

# Detention as a protection risk en route to Türkiye

Detention endangers the physical safety and psychological wellbeing of people on the move, blocks access to rights and services, and challenges durable solutions.<sup>1</sup> Afghans without documentation are exposed to a risk of detention en route to Türkiye, including in Iran and Pakistan, as well as in Türkiye. In all three countries, Afghans who do not possess proof of registration as a refugee or an asylum seeker are at an immediate risk of arrest and detention.<sup>2</sup>

This snapshot provides information on where Afghans are reporting the risk of detention en route to Türkiye, and how the exposure to perceived detention risk changes depending on the use of smugglers.

## Key findings

- The majority of respondents (53%) report detention as a risk en route to Türkiye. Respondents most commonly reported a risk of detention in the city of Urmia (Iran), at the Iran-Türkiye border, and in the city of Van (Türkiye).
- Over half of male respondents (56%) identified detention as a risk, compared to fewer than half of female respondents (41%).
- The risks of detention were more often reported among respondents aged 18-25 (60%) and 26-34 (53%).
- The reported risk of detention was highest for respondents who made journeys over land (95.2%), followed by those who combined land and air transport (4.7%).
- The reported risk of detention was higher among respondents who did not use a smuggler (78%) than among those who used a smuggler (52%). In other words, for at least part of the Afghans on the move to and through Türkiye, using a smuggler is perceived to help keep them out of detention.

1 Human Rights Watch (2021) [Dismantling Detention International Alternatives to Detaining Immigrants](#)  
 2 In Iran, Afghan refugees were issued Amayesh cards until 2002, and currently Afghan asylum seekers are issued headcount laissez-passers. In Türkiye, Afghan refugees are issued an International Protection Registration Document. In Pakistan, Afghan refugees and asylum seekers are issued a Proof of Registration (PoR) card or the Afghan Citizen Card (ACC).

## Profiles

This snapshot is based on data collected from 3,160 Afghans across Türkiye between 19 August 2021 and 31 October 2022 (for a list of locations, see Table 1). All respondents had reached Türkiye within 24 months of the survey being conducted. Among those surveyed, most respondents were male (80%) and between 26 to 34 years old (47%). Nearly one-third of respondents (28%) were travelling to Türkiye with children in their care.

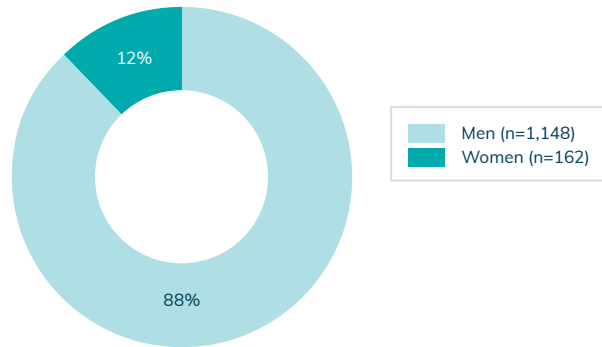
More than half of the respondents (57%) were unregistered or otherwise without legal documentation, while the remainder held some form of documentation, such as an International Protection Applicant Card (31%), or a temporary resident permit or visa (10%).

**Table 1. Locations of interview**

Location (city)	Number of surveys collected
Istanbul	637
Ankara	553
Van	469
Konya	435
Erzurum	249
Kayseri	222
Adana	173
Eskisehir	129
Balikesir	60
Izmir	38
Trabzon	33
Other locations	162
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,160</b>

