

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

Recent weeks have seen greater media attention to the shift in population movement routes across the Mediterranean, their rapid adaptation in the post-EU-Turkey agreement context and the recurrent associated tragedies – which continue to mark the perilous journeys towards hope, as prominently reported by media in 2015. This situation is reflected in the recent report by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *Global Trends*. The report finds that more people than ever have been driven from their homes due to conflict and persecution, numbers quadrupling over the past 10 years, and rising by nearly 10% in just the past year.

<http://bit.ly/1Y3z7vp>

Previous issues of this Bulletin have argued that such population movements – whether internal displacement in Afghanistan, movement to/from countries in the region, or mixed migration to/from Europe – are driven by complex factors that necessarily re-

quire integrated – and enduring – solutions. Such responses are themselves complex, taking account of the disparate causal factors prompting people to move. As the article by the Samuel Hall Consultancy in this Bulletin notes, there are dire consequences



World leaders at the World Humanitarian Summit. Photo: Talk Media News

for populations on the move, who are more likely to fall prey to smugglers and traffickers, underlining the breadth of the human tragedy and the complexity of effectively addressing population movement

The recent World Humanitarian Summit considered a broader range of issues than

population movement and its causes and acknowledged the complexity of the challenge. Specifically, the Summit statement sought to:-

- Find a new approach to reduce vulnerability and improve self-reliance of refugees;
- Support durable solutions for refugees and internally displaced people and reduce internal displacement by half by 2030;
- Provide host countries and communities with increased financial and political support;
- Share responsibility in response to large-scale movements of refugees; and
- Strengthen the protection of refugees and internally-displaced people.

Under the heading of “Leave No One Behind”, the Summit issued a call that is highly relevant to Afghanistan; the challenge ahead is to translate this call into action to address the underlying security and economic challenges that force people to risk everything in search of better lives elsewhere. <http://bit.ly/1R4h0Me>

Latest News Headlines

Mass mixed migration to Europe is for more than just economic reasons

June 23 - On Monday June 20, the world marked World Refugee Day. It was a day we were reminded that because of violence dotted around many parts of the world; hundreds of families are each day forced to flee their homes in search of a safe and peaceful place.

More at New Times <http://bit.ly/28RSP9f>

For Europe, Arab lives matter more than Africans'

June 22 - The summer dying season is underway. It began in earnest late last month when, under a bright Mediterranean sun that cast the sea a sparkling blue, a fishing trawler teetered on its side before giving in to the panicked bodies on board, tipping them into the swell.

More at NYT <http://nyti.ms/28O3XAL>

Refugees: From Syria to Somalia, tales of displacement

June 21 - The UN refugee agency says persecution and conflict in places such as Syria and Afghanistan raised the total number of refugees and internally displaced people worldwide to a record 65.3 million at the end of last year. The previous year, 2014, had already seen the highest number of refugees worldwide since World War II, with 60 million displaced people.

More at Al Jazeera <http://bit.ly/28IwR7U>

The other major refugee crisis: 3 million Afghans

June 20 - Syria's refugee crisis dominates the headlines, but the crisis of Afghan refugees is significant—and has the potential to undermine the future of a country in which the U.S. has invested so much. Here are four things about a crisis that gets relatively little attention in the West.

More at WSJ <http://on.wsj.com/28OH7NE>

UN High Commissioner for Refugees visits Afghanistan on World Refugee Day, urges continued international support

June 20 - Visiting Afghanistan on World Refugee Day, UNHCR High Commissioner Filippo Grandi urged the international community to redouble efforts to find lasting solutions to Afghanistan's complex and rapidly evolving displacement crisis. “This is a problem we cannot ignore,” stated Grandi.

More at UNHCR <http://bit.ly/28WGWwL>

3,657 Afghan migrants and rejected asylum seekers returned from European countries in 2016: Officials

June 20 - At least 3,657 Afghan refugees returned to Afghanistan from the European countries, the officials in Ministry of Refugees and Repatriations said Monday.

Syed Hussain Alemi Balkhi, the Minister of

Refugees and Repatriations, said Monday that 3,657 refugees returned to Afghanistan only since the start of 2016. He said at least 1,962 refugees who returned from Europe were the ones who had claimed asylum in Germany.

More at Khaama Press <http://bit.ly/28OHDeY>

Europe migrant crisis: Charity rejects EU funds over migration policy

June 17 - Medical aid charity Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) says it will no longer take funds from the European Union in protest at its migration policy.

MSF singled out the EU's deal with Turkey under which Turkey agreed to take back any migrants who crossed the sea to Greece in smugglers' boats.

More at BBC <http://bbc.in/1QaPjrE>

Policy for repatriation of Afghan refugees gets tougher

By Zahid Gishkori
ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has decided to introduce ‘tougher policy’ for Afghan refugees days before the deadline (June 30) for repatriation of over three million refugees living here since 80s.

More at The News <http://bit.ly/28XJ890>

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

Population Movements

IDP Trends in 2016

Conflict displacement is increasing, with more than 137,000 people displaced in Afghanistan since the beginning of 2016. This represents a 16 per cent increase compared to the same period in 2015 (118,000) and a 119% increase compared to the same period in 2013 (over 62,000). In terms of geographical trends of displacement, while the main centers in 2015 were Kunduz and Kabul, 2016 has witnessed a substantial increase in Baghlan in the north eastern region (31,000 currently displaced) as well in Kandahar (16,000), Uruzgan (14,000) and Hilmand (12,000) in the southern region. Kunduz still registers a considerable number of newly displaced (16,000) in 2016.

Conflict is the main source of displacement. Sustained ground engagements and confrontation between non-state armed actors (NSAA) and the Afghanistan National Security Forces (ANSF) in Kunduz, as well as clashes and clearance operations in Baghlan led to deterioration of the security situation overall in the north east provinces and the significant current displacement.

