

The decision to migrate among Afghans: access to information and key influencers

Since January 2020, MMC Asia has been interviewing Afghan returnees to better understand their experiences of outward migration, return and reintegration. This snapshot explores factors influencing migration decision-making among Afghans, including the information available to them pre-migration, as well as trusted sources of information. This snapshot aims to contribute towards building a solid evidence base to inform targeted responses on the ground, as well as advocacy efforts related to the protection risks Afghan migrants and refugees face when migrating.

Recommendations

- Information campaigns should target the wider community and actively include diaspora communities as key influencers of risk awareness and protection;
- As well as providing a realistic overview of potential risks en route and how to mitigate them, information campaigns should also include content on job opportunities, living conditions and asylum procedures in destination countries.

Conditions for returnees and the COVID-19 pandemic

The information presented in this snapshot was collected in Afghanistan before COVID-19 was declared a pandemic. In April 2020, MMC Asia adapted its 4Mi returnee survey to assess the impact of COVID-19 on Afghan returnees. According to the findings, returnees face increased difficulties and risks on their return journeys as well as barriers to access healthcare services in Afghanistan. In addition, their access to work is limited in their home provinces, causing increased psychological distress and reduced access to basic goods. Needs are high among these returnees and are currently not being met. See the [4Mi snapshot](#) on the impact of COVID-19 on Afghan Returnees.

Profiles

Information in this snapshot was collected from 1 January to 18 March 2020 in Kabul, Herat, Kunduz, Nangarhar, Kandahar, Balkh, and Nimruz provinces, as well as Zaranj, Turkham, and Islam Qala border checkpoints. 827 surveys were collected. The majority (80%) of respondents were men. The high proportion of male respondents is likely indicative of the high proportion of male returnees, particularly among those returning from Iran.¹

Those surveyed returned from Iran (65%), Turkey (18%), Pakistan (9%) as well as European countries (8%). Respondents were predominantly under 30 (67%), and were evenly split between married (49%) and single (49%), with 66% stating they had high school or primary-level education or below. Respondents were primarily Hazara (31%), Pashtun (25%), and Tajik (21%). Among those surveyed, economic reasons, as well as violence and insecurity, were cited as primary drivers of outward migration (621 and 325 responses, respectively).

