



Internal migration between the islands of Rodrigues and Mauritius

Drivers,
challenges and
opportunities
for support

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Cover photo: After an early morning catch, small fishing boats are anchored near shore in the lagoon that surrounds Rodrigues island. © IOM 2024/Leanne DIXON PERERA

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Prepared by: Leanne Dixon Perera



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This report, which was authored by Leanne Dixon Perera, presents the findings of a research study made possible by the valuable contributions of many participants, colleagues and stakeholders in Mauritius and Rodrigues Island. In particular, the author is deeply grateful to each and every migrant who took the time and care to share their personal stories and experiences for the purpose of this study. This work was greatly enriched by their participation.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Internal migration, particularly from the outer island of Rodrigues, is a prevailing phenomenon in Mauritius. In this context, a research study was conducted to better understand why people move between the islands of Rodrigues and Mauritius and what challenges they face, with a view towards exploring how these challenges can be met. This involved a survey of and interviews and focus group discussions with over 80 internal migrants on both islands, and key informant interviews and roundtable discussions with representatives of 26 government and non-governmental stakeholders. This report details the study's findings and is intended to support the Government of Mauritius, including the Rodrigues Regional Assembly, with recommendations on how to better support and protect inter-island migrants.

With respect to migration drivers, Rodriguan migrants move to Mauritius for a wide range of reasons, though predominantly to find work and earn money. Other important motivations include environmental factors and access to services such as health care, higher education and water. Young Rodriguans emphasize personal aspirations, such as growth, independence and freedom as highly relevant in their decision to leave Rodrigues. For returnees, strong ties to family back home, difficulties in Mauritius and a desire to contribute new skills were reported. Mauritian and Rodriguan migrants alike also shared a preference for a calmer and more peaceful atmosphere in Rodrigues, as compared to Mauritius. A special case of gendered and circular movement was noted among Rodriguan women entrepreneurs whose migration was attributed to various factors, namely access to a wider trade market to sell their goods, strong linkages to the Rodriguan diaspora and, most interestingly, the use of private medical facilities.

Findings from the study reveal several challenges facing internal migrants, such as housing and living conditions, financial difficulties, lack of structured support and access to services, discrimination, difficulty adapting in Mauritius, as well as family separation and challenges finding jobs upon return to Rodrigues. Support networks were varied among the sampled migrant respondents, though they were mostly ad hoc and in the social sphere (e.g. friends and family). Institutionalized support from government was reported to some degree among the sample, in both the origin and destination contexts. However, findings indicate that the Rodrigues Information and Support Desks in Port Louis and Port Mathurin, which were established to assist internal migrants, have not been performing as intended with very limited impact, and virtually there is no beneficiary uptake at these sites.

In light of the findings, policy recommendations are made within four thematic streams of action, with the specific aim of directly supporting people on the move between the islands. These streams include: (1) migrant empowerment; (2) safe, appropriate and affordable housing; (3) mainstreaming mobility into employment and training; and (4) institutional capacity through training, coordination and data. Together, their specific activities intend to achieve a broader goal of creating an ecosystem for safe, successful and dignified migration.

INTRODUCTION AND OBJECTIVE

Internal migration, particularly from the outer island of Rodrigues, is a prevailing and long-standing phenomenon in Mauritius. Previous studies have shown that internal migrants from Rodrigues generally leave due to limited job opportunities at home, and, in some cases, they settle in precarious conditions once in Mauritius.¹ However, very little is known about other factors that influence these migration flows and, why, in some cases, migrants return to Rodrigues. Importantly, the characteristics of inter-island migration – such as the difficulties that migrants face and the support (or lack thereof) that they receive – are largely understudied.

This report presents the findings of a mixed methods study that was undertaken to better understand this landscape, throughout the migration cycle: why people move and what challenges they face, with a view towards exploring how these challenges can be met. Alongside a comprehensive mapping of relevant national and regional legal, institutional and policy frameworks, the following research questions guided the study:

- (1) What motivates and leads people to migrate between the islands?
- (2) What challenges do migrants face and what support do they use to overcome them?
- (3) How can migrants be better supported throughout the migration cycle?

The overall objective of this report is to provide the Government of Mauritius, including the Rodrigues Regional Assembly, with up-to-date evidence and recommendations on how to establish an assistance framework for inter-island migrants. More concretely, it is intended to be a key input into the development of an action plan on internal migration for Rodrigues. As such, these serve as tools to mobilize stakeholders in the protection of migrants.

This study is one component of the IOM project Bouze Rodrig: pour une migration réussie (2023–2025).² In parallel, a data-focused activity was concurrently carried out to identify data priorities, needs and expectations with respect to internal migration between the islands.

In terms of the report's structure, [section 1](#) begins by setting out the context within which the study is situated: a [literature review](#) on what is known on the topic, and the applicable [legal, institutional and policy frameworks](#). [Section 2](#) describes the guiding research questions and scope of the study, followed by [section 3](#), which details the study's methodology with respect to data collection and analysis. [Section 4](#) presents the findings and discussion of the research, homing in on the drivers of migration and the challenges and types of support identified by participants. [Section 5](#) concludes the report by outlining potential policy interventions for consideration.

¹ Here and throughout this report, "Mauritius" refers to the island of Mauritius. The Republic of Mauritius (the State) is referred to by its full name.

² For more on this project, see the IOM Development Fund [project summary](#).

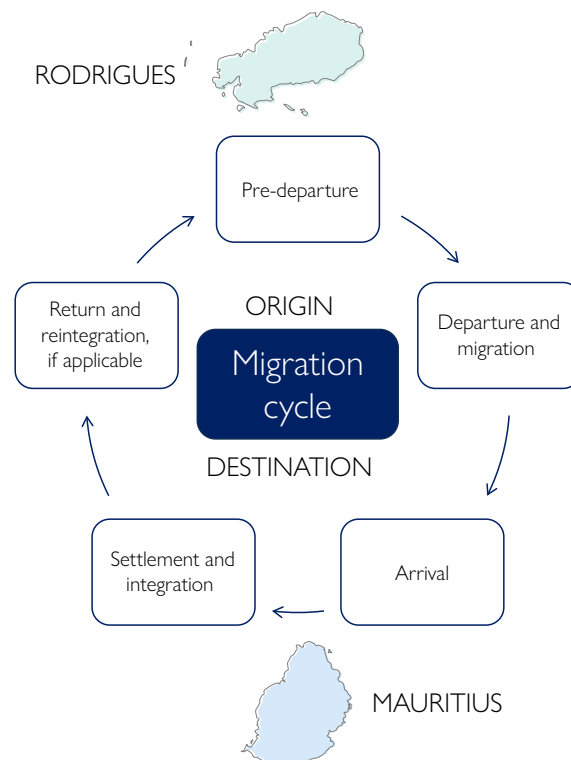
1. CONTEXT: EXISTING EVIDENCE AND POLICY LANDSCAPE

This section sets out the context for the research examined in this report. First, a literature review highlights what is known about inter-island migration between the islands of Mauritius and Rodrigues. The policy landscape in which inter-island migration takes place, including pertinent institutions, laws and programmes, is then mapped out. Together, these components provide the backdrop for the discussion in subsequent sections.

1.1. Literature review

The literature review consolidates the existing evidence base on the topic of internal migration between Rodrigues and Mauritius as published by researchers, organizations (e.g. government departments, international organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs)) and the media. It includes secondary sources and grey literature. The review is thematically presented by stage of the migration cycle (i.e. organized by origin, migration, destination and return) and the associated topic of interest.

Figure 1. Whole of migration cycle, depicted by migration stage



Source: Created by the author using PowerPoint, 2024.

Note: This map is for illustration purposes only. The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the International Organization for Migration.

1.1.1. Origin: Rodrigues

Rodrigues is an outer island in the Republic of Mauritius.³ It is located about 600 km to the north-east of mainland Mauritius and is the smallest of the major islands in the Mascarene archipelago with a surface area of 108 sq km. Its capital is Port Mathurin in the north-west of the island.

Figure 2. Map of Rodrigues



Source: Poonit, 2011.

Note: This map is for illustration purposes only. The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the International Organization for Migration.

Demographics

Rodriguans⁴ – that is, people born in Rodrigues – are mostly of African descent. Rodriguan Creole (Kreol Rodrige) is the most common language of exchange, and Catholicism is the main religion. According to the latest census (2022), the island of Rodrigues has a population of 43,650, and the resident female population (~51%) slightly outnumber the male population (~49%) (Statistics Mauritius, 2022d).

Population density is lower in Rodrigues than the mainland island of Mauritius. However, the crude birth rate in Rodrigues is significantly higher: in 2022, it was 19.5, as compared to 9.2 in Mauritius. When observing population change (by count and average annual growth rate) over the latest intercensal period from 2011 to 2022, the population of Rodrigues increased by 3,220 people (+0.70%), while the population of the island of Mauritius registered a decrease of 5,110 (-0.42%) (Statistics Mauritius, 2023b).

³ The Republic of Mauritius comprises the main island of Mauritius and smaller “outer islands.” Rodrigues is the largest of the outer islands.

⁴ Persons from the island of Rodrigues are also referred to as Rodriguais (French) or Rodrige (Creole).

In terms of age structure, Rodrigues has a younger population (both sexes), with a lower mean and median age. For example, in 2022, the median age in Rodrigues was about 8.5 years younger (29.8) than in Mauritius (38.3) (Statistics Mauritius, 2022a and 2022b). The latest data on family backgrounds and structure were not available at the time of writing.

Table 1. Estimated comparative population data on islands of Mauritius and Rodrigues, 2022

| Island | Population | Density per square kilometre | Population change between 2021 and 2022 (%) | Crude birth rate in 2022 (%) | Crude death rate in 2022 (%) | Mean age in 2022 (%) | Median age in 2022 (%) |
|---------------------|------------|------------------------------|---|------------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|
| Island of Mauritius | 1 216 139 | 651 | -0.25 | 9.2 | 10.3 | 38.9 | 38.3 |
| Island of Rodrigues | 44 783 | 407 | 0.80 | 19.5 | 8.0 | 33.1 | 29.8 |

Source: Statistics Mauritius, 2022a, 2022b and 2023b.

Economy

Most households in Rodrigues are rural and depend on subsistence agriculture (e.g. animal and livestock rearing as well as lagoon fishing) and microenterprises (IFAD, 2013). The economy is relatedly based on agriculture and fishing, with tourism as an important source of revenue (Mauritius, Republic of, n.d.a). In addition, handicraft production (hats, bags) made of jute and other local plants is an increasingly significant source of income for families (Sobhee, 2016). Unlike mainland Mauritius, the economy of Rodrigues is small and less diversified, as there is no sugar cultivation, nor comparable export manufacturing or financial services. Given the absence of business opportunities apart from tourism, the island depends heavily on the central government for funding (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2022).

Unemployment and informal employment

In 2022, the unemployment rate in the Republic of Mauritius was estimated to be 7.7 per cent (Statistics Mauritius, 2022c). The latest available data (Mauritius, Republic of, 2016a) disaggregated by the islands present a significant gap: unemployment was estimated at 25 per cent on the island of Rodrigues compared to 7.9 per cent in Mauritius in 2015.⁵ In Rodrigues, there were 3,743 registered unemployed jobseekers in June 2023, with 47 per cent between the age of 16 and 29 years (Mauritius, Republic of, 2023b). This suggests that youth unemployment is a particularly acute issue in Rodrigues. Gendered disparities were more pronounced for jobseekers between the ages of 20 and 39 where women were overrepresented as compared to men.

For the working population, the large majority of workers in Rodrigues were employed in the tertiary sector (62%) with roughly similar proportions in the primary (20%) and secondary (18%) sectors (Table 2).

⁵ It is worth noting that the Rodrigues Regional Assembly (RRA) recently reported an unemployment rate (*taux de chômage*) of 48 per cent for the 2022–2023 fiscal year (Grandcourt, 2024:38.)

Table 2. Employment by industrial sector and sex, 2022

| Industrial sector | Male | Female | Total |
|--|--------------|--------------|---------------|
| Primary | 2 000 | 1 400 | 3 400 |
| Secondary | 2 500 | 600 | 3 100 |
| of which: Manufacturing | 600 | 600 | 1 200 |
| Tertiary | 5 400 | 5 300 | 10 700 |
| of which: Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles | 1 000 | 800 | 1 800 |
| Accommodation and food service activities | 400 | 600 | 1 000 |
| Public administration and defence; compulsory social security | 1 700 | 1 100 | 2 800 |
| Total | 9 900 | 7 300 | 17 200 |

Source: Statistics Mauritius, 2023a.

However, informality is a dominant feature of employment with recent estimates, suggesting that the informal sector accounted for about 73 per cent of the total workforce in 2020.⁶ In fact, only 1,400 individuals were estimated to be employed in formal enterprises (except for civil servants) that year, while 13,000 were informal or working with microenterprises. Public administration jobs made up the majority of the formal employment sector, estimated at 71 per cent.

Poverty

Within the Republic of Mauritius, Rodrigues is the poorest administrative region (World Bank Group, 2015). Based on the Household Budget Survey data, in 2017, the proportion of households in relative poverty based on the relative poverty line of 7,509 Mauritian rupees (MUR)⁷ for the Republic of Mauritius was estimated at 37.3 per cent on the island of Rodrigues, relative to 9.6 per cent for the Republic of Mauritius (Statistics Mauritius, 2020). When adjusting the relative poverty line to be specific to the island of Rodrigues to account for difference in living standards (a lower MUR 5,036), the proportion of households in relative poverty was still estimated at a substantial 17.1 per cent. By either account, poverty is a significant issue on the island of Rodrigues.

Another relevant measure is the number of households eligible under the Social Register of Mauritius (SRM), which captures households in absolute poverty, as defined by income thresholds.⁸ As of April 2024, some 3,150 households in Rodrigues were eligible for the SRM, which make up around 11,510 beneficiaries: roughly 27 per cent of the total resident population.⁹ More than 50 per cent of these households were female headed.¹⁰ When comparing eligible households under the SRM on the islands of Mauritius and Rodrigues, there is an exceptionally higher rate of absolute poverty in Rodrigues.¹¹

6 Estimates are drawn from COWI Belgium, 2023:296–297.

7 1 USD = 46.36 MUR on 5 August 2024

8 As defined and amended by regulation under the Social Integration and Empowerment Act, 2016.

9 Data were provided to the author by the Ministry of Social Integration and Social Security, Social Integration Division, May 2024.

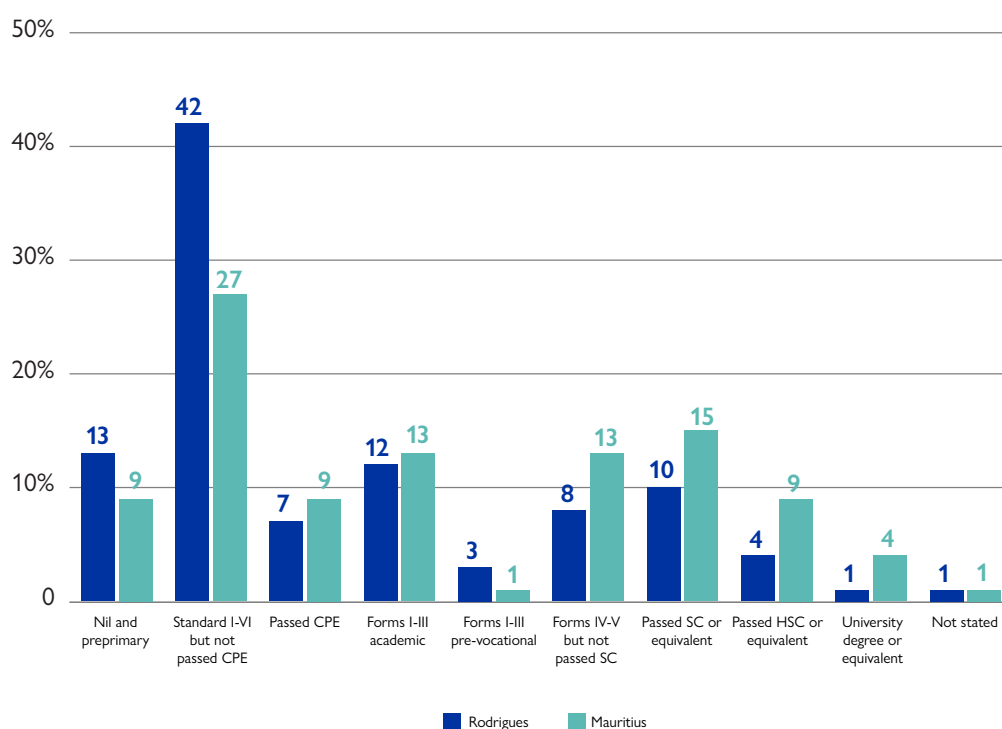
10 Data were provided by NEF Rodrigues through written communication with the author, 27 February 2024.

11 For example, available data from June 2023 demonstrate that there was a nearly even distribution: 2,752 households in Mauritius and 2,720 households in Rodrigues. This denotes an exceptionally higher rate of absolute poverty in Rodrigues as compared to Mauritius, given the fact that the population of the island of Mauritius is over 27 times the size of the population in Rodrigues.

Education

Education is free on the island of Rodrigues, as it is throughout the Republic of Mauritius. With the exception of two technical training institutes, however, there are no higher education (tertiary-level) institutions in Rodrigues. According to the 2011 census, residents on the island of Rodrigues had lower rates of higher educational attainment as depicted across levels in Figure 3.

**Figure 3. Highest level of educational attainment in Mauritius and Rodrigues, 2011
(% of island population)**



Source: Calculations by the author, from data in Statistics Mauritius, 2012a.

The literacy rate in Rodrigues has noticeably increased over the most recent intercensal period (from 2011 to 2022) – from 78.4 per cent to 83.3 per cent for men, and from 78.8 per cent to 84.4 per cent for women (Statistics Mauritius, n.d.). However, these figures are still lower when compared to the rates for the whole Republic of Mauritius (93.6% for men and 90.3% for women) (Statistics Mauritius, 2022d).¹²

Climate change impacts and environmental challenges

Rodrigues, much like mainland Mauritius and other Small Island Development States, acutely suffers the consequences of environmental degradation and climate change. This includes rising sea levels, increasing average temperatures, ocean acidification, anomalies in rainfall and land degradation. These effects cause significant damage to agricultural, fishing and livestock sectors while increasing the risk of health hazards and water shortages (see Sultan, 2017 and Sobhee, 2016). For example, the fishing sector in Rodrigues has historically been dominated

¹² Note that the literacy rate for the island of Mauritius (2022) was not available at the time of writing.

by traditional fishing practices on small boats within the inner lagoon; however, due to siltation and overexploitation, catches have decreased considerably in recent decades (Ragodoo, n.d.:8). Loss of biodiversity, decreased surface water levels (due to lower rates of rainfall) and more extreme weather events particularly threaten coastal communities.

The island of Rodrigues tends to be more affected than mainland Mauritius by the strongest winds and deepest storm surge, as well as more exposed to longer periods of water scarcity (Mauritius, Republic of, 2021). Droughts, water scarcity, cyclones and torrential rains have been identified as having the worst effects on livelihoods in Rodrigues (Sultan, 2017). Water scarcity is a significant concern – natural water resources and rainfall harvesting is insufficient to supply drinking water to the residents of Rodrigues (Sustainable Water and Energy Solutions Network, n.d.). Water scarcity has had dramatic impacts on agricultural yields and prospects for the sector as well.

As discussed further in the “[Environmental drivers](#)” section, environmental degradation and lack of economic diversification play a significant and interwoven role in the vulnerability of Rodriguans to sustain their livelihoods and cope with the consequences. Due to inadequate infrastructure and limited human and natural resources, Rodrigues is vulnerable to the slightest economic shocks and climactic impacts (COWI Belgium, 2023).

1.1.2. Internal migration

Who is moving?

The [Housing and Population Census](#) is a key source of data on internal migration in Mauritius. At the time of writing, the latest census had just recently been conducted (in 2022), and, as a result, relevant disaggregated and detailed migration-related data had not yet been publicly released. Aggregated internal migration flows (e.g. five-year migration streams), which were publicly released in June 2024, are described in the subsection that follows; however, further analysis of raw data sets is warranted for detailed demographic and other attributes, such as income, employment situations and so on. To shed light on available disaggregated data, albeit quite dated, the discussion in the paragraphs that follow briefly captures relevant census data as collected in 2011.

Between 2006 and 2011, 8.1 per cent of the total population aged 5 years and over in the Republic of Mauritius changed their place of residence to a different area within the country. Most of this internal migration was within the island of Mauritius (95.3%). Of the total, 2.3 per cent changed their residence within the island of Rodrigues.

With relevance to this study, 2,178 people (2.3% of the total internal migrants) moved between the islands of Mauritius and Rodrigues between 2006 and 2011. Of these inter-island migrants, 1,116 left Rodrigues to settle in Mauritius and 1,062 moved from Mauritius to Rodrigues. As such, just over 1,000 people moved in both directions between the islands of Rodrigues and Mauritius over this five-year period. Tables 3 and 4 provide a breakdown of this migration by geographical district in each direction.

Table 3. Five-year migration streams from Rodrigues to mainland Mauritius by district

| Origin (from) | District of destination (to) | | | | | | | | | |
|--|------------------------------|---------------|--------------------|-------|------------|---------|-----------------|------|-------------|-------|
| | Port Louis | Pamplemousses | Rivière du Rempart | Flacq | Grand Port | Savanne | Plaines Wilhems | Moka | Black River | Total |
| Rodrigues Islands Census 2011 ^a | 175 | 159 | 52 | 38 | 47 | 45 | 365 | 105 | 130 | 1 116 |
| Rodrigues Islands Census 2022 ^b | 42 | 54 | 6 | 27 | 33 | 4 | 165 | 55 | 63 | 449 |

Sources: (a) Statistics Mauritius, 2012b; (b) Statistics Mauritius, 2024.

Table 4. Five-year migration streams from mainland Mauritius to Rodrigues by district

| Destination (to) | District of origin (from) | | | | | | | | | |
|--|---------------------------|---------------|--------------------|-------|------------|---------|-----------------|------|-------------|-------|
| | Port Louis | Pamplemousses | Rivière du Rempart | Flacq | Grand Port | Savanne | Plaines Wilhems | Moka | Black River | Total |
| Rodrigues Islands Census 2011 ^a | 186 | 159 | 57 | 60 | 62 | 48 | 326 | 79 | 85 | 1 062 |
| Rodrigues Islands Census 2022 | 311 | 90 | 66 | 70 | 46 | 28 | 231 | 7 | 69 | 989 |

Sources: (a) Statistics Mauritius, 2012b; (b) Statistics Mauritius, 2024.

Migration from Rodrigues to Mauritius¹³

Among the cohort of inter-island migrants moving from Rodrigues to Mauritius (Table 3), young adults aged 16 to 29 years were the most mobile age group. They had the highest five-year migrant rate (52.4%), followed by those in the 30–44 age group (22.3%). This demonstrates that most inter-island migrants from Rodrigues were young and of working age.

Inter-island migrants from Rodrigues also had a near equal gender proportion: 50.5 per cent male and 49.5 per cent female. Slightly more were married or in a union (47.0%) than those who were single (45.2%). In terms of housing, just over 4 in 10 inter-island migrants from Rodrigues (43.4%) were living in rented houses in Mauritius. Data on the number of children and family background and structure in migrant households are not publicly available, a measure that would be useful to explore broader family-related implications of migration.

¹³ These data are drawn from IOM, 2014. Comparable detailed data were not provided for migration in the opposite direction, that is, from Mauritius to Rodrigues.

