



GVP Consulting

DANISH REFUGEE COUNCIL

CONFRONTED WITH DESPAIR & DISILLUSIONMENT

**A qualitative research into the
Afghan Diaspora's perceptions
about information-sharing with
migrants**

December 2019

Executive Summary of the Research 'Confronted with Despair and Disillusionment'

The Danish Refugee Council (DRC) decided to enhance protection information for displaced people from Afghanistan through collaborative engagement with diaspora communities in Europe. As part of a three-year project, launched in June 2019, the research 'Confronted between Despair & Disillusionment' aims to understand the views of selected Afghan diasporas in Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands on irregular migration. The paper explores the diasporas' own role and connections with a focus on information sharing in particular in relation to protection assistance to displacement affected people in country of origin and on the move. This document reports the findings of this research.

The research is based on two qualitative data collection methods: a desk review and twelve focus group discussions with diaspora members in Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands, conducted between September and November 2019. In total, 102 Afghans residing in Europe were consulted with regard to the four research topics: connections, role, information-sharing and potential support. Focus group discussion participants represented various population groups within the Afghan diaspora: men and women, younger and older members, older and new arrivals, and different ethnicities.

The research resulted in the **following main findings:**

Connections:

Communication channels between the diaspora and migrants are based on existing connections and use a variety of communication means. However, there are differences between European diaspora in how much the topic of migration is discussed. The initiative comes mainly from the person interested in migrating, with some proactive behaviour on the side of the diaspora. Trust plays a key role in determining who to ask for information. Diaspora organizations and respected individuals are also contacted by people they do not know.

Although women and youths are said to exchange information, the tendency is for men asking for advice to people perceived to be knowledgeable. This potentially leaves children and women in a disadvantaged position, but increasingly, educated female diaspora members have more knowledge on the matter as well. From the perspective of the diaspora, most potential migrants will ask for advice before departure. However, the diaspora has no influence on the actual decision to migrate, and are at times confronted with a 'fait accompli'.

Information-Sharing

The main message of the diaspora toward potential migrants is not to come. For them, the potential risks en route do not outweigh the benefits of successful migration. However, what potential migrants mostly want to know about is what to expect upon arrival and how to make their migration successful. Due to the mismatch in information-sharing and the tendency to provide a generic answer, information from the diaspora is often not used and their advice not effective.

Different information is shared between men and women, resulting in the fact that (potential) female and male migrants have distinct kinds of information. Whereas diaspora want to share a true picture, this is hampered by cultural issues, lack of consistency across diaspora and the (unintentional) image of their own situation. At the same time, diaspora often do not have a full picture of the protection risks and stated to lack information, in particular on specific legal issues.

Role

Most Afghan diaspora members think they have a role in terms of information-sharing with potential and actual migrants. Where some are convinced of the need for better information, other Afghans doubt that better information would lead to safer migration. Nevertheless, the role of diaspora is influenced by a number of factors: on the side of the recipient, on the side of the sender and due to contextual aspects.

When despair is high, having a realistic picture of the protection risks, will make no difference to decision-making. Women and families are more open to information than young men who are ready to take risks, but suffer from the actual challenges upon arrival. Diaspora remain only one information source for the migrants, and their message has not been strong enough to counter false information, myths or rumours.

Potential Support

Afghan migrants have information gaps which the diaspora can fill. However, the diaspora needs guidance on how they can better take up their role in sharing information, taking into account their paradoxical situation. Therefore, it is recommended to strengthen the messages of diaspora, including through the development of more proactive and creative ways of sharing information. In addition, awareness-raising should take place in the importance of the matter and of existing initiatives.

The research concludes that a lack of credibility is the major hindering factor for diaspora to take on their role of sharing information with Afghan migrants. Trust, although perceived to be an important aspect in Afghan society, has proven to be insufficient in overcoming this problem. It is suggested that the main message of diaspora, "Don't come", should be changed. There is a need to move away from advising into actual information-sharing.

For information to be used in order to enhance safe migration, messages need to be tailored, in particular to the vulnerable parts of the population. The ambition should be about sharing practical tips. This kind of information is expected to enhance safer behaviour on routes, possibly leading to less suffering and perhaps even saving some lives. Migrants tend to lack the current information needed to be able to counter information of the smugglers or have so far not been able to sufficiently share the real stories and traumatic experiences Afghan migrants have gone through.

The potential of diaspora to inform (potential) migrants about the dangers en route and the conditions upon arrival is not exhausted yet. A strengthened, tailored and consistent message from diaspora is the only answer. They would need support on how best to do that, building on the good work already done.