



# FLOW MONITORING SURVEYS WITH MIGRANTS ARRIVING IN MALTA

25 MARCH – 1 MAY 2024

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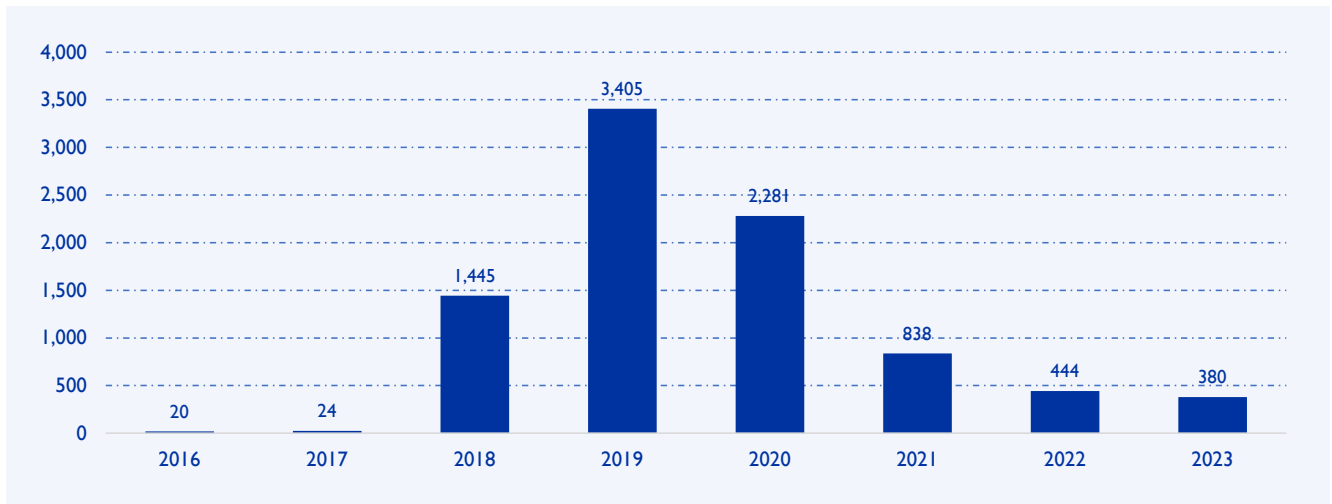


# 1 INTRODUCTION

In recent years, a significant portion of seaborne migration to Europe has been concentrated along the Central Mediterranean Route (CMR), a key pathway for migrants and refugees transiting through and crossing from North

Africa.<sup>1</sup> The CMR primarily involves departures from Libya and Tunisia, with Italy and Malta serving as entry points for migrants attempting to reach Europe.

Figure 1. Arrivals by sea to Malta, by year, 2016-2023



Source: [DTM Mixed Migration Flows to Europe](#)

The geographic positioning of Malta, directly across from Libya and Tunisia, renders it a pivotal actor in the dynamics of migration in this region. At the same time, the number of sea arrivals in Malta over the past few years is directly linked to the coordination between Maltese, Italian, and European authorities in rescue operations, which has often led to migrants rescued in the Maltese Search and Rescue Zone (SAR) disembarking in Italy.

In 2016 and 2017 a total of 44 migrants were registered to have arrived in Malta. In 2018, Malta recorded some 1,445 arrivals, peaking in 2019 at 3,405 – with many of them being rescued by NGO-led SAR missions in the Mediterranean. Since then, and starting from the mobility restrictions implemented following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020,<sup>2</sup> the figures started declining again with a reported total of 380 migrants arrived by sea in 2023. By the end of May 2024, only 68 migrants arrived in Malta.

This report presents findings from IOM’s Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) Flow Monitoring Surveys (FMS) conducted in Malta in 2024. Surveys are aimed at collecting up to date and reliable information and at better grasping the profiles and needs of the people who arrive in the country by irregular means. The surveys were conducted by IOM field staff between 25 March and 1 May 2024. Field staff surveyed a total of 102<sup>3</sup> individuals in different Flow Monitoring Survey Points (FMPs) in Malta, including both open and closed government-run centres in cooperation with the Ministry of Home Affairs, Security and Employment (MHSE). More information on the fieldwork can be found in the [Methodology](#).

