

# The journey towards Italy for Pakistanis: drivers, routes and use of smugglers

There are approximately 2.2 million Pakistanis in Europe, making the region a key destination for the [Pakistani diaspora](#). Italy hosts approximately 120,000 Pakistanis, according to the Italian [Ministry of Labour](#) and a recent report on the [migrants presence in Italy](#), the second-largest population after the UK (over 1 million people with Pakistani origins), and followed by Greece and France. This snapshot offers an overview of their journey to Europe, based on 123 [4Mi](#) interviews with Pakistanis recently arrived in Italy. The snapshot aims to contribute towards a solid evidence base to inform targeted responses on the ground, as well as advocacy efforts related to the situation of refugees and migrants in the country.

## Key findings

- **The majority of respondents started their journey in Pakistan**, and transited through **Iran, Turkey and Greece** before crossing the **Balkans** to reach Italy.
- Migration is prompt by a variety of intertwined factors. 48% of Pakistanis interviewed in Italy mentioned multiple reasons for leaving their country, the most common being **violence, insecurity and conflict (54%), lack of rights and freedom (36%), and economic reasons (33%)**. War/armed conflict/terrorism was the principal violence-related migration driver for over half of respondents who indicated violence as a driver.
- For many Pakistanis interviewed, the journey was long and fragmented. **The majority used more than one mean of transportation (89%)**, and 72% took more than one year to reach Italy.

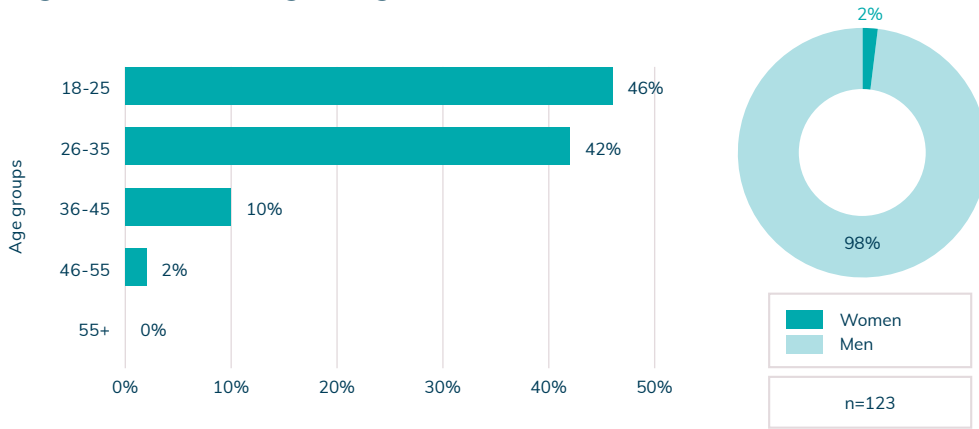
- **88% of respondents used a smuggler<sup>1</sup> during the journey**. While the majority used a smuggler to cross borders (92%), other 'services' were also commonly provided (i.e. in country transportation, food and water etc.).
- **66% of the respondents considers that smugglers helped them in reaching their goal of migrating to another country** but 44% believes that they were intentionally misled by them.
- **Italy is the preferred destination for 67% of respondents**. Of those who didn't choose Italy as preferred destination (33%), around half still intend to move elsewhere while the rest decided to settle in Italy.

