

TUNISIA

**Realities and needs of
migrants and refugees
in the governorate
of Medenine since
September 2018**

Executive Summary

September 2019



This document summarizes the results of the report "**Realities and needs of migrants and refugees in the governorate of Medenine since September 2018**" which was produced by REACH in partnership with Humanity and Inclusion (HI).

The report, available in French, is accessible via the following link: <https://rb.gy/a919de>.



The study was funded by START Network's Migration Emergency Response Fund (MERF).



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About REACH

REACH is a joint initiative of two international non-governmental organizations - ACTED and IMPACT Initiatives and the UN Operational Satellite Applications Programme (UNOSAT). REACH's mission is to strengthen evidence-based decision making by aid actors through efficient data collection, management and analysis before, during and after an emergency. By doing so, REACH contributes to ensuring that communities affected by emergencies receive the support they need. All REACH activities are conducted in support to and within the framework of inter-agency aid coordination mechanisms. For more information please visit our website: www.reach-initiative.org.

You can contact us directly at: geneva@reach-initiative.org and follow us on Twitter @REACH_info.

About Humanity and Inclusion - Handicap International

Humanity and Inclusion, is an independent and impartial international solidarity organization that intervenes in situations of poverty and exclusion, conflict and disaster, working alongside people with disabilities to improve their living conditions and promote respect for their dignity and fundamental rights.

We aspire to a world of solidarity and inclusiveness, where all differences enrich us and where everyone can "live on their feet".

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SUMMARY

During the last quarter of 2018, the governorate of Medenine recorded an evolution in terms of migratory dynamics, characterized by an increase in the arrivals of migrants and refugees. In fact, the number of newly arrived refugees and migrants being referred to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) or their partners, has risen substantially during recent months. While 516 newly arrived migrants and refugees, most of whom had flown directly towards Tunisia and less than half had transited through Libya¹, were referred between January and September 2018, the number of newly arrived refugees and migrants being referred more than doubled to 1077 between October 2018 to July 2019². Of these new arrivals, almost 80% transited through Libya, with half having taken the land route, mainly via the governorate of Medenine, and more than a fifth having been rescued or intercepted in Tunisian waters. The increase in the number of arrivals has also been accompanied by a change in the profiles of migrants and refugees, including a significant presence of East African nationalities. In view of these developments, information on the drivers of migration in Medenine, the priority needs of migrants and refugees, the modalities of their interaction with the host community, and their migratory intentions remains limited.

To address this lack of information, REACH, in partnership with Humanity and Inclusion (HI), conducted a study on the "[Realities and needs of migrants and refugees in the governorate of Medenine since September 2018](#)" funded by Start Network's Migration Emergency Response Fund (MERF). Data collection was conducted from 24 July to 7 August 2019 in the cities of Medenine and Zarzis, which host the largest numbers of refugees and migrants in the governorate of Medenine. This study aims to analyse the following elements of the migratory dynamics in the governorate of Medenine: (1) the recent evolutions in the migratory dynamics, (2) the drivers of migration, (3) the priority needs of migrants and refugees in terms of access to services and livelihoods and associated coping mechanisms, (4) the current response of the different stakeholders, (5) the modalities of interaction between migrants and refugees and the host community and (6) the migration intentions.

This study was based on 60 individual interviews with female and male migrants and refugees who had arrived in the governorate after September 2018, 24 interviews with key informants (KIs) selected on the basis of their expertise and knowledge of the recent migration dynamics in southern Tunisia and 4 focus group discussions (FGDs) with representatives of the host community in the cities of Medenine and Zarzis. Due to the qualitative nature of the study, the results should be considered as indicative only.

Why do migrants and refugees come to the governorate of Medenine?

- **The vast majority of migrants and refugees interviewed for this study reported that they did not intend to come to Tunisia when leaving their country of origin.** Most of them had intended to go to Europe instead.
- **Respondents' journeys were mostly long and fragmented,** increasing their vulnerability to risks such as exploitation and abuse along the way. **Half of the respondents reported transiting through three to four countries before arriving in Tunisia.**
- **Findings indicate that there are three general routes respondents used to come Tunisia: over land, by flying directly to Tunisia or after being rescued or intercepted at sea. The majority of the respondents reportedly came to Tunisia from Libya (47/60),** most of whom had travelled over land (37/60) crossing the Ras Jedir border (19/37), while others had come to Tunisia after having been rescued or intercepted at sea (10/60). **Almost one eighth of respondents reported having transited through Algeria** to reach Tunisia by land (7/60), mainly via the Bouchebka border crossing point, which is mostly used by Syrian respondents (6/7). **The remaining respondents, almost all of whom are Ivorian (5/6), flew directly** from their country of origin (5/6) or from a third country (1/6).
- **Respondents who had taken land routes reported mainly using smugglers (20/44)** or relying on information collected by other migrants and refugees (11/44) and/or nationals of the last transit country (11/44).
- **The most commonly reported factors that pushed the interviewed migrants and refugees to leave the last country before arriving in Tunisia were related to the insecurity and/or protection risks they had faced (42/60).** This was especially the case for respondents who transited through Libya (38/42).
- **According to respondents who had arrived to Tunisia on their own free will (50/60), the motivations to do so were complementary to the factors that had led them to leave the previous country they had**

¹ UNHCR, Tunisia: [Overview of Mixed Migration Movement Profiling](#), 27 September 2018.