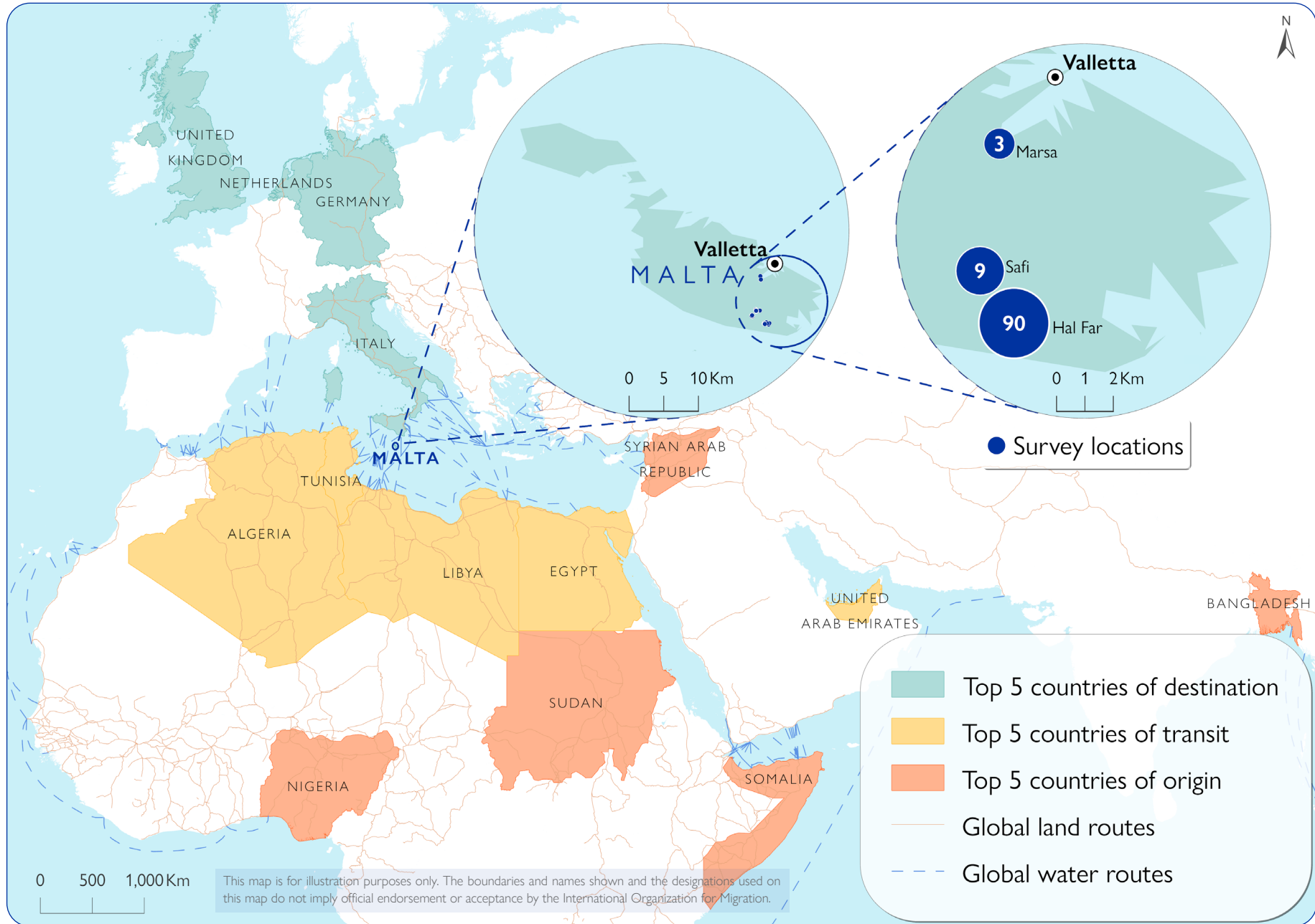
The next section of this report presents the baseline profile of the population interviewed, their main reasons for moving, the characteristics of their journey and their intentions. The third section discusses migrants’ experiences of violence, abuse and exploitation during their journey. The report ends with a section on methodology.

<sup>1</sup> Mixed migration movements are those in which different categories of people are travelling together, generally in an irregular manner, using the same routes and means of transport, but for different reasons. People travelling as part of mixed movements have varying needs and profiles and may include asylum seekers, refugees, trafficked persons, unaccompanied or separated children, and migrants in an irregular situation.

<sup>2</sup> See for example: <https://www.maltatoday.com.mt/news/national/103890/maltese-government-to-quarantine-irregular-migrants-at-sea-due-to-covid19>

<sup>3</sup> As some respondents choose not to reply to some questions, the sample size may vary accordingly for specific findings in the report.

Map 1: Maltese FMP locations and regional migration context



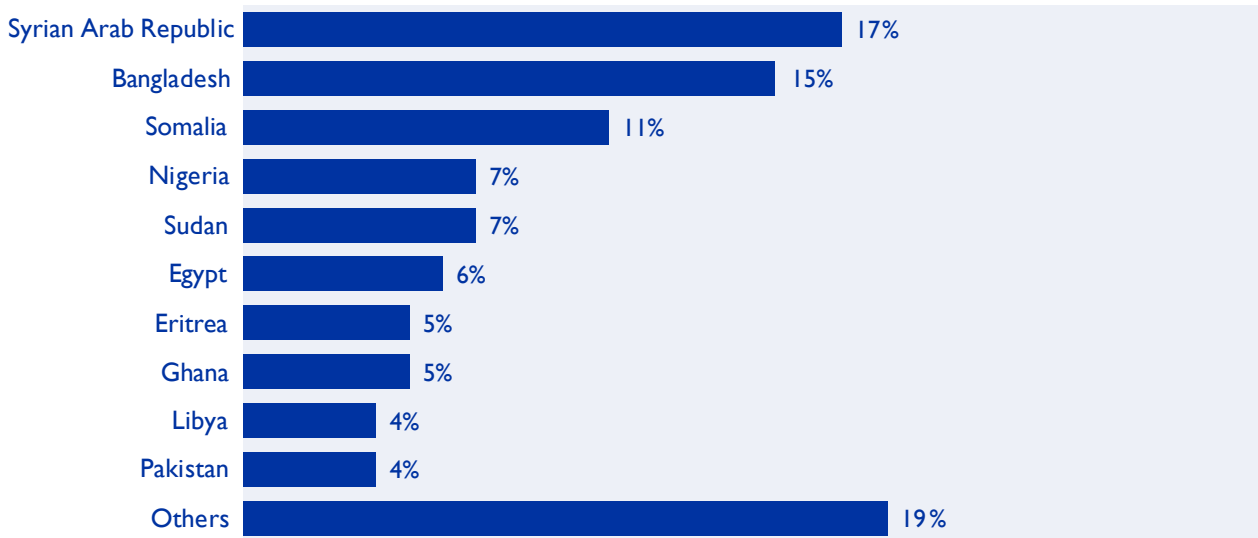
Source: DTM MLT FMS 2024

## 2 MIGRANTS IN MALTA: BASELINE PROFILE

The information in this report is based on a sample of 102 surveys with migrant respondents. The top five nationalities declared by the survey respondents were

Syrian Arab Republic (17%), Bangladesh (15%), Somalia (11%), Nigeria (7%) and Sudan (7%).

