

A photograph of a person standing on a pebbly beach, looking down at the water. In the background, there is a coastal town and a large mountain under a cloudy sky. The top of the image has an orange gradient bar.

SEEFAR

Windows of Opportunity

Iranian irregular migration and return 2014-2016

September 2018

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

Migrant decision-making is non-linear

Migrants' progress and perspectives were diverse and changed frequently over their two years participating in the study. Respondents registered different levels of success in reaching desired destinations. Their preferences on destination also changed, and their opinion on migration – measured by their willingness to recommend it to others – changed, with many adopting a cautious tone.

Marginalization and corruption fed long-held grievances

Practical obstacles to good jobs and education – rooted in alienation from mainstream society – underpinned the decision to leave. Ethnic minorities felt particularly excluded from economic and educational opportunities.

Specifically, poor employment prospects were linked primarily to ethno-religious discrimination. Responses pointed to active discrimination in obtaining stable jobs, which were perceived to be reserved for Iranians aligned politically or ethnically with the majority.

European migration crisis viewed as a window of opportunity

The perceived chance to make it to the west triggered respondents' long-held aspirations to leave Iran. Most had wanted to go for years and felt the European migration surge was their chance. There was a broad sense of missing an opportunity when many of the respondents' peers successfully migrated to Australia.

Respondents showed flexibility on destination choice and willingness to switch their ideal destination for a more realistic one. They gave a range of desired destinations across Western Europe and North America during the first round of data collection in 2014. By 2016, many had switched their destination preference, often to Germany. However, most respondents did not acknowledge they had changed their destination preference.

Respondents' overseas social and family networks were prominent sources of information but not good predictors of destination. Many had large networks in Australia but sought to travel to Europe. Others had strong networks in the UK but migrated to Germany.

Difficult journeys and reception conditions accepted as necessary costs for a better future

Journeys were difficult and several respondents described physical and psychological hardships. Suffering was characterized by long periods of walking or

waiting in poor conditions in Istanbul (Turkey), Athens, and Idomeni (Greece). Hardships may be understated in the study as respondents that were reachable were mostly successful in reaching their destination. They tended to rationalize short-term difficulties and focus on the long-term anticipated gains of settling in Europe.

A handful of respondents had grown frustrated with the long wait for refugee status. Some respondents in the sample may be denied asylum. Respondents' largely positive assessments of life in Europe may then become less favorable.

Migrants knowledgeable but overconfident

Respondents were generally well-informed about migration routes and how smugglers operate. Respondents were also knowledgeable of events in Europe, including the 2015 Paris and 2016 Brussels terrorist attacks, which they linked to growing anti-migrant sentiment.

Respondents seemed less willing to migrate when the chances of success were uncertain. Some indicated they only sought to migrate because of the high volumes of people who reached Europe during the 2015 crisis. This contrasts with patterns seen by Seefar among other national groups, including in West Africa, where migrants were more willing to leave their home countries and work out the details of passage to Europe later in the journey.

Respondents lacked awareness of the unpredictability of the journey. Some overestimated their ability to plan and predict each migration stage. This is shown by respondents who attributed problems caused by unforeseeable events (such as the Greece-Macedonia border closure) to their own choices. In other words, some respondents underestimated the risk of failure.

Respondents averse to return

Financial and emotional investments in the migration journey made return difficult. Respondents had often quit jobs or sold important assets to fund the journey. Despite poor conditions and the difficulty of onward travel, some continued to wait in Greece and Turkey, judging return to be unviable.

More information needed on available support and assistance

Respondents would have benefitted from timely, credible and sensitive information on the possibilities of humanitarian assistance and assisted voluntary return. Despite planning for the journey, respondents who did not reach their destination often felt misled about the ease of reaching Europe and their rights once they had arrived there. Respondents would have benefitted from better information about the journey and available assistance.

INTRODUCTION

Iranians continue to migrate to Western destinations, but relatively little is known about their decision-making and migration processes. Irregular Iranian maritime arrivals to Australia before 2013 brought attention and research funding, but this has since abated. In Europe, influxes of conflict-driven Syrian, Iraqi and Afghan migrants have drawn attention away from Iranian flows.

This report is the fourth output¹ of a longitudinal study following a cohort of 229 Iranians who migrated – or were planning to migrate – irregularly to Western countries. The study follows their physical and psychological journeys through structured surveys delivered in 2014, 2015 and 2016.

Given the time that has elapsed between the last round of data collection (August 2016) and the current report (April 2018), and in anticipation of the next empirically-focused study (likely July 2018²), this paper refrains from detailed descriptive analysis. It instead takes a reflective view of migrant trajectories, perspectives and decision-making from 2014-2016 in the context of twin crises in Europe (migration) and Iran (socio-economic).

The report is structured as follows:

1. **Iran as a country of origin** – long-term economic marginalization meets a strong tradition of regional and extra-regional migration among respondents in Khuzestan, in Iran's south-west.
2. **Motivating migration** – the interaction between poor economic opportunities and ethno-religious discrimination makes it difficult for respondents to imagine a future inside Iran.
3. **The journey** – uneven progress resulting from individual decisions and external events means the cohort is now spread between Iran, Turkey and the European Union.
4. **Preferences** – respondents' perceptions of the relative risks and rewards of continuing the journey, changing destinations, and returning home.
5. **Assessing outcomes** – understanding how respondents define their own success and rationalize failure.

¹ The previous three reports were based on two waves of data collection and supplemental qualitative data. See: Seefar. "Iranian Refugees: An Exploration of Irregular Migration to Australia," April 2015. <https://seefar.org/research/iranian-refugees-irregular-migration-to-australia/>; Seefar. "Iranian Refugees: An Exploration of Irregular Migration to the UK," March 2016. <https://seefar.org/research/iranian-refugees-irregular-migration-to-the-uk/>; and Seefar. "Who Dares Wins: Irregular Migration from Iran to the European Union," July 2016. <https://seefar.org/research/who-dares-wins-irregular-migration-from-iran-to-the-european-union/>.

² Based on data collected in February and March 2018.

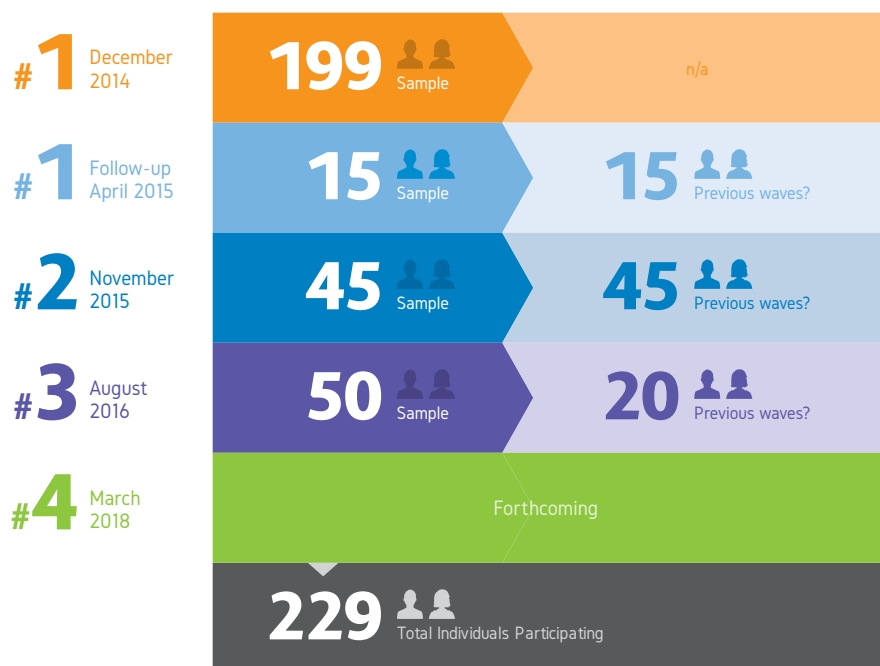
METHODS

The report is based on three waves of data collected as part of a longitudinal study of Iranians planning migration to the West within 12 months of the initial survey (Figure 1):

- Wave 1 – the first structured survey took place in fall 2014, with 199 respondents. A follow-up survey in spring 2015 sought more in-depth explanations from 20 of these respondents who were selected based on their answers to the previous survey.
- Wave 2 – the second structured survey took place in autumn 2015 with 45 respondents. All 45 participants also took part in Wave 1.
- Wave 3 – the third structured survey took place in summer 2016. 19 participants were drawn from previous waves as well as 31 new participants.

