

Understanding information sources and gaps among Afghan, Chin and Rohingya refugees in Malaysia

This snapshot examines access to information about routes, destinations, costs, and risks among Afghan, Chin, and Rohingya refugees in Malaysia. It presents insights on the sources of information and the means used to obtain information both before and during the journey to Malaysia, information gaps and the implications these gaps have on decision-making.

Key findings

- **Approximately 55% of respondents obtained information** about routes, destinations, costs, and risks **prior to their journey**, while only **19%** obtained information during their journey.
- **Personal social networks** were the primary sources of information before the journey, but their usage decreased during the journey.
- **The role of smugglers as a source of information grew to dominate** during the journey, with 68% of respondents relying on them for information compared to 31% prior to the journey. Varied perception of smugglers as a reliable source of information suggested different smuggling dynamic between groups.
- **In-person interactions** were the most preferred means to obtain information before (82%) and during the journey (69%).
- Only 5% of respondents reported that they had received all the necessary information, highlighting a **serious lack of access to information** among respondents.

Profiles

This snapshot is based on data collected from 1,419 surveys conducted between December 2022 and June 2023 among Rohingya (66.8%), Chin (22.6%), and Afghan (10.6%) respondents in Malaysia. The distribution of male and female respondents was balanced overall but varied between groups (see Figure 1). Around two-thirds of respondents (66%) fell within the 18-25 age group, with an average age of 29 years for

Afghan and Chin respondents and 23 years for Rohingya respondents. As for educational background, more than one-third of respondents had completed primary school (39%) and 31% reported having completed secondary or high school.

Figure 1. Profile of respondents

		Afghan (n=150)	Chin (n=321)	Rohingya (n=948)
Age group	18-25	45%	45%	76%
	26-35	29%	39%	21%
	36-45	17%	12%	2%
	46-55	7%	3%	1%
	55+	1%	1%	0%
	TOTAL	100%	100%	100%
Gender	Women	25%	36%	59%
	Men	75%	64%	41%
	TOTAL	100%	100%	100%
Education level	Did not complete any schooling	9%	1%	31%
	Primary school	34%	14%	48%
	Secondary or high school	49%	53%	20%
	University degree	7%	27%	0%
	Vocational training	1%	5%	0%
	TOTAL	100%	100%	100%

About half of respondents started their journey without obtaining information

Just under half of the respondents (45%) embarked on their journey without obtaining any information about routes, destinations, costs, and risks beforehand. This lack of information was more prevalent among Rohingya respondents (49%), followed by Chin (38%) and Afghan (32%) respondents.

For those who did obtain information, personal social networks were the most common sources of information. This included friends or family in another country (81%), friends or family in country of departure (69%), and online community (52%) (see Figure 2). However, Chin respondents primarily relied on smugglers (84%) as a source of information before their journey, followed by friends or family in another country (64%) and friends or family in country of departure (55%).

During the journey, less than one-fifth of respondents (19%) reported obtaining information about routes, destinations, costs, and risks (47% among Afghans, 44% among Chin, 6% among Rohingya respondents). This represents a significant decrease compared to the 55% of respondents who obtained information prior to the journey. Notably, only 6% of Rohingya respondents obtained information during their journey compared to 51% prior to the journey. This difference could be attributed to the difficulties in obtaining information during sea journeys, a route commonly undertaken by Rohingya to seek protection across the Bay of Bengal and Andaman Sea.¹

Significance of personal social networks as information sources decreased during the journey

