



Mixed
Migration
Centre

A Transit Country No More:

Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Indonesia

MMC Research Report, May 2021



Front cover photo credit:

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Refugees in Jakarta wait to relocate by UNHCR.

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About MMC

The Mixed Migration Centre (MMC) is a global network consisting of six regional hubs (Asia, East Africa & Yemen, Europe, North Africa, West Africa and Latin America & Caribbean) and a central unit in Geneva. The MMC is a leading source of independent and high-quality data, research, analysis and expertise on mixed migration. The MMC aims to increase understanding of mixed migration, to positively impact global and regional migration policies, to inform evidence-based protection responses for people on the move and to stimulate forward thinking in public and policy debates on mixed migration. The MMC's overarching focus is on human rights and protection for all people on the move.

The MMC is part of, and governed by, the Danish Refugee Council (DRC). While its institutional link to DRC ensures MMC's work is grounded in operational reality, it acts as an independent source of data, research, analysis and policy development on mixed migration for policy makers, practitioners, journalists, and the broader humanitarian sector. The position of the MMC does not necessarily reflect the position of DRC.

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Executive Summary

Indonesia was once a transit country for many refugees and asylum seekers en route to safety and a new life in third countries. Among those who arrived, most hoped to travel onwards irregularly by boat to Australia. However, since 2013, when Australian policies aimed at curbing irregular movements came into effect, many refugees and asylum seekers have found themselves immobilized and in situations of indefinite transit in Indonesia. Opportunities for resettlement to third countries are now virtually non-existent. Although some refugees and asylum seekers are trying to make the most of being in Indonesia, many feel trapped in uncertainty and struggle to move forward with their lives.

Indonesia currently hosts more than 13,000 refugees and asylum seekers from some 40 countries. In response to the closure of irregular routes from Indonesia to Australia, arrivals since 2013 have significantly dropped, with the exception of Rohingya who continue to arrive by boat to the Sumatran province of Aceh. Since 2013, the Indonesian government has reaffirmed its commitment to providing asylum: it clarified the status of refugees through a 2016 presidential decree, and has shifted away from the widespread use of immigration detention. However, like the refugee and asylum seeker populations it hosts, the Indonesian government assumes that asylum in Indonesia is temporary and that refugees will eventually be able to move on to their final destination, despite the long periods many have now spent in Indonesia. As a result, the Indonesian government is reluctant to assume more responsibility for a population whose needs it believes should be met by the United Nations and wealthier nations in the region and beyond.

The UN's refugee agency, UNHCR, and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), as well as non-governmental organizations (NGOs) — including Indonesian civil society and refugee-run initiatives — offer a variety of support to refugees and asylum seekers. However, great differences exist between the type of assistance offered and donor funding provided — from IOM-supported shelter accommodation and assistance, to UNHCR's monthly stipends and additional crisis payments by NGOs — effectively creating distinct cohorts within the refugee and asylum seeker population. The majority of refugees and asylum seekers are supported by IOM, living in community shelters. In contrast, roughly 6,000 refugees and asylum seekers in and around Jakarta, West Java and other locations live independently within the community, with only the most vulnerable accessing financial support from UNHCR. Increasingly limited funding alongside escalating needs have led to systemic and widespread destitution among refugees and asylum seekers in Indonesia as thousands scrape by on shrinking savings, help from friends and family, and whatever informal work they can find.

Although immigration detention is now rarely used, refugees and asylum seekers still fear being detained and feel constrained by rules imposed by local immigration officials. However, despite the many challenges facing refugees and asylum seekers, Indonesia is at least a place of relative safety where they can access services. Access to education and healthcare has improved in recent years, although barriers — including costs and language — remain. The overwhelming challenge is the lack of work rights, without which refugees and asylum seekers cannot access sustainable livelihoods and will remain dependent on donor assistance. Those who do work do so irregularly, at risk of arrest, and with greater exposure to exploitation.

The COVID-19 pandemic has acted as a risk and threat multiplier for those already in vulnerable situations, including refugees and asylum seekers in Indonesia. Particularly vulnerable are the many who rely on diaspora for support, whose financial security has decreased during the global economic downturn. While UNHCR was able to expand cash assistance to help refugees and asylum seekers in 2020 and is working on continuing this support, it has not yet secured funding required for the whole of 2021.

The prospect of resettlement to third countries is remote, although it is the solution most refugees in Indonesia hope for. In 2020, departures for resettlement from Indonesia to third countries fell to the lowest level since 2012 and the reality is that very few will leave through UNHCR-assisted resettlement — only the most vulnerable among a highly vulnerable group.

Solutions fall into two categories: those that would improve the lives of refugees and asylum seekers while they are in Indonesia, and those that would facilitate their eventual departure, whether through assisted voluntary return to their country of origin or through what UNHCR calls “complementary pathways”. The Indonesian government can and has already taken steps with regard to the former by expanding access to services, but more needs to be done to support livelihoods. Work and training opportunities would assist in the short term and also support refugees to pursue complementary pathways such as educational and labour mobility, which are not among the traditional “durable solutions” for refugees but will become increasingly important in years to come.

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Acronyms

4Mi	Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism Initiative
ASEAN	Association of South East Asian Nations
AVR	Assisted voluntary return
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
CWS	Church World Services
IDR	Indonesian ringgit
IOM	International Organization for Migration
JRS	Jesuit Refugee Services
MMC	Mixed Migration Centre
RM	Malaysian ringgit
UNHCR	UN Refugee Agency

1. Key findings

Profiles, drivers and routes

- Refugees and asylum seekers are involuntarily immobile in Indonesia due to shifting regional dynamics, including Australian offshore processing policies aimed at blocking irregular sea routes from Indonesia to Australia.

- Only Rohingya refugees intending to reach Malaysia are still moving irregularly to and from Indonesia, largely by boat.

- Resettlement is an unlikely solution for most refugees in Indonesia. Globally, resettlement numbers are down, and Australia no longer resettles refugees who registered with UNHCR in Indonesia after July 2014.

- Although new arrivals have diminished and the number of refugees and asylum seekers in Indonesia has stabilized at 13,000 to 14,000 since 2015, few are willing or able to go back to their country of origin. More than half are from Afghanistan.

- Violence, insecurity and a lack of rights are the most common drivers that prompted people to flee. In addition to safety, refugees and asylum seekers also aspire for a better standard of life and services at their final destination.

- Almost no refugees or asylum seekers want to stay in Indonesia. Many were not aware of the conditions in Indonesia before arriving and hoped to pass through quickly. Nonetheless, most still feel safer in Indonesia than in the places they fled.

Indonesia's legal and policy frameworks

- Southeast Asia offers weak protection for refugees and asylum seekers, although Indonesia recognizes the right to asylum and the principle of non-refoulement.

- Like the refugee and asylum seeker populations it hosts, the Indonesian government views asylum as temporary, with the assumption that all will eventually move on to their final destination. As a result, the government expects international organizations and wealthier countries to share the burden of supporting and finding solutions for refugees.

- Australia has been an influential player, steering the direction of Indonesian policy and management of refugees and asylum seekers, primarily through its funding. For example, Australian funding prompted Indonesia to begin using immigration detention as a migration management strategy, and when that funding ceased, refugees and asylum seekers were released to community shelters. Capacity building was also provided by International Organizations and civil society organizations in order to facilitate alternatives to detention and process asylum claims.

- A presidential decree issued in 2016 clarified the status of refugees and asylum seekers under Indonesian law, but it does not propose self-reliance or integration as a potential solution nor guarantee more rights to refugees. The decree is inconsistently implemented throughout Indonesia and local governments, which are responsible for managing refugees and asylum seekers in their area, have no allocated budget to do so.

Actors supporting refugees

- A wide range of organizations support refugees and asylum seekers in Indonesia, including UNHCR, IOM, international NGOs, and Indonesian civil society. Refugee-run initiatives are numerous and are concentrated in Jakarta and West Java.

- IOM supports more than half of the refugees and asylum seekers in Indonesia through an Australian-funded program that provides housing, healthcare and a monthly allowance, but only to those who were previously in immigration detention. UNHCR and other organizations provide support to refugees living independently in the community.

- During the COVID-19 pandemic, UNHCR has been able to expand significantly its cash assistance and reached all refugees who were not under any institution's care during 2020.

Refugee lives

- Immigration supervision of refugees and asylum seekers varies at the local level, but in general those living in IOM-run shelters are subject to more scrutiny and tighter restrictions by Indonesian authorities than those living independently in the community as this was a condition of release from immigration detention and admission into the programme.

- Immigration authorities sporadically conduct raids on or detain refugees and asylum seekers for infractions of government laws, local regulations and accommodation centre rules. The inconsistent application of immigration laws creates uncertainty and stress among refugees and asylum seekers and limits freedoms.

- Although some refugees and asylum seekers have been able to make friends, learn Bahasa Indonesia and work informally, government officials discourage interaction with local communities, and some tensions exist. Most refugees are reluctant to integrate into the surrounding community as they do not want to stay in Indonesia and barriers such as language and the lack of work rights exist.

- The Indonesian government issued a circular to promote access to education for refugee children in 2019 but enrolment in local schools is not possible in all areas. Some parents cannot cover costs of uniforms and books; others are also reluctant to enrol their children in Indonesian schools. Refugee-run learning centres in Jakarta and West Java provide an alternative.

- Access to healthcare is possible and financial support is provided by IOM to their cohort, and by UNHCR to refugees living independently in the community. Yet many — especially women — still struggle to access healthcare, citing cost and language barriers as the main hurdles. Generally, access to primary healthcare is easier than secondary or tertiary care. Advocacy is ongoing to ensure refugees and asylum seekers will be given COVID-19 vaccines.

- Involuntary immobility takes a heavy toll on the mental health of refugees and asylum seekers. Many do not seek support although IOM and UNHCR both offer counselling. COVID-19 appears to have exacerbated pre-existing stresses. The number of suicides among refugees and asylum seekers in Indonesia doubled from two in 2019 to four in 2020 and is of growing concern. During the first three months of 2021, there have already been two suicides.

- Domestic violence and sexual violence are under-reported among refugees and asylum seekers in Indonesia, but incidents appear to have increased during the pandemic.

- Even those who receive a monthly allowance from IOM, UNHCR or another organization struggle to get by, which means they must rely on savings, family and friends or informal work to cover their needs. Refugees and asylum seekers are at risk of exploitation, however, if they work informally. Vocational training is available and can support refugees to become self-reliant, more so if they can legally work.

- The coronavirus pandemic resulted in a loss of income for refugees and asylum seekers relying on family and friends for support. Cash assistance from UNHCR to refugees living independently in the community provided temporary relief but will continue in 2021 if funding becomes available.

Future aspirations and potential solutions

- Refugees will continue to stay in Indonesia and hope for resettlement, although the prospects are dim. Assisted voluntary return is unappealing due to the conditions in their country of origin and further irregular movement to intended destinations is mainly no longer possible.

- The Indonesian government can improve conditions for refugees and asylum seekers by implementing fully the 2016 presidential decree and expanding work and livelihood opportunities. Such changes would support refugees to live more independently and reduce dependence on donor assistance, which currently supports thousands of refugees and asylum seekers. Such changes are unlikely to be a pull factor or induce refugees to stay in Indonesia.

- Complementary pathways, including those related to education and labour mobility, are a potential option for refugees and asylum seekers in Indonesia and elsewhere, as envisioned by the Global Compact on Refugees. Promoting more livelihood opportunities in Indonesia would also support the viability of labour mobility options to other countries than Indonesia in the future.

2. Introduction

Involuntarily immobile

The vast majority of refugees and asylum seekers¹ in Indonesia intended to pass through quickly en route to a final destination, most commonly Australia. Instead, due to shifting immigration policies in Australia, they have found themselves stuck for years, with limited support and little desire or opportunity to integrate. Unable to go home, they wait and hope for resettlement. As of March 2021, there were approximately 13,700 refugees and asylum seekers in Indonesia. While the absolute number is very small in comparison to the Indonesian population and other countries in the region, the challenges they face reveal the regional impacts of hardline border management, lack of opportunities in situ, as well as the need for more permanent solutions when return or resettlement are not possible. The challenges faced by this group also illuminate the devastating impacts of uncertainty and indefinite transit on the daily lives and wellbeing of people on the move.

This report examines two inter-related questions:

- What is the impact of involuntary immobility on refugees and asylum seekers in Indonesia?
- What changes in programming and policy would better support refugees and asylum seekers in Indonesia?

To answer these questions, the research team used a mixed methods approach that combined the Mixed Migration Centre's (MMC) Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism Initiative (4Mi) survey data as well as an online survey designed specifically for this study. This was complemented by qualitative methods, primarily key informant interviews with refugees, asylum seekers and other stakeholders. The research aimed to understand the needs expressed by refugees and asylum seekers, and their ability to access services and support, whether provided by the Indonesian government, UNHCR, IOM or other actors.

More than half of refugees and asylum seekers in Indonesia receive housing and support from IOM whereas the rest live independently in Jakarta and nearby in West Java, as well as in other locations in Indonesia, some of whom are receiving support from UNHCR. Where relevant, this report draws out differences in the experiences of these two groups, in order to illustrate the impact of funding and support.

The report presents findings in five sections:

- The drivers and routes that prompted refugees and asylum seekers to come to Indonesia;
- The legal and policy frameworks, within Indonesia and the broader region, that guide responses;
- The support provided by UNHCR, IOM and other organizations;
- Refugees' and asylum seekers' lives in Indonesia; and
- Future aspirations and potential solutions.

¹ In the remainder of this report, "refugees" is used to refer to both refugees and people seeking asylum whose refugee status is yet to be determined.

3. Methodology

This study used a mixed methods approach to understand the experiences of refugees and asylum seekers in Indonesia and identify possible solutions to their situation of involuntary immobility.

The findings draw upon data previously collected by MMC through its 4Mi core migrant survey since 2018, as well as two other data sets that were gathered by MMC through a modified survey during the COVID-19 pandemic (called Covid I and Covid II in this report). Through 4Mi, MMC only surveys Afghans in Jakarta and West Java who arrived in Indonesia up to two years before being interviewed. From the survey, however, it is not possible to identify which respondents are living independently in the community and which stay in IOM-supported community shelters. To understand the situation of refugees from other countries, those who live outside Jakarta and West Java, those under IOM care, and those who have been in Indonesia for longer; and the impact of IOM, UNHCR or other support, an additional online survey was devised and conducted by the research team specifically for this report. Roughly one-fifth of respondents to the online survey — a total of 61 — were from refugees or asylum seekers living in IOM-run community shelters.

Data from each of these surveys is used throughout this report to illuminate different aspects of refugee and asylum seeker experiences in Indonesia. Across all four surveys, more than 2,000 responses were recorded. None of the surveys was representative. More detailed information about each of the survey tools is available in the annex.

Two Indonesia-based researchers also conducted one-on-one interviews with 14 refugees and asylum seekers in Jakarta and West Java, Medan in North Sumatra and Makassar in South Sulawesi. Medan and Makassar were chosen as they host the largest numbers of refugees and asylum seekers outside Jakarta and West Java. The interviewees were eight men and six women, between the ages of 16 and 68, from seven different countries (Ethiopia, Sudan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Myanmar, Iraq and Iran). Six are refugees living independently in the community; eight are under IOM care. In addition, the research team remotely interviewed civil society actors (Indonesian and organizations founded by refugees), staff from international organizations (primarily IOM and UNHCR), government officials, and experts on refugee policy in Indonesia. In total, including interviews with refugees and asylum seekers, more than 50 interviews were conducted.

Refugee and asylum seeker respondents to the surveys and those who gave individual interviews provided informed consent, were assured of anonymity and confidentiality, and participated on a voluntary basis. Those who gave individual interviews were provided with a transportation or phone credit allowance as appropriate.

The findings are also based on a review of secondary sources — including academic research, policy documents, grey literature and media reporting — in both Bahasa Indonesia and English. This review informed the stakeholder consultations, research questions and survey tool.

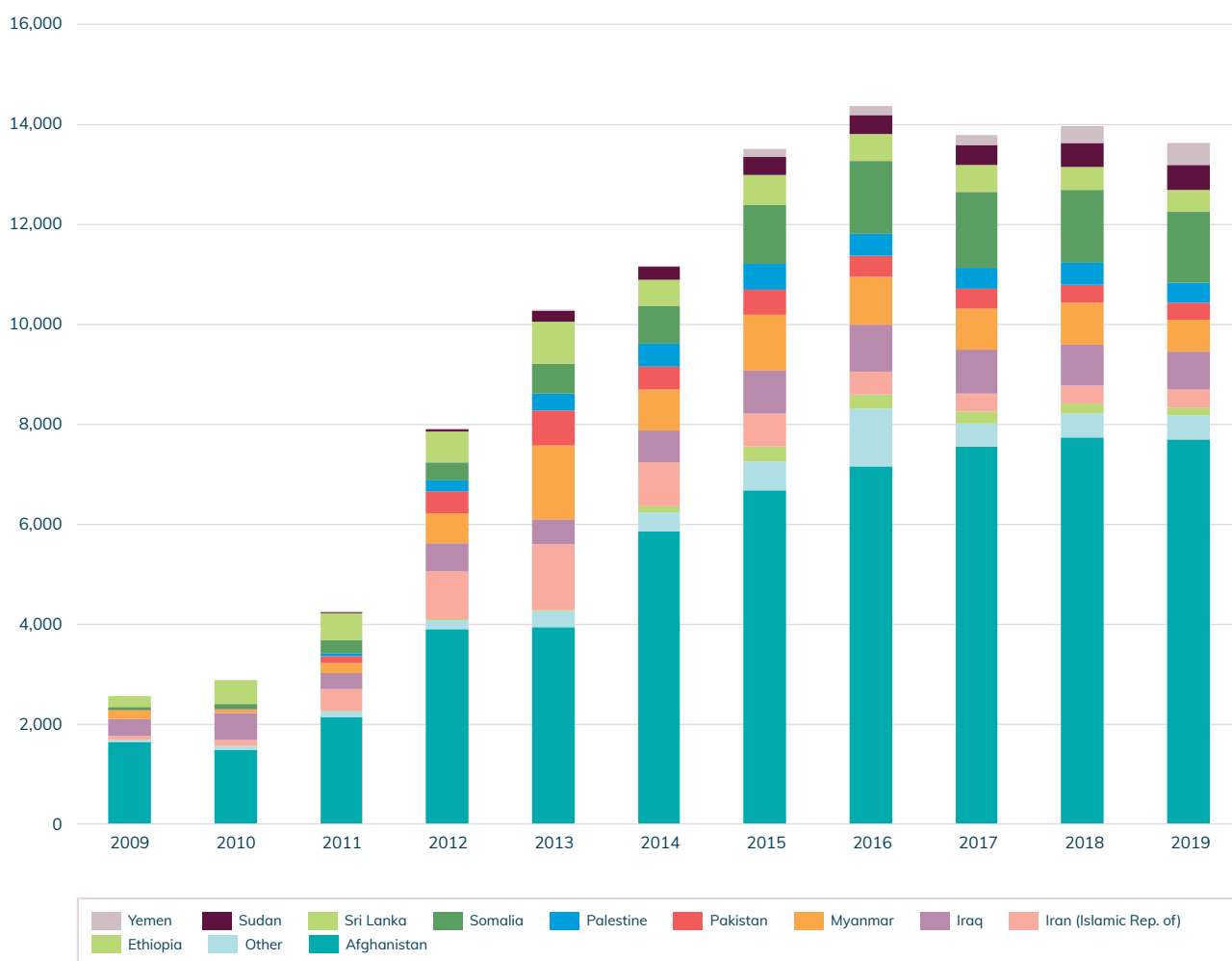
In addition, the research team used publicly available data on the refugee and asylum seeking population and resettlement figures maintained by UNHCR. Where possible, the findings also reflect data maintained by UNHCR and IOM specific to the experiences of refugees and asylum seekers in Indonesia.

4. Profiles, drivers and routes

The profile of refugees and asylum seekers in Indonesia

In Indonesia, the majority of refugees and asylum seekers are from Afghanistan with Somalis being the next largest group at roughly one tenth of the total population. The remainder are from more than 40 countries, with those from Iraq, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Sudan and Yemen numbering in the mid-hundreds. One quarter of the population are children and more than half are men, with women making up less than one quarter.² Almost half of all adults are married, although not all are in Indonesia with their spouse.³ The population of refugees and asylum seekers in Indonesia has hovered between 13,000 and 14,000 since 2015.

Figure 1: Nationalities of refugees and asylum seekers in Indonesia (a)



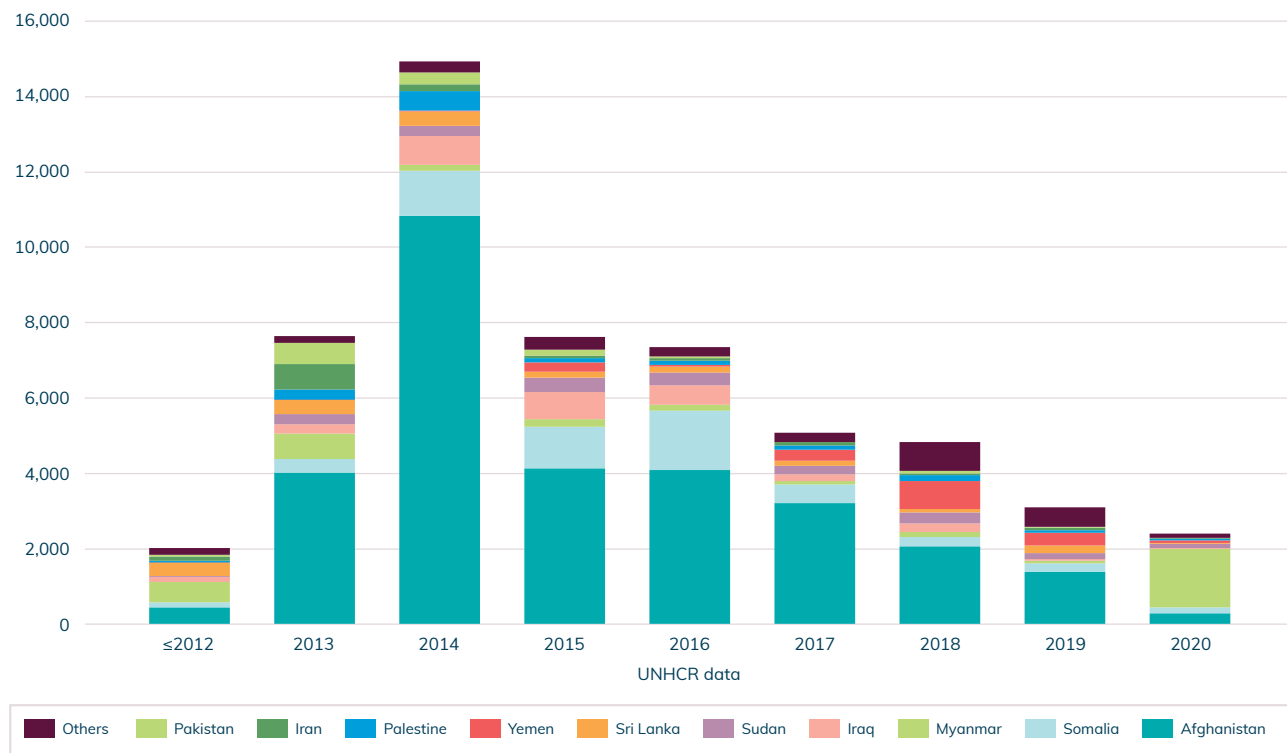
Overall, new arrivals have decreased every year since 2014, when they peaked at 3,734. In 2019 and 2020, only 772 and 600 asylum seekers arrived, respectively. Afghans made up more than half the number of new arrivals between 2013 and 2017; since then, the proportion has slowly decreased.⁴ In 2020, two thirds of new arrivals were Rohingya refugees who landed by boat in Aceh. Unlike other refugee and asylum seekers in Indonesia, most Rohingya refugees' intended final destination is Malaysia, to which irregular onward migration is still possible, aided by smugglers, and where they have family members.

