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Information consumption and decision making of irregular migrants in Indonesia

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<http://www.border.gov.au/about/reports-publications/research-statistics/research/live-in-australia/irregular-migration-research>

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The opinions, comments and analyses expressed in this document are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the views of the Department.

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Executive Summary

1. Indonesia is the key site from which irregular maritime arrivals attempt to make onward journeys to Australia. This research aims to provide a deeper and more detailed understanding of the motivations of irregular migrants in Indonesia in order to contribute to the evidence base that can help inform policy and operational deliberations.
2. The research had two key aims: first, to analyse the **patterns of information consumption** of Iranian and Afghan irregular migrants in five sites in Indonesia, which inform their decisions about onward journeys; and second, to map **common stories or 'narratives of mobility'** that recur and are told in the multiple movements that irregular migrants undertake in order to reach a final destination.
3. Fieldwork was conducted in two phases: July-August 2014 (Pilot Phase) and November-December 2014 (Phase Two). It should be noted that by the time the fieldwork was undertaken, the Australian policy settings had changed, effectively closing off any opportunities for boat departures from Indonesia. The fieldwork involved a mixed-method approach. One hundred and forty semi-structured oral history interviews were conducted with Iranian (n58) and Afghan (n81) irregular migrants¹ in transit in Indonesia (including 30 per cent female respondents) across five key sites including Jakarta (Kalideres and Serpong), Pekanbaru (Sumatra), Denpasar (Bali), Cisarua (Java), and Kupang (East Nusa Tenggara). Following the semi-structured interviews, the 140 interviewees completed a survey questionnaire to provide demographic and supplementary information.

Map of five key sites for fieldwork interviews and surveys, Indonesia.

1. Kalideres
2. Cisarua
3. Pekanbaru
4. Kupang
5. Denpasar, Bali



¹ The 140 interviewees included one respondent who chose to identify as neither Afghan or Iranian

4. Almost 60 per cent (n 71) of respondents nominated Australia as their final destination, two respondents nominated Indonesia and 54 nominated 'Other'. Of those who nominated Australia, they included 63 per cent of the Afghan respondents surveyed and, 47 per cent of the Iranian respondents surveyed. It is significant to note that 51 per cent of female respondents (40 per cent of Iranian women, 75 per cent of Afghan women) nominated Australia as an intended final destination. However, Australia was not always a clear choice of destination prior to the commencement of the migration journey. Most migrants interviewed had no firm plan at the commencement of their migration journey. The primary motivation was to flee to a place of safety.
5. A number of the migrants² interviewed spoke of hearing stories that Australia was a safe and welcoming destination and would provide them with opportunities for a better life – professional, educational and livelihood related – if they could resettle there. This influenced their decision in choosing Australia as their intended final destination. A small number of independent women migrants spoke of wanting to travel to Australia in pursuit of a better life and better education. Mothers spoke of wanting to travel to a place where their children could get a good education.
6. Conversely, a smaller number of migrants interviewed did not want to go to Australia. From the interviews, some commented that they did not like Australia and/or they had heard Australia was not welcoming to refugees. A few interviewees specifically spoke of Australia's border control policies making entry difficult. A small number had heard about boat arrivals being sent to Papua New Guinea (Manus Island) and Nauru, which then acted as a deterrent to them wanting to travel to Australia by boat as they did not want to be transferred to a Regional Processing Centre.
7. For those who decided on Australia as an intended final destination during their migration journey, this decision sometimes changed once information was gathered about the route to Australia (by boat) being 'closed', the risks associated with the boat journey and learning of tow-backs and legal channels for onward migration through UNHCR. All of these factors had an influence on the migrants' decisions for onward travel to Australia, often causing them to reconsider Australia as a final destination or their travel mode to Australia.
8. For a large number of interviewees, learning of the detail of Australian Government policy – including the sea route migration pathway being 'closed', the arrangements to transfer boat arrivals to Regional Processing Centres, and immigration detention on Nauru and Manus Island – acted as deterrents for onward travel to Australia. This caused a number of migrants to change their plans to travel by boat to Australia from Indonesia. Many instead registered with UNHCR leaving their onward journey to be decided by the outcome of the UNHCR assessing their refugee status and referring them to another country for resettlement. However, most of those interviewed who were waiting for the UNHCR assessment processes did assume they would eventually be resettled in Australia. Some respondents indicated they were waiting for the boat route to 'open' again.
9. UNHCR's presence in Indonesia was influential for a number of migrants who were interviewed as well as their smugglers. They chose to travel to Indonesia in order to register with UNHCR for resettlement. Some had heard that the UNHCR process in Indonesia was quicker than UNHCR processing in European countries closer to Afghanistan or Iran, which was another factor encouraging travel to Indonesia.

² We use the term 'migrant' in this paper as a general and neutral descriptor of mobile populations as well as the term irregular migrant.

10. From those who were interviewed, where Australia was the intended final destination the most trusted source of information for a significant majority of migrants was family and friends in home countries, or those family and friends who had already undertaken a migration journey themselves. It seems that the stories heard by migrants, particularly those stories that they had heard from family and/or friends and/or co-nationals, were trusted and not questioned. This was often because the migrants were fleeing situations of danger at home and felt they had no choice but to trust the information and stories they heard.
11. Reasons for reluctance to settle in Indonesia were primarily due to the migrants' irregular status there and limitations on the opportunities they had to achieve the sort of life they desired. Impediments included not being permitted to work and thereby generate an income, not being able to obtain permanent accommodation, not being able to provide children with an education, and not being able to become an Indonesian resident.
12. Return was not a feature of the migrant stories. None of the interviewees expressed a desire to return home. Whilst some missed their home, their family and their life before it was threatened, not one interviewee wished to return home.
13. The main reason the interviewed Iranians gave for leaving their homes were associated with threats to life against the individual for various reasons whilst, in Afghanistan, societal conflict was an additional driving force aside from individual experiences of persecution and threats to life.

1. Introduction and Background

This research project involved a team of researchers from Monash University (Monash), the University of New South Wales (UNSW), Deakin University (Deakin) and Universitas Padjadjaran (Unpad) (Indonesia) under the leadership of Professor Sharon Pickering (Monash). It was concerned with generating a deeper understanding of the multiple influences on the decision making processes of irregular migrants and the triggers for onward movement.

Migration researchers are increasingly open to interdisciplinary approaches in recognition of the complexity of migration decisions and also of the importance of understanding specific and changing contexts (Castles, 2010). Additionally, the absence of durable solutions leads many refugees and potential refugees to seek their own solutions to safety (Long, 2013).

Indonesia is the key location from which onward journeys of irregular maritime arrivals to Australia are undertaken. Given this reality, a deeper and more detailed understanding of the motivations of irregular migrants in Indonesia can help inform policy and operational deliberations for stakeholders such as the Indonesian and Australian Governments and relevant international organisations including the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). This research identifies where there are key shifts or breaks in patterns of information consumption and migration decisions. Understanding these shifts can inform the efficacy of information from governments to migrants (Castles 2010, 2004, Koser & McAuliffe 2013).

The first aim of the research was to analyse the **patterns of information consumption** that a particular group of irregular migrants (Iranian and Afghan) in a particular location (five key sites in Indonesia) engage in when informing their decisions about onward journeys. Governments and inter-governmental organisations seek to provide migrants and those involved in facilitating onward travel with up-to-date information to guide migration decision making, including dissuasion from making hazardous boat journeys.

A significant number of migrants interviewed stated that they had received information about travel to Indonesia, and onward from Indonesia, from personal information networks including family members, friends and co-nationals met during the migration journey and from those who facilitated their journeys (smugglers). Social trust is a key determinant of decisions around reliability of information that can be based on past experience of others, and cultural or ethnic affinity (Misztal 2005, Tazreiter, 2012). However, the informal information networks migrants draw on, and how they interact with official sources of information, are not well understood. This research shows a clear interaction between informal and formal information sources and provides insights into the degree to which these different sources have influenced decision making surrounding onwards journeys from Indonesia as a transit country for irregular migrants.

Strong evidence has emerged from this project that points to the variable of social trust as an important factor in informal and formal decisions and strategies in relation to decision making and information gathering about onward migration. Trust is a key concept to consider in evaluating decision making and information consumption based on rational as well as emotional triggers and justifications. Sociological analysis of human action indicates that individual, group or organisational behaviour and action has both emotional, as well as rational, motivations. The boundaries between emotional and rational decision making are rarely clear cut, requiring attention to context (Ahmed 2004, Barbalet 2002). In the context of irregular migration, trust is a heightened and often elusive concept. Irregular migrants experience mistrust and are themselves often mistrusted by authorities as having unworthy motives (Collyer et. al. 2012, Barsky 2000, Daniel & Knudsen 1995).

The project's second aim was to identify and map **common stories or 'narratives of mobility'** that recur and are told and retold in the processes of multiple journeys that irregular migrants undertake in order to reach a final destination. These narrative patterns include:

- patterns of encouragement through positive stories of reaching a desired endpoint or outcome;
- patterns of dissuasion through stories of risk and the loss of life;
- patterns of 'return home' in stories of failure that develop in relation to unsuccessful attempts at irregular migration; and
- patterns of information consumption across country of origin, gender, age, period of transit, travel configuration.

From the 140 semi-structured interviews conducted with Iranian (n=58) and Afghan (n=81) (1 respondent identified as neither Afghan or Iranian) migrants in transit in Indonesia, we were able to record these narratives of mobility, identifying patterns of encouragement, dissuasion, 'return home' and information consumption.

Importantly, this research was conducted in Indonesia, which enabled the research team to analyse information consumption and migration decisions *in situ*. The limited research conducted on information consumption has relied on irregular migrants recounting their consumption of information and decision making after arrival in Australia. Researching post-arrival migrants can be problematic as a period of time has lapsed between the actual experience of life in transit and arrival. Recollections of migration journeys may be prejudiced by more recent events such as time spent in detention or initial experiences of life in Australia. This research has identified and analysed patterns of information consumption without the experience of the onward journey distorting the migrants' accounts. It therefore offers a detailed and accurate account from the methodology employed (see Section 2 below) because of the temporal and geographical proximity to the actual information consumption and decision making pattern. In other words, migrants are not relying on memories of decision making processes they experienced months or years in the past, but rather, discussing circumstances occurring in the present and decision making processes regarding planned onward migration in the near future.

The fieldwork component of this research was conducted in two phases: July-August 2014 (Pilot Phase) and November-December 2014 (Phase Two) by the project's Indonesian research team³ from Universitas Padjadjaran, Bandung under the supervision of Professor Deddy Mulyana. It involved a mixed-method approach in which 140 semi-structured oral history interviews were conducted with both Iranian and Afghan irregular migrants in transit in Indonesia, of which 25 per cent were female. The interviews were conducted across five key sites including Jakarta (Kalideres and Serpong), Pekanbaru (Sumatra), Denpasar (Bali), Cisarua (Java), and Kupang (East Nusa Tenggara). Following the semi-structured interviews, the 140 interviewees completed a survey questionnaire, administered electronically at the end of the interview, to provide demographic and other personal information that supplemented the information collected in the semi-structured interviews.

³ The Indonesian research team: Mr Aang Koswara, Mr Atwar Bajari, Ms Susanne Dida, Ms Benazir B. Pratamawaty from Universitas Padjadjaran with independent consultant Mr Taufiq Effendi.

2. Methodology

In order to test the two identified project aims, the researchers collected original, qualitative and quantitative data across the five key sites in Indonesia. These five sites represent major points at which irregular migrants either arrive to transit through Indonesia and/or from where they depart on boats. Some are also known sites of immigration detention.⁴

Interviews with the migrants were conducted in two distinct environments by the Universitas Padjadjaran researchers: in the irregular migrant community in Cisarua (n=68) and in immigration detention centres or community houses (n=72) in Kalideres, Serpong, Pekanbaru, Bali and Kupang. Unfortunately, the Australia-based research team (Monash, UNSW and Deakin) had their applications for research permits in Indonesia refused on the grounds that "...the issue of human migration is currently stopped in the bilateral cooperation between Indonesia-Australia".⁵ This meant that the Australian researchers could not conduct the fieldwork component of this research project and instead engaged and provided guidance to their Indonesian research partners at Universitas Padjadjaran to complete the fieldwork.

