

Rohingya refugees in Thailand: Profiles, drivers of migration and access to assistance

This snapshot explores the drivers and profiles of Rohingya refugees migrating to Thailand, as well as the assistance Rohingya require once they arrive there. Building on ongoing 4Mi data collection activities in Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand, this snapshot also compares assistance received by Rohingya refugees in the different countries.

Key findings

- Lack of rights and freedom (78%); violence, insecurity, and conflict (76%) were reported as the primary drivers for migration.
- 63% of respondents reported that they decided to migrate of their own accord, while 37% of respondents reported that their decision to migrate was influenced by other people (family, friends, smugglers, etc.), which vary across gender.
- Almost all respondents (95%) started their journey to Thailand from Myanmar; 5% set off from Bangladesh.
- Over half of respondents (66%) travelled to Thailand because it was the only route available to them.
- 86% of respondents reported that they required help to meet basic needs in Thailand, with food, cash, and water as the three most needed forms of assistance.

Profiles

This snapshot draws on data collected between January 2023 and April 2023 from 107 Rohingya refugees in Thailand: 61 women and 46 men. Respondents were surveyed in three provinces in Thailand: Tak (88%), Phang Nga (8%), and Songkhla (4%). The average age of respondents was 36 years old, with the majority between the ages of 26 and 35. Almost half of respondents (48%) travelled with children. Over one-third of respondents completed primary school (41%), 30% completed secondary or high school, and 7% obtained a university degree. 21% reported that they did not complete any schooling. Almost all the respondents (96%) lacked legal documents for residence in Thailand.

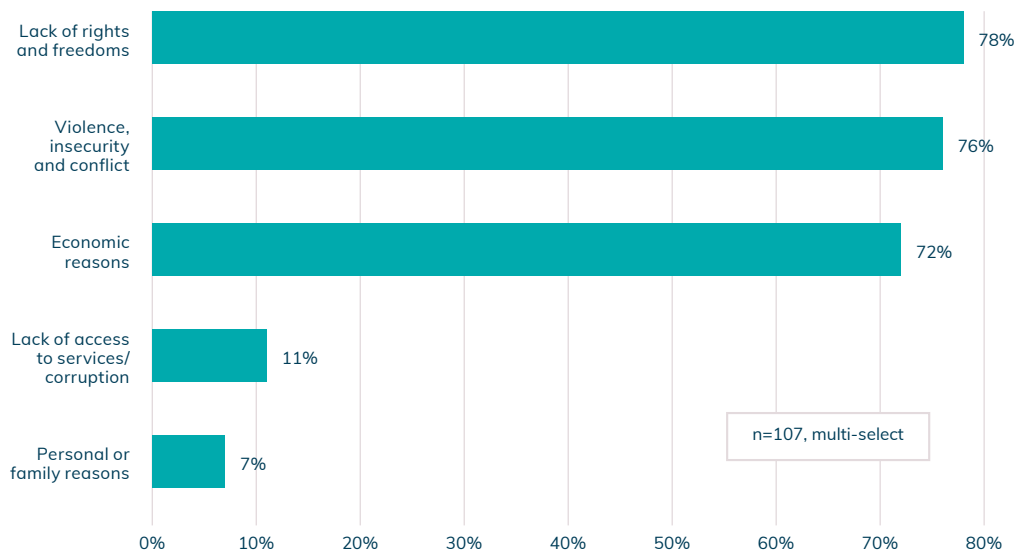
Figure 1. Age group distribution by gender



Decision-making in migration varies by gender

More than one-third of respondents (39%) reported multiple reasons for leaving their country, which indicates that drivers for migration are multifaceted and complex. Lack of rights and freedom (78%); violence, insecurity and conflict (76%) were reported as the primary drivers for migration to Thailand, consistent with the motivations of Rohingya refugees migrating to Indonesia¹ and Malaysia.² This is on account of the human rights situation in Myanmar, where violence in Rakhine state intensified following the military seizure of power, and persecution and systemic discrimination against Rohingya continues.³ Economic reasons (72%) were also a key driver for migration, reflecting the large share of respondents (48%) who did not have an income in the 12 months before they left their country of departure.