Figure 2. Share of respondents by nationality

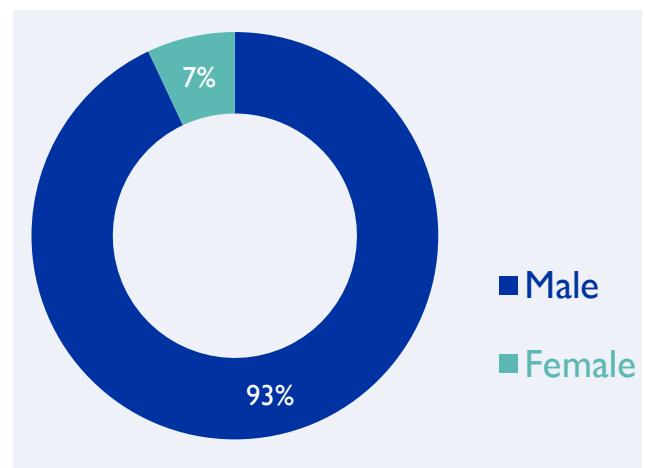


Source: DTM MLT FMS 2024 (n=102)

### 2.1 DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

Male migrants represented the majority (93%) of the sample, followed by 7 per cent female respondents.<sup>4</sup> As for the interviewees' age, most of the participants were below 30. Thirty-nine per cent were between 18 and 24, twenty-two per cent between 25 and 29. Individuals between 30 and 39 made up another 30 per cent while respondents above 40 constituted the remaining 9 per cent. Almost three quarters of the respondents (72%) declared that they were single, followed by 24 per cent who noted to be married. The remaining four per cent were either divorced, in some other form of partnership, or widowed. Three quarters of the respondents did not have children. Among the 25 per cent of respondents who indicated to be parents, 8 individuals (32%) travelled with their children while in 17 cases, all or some children remained in the country of origin (68%).

Figure 3. Share of interviewed migrants by sex



Source: DTM MLT FMS 2024 (n=102)

<sup>4</sup> The question on the sex of the respondent allows for the possibility to select "other" non-binary designations or to decline to respond. No interviewees selected options other than male or female.

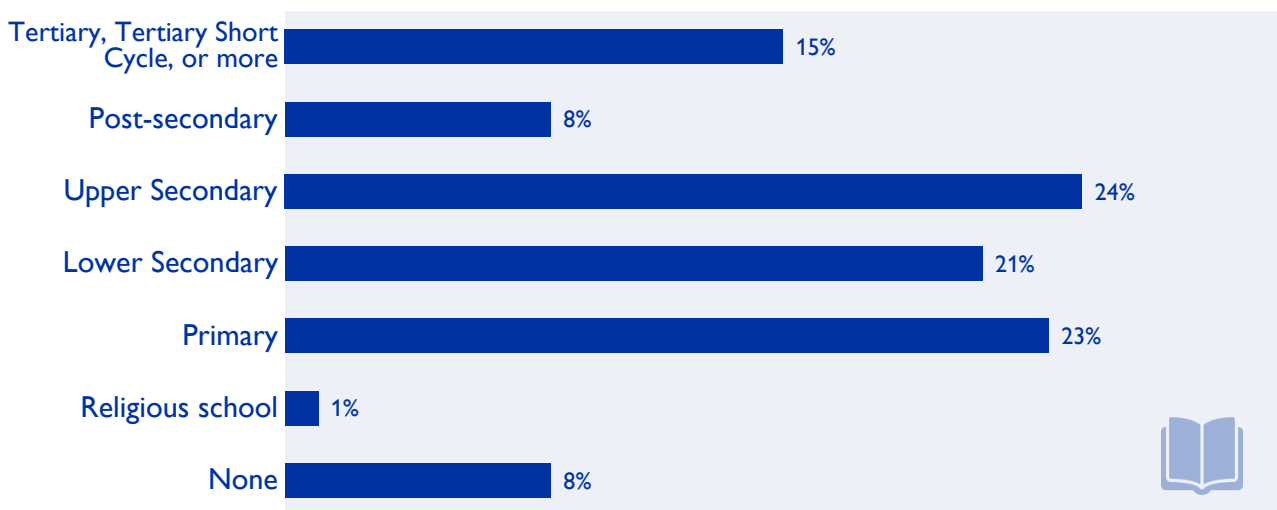
## 2.2 EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

### Education

Information on the educational attainment of different nationalities can help facilitate the planning of community-development or employment programmes and aid in tailoring educational services in host countries. The respondents were therefore asked about the highest level of formal education they had completed.<sup>5</sup> About 21 per cent declared to have completed a lower secondary education, while 23 per cent held primary educational degrees. Twelve per cent completed tertiary education.

Further, 24 per cent of the respondents stated to hold an upper secondary degree and 8 per cent reported to have completed a post-secondary education. A mere eight per cent of the sample reported to have not acquired any formal education. One individual reported a religious education, one declared to be a post-graduate and another two mentioned that they had completed a short-cycle tertiary education.