Friends and family had the biggest influence on the decision to migrate

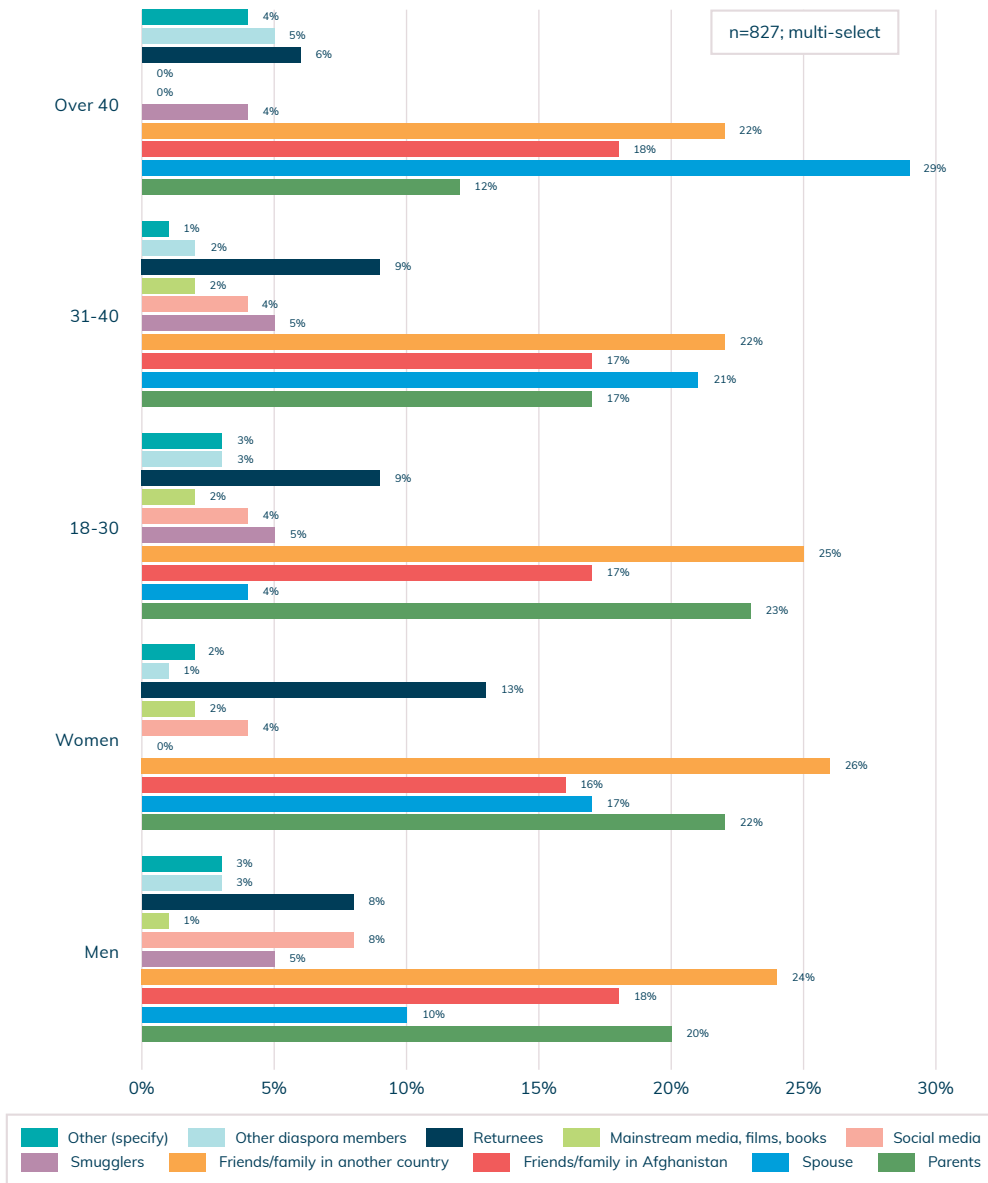
A majority of the 827 respondents reported that friends and family, both abroad (24%), and in Afghanistan (17%), as well as their parents (20%), had the biggest influence on the decision to leave Afghanistan. The levels of influence of parents and spouses differed among age groups. Parents were more influential among younger respondents aged 18-30² and single respondents, with spouses becoming more influential with age. Among age groups, those between 18-30 years old were more likely to have been influenced by social media (11%), compared to other age groups (3%). When comparing influences

1 According to the [UNHCR's Border Monitoring Update 26 April – 2 May](#), the female-male ratio of returnees from Iran was estimated at 1:5

2 It should be noted that only 30% of those in the 18-30 age group were married, while among those above 30 years old, 87% were married

for men and women, men were more likely to be influenced by social media (8%) and smugglers (5%), than women. In addition, spouses had a greater influence on women's decision to migrate (17%), compared with men (10%). Women (13%) were also more likely than men (8%) to be influenced by returning migrants, see Figure 1.

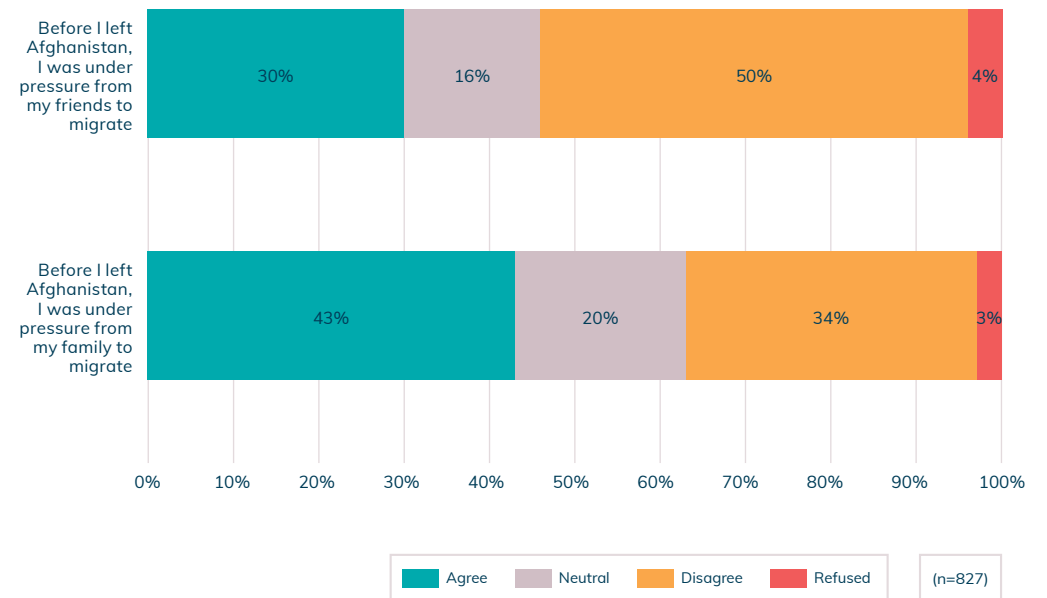
Figure 1. Can you choose the 3 biggest influences on your decision to leave?