All new study participants were selected using purposive snowball sampling. The sampling approach and cohort size means the results of the study are not generalizable to the population of Iran, Khuzestan or any of the demographic groups described in the paper. Further, attrition between Wave 1 and Wave 2 should be noted as a methodological limitation. See Annex 1 for a detailed methodology.

Figure 1: Sample sizes across waves of data collection



IRAN AS A COUNTRY OF ORIGIN

Iran sits at a crossroads. It is a major country of emigration, immigration and transit migration, nestled between regions that have long exchanged labor and forced migration flows. Meanwhile, long-standing social and economic discord has brought discontent, which manifested itself in the 2017 demonstrations against subsidy reductions. Major changes in Iran's relationship with the West - notably surrounding the nuclear deal - were of little relevance to the perspectives and attitudes recorded among respondents.

Emigration

Iranians have a long history of migrating³ 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 percent of the total Iranian population.⁴

Global and regional migration

The largest stock of Iranian-born migrants is in the United States (400,000).⁵ Other Iranian diasporas in the West include Canada (140,000), Germany (the largest EU-based Iranian population at 140,000) and Australia (50,000).⁶ Many arrived to 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 on the World Trade Centre a watershed moment.⁷ Other practical difficulties to accessing legal migration exist. For example, corruption

³ The report adopts an inclusive definition of the term migrant. It should be read as an umbrella term for various categories of people on the move, including asylum seekers and prima facie refugees. It makes no judgment on the merits of an individual respondent's potential claim to asylum.

⁴ World Bank (2011), Iran, Islamic Republic of. World Bank.

⁵ 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.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ For example, see 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>.

can prevent people from obtaining country of origin passports⁸ or block access to foreign embassies and application centers.⁹

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 2015-16.¹⁰ In 2017, the US received 80 percent of resettled Iranian refugees worldwide, despite reducing intake in absolute terms by over 50 percent.¹¹

Regional destinations have historically been important for Iranian labor migrants. Iranians were once able to work and even settle in the United Arab Emirates and freely circulate between home and destination.¹²

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 labor migrants became subject to temporary visa schemes. Opportunities in the Gulf became less lucrative and more short-term.

Ten of 47 respondents in Wave 3 had previously migrated abroad (four to Gulf countries¹³) and subsequently returned to Iran. Others had migrated for limited periods to work in Jordan and Turkey or had gone to Malaysia and Indonesia. Six returned in the two years before

Wave 1, suggesting the aspiration to migrate to Europe quickly followed their return.

Irregular migration

The tightening of 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 - IMAs¹⁴), reported that arrivals climbed steadily throughout the 2000s - reaching a peak of 25,173 in 2012-13. Operation Sovereign Borders,¹⁵ a military-led initiative which prevented unauthorized 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 2017.¹⁶

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.¹⁷

In 2008-9, Iranian nationals made up one percent of applications for asylum. As APH recorded 985 IMAs during this period, nine Iranian arrivals is a reasonable estimation.

⁸ 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.

⁹ 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>.

¹⁰ Australian Government Department of Home Affairs, "2015-16 Humanitarian Programme Outcomes," n.d., 2.

¹¹ In 2017, 669 Iranian refugees were resettled in the US, down from 1,786 in 2016. In 2017, 75 percent of resettled Iranian refugees lived in the US, and in 2016, it was 80 percent. See 'Departures' on UNHCR's Resettlement Data Finder, accessed February 18, 2018, <http://rsq.unhcr.org/en/#6X4o>.

¹² 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>.

¹³ The countries of migration were: Turkey (2 respondents), Indonesia (2), Kuwait (2), UAE (1), Iraq (1), Jordan (1), Malaysia (1).

¹⁴ 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.

¹⁵ Australian Government Department of Home Affairs, "Operation Sovereign Borders," accessed April 23, 2018, <http://osb.homeaffairs.gov.au/>.

¹⁶ 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>.

¹⁷ A more in-depth discussion of these figures is available in Seefar, "Iranian Refugees: An Exploration of Irregular Migration to Australia," April 2015, <https://seefar.org/research/iranian-refugees-irregular-migration-to-australia>.

Iranian nationals rose to a high of 30 percent of asylum applications in 2010-11, 21 percent in 2011-12 and 24 percent in 2012-13. In 2012-13, there were 25,173 IMAs, placing the estimate of Iranian IMAs at about 6,042.

In 2013-14, Iranians constituted 27 percent 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.

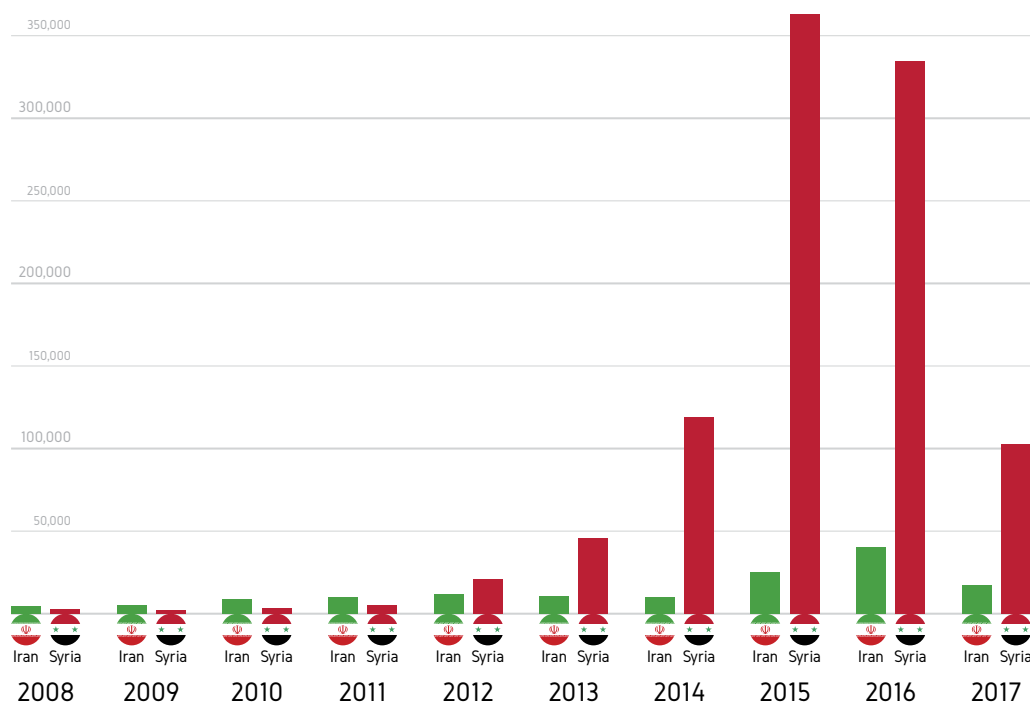
In Europe, several indicators including first time asylum applications and immigration enforcement data point to

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,¹⁸ in 2017 there were 18,470 first time Iranian asylum applications across the EU.¹⁹ For comparison, this is about one fifth of the number of Syrian nationals applying in the same year. Just under half (49 percent) were submitted in Germany.²⁰

Figure 2: First time asylum applications, Iranian nationals vs. Syrian nationals and total

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



¹⁸ The EU's statistical agency.

¹⁹ 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.

²⁰ 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>.

Although absolute numbers actually reduced,²¹ Iranian asylum applicants formed a major part of the UK caseload. From 2016-2017 they rose from 12 percent to 17 percent of total first time asylum applications in the UK.

