hoped to go to Mauritania to study are actually studying.

M., boy, 14, Guinea:

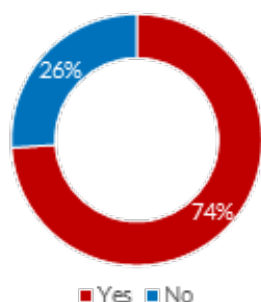
“I came alone. My parents let me go to find work. In Nouadhibou, I did not find work and I can not always feed myself. For me, the most important would be to continue my studies.”

Expériences en route

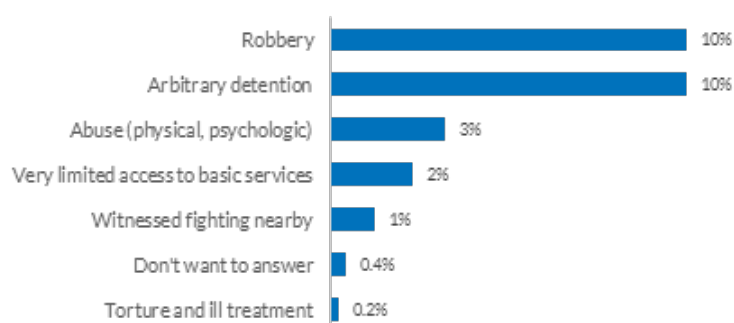
Migrants and refugees in Nouadhibou were asked about with whom they had traveled to Mauritania and whether they had been separated from family and friends while traveling as this is a common situation for people on the move. Of the 34% who traveled with someone to reach Mauritania (56% women and 27% men), 42% report that they traveled with a friend, and 13% report being separated during travel, mostly due to lack of money (87%).

Further, 74% report having problems en route to Mauritania, and among them 10% experienced arbitrary detention and 10% were robbed. A further 0.2% were subjected to torture or ill-treatment. Of note, 0.4% did not want to answer this question, a potential indicator of further abusive experiences.

Had problems during trip to Mauritania



Had the following problems during trip to Mauritania



The survey also sought to identify routes used by migrants and refugees in Nouadhibou: the main entry points to Mauritania are through Rosso (45%) or Gogui (41%).

However, 12.5% indicate that they have entered through “other” entry points, which would reflect the high number of Malians among the population under survey in Nouadhibou



Smuggling

The smuggling of migrants involves the facilitation of a person's illegal entry into a State, for a financial or other material benefit.^{xv} Although it is a crime against a State, smuggling can also be abusive and expose refugees and migrants to life-threatening risks, violence and serious human rights abuses, as well as the risk of being trafficked (aggravated smuggling). Given increasing obstacles to access safety, refugees, asylum-seekers and other persons in need of international protection are often compelled to use smugglers as their only means to flee persecution, conflict and violence.^{xvi}

On this route however, smugglers are not used as much as on other routes. Only 9% reported using a smuggler since leaving their home country. A reason for this may be that when traveling North until reaching Mauritania, certain nationalities can travel visa free and therefore do not require the services of smuggling networks to cross international borders. This may also indicate that smuggling networks have not yet structured themselves to control the routes in the sub-region, thereby not yet forcing most or all who wish to move onward to use their services.

A., man, 30, Sudan:

“I came to Nouadhibou illegally with the help of a smuggler because my goal was to go to Morocco and then Europe. I tried to go to Morocco illegally; I organized with two other Senegalese migrants. We went to spend the night in Kandara [in Mauritania before the border]. Then the Moroccan police arrested me and told me to go back to Mauritania. The two Senegalese migrants have managed to pass. I tried again and again; the Moroccan police pushed me back. I also made contact with Egyptian smugglers who organize boat trips to the Canary Islands, but it is too expensive.”

For those who used the services of smugglers to come to Mauritania, most (62%) paid with West African CFA Francs and 65% paid the equivalent of between USD 277 and USD 555.



©UNHCR/2019

Onward movements

Asked about their onward movements beyond Nouadhibou, 2% of migrants and refugees have tried to cross borders by sea to get to Spain, and 4% have attempted to reach Morocco or Algeria. Of those who tried and were pushed back, most (79%) decided to return to Nouadhibou after their failed border crossing attempt.

M., man, 23, Guinea:

“There is a lot of strikes in my country. During a demonstration in 2015 I was shot in the leg and amputated [...]. I could not find work anymore and I was afraid to go to work and go out. I decided to leave to find a better life [...]. I wanted to go to Europe through Morocco so I took a car to Nouakchott to go to the border of Morocco. Once on the border, the Moroccan police told me that I could not get through and had to take a flight. I stayed four days on the border, then the Mauritanian authorities let me re-enter and gave me a stamp. Since then I stay in Nouadhibou.”

Unlike the southern portion of the Western Mediterranean route, where few migrants and refugees report having used a smuggler, 46% of those who tried to cross the border along the northern route to Morocco or Algeria, and 89% of those who tried their luck by boat to Spain, resorted to the services of a smuggler.

M., man, Ivory Coast :

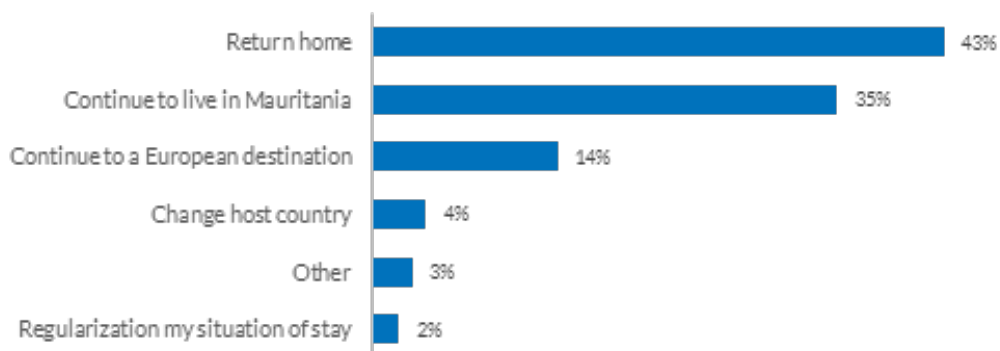
“I tried to go to Morocco. An Ivorian friend showed me the road to go to the border. The police [unclear if Mauritanian or Moroccan], asked me for money because I did not have a passport but I had nothing so they told me to leave. I tried five times to pass without success. Once, I left with three Ivorian friends who did not have passports either but they had money ; they could pay the police and they passed. Every time the police tell me to leave because I do not have the money to pay them.”

Half of those who tried to cross North paid their smugglers in Mauritanian Ouguiya, and less than a third in Euro. In-depth interviews seemed to indicate that smuggling on the northern portion of the Western Mediterranean route is run by small operators in the main.

Future plans

It is commonly believed that people travelling as part of mixed flows want to get to Europe and that Nouadhibou is the launching platform to do so. However, only 14% plan to move to a European country while more than two thirds plan to continue to live in Mauritania, and 43% to return to their home country. Of those who plan to move onward, 66% are in an irregular legal situation, 30% in a regular situation and 4% are refugees.

Main plans for the next year



More women (78%) than men (56%) report having thought of returning to their home country but the lack of money (91%) is the main reason for not returning. For those who had not thought of returning to their home country, one fifth stresses the job opportunities in Mauritania and another fifth closeness to Europe.

