

SEEFAR



Refugee Integration in Europe: Life and Other Plans Among Iranian Irregular Migrants Settling in Europe

April 2019

SEEFAR

OUR VISION

is for a world in which vulnerable people have more opportunities to advance themselves.

THE PURPOSE

of our social enterprise is to work with those people to build a better future.

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Key Findings

Iranians will attempt irregular emigration in greater numbers in the coming years

More than 25% of the people we interviewed in Iran with a plan to migrate irregularly in 2014 have now succeeded in reaching the European Union. This includes people who were not even trying to reach Europe when they first spoke with us. In other words, over the last few years, a high proportion of people determined to reach Europe irregularly could do so, particularly during 2015 and 2016.

Our panel of intending and accomplished irregular migrants demonstrates that the status quo in Iran provides economic and social pressure for many people to emigrate. Over the next few years, there are only a tiny number of low-probability scenarios in which Iran experiences peaceful progress. A type of economic change that benefits would-be irregular migrants looks extremely unlikely; political change would likely increase interest in irregular migration for at least three years. Information and communications will shape how many Iranians are interested in irregular migration. Borders, visas and protection regimes in transit and destination countries will determine the proportion of them that arrive irregularly in Europe.

There will be more smuggler coaching to prove a case for protection

Many participants wish they had known how long their asylum processing would take. Many had their first application for refugee protection rejected. There is high demand for and supply of advice from smugglers to prove a case for protection. In some cases this is deceptive, but not necessarily in the majority. Instead, migrants are responding rationally to the system's demand that you stop talking about your poverty and employability; instead, you must emphasise vulnerability and persecution.

This is not obvious to people before they leave home. Our participants' reflections on the practice indicate that destination countries would benefit from more effective communication of the principles of the asylum system *and how it affects an individual*. In other words, translating and broadcasting summaries of the Refugee Convention will not work. But engagement with individuals and families before they leave Iran would reduce commitment to irregular migration among those who do not have strong grounds for protection.

Satisfaction is highest on emotional dimensions

For participants now in the European Union, the two most satisfying dimensions of living in a Western country have been the least tangible dimensions: a sense of

freedom and of safety and security. These feelings provide a lot of psychological support when participants face a thousand frustrations and disappointments in everyday life.

Integration - even after years - is running on hope

Most of our participants had been in Germany and Sweden for more than two years. Not many are in formal employment. Employment opportunities and government support are viewed quite positively, but there is a lot of frustration regarding integration. Although the physical journey to Europe is complete, participants now see a long, perhaps unending, integration journey ahead of them. It is striking how often participants answer questions about the present by describing hopes for the future. Even after arriving, hope for improvement drives their thinking more than satisfaction with the present.

Learning the local language is the hardest barrier to integration

Participants have found language-learning to be more important and a bigger barrier than they may have expected. This directly affects employment opportunities, as well as the sense of integration. People considering irregular migration and those in resettlement or transit processes do not find it easy to understand in advance just how central their language acquisition will be to future opportunities. In addressing this, a focus on increasing early motivation to learn may have a greater payoff than disseminating knowledge.

The development sector focus on “root causes” is misguided in practice

If traditional development actors get involved in the migration debate, they tend to focus rhetorically on the “root causes” of irregular migration, generally with a strong emphasis on local livelihood alternatives that a potential migrant could take up instead. This is important but impossibly long-term for the politics of migration and asylum. Over the last five years, the biggest influences on our participants’ plans have been (1) information and communications, and (2) physical barriers to irregular migration. Like most contexts of origin for irregular migrants to Europe, our participants come from a limited proportion of people who decide to leave home. If destination countries target development spending, political engagement or communications at that limited proportion of people, it can make a difference in terms of irregular migration.

Snapshot surveys in destination countries can be easily misinterpreted

We have been interviewing our participants for over four years. This method highlights how important context, psychology and time are when interpreting what people mean as they answer questions and make decisions. For example, 34 children were born to our participants in the last few years. For another example, participants tended to misremember what they told us before. If we were only surveying them now, we would draw the wrong implications about the motivations and information needs of other Iranians still at home. To take one practical implication, finding that people are “satisfied” or “happy” now does not tell us much about whether other people should attempt the journey. But listening to how people have changed their perspectives, what they have forgotten, and the wider context of their lives: these dimensions allow us to understand what someone back at home considering the trip may need to consider before departing. Irregular migration research – even more than other kinds of migration-related research – needs care when interpreting snapshot surveys, particularly when they are surveys of people in destination countries.

Fishermen in Khuzestan, the province in Iran that was home to many of our participants



Introduction

Our longitudinal study of Iranian irregular migrants is now in its fifth year - some of our participants have got married and had children who have become toddlers, all while they have been checking in with us. In one sense, their irregular migration journey has been the most important event in their lives. In another sense, it is a sideshow to life flowing ever onwards, whether we migrate or not. Irregular migration has been both more and less than our participants imagined when we began interviewing them in 2014.

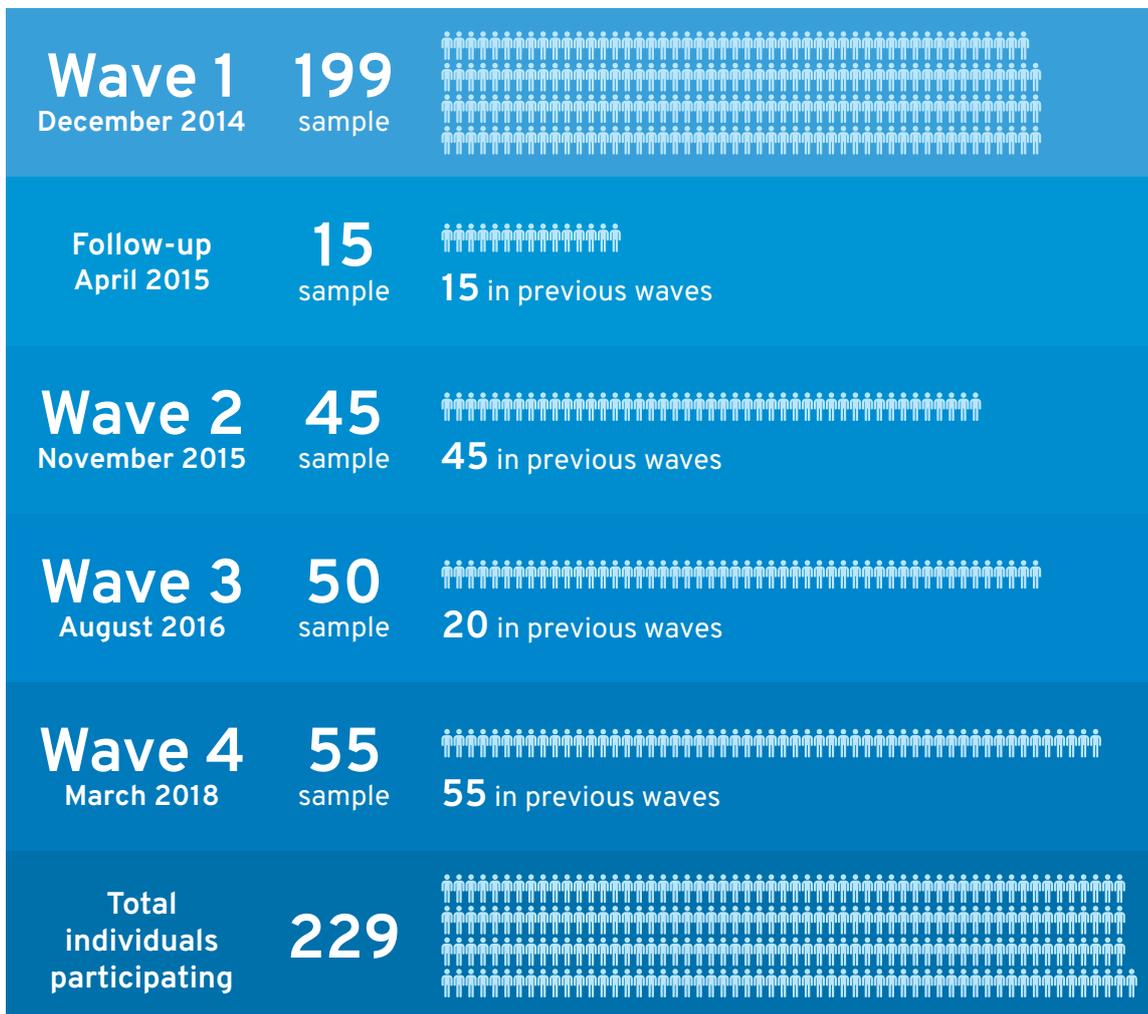
We are not aware of another initiative that has followed Iranian irregular migrants longitudinally for so many years. This report focuses on 55 individuals, all of whom we first interviewed in late 2014 and early 2015. Some have been interviewed multiple times since then, some have not. All of them were initially selected because they intended to migrate irregularly from Iran in 2014. This report provides an update on their situation based on interviews between February and July 2018. Of the 55, 54 are now in another country, 52 of them in the European Union. Throughout this report we refer to them as Wave 4.

We have previously provided a general background on Iran as a country of origin for irregular migration, so we have moved that history and analysis to Annex 1. This report is based on the four waves of data shown below:

- Wave 1: the first structured survey took place from December 2014 to February 2015, with 199 respondents. A follow-up survey in April 2015 sought more in-depth explanations from 15 of these respondents, who were selected based on their answers to the previous interview.
- Wave 2: this second structured interview took place in July–August 2015 with 45 respondents. All 45 participants also took part in Wave 1.
- Wave 3: the third structured interview took place in August 2016, with a particular interest on people in transit. 19 participants were drawn from previous waves, along with 31 new participants.
- Wave 4: a structured interview in February–April 2018 with 55 individuals, all of whom we first interviewed in Wave 1. We followed up with 8 of them to collect in-depth stories in June 2018, based on their original answers.¹

¹ The sampling approach and cohort size means the results of the study are not generalisable to the population of Iran, Khuzestan or any of the demographic groups described in the paper. Attrition between Wave 1 and Wave 2 should be noted as a methodological limitation, with Wave 4 providing new insights on some of those who went missing between Wave 1 and now. See Annex 2 for a detailed methodology.

Figure 1: Project research and reporting waves



Previous publications under this project have focused on:

- 2015: [*Iranian Refugees: An Exploration of Irregular Migration to Australia*](#) Understanding how changes to Australia’s processing of boat arrivals was impacting the intentions of Iranians who had become interested in Australia in recent years.
- 2016: [*Who Dares Wins: Understanding the decision-making of irregular migrants from Iran*](#). Exploring the motivations, intentions and expectations of panel members planning to migrate irregularly to countries in the European Union.
- 2018: [*Windows of Opportunity: Iranian irregular migration and return 2014-2016*](#). Demonstrating the dramatic impacts of changing European policies on individual plans.

This report provides an opportunity to focus on **outcomes**. We have prioritised understanding settlement outcomes, integration experiences and how individuals interpret them. In Europe, a crisis of irregular migration has become a monumental challenge of integration – for governments, communities, and for our participants.

Interviews on these topics also threw up remarkable findings on how people remember and process their migration motivations and experiences – in some cases our files suggest rather different histories to those that our participants now remember. For the researcher and reader, this may feel frustrating at times, since it seems to impede an effort to “get to the bottom of things”. But that is in fact a strength: these gaps are key pieces in the puzzle of understanding individual decision-making. The gaps also suggest caution and provide insight when interpreting single-wave research, which by its nature struggles to identify factors such as mood, malleable narratives and how the present impacts on the past – in other words, the human factors.

If you have an interest in irregular migration and integration, particularly in Europe, then the report will be useful in providing direction on:

- Integration opportunities and barriers
- Irregular migrant decision-making before departure and during the trip
- Information and support needs before departure, while traveling and on arrival
- How asylum-seekers perceive integration support and policies

To get a sense of what a longitudinal study like this can and cannot reveal, you may want to recall what you were doing in December 2014. If we had interviewed you over the years since then, what might we find about how your plans succeeded, changed or failed? On the other side of this report are 55 people sharing their personal stories. We hope you find it useful, perhaps inspiring for your own activities and, as always, we welcome your feedback on how we can improve.

