

Chasing safety: destination selection and onward movement among recent arrivals in Greece

In 2024, persistent conflict, economic hardship, and instability in countries of origin such as Afghanistan, Syria, and Iraq, as well as transit countries such as Iran and Türkiye, continue to drive movements along the Eastern Mediterranean Route (EMR) into Greece. Based on interviews conducted with recently arrived migrants in Greece who have travelled via the EMR, this snapshot explores migration experiences as well as the factors that drive migration decision-making including destination selection and onward movement.

Key findings

- **Violence, insecurity and conflict (74%) was reported as a key driver of migration among all respondents.** Lack of rights and freedoms was the primary driver among Afghan respondents (90%). Economic factors were the primary driver among Egyptians (24 out of 33 respondents).
- **Almost all respondents (97%) personally experienced at least one protection incident along their journey to Greece.** One in three women reported experiencing issues relating to trafficking or exploitation.
- **The majority considered Greece to be their final destination,** with their decision-making motivated strongly by factors relating to safety, among others.
- **Roughly half of respondents (52%) who reported Greece as their final destination, initially aimed at reaching another country,** most commonly another country in Europe.
- **For those who did not initially intend to stay in Greece, a key reason for remaining was the ability to obtain official permission to work and stay,** including access to refugee status and asylum procedures. Regularization through protection appears to be a considerable factor influencing decisions to settle in Greece rather than move to another EU destination.

- **Respondents who considered themselves still in transit reported being motivated by the hope of better income, livelihood opportunities and safety in destinations beyond Greece,** primarily in other countries in Europe.

Profiles of respondents

This snapshot is based on 256 interviews with migrants conducted between July and October 2024 in Thessaloniki (53%) and Athens (47%). All respondents were above the age of 18 and had arrived in Greece no less than 60 days and no more than 2 years prior to interview. Most respondents were Afghans (49%), followed by Syrians (18%), Egyptians (13%), Palestinians (11%) and Iraqis (9%), see Table 1. 77% of the sample were men, while 23% were women. Due to the nature of the sampling strategies (purposive, convenience and limited snowballing), which also relied on recruitment via service providers, findings are indicative of the sampled population, and cannot be generalized to larger groups.

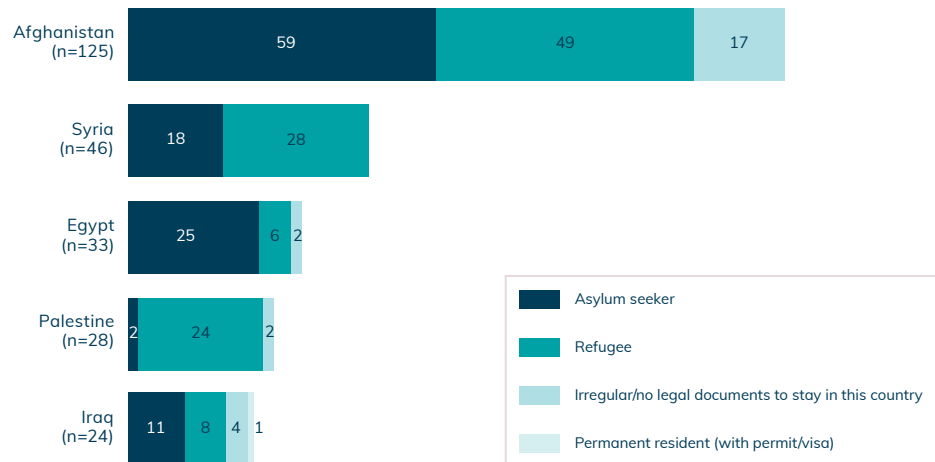
Table 1. Demographic profile of the sample (n=256)

| Country of nationality | Women | | Men | | Total | |
|------------------------|-----------|-------------|------------|-------------|------------|-------------|
| | n | % | n | % | n | % |
| Afghanistan | 31 | 52% | 94 | 48% | 125 | 49% |
| Egypt | 1 | 2% | 32 | 16% | 33 | 13% |
| Iraq | 10 | 17% | 14 | 7% | 24 | 9% |
| Palestine | 8 | 13% | 20 | 10% | 28 | 11% |
| Syria | 10 | 17% | 36 | 18% | 46 | 18% |
| Grand Total | 60 | 100% | 196 | 100% | 256 | 100% |

