

Monthly Migration Movements

Afghan Displacement Summary

Migration to Europe

November 2017

Introduction

This month the CASWA 4Mi paper analyses 89 questionnaires collected from Afghans who have migrated to Europe using the Western Balkans route. The paper finds that (1) Afghans consider migration to Europe to be their only option, even with restricted asylum conditions, (2) Afghans face protection risks along the route that are severe and (3) secondary movement among Afghans is much more diverse than anticipated, with Afghans arriving in Europe from countries as diverse as Iraq, Turkmenistan and Russia.

The Political Climate toward Asylum in Europe

Europe has historically maintained an open position toward asylum seekers, with Germany taking a leading role in supporting these policies. The open door policies, however, came under strain in 2015 due to a steep increase in the inflow of asylum seekers.

Over the course of 2015, an unprecedented number of asylum seekers – around 1.3 million, according to Pew Research – arrived in Europe. Based on Eurostat numbers, Germany was the preferred destination for the arrivals. In 2015, Germany received more than 476,000 asylum applications.¹ Following Germany, Hungary (174,000 applications) and Sweden (156,000) received the highest number of asylum applications in 2015.²

Throughout these arrivals, Germany maintained and consolidated its open door policy. As asylum seekers, primarily Syrian, arrived in Hungary, Merkel temporarily suspended the Dublin Protocol that requires asylum seekers to register in the first EU state they enter, thereby making a clear political statement in favour of the open door policy.

Despite Germany's decision to support openness to asylum seekers, the high numbers of asylum seekers generated a political response. This response included stronger border controls in Eastern European countries such as Bulgaria and Slovenia, political initiatives devoted to migration including the Valletta summit, and the signature of the EU Turkey deal, involving the disbursement of 3 billion EUR in aid designed for refugees.

Linked to European efforts to manage migration, the EU signed the Joint Way Forward with the Government of

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Asylum_statistics

² <http://www.pewglobal.org/2016/08/02/number-of-refugees-to-europe-surges-to-record-1-3-million-in-2015/>

Afghanistan in October 2016. The Joint Way Forward “identifies a series of actions to be taken ... by the EU and the Government of Afghanistan ... to establish a rapid, effective and manageable process for a smooth, dignified and orderly return of Afghan nationals ... and to facilitate their reintegration in Afghanistan.”³ Many observers and humanitarian organizations question this deal and ask if these Afghans are returning to the risk of death and torture.⁴

Afghans in Europe

Afghan migration to Europe has been primarily due to continuous political instability in Afghanistan including civil wars and Taliban rule, and has taken place over the course of more than 30 years. Afghan migration has overlapped with other major movements into Europe, notably that of Somalis, starting in the 1990s and continuing to the present day, and that of Syrians, which started in 2011.

According to Frontex data, Afghans have for several years constituted the second largest group of irregular arrivals into Europe. A total of 20% of new arrivals to Europe in 2015 were Afghans.⁵

Major destination countries for Afghans are Germany, Austria, Hungary and Bulgaria. 127,010 first time asylum applications were received from Afghans in Germany during 2016.⁶ In Austria the number amounts to 11,500, in Hungary 10,775, and in Bulgaria 8,645.⁷

The asylum process for Afghans is marked by two challenges. First, the asylum process is lengthy. In the first and second quarter of 2016, asylum decisions were reached on less than 20,000 Afghan cases. Figures picked up in the third quarter of 2016, however, with 27,300 decided cases.⁸ Second,

³ https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/eu_afghanistan_joint_way_forward_on_migration_issues.pdf

⁴ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/10/european-governments-return-nearly-10000-afghans-to-risk-of-death-and-torture/>

⁵ <http://www.unhcr.org/afr/news/latest/2015/12/5683d0b56/million-sea-arrivals-reach-europe-2015.html>

⁶ http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/images/c/cc/Five_main_citizenships_of_%28non-EU%29_asylum_applicants%2C_2016_%28number_of_first_time_applicants%2C_rounded_figures%29_YB17.png

⁷ http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/images/c/cc/Five_main_citizenships_of_%28non-EU%29_asylum_applicants%2C_2016_%28number_of_first_time_applicants%2C_rounded_figures%29_YB17.png

⁸ Rutting, Thomas (2017): ‘Afghan Exodus: Afghan asylum seekers in Europe - case study Germany’, Afghanistan Analysts Network, p. 4.

recognition rates for Afghans are dropping. In Denmark, for instance, only 26% of Afghan asylum claims were recognised in 2016, compared to an average of 39% over the previous three years. Linked to falling recognition rates, returns have increased. Between 2015 and 2016, the number of Afghans returned by European countries to Afghanistan nearly tripled: from 3,290 to 9,460.⁹

Who is migrating to Europe and why?

