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Urban risks for young migrants in West and North Africa

An analysis of caregiver and youth perceptions

Introduction

This briefing paper aims to provide information on the perceived risks faced by youth migrants and child migrants in four capital cities in West and North Africa (Bamako, Conakry, Niamey and Greater Tunis). It is based on surveys conducted with youth migrants (aged 18-24) themselves and people travelling with children in their care (caregivers). This is the third in a series designed to

inform programming to improve protection and access to work and education for young people in the region. These efforts constitute Phase 1 of the Children and Youth on Migration Routes in West and North Africa (*Enfants et jeunes sur les routes migratoires en Afrique d l'Ouest et du Nord*) project.

Main conclusions

- Bamako was considered as relatively safe for youth and child migrants. In contrast, Tunis was considered to be dangerous, especially for youth.
- Overall, insults, harassment, discrimination and physical violence were the most commonly perceived risks among young men and women migrants, but there was considerable variation between cities and genders.
- Risks of harassment and discrimination were particularly frequently reported by respondents in Conakry and – especially – Greater Tunis.
- Broadly speaking sexual violence and sexual exploitation were more often perceived as affecting young women and girls, and physical violence as affecting young men and boys.
- Young female respondents more frequently perceived risks for young women migrants and young male respondents more frequently perceived risks for young men migrants. However, the gender gap in perception was quite a bit wider in relation to risks faced by young women migrants.

Profiles

This briefing paper is based on 2,464 surveys of migrants in the capital cities of Mali, Niger, Guinea and Tunisia carried out from June 2022 through June 2023. The surveys were conducted both with youth aged 18-24 (n=1,348) and with caregivers travelling with at least

one dependent child under the age of 18 (n=1,116) (see Table 1 below). Youth were posed questions about their perceptions of risk for young women and men migrants, and caregivers were asked about their perceptions of risks faced by girl and boy migrants.

Table 1. Respondent profiles by city of interview

City of interview	Bamako	Conakry	Niamey	Greater Tunis
Total youth (aged 18-24)	367	320	358	303
Total caregivers	390	159	296	271
Sex - youth				
Women	54%	26%	19%	34%
Men	46%	74%	81%	66%
Sex - caregivers				
Women	64%	62%	43%	55%
Men	36%	38%	57%	45%

With exception of two caregivers hailing from Yemen (surveyed in Tunis), respondents were from countries of origin within Africa. The top five countries of origin

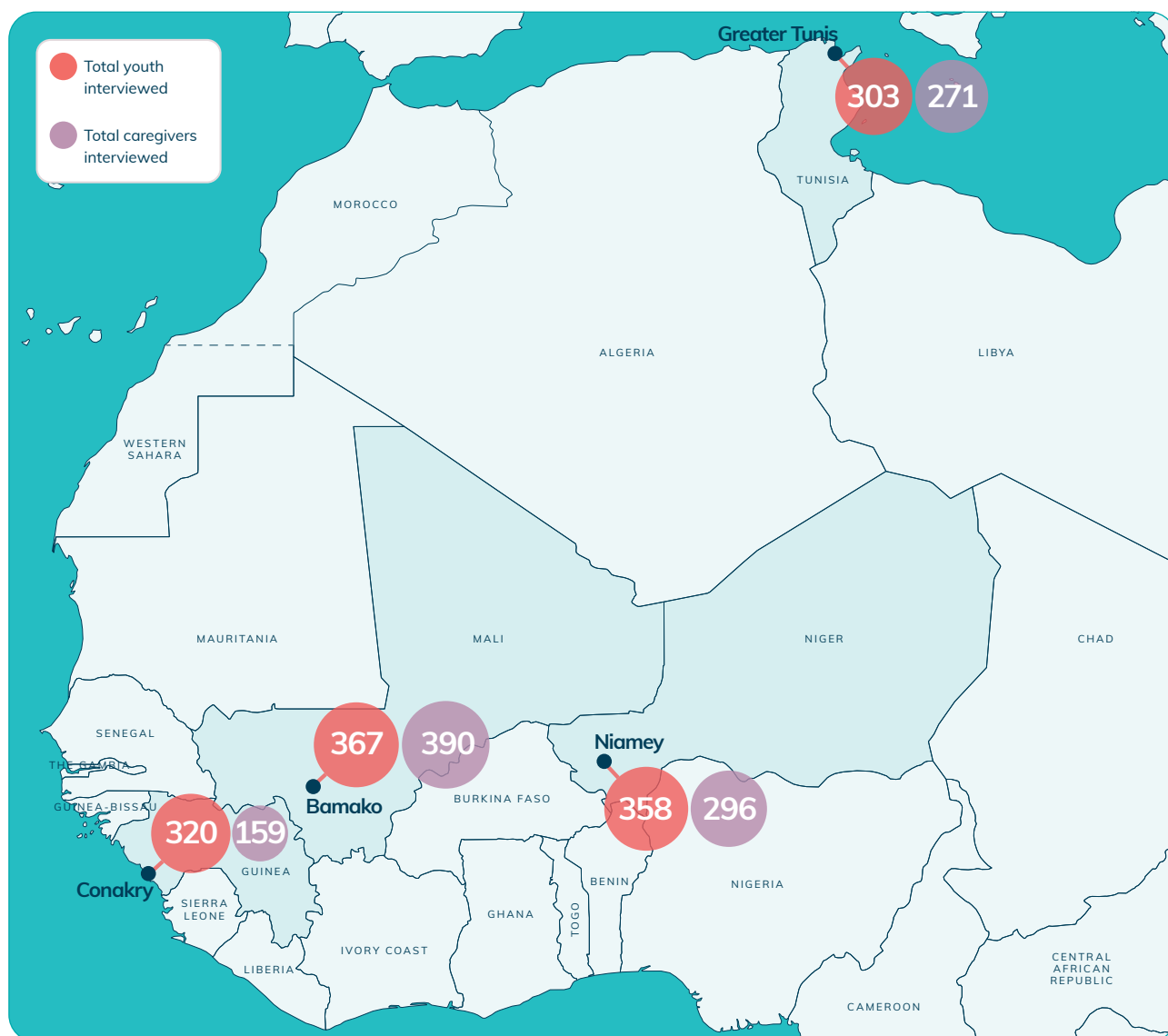
for youth respondents were Sierra Leone (12%), Côte d'Ivoire (11%), Mali (9%), Guinea (8%) and Burkina Faso (8%). For caregivers, the top nationalities of respondents

