

Monthly Migration Movements  
Afghan Displacement Summary  
**Migration to Indonesia**  
August 2017

**Introduction**

This month, the CASWA 4Mi paper focuses on Afghan refugees and asylum seekers in Indonesia. For years, Indonesia has been a transit country for refugees and asylum seekers due to its geographic proximity to Australia, the opportunity of registering with UNHCR for resettlement and the fact that Indonesia traditionally has been tolerant towards refugees and asylum seekers. Currently more than 14000 refugees and asylum seekers are estimated to reside in Indonesia.<sup>1</sup> The largest proportion is from Afghanistan (57%); other nationalities are Pakistan, Myanmar and Iraq.

Based on three months of 4Mi data collection in Indonesia, the report examines migrants' paths to Indonesia via India and Malaysia, often using smugglers. Migration to Indonesia is driven less by economic reasons than by security reasons, compared to those migrating to neighboring countries and onwards to Western countries. Despite Australia's tightening asylum policy, it is still the preferred destination for resettlement.

The paper is based on 4Mi interviews with 138 Afghans conducted during June-August 2017.

**Afghans in Indonesia: Lives in transit**

7,440 Afghans are registered with UNHCR in Indonesia as of May 2017; this number includes 2,481 asylum seekers.

The country is not a signatory to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. The right to seek asylum has been guaranteed in the Indonesian Constitution<sup>2</sup>; anyone seeking asylum is referred to UNHCR and allowed to stay in the country if they hold certification issued by UNHCR. Those rejected by UNHCR are subject to detention, fines, and/or deportation. There is discrimination against arrivals; in practice Indonesian authorities cannot distinguish between different categories of arrivals and refer to asylum seekers and refugees as 'illegal migrants'.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.unhcr.org/id/en/>

<sup>2</sup> Article 28G (2), which says 'each person has the right to be free from torture or inhuman and degrading treatment and shall be entitled to obtain political asylum from another country'.

<sup>3</sup> [www.suaka.or.id](http://www.suaka.or.id): <https://suaka.or.id/public-awareness/human-rights-framework/>

<sup>4</sup> Amy Nethery, Brynna rafferty-Brown, Savitri Taylor 2013: Exporting Detention: Australia-funded Immigration Detention in Indonesia, *Journal of Refugee Studies*, Volume 26, Issue 1

<sup>5</sup> Amy Nethery, Brynna rafferty-Brown, Savitri Taylor 2013: Exporting Detention: Australia-funded Immigration Detention in Indonesia, *Journal of Refugee Studies*, Volume 26, Issue 1

<sup>6</sup> [www.suaka.or.id](http://www.suaka.or.id): [https://suaka.or.id/category/information-for-](https://suaka.or.id/category/information-for-public/protection-concerns/)

Indonesia's asylum policies have increasingly mirrored those of Australia's asylum policies to secure a good bilateral relationship between the two countries.<sup>4</sup> Funded and actively encouraged by Australia, Indonesia has for example strengthened its detention procedures. It is in Australia's interest to keep migrants away from its borders and establish a buffer zone to deny access by asylum seekers to countries that are signatories to the Refugee Convention.<sup>5</sup>

Refugees and asylum seekers in Indonesia have limited to no livelihood support (housing, healthcare, education and work rights) and conditions in detention centers are inhumane.<sup>6</sup> Indonesia has ratified United Nations' Conventions on the Rights of the Child but inclusive education for child refugees is not practiced in Indonesia's public schools.<sup>7</sup> Many refugees, asylum seekers and migrants rely on the limited allowances provided by UNHCR and/or local NGOs such as Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) for accommodation and food. According to 4Mi monitors, some asylum seekers deliberately surrender themselves to detention centers if they have no social network as they can then receive support from the International Organization for Migration (IOM). In finding durable solutions for refugees in Indonesia, resettlement and repatriation are thus the only two currently available options; protection conditions are currently so poor that local integration does not seem feasible.<sup>8</sup>

There are significant challenges with resettlement: waiting periods are long for refugees in Indonesia, and are growing longer due to limited capacity of UNHCR and few resettlement opportunities. The diversion of UNHCR funds to respond to the Syrian Crisis has extended the delay associated with processing resettlement.<sup>9</sup> Australia, traditionally a major resettlement country for refugees in Indonesia, does not resettle anyone who arrived in Indonesia post July 2014.<sup>10</sup> Also, Donald Trump's recent executive order decreased the total refugee admission for 2017 to 50,000, which is less than

[public/protection-concerns/](https://suaka.or.id/category/information-for-public/protection-concerns/)

<sup>7</sup> [www.suaka.or.id: https://suaka.or.id/2015/08/06/education-for-child-refugee-in-indonesia/](https://suaka.or.id/2015/08/06/education-for-child-refugee-in-indonesia/)

<sup>8</sup> Muzaffar Ali et al., 2016: Asylum seekers and refugees in Indonesia: problems and potentials, *Journal of Cosmopolitan civil societies*, Vol. 8, No. 2. Available at:

<http://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/journals/index.php/mcs/article/view/4883/5490>

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> <https://asiancorrespondent.com/2017/02/trapped-limbo-refugees-rally-indonesia-speedy-un-resettlement/>

half the 110,000 proposed by the Obama administration.<sup>11</sup> Considering that the priority for Trump's administration is the resettlement of Christians and the fact that the majority of refugees in Indonesia are Muslims, the number of refugees resettled by the US from Indonesia can be expected to decrease.

