

Afghans en route to Turkey: access to critical information

Afghan migration to Turkey is particularly dangerous, and people face protection risks at nearly every stage. Border areas and specific transit hubs present the greatest risks, where there is also a lack of assistance.¹ Access to information is therefore essential for refugees and migrants in order to make informed decisions about dangers, routes, means of travel, and any number of other considerations. Better access to information can lead to better decision-making, safer journeys, and greater protection for those en route.

This snapshot examines how Afghans en route to Turkey gather information before and during the journey, what kind of information they have access to, what the gaps are, and which sources of information are the most used and the most trusted. It contributes to a solid evidence base to inform targeted responses on the ground, and advocacy efforts related to migration movements to and through Turkey.

MMC Asia has interviewed 1,540 Afghans who have arrived in Turkey over the past 24 months to better understand their migration experiences, protection risks, and the challenges they face. Turkey has been a host country and transit hub for hundreds of thousands of Afghans escaping persecution, political upheaval, and economic insecurity. Many undertake long and arduous journeys overland via Pakistan and Iran, some hoping to continue onward to other countries, including in Europe. This year, numbers have risen in response to increasing political and economic instability in the lead-up to, and aftermath of, the Taliban takeover. While there have been no recent mass movements across the regions, many speculate that numbers will increase.

Key findings

- Less than half of respondents (47%) reported accessing information about routes, destinations, costs, and risks before starting their journey.
- Family and friends outside Afghanistan are the primary, and most trusted, information source pre-departure.
- Once en route, only 32% of the respondents reported accessing information, and the primary information source shifts to smugglers and other migrants.
- The majority of the respondents (86%) had access to a functional phone en route to Turkey and used it primarily for staying in touch with family and contacting smugglers.
- Only 31% used their phones to get information about their journey en route.
- The most frequently reported information gaps relate to conditions of the journey (40%) and security along the journey (37%).
- Phone calls, in-person conversations, and social media or messaging apps are the primary methods of receiving information.

Afghan profiles

Information for this snapshot was collected between 19 August 2021 and 28 February 2022 in ten provinces across Turkey (Istanbul, Izmir, Erzurum, Van, Adana, Ankara, Eskişehir, Konya, Balıkesir, and Kayseri). 1,540 interviews were conducted with Afghans, all of whom had reached Turkey within 24 months of the survey being conducted. The majority of respondents were men (82%), between 18 and 30 years old (78%). Most respondents came from an urban background (64%) and had secondary (45%) or primary school (18%) levels of education. More than half of the respondents (58%) were unregistered or without documentation, while the remainder held some form of documentation, such as an International Protection Applicant Identification Card (30%) and temporary resident permits or visa (9%).

¹ <https://mixedmigration.org/resource/4mi-snapshot-afghans-en-route-to-turkey/>

The majority of respondents lack critical information pre-departure

53% of the respondents said they did not obtain substantive information relevant to their journey before departing Afghanistan. Many respondents reported not having gathered information before departure due to a sudden departure after the Taliban takeover in August 2021. Once en route, even fewer access information, with only 32% of respondents reporting that they accessed information en route. This is likely to result in information gaps, increasing risk by negatively impacting informed decision making about routes, means of transport, and potential risks.

Many of those newly arrived Afghans we encounter complain about lack of information or false information about the situation on the Iran-Turkey border. Many Afghans think that it's a half day journey from the Iran border to Van in Turkey, while many use routes - or get lost - that take them, in some cases, up to five days to reach Van.

4Mi enumerator located in Van, Turkey

Nobody told us that the weather is so cold in the mountains, and I didn't have any warm clothes for my children. We nearly froze to death.