D., woman, 53, Guinea :

“I arrived in Nouadhibou in 1987 to work in a different field than the agriculture that was becoming difficult in my country. I want to go to Europe or go home to get treatment because my health problem cannot be treated in Mauritania”.

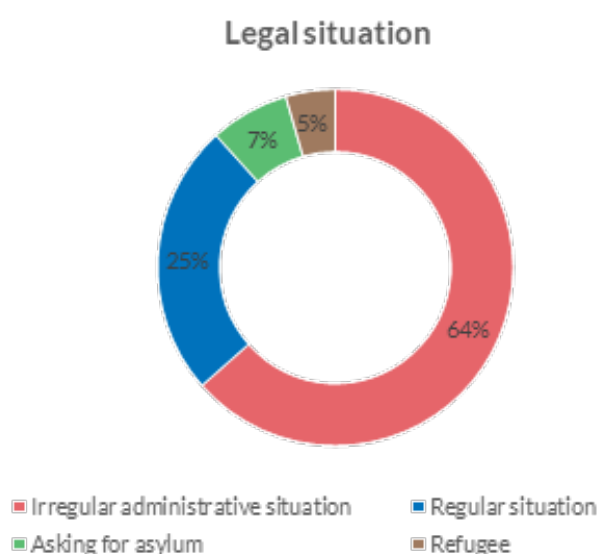


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Legal Situation

The survey highlights that almost two thirds of the refugee and migrant populations in Nouadhibou are in an irregular situation. Among those with irregular status, the majority are men (62%) while those with refugee status are mostly women (77%).

Persons on the move in an irregular situation are at high risk of exploitation on the labour market and may fill gaps by working at more dangerous, dirty or degrading jobs. Their housing situation can be precarious and their right to healthcare limited. Their children's right to education may be unclear. These persons on the move without legal status are the most hidden members of migrant and refugee populations; the RDS methodology managed to effectively reach them.



As for the persons who would come under UNHCR's mandate, 7% of the respondents declare that they have asked for asylum while 4.5% have had their refugee status recognized.

S., woman, 40, Ivory Coast :

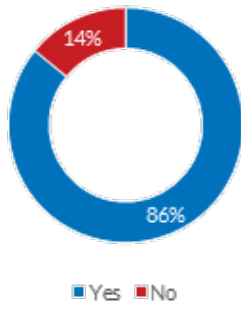
“I was a refugee, recognized in Togo. I left Togo because the country knows troubles because of the marches. I was afraid and also that prevented me from working. I did not want to go back to Ivory Coast and for me Mauritania is safer.”

Documentation

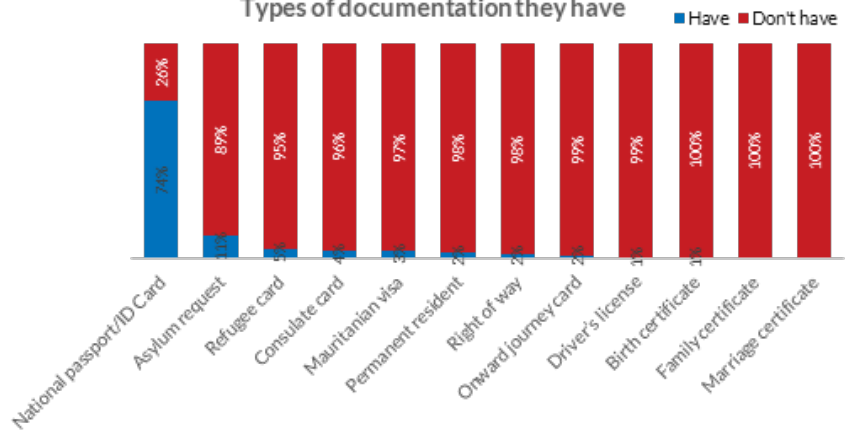
Lack of documentation is a high occurrence situation in mixed movement situations. In Nouadhibou, however, most have some kind of documentation. 86% of migrants and refugees reported having some type of documentation, including 74% a national identity card or a passport. The survey did not enquire whether these documents are still valid.

Of those without a document, most (79%) reported never having had one.

Has some type of papers or any kind of documentation



Types of documentation they have



UNHCR Protection interviewed 89 persons with no documentation. Among them, almost half (48%) declare living in fear of being expelled. Most explain that they stay at home and avoid unnecessary movements, which impacts on their livelihood and their ability to earn a living. Those who work in shops say that they hide when the police controls identities and do not return to work the following days.

Residence permits

While 25% of migrants in Nouadhibou declare that they are in a regular situation, effectively only 8% report having a residence permit. The migrant population, aged 14 and older, originating from Western, Central and Eastern Africa in Noudhibou is largely in an irregular situation.

Of those without a residence permit, two thirds cannot afford the cost to get one, and the other third do not have the necessary documents

K., man, 59, Guinea Bissau, came to Mauritania in 1986 following the political crisis there. He is married to a Mauritanian woman, father of four children, none of whom has

Mauritanian documents:

“I have no problem except for the residence permit that they ask for, and which we cannot get because the conditions required are difficult. It is not only the money requested, but also the employment contract.”

Socio-economic situation

A low level of education

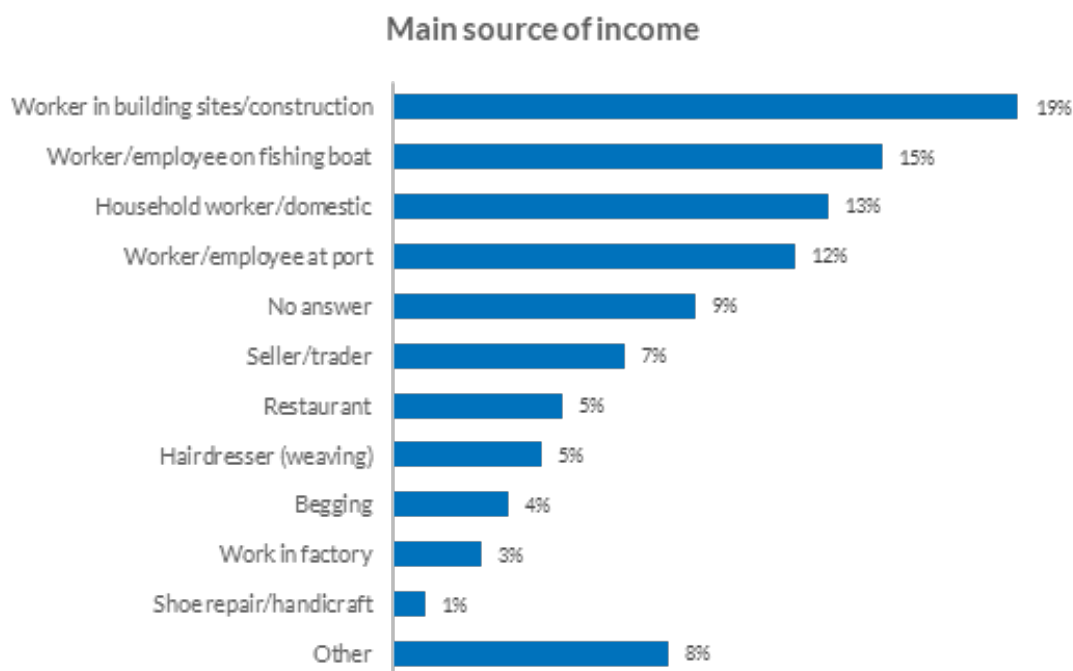
Most migrants and refugees in nouadhibou (58%) have either no education (36%) or only a primary education level (22%). further, 43% of migrants and refugees in nouadhibou have no reading competency. Of interest however, 11% have a university education level, and among them 7% are women and 93% men. Educated migrants and refugees are 14% from liberia, 11% from nigeria, 8% from guinea and 6% from ghana.

