



Needs Assessment Study
Information needs of potential migrants in
Afghanistan
Final Report

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IMPROVING MIGRATION
MANAGEMENT IN THE SILK ROUTES



 **ICMPD**
International Centre for
Migration Policy Development

About ATR Consulting

This report was written for ICMPD by Assess, Transform, Reach Consulting (ATR). ATR is an Afghan company that was founded in 2012 and provides five streams of complementary services to its clients: (i) monitoring and evaluation, (ii) socio-economic research, (iii) polling, (iv) strategic advisory, and (v) capacity development. ATR emphasises gaining safe access, controlling data reliability, and gathering relevant expertise to deliver robust research and analysis services in volatile environments. ATR has offices in Afghanistan, Mali and the United Arab Emirates.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS & ACRONYMS

ATR	Assess Transform & Reach consulting
ABP	Afghan Border Police
CDC	Community Development Council
DRC	Danish Refugee Council
DIREC	Displacement and Returnees Executive Committee
DoRR	Directorate of Refugees and Repatriation
EU	European Union
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
ICMPD	International Centre for Migration Policy Development
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IOM	International Organization for Migration
MoLSA	Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs
MoHRA	Ministry of Hajj and Religious Affairs
MoHE	Ministry of Higher Education
MRC	Migrant Resource Centre
MoRR	Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation
MoFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Mol	Ministry of Interior
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
OCHA	United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OHPM	Organization for Health Promotion and Management
UNHCR	United Nations Higher Commissioner for Refugees
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
WB	World Bank

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Executive Summary

The war in Afghanistan continues uninterrupted, and the economy and labour market have subsequently been badly affected as a result. This has put a burden on the market for jobs and economic prospects, leading to irregular migration.

The International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) commissioned ATR Consulting to conduct an in-depth qualitative assessment on the information needs of potential migrants at the community level, as well as the means by which regions with high numbers of potential migrants can be reached. The findings of this study will be used for the development of strategic interventions and an evidence-based outreach strategy that will be administered by the Migrant Resource Centre (MRC), an information centre on migration run by the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation (MoRR) in Kabul.

This assessment is based on a qualitative research methodology including in-depth interviews with potential migrants, returnees, and key informants. The fieldwork was conducted in 2020 in seven provinces of Afghanistan: Herat, Faryab, Nangarhar, Balkh, Jawzjan, Kabul, Takhar, and Khost, but these findings can be applied to the whole country. Data collection tools for conducting key-informant and in-depth interviews were designed following an extensive desk review, determining the study's scope, and interviewees' selection criteria. Data analysis was based on a total of 119 interviews, drawn predominantly from stakeholders comprising of national and international NGOs, working on migration governance and development in Afghanistan, state institutions and UN agencies, and male and female potential migrants and returnees.

Based on a literature review, the demography of potential migrants revealed that most migrants are male, varying in age between 24 and 35. Whether living in rural or urban regions, the majority of potential migrants are determined to embark on irregular migration journeys. Confirming existing literature on this, primary data has also indicated that willingness to travel irregularly is higher among young individuals in rural communities, while most potential migrants in urban areas seek to migrate with proper documentation to Iran and Pakistan, and subsequently continue travelling to Turkey and Europe irregularly. Ongoing conflict and widespread unemployment are the two main drivers for migration. Destinations and means of travel depend on migrants' socio-economic profiles. Europe and Turkey remain the two preferred final destinations for all potential migrants, but Iran and Pakistan are widely viewed as either final or transit destinations, depending on whether individuals can afford onward travel. Potential migrants living in rural areas have a lower level of education, often obtained informally, as compared to those living in urban areas who in many cases have completed high school, with some holding a bachelor's degree.

The returnees' demographic is mostly composed of men. Interviewed stakeholders identified them as males between the ages of 20 and 35, whose host countries were Iran, Pakistan, Turkey and Europe. Reasons for return often depended on the socio-economic situation in the host country. For instance, most returnees from Iran and Pakistan decided to return after the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, as very few Afghan migrants had access to recognized legal status, nor to basic services such as access to education, or freedom of movement. Denial or the significant delay of asylum applications resulted in deportations from Turkey and Europe. Deported asylum seekers, who often reported feeling shame at

having failed in their objective to successfully reach their desired host country, and who hold concerns about insecurity and economic degradation in Afghanistan, are also among potential migrants in both rural and urban locations.

Informational Needs

Much of the information required by potential migrants concerns evidence-based examples of what challenges they are likely to face once leaving Afghanistan. Most interviewed migrants reported that their priority informational needs surround how to arrive safely in the desired destination country. During interviews, it was evident that most potential migrants do not have access to robust information about what smuggling, and trafficking gateways are, irrespective of whether they are located in rural and urban locations. However, irregular migrants still choose to make this journey, despite being aware of physical risks, such as the reported shootings and torture of migrants on the Iran-Afghanistan border in 2020, crime (theft of possessions) and the likelihood of exploitation by employers. This is due to a belief that the current risks they face in Afghanistan are greater than the risks that lie ahead in their journey. Despite awareness of these risks, Afghan migrants often refrain from sharing such concerns with female members of their family prior to their journey to reduce levels of concern. Therefore, there is a gender gap in terms of access to information about risks associated with irregular migration. Women, particularly in rural communities, typically know little of deals struck between smugglers and their male family members.

Potential irregular migrants to Iran prioritize understanding the formal mechanisms surrounding escalating complaints within the workplace, should their rights be violated by an employer. This group of migrants are also interested in information on access to aid (accommodation, food, and shelter), and their children's right to education.

Potential migrants planning on travelling to Turkey and/or Europe have a higher likelihood of applying for asylum and work permits in the eventual host country, so information valued by this group often surrounds: a) how to successfully apply for asylum, and what contingency plans to develop should the attempt fail. Information about length of asylum applications, process for attesting education documents, existence of refugees and immigrants information centers and details on host country's culture were also identified as "very useful" for potential migrants to Turkey and Europe. For returnees considering returning to Afghanistan, information regarding the security situation in Afghanistan (particularly in their place of origin), as well as the availability of access to support mechanisms/assistance was also highlighted as indispensable. This information could help migrants make a more informed decision as to whether return would be the best decision for them, and address concerns relevant to return, based on up-to-date information.

Sources and Means

The findings of this study indicate that the information-seeking behaviour profile of potential migrants in rural locations often privileges traditional networks and religious figures as desirable sources of information. Information is often accessed via social networks in the community, radio, mosques, and

local councils (shura). Potential migrants in urban locations communicate with friends and relatives abroad, as well as smugglers, about their planned journey. Digital media is often a preferred means of communication for these exchanges, with messaging apps including Facebook, Messenger, WhatsApp, IMO and Viber often used. Messaging apps are less used in rural areas due to the following reasons: inability to afford access to internet, low levels of education meaning high illiteracy rates and/or a lack of understanding of how to use such apps. The use of contact messaging apps is widespread mostly in provincial capitals, and mostly among male migrants. Some female migrants in Kabul, Herat, Balkh and Jawzjan reported using these apps. Online media and messaging apps have not gained popularity, particularly among female migrants and returnees in Nangarhar, Faryab, Khost and Takhar, because of cultural restrictions and economic reasons.

Instead, potential migrants' communications take place either face-to-face, or through phone calls when telephone signal is available. Potential migrants in rural areas are less likely to watch TV. However, while the majority of potential migrants interviewed have not attended any information sessions on migration, nor are they likely to have accessed migration-related programs on TV, migrants in urban regions can be reached through different sources and means, including TV channels, radio stations, NGOs, DoRRs and social media. Regardless of their geographical location, almost all potential migrants struggle to access relevant, practical and useful information.

Based on the findings of this study, the information needs of potential migrants outside Kabul should be addressed. Further, certain key factors should be considered by the MRC whilst attempting to access potential migrants, including:

- **Developing stronger channels of communication with rural communities:** the MRC should focus on rural communities (especially from the provinces of Kabul, Herat, Nangarhar, Khost, Balkh, Faryab, Takhar, and Jawzjan), because the likelihood of attempts to migrate from these provinces is significantly higher. In addition, raising awareness in these provinces especially amongst female members of the family on the likely risks to personal safety and security is recommended, so female family members can better assess risks and influence decision-making of the potential migrants;
- **Building networks across Afghanistan with potential MRC partners:** potential migrants have delayed their journeys during the Covid-19 pandemic, due to perceived risks surrounding infection, heightened socioeconomic issues, and other risks associated with personal health. In order to work with this lull in net attempted migrations from Afghanistan, the MRC needs to expand its operations outside Kabul, for which it needs adequate financial support. The MRC cannot administer its outreach program alone. Therefore, it should extend collaboration with local community actors such as civil society groups, including local musicians, sport celebrities, elders, religious figures, and local government institutions.

For this course of action to take place, the recommendations that should be considered are presented in section 7.

1. Introduction

Although Afghanistan's borders with Iran and Pakistan have generally remained porous, during the last four decades of active conflict in Afghanistan, there have been unprecedented migration and return flows. While few studies support that such levels of migration have taken place on the basis of agreements between the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GoIRA) and other national partners, most research corroborates that this predominantly comprises of irregular migration (Majidi, 2017).¹

The ongoing conflict and related socioeconomic challenges are largely responsible for the scale of irregular migration. In 2019, over 430,000 people migrated from different parts of Afghanistan after security worsened, and natural disasters (mainly drought and flooding) adversely affected agricultural production, which remains the main source of livelihoods in Afghanistan. This catapulted many Afghan families into chronic food insecurity. Forced returns not only from Iran or Pakistan, but also from Europe are said to have affected hundreds of thousands of Afghans in 2016 alone (Ahmadi & Lakhani, 2017).² The return flows in 2020 was primarily driven by the outbreak of Covid-19 (DTM, 2020).³ Considering the history of migration in Afghanistan, migration typically happens irregularly, with the majority of migrants not having sufficient access to information on their rights and the relevant authorities in the host country they can reach out to in order to overcome their information needs and challenges.

This report is divided into seven sections: Section 1 of this study introduces the research questions and describes the methodology that was applied in order to design, collect and analyze the data, utilizing several data collection tools. The list of the data collected per location, and the study's challenges and limitations are part of the description. Section 2 describes the outflow of migrations by countries of destination and the inflow of Afghan refugees from abroad by annual trends and location. Section 3 contextualizes the main research findings by analyzing the demographic profile of returnees and potential migrants. It analyzes explicitly information needs and the sources and means that potential migrants use to obtain information. This part of the study also assesses the challenges and needs of returnees and migrants, dividing them into: pre-departure, in host country, and upon arrival. Section 4 outlines critical findings about the information needs of potential migrants, sources, and means used for gathering information from each of the studied provinces. Section 5 describes the existing migration policy framework in Afghanistan and the mandate and current activities of the Migrant Resource Centre (MRC) in Kabul. Section 6 draws conclusions from the findings, and Section 7 identifies recommendations for evidence-based programming and policymaking.

¹ Nassim Majidi, "From Forced Migration to Forced Returns in Afghanistan: Policy and Program Implications" *Transatlantic Council on Migration*, November 2017

² Belquis Ahmadi, Sadaf Lakhani, "The Afghan Refugee Crisis in 2016", *United States Institute for Peace (USIP)*, 2017

³ Afghanistan DTM Baseline Mobility Assessment Summary Results (January – June 2020)

2. Methodology

ATR developed this research study over three phases: (i) a preparation phase, consisting of developing data collections tool and training of field researchers, (ii) the data collection phase, and (iii) the data processing, data analysis, and reporting. This section also presents the limitations of the study and the challenges encountered during the assignment.

2.1. Research Focus Areas Pre-determined by ICMPD

- The profile of Afghans who require information on migration;
- The needs of Afghans according to different profiles;
- The means to reach the population of interest.

2.2. Target Groups

This study has been designed to focus on the migration journeys, experiences and information needs of the following groups:

- Potential migrants: for the purpose of this study, potential migrants are referred to those Afghans who intend to leave Afghanistan within the next 2 years. It includes regular and irregular migrants and all types of migration, for example migration for labour, family reunification and education - but also persons seeking international protection.
- Returned migrants: for the purpose of this study, returning migrants are referred to as individuals who returned to Afghanistan within the last three years, after being abroad for at least six months. A returning migrant can become an intending migrant if the person considers attempting migration again.

2.3. Method

Prior to engaging with stakeholders, ATR conducted a comprehensive desk review to study available literature on the needs of potential migrants in Afghanistan. The desk review focused on: 1) needs and challenges of the following migrant categories: potential migrants, and returnees; 2) migrants' demographic profile; 3) drivers of migration; 4) regulatory frameworks pertaining to migration in Afghanistan; 5) re-migration, and 6) actors involved in migration and their roles. The review adopted an exploratory approach and extracted all themes relevant to the three migrant categories. ATR also reviewed MRC's relevant institutional documents to ensure a complete understanding of the organization's activities.

The desk review helped ATR develop the study's methodology and tools necessary for primary data collection. In order to answer the research questions, ATR, in coordination with ICMPD and the MRC designed seven data collection tools, one for each specific target group:\

- In-depth interview guidelines for potential migrants;
- In-depth interview guidelines for returnees;
- Key Informant Interview (KII) guidelines for IOs and NGOs;
- KII guidelines for MoRR/MRC;

- KII guidelines for MoLSA;
- KII guidelines for media;
- KII guidelines for Afghan border police.

Each tool contained guidelines as to how it should be administered. A training session for researchers involved in qualitative data collection was organized and delivered over a four-day period. This training was necessary for researchers to understand the objectives of the study (including the research questions), becoming acquainted with the data collection tools and practicing conducting interviews, as well as learning how to encourage respondents to elaborate on their answers. They were also trained in ethical protocols, including the need for sensitivity surrounding some of the research content, how to safeguard the anonymity of the migrant interviewees, and ways of recording and sending data.

2.4. Data Collection

In consultation with ICMPD and MRC, ATR involved its extensive researchers' network in the targeted regions to identify a preliminary list of contacts for interviews. ATR first required assistance from the staff of the DoRR. This included an official request by ATR for providing the research team with the contact details of potential migrants and returnees. ATR then selected interviewees on a random basis from the contact list identified at the provincial level through the support of ATR researchers' network. ATR understands that concern for the safety and security of the data (contact information) is paramount. ATR has ensured data confidentiality by enacting rigorous procedures, including - but not limited to - the restriction of access, limited staff involvement, and encrypting the data by making it unreadable for people outside the project.

Since collecting contacts through DoRR representatives required a longer timeframe than the study timeframe, ATR employed its local researchers' network to visit returnees' settlements, the surrounding communities and acquired their contact numbers. This procedure included a strict application of personal safety and security measures by guaranteeing that safe distances are kept as Covid-19 precautions. ATR staff randomly collected phone numbers from the target population - as well as their verbal consent - from outside their houses, to limit the potential risk of any contamination.

The data collection period lasted from May to December 2020. In total, 119 interviews were conducted in seven provinces of Afghanistan with stakeholders and potential migrants in local languages (Dari and Pashto) and English. The provinces were selected based on a comprehensive desk review on regions producing migrants in Afghanistan. (For further details, refer to section 'Background on Migration Trends in Afghanistan').

Quality assurance staff monitored the performance of qualitative data collection from beginning to end. For this study, ATR crosschecked a minimum of 20 percent of all qualitative work by either being present during in-depth interviews or listening to audio recordings.