The Afghans interviewed by 4Mi monitors in Germany and Denmark are mainly single men from urban areas (60.5%). They are both Shia (48.3%) and Sunni (47.2%). Ethnically, they are primarily Hazaras (46.0%) and Tajiks (31.0%), with only 16.1% of the sample being Pashtuns. The respondents are mainly asylum seekers with pending applications (64.5%) or registered refugees (30.0%).

Almost half of the 4Mi respondents in Europe have a secondary or high school level education (46.1%) and 14.6% have a university degree. Despite these high education levels, most people did not have income generation options in Afghanistan. 50% of the sample was either unemployed or in low skilled jobs (labourers and farmers) before departure. 20% were students, indicating that they had no source of income. Only 20% of the sample had a professional job in Afghanistan before migrating. The systematic gap between education and skill sets indicates that although a lack of economic opportunity may not be a primary cause of migration, it may be an underlying enabling factor contributing to decisions to migrate.

The primary push factors for migration, according to the sample, was violence and general insecurity (34.9%) or personal and/or family reasons (24.5%). Only 4.8% of respondents mentioned economic factors as their primary reasons for migration. It is interesting to contrast the push factors among 4Mi respondents surveyed in Afghanistan with those surveyed in Europe. In Afghanistan, a higher proportion (systematically at least 30%, over one year of data collection) of respondents are leaving for economic reasons – but these respondents are often leaving, not to Europe, but to neighbouring countries such as Iran and Pakistan.

Poor security conditions in Afghanistan are visible, not only in push factors, but also in pull factors identified by respondents. Freedom from oppression or a threat to life at home (24.4%) and personal freedom (15.6%) are the main factors in choosing a destination country while only 3.9% of people are looking for better chances of getting a job and sending remittances home. Again, this contrasts with 4Mi

data collected in Afghanistan, where pull factors are more closely linked to economics – but again, those identifying economics as a pull factor move primarily to neighbouring countries, rather than to Europe.

One of the factors affecting Afghan movement to Europe is improved transport capacity. 4Mi monitors state that previously, movement patterns were hindered by lack of transport – most movement to Europe took place by foot. More recently, increased availability of improved transport options such as trains and planes has resulted in more Afghans being willing to undertake migration journeys.

Migration as the only option

According to 4Mi monitors, many Afghans who migrated to Europe see migration as their only option; they have no intention to return, and even in case of rejection of their asylum applications, they will try to find other ways to stay in Europe. As most of them are fleeing from conflict or feel that there is a reasonable threat to life in their home country, almost all of them have firm plans to stay in Europe.

In the case that asylum applications are rejected, Afghans prefer alternative options to returning home. According to anecdotal information from the 4Mi monitors, some of these options are: (1) living without documentation, (2) going to other non-EU countries (such as Canada or USA), (3) applying again for asylum and (4) re-migration. Re-migration and new attempts to seek asylum are common; 70% of the respondents mentioned that they would migrate again, despite the fact that they faced many protection risks en route.

According to 4Mi monitors, there is constant communication between refugees/asylum seekers and their familial and friendship networks in Afghanistan. Those whose asylum applications are accepted are considering bringing their families to Europe in the near future. According to the 4Mi data, 61% of the respondents have intentions to bring their family members to Europe in the future, while 39% responded that it depends on the conditions.

Complex Routes to Europe

The migration routes that Afghans use to reach Europe are more complicated than anticipated, as shown in Map 1 and 2. In addition to migration directly out of Afghanistan, there is significant secondary movement from countries of first asylum.

Movements from Afghanistan. Most journeys to Europe are irregular in nature and take place along the Western Balkans route. Some of the routes are entirely irregular, but a significant proportion of respondents moved via both regular and irregular means. These people got a visa legally to Iran or Turkey, and once in Iran or Turkey they took irregular routes, through smugglers, to Europe.

⁹ <https://www.rferl.org/a/amnesty-international-afghan-returnees-accuses-europe/28774087.html>

Respondents generally left Afghanistan with Iran as their first port of call. Once they got to Iran, all 4Mi respondents went straight to West Azarbaijan province to cross the border into Turkey. For some respondents, Turkey offered a break in the journey. A proportion of respondents stayed in Turkey for a period before continuing their journey to Greece via the Aegean Sea. To get to destination countries such as Germany and Denmark from Greece, most of the interviewees crossed several transit countries. Common transit countries were: Macedonia, Serbia, Hungary, and Austria. Other transit countries which were used, though less frequently, were Albania, Bulgaria, Slovenia and Slovakia.