In the south, 2016 has seen a clear escalation and a change in the dynamics of the conflict towards increased armed forces confrontations in the Uruzgan province. This has caused an increased displacement and inaccessibility in Dehrawud and Tirinkot, and in Hilmand, preventing critical assessment and

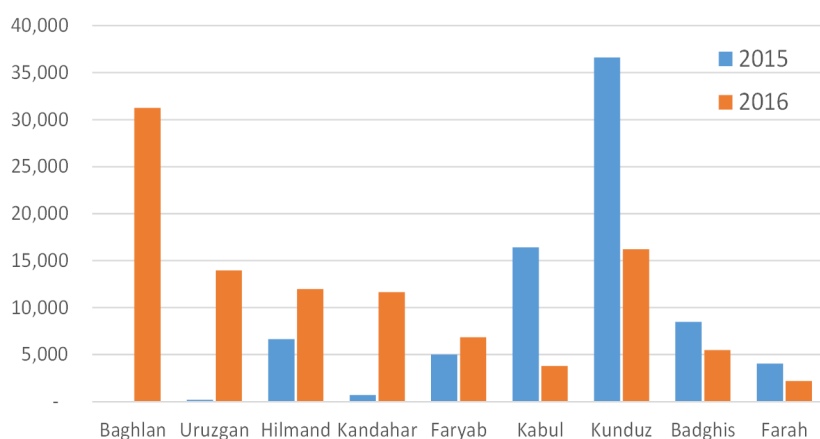
humanitarian assistance to displaced people. Other areas of displacement, namely Baghdis (5,500) and Faryab (7,000) registered similar levels of displacement as last year, reflecting continued conflict and insecurity patterns.

While numbers for May are still to be fully confirmed, initial reports indicate a possible decrease in conflict and conflict related IDPs due to the poppy harvest, which benefits communities and different sides at the conflict.

Humanitarian access constraints are increasing in areas where conflict is on the rise and the environment remains volatile. Service delivery of health care, medicines, food and other life-saving humanitarian assistance to displaced families continues to be restricted.

IDP trend charts*

IDPs in 2015 and 2016 (Jan-May)

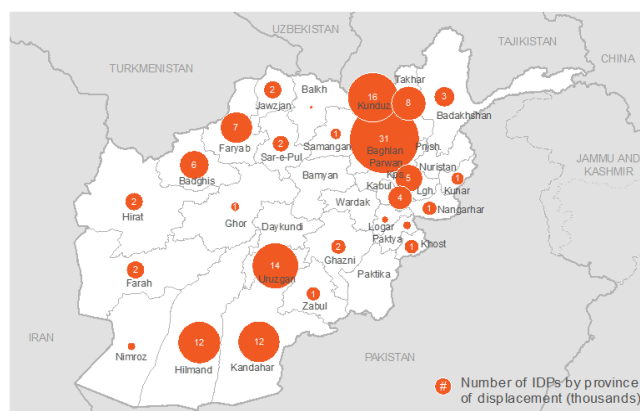
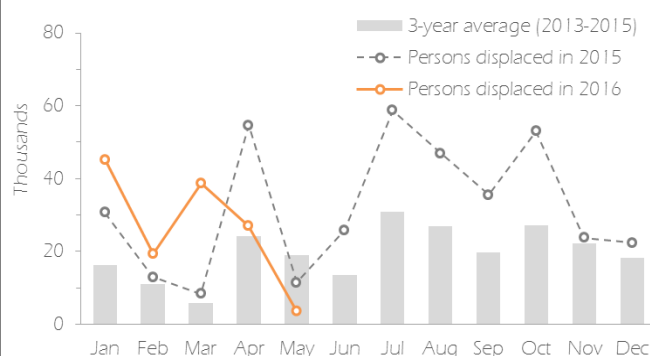


Internal displacement due to conflict (Trends 2013 to 2016)

IDPs in 2015 and 2016 (Jan-May)		
Province	2015	2016
Baghlan	-	31,255
Uruzgan	199	13,961
Hilmand	6,663	11,996
Kandahar	697	11,646
Faryab	5,023	6,846
Kabul	16,423	3,800
Kunduz	36,629	16,205
Badghis	8,475	5,505
Farah	4,063	2,184

*Assessments are ongoing in the field and these numbers in particular for May, are subject to change as more information becomes available.

Internal displacement due to conflict (Jan-May 2016)



UNHCR has doubled the voluntary repatriation reintegration grant

As from 23 June 2016, UNHCR has doubled the voluntary repatriation reintegration grant for registered Afghan refugees returning from Pakistan and Iran. Returnees will now receive USD 350 per person, as well as the existing transportation grant varying from USD 30 to USD 70, so that the average cash grant is now USD 400 per person.

Population Movements

UNHCR Global Trends Report:

Afghans remain the second largest refugee group in record levels of forced displacement

Wars and persecution have driven more people from their homes than at any time since UNHCR records began, according to the Refugee Agency's report on 'Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2015', released on World Refugee Day, 20 June. The report found that 65.3 million people – or one person in 113 – were displaced from their homes in 2015 as an asylum seeker, refugee or internally displaced person, compared to 59.5 million just 12 months earlier. Of this number, 40.8 million were internally displaced and 21.3 million had crossed a border to become refugees. On average, 24 people worldwide were displaced from their homes every minute of every day during 2015 – some 34,000 people per day. There has been a 75% increase in forcibly displaced populations in the past two decades, with 37.3 million in 1996.