were Côte d'Ivoire (13%), Togo (13%), Mali (8%), Senegal (8%), Benin (8%) and Guinea (8%).¹

In terms of legal status, youth respondents (56%) indicated having an irregular status somewhat more

often than caregivers (47%), and both groups reported similar proportions for 'regular migrant without permit' and 'temporary resident,' cited respectively by 23% and 8% of youth respondents, and 25% and 10% of caregivers.

Map 1. Geographical distribution of respondents by city of interview and according to profile



Risks for youth – comparison across cities

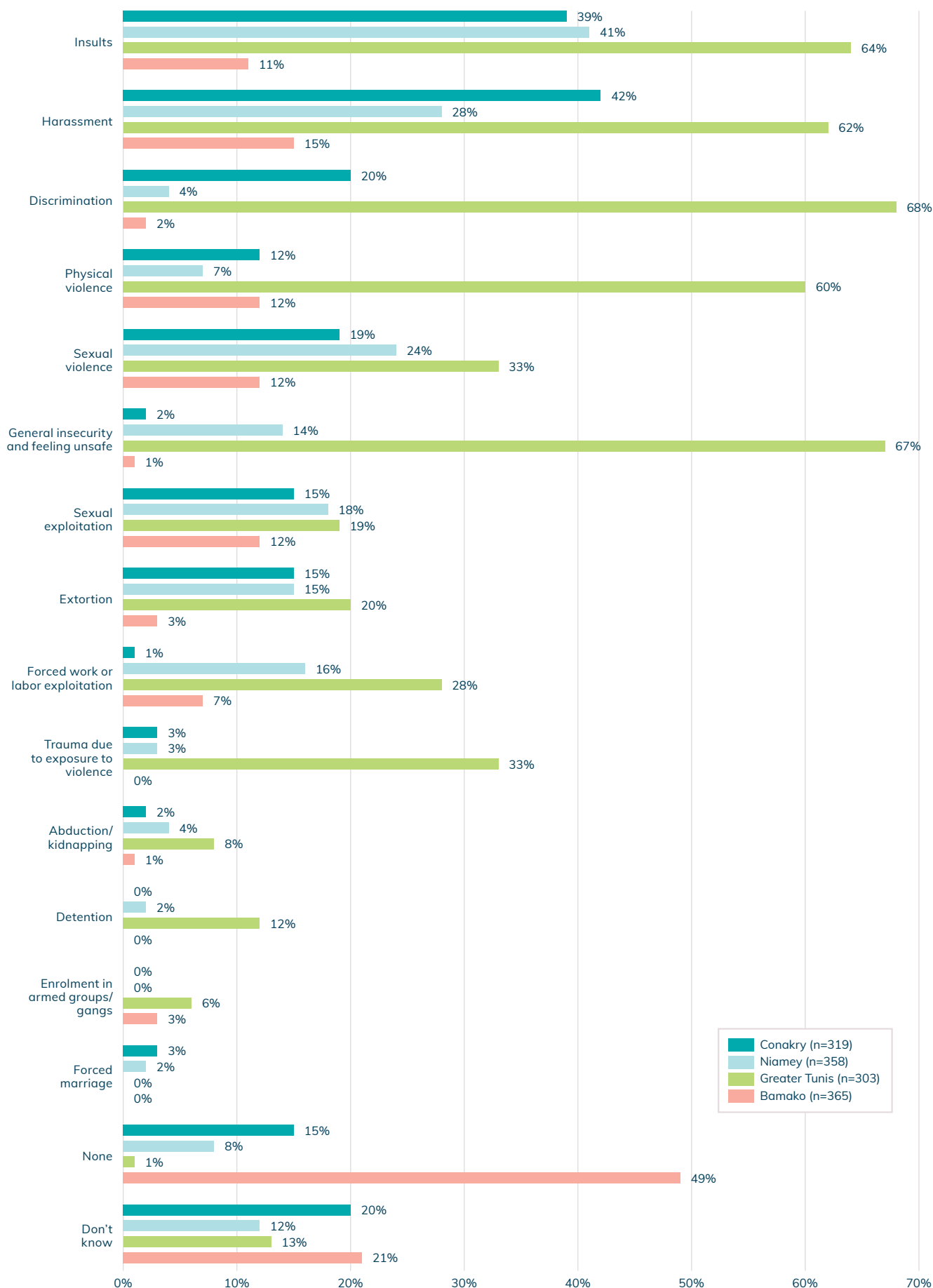
There is a spectrum of perceived risk across the cities, with respondents in Bamako perceiving risks for young men and women migrants much less often and respondents interviewed in Greater Tunis perceiving risks for young men and women migrants much more often.² The perceived exposure to risk does not appear linked to the time spent in the city, since youth respondents spent an average of 9 months in Bamako and youth respondents spent an average of 11.5 months in Tunis.