Immigration enforcement data is also indicative of a large irregular Iranian population in the EU. At the height of the migration crisis in 2015, 45,000 Iranians were apprehended and found to be present in the EU without valid documents. In 2016, this figure fell to 34,000 but still placed Iranians as the sixth largest national group.²² 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.²³

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 defunct²⁴ air connections between Tehran and Caracas have been used by groups smuggling sub-Saharan African migrants to the US via Venezuela and Colombia.²⁵

Iran as a destination and transit country

The fragility of its neighbors has also seen Iran become a major host of migrants. Among them are undocumented migrants living in Iran or rapidly moving onwards via the Zagros Mountains to Turkey; registered refugees and asylum seekers,²⁶ 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.²⁷

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

²¹ From 4,885 down to 3,095 first time applicants.

²² 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.

²³ 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.

²⁴ 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>.

²⁵ 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.

²⁶ 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#_ga=2.208595989.640873106.1517318031-1753140160.1493909582.

²⁷ 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>.

conservative grassroots, which have been pervasive in public life since the Islamic Revolution.²⁸ Human rights bodies have consistently reported discrimination against ethnic and other minority groups, ranging from harassment and persecution by state security forces to economic marginalization.²⁹

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 marginalization of the Arab minority led to protests in 2005 and 2011 (coinciding with the Arab Spring), drawing harsh responses from the authorities including the arrest and execution of Arab activists.³⁰
- 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 renaturalize. However, the bureaucratic procedures

were arduous,³¹ 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.³²

Khuzestan

The majority of study respondents are from Khuzestan, an oil-rich coastal province bordering Iraq (Figure 3) where the majority are ethnically Arab.³³ Residents contend with poor economic conditions despite the region's wealth.³⁴ Sandstorms and snowstorms have made agriculture difficult.³⁵ Under its policies of Persianization, 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.³⁶ However, internal migrants from Khuzestan often experience challenges in accessing good jobs, even in the capital.

²⁸ 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>.

²⁹ 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/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2017/578024/EXPO_IDA\(2017\)578024_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2017/578024/EXPO_IDA(2017)578024_EN.pdf).

³⁰ 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>.

³¹ Minority Rights Group International. "Iraq - Farsi Kurds." Minority Rights Group International. Accessed February 26, 2018. <http://minorityrights.org/minorities/farsi-kurds/>.

³² 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>.

³³ A total of nine other respondents, all recruited to Wave 3, lived in Tehran, Fars, Isfahan, Kermanshah, and Kurdistan.

³⁴ The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) reports Khuzestan's unemployment rate at 38 percent and up to 60 percent for women, one of only three provinces with unemployment above 30 percent. 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.

³⁵ 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>.

³⁶ 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 3: Map of Iran³⁷



³⁷ Interviews took place in shaded provinces. More interviews took place in darker shaded provinces.

MIGRATION MOTIVATORS

This section discusses motivations for migration and factors triggering (or preventing) departure.

Key points include:

- Exclusion from economic and educational opportunities was the main reason for migration. Ethnic minorities consistently described discrimination on the basis of ethnicity and religion as push factors.
- While many respondents had been considering migration for a long time the decision and timing of their departure was triggered by a sense that the European migration crisis afforded a special opportunity to settle in Europe.
- There is likely a large number of potential migrants who would leave if they had sufficient financial resources. The dramatic slide in the value of the Iranian Rial from 2010 onwards made smuggler's fees unaffordable for many.
- The migration surge initially increased the price of migration, but this decreased again as more service providers came onto the market. As with the increase in demand for smuggler services in Libya, the competition forced standards down.
- Smugglers performed a range of functions, most commonly guiding respondents and providing accommodation en route. In some cases they assisted with illegal exits from Iran.

Why respondents left Iran

Respondents attributed their longstanding desire to leave Iran to the perception that respect, freedom and associated opportunities were more reliable in the West. They explained that as ethnic or religious minorities they lacked economic opportunities.

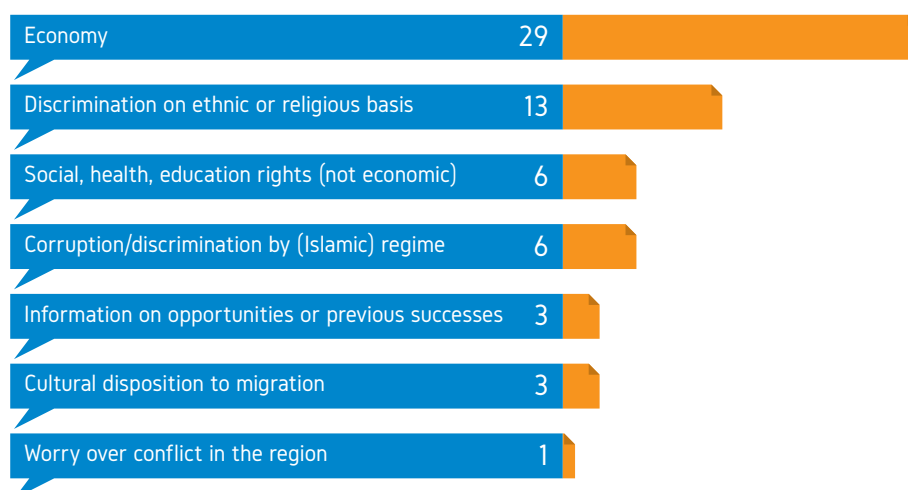
Respondents did not feel alone in making plans to leave. The migration surge of 2015 made emigration to Europe the "talk of the town" (ethnic Arab male, November 2015). Respondents consistently reported that emigration was becoming more popular. Only four (of 34) Wave 1 respondents disagreed that migration had become more popular. In 2016, there were no dissenting voices. However, there was increased caution as it became clear migrants were becoming stuck in transit (see the External Events section).

Figure 4 shows the results of an open-ended question on why respondents thought migration from Iran had become more popular. It reiterates the overwhelming importance of the economic situation in driving migration. The other three most frequent responses (discrimination, denial of rights, and the Islamic regime) are all variations on the same theme of ethno-religious discrimination.

Several respondents attributed the desire to migrate to the fact that others had gone before them and shared their experiences, which fed a growing culture of migration. One respondent pointed to emigrants who left because of the Iran-Iraq war as the origin of the migration trend. Two Kurdish respondents said that migration had long been an acceptable response to hardship in their community.

Figure 4: Why respondents thought migration from Iran had become more popular³⁸

If migration is more popular, why do you think that is?



All respondents to Wave 3 said that nothing would change their minds about irregular migration, meaning more jobs at home or better economic conditions might not dissuade them from leaving. Even those who are employed may lack job security, satisfaction or the chance to progress in their careers. In Wave 2, 65 percent of respondents who said they were unable to find a job were actually in paid employment. Livelihood programs would therefore need to take into account the quality of jobs created in order to have an impact on (irregular) migration intentions.

None of the respondents discussed regime change, but the tendency to attribute problems to the government makes this an interesting area for future exploration. Data from the Center for International and Security Studies at Maryland (CISSM) and IranPoll suggested widespread support for the status quo, with just 16 percent agreeing or strongly agreeing that “Iran’s political system needs to undergo fundamental change.”³⁹ However, support for the regime may vary significantly by ethnicity and region.

³⁸ Open-ended responses were coded. Where respondents gave multiple reasons, all reasons mentioned were recorded. A total of 61 responses were recorded from 47 survey participants who answered this question.

³⁹ Center for International and Security Studies at Maryland (CISSM) and IranPoll, “Iranian Public Opinion After the Protests: Full Data Tables,” January 16, 2018, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5525d831e4b09596848428f2/t/5a74b2da71c10b91e5ebc15d/1517597404995/IranPoll-UMD+Jan+2018+Iran+Results+and+Trend+Tables.pdf>.

“We are fed up with our lives in Iran and there is no hope for any changes under the current regime. The government supporters are living a luxury life with no challenges while the majority must live under daily stress and uncertainty.”