Demographics of respondents

Sex

Females: 25.0 per cent n=35

Males: 75.0 per cent n=105

Afghan Females: 12.9 per cent n=18

Afghan Males: 45.0 per cent n=63

Iranian Females: 12.1 per cent n=17

Iranian Males: 29.3 per cent n=41

Age

18-24 yrs: 18.6 per cent n=26

25-34 yrs: 49.3 per cent n=69

35-44yrs: 25.0 per cent n=35

45+ yrs: 7.1 per cent n=10

Citizenship

Afghan: 57.8 per cent n=81

Iranian: 41.4 per cent n=58

The Universitas Padjadjaran researchers gathered data during the site visits, specifically through semistructured interviews (see **Appendix A** for semi-structured interview questions) with irregular Iranian and Afghan migrants and conducting an online survey questionnaire upon completion of the semi-structured interview (see **Appendix B** for survey questionnaire). Respondents were irregular migrants transiting through Indonesia for varying periods of time. Maximum variation sampling was used to ensure diversity of gender, age and travel configuration. Recruitment of respondents was conducted using typical methods for difficult-to-reach and vulnerable groups including snowballing and by referral from other

⁴ The research partner, Universitas Padjadjaran, received all required permissions for conducting the interviews in Indonesia in line with their own university ethics procedures and requirements.

⁵ Excerpt from formal disapproval of research permit letter issued by RISTEK, dated March 18, 2014.

interviewees and stakeholders. The project has a focus on Iranian and Afghan irregular migrants because of their high incidence as irregular migration arrivals to Australia as well as the expertise and experience of the research team.

The project involved a sample of 140 semi-structured interviews in which interviewees were encouraged to share their migration story, including reasons for leaving their home country, how they arrived in Indonesia and their plans for onward migration. The data, while specifically concerned with the research aims, was collected in a narrative format so that rich contextual material could be extracted and analysis of the key factors involved in 'narratives of mobility' (identified above) could be understood against macro and micro conditions of life experience. This process enabled a thorough exploration of decisions about irregular migration and risk taking. The interview schedule (See **Appendix A**) was built around key themes which drew on key policy concerns regarding decision making and irregular maritime arrivals. These themes include, 'Migration to Indonesia'; 'Life in transit'; 'Onward travel'; and 'Alternative journeys'. The average length of the interviews ranged from 30 minutes to 80 minutes. Respondents were given a small token of thanks (perishables) for their participation.

Interviews were translated and transcribed into English. Data was then managed and analysed using NVivo to identify themes and key lines of analysis across the five sites and within particular irregular migrant groups (e.g. gender: the migration experiences, including information consumption and decision making of men as opposed to women; and nationality: the migration experiences including information consumption and decision making of Iranians as opposed to Afghans).

The survey was completed by all of the 140 respondents including 105 males and 35 females following their semi-structured interview. Not all respondents chose to answer all questions. The survey was administered using an iPad in either English or Persian (dependent on the respondent's language of choice) so that the respondents could enter answers independently and confidentially. A translator was also on hand to answer any of the respondent's queries. Those survey questionnaires completed in Persian were later translated by Dr James Barry and recorded in the English survey version.

The survey questionnaire consisted of 62 questions designed to capture demographic data and supplementary information on key themes – 'Migration to Indonesia'; 'Life in transit'; 'Onward travel'; and 'Alternative journeys' – to support that gleaned from the semi-structured interviews. A large focus in the survey questionnaire was on how and from where information related to the migration journey was consumed and the impact this information had on migration decisions. See **Appendix B** for the full survey questionnaire.

3. Hypotheses and Findings

Four hypotheses were tested:

1. That Australia is a clear choice of destination prior to the commencement of a journey and that it continues to be the intended destination irrespective of experiences in transit.
2. That storytelling practices are a primary information source and have precedence over official information campaigns.
3. That transit conditions are unanticipated drivers of ongoing irregular migration, with greater relevance for some groups than information consumed regarding perils of travel, interception or likely outcomes following arrival.
4. That, as new stories circulate of harsher conditions in asylum destinations, migrants are likely to search for new sources of information to corroborate the stories circulating.

Using the above hypotheses as a foundation for analysis, the research findings from interviews and survey questionnaires conducted with Afghan and Iranian irregular migrants in transit in Indonesia are presented in detail below.

3.1 Australia is a clear choice of destination prior to the commencement of a journey and that it continues to be the intended destination irrespective of experiences in transit

Australia was not always a clear choice of destination prior to the commencement of the migration journey for the sample group.

While the survey inquired as to intended final destination, the interviews revealed that most migrants had no firm plan at the commencement of their journey. Many gathered information quickly once their life was in danger in their home country. Journeys were not planned elaborately and time did not allow for a great deal of advanced planning. Information about the journey often came from friends and family in home countries, in transit in Indonesia and, at times, from friends and family already in Australia, and also from the smugglers whom they approached to facilitate their travel. Plans were made quickly to travel to Indonesia as a transit point for onward travel to Australia. Australia was often identified as a place of safety where the primary motivation was to flee to a place of safety. Most migrants only learnt of Australia as a safe destination once they had decided to leave their home country. Travel to Australia as a place of safety via Indonesia was known to be a quick route out of Afghanistan or Iran.

Australia was a nominated intended destination at the time of leaving the country of origin for some whereas for others, the interviews revealed that it was decided *en route* after meeting others who had information about travelling there. The interviews also revealed that some made plans to travel to Australia only after they had arrived in Indonesia.

“I didn’t plan to come to Indonesia but when I was in Indonesia for one week and I heard people talk there from Indonesia you could go to Australia and they said you just have to find someone to do all these things all the nice things for you to arrange and I found the smugglers...” [Pekanbaru_Iranian_Female_74_BB]

A small number of interviewees had planned their travel in advance and did have Australia in mind as the intended and final destination.

“I planned beforehand to come to Indonesia, and stay here until I get the chance to board the boat and sail to Australia.” [Kupang_Iranian_Female_22_DM]

“I had planned to come to Indonesia and, via Indonesia, go to Australia.”
[Kupang_Iranian_Male_30_AK]

For those who decided on Australia as a final destination during their migration journey, this decision sometimes changed once information was gathered about the route to Australia (by boat) being ‘closed’, the risks associated with the boat journey and learning of tow-backs and legal channels for onward migration through UNHCR. All of these factors had an influence on the migrants’ decisions for onward travel to Australia, often causing them to reconsider Australia as an intended final destination or their mode of travel to Australia. At the point of arrival in Indonesia, and on learning that boat travel to Australia was ‘closed’, not legal, and risky and dangerous, most of the migrants interviewed just wanted to be safe and reach a place of safety, and to do this legally through registering with UNHCR in an endeavour to be referred for resettlement.

A smaller number of migrants interviewed did not want to go to Australia. From the interviews, some commented that they didn’t like Australia and/or they had heard Australia was not welcoming to refugees. A few interviewees specifically spoke of Australia’s border control policies making entry difficult. A small number (n=3) had recently heard about boat arrivals being sent to Papua New Guinea and Nauru under Australia’s tougher border control policies which then acted as a deterrent to them wanting to travel to Australia by boat. A small number of migrants mentioned other destinations including New Zealand (n=6), because they heard it was ‘nice’ there. Canada (n=11) and the US (n=5) were also mentioned by some of the migrants as preferred destinations during the interviews, mostly because these migrants had family already residing in these countries.

Many of those migrants who originally planned on travelling to Australia, but felt that they could not do so by boat given that the migration pathway is ‘closed’, subsequently decided to leave their onward journey to be decided by the outcome of the UNHCR assessment and resettlement process. Traveling to Australia via Indonesia was perceived to be a fast route to safety. Some interviewees believed that they would have more success registering with UNHCR in Indonesia than in other countries, and hence a greater likelihood of being referred to Australia, Canada or the US for resettlement. It should be noted that, in November 2014, the Australian Government took the decision not to accept applications for resettlement from refugees who registered with UNHCR in Indonesia after 1 July 2014.

“UN gives us five country to choose from: America, Sweden, New Zealand, Australia and Canada. For me it doesn’t matter which country. But from what I heard, Iranian only sent to Australia. It’s kind of hard to be sent somewhere else.” [Kalideres_Iranian_Female_01_SD]

“I will never take a boat journey because there’s regulation, and also there is a clear threat of the danger of making the boat journey. And I hope that I can go to Australia with the help of UNHCR by aeroplane.” [Cisarua_Afghan_M&F_145&146_TE]

“We never thought of going to Australia by a boat. We know all the risks, and all the dangers and we don’t want to go to Australia illegally. We only wanted to go there legally through the help of UNHCR.” [Cisarua_Iranian_M&F_124&125_TE]

Others did not mind where they were resettled, as long as it was a place of safety. A handful of interviewees expressed that they were happy to stay in Indonesia as they felt safe there, had a connection with the Indonesian people and Muslim religion, and that it was better to live there than in their home country where their life was threatened (see Section 3.3 for more detail).

Of the survey sample, Australia was given as the intended final destination for respondents as follows:

- 55.9 per cent (n=71) of all respondents
- 62.5 per cent (n=45) of Afghans
- 47.3 per cent (n=26) of Iranians

- 55.7 per cent (n=54) of all males
- 58.1 per cent (n=18) of all females
- 40.0 per cent (n=6) of Iranian women
- 75.0 per cent (n=12) of Afghan women.

Two respondents nominated Indonesia and 42.5 per cent (n=54) nominated 'Other' as their final destination. For the 'Other' category, responses included 'a safe country', 'it makes no difference which country as long as it is safe', 'any country', 'no particular country' and 'it is up to the UN to decide which country'.

Table 1

What is your intended final destination?				
Answer Options	Afghan	Iranian	Response %	Response Count
Australia	45	26	55.9%	71
Indonesia	1	1	1.6%	2
Other (please specify)	26	28	42.5%	54
<i>answered question</i>				127
<i>skipped question</i>				12

For those respondents who nominated Japan, Germany and Canada as destination countries within their survey response, all were Iranian and none had contacts (friends or family) in Australia.

In relation to the respondent who nominated Japan specifically, analysis of the semi-structured interviews shows that this respondent (Kalideres_Iranian_F_02_AB) was able to speak Japanese and not English, which is likely to have influenced the decision to nominate Japan as the intended destination country. The choice to travel to Indonesia as a transit point from which to travel onwards by boat to Australia was prompted by advice from Iranian friends who had already made the journey to Indonesia, as well as from their smuggler who suggested travelling to Indonesia as a point of transit for onward boat travel to Australia as the fastest way to get to a safe country (Australia) from Iran.

The respondent who nominated Germany as the final destination (Pekanbaru_Iranian_M_17_AK) did not provide explicit information within the interview on why Germany was selected in the survey answer to 'What is your intended final destination' (Question 19). However, the respondent stated that although there was another plan in mind when leaving Iran, on gathering information from Iran in regards to the migration journey, decided that travel to Australia via Indonesia looked to be a better option because of access to the UNHCR registration process in Indonesia as a means to reach Australia. Information on travel to Australia via Indonesia was gathered by the respondent from Iranian friends already settled in Australia using social media networks on the Internet and also on advice from the smuggler. The respondent knew of other Iranian friends who had successfully settled in Australia through this process and spoke of relying on UNHCR registration for onward travel to Australia.

The one respondent who specifically nominated Canada as the final destination (Kalideres_Iranian_M_25_DM) (the other 10 who discussed Canada as an intended destination during their interview did so by grouping it as a safe country option along with countries such as the US, and regions including Europe and Scandinavia for example) revealed in the interview that they had family in Canada with whom they wanted to reunite. However, given the urgency in which the respondent needed to leave Iran, they said that there was no time to plan a journey to Canada and that, on the advice of friends and father in Iran, they chose to travel to Indonesia as a transit point for a quick onward journey by boat to Australia. The respondent identified Australia as the second destination choice after Canada and

nominated both countries as being places of safety. The interviewee had been a sailor in professional life in Iran, so felt the boat journey to Australia would be easy and quick.

