

Journeys of Pakistani migrants and refugees to Thailand

This snapshot explores the journeys of Pakistani migrants and refugees to Thailand, focusing on their reasons for leaving Pakistan, the routes taken to arrive in Thailand, their use of smuggling¹ services and exposure to protection incidents en route. The snapshot also explores respondents' access to assistance and needs upon arrival in Thailand.

This snapshot is produced in the context of a partnership with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) [Observatory on Smuggling of Migrants](#).



Key findings

- Deprivation of rights and freedoms (64%); and violence, insecurity, and conflict (58%) were the primary reasons reported for leaving Pakistan. Of those who left due to lack of rights and freedoms, almost all (97%) reported facing religious discrimination.
- A majority of respondents (66%) arrived directly to Thailand from Pakistan by plane, with the remainder transiting through countries like Malaysia, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Türkiye, and Cambodia.
- Respondents rarely used smugglers; only 2% (three respondents) reported using services of a smuggler for a portion of their journey.

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 migrants' and refugees' 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. This publication is produced in partnership with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) [Observatory on Smuggling of Migrants](#). The Observatory uses the word 'smuggler' when it can reasonably be assumed that the crime of migrant smuggling is constituted, as per Article 3 of the UN Smuggling of Migrants Protocol, while the word 'facilitator' is used whenever the elements of (a) irregular entry and/or (b) financial or material benefit, could reasonably be assumed not to be in evidence.

- While 70% respondents reported locations within Pakistan to be dangerous, very few protection incidents were reported in locations outside Pakistan.
- Both women and men identified cash and access to resettlement among their top three needs in Thailand. Women also identified safe spaces for women and children, and men access to work.

Profiles

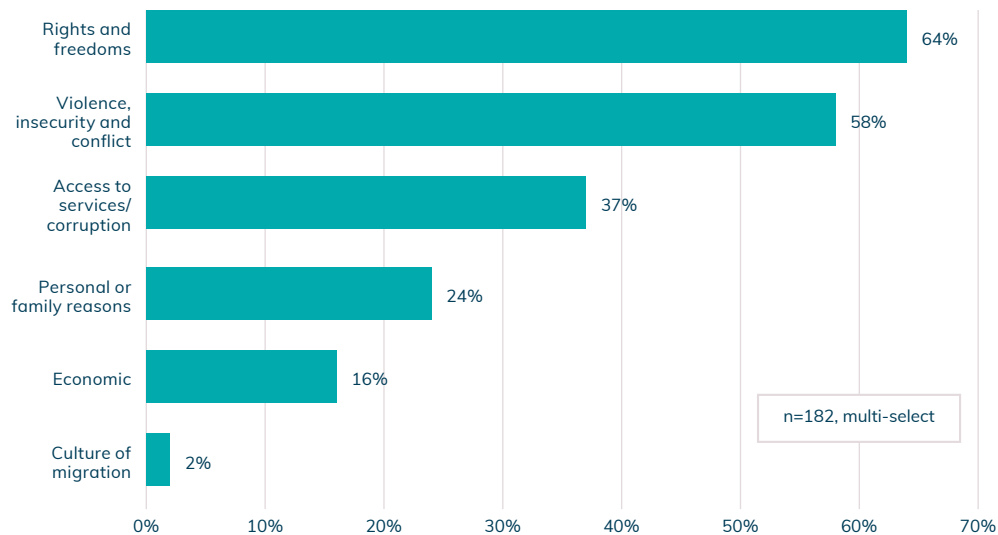
This snapshot draws on data from 182 4Mi surveys collected between January and June 2023 among Pakistani migrants and refugees in Thailand,² predominantly in Bangkok (91%). A majority of respondents were men (62%). A higher proportion (39%) were within the 26-35 age range and 28% were within the 36-45 age range. 42% of respondents had completed secondary or high school prior to their arrival in Thailand. More than half of the respondents (56%) reported not having any income for a year prior to leaving Pakistan. In terms of immigration status, a majority of respondents had sought international protection in Thailand – 46% were asylum applicants, 14% were refugees, and 11% had temporary protection status, while 15% had irregular status, and 14% had other forms of temporary residence.