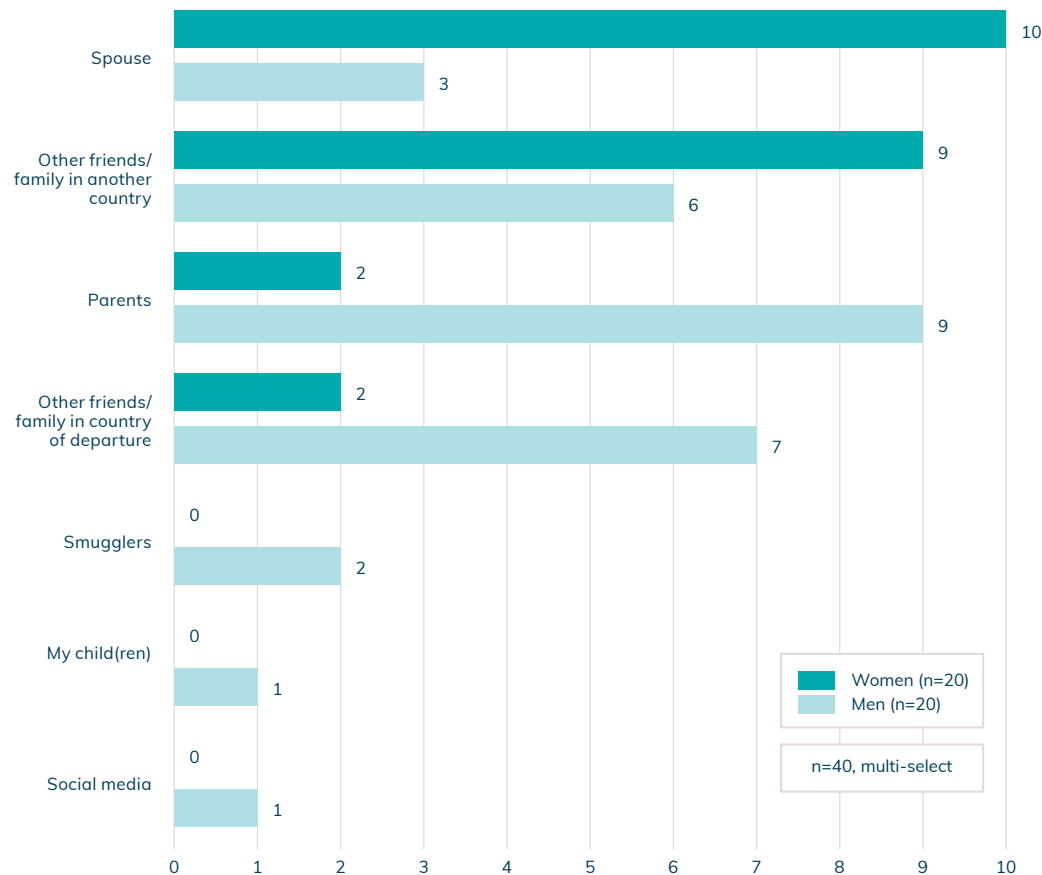
Figure 2. For what reason did you leave your country?



- 1 Violence, insecurity, and conflict (83%); and a lack of rights and freedoms (47%) were the primary drivers of migration for Rohingya in Indonesia. See MMC (2022) [Journeys to Indonesia for Rohingya refugees](#)
- 2 Most respondents in Malaysia reported violence, insecurity, and conflict (79%) and a lack of rights and freedoms (78%) as the main reasons for leaving Myanmar. See MMC (2021) [Profiles and Drivers of Rohingya moving to Malaysia](#)
- 3 OHCHR (2023) [Situation of human rights in Myanmar](#)

More than half of respondents (63%) reported that they decided to migrate of their own accord, while 37% of respondents reported that their decision to migrate was influenced by other people. Among these respondents (n=40), the biggest influence on the decision to migrate varied across gender. Spouses played a role in influencing women (n=10) to migrate, which is consistent with findings in Malaysia.⁴ Rohingya men (n=9) were more influenced by their parents.