Finally, it is worth noting that individuals in this cohort were not all born in Rodrigues, though they made up the vast majority (79.3%). A smaller proportion (20.5%) of migrants were born on the island of Mauritius. This suggests that most migrants who move between the islands are Rodriguan.

Smaller study samples of inter-island migrants from Rodrigues provide further insights into this broader population. For example, one seminal study investigated the health and socioeconomic conditions of 230 Rodriguan migrants living in Mauritius (IOM, 2012). Among this group, Rodriguans had migrated from all parts of the island. Most of their households were male headed (across all income groups) and those born in Rodrigues had some level of education.

In a glimpse into aggregated data from the 2022 Housing and Population Census, 449 people moved from Rodrigues and the Outer Islands to a district in Mauritius, over a five-year migration period, while 989 people moved in the opposite direction (Statistics Mauritius, 2024). Disaggregated data and analysis of the demographics (age, gender and place of birth) of this movement as well as employment situation and income levels would be valuable to better understand these flows. Additional analysis of the number of Rodriguan-born individuals living in Mauritius, and Mauritian-born individuals living in Rodrigues, as well as their demographics and other important data (income, education levels, labour market participation, family structure, housing situation, etc.) would also be important to explore in this respect, based on the latest 2022 Census.

How are people moving: what “type” of migration is occurring?

The type of migration under examination in this study is inter-island migration between Rodrigues and Mauritius. As such, this is an internal migration flow, as opposed to an international one, as it takes place within the State boundaries of the Republic of Mauritius.¹⁴ While internal migration has been found in other contexts to serve as a “step” or launchpad towards international migration (see for example Cirillo et al., 2022 and Vullnetari, 2012), the available body of literature does not provide any insights into the extent of this phenomenon for Rodriguan inter-island migrants. In fact, very little information is available in the literature on Rodriguan aspirations and experiences with international migration.

While internal migration is a much less expensive option than international migration, respondents involved in a small case study of Rodriguans living in Tranquebar, Mauritius, shared that they had to save for about three to four months in order to be able to afford a plane ticket to Mauritius (Gemenne and Magnan, 2010). This suggests that the costs to move between Rodrigues and Mauritius may be expensive for many Rodriguans, with potential implications on savings, debt levels and ability to remit money back home for migrants who do manage to move and their families.

¹⁴ IOM (2019) defines internal migration as the movement of people within a State involving the establishment of a new temporary or permanent residence.

There is a clear rural-to-urban dimension to the inter-island migration from Rodrigues (an entirely rural region) to mainland Mauritius, where many Rodriguan migrants are known to settle in peri-urban areas on the outskirts of Port Louis among other peri-urban districts such as Pamplemousses and Black River. In terms of voluntariness, studies have not suggested strong elements of forced migration or disaster displacement within this pathway. Rather, environmental factors (mostly slow-onset processes) have been found to play a role in migration drivers and decision-making, as discussed further in the subsection on [environmental drivers](#). Relatedly, no evidence of entire community relocation from Rodrigues is apparent from the literature; instead, it appears that inter-island migration takes place at the household and individual levels.

Trends in the duration of relevant migration flows and length of stay in the destination context are mixed. Some research indicates that certain Rodriguan migrants have been staying in mainland Mauritius for decades (mostly in lower-income areas), suggesting the establishment of permanent residence (*ibid.*), while less information is available on those who move for more temporary and short-term purposes, such as for study or other reasons. While migration decisions and experiences are highly dynamic (e.g. a short-term stay can evolve into a permanent one) and migration cannot easily be reduced to such dichotomy (permanent versus temporary), the literature is scant on this temporal dimension of length of stay in the destination context.

Finally, while two-way inter-island migration dynamics are under examination in this study, the vast majority of information available focuses on the one-way migration from the island of Rodrigues to mainland Mauritius, including living and working conditions of migrants once settled in Mauritius. Very little is known about the migration in the opposite direction – if, why and how Rodriguans are moving back to Rodrigues from mainland Mauritius. What is known is limited to Rodriguan migrants' perceptions of return, discussed further in the [return subsection](#).

Why are people moving?

Economic and social drivers

The existing body of research overwhelmingly identifies economic reasons as the primary driver and motivation for migration of Rodriguans from the island of Rodrigues to mainland Mauritius (*ibid.*; IOM, 2012; IOM, 2014; Sobhee, 2016; Sultan, 2017; Ragodoo, n.d.). In particular, limited economic and employment opportunities in Rodrigues are reported in this respect. This is emphasized in relevant national policy documents, for example that “the high unemployment rate (18%) and lack of opportunities are the main drivers of mobility between both islands and elsewhere” (Mauritius, Republic of, 2018:42).

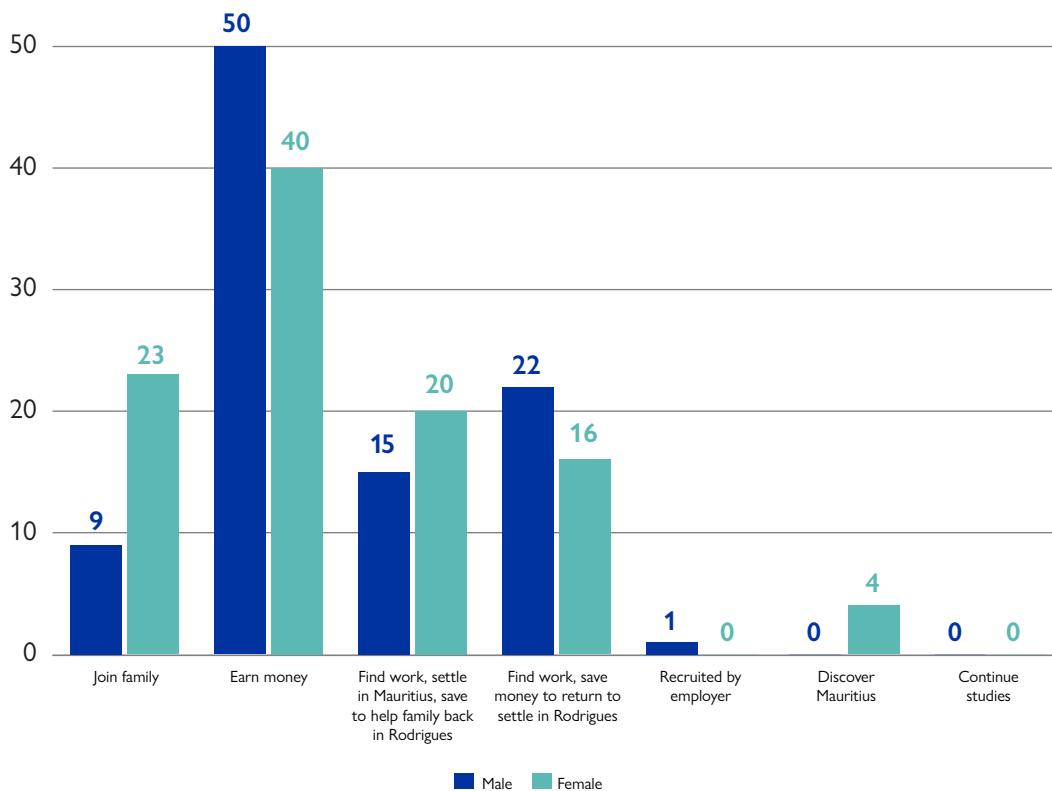
In a study that focused on Rodriguan women migrants living in Mauritius, economic reasons for moving were cited most predominately: 94 per cent of respondents listed lack of job opportunities in Rodrigues and 92 per cent listed availability of jobs in Mauritius, with 84 per cent indicating better salaries in Mauritius.

Similarly, a small case study in Tranquebar (Mauritius) reported that migrants shared that there were “no jobs in Rodrigues”, and, if there were, they were badly paid (Gemenne and Magnan, 2010). In this case, some respondents had been fishers that had suffered decline in fish stocks and from impacts of public policy decisions to phase out government allocation (subsidies) for non-fishing days.

While economic reasons have been identified as the “most important” and “main” driver of migration, they are not reported as the exclusive reason in the literature. In a 2012 study on 230 Rodriguans already settled in Mauritius, the most cited migration driver among them was economic, followed by various social reasons (IOM, 2012).

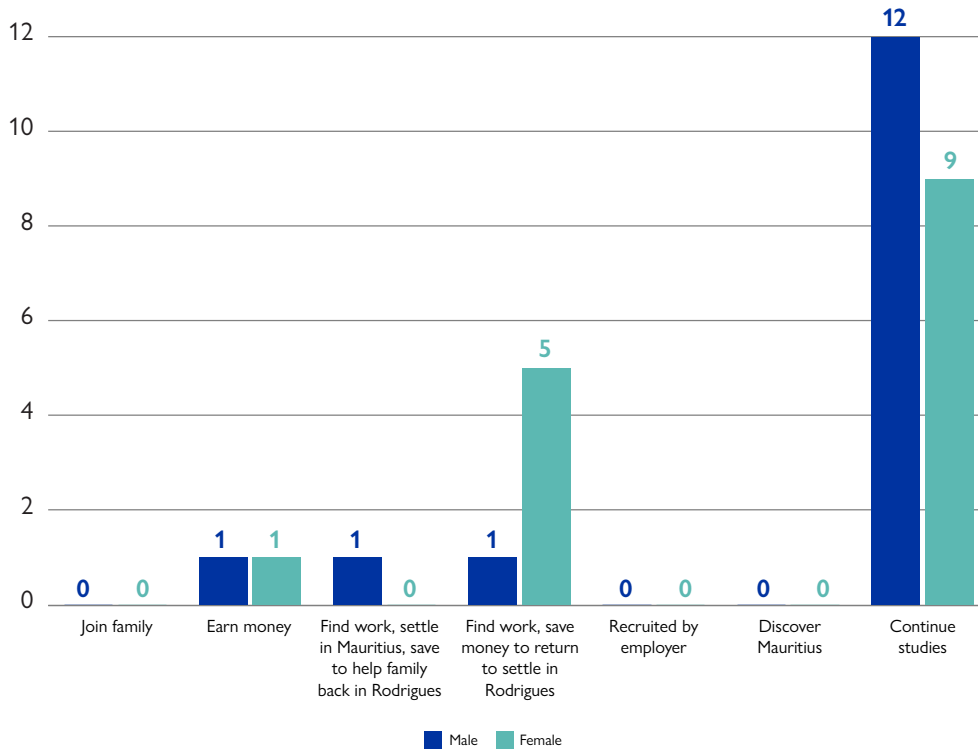
This study also offered insights into how drivers differ between income levels, as findings were distinguished by low-income and middle-income subgroups (see Figures 4 and 5). This supports a more nuanced understanding of how individual characteristics and profiles, such as membership of a particular socioeconomic group, also influence migrant decision-making.

Figure 4. Reasons for migration from Rodrigues to Mauritius among low-income group by sex (number of respondents)



Source: Created by the author based on data from IOM, 2012.

Figure 5. Reasons for migration from Rodrigues to Mauritius among middle-income group by sex (number of respondents)



Source: Figure created by the author based on data from IOM, 2012.

Earning money and looking for a job were the predominant reasons for migration among the low-income subgroup. For those among the middle-income subgroups with relatively higher levels of formal education, continuing studies served as the main reason to go to Mauritius due to the limited education landscape at the tertiary or professional level in Rodrigues. Across both income groups, very few (only one respondent) reported that they were directly recruited by an employer, suggesting that many may move without a job lined up in Mauritius.

Some gendered differences were also apparent: among the low-income subgroup. Women were more likely than men to report family-related migration reasons (e.g. “joining family” and “finding work and living in Mauritius to help family back home”). Men in this subgroup were more likely to report economic reasons, such as earning money, followed by finding work and saving to return to Rodrigues. This suggests distinctly gendered family and social dimensions to migration decision-making. This study also provided insights into motivations at the individual level – some Rodriguan migrants were seeking a level of autonomy and independence, while others wanted to discover Mauritius out of curiosity (e.g. by going on a short-term basis to see if there were opportunities to stay longer).

Environmental drivers

Environmental and climate-related studies on internal migration in Mauritius have shed light on an important environmental dimension of this movement. A recent IOM study that explored environmental dimensions of migration in Mauritius (not limited to inter-island mobility) found that environmental migration is “primarily internal and within regions or over short distances to other regions” (Adaawen and Sookun, 2023:65). That is, the mobility patterns driven by environmental and climate change factors are of an internal, short-distance and temporary nature as opposed to international in nature. The risks and effects of natural hazards, for example, tend to influence localized short-term and anticipatory forms of movements as coping strategies to disaster risks. The study posited that this reinforces the assumption that sudden-onset hazards tend to trigger short stints of mobility and underline the limited geographical and financial potential to move internationally.

With respect to inter-island migration between Rodrigues and Mauritius, studies have notably explored how environmental degradation in Rodrigues has encouraged people to migrate to Mauritius, mostly as an exacerbating factor (Gemenne and Magnan, 2010, IOM, 2011; IOM, 2014; and Sultan, 2017). For example, a study that focused on migrant fishers from Rodrigues revealed that this population migrated due to two main reasons: economic (57%) and environmental (31.6%) (IOM, 2011). In this case, the environmental factor was associated with a sharp decline in fish catch, the vulnerability of the agriculture sector and the resulting threat to their livelihoods.

Other reports indicated the limited scope for employment and an agriculturally locked-up economy in Rodrigues had urged people to look for better prospects, with vulnerability of the agriculture sector to natural hazards as a driving element (Sobhee, 2016:25).

These findings are consistent with broader literature on the climate and migration nexus. That is, that climate change and the environment tend to be underlying or secondary drivers that can impose additional stress (as a “threat multiplier”) on the livelihoods of the rural poor, indirectly leading people to migrate (United Kingdom The Government Office for Science, 2011; IOM, n.d.a). This closely relates to a general consensus in the broader literature on migration drivers that it is impossible to establish a direct, causal relationship between one sole driver and migration.¹⁵

1.1.3. Destination: Mauritius

Where are migrants going on the island of Mauritius?

The Republic of Mauritius has 10 administrative districts, including Rodrigues. Urban settlements on mainland Mauritius are mainly concentrated in a conurbation strip running from the capital city of Port Louis to Curepipe. Slums and informal settlements (“squatters”) are growing mostly around the periphery of Port Louis and around the south-western coastal region. It has been noted that some of the urban informal settlements are inhabited by migrants from the island of Rodrigues (UN-Habitat, 2012).

¹⁵ For more detail, see the IOM Global Migration Data Portal [discussion](#) on this topic.

Figure 6. Map of the island of Mauritius with demarcated districts



Source: World Atlas, n.d.

Note: This map is for illustration purposes only. The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the International Organization for Migration.

According to the 2011 Census, there were around 13,700 Rodriguan-born persons living on the island of Mauritius that year (Statistics Mauritius, 2015). This represented 34 per cent of the total resident population of the island of Rodrigues at that time (40,400). Rodriguan migrants were living across the island but concentrated in Port Louis (22%), followed by Beau Bassin/Rose Hill (9%) and Baie du Tombeau (8%). Women made up 54 per cent of the total Rodriguan population living in Mauritius, a higher proportion when compared to Rodriguan women living in Rodrigues (51%). This indicated a higher rate of migration of Rodriguan women than men to mainland Mauritius.

Nearly half of the Rodriguans captured in the 2011 Census lived in regions on the island of Mauritius considered to be of “low development”,¹⁶ such as Morcellement Ilois (in Baie de Tombeau), Cité Briquetterie, Cité La Cure and Carreau Calyptus (Roche Bois) and Eau Bonne (in Bambous). By contrast, these “low developed” areas were home to fewer than one third of Mauritian-born persons.

¹⁶ Regions with low development were based on the Relative Development Index compiled by Statistics Mauritius.

In a study that focused on Rodriguan women in Mauritius, 81 per cent of Rodriguan migrant women respondents reported that they had transited through the suburbs of Port Louis or were still living in or around the capital. This was explained by a “clan-like attitude where those who have already settled help the newcomers to do so, and the availability of jobs in the vicinity of Port Louis” (Ragodoo, n.d.:16).

It is important to note that research has also found that Rodriguans tend to settle in specific geographic areas in Mauritius depending on their socioeconomic and professional status (IOM, 2012). The same study found that upon arrival, almost all migrants across socioeconomic status were met by a family member. This suggests that social capital and family ties are maintained, at least to some degree, between new and longer-term migrants from the Rodriguan community.

What and how are Rodriguan migrants doing on mainland Mauritius?

Employment and poverty

From the 2011 Census, among the migrants who settled in Mauritius from Rodrigues between 2006 and 2011, 52.0 per cent were employed, 42.3 per cent were inactive and 5.7 per cent were unemployed (IOM, 2014). Rodriguans living in Mauritius were more likely to be engaged in “low occupations” than Mauritian-born persons: with over 70 per cent of people born in Rodrigues working as skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery workers; craft and related trade workers; plant and machine operators and assemblers; and elementary occupations, as compared to around 49 per cent among Mauritians (Statistics Mauritius, 2015).

In the IOM study on 230 Rodriguans already settled in Mauritius, most respondents had found a job upon arrival and through personal research (IOM, 2012). However, job insecurity was relatively high among the low-income subgroup: only 48 per cent of men and 32 per cent of women had regular full- or part-time employment. More than half of those jobs were low-skilled, such as construction or maintenance for men and services and personal assistance for women. The low-income group was also characterized by frequent poverty and financial vulnerability: the vast majority of migrants in this group, both men and women, classified themselves as poor (61%) or very poor (15%) (ibid.).

Short-term and irregular daily jobs were also reported (fisher, porter, cleaner, etc.) as well as exploitation by employers (e.g. breach of contract), suggesting a degree of precarity at work. Qualitative interviews reflected that whatever the job, even a “*petit boulet*” (small job) would be maintained by respondents because there were not necessarily any other opportunities available. This was also found by the study on migrant fishers that reported that respondents were mostly performing manual jobs on an occasional basis (IOM, 2011).

From a gendered perspective, one study found that unemployment among low-income migrants affected women (42%) much more than men (12%) (IOM, 2012). A separate study that focused exclusively on Rodriguan migrant women in Mauritius conveyed a “clear feeling that employers in Mauritius at times exploit the workers coming from Rodrigues as they are

fully aware that the latter need to work, and generally do not have any academic qualifications” (Ragodoo, n.d.:14). With respect to their working conditions, respondents shared that they were made to work long hours and were paid little for their work. Though respondents were earning more than they would in Rodrigues, there was general consensus among them that they were “not able to save much out of their pay packet ... they need to pay for all the bills and the remaining amount has to be spent on foodstuffs. As such, consumption, rather than savings, is order of the day in Mauritius” (ibid.:16).

Housing, living and health conditions

According to the 2011 Census data that captured migration flows from Rodrigues to Mauritius between 2006 and 2011, 43.3 per cent of individuals settled in Mauritius over that period were living in rented houses (IOM, 2014). One study provided further insight into housing arrangements: it found that migrants among low-income households were more likely to stay in free housing, which meant “squatting” arrangements, while middle-income migrants rented their accommodation (IOM, 2012). In a situation report produced on Rodriguan migrants living in Mauritius, data demonstrated that Rodriguans living on the island of Mauritius had less favourable housing and living conditions than Mauritian-born residents: notably that they were less likely to own a house and to live in fully concrete houses (Statistics Mauritius, 2015).

Regarding informal settlements in peri-urban areas, such as on the outskirts of Port Louis, these arrangements were characterized by substandard disaster-resilient housing and community infrastructure. Residents in these settlements have very poor housing conditions with houses made mostly of wood and iron, which can easily be destroyed during extreme weather conditions like the passage of a cyclone (Sobhee, 2016).

Studies also reveal several precarious conditions in these settings: compromised sanitation conditions, poor treatment of waste and wastewater (resulting in higher risk of diseases), and high population densities that can be subject to increased risks of water-borne diseases. Basic services, such as water and electricity, are not available by regular means in squatting communities, and research has reported that residents have to pay for such items at a higher price (i.e. since regular means are not available) (Ragodoo, n.d.:16). These findings support a growing awareness that migrants impacted by environmental change not only move away from places of environmental stress but are also likely to move to them (United Kingdom The Government Office for Science, 2011).

Relatedly, a recent IOM study reflected a “trapped” migrant population in Cité La Cure (Port Louis district) where one respondent in squatted housing expressed the desire to move or be relocated by the Government of the Republic of Mauritius but was unable to due to lack of money (Adaawen and Sookun, 2023). This suggests that migrants may experience a type of immobility as a consequence of their first move to the mainland.

With respect to health, one study on Rodriguan migrants in Mauritius found that most respondents self-reported that they were in good health; however, it was self-reported less often by those in the low-income subgroup and by women. In the low-income group,

19 per cent self-reported bad health, with 24.3 per cent of women self-reporting it within that group. Regarding reproductive health, 21 per cent of women had experienced the death of a live-born child, and 23 per cent had experienced a miscarriage, abortion or stillbirth. In the study's discussion of findings, these proportions were noted as very high in the Mauritian context, warranting further investigation alongside health-care experts and community leaders to confirm and better understand the causes of such disproportionately poor outcomes.

Recognition of challenges in national policy documents

Finally, it is worth noting that some of the aforementioned issues have also been reported in government policy documents; for example, the National Migration and Development Policy of Mauritius states that “the large majority of those who have moved from Rodrigues to Mauritius have achieved little success in terms of better job opportunities and living conditions” and that most migrants tend to settle in “vulnerable and economically disadvantaged areas in precarious conditions” (Mauritius, Republic of, 2018:39, 42).

1.1.4. Return

The existing literature has relatively limited information on the topic of return, particularly the occurrence and experiences of migrants returning to the island of Rodrigues. Research has exclusively considered one-way migration from Rodrigues to Mauritius (that is, investigating experiences of Rodriguan migrants on mainland Mauritius) with little insights into the opposite direction. This is a clear knowledge gap as to why return occurs or why it does not, and if so, what reintegration looks like for these individuals.

There are, however, some insights into the dynamics of temporary return as provided by a smaller case study on Rodriguans living in Tranquebar. This study found that respondents had continued to visit their families in Rodrigues “quite frequently” and had sent them remittances through the year, via post or the bank (Gemenne and Magnan, 2010:46). Moreover, some information is available on permanent return intentions and perceptions of Rodriguan migrants in Mauritius. The Tranquebar case study highlighted that some respondents would like to go back to Rodrigues, and many saved money in order to build a house for themselves in Rodrigues (ibid.). This suggests that relationships and ties with the home island have endured despite migration. Another study on 230 Rodriguans already settled in Mauritius provided the following relevant insights within this sample:

- Return was considered by a strong majority of men and a smaller majority of women respondents, particularly among the low-income subgroup.
- Rodriguans were torn between wishing to return and fear of not finding work and housing back home.
- Some respondents indicated a preference to stay in Mauritius, given that the families are now settled, while others indicated a sense of shame to return to a situation of financial failure (IOM, 2012).

For those who did not plan to return, the following reasons were given in order of frequency (respondents could select more than one answer): being accustomed and settled with family and work in Mauritius; the absence of jobs in Rodrigues; job security in Mauritius; appeal for

more developed life in Mauritius; education of children in Mauritius; no accommodation in Rodrigues; life being too hard in Rodrigues and the lack of accommodation there; and the absence of opportunities for personal development in Rodrigues. One respondent stated that they had no money to resettle in Rodrigues (ibid.). In another study focused on Rodriguan women in Mauritius, respondents shared that despite difficulties in Mauritius, in the long run, they felt that they were better off in Mauritius, as compared to Rodrigues due to the latter's lack of economic prospects and persistent shortage of water, which restricts agricultural activities (Ragodoo, n.d.). Respondents also reported that educational prospects for their children, as well as health-care facilities and infrastructure, were more favourable in Mauritius.

