

Understanding the role of family reunification within mixed movements in Tunisia

Refugees and migrants engaged in mixed movement are rarely able to move with their entire families, as conflicts in origin countries can lead families to become separated or the movement of single family members may be part of a family's strategy to spread risk in the face of crisis. Reuniting with one's family members, therefore, features as a driver of movement, either via formal channels, often assisted by organizations or informal ones in the form of irregular movement.¹ Between July and November 2022, MMC conducted 189 4Mi surveys with refugees and migrants in Tunisia who expressed a family reunification aspiration. This snapshot sheds light on the role of family reunification in the movement decision-making of refugees and migrants in Tunisia, the different family reunification processes and key obstacles to reunification. This snapshot is produced as part of a research partnership with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) focusing on children and youth on the move.

Note: Data collection for this snapshot took place prior to the events of early 2023 in Tunisia, which saw an increase of violence in the country targeting sub-Saharan African refugees and migrants as well as Black Tunisians. The surge in xenophobia and discrimination was accompanied by heightened physical violence and enforcement measures against refugees and migrants. These events had a direct impact on their safety and livelihoods, with many individuals reporting heightened needs for assistance as well as greater barriers to accessing services, housing, the labour market and public institutions and spaces. As data for this snapshot were collected prior to these events, it is likely that the needs of young refugees and migrants in Tunisia are now greater than what is presented here.