The interviews revealed that the migrants relied on smugglers they engaged along the way for information about Australia as a possible destination (See Section 3.2). The survey responses also show that just under a fifth of all respondents relied on information provided by their smugglers when making their migration decisions:

- 18.8 per cent (n=25) of all respondents
- 15.6 per cent (n=12) of Afghans
- 23.6 per cent (n=13) of Iranians 19.8 per cent (n=20) of all males

15.6% (n=5) of females Table 2

Do you rely on persons who will help you travel to Australia for information about Australia when making the decision that Australia will be your final destination?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	18.8%	25
No	39.1%	52
Not sure	16.5%	22
I do not know people who will help me to travel to Australia	25.6%	34
<i>answered question</i>		133
<i>skipped question</i>		7

	Yes	No	Not sure	I do not know people who will help me to travel to Australia	Total
Afghan	15.58% (n=12)	37.66% (n=29)	9.09% n7	37.66% (n=29)	58.33% 77
Iranian	23.64% (n=13)	40.00% (n=22)	27.27% (n=15)	9.09% (n=5)	41.67% 55
Total Respondents	25	51	22	34	132
	Yes	No	Not sure	I do not know people who will help me to travel to Australia	Total
Male	19.80% (n=20)	36.63% (n=37)	14.85% (n=15)	28.71% (n=29)	75.94% 101
Female	15.63% (n=5)	46.88% (n=15)	21.88% (n=7)	15.63% (n=5)	24.06% 32
Total Respondents	25	52	22	34	133

Other survey respondents nominated their family and friends from home, made in transit or those residing in Australia as being a reliable source of information about Australia that influenced their migration-related decision making.

In responding to a question (36) about which was the most trustworthy source of information for their journey:

- 33.1 per cent (n=43) nominated 'friends and family' as their most trustworthy information source (See Chart 1 below).

- 19.1 per cent (n=25) of respondents relied on friends and family in Australia for information that would influence their migration decisions:
 - Afghan 15.8 per cent (n=12)
 - Iranian 24.1 per cent (n=13)
 - Males 20.0 per cent (n=20)
 - Females 16.1 per cent (n=5).

Table 3

Do you rely on telephone conversations with friends/family in Australia for information about Australia when making the decision that Australia will be your final destination?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	19.1%	25
No	35.9%	47
Not sure	13.7%	18
I do not have telephone conversations with friends/family in Australia	31.3%	41
<i>answered question</i>		131
<i>skipped question</i>		9

Of those who decided to travel to Australia, many had little knowledge of Australia or how to get there. Responses to the question (45) *Before you made a decision to leave your home country, how much did you know about Australia?* are shown in Table 4.

Table 4

Before you made a decision to leave your home country, how much did you know about Australia?	
Answer Choices	Responses
A little	79.55% (n=105)
Some knowledge	19.70% (n=26)
A lot	0.76% (n=1)
Total	132

	A little	Some knowledge	A lot	Total
Afghan	85.71% (n=66)	14.29% (n=11)	0.00% (n=0)	58.78% 77
Iranian	70.37% (n=38)	27.78% (n=15)	1.85% (n=1)	41.22% 54
Total Respondents	104	26	1	131

	A little	Some knowledge	A lot	Total
Male	81.00% (n=81)	19.00% (n=19)	0.00% (n=0)	75.76% 100
Female	75.00% (n=24)	21.88% (n=7)	3.13% (n=1)	24.24% 32
Total Respondents	105	26	1	132

Whilst Australia was a clear choice of intended destination for some respondents prior to the commencement of their journey, from the surveys and interviews it became clear that Australia was not the destination of choice for all respondents. Rather, other countries were also nominated as intended destinations including the US, Canada, New Zealand, European countries and Japan. Access to UNHCR registration in Indonesia for resettlement as a means for legal onward travel to a place of safety is also a significant determinant of destination for many respondents. Nomination of intended final destination was decided at various points along the migration journey by the respondents with some identifying Australia or other countries prior to departure from their home country. Other respondents made this decision of their intended final destination during their migration journey as more information about certain destinations (including Australia) became known to them.

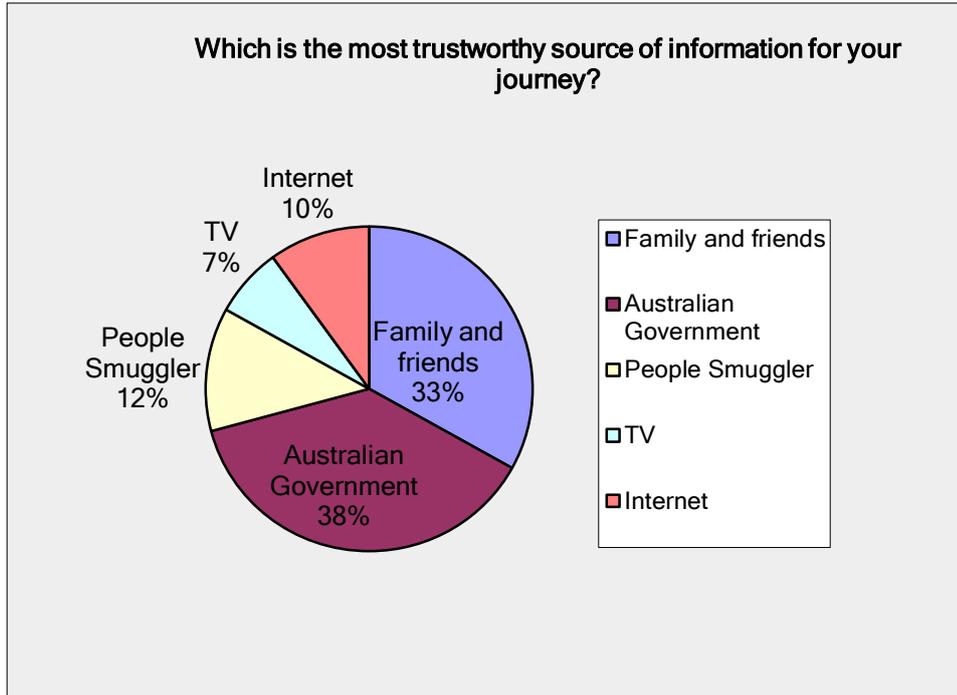
3.2 Storytelling practices and ‘informal information’ sharing as a primary information source

The Australian Government has invested in developing offshore communication campaigns in a number of countries designed to deter potential migrants from travelling to Australia by boat. Additionally, new border control measures and policies were introduced in Australia from September 2013 under ‘Operation Sovereign Borders’ and the Regional Resettlement Arrangement announced by (former) Prime Minister Rudd, resulting in a reduction in numbers of Illegal Maritime Arrivals (IMAs) reaching Australia from Indonesia (Liberal and National Party of Australia 2013). Since mid-January 2014, no IMAs have been successful in reaching Australia.

The interview data overwhelmingly shows that informal information sharing through familial, communal and ethnic networks, including storytelling practices, remain a primary information source for the Iranian and Afghan migrants interviewed and have precedence over official information campaigns. Whilst some of the stories heard by the migrants interviewed worked to deter them from taking a boat journey to Australia (see Section 5.2), other stories contributed to their decision to continue onward travel to Australia. The narratives of mobility – or migration stories - told by a significant majority of the migrants did not refer to the Australian Government as a trusted source of information. Only two interviewees mentioned relying upon or consulting Australian Government information sources when planning and taking their migration journeys.

Conversely, the results from the survey questionnaire showed that 37.7 per cent (n=49) of respondents indicated that their most trusted source of information to inform them of their onward journey to Australia was the Australian Government [Afghan 38.7 per cent (n=29), Iranian 35.2 per cent (n=19), males 35.7 per cent (n=35), females 43.7 per cent (n=14)] although this was rarely mentioned in the substantive interviews.

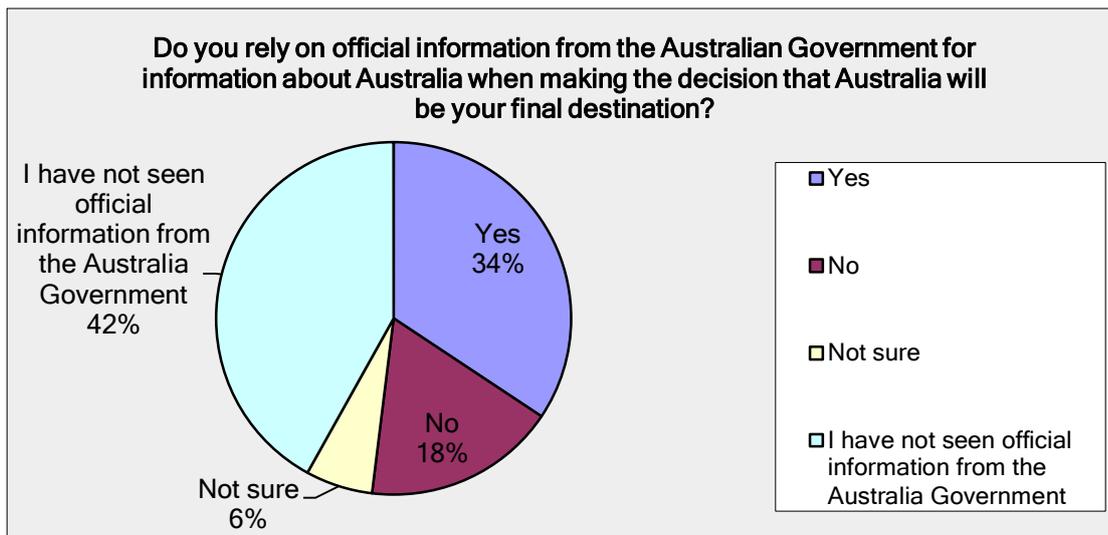
Chart 1



Positive responses to survey question 29 – *Do you rely on official information from the Australian Government for information about Australia when making the decision that Australia will be your final destination?* – were as follows:

- 34.3 per cent (n=45) of all respondents answered 'Yes'
- 26.0 per cent (n=20) Afghans
- 45.3 per cent (n=24) Iranians
- 33.0 per cent (n=33) males
- 38.7 per cent (n=12) females.

Chart 2



The seemingly contradictory survey results and interview narratives can be understood through the lens of subject ambivalence (Smelser 1998) as well as the different responses to research instruments; quantitative and qualitative. An in-depth interview is a more personalised research method in which the researcher takes time to build rapport and make the interviewee feel at ease. Literature suggests that migrants in vulnerable circumstances (such as irregular migrants) are more likely to be candid in an interview where a conversational style allows additional probing and follow-up questions which reveal more candid and self-reflective answers from the interviewee (Marti & Mertens 2014, Mertens 2011).

The interviews revealed that the most trusted source of information for a significant majority of migrants, which confirmed their onward journey to Australia (where Australia was the intended final destination), was family and friends in home countries, or those family and friends who had already taken a migration journey themselves.

However, the survey questionnaire results tell a rather different story. This may be due to the way the questions were framed and contextualised in the semi-structured interviews compared to the way the questions appeared in the questionnaire completed electronically. Responses to survey question 27 – *How much do you rely on friends/family in your home country for information about Australia when making the decision that Australia will be your final destination?* – are summarised in Table 5.

Table 5

How much do you rely on friends/ family in your home country for information about Australia when making the decision that Australia will be your final destination?		
Answer Options	Response %	Response Count
I completely rely on friends and family in my home country of residence for information about Australia	5.6%	7
I rely on friends and family in my home country of residence a lot for information about Australia	7.2%	9
I rely on friends and family in my home country of residence a little for information about Australia	8.8%	11
I do not rely on friends and family in my home country of residence for information about Australia	20.0%	25
I'm not sure	58.4%	73
	<i>answered question</i>	125
	<i>skipped question</i>	15

	I completely rely on friends and family in my home country of residence for information about Australia	I rely on friend and family in my home country of residence a lot for information about Australia	I rely on friend and family in my home country of residence a little for information about Australia	I do not rely on friends and family in my home country of residence for information about Australia	I'm not sure	Total
Male	5.26% (n=5)	8.42% (n=8)	7.37% (n=7)	20.00% (n=19)	58.95% (n=56)	76.00% 95
Female	6.67% (n=2)	3.33% (n=1)	13.33% (n=4)	20.00% (n=6)	56.67% (n=17)	24.00% 30
Total Respondents	7	9	11	25	73	125

	I completely rely on friends and family in my home country of residence for information about Australia	I rely on friend and family in my home country of residence a lot for information about Australia	I rely on friend and family in my home country of residence a little for information about Australia	I do not rely on friends and family in my home country of residence for information about Australia	I'm not sure	Total
Afghan	5.48% (n=4)	5.48% (n=4)	8.22% (n=6)	17.81% (n=13)	63.01% (n=46)	58.87% 73
Iranian	5.88% (n=3)	9.80% (n=5)	9.80% (n=5)	21.57% (n=11)	52.94% (n=27)	41.13% 51
Total Respondents	7	9	11	24	73	124

Other trusted sources of information revealed through the interviews were co-nationals and friends made during the migration journey and/or in transit. A number of migrants also told of gaining information that they trusted about their migration journey from their smugglers. From the survey questionnaire, a very small number [12.3 per cent, (n=16)] of respondents who chose to answer question 36 – ‘Which is the most trustworthy source of information for your journey?’ – selected ‘people smuggler’.

