Mixed
Migration
Centre

Navigating Mixed Messages

Can diaspora-led communications reduce Afghans' irregular migration risks?

SUPPORTED BY:

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands

Executive
Summary

The volume and vulnerability of Afghans contemplating or attempting to reach Europe irregularly remains significant, even as Europe's sense of crisis fades and prospects for a negotiated end to Afghanistan's conflict improve.[1] The risks facing Afghans on overland journeys through Iran, Turkey and beyond are often exacerbated by incomplete, inaccurate, inaccessible or irrelevant information.

The Danish Refugee Council's Afghan Diaspora Information Programme (ADIP) (2019-2022) seeks to respond to the continued urgency of these needs. ADIP supports the Afghan diaspora in Denmark, the Netherlands and Germany to leverage its networks and knowledge to help would-be irregular migrants make safer decisions around migration. MMC supports ADIP by collecting evidence to support the design of interventions.

The study sought to deepen understanding of unsafe, irregular migration and explore the potential for responses that strengthen protection. It draws on qualitative interviews with 42 Afghans living in Herat, Nimroz and Kabul who were either actively planning to migrate irregularly or were in close contact with someone who was, as well as 13 key informant interviews with experts in migration, protection and communications programming.

Analysis focused on the most influential sources of information about the journey and living conditions in destination countries, how potential migrants (PMs)[2] interpret and verify that information, and how this shapes beliefs and attitudes around migration. The study looks at this from individual and community perspectives, leading to recommendations on how best to collaborate with the diaspora on social and behavioural change-based interventions.

[1] Direct peace talks between the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the Taliban began on 12 September, 2020.
[2] This term refers to Afghans contemplating irregular migration who may, subsequently, enter the category "refugees and migrants".

Key findings

Shaping the decision to migrate

In describing their own reasons for migrating, interviewed PMs emphasised their desire to leave Afghanistan rather than offering a specific vision of what life they would like in Europe. This suggests that the desire to leave Afghanistan is stronger than the aspiration to migrate anywhere in particular.

Interviewees usually explained that the desire to leave was driven by economic factors, but grievances differed in nature and severity. Two broad profiles emerged:

1. Afghans with low incomes, owing to unemployment or precarious livelihoods, who saw viable opportunities only outside of Afghanistan. They claimed either that no work was available in Afghanistan or that they did not have the networks to access jobs guarded by nepotism.
2. Afghans with more reliable incomes, through employment or business, but still not confident of maintaining a secure financial future amid the country's volatility.

"The people of Afghanistan are forced to migrate, and they migrate for a loaf of bread."

– a member of the community (25) in Herat.

Security concerns were raised by interviewees just as often and were framed as contributing factors to more urgent economic concerns. The ability to find and hold down a job, or to build a business, was hampered by the risks of robbery, kidnapping, appropriation of property. Women interviewees went further, describing how insecurity and patriarchal norms constrained their right to move and operate freely, in turn preventing them – and their daughters – from accessing work and education.

In this sense, "conflict" is an important but indirect driver, breeding an environment of uncertainty and foreboding about Afghanistan's future that led interviewees to feel that they had no choice but to plan their departure. Fears for personal safety were also present, more often expressed among interviewees in Nimroz and Herat, who also tended to bring up the threat of the Taliban more.

Expectations and protection en route

Interviewees did not have sufficient knowledge to prepare for and mitigate the risks they were likely to encounter en route. While many were broadly aware that they risked injury or death, most could not pinpoint the source or nature of the risk.

"If I do not emigrate, my children will go to school every day in fear."
– a woman (35) planning to migrate irregularly from Herat.

Knowledge of a friend or relative who had tried and failed to migrate did not deter migration plans, but in rare cases it did lead to more careful preparation.

PMs said they would be reliant on family, smugglers or fellow migrants to keep them safe. A couple mentioned NGOs and border police too. While smugglers were not expected to be altruistic, some interviewees implied that the ability to pay for a smuggler with a good reputation increased the chances of safe passage.

PMs knew little of life in Europe. Some expected European governments to provide substantial financial support or to find jobs with unrealistically few hours and better pay. Others, mainly women, anticipated a less restrictive lifestyle and respectful treatment. A minority thought integration into European society would challenge their Muslim faith, a concern that appears to deter others in the community from leaving in the first place.

Regular Pathways

Regular pathways are unlikely to be a realistic option for most Afghans. Practical issues of cost and access make it difficult for many Afghans to obtain essential documents such as Tazkira[3] and passports. Access to visa consular sections, many of which remain closed, present an additional barrier.[4]

While several PMs had applied for study visas, the U.S. Diversity Visa program ('Green Card lottery') and U.S. Special Immigration visas, most had made no inquiry. Interviewees were more confident that the irregular migration process would yield results – despite the noted risks – than regular pathways. This may be because all interviewees knew migrants who had reached Europe irregularly but knew none who had successfully migrated regularly. PMs therefore viewed irregular migration, which is often more expensive in dollar terms overall, as the wiser investment.

Influencers

The Afghan diaspora play a crucial role at various stages of the irregular migration process. Nearly every PM interviewed described inspiration, encouragement, advice or practical support they had received from abroad (and 64 percent of respondents to the 4Mi Afghan Returnee Surveys said the same).

Diaspora members contributed to the aspiration to migrate and supported the planning process. Diaspora, intentionally or otherwise, provide a window into what life could be like in Europe, feeding a long-brewing desire among PMs to emulate their lifestyles. Some actively encouraged PMs to migrate too. PMs who had decided to migrate often approached friends or family in Europe for information about the journey or referrals to smugglers.

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[3] Afghan identity document – proof of residency and citizenship.

[4] For most destination countries, Afghans first need to travel to India or Pakistan to apply for a visa.

This study's findings contrast somewhat with DRC's 2019 ADIP study,[5] which showed diaspora to be discouraging of migration. It may be that relatives or friends in Europe feel they must oppose irregular migration in public, but in private act out of duty to support relatives and friends. Equally, it may be that PMs are more likely to internalise encouraging messages and dismiss those perceived to be blocking their attempts to better themselves.

Smugglers provided practical information at a later stage in PMs' planning, attempting to win the business of those who had decided to migrate. PMs remained wary of smugglers and sought to verify smugglers' claims with friends and family in Afghanistan and overseas.

Interviews suggested that parents and community figures, such as *Mullahs,[6]* were forewarning of the dangers of irregular migration. Despite publicly condemning irregular migration, many communities appeared to encourage or inadvertently pressurise PMs to go. In Nimroz and Herat, a culture of migration had developed in where "everyone" (according to community members) seemed to know someone abroad and *jirgas[7]* sometimes arbitrated contracts between smugglers and irregular migrants. In Kabul, PMs noted that legitimate travel agents connected customers to people smugglers.

Online and mass media influence
PMs relied primarily on Facebook and WhatsApp for private, one-on-one conversations with friends and family in Afghanistan and abroad. PMs almost never referred to publicly-available information, for example on Facebook pages or groups, as relevant to their planning or decision-making. TV was next most important. Tolo TV, a Dari-language commercial station launched in 2004 with American backing, was particularly popular.[8] Afghans who use the internet – or watch TV – appear more willing to migrate.[9] A

What information do potential migrants want?
Interviewees were likely to dismiss information perceived to counter their ambitions. Some interviewees dismissed government-run information campaigns as anti-migration propaganda, while diaspora members taking an anti-migration stance were seen as similarly untrustworthy.

[5] Danish Refugee Council (2019) Confronted with Despair and Disillusionment: A Qualitative Research into the Afghan Diaspora´s Perceptions about Information-Sharing with Migrants

[6] Religious leaders in the Islamic faith.

[7] Tribal councils responsible for local governance issues.

[8] One of Afghanistan's most popular commercial television channels in the Dari language.

[9] The Asia Foundation (2019) *Afghanistan in 2019: A Survey of the Afghan People*.

Interviewees nonetheless thought that access to better, more reliable information was really important to help migrants make preparations that would keep them safer in transit and destination countries. Desires were for information about:

- Life at destination, longer term challenges linked to integration, risk of deportation and discrimination.
- Where to migrate, processes to follow, and security risks on the journey.
- Regular migration channels including the logistics of accessing the necessary documentation (passports and visas).

Recommendations

Better information and decision-making support can equip Afghans contemplating an irregular journey with the information they need to mitigate risks and access protection services. Alternatively, they can provide Afghans with the information, tools and confidence to pursue safer, regular migration options.

Afghans in Europe have existing relationships and communications channels through which they have already established trust. They are already instrumental in shaping aspirations to migrate and in the practical stages of planning. However, support is needed to ensure that the content of messaging is relevant and its delivery credible.

Content of messages

Positive messaging should be used to broaden the appeal of the campaign. Positive messages are those that might help potential migrants to proactively plan to reduce the risk of harm en route or build alternate aspirations. Negative messaging centred on migrants' fears does little to counter widespread feelings of hopelessness and may therefore undermine self-efficacy. PMs sensed that explicit anti-migration messaging was government 'propaganda' and were quick to dismiss community members and diaspora members who they perceived to be in this camp.

Risk-oriented messaging can be effective but should be specific and focus on solutions. Most interviewees claimed to know the risks but did not know their specific nature, where they may encounter them, or how to protect themselves. Women lack information on risks relevant to sexual and gender-based violence. There is scope for clearly communicating risks along with mitigation measures, including: timing departures for safer summer months, being more critical of smugglers, awareness of alternative routes, and who to trust to provide support en route.

Campaigns should help potential migrants to accurately assess life in destination countries. While many migrants do regret the journey because

"I believe in television more than Facebook. *(To verify information)* I ask my friends, those who are aware of these issues."

– a man in Kabul (27) planning to migrate irregularly.

"We get more information about illegal migration from media and friends. Specifically, those friends, neighbours, and relatives who have already migrated to Iran and other countries. They share all the relevant information about illegal migration with us."

- a man in Herat (33), planning to migrate irregularly.

of integration challenges in Europe, few potential migrants in this study had thoroughly considered life in destination countries. Better understanding of life in destination countries could help potential migrants to prepare practically by making plans for life after arrival; prepare psychologically by aligning expectations with reality; decide that life at destination is unlikely to be worth the risks and financial cost of an irregular overland journey.

Communications channels

Members of the diaspora are likely to be effective in delivering messages where they:

- **Possess or can establish strong relationships with PMs.** Diaspora members who already have familial or kinship ties will likely already have private channels of communication open with members of origin communities, which can be expanded to include PMs if they do not already. Others can build on linguistic and ethnic ties to establish relationships in origin communities. Share Afghan citizenship is unlikely to be enough.
- **Are perceived by PMs to be "successful".** PMs' motivations often came from the desire to emulate successful peers. Campaigns might consider role models who have perceptibly completed a journey safely and are happy at destination – or have willingly returned to Afghanistan.

For a minority of PMs, support or signposting to regular migration pathways may be viable. Several interviewees had attempted to secure visas via regular channels but abandoned efforts. None had received formal support. Although Afghans are among the lowest recipients of visas for international mobility opportunities related to work, thousands are issued each year for Afghans to study abroad in India, Pakistan, Japan, the U.S., Europe and others. There has been little formal exploration of the potential to increase Afghan student's ability to vie effectively with other international students for these opportunities.

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"The environment would be different if we migrated. My husband and I can work [in Europe]. There would be security and we would not be afraid. I cannot work easily here."

A potential migrant in Herat, 27

Acronyms

ADIP – Afghan Diaspora Information Project
CI – Community influencer
COVID-19 – Coronavirus disease
DRC – Danish Refugee Council
IC – Information campaign
ILO – International Labour Organization
IOM – International Organization for Migration
KI – Key informant
KII – Key informant interview
MMC – Mixed Migration Centre
NGO – Non-governmental organisation
PM – Potential migrant
RMMS – Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat
SBCC – Social and behaviour change communications
SGBV – Sexual and gender-based violence
UNHCR – United Nations High Commission for Refugees

Definitions

Afghanistan Diaspora Information Project: The Afghan Diaspora Information Project (ADIP) supports members of the Afghan diaspora in Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands to engage with migrants in a way that reduces protection risks.

Mixed migration: Mixed migration refers to cross-border movements of people including refugees fleeing persecution and conflict, victims of trafficking and people seeking better lives and opportunities. Motivated to move by a multiplicity of factors, people in mixed flows have different legal statuses as well as a variety of vulnerabilities. Although entitled to protection under international human rights law, they are exposed to multiple rights violations along their journey. Those in mixed migration flows travel along similar routes, using similar means of travel - often travelling irregularly and wholly or partially assisted by migrant smugglers.[10]

Social and behaviour change communications: Social and behaviour change communications (SBCC) is a theory and evidence-driven framework that looks at behaviour from a socio-ecological lens and studies the interplay between behavioural determinants at the individual, community, societal and global levels. Using sound research, SBCC employs strategic communication techniques to promote positive or protective behaviour.

Potential irregular migrant: an individual aged 18 years or older and living or temporarily staying in Kabul, Herat or Nimroz, who expects to depart Afghanistan and eventually arrive in Europe, without a visa or other explicit permission to enter, within 12 months from the date we meet them.

Community influencer: any member of the potential migrant's networks who may shape beliefs or attitudes around migration, or indirectly influence the aspirations to migrate through depictions of the destination, the journey, or continued life in Afghanistan.

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[10] To know more, visit: http://www.mixedmigration.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/terminology_MMC-en-fr.pdf

Background

Information protects

Social and behaviour change communication (SBCC) methods have helped to prevent harm and improve developmental outcomes among beneficiaries in industrialised and less developed countries globally. By utilising an evidence-based and theory-driven approach to designing strategic communication tools, the methods employed by SBCC experts have helped beneficiaries to act in a way that improves their own outcomes in fields as diverse as health, education, domestic violence and political participation. Increasingly, humanitarian and development actors are seeking to use evidence-based communication techniques to help vulnerable groups avoid or mitigate the dangers of unsafe migration. The most impactful element of well-designed SBCC messaging is that they offer people the opportunity to make an informed choice.

The 2015 peak in migrant arrivals to Europe prompted policy and funding decisions that led to an increased interest in communications-based approaches to protection and migration management. With the increase in funding and interest, there was a corresponding increase in knowledge about what works and the sophistication of programming. European-funded communications projects proliferated in the Horn of Africa, West Africa, the Western Balkans and Afghanistan, with delivery via a wide range of methods from written handouts and billboards, storybooks and comics, radio shows, community theatre, social media content, television advertisements and talk shows, in-person counselling and community discussion groups.

However, the field of migration communications is still in its infancy and projects using simplistic, unidirectional, and static information provision remain common. Projects using more elaborate, interactive communication methods often have poorly defined objectives or base design decisions on assumptions about the target audience rather than research, evidence and past learning.

In this context, the Mixed Migration Centre (MMC) commissioned Seefar to conduct formative research to support the design of a Danish Refugee Council (DRC) and diaspora-led SBCC programme under the Afghan Diaspora Information Project (ADIP). ADIP supports members of the Afghan diaspora in Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands "to engage with migrants in a way that reduces protection risks."

This report uses the study's findings to explore:

- The factors at the individual and community level in Nimroz, Herat and Kabul that influence migration behaviours;
- The beliefs that inform perceived risk, social norms, attitudes and self-efficacy that ultimately drive migration, reflecting SBCC methodology;
- The target audiences, specifically the primary audience of potential migrants (PMs) and the secondary audience of key influencers.

Research approach

Methods

This research integrates framework analysis of qualitative in-depth interviews, key informant interviews, 4Mi surveys with Afghan returnees, and desk research.

The research gathered qualitative insights from Afghans in Herat, Kabul and Nimroz who were actively planning to leave the country irregularly, as well as community members identified as influential in the decision to migrate. The Interview Profiles section below expands on this.

Social and Behaviour Change Communications (SBCC) uses theory and evidence to understand the drivers of behaviour at the individual, community, societal and global levels by studying the beliefs, attitudes, norms and other factors underlying behaviours that put the target audience at risk. Similarly, migration decision-making theory requires us to go beyond superficial push and pull factors to the psychological processes that inform migration aspiration and decision-making, the beliefs and attitudes held at community level that encourage or enable these behaviours, and the environmental factors that restrict the target audience's choices. The research design sought to integrate this framework in the development of the qualitative interview tools.

Interviews with PMs and community influencers (CIs) were complemented by expert interviews with individuals familiar with migration in the Afghan context and/or the use of communications-based programming to counter migration risks. Analysts triangulated qualitative data with the results from an extensive desk review and secondary analysis of data collected in two stages by MMC's 4Mi media monitors. Analysts also integrated insights from a parallel study investigating the views of the Afghan diaspora in Europe on the same subject – the DRC 2019 ADIP study.[11] The framework analysis of the qualitative data was done through the creation of a grid matrix of points under

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[11] Danish Refugee Council (2019) Confronted with Despair and Disillusionment: A Qualitative Research into the Afghan Diaspora´s Perceptions about Information-Sharing with Migrants

each major research question which was subsequently used to find similarities or dissimilarities of response.[12]

Limitations

The research took place in the context of growing concerns in Afghanistan about the spread of the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19). MMC assessed the risks and decided that all fieldwork should take place remotely. The field team therefore conducted all interviews by telephone. Interviews held remotely tend to see a reduction in data quality due to a loss of meaning conveyed through facial cues and body language. In addition, respondents fatigue more quickly and may be less willing to share sensitive information. To mitigate these issues, Seefar conducted enhanced remote training for its field team and adopted a flexible approach to interviews, with some interviews conducted over two or more shorter sessions. Issues of translation may have also influenced the manner in which CIs, in particular, responded to questions about knowledge of irregular migration. There is no Dari or Pashto equivalent for "irregular" migration in interviews, so a term which translates back into English as "illegal" migration was used. Social desirability bias may have encouraged CIs to insist that they were discouraging of irregular migration and have no information sources on it.

Interviewee profiles

The field team completed 42 semi-structured interviews with PMs and CIs, of which 18 were female and 24 were male (Table 1).

Table 1. Overview of sample by location and gender

	Male	**Female**	**Total**
Overall			
Potential migrants	14	7	21
Community influencers	10	11	21
TOTAL	**24**	**18**	**42**
Kabul			
Potential migrants	6	2	8
Community influencers	3	4	7
Herat			
Potential migrants	4	2	6
Community influencers	3	4	7
Nimroz			
Potential migrants	4	3	7
Community influencers	4	3	7

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[12]A more detailed breakdown in available in Annex 1.

Potential migrants

The study defined PMs as adult Afghans intending to migrate irregularly to Europe within 12 months of the interview. The field team accordingly excluded from the research individuals who were under the age of 18, did not intend to migrate within a year or did not intend to migrate to Europe. There were two exceptions of PMs who originally indicated to the field team that they wanted to migrate to Europe but during the interview revealed they were more likely to attempt to go to Canada.

The team interviewed a total of 21 PMs (eight in Kabul, six in Herat, and seven in Nimroz), of which 14 were male and seven were female. Most of the PMs interviewed were aged 20-35 but some were in their 40s.[13]

Most interviewees were employed or students (only six, overall, from Herat and Nimroz were unemployed while two were housewives). Professions among PMs were diverse and included teacher, military doctor, revenue officer, shopkeeper, businessman, housewife and tailor – with the rest being either unemployed or students.

Community influencers

The study defined CIs as any member of the PMs' networks that might shape beliefs or attitudes around migration or otherwise influence PMs' aspirations and plans, for example by helping to shape knowledge and attitudes around the destination, the journey, or continued life in Afghanistan. CIs live in Afghanistan or are part of the diaspora. CIs in this study were living alongside PMs in Kabul, Herat or Nimroz, given that DRC's 2019 ADIP study already collected data from Afghanistan's Europe-based diaspora.[14]

The field team selected CIs on the basis of desk review findings, existing knowledge and emerging results from the PM interviews. A total of 21 CIs (seven in Herat, seven in Nimroz, seven in Kabul) were interviewed, of which 10 were male and 11 were female. CIs hailed from multiple age categories ranging from the 20s to the 50s. Although two CIs were unemployed (one being a housewife), overall, the CI profiles included diverse but influential professions such as religious leader, university professor, teacher, lawyer, manager, physician, journalist, judge and social activist.

Key informants

Thirteen key informants (KIs) were interviewed for this study from diverse backgrounds in research, international organisations, Afghanistan civil

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[13] See Annex 2 for a full list of potential migrant profiles.

