

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

This bulletin focusses in part on changing patterns of population movements as well as some of the motivations and factors underlying the often difficult decisions to uproot families and seek safety and better futures elsewhere. The fast-changing political climate in destination countries has a profound impact on the migration/flight decisions among Afghans. Understanding the flow of critical information regarding risks and opportunities, and well as credibility (or lack thereof) of various intermediaries or interlocutors, is essential to understanding past and future mobility trends, either within Afghanistan or to destinations further afield.

Research suggests that these are rarely individual decisions but involve the extended family and a pooling of their resources. The option to move is often part of a broader coping strategy, and a response to either economic or physical insecurity or both. Families make tactical choices about who to send and what routes to take in response to the changing external environment. Understanding the basis on which families make these decisions is key to developing effective responses that address the underlying causes of flight and create the conditions which may facilitate the eventual return of people in conditions of safety and dignity. There is evidence that patterns of migration from Afghanistan are fluid and adapt to challenges and obstacles in the larger political environment. For instance, UNHCR recently found evidence suggesting that families may increasingly decide to depart, based on a perception that single young men are less likely to be granted asylum in destination countries. Likewise, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) reports suggest that different routes are now being favoured, with more people going through Libya to get to Europe. It is not yet clear what the implications of the EU-Turkey agreement will be on Afghan returnees or those that are already transiting to Europe. It is likely that these measures, along with the problems that Afghans



A mother feeds her two youngest children outside their tent in a makeshift camp near Idomeni, on the border of Greece and Macedonia. Photo: UNHCR

have encountered will continue to influence migration routes and encourage asylum seekers and migrants to use the potentially more dangerous Libyan route.

Recent studies on IDPs and returnees focus on issues of motivation for migration. A 2015 study by DACAAR & Samuel Hall (<http://bit.ly/1Q8EsaT>) looks at the motivation for migration, albeit it for internally displaced people and returning refugees. The study highlights that migration dynamics are changing and that migration decisions are based on multiple factors. Incentives for Afghan refugees to return to Afghanistan are diminishing and are largely driven by a combination of push factors and emotional concerns rather than material considerations.

Within Afghanistan, urban areas were seen to offer greater potential employment opportunities, security and public services. Rural areas are attractive to those with family ties and friends, or for the availability of cheaper accommodation, dependent on security. While these findings remain valid, it should also be stressed that the dramatic security upheaval and economic contraction within the country resulted in a 95 per cent increase in forced displacement within Afghanistan and unprecedented

ed population outflows to Europe which are perhaps not fully reflected in the study. A more recent UNHCR-commissioned study found that the profile of asylum seekers who manage to reach Europe is becoming more diversified across the demographic and economic spectrum, reflecting the fact that Afghans no longer see their neighboring countries as safe havens from violence.

It is important to ensure that migrants and asylum seekers have access to the resources and information they need to make informed decisions regarding migration or flight. In the wake of Afghan migration to Europe, IOM found migrants usually don't have sufficient clear information about what to expect. Information is provided largely by smugglers. UNHCR's monitoring of social media websites also highlights the extent to which misinformation regarding the risks of the journey and conditions upon arrival have permeated the web. Migrants' often rosy picture vanishes as soon as they encounter the reality of Europe. As such, the way in which information is framed and disseminated to migrant groups is important. There is a need for a positive campaign which offers alternatives to irregular migration and viable options to find adequate protection and the possibility of better futures within Afghanistan. Understanding the culture of oral tradition and the esteem that community elders and institutions are held in, oral dissemination of information in mosques and schools by shuras, village elders and those who have attempted to reach Europe, has been identified as an effective information channel.

The last months have seen no significant increase in the number of voluntary or forced returns to Afghanistan. Discussions within the Government of Afghanistan as well as between the Government and individual hosting countries continues. The issues focus on the manner of return, agreement on areas that are considered safe for return, and the legal basis for return.