37-year-old Afghan man, interviewed in Konya, Turkey

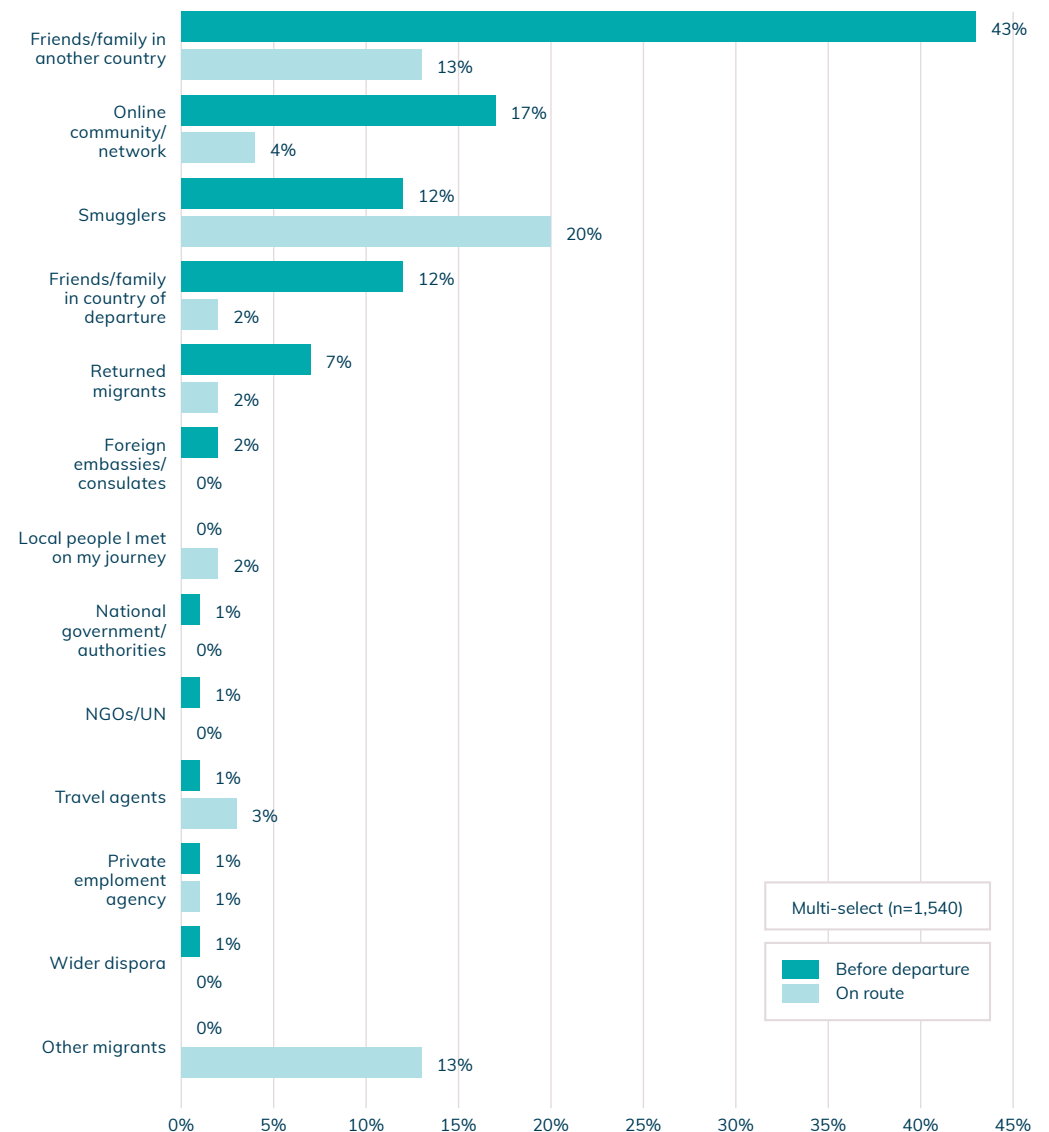
Sources of information

43% of respondents reported 'Family/friends in another country' as their primary information source pre-departure. 17% reported 'Online community/network', followed by 'smuggler' (12%) and 'family/friends in country of departure' (12%) (see Figure 1). Information sources change once en route, however. Reliance on family and/or friends decreases considerably. Only 13% of respondents cited family/friends in another country as their primary information source, and only 2% cited reliance on family/friends in Afghanistan. Reliance on smugglers and other migrants increases en route (20% and 13% respectively).

Half of the respondents reported that they consider family/friends in another country as the most reliable source of information (50%). The data presents differentiated results as regards to gender: 58% of women report that they place their trust in family/friends in another country, while only 42% of men do.