² MMC uses a purposive and snowball sampling approach for 4Mi data collection and acknowledges that the data is not representative of the entire Pakistani population in Thailand. To maximise access to the population, respondents were identified through various means, including referral by community leaders or organisations working with Pakistani migrants and refugees, as well as through enumerators' social networks, and social media platforms.

Deprivation of rights and freedoms relating to religious discrimination, and violence, insecurity, and conflict were the most reported reasons for leaving Pakistan

The primary reasons for leaving Pakistan among respondents were a lack of rights and freedoms (64%), and violence, insecurity, and conflict (58%) (see Figure 1). Among those who left due to lack of rights and freedoms (n=116), almost all reported religious discrimination (97%) as being related to the deprivation of rights and freedoms they faced.

Figure 1. For what reasons did you leave your country of origin?



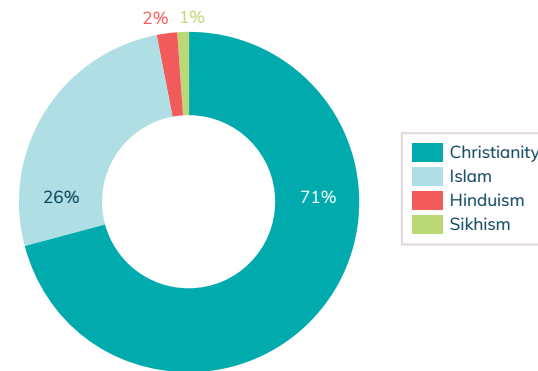
Members of religious minorities such as Christians, Sikhs and Ahmadis have been exposed to violent attacks and persistent persecution under Pakistan’s blasphemy laws³ and are often confined to low paying jobs.⁴ The religious composition of respondents reflects this, with almost three-quarters (71%) identifying as Christian (see Figure 2) – a

3 Renaud, CM (2023) [Christians in Pakistan risk greater persecution from blasphemy laws, while living in poverty.](#)

4 U.S. Department of State (2023) [2022 Report on International Religious Freedom: Pakistan](#); Human Rights Watch (2023) [Pakistan: Mob Attacks Christian Settlement](#); Hussain, A. (2023) [Pakistan’s Ahmadis living in fear as graves, religious sites attacked Al Jazeera.](#)

significant overrepresentation compared to their 1.6% share in Pakistan’s population.⁵ Correspondingly, a majority of respondents (82%) who attributed their deprivation of rights and freedoms to religious discrimination identified as Christian (while 72% of all Christian respondents reported religious discrimination), emphasising the direct link between perceptions of religious persecution and the decision to leave Pakistan.

Figure 2. What is your religion?

