

# Understanding information sources and gaps among Rohingya in Thailand

This snapshot examines access to information about migration routes, destinations, costs, and risks among Rohingya refugees in Thailand, both prior to departure and once en route. It presents insights on the role of information in migration, including sources of information, the means used to obtain information, as well as information gaps.

## Key findings

- Approximately two-thirds of respondents obtained information about migration routes, destinations, costs, and risks prior to (67%) and during their journey (64%). Women (73% prior to departure and 72% en route) more commonly reported obtaining information, as compared to men (64% prior to departure and 61% en route).
- Friends and family in the diaspora were the primary source of information before (70%) and during the journey (67%); they were also perceived as the most reliable information source among respondents (68%).
- Formal channels, including public institutions, non-government organisations, international organisations, and the private sector played a negligible role in providing information.
- Phone calls were the most utilised means of accessing information, potentially facilitated by the widespread accessibility of phones during the journey.
- Most respondents (60%) reported they had all the information that they needed about their migration journey. Among those who did not, information about the duration of their journey (22%), routes (20%), as well as safety and security (14%), were the most commonly reported gaps.

## Profiles

This snapshot draws from 752 surveys conducted between January and October 2023 with Rohingya refugees in Thailand. The majority were interviewed in towns neighbouring the Myanmar-Thai border, particularly in Tak (79%) and Mae Sot (2%), with the rest spread across Thailand, including Songkhla (6%), Bangkok (5%), Pattani (2%), Surat Thani (2%), and other locations. While the majority of respondents were men (69%), gender distribution across age group, migration status and education level were similar (see Figure 1). The average age of respondents was 32, with about two-thirds falling between 18-35 years old. Most respondents (94%) were undocumented, while 4% were registered asylum seekers or refugees.<sup>1</sup> In terms of education level, almost half of the respondents (47%) did not complete any schooling prior to migrating to Thailand.

1 The low percentage of refugees or asylum seekers in the sample could be attributed to the locations of most respondents who were interviewed in towns near the border with Myanmar. In these areas, individuals are unable to apply for asylum with UNHCR, as the agency's office is located in Bangkok. Moreover, with the Thai government classifying Rohingya as "illegal immigrants," they confront heightened risks of arrest and detention, posing significant barriers to accessing UNHCR registration services in Bangkok.

**Figure 1. Profile of respondents**

		Women (n=232)	Men (n=520)	All respondents (n=752)
<b>Age group</b>	18-25	35%	33%	34%
	26-35	39%	31%	33%
	36-45	16%	24%	22%
	46-55	5%	8%	7%
	55+	5%	4%	4%
	TOTAL	100%	100%	100%
<b>Migration status</b>	Applied for permit/visa	0.4%	1%	1%
	Asylum seeker	3%	2%	2%
	Irregular/no legal documents to stay in this country	94%	94%	94%
	Permit is no longer valid/ expired	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%
	Refugee	1%	2%	2%
	Temporary protection	1%	1%	1%
	Temporary resident (with permit/visa)	0%	0.4%	0.3%
	TOTAL	100%	100%	100%
<b>Education level</b>	Did not complete any schooling	44%	48%	47%
	Primary school	38%	35%	36%
	Secondary or high school	16%	15%	15%
	University degree	1%	1%	1%
	Vocational training	1%	1%	1%
	TOTAL	100%	100%	100%

## About two-thirds of respondents obtained information about their migration prior to departure and en route

Two-thirds of the respondents (67%) acquired information about migration routes, destinations, costs, and risks before embarking on their journey, with a greater percentage among women (73%) compared to men (64%). During the journey, the number of respondents obtaining information slightly decreased to 64%, with a similar gender distribution – 72% among women and 61% among men.