- ethnic Turk female, August 2016

Respondents acted on long-term desires to migrate when good opportunities presented themselves. Respondents clearly saw the 2010-2013 surge of Iranian boat arrivals in Australia as an opportunity missed, and the surge of migration to Europe, beginning with Syrian refugees arriving in large numbers in 2013, as their next big chance to leave Iran. The ability of respondents to take advantage of these opportunities was determined largely by their access to resources.

Migration motivated by marginalization

Self-identified ethnic Arab, Kurdish, Lor and Balochi respondents pointed to systematic discrimination as a key reason for leaving Iran. Respondents emphasized economic discrimination, particularly exclusion from work opportunities, but also spoke more widely of being denied social, health and education rights. Respondents described marginalization in several areas:

- **General discrimination** - more favorable treatment of ethnic majority Persians by employers, in particular in government departments.
- **Targeted harassment on the basis of political affiliation or activism** - several respondents said association with political activism or politically active people caused the state to make life difficult. One Arab male described himself as “banned” from employment due to his activism, while another referred to a lack of “respect” for minorities.

Though only one respondent mentioned experiencing abuse, it should be noted that abuses ranging from harassment to false arrest, false charges, and capital punishment are frequently observed in relation to Ahwazi Arab activism.⁴⁰

- **Citizenship-based exclusion** - three ethnic Kurd respondents highlighted their lack of official documentation in Iran. They were likely Feili Kurds, a group that straddles the Iran-Iraq border. In the 1970s, Saddam Hussein’s Ba’ath party painted Iraqi Feili Kurds as traitors of Iranian origin, stripped up to 70,000 of their Iraqi citizenship and deported them to Iran. While some were able to gain Iranian citizenship on the basis of ancestry, most have remained stateless, without access to jobs and services.⁴¹

“We (the Kurdish minority) have no rights in Iran despite being born here. We are always treated with no respect and deprived of opportunities.”

- Male, Kurd, Aug 2016

Kurdish respondents prized the prospect of gaining official identification and citizenship at their destination, highlighting the difficulty of doing so in Iran.

“Religious minorities in Iran receive no respect or (social, health, and education) rights in Iran.”

- Male, Arab, Aug 2016

- **Exclusion based on evading military service** - draft evaders who do not present themselves when called upon by the Iranian military are deprived

⁴⁰ Amnesty International, “Defending Minority Rights: The Ahwazi Arabs,” May 17, 2006, <https://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:xsSTrWNWibAJ:https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/76000/mde130562006en.pdf+&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=ke>.

⁴¹ Minority Rights Group International, “Iraq - Feili Kurds,” Minority Rights Group International, accessed February 26, 2018, <http://minorityrights.org/minorities/faili-kurds/>.

of economic and social rights.⁴² A Kurdish male said employers would not hire him because he had not joined the military when called up. Another ethnic Arab respondent used migrant smugglers to help his son to evade the draft and leave the country. Respondents did not give reasons for their evasion, but country of origin information compiled by the UK government suggests that ethnic minorities face difficult conditions in the Iranian armed forces including heightened vulnerability to self harm and suicide.⁴³

“I am unable to work because I did not complete the compulsory military service of the Iranian government.”

- Male, Kurd, Aug 2016

External events influence migration decisions

While irregular migration was a significant personal or household decision for respondents, they did not make it in a vacuum. Rather, a fast-evolving timeline of Iranian and world events shaped emigration from Khuzestan and Iran more generally (Figure 5).

The outbreak of civil war in 2011 led to Syrians attempting to travel to Europe in large numbers. A handful of respondents commented on how this high profile migration surge had encouraged them to accelerate their own plans.

In contrast, Australia’s Operation Sovereign Borders and the near-complete cessation of spontaneous boat arrivals made Australia appear off limits. It remains to be seen whether the closure of borders in the Balkans, in particular the Greek-Macedonian border, will have a similar effect.

Respondents clearly linked external events with migration policy changes abroad. For example, they were well informed about the 2015 Paris attacks. Respondents realized that this might lead to less favorable settlement or integration policies, but still did not alter their plans.

⁴² A 2013 report from the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs notes, “Draft evaders risk losing social benefits and civic rights including their right to work, to education or the right to set up a business.” Quoted in UK Home Office, “Country Policy and Information Note: Iran: Military Service,” October 2016, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/565821/CPIN-Iran-Military-Service-v1-October-2016.pdf, 22. Note there are provisions in place for those who left the country before 19 March 2004 to buy exemption from military service. Canada: Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, “Iran: Military Service, Including Recruitment Age, Length of Service, Reasons for Exemption, the Possibility of Performing a Replacement Service and the Treatment of People Who Refuse Military Service by Authorities; Whether There Are Sanctions against Conscientious Objectors,” Refworld, accessed May 7, 2018, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/550fd7e64.html>.

⁴³ UK Home Office.

Figure 5: Timeline of events affecting respondent's choices and journeys

Mar 2011

Syrian civil war breaks out

Following the rise of the Arab Spring in Tunisia, protests in Syria are brutally repressed, and the country moves towards civil war.

The ongoing conflicts in Iraq and Syria have resulted in a growing demand for illegal migration.

- Iranian male, Iran, Jan 2015

Apr 2013

Halving of value of Iranian Rial

From April 2012-April 2013, the cost of 1 US Dollar rises from IRR 19,050 to IRR 36,500.¹

The cost [of irregular migration] has tripled in the past couple of years [because of] the growing demand for migration and the cost of currency on the black market.

- Iranian male, Iran, Jan 2015

Dec 2013

Australia turnbacks begin

The Australian government implements Operation Sovereign Borders. 29 boats containing irregular migrants are turned back to their countries of departure.²

I wish I had migrated many years ago when lots of our friends migrated safely to Australia and are now citizens of Australia.

- Iranian male, Germany, Aug 2016

Apr 2014

Targeted arrests of Ahwazi Arabs in Iran

Ahwazi Arab activists report to Amnesty International that at least 100 activists of Arab heritage were arrested in Khuzestan province.³

The recent crackdown on Arab activists and my life being in danger is the main reason for me to finally migrate out of Iran.

- Iranian male, Iran, Apr 2015

Jul 2015

Migrant surge

Iranians join over one million irregular migrants arriving in the EU.

The surge meant open borders and the choice to select your favorite destinations in Europe.

- Iranian female, Turkey, Dec 2015

Aug 2015

German open door policy

Angela Merkel announces that Germany can cope with a mass influx.

The changing policy of the German government and ease of entering Western Europe gave hope and ambition to leave Iran.

- Iranian male, Turkey, Dec 2015

Sep 2015

Asylum applications backlog in EU

German and Sweden repeatedly announce large backlogs of asylum applications.

I wish I had known the process would take a long time... the service provider promised the refugee process would take no longer than six months.

- Iranian male, Germany, Aug 2017

Nov 2015

Paris attacks

A mass shooting and suicide bombing at the Bataclan Theatre kills 130 people. This was followed in March 2016 by an attack at Brussels Airport which left 35 dead.

It is the major reason for controlling the borders... we are currently staying at the [Greek-Macedonian] border... with no proper services to take care of our children.

- Iranian male, Greece, Dec 2015

Greek-Macedonian border part closure

Macedonian authorities permit only Afghan, Syrians and Iraqi migrants to cross the border from Greece.

At this point I just hope they allow us to cross the Macedonian border, and I do not care which country gives us permanent resettlement [sic].

- Iranian male, Greece, Dec 2015

Feb 2016

Greek-Macedonian border full closure

The closure of the Greek-Macedonian border to all migrants creates migrant backlogs in Greece and Turkey and sees a rise in use of alternative routes.

Mar 2016

EU-Turkey agreement

The EU reaches an agreement on management of migration flows across the Aegean Sea.

¹ Source: Farsinet

² Source: Australian Parliament

³ Source: Amnesty International

Finances as push factor and constraint on migration

The European migration crisis coincided with continued Iranian economic crisis, strengthening respondents' will to leave Iran. Yet, even while respondents were more determined to leave, the depreciation of the Rial made it more difficult to pay smugglers.

