

POPULATION MOVEMENT BULLETIN



The *Population Movement Bulletin*, published by the UN in Afghanistan, highlights issues of population movement as it relates to Afghanistan and is designed to consolidate the large amount of media coverage and many statistics into one place. The *Bulletin* includes trends in internal displacement, population movement to and from neighbouring countries and Europe, and policy developments and programme responses, drawing upon public sources as well as information gathered by the agencies, funds and programmes of the UN system, particularly those working on issues related to population movement – nationally and internationally – and the challenges faced by these groups of people.

Commentary



MARK BOWDEN, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General (Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator)

Population movement has dominated the news in recent months, whether here in Afghanistan or internationally. As well as the wider trends, there have been many tragic stories of small groups or families suffering on their journeys towards what they hope will be a safer and a better life, but there are some key points which are often overlooked:-

- The massive population movement in recent months is complex in nature, with ambiguity about places of origin, making

consideration of returns complicated without careful analysis;

- Afghan population movement is not exclusively, nor even predominantly, a European issue;
- In addition to outward migration, internal displacement is a huge issue in Afghanistan;
- Concerns in European capitals are such that some are questioning sustaining their official development assistance to the countries perceived as sources of population movement.

On the international stage, the most notable recent development has been the proposed arrangement between the EU and Government of Turkey, which would see asylum seekers and migrants moving into the EU returned to Turkey, with resettlement solutions in the EU only for Syrians. If this means that other nationality populations such as Afghans would be denied access to asylum procedures, it would appear to be a violation of States' obligations under the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol relating to Refugee Status.

The debate in Europe overlooks the fact that Iran and Pakistan host far greater numbers of Afghan people – 950,000 in Iran and 1.4 million in Pakistan. In addition to those numbers, both countries host significant numbers of unregistered Afghans. Infor-

mation elsewhere in this Bulletin outlines recent patterns of voluntary return to Afghanistan, but many Afghans have moved to Europe from either Pakistan or Iran, and indeed nearly 20% of those Afghans arriving in the Greek islands in January 2016 have never lived in Afghanistan.

In addition to those who have left Afghanistan, there are many – estimated to be about 769,665 – who have been displaced from their homes but remain in the country. This internal displacement is due to various reasons, ranging from conflict in their home districts, to natural disasters or economic dislocation, or a combination of these factors.

At a time when Afghanistan faces many competing challenges, it continues to rely on international support – to maintain its security, public administration and basic services for its population. Major conferences considering security (Warsaw, July) and development assistance (Brussels, October) will take place later in 2016 and are critical to the country. There are concerns that this continued support might be questioned, as countries receiving large numbers may find it necessary to use development assistance to support those people, rather than supporting efforts to strengthen the economy in Afghanistan and – hopefully – helping to address one of the causal factors.

Latest News Headlines

Secret EU plan to deport 80,000 Afghans

March 21 - Revealed: Confidential EU discussion document proposes using aid summit as 'leverage' for removal of migrants to Afghanistan, as Brussels relies on cheque-book diplomacy to curtail the crisis.

More than 80,000 Afghans will need to be deported from Europe "in the near future" under a secret EU plan, amid warnings of a new influx as parts of the country fall back under Taliban control.

More at The Telegraph bit.ly/1Uh68SL

Greece struggles to enforce Migrant Accord on first day

March 20 - Greece and the European Union scrambled on Sunday to put in place the people and the facilities needed to carry out a new deal intended to address the migrant crisis that is roiling Europe, as hundreds of migrants in rubber dinghies continued to land on the Greek islands from Turkey.

The accord, struck between the union and Turkey on Friday, set a 12:01 a.m. Sunday deadline for Turkey to stem the flow of people making clandestine journeys across the Aegean Sea to Greece in an attempt to enter Europe, and required Greece to begin sending

back migrants who are not eligible for asylum. More at the New York Times.

nyti.ms/22raifp

Migration a major issue for NUG

March 19 - The unending conflict in Afghanistan drove nearly 250,000 Afghans from the country in the last 12 months, creating a massive migrant problem for the government.