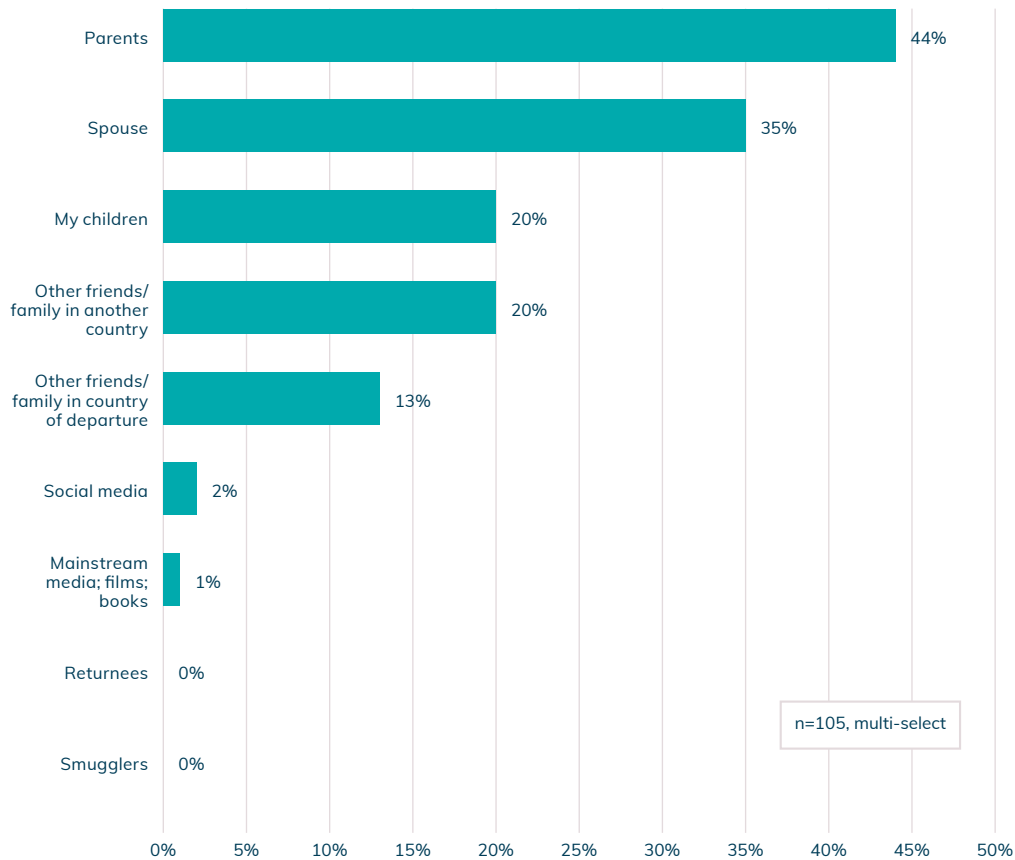


Family and friends played a pivotal role in the decision to leave

More than half of all respondents (58%) indicated that their decision to migrate was influenced by others, including parents (44% of those who were influenced), a spouse (35%), children (20%), and friends and family in another country (20%) (see Figure 3). Among women who reported any influence (n=46), the most frequently cited influence in the decision-making process was their spouse (n=25). In contrast, for men (n=59), the influence of spouse (n=12) ranked third, after parents (n=23) and other friends or family in another country (n=15).

5 Based on the [latest census in 2017](#), 96% of total population in Pakistan were Muslims, and religious minorities including Hindu (1.6%), Christian (1.59%), Scheduled Castes (0.25%), Ahmadi (0.22%), and others (0.7%) comprised 4% of the total population.

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



A majority of respondents did not use a smuggler

A majority of respondents (88%) did not use a smuggler on their journey to Thailand. Only 2% (n=3) reported using a smuggler for one part of their journey.⁶ The very low engagement with smugglers among respondents is unsurprising given that Pakistani nationals can access a tourist visa and enter Thailand regularly by air at a relatively low cost as compared to other destinations.⁷ The availability of regular pathways, despite limitations around accessibility given the costs, likely facilitates Pakistani migrants and refugees' direct entry into Thailand without the need for smugglers' services. On an average, respondents who used smugglers spent USD 4,105 (PKR 1,172,871)⁸ for their journey to Thailand, slightly lower than USD 4,550 (PKR 1,300,000)⁹ spent by one respondent¹⁰ who used smuggler.

Two-thirds of respondents (66%) arrived directly to Thailand from Pakistan, with the remaining one-third transiting Malaysia (11%), UAE (9%), Türkiye (3%), Cambodia (3%), and Sri Lanka (3%) (see Figure 4) to arrive in Thailand.

6 10% of respondents (n=19) declined to answer the question on use of smuggler(s), which is unusual given the sample size. The reasons for refusal are unfortunately beyond the scope of this snapshot, but merit further exploration.