## Profiles

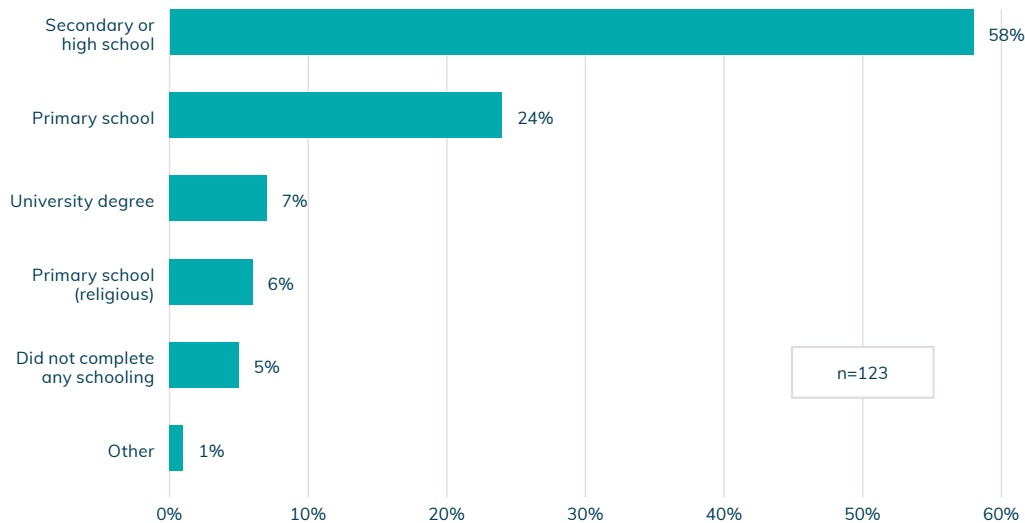
This analysis draws from interviews with 123 Pakistanis conducted face-to-face (n=110) and by phone (n=13) in Italy between November 2019 and September 2021. Almost all respondents (98%; n=121) are men. Even taking into account that the majority of [Pakistanis in Italy](#) are male (69%), the gender ratio in the sample may be due to men being more accessible or willing to be interviewed. All respondents had arrived in Italy within the past 5 years. Respondents were predominantly aged between 18 and 35 (88%), with over half of them (65%) having a secondary or higher level of education.

1 MMC uses a broad interpretation of the terms 'smuggler' and 'smuggling', one which encompasses various activities — paid for or otherwise compensated by refugees and migrants — that facilitate irregular migration. These include irregularly crossing international borders and internal checkpoints, as well as providing documents, transportation, and accommodation. This approach reflects refugees' and migrants' perceptions of smuggling and the facilitation of irregular movement. Our interpretation is deliberately broader than the UN Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants definition. However, this does not imply that MMC considers all activities it includes in its broad understanding of smuggling to be criminal offences. MMC prefers to use the term 'human smuggling' instead of 'migrant smuggling' as smuggling involves both refugees and migrants.