[14] Danish Refugee Council (2019) Confronted with Despair and Disillusionment: A Qualitative Research into the Afghan Diaspora´s Perceptions about Information-Sharing with Migrants

society and leadership. Individuals were selected and interviewed on the basis of their past or ongoing experience with migration, information campaigns, and SBCC programming in Afghanistan. KIs were asked about the role of information in migration decision-making for Afghan PMs, the flow of information between the diaspora and locals, their experiences with SBCC programming, and how they felt it could be more effective.
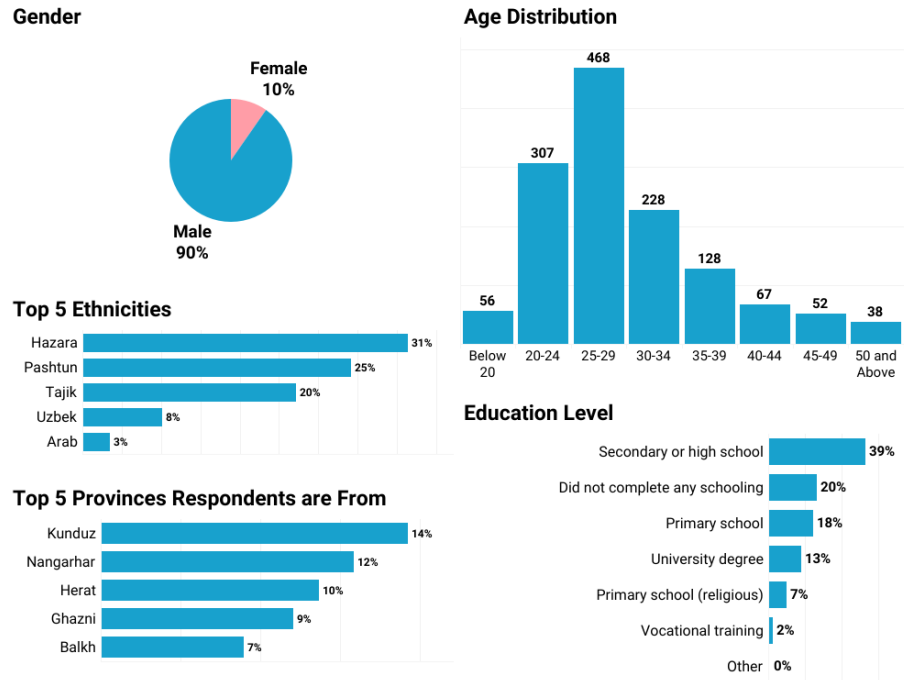
4Mi Afghan Returnee Surveys

The two 4Mi Afghan Returnee Surveys (referred to as such throughout the report) analysed were conducted across two time periods – between January to March 2020, and between April to June 2020. MMC adapted the latter survey for telephone interviewing and included a couple of additional questions on the effects of and responses to COVID-19. A total of 1,344 respondents (all of whom had returned to Afghanistan in the 12 months prior), selected via mix of purposive and snowball sampling, were surveyed (912 in survey one and 432 in survey two). Although the sample provides detailed insight into important questions around migration, it is also non-representative in nature. In Afghanistan, MMC's 4Mi initiative collects standardised, quantitative data through a network of male and female monitors located at key points of transit. A 4Mi survey with Afghan migrants in Greece was also used in this study.

The 4Mi Afghan Returnee Surveys were broadly divided into three segments and collected information on Afghans who had returned to the country in the previous 12 months. The first segment collected profiling and locational data related to where the interview was conducted and details of the respondent such as age, gender, province, ethnicity, religion, and education level. The second segment collected detailed data on migration history – the process of information collection and decision-making prior to migrating, the influences on the respondent, the knowledge of risks, the experience of the journey, the information they felt they should have had, the dangers/risks they encountered, and the perpetrators of such dangers. The third segment was focused on return – the process leading up to the return journey, the experience of the journey itself, the reintegration issues faced, intentions of remigration, and how the respondent's past experiences will inform this new attempt. The April-June dataset also featured questions on the impact of COVID 19 – including access to information and healthcare and whether COVID-19 had influenced their decision to return and how.

It is important to note that the respondents of the 4Mi Afghan Returnee Surveys were returnees and therefore, questions on migration drivers in particular cannot be seen as conclusive since no corresponding population of Afghan non-migrants were interviewed to check for existence of similar drivers. However, given their returnee status, their views on the risks encountered, the help received, and the experience of return are particularly relevant.

Figure 1: Profile of respondents in the 4Mi Afghan Returnee Surveys

Gender

Female
10%

Male
90%

Age Distribution

Below 20	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	50 and Above
56	307	468	228	128	67	52	38

Top 5 Ethnicities

Hazara	31%
Pashtun	25%
Tajik	20%
Uzbek	8%
Arab	3%

Education Level

Secondary or high school	39%
Did not complete any schooling	20%
Primary school	18%
University degree	13%
Primary school (religious)	7%
Vocational training	2%
Other	0%

Top 5 Provinces Respondents are From

Kunduz	14%
Nangarhar	12%
Herat	10%
Ghazni	9%
Balkh	7%

Literature

This section describes the approach to the analysis and gives a broad overview of the evidence base and gaps. Findings from the literature and 4Mi data are otherwise discussed alongside findings from the primary data throughout the report. The study triangulates primary data findings with insights from an extensive review of the migration and communications literature and 4Mi data collected in the first half of 2020.

The desk-based review of the migration literature consulted a total of 66 sources including academic papers, reports, and newspaper articles. Of these, analysts categorised 46 sources as "high quality" for their reliance on primary data collected in the last five years or verifiable secondary sources. The literature search was conducted in line with the selected research areas – migration decision making, audience and influencers, and role of information including information campaigns.

Gap analysis

There is a substantial body of literature supporting insight into migration decision making in Afghanistan. Existing evidence can be described as broad in its coverage but usually superficial, offering little more than suggestions of how Afghan communities form beliefs around irregular migration and how these translate into decisions that see community members depart.

Research frames the decision to migrate as a combination of a vaguely defined faith that Europe can offer an improved quality of life and disillusionment with the current situation and prospects in Afghanistan. Most studies see the diaspora as either an inadvertent encourager of migration or, less often, an ally in promoting safer migration behaviours.[15] In both cases, insight into precisely how PMs establish connections with members of the diaspora, and the way in which information is shared, is limited.

Research repeatedly shows that levels of awareness that irregular migration poses serious protection risks is already high within Afghan communities prone to unsafe migration. Afghans continue to depart for Europe despite this knowledge, acknowledging that they rely on chance but that the gamble is worth it.

Many studies make the valid point that most Afghans continue to live in insecure communities, where jobs are often scarce, crime high and corruption rife.[16] Fewer look at the less widely cited but highly relevant secondary drivers, such as lack of freedom and rights, with the 4Mi data and this report suggesting that these drivers are particularly relevant to understanding migration ambitions among Afghan women.

The same studies tend not to weigh the much-cited reasons for departing Afghanistan against the fact that some Afghans migrate and others do not; some Afghans harbour the aspiration but never act on it; others quickly move from plan to departure while others more carefully consider the risks. All are relevant to understanding how vulnerable Afghans might be supported to make decisions that keep them safer during migration or support them in improving their lives within Afghanistan.

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[15] Nimkar, R. & Frouws, B. (2018) *Split Loyalties: Mixed Migration and the Diaspora Connection* RMMS Discussion Paper; REACH Initiative & Mixed Migration Platform (2017) *Migration from Afghanistan to Europe (2014-17): Drivers, Return, and Re-Integration'.*; REACH Initiative (2019) *Outspoken but Unheard: How Diasporas in Europe Shape Migration along the Central Mediterranean Sea Route*;

[16] Seefar (2016) *Reluctant Journeys: Why Afghans Migrate Irregularly to Europe*; Seefar. (2018). *Pushed Towards Migration: Understanding How Irregular Migration Dynamics and Attitudes Are Evolving in Afghanistan*;.Seefar (2019) *Sustained Interest, Delayed Migration: Emerging Irregular Migration Dynamics in Afghanistan.*;Seefar (2019) *How the Afghan Peace Process and Emotional Well-Being Impact Migration Decision-Making*.

By the same token, existing evidence is restricted in its usefulness for effective communications-based interventions[17] because it does not break down migration attitudes, beliefs and behaviour within the Afghan population.[18] Gender-based analyses are usually superficial and comparison of ethnic or geographic communities generally are not available. With some notable exceptions that are explored in this report, most studies treat Afghan PMs as well as the diaspora as a homogeneous group.

The literature offers good insight into media consumption patterns across Afghanistan, how these differ across the country and among groups, and the varying degrees of trust or scepticism with which they are viewed.[19] It is less revealing of how migration-related messaging, created in various formats and delivered via various channels, contributes to attitudes and beliefs around migration and how Afghan communities turn information received – via whatever channel – into conventional (local) wisdom about migration. In particular, there is limited insight into how social media sources compete for influence with traditional sources, and how misinformation may spread.

To the extent possible, the report findings use information gathered via interviews to address the gaps described above.

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[17] Tjaden, J., Morgenstern, S. & Laczko, F. (2018) *Evaluating the Impact of Information Campaigns in the Field of Migration: A Systematic Review of the Evidence, and Practical Guidance* IOM Global Migration Data Analysis Centre: Central Mediterranean Route Thematic Report Series, Issue 1.

[18] Seefar (2020) *Study on Best Practices in Irregular Migration Awareness Campaigns: Interim Report Phase I* European Commission.

[19] The Asia Foundation (2019) *Afghanistan in 2019: A Survey of the Afghan People*.

Irregular migration from Afghanistan to Europe

Box 1: Who is migrating from Afghanistan?

The question of who is migrating yielded varied responses in the qualitative fieldwork. While some KIs and CIs felt that the more educated, middle class, and urban dwelling population tend to have migration aspirations, others felt the opposite to be true – that poorer, less literate, and rural dwellers tend to migrate more.

The 4Mi Afghan Returnee Surveys, although non-representative, yielded the following profile – returnees were predominantly male and in their 20s. Hazara, Pashtun, and Tajik were the most common ethnicities while Kunduz, Nangarhar, and Herat were the most common provinces of origin. A majority were also educated, having completed secondary school, high school or university (Figure 1). In the January-March survey, a majority said that they had been either fully (36 percent) or partially (38 percent) financially responsible for their household at the time of migrating.

The 2019 Survey of the Afghan People found that the most willing to migrate (regularly or otherwise) were young and single men who, in other sections of the survey, had indicated that they were pessimistic about the future of the country, fearful of personal safety, and supportive of women's rights. The same survey found that Afghan women in urban areas were more likely than Afghan men to want to migrate. A woman CI in this study pointed out that it is the more literate living in conservative areas, who perhaps better know the rights they lack, and see the most value in migration.

Afghans continue to arrive irregularly in Europe in substantial numbers.
Afghan nationals make up the highest proportion of sea arrivals to Greece
(40 percent between January and July 2020), far ahead of Syrian nationals
(25 percent). The rate of arrivals appears slower than in previous years, with
11,000 arrivals overall in the first half of 2020 compared to 75,000 in the
whole of 2019. Approximately four in ten 2020 arrivals by sea were Afghan
nationals.[20]

European Union[21] asylum applications[22] recorded by Eurostat[23] show a
similar picture, with applications up from 2019 but well below the peaks in
2015 and 2016. First time asylum applications by Afghan nationals increased
33 percent from 2018 to 54,675 in 2019 compared to a peak of 182,875 in
2016. In 2018 and 2019,[24] Greece took over from Germany as the common
place for Afghan asylum seekers to lodge applications.

**There is less knowledge of the actual numbers departing Afghanistan
and travelling on specific routes.** As is the case on irregular routes from
West Africa and the Horn of Africa, Afghans' journeys are often fragmented.
Many Afghans spend months or years working in Iran or Turkey before
moving onwards towards Europe, some doing so as part of a conscious
strategy and others simply responding to necessity – Iran's economic crisis
and Turkey's efforts to remove irregular migrants – might serve as examples
of these. In addition, many choose to remain in so-called transit countries; a
2018 IOM flow monitoring survey suggested, in fact, that a greater proportion
of Afghans arriving in Turkey intended to remain there than intended to move
onwards to Europe.[25]

**Cross-border flows between Afghanistan and its neighbouring
countries of Iran and Pakistan continue to be significant.** Media reports
and 4Mi data suggest that large scale returns, as a result of the economic
and public health situation in Iran after the outbreak of COVID-19 crisis, may
be followed by remigration.[26] The pressure to return and accompanying

[20] UNCHR. (July 26, 2020) "Situation Mediterranean Situation,"
https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean/location/5179.

[21] These statistics include the United Kingdom.

[22] Irregular migrants may not submit asylum applications, or may do so months or years after arriving. Some
applicants may submit "first time" applications in two different countries, though this is less likely since the
introduction of the European Asylum Dactyloscopy Database (Eurodac) in 2003 and subsequent
improvements. See European Commission. "EURODAC (European Asylum Dactyloscopy Database)."
Text. Knowledge for policy - European Commission, February 14, 2020.
https://ec.europa.eu/knowledge4policy/dataset/ds00008_en.

[23] Eurostat. "Asylum and First Time Asylum Applicants by Citizenship, Age and Sex Annual Aggregated Data
(Rounded) (Migr_asyappctza)," June 9, 2020. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database.

[24] Eurostat distinguishes between new, 'first time' applications and repeat applications.

[25] Mixed Migration Centre. (2020) Destination Unknown: Afghans on the Move in Turkey

[26] George, S. (May 2020) *Afghanistan and Iran investigate deaths of 16 Afghan migrants near border* The
Washington Post; Sediqi, A & Karimi, S. *Afghan Lawmakers say 45 migrants drowned after Iranian guards
forced them into river* Reuters; Mixed Migration Centre (May 2020) *Understanding the impact of COVID 19
on Afghan returnees.*; Mixed Migration Centre (July 2020) *Knowledge of COVID 19, information sources
and reported needs among Afghan returnees*

deportations is a significant reality for Afghans attempting to migrate to Europe, Turkey and Iran. At the same time, after return, options for support and reintegration are limited. This, coupled with the fact that the main drivers of migration typically remain unaddressed and may be exacerbated by COVID-19, lead to many returnees considering migration once again. The 4Mi Afghan Returnee Surveys used for this report found that 88 percent had not received assistance after returning. About 55 percent reported cash as a priority need at the time of the survey while 18 percent reported shelter, 14 percent reported food, and 14 percent reported assistance to return (indicating that they may be internally displaced). However, at the time of the survey, 34 percent were sure of remigration while 24 percent were sure they would not remigrate. The remaining 41 percent were undecided.

4Mi data found that the economic fallout of COVID-19 in Iran seemed to be behind many respondents' decisions to return home. 82 percent reported returning from Iran while 71 percent had lost jobs. Common reasons for return in April-June included the COVID-19 situation, reunion with family, and lack of livelihood. The impact of the disease was varied – 71 percent reported job loss, 30 percent reported a fear of inadequate health facilities, 39 percent were worried about the safety of their family in Afghanistan, while 14 percent had faced pressure from the local population/government at destination.

The larger political context of migration in Afghanistan is also set to change. Literature, 4Mi data, as well as the findings of this study, tie migration decision making closely to the economic situation as well as the violent conflict that has become endemic to many parts of Afghanistan. The recent agreement between the United States and the Taliban has set in motion a phased withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan. Intra-Afghan talks involving the Taliban and the Afghan Government are also set to begin this year and many hope for a chance of peace. While data from the literature shows that optimism about the peace process typically dissuades migration, it is important to remember that the period of 1996-2001, when the Taliban was last in power, was also a phase of extensive out-migration for Afghan nationals.

With this in mind, it is worth noting that the research team only interviewed PMs who already intended to reach Europe. This should not obscure the fact that many – and perhaps most – irregularly migrating Afghans intent on reaching Europe decide to do so only later, having already departed Afghanistan.

Shaping the decision to migrate

SBCC seeks to understand the beliefs, attitudes, norms and other factors underlying behaviours that might make the target audience more vulnerable. This section discusses the study's findings in the context of migration decision-making at three levels: individual psychological processes describing how migrants themselves weigh risks and rewards; community-level beliefs that see migrants encouraged or discouraged; and the environmental and structural reasons why a certain behaviour is possible or desirable in the first place.

Pushed out of Afghanistan

PMs describing their own decision to migrate put most weight on the desire and reasoning to leave Afghanistan over any specific idea of what life would be like in Europe. PMs did usually state a preferred destination country, but none justified this with country-specific knowledge.

A sense of helplessness also factors into the migration decision. In the 4Mi Afghan Returnee Surveys most felt that they had had no option but to leave Afghanistan. Although the trends across gender were similar, 65 percent felt that they had had no choice but to migrate, with older migrants of 40-44 more likely to feel the lack of options (94 percent) than younger ones of 25-29 who tended to disagree (50 percent), while only 16 percent felt that this was not so.

Figure 2: Compelled to migrate

Before I left Afghanistan, I felt that I had no choice but to leave

- Agree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Refused
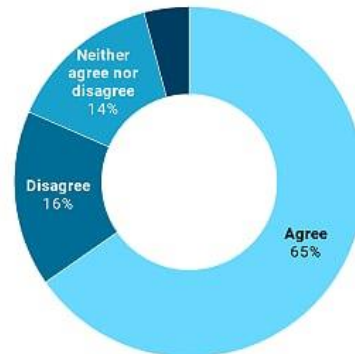
Neither agree nor disagree 14%

Disagree 16%

Agree 65%

n=1344
Source: Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism Initiative (4Mi) · Created with Datawrapper

"Every day in the news we hear about suicide attacks and killings. There is no security in most of the provinces."

– a potential migrant in Kabul, 24.

How does violent conflict create uncertainties?

Interviewees talked about fearing for their own or family members' personal safety (Box 2) as well as the effects of violence on economic prospects. Many discussed feelings of helplessness and despair and attributed this to non-specific conflict-related fatigue or emotional exhaustion.

Box 2: What kinds of violence do Afghans who want to migrate fear?

Interviewees in all provinces described explosions, insurgent attacks, murder, theft, kidnapping, crime, and war. In Herat, interviewees feared or had experienced crimes such as murder, theft, and kidnapping or violent threats to businesspeople. In Kabul, interviewees spoke about conflict in daily life, street fights, suicide attacks, and robberies. In Nimroz, interviewees referenced bombings, and the impunity of those who had committed crimes. Respondents in both Herat and Nimroz brought up their fear of the Taliban, consistent with large parts of these provinces currently being contested territories between the Afghanistan government and the Taliban.

This emotional helplessness or despair weighed on the minds of PMs as they contemplated the extent to which migration was worth it. A female CI in Herat, for instance, spoke about how the problems of Afghanistan are so numerous that the dangers of irregular migration have little influence on the PM. The conviction that things will get worse in Afghanistan or at least, will never get better, impacts migrants' perception of risk by marginalising its importance in their mind or making them feel that it will be worth it.

Is conflict and lack of assistance to returnees creating new migration populations?

Outbreaks of violence can often serve as tipping points in the decision to migrate.[27] While data on regional variations in migration patterns is limited, the 4Mi Afghan Returnee Surveys showed that Kunduz, Nangarhar, Herat, and Ghazni reported economic factors and violence as the top reasons for migration whereas for Balkh, it was economic factors along with access to services.

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[27] Browne, E. (2015) *Drivers of Irregular Migration in North Africa*. GSDRC.

"A person can live when he/she is hungry, but he/she cannot live in war and insecurity. That's why we decided to leave Afghanistan and go abroad."

– a potential migrant in Herat, 33.

However, provinces with violent conflict (Helmand and Kandahar, for instance) are not necessarily provinces of high out-migration, according to the Survey of the Afghan People. A PM from Nimroz interviewed in the qualitative fieldwork, pointed out something similar – that it is those in the north (Badghis, Bamyan) who tend to migrate abroad whereas those in Helmand and Kandahar, for instance, tend to migrate internally – however, this may also be because they lack the resources to migrate internationally.

The returnee population may also be a pool of potential irregular migrants – given the nature of circumstances they report. In the 4Mi Afghan Returnee Surveys, 88 percent said that they had not received assistance after returning, with trends being similar across age and gender. Priority needs included cash, shelter, food, and assistance to travel home and 34 percent also expressed interest in remigration.

A 2018 Samuel Hall report[28] found that 94 percent had been displaced due to violence and pointed out the increasing phenomenon of returnee-IDPs – returned migrants to Afghanistan who had been displaced again,[29] while a 2016 UNHCR study with the diaspora[30] found that 71 percent migrated because of war/conflict and 43 percent were internally displaced prior.[31] Multiple studies in Afghanistan have found that a lack of re-integration policy is a reason for this, especially for young people who may have been raised in foreign countries.[32]

Follow-ups in the second[33] and third[34] rounds of Seefar's longitudinal study found that the relative importance of security issues went up in 2018 – the year that Afghanistan was reclassified as a country in active conflict.[35] The 2019 Survey of the Afghan People partly corroborated this, with respondents saying that improvements in security would induce them to stay. MMC's 2020 *Destination Unknown* report also found violence to be a primary factor, although economic drivers were only marginally less important.[36] A 2019 MMC qualitative study[37] in the Kabul and Nangarhar provinces of Afghanistan

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[28] 2,581 IDP respondents across 5 provinces
[29] Samuel Hall (2018) *Escaping War: Where to Next?* Norwegian Refugee Council.
[30] 122 members of the diaspora
[31] UNHCR (2016) *From a Refugee Perspective: Discourse of Arabic Speaking and Afghan Refugees and Migrants on Social Media from March to December 2016*
[32] Samuel Hall (2017) *From Forced Migration to Forced Returns in Afghanistan: Policy and Program Implications* Migration Policy Institute, Amnesty International (2017) *Forced Back to Danger: Asylum Seekers Returned From Europe to Afghanistan*, Barrat, S & Majidi, N. (2019) *Achieving Durable Solutions for Returnee Children: What Do We Know*?
[33] 210 respondents: Seefar. (2018). *Pushed Towards Migration: Understanding How Irregular Migration Dynamics and Attitudes Are Evolving in Afghanistan*
[34] 187 respondents: Seefar (2019) *Sustained Interest, Delayed Migration: Emerging Irregular Migration Dynamics in Afghanistan.*.
[35] UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (2019) *Civilian Deaths in Afghan Conflict in 2018 at Highest Recorded Level*.
[36] Mixed Migration Centre (June 2020). *Destination Unknown: Afghans on the move in Turkey*
[37] 56 returned migrants from Europe, Iran, and Pakistan

identified general civil conflict as well as targeted persecution from the Taliban, the lack of sustainable economic opportunities, and low wages as drivers of migration.[38]

IOM's 2018 Community Based Needs Assessment (CBNA)[39] found that violent conflict contributed to internal displacement in 83 districts across seven provinces. The Survey of the Afghan People also found that females were more likely than males to report 'domestic insecurity' as a reason for migration (81.2 percent vs 74.5 percent), while urban respondents reported it more than rural respondents (79.3 percent vs 77.1 percent).