Niamey and Conakry fall between Bamako and Greater Tunis in terms of risks perceived. It is worth noting that youth respondents in Niamey had spent much less time in the city on average (3 months), and youth respondents in Conakry had on average spent 11.5 months there.

¹ Nationality composition varied by city of interview.

² Note that youth of both genders were asked about the risks faced both by young women migrants and the risks faced by young men migrants.

Figure 1. Risks faced in current location for young women



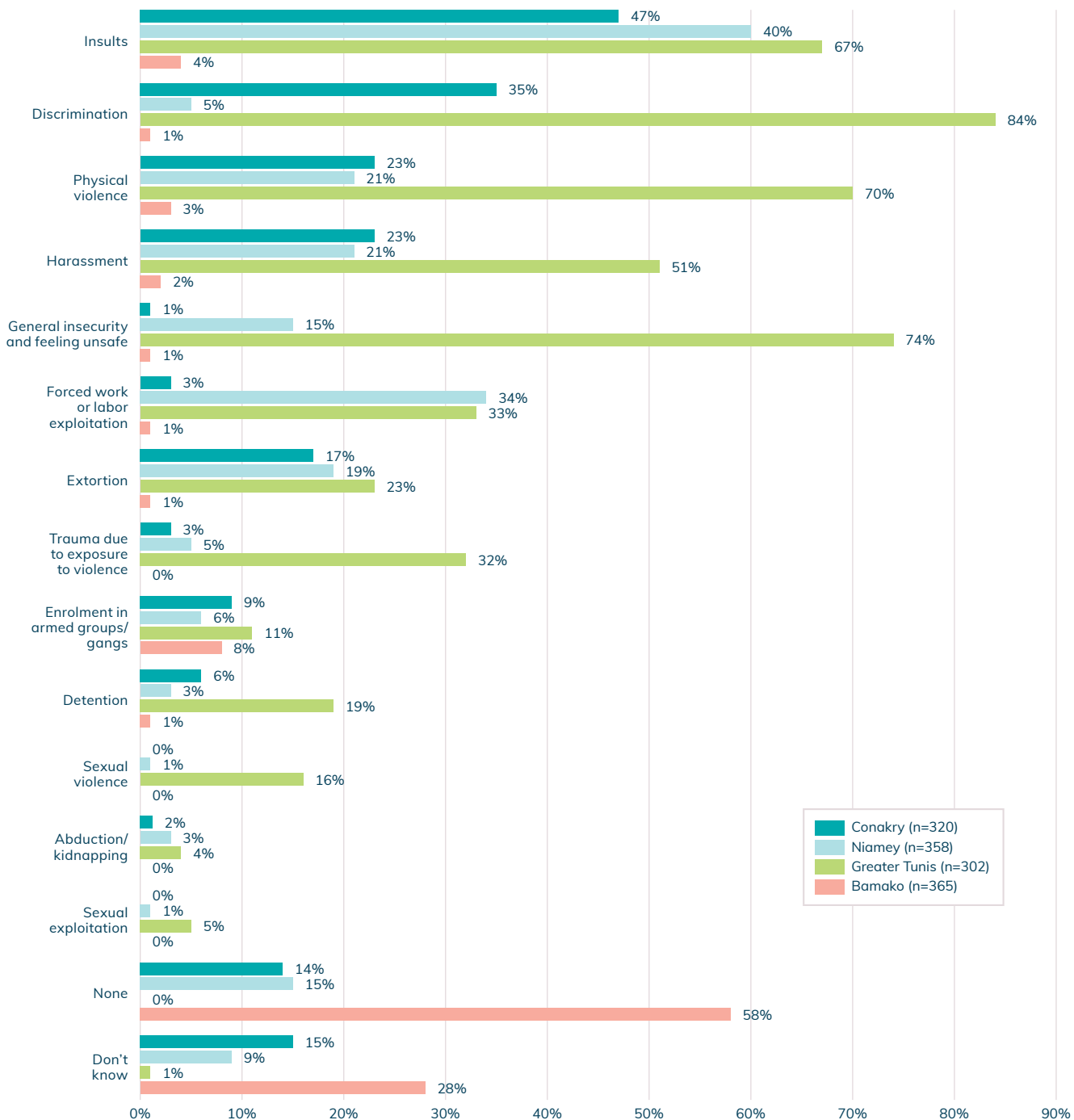
When looking at perceived risks overall, we see that insults, harassment, discrimination and physical violence were the most prominent risks reported as facing both young women and young men. This aligns with risks most frequently perceived by caregivers as facing child migrants.³

However, there were also differences in the extent to which the most frequently perceived risks were cited according to city and gender. For instance, young women migrants were more often considered to experience harassment and young men migrants were more often

considered to experience discrimination, and these risks were more frequently reported by respondents in Conakry, and especially, Greater Tunis.