[The kinds of stories heard](#)

[Australia is safe and welcoming to asylum seekers and refugees, with opportunities for a good life](#)

A number of the migrants interviewed spoke of hearing stories that Australia was a safe and welcoming destination and would provide them with a number of professional, educational and livelihood opportunities if they could resettle there. This influenced their decision in choosing Australia as an intended final destination.

“...I heard more stories that it’s better for us to go to Australia, because the people in Australia are so friendly and very welcoming, and if we go to Australia, then we would be given jobs, would be given good lives, that we would live a good life.” [Cisarua_Afghan_M&F_086&087_TE]

“...Australia I know that is a developed country and they care about humanity. My father told him that countries like Australia, Canada or US are developed countries, they care about people, children, family and also humanity and they respect you for who you are. The most important part is they care about humanity.” [Kupang_Iranian_M_29_AK]

[Travel to Indonesia as a place of transit from which to take a boat to Australia](#)

Some of the migrants interviewed had heard through smugglers or friends and family in their home countries that Indonesia is a place of transit from which to take a boat to Australia. It is not clear from the interviews from where these friends, family and smugglers had gathered their information, although some migrants did know of and gather information from other family and friends who had made the journey before them. Smugglers were another trusted source of information. Many of the migrants instinctively

trusted the information provided by these identified most trusted sources without questioning it. This could be explained given their urgency to leave their country of origin and knowing of successful migration journeys of others they knew who had been facilitated by their particular smuggler. This may indicate that storytelling from personal connections can have greater weight than Australian Government information campaigns attempting to deter migrants travelling to Australia by boat.

“...I was told he just come here to – it's like transit – and then go to Australia...”
[Kalideres_Afghan_M_39_AK]

“I don't plan to stay here. I was going to Australia and they [the smugglers] said we have to stay here [in Indonesia] for short time.” [Kupang_Iranian_M_26_AB]

“I heard while I was still in Iran information about my friends who had fled early that normally the refugees would just stay in Indonesia only for 10 to 20 days before they could go to Australia through the sea road, the sea way.” [Cisarua_Afghan_M&F_091and092_TE]

Iranian respondents considered Indonesian transit as part of the fastest available migration pathway to Australia. This was particularly notable from female Iranian migrants.

“...transiting in Indonesia and getting on a boat to Australia is the fastest route to Australia...if I come to Indonesia, I can go with boat very soon, immediate...I decided to go to Australia immediately. I think boat is faster than the other.... This information that if I come here after one month I'm in Australia. After one month I'm in Australia - for this reason I think it's the very fast way I go to Australia, I choose this.”
[Kalideres_Iranian_Female_02_AB]

“The smuggler that we contacted in Iran told us if you want to go faster [to Australia] you have to come to Indonesia. “ [Serpong_Iranian_Male_80_BB]

“I thought if I take the route to Australia and through – with the boats or something like that I will arrive to her destination more fast...” [Pekanbaru_Iranian_Female_15_AK]

Risks and dangers of the boat journey to Australia

A large number of migrants interviewed heard stories about the risks and dangers of boat travel to Australia in various ways and at various locations along their migration pathway. Responses to survey question 47 – *What information did you have about the journey to Australia?* – are summarised below and given in greater detail in Table 6.

- The majority of respondents [55.8 per cent (n=72), including 62.7 per cent (n=47) Afghans, 45.3 per cent (n=24) Iranians, 55.1 per cent (n=54) males, 58.1 per cent (n=18) females] answered 'Risk of drowning'
- 36.4 per cent (n=47) of respondents [including 44.0 per cent (n=33) Afghans, 26.4 per cent (n=14) Iranians, 35.7 per cent (n=35) males, 38.7 per cent (n=12) females] answering 'danger to my life'.

Respondents could give more than one answer to this question. Just over 44 percent (n=57) of the respondents to this survey question were women. The female responses in comparison to the male responses, as well as the responses by Iranians and Afghans are presented in Table 6. There are clear similarities in the answer options selected by male and female respondents, but some significant differences in responses between Iranians and Afghans.

Table 6

What information did you have about the journey to Australia?		
Answer Options	Response %	Response Count
Danger to your life	36.4%	47
Risk of drowning	55.8%	72
Being arrested	23.3%	30
Transit country conditions	8.5%	11
Cost of the journey	17.8%	23
Other risks	24.0%	31
<i>answered question</i>		129
<i>skipped question</i>		11

	Danger to your life	Risk of drowning	Being arrested	Transit country conditions	Cost of the journey	Other risks	Total
Afghan	44.00% (n=33)	62.67% (n=47)	28.00% (n=21)	10.67% (n=8)	14.67% (n=11)	18.67% (n=14)	104.69% 134
Iranian	26.42% (n=14)	45.28% (n=24)	16.98% (n=9)	5.66% (n=3)	22.64% (n=12)	32.08% (n=17)	61.72% 79
Total Respondents	47	71	30	11	23	31	128

	Danger to your life	Risk of drowning	Being arrested	Transit country conditions	Cost of the journey	Other risks	Total
Male	35.71% 35	55.10% 54	21.43% 21	9.18% 9	13.27% 13	25.51% 25	121.71% 157
Female	38.71% 12	58.06% 18	29.03% 9	6.45% 2	32.26% 10	19.35% 6	44.19% 57
Total Respondents	47	72	30	11	23	31	129

Some of those interviewed had heard information about the risks and dangers from friends and co-nationals in transit in Indonesia. Three interviewees had been told of the dangers and risks by their smuggler. Some knew of the risks before leaving their homeland. Some did not know of the risks and dangers of the boat journey to Australia before they had arrived in Indonesia.

“[female]...I heard the stories of the risks of making the journey, I heard that probably we would get drowned in the sea...once I was here [in Indonesia], I heard all these stories that I would be drowned in the sea.” [Cisarua_Afghan_M&F_086&087_TE]

“And I also heard that there was a possibility to experience unhappy situations. I was also aware that there was a possibility for me to experience near-death, like, drowned at sea.” [Cisarua_Afghan_M&F_112&113_TE]

“The smuggler told me that I can’t guarantee your life but I can guarantee your money he got from me, and because I intended to go to Australia from the sea and the smuggler told me your way is from the sea and it is dangerous too.” [Kupang_Iranian_Male_29_AK]

“Before I came here, before I start this journey, I heard the news about people drowned at sea. But I didn’t care, and it didn’t affect my decision.” [Kupang_Iranian_F_22_DM]

“Because before I came here we didn’t hear about, like somebody dies in the sea. If I know, I don’t come.” [Kalideres_Iranian_F_02_AB]

The boat route to Australia is closed

Many migrants were told that the boat route to Australia was ‘closed’ once they had arrived in Indonesia. Co-nationals, friends and smugglers provided this information to the migrants.

This was disappointing news for some who had planned to travel to Indonesia as a place of short-term transit before boarding a boat to Australia. Learning that the boat route to Australia was ‘closed’ therefore meant that many migrants had to revise their plans for onward migration from Indonesia (see Section 3.3 for further analysis).

A small number of migrants interviewed knew of this route closure before leaving their home country, but decided, nevertheless, to come to Indonesia in order to register with UNHCR for the opportunity to reach Australia via the UNHCR refugee status determination process.

Registration with UNHCR in Indonesia as a legal way of onward travel to Australia

Some migrants who were interviewed stated that were told by friends and co-nationals *en route* or on arrival in Indonesia that the best way to get to Australia by legal means was to register with UNHCR. Others were told by smugglers in the country of origin or on arrival in Indonesia. At the same time, it seems that a large number of those migrants interviewed, who were made aware of the UNHCR process, were misinformed or did not fully understand the role of UNHCR in assessing asylum applications for resettlement. A large number of the interviewed migrants assumed that, by registering with UNHCR, they would be offered safe and legal passage to Australia upon successful completion of the refugee status determination process. One interviewee even assumed that he could make an application for resettlement to Australia, which UNHCR would approve, and that this approval would allow him to continue on to Australia by boat.

“At first I thought that the process would take only one or two months with the UNHCR for the interview and then I will get approval to continue making a boat journey to Australia. But then because the way to go there was closed and now the process has become very slow.” [Cisarua_Afghan_M_088_TE]

A small number of interviewees talked about the possibility of their asylum application being rejected by UNHCR. Most spoke of the UNHCR process as being an alternative and legal route to Australia given that the way to Australia by boat was ‘closed’. From the interviews, it seems that a large number of migrants assumed that they could pick Australia as their destination country via the UNHCR resettlement process without realising that it is the UNHCR who refers refugees to countries for resettlement.

It should be noted that the UNHCR does not refer all registered refugees for resettlement. Demand for resettlement places far outstrips the quotas set by the resettlement countries such as Australia. The UNHCR only refers a very small number of refugees considered to be most vulnerable to resettlement countries. Further, referral is just another step in a complicated process – on receiving a referral from UNHCR the resettlement country may or may not then invite the referred refugee to make an application and the refugee then may or may not be interviewed by the resettlement country and offered a place. The UNHCR also oversees other durable solutions for the vast majority of registered refugees such as integration into countries of resettlement or sustainable return to country of origin.

“So we’re hoping that we can really get resettled very soon and we are aware that we’re not allowed to get a job here, to work, to make money. So at this stage we are expecting, hoping that we can go to Australia as soon as possible... At the moment we have no plans

how we can go to Australia other than relying on UNHCR resettlement process.” [Cisarua_Afghan_M&F_095and096_TE]

“...if you don't take the routes to Australia by boat and you stay here you can go across with UNHCR and you can go legally, everything will be just okay.” [Pekanbaru_Iranian_Female_15_AK]

“We didn't hear any of these because our intention to go to Australia not using boat. We are going through UN.” [Cisarua_Iranian_Male_07_AK]

“We never thought of going to Australia by a boat. We know all the risks, we know all the dangers and we don't want to go to Australia illegally. We only wanted to go there legally through the help of UNHCR.” [Cisarua_Iranian_M&F_124&125_TE]

The research findings indicate that storytelling practices do act as a primary information source amongst the migrants surveyed and interviewed. Stories relating to migration journeys from homelands to Australia are heard from various sources including family, friends, co-nationals, smugglers, the Internet and, less so from official Australian Government campaigns to deter irregular migration. However, stories heard from the more trusted personal connections to the migrants were often the most influential for their migration decisions.

3.3 Transit conditions are unanticipated drivers of ongoing irregular migration, with greater relevance for some groups than information consumed regarding perils of travel, interception or likely outcomes following arrival

During the interviews, difficulties experienced during life in transit were explained by the migrants as resulting from their irregular status, which led to an inability to work and therefore to generate an income. Subsequently many migrants living in the community reported financial difficulties and stress, homesickness and uncertainty about how long they would remain in transit. Transit was understood as either waiting to journey to Australia by boat once the boat route to Australia 'opened' again, or waiting for the outcome of UNHCR asylum and resettlement processing. Other day-to-day difficulties experienced by some migrants included cultural and language barriers as well as difficulties with local food.

The respondents cited below, who are dissatisfied with their life in transit in Indonesia, all said during their interviews that Australia was their intended final destination.

“It's relatively hard. I'm just staying until the time comes for me to go. Everyone here is in the same position. We are all waiting.” [Cisarua_Iranian_Male_09_AK]

“...we are not living here, we are just taking breath, we are just breathing here, we don't have a life of human here, so please help us do something for us. The people who they are - they know, they know there were a tough life, they know what it's like and we are in a very bad condition here, so please help us.... we lack financial support, the second one is, of course, that relates to the first one, that we are jobless, we cannot work, we don't have the right to work, so that's a big problem, that's what has - under pressure and on the other hand, that the process of...are too slow, this process too slow and we have heard about lots of people who have spent here for maybe two years here and then they went, what shall I say, and they got crazy because of this situation and they had a lot of psychological problems, they got a lot of psychological problems because the situation, you have to wait and you don't have money to spend, you cannot support yourself...there's difference between...major difference, cultural differences the food is different, what we eat, the Indonesia people eat something different so there is a problem in providing such food.” [Cisarua_Afghan_3xM_098,099and100_TE]

“It is difficult for me to live in a foreign environment. I don’t know anything about the people, how they live and what they eat, their culture. So those reasons make it even – make life even more difficult here. The life here is very difficult. I have no one. I have no family members here and I am missing my family in Iran and my family in other places. I have no financial backup to support my life here. I am not making any money. I cannot work. I find it very difficult to live in Indonesia.” [Cisarua_Afghan_F x2_135&136_TE]

“Here we are so much frustrated; we can’t work, we can’t make a living, our children don’t go to school, our children cannot get good education and we cannot pay, we cannot afford medical treatment and all these problems have made us frustrated, have made our life here very difficult, so yeah, those are the main problems, the main concerns that we are facing here as asylum seekers.” [Cisarua_Iranian_M&F_122&123_TE]

A number of migrants interviewed expressed that they were satisfied living in Indonesia given that it was a safe place compared to their home country, where their life was in danger. These migrants appreciated that their life was not in danger in Indonesia and that they felt somewhat free from danger. The connection with Indonesia as a Muslim country was also acknowledged and had a degree of influence on some migrants choosing to travel to Indonesia. A number of migrants also commented during their interview on the friendliness and hospitable nature of Indonesian people who made them feel welcome. This was notably the case for Iranian women.