Many respondents felt pressure from their families to migrate

In total, 43% of respondents reported feeling under pressure from family to migrate, with 30% reporting feeling pressure from friends, see Figure 2. Women (63%) were more likely than men (40%) to feel pressure from their families, as well as those over 40 (38%) compared with 18-30 years old (13%).

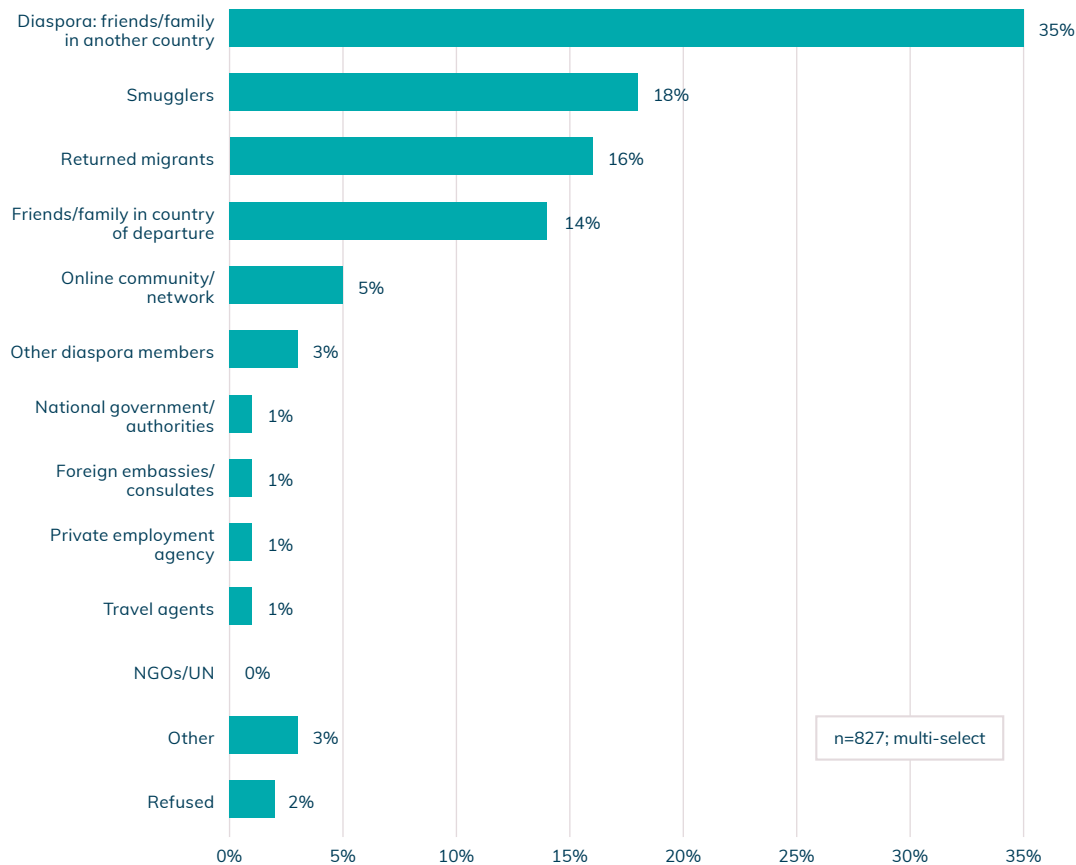
Figure 2. To what extent do you agree with the following statements?