² UNHCR August 2020 update, unpublished.

³ UNHCR statistics, shared by email, March 2021.

⁴ UNHCR statistics, shared by email, March 2021.

Figure 2: Nationalities of refugees and asylum seekers in Indonesia (b)



Due to changes in patterns of arrival and departure, the number of refugees and asylum seekers in Indonesia has stabilized. Currently, more than half are in the Jakarta and West Java areas, with the rest dispersed across other locations.

Figure 3: Locations of refugees and asylum seekers in Indonesia



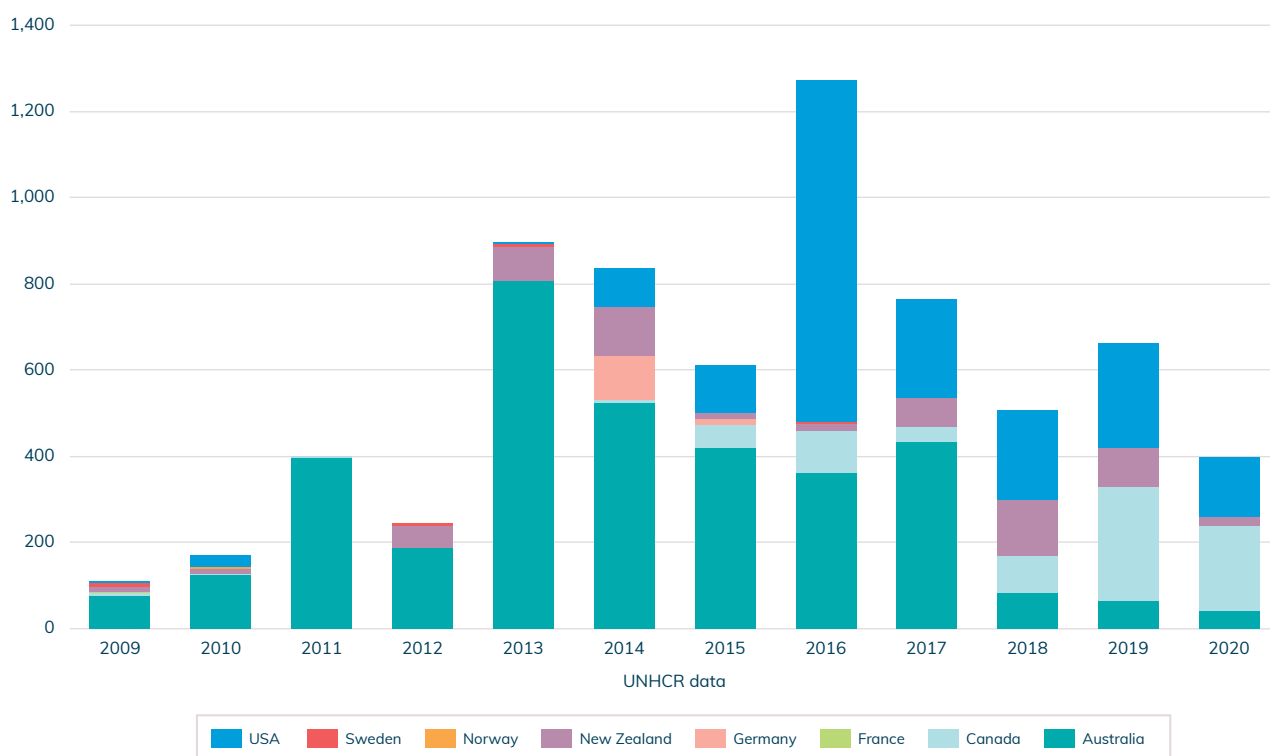
Source: UNHCR statistics, shared by email, March 2021.

The impact of Australian policy

Indonesia is no longer a transit country. Between 1998 and mid-2013, 55,000 people transited through Indonesia to Australia by boat, their movements facilitated by smugglers through Indonesia's porous borders and with the collusion of state officials.⁵ Since July 2013, asylum seekers who arrive by boat to Australia have been subject to offshore processing and banned from settlement there, even if they are determined to be refugees. With support and pressure from Australia, the Indonesian government also stepped up its efforts to intercept these sea movements and detain refugees and asylum seekers en route to Australia.⁶ These policies have largely deterred others from trying to reach Australia this way: the number of new asylum seekers arriving in Indonesia fell by almost half between 2014 and 2015.⁷ Those who have travelled to Indonesia since then and registered with UNHCR still hope to be eventually resettled to a third country.⁸ Only Rohingya refugees escaping worsening conditions in Bangladesh and in search of better opportunities and access to services are likely to continue their journey from Indonesia to Malaysia via irregular means.

For most refugees in Indonesia, resettlement is unlikely. As part of policies designed to stem the movement of boats to Australia from Indonesia, Australia no longer resettles refugees who registered with UNHCR in Indonesia after July 2014, whereas previously it accepted more refugees from Indonesia for resettlement than other third countries. Since 2018, Australia has resettled fewer than 100 refugees from Indonesia each year. Resettlement of refugees from Indonesia to the United States increased in 2016, as Australia stepped back, but only for that year; under Donald Trump, the US refugee resettlement quota fell to its lowest level ever. Canada however began resettling more refugees from Indonesia in 2019 and 2020.⁹ Overall, refugees in Indonesia are unlikely to be resettled.

Figure 4: Refugee resettlement from Indonesia



5 Australian government statistics, cited in Missbach, A. & Hoffstaedter, G. (2020) "[When Transit States Pursue Their Own Agenda: Malaysian and Indonesian Responses to Australia's Migration and Border Policies](#)" *Migration and Society: Advances in Research* 3.

6 According to Australian Federal Policy figures, 1,764 people were intercepted at sea and returned to immigration detention in Indonesia. See Hirsh, A. (2018) "[After the boats have stopped](#)," Refugee Council of Australia; Missbach, A. (2015) "[Making a 'Career' in People-Smuggling in Indonesia: Protracted Transit, Restricted Mobility and the Lack of Legal Work Rights](#)," *Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia*, vol 30, no 2.

7 UNHCR statistics, shared by email, March 2021.

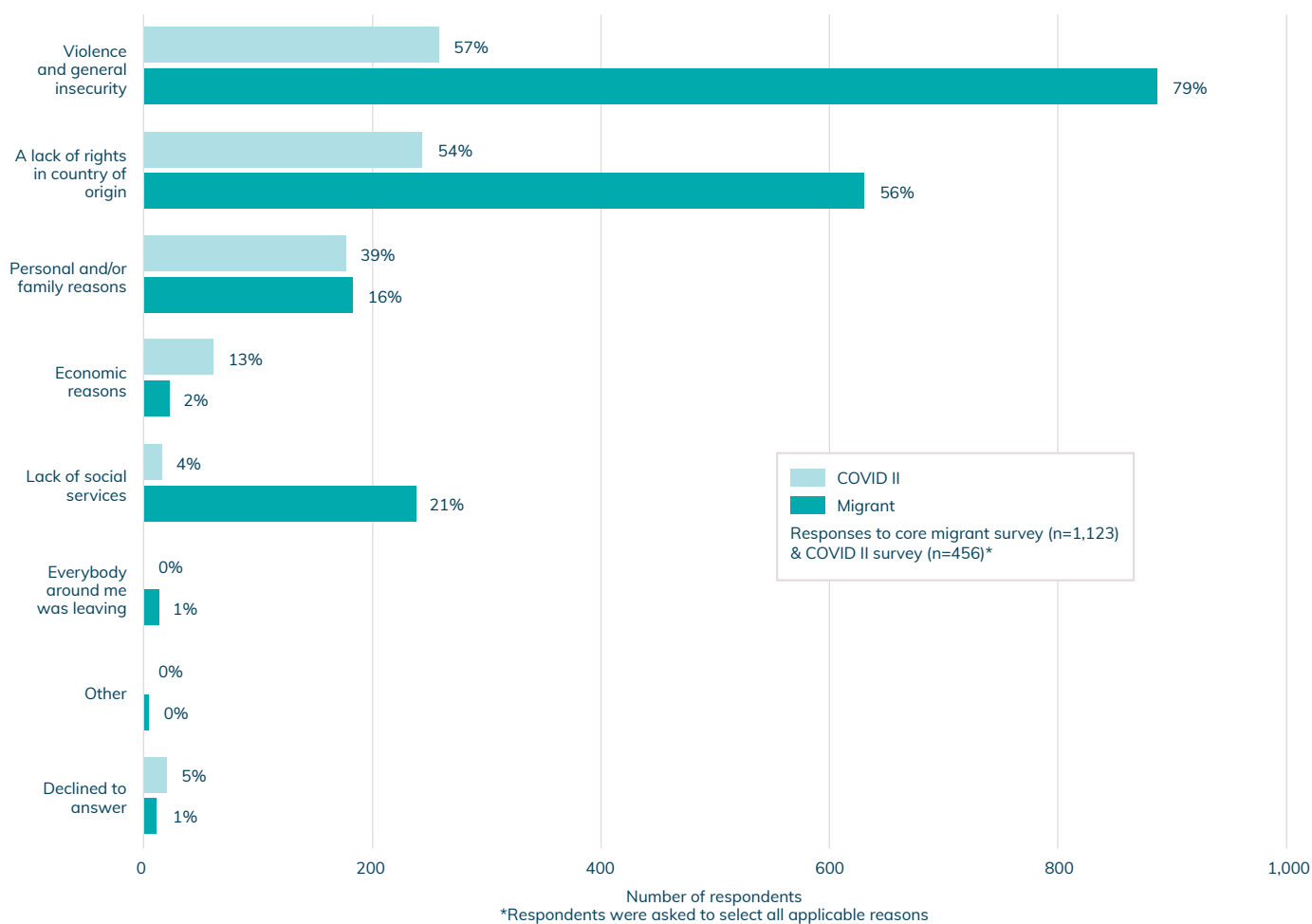
8 The figures are telling – Australia resettled 3,627 refugees from Indonesia between 2000 and 2017, while more than 60,000 arrived by boat in the same period. (Note that those settled after 2014 must have registered with UNHCR before July that year.) Figures quoted in Missbach, A. (2019) "[Asylum Seekers' and Refugees' Decision-Making in Transit in Indonesia](#)," *Bijdragen Tot De Taal, Land en Volkenkunde*, no 175.

9 In 2020, resettlement figures fell worldwide during the COVID-19 pandemic. Refugees from Myanmar made up almost one third of those resettled from Indonesia in 2020.

Drivers and motivations for migration

People claim asylum in Indonesia for various reasons. At present, refugees from 47 countries have registered with UNHCR in Indonesia. The most common migration drivers are violence and insecurity, as well as human rights violations and reduced access to social services. Few respondents identified economic reasons as a factor across all surveys where this question was asked.¹⁰ Some interviewees cited personal experiences of abuse and exploitation.¹¹ Others cited specific government policies; for example, ten out of the 35 respondents from Eritrea cited compulsory military service as a reason for fleeing to Indonesia in the online survey. Results are broadly similar between 4Mi data (only Afghans) and the online survey (all nationalities).

Figure 5: Drivers of migration to Indonesia



Indonesia is not the intended final destination for most refugees and asylum seekers. Although it has been extremely difficult to reach Australia through Indonesia since 2013, some still make their way to Indonesia with that intention. Indeed, while all Afghans surveyed by 4Mi entered Indonesia in 2016 or later, 57% (n=1,123) still hoped to reach Australia.¹² Only a handful of those surveyed said Indonesia was their intended destination.¹³ Across all surveys where this question was asked, Australia was the most popular intended destination, followed by Canada.¹⁴

¹⁰ Twenty-one respondents did so in the online survey, 23 in the core migrant survey and 61 in the Covid II survey.

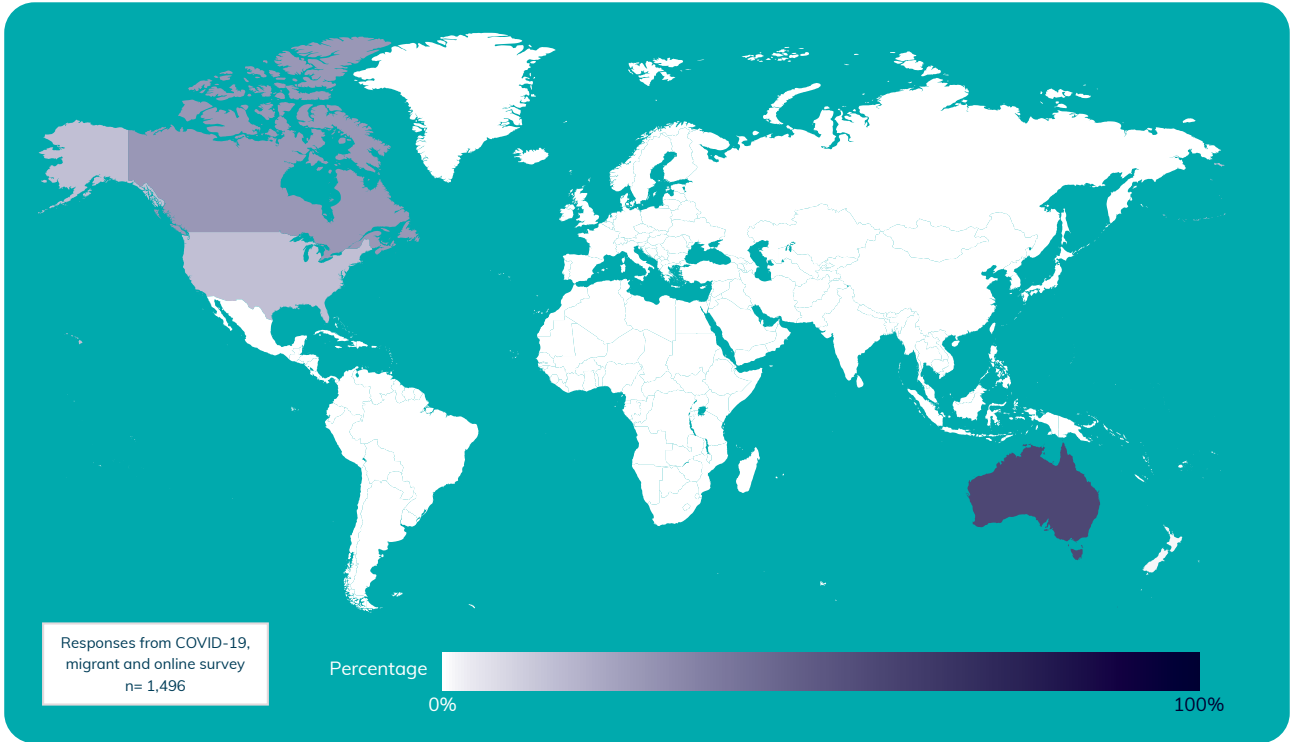
¹¹ Interview with female refugee from Ethiopia, Jakarta, November 2020.

¹² More than 50% using data from the core migrant survey.

¹³ Eight refugees out of all surveyed.

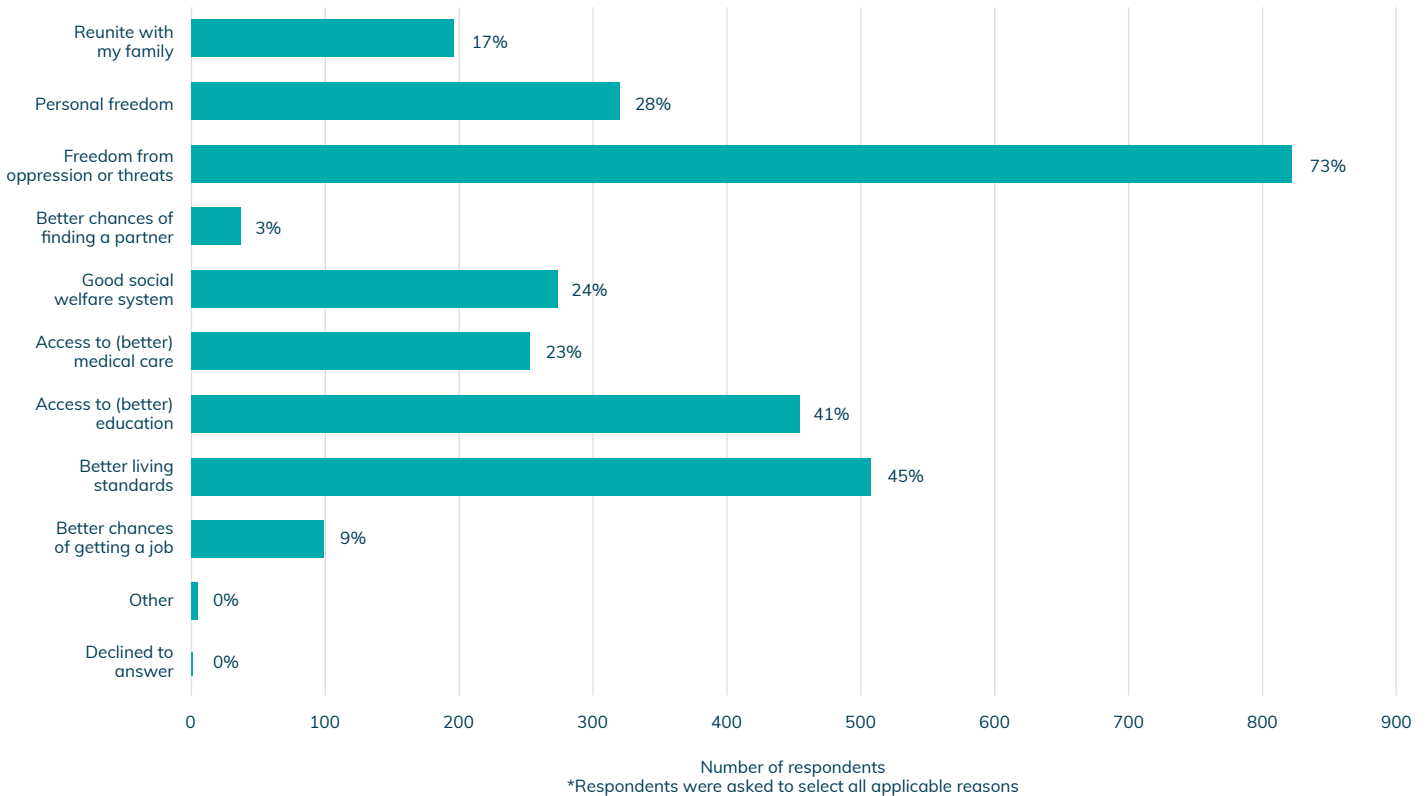
¹⁴ This question was asked in the core migrant, Covid II and online surveys.

Figure 6: Intended final destinations



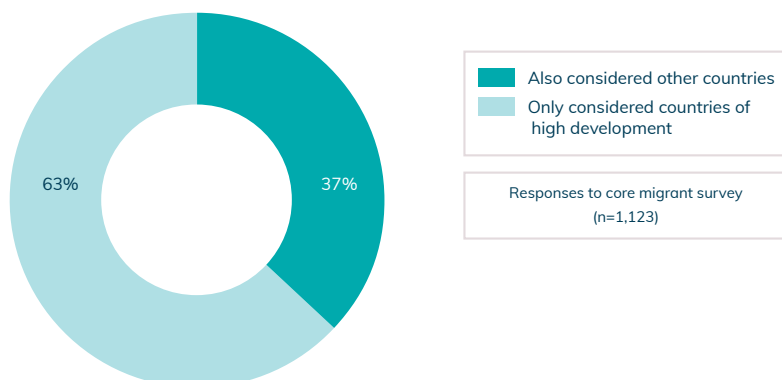
Refugees and asylum seekers are primarily seeking security at their final destination. Most survey respondents experienced insecurity and lack of rights prior to claiming asylum in Indonesia. This pushes them to seek security above all else in their final destination. However, other motives include better living standards and access to services. Most respondents to the online survey provided similar reasons to Afghans surveyed by 4Mi.