“I am happy to live in Indonesia because I feel secure, I feel safe unlike in Iran, I was frightened I was scared, so I find the life here is good for me to live, the people are also kind.” [Cisarua_Iranian_F_119_TE]

“I’m actually happy to live in Indonesia. I can live safely, I feel secure, I can see trees. I’m happy to live here only if my children can get a good education, can get a job.” [Cisarua_Iranian_F_118_TE]

“Life in Indonesia is safe for us. It’s very different from the life in Iran or in Afghanistan where we felt frightened anytime but here in terms of security, I don’t feel that fear. However, I’m just finding it difficult to support my family because I cannot make a living, I cannot work.” [Cisarua_Afghan_M&F_112and113_TE]

“Actually, seeing Indonesia as the biggest Muslim country in the world, I’m really astonished. I’m amazed how people cope with you as a stranger, how people deal with you because they are really good people. The most thing I can gather is they are really good, Indonesian are really good people...” [Pekanbaru_Iranian_Male_13_AK]

A number of migrants interviewed had attempted a boat journey to Australia before. For them, Australia was the intended final destination and Indonesia was a place of short-term transit whilst waiting to board a boat to Australia. All who had attempted a boat journey had either been intercepted at sea by Indonesian or Australian border control authorities and returned to Indonesia, or their boat had run into trouble resulting in rescue by the Indonesian authorities or Indonesian fishermen who returned them to Indonesia.

For those migrants who had not attempted a boat journey to Australia, the majority had been told that they would transit Indonesia for a short period of time (between 2-3 days to 1-2 months) before taking a boat to Australia. However, on arrival in Indonesia, many of these migrants learnt that the route to Australia by boat had been ‘closed’ after being told before leaving their home country that the pathway to Australia by boat was ‘open’. Upon learning that the route was ‘closed’, the migrants experienced transit in Indonesia for much longer periods of time than they expected and their migration plans changed. Some were waiting for the boat route to ‘open’ again, others were waiting for outcomes of UNHCR applications to be processed for resettlement or spoke of being confused and unsure about what to do next in terms of their onward journey.

"I was expecting that I would live here only for one or two months but then the fact that I've been here for more than the time period I expected, I've been here for more than a year. Yeah, I've been here for more than a year, one year and two months and that I'm finding life here is very difficult because I don't have enough savings to live in Indonesia longer than one or two months, the time that I expected and I thought that I would go doing a boat journey but because the way was closed. So yeah, I don't know how many more months that I will stay here." [Cisarua_Afghan_M_089_TE]

"But then, once we are here now, we were told that the way to go to Australia was closed already, so now we are confused, we are anxious, and we don't know what to do or where to go now... When we arrived we were left here, we thought we would go to Australia by boat, but then because the way to go there by boat has been closed, so now we don't know how to go there. We still have no idea about we they can get there." [Cisarua_Afghan_M&F(couple)_086&087_TE]

"We didn't know that the sea was closed to – the sea to go to Australia had been closed...Now that we are here we have been informed about the closing of the sea to go to Australia and we also heard all the danger and all the risks to go there by boat and therefore we're not planning to go there by boat...So at this stage we are expecting, hoping that we can go to Australia as soon as possible...At the moment we have no plans how we can go to Australia other than relying on UNHCR resettlement process however we will take any possibility, any risk to go to Australia, even if we have to walk on foot to go to Australia." [Cisarua_Afghan_MF_095and096_TE]

"So I already know, from the internet, I know Australia they're not going to catch these refugees and I know already that now the road, or the way by boat is already closed, so the only way I know now is just waiting and I already know this information from that." [Denpasar_Iranian_Male_34_AK]

A significant majority of the migrants interviewed had registered with UNHCR on arrival in Indonesia. Some migrants were told to do this by their smugglers or by family/friends when planning their migration journey from their home country. UNHCR's presence in Indonesia was a driving force for a number of migrants and their smugglers in choosing to travel to Indonesia in order to register with UNHCR for resettlement. The interviews revealed that some had heard that the UNHCR process in Indonesia was quicker than UNHCR processing in other European countries closer to Afghanistan or Iran. This was another factor influencing their decision to travel to Indonesia.

Other migrants were not aware of the UNHCR presence in Indonesia or UNHCR processes that may lead to resettlement until after they arrived in Indonesia. When they learnt that this was the 'legal' way to migrate onwards to Australia (or to other safe countries), they registered and were happy to wait for their application outcome, preferring to travel onward with legal status. Others expressed frustration at how slow the UNHCR process was, commenting that, if the way to Australia by boat was 'opened' again, they would take a boat.

"If only the way to go to Australia by boat were open again, then I want to try." [Cisarua_Afghan_Mx2_141&142_TE]

"[Female] If only the sea to Australia were still open I would take all the risk to go there by boat because there is no hope from the UNHCR here to approve my application." [Cisarua_Iranian_M&F_122&123_TE]

"But they'd say – some of them said if the water is open, I don't want to stay here. No future is here. But I tell them that the water is very dangerous, they say no problem, this life is not good. I don't like this life. If the water, we go by boat, not stay here." [Kalideres_Afghan_36_Male_DM]

“Now the decider, the one who decides is UNHCR and the Australian Government or maybe the other governments who are partner options. The people are too exhausted here, too tired here and that if the way, if the way is opened, if the path is opened, if we can go by boat, if it happens in the future, people will go, people will go, even if it costs their life, it doesn't matter, they will go.” [Cisarua_Afghan_3xM_098,099and100_TE]

A number of interview respondents who had not attempted a boat journey to Australia, told that they had specifically travelled to Indonesia as a known point of transit to board a boat to travel to Australia. Responses to survey question 14 – *What were the main reasons you ended up travelling from your previous country to Indonesia* – are shown in Table 7.

Table 7

What were the main reasons you ended up travelling from your previous country to Indonesia	
	Indonesia is a well-known transit point for onward travel to Australia
Afghan	12.7% (n=10)
Iranian	18.2% (n=10)
Total Respondents	20
	Indonesia is a well-known transit point for onward travel to Australia
Male	11.8% (n=12)
Female	24.2% (n=8)
Total Respondents	20

The majority of interviewees said that living conditions in Indonesia were much more difficult or more difficult than expected, although it should be noted that 78 of the interviewees were in immigration detention in Indonesia at the time of interview. For many of those living in the community, life in Indonesia was also described as being difficult.

In response to survey question 42 – *Please complete the following statement: Life in Indonesia is....* – half answered that life was ‘much more difficult than expected’ [50.4 per cent (n=67)]. Responses by Afghans, Iranians, males and females are summarised in Table 8.

Table 8

Please select the statement that best describes your views. Living in Indonesia is...		
Answer Options	Response %	Response Count
Much more difficult than expected	50.4%	67
More difficult than expected	21.1%	28
As expected	4.5%	6
Easier than expected	5.3%	7
Much easier than expected	1.5%	2
Don't know	17.3%	23
	<i>answered question</i>	133
	<i>skipped question</i>	7

	Much more difficult than expected	More difficult than expected	As expected	Easier than expected	Much easier than expected	Don't know	Total
Male	43.56% (n=44)	24.75% (n=25)	3.96% (n=4)	4.95% (n=5)	1.98% (n=2)	20.79% (n=21)	75.94% 101
Female	71.88% (n=23)	9.38% (n=3)	6.25% (n=2)	6.25% (n=2)	0.00% (n=0)	6.25% (n=2)	24.06% 32
Total Respondents	67	28	6	7	2	23	133

	Much more difficult than expected	More difficult than expected	As expected	Easier than expected	Much easier than expected	Don't know	Total
Afghans	54.55% (n=42)	15.58% (n=12)	5.19% (n=4)	2.60% (n=2)	1.30% (n=1)	20.78% (n=16)	58.33% 77
Iranians	43.64% (n=24)	29.09% (n=16)	3.64% (n=2)	9.09% (n=5)	1.82% (n=1)	12.73% (n=7)	41.67% 55
Total Respondents	66	28	6	7	2	23	132

For the majority of respondents, Indonesia is a place of transit *en route* to another country of safety., Most of the respondents did not anticipate having to stay in Indonesia - as a place of transit and not the intended final destination - for a long period of time, thinking that transit would be a matter of days or weeks. However, on learning of the 'closed' boat passage to Australia and limited access to the UNHCR registration process, many of the respondents are experiencing longer periods of transit than expected as they wait for boat routes to 'open' again or for UNHCR decisions on their resettlement. Waiting in Indonesia has caused frustration as, particularly for those migrants living in the community, they lead precarious lives with irregular status. The realities of living in Indonesia as an irregular migrant have proved difficult for many with limited opportunities for work, difficulties in accessing medical care, education for children and other necessities, all of which contribute to the desire to want to move on to their intended destination.

3.4 As new stories circulate of harsher conditions in asylum destinations, migrants are likely to search for new sources of information to corroborate the stories circulating

Some migrants revealed during their interview that they had heard stories of those who travelled to Australia by boat ending up in Papua New Guinea (Manus Island) and Nauru. However, the migrants did not talk about searching for information to corroborate these stories. Hearing these stories acted as a deterrent for their own onward travel to Australia as they did not want to end up in immigration detention.

It is not clear if the following information (stories) was sought out by migrants, or if they just heard these stories either before they left their home countries or once they were embedded within the irregular migrant communities in Indonesia. These stories include those about the boat route to Australia being 'closed', about Indonesia being the transit point for boat journeys to Australia, about the alternative route being the 'legal' route via UNHCR registration and processing for resettlement, and those stories about

travelling to Australia by boat being risky and dangerous. Upon hearing such stories, no migrants specifically reported seeking to corroborate such information or search for new information sources.

It seems that the stories heard by migrants, particularly those stories that they had heard from family and/or friends and/or co-nationals, were trusted and not questioned. This was often because the migrants were fleeing situations of danger at home and felt they had no choice but to trust the information and stories they heard. Others commented that they knew of others who had successfully made the journey to Australia before them and who were now settled in Australia, and had no reason to question information given to them by such friends/family in regards to their own migration journey.

The interviews revealed that some migrants expressed distrust towards their smugglers and the information they received from them, mostly in regard to the journey to Australia by boat, including the information that they would board relatively quickly after arrival in Indonesia. Where this occurred, the migrants expressed anger at the situation they are currently experiencing in longer term transit in Indonesia, commenting that they believed they would be settled in Australia by now.

The narratives of migrants who were interviewed for this project indicated that many learnt of migration journeys, including details of the route and risks, themselves using language such as “I/we heard” or “I knew about...”.

Respondents who had gathered information about harsh conditions in Australia as an asylum destination in regard to learning about immigration detention for boat arrivals did not necessarily corroborate this information. However, learning of this outcome for those seeking asylum certainly caused them to change their migration plans for onward travel to Australia.

4. Narratives of Mobility

4.1 Patterns of encouragement as positive stories of reaching a desired end point or outcome

In terms of patterns of encouragement, the most common themes presented within the narratives told were:

- Smugglers being relied upon to make decisions on behalf of the migrant to get the migrant to the desired destination
- Australia being the desired destination for reasons associated with safety
- Opportunity and/or freedom
- Other places of safety being a desired destination
- UNHCR being a legal and safe mode for facilitating onward travel to a place of safety, including Australia
- Having friends and/or family in desired destination points and opportunities for a better life.

All of these have impacted on migration decisions and have acted as drivers of migration pathways out of Iran or Afghanistan for the migrants interviewed.