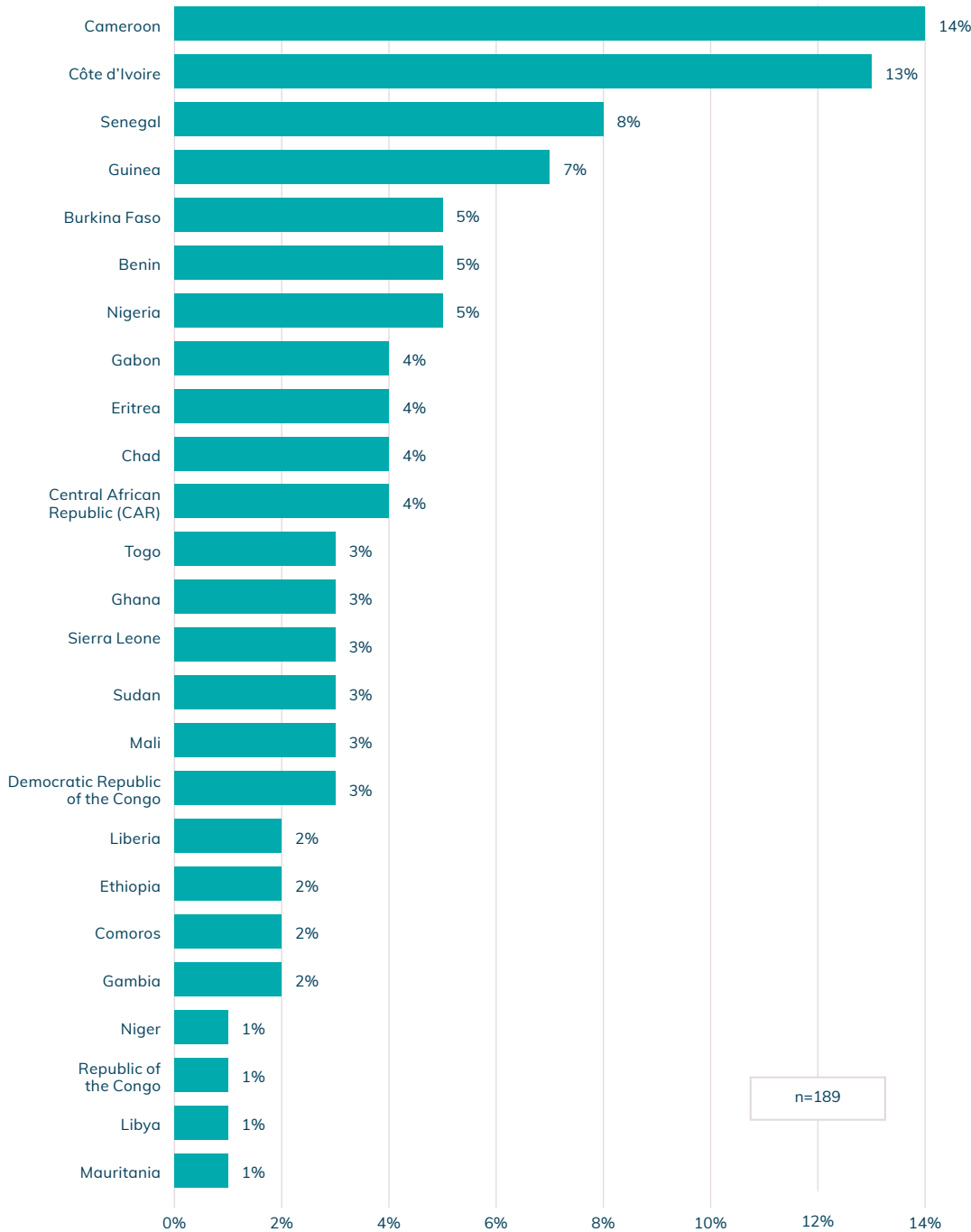
Key findings

- 82% of respondents who expressed a family reunification aspiration, cited it as one of the reasons for leaving their country of origin, and 94% cited it as a reason for selecting their intended destination.
- The majority of respondents (79%) reported their intended destination was Europe, 12% cited Canada, 8% the USA and 1% Australia.
- Respondents reported reunification to join their spouse/partner (42%), brother/sister (18%), uncle/aunt (17%), caregiver outside family (12%), cousin (10%) and mother/father (6%).
- 71% of respondents are aware of formal family reunification processes and, of these, just 26% are utilizing them, perhaps owing to the irregular status of their family abroad and/or Tunisia's position along the Central Mediterranean Route and their intention to move irregularly.
- Respondents engaged in formal family reunification processes most often reported these were being undertaken by relatives in the country of destination (32/50).²
- 32/50 of the respondents engaged in formal reunification processes started less than 6 months ago.
- Administrative delays and access to information were the most commonly reported challenges within formal family reunification processes and were mentioned by 22/50 and 21/50 respondents, respectively.

¹ Non-biological, non-nuclear and adult family relationships, often do not qualify for family reunification programmes, prompting refugees and migrants to organize their own, often irregular movements to rejoin family abroad.

² This likely involves relatives contracting lawyers to pursue in family reunification rather than relatives directly liaising with authorities in destination countries.

Figure 1. What is your country of nationality?



Data and profiles

This snapshot draws on 189 4Mi surveys conducted with adult refugees and migrants in Tunisia between July to November 2022, who were purposefully sampled based on family reunification being either a driver in their decision to migrate or a factor in their choice of intended destination.³ Respondents were interviewed in Tunis (48%), Sfax (39%), Ariana (13%) and Manouba (1%). As per 4Mi's targeting strategy, all respondents had arrived in Tunisia less than two years prior to interview.

60% of respondents were men and 40% were women. 12% of respondents were aged between 18 and 24, 74% were aged between 25 and 34 and 14% were aged 35 or older. Respondents' top countries of nationality included Cameroon (14%), Côte d'Ivoire (13%), Senegal (8%), Guinea (7%), Benin (5%), Burkina Faso (5%) and Nigeria (5%) (see Figure 1 for a full list).

Family reunification was cited by most respondents as a reason both for leaving their country of origin and choosing their destination

82% of respondents who expressed a family reunification aspiration, cited it as a reason for leaving their origin country, while 94% cited it as a reason for selecting their intended destination. This indicates that family reunification both drives the decision to move itself and determines their intended destination. This differs with equivalent research conducted in Sudan,⁴ where family reunification was in large part only influencing the intended destination choice and not the decision to leave itself. This difference may be linked to West African respondents experiencing greater influence from family and friends abroad on their migration decision-making, than interviewed respondents in Sudan.⁵ 79% of respondents had reported that their intended destination was Europe, 12% Canada, 8% the USA and 1% Australia.