The study found that Afghanistan is one of three countries (along with Syria and Somalia) which account for more than half of the refugees under UNHCR's mandate globally. Reasons for the rise in displacement include the fact that conflicts which cause large refugee outflows – such as Afghanistan with the crisis now into its fourth decade – are lasting longer. Indeed, Afghan refugees are the largest protracted refugee group under UNHCR's mandate. The rate at which solutions are being found for refugees and internally displaced people has been on a falling trend since the end of the Cold War, leaving a growing number in limbo. This includes the

estimated 1.2 million internally displaced in Afghanistan and 2.7 million Afghan refugees, in addition to those whose asylum applications are yet to be assessed. Dramatic new or reignited conflicts and situations of insecurity are occurring more frequently and are stretching global attention and resources, contributing to the challenges in resolving protracted displacement and responding to new displacement such as Afghanistan. The more than 380,000 verified newly internally displaced Afghans in 2015 constituted a 96% increase over the previous year.

The Afghan refugee population worldwide was estimated at 2.7 million by the end of 2015, compared to 2.6 million at the end of the previous year. Thus, Afghanistan remained the second-largest refugee source country at the end of 2015. The majority of Afghan refugees resided in Pakistan (1.6 million) and the Islamic Republic of Iran (951,000), in addition to large numbers of undocumented Afghans (estimated to be 1.5 – 2 million in Iran and 1 million in Pakistan).

Other major asylum countries hosting Afghan refugees in 2015 were Germany (30,000), Austria (17,500), Sweden (13,100), Italy (12,200), and India (10,200). These figures do not include asylum-seekers awaiting a decision on their application as at 31 December 2015, or those persons who could be granted temporary stay under subsidiary forms of protection.

Of the 239,600 new asylum applications by Afghans registered during 2015 (excluding

the more than 2.6 million registered Afghan population in Pakistan and Iran who are collectively recognized as refugees on a prima facie basis), Turkey received the most such claims (63,400) and recognition rates were nearly universal. Sweden received 41,300 applications, Germany 31,400 and Austria 25,200. In Sweden and Germany about three-quarters of applications were recognized, in Belgium and Norway around 80%, while in Bulgaria and Hungary the rates were below 25%.

Only 201,400 refugees returned to their country of origin in 2015. Of this number, Afghans constituted some 60,000, but this was to a significant extent the result of pressures to return from Pakistan following a terrorist attack on a school in Peshawar in December 2014.

While the spotlight has been on Europe's challenge to manage more than 1 million refugees and migrants who arrived via the Mediterranean, the report shows that 86% of the world's refugees were in developing countries in the global south.

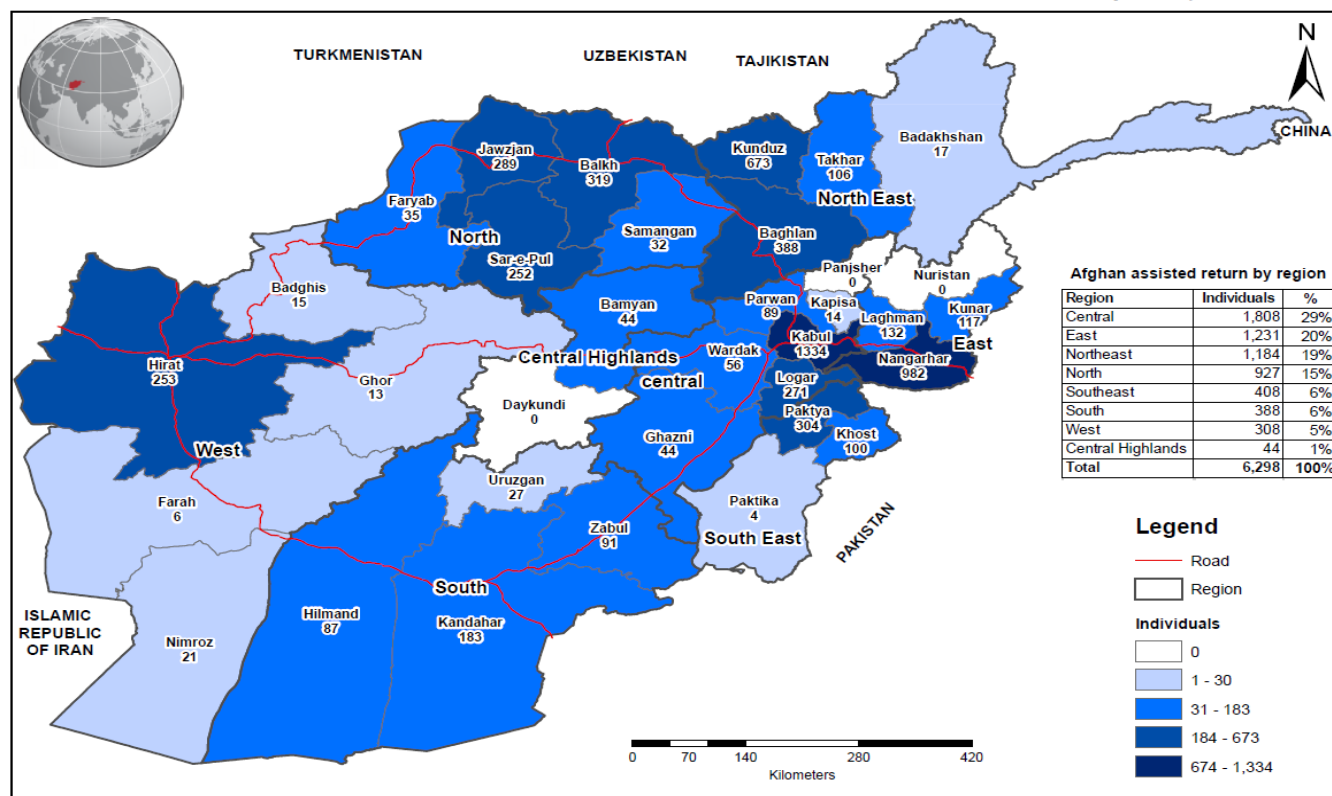
"More people are being displaced by war and persecution and that's worrying in itself, but the factors that endanger refugees are multiplying too," said UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi. "At sea a frightening number of refugees are dying each year; on land, people fleeing war are finding their way blocked by closed borders. Closing borders does not solve the problem."