## What beliefs underlie the decision to migrate?

A lack of faith in Afghanistan's future was the most important followed by an often-vague belief that life in Europe would address these problems. A better life, a safer life, no conflict, and no discrimination were some of the non-specific ways that life in Europe was described (Figure 3). PMs were sometimes more specific, discussing employment, government support, and wages with interviewers. In some cases, this perception came from the observation of and information from friends and family who live abroad and come to visit Afghanistan occasionally as well as through television.

Certain beliefs were contingent on factors that PMs could not describe, were clearly false, or may have been distorted from otherwise factual information. For instance, correct information about minimum working hours may have mutated into a belief that Europeans work only two hours a day. KIs agreed with CIs that a positive image of life in Europe prevails (with only one KI offering a significant counter that Afghans have a culture of not talking about good things for fear of envy). They felt that social media connectivity has spurred this to an extent by allowing for positive signalling about Europe that motivates migrants back home to undertake dangerous journeys.

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[38] Seefar (2019) *Distant Dreams: Understanding Aspirations of Afghan Returnees*. Mixed Migration Centre.
[39] IOM. (2018) *Community Based Needs Assessment*. International Organization for Migration, Afghanistan.

Figure 3. Beliefs about life in Europe

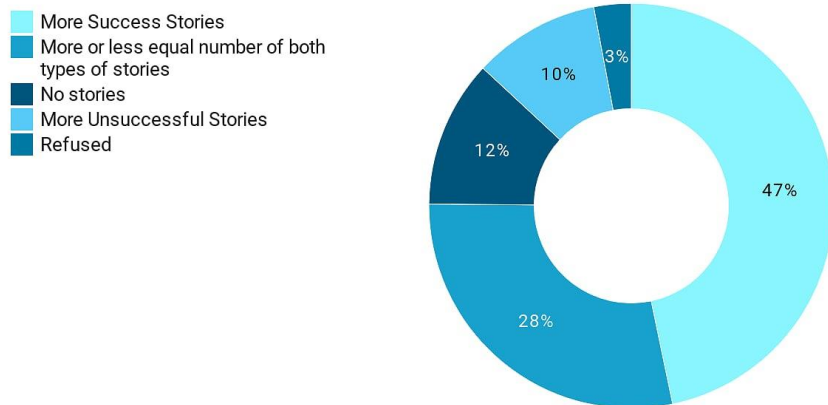◼ Orange: Subjective/Could be true
◼ Red: False/Distortion
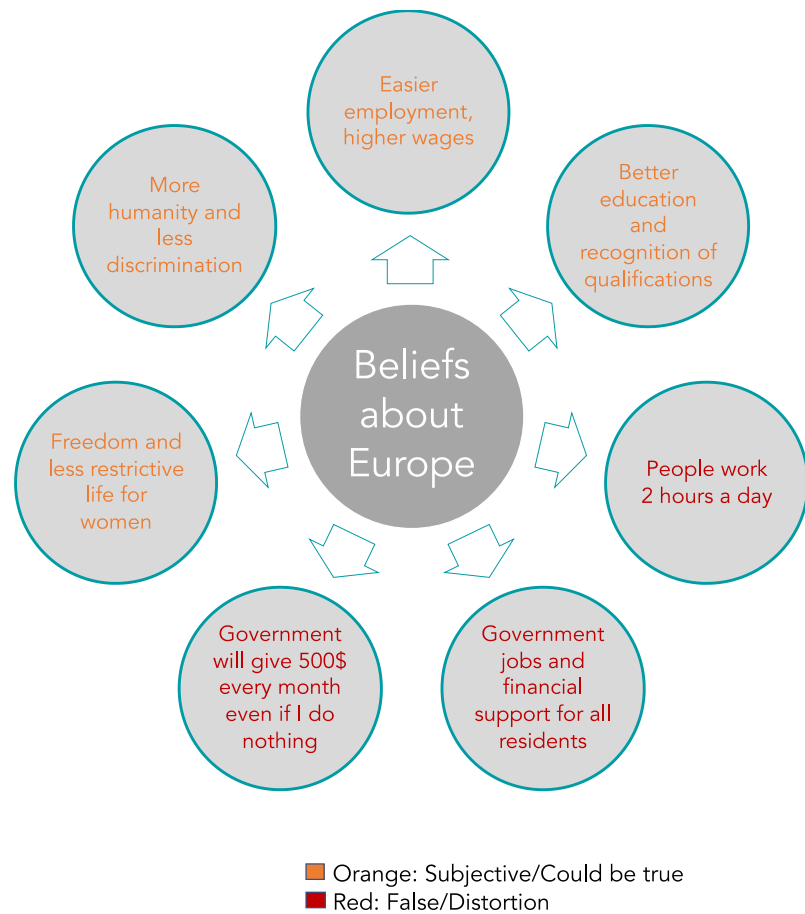
Although women PMs echoed many of the same beliefs as men (better life, better opportunities), they also believed in a life free from discrimination and patriarchy in Europe. While some women were more specific in exactly what kind of patriarchal control they wanted to escape (early marriage, professional restrictions), others spoke generally about a freer life that they would be able to enjoy if they migrated. Younger PMs and women PMs also harboured beliefs about better educational opportunities – with the latter believing that Europe would provide better education and opportunities for their children than Afghanistan.

The 4Mi Afghan Returnee Survey of 2020 probed migration beliefs by asking respondents about the kinds of migration stories they had heard – a factor that may build beliefs. Respondents had generally heard more stories of success than failure or an equal number of both, with no trend difference across gender or age groups or provinces.[40]

Figure 4: Stories about migration

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[40] In Daykundi and Bamyan, the second most frequent answer was 'more unsuccessful stories'.

Stories of Migration Journeys Among Afghan Migrants

Legend:
- More Success Stories
- More or less equal number of both types of stories
- No stories
- More Unsuccessful Stories
- Refused

3%
10%
12%
47%
28%

n=1344
Source: Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism Initiative (4Mi) • Created with Datawrapper

Where do beliefs about Europe come from?

The qualitative fieldwork found that the diaspora in Europe (friends/family) plays a largely encouraging role for the potential migrant contributing to their positive beliefs about Europe, both directly and indirectly. Most PMs, both men and women, reported being inspired by the lives of their friends and relatives abroad and wanting the same for themselves. A minority of PMs also reported getting information on Europe through the internet and TV. Interviews with KIs also highlight that the diaspora has a role to play in building the image of Europe that PMs harbour.

"They only see the colourful life in Europe, and colourful stories of the people who have made it to reach Europe."

– a KI from the Afghanistan section of an international NGO.

Several qualitative studies, reports, and media articles interviewing multiple communities found that aspiring migrants harbour a positive image of life in Europe,[41] sometimes in contradiction of existing information campaigns and the experiences of their friends and family in the diaspora. These are often based on assumptions about asylum status and standard of living.[42] TV and media portrayals may also have a role to play in the perception of Europe as a land of opportunity, easier livelihoods, and security.

Diaspora (in studies conducted with Afghan as well as other diasporas including Malian, Somalian, Eritrean, and Bangladeshi) attempts to temper this view were usually resisted. Aspiring migrants felt that the diaspora no longer have a grasp on realities at home and therefore do not understand the desperation of their situation. [43] They also considered the diaspora as gatekeepers of the good fortune they have already experienced. [44]

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[41] This trend, however, may be changing – a recent World Bank study[41] found that *"very few youths said that they wished to migrate abroad. Mainly respondents shared negative opinions about the difficulties migrants face en route and in their migration destinations"*.

[42] REACH Initiative (2017) *Youth on the Move* Mixed Migration Platform.

[43] Nimkar, R & Frouws, B. Op. Cit.

[44] REACH Initiative. Op. Cit.

However, is important to note that the above-mentioned studies were conducted with diaspora members and may, therefore, reflect what the diaspora thinks are the reasons for disbelieving them and not the actual reasons that migrants have. In fact, the 2019 Survey of the Afghan People had found that having a family member abroad increased the willingness to migrate (46.3 percent among those who did vs 39.2 percent among those who didn't).
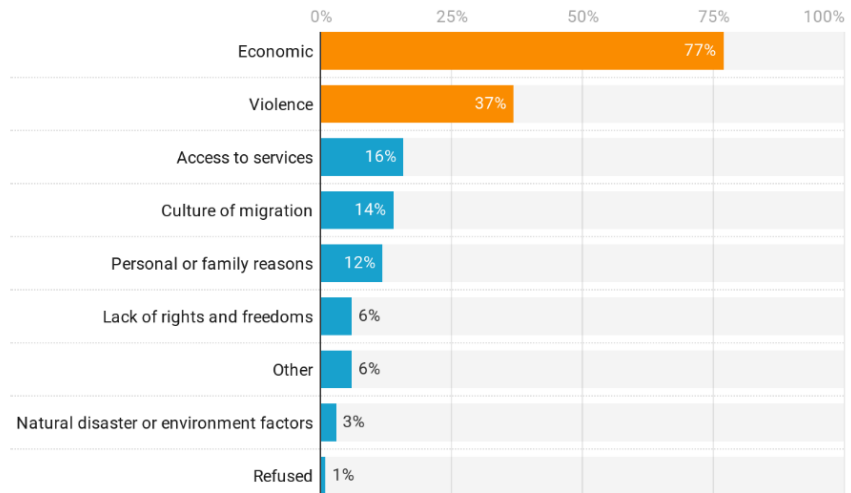
The many faces of 'economic' drivers

Economic reasons dominated PMs' descriptions of why they were migrating as well as CI and KI views of irregular migration but were often presented in combination with other drivers such as conflict, aspiration, and lack of rights. PMs across age and gender categories spoke about unemployment, low wages and lack of economic opportunities, while younger respondents also spoke about lack of educational opportunities which impacted their economic future. Even among women, who experience additional drivers such as lack of freedom, the role of economic factors was prominent. Multiple prior studies in Afghanistan and with the diaspora have highlighted how economic factors, often exacerbated by violent conflict, are a major driver of irregular migration, a finding also reflected in the 4Mi Afghan Returnee Surveys.

Respondents in the 4Mi Afghan Returnee Surveys pointed to economic reasons as their primary motivation (77 percent) while violence was secondary (37 percent).[45] This was true across all age groups, except for those aged 50 and above, for whom, violence was primary, but only marginally.

Figure 5: Reasons for migration 4Mi Afghan Returnee Surveys (2020)

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[45] In Jan-March, 76 percent of respondents (returnees in the last year) reported economic drivers as their reason to migrate, while 40 percent reported violence. In the April-June survey, economic drivers increased marginally to 78 percent while violence fell to 30 percent.

Reasons for Migration

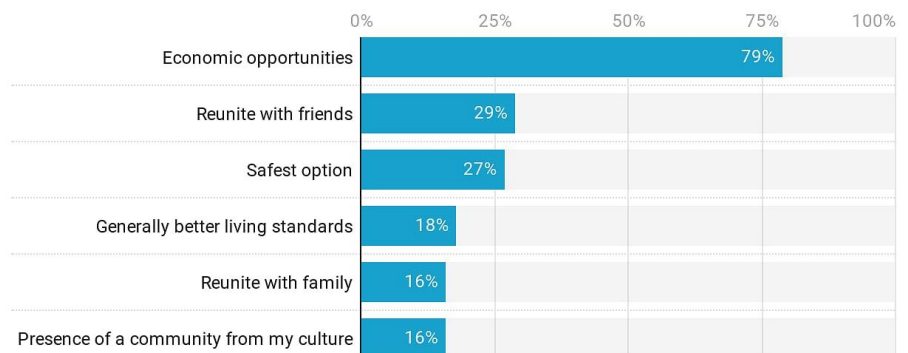|	0%	25%	50%	75%	100%
Economic				77%	
Violence		37%			
Access to services	16%				
Culture of migration	14%				
Personal or family reasons	12%				
Lack of rights and freedoms	6%				
Other	6%				
Natural disaster or environment factors	3%				
Refused	1%				

n=1344

Source: Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism Initiative (4Mi) • Created with Datawrapper

In the January-March 4Mi Afghan Returnee Survey, respondents were also asked their reasons for choosing particular destinations (87 percent had chosen one before migrating). Economic opportunity, reunion with friends, and safety were the predominant reasons. Men were more likely to privilege economic opportunity, followed by reunion with friends while women were more likely to privilege safety of the option, followed by economic opportunity. Across age groups, economic opportunity prevailed.

Figure 6: Reasons for selecting a destination country

Reasons Why a Migrant Selected a Country for Migration

	0%	25%	50%	75%	100%
Economic opportunities				79%	
Reunite with friends		29%			
Safest option		27%			
Generally better living standards	18%				
Reunite with family	16%				
Presence of a community from my culture	16%				

n=912

Source: Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism Initiative (4Mi) • Created with Datawrapper

What role does unemployment play?

Nearly every PM cited some kind of economic issue as central to their decision to leave Afghanistan. The nuances show that even where PMs are able to get a job, this may well have little influence on their plans.

Economic issues varied from:

- Unemployment – PMs who do not have work now and see migration as a way to remedy that.
- Underemployment – PMs with a job who had little faith that a weak economy would allow them to progress and improve meagre wages, or university students seeking opportunities commensurate with their qualifications.
- The inability to build up assets/property and no potential for financial advancement.

PMs often viewed public sector jobs as the most desirable and secure. They blamed nepotism (contacts) and corruption (bribes) as the chief barriers and had little faith in the government's ability to help them by creating jobs.

How do perceptions of long-term stability drive migration?

For some PMs, their present material situation was less important than their expectations for the future. Pessimism around the Afghan conflict directly fed the concerns about viable livelihoods that they were uncertain of having in the future. **Respondents were often not among the poorer groups in Afghanistan, yet economic motives still dominated.** Several were employed or running businesses, or were seeking ways to provide longer-term stability, having little confidence in the ability to sustain and grow their incomes over the longer term.

Among younger respondents, the lack of educational opportunities was cited as a driver along with the general economic circumstances. Women CIs felt that younger people tend to migrate more – older people feel that there is no home for them abroad, but young people can make a home anywhere. Respondents who were young parents, especially mothers, were concerned that the lack of educational opportunities would impact the future of their children in Afghanistan. They felt that Europe meant a better future for their children, and themselves – gender specific drivers are examined in more detail in the next sections.

Seefar's longitudinal study of 2016[46] highlighted that sustainable financial improvement is a driver to stay, whereas a short-term improvement in financial circumstances would be used to migrate – reflecting the importance that perception of long-term stability has. The 2019 Survey of the Afghan People also found that 30.5 percent of those reporting an improvement in household financials were willing to migrate, while a 2018 report[47] by Samuel

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[46] Seefar (2016) *Reluctant Journeys: Why Afghans Migrate Irregularly to Europe*
[47] 9416 Afghan respondents across 6 major datasets

Hall[48] pointed out that employment and perception of job security seemed to positively correlate with the intention to migrate.[49] The economic impact of COVID-19 may now give new impetus to the drivers of migration in Afghanistan.

How does insecurity translate into an economic driver?

Respondents brought up how violent conflict and compromised security can impact economic stability and opportunities as well. Proper investment and growth of the economy would be impossible under dire security conditions and businesspeople were often at particular risk of violence, thereby discouraging asset-building. Circumstances of violence contributed to respondents feeling that there is no safe or sustainable future in Afghanistan and drove a larger lack of faith in the country. A June 2020 MMC report of Afghans in Turkey[50]– *Destination Unknown* – highlighted that violence jeopardizes both personal safety and livelihoods.[51] A few respondents in this study also made the linkage that poor economic circumstances tend to drive young people towards drug addiction or crimes like selling narcotics, which further perpetuates a vicious cycle.

What factors drive women to migrate?

Patriarchal control over women's lives was a recurring theme in both PM and CI interviews. Women PMs discussed their motivations and desires as their own, even when they said the decision would ultimately be made by a male family member. Echoing MMC's *Destination Unknown* report on Afghans in Turkey, women frequently associated living in Europe with personal freedoms or escaping trauma. Although security and economic drivers were important, they also highlighted that:

- Their children would have a better life in Europe, including safe and easy access to secondary and higher education and freedom from the stresses of living in a highly patriarchal society (daughters would not be forced into early marriages).
- They could live free of expectations about how women should live their lives (particularly in Nimroz and Kabul). For example, one woman said living abroad would allow her to laugh more freely. Another said that she could escape her husband who she could never divorce while in Afghanistan.

"Unemployment, insecurity, and lack of education opportunity persuaded me to migrate."

– a PM in Kabul, 21.

"Lots of people leave the country due to insecurity because they feel danger. To be able to provide a better life for themselves and their families, these illegal migrants take these dangerous ways."

– a CI in Herat, 28.

"The law is not implemented, women's rights are not defended, no one defends the rights of the oppressed, our children do not go to school quietly - then we are forced."

– a PM in Nimroz, 35.

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[48] Afghanistan specific datasets were: Mercy Corps INVEST 2015-17 Kandahar Survey (6367), Samuel Hall Urban Displaced Youth in Kabul 2014-17 (2021), Samuel Hall Livelihoods Programmes for Displaced People in Urban Afghanistan 2014 (1028).

[49] Samuel Hall (2018) *Youth Migration Intentions in Afghanistan and Somalia: Rethinking Decisions and Aspirations.*

[50] 341 surveys, 27 in-depth interviews, 9 FGDs across 69 participants

[51] Mixed Migration Centre (June 2020). *Destination Unknown: Afghans on the move in Turkey*

"They can wear shorts in foreign countries, not cover their hair, or go out without a hijab."

– a female CI in Nimroz, 25.

"The looks of men always follow us here when we are outside, and it makes me very sad as a woman."

– a female CI in Nimroz, 27

- Ethnic and gender-based discrimination were mentioned by PMs and CIs, although the former was brought up by a Pashtun woman in Kabul, despite the ethnicity being a majority one.
- A PM in Herat spoke about acid attacks as a potential danger, which she connected to patriarchal control around women working ("I cannot work easily here, maybe someone will throw acid on my face").
- In Europe, they would be able to work more freely. The same PM from Herat who feared acid attacks was supporting her family through hairdressing but could not do so openly – keeping it secret even from friends.
- Women CIs also spoke about the stifling environment for women – one CI in Nimroz spoke about the "looks of men" that make her uncomfortable in public spaces while another in Nimroz felt that it is the people who comprehend the difficulty of their situation – particularly women who are "imprisoned and have no freedom" – who discuss migration the most.

Expectations and protection on the route

This section describes PMs' expectations of the journey, (gaps in) knowledge of risks and the types of information they desired. This points to some of the areas where information-based programming might positively influence actions.

Potential migrants expect danger but are committed to attempting the journey anyway

I admit that illegal migration is dangerous, but I have no choice.

– a PM in Kabul, 25.

What do PMs know about the risks of migration?

Interviewees were aware that irregular migration was dangerous. They described in broad terms the possibility of physical assault, police shootings, drowning, kidnapping and violence from insurgent groups – a few spoke from personal experiences in previous attempts.

The 4Mi Afghan Returnee Surveys showed similar responses (Figure 7). Perpetrators included criminal gangs, government officials (possibly including police) and armed militias/groups. KIs pointed out additional threats from the Taliban, sect-based discrimination (most affecting ethnic Hazaras), and crime, with gangs known to extort money from left-behind families.

Most (60 percent) of respondents to the 4Mi Afghan Returnee Surveys agreed that they had been fully aware of the migration risks (Figure 8). Less than half (44 percent men; 30 percent women) said they were both aware of the risks before migrating but believed they would be able to reach their destination and stay there. Only eight percent of the respondents, mostly ethnic Pashtuns from Nangarhar, said they had been optimistic about reaching their destination and had not been aware of the risks and difficulties they might face during the journey.[52]

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[52] Across ethnicities, the highest number of such responses came from Pashtuns (38), across provinces, it was Nangarhar (39, 25 percent of respondents from Nangarhar out of 159), and 8 percent of men also gave the above response (95 out of 1214) in the 4Mi Afghan Returnee Surveys.