Before departure, friends and family abroad were the main sources of information; they were also the most trusted

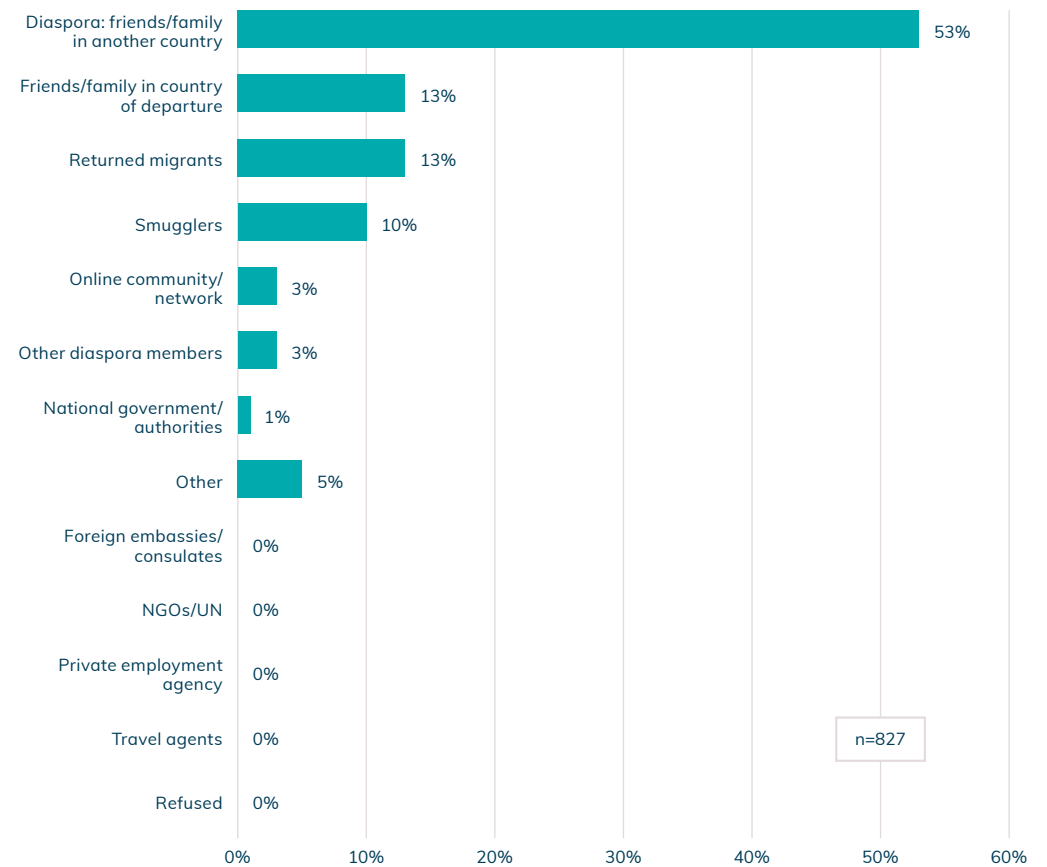
68% of respondents cited friends and family in other countries as the main source of pre-migration information (see Figure 3). This included information about migration routes, destinations, costs of migration, risks, asylum opportunities, etc. Smugglers were selected as another main source (36%), followed by returned migrants (32%) and family and friends in Afghanistan (27%). In terms of gender and age groups, information sources were similar, except for smugglers, with fewer female respondents (only 3%) citing them as key information sources, compared with 19% for males.

Figure 3. Pre-migration sources of information about routes, destinations, risks, costs etc



When asked who was the most trusted source of information regarding migration, around half of respondents cited friends and family in other countries (53%). To a lesser extent, friends and family in Afghanistan (13%) and returned migrants (12%) were also cited as other trusted sources. While smugglers were referenced as one of the main pre-migration sources of information, only 10% of respondents reported them as a trusted source of information (see Figure 4). These findings confirm that the diaspora, especially family members and friends, are the most-used and most-trusted sources of information for prospective migrants.