According to the Afghan Minister of Refugees and Repatriations, Sayed Hussain Alemi Balkhi, nearly 3,000 migrants drowned off international waters during this period. Afghan migrants constitute 12 percent of the total number of refugees to have fled to Europe in the past few months.

More at TOLONews bit.ly/1U3thYm

Too generous for its own Good? Sweden's welcome mat in tatters

March 17 - When it comes to wealth, health and hospitality, Sweden has few rivals. But the same qualities that make the country a beacon of hope for the world's huddled masses are straining it at the seams, as refugee budgets climb.

To see how close to the limit a record inflow of refugees is pushing Swedish generos-

ity, visit Halmstad, a 14th century gateway to the North Sea known for its pristine beaches and golf courses.

More at Bloomberg bloom.bg/1pN4mvH

Europe has migrant responsibility

March 16 - Europe cannot shrug off its responsibility for migrants and pass the buck to Turkey, said the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, François Crépeau.

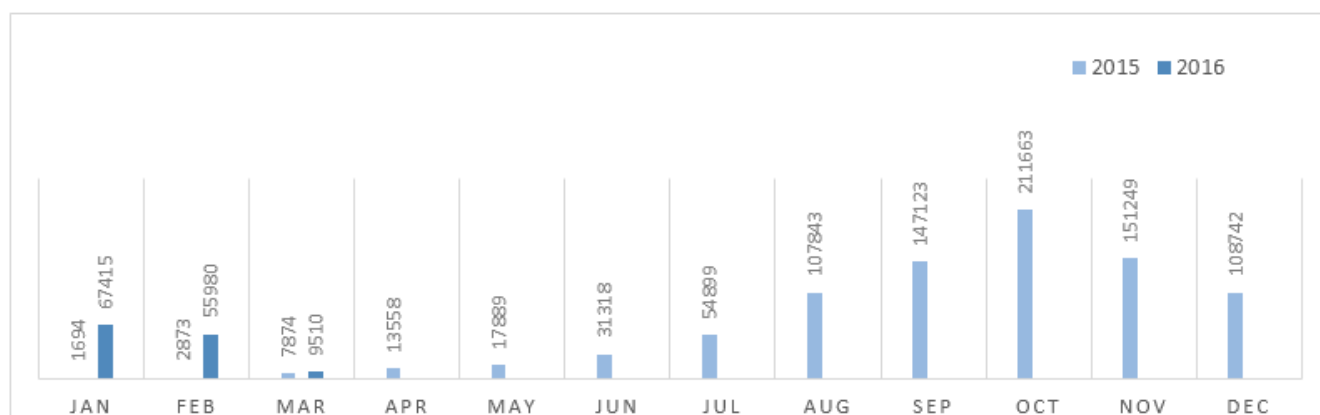
He was speaking on the eve of the European Union Migration Summit on 17-18 March, where leaders will discuss the new agreement with Turkey to take back all migrants crossing irregularly to Greece, including refugees.

"European member states once responsible for drafting key legislation on human rights and humanitarian protection are about to abandon their obligations. In the midst of the greatest migration crisis in Europe since world war two, they are passing their responsibility off to a third-country for political expediency," said the UN expert. More at UN Human Rights bit.ly/1XuEGi6

Relief Web provides the latest humanitarian and development information on Afghanistan. <http://reliefweb.int/country/afg>