A 2018 MMC study[53] found that 31 percent of Afghan women surveyed were not aware of protection risks.[54] In the qualitative fieldwork, while women PMs and CIs echoed the risks spoken of by their male counterparts, CIs mentioned the possibility of rape, risks faced by women with families, and discrimination.

Figure 7: Risks faced during the journey

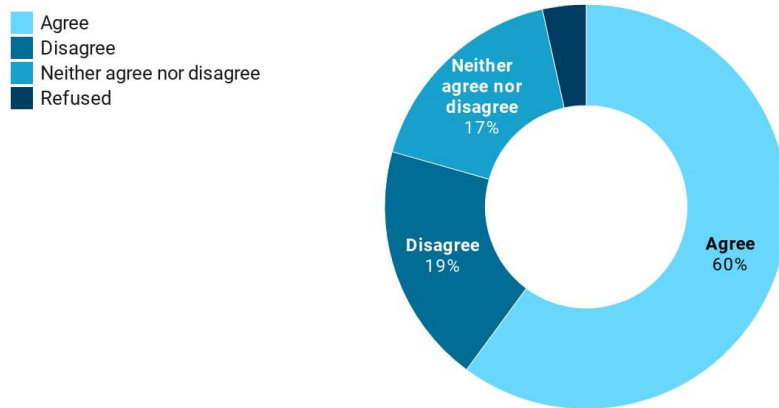## Main Risks (violence/other crimes) on Migration Journey
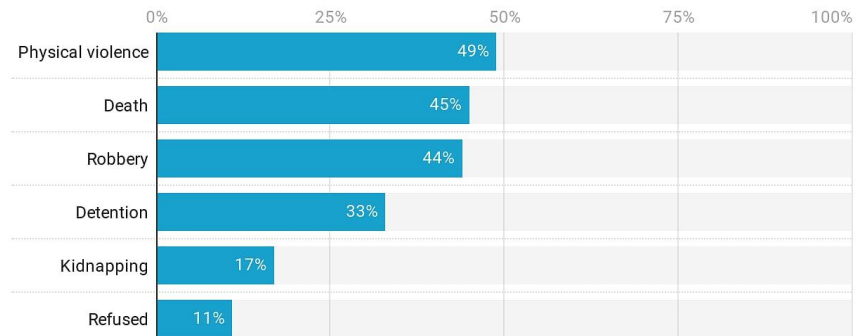
n=936
Source: Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism Initiative (4Mi) · Created with Datawrapper

Figure 8: Awareness of risk during the migration journey

Awareness About Difficulties and Risks During Migration Journey

n=1344
Source: Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism Initiative (4Mi) · Created with Datawrapper

What do PMs know about challenges at destination?

Issues at destination – integration issues, problems of documentation, difficult living circumstances, discrimination, loneliness were frequently mentioned by

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[53] 1062 female respondents

[54] Mixed Migration Centre (2018) *Experiences of Female Refugees and Migrants in Origin, Transit, and Destination Countries: A Comparative Study of Women on the Move from Afghanistan, East and West Africa*.
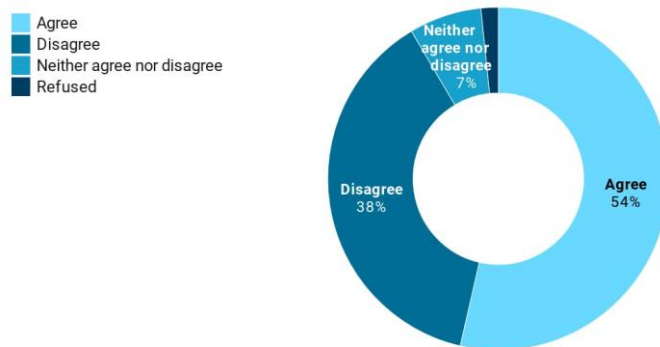
CIs and KIs, who emphasised psychological trauma from prolonged periods in European immigration detention centres. A CI in Nimroz described how a friend faced depression because of language and cultural barriers between her and host communities. She was initially in a camp in the Netherlands but is now better off, according to the CI.

Multiple CIs from across provinces spoke about migrants they knew regretting their journeys despite having built lives in destination countries. They worked difficult jobs, were not accepted or supported, faced employment issues, and could never forget the trauma of the journey.

PMs interviewed for this study had not considered these post-arrival issues. Only half of respondents to the 4Mi Afghan Returnee Surveys (54%) said they had been aware prior to departure (Figure 9). Lack of planning for life post-arrival may be a symptom of the dominance of push factors over migration decision-making.

Figure 9: Awareness about latest policies and restrictions in the destination country

Awareness About Latest Policies and Restrictions at Destination Country

- Agree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Refused

Neither agree nor disagree 7%

Disagree 38%

Agree 54%

n=1222
Source: Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism Initiative (4Mi) · Created with Datawrapper

Separately, interviewees raised that it would be harder to maintain Afghan Muslim culture in Europe and were concerned how they would mitigate that. Two CIs also talked about how those who are religious tended to avoid and discourage migration to non-Islamic countries but are unlikely to be heeded by PMs while one PM spoke about the loss of culture that migration could entail (but wished to migrate, regardless).

How do PMs rationalise risks?

PMs tended to speak of risks either in a tone of helplessness (there is no choice but to migrate)[55] or resignation (risks are necessary to achieve goals). Respondents to DRC's 2019 ADIP study claimed a "100 percent death or rape" risk. Two female PMs in Herat and Nimroz spoke of the odds being 50-

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[55] 4Mi data shows that 65 percent felt that they had no choice but to migrate.

50 of actually reaching the destination while a male PM (Kabul) spoke of a 30 percent chance of return, with a 70 percent chance of reaching and having a difficult life at destination. They wished to attempt the journey anyway.

Many appear to engage with risks at a superficial level. Stigma associated with failed journeys feeds a 'culture of silence' within which aspirant migrants avoid stories about migration that has gone wrong. The absence of open and honest conversations means that migrants can at once be "aware of the risks" and migrate with incomplete and one-sided information.

DRC's 2019 ADIP study also reported that the risk of rape tends to be discussed among women and that husbands may make different decisions if they knew of the risk of rape for female family members. The danger of rape was brought up by a female CI from Herat in the qualitative fieldwork who mentioned that this is a topic that commonly comes up in her discussions on migration with her friends. However, she also added that her relatives in the diaspora do not discuss such matters – she consults the internet ('websites') for information.

There did not seem to be a significant deterrent effect of having a friend or relative who has tried and failed to migrate on the decision to migrate. Both PMs and CIs reported knowing people who had died or disappeared en route. In the case of the former, the PM still intended to migrate. Another female PM from Herat was the exception. She had a brother who disappeared on the route to Europe and had therefore decided to migrate to Canada instead of following through her initial plans to go to Europe.

Similarly, experiencing the hardships of the journey did not seem to deter migrants. MMC's 4Mi data from Greece (March 2020)[56] found that 53 percent reported they would have migrated anyway even if they had known of the risks they would go through on their journey.[57] The 4Mi Afghan Returnee Survey from January-March indicated that three-quarters of returnees interviewed either intended to re-migrate or were undecided. A majority reported being either fully or somewhat influenced by the risks (with women more likely to report the former and men the latter) (Figure 10).

Figure 10: How did risk factor into respondents' decision to remigrate?
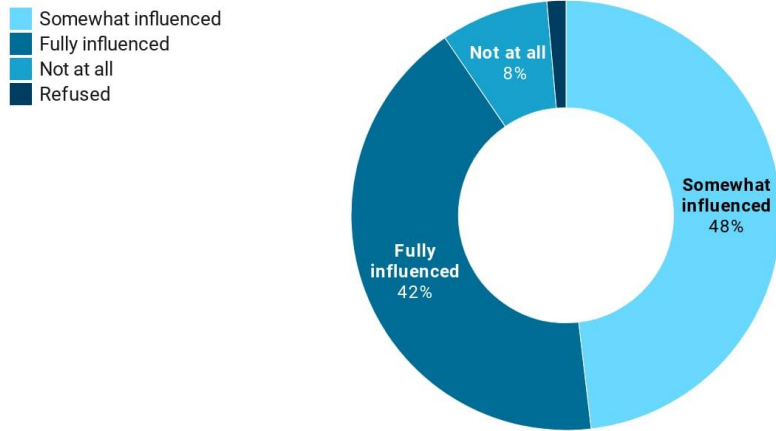

"She was traveling with several other individuals, and had fewer problems while she was with them, but on the way they all separated from each other. This girl was harassed a lot because of being a woman."

– a female CI in Nimroz, 27.

Role of risks of (irregular) migration in decision to migrate again

Legend:
- Somewhat influenced
- Fully influenced
- Not at all
- Refused

Not at all 8%

Somewhat influenced 48%

Fully influenced 42%

n=912
Source: Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism Initiative (4Mi) • Created with Datawrapper

Who helps a migrant during the journey?

Most PMs had not actually given much thought to how they would practically respond to difficulties on the route. Some said it was simply a matter of trusting God.

Many PMs said they would rely on smugglers and fellow migrants en route (a KI said Afghans depart in groups to enhance safety). One PM said that the Red Cross might be in a position to help – no others mentioned NGOs or international organisations as sources of support. Some respondents had family members – parents, aunts, brothers – who they said could provide them with financial support in emergencies.

Most respondents (87 percent) to the 4Mi Afghan Returnee Surveys said they did not receive assistance on the journey. The 10 percent that did receive assistance received medicine, food, and water. This was provided primarily by the UN, NGOs, and friends and family.

"About 10 percent of diaspora discuss the difficulties which is very important and very effective. These 10 percent who talk about difficulties play a good role. But many Afghans don't do this. First because the trend on social media is not about talking about problems but only about perfect moments. Second many Afghans have invested a lot to reach Europe in many ways."

– Afghan KI researching migration.

One female PM said that she hoped to ask the border police for support help on the route. Data from the 4Mi Afghan Returnee Surveys found that border police may sometimes be a source of abuse rather than help – 41 percent (second highest) pointed to government officials as perpetrators of violence.
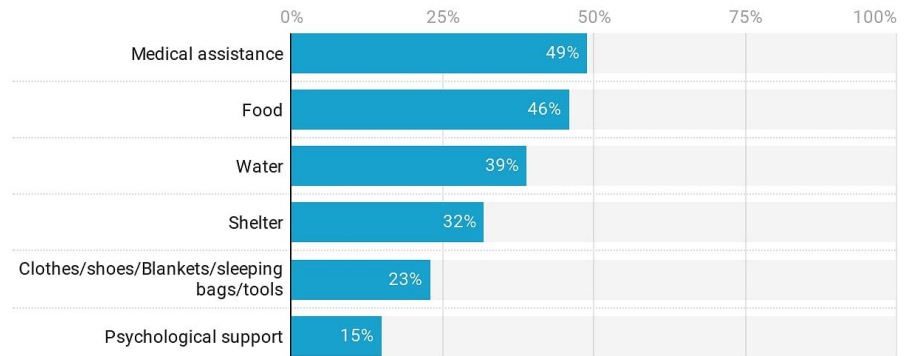
Figure 11: Assistance received during the journey

Assisstance During Migration/En Route (Free of Charge)

Medical assistance	49%
Food	46%
Water	39%
Shelter	32%
Clothes/shoes/Blankets/sleeping bags/tools	23%
Psychological support	15%

n=140

Source: Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism Initiative (4Mi) • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 12: Source of assistance during the journey

Source of Assistance during Migration Journey

UN	45%
NGOs	31%
Friends and family	23%
Fellow migrants	22%
The Government	20%
Local population/volunteers	16%

n=140

Source: Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism Initiative (4Mi) • Created with Datawrapper

"They don't have a problem with taking risks. We have lived in a war zone forever. So, people are used to this. So, with people who are seeing explosions on a regular basis or losing friends and family (especially in the Afghan army) they don't see the risks of the journey as a huge risk."

- Afghan KI with international development organisation.

"First, I will ask my relatives who accompanied me on this journey for help and then from the border police, or international police."
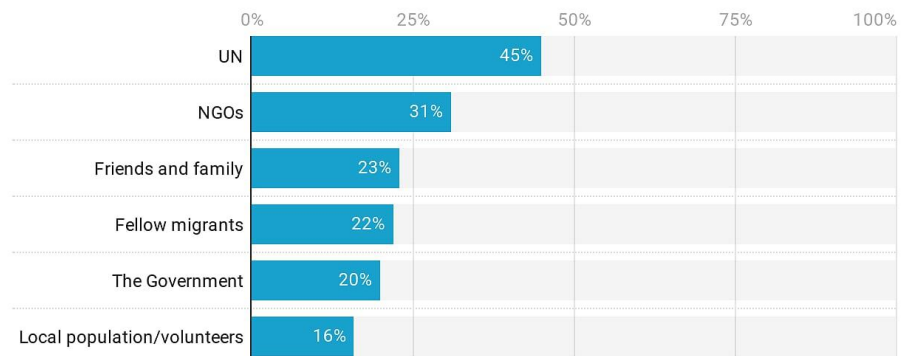**– a female PM in Kabul, 22.**

Multiple international organisations have operations across the major countries that comprise the route of an irregular journey. UNHCR has been working in close cooperation with Turkey on asylum and refugee issues. The UNHCR office is located in Ankara, with field offices in Istanbul, Izmir, Gaziantep, Hatay, Sanliurfa, and Van. The IOM's head office is located in Ankara with suboffices in Istanbul, Gaziantep, Hatay, Sanliurfa and Izmir. UNHCR, IOM, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and Red Crescent Society are also operational in Iran. UNHCR offices exist in Tehran, Esfahan, Mashhad, Dogharoun, Kerman, and Shiraz.

However, as explained by a KI with experience in humanitarian programming, international organisations are limited by risks that publics and donors perceive such activities to facilitate organised immigration crime.

"We are hopeful of reaching there and working there and making our life, and Allah Almighty will manage the rest."

– a PM in Herat, 37.

"The problems in Afghanistan I can't tolerate, but I can bear the difficulties of the way."

– a PM in Kabul, 45.

"Illegal immigration is the wrong thing to do because the risks and difficulties of this journey outweigh the benefits".

– a CI in Herat, 31.

Complications caused by COVID-19

4Mi snapshots from May and July 2020 show that COVID-19 initially prompted many Afghans to return from Iran. Conditions were poor for returnees: most returnees surveyed (64 percent) said they were unable to socially distance while 40 percent said they would not be able to access healthcare should they contract the disease.[58]

Long before the threat of COVID-19 had subsided, economic necessity prompted many to remigrate amid more tightly controlled borders. Media reports have highlighted recent instances of border police violence that resulted in the deaths of several Afghan migrants trying to cross over into Iran.[59]

Regular migration pathways as viable alternatives for a small minority

While Afghans' access to regular migration opportunities are certainly limited, it remains probable that at least some PMs are missing out on opportunities for which they are eligible. Interviews showed a stark information gap, lack of support, and a credibility problem related to the possibility of regular migration (Box 3). In at least one case (an ex-employee of a U.S. Department of Defence contractor), the interviewee may well have been successful in obtaining a U.S. Special Immigrant Visa had he not abandoned the process.

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[58] Mixed Migration Centre (May 2020) *Understanding the impact of COVID 19 on Afghan returnees.*; Mixed Migration Centre (July 2020) *Knowledge of COVID 19, information sources and reported needs among Afghan returnees*

[59] George, S. (May 2020) *Afghanistan and Iran investigate deaths of 16 Afghan migrants near border* The Washington Post; Sediqi, A & Karimi, S. *Afghan Lawmakers say 45 migrants drowned after Iranian guards forced them into river* Reuters

"People are more likely to believe in illegal immigration because they migrate with someone they know. They give him money; then the same person will take them to their destination. But legal channels are not credible. Because there is no guarantee that they take your cash and then take you to your destination."

- female CI, Herat, 25.

"According to the current situation in Afghanistan, potential migrants are not migrating to their desire; they are forced to do so."

– a CI in Herat, 25.

Figure 13: Barriers to regular pathways faced by potential migrants

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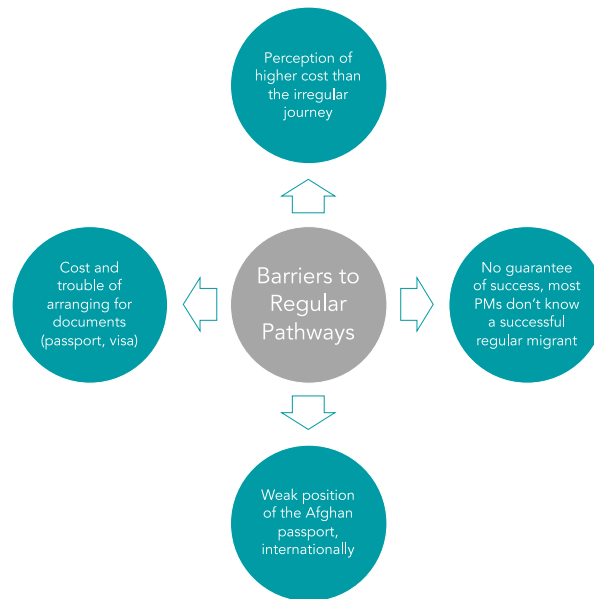
Box 3: Regular pathways

What regular routes had interviewed PMs tried?

- A Kabul-based PM mentioned that one legal route Afghans are known to try is via Iran or India and then on to the desired destination.
- A teacher interviewed in Herat reported that his students often come to him to discuss legal migration through educational channels.
- Two PMs had tried for Special Immigration Visas. While one missed out on the opportunity despite having nearly got it, the other faced limited success with the process.
- A Kabul-based female PM tried for the American Green Card lottery but did not succeed.

A number of PMs were aware of the existence of regular migration options but did not pursue them because they did not know how or felt success was unlikely. PMs from all three provinces spoke about the lack of regular options to migrate, perceived expense, and difficulty of the process – all contributing to a lack of confidence in the system. Many of them drew on personal experiences of a regular journey attempted while others drew on the experiences of their friends and family. Women PMs had even less

information, respondents in all three provinces saying they had heard only second-hand information about regular channels.

Box 4: Why is irregular migration to Iran and Pakistan not more often regular?

Most Afghan labour migration to Iran and Pakistan is low wage and cyclical. Close ethnic and linguistic ties help Afghans integrate into informal labour markets. An estimated 2 of the 4 million Afghans in Pakistan and 1.5 million of the 2.5 million in Iran, live and work irregularly – although the highly cyclical nature of this migration and loose counting of cross-border movements make these numbers unreliable.

Most migrants move for low-wage jobs for which work visas are difficult to obtain. Inquiries made by the research team in September 2020 indicated that Afghans could apply for Iranian business and tourist but not labour migration visas. Some Afghans obtain tourist visas but these are expensive to obtain and do not legally permit work in any case.

Afghans were able to apply for Pakistani visas for entry by air only, for up to three months, for work, study and business purposes. These were therefore not suitable for Afghans seeking to leave the country for extended periods of work or crossing the land border.

PMs may have been reluctant to attempt regular channels because of the perceived greater uncertainty of the regular over irregular process. Most PMs knew someone who had succeeded in irregular migration while almost no one knew of a successful regular migrant. While most of Afghanistan's low-paid foreign labour force is concentrated in Pakistan and Iran, visa regimes in those countries incentivise irregular movements (Box 4).[60] Afghans seeking visas for European countries usually need to travel to Pakistan or India, both of which are known to reject visa applications too.

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[60] Various studies cited in Smith, Rebekah, and World Bank. "Managed Labor Migration in Afghanistan: Identifying Host Countries for Managed Migration from Afghanistan," 2018. Figures on registered refugees at UNHCR. "Refugees in Iran - UNHCR Iran." UNHCR (blog). Accessed September 15, 2020; comparisons between regular and irregular migration costs to Iran in Mixed Migration Centre. "Destination Unknown: Afghans on the Move in Turkey," 2020.

The multiple references to barriers around regular migration indicate that there may be an opportunity to influence PMs in the direction of a regular journey with the right information, institutional support, and chance of success. One PM even spoke about attempting a partially regular journey – her relatives in Turkey wanted her to come (irregularly), live with them for a few years so as to get documentation, and then go on to other countries in Europe, regularly.