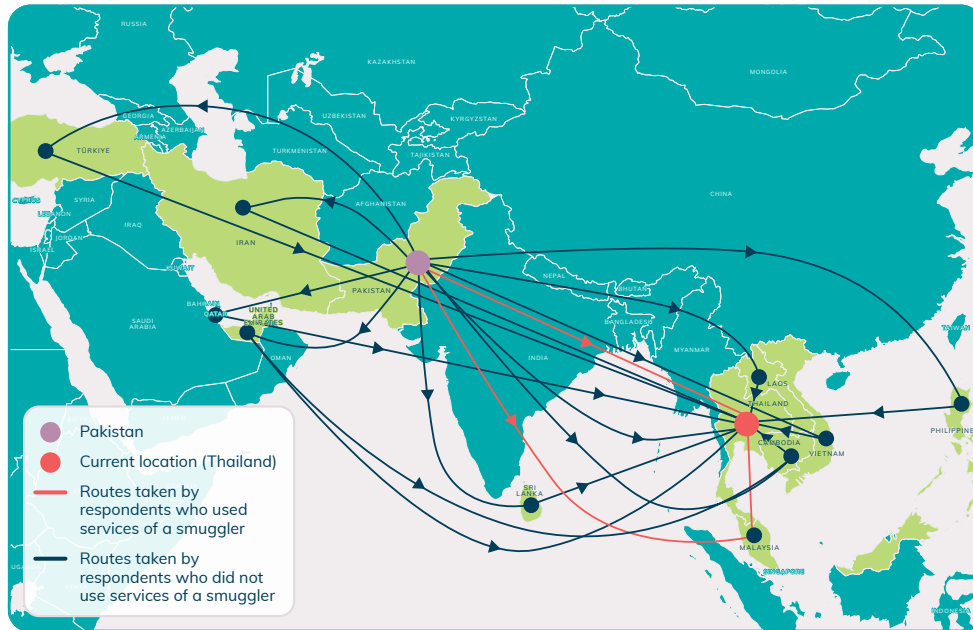
7 Akhtar, S. (2020) [Urban Refugees and Education in the Contemporary World: A case study of Pakistani Christian refugees in Bangkok, Thailand](#), p.p. 50; Global Minorities Alliance (2017) [Are Christians in Pakistan Persecuted?](#)

8 The average cost is calculated based on 62 respondents who disclosed expenses incurred during their journey.

9 PKR 1 = USD 0.0035, exchange rate as of 28 November 2023.

10 Other two respondents who used smugglers reported not knowing the journey costs.

Figure 4. Routes taken by respondents



Over three quarters of respondents (76%) travelled by air for the whole journey to Thailand. The remaining 24% of respondents used a combination of means of transportation including planes, buses, trains, cars or pickups, and boats on their journey. Respondents reported safety (47%), travel duration (44%) and length of journey (42%) as primary factors in decision making around route selection.

Among the three respondents (1 woman, 2 men) who reported using smugglers, the routes taken and means of transport varied. One respondent transited via Malaysia, using a combination of plane, boat, and bus. Another respondent also transited through Malaysia, but used a different set of modes, including plane, train, and car. The third respondent travelled to Thailand directly, by air.

Dynamics around use of smuggling services among Pakistani respondents en route to Thailand are starkly different from the journeys of Cambodian and Laotian respondents interviewed in Thailand under the framework of the same project. The vast majority of Cambodian and Laotian respondents used smugglers.¹¹