Employment

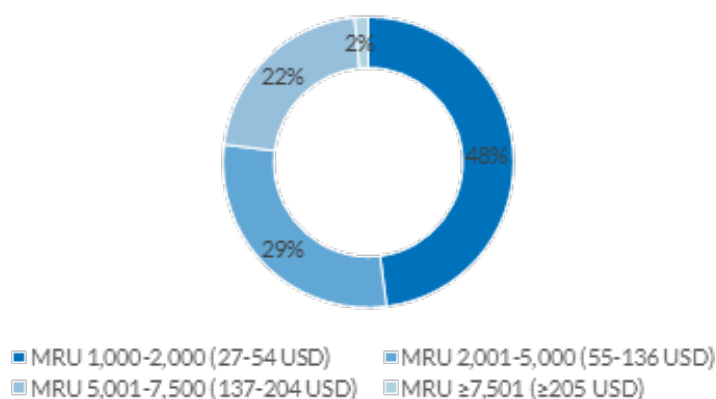
Close to a third of migrants and refugees explained that their employment skills were not found in the list provided in the questionnaire; this will require further analysis. for close to one fifth of migrants and refugees in nouadhibou, the main source of income is from work on building sites or in the construction sector, followed by work on fishing boats (14%). domestic work is also quite prevalent (13%) and 4% resort to begging as their main income source.

H., woman, whose husband works on a construction site, explains that she is begging with their two children to supplement his income.

Asked about salaries, 22% report that they earn a salary, but no one has a contract for work. As for their earnings, half the migrants and refugees in nouadhibou (48%) earn between mauritanian ouguiya (mru) 1,000-2,000 (i.e. usd 5.5) per month, while less than a third (29%) earn between mru 2,000 and 5,000 (i.e. usd 13.6) per month.



Monthly earnings (1 MRU = 0.0272 USD)



Reports of prostitution among populations on the move are well documented. However, in Nouadhibou there were no reports of prostitution as the main source of income. This may be because migrants and refugees who engage in transactional sex also have another source of income or because the level of stigma associated with prostitution is such that respondents were untruthful despite the confidential conditions of the interview. Of note, 9% did not respond to the question on the main source of income, which could be an indicator that some or all of these may be engaging in prostitution. Further UNHCR Protection interviews identified 22 women who were at risk of resorting to survival sex because of their lack of means and opportunities.

Housing

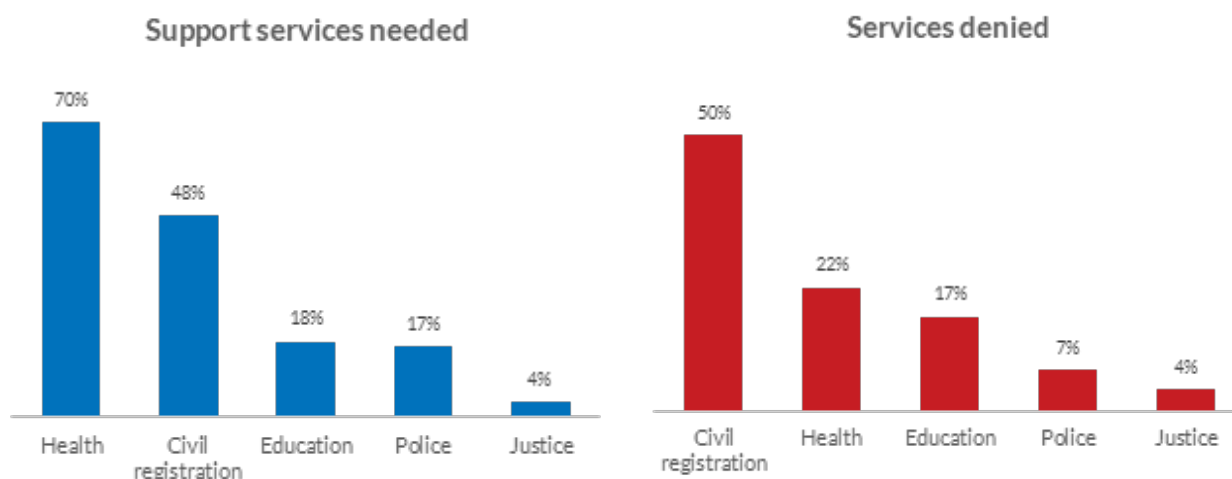
The highest percentage of migrants and refugees in Nouadhibou (72%) live in a room in a compound. Only 11% of women report living alone compared to 27% of men. This may be indicative of women's lower earnings and therefore the need to share the rent; it may also be a protection strategy whereby women feel safer living with others.

The survey also highlights a worrying situation where 11% of those living with multiple persons in the same dwelling, live with fifteen or more persons. Given the poor sanitary conditions provided by rented rooms, this raises serious concerns of health and hygiene for migrants and refugees.

Access to basic services

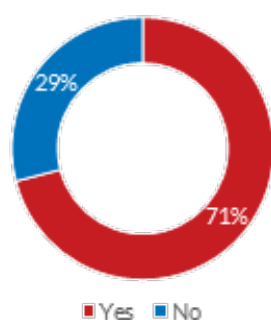
This survey highlights the lack of access to the most basic services, health care and education, for migrants and refugees in Nouadhibou. While 70% require health care, less than a third (28%) report receiving such care since they arrived in Mauritania, and their lack of legal status is the main reason invoked for why they have been denied access to services. A higher percentage of women (37%), however, received medical care compared to men (26%). While 18% of migrants and refugees explain needing to access education, 17% were denied school enrolment for their children.

Further, close to half (48%) report that their need to access civil registration but of those denied services, half were denied civil registration because of being a foreigner.

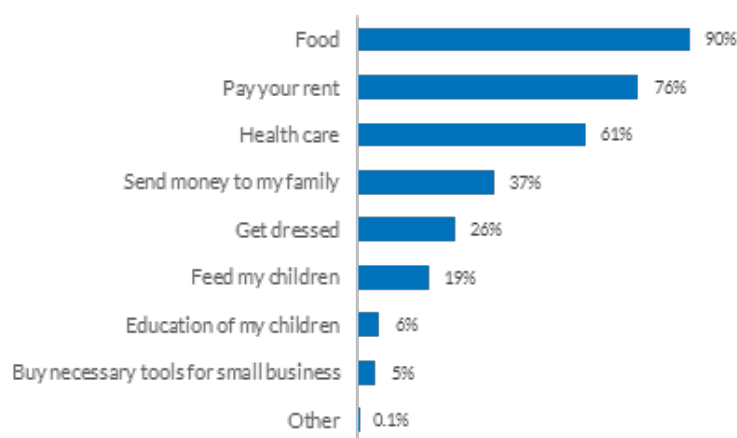


Being on the move in an irregular manner comes with its exposure to hardship. The survey in Nouadhibou shows that close to three quarters (71%) of migrants and refugees have had a difficult time achieving their basic needs because of lack of money (72% men and 68% women). UNHCR Protection interviews confirm that the barrier to access to health care is not so much the irregular situation of these persons in the country, but rather their lack of financial means. 17 migrants with medical problems, ranging from a severe flue to chronic diseases, such as diabetes and complications during and post-pregnancy, were interviewed and referred to IOM for medical assistance.