Lastly, very little is understood on the implications of internal migration on family members, in particular, any family left behind when a household member migrates to the mainland. One study highlights that populations who stay behind in Rodrigues “often suffer from the departure of their family members, which represents a decrease in the workforce and in the assets available to those were forced to or decided to stay” (Sultan, 2017:61). This is an area that merits further investigation; for example, the impacts on children left behind and the consequences of family separation more generally.

1.2. Relevant institutional, legal and policy frameworks

This subsection provides a mapping of the key legal, institutional and policy frameworks that relate to the topic of internal migration between Rodrigues and mainland Mauritius. Relevant national- and regional-level frameworks are distinguished as necessary.

1.2.1. Governance of the Republic of Mauritius and the autonomous region of Rodrigues

The discussion in this subsection describes the division of governance and powers in terms of law and policy-making bodies between the national government (Republic of Mauritius) and the regional government (Rodrigues).

National Assembly of the Republic of Mauritius (national government)

The Republic of Mauritius is a constitutional parliamentary democracy that is governed by the Prime Minister (head of Government), the Cabinet of Ministers and the National Assembly. The Cabinet is the supreme authority for taking policy decisions for government and is led by the Prime Minister, along with 22 ministers. The National Assembly elects the President, who serves as a mostly ceremonial head of State (OECD, 2022). The President, in turn, appoints the Prime Minister; the latter is usually the leader of the majority party or leader of the ruling alliance (i.e. the party or coalition with the most seats in the legislature) (Freedom House, 2023). The civil service is led by the Secretary to Cabinet, and ministries are overseen by Permanent Secretaries.

The National Assembly is the unicameral legislature of Mauritius. With respect to governance, the National Assembly is responsible for law making (passing of bills into acts) and State financial control (through debate and vote on appropriation bills).¹⁷ Among the National

¹⁷ See [functions](#) of the Mauritius National Assembly.

Assembly's 70 members, 62 are directly elected by plurality vote in 21 constituencies, including two members from a constituency representing the island of Rodrigues. Up to eight members are appointed by an election commission (the Electoral Supervisory Commission), drawn from the unsuccessful candidates who gained the largest number of votes ("best losers") to ensure political representation of minorities. The members of the National Assembly serve five-year terms.

The national government sets out legislative priorities in the government programme (a four- to five-year plan)¹⁸ at the beginning of legislation and annual national appropriation bills are accompanied by a budget speech, which outlines funded policy and programme priorities for the fiscal year.

Rodrigues Regional Assembly (regional government)

While the outer island of Rodrigues forms one constituency of the Republic of Mauritius, it has also held autonomous status since 2002.¹⁹ Importantly, this status provides for a distinct regional government – the Rodrigues Regional Assembly (RRA) – as set out in the Rodrigues Regional Assembly Act (2001). The RRA is empowered to make regulations for matters falling within its jurisdiction. It can also initiate and propose legislation; however, bills must go through the National Assembly in Mauritius to become law (Mauritius, Republic of, n.d.b).

A broad range of policy authorities are mandated to the RRA under the Fourth Schedule of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly Act; including agriculture, arts and culture, employment, environment, fisheries, housing, legal services, tourism and more (see [Annex 1](#) for the full list). Some portfolios only confer administration powers, for example, health, education and judiciary, where regulatory and policy reforms are solely taken by the national government. Matters such as security and foreign affairs remain the legislative responsibility of the Parliament of Mauritius (University of Prince Edward Island, 2007).

The RRA also prepares and adopts its own annual budgetary estimates in consultation with the Minister of Finance of the Republic of Mauritius, which are then considered and incorporated into the National Appropriation Bill (national budget) (Mauritius, Republic of, n.d.b). The administration of Rodrigues depends on the national government for funding to deliver its regional policy agenda (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2022).

The administration of Rodrigues is politically headed by the Executive Council (analogous to a cabinet of ministers) and led by the Chief Commissioner, who requires the support of the majority of the elected RRA members. The RRA consists of 17 elected members (12 of whom are local region members and the other 5 are island region members).²⁰ The Executive Council consists of seven commissioners, including the Chief Commissioner and the Deputy Chief Commissioner. Each commission is responsible for a grouping of portfolios. The island's civil service is led by the Island Chief Executive and departmental heads are responsible for each commission.

¹⁸ See the recent [government programmes](#), as addressed by the President of the Republic of Mauritius.

¹⁹ Paragraph 39 (1)(b) and Chapter VIA of the [Constitution of the Republic of Mauritius](#) (1968).

²⁰ Section 3(3) of the [Rodrigues Regional Assembly Act](#) (2001).

1.2.2. Legal framework

People born on the island of Rodrigues are Mauritian citizens. As citizens, they are entitled to the same legal rights and protections as citizens from other islands that are part of the Republic of Mauritius, including the mainland. Mauritian citizens are free to live, work and vote across the Republic of Mauritius.

With respect to internal migration, all Mauritian citizens have the right to freedom of movement, in particular the right to move freely through the Republic of Mauritius and the right to reside in any part of the country, as enshrined in the Constitution of Mauritius (1968).²¹ As such, the freedom to move between islands is clearly prescribed and protected in law.

There are no laws that pertain specifically to the regulation of internal migration in Mauritius at the national or regional (Rodrigues) level. Laws that govern migration in the Republic of Mauritius, such as the Immigration Act (1970) and the Non-Citizens (Employment Restriction) Act (1970), regulate and prescribe rules for non-citizens, that is, they are concerned with the migration of foreign nationals into the Republic of Mauritius only.

Travel between the islands, either by air or sea, is considered domestic travel. Persons travelling between islands are required to report to a port of entry or exit of the respective island, and Mauritian citizens are required to produce either their national identity card or a valid passport (Mauritius, Republic of, n.d.c). The Passport and Immigration Office – a branch of the Mauritius police force – manages border control at ports of entry and exit. The Rodrigues Regional Assembly Tourism Regulations (2007) empower the Passport and Immigration Officer at Plaine Corail Airport and Port Mathurin seaport to require a passenger information form to be filled out upon entry for tourism purposes.²² Passenger information includes name, date and country of birth, nationality, occupation, permanent address, national identity card number, as well as the purpose of visit and place of accommodation in Rodrigues.

In the context of climate change and migration, the Climate Change Act (2020) does not specifically address the issue of migratory movements caused by the adverse effects of climate change or the environment (Mauritius, Republic of, 2020a). Outside of legislative frameworks, migration at the international or internal level has not been mainstreamed into any environmental or climate change strategies in the Republic of Mauritius (national level), nor in Rodrigues (regional level).

Equality, non-discrimination and human rights

The Constitution of Mauritius (1968) upholds the principles of equality and non-discrimination for all. A dedicated legal framework is also in place to protect individuals from discrimination, including in the context of work. For example, all workers are protected in law against discrimination by the Workers' Rights Act (2019), which stipulates that an agreement shall not be terminated by an employer by reason of a worker's race, colour, caste, national extraction, social origin, place of origin, age, pregnancy, religion, political opinion, sex, sexual orientation, gender, HIV status, impairment, marital status or family responsibilities (Mauritius, Republic of, 2019).

²¹ Article 15(1) of the Constitution of Mauritius (1968).

²² Regulation 26 of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly (Tourism) Regulations, 2007.

In addition, the Equal Opportunities Act (2008) provides protection against direct and indirect discrimination based on a person's status, which includes, inter alia, ethnic origin, place of origin, colour, sex and race (Mauritius, Republic of, 2007a). The Equal Opportunities Commission investigates allegations of discrimination and promotes equality of opportunity per the Equal Opportunities Act in both the private and public sectors. The National Human Rights Commission promotes and protects human rights under the Protection of Human Rights (Amendment) Act 2012 (Mauritius, Republic of, 2012).

1.2.3. Institutional frameworks

Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity Division – Prime Minister's Office

The Prime Minister of the Republic of Mauritius is also the Minister for Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity. Accordingly, the Prime Minister's Office has an institutional division dedicated to this portfolio. Its core related function is to "support the Rodrigues Regional Assembly to consolidate and accelerate the socio-economic development of Rodrigues" (Mauritius, Republic of, 2022b). The Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity Division acts as an interlocutor and facilitator between the national government and the RRA. As such, it is sometimes referred to as the "Parent Ministry" or the "Ministry of Rodrigues" in Mauritius. In this role, the Division is regularly engaged with both the central and regional governments on all matters pertaining to Rodrigues in a formal and institutionalized manner.

Among its responsibilities, the Division is also available to provide ad hoc assistance to Rodriguans, mostly but not limited to those on the island of Mauritius. It is also involved in the maintenance of government quarters that are used to accommodate certain Rodriguan officials, students and medical patients in Mauritius. With respect to direct assistance, a Public Relations and Welfare Officer is available at the Division to guide Rodriguans with any issue (e.g. education, change of school and medical purposes) as necessary. This is often in the form of directing requests to responsible ministries and departments and conducting follow-up to ensure that action is taken.

In the mid-2010s, it was observed that visits from Rodriguans to the Division were rather low and declining. This was speculated to be due to the police clearance required to enter the building, thus deterring visitors. In response, there was an interest in creating a more accessible site, originally conceived of as the Maison de Rodrigues, a one-stop shop to assist and support Rodriguans in Mauritius.²³ While the Maison de Rodrigues was not implemented, its concept eventually evolved into the launch and implementation of the Rodrigues Information and Support Desk a few years later.

²³ As referenced in the address by the President of the Republic of Mauritius: "Government will support the setting up of a "Maison de Rodrigues" in Mauritius with a view to better assisting and supporting our Rodriguan brothers and sisters to work and live here" (Mauritius, Republic of, 2015).

Rodrigues Information and Support Desks

The Rodrigues Information and Support Desks were established in December 2017 in Port Louis (Mauritius) and in April 2018 in Port Mathurin (Rodrigues). Their main objective is to provide referrals and assistance to Rodriguans moving to Mauritius (IOM, 2021b). As such, they serve as an institutional support mechanism available to Rodriguan migrants.

The initiative is administered by the National Empowerment Foundation (NEF), under the authority of the Ministry of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity (Social Integration Division). The NEF is primarily mandated to support and empower vulnerable groups of society, through accompaniment, counselling and monitoring.

The intent of the Desk in Port Louis is to inform Rodriguans about the various public services available to them, to offer advice and help when needed, and to facilitate referrals. In practice, it functions as a referral mechanism to other government entities. In Port Mathurin, the Desk was intended to “facilitate the movement of Rodriguans to Mauritius and to try to attend to their eventual problems”.²⁴

Since launch, however, there has been little to no uptake at both Desks by Rodriguans. Further detail and potential reasons for this are explored in [section 4.2.3](#).

1.2.4. Policy frameworks

National Migration and Development Policy

The National Migration and Development Policy of the Republic of Mauritius is the central migration policy instrument in Mauritius. The Policy is guided by the Sustainable Development Goal target 10.7 to facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies.

Adopted in June 2018, the National Migration and Development Policy aims at maximizing the positive outcomes and impact of migration for the socioeconomic development in Mauritius. It is organized into three “intervention axes”: (1) facilitating safe, regular and orderly migration; (2) maximizing the socioeconomic and human development impact of migration and minimizing its negative consequences; (3) and strengthening the domestic migration governance framework.

Policy commitments are detailed in a concrete action plan. These are anchored in guiding principles, some of which include the respect, protection and promotion of human rights and freedoms; the prevention and elimination of all forms of discrimination; and the responsibility of the State towards its nationals, based on protection mechanisms at all stages of migration, among others.

²⁴ This information was provided by Jinny Wendy, Programme Manager at NEF Rodrigues, through personal communication with the author (27 February 2023).

The Migration Steering Committee, chaired by the Prime Minister's Office (Defence and Home Affairs Division), coordinates the implementation of the National Migration and Development Policy and its Action Plan. The Committee adopts a whole-of-government approach, which ensures horizontal and vertical policy coherence across all sectors and levels of government institutions. The main stakeholders are the Prime Minister's Office and line ministries, the Passport and Immigration Office, Statistics Mauritius, the Bank of Mauritius, the Economic Development Board, the Mauritius Council of Social Service and IOM as the supportive United Nations institution. As such, the Migration Steering Committee represents the core institutional framework for migration governance and policy matters.

Rodrigues and internal migration within the National Migration and Development Policy

Notably, the National Migration and Development Policy includes a dedicated objective related to internal migration and Rodrigues to “support the development of Rodrigues Island, including through sustainable mobility opportunities” (Mauritius, Republic of, 2018:42). The objective's specific policy measures are as follows:

- Conduct research on internal mobility (living conditions, employment-related matters and opportunities) on a regular basis in order to formulate policies to enhance the living conditions and services provided to the Rodriguans.
- Integrate mobility from Rodrigues to Mauritius in various policies to create better opportunities for Rodriguans residing in Mauritius.
- Provide services, more targeted information (and success stories) on opportunities in Mauritius and pre-departure training.
- Put in place better and non-discriminatory integration measures and services, through the existing Desk, for Rodriguans working in Mauritius.
- Provide training in financial literacy, so as to encourage savings and investment back in Rodrigues.
- Set up a local coordination mechanism on mobility, made up of relevant stakeholders, within the administration of Rodrigues Island, to adopt and implement a local action plan, as well as to appoint a representative of Rodrigues Island in the Migration Steering Committee led by the Government of Mauritius.

Rodrigues migration technical subcommittee

It is worth noting that the first meeting of the Rodrigues migration technical subcommittee was held on 4 March 2024, in Port Mathurin (IOM, 2024). This responds to the policy measure to “set up a local coordination mechanism, made up of relevant stakeholders, within the administration of Rodrigues Island, to adopt and implement a local action plan”. Attendees included political and civil service officials from the RRA, the Prime Minister's Office and civil society. The meeting was co-chaired by IOM.

The committee is intended to serve as a platform for stakeholders to discuss and advance initiatives aimed at leveraging migration for the sustainable development of Rodrigues. As such, it is expected that it will serve an important institutional role with respect to any internal migration governance efforts between the islands in the coming years.

Sustainable and Integrated Development Plan for Rodrigues 2023–2032

At the regional level, the Sustainable and Integrated Development Plan for Rodrigues was recently revised and updated to cover the 2023–2032 period. The Plan is intended to support the socioeconomic development of the island of Rodrigues and ensure development integrates ecological and social dimensions, based on the principles of integrated sustainable development. It includes a concrete action plan covering eight priority sectors: water, organic agriculture, blue economy, renewable energy and energy efficiency, sustainable tourism, environmental protection and preservation (terrestrial and marine), land use plan, and small and medium enterprises.

With respect to internal migration, the Plan has no specific action or objective related to migration or mobility of Rodriguans to mainland Mauritius or abroad. A minor comment on migration flows is only mentioned in the context of social sustainability and population analysis (COWI Belgium, 2023:288). There is, however, a clear interest in local job creation, increased incomes and poverty reduction, which could result in changes to migration flows of Rodriguans, for example, potentially reduced drivers to migrate to mainland Mauritius and/or increased interest in return to Rodrigues.

Other relevant policy frameworks

It is worth noting that other relevant national policies do not make specific mention of Rodriguan migrants or their inter-island mobility. For example, the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Strategic Framework (2020–2030) (Mauritius, Republic of, 2020d) does not specifically address the issue of migratory movements, such as internal migration between Rodrigues and Mauritius as a result of adverse effects of natural disasters, nor does the latest National Climate Change Adaptation Policy Framework (Habitat, Energy Application and Technology (HEAT) GmbH., 2021). Likewise, policies concerning skills development and employment at the national level do not reference nor incorporate actions or strategies related to inter-island migration. This suggests that internal migration between Rodrigues and Mauritius is not a topic that has been mainstreamed into broader national strategies and policy frameworks.

1.2.5. Programmes and schemes

Rodrigues Youth Mobility Programme

Launched in 2023, the Rodrigues Youth Mobility Programme is an initiative aimed at encouraging young Rodriguans (between the age of 20 and 35 years) to travel to Mauritius or abroad to acquire professional experience and enhance their capacities (Roussety, 2023). This may be in the form of a short training course, internship or skills development programme in an institution or at a workplace for up to one year. Given that certain industries are not well developed in Rodrigues, the Programme provides an opportunity for youth to acquire new skills and know-how from abroad. For entrepreneurs, the Programme is intended to help them professionalize their business. It is open to any sector as long as the participant can secure a placement in their area of choice.

Beneficiaries are provided with financial assistance to cover their round-trip airfare, monthly allowance for housing and subsistence, travel insurance, necessary equipment and any tuition fees if applicable. The all-inclusive monthly stipend for Mauritius is MUR 20,000, while abroad it is MUR 50,000. The programme is administered by Invest Rodrigues, a government entity that operates under the purview of the Commission for Industrial Development and Others (under the RRA).

In the first year of the Rodrigues Youth Mobility Programme, 35 youth beneficiaries were selected to participate, most of whom were destined to Mauritius with others placed in France and Seychelles. Most of the beneficiaries were already entrepreneurs running their own small businesses in Rodrigues. One obstacle that was observed was the difficulty that applicants faced in securing their own placement (e.g. with businesses in Mauritius), which limited uptake in the Programme.

Medical treatment and support for Rodriguan patients in Mauritius

The health-care delivery system on the island of Rodrigues is comprised of one hospital and two area health clinics. Full-time facilities are available in the specialties of general medicine, general surgery, orthopaedics, obstetrics and gynaecology, paediatrics and psychiatry; however, specialists in other disciplines are only available when they undertake periodic visits to the island (Mauritius, Republic of, 2020c).

Importantly, complicated cases or cases requiring additional care and treatment that cannot be clinically managed in Rodrigues are transferred to Mauritius, at the expense of the Government. For scans or tests that require machines that are not available, like MRIs and mammograms, transfers are also necessary. Patients are typically accompanied to Mauritius by one family member to provide caregiving, whose air ticket is also covered. These transfers constitute an important migratory flow of Rodriguans to Mauritius.

The transfer process is overseen by the RRA (Commission for Health and Others), including the facilitation of hotel accommodation and reimbursement of expenses for patients when eligible. As a general rule, expenses incurred from health-care treatment in Mauritius are only reimbursed if the patient is referred by a specialist and the treatment or procedure is not available in Rodrigues. In previous years, lodging in a house was provided and managed by the Prime Minister's Office (Rodrigues Division) for longer-term patients and their caregivers.

Higher education of Rodriguan students in Mauritius

A range of government assistance schemes are available to Rodriguan students to facilitate their studies outside of Rodrigues at the higher education level. These are primarily administered by the RRA's Commission for Vocational Training (Deputy Chief Commissioner's Office) in the form of financial assistance, housing and scholarships.

Notably, first-year Rodriguan students enrolled in a recognized institution in Mauritius, regardless of family income, can receive a reimbursement of registration and tuition fees (up to a maximum of MUR 55,400) and a one-off grant for the purchase of a laptop. For their

second year and onwards, tuition fees up to a maximum of MUR 55,400 are only refunded to students whose family monthly incomes do not exceed MUR 25,000. A monthly allowance of MUR 300 is allocated to all students, regardless of family income and year of study. As such, all Rodriguan students in Mauritius, regardless of family income, can benefit from some form of financial assistance from the Government.

Additional financial assistance in the form of stipends and air ticket refunds are offered to students based on their families' monthly incomes (Table 5).

Table 5. Financial assistance offered to Rodriguan students based on monthly family income

| Support | Description | Family monthly income criteria |
|---|---|-----------------------------------|
| Monthly allowance | Monthly stipend of MUR 4 000 (unless in receipt of same/greater-value scholarship) | Under MUR 15 000 |
| Monthly grant for lodging | Monthly stipend of MUR 2 000 for accommodation | Under MUR 25 000 |
| One-off grant for start-up (only for first-year students) | One-off grant of MUR 10 000 | Under MUR 25 000 |
| | One-off grant of MUR 4 000 | Between MUR 25 001 and MUR 30 000 |
| Registration fees and monthly allowance for parents with more than one child studying at the tertiary level | 25 per cent of school fees as from the second year and MUR 2 000 monthly allowance | MUR 15 000 to MUR 25 000 |
| | 25 per cent of school fees as from the second year | MUR 25 001 to MUR 35 000 |
| Air ticket scheme | Reimbursement of a round-trip airfare between Mauritius and Rodrigues once per year | Under MUR 50 000 |

Source: Table adapted by the author based on RRA Commission for Vocational Training, 2024.

Subsidized accommodation is allocated to Rodriguan students on a first-come, first-served basis, subject to room availability. There are two accommodation facilities: one in Floréal (no monthly rent applicable, only utilities to be paid) and the other is in Vacoas (monthly rent of MUR 2,000, which is inclusive utilities). Refundable deposits are applicable for both: MUR 2,000 in Floréal and MUR 3,000 in Vacoas. It is worth noting that capacity is limited: 24 students can be accommodated in Floréal and 45 in Vacoas. The dorms in Floréal are jointly managed between the RRA and the Prime Minister's Office (Rodrigues Division).

Scholarships tailored for Rodriguan students are also awarded by the Ministry of Education (Republic of Mauritius), the RRA, and other governments such as the Government of India and the Government of China. These tend to be based on merit (e.g. high rankings on standardized exams) and in areas of skills scarcity in Rodrigues (e.g. medicine and veterinary).

Some institutions also offer special schemes for Rodriguan students in Mauritius.²⁵ It is worth noting that any Republic of Mauritius-wide scholarship scheme is also available to Rodriguan students, which is typically based on merit and/or other socioeconomic criteria.

1.2.6. General policy and programmes of note

The final discussion in this policy mapping pertains to a few specific programmes that are not designed only for internal migrants but rather apply to the general population in the Republic of Mauritius. They are raised here because they provide useful context for the research findings and policy recommendations that follow in the remainder of this report.

Social protection and assistance

The social welfare system in the Republic of Mauritius provides several public offerings, such as free education from pre-primary to tertiary level (education is compulsory from age 5 to 16 years); free public transportation for students, the elderly and people with disabilities; a universal free health-care system; entitlement to non-contributory old-age pension; and pensions for vulnerable groups (widows, autrement capable and orphans).

A core social protection measure is delivered through the SRM, adopted in 2016. This is an empowerment programme for poor families to access social assistance, among other programmes and financial allowances. Poor families are those who live in “absolute poverty” as defined in the Social Integration and Empowerment Act 2016. Once assessed as eligible, they enter into a social contract to become beneficiaries.

Income thresholds to be eligible on the SRM depend on household size. As of December 2023, thresholds ranged from MUR 3,575 to MUR 14,650; some examples are provided in Table 6.

Table 6. Eligibility income thresholds for the Social Register of Mauritius, as of 2023

| Household size | Income threshold (MUR) |
|------------------------------|------------------------|
| One adult | 3 575 |
| One adult, three children | 11 075 |
| Two adults | 7 150 |
| Two adults, two children | 12 150 |
| Three adults, three children | 14 650 |

Source: Mauritius, Republic of, 2023c.

The policy framework of the SRM falls under the Ministry of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity (Social Security Division), while the NEF is the implementing arm of the Ministry of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity (Social Integration Division) with respect to poverty alleviation.

²⁵ See, for example, [MCB Rodrigues Scholarship](#) (MCB Forward Foundation) and additional assistance at [Polytechnics Mauritius](#).

Social housing

The Ministry of Housing and Land Use Planning is responsible for creating access to affordable residential units in Mauritius through its social housing programme. Its implementing agency, the National Housing Development Co. Ltd. (NHDC), is involved in building and managing social housing units, including managing intake and applications. More recently, the New Social Living Development Co. Ltd. (a subsidiary of the NHDC) was created to build additional residential units, of which 10 per cent are to be reserved for landless eligible SRM families under the Marshall Plan Social Contract. The NEF also constructs housing units for SRM beneficiaries who own land but do not have a house.