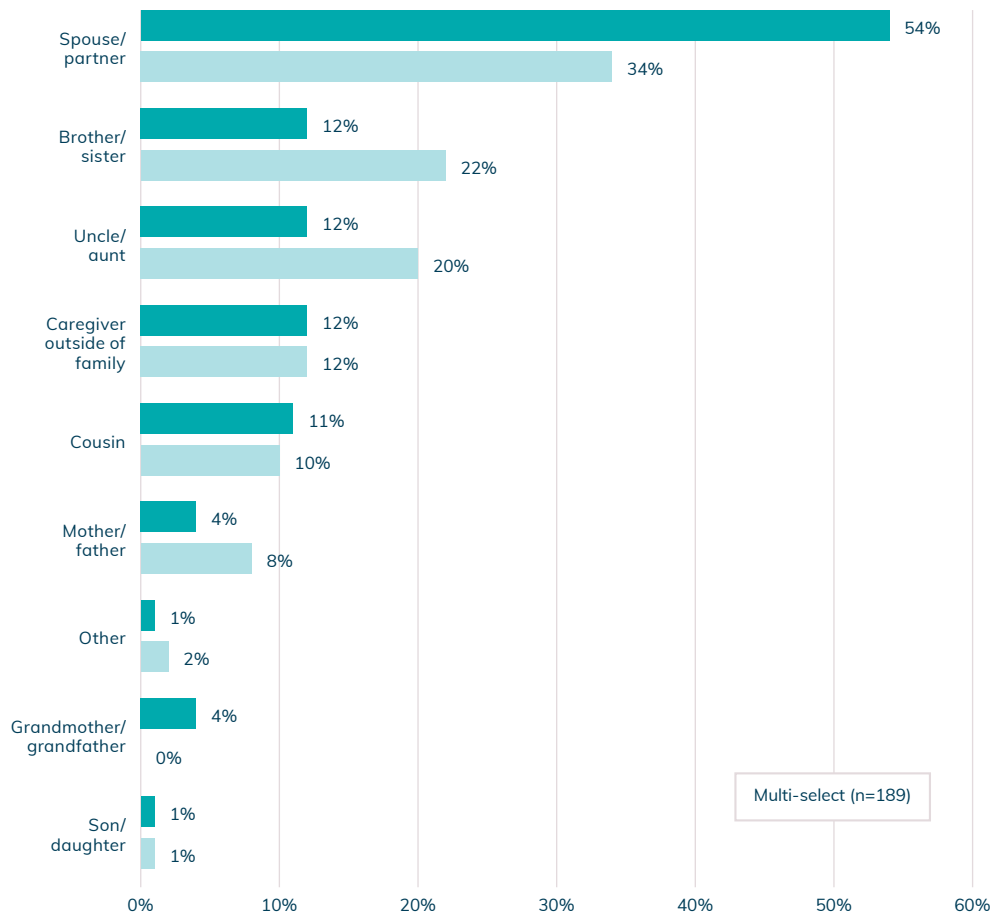
- 3 These are respondents to MMC's 4Mi survey who answered additional questions on family reunification. Such questions were added to the 4Mi survey for a limited period in 2022 for the purpose of this research. To understand how such dynamics feature in MMC's broader 4Mi sample: Of 4,190 4Mi surveys collected with refugees and migrants in Tunisia from February 2021 – November 2022, 33% reported that reunifying with family was either a reason for departing or a factor in determining their intended destination.
- 4 MMC (2023). 4Mi Snapshot: [Understanding the role of family reunification within mixed movements in Sudan](#).
- 5 34% of respondents in Tunisia identified family/friends in another country (not country of origin) as influencing their decision to migrate. This was true for 24% of respondents interviewed in Sudan.