Latest News Headlines

Disorder leads to Afghan woman, child's death at border

April 13 - An Afghan woman and a young girl died while 12 others fainted on Tuesday because of mayhem at Torkham border crossing after the authorities refused to let in thousands of Afghans and Pakistanis without valid travel documents.

More at Dawn <http://bit.ly/1SMbsHJ>

Out of work, Afghan policeman finds a new job: Human smuggler

April 9 - As a police officer in western Afghanistan, Hakem enjoyed a steady if meager paycheck. He had five children to support, and when his three-year police contract expired, he went looking for a more lucrative job.

He found the closest thing to a growth industry in Afghanistan: human smuggling.

More at LA Times lat.ms/1SoZRxL

What became of 25 young Afghan deportees?

April 6 - Young Afghans make up the second largest group of unaccompanied children who apply for asylum in the UK – 656 out of 3,043 asylum

applications from unaccompanied children made in 2015 were Afghan.

The majority are given only temporary leave to remain and are placed with foster families or in the care of local authorities.

More at IRIN bit.ly/1S3mivv

Desperate Afghans flee amid Taliban surge, economic woes, rampant corruption

April 6 - For the hundreds of Afghans who lined up before sunrise here at Kabul's only passport office one recent morning, their slow steps were the first of a long, desperate journey out of their war-stricken nation.

More at Washington Times bit.ly/22ls4eG

Major UK refugee charity challenges the Government's policy

April 5 - As many as 1,000 Afghan asylum seekers, many of whom entered the UK as unaccompanied children, are in danger of being deported from the UK back to Afghanistan, according to law firm Duncan Lewis Solicitors. Cases will now be considered, after Home Secretary Theresa May

won the right to resume deportations to Afghanistan in early March. The decision, made by the Court of Appeal, overturned an injunction imposed in May 2015, which prohibited all removals to Afghanistan due to fears over security.

More at Huff Post huff.to/1VJ4cBg

Thousands of Afghan migrants have hit a dead end in Turkey

April 5 - Local smuggling routes have never been busier. Last year Turkish police detained nearly 36,000 illegal Afghan migrants. Many more made their way into the country undetected, only to sneak out again aboard rubber boats headed for the Greek islands. Of the 1m migrants and refugees who reached Greece since the start of 2015, more than 240,000 are Afghans, according to the International Organisation for Migration (IOM).

More at The Economist econ.st/1TJulL0

Relief Web provides the latest humanitarian and development information on Afghanistan.

<http://reliefweb.int/country/afg>

Population Movements

UNHCR Issues 2015 Returnee Monitoring Report: Key Findings

A total of 58,460 Afghan refugees formally repatriated in 2015, the majority from Pakistan. While the return trend represented a substantial increase from that of 2014, when only 17,000 Afghans chose to voluntarily repatriate, UNHCR’s monitoring documented substantial increases in push factors in Pakistan—including harassment, evictions, arbitrary arrests, and extortion—as the key drivers of return.

Movement patterns of returnees are dynamic and a significant number of returnees opt to return to areas of Afghanistan other than places of origin. Forty-one per cent of those interviewed stated that those alternate destinations mainly due to insecurity and a lack of land, shelter, livelihoods and access to basic services in areas of origin. At the same time, it should be noted that a significant portion of the remaining Afghans are second and third generation refugees born in exile, who were raised in urban or semi urban areas of Pakistan and Iran. Many have no desire to return to rural areas, where linkages with ancestral communities are weak and rural livelihoods completely alien.

Though lack of livelihood opportunities is a major issue for all Afghans, the employment