# Afghans en route to Türkiye are at risk of detention

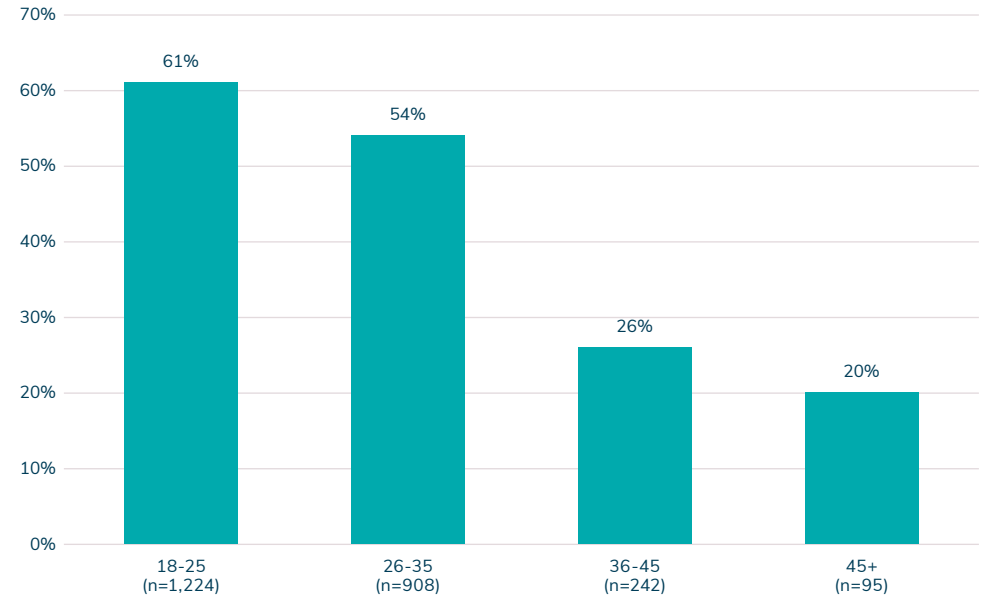
Figure 1. Reported risk of detention, by gender



Among those surveyed, 61% of the respondents transited through Iran and 19% transited through Pakistan before reaching Türkiye. Afghans report exposure to a number of perceived protection risks on the journey, including bribery, extortion, physical violence, robbery, injury or ill-health due to harsh conditions during the journey, kidnapping, sexual violence, detention, and death.<sup>3</sup> For both male and female respondents, detention is the second most common risk (after physical violence for men, and after death for women). Over half of respondents (53%) reported a perceived risk of detention. A greater proportion of male respondents (88%) identified detention as a risk than female respondents (12%). The perceived risk was highest among respondents between the ages of 18 to 25 (60%), and among those between 26 and 34 (53%). The perceived risk decreased for respondents between the ages of 36 to 45 (25%) and over 45 years of age (20%).

3 Mixed Migration Centre (2021) [4Mi Snapshot: Afghans en route to Turkey Routes, protection risks, and access to assistance](#). 4Mi respondents are asked whether there are dangerous places on their journey (they can name up to five) and identify the kinds of dangers. This analysis considers the number of respondents who report the risk of detention is at least one location.

Figure 2. Reported detention risk, by age group.



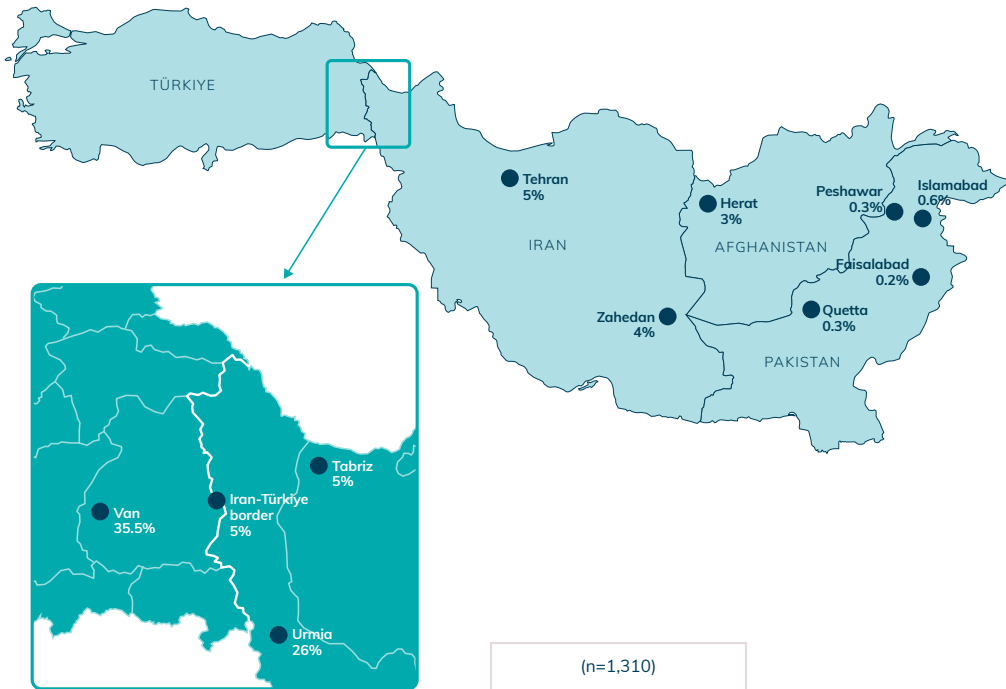
## Risk of detention is high in areas around Iran-Türkiye border