Khuzestan was hit hard in the Iran-Iraq war

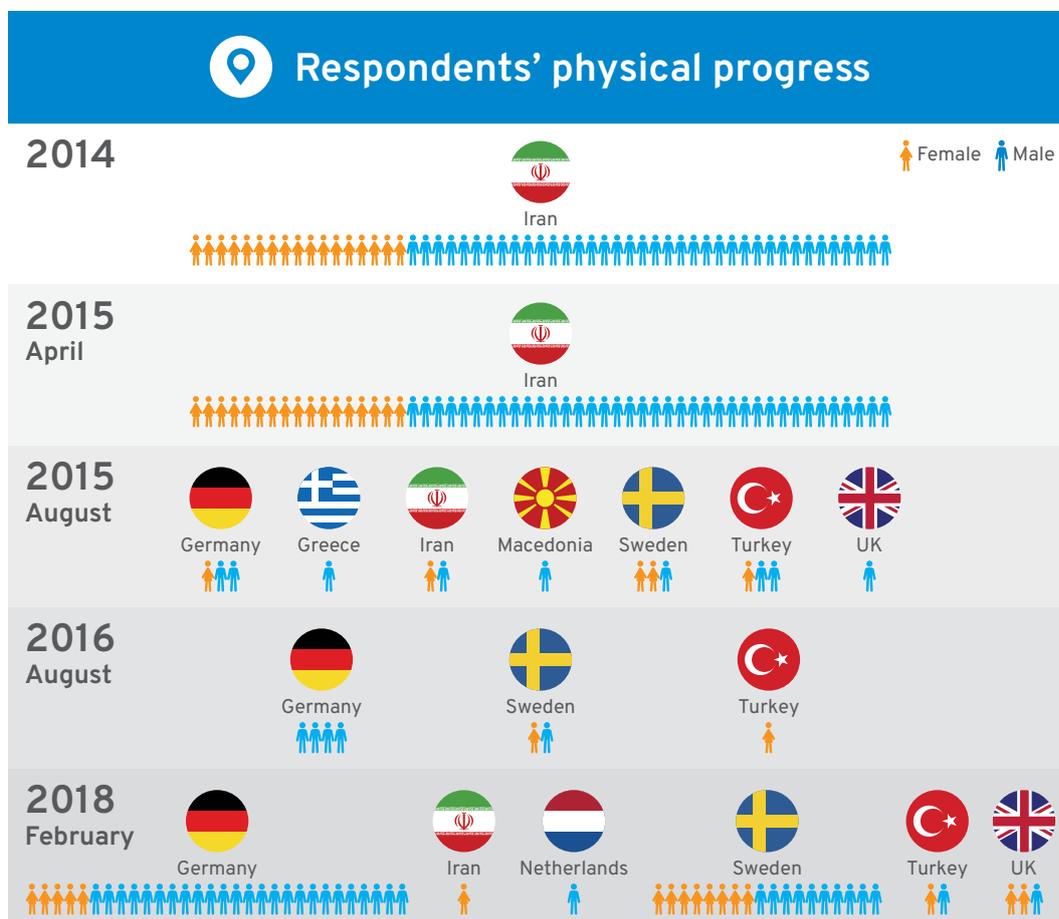


The Journey and the Destination

The majority of migrants switched destination. A quarter switched continent. Many participants do not remember correctly what their previous plans were. Our participants were committed to opportunity rather than a particular destination. The pattern of transit countries indicates gaps in official statistics. What was happening around the journey – such as 34 new children born to our participants – highlights how irregular migration is embedded in a broader framework of “ordinary” life.

During their first interviews in late 2014 and early 2015, participants’ preferred destinations ranged across North America, Western Europe and Australia. By 2016, many switched their destination preference, often to Germany. By 2018, 52 of the 55 were in Western Europe (locations shown below). Two were in Turkey, intending to continue onwards within the next 12 months. One was still in Iran – and not happy about it. Of the 52 in the European Union, only 1 was planning to continue travelling in the next 12 months – she had always intended to reach the UK and had travelled to Germany under the guidance of friends and smugglers.

Figure 2: Known locations of Wave 4 participants during previous waves of interviews



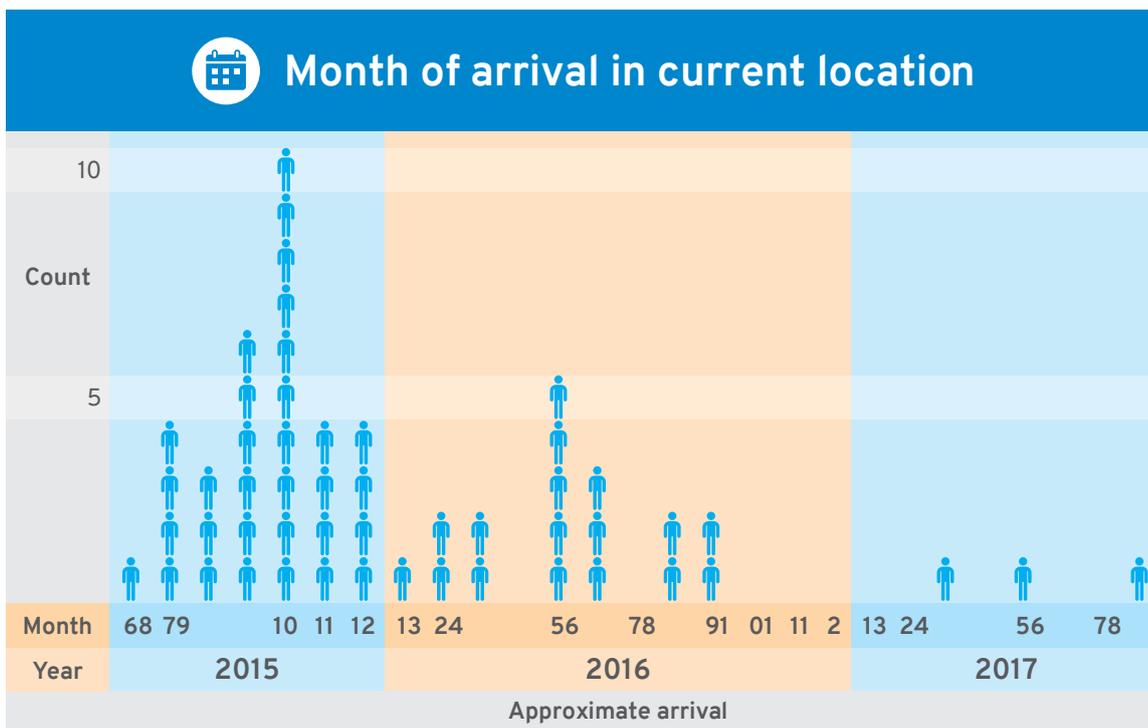
As we explored in [Windows of Opportunity](#), rapid developments in irregular migration patterns and policies in Europe from mid-2015 into 2016 had a dramatic effect on our participants’ experiences. Initially, Germany and Sweden’s openness encouraged many Iranians to evolve from considering irregular migration, then to planning, then to departure. For example, here is a married man from Bandar Imam, Khuzestan province, in December 2015:

“The surge and the arrival of many friends at final destination just gave us more reason to expedite our plans as soon as possible while the borders are still open.”

Subsequently, there was a series of announcements, border closures, logistical chaos and policy changes that participants needed to navigate, whether they were in Iran, Turkey or travelling in Europe. In previous interviews, we noted that participants tended to overestimate their control over these events. They linked poor outcomes to their own choices, in what were objectively quite unpredictable circumstances.

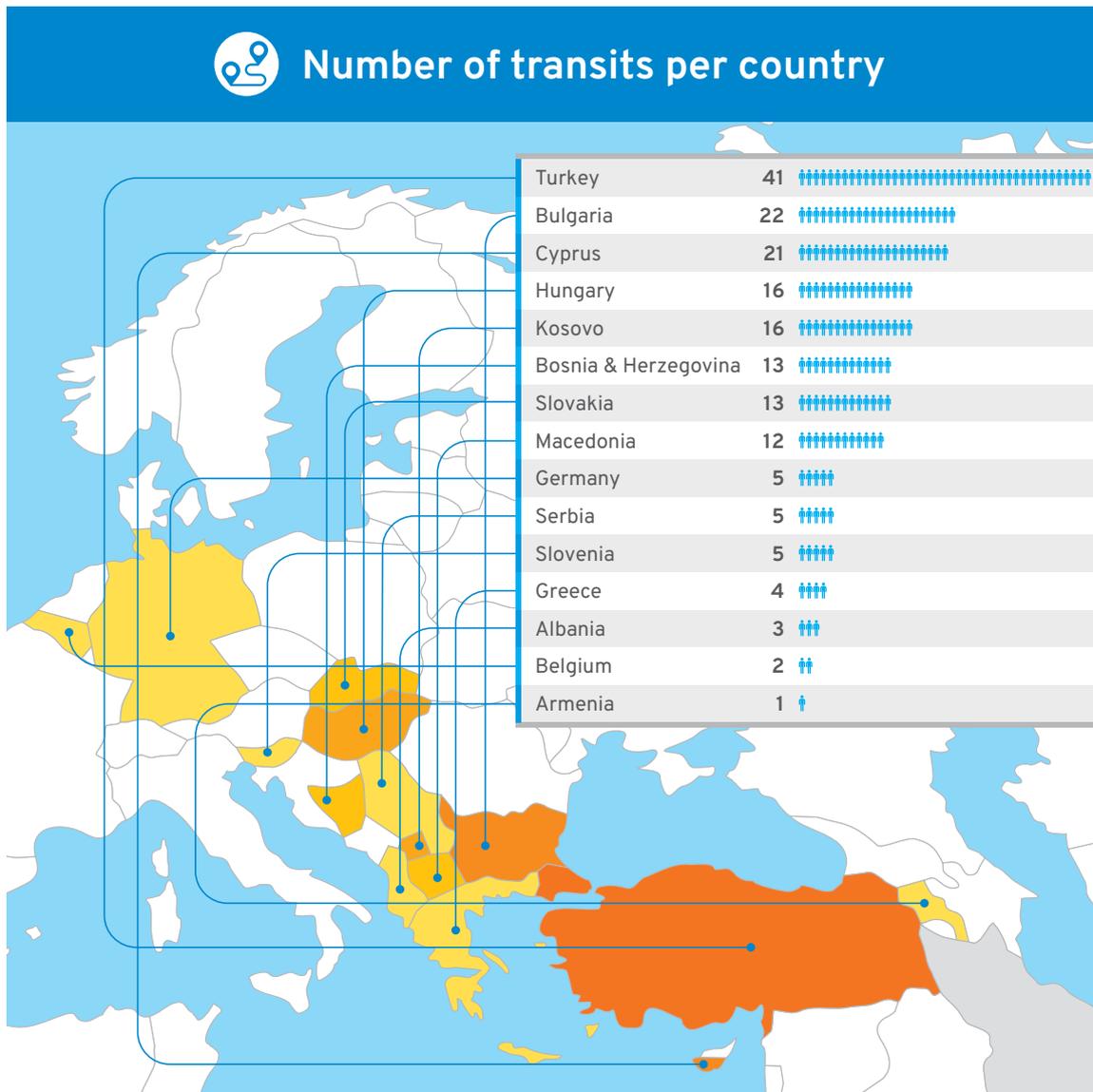
As shown in the chart below, most of the Wave 4 participants arrived in Europe in the second half of 2015 (we are excluding here the 3 participants outside of the European Union). The average time they have been in their current location is over two years.

Figure 3: Month of arrival in current location



As we listened to participants recall their journeys, we noted countries that they transited. The most frequently mentioned after Turkey were Bulgaria, Cyprus, Hungary and Kosovo.

Figure 4: Countries that participants mentioned as transits



The frequency of Cyprus is interesting. In late 2015 and through 2016, official data sources such as the International Organization for Migration were reporting small numbers of migrants and asylum seekers in Cyprus – 345 at the end of 2016, for example.² But at least 20 of our Wave 4 participants passed through there in 2015 and 2016. It is highly unlikely that we collected a sample of more than 5% of all nationalities of migrants transiting Cyprus from just our 55 Iranian participants.

² http://migration.iom.int/docs/2017_Overview_Arrivals_to_Europe.pdf

Much more likely is a big gap between official observations and transits by people who did not want or did not even think to interact with official touchpoints. In this way, direct contact with migrants helps to caveat published data sources – official monitoring of illicit activity is somewhat contradictory as an ambition, and certainly not the most useful basis for taking action.

Switching destinations

Fully 65% of Wave 4 participants changed their intended destination between 2014 and 2018. A quarter even changed their intended continent – for example, they were originally planning to travel to North America or Australia, but are now settled in Europe. The reasons for switching destinations were telling in their simplicity – feasibility and doing what peers were doing. In particular, Australia became much less open to irregular maritime arrivals. By contrast, that next-door region of Europe began receiving many more irregular migrants from lots of different countries, especially Syria and Afghanistan. Despite confusion over policies and shifting border closures, migrants continued to see Europe as a more realistic destination.

For our participants, there was little to distinguish the top destinations of Germany, Sweden and the UK. Our participants' final "choice" was often arbitrary in the sense that it was driven by smugglers and the flows of people around them. For example, a man who has applied for asylum in Germany but ultimately intends to reach the UK, explained:

"The final destination or the route to your country of refuge is all based on strict border controls at each border and also which country is most welcoming the refugees. The main goal is to reach freedom and a place where you could live freely without any discrimination or abuse by the Islamic regime."

A 23-year-old Kurdish woman with a similar history of planning has instead decided to stop reaching the UK:

"I always had an interest to migrate to an English speaking country, but illegal migration is a journey with no confirmed final destination and the journey ends with the place which refugee supporting nations choose for you as your permanent refuge."

In that quote, there is a sense of lacking agency; it is European countries that decide where you end up. Note, however, that she did not experience formal relocation – instead she is referring to informal assessments of which European

countries were accessible while she took a “hectic” journey that included Turkey, Cyprus, Kosovo and Hungary.

For those who are interested in the psychology of decision-making, it is intriguing that many Wave 4 participants do not remember or reinterpret their original plans. For example, of the 36 people who changed their intended destination,

22 (61%) said they always intended to reach this (new) destination. The simplest explanation is that they have forgotten their original plans. It is also possible that they have rewritten their personal narrative to align with their current reality – I always wanted to do this and now I’ve done it.

Based on our experience interviewing more than 50,000 people planning irregular migration, what we hear from Wave 4 participants is a little different. In 2014, compared to other prominent groups of irregular migrants, such as Afghans or Nigerians, Iranian ethnic minorities in Khuzestan had much less communal knowledge of irregular migration to Western countries. Many also experienced what they perceived to be a grinding economic downturn and acute ethnic discrimination. Combined, this made them open to a wide variety of long-term migration options. A burst of people went to Australia from 2012 to 2014. This increased general interest in migration to the West from Khuzestan, after which large numbers of Syrians arrived in Europe. Our participants were not wedded to Australia, North America or Europe – they were committed to opportunity. When they now tell us they always intended the country they have reached, they seem to be saying that they always intended this broad type of location or situation.