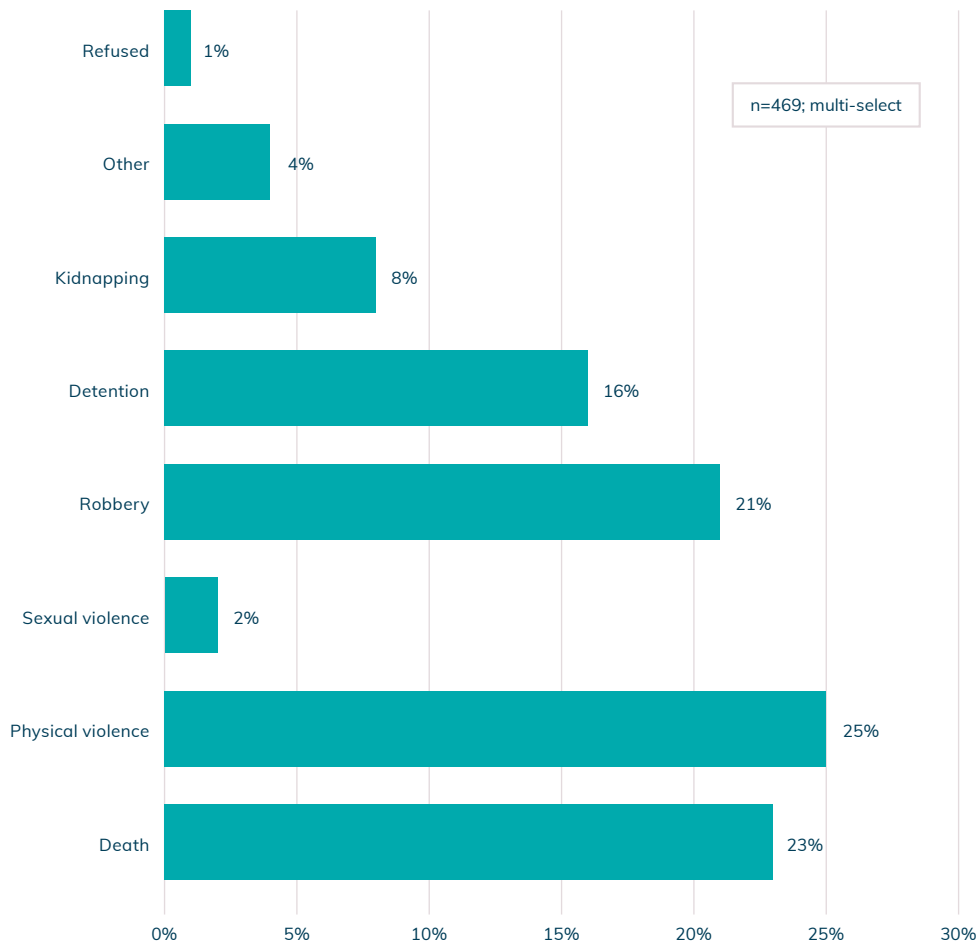
Figure 4. Most trusted sources of information



Protection risks remain particularly high in border areas

The main protection risks to migrants and refugees en route reported by respondents were physical assault (25%), death (23%) and robbery (21%), see Figure 5. Almost 75% of respondents reported Afghanistan-Pakistan, Iran-Pakistan and Iran-Turkey borders as the most dangerous locations for Afghan migrants and refugees en route. Perpetrators were perceived mostly to be criminal gangs (28%), border guards and officials (22%), armed groups/militia (20%) and smugglers (20%).