Very few respondents cited official sources (e.g., foreign embassies, national governments, and NGOs/UN) as sources of information before departure or en route (see Figure 1), suggesting that information coming from these sources plays only a marginal role.

Figure 1. What were your sources of information about routes, destinations, costs, risks etc?



Information tools

The majority of respondents report using phone calls (80%), in-person conversations (59%), and social media/messaging apps (45%) to obtain information before departure. The same means were used to obtain information en route, however in-person conversations increase (78%), while phone calls and social media/messaging apps decrease (54% and 24% respectively). This may be due to a limited ability to make calls or availability of internet coverage, as well as the fact that in-person sources may be more readily available. According to several respondents, smugglers do not allow migrants and refugees en route to make phone calls in most locations:

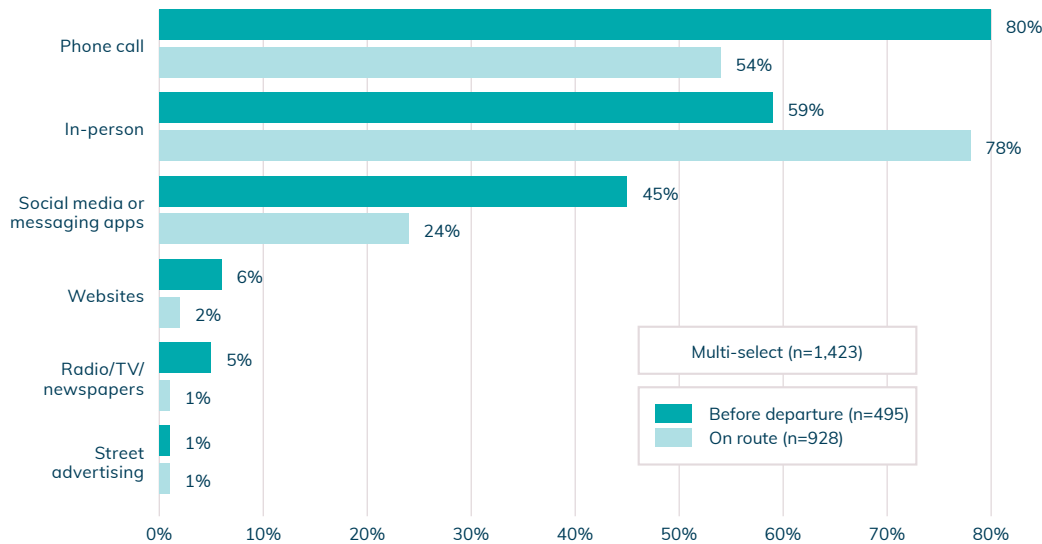
When he [the smuggler] found the phone in my pocket turned on, he beat me and threatened to break my phone if I don't turn it off.

20-year-old Afghan man, interviewed in Balikesir , Turkey

The smugglers collected all of our phones before crossing the [Iran-Turkey] border, saying that it is to avoid detection... when we reached here, they gave [...] our phones back to us.