Table 1: List of total number of KIIs and IDIs conducted

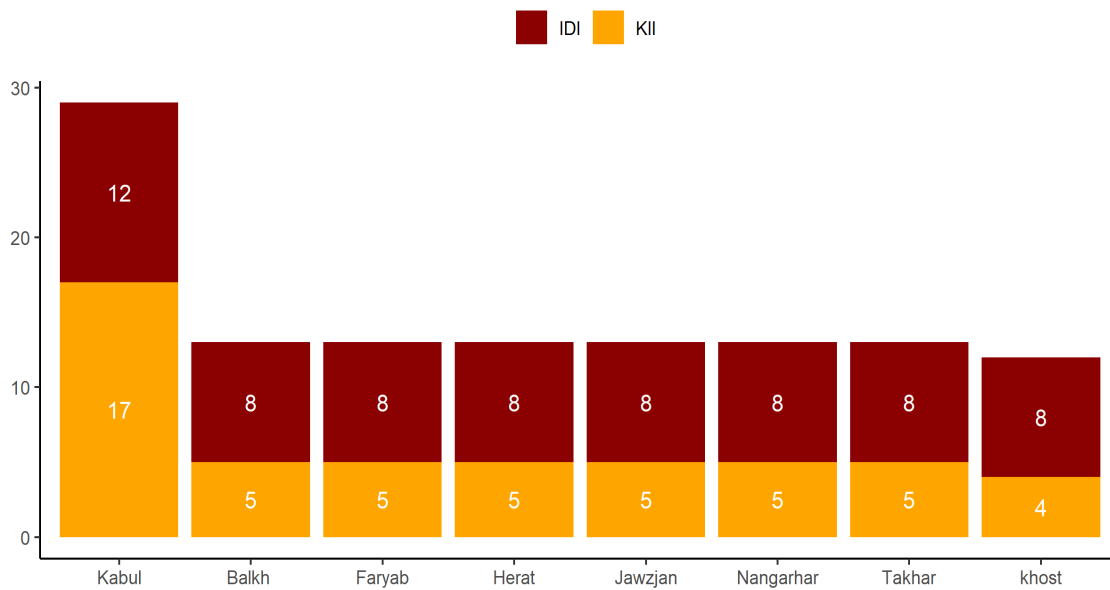
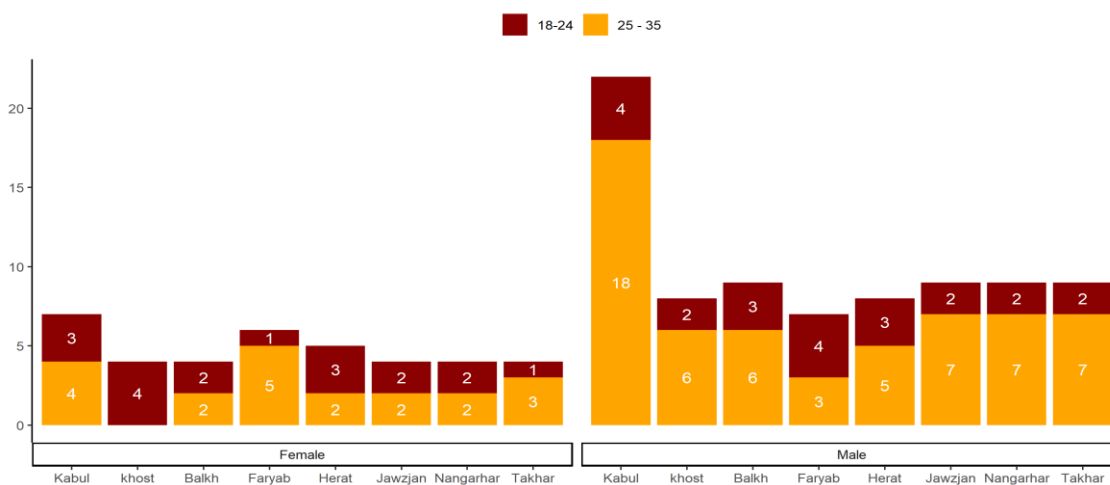


Table 2: List of total number of interviews by age

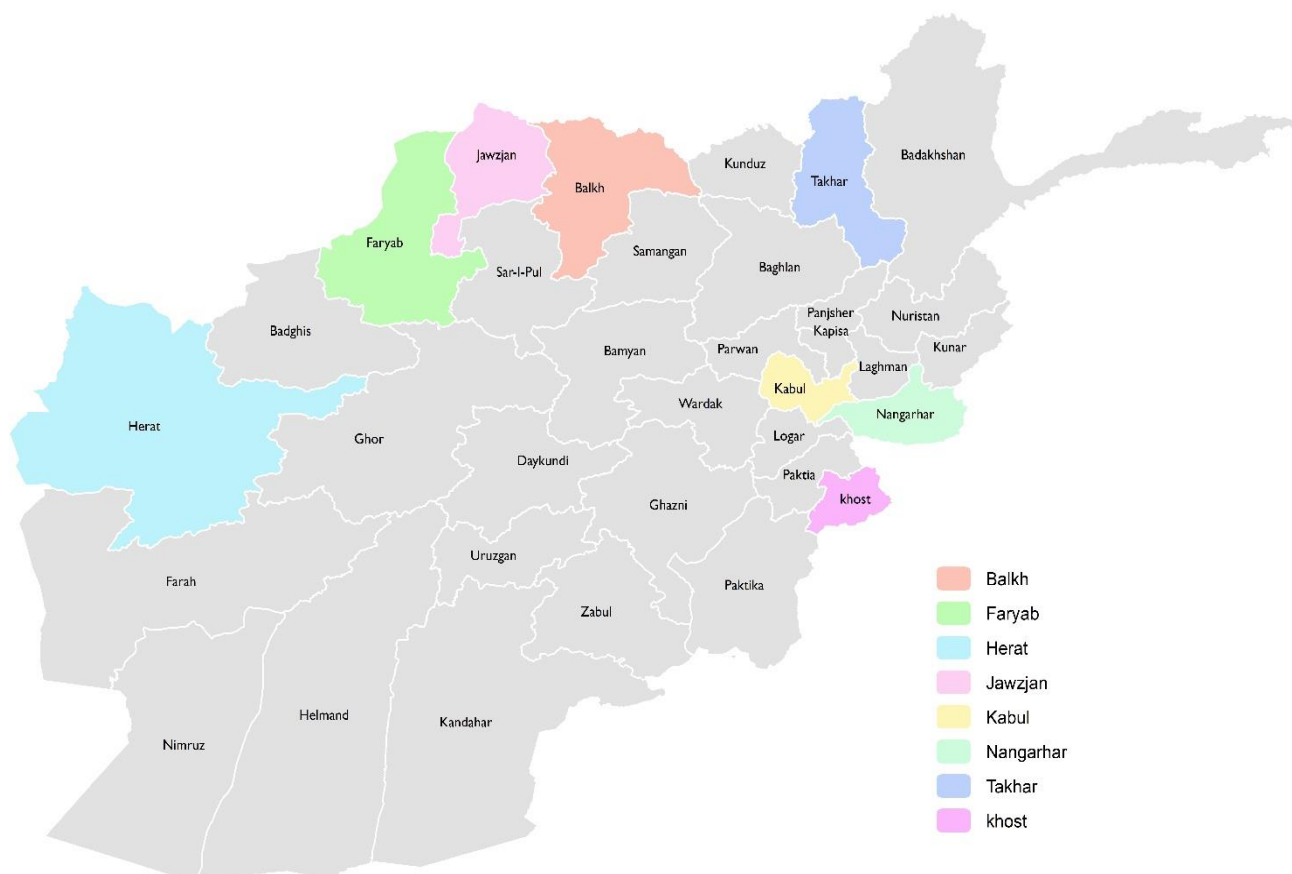


This represents a total of 119 interviews both at the subnational and national level. Potential migrants were selected based on their intention to leave Afghanistan within the next two years. Returnees who returned to Afghanistan within the last three years after being abroad for at least six months were considered for the interviews. The age group for target groups was pre-determined based on the findings of the desk review. According to the majority of the available literature, most migrants were aged between 18-35.

2.5. Geographical Coverage

Regarding the project implementation plan, the data collection was conducted in Kabul, Takhar, Balkh, Jawzjan, Faryab, Herat, Nangarhar and Khost. The selection of the provinces was based on the criteria agreed by IFRC and ARCS, selecting key locations where migration and returns regularly happen.

Map 1: Provinces targeted for this study



2.6. Limitations

Table 2: List of challenges and mitigations

Challenges/Limitations	Mitigation
The data collection for this study was carried out during the COVID-19 outbreak. During the pandemic, government workers were placed on furlough, social gatherings were banned, and transportation restrictions were placed on people and goods.	ATR hired one data collector in each province to collect phone numbers from the local population, based on sample criteria. To minimize the risk of infection, the data collector was provided with a mask, sanitizer, and advised to strictly adhere to social distancing. While collecting phone numbers, the data collector was also asked to collect preferred interview times and consent. To modify the questionnaires to over-the-phone interviews, ATR conducted a pre-test of questionnaires with a demographically

<p>Given the situation, it was impossible to deploy interviewers to the field to collect information from target groups through face-to-face interviews, as initially planned, because of the risk of infection. Since traditional data collection methods (i.e. face to face) were not possible, the data was collected on the phone. Although interviews on the phone offered a solution, potential respondent fatigue and stress (of answering questions over the phone) risked failing to establish rapport and subsequently losing contextual data.</p>	<p>similar group to note how long the interviews would take. This was also checked to note whether interview questions were simple enough and comprehensible over the phone. The pre-testing helped ATR to determine issues with the flow of questions, leading to a reduction in the number of questions, and a revised wording structure. This ensured the questions were simple and easy for both the interviewer and interviewee to understand and respond to.</p> <p>Furthermore, ATR trained the data collectors on best practices of conducting interviews on the phone. This included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Training data collectors on initiating interviews by making sure the interviewee was at ease; - Asking the interviewee if they have enough time, i.e., between 30 to 35 minutes. If not, the data collectors would ask them for a convenient time, note down the preferred interview time and schedule a call then; - Briefly introduce the project scope and convey the importance of the interviewee’s input for the study; - Assuring the interviewees that no information, or personal details will be shared with anyone, and responses, regardless of its nature, will have no impact on any assistance or engagement that the interview may have with the related organizations; - data collectors were also tasked with taking a secondary interview consent before starting the interview, to ensure that interviewees were at ease during the phone conversation; - Last but not least, the interviewers were tasked to ensure interviewees were comfortable with responding to all questions, during the course of interviews, i.e., in the middle of the conversation.
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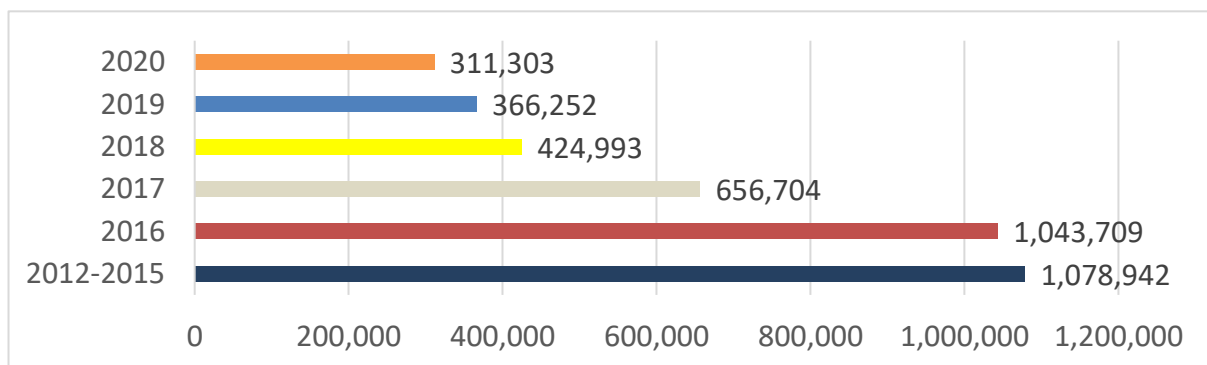
2.7. Data Analysis

Data collected by interviewers was sent to ATR’s Quality Assurance (QA) team, where the quality of the recordings was checked and translated to English. The ATR Research team, together with the QA officer, reviewed all translations in Dari, Pashto, and English, and crosschecked the quality of the data. The team analysed the data, employing a thematic analysis method. Thematic analysis gives order to analysis by coding recurrent, salient themes, exploring patterns and relationships in data, and identifying and developing categories using theoretical approaches.

3. Background on Migration Trends in Afghanistan

While there is not a unique factor shared universally by all migrant groups, the narrative in Afghanistan generally highlights insecurity as the common denominator shaping motivations for migration. The ongoing conflict - now in its 42nd year - and the consequent degradation to both social fabric and socioeconomic opportunities (particularly in highly populated areas) has continued to trigger internal displacements, often resulting in migration (IOM, 2014).⁴ Before the Soviet invasion of 1979, Afghans would cross the border to work in Pakistan and Iran either as seasonal labourers or for a longer-term employment (Wickramasekara & Barua, 2013).⁵ However, following the Soviet invasion and subsequent regime changes, cross-border movement became inextricably related to the safety concerns of individuals and families. By 1997, there were approximately three million Afghans living in Pakistan and Iran (Colville, 1997).⁶ Following the US-led invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, resulting in the ousting of the Taliban regime, an estimated two million Afghans have returned from neighbouring countries (Garrote-Sanchez, 2017).⁷ Conversely, as the security situation in Afghanistan has again deteriorated, a growing number of Afghans have sought to migrate to Western Europe. In the summer of 2015, 200,00 Afghan migrants sought (ultimate) refuge in host countries in Western Europe (Constable, 2018),⁸ which they travelled to via Eastern Europe, the second largest group of migrants to do so after Syrian migrants (Ruttig, 2015).⁹ However, due in large to restrictive EU policies aimed at reducing the inflows of irregular migration,¹⁰ the Afghan exodus to Europe did not last long (DTM, 2018),¹¹ causing the net outflow of migrants leaving Afghanistan to drop.

Chart 1: Out-flowing Regular Migrants with Annual Trends from Afghanistan | Overall (IOM, 2020)



⁴ "Afghanistan Migration Profile," *International Organization for Migration (IOM)*, 2014

⁵ Wickramasekara, P. & Baruah, N. "Labor Migration for Decent Work in Afghanistan", *International Labour Organization*, 2013

⁶ Colville, R. "Afghanistan: The Unending Crisis," *Refugee Magazine (issue 108)*, 1997

⁷ Garrote-Sanchez, D. "International Labour Mobility on Nationals: Experience and Evidence for Afghanistan at the Marco level," *World Bank Group*, 2017

⁸ Constable, P. "Returned to a Land of War and Want," *The Washington Post*, 2018

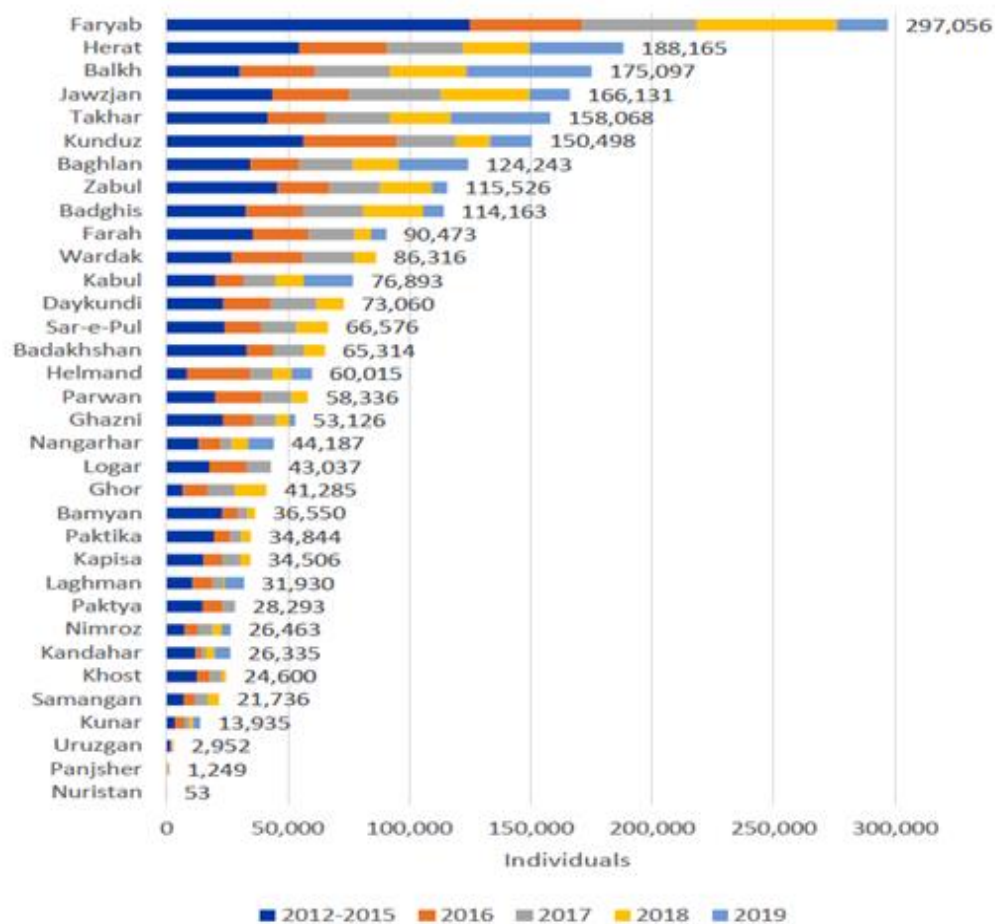
⁹ Ruttig, T. "An Afghan Exodus," *Afghan Analysts Network (AAN)*, 2015

¹⁰ Ruttig, T. "Pressure and Peril: Afghan Refugees and Europe," *Afghanistan Analysts Network (AAN)*, 2015

¹¹ Displacement Tracking Matrix Afghanistan: Kunar Baseline Mobility Assessment Summary Results. *International Organization for Migration (IOM)*, 2018

Of the 3,881,903 migrants who migrated out of Afghanistan in the 2012-2020 period, 360,855 travelled to European countries (13%), 1,779,056 moved to Iran (63%), and 578,890 to Pakistan (21%). The Middle East and Asian countries were recorded as the least Afghan migrant receiving places (3%) (DTM, 2020).¹²

Chart 2: Out-flowing of Migrants by Province | Overall (IOM, 2020)



While migrants come from all parts of Afghanistan, Faryab province recorded the highest number of Afghan migrants, with 297,056 fleeing to escape excessive levels of violence, compounded with increasing food instability due to a protracted drought, and its subsequent impact on local crop harvesting (Afghanistan Food Security Cluster, 2018).¹³ Herat, Balkh, Jawzjan and Takhar provinces were found to have the next highest levels of migration in 2020.