Figure 4: Share of respondents by highest level of educational attainment



Source: DTM MLT FMS 2024 (n=102)

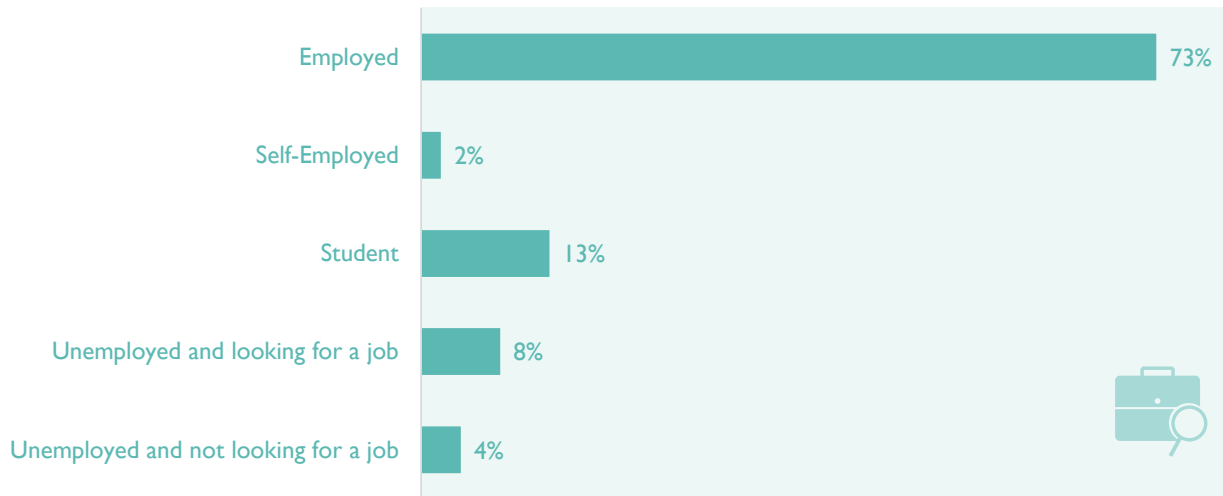
### Employment status before departure

The interviewees were also asked about their employment status prior to their departure. While 12 per cent were unemployed and either looking (8%) or not looking (4%) for a job, 75 per cent of the respondents declared that they had been either employed or self-employed prior to leaving. Approximately 13 per cent of the interviewees identified themselves as students.

Among those who had been employed or self-employed prior to leaving their country of origin, the most frequently cited employment were elementary occupations (31%), skilled manual labour (21%), and occupations related to craft and trade (19%). Ten per cent of the interviewees worked in service and sales, while the remainder of the sample indicated having worked as plant machine operators (6%), technicians (6%), in clerical occupations (1%) or in other fields.

<sup>5</sup> The educational categories used in the surveys are based on the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED). Lower secondary education (ISCED 2) marks the shift from primary education to a more subject-oriented approach. The transition from lower to upper secondary education (ISCED 3) introduces more specialized and in-depth instruction. For further information, please see: <https://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/international-standard-classification-of-education-isced-2011-en.pdf>

Figure 5: Share of respondents by employment status prior to leaving



Source: DTM MLT FMS 2024 (n=102)

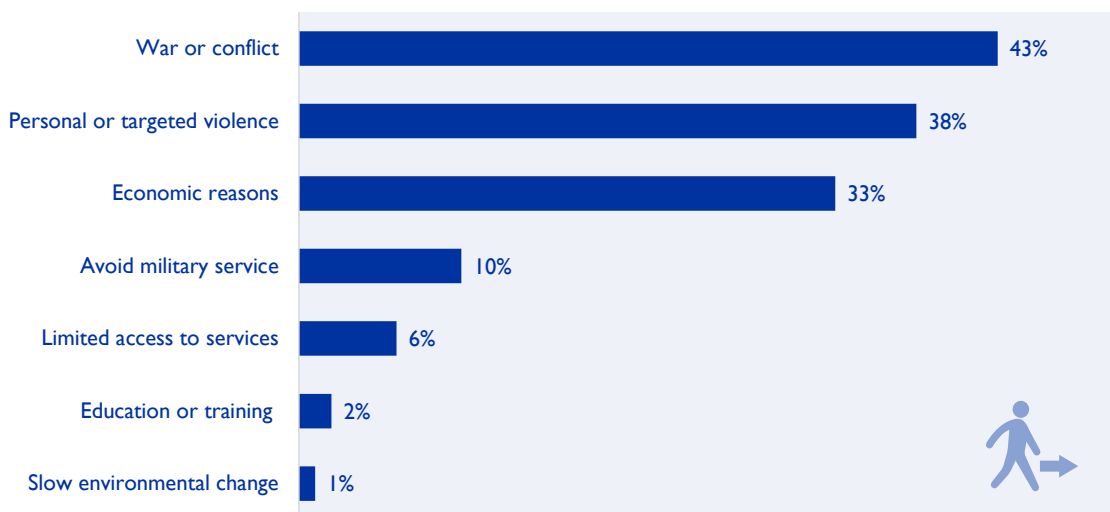
### 2.3 REASONS FOR LEAVING THE COUNTRY OF ORIGIN

The interviewees were asked to state the two main reasons for leaving their countries of origin. Among the respondents, 43 per cent cited war and conflict, followed by 38 per cent who quoted personal or targeted violence, while 33 per cent of respondents mentioned economic reasons.<sup>6</sup> Those who provided a more detailed account of the nature of the economic difficulties they faced, primarily mentioned a lack of jobs, low wages or an absence of economic growth. Ten per cent of respondents cited

avoiding military service followed by limited access to basic services (6%) and other reasons such as educational shortcomings or slow environmental change (3%).

Nineteen per cent of all respondents pointed out that they were internally displaced inside their countries of origin or habitual residence before crossing an international border and starting the journey.

Figure 6. Main reasons for leaving country of origin (multiple responses possible)



Source: DTM MLT FMS 2024 (n=101)

<sup>6</sup> This section shows self-reported reasons for migration by respondents. FMS do not aim at individual assessments of protection needs and vulnerability conditions of respondents, which are beyond the scope of the present DTM exercise.



Among these, 42 per cent were nationals of the Syrian Arab Republic, 16 per cent from Somalia and 11 per cent from both Bangladesh and Nigeria, respectively.