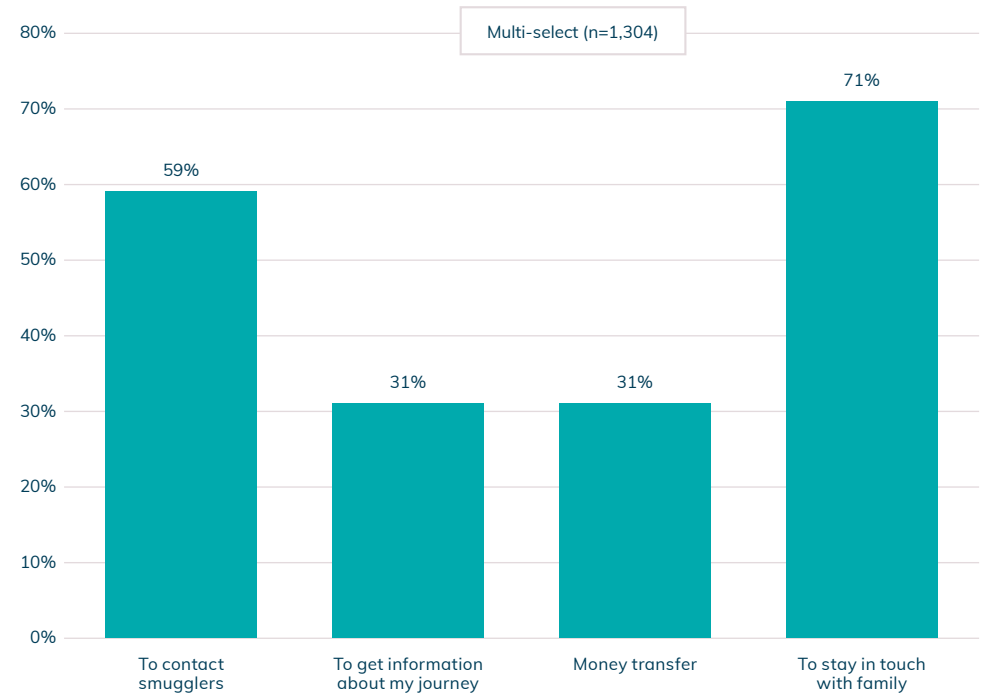
28-year-old Afghan man, interviewed in Van, Turkey

Figure 2. What means did you use to obtain information before you left?



Most respondents reported that they had access to a functional phone during their journey to Turkey (either a smartphone or basic phone without internet access, 62% and 24%, respectively) and they used it primarily to stay in touch with family members (71%) and/or to contact smugglers in various locations (59%) (see Figure 3). 31% also used the phone to get information about their journey while en route.

Figure 3. Did you use the phone for any of the following?



Primary information gaps: conditions of travel and safety in transit

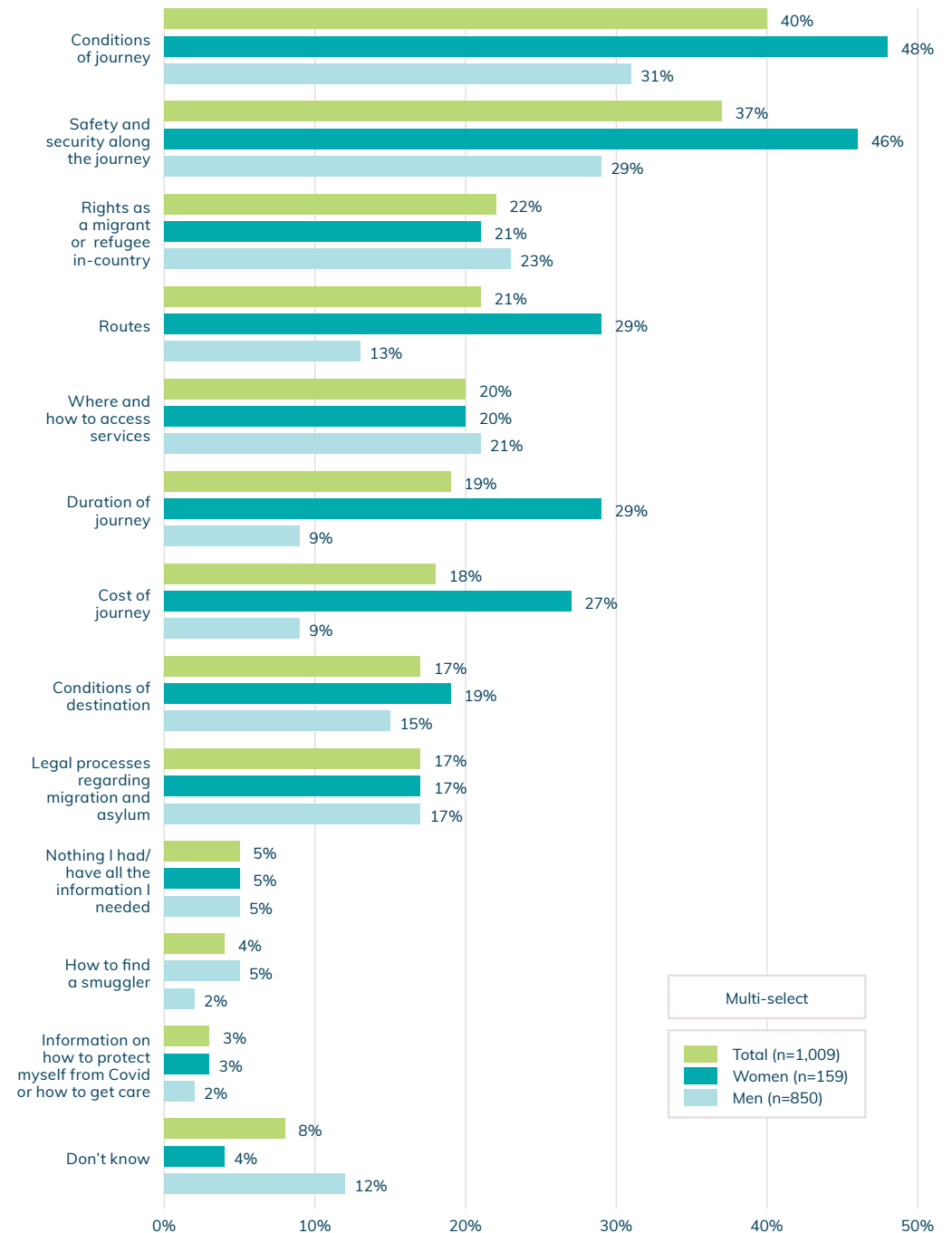
Only 5% of respondents reported that they had the information they needed while en route (see Figure 4). The primary information gaps relate to the conditions of the journey (40%) and security during the journey (37%). This finding is interesting as it demonstrates that despite information campaigns aimed at providing this information, a gap continues to exist. This may be due to distrust of campaigns often designed to discourage migration or a disconnect between these campaigns and primary information sources. 22% of respondents reported that knowledge of their rights as migrants or refugees in destination or transit countries was an information gap. 21% reported a gap in information about routes, and 20% reported a gap in information regarding where to access services.