Respondents most often seek to reunite with spouses or partners

Overall, respondents sought to reunite with their spouse/partner (42%), followed by their brother/sister (18%), uncle/aunt (17%), caregiver outside family (12%), cousin (10%) or mother/father (6%). Responses did not appear to vary by gender. 74 out of 99 respondents who reported having children but not currently travelling with them mentioned intending to initiate the family reunification process with them once they reach their destination.

Among all three age cohorts, reuniting with a spouse/partner was among the most-selected type of family reunification. Respondents aged 25-34 and 18-24 also often cited reuniting with a brother/sister (24/139 vs. 5/23) or uncle/aunt (24/139 vs. 5/23).

Figure 2. Who are you reuniting with?



While most respondents are aware of family reunification programmes, few are actively pursuing them

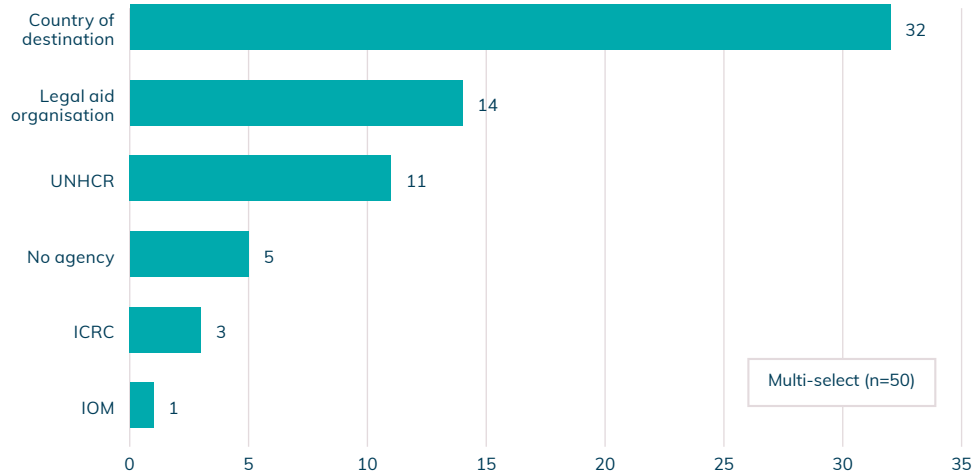
Although the majority of respondents (71%) were aware of formal processes or assistance programmes to facilitate family reunification, few (26%; 50 respondents) were actively pursuing them and undertaking the associated administrative processes. This suggests that most (74%) were using their own means and resources to reunite with family, likely through irregular movements. The low utilization of formal reunification processes among those aware of such processes diverges from parallel MMC data from Sudan which depicts a greater alignment between awareness and usage.⁶ This finding may stem from the irregular status of surveyed West African respondents' family abroad and, hence, their ineligibility for reunification; and/or from Tunisia's position along the Central Mediterranean Route and may reflect respondents' intention to move irregularly. In addition, among the 83 respondents who were aware of formal family reunification processes, but were not currently engaged in one, 24 persons stated they had engaged in an administrative process in the past, suggesting they may have been rejected.

Most of those participating in formal family reunification are assisted by their country of destination

32 out of the 50 respondents actively pursuing formal family reunification programmes reported being assisted by their country of destination. The reported destinations of such respondents included Canada (6), USA (5), Germany (5), United Kingdom (3), Switzerland (3), France (3) and Belgium (3). Other entities facilitating the family reunification of respondents included legal aid organizations (14), UNHCR (11), ICRC (3) and IOM (1). 5 of the respondents reported they were engaging in administrative processes for family reunification on their own.

⁶ MMC (2023). Ibid.

