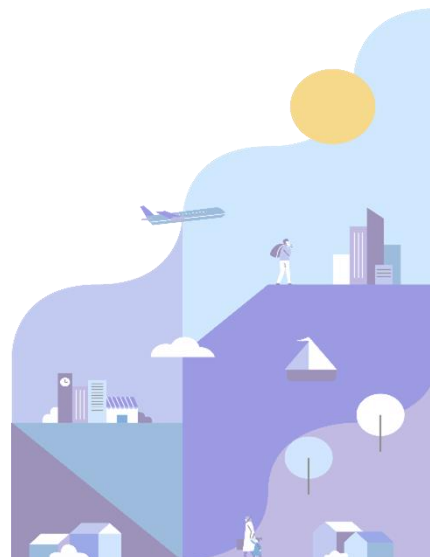


COUNTRY PROFILE: INDONESIA

Community Perceptions and Information Needs of Persons at Risk of Irregular Migration in Bali Process Member States: Evidence from Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand

February 2025

This country profile is developed based on a report published by the Regional Support Office of the Bali Process on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crime (RSO). The report is titled *Community Perceptions and Information Needs of Persons at risk of Irregular Migration in Bali Process Member States: Evidence from Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand*. This report provides insights into the way in which persons at risk of irregular migration and their origin and host communities perceive irregular migration. Moreover, the report assesses the information needs of persons at risk of irregular migration and prescribe actionable recommendations to address these information needs.



Key Insights



Indonesia is a **country of origin**, especially of migrant workers, with 4.6 million migrants globally as of 2020¹. The Indonesia – Malaysia labour migration corridor is characterised by a high degree of irregularity, with nearly half of all Indonesian migrants in an irregular situation.



Economic motivations: The search for better livelihoods and job opportunities are a prominent driver of (irregular) migration, which are often mixed with other factors, including historical and cultural migration practices.



Along the labour migration corridor between Indonesia and Malaysia, an **entrenched culture of migration** was observed. Combined with economic drivers, these cultural drivers lead many prospective migrants to be influenced by the positive narratives perpetuated by friends and family who may downplay the associated risks and legal consequences of migrating irregularly.



Family and friends are the most reliable sources of information for Indonesian migrants followed by **smugglers and facilitators**.



While half of the Indonesian respondents **perceive irregular migration negatively**, most of them would **choose irregular pathways again**, challenging the common assumption that individuals would reconsider their decision to pursue irregular migration if better informed.

¹ UN (2024) [International Migrant Stock 2020](#). The figures presented are estimates and may vary due to gaps in the availability and quality of data. For example, Hasbiyalloh, B. et. al. (2024) in their study, [Political economy analysis of Indonesian migrant workers' vulnerabilities to exploitation in Malaysia's palm oil sector](#) estimate that there are nine million Indonesian migrant workers.



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Participant Overview

Indonesia is considered as an origin country of migrant workers and a transit country for migrants to Malaysia and Australia, in this report.



Map of migration routes taken by the survey respondents

Research period: June–August 2024

Indonesian respondents: 82 Indonesian migrants in irregular situations in Malaysia.

- **76 percent** are irregular/ undocumented
- **24 percent** has a permit which is no longer valid/ expired
- **28 percent** women; **72 percent** men
- **66 percent** of the respondents are between the ages of 36 – 55
- **90 percent** are from rural areas

Key informant interviews (KIs): 12 experts from the Government of the Republic of Indonesia, Non-Government Organisations, and the United Nations (UN) agencies.

Migration Drivers from Indonesia

Economic pressures: **99 percent** of respondents were in pursuit of economic opportunities. Limited job prospects, low wages, and high unemployment, especially in rural areas, drive the search for better livelihoods abroad. However, this is frequently intertwined with other factors, such as personal and family reasons (**35%**), as well as with cultural patterns of migration (**23%**).

Perceived affordability and speed of routes: Indonesian respondents (**46 out of 68**) reported opting for irregular migration as it is less costly; in contrast, some cited that smuggling fees were significantly higher. A study by ILO reveals that the average recruitment cost for a regular Indonesian migrant working in Malaysia's plantation industry ranges between **USD 401 and USD 500**. This is actually lower than the average smuggling fee of **USD 720** paid by Indonesian migrants who entered Malaysia irregularly, as highlighted in a study by UNODC.²

Rural location: In rural areas, such as in West Nusa Tenggara and East Nusa Tenggara, many become dependent on brokers due to limited education, economic hardship, and poor access to reliable information, especially about the risks of irregular migration. This dependency, coupled with inaccessible regular pathways, makes irregular migration appear not only viable but often the only possible route.

Environmental factors: Environmental and climate factors are increasingly recognised as drivers of migration. More often, however, the impacts of climate change and environmental stressors act as underlying drivers of cross-border migration rather than direct triggers and may therefore be underestimated. Key informants from Indonesia indicated that those who live in the coastal regions will be vulnerable to irregular migration as a result of environmental and climate stressors.