A key challenge in this landscape is to “meet the persistent excess demand for low- and middle-income housing”.²⁶ On a small and densely populated island like Mauritius, suitable land is both scarce and increasingly expensive for the Government to acquire for public housing projects. Construction and labour costs also present significant financial challenges. This means that waiting periods for social housing are long with growing application inventories. When units are available, allocation also depends on eligibility criteria, including the applicant’s income threshold and their ability to repay contributions. It is worth noting that the NHDC does not make any distinction between Rodriguans and Mauritians when an application for social housing is being made by a person (that is, eligibility criteria are the same and treated equally). Applicants are ineligible if they own a home or land, or if they hold a residential plot of State-leased land, among other criteria (Mauritius, Republic of, n.d.d).

The current social housing policy targets families with monthly household incomes under MUR 30,000. For beneficiaries with household incomes under MUR 10,000, they must repay 20 per cent of the cost of the unit, while the Government subsidizes the remaining 80 per cent. For those earning between MUR 10,001 and MUR 30,000, beneficiaries pay 33 per cent (one third) and the Government subsidy is 67 per cent (two thirds). Applicants need to visit the NHDC office in Rose Hill or lodge their applications online and submit the required documents. Some NGOs, such as Caritas and Dwenn Lakaz, assist vulnerable citizens to submit applications and come forward.

With regard to informal settlements – that is, people who live on State-owned land – the Government has previously implemented regularization programmes in certain settlements. In those cases, residents have been registered and then granted a lease for the land. Without regularization, residents in these situations are often referred to as “squatters” and are considered to be on land without authorization.

Land policy

An important distinction between Rodrigues and Mauritius is their respective land ownership policies. A public policy referred to as *terrain à bail*, which is unique to Rodrigues, affords its residents with the opportunity to apply to lease for State-owned land when they reach the age of 18. Although waiting periods of a few years are common today, Rodriguans have historically obtained long-term land leases in this manner, and it is on this land that they have

²⁶ As per the brief provided by the Housing Division of the Ministry of Housing and Land Use Planning to the author (February 2024).

built their homes. Mainland Mauritius does not have the same policy, largely due to the fact that the majority of its land is privately owned.

Employment and training

Several institutions are involved in the promotion of employment and training opportunities for unemployed jobseekers in Mauritius and Rodrigues. These include the Ministry of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training; the RRA's Commission for Employment; the Human Resource Development Council; and the Mauritius Institute of Training and Development. Such programmes are notable, given some of the underlying causes of migration related to unemployment, lower salaries in traditional sectors and relatively poor working conditions.

A key institutional mechanism is the **Employment Information Centre**. There are 13 centres on the island of Mauritius (administered by the Ministry of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training) and one on the island of Rodrigues (administered by the Commission for Employment). These are physical spaces where employment officers facilitate linkages between employers, training intuitions and jobseekers. Jobseekers can register in person and receive counselling and other services, while employers can submit vacancies and access candidate lists. The Ministry of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training prioritizes the placement of jobseekers registered on the SRM to support individuals in situations of absolute poverty.

There is no formal coordination between the Employment Information Centre in Rodrigues and the ones in Mauritius; however, they all use the same labour market information system that allows files to be transferred and registered jobseeker data to be shared. In some cases, when employers cannot find candidates in Mauritius, centres in Mauritius guide such employers to the Rodrigues Employment Information Centre to assist them with the vacancy and they are provided a list of candidates. It is worth noting that there is no dedicated counselling programme done at the level of the centres to attract or facilitate unemployed Rodriguan jobseekers to Mauritius. Counselling is rather conducted according to the jobseeker's profile; for example, if a jobseeker in Rodrigues informs the Centre in Rodrigues about their intention to move to Mauritius, they would be encouraged to continue their registration in any employment centre in Mauritius to benefit from those services.

Training programmes delivered by the Ministry of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training include the [Youth Employment Programme](#) (for youth aged 16 to 35 years) and the [Back to Work Programme](#) (for unemployed women of 30 years and above), among others. With respect to the Back to Work Programme for women, its main objective is to help women gain self-confidence and to (re)integrate into the labour market towards economic independence. The period of placement of women under the Programme is two years, and a monthly stipend of MUR 10,575 is paid to each trainee under placement. In Rodrigues, the Commission for Employment and Others executes additional tailored programmes like the Employment Relief Programme, which trains jobseekers in a specified sector and then facilitates their placement with enterprises for practical experience. This is followed by

financial assistance to start a related income-generating activity through another programme. The Ministry of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training also organizes training courses for unemployed women in the fields of hairdressing techniques, beauty therapy, bakery and pastry, early childhood care, care of the elderly and disabled persons, flower arrangements and small-scale gardening with irrigation. These training courses are dispensed by the Mauritius Institute of Training and Development.

The Human Resource Development Council (HRDC) is mandated to promote human resource development in line with the needs of the Republic of Mauritius. It does so through a suite of activities including labour shortage surveys, projections for future skills needs, and training and skills development programmes to equip economic sectors with the appropriate workforce. This includes national programmes that focus on training unemployed individuals, such as the [National Skills Development Programme](#), the [National Training and Reskilling Scheme](#) and the [Graduate Training for Employment Scheme](#). The cost of training and the stipend for trainees are funded by the Government and generally range from 3 to 12 months in duration.

The RRA, with support from the HRDC, has also collaborated on specialized training programmes for Rodriguans. Most recently, this has involved training in the information and communication technology and business process outsourcing sectors to afford participants with technical skills in projected areas of need.²⁷ Notably, they also have a history of implementing tailored short-duration training programmes in Mauritius for Rodriguans. For example, a 2013 programme placed 23 Rodriguan entrepreneurs in seven small and medium enterprises in the field of food production, carpentry, design and décor, poultry, food processing, tailoring and mechanics in Mauritius. This covered air travel tickets and a stipend of MUR 8,000 per trainee for a period of four weeks (Mauritius, Republic of, 2013). A more recent 2019 programme provided a two-month training and placement for 20 Rodriguan automobile mechanics in Mauritius. The mechanics were trained at the Mauritius Institute for Training and Development and completed their placement at different garages in Mauritius.

Empowerment of women entrepreneurs

Several public bodies are also involved in the support and assistance of entrepreneurs and small businesses, in particular women entrepreneurs. The [National Women Entrepreneur Council](#) is a parastatal body operating under the aegis of the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family Welfare. It is mandated to support and assist both potential and existing women entrepreneurs in Mauritius. In Rodrigues, similar support is provided by SME Mauritius and EDB Mauritius, though assistance is not limited to women entrepreneurs. For example, SME Mauritius supports and develops entrepreneurship (not limited to women) through programmes that organize annual salon and local fairs as well as training support schemes and networking events to build community among entrepreneurs. For Rodriguan entrepreneurs selling goods in Mauritius, a partial freight subsidy is offered.

²⁷ As of March 2024, more than 350 young people were trained in the information and communication technology and business process outsourcing sectors under the National Training and Reskilling Scheme, and over 100 individuals received training in the field of web development and mobile technologies. These are in areas of projected labour market needs in anticipation of a Technopark to be built in Baladirou, Rodrigues.

A relevant initiative that is organized on both islands is the organization of trade fairs and sales exhibitions for women entrepreneurs. For example, the National Women Entrepreneur Council organizes such fairs on the island of Mauritius on a regional basis to enable women entrepreneurs to promote and sell their locally made products, meet potential buyers, contract orders and find marketing solutions for their business.

Citizen Support Unit (Prime Minister's Office)

Last but not least, it is important to highlight the institutional framework delivered by the Citizen Support Unit (CSU), which streamlines government services through a whole-of-government approach. Administered under the Prime Minister's Office, the CSU oversees a range of activities including the work of the Citizen Advice Bureaus, an online portal ([Citizen Support Portal](#)) and a mobile application, and a weekly radio programme and a mobile unit that takes government officials to visit communities in person across Mauritius. As an interlocutor between citizens and the rest of government, the Citizen Support Portal provides a platform for citizens to make inquiries on a range of services in an efficient and timely manner.

For example, the web portal, launched in 2017, provides a 24/7 platform for citizens to transmit their requests and share concerns and ideas with relevant government bodies. On average, about 3,000 to 4,000 tickets are submitted per month which are then referred to the appropriate authority. As of February 2024, the portal had received nearly 296,308 tickets, and 91 per cent of them had been settled. As such, it acts as a centralized access point to government where the public can file a ticket, track its status and receive a response from the applicable government body.

With respect to in-person outreach, the radio programme *Ansam avek CSU* (Together with CSU) brings government officials to different towns in Mauritius every Saturday morning. These programmes are generally held in central and accessible spaces (e.g. shopping malls, supermarkets and welfare centres). Representatives from up to 28 ministries and departments go every weekend to communicate with the public by explaining their services and how citizens can access them. In some cases, special facilities are brought on site depending on the needs of the community (e.g. medical tests, career services and water delivery). More recently, the CSU has expanded its outreach to include more vulnerable and high-needs communities, which involves tailored service provision and activities. A similar programme is underway in Rodrigues called *Ansam avek CSU Rodrig* (Together with CSU Rodrigues).

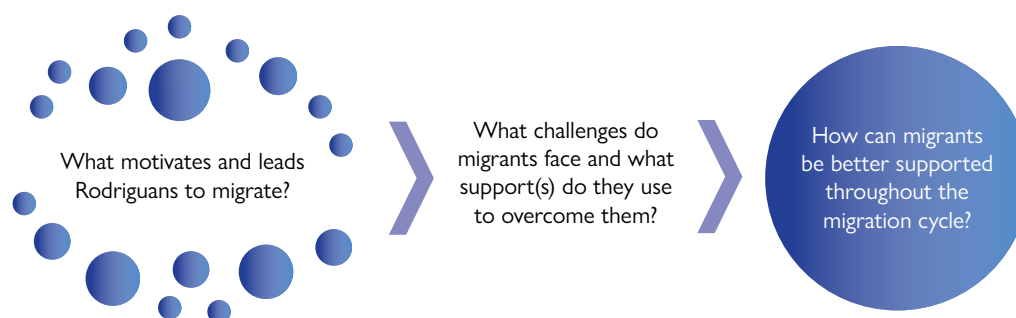
2. GUIDING RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCOPE

2.1. Thematic areas of research

The aim of the study was to better understand the inter-island migration experience of Rodriguans throughout the migration cycle – particularly with respect to their motivations to migrate, the challenges they face and how they can be better supported.

As such, the overarching exploratory themes are threefold: (1) the migration drivers that lead Rodriguans to move to mainland Mauritius, and if applicable, to return to Rodrigues; (2) the issues or challenges migrants face in the migration cycle and the support(s) they use to overcome these challenges; and (3) the implications for government actors with a focus on how migrants can be better supported. This analysis includes a mapping of the relevant national and regional legal, policy and institutional frameworks and the respective roles of relevant State and non-State actors (as captured in the [section 1](#)). The guiding research questions are summarized in Figure 7.

Figure 7. Guiding research questions



Source: Created by the author, 2024.

While studies have uncovered key migration drivers in the direction of Rodrigues to Mauritius (as discussed in the [literature review](#)), very little is understood about return experiences. The first research theme serves to validate existing knowledge of outmigration drivers and fill an important gap in the dynamics involved in return migration to the island of Rodrigues. It also explores circular migration²⁸ patterns where migrants come and go regularly (e.g. for work), an important flow that is largely understudied.

²⁸ IOM (2019) defines circular migration as a form of migration in which people repeatedly move back and forth between two or more countries. Adapted for the internal inter-island context in this study, it involves temporary and usually repetitive movement of a Rodriguan migrant between Rodrigues and Mauritius, typically for the purpose of employment.

Importantly, the literature has also documented various challenges that Rodriguan migrants face in mainland Mauritius (e.g. precarious employment and living conditions as discussed [here](#)); however, research is fairly limited on how migrants navigate these issues and if and how they access existing institutional support mechanisms. In addition, the role of civil society organizations and community-level assistance are not well documented in this context.

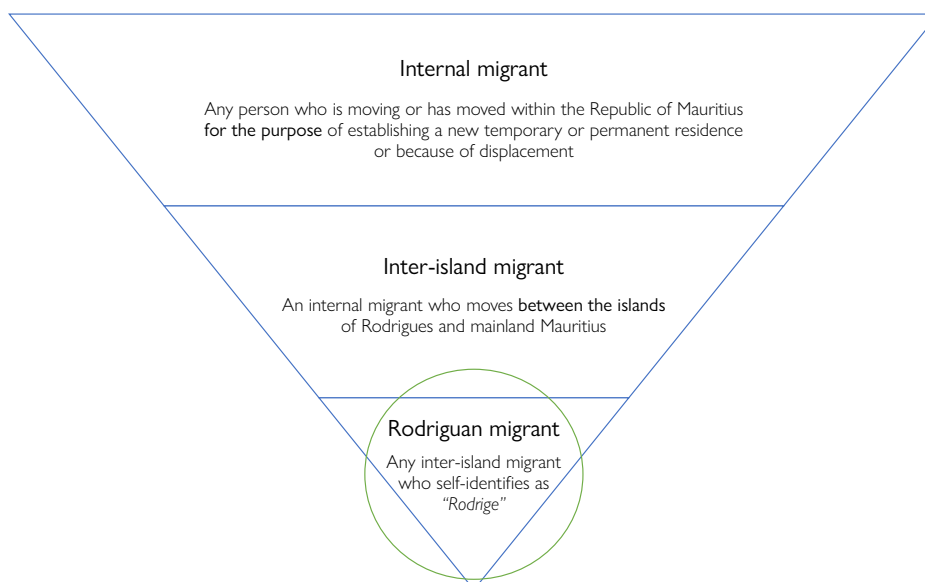
Finally, the study is intended to inform recommendations on how migrants can be better supported by institutional, policy and programme mechanisms throughout the migration cycle.

2.2. Scope and target population

It is worth clarifying that the target population for the study was focused on Rodriguan inter-island migrants. Rodriguan inter-island migrants are defined here as anyone who self-identifies as Rodrigue or Rodriguais (Rodriguan) and who is moving or has moved at any time between the islands of Rodrigues and mainland Mauritius for the purpose of establishing a new temporary or permanent residence.²⁹ This includes migrants returning to the island of Rodrigues, which ensures that two-way migration dynamics are captured.

Mauritian-born islanders who migrate to Rodrigues are also included in the study, albeit in a much smaller sample given that the vast majority of migration (i.e. to establish residence) between the islands is taken up by Rodriguans. Figure 8 captures key definitions used for scope and focus of the study.³⁰

Figure 8. Population in focus: Rodriguan migrants



Source: Created by the author, 2024.

²⁹ Note that IOM (2019) defines an internal migrant as someone who moves "with the purpose of establishing a new temporary or permanent residence".

³⁰ Definitions were developed by the author, as adapted from IOM, 2019.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study used a mixed methods approach to respond to the key research questions. This involved the collection and analysis of a large volume of data generated from primary and secondary sources.

Primary data collection was conducted from January to March 2024 with fieldwork in mainland Mauritius and the island of Rodrigues. This included a survey of and semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with internal migrants, and key informant (expert) interviews and roundtable discussions with representatives of government and non-governmental stakeholders. Direct observational notes were taken throughout the data collection period.

Secondary sources included statistics from government data sources, government and stakeholder reports and publications, grey material, and local media – most of which are captured in the preceding [literature review](#). A stakeholder mapping as well as a detailed examination of cross-cutting [legal, institutional, and policy frameworks](#) on the themes of focus were also undertaken.

3.1. Internal migrants

The insights and lived experiences of internal migrants were an essential component of this study's data collection. These individuals are best positioned to share insights and experiences about opportunities and challenges that they face during the migration cycle and the drivers that influence their migration decisions. For the purpose of this study, internal migrants³¹ were required to meet the following broad inclusion criteria:

- (1) Self-identify as Rodriguan and over the age of 18 years and:
 - (a) Intend to migrate for any purpose to mainland Mauritius in the next six months; or
 - (b) Have migrated, for any purpose to mainland Mauritius; or
 - (c) Have migrated for any purpose to mainland Mauritius and since returned to Rodrigues; or
 - (d) Regularly go between the islands for work purposes.

As such, the sample included migrants already residing (in the long and short term) in Mauritius, as well as prospective (youth) migrants, returnees and circular migrants residing in Rodrigues. This was intended to holistically capture the whole-of-migration cycle experience. While the focus of the study was on the experience of Rodriguan-born internal migrants, given the relative magnitude of this flow, observations were also made with respect to Mauritian-born individuals who had migrated to Rodrigues, primarily those engaged as business owners in Rodrigues as well as those who had returned to Mauritius.

³¹ As a reminder, an internal migrant is defined here as someone who is moving or has moved at any time between the islands of Rodrigues and mainland Mauritius for the purpose of establishing a new temporary or permanent residence.

Recruitment of internal migrants largely relied on a combination of snowball sampling and convenience sampling techniques, utilizing referrals from existing contacts such as community-based stakeholders, including civil society and government counterparts. These were employed to collect data quickly and inexpensively given the time and resource constraints of the study. Purposive sampling was also used to gather in-depth data on relatively small subset populations and their characteristics, for example, to better understand the unique circumstances of circular women entrepreneur migrants. As much as possible, an equal balance between male and female participants was sought to understand any differentiated gendered impacts and potential gender-sensitive policy interventions.

Interviews and focus group discussions with migrants were semi-structured and in conversation style, reflecting the key research questions, while tailored to the background and experience of the interviewees. They were conducted in either Creole, French or English, and interpretation was provided as needed. These qualitative data were audio-recorded with participant permission, anonymized, transcribed and then analysed using content analysis for key concepts and recurring themes during write-up of the findings.

A **survey** was also administered in a selected community in mainland Mauritius (Cité La Cure, Port Louis district) to ask mostly closed questions to Rodriguan migrants about their profile, why they moved to Mauritius, their economic and housing situation, and their support and assistance network. This site was chosen because it is a well-known established settlement where Rodriguan migrants reside in the long term and, in particular, where conditions are relatively more precarious.

Given that the target population was known to be particularly vulnerable and lack access to mobile devices and the Internet, an in-person delivery of the survey in a trusted space (i.e. local community centre) was used. The survey included multiple-choice, select-all-that-apply and a few open-ended questions. The questions were developed in close collaboration with IOM Mauritius, which provided local contextual guidance as well as translation of the survey questions into Creole. A draft of the survey was also shared with a community organization that provides support to Rodriguan migrants for review and input. A local community leader facilitated the dissemination of 300 invitation letters to households: anyone interested in participating who was Rodriguan and over the age of 18 years was invited to fill out the survey on a specified evening. A total of 41 surveys were completed. Quantitative data from the survey were coded into Excel and analysed using this software. An overview of the demographics of survey respondents is included in [Annex 2](#).

Notably, survey respondents in Cité La Cure were provided with the option to be interviewed in case of discomfort and/or literacy barriers with regard to completing the survey by pen and paper. About half of the surveys were delivered verbally in a one-on-one interview, which provided supplementary qualitative data for many responses. These were complemented by a key informant interview with the co-founder of a women's empowerment NGO in Cité La Cure, who also shared their own personal experience as a Rodriguan migrant in Mauritius.

In sum, 81 Rodriguan migrants participated in the study on both islands (see Table 7 for further breakdown).

Table 7. Rodriguan migrant participants on both islands

| Island of Mauritius | | | | | |
|--|---------------|--------------------------------|--------|------|-------|
| Migrant subgroup | Location | Tool | Female | Male | Total |
| Long-term residents (over 15 years in Mauritius) | Cité La Cure | In-person survey and interview | 26 | 16 | 42 |
| Students and recent graduates (six months to three years in Mauritius) | Floréal | Focus group discussion | 3 | 2 | 5 |
| Subtotal in Mauritius | | | 29 | 18 | 47 |
| Island of Rodrigues | | | | | |
| Migrant subgroup | Location | Tool | Female | Male | Total |
| Prospective (youth) migrants | Port Mathurin | Focus group discussion | 9 | 9 | 18 |
| Returnees | Port Mathurin | Interview | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Circular migrants (women entrepreneurs) | Malabar | Focus group discussion | 13 | 0 | 13 |
| Subtotal in Rodrigues | | | 23 | 10 | 33 |
| Grand total on both islands | | | 52 | 28 | 81 |

3.2. State and non-State stakeholders

Representatives from 26 stakeholders (government and non-governmental entities) participated in key informant interviews and roundtable discussions on both islands (see [Annex 3](#) for the full list of stakeholders represented by interviewees).³² Government officials were mostly technical-level experts from relevant government departments and commissions from the national and regional government administrations. They were recruited and invited on the advice of IOM Mauritius and, in some cases, other government officials.

These representatives served as key informants given their expertise and engagement with Rodriguan migrants, as well as policymakers overseeing relevant policy and assistance frameworks. In some cases, they also served as focal points to assist with migrant recruitment, as previously mentioned. Interviews and roundtable discussions with stakeholders were semi-structured and in conversation style. Interview guides with government representatives were designed and adapted to solicit views on existing and potential policy interventions for

³² Multiple representatives were often present during key informant interviews with each government entity.

the Rodriguan migrant community. For non-State actors, such as civil society, interview guides were designed and adapted to solicit views and insights on the Rodriguan migrant experiences and the challenges facing this population, as well as the role they play in supporting them and recommendations for government actors. Interviews and roundtable discussions were recorded with participant permission, summarized, then analysed to inform the mapping of policy frameworks and mapping of key State and non-State actors.

Finally, study findings were presented at a validation workshop with stakeholders in April 2024 in Port Mathurin. This served as an important intervention to corroborate the findings and analysis with key stakeholders from both islands. Importantly, it solicited views on policy recommendations to be incorporated into an action plan on internal migration for Rodrigues.

3.3. Limitations of the study

The findings presented in this report reflect the experiences and perspectives of a relatively small sample of Rodriguan migrants living in Mauritius and Rodrigues. Furthermore, the non-probability-based nature of participant recruitment restricts the ability to generalize findings to the wider population and sampling bias may have resulted from the lack of random selection. As such, the findings presented are not intended to be representative of the entire population but rather aim to shed light on the lived experiences of these individuals during their migration journey.

Despite the inability to make generalizations, the breadth and richness of data allowed for many opportunities for triangulation across quantitative and qualitative data sources, which provided important insights into the whole-of-migration cycle situation for a variety of “subgroups” of Rodriguan inter-island migrants (e.g. long-term residents, new arrivals, students, returnees, circular migrants and prospective migrants).

Another limitation of the study was that it lacked participation from large private-sector entities (e.g. industry associations and major employers) in Mauritius, despite attempts to recruit such participants to gain their views and insights. As a result, the study relied on indirect and secondary sources to glean insights on this sector. Otherwise, small business owners and entrepreneurs were well represented, particularly in Rodrigues.

Future research is thus encouraged to not only include a larger sample, including dedicated research on returnees and Mauritians living in Rodrigues, but also with more concrete interventions with the private sector, including sectors like the construction industry, which is known to hire Rodriguans for employment in Mauritius.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section consolidates the study's findings and results according to the broad themes explored in the research questions related to migration drivers (subsection 4.1) and challenges facing migrants and any support used to navigate them (subsection 4.2). A discussion on the implications of these findings is accordingly woven throughout.

4.1. Drivers of migration

What motivates Rodriguans to migrate?

Rodrigues is characterized by a deep culture of inter-island migration to and from the mainland island of Mauritius. Rodriguan participants shared that not only did they all know someone who had migrated to Mauritius, but that each of them had family members living there. In fact, there is a collective perception that there are more Rodriguans residing in Mauritius than on the island of Rodrigues itself.