The Global Trends Report can be found at: <http://www.unhcr.org/576408cd7>



Assisted Voluntary Repatriation to Afghanistan Return by Province of Destination - 01 January - 31 May 2016

UNHCR Country Office Kabul-Afghanistan
Geographic Information and Mapping Unit
Operational Information Section

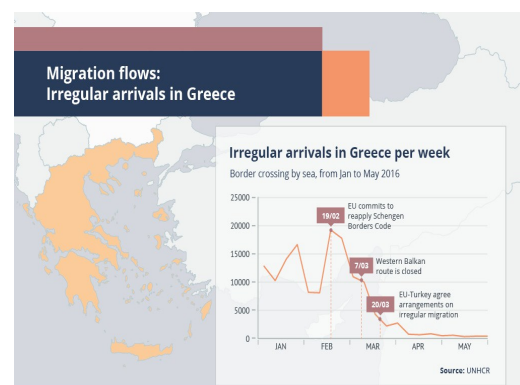


Population Movements

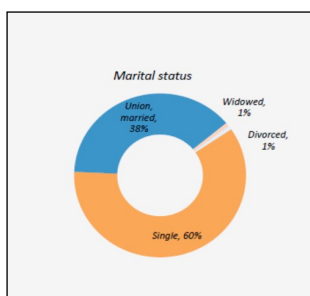
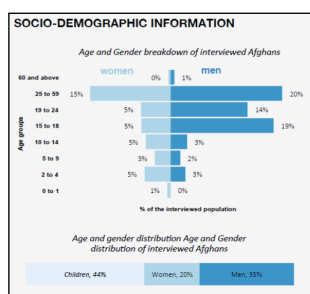
Profiling of Afghan arrivals in Greece – March 2016

Since the beginning of 2016, UNHCR initiated a data collection and analysis exercise with support from the Joint IDP Profiling Service (JIPS) in order to better inform the wider community on the profile of refugees arriving to Greece, and improve immediate response and longer term planning. The profiling exercise is regularly implemented on the islands that are receiving the majority of the arrivals to Greece: Chios, Lesbos, and Samos. A systematic purposive sampling is utilized with enumerators interviewing respondents at regular intervals.

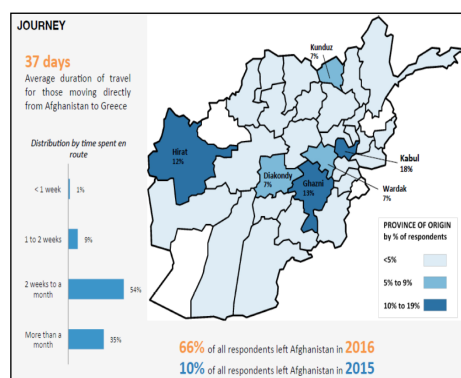
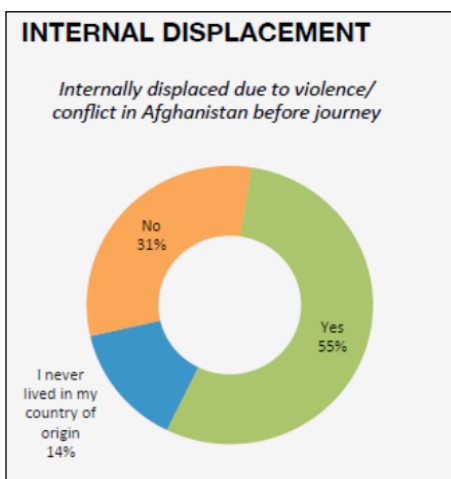
During the month of March, three teams of Farsi/Dari speaking enumerators based in Chios, Lesbos and Samos interviewed 592 Afghans. The findings of the interviews were published on 27 May.



The sample



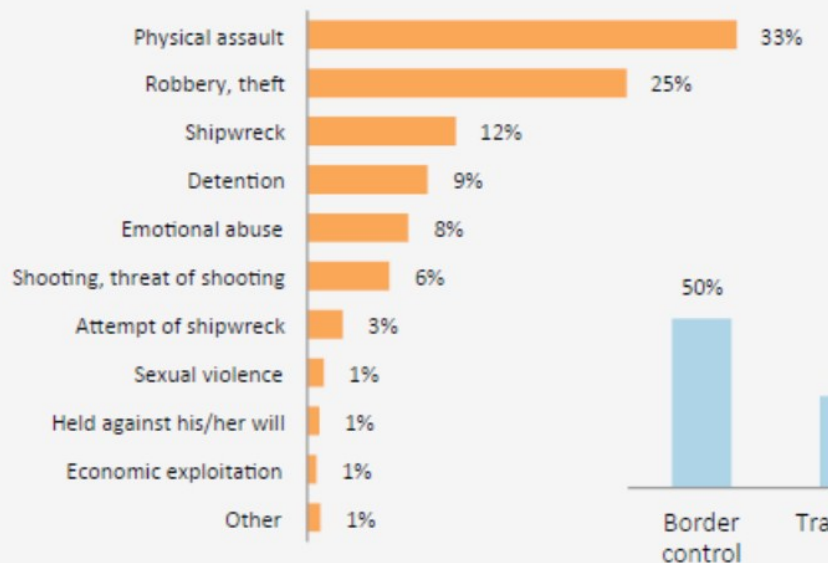
Out of the 592 Afghans interviewed	
55%	Were internally displaced in Afghanistan before starting the journey
75%	Left Afghanistan due to the conflict and violence.
66%	Left Afghanistan in 2016, and for those moving directly from Afghanistan to Greece the duration of the journey was 37 days on average.
68%	Came directly from Afghanistan through either the route Pakistan/Iran/Turkey (37%) or the route Iran/Turkey (31%).
69%	traveled with at least a close family member
16%	Stayed in another country (not Afghanistan) for 6 months or more before starting their journey to Greece and of those and most mentioned lack of documentation (35%) and fear of expulsion (23%) as main reasons for leaving that country.
52%	Directly witnessed or experienced protection incidents during the journey.
10%	Were separated from a family member during the journey. Separations took place at borders in Iran or Turkey. Less than a 4% had found the separated individuals at the time of the interview.