Population Movements

Numbers of migrants and refugees arriving in Greece from Turkey each month



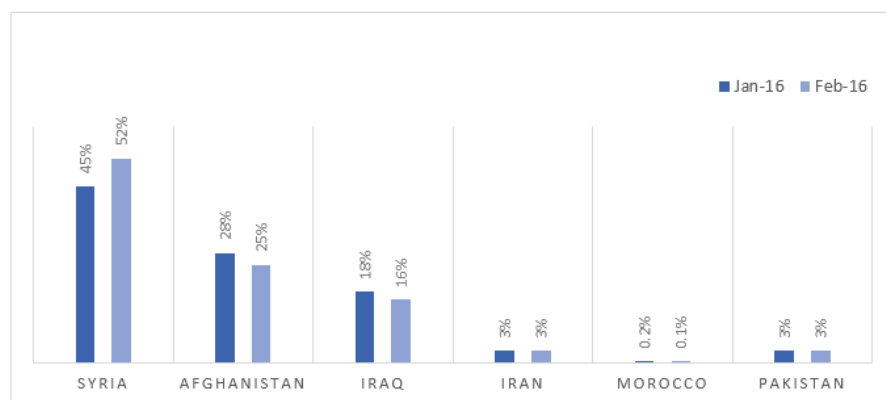
Source: UNHCR (Greece data snapshot, 7 March, 2016)

More than 1 million arrive in Greece

From January up to the first week of March 2016, some 132,905 people had travelled to Greece from Turkey, taking the total of land and sea arrivals into Greece since January 1st 2015 to more than one million individuals. Although the highest rate of arrivals was recorded between August and December 2015,

with an average of 145,000 individuals per month and a peak of over 211,000 individuals in October 2015, arrivals during the months of January and February 2016 well exceed the rates of the same period in 2015. Greece is currently the main country of arrival in Europe, accounting for 93% of the arrivals across the Mediterranean. Greece remains the main country of arrivals for Afghans.

Top nationalities of arrival in Greece (January-February, 2016)

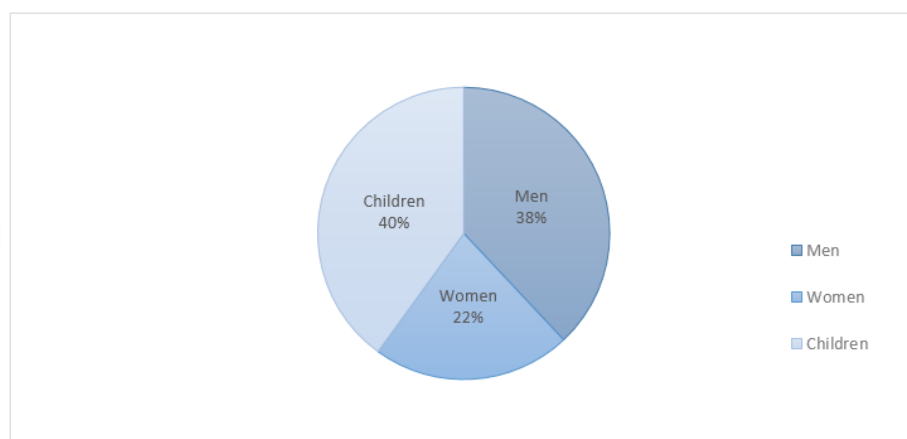


Source: UNHCR (Greece data snapshot, 7 March, 2016)

Afghans second largest group arriving in Greece

During the first two months of 2016, Afghans represented the second largest population group arriving to Greece after Syrians. Percentages varied from 28% (January) to 25% (February). The rate has increased from the cumulative trends of the year 2015, when some 21% of arrivals through the Mediterranean sea was represented by Afghans.

Age and gender of arrivals in Greece



Source: UNHCR (Greece data snapshot, 7 March, 2016)

Most sea arrivals to Greece are women and children

The figures for 2016 indicate that women and children now make up more than 60 per cent of sea arrivals to Greece, compared to much lower rates in 2015 (when it was less than 30 per cent).

bit.ly/1W059nR

Population Movements

Low level of Afghan refugee returns

In the first two months of 2016, 644 Afghan refugees returned to Afghanistan under the UNHCR-assisted voluntary repatriation program, including 495 from Pakistan (77 per cent), 147 (22 per cent) from Iran and 2 from the Russian Federation.

These figures are comparatively low compared to the 7,045 returnees during the same period in 2015, as well as lower than the same period in 2014 (-35 per cent), when the lowest annual rate of return was recorded.