Most respondents were self-reported refugees (45%) or asylum seekers (45%), which is likely the result of interviews taking place in centres where refugees and asylum seekers access food, basic necessities and legal support, among other services see Figure 1.¹

Figure 1. What is your current legal status? (n=256)

Breakdown by nationality



Violence and lack of rights drive both primary and onward movement

Nearly three quarters of all respondents (74%) cited violence, insecurity and conflict as one of the primary reasons for their migration to Greece. It was identified as a primary driver across all nationality groups, and by almost all Syrians (44 out of 46), Palestinians (27 out of 28) and Iraqis (21 out of 24) (see Figure 2). Among the nearly three quarters who left due to violence, insecurity and conflict-related concerns (n=190), the majority reported issues relating to war and conflict (76%), closely followed by crime and general insecurity (65%).

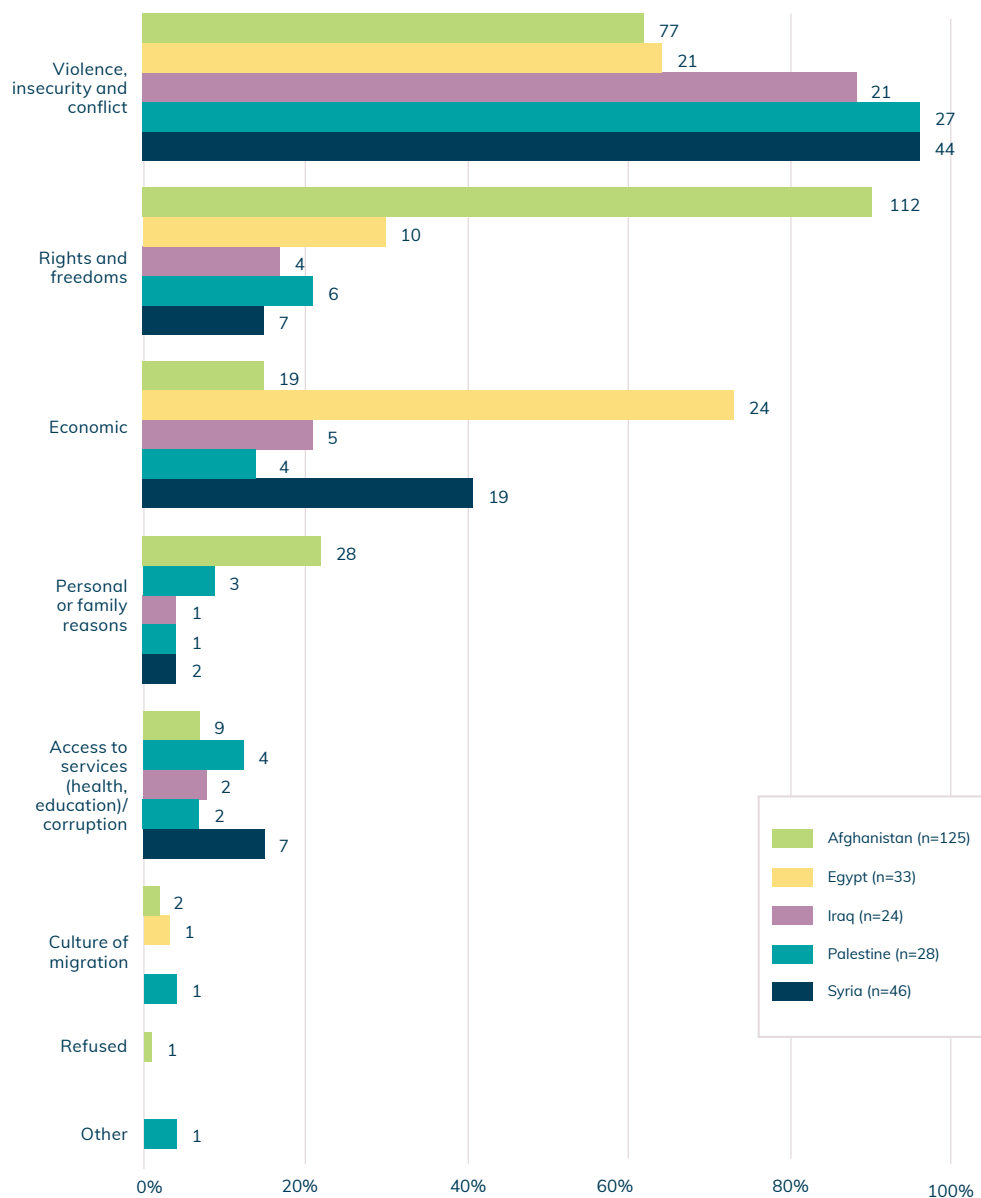
Rights and freedoms was the mostly commonly reported driver cited by 90% of Afghans. Economic reasons were also reported as a driver by respondents across all nationality groups, including among most Egyptian respondents (24 out of 33) and just under half (19 out of 46) of Syrian respondents.