The proportion of Rohingya respondents in Thailand who reported obtaining information before and during their journey was significantly higher than Rohingya interviewed by MMC in Malaysia.<sup>2</sup> This difference could be attributed to the comparatively direct migration routes taken by Rohingya to reach Thailand (88% respondents in Thailand journeyed directly from Myanmar to Thailand without transit), compared to the more complex routes taken to reach Malaysia (only 1% of Rohingya respondents arrived directly to Malaysia). The more direct migration route to Thailand may have facilitated easier access to information compared to the complex migration routes taken to reach Malaysia, which involve multiple transits, longer journeys and sometimes significant periods of time at sea.

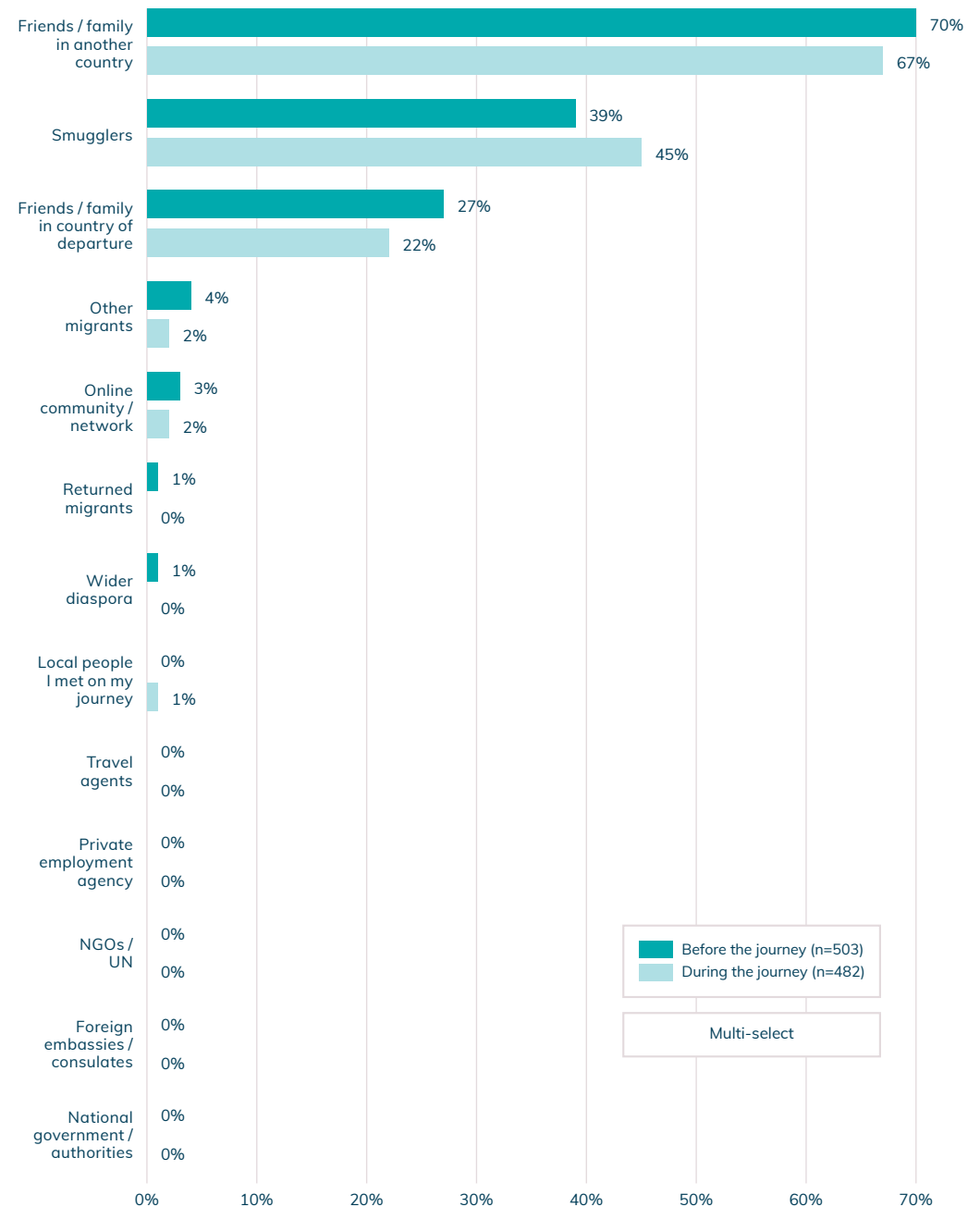
Differences in the use of smugglers may also play a role, with the majority of respondents in Thailand (87%) reporting to have engaged only one smuggler for their journey. In Malaysia, on the other hand, most respondents (51%) enlisted several smugglers for different parts of their journey. Since smugglers serve as one of the primary sources of information, as discussed below, it is plausible that engaging one smuggler for the entire journey may have facilitated better access to information prior to departure and after. However, further research into this is warranted.