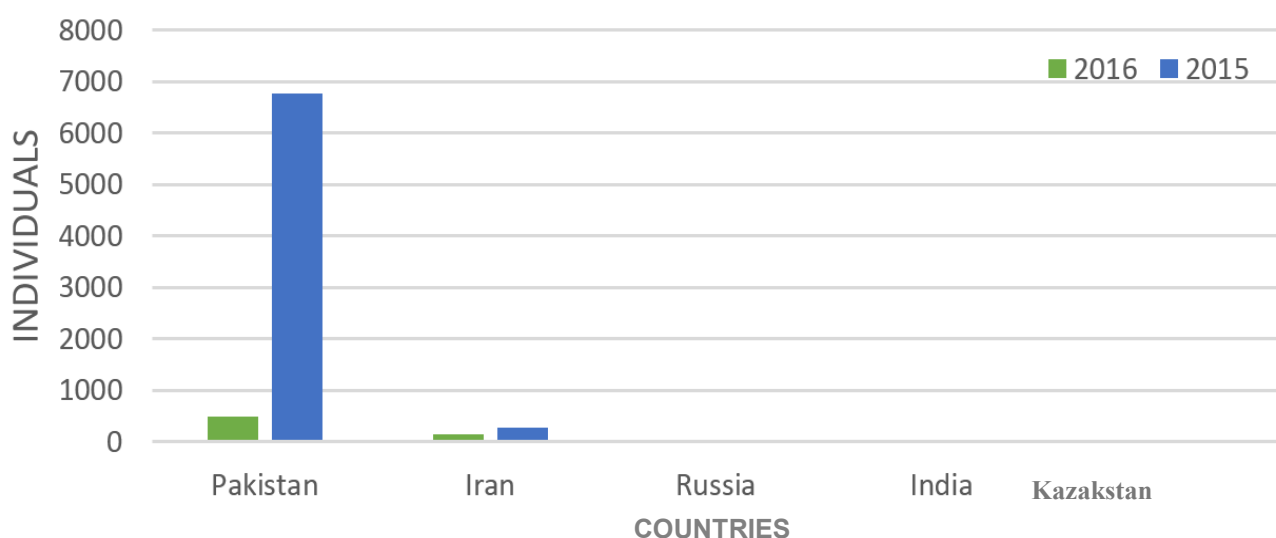
The current low return rate can be related to the agreement by the Government of Pakistan to extend the validity of the PoR Cards up to the end of June 2016. There are also seasonal factors, which normally foresee an increase from the month of March, and the distinct situation in Pakistan in the first months of 2015, when the environment dramatically deteriorated with episodes of harassment and intimidation against Afghan citizens – including refugees – following the terrorist attack to a Peshawar School in December 2014.

Since 02 March 2002 until the end of February 2016, more than 4.8 million Afghan voluntary repatriated to Afghanistan with UNHCR assistance. bit.ly/1RwLya0

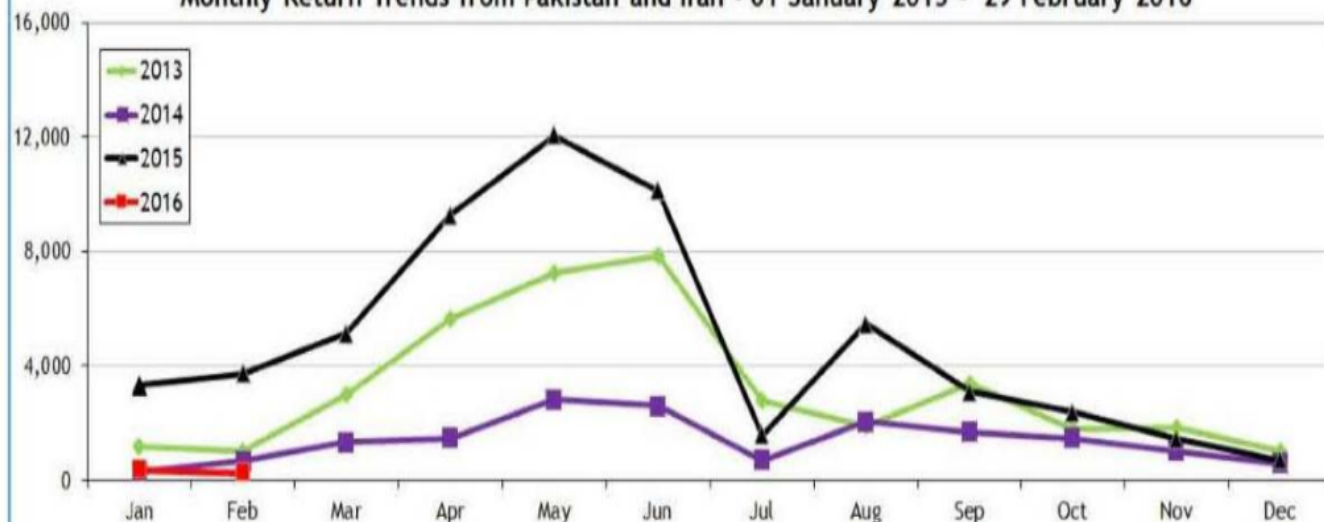
Assisted Returns by region of destination in Afghanistan 2016 & 2015