Difficulty to meet daily basic needs

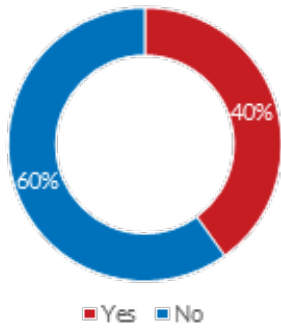


Basic needs not met

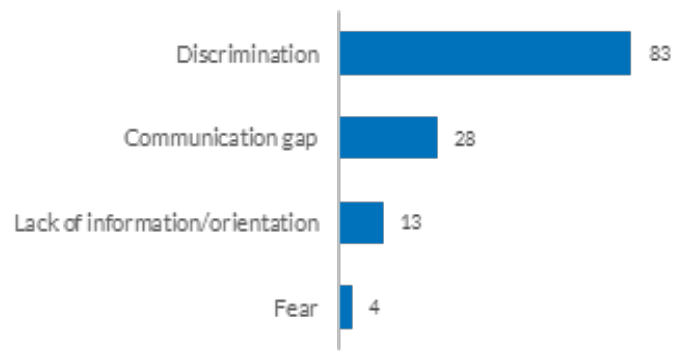


Further, 40% consider themselves to be in situations of social exclusion but men's and women's experiences of social exclusion differ as it affects more men (42%) than women (26%). Asked about how they would explain their social exclusion, the vast majority (83%) explain this is because of discrimination while only 28% refer to a communication gap.

Considers to be in situation of social exclusion



Reason for social exclusion



Protection risks

Police detention

The survey also focused on issues of protection, showing that 17% of migrants and refugees in Nouadhibou have experienced detention by police (19% of men and 14% of women). Among these, 80% were detained because of a lack of legal status or documentation, further enhancing the concern highlighted by this survey where so many are in an irregular situation. The survey also finds that 16% of migrants and refugees in Nouadhibou have experienced arbitrary detention.

Expulsion and risk of refoulement

Migrants and refugees in mixed movements, in particular when they are undocumented and/or in an irregular situation, are at heightened risks of being expelled. For some refugees, return to the border may entail a risk of or amount to refoulement. In Nouadhibou, 10% of migrants and refugees report being taken back to the border, most commonly to Rosso (75%). Most report having a national identity card or passport in their possession at the time they were expelled to the border.

G., man, 24, Ivory Coast :

“I was expelled once. The police arrested me and my ID was not enough. They sent me back to Gogui. I came back with the bus again legally.”

Persons expelled who managed to get back into the country told UNHCR during the protection interviews that they have to keep a low profile after that, avoid walking in the streets and they go out at night only.

Exposure to abuse, human rights violations and violence

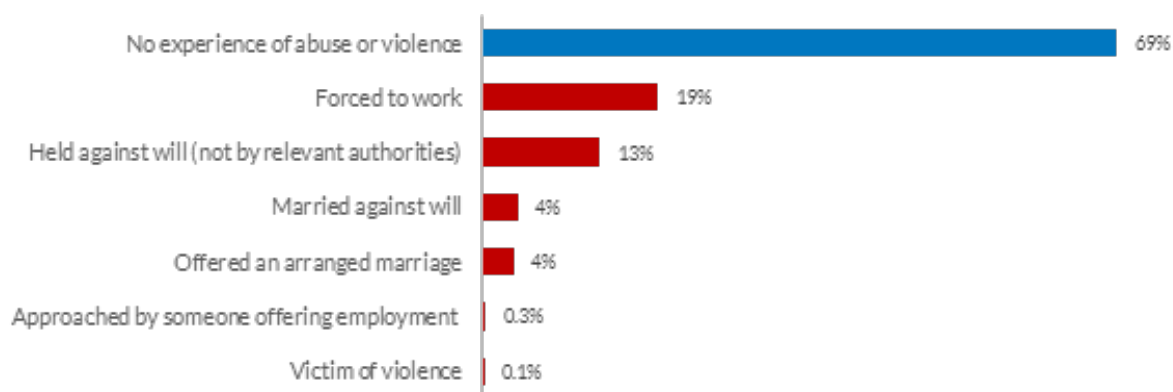
Although many migrants and refugees report not having difficult experiences since living in Mauritania (69%), 19% reported being forced to work. This would seem to further corroborate the qualitative findings around forced begging and forced prostitution.

A., woman, 28, Guinea :

“When I arrived, someone tried to integrate me into a prostitution network, a Senegalese woman who approached me. In the restaurant where I work, there are customers who come to ask for sexual favors, but I refuse each time.”

Further, 13% report being held against their will by persons other than relevant authorities. During the in-depth protection interviews carried out by UNHCR, a woman cited being held against her will. In the survey, 4% declare having been forced to marry, and 3.5% being offered an arranged marriage.

Types of experiences since being in Mauritania



When asked about practices of abuse and violence around them, 11% of migrants and refugees report knowing people who had been beaten or forced to marry including children forced to marry. A further 13% declare witnessing or being informed of abuse, child labour, forced or other forms of begging, physical or verbal abuse and/or sexual violence targeting migrant and refugee children.

Among these, begging was reported to be the most common situation witnessed by 61% of migrants and refugees, followed by general abuse (36%) and child labour (32%). Throughout the protection interviews, a pattern of organized networks using women and children from the Northern and Central regions of Mali for forced begging purposes seemed to emerge.

L., girl, 17, North Mali:

“I came to Mauritania to be with my sister who is disabled and who has been begging here in Nouadhibou for a long time. My sister, her husband and their three children beg. It is the Touareg community who paid for my trip here.”

Concerning abusive treatment against foreign women, 15% reported that they had witnessed or been informed of abuse, forced labour, prostitution, forced prostitution, begging, physical or verbal violence and/or sexual violence.

B., woman, 34, Togo:

“I worked in Nouadhibou in a stationery shop with a Togolese. One day (about a year ago) he raped and beat me. Then he fired me, he did not pay me my dues and threatened me if I reported him. I went to see a doctor, but I still have pain especially in the jaw. I do not have any friend and I’m scared. But I do not want to go back to Togo because at 19 my family wanted to force me to marry and I refused.”

Among these who reported having witnessed a form of abuse or violation, (forced) begging was again the most common form of abuse witnessed (49%), followed by prostitution (48%) and physical or verbal violence (24%).