Figure 7: Final destination criteria



Most respondents aspire to settle in a developed country although others are open to different options, as 4Mi data from Afghan refugees shows:

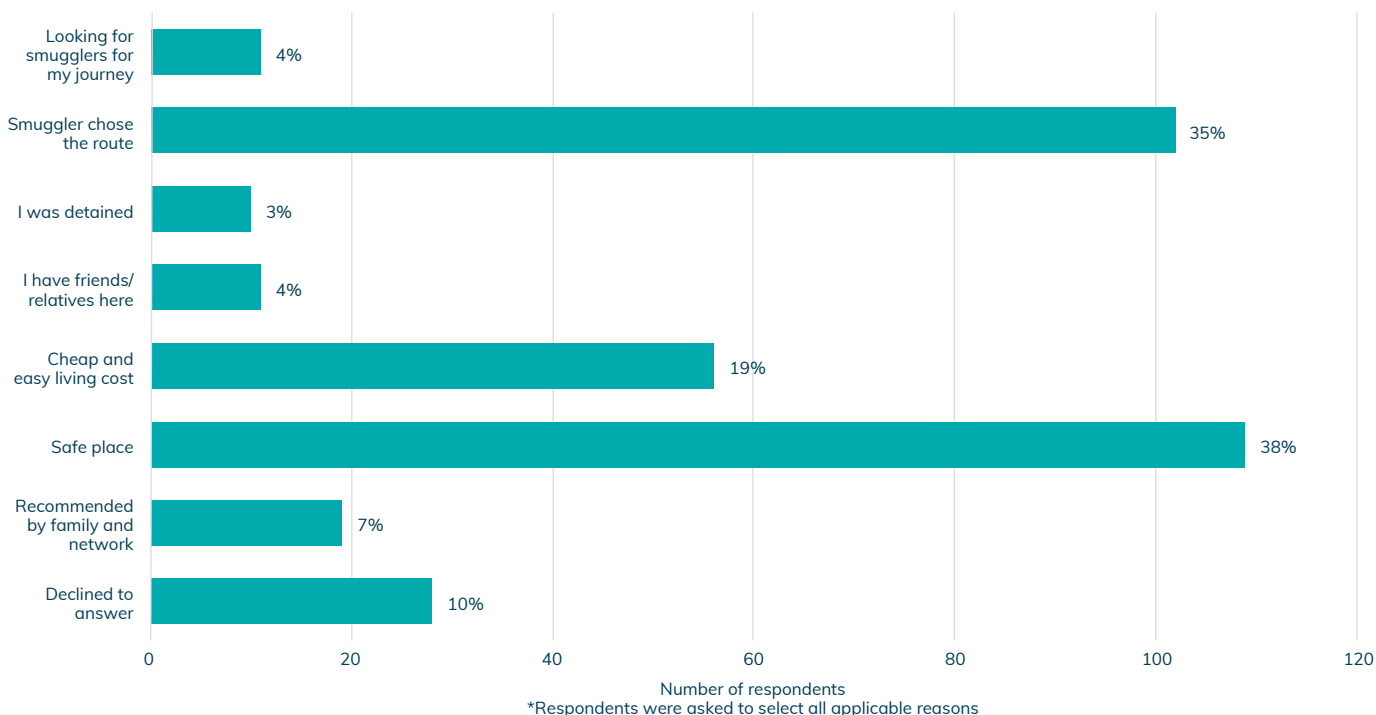
Figure 8: Extent of exclusive focus on developed countries



Routes: Why Indonesia?

Awareness of conditions in Indonesia prior to arrival varied. Historically, Indonesia had a positive reputation as asylum claims were processed quickly and refugees were resettled faster than elsewhere in the region.¹⁵ With refugees in Indonesia now waiting years for resettlement, the country has lost some but not all of its appeal. Some respondents to the online survey provided reasons that suggested they were aware of the conditions in Indonesia before arriving there, while others seem to have depended on their smuggler for such information. Interviews confirmed that some refugees and asylum seekers had deliberately come to Indonesia due to family and friends who had already claimed asylum there. Others had initially come alone, and then were joined later by their spouses and children.¹⁶

Figure 9: Reasons for choosing Indonesia as a transit country



¹⁵ Interview with Antje Missbach, academic, by phone, November 2020.

¹⁶ Interview with male Sudanese refugee, Makassar, December 2020.

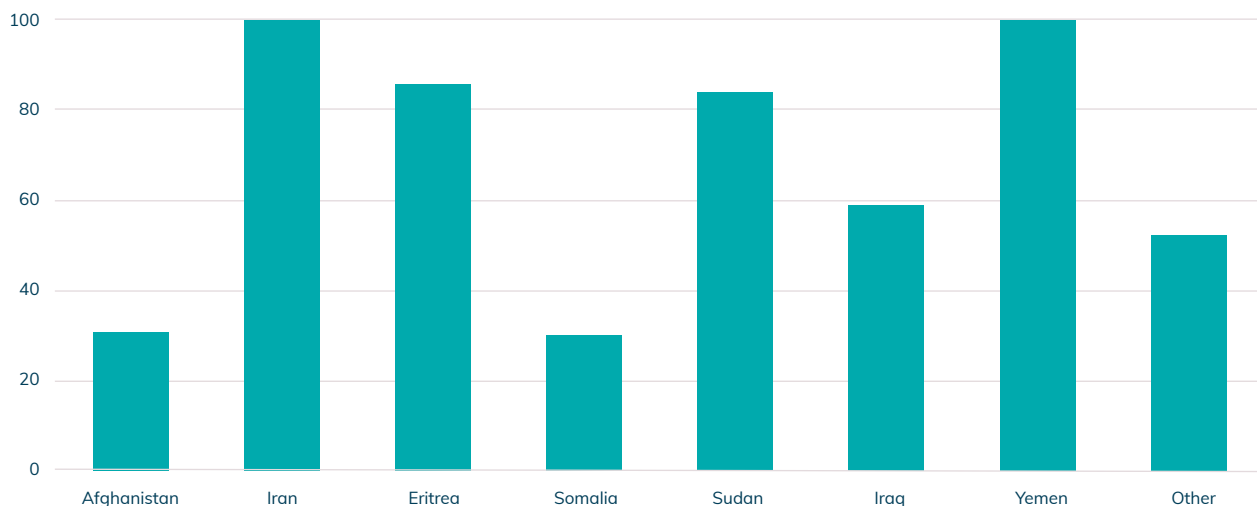
Only one refugee cited international support as the reason she came to Indonesia; she had been advised by a friend that after registering with UNHCR she would receive housing and a living stipend. Although disappointed she was not receiving any support, she didn't want to return home:

*I already don't have anything in Sudan. If there is an opportunity, I want to move to a third country.*¹⁷

Data from 4Mi shows that even if refugees and asylum seekers feel stuck in Indonesia, 80% (n=1123) say they still would have made the journey, even knowing what they know now.

Routes to Indonesia vary by country of origin. Refugees and asylum seekers who were able to obtain a visa to Indonesia often arrived by air.¹⁸ Four refugees who arrived in this way explained in interviews that they did not claim asylum immediately, but rather waited until their visas expired before registering with UNHCR.¹⁹ This option was more accessible to some refugees than others, depending on their country of origin, as shown by the online survey.

Figure 10: Arrivals by air



(See Annex for breakdown of respondents' nationalities)

Percentage of online survey (n=289) respondents replying "yes", by country of origin

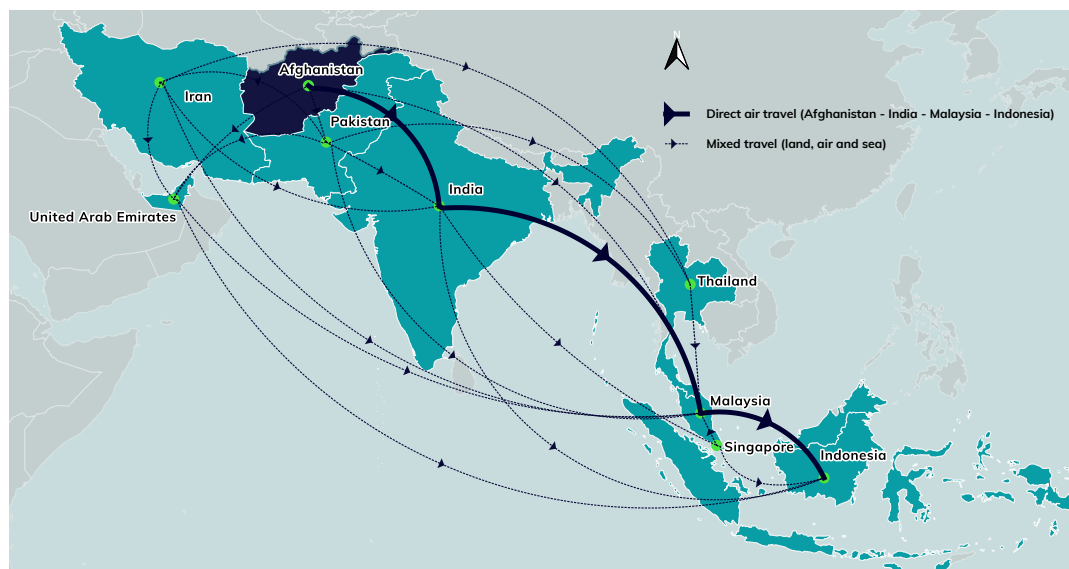
4Mi data provides more detailed insight on the routes to Indonesia used by Afghan refugees arriving between 2016 and 2019.

17 Interview with female Sudanese refugee, Jakarta, January 2021.

18 One hundred and seventy respondents to the online survey (n=289) arrived by air.

19 Interview with female and male Sudanese refugees in Jakarta, November 2020 and January 2021; interview with female refugee from Ethiopia, Jakarta, January 2020; male Iraqi refugee, Jakarta, January 2021.

Figure 11: Routes used by Afghans for their journey to Indonesia

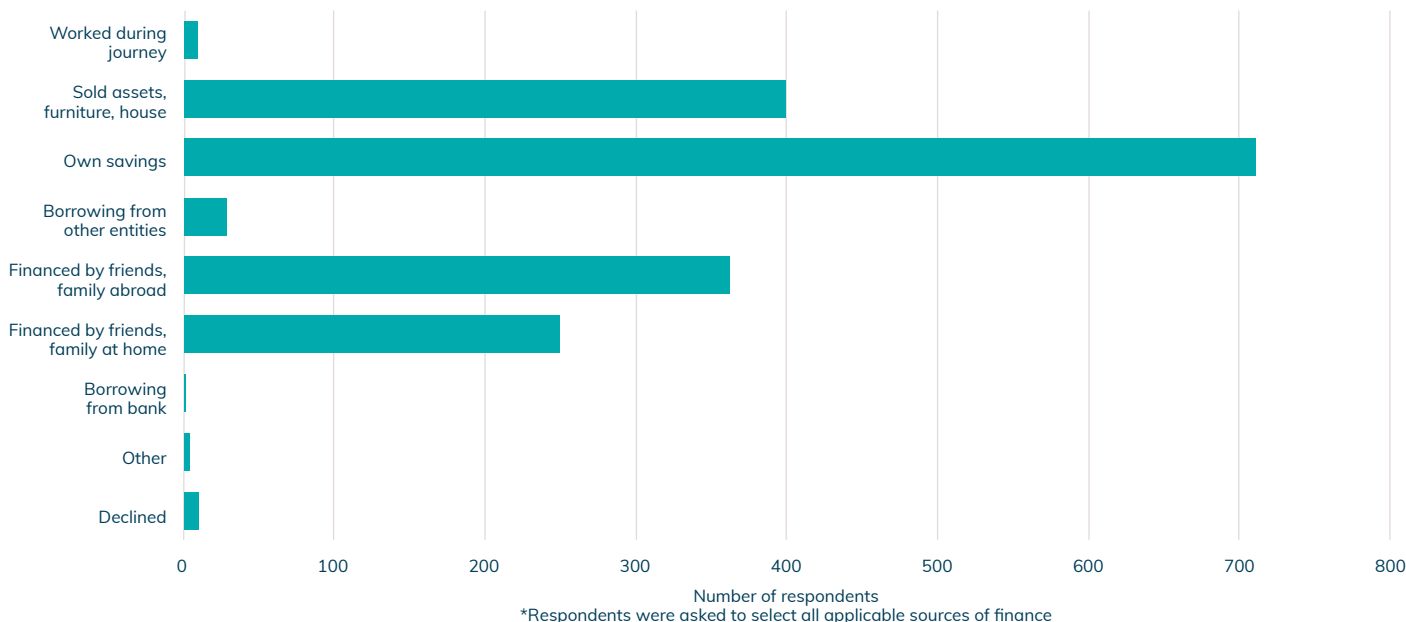


Afghans paid more for their journey compared to others

The cost of the journey to Indonesia varied widely depending on nationality and route. Respondents also undertook their journeys to Indonesia at different times. Data from the online survey suggests that the majority of Afghans paid between USD 4,000 and USD 8,000 for their journey.

4Mi data shows that many Afghan refugees used their own savings to pay for their journey — savings which they will likely continue to deplete during the indefinite period of time they will spend waiting in Indonesia for resettlement.

Figure 12: Funding sources for travel to Indonesia



A majority of Afghan refugees relied on a smuggler for their journey

Some 736 core migrant survey (n=1,123) respondents said they used a smuggler to reach Indonesia; of these, 62% said that they did not feel their smuggler had misled them during their journey. Only three in every ten also felt that the smuggler had helped them achieve their migration goal.

5. Indonesia's legal and policy framework

Regional context

Southeast Asia does not have regional mechanisms to ensure protection and respond to the needs of refugees and asylum seekers. Coordination is focused on law enforcement, migration control, smuggling, trafficking and labour migration instead.²⁰ Some opportunities arise to advance refugee rights and raise concerns within some regional forums, such as the Bali Process, but in general protection norms for refugees and people in mixed migration movements within Southeast Asia are weak.²¹ The ASEAN Declaration on Human Rights, however, does recognize the right to seek asylum in line with national laws.²²

The crisis in Myanmar's Rakhine State, which has pushed hundreds of thousands of stateless Rohingya to flee by land to Bangladesh and across the Andaman Sea to other countries in Southeast Asia, primarily Malaysia, has underscored the inadequacies of the regional architecture. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has reacted with ad hoc statements and unfulfilled commitments instead of a coordinated regional response.²³

Indonesia has been relatively progressive in its policy towards refugees. Within Southeast Asia, Indonesia has responded to refugee needs, particularly regarding the Rohingya, who were allowed to disembark in 2015, 2018 and 2020 when other countries pushed boats back. Although not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention, Indonesia acknowledges the principle of non-refoulement in its own laws and administrative decrees.²⁴ The government frames its actions as humanitarian and has not signalled any intention to sign the refugee convention yet.²⁵ While Indonesia has allowed refugees to claim asylum within its borders — with UNHCR conducting registration, documentation and refugee status determination within the country since 1979 — its officials are concerned that the responsibility be shared with wealthier countries.²⁶ According to a senior government official overseeing refugees management at the national level:

*We aren't a rich country, but we help based on humanity. We support with shelter, housing, but the responsibility for meeting other needs is handled by UNHCR and other organizations that help.*²⁷

Historically and currently, Australia has influenced Indonesia's policy towards and management of refugees. Australia wields influence through regional platforms such as the Bali Process on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Person and Related Transnational Crime, which was set up in 2002 and is co-chaired with Indonesia; its bilateral diplomacy; and, most importantly, funding. However, its impact has been mixed. The relationship between the two countries is complex, not least because Indonesia now hosts thousands of refugees precisely because of Australian efforts to restrict irregular movements to its borders. Indonesia however cooperated up to a point. For example, the government was willing to accept technical support and funding to enhance policing of its borders and manage detention centres but has consistently refused to allow Australia to process asylum seekers on its territory.²⁸

20 For example, the Bali Process as described below. Interview with Indonesian human rights expert by phone, November 2020; and interview with regional UNHCR office, by phone, November 2020.

21 For example, the 2019 [ASEAN Declaration on the Rights of Children in Context of Migration](#) is an entry point for ensuring protection.

22 See [ASEAN Human Rights Declaration](#) (2012)

23 McCaffrie, C. (2020) "[Andaman Sea Crisis: Is the Region Really Better Off in 2020?](#)", Kaldor Centre. For a regional and historical overview, see Kneebone, S. (2016) "[Comparative regional protection frameworks for refugees: norms and norm entrepreneurs](#)," *The International Journal of Human Rights*, vol 20, no. 2.

24 See for example [Regulation of the Director General of Immigration Number IMI-1489.UM.08.05 Year 2010](#) on the handling of irregular migrants.

25 Interview with UNHCR, by phone, November 2020.

26 For example, in her [statement](#) at the First Global Refugee Forum held in Geneva in December 2019, Ms Meutya Hafid, Chair of the Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee, Indonesian House of Representatives, said "Indonesia has gone extra-miles – beyond our obligation and capacity – as a transit country to almost 14,000 refugees, coming from 42 countries."

27 Interview with senior government official, Jakarta, December 2020.

28 See Missbach & Hoffstaedter, op. cit.; and Kneebone, S. (2017) "[Australia as a Powerbroker on Refugee Protection in Southeast Asia](#)," *Refugee* vol 33, no 1.

For the past two decades, Australian financial support for the management of refugees and asylum seekers in Indonesia has been channelled through a regional cooperation arrangement that funds IOM.²⁹ The funding financed detention centres, as well as providing mental health support, education and other essential needs to those detained. Eventually, detention centres became over-crowded due in part to destitute refugees and asylum seekers self-reporting; and Indonesia was not open to building more centres.³⁰ Throughout this period, IOM and civil society organizations advocated for a sustainable alternative to detention.

This led to a shift towards housing refugees and asylum seekers in IOM-run community shelters, which provide an alternative to detention; however, only refugees and asylum seekers who were previously detained could access the shelters. In March 2018, Australia announced reductions in funding for Indonesian detention centres; by the end of that year, those still detained had been released to IOM-run community shelters.³¹ While UNHCR also advocated under the auspices of a global strategy to end detention of refugees and asylum seekers during the same period, and supported the government to develop a national action plan, the change would probably not have occurred without a reduction in Australian funding.³²

Indonesia's piecemeal policies

Indonesia's legal framework recognizes refugees but offers them limited protection. The 1945 constitution and an amendment introduced in 2000, as well as the Foreign Relations Law 37/1999 acknowledge refugees' right to asylum and empower the president to develop policies specifically for refugees.³³ A 2016 presidential decree provided further clarity on the status and handling of refugees in Indonesia;³⁴ importantly, it aligns with the 1951 Convention definition of a refugee, but it does not guarantee rights to work, healthcare and education for refugees and asylum seekers.³⁵ Responsibility for protection and refugee status determination remains with UNHCR. The decree also clarifies that only resettlement or voluntary repatriation are legal options; local integration is not.³⁶

For years, gaps in the national legal framework meant that the treatment of refugees and asylum seekers was governed by immigration law, which adopts a "securitized" approach with exceptions made for refugees and asylum seekers.³⁷ The 2016 presidential decree is a step forward although it did not formally end detention. Immigration authorities are still responsible for monitoring refugees and asylum seekers. But the need to protect refugees due to their status under international law is not well understood by local officials.³⁸

The decree emphasizes Indonesia's obligation to rescue people in distress at sea, reflecting the lessons of the 2015 Andaman Sea crisis, during which hundreds of Rohingya fleeing persecution in Myanmar died. It mandates that boats in distress should be rescued and their passengers allowed to disembark.³⁹ Other sections outline roles and responsibilities for providing shelter to refugees and briefly mention budget and funding.⁴⁰

The 2016 presidential decree delegates responsibility to local governments for managing refugees without allocating budgetary support. At a national level, the Coordinating Ministry for Political, Legal and Security Affairs is responsible for refugee issues and hosts the national refugee task force. The coordinating ministry also liaises between the Ministry of Law and Human Rights (which oversees immigration), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Social Affairs and other concerned ministries. This creates complications in Jakarta, which are compounded

29 For information on the level of funding, see Hirsch, A. & Doig, C. (2019) "[Australia's other 'offshore policy' – containing refugees in Indonesia through the International Organisation for Migration](#)" University of Melbourne blogpost.

30 Human Rights Watch (2013) "[Barely Surviving: Detention, Abuse and Neglect of Migrant Children in Indonesia](#)". On the policy shifts, see Missbach, A. (2017) "[Accommodating Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Indonesia: From Immigration Detention to Containment in 'Alternatives to Detention'](#)," *Refugee* vol 33, no 2.

31 "After the boats have stopped," Refugee Council of Australia. Refugee Council of Australia (2018) "[After the boats have stopped](#)".

32 See Indonesia's National Action Plan available at See [Indonesia's National Action Plan](#). However, international criticism, capacity building for immigration officials and massive overcrowding were significant factors too. Email correspondence with International Detention Coalition, April 2021. .

33 Kneebone, S. (2020) "[Is the 2016 Indonesian Presidential Regulation a potential 'game-changer' on rescue of Rohingya boat refugees?](#)" Kaldor Centre.

34 Peraturan Presiden Republik Indonesia (2016) [Nomor 125 Tahun 2016, Tentang Pengungsi Dari Luar Negeri](#). (Regulation of The President of the Republic of Indonesia Number 125 Year 2016 Concerning the Handling of Foreign Refugees. Unofficial English translation available [here](#).)

35 Although earlier draft versions of the decree were more expansive, the final version did not grant further protection and rights to refugees.

36 Missbach, A. & FEITH TAN, N. (2017) "[NO DURABLE SOLUTIONS](#)," *INSIDE INDONESIA*, NO 127; SUSETYO, H. (2020) "[LOST IN TRANSIT: REFUGEES STRANDED IN A LEGAL VACUUM IN INDONESIA](#)," KALDOR CENTRE.

37 The most important immigration directives include IMI-0352.GR.02.07 from 19 April 2016 on refugees and asylum seekers, and earlier directive IMI-1489.UM.08.05 from 2010 on the handling of "illegal immigrants".

38 Immigration officials perceive refugees as a threat – rather than people in need of protection. Interviews with local officials, Bogor, December 2020.

39 Peraturan Presiden Nomor 125 Tahun 2016.

40 Ibid.

by the difficulties posed by Indonesia's decentralized governance system.⁴¹ Despite allocating responsibility to local governments and allowing them to set up their own task forces, there are no directives from the central government that would allow local governments to use their budgets for refugee management. Nor is there a centrally allocated budget that would support officials to address the needs of refugees in their area.⁴²

Local governments feel the responsibility for managing refugees is an additional and unwanted burden. Without allocated budget, it is unclear what they can and should do.⁴³ An official from the national refugee task force explained the dynamic:

*The task force doesn't have a budget, the local government also doesn't have a budget for refugees. Everyone panics, what to do, what to do, the local government asks me. In addition, it's the pandemic, and many of the budgets have been cut.*⁴⁴

Local government responses to refugees vary and often depend on leadership. Some local governments have set up their own refugee task force. For example, the city of Bogor's task force was set up in December 2019 and, according to local officials involved, one of its main concerns is that Bogor has become an area for refugees rather than tourists. Officials say they are considering relocating all refugees to Parung Panjang, an area in West Bogor, although — or perhaps because — refugees are increasingly dispersed and integrated.⁴⁵

Makassar, the capital of South Sulawesi province, had taken steps to manage refugee issues in the city well before the presidential decree, even signing an MoU with IOM in 2015 and allowing refugees to access local services. However, when a pro-refugee mayor left office, Makassar became a less hospitable place for refugees.⁴⁶

In Aceh province, by contrast, the local government and community has welcomed Rohingya refugees — even opposing directives from Jakarta in order to help them. In June 2020, Acehnese rescued 99 Rohingya at sea against the wishes of the government — as they had before in 2015 and 2018 — and invoked their own hukum adat laut (customary law of the sea).⁴⁷ A local task force was set up to manage emergency response, in coordination with UNHCR, IOM and Indonesian organizations providing funding and material. Even in an emergency, however, the task force could not use government funds — not even after almost 300 more Rohingya were rescued in September.⁴⁸ Given local sympathy, there were many organizations willing to help.⁴⁹

The central government's directives are not always followed. The education ministry in 2019 requested local governments to facilitate access to schools for refugee children, reportedly because officials wanted to ensure that they were complying with obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which Indonesia is a state party.⁵⁰ However in practice local actors decide on their own whether to admit refugee children.⁵¹ Access to government

41 Since the implementation of law number 22/1999 and law number 32/2004 concerning regional government (decentralization or regional autonomy). These laws give regional governments the authority to manage and regulate all government affairs. It also is difficult for organizations that support refugees to identify the appropriate ministry to supervise their work. Interview with Catholic Relief Services, Jakarta, November 2020.