Region	No. of individuals returned -comparison by year			
	Jan-Feb 2016		Jan-Feb 2015	
	No.	%	No.	%
East	199	30.9	2924	41.5
Central	153	23.8	1981	28.1
North	108	16.8	670	9.5
West	69	10.7	144	2
North East	61	9.5	704	10
South	51	7.9	209	3
Central Highlands	2	0.3	20	0.3
Southeast	1	0.2	393	5.6
Total	644	100.1	7045	100

Assisted return by Country of Asylum-Comparison 01Jan-29 Feb

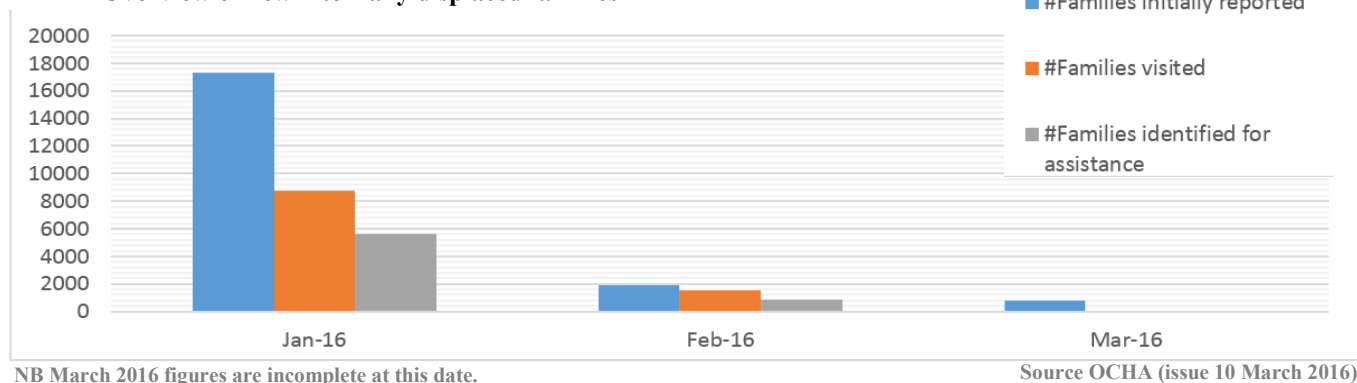


Monthly Return Trends from Pakistan and Iran - 01 January 2013 - 29 February 2016



Population Movements

Overview of new internally displaced families



Afghans displaced due to conflict and insecurity

According to UNHCR reporting in 2015, the number of Afghans who fled their homes due to conflict and insecurity surpassed one third of a million.

With the conflict dynamics not showing any signs of diminishing in 2016 and a risk of intensification, we can reasonably expect a similar number of people to flee their homes and homesteads in 2016. On average this equates to nearly 1,000 people a day fleeing their homes in Afghanistan.

A recent UNAMA report shows more than 11,000 civilian casualties in 2015, the highest number since reporting began.