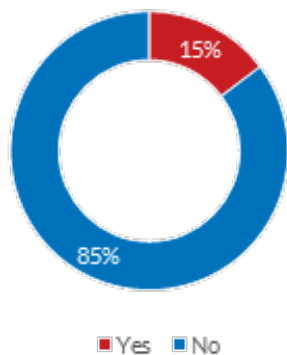
M., 26, a Touareg woman from North Mali, for instance, reports that she begs with her three children and her father. She explains that they live in a house where there are many more, all Malians, who are all begging.

UNHCR Protection also interviewed M., a 27 year old man from North Mali who says that he looks after the house where M. and the other Malians live. On the question if there is a boss who organizes the house, he says it is him because he speaks hassanya, so he makes the link with the owner, he collects money from others.

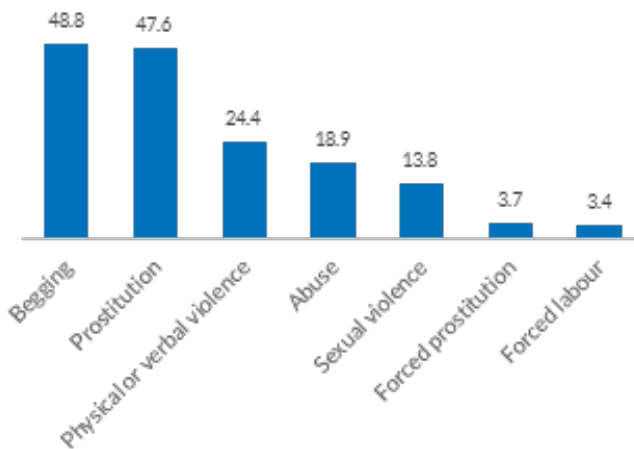
UNHCR Protection identified 22 women at risk with very limited financial means, mostly single women and single mothers who are facing difficulties taking care of their children’s education and medical needs. Some of them typically work in restaurants and bars late at night. The women were all found to be at risk of engaging with survival sex.

Exposure to human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation is a frequent occurrence for people on the move, in particular when they face barriers to onward movements. Of interest in this survey, personal reports of human trafficking did not emerge from the interviews. This may be linked to the Western Mediterranean route having few smuggling networks, which are often the structures that support the emergence of trafficking. Nevertheless, 4% of migrants and refugees in Nouadhibou report having witnessed or been informed of women being forced into prostitution. The UNHCR Protection interviews found one person who knew of a woman, allegedly from Senegal, who is recruiting women and forcing them into prostitution. Also identified in these interviews was a Cameroonian woman potentially at risk of trafficking, who was referred to IOM.

Among known foreign women, witnessed or was informed about protection incidents



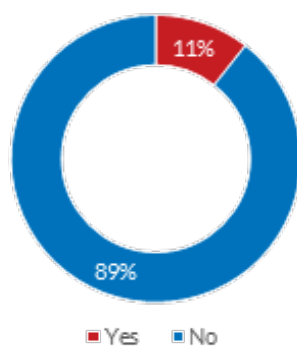
Types of situations witnessed or informed of



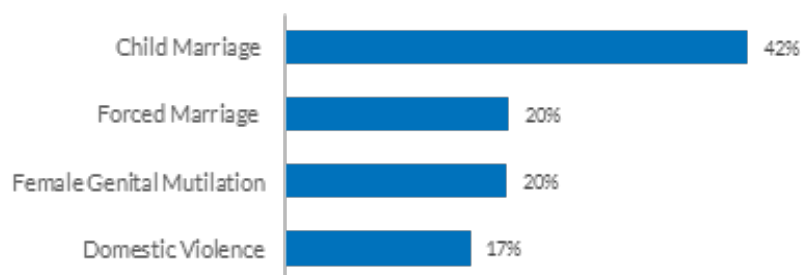
Harmful community practices

The RDS study also enquired about harmful practices within the migrant and refugee communities living in Nouadhibou. Among the respondents 20% say it is common practice to be forced into marriage. Child marriage is also reported by 42% of migrants and refugees to be a normal practice in their community, and 17% explain that being beaten by a spouse or partner is normal practice in their community.

Knows people who have been beaten, forced to marry or forced to marry early



Harmful practices



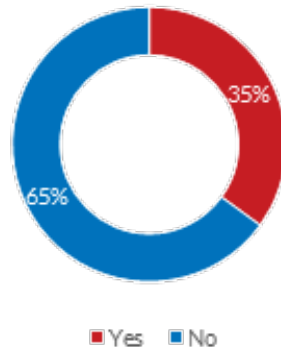
Migrants and refugees were also asked about harmful practices within their own communities, and 21% report that it is normal in their community to practice female genital mutilation (FGM). UNHCR Protection interviews identified a case at risk of FGM.

Focus on children

Children born in mauritania

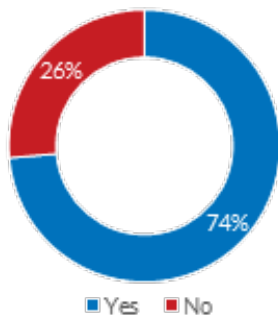
The survey shows that 35% of migrants and refugees have children born in Mauritania.

Has children born in Mauritania

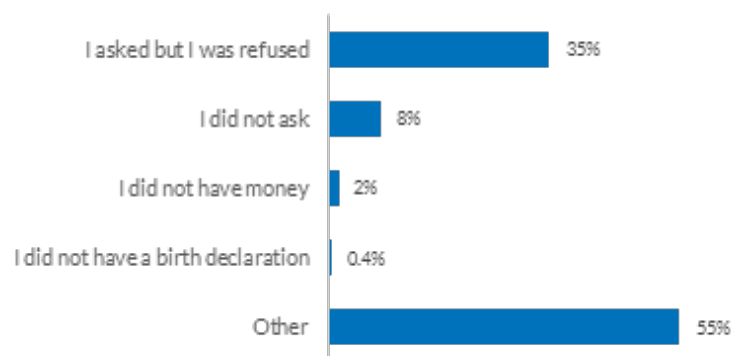


The survey further finds that a quarter of these children did not receive a birth notification from the hospital though 35% of their parents had asked for one but were refused.

Received birth notification issued by the hospital (born in Mauritania)

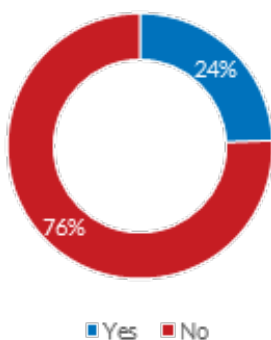


If not, reasons why no birth notification

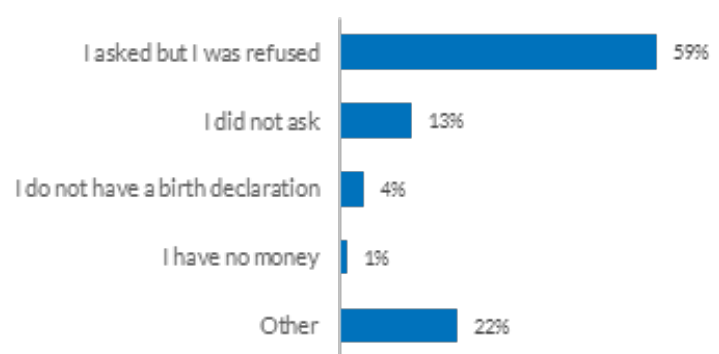


Similarly, the survey establishes that only a quarter of these children born in Mauritania have a birth certificate.