**Figure 1. Sex and age ranges**



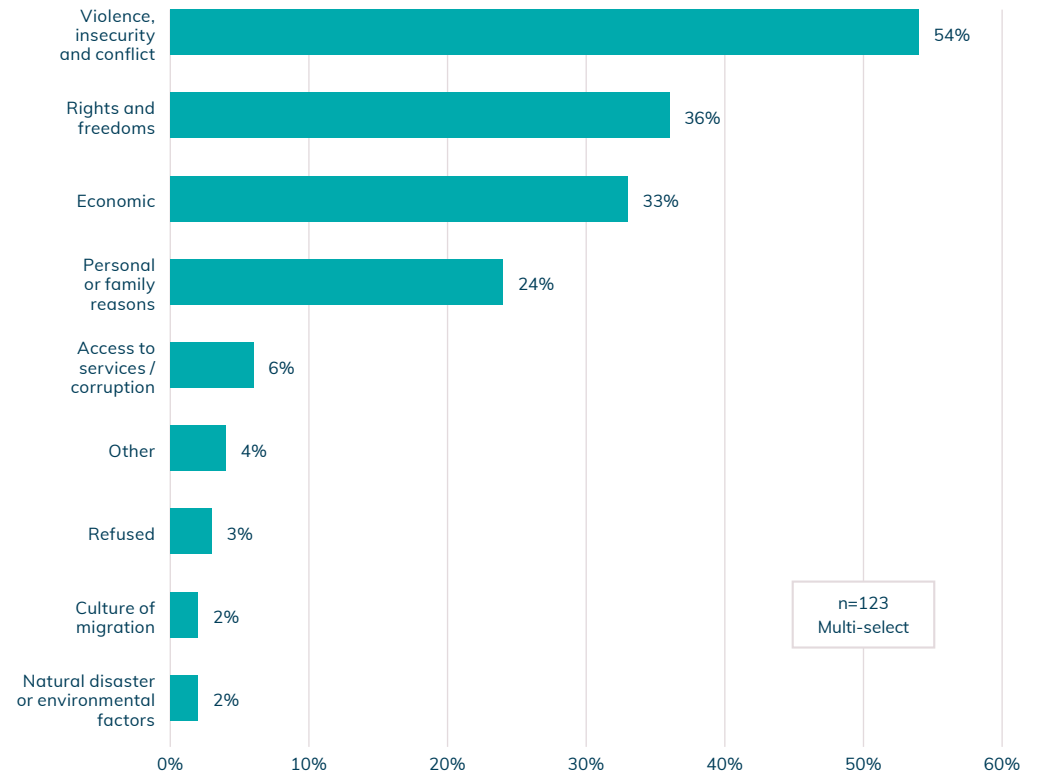
**Figure 2. Level of education**



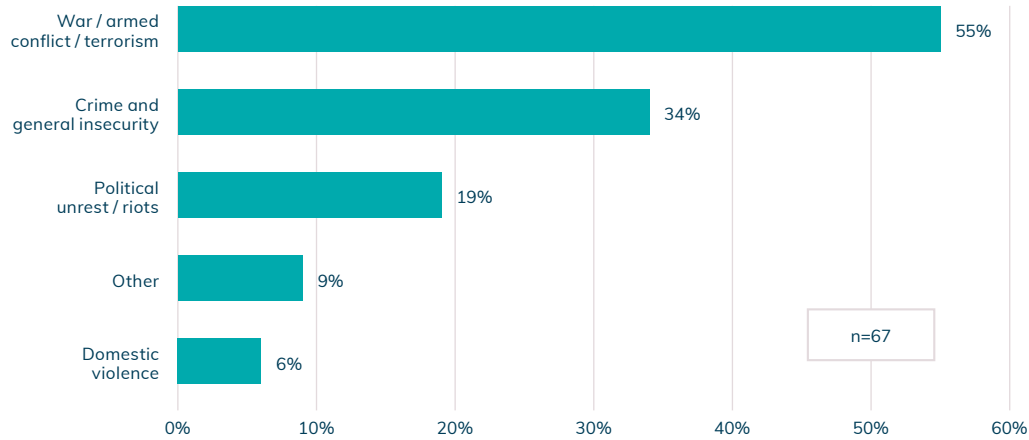
## Violence, lack of rights and economic reasons are the main reported drivers

The decision to migrate often involves a number of factors and different influences. Among the Pakistanis interviewed, almost half (48%) gave more than one reason for leaving their country of origin. The top three drivers were 1) violence, insecurity and conflict (54%), 2) lack of rights and freedom (36%), and 3) economic reasons (33%) (see Figure 3). Among those who said they had left their country for reasons related to violence (n=67), 55% specifically referred to war/armed conflict/terrorism, and 34% mentioned crime and general insecurity (see Figure 4).

**Figure 3. For what reasons did you leave?**



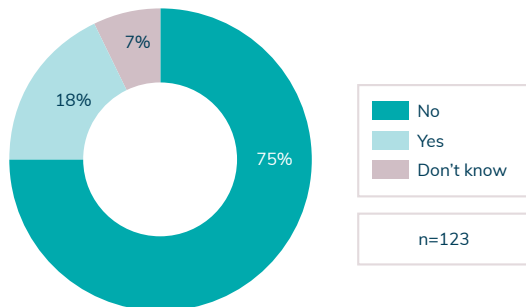
**Figure 4. What kind of reasons relating to violence, insecurity and conflict?**



## Majority of respondents felt they had no other option but to migrate

For many, migration was perceived as the only option. The majority of the 123 Pakistanis interviewed in Italy, thought that they had no other options than migrating (75%; n=92) (Figure 5). Among the others (18%; n=22), over a third (8/22) tried to move to another city and 5 looked for another job.