Secondary Movements. Afghans arriving in Europe are often starting their journeys outside Afghanistan. Iran and Pakistan are the most common starting points for secondary movement, which can be expected, as these are the two most significant host countries for Afghans. Notable points about secondary movement from the sample are:

- There are some cases of secondary movement from Turkmenistan and Russia by people who went first to Ukraine by land and from there to Slovakia
- Rejected asylum seekers from Germany consider England and France as potential secondary destinations
- The length of time required to complete the asylum process leads to re-migration within Europe. Some Afghans respondents were in England and France but re-migrated to Germany due to a perception that the asylum process would be faster.

In choosing routes to Europe, migrants have limited options. They are heavily dependent on decisions made by smugglers (40.6%). Factors that are important in choice of routes are: ease of travel (18.2%), security (13.6%) and cost (13.1%). Common means of transportation are walking (18.9%), car (17.7%), bus (16.8%), train (16.7%) and boat (16.0%). Often, many modes of transport are used on one route. From Afghanistan to Iran and from there to Turkey, most journeys are made via land by foot and car; boats are used in crossing the sea from Turkey to Greece; and within Europe, bus, train and car are the main means of transportation. Almost one third of the respondents had major stops en route, mainly for the purpose of looking for smugglers to organize the next stretch of the journey (38.7%)

Protection concerns en route

Afghans face significant protection risks along the migration route. Previous 4Mi reports have documented the risks within Afghanistan; this report improves the understanding of risks after leaving Afghanistan.

On international routes, death, physical assaults and detention are the most prominent protection risks that Afghans face. Most incidents happen at the start of the

journey in Iran, and Turkey. Throughout the data set, it was notable that the further migrants were from Afghanistan, the fewer protection incidents took place.

14 respondents, or about 16% of the sample, had witnessed one or more deaths along the migration route. In total, 26 deaths were witnessed. Half of the deaths reported were at border points, specifically the borders between Afghanistan and Iran and the border between Iran and Turkey. Victims were mostly male adults (64.7%) and male children/teenagers. (20.6%). They died from shooting or stabbing (27.2%), starvation (21.2%), and sickness or lack of access to medicine (12.1%). In 60% of the incidents, security forces/police/military were responsible for the death.

Physical assaults by security forces/police/military (32.9%), smugglers (23.1%) and others is common: 42 incidents were reported by 37 respondents (42% of the sample). These assaults were mostly in the form of mild physical abuse (63%). Other prevalent forms of assault were denial of food or water (8.2%) and confinement (7.1%). Physical assault was common across the routes, in neighbouring countries as well as, Greece, Turkey and Bulgaria.

Incidence of sexual assault was also high. 29 incidents were reported by 18 respondents; 20 cases of indecent assault or touching, 5 cases of rape, 2 cases of other natures and 2 cases unspecified. Sexual assault took place not only in neighbouring countries, but also in Bulgaria and Turkey. Smugglers (35.1%) and security forces/police/military (32.5%) are the main perpetrators of assault.

Detention is another serious issue with 36 recorded incidents, prevalent in Iran (10 cases), Turkey (5 cases), and Bulgaria (5 cases). This is not so surprising as most Afghans are entering and exiting these three countries irregularly and there is a high chance of getting caught by police and border guards. The main reason given for detainment is also entering or exiting the country illegally (72%). The average number of days of detention is 12.

Other protection risks include kidnapping or being held against ones will (14 incidents), robbery (33 incidents) and bribery (30 incidents). In cases of kidnapping, on average, 350 USD ransom was paid for the release of the kidnapped migrant by family members (33.3%), the migrant itself (22.3%), or others. In robberies, money and personal belongings (75%) were the main stolen items. Bribery incidents were mostly reported in Pakistan (6 cases) and Afghanistan (4 cases) as well as Iran (15 cases), almost all in the form of money.

Despite all these different risks en route, as mentioned earlier, many Afghans not only have migrated once, but would choose to migrate again.

Do you want more information about 4Mi?