Inter-island migration was described as a long-standing reality for the people of Rodrigues who leave for a multitude of reasons, underpinned by a search for a better life. Decision-making was highly fluid: people do not always leave with the intention to do so permanently, and others return even when they never expected to do so. The discussion that follows describes the drivers behind the highly transient nature of Rodriguan society where migration is undeniably part of one's own or family's life. They are presented by direction of migration: (1) Rodrigues to Mauritius; (2) Mauritius to Rodrigues (return, as well as migration of Mauritian-born people); and (3) and the two-way circular migration of women entrepreneurs between the islands.

Conceptualizing migration drivers: a primer

Many conceptual frameworks have emerged in the field of migration studies to explain why people move and how they arrive at their migration decisions, including how decisions change and evolve over time and space. While frameworks differ, there is a growing consensus that people are "driven" by multiple factors that facilitate, enable, constrain and trigger migration processes in complex ways.¹ This is opposed to migration as an outcome of a single factor or root cause.

¹ IOM defines "drivers of migration" as a complex set of interlinking factors that influence an individual, family or population group's decisions relating to migration, including displacement. See IOM, 2019.

As such, migration is understood here as multi-causal, and its drivers are diverse and non-linear. They rarely act alone and are, in fact, interdependent and intertwined. Drivers influence one's ability and need to move as well as their decision to stay or go. While the discussion that follows presents individual drivers to explain inter-island migration between Rodrigues and Mauritius, the analysis validates that migration decisions cannot be reduced to one single reason or factor. In fact, the findings herein demonstrate how deeply woven and interconnected migration drivers are in this specific context.

4.1.1. Rodrigues to Mauritius

Economic reasons

Economic factors were found to play one of the most significant roles in motivating Rodriguans to leave the island. These are rooted in the broader economic context of Rodrigues – one that is characterized by relatively high levels of poverty and fewer economic opportunities as compared to mainland Mauritius. As such, it is most common to hear about migration to Mauritius as a means to find work and earn money.

For many, a lack of jobs in Rodrigues was reported – “*pena travay laba*” (there is no work there) was frequently mentioned. For jobs that do exist, the stable ones (e.g. government jobs) were described as hard to come by and the traditional ones (e.g. fishing and farming) were otherwise precarious and unattractive to the younger generation. Some respondents also shared that a necessary precondition for finding work in Rodrigues was having the right personal connections: either knowing someone or having relatives in a family-owned business. In other cases, available employment was characterized by inconsistency and precarity, where someone has work one week but not the next.

The difficulty of finding work in Rodrigues is especially acute for young people. To illustrate this point, among the 4,884 jobseekers registered at the employment office in Port Mathurin in March 2024, nearly half (49%) were between 16 and 29 years old. Young people perceive economic sectors like agriculture and lagoon fishing as unappealing not only because of the physical labour involved but also because their parents push them to “do better” in terms of their livelihoods and future.

For those pursuing or holding higher education qualifications, government jobs are generally considered the only viable career option on the island: civil servants were described as “sure to be paid” and that they “live with ease” relative to others. One respondent shared that if you do not have a government job in Rodrigues, “you don’t have a future there”. Public administration jobs make up around 16 per cent of the labour force, with average monthly earnings about two to three times higher than other major industrial sectors.³³ While they are considered stable jobs that pay well, they are difficult to obtain with only so many openings for new entrants every year.

³³ Other industrial sectors include manufacturing, construction, wholesale and retail trade, accommodation and food services as per Statistics Mauritius, 2023a.

Accordingly, many Rodriguan migrants who relocate to Mauritius do so primarily because of better prospects of finding work and earning money, including higher earning potential on the mainland. This was confirmed among long-term Rodriguan residents surveyed in Cité La Cure where 93 per cent of the respondents overwhelmingly listed these economic reasons to explain their move to Mauritius. Findings also confirmed an understanding among Rodriguans that any job is easier to find in Mauritius than in Rodrigues.

Family connections and the trust between family members deeply influence the decision to move to Mauritius for work. It was often reported that Rodriguans preferred to move on the basis of advice from a cousin, aunt, uncle or other relative, rather than through a direct recruitment process by an employer for a specified job. As such, Rodriguan jobseekers tend to go to Mauritius by their own means and through their own personal job hunt. This may result in working at a company where their relative is already employed, rather than an unknown company, as they are more inclined to find a job through family connections as more trustworthy.

Finally, these economic factors also explained why many Rodriguans stay in Mauritius and do not return to Rodrigues even if there is a desire to move back home. Some expressed concern that their salary in Rodrigues would not match what their qualifications enable them to earn in Mauritius or abroad. One Rodriguan migrant shared that they had attempted to return to Rodrigues after 15 years in Mauritius; however, the situation in Rodrigues was still very difficult to find work, and they ended up remigrating to Mauritius. With this in mind, however, many migrants shared that if there were in fact viable job opportunities in Rodrigues, then they would consider themselves “lucky enough” to go back.

Access to services

Uneven development between the islands of Mauritius and Rodrigues has played a clear role in internal migration flows. More precisely, better access to public and private services in Mauritius is a clear draw for many Rodriguan migrants. While certain amenities (entertainment, shopping, late opening hours) are a matter of personal preference for some, accessing essential facilities such as hospitals and educational institutions has made migration more of an obligation for others. The following subsection presents a discussion of key services mentioned by participants.

Water

Water is a scarce and precious resource on the small island of Rodrigues. Its production is well below demand: recent figures suggest that the water production and distribution network can only provide 50 per cent of the daily water requirements for the population (COWI Belgium, 2023). This is even more acute during dry seasons. A multitude of factors have contributed to this issue, among them: a lack of strategy for water harvesting, observed water waste due to low maintenance of pipeline networks, as well as a coordination between store, distribution and regulation (ibid.). With climate change, there has also been an overall increase in frequency of periods of dry spells and droughts with respect to rainfall, with Rodrigues more exposed to water scarcity as compared to Mauritius (Mauritius, Republic of, 2021).

In practice, water authorities typically supply homes and businesses once a month with water. However, this can happen less frequently, where water tanks are only filled every two or three months. Residents otherwise rely on rainwater harvesting for their basic needs. Difficulty with respect to access to water was often mentioned as a difficult aspect of life in Rodrigues when comparing standards between the islands. For example, as agriculture is still a predominant employment and income source for many households, these activities can be hindered by the lack of water for irrigation. Obtaining water for daily tasks such as cleaning, and importantly, for drinking, when sources are depleted, is also a significant strain on households whereby residents must travel on their own to obtain and transport it from rivers or State-administered water sources.

On this topic, some Rodriguan migrants described it as a “relief” to have 24/7 access to water from a tap in mainland Mauritius. One former Mauritian migrant who worked in Rodrigues for four years reported that they sometimes wondered how they lived there for so long given the challenges associated with water scarcity. In Cité La Cure, a long-term Rodriguan migrant cited that the lack of development and water scarcity issues in Rodrigues had served as compounding factors in their decision to migrate to Mauritius for work.

Education

The limited educational landscape of Rodrigues plays a significant role in the departure of young Rodriguans to mainland Mauritius. This can be for children, whereby their parents move for more and better educational options, as well as for young adults pursuing higher education.

More precisely, with the exception of two technical college campuses, there are no tertiary education facilities on the island.³⁴ In order to pursue university education, students on the island of Rodrigues must leave – either to mainland Mauritius or abroad – to attend university or other upper-level technical learning institutions. Around 95 per cent of Rodriguan students move to Mauritius, with the remainder studying abroad. On average, about 550 students from Rodrigues are enrolled in higher education institutions in Mauritius each year.³⁵

Among the prospective youth migrants interviewed, every single one shared a clear intention to leave the island to pursue their studies: some shared that it felt “compulsory” to leave the island and that they always knew they would leave since a very young age, and some joked that they knew they would leave “since we were born”. These participants were interested in pursuing specialized programmes in medicine, engineering, finance, information technology and sport. The students and graduates who already migrated to Mauritius had studied in fields such as accounting, art and design, tourism and hospitality, among others.

³⁴ There are satellite campuses in Rodrigues for both the Mauritius Institute for Training and Development and Polytechnics Mauritius, the latter opened a campus in Rodrigues in July 2022.

³⁵ Average calculated by the author based on data on the number of Rodriguans studying in tertiary institutions in Mauritius from 2021 to 2023, as provided by the Ministry of Education, Tertiary Education and Science and Technology (26 January 2024).

Migration for study: a gateway to fulfil personal aspirations

Perhaps one of the most interesting observations made among young Rodriguan migrants is how studying abroad (either in Mauritius or internationally) was perceived as a means to achieve other important personal goals and aspirations. In fact, when asked why they moved or why they would like to leave the island, the reasons given by young migrants were far more personal: to gain independence, to grow, to obtain anonymity and freedom, and to explore new places and opportunities. Leaving the island meant experiencing new things, going on new adventures and moving outside of one's comfort zone.

With respect to exploration, several participants emphasized this point when asked about leaving the island, as illustrated below by two young Rodriguans:

“

I think the island is too isolated, we need to go out in order to open our mind to have an overview of the world. Because here we are like, in a box, we don't know anything else from what's going on abroad. At some point, it is compulsory, as you [another participant] say, to leave here. Even to go to Mauritius, just to have this openness.

It is so that we can think outside the box, explore new and other perspectives.

”

For current and former Rodriguan students who had lived in Mauritius, they all reflected on the benefits of their migratory experience as it had made them more independent. For example, when in Rodrigues, they would have had their parents to “do everything” for them; in Mauritius, they had to manage their finances, cook, do laundry and “survive on their own”. Most students also worked part-time during their studies to financially support themselves, a significant change as they had not worked at all in Rodrigues. While challenging, the newfound independence was perceived positively for participants: it made them more self-sufficient, mature and responsible. Mauritius also offered more social opportunities with respect to fun, entertainment, new people and cultures, and shopping, as compared to Rodrigues.

For prospective and current young migrants alike, the prospect of freedom was well worth the “big jump” and “big decision” that it involved. This is closely related to the small size and community of Rodrigues. The prospect of having freedom to go on their own and manage their life by themselves was described by one young Rodriguan as follows:

“

We are a very small island. Everyone is in everyone's business. So, when we think about freedom, we think about how we want to live our life, how we want it to be: not being oppressed to go and do what people want to see us doing ... being a little bit more unknown. Not being under the spotlight.

”

It is important to note that these themes were not limited to internal migration to mainland Mauritius. In fact, most of the youth interviewed had a strong interest in international migration for work or study. Potential countries of destination were varied, including though not limited to destinations in Europe, Australia and New Zealand, and North America as well as countries like Malaysia, South Africa and India. For one participant, this international outlook was captured as follows:

“ I am always imagining my time abroad. How will it be if I am over there, what would be my performances? How would I behave in such an environment? Because here in Rodrigues, we are so closed. We are like in a little box, we are only thinking about ourselves and nothing else. And that’s why I am always dreaming of going out. Because we have so much potential as Rodriguans here. That’s the problem. We are losing our potential by staying in the country. That’s why I want to exploit my own potential. ”

For those interested in international migration for study purposes, the crucial limiting factor was financial means. Studying within the Republic of Mauritius was simply more affordable because securing funds for international study would require much more significant loans and scholarships for most families. There was also a growing interest and trend observed among young Rodriguans to seek work abroad. For students who had already internally migrated to Mauritius, they reflected on how they could rely on this experience as a launchpad for an international move, for example to go to Canada to pursue more attractive work opportunities.

Health care

Medical patients who require additional tests or care and who cannot be clinically managed in Rodrigues are transferred to hospitals in Mauritius. As such, medical treatment is a predominant driver behind temporary migration to the mainland for Rodriguan patients requiring specialized care. An average of 78 patients are transferred to Mauritius a month. This number tends to increase when specialists visit the island (e.g. neurologists and ENT specialists), which can drive up referrals over 35 per cent above the monthly average (see Table 8 for monthly transfers in 2023).

Table 8. Number of medical patients transferred to Mauritius by month, 2023

| Month | Number of patients | Month | Number of patients |
|----------|--------------------|--------------|--------------------|
| January | 75 | July | 76 |
| February | 65 | August | 86 |
| March | 82 | September | 70 |
| April | 80 | October | 81 |
| May | 107 | November | 88 |
| June | 81 | December | 41 |
| | | Total | 932 |

Source: RRA Commission for Health and Others, 2023.

The length of stay depends on the type of test or treatment involved. For the shortest stays, a maximum of two weeks is typically required for minor tests, with months- to year-long stays in case of more serious illness and treatment. For example, cancer patients generally move for no less than three months and those who undergo radiation or chemotherapy may stay up to a year. For others with serious traumas, their stay can be even longer. After the treatment, patients generally return to Rodrigues, though some can be recalled for follow-up for specialized cases such as cancer or dermatological indications.

In terms of accompaniment, there is a policy that provides for one family member to join patients to care for them during their treatment in Mauritius: this generally means that two individuals move per referred patient. As such, moving for health care is an important migratory flow from Rodrigues to Mauritius for patients and family members alike. In fact, during interviews with long-term migrants residing in Cité La Cure, several respondents shared that they had initially come to Mauritius to support a family member who was ill. In some cases, those family members had to find work in Mauritius to support themselves financially, and eventually they did not return to Rodrigues due to economic and financial restraints. This suggests that taking up temporary residence during medical treatment can and does evolve into longer and even permanent stays in Mauritius for Rodriguans who may otherwise not initially intend on it.

4.1.2. Mauritius to Rodrigues

Family ties

Strong ties to family back home were found to be a crucial factor influencing the decision to return to Rodrigues. Among the returnees interviewed who had gone to Mauritius for both work and study, family was raised as the key reason for return in all cases. This was explained by returnees who strongly valued being close to their families and, in some cases, because their families had asked them to come back. To some degree, this was associated with a sense of homesickness in Mauritius, and also due to practical needs in their family system back home.

Lifestyle and atmosphere of Rodrigues

The islands of Rodrigues and Mauritius were invariably compared by participants as “totally different”, particularly with respect to distinctions in lifestyle, work culture and the overall societal context. Some of the most common contrasts raised by Mauritians and Rodriguans alike are captured in Table 9.

Table 9. Common binaries used to distinguish the islands of Mauritius and Rodrigues

| Mauritius | Rodrigues |
|-----------------------|--|
| Hectic | Calm, peaceful and serene |
| Individualistic | Community oriented |
| Fast paced and rushed | Slow paced and less stressful |
| Competitive | Closely knit social fabric where people help one another |

Accordingly, in terms of intentions and decisions to return, some migrant participants raised how they missed and preferred the community-oriented nature of Rodrigues, where “you always have someone to talk to and count on” as compared to Mauritius where “*sakeen puli*” (“everyone is for themselves”).

With respect to the work culture, Rodriguan migrants also commented on the hectic lifestyle in Mauritius where people were perceived to be working all the time and not taking time to rest. Whereas in Rodrigues, people are often described as enjoying a less stressful lifestyle. It was also common to hear about the traffic jams in Mauritius, which are otherwise non-existent in Rodrigues – an island with no traffic lights and where businesses close by 4pm.

A clear generational divide was observed in this respect: older adults, particularly returnees, emphasized an increased appreciation for tranquility and peace in the latter years of life. For example, retired pensioners were described as wanting to “sit back and relax” after working full careers in government or the private sector in Mauritius or abroad. That being said, all Rodriguans interviewed emphasized that they valued the calm and tranquility in Rodrigues, including young migrants who appreciated being closer to nature and being in a quiet atmosphere. One young prospective migrant described that that this may be something they seek out when they are older, despite wanting to leave the island to see new things during their current life stage:

“

I know that maybe there are a lot of problems in Rodrigues but the calmness I have here in this place is not comparable to anywhere else in the world. Because in Mauritius it is a very hectic life, while here it is very quiet pace of life. So, I think when I have more maturity, I can settle down with that.

”

Difficulties in Mauritius

While challenges experienced in Mauritius are explored in the [next section](#), it is worth noting that these can influence and have influenced migrant decisions to return to Rodrigues. These include housing and financial problems, as well as difficulties adapting to the overall environment in Mauritius.

Access to State-leased land

As discussed in [section 1.2.6.](#), an important distinction between Rodrigues and Mauritius is their respective land ownership policies. A public policy referred to as *terrain à bail*, which is unique to Rodrigues, affords its residents with the opportunity to apply to lease for State-owned land when they reach the age of 18. Although waiting periods of a few years are common today, Rodriguans have historically obtained long-term land leases in this manner, and it is on this land that Rodriguans have built their homes. Mainland Mauritius does not have the same policy, largely due to the fact that the majority of its land is privately owned.

As such, virtually all Rodriguans own their homes, and rent is not a component of their cost of living, as it is for most who migrate to Mauritius. This serves to draw Rodriguans back to Mauritius, including those who have plans to build a home with the savings they collect while working in Mauritius, either on their own land or the land of their parents. One Rodriguan migrant emphasized this draw as land is expensive in Mauritius and that they would rather spend their money on building their house in Rodrigues. Another migrant shared that despite earning more in Mauritius, they do not have to “save only for rent” when living in Rodrigues.

Desire to contribute

Lastly, some participants shared their desire to contribute to Rodrigues as part of their return. One returnee interviewed shared how they wanted to bring back what they had learned in Mauritius – a rich experience with new life skills, training and qualifications – and show what they could do for their “own country”. One young Rodriguan migrant already in Mauritius who thought they might return in a few more years was hoping to increase their qualifications, strengthen their skills and gain more financial stability before bringing that back to Rodrigues.

4.1.3. Mauritian-born migrants moving to Rodrigues

Some important observations were made with respect to Mauritian-born persons and their migration to Rodrigues, albeit in far fewer numbers than Rodriguan-born persons moving to Mauritius and returning.

The primary reason that Mauritians go to Rodrigues is short-stay tourism. For example, in 2022, Mauritians made up 80 per cent (51,799) of the arrivals to Rodrigues among all non-Rodriguan residents, with France (6,323) and Reunion Island (4,010) trailing behind in terms of the next largest visitor groups. While tourism does not fall within the definition of inter-island migration (i.e. tourists do not move with the purpose of establishing a new temporary or permanent residence), it is an important dynamic to highlight here. This is because short-term tourism was frequently cited as the catalyst for a Mauritian’s decision to migrate after developing such positive impressions of the island and wanting to make Rodrigues their home.

In this context, Mauritians shared that they “fell in love” with the culture and people of Rodrigues after only one or a few short visits. For some, it reminded them of the Mauritius of their childhood: Rodrigues is often described as what Mauritius was like 50 years ago. While Mauritian-born retirees were not interviewed in the study, it was reported that older Mauritians also move to Rodrigues for their retirement, as compared to very few if no young working-age Mauritians.

Mauritian-born migrants in Rodrigues also described a draw to the calm and “zen” lifestyle of Rodrigues as compared to the busy and hectic life in Mauritius, as well as the relative safety they feel where crime rates are much lower. They also appreciated the community-oriented society where people speak with and take care of each other.

This has led some Mauritians to become business owners in Rodrigues, for example in food services (café, bakery, restaurant), and, in some cases, to fill a perceived gap in the market such as those opening hardware stores. It was reported that some Mauritians also seek business opportunities in the form of property investments though they do not necessarily migrate permanently; rather, they invest in rental properties and hire local staff for daily management.

In the past, tour of service was the most common driver behind the migration of Mauritian-born government officials to Rodrigues, especially in the years prior to and immediately following the autonomy of Rodrigues (2001). As part of the terms of their employment, all public officers from the civil service and parastatal bodies of the Republic of Mauritius can be posted on a tour of service in Rodrigues and the Outer Islands to serve in certain positions whereby professional and technical expertise is still required. However, this trend has significantly diminished in recent years because the capacity of Rodriguan-born persons has increased and enabled them to take up the majority of public administration roles on the island. It was also reported that as part of this former migration pattern, some Mauritians ended up staying in Rodrigues having met a Rodriguan (i.e. for romance, marriage and family).

4.1.4. Women entrepreneurs: A special case of gendered circular migration

The movement of Rodriguan women entrepreneurs who regularly go back and forth to Mauritius to sell their products is a special type of circular migration between the islands. Their migration is influenced by a variety of factors such as: access to a wider trade market for selling goods; strong linkages to the Rodriguan diaspora, which generates a demand for their products; the ability to visit family in Mauritius; and, most interestingly, the use of private medical facilities during their stay.

For context, matrifocal households are prevalent in Rodriguan society where women are breadwinners for their families. To illustrate this, more than half of self-employed entrepreneurs in Rodrigues are women, and though sea livelihoods are declining, a high percentage of women also work as octopus fishers (COWI Belgium, 2023). Rodrigues also has a well-established reputation for its local macroprocesses products. The majority of agroprocessing operations are conducted at the cottage level (small-scale operations run by an individual or a family) and are mainly run by women (Goburdhun et al., 2010). These women entrepreneurs produce traditional food items, such as pickled limes, pickled chilies, sweet and sour limes, honey, and dried octopus and salted fish, among other products. All products are made from agricultural raw materials produced locally, which are coveted as high-quality goods for Rodriguans and Mauritians alike.

In an effort to expand their market outside of the island of Rodrigues, an interesting form of circular migration thus has emerged for women entrepreneurs in this sector. Initially selling their products on the island of Rodrigues as a means of livelihood, groups of women started to sell their products at local fairs and supermarkets in Mauritius. This was done, in part, with support from the former Small and Medium Enterprise Development Authority, with government subsidies, and many Rodriguan women organized themselves in associations to better consolidate this movement.

Among the women entrepreneurs interviewed for this study, all of them had been selling their products in Mauritius for at least 15 years, with some participants doing so for more than 25 years. They shared that they would go to Mauritius twice a year for about 15 days of business, with the total duration of stay upwards of one month depending on their non-business activities. Despite the high costs to do business in Mauritius (e.g. air travel, local transport, freight and shipping of products, and accommodation), they continue to go because of the clear demand for their products from the Rodriguan diaspora living in Mauritius as well as the growing interest from Mauritians. They explained that by selling their products in person, it serves as a guarantee of authenticity that the consumer is buying products grown and processed in Rodrigues, as opposed to perceived lower-quality raw materials from Mauritius. The wider trade market is thus a key driver of their migration, as some participants reported that they could earn more profit in two weeks in Mauritius than they would in three months in Rodrigues.

Interestingly, the women entrepreneurs interviewed shared that their business migration was equally a way for them to meet unmet health-care needs in private facilities that were otherwise unavailable in Rodrigues. This may be to obtain a second opinion, get a routine health check-up or for other elective treatment. Despite the high cost of private health care (for example, a check-up can cost over half of their profit from one trip), they felt comfortable with this trade-off, as it gave them peace of mind in caring for their health.

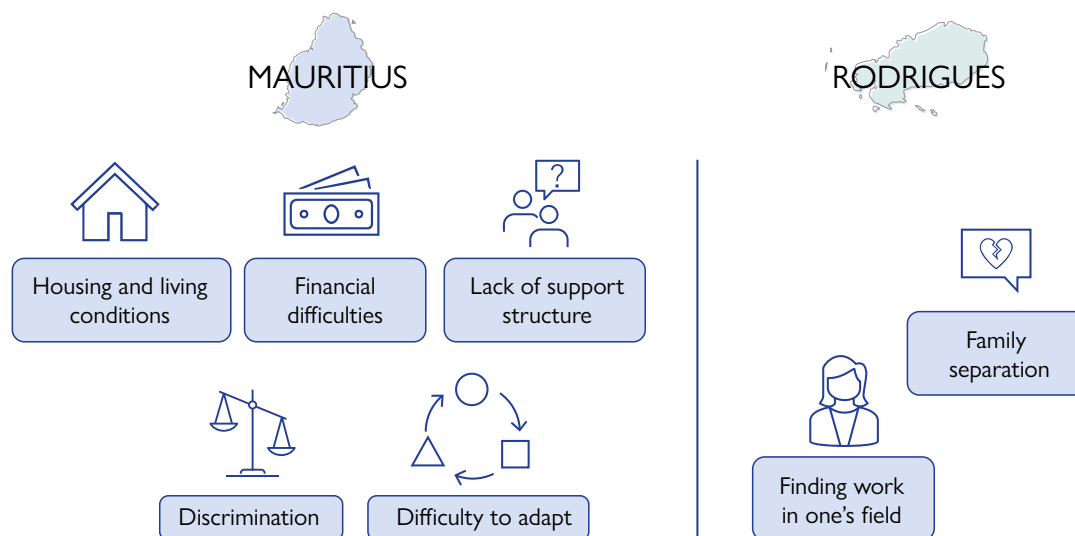
Most of the women interviewed were not interested in moving to Mauritius permanently, echoing similar reasons that Rodriguan migrants return to Rodrigues. They described that their month-long stays were adequate and that they preferred living in their “own country” to be close to family. They shared that people in Rodrigues were more courteous than in Mauritius: people would warmly greet one another and there was a culture of sharing. They also explained that there was more leisure time in Rodrigues and that they had their own small plot of land where they could garden and grow their own food and vegetables – a practice that they highly value along with their health and well-being.