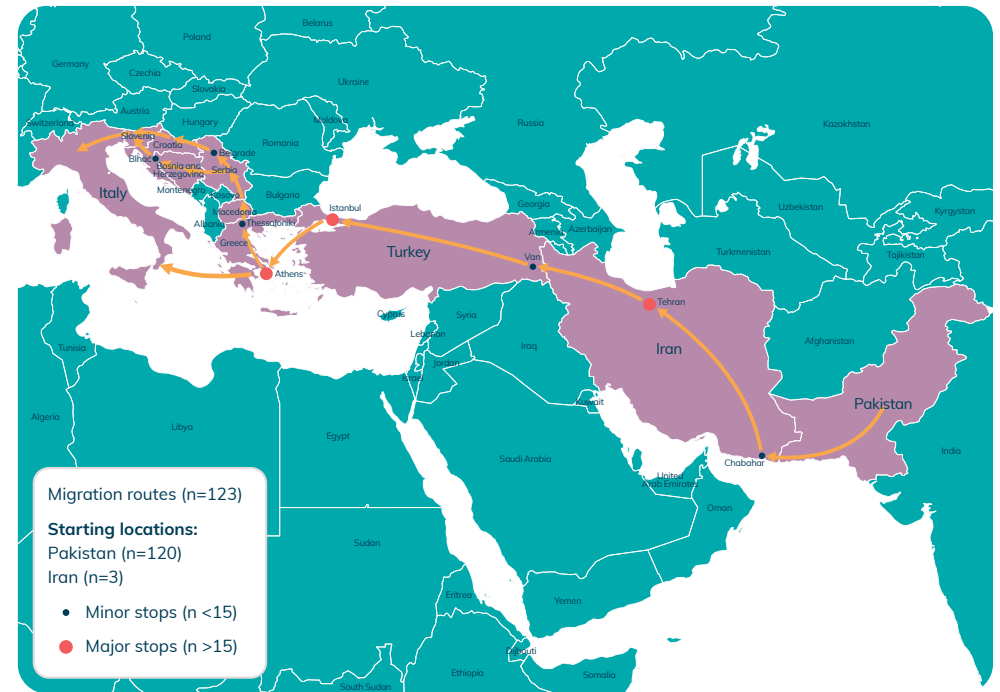
**Figure 5. Did you think there were things that you could do to address the reasons for leaving?**



## Most respondents transited Iran, Turkey and Greece before entering the Balkans

For almost all respondents (n=120) the journey started in Pakistan. From there, the majority (80%) transited first Iran, then Turkey (80%) and Greece (63%). After reaching Greece, the journey continues through the Balkans, starting from North Macedonia and then travelling north and transiting numerous countries, including Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Croatia. Slovenia is the entry point to Northern Italy (see Map 1). In Iran, Turkey and Greece, respondents most often stopped in Teheran (59%), Istanbul (63%) and Athens (38%), respectively. The majority of those who stopped in Iran, Turkey and Greece did so to earn money to pay for the rest of the journey, to wait for transportation or to find smugglers to organize the next stretch of the journey. Some of the respondents who stopped in Turkey were instead detained or held against their will (n=14)<sup>2</sup>.

**Map 1. Migration routes from Pakistan to Italy**



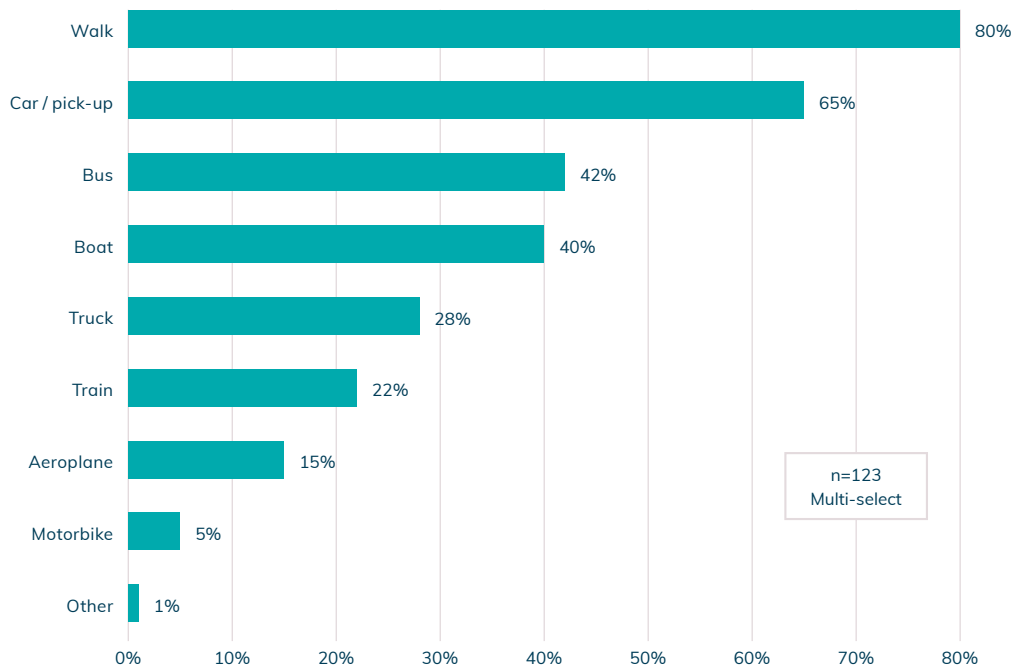
The map does not show cities / places with less than 5 stops.