For example, a Kurdish man from Khoramshar, who originally intended to migrate to the Netherlands, is now in Germany. He says he always intended to reach Germany. More tellingly, he describes his achievement like this: “*We have already reached our goal and that is registration with the UN.*” Furthermore, he now mentions Australia, which did not previously feature in his list of preferences:

“We are happy with our destination but I still wish had taken the opportunity in 2012 for illegal migration to Australia, when many friends and relatives took the journey and now are living well in Australia.”

On this dimension, our experience suggests that Wave 4 participants are not representative of other nationalities or even other Iranian ethnicities. Communities under less acute pressure and with more group experience of irregular migration tend to have stronger orientations to particular destination countries and continents. It is almost certain that people interested in irregular migration from Iran will remain highly opportunistic for several more years. It is possible they

“Your destination can be changed throughout the journey and it all depends on the safety and risks at the borders of the transit countries.”

- Married asylum-seeker in Sweden, who travelled through Turkey, Macedonia, Hungary and Germany

will develop stronger country-specific orientations as their Western diasporas develop. However, in a region like Western Europe, it will be some time until people will delay a general plan to migrate for the sake of getting to a specific country.

Life's journey

Changing countries, dealing with smugglers, losing money and looking for a job have been important events for our participants. But there has been a lot more to life than that. Four years provide plenty of time for other joys and sorrows, particularly for the majority of our sample who are under the age of 30.

The most striking patterns are in family composition. Among the 52 participants in the European Union, at least 14 people formed a new long-term relationship since they left Iran, while six others have broken up. Even more profound has been the arrival of children. Fully 29 of the 52 participants (56%) have had a child since leaving Iran. For 14 of those, it was their first child. In total, 34 children have been born to our participants since 2014.

A range of other sociological and psychological research suggests that these events could impact heavily on individual perspectives, wisdom and emotions. Disentangling that from migration-related influences is beyond the scope of our research. However, it does highlight the potential benefits of deliberately framing migration-related questions in a broader context of the other events happening in people's lives. The longitudinal perspective may be useful or even critical for this, as the examples of changing self-perception and personal narrative in this report indicate.

Expectations and Reality

Most migrants take longer to depart their home country than they expect and the trip is more expensive than they planned. But our participants are generally satisfied with smuggler services, since they paid for an outcome and feel they have received it. They wish they had known how long the asylum processing bureaucracy would take and the financial and physical risks of the journey. Many wish they had been better prepared with a refugee “case” and some paid for advice on this.

Someone from Khuzestan imagining life in Western Europe has access to a wealth of diverse information but a poverty of helpful interpretation. Most of our participants would use the internet frequently and most had frequent contact with people who had travelled to western destinations. However, when we first interviewed them in late 2014, 44 out of 55 participants (80%) had not previously left Iran for a period longer than six months. Of the 11 that had, three had been in Indonesia trying to reach Australia. None of the others had ventured beyond Iran’s immediate neighbours. In other words, Wave 4 participants were reasonably well-connected but not directly cognisant of what the trip and destination would be like in its practical realities.

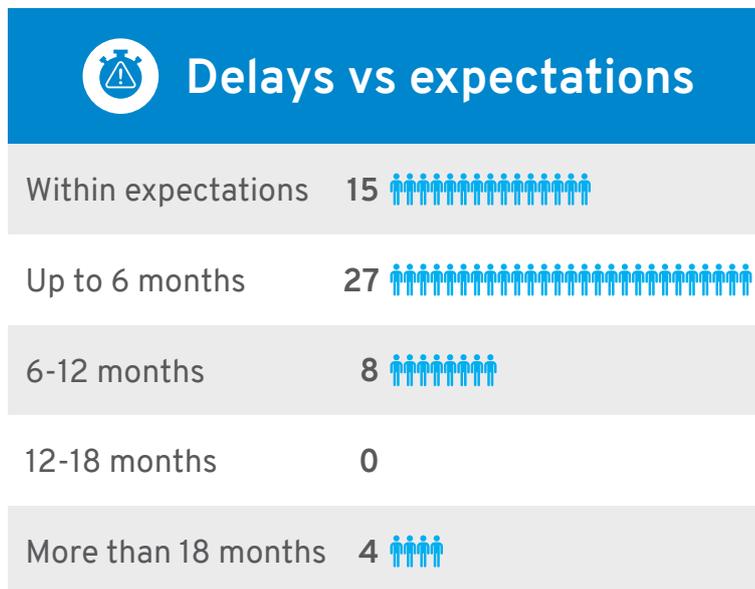
“I was never planning to migrate illegally, but unfortunately the lack of success in receiving a student visa left me no choice but to risk my life to reach my dream of completing my education.”

- 22-year-old female from Ahwaz, delayed in transit in Turkey

The first divergence between expectations and reality occurred during preparations to depart. For example, in late 2014 and early 2015, most participants expected to leave Iran within three to six months. Overall, 15 (28%) of them departed within their expected timeframe, while 40 (72%) did not; of the latter, four were delayed more than 18 months.

Psychological and practical factors interacted to delay departures. There was a common challenge of not feeling financially well-prepared enough and simply not being able to nail down a practical plan with a smuggler. On the other hand, new information and sometimes bewildering information about what was happening in Europe created hesitation. In such a situation, smugglers often have significant influence over specific departure dates, within a range of several months that is selected by the migrant pressing forward with making partial or full upfront payments.

Figure 5: Delays in participants' expected departure from Iran



After they managed to depart, the next clash between expectation and reality was the journey itself. Forty (77%) of those now in the European Union had a travel time of six months or less. Based on interviews, even six months was longer than intended for most, particularly once they confronted transit fears and challenges in Europe. For example, a man now in Sweden, who took less than three months to get there from Iran, recalled:

“We faced lots of challenges at the Serbian border and the soldiers were not respecting the human rights of asylum seekers, and also they were physically abusing the young asylum seekers. The tension also created fear and agony for my wife and children, and we seriously considered returning to Iran.”

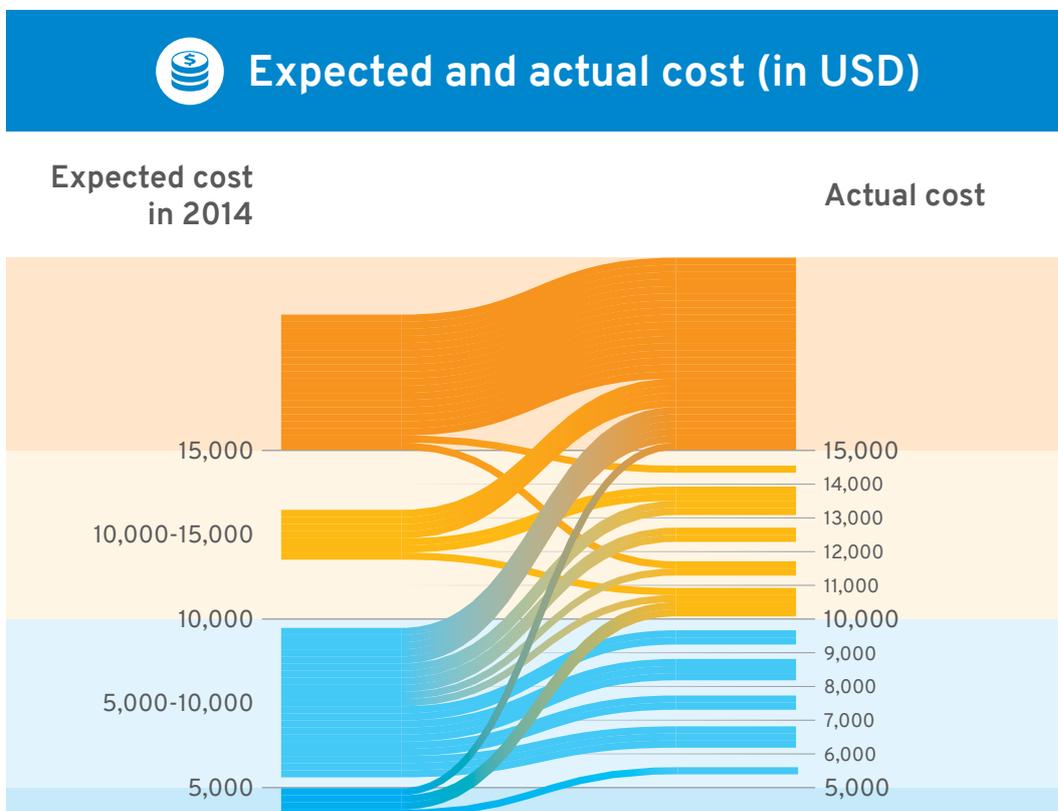
And another man from Khuzestan:

“The illegal journey was never easy and actually the first part of the journey in Turkey was the easy part of the trip, but the actual challenges were in eastern European countries, where we had to cross the borders illegally and in the middle of the night, with all sorts of life threatening risks on the way.”

Costs

The chart below shows what participants originally expected to pay and what they ended up paying for their journey. Nobody spent less than they planned. A majority of 29 spent within the range they expected, noting that 16 of these initially chose “over \$15,000”. Everyone who expected the trip to cost less than \$5,000 was financially disappointed. Among the most popular expectation of \$5,000–10,000, slightly over half found it more expensive than that in reality. Overall, we estimate that these 51 people spent a combined \$100,000 more than they expected on their journeys. For the man forced to return to Iran: “I lost all my savings in the last attempt at illegal migration and had no choice but to return and gather more money.”

Figure 6: Expected and actual cost of the journey



Slower journeys directly contributed to blown budgets. Delays in departure affected some people’s financial planning, particularly for members of minorities who lacked official identity:

“We lacked official identity to obtain travel documents in Iran and had no choice but to pay about \$7,000 extra for 2 forged passports for my family.... And my child was included in his mother’s passport for the initial departure from Iran.”

Unexpectedly long periods in Turkey seemed important to some, such as this Kurdish family man from Ahwaz reviewing his smuggler's performance:

"I wish we did not have to stay as long as we did in Turkey and it means more expenses and also the frustration of delays in our journey, which mostly was affecting my wife's health."

Satisfaction with smuggler services was generally positive, with some outliers discussed below. With a small sample of 52 people in the European Union, linear regression and other tools were not suitable for discerning statistically significant patterns among the participants. There are indications that shorter travel time and lower costs are associated with higher satisfaction towards smuggler services. More interestingly, greater satisfaction with life in the destination country appears correlated with greater satisfaction with smuggler services. In other words, participants may be interpreting their smuggler's performance more positively after the relationship is over, as long as they feel more satisfied now with how life has turned out. If there is such an influence, then it underscores that irregular migrants are not buying a journey from smugglers, they are buying an outcome. As Seefar has discussed elsewhere – and as we see every day in our communications activities – this has important implications for working with irregular migrants before they depart.³

"The biggest challenge I faced was illegal departure from Iran's airport because of the forged passport I was holding."

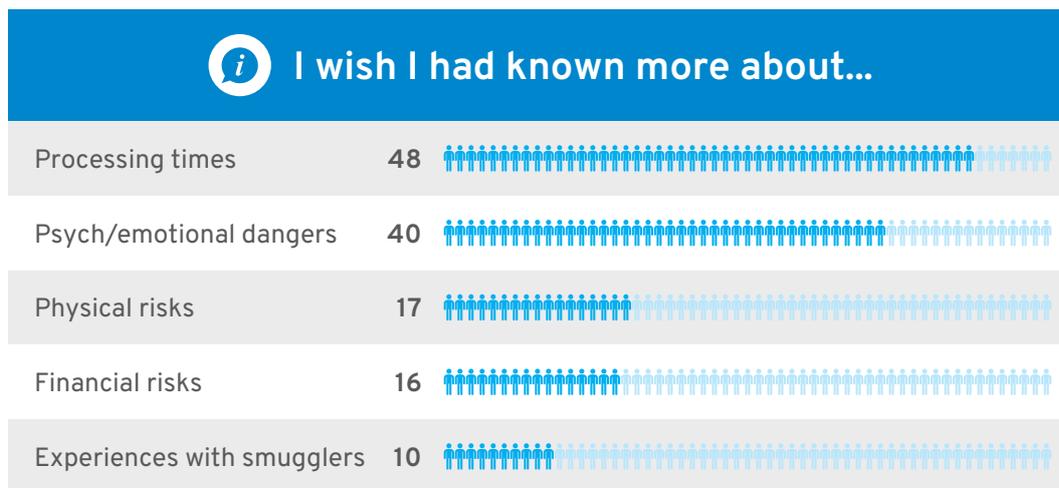
- Ethnic Arab man from Khuzestan, now in Sweden

³ Seefar, 2018, [3E Impact - Running communications on irregular migration from Kos to Kandahar](#).

If only I had known...

Given that most Wave 4 participants had not previously been outside of Iran for any significant period, their journeys to Europe involved a lot of learning. Figure 7 below shows the most popular responses when we asked participants what they wish they had known more about before departing Iran.

Figure 7: Participants' wishes for more understanding before leaving Iran



...how long the bureaucracy takes

Before departing, 48 (89%) of people wish they had known more about how long it would take for destination countries to process their asylum applications. Eleven of 52 people in the European Union have refugee protection status. Thirty-nine of 52 (75%) are still awaiting the result of their asylum application – given most of them have been in the country for more than two years, most appear to have been rejected at first application and are now taking subsequent legal steps.

Figure 8: Legal status for the 52 people in the European Union



Prior to departure, the different legal statuses and why they are granted did not mean much to participants. After being in Europe for an average of two years, the difference becomes apparent, particularly if you have not yet crossed that legal line into “proper” refugee status. For example, one man in Germany explained:

“I am currently staying with a temporary visa and unfortunately my refugee case was initially rejected and I have appealed the decision... I am working as a painter, as many refugees are forced to do some illegal jobs in order to make extra money to survive while hoping to become official refugees.”