While physical violence was the fourth most frequently cited risk for young women, this is largely influenced by its perceived prevalence in Greater Tunis, and in general physical violence was seen as more often a risk facing young men than young women. On the other hand, sexual violence and sexual exploitation were risks much more frequently perceived by young women migrants.

Figure 2. Risks faced in current location for young men



3 For a cross city comparison of risks faced by girl and boy migrants, see [Refugees and migrants travelling with children in urban centres in West and North Africa: Conditions and needs](#).

An analysis of respondents' perceptions of the risks faced by young migrants of the same sex on the one hand, and young migrants of the opposite sex on the other, reveals three general findings. The first finding relates to a stronger perception of the risks to which young migrants are exposed when they are of the same sex as the respondent. The young women surveyed perceived higher risks for young female migrants, and the young men surveyed perceived higher risks for young male migrants.

The second finding shows that respondents are less aware of the risks to which young migrants of the opposite sex are exposed. For example, 21% of young men surveyed said they did not know what risks were faced by young female migrants (versus 7% of young women surveyed). Similar proportions of young women (26%) did not know the risks faced by young men.

However, the third finding reveals a less pronounced gap between the young women surveyed and their male counterparts when it comes to the perception of the extent of specific risks faced by young male migrants. In other words, the young women surveyed seem to have a greater perception of specific risks faced by their male counterparts⁴ than the young men surveyed did of risks faced by their female counterparts.⁵

To provide a basis for programmatic response, the next sections of the paper seek to give a more thorough overview of the risks perceived in each city both for youth migrants but also for child migrants. All perceptions of risks faced by young men and young women migrants are from surveyed youth migrants themselves, whereas perceptions of risks facing boy and girl migrants are from surveyed caregivers. In some cases, an overall proportion is given which aggregates the response of both youth and caregiver respondents.

Bamako – a fairly safe city for young migrants

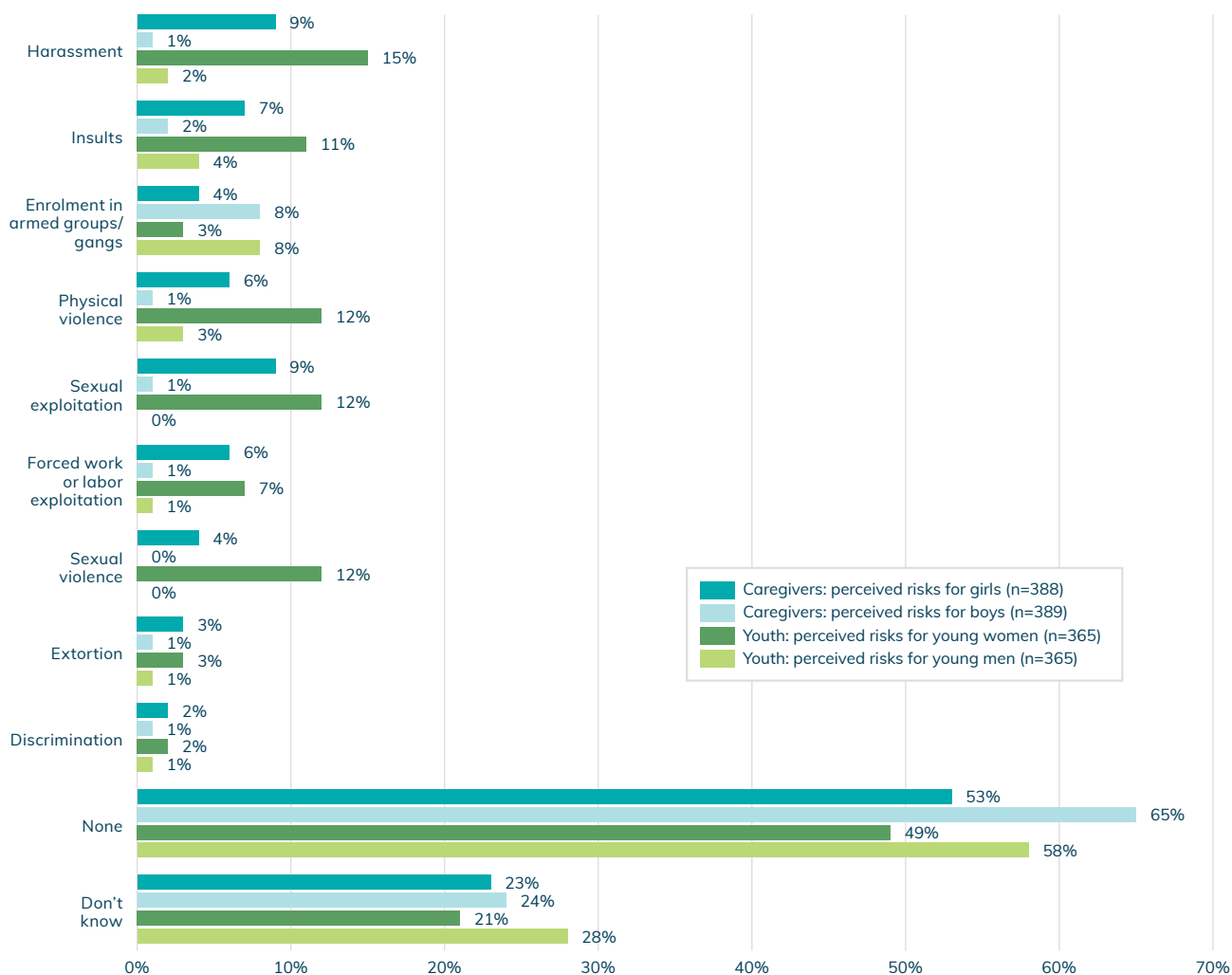
Across the board, respondents did not consider Bamako to be a very risky city for youth and child migrants. Nevertheless, this general observation obscures gender-specific nuances, with male respondents on average being less aware of the risks to which young women and girl migrants are exposed.