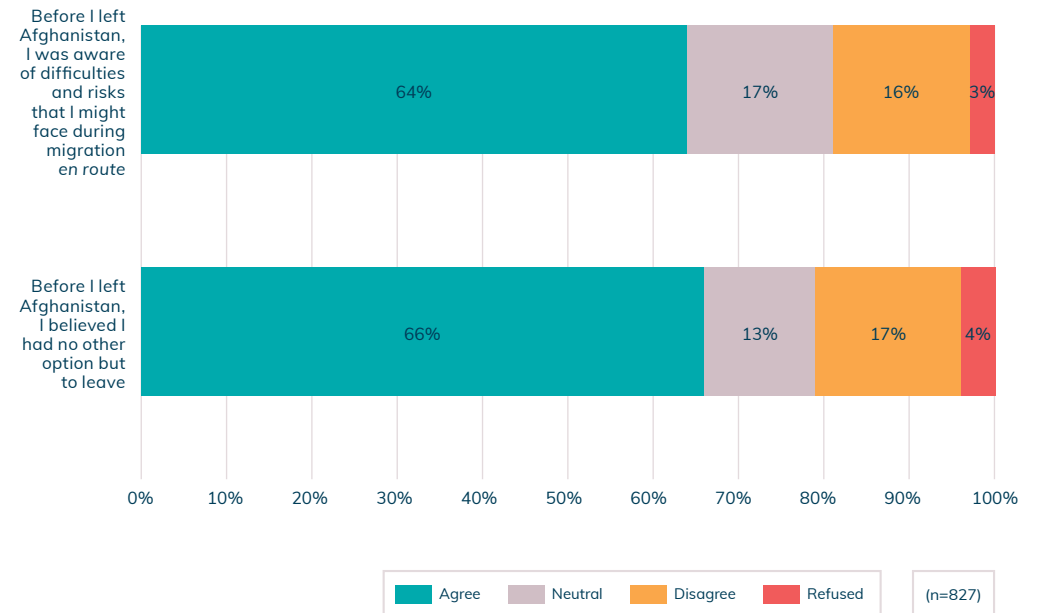
Figure 5. What were the main risks to you in terms of violence or other crimes on your migration journey?



Almost two thirds of respondents were aware of potential protection risks

64% of respondents agreed that prior to migration, they were aware of the potential difficulties and risks that could be faced en route, however, the majority (66%) also mentioned that they felt they had no other option but to migrate (see Figure 6). This indicates that while there is knowledge among prospective migrants about potential protection risks, structural factors driving migration, such as economic insecurity and violence and conflict, continue to outweigh the risks associated with migration.

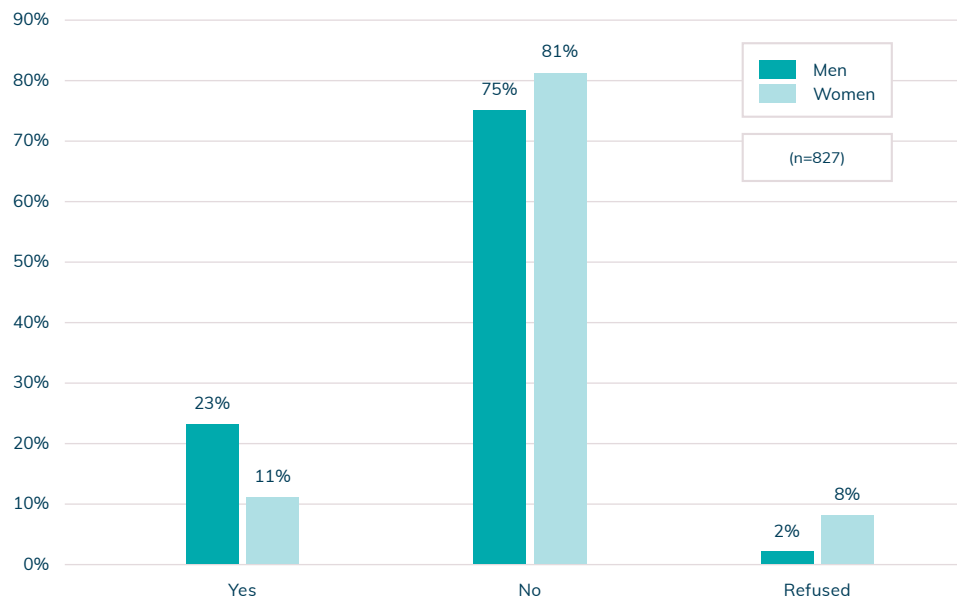
Figure 6. To what extent do you agree with the following statements?



Fewer than one quarter had come across information campaigns, however the minority who did reported slightly higher risk awareness

The majority of people surveyed had not come into contact with information campaigns about the potential protection risks associated with irregular migration, with women less likely than men to have come across a campaign (see Figure 7). Of the less than one-quarter of respondents who had been reached by information campaigns, the majority (65%) reported having come into contact with only one campaign before they migrated, with men more likely than women to have come across a campaign.