There may also be local community interest in promoting regular pathways – CIs were against the illegal nature of irregular migration and both CIs and KIs highlighted the importance of showing alternate pathways. In the 4Mi Afghan Returnee Surveys of January-March, 30 percent, when asked if they would have done anything differently on their migration journey, said that they would have "tried to migrate regularly throughout the journey", with 31 percent of men saying so.
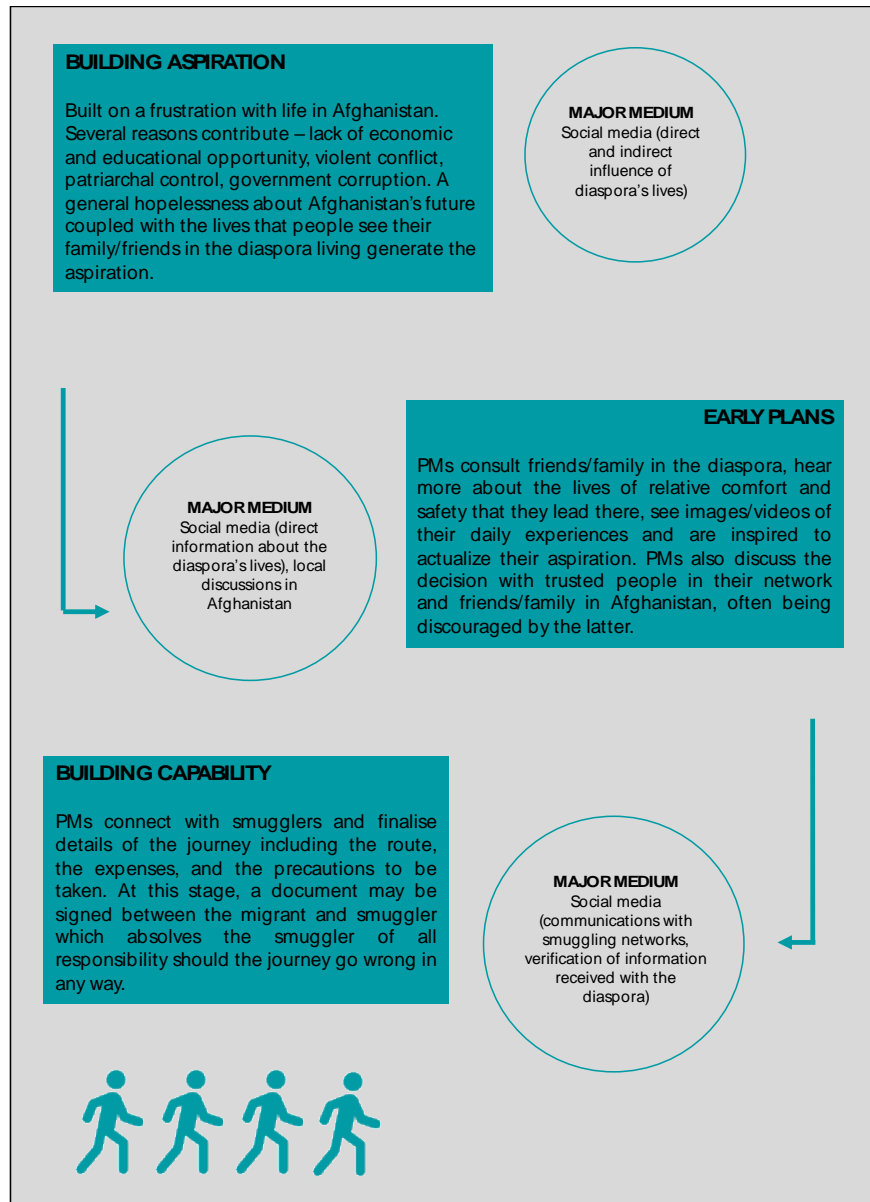
Influencers

While most PMs said the decision to migrate was theirs, they frequently described the importance of the diaspora in their own aspiration and decision to migrate. The 4Mi Afghan Returnee Surveys echoed this (Figure 16). Local community members, including returned migrants, and smugglers were important in other specific ways.

Mixed messages from the diaspora

How does the diaspora influence PMs?

Figure 14: Visualising the decision to migrate

BUILDING ASPIRATION

Built on a frustration with life in Afghanistan. Several reasons contribute – lack of economic and educational opportunity, violent conflict, patriarchal control, government corruption. A general hopelessness about Afghanistan's future coupled with the lives that people see their family/friends in the diaspora living generate the aspiration.

MAJOR MEDIUM
Social media (direct and indirect influence of diaspora's lives)

MAJOR MEDIUM
Social media (direct information about the diaspora's lives), local discussions in Afghanistan

EARLY PLANS

PMs consult friends/family in the diaspora, hear more about the lives of relative comfort and safety that they lead there, see images/videos of their daily experiences and are inspired to actualize their aspiration. PMs also discuss the decision with trusted people in their network and friends/family in Afghanistan, often being discouraged by the latter.

BUILDING CAPABILITY

PMs connect with smugglers and finalise details of the journey including the route, the expenses, and the precautions to be taken. At this stage, a document may be signed between the migrant and smuggler which absolves the smuggler of all responsibility should the journey go wrong in any way.

MAJOR MEDIUM
Social media (communications with smuggling networks, verification of information received with the diaspora)

The literature consistently links networks abroad and the desire to migrate. The 2019 Survey of the Afghan People found that having a relative or close friend abroad increased an individual's willingness to migrate.[61] Seefar's longitudinal survey in Afghanistan found that although not all respondents had diaspora contacts[62] interactions with diaspora were important for finalising and planning the migration journey among those who did.[63] A 2018 MMC study focusing on women in transit[64] found that reliance on information from friends and family abroad is high both for those still in Afghanistan (48 percent) and those who have already migrated (48 percent).[65]

In the qualitative research for this study, most **PMs said the diaspora played a role in their decision to migrate or in the development of specific plans to migrate.** The diaspora influenced in two key ways:

1. **Indirectly – members of the diaspora painted a positive picture of life in Europe, sometimes inadvertently.** PMs described how regular text and video exchanges with friends and family in Germany, Finland, USA, Canada, Turkey, and Iran showed desirable lifestyles. Communication happened privately, usually using social media tools (Facebook, WhatsApp, Viber, Telegram, and IMO – expanded on in the next section).
2. **Directly – members of the diaspora actively encouraged some PMs to migrate.** PMs in all three provinces had friends or family abroad who encouraged them and backed this up by offering practical or financial assistance.

This contrasts with DRC's 2019 ADIP study, where diaspora members claimed to respond to requests for assistance with discouragement. It may be that individuals in the diaspora can at once state public opposition to irregular migration and privately provide encouragement or assistance to help PMs in their networks to migrate safely.

The bigger picture may be more divided. MMC's 4Mi data from Greece (March 2020) described this complex picture of diasporic influence – 49 percent reported being likely or somewhat likely to encourage migration among those back at home while 50 percent said they were unlikely to encourage migration.[66] In the 4Mi Afghan Returnee Surveys, 32 percent said they were likely or somewhat likely to encourage others to migrate while 62

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[61] 46.3 percent for those who did as opposed to 32.6 percent for those who did not.

[62] 88 percent in Round 1, 24 percent in Round 2.

[63] Seefar (2016) *Reluctant Journeys: Why Afghans Migrate Irregularly to Europe*; Seefar. (2018). *Pushed Towards Migration: Understanding How Irregular Migration Dynamics and Attitudes Are Evolving in Afghanistan*.

[64] 380 Afghan respondents in the quantitative survey and 29 additional qualitative interviews with Afghan women in Afghanistan, Serbia, and Germany.

[65] Mixed Migration Centre (2018) *Experiences of Female Refugees and Migrants in Origin, Transit, and Destination Countries: A Comparative Study of Women on the Move from Afghanistan, East and West Africa*.

[66] Mixed Migration Centre Op. Cit.

percent said they were unlikely to do so – however, the higher discouragement may be because the interviewees were people who had returned.

Diaspora members helped with practical and financial aspects of plans. For example, family members in the diaspora had supported one PM in identifying a reliable smuggler. The purpose of this information was to help friends or relatives in Afghanistan to succeed. Financial assistance would help the PM get more reliable support from smugglers and have a successful journey; practical support might direct them to the best route. Information was never more explicitly protection-oriented than that. Specific SGBV or kidnapping risks are not discussed by the diaspora, according to one CI who relied on the internet for this information.

Diaspora members were important for giving or verifying information to help PMs finalise plans. Respondents to this study similarly told interviewers they often verify information about the practical aspects of the journey, which typically came from less trusted sources such as smugglers, with family or friends abroad who have experience of migration.

Can the diaspora have an indirect influence?

Although respondents spoke of being encouraged by their friends and family in the diaspora, many also spoke about indirect influence. **PMs reported that they are inspired to migrate after hearing the stories of a better life from these diaspora members**, some report seeing images and videos of the beautiful destination countries, and hearing about the fact that discrimination, violence, and poverty are not issues over there.

KIs also pointed to the role of the diaspora abroad, whose indirect signalling is facilitated through social media and with whom direct conversations also take place across various social media platforms - one KI from the Afghan head of a migration communication project mentioned the use of online chat rooms within video games like PUBG and said that information tends to move quickly among young people.

> **"The way of life of the Afghan diaspora and their speeches regarding the status of life before and after migration have motivated us to migrate. Our relatives, my cousins, who had lived here with us, have migrated abroad, every one of them has become a doctor and engineer."**
>
> **- a male PM, Kabul, 30.**

Another KI mentioned that indirect signalling can also occur through remittances, which was also highlighted in DRC's 2019 ADIP study. Indirect signalling is particularly important in cases where diaspora members are not honest about their experiences and the extreme risk of the undertaking – because they may feel pressurised to depict their journey as nothing short of successful. Illustrating with an example, one KI spoke about relatives of his who did not share information about their documentation rejections in Sweden until the third time, when they finally asked around for advice. On the other hand, a culture of silence around positive experiences may also prevail, according to the same KI. Afghan culture, according to him, sometimes shies away from talking about good things for fear of envy. In such cases, indirect signalling becomes more important as a motivator than direct encouragement from the diaspora.

One KI pointed to a cultural significance that a connection to Europe holds for Afghans – giving the example of a relative who was unemployed and having trouble getting married while in Afghanistan, but gained considerable respect and stature in the community after he migrated to Germany.

The successful migration journey, the remittances sent home, and images of their life displayed on social media (increasingly used by Afghan[67] migrants) indirectly signal success, according to the 2019 DRC ADIP study.[68] Seefar's longitudinal study in 2018 found that the majority of PMs formed positive impressions of life at destination from the diaspora while the few that formed negative impressions tended to explain them away as a lack of understanding of how difficult life can be in Afghanistan.[69] Coupled with the diaspora's own desire to portray their journey as successful as well as an unwillingness to speak of the trauma experienced, this limits the ability to communicate the dangers of irregular migration journeys effectively.

Who in the diaspora is influential?

Friends and relatives in the diaspora were more important than strangers. Male PMs tended to report being influenced by friends in the diaspora far more than female PMs who spoke about relatives in the diaspora: husbands, cousins, aunts, and even parents. CIs noted that a lot of the information and encouragement they themselves get to migrate, even if they have so far rejected it, comes from friends and family abroad who have built successful lives there.

4Mi's Afghan Returnee Surveys also showed that family and friends in the diaspora were important and strangers much less so. Although only

> "Take pictures next to a boat or a nice building and post on social media. Other Afghans see it and think this is the life they have. But they don't show pictures of working 14 hours in a kitchen or in other difficult jobs."
>
> *but also…*
>
> "Culturally we believe if you talk about something good, people will envy it and it will be destroyed. This is a strong belief so they don't talk about something good."
>
> — Afghan KI working for international development organisation.

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[67] Seefar. (2018). *Pushed Towards Migration: Understanding How Irregular Migration Dynamics and Attitudes Are Evolving in Afghanistan*.

[69] Seefar Op. Cit.

seven percent of respondents cited the general diaspora (non-family/friends) as an influence on their decision to migrate, 64 percent reported being influenced by diaspora friends/family. Nearly 46 percent also reported that they found information (on routes, destinations, costs, risk, and asylum opportunities) received from diaspora friends/family the most useful.

Figure 15: Biggest influences on the decision to migrate
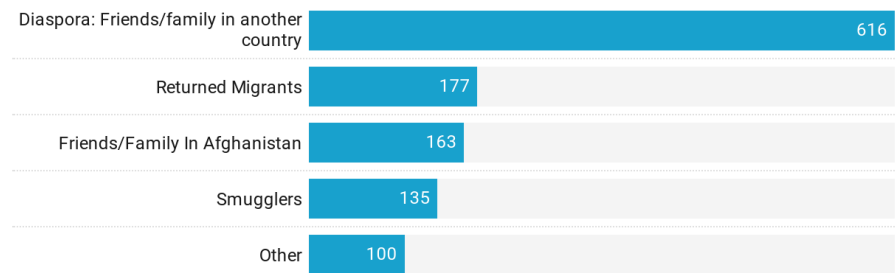
Biggest Influences on Migration Decisions
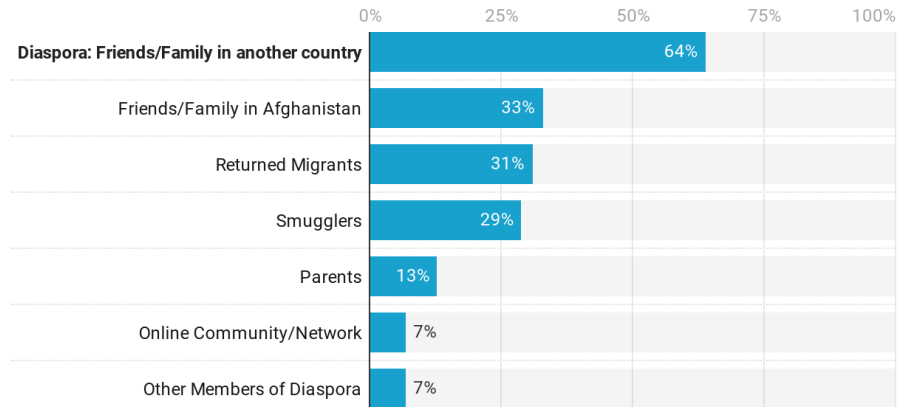
n=1344
Source: Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism Initiative (4Mi) • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 16: Most useful source of information for a migrant

Most Useful Information Source Prior To Journey

Information around routes, destinations, costs, risks, asylum opportunities, etc

n=1344
Source: Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism Initiative (4Mi) • Created with Datawrapper

The 2019 DRC ADIP study showed that diaspora groups insist they are discouraging of irregular migration when contacted. Yet Afghan PMs and CIs in the qualitative fieldwork are certain that those contacting them from the diaspora are encouraging. It appears that public and ostensibly formal or official information flows are much more likely to be dismissed in favour of known and trusted contacts in PMs' own networks.[70] One KI pointed out that

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[70] DRC's 2019 study with the Afghan diaspora points to the phenomenon of potential migrants reaching out to strangers in the diaspora.

diaspora groups are typically focused on advocating for Afghans at destination and do not engage much with Afghans back home.

How are negative stories from the diaspora received?

CI interviews indicate that negative stories from the diaspora do circulate in the local community but are either not heard, not believed, or rationalised by PMs. For instance, the risks of the journey are brought up by almost every PM and are rationalised as necessary experiences to improve their life through migration. Rationalisation also involved the belief that the situation is as bad in Afghanistan anyway, that a person who has started the journey must (and will) find a way to succeed, that the risk is a short-term one, that even if they lose family members, they will not lose everybody and the rest will have a better life at destination.

PMs did not give much thought to life after a successful arrival and dismissed negative stories raised by CIs as less relevant to them. CIs brought up issues at destination including securing the right documentation to be allowed to stay, having to work low wage jobs, and mental health problems stemming from the trauma of migration, reception conditions, and discrimination at destination. CIs felt that migrants who are successful in building a life continue to have regrets. **The most likely explanation is that diaspora members' encouragement and support sufficiently outweigh any seeds of doubt placed by local CIs.**

Two KIs highlighted that negative stories from the diaspora are sometimes rationalised by PMs as an unwillingness to help or share their good fortune. One female CI (who is interested in regular migration) spoke about this as well and felt it to be the reason why diaspora members are sometimes encouraging but not specific in their advice.

The credibility of diaspora messaging can also be undermined by PMs' perception that they are anti-migration.[71] Studies show that diaspora members who advise PMs not to migrate[72] are less credible because a) Afghans who have been out of the country a long time do not have a proper understanding of the current situation in Afghanistan; and b) successful earlier migrants are unwilling to share their good fortune.[73]

"Here in Afghanistan, my whole family has a miserable life. I know the journey is risky, maybe I will lose a member of my family on this journey, but I can save the lives of remaining members and protect them from this miserable life."

– a male PM in Herat, 34.

[71] Nimkar, R & Frouws, B. Op. Cit.

[72] Nimkar, R & Frouws, B. Op. Cit; REACH Initiative (2019) *Outspoken but Unheard: How Diasporas in Europe Shape Migration along the Central Mediterranean Sea Route*; Danish Refugee Council (2019) Confronted with Despair and Disillusionment: A Qualitative Research into the Afghan Diaspora's Perceptions about Information-Sharing with Migrants.
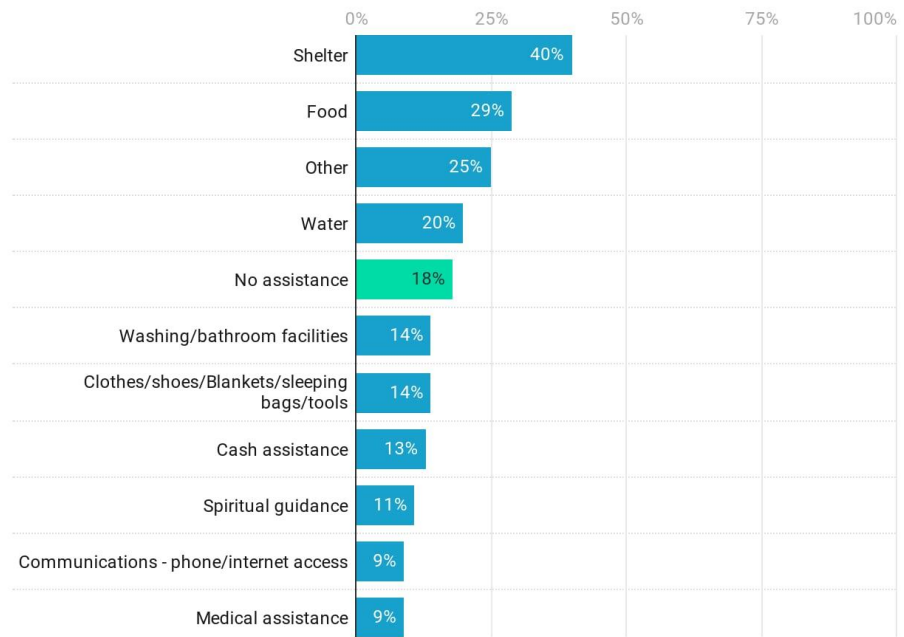
[73] REACH Initiative Op. Cit.

The diaspora also felt the weight of the responsibility should their information lead to unfortunate outcomes for the migrant.[74] A communication mismatch and souring of relations may also take place when their advice is not taken.[75]

The trust deficit is aggravated by the diaspora's own admission that they fear a backlash from natives in the destination country if migration continues.[76] However, they do continue to give financial support, especially in cases where the migrant encounters trouble on the journey and reaches out for help.[77] An expectation of support from the diaspora may partly explain why PMs were happy to migrate without a thorough understanding of the risks.

MMC's 2020 4Mi Afghan Returnee Surveys underline this. 85 percent reported receiving some form of aid from the Afghan diaspora at destination, including shelter, food, water, cash assistance, communications support via phone/internet, medical assistance, psychological support, and legal assistance.

Figure 17: Help received from the Afghan diaspora at destination

Help Received From Afghan Diaspora at Destination

	%
Shelter	40%
Food	29%
Other	25%
Water	20%
No assistance	18%
Washing/bathroom facilities	14%
Clothes/shoes/Blankets/sleeping bags/tools	14%
Cash assistance	13%
Spiritual guidance	11%
Communications - phone/internet access	9%
Medical assistance	9%

n=1142
Source: Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism Initiative (4Mi) • Created with Datawrapper

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[74] Danish Refugee Council (2019) Confronted with Despair and Disillusionment: A Qualitative Research into the Afghan Diaspora's Perceptions about Information-Sharing with Migrants.
[75] Danish Refugee Council Op. Cit.
[76] Nimkar, R & Frouws, B. Op. Cit.
[77] Nimkar, R & Frouws, B. Op. Cit.

MMC's 2020 4Mi Afghan Returnee Surveys also asked respondents about the stories of migration they heard and the sources of these, prior to their journey. Insights corroborated the qualitative fieldwork, namely in that **respondents had heard more stories of success than failure. Moreover, the diaspora was the dominant source of these stories.** For 50 percent of the respondents, the top source of migration stories was friends/family in the diaspora, followed by returned migrants and friends/family in Afghanistan.