4.2. Circumstances related to migration

What challenges do migrants face and what support do they avail to overcome them?

Findings from the study reveal several challenges facing Rodriguan migrants: housing and living conditions, financial difficulties, lack of structured support and access to services, discrimination, difficulty adapting in Mauritius, as well as family separation and challenges finding jobs upon return to Rodrigues (Figure 9). Findings also shed light on the social and formal types of support that Rodriguan migrants draw on to navigate their migration experience, in both destination and origin contexts. The discussion that follows details each topic thematically, with remarks for specified groups noted accordingly.

Figure 9. Challenges identified during settlement and return



Source: Created by the author using PowerPoint, 2024.

Note: This map is for illustration purposes only. The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the International Organization for Migration.

4.2.1. Housing and living conditions

Housing was consistently reported as the most common and significant challenge facing Rodriguan migrants, both upon arrival and, in some cases, after years of settlement in Mauritius. In particular, there were difficulties finding affordable housing due to the high cost of rent, especially for migrants in poverty and those working in lower-paying jobs. Living conditions were likewise often described as precarious upon arrival and with the potential to lead to longer-term difficulties for those residing in informal settlements.

Most Rodriguans tend to stay with a family member when they first arrive in Mauritius: an aunt, an uncle, a parent, a sibling or a cousin. Participants explained that Rodriguans are more comfortable staying with and near people that they already know, and for newly arrived migrants, this is almost invariably a relative that they have living in Mauritius.

In many cases, it was also reported that Rodriguan migrants stay together in relatively larger households, in some cases with a few families in one home. This can contribute to crowded living conditions, only intensified by new arrivals from Rodrigues. For those moving in with a parent, this can involve staying with a new stepparent and other stepsiblings, which can be fraught with difficulties for the household. Cohabitation with many other people and, in some cases, new or not very close family members was reported as quite challenging.

Following the initial period of stay with a family member, it was frequently conveyed that for whatever reason, migrants would then need to move out. This could be due to a breakdown in the relationship, being asked to leave, overcrowded conditions and/or a personal preference to do so. Given that family ties in Rodrigues are generally described as strong and stable, some participants proposed that these markedly different family dynamics in Mauritius were

due to an observed shift in mentality of Rodriguans living in Mauritius. That is, according to some participants, Rodriguans tend to “change” after settling in Mauritius and adopt a more individualistic attitude. For participants who had stayed with family members for longer periods (e.g. for the entire duration of their studies), they considered themselves quite lucky in recognition that housing was otherwise a major challenge for others. In addition, some students shared that their first destination with relatives was not always a conducive environment for studying, as other household members had different lifestyles and daily agendas.

As such, the initial housing arrangement in Mauritius is commonly considered a temporary and transitional phase for many migrants. Following this experience, successful migrants will either find a place to rent once they find stable work and gather sufficient savings, or, for some students, they seek out government-subsidized housing if they are eligible. For those who tend to rent and, in some cases, who eventually become homeowners were reported to stay in areas like Pailles, Tour Koenig, Baie du Tombeau, Roche Bois, Terre Rouge and Sainte-Croix, which are mostly urban areas surrounding Port Louis.

However, it is important to note that rent is considered a very expensive aspect of life in Mauritius for Rodriguans. For reference, a one-bedroom apartment in and around Port Louis can cost anywhere from MUR 10,000 to MUR 30,000, considering that the legal minimum wage in the formal sector was MUR 15,000 as of January 2024.

While Mauritius operates a [social housing scheme](#), it is not often a realistic option for many migrants given the waitlist and eligibility requirements. As of February 2024, the social housing application inventory was estimated to be around 42,000 and waiting periods were very long, in some cases up to 15 to 20 years.³⁶ Land scarcity and funding restraints on the supply side and an inability to pay upfront deposits and monthly payments on the demand side were related constraints that were also raised among stakeholders and migrants alike. Finally, it is also worth noting that any person who holds State-leased land (as many do in Rodrigues) is deemed ineligible for social housing across the Republic of Mauritius, and thus would not be eligible to apply for social housing on the island of Mauritius.

In this context, some Rodriguan migrants in the most economically vulnerable situations have moved to informal “squatting” areas, for example in Bambous (Black River District) and Cité La Cure (Port Louis District). These are considered some of the most precarious housing conditions in the country. Findings from Cité La Cure, one such informal settlement where many Rodriguan migrants live, are highlighted in the next subsection, followed by housing specificities for other migrant subgroups like students, medical patients and women entrepreneurs.

Housing and living conditions in Cité La Cure

Cité La Cure is a suburb located on the outskirts of Port Louis in the north-west of the island of Mauritius. According to the Relative Development Index compiled by Statistics Mauritius, it is considered an area of “low development” (Statistics Mauritius, 2015). Within the town,

³⁶ As cited by a key informant from the National Housing Development Co. Ltd. (16 February 2024).

a segment of the community is informally settled (“squatted”) on State-owned land by over 500 families, many of whom reside in precarious living conditions. It is here that many Rodriguan migrants reside; in fact, the area is sometimes referred to as “Ti Rodrig” (Little Rodrigues). However, some members of the community prefer its proper name – Paul et Virginie – and as such, the former name is not used here.

Several challenges for residents have been identified: a high risk and exposure to hazards (cyclones and floods due to torrential rains), vulnerability of tin house dwellings, lack of infrastructure (lack of drains, poor maintenance), illicit drug use and early motherhood (Mauritius Red Cross Society, 2020). Basic services, such as clean and reliable water and regular electricity, are not available. Residents often have to pay for such items at a higher price or obtain them through irregular means that are highly unsafe. As the informal settlement is densely populated and overcrowded, it is also characterized by precarious health conditions. Compromised sanitation and poor treatment of waste and wastewater create higher risks of vector- and water-borne diseases.

Among Rodriguan migrants surveyed and interviewed at Cité La Cure, all of them had been in Mauritius for relatively long periods of time, nearly all (87%) had been in Mauritius for over 10 years, many of whom had moved over 25 years ago.

With regard to their housing situation, the vast majority (80%) stayed in squatted housing in a structure made of sheet metal roof and walls. It thus comes as no surprise that 79 per cent of respondents also said that they had had to relocate to a safe location due to a natural hazard (e.g. cyclones and heavy rains).³⁷ While this was always a short-term relocation, for example to a community centre or a neighbour’s concrete home, it suggests a high degree of vulnerability with respect to environmental threats. In fact, heavy rain was described as “catastrophic” for the community by one participant, whereby flooding makes crossing through impossible. Since a river runs through the neighbourhood, tropical storms and cyclones invariably flood the area, which can result in children missing school and patients missing medical appointments.³⁸

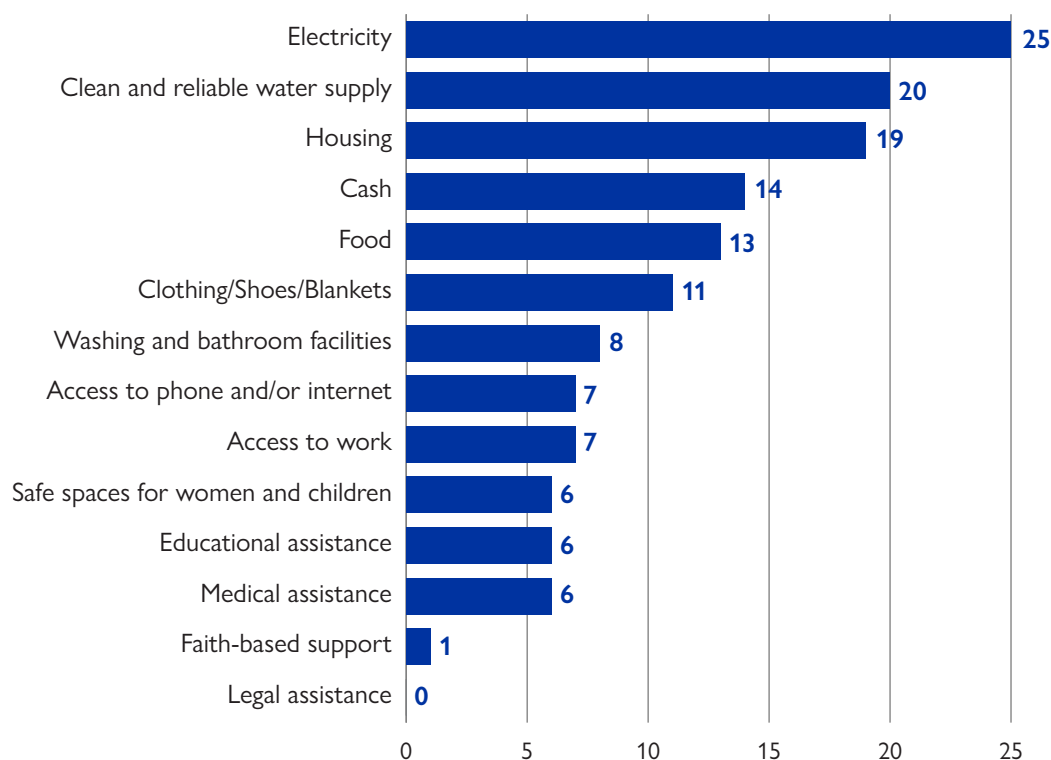
Households surveyed were large, with five or more people in nearly half of the sample (46%). One participant shared how this was particularly challenging for women who were “imprisoned” at home with many children, making it difficult for them to improve their situation. Overcrowding in the neighbourhood was also reported to contribute to increased exposure of children to illicit activities, such as drug use, since it is difficult to avoid when coming and going on the streets.

Basic and essential needs related to housing were ranked highest among respondents: two thirds cited electricity (66%), and around half cited the need for a clean and reliable water supply (53%) as well as housing (50%). Other essential needs included cash (37%), food (34%) and clothing/shoes/blankets (29%).

³⁷ See, for example, a [media report](#) on relocation to a local community centre during a class 3 cyclone warning.

³⁸ See, for example, [media reports](#) on flooding in the neighbourhood.

Figure 10. Needs assessment among Cité La Cure respondents (number of respondents)



Source: Survey results from Cité La Cure, February 2024.

When asked about the level of difficulty in finding housing in Mauritius, 93 per cent of respondents rated the level of difficulty as either “somewhat difficult” (15%) or “very difficult” (78%). Qualitative data exposed that some respondents had initially not expected such difficulties when they decided to move to Mauritius, and they reflected on how their situation had become extremely challenging when they were asked to leave their family member’s home.

With regard to finding housing through government assistance, 46 per cent of respondents in the community had applied for social housing. Some shared that they had been waiting for over 15 years since making their application and others explained that they could not afford the deposit or payments required. A sense of frustration was highlighted in describing the way in which the authorities had previously come to take their information, without any follow-up thereafter.

Students, medical patients and women entrepreneurs

It is worth reiterating that government housing schemes are in place to accommodate two key subgroups of Rodriguan migrants: (1) students studying at higher education institutions, and (2) medical patients transferred to Mauritius.

In the former case, Rodriguan students have access to government-subsidized quarters for which they apply through the Commission for Vocational Training (under the RRA) in Rodrigues. There are two government quarters: one in Floréal (which has a capacity for 24 students) and

one in Vacoas (which can accommodate 45 students), which are both located on the central plateau of the island of Mauritius. Rooms are allocated on a first-come, first-served basis, subject to room availability. Students staying in Floréal only pay electricity (no monthly rent is applicable), while those in Vacoas are required to pay a monthly rent of MUR 2,000, which is inclusive of utilities (water, electricity and cooking gas). Refundable deposits are applicable for both quarters: MUR 2,000 in Floréal and MUR 3,000 in Vacoas.

For students interviewed in Floréal, it was observed that government housing had been helpful for them – it served as a safety net from falling into more tenuous housing arrangements. This suggests that dedicated lodging for a broader set of students and young migrants generally, especially when starting out, could be an important policy area to explore.

While medical patients were not directly interviewed, indirect sources in the field shared that one of the accommodation policies for referred medical patients was to provide full board at a hotel in Quatre Bornes (Plaines Wilhems District) in case of income barriers. Otherwise, expenses were refunded by the Government after the trip through a separate mechanism. It was reported that due to the limited room capacity of the hotel, patients and family members still faced challenges in finding affordable rent due to upfront costs required. Local transport to reach hospital facilities was also often unaffordable for patients being treated far from the hotel location.

Finally, with regard to women entrepreneurs, participants shared that they would often stay with a family member or rent for the short term. The latter was often the case because their relative's place was not always close to their daily point of sale (i.e. their assigned supermarket). As such, some had opted to rent a place close to the supermarket where they were assigned because it was easier and more cost effective to transport their products and arrive there without exorbitant taxi costs.

4.2.2. Financial difficulties and employment situation

Financial difficulties in Mauritius were reported by all migrant participants sampled in the study. This was often cited in the often repeated statement “we earn more, but we also spend more”. That is, while it was much easier to find work and make money in Mauritius, this was accompanied by increased expenses. Expenses were not only on essential needs to manage one's household (housing, food, etc.) but also situated in light of a heightened consumerist culture where there were simply more ways and places to spend in Mauritius as compared to Rodrigues. Younger migrants reflected on how expensive life was, as well as a tendency to buy more due to consumer accessibility.

This was also applicable to students staying in subsidized housing: they highlighted financial challenges given the expenses they had related to their studies and life in general (Internet, food, transport, etc.). Many of the current and former students interviewed worked part-time to support themselves or as part of their programme's work placement, and, in some cases, they worked more than one job.

One returnee explained that working during their studies in Mauritius was a necessity since their family back home could not send them enough money, as they already had a household to manage in Rodrigues. Another returnee migrant who had worked in Mauritius for 25 years emphasized how expensive it was in Mauritius (when asked why they came back) and that they preferred that the culture in Rodrigues was less money oriented.

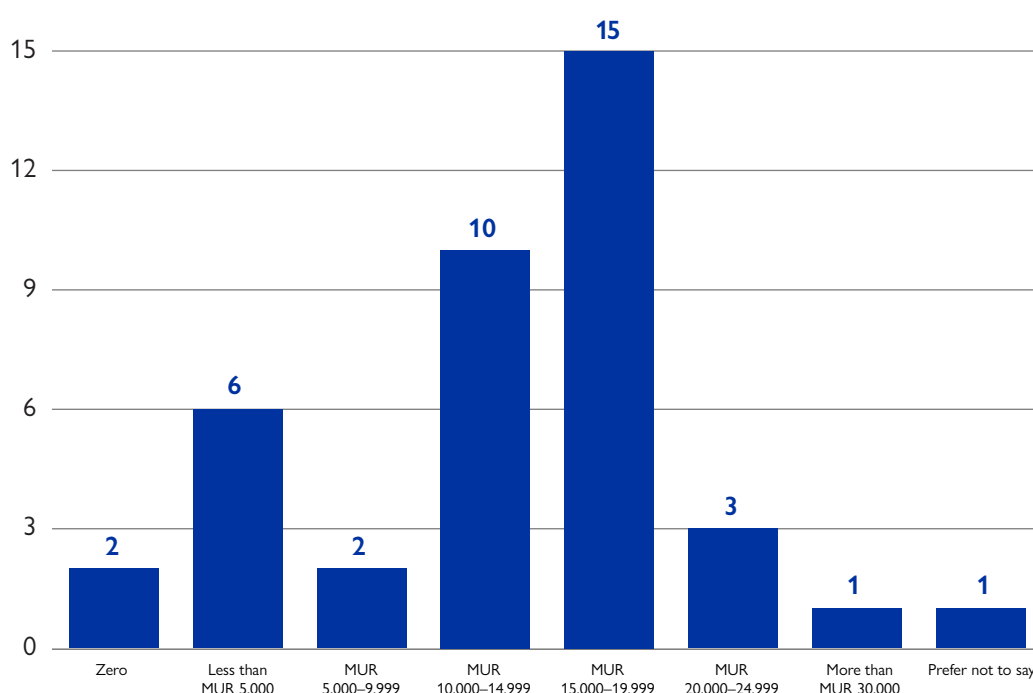
Financial difficulties were also reported by women entrepreneurs when conducting business in Mauritius (e.g. round-trip air travel, local transport and shipping fees) as well as for families moving for medical treatment. For the latter group, this can mean that caregivers must either find new work in Mauritius to support the family unit during prolonged treatment periods, or simply not be able to provide care, due to commitments back home.

Economic situation for respondents in Cité La Cure

Findings from long-term residents surveyed in Cité La Cure presented a particularly acute situation, one characterized by relatively low incomes, difficulties covering basic expenses and employment in more precarious and lower-paying jobs.

For example, survey respondents were asked to estimate their monthly income from all sources. Around 63 per cent fell within the MUR 10,000–19,999 range, with no gendered difference in that income bracket. One fifth of the respondents either had no income source or earned less than MUR 5000, which was more pronounced among women (25%) than men (13%). In terms of dependants, 17 per cent of the respondents had five or more family members who depended on them financially, and 12 per cent had four dependants to support.

Figure 11. Reported monthly income of Cité La Cure respondents (number of respondents)

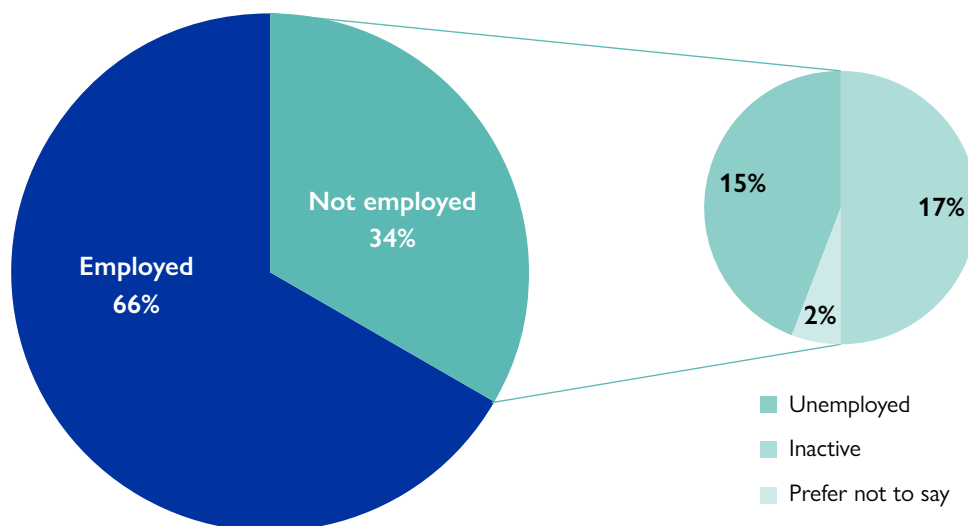


Source: Survey results from Cité La Cure, February 2024.

About half of the respondents reported that they either “rarely” (32%) or “never” (20%) had enough money to cover the basic expenses of their households. Some of these respondents explained that they were living day-to-day, and one shared that “the moment the money comes in, it goes out”. In elaborating on this situation, one respondent shared that they would often resort to borrowing money or finding additional work to supplement their income to meet the basic needs of their households. As such, financial planning and saving were out of reach for many respondents. As an indicator of absolute poverty, 35 per cent of the respondents were registered on the SRM.

In terms of employment, about 66 per cent of the respondents were working. Among those who were not working (34%), about half were unemployed (i.e. available and looking for work), while the remaining were inactive, either retired or unable to work, for example due to illness.

Figure 12. Employment situation of Cité La Cure respondents

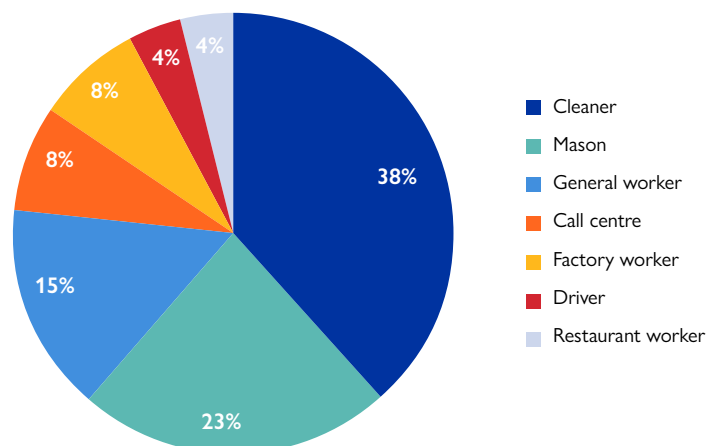


Source: Survey results from Cité La Cure, February 2024.

Slightly more men (69%) were employed than women (64%). More substantial gendered differences appeared among the not working group: women (20%) were more likely to be inactive than men (13%).

Precarious and lower-paying jobs – such as cleaning and general labour – were most represented among those in employment. Masonry and construction were also represented with relatively higher incomes.

Figure 13. Job distribution of Cité La Cure respondents (% of employed population)



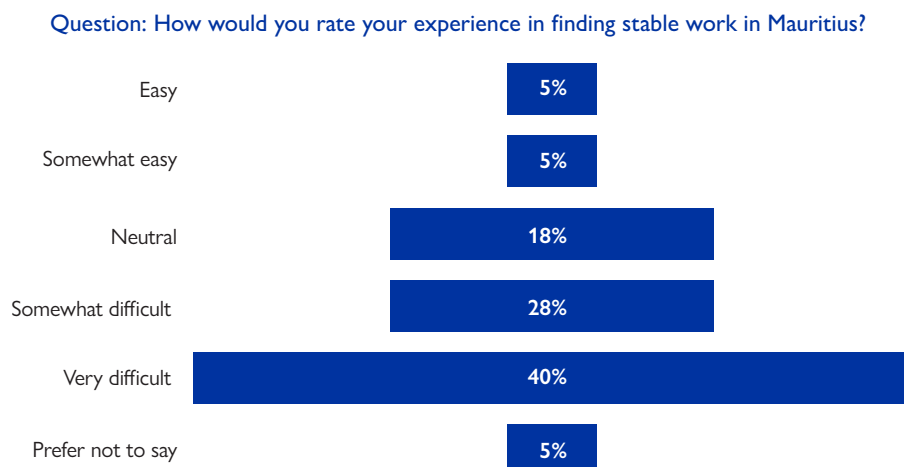
Source: Survey results from Cité La Cure, February 2024.

Occupations were highly gendered: 53 per cent of women worked as cleaners or housekeepers and 55 per cent of men worked in masonry or construction.

Nearly all respondents (95%) had arrived in Mauritius without a job, with no significant difference between genders. This supports qualitative data that reported that Rodriguans often move to Mauritius without a job lined up as they rarely migrate on the basis of a direct employer recruitment. It is worth noting, interestingly, that the only respondent who had an income over MUR 30,000 (reported as MUR 45,000) was also one of the only two respondents in the entire sample who stated that they had a job upon arrival in Mauritius.