PROTECTION

52% of respondents directly witnessed or experienced protection incidents during the journey.

Protection incident witnessed or experienced



For more information on mixed flows across the Mediterranean visit <http://data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/regional.php>

Voluntary Repatriation

Voluntary Return Weekly Comparison of 2015 / 2016

From 01-Jan to 11 June 2016

Date	Pakistan			
	2015	2016	Difference - Increase / decrease compare to 2015	
	Individuals	Individuals	Weekly Ind	Weekly %
13 Mar - 19 Mar	1,039	155	(884)	-85%
20 Mar - 26 Mar	975	156	(819)	-84%
27 Mar - 02 Apr	1,607	279	(1,328)	-83%
03 Apr - 9 Apr	1,889	238	(1,651)	-87%
10 Apr - 16 Apr	2,188	482	(1,706)	-78%
17 Apr - 23 Apr	1,763	496	(1,267)	-72%
24 Apr - 30 Apr	2,599	471	(2,128)	-82%
01 May - 07 May	2,183	474	(1,709)	-78%
08 May - 14 May	2,009	327	(1,682)	-84%
15 May - 21 May	1,994	668	(1,326)	-66%
22 May - 28 May	3,730	625	(3,105)	-83%
29 May - 04 Jun	4,807	769	(4,038)	-84%
05 Jun - 11 Jun	3,100	532	(2,568)	-83%
Total	38,396	6,495	(31,901)	-83%

	Iran			
	2015	2016	Difference - Increase / decrease compare to 2015	
	Individuals	Individuals	Weekly Ind	Weekly %
	205	170	(35)	-17%
	43	41	(2)	-5%
	44	61	17	39%
	56	28	(28)	-50%
	44	48	4	9%
	51	38	(13)	-25%
	43	49	6	14%
	100	35	(65)	-65%
	57	34	(23)	-40%
	29	25	(4)	-14%
	67	57	(10)	-15%
	20	25	5	25%
	57	11	(46)	-81%
Total	1,219	806	(413)	-34%

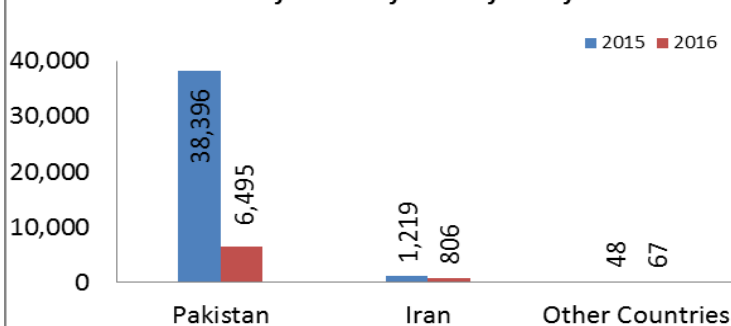
Voluntary Return by year from 01-Jan to 11 June 2016

Contry of Asylum	Year		Increase /Decrease compare to 2015 (%)	
	2015	2016		
Pakistan	38,396	6,495	-31,901	-83%
Iran	1,219	806	-413	-34%
Other Countries	48	67	19	40%
Total	39,663	7,368	(32,295)	-81%

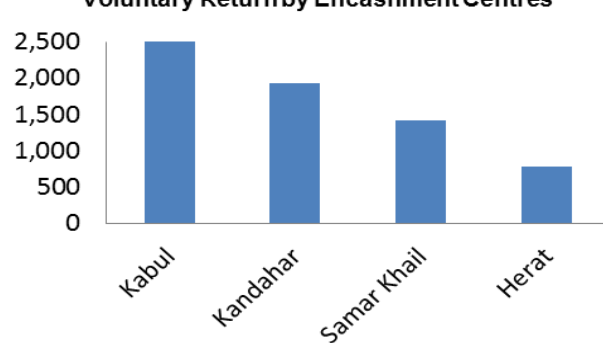
Voluntary Return by Encashment centres

Encashment Centres	Individuals
Kabul	3,221
Kandahar	1,928
Samar Khail	1,415
Herat	789
Mazar office	15
Grand Total	7,368

Voluntary Return by Country of Asylum



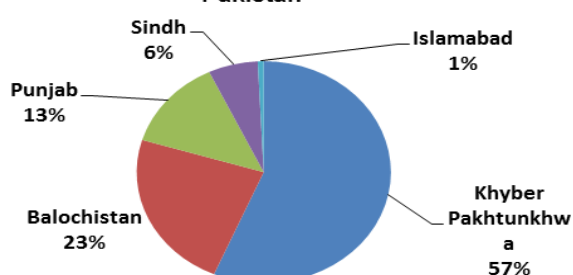
Voluntary Return by Encashment Centres



Voluntary Return by top 5 Provinces of Asylum - Pakistan

Province	Individuals
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	3,658
Balochistan	1,510
Punjab	859
Sindh	409
Islamabad	49

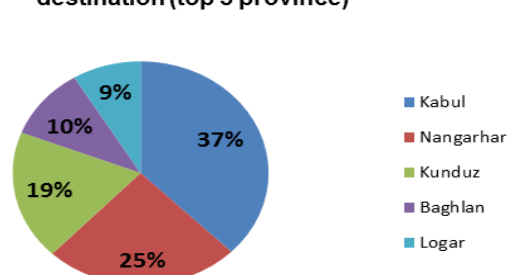
Afghan assisted return by top Province of asylum- Pakistan



Voluntary Return by Destination (top 5 provinces)