Afghan refugee children. Photo: UNHCR

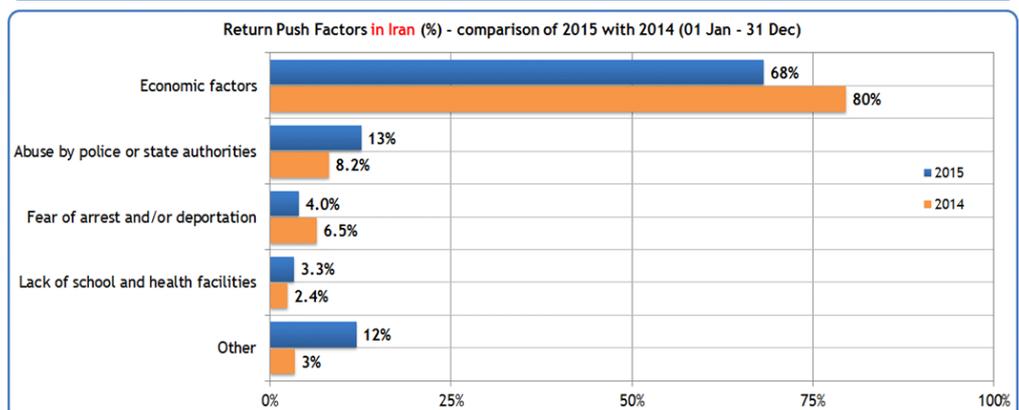
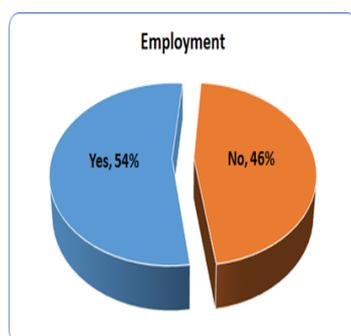
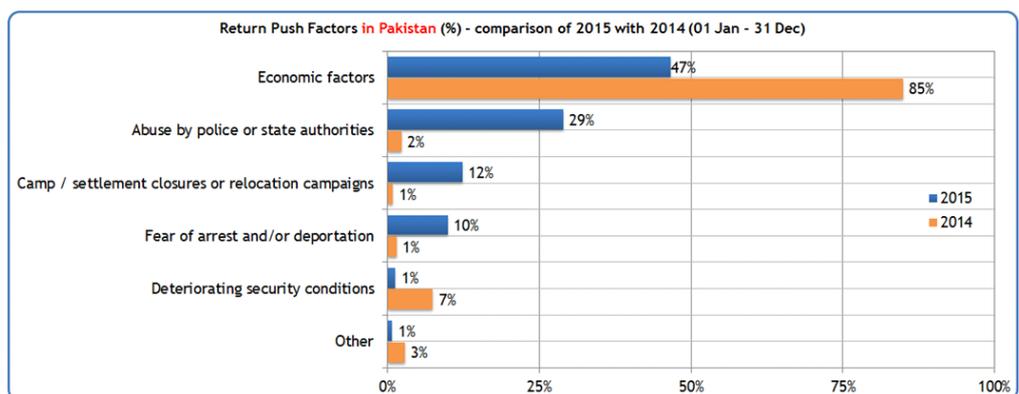
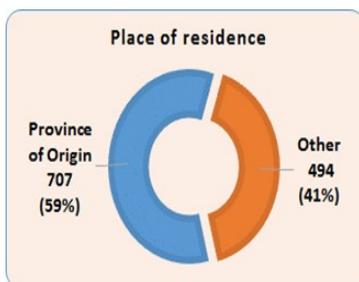
employees. However, respondents expressed concern about job security and sustainability of livelihood opportunities available in the country.

In general, returnees appear to have similar sources of income as in countries of asylum. Despite a slightly better employment rate than the national average, the level of income is very low. 63% of the respondents stated that they earn more than 50 Afghanis per day while 37% said they earn less than 50 Afghanis (less than a dollar) in a day. Among families interviewed, child labor appears relatively low. Ten percent of the interviewed families confirmed that their children are working as daily laborers, shop assistants, garbage collectors, street vendors and farm hands. They work between 5-10 hours a day. The most worrisome statistic, however, is the fact that 69% of those interviewed reported a relatively worse economic situation compared to that in countries of asylum, while only 21% reported improved economic conditions. Ten per cent said they

have similar level of income.