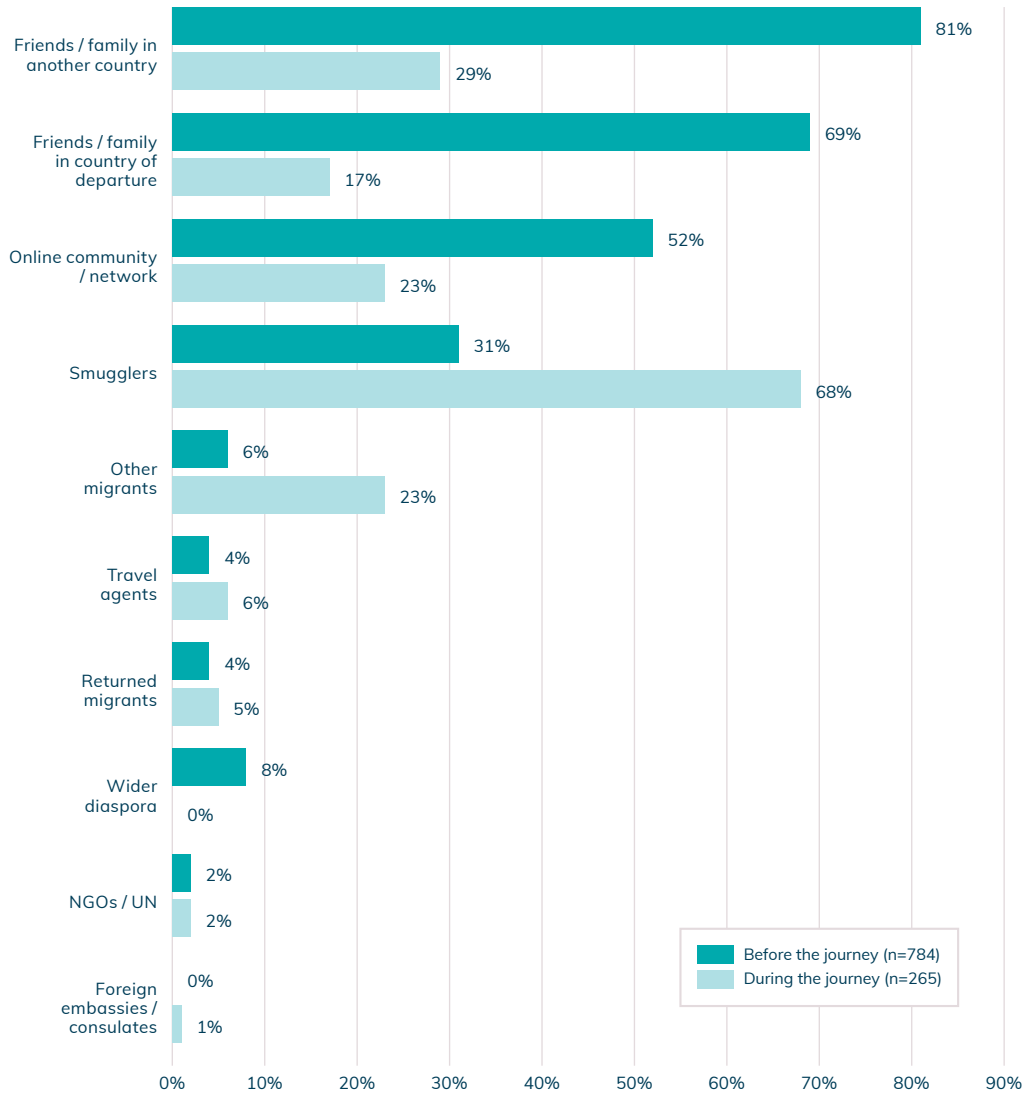
The significance of personal social networks as information sources decreased during the journey. More than half (68%) of respondents who did obtain information during the journey relied on smugglers for information. This was followed by friends or family in another country (29%), and other migrants (23%). The decline in reliance on personal social networks as sources of information during the journey was observed across all three groups, likely due to a change in information needs or accessibility of sources after they embarked on the journey. Smugglers emerged as the primary information source during the journey, especially among Chin and Rohingya respondents. Specifically, 99% of Chin respondents reported relying on smugglers for information during the journey compared to 84% prior to the journey, indicating a strong reliance on smugglers all along. Rohingya are less reliant on smugglers but shift from barely using smugglers as a source before the journey (7%) to them being more common during the journey (35%).