A third of all respondents reported that they started their journey to Greece from a country other than their country of origin, indicating they were engaging in onward movement. This group was primarily composed of Afghans (62 out of 78) who mostly left for Greece from Iran (51 out of 78) and Türkiye (11 out of 78). Türkiye was also the start of the journey for 1 Egyptian, 1 Iraqi, 2 Palestinians and 7 Syrians. Finally, 3 Palestinians departed from Syria and 2 Egyptians departed from Libya. Among Afghan respondents who started their journey in Iran or Türkiye (n=62), almost all (56 respondents) identified a lack of freedoms, discrimination and repression experienced in their host countries as a key driver of departure to Greece.

¹ Respondents for this snapshots were interviewed within the framework of field activities provided by the Greek NGO Solidarity Now, and were selected among most common nationalities of migrants arrived in Greece between 2022 and 2023. See [Hellenic Republic - Ministry of Migration and Aylum Statistics](#).

Figure 2. Why did you leave your country? (n=256; multi-select)

Percentual values, data labels in absolute numbers



Nearly all experienced at least one protection incident during their journey

An astonishing 97% of respondents personally experienced at least one incident on their journey to Greece. Most common was physical violence (62%), followed by witnessing death (38%), injuries and ill health due to the harsh conditions (37%), and robbery (25%) (see Table 2). One in five interviewed (22%) reported experiencing trafficking and/or exploitation.

While limited differences were seen between genders with regards to most protection incidents, women more commonly reported experiencing trafficking and exploitation (as reported by one third of women, 20 out of 60), compared to men (reported by 19% of men). Across all respondents less than 3% reported sexual violence, which was cited by 3 women and 4 men. However due to sensitivities, reports of sexual violence were likely underreported by respondents.

Table 2. Have you personally experienced any of these types of protection incidents on your journey? (n=256, 3 non-responses, multi-select)

| Protection incidents | Afghanistan (n=125) | Egypt (n=33) | Iraq (n=24) | Palestine (n=28) | Syria (n=46) | Total (n=256) |
|---|---------------------|--------------|-------------|------------------|--------------|---------------|
| Experienced at least one violation | 120 | 31 | 23 | 28 | 46 | 248 |
| Physical violence | 90 | 16 | 12 | 19 | 21 | 158 |
| Detention | 60 | 21 | 9 | 16 | 18 | 124 |
| Witnessed death | 43 | 18 | 6 | 16 | 15 | 98 |
| Injury / ill-health from harsh conditions | 65 | 7 | 3 | 8 | 11 | 94 |
| Robbery | 41 | 9 | 6 | 3 | 6 | 65 |
| Trafficking and exploitation | 48 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 57 |
| Non-physical violence (e.g. harassment) | 31 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 38 |
| None | 6 | 3 | 6 | 5 | 14 | 34 |

| Protection incidents | Afghanistan (n=125) | Egypt (n=33) | Iraq (n=24) | Palestine (n=28) | Syria (n=46) | Total (n=256) |
|----------------------|---------------------|--------------|-------------|------------------|--------------|---------------|
| Kidnapping | 19 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 1 | 28 |
| Bribery/extortion | 11 | 4 | 1 | 1 | | 17 |
| Sexual violence | 4 | | | | 3 | 7 |

The majority reported that Greece is their final destination

The majority of respondents (65%) reported that Greece was the end of their journey, compared to 22% who were still unsure at the time of the interview. Only 13% intended to continue their journey onwards (see Figure 3).