The full report of returnee monitoring results, which is based on over 3,000 interviews upon arrival at UNHCR Encashment Centers, more than 1200 telephone interviews after three months, and interviews with some 230 families after a period of six to eight months. While the results are not scientifically representative, they do provide an evidence-based insight into the challenges facing returnees.

rate among interviewed returnees is relatively better, according to RM findings. 54% of the interviewed families stated that they are employed while 46% said they don’t have a job. The majority (nearly 50%) of employed returnees said they are daily wage laborers. Small numbers are also engaged with other employment opportunities such as transportation, agriculture/livestock, etc. A small number said they are government and NGO em-



Population Movements

Internal Displacement in Afghanistan

In the first three months of 2016, there has been a significant level of internal displacement in Afghanistan, on a par with the record number of displaced people recorded by UNHCR in 2105 - over 1/2 of a million people. Between 1 January 2016 and 31 March 2016, OCHA has recorded 81,445 individuals fled their homes due to conflict. 23 of 34 provinces had recorded some level of forced displacement. The provinces that have produced the highest number of displaced people are Baghlan (with over 25,000 displaced), followed by Uruzgan (with over 12,000 displaced), Helmand (with over 9,000 displaced), Kunduz (with over 6,000 displaced), and Kan-

dahar (with nearly 5,000 displaced). However, it should be noted that insecurity and access hinder assessments, preventing verification of the full extent of displacement and reducing the timely and complete provision of assistance and services.

According to the figures OCHA has received, these same provinces are the ones that have recorded the presence of the most number of displaced people, indicating that these displacements are largely internal within the province. This data should be taken as only broadly indicative, as there are a number of complexities and constraints to measuring internal displacement in a dynamic environ-

ment, that means keeping up-to-date with the actual movements and the returns of displaced population is not possible.

Internal displacement affects all individuals differently with needs, vulnerabilities and protection risks evolving over time due to exhaustion of coping mechanisms. Basic emergency assistance has been provided, following initial displacement.

However, inadequate shelter, food insecurity, insufficient access to sanitation and health facilities, as well as a lack of protection, often result in precarious living conditions that jeopardises the well-being and dignity of affected families.

UNHCR releases bulletin on population outflows to Europe

UNHCR recently compiled an update on population outflows from Afghanistan, the second in a series of periodic bulletins aiming to provide qualitative analysis of key factors and protection risks associated with the current mixed-migration movements to Europe and elsewhere. While interest in departure remains high across all segments of society, UNHCR highlighted a potential lull in population outflows as people reconsider destinations and subsequent optimal routes in light of news of border closures, detention, and increased difficulties in accessing asylum procedures, particularly in light of the recent agreement between the European Union and Turkey on deportations from Greece. Key trends include:

- New patterns of movement are emerging, suggesting that Afghans—particularly young men—are opting for more ad-hoc, pay-as-you-go transportation arrangements, often with the intention of working en route;
- Changes in the profile of Afghans on the move—including an increasing perception that single young men are more likely to be denied asylum than families, hence an increase reported among smugglers of a spike in interest among the latter;



Thousands of migrants and refugees arrive in Greece, many of whom are from Afghanistan. Photo: UNHCR

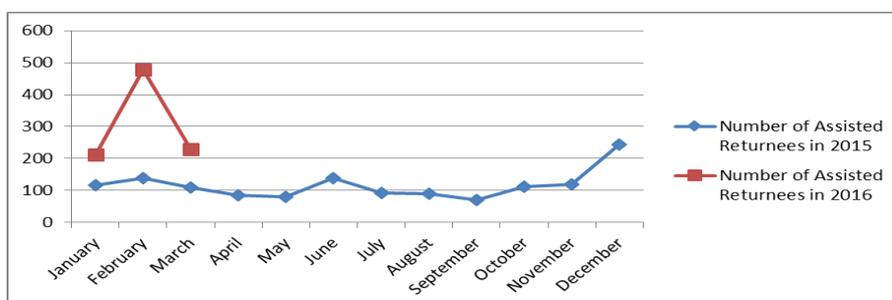
- Potential changes in directionality of movements—UNHCR asylum applications have doubled in recent months and social media sites have emerged advising Afghans on how best to file successful asylum claims. Also, smugglers reported an increase in interest, and subsequent market price, of the overland route through Greece as reports of border closures from Greece spread;
- Continued flight from conflict-affected parts of Afghanistan—UNHCR looked specifically at continuing risks of forced recruitment and minority persecution risks in light of the continuing control of the Taliban and local

