

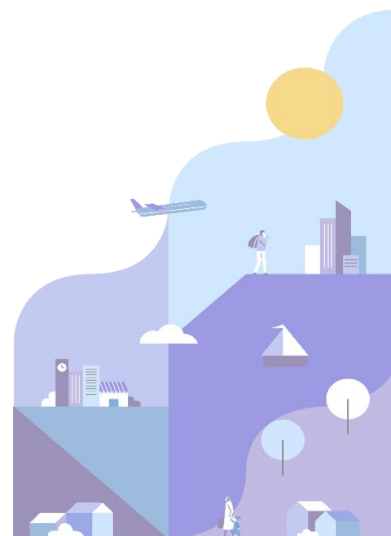


## COUNTRY PROFILE: BANGLADESH

*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



**Bangladesh is one of world's largest migrant sending countries**, accounting for 7.4 million migrants living abroad as of 2020.<sup>1</sup> Bangladesh faces economic pressures and protracted displacement that drive many individuals towards irregular migration. The route from Bangladesh to Malaysia, particularly via boat across the Bay of Bengal, is a prominent irregular migration pathway.



**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.



**Growing climate mobilities:** In Bangladesh, environmental factors have also emerged as a migration driver. Bangladesh ranked 7<sup>th</sup> among the countries most affected by extreme weather events between 2000 and 2019, making climate-related stressors a prominent concern. While climate-related factors are generally not the primary drivers of cross-border migration, they function as a vulnerability multiplier, intensifying pre-existing vulnerabilities.



**Family and friends** are the most reliable sources of information for Bangladeshi migrants. Bangladeshi respondents who did not consider regular pathways reported that agents, smugglers, or facilitators were the ones who chose irregular routes, indicating a **reliance on intermediaries** to navigate migration options.



Bangladeshi migrants pay **significantly high smuggling fees for irregular travel compared to regular travel** via direct flights challenging the assumption that irregular migration is inherently cheaper.



Half of the Bangladeshi respondents tended to view irregular migration negatively and indicated that **they would not have irregularly migrated knowing what they now know**, pointing to unmet information needs.

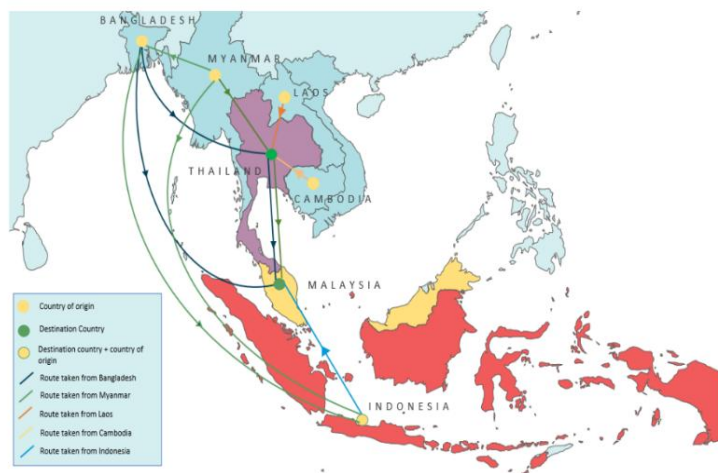
<sup>1</sup> UN (2024) International Migrant Stock 2020:

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## Participant overview

Bangladesh is considered as an origin country of migrant workers to Malaysia in this report.



Map of migration routes taken by the survey respondents

**Research period:** June-August 2024

**Bangladeshi respondents:** 75 Bangladeshi migrants in irregular situations in Malaysia

- **81 percent** are irregular/undocumented
- **19 percent** have a permit which is no longer valid/ expired
- **93 percent** men; **7 percent** women
- **96 percent** are between the ages of 18 and 35
- **57 percent** from rural areas; **43 percent** from urban areas

**Key informant interviews (KIIs):** Nine experts from the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Non-Government Organisations, academia/research, and the United Nations (UN) agencies.

## Irregular migration drivers from Bangladesh

**Economic pressures:** **91 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 violence and insecurity (**31%**), as well as personal or family reasons (**24%**).

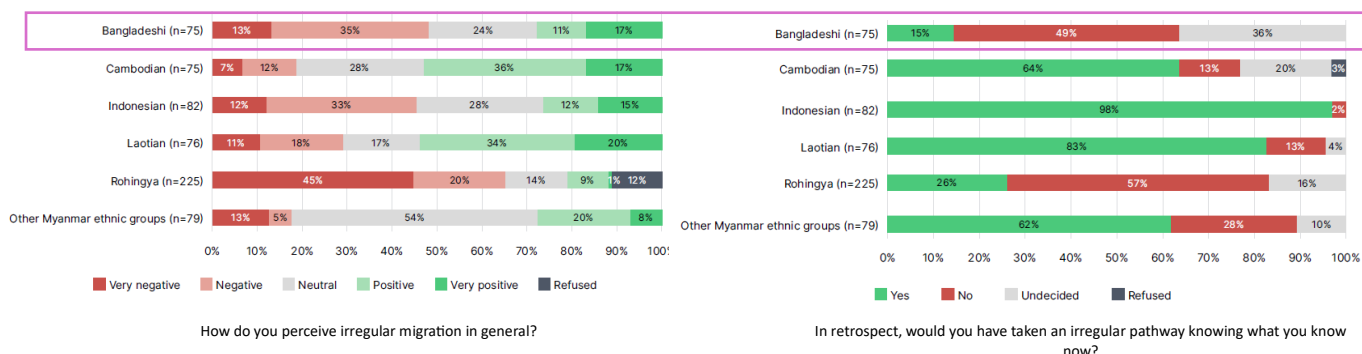
**Role of gender:** Personal or family issues were a significant factor for women to leave origin countries. Key informants from Bangladesh identified the role of male family members or parents in influencing women's migration decisions, systemic exclusion and gender-based discriminatory practices as key reasons compelling women to leave the country in search of safety, acceptance, and opportunity. Women who migrate primarily due to family obligations, such as marriage, may face heightened risks in unfamiliar environments, including social isolation, limited access to resources, and potential exploitation.

**Perceived affordability of irregular travel:** Among Bangladeshi respondents, **50 out of the 55** respondents who did not consider regular pathways reported that agents, smugglers, or facilitators were the ones who chose irregular routes, indicating a reliance on intermediaries to navigate migration options. Smuggling fees for Bangladeshi migrants were significantly higher than the costs that would be incurred if regular travel via direct flights was possible.

**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. While current climate-induced migration is primarily internal—such as movement from rural areas to urban centres—as environmental stressors increasingly play a direct and indirect role in decision-making, many individuals may have little choice but to pursue irregular migration routes in search of safety and better economic opportunities.



## Perceptions of irregular migration among Bangladeshi migrants



- Half of the Bangladeshi respondents tended to view irregular migration negatively and indicated that they would not have irregularly migrated knowing what they now know, pointing to unmet information needs.
- **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** in another country are the most reliable sources of information for Bangladeshi migrants followed by **smugglers/ facilitators and private employment agencies**.



Bangladeshi respondents sought information about costs and financing (**24%**), nature of the journey (**17%**), and regular migration and asylum-seeking processes (**15%**).



The most preferred means of obtaining information for Bangladeshi respondents are phone calls (**79%**), social media platforms or messaging apps (**58%**), and in-person meetings (**40%**).

## Gaps and challenges in existing information programmes

- Despite the variety of information programmes in place, survey data reveals that only **4 percent** of all respondents from Bangladesh, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, and Myanmar 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, or governments.



## Recommendations for Bangladesh

### 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.