### Human smuggling: The journey to the East

Indonesian visas (student and/or business) are rarely issued to Afghan nationals. Thus, most Afghans arrive in Indonesia through smuggling networks, and the journey involves significant risks. A total of 72% of 4Mi interviewees mentioned that they in one way or the other used a smuggler to travel to Indonesia for example to get documents (38%), safe transit across a border (31%) and accommodation along the journey (18%). The use of smugglers also limits migrants' decision making about how to travel; the journey seems to be largely determined by the smuggler and the resources of the migrant. Airplane (42%), Car (19%) and boat (15%) are the main means of transportation used along the journey to Indonesia.

Most (92%) of the 4Mi interviewees started their journey from Afghanistan. A total of 8% travelled from Iran and Pakistan. The majority flew to India (often with a legal visa) and continued the journey by illegal means via air to Malaysia (see Map 1). More than 80% of the interviewees stopped in New Delhi (India), Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia) and Java Barat (Indonesia) in order to organize the onwards journey with assistance from smugglers. There is another route through the Gulf countries, Qatar (2 cases) and UAE (2 cases) and from here interviewees flew to Malaysia. From Malaysia, people continue the journey with fishing boats to North Sumatra by crossing the strait of Malacca (located between the Malay Peninsula and the Indonesian island of Sumatra). Others (9 cases) traveled to Singapore to cross the border. With assistance from smugglers and if one can afford the journey, people fly directly from India to Indonesia. 7% of migrants waited along the route for money transfer from families/friends.

Anecdotal information reveals that smugglers pay bribes to Malaysian and Indonesian authorities to ensure passengers safe passage through airports and other checkpoints. Once people make it to Jakarta they register with UNHCR for asylum and then resettlement. The ID card provided by UNHCR indicating that they have applied for asylum limits risks of arrestment and detention.

Most interviewees included in the 4Mi dataset are registered refugees (37%) or have a pending asylum application (60%) with UNHCR. In 24 cases, people had already applied for asylum in other countries (Iran, India, Malaysia and Pakistan) prior to arrival to Indonesia, but, according to the 4Mi monitors, moved to Indonesia as their case was rejected.

25% of the interviewees report that they relied mainly on smugglers for information about routes, destinations and costs prior to the journey. The first contact with smugglers is made by the migrant (40%) or his/her family and friends (57%), which is consistent with 4Mi information gathered in Afghanistan. Along the journey, migrants are handed over to new smugglers responsible for a certain part of the trip. Migrants are generally kept within the smuggling network, and are handed over directly from previous to new smugglers (85%). The rest have to find new smugglers by themselves when they get to new places.

Social media, especially Facebook and Viber, are other sources of information used prior to the journey. Once migrants reach Indonesia, social media represents the main channel of communication between migrants and the family left behind. 4Mi monitors argue that use of social media among migrants in Indonesia may have a general impact on migration from Afghanistan to Indonesia. Migrants for example upload compelling photos of the nature in Indonesia not reflecting the actual situation and every day for migrants and thus leave those in Afghanistan with a partial picture of the realities for asylum seekers and refugees in Indonesia. The percent of those who are talking to UN, NGOs or volunteers for information on migration, destination countries, etc. increase from zero to 17% once people reach Indonesia. This most likely is because people reach out once they arrive to understand opportunities for support and the process for resettlement.

### Protection concerns on route

The international part of the journey towards Indonesia involves risks, but these risks appear to be less significant than those reported in the border cities in Afghanistan (Nimruz and Nangahar) for people crossing to Iran and Pakistan by land (for more information read previous 4Mi reports published by DRC, Central Asia South West Asia).

The 138 interviewees reported to have witnessed or experienced a total of 47 protection violations in total in Indonesia, India and Malaysia. In all types of incidents reported, smugglers are the main perpetrators, followed by immigration officials/border guards and groups of thugs/criminal gangs.

Most protection issues seem to occur in Malaysia, with particular instances of migrants being held against their will (5 cases) and physical abuse (5 cases).

2 cases of rape were reported when migrants passed through India, however the victims refused to give more details about the incidents. Robbery in India is another incident which was reported by 5 interviewees.