militia groups of several districts. Young men continue to be at substantial risk of recruitment, and large numbers of Hazara have departed the country for Europe, or are preparing to leave. The update also found evidence of large-scale capital flight, as some 350 out of 400 registered businesses in Kunduz city have reportedly shuttered in recent months.

- UNHCR has continued to monitor social media sites, such as YouTube and Facebook, paying particular attention to posts that result in increased traffic. A recent YouTube video on the abuse of an Afghan child by smugglers on the Afghan-Iran border was viewed more than 38,000 times. At the same time, a YouTube post by a young Afghan male about his negative experiences en route to Europe resulted in more than 7000 views, with the majority of comments attributing his misfortune to the personal failings of the individual rather than the inherent dangers of flight and worsening political context. Likewise, UNHCR is also concerned at the emergence of social media sites that ‘coach’ new arrivals on how best to ‘spin’ stories to increase prospects for obtaining refugee status.

Please contact Alex Mundt (mundt@unhcr.org) for the detailed report.

Assisted Voluntary Return: 2015 and 2016



Month	2015 Assisted Returnees	2016 Assisted Returnees
January	117	212
February	138	479
March	110	229
April	85	
May	81	
June	139	
July	93	
August	91	
September	71	
October	112	
November	120	
December	243	
Total	1,400	920

In the first three months of 2016 IOM facilitated the voluntary return of 920 Afghans. In total, 45 per cent of these Afghans were returning from Germany. While it is difficult to draw a statistically significant trend comparison with only three months of data, this is almost three times the number of voluntary returnees IOM Afghanistan assisted in the first three months of 2015.

There is anecdotal evidence that Afghans are opted to return to Afghanistan rather than pursue their asylum claims to the fullest extent possible due to the conditions they find themselves in Europe not meeting their expectations.

For in-depth IOM data on migrant arrivals in Europe visit

<http://migration.iom.int/europe/>

Voluntary Repatriation

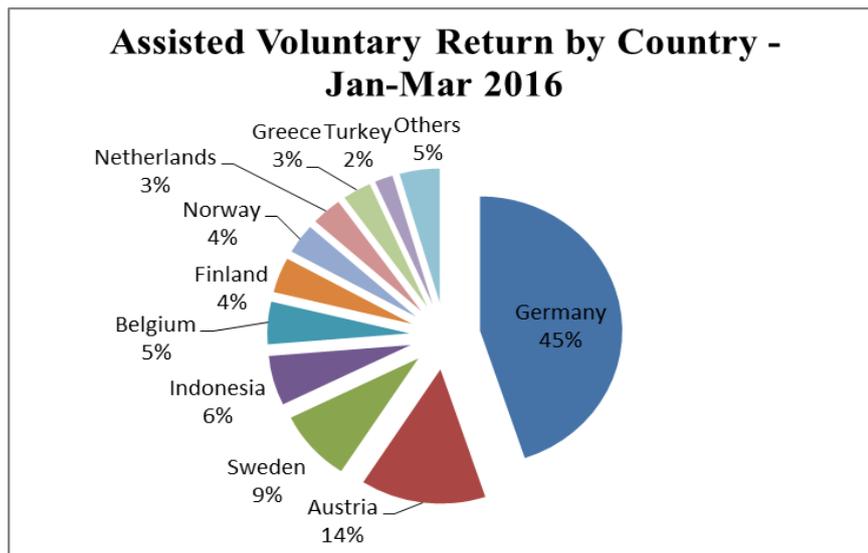
Voluntary Repatriation of Refugees from Neighbouring Countries