Respondents who reported a detention risk en route to Türkiye more often mentioned the risk in the city of Van in Türkiye (35.5%), Urmia in Iran (25%), and on the Iran-Türkiye border (10%).<sup>4</sup> The city of Van and Urmia are located in close proximity to the border between Türkiye and Iran. According to Afghans interviewed in Türkiye, the exposure to detention risk is significantly higher around or at the border.<sup>5</sup>

4 The category of border areas here includes the border crossing point and towns in the vicinity as respondents might not be able to recollect the precise names of smaller towns.

5 Mixed Migration Centre (2021) [4Mi Snapshot: Afghans en route to Turkey Routes, protection risks, and access to assistance](#)

**Map 1. Locations with a reportedly high risk of detention en route**

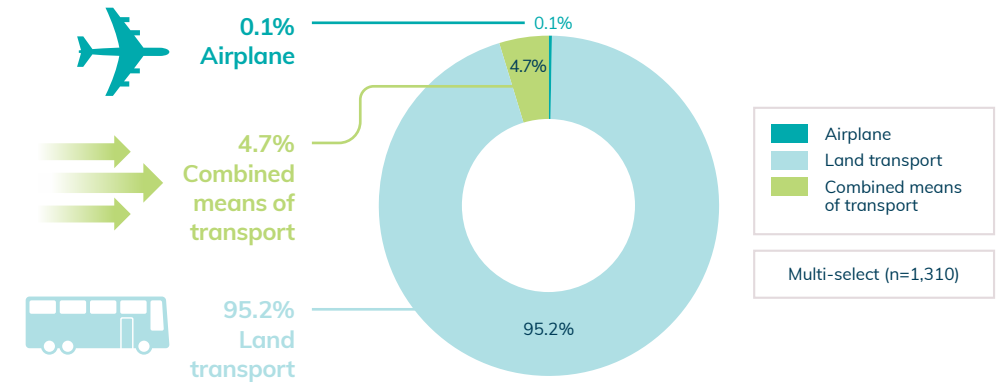


## Detention risk is higher for those who journey over land

Exposure to detention risk differs according to the mode of transport. Among respondents who identified detention as a primary risk, a majority had crossed borders into Iran, Pakistan or Türkiye using land transport (95.2%). Those who used a combination of air and other means far less frequently perceived a risk of detention, and those who travelled only by air barely at all (0.1%). However, since August 2021, there have been a limited number of international commercial flights operating from Kabul.<sup>6</sup> As a result, even respondents with valid visas and documents are more likely travelling at least partly by land, where risks are higher.

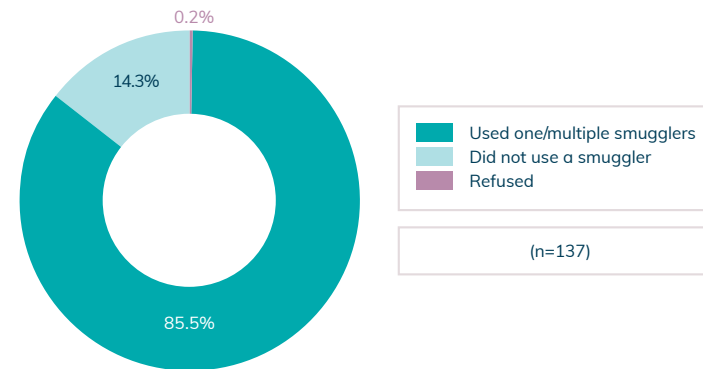
6 Shahir, T. (2022) [Major Airlines Still Not Making Flights to Kabul](#) Tolo News