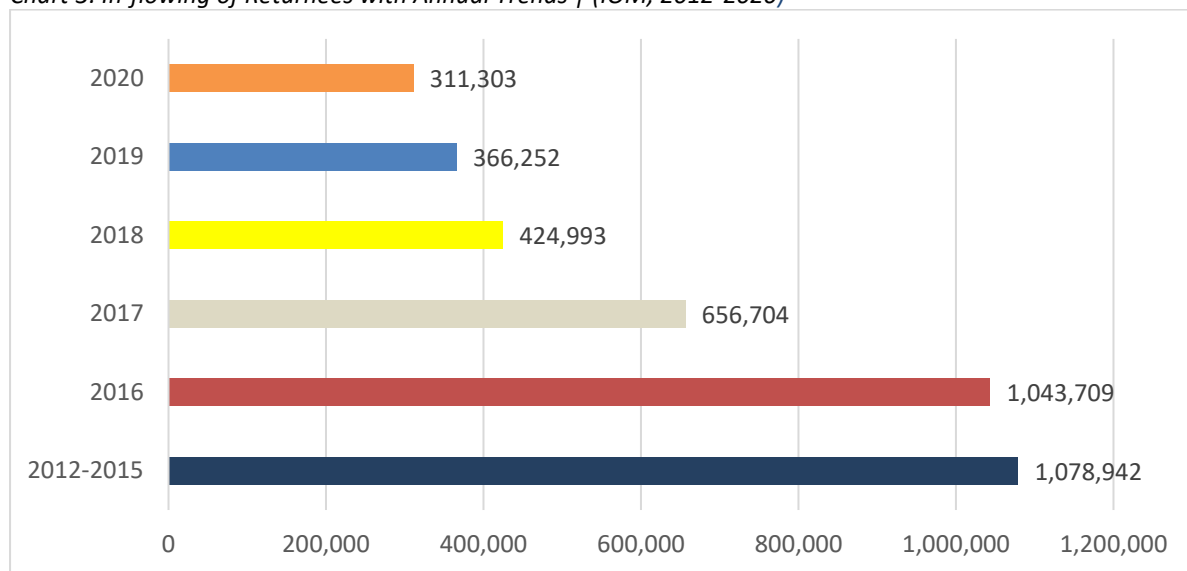
¹² Displacement Tracking Matrix Afghanistan: Baseline Mobility Assessment Summary Results, January - June. *International Organization for Migration (IOM)*, 2020

¹³ "Afghanistan Food Security Cluster & Ministry for Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock", *Afghanistan Food Security Cluster*, 2018

Kabul, Nangarhar and Khost have also been identified as the provinces from where people migrated in highest numbers (DTM, 2018).¹⁴ Migration for seasonal labour to Pakistan from Nangarhar and Khost are higher than from northern and western parts of Afghanistan, from where, according to stakeholders, people typically migrated to Iran. Whereas migrants to Turkey and Europe have been from a variety of communities and locations in Afghanistan.

The size and nature of Afghan migrant returns vary year on year. For example, returns from Pakistan and Iran increased dramatically in 2016, when nearly 600,000 Afghans were forcibly repatriated from Pakistan (DTM, 2018),¹⁵ with further forced returns in the first half of 2017 (Ruttig & Bjelica, 2018).¹⁶ Improving the understanding of the pattern of returns helps to further explore potential migrants' relevant information needs. This is because for returnees who have already undergone migration journeys, there are correspondingly greater levels of awareness of what kind of information they would benefit from.

Chart 3: In-flowing of Returnees with Annual Trends | (IOM, 2012-2020)



Between 2012 and 2020, the overall number of returns from Pakistan reached 2,097,000 (53%), Iran 1,555,000 (40%), and Turkey/Europe 155,000 (4%), with other returns taking place from 3 percent of “other” places. Over 250,000 of these repatriations were facilitated by UNHCR, through its Afghanistan offices. Most returnees from Turkey and Europe were deported once their asylum applications were denied.

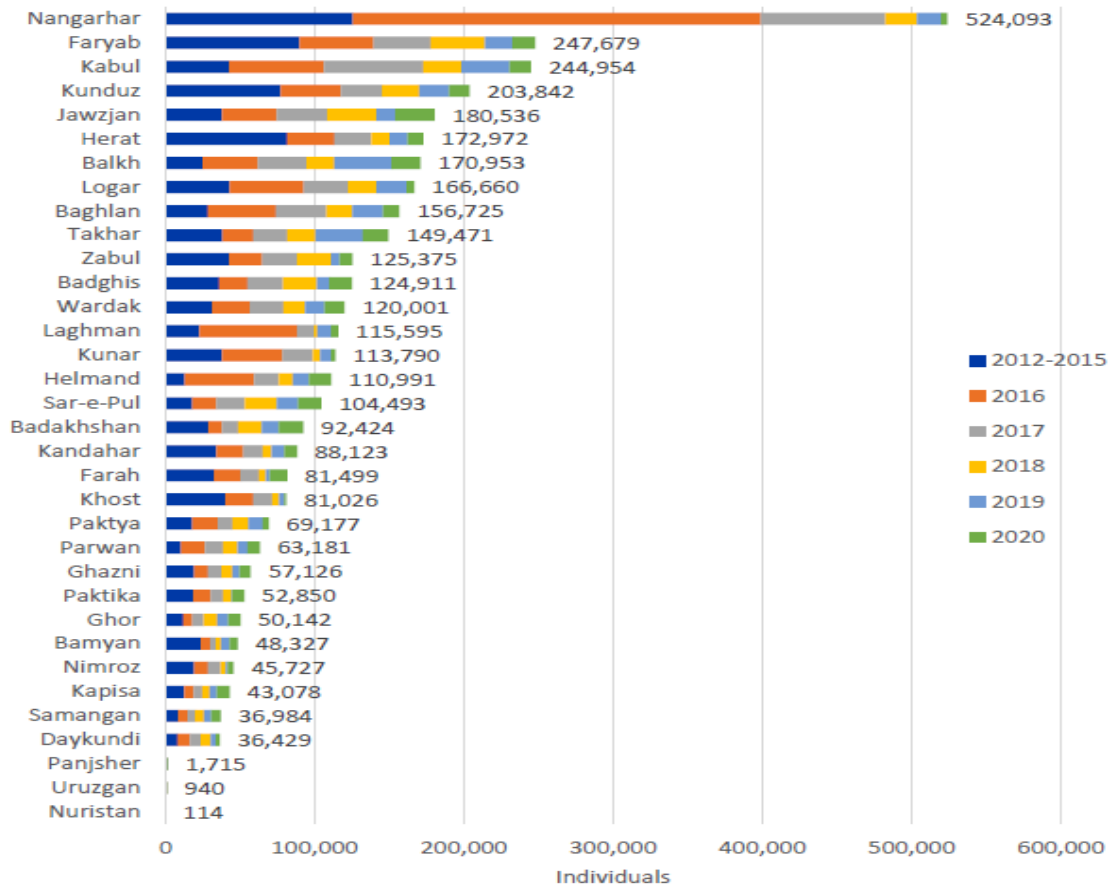
¹⁴ Displacement Tracking Matrix, “Khost Baseline Mobility Assessment Summary Results, January – June,” *International Organization for Migration (IOM)*, 2018

¹⁵ Displacement Tracking Matrix, “Baseline Mobility Assessment Summary Results, January – June,” *International Organization for Migration (IOM)*, 2018

¹⁶ Ruttig, T. & Bjelica, J. “Pressure and Peril: Afghan Refugees and Europe,” *Afghanistan Analysts Network (AAN)*, 2018

The 2020 Covid-19 pandemic greatly impacted the number of returns of Afghan refugees from Iran and Pakistan (European Asylum Support Office, 2020).¹⁷ By mid-2020, challenges in accessing already struggling national health systems, compounded with the widespread loss of employment induced by the global economic recession, forced around 200,000 (mostly undocumented) Afghans to return from Iran (Ziabari, 2020).¹⁸ Additionally, the impact of US-led sanctions on Iran’s economy is attributed as a second factor in recent flow of returns to Afghanistan, and/or further journeys of Afghans from Iran to Turkey (Cunningham & Sultani, 2020).¹⁹

Chart 4: Afghan Returnees by province | Annual Trend| Overall (IOM, 2012-2020)



¹⁷ Afghanistan Socio-Economic Indicators, *European Asylum Support Office*, 2020

¹⁸ Ziabari, K. "Covid-19 Has Forced Afghan Refugees in Iran to back to Afghanistan," *Responsible Statecraft*, 2020

¹⁹ Cunningham, E. & Sultani, M. "Trump’s Sanctions on Iran are Helping Fuel a New Refugee Crisis – in Turkey," *The Washington Post*, 2020

According to IOM statistics, Nangarhar received the highest number of returnees since 2012 - 524,093 individuals. This was followed by Faryab (247,679 individuals), and Kabul (244,954 individuals) as the second and third (respectively) highest level of returnees. These provinces received returnees from both Iran and Pakistan, as well as Turkey and Europe.

All these trends suggest that Afghan migration is dynamic and complex, with a combination of drivers contributing to irregular migration, including (but not limited to) voluntary and forced returns.

4. Fieldwork Findings

This section outlines the findings from the interviews with potential migrants and returnees, media activists, representatives of MoRR, MoLSA, provincial Afghan border police, relevant international organizations, NGOs and UN agencies, including IOM, GIZ, NRC and UNHCR. It specifically assesses the profile of Afghan migrants and returnees, as well as their information needs, and the sources and means that are currently utilized to obtain information. The demographic profile of migrants and returnees below is primarily clarified on the basis of a literature review. Insights have also been provided by stakeholders involved in supporting migration governance in Afghanistan.

4.1. Demographic Profile

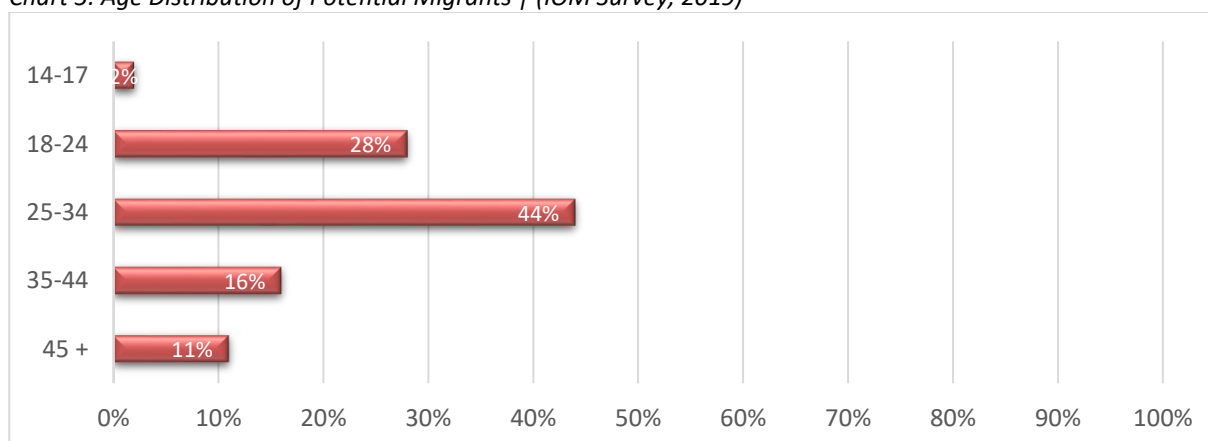
4.1.1. Potential Migrants

There are two main categories of potential migrants:

- First, men who are potential labour migrants and who intend to travel alone. As a breadwinner, they are typically responsible for their family's financial concerns (Garrote-Sanchez, 2017).²⁰ These potential male migrants, who intend to migrate from Afghanistan for work, often come from rural areas. They are generally young and single. While some are married, they often do not plan on being accompanied by their family for socio-economic reasons. They either seek short-term trips to neighbouring countries, or longer-term migration to Turkey and/or Europe.
- Second, families (with a large majority living in urban areas) intending to apply for asylum. They usually have some kind of economic buffer (savings) with which to afford their migration.

This is consistent with the survey conducted by IOM in 2019 with 1,439 potential migrants in Herat, Kabul, Ghor, Balkh, Nimroz, Faryab, and Kunduz provinces. The results of the survey indicated that 87 per cent of the respondents were male, most being of a working age. As the graph below indicates, over 40 per cent of the potential migrants were aged between 25 to 34 years old, with 28 per cent of them aged between 18 to 24 at the time of the survey (DTM, 2019).²¹

Chart 5: Age Distribution of Potential Migrants | (IOM Survey, 2019)



²⁰ Garrote-Sanchez, D. "International Labour Mobility on Nationals: Experience and Evidence for Afghanistan at the Marco level," *World Bank Group*, 2017

²¹ Displacement Tracking Matrix, Afghanistan – Survey of Drivers of Immigration, *International Organization for Migration (IOM)*, 2019

The education and employment background of potential migrants differs based on their geographical location. Representatives interviewed in eight provincial Directorates of Refugees and Repatriation (DoRR) agreed that potential migrants coming from urban settings are more likely to be self-employed, or to work in different government institutions. By comparison, in rural communities, the livelihood opportunities for potential migrants are occasional daily labour and/or seasonal agriculture work.

Potential migrants who are comparatively better-off financially will often have completed secondary school, with some also possessing a bachelor's degree. Most potential migrants living in rural villages, however, are less likely to have had a formal education, but may have attained some form of basic literacy through informal educational settings. In terms of work type, female members of potential migrants' households from all provinces rarely have a professional activity, possibly due to cultural differences and traditional ethos.²²

4.1.2. Returnees

According to stakeholders interviewed, men formed the majority of the returnee population, with returnees from Iran and Pakistan often also both migrating and returning with their families. The average age group of migrants returning from Pakistan and Iran was 20 – 35, whilst by comparison individuals returning from Turkey and Europe were of a noticeably younger age demographic, between 19 – 30. The assertions of the stakeholders were not significantly different than the findings of existing studies. For example, in order to analyze the aspirations of returnees, in 2018 the Mixed Migration Centre conducted 56 interviews with returnees (from Pakistan, Iran and Europe) in Kabul and Nangarhar. The demographic profile of the interviewees revealed that of the 56 interviewees, 47 were male and 9 females, all aged between 18 to 38 years old.²³ The findings of a 2019 Asia Foundation survey of 4,033 returnees in Kabul, Herat, Nangarhar, Kandahar and Balkh provinces revealed that 13% received some kind of formal education abroad, while 86.8% received none. When disaggregated by marital status, single returnees (26.6%) had acquired some formal education, compared to married respondents (11%). Disaggregated by sex, men were found to have obtained more access to education than women (16.3% male, compared to 9.7% female returnees) while abroad (Asia Foundation, 2019).²⁴

Interviewed stakeholders stated that most returnees had a job in Afghanistan before migrating. Self-employment, private business and day labour were the main sources of income, with the transportation and agriculture sector presenting as the second and third highest employing sector. However, returnees often lack job stability after returning to Afghanistan, with households' primary breadwinners often working as daily labourers in construction, or other non-agricultural sectors post return. Some turn to

²² Interview with DoRR, IOM, Media and UNHCR and border police in Kabul, Khost, Herat, Nangarhar, Faryab, Jawzjan, Balkh and Takhar, September 2020.

²³ Understanding the Aspirations of Afghan returnees, 201. Retrieved from: https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&ved=2ahUKewiExrG446jxAhVNBxAIHSIADO4QFjABegQIBRAF&url=https%3A%2F%2Fmixedmigration.org%2Fwp-content%2Fuploads%2F2019%2F02%2F061_Distant_Dreams.pdf&usg=AOvVaw24YyTQoPLL4mJKD7dep93x

²⁴ "Survey of the Afghan Returnees," *The Asia Foundation*, 2019

self-employment, establishing micro and/or small enterprises.²⁵ Due to often large family sizes, their income is frequently insufficient to cover household needs, resulting in most returnees subsequently living below the poverty line.²⁶

4.2. Migration Profile

4.2.1. Reasons for Migration

4.2.1.1. Potential Migrants

Potential female and male migrants interviewed in all provinces cited insecurity and unemployment as the main reasons for migrating. Most respondents expressed deep concerns about Afghanistan's current security situation, and specifically admitted deciding to leave Afghanistan due to increased violence, accompanied by economic concerns. Insecurity has significantly impacted personal safety in recent years. In Faryab, Jawzjan, Takhar and Balkh provinces, armed conflict has been ongoing for years, with only short-lived periods of respite.

The decision to migrate is also economic, with the aspiration of gaining (ideally stable) employment in countries with a strong economy, in order to ultimately be joined by family members. Compared to urban areas, unemployment, or precarious employment, is higher in rural areas where young people are compelled to seek irregular labour abroad, by migrating to Iran and Pakistan. Based on interviews with stakeholders, labour migration of young individuals, particularly from Afghanistan's rural areas, has become a key strategy for many households needing to supplement their income through remittances. Families unable to meet their basic livelihood needs typically triggers the process of a young (male) member of the household to migrate. In addition, staff at provincial DoRR offices stated that consecutive droughts have significantly affected agricultural labour in villages, a local source income-generation for many households.

“Many people in the districts of Herat stopped cultivating their lands because they do not have water and fodder as a result of consecutive droughts. People do not have much to eat. Climate change pushed many of them into severe food insecurity, which has turned into another problem: irregular migration. People migrate because they do not have food and physical safety”.

DoRR, Herat
H-M-09

Migrants, particularly those seeking to migrate legally, also cited education and family reunification as factors contributing to their decision. Still, during interviews, concerns relating to personal safety in Afghanistan regularly featured as compelling reasons for migration.

²⁵ Interview with DoRR, IOM, Media and UNHCR and border police in Kabul, Khost, Herat, Nangarhar, Faryab, Jawzjan, Balkh and Takhar, September 2020

²⁶ Ibid

“What should we do here? There is war and lack of security in the whole area”.

Female potential migrant, Jawzjan

PM-F-33

“We don’t have food to eat. There is no work. There is no school here for our children to get education. That are the reasons why we decided to leave this country”.

Female potential migrant, Balkh

PM-F-62

“I want to migrate out of Afghanistan due to insecurity. I am living in a city where the Taliban are active 5 kilometres away from the city. This city is like a prison for us. We cannot step outside. We cannot shave our beards because if we walk 5 kilometres away from the center of the city, the Taliban group will kill us. I have left my job in the government because the Taliban warned us against working for the government. Everyone here is facing the same threat”.

Male potential migrant, Faryab

PM-M-17

4.2.1.2. Returnees

Most returnees interviewed for this study had spent comparatively longer periods of time in Iran and Pakistan, with other interviewees spending less time in Europe and Turkey. The average length of stay in Iran and Pakistan was between 5 to 10 years (or longer), compared to returnees from Turkey or Europe (two to three years). Respondents returning from Iran and Pakistan often travelled with their families, while those deported from Turkey and Europe were typically younger, single adult males. Within the group of returnees from neighbouring countries, young males seeking economic migration tended to remain in the host country for under three years, as compared to families seeking refuge in Iran or Pakistan (five to ten years).