The majority of almost all groups of respondents said that these youth and child migrants face no risks in Bamako, followed by around one-fifth to one-quarter of each respondent group saying they didn't know what risks youth and child migrants face there. No category of risk was considered to face youth and child migrants in the city by more than 15% of respondents. This is despite the fact that respondents had generally spent a considerable amount of time in the city, at ten months on average.

4 For instance, 23% of young men felt that young male migrants are at risk of harassment, compared to 22% of young women who felt that young male migrants face this risk. Five percent of young men and 4% of young women felt that young men are at risk of sexual violence, and 28% of young men and 27% of young women felt that young men are at risk of physical violence.

5 For example 43% of young women surveyed felt that young female migrants are at risk of harassment, while only 32% of young men surveyed felt that young female migrants are at risk of harassment. Twenty-nine percent of young women surveyed felt that young female migrants are at risk of sexual violence, while only 17% of young men surveyed felt that young female migrants are at risk. And, 29% of the young women surveyed felt that young female migrants are at risk of physical violence, compared with 17% of the young men surveyed.

Figure 3. Risks faced in Bamako⁶



Risks in Bamako were perceived along very clear gender divides, with young women and girl migrants seen as facing risks more often than young men and boy migrants across almost all categories, with the exception of enrolment in armed groups/gangs. Despite the fact that the overall perception of physical violence as a risk for young migrants is not large (6%), it is worth noting that in contrast to other cities where this is more often seen as a risk for young men and boy migrants, the reverse is true in Bamako.

It is also notable that whereas previous MMC analyses sampling migrants above the age of 18 (without a focus on caregivers or youth) found detention to be more often reported in Mali than in other survey countries, it was

reported as a risk by only seven respondents out of the 757 youth and caregivers surveyed in Bamako in this analysis.⁷

When disaggregating perceptions of risk faced by young women and young men migrants by gender of respondent, we see that in Bamako male respondents frequently underestimated or were unaware of the risks to which young women migrants are exposed. Specifically, 56% of young men surveyed in Bamako perceived no risks for women, as compared to 44% of young women, and 35% of young men didn't know what risks young women migrants face, as compared to 8% of young women.⁸

6 The graph shows the most frequently cited responses in the data. The other risks cited by respondents were forced marriage (0 respondents), abduction/kidnapping (2 respondents, other (5 respondents), and detention (7 respondents).

7 Mixed Migration Centre (2020) [Detention of migrants and refugees in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger](#); Mixed Migration Centre (2020) [A Sharper Lens on Vulnerability \(West Africa\)](#)