Province	Individuals
Kabul	1,658
Nangarhar	1,092
Kunduz	831
Baghlan	461
Logar	384

Afghan assisted return by province of destination (top 5 province)



Policy Development

The Migration-Trafficking Nexus in Afghanistan

By Nassim Majidi
Co-founder and Director of Samuel Hall

Trafficking and smuggling are often conflated in the Afghan context. With a renewed Afghan exodus and over 1.2 million displaced in Afghanistan, the number of victims on the move, whether trafficked or smuggled, will continue to increase. This article takes the attention away from smuggling trends of migration to Europe, to focus on the vulnerability to trafficking among populations on the move, in and out of Afghanistan. As this article shows – with extracts from a 2013 IOM/Samuel Hall research on trafficking in persons (TiP) – the migration-trafficking nexus is strong and points to the vulnerability of populations on the move, especially women and minors. Looking ahead, the worsening conflict and economic downturn in Afghanistan are likely to increase individual and household vulnerability to TIP.

Human trafficking is essentially the recruitment, transport or harbouring of individuals through coercive means for the purpose of exploitation – typically labour or sexual exploitation. Although data is lacking on the number of victims, a proxy is the number of victims of trafficking (VoT) assisted by IOM that has risen from 13 victims in 2005 to 466 in 2015.

An analysis of the causes and determinants of trafficking shows that Afghanistan provides an environment in which TIP cannot only persist, but flourish. Increasing economic vulnerability and a high incidence of migration and displacement render households and individuals more vulnerable to exploitative practices, while proximate factors, such as poor law enforcement and the criminalisation of victims create an environment in which perpetrators can operate with impunity. Causes and determinants. Vulnerability to trafficking in Afghanistan is tied to the economic and migration status of the individual or household. Poverty and debt are even more relevant today given the economic transition and downturn since 2014. The connections between internal displacement, cross-border migration and trafficking in persons are widely recognised, yet little is known about the interaction of these patterns in the Afghan context.

Migration-trafficking nexus. Victims of trafficking (VoT) often have a history of displacement. Amongst the general population, “76% have had some experience of displacement in their lifetime.” Out of 80 surveyed victim cases, 41 had experienced some form of displacement: 17 VoT were displaced to another country, 15 were displaced internally, and 9 experienced both cross-border and internal

displacement. Of the 24 internally displaced persons (IDPs), conflict was the main driving factor, although internal displacement due to natural disasters is also common within Afghanistan.

Internal displacement. Conflict-induced displacement disrupts livelihoods strategies and social networks in a way that leaves households vulnerable to TIP and other forms of exploitation. Whether internal or cross-border, displacement severs contact with tribal and family networks, making it more difficult for households to seek assistance from friends and relatives in times of need. In flight, households lose property, shelter, and forms of moveable collateral (e.g. tools) that could help them earn a living in their new home. Moreover, their skills may not be in demand in their

the same provinces, VoT with histories of cross-border displacement originated by and large from rural areas; 21 of the 26 surveyed cases came from rural areas.

Irregular migrants. Of these cases, most victims were irregular migrants while in exile (20 out of 31) and did not have a legal status as a refugee or asylum seeker. Their irregular status is likely to have made them more vulnerable to exploitative practices. A history of cross-border irregular migration was most prevalent amongst males coerced into TIP in illicit sectors. More than half of the male VoT (12 out of 20) coerced into illicit sectors had been irregular migrants prior to their exploitation; an additional two had left as legal refugees. Cross-border displacement was a recurrent, if not common, factor amongst other surveyed

VoT, regardless of gender or exploitation type.

Provinces in the northeast (Badakhshan, Takhar, Kunduz, Balkh), southwest (Nimroz, Kandahar), western (Hirat), central (Kabul) and eastern (Nangarhar) regions are all reported as key areas of activity. Internal and cross-border TIP appears to affect victims in all provinces of Afghanistan. Cross-border TIP flows concentrated to and from Pakistan and Iran. Interviews with informed community leaders indicate that a majority of cross-border trafficking

originating from Afghanistan reaches its destination in Iran and Pakistan.

In conclusion, trafficking victims come from economically impoverished backgrounds, a history of displacement and a ruptured family unit. While both genders are targeted, vulnerability to particular types of TIP varies with age and gender. A majority of TIP is internal; victims may not even leave their province of origin, while others will cross borders into neighbouring Pakistan and Iran. Even when Afghanistan is the country of destination, victims are often of Afghan origin (e.g. refugees and undocumented migrants). The most common forms of TIP in Afghanistan are for labour exploitation, sexual exploitation and forced marriage. While the availability of information about TIP has increased over the past decade, this should not be interpreted necessarily as an increase in prevalence. It is rather indicative of awareness raising efforts and freedom of the press.

TIP remains a pervasive problem throughout Afghanistan. Looking ahead, instability and economic insecurity are likely to increase individual and household vulnerability to TIP. The report outlines key recommendations to strengthen protection, prevention and prosecution, as well as partnerships to build the knowledge base on trafficking and counter-trafficking, build the capacity of local organisations, strengthened coordination and cross-border cooperation on TIP.



Human trafficking and smuggling of migrants. Photo: UNODC

new place of residence. Situations of conflict and insecurity also prompt individuals to consider riskier forms of migration in order to reach a safer environment.

[Unaccompanied minors. Surveyed community leaders confirmed the increased vulnerability of migrants. Unaccompanied minors were identified as the most vulnerable group for both labour and sexual exploitation. The prevalence of unaccompanied minors in Afghanistan is quite significant. In the first half of 2013, IOM registered 2120 unaccompanied minors being deported from Iran through Islam Qala (Herat province) alone. IDPs and irregular migrants were also singled out by community members as representing vulnerable groups for TIP for labour and sexual exploitation.