Smugglers decided on the journey

A significant number of interviewees used the services of a smuggler to facilitate their journey to Indonesia and, for most, a promise of facilitating onward boat journeys to Australia was made. Some smugglers encouraged travel to Indonesia as a place where migrants could register with UNHCR and used this as a driver for recruitment.

“Finally, we met a smuggler who suggested for us to go to Indonesia, because in Indonesia there is UNHCR, who can help us to find a better place. So from India we went to Malaysia. When we were in Afghanistan we got help from the smugglers who prepared all the documents required to make the journey.” [Cisarua_Afghan_M&F_108and109_TE]

“And the smugglers told us that we could go to Australia legally by getting assistance from the UNHCR because UNHCR is based in Jakarta and we should be able to get help to go to Australia or to other countries where we can start a new life.” [Cisarua_Afghan_M&F_114and115_TE]

“I made the call [whilst in Iran, to the smuggler] and after that he [the smuggler] says, ‘Go to the UNHCR office and after that you get the papers you can free, go to other states in Indonesia... After that you can come to Bali and from here I fix other things and you can plane again to Australia.’” [Denpasar_Iranian_Male_32_DM]

“Then the smuggler show me this way, you go to Indonesia, then from Indonesia you can go to other country by UNHCR...They told me there is several country like Australia, like Canada, like several country. But it take time. Also they told me you can go by boat from Indonesia to other country by boat. I told him, no, I don’t want to go by boat.” [Kalideres_Afghan_36_Male_DM]

Smugglers helped organise travel and travel documentation, including plane tickets (for Iranians), fake passports and visas for entry into transit countries along the way. Smugglers were engaged by the migrants in countries of origin or *en route* once the migrants had arrived in transit countries. For some Afghans, smugglers were engaged to facilitate travel from Pakistan or India to Malaysia and/or then from Malaysia to Indonesia. Other Afghans used a smuggler to facilitate their journey from Afghanistan. For

Iranians, smugglers were often engaged from Iran to facilitate the whole journey (usually by plane) to Indonesia. For those migrants who used smugglers to facilitate their travel to Indonesia, most spoke of the smugglers as a key source of information about their journey to Australia. Some smugglers informed the migrants of the risks and dangers associated with the boat journey to Australia. Other smugglers did not mention the risks and dangers.

“Yeah when I want to come here my agent told me because you know I have to leave my country, if I stayed there maybe they make big problems for me because I have a problem with government so the agent told me if you go there is fifty-fifty maybe you will die or maybe you won't. Because he told me it's not good boat it's just something like old boat and they smuggle and maybe you reaching Australia or maybe you don't.”

[Pekanbaru_Iranian_male_73_BB]

“So actually I already knew about this. I got the information from the smugglers I got all the information. So I could go out because of my time and I was in Afghanistan on the road on the way to Australia, it was open. So I was going to go to Australia right away. But on the way I got arrested, and so I am in Indonesia now...So it's different, you know, only the smugglers, what they said there and what they said here, yeah. And then – I heard this, the risk, but not that much, not as much as the smugglers say here. Because the ones here, they already, they told me how the dangerous it is, the water from here to Australia, and so – yeah.” [Pekanbaru_Afghan_male_68_BB]

“The smugglers told us about the dangerous risks that we might have experienced during our journey... when we arrived in Kabul all the smugglers told us that there is a possibility to go to Australia by boat and we also heard all the physical risk, the developing drama of the sea and how it was dangerous but the we still, if that's the only way, that's the only chance to go to Australia, by boat, then we will take all those risks rather than staying in my – back home with all the life threatening that we can be killed any time.”

[Cisarua_Afghan_MF_095and096_TE]

“So the smugglers going to take me to Australia didn't tell anything about it, what I heard, you come to Indonesia and then go to Australia by ship, that's it. But I didn't hear anything about the ship or about the risk, yeah.” [Kalideres_Afghan_M_39_AK]

Narratives of the migrants who used the services of a smuggler show that they felt it was the smugglers who made the decisions in regard to their journey. In some cases, the migrants themselves claimed they had no idea or no knowledge of Indonesia or Australia and were leaving the decisions associated with their journey to the smugglers. Research studies conducted by Koser and McAullife (2013), Koser (1997), and Missbach and Sinanu (2011) support the finding that some migrants traveling to places of safety from Iran and Afghanistan will often trust smugglers to determine their route and migration decisions.

“So at that time, at that stage, we didn't receive any information or any stories about the danger or the risks of making the journey, we just decided to make the journey according to what the smuggler advised us to do.” [Cisarua_Afghan_M&F_106and107_TE]

Q: “How did you go about getting information in planning your journey?”

A: People smugglers and just - - -

Q: Okay. Were your main sources of information through networks of family, friends?

A: No. Only the people smugglers.” [Pekanbaru_Iranian_Female_15_AK]

“You know, the – firstly I don't have any idea about, for example, going to the Australia, to the Europe, or the – or a safe country. But the smuggler chooses for me. In Turkey – I was in Turkish before the Indonesia, and he told me you can go to Indonesia. And this is safe, and all. Then after that you can – we can transfer you to the Australia or the New Zealand or

a safe country. But I not have any idea about this before... Yeah, smuggler, before I told you, tell me about the Australia.” [Pekanbaru_Iranian_male_12_AK]

“The smuggler says there’s no way to go to Australia, he say to go to Indonesia, so it’s not him who decided to go to Indonesia. So, you know, that’s it, we just – I didn’t have any power to make the decision. All the decision is up to the smugglers... This I heard from the smuggler that it’s the first place you’re going to be [Indonesia] before, you know, to go to Australia.” [Kalideres_Afghan_Male_64_BB]

Australia as the desired destination: opportunities for a better life

For those migrants who had Australia in mind as their ultimate destination, desire and encouragement to travel to Australia were often attached to the understanding that Australia would provide them with opportunities for a better life, where they would be welcomed and where they would feel safe. Australia was also recognised as a destination of choice by some migrants because of educational opportunities.

“I like to live in Australia. I very like Australia. Australia is very good, very good.”

[Kalideres_Iranian_M_06_AK]

“...our final destination was Australia and we wanted to come to Australia because the Australian people are loving people, they love immigrants, they admire immigrants and we think they see people from a humanitarian point of view that’s why our final destination is Australia.” [Cisarua_Afghan_3xM_098,099and100_TE]

“...when we arrived in Indonesia, we heard more stories that it’s better for us to go to Australia, because the people in Australia are so friendly and very welcoming, and if we go to Australia, then we would be given jobs, we would be given good lives, we would live a good life...The experience now has made us want to go to Australia as soon as possible, because we heard nice stories about Australia, people are welcoming, very friendly, accept us, accept refugees, accept people from other countries, and we are not planning to stay in Indonesia because of the difficult life that we are facing today, that we’re facing now... Our plan is, the first thing we want to have is first, we want to have a place where we can live, and then we want to learn English language, because at the moment, we are incompetent in English, so we want to learn, therefore we are hoping that we can get a job there, get good education. So, yeah, that’s what we hope for.”

[Cisarua_Afghan_M&F(couple)_086&087_TE]

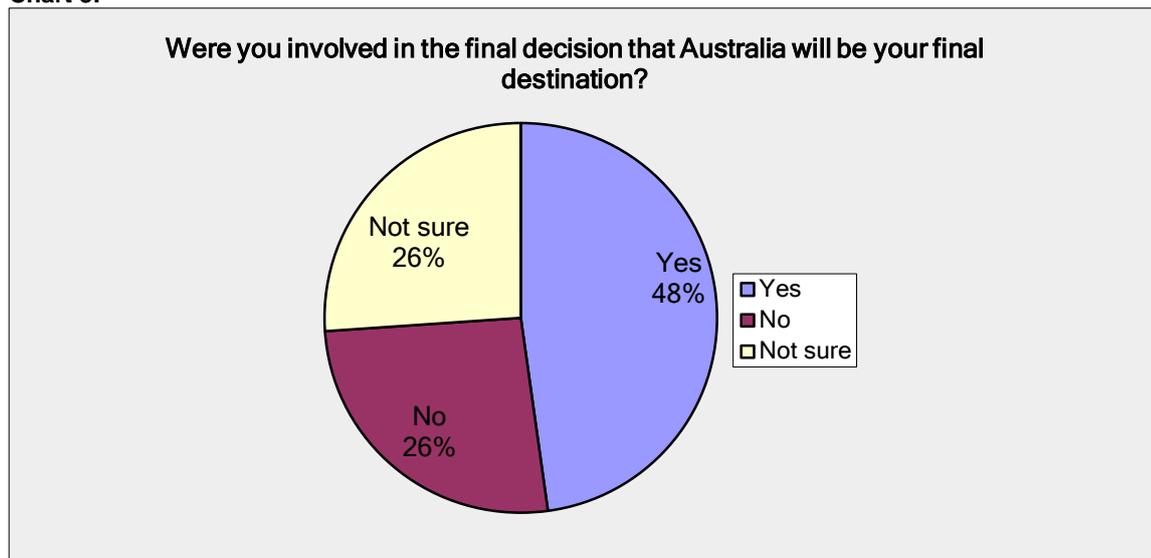
“Yeah, if I can go to Australia I can - if I can I go to university and go...”

[Kupang_Iranian_M_25_DM]

Positive response to survey question 26 – *Were you involved in the final decision that Australia will be your final destination?* – are summarised below and in Chart 3.

- 47.8 per cent (n=64) of all respondents
- 36.1 per cent (n=22) Afghan men
- 56.4 per cent (n=22) Iranian men
- 64.7 per cent (n=11) Afghan women
- 50.0 per cent (n=8) Iranian women

Chart 3:



Places of safety, regardless of which country

When learning that the boat routes to Australia from Indonesia were 'closed', many migrants chose to register with UNHCR as an alternative and legal way of entering Australia through the asylum seeker resettlement program. Others had travelled to Indonesia for the purpose of registering with UNHCR to be resettled in a safe country. Registration with UNHCR opened up other options for safe countries of resettlement and caused some of the migrants to comment that they did not mind where they were sent as a result of a successful resettlement process as long as they were in a country that was safe. This was often said in relation to their reasons for leaving their home country and feeling that it was impossible for them to return home. In such instances, Australia was no longer the ultimate choice in destination as it may have been if boat routes to Australia were available to them.

Other migrants who did not have Australia in mind as a final destination, or who considered Australia as an option of a safe destination amongst a number of other countries, were encouraged to continue their onward journey in the hope of arriving in a safe country. Not many considered Indonesia to be safe, or a country in which they wished to stay long term. From this research, the reasons for reluctance to settle in Indonesia are primarily due to the migrants' irregular status in Indonesia and limitations on the opportunities to set up a life in Indonesia as a result. These impediments included: not being permitted to work and thereby generate an income and, further, plan toward permanent accommodation; not being able to provide children with an education; and not being able to eventually become an Indonesian resident.

While being in a safe destination country was equally important to those travelling alone as to those travelling as a couple (husband and wife) or with a family, for those in a couple or with a family, being in a safe country was often connected to wanting to provide safety for the whole family. Family interest was at stake. This was the case also for some of those travelling alone who hoped to bring their families to their destination country once they were settled.

"So because of that circumstances, because of that danger we decided to leave the country and to face any risk that we will face. What we need is just a country that is safe for us to live and to stay." [Cisarua_Afghan_M&F_145&146_TE]

"The most important thing for me and my family is a safe place - is a safe place. So it doesn't matter to which country, whether it is developed or whether it is a developing

country, it doesn't matter. The most important thing for me is just a country that is safe for us to live." [Cisarua_Afghan_Mx2_143&144_TE]

"We were planning to go to Indonesia because there is the UNHCR that is expected to be able to help us to settle in a new country. We didn't have any specific countries in his mind. We were only expecting that UNHCR would help us go to a new country that is safe for us to have a safe life." [Cisarua_Iranian_M&F_137&138_TE]

"Actually, the resettlement is not based on my decision or where I want to go. I want to be in some place that me and my wife, my family is safe. So whether it's Australia, whether it's any country, whether it's Indonesia, I don't care." [Pekanbaru_Iranian_Male_13_AK]

Friends and/or family in desired destination

Some migrants had family and friends in Australia or other destination countries, for example, the US and Canada. These family members were a driver of onward migration to the countries where they were already settled.