<sup>2</sup> Respondents can mention up to five stops along the journey. The 'n' here refers to the overall number of respondents who stopped in Turkey and mentioned being detained or held against their will.

## Journeys are long and fragmented – taking more than 2 years for almost half of respondents

4Mi data reflect a complex, risky and fragmented journey towards Europe. The majority of the respondents used more than one means of transportation (89%; n=109) to get to Italy. Overall, respondents used predominantly travelled across land (walk, car/pick-up, bus, truck, train and motorbike). 40% also mentioned travelling by boat, probably from Turkey or Greece<sup>3</sup> (see Figure 6 for details).

**Figure 6. Which means of transportation have you used during your journey?**



<sup>3</sup> The 4Mi survey used for the present snapshot does not provide specifics on the means of transportation used for each part of the journey. However, considering the countries transited, it is highly likely that those Pakistanis who travelled by boat embarked from either Turkey or Greece.

72% took more than 1 year to reach Italy. Only 10% of the respondents arrived in Italy in 6 months or less while for the vast majority the journey lasted much longer, with 27% of Pakistanis travelling for over one year and almost half (45%) for over 2 years (Figure 7).

**Figure 7. Length of the journey**

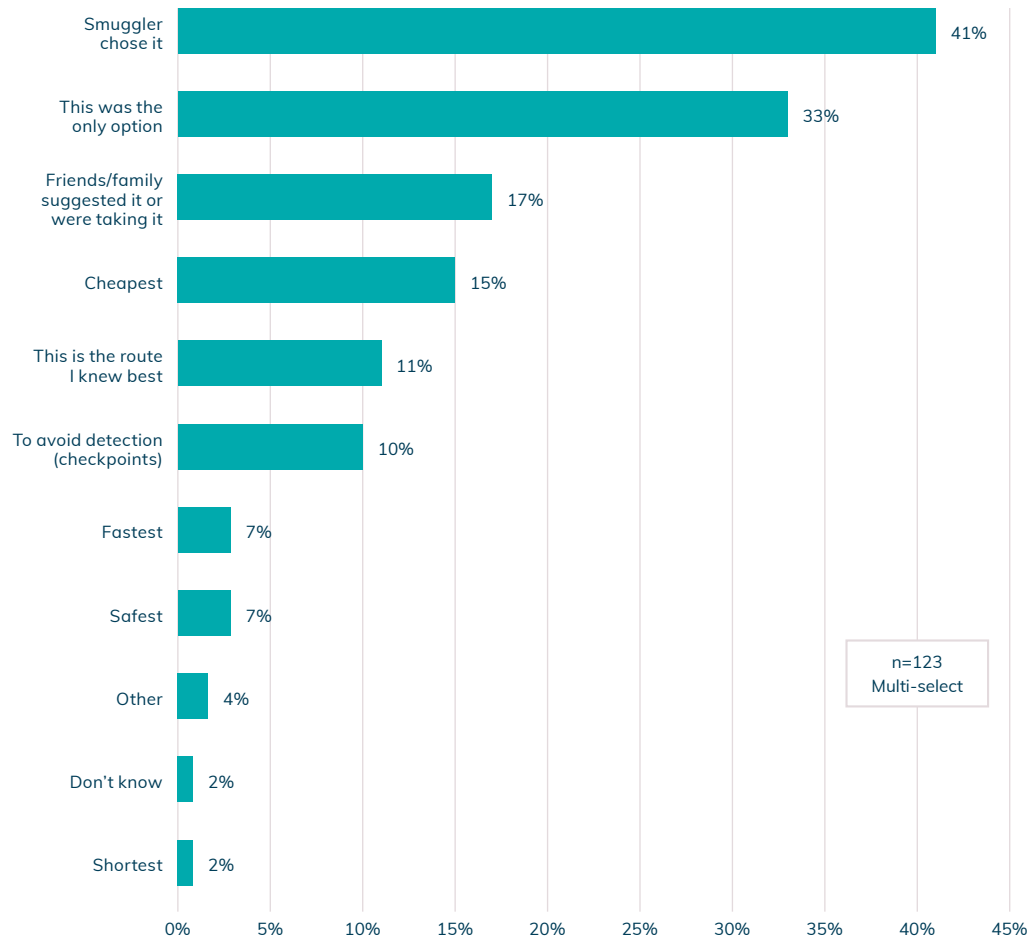
Length	No. Respondents	%
0-6 months	10	9%
7-12 months	21	19%
>1 year	29	27%
>2 years	49	45%
	109 <sup>4</sup>	