<sup>2</sup> See MMC (2023) [Understanding information sources and gaps among Afghan, Chin and Rohingya refugees in Malaysia](#)

## Reliance on smugglers as an information source slightly increased once the journey began

For those who obtained information about their journeys, friends and family in the diaspora and country of departure were crucial sources both prior to departure and en route, indicating the importance of personal social networks for information dissemination (see Figure 2). Smugglers were also among the top three sources of information both prior to departure (39%) and en route (45%), as reported by respondents. Notably, there was an increase in the proportion of respondents citing smugglers as a source of information once journeys began, suggesting a modest rise in reliance on smugglers for information during the journey. Consistent with observations among Rohingya in Malaysia, formal channels of information from public institutions, non-government organisations, international organisations, and the private sector did not play a significant role in providing information for migrants either prior to departure or en route. This could be attributed to the limited availability of information from these sources, barriers to access, or low levels of institutional trust, which is worth further exploration.

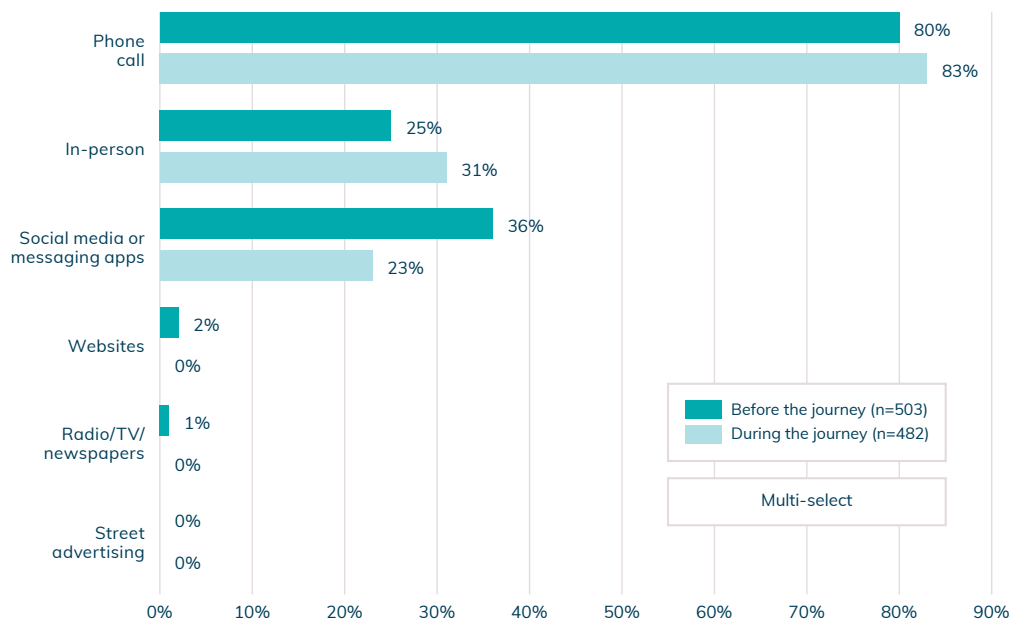
**Figure 2. What were your sources of information about routes, destinations, costs, risks, etc. before and during your journey?**