"Yeah, I'd like to go to Canada...I have family there" [Kalideres_Iranian_Female_01_SD]

"I try to go Canada because my mother uncle in Canada... I want to go to Canada because my family is there and he can help me. But in Australia no have any family." [Kupang_Iranian_Male_25_DM]

"I want to go to Australia, one of my friends is there." [Kalideres_Afghan_Male_55_BB]

"[Wife] My family members all flew to Australia and they're living in Australia and also my friends already left Iran and live in Australia. I really expected to be able to go to Australia, to live in Australia. The reason was because I'm not able to speak English and if I had to go to other countries, other English-speaking countries, then I don't have anyone there. If I go to Australia, I already have family members there, my relatives, my friends. So once I arrive there, although I'm not able to speak English, I have my relatives and friends whom I knows very well and I'm close to so I prefers to go to Australia rather than to anywhere else." [Cisarua_Afghan_M&F_091and092_TE]

Most of those interviewed spoke of the need to leave their homeland with little time to plan every aspect of the journey. Among the people interviewed for this project, there was a common narrative of leaving their country of origin in haste due to a range of 'risks' and 'fears'.

Responses to survey question 18 – *Before you left your previous country of residence to come to Indonesia, did any of the following events trigger your departure?* – are summarised below and in Table 9. Multiple responses could be given to this question.

- 71.9 per cent (n=97) of respondents [76.2 per cent (n=61) Afghans, 64.8 per cent (n=35) Iranians, 72.8 per cent (n=75) males, 68.7 per cent (n=22) females] identified 'Significant security threat or incident' as the main reason for leaving their country of residence
- 32.6 per cent (n=44) [41.2 per cent (n=33) Afghans, 20.4 per cent (n=11) Iranians, 25.2 per cent (n=26) males, 56.2 per cent (n=18) females] identified 'Threat against family/children' as a reason for leaving.

Table 9:

Before you left your previous country of residence to come to Indonesia, did any of the following events trigger your departure?		
All	Response %	Response Count
Significant security threat or incident	71.9%	97
Threat against family/children	32.6%	44
Loss of close family member/ close friend	15.6%	21
Imminent threat of deportation	14.8%	20
Loss of home or shelter/ threat of losing home or shelter	21.5%	29
Lost job or income/ threat of losing job or income	25.9%	35
Family / friend successfully migrated to Indonesia	6.7%	9
Approached by a people smuggler to leave	10.4%	14
Money became available to leave	13.3%	18
Birth of child	3.0%	4
Recently married	0.7%	1
None of these	8.9%	12
	<i>answered question</i>	135
	<i>skipped question</i>	5

Males	Response %	Response Count
Significant security threat or incident	72.8%	75
Threat against family/children	25.2%	26
Loss of close family member/ close friend	16.5%	17
Imminent threat of deportation	13.6%	14
Loss of home or shelter/ threat of losing home or shelter	21.4%	22
Lost job or income/ threat of losing job or income	25.2%	26
Family / friend successfully migrated to Indonesia	6.8%	7
Approached by a people smuggler to leave	6.8%	7
Money became available to leave	9.7%	10
Birth of child	1%	1
Recently married	1%	1
None of these	10.7%	11
	<i>answered question</i>	135
	<i>skipped question</i>	5

Females	Response %	Response Count
Significant security threat or incident	68.7%	22
Threat against family/children	56.2%	18
Loss of close family member/ close friend	12.5%	4
Imminent threat of deportation	18.7%	6
Loss of home or shelter/ threat of losing home or shelter	21.9%	7
Lost job or income/ threat of losing job or income	28.1%	9
Family / friend successfully migrated to Indonesia	6.2%	2
Approached by a people smuggler to leave	21.9%	7
Money became available to leave	25.0%	8
Birth of child	9.4%	3
Recently married	0%	0
None of these	3.1%	1
	<i>answered question</i>	135
	<i>skipped question</i>	5

Afghans	Response %	Response Count
Significant security threat or incident	76.2%	61
Threat against family/children	41.2%	33
Loss of close family member/ close friend	21.2%	17
Imminent threat of deportation	12.5%	10
Loss of home or shelter/ threat of losing home or shelter	22.5%	18
Lost job or income/ threat of losing job or income	23.7%	19
Family / friend successfully migrated to Indonesia	5.0%	4
Approached by a people smuggler to leave	5.0%	4
Money became available to leave	15.0%	12
Birth of child	2.5%	2
Recently married	1.2%	1
None of these	5.0%	4
<i>answered question</i>		135
<i>skipped question</i>		5

Iranians	Response %	Response Count
Significant security threat or incident	64.8%	35
Threat against family/children	20.4%	11
Loss of close family member/ close friend	7.4%	4
Imminent threat of deportation	18.5%	10
Loss of home or shelter/ threat of losing home or shelter	20.4%	11
Lost job or income/ threat of losing job or income	29.6%	16
Family / friend successfully migrated to Indonesia	9.3%	5
Approached by a people smuggler to leave	18.5%	10
Money became available to leave	11.1%	6
Birth of child	3.7%	2
Recently married	0%	0
None of these	14.8%	8
<i>answered question</i>		135
<i>skipped question</i>		5

These results indicate that processes of pre-planning and anticipation of the hurdles involved with an international migration journey were not able to be considered by the migrants interviewed prior to their initial departure. When narrating their migration pathways, the majority of Afghans experienced a long migration journey, passing through a number of countries, sometimes transiting for months or years at a time in Pakistan, India and/or Malaysia. Most Iranians experienced a quicker migration journey to Indonesia, travelling directly by plane at the time of fleeing Iran, with the intention of transiting in Indonesia for a short time before boarding a boat for Australia.

From the interviews, it is not clear why Iranians took such a different migration path to Afghans. The authors assume that factors such as socio-economic status and access to money, connections to more sophisticated, well-informed smugglers who were very familiar with the travel route, ability to organise plane travel, and the knowledge of other connections who informed them of this mode of travel help to explain the differences in migration paths taken by Iranians in comparison to the Afghan respondent. The main reason the interviewed Iranians gave for leaving their homes were associated with threats to life against the individual for various reasons whilst, in Afghanistan, societal conflict was an additional driving force aside from individual experiences of persecution and threats to life.

4.2 Patterns of dissuasion through narratives of risk and loss of life

Many interviewees expressed knowledge of risks and dangers associated with an irregular boat journey to Australia. Some knew of friends or family members drowning at sea during the boat journey or had heard of others who had drowned. A few had heard that, if they arrived in Australia they would be detained in immigration detention, and others knew of boat tow-backs to Indonesia by Indonesian authorities in 'the orange boats'. These narratives did have an impact on the decision to travel to Australia by boat.

Some interviewees expressed a willingness to travel by boat no matter what the risks in an attempt to get to Australia and be safe, start a new life and unite with family members. Others were dissuaded and/or deterred from taking a boat to Australia on learning of the risks. During transit in Indonesia, some learnt of the UNHCR resettlement process as the legal and 'right way' to seek asylum and were therefore happy and content to let this process determine their onward travel to any safe destination. . . Others believed the UNHCR process would provide them with a safe and legal journey to Australia.

On arrival in Indonesia, some migrants heard stories of dangers, risks and deaths during boat journeys to Australia. For a subset of migrants, these stories, then acted as a deterrent and point of dissuasion from taking a boat journey. Upon hearing these stories this subset of migrants revised their decision to travel onwards to Australia by boat, instead opting to travel to Australia the 'legal' and 'safe' way via UNHCR, considering other destination countries such as Canada, New Zealand or Sweden.

"When my family and I arrived in Indonesia, I then realised that the journey that I would do to go to Australia, was very risky and dangerous." [Cisarua_Iranian_Mx2_133&134_TE]

Others who knew, or learnt about the risks and dangers of the boat journey to Australia were not dissuaded from making the journey. It appears they made a calculated risk in this respect, and considered their life being in danger, or the threat of death in their country of origin to be a similar or worse risk than undertaking a boat journey to Australia. Although the boat journey is recognised as risky by many migrants, some calculate it to be less risky than living in their country of origin.

"...we heard the stories of the risks of making the journey, we heard that we probably would get drowned in the sea, but it's still better than being killed in our home country back home, because our life was threatened, and still it is worth for making the journey rather than being killed without doing any efforts to save ourselves." [Cisarua_Afghan_M&F_086&087_TE]

"And then – I heard this, the risk, but not that much, not as much as the smugglers say here. Because the ones here, they already, they told me how dangerous it is, the water from here to Australia, and so – yeah. My life was in danger there, and I know when I get to Australia probably my life is in danger, too, but it is worth trying. Over there I would be like 100 per cent dead, but over here we just have to try. We heard about this risk and everything, but we have to try." [Pekanbaru_Afghan_Male_68_BB]

"Yeah when I want to come here my agent told me because you know I have to leave my country, if I stayed there maybe they make big problems for me because I have a problem with government so the agent told me if you go there is fifty-fifty maybe you will die or maybe you won't. Because he told me it's not good boat it's just something like old boat and they smuggle and maybe you reaching Australia or maybe you don't.

Q: So you were aware of these things?

A: Yeah, already he told me.

Q: And you took the chance, yeah?

A: Yeah because I don't have other choice because I have to.

Q: So these stories that you heard about the risk didn't impact your decision?

A: No because I don't have another choice." [Pekanbaru_Iranian_male_73_BB]

“There is no time we can choose. We have no choice. We have to do it [take a boat to Australia]. We are forced to do it.” [Pekanbaru_Iranian_Male_10_SD]

A number of Afghan interviewees had experienced previous frightening boat journeys between Malaysia and Indonesia. These experiences did work as a deterrent to onward boat travel to Australia from Indonesia and caused some migrants to reconsider their journey to Australia. Others had experienced an unsuccessful boat journey to Australia already.

“We took a boat from Malaysia to Indonesia...As we arrived by the boat we were taken to a jungle and half way we took a bus and we were taken to an airport, and from the airport we flew to Jakarta by night plane...[Husband] I was really frightened that I might have died at the sea while making the boat journey and – or I might have been captured by the police while on the journey. ...[Wife] I was even more frightened than my husband of the risk, of the danger during the boat journey, however we really had to do the journey.” [Cisarua_Afghan_M&F_110and111_TE]

“When we were travelling by the boat we were completely frightened, we were scared. We heard that it would be the end of our life, we would die on time on our journey and when we were on the boat we were actually followed by the Malaysian police officers who were any time ready to arrest us, so we were completely frightened... And even when we reached Indonesia we couldn't go directly to the mainland, we still had to hide in a swamp that was as deep as our neck, so it was the most unpleasant experience that we had.’ [Cisarua_Afghan_MF_116and117_TE]

“When we were in Malaysia, we had to make a boat journey, and on that boat journey my wife was feeling so frightened that the boat might've been sinking or we might have been drowned at the sea. And my son also felt the same thing. He felt frightened, and he kept asking where his father was, although I was actually in front of him. So that condition was really frightening for all of us.” [Cisarua_Afghan_Mx2_143&144_TE]

“At the moment we have no plans to go to Australia on our own. We've never thought of going to Australia by boat because our experience of making a boat journey from Malaysia to Indonesia was so frightening that we would never, ever go to have another boat journey.” [Cisarua_Afghan_M&F_112and113_TE]

For large number of migrants, the interviews revealed that learning the details of Australian Government policy acted as a deterrent to onward travel to Australia, in particular: the closure of the sea route; the implementation of arrangements to transfer boat arrivals to Regional Processing Centres; and detention on Nauru and Manus Island. The most common deterrent was learning either before arrival, or after arrival in Indonesia, that the boat route to Australia had been closed. Learning this caused a number of migrants to change their plans to travel by boat to Australia from Indonesia. Many instead registered with UNHCR leaving their onward journey to be decided through resettlement processes. Others indicated that if the boat route to Australia opened again, they would travel (See section 3.3).

4.3 Patterns of ‘return home’ narratives develop in relation to unsuccessful attempts at irregular migration

Return was not a feature of the migrant stories told during the interviews. None of the interviewees expressed a narrative of wanting to return home. Whilst some missed their home, their family and their life before it was threatened, not one interviewee spoke of a desire to return home. A significant majority spoke of it being impossible for them to return home, mostly in relation to their life being under threat should they return.

Although a number of interviewees had previously attempted the boat journey to Australia, or knew of the risks and dangers in doing so, none felt they could, or wanted to, return home for reasons related to their reasons for leaving.