Figure 18: Source of stories of migration

Source of Migration Stories
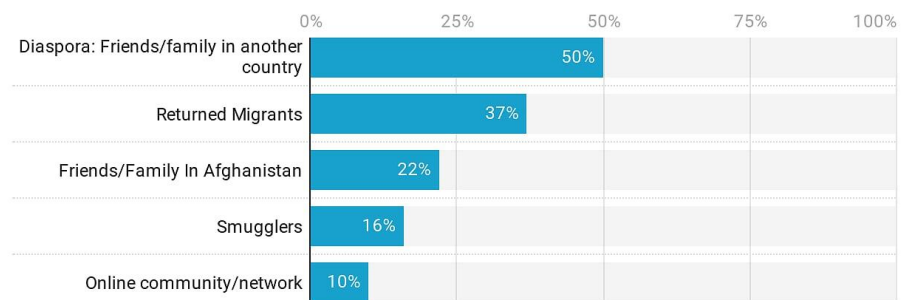
n=1344
Source: Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism Initiative (4Mi) • Created with Datawrapper

Smuggler influence

A 2016 UNHCR report found that smugglers were usually trusted, influential local people, referred to as "uncles" who also posed as "legal advisors for asylum applications."[78] These smugglers often built up an unrealistic picture of life in Europe through photos and false information about the ease of living and integration opportunities. PMs, CIs and KIs in this study explained that smugglers often provided guidance on how to migrate and support en route**.**

"The smuggler gives us information, but they only tell us the route and the way."

- a PM in Herat, 27.

Smugglers may be slightly more proactive in stimulating demand for their services in Herat and Nimroz. A minority of interviewees (three CIs and one PM) felt that smugglers leveraged trusted networks in Nimroz and Herat to this end – however one CI did also mention the prevalence of smuggling networks in Kabul, ns urban area, although they are also said to be more dispersed and difficult to track down in urban areas. MMC's 2020 4Mi Afghan Returnee Surveys suggest that smugglers are more proactive in Kunduz too, where 62 percent named them the second most important influence on their decision to migrate. In Nangarhar, it was 35 percent. Nevertheless, friends and family in the diaspora remained the top influence in all but one location where family and friends in Afghanistan prevailed (Sar-e-

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[78] UNHCR (2016) *From a Refugee Perspective: Discourse of Arabic Speaking and Afghan Refugees and Migrants on Social Media from March to December 2016*

1.

pul). Unlike other ethnicities, Pashtun respondents reported smugglers as their third most important source of information.

On the one hand, a successful track record carried weight and encouraged interviewees to engage smugglers to help with the journey. According to KIs, smugglers in Afghanistan were deeply embedded into society, communities and families. On the other hand, interviewees tended not to trust smugglers, aware that despite belonging to close social networks, they had their own motives. One PM from Kabul mentioned that it is more dangerous to trust smugglers in the cities where they are difficult to get a hold of; close networks in rural areas mean smugglers' identities are well known and they are less able to avoid consequences for poor services. Two KIs explained that members of the diaspora were often keen to distance themselves, speaking of smugglers as third parties.

Local community influence

What influence do families in origin communities have?

PMs were mostly discouraged by their immediate family, but KIs interviewed indicated that family is important for the material support needed in a migration journey. Some CIs felt that PMs tend to keep their migration decisions to themselves, perhaps for fear of discouragement. KIs described parents, especially of younger people unable to afford the cost of migration, as actively contributing to the migration decision by sourcing information, leveraging their network, and paying money – however, they are also invested in ensuring as safe a journey as possible for their child. For example, the thousands of young Afghans returning from Turkey in 2019 and 2020 are unlikely to have been able to afford the journey without family support, according to a KI involved in providing assistance.

The literature echoes this, finding that family members were often opposed to irregular journeys and their associated dangers, even after migrants had reached their destination but nonetheless felt compelled to provide assistance when requested.[79]

What influence do respected members of origin communities have?

CIs were also divided as to the extent of the influence they have, despite their often-high standing in the community. Some spoke of going to great lengths to discourage irregular and unsafe migration – talking to friends and family members, trying to influence students to choose regular migration routes. One CI from Nimroz hired some of the people who came to him for advice just to prevent them from migrating irregularly and had also arranged "anti-migration" gatherings to raise awareness. Another, also from

> "Many of our relatives and family members tell us about the consequences of illegal migration and ask us not to leave the country. But we have no choice."
>
> – a PM in Herat, 27

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[79] Linke, L. (2016) *Deciding To Leave Afghanistan (1): Motives for Migration* Afghan Analysts Network.

Nimroz, spoke about how there are people who take initiative, at the individual level, to gather information and dissuade their friends and family.

Interviewed professors and teachers seemed somewhat confident of their ability to counsel their students and their general role in community building. However, others said that they did not have a lot of influence, that PMs do not consult others when they have decided to migrate, and that the people in dire circumstances will migrate anyway, regardless of advice.

Migration conversations are known to happen in *Jirgas,* **quasi-judicial village level gatherings of community leaders**. One PM from Kabul talked about how migration disputes between smugglers and migrants are resolved in this, involving informal documents which would never be accepted in a court of law. KIs also reflected on how *jirgas* can be leveraged to have community conversations about irregular migration, although any programming in this regard will have to take the current COVID-19 realities into account.

Interviews suggest further nuances with regard to socioeconomic status and gender. Financially stable people, such as those with good jobs or businesses[80] appeared to feel most strongly about the dangers of irregular migration and lament those that decided to migrate – however this may be a function of the fact that most CIs interviewed belonged to such categories.

Women CIs said that migration was one of the most "hotly debated" (Nimroz) topics among women and that most women are interested in it. Women in Nimroz often discuss migration in meetings of close friends, covering topics such as process, conditions, and possibilities. Women appear to be more specific about the risks than men and discussed getting lost, rape and disappearance – topics that their relatives in the diaspora were reluctant to raise. Women were "imprisoned and had no freedom" and often made jokes that they would even marry old men if it meant migrating abroad, according to a CI in Nimroz. Another CI in Herat felt that most women were interested in migrating, anticipating the possibilities of moving for their own employment and education.

However, female CIs appeared less influential than male CIs. Most women CIs had experiences of advising women family members but were otherwise not approached. One female CI in Kabul was keen to help mitigate the dangers of irregular migration but did not know how. This contrasts with the experience of male CIs who were more likely to have had friends, family members and students approach them for advice about migration.

My friends and I (college friends) discuss different topics when we are together, and one of the most hotly debated topics among us is the issue of migrating from Afghanistan.

– a CI in Nimroz, 27.

"They get upset when they think about the situations and realize how flawed they are here, especially women who are all imprisoned here and have no freedom. Although among the people that have left and I know them, women have migrated far less than men."

– a female CI in Nimroz, 27.

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[80] Interesting to note that one potential migrant in the qualitative data was a businessman and he, and another respondent, felt that better off people are the ones who want to migrate – as they have something to lose and cannot grow their wealth in Afghanistan.

The literature more strongly suggests that word of mouth within local communities is important.[81] The sample's focus on Afghans who had already decided to migrate risks underplaying the importance of local communities. One study found that 26 out of 27 respondents who had abandoned their migration plans did so because their family wanted them to stay, while a little over half cited family and friends in Afghanistan as the most important influencer on the decision to *not* migrate.[82]

Despite the rise of social media and newer-ICT enabled channels, 'traditional influencers' such as community elders and religious heads continued to serve as a filter through which news about the outside world was passed – CIs in the interviews also pointed out the aversions religious leaders tend to have to migration and the role they can play in influencing PMs.[83] Prior literature highlights that community elders,[84] in particular, had strong views about the dangers of illegal migration journeys and wanted active discouragement on that front from the national media. [85]

Are Afghans pressured by migration 'culture'?

Some PMs may be responding to a broader peer or community pressure to migrate. A CI in Herat spoke of the aspiration to migrate to Europe almost as a competition among young people, with a successful journey being a more general marker of success. In Kabul, one CI spoke of young Afghans being 'brainwashed' into irregular migration – by 'tourism centres' in Kabul's Gulbahar Centre spreading false information about expensive regular journeys and problems at destination with the regular route. One KI also highlighted the prevalence of a migration culture in Afghanistan due to insecurity as opposed to Africa, where he felt that economic drivers were more important.

This apparent culture of migration seemed particularly relevant to PMs in Nimroz. One PM from the province spoke about how irregular migration is so common there that finding information on it and talking about it openly are accepted, even by government authorities. Another CI reflected how almost all families have someone abroad. However, barriers to regular migration also came up repeatedly in Nimroz.

4Mi's 2020 Afghan Returnee Surveys both found that pressure to migrate from family and friends appears to be important in triggering decision (Figure 21). Although only 14 percent reported the culture of

[81] Seefar (2019) *Distant Dreams: Understanding Aspirations of Afghan Returnees*. Mixed Migration Centre. UNHCR (2016) *From a Refugee Perspective: Discourse of Arabic Speaking and Afghan Refugees and Migrants on Social Media from March to December 2016* World Food Programme. (2017). *At the Root of Exodus: Food Security, Conflict and International Migration*.

[82] Seefar (2019) *Sustained Interest, Delayed Migration: Emerging Irregular Migration Dynamics in Afghanistan.*.

[83] Sayara Research Op. Cit.

[84] A Sayara Research study with 75 respondents in Kabul, Herat, and Nangarhar provinces

[85] A Sayara Research study with 75 respondents in Kabul, Herat, and Nangarhar provinces

migration as an explicit driver, 43 percent either agreed or strongly agreed that they had faced pressure to migrate from their families while 29 percent indicated that they faced such pressure from friends. Family pressure was most significant in Kunduz whereas peer pressure was most significant in Herat.

Among those aged 35 and above, more respondents said that they agreed or strongly agreed with the statement on family pressure (58 percent) as compared to those aged 34 and below (39 percent). 40 percent of young respondents (34 and below) disagreed/strongly disagreed with the statement as compared to 28 percent of older respondents. Those below 20 years old largely felt pressured by friends (57 percent), while other age groups tended to disagree with the statement regarding peer pressure.

Figure 19: Pressure to migrate

Before the respondent left Afghanistan, they were under pressure from
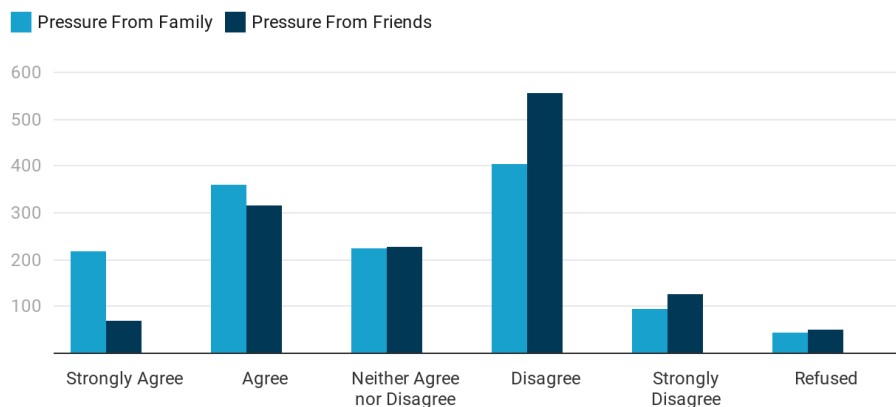
n=1344
Source: Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism Initiative (4Mi) • Created with Datawrapper

Are returnees influential?

The influence of returnees depended on their status. Returns to Afghanistan range from lesser educated labourers forced back from Iran, Pakistan, Turkey or Europe to highly educated and often wealthy Afghans returning of their own volition (sometimes known as "repats"). Wealthy returnees were most credible but KIs and CIs pointed out that, by virtue of their success, were likely to spark interest in migration.

Less fortunate returnees, including deportees, served as cautionary tales. MMC's 2020 4Mi Afghan Returnee Surveys found that respondents aged 25-34 years old (35 percent) and Tajiks (40 percent), were most likely to cite returnees as influential on their decision to migrate. Returned migrants were

more trusted in Herat, Ghor, Bamyan, and Takhar – areas with a higher density of Hazara and Tajik Afghans. When asked if they would encourage migration, most respondents – who are all returnees – (62 percent) said they were unlikely to, while 32 percent reported being likely or somewhat likely to encourage others to migrate. In general, women were more likely to encourage others to migrate and men were more unlikely to do so.

However, returnees were also less likely to be credible and, as studies as well as the 4Mi data have shown,[86] are vulnerable to re-embarking on unsafe journeys themselves. In the 4Mi Afghan Returnee Surveys, a smaller percentage of women (19 percent) reported wanting to stay in Afghanistan as compared to men (25 percent). Germany, Turkey, and Sweden were the popular destinations – for men it was Germany and Turkey, while for women it was Canada and Sweden. Returnees, therefore, may be better deployed in encouraging safer migration and may be incentivised to do so due to their own aspirations.

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[86] UNHCR (2016) *From a Refugee Perspective: Discourse of Arabic Speaking and Afghan Refugees and Migrants on Social Media from March to December 2016;* Samuel Hall (2018) *Escaping War: Where to Next?* Norwegian Refugee Council.

Online and mass media influence

Access to internet and TV appears to be associated with the aspiration to migrate. The 2019 Survey of the Afghan People found that 46.4 percent of Afghans using the internet and 40.7 percent watching TV were more willing to migrate than those who did not. While there is not a conclusive, causative relationship, these trends merit further exploration. Sources of information in the qualitative fieldwork were varied.

Figure 20: PM and CI's sources of information on migration
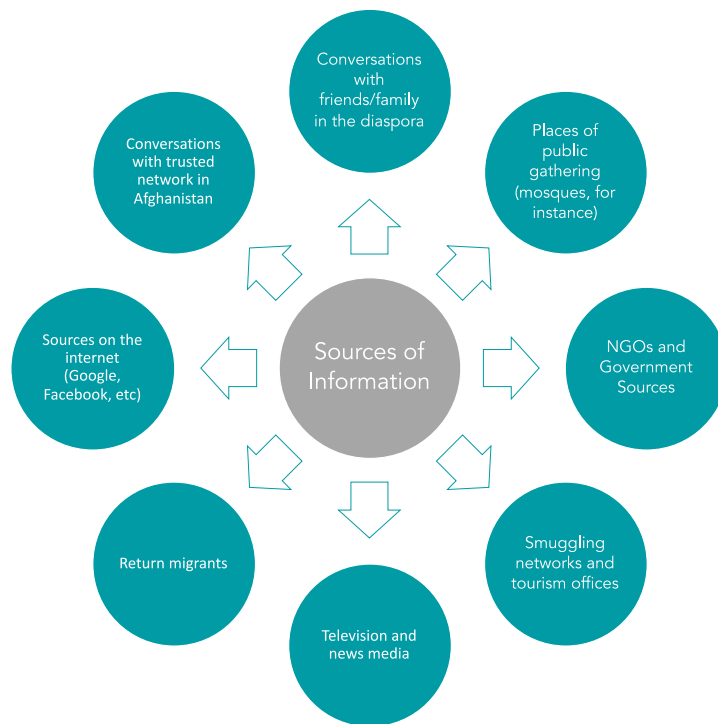
Social media and the internet

Despite the increasing uptake in the use of social media among the Afghan population, social media was primarily a tool of communication, connecting PMs with CIs at home and in the diaspora. An August 2018 4Mi snapshot on Monthly Migration Movements echoed this, finding social media played a supplemental role to personal relationships.[87] TV was the more relevant open information source, as expanded on in the next section.

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[87] Mixed Migration Centre (August 2018) *Monthly Migration Movements: Social Media*

For PMs and CIs, social media tools such as Facebook and WhatsApp were the most important for maintaining this communication. A wide range of online tools were mentioned, the most prominent being Facebook and WhatsApp. Instagram and IMO were mentioned less often but by both men and women.

Older respondents tended to report friends and family in the diaspora and public gatherings as their main sources. Social media, when mentioned, was mostly Facebook and did not include the larger spectrum of avenues (Instagram, Google, IMO, etc.) that younger respondents engaged with.

This is consistent with findings that diaspora-PM communication mainly took place through one-on-one conversations. Public or group conversations about the topic of migration were rare – a finding consistent with some of the CIs' perspectives that irregular migration was considered a sensitive decision that PMs do not wish to broadcast.

<div style="border:1px solid">

Box 5: Social Media Usage in Afghanistan

- Facebook, Instagram, Google, WhatsApp, IMO, and Telegram were all mentioned by PMs and CIs in the interviews, by men and women.
- Respondents without online access indicated that they relied only on their local networks.
- In contrast to low internet penetration nationally, interviewees almost all used the internet. The 2019 Survey of the Afghan people found internet usage was low (17.6 percent) but over 50 percent reported their area having access to it while use of the internet has seen an upward trend from 1.1 percent in 2006. Internet users were more likely to be male, urban, in Kabul, younger, and better educated.
- A 2018 4Mi snapshot found that those with higher education were more likely to be using social media for information and that Facebook was the most common.[1]

</div>

DRC's 2016 study of ICT technologies and migration highlighted that information on journeys, destinations, and smugglers are also found through

these tools.[88] Seefar's longitudinal studies between 2016-2019 echoed this and found that migrants seek information regarding the journey, smuggling networks, risks, and expectations at destination from personal and social networks both at source and from the diaspora. [89]

Television and radio

PMs and CIs described television advertisements and news media as important sources too. Tolo TV was mentioned by several PM and CI respondents, men and women, especially in Nimroz and Herat. Ariana News was mentioned by only one female PM in Nimroz while a male PM from the same province mentioned watching Iranian TV channels. A few PMs and CIs also referred to government sources, NGOs, and embassies, while some PMs said they had no formal sources of information.

To set this in its national context, the 2019 Survey of the Afghan People found that Afghans most often used the following sources for news/information:

- family and friends (86.7 percent)
- TV (65.9 percent)
- radio (57.3 percent)
- mosques (45.3 percent)
- community *shuras* (38.8 percent)
- internet (14.4 percent).

Those relying on TV and the internet tended to be more willing to migrate than radio users. The use of radio reflected a downward trend over the years, and was more prevalent in rural areas, and in the south of the country. TV usage has seen a general upward trend over the years, and is far more common in urban areas, among men, and in the Central/Kabul regions rather than the south. TV usage was also more common among younger Afghans, those with a university education and the Tajik and Hazara communities.

Verification of information

CIs and PMs tended to trust information that came either from people close to them (friends and family) or people they considered to be knowledgeable, such as returnees. A distrust of people outside the immediate circle was reflected by one PM who spoke of not trusting Shias but trusting Sunnis. Despite the rise of ICT use, literature shows that community

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[88] Frouws, B. Phillips, M., Hassan, A. & Twigt, M. (2016) *Getting to Europe the Whatsapp Way: The Use of ICT in Contemporary Mixed Migration Flows to Europe* RMMS Briefing Paper.
[89] Seefar (2016) *Reluctant Journeys: Why Afghans Migrate Irregularly to Europe*; Seefar. (2018). *Pushed Towards Migration: Understanding How Irregular Migration Dynamics and Attitudes Are Evolving in Afghanistan*; Frouws, B. Phillips, M., Hassan, A. & Twigt, M. (2016) *Getting to Europe the Whatsapp Way: The Use of ICT in Contemporary Mixed Migration Flows to Europe* RMMS Briefing Paper.

elders and religious heads verify information[90] – a finding consistent with the qualitative fieldwork where several respondents spoke of verifying information with people they considered knowledgeable.

PMs sought to verify information, usually with others in their local networks or with diaspora. The fact that CIs and PMs within the same community tend to rely on the same sources of information has potentially led to the creation of community echo chambers, where community members verify information with each other, with little outside input to challenge misinformation.

Women PMs tended to rely on family members for verification – parents, husbands, brothers, relatives both in Afghanistan and the diaspora. Women PMs may also have fewer sources of verification. In Herat, one PM mentioned that she relies on the men of the family (also seen in prior literature)[91] for such issues while another said that she has no way to verify information. While evidence from interviews with women PMs showed that gender-based drivers of migration exist (patriarchy, violence, discrimination, oppression), women respondents nonetheless relied more on male figures and those within their family as sources of verification.

In contrast, men were more likely to mention friends abroad as their source for verification. Younger female CIs were among the few interviewees who reported using social media and internet websites, especially Facebook and Google, to verify information they had heard in their community.

Prior literature has also found that women's information channels both within Afghanistan and with the diaspora differed from the ones that men use.[92] The 2019 DRC ADIP study with the Afghan diaspora found that women tended to discuss gender-specific topics like menstruation, rape, and birth control among themselves and that female diaspora members were less comfortable passing on such information to men back home.

Literature pointed out that women tended to rely on the men in their families for information as well as on channels exclusive to them such as beauty parlours. Men, on the other hand, had much more ready access to places of public gathering – mosques, bazaars, public transport – for the verification of information.[93] The 2019 Survey of the Afghan People also found that men tend to use mosques and community *shuras* as spaces for information exchange more than women – however, overall, the proportion of respondents using mosques/*shuras* as a source of information had declined marginally, since prior years of the survey.

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[90] Sayara Research (2016) *Afghan Information Ecosystems: A Design Research Approach* Internews.

[91] Sayara Research Op. Cit.

[92] Sayara Research (2016) *Afghan Information Ecosystems: A Design Research Approach* Internews.

[93] Sayara Research Op. Cit.