42 Naluria Utami, P. (2019) "[Implementasi Peraturan Presiden Nomor 125 Tahun 2016 Tentang Penanganan Pengungsi Dari Luar Negeri di Provinsi Kepulauan Riau](#)," *Jurnal Legislasi Indonesia* vol 16, no. 3.

43 Interviews with local officials, Lhokseumawe and Bogor, December 2020; and interview with Antje Missbach, academic, 2 November 2020

44 Interview with Indonesian government official, Jakarta, December 2020.

45 Interviews with local officials, Bogor, December 2020.

46 The mayor, Mohammad Ramdhan 'Danny' Pomanto, was unusual in Indonesia where many local officials do not see any benefit from promoting refugee rights or facilitating their access to services. Interviews with Antje Missbach, Akino Tahir, and UNHCR, by phone, November 2020 to February 2021. See Missbach, A., Adiputera, Y. & Prabandari, A. (2018) "[Is Makassar a 'sanctuary city'? Migration governance in Indonesia after the 'local turn'](#)," *Austrian Journal of South-East Asian Studies*, vol 11, no 2; and Tahir, A. et al, "Secondary cities and forced migration: accommodating refugees and asylum seekers in Indonesia," paper presented at 55th ISOCARP World Planning Congress Jakarta-Bogor, Indonesia.

47 Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict (2020) "[Rohingya Refugees in Aceh: an Update](#)"; Fajri, A. "Are we there yet? Peculiarities of transit locality: Aceh," Radboud University Nijmegen, Netherlands, doctoral thesis. For a comparison of the reception of Rohingya in Aceh 2015 to the attempted pushback of Sri Lankans in 2016, see Prabandari, A. & Adiputera Y. (2019) "[Alternative paths to refugee and asylum seeker protection in Malaysia and Indonesia](#)," *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal* vol 28, no 2.

48 The local task force prepared a budget of IDR 350,000,000 (~USD 24,000) but it was not approved as it did not comply with local government legislation. Interview with local government official, Lhokseumawe, December 2020.

49 There was more help than was needed when the first boat arrived. Interview with JRS/Jesuit Refugee Service staff, Lhokseumawe, December 2020.

50 Ministry of Education and Culture, "Education for refugee children," 10 July 2019, Number 7 5253/A.A4/HKI.9. Interview with Indonesian official, by phone, November 2020. Indonesia is also bound by the ASEAN Declaration on the Rights of Children in the Context of Migration, adopted in 2019, to enhance access of refugee children to education, health and other services.

51 The circular from the education ministry included a list of specific locations; those places that were not listed are generally unwilling to admit refugee children.

health services is generally better than access to local schools. During the COVID-19 pandemic, refugees have even had access to government quarantine facilities and hospitals — a sign of how Indonesia can enable access to services for refugees and asylum seekers when it wants to, even when under domestic law access is not guaranteed.⁵²

The right to work is the most challenging legal and policy issue. From the government's perspective, work rights could encourage refugees and asylum seekers to stay and lead to competition with Indonesian job-seekers.⁵³ For these reasons, the presidential decree was silent on the right to work, although many refugees and asylum seekers work informally to survive. UNHCR continues to advocate with the government on the issue, as do Indonesian organizations such as the Indonesian Civil Society Association for Refugee Rights Protection (SUAKA). As Indonesia was hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic, the space for advocating for work rights narrowed further in 2020.

52 Interview with UNHCR official, by phone, November 2020.

53 Interviews with national task force, Jakarta, December 2020; with UNHCR and IOM, November 2020 and February 2021; refugee advocate, by phone, December 2020. See also Adiputera, Y. & Prabandari, A. (2018) "[Addressing challenges and identifying opportunities for refugee access to employment in Indonesia](#)," Yogyakarta: Institute of International Studies.

6. Actors supporting refugees

An overview

In addition to UNHCR and IOM, other organizations — some international, some Indonesian, some run by refugees themselves — work with refugees and asylum seekers. UNHCR and IOM deliver services and support through some of these other actors: Catholic Relief Services (CRS), Church World Service (CWS), Dompot Dhuafa, Human Initiative as well as other smaller organizations that only exist at the local level. In the Jakarta and West Java area, there are also multiple refugee-run organizations: Roshan Learning Centre, HELP for Refugees, Refugees and Asylum Seekers Information Center (RAIC), and Sisterhood, among others. Some organizations are primarily focused on advocacy and research, for example, SUAKA. Other Indonesian organizations are involved in emergency response for Rohingya in Aceh, such as the Geutanyoe Foundation, the Indonesian Red Cross, Yayasan Kemanusiaan Madani Indonesia (YKMI) and Muhammadiyah.⁵⁴

Financial assistance to refugees is limited. Only UNHCR, IOM and the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) have programs that offer monthly stipends. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, together the three organizations were able to provide regular financial support to some 9,000 refugees and asylum seekers, leaving thousands of others to fend for themselves. IOM is by far the largest provider of assistance, with 7,700 beneficiaries — more than half the total refugee and asylum seeker population — under its care.⁵⁵ UNHCR supports approximately 1,000 refugees and asylum seekers with a monthly subsistence allowance, while JRS supports roughly 150. Support varies in terms of criteria and the level and kind of assistance.

IOM only supports refugees who were previously in immigration detention or who were referred directly by the Government of Indonesia. This is due to the terms of its funding arrangement with Australia. Historically, many refugees who were unable to get by on their own reported themselves to immigration in order to access IOM care — some 4,000 individuals did so between 2014 and 2017.⁵⁶ Since March 2018, when Australia announced changes to its funding as discussed above, new arrivals no longer qualify for support in order to discourage others from coming. Approximately 70% of refugees under IOM's care have been in Indonesia for five years or more.⁵⁷

Interviews with refugees however do not suggest that IOM support was a motivating factor that led them to come to Indonesia.⁵⁸ Most who were interviewed were either intercepted and detained by immigration shortly after arriving in Indonesia or turned themselves in to be detained out of destitution and desperation.⁵⁹ A female refugee from Afghanistan explained how she had paid more than USD 5,000 for her journey to Indonesia in 2014. Although she, her brother and nephew, whom she had travelled with, had initially gone to Bogor, they ran out of money. At this point they went to Makassar, where they turned themselves in to immigration officials in order to gain financial support and assistance from IOM.⁶⁰

IOM support includes free housing, healthcare and a monthly allowance. IOM provides free accommodation to refugees and asylum seekers in community shelters; it runs more than 80 across nine locations in Indonesia.⁶¹ The number of shelters expanded as Indonesia stopped using immigration detention in 2018. In addition to housing, the eldest two people in any family (not limited to adults) receive IDR 1,250,000 (~USD 85) each per month while the remaining family members each receive IDR 500,000 (~USD35). Refugees under IOM's care who have a spouse — Indonesian or another refugee — who does not qualify for support cannot live together with them in the accommodation, however, but can still receive all the other benefits.⁶² Healthcare costs are also covered through arrangements IOM has with community health centres known as Puskesmas (an abbreviation of pusat kesehatan masyarakat) hospitals

54 Interview with International Federation of the Red Cross, by phone, November 2020; and Muhammadiyah, by phone, January 2021.

55 IOM Refugee and Asylum Seeker Statistics, November 2020, unpublished.

56 UNHCR statistics cited in Missbach, A. (2018) "[Falling through the cracks: The impacts of Australia's funding cuts on refugees in Indonesia.](#)" Policy Forum.

57 IOM Refugee and Asylum Seeker Statistics, November 2020, unpublished.

58 Only one refugee among the 14 interviewed for this study reported having been told by friends in her country of origin that she would receive housing and a living stipend after she registered with UNHCR. Interview with refugee, Jakarta, January 2021.

59 Interviews with refugees in Medan, Makassar and Jakarta, December 2020.

60 At the time Makassar had a positive reputation among refugees, in part because they were more quickly transferred from immigration detention to community shelters.

61 Only some 1,700 of IOM's caseload is in the Jakarta area (in Tangerang).

62 Interviews with male Sudanese refugee and male Rohingya refugee, Makassar, December 2020. IOM staff say the number of refugees in this situation is small. Interview with IOM, by phone, February 2021.

and other specialists. Since the presidential decree in 2016, IOM has helped children under its care to attend local government schools and pays for ancillary costs.⁶³

Refugees and asylum seekers find life in the shelters difficult. Interviewees reported tensions from living in a shared space, complaining of noise and a lack of privacy. Many of the shelters have public kitchens which interviewees dislike — one family had even made a makeshift kitchen in their toilet to avoid using the shared facility.⁶⁴ One female refugee from Iran who lives in an IOM shelter reported that she had no friends and was not close with any of the other refugees in the building. She said she left her room only to cook in the shared kitchen or to go out with her husband:

*We've already been in Indonesia seven years, I feel stressed, my children aren't in school, I'm in our room all day and my husband cannot work. We only receive help from IOM every month.*⁶⁵

The online survey also showed that 64 % of respondents living in an IOM shelter (n=61) said they would prefer independent accommodation. However, there were also some refugees living independently – 29% (n=155) – who stated they would prefer to be in an IOM-supported community shelter. Although these statistics are not representative of the overall population of refugees and asylum seekers, they indicate that some refugees and asylum seekers struggle with the accommodation they currently have.

UNHCR and JRS provide support to the most vulnerable. This support is more limited than IOM's: fewer refugees qualify, and housing is not covered. Continued assistance is also not assured — needs are assessed regularly to ensure funds support the most vulnerable. In practice, this means that very few single men receive support unless they have a chronic health condition; families are more likely to receive assistance.⁶⁶ UNHCR only recently expanded its monthly subsistence allowance to refugees outside Jakarta and West Java.⁶⁷ UNHCR provides a similar level of cash assistance to IOM, but refugees must cover housing out of the monthly sum. It also assists with education by providing an allowance to cover costs such as uniforms, books and transportation. JRS support is also based on assessment and varies according to need, from IDR 500,000 to 2,400,000 (USD 35 to 165) a month. UNHCR supports healthcare for all independent refugees, not just those receiving a monthly subsistence allowance.⁶⁸

The table below provides an overview of support from UNHCR, IOM and JRS to refugees. The level of assistance has not kept pace with the increased cost of living in Indonesia.⁶⁹

63 This includes uniforms and paying for the *dana BOS sekolah* (operational assistance normally paid by the government to schools on a per-student basis), which ranges from IDR 800,000 to 1,000,000 (USD 55 to 70 US) per year per child. Interview with IOM staff, by phone, January 2020.

64 Interview with refugee family, IOM shelter in Medan, December 2020.

65 Interview with refugee, IOM shelter in Medan, December 2020.

66 Refugees joke that "a single man must die" in order to receive UNHCR assistance. Field observations.

67 There are however very few independent refugees in cities outside Jakarta and West Java. UNHCR delivers the monthly subsistence allowance through the post office and is currently making arrangements to expand the program. Interview with UNHCR, by phone, February 2021.

68 Interview with UNHCR, by phone, February 2021. However, some refugees who are not receiving the monthly allowance report that they do not receive assistance for healthcare. See section below.

69 The current level of the UNHCR allowance is based on a market assessment from 2012. The level is currently being assessed for an increase. There are plans to reassess the level. Former IOM staff report that the level of assistance was similar ten years ago to what it is now. Interviews with former IOM staff, by phone, January 2021.

Table 1: Financial support provided by UNHCR, IOM and JRS to refugees and asylum seekers in Indonesia

	UNHCR	IOM	JRS
Accommodation	No	Yes (IOM-run shelter)	No
Number of beneficiaries	~1,000	~7,700	~150
Location	Jakarta, West Java, Makassar and Medan	Medan, Tangerang, Makassar, Pekanbaru, Batam, Tanjung Pinang, Surabaya, Kupang, Semarang	Bogor
Per adult (with family)	IDR 1,245,000	IDR 1,250,000 (parents or 2 eldest family members)	≤ IDR 2,400,000 based on assessment
Per dependent	IDR 640,000	IDR 500,000	
Single beneficiaries	≤IDR 1,305,000	IDR 1,250,000	≤IDR 500,000

UNHCR expanded cash assistance to refugees living independently during the pandemic. During the COVID-19 pandemic, UNHCR provided additional support to all independent refugees, depending on the number of dependents. Individuals and families who were already receiving the monthly subsistence allowance from UNHCR were given a smaller amount.

7. The lives of refugees and asylum seekers in Indonesia

Immigration supervision

Immigration authorities are responsible for monitoring refugees and asylum seekers, yet how this is interpreted varies across Indonesia. The 2016 presidential decree requires immigration authorities to supervise refugees and asylum seekers in Indonesia. Refugees living in IOM-run shelters in cities outside the greater Jakarta area are subject to more restrictions imposed by local authorities than refugees living independently among the local population. The restrictions consist of a wide array of unclear rules imposed by immigration authorities at the local level — for example, curfews and prohibitions on riding motorbikes — that qualitative interviews showed have the effect of confining some refugees, particularly women, to the shelters.⁷⁰ Violation of immigration rules occasionally results in short-term detention, lasting from a few days to two weeks, although in some instances it may be longer.⁷¹ One refugee advocate remarked, however, that those held in some immigration detention centres in fact had allowed considerably more freedom of movement to refugees.⁷²

However, immigration authorities only intermittently enforce the rules, creating further uncertainty. Government officials are aware that refugees receive limited, if any, financial support and therefore need to find ways of meeting their basic needs. Officially, refugees do not have the formal right to work, but officials are aware some do work informally. Immigration officials raid places where refugees are working because they are concerned about tensions between refugees and the local community, which government officials aim to limit and control.⁷³ An official from the national task force explained that they try to put humanity first.⁷⁴

Fear of detention as much as actual detention, coupled with myriad other restrictions and barriers to integration, makes it hard for refugees to live a normal life. Individual refugees and asylum seekers may interpret the rules, such as they are, differently — with some more willing to move around than others.⁷⁵ The prohibition on refugees driving motorbikes illustrates how the restrictions affect day-to-day life and coping strategies. Refugees perceive the prohibition as unfair and some have found ways to get around it. Individuals interviewed said they borrow motorbikes from Indonesian friends or store their motorbikes with Indonesians who live nearby the IOM shelter in exchange for a small fee.⁷⁶

Interactions with local community

Some government officials see refugees as a potential cause of social instability. An official from the social affairs ministry acknowledged that refugees need to be able to interact with host communities, but felt it was better that refugees socialized amongst themselves. She cited concerns about mixed Indonesian-refugee couples having children.⁷⁷ Other government officials in Bogor and NGO staff in Makassar echoed these views and mentioned instances of single male refugees having relationships with Indonesian women.⁷⁸ Refugees struggle to marry legally in Indonesia — even to each other — and often get married in ceremonies only recognized by religious leaders.⁷⁹ Only 2% of refugees and asylum seekers in Indonesia who are married are married to Indonesians.⁸⁰

70 One refugee living in a shelter even reported having to pay a bribe to the security guard to leave the compound. While security guards are not immigration officials or IOM employees, that such practices exist points to the vulnerability of those housed in such shelters. Interview with refugee, Medan, December 2020.

71 For example, staff at Belawan detention centre in Medan report refugees who break rules will be detained for one to two weeks for “reflection” (pembinaan). Interviews in Makassar confirmed a similar practice by immigration officials there. Such detention is arbitrary and has no basis in law. Interview with UNHCR, by phone, November 2020.

72 Interview with refugee advocate, by phone, December 2020. See also Missbach, A. (2017) [op.cit.](#)

73 Interviews with local officials, Medan and Bogor, December 2020.

74 Interview with national task force, Jakarta, December 2020.

75 IOM officials point out there is nothing stopping refugees from moving freely about the area where they live. Interview by phone, January 2021; and email correspondence, April 2021.

76 Interviews with refugees, Medan and Makassar, December 2020.

77 Interview with Ministry of Social Affairs official, by phone, November 2020.

78 Interview with local IOM partner, Makassar, December 2020; and with local officials, Bogor, December 2020.

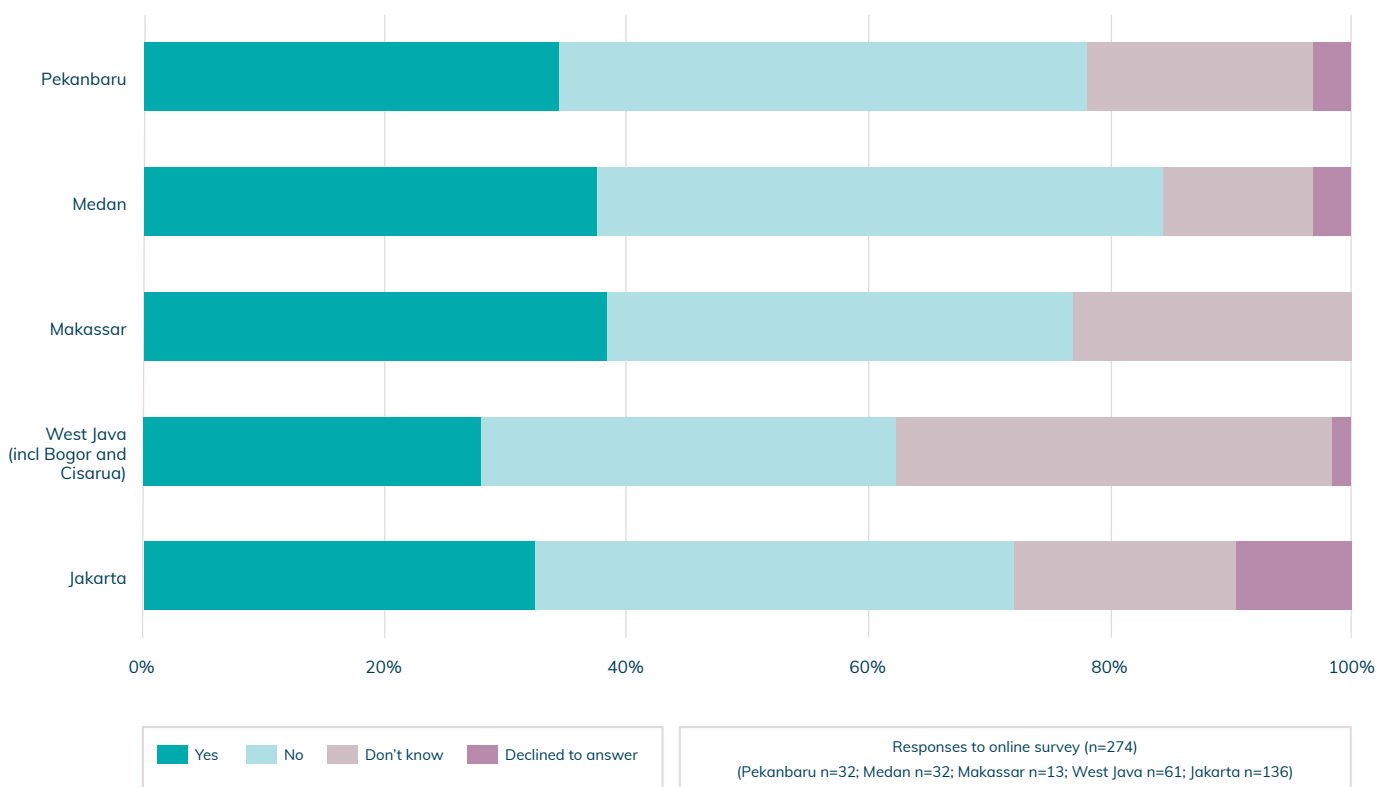
79 Interview with UNHCR, by phone, February 2021.

80 UNHCR statistics, shared by email, March 2021.

In practice, the government cannot prevent some degree of integration, particularly of independently living refugees. Stakeholders in West Java reported that refugees had become more integrated over the past ten years. Whereas they previously lived in specific communities, they are now increasingly dispersed.⁸¹ The extent of integration varies depending on language ability and cultural differences, as both are significant barriers. For example, refugees who are ethnic Hazaras from Afghanistan and practice Shi'ism are sometimes asked by locals why they do not pray with them at the mosque.⁸² Some refugees also resist learning Bahasa Indonesia, and even forbid their children from learning it as they do not want to stay in Indonesia, which makes daily life harder.⁸³

On the other hand, roughly a third of refugees surveyed online (n=274 – excluding those respondents in other locations) said they would like to be more integrated. Men and women had roughly equal levels of interest. Enthusiasm was stronger among refugees living outside Jakarta and West Java where almost all live in IOM shelters.

Figure 13: Integration aspirations - would you like to be more integrated?