The majority of all nationality groups reported that they had reached the end of their journey, including all Egyptians. Syrians had the highest proportion of respondents who intended to continue their journey onwards from Greece (12 out of 33).

Among the 35% who did not intend to stay in Greece (n=84), Germany was the most commonly reported preferred destination (reported by 28 respondents out of 84) (see Figure 4). 38 out of 84 respondents selected a diverse list of other destinations in Europe and North America, while the remaining 18 did not express a specific preference.

Figure 3. Have you reached the end of your journey? (n=256)

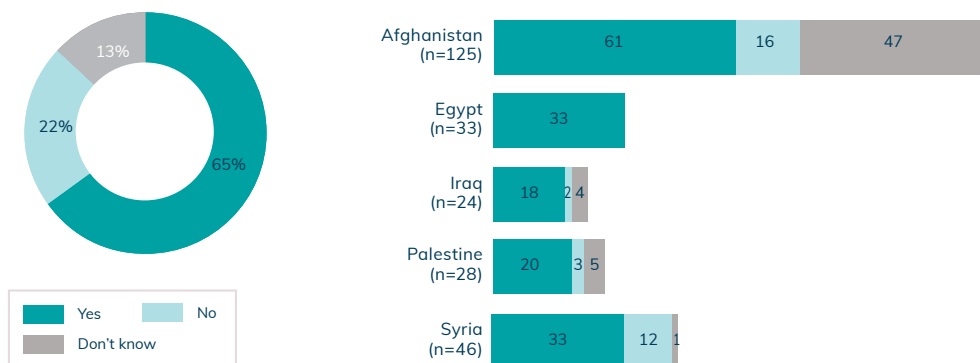
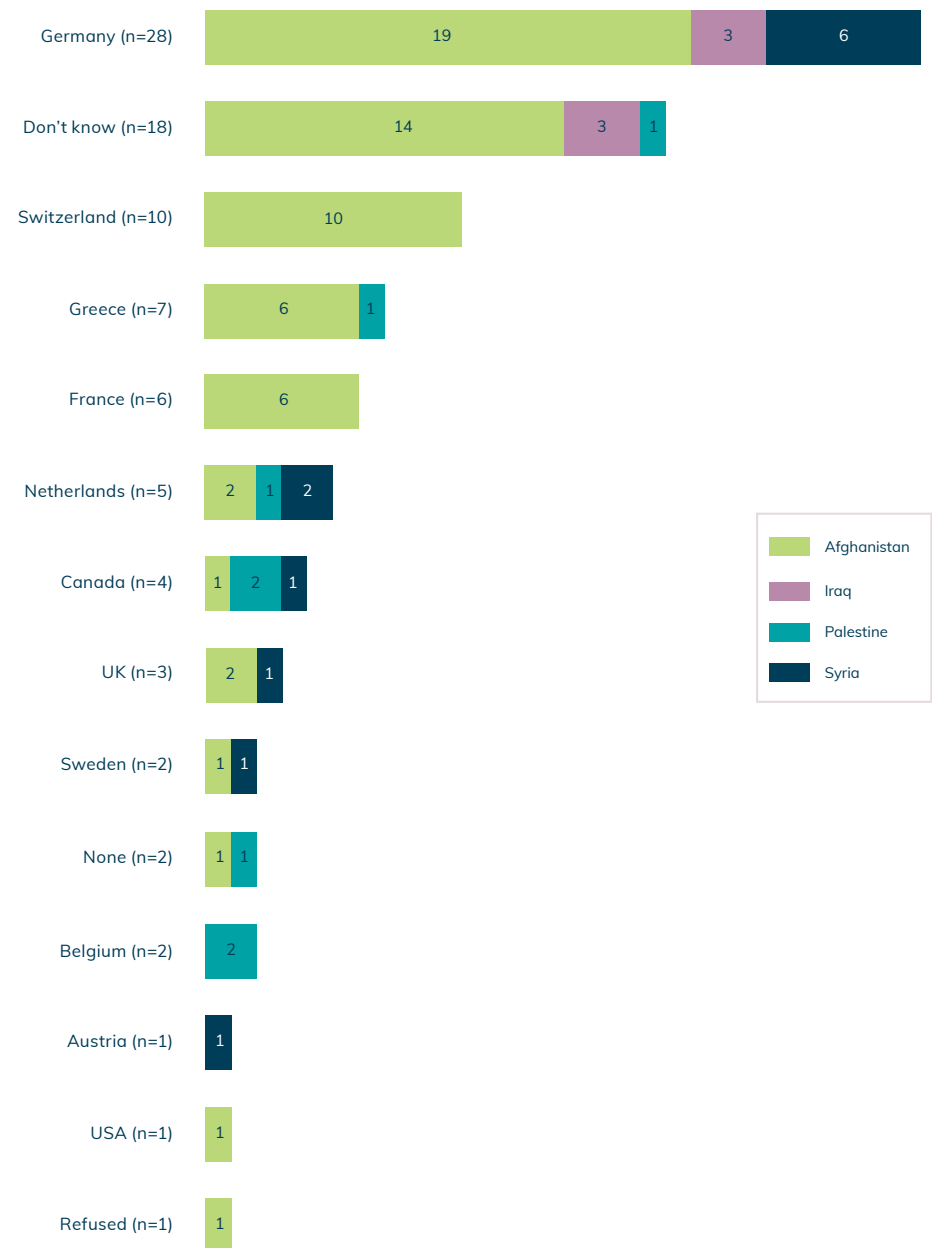