## Migrants have a very limited role in the decision concerning the route to take

It appears that respondents do not have many choices when it comes to determining their journey, and safety and ease rarely feature as options. As shown in Figure 8, 41% of respondents reported that the route was chosen by the smuggler(s), 33% that it was the only option, and 17% that it was suggested by family/friends. Only a few considered prices (15%), ease (fastest route - 7%, and shortest route - 2%) and safety (7%) as a factor in the decision, confirming previous findings.

<sup>4</sup> Out of 123 Pakistanis interviewed, 13 respondents did not reply to the question and 1 provided conflictual dates.

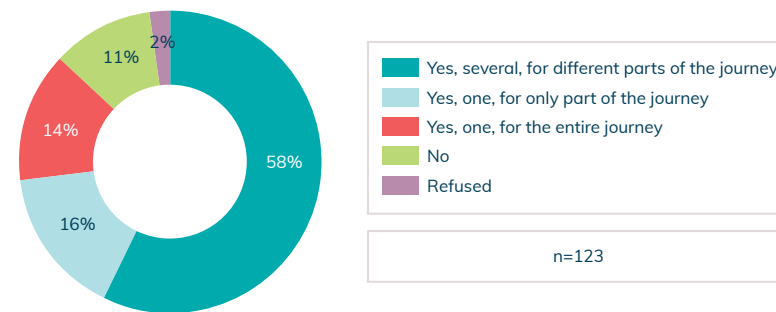
**Figure 8. Why did you take this route?**



## The majority of respondents used a smuggler at some point during their journey

4Mi data on the use of smuggler(s) confirm the fragmented nature of the journey for Pakistanis heading towards Europe. Use of smugglers is widespread (88% of respondents used a smuggler at some point during the journey), and two-thirds of respondents (74%) either used several different smugglers along the way (58% of the total) or one smuggler for only part of the journey (16%); only 14% used the same smuggler for the entire journey.