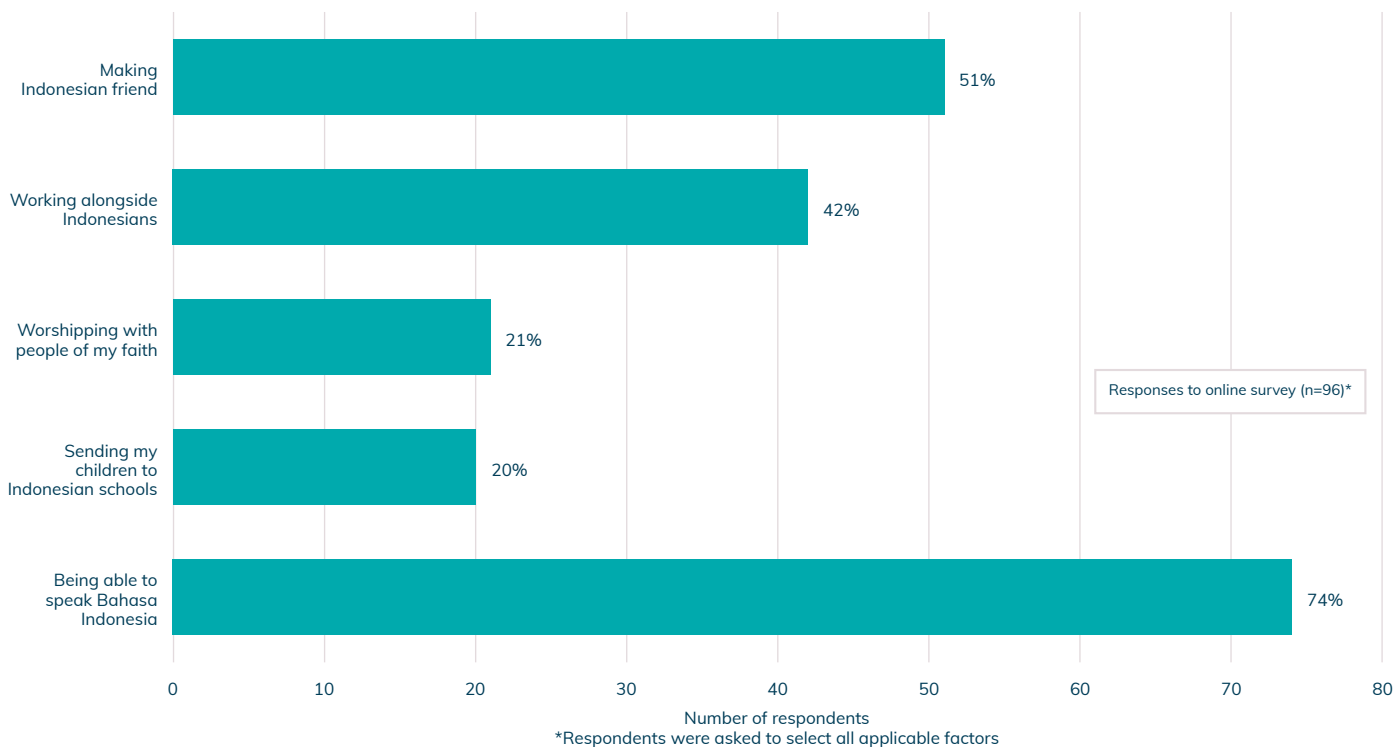
Refugees interested in integrating – a total of 96 respondents to the online survey (n=289) – cited learning the local language as the most important factor; IOM and UNHCR both support learning Bahasa Indonesia.

81 According to one resident, "Before they [refugees and asylum seekers] would only stay around Puncak, go out in the evening, come back in the morning. Now they are suddenly brave enough to hang out in Bogor Mall and drive their motorbikes everywhere on their own. Before they'd walk or take a minibus." Interview in Bogor, December 2020. Some areas in Puncak however still refuse to host refugees. Interview with local community, Bogor, December 2020.

82 Interview with local staff member at CRS, Bogor, December 2020.

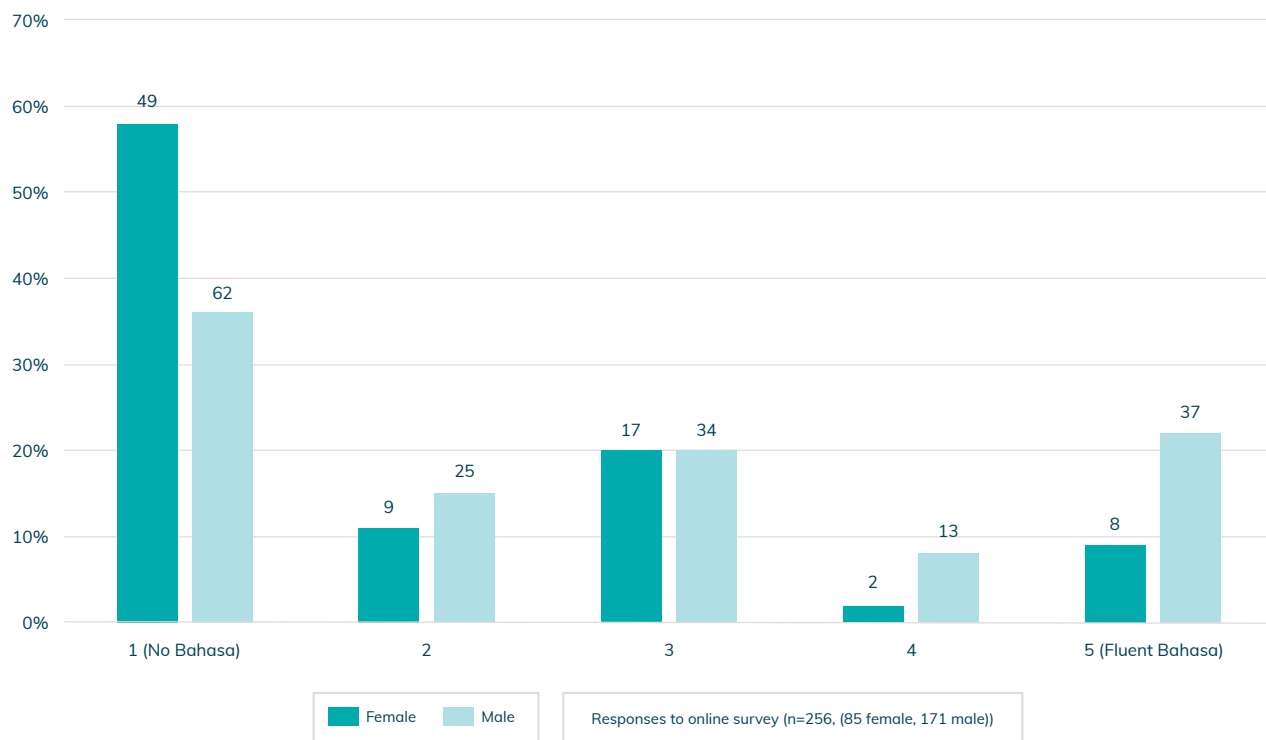
83 Interview with Dompot Dhuafa, Jakarta, January 2021

Figure 14: Factors seen to facilitate integration - what would help with integration?



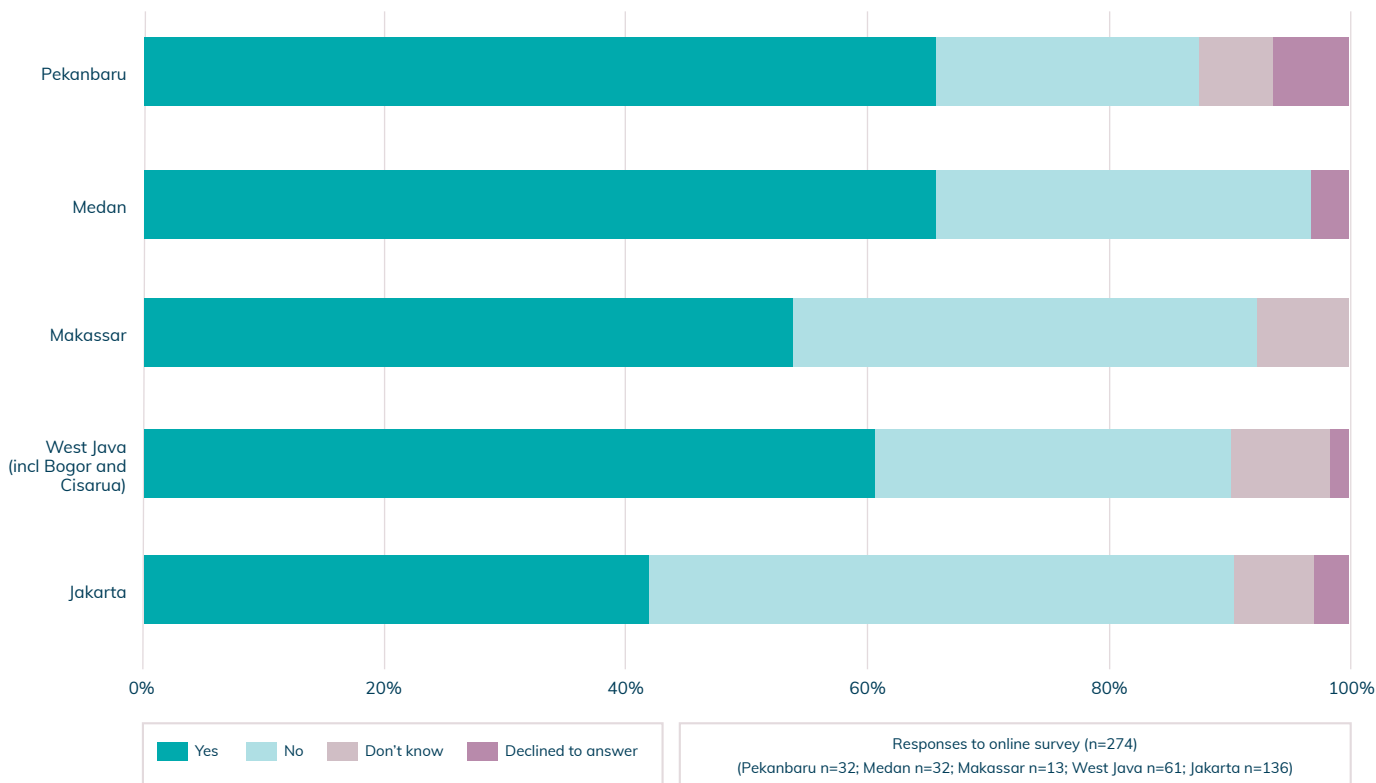
The online survey also showed that women are noticeably less able to speak Bahasa Indonesia than men.

Figure 15: Bahasa Indonesia proficiency - how well do you speak Bahasa Indonesia?



Experiences of discrimination vary widely by gender and location in Indonesia. Overall, more than half of the online survey respondents (n=289) said they had experienced discrimination in Indonesia. Men are more likely to report experiencing discrimination (58%, n=187) than women (39%, n=96) according to the survey results. Refugees currently living outside Jakarta also reported more discrimination than those residing in the capital.

Figure 16: Discrimination against refugees and asylum seekers - have you ever experienced discrimination?



The support that refugees living in shelters receive from IOM is a source of tension among host communities. It is widely reported to be a source of local jealousy and resentment, according to multiple interviews with refugees and experts conducted for this research. For example, to a staff member from a local organization in Makassar said:

The locals consider refugees to be ungrateful, they already have housing and they are given money by IOM, but they still complain. This misunderstanding often can turn into conflict, for example stones being thrown at the accommodation. I think locals still don't have any understanding about refugees. They don't understand why they came to Indonesia.⁸⁴

Although integration is not an option on paper, some refugees have managed to make a life for themselves in Indonesia — even if it is, as most hope, temporary. Interviews with refugees suggested that this is harder for refugees living in IOM shelters, where they are separated from the local community, as well as for women, due to family responsibilities and less ability to speak Bahasa Indonesia.

Access to education

Refugees have started their own learning centres in Jakarta and West Java. These centres not only educate children but also rely on adult refugees as teachers. They include: Roshand (Bright) Learning Center, Hope Learning Center, HELP for Refugee and Cipayung Refugee Education Center.⁸⁵ The centres are independent of UNHCR and IOM and fundraise on their own; UNHCR supports some activities. These initiatives provide an important sense of community

⁸⁴ Interview with local IOM partner, Makassar, December 2020.

⁸⁵ Brown, T. (2018) "Refugee-led education in Indonesia," *Forced Migration Review* 58.

to refugees, while providing an alternative to Indonesian schooling. Because these learning centres generally use English, some parents also appear to prefer them to Indonesian schools, believing English will be more useful for resettlement.

Refugees can also send their children to Indonesian schools, particularly at the primary level, in some areas.

Access to education has improved for refugees following the 2019 circular issued by the education ministry. However, there is considerable variation across Indonesia, with some local governments still refusing to grant access.⁸⁶ Refugee children are generally allocated whatever spots are left over after Indonesians enrol. Further difficulties arise when children need school certificates or when moving from primary school in the absence of an official student number (nomor induk siswa nasional). Access to high schools is still limited.⁸⁷

Both UNHCR and IOM help refugee children to enter Indonesian schools by providing Bahasa Indonesia lessons and covering costs of uniforms, books and transport. With its partners CRS, Human Initiative and Dompot Dhuafa, UNHCR runs preparatory classes to help children enter Indonesian public schools, however enrolment fluctuates over time.⁸⁸ In 2019, this assistance helped 105 children to enter public school in Jakarta and surrounding areas.⁸⁹ IOM also offers classes, such as Bahasa Indonesia lessons and early childhood education, to help prepare refugee children for school. Across Indonesia, however, due to limited space the total enrolment of refugee children in nationally-accredited schools was less than 600 as of mid-2020 — approximately one sixth of the total number of children registered with UNHCR across the country.⁹⁰

Refugee children attending local schools can support relationships between refugees and the Indonesian host community.⁹¹ Often, this takes the form of children becoming translators for their parents. One refugee shared that his wife is now learning Bahasa Indonesia from his teenage daughter who attends local school.⁹² Bullying does occur, but NGOs report that teachers generally handle the issue.⁹³ A teenage refugee who attends a private Muslim school in Medan was largely positive about his experience. He said he and his brother did not experience discrimination or bullying from other students, although some knew about his family's status in Indonesia. The fact that he could attend school made him feel more like other people — even if his family had fallen behind on school fees during the COVID-19 pandemic.⁹⁴ But he still worries about his future and hoped to finish his schooling in a third country:

I don't have a homeland. If we don't get to our destination country [Australia] within the next two years, I can't go to school there.

For many refugees and asylum seekers, difficulties accessing education compound their stress. Despite the available options, many children are still not in school. A refugee with two children living in Medan described her worries about the future of her children:

*The children aren't in school. My son studies on his own using the internet. My daughter has difficulty studying. And I'm not able to teach them.*⁹⁵

Data from the second phase of the COVID-specific 4Mi survey shows that even before the pandemic, access to education was limited for Afghans in the Jakarta and West Java areas. Fortunately, those with children in school were

86 In Semarang, IOM supports refugees to attend private school instead. Interview with IOM staff, by phone, November 2020. In Tangerang Selatan, local education authorities said the school required additional facilities first. Interview with staff from Human Initiative, by phone, November 2020. Schools in West Java are also refusing to admit refugee students as the province was not listed on the circular released by the education ministry in 2019 regarding refugee children's access to schools. Interview with CRS, Jakarta, November 2020.

87 This is current focus of IOM engagement with the government. Interview with IOM, by phone, November 2020.

88 The preparatory classes are run by CRS/Hi and Dompot Dhuafa. They support and coach refugee children and parents to be able to enter the school system, complete the Indonesian government's registration requirements, and build foundational knowledge and skills necessary to transition to a formal school environment.

89 68 in primary school, one in junior high, and 35 attend Pusat Kegiatan Belajar Masyarakat, a certified learning centre under the supervision of the government education department. Interview with Human Initiative.

90 UNHCR monthly statistical update, August 2020, unpublished.

91 Willingness to send children to Indonesian schools varies by country of origin. Iranians in particular have been reluctant to send their children to Indonesian schools, interview. Interview with Antje Missbach, academic, 2 November 2020.

92 Interview with refugee, Jakarta, January 2021.

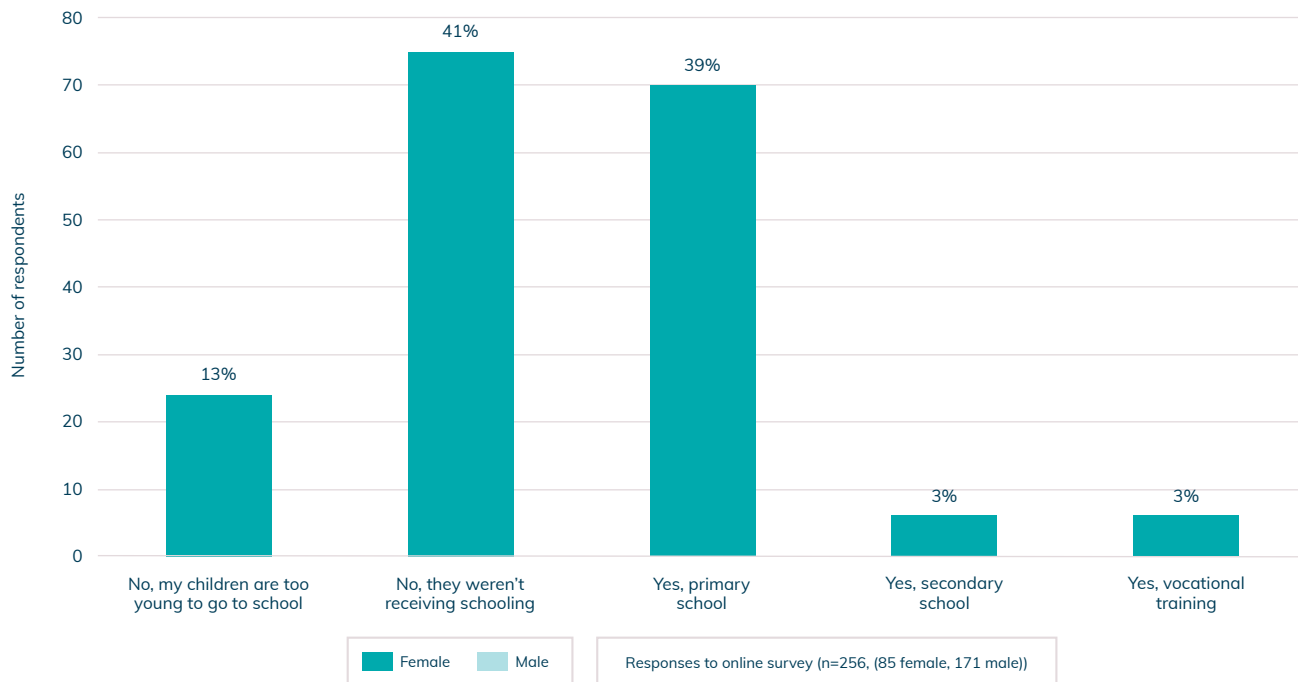
93 Interview with Human Initiative, by phone, November 2020.

94 Interview with refugee, Medan, December 2020.

95 Interview refugee, Medan, December 2020.

mostly able to switch to distance learning during the pandemic (70%, n=179). In other parts of Indonesia, respondents to the online survey were more likely to report that their children did not have access to education than to indicate that they did, with the only exception being Makassar.⁹⁶

Figure 17: Pre-pandemic school attendance - were your children in school before COVID-19?



Access to health

Access to health services is generally better than access to schools. UNHCR and other organizations report that refugees are not refused treatment at the community health centres known as Puskesmas or at government hospitals, even though their right to health care is not guaranteed under Indonesian law.⁹⁷ The Dompet Dhuafa hospital in Bogor and the clinic in Ciputat (south Jakarta) also provide treatment. Refugees have also had access to government quarantine facilities during the pandemic.⁹⁸ Discussions between the UN and the Indonesian government are ongoing about vaccinating refugees against COVID-19. As of April 2021, there were positive indications that it will happen, starting with the government's priority groups for vaccination.⁹⁹

However, refugees and activists say there are still barriers to accessing health services.¹⁰⁰ 4Mi data collected during the second half of 2020 (in the COVID II survey) from Afghan refugees in Jakarta and West Java shows that 31% (n=456) reported they did not have access to health care. Data from the online survey shows that refugees under IOM care surprisingly showed the same proportion (31%, n=61) reporting they did not have access to healthcare despite the available coverage. As this data was collected during the pandemic, it likely reflects access at that moment in time.

Refugees say they cannot access healthcare because of an inability to pay. Although IOM coverage is more comprehensive, including primary care provided through Puskesmas and referral to secondary and tertiary care as required, UNHCR also provides support to independent refugees.¹⁰¹ UNHCR works with its partner CWS to cover refugee medical treatment for primary, secondary and tertiary health care costs up to IDR 10,000,000 (~USD 700).¹⁰²

96 Although there were only four respondents in Makassar with children, half of whom had access to school, the city historically has facilitated access for children to attend local schools. See earlier discussion on Makassar in Section 4.

97 Interviews with UNHCR and CWS, by phone, November 2020. When asked what kinds of health services they can access, survey respondents were most likely to say Puskesmas followed by government hospital.

98 Interview with CWS, by phone, November 2020.

99 Interview with UNHCR, by phone, February 2021.

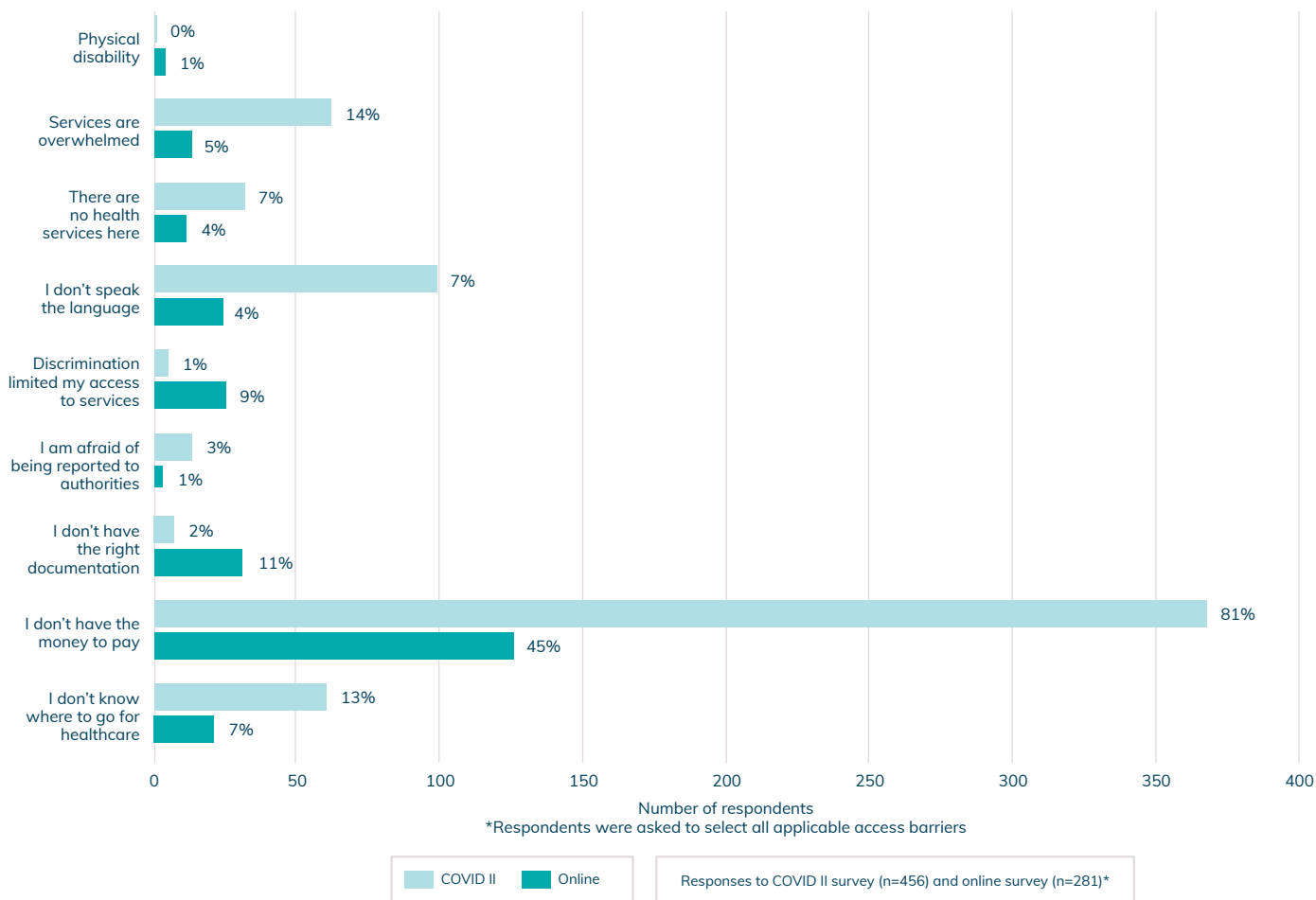
100 Asia-Pacific Refugee Rights Network (2020) "[Indonesia: Lack of access to healthcare for refugees and barriers to legal aid](#)".