Over two thirds (68%) of the respondents reported that it was either “somewhat difficult” (28%) or “very difficult” (40%) to find a stable job. Some shared that initially Mauritians were not interested in hiring them, but as they obtained more experience on the mainland, getting hired became easier.

Figure 14. Experience finding stable work in Mauritius among Cité La Cure respondents



Source: Survey results from Cité La Cure, February 2024.

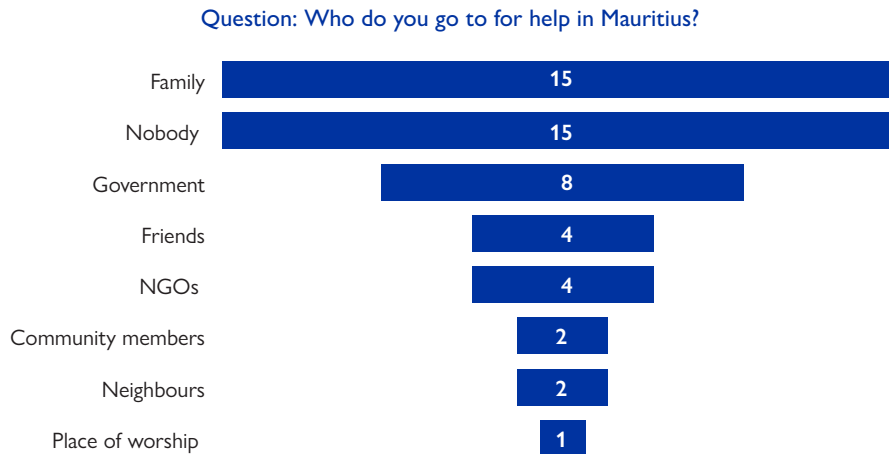
Notably, Rodriguans working as masons shared during interviews that it was not difficult to find work in their field (construction) due to a perceived preference for Rodriguans in the trade as highly skilled masons, as well as the high demand in the labour market. However, when observing their responses related to finding stable work, masons still reported that it was either somewhat difficult (80%) or very difficult (20%). This likely reflects the contracted nature of the construction sector in which labour demands ebb and flow.

4.2.3. Social and formal support

Support networks were varied among the sampled migrant respondents, though they were mostly ad hoc and in the social sphere (e.g. friends and family). Institutionalized or structured support from government was reported to some degree among the sample in both the origin and destination contexts. Data, though limited, also provided insights into some of the government support that Rodriguan migrants have accessed in recent years, including employment counselling and financial assistance. A noticeably low uptake at the Rodrigues Information and Support Desk was also found.

With regard to getting settled and integrated in Mauritius, migrant students shared a mix of close connections who helped them: family in some cases, with very close friends in others. For some, they shared that their success in Mauritius could be credited in part to the support and help offered by Mauritian-born friends that they had made during their stay. For one student, they reflected on how they had not expected to make so many close Mauritian-born friends and had originally assumed that they would rely only on Rodriguans. One returnee who had studied in Mauritius also reflected on the close friendships they had made with Mauritians during their study programme and how these connections had helped them succeed professionally. In fact, they remained in touch and supportive of one another even after completing their studies and at a distance (e.g. sharing opportunities and connecting about projects). As discussed in [section 1.2.5](#), most Rodriguan students benefit in some shape or form from government support (mostly financial assistance, with some accessing subsidized accommodation) while in Mauritius.

The settlement experience of long-term residents surveyed in Cité La Cure was far bleaker. When asked who respondents generally went to for help in Mauritius, the top answers were equally family (37%) and nobody (37%). Government (20%), friends (10%) and NGOs (10%) were also reflected as sources of assistance, with far fewer attributing support from community members (5%), neighbours (5%) and places of worship (2%).

Figure 15. Support network in Mauritius among Cité La Cure respondents

Source: Survey results from Cité La Cure, February 2024.

When asked who had been the most helpful in settling in Mauritius, the top answer was nobody: nearly half (46%) of the respondents said as much. This was followed by family (34%) and friends (12%). Participants shared during interviews that they had had to sort out their life in Mauritius on their own and by themselves. For example, one respondent poignantly shared: “*mo’nn bizin met sa debout tousel*” (“I’ve had to build up my life here all by myself”). This pointed to a common narrative whereby settled migrants had managed on their own without social nor institutional support. This corroborates previous research on internal migration in the Republic of Mauritius that found that migrant households were more likely than non-migrant households to feel as though they had no one to turn to for support (Sultan, 2017).

Survey results also shed light on a sense of discomfort or reluctance in approaching government, as 78 per cent of the respondents reported that they were either “not at all comfortable” (22%) or “slightly uncomfortable” (56%) to approach government authorities in Mauritius for assistance. Qualitative data from interviews expanded on this dynamic: participants expressed that previous requests for assistance from authorities had gone unanswered. Some respondents shared that they were accustomed to officials visiting the community, taking their information (e.g. ID numbers and names) with the purpose of helping them, only to never hear back or see any tangible results. As such, a sense of fatigue and, in some cases, jadedness among respondents was observed with respect to support from government authorities.

Rodrigues Information and Support Desks

With respect to the [Rodrigues Information and Support Desk](#), findings indicate that the initiative has not been performing as intended and that there has been very limited impact, and virtually no uptake. This could be explained by a combination of factors: lack of awareness among the Rodriguan population and as well a range of stakeholders, a sense of distrust or discomfort in approaching government, the unsuitability of the NEF as its administrator and lack of dedicated resources for outreach.

Lack of awareness was identified among migrant and stakeholder participants alike. In fact, among those surveyed in Cité La Cure, not one respondent had heard of the Desk. Most government officials were also not aware of the Desk, nor its purpose or mandate. Some key informants also speculated that the Desk's location at the NEF, which serves the poorest and most vulnerable members of society, may have served as a deterrent for the wider Rodriguan migrant community. This was attributed to the possible stigma associated with asking the Government for welfare assistance.

Site visits to both desks in Port Louis and Port Mathurin and interviews with staff provided further insights into their low uptake and implementation since launch.

Port Louis, Mauritius

The Rodrigues Information and Support Desk in Port Louis had a total of 24 Rodriguan visitors from its launch in 2017 until December 2023, with an average of about 2 persons served a year. This average does not include the notable exception of a significantly higher turnout in 2021 when a repatriation protocol for stranded Rodriguans during the COVID-19 pandemic was put in place. That year, 13 Rodriguans were served and referred to the Prime Minister's Office for assistance to return home.³⁹

Among the remaining 11 visitors over the six-year activity period, they had all come in for the specific purpose of completing paperwork related to the SRM. Their typical profile was someone who had moved urgently to Mauritius for medical treatment for themselves or their family members and were in the midst of the SRM registration process. In many cases, they had been instructed by the NEF Rodrigues office to sign pertinent documents once they arrived in Mauritius, given the time sensitivity of the registration itself.



Rodrigues Information and Support Desk in Port Louis. © IOM 2023/Leanne DIXON PERERA

³⁹ Due to suspension of flights during the COVID-19 pandemic, many Rodriguans were stranded in Mauritius. As reported, the Government's repatriation efforts included financial assistance. Between 1 July and 24 December 2021, 1,175 individuals stranded in Mauritius were repatriated to Rodrigues (Mauritius, Republic of, 2022a).

There were no walk-ins for general information or support related to migration or settlement in Mauritius. Staff posited that this was due to a lack of awareness about the Desk among the Rodriguan community.

Port Mathurin, Rodrigues

Zero visitors were received by the Rodrigues Information and Support Desk in Port Mathurin from its inception in 2018 until March 2024. It is also worth noting that no distinct signage for the Desk was observed; the office was only marked as the NEF for Rodrigues.

According to the Desk staff, the lack of visitors could be explained by a few factors including that Rodriguans “prefer to stand on their own feet” rather than to address their issues at the counter and that those migrating for medical reasons were already facilitated by the RRA Commission for Health. In terms of the perceived reluctance to ask for help, some Rodriguans were described by NEF Rodrigues as “having their dignity” and not wanting to ask for special assistance, even if they were in very poor conditions and that they would prefer to go on their own.

Perhaps most significantly, a key institutional reason for the lack of uptake was also attributed to the heavy workload, lack of dedicated funds and shortage of staff at NEF Rodrigues. This concretely meant that staff could not canvass about the Desk, nor could they realistically attend to any Rodriguan person seeking to migrate given their already overburdened duties related to the administration of the SRM. For comparison, NEF Port Louis shared that an SRM case management officer in Mauritius typically had about 40 households under their care, while NEF Rodrigues reported that their officers were following about 125 households each in Rodrigues – a factor of three times more families.

Other government services

There was a clear lack of data on the uptake of Rodriguan migrant access to various government programmes and services in Mauritius. This was largely due to Rodriguans not being differentiated from other Mauritian citizens when receiving services (e.g. they hold the same ID card).

However, a few related data points were available. With regard to employment services, Rodriguans were found to have visited the employment information centres (EICs) in Mauritius in recent years. Based on the files transferred through the common labour market information system, an annual average of 36 registered jobseekers from Rodrigues visited an EIC in Mauritius between 2019 and 2023.⁴⁰ Nearly half (45%) of these jobseekers availed of services in Port Louis and Quatre Bornes (Table 10).

⁴⁰ Calculated by the author based on data provided by the Republic of Mauritius Ministry of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training (12 February 2024).

Table 10. Number of registered jobseekers whose files were transferred from the Employment Information Centre in Rodrigues to the Employment Information Centres in Mauritius, by regional Employment Information Centre, 2019–2023

| Employment Information Centre | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | Grand total |
|-------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-------------|
| Quatre Bornes | 10 | 6 | 4 | 9 | 12 | 41 |
| Port Louis | 16 | 7 | 3 | 6 | 8 | 40 |
| Rose Hill | 7 | 4 | 2 | 1 | 7 | 21 |
| Triolet | 8 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 4 | 18 |
| Flacq | 5 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 12 |
| Vacoas | 1 | 5 | – | 3 | 2 | 11 |
| Curepipe | 2 | 4 | – | 1 | 2 | 9 |
| Goodlands | 2 | 2 | – | 2 | 2 | 8 |
| Rivière des Anguilles | 1 | 3 | – | 2 | 1 | 7 |
| Quartier Militaire | – | 3 | – | 1 | 1 | 5 |
| Rose Belle | 1 | 3 | – | 1 | – | 5 |
| Rivière du Rempart | – | – | 1 | 1 | – | 2 |
| Mahebourg | – | – | – | 1 | – | 1 |
| Grand total | 53 | 41 | 14 | 32 | 40 | 180 |

Source: Mauritius, Republic of, 2024a.

Furthermore, as of February 2024, 19 Rodriguan women entrepreneurs in Mauritius were registered with the National Women Entrepreneur Council and participated in their events.⁴¹ This suggests that Rodriguan migrant women have availed of these formal networks to some degree.

Rodriguan women entrepreneurs who come and go between the islands reported that they had benefited from various government assistance schemes over the years to support their inter-island business ventures. This included financial sponsorship to cover flights, local transport and shipping fees, among other costs. However, government support had since reduced to only a partial freight subsidy on their shipment of goods. Relatedly, stakeholders reported that Rodriguan women entrepreneurs were previously invited by government entities in Mauritius to participate in sales fairs and markets on the island, with their participation subsidized through government sponsorship. These formal invitations had since stopped, and, thus, the financial sponsorship had also ended. As a result, the women entrepreneurs interviewed were almost entirely self-funded in their biannual migration to and from Mauritius.

⁴¹ Data were provided to the author by the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family Welfare (20 February 2024).

Support structures in place: civil society

It is important to note that, in this context, the support and empowerment of Rodriguan migrants is advanced by local civil society and community-based organizations that operate in Mauritius and Rodrigues. These include Mouvement Solidarité Rodrigues, Fam Unie Foundation and Caritas, among many others. Two NGOs that participated in the study are profiled below.

- Movement Solidarité Rodrigues is a grassroots NGO that works to advance the integration and well-being of Rodriguans residing in Mauritius. Founded in 2012, Solidarité Rodrigues has organized activities, such as integration workshops for youth, welcoming and accompaniment of new arrivals to Mauritius, and hospital visits to support medical patients, among others.

Solidarité Rodrigues also assists Rodriguans with administrative work at their head office in Port Louis (open on weekdays), and a satellite office in Saint-Croix where a social worker attends to beneficiaries one day a week. An important event under their purview is Journée Rodriguais (Rodriguan Day), which is held on an annual basis to portray and promote the gastronomy, music, lifestyle and agricultural produce of Rodrigues. The event, which usually draws 5,000 people, serves as a platform to both promote Rodriguan culture and raise awareness of the Rodriguan people and their plight in Mauritius.

- Established in 2021, Fam Unie Foundation is a women's empowerment and training centre located in Cité La Cure. It offers women from the community (not limited to Rodriguans) access to a range of workshops focused on skill development and psychosocial support. Its overall goal is to help women in precarious circumstances escape extreme poverty and acquire some financial autonomy, with the longer-term goal of supporting them in becoming independent business owners. Training courses include baking (cakes and pastries), sewing, soap manufacturing, macramé and life skills.

Fam Unie also facilitates the production of goods directly on site and works with the private sector to establish points of sale for locally made products (e.g. pastries and bags). An organic farming project has also been launched, in cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme, to provide women beneficiaries with a source of income through sustainable farming practices (UNDP Mauritius and Seychelles, 2024).

4.2.4. Discrimination

The topic of discrimination was raised by some participants, primarily as a sense that, as Rodriguans, they were treated differently than Mauritians when in Mauritius. This was investigated in light of recent research, which found that internal migrant households in the Republic of Mauritius suffer from discrimination at significantly higher rates than non-migrant households (Sultan, 2017). Labels that stigmatize Rodriguan migrants were also observed, particularly stereotypes related to involvement in criminal and illicit activities, such as drug use.

These views have been reported in local media whereby some Rodriguan migrants, notably those in lower socioeconomic situations, feel that they are treated as “second-class citizens” or as inferior to Mauritian-born people.⁴²

Study participants shared that they were identified as Rodriguan by their accent, the way they look (in some cases, their skin colour) and because Mauritians would introduce them to new people as Rodriguans. The latter meant that for one migrant participant they preferred not to mention that they were from Rodrigues. This was to avoid bothersome and ill-informed remarks, particularly as these were sometimes perceived as comments intended to destabilize them. For example, participants shared that Mauritians would ask them bizarre questions related to life in Rodrigues: if they had buses, schools or umbrellas there. Another participant shared that they felt that they had to “prove themselves” and work harder than their Mauritian counterparts in all spheres of life (school, work, etc.).

Another participant shared a more positive experience: that Mauritians tended to say that Rodriguans were “cool and relaxed people” and, as a result, there was friendliness when Mauritians learned they were from Rodrigues. This could be explained by Mauritians who have travelled to Rodrigues for tourism and who typically describe Rodriguans in this way, as found [above](#).

In Cité La Cure, with respect to discrimination in the labour market, participants were asked if, as a Rodriguan, they had suffered from discrimination or exclusion when seeking work in Mauritius.⁴³ Overall, 43 per cent said “yes” with notable gendered differences: 54 per cent of women and 25 per cent of men said the same. When isolating the highly gendered occupations of cleaners (women) and masons (men), half of the women cleaners indicated “yes”, while only 17 per cent of men working in construction said as much.

Qualitative data shed light on these experiences, with some women respondents stating that when seeking work, Mauritian employers tended to look at them strangely (“*zot fer enn figure*”), which was attributed to the way they look, speak and dress. For masons (who were all male respondents), there was an understanding that in their field of work Mauritians tended to trust Rodriguans and that employers were more at ease to hire them, which could explain the lower reported rates of discrimination in this respect.

Respondents were similarly asked if, as a Rodriguan, they had suffered from discrimination or exclusion when seeking housing in Mauritius. A slightly higher percentage of respondents (45%) said “yes”, as compared to the question related to seeking work. Gendered differences were also slightly more pronounced: 58 per cent of women and 21 per cent of men indicated “yes” to the question.

⁴² See, for example, this [media report](#).

⁴³ Definitions of each term were provided as follows: Discrimination is the unfair or prejudicial treatment of people based on characteristics such as one's race, caste, place of origin, political opinions, colour, creed or sex. It is the treatment of a person or particular group of people differently, in a way that is worse than the way people are usually treated. Exclusion is the act of preventing or restricting a person or group of people from participation, consideration or inclusion. It can involve the denial of rights, resources and opportunities that would normally be available to members of different groups in society.

4.2.5. Difficulty to adapt

Difficulty to adapt to life in Mauritius was reported as a key challenge by both migrants and returnees when they reflected on their experiences. As discussed [above](#), the environments of both islands are often compared as very different places; for example, some participants shared that it had been difficult to get used to being surrounded by concrete buildings as they were accustomed to being much closer to nature in Rodrigues. The traffic jams and noise were also a big change, and one participant shared that “sometimes we need to go to Rodrigues just to relax” to manage acclimatization.

Higher levels of crime and illicit behaviours in Mauritian society were also shared by migrant participants. In fact, some migrants reported that even before they came to Mauritius people around them had told them that Mauritius was “dangerous”. After staying some time, they tended to agree with this assessment. In a context with relatively higher incidence of drug and alcohol use, some reflected on how it was difficult for some new migrants to stay grounded when they first came to Mauritius. A few participants said that it is important to stay grounded and focused on one’s goals when they come to Mauritius, and to not be overwhelmed by the temptation of “fast money” to be made in such activities.

4.2.6. Life back in Rodrigues

Lastly, two key challenges were highlighted on the island of Rodrigues: family separation as a result of outbound migration and the lack of viable jobs for returnees.

Family separation

Migration significantly affects family structures, leading to challenges such as family separation and financial strain. Several participants raised a trend that some Rodriguan migrants leave behind their children when they migrate to Mauritius in search of work and a better livelihood. These children stay with other family members such as their grandparents, their remaining parent, or an aunt or uncle. There were no figures or data available on the scale of this issue, though it was observed that many Rodriguans were anecdotally familiar with the issue.

The impacts were reported as challenging for the entire family system: the child, who is traumatized due to the sudden abandonment and separation, the family member in Rodrigues who may not have the resources or capacity to provide adequate childcare, and the migrant parent who is separated and financially struggling to manage two households.

For example, it was reported that grandparents were not always equipped to handle young children, which could negatively impact the child’s development and learning at school. Difficulties for the migrant parent were equally noted: they would find it difficult to send enough money back home due to their own financial challenges in Mauritius. For separated parents, this has led to complex child custody issues with each parent living on separate islands.

For beneficiaries of social assistance, migration sometimes meant that parents were unavailable to make important applications on behalf of their child. For instance, grandparents or other family members do not have the authority to fill out applications for school premiums or

allowances; such forms can only be submitted by parents. As a result, children suffer the consequences and miss out on entitlements. More generally, social assistance schemes assume that the parent and the child are together, not accounting for the family separation that arises from such migration patterns.

Lack of viable jobs back home

Finally, as it closely mirrors one of the key *initial drivers of migration*, from Rodrigues, returnee migrants and other participants reported the enduring difficulty to find work, particularly work in one's field, back in Rodrigues. While the returnee migrants interviewed as part of the study were all working, they each reflected on the difficulties others faced in coming back without prospects for work. This was also clear for students when they reflected on possibility of returning one day, as captured by one participant below:

“ _____
It's kind of useless if you spend five or six years studying and then doing a job that does not use or fit your qualifications, because we sacrifice a lot for this. _____ ”

Viable job opportunities were considered one of the most important factors for migrants, particularly students, when considering return as otherwise they expected to “do nothing” back home and live in a state of “only waiting”.

In this context, it is worth noting that entities like SME Mauritius in Rodrigues have played an important role in supporting the reintegration and economic development of returnees. This has involved facilitating suitable placements for returnee students with employers in their field of study, drawing on specialized skills that migrants have obtained during their time in Mauritius.

5. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

How can migrants be better supported?

This study generated a range of findings related to the reasons why people migrate between Rodrigues and Mauritius, a longstanding phenomenon, and some of the key challenges they face in the process. Importantly, it also identified potential ways in which inter-island migrants can be better supported throughout the migration cycle. These were derived from an analysis of the strengths and gaps in the current support framework, as well as suggestions from migrants and stakeholders alike.

These ideas have been summarized in the policy recommendations that follow. Through a validation exercise, the resulting policy measures are intended to form the basis of an internal migration action plan for Rodrigues, under the purview of the Government of the Republic of Mauritius, including the RRA.

It is worthwhile to highlight that the measures herein go hand in hand with broader government strategies to pursue sustainable development in Rodrigues. For instance, the Rodrigues Sustainable and Integrated Development Plan 2023–2032 drives a comprehensive approach to sustainable job creation, development of infrastructure, environmental sustainability and more. The recommendations that follow are complementary to these efforts. Notably, gendered strategies and actions are mainstreamed throughout the recommendations to emphasize the importance of achieving direct benefits for migrant women, children and families.

In terms of scope, measures are proposed with the specific aim of directly supporting people on the move between the islands. In doing so, they intend to achieve the broader goal of creating an ecosystem for safe, successful and dignified inter-island migration. Policy measures fall under four thematic streams of action, as listed in Figure 16, and discussed in this section.

Figure 16. Proposed goal, scope and streams of policy action



Source: Created by the author, 2024.

Stream 1. Migrant empowerment

1. Empower migrants and their families to make informed decisions and access support

In order to set up a strong institutional framework where migrants are well informed and assisted, information dissemination and service provision should be transformed. Governments are encouraged to design and implement new, stand-alone centres that offer a welcoming and safe environment for migrants in Rodrigues and Mauritius. It is recommended that these activities replace the existing Rodrigues Information and Support Desks to increase beneficiary uptake and impact. Another essential component to foster awareness and trust among beneficiaries is proactive field outreach and targeted communication in collaboration with community-based NGOs and the diaspora.

a. Establish a migrant resource centre in Rodrigues.

Migrant resource centres are physical spaces where migrants can obtain a suite of information, advice and services related to their migration in an interactive medium. These centres serve as a central hub and one-stop shop mandated to empower migrants with the appropriate tools, services and knowledge that they need for a successful migration experience.

To start, a migrant resource centre in Rodrigues could serve as a dedicated space to inform prospective inter-island migrants during their decision-making process, in preparation for travel, and if applicable, upon return to assist with their reintegration. This would be for any individual interested in or planning on moving to Mauritius for any reason, as well as those who have returned, and their families. To increase impact beyond the baseline activities of the current Desk (i.e. only referrals to other government bodies), the centre should be responsible for delivering regular pre-departure training for prospective migrants and reintegration programmes for returnees.

For example, pre-departure training would provide an interactive learning environment for groups of migrants to allow for discussion and reflection. When designed well, the training creates a risk-free forum in which migrants can ask questions and any of their fears, concerns or misconceptions are addressed. Training content and delivery can be designed to include former or returnee migrants as speakers or resource persons to share first-hand knowledge and experience. Curriculums could include:

- What to expect when residing and working or studying in Mauritius;
- Financial education and literacy (e.g. budgeting, saving and remittance management);
- Job opportunities and labour market information;
- Vocational and other training opportunities;
- Housing options and associated costs;
- Gender-sensitive support and services for women including in case of gender-based violence;
- Contacts of key service providers;
- Social support and diaspora networks;
- Information and services related to stress management, family separation and mental health, especially children;
- Sensitization on risks and tools to navigate them.