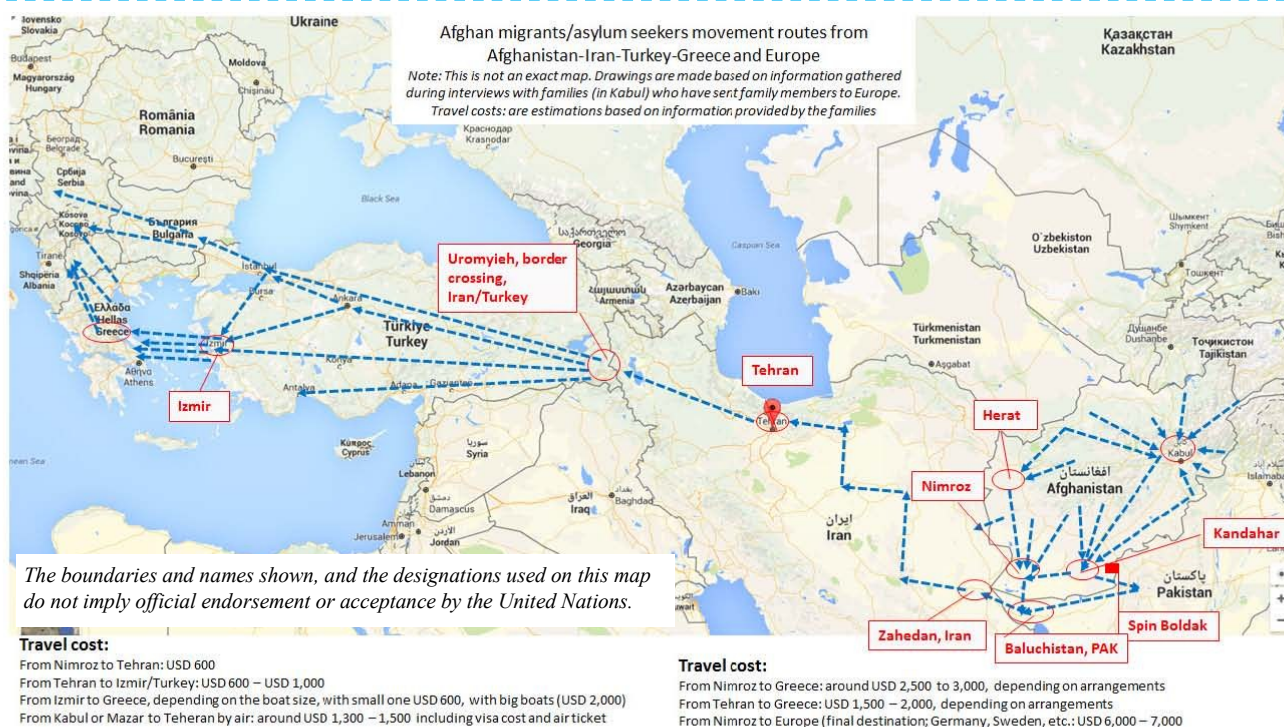
In 2016 we have seen intense fighting across the country, as the Afghan armed forces battle with the Taliban and other insurgents. This includes in Dahana-e-Ghori in Baghlan province (North), in Shindand in western Herat province; in eastern Kot and Achin in Nangarhar province; and the intense fighting in early March in southern Ghershk, the district centre of Nahr-e-Saraj in Helmand province.

Whilst individuals and families choose to flee their homes for multiple reasons, interviews with internal migrants show that fleeing violence surrounding their homes is sometimes a decisive factor.

When natural disaster strikes, such as spring floods, earthquakes and droughts - all of which are common in Afghanistan - people seek haven with family until they can rebuild their homes and livelihoods.

In a study carried out last year involving interviews with internally displaced people (1) showed that only 15.8 per cent claimed their move was due to a specific incident. The vast majority stated that moving was the result of a combination of factors. Over half of those who attributed their move to a specific incident stated that it was due to an attack by local armed groups or anti government elements. In addition, location of settlement was based on security considerations first and foremost.