101 IOM provides support for chronic conditions and operates hotlines to help refugees access healthcare services. Interview with IOM, by phone, February 2021.

102 Medical expenses higher than IDR 10,000,000 (~USD 700) are approved by UNHCR directly.

However the budget is limited and primary healthcare is prioritized over referrals to secondary care. Generally, emergencies are covered, but other needs are assessed on a case-by-case basis. Although UNHCR support is available to all refugees who are not under IOM care, interviews suggested that in practice it is easier for those receiving the UNHCR monthly subsistence allowance to access support since they have completed a vulnerability assessment. One refugee who had been receiving an allowance from UNHCR for three years said that he was no longer able receive healthcare support after it stopped.¹⁰³

Figure 18: Barriers to accessing healthcare services - what has stopped you accessing healthcare services?



Many interviewed refugees said they do not seek medical care when they fall ill, as they fear the fees and the cost of medicine. As one female refugee from Iran explained in her reply to the online survey:

We have ... high costs without jobs and income is very difficult, we prefer not to go to the doctor.

Refugees under IOM's care also have to cover the cost of basic medicines provided through Puskesmas themselves; medicines prescribed by specialists however are covered. Although the costs at Puskesmas may not be high, some refugees choose not to seek treatment. Nor can refugees under IOM care use their coverage for their family members unless they too qualify for IOM support. One refugee in Makassar reported spending IDR 750,000 (~USD 50) per month on medicine for his mother-in-law, who lives with him and his wife:

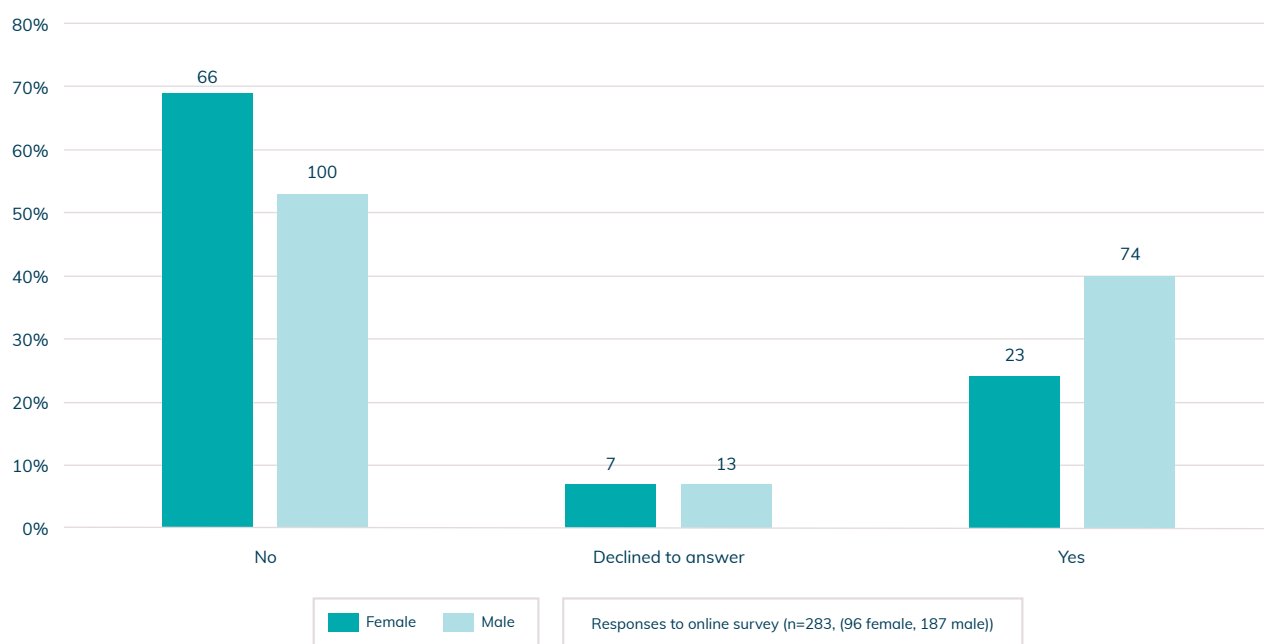
I am covered by IOM. But it's my wife and my mother-in-law who need health check-ups. Now, if they're sick, I have to buy the medicine alone; if they die, I will have to manage it alone.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ Interview with refugee, Jakarta, January 2021.
¹⁰⁴ Interview refugee, Makassar, December 2020.

And those who do seek treatment are often confused by the referral system.¹⁰⁵ After seeking treatment for stomach pain and being advised to undergo surgery, one female refugee tried to request help from UNHCR but received no reply. She no longer goes to the Puskesmas when she feels sick as she cannot afford the recommended treatment.¹⁰⁶

Gender also influences access to healthcare. In the online survey, women were more likely to say they did not have access (74%, n=85) than men (57%, n=171). This may partially reflect that that five sixths of respondents living in IOM shelters — who have health coverage — were men. Interviews however suggested that women were also more reluctant to seek care, a problem which is compounded by language barriers and a lack of translators which contribute to delays in seeking care.¹⁰⁷ One female refugee who miscarried reported being treated poorly by Puskesmas staff when she sought treatment.¹⁰⁸ In another instance, a male refugee reported that he was unable to get treatment for his pregnant wife because she is not under IOM care, whereas he is. His wife subsequently miscarried too. Other couples reported similar experiences, where IOM healthcare only covered one person, often the man, due to their date of arrival in Indonesia, despite the other person, often the woman, requiring medical treatment, especially for pregnancy.¹⁰⁹

Figure 19: Access to healthcare services, by gender



Access to birth certificates for children born to refugees and asylum seekers in Indonesia is also difficult. These children generally do not receive birth certificates, not even those who have one Indonesian parent.¹¹⁰ UNHCR is advocating with the authorities in charge of civil registration at national and local levels to issue birth certificates to refugees on the basis of their UNHCR IDs. However, the presidential decree did not provide guidance on the issue. Most refugees only receive a document from the hospital which is verified by UNHCR; the child is then added to the family's registration. However, in some locations, local authorities will issue a birth certificate, but only if the parents still have their passports, which many do not.¹¹¹

105 Interview with Dompot Dhuafa, Jakarta, January 2021.

106 Interview with refugee, Jakarta, January 2021.

107 Interview with Jakarta-based refugee organization, by phone, January 2021. IOM relies on community liaison officers to provide translation support. Interview with IOM, by phone, February 2021.

108 Interview with refugee, Makassar, December 2020.

109 Interviews with refugees in Medan and Makassar, December 2020.

110 Interview with IOM, by phone, January 2021. On the legal issues around children with one Indonesian parent, see (in Bahasa Indonesian): Smartlegal.id (2019) "[Status Anak Hasil Perkawinan Campuran](#)".

111 As is current practice in Makassar, interview with IOM, by phone, January 2020.

Mental health

The prolonged wait and uncertainty experienced by refugees in Indonesia takes a toll on their mental health.

Although both IOM and UNHCR provide mental health support for refugees, requests for counselling are increasing.¹¹² One refugee said she waited two years to see a counsellor.¹¹³

Refugees may require counselling for experiences that occurred prior to their arrival in Indonesia — including during their journey — as well as trauma they have experienced since arriving. One refugee, who was a child when he was separated from his mother and put in immigration detention with his father and another sibling, was still scared he could be detained again.¹¹⁴ He was being held in the Belawan immigration detention centre outside Medan in 2013, when a brawl broke out between Myanmar Buddhist fishermen and Rohingya Muslim refugees, leaving eight of the former dead.¹¹⁵

Others appear to have mental health needs due to a sense of isolation. According to one female refugee from Iran living in an IOM shelter with her husband and children in Medan:

*I have difficulties communicating with other people. My English is bad and I can't speak Indonesian because I don't have friends. I'm not brave enough to go out.*¹¹⁶

More than 70% (n=271) of refugees in the online survey reported feeling very worried on a daily basis, on a scale of one (not worried at all) to five (very worried). Refugees living in IOM-run shelters reported feeling more worried than those living in private accommodation. Generally, refugees in the shelters have been in Indonesia for longer because of the closure of the IOM programme to new entrants in 2018. And desperation builds over time.

Referrals to counselling have increased but many refugees do not ask for help. Interviews with refugees suggest that mental health issues are even more widespread than referrals to counselling services run by UNHCR and IOM indicate. Many refugees are reluctant to seek treatment or try to cope on their own. Refugee-run organizations in Jakarta and West Java emphasize that the mental health crisis among women is invisible, as they are more reluctant to seek support.¹¹⁷

One elderly Rohingya woman said she often cries uncontrollably. Neither she nor her daughter receives financial support, leaving both of them dependent on her son-in-law, who only receives IDR 500,000 (~ USD 35) a month from IOM and works illegally to support the family.

*I can only pray to God...life is difficult. I want to die so that I won't be a burden for my daughter.*¹¹⁸

Her son-in-law feels a similar level of despair, frustrated by the long wait for resettlement and the constant struggle to earn money.

*Their answer is always: "wait, wait." It continues like this. I want to kill myself but if I commit suicide, who will protect my wife and my mother-in-law? We're waiting until after COVID, until Australia opens again.*¹¹⁹

COVID-19 has exacerbated mental health problems and made it harder for refugees to use coping strategies. The COVID-19 pandemic is causing more stress and increasing uncertainty around asylum and resettlement processes.

112 UNHCR's partners say the demand has led to waiting lists and curtailed treatment. Most refugees only receive two or three counselling sessions due to the demand. Interview with CWS and Lifespring, November and December 2020. The increased request may also be due to more awareness of counselling services, in addition to need among refugees.

113 Interview with refugee, Jakarta, by phone, January 2021.

114 Interview with refugee, Medan, December 2020.

115 Gunawan, A. (2013) "[8 Myanmar detainees die in Medan brawl](#)," *The Jakarta Post*.

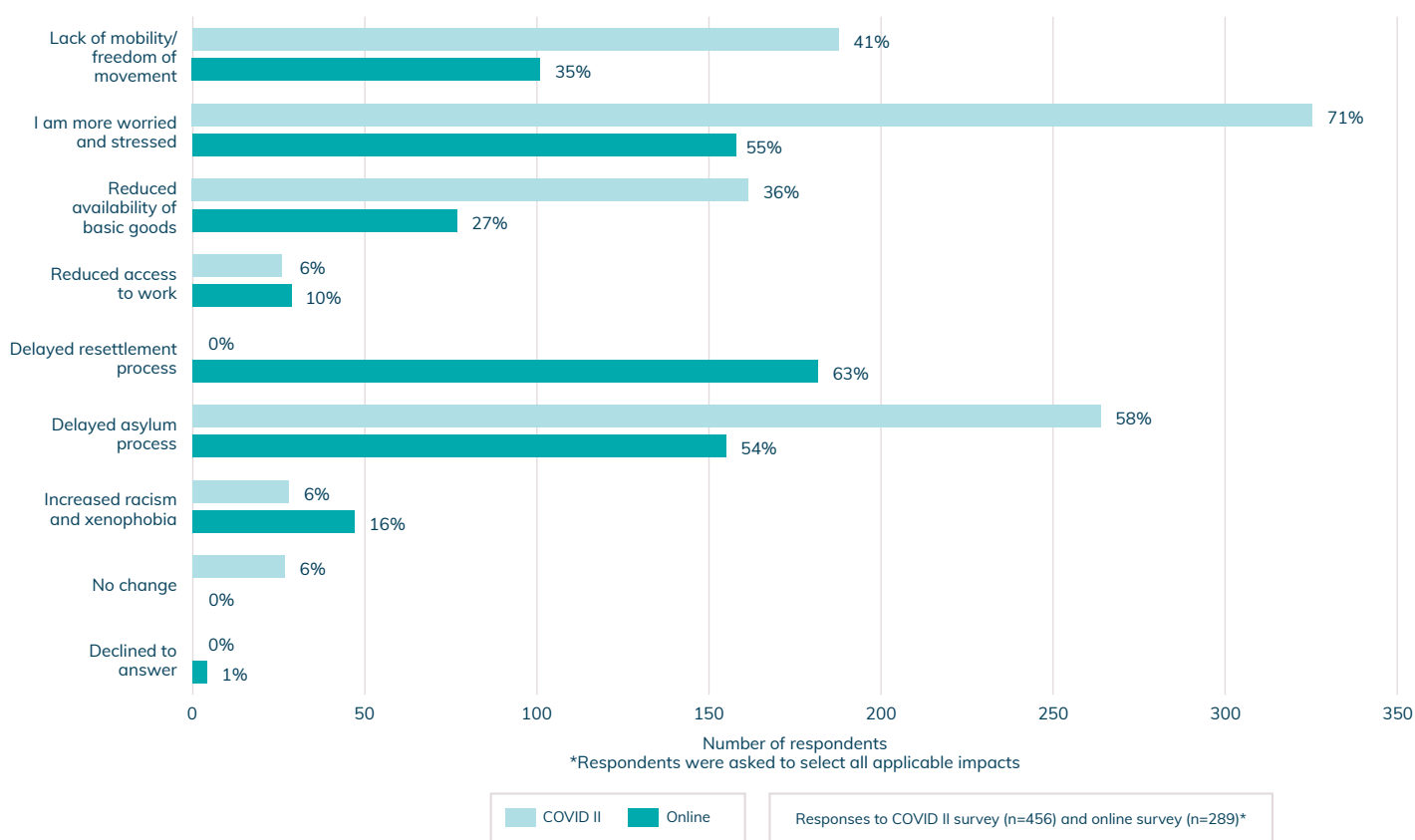
116 Interview with refugee, Medan, December 2020.

117 Interview with Sisterhood, by phone, Jakarta, January 2021.

118 Interview with refugee, Makassar, December 2020.

119 Interview with refugee, Makassar, December 2020.

Figure 20: Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic - how have you been affected by COVID-19?



Men seemed more likely to have contacts and activities outside that helped them manage their stress — although some women reported similar coping strategies, such as exercise and trying to stay busy.¹²⁰ Lockdowns have isolated refugees from their social networks and created new worries, resulting in an uptick in requests for counselling.¹²¹ At the same time, it has been hard for organizations to maintain mental health programming during the pandemic due to the suspension of many in-person programmes.

Some refugees and asylum seekers find their lives in Indonesia so unbearable and their prospects so bleak that they have taken their own lives: two suicides were reported in the first three months of 2021, four in 2020, and two in 2019.¹²² During the period the research for this study was conducted, refugees and asylum seekers mentioned at least two recent suicide attempts to researchers. In December, following the suicide of two male Afghan refugees in the Jakarta area, refugees held a vigil in front of UNHCR's office.¹²³

Domestic violence and SGBV

Women and children are especially vulnerable to domestic violence and SGBV. Organizations working with refugees and asylum seekers report incidents such as domestic violence and rape, as well as early marriage and harassment.¹²⁴ Although services for survivors exist, they are limited and language barriers, coupled with stigma, create access impediments. For example, in Makassar, IOM works with a local NGO to make refugees aware of local services — including a shelter — for sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) survivors but engagement in recent training was

120 Interviews with refugees, Jakarta, Medan and Makassar, November-December 2020.

121 Interview with IOM, by phone, November 2020.

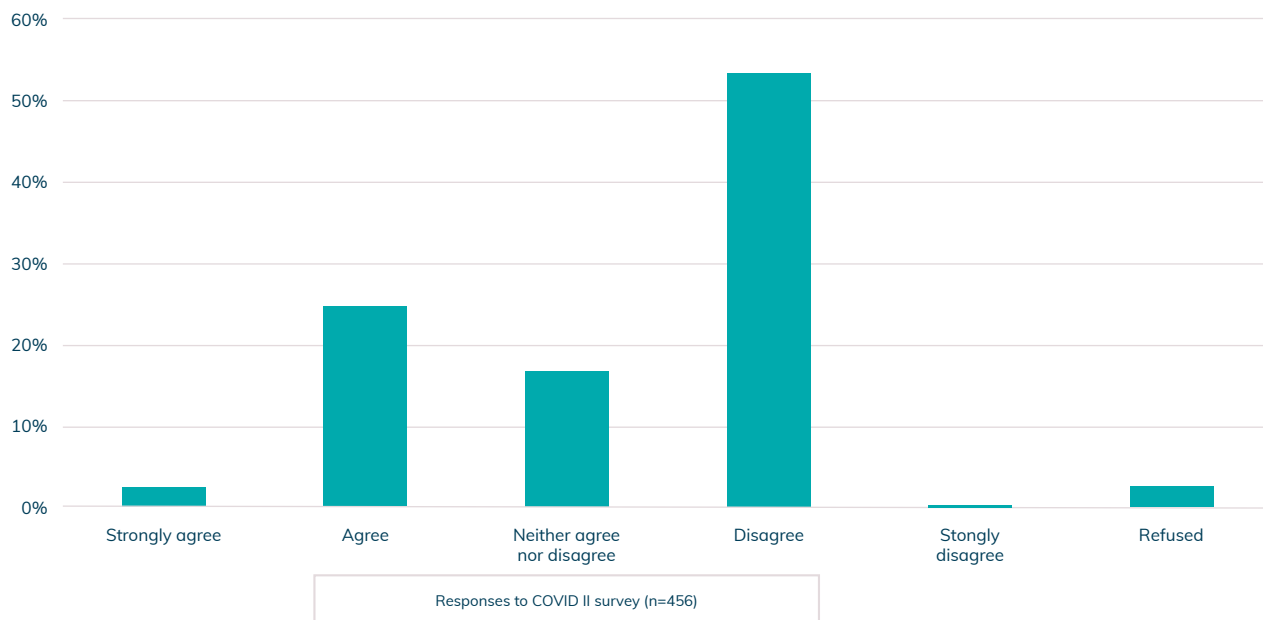
122 Interview with UNHCR, by phone, February 2021.

123 Joniad, JN. (2021) "[Indefinite limbo drives refugees to take their own lives in Indonesia](#)," Overland..

124 For example, in 2019, most SGBV cases handled by CRS among independent refugees in the greater Jakarta area involved women experiencing domestic violence. Harassment appears to be frequent although under-reported. Single male refugees reportedly harass single female refugees in the hopes of getting married, which they believe will increase their prospects of resettlement. Interview with a female refugee, by phone, Jakarta, January 2021.

low, with more male than female refugees attending.¹²⁵ Multiple stakeholders reported an increase in SGBV during the COVID-19 pandemic, although this was not confirmed by the survey data, potentially due to the sensitivity of the issue.¹²⁶ However 27% (n=456) of the respondents to the Covid II survey agreed or strongly agreed that incidents of domestic violence had increased during the pandemic.

Figure 21: Impact of COVID-19 on domestic violence - has domestic violence increased since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic?



Access to work

Some refugees work informally, although exact numbers are unknown.¹²⁷ Interviews showed that employment varies from unskilled manual labour, to electronic and mechanical repairs, to hairdressing. Refugees seem to have assessed the local labour market and positioned themselves accordingly. For example, one Sudanese refugee previously worked as an Arabic teacher in exchange for food and lodging at a boarding school.

Working irregularly is risky, due to the potential for exploitation and crackdowns by immigration authorities. An official from the national task force indicated that he was aware many refugees are working, and that as this is illegal, the government cannot entirely turn a blind eye. But in practice, he did not feel it was a problem as long as it didn't cause tensions at a local level.¹²⁸ When refugees start their own businesses, officials appear to tolerate it more if they are only catering to other refugees, although over time the businesses often start serving Indonesians too.¹²⁹ In some places, there is a perception that such businesses are in fact contributing to the local economy, for example by renting rooms or doing small livelihood activities, such as making bread or tailoring.¹³⁰ Although immigration authorities intermittently carry out raids, refugees resume running their businesses afterwards.¹³¹

But the lack of work rights increases the risks of refugees being exploited. UNHCR is aware of cases where refugees are not paid at all for their labour.¹³² One Rohingya in Makassar who does manual labour described the difficulties in negotiating a fair rate for his work:

¹²⁵ Interview with local IOM partner, Makassar, December 2020.

¹²⁶ 4Mi's Covid II survey asked respondents if risks of sexual exploitation had increased; only ten respondents agreed. Similarly, only eight respondents to the online survey reported experiencing SGBV when asked about threats they have ever experienced in Indonesia.

¹²⁷ The survey asked respondents to choose all sources of income they had received in the last two months – only two respondents indicated they had received money from an employer. However, others described “informal work” in written answers to the question.

¹²⁸ Interview with member of the national task force, by phone, December 2020.

¹²⁹ Interviews and field observations, Makassar and Bogor, December 2020.

¹³⁰ One local official doubted the wide economic benefit of having refugees in the area, but acknowledged that landlords renting them rooms are benefiting. According to interviewees, refugees are often charged more than locals in rent – for example, IDR 2,000,000 (~USD 140) where an Indonesian would pay half as much.

¹³¹ According to a local official in Bogor, “We have limited staff for monitoring, so they will come back after being sanctioned and processed by immigration.” Interview with local official, Bogor, December 2020

¹³² Interview with UNHCR, by phone, February 2021.