Drivers of migration varied between the different nationalities. Looking at the two main nationalities in the sample as well as among arrivals in Malta by sea,<sup>7</sup> there is a stark contrast as to why individuals of the Syrian Arab Republic and of Bangladesh decide to move.

Of the 16 respondents from Bangladesh, 13 cite economic reasons as one of the primary reasons for leaving their country of origin. These were referring in particular to the lack of job opportunities and to the low economic

prospects of the country. Others mentioned the need to escape from personal and targeted violence (5), often linked to political instability and repression of opponents, and to a lack of access to basic services (2). Additionally, 6 of them reported environmental events – floods and storms among them – that have affected their location of departure in the six months before departure.

Out of the 18 respondents from the Syrian Arab Republic, 13 reported war and conflict as one of their central motivations for moving. Other mentioned factors were escaping personal violence (6), economic reasons (5), and avoiding military service and conscription (6). No environmental factors were mentioned by Syrians.

## 2.4 JOURNEY MODALITIES AND COSTS

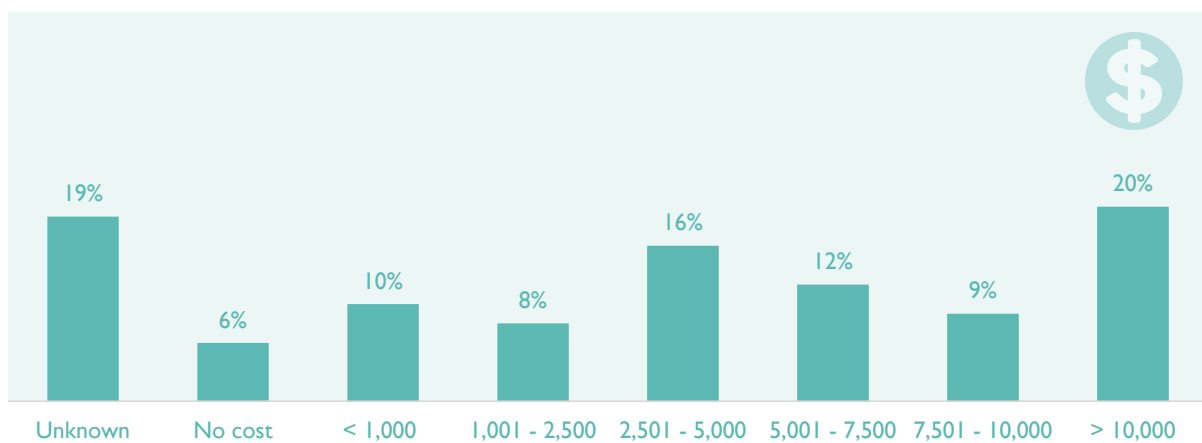
Some 34% of the respondents travelled in a group while the remaining 66 per cent travelled alone. More than two thirds (68%) of those who travelled in a group did so with non-family members, while the remaining part travelled with relatives (29%) or facilitators (3%).<sup>8</sup>

The routes that were travelled vary considerably, both in terms of modalities and length of the journeys. More than half of the respondents (56%) reported staying in a country different than that of origin for more than one year. In these cases, that country is considered as the country of departure towards Europe. Most of these respondents (82%) spent this time in Libya. Furthermore, 86 per cent of the total sample indicated Libya as their last transit country before reaching Malta by sea. Others

have left from Tunisian coasts (four respondents), and the remaining few others report to have reached Malta by air via Greece, Italy, Spain, or Germany.

Another question investigated was how much time lied between the interviewees' departure and their arrival. The majority, 51 per cent, indicated that their journey took less than a month. Some thirteen per cent were travelling for three to six months, while twelve per cent moved between six months and a year. Another 12 per cent cited 31 to 90 days and 9 per cent of the respondents stated that they travelled longer than a year. The remaining three per cent (3 individuals) embarked on their journey on the same day they arrived.

Figure 7. Cost of journey in USD



Source: DTM MLT FMS 2024 (n=101)

<sup>7</sup> See IOM's DTM mixed migration to Europe page for more on arrivals to Malta: <https://dtm.iom.int/europe/arrivals>

<sup>8</sup> The questionnaire defines facilitators broadly as either agents, employers or smugglers who facilitated the journey and the crossing of borders.

Figure 7 provides a complete breakdown of the cost of the journeys from the country of origin or habitual residence to Malta. More than half (57%) of respondents spent more than 2,500 United States Dollars (USD) on their journey.

When asked how they financed their journeys, respondents could choose multiple answers. Of 94 respondents who provided this information, 44 per cent stated that they used their own money. This was followed by 42 per cent