Information campaigns: experiences and perceptions

SBCC Campaigns in Afghanistan

Migration information campaigns have proliferated in Afghanistan in the last ten years. They include:

- The 2013 "Don't be Sorry" campaign by the Australian Embassy;
- "Leaving Afghanistan? Are you sure?" and #RumoursaboutGermany, both part of the same 2015 campaign by the German Embassy in Kabul.
- The European Commission and ICF Mostra's 2015 "We stay to build Afghanistan" campaign.
- The 2015-2016 Communications Campaign for Persons of Concern hosted/transitioning through Turkey to the EU by UNHCR Turkey.
- The Migrant Project (2017 – present), implemented by Seefar and funded by the United Kingdom and German Federal Foreign Office.
- ICMPD's Migrant Resource Centres, first opened in 2018.

Exposure to migration campaigns is generally high

Most PMs and CIs said they had seen some kind of information campaign (IC). CIs pointed to workshops by ICRC or Oxfam, Australia's "Not Your Home" campaign or campaigns by the Italian Government (unnamed). A majority of respondents, especially PMs, spoke in general terms when asked about exposure to ICs – they spoke in terms of TV advertisements (Tolo TV was mentioned multiple times), Facebook, and news shows which gave them information about the dangers of irregular migration – these have been included within the ambit of exposure to ICs.

Whether these were part of formal ICs was unclear from the interviews. KIs were familiar with more well-known information campaigns such as the Australian ones and TV advertisements while some had been directly involved in programmes such as "We stay to build Afghanistan". CI/PM interviews indicated that the government speaks out against irregular migration through television.

Not all KIs had direct involvement with SBCC programming but did have inputs on how effective communications could be undertaken. However, a few were also pessimistic about how much influence messaging campaigns could have in a situation where people have fundamental factors such as poverty, unemployment, and lack of opportunity pushing them to migrate. The importance of capacity building and working to address these factors, along with improving messaging, was highlighted by KIs.

Campaigns had an uneven effect in improving protection or limiting migration

Most PMs who had heard of campaigns said these had a limited impact on their decision to migrate. While this is somewhat expected as the study purposively selected PMs who planned to migrate, the reasons for this are worth exploring. Several cited Australia's "Not Your Home" campaign while others reported watching video advertisements on TV (Tolo TV) and Facebook about the dangers of irregular migration.

Interviewees felt that campaigns based on negative messaging about risks and failures could not impact migration. Their minds were made up about wishing to migrate and motivation came from seeing the better life that is possible at destination and the desperation of their situation in Afghanistan. A UNHCR study which found that respondents from urban areas tended to view information campaigns as government propaganda echoed this.[94]

Campaigns' effectiveness can also be limited by a misplaced assumption that PMs lack information when they may simply disregard information that may otherwise be useful to them.[95] Similarly, assumptions that smugglers drive migration can miss the dynamics that lead to demand for smuggler services arising in the first place.[96]

Nevertheless, this does not mean that campaigns focused on these issues are necessarily ineffective. In response to this study, two PMs said that the campaigns they have been exposed to frightened them and weakened the decision to migrate. CIs were more divided. While several felt that campaigns were not effective in the absence of material change to jobs and security, others were encouraging of their potential to help Afghans migrate more

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[94] UNHCR (2016) *From a Refugee Perspective: Discourse of Arabic Speaking and Afghan Refugees and Migrants on Social Media from March to December 2016*.

[95] Nimkar, R & Frouws, B. (2018) *Split Loyalties: Mixed Migration and the Diaspora Connection* RMMS Discussion Paper; REACH Initiative (2019) *Outspoken but Unheard: How Diasporas in Europe Shape Migration along the Central Mediterranean Sea Route*; Vermeulen, M. (2020) *Europe Is the Promised Land – and Nothing Will Convince These Migrants Otherwise* The Correspondent.

[96] Alpes, M & Sørensen, N. (2015) *Migration Risk Campaigns Are Based on Wrong Assumptions* Danish Institute for International Studies.

safely. One female CI felt that media campaigns in particular could lead people to safer alternatives or regular routes. Although some CIs did mention the effectiveness of in-person conversations, the role of media campaigns through TV was brought up by several – two respondents spoke about how TV was more trustworthy because information is verified and investigated whereas anybody can post on social media.

CIs and KIs felt that information campaigns aiming to deter dangerous irregular journeys cannot be effective in doing so long as the fundamental issues forcing people to migrate – jobs, education, violence – remain prevalent in Afghanistan. However, KIs also felt that there is a role for campaigns that correct existing information asymmetries and tackle the one-sided information/misinformation that prevails in some cases.

4Mi Afghan Returnee Surveys[97] found that exposure to formal information campaigns had been limited. Although no significant gender or age differences existed, of the 21 percent who had been exposed to ICs, most had been seen by respondents in Ghazni (17 percent), Kunduz (13 percent), Herat (10 percent), and Daykundi (7 percent). However, the maximum number of responses also came from these provinces.

Figure 21: Information campaigns

"In my opinion, campaigns are useless, because they do not guarantee our lives and do not help people."

– a PM in Herat, 27.

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[97] Note that respondents were returnees, those who had already migrated once and returned to Afghanistan, meaning some may have been abroad during campaign periods.

Did the respondent come across any information campaigns about the dangers of migrating without documentation

For respondents with yes as a response, they came across minimum of 2 information campaigns on average.

No (76%)
Yes (21%)
Refused (2.8%)
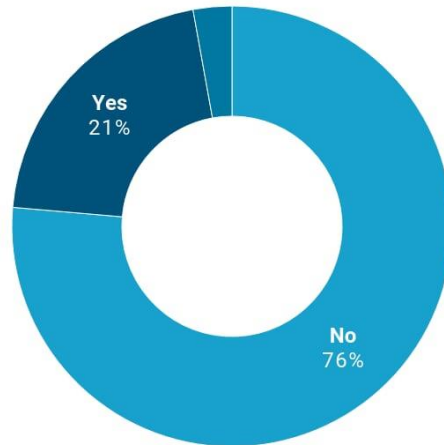
n=1198

Source: Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism Initiative (4Mi) • Created with Datawrapper

MMC's 4Mi snapshot of June 2020, based on the January-March dataset of the Afghan Returnee Survey also reported that although less than a quarter had encountered ICs (with men more likely to than women), the minority that did reported slightly higher risk awareness.

Lack of evaluation culture hinders understanding of what is effective

In the case of Afghanistan, information campaigns have targeted a variety of issues including violence, health, security, drugs, and elections[98] - and an increasing number aimed specifically at changing attitudes and behaviours around irregular migration. Assessments in Ethiopia and Nigeria show that information-based campaigns in the field of migration have brought positive outcomes in terms of community engagement and informed discussion on the issue of irregular migration.[99]

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[98] Seefar (2020) *Analysis of Communications Campaigns in Afghanistan*.
[99] Joloba, D. (2018) *ILO Assessment of Awareness-Raising Interventions to Prevent Irregular Migration*.
   Chinedu, O., Bartolini, F., & D'Haese, M. (2019) *Evaluating the Impact of Information Campaign in Deterring Irregular Migration Intention among Youths. A Randomised Control Experiment in Edo State, Nigeria*.

However, understanding of the effectiveness of migration communications campaigns is limited, not least as evaluations tend to be rare, less than rigorous or not publicly available. A 2018 IOM assessment of 65 information campaigns across four continents found that only 30 percent had publicly available results and only two had been published in peer-reviewed journals. Seventy-five percent claimed some degree of success but the assessment found that the quality of evidence underpinning that assertion was inadequate.

Improving the evaluation culture requires understanding the three key reasons why robust evaluation of previous efforts is not available:

1. **Evaluations are conducted but donors or implementers are reluctant to make results public.** Some donors fear that public scrutiny in such a sensitive area of programming may undermine efforts in other areas; implementers fear breaking trust with beneficiaries in origin countries where irregular migration is unlawful and stigmatised.
2. **Evaluations and assessments are conducted but the lack of a clear theory of change make outcomes difficult to measure.** For example, the lack of a structured communications for development or SBCC framework means that ambitious but vague goals are set with no clear path from intervention to attitude or behaviour change.
3. **Resource constraints mean evaluation is not considered.** Communications interventions are often small and short-term, making evaluation seem less worthwhile. Short lead times to projects can limit time available for formative research, making it difficult to set baselines and to properly evaluate.

A cross-cutting symptom of these three factors is confusion around what campaigns are supposed to achieve. Should project resources be committed to increasing the awareness of risks, encouraging help-seeking behaviour en route or pursuing strategies that decrease the appeal of irregular migration? IOM's 2018 assessment of 65 information campaigns found a third did not have clear objectives, missing an opportunity to align the efforts and resources of donors, managers, implementing staff and partners.

Information campaigns: what next?

What are the information gaps in existing information campaigns?

The few PMs who stated the information they felt would be useful echoed CIs and KIs, asking for:

- Information about life at destination (PM), longer term issues such as employment, integration, deportation, and discrimination (CI, KI)
- Information about where to migrate, processes to follow, and security risks on the journey (PM, CI, KI)
- Information about regular migration channels including the logistics of accessing the necessary documentation (passports, visas).

Rather than information on general or minor risks, KIs felt that specific information as well as major long-term risks should be highlighted. This included information on destination countries (high deportation rates, for instance), discrimination and stereotyping, role of organised crime, insurgent groups, and security risks. The interviews and prior studies highlight the limited avenues for discussion on SGBV risks – however, KIs also pointed to the need for politically sensitive and culturally appropriate messaging.

Campaigns may do well to accompany messages on specific and longer-term risks within a framework of positive messaging. Two KIs, both associated with international organisations working on migration and development, pointed out the importance of positive messaging around Afghanistan. They felt that giving people hope in their future would better connect with PMs. This could help in cases of emotionally-led decision-making which was more typical of younger migrants, according to another KI. The Survey of the Afghan People had also correlated optimism and hope in the government with a lower willingness to migrate.[100] DRC's 2019 ADIP study also suggested having in-depth conversations about people's aspirations and fears instead of a blanket discouragement, and objective portrayal of both the positive and the negative to counteract the belief that stopping migration is the aim.

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[100] Seefar (2019) *How the Afghan Peace Process and Emotional Well-Being Impact Migration Decision-Making*.

The 4Mi Afghan Returnee Surveys pointed to the following kinds of information that respondents said would have helped them prepare better.

Figure 22: Information that would have made preparation for the journey easier

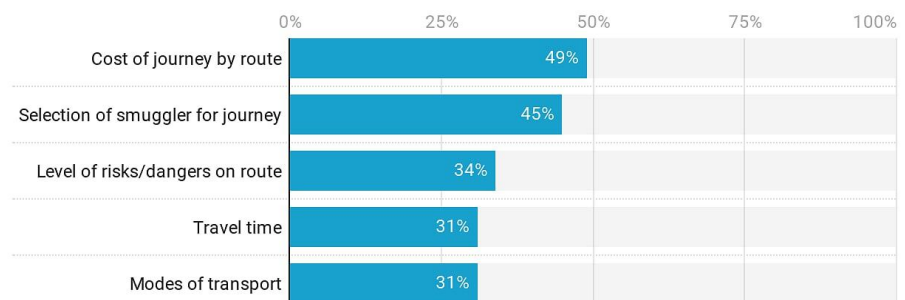### Information about the journey that would have helped respondents prepare better
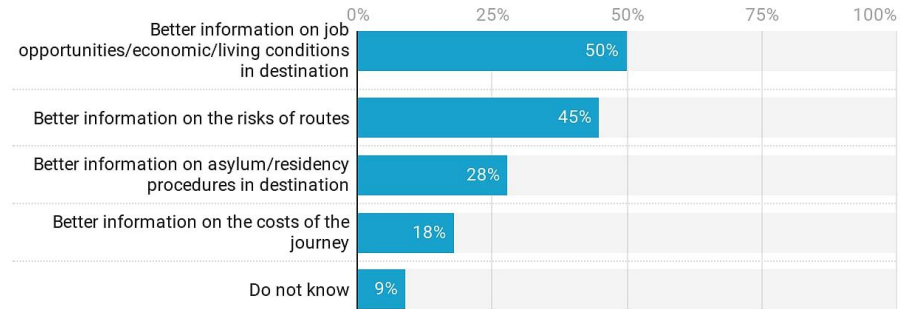
n=1344

Source: Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism Initiative (4Mi) • Created with Datawrapper

The January-March section of the 4Mi Afghan Returnee Surveys also pointed to particular kinds of information that returnee respondents said had helped them select the route on their migration journey. Men tended to be more concerned about selection of smuggler while women tended to be more concerned about level of risk.

Figure 23: Information that helped migrant route selection

Information that helped respondents selecting a route

n=912

Source: Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism Initiative (4Mi) • Created with Datawrapper

How can ICs be designed better?

The impact of ICs by way of enhancing protection of migrants during the journey can be improved according to respondents.

KIs suggested that television and radio may be useful for information dissemination given their widespread use but said that websites may not be the best medium for Afghanistan – one KI from an Afghanistan-based international organisation highlighted the effectiveness of the BBC's programming from the early 2000s. Targeting of urban and rural areas should also include using different tools popular in the respective regions (Tolo TV and radio, respectively, for instance). Use of visual content to depict real stories of migration, especially of returned migrants and deportees, could also be more effective, a finding also highlighted in the 2019 DRC ADIP study.

Interviewees also suggested that better protection outcomes can be achieved through information campaigns with a more specific target population, disseminated in the relevant languages/dialects and with culturally sensitive messaging, perhaps developed in consultation with experts (anthropologists, for instance). Evidence for this was the Australian campaign that targeted Hazara Shias in particular, in Hazara dialects, seems to have succeeded in its mission to dissuade PMs from targeting Australia. However, despite its high visibility (it was mentioned by several PMs and CIs), KIs felt that it had it been insensitive, with one KI saying that it had also been ineffective, in their opinion. Along similar lines, KIs highlighted the need for political sensitivity in such campaigns. As a part of targeting, scrutinising data on returnees can also give a sense of who the migrating population is – predominantly young, single men, according to one KI. The importance of targeting has also been brought up in prior literature.[101]

"If a well-known reference provides the information, many people will believe that, so it's better that information is verified through the same famous reference."

– a female CI in Herat, 30

Several international organisations have ICs in the form of resource centres. In the qualitative fieldwork, KIs felt that there is a role for better information dissemination around irregular migration, especially through the use of these centres. Some KIs had prior experience of working with centres and one spoke positively about the impact of measures such as migration resource centres, hotlines and dissemination through audio clips. One KI felt that politically unaffiliated information centres in cities that provided information on migration (legal alternatives, especially for education) would be effective, while another pointed out the need to establish these centres strategically – perhaps in border areas.

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[101] Seefar (2020) *Analysis of Communications Campaigns in Afghanistan*.

"No, there is no place to get information from. The smuggler gives us information, but they only tell us the route and the way. There is no foreign and national office or institution that we can go to and get information from."

- a female PM in Herat, 27

No PMs mentioned such centres as a source of information prior to migration (although one referred to embassies and another mentioned international organisations as a source of aid while travelling) and only two CIs referred to information centres, including one run by the government and another referring to Seefar's migration campaign in their interviews. However, one female PM from Herat did talk about there being no options like foreign offices or institutions where one can get migration information, thereby leaving her to consult smugglers and another CI from Nimroz said that mosques and gatherings were a source for her since there are no offices that dispense such information. This was echoed by another female CI and together, may indicate that information centres could have a positive role to play in improving protection outcomes by providing information to both CIs and PMs.

Literature shows that it is an assumption that ICs constitute a trusted source of information, that this new information sent out will translate into a change of attitude, and then into a change of behaviour.[102] KIs point out that instead of targeting social media generally and attempting to counter misinformation, **ICs should aim to displace or enlist trusted sources of information for PMs** – the diaspora and smugglers. A KI also suggested using Afghanistan's Citizen Charter programme – the social workers in the Citizen Charter network are trusted, particularly in rural areas and can be engaged to disseminate information about protection risks. KIs and CIs also suggested engaging local community leaders to tap into local trusted networks and emphasised the need to understand the dynamics of community conversations around migration (at the household, community, or *jirga* level).

The interviews as well as prior studies have found that local communities (as well as PMs) do not always trust smugglers – ICs therefore, can take advantage of the mistrust that often exists towards smugglers by providing a counter-narrative about protection risks to the aspiring migrant.[103] Using multiple complementary channels, local influencers, and focusing on platforms encouraging engagement instead of uni-directional messaging such as billboards or pamphlets can disseminate the message better and avoid misinterpretation.

KI interviews also pointed out that it is important to factor in the source of the messaging – when campaigns are sponsored and publicised by particular destination governments, they are perceived to be biased by PMs and may be explained away as political messages more easily than similar campaigns undertaken by multilateral or non-governmental organisations. Even campaigns that aim to merely portray protection risks and not deter

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[102] Tjaden, J., Morgenstern, S. & Laczko, F. Op. Cit.

[103] Seefar (2020) *Study on Best Practices in Irregular Migration Awareness Campaigns: Interim Report Phase I European Commission.*

migration as such may be dismissed if they are interpreted as political messaging.

Defining of campaign objectives is important, as well as identifying its focus on individual or group behaviours.[104] Campaigns may have a broad range of objectives – from providing valuable information for protection of migrants to outright deterrence of irregular migration altogether. IOM's analysis found that most ICs had vaguely phrased aims of raising awareness or generating knowledge – neither of which lends itself well to impact assessment.[105]

What role can the diaspora play?

The interviews found that the diaspora exerts both a direct and an indirect influence over the community in Afghanistan but this is largely limited to kinship networks. Despite the existence of strong linkages with home, enabled by technology, connections remain largely personal and kin-based, not extending to the image of a larger Afghan community.[106]

Diaspora-led communication not built on trusted networks requires overcoming a trust deficit. Studies show that many in the diaspora see a role for themselves[107] in helping to increase safety and protection for other migrants and improving outcomes for compatriots who often struggle after reaching their destination. Some also fear a backlash in the destination countries if migration continues at high levels. However, they are impeded by a deficit of trust with PMs who too often see these concerns manifested as anti-migration sentiments that do not take into account the present situation in Afghanistan or would otherwise "pull up the drawbridge" for their own interests.

KIs point out that certain groups in the Afghan diaspora may have more potential on this front. Young women in the diaspora, who are educated, informed and fundamentally European in many ways, are increasingly respected among friends and family back home and could be an important source of information for women PMs in particular, who in any case were more likely to openly weigh up the pros and cons of the journey and take advice on how to mitigate the risks.

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[104] Seefar (2020) Study on Best Practices in Irregular Migration Awareness Campaigns: Interim Report Phase I European Commission.

[105] Tjaden, J., Morgenstern, S. & Laczko, F. Op. Cit.

[106] Meshkovska, B, Sayed, N, Koch, K, Rajabzadeh, I, Wenger, C, & Siegel, M. Op. Cit.

[107] Danish Refugee Council (2019) Confronted with Despair and Disillusionment: A Qualitative Research into the Afghan Diaspora's Perceptions about Information-Sharing with Migrants; Meshkovska, B, Sayed, N, Koch, K, Rajabzadeh, I, Wenger, C, & Siegel, M. (2019) *Afghan Diaspora in Europe: Mapping Engagement in Denmark, Germany, Sweden, and United Kingdom* Danish Refugee Council.

KIs and CIs had a range of other suggestions for engaging the diaspora, although these were speculative and not necessarily grounded in successful experience:

- TV programmes with the diaspora to engage PMs.
- The use of visual methods to connect with PMs. These might include documentary stories on migration journeys, highlighting the experiences of returnees and those who have been deported.
- Allowing the diaspora to listen and provide individualised advice, rather than messages designed for the masses that can be easily misinterpreted. More targeted, practical information was also a finding of DRC's 2019 ADIP study.[108]

What can we learn from communications around COVID-19?

Respondents in the qualitative fieldwork were aware of the virus and many also spoke about the precautionary measures they had taken, which included social distancing, hand washing, and keeping up to date on public information about the disease. Several spoke about a government helpline for the disease and seemed to trust information that they were receiving from the Directorate of Public Health as well as media sources, which had been further verified by medical professionals in their network.

Respondents also mentioned the economic fallout COVID-19 has had and how it has worsened the economy, impacted business, movement of goods, and educational institutions. This could be the reason why although awareness of COVID-19 was high and some respondents had even had direct encounters with the disease, this had not impacted the decisions of PMs taking part in this study's interviews. 4Mi's snapshot of July 2020 found that although the government and community leaders are trusted sources of information, they contributed little of the actual COVID-19 information that respondents get. By contrast, NGOs and friends and family were providing most of the information but were not necessarily as trusted as government and community leaders.

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[108] Danish Refugee Council (2019) Confronted with Despair and Disillusionment: A Qualitative Research into the Afghan Diaspora's Perceptions about Information-Sharing with Migrants.

Conclusion

This study aimed to understand migration decision-making in Afghanistan through the lens of SBCC programming. It examined the factors influencing migration at the individual and community levels and explored the beliefs, norms, and attitudes underpinning these factors.

The findings corroborate existing evidence in the literature that a confluence of economic and security concerns lead to many Afghans wanting to depart the country. The way these factors interacted were diverse, with some driven more by economic desperation and others by economic aspiration. Conflict and crime were the primary cause of interviewees' doubts that Afghanistan would ever provide the stability they desired.