11 See: MMC (2023) [Use of smugglers on the journey to Thailand among Cambodians and Laotians](#).

Very few respondents reported protection incidents en route

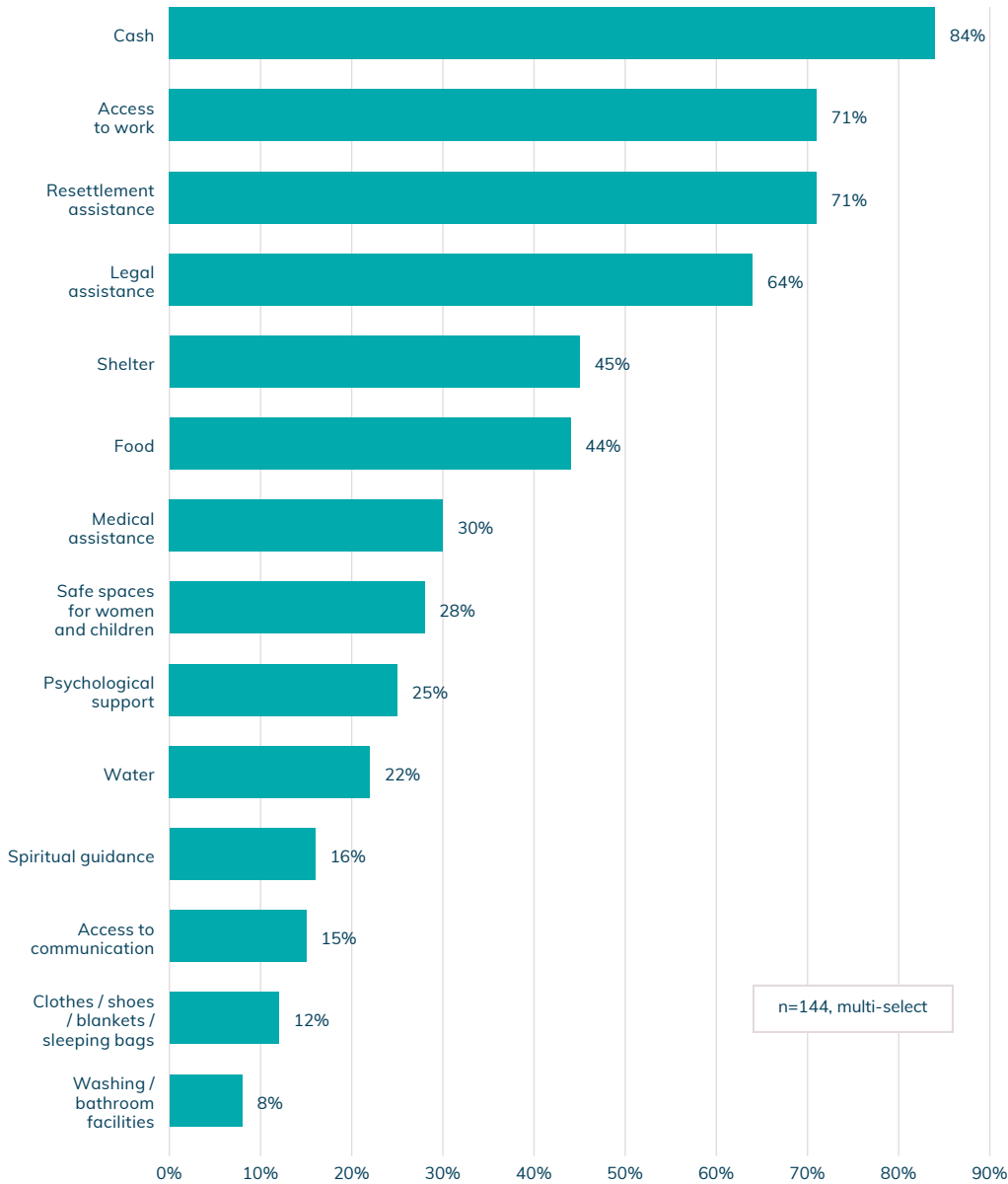
A majority of respondents identified locations within Pakistan (70%) as dangerous en route to Thailand. These responses may also be related to the drivers of migration - deprivation of rights and freedoms, as well as violence. 8% of respondents did not report any dangers, while 21% declined to answer this question.¹² The low rate of protection incidents experienced en route to Thailand is likely due to the means of travel (mostly by air) and routes taken (mostly direct) among respondents, as well as the accessibility of regular entry into Thailand.

Respondents reported limited access to assistance in Thailand

Most respondents reported a need for assistance in Thailand - 79% of respondents reported requiring support at the time of survey, with the most pressing needs being cash (84%), access to work (71%), resettlement assistance (71%), and legal assistance (64%) (see Figure 5). Assistance needs varied by gender - safe spaces for women and children were the third most reported need among women (cited by 36 out of 56 respondents). Access to work was the second most reported need among men (reported by 70 out of 88 respondents), but ranked sixth among women (reported by 32 out of 56 respondents).

12 In comparison to surveys conducted among respondents of other nationalities in Thailand under the same project, the proportion of Pakistani respondents who declined to answer this question is unusually high.

Figure 5. What kind of assistance do you need in Thailand?



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