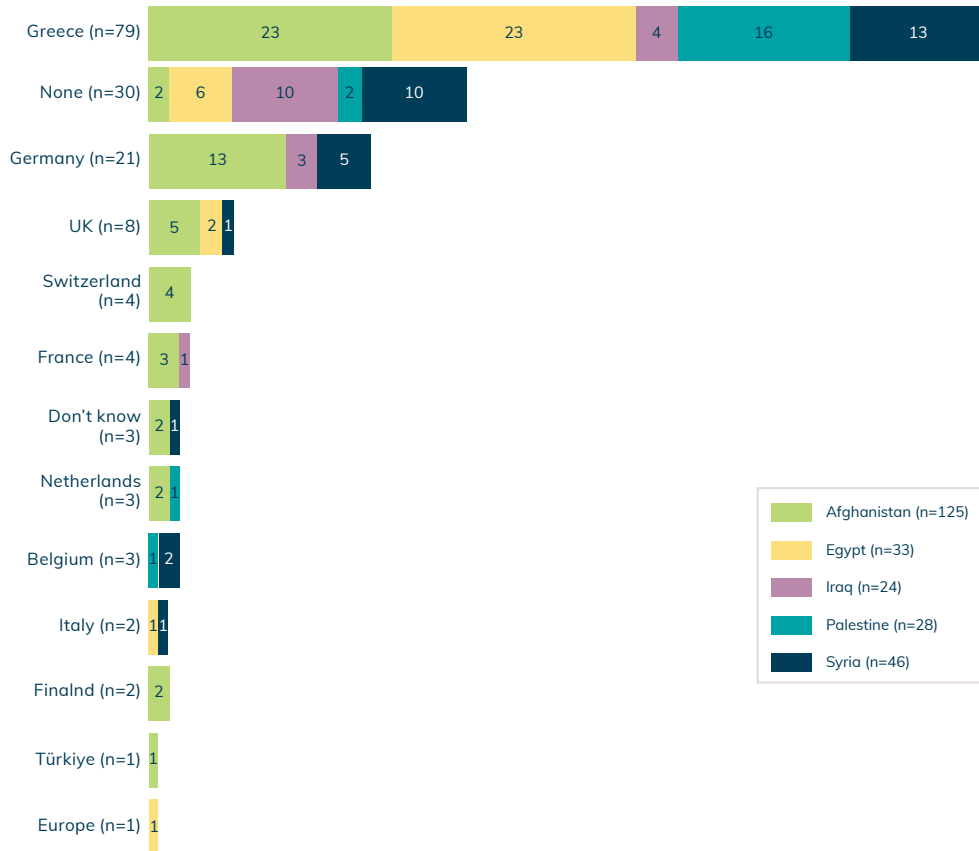
Figure 4. What country is your preferred destination? (Respondents who had not reached the end of their journey; n=83. 1 refused)



Half of those who reported Greece as their final destination originally intended to reach a different country

Among respondents who cited Greece as the end of their migration journey (n=165), 52% had originally intended to end their journey in another country. Around a quarter of these (21 out of 86) were initially intending to reach Germany, with over half (53 out of 86) initially intending to reach other countries within the EU, or the United Kingdom, see Figure 5. 38 out of the 86 did not originally have a specific destination in mind.² Only 1 respondent from Afghanistan had intended their final destination to be Türkiye.