This is not simply a practical problem, but also weighs on participants emotionally, as with this 25-year-old in Germany:

“I hope to be accepted as a refugee and to start my new life as an ordinary citizen. I suffer from total uncertainty about my refugee status.”

When we compare this wish for more information to our database of 50,000 other interviews with people preparing to migrate irregularly, we see that before departure, interest in destination country policies is moderate-strong. Often, there is stronger interest in the risks and costs of the journey. This makes sense, given that people preparing to depart are more focused on logistics. Nevertheless, it suggests another gap between what people are able to imagine is important before they depart and what they discover is important after arrival. It would be useful to help people understand in advance that there may be such delays and risks on the way to their dream of feeling settled in a Western country.

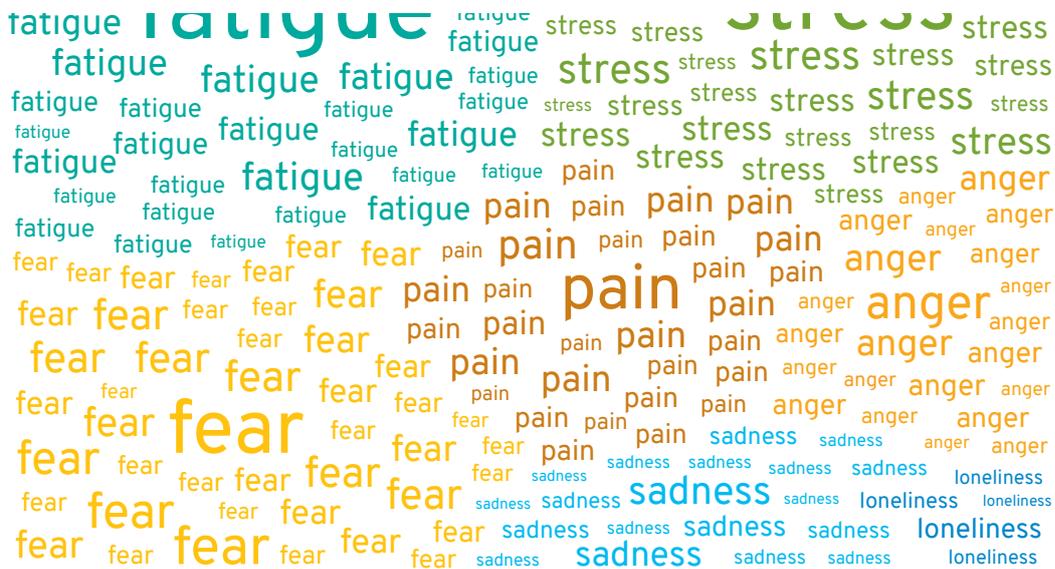
“The process was very long and to be honest there were times when I was without hope of becoming a refugee, but it all happened for the best.”

- Divorced 38-year-old woman with 3 children, now in Sweden

...the risks in the journey, including smugglers

Figure 7 above also showed that 40 people (74%) wish they had known about psychological and emotional dangers on the journey. Figure 9 below shows the negative emotions that participants experienced during their trip: big majorities reported fatigue (87%), stress (85%) and fear (83%).

Figure 9: Prevalence of negative emotions during the journey



Compared to the psychological and emotional dangers, a smaller proportion of people wish they had known more about the physical risks (31%) and financial risks (30%). Experience with physical risks is largely captured in the word cloud above – a number of people faced cold, hunger and strains in travelling through the Balkans and Eastern Europe. As one woman explained of her time preparing in Turkey:

“The time in transit was never easy and there were many challenges ahead of us, also during the time of our stay in Turkey. We had no choice but to continue despite all the risks and the unfortunate news we were hearing of the trauma and life threatening incidents during the way. We had no choice but to trust the service provider and hope to start our journey as soon as possible.”

Financial risks arise especially as a result of smuggler duplicity and particularly affect migrants who are misinformed about how long the trip may take. As described earlier, financial problems hit a number of participants – we estimate that they spent an average of over \$2,000 more than they expected. They generally perceived these problems as the result of delays they did not foresee, requiring them to spend money on subsisting during transit. For example, one woman now

in Germany, who travelled through Turkey, Cyprus, Kosovo and Hungary, went into greater debt than she expected:

“...you are mostly depending on the private charities and also your family in Iran to support you. I also had to borrow lots of money from friends living in the community, which I have to return in the future.”

Financial calamity was also reported by the participant forced back to Iran. In January 2015, she was expecting to spend more than \$15,000 and intended to reach the UK, motivated firstly by the fact that her family had left and she wanted to join them. She had already paid a smuggler to help her, but in the event: *“I lost all my savings in the last attempts for the illegal migration and had no choice but to return and gather more money.”* What will she do now? *“I pray to be successful in my next journey and also to see a better future for my children.”* She intends to try again and is focused on Germany.

Given the unexpected financial problems, the various risks and the psychological/emotional dangers that participants experienced, it might be expected that there are mixed reviews of smuggler services. Only a minority (19%) wished they had known more about experiences with smugglers before departure. This correlates with high ratings of smuggler services: 50% of participants were “more or less satisfied” and a further 37% were “very satisfied”.

The single participant who was “very dissatisfied” reported a terrible experience:

“We got cheated by the transit smuggler in Turkey and were forced to work for few months to gather the money for our journey.”

In a comment that provides some insight into relationships among his smuggling network, he also explained that the smuggler in Iran was not willing to repay the amount lost to the smuggler’s “agent” in Turkey. This was enough to make him consider returning to Iran, but he eventually saved up enough to pay for another journey and made it to Sweden with his partner and children in mid-2016.

However, when assessing satisfaction with smugglers, it is important to note the selection bias: participants tend to talk about “their” smuggler – the last one that helped them. In other words, unless pressed they will not raise other smugglers who duped them, or who they found untrustworthy. For example, here is a man who declared he was “more or less satisfied” with the smuggler:

“We were cheated twice by the service providers in Turkey, and therefore I had to work as a laborer for a few months in order to pay the third service provider.”

And if you were migrating again, would you do anything differently?

“I would inquire more about the service provider and never pay the full amount prior to arrival at the destination.”

These layers of perception and meaning when discussing smugglers show how important it can be to go beyond discussions of “the smuggler” if you wish to understand relationships between smugglers and their customers.

Even on the basic dimension of price – something you might expect to be a key feature of satisfaction with a service provider – some participants were forgiving:

“He delivered on his promises such as accommodation in the transit countries and also on arriving safely in to EU countries. During the journey the price of migration rose unexpectedly and it was not his fault.”

For the majority who were satisfied or very satisfied, an important point is that almost all of them have made it to a place they consider satisfactory, so it may be expected that they are positive towards the people who helped them travel there. When we interviewed our participants in transit in 2015 and 2016, there was generally a much higher sense of anxiety and uncertainty, including in relation to what smugglers had told them. For example, a man who paid more than \$15,000 to travel with his wife and two children told us in December 2016, after recently arriving in Germany:

“The journey was much tougher than we expected and than we had been told by the smugglers. And many times during the journey we all considered the return home instead of risking our lives on the road.”

However, by mid-2018, he reported satisfaction with the smuggler. His reasons included:

“He has assisted us and many of our family and friends to make a safe arrival and also introduced us to an adviser on our refugee case.”

The compilation of travel histories and assessments of smuggler services helps to highlight the way in which smugglers manage risks. Almost all Iranians migrating irregularly to Europe appear to transit Turkey. Even if they pay a smuggler to help

leave Iran, most of them still end up paying subsistence costs in Turkey. Smugglers have a lot of power in choosing when the migrant can move onwards, but in almost every case it is the customer who bears the cost of delay. In other words, the smuggling network dumps the risks of logistical challenges on the migrant, as can be heard from this woman in Turkey, trying to reach Sweden:

“I never expected such a challenge of uncertainty on when to continue my journey.”

“...at this point I would not encourage anyone to take this journey, and please do not depart Iran until you are sure that the [EU member state] borders are open to Iranians.”

“If the journey is delayed for an uncertain period, it will leave me no choice but to return to Iran.”

As we have found in migrant decision-making and migrant smuggling markets around the world, participants are not buying travel services – they are buying an outcome. Not a boat, but freedom. Not a plane, but prosperity. When a smuggler delays a migrant and delays them again in Turkey, the migrant gets worried, more vulnerable and poorer. But protection from worry, vulnerability and poverty is not what they are expecting from the smuggler. If they eventually reach a country in Europe and can stay there, it is mission accomplished.

...and the importance of having a case

In the next section, we focus specifically on integration and the satisfaction that participants have with their current jobs, life and legal situation. Here, we explore the appearance of a small but critical feature in the settlement process. When we were analysing relationships between satisfaction and issues such as legal status or their date of arrival in the country, we noticed a pattern that has already appeared in a few quotes above: the importance to participants of having or developing a strong enough “case” to receive refugee protection. In preparing to battle the protection bureaucracy, our panel appears to include a wide spectrum of approaches, from zero advice to extensive case “coaching” and preparation. Getting across a border is one service; figuring out how to stay is another.

“I submitted a strong application with great supporting documents to prove my case, but many are here with no strong case or any supporting information, and mostly they are known as economic migrants looking for a better job or opportunities outside their country or homeland.”

- 29-year-old female asylum-seeker, divorced, in the UK for the last three years

When making decisions before leaving Iran, a small number of people considered the challenge of obtaining refugee protection or other legal permanent settlement. Here is a woman who now has “full refugee status” in the UK:

“I believe many think arriving at the destination is the final stage of the journey and there is no chance of rejection and that is the greatest mistake many are making. I was aware of the case requirement prior to my departure – with information from my family abroad – and prepared a valid and strong case.”

However, for most people, the simple presence of friends and family in destination countries was generally enough to create an actionable sense of confidence that settlement would be possible. So they did not reflect on or invest much in justifying their claim to refugee protection. Again, it is the outcome that is interesting to the potential migrant – it takes a lot more effort for someone to analyse the process and how broad categories of risk may apply to them. Then, as soon as our participants interacted with the diaspora and bureaucracy in their new country, they began to understand that there are devils in the details of destination decisions. For example:

“The process is never easy and it is very time consuming, especially for asylum seekers like myself who do not have proper reasons to become refugees. Only the lack of channels to migrate legally forced me to apply for refugee status, instead of a student visa as I had initially hoped for. I am aware that all asylum seekers face a serious challenge with the process and also the growing number of asylum seekers from all different countries is making the process much more difficult and very time consuming.”

The observation that more people in the system is making it more difficult has been widespread since our interviews in 2016.⁴ Participants – such as this man in Germany – have a nuanced interest in asylum laws that most local citizens probably lack:

⁴ See [Windows of Opportunity](#).

“I am currently staying with a temporary visa and unfortunately my refugee case was initially rejected, and I have appealed the decision. I do not have the requirements to be a refugee and the main reason that I left Iran was economical, and for reasons of seeking freedom, which I was deprived of while living in Iran... The process is always long and the claim of many false refugee cases is forcing the Western governments to implement more restrictions and tougher laws for the refugee to be accepted as an official refugee... I currently have subsidiary status, which only allows me to work and receive minimum government assistance, and also some assistance from the refugee protection organizations, who help us with food and clothing.”

It is important to note that case “coaching” is not necessarily deceptive or manipulative. For most of our participants, the advice focuses on learning to express their situation or feelings in Iran in ways that asylum bureaucrats understand. In particular, the system demands persecution and vulnerability in order to provide protection, so that is what people learn to emphasise.

For example, Daniel is a man who spent time in prison in 2014 for participating in protests in Iran. This spurred a commitment to irregular migration. His history justified a search for protection but he still mentioned economic drivers as important. By late 2015, he was in Sweden and in his interviews in 2018, economic motivations in his history in Iran were absent from the conversation. When talking about his legal status, the new emphasis on persecution is clear: *“I gladly was able to provide all the supporting documents to prove my arrests and torture under the current regime in Iran, which helped the processing of my refugee case.”* Our conversations suggested his personal narrative had subtly shifted to attach less importance to economic drivers. In Daniel’s case this is not deceptive, but it does indicate how knowledge of the asylum system changes how people describe their histories and motivations.

For people who lack direct experience of arrest and torture, the learning curve – and changes in presentation – can be even more striking. In our experience, it is common to find capable people of moderate success in Iran who want to start a new life of moderate success in a Western country. Before they receive guidance on the asylum system, they approach it as a kind of job recruitment process, since they reasonably believe the destination country is selecting the people best able to contribute. They come ready to emphasise their skills, experience and employability, but then learn that the asylum system focuses on vulnerabilities, traumas and needs. So they throw out the CV and suit, in order to explain that the pressures on them in Iran at least met the standards required for subsidiary protection.

Elham, a woman who left Iran in late 2015, provides a fuller illustration of how people prepare – or do not prepare – their case for protection. In early 2015, she wanted to leave Iran for economic reasons and to join family and friends: *“We are fed up with the current economic challenges and women are deprived of their rights under the Islamic fanatic regime.”* Until she arrived in Sweden, she was very focused on logistics:

January 2015: *“The cost has become very expensive and you must find a reliable service provider in order to reach your destination.”*

December 2015, in Turkey: *“...so far he has only provided me with the accommodation in Turkey, and I hope he can assist us with a safe boat for the journey to Greece... He will assist me all the way to the destination, and I am paying him more money to make sure I’ll receive the best assistance possible.”*

She arrived in Sweden in mid-2016. She still had a positive sense of having prepared the logistics of her journey well: *“I made lots of inquiries prior to departure and discussed the plan with many who had already migrated illegally out of Iran. There are not many options and the most important thing is to find the right service provider.”* (February 2018)

But she also noted the importance of engaging effectively with the asylum process: *“I had no idea about preparing an ideal refugee case to support our refugee application. The assistance of others during those months surely was a savior in preparing a proper refugee application to be accepted.”* (June 2018)

For those who care about an effective protection system, the implications of case coaching are unsettling. On the one hand, it is inevitable that advisory services will spring up to help people jump through a complex bureaucratic obstacle course. In a lot of countries, governments or charities already fund legal or quasi-legal advice on obtaining refugee status. Less official services from smugglers or others feel more accessible to many migrants. They perceive those services as more likely to focus on what they need in order to get the outcome they want: they are not buying advice on an application for refugee protection (process); they are purchasing the certainty that they will be allowed to settle forever (outcome).