In Indonesia, 8 cases of robbery and 7 cases of bribery were reported among interviewees who in average have stayed in the country for more than a year. In general, the robberies seem to be carried out by groups of thugs/criminal gangs and

<sup>11</sup> [http://www.thejakartapost.com/academia/2017/02/02/doubt-over-](http://www.thejakartapost.com/academia/2017/02/02/doubt-over-refugees-living-in-indonesia.html)

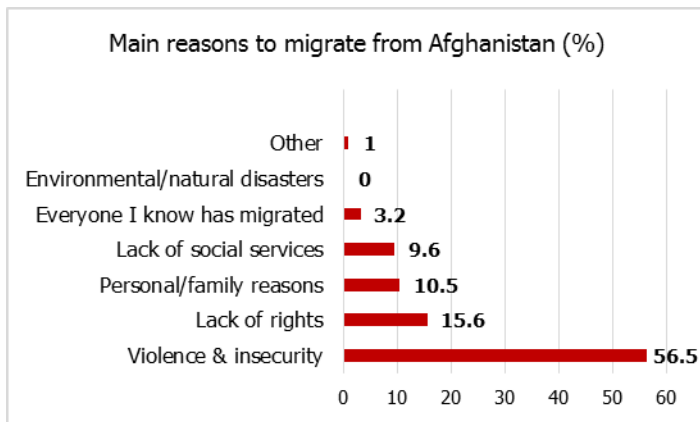
[refugees-living-in-indonesia.html](http://www.thejakartapost.com/academia/2017/02/02/doubt-over-refugees-living-in-indonesia.html)

result in people losing their money and personal belongings.

**Why migrate? Push & Pull factors**

In comparison to those migrating from Afghanistan to neighboring countries and potentially onwards to Western countries, Afghan migrants interviewed in Indonesia on average seemed to have higher levels of education<sup>12</sup>. The majority of the interviewees are adult men between 20-32 years old with either primary, secondary or high school level (78%). 25% were students once they left Afghanistan. They are migrating from both rural and urban areas.

In contrast to those who are migrating from Afghanistan to neighboring countries and potentially onwards to western countries, economic reasons are not a major push factor for migrating to Indonesia; Only 3.6% reported that economic factors drove their decision.<sup>13</sup> The majority of the 4Mi interviewees in Indonesia are Hazaras and Shia Muslims. Almost half of the interviewees are originating from Ghazni province (46%) at the southeastern part of the country. The province consist mostly of Hazara and Pashtuns and is a province with a precarious security situation. Other respondents are mainly coming from Maidan Wardak (13.8%), Bamyán (7.2%), Daykundi (6.5%), and Kabul (6.5%). The precarious security situation in Ghazni province and the historic discrimination of Hazaras in Afghanistan<sup>14</sup> could indicate reasons why most 4Mi interviewees in Indonesia report that they migrated from Afghanistan due to insecurity in the country (56.5%) followed by lack of rights (15.6%). Among those who reported to be migrating due to insecurity, the presence and attacks by terrorist groups (44.7%) was the main factor. Ethnic discrimination/persecution (35.6%) is a dominant factor among those who are migrating due to lack of rights in Afghanistan.



**Graph 1. Main reasons to migrate from Afghanistan**

<sup>12</sup> Based on a comparison between the dataset from Indonesia and Afghanistan. The two datasets are different in size.

<sup>13</sup> There is a potential risk that data is biased as interviewees have pending asylum applications.

Despite Australia’s tightening asylum policy, the preferred destination among 4Mi interviewees is surprisingly still Australia, reported by 73%. According to discussions with monitors, the reason for the pull factor to Australia is partly because there is a well-established Hazara diaspora in the country, which has a well-established network with those in exile as well as those who has remained in Afghanistan. Canada (14.5%) is the second major preferred destination country while few respondents choose the US. Monitors explain that this is because only few people have family and friends in the country. In choosing the preferred destination country, freedom from oppression or a threat to life at home (37%), generally better living standards (28%) and personal freedom (24%) are the main factors.

**Do you want more information about 4Mi?**

The Mixed Migration Monitoring Initiative (4Mi) in Central Asia and South West Asia (CASWA) region aims at gathering data on displaced Afghans on the move. The initiative is part of DRC’s global 4Mi data collection project. For more information about this initiative please visit:

<http://4mi.regionalmms.org/4mi.html>

As part of 4Mi, DRC CASWA publishes monthly series of trend analyses about movement within Afghanistan and towards the East and the West. Analysis is based on interviews collected by 4Mi monitors with the purpose to increase knowledge about drivers of movement and protection risks faced by Afghans.

The 4Mi data published monthly only represents a small section of those on the move in Afghanistan. Any generalizations about the total population of Afghan migrants on the move must be made with an understanding of the sampling methodology of 4Mi.

<sup>14</sup> <https://unama.unmissions.org/unama-human-rights-report-mass-killings-mirza-olang>

**Map 1: Migration routes to Indonesia**