Figure 5. What country was your preferred destination? (Respondents who had reached the end of their journey in Greece; n=164, 1 refused)

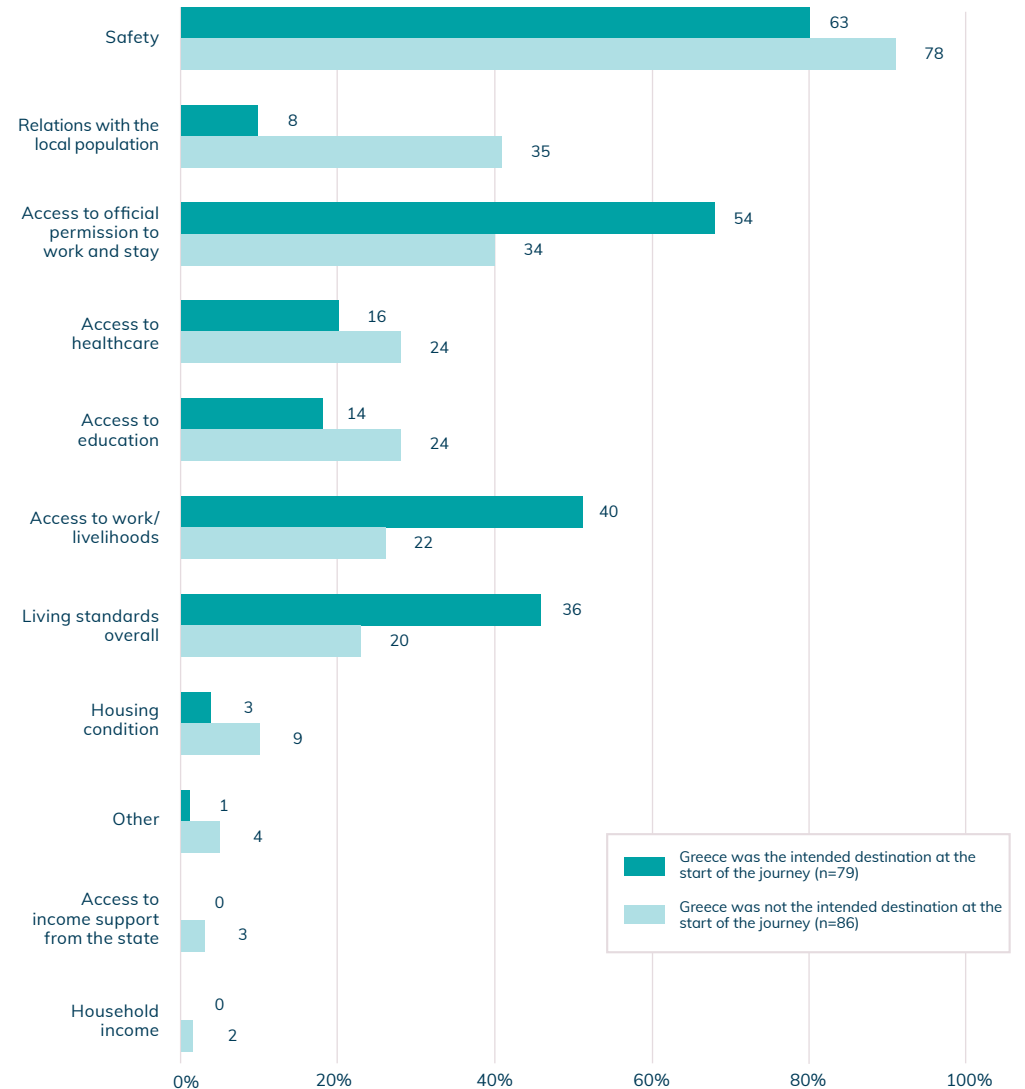


² This includes both respondents who said they did not know what their final destination was (3) and those who did not identify a particular country as a destination (answer option 'None'; (30).