Most returnees (both male and female) had left Afghanistan for Pakistan and/or Iran prior to 2001 due to conflict and insecurity. For this group, the primary goal was to seek relative safety, with only a few possessing the means to establish clear goals to accomplish post arrival. The dream of an improved quality of life through finding stable employment was the second reason for initial migration for many returnees.

“The reason we went to Iran was because we were not safe here. Many Afghans migrated out of the country with us for the same reason”.

Male returnee, Iran

R-M-04

“I went to Turkey because there was no job for me here”

Male returnee, Turkey

R-M-03

Most returnees who fled to Turkey and Europe had clear plans for tangible goals they wanted to achieve once they reached their destination. The aim of living in Europe was to find a secure environment, and a decent job to support families back home. However, most respondents did not succeed in their plans because their asylum applications were refused.

Reasons for return vary depending on what conditions migrants were able to establish in the host country. The experiences of migrants who had returned from Pakistan, Iran and Turkey bear similarities. In Pakistan, refugees were issued the Proof of Registration (PoR) cards, providing them freedom of movement and the possibility to seek employment. Refugees were not allowed to buy property, or enrol their children in public schools. PoR cards were granted to around 1.4 million registered Afghan refugees in 2015, permitting them to stay until the end of 2020, at which point they were expected to return to Afghanistan (UNHCR, 2020).²⁷

Lack of access to employment, education and healthcare were cited by respondents returning from Iran as reasons to leave. As part of Iran's more recent policies towards Afghan refugees, returnees stated that they were registered as refugees and granted Amayesh cards (Quie & Hakimi, 2020),²⁸ exposing them to restricted movement, as well as limits on access to education. Afghan refugees in Iran were required to pay to receive Amayesh cards to gain a temporary residence (Naseh, Potocky, Stuart & Pezeshk, 2018).²⁹ However, following the expiry of the Amayesh card, refugees were subject to deportation. In spite of many Afghans attesting to having sought to extend their Amayesh card, many returnees reported their applications were instantly rejected, causing many to live with the constant fear of deportation looming over them.

The majority of respondents returning from Turkey stated that they initially travelled to Iran, and subsequently to Turkey through irregular routes. Since a large number could not afford to continue their journey to Greece then Germany, many applied for refugee status in Turkey. However, for many the application process to achieve refugee status was rejected, restricting their access to work, formally seek accommodation, as well as the ability to move freely inside the country. Ultimately, this led to deportation.

Afghans deported from Europe, particularly from Germany, reported that they had been registered as asylum seekers upon their arrival, and also issued work permits.³⁰ They had access to accommodation, education, food and monthly financial benefits. When asylum status was denied, they subsequently faced deportation back to Afghanistan, which involved being bought an air ticket and a cash handout.

"I went to Turkey; the reason I did was the lack of employment and the Taliban....." [...] "I tried a lot to stay there but I could not get asylum and that is why they deported me to Afghanistan.

Male returnee, Iran

R-M-05

²⁷ "Pakistan – Afghan Refugees PoR Card Registration Update," *United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR)*, January 2020 "

²⁸ Marissa Quie and Hameed Hakimi, "The EU and the Politics of Migration Management in Afghanistan", *Chatham House*, 2020

²⁹ Naseh, M., Potocky, M., Stuart, P., Pezeshk, S. "Repatriation of Afghan Refugees from Iran: Shelter Profile Study," *Journal of International Humanitarian Action*, 2018

³⁰ Work permit application process varies in Europe. Majority of EU Member States do not issue work permits until the asylum status was granted.

“I was working before going to Germany, but I have no job now. The security situation is getting worse again. I knew what is happening here, but I could not stay in Germany too because my case was not accepted”.

Male returnee, Germany
R-M-31

Afghans who returned from Pakistan and Iran in 2020 cited the spread of Covid-19 and the lack of legal status as reasons for their return. Returnees (particularly those coming from Iran) said they resided in Iran with no legal documents when the pandemic broke out, and they were forced to return mainly due to their illegal status that did not allow them to access free healthcare, as well as the difficulties in maintaining social distances in overcrowded accommodations.

“Our men could not find jobs here. Suicide attacks were killing many people. So, we went to Iran, but had to return because we had no documents and the coronavirus was also getting serious there”.

Female returnee, Iran
R-F-35.

“We came because of the coronavirus in Pakistan. Our relatives also came back”.

Female returnee, Pakistan
R-F-27

Some returnees interviewed did not return to their place of origin, especially those from rural areas. Most returned to urban areas, such as Kabul, Nangarhar, Herat, and Balkh, and other provincial capitals, often for reasons relating to “relatively better security”, “better job opportunities”, and “better services (food, water, shelter and health care)”.

4.2.2. Journey

Choices surrounding the country of destination depends on the economic background of potential migrants, which stakeholders believe has changed over the past 10 years, particularly in urban areas. For instance, the majority of Afghan labour migrants previously migrated to Iran and Pakistan for seasonal labour. Today, in urban areas, potential migrants to Turkey and Europe far outweigh migrant workers to Iran and Pakistan, because urban potential migrants have a higher level of capital and resources.

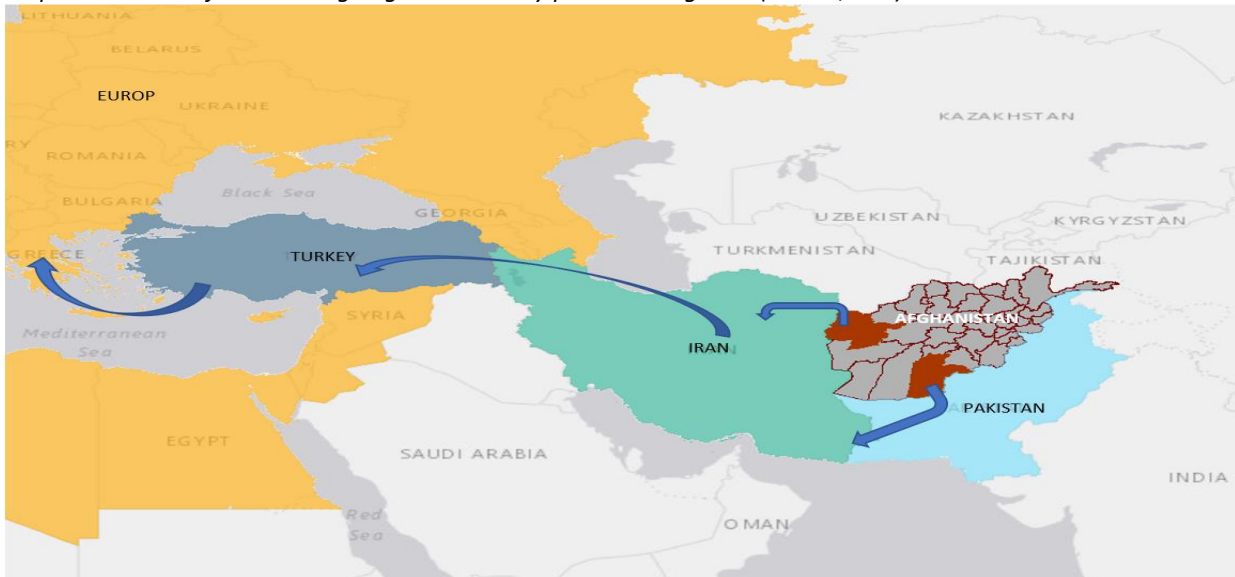
Even potential migrant workers to Iran, most of whom are skilled labourers often working in the manufacturing and construction sectors, consider migrating to Turkey and Europe if they are able to borrow capital from their networks, or earn enough in Iran to afford the onward journey.³¹ Such migration trends were much less prevalent a decade ago.³²

³¹ KII with stakeholders-Kabul, Herat, Khost, Herat and Nangarhar, September 2020

³² Ibid

Pakistan is similar to Iran in terms of cross-border labour migration. Potential migrants typically have ties in Pakistan, because they or their family members may have previously lived there.³³ Potential migrants seeking to travel to Pakistan often originate from eastern and southern cross-border areas of Afghanistan including Paktia, Paktika, Nangarhar, Khost, Kunar, Kandahar and Helmand, and will have often attended secondary education, but not university. Afghans seeking to migrate to Iran and Pakistan in search of economic opportunities are more likely to return if they fail to finance their onward journey to Turkey and Europe. Migrants seeking to travel to Turkey often have a relatively middle-class profile, with identifying factors such as having attained secondary education and even university degrees, and who plan to remain abroad for longer. Most seek to establish a business, such as a restaurant or shop, in Turkey. Many other potential migrants simply seek to continue to Europe when they arrive in Turkey, though most of them often have not chosen their final destination in Europe. There is a correlation between Afghan migrants planning to ultimately travel to Europe, with their ability to leverage higher sums of capital. This demographic is presumably from a more affluent economic background, are better educated, and seek to have a stable income. Aims often cited include the desire to leave permanently. Such attempts at migration are typically afforded through the young male migrants' personal or family's ability to leverage capital. According to migrant interviewees, routes that potential migrants are likely to take are selected by the smuggler. Those who have chosen Turkey and Europe as their final destination typically transit through Iran, and will either be taken there directly, or through Pakistan. However, some respondents who plan to travel by air do so by obtaining forged Turkish visas from the Kabul black market, whilst most potential migrants find the cost of obtaining an Afghan passport to be prohibitively expensive. Subsequent deals with smugglers concerning the journey to Greece are negotiated in Turkey, if a migrant wishes to move onwards to Europe.

Map 2: Overview of the routes going to be used by potential migrants (Source, ATR)³⁴



³³ KII with stakeholders, Kabul and Herat, September and December 2020

³⁴ Routes have been determined by ATR based on field work.

Respondents intending to cross into Pakistan irregularly are smuggled through Afghanistan's southern and eastern borders. Provinces close to these borders are the main locations of negotiation between potential migrants and smugglers, with this demographic entering into deals with brokers and waiting for the call to be smuggled. Those planning to enter Iran are taken via Baluchistan (an area in Pakistan close to the border with Iran). However, interviews indicate that the western border route is currently avoided wherever possible due to the increased level of assaults by Iranian border guards on Afghan migrants. Smugglers apparently prefer the route via Spin Boldak district of southern Kandahar province.

Most migrants travelling to Turkey and Europe journey in groups with relatives and/or friends, while a few prefer to travel with their spouse and children. Some irregular labour migrants living in rural regions are not accompanied by their spouse and children to Iran and Pakistan, except when these two countries will be crossed as part of a journey to Turkey (and further).

Migrants are often encouraged and/or required to take the decision to leave Afghanistan due to pressure from family members and extended community, particularly relating to severely restricted household budgets. However, some potential (male) migrants reported that when discussing the possibility of leaving, they initially found their wife and parents opposed to their decision, but that willingness within the household increased in parallel to upticks in violence and conflict.³⁵

Parents often strongly disagreed with their sons' decision to migrate to Europe when the border crossing at the Turkey-Greece border became easier to cross in 2015. Nevertheless, it seems that the recent upsurge of violence in Afghanistan has resulted in parents beginning to encourage their sons to leave, and even paying for their journey.³⁶

When asked about their feelings surrounding migrating from Afghanistan, the majority of respondents expressed no hope and faith in the future, and showed no intention to come back, especially those who intend to reach Turkey or Europe.

COVID-19 prompted the majority of potential migrants, whether planning to travel regularly or irregularly, to postpone their journey. This trend has been noticed in most of the geographical locations where data for this study was collected. Respondents stated that they have been advised by smugglers to wait until Covid-19 cases decrease, while regular potential migrants reported that flights to certain countries - including Turkey - were cancelled.

4.3. Needs and Challenges

In Afghanistan, the vast majority of returnees have chosen to reside in provincial capitals. Before migrating, over half of the respondents said that they used to live in rural areas. Currently, most returnees returned to regional hubs, such as Kabul, Nangarhar, Herat, and Balkh, and provincial capitals. Returnees, when asked why they did not return to their place of origin, stated that urban areas are of “relatively

³⁵ Ibid

³⁶ KII with stakeholders-Kabul, September 2020

better security”, had “better job opportunities”, and that there was greater “availability of better services”.^{37 38}

The main needs and challenges cited by respondents and key stakeholders are presented below, under three categories: pre- departure, while in host country, and upon return.

4.3.1. Pre-Departure

Most potential migrants plan to embark on irregular journeys, particularly to Iran and Pakistan, because they do not perceive any legal channels to be available to them. According to the MoLSA, Afghanistan currently sends around 2,000 labour workers to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Considering the levels of demand for labour in the Gulf, this number seems low. Further to this, this gap is currently being discussed in the office of the first vice president of Afghanistan.

Irregular potential migrants are generally not aware of there being any labour migration schemes in Afghanistan. It is important that they are equipped with information on labour and employment opportunities, work rights and likely living conditions abroad. Currently, ICMPD is supporting the development of the labour migration scheme of Afghanistan. Interviewees suggested that the orientation programs about labour migration schemes should be expanded in scope and in terms of geographic coverage, and that this should be added as one of the components of future labour migration programs, in all migrant producing-regions.

4.3.2. In Host Country

Education, in particular, was important for Afghans both in Pakistan and Iran. Migrants’ children were not allowed to go to public schools in Iran, while Afghan refugees in Pakistan could only admit their children to schools facilitated by humanitarian organizations inside refugee settlements. Access to higher education in public universities is banned for Afghans, both in Iran and Pakistan. Afghan refugees in Iran and Pakistan are only allowed to attend private universities if they are able to cover associated costs.

“We tried a lot to find a way to get our children admitted to school in Iran, but we could not because we were living there without any legal status”.

Female returnee, Iran
R-F-30

“When we went to Pakistan a long time ago, our children were allowed to study. They went to schools that were managed by Afghan refugees themselves, but those schools are no longer there. They [public schools in Pakistan] did not allow our children to study. They were only for people of Pakistan”.

Male returnee, Pakistan
R-M-49

³⁷ IDI with returnees in Kabul, Herat, Balkh and Nangarhar, December 2020

³⁸ KII with stakeholders-Kabul and Herat, November 2020

Afghan refugees in Pakistan and Iran experienced multiple hardships, including shelter, anti-refugee sentiments (xenophobia), police brutality, lack of access to public health services, lack of freedom of movement, and difficulties in obtaining legal documentation.

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Deported asylum seekers from Turkey and Europe complained about the lack of food and shelter during transit on the way to Turkey and Europe, as well as the crushing sense of failure when their asylum applications were rejected. When asked how they managed these challenges, and whether or not they received any assistance or support, the responses were almost the same:

“There was no humanitarian organization to help us”.

Female returnee, Iran
R-F-30

“We worked for very low wages to feed ourselves in Iran”

Male returnee, Iran
R-M-31

“We waited for weeks in Greece for aid workers to come and provide us food”

Male returnee, Germany
R-M-03

“We lived in crowded places in Turkey. They [Turkish government] neither registered us as refugees, nor provided us any proper place to live. We were also not allowed to move around.”

Male returnee, Turkey
R-M-05

“UNHCR provided us food and tent. It was not helpful. We needed proper accommodation”

Male returnee, Pakistan
R-M-54

While the entire world has been affected in different forms due to the outbreak of Covid-19, returnees - particularly from Iran – stated that their precarious situation had significantly exposed them to contracting the disease. Some interviewees resided in Iran when the pandemic broke out. They felt compelled to return to Afghanistan because they did not have access to public health care, and because of the inability to maintain social distancing in overcrowded accommodation.

4.3.3. Upon Return

Migrants returned to an Afghanistan that displays many of the same (if not even further deteriorated) security and economic conditions that led to an initial decision to migrate. Returnees expressed concerns related to continued suicide bombings and air operations in their villages. Stakeholders also suggested that female returnees were vulnerable to domestic and sexual violence.

In almost all provinces where this study was conducted, a lack of employment opportunities was cited as a major concern by returnees. A majority of the returnees interviewed had requested loans to establish

small businesses, market-oriented skill training, and access to housing to help in re-establishing their livelihoods. However, a number of returnees from Iran who had gained professional skills, particularly information technology skills, were able to secure jobs in the private sector. DoRR staff across Afghanistan are assigned to match returnees with employment opportunities. Stakeholders stated that DoRR services to returnees had been developed on the basis of annual assessments, which focuses on the primary needs of returnees in each region. However, female returnees stated that they were not the main beneficiaries of these programs.

“We provide health services as well as food for returnees in their settlements, and pay transport costs for them when they return to their province of origin. We have a protection section, which helps returnees with their legal cases, and provides them with legal services.”

IOM, Afghanistan

J-M-15

“Right now, for each person who comes back home because of the spread of the COVID-19 virus, we give \$250 to each person. So, if a family has five members, they would receive \$1,250 once they arrive in Afghanistan.”

UNHCR, Afghanistan

K-M-32

Very few individuals acknowledged receiving assistance from UN agencies and International NGOs upon return. Most of the returnees interviewed could not recall the assistance they received, let alone name the organizations that helped them, possibly because short-term humanitarian support did not meet their needs or expectations.

Returnees from Europe whose asylum applications were rejected were assisted with cash and air tickets to return to Afghanistan by the International Organization for Migration (IOM). Children and minors travelling without a guardian upon arrival in Afghanistan are escorted back to their place of origin in coordination with the MoRR and DoRR. However, returnees interviewed insisted that the assistance of NGOs is temporary, and limited, which does not provide opportunities for sustainable reintegration. Several returnees suggested they should receive better support in re-establishing a livelihood for themselves in Afghanistan, or be facilitated in seeking access to legal migration routes.

Additionally, children of returnees are subject to increasingly difficult conditions once returning to Afghanistan, often with limited or in-existent access to education and healthcare. According to stakeholders, the increased number of returnees in certain provinces, particularly Herat, have caused crucial public sector services to be stretched to the limit, such as local hospitals, which are increasingly unable to meet the ever-growing demand.