Respondents appear to be very well informed about how to find human smugglers, suggesting that smuggler networks are widespread and accessible in Afghanistan. Only 4% of respondents reported an information gap relating to finding a smuggler.

All smugglers are liars and give false information about the route... my smuggler told me it is only one day easy walk from Borjak to the Iran border, but we ended up wandering for three days in the mountains without food before reaching the Iran border.

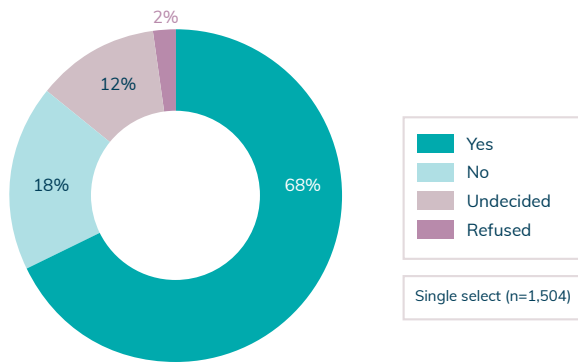
20-year-old Afghan man, interviewed in Istanbul, Turkey

Figure 4. What information would have been most useful that you did not receive?



Despite the difficulties and protection risks en route, only 18% of respondents reported that they would not have started their journey knowing what they know now. The majority (68%) reported that they would have started the journey anyway, even taking into account everything they have learned since starting out (see Figure 5). This suggests that many Afghan migrants and asylum seekers feel the risks of remaining are greater than those of leaving.

Figure 5. Would you have started this journey knowing what you know now?



If I knew that the journey is so difficult, I would not come, I would not bring my children with me. I would tell my husband to go alone as the children cannot bear the hardship of this journey.

25-year-old Afghan woman, interviewed in Istanbul, Turkey

Further resources:

For the experience of protection risks among Afghans en route to Turkey, see: <https://mixedmigration.org/resource/4mi-snapshot-afghans-en-route-to-turkey/>



**MINISTRY OF
FOREIGN AFFAIRS
OF DENMARK**



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