I say to Indonesians, if there is work, ask me. I need to eat. Before, they would refuse because I don't have permission [to work]. I say to them, I only get IDR 500,000 [~USD 35] from the UN each month, it's not enough for three people to eat. I don't always get work, three or four times a week. As long as they'll give me IDR 50,000 [USD 3.50 per day], I'll take the work.¹³³

A refugee who has a family of seven estimates that he needs IDR 3,500,000 (~USD 240) per month to cover his expenses. Only he qualifies for IOM support — IDR 1,250,000 (~USD 85) per month — which means he must earn the rest by running a small shop with his wife and by doing electrical repairs. But their income is not stable, and business has gone down due to the pandemic. As his wife recounts:

During the pandemic, we've eaten only vegetables. We haven't paid the school fees for the kids. We only ate meat on Idul Adha because how can we afford to buy it?¹³⁴

Opportunities for work and vocational training are greater in Jakarta and West Java. There are several factors that explain the difference: independent refugees are more integrated here; refugees have started learning centres and micro-enterprises; UNHCR needs interpreters and refugee representatives; and there are more options for vocational training. These activities often support interaction with Indonesians. Sisterhood, a refugee-run community centre in Jakarta, engages Indonesians as volunteers and, prior to the pandemic, was planning to run English classes for the local community and refugees together.¹³⁵ “Ready for Business”, an entrepreneurship training program that pairs refugees with Indonesians, has run twice, supported by UNHCR, the International Labour Organization, Dompot Dhuafa and Atma Jaya Catholic University. But these are still niche opportunities, which are inaccessible to refugees with lesser language skills.¹³⁶

IOM also works with partners to run activities including vocational training for refugees living in the shelters, although feedback from one facilitator was mixed. On the one hand, some refugees seemed glad to have something to do. On the other hand, it can be hard to get them interested, as they consider trainings useless as they just want to be resettled.¹³⁷ In some locations it also organizes social cohesion activities with host communities, for example, refugees teaching Arabic or cooking to Indonesians.¹³⁸

Getting by during the pandemic

Refugees struggle to cover their day-to-day needs — even more so during the pandemic. Although the most common form of assistance refugees receive is an allowance from UNHCR, IOM or JRS, thousands do not receive this support. And even those who have a monthly stipend report that it is not enough. In the online survey, 92% (n=272) replied that they do not have enough money to cover their basic needs. COVID-19 has also worsened pre-existing financial stresses. More than 80% (n=456) of Covid II survey respondents said they need extra money since the pandemic began. Many end up destitute, living on the street or turn to sex work.¹³⁹

Refugees who were relying on family and friends — either in their country of origin, those who have already moved or been resettled abroad or in Indonesia — for help have likely felt the impacts of the pandemic even more.¹⁴⁰ Economic hardship has likely made it even harder for systems of community self-reliance to function.¹⁴¹ With the pandemic affecting economic activity around the world, the ability of family and friends to help out has diminished.

133 Interview with refugee, Makassar, December 2020.

134 Interview with refugee, Medan, December 2020.

135 Interview with Sisterhood staff, by phone, Jakarta, January 2021.

136 Interview with refugee advocate, by phone, December 2020. According to partners involved in the programme, the requirement for participants to speak English or Bahasa Indonesia was a significant barrier.

137 Interview with NGO facilitator, Makassar, December 2020.

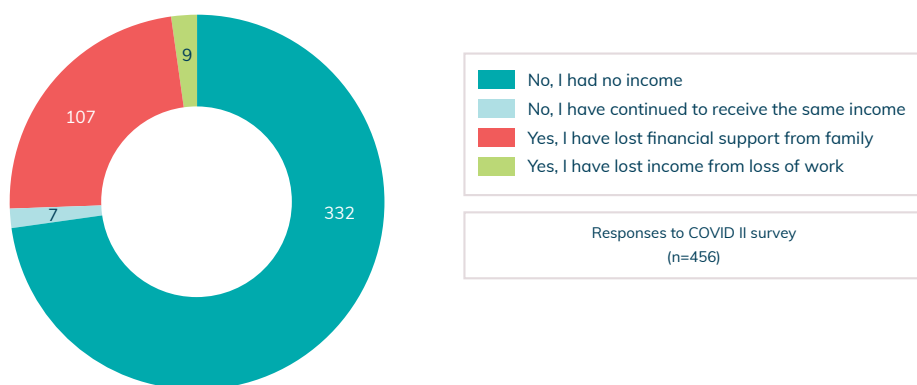
138 Interview with IOM, by phone, February 2021.

139 At least seven respondents to the online survey replied that they had been forced into prostitution at some point. A refugee interviewed in Jakarta in November 2020 also mentioned some refugees were involved in sex work.

140 Exactly how many rely on friends and family is unclear. The online survey showed that receiving money from friends and relatives in another country was the second most common form of financial support (64 respondents). However, organizations that work directly with refugees believe the proportion is much lower. CRS estimated that it was less than two percent. Interview with CRS staff, Jakarta, November 2020.

141 This often seems to take the form of helping with housing. One female Sudanese refugee in Jakarta reported that other community members pay for her room. Interview with refugee, Jakarta, January 2021. In Makassar, one reported being allowed by his Indonesian landlord to live in his housing for free.

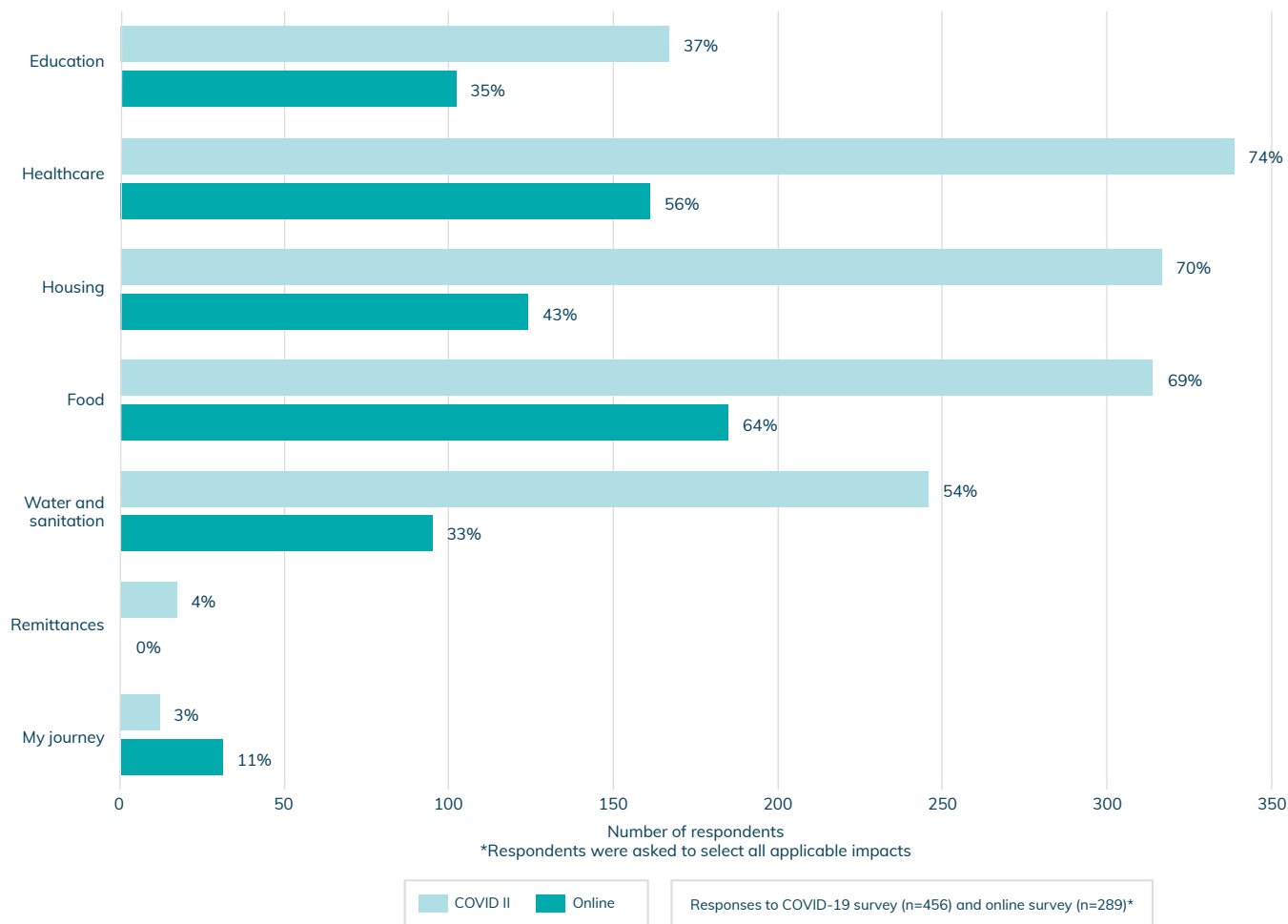
Figure 22: Impact of COVID-19 restrictions on income - have you lost income due to coronavirus restrictions?



The impact of the loss of income during the pandemic is considerable. Increased stress, an inability to pay rent and purchase goods are the most frequently cited consequences among Afghan refugees in Jakarta and West Java, according to 4Mi data.

Across all locations, refugees reported needing money for housing, food and healthcare. The main difference between those living in IOM shelters and other respondents was that the former were far less likely to report needing money to pay for housing.

Figure 23: Pandemic-related financial needs - what do you need additional money for?



UNHCR significantly expanded its cash assistance to independent refugees during the pandemic to help address these needs. Independent refugees who do not normally receive cash transfers were included in UNHCR's expanded COVID-19 assistance. Other actors to whom refugees would normally turn to for help were not able to assist as much as UNHCR did.

Informal monitoring and interviews show that refugees are very grateful for the additional support, with some using it to pay off accumulated debts.¹⁴² A refugee supporting his wife and two children in Jakarta who was living off his savings and sporadic work as a carpenter said he had received more than IDR 10,000,000 (~USD 700) — which was a huge help to his family, as he had almost exhausted their savings.¹⁴³ It is likely that UNHCR will continue to provide cash assistance at this level through 2021, if funding is available.¹⁴⁴ Refugees under IOM's care did not receive additional allowances but received masks, soap and other supplies to protect themselves.¹⁴⁵

142 Interview local CRS staff member, Bogor, December 2020.

143 Interview with male Iraqi refugee, Jakarta, January 2021.

144 Interview with UNHCR, by phone, February 2021.

145 Interviews with IOM-supported refugees, Medan and Makassar, December 2020. IOM distributed hygiene kits twice; supported the production of face masks jointly by refugee and local communities through local NGO partners; increased SGBV services; and provided food/non-food item support to those requested to isolate by Puskesmas. Email correspondence with IOM, April 2021.

8. Future aspirations and potential solutions

Refugee intentions

Refugees feel safer in Indonesia, despite all the challenges. Since 2017, UNHCR has delivered a hard message to refugees and told them that it is extremely unlikely they will be resettled to a third country because of the sharp reduction in the number of resettlement places. But as interviews and survey data show, refugees still hope they will leave. Many feel they have no choice but to stick it out and wait for resettlement, however small the odds may be.

The multiple drivers that prompted refugees to flee also explain why they are unwilling to consider assisted voluntary return (AVR): it is not safe to return. According to IOM data, 5,299 individuals received assistance to return to their home countries from Indonesia between 2011 and 2018.¹⁴⁶ In 2019 and 2020, however, the number of assisted voluntary returns was only in the low hundreds. In most cases, returns are the result of refugees running out of money after a long and vain wait for resettlement. After counselling and filing the necessary paperwork, IOM provides the airplane ticket and funds for reintegration.¹⁴⁷ But for most of the refugees surveyed and interviewed for this research, AVR is not an attractive option; however difficult, life in Indonesia is still preferable.

With irregular sea movements largely blocked, refugees also no longer have the option of continuing their journey on their own to countries such as Australia. The main route for irregular movements that remains open appears to be between Penang and northern Sumatra — a route many refugees used to arrive in Indonesia, and by Rohingya refugees to depart for Malaysia. This movement appears to have become much more expensive. A refugee family that paid RM 800 (~USD 195) per person in 2012 reported that the crossing back to Malaysia would now cost RM 7,000 (~USD 1,700) per person. At present, only Rohingya refugees are likely to undertake a secondary movement from Indonesia to Malaysia, due to the large Rohingya community there, where many refugees have relatives waiting for their arrival.¹⁴⁸ Of the 400 Rohingya who arrived in Aceh during 2020, as of early 2021 only slightly more than 100 remained.¹⁴⁹ The rest are presumed to have left for Malaysia.

The reality is that most refugees will continue to wait in Indonesia for years. As noted above, the Indonesian government fears that granting more rights to refugees would make them want to stay. This fear is misplaced. There is little evidence from the research to show that granting more rights in Indonesia would alter refugees' long-term intentions. When survey respondents were asked whether having work rights would induce them to stay in Indonesia, more than 60 percent said no — only refugees in Jakarta were more likely to opt for staying.

Improving lives in Indonesia

Refugees and asylum seekers eke out an existence despite having few rights. Although there is little chance that Indonesia will embrace integration officially, it is already the de facto reality for many refugees, especially the thousands who live independently in the greater Jakarta area. Inconsistencies in law enforcement and the informal economy allow some space to carve out a life. But for others the uncertainty and ambiguity have a paralyzing effect. Even if it may be possible to take more risks, refugees worry that if they do anything wrong, they may lose their chance at resettlement.¹⁵⁰

146 In the same period, approximately 5,500 refugees were resettled. For the AVR data, see the [IOM Indonesia website](#).

147 According to interviews, JRS does not allow IOM to conduct AVR counselling for refugees under its care as it feels its mission is to protect refugees, not return them to places where they are persecuted. AVR is also not an option for stateless refugees such as the Rohingya, nor for refugees from Eritrea (where IOM has no presence), Palestinians, and ethnic Bedouins from Kuwait. Interview with IOM staff, December 2020. IOM staff note that AVR is an option for many, although some may not consider it a fair choice, given that the uncertainty and stresses that refugees and asylum seekers in Indonesia face. Email correspondence, April 2021.

148 See for example this profile of a Rohingya refugee family who recently reunited in Aceh after the father crossed illegally from Malaysia to reunite with his two daughters: Suryono, M. (2021) "[After 7 years, refugee family reunite with happy tears in Lhokseumawe, Aceh](#)" UNHCR Indonesia.

149 Interview with UNHCR, by phone, February 2021.

150 Interview with refugee advocate, by phone, Jakarta, December 2020.

Refugees live in a cloud of uncertainty about their future, as Indonesian officials are aware.¹⁵¹ Policy changes in Indonesia seem unlikely to provide long-term solutions. But the Indonesian government could improve the services and coping mechanisms available to refugees while they wait. Isolation and financial insecurity are clearly contributing to increased requests for counselling and the rash of suicides and attempts in 2020, which suggest a growing mental health crisis.¹⁵²

Indonesia should further enhance access to services. The 2016 presidential decree did not expand the rights of refugees and asylum seekers in Indonesia, but the national government has taken steps to expand access to education and healthcare through circulars and policy-making, such as including refugees in pandemic response.¹⁵³ Closer coordination between the task force under the Coordinating Ministry for Political, Legal and Security Affairs and local governments is needed to address access to services, as not all governments are following directives from the central government.¹⁵⁴ Implementation of the presidential decree and allocating budget to local governments to manage refugees in their area is also still needed.¹⁵⁵

Expanding livelihood and work opportunities will help refugees support themselves. Indonesia's willingness to expand livelihood and work rights — if not formally, then through expanded opportunities for vocational training, joint start-ups run by refugees and Indonesians, or permission to work for specific employers or sectors — is essential.¹⁵⁶ Law and policy needs to align with the facts on the ground: many refugees already work out of necessity, because there is not enough funding to go around. Allowing refugees to work would ensure protection under the law from exploitation while addressing concerns of local officials, who worry that refugees working illegally is a potential source of conflict with host communities.¹⁵⁷

As long as the Indonesian government clings to a belief that international organizations will take care of refugees' needs, it will continue to push refugees into the informal economy and perpetuate a "securitized" approach to refugee management, whereby refugees are subject to intermittent immigration checks and arbitrary detention for trying to get by. Ongoing efforts by the Ministry of Manpower to provide refugees and asylum seekers with access to vocational training through its own centres (balai latihan kerja) are a good step forward.¹⁵⁸

Funders also need to back more sustainable solutions. International funding to support refugees stuck in Indonesia is already inadequate and is unlikely to remain at current levels in the years ahead. Cuts to Australian funding in 2018 may presage future reductions. Funders therefore have an incentive to push for changes that would make refugees able to support themselves; at the same time, it should be recognized that this funding is preventing thousands of refugees from becoming destitute. It seems likely that allowing refugees to take part in the local economy would not only lessen dependence on international organizations, but also reduce social jealousy from host communities that resent what they perceive as handouts.

Refugees living in Indonesia will continue to need support from the international community but that assistance should be structured around their needs — for example, their preferences regarding housing — and delivered in partnership with local governments where possible, to support them to fulfil their responsibilities as set out under the 2016 presidential decree .

Leaving Indonesia

Complementary pathways are more likely than traditional durable solutions. Voluntary return, and resettlement to a third country are increasingly unlikely for refugees in Indonesia, as they are for the rest of the world's more than 20 million refugees. UNHCR is increasingly turning to complementary pathways, however, these will only be able to help a limited number of refugees and will require the support of many third states to be flexible in their laws and policies.

151 Interview with national task force, Jakarta, December 2020.

152 Interview with refugee-run organization, by phone, Jakarta, January 2021.

153 The government also included refugee and asylum-seeking children as a vulnerable population in need of special attention during the pandemic in its COVID-19 child protection protocol. Email correspondence with International Detention Coalition, April 2021.

154 Before the pandemic, the national task force conducted visits to specific areas and would discuss issues such as access to local schools. Interview with IOM, by phone, November 2020.

155 Local officials are concerned that misappropriating budget lines, even in an emergency, could land them in hot water. Interviews with local government, Lhokseumawe and Bogor, December 2020.

156 This is an advocacy priority for a cross-section of actors, from UNHCR to civil society and academia.

157 Interviews with local officials, Bogor, December 2020.

158 Interviews with national task force, Jakarta, December 2020; and with IOM, by phone, February 2021.

Refugees in Indonesia are already exploring private sponsorship, which involves being assisted by individuals or organizations to resettle outside the UNHCR-managed process — in 2019, 57 refugees left Indonesia through private sponsorship.¹⁵⁹ Canada has the largest programme in the world, dating back to the late 1970s. In 2019, approximately 20,000 refugees were resettled by Canadian citizens and organizations.¹⁶⁰ Other countries have versions of the programme but are subject to more restrictions and do not operate at the same scale.

UNHCR is still exploring other potential pathways, including family reunification, education programmes and labour mobility. All would allow refugees to leave Indonesia through legal routes while also ensuring their protection needs are met.

Some refugees may be better suited for complementary pathways than others. Options that involve education and work visas will be more accessible to refugees who already have language skills and relevant work experience. Evidence from this paper’s research suggests that female refugees are likely to be less able to access labour mobility pathways as they generally have less work experience than men.¹⁶¹

Another unknown is whether refugees would embrace opportunities that only give refugees a time-limited stay. Generally, complementary pathways do not guarantee having a permanent home in a third country, although in some cases this is possible.

Indonesia is open to supporting work opportunities if they increase the likelihood of refugees leaving. Labour mobility schemes are appealing to Indonesian officials, who would like refugees to leave through whatever legal means are possible. They also reinforce the need to permit vocational training and to provide work opportunities while refugees are still in Indonesia. As one official from the national refugee task force explained:

*If we help them to develop their abilities through training, they will have skills, and this may be a consideration for third countries to receive them.*¹⁶²

Indonesian government officials as well as the public are generally more aware of the need for safe labour migration than they are of the protection needs of refugees. As millions of Indonesians work overseas, safe labour migration is a more familiar concept — because it deals with “our neighbours, our communities, ourselves,” as one Indonesian human rights expert explained.¹⁶³ Regional cooperation on safe migration is also more developed. UNHCR continues to explore labour mobility schemes that would increase options for refugees while ensuring their protection needs are met. The two global compacts — one on refugees and one on migration — however provide a framework for Indonesia’s engagement on both issues.¹⁶⁴

159 UNHCR August 2020 update, unpublished.

160 The programme requires that refugees have a UNHCR-issued document in order to qualify for sponsorship by a group of five private citizens. Because most refugees in Indonesia have the required paperwork, the pathway is viable, provided they have can find sponsors and funding. (Sponsoring a single adult requires sponsors to show they have raised CAD 16,500.) Refugee advocates in Canada say they are overwhelmed with requests from refugees, particularly Hazara from Afghanistan, for help with private sponsorship. Interviews with private sponsors in Canada, by phone, November 2020.

161 However, the first refugee to leave Indonesia through an educational pathway was a young Afghan woman. She departed in March 2021. Email correspondence with UNHCR, April 2021.

162 Interview with Indonesian government official, Jakarta, December 2020.

163 Interview with Indonesian human rights expert, by phone, November 2020.

164 Afriansyah, A. (2018) “[Indonesia and the Global Compacts on Refugees and Migration](#),” International Journal of Refugee Law, vol 30, no 4.

9. Recommendations

To the Government of Indonesia:

- Continue to provide asylum and uphold the principle of non-refoulement for refugees and asylum seekers in Indonesia, while expanding protection of their other rights in Indonesian policy and law.
- Implement fully the 2016 presidential decree and ensure local governments permit access to services and have allocated budgets to use for the management of refugees and asylum seekers in their area.
- Consider ending immigration detention not only in practice but also in policy and law.
- Ensure national and local refugee task forces include active participation of all relevant line ministries, such as those in charge of education, health, social affairs and manpower, to provide a holistic response to refugee needs.
- Expand livelihood opportunities for refugees and asylum seekers — including but not limited to vocational training — to enable them to contribute to the local economy, to protect them from exploitation and to lessen dependence on funders.
- Draw on Indonesia's experience managing labour migration to support and prepare refugees and asylum seekers for labour mobility schemes, as one potential complementary pathway that would enable departure to a third country.
- Ensure adequate funding for regional and local responses to new arrivals, particularly Rohingya arriving by boat.