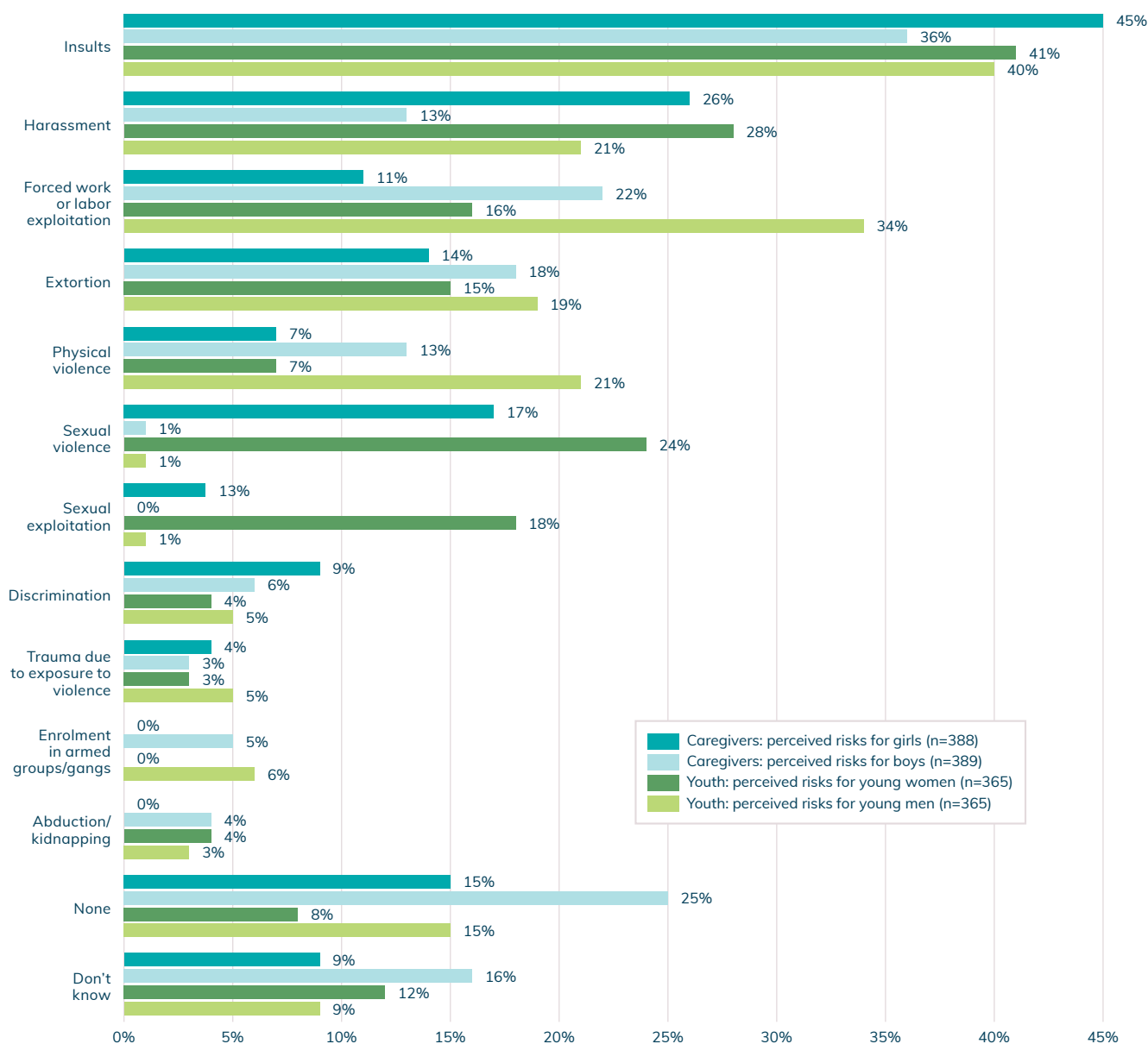
8 More specifically, harassment was cited as a risk faced by young female migrants by 27% of young women respondents compared to 1% of young men respondents, insults were cited by 21% of young women vs 0% of young men, sexual violence was cited by 20% of young women vs 1% of young men, physical violence was cited by 20% of young women vs 4% of young men and sexual exploitation was cited by 17% of young women vs 5% of young men.

Niamey – relative prominence of forced work/labour exploitation compared to Bamako and Conakry

In Niamey, insults were perceived as the most common risk facing youth and child migrants in general, cited by 40% of respondents overall. This was followed by harassment (22%) and forced work or labour exploitation (21%). Harassment was more often seen as a risk facing girls and young women. Forced work or labour exploitation was much more often perceived as affecting young men (34%) and boys (22%) compared to young women (16%) and girls (11%). It was also far more commonly reported in Niamey than in Bamako or Conakry.

While physical violence was cited less frequently by respondents (12%), it showed a similar gender divide. In contrast, sexual violence and sexual exploitation were much more frequently seen as affecting young women (24% and 18% respectively) and girls (17% and 13%) as compared to young men (1% and 1%) and boys (1% and 0%).

Figure 4. Risks faced in Niamey⁹



⁹ 5 The graph shows the most frequently cited responses in the data. The other risks cited by respondents were forced marriage (16 respondents) and detention (32 respondents).