It is also worth noting that respondents rarely obtained information from formal institutions such as UN agencies or NGOs (2% before the journey and 2% during the journey) and foreign embassies or consulates (0.4% before the journey and 1% during the journey) (see Figure 2). Studies have shown that exposure to conflict and violence in country of origin can influence the level of institutional trust, especially in instances where state actors were accountable, which may contribute to an explanation.² These negative experiences can contribute to a broader sense of distrust extending to other actors or institutions.

1 Missbach, A. (2022) [Maritime Refugees as an Evolving Threat to Southeast Asia's Maritime Security](#); UNHCR (2023) [Protection at Sea in South East Asia - 2022 in Review](#).

2 Hall & Verner (2022) [Trauma and Trust: How War Exposure Shapes Social and Institutional Trust Among Refugees](#); Sundbäck (2023) [Trust Shaping in Forced Migrants' Institutional Encounters in the Finnish Welfare State](#).

Figure 2. What were your sources of information about routes, destinations, costs, risks, etc.?

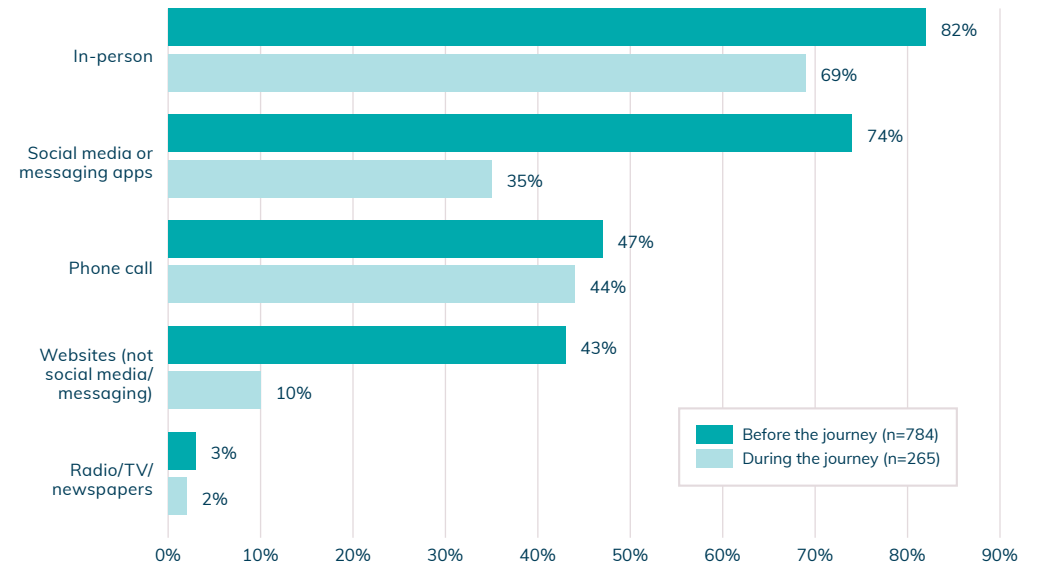


Most respondents obtained information through in-person interactions before and during their journey

Before starting their journey, the majority of respondents obtained information through in-person interactions (82%) and social media or messaging apps (74%). Phone calls were also popular, utilised by 47% of respondents. Notably, Afghan respondents far more frequently used phone calls (84%) to obtain information prior to their journey, followed by social media or messaging apps (70%) and in-person interactions (67%).

During the journey, in-person interactions (69%) remained an important means of obtaining information, followed by phone calls (44%). However, the use of social media or messaging apps for information during the journey decreased by more than half – from 74% to 35%. Similarly, the use of websites dropped to only 10%, a decrease from 43% before the journey. Traditional media outlets such as radio, television or newspapers were rarely used at any point (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. What means did you use to obtain information?