## Phone calls were the most common mode of obtaining information

The primary mode of obtaining information for the majority of respondents was through phone calls, with 80% relying on this method before the journey and 83% during the journey. The accessibility to functional phones during the journey, with 67% having access to smartphones and 18% possessing basic phones without internet access, likely played a crucial role in facilitating information access via this means. However, despite the high proportion of respondents with access to a smartphone, relatively few accessed information via social media or messaging apps (36% before and 23% during the journey) and websites (2% before and none during the journey). This is likely due to factors such as limited internet connectivity during the journey and low levels of literacy and digital literacy among respondents. Once en route, a higher proportion of respondents reported obtaining information in-person, presumably from smugglers or others they interacted with during their journeys.

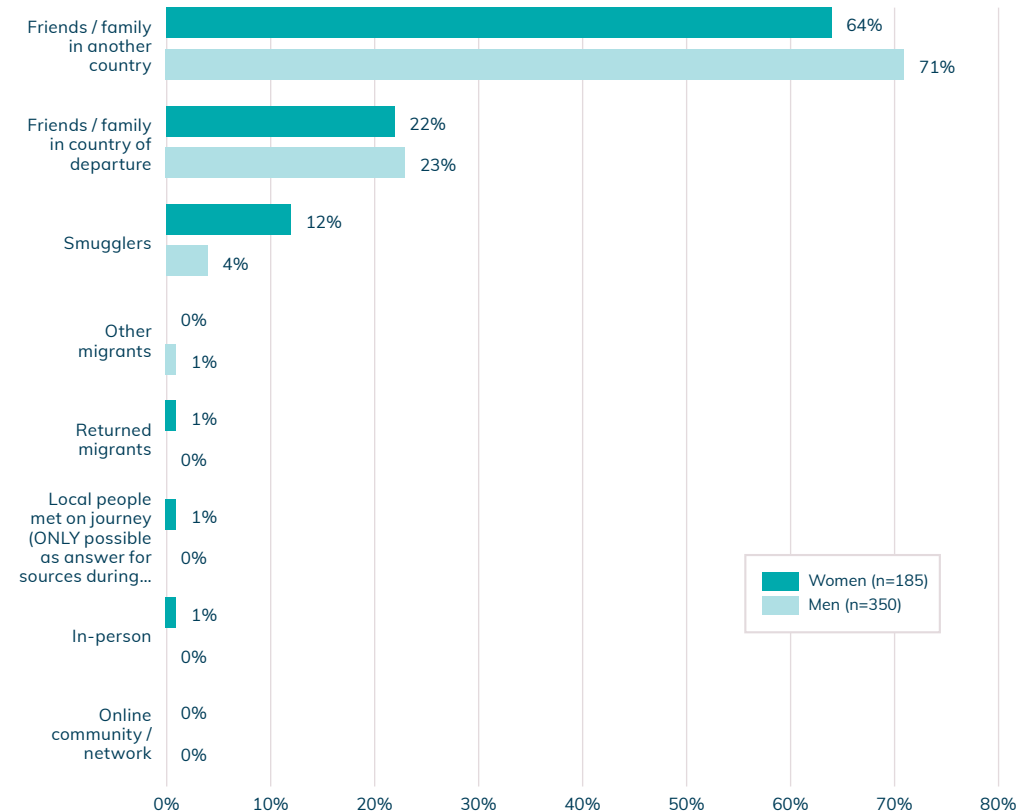
**Figure 3. What means did you use to obtain information before and during your journey?**



## Family and friends in the diaspora frequently cited as the most reliable source of information

Friends and family in the diaspora were cited as the most reliable sources of information (68%), likely owing to their personal experiences with similar migration routes (see Figure 4). Their presumed firsthand knowledge distinguished them as a more reliable source in comparison to friends and family in the country of departure (23%). While smugglers became a more important information source during the journey to Thailand as reported above, only 7% of respondents reported them as the most reliable source of information. Interestingly, 12% of women reported smugglers as the most reliable source of information, three times higher than reported by men. This challenges the prevailing perception of smugglers solely as perpetrators of abuse, particularly among women, prompting a need for further exploration and a nuanced understanding of their roles, particularly in terms of information dissemination.