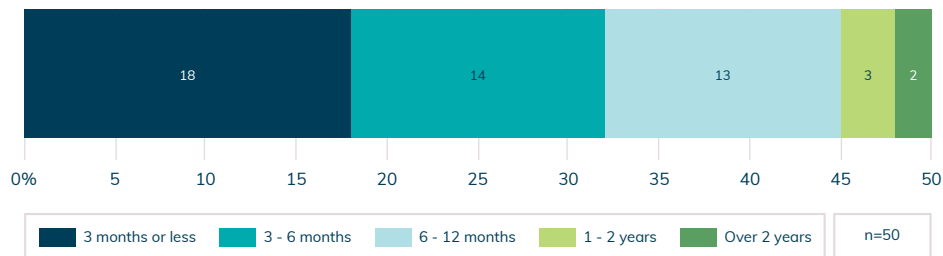
Figure 3. Through which agency is the process being undertaken?
(Among those engaging in a process for family reunification)



Most respondents had been engaged in a formal family reunification process for less than 6 months

Of those engaged in a formal process for family reunification, 32/50 outlined having started this process less than 6 months prior to interview. 13 started the process between 6 and 12 months prior, 3 between 1 and 2 years prior and 2 more than 2 years prior, before arriving in Tunisia.

Figure 4. How long ago did you start this process?
(Among those engaging in a process for family reunification)

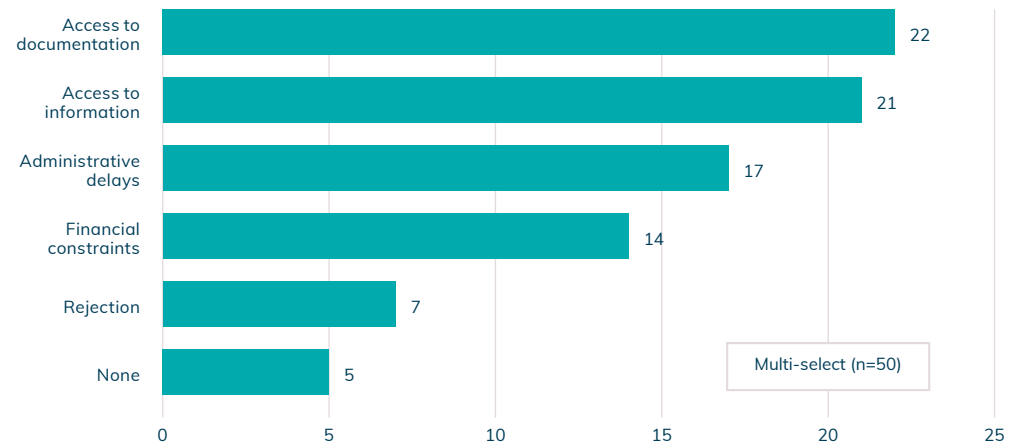


Most respondents faced difficulties in the family reunification process, often linked to administrative delays and access to information

45 out of the 50 respondents engaging in a formal process for family reunification reported facing difficulties. Administrative delays and access to information were the main challenges reported by 22 and 21 respondents, respectively, followed by access to documentation (17),⁷ financial constraints (14) and rejection (7).

Figure 5. Did you experience/Are you experiencing any difficulties in this process?

(Among those engaging in a process for family reunification)



Among respondents in Tunisia, the wish to reunite with family impacts both the decision to leave their country of origin and the choice of destination. However, people face multiple challenges in reuniting with their family, including a lack of access to information and the right documentation. Moreover, families may be scattered, and family members abroad may not have a regular status. Legal channels for family reunification are often not available. In a country such as Tunisia, which is strategically positioned on the southern Mediterranean coast, refugees and migrants may have greater opportunities to move irregularly. Indeed, three-quarters of respondents were reuniting with family using their own means.

⁷ Documentation including documents of personal identification, as well as documents providing proof and justification of family ties.

Family reunification is a key component factoring into people's decision making in terms of how and where to move, yet remains an underexplored issue within our broader understanding of mixed, irregular movement. More support is needed to assist people in accessing legal channels for family reunification, which might decrease the need to engage in dangerous, onward and irregular journeys.



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 Eastern and Southern Africa, North Africa, West Africa, Europe, Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean.

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