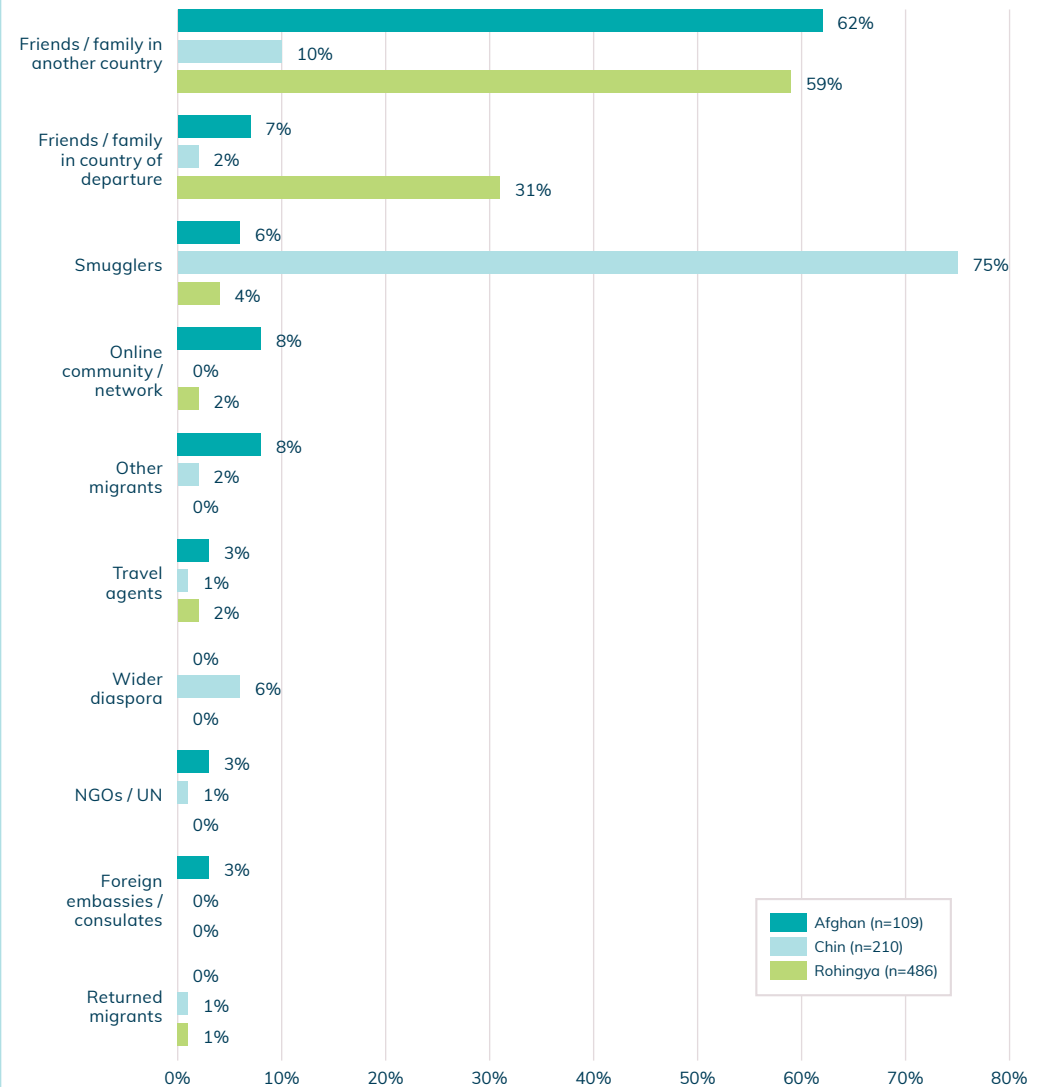


Smugglers considered the most reliable source of information among Chin respondents

Among respondents who obtained information before or during the journey, friends or family in another country (47%), smugglers (23%), and friends or family in the country of departure (21%) were commonly cited as the most reliable information sources. However, this varied across profiles (see Figure 4). For Afghan and Rohingya respondents, over half (62% and 59%, respectively) reported friends or family in another country as the most reliable source of information.