WEEKLY RETURN TRENDS - 2016

Week	Week Period	Pakistan		Iran		Other Countries		Total		Total Individuals
		Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	
01	01 Jan - 02 Jan	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
02	03 Jan - 09 Jan	36	39	4	2	0	0	40	41	81
03	10 Jan - 16 Jan	47	51	7	17	0	0	54	68	122
04	17 Jan - 23 Jan	21	20	9	5	0	0	30	25	55
05	24 Jan - 30 Jan	35	42	10	12	0	0	45	54	99
06	31 Jan - 06 Feb	11	23	16	22	0	0	27	45	72
07	07 Feb - 13 Feb	9	20	12	3	0	0	21	23	44
08	14 Feb - 20 Feb	32	37	6	0	1	1	39	38	77
09	21 Feb - 27 Feb	30	31	10	10	0	0	40	41	81
10	28 Feb - 05 Mar	47	54	4	6	2	5	53	65	118
11	06 Mar - 12 Mar	100	137	15	14	5	1	120	152	272
12	13 Mar - 19 Mar	74	81	69	101	0	0	143	182	325
13	20 Mar - 26 Mar	64	92	26	15	0	0	90	107	197
14	27 Mar - 02 Apr	141	138	31	30	0	0	172	168	340
Total		647	766	219	237	8	7	874	1,010	1,884



2016 Assisted Voluntary Returns by Country



Voluntary returnees from January to March 2016

Country	# of Returnees
Germany	413
Austria	131
Sweden	79
Indonesia	55
Belgium	47
Finland	39
Norway	33
Netherlands	32
Greece	30
Turkey	19
Switzerland	15
Bulgaria	10
Denmark	8
UK	4
France	4
Australia	1
Grand Total	920

Country	Number	Per cent
Germany	413	45%
Austria	131	14%
Sweden	79	9%
Indonesia	55	6%
Belgium	47	5%
Finland	39	4%
Norway	33	4%
Netherlands	32	3%
Greece	30	3%
Turkey	19	2%
Others	42	5%
Grand Total	920	100%

Countries of return appear to have changed significantly compared to the first three months of 2015. Of the 363 voluntary returns IOM facilitated from January to March 2015, most of the returns were from Greece (29%), Indonesia (14%), Turkey (14%) and Norway (10%), with only 3% of returnees coming from Germany; whereas this year the most returnees have come from Germany (45%), Austria (14%), Sweden (9%) and Indonesia (6%).

IOM predicts that returns from Germany will continue at a very high level for at least the rest of 2016.

Policy Development

UNHCR seeks stronger protection safeguards for deportations from Greece to Turkey

On 4 April, the first deportation of 202 migrants from Greece to Turkey took place, in accordance with the 18 March agreement between the European Union and Turkey. Although it appears that none of these deportees (including Afghans, reportedly) had formally sought asylum in Greece, UNHCR remains concerned at the lack of safeguards in place to ensure that those in need of international protection are not forcibly returned, in contravention of international refugee law and European law.

There are currently around 51,000 refugees and migrants in Greece. Conditions in detention facilities are worsening, with increasing reports of family separation. The Greek asylum services are overwhelmed and in the absence of additional EU support, the sense of confusion and anxiety among recent arrivals will likely increase.

On 23 March, UNHCR issued legal considerations on the return of asylum seekers and refugees from Greece to Turkey, outlining the safeguards that should be put in place.

(<http://www.refworld.org/docid/56f3ee3f4.html>)

Although focusing on Syrians, the analysis has important potential consequences for Afghan asylum seekers, who currently ac-

count for some 24 per cent of new arrivals in Greece.

The legal basis for planned returns under the EU-Turkey agreement is based on the concepts of ‘first country of asylum’ and ‘safe third country’ guided by clear admissibility procedures. According to UNHCR, the ‘first country’ concept is applied in cases where an asylum-seeker has already found, in a previous state, international protection in line with obligations under the 1951 Convention related to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol, particularly the principle of ‘non refoulement’ (prohibition of forced return of refugees).