Nearly one-third of surveyed victims that Samuel Hall researchers spoke with in 2013 (26 out of 80) were forced to flee to another country at some point prior to their trafficking experience; 11 fled to Pakistan and 15 to Iran. Victims from Western provinces tended to flee westward toward Iran, while victims in eastern provinces went to Pakistan. Victims with a history of displacement came from a wide variety of provinces; there were 15 different provinces represented amongst the 26 victims with a history of cross-border displacement. Due to the wide distribution, no patterns were revealed relating in particular provinces. Although they did not come from

Programmatic Responses

Torkham Border – The New Regime

Torkham border is the main entrance gateway connecting via land South Asia with Afghanistan and Central Asian countries. Torkham is the doorway to access from Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) to Afghanistan, particularly the eastern (Nangarhar Province) central and northern areas. It is one of the busiest ports of entry between the two countries, serving as a major transport, shipping, and crossing site for passengers. It is estimated that some 10,000-15,000 people use the crossing every day. Torkham border has also been used as the most economical and direct access route by Afghans who intend to return to their home-country after spending decades of their life in exile inside Pakistan.

UNHCR has a presence at the border largely through the activities of the Department of Refugees and Repatriation (DoRR). Through DoRR, UNHCR monitors the voluntary repatriation process for Afghan refugees and the basic guarantees as stipulated in Tripartite Agreement on voluntary repatriation between the Governments of Afghanistan and Pakistan and UNHCR. This includes the physical safety of returning refugees at the border while they are en route; the prevention of family separation while crossing the border; the provision of necessary information on the voluntary repatriation process, entitlements, and reintegration; attention and assistance to vulnerable returnees; and the identification of protection concerns of families and person with specific needs amongst the returnees for referral and follow up. In cooperation with DoRR, IOM also carries out similar interventions for returning undocumented Afghan citizens not holding a Proof of Registration (PoR) Card qualifying them as refugees.

Torkham border has traditionally remained opened for movements of persons and goods and has emerged as one of the most congested crossing-points between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Nonetheless, in the wake of recent security developments between the two countries, the Government of Pakistan introduced a more robust border management strategy. This inevitably affected the poorly regulated and traditional commuting flows between the two countries, which for years had been allowed without any stringent control and with different types of documentation. While the standard travel document to cross from Afghanistan into Pakistan has been the passport with Pakistani visa, several subsidiary documents such as student cards, national identity cards, sickness certificates, Rahdari Pass, and Proof of Registration (PoR) Card were widely

accepted by the Pakistan border guards to allow Afghans to cross into Pakistan.

Since April 2016, Pakistani border authorities announced the introduction of a strict border management regime and increased the checking of travel documents of each individual crossing into Pakistan. It was reported that a formal letter from Pakistan border authorities had informed the Afghan Deputy Border Commissioner in his office at Torkham that



Torkham border. Photo: UNHCR

all Afghans travelling to Pakistan had to possess a valid passport and a Pakistani visa if they intended to cross into Pakistan via Torkham border. Pakistani border guards started briefing travelers that from 1 May 2016, no individual would be allowed to enter Pakistan without a regular Afghan passport and a Pakistani visa. This was reported to have been accompanied by sign boards installed on the Pakistan side of the border. In addition, baggage screening, cameras and a new immigration hub complemented the border reinforcement strategy. UNHCR started an early dialogue with the border authorities to ensure continuous cooperation in movement of assisted returnee families and to continue facilitation of access by DoRR border monitors to deportees.

Considering the necessity for increased public awareness on the change of the border regime, the Government of Pakistan extended the deadline for the start of implementation to 31 May 2016. The new deadline was widely broadcasted. This postponement, however, did not avoid a closure of the border for more than 75 hours between 10 and 13 May, reportedly due to a disagreement between the Pakistani and Afghan border police over the fencing of an area. The event generated moments of tensions between the two military contingents, with the complete block of traffic including repatriation movements. The situation was solved only after high level interventions.

From 1 June 2016, the border control measures entered into full effect. Apart from a passport with a valid Pakistani visa, only Rah

Dari Pass holders, identifying individuals with a specific tribal affiliation in the area, have since then been allowed to cross into Pakistan. As a measure of reciprocity, Afghan authorities started inquiring about valid passports and visas from Pakistani nationals who intend to cross into Afghanistan for business, work or visit purposes.

There are debates as of why the measure was introduced, whether for security

measures, or as part of the less-than-ideal current political relations between the two countries, or as a general measure to curb illegal crossing of persons and goods that so far has been the norm in Torkham. However, a few important aspects must be noted.

The regime initially had only minimal repercussions on the voluntary repatriation process at the border, since Afghan refugees return to their own country of origin. However, a problem emerged with the Afghan truck drivers who normally provide transportation to the returnees up to and inside Afghanistan and who may be prevented from returning to Pakistan.

However, several days of fighting at the border between border guards using heavy weaponry, with casualties on both sides, halted voluntary repatriation of Afghans. It is hoped that the reopening of the border will lead to resumption of smooth and safe return.

Some specific guarantees for the repatriation process may be discussed by the respective governments in the upcoming Tripartite Commission (Government of Afghanistan, Government of Pakistan, and UNHCR) to be held likely in mid-July 2016.

While legitimate, the requirement of possessing a valid passport is put into effect in a context where the capacity of the Government of Afghanistan to issue the document is not yet fully developed, particularly at provincial level. Afghan citizens can still obtain an e-passport mainly at the Central Passport Office in Kabul, as the necessary technology for issuance has not yet been transferred locally.

The old, handwritten versions of the Afghanistan passport will soon become obsolete and an e-passport will be compulsory. The fees to obtain a new Afghan e-passport may be unaffordable to most of the families.

Many Afghans refugees in Pakistan use the opportunity of a preliminary visit before return, largely by the head of the family, to ensure that after decades in exile preparations are in place for a smooth process of return and initial reintegration. The new border regime may disrupt this practice, which was an important element in making return and reintegration well-informed, safe and dignified.