On the other hand, coaching can clearly go over the line of honesty. Furthermore, the rewards to dishonesty are growing. It is not clear that the current system of destination country bureaucrats and judges relying on statements and “country information” is robust enough to deal with this. Worse, it is the most

“I had no idea about preparing an ideal refugee case to support our refugee application. The assistance of others during this time definitely saved me in preparing a proper refugee application to be accepted by the UNHCR.”

- Female refugee in Sweden, who paid more than \$15,000 for assistance in resettlement

vulnerable people who are likely to feel the negative impacts of administrative burden and host-country suspicion.

Initially, officials in a destination country may believe it is positive that most intending irregular migrants are not considering the bureaucratic challenges of settlement before they depart. In principle, this should mean that the decision of whether to depart or not does not include gamesman-like preparation of genuine or fabricated evidence for their case. However, there is a clear cost to potential migrants' vagueness about the grounds for protection – many are departing with misplaced assumptions.

It would be better for the system and better for them if they would understand levels of uncertainty that apply to their claim for permanent settlement. Games-playing and dishonesty would continue, but potential migrants would face more pressure to work through the moral and practical burdens of these before departure, or abandon their plan.⁵ In any case, such knowledge is spreading. Smugglers are offering to manipulate it. So destination countries will need to compete with this or face further erosion of asylum system effectiveness and public trust.

⁵ As we have written elsewhere, even in communities whose members have a strong tradition of receiving refugee protection, there is a very low understanding of what that means from the destination country's point of view, including the grounds for receiving protection. So information and awareness-raising campaigns cannot simply broadcast a UNHCR-style explanation of international refugee law. Most people will not understand it. Instead, this aspect of irregular migration planning would need to be packaged into other, more personal engagements.

Integration and its Discontents

The 52 participants in Europe generally feel that life in the destination country has met their expectations so far. Emotional dimensions are most appreciated; tangible benefits such as employment and government support the least. Even after years in the destination country, there is a strong focus on a more hopeful future, expressed through career expectations and through children. A lack of language skills is the most commonly and strongly observed barrier to progress.

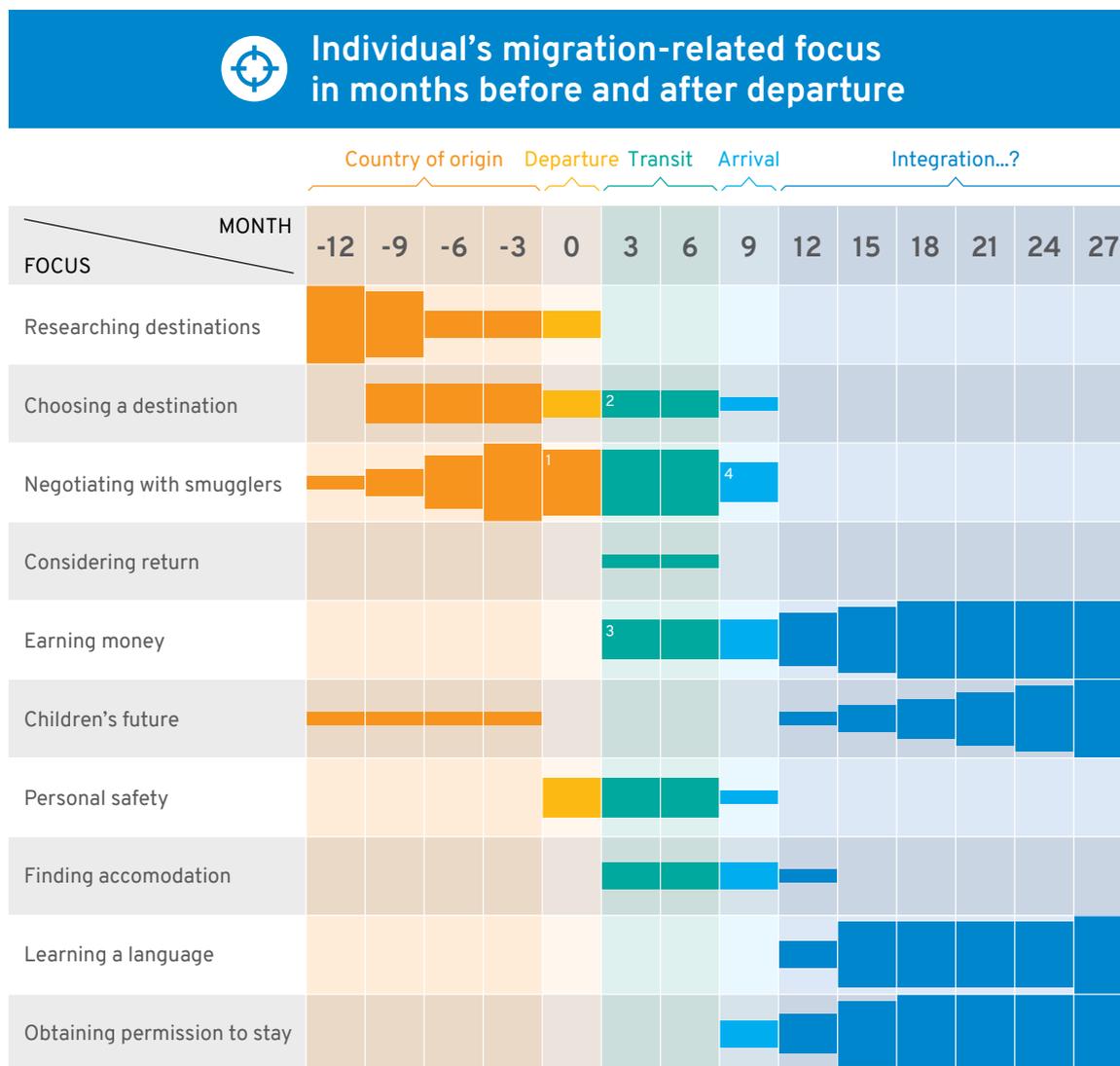
Figure 10 combines our participants' stories into a montage to highlight key streams and sequences. In particular, it highlights how the focus of attention for an individual shifts. There are only so many problems or opportunities that a migrant can prioritise; moreover, they will struggle to pay attention to issues that they do not understand will be important in the future.

The voluminous literature on integration adds up to a broad framework for assessing whether someone born overseas is leading a good life in their new home. For our participants, integration is a feeling. That feeling is both a cause and symptom of the practical steps they take and the barriers they experience. For the majority of participants who have been in a Western country for more than two years, general satisfaction is high. Specific problems are language and social interaction. And, as mentioned earlier, many feel they have not yet left the purgatory of lacking full refugee status.

Figure 11 uses a satisfaction scale from -2 to +2 and it shows a high level of satisfaction on most dimensions for the 52 people in the European Union. We calculate this by asking participants the extent to which their current situation meets the expectations they had. We would suggest keeping in mind the anchor for this scale: participants have many immediate anxieties but a broad sense of having achieved something life-changingly positive, as this 29-year-old in Germany explains: *"I have reached my lifetime goal to migrate and the chances of success here are much greater than Iran."*

Reporting on expectations and satisfaction is most useful when compared with the qualitative nuance of how the emotions of integration evolve and how they compare to the perspective of the same person four years ago. For example: what does it mean for a stateless person to report dissatisfaction with government support in Sweden? Or: why does a man previously employed in Iran, who said he had economic ambitions for migrating, now say he is highly satisfied with his employment situation in Germany, even though he is unemployed? If you are trying to improve community cohesion in the Netherlands, disrupt smuggling networks in Turkey, or reduce interest in irregular migration from countries of origin, broad surveys of attitudes and perceptions will mislead you regarding opportunities and dangers in migrants' social and psychological experiences.

Figure 10: A composite sketch of our participants' integration experiences



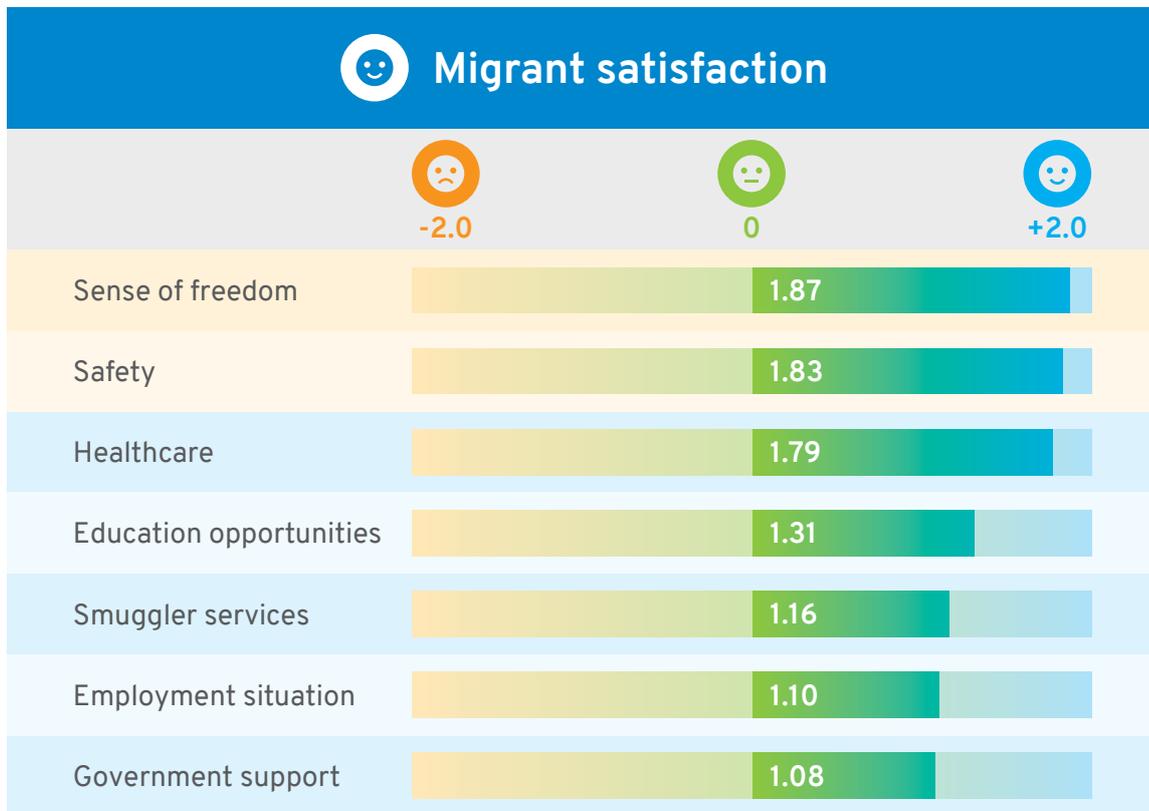
¹ Focus more on logistics

² Less info and power to choose in transit

³ Several participants worked en route to pay for accommodations and next steps

⁴ Getting advice on refugee application

Figure 11: Reported satisfaction of 52 participants in the European Union



Satisfaction is highest on emotional dimensions

The two most satisfying dimensions of living in a Western country have been the least tangible dimensions: a sense of freedom and of safety and security. About half our participants mentioned a sense of lacking safety when we interviewed them before they left Iran, although there were only two cases in which there was a direct report of physical danger. However, many migrants feel insecure in transit. It is possible that participants are comparing their transit experience to the feeling they now have in a more settled phase, but it seems more likely they are feeling a generalised sense of physical and emotional security that they believe is greater than what they had in Iran – or at least meets their expectations for how life should feel in a destination country. For a strong endorsement of freedom and a gendered perspective on the difference, here is a woman now training to be a dental assistant in the UK:

“I feel very happy and respected as a human being, and no one treats me with disrespect because I am a divorced Iraqi woman, as I was being treated in Iran.”

This sense of freedom, safety and security provides a lot of psychological support when participants face a thousand frustrations and disappointments in everyday life. For example, this is a university-educated, unemployed woman who had been in Germany for more than two years when she said:

“I am happy to have reached the destination and illegal migration is never easy but we have reached our goal of arriving safely and living with more hope for the future. The people in Iran are living a hopeless life...”

Similarly, here is a 30 year-old man who had been in Sweden for more than two years:

“We are living a happy life, with lots of goals for the future of our family, and it all depends on our determination to reach our goals. There is hope for everyone to live freely without the restrictions of the Islamic government.”

In other words, even after two years in the country and with many practical problems of progress in their lives, hope for the future is still a central feature of perspectives on integration.

Attitudes to government support

Among our participants, the least satisfying dimensions of the experience so far have been government support and employment. Forty-eight participants (92%) in the European Union report government support as a main source of income.⁶ As we have reported since 2014, expectations of destination government support were high. People in their countries of origin and considering irregular migration often have a broad guess and a detailed list of types of support they understand a destination country will provide to people like them. The details are generally filtered from semi-random information that an individual absorbs from friends, family and the internet. For example, there may be overly-specific expectations of particular kinds of housing or healthcare.