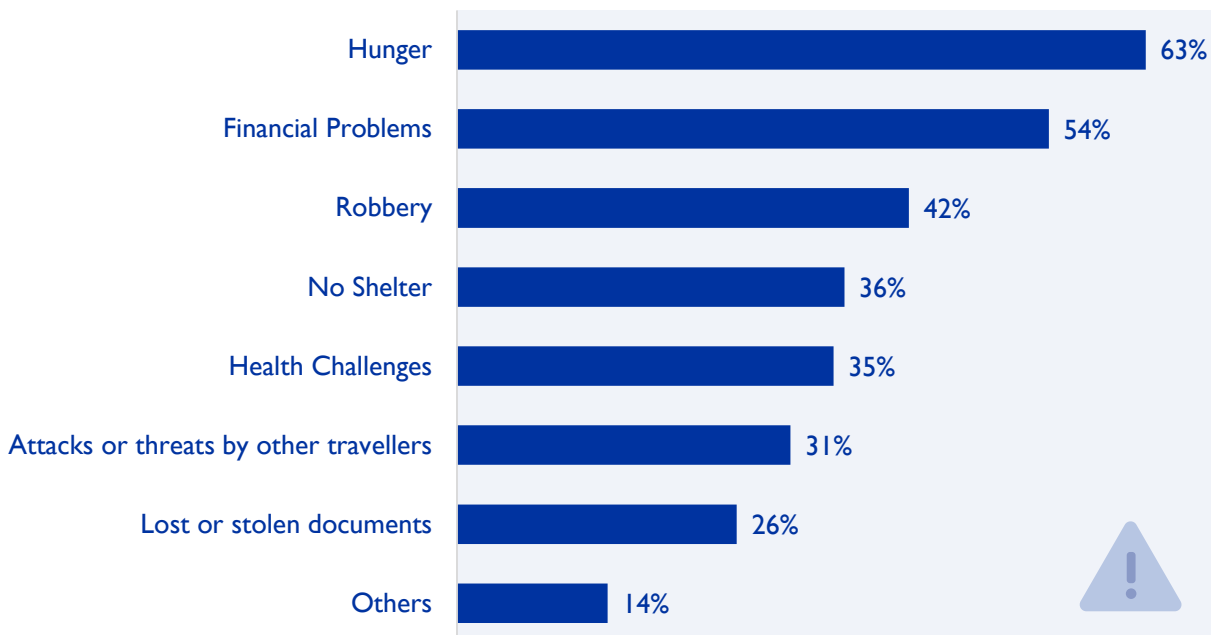
who received money from relatives in the country of origin or abroad, while 14 per cent had to sell property. Among the 95 respondents who gave the enumerators a more detailed account of their payment modalities, 34 per cent said that they paid in cash instalments. This was followed by 27 per cent who paid the full amount upfront, and 13 per cent who paid in instalments using the hawala system.<sup>9</sup> Six individuals stated that they paid for each leg of their journey separately among other modalities.

## 2.5 PROBLEMS DURING THE JOURNEY

The interviewees that recount the problems encountered along the CMR draw a picture of severity and hardship. Some 63 per cent note that they suffered hunger as a central issue during their journey. Fifty-four per cent reported experiencing financial problems on their journey, while forty-two per cent mentioned that they were robbed. These incidents primarily occurred during the respondents' stay or transit in and through Libya (79%). Health challenges were another prominently encountered ailment with 35 per cent of the interviewees mentioning such problems. Moreover, 36 per cent of respondents reported to have suffered from a lack of shelter, while

almost one third (31%) experienced attacks by other travellers. Finally, 26 per cent mentioned that they had lost their documents or that they had been stolen. Fourteen respondents reported encountering problems outside of the above-mentioned. These included episodes of violence, torture and threats of sexual exploitation. To shed light on experiences of abuse and related incidents, section 3 will examine such accounts in more detail. As mentioned in the previous section, most of the respondents transited through or spent a considerable amount of time in Libya, which likely contributed to the fact that most recorded incidents occurred in the country.

Figure 8: Problems experienced during journey (multiple responses possible)



Source: DTM MLT FMS 2024 (n=101)

<sup>9</sup> The hawala system is an informal method of transferring money, including across borders, through a network of money brokers.

Respondents were also asked if they had been readmitted to another country by the authorities of the countries they passed during their journey. Nineteen per cent of respondents (19 individuals) reported having been readmitted or transferred back from one country to another during the journey. Among them, nine respondents experienced this once, four experienced it twice, and six experienced it three times.<sup>10</sup> When asked as to where the interviewees' current needs lie, most respondents mentioned that they currently need support

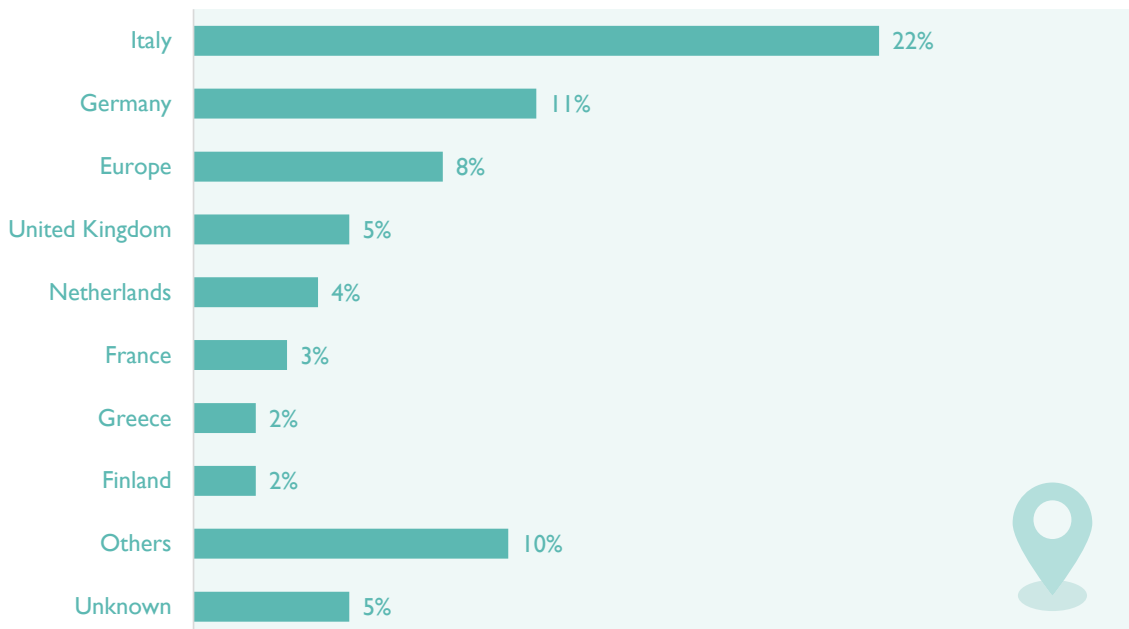
with employment (31%), in obtaining documentation regularizing their stay in the country of arrival (23%), accommodation (20%) and personal safety (6%). As some of the respondents were accommodated in closed centres at the time of the interview, almost one quarter of the respondents (23%) mentioned freedom from such conditions among their most pressing needs. All respondents who mentioned this as their central need were accommodated in the Safi Closed Centre.