This bleak outlook on Afghanistan's future came through much more strongly than any articulated vision of life in Europe. Potential migrants in this study nevertheless had an overly positive image of what life in Europe would be like. PMs had been clearly mislead on certain beliefs, for example that people work for two hours a day in Europe.

At each stage of the developing aspiration and subsequent plan for migration, family and friends abroad featured. Members of the diaspora sometimes actively encouraged irregular migration while their efforts to keep would-be migrants safe were largely limited to recommending a reliable people smuggler. There is a gap

The challenge for programmers interested in shifting attitudes and behaviours in a way that strengthens protection is to deliver compelling messages via platforms as credible as the tight-knit transnational networks that have seen the irregular migration ecosystem deeply engrained in many communities.

Annex 1: Methodology
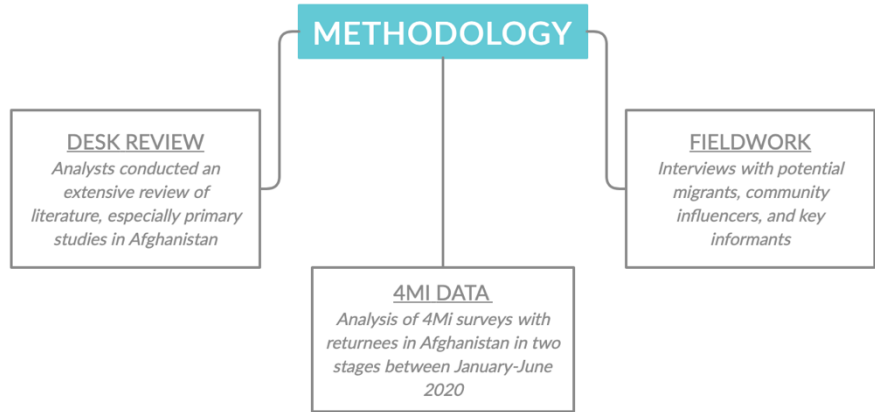
DESK REVIEW: The desk review proceeded in five stages. Stage One involved preliminary reading on Afghan irregular migration, Afghanistan's historical, geographical, and economic context, and how these developed. Stage Two shortlisted relevant studies and reports from an existing database of sources from Seefar, the Danish Refugee Council and the Mixed Migration Centre. Stage Three involved a comprehensive literature search on the basis of the Seefar Evidence Review Approach (SERA), which shortlists sources on the basis of cogency, relevance, credibility, and recency. Both academic and grey literature was sourced, using project specific keywords in various online tools.
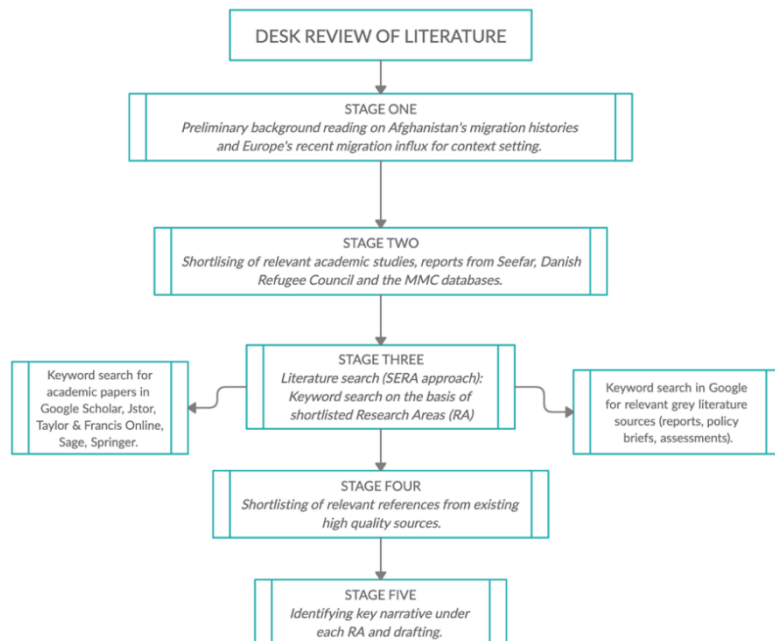
Afghan Returnee Surveys: Analysts triangulated the narrative emerging from the desk review with data collected in two stages by MMC's 4Mi monitors. These surveys were conducted with returned migrants in Afghanistan between January-June 2020.

The two datasets were merged as follows: common columns were identified in both the surveys and before merging two columns, consistency of type of data was checked; for columns where some of the responses were blank, these were marked NA and were not included in the n-size for that particular question; some of the categories were merged in a question to make the data points more concrete (based on information received from DRC). For example: Friends/Family in other country + Friends/Family in country of return were merged in Diaspora: Friends/Family in another country.

Additional 4mi data: data from a 4Mi survey with Afghan migrants in Greece.

FIELDWORK AND ANALYSIS: The qualitative research sought insight from Afghans in Herat, Kabul and Nimroz actively planning to depart the country irregularly, and community members identified as influential in the formation of the aspiration to migrate. In-depth interviews were conducted telephonically due to the pandemic constraints. PM and CI interviews were complemented by expert interviews with individuals familiar with migration in the Afghan context and/ or the use of communications-based programming to counter migration risks. Analysts also integrated insights from a parallel study with the Afghan diaspora in Europe investigating views on information sharing and impact on migration decisions.[109]

The framework analysis methodology analyses qualitative data through a step-by-step process. The interview transcripts were first coded into a grid on the basis of the major research areas (migration decision-making, audience and influencers, sources of information and information campaigns) and their sub-areas. The process yielded a grid framework of responses, categorised by research area allowing for a granular understanding of who said what. This was used to first draw out the broad findings under each research area. The grid was then rearranged according to gender, type of respondent (CI/PM), province and age category (although a majority are below 35) to understand responses at a disaggregated level. Common phrases and points were isolated for each RA to break down similarity or dissimilarity of responses across the categories. These formed the basis of the detailed key findings and allowed for a holistic look at the questions and sub-questions under each RA. A similar process was followed for the key informant

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2. [109] Danish Refugee Council. "Confronted with Despair and Disillusionment: A Qualitative Research into the Afghan Diaspora´s Perceptions about Information-Sharing with Migrants," 2019.

interviews – isolation of points under each RA, and then an analysis of what each KI said for each major question.

Annex 2: Pen Profiles

Case: KBL-MP-001
Potential Migrant
Pseudonym: Aman

Aman is a middle-aged Pashtun man living in Jalalabad, Nangarhar considering migrating irregularly to Italy or France. He earns AFN13000 ($170) per month working in the private sector. He says he would expect to multiply his income tenfold once in Europe, with the added benefit of a social security system that takes care of him in retirement, whereas in Afghanistan, he would expect to work "as long as there is breath in [his] body." He sees good job opportunities in Afghanistan - such as academic or government jobs - as out of reach because he doesn't know the people and cannot afford bribes. He considered applying for a US Special Immigrant Visa but found the process too daunting. He talks about the precedent for migration in the Quran but notes his motive is economic not religious. In fact, he fears the corruption of his faith in Europe.

Aman has relatives in Europe but doesn't trust them with his migration plans, sharing them only with friends and old classmates living in Germany and Austria, who have agreed to help him. He knows the journey is risky and puts his chances of reaching Europe at 70 percent. But he has been caught up in fighting in Afghanistan too so remaining doesn't feel particularly safe. He doesn't trust the smugglers and knows that the government can't help him if things go wrong but he describes how the local jirga (elders council) often review agreements and resolve disputes between smugglers and migrants.

Case: HER-FP-008
Potential Migrant
Pseudonym: Nasima

Nasima is a 27-year-old ethnic Tajik student. She is planning to migrate to Germany hoping that her family "will be safe and [their] security guaranteed". She talks of insecurity in terms of crime: robbery and the threat of acid attacks. Amidst a climate of violence and economic malaise, Nasima and her husband find it increasingly hard to access find jobs or study opportunities in Afghanistan, which she is convinced would be possible in Germany, where the government really "serves the people".
She takes the example of her aunt and uncle, who reside abroad and claim to have successful jobs and good living conditions and expects the same for her family.

Nasima finds the legal route seems too expensive: a travel agent [possibly a smuggler] told her the cost was AFN1 million ($13,000) per person for legal migration, while irregular migration would cost the same amount for her entire family. She has already tried to enter Europe irregularly once but was caught in Turkey and deported. Whilst she is

aware of the dangers and threats that migrants face along their way (e.g., hunger, thirst, beatings), which she is constantly reminded by her relatives and friends, she believes not to have any other option.

Migratory media campaigns like TV advertisements that attempt to discourage migration to Australia "does not affect [her] decision, because [she] has no choice". The information she obtains about the migratory route and other aspects of irregular migration fully stems from the smugglers and underlines her sense that there is no reliable source of information.

Case: NIM-MP-002
Potential Migrant
Pseudonym: Dariush

Dariush is a young Tajik student who is contemplating migrating to Finland, where his cousins live. His concerns mix security threats, lack of education and employment opportunities. He adds that nepotism is a widespread problem in Nimroz province, where job seekers are forced to bribe employers in order to occupy positions; whereas some of his friends residing abroad have been able to build their careers without such help. Staying in Afghanistan means to him the continuation of poverty and alienation, and he is convinced that life in Europe will provide him with peace, security and better living conditions, going so far as to state: "even if I don't do anything there, the government will pay me $500 per month". Moreover, everyone in his community seems to encourage him to migrate.

Dariush intends to migrate irregularly because the assumed USD20,000 cost of doing so regularly is unaffordable. He gets most of the information on irregular migration from smugglers living in Afghanistan and his relatives in Finland, mainly through WhatsApp and Telegram. He says that life in destination is worth the many risks that migrants encounter along the way - hunger, thirstiness, and exhausting walking, amongst them - and claims to trust his potential smuggler, as he has previously worked with some of his colleagues. He expects his companions and the smuggler to help him if he gets into trouble.

Case: KBL-FP-007
Potential Migrant
Pseudonym: Fatima

Fatima is a Tajik woman in her twenties living in Kabul. Whilst she has friends and enjoys attending university, she struggles with discrimination by members of the Pashtun majority. She firmly believes that "humanity is not valued in Afghanistan." For this reason, along with the higher levels of education and the better enforcement of anti-discriminatory measures that she claims that exist in Europe, she intends to leave Afghanistan.

Fatima has decided to migrate irregularly with her brother and some other relatives because she claims not to have enough resources or know the language of the country of final destination - requisites that one of her relatives told her are necessary to be granted a visa. She emphasises the freedom that she would enjoy in Europe, which she calls "a dream paradise of a human being" - a perception that is highly influenced by foreign TV shows featuring European lifestyles.

Life in Europe would make up for the many troubles she might face along the way. If necessary, she will ask for help from the border or "international" police, which might provide her with water, food and clothes. She is planning her journey in dialogue (via the IMO messaging app) with a relative who travelled to Germany through Turkey and Greece. She has also been in contact with a smuggler that will transport her to Iran before accessing Turkey.

Case: KBL-MC-011
Community influencer
Pseudonym: Ahmad

Ahmad is a middle-aged Pashtun man living in Kabul. He is a professor and uses his position to encourage students not to migrate illegally. He most dislikes corruption, which he blames on warlords among others, who not only intimidate but also co-opt the labour market and impede the access of job-seekers who do not enjoy the right connections. He claims that almost 90 percent of potential migrants are not fully aware of the risks of migrating irregularly and are deceived by smugglers' reassurances about the journey. He cites insecurity and poverty as the two main drivers. Ahmad thinks young Afghans don't consult properly but do share information from their classmates and relatives through social media networks such as Facebook. To him, parents and community leaders play a key role in encouraging or preventing illegal migration. Ahmad claims to have come across some commercial advertisements on TV that discouraged the viewers from migrating to Australia.

Case: NIM-MP-001
Community influencer
Pseudonym: Azim

Azim is a 30-year-old university-educated Tajik male living in Nimroz, currently unemployed and considering migrating to Belgium. He describes his life in Afghanistan as a "prison", as he feels frustrated due to the harsh weather conditions, low water availability, security concerns and lack of employment opportunities - issues he believes are solved in Europe.

Relatives living in Europe, with whom he communicates through WhatsApp and Telegram encourage him to migrate but he remains sceptical that "migration gives a prosperous life for a person 100 percent". The same relatives put him in touch with smugglers. Whilst he has been exposed to campaigns in social media platforms such as

Instagram and Telegram encouraging migration, especially amongst the youth, Azim emphasizes the experiences of the people he knows.

Procedures for regular migration appear to him too expensive and the chances of obtaining a passport and being granted a visa seem low. He suggests Afghanistan's weak economy and the government's limited influence in the international arena are the reasons why regular migration is so difficult. He estimates his chances of successfully reaching Europe at 50 percent. In case of emergency, Azim would contact humanitarian organisations and names the Red Cross.

Case: NIM-MP-007
Potential migrant
Pseudonym: Zahid

Zahid, a middle-aged Pashtun man living in Nimroz, wants to migrate to Europe. Alongside weariness of conflict, he desires better education for his children and job security for himself. He is not optimistic that the current peace process will change anything and he finds education and health facilities inadequate for his children's future. He believes he can get a decent job with a good salary in Europe with which he can provide a comfortable life for his family.

Given the choice, Zahid would choose to migrate through legal channels. While working for a construction company affiliated with the U.S. Department of Defense, he was given the option of migrating to the U.S. But he lost his job and was unable to pursue this opportunity [author note: it is not clear if Zahid would nonetheless be eligible for a U.S. Special Immigration Visa].

His hope of migrating to Europe comes from talking to his brother, who successfully migrated to Germany and shares stories of his life and encouragement through WhatsApp. He has seen campaigns on social media (mainly Facebook) and TV about the risks of irregular migration, particularly for those who wish to travel to Australia or Europe by boat. The campaigns have made him realise how risky and dangerous the journey can be but his anxiety for his children's future make the risks seem worth it.

Case: NIM-MC-004
Community Influencer
Pseudonym: Azhar

Azhar is a middle-aged man living in Nimroz. He points to low incomes and unemployment as the main reasons why people migrate irregularly. He is aware that irregular migrants face injury, deportation or death and even after reaching the destination, migrants have to work hard and do menial jobs. He goes so far to say that irregular migration contravenes Islamic principles, as well as being a humanitarian tragedy.

He estimates at least one member of each family in Nimroz have migrated, feeding frequent conversations around loved ones' migration

experiences. He believes that since smugglers also live in the same area there is a mutual trust between the smugglers and the people wanting to migrate irregularly.

Azhar along with some other community members held several anti-migration gatherings and programmes dissuading people from migrating illegally. He says these programmes and campaigns are effective in raising awareness but do not persuade those who are unemployed and seeking work not to migrate. For him, campaigns must provide jobs. He has gone to the extent of hiring people himself to address this issue.

Case: NIM-MC-003
Community Influencer
Pseudonym: Abdul

Abdul is a young man living in Nimroz. He believes that irregular migration happens because of poverty, lack of economic and social security and theft that affects people's lives and has an adverse effect on their mental health. Abdul points to smugglers as the main source of danger on the route, accusing them of doing "anything" for money, including killing migrants. He says he has learned much about irregular migration from TV channels such as Tolo TV. He also stated that there are other members in the community who talk to potential migrants on an individual basis about the risks. He also says that there is not so much irregular migration from his local community because it is comparatively more secure and working conditions are fairer than other communities.

Case: NIM-FP-005
Potential Migrant
Pseudonym: Imrana

Imrana is a young adult woman who lives in Nimroz and hopes to migrate to Germany. As a Muslim, she would like to continue to live in Afghanistan but she her fear for her children's future outweighs her concerns about the culture clash after arriving. Three and a half years ago her husband was killed and his perpetrator is yet to be arrested. She fears the same for her children, especially her daughters, as she believes that it is difficult for women to find justice in Afghanistan.

She has a few relatives who live abroad and are in contact with her through WhatsApp. Her relatives have told her that apart from being away from their families and their country there is nothing else to worry about once you reach Europe. She completely trusts her relatives and would like to migrate to Germany with their guidance. She is also in contact with a smuggler who has assured her that if she pays him enough money, he will make sure they reach their destination country safely. She is aware there are risks but believe these outweigh the risks of living with impunity in Afghanistan.

Case: KBL-MP-006
Potential Migrant
Pseudonym: Sameeruddin

Sameeruddin is a middle-aged man from Kabul who wishes to migrate to the UK. He is deeply sceptical that anything will improve. For him, from Afghanistan's communist era until now, every political regime has only led to oppression of the Afghan people. He does not think the situation in Afghanistan will change in the near future and he is tired of witnessing violence on a daily basis in Kabul.

Sameeruddin does not want to migrate irregularly but his attempts to migrate legally have all failed. He tried several times to get a visa for Pakistan and has made other failed attempts to study abroad. Currently, he has a job but does not have enough capital to buy property. He believes migrating to Europe will give him a more secure and comfortable life.

Sameeruddin has friends and family who have successfully managed to migrate irregularly to Europe. He knows there are risks but believes God will protect him on the journey. He views smugglers as untrustworthy and so verifies information by talking to friends and family, many of whom live in Europe.

Case: HER-MP-005
Potential Migrant
Pseudonym: Haneef

Haneef is in his thirties, from Herat, and aiming to travel irregularly to Germany. Haneef is his family's sole earner and sees travel abroad as the only way to improve on his present salary of AFN8000 ($104) per month. His desire to provide for his seven-person family is compounded by weariness at the criminality in his town: he says it's impossible to leave one's home at night even if it is a medical emergency because of thieves. COVID-19 has only increased unemployment and food prices.

He would have liked travel to Germany regularly but feels he cannot afford visas and passports for all seven people in his family and does not want to travel alone. He estimates that it will cost AFN20,000-30,000 ($260-$390) to reach Iran alone, where he will work for a few years to save for the onward journey.

He knows there are real risks en route but reasons that losing one member of his family may be worth it to save and support the rest. His knowledge of irregular migration comes from friends in Europe who share pictures, videos and advice. His parents, who live in Afghanistan, have unsuccessfully tried to persuade him to abandon his plans. He believes information about the journey is an important part of preparing people but would most like to see efforts to solve problems.

Case: HER-FP-007
Potential Migrant
Pseudonym: Nazneen

Nazneen is a 30-year-old female living in Herat province who wants to migrate to Canada. Nazneen works as a hairdresser and has set up a shop in her house but struggles because of conservative members of the community, including friends, who disapprove of her profession. She is also the sole earner in her family as her husband fell ill some time ago and has been unable to work since, although he would still make the final decision on whether they migrate or not. Whatever she makes as a hairdresser is not enough to sustain her family - this is the main driver of her decision to go. She believes once they reach Canada, the government will provide them with a house and provide educational opportunities to her children.

Nazneen is aware of the dangers of making the journey and puts her chances of making it to Canada at 50 percent. A few years ago, two of her brothers decided to irregularly migrate to Europe. While one of her brothers reached the destination country, the other one died. Since her brother died in the journey her parents are against her decision to migrate irregularly. However, friends abroad are encouraging her. Nazneen saw the 'Australia is not your home' campaign but dismissed it as irrelevant to her plans to migrate to Canada.

Case: HER-FC-005
Community Influencer
Pseudonym: Abida

Abida is a community influencer in her twenties living in Herat, with several family members who have attempted the overland journey to Europe. According to Abida, people migrate because of poverty, unemployment, forced labour and to pursue higher education. She believes that for some women, the decision to migrate is made by their husbands and they have no choice but to follow them. She shared an example of her sister whose husband threatened to divorce her and take her children away with him if she didn't agree to migrate. She went with her husband and after about 18-19 days in the journey to Iran, they saw the difficulties and returned to Afghanistan. She thinks irregular migration is extremely dangerous because it forces people to put their families at risk. Two years ago, both her brothers successfully migrated to Iran, going irregularly because they could not afford the costs of a passport.

According to Abida, there are two kinds of people who oppose irregular migration. The first are from religious groups who believe there is a risk that migrating Afghans will convert to other religions so they can get citizenship of that country sooner and the second are families who believe that once they reach the destination country their children will forget Afghan values, customs, traditions, religion and family. Abida has seen several campaigns on irregular migration on TV, newspapers, magazines and on social media. While she thinks these campaigns are useful, she says that the campaign messages only really impact those who have already lost someone on the journey.

Case: NIM-FP-004
Pseudonym: Ameena

Ameena is in her twenties, lives in Nimroz and hopes to migrate to Austria to improve her job prospects. At the moment, her husband does not have a job and they both can't get jobs because they don't have bachelor's or master's degrees. Her parents are also currently living in Austria. Based on the information she has received from her parents and other relatives who have successfully migrated to Europe, she believes she has a 50 percent chance of successfully reaching her destination. Her parents are in contact with smugglers, chosen because they successfully helped relatives in the past. They are also funding the journey, paying extra to ensure that Ameena and her husband are treated well on the route. She thinks that the media doesn't provide enough information on the difficulties Afghans face after they reach their desired destination.

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