² ILO (2022) Cost of recruitment in the Indonesia–Malaysia migration corridor:

https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@asia/@ro-bangkok/documents/publication/wcms_840109.pdf;

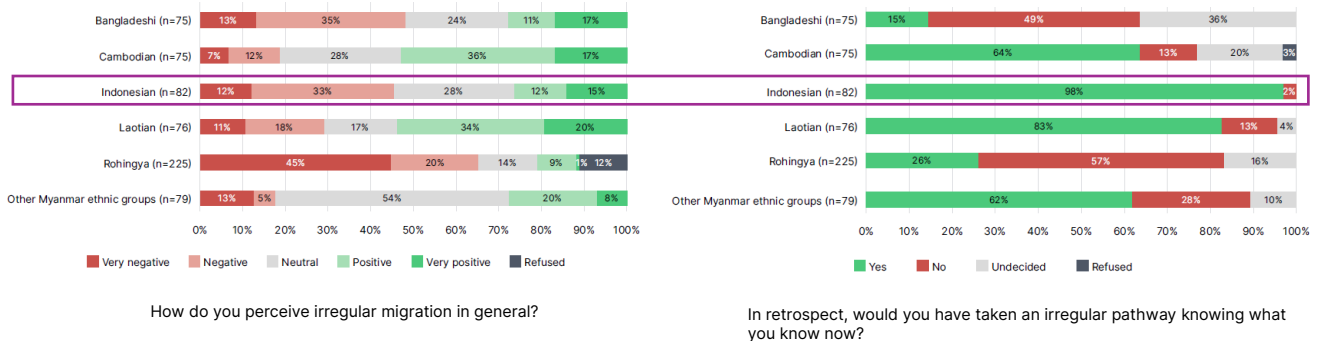
UNODC (2024) Migrant Smuggling in Southeast Asia - Research Findings on Migrant Smuggling in Southeast Asia:

https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/glosom/Observatory/2024/ObservatorySOM_SEA_ResearchBrief.pdf



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Perceptions of Irregular Migration: Indonesian Migrants and their Origin Communities



- **45 percent** of Indonesian respondents tended to view irregular migration negatively. However, a large majority (**98%**) would still choose to undertake irregular migration routes again.
- **Downplaying the associated risks to irregular migration:** Because of the strong culture of migration and reliance on informal social networks, many are influenced by positive narratives promoted by friends and family. Many do not consider the risks of the journey, believing that their connections in the host country will protect them from these risks.

How Migrants Seek and Engage with Information



Family and friends are the most reliable sources of information for Indonesian migrants followed by **smugglers and facilitators**.



Information needs: Most Indonesian respondents sought information about the costs and financing of the journey (**24%**), ways to find a smuggler/ facilitator/ travel agent (**18%**), and regular migration and asylum-seeking processes (**16%**).



The most preferred means of obtaining information for Indonesian respondents are phone calls (**77%**), in-person meetings (**75%**), and social media platforms or messaging apps (**72%**).

Gaps and Challenges in Existing Information Programmes

- Despite the variety of information programmes in place, survey data reveals that only **4 percent** of respondents attended pre-departure information programmes. This points to a gap in **reach and accessibility** of existing information programmes, many of which target prospective migrants using regular pathways, often overlooking those at risk of irregular migration.
- There is a **disconnect between information dissemination methods used** by government and non-government institutions. **Migrants and refugees typically obtain information** from friends and family. Smugglers and facilitators were also reported as the predominant and most reliable information sources, with very few respondents accessing information from formal entities such as NGOs and the United Nations (**6%**), or governments (**2%**).



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Recommendations for Indonesia

Practical recommendations to address information gaps



Conduct a targeted needs assessment and stakeholder mapping to identify gaps in information and access, especially for vulnerable groups.

➔ Effective information programmes must be tailored to the specific cultural, socio-economic, and geographical contexts of target populations. This involves understanding the unique challenges and opportunities faced by different communities and adapting content accordingly.



Enhance and tailor information programmes based on the findings of the targeted needs assessment and the stakeholder mapping, prioritising accessibility and relevance for various demographics. This includes tailoring messages to specific audiences such as low-literacy populations, rural or urban dwellers, and different cultural backgrounds.

➔ It is important to go beyond generic information about migration risks and draw from evidence-based research to address specific concerns and perspectives. The information provided must be clear, concise, easy to understand, and accurate.



Leverage social networks and digital platforms especially Facebook and TikTok for information dissemination. Information programmes should account for how different groups seek and receive information.



Implement a localised and decentralised approach in information dissemination by drawing on migrants' experiences and community insights, developing localised and culturally relevant content that resonates with the targeted audience. Community-specific approaches, especially at the village level, foster trust and allow programmes to engage more deeply with their target populations.



Enhance cross-border collaboration between host and origin countries to strengthen cross-border information programmes through initiatives such as the Bali Process and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Moreover, effective coordination between governments, civil society organisations, and international bodies can prevent duplication of efforts and wasted resources.

Addressing misinformation and disinformation



Raise awareness against misinformation and disinformation by providing accurate information, particularly on social media or through agents. Moreover, it is essential to empower prospective migrants with the skills and tools to verify the information they receive— whether from social media, agents, or peers.



Strengthen monitoring on social media platforms by collaborating with social media companies, particularly Meta and ByteDance, to advocate for enhanced protection measures against misinformation and online abuse targeting migrants and refugees. Additionally, bolster the presence of government institutions on social media platforms to ensure accurate information and support are readily available.

The RSO provides technical support to Bali Process Members to strengthen cooperation on refugee protection and international migration, including combatting people smuggling, trafficking in persons, and related transnational crime. Get in touch to find out more and discuss new activity proposals.



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