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

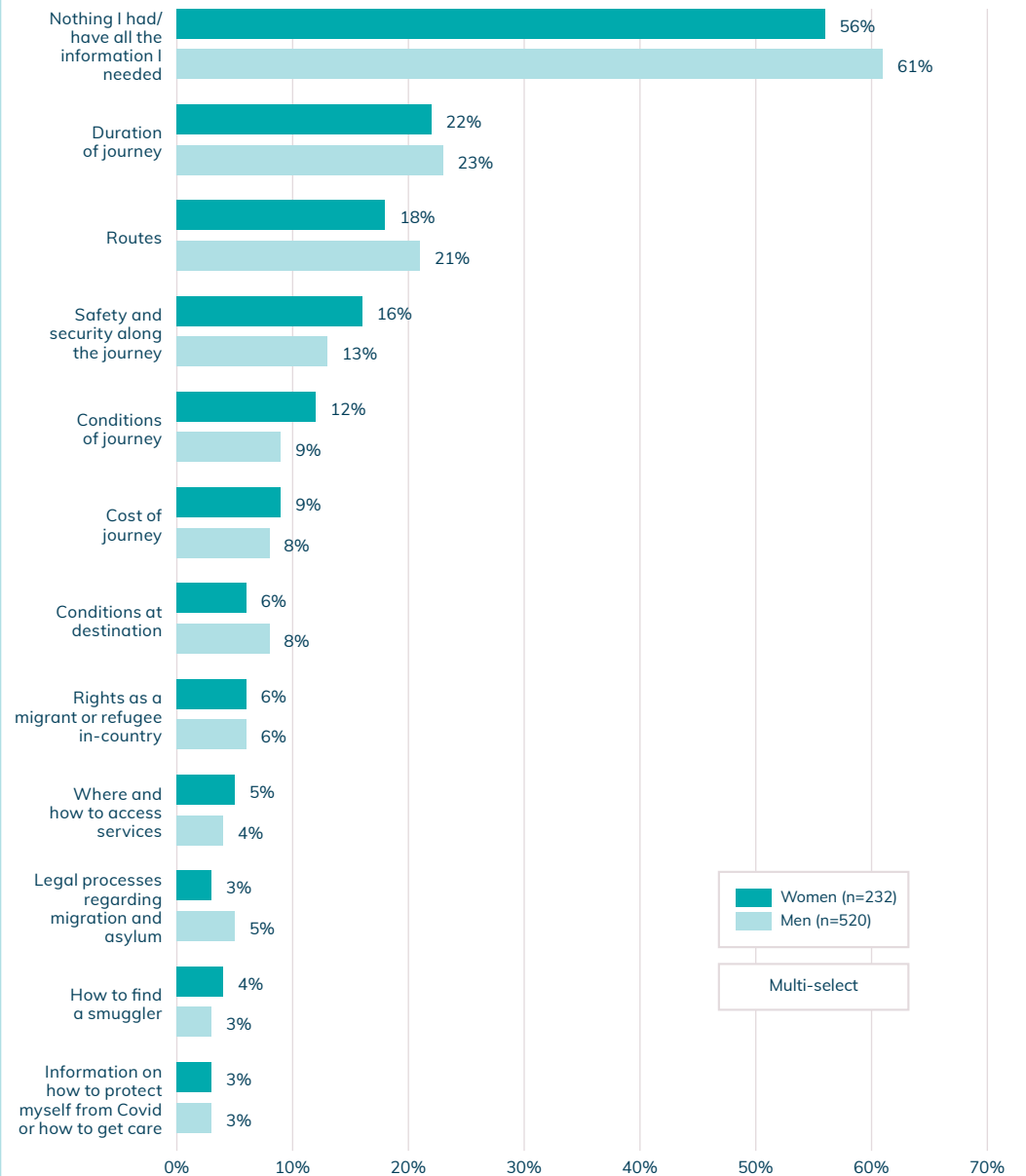


## Information gaps include journey duration, routes and safety and security

Overall, 60% of respondents reported they had access to all the information they needed about their journey to Thailand. This stands in stark contrast to Rohingya respondents interviewed by MMC in Malaysia, where a mere 3% reported having obtained all the information they needed.<sup>3</sup> As discussed above, the shorter distance between Myanmar and Thailand, coupled with more established irregular border crossings, in comparison to Malaysia where migration journeys are more complex, could account for these differences.<sup>4</sup>

Among those who reported their information needs were not met, the top three gaps pertained to critical aspects of the journey's nature: the duration (22%), routes (20%), and safety and security (14%). Women reported safety and security along the journey (16%), and conditions of the journey (12%), as key information gaps slightly more often than men (13%, and 9% respectively) (see Figure 5). Around half of all respondents (51%, n=380) reported experiencing abuse or violations en route to Thailand, including physical violence (63% of those who reported experiencing protection incidents), detention (36%), and bribery or extortion (27%), among others. Therefore, targeted programming for addressing information gaps pertaining to safety and security is imperative.

**Figure 5. What information would have been most useful that you did not receive?**



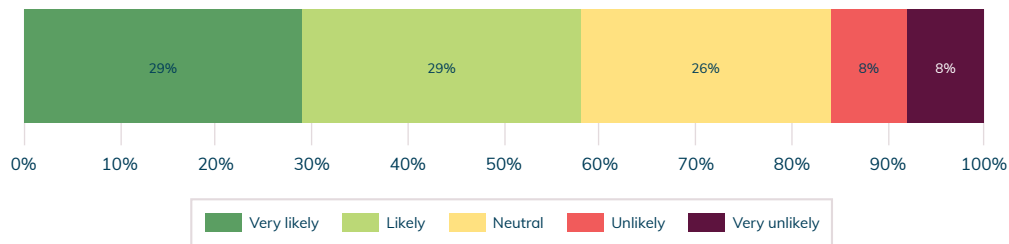
<sup>3</sup> See MMC (2023) [Understanding information sources and gaps among Afghan, Chin and Rohingya refugees in Malaysia](#)