Moreover, migrants both individuals and families, experienced harsh situations in host countries for various reasons, including long immigration procedures, asylum claim refusals, and an often-negative perception of migrants. These experiences were mostly reported among forced returnees. While some

mental health services are available in Kabul,³⁹ returnees' psychological problems - particularly deported youth - is exacerbated from the shame experienced in not having successfully claimed asylum. Families suffer from depression and anxiety as they face serious violations during their migration journey, including sexual assaults. Respondents who had travelled with their family acknowledged that migration journeys put unimagined levels of pressure on them, particularly when they were separated by smugglers during their journey.⁴⁰ However, psychological support is very limited, and more than half of deported returnees are not likely to receive mental health care (Samuel Hall, 2016).⁴¹

4.4. Information

4.4.1. Information Needs

4.4.1.1. Potential Migrants

Interviews with prospective migrants indicate that most potential male migrants know which route they will take to reach their country of destination. They report having received the specifics of the routes from smugglers in Afghanistan, and friends and relatives living abroad. There was a general level of understanding among potential migrants of the risks that exist on these routes. Most stated that they did not want to travel by sea from Turkey to Europe, afraid they may drown as has already happened to so many. Regarding awareness of the likely risk of threats to personal safety and/or violence along the way, respondents attempting migration for a second time displayed more awareness than those potential migrants attempting a journey for the first time. In terms of providing access to valuable information, these two groups both expressed an interest in being provided a detailed assessment of all likely risks, including what risks they and accompanying family members may face. Access to precise information about all potential risks was cited as a priority need, particularly by those accompanied by their families.

"I do not have very specific information; however, I have heard from my relatives that irregular migration involves dangerous risks. Many people have been tortured on the border with Iran. We do not know if it is possible to remain safe and prevent these risks".

Potential male migrant, Kabul
PM-M-06

"My friend living in Turkey told me that there are some risks. He did not tell me how to avoid them though. I hope the smuggler takes care of us".

Male potential migrant, Takhar
PM-M-61

³⁹ Psychosocial Center in Kabul. 2020. *Ipsos Context*.

⁴⁰ IDI with returnees in Faryab, Balkh and Herat, December 2020

⁴¹ "Urban Displaced Youth in Kabul – Part 1: Mental Health Matters," *Samuel Hall*, 2016

During interviews, potential migrants were aware of some of the types of risks (kidnapping, gunfire and torture) associated with irregular migration. They could not, however, distinguish between smuggling and trafficking, and most notably, how smuggling might end up in human trafficking circumstances.

However, the amount of information potential migrants have about physical protection risks significantly differs between genders. Except for some young potential migrants who had no concerns about their journey, almost all married male potential migrants were deeply worried about their safety, but they refrained from sharing these concerns with their spouse and other female members of their family in order to not worry them.

Women accompanying their spouses presented as having low levels of information about their upcoming journey. Often, all they had been informed of was that they were going to leave Afghanistan, and that their male spouse/relative was busy negotiating with smugglers. Details of the negotiations were not shared with them either.

“No, I do not have any information. Our men know where we will go once we leave here. I do not know.”

Female potential migrant, Balkh
PM-F-12

“I have no information about my migration journey.”

Female potential migrant, Takhar
PM-F-64

The pressing need for improved knowledge (and its wide dissemination) surrounding the serious risks associated with being smuggled are underlined by the stories told by undocumented migrants deported or returned to Afghanistan, including women - both traveling alone, or with their spouse and children. According to them, there is an urgent need for information about such risks, with many of them stating they had underestimated the levels of danger, trusting smugglers blindly. Previous to departing, they did not understand how easily smuggling can turn into trafficking, making them victims of serious human rights violations, such as sexual exploitation, forced labour, slavery, and organ removal.

“While we were on their way to Turkey, my under-age brother was separated by smugglers from us, forcing us to contact our family in Kabul to release the sum of money that was agreed to be paid after our arrival in Turkey”

Female Returnee, Turkey
R-F-57

Additionally, returnees also said they needed information on how to protect their assets, such as jewellery and cash that they need to bring with them.

“I wish I had enough information. Smugglers should not be trusted at all. They are very cruel and they always give wrong information. They abuse people and take their money when they are on the way”.

Female returnee, Turkey
R-F-22

Most prospective irregular migrants are not aware of which organizations or authorities to contact should they face any violence or abuse during their journey. They fear being imprisoned if they declare these abuses to law enforcement agencies (including the police), because of the irregular nature of their journey.

Respondents with plans to travel irregularly to Turkey and Europe were also concerned with information relating to whether or not their asylum case would be approved once in the country of destination. Additionally, high school graduates required information on whether their Afghan educational documents would allow them to be admitted to European universities, and what process they should follow for document attestation.

Drawing on the interviews conducted with potential migrants and stakeholders, two narratives have been identified about the knowledge of potential migrants about their rights as a migrant. Educated potential migrants planning to move to Turkey and Europe were aware of their rights to work, housing, education, and legal aid as an immigrant - information they had received from friends and relatives in Turkey and Europe. Since most of this group were planning to migrate irregularly to Turkey and Europe, they wanted to know whether they could eventually be employed. Interestingly, some of them knew that it would not be easy to find work upon their arrival. However, they were not concerned about whether they would be employed immediately after arrival, but rather if they would ultimately become eligible for a work permit.

Accessing education is another area where migrants urgently seek accurate information, especially where their children's future prospects are concerned. Due to various reasons, including legal status and language barriers, Afghan migrants in Turkey faced difficulties enrolling their children in local schools. Also, in Iran, policies seeking to reduce the number of Afghan children in local schools meant that many Afghan families were unable to provide their children with continued access to education.

Irregular potential migrants to Iran and Pakistan have general and very limited information on their rights as migrants, including the right to work. Those migrating to Iran were often already informed by friends and relatives that they would end up working irregularly. While migrants do not seek information on finding employment, they instead want to know if, being irregular migrants, they have the right to file any complaints, and to which authorities they should address themselves to – without running the risk of disclosing their illegal status and therefore risking deportation. Potential migrants to Pakistan presented as having comparatively less worries of their legal status impeding their ability to find work. Rather, during interview discussions, the main focus of their questions was regarding their rights as migrant workers, without asking for detailed information on current redressal mechanisms for migrant workers' complaints.

However, while the main purpose of the potential migrants' journey to Iran and Pakistan is to improve their financial situation, they also need to know if any humanitarian organizations can help them with accessing accommodation and food staples, particularly in Iran.

Some potential migrants requested information on whether there are any institutions or organizations they could turn to for support on arrival. Others, in Kabul, stated they needed information on how to access support on arrival in Europe for assistance in their asylum procedure.

Unlike potential migrants to Iran and Pakistan, respondents intending on migrating to Turkey and Europe planned to apply for asylum. They had been informed by relatives abroad that the application process for

seeking asylum was strict, especially in the more desirable final destinations of Germany and Sweden. They were also aware that Afghans whose applications were refused would be deported.

Deportees from Turkey and Europe often said that part of their inability to get their asylum applications accepted was due to a lack of knowledge about their host country's asylum application process, while some of their other relatives and friends had been accepted as asylum seekers. Deported Afghan returnees from Germany, for instance, acknowledged not knowing the length of the asylum procedure and what facts could impact their application for asylum. They requested more information about how to maximize their chances of success in the asylum-seeking process, and how best to mitigate the potential outcome of being denied asylum.

The need for information about the asylum-seeking process also runs high among individuals and households seeking to be reunited with a family member already living abroad with a legal status. Most respondents requiring this information were women whose husbands were either in Europe or North America. The process of being legally reunited with a relative or spouse already living abroad is lengthy, and as the respondents had yet to undergo the journey, information of both migration routes as well as formal reunification mechanisms were minimal. With the exception of those respondents who had migrated (both regularly and irregularly) and been returned - and who were therefore already aware of cultural norms - most potential migrants interviewed presented low levels of information about the destination countries' culture, particularly Turkey and European countries. When asked how they might adapt to a new culture, most respondents admitted that they did not have sufficient knowledge about Turkey and Europe's history, language, or climate. By comparison, potential migrants seeking to travel to Iran and Pakistan said they could speak Persian and Urdu fluently, and had sufficient information about their culture and history.

4.4.1.2. Returnees

On their return to Afghanistan, the information needs of returnees revolved mainly around security and assistance. Most recent returnees were aware of the general security conditions in Afghanistan, identifying friends and relatives as their main sources of information, while others had been monitoring the country's security situation via the media. However, for refugees born outside of Afghanistan returning voluntarily, low levels of information and knowledge were noticeable, especially in areas surrounding what to expect socio-culturally.

Additionally, these respondents admitted that they had received minimal information about the extent of assistance available through personal networks. Some returnees from Pakistan and Iran had information about the assistance offered by UN organizations and International Non-governmental Organizations (INGOs), including the provision of land and work opportunities. However, the majority of them stated they would have benefited from having access to information more tailored to their needs previous to returning. The host country authorities told deported asylum seekers in Europe and Turkey at the airport about what type of assistance will be provided to them upon their arrival.

However, forced returnees from Iran and Pakistan stated that whilst in country, they had received no information about modes of available assistance and their rights. Others interviewed reported that UNHCR and IOM had informed them about this assistance at the border upon their arrival. The experience of voluntary returnees was different. Both male and female migrants from Iran and Pakistan reported that they had some information about assistance, but that it was not detailed or precise. This information

was typically accessed through personal networks and media platforms. Information was also accessed by voluntary returnees via the UNHCR helpline, known as Afghanistan Voice, in Pakistan and Iran prior to their return to Afghanistan. Information is conveyed by telephone once returnees have decided to return and informed the UNHCR office.

4.4.2. Sources of Information

When asked who they were contacting to provide them information about their migration journey, over half of prospective migrants reported that the most common source of information they relied on to plan their journey were friends and relatives in other countries. Their friends told them who they should approach and how. Very few respondents named smugglers as their trusted source of information. Stakeholders, while believing that the majority of potential migrants rely on unofficial sources such as friends and relatives abroad, as well as local community members, stated that potential migrants are not aware of any official sources of information on migration inside Afghanistan. They suggested that potential migrants needed to be informed about official sources of information, assuring them that their information would not be disclosed to a third party.

“They [potential migrants] go and contact their friends who link them with smugglers to plan their migrations because there is no other source so that they can contact with. It is a big problem. They lose their lives due to lack of valid information and information source”.

DoRR, Balkh
B-M-05

In transit countries, migrants often exchange information in key locations, such as border crossings. This kind of relevant, pragmatic and up-to-date information often helps them make informed decisions, or alter their plans entirely, and can be very valuable.

The information sources of returnees prior to return included UNHCR, Afghan refugees’ unions⁴² and their social networks in Afghanistan. When asked what source was most trustworthy, respondents identified religious and traditional elders, government institutions and NGOs in Afghanistan.

In both provincial capitals, and to a large extent even in districts,⁴³ religious and traditional elders were trusted the most. Respondents from rural backgrounds preferred to access migration information from religious and traditional elders, including mullahs, tribal elders, shuras, maliks, wakil gubar and tribal elders. Respondents clarified this was because they viewed such religious and traditional elders to be intermediaries and the main interlocutors within their local setting with communities’ members, local government institutions and humanitarian and development NGOs.

In urban settings, DoRRs and local NGOs and INGOs-including IOM, DRC and NRC remain accessible sources for information. However, when respondents were asked to choose between government institutions and NGOs as sources of reliable information to access, most selected NGOs as trusted sources.

⁴² Refugee unions are non-governmental organizations being led by Afghan refugees in host countries.

⁴³ The public administration in provinces is divided into districts.

4.4.3. Means of Information

Migrants mostly consulted friends and family members about their migration information needs through messaging apps (Facebook, WhatsApp, IMO, Telegram and Viber). The use of messaging apps is widespread mostly in provincial capitals, and mostly among male migrants, while some female migrants in Kabul, Herat, Balkh and Jawzjan also use the apps. Online media and messaging apps have not gained popularity, particularly among female migrants and returnees in Nangarhar, Faryab, Khost and Takhar because of the cultural restrictions and economic barriers. These apps allowed most male respondents to keep in contact with their sources, being both affordable to most respondents, and easy to use.

Most potential migrants interviewed had neither attended physical information sessions on migration, nor had they watched programs (television or online), such as the now infamous Australian advertisement *“you will not make Australia home if you come by boat”*. This commercial was funded by the Australian government and broadcasted in Afghanistan by local television channels. It was aimed at preventing irregular migration, but was not considered to be helpful by most stakeholders because it was framed as a warning, and as a short commercial lacked any useful informational content. Nevertheless, television remains the preferred source for accessing information in provincial capitals.

Radio is a popular and preferred source of information in rural areas where TV sets are rare. Organizations that work on peace, reconciliation and community development programs work closely with local radio channels for facilitating public dialogue and disseminating information. Several stakeholders have highlighted radio programs as a valuable means of information to educate potential migrants in rural communities on the risks of irregular migration, and the rights of migrant workers.

Also, respondents both in urban and rural areas replied positively when asked if they would be comfortable contacting a phone number to obtain information, such as on legal migration processes, risks of migration and the rights of migrant workers abroad. Most potential migrants were not aware that such a system was in place. Moreover, while many were not aware of the MRC hotline (5588 – facilitated by the MoRR), most respondents wished that they had known about accessing this information prior to their departure. However, interest was shown only by respondents in possession of telephones and/or mobiles. Respondents from rural areas were less likely to possess or have access to a telephone, thus were less interested in this form of information.

Several NGOs have identified TV channels in provincial capitals, and radio programs at the district level, as valuable means of information dissemination on migration. NGOs are aware that most rural communities do not have access to internet or television. Further, due to enduringly low levels of literacy in rural areas, print media, including newspapers, brochures, or leaflets, were also less effective in terms of disseminating information. Stakeholders have called for the launch of public outreach initiatives that, through means accessible to communities, provide relevant and specific information to potential migrants and returnees. The provision of information packages to potential migrants and returnees that match communities' local language and culture is vital.

The table below summarizes the primary sources and means of information discovered during the fieldwork. The table's first column splits migration journeys into three phases: before departure, in-transit, and upon arrival. The second column relates to potential migrants' and returnees' sources of information, while the third column contains all of the means utilized by potential migrants and returnees for communications with their sources.

Table 3: Used sources of Information and Means (Source, ATR, based on fieldwork)

	Source	Means
Pre-Departure	Friends	Facebook Messenger, Viber, WhatsApp, direct phone calls
	Relatives	Facebook, Messenger, Viber, WhatsApp, direct phone calls
	Smugglers	WhatsApp and direct phone calls
	Returnees	Face-to-face conversations, WhatsApp
In-Transit	Migrants waiting for their journey	Face-to-face conversations, WhatsApp, Viber, IMO
	Relatives	Face-to-face conversations, WhatsApp, IMO, Telegram
	Friends	Face-to-face conversations, WhatsApp, Viber, IMO, Telegram
	Smugglers	WhatsApp, Viber, IMO, face-to-face conversations
Upon Arrival	UNHCR, IOM, DoRR	Face-to-face conversations
	Friends and relatives	Face-to-face conversations, Facebook, WhatsApp, Viber, IMO
	Tribal leaders	Face-to-face conversations
	Religious elders	Face-to-face conversations

4.5. Regional Highlights

The following sections provide key findings about the information needs of potential migrants, sources and means used for gathering information from each of the study locations. Findings from some of the provinces have been presented together, as part of a larger region, as they have been found to be very similar. This is the case for the eastern provinces (Nangarhar and Khost) and three of the northern provinces (Faryab, Takhar and Balkh). Jawzjan, also a northern province, is presented separately, as it presents specificities not found in the three other provinces of the region.

Table 4: Regional highlights

Regional Highlights	Destination	Source of Information	Means of Information
Herat	1. Iran	1. Friends	1. Facebook
	2. Turkey	2. Relatives	2. WhatsApp

	3. Europe	3. Community elders	3. TV 4. Radio 5. Direct Calls
Faryab	1. Pakistan	1. Friends	1. Face-to-face conversation 2. Direct calls
Takhar	2. Iran	2. Relatives	
Balkh	3. Turkey	3. Smugglers	
Jawzjan	1. Iran 2. Turkey	1. Friends 2. Relatives 3. Community elders/members	1. Facebook 2. WhatsApp 3. Telegram
Kabul	1. Iran 2. Turkey 3. Europe	1. Friends 2. Relatives	1. Facebook 2. WhatsApp 3. Telegram 4. Face-to-face conversation 5. IMO
Nangarhar	1. Pakistan	1. Friends	1. Facebook
Khost	2. Iran 3. Turkey	2. Relatives 3. Community elders/members	2. Face-to-Face conversation

4.5.1. Herat

Herat is a destination for migrants who look for work opportunities inside Afghanistan, and a transit location for migrants planning to migrate abroad to escape insecurity, conflict, and unemployment. In Herat city, most potential migrants who have the financial means plan to travel to Turkey and, if possible, to Europe. They make the necessary arrangements to obtain documents such as a passport, Iranian visa, and a one-way ticket to Iran. On arrival in Iran, migrants proceed on their journey irregularly to Turkey, and then Europe. These people have a relatively higher socio-economic status than potential migrants coming from rural areas, who intend to travel all the way to Turkey, relying on smugglers. Those who do not have the financial means to travel to Turkey stay in Iran, and work in construction or manufacturing companies.

For potential migrants from Herat, safety is the primary concern, as irregular routes will be used anyway either starting from Afghanistan, or from Iran to Turkey, and then Europe. Specific information about how to prevent physical risks and remain safe is listed as their priority need, followed by information about regular labour migration opportunities, access to education, employment, asylum application procedures, and shelter in Iran and Turkey.

Most returnees interviewed in Herat were living in Iran, and were either forced to return, or voluntarily returned once Covid-19 cases increased in the host country. The returnee population consists of male and female individuals and households. The length of their stay in Iran ranged from three to over five years.

