

MIGRANT SMUGGLING IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

Special Points of Interest on Migrant Smuggling in Southeast Asia

UNODC Observatory on Smuggling of Migrants First Edition | March 2024



This document sets out the special points of interest of research by the UNODC Observatory on Smuggling of Migrants in Southeast Asia. The full research study, including interactive and static maps and graphs, infographics, case studies and research methodology, can be accessed at: www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/som-observatory.html. The Observatory is UNODC's principal knowledge source to develop the evidence base on smuggling of migrants, as a service to Member States to inform their counter-smuggling responses to combat the crime of smuggling of migrants and to protect the rights of smuggled migrants.



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UNODC Observatory on Smuggling of Migrants

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1. **Tens of thousands of people** from Myanmar, from other parts of Southeast Asia and from outside the region are smuggled to, through and from Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand every year.
2. Of 4,785 migrants and refugees surveyed in Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand for this research, **83% said they were smuggled.**
3. **Demand for migrant smuggling** among refugees and migrants is driven by a perception of lack of opportunities for regular migration in contexts of:
 - conflict, violence and persecution;
 - statelessness and lack of travel and identity documents;
 - limited access to regular migration channels to apply for international protection and for labour migration; and
 - corruption.
4. People also reported that they approached smugglers because they think **smuggling will be easier than regular migration or independent irregular migration.**
5. Among smuggled people surveyed, **almost half (48%) stated that they would have taken the journey anyway, knowing what they did now about the conditions**, 40% said that they would not have and 12% were undecided.
6. **Corruption is a major enabler of migrant smuggling.** One in four smuggled people surveyed had to give officials a gift, money or a favour in exchange for a service. Corruption in this context mainly consists of:
 - a. collusion between smugglers and corrupt officials; and
 - b. payments of bribes to corrupt officials by smugglers or smuggled people.
7. **Corruption is also a driver of demand for smuggling**, as smuggled people perceive – whether accurately or not – that they need smugglers and brokers to deal with state authorities, because of corruption. Twenty-eight percent of smuggled people surveyed for this research reported that **smugglers assisted them in dealing with authorities.**
8. **Climate-related issues influenced the decision to migrate** for one in four smuggled people surveyed and are particularly relevant for smuggled Bangladeshis.
9. Smuggled people surveyed generally interacted with smugglers they perceived as **individual actors (65%) or loosely structured groups (13%).** The research also found **indications of higher levels of smuggler organization** (perceived by 8% of smuggled people surveyed), particularly among smugglers operating from Myanmar and Bangladesh to Malaysia and Indonesia.

10. In most cases, **the person to be smuggled or their family and friends initiate contact with smugglers (69%)**. Smugglers actively approached people intending to migrate in less than one-third of cases (31%).
11. **Three percent of smuggled people surveyed said they felt pressured by smugglers** to use their services.
12. **Social media is rarely the first point of contact with smugglers**. Eighty-seven per cent of people seeking smuggling services contacted the smuggler by phone or in person, and only 13% *via* social media.
13. Rohingya people who are already displaced in Bangladesh are **smuggled by sea directly to Malaysia or are first smuggled by sea back to Myanmar, for onward smuggling by sea or land to Malaysia**. Bangladeshis are sometimes smuggled to Malaysia along the **same routes as Rohingya people**.
14. Migrant smuggling **from outside Southeast Asia (Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Somalia) usually begins by air on commercial carriers and generally involves forged or fraudulent travel and/or identity documents**. Almost one third of smuggled people surveyed were provided with forged or fraudulent travel or identity documents by smugglers.
15. Though a wide range of fees was cited (from US\$19 to \$6,650), smuggled people surveyed paid **an average of the equivalent of \$2,380 in smuggling fees**, in cash, by bank transfer and, in the case of some Afghans, partly through *hawala*.
16. Smuggled migrants and refugees surveyed perceive **military and police, smugglers, and to a lesser extent border guards and criminal gangs, as likely to perpetrate abuses** during the journey. These include: physical violence; asking for bribes; extortion; unlawful killing; and sexual violence. Three out of four smuggled people surveyed experienced some form of abuse during their journeys. This is particularly prevalent among Somalis, Cambodians and people from Myanmar.
17. People smuggled to, within, and from Southeast Asia are subjected to **forced labour and trafficking for forced labour, perpetrated by smugglers and by employers with or without connections to the smugglers**. When smuggling is linked to the brokering of jobs, as is often the case for Rohingya and Chin people from Myanmar, as well as for Indonesians, Cambodians and Laotians, risks of debt bondage and trafficking are high.