Safety considerations are central in respondents' decision to stay in Greece

Figure 6. What is the most important reason that made you decide to stay here? (n=165; multi-select)

Percentual values, data labels in absolute numbers



Safety considerations were reported by respondents as a key factor in deciding to end their journey in Greece. The majority of those who always intended their final destination to be Greece reported safety as a primary factor in selecting their destination (63 out of 79 respondents). Safety was also a primary motivation among respondents who initially intended to reach another destination but subsequently chose to remain in Greece (reported by 78 out of 86 respondents), see Figure 6.

Access to official permission to work and stay, access to services and livelihoods, as well as relationships with locals inform the choice of Greece as destination

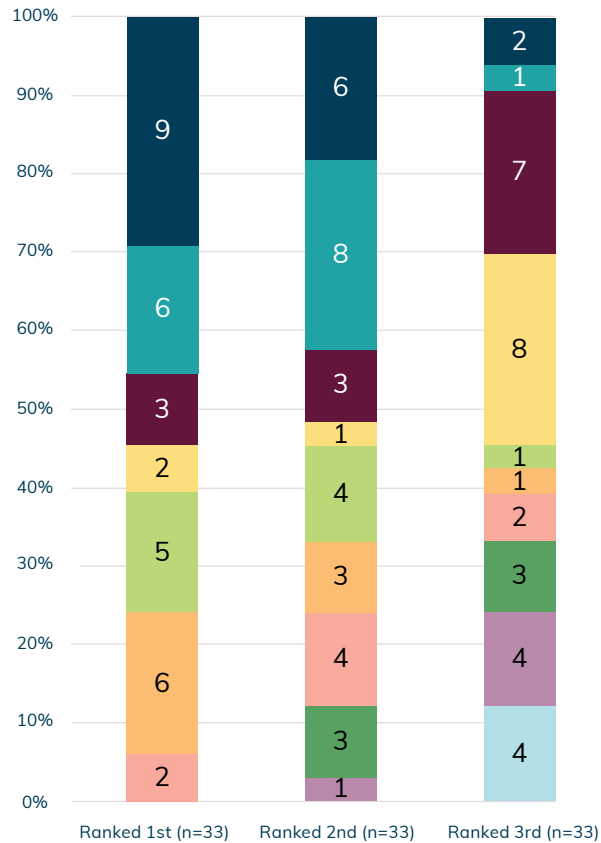
Beyond safety, access to official permission to work and stay (54 out of 79), access to work/livelihoods (40 out of 79) and overall living standards (40 out of 79) are the primary reasons to stay in Greece for those who always intended Greece to be their final destination, see Figure 6.

For **those who did not initially intend Greece to be their final destination, the key reasons for staying in Greece beyond safety were relations with the local population (35 out of 86) and access to official permission to work and stay.** Access to refugee status and an asylum procedure falls under this latter category and the sample primarily consisted of refugees and asylum seekers. **Access to protection and thereby regularizing their stay in Greece as such seems to be an important factor in making people change their course and decide to stay in Greece rather than to move on to other destinations in the EU.** Additionally, good relations with the local population seem to indicate people experience a more receptive environment than initially expected.

Those still in transit are motivated by perspectives of a better income and work opportunities

Those interviewed who decisively considered Greece as a transit location (n=36) were asked to rank the top three reasons that motivated them to reach their intended destination, see Figure 7. The most common reason for moving on, cited by 17 out of 33 respondents, was the belief that work, and livelihood opportunities would be better elsewhere than in Greece. Living standards and access to basic services (such as healthcare and housing) were also mentioned frequently but ranked lower in importance, with most respondents placing them second or third in importance. Income support from the state and access to legal permission to live and work were less important factors. Although the sample is small, these findings challenge some widespread “magnet” or “pull factor” assumptions, which suggest that ‘generous’ welfare systems or residency benefits drive higher immigration.

Figure 7. First, second and third most important factor³, in the decision to continue the journey onward (n=33)



³ First, respondents were asked to pick 3 most important factors to them, among a list of 11 options. Following that, they were asked to rank the three factors they selected, from the most to the least important.



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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 migration 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 East 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