The information needs of voluntary returnees prior to their return included 1) the security situation in their place of origin, and 2) the availability of assistance. Returnees who knew about the security situation in Afghanistan described their relatives and friends living in their places of origin as their primary source of information. Sources of information of returnees and potential migrants are the same. Their friends and relatives communicate with them and share the contact details of smugglers. Returnees from Iran

tracked Afghanistan's situation either by watching news channels, or by talking on the phone with their relatives and friends in Afghanistan.

Different means of information are employed by potential migrants living in urban and rural areas of Herat, mainly due to their socio-economic profiles. People in Herat city (both men and women) use Facebook, WhatsApp, watch TV (Ariana, Tolo, 1TV, and Shamshad), and sometimes listen to the radio (Radio Modjda, Radio Baran). In Injil district, radio and TV are the main means of information, followed by direct calls to friends or relatives.

Humanitarian efforts in Herat are focused on assisting returnees, regardless of whether they were forced, or voluntarily returned, to their country. They are provided with food, clothing, healthcare, kitchen materials and transportation costs by NGOs in coordination with provincial DoRR representatives. However, there are no activities aimed at addressing the information needs of potential migrants. Acknowledging that potential migrants need information before their departure as Herat remains one of the main hubs for migration, NGOs and the DoRR in Herat described the absence of an information center as a main gap in the province. The majority of respondents admitted that they have never watched a migration related program on TV, attended any event on the topic, or been provided with a phone number to call to access information. Potential migrants would welcome the establishment of an MRC, hoping to be provided with information about opportunities that can help them avoid using irregular channels.

4.5.2. Faryab, Takhar and Balkh

This study finds that Iran is the main intended destination for most potential migrants from Faryab, Takhar and Balkh, regardless of whether they live in urban or rural areas. Depending on a migrant's socio-economic background, Iran can be either the final or transit destination for a potential migrant from these provinces. Migrants in this scenario are often young males who plan to travel alone to Iran through irregular routes - either via the western province of Herat (Islam-Qala border crossing), or through Pakistan. Their planned stay in Iran is not permanent because they know they will not be able to file an asylum application, or obtain a work permit. Their aim is to work as labourers in the construction or manufacturing sectors that often hire undocumented labourers. Individuals and families from Balkh and Takhar seeking to migrate often have destinations like Iran and Turkey in mind, though are generally only able to finance this if they are able to leverage capital from their personal networks. Most of the potential migrants in this region are waiting for the Covid-19 pandemic to stop, or for the number of cases to decrease before they begin their journey.

The socio-economic profile of potential migrants in Balkh, Takhar, and Faryab indicates the high level of unemployment, and the correspondingly low level of educational attainment (graduation from formal primary and/or secondary education). Among potential migrants are individuals who had previously travelled to Iran seeking labour and were deported back to Afghanistan due to a lack of legal documentation.

Potential migrants and returnees know of the life-threatening risks that exist on their way to Iran. Still, they describe ongoing conflict and unemployment in their neighbourhoods as more dangerous than the risks of irregular migration, which they believe are temporary. Further, migration is often their only option to support their families. However, they do appear worried about their safety.

Information needs of potential migrants in Balkh, Takhar, and Faryab included information on: 1) regular migration channels for labourers; 2) where they should seek support from if they face physical violence during their passage, and 3) where they should address grievances for incidents and rights abuses in the workplace.

Friends and relatives living in Iran are sources of information for potential migrants, whose destination country is Turkey, and who do not plan to return to Afghanistan, at least not in the short-term. Facebook and WhatsApp are barely used by male individuals, and not at all by women, in the cities of Mazar-e-Sharif, Maymana, and Taloqan. In the rural districts of these three provinces, social media is hardly ever used. When asked if they have watched any migration-related program on TV, or attended any relevant gatherings, particularly on the risks of irregular migration, all respondents in Balkh, Faryab, and Takhar responded negative. Respondents in Faryab, Takhar and Balkh watch Tolo and 1TV, and listen to the radio Nai, Khaama and Azadi FM 100.5.

Assistance efforts in this region lack specific and evidence-based public-outreach programs to address the information needs of potential migrants. Instead, most of the programs are focused on providing food, clothing, and transportation costs to returnees. In some cases, DoRR staff escorted some deported minors to their households and informed parents about the existing risks of undocumented migration. This does not happen regularly, and also depends on the proximity of the returnee's family to DoRR outreach areas.

This study found that public awareness of the MRC hotline number in Balkh, Faryab, and Takhar was low, to non-existent. Addressing this knowledge gap could prove useful in connecting potential irregular migrants – a large proportion of whom originate from these provinces - to address their information concerns by calling the 5588-hotline number. Stakeholders suggested that building public awareness could be achieved by disseminating information to the public about the activities of MRC, and its hotline number by involving local elders, religious influential figures, and using traditional mechanisms for gatherings such as mosques and madrassas. Posters and banners were not suggested as tools for disseminating information, due to a high rate of illiteracy.

4.5.3. Jawzjan

The majority of potential migrants interviewed in central Jawzjan were not considering irregular migration. Most respondents presented as making the required arrangements for a journey, such as obtaining legal documentation. For most respondents, Turkey was the preferred destination country, where they sought to set up a small business and settle. Europe was not their intended destination for the time being. Most potential migrants in central Jawzjan are in possession of high school graduation certificates, with some having university degrees. Interviews in Jawzjan showed a specificity not found in other surveyed provinces: a very strong connection with Turkey. More concretely, after their visa applications were submitted to the Turkish consulate in Kabul and approved, many travel to Turkey with their families, primarily due to insecurity.

Most respondents interviewed in Jawzjan had returned from Iran, and Turkey to a lesser extent. Respondents had not made a final decision yet as to whether they would remain in Afghanistan, or try migrating again. Nevertheless, they said that they were aware of the risks of irregular migration. An in-depth understanding of migration risks was identified as their primary information needs. It was also noted that this group of respondents needed to know about 1) regular migration channels, 2) irregular migration channels, and 3) education opportunities in Turkey.

Relatives and friends living in Turkey are the main source of information for potential migrants in Jawzjan, who use Facebook, WhatsApp, and Telegram for communication. These messaging apps are also popular among young irregular migrants in the Khaja Duko areas of Jawzjan, where they have also access to television and radio. However, none of them had watched migration-related programs on TV, or attended migration related events in their home town. Habitants of Jawzjan preferred watching Tolo and listening to Radio Azadi.

Stakeholders, particularly the DoRR, agreed that their operations in Jawzjan were very limited in scope, and focused mainly on returnees due to a lack of adequate resources. No outreach initiative has been implemented yet. Most stakeholders believe that a migration information center would be useful in providing people with information, particularly on the risks of irregular migration and the networks of regular migration for labour workers, or indeed whether there are any. Respondents did not know about the MRC's hotline number, but they stated it could be a helpful source of information for their migration concerns.

4.5.4. Kabul

Migration plans of people living in Kabul were also shaped by conflict and unemployment. While respondents intending to migrate from both Arzan-Qimat and Dasht-e-Barchi neighborhoods - the two areas of Kabul where data for this study was collected - the largest share of people that planned to migrate undocumented appeared to live in Dasht-e-Barchi. Interviewing potential migrants in Arzan-Qimat, most respondents reported that they would soon migrate to Turkey, and they have already applied for a visa. They did not want to use irregular routes as they knew of the various challenges and risks migrants faced along their journey to Turkey. In Arzan-Qimat, where potential migrants are financially better off, and can afford direct flights to Turkey, decisions to migrate had not been made by individuals alone, but were generally made in consultation with the entire family. Most consultations resulted in the decision to migrate as a family.

For potential migrants interviewed in Dasht-e-Barchi, Turkey was also a preferred destination country, but few could afford to travel to Turkey by air. Respondents planned to travel irregularly to Iran, and then Turkey. Whilst Kabul receives migrants deported from Turkey and Europe, some returnees had no immediate future migration plans. Most of Kabul's potential migrants felt sad about having to leave their country, but they felt they had no other choice. Most respondents interviewed had relatives and/or friends living in Turkey and Europe. These contacts played a big role in potential migrants taking the decision to leave Afghanistan. Social media (Facebook, WhatsApp, Telegram, IMO) allowed migrants to remain in regular contact with friends and relatives.

The information needs of respondents in Arzan-Qimat and Dasht-e-Barchi vary according to their migration strategy. Respondents in Arzan-Qimat were interested in Turkey's immigration procedures, and which specific documents they would need to file their asylum applications. By contrast, the information needs of potential irregular migrants in Dasht-e-Barchi include specific details about the scope and frequency of the risks in each route, and ways to avoid and/or mitigate them whilst traveling from Iran to Turkey. Providing information about regular migration opportunities has been cited by all respondents as an important initiative to save lives of people who have no choice but to resort to irregular routes to reach their country of choice.

Deportees returning from Turkey and Europe are assisted by NGOs and UN agencies after being screened at Hamid Karzai International Airport. However, no research has been conducted by stakeholders regarding their information needs. It was also noted that migrants in Kabul watched TV programs on Tolo, 1TV and Aryana that discussed the risks associated with irregular migration. They did not find them relevant, as the programs did not address their specific migration related information needs. Interviewees said they wanted to know whether or not there was an opportunity for them to migrate and work abroad.

Unlike other provinces, most respondents and stakeholders in Kabul knew about MRC activities, and the hotline number it provides (5588). In order to further expand its activities, stakeholders suggested that the MRC provide services outside Kabul in a well-coordinated way that complements existing services of NGOs and provincial DoRR offices, although these services are minimal. Stakeholders highly recommend that the MRCs inform Afghans living in targeted provinces about its hotline services, and also coordinate and monitor awareness raising programs with relevant traditional community members. A well-coordinated and multi-stakeholder approach to information provision in each location could result in a widespread public outreach program. Moreover, stakeholders in Kabul believe that previous migration related awareness programs were not tailored according to the needs of potential migrants, nor were they provided in the local languages spoken in the targeted communities. In order to fill this gap, they suggested that local community members should be involved and trained in the provision of public awareness programs. Such an inclusive initiative would help the MRCs reach groups that reside in remote and hard-to-reach areas, constituting a large proportion of potential migrants undertaking irregular migration routes, and therefore at greater risk of exploitation by smugglers and human traffickers.

4.5.5. Nangarhar and Khost

There were important similarities in the socio-economic profile of migrants, whether regular or irregular, from Nangarhar and Khost. No respondents interviewed in these two provinces had access to formal education. They had all resided in Pakistan for a period ranging between three to over five years before returning to Afghanistan. While often originating from rural communities, they were displaced to the provincial capital due to conflicts. When asked if they faced any challenges in Pakistan during their stay, they could not recall any problems. However, some of them complained of law enforcement agencies' misconduct and the misperceptions of Pakistanis about Afghan refugees. The majority of respondents had been issued Proof of Registration cards (PoR), which allowed them to move freely and work.

Those who returned in 2020 cited the growing number of cases of Covid-19 as the main reason for their return to Afghanistan. Lack of access to education for their children, limited health care services, and limited employment opportunities were cited as the main challenges faced since returning. However, despite these problems, most respondents do not have immediate intentions to migrate again. Some potential migrants intend to move to Pakistan for seasonal labour, or for medical check-ups by crossing the Torkham border. Only a few intended to migrate to Iran and Turkey, with some stating they would like to move to Iran via Pakistan, then proceed to Turkey. Such potential migrants typically remained in contact with friends who shared their stories and experiences with them, often on Facebook.

Whilst seasonal migration to Pakistan remains a constant, this does not mean that migrants do not need information. Overall, migrants from Nangarhar and Khost are interested in information on (1) the length of the Pakistani visa process, (2) support for obtaining the visa (a visa is required for everyone who plans

to cross the Torkham border), (3) the risks of irregular migration, and (4) information about regular labour migration to the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia.

Social media (predominantly Facebook) was only used by young male potential migrants, and returnees in Matun (Khost) and Jalalabad city (Nangarhar). Social media was not popular in rural areas of both provinces, as locals mostly cannot afford internet connections. Face-to-face communications are frequently used for information exchanges at the community level. Most respondents did not have a television, but most respondents either possessed or had access to a radio (Abseen, Arman 98.1 and Chinar) in both urban and rural communities.

Much like other provinces, stakeholders' efforts were mainly focused on returnees, who were provided with essential support (food, clothing, and transportation costs) upon their arrival. Most returnees wished they had more detailed information about the security situation in their places of origin before their return, as instead of returning to their area of origin they would select a safer location to be escorted to.

Given all the needs of potential migrants and returnees, an information center was universally considered essential by both potential and returned migrants and key informants. No respondents in Nangarhar and Khost knew about the MRC and its activities, and had never called any number to raise migration-related concerns or questions. Still, when they heard about the hotline number of the MRC (5588), they showed an interest in using it, if needed. To build public awareness about such programs, stakeholders suggested that existing traditional platforms such as mosques, cricket gatherings, and poetry events should be used.

5. Migrant Resource Centre (MRC)

5.1. Policy Framework

Migration policy frameworks have been evolving, especially since 2001. The Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA) participates in several international conventions on the status of refugees, including the Global Compact on Refugees. In 2018, the Governments of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan, along with other States of the UN General Assembly became signatories to the Global Compact on Refugees, and created the Global Refugee Forum, aimed at sharing responsibility, recognizing that a sustainable solution to refugees' concerns cannot be achieved without international cooperation.

The Global Compact on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration is another cooperative framework that was developed based on the commitments guaranteed by the member states of the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants. While Afghanistan has yet to ratify this declaration (Majidi, 2020),⁴⁴ it remains fully committed to cooperating with the international community on migration, and reforming its migration governance accordingly. Migration trends indicate that both migration and returns have presented Afghanistan's migration governance with new challenges, particularly in terms of scope and complexity. Absence of migration policies and institutional structures have been often cited as one of the main challenges of migration governance in Afghanistan (Seese & Kandiwal, 2017).⁴⁵

In order to reform the national migration governance, GIROA has recently endorsed the Comprehensive Migration Policy (CMP) with the technical support of ICMPD in order to streamline all existing migration policies and define the government's priorities. ANNEX 6 lists all national and international frameworks pertaining to migration in Afghanistan.

The implementation of the frameworks rests on a variety of national and international institutions, representing the cross-cutting character of migration governance in Afghanistan. Coordination of programs rests with MoRR, and the implementation of policies are discussed at the Migration Executive Committee (MEC), being held in the office of the first Vice President of Afghanistan.

Stakeholders interviewed argued that un-defined roles of actors, and scarcity of resources in the MoRR are the technical challenges that continue to hamper the ability of the MoRR to properly coordinate the implementation of migration-related policies. The challenges are also believed to have created obstacles to implement re-integration interventions. For instance, linking humanitarian programs with the development plans of line ministries in order to address the concerns and needs of returnees has proven a problem, which in order to solve the MoRR needs greater resources, well-defined reviews and the re-allocation of functions for each actor.

5.2. The Migrant Resource Centre

The Migrant Resource Centre (MRC) in Afghanistan was inaugurated in July 2018. The MRC's core mission is to raise awareness on legal migration; the dangers and consequences of irregular migration, and the protection of migrants' rights. It also links to existing governments and non-governmental structures, and guides service users to the respective areas of assistance provided by the government and civil society

⁴⁴ Majidi, N. "The Potential of Migration for Development in Afghanistan," *Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD): Development Matters*, 2020

⁴⁵ Helen Seese and Mohammad Kandiwal, "Migration Governance," *Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit*, 2017

for outgoing and returning migrants. The MoRR is responsible for the overall management of the MRC. The MRC works closely with other ministries, including the MoLSA, across areas including labour market assessment, and pre-departure orientation to migrant workers.

So far, the MRC has embarked on public awareness-raising initiatives in schools, universities, and vocational training centers, set up a hotline number that provides callers with information, and provides information through social media such as WhatsApp, Viber, and Facebook. As a leading government agency in the management and supervision of the MRC's tasks, the MoRR has expressed its satisfaction with the MRC's success since its establishment, and plans to expand its outreach activities in other provinces of Afghanistan. In response to the question of whether the MRC/MoRR offer any services to migrants abroad, the MoRR reported that most of its programs are aimed at refugees' return and coordinating their re-integration.

However, the results of this study suggest that the majority of potential migrants interviewed in provinces outside Kabul are not aware of the initiative, but have expressed their strong interest in learning about the MRC and its activities. Similarly, as there is no institution/center for providing migration information to the public, several stakeholders have described the lack of mechanisms at the provincial level for providing information as one of the key contributors to the vulnerability of Afghans to irregular migration, human smuggling and trafficking. In Nangarhar, a DoRR staffer reported that migrants fall victim to smugglers because they do not have information about how quickly a migration situation can transform into a life-threatening concern. In Kabul, respondents were appreciative of the role of the MRC in contributing to the governance of migration (particularly in raising public awareness about the risks of irregular migration through social media, and fielding calls through its hotline number).

When asked what could be done in future to improve the effectiveness of the MRC, many stakeholders responded that, being the only service provider of its kind, expanding the MRC to the provincial level would significantly increase its impact. Potential migrants are often motivated to migrate by their friends and relatives residing in Turkey and Europe, a narrative often contextualized without the multiple dangers likely to be faced on their journey. Therefore, provision of information to potential migrants in Afghanistan about the living conditions of irregular migrants and asylum seekers abroad is another practice suggested by stakeholders to be adopted by the MRC.

To widen the MRC's scope of reach to cover all Afghanistan and provide information, three full time and four part time staff (current staffing levels), do not suffice. More staff are needed to increase the MRC's portfolio, including full time staff allocation by the MoRR. Currently the MRC staff manages two departments, with requests for migration information significantly increasing, requiring more staff to collect and process the data, and respond to public requests.

"We plan to expand our activities. It would include promoting further our Facebook page to attract more and more visitors and be able to disseminate migration related information to people".