TO UNHCR, IOM and other organizations supporting refugees and asylum seekers in Indonesia:

- Ensure assistance to refugees and asylum seekers responds to their expressed needs and facilitate expansion of refugee-run initiatives, especially in areas outside Jakarta and West Java.
- Advocate for the end of arbitrary rules imposed by local governments that limit the freedoms of refugees and asylum seekers.
- In partnership with local governments, support housing arrangements that would maximise the well-being of refugees and asylum seekers and foster positive interactions with host communities.
- Support greater integration, including by increasing opportunities to learn Bahasa Indonesia and ensuring women can participate in classes.
- Continue advocacy such that children can enrol in Indonesian schools as per the education ministry's directive.
- Address barriers, including those related to language and costs, that deter refugees and asylum seekers from seeking healthcare.
- Expand mental health programming to support refugees and asylum seekers, including by strengthening the role of refugee-run centres in ensuring that individuals who need counselling can access support.
- Link vocational training with income-generating opportunities where possible, in partnership with the Indonesian government.
- Ensure that all support provided to refugees and asylum seekers is gender-sensitive and addresses additional barriers faced by women so as to support their empowerment.

10. Annex

Methodology

This study used a mixed methods approach combining quantitative and qualitative sources of data to understand the experiences of refugees and asylum seekers in Indonesia and to identify possible solutions to their situation of involuntary immobility.

Quantitative data

The findings draw upon data previously collected by MMC through its 4Mi core migrant survey, as well as two other data sets that were gathered by MMC through a modified survey during the COVID-19 pandemic (called Covid I and Covid II in this report). Through 4Mi, MMC only surveys Afghans in Jakarta and West Java who arrived in Indonesia up to two years before taking the survey questionnaire. This means that most survey respondents are living independently in the community, as opposed to in IOM supported community shelters. To understand the situation of refugees from other countries, those who live outside Jakarta and West Java, those under IOM care, and those who have been in Indonesia for longer, an additional online survey was conducted by the research team specifically for this report.

Table 2: Overview of survey respondents

	Migrant Survey	COVID Phase I	COVID Phase II	Online survey
Number of respondents	1,123	166	456	289
Gender	32% Female 68% Male	38% Female 62% Male	32% Female 68% Male	34% Female 66% Male
Country of origin	Afghanistan	Afghanistan	Afghanistan	Mixed
Year of arrival in Indonesia	After 2016	After 2018	After 2018	2012 to 2020
Place of residence	63% Jakarta 37% West Java	78% Jakarta 22% West Java	75% Jakarta 25% West Java	47% Jakarta 21% West Java 32% Other
Survey method	In person	Phone	Phone	Online
Survey language	Dari	Dari	Dari	English, Arabic, Farsi, Somali
Timeframe of data collection	April 2018 to December 2019	March to June 2020	July to December 2020	December 2020

None of the surveys were representative, but the survey techniques used generated a sample roughly proportionate to the overall refugee and asylum seeker population. For example, across all four surveys, women were slightly over-represented as they make up only 26% of the total adult population.¹⁶⁵

Broad similarities in respondent educational background, ages, and marital status can be seen across the 4Mi surveys. However, respondents to the online survey were more likely to have a university degree and to be older than respondents to the 4Mi surveys.

¹⁶⁵ UNHCR August update, unpublished.

Figure 24: Marital status of survey respondents

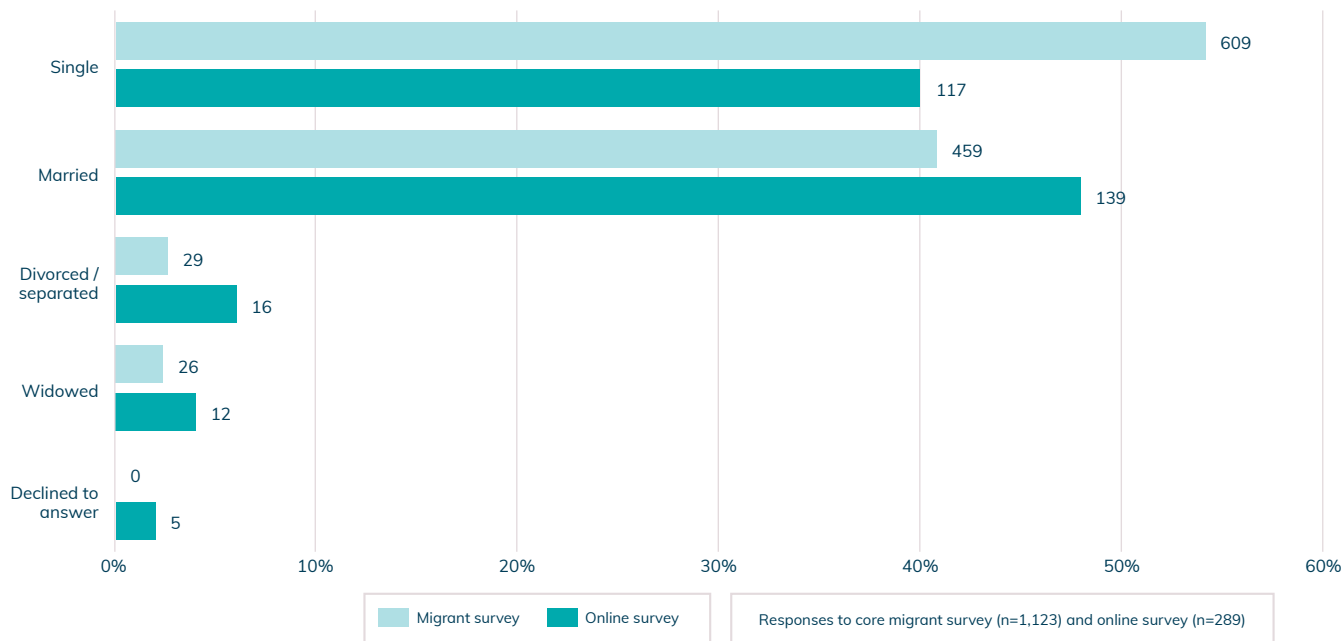


Figure 25: Education status of survey respondents

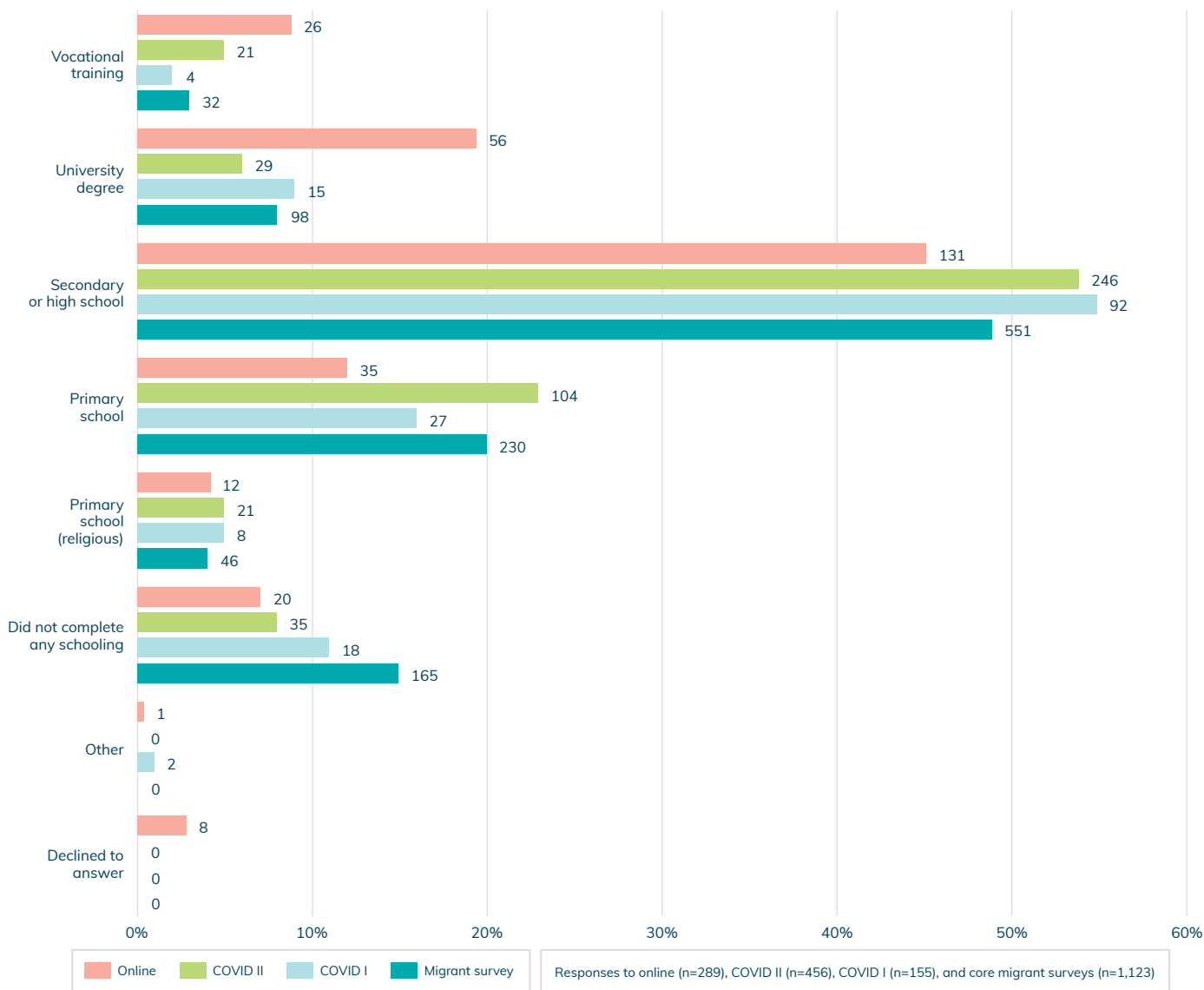
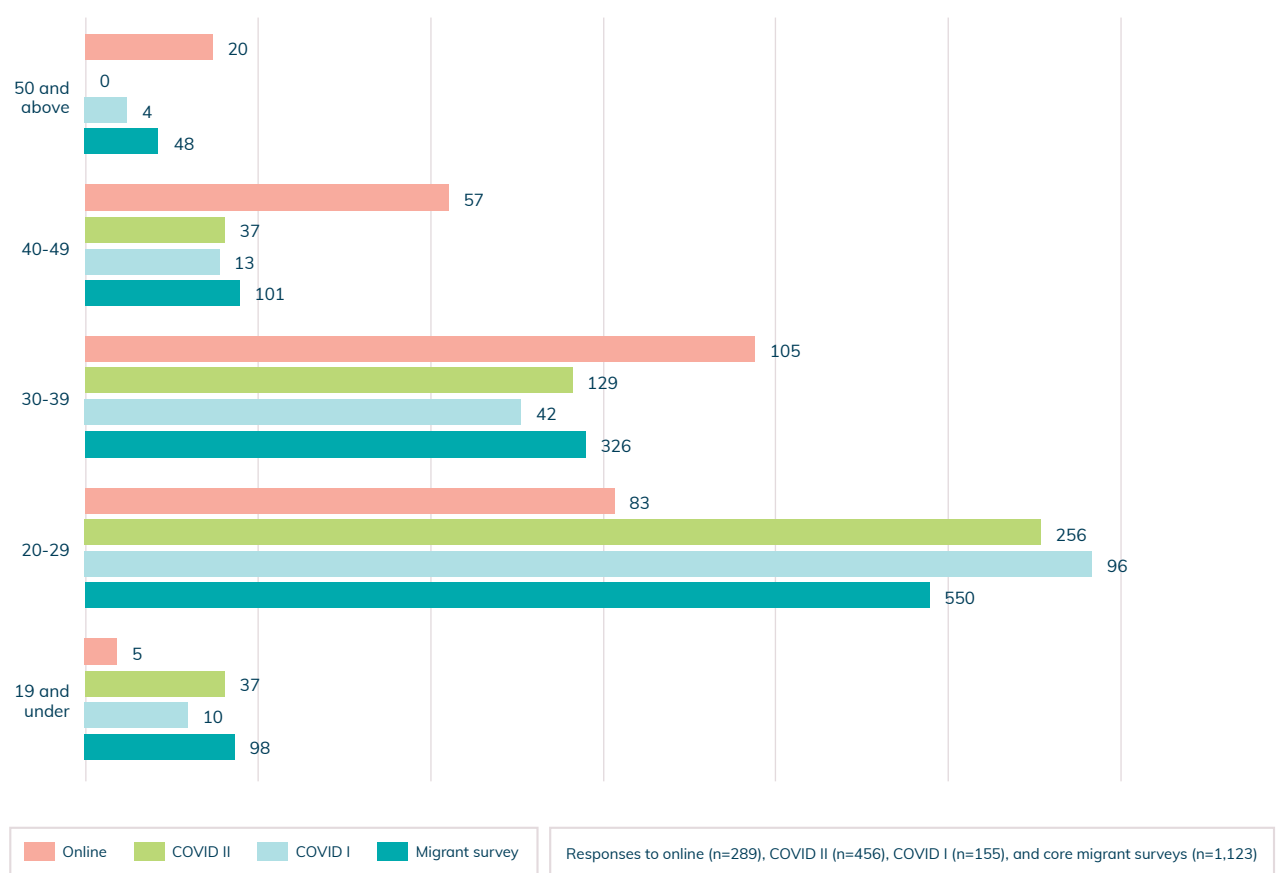


Figure 26: Age distribution of survey respondents - how old are you?



4Mi migrant survey and COVID-19 surveys. MMC implements its flagship Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism Initiative (4Mi) in Indonesia and around 15 other countries in six regions across the globe. The survey uses a mixture of purposive and snowball sampling and is implemented in person by trained monitors.¹⁶⁶ Data collection in Indonesia began in April 2018 and the dataset comprises more than 1,123 responses. A COVID-19 specific survey was introduced in April 2020, focusing on the impact of the pandemic on refugees and migrants, and administered by phone due to restrictions on in-person data collection during the pandemic. The first iteration of the survey collected 166 unique responses in Indonesia by the end of June. The survey tool was then revised and data collection continued in July. By the end of 2020, 456 responses had been recorded in this second phase.

Data from these surveys has been included where relevant in the report. As shown in the table above, these surveys focus on the Afghan refugee population living in Jakarta and West Java that arrived within the past five years. The Afghan population in these areas numbers around 4,100 — or 30% of the total refugee and asylum seeker population in Indonesia.¹⁶⁷ The online survey was not restricted to one nationality, geographic area, or timeframe of arrival, and thus complements the 4Mi data.

Data from the main 4Mi survey has primarily been used to inform discussion of drivers and routes used by refugees and asylum seekers in Indonesia, while data from the two COVID-19 surveys has been used to illuminate challenges of access to healthcare during the pandemic and additional hardships experienced by refugees and asylum seekers.

Online survey. An online survey devised and conducted especially for this study using non-probability sampling reached 289 respondents.¹⁶⁸ As with the 4Mi surveys, this sampling methodology means that those who responded may not be representative of all refugees and asylum seekers. The following paragraphs however outline how the distribution of respondents corresponds to the overall refugee and asylum seeker population in Indonesia. The survey

¹⁶⁶ For more details, see the [FAQs on 4Mi](#)

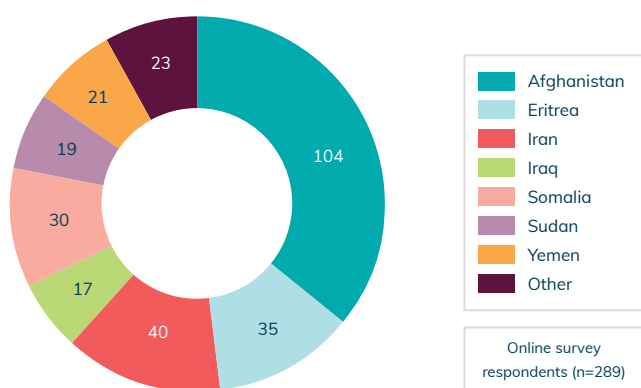
¹⁶⁷ UNHCR August update, unpublished and IOM Refugee and Asylum Seeker Statistics, November 2020, unpublished. Of Afghan refugees and asylum seekers in Jakarta and West Java, slightly more than 1,000 live in IOM accommodation in Tangerang, on the outskirts of Jakarta.

¹⁶⁸ More than 400 began the survey but only complete responses were used for this analysis.

was implemented during December 2020 via representatives from the refugee and asylum seeker community in Indonesia who distributed the link widely among their contacts. Refugees were given a choice of completing the survey in English, Farsi, Arabic, and Somali.

More than one third of respondents were from Afghanistan (104 individuals), although in the overall population Afghan refugees and asylum seekers make up more than half the total number. The next largest groups of respondents included Iranians (40), Eritreans (35), Somalis (30), Yemenis (21), Sudanese (19), and Iraqis (17). Not all countries of origin were reflected among the respondents due to language limitations and time constraints.¹⁶⁹

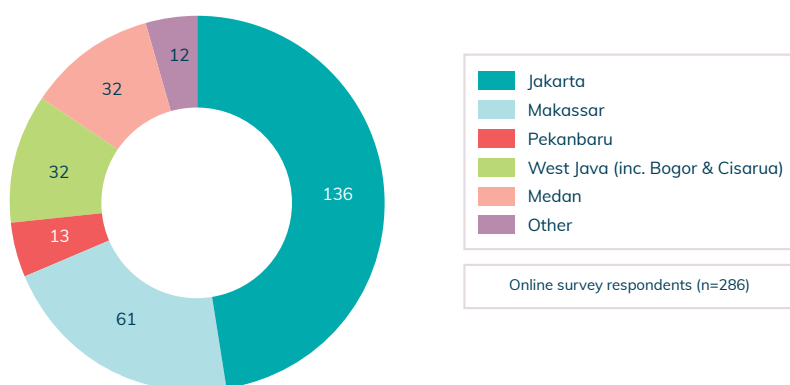
Figure 27: Nationalities of online survey respondents



Men made up the majority of respondents from all countries of origin, except Eritrea, where women were over-represented (74%, 25 respondents). Female respondents more frequently had children living with them (65%, 62 respondents) and to be married (58%, 56 respondents) whereas male respondents were less frequently with children (30%, 56 respondents) or married (44%, 82 respondents). (Not all refugees who responded they were married may have their spouse with them in Indonesia.¹⁷⁰)

Refugees and asylum seekers surveyed online live across Indonesia, although two thirds of respondents were concentrated in Jakarta and West Java (197 respondents), which slightly over-represents the population in these areas.

Figure 28: Location of online survey respondents



¹⁶⁹ The survey did not reach any respondents from Myanmar, who make up the fourth largest number of refugees and asylum seekers. However, Rohingya refugees were among those interviewed for the qualitative portion of the research.

¹⁷⁰ Meeting with UNHCR, by phone, February 2021.

Length of stay in Indonesia varied among respondents, although most had arrived between 2013 and 2018 (87%, 251 respondents). More recent arrivals were concentrated in the Jakarta and West Java area. In contrast, respondents living in other areas of Indonesia were more likely to have been in the country for longer. Refugees and migrants who had been in Indonesia since 2015 or earlier made up 69% (9 respondents) of those who took the online survey in Makassar, 74% (23 respondents) in Medan and 88% (28 respondents) in Pekanbaru.¹⁷¹

Sixty-one online survey respondents (about a fifth of the total) indicated that they were living in IOM accommodation, and all but five were in secondary cities.¹⁷² Inclusion of this group in the survey allows for comparison between the cohort under IOM care and refugees living independently, who are not assured of the same support, although the total number of respondents under IOM care is small.

Qualitative data collection

Two Indonesia-based researchers conducted one-on-one interviews with refugees and asylum seekers in Jakarta and West Java, Medan in North Sumatra and Makassar in South Sulawesi. Medan and Makassar were chosen as they host the largest numbers of refugees and asylum seekers outside Jakarta and West Java. Although the research team visited Lhokseumawe, Aceh, they did not interview Rohingya refugees, given the focus of the research is experiences of refugees who are stuck in Indonesia rather than recent arrivals. However, meetings were conducted with government and organizations supporting humanitarian response, in order to illuminate similarities and differences in the response to Rohingya refugees as compared to the rest of the asylum seeker and refugee population.

Fourteen refugees were interviewed in Medan, Makassar, Jakarta and West Java: eight men and six women between the ages of sixteen and 68 from seven different countries (Ethiopia, Sudan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Myanmar, Iraq and Iran). Six are refugees living independently in the community, eight are under IOM care. Interviews with refugees were conducted in English or Bahasa Indonesia — with translation where necessary — in person with appropriate social distancing. In addition, the research team interviewed civil society (Indonesian and organizations founded by refugees), staff from international organizations (primarily IOM and UNHCR), government officials, and experts on refugee policy in Indonesia. Interviews with these stakeholders were primarily conducted remotely, with the exception of interviews in Lhokseumawe, where the researchers interviewed stakeholders in person. In total, including interviews with refugees and asylum seekers, more than 50 interviews were conducted.

Secondary sources

The findings are also based on a review of secondary sources — including academic research, policy documents, grey literature and media reporting — in both Bahasa Indonesia and English. This review informed the stakeholder consultations, research questions and survey tool.

In addition, the research team used publicly available data on the refugee population and resettlement figures maintained by UNHCR. Where possible, the findings also reflect data maintained by UNHCR and IOM specific to the experiences of refugees and asylum seekers in Indonesia.

Ethics and limitations

Refugee and asylum seeker respondents to all the surveys and those who gave individual interviews provided informed consent, were assured of anonymity and confidentiality, and participated on a voluntary basis. Those who gave individual interviews were provided with a transportation or phone credit allowance as appropriate.

As a sampling frame was not available for the refugee and asylum seeker population in Indonesia, it was not possible to conduct a representative survey. Therefore findings cannot be generalized to the whole population. In addition, respondents may have responded inaccurately to sensitive questions, and thus it should be assumed that response bias may affect the data.

171 This is not surprising as most of refugees living in these cities are under IOM care and 70% of IOM's cohort have been in Indonesia for five or more years. IOM Refugee and Asylum Seeker Statistics, November 2020, unpublished.

172 Other online survey respondents indicated that they were under IOM care but not living in the shelters. Although some refugees fall into this category, interviews with IOM confirmed that the number is small. Respondents under IOM care were identified based on whether they live in an IOM shelter. Although there are some refugees under IOM care who do not live in these shelters, they comprise only a small number of IOM's caseload.



The MMC is a global network consisting of six regional hubs and a central unit in Geneva engaged in data collection, research, analysis and policy development on mixed migration. The MMC is a leading source for independent and high-quality data, research, analysis and expertise on mixed migration. The MMC aims to increase understanding of mixed migration, to positively impact global and regional migration policies, to inform evidence-based protection responses for people on the move and to stimulate forward thinking in public and policy debates on mixed migration. The MMC's overarching focus is on human rights and protection for all people on the move.

The MMC is part of and governed by the Danish Refugee Council (DRC). Global and regional MMC teams are based in Copenhagen, Dakar, Geneva, Nairobi, Tunis, Bogota and Bangkok.

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