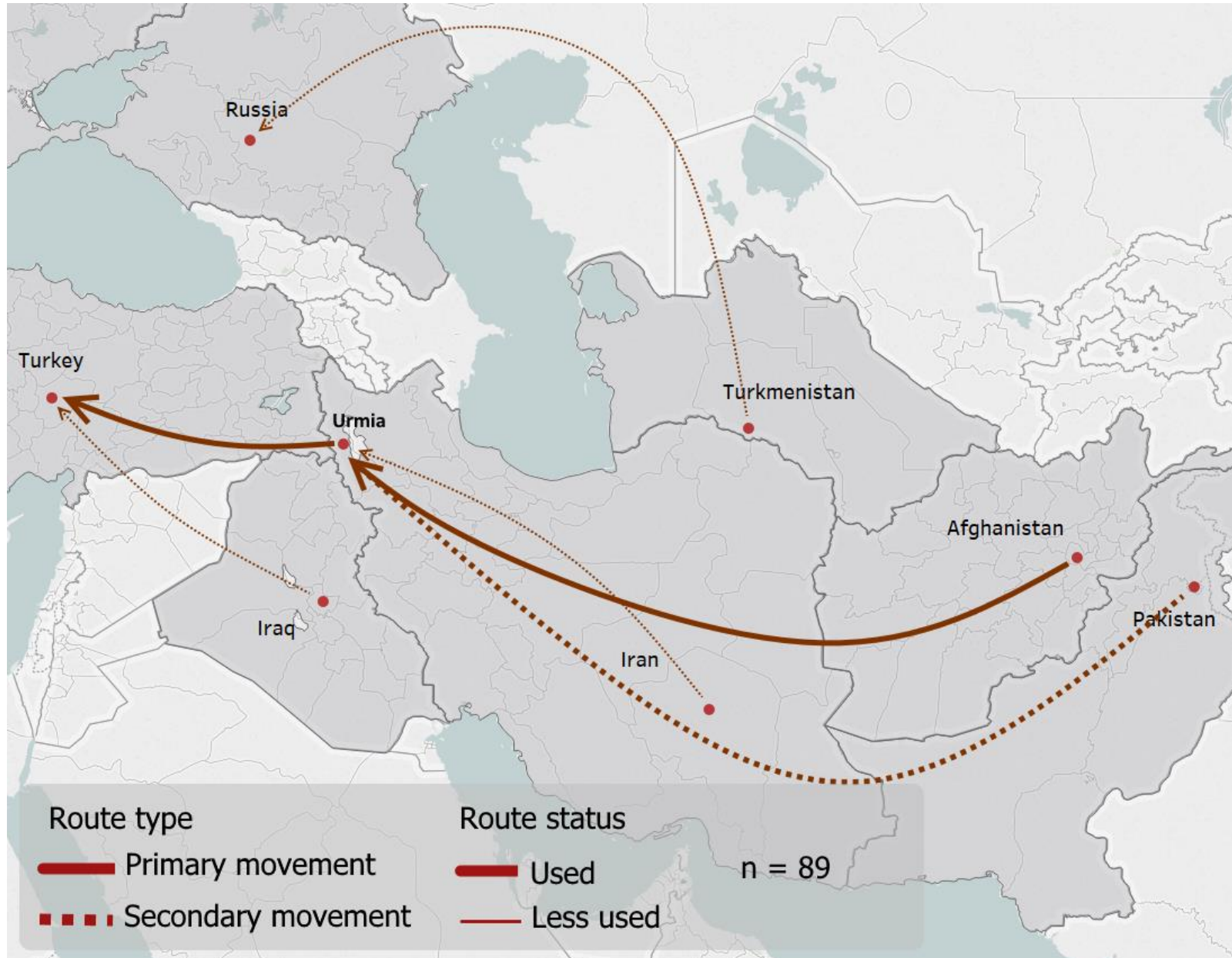
The Mixed Migration Monitoring Initiative (4Mi) in Central Asia and South West Asia (CASWA) region aims at gathering data on Afghans on the move. The initiative is part of DRC's global 4Mi data collection project. For more information about this initiative please visit:

<http://4mi.regionalmms.org/4mi.html>.

As part of 4Mi, DRC CASWA publishes monthly series of trend analyses about movement within Afghanistan and towards the East and the West. Analysis is based on interviews collected by 4Mi monitors with the purpose to increase knowledge about drivers of movement and protection risks faced by Afghans.

The 4Mi analysis is based on the accumulated, ongoing data collection by 4Mi field monitors through direct interviews with migrants/refugees on the move. Sample sizes are clearly indicated and represent a limited section of those on the move. All findings derive from the surveyed sample of migrants/refugees and should not be used to make any inferences about the total population of any mixed migration flow.

Map 1: Movement to Europe



Map 2: Movement to Europe