Children born in Mauritania with birth certificate



If not, reasons why no birth certificate



D., woman, 26, Guinea :

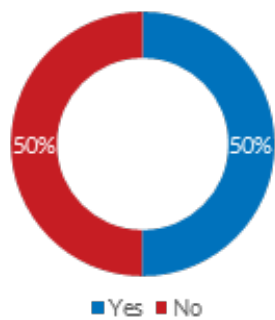
“I left Guinea in 2011 with my husband. I had three children born in Mauritania, they are 7 years old, 3 years old and 1 year old. Neither me nor my husband nor the children have passports, no residence permit, no visa, no documents.”

Children living with migrant or refugee parents and separated children

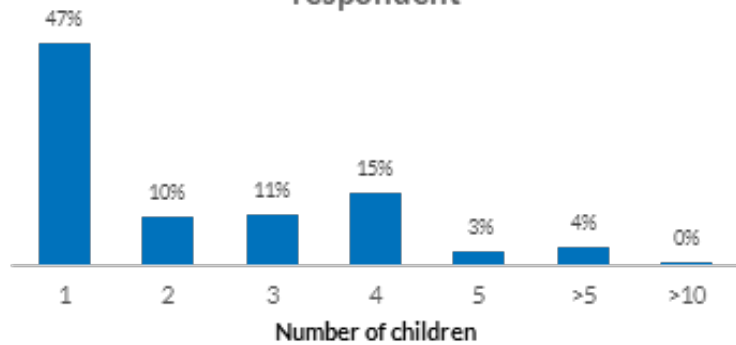
Only half the migrants and refugees who have children report that their children currently live with them. UNHCR Protection’s interview would seem to indicate that entire families have come from North Mali and are begging in Nouadhibou. The begging is organized around houses where all these persons live. The children who beg do not attend school.

Further, 9% of adult migrants and refugees report that they live with children who are not their own. In over half the cases (58%), these separated children are either nephews or nieces. Of concern though, is that more than one in five (23%) of these separated children have no family relationship with the adult under whose care they are.

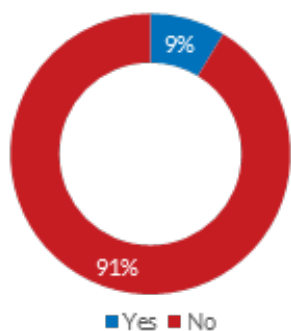
Has children currently living with respondent



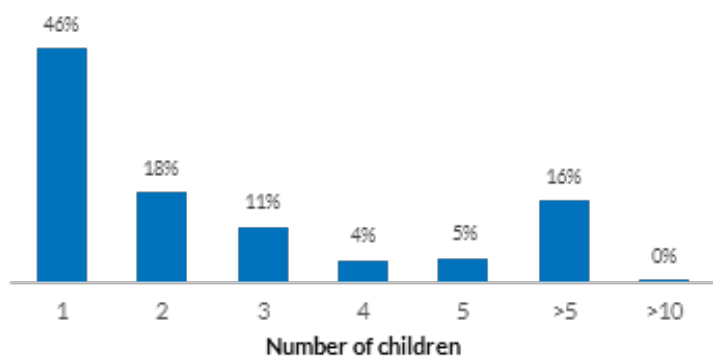
Number of children currently living with respondent



Children other than own children who live with respondent in Mauritania

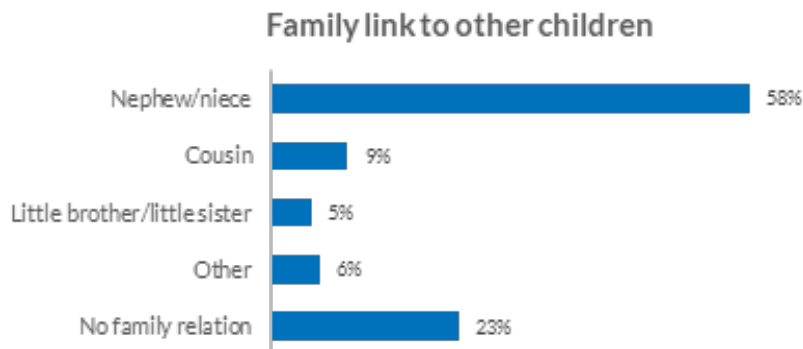


Number of other children living with respondent in Mauritania



The survey did not investigate how these children ended up living with these adults or the relationship between them.

**M., woman, 26, North Mali, blind, is begging with her six year old brother:
 “In Nouakchott, the police stopped us and asked us to pay money because they were chasing people who beg. So we came to Nouadhibou.”**



Child education

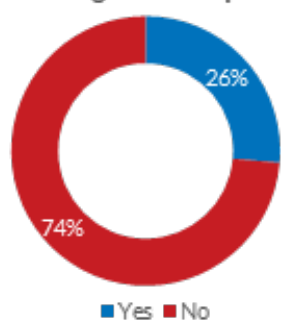
Migrants and refugees in Nouadhibou who have their children living with them report that 26% of these children are enrolled in school, and just over half used a birth certificate to register them with the school. Other documentation available to migrants and refugees (national passports, national identity cards, consular cards, driver’s licenses, asylum documents) were not of use in this process.

A higher percentage of women (19.3%) compared to men (10.3%) have these children enrolled in school. Among those who did not enroll their children at school, 58% report that it was because they were afraid and 47% because they could not afford the tuition fees.

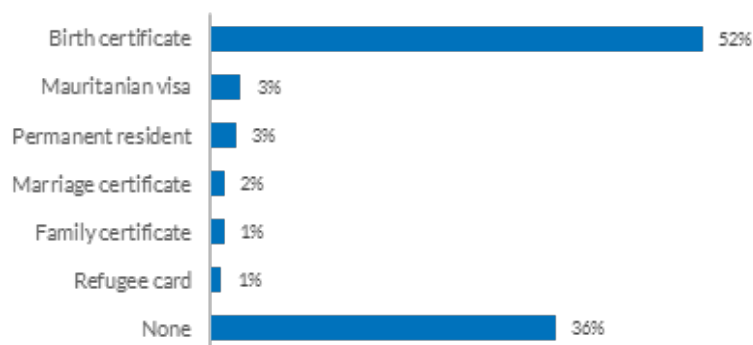


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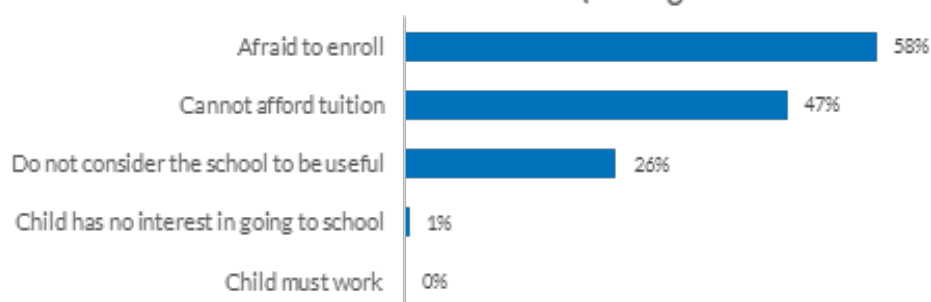
Children are enrolled in school in Mauritania (among those living with respondent)