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

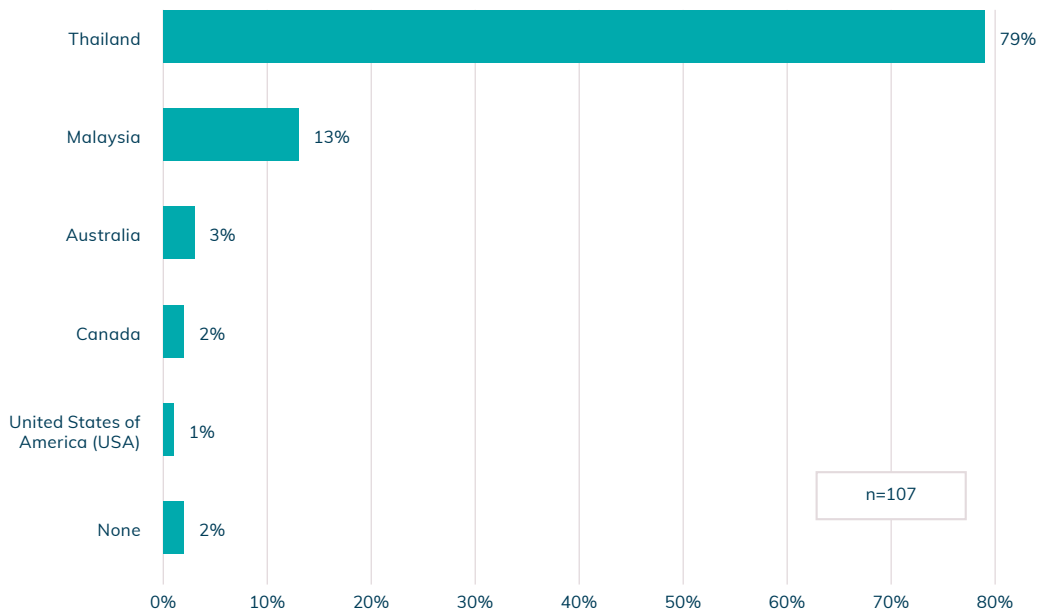


- 4 In Malaysia, 84% of women who reported being influenced by others (n=82), reported their spouse as the main influencer. See MMC (2021) [Profiles and drivers of Rohingya moving to Malaysia](#)

Myanmar as the starting point of the journey

Almost all the respondents (95%) started their journey to Thailand from Myanmar. The remaining 5% set off from Bangladesh, a frequent transit country for Rohingya respondents in Indonesia⁵ and Malaysia.⁶ Thailand was reported as the preferred destination country for most respondents (79%, n=84), followed by Malaysia (13%) and Australia (3%). The top three reasons behind selecting Thailand as the preferred destination were economic opportunities (n=63), respect for human rights (n=56) and access to medical care (n=42).

Figure 4. What country was your preferred destination?