MRC staff, Afghanistan

K-M-21

The need for information about migration is not only in Kabul where the only MRC office is currently located. This study has found that people in other provinces who plan to migrate also urgently require information for their journeys. The MRC plans to work closely with the Directorates of Refugees and Repatriation (DoRRs) in each province. To that end, the MRC, as part of its 2020-2025 strategy, plans to arrange training sessions for DoRR staff in Kabul, and enhance its migration capacity in general and information needs of Afghans in particular.

As part of its coordination efforts, the MRC has conducted a mapping study and established a list of all stakeholders involved in migration governance. The MRC plans to cooperate and coordinate its activities, conduct joint outreach and awareness raising sessions with these groups through the support of external stakeholders into other geographical areas of Afghanistan, where stakeholders have already established networks and offices.

The MRC has already started consistent coordination with some ministries. For example, the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) assists the MRC in coordinating information sessions to students, while the Ministry of Hajj and Religious Affairs (MoHRA) is willing to cooperate on the dissemination of information through religious channels, which this study has found to be one of the highly trusted sources of local people at the district level. The MRC also plans to engage effectively with civil society organizations (CSOs), and international actors, including the International Labour Organization (ILO), and United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) to ensure its future activities complement current relevant programs.

6. Conclusions

Reviewing migrants' profiles, men constitute the vast majority of migrants from Afghanistan. However, those who are of a relatively improved socio-economic situation are more likely to be accompanied by their spouse and children. In these instances, families would directly fly to Turkey, then cross to Europe, or fly to Iran, irregularly enter Turkey and then continue to Europe. Female migrants were deemed to be more vulnerable to protection risks, often not being aware of the dangers of being smuggled, while their husbands or male siblings usually had some sense of the risks involved. Male relatives, however, are often not willing to share such information with female members of their household to avoid worrying them. Despite being aware of the dangers to their physical safety, irregular migrants seemed to be unaware that smuggling could easily turn into trafficking, leaving them vulnerable to severe human rights abuses.

Most irregular migrants to Iran are aware that they will be unlikely to obtain a work permit, which contextualizes their preferred area of information to access, i.e. how to report instances of not being paid by an employer, without disclosing they are undocumented. Additionally, this group also sought information regarding the following themes: how to access accommodation, food, housing, education for their children, and other types of essential requirements.

Prospective migrants to Pakistan, often young, from a rural community, and generally with a low level of education, seek information on how to easily get a visa to cross the Torkham border. Those planning on travelling to Turkey and Europe seek to apply for asylum and a work permit upon arrival. This group seeks information about how to have their asylum applications approved, and what the next step could be if their asylum application is rejected. Other priority areas for accessing information include: length and procedure of asylum application, access to education, institutions and authorities that migrants can address their queries to, and seek assistance from.

Information needs of returnees prior to returning to Afghanistan centered primarily on the security situation, and the availability of assistance. Voluntary returnees from Iran and Pakistan, unlike deported returnees, had knowledge about the availability of assistance, but their information was not extensive. For example, they understood that returnees were assisted upon arrival in Afghanistan, but they were unaware of what this support consisted of, and whether it would be of any use to them. Some expected land/housing to be given.

While deported asylum seekers from Turkey and Europe were given information about their return journey immediately prior to their return, deported returnees from Iran and Pakistan had no information about such assistance.

The Covid-19 pandemic had the dual effect of triggering migrants in Iran and Pakistan to return to Afghanistan and put on hold many regular and irregular potential migration plans. The urgency for outreach and awareness programs has been determined as both regular and irregular potential migrants have expressed an urgent interest in being able to access information from an information center. The information needs of irregular potential migrants in Kabul, Herat, Nangarhar, Khost, Balkh, Faryab, Takhar and Jawzjan all align. Also, there is a high demand for information in the regions of Balkh, Faryab, Takhar, Khost and Nangarhar, and rural areas of Kabul and Herat. These are the regions from where most potential migrants are planning to embark on irregular journeys to Pakistan, Iran and Turkey and, if possible, to Europe. The MRC should prioritize these targeted areas as the principal focus of its outreach programs, and potential irregular migrants as the main recipients of information. The enabling of a sustainable, effective, and evidence-based outreach program is possible if the means of information are accessible to communities and match local communities' language and cultural aspects.

The most trusted sources in rural areas are traditional and religious organizations such as mosques and jirga councils, followed by radio channels. Stakeholders also suggested disseminating information to the public about MRC activities, including its hotline number by involving local elders, religious influential figures, and using traditional mechanisms for gatherings such as mosques and madrassas. Posters and banners were not suggested as tools for disseminating information, due to high illiteracy rates. Social media and TV channels are available means that can be used for the dissemination of information involving deported returnees, councils of Afghan women, local female activists, local celebrities, community elders, and immigration experts. Methods/tools that the MRC should employ for information dissemination, by which information can be provided to targeted groups based on availability and applicability of the methods in their respective locations. As the findings of the study indicate, the tools that are used by potential migrants in urban and rural areas vary, whether they are regular or irregular potential migrants. Therefore, with methods of information dissemination ranging from technological to simple localized and traditional means, the MRC should use a mixture of methods and approaches.

7. Recommendations

The following section provides the MRC with recommendations about what type of information it should provide potential migrants to address their needs, and through which sources and means.

7.1. Information, Sources and Means

The information needs of potential migrants did not significantly vary at various stages of their journey. At pre-departure and en-route, information needs to include how to avoid physical risks on the route (loss of valuable assets, smuggling and trafficking circumstances, risks of irregular work in the host country, family reunifications), while at the country of destination, they need information about education, access to accommodation, asylum-requests and work-permits. Both prior and after returning to Afghanistan, returnees' information needs to revolve around the security situation in their place of origin, and the availability of assistance such as shelter and livelihood support.

The urgency of receiving information varies. The level of the need for information among irregular potential migrants (particularly female potential migrants) in rural areas of Kabul, Herat, Nangarhar, Khost, Balkh, Faryab, Takhar, and Jawzjan is significantly higher in comparison to potential migrants living in urban communities, as they have relatively more access to means of information. Therefore, the MRC should prioritize these targeted groups as the main recipients of information, primarily through traditional and religious sources and locally trusted means, such as radio and face-to-face gatherings. The information for the targeted groups in both rural and urban regions of the mentioned provinces should include:

7.1.1. Human Smuggling and Trafficking

Provide information to irregular potential migrants both in urban and rural locations of Kabul, Herat, Nangarhar, Khost, Faryab, Balkh, Takhar and Jawzjan about how smuggling can turn into human trafficking circumstances. Given the experiences of returnees who migrated irregularly to neighbouring countries or to Turkey and Europe, and the account of stakeholders, information about the risks, their scope and frequency should be provided. Such information can be obtained from families whose loved ones faced physical risks on their way between Iran and Turkey. The MoRR also has quantitative data about the occurrence of the risks. Deported returnees from Turkey and Europe can be suitable sources for providing this information. The MRC should identify returnees in each region through DoRR staff, and provide them training about the information needs of potential migrants. During training sessions, an indirect assessment of each source's communication strength and weaknesses should be conducted to leverage the former and resolve the latter. Information provision sessions should be organized in mosques and shuras, mobilizing the participation of young people in close coordination with maliks, mullahs, wakil-e-guzars and community elders.

However, some returnees may not be willing to share their stories, as they might feel ashamed for having failed the aim of their journey. Therefore, another approach could be to record and broadcast their stories on radio in remote areas, or facilitate radio discussions in order to discuss in detail their stories, especially where the level of risk swiftly escalated.

MRC is already providing this information through TV channels. However, this information needs to be provided also to people in other urban communities, inviting experts, the staff of MRC and returnees from Turkey and Europe. TV debates should be aired on local TV channels at night time, because most Afghan men are not at home during the day. Links and video clips of the debates can be disseminated through Facebook and Instagram accounts of local celebrities, civil society activists, provincial members of the

parliament, members of the provincial council, regional football players and winners of Qur-an recitation contests.

It is also crucial for the dissemination of information to be purposeful and targeted. Efforts should be made to provide information to its intended audience, by focusing on the audiences' preferred means of information delivery. To illustrate this, the MRC should hire returnees (male and female) to provide mobile information services in both rural and urban areas of Faryab, Balkh, Takhar, Jawzjan, Nangarhar, Khost and rural areas of Herat. These are the areas where people do not have TVs to watch migration programs, and access to social media. Mobile teams need to be fully trained about human smuggling and the needs of trafficked potential migrants, and understand all information before they launch door-to-door information disseminating programs. The MRC and DoRRs should remain in regular contact with mobile teams in order to closely monitor the activity. Be advised that inclusion of women in mobile teams is critical, as women in these areas rarely (or never) attend public events.

7.1.2. Rights of Irregular Migrants

Irregular potential migrants in rural locations of Kabul, Herat, Nangarhar, Khost, Faryab, Balkh, Takhar and Jawzjan should be made aware that legal employment opportunities enables decent work, pay, and opportunities for professional development, while unregulated labour can lead to exploitation and eventually deportation. They should be also informed that there are no complaint mechanisms for irregular migrant workers in Iran and Pakistan. The complaints of regular migrant workers are heard and processed. Information on legal aid and recruitment procedures would help potential migrants to Iran and Pakistan understand employment related rights and procedures governing labour work in countries of transit and destination. The MRC in Kabul should provide information about employment opportunities in countries of destination, including information about job search portals, to regular migrants. The MRC can share the information about work prospects in countries that Afghanistan has bilateral labour work migration agreements with.

As irregular potential migrants living in rural regions need this information, the MRC can work with mullahs, maliks and elders to inform migrants, using existing traditional and religious premises such as madrassas, schools, mosques and community shura settings. These sources are more trusted and better-suited to transfer information. The MRC can also use local radio channels for the dissemination of this information, since people in Faryab, Kabul, Balkh, Takhar, Jawzjan, Nangarhar, Khost and Herat (rural areas only) listen to radio. The MRC, in coordination with the DoRR, can contract local radio stations to produce short dramas and talk shows involving famous radio celebrities to engage listeners about rights of work in Iran and Pakistan.

7.1.3. Work Permits

Potential migrants would like to know whether or not they would become eligible to be granted work permits in Turkey and Europe upon their arrival. In order to respond to their information needs, work permit application requirements in Turkey and Europe should be identified and presented to potential migrants in light of immigration/asylum-seeking procedures. For example, valid residence permits are one of the requirements of being granted work authorization in Turkey. Regular migration-customized work permit information will help potential migrants to make informed decisions and choices, before planning to migrate.

It would be effective to provide this information to potential migrants in rural communities of Faryab, Takhar, Jawzjan, Nangarhar, Khost, Herat, Kabul and Balkh. The MRC can present this information through local radio channels.

Since social media platforms are popular in the provincial capitals, Facebook and Instagram are better forums for sharing this information to potential migrants. The MRC can share the TV video clips through Facebook and Instagram accounts of local celebrities, journalists and civil society activists.

7.1.4. Host Country Culture

Most potential migrants do not have enough information about Turkey and Europe's systems and sociocultural norms. To support integration, the MRC should provide specific country information that can include: history, language, geography, challenges that migrants - particularly undocumented - would face, including public perception, cost of living, transfer of remittances procedures, dress and attire in public places, use of public transport, public school admission requirements, safe sexual behaviour, religion/religious practices. Both regular and potential irregular migrants need this information.

Since this information is needed by potential migrants, both in rural and urban communities, it can be delivered through local celebrities (sportsmen, singers, Quran recitation winners, and local journalists) on local radio programs. This information can also be delivered through mullahs, maliks and community leaders once they are fully trained by MRC staff.

As part of the MRC outreach program in urban locations, 3-minute TV video clips (about the culture of each country) can be used as an accessible means for dissemination of this information. Just as for other messages, the MRC can hire local celebrities, female civil society activists, as well as influential local religious figures to produce the video clips, which should be aired both on local TV channels, as well as on Facebook and Instagram pages.

7.1.5. Temporary Labour Migration Programs

Although regular labour migration programs are limited, the Government of Afghanistan has signed agreements with nine countries including Qatar and Saudi Arabia. Information to potential migrations about labour programs in these countries should include vocational trainings that are aimed at enhancing the skills of labourers to be recruited to join foreign markets; the visa and work permits that are arranged and provided by the MoFA and MoLSA in order to send labourers to Qatar and Saudi Arabia; salary/wage scales offered to labourers through these programs; registration processes; information about the labour markets in Qatar and Saudi Arabia, and future programs of the Afghan government to facilitate labour work vacancies. The MRC in Kabul can provide information about employment opportunities in countries of destination, including information about job search portals, to documented and regular migrants. The MRC can search and share the information about work prospects in countries that Afghanistan has bilateral labour migration agreements with.

The information should be disseminated as widely as possible both in rural communities of Kabul, Herat, Nangarhar, Khost, Faryab, Takhar, Balkh and Jawzjan, through tribal elders, mullahs and Maliks in premises such as in community shuras, local jirga sessions and Friday prayer gatherings.

As this study has found, local radio channels offer valuable and effective platforms for building the awareness of the public on migration in rural regions, the MRC should also use local radio channels for disseminating this information on temporary labour migration programs.

The MRC can also organize TV debates in urban regions, inviting representatives from the MoLSA, MoRR, as well as members of the National Workers' Union of Afghanistan (NUWA). The participants will explore regular labour migration opportunities, and provide information about the criteria for vacancies. Scripts of TV debates should be developed in a manner that can motivate individuals to concentrate on routine labour migration, as irregular journeys pose significant risks to them and their families. Returnees and deported individuals from Turkey and Europe, as well as young residents of the communities, should be invited by the MRC to engage in the TV programs.

7.1.6. Where to Get Help From

Potential migrants do not know who they can contact to ask for help upon arrival in their destination countries about asylum-seeking procedures, as well as to get information or assistance in regards to practical issues, such as seeking accommodation. In order to address their information need, the MRC should prepare a list of all NGOs, MRCs, and Afghan refugees associations in Pakistan, Iran, Turkey and Europe that provide services or guide new arrivals. It can be part of the training material that the MRC should provide to mullahs, maliks, wakil-e-guzars and tribal elders in mosques, community jirgas and councils.

TV programs and social media are the tools that can be used for the dissemination of video clips of local celebrities presenting the information. Audio clips can also be developed to be aired on radio to potential rural migrants.

7.1.7. Personal Safety Solution

Migrants, who would like to migrate again, and already experienced violence during their previous journey, need to know who they should contact if they face abuse or exploitation, particularly at their workplace or during their journey. This should include information about the contact numbers/address of Afghanistan national consulates, as well as UNHCR offices in destination countries that can be helpful in such circumstances. This information should be provided to all irregular migrants irrespective of their country of destination through tribal elders, mullahs and local journalists in rural areas of Faryab, Balkh, Takhar, Jawzjan, Nangarhar, Khost and Herat, using traditional and religious premises.

While providing this information, it should be emphasized that support centres are either limited, or do not exist, particularly in Iran and Pakistan for irregular migrants. Contact with law enforcement agencies often culminate in deportations. The MRC can provide the same information through radio stations and TV channels to targeted potential migrants living in urban regions.

7.1.8. Assistance upon Return

As has been noticed, the majority of returnees alleged that they had not received assistance, as they did not know about the availability of it prior to their return, or the assistance provided was merely temporary and did not meet their needs. In order to provide relevant information to returnees about availability of assistance prior to their return, the MRC in Kabul needs to coordinate with relevant NGOs and UN

agencies, in particular OCHA, to collect information about assistance programs. The MRC can provide information to returnees about assistance programs' consular offices of Afghanistan in Iran, Pakistan, Turkey and Europe, refugee and repatriation attaches in the mentioned, as well as Afghan Refugee Unions. Moreover, the MRC can connect returnees prior to their return with a number of sources in their place of origin (e.g: wakil-e-guzar, religious figures, tribal elders and community development councils). These sources can be identified through the staff of DoRR.

7.1.9. Security in Afghanistan

Most returnees had information about the general security situation of their country. However, they, particularly those who were born abroad, were looking for specific information about the security situation in their places of origin. The MRC can connect returnees prior to their return with a number of sources in their place of origin (e.g.: wakil-e-guzar, religious figures, elders and CDCs). These sources can be identified through the staff of DoRR.

7.1.10. Education

Potential migrants typically are concerned of whether or not their children would be allowed to access education in Turkey. More specifically, they are concerned of whether an irregular entry may bar their children from being able to access education. All irregular potential migrants, both in rural and urban locations of Kabul, Herat, Nangarhar, Khost, Faryab, Balkh, Takhar and Jawzjan should be made aware that access to education in other countries offers the possibility to foster leadership, interpersonal and technology skills of students, but children of undocumented migrants might not be able to easily benefit from educational opportunities.

Young potential migrants are interested in continuing their education in Turkey and Europe. They understand their current education documents should be attested in the destination country to become eligible for university admissions. However, they do not know what the required procedures are to do so. Considering that attestation processes of educational documents in destination countries vary, the information that MRC provides to migrants should include contact details (phone number and website addresses) of the Ministry of Higher Education of Afghanistan, which runs a public call centre. Young potential migrants can contact the Ministry and seek information about the required protocol for attestation of educational documents.