“...we cannot go back to our own country because our lives are in danger, we will be killed there and then going to another countries now, it is impossible, there is no way to go... the people who came from Afghanistan, they don't have any hope to go back to Afghanistan, they will certainly die there..” [Cisarua_Afghan_3xM_098,099and100_TE]

“...I couldn't go back to Iran because my father died and because of my marriage. People who wanted to marry me kept on threatening for my husband to be killed, and my life and my husband's life were in danger back home in Afghanistan. We were threatened.” [Cisarua_Afghan_f x2_135&136_TE]

“So basically it's impossible for me to return home because I would be killed. It's a really life-threatening reason so there's no way I would consider going back home.” [Cisarua_Afghan_M_088_TE]

“It's impossible for me to go back to Iran. Probably when I was identified that I was going back home to Iran, then I would be arrested by the government.” [Cisarua_Iranian_F_119_TE]

“[Female] It's impossible for us to go back home to Iran. Two uncles of mine, military officers, the supporters of the revolution government, they have spies everywhere and it's easy for them to find us once we just landed by the airplane, at once we could be killed. Even if we go to remote places in Iran, back home, it is still easy for our family to find us and kill us. So it is really a life threatening reason for us to leave the country. And it is a life threatening reason for us not to be able to go back home.” [Cisarua_Iranian_M&F_124&125_TE]

All of those interviewed who had attempted unsuccessful boat journeys to Australia were waiting in immigration detention in Indonesia to be processed for resettlement by UNHCR⁶.

Some migrants interviewed did have knowledge of Australia's tightened border control policy. A large number knew of the boat route to Australia being 'closed', many learning of this on arrival in Indonesia (see Section 4.2 for detailed discussion). Others knew about tighter border control policy implemented since late 2013, and some Iranian interviewees in Kupang spoke of their knowledge of the possibility of being sent to Nauru and Manus Island and into immigration detention.⁷

However, this knowledge and these stories were learnt mostly through information received from friends and family, not directly from the Australian Government. Learning of route closure and the possibility of being sent to Papua New Guinea or Nauru caused some of the migrants to revise their plans for onward travel to Australia, either reconsidering Australia as a final destination or wanting to get there through registration with UNHCR.

“I heard from my friends.... I also heard that there was actually a way to go to Australia by a boat, but I heard that the way to go there has been closed. So yeah, it makes it impossible to go there by a boat.” [Cisarua_Afghan_MF_093and094_TE]

“Before Tony Abbott was in the government it was easier, that's what I heard. It was easier for the refugees to go there, but now since Tony Abbott is there it's harder for them.” [Denpasar_Iranian_Male_34_AK]

⁶ This circumstance indicates the individuals had been found to be refugees by the UNHCR in Indonesia through a previous process.

⁷ All interviewees in Kupang had attempted a boat journey to Australia, had been caught by authorities during their journey and returned to immigration detention in Indonesia.

“I’ve heard that they sail on the boat, and they go there, but they are facing discrimination in Australian camps, and they have really a hard life there, even in other Australian camps in Nauru and - I forgot - Papua New Guinea. Yeah. In there they don’t have good situation, and even they’re really disappointed, and they’re treated discriminatively, and very bad.” [Kupang_Iranian_Female_22_DM]

“Now, from 11 months ago, I didn’t know about Papua New Guinea and Nauru. And I don’t want to go because so many of my friend in Papua New Guinea I know.” [Kupang_Iranian_Male_24_AB]

“At the moment, I’m not thinking of going to Australia by boat because I realise that it’s already the government’s policy to refuse any refugees or people coming by boat to Australia.” [Cisarua_Afghan_M&F_091and092_TE]

4.4 Patterns of information consumption across country of origin, gender, period of transit, travel configuration

Afghan compared to Iranian interviewees

There were few notable differences between the information consumed by Afghans compared with Iranians. Whilst migration pathways were different between the two nationalities, and times spent in transit were usually longer for Afghans before arriving in Indonesia, both Iranians and Afghans accessed journey information before, during and after arrival in Indonesia from sources including friends, family, co-nationals and/or smugglers. Both had similar experiences of learning on arrival in Indonesia that boat routes to Australia were ‘closed’, which then caused them to reconsider their onward journey plans. Registering with UNHCR was common across both nationalities as an alternative migration pathway for onward travel.

Men compared to women interviewees

As noted earlier, 25 per cent of respondents in this project were women. However the data did not clearly present notable differences in the narratives told by men and women interviewed for the project. The majority of the women interviewed were travelling with their husbands and reported consuming information in the same manner as their husbands, or were following their husbands and relying on them to access and act on information as necessary.

A small number of independent women migrants who were interviewed specifically spoke of wanting to travel to Australia in pursuit of a better life and better education either for themselves or their children. This narrative was not offered in place of other concerns around risk and safety (as similarly expressed by male respondents) but rather in addition. The concern for a better life and better education often seemed to encapsulate concerns around experiences of systemic or structural discrimination against women or particular ethnic groups which had been experienced as a key site of harm or threat of harm in countries of origin. This is consistent with research which has found women’s irregular migration journeys to Australia are informed by the declining status of women and increasingly repressive social mores (Pickering and Barry, 2014). Mothers consistently spoke of wanting to travel to a place where their children could get a good education. Some women were worried that their children were not attending school while in transit in Indonesia. While male respondents also included such references, these concerns were more consistently expressed by female respondents.

Whilst some men spoke of the desire to be in a safe country, it was notable that a significant majority of the women interviewed particularly spoke of wanting to be safe after fleeing from their home country, wanting to feel safe in Indonesia and/or wanting to reach a place of safety as an ultimate destination.

Travel configuration/routes

Afghans generally took longer routes via South Asia including long transits in Pakistan and India to Malaysia, followed by a boat journey to Indonesia. Many had experienced a boat journey between Malaysia and Indonesia. Some described this as so frightening that it influenced their decision not to take another boat journey, meaning they did not want to travel by boat from Indonesia to Australia as originally planned. Iranians experienced shorter travel routes primarily by plane from Iran direct to Indonesia, transiting in Doha. Some had flown to Malaysia and taken the boat across to Indonesia (irregularly).

Map of migration pathways for Afghans and Iranians to Indonesia



All migrants had experienced periods of transit, with longer than anticipated periods of transit in Indonesia. This led to impatience with UNHCR processing time frames and considerations of making a voyage by boat, should the way to Australia open up again. Knowledge that the route by boat to Australia is currently 'closed' impacted on the decision to wait in Indonesia; to register with UNHCR in the meantime (which most people learnt of only on arrival or just prior to arrival in Indonesia); to wait until the boat routes open up again; or to wait for the outcome of UNHCR processing. Many who had used a smuggler believed that they would only be waiting in Indonesia for a matter of days or weeks.

Solo travel v group/family/couple travel

Some migrants travelled alone due to the reasons that caused them to flee their homeland alone and had no intention or plan to bring other family members. Others were travelling alone because travelling with family would be too risky and dangerous – their intention was for family to follow and reunite once the solo traveller had resettled in a safe country. Those travelling with families seemed to be more flexible, being more likely not to mind where they travelled to as long as their final destination was a safe country (see Section 4.1)

“We thought that it would be more dangerous, it would be more risky, to bring along our family members together with us so we decided to travel by – to travel alone first until we could settle in a country to get our family back to reunite with them. “
[Cisarua_Afghan_Mx3_126,127,128_TE]

5. Conclusion

The project has identified that the key features of migrant information consumption and decision making in transit for the group surveyed are that:

1. Migrants overwhelmingly rely on information from trusted family, friend and social networks and smugglers;
2. Although migrants report using information from government sources to plan migration or onward migration, particularly when answering a survey, the stories they tell in in-depth interviews of how decision making was undertaken suggest this is a much less significant source of information than family and friends;
3. Migrants make both rational and emotional decisions even after they have gathered what they believe to be reliable information about the potential risks of an onward journey;
4. A good deal of information is gathered during the journey from a country of origin and in transit rather than prior to leaving a country of origin;
5. Migrants do not have sufficient information and understanding regarding UNHCR registration and refugee status assessment processes, or resettlement processes prior to leaving a country of origin.

The rich, detailed narrative data this project collected is evidence of nuanced self-understanding of irregular migrants in transit in Indonesia. Even under conditions of high stress and day-to-day deprivation, the migrants displayed significant levels of self-reflexivity, being able to weigh up the challenges they and their family members faced in transit and in planning onward migration journeys.

From the migrant narratives taken from the interviews, smugglers were part of the extended informal networks relied upon in decision making on migrant journeys, with some smugglers being more ethical and truthful than others, depending on individual migration experiences. For many people in transit in Indonesia and living in the community rather than in detention, the vagaries of everyday life, local rules and access to resources were limited, thus making life in Indonesia difficult.

This research contributes to researchers' and policy makers' knowledge and understanding of the informal information networks migrants draw on and how they interact with official sources of information. For example, the key features in points one and two above highlight the fact that social trust figures more significantly in the decision making of irregular migrants than the more distant notion of trust in the institutions of governance that operates in democratic societies. Keeping in mind the socio-political context of Afghanistan and Iran, it is perhaps unsurprising that social trust of known intimates and social networks is more prominent than trust in official sources or networks.

Aside from the major findings of this project on the patterns of information consumption, two other key findings are notable.

First, during their interviews the migrants reported a willingness to take a 'calculated risk' in potentially dangerous onward journeys with uncertain outcomes when comparing these risks to the life of danger or the threat of death they fled from in their country of origin (See 4.1. above).

Second, it is significant that return to a country of origin did not feature at all in the narratives of the migrants interviewed, even when faced with extremely difficult circumstances in transit in Indonesia, including a life of indefinite uncertainty (See 4.3 above).

In terms of the four hypotheses to be tested outlined at the beginning of the project, the outcome is as follows:

1. That Australia is **not** a clear choice of destination for many migrants prior to the commencement of a journey and **does not** continue to be the intended destination irrespective of experiences in transit. Even though many of those interviewed did mention Australia as a potential or desired destination, many also considered or were willing to consider other options, including residence in Indonesia if they were granted more favourable rights and access to basic resources and services.
2. Storytelling practices did prove to be a primary information source and had precedence over official information campaigns. Even though official sources of information were consumed and people were aware of them, unofficial sources remain the most sought after and trusted source.
3. Transit conditions did prove to be unanticipated drivers of ongoing irregular migration, with greater relevance for some groups than the information consumed regarding perils of travel, interception or likely outcomes following arrival.
4. The research did find that as new stories circulate about harsher conditions in asylum destinations, some migrants did search for new sources of information to corroborate the stories circulating – although ultimately the original reason and risk for leaving a country of origin is talked about as being a stronger ‘driver’ than conditions in transit or in country of asylum destination.

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Appendix A: Semi-structured interview schedule

Migration to Indonesia

1. How long have you been in Indonesia?
2. Can you tell me about why you left Iran/Afghanistan?
3. What stories did people tell you about making the journey? Did you believe these stories?
4. What was the most important source of information about the journey?
5. [If the respondent has not mentioned the physical risks of the journey] Did you hear stories about the risks of making the journey? Who told you these stories and did they impact on you?
6. Did you plan to travel to Indonesia or did you have another destination in mind?

Life (in transit?) in Indonesia

7. What stories had people told you about Indonesia?
 - a. What is life like for you in Indonesia? Is it very different from what you expected?
 - b. Can you tell me about how you came to live in [town/place where you are interviewing]?
 - c. Have you lived anywhere else in Indonesia other than [town/place where you are interviewing]?
8. Have IOM or UNHCR assisted you with regional processing since you arrived? If so, what has been your experience of this process?
 - a. Has regional the regional processing process influenced your migration decision (i.e. to stay in Indonesia, leave Indonesia (return home?), onward journey)?
9. How long do you plan to stay in Indonesia?
 - a. What is your current visa status?
 - b. At the moment, do you work in [the town/place where you are interviewing] legally or not?

Onward travel

10. Are you planning an onward journey [to Australia]? Can you tell me a little about your plans?
 - a. How do you plan to travel onwards [to Australia]?
11. Can you tell me about how you have gathered information about the boat journey [to Australia]?
 - a. Has it been difficult to get trustworthy information about the boat journey?
 - b. What sort of stories have you heard about people making the boat journey to Australia? Do you think these stories are true?
 - c. Have you heard stories about people dying at sea/boats be turned around/offshore detention? If so, have they changed your thinking about your onward migration journey?
 - d. (If travelling as part of a family) How have you told these stories to other members of your family?
12. Would you make the journey again?
 - a. What would you do differently if you were making this journey again?

Alternative Journeys

13. Do you think it is possible to return home?
 - a. Have you considered returning home? Why/why not?
14. Have you considered going somewhere else? Why/ why not?
 - a. What would make you change your mind and travel elsewhere?