Figure 7. Before you left Afghanistan, did you come across any information campaigns about the dangers of migrating without documentation?

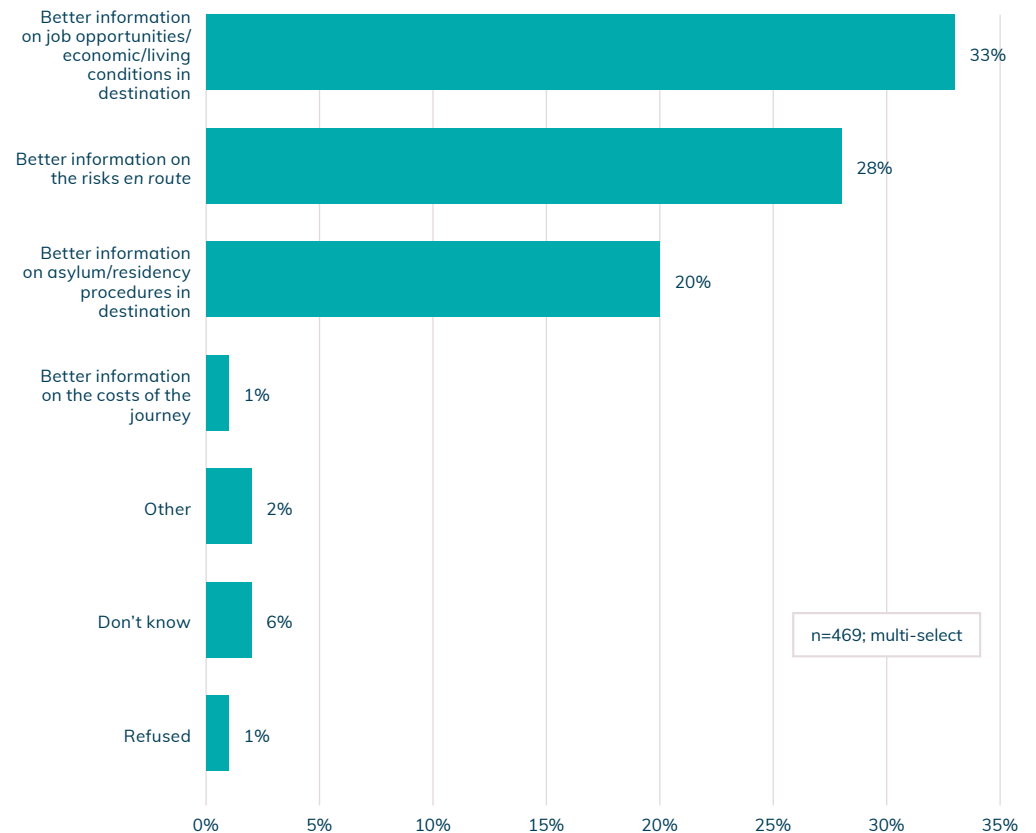


Those who reported coming across an information campaign prior to their journey cited greater awareness about difficulties and risks on route (80%) compared with those who had not been reached by a campaign (65%). This indicates that information campaigns may have had some impact in raising awareness of protections risks among prospective migrants, although this is likely greatly dependent on the quality and type of campaign run.

More information on protection risks, as well as economic opportunities and living conditions in destination countries is needed pre-migration

Despite almost two thirds of respondents reporting awareness of potential risks faced en route (see Figure 6), better information on the potential risks faced en route was cited as the second highest information need among prospective migrants (28%, see Figure 8). In order to be better prepare for migration, respondents also reported a greater need for information about job opportunities and living conditions in destination countries (33%) as well as better information on asylum and residency processes in destination (20%).

Figure 8. What information would you have liked to have had about your journey, to be better prepared for it?



4Mi

The [Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism Initiative](https://www.mixedmigration.org/4mi) (4Mi) in Asia region gathers data on regional mixed migration flows. Data is currently collected in Afghanistan on returnees as well as with Afghans on the move toward the East and West. 4Mi in Asia also includes data collection of the onward movements of Rohingya and other migrant and refugee groups in South East Asia. The purpose of this research is to increase knowledge about drivers of movement and protection risks faced by migrants and refugees on the move. For more information, go to www.mixedmigration.org/4mi