## 2.6 INTENDED DESTINATION

Upon arrival, the interviewees were asked about their intended country of destination when they had first embarked on their journey. Italy (52%), Europe in general (21%), Germany (6%) and Malta (6%) were most frequently cited. This picture changed once the respondents arrived in Malta, with 28 per cent intending to remain in Malta, while the rest still intended to continue the journey and to reach Italy (22%), Germany (11%) or other European destinations (29%).

Respondents were also asked why they chose these countries as their final destination. Most respondents cited appealing socio-economic conditions (35%), reasons of safety (20%), relatives in the intended destination country (20%), ease of access to asylum procedures (6%), or a well-established network of co-nationals (4%). Five respondents mentioned language-related reasons while another three mentioned that there was no other choice due to existing migration policies or other geographical constraints.

Figure 9: Most frequently cited countries of intended destination at the time of the interview, excluding Malta<sup>11</sup>



Source: DTM MLT FMS 2024 (n=101)

<sup>10</sup> The survey asks migrants about whether they have been readmitted from one country to another. Migrants may or may not know the difference between formal readmission procedures and push backs and may use or understand these terms interchangeably. Findings on readmission should therefore not be understood to definitively mean pushbacks.

<sup>11</sup> At the time of the interview 28 per cent of the respondents indicated that they wished to stay in Malta. This is in line with FMS carried out in other European countries with most interviewees seeking to remain in the country of interview.

### 3 VULNERABILITY TO VIOLENCE, EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE

The questionnaire also included a module that gathers data on the migrants' vulnerability and the different forms of abuse, violence and exploitation they have experienced or witnessed during their journey. More specifically, the survey includes eight questions that aim to capture information about whether the respondent, during their journey:

1. Worked or performed other activities without receiving the expected payment
2. Was forced to perform work or other activities against their will
3. Was approached by someone offering a marriage (to either the respondent or to a close family member)
4. Was kept at a certain location against their will (by persons other than the authorities of the country)
5. Had experienced any form of physical violence
6. Was forced to travel or to move
7. Was lied to, tricked, manipulated, indebted, given false promises, or otherwise deceived into moving or travelling
8. Had access to travel documents during the journey

These questions relate to events, that might indicate exposure to human trafficking, exploitation and abuse practices, physical and sexual violence, experienced by the respondent, or witnessed by the respondent during the journey. The experiences described in these questions do not aim to identify cases of human trafficking as defined by international and national legal instruments. If interviewers came across respondents who requested further support, they referred these cases to the relevant protection actors.

#### UNPAID LABOUR



About 41 per cent of respondents reported that they worked or performed other activities during their journey without receiving the expected payment. In total 41 of these cases were recorded, 36 of which in Libya. The activities primarily included construction work, fishing, agricultural work, and manual labour more broadly. A few of the respondents also mentioned having worked as cleaners, hairdressers or drivers.

#### FORCED LABOUR



About 19 per cent of respondents reported having been forced to work or conduct activities against their will. Seventeen of 19 cases reported took place in Libya. These activities included moving weapons, transporting petrol to the boat they had travelled on and two instances of sexual exploitation.



### OFFERS OF AN ARRANGED MARRIAGE

Two respondents reported that they had been approached by someone offering marriage, one in Libya and one in Tunisia.



### KEPT AT A CERTAIN LOCATION AGAINST WILL

More than half (53%) of all respondents mentioned that they had been held at a location against their will. Most of them (48 individuals) recount that this took place in Libya. The reports included both governmental detention as well as being held against their will by informal groups, demanding ransom.



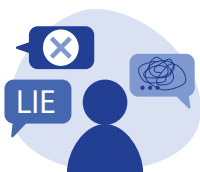
### PHYSICAL VIOLENCE

Forty-nine per cent of respondents reported having experienced some form of physical violence during their journey. Almost all of these episodes were reported to have taken place in Libya (46 of 49 cases). The accounts included reports of beatings, rape and instances of torture using electricity.



### FORCED TO TRAVEL

Eight per cent of respondents reported that they had been forced to travel, all of which in Libya.



### DECEIVED INTO TRAVEL

Thirty-seven per cent of respondents reported that they had been deceived, manipulated, or tricked into moving or travelling. Of 37 cases, 28 were reported to have taken place in Libya. The remaining incidents took place in Morocco, the United Arab Emirates, Greece, Guinea and other countries.



### TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

About one third (36 interviewees) of the sample noted that they never had travel documents during their journey, 14 respondents mentioned that they had lost their documents, 5 stated that someone else took their documents, 3 noted that they were stolen, while 2 interviewees did not provide an answer.

## 4 RETURN INTENTIONS

Respondents were asked whether they have ever considered the possibility to return to their home country during the journey. The intention to return can be different to the ideal and intended country of destination at the time of departure or upon arrival in Malta, as expectations and viability of different options can change depending on the specific conditions at any given moment during the journey.

About 81 per cent of the sample did not consider returning to their home country during the journey, while 16 per cent did think about this possibility. The remaining 3 per cent did not know or could not reply. Out of the 16 respondents who have considered the possibility of

returning, 6 did so while in Malta while 10 did so when they were in Libya. Being tired of their situation in the country and not finding a way to regularize their position were the two main motivations for them to think about return.

With regards to the majority who did not consider the possibility of returning home, 50 respondents said that they cannot due to the security conditions there, 21 say they are not willing to return, 5 they did not want to as they had family obligations to comply with, 4 had other protection concerns due to which they did not want to return. One participant sought to re-join family abroad.