Conakry – relative prominence of discrimination compared to Niamey and Bamako

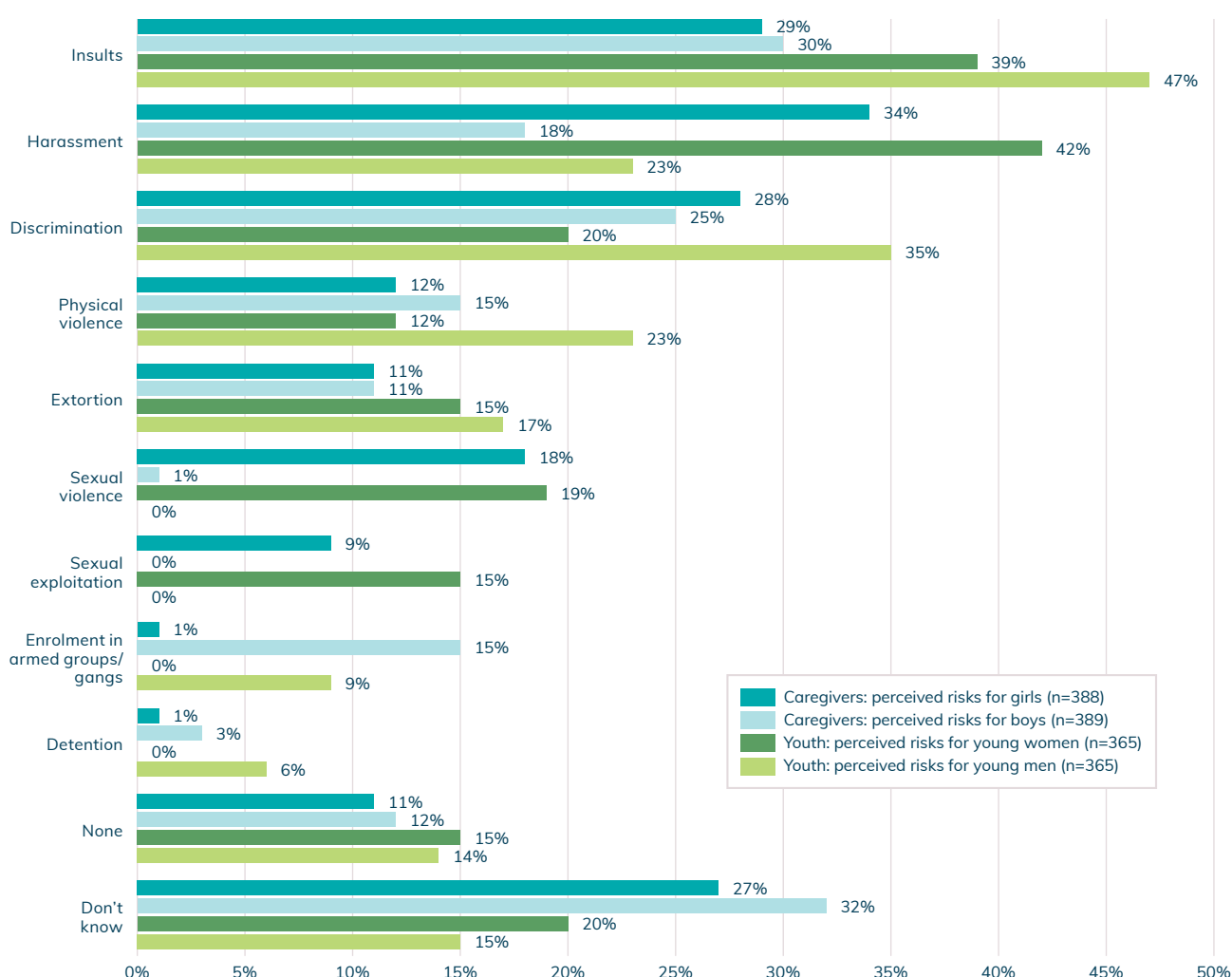
Like Niamey, insults and harassment were the most commonly perceived risks facing youth and child migrants in Conakry. Harassment was once again more frequently cited as an issue for young women (42%) and girls (34%), but insults showed a greater divide by age than by gender, with 39% of young women migrants seen as facing this risk compared to 29% of girl migrants and 47% of young men migrants considered to face this risk compared to 30% of boy migrants.

In contrast to both Niamey and Bamako, a much higher proportion of respondents overall considered discrimination to be a factor (27%). It is also worth noting that Conakry is the city where the largest proportion of

respondents saw enrolment in armed groups/gangs as a risk, and this was primarily considered a danger facing boys (15%) and young men (9%). While seemingly low, it is noteworthy that on average more than 1 in 10 consider it to be a risk to boys and young men. Conakry is a city which has become well known for often highly politicized gangs.¹⁰

Finally, Conakry followed the pattern seen in the other West African capital cities, with young women and girl migrants substantially more often considered to face sexual violence and sexual exploitation as compared to young men and boys.

Figure 5. Risks faced in Conakry¹¹



10 Tilouine, J. (2015) *Avec les gangs de « l'Axe », mercenaires politiques de Conakry*. Le Monde.

11 The graph shows the most frequently cited responses in the data. The other risks cited by respondents were other (6 respondents), forced marriage (14 respondents), forced work or labor exploitation (18 respondents), abduction/kidnapping (21 respondents) and trauma due to exposure to violence (22 respondents).

Greater Tunis – a generally dangerous city for young migrants

Greater Tunis was considered the most dangerous capital city for youth and child migrants by respondents in this analysis. Out of all 574 respondents interviewed in Tunis, only one respondent did not perceive any risks.