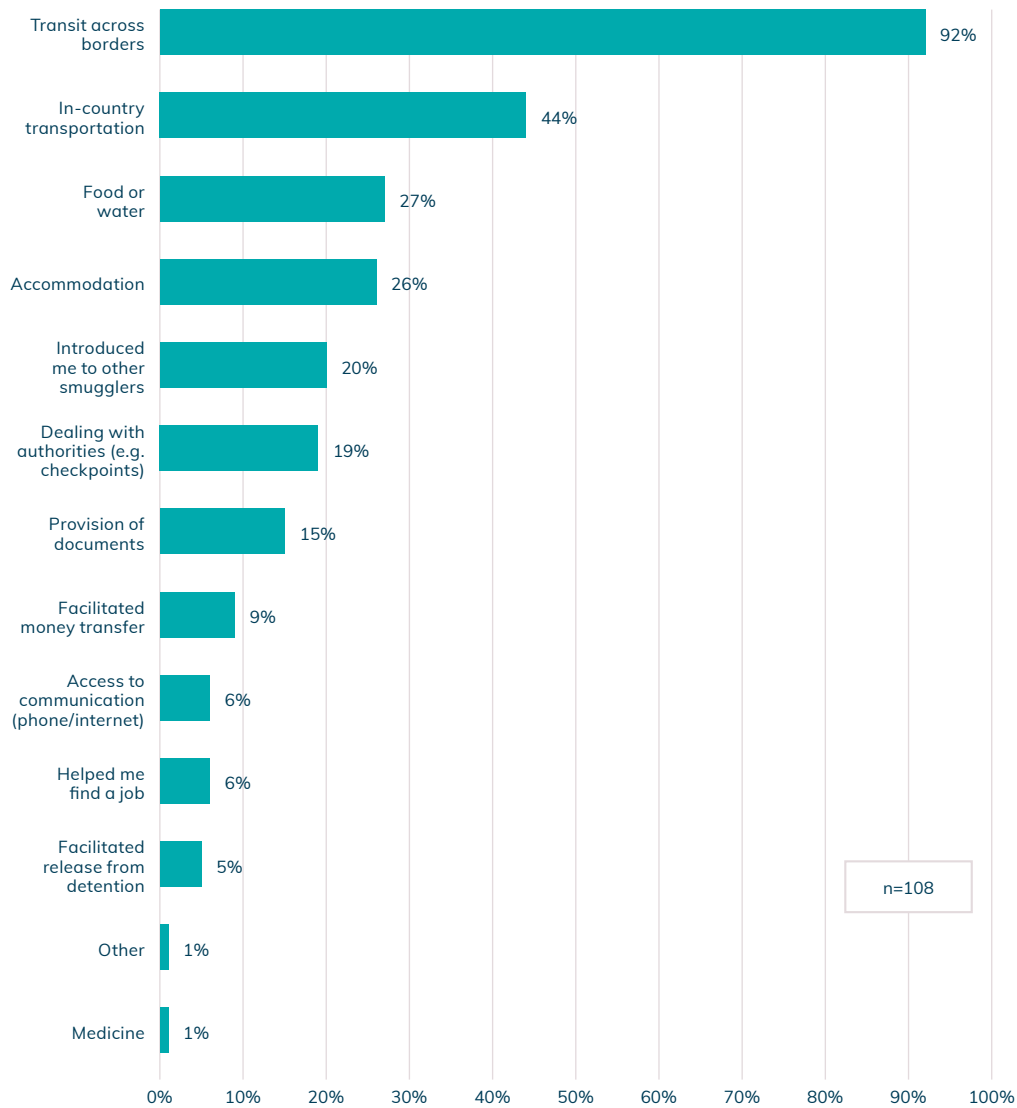
**Figure 9. Did you use a smuggler?**



## Majority of respondents used smugglers to cross borders, but other 'facilitation activities' are common

Out of the respondents who used a smuggler (n=108), 92% said that the smuggler provided transit across borders. Other migration facilitation activities include: in-country transportation (44%), providing food or water (27%), arranging accommodation (26%), introducing respondents to other smugglers (20%), and dealing with authorities (19%). The role of smugglers is not limited to border crossing but extends to a variety of other "related" activities.

**Figure 10. What did the smuggler provide you with?**

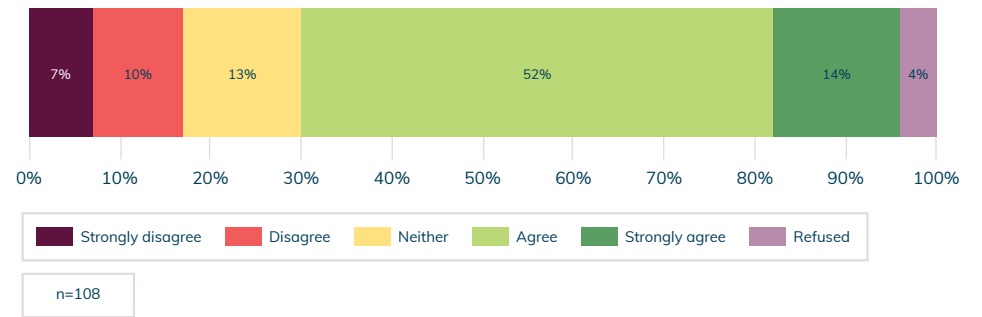


## Beyond a simplistic narrative on smugglers

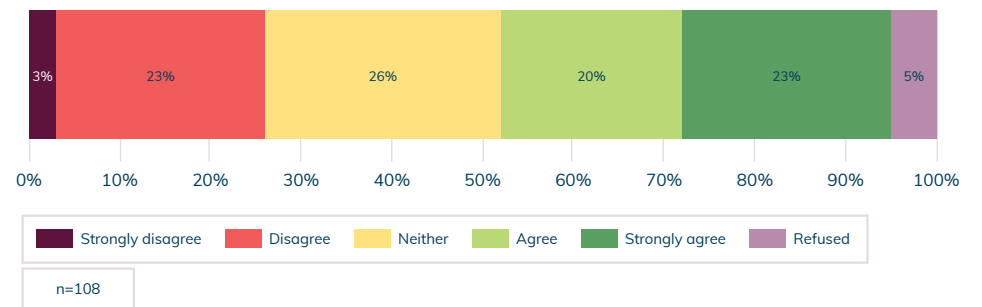
66% of the respondents who used smuggler(s) considered that the smuggler(s) helped them in reaching their goal of migrating to another country (see Figure 11). 44% believe that they were intentionally misled during the journey by the smuggler, with only 26% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing (see Figure 12).