Document used to enroll children into school



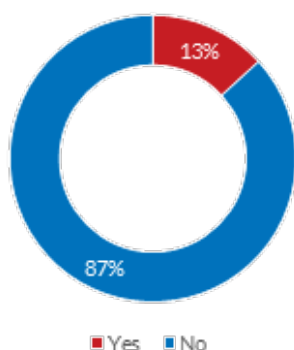
Reason for children not to be in school (among those not enrolled)



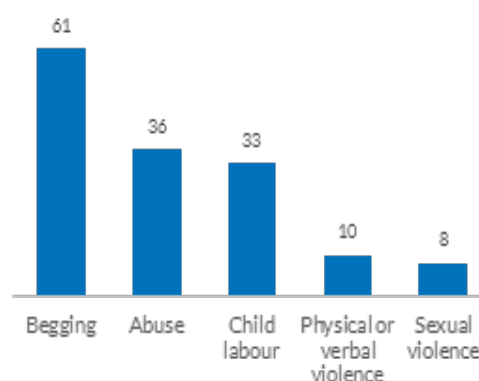
Harmful community practices

The RDS survey in Nouadhibou has also tried to highlight the situations of violence to which migrant and refugee minors are subjected. As such, 13% among them report having been witness of violence and other forms of abuse or protection incidents against foreign children. Close to two thirds of the respondents (61%) witnessed cases where children were forced to beg, 36% report cases of abuse and another third talks about cases of child labour.

Among known minor foreigners, has witnessed or been informed of protection incidents

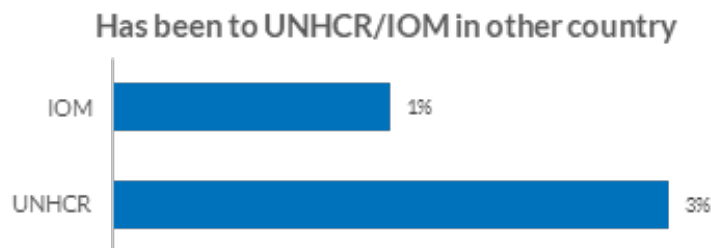


Types of situations witnessed or informed of

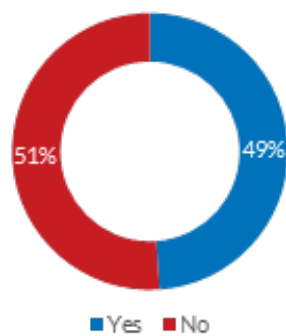


Exposure to organizations working with refugees or migrants

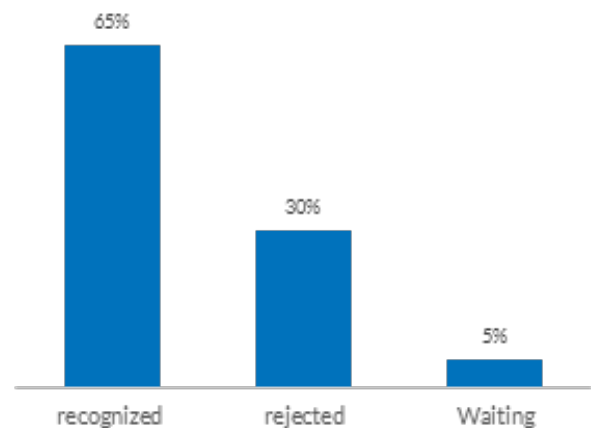
Of the migrants and refugees who spent a year or more in another country other than their home country before arriving to Mauritania, 2.6% had approached UNHCR in another country and half of them (49%) applied for asylum. Among these, the majority report being recognized as refugees. A further 1.3% had approached IOM in another country.



Applied for asylum with UNHCR in another country before arriving in Mauritania (among those who have been to UNHCR in other countries)



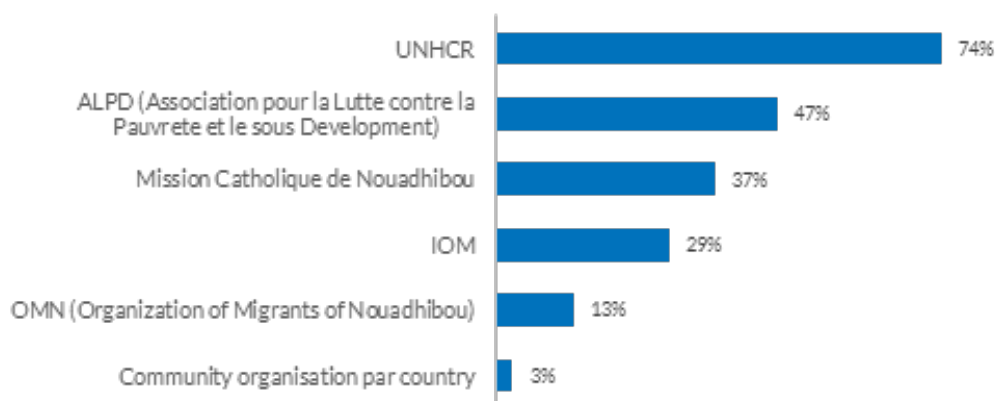
UNHCR decision (among those who applied for asylum in other countries)



Most migrants and refugees have heard of UNHCR

Almost three quarters of migrants and refugees in Nouadhibou report knowing about UNHCR, close to half (47%) knew about ALPD (Association pour la lutte contre la pauvreté et le sous développement), UNHCR’s partner in Nouadhibou, and close to a third (29%) about IOM. It is important to consider that these high percentages may represent a bias related to having the survey conducted by UNHCR at the offices of ALPD (and Mission Catholique, which had the third highest percentage).

Organizations known to migrants and refugees in Nouadhibou

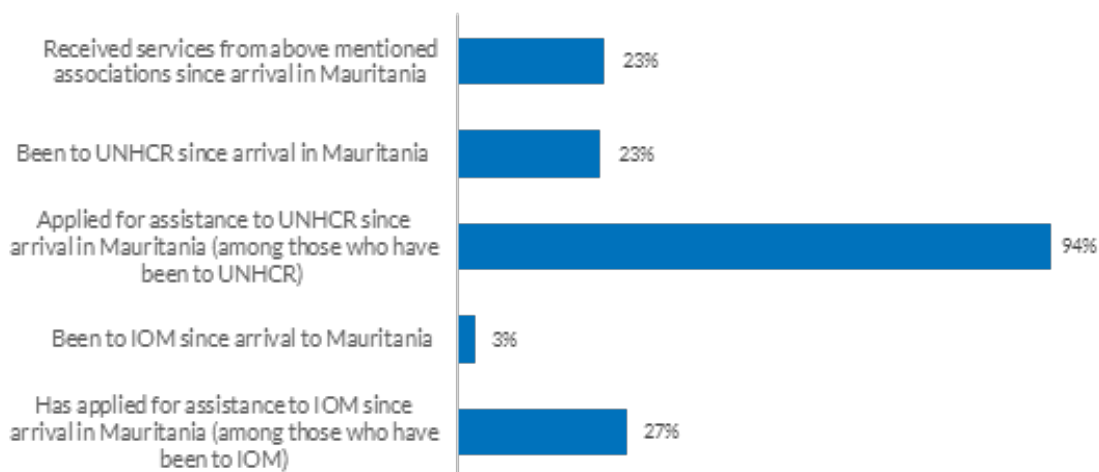


One quarter of migrants and refugees have received services

Just under one quarter received services from one of the organizations mentioned above. More specifically, 23% of the migrants and refugees in Nouadhibou have been to UNHCR since their arrival to Mauritania, a slightly higher percentage of women (18%) than men (15%).