These details may or may not be right. If you are trying to prepare someone better for a dangerous trip or dissuade them from going, it can be useful to start a conversation about the details.⁷ These conversations can be a way to help someone

⁶ As described further below, 33 people mention informal employment and four people formal employment as a source of income.

⁷ Seefar, 2018, [3E Impact - Running communications on irregular migration from Kos to Kandahar](#).

check how well-informed they are, to seek new information and to consider how they have developed a broad sense of positivity without knowing much about reality.

However, the details of what they previously believed are largely irrelevant to someone once they have arrived. In terms of satisfaction, what matters is whether they got the broad guess roughly correct. On that benchmark, it seems our participants tended to be correct, but bordering on disappointment. For example, a married man in Germany was generally very positive on the choice to migrate and the sense of freedom, but he contrasted this with frustrations of not being able to progress because of what he saw as bureaucratic barriers related to his identity:

“We are tired of living in total uncertainty all our lives as a Kurdish minority and the nightmare still continues while trying to receive our refugee status and obtain full identity... The government will support us with a financial grant to start our own business but of course it would require an official certification to be eligible for the financial assistance.”

It is common to hear a mixture of broad gratitude and basic grievance when discussing dimensions of government support. Many asylum-seekers and refugees are thankful for the opportunity to settle but disappointed by low income, or a low standard of housing. Six of the 52 participants in the European Union reported charities as a main source of income, compared with four who reported formal employment as a main source of income. Reliance on charity, informal employment and government support leaves participants under financial pressure. Many of them felt financial pressure before leaving Iran, but in most cases assumed that the destination country would alleviate the feeling. Some of this disappointment is directed at “government support”, but for most people it is directed at the barriers to better employment.

(Dis)satisfaction with employment

For the 52 participants in the European Union, the biggest changes in employment since living in Iran have been from unemployment to employment and towards informal employment. Many people who said they were not looking for work in Iran now report being self-employed, at least part-time. Only one person in Europe says they are not looking for work. Twelve participants say they are unable to work, compared to 15 who said that when they were unable to work in Iran. Of the 37 people who report

“I am working as a painter as many refugees are forced to do some illegal cash jobs in order to make extra money to survive while hoping to become official refugees.”

- Unmarried male asylum-seeker in Germany, originally from Abadan

being employed, 33 (80%) are in informal employment and four report formal employment.

Participants experience strong legal and practical barriers to formal employment. For starters, many are aware that they are working illegally and feel forced to do so because they believe their asylum-seeker status gives them no other option. For example, this man was “*prepared to submit a strong refugee case based on my political activities*”, but nevertheless he explained:

“The process is very long and it may take years to receive your final refugee status, during which time you are still receiving some assistance by the government in order to survive. And you also have the option to work unofficially for cash to make extra money.”

Or this man in his late 20s in Germany:

“I am working as a painter, as many refugees are forced to do illegal cash jobs to make extra money to survive, while hoping to become official refugees.”

This woman in the UK links financial pressure to the number of asylum-seekers and refugees in the system:

“Due to the very high number of refugees, the support of the government is very limited during the process, and it forces many to work or do an illegal job for some extra money to support their families.”

On income sufficiency, our group of participants is largely split between people who feel their income is sufficient for survival only, and those who feel that it is also sufficient for the life they expected to live. Even for the latter, there is a lot of remaining ambition for improvements to income and career. Indeed, when participants were asked about their hopes for the future, a change in employment was the most common topic, alongside dreams for their children. Some of these hopes are shown below in Figure 12.

Figure 12: Sample of employment-related hopes for the future



I speak, therefore I can

Common sense and other integration research have underlined how important it is for refugees to learn the destination country language. The practicalities of getting a job and navigating government administration are obvious. In turn, their ease or otherwise affects the psychology of settling in. Our participants agreed: language was commonly identified as a barrier to integration.⁸ This appeared to be another example of something that was abstractly understood before departure without full appreciation for its very personal impacts when trying to settle.

When they first arrive, a sizeable minority identify a lack of language as a main reason why destination countries must support them financially and with shelter, such as this woman we interviewed in Germany in November 2015: *“I think they must assist us until we become familiar with the language and culture, in order to be independent and search for a job”*.

Similarly, a woman discussing her arrival in France in November 2015 believed:

⁸ As discussed earlier, bureaucratic and practical barriers to employment were more common topics of conversation.

“The French government has been very cooperative and assisted us in the best way possible, and in many ways has been more helpful than many of the other European governments in processing refugees from Middle Eastern countries... As part of their commitment to refugees they must assist us during our resettlement period to adjust ourselves to the culture, language and job market in France.”

When discussing the future, thinking about their employment ambitions and more generally a sense of progress, several participants highlight the need to improve their language skills:

“I am glad we have arrived safely. I hope to become a permanent resident and to be able to find a permanent job in the next couple of years, also by improving my language.”

A mother in Germany contrasted her challenge with that of her children:

“The language is the most difficult challenge we are facing, considering my age, but my children have been able to learn the language and enjoy living in the community with different people from different nations and religions.”

A tertiary-educated woman who originally wanted to reach the UK, but now found herself in Germany, put it simply: *“The language is always the main challenge for all refugees”*.

A number of participants are likely to experience a different problem in relation to language, namely that they are focused on reaching an English-speaking country. In our sample, three people emphasised that they will settle in Germany or Sweden, but ultimately intend to move to the UK or North America when bureaucracy allows them. Integration seems likely to be even more challenging for participants who feel less of a reason to learn the local language. For example, this woman in Sweden explained her plan:

“I hope to be able to receive my EU residency in order to travel permanently to the USA, where my husband and I have our strongest connections and anyway our preference is to live in an English speaking nation.”

Language, family and fate have left one man feeling settled but still in transition. In 2015, he was focused on migrating to the UK, Canada or Australia – he explained his most important motivations for leaving Iran as finding a job and joining family and friends. Within six months he was in Germany, having travelled through Turkey, Serbia, Bulgaria and Hungary. In February 2018 he planned to continue to the UK within a year:

“I am so glad we left Iran, and the goals we have set for the next five years are to receive my technical certification as an electrician and also for my wife to continue her nursing school. The life we have established so far with my wife and our child would never have been possible if we had stayed in Iran.”

- Ethnic Lor male who was intent on reaching Australia, now in Germany

“I wish I had the money or connections to migrate legally or pay for the forged visa to travel directly to the UK... where all my friends and family are residing, and so I can continue my education in an English-speaking community.”

In June 2018, he had not made much progress and was emphasising instead that the reason he was staying in Germany was due to the priority of finding somewhere without discrimination or abuse.

We will not repeat here the libraries of policy papers and academic articles presenting options to accelerate language learning and the trade-offs in doing so. We note, however, the relatively unexplored point that people considering irregular migration and those in resettlement or transit processes do not find it easy to understand in advance just how central their language acquisition will be to their future opportunities. In addressing this, a focus on increasing motivation rather than disseminating knowledge may have a greater payoff. For example, experiment with remote tutoring from someone who has lived through integration. Or, turn bilingual information and language learning apps into challenging games that generate energy and engagement.

“I have very few family members living close to my place and unfortunately there is not much time to socialise while dealing with different challenges such as work or learning the languages.”

- 29-year-old male asylum-seeker who travelled through Turkey, Serbia, Bulgaria and Hungary to reach Germany

“I have also many opportunities to work and have my income without relying on anyone for financial support. The only challenge has been the language.”

- Female asylum-seeker with tertiary degree in the UK

An additional dimension arises from the ties of history and language. Those participants who showed a strong preference for English-speaking countries

appear to have developed this because of family connections and cultural exposure to these countries. It is likely that the UK and Ireland will remain desirable destinations for Iranians who feel an ambition to be anywhere that uses the English language. The mix of historical connections and linguistic affinity has a similar result for France and West Africa. One implication is that different European countries have different geographical priorities when investing in stabilisation, legal migration options, or communications in relation to irregular migration.

“I was always hoping to settle down in an English speaking country after becoming a refugee, but unfortunately Brexit has reduced my hope of settling in Britain.”

- Ethnic Arabic female in transit to Europe, speaking in June 2018

The role of children

Alongside employment ambitions, the most common topic for participants discussing the future was a diffuse hope for their children. This was overwhelmingly in positive terms, such as:

“I am glad to have started my new life with my husband in Sweden and the future for our children in Europe is much brighter than in any country in the Middle East.”

“The life we have established so far with my wife and our child would never have been possible if we had stayed in Iran.”

“I hope to see my children receive a proper education and to establish their lives in Germany, to become a decent citizens of Europe.”

“I am so happy to have reached Sweden for the better future of my children. They no longer have to live through all the conflicts and economic challenges...”

A small number of participants also registered anxiety about their children, specifically that they worried about the religious or cultural context. For example,

a male asylum-seeker in Germany, while happy to have achieved his “goal” and who back in 2015 told us he wanted to leave Iran to have more freedom and respect as an ethnic minority, now worries:

“Raising our children is going to be more difficult because of the open environment, which allows our children to do many things that we may not approve of because of our cultural or religious beliefs.”

Another man in Germany, who expressed similarly positive sentiments overall, is also concerned:

“The culture is also a big challenge, especially for families with teenage children who are living in a totally different community than Iran.”

For these participants, there may be a contradiction - or at least tension - between the stated drive for Western freedom and the discovery that this style of freedom comes with other risks.

By contrast, a woman in Sweden took the link between culture and children more as a question of her family’s integration:

“I have no fear related to cultural identity and I am sure with the proper teaching of my children at home and in the community, they can adapt to the new ways and become valuable citizens, and to respect all people living in the community. Also, the opportunities for my children in this country are vast and everyone can make their own choices based on their own interest.”

Interestingly, for people discussing the future *before* they migrate, it is much less common to emphasise children. In other research involving tens of thousands of interviews, we have found that marriage impacts on urgency of departure for irregular migrants more clearly than having children. Alongside the long-term motivation of securing a different future for their children, parents are equally likely to mention that there are additional costs, travel risks and logistical burdens of travelling with a family.

“I will always keep my identity and pride in who I am, but will learn to integrate in the community in order to live a safe and comfortable life.”

- 23-year-old female Feili Kurd in Germany for the last three years

Reaching decisive psychological conclusions on the role of children is difficult from the topics and style of conversation in our interview format. We have often heard a sense of integration frustration among adults, which they contrast with the apparent happiness of their children. They tie these emotions together by expanding the original purpose of taking the risks they did so that their frustration is justified by their children's happiness: an adult's problem combined with a parent's pride. For example, someone who did not mention their children before departure may, after experiencing a sense of freedom and a lack of employment, develop a post-facto rationalisation from focusing more on how their children will benefit from the journey.

Even if children have a rationalisation role for adults struggling with integration, the impact in terms of the psychology of integration is likely "real", in the sense that parents feel more contented as they take a longer view of their settlement challenges. One implication is that people in the diaspora and people in countries of origin may be talking from different perspectives without realising it. We have found in other research that someone in a country of origin who gets an insight into the struggles of integration may say it looks unattractive, even though the person living through it will express satisfaction. The long view apparent in our participants' discussion of the future suggests that children are a factor driving this divergence between what I focus on before departure and what I feel after arrival.

Conclusions

We have been working with the participants in our study for more than four years. The first and most fundamental point is that at least 25% of the people we found in Iran with a plan to migrate irregularly in 2014 have now succeeded in reaching the European Union. This includes people who were not even trying to reach Europe when they first spoke with us. In other words, over the last few years – particularly in 2015 and 2016 – a high proportion of people determined to reach Europe irregularly could do so.

During their time in this study, they experienced fear and pain, lost money, considered returning and struggled with the language. A less studied but more profound point is that they got married, broke up, had children and changed their justification for why they were travelling. As has been said and sung, life is what happens while you are making other plans.⁹ The focus of our participants and of our research has been on irregular migration decision-making, but what it has also shown is how much this process interacts with more “ordinary” processes in someone’s life. The irregular migrant journey is physical and philosophical; expensive and expressive; full of ambition but also altering that ambition along the way.

For destination country politicians and policymakers, this update from Wave 4 points to four main conclusions. *First*, the quest to address root causes through traditional development spending is important but impossibly long-term for the politics of migration and asylum. The biggest influences on our participants’ plans have been extremely intangible or extremely tangible: only information, communications and physical barriers have played an important role. For example, the combination of physical intervention by Australia and information from family and friends encouraged many participants to switch to focusing on Europe. In a different vein, the level of participants’ preparation for integration varied a lot based on their understanding of information about the trip and life in the destination country. Traditional development programming is not relevant to these issues.

Between 2014 and 2018, there were changes in the relationships between our participants and the destinations in which they settled. The biggest influences were external to the participants and their country of origin. War in Syria and the increase in Syrians to Europe had nothing to do with our participants. Nor did the initial welcome that some European governments announced for Syrian refugees. But this did increase our participants’ attention to Sweden and Germany in particular – they were a timely substitute for Australia. Media, community and smugglers’ attention to Turkey-Europe travel was then helpful in reducing uncertainty and increasing urgency for departure.

Throughout this period, the “root causes” did not change much. The ups and mostly downs of the Iranian economy in the period from 2013 to 2018 have been

⁹ An idea attributed to a John Lennon song, but appearing before that and attributed to Allen Saunders: <https://quoteinvestigator.com/2012/05/06/other-plans/>

visible at the macroeconomic level and in some big cities. For our participants, this was background mood music. The loud, foreground melody was a feeling of discrimination and constrained economic opportunities. That tune has not changed and is unlikely to improve in the next five years. On that time horizon, the changes that most matter to Iranians interested in irregular migration are changes in transit routes and in the information they receive about life and permanent settlement in destination countries. A 5-20 year development that will matter is the growth of their diaspora in destination countries, which will provide other opportunities for regular and irregular travel.