² UNHCR, Tunisia: [Overview of Mixed Migration Movement Profiling](#), 31 July 2018.

been in. These factors were mainly the search for security (20/50), following family members, friends or acquaintances who went to Tunisia (15/50) and the search for better living conditions in Tunisia (11/50). The hope of being resettled by the United Nations (UN) in Europe or in a third country was also reported as one of the factors motivating the decision to come to Tunisia (11/50).

What are the priority needs of migrants and refugees in the governorate of Medenine regarding access to services?

- **The most reported priority needs by respondents were access to cash (53/60), healthcare (46/60) and food (39/60).**
- More than half of the respondents (33/60), **most of whom lived in reception facilities (31/33) and came from East African countries (23/33)**, reported that they were not / not at all satisfied with their housing conditions. The most commonly reported concerns regarding housing conditions were the overcrowding of the shelters (25/60), the poor hygiene conditions (17/60) and the limited access to basic public services (water, electricity, etc.) (15/60).
- According to respondents, the three most common healthcare needs among migrants and refugees in the governorate of Medenine were improved access to emergency care (26/60), antibiotics (24/60) and nutritional assistance (20/60).
- **Almost all of the interviewed migrants and refugees reported several symptoms indicating the possible presence of mental health conditions (55/60)**, of whom only 7 reportedly received the necessary healthcare assistance.
- **Almost half of the respondents (29/60) reported experiencing (or having experienced) difficulties in accessing basic food and non-food items since their arrival in the governorate of Medenine.**
- During the seven days prior to the interview, due to limited access to food, respondents reported having used various coping strategies, such as **reducing the number of meals consumed per day (54/60), reducing portion sizes (53/60), or reducing the amount consumed by adults so that children could eat (40/60).**
- **A majority of respondents (31/60) reported not always having had adequate access to clean water to be able to cover their basic needs. (31/60).**
- **Almost a quarter of the respondents (13/60), including 11 living in the city of Medenine, reported that they did not feel safe.** This was reportedly related to episodes of verbal harassment (7/13), threats (5/13) and fear of being arrested (4/13). In order to minimize this sense of insecurity, respondents reported avoiding walking or being alone (9/13), or going out at night (4/13).
- **More than a third of the respondents reported having met unaccompanied refugee or migrant children in the governorate of Medenine since their arrival (22/60).** The latter are considered among the most vulnerable groups, being exposed to the highest protection risks along their journeys³.
- **Most respondents reported having experienced difficulties in obtaining enough money to meet their primary needs since their arrival in the governorate of Medenine (52/60).** To support themselves, respondents mainly relied on the support of UN agencies, NGOs or civil society (29/60) or worked (21/60) in Zarzis (13/21) and/or Medenine (9/21).

What are the interaction modalities between migrants and refugees and the host community in the governorate of Medenine?

- **The majority of respondents had been in contact or interacted with the host community (40/60).** Nevertheless, there are differences in the levels of interaction depending on the respondent's gender, country of origin and type of accommodation. Compared to other refugee and migrant profiles, men living outside of reception centres were the most likely group to interact with the host community. As for nationalities, all Syrian respondents reported having had interactions with the host community, while this was the case for a much smaller number of respondents from East Africa.
- Almost half of the respondents (28/60) reported having received support from the host community in the governorate of Medenine, the most frequently reported forms of received support were food, money and work opportunities. FGD participants deemed that the best forms of support for migrants and refugees are information sharing and the provision of employment opportunities, rather than in-kind and cash-based assistance.

³ IOM, [Migrant children in Italy](#), December 2018.

- The increase in the number of migrants and refugees since autumn 2018, as well as the overcrowding of the reception centres, has led to a greater visibility for migrants and refugees in the governorate of Medenine. This has generated tensions, as reported by FGD participants, but at the same time benefits, particularly in terms of the contribution of the migrant and refugee population to some sectors of the local labour market.
- Language and cultural barriers emerged as a disadvantage, especially for migrants and refugees originating from African countries where Arabic or French are not the official languages. These language barriers are likely to undermine opportunities for integration into the social fabric and the local labour market. FGD participants also emphasized the importance of socio-cultural activities, which are beneficial to social cohesion and inter-community interactions.

What are the migratory intentions of migrants and refugees in the governorate of Medenine?

- **In Medenine and Zarzis, almost all respondents reported that they had applied for asylum (42/60) or intended to do so (10/18).** A small number of respondents reported that they had applied for voluntary return programs (3/60).
- **About half of the respondents reported not intending to stay in Tunisia within the six months following data collection (28/60), while more than a third of respondents reported being undecided (23/60).** Of the 28 respondents who reported wanting to leave Tunisia, 21 intended to go for Europe.

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