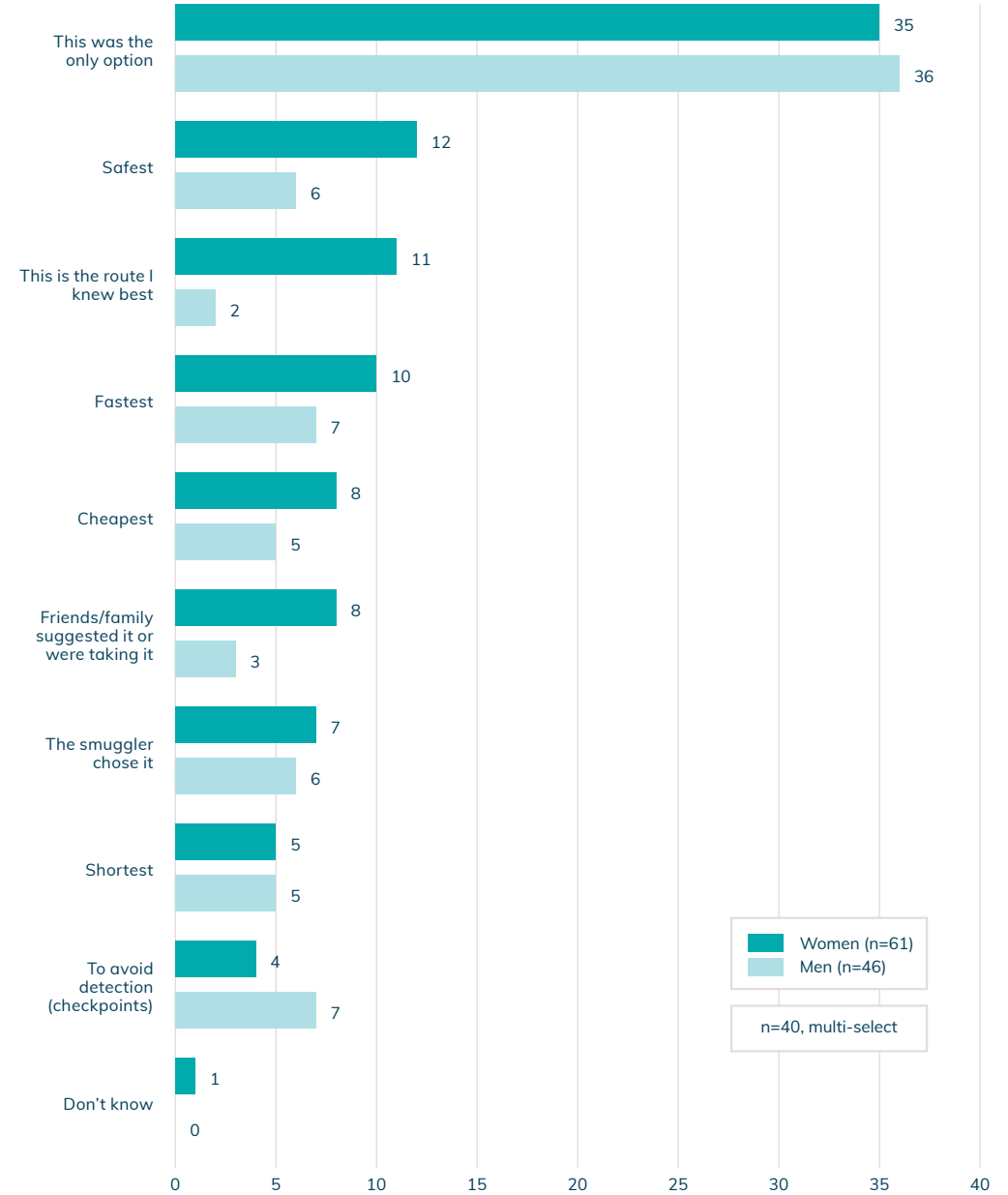


In terms of the route taken to reach Thailand, respondents demonstrated limited agency: 66% took the route because it was the only option they had (66%). Among female respondents, safety (n=12) was the second topmost consideration in selecting a route, while male respondents chose the route because it was the fastest way to reach Thailand (n=7), and they were able to avoid checkpoints en route (n=7).

⁵ 55% of respondents in Indonesia transited through Bangladesh. See MMC (2022) [Rohingya refugees in Indonesia: a focus on smuggling, information, and financing](#)

⁶ 44% of respondents in Malaysia transited through Bangladesh. See MMC (2022) [Protection risks facing Rohingya refugees en route to Malaysia](#)

Figure 5. Why did you take this route?