If you are a European official planning for asylum and migration flows, the tools relevant to Iranians like our participants are: transit barriers and transit care; communications; and domestic settlement policy. They are unlikely to be a majority of the people arriving irregularly in Europe. Instead, they will arrive in thousands where enabled by events in other countries, transit pathways, and European policies. Like most contexts of origin for irregular migrants to Europe, our participants come from a limited proportion of people who decide to leave home. If destination countries target development spending, political engagement or communications at that limited proportion of people, it can make a difference in terms of irregular migration. If not, it is a waste of time, money and effort.¹⁰

Second, our participants' experiences of settlement indicate how information and services will evolve for other Iranians. There will be growing awareness of the importance of preparing a case to be recognised as a refugee. If communicated well by destination countries, this can promote individual responsibility and the integrity of the international protection system. If not communicated well, smugglers will dominate and there will be an even greater gaming of the system.

Third, there is an urgent need to experiment with new methods of language learning by people like our participants. The earlier they can be motivated to engage, the better. Even after arrival, there could be extraordinary benefits from experimenting more with the standard classroom language courses on offer in most settlement systems.

Finally, go beyond snapshot research and take care interpreting surveys in destination countries. Our method highlights how important context, psychology and time are when interpreting what people mean as they answer questions and make decisions. The examples of badly remembered stories and 34 new children highlight the human factors in migration research. To understand intentions, interventions and integration, we need to look more carefully at the interaction between context, psychology and time.

For example, most migration-related surveys do not look at individual context beyond asking about employment status or basic demographics. When preparing analysis and recommendations, it is common to mix together concrete findings like "75% are unemployed" with contingent snapshots like "90% are happy they

¹⁰ To be clear, there are a lot of reasons other than irregular migration to provide development spending, political engagement or public diplomacy. We focus here only on justifications related to irregular migration.

took the trip”. The meaning of the latter is obscure and its practical implications for managing migration and asylum are unknown without more in-depth understanding of the psychology and history of the individuals. Irregular migration research – even more than other kinds of migration-related research – needs care when interpreting snapshot surveys, particularly when they are surveys of people in destination countries.

Annex 1 - Iran as a Country of Origin

Emigration

Iranians have a long history of migrating internally, regionally and – especially since the 1979 Islamic Revolution – to the West. The World Bank estimates 1.3 million Iranians are living outside Iran, which is 1.7% of the total Iranian population.¹¹

The largest stock of Iranian-born migrants is in the United States (400,000).¹² Other Iranian diasporas in the West include Canada (140,000), Germany (the largest EU-based Iranian population at 140,000) and Australia (50,000).¹³ Many arrived in the US on education and work visas, although new arrivals have significantly reduced following the 2017 US immigration restrictions against Iranian (and other) nationals.

Western governments have made obtaining visas more difficult for all nationalities, with the 2001 terrorist attacks in the US a watershed moment.¹⁴ Other practical difficulties to accessing legal migration exist. For example, corruption can prevent people from obtaining country of origin passports¹⁵ or block access to foreign embassies and application centers.¹⁶

Other Iranian migrants arrived through refugee resettlement schemes, but these have also been dramatically scaled back in recent years. No EU member state resettled more than 100 Iranian nationals from 2015-2017, while Australia granted just 337 humanitarian visas to Iranians from 2015-16.¹⁷ In 2017, the US received 80% of resettled Iranian refugees worldwide, despite reducing intake in absolute terms by over 50%.¹⁸

¹¹ World Bank (2011), Iran, Islamic Republic of. World Bank.

¹² Data from the United Nations Population Division (UNFPA), collated by the Pew Research Center. “Origins and Destinations of the World’s Migrants, 1990-2017,” Pew Research Center’s Global Attitudes Project, February 28, 2018, <http://www.pewglobal.org/2018/02/28/global-migrant-stocks/>. Note that data reflects the United Nations definition of migrant: “Someone living for one year or longer in a country other than the one in which he or she was born.” Figures therefore include students and temporary workers, which are often excluded from national statistics.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ For example, see the discussion of how US international students increased eight-fold from 1960 to 2000, only to reduce after the post-2001 changes to foreign student visa rules. Darrell M. West, “The Costs and Benefits of Immigration,” in *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 126 (Brookings Institute, 2011), 427–43, <http://doi.wiley.com/10.1002/j.1538-165X.2011.tb00707.x>.

¹⁵ Seefar’s research in Iraq showed the importance of contacts in the government for timely acquisition of passports. Seefar and Aktis Strategy, “In Europe There Is Freedom: Irregular Migration from Iraq,” December 2017.

¹⁶ Crock and Ghezelbash, “What Is a Persecuted Iranian to Do?,” ABC News, July 24, 2013, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-07-24/ghezelbash-crock-making-iranian-refugees-disappear-by-decree/4840158>.

¹⁷ Australian Government Department of Home Affairs, “2015–16 Humanitarian Programme Outcomes,” n.d., 2.

¹⁸ In 2017, 669 Iranian refugees were resettled in the US, down from 1,786 in 2016. In 2017, 75% of resettled Iranian refugees lived in the US, and in 2016, it was 80%. See ‘Departures’ on UNHCR’s Resettlement Data Finder, accessed February 18, 2018, <http://rsq.unhcr.org/en/#6X4o>.

Regional destinations have historically been important for Iranian labour migrants. Iranians were once able to work and even settle in the United Arab Emirates and freely circulate between home and destination.¹⁹

The introduction and tightening of visa requirements in the early 1970s and the Islamic Revolution stemmed the free flow of Iranian migrants across the Persian Gulf. Iranian labour migrants became subject to temporary visa schemes. Opportunities in the Gulf became less lucrative and more short-term.

Irregular migration

Tightening legal migration channels within the region and to the West has likely increased the incentives for many to migrate irregularly to Europe and Australia. Australian Parliament House (APH), which records the total number of people arriving irregularly by boat (Illegal Maritime Arrivals - IMAs²⁰), reported that arrivals climbed steadily throughout the 2000s – reaching a peak of 25,173 in 2012-13. Operation Sovereign Borders,²¹ a military-led initiative which prevented unauthorised boats from landing in Australia and turned them back to countries of origin, resulted in a sharp decline in irregular arrivals. No boats arrived from 2015 to 2017, while 29 boats carrying 740 people were turned back between 2013 and 2017.²²

The Australian Department of Immigration and Border Protection (DIBP) records the total number of people applying for international protection by nationality, which gives some indication of the proportion of Iranian nationals arriving irregularly.²³

- In 2008-9, Iranian nationals made up 1% of applications for asylum. As APH recorded 985 IMAs during this period, nine Iranian arrivals is a reasonable estimation.
- Iranian nationals rose to a high of 30% of asylum applications in 2010-11, 21% in 2011-12 and 24% in 2012-13. In 2012-13, there were 25,173 IMAs, placing the estimate of Iranian IMAs at about 6,042.

¹⁹ Shirin Hakimzadeh, “Iran: A Vast Diaspora Abroad and Millions of Refugees at Home,” Migration Information Source, September 1, 2006, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/iran-vast-diaspora-abroad-and-millions-refugees-home>.

²⁰ Numbers exclude crew. Before 2013, IMAs were known officially as irregular maritime arrivals. The accuracy and appropriateness of the term is still disputed. We use it here to be consistent with the government of Australia’s terminology. Australian Government Department of Home Affairs, “Operation Sovereign Borders,” accessed April 23, 2018, <http://osb.homeaffairs.gov.au/>.

²¹ Australian Government Department of Home Affairs, “Operation Sovereign Borders,” accessed April 23, 2018, <http://osb.homeaffairs.gov.au/>.

²² Australian Government Department of Home Affairs, “Department of Immigration and Border Protection Annual Report 2016–17,” May 2017, <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/about/reports-publications/reports/annual/annual-report-2016-17>.

²³ A more in-depth discussion of these figures is available in Seefar, [Iranian Refugees: An Exploration of Irregular Migration to Australia](#), April 2015.

- In 2013-14, Iranians constituted 27% of applications for international protection. With overall IMAs at 7,674 during this period, the number of Iranian IMAs can be estimated at 2,072.

In Europe, several indicators including first-time asylum applications and immigration enforcement data point to notable levels of irregular migration from Iran. Flows are significantly higher in Europe than in Australia.

Asylum applications lodged by Iranian nationals, in the low thousands for most of the early 2000s, peaked in 2016, tracking overall trends in the EU (Figure 2). According to Eurostat, the EU's statistics agency, in 2018 there were around 23,200 first-time Iranian asylum applications across the EU.²⁴ For comparison, this is about one quarter of the number of Syrians applying in the same year. Just under half (49%) were submitted in Germany.²⁵

Although absolute numbers declined,²⁶ Iranian asylum applicants formed a major part of the UK caseload. From 2016-2017 they rose from 12% to 17% of total first time asylum applications in the UK.

Immigration enforcement data is also indicative of a large irregular Iranian population in the European Union. At the height of the migration crisis in 2015, 45,000 Iranians were apprehended and found to be present in the European Union without valid documents. In 2016, this figure fell to 34,000 but still placed Iranians as the sixth largest national group.²⁷ The European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) noted in its 2018 Risk Analysis that Iranians constituted the third largest national group attempting to enter the Schengen area using fraudulent documents.²⁸

²⁴ Note that first time asylum application numbers can be only suggestive of the actual numbers of irregular arrivals because of: 1) clandestine migrants who are often not recorded by authorities; 2) the time lag between lodging an application for asylum, having it processed and it appearing in the European Commission's statistical databases; 3) variation in procedures, definitions and timelines within and between member states and double counting when figures are aggregated and; 4) the tendency for some applicants to pretend to be nationals of other countries. Previous Seefar research found that Iraqi Kurd asylum seekers were lodging applications as Iranian nationals due to the perception that this would increase their chance of success. For more discussion on measuring irregular migration in the European Union, see Michele Vespe, Fabrizia Natale, and Luca Pappalardo, "Data Sets on Irregular Migration and Irregular Migrants in the European Union," Migration Policy Practice 7, no. 2 (September 2017), https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/migration_policy_practice_journal_30.pdf, 26.

²⁵ See Eurostat, Asylum and first time asylum applicants by citizenship, age and sex, annual aggregated data, accessed February 18, 2018, <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>.

²⁶ From 4,885 down to 3,095 first time applicants.

²⁷ See Eurostat, "Top 30 Citizenships of Non-EU Citizens Apprehended and Found to Be Illegally Present in the EU, 2008-2016.PNG - Statistics Explained," May 2017, http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=File:Top_30_citizenships_of_non-EU_citizens_apprehended_and_found_to_be_illegally_present_in_the_EU_2008-2016.PNG. The use of immigration enforcement data to demonstrate the scale of irregular migration to the EU is without prejudice to the merits of the rights of Iranian irregular migrants to remain.

²⁸ Most commonly detected were Moroccans (803), Ukrainians (801) and Iranians (438). Frontex, "Risk Analysis for 2018," February 2018, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Risk_Analysis_for_2018.pdf.

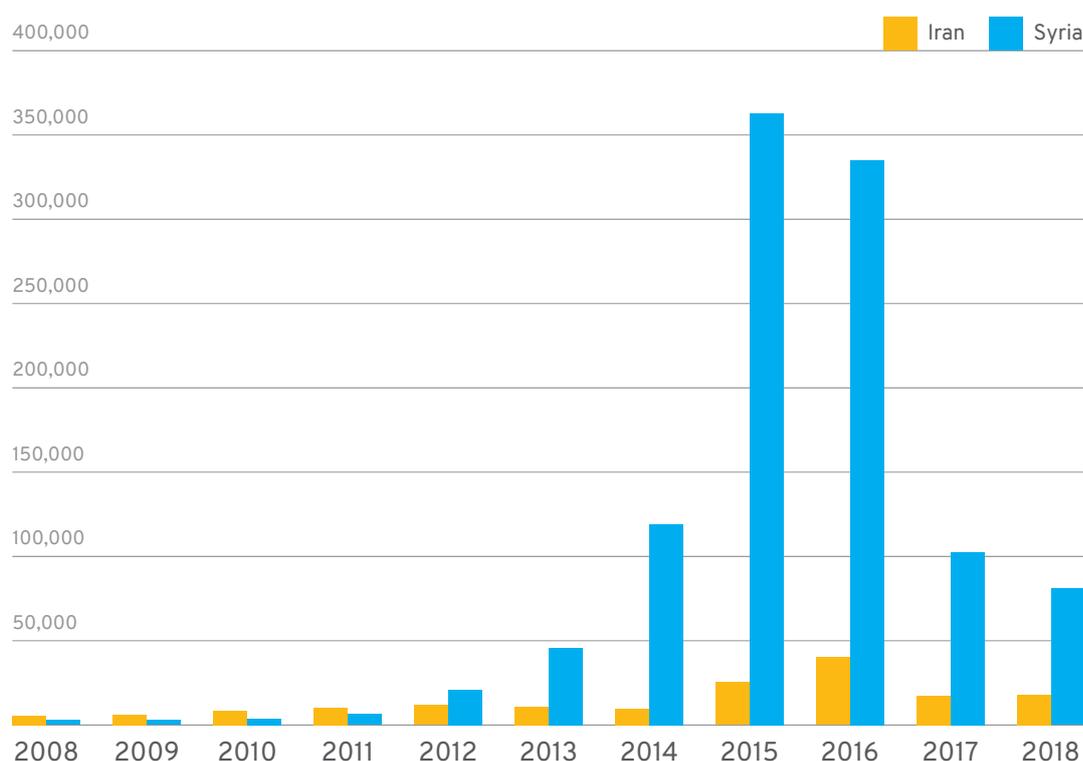
The US is not a common destination for irregular migrants from Iran. Although South and Central Asians often join irregular flows transiting Latin America to the US, there are few Iranians among them. However, Iran appears to be a transit destination for other irregular migrants on this route. Now defunct²⁹ air connections between Tehran and Caracas have been used by groups smuggling sub-Saharan African migrants to the US via Venezuela and Colombia.³⁰

Figure 13: First-time asylum applications, Iranian nationals vs. Syrian nationals and total

Iran as a destination and transit country



First-time asylum applications to the EU, by year and citizenship of origin (Eurostat)



The fragility of its neighbours has also seen Iran become a major host of migrants. Among them are undocumented migrants living in Iran or rapidly moving onwards

²⁹ The route was launched in 2007, stopping en route in Damascus but is no longer offered by Conviasa (the Venezuelan national carrier) or Iran airlines. Simon Romero, "Venezuela and Iran Strengthen Ties With Caracas-to-Tehran Flight," The New York Times, March 3, 2007, sec. Americas, <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/03/03/world/americas/03caracas.html>.