- A. Irregular migration is expensive, estimated by most respondents in the first wave of data collection to be in excess of USD 5,000.⁴⁴
- B. According to three respondents interviewed during Wave 2, increased demand during the European migration surge allowed service providers and smugglers to increase prices by a "few hundred dollars."
- C. Respondents reported that as more service providers came onto the market, the price of migration dropped again. However, one respondent accused the new entrants of providing an inferior service.
- D. During Wave 1, respondents described the prices quoted by smugglers as having tripled due to the decline of the Rial. From April 2012 to April 2013, the black market value of the currency almost halved.⁴⁵ As it continued to slip in 2018, the Central Bank of Iran began taking measures to stabilize the Rial and halt the black market exchange.⁴⁶
- E. A recent survey found that 41 percent of Iranians thought the economic situation of their family had deteriorated over the past four years.⁴⁷ The World Bank reported rising unemployment, even as the economy was growing.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Wave 1 data, collected from November—December 2014: of 192 responses, only 21 said it would cost less than USD 5,000; 66 respondents estimated it would cost between USD 5,000 and USD 10,000; 31 said between USD 10,000 and USD 15,000; and 69 said it would cost more than USD 15,000. However, note that some responses refer to fees paid for multiple people (for example, the respondent and his family).

⁴⁵ Farsinet. "Iranian Currency Exchange Rate," January 2018. <http://www.farsinet.com/toman/exchange.html>.

⁴⁶ Jalili, Saeed. "Currency Devaluation against US Dollar Rattles Iran," February 17, 2018. <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/02/currency-devaluation-dollar-rattles-iran-180216123318948.html>.

⁴⁷ Only 17 percent of respondents to the University of Maryland's representative survey said the economic condition of their family had improved in the last four years, with 41 percent saying it had deteriorated. Forty-one percent said it remained unchanged. Center for International and Security Studies at Maryland (CISSM) and IranPoll, "Iranian Public Opinion After the Protests: Full Data Tables."

⁴⁸ The World Bank put unemployment in the last quarter of 2016 at 12.5 percent, with 29.1 percent of youth unemployed. World Bank, "Iran Economic Monitor: Oil-Driven Recovery" (World Bank, Spring 2017), <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/344651498863986174/pdf/117165-WP-P162048-QUO-9-P162048-Iran-Economic-Monitor-FINAL-web-Jun-29-2017.pdf>.

MIGRATION JOURNEYS

This section discusses migrants' experiences in transit. After hearing about the horrors along other major routes to Europe, many respondents downplayed the risks that they faced on the more straightforward route through Turkey to Europe.

Key points in this section include:

- Migration pathways were uneven and winding. While many respondents had reached Europe by August 2016, most were not where they thought they would be before departure in 2014.
- Key external events heavily impacted journeys. Pertinent was the closure of the eastern Balkan route. However, respondents tended to attribute failure to their own choices.
- Service providers performed a range of functions, most commonly guiding respondents and providing accommodation en route. In some cases they assisted with the illegal exits from Iran.
- There is scant research on the experiences faced by Iranians early in the journey to Europe, particularly the first leg from Iran to Turkey. There is therefore little insight into their protection needs. Further research conducted along the route could provide useful data for protection-oriented intervention.

Journeys are fragmented and winding

Migration is often painted as a straightforward process beginning with departure and ending with arrival at the destination country. The reality of migration is different. From the decision to migrate, to departure and transit, journeys are non-linear and unpredictable. Five cases of individuals highlighted in Figure 6 (Anoush, Farroukh, Amira, Dilan and Malik) are explored here.⁴⁹

The image shows the unevenness of their progress and divergent outcomes. An upward movement of the line graph shows respondents moving closer to their original plans, while a downward trajectory shows movement away.

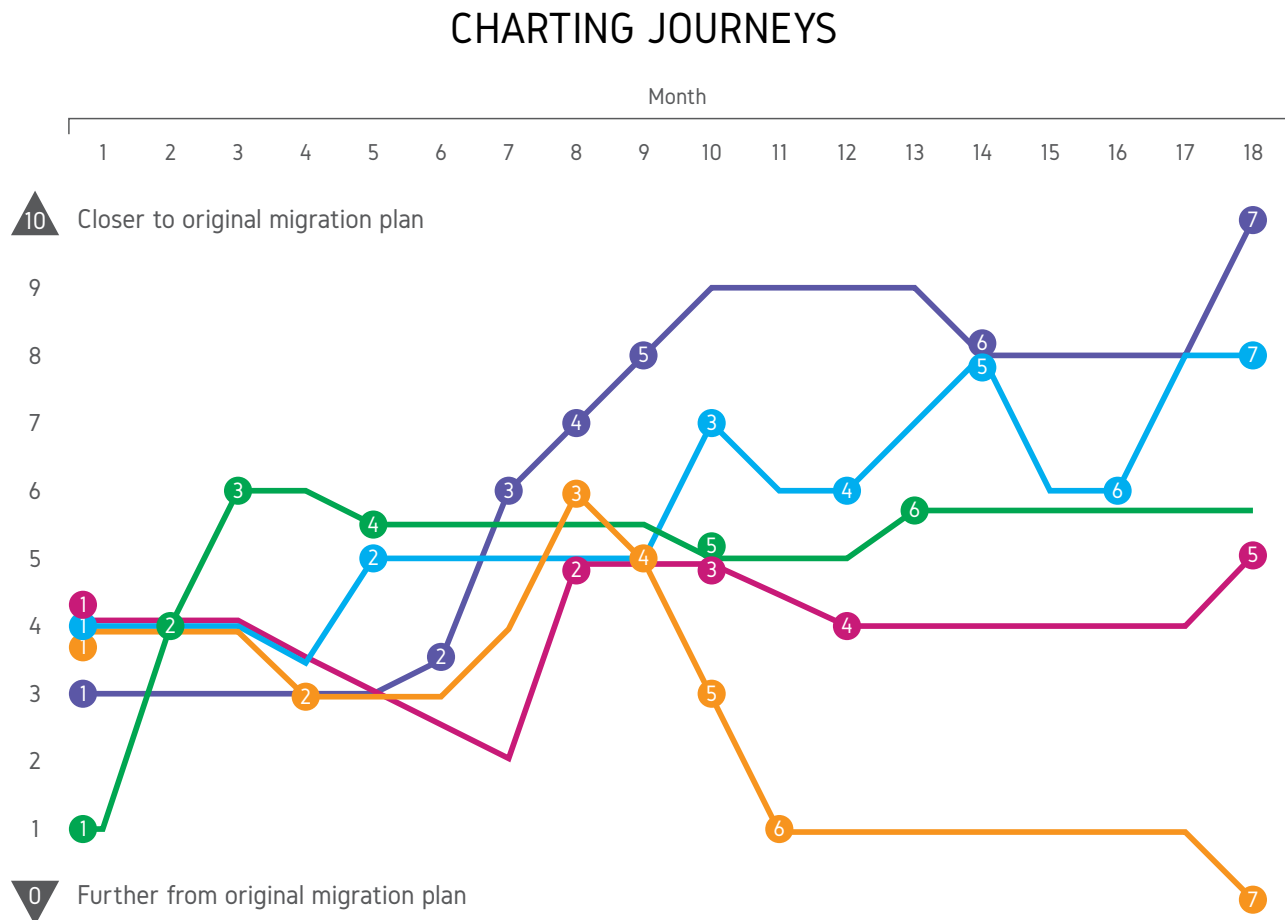
Personal factors – responses to key events early in the journey played a decisive role in the outcomes of their migration attempts. Dilan was delayed trying to sell his house. Once he had done so, he quickly brought forward his plans to depart. Farroukh decided to remain in Iran to attend a summer wedding. He blames this delay for his lack of success.