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Annex 1: Sampling Plan

Location	IDI – Potential Migrant	Age	IDI – returned migrants	Age	KII with Government	KII with border police	KII with media	KII with NGO/IO
Faryab	2 male, 2 female	18 – 24 25-35	2 male, 2 female	18 – 24 25-35	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DoRR • MoLSA 	1 male	1 male	IOM
Nangarhar	2 male, 2 female	18 – 24 25-35	2 male, 2 female	18 – 24 25-35	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MoRR • MoLSA 	1 male	1 male	IOM
Herat	2 male, 2 female	18 – 24 25-35	2 male, 2 female	18 – 24 25-35	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DoRR • MoLSA 	1 male	1 male	IOM
Balkh	2 male, 2 female	18 – 24 25-35	2 male, 2 female	18 – 24 25-35	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DoRR • MoLSA 	1 male	1 male	IOM
Jawzjan	2 male, 2 female	18 – 24 25-35	2 male, 2 female	18 – 24 25-35	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MoRR • MoLSA 	1 male	1 male	IOM
Takhar	2 male, 2 female	18 – 24 25-35	2 male, 2 female	18 – 24 25-35	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DoRR • MoLSA 	1 male	1 male	IOM
Khost	2 male, 2 female	18 – 24 25-35	2 male, 2 female	18 – 24 25-35	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DoRR • MoLSA 	0 male, 0 female	1 male	OHPM

Kabul	3 male, 3 female	18 – 24 25-35	3 male, 3 female	18 – 24 25-35	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MoRR • MoFA • MoLSA • VPs Office • MoRR-MRC • MoIA 	1 male	2 males	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GIZ • NRC • DRC • EU Delegation • UNHCR • IOM • UNODC • World Bank
Total	17 male, 17 female		17 male, 17 female		18 male, 2 female	7 male	9 male	13 male, 3 female

Annex 2: Legal Framework on Migration in Afghanistan

A. National Frameworks

- 1) **Tripartite Agreement Between the Government of Afghanistan:** the government of Pakistan and UN High Commissioner for Refugees: in June 2019 the Government of Afghanistan, the Government of Pakistan and UNHCR High Commissioner reaffirmed their commitment for extending the existing tripartite agreement, which governs the voluntary repatriation of Afghan citizens living in Pakistan.
- 2) **Tripartite Agreement Between the Government of Afghanistan:** the Government of Iran and UNHCR Afghanistan, Iran and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees assigned a tripartite agreement in 2005, extending the 2002 first tripartite agreement. The agreement is aimed at paving the way for a dignified, voluntary and safe return of Afghan refugees living in Iran.
- 3) **The 2017 National Policy Framework for Internally Displaced Persons and Returnees:** the primary objective of this policy framework is to ensure socio-economic re-integration of Afghan returnees and IDPs, encouraging the participation of IDPs and returnees in the development of the country. This policy framework takes into account the national policy on IDPs endorsed in 2013, which provides a basis for achieving durable solutions for IDP populations in Afghanistan, and the comprehensive voluntary repatriation and reintegration strategy, approved by the government in 2015.
- 4) **The Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework:** The Government of Afghanistan endorsed the comprehensive Refugee Response Framework in July 2018, which is aimed at establishing a platform to better mobilize international support to achieve solutions for refugees, while standing in solidarity with host countries, including Iran and Pakistan. The framework also clarifies approaches in order to manage and regulate migration movements.
- 5) **Comprehensive Migration Policy:** in 2019, Afghanistan endorsed a comprehensive migration policy as part of the Budapest process. Based on a memorandum of understanding (MoU) signed between the MoRR, and the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) in 2017, the Government of Afghanistan developed its comprehensive policy framework on migration, and it focused on four policy areas: 1) return and integration, 2) regular migration, 3) migration and development, and 4) prevention of irregular migration. The policy is aimed at facilitating regular migration channels in Afghanistan, based on regional and international frameworks, and enhancing the skills of labour applicants based on the labour market requirements.
- 6) **Afghanistan National 2018-2020 Labour Migration Strategy:** the purpose of the strategy is to transform the current informal and irregular migration movements into a formal labour migration system based on norms, reforms, bilateral, regional and international co-operation, building workers' skills and competencies needed to be recruited in the international labour market.
- 7) **Afghanistan-United Arab Emirates Agreement:** Afghanistan signed an agreement on 2018 with UAE for sending labourers to the Gulf state. The first batch of 2,500 Afghan labourers were

sent in 2019, which is an initiative to tackle unemployment in the country (Migrant Project, 2019).⁴⁶

B. International Frameworks

- 1) **The Global Compact on Refugees:** in December 2018, the Governments of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan, along with other states of the UN General Assembly (UNGA), affirmed the global compact on refugees and created the global refugee forum. The global compact on refugees is aimed at sharing responsibility, recognizing that a sustainable solution to refugees' concerns cannot be achieved without international cooperation. Also, it provides a blueprint for government, international organizations and relevant stakeholders to ensure that host communities receive the support they need, and that refugees can have productive lives.

- 2) **International Convention on The Protection of The Rights Of All Migrants Workers And Members Of Their Families:** the convention considers the concerns of migrant workers and their families, the situation of vulnerability in which they frequently find themselves owing - and among other things - to their absence from their country of origin, and to the difficulties encountered arising from high levels of unemployment amongst refugees. The Government of Afghanistan is not a signatory of this convention.

- 3) **Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea, and Air, Supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime:** Afghanistan is one of the signatories of the protocol since 2000. The purpose of this protocol is to prevent and combat the smuggling of migrants, as well as to promote cooperation among states parties to that end, while protecting the rights of smuggled migrants.

- 4) **The Global Compact on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration:** the global compact on safe, orderly and regular migration is a cooperative framework that has been developed based on the commitments guaranteed by the member states of the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants. The compact acknowledges that no state can address migration-related issues on its own, and it requires the cooperation of all actors. Therefore, it encourages cooperation among member states that remain the primary responsible actors when it comes to migration under international law (UNGA, 2018).⁴⁷ This document is non-binding, and while Afghanistan as a sovereign state has not yet signed the document (Majidi, 2020),⁴⁸ it remains committed to cooperating with the international community on migration, and reforming its migration governance accordingly. Migration trends indicate that both migrations and returns have

⁴⁶ "Afghanistan to Send First Batch of 2,500 Workers to UAE," *The Migrant Project*, 2019

⁴⁷ "The Global Compact on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration", Resolution 73/195, *United Nations General Assembly (UNGA)*, 2018: https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/73/195

⁴⁸ Majidi, N. "The Potential of Migration for Development in Afghanistan," *Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD): Development Matters*, 2020

presented Afghanistan’s migration governance with new challenges, particularly in terms of scope and complexity because of several reasons, including - but not limited to - the absence of legal migration channels, migration polices, and institutional structures that can adequately accommodate the new trends (Seese & Kandiwal, 2017).⁴⁹

Annex 3: Interview Codes

A. Migrant interviews

Code	Profile	Date	Location
PM-M-01	27 years old	22.11.2020	Dashte Barchi, Kabul
R-F-02	23 years old	18.11.2010	Arzanqemat, Kabul
R-M-03	34 years old	18.11.2020	Arzanqemat, Kabul
R-F-04	35 years old	18.11.2020	Arzanqemat, Kabul
R-M-05	20 years old	22.11.2020	Arzanqemat, Kabul
PM-M-06	18 years old	17.11.2020	Dashte Barchi, Kabul
PM-F-07	24 years old	16.11.2020	Dashte Barchi, Kabul
PM-F-08	27 years old	17.11.2020	Dashte Barchi, Kabul
R-M-09	26 years old	16.11.2020	Mazar Sharif, Balkh
R-F-10	22 years old	16.11.2020	Mazar Sharif, Balkh
R-M-11	24 years old	17.11.2020	Mazar Sharif, Balkh
PM-F-12	24 years old	17.11.2020	Mazar Sharif, Balkh
PM-M-13	24 years old	16.11.2020	Mazar Sharif, Balkh
PM-M-14	24 years old	16.11.2020	Mazar Sharif, Balkh
PM-F-15	27 years old	16.11.2020	Mazar Sharif, Balkh
R-F-16	27 years old	16.11.2020	Mazar Sharif, Balkh
PM-M-17	25 years old	16.11.2020	Maimana, Faryab
PM-F-18	26 years old	16.11.2020	Maimana, Faryab

⁴⁹ Seese, H., Kandiwal, W. “Migration Governance,” *Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU)*, 2017

PM-F-19	34 years old	16.11.2020	Maimana, Faryab
PM-M-20	24 years old	16.11.2020	Maimana, Faryab
R-M-21	22 years old	16.11.2020	Andkhoy, Faryab
R-F-22	25 years old	16.11.2020	Andkhoy, Faryab
R-M-23	22 years old	16.11.2020	Andkhoy, Faryab
R-F-24	27 years old	16.11.2020	Andkhoy, Faryab
PM-F-25	26 years old	17.11.2020	Center, Herat
PM-F-26	24 years old	16.11.2020	Center, Herat
R-F-27	26 years old	16.11.2020	Injil, Herat
PM-M-28	24 years old	16.11.2020	Herat, Herat
PM-M-29	30 years old	16.11.2020	Herat, Herat
R-F-30	20 years old	16.11.2020	Injil, Herat
R-M-31	20 years old	16.11.2020	Injil, Herat
R-M-32	23 years old	16.11.2020	Injil, Herat
PM-F-33	27 years old	22.11.2020	Khvajaduko, Jawzjan
PM-M-34	28 years old	22.11.2020	Sheberghan, Jawzjan
PM-F-35	29 years old	03.12.2020	Khvajaduko, Jawzjan
PM-M-36	35 years old	22.11.2020	Khvajaduko, Jawzjan
R-F-37	21 years old	17.11.2020	Sheberghan, Jawzjan
R-F-38	25 years old	17.11.2020	Sheberghan, Jawzjan
R-M-39	22 years old	16.11.2020	Sheberghan, Jawzjan
R-M-40	35 years old	16.11.2020	Khvajaduko, Jawzjan
R-M-41	28 years old	22.11.2020	Maton, Khost
R-M-42	30 years old	18.11.2020	Gardez, Khost
R-F-43	35 years old	18.11.2020	Gardez, Khost
R-F-44	23 years old	24.11.2020	Maton, Khost
PM-M-45	24 years old	18.11.2020	Gardez, Khost

PM-F-46	24 years old	18.11.2020	Gardez, Khost
PM-M-47	20 years old	24.11.2020	Maton, Khost
PM-F-48	26 years old	25.11.2020	Maton, Khost
R-M-49	35 years old	22.11.2020	Behsod, Jalalabad
R-F-50	28 years old	22.11.2020	Nangarhar, Jalalabad
R-F-51	18 years old	22.11.2020	Behsod, Jalalabad
PM-F-52	28 years old	22.11.2020	Behsod, Jalalabad
PM-F-53	20 years old	24.11.2020	Nangarhar, Jalalabad
R-M-54	24 years old	23.11.2020	Nangarhar, Jalalabad
PM-M-55	24 years old	16.11.2020	Behsod, Jalalabad
PM-M-56	33 years old	16.11.2020	Jalalabad, Nangarhar
R-F-57	28 years old	16.11.2020	Baharak, Takhar
R-M-58	23 years old	16.11.2020	Taliqan, Takhar
R-F-59	22 years old	16.11.2020	Baharak, Takhar
R-M-60	23 years old	16.11.2020	Baharak, Takhar
PM-M-61	26 years old	16.11.2020	Taloqan, Takhar
PM-F-62	25 years old	16.11.2020	Taloqan, Takhar
PM-M-63	25 years old	16.11.2020	Baharak, Takhar
PM-F-64	18 years old	16.11.2020	Taloqan, Takhar
PM-F-65	21 years old	16.11.2020	Dashte Barchi, Kabul
PM-M-66	25 years old	16.11.2020	Dashte Barchi, Kabul
R-F-67	35 years old	17.11.2020	Arzanqemat, Kabul
R-M-68	21 years old	22.12.2020	Arzanqemat, Kabul

B. Key Informant Interviews

Code	Organisation	Date	Location
B-M-01	Border police	15/08/2020	Balkh
B-M-02	Directorate of Labour and Social Affairs	24/06/2020	Balkh
B-M-03	National TV	22/06/2020	Balkh
B-M-04	International Organization for Migration (IOM)	04/06/2020	Balkh
B-M-05	Directorate of Refugees and Repatriation (DoRR)	24/06/2020	Balkh
H-M-06	Shin Hawa News Agency	17/06/2020	Herat
H-M-07	Border police	15/08/20	Herat
H-M-08	Directorate of Labour and Social Affairs Martyrs and Disabled	15/06/2020	Herat
H-M-09	Directorate of Refugees and Repatriation (DoRR)	03/06/20	Herat
J-M-10	Border police	18/06/2020	Jawzjan
J-M-11	Directorate of Labour and Social Affairs Martyrs and Disabled	18/06/2020	Jawzjan
J-M-12	Directorate of Refugees and Repatriation (DoRR)	20/06/2020	Jawzjan
J-M-13	Media (Main Television Networks)	22/06/2020	Jawzjan
J-M-14	International Organization for Migration (IOM)	04/06/2020	Jawzjan
K-M-15	The Danish Refugee Council (DRC)	14/08/20	Kabul
K-M-16	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)	28/05/2020	Kabul
K-M-17	Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)	26/07/2020	Kabul
K-M-18	Delegation of the European Union in Afghanistan	20/05/2020	Kabul
K-M-19	German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ)	16/07/2020	Kabul
K-M-20	Migrant Resource Center (MRC)	18/05/2020	Kabul
K-M-21	Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs Martyrs and Disabled (DoLSAMD)	21/06/2020	Kabul
K-M-22	Ministry of Interior Affairs	05/07/2020	Kabul
K-F-23	World Bank	09/07/2020	Kabul
K-M-24	Moby/Tolo News	07/06/2020	Kabul
K-M-25	Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation (MoRR)	07/06/2020	Kabul
K-M-26	Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA)	09/06/2020	Kabul

K-M-27	Hasht-e-Subh Press	03/06/2020	Kabul
K-M-29	International Organization for Migration (IOM)	28/05/2020	Kabul
K-M-30	Civil Aviation Authority of Afghanistan	17/06/2020	Kabul
K-M-31	Executive Director (VPs Office)	02/07/ 2020	Kabul
K-M-32	United Nations High Commissioners for Refugee (UNHCR)	20/07/ 2020	Kabul
N-M-33	International Organization for Migration (IOM)	11/06/2020	Nangarhar
N-M-34	Media		Nangarhar
N-M-35	Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation (MoRR)		Nangarhar
N-M-36	Directorate of Labour and Social Affairs Martyrs and Disabled		Nangarhar
N-M-37	Border Police	17/08/2020	Nangarhar
T-M-38	Border Police	08/06/2020	Takhar
T-M-39	International Organization for Migration (IOM)	21/06/2020	Takhar
T-M-40	Directorate of Labour, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled	14/08/2020	Takhar
T-M-41	Directorate of Refugees and Repatriation	05/07/2020	Takhar
T-M-42	Media		Takhar
F-M-43	International Organization for Migration (IOM)	15/08/2020	Faryab
F-M-44	A news agency in Faryab	18/06/2020	Faryab
F-M-45	Border police	05/07/2020	Faryab
F-F-46	Directorate of labour and Social Affairs Martyrs and Disabled	05/07/2020	Faryab
F-M-44	Directorate of Refugees and Repatriation	04/06/2020	Faryab
Kh-M-45	Directorate of Refugees and Repatriation	30/10/2020	Khost
Kh-M-46	Media	18/11/2020	Khost
Kh-M-47	Directorate of Labour and Social Affairs	12/11/2020	Khost
Kh-M-48	Organization for Health Promotion and Management (OHPM)	07/12/2020	Khost
Kh-M-49	Directorate of Refugees and Repatriation (DoRR)	16/06/2020	Khost
Kh-M-50	Border police	15/08/2020	Khost
Kh-M-51	Directorate of labour and Social Affairs Martyrs and Disabled	23/06/2020	Khost

Annex 4: Glossary

Refugee: A refugee is any person who "...owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his [or her] nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail him [or her]self of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his [or her] former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it."⁵⁰

Wakil-i-Guzar: A person chosen to represent a community. 'Guzar' means a neighborhood or area. Hence, a Wakil-e Guzar represents the interests of a community and articulates its problems to government officials.⁵¹

Migrant: Any person who is moving, or has moved across an international border, or within a state away from his/her habitual place of residence, regardless of (1) the person's legal status; (2) whether the movement is voluntary or involuntary; (3) what the causes for the movement are; or (4) what the length of the stay is.⁵²

Asylum seekers: An individual who is seeking international protection. In countries with individualized procedures, an asylum-seeker is someone whose claim has not yet been finally decided on by the country in which the claim is submitted. Not every asylum-seeker will ultimately be recognized as a refugee, but every refugee was initially an asylum-seeker.⁵³

Undocumented migrant: A non-national who enters or stays in a country without the appropriate documentation. This includes, among others: a person (a) who has no legal documentation to enter a country but manages to enter clandestinely, (b) who enters or stays using fraudulent documentation, (c) who, after entering using legal documentation, has stayed beyond the time authorized or otherwise violated the terms of entry and remained without authorization.⁵⁴

Trafficking in human beings: The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ Glossary: United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR).

⁵¹ [wakil_e_gozar_en.pdf \(iwaweb.org\)](#)

⁵² <https://www.iom.int/who-is-a-migrant>

⁵³ <https://reporting.unhcr.org/glossary/a#top>

⁵⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/e-library/glossary/undocumented-person_en

⁵⁵ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/protocoltraffickinginpersons.aspx>

Migrant smuggling: Article three of the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, Supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime defines the term migrant smuggling as follow: “the procurement, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit, of the irregular entry of a person into a State Party of which the person is not a national or a permanent resident. ”⁵⁶

Potential Migrants: For the purpose of this study, outgoing migrants are referred to those Afghans who intend to leave Afghanistan within the next 2 years. It includes regular and irregular potential migrants and all types of migration, for example migration for labour, family reunification and education but also persons seeking international protection.

Returned migrants: For the purpose of this study, returned migrants are referred to Afghans for this purpose of this study who returned to Afghanistan within the last three years after being abroad for at least six months. A returned migrant can become a potential migrant if the person considers to re-migrate again.

Migrant worker: A person who is to be engaged, is engaged or has been engaged in a remunerated activity in a State of which he or she is not a national.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ <https://www.refworld.org/docid/479dee062.html>

⁵⁷ <https://www.iom.int/key-migration-terms>