<sup>4</sup> Aung, W. S. (2011) [Informal Trade and Underground Economy in Myanmar - Part 2. Cross-border mobility and human smuggling from Myanmar](#), pp 51-79; Five Corridors Project (2021) [Myanmar to Thailand: Fair recruitment in review](#)

## The majority of respondents would migrate again knowing what they now know

In hindsight, when asked if they would still have started their journey given the information they now have, 84% of respondents said 'yes'. Only 7% said they would not, while 9% remained undecided. This is in stark contrast to Rohingya respondents in Malaysia, where only 19% said they still would have started their journey given the information they now have, compared to 68% who said they would not. Similarly, over half (58%) of the respondents (compared to 8% in Malaysia) affirmed that they would be likely to encourage others to migrate, drawing from their own experiences (see Figure 6). This suggests that, for respondents in Thailand, their actual experiences closely matched with their initial expectations, aligning with findings presented in this snapshot that Rohingya interviewed in Thailand had greater access to information about their journey compared to those interviewed in Malaysia.

**Figure 6. How likely are you to encourage others to migrate as you have, 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](#)
- [Understanding information sources and gaps among Afghan, Chin, and Rohingya refugees in Malaysia](#)

## 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 migrants on the move. 4Mi field enumerators are currently collecting data through direct interviews with migrants in Eastern and Southern Africa, North Africa, West Africa, Europe, Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean.

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)