³⁰ UNODC and Migracion Colombia, "Dimensión Del Delito de Tráfico de Migrantes En Colombia: Realidades Institucionales, Legales y Judiciales," 2013, http://migracioncolombia.gov.co/phocadownload/Investigacion_trafico_migrantes.pdf.

via the Zagros Mountains to Turkey; registered refugees and asylum seekers,³¹ and other regular migrants holding Iranian visas and passports. The increasing migration flows through Iran in recent years culminating in the 2015 crisis were a massive challenge to Iranian migration and border control authorities.

Migrants can be vulnerable to traffickers and modern slavery. Examples include Iranian minors and adults trafficked to work in domestic service and brothels in Iraqi Kurdistan, the UAE and Europe. The precarious status of Afghan and Pakistani minors and adults see many coerced or deceived into prostitution and forced labor within Iran or sent to fight as mercenaries in Syria.³²

Religious and ethnic discord

Complex factors inform ethno-religious relations in Iran, a full analysis of which is beyond the scope of this report. In short, the fault lines of social cohesion are drawn by ethnic and religious differences and social values diverging between Western-oriented elites and the conservative grassroots, which have been pervasive in public life since the Islamic Revolution.³³ Human rights bodies have consistently reported discrimination against ethnic and other minority groups, ranging from harassment and persecution by state security forces to economic marginalisation.³⁴

The situation of minorities in Iran is guided in part by its implicit and explicit self-identification as an ethnically Persian and Shia Muslim state. Minorities face a range of challenges including:

- The Arab minority is often targeted by the state due to perceived disloyalty stemming from its alleged participation in the 1980s Iraq-Iran war in support of Iraq. The marginalisation of the Arab minority led to protests in 2005 and

³¹ UNHCR reports a population of concern in Iran of 979,537. Registered refugees in Iran hold Amayesh cards. These cards are official identification provided by the Iranian government entitling the holder to stay legally and obtain international assistance. UNHCR, "Islamic Republic of Iran | Global Focus," accessed January 31, 2018, <http://reporting.unhcr.org/node/2527#qa=2.208595989.640873106.1517318031-1753140160.1493909582>.

³² This is part of the reason for Iran's Tier 3 rank on the US Department of State's Global Trafficking in Persons Report, despite some efforts by the government of Iran to provide support to victims. See Department of State. "Trafficking in Persons Report: June 2017," June 2017. <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/271342.pdf>.

³³ Hakimzadeh, Shirin. "Iran: A Vast Diaspora Abroad and Millions of Refugees at Home." migrationpolicy.org, September 1, 2006. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/iran-vast-diaspora-abroad-and-millions-refugees-home>.

³⁴ US Department of State. "Iran 2016 Human Rights Report." Accessed January 31, 2018. <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/265708.pdf>; Directorate-General for External Policies of the Union, and European Parliament. Human Rights in Iran after the Nuclear Deal: Business as Usual or Time for Change?, 2017. [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/ReqData/etudes/IDAN/2017/578024/EXPO_IDA\(2017\)578024_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/ReqData/etudes/IDAN/2017/578024/EXPO_IDA(2017)578024_EN.pdf).

2011 (coinciding with the Arab Spring), drawing harsh responses from the authorities including the arrest and execution of Arab activists.³⁵

- Kurds expelled by Iraq found refuge in Iran but had no path to citizenship. After Saddam Hussein was overthrown, some were able to return and renaturalise. However, the bureaucratic procedures were arduous,³⁶ and many Kurds remained in Iran without any official identity.

Protests in early 2018 took on economic and gender dimensions. The renewal of the budget included a reduction in fuel and food subsidies, while women protested clothing laws by making flags out of their headscarves.³⁷

Khuzestan

The majority of study respondents are from Khuzestan, an oil-rich coastal province bordering Iraq, where the majority of people are ethnically Arab. Residents contend with poor economic conditions despite the region's wealth.³⁸ Sandstorms and snowstorms have made agriculture difficult.³⁹ Under policies that advance Persianisation, the government has confiscated land and detained and tortured protestors.

Khuzestan is also among the top provinces of origin for internal migrants, many moving to Tehran.⁴⁰ However, internal migrants from Khuzestan often experience challenges in accessing good jobs, even in the capital.

³⁵ The pervasiveness of this situation is demonstrated in reports by Amnesty International in 2006 and 2013 detailing the exclusion of Ahwazi Arabs from economic and social life. See Amnesty International. "Defending Minority Rights: The Ahwazi Arabs," May 17, 2006. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/056/2006/en/>; and Amnesty International, MANUS. "This Is Breaking People: Human Rights Violations at Australia's Asylum Seeker Processing Centre on Manus Island, Papua New Guinea," 2013, 19. <https://www.amnesty.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Amnesty-International-Manus-Island-report-1.pdf>.

³⁶ Minority Rights Group International. "Iraq - Faili Kurds." Minority Rights Group International. Accessed February 26, 2018. <http://minorityrights.org/minorities/faili-kurds/>.

³⁷ Saeed Kamali Dehghan, "Tehran Hijab Protest: Iranian Police Arrest 29 Women," The Guardian, February 2, 2018, sec. World news, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/feb/02/tehran-hijab-protest-iranian-police-arrest-29-women>.

³⁸ The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) reports Khuzestan's unemployment rate at 38% and up to 60% for women, one of only three provinces with unemployment above 30%. UNFPA. "Policy Papers: Emerging Population Issues in Islamic Republic of Iran." UNFPA, 2015. <https://iran.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Five%20policy%20papers%20on%20population%20issues%20-%20English.pdf>, 21.

³⁹ For example snowstorms in January 2018 and dust storms in September 2017. See Iranian Red Crescent. "Iranian Red Crescent," January 10, 2018. <http://en.rcs.ir/news/news+archive/104068/IRCS+offers+Relief+to+645+Snowstorm+Victims+Emergency+Shelter+of+74+People>; and "Khuzestan Needs \$42m to Battle Dust Storms." Financial Tribune, September 16, 2017. <https://financialtribune.com/articles/energy/72496/khuzestan-needs-42m-to-battle-dust-storms>.

⁴⁰ Data compares 1986 with the 2011 censuses. See UNFPA, and Hassan Mahmoudian. "Policy Papers: Emerging Population Issues in Islamic Republic of Iran." UNFPA, 2015. <https://iran.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Five%20policy%20papers%20on%20population%20issues%20-%20English.pdf>.

Figure 14: Iranian provinces of origin for most participants in the four waves of the longitudinal study



Annex 2 - Methodology

The report is based on four waves of research with Iranians migrating irregularly to the West or contemplating it. The composition of each wave is shown in Figure 1 in the body of the report.

Sampling approach

Waves 1 and 2 consisted of respondents drawn exclusively from Khuzestan. During the design of Wave 3, the decision was taken to bolster the sample with the inclusion of additional respondents from Khuzestan, Tehran, and elsewhere in Iran. Wave 4 then selected from the original database of respondents to Wave 1, sampling a mixture of people who had been in interim waves and those who had not.

The study attempted to achieve multiple difficult objectives. The limitations reflect this. Irregular migration is a sensitive topic, in particular because of the strong anti-regime elements at the root of many respondents' desire to migrate. As well as asking respondents to divulge information about potentially illegal activity, the study also asked for contact details, a necessary step to allow for follow up in subsequent waves of data collection.

Given these challenges, it was decided that the maximum flexibility should be given to the research team in the following areas:

- The field team used a combination of telephone and face-to-face interviews across the waves of data collection. Surveys were conducted in Farsi.
- A simple snowball sampling technique was applied. While other research methods are available to improve the validity of non-representative survey data, including Respondent Driven Sampling, it was decided that these would be too restrictive.
- Screening criteria were kept to a minimum. No quotas (demographic or otherwise) were set.

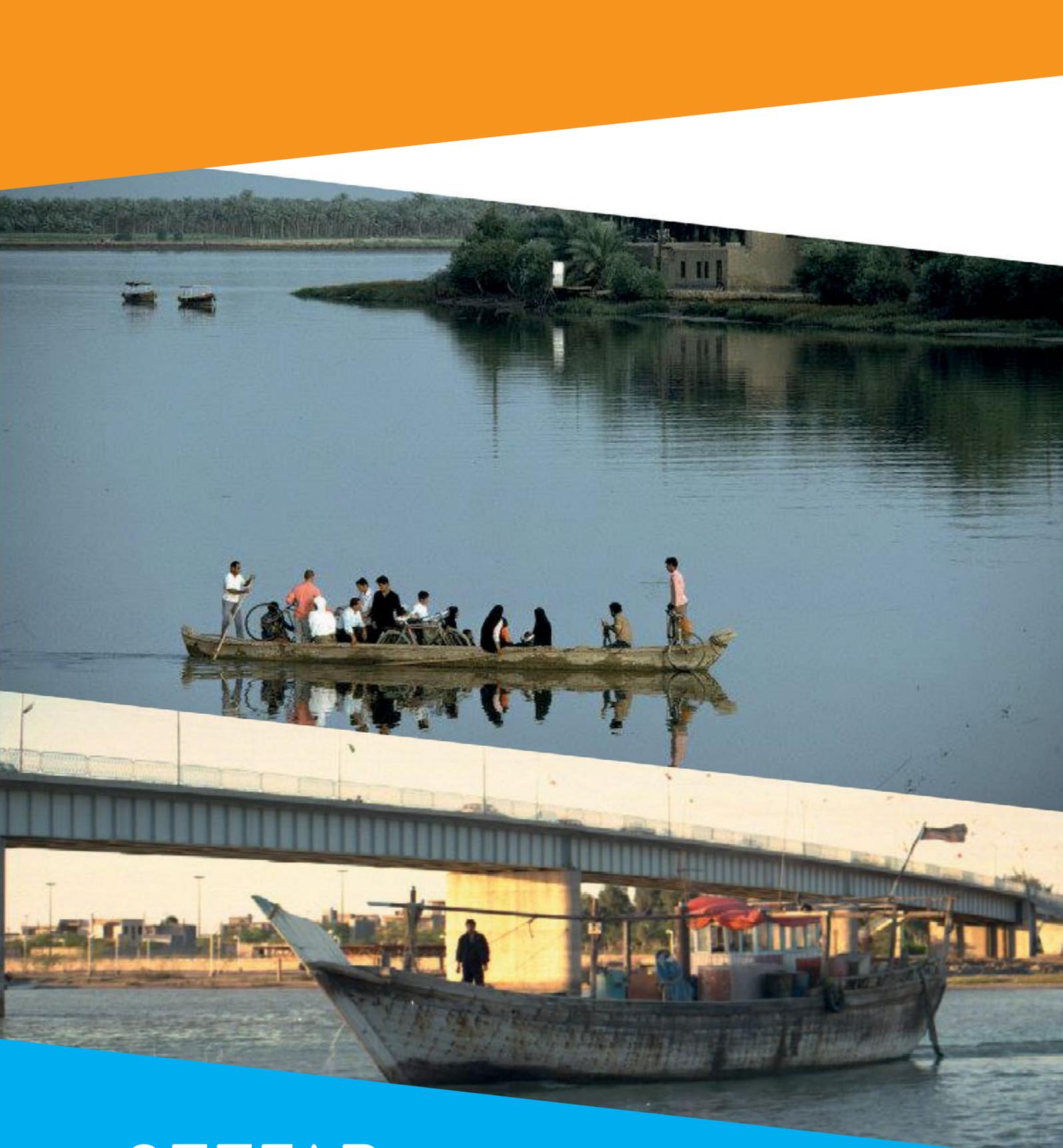
Limitations

The audience of this research is difficult to access and is part of the reason a randomised sample was not possible. As the sample cannot be representative of this specific population, the context limits the methodology to non-randomised snowball sampling.

The study experienced substantial attrition between the first and second waves of data collection. As study waves continued, some respondents proved impossible to contact. Others may have migrated internally or changed contact information. The most pertinent implication is that migrants who were successful in reaching Europe are more likely to be included in the sample. This may have led

to a disproportionate emphasis in this report on the positive aspects of irregular migration.

One strength of the longitudinal approach is also a weakness, namely that respondents are not always consistent over time about their motivations, journeys or personal circumstances. For the researcher and reader, this may feel frustrating at times, since it seems to impede an effort “to get to the bottom of things.” But that is in fact a strength: these “gaps” are key pieces in the puzzle of understanding individual decision-making. The gaps also suggest caution and provide insight when interpreting single-wave research, which by its nature struggles to identify factors such as mood, malleable narratives and how the present impacts on the past – in other words, the human factors.



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