Despite being frequently used as a source of information, particularly during the journey, smugglers were rarely considered the most reliable information sources among Afghan (6%) and Rohingya (4%) respondents. On the other hand, three-quarters of Chin respondents reported smugglers as the most reliable source of information, suggesting a very different smuggling dynamic between these groups.

Figure 4. Of all sources, what has been the most reliable source of information overall?

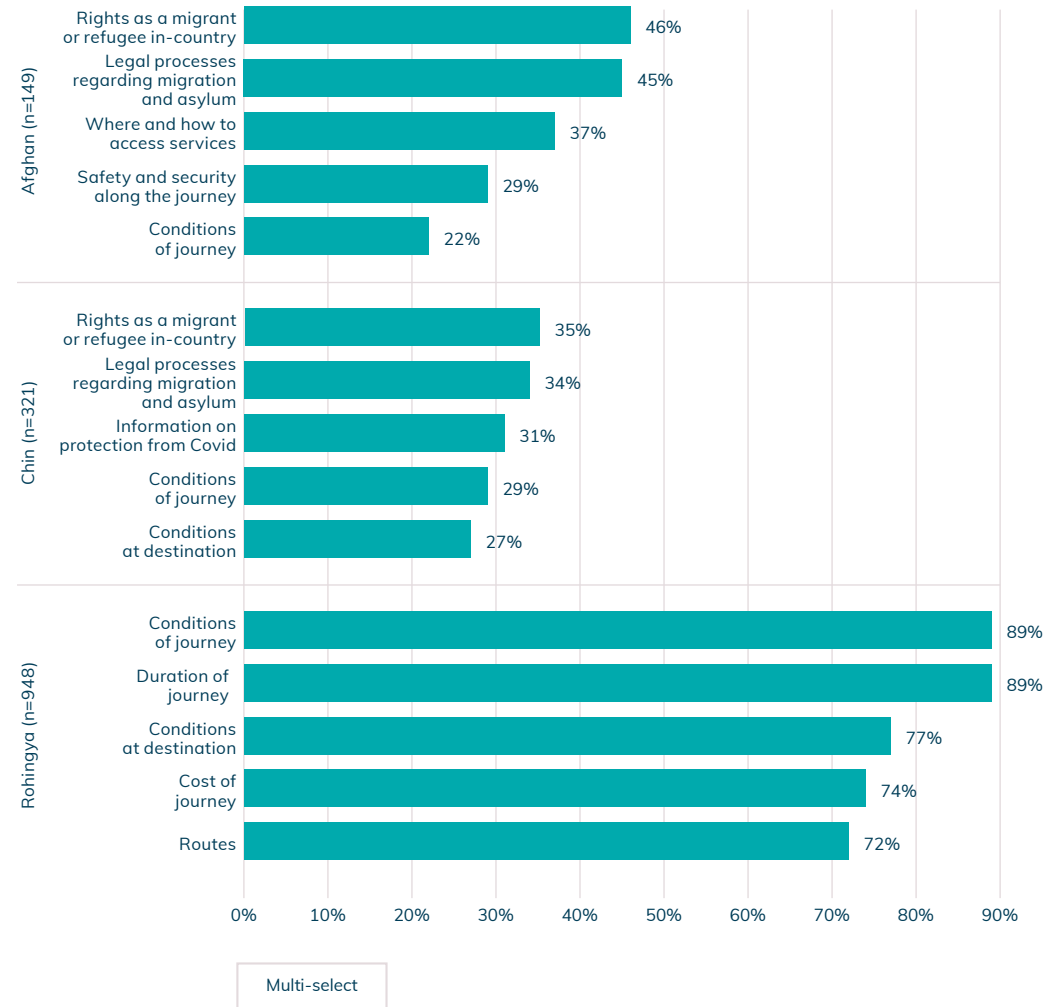


Most Rohingya respondents needed information related to the journey

Only 5% of respondents mentioned receiving all the information they needed, indicating a significant lack of information. The types of information gap varied: Afghan and Chin respondents were most concerned about information related to their rights, legal processes regarding migration and asylum, and access to services, therefore points to their plans in destination.