(1) "Agency and choice among the displaced," by Samuel Hall and DACAAR.



Afghan migrant and refugee movement routes

A broad-based crisis of confidence has propelled tens of thousands of Afghans to seek social and economic security in Europe and, in many cases, asylum seekers in urgent need of international protection. However, due to the undocumented nature of the population movements, often facilitated by well-established human smuggling networks, exact trends are difficult

to discern and quantify. Moreover, the dynamic nature of the current outflows, fed by changing local perceptions regarding the risks, obstacles and opportunities associated with voluntary migration or forced displacement, further complicates efforts to track and understand the fast-changing nature of an unprecedented mixed migration crisis.

Policy Development

EU-Turkey migrant and refugee plan faces opposition

The United Nations has raised concerns about a European Union-Turkey plan that aims to stem the tide of irregular mixed migration to Europe via Turkey.

According to the plan, Turkey will accept the rapid return of all migrants not in need of international protection who crossed from Turkey into Greece. They would also take back all irregular migrants apprehended on Turkish waters.

In return for its backing, Turkey would receive additional financial support, fast-tracked EU membership talks, and quicker visa-free travel for Turks.

The plan has met with opposition, however, from UNHCR and other UN bodies who have raised serious concerns over its contravention of established international law.

"I am deeply concerned about any arrangement that would involve the blanket return of anyone from one country to another without spelling out the refugee protection safeguards under international law," said Filippo Grandi, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

Mr. Grandi stressed that "an asylum-



Refugees wait for a bus in Hungary after crossing the border from Serbia. Photo: UNHCR

seeker should only be returned to a third state, if the responsibility for assessing the particular asylum application in substance is assumed by the third country; the asylum-seeker will be protected from refoulement; and if the individual will be able to seek and, if recognized, enjoy asylum in accordance with ac-

cepted international standards, and have full and effective access to education, work, health care and, as necessary, social assistance."

Mr. Grandi expressed concern that the agreement would disproportionately affect Afghans, who currently account for 25 per cent of new arrivals in Europe. bit.ly/21ZvVzK

European Commission €700 million proposal aimed at faster crisis response

As the refugee crisis continues to put pressure on many European Member States, the European Commission has proposed an Emergency Assistance instrument to be used within the European Union to provide a faster, more targeted response to major crises, including helping Member States cope with large numbers of refugees.

The €700 million initiative for the period 2016-2018 comes as the refugee crisis reaches an unprecedented scale with the need to provide immediate emergency support in several Member States hosting large amounts of refugees on their territories.

"With this proposal, we will be able to deliver emergency assistance for crises much faster than before, inside the European Union," said Christos Stylianides, European Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management.

"Right now, there's no doubt that this will be particularly needed to support refugees. No time can be lost in deploying all means possible to prevent humanitarian suffering within our own borders," said Mr. Stylianides.

Member States whose own response capacities are overwhelmed by urgent and excep-



Highlights of the European Commission proposal.

tional circumstances, such as the sudden influx of refugees or other major disruptions could benefit from this new instrument.

Emergency assistance would be provided in close coordination with Member States and organisations such as UN agencies, non-governmental organisations and international

organisations, and include the provision of basic necessities such as food, shelter and medicine to the large numbers of children, women and men currently arriving in EU countries. bit.ly/21ZvVzK

Refugee crisis: Afghanistan ruled safe enough to deport asylum-seekers from UK

In late February, the UK appeal courts upheld a Government appeal against a blanket ban on deportations to Afghanistan. A lower court had previously imposed that ban, on the grounds of insecurity in Afghanistan, a view also expressed by Minister of Refugees and Repatriations, Sayed Hussain Alemi Balkhi. This means that the British government will be able to resume deportations of those whose asylum applications have been unsuccessful. ind.pn/1TdGMVd

In future issues ...

- We plan to consider the costs of migration – how much some of those who are travelling to Europe have had to pay, and how they have been able to fund it;
- Patterns in population movement – smuggling and trafficking; and
- Weather and its implications, initially for internal displacement.