**Figure 3. Risk of detention according to mode of transport**



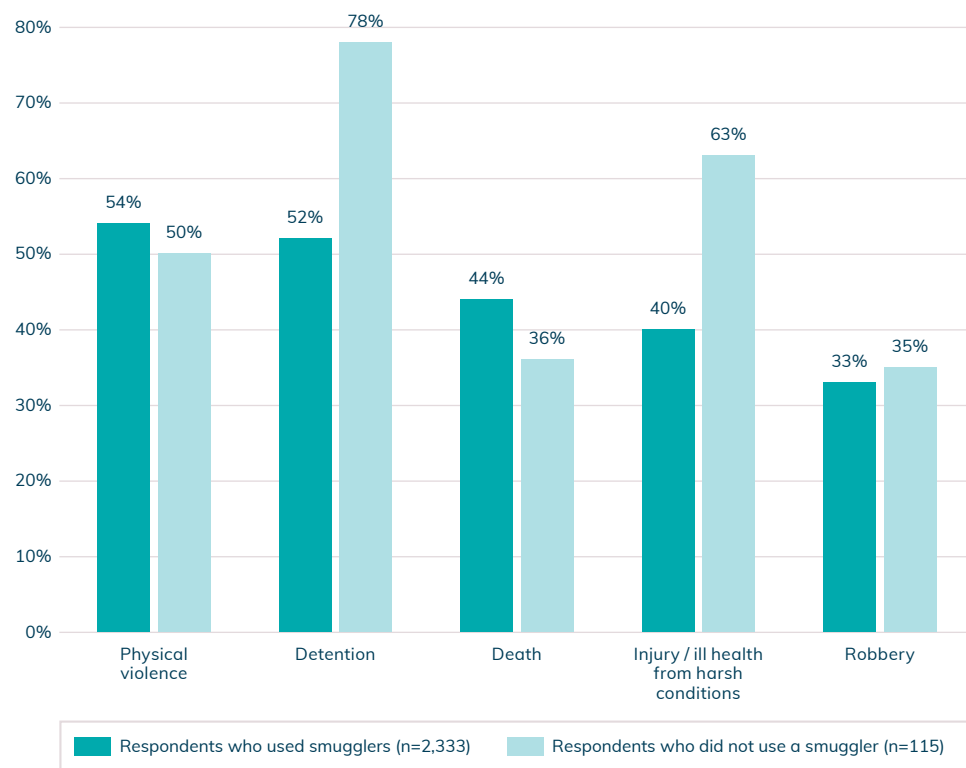
## Perceived detention risk was higher among respondents who did not use a smuggler

**Figure 4. Respondents' use of smugglers en route to Türkiye (n = 137)**



While a majority (85.5%) of respondents used one or more than one smuggler to facilitate their travel to Türkiye, 14% of respondents did not use a smuggler. Perception of detention risk, among other most frequently reported risks such as physical violence, ill health and injury from harsh conditions, death and robbery, varied depending on the respondent's use of smugglers.

**Figure 5. Five most frequently reported perceived risks among respondents**



Half of respondents (52%) who used one or more smuggler during their journey reported a perceived detention risk. For this group, detention was the second most frequently reported risk, the first being physical violence (54%). The case of respondents who did not use a smuggler during their journey was starkly different. A perception of detention risk was reported by the majority of respondents (78%). The second most frequently reported risk is injury or ill health from harsh conditions (63%), followed by physical violence (50%), death (36%) and robbery (35%).

You can access previously published 4Mi snapshots on Afghans en route to Türkiye here:  
[The role of smugglers in Afghans' irregular journeys to Türkiye](#)  
[Afghans en route to Türkiye: access to critical information](#)  
[Afghans en route to Türkiye: Routes, protection risks, and access to assistance](#)

The data analysed in this snapshot was collected before the earthquakes which struck Türkiye and Syria in February. Data collection has been suspended and will be resumed as soon as is feasible. MMC Asia and Pacific will be monitoring the impact of the earthquake on the refugee and migrant population it interviews.



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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 Asia and the Pacific, Eastern and Southern Africa, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, North Africa, and West Africa.

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)