Outcomes – Dilan and Farroukh have the most contrasting outcomes, with Dilan settled in Germany and Farroukh returning to Iran. Respondents were willing to adjust their aspirations, with Malik settling for France after failing to reach the UK. This is explored further in the subsequent section.

Seeking assistance – some respondents sought help with their journey or to return to Iran. Anoush and Amira returned to Turkey when they failed to cross the Greek-Macedonian border. Both intended to attempt the journey again, but Anoush decided to register with UNHCR first. She had little faith in resettlement but felt that staying in Turkey would provide some security. Meanwhile Farroukh, who was apprehended in Bulgaria and returned to Turkey, planned to return to Iran with support from IOM.

⁴⁹ Not their real names.

Figure 6: Journeys of Amira, Dilan, Malik, Anoush and Farroukh



AMIRA	DILAN	MALIK	ANOUSH	FARROUKH
<p>1 Amira makes a part payment to the smuggler, with the rest due on arrival. She expects to leave in three months.</p> <p>2 Departs Iran.</p> <p>3 We could not get in touch with Amira for Wave 2. At this point, she was likely in the makeshift refugee camps that had built up at the Macedonian border, and will spend winter there.</p> <p>4 Poor conditions in Macedonia encourage Amira to turn back to Turkey.</p> <p>5 Amira is in Turkey but hoping to find an opportunity to continue her journey to Germany.</p>	<p>1 Dilan makes a part payment to the smuggler, with the rest due on arrival. He expects to leave within six months.</p> <p>2 Delay as Dilan tries to sell his home to fund the journey.</p> <p>3 Brings forward departure to take advantage of migrant surge. Leaves with family.</p> <p>4 Switches destination choice while en-route (in Turkey/ Bosnia & Herzegovina or Bulgaria)</p> <p>5 Makes quick progress towards final destination.</p> <p>6 Dilan still harbours some desires to continue his journey to the UK.</p> <p>7 Dilan is now happy to settle for Germany and remain there, the UK appearing out of reach.</p>	<p>1 Malik pays the full amount before departure and expects to leave within 6 months.</p> <p>2 Departs Iran.</p> <p>3 Not contactable, likely en-route and progressing as planned.</p> <p>4 Uncertainty: at some point, Malik decides to go to the UK instead of Germany.</p> <p>5 Malik likely arrives in France at this point and starts first attempts to migrate onwards to the UK.</p> <p>6 Around this point, Malik begins to give up on reaching the UK.</p> <p>7 Malik is in France, and has given up on arriving in the UK.</p>	<p>1 Anoush applies for visa, plans to leave legally in 6 months.</p> <p>2 Visa is rejected and she makes plans to leave irregularly immediately.</p> <p>3 Departs Iran sooner than expected.</p> <p>4 In Turkey, hears that border controls are getting tougher in Sweden. Decides to change destination to Germany.</p> <p>5 At Macedonian border but can't cross to the EU. Returns to Turkey. Doesn't return to Iran because of shame and failure.</p> <p>6 Registers with UNHCR in Turkey, but due to the long process is still anticipating crossing to Europe.</p>	<p>1 Farroukh gives smuggler a deposit, expecting to leave within 3 months.</p> <p>2 Remains in Iran for a relative's summer wedding. Departure planned for September.</p> <p>3 Progress - is in Greece by September 2015.</p> <p>4 Cannot find a way to leave Greece. Eventually attempt the overland route via Bulgaria.</p> <p>5 Apprehended in Bulgaria.</p> <p>6 Elects to return to Iran with governmental and IOM support.</p> <p>7 Farroukh says he will never leave Iran again: "I am totally embarrassed, I have given up our life savings for nothing."</p>

Unexpected hardships

Obstacles encountered on journeys stood in stark contrast to the anticipated ease with which respondents expected to migrate. Hardships included:





























- Walking for long distances.
- Poor conditions in Istanbul, Athens and Idomeni, at the Greek-Macedonian border.

Respondents often characterized these difficulties as unfair, because they thought that others had reached destinations in Western Europe in a matter of days and believed they would also arrive relatively quickly. In reality, most journeys lasted around a month.

Some respondents reasoned that progress could not be expected without hardship. However, two respondents said they were suffering psychologically, despite being successful in reaching Western Europe. Psychological challenges were likely understated, because respondents were not asked directly about them.⁵⁰

Respondents were asked whether they felt better or worse off since leaving Iran (Figure 7). Most who reported being better off were in Western Europe. Those who felt worse off were in Turkey, Macedonia or Greece. However, there was a small contingent in Germany who were unsure whether their situation had improved or not.

Figure 7: Whether respondents are better or worse off by location

 Better	 Germany		2016
	 Sweden		2016
	 The Netherlands		2016
 Worse	 Greece		2015
	 Turkey		2015
	 Macedonia		2015
	 Sweden		2016
 Don't know	 Germany		2016
	 Sweden		2016
	 France		2016
 No change	 Greece		2015
	 Turkey		2015

⁵⁰ While respondents had the opportunity to describe emotional and psychological wellbeing in open-ended questions, the methodology did not explicitly ask about these indicators to avoid re-traumatizing respondents.

PREFERENCES

This section discusses the flexibility of migration decision-making – how decisions are not fixed but frequently change – particularly around destination choice.

In this section:

- Respondents received information and advice en route that caused them to switch their destination preference, most notably from other countries in Europe to Germany.
- Overseas social and family networks were prominent sources of information for respondents, but there was little correlation between the location of overseas contacts and destination preferences.
- There is demand for return and reintegration assistance among those who do not get to Europe and are unable to return home due to lack of funds and support in their places of origin.
- Respondents who changed destination mostly did not report having done so. An improved survey design may help to better understand why.

Shifting goals

Respondents were willing to migrate to a destination that was different to their original choice. Of the 19 respondents in August 2016 who also took part in the first wave of data collection, only five had arrived at their originally preferred destination.

Although 16 respondents changed their destination choice en route,⁵¹ only three explicitly acknowledged having done so. This may be because respondents state a destination preference that they are open to changing from the beginning. As a result, if they were ambivalent about their destination choice, they may not consider it to have changed when asked by researchers later on.

Decision-making on destination and other aspects of migration is dynamic. Respondents continually assess information and feed what they've learned into their decision-making. Figure 8 shows respondents who said that, while en route, changing migration policies and emergent dangers of the journey influenced their choices. It also shows the number who considered returning to Iran while in transit.

⁵¹ Their location at time of the Wave 3 survey was different from the originally intended destination stated in Wave 1.