UN High Commissioner for Refugees urges continued international support during Afghanistan visit

Visiting Afghanistan on World Refugee Day, UNHCR High Commissioner Filippo Grandi urged the international community to redouble efforts to find lasting solutions to Afghanistan's complex and rapidly evolving displacement crisis. "This is a problem we cannot ignore," stated Grandi, adding that "despite growing insecurity and other challenges, there are opportunities to provide lasting solutions for the growing numbers of internally displaced and pave the way for the eventual voluntary return of refugees remaining in neighbouring countries. Afghans everywhere are counting on us." He stressed UNHCR's continued commitment to the 2.5 million remaining Afghan refugees in the region, as well as his agency's intention to renew efforts to find durable solutions for the country's estimated 1.2 million internally displaced people in partnership with the Government of National Unity and humanitarian and development agencies.

Noting that Afghanistan remains the second-largest refugee-producing country in the world, High Commissioner Grandi called for international respect of the principles of refugee protection and for increased international solidarity towards people fleeing conflict, insecurity, and persecution: "Today, Afghanistan sees record-high civilian casualties, unprecedented levels of internal displacement, and increasing humanitarian needs. UNHCR is concerned by the growing risks Afghans on the move face, both inside Afghanistan and on their way to Europe or other safe countries." Underscoring the gravity of the current situation and its far-reaching consequences, Grandi said "we simply do not have the option of turning our backs and walking away" and stressed the urgent need for international engagement and funds to

reverse the country's current trajectory.

High Commissioner Grandi recognised the generosity of the neighbouring Islamic Republics of Iran and Pakistan, which have been hosting millions of Afghan refugees for nearly four decades: "On this World Refugee Day and in this holy month of Ramadan, we stand with the Afghan people, as well as the peoples of Iran and Pakistan, celebrating their



The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (centre with tie) during his recent visit to Afghanistan. Photo: UNHCR

resilience, strength, generosity and determination to find solutions."

Mr. Grandi's visit to Afghanistan was his first since he was appointed United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees on 1 January this year. He has previously served as UNHCR Chief of Mission in Afghanistan in 2001 - 2004 and as Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General to Afghanistan in 2004 -2005. His visit was part of a regional tour taking him also to Iran and Pakistan. Arriving from Iran on 19 June, Mr. Grandi met with displaced families in Maslakh, Herat. In an inter-agency gathering of key humanitarian and development actors with the Provincial Government, he pledged UNHCR's assistance with operational activities in support of government initiatives to finding lasting solutions for protracted displaced populations.

Mr. Grandi commemorated World Refugee Day on Monday 20 June with internally displaced, returnee and host communities in Ghaziabad, Kabul, visiting UNHCR's vocational skills training programmes for these communities aimed at promoting self-reliance.

Mr. Grandi met with President Ghani, Chief Executive Officer Abdullah, as well as the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Refugees and Repatriation and other high level government officials. He also attended a meeting of the High Commission on Migration's Sub-Committee of the Council of Ministers, with 19 Ministers represented. At a meeting of ambassadors from key donor countries, he urged the international community not to forget Afghanistan at this critical moment. He noted the importance of allocating more funds for programmes targeting livelihoods, housing, health and education in order to help stabilise population movements within the country as

well as strengthen resilience and help pave solutions for Afghan refugees in Iran and Pakistan. At an inter-agency gathering with UN, NGOs and other actors, he emphasized the importance of working together in emergency response and solutions for IDPs, support to reintegration of returning Afghans, as well as helping Afghanistan to fulfil its responsibilities as a significant refugee hosting country for the first time.

UNHCR's Representative to Afghanistan, Maya Ameratunga, said the visit comes at a critical time when the spotlight is on renewed outflows of Afghan refugees and migrants to Europe. "We must refocus international attention on the largest and most vulnerable displaced populations who are right here in our midst – the millions of internally displaced and refugees in this region," said Ms. Ameratunga.

President Ghani delivers statement on World Refugee Day

His Excellency President Ghani delivered a statement in honour of World Refugee Day, which has been broadcast this week in local languages on Afghan media:

<http://bit.ly/28VIKVA>

The English translation is:

"Dear compatriots inside and outside of Afghanistan,

20 June, World Refugee Day, is a day when our thoughts and prayers are very specially with Afghan refugees abroad and those who have returned; the internally displaced within Afghanistan; and refugees from other countries to whom the people of Afghanistan are giving shelter in their hour of need.

On this World Refugee Day, we all realize that the key to return of our dear compatriots and to help them restart a new life in our

beloved Afghanistan is peace, stability and development of our country. Five million Afghan refugees have already returned home since 2002 in the world's largest repatriation, with the help of the Government and UNHCR (the UN Refugee Agency). Afghanistan is incomplete as long as millions of our dear brothers and sisters remain outside their homeland. I wish to see the word 'displacement' disappear from Afghanistan's vocabulary. I hope that those who are still in exile will soon see that they can have a better life at home as citizens rebuilding their country. In the meantime, I salute all countries who are generously hosting our Afghan brothers and sisters.

We as a nation know what it is to be a refugee, and so we in turn welcome those who have fled from war and persecution in their countries and we grant them refuge in ac-

cordance with Islamic principles of hospitality. I wish to thank local communities who are generously hosting refugees.

My Government is more than ever determined to create peaceful and stable conditions in Afghanistan, so that people no longer have to flee from their homes and those who have been uprooted can return home in safety and dignity. Long live Afghanistan!"

UN High Commissioner for Refugees highlights the plight of displaced Afghans

On World Refugee Day, the High Commissioner for Refugees, Mr. Filippo Grandi, highlighted that faced with mounting global refugee crises, the world is losing sight of Afghanistan and the plight of millions of its people. He noted that Afghanistan needs peace and development and its people need sympathy and support, wherever they are.

More info >> <http://bit.ly/28VFt9u>