Altogether these results suggest that smugglers play different roles, depending on the circumstances, individuals concerned and contexts, we should be wary of over-simplistic, binary, narratives.

**Figure 11. To what extent do you agree with the following statement: “The smuggler or smugglers I used helped me in achieving my goal of migrating to another country”?**



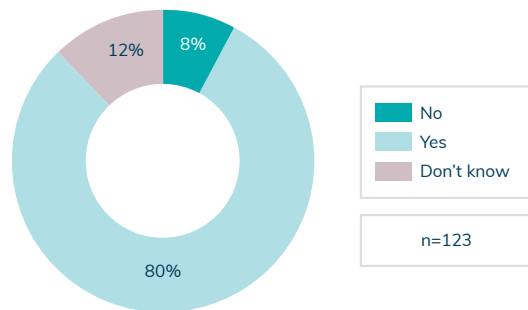
**Figure 12. To what extent do you agree with the following statement: “I was intentionally misled about the journey by my smuggler or smugglers”?**



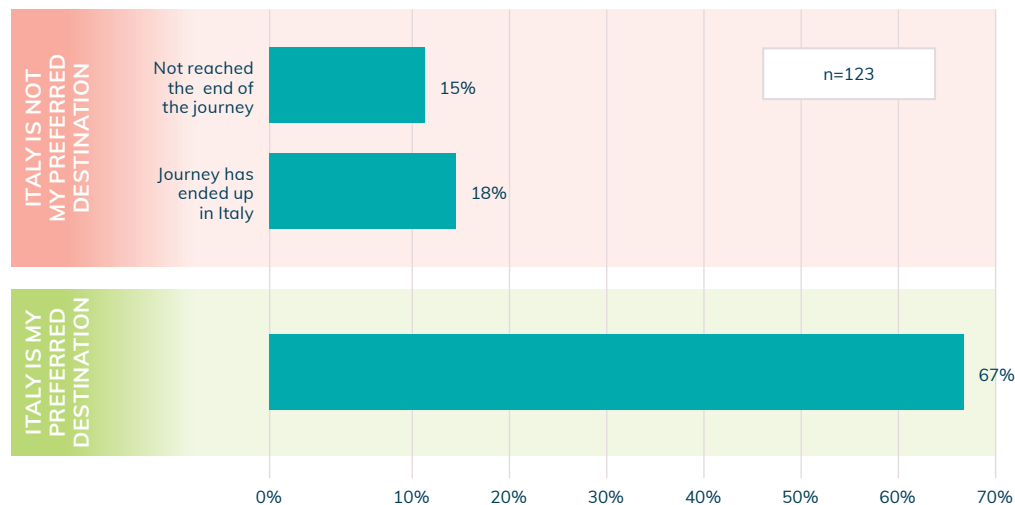
## Italy is the preferred destination for the majority of respondents

80% of respondents interviewed in Italy reported that they had reached the end of their migration journey (Figure 13). 67% referred to Italy as preferred destination. Of the remaining 33%, half decided to settle in Italy anyway (18%), and half still intend to move elsewhere (15%) (Figure 14).

**Figure 13. Have you reached the end of your journey?**



**Figure 14. Destination and future intentions**



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### 4Mi data collection

4Mi is the Mixed Migration Centre's flagship primary data collection system, an innovative approach that helps fill knowledge gaps, and inform policy and response regarding the nature of mixed migratory movements and the protection risks for refugees and migrants on the move. 4Mi field enumerators are currently collecting data through direct interviews with refugees and migrants in West Africa, East Africa, North Africa, Asia, Latin America and Europe.

Note that the sampling approach means that the findings derived from the surveyed sample provide rich insights, but the figures cannot be used to make inferences about the total population. See more 4Mi analysis and details on methodology at [www.mixedmigration.org/4mi](http://www.mixedmigration.org/4mi)