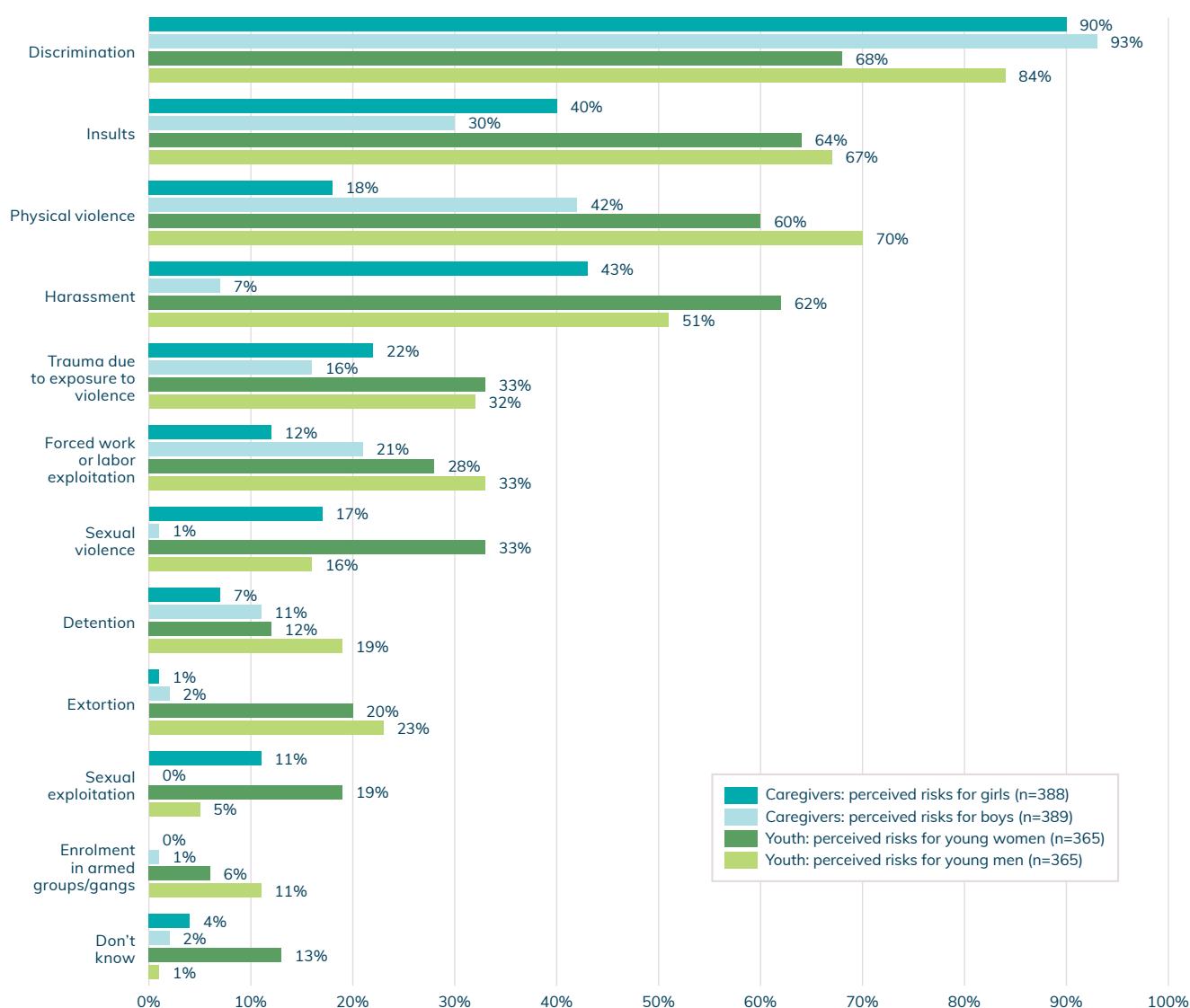
Discrimination was particularly frequently perceived as a risk, cited by 83% of respondents overall, and notably most often for boys (93%) and girls (90%). In contrast, insults, physical violence and harassment were considered more of a risk to youth than children.

The perception of discrimination as a more common risk to boys and girls may have linkages to an education system in which non-Arabic speakers can face obstacles. The

perception of higher risks in almost all other areas among young adults is likely because they are generally living independently in a city that has become increasingly hostile to migrants, especially those from sub-Saharan Africa, during 2023.¹²

It is also worth pointing out that while sexual violence was more often perceived as a risk encountered by young women migrants (33%) and girl migrants (17%), it was also cited as a risk for young men by 16% of youth respondents. This contrasts with the West African capitals in which sexual violence was almost never seen as a risk for young men.

Figure 6. Risks faced in Greater Tunis¹³



12 For more information on these dynamics see MMC North Africa Quarterly Mixed Migration Updates for [Quarter 1 2023](#), [Quarter 2 2023](#), [Quarter 3 2023](#).

13 The graph shows the most frequently cited responses in the data. The other risks cited by respondents were none (1 respondent), other (2 respondents), forced marriage (3 respondents), abduction/kidnapping (37 respondents).

Female respondents more frequently perceived risks across multiple categories, both for risks faced by young women and risks faced by young men. For instance, 87% of female respondents saw discrimination as a risk for young women migrants and 93% saw it as a risk for young men. This is in contrast to male respondents, 59% of whom saw discrimination as a risk for young women migrants, and 79% of whom saw it as a risk for young men. Similar patterns were seen with physical violence and insults. This suggests that young women migrants feel particularly insecure in the city, colouring their perception of risks faced by youth in general.



MMC is a global network engaged in data collection, research, analysis, and policy and programmatic development on mixed migration, with regional hubs in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe and Latin America, and a global team based across Copenhagen, Geneva and Brussels.

MMC is a leading source for independent and high-quality data, research, analysis and expertise. MMC aims to increase understanding of mixed migration, to positively impact global and regional migration policies, to inform

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MMC is part of the Danish Refugee Council (DRC).

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