Figure 8: Influences and perspectives while in transit

Influences and perspectives while in transit

Migration policies influenced choices en route



Dangers of the journey influenced choices en route



Considered returning to Iran en route



Factors shaping destination choices

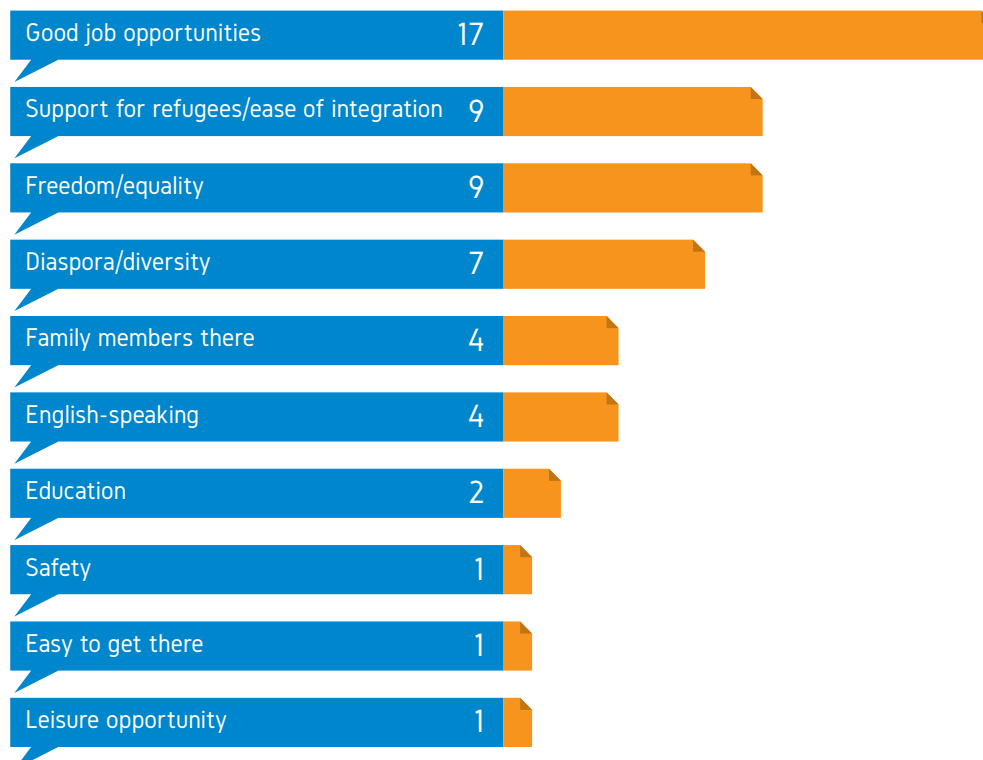
The top three destination preferences in Wave 3 were Germany (16 individuals), the UK (13)⁵² and Sweden (8). Some respondents were more general, selecting 'anywhere in the European Union' (6) and 'anywhere in the West' (2). When asked about their expectations, respondents thought they would have good job opportunities at their destination (17)⁵³ and were travelling to welcoming societies with freedom, equality and diversity, where the government supports refugees (Figure 9).

⁵² Two respondents indicated they preferred to migrate to the UK but had now settled for France and Germany.

⁵³ 55 responses were recorded from 28 respondents on what life is like at their preferred name destination.

Figure 9: Responses on what life will be like in migrant's preferred destinations

What is life like in your preferred destination?



Respondents' overseas social and family networks were prominent sources of information but not good predictors of destination.⁵⁴ All respondents knew somebody overseas whom they spoke to at least once a year. Nearly all Wave 3 respondents (40 individuals, or 87 percent) knew somebody in Australia, and 17 (34 percent) had their strongest network there. However, all respondents said they preferred to go to Europe or had already arrived there.

However, destination preferences may be best understood as the places where respondents believe they are most likely to reach. For example, they saw the 2015 migration surge to Europe and the 2008-2013 surge of IMAs to Australia as key opportunities to escape Iran and settle in the West. When the route to Australia all but closed, respondents switched focus to other Western destinations.

One respondent - an ethnic Lor man with children - was an exception to the rule. He was adamant that he wanted to reach Australia despite acknowledging the difficulties, as he wanted to rejoin close relatives.

⁵⁴ This contrasts with findings in a forthcoming report from the Afghan Panels sister study, which found that destination preferences were strongly correlated with the location of social networks.

Returning home

Most respondents en route to Europe did not anticipate returning to Iran. Just one out of 21 respondents in Wave 2 hoped to live in Iran at some point in the future.⁵⁵ This was a Kurdish man who had successfully reached Germany with his family. In Wave 3, a single respondent said he would return to Iran but not for at least five years.

There were practical and emotional barriers to return:

- Respondents had made high-stakes investments in migration, including the very public, highly visible sale of houses, cars and land. They believed return would be shameful or embarrassing.
- The high volume of migrants reaching Australia and Europe and visibly displaying their success in these destinations made some feel their own failure more keenly.

⁵⁵ Response options were a) yes, to live b) yes, to visit c) no d) I don't know.

ASSESSING OUTCOMES

Respondents' interpretation of their own progress is valuable in understanding why decisions are made and what outcomes are considered successful. Investigating irregular migrants' own perspectives gives insight into why they think dangerous, expensive and/or uncertain journeys are worth the risk.

In this section:

- Most respondents reported their journey to have been successful. Many were satisfied with outcomes despite a number of expectations not being met, indicating that the most important goal was simply to reach the West.
- The difficulties of the journey were rationalized as the inevitable price of a coveted prize.
- A small minority of respondents who felt they failed said they would not have made the journey had they been able to properly appraise the risks.
- Respondents often prepared thoroughly for the journey. However, some may have overestimated their control over unpredictable factors. Migrants tended to attribute poor outcomes to their own choices, when the nature of irregular migration means that some risks cannot be mitigated.
- Most respondents in Europe were still in the asylum application phase. If their applications are rejected, future waves of this study may see their outlook become more negative.

Defining success and failure on the migration journey

Many respondents who took part in Wave 3 had reached destinations in Europe (Figure 10) including Germany, Sweden, the Netherlands, and Turkey. Some had returned to Iran or had not yet departed.

Figure 10: Location of respondents at each wave of data collection⁵⁶

📍 Respondents' physical progress 2014-2016				
	Country 2014	Country 2015/04	Country 2015/08	Country 2016/08
Male	Iran	Iran	Germany	Germany
Female	Iran	Iran		Turkey
Male	Iran	Iran		France
Male	Iran	Iran	Turkey	Germany
Male	Iran	Iran	Sweden	Sweden
Female	Iran	Iran	Germany	Germany
Female	Iran	Iran	Sweden	Sweden
Male	Iran	Iran		Germany
Male	Iran	Iran	Greece	Iran (returned)
Male	Iran	Iran	Greece	Sweden
Female	Iran	Iran	Sweden	Sweden
Male	Iran	Iran	Germany	Germany
Male	Iran	Iran		Germany
Male	Iran	Iran		Germany
Male	Iran	Iran	Germany	Germany
Male	Iran	Iran	Greece	Germany
Male	Iran	Iran	Holland	Holland
Male	Iran	Iran	Germany	Germany
Female	Iran	Iran		Turkey

Despite facing hardships, those who had reached Europe said they had fulfilled their migration goals. Hardships included being placed in immigration detention (two respondents) and financial difficulties (one). Nine of 20 respondents said their income was not enough to survive. Respondents for whom income was sufficient relied on charitable donations and casual jobs to supplement government allowances.⁵⁷

Respondents who returned to Iran felt they had failed. Two individuals had returned, deeply disappointed with the journey, hardships and financial losses. They would not encourage others to attempt the journey.

Not all respondents who reached Europe were positive about migration outcomes. Respondents in Germany (six), France (one) and Sweden (one) said they would not

"The government is only providing minor support while our case is processed but we are happy to be here."

- ethnic Arab male in Germany, November 2015

⁵⁶ Included are the 19 respondents in Wave 3 who took part in previous waves. The remaining 31 respondents were all surveyed in Iran and had not yet begun their journeys.

⁵⁷ Germany (6), Sweden (2), France (1).

"I've never been so depressed in my life... the journey was much tougher than I expected."

- ethnic Arab female in Sweden, August 2016

encourage others to make the journey. This could be driven by the perception that it is more difficult to reach Western Europe now. More broadly, they do not think the potential rewards justify the risks. In one telling example, the respondent described suffering the long-lasting psychological effects of her difficult journey, including anxiety and depression, despite reaching Sweden relatively quickly.

There was a third group of respondents stuck in Turkey or Greece who still hoped to reach Europe. This category included two respondents who were frustrated at the length of time involved in the asylum process at their destinations compared to peers who had migrated earlier and other nationalities (like Syrian) processed ahead of them.

The fuzzy line between success and failure included a small number of respondents whose expectations of Western European countries had not been met. Some respondents left jobs and well-developed social networks in Iran only to find government support and labor market opportunities disappointing. Although this was the minority, it included respondents who reached

In December 2014 Akil, an ethnic Arab from Ahwaz, was in Iran and unable to work. He said that, in addition to security and freedom, Europe offered more economic opportunities. In November 2015, after arriving in Germany, he explained: "I had no income in Iran, but had the support of family to survive. Today I feel totally alone and in need of more help while trying to settle down."

Germany, where labor demand is widely believed to be strong.

Given that protection is granted to roughly half of Iranian asylum applications in the EU, it might be expected that some respondents' applications are rejected. This may change respondents' perceptions of their migration and is an area to watch in subsequent study waves.