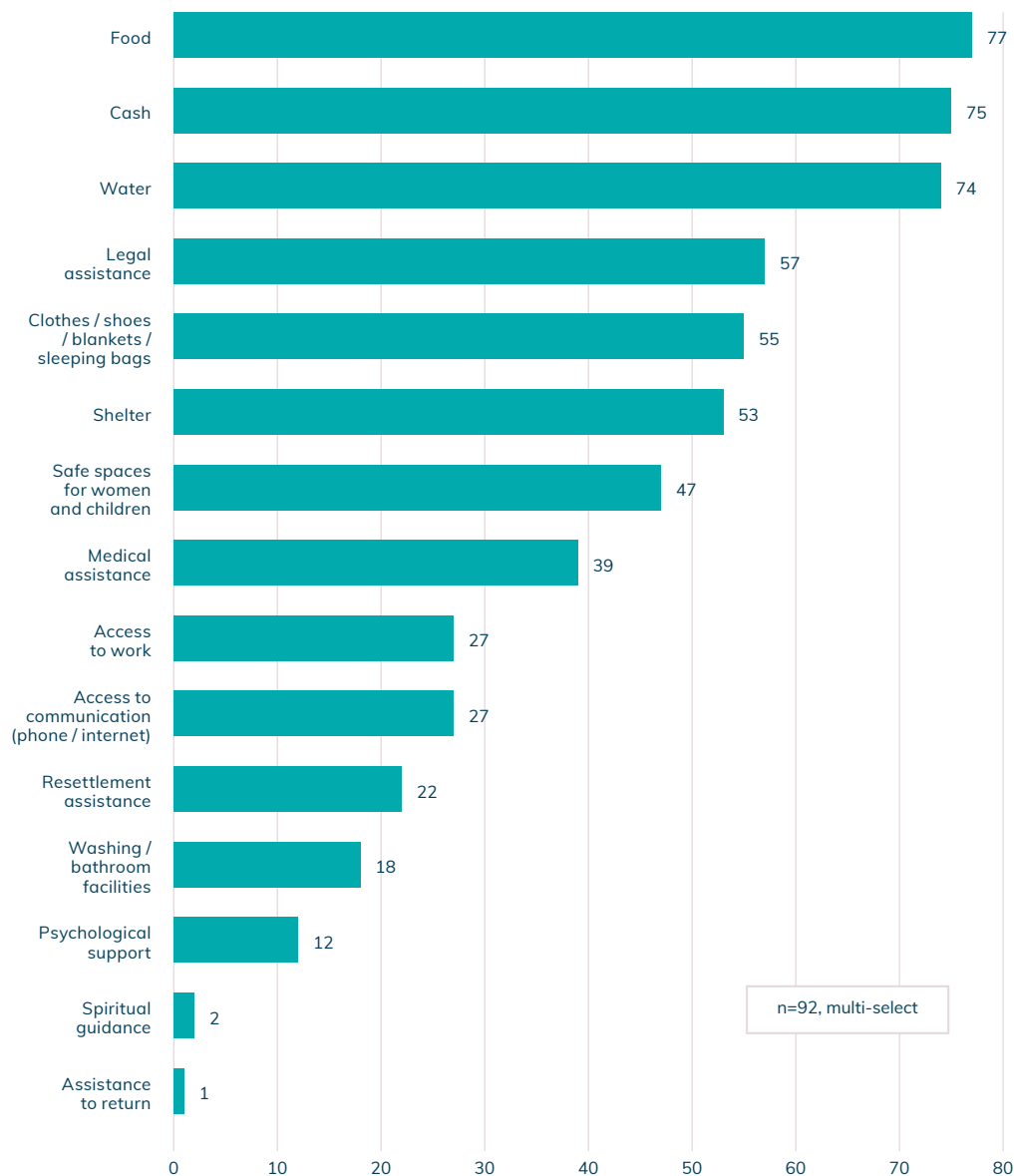


Risks en route and assistance needed to address unmet basic needs among Rohingya respondents in Thailand

Travel to Thailand is risky. Respondents reported that they had experienced incidents of physical violence (n=29), bribery or extortion (n=27), and detention (n=13) on their journey. Access to assistance was limited both en route and upon arrival. More than half (52%) of respondents did not receive any assistance while travelling to Thailand. The remaining respondents received assistance—primarily water (n=45), food (n=44), and shelter (n=24)—provided by local communities or volunteers (n=18), smugglers (n=17), and family or friends (n=12).

At the time of survey, 86% of respondents reported that they required assistance to meet basic needs in Thailand. Of these respondents (n=92), both females and males cited food (n=77), cash (n=75), and water (n=74) as the three most needed kinds of assistance. This is in sharp contrast to Indonesia, where Rohingya refugees have reported resettlement assistance (90%), access to work (48%), and cash (24%) as their three most needed kinds of assistance.⁷ This likely reflects the different policy responses towards Rohingya refugees in Indonesia and Thailand. In Indonesia, Rohingya receive temporary protection including necessities like temporary shelter, food, and water as stipulated in Presidential Regulation No. 125 of 2016 concerning the Treatment of Refugees.⁸ In Thailand, Rohingya refugees are deemed irregular migrants, resulting in restricted access to humanitarian assistance and poor living conditions.⁹

Figure 6. What kind of assistance do you need in Thailand?



7 MMC (2022) [Journeys to Indonesia for Rohingya refugees: Routes, risks, assistance and needs](#)

8 IOM Indonesia (2022) [IOM Provides Life-Saving Support and Transfers 229 Rohingya](#)

9 Imran, H. (2022) [The Plight of Boat Refugees to Thailand](#). International Journal on Minority and Group Rights

Protecting Rohingya Refugees in Asia - towards a coordinated regional approach

Protecting Rohingya Refugees in Asia (PRRIa) is a two-year ECHO-funded initiative launched in 2021 to address protection risks and needs of Rohingya refugees in Southeast Asia. The joint project of the Asia Displacement Solutions Platform (ADSP), Danish Refugee Council (DRC), Geutanyoë Foundation Malaysia, HOST International Malaysia, Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) Indonesia, and the Mixed Migration Centre (MMC) combines evidence-based research, programmatic and advocacy expertise to inform integrated regional protection responses in support of Rohingya refugees as the world's largest stateless population. PRRIa targets 54 local, 20 international, and 27 regional organisations with a particular focus on Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia.

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[Rohingya refugees in Indonesia: a focus on smuggling, information, and financing](#)

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