On the other hand, 3% of respondents have been to IOM, and among them 27% applied for assistance. Among those who reported going to the UNHCR office in Mauritania, 9% also went to the IOM office.

Exposure to organizations working with refugees or migrants in Nouadhibou



Glossary

Asylum: The grant, by a State, of protection on its territory to persons who are fleeing persecution, serious or irreparable harm, or for other reasons defined in national law. Asylum encompasses a variety of elements, including protection against non-refoulement and permission to remain on the territory of the asylum country, possibly with a view to local integration.

Asylum-seeker: An individual who is seeking asylum, but whose claim has not yet been finally decided.

Refugee: A person who meets the eligibility criteria in the refugee definition provided by relevant international or regional refugee instruments, UNHCR's mandate, and/or national legislation. According to many of these instruments, a refugee is a person who cannot return to his/her country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of persecution or serious and indiscriminate threats to life, physical integrity or freedom.

Stateless person: A person who is not considered a national by any State, either because s/he never had a nationality or because s/he lost it without acquiring a new one.

Person of concern to UNHCR: A general term used to describe all persons for whom UNHCR is mandated to provide protection and assistance. They include refugees, asylum-seekers, returnees, stateless persons, and, in many situations, internally displaced persons. UNHCR's authority to act on behalf of persons of concern other than refugees is based on various United Nations General Assembly and Economic and Social Council resolutions.

Migrant: There is no universally accepted definition of the term "migrant". It is usually understood to cover all cases where the decision to migrate is taken freely by the individual concerned for reasons of "personal convenience" and without intervention of any coercive external factors and there is no fear of return according to the definition of the 1951 Convention.

Mixed movements: A movement in which a number of persons are travelling together, generally in an irregular manner, using the same routes and means of transport, but for different reasons. Persons travelling as part of mixed movements varying needs and profiles and may include asylum-seekers, refugees, trafficked persons, unaccompanied/separated children, and migrants in an irregular situation.

Expulsion: An act by a State authority with the intention and effect of securing the removal of a non-national from its territory. Refugees lawfully on the territory of the State can only be expelled on reasons of national security and public order.

Non-refoulement: A core principle of international human rights and refugee law that prohibits States from returning individuals in any manner whatsoever to territories where they may be at risk of persecution, torture, or other forms of serious or irreparable harm. Refoulement can result, for instance, following interception operations, rejection at the frontier, or return to third countries ("indirect refoulement"). The most prominent expression of the principle of non-refoulement in international refugee law is Article 33(1) of the 1951 Convention. The principle also is part of customary international law and is, therefore, binding on all States whether or not they are parties to the 1951 Convention or other relevant international refugee law or human rights instruments.

Protection: A concept that encompasses all activities aiming to achieve full respect for the rights of the individual in accordance with the letter and spirit of human rights, refugee and international humanitarian law. Protection involves creating an environment conducive to preventing and/or alleviating the immediate effects of a specific pattern of abuse, and restoring human dignity through reparation, restitution and rehabilitation.

Notes

- ⁱ UNHCR, Global Trends, Forced Displacement, 2018, <https://www.unhcr.org/statistics/unhcrstats/5d08d7ee7/unhcr-global-trends-2018.html>.
- ⁱⁱ Di Bartolomeo, A., Fakhoury, T., Perrin, D. CARIM-Migration Profile: Mauritania. Consortium for Applied Research on International Migration. 2010.
- ⁱⁱⁱ GRDR Migration-Citoyenneté-Développement : *Nouadhibou, Une ville cosmopolite à la croisée du désert et de l'océan*, https://grdr.org/IMG/pdf/nou_64p_profils_migratoires_bd.pdf.
- ^{iv} International Organization of Migration : *Mauritanie: Cartographie et profils des migrants à Nouadhibou*, <https://displacement.iom.int/reports/mauritanie-%E2%80%94cartographie-et-profils-des-migrants-%C3%A0-nouadhibou-8%E2%80%94novembre-2018>.
- ^v UNHCR, The Global Compact on Refugees, <https://www.unhcr.org/the-global-compact-on-refugees.html>.
- ^{vi} Para 12. « While the CRRF relates specifically to large refugee situations, population movements are not necessarily homogenous, and may be of a composite character. Some may be large movements involving both refugees and others on the move [...]. Support for appropriate responses could build on the operational partnerships between relevant actors, including UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), engaging their respective mandates, roles and expertise as appropriate to ensure a coordinated approach. »
- ^{vii} IOM, Global Compact on Migration : <https://www.iom.int/global-compact-migration>.
- ^{viii} Heckathorn DD. Extensions of respondent-driven sampling: analyzing continuous variables and controlling for differential recruitment. *Sociol Methodol.* 2007;37(1):151–207; Johnston LG. Module 4: Introduction to respondent driven sampling. Introduction to HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infection surveillance. 2013. http://applications.emro.who.int/dsaf/emrpub_2013_en_1539.pdf; Tyldum G, Johnston L. Applying Respondent Driven Sampling to Migrant Populations: Lessons from the Field. London: Palgrave Macmillan; 2014.
- ^{ix} Gile KJ, Handcock MS. Respondent-driven sampling: an assessment of current methodology. *Sociol Methodol.* 2010;40(1):285–327.
- ^x WFP, *Reaching Hidden Populations with an Innovative Two-Stage Sampling Method A case study from the refugee population in Turkey*, March 2019, <https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000104292/download/>.
- ^{xi} UNAIDS, Guidelines on Estimating the Size of Populations Most at Risk to HIV, Geneva, Switzerland; 2010. Available from: http://www.unaids.org/en/resources/documents/2011/2011_Estimating_Populations; Johnston LG, Prybylski D, Raymond HF, Mirzazadeh A, Manopaiboon C, McFarland W. Incorporating the Service Multiplier method in respondent-driven sampling surveys to estimate the size of hidden and hard-to-reach populations: Case studies from around the world. *Sex Transm Dis.* 2013;40(4).
- ^{xii} KoboCollect. Access at: https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=org.koboc.collect.android&hl=en_US.
- ^{xiii} The Service Multiplier was also used for participants who accessed UNHCR. However, the population size was underestimated since the assumption of independence between the UNHCR service data and the estimate of those who received the service were not independent. This was due, in part, to the survey being conducted by UNHCR, resulting in a high familiarity of UNHCR by participants.
- ^{xiv} UNHCR Position on returns to Mali - Update II - July, 2019: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5d35ce9a4.html>
- ^{xv} Article 3(a) of the UN General Assembly, Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, Supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, 15 November 2000, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/479dee062.html>.
- ^{xvi} See UNHCR, People Smuggling, <https://www.unhcr.org/smuggling-of-migrants-and-refugees.html>.



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