After being cheated of his money by a smuggler in Turkey, Daniel became stranded in Turkey, lamenting that his poor choice of smuggler cost him success.

Mitigating risks

Respondents' assessment of failure can be divided into two categories: internal factors over which they perceive they have control and external factors, which they are not able to address. When to leave Iran and which smuggler to use are examples of internal factors. Border closures, conditions in transit countries and asylum policies are external.

Respondents assumed responsibility for internal factors. They most often attributed the failure of their journey to their own choices on the timing of their departure and choice in people smuggler. This belies the fact that many failed because of changes in border policy, in particular at Idomeni, and later increased Turkish vigilance under the EU-Turkey migration deal. Moreover, choosing a well-intentioned smuggler is no guarantee of success. This overemphasis on internal factors and neglect of external factors means migrants sometimes overestimate their ability to mitigate risks through preparation.

CONCLUSION

The report explored the physical and psychological development of respondents' migration journeys from 2014-2016.

Respondents decided to leave Iran because of a deep-seated sense of exclusion from economic and educational opportunities. Most departures were triggered by the perception that the 'surge' of migrants to Europe, many of them Syrian, presented a window of opportunity for respondents.

The uneven progress of respondents and divergent outcomes demonstrated the non-linear, fragmented nature of journeys. Respondents departing with certain intentions often changed their views en route or abandoned their journey altogether. Decisions on destination appeared to be made on the basis of the likelihood of success, with many switching their preference to Germany.

While respondent outcomes have been reported here as success or failure, it is clear that neither are permanent outcomes. Many were satisfied to have reached Western Europe, but there are those in coveted destinations (such as Germany) who are uncertain about the future. The contingent who occupy the space between success and failure include those stuck in Turkey and Greece who still harbor aspirations of reaching Europe. Even those who accepted failure – and said they would not migrate again – may attempt to do so if conditions change.

Factors in future migration

Responses from the three waves of study suggest that the desire to migrate remains strong in respondents' communities of origin. Many will depart the next time there is clear opportunity to do so. As with the opportunity presented by the migrant crisis in Europe, resources will play a significant role in determining who departs and who does not. In predicting future trends, analysts must take into account income levels, smuggler fees, and currency fluctuations.

Meanwhile, other external events may change dynamics completely. Political destabilization in Iran or the region may make waiting untenable, as was the case in Iraq and Syria. On the other hand, improved governance bringing a heightened sense of liberty and economic opportunity may encourage potential migrants to at least postpone plans. Major efforts would be needed to convince ethnic minorities that any changes were sincere and sustainable.

Recommendations

The study findings allow us to make limited recommendations in three areas: strategic communications, data, and assistance.

Strategic communications - decision-making support for Iranians considering irregular migration to Europe

Many respondents said they would encourage others in the country of origin to migrate irregularly, and it is clear that the advice of those deemed successful in the journey is valued by potential migrants. However, successful migration depends on a range of factors that those who have succeeded in reaching Europe are not always qualified to answer. Unforeseen factors include changes to migration policies en route and in Europe. Potential migrants would therefore benefit from support in weighing the potential risks and rewards of migration.

Generating better data on protection needs in transit to improve communications and protection-based responses

Hardships en route are more easily overlooked by respondents when their journey has been successful, and they are likely to underrepresent any difficulties. Yet, respondents who were not successful in reaching Europe were damning of the conditions en route. Further research conducted with migrants in transit, for example at the Iran-Turkey border crossing, would provide valuable insight into real protection needs.

Return assistance for stranded migrants

This study highlighted several instances of respondents becoming stranded, considering return, or aborting their journeys while in Turkey, Bulgaria, Greece or Macedonia. Assisted return programs may benefit Iranian irregular migrants who do not wish to continue the journey but do not have the means or knowhow to return home and reestablish their lives. In conjunction with the recommended research above, new strategies can be developed to reach out to those who might benefit.

ANNEX 1 - METHODOLOGY

The report is based on three 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.

Annex 2 shows the demographic breakdown of respondents during the most recent wave of data collection.

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.

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:

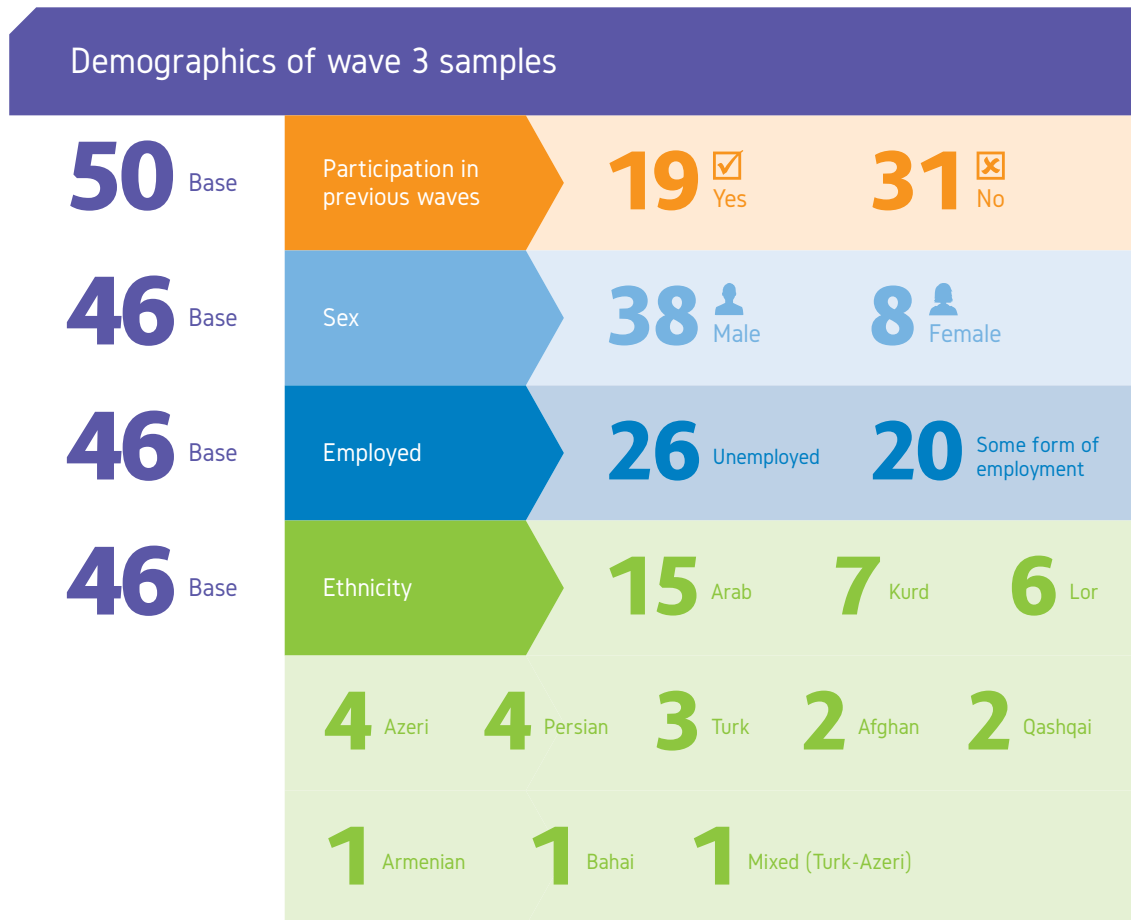
- The field team used a combination of telephone and face-to-face interviews across the waves of data collection. Surveys were conducted in Farsi.
- A simple snowball sampling technique was applied. While other research methods are available to improve the validity of non-representative survey data, including Respondent Driven Sampling, it was decided that these would be too restrictive.
- Screening criteria were kept to a minimum. All respondents were required to be over 18 and intending to migrate to a Western destination within 12 months of the survey. No quotas (demographic or otherwise) were set.

Limitations

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

ANNEX 2 - DEMOGRAPHICS



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