In the case of Rohingya respondents, the most common information gaps were related to the nature of the journey; 89% expressed a need for information about the conditions and duration of their journey. This suggests that Rohingya need more information both before and on the way about the conditions of their migration journey and destination.

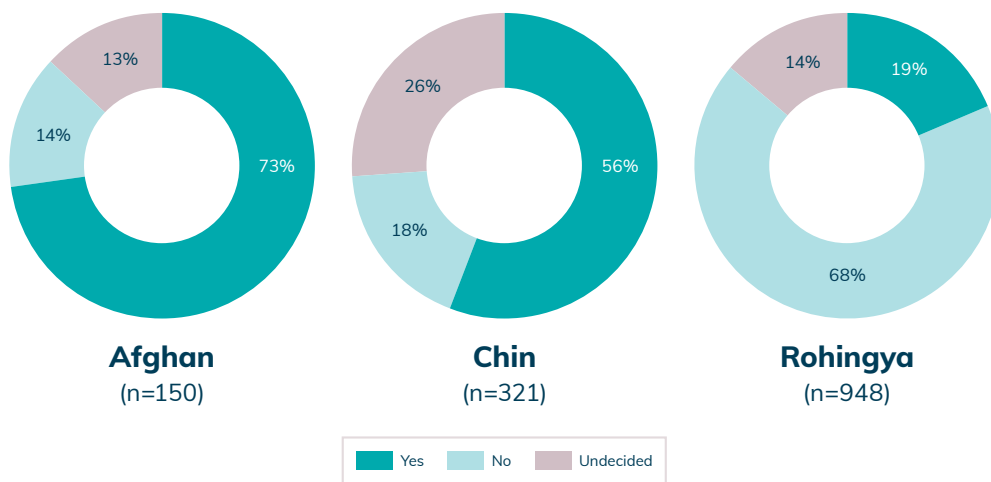
Figure 5. What information would have been most useful that you did not receive? (Top five gaps identified in each group)³



³ Options for this survey question include: routes, duration of journey, cost of journey, conditions of journey, conditions at destination, rights as a migrant or refugee in-country, where and how to access services, safety and security along the journey, legal process regarding migration and asylum, how to find a smuggler, information on how to protect myself from COVID or how to get care, I have all the information I needed.

Most Afghan (73%) and Chin (56%) respondents reported that they would still have started their journey even with the information they now have, while only 19% of Rohingya respondents would have done the same (see Figure 6). This suggests that access to additional information about migration journeys is a critical need among Rohingya, so that they can make better-informed decisions (see Figure 5). It is likely that a more informed understanding of the potential risks and uncertainties associated with their journey could have led many of them to reconsider their decision to undertake the journey.

Figure 6. Would you have started this journey knowing what you know now?



Protecting Refugees in Asia - towards a coordinated regional approach

Protecting Refugees in Asia (PRiA) is a three-year ECHO-funded initiative launched in 2021 to address protection risks and needs of refugees in Southeast Asia. Phase II (2023-24) of the joint project of the Adventist Development & Relief Agency (ADRA), Asia Displacement Solutions Platform (ADSP), Danish Refugee Council (DRC), 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 refugees. PRiA targets 65 local, 20 international, and 27 regional organisations with a particular focus on Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia and India.



Access other publications under the PRiA Project here:

- [Profiles and drivers of Rohingya moving to Malaysia](#)
- [Protection risks for Rohingya women and children: from departure country to arrival in Malaysia](#)
- [Journeys to Indonesia for Rohingya refugees](#)
- [Protection risks of Rohingya refugees in Malaysia](#)
- [Rohingya refugees in Indonesia: a focus on smuggling, information, and financing](#)
- [Rohingya refugees in Thailand: Profiles, drivers of migration and access to assistance](#)

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