Drawing on international practices, workshops could also be designed to create training environments for migrant families to prepare for migration together, rather than only one individual.⁴⁴ These can emphasize education on maintaining healthy family relationships, communicating with children while away and family financial management. Integrated family support programmes that offer both financial aid and social services to migrant families to ensure that they can cope with the challenges of migration should also be considered in this context. Specific provisions for children of migrants are essential; these could include developing strategies to support children during migration, particularly in their education and health-care experiences. Childcare facilities or day-care centres for migrant families could also be considered.

44 See, for example, the Famili I Redi programme in Vanuatu, among other examples of migrant-facing information initiatives in IOM, 2023.

b. Set up a Rodriguan welcome and welfare centre in Mauritius.

Likewise, it is recommended that a stand-alone centre with wrap-around welcome, orientation and tailored support services should be established in Mauritius for newly arrived and settled migrants. These could include regular orientation sessions for recent arrivals with an overview of assistance and service available, tailored psychosocial support for families undergoing medical treatment, special community events and recreational activities to generate social networks, access to information on available jobs and training programmes, networking and cultural exchange with other members of the diaspora, and so on. Special youth initiatives could be housed under the centre in the form of social clubs or leisure and sports activities. Given that women migrants face distinct challenges, including higher unemployment rates and susceptibility to economic vulnerabilities, specific initiatives aimed at empowering women migrants through training, funding and support networks should be developed. These could be aimed at assisting them in securing employment and accessing support for entrepreneurial opportunities. Similar to the centre in Rodrigues, specific strategies to support children of migrants are essential components of the welcome and welfare centre to ensure the children's successful integration. Childcare facilities or day-care centres for migrant families could also be considered.

A market kiosk for Rodriguan products could also be set up at the centre. This could serve as a draw for the Rodriguan community and an established point of sale for entrepreneurs in Rodrigues to sell their products. It could also act as a single window for the promotion of Rodrigues more generally on the island of Mauritius, for example as a tourist venue and a cultural hotspot to promote Rodriguan cuisine, music, handicraft and culture.

To build trust, partnerships with community-based NGOs are essential in the delivery of services and programmes. In this spirit, it is also recommended for the centre to be staffed in part by Rodriguans.

c. Implement a communication campaign and undertake proactive outreach to vulnerable communities.

A dedicated communication campaign is crucial to ensure that migrants are aware of the new and existing services available to them. Since migrants mostly rely on information from informal sources (e.g. family and friends), governments are encouraged to make concerted efforts to disseminate information in ways that migrants are likely to receive it. This could involve partnerships with NGOs that are already tapped into migrant networks on both islands.

Ideally, this would also leverage the CSU to conduct proactive and tailored outreach with individuals who are unlikely to come forward. In Mauritius, this would involve visits to identified vulnerable communities where Rodriguan migrants are densely settled, such as in Cité La Cure. Active participation in important cultural events, like Journée Rodriguais, to promote available services and the new centres would also be essential.

Stream 2. Access to housing



2. Provide safe, appropriate and affordable housing for migrants

Difficulties finding affordable and appropriate housing in Mauritius were widely reported in the study. While strategies to improve the general accessibility of existing social housing schemes are crucial, the following measures focus on migrant groups during their earliest stages of relocation to Mauritius. This takes a preventative approach to reduce the likelihood of migrants falling into precarious housing and living conditions after arrival.

a. Establish a *habitat jeunes* in Mauritius.

Firstly, governments are encouraged to consider establishing dedicated accommodation for young Rodriguan workers as a temporary place for them to stay at a subsidized rate when they first arrive in Mauritius. Loosely based on the similar initiative Habitat Jeunes in France, the accommodation would be a transitional social housing solution for young people who are going to Mauritius for work purposes (DILA, 2022).

Eligible Rodriguans would be individuals under the age of 30 at the start of their working life either already in professional activity (e.g. as a trainee, an intern and an employee) or arriving as jobseekers. As a transitional housing option, it could be offered on a monthly basis with the opportunity to extend it up to one or two years. This would be towards the aim of helping youngsters start off in safe, appropriate and affordable housing when they first land in Mauritius before they sign up for a long-term agreement. Referrals to job matching and counselling services could also be offered in a structured manner. The dorms could be modelled on the student quarters in Floréal, where a resident caretaker manages the property and serves as a contact point for new arrivals.

b. Increase and enhance the capacity of government quarters dedicated to students and medical patients.

In light of continued flows of migrant subgroups going to Mauritius for essential services, like students and medical patients, governments are encouraged to assess if and how subsidized accommodation can be increased to match the demand.

For example, about 400 Rodriguan students were in Mauritius during the most recent academic year (2023–2024); however, government quarters had a maximum combined capacity of 69 students, and eligibility was on a first-come, first-served basis. Increased accommodation and spaces at these quarters should be explored and considered accordingly.

With approximately 78 medical patients going to Mauritius a month, it is also recommended to consider if more hotel or government quarter capacity would be feasible, including new locations closer to the multiple hospital sites where patients are commonly treated. A full-service boarding home that provides meals and accommodation, as well as transport, could be considered in this exercise. Authorities could examine international examples, such as [medical boarding homes](#) that accommodate Inuit people from Nunavut, a territory in Canada, who travel to other parts of the country to receive medical services not available in their origin communities. These boarding homes house patients and their escorts (caregivers) for the duration of their stay, with full board, and provide local transport to and from the airport and medical appointments. One such example is the [Larga Baffin](#) in Ottawa, Canada, which cultivates a community approach with additional facilities such as counselling, cultural events and support staff.

Stream 3. Employment and training



3. Mainstream mobility into employment and training schemes

Currently, governments in Mauritius and Rodrigues administer a range of employment and training schemes for unemployed jobseekers, entrepreneurs and youth. However, these schemes are typically designed without the reality of inter-island migration in mind: that young and working-aged Rodriguans are often seeking work and moving to Mauritius without a job lined up nor the necessary knowledge or training to obtain stable opportunities. Certain migrants also go back to Rodrigues with enhanced skills and experience yet face persistent challenges with un(der)employment. These trends are situated in a broader context in which Mauritius is facing growing labour shortages and increasingly meeting these demands with foreign labour.

As such, it is recommended that inter-island migration is mainstreamed into human resource development and employment programmes on both islands. Policymakers are encouraged to integrate support for inter-island mobility into new and existing schemes and enhance those where mobility is already a component. This could include mounting youth mobility-based employment and training initiatives in sectors of high demand in Mauritius and in areas of projected demand in Rodrigues, for example in sectors expected to grow from the new airstrip at Plaine Corail and related infrastructure investments on the island.⁴⁵

In these schemes, migrants moving for work would be provided with a support structure (e.g. training and stipends) throughout their journey. Relevant institutions could be engaged to ensure decent working conditions, proper accommodations and so on, for example by conducting regular labour inspections. Such programmes could also integrate lessons learned

⁴⁵ An airport project, with a USD 184 million loan from the World Bank and a EUR 16 million grant from the European Union was approved in September 2023. It is expected to transform the economy of Rodrigues and Mauritius. For more details, see World Bank Group, 2023.

and experience from relevant schemes, such as the current [Rodrigues Youth Mobility Programme](#) and previous [programmes](#) that placed Rodriguan entrepreneurs in small and medium-sized enterprises in Mauritius, and trained Rodriguan automobile mechanics for placements at garages in Mauritius. In addition, returnee migrants bring new ideas, skills and knowledge to Rodrigues and can play a role in strengthening trade and investment links between the islands given the professional networks they make during their time in Mauritius or abroad. Governments are also encouraged to implement programmes designed with the specific needs of returnees in mind, for example through monetary support and incentives, including access to credit and/or seed grants.

Other potential ideas to facilitate employment and training for migrants include:

- Partnering with Mauritian-based employers who hold regular job fairs in Rodrigues;
- Launching a *programme de jumelage* where Rodriguan and Mauritian entrepreneurs in similar sectors are paired with a view of exchanging skills and expertise, supported by short duration visits to each island;
- Promoting and supporting the participation of Rodriguan women in trade fairs in Mauritius, including financial sponsorship scaled for those in early years of business;
- Establishing a network of industry groups and private-sector entities in Mauritius to support placements (e.g. for the Rodrigues Youth Mobility Programme).

Stream 4. Institutional capacity



4. Strengthen institutional capacity through training, coordination and data

a. Implement a capacity-building programme for governments on inter-island migration trends and governance.

During consultations, it was observed that the concept of internal migration was relatively new and unfamiliar to many government stakeholders. That is, the term “migration” was generally received with an assumption that it only referenced international flows (i.e. the migration of foreign nationals). In light of this, it is important to sensitize government officials at the national and regional levels on key concepts, terminology, trends and evidence related to internal migration, and inter-island migration more specifically, as a first step in broader capacity-building efforts.

As part of this aim, it is recommended that IOM delivers a comprehensive capacity-building programme for officials to strengthen institutional capacity on internal migration and its governance. This should include a needs assessment at both levels of government, with a view to enabling officials to adopt and deliver components of the eventual action plan on internal migration for Rodrigues.

b. Leverage the new Rodrigues migration technical subcommittee.

The **Rodrigues migration technical subcommittee** is a new institutional mechanism that will serve as a platform for stakeholders to discuss and advance initiatives aimed at leveraging migration for the sustainable development of Rodrigues. Going forward, it is expected to serve a crucial role in the design, implementation and monitoring of the internal migration governance for Rodrigues. Two areas of focus are suggested:

i. Promote policy linkages and institutional coherence between national and regional governments.

It is important that the subcommittee makes concerted efforts to enhance collaboration between levels of governments when designing and devising relevant frameworks to support and protect inter-island migrants. For example, in mainstreaming mobility into relevant employment and training programmes, the Ministry of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training (Mauritius) and the Commission for Labour (Rodrigues) could hold collaborative sessions under the subcommittee to tap into each other's unique labour market analysis, capacity and resources. This could involve establishing closer links between employment information centres between the islands to facilitate information on job availability and working conditions for prospective and current inter-island migrants.

ii. Introduce a “migrant voice” component into decision-making with a focus on the youth and the diaspora.

As best practice, policy measures intended to help migrants should be grounded in the lived experience of migrants themselves. The technical subcommittee is encouraged to provide a distinct space for migrants, including the youth and the diaspora, to be engaged in meaningful and participatory discussions on the governance mechanisms intended to assist them. This can provide insights into realities on the ground and serve as an important feedback loop on potential areas for improvement over time. Such dialogue can go a long way in making migrants feel heard and empowered, lifting some of the existing barriers to engagement. Finally, a migrant voice component can also help inform, design and implement more innovative and inclusive policies. For example, the diaspora could be engaged to generate migrant-led mentorship schemes and partnerships across the islands.

c. Improve data collection and monitoring.

A project was carried out by IOM in parallel with this study to identify data priorities, needs and expectations with respect to internal migration between Mauritius and Rodrigues. A key outcome of this exercise will be the establishment of a Rodrigues migration dashboard, as well as the implementation of other recommendations on improved data collection and monitoring. These activities should be integrated into the overall governance framework on internal migration, including the action plan on internal migration.

ANNEXES

Annex 1. Responsibilities of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly

Fourth Schedule of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly Act, 2001

- | | |
|--|---|
| (1) Agriculture | (26) Legal services |
| (2) Arts and culture | (27) Labour and industrial relations |
| (3) Central administration | (28) Marine parks |
| (4) Child development | (29) Library services |
| (5) Civil aviation (administration) | (30) Marine services (administration) |
| (6) Civil status | (31) Meteorology (administration) |
| (7) Community development | (32) Museums, archives, historical sites and buildings |
| (8) Consumer protection | (33) Plant and animal quarantine |
| (9) Cooperatives | (34) Postal services (administration) |
| (10) Customs and excise (administration) | (35) Prisons and reform institutions (administration) |
| (11) Education (administration) | (36) Registration |
| (12) Employment | (37) Social security (administration) |
| (13) Environment | (38) State lands |
| (14) Family welfare | (39) Statistics in respect of Rodrigues |
| (15) Fire services | (40) Town and country planning |
| (16) Fisheries | (41) Tourism |
| (17) Food production | (42) Trade, commerce and licensing |
| (18) Forestry | (43) Transport |
| (19) Handicraft | (44) Vocational training |
| (20) Health (administration) | (45) Water resources |
| (21) Housing | (46) Women's affairs |
| (22) Industrial development | (47) Youth and sports |
| (23) Information technology and telecommunications | (48) Any other matter which the President may, by Proclamation, assign to the Regional Assembly |
| (24) Infrastructure including highways and roads and public buildings and utilities | |
| (25) Judicial (administration) | |

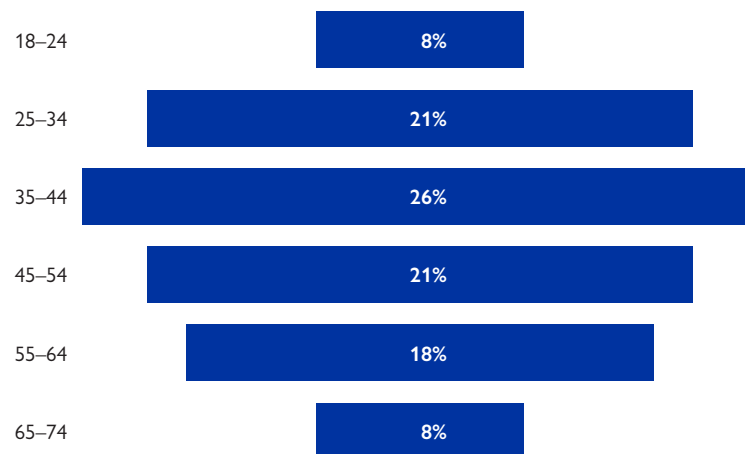
Annex 2. Demographics of survey respondents

Age, gender, education and ancestry

All respondents self-identified as Rodriguan (in this case, they were born in Rodrigues). All but one respondent resided in Cité La Cure (also identified by participants as Paul et Virginie, Ti Rodrig and Crown (“cow”) land)). The other respondent resided in the nearby town of Roche Bois.

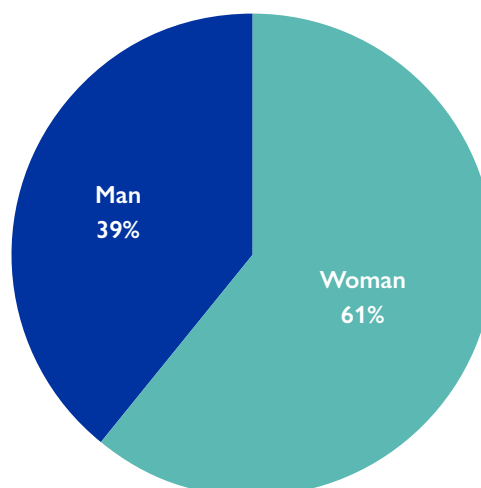
Respondents spanned the adult age range, and the vast majority were of working age. There was less representation from the youngest (18 to 24) and oldest (65 to 74) subgroups, with 8 per cent each of the total surveyed population.

Figure A17. Age distribution



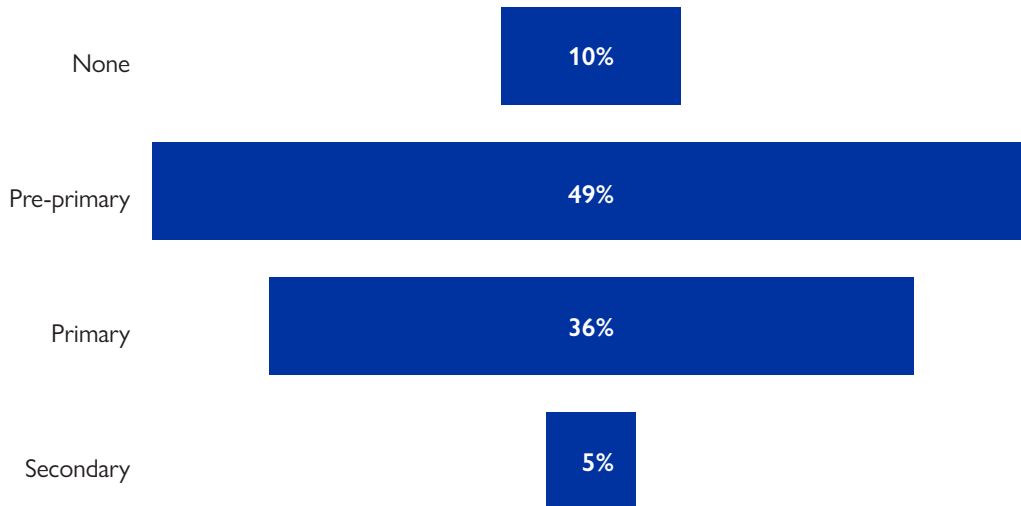
More women (61%) than men (39%) completed the survey. While some research has indicated that slightly more women than men migrate from Rodrigues to mainland Mauritius, this gender distribution may also be explained by other factors, such as availability and interest to participate in this type of study.

Figure A18. Gender distribution



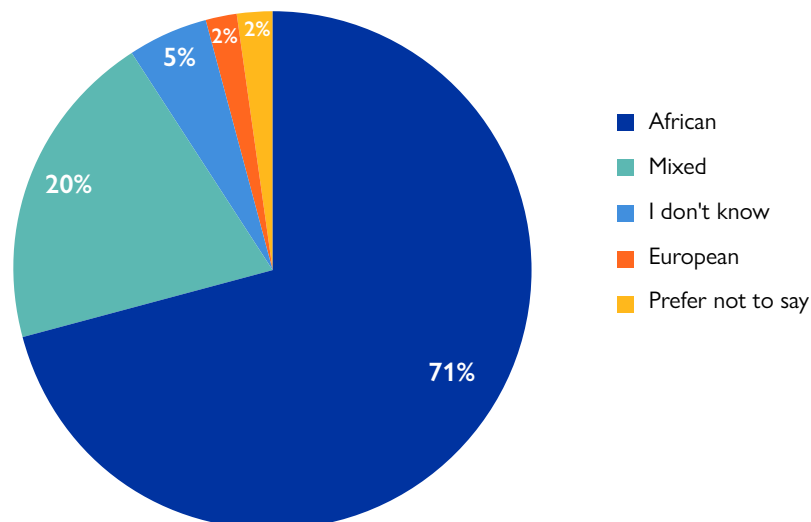
In terms of education, respondents had rather low levels of education. In fact, 10 per cent had no education, and for those that did, the highest proportion had only completed pre-primary level (49%). Only 5 per cent had completed secondary level, which was the highest level among the surveyed group. No respondents had vocational or tertiary level education.

Figure A19. Highest level of education completed



Finally, in terms of ancestry, 90 per cent stated that they were either of African or mixed descent. While not a term used in the survey, it is worth noting that the term “Creole” in Mauritius has come to be predominately associated with descendants of African slave populations; however, it can be and is also used to refer to anyone in Mauritius who is of mixed descent (Couacaud, 2023).

Figure A20. Ancestry



Migration to Mauritius

None of the respondents from the sample were new arrivals to Mauritius. All of them arrived in Mauritius at least five years ago, and 87 per cent had been in Mauritius for more than 10 years. Most of the latter group shared that they had been here for decades (over 25 years) demonstrating long-standing settlement in Mauritius. Duration of residence correlated highly with age; for example, respondents in the youngest age group (18 to 24 years old) had all been in Mauritius for 5 to 10 years, while those over 45 years old had all been in Mauritius for more than 10 years.

Figure A21. Duration of residence in Mauritius

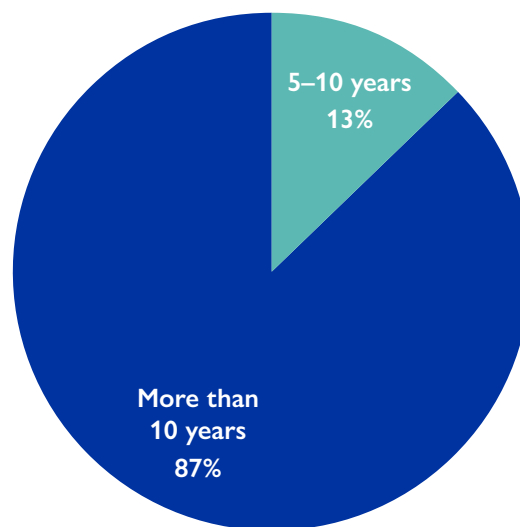
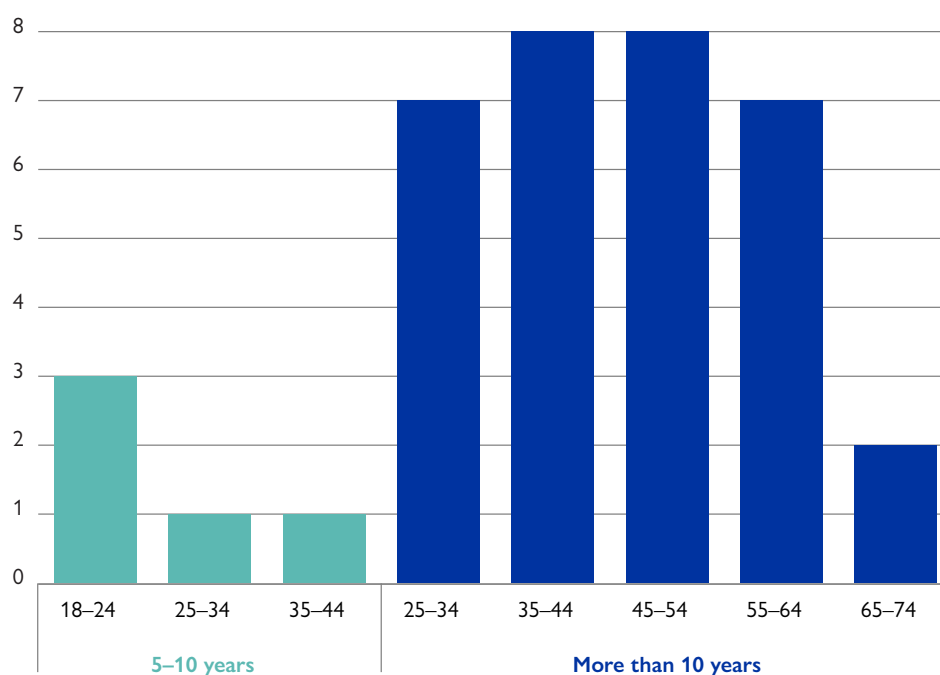


Figure A22. Duration of residence in Mauritius by age group (number of respondents)



Annex 3. List of stakeholders consulted

Mauritius

- Prime Minister's Office including representatives from:
 - Rodrigues, Outer Islands and Territorial Integrity Division
 - Citizen Support Unit
 - Defence and Home Affairs Division
- Ministry of Social Integration and Social Security
- National Empowerment Foundation (Port Louis)
- Ministry of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training
- Ministry of Education
- Human Resource Development Council
- Ministry of Housing and Land Use Planning
- National Housing Development Co. Ltd.
- Ministry of Gender Equality and Family Welfare
- Ministry of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change
- Equal Opportunities Commission
- Solidarité Rodrigues
- Fam Unie Foundation

Rodrigues

- Chief Commissioner's Office
- Deputy Chief Commissioner's Office
- Commission for Education, Vocational Training, Industrial Development and Others
- Commission for Tourism, Employment, Labour and Industrial Relations, Information Technology and Telecommunications
- Commission for Women's Affairs, Family Welfare, Child Development and Consumer Protection
- Commission for Public Infrastructure, Transport, Environment, Community Development and Housing
- Commission for Health, Social Security, Fire Services, Prisons and Reforms Institution, and Probation and Social Rehabilitation
- Invest Rodrigues
- Commission for Agriculture, Fisheries, Food Production, Forestry and Plant, and Animal Quarantine
- SME Mauritius (Rodrigues)
- National Empowerment Foundation (Port Mathurin)
- Centre Carrefour

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