The latter concept is applied in situations where a person could have applied for refugee status in a previous state but did not do so, or where protection was sought but their status could not be determined. The determination of the ‘safe third country’ needs an assessment that the country will offer access to free and effective asylum procedures. When either concept is applied, the individual asylum-seeker must have an opportunity to be heard and to rebut the presumption that s/he will be protected and afforded relevant standards of treatment in a previous state based on his or her circumstances.

UNHCR’s legal considerations find that the concept of ‘sufficient protection’ under the recast EU Asylum Procedures Directive need further clarification. ‘Sufficient’ protection requires that protection in the first country is available and effective in law and practice, consisting of a number of elements, including:

- No risk of persecution, as defined by the 1951 Convention, or serious harm in the previous state;
- No risk of refoulement from the previous state;
- Compliance, in law and practice, with established refugee and international human rights law;

UNHCR has stressed that it has no objection to the return of people without international protection needs and who have not asked for asylum, provided basic human rights standards are respected. At issue, however, is that many aspects of the current system in both Greece and Turkey that should afford asylum seekers access to due process are still either non-functional or non-existent.

The UN and partners are concerned about reports of 80,000 Afghans to be returned from Europe ‘in the near future’. The level and pace of returns need to take into account Afghanistan’s absorption capacity.

Programmatic Responses

Improving migrants access to information likely to result in better migration outcomes

Ensuring that migrants and potential migrants have access to the resources and information they need to make an informed, rational decision about if, when, and through which channels to migrate is vitally important to ensuring people migrate for the right reasons, and that migrants, as well as sending and receiving states benefit from migration.

In the context of Afghan migration to Europe, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) has found that migrants often decide to leave Afghanistan based on very little reliable information about the journey ahead of them or what is in store for them in their final destination. The information Afghan migrants do have available to them is often supplied by people smugglers or those involved in smuggling networks, who have an interest in encouraging Afghans to part with large sums of money to smugglers in return for “safe passage” to Europe. The most common, and often most influential, misconception held by migrants and potential migrants to Europe is their understanding of what they should expect, if and when they arrive. Migrants often hold an idealized view of what it will be like for them in Europe and how they will be treated by the authorities.

How The way this information is framed and disseminated is also vitally important. There is a growing body of evidence that highly negative information campaigns based

on fear-tactics about the dire consequences of irregular migration, such as the “There is no way” campaign, are generally less effective. In part, this can be put down to alternative, competing sources of information. In a country such as Afghanistan, potential irregular migrants will know people who have made it to the West irregularly, and have claimed asylum. Differences between the information shared in the campaign and information shared by Afghans who made it to the West tend to undermine the credibility of these campaigns. Instead, IOM advocates for more positive campaigns which offer alternatives to irregular migration. IOM Afghanistan’s recommendation is to design information campaigns that focus on three themes: the risks of being smuggled and irregular migration; alternative legal migration opportunities; and what migrants should expect if they do reach Europe. This approach, which sets out to manage expectations realistically, can inform potential migrants’ decisions without alienating them or undermining the authenticity/genuineness of the message.

Additionally, how the way the information is disseminated makes a significant difference in Afghanistan. Traditional information campaigns that rely on television advertisements and billboards are generally thought to be less effective in Afghanistan. This is true for a number of reasons. By their very nature, these

methods target the relatively well off - with access to television - and the urban-dwelling - where billboards are located. While this is certainly one demographic group leaving for Europe, it is certainly not all of the potential migrants. Additionally, wealthy urbanites tend to be the better educated group of potential migrants, and as such are less likely to be dissuaded by such a television campaign based on negative messaging fear.

Given the strong oral tradition in Afghanistan, and the esteem that community elders and institutions are held in, oral dissemination of information in mosques and schools by shuras, village elders, and those that have attempted to reach Europe have been identified as one of the most effective ways to share information about migration to Europe. This methodology further increases the credibility of the message, as well as targeting a much wider demographic than traditional information campaign dissemination methodologies.

In future issues ...

- Information and communication dissemination methodology
- Refugee Law and MoU with European countries on return
- Use of terminology