## 5 METHODOLOGY

Flow Monitoring Surveys (FMS) in Malta were conducted as part of DTM activities in the Mediterranean that IOM launched in October 2015 and are presently conducted within the framework of IOM's research on populations on the move. These cover routes of migration via the Mediterranean Sea, the Western African Atlantic and the Western Balkans to Europe. The data collection involves direct interviews with migrants and the collation of statistical data on arrivals and migrant presence in- and outside of reception, collected by national authorities and IOM staff. Regular updates on arrivals are available on [DTM Migration Flow to Europe | Europe](#).

DTM FMS in Malta were conducted for the first time by IOM field staff between 25 March and 1 May 2024. In this first pilot exercise, two DTM enumerators (one female and one male) were trained by IOM. DTM enumerators obtained the authorization to access different open and

closed government-run centres in close coordination with MHSE. These were used as main flow monitoring points (FMPs) to meet migrants and to propose them to participate in the survey. Potential participants were asked to provide verbal consent for the interview and were informed about its voluntary nature and that it was not remunerated. The interviews are anonymous and conducted one-on-one with respondents, in safe and isolated spaces. Interviewees could decline to respond to any individual questions or to stop the interview at any moment if they wished to so.

The first weeks of the fieldwork were dedicated to the planning of activities, open contacts with relevant institutions and entities managing the facilities to be visited, in close collaboration with the MHSE. DTM enumerators also reached out to migrants in some informal settlements.

### 5.1 TARGET

The FMS Europe survey is designed to profile third country (non-EU) nationals who are travelling to Europe by sea and by land.

In the case of Malta, the survey targeted migrants who arrived by sea or by air irregularly or entered regularly but overstayed. Furthermore, the participant should not have resided in the country of the interview for a period exceeding one year.

Migrants aged 14 years and older could be asked to participate in the FMS. Migrants aged between 14 and 17 years could only take part if the written consent of

the legal guardian was obtained. The final sample only included adults.

## 5.2 SAMPLING

In Malta, IOM applied a non-random, convenience sampling procedure due to the limited duration of the data collection and the limited size of the reference population in the reference period as per available data on arrivals shared by the MHSE. DTM enumerators had different language skills, visited different types of locations and facilities (closed and open centres, informal settlements), and adapted the fieldwork and working hours to centres' schedules and migrants' needs. The data collection took place partially during the month of Ramadan, during which Muslim migrants were less available during the central hours of the day.

Out of the 147 migrants approached and who were introduced to the survey and its aim, 45 (31%) did not consent to participate. The high number of non-responses may be due to a combination of factors, including time limitation by respondents, respondents being tired, not being interested or not willing to share – even anonymously – their thoughts while being in closed centres or informal settlements. Given the purposive sampling approach, figures should not be interpreted to be representative of the broader population of migrants in Malta.

## 5.3 THE QUESTIONNAIRE

The DTM's FMS questionnaire was available in e-format in Kobo Toolbox in English, French and Arabic, and in paper forms translated into Arabic, English, Farsi, French, Pashto and Urdu. IOM cultural mediators supported the data collection activity upon need.

FMS are part of the global DTM toolbox and are described in the DTM [Methodological Framework](#). The FMS questionnaire for Europe was first designed in 2015 and has been continuously revised and adapted to the changing context of mixed migration to Europe since then. The questionnaire has a modular approach, and questions aim at collecting data for variables which are defined in the global DTM data dictionary for comparative purposes. Questions of thematic sections have been developed by DTM together with relevant thematic IOM's specialists and piloted before being implemented in all EU and Western Balkan countries involved.

The baseline module captures data on the socio-demographic profile of the respondents, their education and employment background, the circumstances of their migration journey and migration factors, their areas of

origin or their last country of habitual residence, as well as their intended countries of destination.

The second FMS module contains questions that refer to experiences of exploitation, violence and abuse that may amount to human trafficking, lived by the respondents during the journey. The module was developed together with IOM's Migrant Protection Unit and gathers information on events and practices, experienced directly by the respondent or by their family member(s), or that are witnessed by the respondent during the journey. These questions relate to an event, that might indicate exposure to human trafficking, exploitation and abuse practices, physical and sexual violence, experienced by the respondent. The experiences described in these questions do not aim to identify cases of human trafficking as defined by international and national legal instruments.

The third module contains questions related to return intentions, that connects with outreach activities on the existence and functioning of Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) programme in several countries where the survey is deployed.

## 5.4 LIMITATIONS

This a pilot study, implementing DTM's FMS in Malta for the first time. Three interviewees did not complete the survey and therefore did not answer all questions. This resulted in varying sample sizes (ranging from n=102 to n=99) depending on the question. The limited sample size is a consequence of the study's pilot nature, where initial resources were allocated to establishing access and creating an environment conducive to conducting the research — and to the expected small target population — given the low number of arrivals reported in Malta during the data collection period. Between January and April 2024, 68 irregular arrivals have been registered by Maltese authorities, while this figure amounted to 380 for all of 2023.

Bearing these limiting factors in mind and the overall sampling strategy highlighted in the previous section,

the sample size and structure by sex and nationality corresponds to that of the arrivals in Malta in 2023-2024. Although surveys are anonymous and information provided is shared only in an aggregate manner, it should be noted that there can be some degree of inconsistency and bias in the given replies considering the specific condition of migrants in an irregular position and/or being sheltered in governmental facilities at the time of the survey. The data presented in this document are therefore representative of the individuals surveyed in the covered locations and during the indicated timeframe. The data should not be generalized and do not represent a full picture of migration flows to Malta. Accordingly, the findings of this report shall not be used to assess the validity of individual or collective protection claims within the sample's population, as this would be beyond the scope of the FMS exercise.



